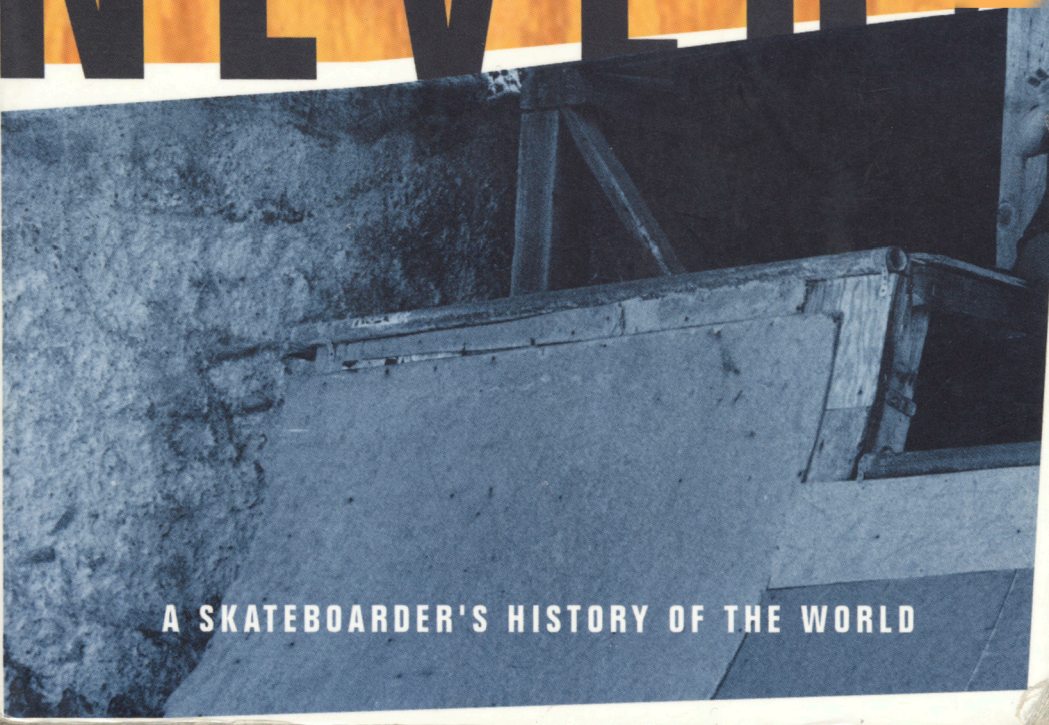




THE ANSWER IS NEVER



A SKATEBOARDER'S HISTORY OF THE WORLD

Chapter One

Noble Pursuits

From the instant of the singularity that began the universe, movement has been a constant. Clouds of matter became stars and planets that were propelled away from each other, a scenario of unstinting expansion that continues to this day. Hundreds of millions of years after the big bang, the earth coalesced into a planet, spinning and moving along with the rest of the universe. The parts of this particular planet mimicked the entropy of the larger reality. Plates of rock shifted, mountains rose, volcanoes erupted. Moisture turned to vapor that became clouds and then rain, which fell to the earth to become streams and rivers that emptied into seas and oceans that sent waves crashing to the shore. Unending, eternal movement.

With the arrival of life the movement continued. In the beginning it wasn't planned or desired—the amoeba unthinkingly jostled to and fro—but by the time of the original amphibian crawling out onto shore, propulsion had become willful. Evolution led to more intricate creatures, moving, always moving, now with self-determination. Locomotion in the service of obtaining food, of seeking out new habitats to escape predators. At some point there was a development of movement that didn't have any clearly useful purpose. The baby cubs rolled and tumbled,

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the ancestors of dolphins jumped and splashed. They were playing; their actions didn't have a practical or easily decipherable reason.

Down the line, humanity evolved and had to move like all the other creatures. Except during sleep and infrequent periods of rest, they had to hunt and chase game and run away from fiercer fauna. The new species also traveled, leaving its birthplace in Africa and spreading out across the globe. At some point, humans came up with ways to move themselves along that didn't rely on their two feet. Floating rafts pushed by sticks and paddles and sails, then most importantly, the wheel facilitated this movement of the human body from one place to another. In addition to this, there were domesticated animals that were eventually ridden for transportation. And some of these, the horse in particular, could go much faster than humans could on their own.

The harnessing of the domesticated animal to the wheel led to the rounded object as an engine of recreation, and the primal urge for speed blossomed. The mechanical advancement of the wheel allowed humans to figure out ways to ride in chariots and wagons, gliding with the forces of nature to become one with them, and in doing so to experience the joy of unshackled propulsion.

In myriad ways, the mechanical device married to natural forces enabled this urge for movement and unlocked the purely psychological reasons that were behind it all—a need for release, uncertainty and fear induced on purpose at high speed. All over the world, the ways of doing it emerged and multiplied. The horse was ridden faster, initiates jumped off of towers with only a vine attached to their feet, rafts shot rapids, and ships were flung forward by the power of the wind. A singular relationship to the earth

Chapter Seven

Frontier Tales

Skateboarder magazine was a mirror of the times and is now a historical document—one of the few, since there aren't many books or other primary sources covering skating from that time. It also had a writer who was in a category altogether different from the norm. Most writing in the magazine is just what would be expected for a periodical whose main audience was fifteen-year-olds: workmanlike. Not that there was anything wrong with that; it fit the market and the audience's mind-set. But somehow because of the whole wide-openness of the time, something besides that slipped into the pages of the magazine.

In a series of articles over a five-year period, one particular writer got to the core of the skating ethos in a distinctive prose style, accompanied by equally unorthodox and important photographs. He turned out to be the bard of skateboarding and has continued to make unique contributions to this day. It's doubtful he was appreciated at the time, but his articles and photographs communicated to anybody interested that something new and special was going on in a way that would stand the test of time. This was a singular voice describing a singular subculture, and one uniquely suited to do so. Whether the people reading his articles knew or cared that their author had written for *Surfer* in the six-

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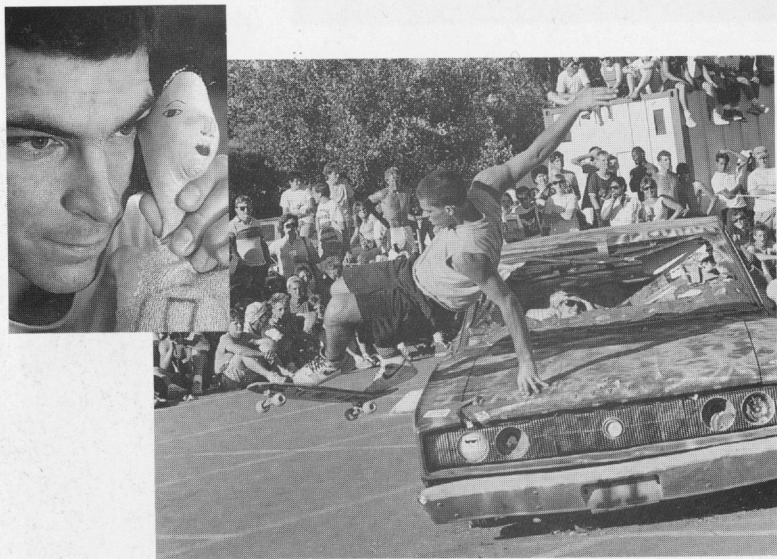
ties, was an expert on duck migration and California custom-car culture and many other arcane subjects, was an artist with a career completely outside the realm of skateboarding and, more importantly, had been a part of skating's inner workings in Santa Monica, that crucible of skateboarding, was beside the point. The man's name is Craig Stecyk or, as he is more commonly known, C. R. Stecyk III.

Stecyk's name is probably unknown to the majority of people who have skated in the last thirty years, but his influence has been extraordinary. Pundit, philosopher, friend and confidant to top skaters and industry types alike, he holds sway in a way no one else has. Stecyk's photographs are always credited to him, but his writing has appeared under numerous pseudonyms, adding to the mystery of just who he is. Whether they appear under Carl Izan, Sam Fernando, John Smythe or Lowboy, his writings and photos have always represented skating in a literate, complicated way.

Starting in the fall of 1975 with "Aspects of the Downhill Slide," Stecyk set out his personal vision. His combination of text and photography is unmistakable and makes for an utterly original whole. The photos are more artful than the usual skate photo, with a melding of intense action in the foreground—real "sports" photography—and sociological concerns in the background. The sensibility combines a "*consosas*" (a Hispanic gang term that translates loosely as "Such is the nature of things; if you don't like it, fuck you") attitude with a deep background of Hollywood and surfing history. His oft-quoted pronouncement about "two hundred years of American technology" was the beginning of his broad-based, eclectic, erudite, informed polemics, stories and rambling theses. His work hybridized an innate knowledge of the art



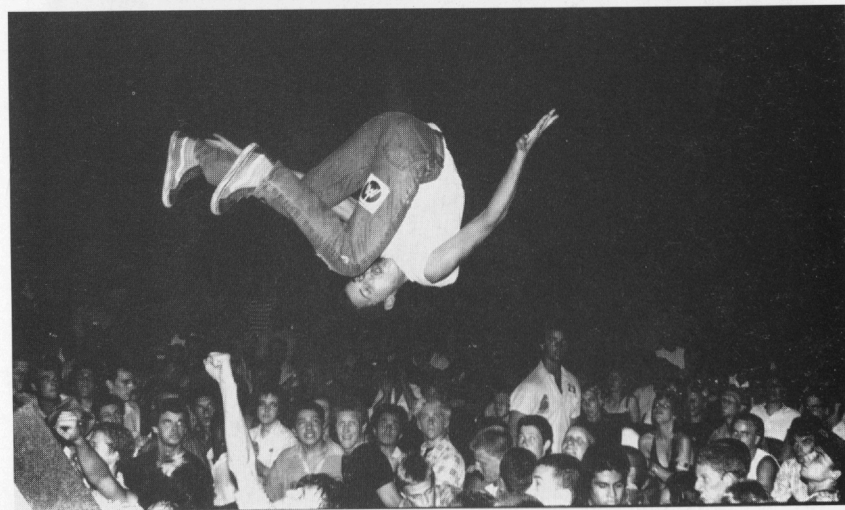
John Gibson, ollie over the hip, at Pflugerville outside Austin, Texas, 1987. Another non-Californian who made his mark in the early days before skating went international. (M. Fo)



Neil Blender, an innovator on both vertical and flat ground, combines both during a bert off a car hood at an anarchic Sacramento street contest in 1986. Note the drunken revelers inside the soon-to-be-demolished car/skate prop. (M. Fo)
(inset) Neil Blender with a friend, 1984. (M. Fo)



Richard Armijo, frontside rock and roll, Los Angeles, 1981. Stecyk wrote: "Richard Armijo was kicked out of Whittier again for the last time. Maybe his hair was too short, maybe it was his attitude, maybe he just doesn't care. Things are different this go around because Richard and his friends say they're not going back. . . . Ever." (C. R. Stecyk III)



The crowd at a Los Angeles punk show watches as an inverted aerial by skateboarder Chuck Burke—wearing hightop Vans—illuminates the confluence of skating and hardcore, 1982. (Edward Colver)

Chapter Fifteen

The Future Is Yesterday's Point of Departure

Who cares if the rest of the world knows what we're doing . . . the big media moguls only cover events when they've reached their final stage . . . it's at its hippest when it's underground. Let it run its natural course." Stacy Peralta's article "Skate of the Art '85," in the August 1985 *Thrasher*, revealed his usual insight. Through the eighties, skateboarding was undergoing a metamorphosis. Freestyle and downhill gradually got subsumed into skating as a whole, while in the street, a strange mix of old-fashioned and radical moves was receiving equal attention. Skating was about to reach a plateau of progress and mainstream acceptance. It was approaching the end of its own history. Stacy's questions and predictions addressed what had been and what was to come: "Is skateboarding a culture? A happening? An event? A lifestyle which sets itself apart from other sports? . . . Some feel it can be the next Little League with international status, but no way! Maybe in fifteen years when worldwide saturation sets in, but not until."

The same year, Scott Smiley's letter to *Thrasher* gave voice to the apprehensions that recognition aroused. "I totally disagree (about wanting skating on TV, etc.). Skaters will be skaters and not

jocks. Skate for fun or not at all." Jesse Davis was more emphatic: "AAAHHH! Stop it! Stop it! What are these people talking about? Who wants skating on Wide World of Sports? Never! Doesn't anyone learn from mistakes?" Their concerns were well founded. For better or worse, fifteen years down the line, saturation has set in.

But in 1985 the parks were mostly reduced to rubble. Some, like Colton and Reseda Skatercross, became off-limits territory like backyard pools, ridden illegally after they went out of business and before the bulldozers arrived. Parks had been important and fun, but their erasure meant they could no longer be relied on, and the street and ramps took precedence. A flurry of untrained construction meant scores of bigger customized half-pipes. Mile High Ramp, the Fresno Ark and Joe Lopes's ramp were just a few in California. Cambodia. III in Florida, Annandale and Cedar Crest in Virginia, the Keystone Ramp in Pennsylvania, the Clown Ramp in Dallas, painted blue with yellow stripes. Things got official in Virginia Beach when Mount Trashmore, built on a garbage dump, opened with a ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by the mayor. Henry Guitierrez, Mike Crescini, Rob Mertz, Jimmy Murphy and Dan Tag all came out of an East Coast scene that revolved exclusively around wooden half-pipes. Ramps went up all over continental Europe. In London, there was Crystal Palace, with Danny Webster, Bod Boyle, Rodga Harvey and Lucian Hendricks, the British Christian Hosoi. Anywhere there were skaters with initiative and access to land and wood, some form of skatepark substitute was brought into being.

Contests were held in backyards almost every weekend, some big, some small, some with pros, most without. For one at Eagle Rock, near L.A., first place earned five dollars. Fun was the operative principle. Owner Jay B. Moore explained the rationale in *Thrasher*: "Doug,

Chapter Nineteen

Awe Against Compromise

Outsiders peering into the closed world of skateboarding wonder where the devotion comes from. . . . To my mind, what is engaging about skating is that it is a metaphor for life. . . . It will teach you the difference between courage and vanity, it demonstrates that power is nothing without control. She rewards hard work and perseverance, and short-cutting in application will get you shown the horizontal door. Style over content are the emperor's new clothes, while quiet and clear truth resonates like a clarion. . . . Disappointment and frustration serve to temper our overleaping ambition and season our dreams of majesty with the earthy taste of humility. . . . The victory of optimism over experience is the engine room of skating. It underlines the importance of bringing a sense of awe and wonderment to a compromised and average adult world.

—Niall Neeson, *Slap*, June 2001

Neeson's eloquence touches on skateboarding's enduring noble aspects. At the same time, it can be more than a little dispiriting to see skating partially neutered and subdued by modern society's ma-

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lignant forces, but what else is new? Isn't that what happens to everything in the end? The barbarians were inside the gate a long time ago, and this onslaught is just the latest corruption. All skaters used to be participants who collectively rebelled against the false values associated with sport, but the divide has gotten smaller. Does it matter? Not as long as skating remains challenging, different and fun. That's what matters.

One leitmotif in the history of skating and the punk movement is the stark contrast between the real counterculture of the past and the pseudocounterculture of the present—a present where teenage rebellion is packaged and sold in a perpetual feedback loop of co-optation and regurgitation. Youth movements are picked over the moment they surface, and everything is “edgy” and “extreme” to the point that these concepts have lost all meaning. The quotes around those very words tell the story, and the overwhelming mood among the adults who pander to young people is one of calculated cynicism and hypocrisy. Before MTV and the Internet and the current vulturelike mentality of appropriation, youthful rebellions and experimentations could be off the radar of popular culture, thriving and developing organically. Punk and skating could be hidden—and their appeal and authenticity lay therein. That freedom to be underground has all but disappeared today.

It's become an old saw that society integrates formerly reviled movements by turning them into cultural consumer goods. They are commodified, studied, and explained—and all their unwholesomeness is stripped away. From the Marxism that originated this argument to Dada, surrealism and body piercing, this tendency has proven to be true. With punk it was due partially to the transience of the new and a mass audience coming around to a watered-down version that suited their taste. What was once a movement has be-