University of Reading

C me Sk8: discourse, technology and bodies without organs

Book or Report Section

Accepted Version

Jones, R. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9426-727X (2011) C me Sk8: discourse, technology and bodies without organs. In: Thrulow, C. and Mroczek, K. (eds.) Digital discourse: Language in the new media. Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 321-339. ISBN 9780199795444 Available at https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/66628/

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See Guidance on citing.

Published version at: https://global.oup.com/academic/product/digital-discourse-9780199795444?cc=gb&lang=en&

Publisher: Oxford University Press

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the End User Agreement.

www.reading.ac.uk/centaur

CentAUR

University of Reading

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

C me Sk8
Discourse, Technology and 'Bodies without Organs'

Rodney H. Jones
City University of Hong Kong

Jones, R. (2011) C me Sk8: Discourse, technology and bodies without organs. In C. Thurlow and K. Mroczek (eds.) *Language in the new media*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 321-339.

> *Find your body without organs. Find out how to make it. It's a question of life and death, youth and old age, sadness and joy. It is where everything is played out.*
>
> -- Deleuze and Guattari

In this chapter I will consider the relationship between technology and the human body. Most contemporary debates about this relationship have been dominated by the notion that digital technology, particularly computers and the Internet, are somehow alienating us from our physical bodies. Some worry, for example, that computers are turning our young people into a generation of sedentary and dangerously obese 'net potatoes' who have lost all awareness of their bodies, while others are concerned that the increased objectification and externalization of the body made possible by technology has reduced human beings to *simulacra* and human relationships to 'figments of the imagination' (Varga 2005:228). As Arthur and Marilouise Korker (1987:2) put it, 'in technological society, the body has achieved a purely rhetorical existence: its reality is that of refuse expelled as surplus-matter no longer necessary for the autonomous functioning of the technoscape.'

There are those, on the other hand, who think that this is not such a bad thing. They celebrate the freedom from the physical body which digital technology supposedly affords and dream of a utopian future in which flesh and

blood bodies are traded in for avatars that are immune to sickness, old age, as well as the bodily markers of identity (like race, gender and disability) that lead to discrimination and inequality (see for example Cromby and Standon 1999, Haraway 1991, Turkle 1995).

The problem with both of these perspectives is that, while engaging in complex conjecture about utopian or dystopian futures, they ignore what is actually going on with technology right now, how computers and the Internet are actually (rather than theoretically) changing the way we think about, interact with and use our physical bodies. Much empirical evidence (see for example Ho and Lee 2001, Orleans and Laney 2000) indicates, for instance, that teenagers who spend more time online do not necessarily engage less in physical activities like sports and in fact often enjoy even more active social relationships than others. Furthermore, even the most cursory journey through the tangle of social networking sites, webcam portals and dating services that make up today's internet landscape should be enough to convince us that, far from having been 'erased', the body seems in many ways more obtrusive than ever before. As Stone (1991:111) has pointed out 'no matter how virtual the subject may become, there is always a body attached. It may be off somewhere else - and that "somewhere else" may be a privileged point of view - but consciousness remains firmly rooted in the physical.'

That is not to say that our relationships with our bodies have remained unchanged in the face our increased ability to pixilate, manipulate and project them over large distances. Just the opposite; this change has been profound. The ability to externalize the body, to turn it into a *text*, however, is not particularly new, and the kinds of changes we are seeing in the status of the human body

brought on by digital technologies represent more of evolution than a radical departure from the past.

The questions I will be asking in this chapter, then, have to do with how the process of *entextualizing* our bodies affects the way we think about them and use them in the physical world, and how this process has changed with the development of digital technology. I will use as the foundation of my argument principles of mediated discourse analysis (Norris and Jones 2005, Scollon 2001), a perspective which focuses on how texts and other cultural tools mediate human activities and social identities.

The central concept in mediated discourse analysis is that of *mediation*, which has its roots in the work of Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky. For Vygotsky, all thoughts and actions are *mediated* through artifacts or 'cultural tools'. Since different kinds of tools make different kinds of thoughts or actions either more or less possible, *mediation* has a profound effect on limiting and focusing human activity and cognition. 'The inclusion of a tool in the process of behavior,' writes Vygotsky (1981:139-140) 'alters the course… of all the mental processes that enter into the composition of the instrumental act (and) re-creates and reorganizes the whole structure of behavior.'

Cultural tools can be either physical (hammers, screwdrivers, computers) or psychological (language, counting systems, conventional schemes of writing and speaking, conventional signs, and systems of thought and ideology) (Jones 2001, Wertsch 1998). For Wertsch, all cultural tools, however, are essentially material as, in order to be used to perform actions, psychological tools must undergo some kind of physical instantiation: ideas and languages must be transformed into spoken utterances or written texts. At the same time, all tools

are also psychological or *semiotic*, that is, they exist simultaneously as objects in the world and in the minds of users as mental representations imbued with meaning. It is this semiotic or 'textual' dimension of meditational means -- the relationship between what cultural tools 'mean' and what we can do with them -- which is of particular concern to mediated discourse analysts.

One cultural tool which has received relatively little attention in this model is the human body itself, although some, like Randolph (2000) and Nelson (2002) have pointed out how people make use of other social actors as meditational means to accomplish actions: a kidnapper uses the body of a hostage to shield himself from gunfire; crowds are used by promoters and politicians at sporting events and rallies to create an ambiance of excitement; medical students regularly use the bodies of the dead to study anatomy; and physicians use the bodies of their patients as meditational means to practice medicine. The kinds of bodily cultural tools I am concerned with here, however, are not the bodies of others, but representations of our own bodies which, through various processes of technologization (Jones Scollon 2001), we are able to separate from our physical bodies and appropriate into social actions. I have in mind things like passport pictures, portraits, and the photos of ourselves we post on *Facebook*. The position I will be taking is that representations of the human body (whether printed, painted, photographed, or pixilated) represent a unique and powerful class of meditational means with their own special set of affordances and constraints, and their own set of consequences on both social interaction and on individual cognition.

To refer to this particular class of meditational means I will rather shamelessly appropriate from the French philosophers Gille Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) the

term ‘bodies without organs’. Deleutz and Guattari use the term to refer to the ‘virtual’ dimension of the body, the body freed from the ‘organization of the organism’, the body outside any determinate state, torn from the here and now, exemplified, for them, in the body of the masochist, the drug addict, the lover, and the schizophrenic. The subject that I will be drawing upon to illustrate my analysis may in fact have some similarities to these figures, for the bodies I would like to consider as my exemplars are the bodies of urban skateboarders – not their physical bodies, but the representations of their bodies they produce and consume in amateur skateboarding videos, which they regularly spend hours shooting and editing and setting to music and then distribute on Internet sites like You Tube and My Space. Through examining these particular virtual bodies and the practices around producing and consuming them, I hope to illustrate more general principles about the way I believe technology is affecting how representations of the body are used as texts to take social actions.

Bodies without Organs and Technologies of Entextualization

I say I am appropriating the term ‘bodies without organs’ shamelessly because much of what I mean by the term is not really part of Deleuze and Guattari’s definition, and much of what they mean I am not including in mine. By bodies without organs I simply mean all representations of our bodies that we or others make use of to take actions in the world. ‘Bodies without organs’ defined in this way are always the result of *externalization*, or what Bauman and Briggs (1990) call *entextualization*, the process by which discourse (in so far as the body is inherently discursive) is rendered ‘extractable’, able to be lifted out of its immediate spatial and temporal materiality and inserted into another (Jones forthcoming).

‘Bodies without organs’ are characterized by five main features, which both

distinguish them from and connect them to their physical antecedents. The first is *deterritorialization*; 'bodies without organs' can be separated from the physical space that the body occupies and transported into different spaces. The second is *desynchronization*: moments in the existence of the physical body can be captured and lifted out of time and used in future moments, and these bodily representations are often not subject to the same laws of time and space that physical bodies are. The third is *reproducibility*: 'bodies without organs' can be reproduced and duplicated so that multiple instances of the same body can exist simultaneously, a feat which, despite advances in cloning technology, is not yet possible with the human body. Fourth is *mutability*: 'bodies without organs' like other texts can be revised, edited, altered and re-altered in ways that are not possible with physical bodies without severe physical consequences; 'bodies without organs' always have some degree of *plasticity*, depending on the media in which they are rendered and the technologies that are employed in this rendering. Finally, the fifth and perhaps the most important feature of 'bodies without organs' is *mimesis*; 'bodies without organs' are above all representations, and their sole utility as cultural tools is based on there existing some kind of resemblance to or connection with some actual physical body existing (or supposedly existing) somewhere. 'Bodies without organs' qualify as a special class of cultural tools precisely because of the reflexive relationship they have to the particular, concrete human bodies that they represent.

One example of such a cultural tool is my Hong Kong identity card, on which appears a picture of me as I appeared in 1997 when I became a permanent resident of Hong Kong. This photograph, however, is not the only representation of my body that appears on the card. It also contains a textual 'body without organs' in the form of my name and various information about my body, and, in the corner of the card, an

electronic chip that contains an image of my thumbprint. With this tool I can perform a whole host of actions that would be physically or legally impossible without it. I can carry it in my pocket. I can make a Xerox copy of it and fax it to my bank when applying for a mortgage. And I can use it to enter and leave the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong through a special turnstile that collects an image of my actual thumbprint and compares it to the image embedded in the electronic chip.

This example, in fact, illustrates a number of other important aspects of 'bodies without organs', in particular the fact that they are always partial, that a 'body without organs' can never be a 'copy' of the original body and often represents the body through synecdoche, with a part of the body like the face or the fingerprint signifying the entire body. Furthermore, bodies without organs are often deployed in 'semiotic aggregates' (Scollon and Scollon 2003), with several different representations working together to complement or verify one another. Finally, despite the potential for despatialization and deterritorialization inherent in 'bodies without organs', many ways in which they are used require the physical body and its representation to be co-present, as when I use my passport or ID card to cross a border or a student uses hers buy alcohol in a bar. For such actions to be performed successfully, the 'body without organs' requires the presence of its antecedent: as any college student will tell you, you cannot buy a drink if you have left your ID at home.

Here is where Deleuze and Guattari and their followers would no doubt cringe, for nothing could be farther than their conception of the 'body without organs' as a 'field of intensities' than the example I have just given. In fact, they have another term for such objects as passport photos and mug shots and other socially orchestrated

captures of the body, especially those based on categorizations like gender, race and national origin. These they call 'incorporeal transformations', and their function is not to facilitate flows of desire, but to control it, to fix it into various assemblages as determined by institutions (the state, the church, the prison). They are operations of discipline that aim to enforce particular regimes of representation and economies of meaning (Foucault 1979).

The reason I have chosen to use the same term to describe both of these phenomena is that they really do not describe different objects, but rather different kinds of actions that can be taken with the same object. The field of possibilities which Deleuze and Guattari image to be 'the body without organs' and the disciplinary regimes of 'incorporeal transformations' are simply two different sides of *entextualization*, two different potentials present in all representations of the body. I will refer to these as the potential for *virtualization* and the potential for *reification*. *Reification* is based on disembodiment and alienation. Its aim is to transform a dynamic process into a fixed object: an identity, a document, a piece of evidence. *Virtualiztion* on the other hand, has the opposite effect: rather than closing down possibilities, it opens them up. It is a kind of problematization of the body. In the words of Pierre Lévy (1998:44):

> virtualization involves a change of identity, a transition from a particular solution to a general problematic, the transformation of a specific and circumscribed activity into a delocalized, desynchronized, and collectivized functioning. The virtualization of the body is therefore not a form of disembodiment but a recreation, a reincarnation. a multiplication, vectorization. and heterogenesis of the human. However, the boundary between heterogenesis and alienation, actualization and commodity

reification, virtualization and amputation. is never clearly defined. This uncertain boundary must constantly be estimated and evaluated.

Of course there are a whole host of factors – social, economic and material – which determine whether or not the representations of the body created under particular circumstances will be used for *reification* or for *virtualization*. This chiefly depends, however, on the kinds of 'technologies of entextualization' (Jones forthcoming) that are available, and on who controls these technologies, and on the kinds of concrete social actions these technologies and their products are used to take.

The different kinds of technologies of entextualization which have developed over the years have introduced new sets of affordances and constraints regarding the processes of deterritorialization, despatializtion, reproducibility, mutability, and mimesis which I discussed above, and these configurations of affordances and constraints have had consequences on how the 'bodies without organs' that result from these processes can be used. The degree of deterritorialization enabled by digital technology, for example, which can send representations of the body instantaneously across the globe is very different from that enabled by drawing or print technology, and the degree of mimesis afforded by photography differs radically from that of drawing or painting.

One of the most important innovations in portraiture in the seventeenth century, for example, was the increased portability of images. With the development of miniature portraits, representations of the body could be transported in ones pocket or in a piece of jewelry and could be used for private rather than public viewing. An innovation of the eighteenth century was the development of pastel portraiture, which allowed artists to create significantly more lifelike 'bodies without organs', so lifelike

and seemingly touchable, in fact, that, according to art historian Shearer West (2004), they began to take on an 'an erotic or fetishistic quality'.

Perhaps the chief function of 'bodies without organs' in this era was memorialization, a function fulfilled in the modern world with family snapshots. People had their portraits painted to be remembered, and even miniature portraits exchanged between lovers were often referred to as 'remembrances'. This particular function is important not just for individual relationships that spanned across space and time, but also for the creation of social cohesion, as when the portraits of kings were displayed in public places. Such bodies without organs were integral to people's ability to 'imagine communities' (Anderson 2006), whether those communities were families or nations.

Perhaps the most significant advance in technologies for representing the human body, however, came with the development of photography, which facilitated more than ever before the *documentary* and *evidentiary* functions of 'bodies without organs'. No technology, perhaps, is more emblematic of the modern era, what Benjamin (1969) calls 'the age mechanical reproduction', than analog photography, and it was during this time that the entextualization of the body became increasingly associated with discipline and surveillance. Whereas in the past, bodies without organs served a primarily retrospective function oriented towards past events, in the era of analog photography their primary function became as documents, oriented towards their future use. Photography became a central tool for journalists, police officers, hospitals, schools, insane asylums, prisons, and departments of immigration and public health, and photographs themselves began to take on a truth value which paintings never had; they could be used, for example, to prove or disprove ones identity or to convict one of a crime (Tagg 1999).

At the turn of the century, however, a development occurred in photography that irreversibly altered the disciplinary nature of the technology: the invention and marketing by Eastman Kodak of the small personal camera. Suddenly for the first time in history people had at their command means to produce highly accurate representations of their own and others bodies for their personal use. This change in control over the means of production of 'bodies without organs' gave to photographs a more reflective function: photography became not just about being looked at by the other, but about looking at and reflecting upon oneself, and these acts of self reflection (and, as Foucault might add, 'self-disciplining') facilitated by rituals of taking and viewing photographs became an integral part of bourgeois family life. Bourdieu (1990:83), for example, commenting upon the rise of photography as an amateur pastime, remarks how in such family rituals, 'looking at the person who is looking (or who is taking the photograph), correcting one's posture, one presents oneself to be looked at as one seeks to be looked at; one presents one's own image.' The family photograph, then, became a materialization of what Cooley (1902), and later Mead, referred to as 'the looking glass self'.

The rise of digital photography and video and of computers and the Internet, of course, further increased individuals' potential to create and control their own bodily representations, but the more important change came with their increased ability to alter these representations, to combine them with other representations, to make them more immediate and interactive, and to disseminate them at an unprecedented speed to an unprecedented number of people. The increased *mutability* of 'bodies without organs' brought on by digital technology seriously undermined the *evidentiary* function of such objects as the truth value of photographs became

compromised (Mitchell 1992). At the same time, however, it strengthened another function, one I have not yet addressed, what I will be calling the *anticipatory* function of 'bodies without organs'.

The *anticipatory* function of 'bodies without organs' is not new—in fact it might be the most 'primitive' of functions for which bodily representations are used, associated with the sacred and the aesthetic, with myth and magic, with voodoo dolls and religious images. It is the function by which representations are used not to recall past bodies, nor to control present bodies, but to imagine future bodies. What I have in mind is not much different from the way Tibetan Buddhist meditators make use of images of the bodies of deities on *tankas* and on the walls of temples to imagine themselves as enlightened beings, that is to experience themselves as they will one day be. This function is perhaps closest to the Deleuzian definition of 'bodies without organs': bodies of pure desire and potentiality.

C me Sk8

In order to illustrate this function, I would like to consider the technologies involved in contemporary practices of skateboarding, technologies which go beyond the boards and trucks and neoprene wheels upon which skaters traverse the urban landscape to include technologies of entextualization like video cameras, fisheye lenses, and software for digital editing. Ever since the early days of the sport, 'bodies without organs' have played a central role in skateboarding (Weyland 2002), although the technologies of entextualization and the uses to which these representations have been put have changed. In a sense, the history of skateboarding in the past fifty years mirrors the development of 'bodies without organs' that I outlined above. In the sixties and seventies, skaters used analog photography to capture the ephemeral moments of their performances in durable documents, which they would send to

skateboarding magazines for possible publication. In fact, what made early pictorial publications like *Skateboarder* magazine unique was that they depended so much on photographs taken by readers. These photographic 'bodies without organs' primarily served evidentiary and memorial functions: they were used first and foremost to document the accomplishments of particular skaters, and the reputations of many of the early heroes of the sport were built on these often blurred and grainy amateur photos. These pictures also, however, served to build social cohesion, which contributed significantly to the early growth of the sport. As skateboarding historian Jacko Weyland (2002:162) writes, 'It wasn't about self aggrandizement or fame; it was about your far-flung tribe recognizing your will to exist and skate under the toughest of circumstances.'

There has also been a long tradition of self-publication in skateboarding, as skaters early on took control of distributing their 'bodies without organs' though photocopied 'zines' with titles like *Body Slam* and *Curbsnot*. This early adoption of DIY media, underlines a fundamental ideological construction of skateboarding as a sport created and controlled by participants themselves.

When video technology came on the scene in the early eighties, skateboarders were among its earliest adopters, although then most skateboarding videos were commercially produced by sporting goods companies to market their products. The fist widely distributed skateboarding video made by skaters themselves was *The Bones Brigade Video Show* produced by George Powell and Stacey Peralta in 1984, which featured such legendary skaters as Tony Hawk, and Rodney Mullen. It was in these early videos that Powell and Peralta developed the techniques and generic conventions that informed later amateur videos.

As video cameras became increasingly affordable, and with advances in

digital technology that made sophisticated editing and special effects more and more accessible to non-professionals, video became a central part of the activity of skateboarding. Learning how to shoot, perform in and edit video to some extent became part of learning to be a skater. Skaters began to bring video equipment with them when they skated, and to spend hours meticulously editing these videos and setting them to music, and then posting them to sites like *You Tube, My Space*, creating online digital archives of their personal accomplishments, the histories of the social groups they were part of, and of the locales in which they skated.

The skate video is not just a random collection of shots of people skating. It is a genre with clear conventions that have particular meaning and currency within this discourse community. Typically these videos open with an initial narrative frame in which the characters are introduced, characters which often include not just the skaters themselves but also various bystanders, passers by and antagonists (usually in the form of policemen and security guards). The bulk of course consists of skating, a series of successive beautifully executed lines that give the viewer the impression that the skater is travelling seamlessly through the environment, weaving a geographic narrative, a journey in which successive architectural objects present obstacles for the hero to overcome, rather like traditional hero narratives. Music of course is an important feature, and soundtracks range from hip hop to punk to Billie Holiday, but whatever track is chosen, the footage is edited so that the rhythms of the skating are carefully entrained with the rhythms of the music. As with all hero narratives there are inevitable setbacks, represented by what skaters call 'bail footage', shots of falling down. And as with more traditional hero narratives, there are scenes of comic relief represented through episodes of ritual insulting or horseplay.

The 'bodies without organs' that these videos constitute continue to fulfill the

memorial and evidentiary functions previously performed by photographs. Within the subculture of skateboarding, in fact, these videoed documents of individual accomplishments are extremely important tools for the ongoing and cyclical process of verifying membership and earning cultural capital within the group (Donnelly and Young 2001). With each new video posted online, a skater renews this membership and revises the status associated with it.

And, of course, as with any home videos, the retrospective or memorial function is quite important: the chance to relive the good times of past skate sessions, to recall past skate spots which have since been re-appropriated by the authorities, and to create a digital record of the history of the group and its members. For skaters, however, this retrospective function has an important cognitive dimension as well. These practices of retrospection are, in fact, integral to the process of learning to be a skater, allowing them to reflect on past successes and dissect past failures, to understand the motions and timing that go into performing particular tricks by attending to what Ferrell (2001:182) and his colleagues call the 'microphysics of representability' aided by their ability to freeze, slow down and speed up their movements. Over time, these videos constitute visual records of particular skaters' learning trajectories, allowing them understand how they have improved and what they still need to work on, encouraging them to view their learning from a broader temporal perspective. After the videos have been posted online, groups of skaters engage in collective recollection through posted comments and feedback, which facilitate not just individual learning but also group cohesion.

The most important function of these 'bodies without organs', I would argue however, is documentary or retrospective, but *anticipatory*, their ability to help skateboarders *imagine futures* and to contribute to their ongoing symbolic projects of

self-formation. The selves in these videos are not just representations of past bodies, they are rehearsals of future ones.

To understand this fully one must consider the plight of bodies *with* organs from the perspective of skaters. Anyone who has watched a lot of skateboarding videos but not gone out skating would be surprised at how different the real procedure is from what one sees on the screen. Far from the unbroken lines of successful tricks that make it seem as if the skateboarder is travelling effortlessly through the city, what actually occurs is a lot of falling down. Skateboarders do *not* land tricks far more often then they do, and a successful *line*, an unbroken series of tricks across sequential obstacles, is even more rare. The lived experience of an actual skateboarding session is a tedious and painful process of trial and error in which error is the rule.

And so what occurs in the editing process of these videos is not just a reliving of the experience but a *re-creation* of it. The lines documented in skating videos, and the chains of lines that give the impression of seamlessly traveling through the urban landscape in a sense portray skating not as it is but as it 'ought to be', they are at once documents of serendipitous moments and the compression of many hours and days of failed attempts, at once documents of what really happened, and idealized versions of what could happen or should happen, produced through careful selection and editing. This is where these 'bodies without organs' function in particularly powerful ways for skaters, allowing them to string together their successes into idealized portrayals that reveal not just their past glory but also their future potential. 'I'm really not that good, you know,' one skater admitted to me, 'but if I'm good at editing, I can make myself look like a pro.'

One important feature of digital editing which facilitates this function is the

way it amplifies the potential for *desynchronization* inherent in all processes of entextualization. Digital media makes the relationship between time and space more fluid and contingent, allowing time to be slowed down so that the brief, visceral adrenalin intensity of a trick can be elongated into a slow, balletic dance, and speeded up, so that the tedious and painful processes of learning, the experiences and accomplishments of weeks of skating, can be collapsed into a single document. On one hand, this manipulation of time helps to mediate the objective observable time of the stationary observer with the relative psychological time of the skater in motion. 'That's really the way it feels when you're doing it,' said one of my participants, 'like time is slowed down and you're aware…aware of everything around you and everything you do.' On the other hand, it helps skaters to reconstruct past experiences occurring on multiple timescales (Lemke 2000) into coherent narratives -- from the level of the micro move which skaters study to understand intricate aspects of timing, to the discrete trick, to the line, to the session, to their skating careers, to the various local and global histories of skateboarding, fashion and popular music within which they situate their lives, the rhythms of all of these timescales carefully synchronized so that the sounds of the skateboard along the surface of the ground are entrained to the beats of the skater's favorite song, and to trajectories of learning that have brought him to this moment and will carry him into the future.

Skate videos, and skateboarding itself, are examples of what Lemke (2001) calls 'traversals'– defined as 'temporal-experiential linkings, sequences, and catenations of meaningful elements that deliberately or accidentally, but radically, cross boundaries or standardized genres, themes, types, practices, or activities.' (86) What characterizes a traversal, writes Lemke, 'is precisely that some kind of coherent meaning is made in the unpredictable sequencing over "text-scales" that are longer

than the scales of the standardized elements which are strung together along the traversal' (89). Examples of trasversals include hypertexts, channel-surfing, mall cruising, Djing and Mcing, and skateboarding, a practice in which skaters construct coherent *lines* through navigating across disparate and seemingly unrelated features of urban architecture, and then re-edit these lines into videos which are later embedded into other genres like web pages. 'Bodies without organs' become figures in a, mobile, reconfigurable textual field, incorporated into the structure of other texts, pretexts, cotexts and contexts and various instrumentalities of entextualization and interpretation, infinitely multiplying opportunities for producing meaning.

And these connections ultimately extend back out to the physical body itself. Just because these narratives of future successes are virtual and, in some respects, highly idealized, does not mean they have no connection to the 'real world'. The anticipatory qualities of the videos skaters have made in the past infiltrate their future skate sessions, creating dynamic feedback loops. One of the most memorable lessons I received during my fieldwork came when I asked a skater who was practicing at a local skate park while listening to his iPod if he tried to skate to the rhythm of the music he was listening to, rather naively assuming a linear relationship between one mode and activity type and another on a single, linear timescale. 'No, he said, it doesn't really work that way. When I listen to the music, what the songs remind me of are the videos I made and the times I landed the trick and like how it felt.. and so I'm thinking about the next video and the music and the editing and stuff.'

Conclusion

The effect of digital technologies on practices of entextualization seems primarily to be to amplify those processes that I discussed at the beginning of this chapter. The body becomes more deterritorialized, more desynchronized and more

able to be copied and multiplied. But the most important effect is that is that digital technologies make the body more mutable, more editable, more susceptible to the imagination, and so more resistant to the *reification*. They problematize the body rather than stabilize it, and this might be in part what people find so threatening about them. Digital technologies do not so much capture the body as set into motion new processes of pursuing it.

One of the most important features of the digital age is the way it has created for people new opportunities to engage in self-fashioning through narrative projects using digital tools – projects which allow them to articulate important moments in their lives, to reflect on life's trajectories, and to reposition themselves as agents in and authors of their own stories. Like Tibetan meditators, skaters use their 'bodies without organs' to visualize themselves not as they are, but as they'd like to be, not just to recount to themselves the narratives of how they got to where they are, but to write the narratives of where they are going from here.

A number of scholars have seen extreme sports like skateboarding and snowboarding as metaphors for the new affordances of digital virtualization. Rushkoff (2006), for example, compares skateboarders surfing the city streets to 'screenagers' surfing the Internet, and Lévy sees extreme sports as physical manifestations of virtualization, attempts to exceed physical limits, to explore other velocities as ways of intensifying our physical presence and lifting us momentarily out of the here and now. Like an avatar, the skater is 'never entirely there. Leaving the soil and its support he rises into the air, slides along interfaces, follows vanishing lines, is deterritorialized and vectorized' (43). And the body escapes itself, acquires new velocities, conquers new spaces, and overflows itself.

The entextualization of the body using digital technology, for skateboarders at

least, rather than resulting in disembodiment, results in *re-embodiment*. Far from alienating these young people from their bodies, these technologies have in many cases created for them opportunities to experience their bodies is completely new ways, ways which approach what Deleuze and Guattari might have had in mind when they spoke of 'bodies without organs' as presenting us opportunities to 'find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment.'

References

Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism (New Edition)*. London: Verso.

Bauman, R. and Briggs, C.L. (1990) Poetics and performance as critical perspectives on language and social life. *Annual Review of Anthropology 19* : 59-88.

Benjamin, W. (1969) The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, In H. Arendt (ed.) and H. Zohn (trans.) *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, 217–52.

Bourdieu, P. (1990) *Photography: A middle-brow art.* S. Whiteside (trans.). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Cooley, C. H. (1902) *Human nature and the social order*. New York: Scribner.

Cromby, J., and Standon, P. (1999). Cyborgs and stigma: technology, disability, subjectivity. In A.J. Gordo-Lopez & I. Parker (Eds.), *Cyberpsychology*, pp. 95-112. New York: Routledge.

Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1987) *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. B. Massumi (trans.) Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Donnelly, P. and Young, K. (2001) The construction and confirmation of identity in sport subcultures. In A. Yiannakis and M. Melnick (eds.) *Contemporary issues in sociology of sport*. Champaign, IL, Human Kinetics, 299-411.

Ferrell, J., Milovanovic, D., and Lyng, S. (2001) Edgework, media practices, and the elongation of meaning: A theoretical ethnography of the Bridge Day Event, *Theoretical Criminology 5* (2): 177-202.

Foucault, M. (1979) *Discipline and punish : the birth of the prison*. A. Sheridan (trans.) Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Haraway, D. (1991) A cyborg manifesto: Science, technology, and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century," in D. Haraway, *Simians, cyborgs and women: The reinvention of nature* (pp.149-181). New York: Routledge.

Ho, S.M.Y. and Lee, T.M.C. (2001) Computer usage and its relationship with adolescent lifestyle in Hong Kong. *Journal of Adolescent Health 29* (4): 258-266.

Jones, R. (2001) Mediated action and sexual risk: discourses of AIDS and sexuality in the People's Republic of China, unpublished PhD dissertation, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia.

Jones, R. (forthcoming) Dancing, skating and sex: Action and text in the digital age. *Journal of Applied Linguistics*.

Kroker, A. and Kroker, M. (1987) Theses on the disappearing body in the hyper-modern condition. In A. Kroker and M. Kroker (eds.) *Body invaders: Panic sex in America*. Montreal: CultureTexts, 20-34.

Lemke, J. L. (2000) Across the scales of time: Artifacts, activities, and meanings in ecosocial systems. *Mind, Culture, and Activity 7* (4): 273-290.

Lemke, J. L. (2001) Discursive technologies and the social organization of meaning. *Folia Linguistica 35* (1-2): 79–96.

Lévy, P. (1998) *Becoming virtual : reality in the Digital Age*. R. Bononno (trans.) New York: Plenum.

Mitchell, W. (1992) *The reconfigured eye: Visual truth in the post-photographic era*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Nelson, M. (2002) On the border of humanity: A mediated discourse analysis of four medical students and one cadaver in gross anatomy lab. Department of Linguistics, Georgetown University. Masters Research Paper.

Norris, S. and Jones, R. (eds.) (2005) *Discourse in action: Introducing mediated discourse analysis*. London: Routledge.

Orleans, M. and Laney, M.C. (2000) Children's computer use in the home: Isolation or sociation? *Social Science Computer Review 18* (1): 56-72.

Randolph, T. (2000). Mediated discourse analysis: The social actor as mediational means in agents' habitus. Paper presented in the colloquium: Mediated Discourse: An Integrated Theory of Sociolinguistic Action at Sociolinguistics Symposium, April 21- 29, Bristol.

Rushkoff. D. (2006) *Screenagers: Lessons in chaos from digital kids*. Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press.

Scollon, R. (2001) *Mediated discourse: the nexus of practice*. London: Routledge.

Scollon, R. and Scollon, S.W. (2003) *Discourses in place: Language in the material world*. London: Routledge.

Stone, A. R. (1991) Will the real body please stand up? Boundary stories about virtual cultures. In M. Benedict (ed.) *Cyberspace: first steps*. Boston: MIT Press, 111.

Tagg, J. (1999) *The disciplinary frame*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Turkle, S. (1995) *Life on the screen: identity in the age of the Internet*. London: Phoenix.

Varga, I. (2005) The body - the new sacred? The body in hypermodernity. *Current Sociology 53*: 209-235

Vygotsky, L.S. (1981) The instrumental method in psychology. In J.V. Wertsch, (ed.) *The concept of activity in Soviet psychology*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 134-143.

Wertsch, J. V. (1998) *Mind as action*. New York: Oxford University Press.

West, S. (2004) *Portraiture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Weyland, J. (2002) *The answer is never: A skateboarder's history of the world* New York: Grove Press.