

## Being in the peripheral: How Street Culture grows yet stays young

Tomohiro Ishii

Independent Researcher, Artist

Global Art Practice Major, Tokyo University of the Arts, Japan; [tommoishii.works@gmail.com](mailto:tommoishii.works@gmail.com)

### Abstract

Street Culture, composed of Hip Hop, Graffiti, Skateboarding and more, has impacted many aspects of popular culture today. In this essay, I would set Street Culture as a complex of creative activities and by comparing with Kabuki culture, I would like to see their common points as cultural phenomena. And at the same time, seeking the origin of Street Culture's mindset into their experience: Great Alienation. With this point of view, I would like to point out what is the unique point of Street Culture from the others. And I would try to foresee which direction Street Culture might take in the future and how it can be staying as a unique phenomenon.

### Keywords

Street Culture, Graffiti, Hip Hop, Center, Peripheral

### 1. What is Street Culture.

Today, when we say 'Street Culture', we imagine it with the styles of Hip Hop, skateboarding and graffiti. From this image, I would like to set Hip Hop as the face of Street Culture and other activities happen in the street as an important foundation of Street Culture.

Despite of its young age compared to other cultures, Street Culture has already influenced music, film, visual art, fashion and more. Its expansion has also reached the internet and created its own space. (Datpiff, 2005; Virgil, 2022)

However, unlike other cultures raised from the street, I think Street Culture, in the end, will stay in the street with fresh minds and flexibility. With literal (places between or among two or multiple places or destinations) and metaphorical (between or among two or multiple central knowledge, expertise and such) means.

#### 1.1. What is metaphorical street?

If we set profession or expertise as a central point of knowledge or experience, we can say Street culture exists somewhere among these center points. For example, it takes experience and knowledge of painting and drawing for graffiti. However, the knowledge of urban structure, spatial

perception and sometimes physical strength are required for the execution. Sometimes a practitioner may need to improvise with a situation.

For skateboarding, not only athletic ability, but also an eye for finding skatable spots and concentration are required for the quick execution.

As we can see from this, Street Culture is a complex of multiple skills. And look from a traditional point of view, these skills that practitioners have might not be enough to be in the central spot.

### 2. What is Kabuki?

Kabuki (Japan Echo.) is a theatrical play that appeared as street performance in early 17<sup>th</sup> century Japan. At first, it was performed by women. Soon it became popular, however the government banned women from performing due to the adverse effects on public morals. This changed Kabuki so that only men can practice and perform on the stage. Also, theater programs were guided by government to keep the public order and morals. Soon later, Kabuki introduced the *lemoto* system (Spacey, 2015). These changes made Kabuki more of an exclusive activity and it is still difficult for outsiders to enter this world. (JOBZUKAN)

### 2.1. Comparison with Street Culture.

Street Culture is, as its name suggests, came from street. When it became popular, some part of it were not welcomed by authorities. e.g., Gangsta Rap and violences, Graffiti, Skateboard and vandalism.

For example, 'N.W.A vs FBI' is one of the infamous cases. However, sometimes practitioners use these restrictions as a way of branding. (Schonfeld, 2015; alvare3, 2018)

Unlike Kabuki, Street Culture does not have something like lemoto system, yet these days, we can find school for Skateboarding, DJing and Rapping. (DJ school, 2020; The rap school; バンタンデザイン研究所 高等部スケートボード&デザイン専攻; 東京渋谷DJスクール)

### 2.2. Development of culture

Looking at the development of Kabuki and Street Culture, we can say both went through similar steps. The list below (table 1) shows the stages of the development of culture.

In today, Street Culture has reached stage 4 and we can see stiffness in some part of it. For example, competitions in

skateboarding such as X-games, Street League and Olympic can be criticized for keep having similar skate sections and tricks for achieving championship. (Team, R.B.E, 2020).

Having format enables people to remember and even enables government and/or private cooperation to sell its image to public. This may generate financial support but if it stiffens too much, as we see in the Kabuki, it is easy to foresee that skateboarding will lose its openness.

This might be difficult balance between formalization and flexibility. However, I believe that Street Culture can rejuvenate itself to the point of its early state. The key is peripheral, and here is why.

### 3. Alienation: Being at Periphery.

As we see on the section 1. and 1.1. Street Culture exists on street: Peripheral. And it is because great alienation was the very basis of this culture. Look at the history of Hip Hop culture, it is easy to go back in the time of slavery. To survive in an alienated and serious life or death situation, people creatively avoid or embed the obstacles. This creativity is the basis of Street Culture. (後藤護, 2022)

1, Occurrence	Started by one or few group of people. In this state, people call same phenomenon with different names. Also, the styles in this state may different from today's standard.
2, Naming	One name becomes popular due to the mass media or ease of calling. It also enables us to have clear image.
3, Cognition and Limitation	Recognized by many people due to the increase of the population who practice it. However, after the Naming state, people start to limit the format by themselves or by government.
4, Popularization and Formalization	Become popular by mass media, and/or internet. In this state, new style is rarely invented.

**Table 1,** Stage of development of culture.

We are not experiencing huge scale of alienation like slavery, yet in everyday life or in youth time, many people experience alienation or marginalization in some degree. In this common feeling, Street Culture is still catching the heart of young generation and stays fresh as a culture.

#### 4. Conclusion

We saw what is Street Culture and how it can be in the future. One side of it might take the steps of what other culture has experienced. Yet we can say that core of Street Culture is always on street with resonance of wide range of generations who considered as marginalized. And importantly, Street Culture is practiced by those who marginalized for those marginalized. Which means Street Culture can be centralized yet never converge itself into one point.

#### References

- alvare3. (2018, May 1). 1980's music censorship: NWA vs. FBI. Retrieved June 1, 2023, from Music 345: Race, Identity, and Representation in American Music website: <https://pages.stolaf.edu/americanmusic/2018/05/01/1980s-music-censorship-nwa-vs-fbi/>
- DatPiff. (n.d.-a). DatPiff. Retrieved June 1, 2023, from YouTube website: <https://www.youtube.com/@DatPiff/about>
- DatPiff. (n.d.-b). Retrieved June 1, 2023, from The Authority In Mixtapes website: <https://www.datpiff.com/>
- DJ school. (2020, March 23). Retrieved June 1, 2023, from V2 TOKYO website: <https://www.v2tokyo.com/school/>
- Japan Echo. (n.d.). *KABUKI: A vibrant and exciting traditional theater*. Retrieved from [https://web-japan.org/factsheet/en/pdf/e30\\_kabuki.pdf](https://web-japan.org/factsheet/en/pdf/e30_kabuki.pdf)
- JOBZUKAN. (n.d.). 歌舞伎役者になるには?求められることや向いている人の特徴などを具体的に解説 | 職業仕事の情報ポータルサイト ジョブ図鑑. Retrieved June 1, 2023, from 職業仕事の情報ポータルサイト ジョブ図鑑 website: <https://job-zukan.jp/kabuki-actor/7752/>
- Schonfeld, Z. (2015, November 10). Does the parental advisory label still matter? *Newsweek*. Retrieved from <https://www.newsweek.com/does-parental-advisory-label-still-matter-tipper-gore-375607>
- Spacey, J. (2015, September 4). What is an Iemoto? Retrieved June 1, 2023, from Japan Talk website: <https://www.japan-talk.com/jt/new/iemoto>
- Team, R. B. E. (2020, October 9). Red Bull solus announcement. Retrieved June 1, 2023, from Red Bull website: <https://www.redbull.com/us-en/top-skateboarding-competitions>
- The rap school. (n.d.). Retrieved June 1, 2023, from TheRapSchool website: <https://www.therapschool.com/>
- Virgil, A. (2022). ダイアログ. アダチプレス. (Original work published 2022)
- バンタンデザイン研究所 高等部 スケートボード&デザイン専攻. (n.d.). Retrieved June 1, 2023, from バンタン高等学院 website: <https://www.vantanhs.com/sk8-design/>
- 後藤護. (2022). 黒人音楽史: 奇想の宇宙. 中央公論社.
- 東京渋谷DJスクール | III FAITHS DJ SCHOOL. (n.d.). Retrieved June 1, 2023, from 東京渋谷DJスクール | III FAITHS DJ SCHOOL website: <https://www.3faithsdjschool.com/>

