

Masters of Peace

RESEARCH

Sophie Friedel

The Art of Living Sideways

Skateboarding, Peace and
Elicitive Conflict Transformation



 Springer

Masters of Peace

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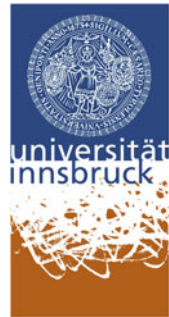
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Conflict Transformation

With a foreword by Iain Borden

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ISBN 978-3-658-08954-2

ISBN 978-3-658-08955-9 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-3-658-08955-9

Library of Congress Control Number: 2015933628

Springer

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To life, with its ups and downs – thank you for the magic.

Acknowledgements

It took me a long time to complete this book and I am grateful for an extensive list of people that made its existence possible; you are all in my heart. I would like to recognize here those that happen to be essential to the final version of this text.

Alexandra Stewart and Shawn Bryant for your proofreading and your brilliant fine-tuning. Norbert Koppensteiner for being the best advisor I could have imagined; thank you for being there when I needed you, for giving me the freedom to express myself and for your mind-blowing lectures. My soul sister Rosalie Kubny for your support on many levels, life would not be so enjoyable without you. Marije de Haas & Richard Holland for generously opening Floda31 to me, and the beautiful ticket to the wild. Iain Borden for inspiring me with your writings on skateboarding and for your informative introduction to this book. Victoria Fontan for inviting me to *UPEACE*, Daniela Ingruber for sharing your office and your great company in Costa Rica. Thank you also to the moon for shining bright on dark nights.

To my wonderful friends across the world and the (skateboarding) adventures we had. Particularly to Charlie Whinney for introducing me to the deck with four wheels and the *Faltown Castle Hill Mob* for taking me under your wings. The *Skateistan* team and students for spreading the stoke. Without you, this book might never have existed and I am deeply grateful that I was able to roll along with you all. Especially to Oliver Percovich, Max Henninger, Sharna Nolan and Shams Razi for welcoming me to Kabul and the rad times we shared.

Last but not least, despite the difficult times we had, to my family. My parents, Julia, Thomas and Franzi; as much as my siblings, Augustin, Josefa and Rosina; I love you and I am deeply thankful for your support and for believing in me.

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Foreword

For such an apparently simple operation – one piece of wood, two basic trucks, four wheels and a balancing rider – skateboarding can be a surprisingly complex phenomenon, involving all manner of actions, attitudes, philosophies, purposes, procedures and technologies. And it can affect all those who come within its orbit, from those who skate to those who work with skaters, community groups, manufacturers, media types and so on. Sophie Friedel’s perceptive and timely study provides a unique insight into one part of this complex realm – that of peace work, and skateboarding’s potential role within it.

On the one hand, this is an exploration into the internal world of skateboarding, and one of the great virtues of this publication is the exploration of “the bodily sensation of feeling at peace” which is here labelled as the “Art of Living Sideways”. Through “ecstatic moments of bliss” we understand skateboarding as offering a kind of inner peace to those who ride. This is far more than just a momentary condition, and Friedel also takes us into a more profound understanding of the body, mind and soul as one performative entity. The sheer joy of skateboarding can then be seen as an embodied practice of what is termed “Transrational Peace Philosophy”, or, simply “the humble act of living the experience and making art as life happen”.

Even more importantly, skateboarding can have effects outside of its own procedures, offering as Friedel notes “unlimited potentials”. Here then we are into the world external to skateboarding, and which other observers of the skate scene have explored in relation to art, graphic design, photography, film, historic preservation and myriad other territories. But, until this book, no one has done this for peace work, and here is another of Friedel’s welcome contributions.

Friedel’s extensive involvement with Skateistan is clearly key, and, for example, we learn much from her observations about the young students there (many of them female). “I could on several occasions,” writes Friedel, “observe how their body energy increased and their self-worth grew when a new trick, no matter how simple or apparently senseless, was learned; this was most visible in their eyes.”

Yet this is far from being a hagiographic account of life at Skateistan. Indeed, a good deal of this book is directed at Friedel herself, showing how skateboarding can be a transformative journey for all of those who come encounter it,

while also being highly reflective of peace studies in relation to western imperialism, theory and practice, and the personal. Particularly robust is the critique of the kind of prescriptive conflict transformation which aims to pass on new knowledge and techniques, in comparison to Friedel's preferred elicitive approach to peace work, which posits the trainer as "a facilitator or even catalyst of the knowledge and techniques that are already within the conflicting parties." As she concludes, this is a move away from peace work done by builders, charity-workers, doctors and engineers and more towards "a work that unfolds the extraordinary human potential inherent in all of us."

Above all, then, Friedel shows that skateboarding's "art of living sideways" is also an art of moving forwards, both physically in space as well as socially in our contemporary society. No one will ever pretend that skateboarding holds immediate answers to contemporary ills and iniquities – as Friedel notes, the world is "too complex to produce pre-fabricated solutions that can solve conflicts" while skateboarding and sport "can only bring change to relational encounters between conflicting groups" – but it can offer a distinctive contribution to aiding in both internal and external peace. This book shows us how that might be.

Iain Borden

1 Introduction

I really think that peace and understanding can be brought forward through skateboarding. You can meet Israeli skaters and hang out with them even if you are Arab and people say they are our enemies.

(Maysam Faraj in Sames, 2010:16).

This book deals with the striking potentials for peace work in the beginning of the 21st century, that I see rising from the fertile ashes of modernity's dead ideals of development and peace building. Despite its modern horror (Kaller-Dietrich in Dietrich et al, 2011), without the ideals of the development industry and the suggestions of peace building scholars, the thoughts shared in this book would have not had the spark of life to emerge. As such, this book is about peace work in the early 21st century, its challenges and potentials; it is a portrait on the examples of my experiences with teaching skateboarding in Afghanistan. I doubt the modern belief of development and peacebuilding and consciously move through the postmodern critique to explore the athletic stream of consciousness that one can experience from skateboarding. Doing so, I suggest skateboarding as one possible way to access elicitive conflict transformation, and as a vehicle to the bodily sensation of feeling at peace in the here and now which I conceptualise as *The Art of Living Sideways*.

The relationship between skateboarding movements and peace facilitation, as far as I am aware, has not been drawn in peace studies or any other academic discipline's literature before. It has however been informally discussed in the skateboarding circles I am moving in and occasionally some aspects have been printed in the skateboard media that I will be referring to. Exploring the relationship of peace facilitation and skateboarding is significant for two reasons in particular that I would like to address.

Firstly, studying the relationship between skateboarding and peace and conflict transformation is timely because of the increasing amount of projects that link philanthropy with skateboarding (O'Connor, forthcoming). The year 2012 in particular saw a steep increase of projects that are designed to use the skateboard as an interventional tool to reach a certain objective (see appendix 1 for a list of such projects). Other initiatives such as *Skateboarding for Peace in the Middle East* and *Skateistan*, have been operating over the last nine years. Those projects are predominantly founded as well as managed by action sports enthusiasts from high-income backgrounds and implemented in low-income regions, often with

underlying humanitarian or social related improvements as motivation for action (Thorpe and Rinehart, 2013). With the increasing rise of social projects in the board and lifestyle sport field, I find it essential to draw attention to such projects and understand their wider implementations.

Secondly, the bodily experience of peace is a vital aspect of living well and the relationship between skateboarding and peace deserves to be explored to discover its countless possibilities. Tricks that are applied to transform inner conflicts (Perls, 2002) and that might aid to clean the self from ego structures (Naranjo, 1990) can benefit the elicitive peace worker. I propose skateboarding as one such trick, which can aid the elicitive peace worker to work authentically. Or, as it is known in the circles of *Gestalt* therapy, the benefits of skateboarding can aid the peace worker to practice coherently as well as with empathy her/his professional work (Dietrich, 2013; Vincent, 2005). Understanding the potentials of skateboarding thus becomes relevant for the peace worker as a possible access to elicitive conflict transformation that has the potential to transform inner conflicts and as a possibility to clear her/his awareness.

This text began as my MA thesis for the UNESCO Chair of Peace Studies MA Program at the University of Innsbruck and I am thankful that I have the opportunity to transform my MA thesis into this book. When I started my thesis I had the intention to share the lessons I learned from fusing my previous peace work experience with skateboarding in Afghanistan and peace studies literature. My initial thesis proposal was aligned to the *Sport for Development and Peace* sector with a case study of *Skateistan*, Afghanistan's first Skateboarding school. As a skateboard addicted advocate of peace, I wanted to change the world and make it a better place.

Originally I saw the manuscript to be a milestone for my career in the field of post-conflict peace work, intending to get a prosperous job in an exotic location. However, I abandoned my initially planned research project after having studied three semesters at the *Innsbruck School of Peace Studies* and completed a five-month research visit to the *United Nations Mandated University for Peace* in Costa Rica. From what I learned and observed over time there, I could no longer support the idea of observing the so called 'local' Other through a magnifying glass, to then in turn create assumptions and recommendations for their betterment.

My doubt concerning the use of the *Skateistan* as a case study and the students as research participants began when I started to inform myself about ethical considerations and accountability with children in areas of conflict, which among other issues, suggest that the children should benefit from the study as well (Save the Children, 2004). Shortly before my flight to Kabul in the summer of 2012, I had a 'method meeting' with my supervisor Norbert Koppensteiner to fine-tune my strategy and what I had hoped for, to eliminate my uncertainties.

“Just write about your experience with skateboarding, how it makes you feel and how it can transform,” he said when I called him on *Skype*, drenched in doubt. Do you know how difficult this is in an academic setting? Yet moving away from observing others and focusing on my personal experiences appeared to be the one thing I really found necessary to do.

Through a transrational approach to research I initially deconstructed my experiences with skateboarding and peace work in Afghanistan, until there was nothing left. At times this doubting phase came close to being unbearable, however in that void that emerges at the point of nothingness, emerged a horizon of countless possibilities for peace. I exposed my then relentless doubts as well as realisations in the MA thesis and turned to theory to find resonance to open questions of mine. With that initial intimate voyage to understand my experiences, I rediscovered my intuition and wonder for the unknown. Nevertheless for this book I decided to edit the original text and leave the personal process on the side to be able to focus on *The Art of Living Sideways* and *The Aesthetics of Transrational Peace Philosophy*, because I find them more important to share. Both are key concepts of this book that I introduce in the conceptual consideration chapter and expand upon during the course of this text.

This book is written for people interested in skateboarding, peace and elicitive conflict transformation work. Especially for students, researchers and practitioners that work with, or are interested in, embedding skateboarding in their work. I wish for this text to inspire the one or the other skateboarder and inform the non-skateboarding public about the grand potentials of the deck with four wheels.

Elicitive peace work implies to work on the self (Dietrich, 2013). As such, this book is a call for peace workers in particular but for my dear reader in general to pursue self-inquiry — to dismantle critically personal belief systems, perspectives and intentions. What better self-work is there then to own one’s history, neuroses, feelings, emotions and thoughts to then be able to transform them? This self-awareness, I argue, is an essential practice for elicitive conflict transformation work, especially when it comes to crossing cultures or disciplines (Lederach, 2005).

In today’s intercultural world, as we reproduce social constructs as well as values in or own psyche and personal relationships (Butler, 1990) and while we recognize that “the personal is political and the political is personal” (Popkin, 1979:195), I find it important to bring the dialogue of experiencing peace back into the public debate. As such, discussing the countless opportunities that emerge when stepping away from thinking about peace as ‘an absence of war’ is inherently timely. Where I come from, peace is often portrayed as a lofty endeavour, ludicrous, or similar to sexual intercourse, considered improper to discuss in public. I would like to change this. Therefore, I write.

1.1 An Overview

I've seen the analogies between skating and life – like how they require commitment, patience, and persistence, and how sometimes things may be discouraging. But other times, things come together and it makes your day, and finding the flow through it all is a much nicer way to live.

(Peggi Oki, 2004:159).

After this organisational overview, I explain my drive to write this work and why I do not have a conventional research question but rather take myself as the research subject. As such, the path is the question and over the length of this book I will be referring to my peace facilitation experiences in order to understand the relationship between the act of skateboarding and the bodily sensation of feeling at peace. Then, at the end of this beginning chapter I briefly clarify some points in regard to my methodology and key terminology.

Chapter two offers my exploration into what a transrational peace research process might be and how it could be led. I explain why I find it important to explore the possibilities of transcending rationality as part of my research methodology and clarify my (re)-search design on the basis of three research tools. I blend those strategies, to find academically valued answers and to take myself as the author on a journey of learning and transformation. The methodology chapter might be a rather lengthy exploration, however I consider this elaboration, as one of my main contributions to *The Aesthetics of Transrational Peace Philosophy*. This second chapter also includes the literature review where I refer to peace and conflict studies authors (Wolfgang Dietrich, Victoria Fontan, John Paul Lederach and Norbert Koppensteiner) as much as lifestyle-sports scholars who write for physical cultural studies (Holly Thorpe in particular).

Then in the third chapter, I present and elaborate on my conceptual considerations that I name: *The Art of Living Sideways* and the *Aesthetic of Transrational Peace Philosophy*. Both can be understood as lenses that represent my understanding of the topic as well as the methodology at the beginning of the research journey.

In chapter four I, share my involvement with boardsports and introduce *Skateistan*, the organization I used to work with in Kabul. I further clarify how I ended up with harnessing the power of sport for an agenda of peace building and development. In this chapter, I also talk about terrorism as a weapon of warfare and the need to practice alternative intercultural communication strategies. Then I take the reader on a journey to my first day in Afghanistan. I also highlight the curiosity in regard to skateboarding and the respectful and welcoming hospitality my colleagues and I were shown, with the intention to share an alternative picture to the common western media frame on Afghanistan. In the last subchapter I

introduce the so-called field of *Sport for Development and Peace*, in the form of a critical dialogue that addresses the particular trend within the field to use sport as an interventionist tool for peace building and development work. The criticisms that I am raising are not new in the field of development work but it has been an important process for me to work my way through the deconstruction of my experiences in Afghanistan. Not only was the deconstruction an eye-opening practice for my understanding but also it simultaneously changed my personal perspective on the work I intended to start a career in. I argue that peace cannot be built and explain why I am of that opinion.

As an alternative to the global playing field of *Sport for Development and Peace*, but still convinced about the potentials of skateboarding in regard to peace work, I explore skateboarding's transformative capacities in chapter five. With chapter five, I finally come to the topic that excites me most. When defining peace away from the absence of war, countless opportunities for the experience of peace emerge. Then working with peace from elicitive perspectives requires an attitude of compassionate presence and the necessity to be aware of our own underlying intentions when going to work in cultural, social, political or sexual realities away from our own. I find it necessary not to be stuck in the postmodern criticism of development and peace work, although I find this critique an important contribution to today's peace work because it allows one to dismantle personal beliefs and misconceptions. However, I suggest to move away from the postmodern doubt and actively engage in becoming present in the here and now when facilitating peace work. I expand on the roles of today's peace worker and point out, that one of the biggest challenges is to find ways to overcome uncertainty in the mist of not knowing. Then I continue with how I found the art of skateboarding to be liberating and how it helped me to move out of my own circles of despair. Continuing on this dialogue, I share the magical gifts of living sideways. I also open the discourse of skateboarding's potentials in relation to conflict transformation and healing when rendering *The Art of Living Sideways* as an embodied practice of *The Transrational Peace Philosophy*. I pay particular attention to the movement of skateboarding as an athletic stream of consciousness and suggest that it can be a self-healing practice for elicitive peace workers and a practice for peace. I find that skateboarding has an ability to evoke yogic like properties that evoke a person's most extraordinary potentials.

Last but not least, I close this book with the final remark, that this research is on-going and further questions are waiting to be asked.

1.2 The Path is the Question

Research is formalizing curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose. It is a seeking that he who wishes may know the cosmic secrets of the world and they that dwell therein.

(Zora Neale Hurston, 1996:143).

In his book, *The Wounded Researcher*, Romanyshyn (2007) asks the question how one might do research that keeps soul in mind. By addressing an imaginable approach to the research process he proposes that research is about finding what has been lost, neglected, marginalized, forgotten or otherwise left behind. While contemplating what drives me to invest time and energy into my work, I became aware that from within my thoughts, there is some unfinished business that I would like to understand in regard to skateboarding and peace.

While assisting to set up Afghanistan's first co-educational skateboarding school, from teaching my students and living in the war torn city of Kabul, I found that the line between building peace and Western cultural imperialism is a thin path and in some cases even the same (Fontan, 2012). It disturbed me to see how we (as the peace builders and aid workers) disrespected the so-called 'local' situation in order to put forward our own needs and agendas with the mission to fulfil our job descriptions, managed from a far away reality (ibid). Even in the very same separation of local and international staff-knowledge-organisations lies an imperialistic notion of dissonance (Dietrich, 2012). At the beginning of this research I was particularly concerned about the apparent exploitation of 'skateboarding for peace' — the sexy phrase that harnesses the power of skateboarding to push forward a neo-liberal dominated agenda of development and peace. The agenda calls for the development and betterment for the world in the name of one world-peace through sport and I see this program as very problematic. But is this really the case? Or are those just my own rumbling thoughts? As I have no real proof apart from my personal experiences, the unfinished business resembling a scar, a mark left within my body tissue or what Romanyshyn calls a "wound that drives the searcher" (Romanyshyn, 2007). The wish to heal that scar drives me to understand the idea of building peace through skateboarding (UN-OSDP, 2011).

Although I used to be a strong believer, advocating that skateboarding builds peace, I am now filled with scepticism when it comes to the rapidly growing acceptance that sport builds peace (Ban, 2013; Giulianotti 2011a; Giulianotti & Armstrong, 2011). After three years of wearing my rose-tinted glasses that romanticized the idea that skateboarding builds peace, my shades have broken, cracked by the discrepancies between my then idealistic drive to build peace in Kabul and the heartbreaking dilemmas of the execution. To be clear from the

beginning, I cannot see that skateboarding builds peace. In fact, building peace as external intervention is most likely the greatest flaw of the peace industry (Fontan, 2012: 63-68). The current situation in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria shows that clearly.

However, I can see how the movement of skateboarding can be used to facilitate a peaceful state of being for oneself but also between conflicting groups. Skateboarding gave me joy and yes pain too but in general skateboarding previously helped me to transform stuck energy and access a state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). The action of skateboarding also catapulted me into stages of what Gabrielle Roth refers to as ultimate bliss and ecstasy (Roth, 1989). Yes, skateboarding also gave me peace of mind, a deep inner happiness and fulfilment.

To find answers to this unfinished business explained above I announced my original research question at the very beginning of this research project to be: *How can the power of skateboarding be harnessed as an elicitive tool for conflict transformation?* However, while I reflected on concepts of truths and knowledge I could no longer answer this question. Instead it became more important to find a suitable way of performing research that helps me to make sense of my experiences. Inspired by elicitive conflict transformation and the transrational turning point in peace politics (Dietrich, 2012) I see it as an important quality to be self-reflective when working in the realms of peace and conflict transformation. The self though is a complex ‘thing’ to understand. For it is so difficult to grasp yet so essential to become an elicitive peace worker, I decided I needed to frame peace research in a way that helps potential elicitive conflict workers to get to know themselves better. Therefore, I abandon the research question in a classical sense and took off on a transrational research journey as outlined in the methodology chapter.

In that sense, I am the research question as much as the research object, with the purpose to practice listening to my innermost intuition (Cohn, 2004) and awaken my inner healing capacities (Satir, 2009). I board a journey where I take what I know myself to be on a research quest to further understand and make sense of underlying relationships between skateboarding and peace. By doing so, I hope I can pass on new information concerning skateboarding and peace as well as inspire my reader to practice the work on the self.

1.3 Clarification on Process and Terminology

I wish to hold myself close to the messiness of ideas, processes and change and from such a place speculate about the nature of our work and the lessons learned.

(John Paul Lederach, 2005:x).

Inspired by John Paul Lederach's style of writing, the below clarifications are intended to incorporate the background process into the work. Like Ledearch, I, too ventured on my path to make sense of the chaos surrounding my practice with peace work. This reflection is not a walk on a straightforward and obvious path. My thoughts rather mirror the ancient and wild forests outside my *friggebod*,¹ a place where most of those words found their place on paper. Below I give a brief introduction to my process and render key terms that are relevant for this book.

As part of my methodology, I originally had the initial intention to write this work in one place and isolate myself *à la* Henry Thoreau in the deep woods of the Swedish North. I had hoped that isolation would support the reflection of my experiences and help me practice listening to my intuition. However, life got in the way and in the end, this book was written in: Afghanistan, Austria, Costa Rica, Germany and Sweden. Although I changed my desk several times, I made sure that I could work in solitude with the intention to focus on the reflection process. This methodological process will be further explained in the following chapter.

In the case that a text quoted is not from an English source, the translations are done by me as the author and are added in a corresponding footnote. On rare occasions I used *Kindle* books that do not have page numbers. Instead I reference them with *Location* number, marked as "*loc*" because this is the system kindle uses to mark text in the digital format. With the intention to share my underlying process I include what I call 'process notes' that are embodied reflections of experiences or journal entries.

I would also like to clarify my usage of quotation marks. For quoted text in this book I always use double ("...") quotation marks. When I intend to highlight a certain expression, quote from my reflective diaries or make use of skateboard related jargon I mark the word with single ('...') quotation marks. It should be clear from the text which instance I refer too. Before I can close this chapter I will also introduce some frequently used terms below.

1 Friggebod is a term for a Swedish housing structure up to 15sqm, that can be built without permit.

(Re)-search

In its style of writing, although etymologically not quite thorough, (re)-search is a play on the notion of searching, inspired by depth psychology researcher Robert Romanyshyn's (2007) definition of *re-search*. He re-imagines a research process that accommodates the unconscious as well as conscious (he calls it soul) complex entanglement of the researcher with the research topic. Romanyshyn explains "the researcher who keeps soul in mind is worked on and even worked over" (2007:71). It is here to be understood as an ethical call for self-examination on the side of the peace researcher, who in the fashion of humanistic psychology meets the research topic not as neutral or superior but as an equal partner.

Skateboarding

This work will predominantly focus on the wooden deck with its curved nose and tail, the grip tape, the two trucks that hold the four wheels, which together create what is commonly called a skateboard. The work will additionally focus on the skateboarder, who is the being that practices skateboarding, an activity that requires the above explained board to ride and to perform manoeuvres called 'tricks' in skateboarding lingo.

From within the field of skateboarding, there are several different types of skateboards, such as: street-boards, pool-boards, slalom-boards, freestyle-boards, long-boards, short-boards, downhill-boards, slide-boards, dancers and cruisers to name the more common differentiations. They do not only differ in 'style' such as shape, weight, material or brand but they also have slightly different terrains of use, and what some call 'subcultures' (Wheaton 2004) attached to them.² Within the world of skateboarding there are on-going debates, sometimes reaching the state of battles about who is a 'real' skateboarder. For the purpose of this study however, I do not consider a difference between those sub categories of skateboarding. They all need a deck, trucks and wheels. The conflicts that emerge between the different consumptions, identities and differences of skateboarding are worth further investigative research but this book is not the place to do so. Some call skateboarding an action sport (Thorpe & Rinehart, 2013), some call it a lifestyle (Thorpe, 2012b, Wheaton, 2004) and some call it art (Pisano, 2010). For other it is a hobby, for some a youthful fad and for others a crime. For me, skateboarding is part of all of that. During this study I might at times define skateboarding to be only one of these things but within the bigger picture of this study, skateboarding is skateboarding and can be understood as *The Art of Living Sideways*, a term that I conceptualise further in chapter four.

2 As I find the ethnographical research performed on skateboarding has already been adequately explored I do not wish to go into that field, rather direct the interested reader to Berlinda Wheaton's work.

Stoke

In my skateboarding circles the word “stoke” resembles “joy” (Pisano, 2010:50) and at times lust for life or enthusiasm. Etymologically speaking it derives from the “Dutch *stoken* - to feed and stir up a fire” (Harper, 2013) and resembles the joy that can be felt when sharing the love of skateboarding or during and after a good skateboard session. Getting stoked is a brilliant and vital part of my skateboarding experiences. Skateboarding Taoist James Pisano writes: “getting stoked is a wonderful and necessary part of living. It adds color to life and makes life worthwhile. It can even help make us better people, as we are only able to share and spread the joy we have ourselves” (Pisano, 2010:50).³ Towards the end of this work, I will explore the concept further and suggest that being able to access that ‘stoke’ is part of the transformative practice of skateboarding.

Elicitive

Elicitive is a term coined by John Paul Lederach, originating from the verb ‘to elicit’ and it stands in contrast to prescriptive peace building approaches as discussed in his book *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures* (1996) in which he develops the case for a critical understanding of why and how we train in the frame of peace building. Prescriptive conflict transformation has as its goal the transfer of knowledge and techniques that aid the conflicting parties to mitigate their conflict. It refers to those scenarios, where the trainer is seen as the expert who most likely knows the best model to solve the conflict of the disagreeing parties. The elicitive approach on the other hand understands the trainer to be a facilitator or even catalyst of the knowledge and techniques that are already within the conflicting parties.

Lederach’s key point is, that trainers or peace builders should not act out of a self-evident basis to conflict resolution. This becomes especially important when working across cultural, ethical and class lines. He argues that conflict transformation methodologies should create encounters across people and between one another like art rather than a technical prescription. Although still not found in any dictionary, the term elicitive is a corner phrase at the Innsbruck School of Peace Studies. Metaphorically speaking, *elicitive* conflict transformation means to “discover ways to catch fish in our own pond” (Lederach, 1995:55). Lederach’s model advocates, that the energy, the best method or strategy to transform the conflict, is located within the conflict.

Wolfgang Dietrich, in his essential work on *Elicitive Conflict Transformation and the Transrational Shift in Peace Politics* (2013) elaborates on the term elicitive and shows that the term was first used in therapeutic settings (ge-

3 Spelling original

stalt therapy, humanistic psychology and neurolinguistic programming) and “refers to processes in which therapists guide their clients through a transformation” (2013:14). Dietrich further describes the core essence of elicitive work in relation to practical peace work by summarising that, “the energy of the conflict provides the method and the direction of conflict transformation” (2013:10). The difference between elicitive and prescriptive conflict transformation is essential for this book, which focuses on the former.

2 (Re)search Methodology

Empiricist and rationalist methods function as a defence against anxiety. [...] No, my point is not that this method is incorrect. Rather, I am arguing that method is a way of making some things count while discounting other things.
(Romanyshyn, 2007:208,212).

With the desire to find out, what transrational peace research entails, I conducted an analysis of fellow peace researchers that refer to transrational peace concepts in their work.⁴ Although Kathleen McGoey (2013) recently published a beautiful and brave example of transpersonal research, there are no other published accounts that suggest methods for transrational knowledge seeking strategies. Such methods however have been the topic of discussions as well as teachings not only in the realms of the *Innsbruck School of Peace* but also while I was at the *University for Peace* in Costa Rica. It was during the analysis, that I (re)-remembered (and yet it seems for the first time (re)-realized) that there is no such thing as a transrational peace research methodology when it comes to academic research and writing.⁵ However, I consider the discussion on research methods as a vital aspect missing from the *Transrational Peace Philosophy* as taught at the Innsbruck School of Peace.

Given that the *Transrational Peace Philosophy* is a relatively new approach to contemporary peace studies, the absence might not come as a surprise. Nevertheless, behind the apparent lack is a conscious reason for the absence of prescriptive suggestions. Dietrich, in his second volume of the *Many Peaces Series, Elicitive Conflict Transformation and the Transrational Shift in Peace Politics* (2011, 2013) provides a comprehensive explanation on, as well as examples of elicitive conflict transformation methods. His wonderful book theoretically captures the practice behind the *Transrational Peace Philosophy*. Dietrich further shows, that awareness towards transrationality is emerging on a global scale when it comes to response to conflict (diplomacy, military peace operations, aid politics as well as in socio-economical spheres) and peace studies (topics that

4 See: Dietrich 2008, 2011, 2012, 2013; McGoey, 2013, Vallejo Piedrahita, 2012, Dueck 2012, Lozano Mancera, 2012, Bukuluki 2011, Ditzel Facci, 2011, Buchleitner, 2010, Kumar 2010.

5 To explain myself further, I (re)-remembered and (re)-realized because I knew before, we talked about this during my time as a student in Innsbruck but I had forgotten to an extent that when I rediscovered a wave of excitement soaked me in with the intuition that it is important to write about a transrational approach to research within peace studies.

concern healing, trust, awareness and consciousness). Nonetheless, he does not give a research paradigm or methodology on how to seek or understand knowledge in a transrational manner when it comes to academic writing and enquiry. Dietrich deliberately refrains from suggesting a methodology because transrational peace research is an elicitive rather than a prescriptive practice (Dietrich, 2013, Lederach, 1996). Therefore, there is no such thing as a toolkit or method catalogue on how to conduct research. Methods for elicitive conflict transformation are defined situationally and can come in various forms and shapes (Dietrich, 2011:386). This ultimately means not relying on a fixed set of rules or a prescriptive methodology.

However, I want to understand how the *Transrational Peace Philosophy* can shape as much as inspire research. Merging my product design education and peace studies background, I designed my own research methodology that shall guide me through my research process. Thus, I will be adapting the elicitive approach and exploring how a transrational approach to knowledge seeking might look. I will continue to outline why I find it important to explore transrational research methods and towards the end, I introduce the tools that will act as structured elements for my research frame.

2.1 Why Transrational Peace Research?

Nations are losing the ability to hear each other's heartbeats. Many international negotiations break down because they are built on mutual accusations instead of mutual confessions.

(Yevgeny Yevtushenko, 1991:365).

Pained by the occasional attacks, suicide bombing, and kidnappings in Kabul as much the heartbreaking social isolations I experienced in Germany, I am searching for opportunities to actively support the transformation of human relations. I am especially interested in living artfully and how we can incorporate this style of living not only in the private spheres of the personal social surroundings but also in public domains such as in academia. Transrational Peace Research appears to be a suitable method for me because it provides me with the opportunity to integrate rational, emotional, cognitive and spiritual awareness in my (re)-search. Merging those elements in my opinion becomes a key component of this methodology and a way forward for Peace Studies research.

Much of the destruction and harm we inflict upon each other occurs out of unawareness and banality (Arendt, 2012), or what philosopher and political theorist Hannah Arendt (2012) provocative called the *banality of evil*. Arendt's observations, at times controversial, are built on the Israeli trial and execution of

the German National Socialist administrator Adolf Eichmann, who organised the transports to the concentration camps during the Second World War. She maintains that neither fanatics nor sociopaths executed humanity's greatest evils, nor, in this particular case, the Holocaust. Instead she puts forward that in fact ordinary people, accepting the premises of their ruling powers, participated in a banal manner, seeing the execution of evil or any other inhumane actions towards Otherness as normal. Like many before me, I read her work as telling us that the *banality of evil* is in all of us and in all of our bureaucratic systems.

I am alerted by Arendt's words and they inspire me to keep on looking, to keep on thinking and to keep on feeling for myself. This alerted stage inspires me to search for methods that assist me in opening the flow of freethinking. Certainly it could be argued if thinking is ever truly free but I do not intend to open this philosophical debate now. For now, in a time when we fight wars and do business in a way that dehumanizes fellow human beings because of their social-political background, caste, ethnicity or general Otherness, I find it necessary to find ways that improve the way we accumulate and value knowledge. Practicing my self-awareness through reading and writing has been healing for me. I have been more imperialistic than I had imagined, was more deeply touched by the helper syndrome than I like to admit and confronted the shadow side of development aid work right in the face. Inspired by the experiences, I have dared the process of writing this book as an intellectual journey to find out more about myself, which I see as one key element in becoming a peace and conflict worker.

What I see as the ontology of transrational peace research (which I explain in more detail in the following chapters) seem to fit most closely with my current cosmivision that assumes that, firstly, we live in a state of flux, secondly, that the human subject is a contact boundary at work, and finally, that not even this assumption is not totally certain.

There is such a multitude truths and ways of perceiving *Dasein* on this earth. Those truths of perception come and go, dissolve and burst when coming in contact with each other and, for me, Transrational Peace Research is the most appropriate method to mirror this understanding of the world. John Paul Lederach writes:

In the process of professionalization we too often have lost a sense of the art, the creative act that underpins the birth and growth of personal and social change. I fear we see ourselves to be – and have therefore become – more technicians than artists.

(Lederach, 2005:73)

I was close to becoming a technician of peace building by screwing around with best practice guides, empirical evidence and a blown-up ego. Luckily I read *The*

Moral Imagination (Lederach, 2005) and remembered my heart and soul. Inspired by his call of “listening to the deeper inner voice” (Lederach, 2005:176) I find it necessary to provide alternative methods for the practice of accumulating knowledge. Like Romanyshyn (2007) above, by no means do I intend to say that objective methods are incorrect. I can see their usefulness at certain times in certain contexts but find it necessary to provide alternatives. With that in mind, I will “start close to home” as Dietrich (2011:383) says and explore my inner space in order to learn about my patterns and neuroses. This is a much needed practice for peace and conflict workers as it helps to disentangle the inner space and in turn allows room to support others in their processes (Dietrich, 2013).

A further reason, on why I find transrational peace research a timely and important method is well reflected by methodologists Anderson and Braud who, fittingly recommend:

that all people world wide become perfectly themselves in their own time and space. No people or group need to imitate another. Now is the time to understand that our diversity and otherness is an asset and not a liability to global conviviality and peace. As a species, ultimately, we cannot survive without our diversity.

(2011:304)

Triggered by my past experiences of dehumanizing otherness and inspired by the above suggestion I choose to conduct transrational peace research, with the hope of coming closer to my self and adding my voice to our global diversity. In the following chapter, I propose a potential transrational peace research epistemology. Not with the aim to present prescriptive procedures but with the hope to inspire more endeavours into the realms of transrational peace research.

2.2 A Definition of Transrational Peace Research

The secret... is to regard... intelligence as a fertile field in which seeds may be sown, to grow under the heart of flaming imagination.

(Maria Montessori in Anderson & Braud, 2011:15).

Inspired by Norbert Koppensteiner’s seminar lectures on *Transrational Interpretations of Peace* during January 2011 in Innsbruck, as well as by the curiosity of my UPEACE neighbours in Costa Rica, I ventured to gather information on what I understood a transrational approach to knowledge seeking to be. This is slightly confusing because the theory can be explained under the label transrational peace philosophy whereas the practice that puts that same philosophy into action is named elicitive conflict transformation (Innsbruck School of Peace Studies, 2014).

I have attempt to fuse the philosophy with an action plan for my upcoming research and take the term ‘transrational’ from Wolfgang Dietrich’s (2012) interpretations of peace in history and culture. He uses the word to define transrational peace concepts, which as he understands it, is a way of going beyond the limits of modernity and postmodernity by recombining the rational (modern) element with the energetic aspect of peace. The Innsbruck school differentiates between five so-called ‘families of peace(s)’ where perceptions of peace understandings can be categorised. This is not the space to go into a more detailed description but for further explanation on energetic, moral, modern, postmodern and transrational interpretations of peace please refer to Dietrich (1998, 2011, 2012, 2013).

Although Dietrich is not the first to introduce the prefix *trans* into the realm of peace studies, Dietrich is the predecessor of the transrational interpretations as introduced here in my text.⁶ When introducing the terrain that opens up after the twisting of modern and postmodern peaces, Dietrich clarifies that modernity’s rationality, as well as energetic spirituality are preserved within the transrational interpretation of peace. With the aspiration to reintegrate the cosmic dimension and to neutralize reason’s monological aggressiveness, transrationality is embedded in the larger concept of peace, beyond reasons’ ultimate validity (Dietrich, 2012). This means that while acknowledging the rational aspects of modern science, transrationality can transcend this construct to incorporate emotional, cognitive and spiritual human experiences that cannot be explained purely by logic (Dietrich, 2013).

Born in the postmodern counterculture, the transrational approach has grown up with *unmodern* influences from India’s philosophical and spiritual traditions as well as within the field of psychology (Walch 2009, Dietrich 2012).⁷ Jiddu Krishnamurti is one of the several key figures from India that influenced Western thinking and consequently the study of peace.⁸ Krishnamurti profoundly criticised any form of religion and state institution and instead urged people to be their own guide. To look at ourselves and to face our self rather then rely on wisdom of churches, spiritual leaders, books or institutions was one of his core teachings.

6 Johan Galtung and Dumiko Nishimura seemed to have introduced the word *trans* to the realm of peace studies when they founded TRANSCEND, A Peace Development Environment Network in 1993. (Transcend International, 2013).

7 The term *unmodern* here describes influences that can neither be clarified as modern nor postmodern because they have not gone through the European mind-set. This might sound disrespectful in a non-European setting but it is not intended so. Rather this is based on the idea of the European enlightenment (Kors, 2003) that aimed to reform the way of thinking, using reason and scientific methods to completely rule out any kind of superstition or any unreasonable events.

8 Dietrich (2011) also introduces Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the Dalai Lama as well as Osho and discusses their influence on peace studies. I choose to focus only on Krishnamurti because he seems most appropriate to explain my thoughts.

Truth, being limitless, unconditioned, unapproachable by any path whatsoever, cannot be organized; nor should any organization be formed to lead or to coerce people along any particular path. If you first understand that, then you will see how impossible it is to organize a belief. A belief is purely an individual matter, and you cannot and must not organize it. If you do, it becomes dead, crystallized; it becomes a creed, a sect, a religion, to be imposed on others. This is what everyone throughout the world is attempting to do. Truth is narrowed down and made a plaything for those who are weak, for those who are only momentarily discontented.

(Krishnamurti, 1929)

In order to be able to work elicitively, a peace worker needs to know her or himself (Dietrich, 2013). Looking at ourselves thus becomes a key element in understanding transrational research. We destroy beings because we do not know ourselves, stresses Krishnamurti (1929). Religion and (state) institutions, he argues, are mechanisms of control with fear (ibid). In a fear driven institutional environment, labels sadly become more relevant than actual states of affections, love and kindness (in Dietrich 2012).

Apart from investigating oneself, the awareness that everything is connected in a pulsating and expanding network of relations is another key aspect of transrational research that determines the research approach. Connectivity influences the planning, the process and the outcome. Inspired by Fritjof Capra (2002), ‘hidden connections’ in the realm of biological, cognitive and social dimensions are stitched into the larger fabric of methodology to form a depth inquiry into the unknown. Having established what transrational refers to, I will now outline the word transpersonal because both terms are intertwined and inform each other.

Etymologically speaking, the transpersonal comes from the Latin words *trans*, which means beyond/across/through and the Latin word *persona*, which indicates a mask or façade (Dietrich, 2012). Transpersonal in other words means “beyond, across or through the personally identified aspects of self” (Anderson and Braud 2011:8). Subsequently, I have to inquire on how to conduct research which not only goes beyond, cross or through that which I already know, but uses this path to understand what I know.

There is no such thing as a golden rule that defines transpersonal research; in fact its strength is the open ended and fluid approach to understanding and seeking of knowledge. This allows and even urges each researcher to develop her/his own tools. As professor of clinical psychology Kaisa Puhakka in relation to transpersonal psychology states: “The best way to guard against [mistaking egoistic functioning for something beyond it] and to ensure the continued vitality of inquiry in Transpersonal Psychology is to consider its theories, methods and definitions ... as provisional and open-ended” (cited in Anderson and Braud 2011:9).

A fluid transpersonal approach to research by no means equals a lazy or negligent attempt to accumulate knowledge. The point of it is that the “researcher is an embodied presence who brings to the work the fullness of who she or he is and who carries the work as more than a matter of mind” (Romanyshyn, 2007:99).⁹ I see this embodiment as a timeless companion on my journey as a travelling nomad and peace researcher. However for the purposes of a research project such as this book, the awareness towards that embodiment grows stronger and more precise for a set amount of time. Peace builder and researcher John Paul Lederach expresses the personal exploration to accumulating knowledge in the context of training and education. In his book, *The Moral Imagination* he suggests,

that education and training are incomplete in any of the fields related to social change if they do not build early and continually the space to explore the meaning of things, the horizon towards which to journey, and the nature of the journey itself. The quest is one that must take seriously the process of listening to the deep inner voice, a spiritual and deeply human exploration that should not be relegated to occasional conversations among friends, or worse, to the couches of therapy when professional life crises emerge. This is the heart, the art and soul of who we are in the world, and it cannot be disconnected from what we do in the world.

(Lederach, 2005:176)

From a modern perspective, the transrational approach to research might appear New Age, esoteric or unscientific. However, I find that the exclusion of the personal from mainstream science resembles an image of reality that has been shattered, by scientific methods as well as through accounts of human experiences as part of the human growth and potential movement research (Grof, 2006).

The paradigm-breaking observations detected by consciousness research and transpersonal psychology show that it is impossible to ban evident qualities of human experiences from core areas of research (Dietrich, 2006 and Grof, 2006). The new data collected by quantum physics as well as transpersonal psychology might be challenging at times, for instance, the discovery that there is no impartiality, and that consciousness is not a product of the brain or limited by its conceptual capacities but it can also sit in other body parts (Grof, 2006). Psychiatrist, Stanislav Grof, one of the founders of transpersonal psychology and researcher into the realms of non-ordinary states of consciousness writes: “consciousness is seen as an integral part of the universal fabric, certainly not limited to the activities contained inside our skulls” (1993:19). Disregarding scientific

⁹ Here I borrow Romanyshyn’s word, which he uses to express the interconnectedness of the researcher and her or his work. In his book *The Wounded Researcher*, he re-imagines depth psychology as research praxis to reunite soul work and academic research. Romanyshyn argues, that the split between the two lames both disciplines and suggest ways to reunite both fields.

data that tells us that we exist of unceasing transforming energy resembles scientific tendencies that mirror a similar fanaticism to religious fundamentalists (Grof, 2006).

I am of the opinion that science needs to rethink its methodological boundaries and look towards emerging horizons otherwise it will outdate itself. The exciting news is that this is happening. From all walks of life a growing global awareness, or what generalist and pathfinder Ken Wilber (2000) calls *global consciousness* is emerging. This is an awareness that calls for a paradigm shift and individual action on how we see and interpret the world. In times where the Internet and TV resemble global campfires, allowing the sharing and connecting of stories, the impact our actions are having on a global sphere become increasingly apparent.¹⁰ ‘Think globally — act locally’ initiatives and advocates such as *Economy of Happiness* (Norberg-Hodge, 2013) and *Transition Town* (Hopkins, 2008) but also communal living experiments such as *Tamera* (Duhm, 2007) are emerging, and not only in the so called Western part of this globe.

From a research approach this means that collective attributes, feelings and memories move back into the sphere of research. The researcher needs to define her/his own perspectives as well as boundaries and argue for or against them. Before I continue and because of the inherent scepticism I am confronted with when mentioning transrational peace concepts, I feel inclined to mention that the transrational peace philosophy does not suggest being the new answer to solve world problems. On the contrary, I see it as an attempt to act with the understanding that world’s problems cannot be solved! Instead, what is possible from a transrational interpretation is, a transformation of concrete problems. This will never lead to a worldwide conflict-free peace but a diversity of peaces that include conflicting tendencies, which also find their space in research projects.

To explain further, the transrational approach is a framework of thinking and embodied living that borrows from humanistic and transpersonal psychology, quantum physics and system theories, deep ecology and the Gaia hypothesis as much as from different Eastern and Western spiritual practices. Within the transrational, a variety of the above perspectives are reflected upon, which are seen as overlapping. By integrating transpersonal dimensions, the transrational frame adds a diversion and opens space for the acceptances of non-rational measures of perception. In other words, my rationality is not seen as depraved, but mind’s limits are acknowledged and other modes of perceiving such as from the heart, intuition and transrational intelligence are acknowledged to the same extent.

I see intuition, intention, transpersonal dimensions, the human spirit or soul and connectivity between everything as the key chorus in transrational peace

10 This is not the space to discuss the control of those networks but it is important to consider who has the power to shape the agenda of what is shared; where, when and how.

research. In Dietrich's words: "Interaction of the individual aspect beyond the exterior and beyond the rational is the topic of transrational peace research" (2012:257). Transrational peace research thus acknowledges spirituality but not in an esoteric, moral, religious or romantic way. Transrational peace research is rather concerned with recognising spirituality as a conscious knowledge inseparable from human life such as from social, business, economic, cultural and political spheres. Dietrich, who actively optimises the state of the art in the field of elicitive methods to conflict transformation builds, among other theories, on system theory. In order to raise awareness towards relational and situational dependencies in context to applied peace work, he notes the following:

According to general system theory: complexity, dynamic exchange, interactions, and self-organisations are inherent properties of systems, and they must therefore be expected to surface in conflict work. Accordingly, elicitive conflict transformation does not work towards predetermined goals, but instead brings workers into the exchanges and interactions. In the process, the available choices increase, while the self-organization of the system remains intact.

(Dietrich, 2013:226)

As part of my methodology I take Dietrich's above explanation to elicitive conflict transformation that suggests applied means and adapt it to research. Even though there is no fixed methodology for a transrational peace research approach, I think there are certain characteristics, such as the above-mentioned key words: intuition, intention, transpersonal dimensions, spirit and connectivity, which can guide a transrational methodology. When designing a transrational peace research system those aspects become the sources of the endeavour and at least some of them need to be woven into the method. Before I introduce the method tools that I am using for this piece of work, I would like to highlight a summary of what I see transrational peace research to be.

- Transrational peace research is grounded in the human experience of the researcher who needs to open up to share internal processes.
- Transrational peace research becomes a process that resembles a perpetual interplay of inner and outer influences.
- Transpersonal research encourages the researcher to reflect on personal behavioural patterns, deconstruct psychological schemas as well as dares to challenge existing cosmovisions.
- Transrational peace research interconnects ageless wisdom and the latest knowledge in academia.
- Transrational peace research includes rational, physical, and psychological as well as spiritual domains of awareness.

- Transrational peace research not only informs but also transforms the writer as much as the reader of the research subject.
- Transrational peace research is interested in exploring and recognising transpersonal aspects on different research topics.
- Transrational peace research encourages knowledge-seeking tools that access altered stages of consciousness and multiple modes of knowing such as dreams but also breath, voice and movement orientated approaches.
- Transrational peace research is a deep and holistic process that can be referred to as a vocation on the work of the self.

In that regard, Wolfgang Dietrich's (2011) argumentation of embodying situated knowledge as a call to take responsibility for my own truth claims. This I consider as inherent to the practice and research of peace work in the twenty-first century. In order to 'walk the talk,' I position myself as the peace worker as well as researcher within my work. In the spirit of Dietrich (2011:383) to "avoid idealistic projections into far away lived realities of others," I, too, see the future of peace work in a knowledge making that is situational and not universally applicable. With the intention to find alternatives to the current dominant narrative that sees a peace worker as a practitioner with prescriptive intervention techniques, I am searching for something that suits me better. With the intention to portray this, it is indeed possible to include transrational aspects in academia; I will continue to explore tools that I provide as a frame to validate this work. For inspiration on how to conduct a research project that helps me to understand who I am as a peace worker and that guides me through my process to find answers to my research question, I turned to depth psychology (Romanyshyn, 2007) and transpersonal psychology (Anderson and Braud, 1998, 2011). Anderson's and Braud's pioneering work on transpersonal research inquiry is not just inspiration for my methodology. Their work also influenced the way I decided to take the journey as the researcher. I wanted to experiment how I could possibly cultivate the 'ways of the heart' rather than, what I am accustomed to by my linear and analytical left-brain attributes.¹¹ Instead of disrespecting my rationalism with polemic aggression, I seek to recognise its qualities and balance the structure with flexibility, the thinking with feeling, the exterior with interior.¹² With the intention to research from the outlined transrational approach I thus turn to what I call: 'autobiographical embodied writing' and 'flow inquiry' as research tools. Those two tools I will now introduce below.

11 They way of the heart refers to accepting alternative methods of cultivating knowledge. Details matter, secrets matter, and the ordinary is extraordinary while the practical is favoured such as in intuitive inquiry (Anderson and Braud 2011).

12 See Dorit Netzer in Anderson and Braud, 2011.

2.3 Tool One: Autobiographical Embodied Writing

When immersing yourself in your experience of the past, seek to cultivate the attitude of an impartial observer. Write as one who merely reports on the facts, inner experiences, thoughts, decisions, actions or reactions of the past.

(Claudio Naranjo, 1990:156).

Autobiographical embodied writing is a style of writing that helps me to find and develop my own voice. It is a form of writing that pursues individual insights rather than arguments. Last but not least, it is my intellectual quest to understand previous embodied experiences in regard to skateboarding and peace.

For now it is relevant to consider Foucault for a moment and introduce his writings on the “arts of oneself” (1983) although I elaborate on this concept once again in chapter four in more detail. His literature influenced my thoughts on using writing as a way to understand life. Foucault invites the so-called autonomous subject to question her or his relationship to the self by using self-techniques that might transform life into a work of art. He understands the act of writing as such a self-technique and “a training of the self by oneself” (Foucault, 1984: 364). It is an art of one’s own narrative and an attempt to find a personal style, identity or oneself that can be situated in the constant flux of becoming. Foucault further suggests exercising this self-writing technique to learn the art of living, which could also involve “abstinences, memorizations, self-examinations, meditations, silence and listening to others” (ibid).

To find myself as an elicitive peace and conflict worker I will reflect on my experiences that I made with my practical work with skateboarding and peace. This implies, that I write about my skateboarding encounters in Europe and Afghanistan, infuse them with peace studies theory and vice versa. I also reflect on my process whilst writing this work and include embodied reflections of what I call ‘process notes’ throughout the following chapters. This note taking is inspired by Claudio Naranjo, psychotherapist and teacher of the wisdom of the *Enneagram of Personalities*. I pay attention to write with the impartial observer kind of mind attitude that merely reports facts, as is reflected in the quotation from Naranjo used as an epigram at the beginning of this section.

I take further inspiration for this approach from the work of Anderson and Braud (2011) and also John Paul Lederach. Lederach’s book, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (2005), is an example of what I call autobiographical embodied writing. In that regard, Anderson and Braud (2011:24) write the following: “I have sought to cultivate enhanced body awareness through embodied writing, a research technique that records the finely textured nuances of lived experience, awakening the senses in the writer and inviting a kindred resonance in readers.” It is a process that awakens my (the author’s and potentially

readers') needs to reconnect body, heart and spirit. The approach I chose is also a step towards healing the public-private division that I find problematic as it allows unethical professionalism.

The limitations of autobiographical embodied writings lay in the controversy of the experience and the unlikelihood to replicate a follow-up study. However, I witnessed the dilemmas of researchers in Kabul who had issues of providing accurate data due to security restrictions and biases resulting from fixers, translators, stereotypical ethnicity issues, assumptions of foreign behaviour, as much as gender and cultural restrictions. It was then that I came to the conclusion that I wanted to explore personal relational experiences rather than abstract data.

Autobiographical writing is not a walk in the park on a sunny afternoon but a deep process that can take the author to the steepest mountain ridge on a stormy evening. Editor of *Autobiographical International Relations* (2011) and associate Professor at Ithaca College Naeem Inayatullah (2011:1) calls this style of writing "falling and flying." It begins with "a falling without wings and ends with the wish to fly." With the intention to build a frame to hold onto, I chose to work along the lines of flow inquiry. Below I will define what I understand by this mode of inquiry and how I will apply it.

2.4 Tool Two: Flow Inquiry

The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honours the servant and has forgotten the gift
(Albert Einstein, 2004:2).

Flow Inquiry is the name I gave my research tool that shall guide me through my personal discoveries. In this chapter I take the time to explain intuitive capacities by clarifying what I understand this knowledge seeking approach to be.

Countless books have been written about using intuition or what cognitive psychology also calls "implicit learning", "automatic progressing" or "tacit knowledge" (Cloninger, 2006:17). For me it is a new encounter to rely on this form of perceiving for research purposes. Intuition is a deep inner voice that is innate to all human beings and vital to human relations, problem solving and creativity (Roth, 1998; Walch 2006, 2009; Vaughan 1979). Yet it is apparently a crazy vitality to rely on when it comes to academic research. Strategies exist on how to eliminate the illogical, unusual or paranormal experiences inherent to intuitive knowledge (Vaughan, 1979). Time plans and pros-versus-cons lists and other such tools eliminate or repress intuitive knowledge (ibid). Urban Shaman and founder of five Rhythm dance, Gabrielle Roth writes: "Intuition is knowing without knowing" and it does not involve analysis, comparison, judgment, de-

duction, or logic (Roth, 1998:190). Rarely are skills such as intuition, direct knowing, unconscious processing or holistic research are associated with trusted or rigorous research, yet they appear to be useful life skills. Or as Albert Einstein said as is quoted above, intuition is a forgotten gift.

Within my search to clarify my methodology, I turn to Anderson and Braud's (2011) research methods. The professors of Transpersonal Psychology propose methods for transpersonal research and explore what intuition processes are by referring to authors such as Carl Jung, Frances Vaughan, and Hildegard von Bingen among others. Based on their findings, the authors encourage researchers to focus on multiple ways of knowing, such as knowing with depths of intuition, imagination, play, mindfulness, compassion, creativity and embodied writing. Inspired by Anderson's and Braud's work, the flow inquiry method is based on their intuitive inquiry process, which they define as the following:

Intuitive inquiry invites intuitive processes and insights directly into research practice – in the formulation of a research topic or question; the reflection on pertinent theoretical and empirical literature; data collection, analysis, and interpretation; and the presentation of findings. Based on the classic hermeneutical understanding that interpretation is personal and cyclical rather than linear and procedural, the approach provides a series of cycles that carry the research process forward. Throughout intuitive inquiry, compassion towards self and others is considered central to understanding.

(Anderson and Braud, 2011:6)

I have difficulties accessing my intuition in regard to research and therefore see it as inappropriate to name my research tool after the ability to understand something immediately. However I do like to practice that way of perceiving and have decided to name my research tool flow inquiry, after Professor and former chair of the Department of Psychology at the University of Chicago Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's *Flow Psychology*. Csikszentmihalyi studied the states of what he calls *optimal experiences* for more than three decades. In his book, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* he suggests that a space can be created to feel in flow, a experience that is used to generate ideas, for therapy, rehabilitation and other activities where flow can point the way. Being in flow is an automatic or spontaneous process that he defines as "the way people describe their state of mind when consciousness is harmoniously ordered, and they want to pursue whatever they are doing for its own sake" (1990:6). As part of my skateboarding experience I have been relying on intuitive perception and the 'gut feeling' or flow has guided me. Applying this strategy to research however is a new dimension for me.

Flow inquiry is a state in which my body signals a kind of 'go for it feeling' in response to the things I read and write. To access this state of flow and to create a space for intuitive knowledge to emerge, I pay particular attention to my

conscious awareness of my body through breathing and slowing-down techniques. With the intent to awaken and cultivate my intuition, I meditate and dance to arrive in my body before settling down to write. Also when feeling stuck, I get up to move. I ride on my skateboard for a short while or perform other movement-based activities such as simple stretches or a walk. The matters of love, honesty, trust, openness, courage and silence are also regular visitors to my flow inquiry. Sometimes I still reject them, although this is not what I intend to do. I practise staying with my attention in the moment and move what is there, to decide then if I include it on paper or let it be. When aware, I perceive a bodily sensation, a tingle but also at times tension or blockade that I take as signals to continue or to stop. It is difficult to comprehend this awareness in words as the experience is limited by language, yet it is a distinguished feeling of knowing.

Flow inquiry becomes a tricky endeavour because “the control of consciousness cannot be institutionalised” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991:21). Or as I painfully experienced, awareness to this bodily signal cannot be pressed into a fixed set of rules or routines. It appears to me that as soon as awareness of the flow state becomes part of a set of rules the flow is apt to disappear, a response which blocks my writing process rather than enhances it. To minimise this tendency, I allow myself the freedom to change and go where the intuitive flow carries me.

“Often, intuitions are accompanied by feelings of certitude, coherence, meaningfulness, wholeness, harmony, and unpredictability” write Anderson and Braud (2011:21) or what I tried to explain above with the expression of flow. They further categorise “five types of intuition” (2011:22-27) according to how intuition expresses itself in lived experiences. Those are:

1. Unconscious, symbolic and imaginal processes
2. Psychic or parapsychological experiences
3. Sensory modes of intuition
4. Empathic identification
5. Through our wounds

As part of this flow inquiry all experiences of intuition could be possible. Giving space to intuition seems to be a logical next step, yet I am nervous about doing so within the practice of writing this book: A) Because using an approach of non-logic in a logical field such as academia seems paradoxical and B) because from what I learned from intuition so far, following its insights is a wild ride and I do not know where it takes me.

Nevertheless, what better time is there to pay attention to my intuition than now? I see intuition as a genuine force to act upon, a drive that comes from somewhere just to do, rather than to be restricted by the demons inside me or the

voices telling me how I should act rather than how I would like to act. Intuition is also a handy tool for peace work, a tool that I would like to nurture by giving it the space to be heard. John Paul Lederach writes in this regard:

Anger, bitterness, regret, sadness, loss, and misunderstanding are all mixed in a bundle of messages made up of words and images, spoken and unspoken. In the midst of that very human mess, listening is the art of connecting and finding the essence. More often than not the spring that bubbles from intuition flows towards this kind of deep listening. In those settings a mediator with too many words does not hear the bubbling. A mediator incapable of touching intuition misses the flow.

(Lederach, 2005:70)

Lederach also shares that in a setting of tragedy loss and violence he often listens to ambiguous or unclear recollections of the same event. It is through deep listening, that he can engage with his intuitive senses and he further notes that “listening requires the discipline of very few words and enormous patience to penetrate the great clouds of ambiguity while living in them” (ibid).

With the intention to create a space that allows me to listen to my intuitive senses, I approach this flow inquiry like I imagine an artist approaching her painting. Words are my paints and my wisdom is my brush. Microsoft Word is my canvas and intuition is my creativity. My office is my studio and what happens around me influences my outcome. With the awareness that all things are interrelated, everything matters. The internal disposition and the external conditions influence each other (Cohn, 2004) and in this context, transrational peace research becomes a process that resembles a perpetual interplay of inner and outer influences. Here I would like to close the definition of flow inquiry and continue with introducing my literature investigation.

2.5 Tool Three: Literature Review

It is a complex unity: one step for life, one step for thought. Modes of life inspire ways of thinking; modes of thinking create ways of living. Life activates thought and thought, in turn affirms life.

(Gilles Deleuze, 2001:66).

To supplement the data that I gathered from being the observer and the observed as explained previously I also will include a body of peace philosophy literature, to understand my experiences I so far made with peace, conflict and skateboarding. I will review and connect work from academics and practitioners from within that field. I will also venture outside the frame of peace studies to grow on wisdom from the realms of ‘action’ or so called ‘lifestyle’ sports or what some

call ‘physical cultural studies’, and what I call *The Art of Living Sideways*. Below I acknowledge the work that has been done before me and outline how my work grows out of the above-mentioned existing schools of thoughts. I name why I choose the selected key authors and how they influenced my writing. To be more specific, I consider Wolfgang Dietrich, Victoria Fontan, John Paul Lederach, Norbert Koppensteiner and Holly Thorpe as key authors relevant for this work as a whole.

In particular, Wolfgang Dietrich’s eye opening teachings on the philosophy of *Many Peaces* (2012) at the MA Program for Peace, Development, Security and International Conflict Transformation enriched me with colourful peace understandings and a language to express my experiences. Wolfgang Dietrich is the UNESCO Chair holder for Peace Studies at the University of Innsbruck, Austria and is also the program director of the aforementioned MA program. Dietrich ends his latest volume of the *Many Peaces* series with the words: “Peace work is a tremendous and wonderful challenge that takes us into the deep layers of ourselves, so we can be of service to the world outside of ourselves” (Dietrich, 2013:228). The essence of those words is what I attempt to explore in my above named method and I like to share another of Dietrich’s insights as this attitude inspires my work.

The deeper we venture into the larger context of global crisis, the more directly we are affected personally. Paradoxically, the epicentre of a persona’s conflictive episodes is as wide as it is deep, marking both innermost and outermost spheres. Therefore, those who maintain balance will be able to balance the world.

(Dietrich, 2013:227)

Finding balance in the midst of the chaos I was living in was one reason why I became interested in the study of peace. As an academic subject, peace studies, as we know it today, is founded on inherent postmodern thoughts, by, among others, Johan Galtung. Postmodern plurality in the context of peace studies does not equal with the ‘anything goes’ mentality says Dietrich (2011). Rather the philosophy of plurality provided by Lyotard and developed further by the Innsbruck school “reflects the amazing potential of concrete human relations” (Dietrich, 2011:8). In a social context, plurality asks for limits and definitions and is flowing, in different currents at times, to reflect the permanent flux of relations. Dietrich’s work is about highlighting the plurality of peaces and in retrospect, his teaching gave the necessary impulses for my epistemological shift from one peace to many peaces, and consequently a plurality of perspectives and truths. Dietrich, who asserts that peace cannot be built, highlights the importance of peace as an attitude in a relational context rather than a fixed status. He proposes, that peace is an experience that can be felt in the ‘here and now’ through body-work such as breath, voice and movement (Dietrich, 2011, 2012, 2013).

My first encounter with Victoria Fontan's work was during a key-note presentation at the 2012 European Science Foundation Conference, *In Search for Peace*, held at the University of Norrköping in Sweden.¹³ Her stories resonated with my experiences in Afghanistan and later on, over a beer and dinner she invited me to write parts of this book at the *University for Peace* as part of a research associate visit. The subsequent discussions on the topic of sport, development and peace with her and other faculty members extended my horizon and academic understanding of peace and conflict studies. In *Decolonizing Peace*, her critique of post-liberal peace and conflict studies, she makes several references to the phrase: "the map is not the territory" (2012:28) and argues, that "Decolonizing peace means harmonizing the map and the territory" (2012:44). She further writes that:

there is a strong relationship between cause and effect when it comes to 'peace' from a map perspective, what William Easterly refers to as the 'planners peace' and Oliver Richmond as 'liberal peace'. According to this mode of thinking, peace comes with a few tools and recipes that will ensure its success. Most peace and conflict trainings worldwide teach these tools to an army of soldiers either coming from peaceful/democratic states or elites of the developing world that have a vested interest in maintaining the social status-quo that benefits both them and the Western democracies.

(Fontan, 2012: 64)

Fontan and I both agree that prescriptive tools and recipes do not ensure peace and I find her above description useful to portray the dominant paradigm under which, as far as my experiences go, peace is understood 'out there'. When I was working in Kabul, I realised the map I had did not match the territory either. The combination of Fontan's decolonizing peace work and Dietrich's five families of peace has inspired me to create my own map. Working with Fontan gave me the courage to follow my heart and write what I see as well as critically deconstruct my experiences.

I consider Norbert Koppensteiner's seminars on *Postmodern Interpretation of Peace* (2011) and *Transrational Interpretations of Peace* (2012) at the University of Innsbruck as the cradle for my academic wondering and wandering. Koppensteiner is a peace facilitator, researcher and program coordinator at the aforementioned peace studies MA program. Prior to his seminars, I had a strong interest in physically experiencing the very notion of being through my nomadic lifestyle as much as through pushing my body to its physical boundaries. It was during these seminars that Koppensteiner showed me a door to explore philo-

13 <http://www.esf.org/?id=9306>

sophical concepts of the art of living not only through physical experience but also with *nomadic thinking* (Deleuze, 2006). “Movement, for the nomad is not simply a means of getting from point A to B, but is an intrinsic figure for a way of thinking and living” says Koppensteiner (2009b: 9) about *nomadic thinking*. He further writes:

Nomadic living implies leading the own life as a permanently ongoing, open search and questioning that never settles on any ultimate point. Instead of the settlement of a stable, coherent identity the own life so turns into a perpetual transformation and is seen as a process of permanent, unfinished becoming.

(ibid)

Koppensteiner uses the postmodern state of plurality that he names an unfinished permanent becoming as a starting point to venture beyond. Beyond as into the realms where the very notion of ‘being’ can be interpreted as transrational understandings of movement in and around the Self. Inspired by Koppensteiner, the notion of being, also called *Dasein* and the transpersonal Self are key concepts that weave in and out of this entire work. In his seminal book, *The Art of the Transpersonal Self, Transformation as Aesthetic and Energetic Practice* (2009) Koppensteiner assembles an “*Art on the Self*” and proposes this self to be a “relational” as well as “plural” subject (Koppensteiner, 2009a:117). In his words:

the self can so be perceived, firstly, as part of an aesthetic/energetic sphere in which, secondly, its form is emergent through relationally. Thirdly, this self can so not be separated from the sphere of which it forms part, but there is no longer a clear separation towards the others with whom this self is in relationality.

(Koppensteiner, 2009a:116)

In consequence of the relational aspect of the Self, work on its character is thus always interactive and touches other Selves. The work of the Self “is never a work just on the self as its effects will flow through the lines of connectivity towards the partial others and become part of the mutual co-determination” (ibid). This rendering is essential to keep in mind while reading the following chapters.

John Paul Lederach, according to his business card, builds peace, although he is rather doubtful about this description himself. On immigration forms, tax returns, or credit card application his profession is: ‘unknown’ and his purpose of visit is: ‘other’. He calls himself a parasite, who has “travelled most of the globe on the back of people whose lives are held together by the wars they fight” (Lederach, 2010:2). I see his work on *elicitive conflict transformation* (1996, 2005) as essential pillars of this book. Instead of building peace from a top down approach, Lederach argues that the key to successful conflict resolution is to facilitate a process of elicitive transformation.

Thus, the base of the pure elicitive approach does not lie with a series of techniques to be mastered by the trainee, but rather in the shift in relationship between participants and the trainer, and redefines power as participation in discovery and naming rather than transferring of knowledge.

(Lederach, 1996:62)

This is an attitude to peace work that sees it as necessary to use the energy from within the conflict to transform the conflict, but this concept I will explain further in the book.

Not only is his methodological style an inspiration but also his writing made me see the potentials of conflicts. I grew up in a family where conflicts were ‘not allowed’ and before reading Lederach I was of the opinion that conflicts should be mitigated and if possible avoided. Lederach’s writings and an impressive lecture workshop on *The Art of Compassionate Presence* (2011) in Würzburg, Germany made me see the potentials of transformation. In the lecture, he explored spaces within human encounters that can give room for the *moral imagination* (2005) to emerge such as walking while talking, the Tibetan singing bowls and Haiku poems (Lederach & Lederach, 2010). He also talks about the importance of creating spaces where compassion is nurtured and the courage to engage can be renewed (Lederach & Appleby 2011). Creating such spaces is what we attempted at Skateistan and by reflection on the opportunities as well as limits of creating such spaces I hope I can share some valuable insights and inspire such future endeavours.

Last but not least, action sports participant, researcher and Senior Lecturer at the University of Waikato, New Zealand, Holly Thorpe has been critical to my understanding of the wider field beyond the mere participation in action sports. Especially Thorpe’s outstanding interdisciplinary reflective research, “*Wandering and Wondering*”: *Theory and Representation in Feminist Physical Cultural Studies*, with Karen Barbour and Toni Bruce (2011) was especially influential for this work. Thorpe and her colleagues explore an innovative style of gathering knowledge in a self-reflecting grace that sparked my interest in academically researching my own understanding of the skateboarding-body.

Holly Thorpe’s collaborative work with Robert Rinehart (2013) illustrates some of the unique strategies applied by action sports related social justice movements within a neo-liberal-dominated politics and use *Skateistan* and *SurfAid International* as examples. Both adequately questioned why the founders of the mentioned initiatives decided to establish their NGOs in foreign countries, despite there being identifiable social needs in their own countries and suggest further research for a greater understanding of “helping the exotic Other” within the (action) sports realm (Said, 1979, Thorpe and Rinehart, 2013:20). At first I was outraged at their suggestion. When I asked myself why their suggestion triggered this reaction and

what exactly did it trigger, I found that I too was deeply entangled in the “White Mans Burden” (Easterly, 2007). The wish to find my own history and thus ‘stake my claim’ is an underlying read thread of this book.

In her latest work, *Transnational Mobilities in Action Sport Cultures* Thorpe (2014) explores the action sports arena in relation to nationalism, development and peace building. She proposes, that: “in contrast to many traditional sports, action sports have never been closely associated with the nation. Adopting a counter-cultural ideology, and early participants explicitly rejected nationalistic sentiments” (Thorpe, 2014:6).

The production and consumption of contemporary action sports, such as B.A.S.E jumping, surfing, snowboarding, skateboarding, BMX, parkour and kite-surfing, differ from traditional sports in their relation to the nation and thus offer a valuable case for exploring new trends in the transnationalism of sport and physical youth culture.

(2014:3)

However, due to time restrictions, I have been unable to engage with this latest book of hers as much as I would have liked. Nevertheless, with the intention to fuse the intellectual discipline that is peace studies with the action of skateboarding I also draw on a discursive analysis of so called physical cultural studies literature (Andrews, 2008), written by academics that are athletes themselves (Fletscher, 2007 & 2008; Thorpe, Barbour & Bruce, 2011; Thorpe, 2009, 2011, 2012a, & 2012b). The emerging field of physical cultural studies is “dedicated to the contextually based understanding of the corporeal practices, discourses, and subjectivities through which active bodies become organized, presented and experienced in relation to the operations of social power” writes Andrews (2008:57).

While the principal futures of skateboarding are unique, the surrounding social and cultural fields somehow overlap with other activities of moving bodies such as surfing and snowboarding, kayaking and climbing (Fletscher, 2008; Thorpe, Barbour & Bruce, 2011). There is a lack of scholarly literature with a focus on skateboarding, and especially skateboarding and peace; therefore I see it as legitimate to include ‘physical cultural studies’ authors in my discussion where appropriate.

Having framed the above theoretical context I find my work to be a hybrid combining knowledge from peace and conflict studies as much as from physical cultural studies. As a hybrid this work builds on the above-described context with a methodological consideration on how to practice transnational peace research. As far as I am aware, an attempt to deal with moving bodies and in this particular case skateboarding under the banner of transnational peace studies has not been published before. Personally, I find this fusion exciting and hope it will be explored further beyond the scope of this book.

3 Conceptual Considerations

I was going to die, sooner or later, whether or not I have even spoken myself. My silence had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you. [...] What are the words you do not yet have? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence?

(Audre Lorde, 2007:41-42).

I based this work on the conceptual assumption that theory is practice (Foucault, 1996:75). Knowledge and power breathe together and from them, truth emerges as a localised and ceaselessly modified function. Not as the image of one fixed metaphysical plot but as a fleeting appearance, that is "twisted", "distorted" and "fading" (Koppensteiner, 2009a:18-20). Conceptually this implies a *twisting* of different, and yet relevant, strong metaphysics with *weak thinking* (ibid). *Twisting*, in this context means to give shape to different narratives and understands that nothing is lost. The practice of *twisting*, according to Koppensteiner (2009), also involves the incorporation of emerging transpositions while simultaneously being aware of not elevating such fusions into a new or more advanced division. *Weak thinking* in this book refers to an intuitive form of thinking that is aware of its own situated position, contingency as well as historical origin (ibid).

Practically, this theoretical concept is exercised by sharing my situated experiences as well as metaphysical thoughts related to skateboarding and peace. For both, skateboarding and peace are heavily loaded terms; below, I give them situated meaning under the expressions of *The Art of Living Sideways* and *The Aesthetics of Transrational the Peace Philosophy*, to then clarify how they relate to each other. It is necessary to frame this cocktail of experiences as lenses that can act as a reference and guideline for this work. On the one hand I use it as a reference for me as the author and on the other also as clarification for the reader. Hence, in order to share my starting perspective, I now describe below the two lenses that are vital parts of my conceptual understanding of this work. At times they fade or blend but I attempt to hold them in a frame to conduct this research. Those lenses are basically a combination of skate movements and peace practices that I will investigate further as part of the research process.

It appears to be a paradox to state that my self is ever changing and now presenting *The Art of Living Sideways* and *The Aesthetic of Transrational Peace Philosophy* as lenses for research. It was not easy to frame the lenses and at times it even created conflict like friction within myself. But it was a grounding process that helped me to grow while writing. As such I see those two lenses as

an important plateau of thoughts that resemble a base station to return back to as necessary. From there, when staring into the distance, be it far or close, further thoughts might emerge.

3.1 The Art of Living Sideways

Movement isn't only movement. It is meditation; it's also medicine that heals the split between our minds and hearts, bodies and souls

(Gabrielle Roth, 1998:2).

The Art of Living Sideways is here to be understood with a double meaning. On the one hand, it refers to the action of riding and the riders that identify with their boardsport to such an extent that the activity becomes more than a sport and turns into a form of art. An art, that expresses a certain moment but also an art that extends to shape one's life-(style) (Wheaton, 2004). *The Art of Living Sideways* symbolises the experience that one can gain from surfing waves, riding through fresh powder snow or from flying with a skateboard. Those activities might sound unrelated, however what they all have in common is that the rider is required to stand on the board sideways in order to manoeuvre the chosen plank. They further have in common that from all those sideways activities there is a possibility to experience an ecstatic moment of bliss (Fletscher, 2008). I will be examining this experience further later in the book but for now I propose that this state of bliss resembles a sensation of peace in the flow with oneself and the world.

On the other hand I define *The Art of Living Sideways* as a metaphor that looks at life from the side and a call to incorporate the perceptions of mind, body and soul. As such, *The Art of Living Sideways* is to be understood as an embodied process of peace work or even a language that by including the multiplicity of perceptions helps us to unfold and transform (McNiff, 1992). Inspired by Gabrielle Roth's movement-based art, *The Art of Living Sideways* is a type of medicine that gives us the possibility to reconnect with the body, the mind and the soul (Roth, 1998).

It took me a considerable amount of thought to decide that this work will focus on skateboarding because any type of sport where the athlete sees her manoeuvres as art would be worth analysing for the purpose of my inquiry. However, I choose to focus on skateboarding because of my love for the activity and for of my previous 'peace building' experiences with the little deck on four wheels.

At the beginning of this book I gave a short overview of the term skateboarding and I would like to take the time here to conceptualise *The Art of Living Sideways* by expressing skateboarding's complexity in words. Defining skateboarding is not an easy endeavour and I could write an entire book attempt-

ing to explain its meaning. This attempt will never be successful because not even skateboarding knows what it is, neither can I define a fixed definition. However I can explain, especially for the non-skateboarding community, the rich texture of skateboarding vibes as I experienced them for the past ten years. To start with, I will borrow the voice of Iain Borden who is a skateboarder himself, an architectural historian and urban commentator who asks his reader to:

consider that skateboarding is local, being fundamentally concerned with the micro-space of streets, yet is also a globally dispersed and proliferous practice, with tens of millions of practitioners worldwide. [...] It says almost nothing as codified statements, yet presents an extraordinary range of implicit enunciations and meanings. It produces space, but also time and the self. Skateboarding is constantly repressed and legislated against, but counters not through negative destruction but through creativity and production of desires. It has a history, but is unconscious of that history, preferring the immediacy of the present and coming future. It requires a tool (the skateboard), but absorbs that tool into the body. It involves great effort, but produces no commodity ready for exchange. It is highly visual, but refutes the reduction of activity solely to the spectacle of the image. It began in the suburbs, but has come downtown to the core of urban conflicts. It is seen as a child's play activity, but for many practitioners involves nothing less than a complete and alternative way of life.

(Borden, 2001:1)

Here I like to continue on Borden's notion of skateboarding as a way of life as I identify with his words. Skateboarding changed my life and gave me purpose. It also gave me tremendous joy and great pain, reasons to travel, to see the world and meet people. Through skateboarding I could support myself financially and because of it I discovered the connection between mental training, physical movement and ecstatic peak experiences. Skateboarding shows me some of my limits as well as potentials. It makes me eager to compete and at times seduces me to show off but also teaches me to embrace the moment and life in the flow. The board with its four wheels also stoked the initial flame to start this research and deserves the elaborated space below so that some of its potentials as well as limits can be understood theoretically.

In academic realms skateboarding has been of interest for physical cultural studies and is often seen as different from dominant sporting forms or as a sub-culture (Wheaton, 2004). Labels such as 'whiz', 'action', 'extreme', and 'lifestyle' sport are used to categorise skateboarding separately from so-called institutionalised sports. After a detailed discussion by Tomlinson et al (2005), that examines the appropriateness of the above terms, skateboarding is labelled as a 'lifestyle sport' in contemporary academic discussions. Ultimately skateboarding adds a certain perspective of what it means to live and over the years I came to understand skateboarding more as an art of living than a lifestyle. An art that

allows the skateboarder to express living and there is a certain unspoken rule that one should find one's own style. Or in the words of skateboarder Rodney Mullen: "Originality is most important for me ... skaters that copy a lot aren't skating for themselves" (in Borden, 2001:121).

With Borden's word in mind, *The Art of Living Sideways* does not ultimately refer to every person who steps on a board. Certain characteristics are necessary for skateboarding to become this art. Similar to Buddhism, the word 'master' is not appropriate for everyone. From my lens of looking, discipline, practice, love, as well as frustrations that are not shattered by failures, are characteristics of *The Art of Living Sideways*. A skateboarder tries and tries and tries again, if needed a thousand times until she/he achieves her/his desired trick. Further, I find identification with the skateboard to an extent where the lines between the skateboarder and the skateboard blur essential in order to call skateboarding an art. Or as Iain Borden expresses it effectively:

To someone learning to skateboard, the skateboard appears as an instrument separated to her or his body, a platform on which to balance – and this is how most 'how to' books explain it. Foot position, standing, pushing off, turning and stopping are followed by 'next steps' involving basic manoeuvres such as kickturns. By contrast, the more proficient skateboarder quickly reconceives of the skateboard as at once separated to, and part of her or his body, and so integral to their relation to the external world.

(Borden, 2011:97)

It is a fluid art that is constantly renewed and re-formed. The following quote is written by skateboarder James Davis (1999:6) as an attempt to capture the fluctuating meaning that the art of skateboarding can produce.

Skateboarding is everything.

It is a pastime, a sport, a hobby. A craze, an industry and a toy.

A profession, an excuse, a game. A lifestyle, a distraction.

It is a reason, not a crime

Although I do not completely agree with Davis, I find his summary of skateboarding above, a good reflection on the vibes of skateboarding. Skateboarding is an activity in the grey world between childlike play and public disobedience and it is exactly in that space that provides most of its potentials. It is in the between spaces where the art emerges and has the possibility to create exciting new definitions and meanings.

I do repeatedly experience situations where the non-skateboarding public sees my skateboarding activities as a crime. Skateboarding challenges the status quo of using space (Borden, 2001). In particular when it comes to defining the

use of shared spaces in communal living environments such as stairs, pavements, benches, recreational public places, car parks and mountain roads (ibid). We skateboarders have been and still are part of on going negotiations when it comes to the legal and illegal use of space (ibid). Especially as a female skateboarder, I have been the subject of controversy not only in terms of using space but also in regard to social as well as gender constructs. In Kabul, for example, I had tomatoes thrown after me by people who disapproved of me riding on the streets. Whereas in the UK and Germany, the police are more concerned about me riding with a handbag or using public ground ‘inappropriately’.

Known by some for its ‘anti-social’ behaviour, ‘vandalism’ and ‘drug use’ (Goldenberg & Shooter, 2009; Wood, Carter & Martin, 2014), skateboarding might be an unusual subject of study within the frame of peace studies. However it is about time to redesign how we think about peace. Seeing peace exclusively as the absence of war and as a desired end state for humanity is intellectual violence. In fact, and here I borrow from the Innsbruck school of Peace Studies, “the image of a complete and consistent peace is not just totalitarian but it is directed against the nature of being; it is equally inhuman as unrealistic” (Dietrich 2012:261). Inspired by Wolfgang Dietrich’s thesis of the ‘five families of peace’, *The Art of Living Sideways* metaphor is an attempt to understand how the transrational peace interpretation can be experienced in practice.¹⁴

From within the understandings of the five families of peace, bodily expression such as breath, voice and movement are possible ways to access the experience of peace (Dietrich, 2011). Although Dietrich does not refer to skateboarding he says that the action of movement has a quality to transform currents of energy, to gain a peaceful state of being and a peace of mind experience (ibid). This is important to mention here and I will come back to the art of transformation through skateboarding later.

Simultaneously skateboarding also has the tendency to create conflicts, on a personal as well as social sphere. Skateboarding connects and skateboarding divides. The skateboard is only an object that can be used and abused for several different outcomes. As I am here writing about an art, it is important to remember, that the skateboard is only the vehicle and not the driving force. Like a painter uses her brush as an expression of the self, the skater uses her board to experience and make sense of life.

14 The five families of peace refer to Wolfgang Dietrich’s (2006, 20011, 2012, 2013) research and teachings. He categorizes peace into energetic, moral, modern, postmodern and transrational understandings. In the following chapter I talk more about this concept.

As the rider gets more advanced, he begins to realize that there are times when there is almost no weight on his feet. This is when he begins to discover that the skateboard as a vehicle, operates more as part of himself than as something he rides on.

(Curtis Hesselgrave in Borden, 2001:97)

It is in those moments, where the boundaries between the vehicle and the self blur, that the art can emerge.

Although a tricky subject, I would briefly like to introduce some ethics closely related to the art of skateboarding that are unofficially recognised in my skateboarding circles. Jim Fitzpatrick kindly wrote them down for us while explaining that the success of *Skateistan* is partly founded on those pillars. They are: “Independence. Persistence. Self-reliance. Creativity” (Fitzpatrick 2012:7). Those are also often the values or pillars of reason for skateboarding philanthropy such as *Skateistan* and the *Tony Hawk Foundation* (O’Connor, forthcoming).

As outlined above, skateboarding as art incorporates many shapes and styles that include a rich texture of perceptions and most importantly can be lived. Thus, from a skateboarding perspective, *The Art of Living Sideways* seeks balance between the different forces and searches for meaning as well as understanding in an apparently meaningless world.

3.2 The Aesthetics of Transrational Peace Philosophy

As artists, aesthetics requires certain disciplines from us. Be attentive to image. Listen for the core. Trust and follow intuition. Watch metaphor. Avoid clutter and busy-ness. See picture better. Find the elegant beauty where complexity meets simplicity. Imagine the canvas of social change.

(John Paul Lederach, 2005:74).

I propose to read aesthetics here as work on the self in relation to transrational experiences of peace. Contrary to the patriarchal Greek values of aesthetics (Bychkov & Sheppard, 2010) or the fascist aestheticization of life (Stollmann, 1978) aesthetics is here understood as the Foucauldian ‘aesthetics of existence’ (Foucault, 1983). To understand the relationship between the aesthetics and peace philosophy for my second lens, Norbert Koppensteiner’s (2009:138-146) thoughts are traced back to Foucault and Nietzsche. All three understand the aesthetics of existence as a collection of experimental and creative processes by which an individual can turn herself into a work of art.

For Nietzsche (2011) the musician best embodied this mode of creative self-transformation, whereas for Foucault it was the figure of the writer. For Koppensteiner it is above all the figure of the ‘*transpersonal self*’ (2009), which he in-

roduces to the debate by questioning how such a self-transformation could be lived concretely. The transpersonal self is a subject that incorporates transpersonal and transrational experiences. It is a subject that is in a continuous process of transformation, a transformation that Koppensteiner understands as an ongoing practice of aesthetic (Apollonian) and energetic (Dionysian) aspects (ibid). The transpersonal is conceptualized as a precarious, perpetual changing and in a permanent flow of becoming self that is ‘fluid’, ‘open’, ‘soft’ and in “any case not geared towards a finished state” (2009:114). In this sense, it is a self that comprehends living as a form of art that is best enjoyed dancing or skateboarding. It is also an adventurous self that dares to embrace conflicts because it understands conflict as being an integrative part of its relational becoming (ibid). In Koppensteiner’s (2009:143) words,

[t]he aesthetic component refers to the attempt to shape this process [of perpetual becoming] and give it a certain form according to concrete relational necessities much rather than following a category of beauty towards an abstract ideal form.

Rather than the suppression of conflict, this understanding of transrational aesthetics opens the possibility to in-cooperate conflict in our daily lives. Conflict, under the framework of *The Aesthetics of Transrational Peaces* is understood systemically (Dietrich, 2013), meaning, that a conflict is an eternal aspect of human aliveness located between human relations and the dysfunction in their communication (ibid). This in turn opens the space for conflict transformation; once there is a space to allow conflicting tendencies to emerge they can sooner or later be transformed (Perls, 2002).

The *Aesthetics of Transrational Peace Philosophy* further understands the four other members of the peace family as reference for the work on oneself.

Each of them circulates around a specific key value: energetic peace privileges harmony, the moral interpretation emphasizes justice, the modern understanding of peace calls for security, and the post-modern approach deals with the question of truth(s).

(Innsbruck School of Peace Studies, 2014).

In my understanding, the *Transrational Peace Philosophy* presupposes an awareness of not only the conflicting as much as harmonising tendencies within oneself but also in other members of the peace family that guide as reference, where one can find her own resonance or dissonance. Peace in that sense is a bodily experience that can be facilitated, it is a conscious state from within the individual that requires a sense of freedom as much as responsibility for the personal as much as the collective sphere.

Last but not least, aesthetics under this research can also refer to the energetic interpretations of peace that are born out of harmony and refer to the fullness of human relations. (Dietrich, 2012).

Harmony is when the energy of life can flow unimpeded. That is why the aesthetics of peaces is about the implicit relation of that which can be called soul, self or *ātman*, towards others and towards the All-One, which can also be called God, world soul, *brahman*, existence, Kosmos, or universe.

(Dietrich, 2012:260)

This unimpeded flow can resemble a radical immanent experience of oneself in the here and now and also from oneself towards others. Understanding aesthetics in that sense turns into gifts that as Lederach says: “help those who attempt to move from cycles of violence to new relationships and those of us who wish to support such movement to see ourselves for whom we are: artist bringing to life and keeping alive something that has not existed” (2005:73-74). That, from my experience, is an essential part of living artfully and the question ‘how to do this?’ is an essential question of peace studies.

While proposing the question on how to surpass such cycles of violence, Lederach introduces the *moral imagination, the art and soul of building peace* (2005). It is a jewel in the form of a book where he captures the essence of his vocation as a peace builder. Or what could also be called the “aesthetics of peace building” (2005:71), a set of disciplines and capacities that he noticed are practiced by those who are able to “rise above violence” (2005:5).

the capacity to imagine ourselves in a web of relationships that includes our enemies;

the ability to sustain a paradoxical curiosity that embraces complexity without reliance on dualistic polarity;

the fundamental belief in and pursuit of the creative act;

and the acceptance of the inherent risk of stepping into the mystery of the unknown that lies beyond the far too familiar landscape of violence.

(ibid)

Pirating from Lederach with due respect, the above are required to practice the *Aesthetics of Transrational Peace Philosophy*.

Now I also need to frame the contested concept of peace for this research lens although a consensual definition across different cultures or political orientation is very unlikely (Wiberg, 2005:1). Defining the delicate notion of peace is

nearly impossible yet humankind has a longing to look beyond constructed borders and *Otherness* to find a place of peaceful coexistence. When asked myself what peace means for me, I can never come up with just one answer mainly because, I too understand and perceive peace relationally and situationally dependent (Dietrich, 2012). Peace, I find, is perceptible like the wind, persistently changing, sometimes rarely, sometimes explosively. “There are as many interpretations of peace as there are humans to sense them” (Dietrich et al, 2011: xxviii) and I suggest that even within every human to sense them there are once again several perceptions of peace. Therefore, I will not attempt to define a fixed notion of peace but highlight its fluid and fluctuating tendencies. In relation to the understanding of aesthetics above, I am left with an open image of peace that can be shaped in the here and now. Within the transrational philosophy all things are related and human experiences and interaction as well as communication of peace are explored (Dietrich, 2011, 2013).

It is precisely the philosophy of the trans-rational peace with its reintegration of spirituality into rational, modern and post-modern interpretations of peace, which indicates that peace is a flow, that it has to be reshaped every moment in every context and can never be kept in the cage of a rigid rational structure

(Dietrich et al, 2011: xxix)

To summarise, the *Aesthetic of Transrational Peace Philosophy* is then an everyday practice on the self, a form of art (also known as work) that is open to the possibility of transformation. The transformation of the transrational Self in its permanent flow of becoming but also the transformation of lived experiences through this work on oneself, while simultaneously acknowledging the many other interpretations of peace(s) around one’s own experience. It is essentially a free gift and whoever feels invited to, can turn life into a work of art. An art of living, that as Lederach proposes above, supports transformation and gives life to fresh forms in all possible dimensions. In practice, *The Aesthetics of Transrational Peace Philosophy* is then the humble act of living the experience and making art as life happen. As such, this research frame then creates an arena that allows me to illuminate and significantly reflect on the act of skateboarding in relation to peace work and is my second lens of analysis during my research path.

4 Kabul, Peace & Skateboarding

There are a lot of children in Afghanistan, but little childhood.

(Khaled Hosseini in Fitzpatrick 2012:114).

When I was young, boardsports were amusing and a welcome escape from my then family disarray. It started with falling in love with snowboarding, riding fresh powder, having fun and forgetting about my worries at home. As I write this, I have been involved with boardsports for 18 years. The years before my first stay in Kabul, I had organized and taught mountainboard as well as skateboard workshops in England, Germany, Switzerland and Austria. However, my former educational background was in Sustainable Product Design, where most of my projects were tailored for the snowboard, mountainboard and skateboard industry.

In 2009 I travelled to Kabul as an English teacher, skateboard instructor and program coordinator for a six-month volunteer placement. My task was to assist the set up of *Skateistan*, the world's first co-educational skateboard school, which I will explain in more details in the following chapter. I later returned twice with job titles such as *Human Resource Manager* and *Female Support Officer* between autumn 2009 and autumn 2012. The occurrences in Afghanistan, but also my determination to go there, had a significant impact on how I see the world and I feel it is important to share them. Not to show off my apparent recklessness, which I have been criticised for, but to share with the hope that this opens a space that allows me to work authentically and share deeply personal experiences without removing the grit of reality.

4.1 Skateistan: Sharing the Stoke

Skateistan's not just about skating. It's about giving people life skills and hope for their future.

(Tony Hawk, Skateistan, 2014a).

In 2007, Oliver Percovich visited his then girlfriend Sharna Nolan in Kabul who had a research position there, with the hope to also find employment as a researcher. Percovich, who had been a skateboarder since the age of six, had been travelling the world with his skateboard prior to coming to Kabul. Despite countless people telling him it is too dangerous to skate on the streets, Percovich, rode

his wooden deck through Kabul, and quickly became friends with some Afghan boys. Together they went searching for the best concrete to skate, in a city where women are not supposed to ride bicycles or drive cars and where all popular sports are only for boys. On their sessions they were always joined by mobs of girls and boys who wanted to learn how to skateboard, too. It was then that Percovich realised, that “skateboarding was a loop hole, it was so new that nobody had the chance to say that girls could not do it yet” (Percovich, 2014; 02:09). Today, 40% of *Skateistan*’s students are girls and Afghanistan has the highest ratio of female skateboarders worldwide (ibid).

The kids told Percovich: “we need more skateboards!” (in Fitzpatrick, 2012: 16) and he organised a couple of more decks for his next visit. By then he had found a job and started to arrange daily session at an empty fountain in *Macroyan* after work. The revolutionary idea of linking skateboarding with education came to him through Fazila Shirindel, one of the street working girls he used to instruct how to skate. Fazila’s story is a keystone in *Skateistan*’s history, which has been told to me by herself and Percovich several times while I was skateboarding and working with them in Kabul. To substitute her family income Fazila was pulled out of school to work full time on the street. Together with one of Percovich’s early Kabuli friends, Sham Razi, they could make a deal with her parents that meant he could employ her as a skateboard teacher instead of working on the street and that she was allowed to go back to school. Fazila’s parents agreed. At about the same time there was one particular session when Fazila was teaching that Percovich’s vision started to come alive. On this particular day he witnessed how girls from different socio-political backgrounds were singing and dancing together after they had finished their skate. Usually they would have not played with each other but the novelty of this new thing called skateboarding had brought them together. He was touched by the trust the girls showed each other and saw that trust is a basic ingredient for communicating inter-culturally. He then started to think bigger and approached donors for funding a skate park with the vision to build a sporting and education facility where young males and females felt safe and free to express themselves. It took him two years and he was confronted with many sceptics and at times had to question his own sanity. Finding himself in one of the most dangerous cities in the world at the time, with little electricity and warm water it was the daily skate session with the kids that kept him going through the dark days like a flask filled with hope (Percovich, 2014).

In October 2009, Afghanistan’s biggest sporting hall was completed, providing 5428 square meters of educational and sporting ground built by a local construction company in the heart of the *Afghan Olympic Committee*, which donated the land. My arrival corresponded with the opening of the skate park, at a time where peace building was still a common term on the *Skateistan* agenda, together with the promotion of the message of non-violence and non-discrimination. The

idea of linking education with skateboarding, let alone in Afghanistan, was perceived as groundbreaking by the worldwide skateboard community.

Now, that there's a skateboard park, a skateboard park and school, in Kabul? In Afghanistan? In a war zone? I mean, a skateboard park and school surrounded by war makes perfect sense in a senseless world, doesn't it? It's absurd in an absurdist's world! Skateboarding, in the form of 'Skateistan', has done it, again. The impossible is possible, the improbable is there for the rest of us to experience

(C.R Stecyke, III, 2012:289)

Today, *Skateistan* is a prizewinning global organisation that now operates with the mission, "to use skateboarding as a tool for empowering youth, to create new opportunities and the potential for change" (Skateistan, 2013a). *Skateistan* provides free access to education, focuses especially on girls and working children, develops leadership opportunities and builds friendship, trust and social capital (Skateistan, 2013b). In Kabul, classes are a combination of one-hour classroom based activity and one-hour physical education. According to the *Skateistan's* Annual Report 18,000 students attended once a week during 2012 with a percentage of over 50% street-working children (Skateistan, 2013b).

What started, as a Kabul based grassroots initiative, fast grew into a global not-for-profit organization. With the growth of the project and the increasing security concerns, *Skateistan's* headquarters and bank account moved from Kabul to Berlin, Germany in 2012. Today, major funding comes from governmental donors, In-Kind donations as well as individuals and industry-corporations (Skateistan, 2013a). As foreign aid to Afghanistan is likely to decrease, *Skateistan* is taking measures to run their own income by growing the *Skateistan* brand and through fundraising drives (ibid). Seven years after Percovich's original brainchild was born in Kabul, the project has now turned into a Global endeavour "that builds confidence, trust and social capital among children" (Skateistan, 2014b). The idea is to provide "opportunities for education, leadership, and creative thinking that helps break the cycle of poverty and exclusion" (ibid) with the aim of changing the lives of youth in conflict regions and creating leaders through skateboarding and access to education.

4.2 I Used to Harness the Power of Skateboarding for Peace

The skateboarding is just a hook. The most important thing is the peace building.¹⁵
(Sophie Friedel in Everett, 2010)

Skateboarding for peace! When I read it the first time in 2007 it made so much sense. Sitting at my then boyfriend's kitchen table in Falmouth, United Kingdom, he passed me *The Guardian* and added, "look Sophie this might interest you." I saw a picture of a handful of young girls in Afghani fashion with bright headscarves skateboarding in a rundown fountain in Kabul's *Macroyan* neighbourhood. The girls with their big smiles, whose scarves were fluttering in the wind while they attempted to manoeuvre the dust covered skateboards in their faded flip flops touched me somewhere deep in my heart.

The headline above the picture read something along the lines of *skateboarding for peace* and was a call for donations to build a skate park in Kabul with the idea of facilitating cross-cultural exchange and peace building. Being a skateboarder myself, the story made so much sense. The article resonated with me instantly and I had the urge to be involved. It was then, even without words to express myself, I understood, that skateboarding provides an access for the feeling of peace, freedom and transformation. I had a tingly sensation just by the thought that I could be part of this amazing project in Kabul.

I started skateboarding relatively late and was 21 when I first stood on a skateboard. It was at lunch break during a summer internship with a design business in England that was run by three skateboarders. At first it was only a lunch break amusement. Then Charlie, asked me to come out to the skate spot one Sunday and I got addicted. Skateboarding became the new snowboarding, which I dreadfully missed since having moved away from the Alps. I was in love, a little bit with Charlie and more so with the whole skateboarding vibes. Skateboarding saved my soul, skateboarding helped me to go through terrible times and skateboarding got me into trouble with the police, with some of my friends as well as with my parents.

Skateboarding also brought a lot of creative joy to my then otherwise dull life and skateboarding today helps me to pick myself back up when I am in depressive moods. At times it was even the only reason to get out of bed in the morning. Skateboarding and the community I found myself a part of gave meaning to my existence and it shaped my identity for a while, especially at the time I read the above-mentioned article. I could feel the Afghani girls joy and energy

15 During the course of the previous chapters, I should have become clear, that I changed my opinion on the use of term *peace building*. I said the quoted in 2010 but for the purpose of portraying my transformative process I include the terminology here. See chapter 2.3 The Path is the Question for my understanding on the use of the term peace building.

all across the ocean at my British breakfast table 5000 miles away. I was all for it, for the idea of building peace with skateboarding.

Yes, there is such a thing as building peace with sport. However, when I left for Afghanistan I was unaware of what I later got to know as *Sport for Peace and Development* (Cardenas, 2013; Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011; Giulianotti, 2011a), a field that I will describe later. At the time, I just knew that skateboarding had given me a sense of peace and I was keen to share it. I was ready for an adventure and determined not to be trapped in the rat race of Germany's economy that from my perspective at the time seemed to place profit before people. I was also keen to bring joy and hope to children that grew up, surrounded by war and violent conflict. Two years after reading the article, I left Europe with the intention to pursue a more meaningful job than sitting all day in front of a computer.

At first, I was 'just there', in the magnificent mountainous city of Kabul. Afghanistan's capital is geographically located in the South of Asia and strategically positioned on the ancient Silk Road, a caravan route established during Roman rule in Europe, that linked central China with the Mediterranean. The country has been used as a buffer for strategic wars of larger external powers over the last three decades. Afghanistan was not on my personal radar until the invasion of US American troops under the mandate of the NATO led *Operation Enduring Freedom* following the September 11th incidents in 2001. The narrative I had on Afghanistan was that the country is a security problem and that the real challenges lay in reconstructing it by generating means that can provide jobs, education, health care, legal as well as political structure and social opportunities, with the ultimate aim to control the insurgency threat against North America and Europe and a general economic expansion of the West (Barnett, 2002; Bhutta, 2002; Shurke, 2007; Waldman, 2008).

Although the situation is proportionally more complex that I can ever explain here, I can say, that the cost of war is high (Jackson, 2010). During three decades of conflict hearts have been broken, structures and systems collapsed, the earth has been shaken, and manufacturing skills have been lost due to war and its aftermath. In Kabul, social, environmental, economical, religious and security concerns among other restrictions hinder female teenagers to participate in public events. Gaining an education is more difficult for girls than for boys and participating in sport, especially if there is a possibility that men could watch is uncommon. The literacy rate in Afghanistan is among the lowest in the world and due to economic shortfalls, children are often required to take on income-generating tasks (UNICEF, 2010).

Although there was a time I thought I could find out what is really happening, by now I understand that there are no smug answers to what is really going on in Afghanistan. I was met with conflicting stories that all wanted to be heard and respected. Close up those stories all made sense and often wanted me to take

sides. The perplexing circumstances in and around the fog of war resemble a complex adaptive system surrounded by horrible suffering and propaganda from the different interest groups (Fontan, 2012). I could cogently explain the recent conflict situation and its history in more details, based on literature written by foreign experts on Afghanistan who attempted to make sense of the situation before me. However, this would be beside the point of writing this book. It is no longer my interest to pretend to know what is really happening. I feel however, that the above interpretation of the setting is important to understand the situation I found myself in when I first worked under the umbrella term of using skateboarding as a ‘hook’ for peace building.

In 2009 I found myself in Afghanistan’s capital with the intention to share the skateboarding *stoke* with the girls and boys from Kabul. We were revolutionaries challenging the traditional way of delivering aid by transgressing existing taboos.¹⁶ Instead of the traditional top-down approach, we were working on the grassroots level and the kids made the agenda for our actions. We had meetings during which they told us what they wanted to learn and we organised our workshops according to their wishes. We wanted the kids to have fun and provided opportunities to allow them the chance to forget about the war. We challenged the way traditional aid organisations market their donor campaigns to give money to the poor and pitiful. Instead, we wanted the kids to become “subjects of respect not pity” (Percovich, 2014; 08:16) and focused on participatory learning, trust, ownership, creativity, respect, equality as much as quality. We took training in participatory theatre work and played games with the kids so that they could have their say and share their experience to find common ground. We did dress according to the ‘local’ fashion but did not care about curfews and the so often practiced discriminatory separations of so called locals and expatriates. We attempted to control the media consumption of the kids by not showing them (Western) skate videos or magazines. Later we showed them skate magazines to help them improve their skate tricks but ripped out many pages that we found culturally inappropriate. Such as for example images of naked female body parts or people who smoked. We piled motorcycles with skateboards and safety gear and rode around Afghanistan to give lessons in and outside a newly built skate park.

Determined to offer kids cross-cultural education and opportunities especially for girls, I taught English, held art based projects and gave skateboard lessons. The term ‘peace building’ was a common part of my vocabulary and it was a useful phrase to explain what I was doing in Kabul. Then I used to harness the power of skateboarding for what I called peace building. I found the term self-explanatory in its own sense. For me peace building implied something along the lines of providing a space for intercultural interaction through skate-

16 The “we” refers to my *Skateistan* colleagues and me.

boarding, education and community involvement, all things we did at *Skateistan* (Friedel, 2010a:12). For me the skateboard is a tool that makes relationships visible. Just the simple act of helping a novice balance on the little deck with the small wheels is an interaction that helps people from all ages and backgrounds to interact in a joyful way. There is insecurity involved, providing trust by lending a hand to lean on and laughs to be shared while rebalancing the body on this moving device. This example might sound banal but it opened doors that I previously did not imagine possible.

I have seen former warlords with their security guards and their AK-47s strapped on their backs having the same balancing issues on the skateboard as young girls giggling with their friends while keeping their headscarf in place. Throughout the book I will discuss and philosophise about the work a peace worker does in more depth but for now it was important to share my former understanding of peace work. I loved my job but wanted to deepen my understanding of peace and conflict work and enrolled in the MA Program for Peace, Development, Security and International Conflict Transformation at the University of Innsbruck. As a natural side effect of the program and inspired by a paper by Holly Thorpe and Robert Rinehart (2013) which I explain in the following chapter, I started to question my personal beliefs and assumptions.

What is my need as northern-based action sports enthusiast, when implementing peace facilitation initiatives? Why do I find it important to empower and build peace? What right do I have, to intervene in a country other than my own? Who decides when an Afghan girl is empowered? Who decides over developed or underdeveloped territory? Who has the power to decide what peace means? Who defines the categories of the monitor and evaluation sheets and with what intention? Who has the power to erect walls of inclusion and exclusion? Who decides the peace work agenda? And how can I, instead of fulfilling my own wish to help, contribute to the unfolding of peace?

Frustrated by the social inequalities, power struggles and compulsive need to help, I decided to leave *Skateistan* with the hope of finding parts of myself and I ended up writing this book.

4.3 Finding my Stance between War and Non-War

Afghanistan is calm. There is no fighting. Foreigners think that though and are therefore scared to come.

(Faranas, 2010; 6:54).

I left Europe during the controversial and dispute-ridden re-election of president Hamid Karzai (Walsh, 2009). Shortly after my arrival, the then Commander of

the International Assistance Force (ISAF), Stanley McChrystal, called a surge to move 30,000 thousand more soldiers into the invaded territory. “The only way to defeat al Qaeda in Afghanistan, argued general McChrystal in fall 2009, was to do proper counterinsurgency and protect the people,” remembers US American Colonel Gian Gentile, (2013:118) in his timely and honest book, *Wrong Turn: America’s Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency*. Despite the well-intentioned mandate to ‘protect the population’ and to ‘serve the local people’, counterinsurgency operation (COIN) is not working (See also, Wissing, 2012). The efforts and risk of life on both sides of the fence is a mere “nation building at the barrel of a gun” (Gentile 2013:114). Its potentially well-intended (moralistic, I might add) attitude notwithstanding, the reality of COIN is death and destruction. Militaries’ assumptions still appears to be, that by getting the tactic right, by organising properly and by having the appropriate technologies, counterinsurgencies can win wars (Gentile, 2013). I have trouble seeing that. War as much as counterinsurgencies kills and wars from my perspective cannot be won. “The idea that any of this [the war in Afghanistan and counter terrorism] ever made sense or has ever worked should be buried deep in the ground, yet the belief that counterinsurgency works persists like a vampire among the living,” writes Gentile (2013:135) and I cannot agree with him more.

Really, they should have sent 30,000 teachers instead of solders! I expressed my opinion at the time in the political section of *Sonntag Aktuell*, a German newspaper (Friedel, 2010:2). Later, my superior cautioned me not to mention politics in public because my tongue, he said, “could harm our organization.” The more aware I became of the absurdity and the tremendous cost of war (Jackson, 2010), the more I found myself confused and disillusioned. On the one hand, back in 2009 I was pro foreign intervention because I understood the ‘war against terror’ as a just and good intervention that needs to be done in order to make the world more peaceful. It seemed legitimate to free Afghanistan from the Taliban and provide access for female education and healthcare. Four years and three visits to Afghanistan later, my previous supportive attitude towards ‘the war against terror’ vanished.¹⁷ During all three visits, the Afghani population welcomed me with warmth, care, hope, love and a lot of chai. I kept my distance from military operations and for most of the time I felt like Faranas above, as if there was no war.

Shocking, embarrassing and disappointing to realise but terrorism is nothing but a weapon of warfare. There are no evil men that need to be killed for the sake

17 The war against terror is here to be understood after Richard Jackson as the large scale series of counter-terrorist campaign which simultaneously are “a set of practices, war, cover operations, agencies and institutions and an accompanying series of assumptions, beliefs, justifications and narratives” (2005:8).

of world security. Terrorism is a construct to justify a need for economic expansion and to fuel the security policies of empires (Jackson et al. 2007). Or in the words of French army officer during the Second World War and Counter-insurgency theorist Roger Trinquier (2006:15):

Terrorism, then is a weapon of warfare, which can neither be ignored nor minimized. It is as a weapon of warfare that we should study it. The goal of modern warfare is control of the populace, and terrorism is a particular appropriate weapon, since it aims directly at the inhabitant.

Anti-terrorism then perpetuates violence and is even more violent than terrorism (Gentile, 2013), but when I first went to Afghanistan I had a different opinion. I used to think, that the ‘war against terror’ makes the world more secure and potentially a more peaceful place. It is easy to laugh about this now and to know better but in the past it was not so obvious to see. Of course certain voices such as, among others, US American writer Evan Wright, who covered the Afghanistan War for the magazine *Rolling Stone*, knew it back then. However, I did not read his *Make Believe War* (2002) article in which he describes the frustration and pointlessness of military operation until recently. Something in me assumed and trusted that the people in charge of the war against terror know what they are doing. I thought it must be for a good reason that they risk countless lives of brave soldiers for the security of the whole. I am no longer of that opinion.

In retrospect, I think I had this perspective partly because of my experience twelve years ago. On the eleventh of September 2001, I watched two airplanes that were flown into the World Trade Centre in Manhattan, North America and one that was crashed into the Pentagon building. I was sixteen years old and followed the news coverage from the communal room of Munich’s *Harlachinger* Hospital. At the time I was in a psychosomatic rehabilitation program to recover from chronic pain and a near death experience due to meningococcal meningitis, a bacterial inflammation of the meninges.

The aftermath of the crashed planes, that according to the official story were hijacked, was named a terrorist attack and we, the staff and patients watching the news, were all a bit scared that this could happen to us in Munich as well. Following the event, therapies and treatments were cancelled or postponed because the hospital staff attended emergency meetings to prepare crisis action plans. People were worried, that the then approaching annual *Oktoberfest* festivities could be a potential target for a militant attack that could affect people in Munich.¹⁸

18 *Die Wiesn* as the *Oktoberfest* is also called is a 16-day beer drinking and funfair riding mass event in memorial to the marriage of Bavarian’s King Ludwig to Therese of Saxe-Hildburghausen in 1810. It is one of the world’s largest fairs with visitor numbers above the six million mark.

The possibility of an attack that could kill countless human souls, apparently out of the blue sky, shaped my thinking at the time and made me believe that something would need to be done to prevent such future events. Before going to Kabul, I had the impression that I could teach Afghani kids to be more peaceful than their grown-up terrorist parents. Aware that the term terrorist is a highly loaded expression and that “one man’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter” (Jenkins, 2003:18), I deliberately used this by now somewhat banal label of terrorist to share the shift of my understanding. Those kids then, of course in the future, would grow into wiser and more peaceful adults than their parents. Educating the Kabuli children would mitigate violence and make the world a more peaceful place I cleverly thought back then. Little did I know!

The many contradicting dichotomies between my European background and my Afghanistan experiences made it at times difficult to find my ground. Witnessing the brutal face of violence among the different opposing reasons for action and description of reality did not leave me unmarked. After an initial devastation, those experiences made me curious to look behind the obvious and explore what it means to be human, how we can live together and accept each other despite our differences. I like to think that rather than trusting the status quo I am now slightly more aware of underlying political, institutional and behavioural power relationships. Michel Foucault (1996:299) says that:

the deepest roots of violence and its permanence come out of the form of the rationality we use. The idea had been that if we live in the world of reason, we can get rid of violence. This is quite wrong.

I used to have the idea that I should act rational in order to live well. But then in the three years of living in countries with social constructs much different from each other I found it impossible to be rational. While figuring out how and where I can place my feet within the, at times conflicting, social realities, I noticed that I have a need to find more peace within myself, to become more aware, to educate myself and take responsibility for my choices and actions, not only in a reasonable way but by balancing my heart, mind and soul. Logically this sounds easy but relationally lived, the work on myself resembles a wild hurricane ride. As such, I find it of utter importance to practice alternative possibilities of communications that allows us to respect the diversity of Otherness’s despite our differences.

4.4 Plank-Pushing in Afghanistan

The key is not skateboarding! – The key is the power of sharing something that you love and with persistence it can grow into something quite unexpected and truly amazing.

(Oliver Percovich, 2014; 10:00).

I left for Afghanistan on an evening in the first week of November 2009, eight years after I watched the World Trade Center collapse. Back then there was still a direct flight from Frankfurt to Kabul. It was also the day of my uncle's funeral. Ludwig was my mum's brother and he died of cancer the week before. The atmosphere in front of the gate was tense. The *Safi-Air* direct flight was one of the last departures for the day and the news was on a loop repeating that militants attacked a Kabuli UN guest house killing five and leaving nine wounded. Silently I wondered if I would survive the path I was about to take. How would I react if I came back in pieces, half paralyzed or if I had to spend the rest of my life in a wheelchair? Would I be able to cope? What about my parents, brother and sisters? How would they cope?

I nearly did not board the plane; while I was waiting for the flight crew to open the gate, the voice of my doctor whom I visited for travel vaccinations came into my mind. Two weeks before my departure, I went to see his assistant for the last job. It was then that he came out of his office and asked me to come in for a talk. "I also work for the German Army as an emergency medic," he says as he showed me pictures of himself in action, proudly standing in uniform in front of a helicopter. "Listen, Sophie, he said, "I strongly advise you not to fly to Kabul!"

He told me that he was 'out there' for some emergency evacuations of German soldiers and reported, that, "the Afghani National Army soldiers tended to help the man that were less injured and just left severely wounded women to die on the road." My stomach turned in disgust and I could not believe my ears. "How can humans be so cruel and not help an injured person just because she is a women?" I thought to myself. "The Afghani pack is evil and treat women like shit, you should not go, Sophie." This was his last attempt to keep me from going.

The tingling sensation telling me that this is what I had to do was stronger than my concerns and the only way forward was to fly. I was a bit nervous, and I must admit I ran scenarios through my head and tried to imagine what I would do in case I was involved in a kidnapping or explosion. Nagging concerns about my safety were at the back of my mind ever since I saw that picture of the skateboarding girls and decided that I wanted to go to Kabul. I tried to ignore them as the urge to go was greater than the concerns. The argument while I played those scenarios in my head was either "I will be fine" or "it is only me in case shit hits the fan."

The gate in front of me finally opened and it was my last chance not to board the plane. I had to think of the funeral of my uncle. "One day I will die," I thought to myself and prayed that it would not be like the vaccination doctor described the death of the bleeding Afghani women. Apart from a German speaking journalist, who as I overheard them talking, were on the way to cover the potential re-election of Karzai, and an elderly Afghani mother with her family, I was the only female passenger among the otherwise male travellers on the half empty flight.

I was exhausted from the good-bye parties and funeral and fell asleep in the airplane just after take off. When I opened my eyes again hours later, it was just in time to see the snowy peaks of the Hindu Kush mountain range glittering with the glorious morning sunshine. It looked incredible and the worries I had before turned into excitement and curiosity. The majestic mountains form a sub-range off the Himalayas and reach up to 20,000 feet, which I learned later while studying de-mining maps on the search for clean snow ridges for our snowboard adventures.

As the airplane approached Kabul, I felt an arousal of excitement and trust throughout my entire body that I read as an indicator that I was doing alright. The landing strip was not much more than a dusty road and never before had I seen such an array of barbed wire, sand bags and blast proof walls on display. Not even in the military training camps I visited while I was a member of the British Combined Cadet Force (CCF). As a single female traveller I was a bit of a curiosity at the Kabul Airport, a space that was predominantly filled by armed males portraying their different ranks and nationalities on their uniforms. I do remember a slight feeling of unease as I realized that I appear to be the only woman not accompanied by a man. I was wearing a red summer coat that covered my breast, wrists and butt, a light blue silk headscarf, black skinny jeans, and my hiking boots.

While I struggled to push my belongings on a broken luggage trolley, it briefly crossed my mind that any of the armed men could just shoot me right then but generally I was more worried about my headscarf; if I was wearing it properly and if I looked alright. In my headscarf fear, I attempted to catch a glimpse of my reflection in the tinted windows of the armoured Mercedes Jeeps of the German Police that were lining the path in a parked convoy. The presence of the armed German police had, I must admit, a strangely calming effect on me.

Once I made it out of the airport complex and into the pick up area, I was greeted by two skateboarders and instinctively knew that we were going to have a crazy time together. This was the first time we met in person; we only spoke on *Skype* before and I think we were all equally excited to finally meet. My colleague navigated his *Toyota* that was blasting out music from an *iPod*, passed

chaotic traffic, donkey carts and flocks of sheep that were shepherded through the streets by young girls and boys. Kabul traffic is something else, with no apparent rules it is a spectacle to watch and a pain to be stuck in, with checkpoints where the guards would sometimes harass me or offer cups of chai.

After a quick coffee break we drove to the skate park. It happened to be that the head of the Afghan Olympic Committee, and former *Massoud* fighter, General Aghbar was touring the Afghan Defence Minister and some of his staff through the compound. The delegation asked if we could do a skate demo. So that is what we did. My skateboard wheels touched Afghani soil not even two hours after my arrival in front of a male group of government officials with a heavily armed security team. Their impressive arsenal of weapons scared and excited me at the same time. The armed men in their suits and military uniforms wanted to try the ‘new sport’, so the guys in my group gave them a short skateboard lesson while they still had their weapons on their back.

I was advised beforehand not to touch, shake hand or make eye contact with men in public but I needed my female colleague to remind me not to touch the men and I stepped to the side, feeling slightly awkward for a short moment for not knowing where to look. My heart was pumping fast from the incredible feeling of finally arriving at *Skateistan* and then in such a crowd. I was not sure how to deal with my headscarf yet, that constantly wanted to slip off my head, while playing with the fabric I discovered that the scarf is a great tool to hide my insecurity.

Later in the afternoon, I was shown the city on the back of a motorbike. I loved the excitement and enjoyed weaving in and out of the heavy traffic, squeezing through impossibly narrow gaps. My teammates showed me an abandoned Soviet built swimming pool on top of *Bibi Maru* hill. “The Soviets never managed to fill the Olympic sized basin with water but the *Taliban* used the diving boards to execute people by shooting and hanging. The dead would then fall into the concrete pool,” I was told. Later in the week, a bunch of excited children including my colleagues and me ended up skating the pool. Today the area has been enhanced under a “post-military clearing operation” (USAID, 2013), led by the United States Agency for International Development and is for the first time in its history filled with water and framed with rose bushes. However, at the time, knowing the past history of the place, it was a bizarre moment to skate it at first. I briefly wondered what the souls of the many dead bodies might think and how the relatives of those who lost their loved ones might feel if we skate that place. “Is it disrespectful to skate there?” I secretly asked them. Life continues and it made much more sense to have the pool filled with laughing and giggling boys and girls having a good time than with dead bodies. It felt like skateboarding on the concrete tails transformed the horror of that place into an accepted playing field.

I have been criticised for introducing skateboarding, a Western activity to Afghanistan, never by people who live in Afghanistan but by passport holders with European and North American roots. People I have talked to about my experiences in Kabul have, in the past, disapproved of my habits of close interaction with the Afghani population such as going shopping in crowded places and visiting families at home. I have been accused to be generally naïve, reckless and frivolous. That last accusation I find offensive! However, I am not here to justify my action but rather to relate my experience and, maybe, to show an alternative reality to how the mainstream media frames Afghanistan.

Throughout the next three years, I skateboarded through certain parts of Kabul city, passed the empty *Buddha's of Bamiyan*, down the dusty mud roads of *Paghman*, the curvy *Salang Pass* in the *Hindu Kush* and the streets of *Panjshir Valley*. Security, in the sense of protecting my own self as well as the well-being of others, was always in the back of my mind. Sometimes I was worried about my security but more often than not I trusted. I still do not know what or whom I trusted but intuitively I felt safe most of the time. For me it was more appropriate to interact with the people that I was intending to help then barricading myself behind security measures that imposed restrictions to life and human relationships. I experienced Afghanistan as a gorgeous, heart-warming place, with people who have similar hopes, needs, dreams, angsts, worries, fears of failure and need for security as well as the wish to be loved as anywhere else in the world. Most parents were happy that we taught lessons and played with their kids and were proud if their children learned a new skill.

Only on one occasion did I have a tomato thrown at me while skateboarding a freshly paved strip of road next to Kabul River. Generally the people reacted with curiosity and with excitement when they saw us on skateboards; kids would run behind and want to have a go. Village elders, bystanders and even the police were interested in the strange foreigners and their *sikiboards* as the skateboard was often called. The police once blocked a hilly road for us to allow us to skate in main traffic. A village chief thanked us for skateboarding through their place and showing his children that foreigners do not always come armoured and in presence of military or police convoys.

During my early skate days in Europe, remarks such as “girls cannot skate” and other nasty comments from men were not uncommon. The curious, respectful and joyful attitude towards skateboarding in Afghanistan was refreshing and in great contrast to my experiences in Europe, the USA and Canada, where skateboarding is often restricted with regulations and bans.

4.5 Sport for Development & Peace: A Space for Peace Work?

Sport is increasingly recognized as an important tool in helping the United Nations achieve its objectives, in particular the Millennium Development Goals. By including sport in development and peace programmes in a more systematic way, the United Nations can make full use of this cost-efficient tool to help us create a better world.

(Ban Ki-moon, United Nation Secretary-General, 2014).

I long had the impression, that a peace worker is someone who works in the armed conflict zones on this earth under the umbrella of former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's (1992) *Agenda of Peace*. A concept that suggests strengthening national capacities with actions such as: preventive diplomacy, peace keeping, peace making and post-conflict peace building as actions to avoid lapsing into or re-lapsing into conflict (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). I do not intend to disrespect the pain and daily struggles of the brave men and women who put their life at risk in regions of armed conflicts worldwide. I have friends who do astonishing work in Afghanistan's, Iraq's, Somalia's and Syria's armed conflict zones. However, I would like to provide a space to open questions on the current notion of peace work, my colleagues and I claim we do.

I planned my first trip to Afghanistan with the assumption that I would know what 'they' needed. With good intentions, I flew to Kabul to educate the kids and ignite a spark of hope. I also wanted to have an adventure and to have a meaningful job. But the latter were not as dominant as my will to help and my intention to do good. I found handbooks and 'tool kit' pdf's (i.e. *War Child Holland's I DEAL* intervention manual) that suggested possible ways of building peace and fostering recreation. They were great and gave me the impression that I knew what I was doing. In 2009, when I first came to Kabul, I had the impression that we are doing something unique and extraordinary, and certainly we did. At the time, teaching skateboarding in the framework of *Sport for Development and Peace* in Kabul was sometimes considered innovative and *Skateistan* was then and up to now still is, frequently appearing on *Sport for Development and Peace* platforms for its unconventional mix of education and skateboarding programs (Sportanddev, 2014a). In this chapter I will introduce the *Sport for Development and Peace* landscape because the early dialogue that emerged from the working group, platforms and academic research that were concerned with *Sport for Development and Peace* sparked my initial interest in academically working with sport and peace and influenced where I am standing today. I also hope that my critique enriches the *Sport for Development and Peace* field and can be an inspiration for people who are interested in combining sport and peace work.

My initial facilitation experiences with skateboarding, education and peace in the post conflict environment were very much freestyle learning by doing.

Despite the at times challenging freedom of creation I loved the spontaneous flexibility that I had. We were all novices in our field but with a big heart for skateboarding and teaching it to the young population in Kabul (the 'we' consisted of the founders and colleagues of *Skateistan*). From my previous experience with teaching boardsports in Germany and England, I knew about the power of skateboarding and created lesson plans for the skate park as much as for the classroom that were based on participatory education and engaged pedagogy (Hooks, 1994).¹⁹ But still I had the wish to improve my techniques and support the growth of *Skateistan*. I researched into best practice strategies in post-conflict peace building and to my joy found that other clever minds had come up with the idea of using sport for social change long before us.

As part of my wish to understand sport and particularly skateboarding as a tool for peace work, I conducted contextual research, on the origin of the idea of harnessing the power of sport for peace intervention. What I found was that the power of sport had been harnessed not only since the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) implemented the International Charter of Physical Education and Sport in 1978, nor since the United Nation called the year 2005 to be the *International Year of Sport and Physical Education*. Already in the Ancient World of Greek myths (circa 467 BC), the Oracle at Delphi knew of sports potential. According to the legend she advised Zeus to hold the ancient Olympic games with the intention to bring peace to warring cities (Young, 2004).

Today, harnessing the power of sport in the name of peace building and development is becoming a popular praxis within peace work efforts in regions affected by conflict, violence and poverty (Cardenas, 2013; Giulianoti, 2010, 2011a, 2011b; Kvalsund, 2005; Kidd, 2008; Lyras & Peachey, 2011; Sugden, 2010). The aim of such intervention is "to remobilize sport as a vehicle for broad, sustainable social development, especially in the most disadvantaged communities in the world" (Kidd 2008:370).

At the beginning of my (re)-search there was no specific literature on skateboarding for peace and development but football and rugby were often chosen as an example to demonstrate the power of sport and how this might be harnessed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (UNOSDP, 2014). Projects in the field of Sport for Development and Peace are often organised around the principles of education, child & youth development; peace-building; disability and inclusion; disaster response; health promotion; gender equality and female empowerment; as well as economic development (Kidd, 2008; Norman, 2005; Sportanddev, 2014b).

19 At the time we determined the needs of the students by interviewing their parents at their home and holding working group meetings with the children where we asked them what they would like to learn.

Stakeholders for such interventions are the United Nation system, Non Governmental Organisations and for profit sport related businesses alike (Ban, 2014; Bruce, 2008; Thorpe & Rinehart, 2013; UNOSDP, 2014). The *Sport for Development and Peace* (from now on, SDP) field is currently predominantly focused around the experiences of the practitioners and actors on the various playing fields but a growing theoretical discourse emerges that gives the landscape various descriptions. Some scholars such as Alexander Cárdenas (2013) refer to SDP as a strategy that addresses a variety of social issues but others such as UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon call it an industry. “It is a world wide industry whose practices can have widespread impact. Most of all, it is a powerful tool for progress and for development” says Ban (2011), during the 2nd International Forum on Sport, Peace & Development in Geneva. Yet, other scholars, such as Giulianotti (2011b:757), name SDP a “sector [that] is located conceptually within the broader ‘global civil society’, a highly contested policy field that features diverse political actors and ideologies.” A field that appears to be associated with four major interest groups, and here I borrow the carefully conducted analysis of Richard Giulianotti (2010 and 2011b:751) who suggests those fields to be:

First, neo-liberal social policies, as embodied by private or commercial interests, such as transnational corporations and forms of ‘corporate social responsibility’; second, ‘developmental interventionist’ policies associated with non-governmental and community-based organisations; third, ‘strategic developmentalist’ policies associated with national and international governmental organisations, and sport federations; and, fourth, social justice policies associated with new social movements and critical NGOs.

Working with SDP on a practical level, Giulianotti’s described fields blending into each other. I locate my personal experiences in a blender of a critical NGO, new social movement and commercial interest as part of transnational corporations for corporate social responsibility.

A variety of organisations, particularly the *United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace* (UNOSDP) in Geneva, *Peace and Sport* in Monaco, *The International Platform on Sport and Development* and the *Sport for Development & Peace International Working Group* (ISDP IWG) were early influences for my understanding of harnessing the power of sport in an academic frame. Within the SDP sector, sport is positioned as a socio-cultural instrument, notable in post-conflict contexts, that is seen to support the reduction of social tension, to aid conflict transformation and to promote reconciliation and reconstruction (Sekulić, Massey and Hodson, 2006). In June 2013 at the third International Forum on Sport for Peace and Development in New York, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon said, “we can use the power of

sport to build the peaceful, prosperous future we want” (Ban, 2013). The Secretary-General further highlighted several initiatives within the UN system, that have used ‘the power of sport’ to reach ‘anti poverty’ targets and aided UN peacekeeping operations. For example, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) “uses sport for raising awareness about the importance of a healthy, drug-free lifestyle” (UNOSDP, 2013).

Sport according to the dominant voice of *Sport for Development and Peace* not only builds peace but it is recognised as a language that despite the diversity of the human population can be understood globally (Lemke, 2009). Sport in this context is further praised as tool that helps to create a more “prosperous and united global community” (Lemke, 2009:1). Moreover, the SDP sector is generally driven by Global North agencies and the work is mainly conducted in the Global South, or regions that experienced social breakdown, natural disaster or are recovering from fighting (Giulianotti, 2011a).²⁰ Or to further extend the words of the Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on Sport for Development and Peace, Wilfried Lemke (Lemke, 2014):

Sport has a crucial role to play in the efforts of the United Nations to improve the lives of people around the world. Sport builds bridges between individuals and across communities, provides a fertile ground for sowing the seed of development and peace.

I do agree, with Lemke that bridges can be built with sport and that the athletic stream of consciousness inherent to sport can provide a fertile ground for seeds of peace. However, I find his universal concept of development and peace highly problematic. It drives out of a myth that falsely promises that one day we as the world population are all equally well developed and can live in paradise on earth but this is a worldview that is luckily not shared by the majority of the population on planet earth (Dietrich, 2013; Escobar, 2013). Dietrich, who introduces the transrational turn in development policies by firstly introducing the relationship between idealistic theories of modernization and essentially structuralist dependency theories, fittingly writes:

Assuming a linear trajectory of social time, the both relied on the idea that societies and states that had advanced less and were thus ‘underdeveloped’ required assistance in order to catch up on the pathway to redemption.

(Dietrich, 2013:175)

20 A fixed definition of the SDP sector is difficult to pin down, however Giulianotti attempted a contextual analysis of the sector that influenced my understanding and which is recommended for further reading (Giulianotti, 2010, 2011a, 2011b).

The zenith of the SDP movement might be the newly introduced joint masters degree program: *Sustainable Peace through Sport*, in Monaco. Introduced for the winter semester 2012, the program is a partnership between the *University for Peace* in Costa Rica, *Peace and Sport - L'Organisation pour la Paix par le Sport* and the *International University of Monaco* (IUM). According to HSH Prince Albert II of Monaco the MA degree “will lead to the genesis of a body of trained and competent Engineers for Peace through Sport able to make sustainable peace through sport a reality” (2012:2).

The romantic inside me finds Prince Albert’s words attractive; the promise to make peace sounds desirable, especially when I think about my friends, colleagues and students that are no longer with us due to violent acts inherent to the conflicts in Afghanistan. However, the philosopher inside me on the other hand finds that the *Sport for Development and Peace* sector is growing in a direction that is highly problematic and my rebellious spirit wants to free skateboarding from the institutionalisation inherent to this type of building peace. This philosophical voice wants to scream at the top of her lungs, wake people up and publicize, that, “the world is not a machine!” Yet the modern dream that development and progress through economic growth will lead the entire world towards utopia lives on in the mind and heart of the *Sport for Development and Peace* landscape.

Not even with the world’s best engineer can peace be built, nor do I think that the world’s problems can be ‘fixed’. (World) peace, in a fixed sense, is a misconception as much as a life without conflict is. The mainstream perspective of the *Sport for Development and Peace* field however advocates as a guiding principle that engineers can design as well as build peace and development (Peace and Sport, 2012). Personally, I have my doubts.

It is exactly this modern idea of developing the underdeveloped that is one of the main drives of the *Sport for Development and Peace* landscape (Sportanddev, 2014b). The problem that I have with this drive is the inherent violence that comes with missionizing, civilizing and developing those perceived as *Other* (Koppensteiner, 2009b). The attempt to build peace is made through short projects that want quick results and which need to be monitored as well as evaluated for their outcomes in order to get donor funding. This is done from a top down approach from the financially rich for the economically poor and robs the latter of their freedom and equals paternalism. The current funding method further raises several questions of the appropriateness of measuring the outputs of youthful unfolding and the challenges on how this might be executed.

I am concerned and have an inner conflict with some of the work that emerges from the *Sport for Development and Peace* field. Seeing sport as an intervention tool that enables peace workers, social workers or sport instructors to reach out to at risk youth might at first appear commonsensical and a noble

thing to do. However, I call for a more reflective working attitude with the use of sport as an interventionist tool. The path between facilitating space for youthful unfolding and cultural imperialism is thin and it is important not to romanticize the idea that sporting intervention can build peace. The growing initiatives allow political actors to institutionalize the once rebellious art of skateboarding to fuel their own political interests.

On that note, I would like to bring William Easterly's and Victoria Fontan's work once more to attention because they articulate intellectually what I have experienced practically in Afghanistan. Both mark the aid and development community to be an industry that re-cycles Northern aid money for their own good. Fontan (2012:33) articulates her perspective as:

a neo-colonial arm of Northern power working to keep the greater South in a cycle of dependency and despair, while simultaneously granting themselves a moral self-righteousness for helping the world's poor and pulling them out of 'darkness'.²¹

I am concerned that the peace-building engineers that harvest the power of sport for their prescriptive interventions are celebrated as progressive heroes for their altruism and commitment to the development of the poor and underdeveloped when really, the apparently economically well-developed might be rather poor on a social, mental or spiritual level and vice versa. Sadly, I have seen that the promotion of development and peace in the frame of the *Millennium Development Goals*, for example, often neglects the voices of the intended beneficiaries, re-cycles money, and creates more chaos.

Am I being an unfair critic to a movement that intends to foster dialogue and communication across the globe? Maybe I am. The benefit of criticising is that the critique always has a point. However, while I write this work, the discourses and strategies of the *Sport for Development and Peace* landscape are turning into a nightmare disguised as a romanticised dream of prosperity and growth and I am surprised it took me so long to realise it. The drive to develop another person or the intention to build peace for somebody, is an imperious act and often creates more disorder than harmony (Illich, 1968).

Skateboarding is a novelty that certainly for me has been an agent of change and a path to peace and *Skateistan* was a wonderful example that on a small

21 Fontan frames "darkness" in quotation marks and thereby refers to Easterly's (2006) *The White Man's Burden*. Easterly deals with the question of why, despite its obvious failures and ineffectiveness, development aid is not losing popularity. He argues, that the modern development aid has not been released from the philosophy of the colonial period. The period in which the colonial power drew up plans to help/colonize the *Other*. He calls this top-down approach to aid work utopian 'planner' and suggest a 'seeker' (bottom-up) approach, limited to smaller, local interventions as alternative.

scale this can work. I, however, dislike the misuse of harnessing skateboarding's magic for capitalistically driven development interventions. Defined by a capitalistic perspective, development concerns itself with gross domestic products first and people second. The unfolding of human beings on a mental, physical and spiritual plane as well as the well being of communities and the environment, is sold short for market share expansion — all well packaged in a lovely picture that tells unaware onlooker a story of building peace and prosperity. The tragedy is that the picture-creators often work hard with the best intentions unaware of the undertone corrupting their project.

While critically analysing the current approaches in the realm of sport and peace building work in practice and in theory, I identified an oversimplification of the power of sport as much as peace. There is also an overall tendency to romanticize the relationship between sport and peace (Thorpe and Rinehart, 2013). For example, when asked about his opinion on skateboarding and peace building, Head of the *National Olympic Committee in Afghanistan* Zahir Aghbar, was quoted as saying, "The only solution that leads Afghanistan toward peace and stability is sport" (in Welch, 2010). While I agree that sport is a great instrument to facilitate peace, in Afghanistan or in any other place, I by no means find sport to be the solution, nor peace building the answer.

I see the world as being too complex to produce pre-fabricated solutions that can solve conflicts; sport can only bring change to relational encounters between conflicting groups. Declaring that sport brings peace is a two-fold act as sport is only a mirror of our society and it is important to be aware of sport's limitations. There is no denying that mass sport events are sources of environmental and social conflicts and that sport has also been used for "tit-for-tat diplomacy," "to terrorise" and "to promote nationalism" (Sport for Development & Peace International Working Group, 2008:208). Especially once governmental and corporate organizations are involved, it becomes critically important to be aware of the underlying intentions and power structures behind such projects. While critically deconstructing my experiences during the course of three years and questioning my assumption of peace work I realised the harm good intention can do (Illich, 1968). Additionally, Dietrich, who in regard to the attraction of social work, appropriately points out:

Interpersonal bonding weakness, a frequent phenomenon, may give a certain appeal to working with the socially weak, as the desire for dominance and control can easily be hidden behind the mask of the helper.

(Dietrich, 2013:214).

As part of this research project I was working from Costa Rica as a research associate with Victoria Fontan, who was then the head of the Department of

Peace and Conflict Studies at the UN-mandated University for Peace. She recently published a critique to the mainstream peace industry, *Decolonizing Peace* (2012), in which she exposes the pitfalls and perils of the peace industry by de-constructing the neo-colonial liberal democracy as the royal path to peace.

Although post-structuralists have raised similar concerns since the eighties (Illich, 1968), I see Fontan's work as an important contribution to the holistic discourse of peace work in the early 21st century, especially in the face of the humanitarian assistance missions for peace initiatives from within the action sports realm. Fontan (2012:122), imagining herself attending a *Peacebuilding Anonymous* help group, analyses her peacebuilding work as if it were a saturated drunkenness of the West to save the rest with benevolent help.

The destruction that our compulsive help brings around us is manifested in tip-of-the-iceberg scandals and paradoxes such as the oil-for-food program, the sexual abuse of children by the UN peacekeepers, the endemic corruption of the interlocutors that we empowered in the first place, the election of war criminals as a result of our democratization process, the US drones that kill innocent civilians for peace, the Just War theory, Nobel Prize acceptance speech by US President Barack Obama, etc.

(Fontan, 2012:122)

While US American president Obama (2009) was in Norway to receive the Nobel price and to justifying the pointless war in Afghanistan as 'self-defence', I was in Kabul to teach skateboarding, English and arts. From what I saw of this world, I find Fontan's critique of well-intended help a timely necessity of contemporary peace work. For me, her work was an important inspiration to deconstruct my perceptions and pre-assumptions. Deconstructing and criticising the hegemonic political and social context of the peace industry as such is certainly one part of today's peace work. However, I find it essential not to get stuck in the critique of modernity and have a need to search actively for possibilities of living a human presence in the famous here and now (Dietrich, 2012).

To conclude, the path between facilitating space for youthful unfolding and cultural imperialism is a thin ridge when working interculturally that is best walked carefully and with compassion. With the *Transrational Peace Philosophy* in mind, I find it of importance to explore possible ways to facilitate or access peace(s), especially in conflicting environments. Peace work then becomes a delicate matter and I find it necessary to be aware and reflective on who can facilitate, unfold and define whose peace. In today's world of different perspectives, facilitating peace becomes a task that needs to be considered from several worldviews. Finding a fertile ground to be able to feel at peace in our intercultural world is a challenge itself. Another challenge I perceive lies in finding a way to flower and to let myself as well as the *Other* grow in each of our incomparable ways (Illich, 1992).

As admirable as the philanthropic initiatives might appear to me, I find that the SDP sector supports a fundamental worldview of economic growth and capitalist expansions that I personally disagree with. Furthermore, there is no need to romanticize the idea that sporting intervention can build peace. As far as I can see, peace can not be built because life is far too complex and infinite to reach a peaceful end-like state that might resemble heaven on earth. Conflicting tendencies will always be a substantial part of living. The question is no longer about building peace but how to grasp conflicts as opportunities for transformation and the unfolding of human potential. I agree with Fontan that peace workers are “not benevolent physicians at the side of sick nations, society, etc.” (2012:32). If a peace worker is not a doctor curing sick states, what is her or his profession? This is the driving question for the upcoming chapter.

5 Medicine for the Soul

Some say we need more bombs to protect our way of life. I think we need more artists [...] with their creativity, constantly reinventing the way we experience life, keeping us fresh, awake, inspired

(David Ellis, 2012)

Over the years skateboarding movements gave me a greater sense of acute well-being and even only the memory of a good session or the sound of the wheels on asphalt from a passing fellow skateboarder can be uplifting (Cesari et al, 2014). A good ‘session’ in the bowl or on the road is like medicine for the soul. Those are moments when the air is temporarily charged with fruitful energy and joy is echoing between our bodies. We usually skate one by one while the others are standing on top of the bowl, ramp or side of the ‘spot’ witnessing the act of the one skating body and it is like we are feeding off of each other’s energy. Increasing power or falling, and again falling, but somehow the power increases once somebody landed a trick and this rhythm can lead to euphoric highs of radiating joy. After such a session is over, I go home feeling content, light and relaxed. Those moments are not rare but they do not happen every time I go skateboarding. It is like a skateboarding treat, that I like to call the *gifts of skateboarding*.

In this chapter I talk about the experience of peace and the potentials of skateboarding as rendered under the conceptual consideration as *The Art of Living Sideways* and *The Aesthetic of Transrational Peace Philosophy* (see chapter three). So, below I render some of my skateboarding experiences in language and introduce the healing as well as transformative aspects of skateboarding. I further explore skateboarding potential as work on the self and as a practice for experiencing peace.

5.1 Skating to Escaping Cycles of Despair: A Discovery

When I skateboard, I’m feeling like I am a bird. I feel free like I am flying. It is like I am above the war and not part of it.

(Madina, Saidi, 2013).

Discovering the power of skateboarding is an on-going encounter that started with a delicate thought during my early skateboarding days and eventually grew into a language that I can now place on paper. When I first discovered what I call *The Art*

of Living Sideways, I found myself in the following situation: early twenties; escaping family conflict; living in England, a foreign country to me where I am gaining an undergraduate degree in sustainable product design; riding mountain-boards competitively; having all sorts of adventures as well as attempting to make sense of my existence. In appropriate strict German fashion, I am also planning my future career while simultaneously working late night shifts in a restaurant to subsidize my study fees. In-between university life, restaurant work and riding mountain-boards, I squeeze in a relationship with a man that I was madly in love with. The latter does not work so well and after a painful process that broke my heart and shattered my soul (at least that is what I felt at the time), it was *The Art of Living Sideways* that helped me to move out of sadness and pain. It was like Madina above; I too could forget about my troubles and felt free from the mental and emotional suffering I experienced in other parts of my life.

In order to escape the reappearing cycles of heart pain I felt from the break up and my family messiness, I devoted a substantial amount of time and energy into learning to skateboard. At that time, I did not like my body and had numerous moments in which an unbelievable amount of despair and sadness clutched itself to my chest and knees. I call those moments *destructive flushes of existence*, something I occasionally have since before my near death experience with meningitis. Those moments also come with symptoms of anxiety, feeling of low self-worth, poor concentration and decreased energy. Some call it depression (Gross, 2010). *Destructive flushes of existence* feel as if I am trapped in my own body and I feel stiff, motionless, restricted and mostly frustrated with life or with myself. During as much as after a residential psychosomatic therapy I learned to loosen my then fixed identity constructs and practiced my situational awareness (Hobl, 2009; Naranjo, 1990). In psychotherapeutic realms, identity is seen as something we cannot own but we are rather in a constant dialogue with our identity process that is always in the now (Holb, 2009:149). Improving my relational and situational awareness helped me to cope with my self and the flushes lessened, but it was not until I discovered skateboarding that I learned to transfer the sadness outside my knees through movement. I made this discovery in my early skateboarding days but only begin to understand its potential now, especially since I started my psychotherapeutic training.

I found, that with skateboarding movements I could divert unbearable energies into artistic expressions that help me to cope. Like an Aikidō master who uses her/his opponent's own movement, I too learned to redirect the energy that was coming towards me into new movements. Hereto, Dietrich notes the following in regard to Aikidō:

Aikidō emphasizes many aspects that play a major role in elicitive conflict transformation: awareness of the present, elaborate control of breath and body, control of one's language and gestures, agility, release of muscle tension, empathic resonance with the adversary – an adversary who is considered as partner since he or she becomes one with the aikidōka through the energy of motion.

(Morihei Ueshiba, founder of Aikidō, in Dietrich, 2013:124)

Dietrich here refers to a highly peaceful practice of Aikidō, which excludes physical and combative aspects and where the idea of winning is absent. Although I cannot claim that these aspects are absent from skateboarding, this description of Aikidō still mirrors what skateboarding can be like. With skateboarding, it was as if I could ride for joy or I could get all my aggression out. Expressing myself in return helped me to escape cycles of pain and aided me in finding balance. I started practicing almost every day. The act of skateboarding fulfilled me and the energy of motion even filled me up with an inner ecstatic glow that reached outside my skateboarding experiences (Murphy, 2011). Skateboarder Justin Hocking writes about his ups and downs of being a skateboarder and notes that, “sometimes if you skate enough, your mind becomes less like a grease fire and more like a candle flame. Focused” (Hocking, 2004:94). So for me too, skateboarding gave my wandering mind a candle flame focus. It gave me wonderful friends as well as mentors and above all the simple fun aspect of improving my skills brought joy and a kind of inner peace experience.

Yes, I did fall and yes, I did dance on the edge of self-destructiveness and sometimes ended up hurting myself — badly. But the pain somehow did not trouble me for many years. In a paradoxical way, I felt I needed the pain to feel alive and was particular proud of my wounds. Then, I proudly proclaimed that scars need to be earned — tattoos can be bought! As I grew older and my skateboarding performances improved, the disrespecting attitude that I used to have towards myself shifted. I started to appreciate my body, ate healthier and started to listen to my intuition when riding. After all, I wanted to skateboard as much as possible and that works best with a strong mind and healthy body. Here it is up to the individual to define strong and healthy; as for me, those definitions constantly shift and new meanings occur the more I become conscious.

What I would like to highlight is the shift that occurred in myself, as much as other skateboarding bodies around me, with the improvement of our skateboarding skills. We not only became more aware of our surroundings and possible spots to skate but also became more conscious of our-selves and others. It was as Hauser et al describe:

In their practice, skateboarders are constantly engaged in interactions between their bodies, the environment surrounding them, and the technology they are using (the skateboard). As they ride and perform tricks, they are able to fluidly modify bodily techniques and movements to adjust to their environment.

(Hauser et al, 2013:1420)

Without realising it at first, learning to skateboard helped me to get out of my *destructive flushes of existence*. The joy that I could then gain from skateboarding, and still experience, certainly was a great healer for my broken heart and still does get me moving when I am stuck. From the perspective of a peace and conflict researcher, the ability to adjust fluidly is a valuable life skill to have and aids the movement out of cycles of pain and despair (Lederach, 2005), no matter if it is practiced through breath, voice or movement orientated approaches to conflict transformation (Dietrich, 2013). This brings me from discovering skateboarding's healing gift to unwrapping the package and explain what exactly such a gift might be.

5.2 The Magical Gifts of Living Sideways

Speed will set you free. Speed is the crack between sketch and style. Catch it and then hang on for the glide. With speed, nothing is impossible.

(Brannon in Borden, 2001:107).

I rode into the deep mystery of skateboarding by accident in 2009 during the *Kozakov Challenge* in the Czech Republic, which is now home to the *World Championship*.²² The racetrack then was a freshly paved 3 km long mountain road with several bends and corners where boarders are able to achieve an approximate speed of 80-105 kph (IDF, 2013). It was during one of the qualifying time runs, where I had a kind of epiphany, an experience that took my understanding of skateboarding to a new level and broadened my horizon of awareness. Below I attempt to express this humbling experience in words but I would like to remind the reader that it is a slippery thing to capture the magnificent feelings of skateboarding in words. Those feelings appear to be like art, such as the aura of paintings by Marc Chagall, the bodily experiences are difficult to render in language — they are best experienced to appreciate.

22 Downhill skateboarding is one of the many divisions of skateboarding. Essentially, the core goal of racers is to skate down hills as fast as possible. The current world speed record is held by Mischo Erban at 80.83mph/130.08kph (Longboardism.com) and is an incredible achievement. My personal fastest was recorded at 50.96mph/83.2kph during the event explained above.

It is a hot summer day and I am wearing a tight red full body leather suit, a full-face helmet and it is my first major downhill race. I am nervous, thrilled excited and generally in an extreme joyful mood, honoured to have met a community of inspirational people from all walks of life. Next to my tent camps a dentist, a carpenter, a postman, a lawyer, an architect, a graphic designer a biologist student, a skateboard shop owner, a warehouse manager, a masseur, a physiotherapist, a fulltime dad and many more boarders from across the globe. Young and old gather despite those labels outside the bubble of the championship, an event that seems to break down barriers between people and push aside the social conventions and norms. The only thing that counts now is 'riding'.

It is a competitive race and at the same time there is a communal spirit that unites us to enjoy the ride in the moment rather than competing for the podium. It is about having fun and improving our riding tactic, style and flow. We are stretching our bodies, focusing the mind and exchanging strategies and technical bits and bobs. There is bliss in the air, people are beaming with energy, excited, happy, relaxed, flowing and yet most are structured enough to make it to the racetrack on time. The vibes of the event are extraordinaire.

It is now my time run I am 'in tuck' (a position on my board, that gives the best possible aerodynamic stance). My back leg is tucked tight in the curve of my front knee, my back foot heel is somewhat in the air and most of my bodily weight is on the front leg. My spine is bent at the hip, laying straight with my chest slightly propped on my front leg. I am flying down the straight bit of road just before the last corner. I am hot, my breath steams up my slightly scratched visor and the environment around me rushes passed. Fast, fast fast fast like, as I am sitting on one of Germany's Inter City Express speed trains. I have the entire road for myself and I am flying!

It feels like the fastest I ever been (later on the timer I learn it was 83.5 kph). I know that the faster I am going the slower I have to act and I am careful to adjust my body slightly. Immediately I notice the front trucks wobbling so I make sure to stay still, and in full body tension. My position is not perfect but I have a feeling that I am too fast to move my body parts. I surrender to whatever happens but intuitively trusting that I will ride through the upcoming last corner. The speed wobbles stop, my heart is open and it feels as if the wind, despite my leather manages to blow through all my pores. Never before did my board carry me so fast yet time appears to stand still for a moment.

I am in a paradoxical way feeling a sense of joyful silence, extreme stoke and a sense of the possible destruction inherent to my activity in case it goes not as planned. I am on the edge of my comfort zone for a minute. I am feeling an extreme rush of luck and appreciation that I can go so fast and an intoxicating lust for life rushes through my cells. My mind is focused, my muscle tense and I ride through the last corner, across the finish line and I am in a passionate overflow of all sorts of feelings. Bucket loads of endorphins spread across my entire body and I feel; sensual, sexy, honoured and totally alive in the present moment with a glow of energy that radiates through the group of skateboarding bodies.

The above moment happened within seconds yet it felt like an eternity and the smile on my face did not vanish for days. I was on a natural high and felt like drifting through life. I was no longer an individual skateboarder but dissolved in an intense feeling of ‘stoke’. It might have been what Abraham Maslow calls a “peak experience” (Maslow, 1961). Such an experience, according to Maslow (1970:164) includes: “feelings of limitless horizons opening up to the vision, the feeling of being. Simultaneously more powerful and also more helpless than one ever was before, the feeling of great ecstasy and wonder and awe, the loss of placing in time and space.” He found, that people reported themselves to be ‘lucky’ after having experienced such moments and that such experiences result in an increase of empathy, self-determination, creativity and free will — all recurring themes among skateboarding bodies (O’Connor, forthcoming). Maslow understands those experiences as moments in our life that come and go but resemble absolute wholeness.

All peak experiences may be fruitfully understood as completions-of-the-act ... or as the Gestalt psychologists’ closure, or on the paradigm of the Reichian type of complete orgasm, or as total discharge, catharsis, culmination, climax, consummation, emptying or finishing.

(Maslow, 1968:111)

He further believed all people strive for self-actualization, which will differ from person to person, yet it is this process orientated thing where we can improve ourselves — to be more in the moment, more appreciative, more aware, feel more, experience more, become less defensive, less guarded etc. Such experiences are significant for peace and conflict work because they can lead to increased personal awareness and understanding and even can serve as a turning point in a person’s life. While focusing his ideas on the individual experience, Maslow does not forget to remind of the importance to care about other people while following a pursuit of self-actualization. With his disapproval about narcissistic selfish and non-caring types, Maslow filled file after file.

This concept of a peak experience has several similarities to the theory that Hungarian psychology professor Csikszentmihalyi calls *state of flow* (1974). According to Csikszentmihalyi, this is a state of extreme focus where time seems to fly by and nothing else matters. Even pain seems to disappear. It rather feels like a fluid cycle or wave (depending on the experience) of intuitive action and when in such a flow a loss of self-consciousness can be experienced (ibid). Or in the words of Csikszentmihalyi:

Flow refers to the holistic sensation present when we act with total involvement. It is a kind of feeling after which one nostalgically says: “that was fun” or “that was enjoyable”. We experience it as a unified flowing from one moment to the next in which we are in control of our actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment; between stimulus and response; or between past, present and future.

(1974:58)

Although Csikszentmihalyi does not precisely relate this feeling to peace, I see striking similarities. He says that there is no royal road to experiencing the feeling of flow but it is an ultimate human potential that everybody has to find for her or himself. However, once it is understood how to find the access to flow, one has the possibility to unfold this feeling from the inside out (ibid).

Feeling the flow is one of the main motivations, both athletes as much as scholars name to describe the drive to participate in (action) sports (Csikszentmihalyi, 1974; Fletscher, 2008), or, for the purpose of this research, skateboarding. It is for moments such as the one described that I love skateboarding: it makes me feel alive and real, mysterious and fulfilled. It makes life joyful again and helps me to unfold peace inside me. It took nearly a year too have a comparable deep moment again, for me they are very rare and not predictable, they just come. Gabrielle Roth explains a strikingly similar experience that she calls ecstasy state of being in her book *Maps to Ecstasy* (1989) with the example of her *5 Rhythms* dancing method.

Ecstasy is an egoless, timeless, state of being. It’s a state of total alignment and unity. [...] Most days, I fall short of ecstasy, but the days I hit it make up for all the rest. Some days, my experience is purely physical, as I explore the terrain of my body. Other days, I pass through deep emotional states or get caught in my head and ride a mental wave right out of myself. But whatever happens, I continue to show up and work with what is true for me.

(Gabrielle Roth, 1989:22)

Psychological research suggests that consciousness altering experiences such as moments of ecstasy are profoundly moving and strengthen inner stability and peace on a transpersonal level (Walch, 2009).

Sometimes even just the simple act of pushing the wooden plank down a street can evoke the gifts of skateboarding. However, and this is may be a weakness of skateboarding but potentially also its strength, it takes a while for the gifts to emerge. In our capitalistic societies, we are used to instant satisfaction, but with skateboarding it takes a while to get connected to the flow. Speeding down a mountain road with a downhill-skateboard, launching off ramp-like structures on a short board or just mellow cruising with a light breeze around my face can be extremely satisfying, rewarding, humbling and peaceful. Progressing

with friends, overcoming my fear and learning new tricks or just being absorbed in the family-like skate community used to give my life a purpose and meaning. It is not that hardship is forgotten but during a good skate session troubles are put aside and connections can be made with the flow of the moment. This resembles a balancing act, which I find inherent to living a harmonious life.

This gift I am referring to is multi-coloured. Skateboarding can also be a way to let off steam, to express emotions and additionally carries the possibility to improve athletic abilities; to balance the connection between mind, heart, and soul; to spend time outdoors and in nature; to energize; to feel confident and centred. Skateboarding provides countless possibilities to confront oneself, to learn to trust one's abilities and to face the unknown.

I find, watching people that learn to 'drop in', that they illustrate those qualities well. Dropping in is one basic step to start skating a pool, ramp or similar architectural object. It is the moment where the skateboarding body stands at the edge of the pool for example; with the tail of the board still on the solid top but the rest of the board hangs over the lip, in the air, about to ride down the vertical. Especially at the beginning, this act of balancing once body over the edge of the pool requires the boarder to overcome her/his fear of the unknown and trust her/his balancing abilities. After a certain time, (some need longer, some are faster) the body of the skateboarder becomes less stiff of fear and it is beautiful to observe how the skateboarding body becomes more and more fluid and embraces the 'drop in' as a natural movement. This process happens with every new learned trick and gives the skateboarder a feeling of accomplishment, self-confidence, awareness and even self-actualisation (Brooke, 2012; Buck, 2013; Farin, 2013a; Pisano, 2010).

I used to praise skateboarding for its potential physical and mental health benefits such as increasing self-esteem when learning a new skill, or increasing social competence through interaction with others (Owens, 2001; Bradley, 2010; Wood, Carter & Martin, 2014) and used to be of the opinion that accomplishment in skateboarding is "all about the mind" (Friedel, 2010b). Yes skateboarding is a lot about the head,

First you think: 'I wanna try this. I wanna try this. I don't wanna get hurt!' There is a lot of talking to yourself. Then you just have to try it. For a hundred times. It is a lot the mental power [...] You have to be mentally committed or it will never happen.
(in Hauser et al, 2013)

However, with time and experience my philosophy changed. Instead of the strong-willed mind as commanding master, I now value the balance of a plurality of human experiences such as cognitive, sensual, sexual, intuitive, imaginal and spiritual perceptions (James, 1977; Hüther, 2011) as essential in skateboarding. Or in other words:

What really makes a trick insane has nothing to do with the trick itself. It’s a combination of terrain, the individual, the madness of the moment and the situation at hand.

(in Borden, 2001:113)

Recognising those different forms of perceiving deepens self-awareness (James, 1977) and teaches one to be aware of the body. Recognizing reality from a balanced mind, body, soul connection is a key to being in equilibrium with oneself and one’s surrounding environment (Hütter, 2011). Acknowledging this connection allows one to relate to others with more empathy (Roth, 1998). It seems to me that, somewhere in the recognition of those different ways of perceiving reality, lay the roots of the healing and transformative tendencies of skateboarding.

Here I find it important to come back from the ‘sublime’ and root the skateboarding experience back on the ground by emphasising the word ‘can’. It is not always the case that skateboarding sets the human subject flying through bliss. Just as in life there are ups as well as downs, there is not much to romanticize about skateboarding. One only needs to watch a group of skateboarders for a short amount of time to realize that the movements that might look pleasingly fluid are only emerging from hours of practice, hard work, slams, fails, and injuries.

As I am unwrapping the gift of skateboarding here, I suggest that in a balanced mind-body-heart-and-soul connection that is grounded in the present moment lay the roots to the potentials of experiencing *The Art of Living Sideways* — a peak-experience like awareness that is best shared to be enjoyed.

5.3 On Being ‘Stoked’ from Skateboarding

We think the most important thing is to stay true to what skateboarding is really all about; having fun. It’s not just about performance; it’s about aesthetics, about style, about soul. That’s where the magic of skateboarding lies in our opinion.

(Element Skateboard Crew in Vogel, 2013).

Albeit often unnoticed in the midst of professional skateboarding and market-driven growth, and while being reminded of the above gifts of skateboarding, I propose that skateboarding can be experienced from a soulful awareness that is profoundly humbling. This connection can be an awkward topic to discuss in my skateboarding community. However, I found that for some riders the soul is part of skateboarding, whereas others find the connection difficult to see or do not wish to talk about it at all.

Michael Brooke (2012), founder and editor of the Concrete Wave Magazine published a series of articles that explored longboarding and spirituality in which he asked his readers if there is such a connection at all and what it could look

like.²³ The articles, although not quite seriously academic, are the beginning of a highly interesting discourse of skateboarding's potential. When asked about his drive behind his work, Brooke provides a summary of, in this case, longboarding's potential, but I do see the connection to any type of skateboarding.

We want to reach all those who love longboard and truly understand its incredible ability to heal, transform and rebuild. We are talking about a soulful and truly spiritual journey to make this world a better place through longboarding. It makes no sense to most, but the truth is that longboarding is about balance. And once you have physical and mental balance, you achieve harmony. And with harmony, anything is possible. I know this in my heart.

(Michael Brooke in Murphy, 2013)

For example, for US American skateboarder Steve F. (2010:24), skateboarding is spiritual. "Not everyone may see it that way, but I certainly do. I think it's up to the individual as to whether they want to tap into the spiritual aspect of skating — no religious dogma attached, just purely spiritual." Steve F. continues with, "I believe skateboarding can be a tool of self-transformation as well as having a spiritual aspect" (ibid). I also see skateboarding potential for transformation and spiritual unfolding and so does Costa Rican skateboarder Diago Ruiz (2013). He, for example, sees skateboarding as a tool for meditation and a passage that he takes to get to know himself better. "Skateboarding is a free activity just with yourself and your board and its popularity is increasing because a growing amount of people find it necessary to get to know themselves and their immediate reality," Diago (2013) tells me.

In an article entitled *The Tao of Skate*, James Pisano, a Taoist skateboarder writes about the connection of Taoism and skateboarding as part of his spiritual development and describes several ways of being *stoked* from skateboarding, which I would like to share:

- By doing something dangerous and invoking adrenaline, which is a sharp high that can cause giddiness and, depending on how scared you get, can last for a number of hours
- By doing something you couldn't do before, developing greater skills at something, causing a less sharp high that doesn't seem to last as long
- By physical exertion, causing a high that is more subdued and lasts a long time — likely similar to a "runner's high"
- By the simple act of moving through space and time on a skateboard, not particularly fast, but just enjoying the lack of goals or striving — the childlike

23 Although I keep on referring to skateboarding, a longboard is a long skateboard with slightly bigger as well as softer wheels and wider trucks.

pointlessness of it – which causes a light buzz. I’ve had a distinct experience where I got totally stoked just to put my foot on my deck before I even pushed anywhere. I literally put my foot down and my speedboard and before I even began pushing, I felt a huge and tangible sense of relief. This happened after a long period (two weeks) of no sessions due to the weather

- Meeting people along the way; having someone give you the thumps-up or beep their horn at you or just smile as you go by; enjoying the scenery, whether it’s a new neighbourhood you haven’t passed through or a beautiful full moon, or a sunset or wildlife.

(James Pisano, 2010:50)

James Pisano’s observations on how to access the flow are significant and aid in understanding skateboarding’s potential for peace and transformation work.

Due to experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness (in the form of a near death experience at age 15 due to Meningitis, stages of flow while skateboarding, holotropic breathing sessions, and shamanic journeys) that I made on over the last few years, I am inclined to suggest that this magical moment explained above can be a form of embodied spirituality. With that I understand a soulful sensation that is experienced through the body and detached from any religious doctrines. Embodied spirituality rather resembles a kind of free spirit mentality that wants to be explored in a contemporary context. Spirituality in that sense can be experienced from skating in the flow of the moment and gets one stoked on skateboarding. This skateboarding stoke disregards national, social, religious, cultural, political, gender and potentially more boundaries. Embodied spirituality, altered perception or what is called extraordinary human potentials, is not uncommon to moving bodies. In their comprehensive study of sporting experiences, Michael Murphy and Rhea A. White (2011) analyse and explain how athletic streams of consciousness can reveal extraordinary human potential and evoke yogi-like powers. Similar to what I have already outlined over the last chapters both identify sensations such as feeling at peace and in stillness, detached and a sense of absolute freedom.

In the previous chapter, I unwrapped the countless gifts of skateboarding. Yet at times of doubt, I question if these tales of flow are not a mere meaningless combinations of words for childhood puerility. Especially when my knees or elbows are dripping with blood, when my palms hurt from falling or when I have not landed a trick after countless attempts, I ask what is healing or peaceful about that?

However, it is exactly this richness of occurrences, from the childhood fun to ecstatic moments, experiencing anger after constant bails and the inherent doubt that makes the power of skateboarding and mirrors the up’s and downs of everyday life. The hard work and self-destructive nature inherent to skateboarding, one might argue, is a considerable limitation in relation to peace work. This might be the case, but it might also be its greatest potential as the deck with its

four wheels can be a teacher that helps the skateboarding body to find the balance between self-destruction and self-fulfilment.

5.4 Humanistic Roots, Embodiment and Transformation

Skateboarding is like therapy for me.

(Danny Way in Johnston, 2010:4).

Skateboarding is known as an embodied practice at least since Iain Borden described skateboarding with the following words: “it requires a tool (the skateboard), but absorbs that tool into the body” (Borden, 2001:1). However, little has been written about this embodiment, however, exploring skateboarding as embodied understanding opens a highly interesting field for research.

Before I can elaborate on the ideas that will follow, I will begin by briefly summarising basic principles and assumptions of humanistic psychology because some of the roots of the upcoming ideas can be found there. This is only a brief introduction and for a deeper understanding, I suggest reading Wolfgang Dietrich’s (2013:25-44) in-depth discussion on how elicitive conflict transformation is rooted in humanistic psychology.

The humanistic approach is associated with theorists and psychotherapists such as John Cohan (1958), Abraham Maslow (1961, 1971), Fritz Perls (1989, 2002) and Carl Rogers (1951, 1961) who, in the 1940s to the 1960s shared certain concepts and approaches that deviated away from the then dominant psychological discipline of Burrhus Frederic Skinner’s behaviourism (first force) and Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory (second force) in psychology. What used to be called humanist, is now since the 1960s often referred to as human potential movement or positive psychology (Gross, 2010).

It was mainly due to Abraham Maslow’s (1961, 1971) objection against the study of animals to determine human behaviour that he birthed what he called the 3rd force of psychology, with the hope of unifying the two other forces then present in US American psychology (Gross, 2010). Humanistic psychologists intended to merge both subjective and objective, the public and private aspects of a person and hoped by doing so to create a holistic psychology that better represented the human psyche (ibid). They also proposed a definition of mental health that included the complexity and subjectivity of the individual, rather than reductively quantifying human existence.

Humanistic psychologists named the people they were working with client’s instead of patients and understood them to be self-responsible equals (ibid). They also advocated for self-exploration rather than studying behaviour of animals or other people and suggested we should strive to become more than what

we are (Maslow, 1961; Perls, 1989). Early humanistic psychologists were trying to extend the human potential concept in psychology by research, teaching and experimenting into the dimensions of the ultimate capacities of healthy humans, which psychoanalysts and behaviourists did not include in their studies at the time (Gross, 2010).

Crucially, the humanistic approach suggested that people are not simple slaves to environmental contingencies (as Skinner advocated) but have an inner capacity for growth, free will, choice, personal responsibility, self-agencies, courage, and peace as well as the drive for self-actualization. Other important contributions are the assumption that people are born with essential motivations that are life affirming (Maslow, 1971), however, we are born into a sick society that shapes the character and its neuroses (Maslow, 1971; Naranjo, 2013a).

One last crucial concept for the upcoming ideas is the contribution of psychotherapist and founder of gestalt therapy, Fritz Perls. Whereas Sigmund Freud's theories focused on the unconscious perception of patients' past, Perls' contribution focused on the clients' conscious perception of the here and now (Perls, 1989). This focus brings attention to a bundle of emotional interpretations and sensory inputs that make up a narrative construct, or what Perls calls Gestalt, also a "contact boundary at work" (Dietrich, 2013:33). The contact boundary at work is an idea that becomes crucial when working elicitive and I pick up on this concept later on when explaining Dietrich's elicitive conflict map. For now I still need to share the ideas behind *homeostasis*, before I can proceed with the chapter. *Homeostasis* is part of Perls' (2002) hallmark description of psychological health, and stands for the ability of a person to self-regulate the process of life's ups and downs. Or as Dietrich (2012:32) fittingly explains:

This term refers to the process by which the human organism satisfies its needs through a constant shifting between balance and imbalance. Accordingly, the human being is not controlled by drives determined by the species or by genes, but by homeostatic processes of adjustment between satisfied and unsatisfied needs relating to each other in a constant exchange. [...] From that perspective, a conflict is simply a tragic expression of the unmet need of the moment.

Although earlier in the section on *The Aesthetics of Transrational Peace Philosophy* I discussed that peace is a plural, open image, perceived in the here and now (Dietrich, 2012) that I am reluctant to define, I will change my mind and give peace a definition as defined from the understanding of Gestalt therapy. Peace, from that perspective then, and here again I quote Dietrich, is perceived "as surrendering to a continuous learning process, to the smooth movement from one situation to the next, with each situation marked by new needs, feelings, experiences, external perceptions, contacts, dialogues, or encounters" (Dietrich,

2013:33). What then becomes interesting is the question of how to work with such an image of peace? How can I surrender to continuous learning? How can I roll from one contact moment into the next? How can I find my inner peace when I lost myself? How do I even know I lost myself or if I am myself? Seeking answers to such questions makes living adventures and will always be relational and situationally dependent.

Nevertheless, below I expand on conceptual consideration of *The Art of Living Sideways* and explore skateboarding as an embodied practice. Rendering skateboarding as an embodied practice opens not only a new field of research but also the focus of the body is of interest to peace studies as it allows me to explore the above introduced ‘contact boundary at work’ in greater depths. Understanding skateboarding as an embodied practice allows me to tap into the creative potentials that one can work with once understanding the image of the body as messenger (Halprin, 2009). Then when embodying skateboarding, the act of movement becomes an athletic stream of consciousness that with conscious awareness can support the unfolding of human potential. Practicing the *Art of Living Sideways* then becomes a way to increase self-knowledge and is an art of peace.

The idea of healing as well as transforming with or through movement is not new in the arts and therapeutic environment. Dance for example, has been explored and recognised in the cycle of peace studies as much as psychology to have transformative as well as healing tendencies (Dietrich, 2013; Ditzel Facci, 2011; Halprin, 2009). Halprin, who is a dance therapist, says, “The integration of the body, movement, art, and healing is rightly part of our ethical criteria for a sustainable life [...] Art is as essential to our survival as food, shelter, medicine, and the natural environment” (Halprin, 2009:230-231). Remembering skateboard legend Danny Way, who sees skateboarding as therapeutic, exploring the healing and transformative tendencies of *The Art of Living Sideway* appears to be the next logical step to me.

The childlike play that is an integral part of *The Art of Living Sideways*, the search for one’s own style, the ability to dare the unknown, the athletic stream of consciousness and the quality of being in the moment are all also aspects that play a significant role in elicitive conflict transformation. Fritz Perls says:

Wenn du im Jetzt lebst, bist du schöpferisch, bist du erfinderisch. Wenn deine Sinne bereit sind, wenn du Augen und Ohren offen hältst – wie jedes kleine Kind – , dann findest du ein Lösung.

(Perls, 2002:12)²⁴

24 “If you live in the now, you’re creative, you’re inventive. If your senses are ready, if you keep your eyes and ears open - like any small child, then you can find a solution.” Translated by the author.

He also says people do not experience anxiety when they are in the here and now because if you are truly in the now, the arousal of fear is instantly transformed into a constant spontaneous activity. For him, “anxiety is the gap between the now and then” (Perls, 1972:3). Being free of anxiety is rather useful when daring to act peacefully in conflicting times and also when practicing *The Art of Living Sideways*.

Khorshid, whose name translates as ‘the sun’, was a former student of mine and a female *Skateistan* instructor until she tragically passed away during a teenage suicide bomb attack outside the Kabuli ISAF HQ the last time I visited Kabul. She was an inspiration to me and I want to give her spirit a space here to share her wisdom about anxiety: “If you are scared you end up doing nothing and without doing you cannot achieve anything. But if you do things, all that can happen is you succeed or fail” (Korshid in Skateistan, 2012). Of course, anxiety is also a healthy bodily signal of protection. Still, learning to get to know one’s bodily anxieties and playfully daring to overcome them on a skateboard has ripple effects towards other spheres of living.

For beginner skateboarders as much as for advanced riders there are plenty of occasions where a skateboarder is being challenged. While skating during a regular skate session, they might just be seen as a cognitive wall or a physiological border. However, when consciously paying attention to such somatic and psychological experiences one can gain a greater understanding of one’s drives, desires, blockages, and weaknesses. What drives me? What scares me? Where does my contact boundary reach its limits and where can I dare to go further? Can I trust easily or have my difficulties to step into the unknown? How can I handle my anger and frustration?

Fusing the act of skateboarding with exercises that increase somatic and psychological perception such as yoga, meditation or psychological counselling can offer a rich source for balance, harmony and above all transformation (Farin, 2013). Transformation is in a deeper sense a constant process that happens as a natural side effect with every breath we take. Although the outcome cannot be planned prescriptively, transformation however, can be intentionally facilitated and experienced in a “relational, multidimensional, and process orientated” (Dietrich, 2014:200) frame. Sometimes transformation is guided, tricked, hypnotised, worked on with awareness, or assisted with instruments (Murphy, 2011) for example as in Bioenergetic therapy where massages and other physical rehabilitation techniques are used in conjunction with psychotherapy (Lowen, 1986). I follow consciousness researcher Ralph Metzner who, in regard to self-transformation, proposes that transformation in its fiercest way implies that “patterns of thought or perception are actually changed. The structures and function of our psyche become different” (Metzner, 2010:34). Changes in the psyche do influence the physical body and vice versa (Hüther, 2011; Lowe, 1986; Metzner, 2010). This happens in various intensi-

ties, speeds and alterations and physical changes of psychic change can be observed as facial expressions or body changes (ibid). In the most extreme cases, transformation is here understood as a shift of perceiving the world as for example happened to me when I had the peak-experience like downhill moment as explained above.

During my skateboard instruction sessions I could again and again observe that riding a skateboard had the tendencies to transform the relationship of the person on the board to her/his environment as much as to her or himself (Borden, 2011). For example, by concentrating on the body, the skater can pay attention to her or himself. When riding a bowl fluidly my arms and hands are relaxed; however, when I am scared or trying too hard, I cramp my fingers into a fist, which hinders the stream of body energy to flow naturally. When I pay particular attention to where I am blocked or where I am fluid, this not only helps me to improve my movement and thus personal well-being but also has a kind of ripple effect contribution to the outside world of my physical contact boundary at work. As such, metaphorically speaking, a skateboarding body, at peace with oneself or perhaps not, is like a stone thrown into the ocean of life, that when making contact with the surface, just before dunking in, leaves a rippling mark to be seen for a short moment of time.

The young students I taught in Kabul were great teachers in regard to bodywork, the experience of peace through skateboarding and conflict transformation across intercultural borders. I could on several occasions observe how their body energy increased and their self-worth grew when a new trick, no matter how simple or apparently senseless, was learned; this was most visible in their eyes. Kids' eyes light up when they find something interesting and that they would like to learn (Hüther, 2011). Seeing how a sparkle in the eyes can grow to a big flame of excitement was not only energising for me as a teacher but also seemed to motivate the kids to step up as leaders and inspire other kids to ride skateboards or to get involved in the community work *Skateistan* does. For example a former student, Madina Saidy, who used to work on the streets of Kabul, recently spoke to the Afghan Parliament about the Children's Shura, where they discussed issues of Kabul's youth (Skateistan, 2013c). With the increase of Madina's ability on a skateboard also her confidence and cheerfulness seemed to increase. Such an unfolding should not be planned but a caring framework that allows the students to explore themselves can be created.

Of course there are plenty of possibilities of how such a space can be created and it depends on the situational context of what might be most suitable. In Kabul it was building a safe house where girls, especially, can participate in skateboarding and educational classes without being watched by strangers. In other areas building a house might not be necessary and basic safety equipment might be enough to create a space. From the perspective of *The Aesthetic of*

Transrational Peaces, one of the most crucial points to consider when creating such a space is, besides the outer environmental conditions, the attitude of the ‘space holder’ or what is also known as facilitator. I will not provide a prescriptive account on how to facilitate a space for elicitive conflict transformation. This would be contrary to the essence of this approach, which implies that no fixed framework should be created. However, the facilitator should know some basic ideas, which I will elaborate on in the next chapter.

Although he is talking about unfolding in relation to his Gestalt therapy, Fritz Perls says that unfolding human potential is a delicate process that needs its time to unfold as much as space to rest. His Gestalt approach offers the clients healing as much as the unfolding of their potential with role-plays and other methods but he says that the most important aspect is the involvement of the person he works with (Perls, 2002). This is the same with peace work; not even the best peace facilitator can support the unfolding of peace if the actors she or he works with are not willing to transform their conflict (Dietrich, 2013). While working with skateboarding on transformation, actors in this sense could be several human bodies but also the inner theatre of just one person (Satir, 2009). Supposing the actors want to work, what is important then is the conflict awareness I explained under *The Aesthetics of Transrational Peace Philosophy*. As a recap, this perspective then understands conflict as a systemic dysfunction in relation and a transformation brings change to that relation, may it be a personal or interpersonal change (Dietrich, 2013).

As such transformation happens on an individual level as much as part of a group process. An example of an individual process could be my own transformation as explained under the previous chapters. For a group setting I momentarily do not have sufficient data to provide information on what type of transformation could occur from practicing the *Art of Living Sideways* but certainly this would be a further research topic.

Peace, I declared, earlier begins within one’s self. Paradoxically, the more I wrote about the opportunities skateboarding has to offer, the more I found myself in an unsatisfactory imbalance. While writing, a deep scepticism towards skateboarding as much as peace sprouted inside me to an extent that I nearly discontinued writing. Until, in a kind serendipitous moment, I stumbled upon the old joke of Mullah Nasruddin, who is looking for his lost key under a street lantern only because it is lighter there than where he originally lost it. Claudio Naranjo uses the story of the Mullah, to underpin the central argument of his theory of suffering, which is based on the indication, that we “are looking for the key to our liberation, to our ultimate fulfilment, in the wrong place, and this cognitive error is the source of our dissatisfactions” (Naranjo, 1990:xx). The lost key, according to Naranjo, who is concerned that giving it this name might be limiting is “being” (ibid).

The contention that wherever “being” may seem to be, it is not; and that being can only be found in the most unlikely place, or rather in the most unlikely manner: through the acceptance of non-being and a journey through emptiness.

(Naranjo, 1990:19)

Instead of acting from our true essence, we are hiding behind masks and constructed personality structures or what, after Winnicott, in psychological cycles is also called the “real self” and the “false self” and by doing so we forget who we truly are (Naranjo, 1990:19). Working with transformation it is important to be aware of one’s own mask for the self and the different layers that are mapped on the self, as Wolfgang Dietrich’s transrational conflict map explains, which will be introduced in the next chapter. Although Naranjo uses this little joke to introduce one explanation of human suffering, I told this story here because Mullah Nasruddin once more reminded me, that skateboarding is only the vehicle of conflict transformation but the central argument to unfold peace is up to the skateboarder her or himself. I already talked about the gifts of *The Art of Living Sideways*, and ultimately the harvest comes down to the skateboarding body as the channel of momentum. If I want to learn that trick, feel more at peace or transform that conflict, there is no one else I need to go to, I must practice myself. Then at the same time it is also crucial to find the balance between narcissistic selfishness and including altruism into one’s action when working with embodied transformation. There comes a time when asking for help is as important as offering assistance. Finding the balance between those different forces creates art out of living.

5.5 Thoughts on Working with Peace in the Early 21st Century

Its peacemaker is more a catalyst or facilitator than an expert applying a specific model. She opens a space in which the knowledge of all involved parties is utilized as a valued resource for new possibilities and directions in the mediation process.

(Kathleen McGoey, 2014:178).

I loved working and living in Kabul with my whole heart and when I am feeling good about myself, I even like to think that I have a talent doing the things I did. I feel fulfilled when I can skate and I am thankful that I was able to combine my love with a work that is simultaneously fun, challenging, adventures and fulfilling. However, I have a nagging dilemma inside me. Who am I to have the permission to bring change to girls in Kabul?

The parents and the girls themselves seemed to be grateful that I taught them. However, given the educational dilemmas (Robinson, 2011) we face in the Northern Hemisphere of this world, am I not doing more harm than good when teaching

in Kabul? Should I not better work on education in my own country? How must a girl feel who was once allowed to fly on a skateboard and then is forced to be in a cage with a sign called forced marriage in front of her bars? How do I know that my well-intended help would not result in the counter effect? Will I ever know? Do I need to know? Or am I being a saint by coaching those girls, and facilitating capacity building workshops? What can I do, now that I realise that my actions, no matter how small or big, can lead to unpredicted effects elsewhere? Now and then I argue with myself on those questions and it appears to be that, exactly in this uncertainty, on how to act, in the ambiguity of not knowing, lies the challenge of today's peace work. Embracing uncertainty, and finding one's own style to cope, especially in the midst of devastating violence, then becomes one of the tasks of today's peace worker (Lederach, 2005). What becomes interesting then is how to overcome this challenge concretely. Practicing *The Art of Living Sideways* is one possibility to cope, to roll on, when facing the unknown; centring the body and attending to the flow of the moment, by balancing my mind, body and soul. Balancing one's inner world allows for an authentic presence, which is vital for being in the role of a person that aids transformation (Dietrich, 2013; Perls, 1989; Rogers, 1951). As such, this chapter deals with what qualities and roles an elicitive peace worker of today embodies, in order to be able to work with the challenge of postmodern doubt (Koppensteiner, 2009a, 2009b).

When it comes to working elicively with skateboarding it is not only inherently necessary to be aware of the transrational conflict map (see below). A peace worker who includes skateboarding in her or his bags of tricks also needs to be aware that skateboarding is only a trick that might be useful to have fun, to feel alive, to improve the unfolding of the senses or to come into balance. However, peace work for me goes deeper than the instant gratification of feeling at peace. It is about transforming inner conflicts and unfolding human potential. This is a process that takes time (Lederach, 2005; Perls, 2002) and great situational awareness (Dietrich, 2013). To understand how this might be done I elaborate on the task of today's peace worker below.

Peace scholar and mediator Christopher Mitchell (1993:147), compiled the following list of the roles of a peace worker.

explorer, forerunners, reassurer, convener, initiator, advocate, decoupler, disengager, unifier, aggregator, consolidator, ensembler, empowered, envisioner, fact finder, guarantor, facilitator, moderator, legitimizer, endorser, enhancer, developer, monitor, verifier, enforcer, implementer or reconciler

Also, Wolfgang Dietrich's Many Peaces Series (2012, 2013) provides a detailed exploration of an elicitive conflict worker's qualities. I do not intend to reproduce their work but feel the need to highlight and extend on key capacities that are in-

herent to holding space that make it possible to facilitate elicitive conflict transformation in the frame of *The Art of Living Sideways* and *The Aesthetics of Transrational Peace Philosophy*. Elicitive conflict work includes a grand responsibility of not only sensitivity but also clarity and awareness of the own persona (Dietrich, 2012). The willingness to dare to act in the face of uncertainties and most importantly to dare to just be, without strings attached to familiar concepts. Being with awareness and without the eagerness to help or the need to suggest solutions allows the possibility for a loving presence (Dietrich, 2011). It is exactly this state of being that is not only highly rewarding and energising but allows for a deep reaching elicitive transformation — a transformation that allows a non-judging acceptance of the situation in a peaceful wakefulness. Dietrich says that from such a state of being “the contact boundary of the *persona* blurs and a world that extends itself beyond those mental boarders appears” (Dietrich, 2011:379). It is in that magical space, that the observation itself becomes peace and in its awareness lies the epicentre of elicitive transformation (Dietrich, 2011 378-379). This awareness of itself is an art, an art of being present in the now and art that allows to be connected to the flow of *The Art of Living Sideways*.

Below I share Dietrich’s interpretation of Lederach’s conflict pyramid that adequately shows the contact boundary at work and the complex system of which an elicitive peace worker needs to be aware of from a bird’s eye perspective.

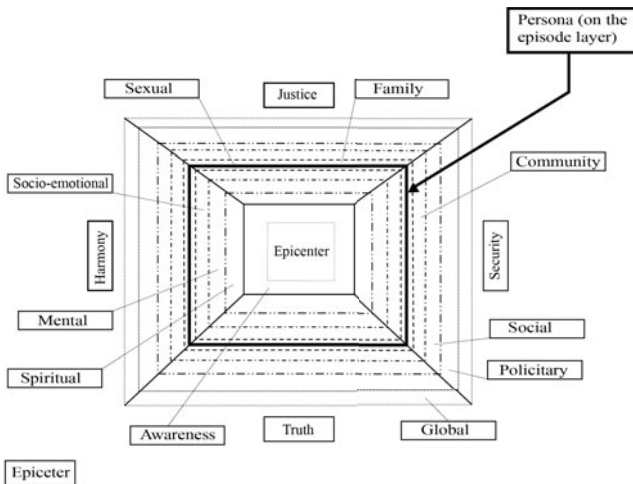


Figure 1: The complete transrational model as seen in Dietrich (2013:203)

The black bold square resembles the contact boundary of the persona at work. A persona, after Dietrich (2013:203) is here to be understood as:

an integrative aspect of this whole, can never perceive itself wholly, regardless of whether he or she is a conflict party, a facilitator, or a scientific observer. The persona is merely a flexible and active contact boundary between the inner and the outer layer, both of which contribute to constituting the persona.

The corners represent the four peace families with which *The Transrational Peace Philosophy* is concerned; peace out of harmony, justice, security and truth (Dietrich, 2013). The surrounding squares resemble the different layers, themes as well as levels in the human nature that an elicitive peace worker has to be aware of when searching for the imbalance that leads to conflict (ibid).

The above map and the awareness of oneself on this map and in contact with others is a key constituent of *The Aesthetics of Transrational Peace Philosophy*, the job of the elicitive peace worker is then to balance those different layers within her or himself in the situational context (ibid). Another basic principle of working elicitive is already mentioned elsewhere in this text but I feel the need to repeat myself as I am here combining the key concepts of elicitive peace work. What I am referring to is the awareness about one's own internal power struggles and weaknesses but also the peace industry as a whole (Dietrich, 2013). I, as others before me (Dietrich, 2012, 2013; Lederach, 2005), find it of utmost importance in the realms of peace work to disentangle power games within oneself. Becoming aware of one's own self, needs, desires, manipulation strategies and character to take then responsibilities as one's own chairperson (Cohn, 2004) is one task of today's peace worker.

There are countless roads to self-awareness and it is up to the individual which one to take, the importance lies in searching for once own road for traveling. To clarify what I mean I will here mention Krishnamurti (1972) who suggests that each of us must learn things for ourselves through observation and intellectual analysis as well as through the mirror of relationships. In that light, a peace worker of the 21st century supports by facilitating a process of learning, not by dominating a prefabricated image of peace but by providing a coherent mirroring relationship. This job is best proceeded like an art and rather than providing a fixed framework on how this should happen. I find it is a good idea that the elicitive conflict worker knows some basic principles. Those have their roots in the concepts of humanistic psychology as introduced above. Here I would like to summaries those principles into three pointers for working elicitive: 1) that he or she acts coherently in her or his own truthfulness; 2) that he or she makes sure to understand what the people are saying 3) that he or she has a general interest in the betterment of the people (Rogers, 1951). This might

involve times of asking questions, might include a state of non-doing, or to speak out about what one sees even if it is uncomfortable, as long as it feels to be the personal truth in an emphatic and equal relationship, rather than somebody who is superior and knows the truth (Naranjo, 2014). Providing such a relationship requires an attitude of inner non-attachment from the facilitator, which allows facing the unknown in a humbled presence, rather than wanting to control the future (ibid).

Krishnamurti (1983) further points out that relying on knowledge and a fixed image of reality make one arrogant and the need for certainty takes as its price the loss of deep, natural humility. Humility so he said, is unable to shine through a person if she/he identifies her/himself with a country, certain ideology, conclusion or concepts. Having said this, violence, according to Krishnamurti, occurs when a projection of a certain ideology, or ideals are not met. For him, ideals are a fabrication of a reality that does not exist. He suggests avoiding a clouding of present thoughts with such delusions (Krishnamurti, 1987). Ideals in that light become meaningless for the betterment of the world but much rather inflict a certain danger because they are borne out of thinking and an I-mentality (Dietrich, 2012).

A further factor that eases embracing uncertainties is the understanding that disharmony and conflict is part of our being (Dietrich, 2013). Rather than focusing on mitigating conflict, the elicitive peace worker then sees that a conflict is a carrier of important life lessons. He or she learns how to move with conflict and find ways to bring conflicting tendencies to light that can then be acknowledged and transformed (Perls, 1989). Family therapist Virginia Satir (2011:72) writes the following in that regard:

So we are in a constant process of changing. Change always carries with it a period of imbalance [...]. This happens when something new is added or something old is discarded. The feeling of imbalance is often one of confusion. The picture of imbalance can be physical illness, internal troubles, competence problems, or spiritual desolation. I would go so far as to say that any imbalance is a message about some change taking place. This is a perfectly natural phase because, while we are in the process of rebalancing, imbalance has to take place first.

Her words might sound harsh in the face of the violent struggles, especially with the recent armed clashes around the world. It is of course a lot easier to talk about disorder and change than understanding or accepting it in the midst of overwhelming conflict.

Another quality of today's peace worker is the idea that the facilitator takes the role of an observing witness with a coherent communication style (Dietrich, 2013). My idea of this witnessing space holder when working with skateboarding is representative of what Daria Halprin writes about in regard to dance therapy.

The therapist or teacher is a vital partner who witnesses and encourages the most internal experience being expressed through creative enactment. Having a witness and guide as a companion to see, hear, and validate our experience plays a crucial part in this healing process.

(Halprin, 2009:178)

Witnessing is in some way a natural by-product of an ordinary skate session on a vert-ramp, mini-ramp or pool for example. Usually one skater skates and the rest watch, while waiting for their turn. Those that are watching are naturally holding a space for the one skateboarding body to experience her or him. The peace worker, who could be an instructor, teacher, therapist, facilitator or, what appears more appropriate for me, *space holder*, can tap into the natural skateboard setting and consciously hold a space where skateboarders can explore themselves. The peace worker can then, according to the situational context and with a combination of other methodologies for elicitive conflict transformation (see Dietrich, 2013), such as non-violent communication and sensory-motor exercises, hold the space for embodied transformation to happen. Non-violent Communication is a style of communication that focuses on connecting to others free from heart to heart (Rosenberg, 2005). With sensory-motor exercises, I am referring to body-centred awareness exercises that can be practiced before the act of skateboarding such as cardinal warm-up exercises or yoga, for example. Together with two friends of mine, we lately started organising workshops in which one friend does the yoga session and we others teach longboarding (Bily, 2014; Fleck, 2014). For a deeper discussion on the outputs I do not have sufficient data at the moment. This combination however, certainly requires more research but for an initial feedback, combining yoga with skateboarding is a wonderful way to connect to the body and to turn into the flow of living sideways.

I was inspired by Professor of Environmental Studies and Politics at Oberlin College, David Orr (2004:12), who writes in his book *Earth in Mind: Education, Environment and the Human Prospect*:

The plain fact is that the planet does not need more successful people. But it does desperately need more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers, and lovers of every kind. It needs people who live well in their places. It needs people of moral courage willing to join the fight to make the world habitable and humane. And these qualities have little to do with success as our culture has defined it.

I dare to frame peace work in the early global transcultural 21st Century to be the labour of understanding, defining as well as embodying what it means to live well in this situated, relational and complex world. The definition of 'well' will of course need to be understood in its fluctuating multiplicity. This means that an

elicitive peace worker knows her or himself and dares to be present in the moment (Dietrich, 2013). A peace worker then finds her or his way to transform the sterile emptiness humans have the tendency to suffer from into fertile soil, be it in their own inner space or by facilitating a space that allows for the transformation and healing of others (Lederach, 2005).

As such, a peace worker of today can also be a shaman, for example, and here I would like to recall the words of peace scholar Kathleen MyGoey as quoted at the beginning of this subchapter. An elicitive conflict worker is like a catalyst, yet holding, balancing and channelling energies, or facilitates space for learning and the potential for human unfolding (McGoey, 2013). Before starting a session, it might be a good idea to have a conscious step of giving oneself to the service of the process one works with (Naranjo, 2014). Like a decision to stay with what feels right for oneself as this has a mirroring effect for the relationship between facilitator and participants (ibid).

Before rounding up the exploration of the roles and qualities of an elicitive peace worker, I will let Abraham Maslow speak one more time, because his call for psychotherapists to help people recognise peak-experiences fittingly fits to an elicitive peace worker too: “Helping people to recognize these little moments of ecstasy when they happen is one of the jobs of the counsellor” (Maslow, 1971:48). To overcome uncertainty, an elicitive peace worker then can find ways that allow owning one’s experiences, no matter how painful or crazy they might seem. With the intention to then cultivate a healthy Gestalt or what Fritz Perls understands to be wholeness — the emphasis on the organismic unity of sensory aliveness, emotional expressivity and mindful cognition (Perls, 1989).

I would like to conclude by extending Christopher Mitchell’s list from above, that I see a peace worker of the early 21st century also as a: connector, space opener, energy holder, shaman, catalyst, facilitator, lover, mistress, actress, dancer, clown, therapist, healer, transformer, teacher, story-teller, non-violent communicator, mirroring being, human seed of radiant joy, chairperson, transformer, witness and of course a skateboarder. If my above assemblage of impressions would be a job description, it would be a rather challenging task to find a suitable candidate for, but nobody said peace work is easy.

6 Epilogue

And it is possible that, in the realm of human destiny, the depth of questioning is more important than answers.

(André Malraux, 1970:15).

This book was not written to reach a final answer. Instead, I wanted to explore a research method that might allow me to find my stance as a peace worker and share the possibilities of *The Art of Living Sideways*. To start off, I did not find myself but I do not see this as a failure of the project, rather as an encouragement to keep searching because this project brought me close to what I might be. What I did find, however, was that beyond the poststructuralist criticism on development and peace building there is an opening that creates countless potentials for the experience of peace.

Here I will express my experienced transformation in language, highlight the main points of this work, and finally propose further research questions.

I already mentioned in the introduction, that I abandoned my initial research project with *Skateistan* staff and students; nevertheless I spent my summer in Kabul because I was looking forward to seeing my friends and I had work commitments. Besides the usual busy six-day working week, I still had the pleasure of enjoying the Afghan hospitality, as much as luxurious embassy parties. Sadly, I also experienced the loss of five dear students due to a teenage bomber. The resulting suffering as well as the ostensibly clashing interpretations of reality between Eastern and Western interpretations of the world made me search for possibilities on how I could change and further support thoroughgoing change with this research.

Then I had the hypothesis that skateboarding can be used as a tool for peace building. With the conceptual consideration that I defined as *The Art of Living Sideways* and *The Aesthetic of the Transrational Peace Philosophy*, I explored a transrational (re)-search methodology that focuses on my experiences with skateboarding and peace work. As part of this research I started to criticize as well as deconstruct the idealist's perspective of the *Sport Development and Peace* movement that suggests that sport, and in this case skateboarding, can be used as a tool to build peace to an extent that I could no longer hold the hypothesis that peace can be built through sport. There is no wrong or right answer to why sport cannot build peace; it is rather a matter of definition, interpretation and understanding. For me it feels like a paradigm shift that occurred as a side

effect of my conceptual consideration, which recognizes that theory is practice. This practice changed my worldview.

I found that ideals are meaningless for the betterment of the world (Krishnamurti 1987) and so are good intentions (Illich, 1968). As such, *The Art of Living Sideway* suggests a move away from the modern concept of peace workers as builders, do-gooders, doctors or engineers. Instead, I (re)-redefine peace work in the early 21st century as a work that unfolds the extraordinary human potential inherent in all of us. From there, peace cannot be built because the world is not a machine but a living organism. Instead, peace, in its plurality (Dietrich, 2011, 2013) and imperfection (Muñoz, 2001), can be facilitated and lived (Dietrich, 2013). Under *The Aesthetic of Transrational Philosophy*, I advocated for a greater understanding of the lived experience of peace. In its plural context, this incorporates conflicting tendencies rather than mitigating them (Dietrich, 2011, 2013). I argued that we need more facilitators that can hold spaces of transformation with awareness not only for their own persona but also for social and environmental spheres. As such, elicitive conflict transformation is not concerned solely about finding transformative tendencies from within the conflicting parties (Lederach, 1996), but actually suggests that the facilitator dares to be present in the flow of the moment.

Under the conceptual frame of *The Art of living Sideways*, I frame skateboarding to be just skateboarding and at the same time, it has unlimited potentials. I put forward that skateboarding is only the vehicle but the driver of change is the skateboarding body her or himself. I also, on the example of autobiographical writing, illustrate how especially the athletic stream of consciousness that comes with its art has transformative powers that help to move out of cycles of sadness and pain. I not only make the suggestion that the movement of skateboarding can be one way to access elicitive conflict transformation, I further defined the union of body, mind and spirit as the aesthetic of skateboarding that has the potential to elicit an experience of peace, healing and transformation or what has also been known as *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1974). Transformation is understood here as changes to the self as well as the transformation of conflicts into more bearable situations. When I am talking about the self, I refer to a soft, fluctuating and transpersonal self (Koppensteiner, 2009a). From *The Aesthetics of the Transrational Peace Philosophy* such a transformation can occur when fixations are made visible and acknowledged. Owning and taking responsibility for our own fixations or neuroses is closely related to a soulful awareness (Naranjo, 2013). From that perspective, skateboarding movement can be highly spirited and is an extraordinary human potential (Murphy, 2011), or what is known in skateboarding circles as *stoke*.

Coming from the midst of social conflict and seeing the importance of working on myself to get out of those conflicts, I hope this book can serve as inspira-

tion. I am now convinced more than ever that it is a highly rewarding experience to explore oneself and take responsibility for one's thoughts and feelings. Clarity about oneself can be found in many ways and one way is practiced in this text, where I am working on my own self, mask, dreams, and desires with the intention to communicate and live freely. Sometimes I felt ashamed and naked during the writing process, other times I felt stupid, useless and unaware, like an elephant in a porcelain shop. I had the impression that madness was drowning me in its deepest black gorge but somehow I managed to climb out again. I had fun exploring my intuition and theoretical concepts related to the realm of peace and sport. I got frustrated about the gap between slick theory and my chaotic perception of the territory and practical manifestations but I managed to juggle those differences into a coherent line of text. I learned a lot and experienced more transformation than I had anticipated. In retrospect, it was a humbling journey and I am honoured for the possibilities that were there for me. I attempted to write what I live(d) to the best of my ability with the intention of gaining an understanding and feeling of my process. Although I think I was successful in interweaving the living and thinking in the most eloquent way possible, there still remains a gap between the observed and me as the observer. Emotions and feelings are elusive and difficult to portray in language; this grew more and more obvious to me as the writing process continued. I not only became more aware of the gap but also of the things in between that cannot be named.

I have benefited from the transformative tendencies of reflective writing. The change that happens with that synthesis excites me and they drive me to continue this exploration. Michel Foucault once said, "My problem is my own transformation" (Foucault, 1996:379). Inspired by the French philosopher, I too explore how knowledge changes me. To answer this question, I have to say that in this particular case, writing this book allowed me to become more humbled and increased my capacity of compassion, for which I am thankful.

This book is reaching its end and it does not mean that the work is finished. Quite the contrary, my interest is to remind the reader that working on the self involves a perpetual transformative becoming (Koppensteiner, 2009a, 2009b). Simultaneously, I would like to propose opportunities for future research undertakings.

The question of how to work elicitively with *The Art of Living Sideways* in the aftermath of postmodern doubts needs to be elaborated in more details than I was able to do in this text. How a transformational process can be facilitated concretely also deserves more attention than I was able to provide here. I furthermore see a greater need to understand better the relationship between ecstasy like peak-experiences and the unfolding of the experience of peace. Another important consideration is how the experience from the skateboard setting can be

taken into other relational encounters. I have experienced that success and failure from skateboarding also has ripple effects into other social sphere and vice versa. How those realms can influence each other needs to be investigated further. Most importantly, how can you and I transform the cycles of despair into fertile grounds for the human potential to unfold? Those are questions that are searching for answers from different perspectives and form an essential part of *The Aesthetics of Transrational Peace Philosophy*. It does not lie within the scope of my capabilities to define fixed answers for those multifaceted challenges. However, I consider it essential to continue asking such questions with the hope of defining contemporary methods as well as food for thoughts in regard to elicitive conflict transformation and its grand potentials.

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Appendix

List of Skateboard Projects and Organizations that Go Above and Beyond

Adaptive Action Sports: www.adacs.org

A.skate Foundation: www.askate.org

Actions REALized: www.actionsrealized.com

All Nations Skate Jam: www.allnationskatejam.com

Board Rescue: www.boardrescue.org

Boarders without Borders: www.bwbskateboarding.com

Boarding for Breast Cancer: www.b4bc.org

Boards without Borders: www.bowibo.org

Ethiopia Skate: www.ethiopiaskate.org

Girls is not a four letter word: www.girlisnota4letterword.com

Girls Riders: www.girlsriders.org/

Go Skateboarding Foundation: www.goskateboardingfoundation.org/

Harold Hunter Foundation: www.haroldhunter.org/about/the-foundation

High Five: www.wearehighfive.com

Holy Stoked Collective: www.holystoked.com

I like da Skateboard: www.kodexmag.de/ilds

Let it Flow: www.letitflow.org

Long Live Southbank: www.llsb.com

Longboarding for Peace: www.longboardingforpeace.org/

Next Up Foundation: www.nextupfoundation.org

Schtifti Foundation: www.schtifti.ch/stiftung

Sheckler Foundation: www.shecklerfoundation.org

Skate Aid: www.skate-aid.org/en

Skate Arabia: www.skatearabia.com/

Skate for Change: www.skateforchange.org

Skateboarding for Peace in the Middle East: www.sourcrew.com

Skateistan: www.skateistan.org

SkatePal: www.skatepal.co.uk/design-build-skate-2014/

Stoked: www.stoked.org

Street League Skateboarding Foundation: www.streetleaguefoundation.org

The Bedouins: www.thebedouins.flavors.me/

Tony Hawk Foundation: www.tonyhawkfoundation.org

Uganda Skateboard Union: www.ugandaskateboardunion.org

Uncle Skate Charity: www.uncleskate.org