Parkour: Loosening Public Urban Space in Finland

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Introduction

Parkour is a physical form of movement that treats features of urban or natural environment as an obstacle course to be traversed by the body. While there are no formal rules in parkour, *traceurs,* the practitioners of parkour, have identified six basic elements of the activity: running, jumping, climbing, balancing, stealth, and touch/sensitivity (Edwardes 2009, 18–19). By practising and repeating these actions, a traceur can begin to connect these actions into a series of movements and strive for a fluid and continuous motion.

The aim of this chapter is to examine how traceurs use physical and architectural features of everyday urban environments as opportunities to practise their craft. An important part of this practice is the process of developing "parkour eyes", an attitude toward space that allows traceurs to evaluate its suitability for parkour training. The complex role of visual media for the development, dissemination, and practice of parkour is also explored. Finally, parkour is examined as a way in which urban public and semi-public spaces are loosened.

Information for this chapter is drawn from research conducted in two Finnish cities, Helsinki and Jyväskylä. This chapter examines traceurs' notions of ideal places for parkour, their appreciation of different types of physical features in the environment, and their encounters with other people – passers-by, security personnel and the police – while they practise. Eighteen participants (aged 14 to 31) were interviewed in 2009. For this chapter, additional interviews with eight traceurs (between 24 and 42) were conducted. Four of them had participated in our earlier research, which gave us a good opportunity to reflect on the changes of parkour and its status in Finland. This second round of interviews was conducted in 2020. Of the 22 traceurs interviewed, 8 were female.

History of Parkour

Parkour emerged as a form of challenging athletic movement in French suburbs in the late 1980s. Researchers and parkour practitioners give several stories of its origins. The most common one gives credit to David Belle and Sébastien Foucan, who started to use their suburban environment in Lisses, in the south of Paris, as an 'urban jungle' for their movement. Their goal was to move as efficiently and fluidly as possible from one place to another by using physical elements of the environment along their route as stepping-stones rather than as obstacles. They adapted the practice of traversing an obstacle course in military training (*parcours du combattant*) to everyday urban settings. Some features of earlier parkour practices can be traced to the early years of the 20th century when French naval officer Georges Hébert developed a physical training method, *la Méthode Naturelle*, which in part aimed to imitate movement through natural environments (Atkinson 2009). At a later stage, Foucan started to focus on the aesthetic and acrobatic features of the discipline and added elements of martial arts to his style, which be called "free running" (see El-hage 2011). David Belle has continued to emphasize the original idea of parkour as efficient movement (see Wilkinson 2007).

A different history of parkour connects it to three Parisian suburbs in the late 1980s where a group of young men started to use their surroundings in a creative way, approaching their urban environments as an everyday obstacle course. Their approach was called "the art of displacement" (*l'art du déplacement*) and the group – including Belle and Foucan – was named Yamakasi,

meaning “strong body, strong person, strong spirit”. Both built and natural environments were essential to their form of practice (Daniels 2005; Ameel & Tani 2012a). The main idea behind both histories of parkour’s inception is the same: to use everyday surroundings in a creative way to progress as smoothly and fluidly as possible from one location to the next one.

Several features of parkour’s inception in the Parisian suburbs have remained important for understanding the discipline and its later development into a global discipline, and for practitioners’ negotiation of public space. These features are: physical exercise in everyday environments; a focus on urban environments (in particular concrete suburbs) but also the acknowledgement of parkour’s roots in natural environments; the suggestion of possible social elevation through parkour practice; and the ambiguity between a “naturalness” and continuous flow of movement, on the one hand, and the artificiality of training and repetitive exercises on the other.

Parkour, especially in its representation in popular culture and publicity, tends to look like a spectacular and high-risk practice. A number of studies about parkour injuries and parkour-related accidents have appeared (see e.g. Back & Knight 2013; Rossheim & Stephenson 2017), but to date, there have been no large-scale comparative studies of parkour injuries. In their everyday practice, traceurs emphasize the importance of an intimate knowledge of the environment in which parkour is practised, as well as knowledge of one’s own bodily capacities and limits, as a way to limit risks (see Daniels 2005). Kidder (2013, 243) notes that, while “[y]oung men “in other sports often discuss injuries and pain with pride ... [in] parkour, however, injury was often used as proof one did not adhere to the principles of progression”. On websites such as the Finnish Parkour Academy, parkour injuries are claimed to be rare, especially if parkour is practised following the established guidelines (Parkour Academy 2020).

Urban Spaces Used for Parkour

The practice of parkour relies on a particular kind of playful and transformative attitude towards everyday spaces. In practice, parkour can be practised everywhere; even modest changes in elevation (kerbs, stairs, etc.) can be used as stepping stones (Figure 1). Practitioners interviewed for this chapter repeatedly emphasized the importance of natural elements of the environment (e.g. stones and trees) in their everyday practice (Figure 2). Some physical features of urban spaces are, however, particularly valued. According to the traceurs interviewed, one of the most important elements is the three-dimensional geometry of the location. Different heights offer many opportunities for practice, not only for seasoned traceurs but also for beginners, who can use such height differences to practise basic skills.

Typical examples of these ideal environments can be found in densely built areas, including high-rise suburbs, where – following modernist paradigms – pedestrians and vehicle traffic have been assigned to their own levels. Many of these good parkour areas in Finland are concrete suburbs constructed in the 1960s and 1970s; similar types of neighbourhoods can be found in most Western cities. Because of the separation of vehicles from pedestrians, there are many ‘dead public spaces’ (Sennett 1974/1986; Mitchell 2003, 138) in these environments, which enhances their usability as iconic places for parkour (Ameel & Tani 2012a, 168). Based on their disconnection from the history of the broader city, these areas can be regarded as ‘non-places’ (Augé 1992), typified by a (post)modern ‘sense of placelessness’ (Cresswell 2004, 43–46; Relph 1976). For traceurs, however, these areas carry totally different meanings; for them, they are ideal places to trigger their imagination and offer a virtually endless number of affordances that they are ready to put to good use. As Kidder has shown, many places may look ‘meaningless until they are brought to life through parkour’ (2012, 237).

Figure 1: Traceurs often use stairs, railings and ramps for practising fluid and continuous movement (Photo: Unto Ikkala)

Figure 2: Although parkour is primarily an urban discipline, many traceurs value natural elements and their organic shapes for offering interesting challenges (Photo: Unto Ikkala)

The foregrounding of urban environments and brutalist architecture as ideal environments for parkour may be related both to the dominant view that parkour emerged in French suburbs and to the dominance of dense urban environments in media and popular culture depictions of parkour. There is always the risk that such representations in popular culture aestheticize landscapes of real social inequity, without "addressing systemic urban inequality and exclusion" (Lindner 2018, 283). The preference for environments with lots of concrete surfaces is also practical: unpainted concrete is not slippery and traceurs' shoes will not leave any traces during the practice; concrete is also generally predictably stable.

As a physical discipline that does not need any special place or equipment to be practised, parkour is based on direct interaction between traceurs and their environment. This is also a feature that underlines the potentially democratic nature of parkour as a practice for which no expensive equipment is needed, in which no fees for outdoor practice have to be paid, and in which there are no complex hierarchies either between groups or within groups. The unmediated relation to the environment emphasizes the importance of bodily contact and tactile sensations. Parkour practitioners interviewed for this chapter described how they often feel their way through new places. They tend to routinely touch railings, fences and tree branches to find out if they are solid and stable enough for the possible return. Corporeal experiences are thus essential for them (see also Clegg & Butryn 2012, 327; Aggerholm & Højbjerre Larsen 2017).

Crucially, parkour is not only a discipline that favours particular urban environments; it is also a discipline that develops, in its practitioners, a particular attitude towards the mundane material features of urban public space. Parkour practitioners interviewed told us how the way they look at the environment changed fundamentally after they started practising parkour. They started to develop 'parkour eyes', to see new opportunities in their environment, and many banal details began to reveal hidden qualities. For example, fences built to separate areas could be used as stepping stones or obstacles to be jumped over. 'Parkour eyes' can be defined as a special kind of way of looking at the environment in order to evaluate its suitability for parkour. This attitude also has its affective components. What appeared from this research is that parkour is "not only a different way of seeing space, but also a new way of attaching emotions to everyday environments" (Ameel & Tani 2012a, 165). When traceurs study details of the environment for parkour practice, they also construct meaningful personal bonds with the place.

Parkour eyes reveal not only new opportunities for using material elements in the environment but also increase traceurs' appreciation of those environments (Figure 3). Some of the traceurs described in detail how a mundane environment changed its meaning for them; it started to feel aesthetically interesting and "right". A female traceur described how she became sad when she saw that a certain branch of a tree that she had used for training had been broken off. Consequently, some movements had become impossible to perform at that location (Ameel & Tani 2012a, 171). This story is just a one example of traceurs' emotional attachment to their training place, which also entails a sense of ownership (see also Atkinson 2009; Saville 2008).

Figure 3: With their "parkour eyes" traceurs see their everyday surroundings in new ways. One key feature for their practice is the solidity of elements. (Photo: Unto Ikkala)

The development of "parkour eyes" has been reported in a range of studies. Saville (2008) quotes a parkour practitioner who describes how traceurs, after they started to practise parkour and became more familiar with the spaces around them, gained a special kind of "parkour vision" or a "parkour gaze", a mode of seeing that they cannot "switch off" (also see Kidder 2012). When traceurs' skills improve, they often feel empowered and more capable, and find new ways of moving in different environments (Lamb 2014b). Parkour practitioners interviewed for this chapter described similar experiences. Some of them reported that particular places started to reveal new opportunities when their skills improved.

Parkour as Practised, Parkour as Represented

One important feature of parkour is its complex relationship with the mediated images of the discipline. Mediated images were crucial for the discipline's geographic diffusion outside France, which can be traced to a couple of television documentaries such as *Jump London* (2003) and *Jump Britain* (2005), both directed by Mike Christie, and to commercials after the turn of the millennium (the BBC trailer *Rush Hour* from 2002 being probably the most influential one, with David Belle showing his parkour skills on rooftops to avoid traffic jams) (see Ameel & Tani 2007, 4). Many of the pioneering traceurs interviewed for this chapter reported that – after viewing these documented actions on television, often with a small group of friends – they started to imitate the moves they had seen. Over the past decades, documenting one's parkour practice by making videos and distributing them via social media platforms such as YouTube and Instagram has become an integral part of parkour culture and an important resource for community-building. Mediated images of the practice – both in popular culture and in personally made videos – are relevant also for understanding parkour's focus on particular urban environments (see also Kidder 2017). In commercial representations, it is possible to note the strong emphasis on urban environments and on spectacular settings and high-risk moves such as rooftop running and jumps from high places, and the production of an illusion of uninterrupted movement.

After the first documentaries and commercials appeared around 2003–2005, knowledge of parkour spread internationally via feature films, music videos, computer games and television commercials. Many of the traceurs interviewed in 2009 were familiar with these representations. Their relationship to the commercial use and re-interpretation of their discipline was complex. On the one hand, they were interested in seeing parkour in various types of popular culture. They felt the spread of information about parkour was important also because it meant more people in public space would become aware of the practice, which would help them negotiate public space. Media presentation was seen as possible means of loosening of space, but the interviewees were also aware of the differences between the created images and the physical reality of parkour. They were critical of how computer games and action movies, in particular, focused on potentially life-threatening stunts, while the hard work of everyday, repetitive training remained out of sight. This difference between common ideas about parkour and the hard work behind the smooth movements has also been noted elsewhere (Mould 2009; Saville 2009; Kidder 2012).

The internet has played an important role for emerging parkour communities in strengthening traceurs' sense of belonging to a particular community and through establishing contacts with other

traceurs, both locally and globally. Based on this feature, parkour can be seen as one of many living online cultures, despite the fact that it is very much a physical discipline, depending on bodily experiences of physical space. There is a "sense of virtual community" present in traceurs' manner of talking about the role of the internet (Blanchard 2008; González-Anta et al. 2019).

Traceurs' posting of videos fulfils important functions. First, traceurs' own videos and their way of sharing them on social media create an important channel, in particular for beginners. Privately posted videos, as well as multi-media representations in popular media, provide concrete examples of where to start a practice, what environments can be chosen, and how to behave in public space. For beginners, mediatised versions of parkour are important in shaping images of the discipline and acting as a virtual coach. When these images are combined with actual training from more experienced traceurs in the real world, beginning practitioners receive a multifaceted image of parkour. According to the interviewees in our research, traceurs start to evaluate the contents of the mediatised parkour in a more critical way once they have trained parkour for a longer time.

Second, the internet offers a channel to build up social networks, both locally and globally, which for the most part work virtually but quite often continue into the real world. On the local level, the internet is used for the information it provides about the time and location of weekly jams and of special occasions. Facebook, Instagram, Telegram and WhatsApp are used to give updated information on parkour's presence in the media. On the global level, practitioners in all possible geographical locations may follow websites of national parkour communities. Kidder (2012, 241) has described the process in which the internet works as a platform for "on-screen pedagogy", transmitting knowledge of parkour and creating online places for interaction.

Parkour as Loosening Urban Space

When traceurs use urban public space as their training ground, adopting physical features such as railings and height differences, they transform the socio-spatial properties of that space. Parkour practice and the development of "parkour eyes" heightens the practioners' spatial awareness. Space itself is transformed: drawing on the work of Karen A. Franck and Quentin Stevens (2007), parkour practice can be understood as an opportunity to 'loosen' urban spaces.

The concept of 'tight space' was originally introduced by Robert Sommer in his book *Tight Spaces: Hard Architecture and How to Humanize it* (Sommer 1974; quoted in Franck & Stevens 2007; see also Penman 2019). Sommer described tightly planned architectural spaces in which people's opportunities to remodel space to better suit their own needs are restricted or completely restrained. He emphasized the need to 'soften' architecture in such a way that it could be made more welcoming, responsive and reflecting the activities of human beings (Penman 2019). Franck and Stevens (2007) applied these ideas to urban spaces. For them, tight spaces are planned for a certain type of use only. Other possible ways to use these spaces are prohibited by various means: with clear restrictions such as prohibition signs (no skating, no loitering, no trespassing, etc.); with concrete obstacles such as bollards, skate stoppers and barbed wire; or by applying social exclusion to make people feel unwelcome. Social exclusion can be witnessed especially in many commercial spaces, for example in restrictions on young people's hanging out (Tani 2015).

Tight spaces can, however, be loosened if alternative ways to use them are tolerated. Loose spaces can also occur in places where the original use does not exist anymore (e.g. old industrial and warehouse buildings) or where no fixed use ever existed (e.g. wastelands). Franck and Stevens noted that even when the physical structure and the location of certain spaces may be looser than others, "it is people's actions which make a space loose, with or without official sanction and with or without

physical features that support those actions" (2007, 2). It is important to keep in mind that tightness and looseness are not fixed entities, but parts of an ongoing dialogue (Franck & Stevens 2007).

Franck and Stevens list four mechanisms related to loose space: appropriation, discovery, tension, and resistance (2007, 29–30). Appropriation is the most basic means of making space loose by people who use it for an expected or unplanned use. These spaces may be "open-ended": such as streets (e.g. Fernando 2007) or they may be "found spaces" without any strictly planned meaning (e.g. Rivlin 2007). Discovery refers to the exploration of spaces that do not have any current use; people can thus explore them and use them for their own purposes. Tension occurs in spaces where people have different, often contradictory ideas of the acceptable use of the space. In these spaces, acceptable behaviour is negotiated in social encounters. When these different ways to use space are accepted or at least tolerated, space can become loose. Resistance arises when space is tightly regulated and alternative ways to use it are not accepted. These four categories are useful for our analysis of traceurs' relationships to urban spaces. In the case of parkour, the discovery of interesting spaces, for example, is essential. A particular feature of parkour is that virtually any space can be appropriated for use in parkour practice. What can be discovered is as much, or even more, dependent on the imagination of the practitioner as on the material properties of the space itself.

The first way parkour is a loosening of space is how its practitioners make unexpected and unplanned use of everyday environments. Parkour practitioners show how even the smallest differences in elevation can provide possibilities for exercise and how the material elements designed most explicitly for restricting movement (such as railings and fences) can be transformed into supporting structures for moving forward (Figure 4). Parkour foregrounds the many unexpected affordances (Gibson 1979) – the potential for use of particular features of everyday urban environments (see Bavinton 2007; Ameel & Tani 2012a). Bavinton is one of several parkour researchers who draws attention to how practitioners turn obstacles into opportunities. He foregrounds how traceurs are able to reinterpret space and use it in unconventional ways, thereby contributing "to their sense of agency as individuals" (see also Clegg & Butryn 2012, 321; Holly & Nida 2013). In the way it questions the limits of how space is supposed to be used, and the way bodies are supposed to behave, parkour draws attention to possibilities for subverting restrictions. A key term is *détournement*, which was used by early French traceurs in its everyday meaning of "appropriation for new purposes" but which also has theoretical undercurrents, grounded in the International Situationist movement (see Ameel & Tani 2007; Daniels 2005; Lamb 2010). *Détournement* is a rerouting of physical structures and behavioural expectations of the public city. However, such rerouting can in turn be re-appropriated by others, for example, for commercial purposes (Franck & Stevens 2007, 23; Atkinson 2008, 172).

Figure 4: Traceurs use even modest changes in elevation for their practice (Photo: Unto Ikkala) about here

When witnessing parkour, onlookers, too, are invited to see how the everyday city can be rerouted for new purposes, as a potential "jungle gym" or urban "playground" (Atkinson 2009). These two terms suggest two different approaches to how parkour changes perspectives not only on the possibilities of public space, but also on the possibilities of bodies in public space (see also the idea of parkour as either "craftmanship" or as "play" in Eichberg & Højbjerre Larsen 2019). The idea of the public "gym" suggests parkour's utilitarian purpose and the able-bodiedness of the traceur. The idea of the city as "playground" focuses attention on parkour as a playful activity and the city as a "ludic city" (Stevens 2007a).

Whether considered a playground or a gym or both, parkour transforms urban public space into an unexpected space of performance, in which the boundaries between participants and the public are fundamentally unclear. Stevens notes that practices that loosen space often tend to invite passers-by

to join in, even for the briefest of moments (2007b, e.g. 86–87). The traceurs interviewed recounted how children and teenagers, in particular, mimic their parkour moves, for example by jumping on small obstacles or running along with practitioners. Whether parkour activities are perceived as part of the urban spectacle in which passers-by want to participate, or are seen as strange and undesirable behaviour, depends on a range of factors. The parkour practitioners interviewed mentioned that passers-by who were acquainted with parkour tend to be positively inclined. For these onlookers, parkour was no longer strange or unexpected, but one of the possible ways to behave in public space. Some of the passers-by who were not acquainted with parkour tended to understand parkour as one of several activities they consider undesirable: drunks boozing in public, or young people hanging out. According to the interviewees, in cities where parkour is less well known, they encounter more negative reactions from passers-by.

Traceurs connected the degree of "loosening" of space and the possibility for unusual behaviour to the locations where parkour is practised, particularly whether these were central or more peripheral locations. Densely used downtown environments, with few permanent residents and with a great variety of functions (from window-shopping to street performances) tend to have a relatively low threshold of acceptance of the performative activities of parkour practitioners. In videos created by parkour practitioners and in popular movies featuring parkour, centrally located and densely used environments are often featured. In everyday practice, however, traceurs tend to prefer quieter environments, where they are less likely to disturb other users – and the other way around. Such environments include parts of the deserted post-industrial Helsinki waterfront whose rocky boulders offer ideal affordances for varied exercise, quiet corners of suburban environments, or forest environments. The differences between these environments demonstrate different faces of parkour: parkour as highly visible performance in the thick of densely used public space, or parkour as painstaking and repetitive practice, pursued away from prying eyes. The former shows spontaneity and easy playfulness; the latter demonstrates the organized, everyday nature of parkour practice.

The attentive consideration traceurs give to other users of public space (especially the more seasoned practitioners who were interviewed) is an integral part of parkour philosophy, which is based on attention and consideration for varied elements of public space. On several occasions, traceurs mentioned that they clean walls if they leave traces of shoe marks – a small symbolic gesture that expresses consideration for the built environment as well as for other users of public space.

Traceurs were aware of the possibility of confrontations when they move through public space, being "on stage" for other users of the same space. The interviewees were aware of the unwritten rules of acceptable use of public space. When stretching the boundaries of these uses, they experience various types of reactions from passers-by, but also from security personnel and (rarely) also from the police. Encounters with other users follows the kinds of patterns of tension and resistance identified by Franck and Stevens (2007), with unusual behaviour generating tension and occasionally giving rise to resistance in the form of regulation.

For traceurs, arguably the best way to draw attention to underused affordances of public space, and to the possibilities of loosening space, is to let their bodies speak. Many of the practitioners interviewed were also happy to discuss their rights to be there. There is a clear hierarchy here: less experienced traceurs were advised to avoid confrontations and to move on when challenged, but more seasoned practitioners were not averse to stay and to talk with other users of public space. Many of the more experienced practitioners had extensive knowledge of the uses of public space and the right to the city and were aware of their legal right to public space. Here, the highly organized nature of parkour in Finland is visible as a structuring force. Both the Finnish Parkour Association and the Parkour Academy have clearly outlined guidelines for how to act when confronted and disseminate information about legal rights through training.

A fascinating aspect of the right to public space that came up in the interviews was the Nordic customary law "Everyman's Right", which allows free access to private land, for example to pick berries or to hike. The practice, which is not explicitly spelled out in Finnish law, is typically applied to rural environments but parkour practitioners use it to defend their right to pass through semi-private spaces such as open space surrounding apartment blocks (see Ameel & Tani 2012b; Franck & Stevens 2007, 24–26). While the public right of way on countryside paths exists in a number of other countries (notably the UK), we are not aware of parkour practitioners in other countries drawing upon that right. The term parkour itself has roots in the complex history of European rights to public space. In medieval and early modern France the *droit de parcours* or right of *parcours* "permitted the common feeding of animals on the stubble after the harvest as well as on the fallow and waste land" and was a powerful obstacle to the enclosure of the commons in early modern Europe (Wallerstein 1989/2011, 65).

What emerges from traceurs' encounters with others in public space is a complex tension between a strong sense of entitlement among some users of public space, on the one hand, and a profound lack of clarity concerning what is acceptable behaviour and use, on the other. One interviewee noted that he used to practise by using a tree in a small public park but that people living nearby interfered with his practice. For them, this was "their" tree (see Ameel & Tani 2012b, 22). In strictly legal terms, neither the parkour practitioner nor the inhabitants of nearby apartment buildings had ownership of the tree in question. For both groups, the tree belonged to an everyday, affective geography but in ways that were potentially mutually exclusive. When challenged, the traceurs interviewed for this research preferred to move on to avoid potential conflict and to continue their practice elsewhere. However, in previous research there are several examples of cities where traceurs found it hard to gain access to public environments where they can practise (especially when they are members of ethnic minorities or come from underprivileged backgrounds), and in which parkour practice is part of more complex negotiations for access to, and visibility, in public space (see de Martini Ugolotti 2015; de Martini Ugolotti & Moyer 2016).

At one end of the spectrum of loose space/tight space are gatekeepers of public and private space, such as police officers and security guards. Surprisingly, the parkour practitioners interviewed mostly reported quite positive encounters with police and private security guards. Most of the time, such official figures were aware of parkour and this awareness provided the groundwork for acceptance. This foregrounds the importance of mediatised images of parkour, and the effect this may have on providing the public with a positive image of the practice. The positive reaction to parkour did not necessarily mean that the space where it was practised was made loose for other kinds of unusual behaviour. Many of the traceurs interviewed noted that police officers and passers-by gave them positive feedback by contrasting parkour as positive, playful, sports-like, and healthy behaviour with other forms of unusual public behaviour that are often perceived as unwanted, such as hanging around. Practitioners, too, made a distinction between their activities and other unusual forms of behaviour, pointing out they are not noisy like skaters, and do not disturb others as alcoholics do when they congregate in busy public spaces (see Ameel & Tani 2012b, 23).

Implications

Loosening of space is a dialectical process that takes place in particular circumstances and within particular social and legal contexts. In our study of traceurs in Finland, several features of ideal parkour environments as well as the ways in which parkour may loosen urban public space, are evident. Parkour can be practised virtually everywhere, with natural elements addition to urban public spaces. Even modest differences in height can be used for practice. Solidity and stableness of structures are appreciated and, therefore, concrete walls and metal railings are widely used.

One of the interesting features of parkour is the way it changes traceurs' attitude towards their everyday environment. With their parkour eyes, they give new meanings to mundane environments and thus discover otherwise underused affordances of public space. Playfulness is one special characteristic of parkour practice. When traceurs use their environment in unconventional (and often playful) ways, they can make other people reflect and re-evaluate unwritten rules of the "right" way to use public space.

The example of traceurs negotiating their access to public space by distinguishing their own practice from other, less desirable forms of loosening space, illustrates the complex and sometimes contradictory dynamics at work in the processes of appropriation, discovery, tension, and resistance that are working in public space. To a certain degree, parkour practitioners also confirm the unwritten rules of what is possible and desirable in public space, and what kinds of spaces can be appropriated for unusual behaviour. They do so by practising away from crowded areas or by avoiding private spaces or semi-public spaces such as shopping malls.

More research on these themes is needed. One important feature that warrants closer study is the effect of institutionalization of parkour on encounters in public space. This has already been studied in New Zealand and the UK (see Puddle, Wheaton & Thorpe 2018; Wheaton & O'Loughlin 2017). Further examination of parkour in Finland promises to add interesting dimensions to this discussion, with an unusually high degree of institutionalization and organization in the country. Several of the parkour pioneers have started their own businesses to organise parkour courses for children and adults. Some of them emphasize the philosophical side of the discipline, while others concentrate mainly on the physical exercise.

The role of indoor and outdoor practice could also be studied further. When the number of organised courses and parkour parks increases, these begin to have an increasing impact on the discipline for newcomers. Gendered perspectives (see Wheaton 2016) also deserve more attention in future studies. Due to continuing institutionalization in recent years, parkour has started to resemble other physical disciplines. Local and national parkour societies have started to organize courses, in which beginners and more experienced traceurs receive full training and instruction in a safe and controlled environment. One proof of parkour's institutionalization is its introduction into schools that have collaborated with parkour associations and firms organising parkour courses.

Inevitably, the increasing organization and institutionalization of parkour has consequences for loosening space. On the one hand, it is possible to argue that the gradual institutionalization of parkour has diminished its ability to loosen space. The everyday parkour practices of the traceurs we interviewed included spontaneous and unplanned activities, alongside set hours for regular practice, a somewhat hierarchical structure of instruction and teaching, and including indoor practice in specially designed gyms. There are many parkour parks in Finland, and there are several playgrounds with parkour features. The traceurs we interviewed emphasized the importance of media visibility and a degree of organization for enabling beginning traceurs to practise safely, for enhancing awareness of the practice among other users of public space, and for enabling a low threshold for newcomers to enter the discipline. In both sets of interviews conducted in 2009 and 2020, traceurs expressed their awareness of the risks related to institutionalization of parkour but emphasized that in their experience, the original spirit of playfulness, creativity and spontaneity continues.

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