URBAN ASSEMBLAGE: THE CITY AS ARCHITECTURE, MEDIA, AI AND BIG DATA.

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Skateboarders, Traceurs, Explorers, and Other Denizens of the Mediated Metropolis: An Examination of Teen Life in London, Paris, and Moscow in the Surveillance Age

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• Abstract (300 words):
Teens and young adults have always pushed boundaries, yet youth culture in our current era entails greater access to technology, greater agency, and paradoxically, both seemingly a compression of time and extension of activities to the extreme—often for the purpose of social media exposure. Everything appears to happen faster: immediate news cycles, instant replays and it is all recorded. It is a time when one can become a celebrity without starring in a movie or having a record deal and yet a time when cellphone and laptop cameras are not the only cameras watching—as are those of the heavily-surveilled city.

This paper examines youth who are on the fringe of societal perception but in many ways closest to the varied heart of the urban experience: the urban explorers, skateboarders, and traceurs (practitioners of parkour) of London, Paris, and Moscow. Paris was the birthplace of parkour, London one of the epicenters for urbanex, and Moscow the current site of a revival of skateboarding as well as the origin of “roofers”, or Russian youth who illicitly climb to daredevil heights on
skyscrapers and cranes. All are engaging in activities on the margins of legality and societal approval, hence their wariness of apparatuses of official surveillance. Drawing on the urban theory scholarship of Iain Borden and Walter Benjamin’s seminal Arcade Passages to interrogate the integrated information city and its youth, this paper seeks to posit how the next generation is growing up differently and how technological and security state cities are fostering those differences.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Mike Walker is currently a visiting graduate student at the Savannah College of Art and Design and holds a BFA from the same institution in Architectural History. He is also a grad student in the program in law at Russian State University Tomsk. As a journalist his work has focused on Russia and the Balkan states with an emphasis on youth culture, sport, aviation, economy and urban planning. He has also written about urban planning in the United States. Walker’s career has been primarily as a journalist and a translator with publications in: SEE: A Fortnight in Review, Slate, The ATA Chronicle, Translation Journal, The San Francisco Chronicle, The Moscow Times, RT, The Bold Italic, InSerbia, Croatia Today, Untapped Cities, Top Soccer, and elsewhere. He also has presented original research on planning issues and architectural history at the Vernacular Architecture Forum, Auburn Montgomery Southern Studies Conference, Southern Association for the History of Medicine and Science annual meeting and elsewhere.