

Dilemmas of a sport under-construction: an analysis of the letter section in the Overall magazine (1985 - 1990)^{1 2 3}

Dilemas de um esporte em construção: uma análise da seção de cartas na revista Overall (1985 - 1990)

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Abstract

This article aims to investigate the dilemmas surrounding skateboarding through the letters published in Overall magazine. This magazine had 19 issues between 1985 and 1990, and in all of them, 107 letters were published during this period. The 1980s can be understood as a key moment for the sportivization of this activity, however, it paradoxically marks the period in which ambivalent conceptions about skateboarding are triggered, especially about its practice on the streets. Such letters reflect this paradox, while many skateboarders felt confident that Overall existed as an element to foster this activity as a sport, others complained about the restrictions and prohibitions the practice entailed.

Keywords: Youth, Skateboarding, Letters, 1980s

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Resumo

Este artigo visa investigar os dilemas em torno da prática do skate através das cartas que foram publicadas na revista Overall. Essa revista contou com 19 edições entre 1985 e 1990, sendo que, ao todo, 107 cartas foram publicadas ao longo deste período. A década de 1980 pode ser compreendida como um momento-chave para a esportivização desta atividade, entretanto, ela marca, paradoxalmente, o período no qual se desencadeiam concepções ambivalentes sobre o skatismo, sobretudo acerca de sua prática nas ruas. Tais cartas foram um reflexo desse paradoxo, pois, ao passo que muitos skatistas se sentiam confiantes pela existência da Overall como um elemento de fomento desta atividade como um esporte, muitos também reclamavam das coibições e proibições que a prática ensejava.

Palavras-Chave: Juventude, Skate, Cartas, Década de 1980

Introduction

For centuries, and no longer than 2 decades ago, a good part of long-distance interpersonal communication in our continental country was done by letters. Be it the correspondence between people, or a reader writing to a newspaper or a magazine, letters had a very important place in social and cultural life. Today its use has drastically decreased and they are little remembered as part of the experience of a certain period. They are also rarely used as sources for historical studies on sport and leisure. This study uses the letters readers sent to the most important and long-lasting publication specifically about skate during the 1980s in Brazil, the magazine *Overall*.

Skate became an Olympic sport (it was part of Tokyo Olympics in 2021) and has a great number of practitioners in Brazil (according to the data on the last research of *Datafolha*, in 2015, there were 8.5 million skaters in the country⁴). However, it was not always like this. As any sport, skate also has a history, in which the 1980s represents an important moment. Though this period presents considerable advancements regarding the professionalization of skate as a sport— with the creation of skating associations with business and the *União Brasileira de Skate* (U.B.S.- Brazilian Skate Union), besides big championships, such as *Copa Itaipava de Skate* and the *Sea Club*

⁴ <http://www.metodista.br/ronline/noticias/esportes/2017/chega-a-8-5-milhoes-o-numero-de-skatistas-no-brasil-ouca-no-esporte-10>, accessed July 03, 019.

Overall Skate Show – the 1980s also brought attempts of the government to inhibit its practice, the most well-known is the prohibition enacted by the then mayor of São Paulo, Jânio Quadros, in 1988 (Brandão, 2016).

Considering the 1980s as a key period that marks the ambivalent condition of skate – on one hand its increase and sportivization; and on the other, marginalization⁵ –, we focus on readers' letters in the magazine. Through these letters it was possible to discuss elements connected to the history of the activity that were not yet explored by historiography related to the sport in the country. This was mainly due to the fact that this source surpasses the usual actors, because the writers were not professional skaters but common people who skateboarded.

Therefore, the hypothesis that led to this study is that, through the letters, it would be possible to get into contact with the daily experiences of common people, of varied regions and cities in the country, in their attempt to insert themselves in a leisure practice that was under consolidation to childhood, teenage hood, and youth in the period at stake. Evidently, we are not here investigating the professional skater, that was, at that time becoming athletes, normally the main focus of the magazine. Such letters were mostly written by young skateboard practitioners,⁶ many of whom complained about the non-acceptance of their families, prejudice, fights, and discussions caused by the activity.

What do these letters say? What stories do they tell? What do they reveal about the possible tensions that permeate the skating practice at the time? How was the development of professionalism seen by those young readers? How did they relate with this practice considering the construction of their cultural identities? Based on the letters, what can we discuss about the place of the magazine in the everyday life of these young readers? These are the questions we aim to answer in this article.

⁵ In the 1970s, in Brazil, skateboarding was a novelty – initially nicknamed *surfinho* (tiny surf) – and practiced by sectors of the high middle class. There was a concern of parents and families with the risks offered by the sport, but it was not marginalized. This marginalization appeared especially in the 1980s with the development of street skate, a modality in which skateboarders interacted with public equipment, such as stairs, rails, sidelines, walls, etc. Besides this, the association to punk rock and the alternative look contributed to its marginalization (Brandão, 2014).

⁶ Recurrent elements in the letters allow us to affirm that writers were mainly *young* and *practitioners*. Young because they characterized themselves as such or by other elements (such as living with the parents and/or depending on parental authorization to circulate in certain areas of the urban space and/or do certain things – for instance, skateboarding). And *practitioners* because they identified themselves as so and also because the content of many letters refer to the universe of the practice, including doubts (for example, how to do a certain maneuver or how to build a wooden ramp) and testimonies of persecutions.

Characterization of the magazine *Overall*

The 1980s was an important moment to consolidate Californian⁷ sports in Brazil. In this period, there is an exponential increase of practitioners, connected to the greater visibility of media (magazines, television and radio programs) and its professionalization (in the case of surfing and skateboarding), the result of a change in organizational structures, but also the effort of many practitioners (Fortes, 2009, p. 417).

The consolidation of these activities dialogues with the expressive increase of specialized spaces in the media. Evidently, such spaces fomented these activities and also benefited, in commercial and audience terms, from the appeal of these practices to broader segments of the population – a process that also happened in other contexts studied by the history of sport (Couto, 2016; Fortes, 2011b; Melo, 2012).

Thus, in a non-comprehensive list, we try to present some communication media that covered and fomented these forms of youth expression in the 1980s: a) magazines: *Fluir*, *Visual Esportivo*, *Yeah!*, *Skatin'*, *Trip*, *Inside*, *Overall*, *Vital Skate*; b) newspapers and informative handouts: *Surf News*, *Skt News* e *Staff*; c) programs, flashes and/or championship coverage in FM radios: *Pool*, *Gazeta*, *Bandeirantes* e *89* (São Paulo/SP), *97* (Santo André/SP), *A Tribuna* (Santos/SP), and *Fluminense* (Niterói/RJ); d) television programs: *Grito da Rua*, *Realce*, *Vibração* e *Armação Ilimitada*; e) films: *Menino do Rio* e *Garota Dourada* (Fortes & Brandão, 2013, p. 214).

In this text, as indicated, we have focused our analysis in the longest-lasting skateboard magazine.⁸ Edited in the city of São Paulo, *Overall*⁹ circulated from 1985 until the beginning of 1990, the first number was in 1985, quarterly issued between 1986/87, increasing to 4 issues in 1988, reaching bimonthly issues in 1989. In total, 19 issues were published between 1985 and 1990¹⁰. Its origin is related to the success of skateboard events promoted during the first half of

⁷ We use here the notion of Californian sports by Pociello (1995), because most of these physical activities (skateboarding, BMX, surf, windsurf, body board etc.) were developed and initially underwent a process of sportivization in the state of California (USA).

⁸ Besides *Overall* (1985/1990), the second half of the 1980s also had magazines such as *Skatin'* (1988/1990), *Yeah!* (1986/1988), *Vital Skate* (1988), and the newsletter *Skt News* (1988/1990). Besides this, we also highlight the sticker album *Overall Skate Stamps*, which circulated in 1987 and was responsible for the first contact of a whole generation with skateboarding.

⁹ Our concern to characterize the magazine *Overall*, before analyzing the letters themselves, is inspired by the studies of Tânia Regina de Luca (2005).

¹⁰ In 1990, the year *Overall* finished, only two issues were released numbers 18 and 19.

the 1980s, specially, the championships that took place in Guaratinguetá¹¹. Part of its *staff*, however, was from the São Paulo office of magazine *Visual Esportivo*,¹² with Paulo Aniz Lima,¹³ Carlos G. “Califa” Sarli,¹⁴ Cesar Diniz “Cesinha” Chaves¹⁵, and Flávio Badenes¹⁶. With the success of skateboard championships, this group started to believe on the market viability of a new magazine specific of skateboarding in the country– considering that the magazine *Visual Esportivo* approached different sports, such as surfing, hang-gliding, etc.¹⁷

Though feeling that this undertaking could be a “challenge”¹⁸, they edited an experimental issue (number zero) as a market strategy and justifying its existence due to “the

¹¹ Besides the events in Guaratinguetá/São Paulo, other skateboard championships, such as “*Primeiro Torneio Verão de Skate*”, held in January 5 and 6, 1985, in *Pista de Skate de Campo Grande*, Rio de Janeiro, also point out the increase of the practice. This championship was portrayed in the pages of *Visual Esportivo* as an event involving various skateboarders, who participated in three different modalities. Source: Revista *Visual Esportivo*, n. 16, 1985, p. 25.

¹² The magazine *Visual Esportivo* was headed by Nilton Ribeiro Barbosa and his brother Nilson Barbosa. Eduardo “Dadá” Borgerth, was the “surf editor of the magazine *Visual Esportivo*” and “was part of the creating team of the project *Trip*”. In its peak, the publishing company of brothers Barbosa also published *Visual Surf* and *Visual Body Board*. Adler, J., & Barbosa, N. *Goiabada*, Dec. 20, 2005. <http://julioadler.blogspot.com/2005/12/nilton-barbosa.html>.

Bittencourt, L. Da casa. *Trip*, n. 131, p. 35, March. 2005. https://books.google.com.br/books?id=HWIEAAAAMBAJ&pg=PT33&dpq=PT33&dq=carlos+sarli+visual+esportivo&source=bl&ots=c6iII-NBFK&sig=ACfU3U2OiCcZRI7k_J8XA1StdWMTDb0SFQ&hl=pt-BR&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewjcz97dgqjjAhWQKrkGHfgyDhIQ6AEwCHoECAkQAQ#v=onepage&q=carlos%20sarli%20visual%20esportivo&f=false

¹³ Presented the programs *Visual Esportivo* and *Surf Report* (radio 87 FM, São Paulo/SP, 1984-1986). In 1986, he left the team of *Visual Esportivo* to found magazine *Trip* and transformed the program into *Trip 89* (radio 89 FM, São Paulo/SP). He is the owner of *Trip Editora*. TRIP FM 25 anos. *Trip*, 28 ago. 2009. <https://revistatrip.uol.com.br/trip/trip-fm-25-anos>. RODRIGUES, Alana. Programa de entrevistas “Trip FM” celebra 30 anos e independência editorial. *Portal Imprensa*, 7 ago. 2014. <http://www.portalimprensa.com.br/noticias/brasil/67359/programa+de+entrevistas+trip+fm+celebra+30+anos+e+independencia+editorial>. LESSA, Isabella. Trip: a viagem dos 30 anos da revista. *Meio & Mensagem*, 18 out. 2016. <https://www.meioemensagem.com.br/home/midia/2016/10/18/aos-30-trip-alimenta-projetos-customizados-para-marcas.html>

¹⁴ He was responsible, together with Paulo Lima, for the office of *Visual Esportivo* in São Paulo. Founded *Trip*. In *Overall*, he was one of the people responsible for planning and, later, the administrative director. Ac. Revista *Overall*, n. 1, 1986. Revista *Overall*, n.19, 1990. Scheller, F. ‘Éramos uma startup encarando um tsunami?’. *O Estado de S. Paulo*, August 22, 2012. <https://economia.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,eramos-uma-startup-encarando-um-tsunami,124147e>

¹⁵ Editorial contributor in the articles about skateboarding in *Visual Esportivo*. Source: Revista *Visual Esportivo*, n. 14, 1984.

¹⁶ Editorial contributor in the articles about skateboarding in *Visual Esportivo*. Source: Revista *Visual Esportivo*, n. 14, 1984.

¹⁷ *Visual Esportivo* continued to exist, while other specific titles were created for surfing (*Visual Surf*, *Visual Surf Magazine*) and body boarding (*Visual Bodyboard*).

¹⁸ Magazine *Overall*, (zero), 1985, p. 4.

greater ideal: 'THE SPORT'¹⁹. Thus, if readers' answer was positive and the proposal found its niche, a number one would be released.

In the end, the editors believed that the test would work out. Some months later, number one celebrated a sales success in an editorial by Paulo Lima:

Overall n. 1 is in your hands! Real, colorful, and mind-blowing. That's how our team works: few promises and much work. And here it is, after the support given by all our friends, workers, and advertisers, our number zero reached the newsstands in Rio and São Paulo, acting as a thermometer, feeling the temperature of skateboarding in these two great centers. And that was it: FEVER, TEMPERATURE, OVER CONTROL, SUCCESS of sales, and a hit among the insiders and the businesses that could understand that this tiny magazine was just the beginning. And we can already feel it. We have doubled the number of pages, we are now printing in the best paper in the market, also doubled the number of colored pages and started to print in the biggest printer of Latin America: *Editora Abril S/A*. The results are in your hands: take your *OVERALL*, n. 1 and devour the crazy articles that will blow your mind and the photos that will raise your hair. You deserve this work, after all you keep the spirit of SKATE ALIVE!²⁰

The metropolitan regions of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo were two of the most populous in the country²¹, as well as standing out in the market of skateboarding and a great number of practitioners. The commercial decision to test them in these areas refers to this context, as well as the success of the championships in Guaratinguetá, situated around 250km from Rio de Janeiro and 170km from São Paulo on the margin of the road *Presidente Dutra*, which connects both metropolises.

According to Mira (2001), "since the mid-1980s, the process of media segmentation had increased in general" (p. 147). However, publishing a niche magazine, as sectorized and specific as *Overall*, able to pay to use "the biggest printer in Latin America" suggests a market power that the edition number zero of the publication has helped to see.²² This seems so true that, in 1986, in the same year of the official launch of *Overall*, a competitor interested in the same segment has reached Brazilian newsstands: the magazine *Yeab!*, edited by *Editora Visão Ltda.*²³

¹⁹ Magazine *Overall*, n. zero, 1985, p. 4.

²⁰ Magazine *Overall*, n. 1, 1986, p. 4.

²¹ According to IBGE, in the Statistical Annuary of Brazil in 1980, the city of São Paulo had 8,490,763 inhabitants, followed by the city of Rio de Janeiro, with 5,039,496. In third place, there was Belo Horizonte, with 1,774,712 inhabitants. Source: Anuário estatístico do Brasil / Fundação Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. Rio de Janeiro: IBGE, v. 41, 1980 p. 70. https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/periodicos/20/aeb_1980

²² Issue number 0 was independent, the issues 1 and 2 were done by *Editora Abril*. Since the issue n. 3, 1986, *Overall* was edited by *Trip* Editora.

²³ In total, there were 11 issues of the magazine *Yeab!*, which circulated in newsstands from 1986 to 1988.

Considering the decade, normally characterized by an economic crisis, we should highlight the specificity of 1986, with the enactment of *Plano Cruzado* (Fortes, 2004). The economic measures taken by José Sarney's government, especially freezing prices, have led to a significant increase in consumption. According to journalist Arthur Dapieve (2000):

Its main measures ... opened the doors to the society of consumption for around 200 million Brazilians who survived with one minimum wage or less. These people started to buy, buy, and buy, including music records. It was a year of great sales: “*Selvagem?*”, by *Paralamas*, soon reached 300 thousand copies; “*Dois*”, by *Legião Urbana*, reached 800.000; and the absolute champion, “*Rádio Pirata – Ao vivo*”, by RPM, reached more than 2 million consumers. Naturally, following these numbers, the record labels released dozens of bands on the stores. It was never so easy. (p. 201)

The best-selling album of many Brazilian bands with decades of career, including those above, was the one released in 1986, taking advantage of this consumption boom. Besides this, according to the article entitled “*Os nanicos da nova geração*” (The new generation tiny ones) published in 1987 at the magazine *Imprensa*, new niche publications, such as *Yeab!* and *Overall* – two of the “tiny” media quoted in the article – ended up consolidating themselves by betting on the loyalty of a new type of reader, the practitioners of “extreme sports” (in the case, skateboarders). However, these are media with very particular characteristics, because their editors “have never been part of the great newsrooms, paid no importance to *leads* or *sub-leads* and ignored the most basic graphic and editorial conventions”²⁴. Paulo Lima, editor of *Overall*, a lawyer graduated in the traditional *Faculdade de Direito do Largo de São Francisco*, in São Paulo, “join the word of ‘magaziners’²⁵ simply by “fandom”²⁶, because as a surfer or skateboarder, he recognized himself as an avid reader of publications about these practices on the late 1970s in the country.²⁷ Neither him, nor Anshowinhas²⁸, editor of the magazine *Yeab!*, came from the

²⁴ Magazine *Imprensa*, December 1987, p. 22.

²⁵ Mira (2001, p. 164-166) uses the term *magaziners* (in Portuguese “*revisteiros*”) to refer to the practitioners of sports and/or outdoor practices that created magazines in the 1980s with no study in Social Communication nor experience in journalism. *Overall* is used by the author as one of the examples of publications started by *magaziners*.

²⁶ Idem, p. 22. We need to weigh this statement: the decision to create magazines and/or companies also arose from the wish to combine the proximity of the activity with a source of income (work). In other words, be part of the job market without having to get away from the activity (skateboard, surf, etc) that they liked.

²⁷ Reference to magazine *Esquete*, *Brasil Skate*, and *Brasil Surf*.

²⁸ Paulo Anshowinhas de Oliveira Brito started to write articles in *Fluir* in 1983 and, in 1986, together with some friends, he started a specific publication on skateboard called *Yeab!*, he was also part of the writing team of *Jornal da Tarde*, focusing on the so-called “extreme sports”, a term that he helped to popularize and naturalize. Besides this publication, , Anshowinhas worked in *Caderno Zap* from *Jornal Estado de São Paulo*, was a columnist of *Correio Popular de Campinas* and a television reporter for *Gazeta*, *Cultura*, and *Record*. (Fortes & Brandão, 2013, p. 215).

press or had a university diploma on journalism or communication. They had just “started, when teenagers, to work with what they liked [...] and it was just a matter of time to create their own specialized publications”²⁹.

To journalist Débora Chaves, however, this lack of formal academic training had several positive points, mainly, because these young editors, amateurs of the practices focused on their publications, allowed their staff (made up by skateboarders) to experience new textual and imagery languages. According to her, this allowed the development of niches of aesthetic and narrative experimentalism that had no place in the great media. In her words,

Self-taught in journalism, these editors-sportsmen innovated not only on the texts and visual of their magazines, but also in the production system, in which the trademark was improvisation. In *Overall*, for example, the members of the ‘editorial board’ handed their articles written by hand, on notepads or computer sheets of paper. Often, the editors themselves appeared in the articles, as is the case of Paulo Anshowinhas, at *Yeab!*. “Besides being an editor, I’m also a skateboarder, and a great articulator of skating movements”, states Anshowinhas. In fact, impartiality was not a strong point in these magazines.³⁰ “These are not journalistic publications *per se*” recognizes Otávio Rodrigues, 28 years old, editorial director of *Overall* and the only graduated journalist working in the publishing company. “Here we have a healthy mix of emotion and information”³¹.

Maria Celeste Mira observed that the second half of the 1980s was marked by a significant presence of media targeting skateboarders. According to her, in 1988, *Overall* and *Yeab!* sold “100 thousand issues bimonthly” each (Mira, 2001, p. 165).³² In the period there were also programs about skate in the television, radios (as in 89.1 Mhz³³), and in the comic book

²⁹ Magazine *Imprensa*, December 1987, p. 21.

³⁰ We note here that the article in *Imprensa* reproduces the belief – very disseminated in Brazilian journalism – according to which there would be no impartiality on the magazines done by journalists with a specific training/education.

³¹ Magazine *Imprensa*, December 1987, p. 22. Fortes (2011b) considers adequate the concept of niche media, created by Sarah Thornton, to characterize such media.

³² It is difficult to have reliable sources about the print run of these publications. Mira worked with sources such as reports and surveys done by *Editora Abril*. In this excerpt, the author uses as a source an article written in the newspaper *O Estado de S. Paulo. Veja*, the best selling magazine in Brazil, has reached “a print run of around 500,000 copies in 1981, reaching issues with more than 1 million copies in some moments of the following years” (Velasquez & Kushnir, 2010).

³³ The program “89 *Overall Skate show*”, done by magazines *Trip* and *Overall*, and presented at 8 p.m, “an hour of music and information exclusively dedicated to skateboarding”. Source: *Folha de São Paulo* (Ilustrada), June 27, 1988, p. A - 36.

market, with the release, by *Editora Abril* in June 1988, of *Skatemanía*, written by Spacca (who worked at the newspaper “*Folha de São Paulo*”) and Maurício Villaça.³⁴

Certainly, the advancements on technology favored the dissemination of a higher number of titles, computers and the new possibilities of printing, have to be considered together with the increase of manufactures and stores in the area of skateboarding. As “one publication does not make summer” (Bolota, 2000, p. 35), the emergence of *Yeab!* competing for the market with *Overall* was a sign that skate was counting with a more expressive number of companies, factories, and shop owners to advertise in their publications, supporting them as channels to publicize their equipment, clothes, and accessories related to skateboarding.

What do the letters say?

The letter section was present since the number 1 issue of *Overall*³⁵, first called *Cartas e Toques* (Letters and Tips), it became just *Cartas* (Letters) after issue 4. This section was on the last pages of the magazine, always listed in the summary, and had, depending on the issue, from 1 to 3 pages. In total, 107 letters were published, almost all by men³⁶, mostly living in the state of São Paulo.³⁷ Four of them did not indicate their origin. Among the 103 letters with indicated origin, 49 were from the state of São Paulo and 44 other states (besides 10 from abroad), Rio de Janeiro³⁸ stands out with 10 letters, and Rio Grande do Sul³⁹ with 8. The others came from

³⁴ *Folha de São Paulo* (Folhinha), June 19, 1988, p. B – 7. The comic *Skatemanía* was publicized at *Veja*, issue from June 22, 1988, p. 110.

³⁵ We remind the reader that before issue 1, *Overall* had an issue 0 in the newsstands.

³⁶ Only five letters were written by women. The issues on genre will not be explored in this article because the content of these 5 letters have not given us elements to do so. On the other hand, considering the sender of the letters, it is clear that the majority of readers of this magazine were men.

³⁷ Differently from other series of letters, especially those related to state institutions, we do not expect that these letters were preserved in archives (BACELLAR, 2005). We could not find information on the amount of letters received by the magazine. We suppose that the magazine received more letters than it published. If so, those involved would have to establish selection criteria – among which, we might speculate some, such as: readable handwriting; clear language; diversity (of people, regions/states of the country, topics). In any way, we cannot affirm if or to what extent, from a quantitative point of view (and, to a certain point, qualitative), the letters published were representative of all letters received.

³⁸ Seven letters were published from the city of Rio de Janeiro the following cities in the state had one each: Búzios, Campos dos Goytacazes, and Duque de Caxias.

³⁹ 3 letters from Porto Alegre, and one from each city of the state: Canoas, Novo Hamburgo, Osório, Sapucaia do Sul, and Viamão.

the following states: Paraná (6 letters, 2 from Curitiba, 1 from Londrina, 1 from Toledo, and the other from Astorga), Bahia (4 letters from Salvador), Pernambuco (4 total, 2 from Petrolina and 2 from Olinda), Federal District (2 from Brasília), Minas Gerais (2, 1 from Belo Horizonte and the other from João Monlevade), Alagoas (1 from Delmiro Gouveia), Espírito Santo (1 from Vila Velha), Maranhão (1 from São Luís), Mato Grosso do Sul (1 from Campo Grande), Piauí (1 from Parnaíba), Rio Grande do Norte (1 from Natal), Rondônia (1 from Ji-Paraná). By region we had Southeast (62), South (14), Northeast (12), Center-West (3), and North (1). Another interesting data were the letters from other countries, 10 in total, 4 from Portugal, 3 from the United States, and 3 from Argentina, suggesting that the issues reached abroad – at least in the case of Argentina, one of the letters published stated that the magazine could be found in the newsstands of Buenos Aires.

Though it is not our aim to discuss these letters, those from Portugal called our attention as they complained about the lack of tracks and skate magazines in the country. In issue 2, from 1986, the letter from Daniel Anton, an Argentinean from Buenos Aires, was published in which he wrote suggesting the cooperation among Latin-American skaters to maintain an exchange. In this edition, the American Dave Ducan, from Cardiff/California, asked about the skate scenario in Brazil (by this letter we can understand that he had already been to Brazil, because he says that he wrote an article about the country to be published in the American magazine *Transworld*). In issue n. 3, from 1988, Brenno, from Los Angeles/USA, congratulates the magazine and Argentinean Fernando Castellana, from Buenos Aires, writes that *Overall* could be bought in Buenos Aires newsstands, but complained that few issues arrived in the country. In issue n. 5, from 1987, a letter from La Matanza/Argentina was published in which the author talks about the creation of a fanzine in his city, entitled *Grind*, and a band of skate-rock called *Massacre Palestina*. In issue. 6, from 1987, there is a letter written by American J. Brittan thanking for the publication of a photo. In issue n. 7, from 1989, there is an interesting letter from Lisbon/Portugal, in which the author, Teófilo Augusto, complains that there were no skateboard parks in Lisbon, nor a skate magazine (this suggests that the skating scene in Brazil was more developed than in Portugal). In issue n. 10, from 1988, Carlos, from Portugal, asks to the magazine a project to build a skate park and, in issue n. 12, Pedro, from Lisbon, complains that skating is not strong in Portugal and asks for the help of Brazilians to increase the power of the sport there. Finally and in this same aspect, Nuno, from Sacavém/Portugal, complains about the lack of skating places in the country.

Therefore, this geographical mapping of the letters is evidence that, during the second half of the 1980s, skating practice was present in many cities of different Brazilian regions. If, on one hand, there is a predominance of capitals and big cities, on the other, we highlight the presence of small and middle-sized cities. The existence of a space for readers to write, and their participation by sending letters, the selection, and the publication of issues that would be distributed in different regions, allowed for the contact of people separated by great geographical distances, for example São Luís/MA is 4,000 km from Porto Alegre/RS, and readers from both these places wrote to *Overall*.

Several topics were discussed by readers in the more than 100 letters published during the 5 years of the publication, from asking for skate lane projects to complain on the organization of championships, as well as demand for sponsorship, or even poetry. However, as a methodological choice, we will focus here on the two most frequent themes which show the ambivalence of this activity, i.e., the growth of the practice and its marginalization. First, we highlight the role of *Overall* as a disseminator of skating and later the prohibitions and persecutions since the emergence and dissemination of *street skate*.

The magazine *Overall* as a disseminator of skating

Fortes (2008) argues that a magazine can influence and disseminate sporting experiences and that this took place with the new sports held in California. Certainly, while we cannot hold a publication accountable for the interest of thousands of people in an activity, on the author we should keep in sight that a specialized magazine, broadly distributed, helps to “establish parameters and raise interest by people in the whole country” (Fortes, 2008, p. 6).

The distribution of *Overall* in the continental national territory suggests that many young people practiced the activity and that the publican could have helped to make it more dynamic. An evidence is the number of letters written by young skaters simply to thank the magazine.

Certainly, such letters are more common in the first issues, as *Overall* was a novelty, being the first magazine exclusively dedicated to skateboarding published in the 1980s. Thus, skateboarder Luiz Henrique Galliac, from São Paulo/SP, sent “congratulations for the first issue” (probably referring to issue zero), saying that “for a while people from skate expect a

publication such as this”⁴⁰. In the following issue, there were many congratulatory letters. This was the case of the letter written by Antônio Henrique López, from the city of Rio de Janeiro, who wanted to “congratulate them for the last edition, who let is more confident on the future of the sport here in Brazil”, followed by the letter of Glauco de Freitas, from Búzios/Rio de Janeiro, who was “pleased with the security and maturity shown by the editorials”, wishing much success to the magazine. Julio Hatzenger, from Canoas/Rio Grande do Sul, affirmed that “in fact *Overall* was not kidding. Number 1 was mind-blowing. The cover and the poster really killed it”. Finally, writing in the name of SUB, an abbreviation for *Skatistas Unidos de Brasília* (United Skaters of Brasilia), Robert Lopes Soares explained that the publication of the magazine was so successful in the city that “people almost fought to decide who would have the *Overall*”⁴¹. A similar expression was used, years later, when Marcos Alfredo, from Belo Horizonte, stated that “people are almost slapping each other to get the magazine in the newsstands here in Belo Horizonte”⁴². Such statements allow us to think that there was, at least in some places and for some months, an unbalance between offer and demand. This may be due to multiple factors, from a small number of copies of each issue until the criteria and method to distribute the issues in such a large territory – what is costly and complex. Besides this, we highlight in these letters, the intense desire of young skating amateurs to acquire and consume this written product. Though this is not the focus of the article, we indicate the fascination that certain publications had among segments of Brazilian youth in the 1970s and 1980s,⁴³ a topic that deserves attention of future studies.

The congratulatory letters continue in issue 3. One of them emphasizes the role of the magazine to stimulate the practice of skateboarding. Hugo Bellingrodt, from Brasília/DF writes:

I’m very happy and wanted to congratulate you for this brilliant magazine. Happy because for many years, I felt skateboarding decreasing as if it were just a fad, restricted to places where only the fanatics still kept their feet on the shape. But with *Overall*, we are glad to have kept the sport, though reduced, during this dry season. In fact, you are fully supporting us and giving a great boost to skateboarding⁴⁴.

⁴⁰ Magazine *Overall*, n. 1, 1985, p. 29.

⁴¹ Magazine *Overall*, n. 2, 1986, p. 36.

⁴² Magazine *Overall*, n. 13, 1989, p. 49.

⁴³ Such is the case of magazine *Brasil Surf*, edited in the 1970s, according to several testimonies on the documentary *Brasil Surf Doc* (direction: Olivio Petit, 2015).

⁴⁴ Magazine *Overall*, n. 3, 1986, p. 40.

This tone of acknowledgement continues on subsequent issues. On issue n.5, Alex, from Vila Medeiros, a district in the north region of the city of São Paulo, affirmed that the arrival of *Overall* revitalized the practice of skating⁴⁵, in the following issue, George Araki, from São José dos Campos/São Paulo, affirmed that the magazine was helping to incentivize skate, from the beginners to the old-timers⁴⁶.

From issue 7, 1987, the letters of congratulations on the existence of the magazine were rarer, as it was no longer a novelty. Though the tone of acknowledgement can be found in the other issues, an event focused the attention of the letters to *Overall*: the repression of skateboarding practice in the streets. In particular, the prohibition of skating in São Paulo, decreed in 1988 by the mayor, former president Jânio Quadros.

The prohibitions of skate practices since the emergence of *street skate*

Though skate practiced in parks with vertical ramps (*half-pipe*, *banks*, *bowl*) was establishing itself in the country as a sport modality, with championships, awards, and investment, the emergence of the so-called *street skate*, during the second half of the 1980s, became a phenomenon among young people, by providing them *another space* for these practices, beyond the skate parks. Certainly, we should consider that many cities in the country did not have specific equipment, thus, for a young person to skate on the streets and squares –*street skate* – was the only option. It was an easy and quick way to take part in the activity⁴⁷ for places with no skate parks

Street skate, therefore, expanded in a different sense from the skate organized in parks and championships, through pathways where the body acted in territories with less-rigid frontiers. According to American researchers, “*street skate* praised an urban identity involving freedom and non-conformity” (Atencio et al., 2009, p. 6).

From the aesthetical/spatial experimentalism that skateboarders enacted since the second half of the 1980s, certainly something not expected by politicians, urbanists, architects,

⁴⁵ Magazine *Overall*, n. 5, 1987, p. 48.

⁴⁶ Magazine *Overall*, n. 6, 1987, p. 49.

⁴⁷ For example, the activity could be done in their own neighborhood, avoiding long displacements to a place with a skate park and possibly reducing expenses with transport and food.

designers, and other planners and managers of the urban space, we can identify a series of counter-positions that would lead to consequences, as we will see later on. This new use would engender a way of perceiving and using that space that was not institutionally foreseen – nor well-accepted. To turn a handrail into an obstacle, and not an instrument to help support the body, to use stairs to jump, and not as a way to go through one level to the other, are concrete and real examples of creating other spaces and alternative uses of the urban spaces. *Overall* did not only portray these practices but also tried to teach beginners how to enter in this corporal and urban culture.

However, the issue is that the practices of *street skate* raised concerns. With the emergence of *street*, the discourses presented by *Overall* were not exclusively in favor of its enactment as a “sport”. Beyond the actions in the parks, this new use of skateboards in the urban spaces activated discursive statements that did not previously exist (or that were not relevant) in the 1970s publications, such as *Esquete* and *Brasil Skate* (Brandão, 2014).

The cover of the second issue of *Overall* portrays São Paulo skater Fernandinho who, according to the article in the magazine, was “destroying the street obstacles in the streets of Sampa” [a nickname for the city of São Paulo]⁴⁸. In this issue, *street* was the main theme of an article ironically entitled⁴⁹: “Don’t wake the city up... *Street Skate*”⁵⁰. The article written by Fábio Bolota (skateboarder and one of the writers for the magazine) reported *street skate* in the following way:

I want asphalt and concrete, to take my skateboard and wander around, killing my wheels, going up and down the hills carried by the buses, dropping from walls, horrifying in the traffic, finding transitions for good fun, going the wrong way, going over the sidewalk, etc. Why? Because we love that, we live that!!!

⁴⁸ Magazine *Overall*, n° 2, 1986, p. 5.

⁴⁹ The irony is that skateboarding creates a lot of noise on the streets, a fact that contradicts the title of the article “Don’t wake the city up”.

⁵⁰ Possibly the title “Don’t wake the city up” is also an allusion to a song with the same title by a punk rock band called *Inocentes*. The lyrics, transcribed in Helena Wendel Abramo’s book, says: “At night when the city sleeps/black angels with dirty and dark wings /leave their lairs/and take over the streets/they are the kings of fun/of hate and loneliness/they have no hope/neither of living nor of vengeance/in each corner you pass by/in each ally you enter/don’t be surprised/they will be there/they sell sex and drugs/steal or kill/have a short life/no matter what they do” (Abramo, 1994, p. 102).

Imagine the infinity of things a city can have in its streets, lamp poles, cars, sidewalks, hits, drunks, bitches, transitions, potholes, ditches, old people, and a lot of asphalt. What do these mean? Obstacles?

Maybe yes, to those who do not dare to face unknown streets and unexplored spaces. But to others, these “obstacles” become a real battlefield, in which the goal is to show the mastery of your attack weapon: the skateboard. The action ground: the streets!⁵¹

“Destroying the street obstacles”, “horrifying in the traffic”, and “going the wrong way” do not seem attitudes compatible with what we generally see as “sport”. If with the championships and the development of skates in parks built for this activity were associated to the term “extreme sport”, now, beyond this modality (and at the same time), there was the claim of certain characteristics far from the traditional ways to organize sports.⁵²

Simultaneously to the use of skate parks and championships, *Overall* started to incentivize the practice on the streets. When this modality gained a great number of practitioners and started to bother pedestrians and authorities, the letters of young skaters complaining about the repression of the activity invaded the section Letters. In the metropolitan regions of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, in the 1980s, other youth activities created nuisances – some shared by skaters – such as the involvement with the punk movement and graffiti/tagging. Many of these young people lived in the outskirts, but were not restricted to their neighborhood, which also bothered sectors of the society and the authorities (Arce, 1999; Caiafa, 1985).

In 1988, reader Raphael Bittencourt, from Curitiba/Paraná, complained that people in his city vilified skaters, because “in some places here, skaters⁵³ are worse than *maloca*”⁵⁴. However, it was since the prohibition of the skating practice in the city of São Paulo, decreed by mayor Jânio Quadros on June 24, 1988, that the letters on the repression of skate use have gained more space. In its 10th issue in that same year, 14 out of the 10 letters published were focused on the prohibition of skating on the streets.

⁵¹ Magazine *Overall*, n° 4, 1986, p. 16.

⁵² Besides this, there is the issue of citizens’ complaints *about* the practitioners of *street* skate and the uses they did of the urban equipment. This issue would require the investigation and use of sources such as local/neighborhood newspapers, police and medical records, and legal processes.

⁵³ It is an appropriation of a word with a different meaning. In English, skater refers to those who use rollerblades/inline skates, while skateboarders are those using a skateboard.

⁵⁴ Magazine *Overall*, n. 9, 1988, p. 70. *Maloca* and *maloqueiro* were (and still are) slangs used in São Paulo and in the South of Brazil as a synonym for thug, robber and/or criminal.

Luciano Pandinha, from São Paulo, wrote: “I’ve been criticizing Jânio for what he did with the skateboarders of São Paulo, prohibiting the use of skate in Ibirapuera and on the streets”. Similarly, Saulo Oliveira Cabral, from the same city, explained that “In Ipiranga [a neighborhood] there is no place to practice vertical or *banks*, with so much empty space of the city hall round. We already had few places to practice skating and now Jânio created this law. No way!”⁵⁵.

As the repression against skating in the streets of São Paulo became visible and explicitly, through the decree of Jânio Quadros, skateboarders from other cities wrote to *Overall* claiming that they were similarly constrained in their cities. This was the case, for example, of Arquimedes Nascimento, from Guarulhos/São Paulo, who denounced what was happening in this city: “I’m kind of unhappy with the repression of authorities against skateboarders”⁵⁶. Also in 1988, Paulo Gomes, from São Luís/Maranhão, vented:

Here in São Luís (MA), the repression is something negative, because we can’t evolve with so much repression. Damn it! Why so much? Are we criminals? Are we practicing a crime by skating? If we go to a public space, there is always some sucker to repress us. Oh shit! No way. We urgently need a park, if not, sooner or later, skating in São Luis will finish. A repressor where I live, here in Cohama, is a commissioner of police called Marilda. She always tries but never can [get them], because when they appear in Veraneio, we quickly remove the ramps and the rail. Then these assfaced policemen instead of looking for thieves to arrest, come here to reprehend us⁵⁷.

A history on the prohibitions and repressions against skateboarding in Brazil during the 1980s is a task/research still to be conducted. Therefore, we have no data to know which cities had laws or ordinances that established restrictions against skateboard practice. This group of letters indicate that the idea of being an object of repression was a perception among skateboarders and motivated them to write letters denouncing such posture of authorities. It seems that these data can be part of the broad array of persecutions enacted by repressive forces against youth activity leisure, mainly when young people from the outskirts circulated in the urban space (Arce, 1999).

In the specific case of the letter above, it is clear the discrepancy between the desire of young people to practice skate – even taking around the city some heavy equipment as rails and

⁵⁵ Magazine *Overall*, n. 10, 1988, p. 65.

⁵⁶ *Idem*, p. 65.

⁵⁷ Magazine *Overall*, n. 11, 1988, p. 64.

ramps, having to escape the police carrying them— and the lack of an appropriate space for this type of leisure activity. In an active position, the young people demanded the construction of a ring. We can see that the writer identifies himself by name and surname, also indicating where he lived and the name of the “repressor”, suggesting that the author probably did not consider the possibility that the commissioner of police could access the issue of the magazine with his denouncement.⁵⁸

In the same issue, Allan Ferreira, a skateboarder from Igarapava, in the countryside of São Paulo stated that:

We're from the countryside of São Paulo: Igarapava.⁵⁹ We want our space here, but the law does not allow skating on the streets. We travel 36km to buy your magazines, because they're the best in Brazil. The mayor promises everyday he will build a park, but it's only an illusion. Our only option is to build small street ramps but, even so, the owners here complain that we are skating on their sidewalks. We want the support of, because skateboarding is not a crime.⁶⁰

The letter points out the initiatives taken by these amateurs. They traveled dozens of kilometers to buy a magazine (which corroborates our argument that these were much desired objects of consumption), demanded from the mayor the building of a space exclusively for the activity, and wrote to the magazine reporting their situation and asking for help. Besides this very active role, indicating the importance of the practice to their lives, the position of these young people simultaneously show that *Overall* was seen as a powerful agent to help them fight for changes: simply by existing it incentivized their desire; but it also served as a forum through which the common reader, in the *Letters*, could make their voices (and in this case, their complaints) heard in the whole country. Though we have not studied its reception, it seems reasonable to suppose that the reading of these letters gave many young people the sensation (and the relief) of not feeling alone, but to share the desires, angst, fights, and difficulties with their peers in other Brazilian cities. This effect probably took place with the letter writers themselves, especially those whose letters were published.

⁵⁸ It is also possible that the name of the writer and/or the commissioner were changed by the author or the magazine. There is also the hypothesis of a typical irresponsibility of youth.

⁵⁹ The Census held by IBGE in 1980 and in 1991 pointed out, respectively, a population of 20, 257 and 22,237 in Igarapava. Acc. a p. 91 of the document available in: https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/periodicos/309/cd_1991_v6_n19_sp.pdf. Accessed April 9, 2019.

⁶⁰ *Idem*, p. 65.

Therefore, we understand that the episode of skateboarding as a practice persecuted by the authorities was not geographically restricted to the city of São Paulo. If, in fact, the reaction of authorities had such an extent, it indicates the scope of the phenomenon and the number of practitioners. In the same sense, the adoption of a *solution* by the mayor of the most populated city in the country has possibility reverberated, stimulating others to do the same. This is suggested, in 1988, by Edu Salgado, from Sapucaia do Sul/Rio Grande do Sul, when explaining that skateboarding was also prohibited there:

A virus was recently discovered, the “Jânio Quadrus Annoyngus” is contagious!!! It has already reached the South: an idiot that sits in the city hall of this end of the world prohibits, without even keeping – a tiny- space for skateboarding. I’d very much like for you to tell me if this type of decision is legal and, if not, what we could do to solve it... We wish to say that the guys in Sampa know very well what we’re going through...and together, paulistas [people from São Paulo] and gaúchos [people from Rio Grande do Sul], will shout: Skate or die!⁶¹.

The skateboard fever was followed by the prohibition of mayors, from the greatest metropolises of Latin America to the “countryside” and “ends of the world”. Again, the complaint criticizes the prohibition without offering skateboarders a specific area, made for the practice and/or authorized for it.

In the following issue, number 14 from 1989, the published letters continued to denounce the prohibition of skateboarding in other cities and there were also young skateboarders complaining about family repression. From Cordeirópolis/São Paulo, Igor Santucci complained that the police was apprehending the skateboards; Victor Beal, from Toledo/Paraná denounced that a Church pastor from his city had asked the police to remove the ramps and rails the skateboarders have built on the sidewalks; Edilson de Oliveira, from Lins/São Paulo, writes that “in Lins it’s very difficult to skateboard, because he have no park and the police has prohibited skating on the streets. They turned the sport into a crime”. Fábio Bezzi, from Campinas/São Paulo, talked about a different repression, his father prohibited him to skateboard.; similarly, one of the few women who wrote to *Overall*, Adriana Oliveira, from Itaim/São Paulo, commented: “I’m a girl who loves skateboard and skateboarders. The problem

⁶¹ Magazine *Overall*, n. 12, 1988, p. 64.

is that in my house nobody likes it; they don't give me any support nor a skateboard. But someday the sport will be legalized!!! And my parents will fully support me".⁶²

Issue 14 published 10 letters. 5 complained on the prohibition of skateboarding and the other 5 asked for the construction of public skate parks. This was the case of a letter sent by Nelson Garcia dos Santos, from Cosmópolis/São Paulo:

We don't have a skate park to skate. A city councilor, before being elected, promised us a half. Now we're organizing a demonstration. We're desperate, because in this shitty city we have nowhere to skate. There are some little street ramps, but this red-neck neighborhood is very uptight! It's a pain in the ass!⁶³

The skateboarder stated that he and his friends talked with political leaders, organizing a manifestation to pressure for their demands, or receiving the promise of a candidate that was not fulfilled after the election. These movements indicate that some politicians were aware of the movement of these young people and/or could see the potential, in terms of votes, to promise to incentivize skateboarding as a sport and leisure activity. It also shows that the number of practitioners was relevant enough.

The following issues continued bringing denouncements against the prohibition and/or repression towards *street* and the lack of parks and parental support. Walney Bastos, from Delmiro Gouveia/Alagoas, complained that, besides not having a park in the city, his parents did not support him⁶⁴. Issue 16 presented a compile of two letters, one from Santos/São Paulo and another from Viamão/Rio Grande do Sul, in which both complained of the repression against skateboarding in the streets, the magazine defends the skateboarders:

Alexandre Leão de Santos, from the state of São Paulo, complains that he cannot put ramps on the street, because people will bark and call the police; if they go to the sidewalks, they neigh that skateboarders will ruin the paving and destroy the ramps or will also call the police. He asks Mayor Telma de Souza to build a specific area. Tito Lívio from Viamão/Rio Grande do Sul, denounces the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, where four (armed) guards on one side and two on the other surrounded him and his group to intimidate them and took their skateboards, returning to them days later. What a joke! Watch out, these dogs bark and bite. Shoo! Move!⁶⁵

⁶² The phrase suggests that the issue of gender played a role in this parental discouragement towards her involvement with skateboarding. The questions of gender are an aspect that can be explored in other studies on the history of skate. To this topic specifically, we indicate the reading of the doctoral thesis: Figueira, Márcia Luiza Machado. *Skate para meninas: modos de se fazer ver em um esporte em construção* [Doctoral thesis in Science of Human Movement, UFRGS, 2008].

⁶³ Magazine *Overall*, n. 14, 1989, p. 69.

⁶⁴ Magazine *Overall*, n. 15, 1989, p. 62.

⁶⁵ Magazine *Overall*, n. 16, 1989, p. 62.

Thus, this is a positioning of the magazine, not only as a space for these voices to be heard but also as an agent. The position-taking probably also has market motivations, aiming to please different sectors interested in skateboarding. In general, *Overall* placed itself not only as a media that disseminated skateboarding but that fomented all the facets of this culture, in professional championships in skate parks, or in street practice, as leisure or fun.

Furthermore, there seems to be an internal contradiction in the discourse of the publication. After all, if one of the aims of *street* skateboarders was to “horrify” people and the traffic, as said, it was predictable that authorities would repress them.

Final remarks

We have investigated in this article elements from letter communication as a research source in the studies on skateboarding, mainly, the one practiced as non-professional leisure. In this sense, we note that the advancement of studies on leisure can take place when the researcher investigates communication vehicles that were beyond the hegemonic media, as the so-called niche media (Fortes, 2011a, p. 58). Because hegemonic media normally emphasizes certain leisure practices, instead of others, as was the case of skateboarding in the 1980s.

As highlighted in the beginning of the text, we supposed that readers’ letters could offer other angles of analysis beyond those offered in the magazine content, mostly focused on interviews with professional skateboarders and championships. Certainly these contents were important, but they have been analyzed in previous studies (Brandão, 2011, 2014).

After analyzing the 107 letters published in all issues of *Overall*, we concluded that, in the second half of the 1980s, this magazine was an important channel to culturally disseminate skateboarding, as the writers identified themselves with it and were engaged to strengthen and increase this sport-leisure. The creation of *Overall* was celebrated by readers who wrote to the magazine to thank the existence of such a magazine, as well as to congratulate the writers and photographers. *Overall* was a reason of joy to many, who “slapped each other” for each issue in the newsstands. We can say that *Overall* helped to foment the skateboarding scene in the period, helping to increase the activity in the country.

Besides this, the most relevant aspect in the letters was the complaints on the repression against *street skate*, in the city of São Paulo and other places. Thus, it is possible to conclude that the construction of skate parks by the government bodies did not (only) mean a disciplinarian project by these groups, but also an answer to the demand of skate practitioners, who saw in the building of these spaces a way to continue their practice without the repression of the police or the neighbors. The letters suggest active young people, who asked the magazine to air their claims and for the authorities to listen to them. This included, not only the recognition of skateboarding as legitimate, but also its reframing within political policies, with the end of repression and the building of appropriate leisure equipment. A survey to identify the Brazilian cities with permanent skateboard parks, who built them, and if the access was restricted/paid or free needs to be done. Anyway, the demand for the government to build parks and to skateboard safely and in peace suggests that many did not want to *horrify* the city.

Finally, we highlight that skateboard can be seen as an important youth leisure activity during the second half of the 1980s, which was part of the everyday life of young people from different cities – beyond the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, where lived an important part of practitioners–, because skateboards from all regions wrote to *Overall* about their dreams, passions, anguishes, and dilemmas. Amongst the anguishes and dilemmas, the prohibition and/or repression of the practice on the streets stood out. Skate was a leisure activity, but a leisure represented as prohibited and marginal/criminal. Maybe this perspective of marginality/criminality (even if it were, in the case of one of the skateboarders, a repression by the mother) has, paradoxically, resulted in the great support it has gained from an important part of youth.

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