# ‘Look at What We Made’: Communicating Subcultural Value on London’s Southbank

**Abstract:** This article sets out key findings of an interdisciplinary Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded project that uses Long Live Southbank’s (LLSB) successful campaign to retain London’s Southbank Undercroft for subcultural use – skateboarding, BMXing, graffiti art etc – as a case study to generate discussions about young people’s experiences and engagements with (sub)cultural heritage and political activism. At the heart of this inquiry is the perceived contradiction between the communicative practices of subcultures and social protest movements: the former typically understood to be internally-oriented and marked by strong boundary maintenance, and the latter, to be successful, to be externally-oriented to a diverse range of publics. In explaining the skaters/campaigners negotiation of this contradiction, we look to the inclusive and everyday concepts of ‘inhabitant knowledge’ (Ingold 2000), ‘vernacular creativity’ (Burgess 2009) and ‘affective intelligence’ (Van Zoonen, 2004). In eschewing the exclusionary and contestatory language of (post)subcultural and spatial theories, this article proposes new frameworks for thinking about the political nature of young people’s bodily knowledge and experiences, and the implications of this for the communication of (sub)cultural value.

**Keywords:** subculture; skateboarding; activism; heritage; youth; South Bank

The Southbank Centre sits on a part of the River Thames that was developed for the Festival of Britain in 1951. The Undercroft which lies beneath the Southbank Centre was

'left over' space (Participants one and two) and has, over the years, been used to park cars, store bins and to shelter the homeless. It was, in the words of one of the skaters 'space that nobody wanted' (Participant one). While nobody in the mainstream was interested in this space, it was quickly found by London's nascent skate community and discovered to be 'absolutely perfect' for street skating (Participant nine). It has been skated continuously since 1973. Attempts have been made by the Southbank Centre to re-appropriate the Undercroft. These have been made obliquely (for example by throwing water or strewing gravel over the Undercroft floor) and more directly (for example by boarding off sections of the Undercroft). However, as the commercial value of the land increased, these efforts became more concerted and in 2013 the decision was taken to remove the skaters from the site completely in order to open retail units with the potential to fund the Southbank Centre's ambitious redevelopment program (LLSB 2014).

The Southbank Centre was mindful of the skater community and planned to build a new purpose-built skate park a few hundred meters down the river under Hungerford Bridge. However, their offer was rejected by many of the skaters, who nimbly put together an online and offline campaign, Long Live Southbank (LLSB), which articulated to both policy makers and the wider public the value of the cultural practices which took place in the Undercroft. The campaign surprised decision makers within the Southbank Centre (Participant sixteen) and quickly gained public momentum winning public support for an application to have the Undercroft listed as an Asset of Community Value and to be registered as a Village or Town Green. The Mayor of London subsequently stated that he intended to reject any redevelopment plans submitted by Lambeth Council that included a redevelopment of the Undercroft. The Village Green legal case was eventually halted when The Southbank Centre offered a long-term guarantee that the Undercroft would be preserved under a section 106 planning agreement.

The Undercroft and campaign to save it have significant implications for thinking about cultural heritage policies and practices, particularly in relation to the exclusion of subaltern or subcultural voices. Debates concerning the values of, and relationships between, tangible and intangible heritage have recently intensified in the light of an increasing focus on pluralism and inclusivity (Burra Charter, 2013, 16.3). The tagline of LLSB's's 'Dear Jude' (2013) YouTube film 'Look at What We Made' (see fig. 1) succinctly captures the complex interweaving of tangible and intangible heritage to which the skaters laid claim: they, not the Festival Wing's Brutalist architects who left it to be discovered, brought this 'found space[i]' (Participant eleven) into existence through their usage. We have explored elsewhere how the concept of 'found space', central to the LLSB's claims and campaign, necessitates a reconceptualising of authenticity such that it recognises the felt experience and emotions generated by individual and collective users of space. Acknowledging and authenticating the experiences and emotional attachments of the skaters is a controversial and contested area of heritage practice within an English system that does not recognise intangible heritage in the way that many of the international charters and declarations do (UNESCO 2003). In that article, for the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, we suggested that the Undercroft calls for an extension of even these frameworks in recognising not just the experiences but also the expertise of 'citizen experts' such as the skateboarders involved in the LLSB campaign (authors 2018).

In this article we want to take up where that article left off, and explore how the attachments, experiences and expertise of this distinct 'subcultural' community were communicated and translated within the LLSB's 'political' campaign. At the heart of this inquiry is the perceived contradiction between the communicative practices of subcultures and social protest movements: the former typically understood to be

internally-oriented and marked by 'strong boundary maintenance' (Hodkinson 2003), and the latter, to be successful, to be externally-oriented to a diverse range of publics (Fraser, 1990). In order to analyse this apparent contradiction our Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded research project brought together a range of expertise from diverse fields: from social movement studies, (sub)cultural studies, town planning and heritage studies. Whilst members of the research team bought very different bodies of theoretical knowledge to the project we shared a broadly social constructivist epistemological position and this underpinned our shared methodological approach.

We gathered together an archive of online and offline materials both from mainstream and alternative sources. These were used to formulate the topic guides for 25 semi-structured interviews. These included a series of walking interviews with individuals who were directly involved with the campaign, and a series of oral history interviews with an older generation of skaters who no longer skated the Undercroft. Finally, we interviewed a wide range of individuals who are involved in various different capacities with the construction of heritage policy and planning decisions. Interviewees were recruited through snowball sampling. All the interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically by individual members of the research team. We then compared and contrasted our findings collectively. Whilst the reliance on interviews with skaters, campaigners and policy makers directly involved with the conflict over the future of the Undercroft limits the range of voices available for analysis, it has enabled us to develop a real depth of understanding. Because of the focus of this article we draw heavily on the campaigning side of the interviews, as well as analysing the online and offline campaign materials they created and circulated.

The research team also wanted to show the experiences and emotions of the Undercroft and the ways in which the skaters interacted with the space to different

audiences. We worked in collaboration with Paul Richards from BrazenBunch, and a long-time Southbank skater and filmmaker, Winstan Whitter, to produce a twenty-minute film that could convey the experiences of skating at the Undercroft. The film is designed to allow a sensorial engagement with skating to be experienced as it conveys the sights, sounds, and uses of the space. This film, entitled *You Can't Move History* was awarded the 'Best Research Film, 2016' in the AHRC's 'Research in Film Awards' and is designed to act as a companion to this paper. All participants have been anonymised in the paper except where their words are spoken within the accompanying film. To watch the twenty-two minute film please see https://vimeo.com/146671695.

The article will begin by mapping some of the current approaches to understanding skateboarding via subcultural, postsubcultural and spatial theory. It makes a case for moving beyond the limits of these previous studies of skateboarding and other subcultures, in shifting from an exclusionary and contestatory language of 'subcultural capital' (Thornton 1996; Kahn-Harris 2007; Atencio, Beal, and Wilson 2009; Du Pont 2014) and 'spatial tactics' of resistance (De Certeau 1984; Borden 1998; 2003; Chiu 2009), to a more inclusive and everyday language of 'inhabitant knowledge' (Ingold 2000) and a 'politics of bodily knowledge and experience' (Moores 2012). We follow Shaun Moores (2012; 2015) in this regard, looking to non-representational theories to assist in understanding both the skateboarder's attachments to the Undercroft – grounded in the everyday, sensual experiences of inhabiting rather than spectacular, symbolic acts of resistance – and their successful communication of the skate spot's primarily lived rather than representational value. In moving on to discuss the LLSB campaign, we highlight how its language and visual imagery sought to translate the bodily understandings and inhabitant knowledge of the skaters to 'strangers' encountering their

message both within the physical space of the Undercroft and the media environments of YouTube and social media platforms.

In this section we use the concept of 'vernacular creativity' (Burgess 2009) to understand the coproducing social practices of skateboarding and filmmaking that emerge and evolve in the Undercroft, and their resultant relatability beyond that specific social, temporal and geographical context. We argue that the campaign's foregrounding of habitual practices and social interactions and its familiar discourses of 'family' and 'home' connect the Undercroft to a 'body politics' of the ordinary and everyday that set it apart from the, oft-perceived, elitist and exclusionary practices of both official cultural institutions (including those sharing the Southbank site) and subcultural groups (Thornton 1996). Finally, we examine the 'critical publics' (Warner, 2002, p45-6) bought into being by the campaign to save the Undercroft and explore the ways in which the 'affective intelligence' of fan communities/publics (Van Zoonen, 2004, p.39) created mediated spaces in which alternatives to the status quo could be imagined (Livingstone, 2005). We also examine the communicative dynamics which prevented decision makers at the Southbank Centre from 'hearing' the heritage claims articulated by the Long Live Southbank campaign. In short, the three sections are shaped around three fundamental questions: how did and do the skaters feel about the space; how did they communicate these attachments and experiences; and to what extent were they heard?

**The Undercroft as subcultural space**

Within sociological and cultural studies of skateboarding, street-skating has been framed through two dominant theoretical frameworks: a focus on skater's transgressive uses of space often via De Certeau and Lefebvre (Borden 1998; 2003; Chiu 2009); and a focus on the communal and contested relationships between skaters and mainstream culture via

subculture and post-subculture literature (Brake 1985; Beal 1996; Du Pont 2014). These studies tend to be favourable – at times utopian – about the counterhegemonic 'tactics' employed by skaters to 'win back space' (although following Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies' subcultural lead [Hall and Jefferson 1975] mostly symbolic space) from dominant commercial culture. More recently ethnographic research has highlighted the mainstream-subcultural distinction underlying these analyses to be overstated and oversimplified. Drawing particularly on Sarah Thornton's (1996) reworking of Bourdieu (1984) for the early 1990s club culture scene, recent research has characterised the world of skateboarding as hierarchically divided, with elite skaters distinguishing themselves not only from the 'mainstream' but also one another – particularly across generational and gendered lines – through their assertion of social and subcultural capital (Atencio, Beal, and Wilson 2009; Du Pont 2014).

These studies raise a number of questions for the study of contestation for and within the Southbank site. Through their chosen verbal and visual vernaculars, LLSB clearly constructed their campaign as resistance to mainstream, corporate culture, but in a way that embraced wider public and policy concerns around gentrification and preservation. In addition, whilst the campaign evidenced its argument for maintaining the Undercroft through a unique visual and discursive language derived from skate media within its online spaces, it was at pains to be inclusive with regard to more subculturally naïve or inexperienced actors, highlighting the Undercroft as a welcoming space for all classes, ages, genders, and ethnicities, where novice and expert co-existed harmoniously (LLSB, 2014). So, to what extent does a subcultural lexicon – both as theoretical framework and as situated argot – apply to how the Undercroft skaters and campaigners understand and articulate their connections to each other and to their space?

In the oral histories we conducted, the older generation of (ex)skaters expressed a 'subcultural' positioning to the space, expressing nostalgia for an authentic, underground experience that had been lost. The older skaters simultaneously bemoaned and lamented the 'dark ages' period in the late 1970s to early 1980s when skateboarding became less popular and so a more exclusive and committed community skated the Undercroft. One of the oral histories explicitly connected that era's core group of regulars to the subcultural capital circulated within underground music subcultures: 'I mean there was a strong element, I think, during the dark era in particular of being into something that other people weren't into, that sort of obscure knowledge, I'm into this obscure band that nobody else has ever heard of. And there's only five of us in the entire planet, only two copies of this record ever released! That level' (Participant eight).

These subcultural discourses of exclusivity and inaccessibility, however, are not re-articulated by the current generation of skaters to describe their relationships to the Undercroft or each other. Rather than discussing the Undercroft as an oppositional and boundaried space, the younger skaters describe it as 'a safe place for misfits' (Joey) where an 'extraordinary demographic selection of people […] right across the class and social, racial divide' (Participant nine) comingle and create collectively. The current skaters and campaigners rarely employ a subcultural lexicon, instead opting for the term 'community'- a terminology also employed across a number of campaign images and documents. Subculture theorists like Thornton and Halberstam make a clear distinction between the concepts, with 'community tend[ing] to suggest a more permanent population, often aligned to a neighbourhood, of which family is key constituent part' (Thornton, 1997, p. 2) whilst 'subcultures provide a vital critique of the seemingly organic nature of "community" […through] transient, extra familial and oppositional modes of affiliation' (Halberstam 2003, p. 14). For both Thornton and Halberstam, quests for

community are characterised, typically, as nostalgic and conservative in striving 'to return to some fantasied moments of union and community' (p.14).

These familial connections, however, were explicitly and repeatedly foregrounded in the discourse used by the current Undercroft skaters, with the terms 'family' (Participants two and three), 'home' (Participant two, three and thirteen), and 'mother's womb' (Participant four) used to describe the community and its connection. For example, one of the skaters stated, reflected, and then substantiated his selection of the term 'home' to capture the sense of belonging and nurturing the Undercroft provoked for him: 'I dunno, it's home man. It's home for a lot of people. And not in the sense of like somewhere you live, but as where you feel comfortable' (Grant).

As Livingstone point out the notion of 'home' has historically been associated with the private rather than the public sphere (citing Williams, 1983). However, there is a body of work which seeks to examine the political potential inherent in familial spaces. Dahlgren for example describes such spaces as 'a reservoir of the pre-or non-political that becomes actualized at particular moments when politics arise' (2003, p.155). Similarly, Van Zoonen makes a connection between the activities of leisure-based fan communities and participating publics arguing that both 'can be seen as provoking the 'active intelligence' that is vital to keep political involvement and activity going' (2004, p.39) beyond the confines of 'home' and 'family'. Consequently the skaters identification of the Undercroft as 'home' does not preclude the formation of a more publically orientated community, indeed it could be read as a precondition of its formation creating spaces characterised by 'early expressions of interest, explorations of experience, tentative trying out of view points' (Livingstone, 2005, p.28).

The idea of subcultures operating as *symbolic* family structures – even spaces to work through unresolved Oedipal tensions – goes back to the Chicago School in the

interwar years and is central to the Birmingham School's theorisations of post-war subcultures. But the way in which the skaters marshal a familial discourse goes way beyond these theoretical equivalences, with, for example, one of the skaters who moved from Mainland Europe at 18, explaining that the extra familial connections within the Southbank community facilitated his reconnection and resolution of issues with his estranged family back-home. He explains:

> You know and I'm sorting things out that I was supposed to sort out a long time ago, like things like relationships with my family. Things like that, you know. Which I've got in touch, I've got a feeling from being here, when we had such a big you know community here of people coming together (Participant four).

This sensual and tactile language of 'feeling' a familiar and familial connection to the Undercroft speaks of a more bodily rather than cognitive understanding of the space.

Within the interviews the current Undercroft community adopted a highly emotive and inclusive language to discuss their attachments to the space, rather than the exclusionary argot or subcultural capital more usually associated with internal subcultural communication. This emotional register was tied very much to an experiential sense of more universalist values of 'feeling' and 'belonging', but one built up through individual and collective usage of the space over time. Setha Low's conception of 'embodied space [as] the location where human experience and consciousness take on material and spatial form' (2003, p. 10) ran through many of our interviews. So, for example, one of the skaters who was in charge of the online campaign said:

> It's integrated with my muscle memory, you know the things I feel. And I can feel skating there when I'm miles away. And I can come to places that are similar and I'm instantly reminded of it. It's like an imprint on my

> psyche. It's very special to me. And anyone who's ever skated here. Just the way it sounds. People can tell you exactly the way it sounds. I could hear a thousand different sounds. Nowhere sounds like Southbank. That's it (Jason).

Like many of the other young people we spoke to, this skater evoked the smell, sound, touch and feel of the space in intimate detail. Furthermore, the slippages between first and third person are important here – the sense of collective experiential attachment (how it sounds); but also, the blurring of the physical and the cerebral (or human experience and consciousness) in which 'being there' is an integrated 'thought-feeling' that can be recollected even 'when miles away'. One of the ex-Undercroft regulars from the late 1970s (who has not skated there since the reduction in the spot's size) spoke of 'muscle memory' spanning temporal as well as geographical distance. He stated:

> No, I just remember as it a space and an atmosphere, I know exactly… I can remember the space exactly as it existed in its entirety, because I traversed it so many times, but it's just the atmosphere of it and the noise that comes with those kinds of places, the way the noise reverberates around in that enclosed… with that low ceiling (Participant nine).

These two accounts, recollected from a spatial and temporal distance, suggest that 'the embodied mind (or enminded body)' is 'the *subject* of perception' (Ingold 2000, 169-171). Anthropologist Tim Ingold's concept of 'inhabitant knowledge' is a useful way of understanding the primacy of the skaters' bodily movement as their 'way of knowing' the Undercroft (2011, p. 154). Ingold explains that 'inhabitants, then, know as they go, as they journey *through* the world *along* paths of travel', rather than relying on the lateral view provided by 'official' maps and plans. This everyday 'inhabitant knowledge' was

seen by skater we interviewed as the source not only of emotional connection but also of 'creative power'. Another skater highlighted everydayness rather than exceptionality as the source of creative innovation stating: '[…] with familiarity you know where the next place is to go, and always like new ideas, and new lines to take, so, it's definitely a place where you can get creative with your skateboarding as well' (Participant six).

The skaters we interviewed shared a 'Southbank style' which has been collectively developed over time through their engagement with the urban spaces they embodied. This living language has evolved as a result of the limited space within the Undercroft which requires skaters to build the speed required to do tricks in two rather than three pushes. As one skater put it the Undercroft 'breeds a certain style as well, like you can always tell here who is local, 'cause you can tell they are skating the Southbank style' (Louis). Whilst the recognition of this 'style' clearly requires a high degree of shared inhabitant knowledge, it also recognises the presence – in principle as well as in practice – of those who 'aren't locals here' (Louis). In doing so the skate community implicitly acknowledges the 'relation of inclusion/exclusion' (Dahlberg, 2007, p.835) which underpins many of the inhabitants' connections in the Undercroft. However, it does so whilst also implicitly acknowledging the potential for 'association' (Mouffe, 2005, p.20) with non-locals both within and beyond the Undercroft community.

Ingold explains that it is 'the ability to situate one's current position within the historical context of journeys previously made – journeys to, from and around places – that distinguishes the countryman from the stranger' (Ingold 2000, p. 219). The above account of breeding localness – the 'Southbank style' – through retreading and revising familiar 'lines' fits Ingold's distinction between the 'countryman' and 'stranger', but also points to more spatially and temporally complex processes. Throughout their interviews the younger generation of skaters we spoke to were at pains to highlight both the

diversity/inclusivity of the Undercroft as a both a material space and a sub-cultural community. Even the older skaters, whose accounts of the Undercroft had a tendency to slip into a 'celebration of the ghetto' (Sennett cited in Calhoun, 1998, p.388) were eager to point out the significance of the Undercroft as the focal point and essential networking 'hub' (participants one, two, seven and eleven) which spread out across the country. This was summed up by one of the older skaters who said:

> You didn't just skate there all day long, you'd meet there, have a little skate while you're waiting for everyone and then say, 'Right, we're going to go… We'd go to Glasgow and skate up there and go skate Bury and Manchester, Birmingham, [12:49], but we'd meet at Southbank and go. So, there's always that space you come back to (Participant one).

Skater's physical movement through spaces and repeated engagement with skaters from other spots and places requires a fluidity of subject position. It requires skaters of all generations to address and be addressed by, both locals and non-locals. This mode of address is significant because it recognizes one of the 'necessary means of commonality' underpinning the formation of modern 'counter publics, namely the existence of strangers (Warner, 2002, p.417).

Furthermore, and equally significantly, non-locals were not the only strangers to be found in the Undercroft. The 'sociability' of skating (Woolley and Johns, 2001) enables skaters to participate in communal interactions even when they are not skating, or indeed when the practice of skating had been rendered impossible. Thus, for example, one of the older skaters described the way in which even in the 'dark ages' the community would congregate in the space 'sitting on the walls that aren't there now … spending more time moaning about the state of the world, their particular world, than skating' (Participant one). Time spent beyond the board 'chatting, eating …and watching others

skate' (Jenson et al, 2012, p.347) has the potential to include non-skating friends including those whose place within the skating community is secured by a distinct but closely related form of inhabitant knowledge- the ability to mediate tricks. In the following section we will explore the role of mediation in the constitution of the Undercroft, and the resultant (re)use of media within the LLSB campaign as a method of communicating the skaters' bodily understandings and inhabitant knowledge in mobilising the public and decision makers.

**The Undercroft as mediated space**

Most of the skaters highlight the communal retreading of paths across generations as where the heritage value of the Undercroft is located, as one skater explains: '[ …] the journey is what matters […] the ongoing process is what matters, the evolution of it, you know' (Domas). And whilst the LLSB campaign (discussed in the following section) clearly makes reference to the tangible space of the Undercroft – hence the tagline 'You Can't Move History' – its significance emanates from the collective reinscribing of that space through its use rather than specific historical or architectural factors. As one skater and campaigner explains: 'you can see the history in the space. In the stones themselves there's marks of tricks that people have done that nobody even remembers anymore, but that somebody might have saw, that never left them, that's the kind of place it is really' (Jason).

One of the older skaters felt that this historical sensibility was a more recent development – to some extent a luxury – afforded by both the passage of time and contemporary digital technologies. He stated:

> […] that is a part of a language that I think the younger guys have built up which I think is… I'm not denigrating it in any way, I think it's fantastic, but

> I think they've been very aware that there's been this great arc of time that they've been able to capitalise on, whereas I think for my generation it was just living in the moment in a sense and there was no sense of the past, there was no recorded past like there is now, there's no way that these guys could go on and look online and find loads of pictures of them from years ago (Participant nine).

The ability to record, access and circulate media through new digital technologies is highlighted – in congruence with Shaun Moores' (2015) understanding of media use as place-making – as a form of 'wayfinding' that allows strangers to more easily become locals.

Over the years analogue photographs, hand-held video cameras and mobile phones have all made the Undercroft accessible to locals, non-locals *and* non-skaters beyond its walls. This is not, of course, a new phenomenon. However, the ease of digitisation, curation and circulation of analogue skate media alongside newly captured digital footage has intensified a wider sense of (mediated) accessibility and historical continuity (Garde Hansen, 2011). Moreover, the movement of images through the skate community expands the 'constellation' of individuals who can collectively remember the Undercroft in its many incarnations (Pentzold and Sommer, 2001, p. 74). In this way the mediation of the Undercroft extends the spaces in which the skate community can reflect upon the development of their attachments, experiences and expertise over time and in doing so validates their claim to space..

This mediation of the Undercroft facilitated a 'tentative trying out of view points' (Livingstone, 2005, p.28) which enabled the skate community – both current and former – to develop a stronger sense of collective memory. The contingent and non-linear sense of that memory might go some way to explaining what one of the current skaters

described as 'this whole generational paradigm, paradox, where it becomes the younger people touting about history and the older people talking about a compromise' (Jason). For the older skaters, their presentist experiences of the Undercroft ('I think for my generation it was just living in the moment') carried over into their initial feelings about the campaign- that *their* space and *their* moment had been lost so why not take the offer of a new skate park for a new generation. The younger skaters feeling of generational inheritance – whether arising from the aforementioned remediations of the Undercroft's 'recorded past' or the demands of improvising a preservation campaign, or both – became the central campaign message.

The significance of skate videos and photographs – both commercially and non-commercially produced and circulated – was a constant across generations of skaters. The connection between skating and filming in particular is one which has been explored by commentators in this field (Jenson 2012; Borden 1998). Many typographies of skate culture place the filmmaker at the heart of the community alongside the skater and BMXer. (DuPont 2014, p.564). Here we will draw upon the concept of 'vernacular creativity' to understand LLSB's strategies for 'translating the feeling into something that people who don't skate can understand' (Henry), which was extremely successful with the wider public, but unsuccessful with the Southbank Centre.

Almost all the Undercroft skaters (particularly those not originally from London) foregrounded the circulation of historic and contemporary images and videos in magazines, videos and online platforms as how they initially came to understand the Undercroft temporally as well as spatially. One skater, originally from Mainland Europe, explained that his first experience of the Undercroft was when it was included as a level in the PlayStation *Tony Hawk Pro Skater 4* video game. He explains: '[…] that was the first time I heard about it or seen it, you know, skated, virtually skated, skateboarded here,

you know!' This virtual 'wayfinding' experience created not only an initial cognitive map, but also shaped future embodied experiences of the Undercroft. He continues that on moving to London: 'I felt the first time I came here, I felt like I was in that video game, I'm you know Tony Hawk Pro Skater! Aw, this bit was there, you know' (Domas). The physical rupture of migration was offset by the continuity in feeling of inhabiting the Undercroft across geographical and digital/physical boundaries.

Skate media – particular skate magazines and videos – are central to skate culture and connect 'locals' with other skaters and skate spots elsewhere. This was evidenced by the way in which most of the interviewee's Undercroft origin stories foregrounded the role of both mainstream and underground media in shaping their identities, attachments and experiences of skate spots like the Undercroft. As one skaters who grew up in the New Forest explained:

> Well, the elements of the Undercroft that are meaningful to me, in the first instance, was the things that I saw in magazines, because we were just kids then, and when we got hold of skateboarding magazines which were quite difficult to get, and then there was these really beautiful photographs that were shot with a fish eye lens, so all the dimensions were kind of warped, so places like this just look incredible in that format. (Joey)

This connection between skating and filming in the Undercroft (was) underpinned by both the skaters' and filmers' shared emotional attachment (feelings of love, pride and joy) to the Undercroft (Magdin et all, 2016). For example, one of the older skaters said:

> you don't love it any less because you're the guy who only takes pictures, because you realise that you're not going to reach the kind of skill level you want but you love it, you can hang out with the people who are amazing if you take good pictures of them. And you might give those pictures to another

friend of yours who also like makes magazines or runs a blog or… it's just… it's fantastic like that (Participant nine).

The performance of skateboard tricks, and the capturing of those skateboard tricks on film are coproducing fields of cultural practice: the presence of the camera pushes the skaters to evolve and learn new tricks, and the filmmakers (themselves often skaters) have to adapt their practices to record and represent these innovations. This understanding of the relation between tricks practiced in material and re-presented in mediated space was confirmed by our own interviewees who said 'this is what we do, we shoot photos of it and film it and we document it and that then inspires the next generation to push the bar' (Participant two). In this way the production of skate images can be understood as part of an everyday life in the Undercroft which moves fluidly back and forth between material and mediated spaces.

In Jean Burgess' terms skating and filming are converging modes of 'vernacular creativity' that emerge from everyday practices and spaces; that are communally rather than individually produced; and are predominantly socially rather than economically productive. Burgess explains, vernacular creativity operates outside the 'institutions or cultural value systems of high culture or the commercial popular media, and yet draws on and is periodically appropriated by these other systems in dynamic and productive ways' (2009, p. 116). Whilst the habitual and material (sub)cultural practices that emerged and evolved within the Undercroft are associated with a specific temporal, social and geographical context, they are not elite or exclusionary in the way that the creativity of official art worlds and cultural institutions (including many on the Southbank site) are often perceived to be (Bourdieu 1993; Becker 1982). A key aspect of the relatability and translatability of the LLSB campaign was the non-elite and non-institutional nature of its message: its commonness. Edensor et al state that vernacular creativity 'possesses the

power to transform space and everyday lives of ordinary people to reveal and illuminate the mundane as a site of assurance, resistance, affect and potentialities' (2009, p. 10). Whether walking past and pausing to watch skaters performing tricks on the Undercroft banks and obstacles, or watching this vernacular creativity remediated via a YouTube video, 'strangers' are invited to pass through a material and social environment that feels simultaneously ordinary and familiar, and spectacular and special (Silverstone, 2002). Moreover, while this engagement is not in itself political it can be read as being pre-political (Dahlgren 2007) in so far as it addresses the passer-by as an interested and potentially participatory.

LLSB's campaign film 'The Bigger Picture' (which has had almost 100,000 views on YouTube alone) makes the beauty of the everyday explicit in the opening of the film as a long, elegant tracking shot, running in reverse with the camera at foot level, follows members of the public walking past Undercroft then doubles back to follow skaters following the same paths and lines. This intro makes an equivalence between the two forms of 'being in the world' – locals and strangers on a shared journey – whilst grounding skating as a pedestrian and everyday practice. The everyday vernacular of the skaters in juxtaposition to the elitist and exploitative vernacular of the Southbank Centre is made even more explicit in LLSB's YouTube film 'Consumerism over Culture' which edits between footage of skaters and market stalls on the Southbank, and combines interviews with skaters and market traders advocating for the value of the Undercroft.

Visually and within the interviews a symbiotic relationship is drawn between the organic skate community and local economy of the Southbank Food Market, and the joint threat of the 'fancy restaurants' planned to take their place. One of the food market's stall holders reiterates the testimonies from our interviews, in locating place in embodied practices and habitual retreading of paths, explaining:

> When you come past the sound of the screech of the skateboard and, you know what I mean, the sound of the wheels hitting the concrete, its great and you do know the sounds… them sounds when you hear them they will make you feel yeah I'm here, I can hear it, know what I mean.

This interview is telling in that it verbally (and in a clearly 'local' cockney accent) restates what the skate footage (used here and elsewhere) seeks to do- making visible and audible the beauty of the familiar and everyday in contrast to the perceived impersonal and formal discourse of the Southbank Centre. LLSB is set up not in opposition to the commercial world, but in alignment with the organic and authentic commerce of the food market and the creative entrepreneurship of the range of dancers, poets, musicians and visual artists who lend their voices to the campaign. The LLSB campaign, therefore, aligned itself with wider public discourses regarding the damaging effects of gentrification (in London and beyond) to local economies, communities and families. In doing so it refuses to address its YouTube audience as 'trivial, passive and individualised', addressing it instead as an 'active, critically engaged and politically significant public' (Livingstone, 2005, p.18). 'The Bigger Picture', like the majority of the films created by the Long Live Southbank campaign provokes the 'active intelligence' of its audience and requires then to reflect upon their 'place in society' as well as the 'obligations we have and the rights that are due to us' (Hermes ad Stello, 2000 p.219).

In fact, LLSB converted its vernacular creativity into commercial activity in order to fund the campaign. This involved turning the intangible and non-representational – the feeling of the Undercroft – into the tangible and representational– an identifiable product that captured the spirit of the Undercroft semiotically. Emblazoned on t-shirts, hoodies, stickers, even its own exclusive range of Adidas sportswear, the LLSB logo of a monochrome image of one of the Undercroft's concrete pillars transcended its material

referent to become not only a good funds generator but also a globally-recognised symbol (see fig. 2). The symbol, though indexically referencing the materiality of the space was seen to be authentic ('people seem to really respect the logo' [Participant eleven]) because it emerged from the inhabitant knowledge of a 'skater from there' articulating his 'interpretation of that space' (Participant eleven).

This articulation of inhabitant knowledge into a recognisable visual language for strangers was a vital component of the more explicitly campaigning LLSB videos. Whilst some featuring well-known skaters (within the skate community) doing tricks were clearly aimed at a niche audience, videos aimed at a decision makers, stake holders and the wider public combined the aesthetics and DIY ethics of skate media with more recognisable (art) cinema technique. For example, the 'Dear Jude' video – addressed to the Southbank Centre's then artistic director Jude Kelly – employed slow motion and montage editing and focused far less on tricks and more on the faces of the young skaters and the reactions of the public spectating and signing petitions (see fig.3). This balletic film captures the Undercroft's community and creative agency but also extends it to the wider public. These YouTube videos and photos (many explicitly highlighting historical continuity between the seventies and today [see fig. 4]) circulated through Facebook, Twitter and Instagram served to funnel viewers back to the Long Live Southbank website which had been created as a 'one click place to go' to inform the wider public of the proposed redevelopment plans and encourage them to sign their petition and write to the Southbank Centre and the local council (Participant eleven). In the final section of this article we will reflect upon the communicative dynamics of Long Live Southbank activists and analyse the Southbank Centre's perceived failure to 'hear' the skate community's heritage claims.

## The Undercroft as Political Space

While skate films enabled 'skaters' performances to be broadcast to one and another' (DuPont 2014 p. 568), and to wider publics beyond the skate community, these films were not being watched by the Southbank Centre. A traditional understanding of the public sphere as a space in which sincere individuals arrive at a consensus as to what constitutes the greater good (Habermas, 1974) underpinned the position of both the Southbank Centre and the Long Live Southbank campaign's understanding of the debate which unfolded about the future of the Undercroft. Thus, one of the directors from the Southbank Centre described the conflict over the future of the Undercroft as 'two separate groups of people acting in an honourable way' (Participant sixteen), whilst one of the key campaigners from Long Live Southbank maintained that the campaign tried to establish a 'common goal for both people that everyone could benefit from' (Participant eleven). The initial failure of the two groups to arrive at a common consensus about the future of the Undercroft was rooted, in part, in the different modes of communication favoured by both organisations.

The Southbank Centre is a hierarchically-organized arts institution which communicated with the skaters through what they described as 'the usual corporate language' (Participant two). The Southbank Centre made an early attempt to reach out to the skate community by commissioning a third party – Central School of St Martins – to organize a series of consultations designed to engage the skaters in the process of relocating the spot to a space beneath Hungerford Bridge. However, these attempts depended heavily upon skaters' preparedness to participate in 'pre-given frameworks' and therefore engendered a sense of disempowerment in the skate community (Warner, 2002, p. 414). The Southbank Centre misread the skaters favoured communicative approach as an unwillingness to engage with this approach as an unwillingness to engage

per se (Participant sixteen). Moreover, and as is often the case with informal, horizontally organized groupings, the skater's attempts to engage with the more formally organized institutions such as the Southbank Centre were susceptible to being framed as 'incoherent, uncontrollable and therefore potentially dangerous' (Ruiz, 2014, p.93). This sense was summed up by one of the skaters who said that skateboarding is 'always misrepresented by the media, by people who take the image of it or think they understand it and want to use it in some way and it skews it and taints it' (Participant two).

In contrast to the Southbank Centre, the Long Live Southbank campaign described itself as 'an organic big group of people, a community who have no real formal structure and who have no hierarchy or particular leader'. This skater/campaigner went on to say 'you've just got people that are putting themselves out to do roles … in response to something' (participant 11). Consequently, the Undercroft community responded to the threat posed by the Southbank Centre's redevelopment plans by calling itself into being as a 'self-creating and self-organizing' organisation (Warner, 2002, p.414). In this way the skaters moved from being a 'pre or proto or quasi-public' tentatively exploring the experiences offered by the Undercroft (Livingstone, 2005, p.29) to being a fully formed critical public (Warner, 2002) or counter public (Fraser, 1991) attempting to engage the Southbank Centre.

As the conflict unfolded the Southbank Centre continued to try and engage the skaters through traditional communications forms such as planning documents, formal emails and press releases. Such communicative processes require very specific and narrowly defined forms of engagement which were felt to preclude the participation of the skater community in the wider decision-making process. These 'vertically integrated' or top down forms of communication clashed with the more 'tentative' (Livingstone, 2005) '*alongly* integrated' (Ingold 2007, p. 89) or horizontal communication preferences

(Atton, 2002, Downing, 2001) of the skate community (SBC, 2011, 154). Thus, one of the campaigners remarked

> Certain members of our community were really against the way that we were being treated in the meetings. Yeah, being divided into different rooms, and having big screens with presentations and these grandiose plans for alternatives. But then there's real issues to people that come here every day and skateboard every day that weren't being addressed, so it felt like there was a lack of respect, instead of treating us as people with creative power and imagination (Joey).

While another pointed out that the skate community 'felt there was no consultation, they felt there was a constant barrier, they want to talk to this person or that person, they can't find them or how do they get hold of them. So, there was definitely some sort of clash in communication' (participant 11). These account highlights the skaters' frustration at the Southbank Centre's inability to see or recognise the value of the embodied knowledge and agency which the skaters had fostered through the habitual re-treading of paths and lines within the Undercroft.

The material and digital discursive spaces set up by the Southbank Centre to engage the skate community were invariably constructed by communicative norms which are – upon closer inspection – exclusionary in their formation (Fraser,1991, p.57). In doing so they failed to recognise that participation in the public sphere, as opposed to participation in the type of externally organised process identified by Warner, requires conditions in which the communicative terms of the debate are mutually constructed. Instead, the Southbank Centre addressed the skate community as users of the Undercroft, in other words as passive consumers of 'left over' space, rather than as community active and critically engaged in the production of (sub)cultural spaces (Livingstone, 2005). Consequently, there was no space in which the Long Live Southbank campaign could

'speak' in its's 'own voice", thereby simultaneously constructing and expressing … cultural identity through idiom and style' (Fraser, 1991 p.69).

The sense of exasperated miscomprehension prompted by the Southbank Centre's failure to communicate with the skate community were summed up by one of the skaters who said:

> […] and the main feeling at the time…is they've got all these words, they're trying to look at statistics, they've got this, they've got that but just take a moment to look at the beauty of what this place is, that transcends any language, you just have to look (Henry)

For the skaters 'being able to speak' was not predicated upon the ability to respond to the written or spoken word of others but through an 'idiom and style' which was rooted in their identity as skaters and which prioritised less text-based forms of communication. Many of the skaters described the practice of skating as their primary form of communication. One of the most proactive campaigners in the Long Live Southbank campaign said 'if you're a skateboarder you're generally quite an understated person, you let your skateboarding do the talking' (Participant 2). Within this context, tricks were described as 'a vocabulary' or 'a language' which skaters used to interpret their immediate environment (Participant two). However, the Southbank Centre, who were 'listening physically' but not 'listening digitally' (Participant eighteen), did not recognise skating (nor images of skating) as a legitimate form of address and therefore failed to hear the Undercroft's heritage claims.

The fact that 'the texts' produced by the LLSB campaign were 'not even recognizable as texts' by the Southbank Centre did not prevent their videos from calling publics into being (Warner 2002, p.414). In many ways, the Long Live Southbank campaign strategy was predicated on the notion of translation and assumed that while the

average member of the wider public might lack the cultural competences required to understand the nuances of particular tricks, many people walking past the Undercroft or clicking through the website would be able to decode the images produced and circulated by the Long Live Southbank campaign. Thus, one of the skater/filmer/campaigners said:

> My biggest job would be to translate the concept of skateboarding to people who wouldn't necessarily be open to it […] to explain to people that it's a valid form of expression just as dance is, as music is' (Henry).

Translating the Undercroft in this way enabled skaters/filmers/campaigners to open up a political space in which the future of the Undercroft could be discussed by the wider public through mediated images of skating that presented it as an organic and everyday pastime, whilst, at the same time, foregrounding the vernacular creativity which distinguish the Undercroft from the more mainstream and/or exclusive spaces on London's Southbank. In this way, the skaters used images rather than words to frame skating as a valuable form of expression and the Undercroft as a site of cultural heritage which should be preserved for the appreciation of future generations.

The Long Live Southbank campaign's sophisticated understanding of social networks enabled them to circulate 'current photos, campaigning photos and some historical stuff' quickly to publics of non-locals and strangers. As one campaigner put it 'you slam is on social media and everyone knows and they're going to share it with all their people, so it resonates with thousands and thousands of people' (Participant eleven). The Southbank Centre did not 'follow' the Long Live Southbank campaign, choosing instead to 'monitor' their feeds. However, large numbers of the wider public did follow the campaign, sign electronic petitions and contact their MPs and other decision makers causing the Southbank Centre's email to go 'completely berserk' (Participant sixteen). Indeed by the end of the campaign 150,000 members of the public had joined the

campaign and 40,000+ objections (the highest number in UK history) had been lodged with Lambeth Council.

As public pressure grew, the Southbank Centre did attempt to communicate via YouTube with the skate community. Unfortunately, the video they produced was described by members of the Long Live Southbank campaign as:

> Having this horrible, fake, urban feel to it which is probably what they were trying to avoid. But any kind of institution that that's far removed from the real culture that's happening on a street level is always going to try and replicate and create these kind of pastiche culture videos – essentially the skate park itself would've been a pastiche of our culture (Henry).

The Southbank Centre failed to understand and therefore authentically imitate the coproducing vernacular creativities of skating and filming. The Hungerford Bridge Skate Space video created a discordant clash between the '*alongly* integrated' language of skating and skate videos (mobile, flowing, ground level) and the 'vertically integrated' languages of planning documents. Initial tracking shots of the Undercroft site jarringly shift to crane shots of the architectural plans for the new skatepark with animated skateboarders hovering over the purpose-built obstacles (see fig. 5). As one of the campaigners explained: 'It made our job easy in exposing, 'cause all we did was just post the video they made, and everyone saw through it as it was that bad' (Henry).

Correspondingly, the LLSB campaign's success depended upon the ability of skater/campaigners to maintain the 'fine balance between presenting it in a kind of sanitized clean way that your average middleclass worker-type person could understand but at the same time staying true to the raw street essence of it' (Henry). This 'balance'

is difficult to maintain and is something that the skaters demonstrate an acute awareness of, as one of the key campaigners said:

> Yeah, it was so hard because I had to start using language that I would not usually use to describe skateboarding because I was translating it, and every time I was saying something or putting out a video or writing something I was always conscious of what the skaters thought of it, because the biggest job was to represent them because this was the first time that the eyes were on the skateboard community (Henry).

Moreover, while the current collaboration between the Southbank Centre and the Long Live Southbank campaign is in many ways a victory for the skaters, the potential for cultural appropriation remains. At the time of writing, the Long Live Southbank campaign is currently working with the Southbank Centre to open up the boarded-up section of the Undercroft, returning the space to a closer approximation of its former glory, so the struggle to 'stay true to the culture of skating' whilst engaging with 'corporate stiffs' is ongoing (Participant two).

## Conclusion

At the outset of this article we posed three key questions: how did and do the skaters feel about the space; how did they communicate these attachments and experiences; and to what extent were they heard? As we have explored elsewhere (authors 2018), a reoriented and relocated conception of 'authenticity' is required in understanding how the skaters feel about this 'found space'. In this article we have borrowed the concept of 'inhabitant knowledge' (2000) from anthropologist Tim Ingold, to articulate how the authentic is located within a collective and individual 'bodily knowing' of the space. This sense of

the familiar and the familial – articulated through a language of 'community' and 'home' – is central to the Undercroft users' experience of its (sub)cultural value.

The threat to the Undercroft posed by the Southbank Centre's redevelopment plans required the skate community to develop and evolve their bodily understandings and inhabitant knowledge into a more overtly political form of communication. Moreover, the need to communicate with policy makers and the wider public in a language beyond that of skating brought different generations of skaters together and created a more sophisticated self-understanding of the 'community'. This was recognized by a director from the Southbank Centre who rather ruefully commented that 'the paradox here is that it took the Save campaign for them to articulate what it was that was special about the space which they couldn't have told me, even if I asked, before that' (Participant sixteen). The rupture in routine evinced by the South Bank Centre's plans 'enable[d] aspects of practical knowledge to be brought to discursive consciousness' and for the skaters to rearticulate them in a familiar and familial vernacular (Moores 2012, p. 107). In this way, the Long Live Southbank Campaign not only 'formulated oppositional interpretations of their identities and needs' amongst themselves (Fraser 1991, p.67), but they also successfully circulated these understandings to the wider public who heard the skaters' argument that they owned the space because they had brought into existence through their everyday usage.

The skater/campaigners were not, at least initially, heard by the Southbank Centre or the heritage and planning sectors. The breakdown in communication which characterized the early stages of the relationship with the Southbank Centre was rooted not in the skaters' failure to speak in their own voice, but in the Southbank Centre's failure to hear those voices. Over the course of their campaign, however, the Long Live Southbank Campaign successfully drew upon the inhabitant knowledge of their

community to contest the exclusionary norms which structured the Southbank Centre's attempts to arrive at a consensus about the future of the Undercroft. In welcoming everyday exchanges and conversations – both in-situ at the campaign table and (re)mediated online – the skaters elicited political solidarity from the wider public, whilst discharging claims of oppositionality and exclusivity onto commercial and cultural elites.

The Southbank Centre's concession to LLSB, in the form of a long-term guarantee that the Undercroft would remain open and skateable under a section 106 planning agreement, was motivated more by political and public pressure than an explicit acknowledgement that figurative or *felt* ownership can amount to a legal claim. But this victory – and the subsequent collaborations between LLSB and the Southbank Centre on the 'You Can Make History' restoration of the original Undercroft space – is significant beyond this individual instance of contesting (sub)cultural value through emotional and experiential claims. In persisting with and nuancing its challenge to the orthodoxy that legal ownership affords an automatic position of dominance – and the power to set the discursive frameworks – the skaters offer a powerful model for conveying (sub)cultural particularity as a public good.

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Figure 1


Figure 2

Figure 3

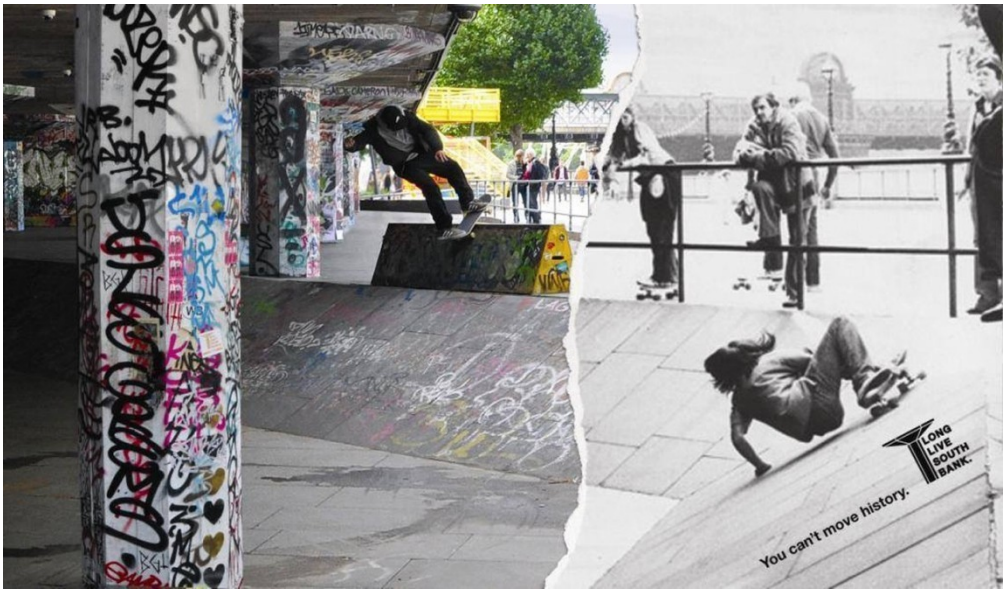


Figure 4


Figure 5