

TRACING THE PATH OF POWER THROUGH THE FLUIDITY OF FREEDOM:
THE ART OF PARKOUR IN CHALLENGING THE RELATIONSHIP
OF ARCHITECTURE AND THE BODY AND
RETHINKING THE DISCURSIVE LIMITS OF THE CITY

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ABSTRACT

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This study explores the production of urban architectural space and investigates how the art of parkour attempts to (re)appropriate the spaces of the city. It interrogates the reflexive and continuously (re)negotiated relationship of power and freedom, as defined by Foucault, in and through the corporeal link of the traceur body, the practitioners of parkour, and urban architecture. Parkour forefronts the relations of power through a corporeal connection with architecture. This connection functions to offer more emancipated alternatives both to and within the hegemonic discourses disciplining the space of the city. Traceurs exercise agency as the discourse of the city creates limitations through regulatory norms; however, these limitations create the conditions for action. As a technology and technique of power, architecture's participation in (re)producing regulatory norms is seen in the ways in which it informs individuals' interpretations of everyday practices. Architecture embodies particular ideologies which communicate to a body of urban inhabitants. This embodiment communicates as a reflection and reinscription of the social actor's position within social relations. In being formed by power even as one reworks it, traceurs continuously challenge the reiterative

chains of discourse by inscribing their own truth or counter discourse. Parkour functions ontologically as it *is* a performance, and functions epistemologically *as* a performance. This study demonstrates how parkour offers insight into the intersections of the body and architectural space to bring to the fore the emancipatory potentialities therein.

To understand the emancipatory power of parkour, epistemology of doing as a critical ethnography is employed as the method for investigation. Epistemology of doing centers on a learning-by-doing approach positioning the researcher as participant in the production of knowledge and experience, in the case of this study, immersed in a community of traceurs during a parkour training seminar at B.A.S.E. Fitness in Noblesville, Indiana. The ethnographic experience allowed for empirical insight into parkour's relationship in the discursive formation of power and freedom. The experience, and the broader study, reveals insights about the practice of parkour and draws attention to how a traceur's personal journey elicits emancipatory potential in and through ostensibly freer movement within architectural space.

For Renee, whose meaning in my life not even another dissertation could
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CHAPTER I

EXPERIENCING THE CITY AS A SPATIAL PRACTICE:

WHAT'S ARCHITECTURE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

"Every story is a travel story—a spatial practice..."

Michel de Certeau

My fascination with urban life began, in many ways, as a travel story. The story was set in what happened to be Centerville, Indiana, but it could have been any number of 'Centervilles' in the rural U.S. Back in my youth, the travel was local; my fellow 2,000 some residents and I enjoyed strolling the cobblestone roads, frequenting small family-owned shops, and accompanying visitors to antique shops like the Olde Brass Hog and Tin Pig and the town's log courthouse, the only original log courthouse still standing in what was once called the northwest territory.

True to its name, Centerville was the center of my world. Perhaps that is why some of my most vivid memories involve leaving it. The travel story really began when I abandoned, however temporarily, that comfortable and contented center of my world for The City. My mother would drive my

brother and me to The City to visit my uncle who owned a hair salon on Massachusetts Avenue, right in the heart of The City's arts and cultural district. My brother and I would sit in the salon while my mother got her haircut. Looking out the window of my uncle's salon, we would be fascinated by life in The City. People honking their horns in traffic, homeless people asking for money, artwork decorating businesses and street corners, taxi cabs flying by, skyscrapers — these were all things we had never encountered.

While Centerville, the center of our world, offered similar attractions found in The City, rural life had a different pace, look, and feel. The City — which happened to be Indianapolis — I would later learn in my travel story is far from many people's idea of an urban metropolis, but the contrasts between it and Centerville were colossal. Life in Centerville was much slower, more spread out. We did not have congested traffic and usually did not have to wait in line at stores. Houses were mostly on acre plots often passed down through generations based on family ties. Grocery shopping was done once a week as a routine family activity. Neighbors were familiar and staples at any local event, such as church or little league games. There were no skyscrapers as shopping and theater going was done mostly in small shops. The center of town was only lit by street lights and buildings were not adorned with LED

lit media displays or flashy advertisements. Buildings that were abandoned from closed businesses stayed abandoned as the economic conditions kept them that way. While residences and buildings were spread out small town life was communal. The experience of the everyday was shared with a largely consistent cast of characters with community and familial connections. In a small town you know *who* everyone is and *where* they are. In effect, life there was predictable.

Predictability was thought of as a foundational quality. Seeing the same people in the same places and at the same times lent itself to feelings of security a sort of rationale for the way life was supposed to be experienced. This predictability fostered feelings in the community of routine which conditioned us with expectations. Our expectations set the stage for our thinking about the world around us, ourselves, and the people with which it was shared. This is in no way a condemnation of small town life but an example of how an almost accident of geography can shape the people we become and how we view the world.

Experiencing the phenomena of the urban milieu as a sort of outsider certainly left an indelible impression. Even in my earliest experiences as a child The City seemed to be about movement. The pace of life actually felt faster than

my rural upbringing. There was a visceral reaction riding in the car with my uncle and circling the block several times to compete for a parking space. It felt competitive and even dangerous. He would stop in the middle of traffic and put the car in reverse to park and once he did we were often met with angry drivers honking their horns at us for such an abrupt stop. Nothing ever seemed to come out of their expressions of anger. People just yelled, honked, and continued on their way. This seemed to me to simply be normal behavior for *these* strangers.

Once we finally did find a place to park I was surprised that he had to *feed the meter*: a practice with which I became accustomed and even volunteered to put change in the bizarre machine. He would take us to a pizza place on Monument Circle which was lit by the lights of the buildings around the circle and the fountains on the Soldiers and Sailors Monument. People would walk all around the area going to pubs, shopping, and children could be seen playing even late at night on the monument alongside young lovers kissing by the fountains. In the restaurant customers were allowed to write messages on the wooden tables and the smoke-stained walls. To get to the pizza place we had to walk past an old pub at the corner of Market and Pennsylvania. The alleyway behind the pub scared me as it was always dark and the only place not touched

by the lights of the surrounding buildings. I can still remember quite vividly the smells of cigarette smoke and urine emanating from behind the run-down bar.

We would follow my uncle down the street to our destination. Even though my uncle had grown up in the same town we did he had a certain spatial awareness of how to dart in and around others walking along the sidewalk. My mother often had to ask him to wait for the three of us as we had trouble keeping up with him. He seemed to drive fast and walk fast: a pace with which we were unfamiliar. I remember each time we stopped feeling embarrassed as if we had been found out as not being from the city. The inability to negotiate the crowd on the sidewalk made me feel like we were outsiders and as outsiders we appeared to be out of sync with the energy and pace of the city. Inhabitants Of The City always seemed to know exactly where they were going and how to get there. Leisurely strolling through the city to take pictures or look around was disciplined with shouts of "hey, watch where you're going" or a subtle rolling of the eyes indicating that those not Of The City were merely tourists, far on the margins of urban sophistication. There was a flow to the city, a vibe, an energy that, if disrupted by those not Of The City, had consequences.

Later in life, I became a citizen Of The City, moving from Centerville to The City, Indianapolis. Only after journeying thousands of miles from The City to THE CITY did I realize the full impact of my body following “the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’” (de Certeau, 93).

This was London, THE CITY of all cities, “indeed, the coolest city in the world. The capital of the world” (Harding). The visceral flow of THE CITY immediately hit me in my jet-lagged face; Even finding my way out of London Heathrow proved particularly taxing. There were no green exit signs only yellow signs that read *WAY OUT*. Once outside of the airport the weather lived up to its reputation as it was overcast and drizzling in mid August. I hailed what the English refer to as a hack or black cab because it looked like the cars I had only seen in movies. As we drove to the house where I would be living for the next two years I took in the remarkable scenery of the M4, the major highway route from Heathrow to fashionable West London. Everything looked different. The cars drove on the wrong side of the road, the billboards advertised products I had never heard of, and as we approached the city the vast skyline was much lower than I anticipated, missing the congestion of skyscrapers I would have expected of THE CITY. It was obviously, visually,

older than the cities in America and the London skyline was framed with a sharp gothic look.

It took some time to find my way in London. For the first few months I stuck to train and tube route I took from the room I rented to the petrol station where I worked as a cashier. I would often eat prepackaged food at the station for fear of getting lost if I ventured out at night when I returned home. As I look back on the experience now much of my self-imposed confinement had as much to do with the irrationality of London's design as much as it did my own mental blocks stemming from my past.

It can be difficult to find a personal flow in any new place. However, having never been to London or even outside of the U.S. this was especially challenging. London can be confusing, even to lifelong residents of it, because its shape does not follow the rational or Cartesian grid familiar to most Americans. The Cartesian grid describes the parallel structuring of urban centers so that city blocks are designed in grid or rectilinear patterns giving each intersecting point a uniform coordinate regardless of topography.¹ My

¹ One of the best examples of the Cartesian grid can be seen in New York City's orthogonal or perpendicular street patterns.

difficulty in navigating London was compounded by the hustle and bustle of streets packed with the traffic of odd looking cars, stores which held hours I felt were inconvenient through American eyes, and spaces which were often littered with empty beer cans and cigarette butts. The city felt congested. Overcrowded sidewalks had little room to share and the streets often curved around leading to nowhere. The constant drizzle covered the streets and the architecture and when lit at night gave off a sheen that made it appear more like the scene of a graphic novel.

As I became more familiar with London I became more confident. I began to find my own rationality within the design's irrationality. Each new city block I navigated came with a tearing down of my mental barriers. Coming to know the city through experience developed an appreciation of the space. I began to explore London like a curious traveler. When my brother came to visit me I can still remember the pride I felt being familiar enough to show him my favorite places. There was the famous Red Lion pub for the swankier tourist experience along with the usual attractions such as West Minster Abbey and Tower Bridge. I took him for the obligatory walk across London Bridge but the experience however does not live up to its fame. For the *real* London experience

I took him to the dodgy nightclubs in Brixton and then to my favorite spot for coffee on the benches outside St. Paul's Cathedral.

Several years later I traveled back to the U.S. Moving to downtown Indianapolis gave me a kind of reverse culture shock. Upon returning to the city I was excited to experience the fast pace of urban life. The skyline was familiar as I had been there before but it felt as if it lacked the scale I remembered. The streets *made sense* as they followed the Cartesian grid. Many of the buildings were new, parking was easy and the streets cleaner and safer than I remembered. The pizza place where you could write on the walls was gone. The energy I experienced earlier in life navigating the city felt slower: in a word, manageable. My newly developed urban sensibilities interpreted Indianapolis as less exciting than my memories of the city. Indianapolis boasts being the 13th largest city in the U.S. Moving back there after living in London the city felt smaller, yet, more open with less congestion and the pace of life seemed to slow to crawl in comparison to London. I used that feeling to get to know my city again. I traveled through the downtown area further exploring opportunities it had to offer. I found one of the joys and even sources of my personal identity and pride came from learning ways and knowing how to move within and use the city.

Knowing how to navigate city life such as finding the place that has the best cup of coffee, the centrally located apartment, or even the holy grail of mastering knowledge/movement within the city — the short cut — all imply an embodied knowledge of city space. However, this embodied knowledge is subjective and is informed by individuals' position in life. Certain inhabitants, most notably persons who are homeless, might be barred from the coffee shop as well as the centrally located apartment not even being an option. In turning a critical eye toward the complexities of urban life, this knowing how to use the city is confined by forms of power at work in that space which offer opportunities for some while at the same time marginalizing others.

Life in the city can be fantastic and fearful, magnificent and menacing, and delightful and daunting — often all in the same moment. It is a place of promise, of reinvention, holding the potential for a new life, a new identity, or a new destiny. While city space is actively watched and controlled (see Mitchell's "Controlling Space")² it still holds emancipatory potential for those who use and

² Mitchell, Don. "Controlling Space, Controlling Scale: Migratory Labour, Free Speech, and Regional Development in the American West." *Journal of Historical Geography* 28.1 (2002): 63-84. Print.

help to produce the space of the city. The city is itself a culmination of many different worlds and in combination it holds possibility as the “apex of civilization, the birthplace of citizenship” (Massey, Allen, and Pile 1). Cities are the “crucibles of the new,” in that they are places of promise and dreams, where anything seems possible (Massey, Allen, and Pile 1). They are imaginative places where ostensibly people have the freedom to produce the self in whatever manner they choose amid the chaotic tensions of urban life. Cities are a place where a mixing of people and cultures thrives and is celebrated. However, this mixing of myriad identities and interpretations of ways of being presents a constant struggle, often oppressive sometimes productive, inherent in urban life.

Perhaps nowhere is the struggle between power and freedom more profound than it is in the city. It is, as Lefebvre describes, a “place of desire, permanent disequilibrium, [and a] seat of the dissolution of normalities and constraints” (“Writings on Cities” 129).³ The city has long been celebrated as an

³ This is the only citation used from Lefebvre’s book *Writings on Cities*. All other citations come from his book *The Production of Space* and will not include the required short title. Lefebvre’s work is used extensively and this editing choice is

“emancipatory space/place in the social imaginary of the West” (Lees 5). Even the etymology of the word *city*, which comes from the Latin *civitas*, means the body of the citizens rather than the place or settlement type (Lees 5). This suggests the city is a development out of the relations between individuals: relations that constitute ways of living dialectically within the relationship between power and freedom.

Debord contends the city serves as the “historical battleground for the struggle for freedom” because it embodies the concentration of social power and a “consciousness of the past” (98). It is here, in the urban milieu, where the needs of power are in dialectical contestation with individuals who are not only aware of such constraints but struggle against them because they have a stake in living in that space. Just as the city acts as a historical site for the practice of freedom it too is simultaneously the locus for a “history of tyranny” (Debord 98). For Sharon Zukin, this tyranny comes in the form of a type of symbolic oppression played out and produced through material relations. The

to ease redundancy for the reader and reduce cumbersome in-text citations.

Proper MLA format requires that multiple works cited from the same author be distinguished by a short title included in the citation.

building and functioning of cities, she suggests, depends as much on people combining land, labor, and capital as it does on how “they manipulate symbolic languages of exclusion and entitlement” (7). In this sense, the struggle between freedom and power can take on the form of tyranny as certain groups will effectively *win* these struggles because of different accesses to power. For Zukin, this struggle is directly reflected through the practices which produce cities both materially and discursively: practices which “reflect decisions about what—and who—should be visible and what should not, on concepts of order and disorder” (7). Further, Lefebvre explains actions alone do not (re)articulate power within the urban sphere. Analyzing power as produced and maintained within urban space presupposes the production of “images, symbols, and the construction of buildings, of towns, and of localized social relationships” (Lefebvre 245). Both Lefebvre’s and Zukin’s comments illustrate how the material forms of the city (the built environment) as well as knowledge of appropriate ways of being (discursive struggles) are produced and contested dialectically within the city.

Movement, while seeming a largely free enterprise, is very much disciplined in city space. Mike Davis, for example, points out the discipline to encourage appropriate movement in the city is actually part of the design

strategies of architects and city planners. The city streets, he notes, are made as “unlivable as possible” (160). Specifically centering his argument on disciplining the homeless, Davis notes one of the design strategies implemented by architects and city planners was the barrel-shaped bus bench which “offers a minimal surface for uncomfortable sitting while making sleeping impossible” (Davis 161). Further, Davis points out cities place sprinklers in the parks set to go off at random times during the night so the homeless could not sleep there. Restaurants in many urban areas have begun to build what Davis calls “baroque enclosures” which consist of steel fences complete with “locks and out-turned spikes” to keep the homeless from searching for food in the dumpsters behind the buildings (161). Davis’ criticisms of city space point to the ways such space confronts movement, for whom, and in what forms are deemed appropriate.

As such implicit strategies to discipline movement are found in the built environment there are explicit and direct strategies which work on all aspects of city life. There are in fact legislated restrictions to the pace and range of movements available to individuals. If you move too fast, for example while driving, you can be fined with a speeding ticket. If you stay in one place too long you can be cited for loitering. All throughout city space there are embedded codes within the built environment that implicitly and explicitly

restrict movement and access to and within certain places. If you ignore these you can be arrested for trespassing which is a criminal offense. The act of trespassing is considered a misdemeanor — *mis* meaning wrong and *demeanor* meaning conduct. Embedded in the legal language, which is a code and form of power itself, is a set of punishments designated to address conduct deemed as wrong. The irony of such infractions is the taking away of your right and ability to move at all by confining you to jail. An embodied knowledge of city space comes with learning how to move in and around such restrictions. These restrictions become so normalized they largely become uncriticized.

This embodied knowledge emerges out of struggles occurring within lived experiences of the city. It is, in many ways, a conditioning on the one hand of the confines of city space, and the freedoms of choice and movement on the other. It might be said that we are free to experience city life but within the confines inherent in the struggle and tension that is social life. Spatial movement, then, is an important concept in understanding the lived experiences within the city. The freedom to move is as important as the power to discipline movement. Each exists within a discursive and continuous dialectic struggle which marks ways of being in the city.

Yet, neither city spaces nor the behaviors and practices producing such space ever conform to a simple set of rules or expectations. Urban space as social space is subject to what Lefebvre calls the “hypercomplexity of social space” as it embraces the interpenetrating “individual entities and peculiarities, relatively fixed points, movement, and flows” (88). Further, Quentin Stevens reveals how the concentration of diverse and unfamiliar “people, objects, meanings, and opportunities for action” help to stimulate a wide range of behaviors within city space (25). It is the very hypercomplexity of urban space wherein the relationship between power and freedom holds emancipatory potential.

Lewis Mumford, in *The Culture of Cities*, observes the “mind takes form in the city; and in turn, urban forms condition [the] mind” (5). For this reason my study concerns itself with the ways in which urban forms not only condition the mind but also with the ways in which the mind might condition urban forms. Specific to my study are the ways in which urban architecture, as an urban (built) form, function in what Foucault calls “regimes of truth” which are produced discursively in the city and how these delimit what is knowable about the self and the possibilities for city space. More specifically, I seek a better understanding of architecture’s role, as an urban form, in conditioning the mind. Moreover, my intention is to investigate how these truth discourses are

(re)produced within the relationship between urban architecture and the body. Further, my investigation seeks to understand how this relationship influences the dialectic of freedom and power within the city.

I argue for a dialectic consideration of freedom and power because the city does not have one geography or one history. Doreen Masey positions cities as characterized by their openness “to new possibilities, and to new interactions between people” (viii). The urban milieu is constituted by a multiplicity of people, cultures, experiences, and interpretations and therefore cannot be taken as a singular or linear history. Mumford believes the history of the city to have been developed from practices centered on manipulating the environment so as to affect it in such a way one could survive. The impetus for concentrating resources through constructing city space stems from attempts to create an environment conducive for settled life. Settled life, then, became possible through the emergence of permanent agriculture. Labor directed towards the creation of a settled life founds the history of the city: one that finds architecture with an important role to play. As Mumford describes settled life is “a life conducted with the aid of permanent shelters, permanent utilities like orchards, vineyards, and irrigation works, and permanent buildings for

protection and storage" (3). Just as the city is both a result and reflection of the multiplicity of human activity so too is its architecture.

Aldo Rossi points out architecture "came into being along with the first traces of the city" and is "deeply rooted in the formation of civilization" (21). The relationship between architecture and the body is one of mutual dependency. From vernacular architecture (structures built from found materials in the environment, for example, a clay hut or an igloo) and the simplest of sheds to the skyscrapers of corporate power, both the body and architecture have relied on one another for much of their social production and legibility. This relationship is often overlooked as a basic necessity for human activity in the process of social (re)production. As architect Phillip Johnson explains, the practice of architecture "next to agriculture, it is the most necessary to man [sic]. One must eat, one must have shelter" ("Pritzker Prize"). Architecture, then, is "inseparable from civilized life and the society in which it is manifested" (Rossi 21). Simultaneously, architecture's material existence and social meaning are bound to and produced by human beings engaged in socio-practical activity.

This understanding has important implications for thinking about the body within urban architectural space. Similar to architecture, the body, too,

cannot be constituted nor take on meaning outside of the material and social contexts from which it is enmeshed and is produced. Georges Bataille connects “the human order” to the built environment as it “is bound up from the start with the architectural order” (21). Thus defined, the relationship between architecture and the body is produced within and as a product of social space.

The material and discursive practices which produce social space, specifically here, urban architectural space, is of particular importance in unpacking the relationship of architecture and the body. To be sure, I take architecture to mean the physical built environment of the city and as Umberto Eco describes, “to indicate phenomena of industrial design and urban design as well as phenomena of architecture proper” (182). Incorporating the concepts of design and the phenomena of architecture proper are important in understanding the connection of architecture and the body. These concepts incorporate into the conversation the notions of material and discursive processes responsible for producing the built environment. For example, to construct a building to completion there first must be a plan to build, a plan which requires understandings of design. Each component of the architectural project, then, is comprised of a physical and social element. In the built environment, the physical and the social are never mutually exclusive. Leslie

Weisman comments on this interdependence maintaining physical and social space “reflect and rebound upon each other” as “neither is understandable without the other” (9). Further, Weisman suggests “we simply do not understand *who* we are until we know *where* we are” (9; emphasis mine). Space, then, provides an important framework for understanding the ways both architecture and bodies in urban space become constituted by the discourses and practices of everyday urban life.

An analysis of city space reveals the central position of architecture and the urban built form in not only the material organization of urban space but also the symbolic understanding and expression of life therein. Both architecture and the body are rendered legible by the discursive construction of social space and through its (re)articulation by social practice. Thinking through Lefebvre’s conception of social space, both the body and architecture are (re)produced materially and socially in and through discursively constituted relations of production that serve as relations of power. These relations of power have significant consequences for the urban lived experience. As Weisman explains some individuals and groups have the power to “create a world in which they and their priorities, beliefs, and operating procedures are not only dominant, but accepted and endorsed without

question" (10). As architecture and the body are produced materially and symbolically such forms, Zukin suggests, "shape both the city and our perception of it, they are material as well as symbolic" (42). The symbolic meanings embedded in architecture and the ways the social body is made legible are constituted by the discourses and practices that produce social space as the city. Thus, the discourses and practices at work in the city, always relational, always social, function in important ways for the organization of the power relations informing and disciplining our interpretations of urban lived experiences.

Understanding the city as produced discursively through material social relations, then, presents a useful framework for the move toward a better understanding of architectural space, the people that use it, and its spaces of emancipatory possibility. It is through the struggle between freedom and power wherein practices which produce space provide its spatial representation and meaning. As Foucault contends, within the social relations between people and urban built form, no architectural project by its very nature is "absolutely liberating" for "liberty is a practice" ("Power" 354). Still, he contends architecture holds emancipatory possibilities. Architecture holds the possibility to resolve social problems when the "liberating

intentions of the architect coincide with the real practice of people in the exercise of their freedom" ("Power" 355). As such, urban architectural space acts as a potential location for a more emancipated envisioning of the urban lived experience, one more open to the engagement and contestation of its existing order.

Within the frame of social relations, and specific to my purpose here, is the consideration of the body and its movement, in its relation to architectural space, as a site of contestation of the interlocking hegemonic discourses that constitute the city. Such discourses are (re)produced through urban lived experiences but are also that through which the city itself is made legible. Architecture does in fact influence behavior as the materiality of the city is closely associated with urban intelligibility. Hillier et al. contend the physical pattern of urban space "does, in very precise senses, create — or eliminate — 'life'" in the sense that it "determines a field of potential encounter and co-presence" (235). While architecture might be implicated in an indoctrination of intelligible spatial modalities, it has been traditionally thought to do so as a "kind of backdrop to relations between persons" (Tilley 2). The role of architecture in constituting life in the city is simply read or looked at and interpreted. Even de Certeau's walker in *The Practice of Everyday Life* merely

traversed urban space by strolling around the city's architecture. Karen Wells, however, states material culture, in this instance architecture, might be better understood "as encompassing all the objects of the city, their arrangement in space, their interaction with bodies, and the vantage points from which bodies see objects and are seen by objects" (137). Taking this one step further, I suggest in a very real sense architecture must be understood through the interactions with its users, that is, the corporeal connection between bodies and buildings.

To forward this new way of engaging architecture and the body, in its relation to the struggle between freedom and power, I utilize the art of parkour as both a unit of analysis and as a method of investigation. Known as *l'art du déplacement* [the art of displacement], parkour is defined as an art to help you overcome any obstacle in your path, an art of movement "focused on discovering original and creative ways to negotiate city spaces" (Bavinton 392). Parkour is a way of moving centered on overcoming obstacles by executing a series of moves such as jumping, climbing, and vaulting in an effort to efficiently pass over, through, and around any obstacle found in one's environment. Parkour functions as a way, even method, of

understanding and locating the self within and in relation to urban architectural space.

The practice of parkour acts as a critical exterior to normative considerations for urban spatial modalities and ways of thinking. As Atkinson describes parkour can offer its practitioner a challenge of dominant social constraints through “the use of urban gymnastics as social critique” (170). Therefore, parkour provides a useful form of criticism with which to problematize the relations of power which attempt to manage and distinguish its own space — that of the modern city.

Research Questions

This study focuses on several key issues detailed in the following research questions:

RQ 1. Is parkour an emancipatory practice, giving insight into the relationship between power and freedom?

RQ 2. How can the art of parkour be used to understand the relationship of architecture and the body?

These two research questions lead to the following goals. First, I seek a better understanding of the operational logics in urban space, their production and maintenance, and the ways they become readable and codified through urban architecture. Additionally, the aim is to further explicate the role urban architecture plays in the articulation of codified forms of power in urban space. Second, this study interrogates how traceurs, the practitioners of parkour, forefront such logics and offer new ways of being within the discourses and practices involved in (re)producing such a rationality. In that same vein, this research focuses on experiencing through practice the reciprocal relationship of power and freedom, specifically, at the intersection of urban architecture and the traceur body. Finally, while I am concerned with the possibility of social change, with parkour as the focal point of engagement, my investigation centers not on changing the material conditions but changes in the ways traceurs experience these conditions.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the production of social space, through the production of urban architectural space, and how the art of parkour attempts to (re)appropriate these spaces within the city. I investigate the reflexive and continuously (re)negotiated relationship of power and freedom, as defined by Foucault, in and through the corporeal

link of the traceur body and the architecture that constitutes the material and symbolic space of the city. The art of parkour, I argue, forefronts the relations of power through a corporeal connection with architecture. This connection functions to offer more emancipated alternatives both to and within the hegemonic discourses working to mark and discipline the space of the city. I use parkour as a method and an approach to knowledge and being as it acts as a critical exterior to urban architectural space. Through this examination, this study will demonstrate how parkour offers new insight into the intersections of the body and architectural space to bring to the fore the emancipatory potentialities therein.

To answer the research questions put forth in this study I employ an epistemology of doing as my method for investigation. This method is centered on a learning-by-doing approach focusing on the researcher as participant in the production of knowledge and experience within the field of study. As will be further explicated in Chapter IV, I am exploring the research questions while simultaneously learning how to be a traceur through the practice of parkour. To do this, I enrolled in a parkour training seminar at B.A.S.E. Fitness in Noblesville, Indiana. The experience of the training class then developed into my participating in the parkour

community and gaining empirical insight into parkour's relationship in the discursive formation of power and freedom. The advantage of this particular method is found in the experience gained through my participation with other new traceurs. I am learning as my counterparts learn. Most importantly, my positionality within the experience lends itself to particular personal insights about the practice of parkour and draws attention to how this personal journey elicits emancipatory potential in and through ostensibly freer movement within architectural space.

To understand architecture's influence in the lived experience one must begin with an investigation of the social relations through which power is produced in the city. This tracing of the path of power begins with a look at how and where power is exercised. The embodiment of power is perhaps most notable in the architecture of the city. Increasingly, the ways individuals interpret lived experience in and around the architectural space of the modern city is becoming far more complex and diverse. Urban inhabitants continuously reappropriate "conventional usage of cities and the built environment" through the "countering of it by subversive urban practice" (Mould 738). Parkour is such a practice.

According to Mould there are approximately 40,000 traceurs in the United States alone (740). The numbers reported by Mould demonstrate parkour as a world-wide phenomenon. Therefore, this study is important in order to further explore the production of social space, through the production of urban architectural space, and how the art of parkour attempts to appropriate these spaces within the city. Further, this study is important for a better understanding of the reflexive and continuously (re)negotiated relationship of power and freedom in and through the corporeal link of the traceur body and the architecture that constitutes the material and symbolic space of the city. The art of parkour, I argue, forefronts the relations of power through a corporeal connection with architecture which functions to offer more emancipated alternatives both to and within the hegemonic discourses that discipline the space of the city. Through this examination, this study demonstrates its importance in furthering an understanding of how parkour offers new insight into the intersections of the body and architectural space to bring to the fore the emancipatory potentialities therein.

A better understanding of the relationship between urban architecture, the body, and the organizations of power is beneficial to city life as well as to the individuals who practice parkour. Bavinton claims, it is in

these codified forms of power found in the built environment where parkour's free movements have the potential to illuminate arbitrary practices where others are marginalized and power is "challenged, disrupted, and resisted" (393). Therefore, the benefits of this study are located in its potential to build upon the scholarly conversations centering on the appropriation of urban architectural space toward feelings of a more emancipated urban lived experience. In doing so, this study engages parkour as both a method and unit of analysis to investigate this counter use of urban architectural space. Parkour was chosen because it provides a useful form of criticism with which to problematize the relations of power which function to delimit any exteriority to the rationality that attempts to manage and distinguish its own space—the modern city. Further, parkour offers practitioners a way of engaging differently the material-spatial embedded relations of power.

Building Parkour

The literature positions parkour as an antagonist to capitalism while also positing parkour offers the traceur a way of achieving a sense of freedom. Yet, what the literature lacks is the notion of process in its thinking. Current research on parkour makes clear this practice challenges dominant

logics and hegemonic discourses. Further, these debates forward the critical position that parkour reinterprets such logics and discourses while at the same time offering their critique. However, if parkour is able to challenge the production of space and reinterpret meanings of architecture and the body, this study is concerned with what consequences for freedom and power such actions may have.

Building from these positions, this study is concerned, too, with the ways traceurs inscribe themselves into the process of producing these meanings. If Laclau and Mouffe are correct, what is taken as a social order exists within a whole host of diverse practices of which the notion of society has “failed to domesticate,” the practice of parkour, then, is able to play a role in the production of a social order (96). In this sense, parkour playfully engages the balance of power and freedom and in doing so alters the way power is able to produce itself and reproduce hegemonic discourses.

Perhaps more importantly the body of parkour scholarship is missing an expansion on the binary of resistance to power through a form of nonconformist movement in city space. While this is a major point of contention in both the literature and in the practice of parkour, such positioning of parkour lacks the type of fluid thinking which marks both

parkour and the understanding of the discursive limitations of the city. The literature quite convincingly presents parkour's ability to confront power in urban space and challenge interpretations of the traceur body. Yet, such arguments position parkour as an enactment of personal freedom against a fixed hegemonic power encoded in the built environment.

While I do not disagree with the arguments forwarded in the parkour literature I do, however, argue such engagements are not so easily confined and defined in the urban sphere. In other words, the power codes implicit in urban architecture, similar to the traceur body, are never fixed and are in continuous negotiation. The literature sees architecture as participant in the production of meaning, yet, treats parkour as something that happens to architecture. This relationship, I argue, is more complex and nuanced. What does a displaced body mean to urban architectural space and what meanings does the architecture have for a displaced body? Writings of the body and architecture are struggled over outside of the practice of parkour. Therefore, the power challenged at the site of the corporeal connection between body and building is never quite as consistent as the parkour literature finds it. My study utilizes the existing literature but also expands the current body of

parkour scholarship with a more flexible account of both parkour and the city.

Specific to this study is parkour, if it is to be a practice of freedom, does not go unnoticed by power. In this balance of enacting power to elicit freedom we see responses by power which implies a movement of its own. Foucault points out that power is able to essentially regroup and enact different technologies of power to absorb socio-cultural phenomena and co-opt them in such a way their subversive characteristics are spectacluarized and nullified. He explains “for each move by one adversary, there is an answering one by the other” (“Power/Knowledge”57). Therefore, if the techniques and technologies enacted by hegemonic forces are not static but do in fact have a strategic interplay with subversive thinking and behavior it can be said hegemonic power enacts a movement of its own in order to answer any potential subversion. The art of parkour, then, can be seen as having a certain influence in the formation and forms a hegemonic power takes in its own movement to absorb and align traceur’s attempts at spatial freedom. Through parkour, traceurs dialectically engage in the ever-changing and fluctuating movement between power and freedom. They do so by enacting a certain power into this interplay and in so doing they insert

individual and even personal acts of freedom which complicate and participate in freedom and power's balance, production, and maintenance in urban space.

In so doing, parkour enacts its own power by forefronting⁴ and recognizing the ways power is produced. Yet, as I will argue, a hegemonic power at work in the city has to adapt its focus and approach in order to continue to act on the practice of parkour and the traceur body. It is perhaps power's ability to move and conceal its dominance, its own deceptively free movement, which causes this reflexive play between power and freedom to go unnoticed in the body of literature theorizing the value of parkour to urban lived experiences. This is potentially why parkour is often dismissed by scholars as a political diversion or the carnivalesque. Further, parkour's participation in the balance of freedom and power in urban life is often

⁴ In the book, *Strangely Familiar: Narratives of Architecture and the City*, the term *forefronting* was used to describe how architectural theorist could foreground or make prominent architecture's role in shaping experience. Similarly, here, I use the term to describe a way of positioning phenomena at the foreground of critical inquiry and making it knowable or visible.

dismissed as simply coping with life in late modern capitalism (see Ortuzar 186 – 89). Yet, parkour serves as a legitimate practice to offer its participant a freer engagement of urban space which is not so easily reduced to distraction or temporary subversion.

Parkour does outwardly resist forms of domination found in urban space; however, it seeks these out with an eye toward resistance centered on finding opportunities to improve self. While some traceurs say parkour is not a political practice, this practice is, as Smith insists, “inherently political” (“Art of Displacement”). For Smith, the reason parkour is inherently political is because it “brings a sense of freedom of expression, challenge to social behavior and autonomy” which are themselves inherently political acts (“Art of Displacement”). The practice of parkour is a discipline committed to changing the traceur’s experience of life by tapping into and bringing out the potential for the self through a realization of the potential of the body. Parkour’s focal point is from the inside out. Parkour first seeks individual change and transformation by utilizing potential for personal growth through opportunities found in connection with the environment. The traceur is something one becomes, as a developmental process in a way of

life or becoming, and not a temporary performance of play or a momentary subversion.

Change located at the level of the individual has important implications for understanding the body and the self within urban space. Foucault teaches the body is a strategic site and target of power. As parkour offers a reinterpretation of the body it also challenges interpretations of the power which produces the meanings and disciplinings informing such interpretation. Parkour specifically engages this struggle at the site of the body. In revisiting Foucault's argument, liberty is a practice, it is clear both freedom and power are never finished. The unfixed nature of this relationship implies to be free requires both the practice of freedom and the presence and practice of power. Moreover, it also implies these are brought about by human practices they are not innate or given social qualities but actions to be enacted and performed. As such, parkour holds a certain utility for traceurs in their adaptation and performative and discursive struggle within the tensions of the power-freedom dialectic.

Organizing the Study

This dissertation consists of six chapters. Following this chapter, *Experiencing the City as a Spatial Practice*, Chapter II begins with an overview of the theories informing my analysis of the relation between power and freedom and how this is (re)produced and challenged within the relationship between architecture and the body.

Chapter III continues the theory building through an analysis of parkour as communication. This chapter then provides a historical account of how parkour developed into its current form followed by a review of the body of literature addressing and theorizing the practice of parkour. The focus of this chapter is to situate the foundation of the study and describe how this dissertation fits into the study of this cultural phenomenon.

Chapter IV outlines the methods chosen to analyze traceurs and their engagement with urban architectural space. The method I have chosen is an epistemology of doing as introduced by Gajjala, Rybas, and Altman in 2006. Through an epistemology of doing I explain how I engaged the research as a traceur, how I went about executing my research plan, and provide a rationale for the importance of this methodological choice.

In addition, Chapter V begins my analysis of the relationship between architecture and the body by explicating my engagement of this relationship as a traceur practicing parkour. Here, I address my research questions centered on a better understanding of architecture and the body. This chapter focuses a discussion on how power and freedom are produced and challenged through the traceur body and the architecture of the city. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an in-depth discussion of both of the research questions: one founded on the empirical knowledge afforded by the research method.

In Chapter VI, I summarize the findings of the study. In doing so, I position the findings of the study in and among the theoretical and the methodological implications for understanding urban lived experiences. Further, I add to the discussion by engaging possibilities for future research in understanding the ways power and freedom are produced and challenged within the relationship between architecture and the body. Finally, I argue the implications this study has for the discipline of communication. I argue the importance for scholars to turn a critical eye toward the production of urban architectural space to better understand the ways individuals render legible themselves, others, and their environments.

A Note on Language

It is important here before moving into the theoretical portion of this study to comment on the language used to frame the relationship between power and freedom. Foucault often uses the terms liberty and freedom interchangeably. My analysis of parkour differs from Foucault's account of power and freedom in the distinction between the uses of the terms liberty and freedom. Liberty implies freedom as it is a result of a process of liberation. Yet, to be liberated implies a kind of finished product in the struggle with that which once dominated. One wins or gains their liberation over an oppressor of some kind. In this sense, the use of the term liberty sets up a sort of zero-sum game with the production and practice of power. As such, and through this particular frame, the social relations from which power is produced are dichotomized and their agonism functions adversarially.

Traceurs are not unaware of power. In fact, a founding philosophy in parkour is being aware of such power and to always find potential freedom by interacting with such forms. This distinction becomes increasingly important as this study moves forward. I use the term freedom here quite purposefully. Parkour does not liberate individuals from an oppressor or forms of domination. The practice of parkour does challenge these relations of power but not in such a

way as to break them apart and recombine them in forms which find the traceur completely liberated in opposition to power. Freedom, here, implies a continuous reflexive and dialectical struggle with power. Further, the term emancipatory is also used in this study to describe experiences of personal freedom. To be sure, I use the term emancipatory to describe spatial practices and, as Loretta Lees describes as “ideas about the city as space for freedom, cradle for civilization, and seed-bed for democracy” (5). Further, the term emancipatory is used to indicate practices which take on *emancipatory qualities* by “challenging culture and pointing at implications of descriptions and constrains of discourse” (Rybas and Gajjala). As an emancipatory practice, the strength and legitimacy of parkour is found through the power to enact personal freedom. Power relations are challenged and reinterpreted through the practice of parkour. While one can enact power to bring about a freer existence in urban space, one simply cannot completely efface forms of power found in space. In fact, as will be made clear momentarily, freedom and power are necessarily co-existent and mutually dependent.

CHAPTER II

TRACING THE PATH OF POWER: TOWARD A THEORETICAL CONCEPTUALIZATION OF DISCOURSE, SPACE, POWER, AND FREEDOM

This study is concerned with social change but does so through an understanding of how traceurs engage a potentially more emancipated lived experience. To do so, I will ground my interrogation of parkour with the relevant scholarship; however, I will draw mainly from the theorizations of Judith Butler, Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

Specifically, I use Foucault's arguments on the relationship of power and freedom and how those are produced discursively through spatial practice. In addition to Foucault, Butler will be used to ground and support discussions of discursivity and performativity. Butler's arguments will be used to explore the traceur's relationship to power and the ways the traceur is produced as subject. Further, Butler's work will situate parkour within the never-finished relationship between discourse and performativity. In addition, I will turn to the work of Lefebvre and his theories on the production of space. Of particular importance to this study is Lefebvre's founding arguments for a practice-based spatial analysis with regard to understanding the production of urban space. Moving into Chapter

III, I will use de Certeau's theorization on the practice of everyday life for discussions on the ways traceurs can make tactical use of architectural space.

Power and Freedom

For Foucault, modern or disciplinary forms of power are comprised of procedures, practices, and expert inquiries co-emerged with apparatuses and institutions of power such as asylums, prison, hospitals, schools and other forms of state power. Foucault explains such disciplinary power is "possessed of highly specific procedural techniques . . . [and] presupposes a tightly knit grid of material coercions rather than the physical existence of a sovereign" ("Power/Knowledge" 104). These material coercions function as techniques of power in the form of social constraints. However, where such constraints are thought to be imposed restrictions by those who possess power over those who do not, Foucault maintains power, and in many ways these social constraints, can become forms of empowerment. This is because power not only "produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, [and] produces discourse" (Foucault, "Power/Knowledge" 119). As such, and in relation to freedom, power can be enabling and therefore productive as it is never wholly limiting.

Disciplinary power, then, affects subjectivity and the self-recognition of our position in society. Foucault asserts disciplinary power differentiates individuals through distinct operations as it:

refers individual actions to a whole that is at once a field of comparison, a space of differentiation and the principle of a rule to be followed...that the rule be made to function as a minimal threshold, as an average to be respected or as an optimum towards which one must move...It introduces, through this 'value-giving' measure, the constraint of a conformity that must be achieved. ("Discipline and Punish" 182-183)

The effect of disciplinary power is it hierarchizes, homogenizes and perhaps most dangerously, it normalizes. This technique of power attempts to discipline individuals and in so doing acts as a constraint of conformity. These techniques are directed toward producing certain conformity in producing subjectivity. As such techniques are part of social life, who we are in society cannot escape its influence.

Yet, while the techniques of power appear all too determining, subjects still have a certain amount of freedom to challenge and think differently such constraints. It works on the one hand to produce subjectivity while on the other

it is still susceptible to our challenges through enacting our own power in productive ways. For Foucault, not only is the element of freedom also part of this relationship but is in fact necessary for power to function. Foucault points out there is “no such entity as power” but power only exists or functions “as exercised by some on others” (“Power” 340). Power, then, only exists when it is put into action. Relations of power, however, do not act directly on others. For power to find its most effective expression it must work on the level of individuals’ perception of available choices of thought and action — in short — their desires. Therefore, power becomes effective in the field of possibilities. It acts as a certain “conduct of conducts” as a “management of possibilities” (Foucault, “Power” 341). Further, while power constrains or even forbids absolutely it is “always a way of acting upon one or more acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action” (Foucault, “Power” 341). This is always relational for in the field of possibilities the thinking, acting subject is always able to inscribe itself.

As power is produced discursively it is in constant contestation. For power to exist the subject must have the ability to speak back, to be capable of action. Without the subjects’ possibility of action there is no “possibility” for power to act on, constrain, or even empower. Foucault contends there must be

an element of freedom in the relations of power. Power, he claims, is exercised “only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are ‘free’” (“Power” 342). This is because of the subjects’ relation to regimes of truth and disciplinary power is inherent in relations of and as power. The notion of freedom is important because in the absence of possible reactions or modes of behavior there is no relation of/to power. Foucault uses the example of a slave: “slavery is not a power relationship when a man is in chains, only when he has some possible mobility, even a chance of escape” (“Power” 342). In other words, freedom is both the condition and precondition for the exercise of power.

Thus, power as described by Foucault is not static or predetermined. It is produced along with freedom in a discursive relationship. This relationship should not be understood as a simple binary of those who have power and those who do not. Further, it is important for the understanding of how power and freedom operate within society to look beyond the notions of violence and consent. While violence and consent operate as strategic techniques and expression in this relationship, for “power can never do without one or the other, “they are “instruments or results” of power and do not constitute the basic nature of power (Foucault, “Power” 341). Because power requires an element of freedom it must be exercised, even analyzed, as an active process.

Power and freedom share a reflexive relationship and each must be continuously practiced. Parkour enters into this particular struggle as both a practice of power and of freedom.

The dynamic of acting upon an acting subject, or individuals capable of action, is the locus of the relationship between freedom and power. For Foucault, freedom and power are not necessities of social life but are the political task inherent in social life. However, this political task finds at its core power relations “rooted deep in the social nexus, not a supplementary structure over and above ‘society’” (Foucault, “Power” 343). Further, as Foucault notes, to live “in society is...to live in such a way that some can act on the actions of others” (“Power” 343). For Foucault, to think of a society without relations of power is to only think of society as an abstraction. Freedom, then, cannot be exercised outside of power. Power, too, relies on “freedom’s refusal to submit” (Foucault, “Power” 342). At the very heart of power, Foucault argues, is “the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom” (“Power” 342). As such, Foucault insists we should not analyze power with power, or think of freedom and power as an easy dichotomy. We must see them as relational and situational, and turn an eye toward their agonism as a relation. For Foucault, this relation is one “that is at the same time mutual incitement and struggle”

("Power" 342). Framing power and freedom as antagonists positions this relationship as involved in continuous struggle where neither side is lost in the other nor dominated. In other words, for power to find its expression it must be accompanied by a certain freedom of action. The freedom of action necessarily in this incitement presents the possibility for freedom to employ techniques to contest power through a power of its own.

For Foucault, the relationship of power and freedom occurs in the discursive terrain where the struggle for knowledge and power are essentially fought out. What is demarcated as knowable in and through discursive contestation becomes powerful when, as Raymond Williams notes, a "whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living" function as hegemonic (110). A whole body of practices and expectations can become hegemonic because in any society there are any number of relations of power which, as Foucault contends:

permeate, characterize and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. ("Power/Knowledge" 93)

Therefore, the exercise of power is dependent upon an “economy of discourses of truth” to which we are subjected and also producer (“Power/Knowledge” 94). It is through the effective dispersion of dominant discourses, through a whole body of practices which delimit possibilities for action while celebrating others, where certain domains of knowledge and relations of power produce regulatory norms.

For Foucault, thinking and acting are tied to tradition and bound in relationship with productive apparatuses and institutions which are established to manage individuals in social life. Here, the apparatuses and institutions help to shape urban lived experience as they shape and discipline normative urban life. Cultural Studies scholar, Lawrence Grossberg explains these apparatuses as being constituted as an ensemble of heterogeneous practices to “bring together various ‘regimes’ of practices” and act as “particular technologies or ‘programmings’ of behavior” (101). For Foucault the apparatus itself is the system of relations. For example, the church is an institution which functions as an apparatus which provides a space for individuals to share their ideas and practices with one another. As they pass these lessons, morals, ideas on to their children the church becomes a way to program behavior. Yet, what Foucault points out is the church itself exists within the system of relations (the congregation participating in shared practices). Society is, however, imbued with such apparatuses and

institutions. The elements of which, Foucault describes, consist of “discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid” (“Power/Knowledge” 194). Apparatuses, thus defined, participate in the (re)production of regimes of truth. Further, these apparatuses and institutions delimit the realm of possibilities for individuals to circumscribe what is knowable about themselves and their life-world. They inscribe a disciplinary power as they function to inform and constrain possibilities for how the self is constituted specifically within the city. As Foucault points out, power acts “upon their actions: an action upon an action, on possible or actual future or present actions” (“Power” 340). This discipline functions in the urban milieu on the level of possibilities for what is actionable and knowable for individuals.

Within one’s environment there is, then, a power of knowledge and also a knowledge of power. This is also tethered to what is taken as truth. Knowledge, Foucault argues, is “always the historical and circumstantial result of conditions outside the domain of knowledge” (“Power” 13). Foucault explains there is no partial or neutral knowledge, there is only knowledge “in the form of a certain number of actions...by which the human being violently takes hold of a certain

number of things, reacts to a certain number of situations, and subjects them to force" ("Power" 14). Knowledge or what gets taken as true or knowable is essentially a way of selecting-out truths among myriad readings and possibilities produced and informed by material relations. What counts as truth, then, are those readings and codified conceptions promoting the interests of those doing the selecting. Thus, knowledge is always a "strategic relation in which [people are] placed" ("Power" 14). These strategic relations are based on relations of power and political relations in society. Foucault notes each society "has its regime of truth...the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true" ("Power" 131). What gets taken as truth and our knowledge of what is true is the result of a process of struggle between individuals interlocked in material and discursive social relations.

There is a reflexive relationship with truth and power as truth is "already power" and there is a power of truth (Foucault, "Power" 133). Foucault contends there is a battle "for truth" and a "battle around truth" struggled over in "the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true" ("Power" 132). In other words, what is taken as truth is produced through power relations. These relations of power connect truth to a "circular relation with systems of power that produce

and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it” (Foucault, “Power” 132). His position is one where we are subjected to a true discourse which:

[D]ecides, transmits and itself extends upon the effects of power. In the end, we are judged, condemned, classified, determined in our undertakings, destined to a certain mode of living or dying, as a function of the true discourses which are the bearers of the specific effects of power. (Foucault, “Power/Knowledge” 94)

Further, Foucault positions truth as “a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements” (“Power” 132). Truth becomes powerful as different relations of power produce truth differently because of the material practices or techniques of power afforded by the various power relations. There are those in particular positions of authority or expertise who dictate what is to be taken as true: positions constituted through power relations.

A discursively constructed truth about urban space is performed and reiterated through the built environment. As Richard Sennett describes, cities are haunted with the threat of being overwhelmed by social interactions. These are dealt with by power through “fixing a self-image *in advance*” (“Uses of Disorder”

6). One technique used by city planners, according to Sennett, has been the establishing of “projective needs” (“Uses of Disorder” 6). The goal is to predict future physical and social needs of a community which materializes in the planning of urban space. As an act of preemptive defense against an unknown future, city design centers on the attempt to “build an image or identity that...is unified, and filters out threats in social experience” (Sennett, “Uses of Disorder” 7). Sennett believes individuals’ sense of place to be “deflated” in what he calls a “truth value” (“Uses of Disorder” 10). One’s sense of place becomes homogenized through design, in this case to control the unknown, as State interests dictate truth values about how one should experience urban space.

The truth value produced and maintained in design can be seen in revisiting Mike Davis’ account of bum-proofing the garbage bins outside of city restaurants. The physical barricades or baroque enclosures around the bins are in place to keep the homeless from rummaging through the trash for discarded food. It is also to keep them from occupying the same space as paying customers. For the homeless, the truth communicated through design is a warning symbol for them to keep out clearly demonstrating they are not wanted. For patrons of these restaurants the barricades go unnoticed as the message in design is not meant for them. In fact, the placement of the bins is kept purposely out of sight so

that this group is not exposed to the garbage. Patrons of the restaurants mostly likely do not even venture into the alleyways where the bins are located and stick to areas of the sidewalks and storefronts. A truth about access and use is communicated through built structures as architecture participates in filtering out threats in the social experience. Architecture, then, helps to maintain an image of the city and an image or truth about who is accepted and where. This perpetuates a truth about the city and deflates people's sense of place as it purifies experience for some causing a dissonance between an intended image and actual existence in urban space.

At issue for the relationship between freedom and power are the social constraints informing thought and action and how these are produced through the struggle over whose truth counts. There is, essentially, no truth only that which counts as true through discursive struggle. This is constituted through discourses themselves which are neither true nor false. Ideas are discursively produced as true and become powerful because they are normalized. Their normalization finds them becoming a regulating force or regulatory norm which includes or excludes other forms of knowledge and truth on the basis of their commensurability with what is deemed legible by discourse.

Discourse and Performativity

Ways of knowing and acting are included and excluded by discourses and constitute individuals as subjects. Discourses functioning as techniques of power organize the individual and mark “him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity” and impose a “law of truth on him that he must recognize and others have to recognize in him” (Foucault, “Power” 331). Foucault defines subjects as individuals who are “subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his [or her] own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge” (“Power” 331). This, he suggests, implies two meanings. First, there are forms and relations of power which subjugate individuals. Second, these make individuals subject to forms of power. Yet, this is always intertwined in social relations and at specific temporal-historical moments once again suggesting their reflexive and never-finished struggle.

For Laclau and Mouffe, the temporal-historical moment of a discursive structure is of particular importance to the subject and her or his position. Specifically, this is important for understanding the subject-position’s openness to challenge or contestation. They argue the subject and her or his position is only manifested within a discursive structure. The subject, they explain, cannot “be the origin of social relations [for] all ‘experience’ depends on precise

discursive conditions of possibility” (Laclau and Mouffe 115). The discursive conditions of possibility are central to ways the subject is constituted as power acts on the possible actions of individuals rendering certain experiences and conditions possible while excluding others. This constitutes, for Laclau and Mouffe, subject-positions which are “discursive position[s]” because of individual’s participation in “the open character of every discourse” (115). The open character of discourse is central to individuals’ ability to challenge power and enact agency. Laclau and Mouffe argue the discursive structure is “an articulatory practice which constitutes and organizes social relations” (96). Articulatory practices are social actions which mediate social relations as they challenge or reiterate the structured totality offered by the discourse which renders them intelligible. Therefore, social actions are structured by discourses which appear to present a totality of knowledge or at least what is circumscribed as knowable by discourse (in/as discourses of truth). These discourses compete for dominance (and over knowledge) and because the totality of any discourse is never fully realized nor fixed neither are the subject and its position(s).

Individuals, then, constitute themselves as subjects in and through the regimes of truth operating in the historical-temporal moments in which the subject is enmeshed. These are, as Butler states, “presented as the available norms

through which self-recognition can take place" ("Giving an Account" 22). Butler reiterates Foucault's notion of the ways in which the subject comes into being. The subject is constituted through the always already articulated historical and social contexts which limit our ability to give a comprehensive account of ourselves. Butler explains:

There is no 'I' that can fully stand apart from the social conditions of its emergence, no 'I' that is not implicated in a set of conditioning moral norms, which, being norms, have a social character which exceed a purely personal or idiosyncratic meaning. ("Giving an Account" 7)

Our knowledge of self, our subjectification, is intertwined in the social conditions of our emergence. In effect, we make choices about which practices, or social actions, to enact based on their commensurability with the regulatory norms produced through discourse.

The emergence of self, of the subject, is constrained by such discursive conditioning. However, while discursive conditions may constrain through regimes of truth they are never fully able to articulate the subject and her or his lived experience. This is attributed to social forces and structures appearing to the subject to be outside of her or himself. The notion of an alterity is important in understanding self because self-consciousness is "always driven, quite literally,

by an alterity” which becomes internalized as “a set of enigmatic signifiers that pulse through us in ways that make us permanently and partially foreign to ourselves” (Butler, “Giving an Account” 98). Thus, the “I” Butler speaks of internalizes discursively produced regulatory norms – produced in discourses of truth. The regulatory norms become guiding influences in how we understand ourselves. This alterity internalized by the subject is a constitutive moment of subjectivity. As norms are discursively produced they inform and constrain but do not determine. Discursive conditionings of thought and behavior provide a framework for the recognition of self and one’s subjectivity. It provides a reference point for decisions about behaviors one can or should enact to (re)produce oneself and her or his life. For Butler “any relations to the regime of truth will at the same time be a relation to myself” (“Giving an Account” 2). The connection of self and truth is perpetuated through power relations to which individuals are subjected and become “their formative principle” (Butler, “Bodies that Matter” 34). Regimes of truth, in governing subjectivity, do so in relation to the mechanisms of power which construct a framework about and for an understanding of the world.

For Butler the governing of subjectivity is due to the exclusionary nature of discourse. Butler defines discourse as “complex and convergent chains in which

'effects' are vectors of power" ("Bodies that Matter" 187). Like Foucault and Laclau and Mouffe, Butler sees discourse as a constitutive force but one which is never stable. The constitutive effects of discourse are constantly engaged in struggles giving rise to the necessity for its constant (re)articulation. As Butler points out, what is constituted in discourse is not fixed by discourse but provides occasions for individuals to act. However, this does not ensure any and all actions are possible but that discourse functions along reiterative chains to render some practices legible while excluding others as illegible. Thus, the power of discourse is found in its ability to "circumscribe the domain of intelligibility" (Butler, "Bodies that Matter" 187). Therefore, the notion of performativity cannot be taken as simple exercising of the will or a set of arbitrary choices of social action. This, for Butler, misses the important "historicity of discourse...the historicity of norms [and how they] constitute the power of discourse to enact what it names" ("Bodies that Matter" 187). Discourse derives this power from its relationship with performativity as they are mutually constitutive.

Discourse and performativity work together to create regulatory norms. Norms function as regulatory laws constituting the interior and exterior of what counts as being: or regulate what beings count as normal. The performative act (in action or in speech) reiterates the discursive norm as a regulatory law. For

Butler, the performative act functions as a normalizing force through its “power to establish what counts as ‘being’” because it “works not only through reiteration, but through exclusion as well” (“Bodies that Matter” 188). This requires constant reiteration in order to constitute a regulatory force in social life. In fact, discourse is reliant, for its reproduction, upon the performative action to cite its authority. Discourse functions as power in its ability to mark this inclusion and exclusion in an effort at stabilizing its constitutive effects. Because such effects can never fully stabilize meaning it creates a “constitutive outside” complete with demarcations of “the unspeakable, the unviable, the nonnarrativizable” (Butler, “Bodies that Matter” 188). The perpetuation of a constitutive outside “secures and, hence, fails to secure the very borders of materiality” (Butler, “Bodies that Matter” 188). Discourse and performativity work reflexively to induce certain performances and, in so doing, induces understandings of the material world. Those performances, then, reinscribe discourse and its regulatory norms. The performative act functions as a modality of power through a (re)articulation of discourse compelling certain reiterations while exiling others to the margins.

Identity is produced by a historical regulating and citational process socializing us as subjects. Individuals come to learn their roles by being subjected

to a dominant discourse which teaches appropriate actions rendering them normal, rational, even invisible as givens. Similarly, one also learns appropriate uses for the body through the frame of dominant discourse. These modalities of movement manifest themselves as appropriate ways of walking, standing, dressing, stopping at crosswalks, using stairs. These are just a few examples, yet, they are the result of a constant repetition or reiteration of discourse. This circumscribes the domain of intelligibility (what actions are appropriate, available, or knowable) because certain behaviors (even thoughts) are seen as normal while others are unthinkable. As we continuously reenact normative behaviors they become performative as they reiterate the regulatory norms outlined by discourse. Further, performative acts are citational as they draw from discourse an authoritative source to justify certain actions. In conforming to a set of uses of the body rendered appropriate by discourse; those uses essentially cite their authoritative source, which is discourse giving discourse the power to enact what it names.

Considering the exterior of appropriate movement, or movements constructed as not being *normal*, can provide insight into how movement is constrained and constructed through performativity and discourse. The act of walking down the sidewalk is not only expected in urban space it often goes

unnoticed until something happens that perturbs this expectation or draws attention. If one has ever walked down the street and tripped and fallen, for example, she or he has experienced the embarrassment of being outside the norm: of perturbing expected movement. In many ways the fallen body is not normal and leaves the person susceptible to ridicule and feelings of humiliation. The fallen body, at least momentarily, fails to conform to a set of uses of the body rendered suitable by discourse. The potential for feeling self-conscious or being made fun of for falling points to the ways that movement, in this case the simple act of walking, is disciplined. Tripping and falling on the spectrum of possibility is not terribly abnormal but brings with it the imperative to get back up and regain one's composure. In the moment of being on the ground one is well-aware of this fact; yet, before the instance of falling normative movement, the act of walking down the sidewalk, went unquestioned. Feeling compelled to get back on one's feet and reenter the norm stems from a form of discipline in how movement is audienced by others in urban space but also, in its exteriority to normative movement, reinscribes a dominant discourse that constructs the act of walking as the norm.

Because discourse can never fully secure the borders of materiality and can never completely discipline uses of the body, movements counter to the

discursive norm, such as parkour, find a certain freedom in the constitutive outside. Each performative act in parkour, for example, a cat leap over a stairwell, as well as the traceur's subjectivity, occurs within relations of discourse as power. The enactment of a traceur's power is an enactment of her or his agency. Roland Bleiker points out there is "no essence to human agency" but rather recognition of practices which produce the "complexities that are involved in a formulation of human agency" (209). Emirbayer and Mische provide a more detailed definition of agency describing it as:

A temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past...but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment). (963)

The past, present, and future coalesce wherein the social actor then makes decisions of thought and action based on moments and contexts in an ongoing process. Agency is found in the complexities, perhaps web, of structures, schemas, and the constitutive practices of social life. Traceurs executing monkey vaults⁵ over architectural objects rearticulate but also challenge relations of power

by exercising their freedom through acts of agency. As Butler comments, one is “in power even as one opposes it, formed by it as one reworks it” (“Bodies that Matter” 241). It is within “this simultaneity” wherein also exists “the condition for action itself” (“Bodies that Matter” 241). Traceurs are never outside of power as it defines both them and the conditions under which they act. Therefore, agency is central to parkour’s ability to find occasions for action and the traceur’s reworking of the power they challenge.

As the subject is never complete in this process, traceurs are able to imagine alternative possibilities in challenging disciplinary and constraining regulatory norms because agency can be “derived from the impossibility of choice” (Butler, “Bodies that Matter” 124). Traceurs exercise agency on the one hand as the discourse of the city creates limitations through regulatory norms while on the other these limitations create the conditions for action. In engaging these conditions for action traceurs challenge the discursive limits of the city for there exist possibilities outside of the regulatory laws of spatial modality. Therefore, in enacting a performance of parkour which is incommensurate with

⁵ The various moves in parkour will be described and defined with greater detail in Chapters IV and V.

dominant discourse, the traceur's agency, and acts of freedom, are located in the "double-movement of being constituted in and by the signifier" of discourse (Butler, "Bodies that Matter" 220). In being formed by power even as one reworks it, traceurs continuously challenge the reiterative chains of discourse by inscribing their own truth or counter discourse. On the one hand, parkour functions ontologically as it *is* a performance, and on the other functions epistemologically *as* a performance. The traceur's agency and enactment of freedom not only operates in the multiple and shifting dimensions of discourse but also offers a way to re-think the practitioner's relationship to the structure of urban life.

Parkour as a social act, a performative act, struggles over knowledge about ways of being in the world and thus is a struggle occurring in the relationship between power and freedom. Parkour's goal is not, nor could it ever be, total subversion but a way of achieving a personal freedom by engaging fluidly with what are constituted as impossible choices for action. Parkour acts explicitly within the fissures, or double movement, of discourse to challenge and rearticulate dominant ways of thinking and of disciplining spatial practice. Parkour is an exercise of agency in as much as it works to inscribe the practitioner's power to use space but also to (re)codify the power relations which

constitute the *normal* functioning and materiality of architectural space and the body.

Through a Foucauldian analysis of power/knowledge as discourse, theorizations of resistance tend to center on the possibilities for alternative discourses to develop. In so doing, alternative discourses produce new or counter ways of thinking, knowing, and acting. The potential for these counter discourses to effect change in the lived experience is found in their being empowered so as to effectively inscribe their own discourse. To buttress this point, Bavinton explains such acts of resistance are “more effectively interpreted as an exercise of power rather than a struggle *against* power” (394; emphasis mine). Individuals, through acts of agency and empowering the constitutive outside, find the capacity to think differently, know differently, and experience differently. It is in the exteriors of hegemonic discourse wherein the potential is found to elicit experiences which are more self-determined, autonomous, and even freer. Therefore, as the architecture of the city presents a codified power in its representation — as it acts as a technique of power — it is through this relationship where traceurs find possibilities to employ techniques, exercises of power, which enact their freedom.

Space, Architecture, and the Body

With the endless advertisements that adorn urban space and iconic buildings, even in their absence, such as the World Trade Center towers, it may seem obvious to suggest architecture carries symbolic meaning. Yet, to only consider the symbolic meaning as communicated through the physicality of architecture would overlook the ways such meanings are produced. This is because architecture is not simply an object but “a process, not a thing but a flow, not an abstract idea but a lived thought” (Borden 9). Of particular importance for the ways architecture is perceived are the myriad constitutive social relations producing both its utility and derived meaning. As a product and result of human activity architecture reflects social relations as it represents “those who have the power to define their society’s symbolic universe” (Weisman 10). Architecture embodies cultural codes bearing witness to the past and the forms of power responsible for its material and symbolic meaning. However, architecture is not a simple backdrop to social drama. The social spaces in which architecture takes form and function are not voids in which material was placed. Architecture as a process, as a lived thought, is produced through human activity and towards purposeful ends. Architecture is at once the medium and outcome of social relations. In fact, any discourse on space, Lefebvre notes, is a discourse of space

and each “discourse *on space* can...do no more than supply clues to, and testimony about, this productive process” (37; emphasis mine). One cannot engage a discourse about a particular space without understanding the knowledge of space is bound within and produced by the very discourses and practices an analysis hopes to engage. Therefore, architecture does not sit in the background as a *mis-en-scene* of urban lived experience as city space is a lived practice where architecture is both producer *of* and produced *by* the socio-spatial practices in which it is enmeshed. Architecture participates in what Edward Soja describes as the “socio-spatial-dialectic” wherein place participates in the shaping of people as much as the people participate in shaping the place (126). Architecture, then, acts in part to reinscribe dominant discourses as it is part of the city’s story while simultaneously being an occasion for action susceptible to being reshaped.

Architecture as Communication

Architecture’s determining function is seen in the ways in which it informs individuals’ interpretations of everyday practices. Buildings in urban environments are “designed to reflect, as well as to create patterns of behavior” (Hillier et al. 233). The rational ordering of city space coevolved with an emphasis

on the development of disciplinary structures as these were designed to imply a homogenous arrangement bent on collective totality. Foucault describes the conception of a disciplinary architecture was employed as a technique to discipline and maintain normative behavior as this was thought to have been able to be internalized through structures housing education and training. The development of disciplinary architecture such as schools, government buildings, military barracks, and prisons was an effort to constitute a harmonious arrangement of society in which its rules and norms were learned and applied through and by a rational notion of city space. An architectural design that promised to manage irrational behavior — behaviors counter to the desires of the state — existed as an instrument of rationality. For Boyer, architecture as an instrument of rationality, an object through which power is practiced, stemmed from the belief “architecture itself could effect and reform social behavior” (12). This practice was meant to reproduce and disseminate dominant discourses to be encoded in both the material forms of the city as well as within and as a docile body. Foucault posits the transformation was from an architecture built to be seen to an architecture that would “operate to transform individuals [and] carry the effects of power right to them” (“Discipline and Punish” 172). Architecture was used as a technology to act on the actions of a social body and as a control

measure for threats to the functioning of power. The impetus for a disciplinary architecture, as Foucault notes, is because “stones can make people docile and knowable” (“Discipline and Punish” 172). Architecture, then, participates in reproducing and representing the interlocking hegemonic discourses of governmental, capital, and other institutions that disguise themselves as rational, even normalized, social relations.

Urban centers, as a locus and concentration of competing hegemonic discourses inform experiences of urban life through the constant contestation of physical and symbolic forms found in architecture. The significance of the built environment, for example the institutions and apparatuses mentioned above, Wakabayashi notes, is found in its acting as “information and communication media, which represent and transmit symbolic meaning” (8). Architecture plays an integral role in providing meaning and function to urban life. Due to these structure’s pragmatic and representational functions, Bataille contends, architecture signifies the “very being of societies” (21). The codification of power embodied by and flowing through architecture participates in the (re)production of power discourses. Hegemonic interests perpetuated in architecture organize the city, provide places to live and work, and informs practices of everyday urban life.

The symbolic meaning of architecture can be found in a shared reflexive relationship with discourse. As Hendrix notes, the composition of architecture acquires meaning through “the way in which the image or form is experienced and incorporated into language” and “the way in which the language...influences how the image or form is experienced” (76). The relationship between the users of urban space and its architectural objects, according to Eco, tells “us we commonly do experience architecture as communication, even while recognizing its functionality” (182). Similar to discourse, then, architecture holds a sort of double movement. Roland Barthes, while commenting on the conflict between signification and reality within the city, believes the “city is a discourse and this discourse is truly a language: the city speaks to its inhabitants, we speak our city, the city where we are, simply by living in it, by wandering through it, by looking at it” (168). Taking de Certeau’s notion that our experiences of the city take on a “qualitative character,” one of “tactile apprehension and kinesthetic appropriation” it becomes clear in understanding architecture we must understand how cities are constituted through and by multiple discourses and practices (97). These multiple discourses (re)produced in and through material practices compete and overlap bringing about symbolic meanings for individuals engaging the city.

Architecture's role then in producing meaning in one's environment is of particular importance in understanding urban life. As Kevin Lynch describes, the city has come to represent a "new phase of this interaction" (29). The construction and design of cities begins a phase in human existence where people adapt the environment to the "perceptual pattern and symbolic process" of human beings (Lynch 95). Where once individuals adapted their lives to their environment the development of the modern city presents a sort of turn where individuals began to adapt the environment to their lives. Architecture's position in and among this transition is perhaps most effective in the meaning it carries. Architecture effectively carries meaning because, as Mumford suggests, "every building performs work" (85). The work performed by each building can include protection from the elements and even symbolic meaning. Even the simplest structure, according to Mumford, "produces a visual impression upon those who use it or look at it: unconsciously or by design" (85). For Mumford, this impression modifies the user's perceptions "in some slight degree at least, his organic reactions" (85). The influence is central to urban lived experience as architecture embodies particular ideologies which communicate to a body of urban inhabitants.

Specifically in the U.S., the trend in urban design and planning after the attacks on September 11th, suggests Marcuse, is a move toward more barricading within the city and a “citadelization” of new construction (264). Marcuse’s characterization of citadelization through design is most noticeable in the new and refurbished facades of these complexes. Along with the border of the property they occupy the buildings are secured with computerized identification monitors and surveillance systems. Thrift and French suggest the increased presence in surveillance technologies has led to the “automatic production of space” (310). The consequences of an automatic production of space centered on disciplinary measures finds urban centers in the West being technologically managed through automated access and boundary control.

Even the best design techniques still fall short in completely managing threats to the functioning of power. In 2003, for example, a camouflaged gunman swept through the Peter B. Lewis building at Cleveland’s Case Western Reserve University killing one and injuring two more in a seven hour standoff. The building’s commission was given to renowned architect Frank Gehry who, after the incident, was criticized for his postmodern design. The five story building has a swooping roof that curves all the way to the ground instead of utilizing standard walls. The roof, made of 20,000 stainless-steel shingles, “seemingly

tumbles to the ground” (Bernbaum). Gehry’s distinctive design of the Lewis building “with hallways that dip and swerve, complicated the job for police” making it easier for the gunman to evade capture for seven hours (Bernbaum). Architecture, then, becomes a central character in the tragedy. It further highlights how architecture communicates, in this instance, to power as a space that is difficult to police.

The result of a disciplinary architecture, produced to secure and control, John Hockenberry observes, stems from America’s concern for security and has reshaped the country’s psychology, politics, and design. He suggests the effects of which most directly impact the architectural design of American cities. Further, Hockenberry describes the changing physical landscape of New York City:

there are two idling pickup trucks parked at William Street and Exchange Place. It’s a four-year-old ‘temporary’ security barrier. A mile away, at Foley Square, the shiny marble facades and approaches to a group of federal buildings are defaced with police tape and choked with metal-detector screening queues. (Hockenberry, “Designing Post 9/11”)

Hockenberry’s disturbing observations of New York City point to the changing physical space and how it is being altered so that it can be more

easily secured. As every building does work the changing face of architecture bent on surveillance and citadelization influences urban inhabitants and their organic reactions to the experience of space.

I refer to Hockenberry's observations as disturbing because many architects are now being commissioned to create not only major civic landmarks and iconic monuments bearing witness to the past that serve the dual function of being banal lines of civic defense. Similar to the baroque enclosures described by Mike Davis, these architectural designs come complete with "aesthetically pleasing features like elegantly sculpted barriers around public plazas or decorative cladding for bulky protective concrete walls" (Ouroussoff, "Medieval Modern"). These features, Ouroussoff suggests, become "the fragile balance today's architects are struggling to reach between assuring the freedom of movement that is vital to a functioning democracy and bolstering security" ("Medieval Modern"). The streets may be more aesthetically pleasing but as Ouroussoff further indicates, "the prettiness is camouflage for the budding reality of a society ruled by fear" ("Medieval Modern"). The shape of America's urban architecture after 9/11 eerily parallels Chandavarkar's comments that "architectural emotion exists when the work... [is] in tune with a universe whose laws we obey, recognize

and respect" (98). As architecture carries hegemonic discourses through which we are constituted such an environment effaces opportunities for agency and freedom by encouraging blind acceptance of power's attempts to produce docile subjects.

Like discourse, architecture is produced within, and as, a constant social process that influences the interpretation of life within the urban environment. Cities are sites of constant flux, with their built form mediated by successive acts of destruction and creation (Miles et al. 2). Much of this process can be seen through the discursive interplay responsible for the destruction and creation of buildings and their meanings as they hold different representations at different times to their myriad users. Yet, the constant destruction and creation of both the physical and representational meaning of architecture can also be located in design practices and philosophies. The discourses of architectural design and city planning centered on controlling space produces regimes of truth that exclude counter discourses urging the construction of spaces for free engagement and community needs.

As a technology and technique of power architecture's participation in (re)producing regulatory norms is seen in the ways in which it informs

individuals' interpretations of everyday practices. This in turn communicates as a reflection and reinscription of their position within social relations.

Buildings in urban environments are "designed to reflect, as well as to create patterns of behavior" (Hiller et al. 233). Those with the power to build have the power to shape architectural space towards specific ends. This creates specific effects with regard to understanding the body in its relationship with the production of architectural space.

Architecture relies on the bodily experience in order to constitute its meaning and existence. Elizabeth Grosz explains this relationship between the city and the body:

Cities have always represented and projected images and fantasies of bodies, whether individual, collective, or political...the city can be seen as a (collective) body-prosthesis or boundary that enframes, protects, and houses while at the same time taking its own forms and functions from the...bodies it constitutes. Simultaneously, cities are loci that produce, regulate and structure bodies. (49)

The corporeal connection of body and built form takes on meaning through what Pallasmaa calls the "authenticity of architectural experience" which is grounded in the "language of [the] building and the comprehensibility of the act...to the

senses" (64). In this sense, architecture articulates the "experience of being in the world" as it strengthens our "sense of reality and self" (Pallasmaa 11).

Architecture communicates as it mediates one's sense of reality. It does so through effectively organizing temporal and spatial patterns. To understand the effects of architecture on lived experiences a direct corporeal link is required. The art of parkour provides us such a link.

CHAPTER III

TROUGH THE FLUITDITY OF FREEDOM:

PARKOUR, ARCHITECTURE, AND THE BODY

Parkour as Communication

Traceurs share a unique corporeal bond with the built environment of the city. Iain Borden's work on architecture and the body demonstrates skateboarders, much like the practitioners of parkour, produce space through complex spatial actions and in turn "generate an extraordinary movement and production of body-centric space" (96). Traceurs directly connect the body to the architectural space of the urban terrain. In this connection their spatial understanding is produced through and by the body within this relationship.

This sort of body-centric space, for Lefebvre, first comes about through the corporeal occupation of space. Lefebvre explains:

Before *producing* effects in the material real (tools and objects), before *producing* itself by drawing nourishment from that realm, and before *reproducing* itself by generating other bodies, each living body *is* space and *has* its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space. (170)

The body produces its own space; however, the complexities of space are not produced by simple occupation alone. The body is space as it has a material existence which is mediated and mediator of what Lefebvre describes above as the “material real.” There is, then, an immediate relationship between the body and its space insofar as its deployment in and occupation of space constitutes such a relationship.

The immediacy of the relationship between the body and its space, Lefebvre argues, exists in “the body’s deployment in space...its occupation of space [and] the energies at its disposal” (170). With the energies of the body — the ability to act and move — the body “creates or produces its own space” (Lefebvre 170). The body and space share a reflexive and mediating relationship, for, “the laws of discrimination in space, also govern the living body and the deployment of its energies” (Lefebvre 170). The body creates or produces its own space, yet is simultaneously governed by the spatial laws in its ability to deploy its energy within and as the space that it occupies and takes on meaning. For Borden, this means the “body produces its space dialectically with the production of architectural space” (101). As the traceur executes a run she or he and space are both simultaneously producers of and produced by the experience.

The body conceived as produced and as the production of a space, for Lefebvre, appears as a “spatial body” and is “immediately subject to the determinants of that space” (195). For parkour to be performed within the urban sphere requires the traceur’s body to corporeally connect with architectural spaces already engendered with multiple determinants, codes, or regulatory laws for thinking and behaving. Lefebvre notes all “subjects” are situated in a space. The “I” as discussed by Butler is produced dialectically through the discursive struggle between body and building. However, as argued above, space (and the body) has a contingent quality as its production is bound to ever-changing material and discursive practices. For Lefebvre this gives the subject the option of enjoying or modifying the effects of power marking particular spaces to which the subject is subjugated. Through parkour traceurs interact with their environment so as to differently situate themselves within urban space. Yet, reflexively it is within and through space wherein the traceur is constituted as subject. In being constituted as subject the traceur is subject to what Lefebvre calls a “social status” (182). One’s social status, according to Lefebvre, assumes a stable situation, and “hence determination by and in a *state*” (182). This, Lefebvre continues, “implies a role and a function: an individual and a public identity” (182). Public identity also

implies a location, a place in society, a position (Lefebvre, 183). The traceur's body is itself an immediate space constituted by its own subject-position inscribed by its living through a representational architectural space. With regard to the relationship between architecture and the body, Borden notes it is the body's "engagement with architecture that is important...such that the moving body treats architecture as but one projector of space to be interpolated with the projection of space from itself" (107). Parkour, then, provides its practitioner a way of challenging her or his subject-position by engaging the dialectical relationship between architecture and the body.

Jorge Luis Borges' writing offers us a metaphorical consideration of such a relationship. Borges teaches "the taste of the apple...lies in the contact of the fruit with the palate, not in the fruit itself" ("Selected Poems" 2). Architecture is not simply defined by its physicality but by the traceur's corporeal engagement with it. The "taste" or meaning of architecture is produced for the traceur within the execution of the move; the contact of the "fruit" (architecture) with the "palate" (the body executing the cat leap). Traceurs engage in a reinterpretation of the body and of space and reproduces each through the performance of parkour. Here the traceur and the

architecture (re)combine to produce new spatial and bodily movements, meanings, and imaginings.

Traceurs traverse urban space with the fluid, improvisational flow across the physical structures and the gaps between them. These free-flowing movements temporarily place the traceur body in a counter-position to the hegemonic discourses disciplining urban space. Parkour facilitates a new intelligibility of the physical-spatial and discursive limits the city's urban built form attempts to place on the subject. In the process, the practice of parkour becomes a way to appropriate urban space as it calls into question the engendered hegemonic forces and disrupts its controlling logics or regulatory norms. Through the practice of parkour, Geyh points out, "the relation between body and space is made dynamic, two reality principles in concert, interacting amid a suspension of the social strata...one might even say that the urban space is re-embodied" ("Urban Free Flow"). Parkour, then, can be seen as an effort to remap urban space and offers a way to reject and resist its disciplinary functions.

Spatial practices and representations of space are "in thrall to both knowledge and power" (Lefebvre 50). Urban space is particularly central to this discussion as it "is both the object of political agency and its medium"

(Tonkiss 63). Further, within the city, Tonkiss suggests, urban social movements locate “sites of power” which “are at the same time constituted as points of resistance” (60). The key practice for urban social movements is to create counter-spaces. The production of counter-spaces functions to problematize the normative political spatial arrangements within the urban milieu. As Lefebvre describes:

What runs counter to a society founded on exchange is a primacy of *use*.

What counters quantity is quality. We know what counter-projects consist or what counter-space consists in – because practice demonstrates it. When a community fights the construction of urban motorways or housing developments, when it demands ‘amenities’ or empty spaces for play and encounter, we can see how a counter-space can insert itself into spatial reality. (381-2)

Parkour’s ability to produce a discourse centered on use versus exchange offers a counter discourse inserted into spatial reality. Parkour becomes a form of performativity through its inscription of a counter discourse into the struggle of power and freedom: one which offers the traceur a more emancipated way to describe her or his spatial experiences.

The conversation centering on parkour as a practice of rewriting or appropriating the meaning of architectural space becomes paradoxically problematic. Fredric Jameson, when considering architecture as art insists “no work of art...can set out to be political once and for all, no matter how ostensibly it labels itself as such, for there can never be any guarantee it will be used the way it demands” (258). Such a notion situates parkour as subject to the influence of power discourses which might either alter or dismiss its intended ethos. Hill parallels Jameson’s argument, pointing out it is rare the users of architecture are also clients with influence over the design process. Yet, while not being clients themselves, Hill finds users who are “detached from the commissioning, ownership, design and management of a space” are often “more likely to initiate unexpected uses because they lack a strong sense of responsibility for a space” (65). Even with parkour’s growing global popularity, as demonstrated through television commercials and viral spread through various social media including YouTube, its practice is dependent upon the existence of a physical space. The practice of parkour, in fact its ability to displace the body and create new urban sensibilities, requires the physical presence of a city’s built form. Often the traceur runs or flows through urban spaces of which he or she claims no politically recognized ownership. If the power of parkour as an urban art form lies in its

detachment from and responsibility for the maintenance of urban space, its dismissal can be found in the art's inability to exist outside of and separate from the political and capitalistic forces it sets out to disrupt no matter how ostensibly it labels itself as such.

Jameson calls into question architecture's ability to guarantee its user's acceptance of the political ideology from which it was produced and meant to convey. Jameson suggests changes in architectural design and function point to the "relationship between the possibility of certain symbolic meanings and the possibility of radical social and systemic change" (264). Jameson's comments speak to the temporality of architectural meaning and the ongoing flux in the ways in which its functions are identified by its users. If meaning assigned to and extracted from architectural space is reliant upon temporal-spatial conditions or experiences, it is within such conditions where uncertainty of use exists. As such, revisiting Borden, much like its urban counterpart, parkour like skateboarding, promises the possibility of a re-imagining of spatial experiences through a dialectical engagement of the body with the physical environment. Within urban conditions not chosen by the traceur, parkour relies on the corporal engagement with the real and imagined, multiple and shifting dimensions of the city's

architectural space. It accomplishes this through bodily movement as a reaction to the city by projecting bodily movements onto its built form.

Architecture's role in social reproduction is not limited to its physicality or occupation of spaces but also involves the "representations embedded in architecture, in codified conceptions of space" (Borden 9). These representations and codified conceptions of space suggest for the architectural user a particular manner of use. As such, architecture's role in social reproduction functions as a medium through which to communicate and construct material and discursive boundaries for the urban body. As the body produces its own space, existing within urban space the body is at once a political site. In fact, even the absence of certain bodies produces and reifies hegemonic forces embedded in architecture.

Through the lens of parkour — when considering architecture as the embodiment of such forms — it is within these fissures in totality the corporeal experience of parkour may provide the traceur an opportunity to call into question and re-write her or his subject-position. During the practice of parkour bodies are purposely placed in spaces counter to the intended spaces in which the urban body is meant to occupy. These intended uses of space are determined through the ways architecture and urban built forms are

produced. Running up and down walls and jumping from building to building can function, for the traceur, as a way to rearticulate the discursively produced relationship between power and freedom at the site of the body and architectural space.

The insertion of the traceur body into unintended spaces forefronts the representations and codified conceptions of architectural spaces and exposes them as arbitrary and produced. Because power's representation in architecture is produced through spatial practice it is within counter uses of architecture where traceurs' expose codified power in the built structure and challenge dominant discourses. As Forty notes, architecture "is not made just once, but is made and remade over and over again each time it is represented through another medium, each time its surroundings change, each time different people experience it" (5). Traceurs' counter uses of the body acts as another medium: parkour. The practice of parkour challenges discourses ability to circumscribe the range of intelligibility for understanding the relationship between architecture and the body. Challenging the range of intelligibility, through parkour, produces possibilities for traceurs to engage a new form of understanding and communicating their existence within urban space. Through a corporeal engagement with architecture the traceur seeks to

expand the discursive order further complicating the social lives of bodies and built form. Parkour offers the traceur a way to construct the body as a new medium through which to discursively reconstruct and re-imagine urban spaces and traceur bodies as products and instruments of emancipatory possibilities. The practice of parkour alone, though, does not lead to radical disruptions in the discursive order which informs the significance of the city's built form. However, that is not to say parkour's unique treatment of urban space cannot disrupt hegemonic codifications of power engendered within architectural space.

In the article "The Pleasure of Architecture," architect Bernard Tschumi suggests the pleasure derived from architecture's use may be found within its *misuse*. With regard to specific buildings and urban spaces, Tschumi contends "uselessness contradicts societal expectations of usefulness" ("Pleasure of Architecture" 51). Further, Tschumi suggests disjunction, in architectural use, is "the intentional or accidental appropriation of a space for a use for which it was not intended" ("Index of Architecture" 105-106). Parkour's "misuse" of the material and discursive forms of the city presents the opportunity for a creative experience unintended for normative practices within urban space. As Tschumi notes, the most extreme misuse of architecture negates "the form that

society expects of it" ("Architecture and Disjunction" 87). Through this extreme misuse parkour attempts to reclaim the traceur's freer experiences of the city. They do so by forefronting the arbitrary connection between expected patterns of behavior, bodily movements, and the hegemonic forces codified within the city's architecture.

This misuse provides the traceur a way to reconsider the subject-position and the built form as an always already hegemonic force. In essence, traceurs re-imagine "architectural space and thereby recreate both it and themselves" (Borden 89). Misuse of the body, too, holds an emancipatory possibility. As one traceur reveals:

When one does a vault or a long cat leap or even a wall flip, that person becomes free of fear, free from the bonds of gravity. To be free from the obstacles of life by means of efficient and quick thinking...with the knowledge of the vaults and flips of course.

(Toorock)

Parkour's misuses of architecture and the body develops new representations of urban spaces and the traceur bodies therein. Traceurs engage new representations by seeing anew the pre-existing world. Parkour's ability to produce counter representations functions as a new method for moving through

the world. At the intersection of the moving body and the physicality of architecture, Borden argues, "user and architecture come together to create a new spatial event," one where "architecture is at once erased and reborn" (107-8). In reconsidering appropriate uses of architecture and the body traceurs, through performativity, discursively reproduce urban space. Traceurs do this through an expansion of the discursive limits of the city.

A More Disciplined Body

For Foucault the exercise of power comes down to techniques developed to employ its effects. In the instance of architecture it is produced as a way of organizing space such that the effects of power can be effectively deployed. The physical organization of space, through the technique of architecture, helps to mark spaces for certain actions while limiting others. For example, prisons, housing, schools, government buildings, and corporate towers all communicate a representation of use and access. This is an essential component in power's ability to work on bodies in society. The social body described by Foucault is not an effect of "consensus" but of the "materiality of power operating on the very bodies of individuals" ("Power/Knowledge" 55). Architecture, as a strategic

technique developed to exercise power on social bodies, functions as a materiality of power employed in the struggle of power and freedom.

As this materiality of hegemonic power is exercised on individuals it develops their bodies to take actions amenable to power's interests. Foucault describes how spatial norms are inscribed pedagogically through an art of distribution and "enclosure" ("Discipline and Punish" 143). The art of distribution organizes space by partitioning and enclosing certain spaces for the development of skills "to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual" (Foucault, "Discipline and Punish" 143). Foucault describes how this works through the following example of the function of the university. He explains:

There is the first function of the university: to put students out of circulation. Its second function, however, is one of integration. Once a student has spent six or seven years of his life within this artificial society, he becomes 'absorbable:' society can consume him. Insidiously, he will have received the values of this society. He will have been given socially desirable models of behavior, so that this ritual of exclusion will finally take on the value of inclusion and recuperation or reabsorption. ("Foucault Live" 66)

Foucault's example highlights how architecture is used in the distribution of space as a technique to discipline bodies and internalize the values which (re)produce hegemonic power. By designing architectural space to demarcate certain spaces for the development of specific skill sets, the exercise of power takes on a spatial consciousness. Architecture then can serve power's spatial awareness as a technique used to discipline bodies.

The practice of distributing space to train bodies with the skills and values of their society affords power the opportunity to be continuously active and work at the level of desire. Actively working on individuals at this level helps to ensure those individuals' desires center on the socially desirable models of behavior. However, once these bodies have been essentially trained they are empowered to act. Power, then, has to contend with a society of disciplined bodies equipped with techniques and knowledge of power.

Foucault suggests it is power, after investing itself in the body, which "finds itself exposed to a counter-attack in that same body," or in other words, "what had made power strong becomes used to attack it" ("Power/Knowledge" 56).

This, for Foucault, requires the mastery and "awareness of one's own body" ("Power/Knowledge" 56). A mastery of the body can be acquired "only through the effect of an investment of power *in the body*" ("Power/Knowledge"

56; emphasis mine). Foucault uses the examples of training the body in gymnastics, muscle-building, and glorifying the body beautiful as forms of investments individuals use to master and become more aware of their bodies. It is through the meticulous work of power on the body, a form of a technology of power, individuals can develop techniques to master the body and enact agency. Power is able to train and develop individuals' skills with regard to strategies which reinscribe hegemony, for example, developing skills and values consistent with production reproduction of capitalism. Yet, and because power and freedom are constantly present and struggled over, once power develops the body in such a way individuals can use those skills against power. Foucault states "once power produces this effect, there inevitably emerge the responding claims and affirmations, those of one's own body against power" ("Power/Knowledge" 56). This has important implications for training the body to practice parkour in developing as a traceur.

To the extent dominant discourses work to normalize the body (e.g. constructing categorical uses of the sexed, raced, classed, and gendered body), it is constructed as a site for reinscribing power through disciplining appropriate movement and use of the body. Dominant discourses, for example

about normative use of the body, manipulate bodily behavior as a process of self-monitoring which reinforce those discourses. These set up material and discursive constraints for individuals. Shogun claims these constraints prescribe and limit action by “circumscribing the range of actions possible” available to individuals (30). As traceurs invest power in their bodies through parkour they develop the skills necessary to challenge power’s ability to act upon their actions or their possible actions. In this way, traceurs are using parkour as a technique of power to speak back to a power which limits uses of the body and prescribes experiences.

As architecture participates in power’s organization it acts as obstacles and borders in urban space. Jane Jacobs sees these borders constituted through architecture as participating in producing an “‘ordinary’ city” where borders are thought of as “passive objects” (336). She continues by criticizing the notion of a passive object stating, however, “a border exerts an active influence” (336). Such constraints, Shogun argues, “produce particular ways of walking, standing” and are the result of daily “disciplined repetition within particular spatial and temporal constraints” (30). However, constraints are also occasions for action. As traceurs develop their skills and bodies parkour becomes a method of jumping over, around, and through these obstacles exerting a

material and active influence. In this sense, traceurs are able to train the body with a different set of repetitive discipline allowing them to develop different responses to the spatial and temporal constraints which prescribe experience. It is only when they have constituted a more (or differently) disciplined body are they effectively able to play with, challenge, and overcome these borders and barriers (re)presented through architectural space.

Developing the body to playfully and creatively engage architecture is important as “play takes part in the struggle over the freedoms available in urban society. (Stevens 143). Developing skills through parkour traceurs develop a more able body to challenge power’s effect on disciplining spatial modality and behavior. Parkour as an investment of power in developing the traceur body functions as a performance of power to enact the freedoms available in urban society – even if those freedoms are constituted as unknowable by the hegemonic and normalizing discursive limits of the city.

Making Tactical Use of Space

In disciplining the body through parkour, traceurs reengage relations of power and the truth those relations attempt to normalize. de Certeau refers to these determinations as operational logics. For de Certeau operational logics are

forms of rationalization disguising “themselves in order to survive...which has...been concealed by the form of rationality currently dominant in Western culture” (xi). This concealed rationality functions as an operational logic centered on production and consumption. For de Certeau operational logics are manifested “through its *ways of using*” the products as dictated by a dominant economic order (xiii). Appropriate ways of using objects of space and the body are imposed by relations of power, always social, who determine the terms – “that each individual is a locus in which an incoherent (and often contradictory) plurality of such relational determinations interact” (xi). In trying to determine the *use* (by groups and individuals) of schemas of action or operational logics, de Certeau questions rationality as he sees the individual as the author and the vehicle of these ways of using. Use, here, implies even under the influence of determining logics individuals can challenge or use such schemas in ways counter to their intended purpose. Through parkour, traceurs use schemas constructed as normal as a way to transform the self.

Within the relationship of freedom and power any number of operations are available to individuals in urban space. Power must construct operational definitions of appropriate use in order to ensure uses that maintain a predictable functioning of space. For example, sitting might be confined to benches which

are placed out of the way of walking or driving. One is not *supposed* to sit in the middle of the street or the sidewalk. Doing so is not logical as it does not conform to an operational definition for the use of space. This sets a threshold for appropriate or normative behaviors. Actions outside of the threshold do not conform to the rational or logical use of space. Operational logics coalesce and even conceal themselves in architecture as architecture represents logical use. For example, when one sees a stairway that structure is defined as something to be walked up and down and not to be jumped over or across. A concrete barrier dividing buildings is meant to be walked around and not climbed on or used to jump to the roof of the adjacent building. It is important for power that such logic operates successfully. This homogenizes spatial experiences and practices and constitutes an epistemology of space, its function, and the operations responsible for its (re)production.

An epistemology of normative spatial operations has important implications for the traceur body. Just as architecture comes to represent logical use so too does the urban body. For example, the act walking backwards falls outside of the threshold for normative use of the body. In enacting such a behavior the individual is taking on a use of the body determined as outside an operational logic. The body, like architecture, is not

only a site for the actions of power but is also an occasion for action. Climbing over the concrete barrier and jumping to the next structure falls outside the logic of the body and thus the action, the structure, and the body must be redefined. Hegemonic discourse confines such an action to an illogical use of the body. Yet, the traceur, through the creative act, uses the illogical behavior of climbing over the wall as a way of transforming the possibility of the body and therefore transforming its meaning: a meaning redefined by the traceur as an empowered body that is able to engage freer experience outside of the constitutive norm.

Parkour as a creative practice holds the ability to shift interpretations reinforced by hegemonic discourses. Similar to de Certeau, Lengel embraces the power of creative practices stating they “can confront hegemony, engage in resistance, and bring to bear agency within existing systems of power” (“Intercultural Communication” 4). Further, there is a “degree of plurality and creativity” within urban space, de Certeau explains, the individual, in this instance the traceur, is able to draw “unexpected results from his situation” (30). As the traceur jumps from building to building, over stair railings, and other obstacles designed to discipline movement, she or he is engaged in what de Certeau calls bricolage. Bricolage is the “variant of

activity” in the types of operations and the roles of spaces (de Certeau 29). Those engaged in bricolage de Certeau calls “bricoleurs” (29). In comparing the act of bricolage to reading, the bricoleur, according to de Certeau, “poaches” from the dominant readings of appropriate uses of space. Individuals take what is necessary and relevant from a text and deploy it for their own purposes. Therefore, it is no longer the passive receptivity informed by the apparatus reinforcing and concealing operational logics. Through parkour the traceur becomes the bricoleur par excellence. Traceurs make tactical use of their environment, not in explicitly resistive or violent ways, but in creating a free-flow with the conditions and structures of relations of power. The traceur as bricoleur inscribes a discourse of its own, yet, in relation to the interlocking hegemonic discourses acting on the possibilities of use for traceurs in social space.

Operational logics inform the “types of operations and the role of space” (de Certeau 30). For de Certeau the types of operations consist of strategies and tactics which are ways of operating which he describes as “instructions for use” (30). Strategies are able to “produce, tabulate, and impose these spaces” informed by the operational logics wherein they take place (de Certeau 30). A strategy is a rationalization seeking “first of all to

distinguish its 'own' place...the place of its own power and will, from an 'environment'" (de Certeau 36). Power seeks to delimit its environment, in this instance the city, so as to be able to counter and control threats to its functioning. Tactics, however, "can only use, manipulate, and divert these spaces" (de Certeau 30). Tactics, in short, are an "an art of the weak" (de Certeau 37). The space of a tactic, de Certeau reveals, is the "space of the other...it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of...power" (37). The codified power in architecture communicates an operational logic and therefore acts as a strategy of power which imposes instructions for use. The traceur, engaged in the bricolent practice of parkour, enacts a tactical use of the environment. Traceurs invest power in the body to develop the skills of parkour to divert and manipulate the imposed instructions for use reinforced in the materiality of architecture.

Traceurs see the operational logics as fettering both the mind and the body. For traceurs, the produced impositions (strategies) are located within the Cartesian or rational notion of city space in both its design and intended use. Tactical (re)evaluation and manipulation of these habits, for the traceur, begins with the recognition and challenging of the contemporary determining logics. Traceurs play on the terrain imposed on them which is organized by power

and continuously disciplines and reinforces the laws and interests of those with the power to manage the space of the city.

David Belle, in describing an epistemology of parkour, tells of an attitude of parkour which is:

Also to know how to deny evidences, to keep a critical acumen.

[For] example: the streets...a marked out route, where we no longer need to wonder if we must take it or not. It's there; we take it, that's all. Parkour is the adventurous spirit dared in conquered fields.

(Belle, "Urbanfreeflow")

The traceur perceives such practices, to discipline and deceive individuals, as forms which rigidly bind them to a system or habit of thought hindering their own free engagement of the world in which they exist.

Employing the power afforded a more disciplined body, traceurs engage in tactical acts of bricolage which challenge the strategic spaces of power for "tactics do not obey the law of the place, for they are not defined or identified by it" (de Certeau 29). Consider, for example, Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hall & Museum, more commonly known as Monument Circle, in downtown Indianapolis. The monument stands inside a circular roundabout — hence the nickname the Circle City — and is located in the center of downtown at the

intersection of Meridian Street and Market Street. Encased by a series of alternating fountains and two large staircases is the 284 foot statue memorializing Indiana natives who have lost their lives in America's wars.

As traceurs run up the concrete barrier enclosing the west staircase and perform a series of monkey vaults — placing the hands directly on the encountered object and bringing the feet through the hands clearing the obstacle — they are engaged in parkour as an act of bricolage. Monument Circle is a strategic space of power. It exists to memorialize soldiers but it also exists to represent the power of the State. The space is policed and controlled by surveillance and access of use is determined by the hours set forth by the state. Further, the circle is designed as a central point of the city and functions as a way to move both traffic and bodies. Its circular design acts as a roundabout to move traffic to the wholesale district which is the downtown shopping and dining area. Similarly, the circle distributes bodies to the arteries of Meridian and Market Street as it offers pedestrians several access points to this area as well.

As traceurs jump the circular wall marking the first fountain executing a series of turn vaults — placing the hands on the objects and swinging the hips around the hands spinning the body over and around the obstacle — they play

on and with the terrain imposed and organized by the law of power. By making tactical use of Monument Circle the traceur body “can project its symmetries and actions onto that architecture, refusing to accept it as a pre-existent world and instead (re)producing architecture on its own terms” (Borden 105). Through parkour traceurs create “a space in which [they] can find ways of using the constraining order of the place” (de Certeau 30). In so doing, traceurs are able to maintain “their difference in the very space that the occupier was organizing” (de Certeau 32). These series of moves are bricolent acts as they are not paying homage to soldiers nor using the monument as a point of access to Indianapolis’ wholesale district. Traceurs make tactical use of the circle as they manipulate the imposed instructions for use of this particular space.

Historicizing Parkour

Parkour can be a difficult practice to define. Because parkour is a subjective and personal journey, many practitioners define parkour differently. However, parkour, as defined by its originator, David Belle, is an art developed to “help you efficiently pass any obstacle you encounter” (Wilkinson). The practice of parkour consists of a mode of bodily movement interacting with the architectural space of the urban environment.

The basic maneuvers in parkour are known as the cat leap, the precision jump, the roll, and the wall run. A wider repertoire of moves finds the tic-tac, the underbar, various vaults such as the kong, monkey, and even lazy vault. When executing the tic-tac the traceur, from a horizontal position, walks up a wall and jumps from the wall to the ground or the next obstacle. The underbar is a move in which the traceur falls feet first through a gap or between fence rails, like falling through a manhole, then grabs the upper rail as her or his shoulders pass under it. Vaults include the lazy vault, the reverse vault, the turn vault, the speed vault, the dash vault, and the kong or monkey vault. To execute the kong or monkey vault, a traceur must run at a wall or a railing, plant the hands on top, while simultaneously bringing the feet through the hands, clearing the obstacle. Each of these moves is linked together, one after another in unison, in an exercise in fluid motion as a way to negotiate or run through uninhibited by the urban terrain.

The word parkour was derived from the French words *parcours* “a line, course, circuit, road, way or route” and the verb *parcourir* “to travel through, to run over or through, to traverse” (Woody 1). Jaclyn Law traces the contemporary roots of parkour as she explains in the 1980s pioneers David Belle and Sebatién Foucan named their art “‘parkour’ after *Parcours du Combatant*, the

obstacle courses of the French military” during the U.S.’s war with Vietnam (Law). Traceurs are the practitioners of parkour. In the practice of parkour men are called a traceur and women are called *traceuse*. The moniker, *traceur*, comes from the French word meaning bullet. The word traceur is used by practitioners to “indicate someone who goes fast” (Wilkinson). It was chosen by Belle and Foucan to place emphasis on the fast execution of direct and efficient movement highlighting traceurs’ ability to “cross any terrain in flight without compromise” (Wilkinson). Traceurs combine running, jumping, and climbing to explore both the potential of the body and the physical obstacles presented in the urban environment. This art of displacement is centered on the use of the body to move freely and quickly through urban terrain unhindered by any structure. These ostensibly free movements are guided by an emancipatory philosophy.

Parkour provides traceurs a means through which these individuals can call into question the dominant discourses that constitute operational logics and discipline normative spatial practices. In doing so, traceurs forefront the material and discursive organizations of power which (re)produce hegemonic meanings and boundaries found in the production of urban space. As described by Jimena Ortuzar, parkour “can be seen as an escape from the practices of power that govern our movement and regulate our behavior” (55). While I will

not argue parkour is an escape; parkour, however, makes explicit, through ways of using urban architectural space, a dominant order codified in urban architecture disseminated and imposed through relations of power.

My initial interest in parkour emerged in 2000 when I saw a commercial titled “The Angry Chicken.” The commercial for the Nike Presto — a type of athletic training shoe — depicts parkour co-founder Sebastian Foucan being chased throughout an urban environment by the angry chicken. What captured my attention, and my imagination, was the depiction of Foucan performing amazing leaps and bounds across parking garages, stairways, and even the interior of an apartment. The athleticism and even courage to not only attempt such moves but to execute them successfully was something I envied and found quite remarkable. I was enthralled with the idea someone could move in such a seamless way through the architecture of the city.

My friends and I decided to emulate what we saw on TV. This new phenomenon, for me, was exciting and imaginative. Together with my group of friends and after many failed attempts I was able to execute, what I would later find out were termed cat leaps and monkey vaults over the staircases at the entrance of the local church. We started with a competition to see who could jump from handrail at the top of the stairs and successfully land at the concrete

landing below. The handrail was approximately six feet above the concrete landing and after that move we decided to see who could jump back up using the brick wall of the staircase climbing back over the rail. At the time we were unaware that what we were doing was called parkour. My thoughts at the time were largely uncritical and lacked any self-reflection about what I was doing.

Not long after this I found my view of physical space began to change. Stairways no longer lead to an entrance they became something to jump over. I found myself looking at building facades and wondering about the fastest way to the roof. Unfortunately, the shift in interpretation of physical space was short lived. I was not practicing parkour so much as I was imitating what I had seen in a TV commercial. Admittedly, the activity was just something fun to do with friends: something that was dangerous and thrilling. Being unaware of what parkour really was my interest and even vision was short lived.

The primacy of pleasure I derived from the practice of parkour was located mainly in the sheer enjoyment of movement; however, there also existed an un-admitted pleasure derived from what I began to perceive as subversive action. These feelings of subversion and of rethinking perceptions of the environment are central tenets in the practice of parkour. Parkour has been described as a type of play *within* and *with* the urban environment. As David

Belle comments parkour is “a natural method to train the human body to move forward quickly, making use of the environment that’s around us at any given time” (“What is Parkour”). This discipline of movement is based on the practitioner finding the most efficient path from point A to point B. David Belle describes parkour in the following:

Draw a straight line on a map of your hometown. Start from point A and go to point B. Don’t consider the elements in your way (barriers, walls, wire fences, trees, houses, building) as obstacles. Hug them: climb, get over, jump, let your imagination flow. You are now doing parkour. (Belle, “Urbanfreeflow”)

Finding this flow involves moving rapidly, but more importantly fluidly, through one’s urban environment. Through fluid movement traceurs become in sync with and aware of themselves and their connection with the physical and emotional surroundings. In this connection traceurs reflexively (re)interpret objects in the environment “as obstacles but [also] as opportunities for movement” (Bavinton 392). Parkour is essentially “intent upon re-imagining place,” which according to Saville, grants it certain “spatially transformative powers which can prevent comfortable closure” (892). This is accomplished through an embodied contestation of the possibilities for spatial modality in the urban milieu.

This contestation of possibilities centers on overcoming real and imagined obstacles that traceurs perceive as fetters to lived experience. As Belle describes in an interview with Alec Wilkinson of *The New Yorker*, in parkour:

You always have to get through the first obstacle that says, 'I can't do it,' whether in your mind or for real, and be able to adapt to anything that's put in your path. It's a method for learning how to move in the world. For finding the liberty men used to have. (Wilkinson)

At its core, this discipline is a practice of freedom, a way of liberating the practitioner from the confines, both material and abstract, found and engendered in urban architectural space.

Much of parkour's founding philosophy parallels the martial arts regarding its devotion and commitment as a lifestyle. In fact, many traceurs consider parkour not only as a lifestyle but as a way of thinking, a frame through which to view the world. Like many of the martial arts, practitioners of parkour do not want it to be seen as a sport but rather as a discipline or art form (Woody 2). Yet, while parkour centers on free movement of the body in and around urban space, this art of displacement is also heavily dependent upon the acquisition of a new vision. The discourse of parkour centers on the practitioner's personal development as a traceur and her or his discovery of a

personal way or path which translates into a personal truth. Discovering one's own truth offers a new form of knowledge and new experiences of the constitutive forces inherent in urban space. Parkour is meant to be a means of self-discovery and of self-improvement. The underlying philosophy draws many parallels with eastern religions in its search for an inner way, a path toward personal truth and inner peace by being one with the self and the environment. Often compared to a Buddhist mindset, parkour emphasizes not competition, but the discipline of the individual. This art form values the personal journey of the individual and of her or his becoming.

This philosophy and search for perfect fluidity emerged from David Belle's and Sebastian Foucan's developing their art in order to navigate Lisses, France (Woody 2). Lisses, as with most urban spaces, was constituted through both real and imagined boundaries constructed to restrict and manage movement. Belle and Foucan began developing parkour in what Rubenstein refers to as the "decay and neglect of the Parisian suburb," Lisses 20 miles south of Paris (32). According to Guss, Lisses and other French suburbs were built in response to housing shortages in 1960s Paris. The decay described by Rubenstein was a result of "physical degradation" from cheap construction and Lisses' "distance from [Paris'] services, shops, and cultural activities"

(Guss 74). The conditions of the Parisian suburbs brought about feelings of marginalization and many felt “alienated or disempowered” because of a lack of integration (Guss 75). According to Guss, this led some suburban inhabitants to express feelings of self-determination and control or “empowering sensations” through “mastery of dangerous situations” (75).

Parkour is founded on the notion that one finds one’s own way to overcome physical and mental obstacles. The two founders pushed this notion further, as they felt such restrictions to the movement of the body also led to a suppression of thinking and ways of being. Thus, parkour was born.

To understand parkour as an embodied contestation it is helpful to trace its historical origins. Parkour was first associated with a type of military training developed by French naval officer, Georges Hébert. The training style introduced by Hébert emerged in the early 20th century as part of his *méthode naturelle* (natural method) and was founded upon his maxim: “*Être fort pour être utile,*” [be strong to be useful] (Woody 1). Smith points out through observations of indigenous people in Africa and the Caribbean Hébert believed their “bodies were splendid, flexible, nimble, skilful, enduring, resistant” even though “they had no other tutor in gymnastics but their lives in nature” (“Art of Displacement”). From these observations Hébert refocused

his approach to intense physical training and began to develop his natural method which he believed could train the body physically but also instill sound moral values.

Hébert's natural method was conceived during his time stationed in French occupied St. Pierre, Martinique in the Caribbean Islands. In 1902 St. Pierre was hit by a volcanic eruption and Hébert himself coordinated the evacuation of nearly 700 inhabitants of the island (Atkinson 170). This experience left Hébert with the belief "athletic strength and skill" should be combined with "courage and altruism to be civically useful" (Atkinson 171). The notion of a combination of civically useful athleticism and virtue resulted in Hébert's development of the natural method to achieve "physical perfection and communion with one's local environmental surroundings" (Atkinson 171). This, for Hébert, became a specific training technique to develop one's sense of place which acted "as a vehicle for bringing forth the underlying essence of one's own humanity" cultivating a sense of inner-peace (Atkinson 171). The *Parcours du Combattant*, which according to Bavinton could translate to either "running against" or "way of fighting," made their appearance in the 1960s when the French developed a type of training course constructing obstacles based off of Hébert's method (392). This was employed to train

French soldiers during the Vietnam War. Hébert believed individuals should “train in open environments as an unfettered animal species traversing a variety of landscapes and obstacles” (Atkinson 171). Hébert’s style of training was implemented by the French to develop soldiers’ bodies to be in unison with their environment: specifically, the jungles of Vietnam.

Raymond Belle, David Belle’s father, was born in Vietnam during the war. He received an education and training from the French army stationed there (Fuggle 208). He practiced and experimented with the “efficient escape techniques” of the *Parcours du Combattant* in order to “improve his chances of survival during the war” (Witfeld, Gerling, and Pach 22). While living in France Raymond Belle embraced Hébert’s ideas of training the body and put them to work during his time as a firefighter. Belle became “proficient in *parcours* training methods and promoted their virtues almost as passionately as Hébert” (Atkinson 172). The promotion of these virtues he passed on to his son, David.

As a child, David Belle was active in gymnastics and martial arts. Inspired by his father’s physical abilities attained through *parcours* training and his heroism as a firefighter, David Belle trained in a similar fashion preferring to train in the open air and the woods. Through this training Belle

developed the belief his “movements had to have an element of ‘usefulness’” as instilled in him by his father (Witfeld, Gerling, and Pach 22). Belle developed a passion for overcoming obstacles and “always moving forward and not letting anything get in his way” (Witfeld, Gerling, and Pach 22). When David was 15, the Belle family moved to Lisses, France. It was there that Belle turned his useful movement to overcome obstacles toward the urban environment.

Belle, along with some of his childhood friends, including Sebastian Foucan (a key figure in the popularization of parkour) formed the group known as the Yamakazi. Belle and Foucan appropriated their own urban style of the natural method which they termed, parkour. Atkinson notes that Belle and Foucan’s “use of concrete and steel city spaces jibed well with Hébert’s philosophy of immersing oneself in one’s immediate physical/natural environment to gain a deep phenomenological awareness of it” (172). As the group fully immersed themselves in the urban environment the Yamkazi’s parkour in Lisses sparked public interest. During the late 1990s parkour participants began to grow alongside the attention it fostered from the media.

In 2001, a commercial for BBC One titled “Rush Hour” featured David Belle in a parkour run over the rooftops of Paris. These TV commercials, along

with the performances of the Yamakazi, brought parkour into the public eye. As parkour's popularity began to gain momentum the 2003 documentary film "Jump London" aired in the UK on Channel 4. The footage followed Sebastien Foucan and a group of traceurs as they engaged parkour through London's urban environment. The documentary captured the group of traceurs in their "revitalizing and transforming the architecture of the city as they went" (Saville 892). The documentary proved to be influential in the West as it jettisoned parkour in the public consciousness. Since the 2003 air date of the documentary the popularity of parkour has continued to grow. Parkour's popularity continues to proliferate as the many TV commercials, Hollywood movies, and Youtube videos utilize and celebrate parkour's freedom of movement and the stylized images depicted by the media.

Parkour, Power, and Freedom

Tracing parkour's historical trajectory has important implications. Parkour's history demonstrates its development (into its current form) was rooted in the belief that disciplining the body to be in tune with one's environment offered a way of engaging a corporeally different use of the environment which functioned as a direct response to power. This belief also

centered on the notion that disciplining the body was not only useful but was also virtuous. Such a belief, too, holds implications for a type citizenry as it describes for its practitioners certain ways of being in the world. Parkour and its development then provides a lens through which to better understand how power in the city is produced discursively and what consequences such productions may have for traceurs in enacting freedom.

As an enactment of freedom parkour can be seen as both a technique of power and a technology of the self. Foucault points out certain technologies used by individuals through which they come to develop a knowledge about themselves and the environments in which they are enmeshed. Technologies, for Foucault, are a function of discourse wherein “specific ‘truth games’” are contested and struggled over (“Power” 15). Within this contestation certain truth discourses, to which we are both subject and object, establish techniques that act on individuals (techniques of power). Individuals also employ these techniques to modify and train themselves under particular historical conditions (technologies of the self). It is through these techniques individuals come to recognize self and constitute what is knowable or true. These are employed as techniques or technologies used to dominate and control. They are factors in the ways individuals’ develop notions of self – who they are and their place in

society, a subject. Yet, for Foucault, the subject is a thinking subject and not one in isolation. They have at their disposal the technologies of the self both for understanding their subjectivity but also as a technique to effect their life-world by their own means and perhaps more effectively with the help of others.

Foucault details the four major types of these technologies. The first are technologies of production. These “permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things” (“Technologies” 18). The second are technologies of sign systems which “permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification” (“Technologies” 18). Third, there are technologies of power which “determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination:” a process he describes as an objectivizing of the subject (“Technologies” 18). The fourth type is the technologies of the self.

Technologies of the self is the focal point of Foucault’s investigation and explains technologies of the self as those techniques which:

permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (“Technologies” 18)

These four types are interrelated, never mutually exclusive, and are always associated with certain forms of power and domination. He explains “each implies certain modes of training and modification of individuals, not only in the obvious sense of acquiring certain skills but also in the sense of acquiring certain attitudes” (“Technologies” 18). Thinking through the lens of Foucault, Hébert’s, *méthode naturelle* served as a technology of the self. It provided a method of training, enacting operations on the body, to transform the practitioner. In this sense it offered an operation which permitted individuals to effect by their own means a transformation toward a particular way of being. Through disciplining and thus transforming the body practitioners were thought to be able to achieve inner-peace, as well as escape volcanic eruptions. As a technology of the self Hébert’s method was a modification of its practitioner that provided the acquisition of new skills but also of new attitudes.

Hébert’s training techniques used by the French served as a technology of power. This functioned in several ways. The French military enacted technologies of production as their actions on the soldiers permitted them to produce, transform, and manipulate the soldier in manners aligned to State interests. Further, the training was implemented as an operation on the bodies

of the soldiers with the intent to determine their conduct and submit them to certain ends or domination. The French military enacted these technologies to ensure soldiers' actions were in line with the State's interests in further producing and maintaining their power. Namely, this came in the form of ensuring a docile subject (the soldier) and in helping the United States Military in the war against the Vietnamese.

Parkour's Developing Body of Scholarship

The existing literature on parkour centers on the practice as an act of freedom. William J. Mitchell describes parkour as an exuberant way "to slip the surly bonds of the paved ground plane and valorize the vertical" (156). Further, Sophie Fuggle argues parkour's main objective is to find a "way to escape the limits and rules imposed by society and its conventions" (205). Although positioned with varying terms, research addressing parkour has much to say about this art's ability to slip surly bonds, escape urban restraints, and challenge forms of power embodied by the urban built environment. In making such arguments, this burgeoning body of scholarship seems to have developed three major themes. The first theme sees parkour as an antagonist to capital. This antagonism challenges the binary logic of urban space produced as the space of

capital. The second theme offers parkour as medium through which urban restraints (to movement) are, or at least can be, subverted. The third major theme and most closely aligned with my study here, finds power codified in architecture and positions parkour as is a way of examining these forms of power. Parkour's examination not only points to the organizations of power but offers their reinterpretation.

Antagonizing Capital

Thompson explains how parkour lends itself to a new envisioning of significant features of the material and practiced city. A particularly significant feature of the city, for Thompson, is its tendency to elude urban inhabitants. The constraints disciplining users of urban space are found in how such space is produced, policed, and promoted as the space of capital. Further, Thompson describes urban space as in thrall to a capitalistic prerogative which constrains urban life and restricts usage counter to the interests of capital flow. Parkour, then, acts as an antagonism to capital as it challenges dominant conceptions of urban space and in so doing such constraints might be reconsidered.

Mould takes parkour as a critical lens for understanding and questioning the binary logic of late capitalism. Parkour, he posits, is a subversive use of city

space. The subversive character of parkour, Mould contends, is found in traceurs establishing a kind of counter logic to capitalistic space. City space as capitalistic space is produced and understood through the binary logic of capitalism. For Mould, the practice of parkour centers not on the production and consumption of commodities but on the counter production and consumption of space itself. According to Mould, parkour moves beyond the binary of anti-capitalism by conceptualizing parkour fundamentally as a process of movement. More specifically, he views parkour as a freedom to move within and around the confines of the binary logic of capital which limits movement in city space to the confines of capital flow.

The current scholarly literature concerned with parkour positions this practice as one which challenges dominating logics by rewriting the body as well as meanings embedded in architecture. This conception of the relationship of the traceur body with architecture is central to my argument, yet, the main focus in the literature centers on the ways parkour acts as an antagonist to capital flows in Western cities. Mould treats parkour as a subversive act with the power to question the binary logic of late capitalism. This logic, for Thompson, is a significant feature of Western cities as the flow of capitalism has a tendency to elude urban inhabitants by setting up constraints on thinking and being. Still,

others see parkour's antagonism to capital through its reinterpretation of capital's material-spatial productions. Atkinson sums-up the anti-capital argument in suggesting parkour is "a political re-appropriation of commercial urban space" by "disrupting the order of technocapitalist space" (183).

Subverting Urban Constraints

Scholars position parkour as a leisure practice which challenges restraints imposed by power in the organization of public space. For example, Bavinton positions parkour's challenge of such restraints imposed by power as a reinterpretation of material-spatial restrictions on public behavior. This unscripted leisure practice, through creative play, reinterprets the built environment as an obstacle to freedom into an opportunity for a freer engagement of spatial meanings and modalities. For Bavinton, parkour does not remove these constraints but reinterprets them through a different, creative, and momentary counter use of the built environment.

Informed by Merleau-Ponty's theorizations of the body, Fuggle analyzes how the traceur, through the body, engages in a dialogue with the world. The traceur experiences architecture not in its position but as what Merleau-Ponty calls a "spatiality of situation" (115). For Merleau-Ponty, the

body is not in a determinate position in relation to other positions it is an “anchoring of the active body in an object” (115). Moreover, the body is tied to a certain world it is “not primarily in space: it is of it” (Merleau-Ponty 171). For Fuggle, the traceur body in and of space is formed and transformed by architectural structures while simultaneously transforming space. The traceur’s body, in differently using architectural space (uses counter to its intended purpose) invites counter interpretations of both the body and architecture. Fuggle sees this counter interpretation through the act of parkour as traceurs change both the meaning of the body and the identity of the architecture as perceived object.

Others view parkour as a distinctly mobile engagement of the environment. In this mobile engagement traceurs wrestle with the emotion of fear of their limitations and their environment. Fear itself can create a connectedness to space providing a “familiar link” to one’s environment (Saville 908). Parkour, Saville suggests, plays with our emotional connectedness to space and the way “we build knowledge [through emotion] can bring depth and intimacy to our fear, rendering it an engagement that has the possibility of play with space” (908). This fear can both restrict individuals

learning to move in space differently while at the same time it may also facilitate creative and playful engagement with the environment.

Scholars locate the freedom offered the traceur in parkour's deconstruction of restraints to movement in urban environments. Much like the flaneur, for Atkinson, the traceur expresses "disdain for suffocatingly organized...and consumer-based cultural experiences and spaces" (179). This, for Atkinson, points the way for the lives preferred by traceurs that are "open, creative, and liminal lifestyles" (179). Similarly, Daskalaki locates the freedom of parkour in the ability to move freely which challenges "pre-defined perceptual routes and regimented experiences" (56). The feelings of freedom afforded by the practice of parkour, for many scholars, come by way of its challenge to restrictions in urban life.

Theorists contributing to the body of work on parkour view this art as a subversive act which reappropriates the body and architecture. This strain of the literature takes parkour as a subversive act against the constraints found in the urban built environment. As David Thompson suggests, traceurs reimagine the city and their bodies become "instruments by which many urban constraints can be reconsidered" (259). Mould posits parkour's freedom is to be found in its juxtaposition between fluid movement and the constricted

“nature of the urban environment” (738-9). Further, the traceur body and the architecture it encounters is seen as being renegotiated as it “enables a conceptual transformation of perceiving subject and perceived object” (Fuggle 215).

Codifying Power in Architecture

Traceurs’ connection with urban architectural space has lent itself to these individuals having been compared to martial artists and comic book characters. Such comparisons stem from a series of moves performed in what are known as parkour *jams* or *flows*. Jams or flows are the terms used to describe a group of traceurs doing parkour. In the parkour flow, traceurs are simply practicing their art which often finds them executing a series of daring and visually stunning moves through urban environments. Some have even been referred to as urban ninjas for their ability to scale rooftops and pull off death defying leaps and flips from building to building. Mitchell explains many traceurs are just like the character of Spiderman because they are kids from the suburbs who love “the close-packed towers of Manhattan and the vertiginous perches they provide” (157). Traceurs engagement with urban architectural space, Mitchell argues, is demonstrated in the following passage:

Architectural obstacles are taken as adversaries to grapple with — even to the extent of heart-stopping handrail surfing and building-to-building leaping—rather than as inert lumps of stuff to be circled around, peered at, or parked beside. (156-157)

Mitchell's comments point to a way of thinking about parkour, one which I support and build from, which sees in this art form the potential to enact change through a corporeal contestation of a codified power found in urban architecture.

Others, too, view parkour as a challenge of hegemonic power embodied in the built environment. Nathan Guss, for example, theorizes parkour as a liberating practice wherein a potential emerging political force is created within the global information economy. Guss illustrates parkour's emergence as a cultural phenomenon is a reaction to the feelings of confinement that were the result of the urban housing developments in France during the 1960s. Such conditions set the stage for parkour's popularization with the youth in French suburbs and urban housing developments because it presented an "empowering art of spatial liberation" (Guss 74). Traceurs reinterpret codes of proper movement in architecture and by using these elements "they imagine their own course and move

according to their own imagination, desires and physical capacities" (Guss 76). Traceurs subvert urban spaces "planned and coded by urban planners, architects and other experts of the state to generate certain forms of social interaction and economic exchange" (76). For Guss, parkour acts as an artistic form of subversion to the way of living imagined and imposed by planners, architects, and others in power with regard to urban space.

Just as architecture requires a body of users the practice of parkour requires the presence of architecture and a built environment. Traceurs rely on surfaces, gaps, handrails, rooftops, and buildings. In other words, they rely on architecture for the obstacles which they attempt to overcome. As traceurs engage the city's architecture, they do so within urban spaces designed around a "freedom from resistance" of another kind (Sennett, "Flesh and Stone" 17). Sennett describes urban spaces in the West as the result of capitalistic power structures centered on designing "ways to move with obstruction, effort, or engagement" ("Flesh and Stone" 17). Similar to the Cartesian grid described earlier, city spaces are designed to ease and direct the flow of traffic and pedestrian movement. City spaces are perceived in terms of "how easy it is to drive through them, to get out of them" (Sennett, "Flesh and Stone" 17). The look of urban space, in its design and

planning is “enslaved” to what Sennett believes are “powers of motion” (“Flesh and Stone” 18). The organization of the built environment, then, becomes a “mere function of motion” because the driver, even the pedestrian wants to “go through the space, not to be aroused by it” (Sennett, “Flesh and Stone” 18). The densely populated space of urban life holds and produces cultural norms for movement and behavior—powers of motion compelling production and consumption. Traceurs share a certain dependency on these cultural norms embodied in architecture and the organization of the built environment. While parkour is dependent upon such an environment traceurs at the same time refuse to conform to such norms and engage a freedom of resistance of their own. As architects and city planners attempt to design resistance to movement out of urban space, parkour seeks out this resistance challenging the notion of freedom offered by such design strategies. The focus in the literature on architecture and its embodiment of cultural codes is due to parkour’s dependency on the existence of these codes and obstacles as a built environment. Many of the restrictions to movement or feelings of a freer spatial engagement challenged by traceurs are those codified in architecture. For example, Mould comments capitalist symbolism is “most evident in the architecture of the urban terrain” (738). This

symbolism evidences the codified power in urban architecture. In many ways this codified power induces a normative conception of movement in the urban environment. The restriction of movement, its discipline through architectural symbolism and form, produces a type of thinking wherein creative or freer engagements of space are out of question.

The restriction of movement and its potential effects for a type of spatial freedom is a major point of contention in the parkour research. Ortuzar, for example, locates parkour's offering of freedom in the freedom of movement. For Ortuzar, the freedom of movement is the freedom modernity understands. The "self-moving being" strives to overcome conditions which hinder free movement and "result in a loss of freedom" (59). Parkour's counter or different way of moving in urban space is an experimental interaction with body and built environment. Daskalaki believes parkour is a process of "continuous transformation" through and by direct confrontation of both material and symbolic disciplining of spatial modality. The continuous transformation is because of parkour's "experiential interactivity between spatial structure and human body" (Daskalaki 58). Further, buildings become "nodes of creativity" and "spaces acquire new use, becoming liberating rather than restricting" (Daskalaki 56). In addition,

Ortuzar further buttresses this point by arguing parkour reactivates the “dialectic relationship between structure and moving body” by reinterpreting restrictions to spatial movement and produced meanings for bodies moving within a given space (57). A more spatially liberated traceur body, Ortuzar demonstrates, reconfigures both understandings of the body and architecture as the traceur exploits “the structural specificities it navigates” (57). In this way, the traceur’s treatment of the city’s architecture challenges the power relations codified in architecture not through its physicality but through a corporeal engagement centered on reinterpretations of normative spatial movement.

Because people are unable to walk through walls, architecture presents a real physical presence that must be recognized. Architecture is able to discipline and direct behavior and movement largely through its physical presence. While engaged in parkour’s flow where once stood a wall or barrier to prevent movement traceurs find the occasion for action. Yet, buildings also impede movement through the visual impression which individuals internalize and to which they react. Parkour, however, intervenes in practitioner’s perceptions of what meanings architecture may effectively carry. Traceurs do not dismiss these cultural codes or pass by

unaware; however, through parkour buildings become not sites of power or oppression but obstacles and those obstacles become opportunities. For traceurs these opportunities are re-presented as chances to improve the self and grow physically and mentally. The building becomes a sort of dance partner as it participates in becoming part of the transformation. Within these relations of architecture and urban life, parkour offers traceurs an exercise *of* power rather than a struggle *against* power.

The Parkour Vision

The parkour vision, differently envisioning urban space, is realized as the traceur perceives the urban anew through the lens of parkour. Traceurs use the phrase “parkour vision” to describe this phenomenon of seeing urban space differently (Smith). Parkour vision “describes the altered way of analyzing lines and architecture that occurs within the participant” (Smith). For the most devoted traceurs, parkour is more than an art form to be practiced; as the traceur matures in her or his ability parkour becomes not something one *does* but something one *is*. As the traceur reformulates the body and ways of thinking, it is through parkour she or he challenges culturally accepted considerations of normative spatial modalities and ideologies.

This change in how the traceur comes to know architectural space brings about feelings of freedom from being “released from mundane preconceptions and familiarity” (Smith). This release, then, allows traceurs, through the corporeal connection between body and urban architectural space, to explore differently the urban lived experience toward a more emancipated existence in the city.

As traceurs engage the built environment they simultaneously critique both themselves and their conditions. It is this critique of the environment which positions parkour as a political practice with the potential for change. Traceurs unique understanding of space is central to their ability to change their world. Traceurs directly engage the built environment and question often ignored conditions of the urban milieu. Through the practice of parkour they open up new ways of experiencing urban life and the socio-spatial relations therein.

CHAPTER IV

A METHOD FOR STUDYING THE ART OF PARKOUR

This research study is framed by the thinking methodologically, to best understand parkour one must actually do parkour. Further, in order to respectfully and honestly report on traceurs' feelings about parkour the researcher must not only participate with them as a traceur but engage in dialogue with them about the practice of their art. This chapter explicates the process and methodology grounding my research on, and participation in, the practice of parkour. The research method I have employed is an "epistemology of doing" introduced by Gajjala and Altman in 2006. An epistemology of doing is an approach to critical ethnography which is imperative to obtaining an in-depth and situated knowledge of participation in the art of parkour. The justification for this choice of method is because it is impossible to comprehend the transformative process traceurs undergo by simply observing this practice from an outsider's perspective or by analyzing media coverage. Therefore, an insider's perspective is necessary.

My personal experiences, however, will not be the only resource for reporting and analyzing my investigation. My study is more collaborative and

therefore includes an analysis of other experiences and perceptions shared by and with my fellow traceurs. In utilizing a critical ethnography, conducting interviews with fellow traceurs helps to offset some of the limitations of a self-report and provides a more balanced assessment of the research questions.

I begin this chapter with a description of and justification for moving beyond the traditional ethnographic method to a critical approach which is more nuanced and spatially aware. I will then define an epistemology of doing and provide an account of how the method was used in this study.

Understanding Ethnography

Traditional ethnography has been unable to uncover political influences attributing to and guiding the phenomena under investigation by the researcher. Ethnographers collect data in their chosen setting through empirical observation or participation and use this data to generate narrative-based interpretations of the lived experiences occurring in chosen contexts. These efforts are encoded in the term's roots, "*ethno*—(people) and —*graphy* (describing)" (Cramer and McDevitt 127). The methods of ethnography seek empirical investigation and interaction where the researcher is socially situated through a process of immersion into the life, routines, and rituals of the social setting under study

(Cramer and McDevitt 127). These methods of qualitative inquiry include interviews, participant observation, analysis of cultural artifacts, visual methods (analysis of photographs, movies, or the Internet), autoethnography (researcher as subject), and focus groups. Each of these methods are tools for ethnographic research but are founded on the principle of fieldwork which is engaged in the actual setting and conditions of interest to the researcher. Ethnography is explicitly an interpretive research methodology seeking, through empirical investigation, to understand culture and ways of being for individuals in particular contexts.

The researcher as bricoleur connects different views or voices to “create a new vision” (Guthrie 3). The bricolent researcher selects different “methods and techniques, within and between...research paradigms” to engage research and ethnographic encounters which are interactive and “shaped by a myriad of factors including socio-cultural history, personal history, social setting, gender, and so on” (Guthrie 3). This approach to qualitative inquiry stems from the epistemological position which views knowledge as subjective, situated, and produced through interactions. It is not something out there to be discovered but to be understood *in situ*.

Troubling Tradition

Historically, this approach has been plagued by the elitism and colonialism, which for a long time, went unquestioned in ethnographic research. In ethnographic work, Lengel notes the researcher can be situated as “the elite, the colonizer, and the oppressor” (“Researching the Other” 233). At issue, for ethnographic research, is that it requires the ethnographer to be “‘there’ (in the field) [while] she or he is supposed to be ‘not there’” (“Researching the Other” 233). This being there while not being there assumes the researcher has the ability to erase or avoid any effects their subjective presence might produce. Such an assumption builds an epistemological assumption “grounding the finished ethnographic work [in] ‘facts’ that have nothing to do with the researcher; rather, it is ‘their story’” (“Researcher the Other” 233). Using these *facts* as data to analyze and compose a narrative about someone else (the Other) fails to recognize the researcher’s position with regard to subjectivity and point of view. Because the researcher is unable to disappear, thus making objectivity impossible, Lengel’s observations demonstrate the necessity for ethnographers to move towards self-reflexivity and critical awareness of their own position in the research as well as the relationships of power and domination their work seeks to uncover.

By moving away from traditional ethnographic approaches, researchers have pointed to the politics inherent in the practice of writing ethnographic texts as they, too, function as power. The call is for a rearticulation of ethnography which negotiates the traditional privileging of the sort of omniscient ethnographer. Specifically, in the age of post-colonialism the idea of the lone ethnographer has had to be rethought. At issue for ethnographers has been the compulsion to give objective accounts of the people and cultures they studied in neutral and attempted apolitical language. However, the process of ethnography and of working to produce knowledge is itself a form of power and therefore neutrality is impossible. This has led to what some have called a “crisis of representation” leading to the need for more dialogic engagement during the research process.

Practices of ethnography have specific consequences for understanding and what gets called “knowledge.” Dwight Conquergood criticizes Western regimes of knowledge for being so focused on texts it failed to attend to “extralinguistic human action and embodied events” (“Performance Studies” 371). This, he argues, enacts an “epistemic violence” against the “whole realm of complex, finely nuanced meaning that is embodied, tacit, intoned, gestured, improvised, coexperienced, [and] covert” (“Performance Studies” 370).

Conquergood's argument is a call for a knowledge which is embodied, experienced, and situational. His argument is worth quoting at length:

The dominant way of knowing in the academy is that of empirical observation and critical analysis from a distanced perspective: 'knowing that,' and 'knowing about.' This is a view from above the object of inquiry: knowledge that is anchored in paradigm and secured in print. This propositional knowledge is shadowed by another way of knowing that is grounded in active, intimate, hands-on participation and personal connection: 'knowing how,' and 'knowing who.' *This is a view from ground level, in the thick of things.* ("Performance Studies" 370; emphasis mine)

These forms of knowledge have an even deeper meaning because they are excluded or have no formal inclusion in dominant knowledge production.

In critiquing knowledge production, Foucault introduces the term "subjugated knowledges" to include local, regional, vernacular, naïve ways of knowing. ("Power/Knowledge" 82). According to Conquergood these are the non-serious ways of knowing which dominant culture "neglects, excludes, represses, or simply fails to recognize" ("Performance Studies" 312). Subjugated knowledges are dismissed or even rendered illegible because they exist as active

bodies of meaning “outside of books, eluding the forces of inscription that would make them legible” and legitimate ways of knowing (Conquergood, “Performance Studies” 312). Similar to Conquergood’s account of the ills of traditional ethnography is Donna Haraway’s argument against this sort of “god-trick” of traditional research (“Simians” 193). Instead, she calls for the production of scientific knowledge centered on “epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, *where partiality and not universality* is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims” (“Simians” 195; emphasis mine). The effort is for the ethnographer to work against forms of dominant power but in self-reflexive and multi-vocal ways. This facilitates the individuals with which the ethnographer is engaged to empower themselves with their own voice. The critical ethnographer, then, is seeking to disrupt forms of power, while negotiating her or his own position, in an effort to build creative and resistive ways to address power in social life.

Subjectivity is of particular importance to critical ethnographers, specifically in the turn away from positivism and the concern for self-critical and reflexive research. Critical ethnographers have been criticized for their lack of focus on their own positionality. Noblit et al. urge critical ethnographers to “explicitly consider how their own acts of studying and representing people and

situations are acts of domination even as critical ethnographers reveal the same in what they study" (3). Turning a critical eye toward our own subjectivity forefronts the political act of writing but also situates the argument constructed therein and the point of view from which it came. Although this can be dismissed by some as a singular act of criticism, it nevertheless remains true to epistemological conceptions of knowledge as subjective, situational, and constructed. It becomes increasingly important for critical ethnographers to critique relations of power but also their own relation to power and its influence on subject(ive) perceptions of lived experience.

Toward a Critical Ethnography

Critical ethnography pushes traditional ethnographic inquiry to contain a critical focus. Critical ethnography examines power relations using field methods to identify "the consciousness" and "lived experiences" of others to expose the social and material inequalities of individuals in order to enact change (Street 12). Once the critical ethnographer rejects the "positivist fallacy" where such techniques "produce a detached, objective standpoint" it is possible to engage a hermeneutical approach better suited for investigations of ever-changing social relations (Foley and Valenzuela 288). The advantage of critical

ethnography is to extend inquiry into critique to “describe, analyze and open to scrutiny otherwise hidden agendas, power centres and, assumptions that inhibit, repress and constrain” (Thomas 2). Further, critical ethnography focuses on raising consciousness to disempowering social relations in attempts at “aiding emancipatory goals” through critiques focused on addressing “historical, social, political and economic dimensions of cultures” (Polit and Beck 264). González and González explain how certain ideologies become privileged while others get repressed and in this process one ideology assumes a “superordinate ‘natural’ legitimacy” (411). Specifically centering their critique on the privileges accompanying Whiteness, the authors point out this privileging of ideologies “prevents individuals from understanding the world from multiple points of view” as the dominant ideology establishes social norms and oppressive power relations (González and González 411). Critically examining these dimensions of culture helps to unmask how such concepts become powerful as they tend to be taken as natural or normal frameworks for lived experiences.

To uncover oppressive power relations which constitute these dimensions, critical ethnographers “investigate the interrelationships between the administrative and symbolic power of institutions” (Artz 244). Artz

specifically encourages communication scholars to lead the charge with special attention centered on “how language, metaphor and ideology both reflect and reproduce dominant-subordinate relations” (Artz 244). Artz’s stance demonstrates communication scholars have an advantageous position to offer useful insights with which to critically engage ethnographic research and social life. In addition to this central position, communication scholars can offer a critical ethnography which both recognizes and utilizes the political dimensions of cultural research so as to subvert oppressive regimes of power.

Huspek points out the critical ethnographer has the responsibility to demonstrate sensitivity to others’ conceptions of meaning and ways of being. While this should go without saying, it has given rise to what was first referred to by Marcus and Fischer as a “crisis in representation” (8). This crisis, according to Marcus and Fischer, is the result of a reassessment of and challenges to the establishment of positivism, specifically in social sciences. At issue for the role of positivism in ethnographic writing has been whose voice is privileged in the account. Traditional ethnography positions the lone ethnographer as one who could seek out and understand distant individuals and ways of life through the scientific method. However, people and social life cannot be recreated in a laboratory. Marcus and Fischer state the “crisis arises

from uncertainty about adequate means of describing social reality” (8).

Further, the authors state post-WWII research trends in the U.S. sought grand theories which had a “taste for totalizing frameworks” guided by a way of thinking at the time which was “dominated by hopes for...massive, revolutionary transformations” (9). Theoretical debates, then, challenged these regimes of “grand theory” and thus the field of ethnography focused concern on self-critical reflection and problems of description and representation (Marcus and Fischer 9). The failure of existing paradigms, objectively describing cultures and people, has made possible “the exploration of new ethnographic modes of enquiry...and new styles of sensibility and writing which understand ethnography as always caught up in invention [and] representation of culture” (Jordan and Yeomans 394). Moreover, this move away from traditional ethnography centered on positivism is “coeval with an expansion and pluralisation of the condition of contemporary multicultural life” (Jordan and Yeomans 394). This challenging of the traditional representation from the lone ethnographer was a move away from the commitment of positivism as a way to understand (and at once label, objectify, and freeze in time) how *other* people live.

The epistemological lens of positivism positions the Other as a person or group which can be understood through the methods of fieldwork and participant-observation but fails to represent the voice of the object (the Other) of study. The Other's story is represented in the objective, neutral language of the ethnographer. Conquergood agrees with Marcus and Fischer believing this crisis of representation "has induced deep epistemological, methodological, and ethical self-questioning" ("Rethinking Ethnography" 179). Critical ethnographer Renato Rosaldo's reaction to the crisis is as he explains:

The once dominant ideal of a detached observer using neutral language to explain 'raw' data has been displaced by an alternative project that attempts to understand human conduct as it unfolds through time and in relation to its meanings for the actors. (37)

Douglas Foley demonstrates this crisis as having emerged from "generic ethnography" wherein "the narrator stands apart from what he or she is describing and reconstructs the scene in an analytic language...language becomes a tool rather than the grounds of experience" (224). Thus, the call has been made for self-critical and reflexive approaches helping to re-think how ethnographers (re)present themselves and the lived domain of study.

The tendency, here, has been for ethnographers to construct “a monological relationship in which Other is observed and recorded primarily according to rigorously enforced truth standards” (Huspek 45). Foucault’s theorizations closely parallel this rethinking of representation. Foucault contends individuals who speak and act are “always a multiplicity, even within the person who speaks and acts” (“Language” 206). At issue for Foucault within the notion of representation is the intellectual’s position within bourgeois society and how discourse becomes “revealed [as] a particular truth” and therefore a form of power (“Language” 206). Because critical theory and ethnography are political, as Conquergood notes, they “politicize science and knowledge,” ethnographers must be conscious of the consequences of their research (“Rethinking Ethnography” 179). Therefore, the critical ethnographer must consider struggles over truth and power which are constantly in tension. Efforts at control and resistance can often be so banal they appear invisible. Perhaps this is where they might be their most effective. However, for the critical ethnographer to engage these in meaningful ways there must be the recognition she or he is writing from a particular position and how such a position can influence the interpretation of subjective *data*. Ethnographers must enmesh themselves in the mundane and the articulatory practices which (re)produce discursive power through material

practices. Critical ethnographers engage in the dialogic approach, from their position as subject, to help avoid the pitfall of, *we* have solutions to what we think are *your* problems.

Even with concerns centering on subjectivity, subversion, and lived practices, all of this theorization of critical ethnography can become convoluted and even abstract without arguments for how to execute. George Marcus argues for a multi-sited research approach which studies the intersections of embodied practice and the link to interpenetrating social space. As a researcher interested in parkour, Marcus's argument is particularly salient to understanding the production of urban space and the influence of architecture as signifier of codified power relations. Marcus continues stating "any ethnography of a cultural formation in the world system is also an ethnography of the system" (83). He posits the attempted totality of capitalism can only be engaged by tracing the production of the system which cannot only be understood "in terms of the conventional single-site *mise-en-scene* of ethnographic research (83). Marcus's spatial re-focusing of critical ethnography is "designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence" (90). This is accomplished through a logic of association which includes interacting with people in their

daily lives, following objects, analyzing metaphors, stories, and the historical trajectories of conflicts and biographical accounts. Gille's contention is such methods transition the ethnographer from "observer of reality...to becoming its creator" (323). Transitioning the researcher from observer to participant is especially central to the study of parkour. From the position of observer, the researcher is unable to go through the development of becoming a traceur. Such positionality lacks the empirical understanding of what developing as a traceur means to the practice of parkour but also lacks understanding of what the transition means to her or his understanding of self.

Spatial Awareness

Thinking of the researcher as participating in creating reality for both themselves and along with those encountering the research site requires a critical eye toward the production of space. For Lefebvre, to understand the relations which constitute space they must be understood through empirical investigation. This call is situated in recognizing "the specific spatial competence and performance of every society member can only be evaluated empirically" (Lefebvre 38). Because social space consists of myriad interpenetrating spaces, Conquergood's argument for ethnographers to operate in the boundaries

becomes particularly salient. He states “communication becomes even more urgent and necessary in situations of displacement, exile, and erasure” (“Rethinking Ethnography” 185). Further, Rosaldo contends borderlines should no longer be perceived as “analytically empty transitional zones,” but instead as “creative cultural production that requires investigation” (208). Gille buttresses this point in applying spatial thinking to an embodied research method which “forces us to see and analyze connections among sites as lived social relations and not merely as conceptual links forged by the imagination of the ethnographer” (327). Further, Gille criticizes spatial theorizations arguing they should be central to the ethnographer’s methods and self-criticism so as to link “a spatial imagination of the self in relation to an increasingly globalized social reality” (330). Spatial connections are important for this study in better understanding both myself as participant and researcher as well as the individuals and practices which produce space and the power relations therein.

The spatial imaginary lends a much needed nuance to an empirical investigation of parkour and architectural space. The addition of spatial thinking affords critical ethnographers a frame with which to interrogate discursive struggles. Further, this provides the researcher a more complex method for

understanding multiple and multi-vocal productions of myriad spaces
constituting social space.

Situating Knowledge

One of the most important concepts for the situated researcher is Donna Haraway's conception of situated knowledge. Haraway reveals social constructionist's notion of knowledge which centers on the assumption "all forms of knowledge claims" are available and valid ("Situated Knowledges" 576). Thus, "no insider's perspective is privileged" because "all drawings of inside-outside boundaries in knowledge are theorized as power moves, not moves toward truth" ("Situated Knowledges" 576). This, Haraway shows, is a dichotomy of objectivity trapping scientists between objective representations and constructionist's privileging *any* knowledge. It is for this reason an embodied approach to research must occupy a strategic, if not crucial, position for intervention, subversion, and change.

Haraway's call is an effort for researchers to engage what she describes as a return to: "the embodied nature of all vision to reclaim the sensory system that has been used to signify a leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere" ("Situated Knowledges" 581). This gaze has been marked by

positions of Man and White, Haraway points out, and has been marred by “nasty tones of...’objectivity’” (“Situated Knowledges” 581). Furthermore, Haraway reasons for an embodiment of vision; one allowing researchers, specifically feminist researchers, to learn in their own bodies how to engage objective, theoretical, and political conceptions “in order to name where we are and are not, in dimensions of mental and physical space” (“Situated Knowledges” 582). Thus, situated knowledge becomes a specific embodiment and a way of knowing through location and situations that does not split the “subject and object” (Haraway, “Situated Knowledges” 583). The impetus for Haraway’s forefronting the notion of situated knowledge is because, for her, there is no such thing as the unmediated experience. The focus on situated knowledge “allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see” (Haraway, “Situated Knowledges” 583). Haraway’s situated knowledge offers a framework for an epistemology of doing. The most important lesson to be learned from Haraway, and the research highlighted above, is for the critical ethnographer to be reflexive, self-critical, and aware of her or his positionality. Haraway specifically addresses with situated knowledge how the change in orientation (embodiment vs. objective neutrality) lends itself to a change in understanding (subjective-lived vs. objective-observed).

I use Haraway's invitation to start with situated knowledge so as to be accountable and have a better understanding of how I learn and what I see.

An Epistemology of Doing

To empirically engage social relations and to unpack the relations of power at work in urban space, I ground the critical ethnography with what Gajjala and Altman refer to as "epistemologies of doing" ("Producing Cyber-selves"). Gajjala, Rybas, and Altman explain, this method as an approach to critical ethnography centers on the experience of doing and is:

an exploration of process through doing and being self-reflexive while doing... the methodology would require the subject/object to produce selves—through typing, writing, image manipulation, digital video, and digital audio and so on—and also to continually interact and 'live' at these interfaces. (210)

Although developed as a method to challenge traditional thinking of the binary discourses of online/offline interactions, there are essential components of this approach which are useful to my study. Parkour centers on a more emancipatory personal journey toward being in the world. For traceurs, parkour acts as an emancipatory practice within the experience of material conditions. To produce

an understanding of this requires an exploration, through doing, of the processes which produce such effects. An epistemology of doing offers an effective method for such an inquiry.

An analysis of the materiality of the city, as Karen Wells argues, is as revealing of the “power relations that structure urban life” as the ethnographer’s interviews asking urban inhabitant to recount their experiences of life in the city (138). Critical here refers to the process of questioning a “taken for granted reality” and scrutinizing “otherwise hidden agendas, power centers, and assumptions that inhibit, repress, and constrain” in a world which often “seems too confusing, too powerful, or too mysterious to slice beneath appearance” (Thomas 3). An embodied and critical research method which is situated and self-reflective affords an exploration of the production of power relations and how the self is produced through practices in everyday life, specifically here, through the practice of parkour.

Epistemologies of doing offers a method for understanding architecture and the body as it allows the researcher to produce an understanding of this intersection by exploring the process, through developing as a traceur, while being self-reflective through the process of learning and *doing* parkour. An analysis of architecture and the body, through a situated critical ethnography, can

reveal how traceurs enact agency enabling them to produce knowledge about and reactions to how this relationship influences the production of the self in urban space.

Further, in being critical during my ethnographic encounters in the parkour community I engage in what Haraway describes as “epistemologies of location” by being in the culture and the environment of study (“Simians” 195). The researcher goes “through the process of entering and living in that environment, trying as far as possible to engage in everyday practices that are permitted at this interface” (Gajjala, Rybas and Altman 210). The result of this existence-in-culture is the researcher keeps daily logs and field notes. The research further develops through a collaboration and dialogue between researcher (as participant) and participants as they discuss their experiences and observations.

This supports a multi-vocal and collaborative approach which has a reflexive dimension. Ethnographic reflexivity allows the researcher to theorize, analyze, and also account for the presence and position of subjectivities in the interaction. This reflexivity, then, does not simply describe but criticizes the political dimensions of how knowledge is co-authored with the *subjects* whose subjectivities “get mutually constituted in the interaction” (Rybas and Gajjala).

The researcher's participation in the environment lends itself to autoethnographic writing which "places emphasis on the research process, culture, and self" as well as exposes and connects "social and cultural aspects of personal experiences" (Rybas and Gajjala). My existence-in-culture offers experiences of the practices which connect "material actions, principles guiding the actions, discourses, [and] moments and places of acting and meaning making" (Rybas and Gajjala). Through this method, understanding the relationship between architecture and the body is constituted through doing, specifically here, through living as a traceur doing parkour.

Therefore, the method for this study becomes a critical ethnography of doing. I investigate the relationship of architecture and the body through practicing parkour and experiencing the corporeal connection wherein the relationship of power and freedom is produced and challenged for the traceur. By participating in the practice of parkour, I am learning through doing what traceurs do while at the same time learning first-hand what a traceurs truly is. Taking such an approach initiates action for change as the ethnographer can "use [this] knowledge for social change [because] the objective is not only hermeneutic...but also emancipatory" (Rybas and Gajjala). The knowledge

gained through doing supports my critical encounters of power and freedom through the practice of parkour.

Taking a practice based approach, learning parkour by doing, lends access to the experiences of the traceur in her or his everyday life. This opens up to the ways traceurs negotiate their place within and understandings of urban space which is so integral to this study. Conducting the study in this way finds the researcher appropriately situated in context and the researcher immersed, critical, and positioned within the various intersections of traceurs in their practices of everyday life in urban space. A critical examination of the social practices involved in the production of space in and around urban architecture, reveals more than just how the space is produced. It illuminates how parkour's appropriation of space offers a more emancipated experience of the material relations responsible for its production. Applying this knowledge toward change can reposition parkour from an activity that is isolated or something that happens in urban space to a participative and inclusive intervention in oppressive power relations that dominate urban lived experiences.

Describing the Research Site

In order to research traceurs and their experiences with architecture I engaged in the ethnographic encounters necessary for this study through participating in the parkour community. Because many traceurs consider parkour to be a non-competitive and personal journey the community is very accepting of newcomers. My entry into the parkour community began with my participation in a series of training seminars conducted at B.A.S.E. Fitness in Noblesville, Indiana. The training seminars are open to all and anyone of any skill level, race, gender, or body type is welcome. I became familiar with the program at B.A.S.E while living in Indianapolis.⁶

The purpose of participating in the training seminars with B.A.S.E. Fitness is twofold. First, the seminars offer training in the techniques of parkour taught and passed down by founder David Belle through his group of parkour practitioners called The Yamakasi. The leader of the seminars at B.A.S.E. has

⁶ More information on the parkour classes conducted at B.A.S.E Fitness can be found on Facebook through the following link:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Base-Fitness-Parkour-BASE-Fitness-Indiana-Parkour/114197375271651?v=info>.

practiced and studied the art of parkour with this founding group in France, England, and China. Second, while learning these techniques I was able to participate in the practice of parkour and meet and interact with other traceurs. Thus, the experience from the seminar is useful for learning parkour while it also served as a way to make connections with fellow traceurs.

My participation in the training seminars lends itself to participant observation as a technique employed in this inquiry. Rybas and Gajjala defend this methodological choice within an approach centered on an epistemology of doing. Participant observation, “follows the canons of ethnography, it retains the qualities of realistic study” (Rybas and Gajjala). Further, to support this empirical investigation and while being situated in the culture and practice of parkour, I chose to conduct interviews with traceurs in the training seminars. Both the participant observations and the interviews added to the study a much needed empirical component deriving from socio-culturally situated interactions.

These modes of inquiry were conducted while existing in the culture and the practice of parkour within the relevant community. By going through the process of entering and living in that environment I able to critically reflect on my experiences as a traceur while also gaining insight to the experiences of my fellow traceurs. Of particular importance to this study is the empirical access gained

through doing which situates me as researcher within the relationship of power and freedom at the intersection of architecture and the body. Further, utilizing an epistemology of doing with regard to such interactions is important, Gajjala, Rybas, and Altman posit, because “examining such contexts relationally and in tension reveals how ideology, discourse, and material practice interweave” (210). Examining how ideology, discourse, and material practice interweave is integral to a practice-based study centered on parkour. By engaging in the practice of parkour I situate myself relationally and in context. This positions me as traceur-researcher to participate in and experience first-hand the dialectical tensions of freedom and power struggled over at the site of my body and its corporeal connection with architecture.

The ethnographic methods utilized to engage this study, participant observation and the conducting of interviews are connected with self-reflective writing throughout the process. My self-reflexivity throughout the research process “implies [I am] theorizing and analyzing how subjectivities of the researcher and the subjects get mutually constituted in the interaction” (Rybas and Gajjala). Drawing attention to my own subjectivity is salient to this study because the self-reflective writing helps to capture the personal journey of the traceur while also analyzing how this group is produced in the process. An

advantage with this approach is the added component of being self-reflective while doing. This is advantageous to this study for its ability to offer a better understanding of the ways in which traceurs themselves are transformed by the spaces they encounter.

Interacting with Traceurs

Interviews were conducted after completing the training seminar at B.A.S.E. Once we were finished with the parkour session during the cool down the lead instructor informed the traceurs that part of my participation there was to conduct interviews for the research study. He then invited me to speak to the group about my how the interview process would be conducted. I notified the group that their participation in the interview was on a volunteer basis and they were free to withdraw at any time. Further, the group was instructed that because their participation was voluntary they were to free to answer or refuse to answer questions according to their comfort level. Finally, I ensured potential participants neither their relationship with B.A.S.E. Fitness nor Bowling Green State University would be harmed or benefited due to their choosing to participate or not.

The only criterion I asked of respondents before volunteering to be interviewed was they needed to have practiced parkour at some point in their lives. Further, I let the group know that any skill level, from beginner to advanced, was welcomed in the study. This was important to make clear because not everyone at the facility had participated in the seminar. Traceurs which met the criterion were then asked if they were willing to participate in the study. For those that agreed, the lead instructor at B.A.S.E. set aside a room for me to meet with volunteers. During the interviews, participants were asked to recount their experiences practicing parkour. The goal in conducting the interviews was to have respondents provide as much detail as they were able in retelling of these accounts. The purpose of collecting such detailed narratives was to ensure as accurate a text for analysis as could be gathered through the interview process. This was to make certain their responses provided as much rich detail as possible but to also properly capture the personal feelings of participants about the practice of parkour.

An interview schedule was created and used to guide the interviews conducted with each of the traceurs (see Appendix A). Interviews with each of the participants followed the same schedule. Participants were given time to provide as much detail about their experiences as they were able. The purpose

for using the same open-ended questions for each interview was to allow for more free-flowing narratives. Before beginning the interviews the purpose of the study was explained to participants using conversational language. After an explanation of the aims of the study and why their input was important (how their experiences are central to my understanding) interviewees were asked to describe their experiences with parkour. Next interviewees were asked to give an account of their development as a traceur and encouraged to discuss if this influenced the way they interpret ways of being in the various environments. Participants were then asked if parkour influenced their feelings of being freer within these environments. Finally, I invited interviewees to discuss if participating in parkour lead to a change in thinking about the world around them.

Upon completion of the interviews with each of the sample groups, the interviews were then transcribed and content analyzed. During transcription each participant's name was replaced with their traceur nickname such as Rabbit, or Aleapster. In addition, any individuals or organizations mentioned in the participant's account were also assigned an alias. In the subsequent chapter, I provide a description of the research site, my participation there, and address the

research questions through my personal experience and the conducted interviews.

CHAPTER V

LEARNING BY DOING: THE ART OF PARKOUR IN RETHINKING THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ARCHITECTURE AND THE BODY

Entering the Community, Entering the Space

When I decided to center my study of architecture and the body on the practice of parkour I began searching the Internet for parkour groups in Indianapolis. For the past ten years I have been aware of parkour, yet, consider myself as a newcomer to the actual practice of the art. I chose to look for training classes because I wanted to start from the ground up so to speak and learn the skills and philosophies along with other new traceurs. Parkour's representation online was a little intimidating because of the level of expertise dominating the videos circulating the Internet. I thought entering a parkour group as an admitted first-timer would position me in such a way so as to mitigate a sense of obligation to operate at any expected skill level. This, too, allowed me to enter into the community in a position to learn and grow: someone who was expected to make mistakes, not be an expert, and thus not threaten any power structure or cohesion the group already possessed. This was important to me as a researcher in being

respectful of the group I was entering but was also important to me personally because of a genuine interest in being humble.

Many of the traceurs in the training class at B.A.S.E. also became familiar with parkour through media. Several traceurs recalled learning about parkour by “watching videos on YouTube, and seeing it in martial arts movies. Then I started Google searching” (Flyin R). As another traceur describes: “I actually learned about it from watching *Prince of Persia* [a Hollywood blockbuster action movie]. I just happened to be watching the special features on the DVD and they were talking about parkour. So I started looking for classes on the Internet” (Aleapster). Jumper, one of the first traceurs I met at B.A.S.E. told me he learned “about it mostly from YouTube. My friend and I started watching these videos on YouTube and decided to try it. We looked on the Internet and found this class” (Jumper). Parkour’s proliferation over the Internet and its increasing use in Hollywood action films has helped to popularize the art form. Like many of the traceurs in this study, the Internet searchers lead to me to social networking, most notably Facebook.

Facebook helped me become more familiar with parkour interest groups in and around Indianapolis. I found information about groups that met in Indianapolis but all appeared to be fairly cohesive because there were few if any

invitations to join particular groups. I sent several messages through Facebook to a group of parkour practitioners that met every Saturday in Indianapolis but received no response from the group's administrator. Weeks later and after several attempts I decided to keep searching. I found the Facebook page of B.A.S.E. Fitness which led me to their official website.

B.A.S.E (Balance Agility Strength Endurance) is the only "parkour insured and A.D.A.P.T. trained facility available in the U.S." (BaseFitness). A.D.A.P.T. training which stands for Art du Displacement And Parkour Teaching is one of the primary aims at the facility. The instructors have 20 years of teaching experience and have international parkour certification "through the rigorous and reputable UK Standards of the Parkour Generation/Majestic Force and Yamakasi A.D.A.P.T. Training Program in London" (BaseFitness). The training provided at the facility is conducted by instructors that have trained in the U.S., the U.K., France, and China and their methods concentrate on pushing students in new directions both mentally and physically. Their focus on teaching, safety, and expert certified instruction lent itself to a credibility and openness appropriate to learning the practice and philosophy of parkour. My opening contact with the group was over email. I expressed interest in joining the parkour training classes and asked about registering and the cost of the classes. I then

called the lead instructor, who I affectionately came to know as Rabbit, and over the phone explained that my participation was twofold: I wanted to learn the techniques of parkour and, if allowed, conduct interviews for my study with the other traceurs participating in the training.

Tracing the Space

B.A.S.E. is located in Noblesville, Indiana approximately 30 miles north of downtown Indianapolis. When I drove up Herriman Boulevard, where the facility is located, I was looking for a gym. I looked for a large noticeable building designed with twists and turns, a structure whose form would follow its function—a structure worthy enough to challenge a group of traceurs climbing and jumping over and around its design. I had heard about places like Monkey Bar Gymnasium in Chicago, one of several grandiose postmodern designed buildings across the country housing state-of-the-art complexes with massive indoor obstacle courses. I kept trying to imagine what a parkour facility might look like. Would there be swooping roof designs, jagged walls to vault off of and between, or ledges to run across? At very least I thought the building would be designed to catch the eye. Parkour as a practice and in its proliferation across the web has a strong visual component: something I hoped might be reconciled

within the design of the training facility. As I drove up to where the building was located I actually drove past the complex. B.A.S.E. sits in the back of an office park and shares commercial space with other businesses. There is no sign on the front of the building displaying its name only a sign at the entrance to the office park with the names of the businesses located at that site.

Walking into the facility is like entering any other business. There is a lobby with a front desk to meet visitors and behind the front desk are an office, a meeting room, and a kitchen. I walked down the hall past the desk to the back of the complex and started to hear voices and a loud smacking sound which turned out to be the sound of traceurs landing flips on padded mats. The adrenaline started to rush as I was excited to meet the group but there was also a feeling of anxiety due to my fear of the unknown and how I would be received. I introduced myself to the first group of traceurs I encountered and asked for the lead instructor, Rabbit. We introduced ourselves and walked back to his office. Rabbit and I briefly discussed how the class would be conducted, his experience with parkour, and some of the goals I had for the interaction with his other students and my study. He had me sign a waiver and afterwards we walked back to where the course was located.

The back of the building is where the training is conducted. It is a large warehouse type structure with high ceilings and contains a large parkour obstacle course. I began to think about the *Parcours du Combattant*, the training courses of the French military, and was ready to start learning parkour. When I entered the space I encountered two or three large mats stacked on top of one another. These mats were placed at the bottom of an eight foot tall box which was constructed for traceurs to climb on and jump off. Before the class began several of the more advanced traceurs were already doing flips off the eight foot box: an experience that was both intimidating and intriguing.

When it was time for the class to officially begin one of the other instructors called the entire group together to begin warming up. The class consisted of 22 people and the group was made up of mostly high school and college students. However, ages ranged from nine years old to people in their 30s. There were 15 men and seven women participating in the class. Rabbit introduced me to the class. I was a little nervous at this point, however, everyone in unison and with some enthusiasm replied, "hi." As a group we began a series of squat and pushup combinations to prepare our bodies to begin training. The purpose of these combinations is to engage the body in dynamic movement as opposed to traditional warm ups involving standing and stretching. The dynamic

movements increase strength while they simultaneously enhance flexibility. Having been a triathlete for many years I felt as if my body was strong and fit enough to handle the parkour training, however, halfway through the warm up my arms and legs felt as if they were already at failure. With each squat and pushup my quadriceps and triceps would quiver because my body was not used to the fast explosive muscle movement involved in this type of conditioning. Following the squat and pushup combinations we did a series of movements to warm up the hands and forearms. The instructors had us raise our arms above our head and open and close the hands from a wide open hand position to a closed fist. At first I did not understand why the instructors had us do this exercise. Admittedly, I felt a little childish. After several minutes of opening and closing my hands I began to feel the muscles in my shoulders and forearms start to burn. After the hand exercises the group broke to hydrate before beginning the parkour portion of the class.

After completing the warm up everyone appeared to be thoroughly exhausted. Traceurs were dripping with sweat, faces were flushed, and many were shaking their arms and legs to cope with the muscle exhaustion. The instructors then had us line up for QMs. I was unsure what we were about to do and as we got in line I asked one of the traceurs next to me, Mist, "what are

QMs?" She told me QM stood for quadrupedal movements which consist of crawling on the hands and feet across the floor and over and under obstacles. During QMs neither the knees nor any other part of the body except the hands and feet are allowed to touch the ground. The technique is to reach out with one hand resting the weight of the body in the connection between the palm and the ground while bringing the opposite leg forward. For example, if one reaches with the left hand as the bodyweight rests on that arm the right knee is bent in and the right leg comes forward. One repeats this on the opposite side executing the moves in succession to drive the body forward.

Much like Merleau-Ponty's notion of a "spatiality of position," understanding of my body during QMs is located in my "anchoring of the active body *in an object*" (115; emphasis mine). During QMs my body is anchored in the floor through the connection of my hands and feet. I am not unaware of the rest of my body but the rest of my body is swallowed up in the connection to the object and the position and movement of the QMs. In this connection I come to know my body differently as my body's relation to space is forefronted during the quadrupedal movements. As one of my first experiences with parkour, the body-space connection during QMs began the first step in becoming a traceur and rethinking my body through its connection with the obstacles.

The quadrupedal movements had us crawling on hands and feet in, around, over, and under the obstacles in the course. In the course there is a six foot wall that sits approximately three feet in front the eight foot box described above. Facing the wall, turning left there is a series of three smaller boxes increasing in height from around three feet to about four feet and spaced approximately five feet apart. As you move past the series of boxes you come to a balance beam stretching ten feet long and resting a foot off the floor. This leads to a four-cornered metal structure close to eight feet off the ground resembling a painter's scaffolding. The scaffolding-like structure is connected to two lower metal rails which are waist and knee high respectively. Connecting the two lower rails is another balance beam which is three feet off the ground. Navigating back around the course from the lower rails brings you back to the six foot wall and the course is repeated.

During the QMs we followed each other in a single-file line maneuvering under the supports for the six foot wall, around the eight foot box, over the padded mats just below the box and back around moving again under the supports for the wall. We then moved toward the scaffolding sliding under the lower rails still careful to only allow the hands and feet to make contact with the ground. This requires core and arm strength and an awareness of the body in

relation to the object. To complete the QM maneuvering the body under the rail, traceurs have to slide their chest an inch from the ground while simultaneously arching the back and buttocks in a concave motion which conforms the body under the bar. This requires an embodied awareness of the object as coming out of the arch too soon forces the body to make contact with the rail interrupting the execution of the maneuver. Once we passed under the rail the group moved toward the higher balance beam doing a similar sliding maneuver to pass under the obstacle and then move toward and over the lower balance beam. After passing over the lower beam the group continued back toward the six foot wall. In unison we completed three to four passes of the course with slight changes based on where the instructor led.

Learning the course initially from the visual perception of a standing position was much different than crawling through the course during QMs. The initial visual perception of the course arranges the obstacles in my mind, which Merleau-Ponty describes as, limiting the object's existence so that "spatial distribution" is the only "possible significance to existence" (171). Learning the course through corporeal connection of hands and feet I come to know the obstacles in both their physical sensation and in my body's relation to them. The significance of existence then for both my body and the objects is sublimated in

my body's spatial distribution in its direct contact with the obstacles in the course.

The Boxes. After QMs we broke again to rehydrate and then Rabbit separated us into three groups: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. I joined the other traceurs in the beginner group. From there, each group was positioned at one of three stations. The advanced group started at the station where the six foot wall and eight foot box were located. The intermediates began working with the scaffolding section and the beginners went to the portion of the course with the three varying leveled boxes. Each group was assigned a series of moves to learn and practice which were demonstrated by the instructors before we began.

In the beginner group we executed a series of side vaults over each of the boxes. The side vault is done by placing both hands shoulder width apart on the obstacle bringing the legs through the air to the side of the body. Keeping the hands in contact with the object you then place the outside leg on top of the obstacle and bring the inside leg under and through the outside leg. This provides the momentum necessary to carry the body over and passed the obstacle. After several runs using the side vault to get over the boxes the instructor gave the group the option of adding a monkey vault to the series. The monkey vault is a more advanced move but also allows you to clear the obstacle

faster and smoother as it reduces bodily contact. The monkey vault is executed in a similar fashion as the side vault; however, instead of bringing the legs to the side of the body around the arms the traceur brings both feet through the arms either landing on the box and then jumping off or completely vaulting over with the hands providing the only contact. The beginners that felt confident enough began implementing the new move into the series. After clearing the third box traceurs would perform a PK (short for parkour) roll. In the PK roll the traceur lands on both feet and brings one of the arms down toward the legs rolling onto the shoulder blade and lower back in a smooth motion. The momentum gained from moving past the boxes makes connecting the vault and the roll, if done properly, a very fluid transition.

The Scaffolding. The instructors then moved the beginners to the next station which was the scaffolding-like structure. The series of moves we were to learn during this portion of the course consisted of running up to, jumping on, and swinging in and through the metal rails. We approached the scaffolding by stepping onto and running along the lower balance beam. At the end of the lower beam we jumped to scaffolding grabbing the vertical railing swinging the body a full 360 degrees back around to the higher balance beam. From there we ran atop the beam and jumped down beside the lower

scaffolding rails. Placing the left hand on the rail we executed a lazy vault over the obstacle. The lazy vault is used to clear barriers closer to the ground. In the lazy vault one hand is placed on the barrier, in this case the railing, and with a scissor kick motion both legs are brought over the structure. The move is called a lazy vault because it requires very little effort to perform the move over lower barriers. After we lazy vaulted the rail we were to spin back toward the rails and duck under and pass through them in one fluid motion.

This series presented me with the biggest challenge of the entire obstacle course. Taken individually each move is easily executed: running over a beam, jumping and grabbing a rail, and spinning under another rail. If parceled out, these moves individually present little trouble. As one traceur told me, “parkour is as much mental as it is physical” (Flyin R). Vaulting over the boxes is, quite literally, straightforward. The traceur moves over the boxes in an efficient straight line. Tracing the scaffolding requires a more complex and nuanced series of maneuvers—the mental part of parkour. Putting each move in successive combination requires physical and mental awareness of the body’s movement and its connection with the obstacles. This forces me to not only move *with* the scaffolding but also to *think* about the scaffolding.

The Wall, the Scaffolding, and the Box. The third and final station of the course was the combination of the six foot wall and the eight foot box. There was a smaller box, approximately two feet high, connected to the wall to help beginners get to the top. In this series traceurs jumped onto the box pulling the body to the top of the wall using a side vault. Then, while standing on top of the wall, we jumped down landing in the three foot gap between the wall and the higher box. To get to the top of the box we had to jump and grab the top and perform what is called a muscle up. The muscle up is used to pull the body up and over higher objects. One jumps and grabs the top of the obstacle and a pull-up motion is used to bring the head and shoulders parallel with the hands. Then, using the feet to kick off the structure, in one fluid motion the hips are thrust upward level with the hands. From there, the body is cleared to step onto or vault over.

Once traceurs became familiar with each of the obstacles at the various stations we came back together as a group. Starting from the portion of the course with the three boxes, in a follow-the-leader fashion, we each began our parkour flow. Vaulting over each of the boxes we performed the PK roll and ran toward to the lower balance beam. We ran over the beam jumping to the scaffolding spinning around to the higher balance beam. We then jumped off of

the beam executing the lazy vault over, and then slid under, the lower rails of the scaffolding. Once the scaffolding was cleared we followed each other toward the wall climbing up and vaulting over. The more advanced traceurs jumped the gap from the wall to the large box and did a flip to the mat below finishing in a PK roll. The beginner and intermediate groups jumped down to the gap between the wall and the box performing the muscle up to pass the box jumping down to the mat into the PK roll.

At this point in the training my confidence began to grow. I became more confident in my ability to adapt to and overcome each obstacle as my skills developed. I was becoming more familiar with the space, with parkour, and with the other traceurs. During the flow I would talk to others about their experiences in the training. Jumper, one of the other beginners struggled getting through the scaffolding and traceurs behind him had to wait before continuing. I told him that I struggled to negotiate the scaffolding as well and asked him if he thought it was confusing. He said, "it was at first but I just got caught up trying to go too fast" (Jumper). After he told me part of his problem with the obstacle was trying to go too fast, I thought that I might be doing the same thing. During my next attempt I tried to go a little slower and concentrate on each maneuver. Once I got to the end of the scaffolding I again spun the

wrong direction. While Jumper and I waited in line for another turn I told him I tried to slow down and still got the maneuver wrong. He reassured me that I would eventually get the move down but told me to concentrate on the position of my hands when vaulting. "Just make sure both hands are on there," he said, "and when you bring yourself over just keep telling yourself to spin left" (Jumper). "It's ok," he added, "we're not expected to be masters just yet. I keep messing it up too but at least we're both trying" (Jumper). While I never did get the move quite right it was helpful to be able to openly talk about my mistakes with someone who was experiencing the same struggles. Jumper was also new to the group. Being able to talk to me about his mistakes seemed to help him negotiate his feelings as a newcomer and to also feel more connected with me, the group, and parkour. Sharing experiences like this connected us as traceurs and began to shape how we understood ourselves in parkour and as members of the group.

Much of my growing confidence interacting as a traceur and practicing parkour with the group was due to the feeling my position amongst the other traceurs was beginning to emerge. While doing the flow as a group I continued to struggle with the scaffolding apparatus. I at first felt embarrassed and kept apologizing to Smoke, the instructor who was stationed there to catch anyone

who fell. With each pass I told her I was sorry for doing it wrong but I would eventually execute the move properly. She reassured me “all you need to do is keep trying.” After one final pass I again spun the wrong direction and again apologized. She told me “it’s getting more fluid and that’s really one of the most important things.” Part of my embarrassment was feeling like I was disappointing her, however, Smoke’s response made me feel like I was finally becoming a traceur. As my movements became more fluid so did my participation in the practices producing both the parkour space and my subjectivity as a traceur.

Positioning the Researcher-Traceur

My participation in the seminar afforded me the opportunity to become part of the group of traceurs at B.A.S.E. This existence-in-culture is central to an epistemology of doing. The traceurs there consider parkour as a lifestyle. Therefore by participating with them in their daily training and my entering the parkour community I am learning through the process of living in that environment by engaging in the everyday practices permitted therein. Engaging everyday practices lends itself to understanding and connecting traceurs’ actions, guiding principles, and ways of meaning making through the practice of

parkour. Knowledge, then, is produced in my participation in the class and through my interactions with other traceurs. While existing in the culture is advantageous to my empirical understanding of this art my participation in the culture produces certain effects that must be recognized.

During a conversation with the lead instructor, Rabbit, it was made clear the importance of understanding how each practitioner participates in constituting the group and the experience of parkour. He explained, "one person changes the whole group...just one other person can change the energy of a group from the direction you take to the places you go" (Rabbit). Engaging ethnographic encounters by being part of the group I change the energy in some way. As a new traceur, for example, I would alter the energy of a group consisting of only advanced practitioners. I might slow them down because of my skill level making it difficult for me to gain full understanding of the experience. The group at B.A.S.E., while accepting of newcomers, must recognize that a new person has entered the space. I in turn have to reconcile being the newest member and also have to find a way to negotiate differences and expectations so that I can successfully become part of the culture. Expectations might be pre-formed based on my age, ethnicity, gender, or skill level. I, too, do not enter the group uninformed by such constructions. This reinforces the cohesion of the group by

excluding me or expands how the group understands and defines itself (making meaning) by accepting me. Together we produce the space of the training facility, each other, and ourselves. This is done through the discourses and practices that produce the space and the subjectivities therein.

To understand subjectivities means to take into account the power structures constituting the spatial relations of the traceurs. One way the power structure can be seen is in how the group was divided for training. The division involved instructors, advanced traceurs, intermediates, and the group of beginners. The instructors directed the group as they possess a formal knowledge gained from learning and training in parkour techniques and philosophies. This expertise gave them the necessary skill set and experience to lead. Possessing the knowledge and skill set produces them as experts and therefore produces their power as knowledge. Here, the body's connection to space becomes a form of power through expert knowledge of how to use the body in space. A traceur who is able to vault over a structure 10 feet high enacts a kind of bodily performance of knowledge. As a new traceur my lack of knowledge and experience produces me as beginner. In mutually constituting our subjectivities, my beginner status reflects and reproduces the power

structure through spatial practice and relation because my beginner subjectivity reinscribes the instructors as experts.

During the training the instructors had the group do pushups and used the time to remind the group to work as one. From the pushup position as we lowered ourselves to the ground we all stated in unison, “we start together” and pushing back up, “we finish together.” By reiterating “we start together we finish together” we as a group reinscribe a discourse of cohesion which guides how we understand ourselves and the space. This example demonstrates how spatial practice functions in discursively producing an understanding of the space and the group. Meaning, therefore, is made through doing. Through an epistemology of doing I engage ethnographic encounters in which I participate in and learn how meaning is communicated, even constructed, by being in the culture and also in my participation in the group’s daily activities.

My presence alters the energy, described above in my conversation with Rabbit, as I alter the spatial relations. This in turn alters my understanding of parkour. Later during the same conversation with Rabbit we discussed the lack of cohesion amongst traceurs in the U.S.’s parkour community. He continued telling me, “it’s not like in the UK or even in France where there’s more camaraderie, over here you have little islands of PK” (Rabbit). If I had practiced

parkour with another group in another location the spatial relations would be different and thus my experience. My participation in these practices is a participation in the spatial relations which produce the power structure and therefore the subjects. Entering the culture my subjectivity, in this instance as a new traceur, and my knowledge of parkour are produced in and through the everyday actions constructing the culture of the environment. Gramsci believes individuals are already cultured because they are “empirically, primordially cultured, not organically” (“Cultural Writings” 25). By existing in culture I come into a form of meaning-making rendered legible through practiced spatial relations. For Mitchell, culture and space take on meaning by being “appropriated in use” (“Right to the City” 129). Therefore, the culture in which my ethnographic encounters occur as a traceur and as a researcher is produced and appropriated in use and understood through spatial practice.

My participation as traceur-researcher facilitated the development of a collaboration and dialogue with the traceurs in the training seminar. As we share experiences we co-create a meaning of the space, the experiences of parkour, and each other. An epistemology of doing is centered on producing knowledge from within the community so the researcher is not disconnected but participates in the production of knowledge. The traceurs at B.A.S.E. and I consider parkour as

a lifestyle. Together we develop skills and knowledge of parkour and what it means to be a traceur. Therefore the traceurs in the training seminar should not be considered as Other because our interaction and collaboration occur in our everyday practices. The interviews conducted were used to highlight this collaboration and turn a dialogue centered on the practice toward understanding the art of parkour in the interworking of freedom, power, architecture and the body.

Learning Parkour, Learning the Body

I have been an athlete for most of my life. In my teens and twenties I was involved in sports such as basketball, football, and running. After college my athletic pursuits turned more toward endurance sports involving marathons and triathlons. These sports require great lung capacity, core, arm, and leg strength along with intense muscle endurance conditioning. Most recently I completed the Ford Ironman in Louisville, Kentucky which consists of a 2.4 mile swim, a 112 mile bike ride, followed by running a 26.2 mile marathon. This is arguably the most challenging one-day endurance race in the world. I mention my athletic background, and my completing the Ironman for two reasons. First, I felt that in being conditioned enough to finish the Ironman my body was trained sufficiently

to handle any physical challenge. Second, it is through these experiences that I have come to know how to use my body athletically.

My triathlon experiences increased an awareness of how to use my body when it is pushed to physical limits. In the disciplines of swimming, biking, and running one learns to fine-tune her or his sense of bodily awareness and to regulate the internal functioning of the body through self-monitoring. An example of self-monitoring can be seen in long-distance running techniques. If the runner's calf muscles feel too tight the trick is to tighten the core muscles and shorten the stride. This breaks the runner out of the pattern of over-striding and alleviates pressure on the leg muscles. If the runner's knee begins to feel pain it is most likely not caused by the pounding of the feet to the ground but is most often caused by the lack of flexibility in the IT (iliotibial) band: the tendon connecting the pelvis, hip, and knee. However, in learning parkour, I had to relearn how to use the body.

In learning parkour I had to relearn how to use my body because the muscle requirements are much different and the regulating of the body (by trying to maintain efficacy through fatigue) requires a different approach. In parkour your body is asked to start and stop and then explode forward again many times in successive moves: the flow. Through these movements the body must be able

to maintain composure while experiencing fatigue. For example, after climbing up and over an eight foot obstacle, jumping down and rolling from the ground back to the feet one might be required to run across a gap only 6 inches wide. As fatigue sets in caused by this type of displacement of the body—an experience not felt in the rhythmic pattern of running long distance for example—the body experiences a feeling of dizziness and the vision can become blurred. To make it across the narrow beam takes composure and concentration. Running across the beam on one's tip-toes, for example, keeps the eyes from jiggling and complicating vision. Gaining a different knowledge of one's body, through parkour, is produced through different uses that broaden familiarity of the body. The expansion of body knowledge is further produced through practice and repetition and becomes internalized as the awareness in embodied.

Learning, even relearning, the body is like anything else — constructive. Schemas and knowledge structures guide our expectations, perceptions, thoughts, and memories concerning the body and are produced, not given, by the discourses and performances to which we are exposed. This exposure is a spatial one. Merleau-Ponty describes the synthesis of body and space stating to be “a body, is to be tied to a certain world...our body is not primarily *in* space: it is of it” (171). The discourses through which we are produced as subjects act as

multiple constraints that guide bodily and spatial awareness. As Merleau-Ponty notes, this body-space awareness becomes a “way of stating that my body is in-the-world” (115). Because I am of space my subjectivity is tied to conscience or self-knowledge produced through spatial practice. Yet, because of discourse’s continuous need for reiteration, through a performance of relearning my body (practicing parkour) I am able to rethink the conscience self-knowledge that defines my body and informs my relation to space.

Tracing the Path of Power through the Fluidity of Freedom

The first research question this study sought to investigate was if parkour is an emancipatory practice giving insight into the relationship between power and freedom. Parkour, as the research demonstrates, is in fact an emancipatory practice. The art lends insight into the relationship between power and freedom by engaging this relationship at its basic level — spatial practice. As traceurs employ new ways of moving in and conceiving of space they at once forefront and challenge the normative spatial practices that constrain both their subjectivity and their conceptions of ways of being. Parkour is an emancipatory practice as it creates new spatial modalities, and in so doing disrupts the reiterative chains of hegemonic discourses and performances.

Parkour begins this disruption as it produces its own knowledge, its own truth, through discourse. The philosophies of parkour are constructed in discourse and take on meaning through the body in the performance of the flow. The discourse of parkour as a constitutive force functions along reiterative chains rendering some practices legible while excluding others. "It's like, if you just jump over something," one traceur told me, "like if a ball rolls passed you and you jump over it you're jumping over something in your way but that's not parkour. You have to think about it" (Aleapster). Much like Smoke encouraging me to concentrate on fluid motion versus performing the move correctly the exclusionary nature of parkour discourse produces a truth about what counts as parkour and what does not. Thus, what counts as parkour, that is, what gives a parkour discourse the power to enact what it names is rendered legible through purposeful action: enacting the performance of parkour to overcome physical and mental barriers. Parkour in practice produces its own truth as discourse. The moves are guided by a way of thinking centered on fluid motion, to never be stopped by any obstacle in one's path, and finding the most efficient way from point A to point B. This truth discourse expands the traceur's self-knowledge and thus subjectivity. As Aleapster further reflects "the world tells me what I am but parkour tells me what I can be" (Aleapster). Traceurs are empowered as the

discourse of parkour expands the domain of self-knowledge, what I am or what I can be, circumscribed by dominant discourse. While standing in line waiting for my turn to have another go at the obstacle course I heard Smoke yell out "*ten pushups!*" I got down in the pushup position and started doing repetitions on her count. The group began chanting, "up...down, that's one, up...down, that's two." Not knowing why the entire group had to suddenly drop down and *give her ten*, I whispered to Mist, doing pushups next to me, "why are we doing pushups?" She whispered back to me "we're not allowed to use the *c* word." I asked her, "what's the *c* word?" The group finished the 10 pushups and as we stood, still unable to bring herself to say the word, she said "we're not allowed to say" and she spelled out "c-a-n-t." What is so telling about this interaction, even Mist not saying the word but spelling it out, is how discourse informs knowledge of parkour and in turn informs knowledge as power. Simply telling someone that the *c* word is not to be used has very little power discursively to constitute a truth/ knowledge about regulatory norms. The power of the discourse, and thus the norm, is brought to life by changing spatial practice.

Disciplining the word out of the discourse through pushups repositions a discursively constructed truth. In other words, *I can't* is no longer knowable because the discourse has no reiterative performance. This is not to say the

thinking acting traceur simply forgets the discursive limitation of *I can't* but rather parkour offers a discourse of possibility of which she or he can reiterate to produce a counter truth. Once incorporated into the traceur's framework for thinking and acting, as evidenced by Mist spelling out c-a-n-t, it internalizes the discourse as it becomes part of how one comes to relearn the self through the body's use in practicing parkour. Therefore, what was once circumscribed as knowable by normative discourse, inscribing a self-knowledge of *I can't*, is reconceptualized through parkour as *I can*. This perception of possibility, of rethinking what you can be, one of the more advanced traceurs described to me, is because "parkour is possibility" (The One). During a conversation with The One, he told me "part of your development is learning how to get over your fears and jump from one thing to the next. It has helped me overcome that fear" (The One). The reiteration of *I can*, for me, for The One, and for many other traceurs, furthers a discourse of parkour through bodily performances centered on possibility. This functions as parkour's own regime of truth as *what I can be* challenges the conscience and self-knowledge to which subjectivity is tethered.

Parkour as a truth discourse broadens traceurs' notions of self. A traceur's challenge of her or his subjectivity is done through training in the ways of parkour. Developing as a traceur modifies a conception of self and her or his

material-spatial conditions. As a technology of the self, parkour allows the practitioner to (re)produce, transform, and manipulate physical and mental barriers she or he perceives as limiting. Practitioners accomplish this through finding their own way or journey but also with the help of others such as instructors and other traceurs. Traceurs utilize the practice of parkour as a technology of the self to reconstitute their experience of the world: or the experience prescribed by social life. As the body is of space so too are the practices that produce space. A change in the body, then, has the potential to change the production of space and therefore the body-space dialectic which informs ways of being. Thus, training in parkour modifies the individual as traceur not only in acquiring new skills but also in acquiring new attitudes.

Traceurs' newly acquired skills and attitudes become embodied as they are put into practice. Putting these skills and attitudes into practice is central to developing as a traceur. Jumper described to me that he felt as if parkour "changes your take on the world...you know the more you do parkour the more it changes your perspective...the more it gives you energy" (Jumper). In training, the practitioners affect a number of operations on their own bodies. Spinner, a traceur whose advanced moves garnered much respect from the group and the instructors, mentioned his development as a traceur "has," for example, "even

changed my diet you know...I started eating better and paying more attention to what I put in my body because of fuel" (Spinner). Spinner's comments highlight how actively working on the body, in parkour, is an active work on thought and action. Spinner went on to say:

Well before I started doing it [parkour] I was not physically fit at all. I was real skinny, skinny as a stick and it got me past all my fears that I couldn't do stuff. I never even thought about flipping or something like parkour before but it got me past all that. (Spinner)

Like Jumper and Spinner, traceurs use parkour as a technique of empowerment. By being more aware of the body and producing changes in the body, the practice of parkour leads to changes in thought and conduct.

As one develops as a traceur, in both body and thought, the newly acquired skills have a significant influence on how these practitioners approach life. "[Parkour] made me realize that I can do anything...after ten years of gymnastics I didn't think I could do anything to improve to get better personally" (Mist). The notion of getting better personally is linked to a certain ownership in the expansion of self-knowledge derived from the practice of parkour. Spinner also comments: "I was always kind of enamored by special forces [military] training. I wanted to do that. Parkour has changed the way I exercise and made

me smarter doing my training...it's expanded my view of what I am capable of" (Spinner). The feeling of empowerment, of being capable of more, as reflected by Mist and Spinner, results from the traceur being responsible for her or his training and development. As traceurs transform their body so too do they transform their attitudes toward ways of being.

Agency, then, is enacted through traceur's transformation of the body. As the subject is never complete, in this process traceurs are able to imagine alternative possibilities in challenging disciplinary and constraining regulatory norms. As Smoke mentioned in a conversation after the training class:

Parkour put a name on things I wanted to improve in myself. Stuff that I was nervous about or afraid of it helped me look at those differently and approach them differently. Like running up a wall, for example, it makes me think of mental obstacles too. It's helped me recognize those. Parkour gives a name to things I wanted to try or change in myself like getting over physical and mental barriers. (Smoke)

Parkour, for many, acts as a name for their agency. Agency can be derived from what are perceived as impossible or unknowable choices. Differently approaching, even recognizing, physical and mental barriers provides the occasion for action. Parkour offers practitioners a wider range of *impossible*

choices. As power acts on the traceur's possible actions parkour reframes what actions are possible. Through a more disciplined body traceurs limit power's ability to constrain. The domain of intelligibility is expanded because of the traceur's expanded possibilities.

The training of parkour functions as meticulous work of power on the body. Traceurs employ techniques to master the body and enact agency. Thus, hegemonic power provides the occasion to act — disciplining spatial modalities — while parkour responds giving the traceur the techniques to use the body as an exercise of power. As Aleapster noted during one of our breaks in training:

There's not a sense that something is an obstacle. It's not an obstacle it's an opportunity. My viewpoint has changed on the obstacles you find in your path because you say 'I have to stop or go another way.' But with parkour you use the obstacle as a tool. (Aleapster)

Through the practice of parkour obstacles become tools of agency. The building or barrier becomes an opportunity to enact agency. For the traceur the body, space, and agency have a reciprocal inherence.

For traceurs acts of agency, as acts of power/freedom, are employed through an appropriation of both the body and space. The body, Lefebvre claims, "takes its revenge" on space in seeking "to make itself known" (384). The

reciprocal inherence of agency, body, and space is located in traceurs making themselves known, or differently knowable, in space. Making the self knowable in space is accomplished through appropriation of the body as the body is generative of “practice, of use [and] hence of space” (Lefebvre 384). Therefore, an appropriation of the body is at once an appropriation of space. Combining practice, use, and space as opportunities and as tools for agency, the traceur uses corporeal connection of body and built form to enact freedom by generating new practices, uses, and hence new spaces.

Parkour’s ability to generate alternative meanings of spaces through new practices is due to space and action being co-constitutive. New spatial practices produce space differently in the same way that new spaces encourage new practices. Many traceurs find the freedom to act in the development of the parkour vision. The acquisition of the parkour vision, Mist recalled:

[C]hanged my experiences of even walking down the street. My outlook walking down the street like with architecture and stuff if I hadn’t done parkour I would have just looked at it. I would have walked down the street and seen that wall and that rail and not thought to use them but now I have a different view of the architecture when I walk down the street. (Mist)

Parkour forefronts the structure — its meaning and use — and allows the traceur to rethink her or his interaction with the built environment. Rethinking space brings with it an emancipatory reconceptualization of spatial practice. The rethinking of space is highlighted by Spinner when he told me: “I don’t see fences anymore. I see I can do this! So like the fence is something I can get over so I see a tic tac or a way to monkey over it. I don’t see I can go through the gate, now I see how many ways I can get over it” (Spinner). By deploying energy in space subjects, in this instance traceurs, “produce space and themselves, along with their motions, according to the laws of space” (Lefebvre 171). Producing the self through motion becomes emancipatory as space is produced through practice. Rethinking structures in space lends itself to new spatial practices and thus (re)produces space as more emancipatory and less constraining.

The traceur, however, is still subject to power even as she or he tries to rework it. Even through the parkour vision the appropriation of space, for Lefebvre, requires more than just vision as subjects are still limited by the “symmetries, interactions...and other determinants of space” (195). There are material symmetries and determinants, for instance, the physicality of architecture and the organization of space. Traceurs cannot walk through walls; however, they can vault over them. The laws of gravity, too, play a part in

determining the traceur's interaction with the built environment. Traceurs cannot fly between buildings or over them; however, they can tic tac and climb to the roof or jump from one building to the next. There are discursive laws that discipline and circumscribe the normative operations producing spaces and bodies. In other words, "certain movements, like parkour, are not real conducive or acceptable really. It's because we're so preconditioned to commute from place to place in a certain way" (Rabbit). It is through the fluid movement of parkour where traceurs find a more emancipatory engagement of architectural space. Through the parkour flow the practitioner challenges discursive symmetries, interactions, and determinates which precondition individuals' use of space: a precondition that constrains and informs the self-knowledge of subjectivity.

In challenging power through the body Lefebvre calls for the mastery not only of space through appropriation but also in individuals' taking "control of their own nature" (166). Mist describes her feeling of this mastery in her continued progression as a traceur:

Parkour has definitely opened new doors, literally. It's given me a really great appreciation of more people and like where I am. I definitely feel way more in control of my body now. I see stuff way different now. Not only like the world but like myself too. I can do a lot more stuff now

because I'm so confident in *the way*, you know, parkour allows me to accomplish that. (Mist; emphasis mine)

The way she speaks of is how many traceurs describe their personal journey and finding their flow. The personal journey that is parkour gives traceurs a sense of discovering a personal truth about themselves. For many, they discover this personal truth as they continuously master their nature, their body, and create freer conceptions of their place in the world.

Traceurs find this development particularly emancipating. Describing his feelings of a more emancipated experience of self and space, Aleapster comments:

As far as feeling freer, I feel like there are no restrictions now on what I can and can't do in my environment. There's a larger sense of freedom.

Gates and walls are total barriers and there's no way to get over them.

But with parkour restrictions are no longer obstacles. (Aleapster)

His comments of feeling freer are developed in his parkour training. Parkour acts as a technology of freedom by developing in the traceur techniques of agency: the ability to act. The feelings of empowerment acquired through the practice of parkour provide Jumper with a sense of agency, as he reveals: "there's a feeling of the biggest badassness in the world. Like, you start seeing things to monkey over or just get over. You start feeling like you can do anything" (Jumper).

Parkour presents traceurs a freer engagement of space as it develops freer uses and expressions of the body. Practitioner's become agents capable of freer and alternative action through the misuse of the body: a misuse that comes to define them as they master their nature. Traceurs are empowered to enact agency and engage a more emancipatory use of space through the fluidity of freedom that is parkour.

Freedom, like power, is practiced. Freedom and power are mutually constitutive in this relationship. There is no ontological freedom or power that can be picked up and analyzed. There is only an epistemology of freedom (and power) in that traceurs learn freedom through parkour's emancipatory practice. Therefore freedom, power, agency, and subjectivity cannot be abstracted from space and the relations therein for each are mutually determining as they are mutually constitutive through spatial relations. The reciprocal inherence of spatial practice and practices of freedom, in this instance parkour's fluid movement, lies in the processes of human activity, always relational, which "fashion space and are determined by it" (Lefebvre 85). Parkour, then, becomes an emancipatory practice by (re)engaging and (re)producing the spaces, bodies, and practices which produce freedom and power. Parkour as an act of power is guided by a discourse of freer engagement of architectural space. Traceurs

develop their bodies, skills, and minds and enact performances through the parkour flow that reiterate the discourse of freedom and possibility. Parkour's ability to challenge power in socio-architectural space is achieved through the different use of the body and space. It is in the different uses of the body and architectural space wherein the freedom of parkour is not only produced through emancipated modalities but is also embodied in the lived practices of the traceur.

Rethinking the Relationship between Architecture and the Body

After the training classes I wanted to find and challenge power in architecture. The next chapter of my travel story I took me — and my developing skills as a traceur — into The City, that first urban environment that so fascinated me during my youth. I journeyed back to my old neighborhood on the 400 block of Massachusetts Avenue in downtown Indianapolis. “Mass Ave” or The Avenue as it is known to locals has played a significant role in my life. I continue to maintain many social and familial ties which are connected to the area. These connections bring with them many emotional ties to Mass Ave. This is the area of The City in which my mother would take my brother and me to see my uncle when we were children. It is the same area of Indianapolis in

which I lived when I moved back to the States after two years inhabiting London, THE CITY of all cities. Having lived on Mass Ave for much of my adult life I still hold many memories of the area such as seeing the Indianapolis skyline lit at night, having lunch at the Old Point Tavern, or simply having a coffee on the S-shaped sitting wall outside in Davlan Park. Each of these spaces and my emotional connection to them has shaped the way I understand myself in relation to the space but also in how I have learned to move in the space. In this way, much of how I have come to understand myself is connected to Mass Ave.

Massachusetts Avenue was developed as a direct result of Indianapolis' flourishing Wholesale District in the late 19th and early 20th century (National Park Service). The Wholesale District grew out of the city's geographic location along the railways as Indianapolis' Union Station functioned as a rail hub connecting Chicago, Louisville, and Cincinnati. Around 1863, German immigrants, August and Henry Schnull built the first of what were known as wholesale houses to provide area residents and rail workers with food, products, and other services. These wholesale houses "liberated shoppers from their dependence on retailers outside of the city" (Discover Cultural Districts). The rail industry propelled Indianapolis' commerce as the residents were able

to purchase supplies and ship goods across the country. The Ralston Plan of 1821 was a development initiative which originally planned the city as a one-square mile block with the Governor's Mansion located in the center of a large circular commons area (National Park Service). The Governor's Mansion was later relocated north of the city and was replaced by the Soldiers and Sailor's Monument or Monument Circle. Indianapolis then constructed four diagonal streets which were to serve as the main arteries to the downtown or Wholesale District. The four streets were constructed in an X pattern intersecting at and crossing through Monument Circle. This project led to the development of what are currently known as the five cultural districts. The five cultural districts consist of: 1) Broad Ripple Village directly north of downtown; 2) Fountain Square directly south of downtown; 3) Indiana Avenue on the northwest side; 4) Massachusetts Avenue on the northeast side; and 5) The Wholesale District which is considered the center of Indianapolis.

Mass Ave thrived during the time of railways at the height of the Wholesale District's commerce between 1870 and 1930 (National Park Service). The area continued to grow as a place for residents and businesses alike to share in the city's prosperity. After the Great Depression, however, The Avenue suffered and economic growth began to wane. In the 1960s, the

finished construction of Interstate 65 “virtually cut Massachusetts Avenue from outside traffic, withering its vitality” (Discover Cultural Districts). Since then, gentrification efforts redeveloped Mass Ave as the “Arts and Cultural District” of Indianapolis (Discover Cultural Districts). Today, the area is a hotbed for fine dining, art galleries, theater, and nightlife.

Doing by not Doing

The architecture of The Avenue still bears witness to its economic past. The street is lined with four to five story buildings designed with “brick Italianate façades [with] cast iron storefronts and window hoods [and] Chicago Style commercial buildings with banks of windows, simple moldings and plain overhanging cornices” (National Park Service). The vertical storefronts are bereft of any stairways for entry, stoops for sitting, or awnings for protection of the elements. The Avenue has the occasional steel bench for sitting; however, much of that space is relegated to the Starbucks at the corner of Mass Ave and Vermont Street. The space of Mass Ave is conducive to walking, shopping, and dining. The design of the area encourages movement from business to business or to residences accessed through unassuming doorways hidden among the dark red brick of buildings along the street. The Avenue is truly dedicated to

moving individuals in the direction of storefronts and to lead them further downtown. The built environment of The Avenue invites a commercial movement and is not amenable to stopping, sitting, or even practicing parkour. In short, through the eyes of a traceur, The Avenue is boring. I wanted to go back to my old neighborhood to practice parkour because of my history with the space and to see if parkour could lend a relearning of both space and my body; however, there were few opportunities. Not doing parkour lent itself to a more nuanced understanding of the art and the body's relationship with architecture.

I traveled to a parking garage located on the northwest corner of the 400 block of Massachusetts and Michigan Street. The structure is an eight-story monolith style building constructed of exposed concrete — what architects refer to as the brutalist style. The access ramp is a walkway leading up and through the structure and is closed to the outside but is open to the parking decks inside. The walkway is approximately four feet wide with painted blue railings on either side. The ramp provides access to each parking level in a switchback or zigzag pattern. Along the switchback is a two foot gap between the parallel concrete barriers that mark the ramp and the parking levels. Although not its

intended design, it was evident the gap was mainly used to dispose of waste of all kinds.

I started by side vaulting onto the diagonal barrier enclosing the ramp. From there I ran along the wall much like the balance beam in the training class. Once I came to the start of the next switchback I jumped and grabbed the top of the next wall and climbed up in the same manner I climbed the eight foot box at B.A.S.E. The exposed concrete was excellent for gripping the walls. It had deep ridges and jagged edges from the pebbles mixed in the cement. It was cold and felt wet even though it was dry. The grooves in the concrete also provided much needed traction for my feet to push off and give me the momentum to get up and over to the top of the wall. Once on top of the next switchback I decided to jump the four foot gap between the ramp wall and the parking deck. I planted both feet and jumped the gap. I landed using my hands to grab the top of the parking deck wall and swung my feet directly to the blue handrail connected to the wall. Executing a wall run I climbed to the top. I then ran up the diagonal switchback and repeated the series of moves to complete a parkour run up several floors.

I made my way to the roof (admittedly using the stairs) and looked over Mass Ave. From the vantage point atop the parking garage I could see most of The Avenue. While Mass Ave is billed as a center for arts and culture in

Indianapolis the question still remains, for whom? The residents on The Avenue come from myriad backgrounds as it is populated by mixed-income apartments and condominiums; however, the majority of the people who use the space are largely the White middle class who come to The Avenue for their *cultural* interests.

The area surrounding Mass Ave is visibly neglected. The apartment buildings and business on the adjacent streets of Michigan and Alabama are dilapidated, full of litter, and have obviously not been maintained over the years. These residences and businesses are located within the politically demarcated space of the Arts and Cultural district, yet, have had little or no money devoted to their renovation. Mass Ave is on a 45 degree angle from the perpendicular Cartesian street grid of Indianapolis. The marketing campaign for Mass Ave advertises the area as “45 degrees from the ordinary” (Discover Cultural Districts). This advertising strategy has a sense of irony as The Avenue’s development stands in stark contrast the surrounding area.

What is so revealing about The Avenue is that when analyzed through its history and economic development it tells a story — a spatial story. The spatial practices giving shape and meaning to Mass Ave produce a representation of power which becomes encoded in the architecture.

Individuals and their use of the space produce meanings of the body which become encoded in their spatial operations and movements. The raced, sexed, and classed bodies that have the economic means to patronize the businesses on The Avenue take on different meaning as they become juxtaposed 45 degrees from the *ordinary*. Individuals without the means or access to the same spatial practices are constituted differently. Architecture, then, participates in the production and reflection of the intelligibility of the body and thus subjectivity. The architecture on Mass Ave not only disciplines spatial practices so that they center on production and consumption but also communicates access or denial to certain operations or ways of being which reflects and (re)produces subjectivity.

The second research question this study sought to investigate was how the art of parkour can be used to understand the relationship of architecture and the body. I recount this experience of parkour in the Mass Ave area, and perhaps more revealing the absence of parkour, to begin answering the second research question but to also demonstrate the traceur's relationship to architecture is more than a simple bodily production of space. According to Lefebvre buildings in urban space successfully merge objects of control by power including bodies and their spatial practices. He contends this

combination “effects a brutal condensation of social relationships” which reduces the whole paradigm of space to practices centered on domination and appropriation toward capitalistic ends (Lefebvre 227). This compression of social relations, Lefebvre claims, “reduces significant opposition and values among them pleasure and suffering, use, and labor” (227). de Certeau finds the privileging of capitalistic use causes “space itself to be forgotten” as individuals become blind to such representations in architecture and its condensing of socio-spatial practices (95). Alternative notions of bodies, such as parkour, and of spaces are disciplined in their relationship to architecture. The relationship between architecture and the body, then, acts as a determinant for the range of intelligibility for the users and uses that produce urban space. Reducing social relationships to relations of capital flow works to exclude alternative views of architectural space that might threaten power, specifically, views centered on practices that might challenge normative spatial modalities and subjectivity.

The potential to expand possibilities, for the traceur, has an immediate connection with architecture. Architecture, in its representation, acts as a type of social mirror in which the individual is continuously “self-checking her or his identity against a building or boundary” (Borden 101). For Beatriz Colomina, architecture is not simply a “platform that accommodates the

viewing subject...it is a viewing mechanism that produces the subject" (83). As a social mirror and mechanism producing subjects, architecture is a constant reminder of an Other. In the same way that I perceive access to Mass Ave or access to the surrounding area I am also seeing my subjectivity reflected in the architecture. As Lefebvre explains, "one relates oneself to space, situates oneself in space...measures oneself. One is, in short, a subject" (182). My connection to space in many ways forms my subjectivity in relation to an Other represented in architecture.

Parkour's contribution to the relationship between architecture and the body is found in how the art displaces bodies so as to challenge normative spatial modalities and subjectivity. Aleapster commented on his alternative views of architectural space:

Five or six people see the exact same thing but you see it differently.

Your perceptions are based on ability...based on your level. So an obstacle, like a building, is about your perception. So with parkour, I guess I can adapt to situations and be different than most people.

(Aleapster)

Through parkour, he sees architectural space differently. The alternative perception of architecture challenges power's attempts to homogenize space and

as a result homogenize spatial practices. Practicing parkour engages alternative perceptions of power's attempts, through the production of urban architectural space, to condense social relationships to relations of capital production. Being able to adapt to situations and be different allows the traceur to enact more autonomous and emancipatory performances of the body and of the self.

Discourse's confinement of available or appropriate practices disciplines the production of the subject as it determines the range of performances in relation to subjectivity. Parkour (re)produces subjectivity through actions incommensurate with a hegemonic discourse as it provides a greater range of available spatial practices.

Power's visual representation in architecture and its acting as a mirror to subjectivity creates what de Certeau calls an "optical knowledge" of urban space (93). In other words individuals visually perceive power's representation in architecture and their access or denial to space and the range of available uses (movements). As the traceur develops, she or he acquires a parkour vision which challenges the optical vision prescribed in architecture. As Smoke eloquently describes:

I compare it to taking a painting class. You have to mix all the colors and shades and if you do it long enough you start to see all that in

your environment. The more you practice, the more you do it [painting], and the more you know how to do it, you develop it in your mind. Everywhere you go you see it. Like the painting class, you're learning that ability to notice opportunity in your environment. From PK you learn how to see the obstacles differently. (Smoke)

Seeing the obstacles differently is co-constructed between body and building through the PK flow. As traceurs engage in the flow they begin to perceive architecture through the parkour lens. In parkour, "everyone has a different perception of their line. So parkour teaches you a vision of the obstacles and how to see your line" (Rabbit). This constitutes an optical knowledge of their own which leads to different spatial engagements. Traceurs challenge a normative optical knowledge, a visual representation of power, through corporeal connection to architecture, an embodied agency.

As Borden notes, the moving body (re)produces "architecture on its own terms" (105). In challenging "appropriate use," Borden suggests, individuals enacting performances with an intimate knowledge of "a craft" (in his example, skateboarding) are "capable of defining space by gesture and movement" (100). The traceur's moving body is able to project itself and its actions onto architecture and in the movement the body challenges the visual with the corporeal. In this

projection the traceur is able to refuse an acceptance or submission to the constraints informed by her or his relationship to architectural space.

Architecture, in part, produces an optical knowledge of one's place as a subject; however, parkour's fluid and freer movement has significant effects for the interpretation of appropriate use, and therefore meaning, of the body in architectural space.

Traceurs challenge appropriate use through bricolent movements and gestures. The stairway in the parking garage, for example, has no power in its physicality. Power is produced in the stairway through use. The structure has the power to prescribe but not to determine as architecture "reproduces itself within those who use the space...within their lived experience" (Lefebvre 137). Traceurs, then, redefine architectural space through a redefinition of appropriate use. As The One explains, "normal society is taught that a wall is supposed to keep you out, unless you're criminally minded. People will see it as a barrier. With parkour you start to see walls that you can look at differently, it's not a barrier anymore" (The One). Normal society, as he states, creates ways of operating or instructions for use, for example, the wall being designed to keep you out. The traceur as bricoleur distinguishes the types of operations that give meaning and power to architecture. By making tactical use of architectural space traceurs are able to

manipulate and divert architecture's instructions for use and establish within them (both body and building) a degree of emancipatory plurality and creativity.

In understanding the relationship between architecture and the body it is the traceur's corporeal engagement with architecture which is important. In the parkour flow the architecture and the body are redefined not in their physicality but within their connection. Mist indirectly explains the traceur as bricoleur:

I think architecture has limited us. We learned in my psych class it's called functional fixedness where you see the object for what it's supposed to do and when you do something different with it you change its purpose. In parkour you are changing the purpose of the obstacle because you're doing something different than its purpose like a gate or wall. (Mist)

In using the structure in ways counter to its intended purpose the traceur at once recodifies the meaning of both body and the obstacle. The meaning produced in both architecture and the body is redefined in the parkour flow. Through the flow the traceur body and the structure (re)combine in a series of bricolent maneuvers to create new spatial practices, knowledges, and imaginings.

Bricolage against Subjectivity

The mutually constitutive nature of bodies and buildings is once again forefronted through the parkour flow. Individuals making a “revolt against normative space,” Borden contends, lies in their performative and representational practices wherein they re-imagine architectural space and thereby “recreate both architecture and themselves” (89). Architecture and the body are both sites of power. The functional fixedness of the gate or wall, as the traceur explains above, has a meaning as a barrier. That meaning is produced through use as a spatial practice. Walking through the gate for those who have access as well as keeping out for those who do not, those uses reinscribe or (re)produce the meaning of the gate and the bodies conforming use to the constructed meaning. As the traceur vaults the gate or executes a wall run overcoming the structure she or he simultaneously alters the meaning of both the body and the structure. As bodies and buildings take on meaning in space through spatial practice appropriation of use, for both, is an appropriation of meaning. Parkour as a tactical act of bricolage in the strategic space of power (urban architecture) also functions as an act of bricolage against subjectivity.

In executing a vault over the parking garage wall I at once reinscribe and expand the meaning of the wall. The wall, then, is reproduced as barrier-obstacle

and barrier-opportunity. In the same moment, through the corporeal connection with the structure, I reinscribe and expand the meaning of my body as traceur or as criminal to some. However, if I own the structure over which I am vaulting potentially recodifies my body as abnormal and not as criminal. Vaulting over the structure that one owns contains no real threat to power and thus power's need to marginalize the behavior to the constitutive outside is minimal. To be sure, traceurs are not criminals. Parkour is about freer movement and emancipating the traceur from normative constraints on moving-being. Using parkour as a means for criminal ends does not align with the spirit and purpose of the art.

The corporeal connection of body to building, for Borden, has a destabilizing effect. He claims through the corporeal connection the meaning of both the body and architecture are "dissolved, recast, and rematerialized" (Borden 135). While I disagree that the body's and architecture's meanings are dissolved, parkour as an act of bricolage does recast and rematerialize the relationship. In making bricolent use of my body I am making bricolent use of the discourses and practices that constitute my body. As a 34 year old white middle class male there are a range of discourses (race, gender, class, age) that invite performances to (re)produce the meaning of my body as such. However, in parkour I am using my body in ways counter to the performances that assign

those discourses constitutive power. By enacting performances commensurate with those hegemonic discourses my body becomes a strategic site of power imbued with characteristics of which I can enjoy or challenge. Thus, parkour is not only a tactical use of strategic architectural space through bricolent appropriation but is at once a tactical (mis)use of my body as a strategic site of power. As I develop as traceur-tactician I develop the skills to make tactical (mis)use of my body. Through the parkour flow, with each successive bricolent maneuver over one obstacle to the next, I am simultaneously enacting bricolage against my subjectivity by manipulating or recasting constraining discourses that constitute my body.

Acts of bricolage, such as parkour, do not go unnoticed by power. The training facility at B.A.S.E. is a distribution of space or what Foucault calls a “functional site” for the training and development of individuals (“Discipline and Punish” 143). The architecture of functional sites operate as a way to discipline a “code of space” (Foucault, “Discipline and Punish” 143). The purpose of functional sites as a distribution of space is to train individuals to embody, subscribe, and conform to a set of norms. In the training facility these norms are those produced in the practice of parkour. In urban space produced norms center on production and consumption. Traceurs, however, reverse the notion of

functional sites. As the traceur develops and takes those skills into urban space, the space of the city then becomes a functional site. The traceur makes use of the built environment to train and develop her or his body to the norms of parkour thus redefining the prescribed codes of architectural space.

The practice of parkour is marked as unintelligible by a rationality of production and consumption. Power, then, must move with parkour in order to discipline the practitioner to conform to practices that align with the interests of capital. Parkour as a practice of freedom has the ability to alter the balance of power as it challenges the ways that power is able to (re)produce itself through not only hegemonic discourses but also through architectural space. Power, then, like parkour has a movement of its own. Hegemonic power at work in the city must reformulate itself to maintain its ability to act on the actions afforded the traceur. Power's ability to adjust and recast is described by Rabbit:

Parkour, if it continues it'll continue to have an impact. More places will put chicken wire on the rooftops. Like in France they put a mixture of broken glass and mix it with mortar to keep traceurs off the roofs. More architecture and structures will start to change based on how society sees PK. If it's spun the wrong way and becomes criminal

or competitive, which is criminal, it'll have an effect on the environment that way. It already has. (Rabbit)

Parkour's impact on the balance of freedom and power, in this example, demonstrates how power moves in order to answer its potential subversion. Power can and must "shift from one [disciplining code] to another" to subsume practices by which its efficacy is threatened (Lefebvre 162). Recoding in the form of chicken wire barricades and glass-laden rooftops demonstrates power's need and ability to "never allow itself to be confined" so as to be able to adjust to behaviors counter to hegemonic production and maintenance (Lefebvre 162). By enacting freedom traceurs then alter power's balance and production.

The recognition of parkour as an act counter to hegemonic functioning positions the art as one in which individuals can influence the number and forms of operations available to power. Causing power to recode and react, parkour expands the discursive formation of power's realm of intelligibility. Further, power's susceptibility to acts of freedom is due to "power [having] only strategies – and their complexity is in proportion to power's resources" (Lefebvre 162). The techniques and technologies enacted by hegemonic forces are not static but do in fact have a strategic interplay with traceur's attempts at spatial freedom. Parkour, in its expansion of dominant discourses, can be seen as an

action on the actions of power. Traceurs, through freer engagement of architectural space (and their bodies) do not liberate themselves from power but alter, upset, and challenge its ability to define them.

Through the dialectic of power and freedom the traceur develops a different understanding of the relationship between architecture and the body. A hegemonic deployment of power, such as mixing broken glass and mortar, further explicates power's use of architecture to discipline individuals' perceptions of the range of available spatial practices. The result of this interplay, between power's attempt to control space and practitioners' attempts of personal freedom is what de Certeau refers to as a "truth value" of space (99). A truth value of space, a *truth* of ways of being in space, develops, as de Certeau explains, individuals' "epistemic modalities;" how subjects come to know and interpret the ensemble of possibilities for spatial the practices (99). The construction of an epistemic modality—knowing *who* I am based on *where* I am or knowing where *to go* based on where I *can go*—highlights the importance of an epistemology of doing with regard to understanding parkour as this approach is centered on knowledge being locational, situational, and positional. As a kind of pedagogy of space, epistemic modalities become so

normalized they reduce and limit the creativity and improvisation needed for the production of more emancipatory urban spaces.

Parkour is a continuous change in spatial location and therefore is a constant change in traceurs' relation to space. Parkour requires an expansion of traceurs' epistemic modalities. As a traceur my subjectivity, and my power to act (agency) are tied to my spatial location and the produced meaning (representation) of the space. My body takes on different meaning and thus enacts different modalities in the overlapping of myriad spaces. Just as I was in between Mass Ave and neglected or *ordinary* surrounding area I learn how to move in and around those architectural spaces as I learn my subjectivity. These spaces, too, are not demarcated as little islands of space but also reflect meaning and produce representations of each other. Further, these spaces not only reflect my subjectivity they also reinscribe my relation to the architecture in my occupance or absence of those spaces. I learn, or know, how to move and where I can move based on who and where I am in relation to architectural space.

Traceurs develop expanded and more nuanced epistemic modalities. This development, however, is still tethered to a spatial order which "organizes an ensemble of possibilities (e.g. a place in which one can move) and interdictions

(e.g. a wall that prevents one from going further)” (de Certeau 98). The body and architecture are connected once again as the spatial organization informs the parkour flow. As Rabbit explained in our initial conversation before the training class, “the structure is the move. Location dictates your movement. Location in terms of where you are or where you’re from will influence the type of flow and the techniques they throw” (Rabbit). He went on to say:

If structures are tightly knitted the flow is different. If its 50 or 60 feet apart you develop more cardio whereas if you’re doing short jumps you have a tighter flow and its based off your terrain and your vision of it.

Indiana: not a good place for parkour. It’s real spread out and around here you have to seek places out. We’ll check out a place and the structure isn’t strong enough to support you. But in the U.K. the architecture is built better and will hold you. Here you jump up and reach out to get a hold and the brick comes off in your hand. It doesn’t allow people to experience PK in the U.S. like they do overseas because of so much space between us. You have to drive for a while to find something you can play on. (Rabbit)

The traceur’s development is situational, spatial, and contextual. Similar to my experience on Mass Ave, the realm of possibilities for the traceur is in many ways

dictated by the built environment. Through parkour's flow traceurs' epistemic modalities are multiplied as they transform the meaning of the spatial order and the possibilities for practices therein.

However, the spatial order reciprocally informs which obstacles are repositioned as opportunities. Different obstacles lend themselves to a differently developed traceur. As Rabbit further explained:

This gives people different development and lends itself to different training and a different training mindset. You develop based on what's around you and that develops a certain mindset. It's like why everybody wears different clothes. So if you're used to being in flat spaces you're going to do more running because you're trying to fill the space with movement, but, if you're in a tight knit space it allows you to do more kongs, monkeys, and jumps. That develops your body different and your vision too. (Rabbit)

One's conception of freer engagement with space, expanding epistemic modalities, is produced dialectically with the space in which one is enmeshed. Parkour in a more dense urban space develops the traceur's spatial sensibilities differently than parkour in a less dense area, in this example, Indianapolis.

The traceur's body, too, plays a significant role in how she or he develops a vision of the line in the built environment. "Different body types" Rabbit reveals, "dictate the moves...someone who's 6'4" can't take the path the same way as somebody who's 5'2" so a different body type has a different attack method. For example, taller people a lot of the time might take a higher line" (Rabbit). The physicality of one's body informs how she or he uses architecture in parkour. Simultaneously the architecture informs how she or he uses the body. The series of moves one conducts is "based on your body...it causes you to be more self-aware because you have to be aware of your body like you're using it to solve a problem" (Rabbit). Rabbit's comments expose the intricate balance between the body and architecture as each play a central role not only in the traceur's development but in her or his conceptualizing the body's role in epistemic modalities.

In my development as a traceur I have found that perhaps parkour's greatest act of freedom is in the ways that it redefines and repositions social relations. Parkour reframes the building or boundary in which one self-checks her or his identity. Buildings become opportunities to act and a tool of traceur agency. This reframing, for many traceurs, allows parkour to be a practice which produces themselves and others as a community. Another advanced practitioner,

known as Brother Traceur, positions the development of traceurs as a development in a family. "Parkour," he tells, "is very social and supportive and everyone supports you in your progress" (Brother Traceur). For Sure, one of the instructors at B.A.S.E., buttresses this feeling commenting: "parkour has really made me open to different people and different ideas...parkour is about gathering and moving and helping each of get better" (For Sure). Reframing the viewing mechanism (architecture) into an opportunity to develop family and become open to new people and different ideas creates urban architecture as a potential space of support and new social relationships. Brother Traceur finds this coming together to be emancipatory: "people now days have lots of social pressure and people don't do things because of judgment...but with parkour it's like you're free of all that, it's like I fit in because I'm able to adapt and get better" (Brother Traceur). In being free of social pressure, traceurs challenge the mirrored image of the Other as they also challenge their prescribed reflection.

Architecture as a viewing mechanism (re)produces self and Other, however, parkour perturbs this effect on the relationship between architecture and the body by reproducing spaces of equality, appreciation, and community. As traceurs come together they produce a new set of social relationships that architecture tries to condense. It is through parkour that traceurs create

emancipatory social bonds. These social bonds are important in parkour, many traceurs feel, because “the travel is the bond” (Rabbit). The ability to appropriate spaces and social relationships toward more communal and equal sensibilities provides a sense of agency. Parkour offers traceurs a way to redefine their subject-positions because, “PK is about your ability to do the flow not really who you are. It’s hard to define but it’s not even skill level because everybody is the same and everybody is always progressing” (The One). This same sense of acceptance and community is shared by Rabbit who states: “parkour is something everyone can do. You look at it and think all they’re doing is running and climbing and jumping. I can run and jump and climb. That’s all. Keep it that simple” (Rabbit). He also stated in a later conversation: “parkour is non-judgment and non-judgment builds trust. So, people can communicate more freely not only in parkour but in other things in life as well” (Rabbit). In expanding the nature of social relationships and centering them on parkour, this art has value outside of corporeal connection of body and building. Parkour helps traceurs reshape the understanding of self and others and facilitates the (re)production of more emancipated spatial practices and relationships.

As I finished my parkour run in the parking garage it was apparent there was no power in the exposed concrete, the painted blue rails, or deep grooves of

the ramp walls of the structure. There was no freedom in my body, the clothing I wore, or even in my connection to the building. The body and architecture are produced in and among the material relations producing urban space. One might say that the parkour flow is produced within a flow: capital flow. Bodies and buildings have a material existence or physicality. Each exists as producer and production of space. The body and the building take on meaning through the spatial practices that constitute one another. Their meaning is reflected and internalized in their relationship. Bodies give meaning to buildings, for example, the classed, raced, and gendered bodies on Mass Ave and in the surrounding area. The buildings reflect a meaning onto bodies and in this relationship meaning rebounds, reflects, and constitutes subject and space for these cannot be understood as mutually exclusive. The relationships and the meanings produced therein are in constant dialectic struggle with the lived practices of individuals in social relations inherently imbued with power. The freedom I felt in the parking garage and the power I sought to challenge existed in the parkour flow and the challenging of normative practices which (re)produce Mass Ave. Parkour can be used to understand the relationship between architecture and the body as it engages the spatial practices that produce meaning, bodies, and buildings. Through its very exteriority of appropriate use of the body and of architecture,

the practice of parkour lends insight into how each produce one another through discursive and material practices. This exteriority positions parkour as an act of freedom but also as an emancipatory way of being in urban architectural space.

CHAPTER VI

LOOKING BACK AND LEAPING FORWARD

In the process of my travel story and of conducting this research I had an opportunity to spend some time with my two nieces, Riley and Reagan. While having dinner with my nieces and their parents, Reagan who is three years old began to slam her cup down on the table. She intently analyzed her fingers around the cup and would watch the cup as it connected to the surface of the table. Reagan seemed to derive a certain pleasure realizing it was her making the loud banging noise. After several slams of the cup her sister, Riley, who is two years older, quickly made it clear “we don’t bang our cups on the table, Reagan.” Reagan began to laugh, in part because of her slamming the cup but also for antagonizing her older sister. The parents then intervened and reminded Riley she was not the parent and reminded Reagan of their expectations for proper behavior at the dinner table.

Reagan, as she watched her hand’s connection with the cup and the effect it made in hitting the table was learning something. She was learning to use her body. Moreover, she was learning to use her body in relation to the objects she encountered. However, learning to use her body, watching herself grasp the cup

and slam it down also occurs outside of herself. Learning how to use her body, developing hand eye coordination, is also learning how to use objects in relation to the body. In this example she learns appropriate use within an existing power structure, for example, parents defining how to behave. Her relation to the cup and the table is also a relation to power.

As I watched the interaction I realized if I had not been studying parkour the entire occurrence would most likely have gone unnoticed. My development as a traceur is not unlike Reagan's learning how to be in the world. There is a sense of appropriate use of my body in relation to the objects I encounter. These objects, in this study architecture, act as a pedagogy of appropriate use continuously and often subconsciously reminding me of my relation to forms of power defining how to behave. Yet, parkour provides a method of rethinking the relation to power. In the practice of parkour the disciplinary functioning of architecture becomes very apparent. Limitations on the body, of understanding the self through use and location, become forefronted in the practice of parkour. By encouraging a rethinking of the body's relation to architecture, parkour provides practitioners a way of reconstituting their understanding of self and their relation to the world. This rethinking of the body is of particular importance with regard to change for "I am not in front of my body, I am in it, or rather I am

it" (Merleau-Ponty 173). Therefore, a change in the operations of my body is a change in how I understand myself and my place in the world. Developing a different understanding of self through my body's relation to space can begin a process of reconceptualizing my existence—or how I approach that existence.

Theoretical and Methodological Implications

This study sought to explore the production of urban architectural space and how the art of parkour (re)appropriates such spaces toward more emancipated ways of being. In addressing the first research question, is parkour an emancipatory practice giving insight into the relationship between power and freedom, the answer demonstrated by the research is, for many, yes. The traceurs in this study not only felt a sense of freedom through parkour but also a sense of empowerment. The reason parkour is able to enact freedom is because freedom is practiced. Traceurs engage the very spatial practices that produce power and freedom. By changing spatial practices, traceurs can begin the process of (re)producing the space of the city and the space of their body toward freer conceptions of thinking-being.

In forefronting freer conceptions of space and the body, the second question this study sought to address was how the art of parkour can be used to

understand the relationship of architecture and the body. The practice of parkour lends insight into this relationship as it is a direct corporeal engagement of architecture. As demonstrated in the research parkour challenges the visual representations of power codified in architecture through direct corporeal connection between body and building. The traceurs participating in this study reflected many experiences of not only being freer in their environments but also feeling freer in their body's relationship to architecture. Further, they recounted many instances of reevaluating the relationship of the body and architecture by forefronting the prescribed limitations to spatial practice represented and reflected in the built environment. Parkour's challenging of traceur's relation to the world engages more emancipatory envisioning of both spatial practice and spatial production. By challenging their relationship to architecture these traceurs challenged and expanded how they understand themselves.

My goal in conducting this study was to interrogate the relationship between architecture and the body. The use of parkour was a specific choice for its ability to engage this relationship from the exterior of normative conceptions of spatial practice. The theoretical implications, as highlighted through parkour, are found in how this art form demonstrates the need to reposition the study of discourse, performance, space, and the body. It is within the traceur's corporeal

connection with architecture wherein understandings of discourse, performativity, spatial production, and meanings of the body are challenged, expanded, and reimagined. "The union of soul and body," Merleau-Ponty points out, is not an "amalgamation between two mutually external terms, subject and object" (102). The connection between body and mind is "enacted at every instant in the movement of being" (Merleau-Ponty 102). The study of these important concepts of human experience is better served in their being applied to and with each other. Understandings of discourse and performance are more complex when positioned among the practices responsible for the production of space. In turn, analysis of the production of space affords a way of grounding these concepts and understanding their trajectories within lived spatial practice. Spatial analysis offers a way to investigate how phenomena such as discourse, performance, and the body are produced and derive their influence out of lived practice.

This has important implications for the methods used to analyze lived experience in urban architectural space. The nuances of a critical ethnography such as an epistemology of doing is a much needed addition to communication and cultural research for it affords the ability to exist-in-space with those that produce and are produced by that space. Further, because parkour is a spatial

practice, it is in fact dependent on location, situation, and context. Analysis of the built environment through an epistemology of doing is the appropriate method for investigating parkour's functioning within socio-spatial relations. If the traceur is to have agency she or he requires a space in which to practice parkour. To understand parkour one must locate and understand the discourses and performances that produce the space and power relations of which traceurs attempt emancipatory practices. The existence-in-culture and learning by doing approach of an epistemology of doing positions the researcher in such a way so as to investigate the relationship of power and freedom through embodied practice and empirical understandings.

Leaping Forward

Parkour is an exercise of freedom giving traceurs a method to rethink their relationship to both the structure of and structures in urban life. As such, the performance of parkour fits Diana Taylor's description of "embodied practice," that "along with and bound up with cultural practices, offers a way of knowing" (2). Parkour is a struggle over knowledge about ways of being in the world and thus is a struggle in and of power. Throughout this study I have been careful to not position parkour as pure subversion but as an enactment of power with the

ability to expand the range of intelligibility for its practitioner. The goal for any analysis, Butler notes, cannot be pure subversion “as if an undermining were enough to establish and direct political struggle” (“Bodies that Matter” 240). She calls for researchers to think of ways to resignify power with power for an interarticulation of social relations. Parkour’s goal is not total subversion but a way of achieving a personal freedom by engaging fluidly with one’s environment. Parkour is not total subversion but a practice which resignifies power at the site of the body and architecture. The practice enacts freedom by explicitly operating within the fissures of discourse to challenge and rearticulate dominant ways of thinking and disciplining spatial practice. Parkour is an exercise of agency in as much as it works to inscribe the practitioner’s power to use space but also to (re)codify the power relations that constitute the functioning and materiality of urban space.

Although my experience with parkour as well as the traceurs interviewed in this study finds parkour to be an emancipatory practice there are still some emerging issues yet to be addressed. Issues of raced, gendered, and classed bodies need further interrogation. Specifically, as architecture acts as a social mirror the practice of parkour can lend insight into how traceurs might further complicate and challenge such conceptions. A group of African American

teenagers performing parkour, for example, may have particular meanings that a group of White teenagers may not. Further, women's experiences of parkour need to be addressed with regard to parkour's ability to transform normative rules that discipline women's use of their own body. In addition, a focus on the women of parkour would further highlight how the built environment is shaped spatially by social, political, and economic forces which reflect and reiterate power relations which (re)produce particular ways of thinking-being about the female body. Further empirical investigation of these phenomena, specifically through an epistemology of doing, will engage the much needed possibilities for future research. Within these possibilities lie a better understanding of the ways power and freedom are produced and challenged within the relationship between architecture and the body.

Communication scholars are particularly well-suited to approach these issues from the vantage point of parkour. Because of Communication's multi-disciplinary approach, scholars are positioned to analyze the continuously (re)negotiated struggle of power and freedom as it is played out in the relationship between architecture and the body. The disciplines of Communication, Performance Studies, and Architectural Design and Criticism have a great deal to learn from the practice of parkour. Both architecture and the

body are produced and made legible with the social context, or rather the spatial relations producing social context. Communication scholars can lead investigations into the relationship of architecture and the body to produce knowledge about alternative practices with emancipatory potential.

Yet, as an emancipatory practice parkour may not be for everyone. There are myriad engagements of urban performances centered on emancipatory appropriation of space. For example, dance, skateboarding, the practice of building, all exist as embodied practices which offer a freer expressions of self and experiences of space. As architecture is produced by social processes, it is also a reflection of that society's values and relations of power. In continuing to analyze the reciprocal inherence of our bodies and our environments we can continue to appropriate spaces which resist hegemonic normative structures and center them on more emancipatory, participatory, and inclusive productions of space.

Parkour's rethinking of the relationship between architecture and the body offers an expansion of Hébert's maxim centering on being strong to be useful. Through the practice of parkour, to be strong can be thought of as being empowered. Parkour does not limit the notion of strength to only physical strength. Parkour also develops one's mental awareness so that the notion of

strength includes a greater capacity to *see* the limiting effects of hegemonic discourses on understanding the body and urban space. Thus, the notion of being useful can also be rethought through the lens of parkour. As demonstrated by the traceurs in this study parkour gives a greater sense of personal connection not only to space but to others. Parkour encourages appropriation of spaces toward more accepting, inclusive, and communal uses.

Parkour can act as a method for people to be empowered by relearning their body's meaning in and among myriad urban spaces as well as a method for appropriating spaces for civic engagement. Taking this expanded notion of Hébert's original claim, through parkour, people can be empowered (strong) to create participatory and inclusive urban spaces (useful). In order to challenge and transform the practice of everyday life it is necessary to engage new forms of socio-spatial practices. Parkour's emancipatory value lies in its ability to expand life and enhance freedom through new engagements of the production of space and the reciprocally influential discourses and performances therein.

Appropriate ways of being in the city, with instructions, prescriptions, and prohibitions for use and access exist within and as the determining logics that mark urban space. Such characteristics of the city, invite meanings to be codified in both architecture and the body. Parkour transforms the city in its offering the

traceur a new vision of urban sensibility and ways of existing in the world.

Parkour provides a medium through which the traceur voice is able to speak back to power's attempts at constraining how they know themselves and the world in which they live. Much like my niece learning to use her body, parkour is a way of relearning the body and its relation to urban space. Even the slightest change in the body's energy, Borden suggests, produces "some change no matter how small, in the world" (112). In this way, traceurs disrupt normative conceptions of both themselves and architecture as they explore new considerations of their bodies and the complacency in the order of things.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interview Questions

1. Will you briefly describe how you came to participate in parkour?
 - a. How did you become familiar with the art form?
 - b. Why did you decide to try parkour?
2. Will you briefly describe some of your experiences with parkour?
3. How have you developed as a traceur?
 - a. Has this influenced your life at all?
4. Has your development as a traceur influenced the way you see your environment?
 - a. If so, how?
 - b. If not, why do you think it has not changed?
5. Parkour founder, David Belle, suggests parkour is a way to achieve the liberty that men [sic] once had. Do you feel as if the practice of parkour helps you feel freer in the world?
 - a. If so, can you describe how parkour influences those feelings?
 - b. If not, can you describe why you do not think that is true?

APPENDIX B: HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

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2010-2011

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April 20, 2011

TO: Matt Lamb
COMS

FROM: Hillary Harms, Ph.D.
HSRB Administrator

RE: HSRB Project No.: H11D192GX2

TITLE: *Tracing the Path of Power Through the Fluidity of Freedom: The Art of Parkour in Challenging the Relationship of Architecture and the Body and Rethinking the Discursive Limits of the City*

You have met the conditions for approval for your project involving human subjects. **As of April 20, 2011, your project has been granted final approval by the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB). This approval expires on March 27, 2012.** You may proceed with subject recruitment and data collection.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is attached. Consistent with federal OHRP guidance to IRBs, **the consent document(s) bearing the HSRB approval/expiration date stamp is the only valid version and you must use copies of the date-stamped document(s) in obtaining consent from research subjects.**

You are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB and to use only approved forms. If you seek to make any changes

in your project activities or procedures, send a request for modifications to the HSRB via this office. Those changes must be approved by the HSRB prior to their implementation.

You have been approved to enroll 15 participants. If you want to enroll additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

Good luck with your work. Let me know if this office or the HSRB can be of assistance as your project proceeds.

Comments/ Modifications:

c: Dr. Lara Lengel

Research Category: EXEMPT #2

Informed Consent for participants of the B.A.S.E. Fitness parkour training seminar

Introduction: Hello, my name is Matt Lamb. I am a doctoral student at Bowling Green State University in the School of Media and Communication. Working under the direction of my advisor, Dr. Lara Lengel, I am researching the art of parkour and the role it may play in individuals' feelings of power and freedom in their environments. I have chosen to study the group of traceurs at the parkour training seminar conducted by B.A.S.E. Fitness.

Purpose: The purpose of my study is to find out if this art form truly does allow people to feel freer in their environments. I am asking for your participation in my study because as a traceur your insight and experiences are key to finding an answer to this question. One of the benefits to you in participating in this study is that you'll help to further our knowledge about just how powerful parkour is as an art form. Unfortunately there are no monetary awards for participation in this study.

I am asking permission to interview you for this study. The interview is voluntary and consists of 5 questions about your experience practicing parkour. The process should only take about 10 minutes of your time. I will take notes during the interview and tape record your responses. I will be asking about your experiences practicing parkour. The only criteria for inclusion in this study are that you have participated in the training seminar at B.A.S.E. Fitness and have participated in parkour at some time in your life.

What I'm trying to find out

My study seeks to investigate if the architecture in our environments really does influence the way people live, and more importantly the way they think. I would like to find out if parkour offers people a way to break out of the routine that can condition people to think and act in "appropriate" ways.

Why I need your help

Parkour is a personal journey. It is something that helps people overcome not only physical barriers in their environment but also mental barriers in their life. Because this is a personal journey I can't speak for everyone. I would like to get individual stories of people's



BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

School of Media and Communication
Department of Communication

experience practicing parkour. I have chosen to interview people because I believe these individual stories will help me find out if parkour really does help people feel freer in their environments.

Voluntary nature: I have obtained permission to conduct research with participants of the parkour training seminar conducted at B.A.S.E. Fitness in Indianapolis, IN. Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time. Because the interview is voluntary you may decide to skip questions or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Deciding not to participate will not, in any way, affect your relationship with Bowling Green State University or your relationship with B.A.S.E. Fitness.

Confidentiality Protection: To ensure confidentiality audio tapes and interview notes will be destroyed directly after transcription of the completed interview. A breach in confidentiality is a potential risk with your participation. In order to stop any breach in confidentiality I have implemented the following safeguards: 1) I will be the only person to have access to interview transcripts, notes, or recordings; 2) your name will not be used in the study - your responses will be assigned a code name; 3) interview transcripts will be kept by me on a password protected flash drive; 4) upon completion of the study I will delete all information on the drive, and destroy any hand-written notes or audio recordings.

Risks: The risks of participating in this study are no greater than that experienced in daily life.

Contact information: You may contact either me or my advisor through the following:

Matt Lamb, Doctoral Candidate

School of Media and Communication, Bowling Green State University

Email: mlamb@bgsu.edu

Mobile: 765/914-3172

Dr. Lara Lengel, Professor

School of Media and Communication, Bowling Green State University

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EXPIRES 03/23/12

School of Media and Communication
Department of Communication

Email: lengell@bgsu.edu

Office: (419) 372-7653

If you have any questions or concerns about the research or your participation in the research please do not hesitate to contact either me or Dr. Lengel. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-7761 or hsrb@bgsu.edu, if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research. Thank you very much for your time and participation.

I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.

Participant Signature