JUMP CUTTING:

TRACING PARKOUR AS INVISIBLE SPECTACLE THROUGH THE FILMIC CITY

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Abstract

Seen as the art of moving from one location to another in the most efficient manner possible, *parkour* is a physical discipline preoccupied with gymnastic efficiency through the surmounting of urban architectural features that are designed to both facilitate and impede everyday pedestrian movements in the city. This thesis is an examination of the practice, and its representation in various films, YouTube clips, documentaries and advertisements.

Symbiotically linked with its own depiction in these mediated and narrativised depictions, parkour plays out as a contradictory interfacing with a metropolitan environment that it sees (and feels) as both delimiting and psycho-geographically malleable. The elemental contradiction addressed in this thesis is the practice's emergence, making-visible and containment through and within the discussed media, even as it evolves as a system of total, bodily evasion from retinal powers of civic design and filmic surveillance.

In investigating this topic, I was drawn to a number of popular texts that both document and reciprocally inspire a global echelon of parkour practitioners, called *traceurs*. In sequence, I will analyse YouTube videos posted by this expanding audience of enthusiasts; parkour narrative films that incorporate the practice's stylized acrobatic idioms; and blockbuster feature films that both literally reference parkour through the use

of explosive cameos, and metaphorically provoke the discipline's desire for superhero transcendence of the city's gridded matrix.

Throughout my textual and performative enquiry, and through comparative, anecdotal experiences I have had everyday on the street, I have increasingly sensed that parkour's radically kinetic approach to professed liberation in and from the city is only one of the most conspicuous of many locomotive rhythms in the city. It is both this nominal and physical conspicuousness that belies the traceur's attempted, limpid escape from the interning and channeling structures of the built environment. It is the less photogenic, unnamed and sometimes accidental paces enacted in equally chance, pedestrian encounters that become an even more imaginative catalyst for ambivalent evasion and liberation.

Acknowledgements

Thank you, Sharon

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Chapter One

Introduction

Jump cutting:

Tracing parkour as invisible spectacle through the city

I was walking down the street just before, when I came across a rubbish bin and a lamppost, placed about a third of a meter apart. Ruminating about *parkour* – an urban sport whereby an individual performs a series of acrobatic manoeuvres and negotiations with the structures and strictures of the urban environment – I set myself the challenge of moving through the gap sinuously, efficiently. I was manipulating my own body and behaviour to create a kind of fleeting dialogue with these objects, which were, by my gesture, made visible as obstacles but also, paradoxically, as provocative loci from which to escape the demands of the pavement before me, and the ceaseless current of everyday life.

My real desire in that moment was to move through the obstacles, as if they were suddenly, magically permeable – to drift limpidly, as though I had become one with them, yet had transcended them as a new, invisible phenomenological entity, just like the renegade characters of the film *The Matrix*. Barring that, I wished to shift through the gap as if transported, like the heroes of *Spiderman* and *Batman* etc, or at least to dance with them in the way that the French *traceur*, David Belle, does when he races through the apocalyptic urban decay of *District B13*.

My thesis will focus on parkour as a way of performing this desire in encounters with the city, as a mode of re-styling the urban grid through a body of discreet, yet animated tactics that confront a dominant culture which seeks to capture and inhibit/inhabit these very resistant, contrary impulses in/to ordinary life. Looking at parkour as a discipline in various cultural texts such as videos posted on YouTube, documentaries, parkour narratives like *District 13*, and action films like *Casino Royale* and *The Matrix*, I will analyse the way in which such representations construct and reinforce an imaginary space for this empowered mobility, while contributing to its very incarceration in the peremptory coordinates of its spectacular, filmic frame. Snared in a narrative that smoothes out the traceur's oscillation between pure, peripatetic efficiency and pure, wasteful play, parkour is made visible as an exhibition of invincibility, making it easier to track an otherwise elusive, protean trajectory through the city.

This logic of assimilation points to the most knotty paradox of my project. The espousal of parkour as *performance* necessarily jeopardizes the traceur*'s* desire to remain invisible. This paradox is pre-echoed in the earlier figure of the *flâneur*, who subscribed to Henri Lefebvre's future obiter dictum, "'Transform the world' – all well and good. It is being transformed. But into what? Here, at your feet, is one small but crucial element in that mutation".[1] Thus, the flâneur proceeded tentatively, moving solitarily through the seduction of the crowd, subsumed yet peripatetic, voyeuristic and elegant, consuming and consumed by the bustle of the modern metropolis.

As Walter Benjamin would put it, the flâneur was an incarnate vestige of what was, Janus-faced, an archaeologist, glancing at an accreting past while always moving

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[1] Henri Lefebvre quoted in Iain Borden, *Skateboarding, Space and the City; Architecture and the Body* (New York: Berg, 2001), p.iv.

toward a radically indeterminate, entropic future. For the flâneur the aim was to drift, to absorb and be absorbed without getting stuck, to experience the self in the city with other selves as a phantasmagorical flow of images and sensations, producing knowledge as a podiatric shift between eavesdrop and enunciation. Interaction and ambulatory perception was perceived as the flâneur's 'aim' – his 'botanizing on the asphalt' an epistemological safari through the palimpsests of the city's ecology.

While the flâneur continually arrived at a mixture of deeply embossed plateaus, conducting poetic and podiatric enquiries upon the urban surfaces he encountered through a process of anamnesis – a mobile recollection of their burdened, historical nomadological[2] meanings – the traceur moves through the city in an incessant state of poetic amnesia, skimming across the city's architecture in a state of utter present-ness, consuming these surfaces as points of imminent and immanent departure. Simultaneously overhauling the notion of a purely optic encounter with the spectacle-city, the traceur sees these surfaces as reflective and refractive loci from which to transfer to an even more radically indeterminate future, and conducts, in de Certeau's terms, spatial acts of asyndeton, whereby prescribed, 'conjunctive' thoroughfares are deleted in abbreviated, yet energetic, bodily manoeuvres – taking the city as a sentence for a sort of schizophrenic 'stroll'.[3]

Parkour thus equivocates between getting from A to B in the most 'flexible' way and belying this very linear attitude by behaving so flexibly, so whimsically. The traceur is an embodiment of an athletic ideal, and yet he engages in a sport that is radically anti-competitive, appearing as an enviable, heroic figure upon capitalism's lustrous

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[2] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p.387.
[3] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p.101.

monuments, before disappearing, like *Batman*, into the 'league of shadows' of their shimmering peripheries. As Deleuze and Guattari write, "Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for? These are totally useless questions".[4] At the core of my thesis exists an impossible oscillation: The traceur performs a sort of sleight of foot, simultaneously tracing an oblique trajectory across the grid of the city, while erasing this very trace. As Lefebvre might say, parkour can be seen as productive action without a product, an (im)material performance against capitalism as a graphic circulation of commodity goods and services.

For the parkouriste, or parkour practitioner, the act of jumping a wall is immediately liberating as an athletic gesture and as a social leap over the patterned objects laid out before him or her as an obstructive rite or custom. The physical act of encountering and literally overcoming a wall with svelte grace is also an imaginary *under*mining of its cognitive divisiveness, and a mental breaking of its entrenched role as a kind of caesura to poetic movement through the city, the latter operating as a sort of rigid text. As Paula Geyh observes in her essay, "Urban Free Flow: A Poetics of Parkour,"[5] the "institution of the street 'grid' facilitates both the intelligibility – in terms of both navigation and surveillance – and control of space in the city. It situates people in urban spaces in determinate ways and channels the flow of pedestrian and vehicular traffic".[6]

Parkour reads between the lines of this urban manuscript, destabilizing its sense-making architectural syntax and rubbing over and out what Deleuze and Guattari refer to

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[4] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.25.
[5] Paula Geyh, "Urban Free Flow: A Poetics of Parkour," M/C Journal, 9(3), accessed 8 March, 2008, <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0607/06-geyh.php>.
[6] *ibid*.

as 'striated' administrative spaces and "fixed paths in well-defined directions, which restrict speed, regulate circulation, relativize movement, and measure in detail the relative movements of subjects and objects".[7] Parkour is a different type of regulated pastime, drilled escape and synchronized efficiency. It seeks to create cognitive and athletic confluence at architectural points of partition and punctuation, turning walls into platforms for airborne flow and buildings themselves into access ramps. This thesis will explore the practice's simultaneous smoothing over and rupturing of these putatively opaque urban partitions, emblems of what Foucault refers to as 'carceral'[8] properties of the urban institution.

Parkour emerged in the late 1980s in France as an urban practice in which runners treat the city as a playground or obstacle course. Pioneered by David Belle and his childhood friends, including Sébastien Foucan, parkour was popularised through a number of media ranging from cellphone videos uploaded onto YouTube, to advertising and films. As a brand derived from 'le parcours du combatant' – the military obstacle course conceived of by the physical theorist and educator, Georges Hébert – parkour is both a quasi-militant engagement with the city as an adversary set of impediments and fortifications, and a childlike interfacing with its built environment. As Sébastien Foucan has reminisced, "We were playing mere children's games. David Belle and I wanted to develop these games and make them an art, a philosophy…what is shameful is to believe

[7] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 386.
[8] Michel Foucault, "The Carceral," in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York, Pantheon, 1977).

that, once grown up, we shall stop playing. Like Bruce Lee said: play, but play seriously."[9]

The combination of both this militant, and paradoxically puerile form of ambulation might also be a politically efficacious approach to the city. In this way, parkour might exemplify, in part, the earlier urban theories of Walter Benjamin and Henri Lefebvre. Each saw the city in a necessary state of indeterminate production, both valorising aimlessness as a necessary counterpoint to the functional rapidity of expansive, capitalistic modernisation. For Benjamin, especially in his earlier Berlin material, the city was made strange by the child's "continual movement or fluctuation of vantage points", resisting the petrifying impulses of familiarity and forgetfulness.[10] As Benjamin continues in "Berlin Childhood",

> what makes the very first glimpse of a village, a town, in the landscape so incomparable and irretrievable is the rigorous connection between foreground and distance. Habit has not yet done its work. As soon as we begin to find our bearings, the landscape vanishes at a stroke like the facade of a house as we enter it. It had not yet gained preponderance through a constant exploration that has become habit. Once we begin to find our way about, that earliest picture can never be restored.[11]

While parkour is not synonymous with Benjamin's vision of the flâneur, it shares its *heurism* – the willingness to explore the city as if seen for the first time. The traceur or traceuse tries out the various objects he or she encounters, sometimes working on one specific site for up to an hour, refining and perfecting his or her athletic acquaintance with the object played with. While this rehearsed approach towards the object-city might

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[9] Sebastien Foucan quoted in Zoe Laughlin, "Sewing The City: Parkour And The Traceurs Of Narrative Threads", on As If It Were Real, accessed 23 August, 2005, <http://www.asifitwerereal.org/zoe/archive/Parkour/parkour.htm>.

[10] Graeme Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), p.62.

[11] Walter Benjamin, in Marcus Bullock, and Michael Jennings (eds.), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 1, 1913-1926* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996): p.62-74.

appear antithetical to both investigative chance and parkour's very *sine qua non* efficiency, it remains a trial and error adventure – a zooming in on its various 'targets' and a quasi-military – as discussed imminently – manoeuvre upon its cordon surfaces. Lefebvre, like his own Situationist contemporaries, Guy Debord and Raoul Vaneigem, saw the volatile and aleatory nature of childlike urban locomotion, and the contingent unknown-ness of its incalculable multiplication throughout the urban fabric as constituting the city's continual renewal and animated re-production. In this thesis, I will explore how parkour might enact this opening-up of the city, and perform an ostensibly spontaneous playfulness – what Lefebvre calls the ludic – upon the unplanned, quasi-carnivalesque spaces of the urban playground.

Initially, the notion of parkour as a playful enterprise might seem to sit in contrast to the view of the practice being a quasi-militant engagement with the city. The practice could be seen to be a bodily technology developed – in artist, Gordon Matta-Clark's words – for the role of 'un-walling the wall',[12] a strategy deployed by contemporary urban military forces. No longer occurring on avant-garde frontiers between two opposing regiments, urban warfare occurs on anti-linear and literally rhizomatic terrain, over, under and through architecture, as discussed by dissident architect, Eyal Weizman in relation to ground-breaking military tactics deployed by Israeli troops on the West Bank and Gaza.[13]

The traceur or traceuse, through his or her own desultory urban reconnaissance mission, role-plays the modern combatant engaged with the scripted cartographic forces of city planners and architects. The city itself becomes both the medium and the

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[12] Gordon Matta-Clark, quoted in Brian Hatton, "The Problem of Our Walls," *The Journal of Architecture* 4, Spring 1999, p.71.
[13] Eyal Weizman, "The Art of War", in *Frieze*, Issue 99, May 2006.

adversary in this series of encounters. In this martial circumscription, the city's very disciplinary template is activated as a battleground, the traceur's requisite trespass and transgression of its civic parameters, becoming the potential focus of law enforcement's corrective reproach and literal incarceration.

For Michel de Certeau and Umberto Eco, the city also exists as a combative realm in which 'guerrilla tactics'[14] and 'semiotic guerrilla warfare'[15] are deployed and waged by countless "groups of communications guerrillas, who would restore a critical dimension to passive reception"[16] of the city as a prefabricated text, pulling open its seemingly hermetic, fortified meanings before producing and exposing resistant readings of and off its numerous architectural and cartographical planes. As urban and cultural theorist, Richard Sennett observes, "What is characteristic of our city-building is to wall off the difference between people, assuming that these differences are more likely to be mutually threatening than mutually stimulating",[17] thus encoding the urban with a "militarized conception of everyday experience, as though attack-and-defense is as apt a model of subjective life as it is of warfare".[18]

Parkour is an insurgent embodiment of the dissolution of urban architecture's boundary paradigms, tactically slipping in between the literal cracks of what de Certeau sees as the 'strategic' and panoptic frameworks put in place by planning 'gods'. The tactical 'poaching' of prescribed and unified places in what de Certeau considers the

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[14] Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*.
[15] Umberto Eco, "Towards a Semiological Guerrilla Warfare." *Travels in Hyperreality* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), p.143.
[16] *Ibid*., p.144.
[17] Richard Sennett, *The* Conscience of the Eye*: The Design and Social Life of Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1990), p.8.
[18] Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye*, 8.

'concept city',[19] and the way the traceur might be seen to perform the short cuts, rapid detours, and desultory assaults on the city's institutional and territorial strongholds will emerge as a central matter in my own analysis.

Parkour's appellation was adapted from 'parcours', which translates as a route from one point to another, both physically and metaphorically, and occasionally refers to a river's course. As a river is widely considered in contrast to the orthogonal concourses of the city, parkour seeks to cut an untamed, volatile trajectory through its domesti-city, becoming a feral interfacing with the deterministic artifice of its 'man-made' parameters. As a black man who has become emblematic of both parkour and 'free running' – an alternative term for the practice discussed shortly – Sebastian Foucan symbolizes this stylised, 'elemental' transgression, appearing primal but graceful – 'like a cat', as he comments, after performing the namesake move in the 2003 feature-length documentary, *Jump London*.[20] Foucan's short-lived role as an antagonist in the James Bond film, *Casino Royale*, further foregrounds his branded role as an admirably savage – even dangerously villainous – Other. While finally succumbing to the Bond character in an expository chase that is as incessantly thrilling as any blockbuster intro, Foucan's consummate embodiment of primitive and intuitive athleticism is set up in fascinating contrast to the cultured sophistication of Bond's proverbial gadgetry and suave ferocity. This dialectic is reinforced by Foucan's on-screen appearance as his own stunt-man, appearing 'for real' in a natural manifestation of his own real life pursuit, however reworked into the constraints of the narrative's own diegetic chase. The question of how

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[19] Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 95.
[20] *Jump London*. Dir. Mike Christie. Perf. Jerome Ben Aoues, Sébastien Foucan, and Johann Vigroux. DVD (United Kingdom: Channel 4, 2003.

his blackness figures into this process of signification will be addressed more directly in Chapter Three.

In parkour, the city is treated as an environment in which the traceur or traceuse expresses him or herself 'with no limitations',[21] thus evoking notions of 'habitat' and the 'stray' – which I will address later on this thesis – while also calling to mind the river's own irrespective flow over and around the lapidary impediments in its stream. The term, 'parkour' also reflects the aquatic principles of flow in Bruce Lee's Jeet Kune Do, a formative influence on Sebastien Foucan's own athletic and aesthetic outlook.[22] The violence performed by Lee and in the infantry-like deployment of free running as an overall movement eschews the point of impact and instead initiates a continuum of action that defines themselves as much in the air as in contact with their respective opponents. Parkour, and particularly the ninja-like style of Foucan's, is known to flow through architecture, puncturing its apparent inertia, while leaking the literal and virtual facades of resistance put up by the sedentary edificial corpus. This sense of flow reflects my own desire to act in such a limpid manner as recounted at the beginning of this thesis, and seems to mirror Bruce Lee's axiom:

> Don't get set into one form, adapt it and build your own, and let it grow, be like water. Empty your mind, be formless, shapeless — like water. Now you put water in a cup, it becomes the cup; You put water into a bottle it becomes the bottle; You put it in a teapot it becomes the teapot. Water can flow or it can crash. Be water, my friend.[23]

In modifying the standard spelling of 'parcours', David Belle and another associate, Hubert Koundé, sought to imbue the term and the practice itself with a kind of *plosion,*

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[21] Sebastien Foucan, quoted on Foucan.com, accessed 19 April, 2009, <http://www.foucan.com/>.
[22] "Background & History" timeline on Foucan.com, official website, accessed 28 June, 2008, <http://www.foucan.com/?page_id=19>.
[23] Bruce Lee quoted in John Little, *Bruce Lee: A Warrior's Journey*. DVD (United States: Warner Home Video, 2000).

reinforced by the exclusion of its 's', an apocope that was symbolic of the practice's imperative of efficiency and spatial ellipsis or abbreviation. Parkour has also been dubbed 'PK' – a further abbreviating of the term – *l'art du déplacement* – translating as 'the art of displacement' and thus intimating the practice's short-cutting and displacing of urban space itself.

The term is also interchangeable with 'free running', although the latter has often been differentiated for its seemingly more acrobatic and aesthetic properties and is seen as a derivative invention, mainly championed by Sebastien Foucan. Parkour's central tenet remains efficiency while free running eponymously – and perhaps redundantly – emphasises freedom of movement. [24] For me, free running is more histrionic, by which I mean its focus appears more about the drama of the movement than its utility. Its originator, Foucan, posits free running as a quasi-Zen rite of passage, holistically related to one's way of life.[25] As such, the social is eroded by a personal, meditative 'reserve' in Foucan's conception, one that puts up an elegant resistance to the visual cacophony of the urban everyday, yet competes with – or indeed contributes to – the latter's overarching kinetic distraction.

Parkour *sui generis* was launched into popular consciousness with the broadcasting of the 2002 BBC advert, "Rush Hour".[26] It depicts David Belle in a balletic

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[24] This history of parkour has been drawn from a number of Internet resources – appropriate, given its largely web-based provenance and fruition – all accessed between January 2007 – 2008, including: "Parkour" on Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parkour>; "Parkour.Net" < http://parkour.net/>; "Wellingtonista" < http://wellingtonista.com/le-parkour-wellington>; "American Parkour" <http://www.americanparkour.com/>; "Urban Free Flow" < http://www.urbanfreeflow.com/>; "3 Run" <http://www.3run.co.uk/>; "Worldwide Jam" <http://www.worldwidejam.tv/>; "Parkour US" <http://www.parkour.us/>; "Parkour North America" <http://parkournorthamerica.com/>.
[25] Sebastien Foucan quoted in *Jump London*.
[26] Edel Erickson, "Rush Hour" promotion trailer, DVD (United Kingdon: BBC Broadcast, 2002).

commute home from work along the dense, networked surfaces of London's residential rooftops, stairways and elevated back-lots. In this video, we see Belle checking his watch and removing his office attire from behind an ornamental, clay Samurai figure. He is then seen cambering lithely out of his workplace window, as traffic waits marooned below. Belle's flowing and acrobatic movements are frequently contrasted with the halting milieu of the traffic jam, through cutaways to red lights and 'wait' indicators. Belle flexes his muscles with slow-motion grace before performing a meditative handstand on a balustrade overlooking the heavily clogged, commuter freeway below. The pose is yoga-like, redolent of Batman's elevated moments of solitude above a nocturnal Gotham City. Office workers are seen looking out in casual amazement and bewilderment at his topless, ninja-like figure flipping and leaping from rooftop to rooftop.

At one point, Belle is seen adjusting a television aerial after colliding with it, setting straight the reception of a cartoon being broadcast into the TV set of a child in the tenement below. Belle is then seen performing some of parkour's *de rigueur* moves, such as the precision jump (*saut de precision*), from one minute fixed point to another, the cat leap (*saut de bras*) – a jump to a vertical object, with the feet absorbing the impact before the hands grapple the landing surface with balanced precision, and the vault (*passement*) – where the traceur jumps over an object with the guidance of dexterous hands. After back-flipping into the property of an similarly lissom nude female playing the piano in a plush domestic foreground, Belle is finally seen sliding down the steep roof of what appears to be his own abode, slipping through the window with intrusive ease, reclining on a leather couch and aiming a remote at his own television set. The BBC One logo

flickers at the bottom of the screen as the remixed and pumped non-diegetic version of Dean Martin's "Sway" becomes the broadcast sound emanating from the television set.

Belle's appearance in the BBC promo serves to reinforce the channel's informed styling of itself as an attuned, *au courant* enterprise, appearing – as if by synergistic implication – as an antidote to the testing repetition of everyday work. The oxymoronic temporality of the video's titular stereotype is exposed as Belle – posited as an office worker, albeit as extra-ordinary as BBC claims to be – takes his own pioneering route home from the oppressive deskbound rank his character holds during the day.[27] Belle's surmounting of the gravity-ridden toil of the everyday pedestrian commute in this arresting portrayal is screened as a fleeting, and equally circadian escape from the sedentary reign and reins of the workplace and its attendants' daily retreat. While the commute and television remain predestined routines, both Belle and the BBC advert purport to offer innovative variations on their ordained thematics, offering reciprocal leisure and reward for a collective workforce striving to transcend the sameness of affective labour in quotidian existence.

"Rush Hour" is a reciprocal show reel for both the kinetic-ization of the BBC and Belle's own pioneering practice. His flight is book-ended by two sedentary acts: his chair-swivelling, work-induced ennui and the repose of his well-earned leisure-date with the television. Belle here appears both ordinary and extra-ordinary, like everyone else in his balancing of workplace obligation and tele-leisurely relief, but electrifying that purportedly inevitable dialectic through his committed and desire-laden transferral from the former sedentary role to the latter, remunerative one.

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[27] "Rush-hour traffic slows down", 29 March, 2003, BBC News. Accessed, 19 November 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/2895373.stm>.

The broadcast of Belle's performance in "Rush Hour" announced parkour as an international cultural phenomenon. It was in this screening, and with the pioneering Belle making his on-screen debut, that parkour became irrevocably linked with the transmitting imperative of television itself. As a result, parkour could be seen as symbiotic with television, with the BBC pilot becoming a trailer for this supposedly radical new sport. The advertisement became a conduit for parkour, embedding its ostensibly liberated protagonist-progenitor – and his remote audience of potential copy-cat protégés – within its rapid, two-dimensional edited path. Viewership of the sport was therefore inextricably linked with BBC patronage. Such a symbiosis immediately undercuts parkour's revolutionary thesis, reducing it to a cut-up and easy manipulable corpus of tricks. The transference of parkour into televisuality serves to *re-place* its constitutional flow as a narrative flow re-constituted within the seamless confines of the screen. Parkour, as it became known to a global audience, was a pantomime, superimposed with the post-production sheen of highly graded colour and equally over-saturated music. To appropriate the title of the Gil Scott-Heron's song, parkour's revolution would not be televised.[28] Belle's contribution to parkour will be analysed in greater depth later in this thesis.

As such, one of my primary concerns in this thesis will be to analyse the implications of parkour's travel from the live to the televisual; film from documentary verité to narrative embedding; and from plot to ornament, whereby the parkouriste's style or fashionable athleticism is inserted to aggrandize the excitement of the preordained,

[28] Gil Scott-Heron, ""The Revolution Will Not Be Televised", from the single, "Home Is Where the Hatred Is". 7" single (New York: RCA Studios, 1971).

blockbuster premise. I will struggle with the tension of what might appear to be the ideal and idealised version of this contemporary form of urban exploration, and its elusive manifestation on the street. Parkour, in its various senses as sport, crime, art form, leisure, entertainment and meditation is mirage-like: the archetypal path led by Belle and his peers in the many videos that ensued "Rush Hour" cannot be effectively followed so much in practice as in a cultural imagination. I want to analyse – to *shadow* – an irretrievably live practice that exists in a universal cultural imagination almost exclusively within the live-action replay of ubiquitous media representations like "Rush Hour", which reveals an exuberant freedom to its audiences at the exact moment of its televisual and filmic internment.

Parkour exists in an unformulated point between sport and performance, in a kind of para-region, seemingly slipping between categorical imperatives and spectator perspectives. In this respect, the practice might be seen to perform in the interstitial in-between that Deleuze theorizes as a vivacious space where one proceeds from the middle, 'not according to genealogy or teleology, but according to networks of movement and force'[29]. As such, the traceur or traceuse becomes elusive not only in his or her physical acts of evasion, but through the invasion upon the everyday by his or her categorical remixing of prescribed modes of perambulation. The parkouriste and his or her on and off-screen audiences mirror the quasi-ufological dynamic between Superman and his own observers: 'Is it a bird? Is it a Plane? It's Superman!'[30] The definitional smudgings that parkouristes commit on and in-between the city's structural lattice also constitute what

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[29] Gilles Deleuze, quoted in Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2001), p.95.
[30] Richard Donner, *Superman: The Movie*. DVD (United States: Alexander Salkind, 1978).

Certeau deems a 'making-do'[31] with the seemingly predestined circumstances the 'ordinary' citizen finds him or herself in in the city. With characteristic, anthropological flair, he describes a North African living in Paris or Roubaix, France: "Without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its laws for him, he establishes within it a degree of *plurality* and creativity. By an art of being in between, he draws unexpected results from his situation."[32] In a more extraordinary way, seemingly, the parkouriste takes part in similar gap-finding expeditions through the city's porous topography. He or she never 'sets-out' as one might on a linear voyage through the however diverse and proliferate routes and rites of navigable affective labour and consumption, but again, proceeds from the middle, engaging his or her immediate surroundings as a confrontation with an almost abstract series of hard, revolving surfaces.

Parkour is performed above the heads and beyond the fixed perspective of any prospective live spectator. However, it is brought into a chartable, cohesive light by his or her reproduced action in the cinematographic frame. Film thus capitalises on and erases parkour's very resistance to frames, concatenating a series of elusive tangents into an apparently seamless route, traceable by a remotely sedentary viewer from screen left to right. As the traceur or traceuse 'draws', 'traces' or 'goes fast' – to use its French translations – the film traces the traceur's action across its screened coordinates, the latter's edit-cuts accumulating its actors' disparate runs into a displaced sprint across the planar televisual or filmic realm. Film substitutes one apparent seamlessness for another, removing the tangible obstacles that arise within the real-life mise en scene by cutting them out of the on-screen action. This erasure and elision occurs in all the texts that I will

[31] Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p.29.
[32] Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p.30.

be looking at herein: from the ostensibly raw verité of the uploaded YouTube vignettes; to the stylized documentaries featuring trained traceurs; to the dramatized cinematic narratives featuring both stunt doubles and actual parkour practitioners; to the fully ornamental parkour passages inserted into blockbuster action films.

An archetypal, cinematic pre-echo of parkour's civic disobedience is found in the antics of classic, silent physical comedy, a genre of comic errance played out with the risk-oriented hilarity of its stars, namely: Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd. Foreshadowing the actor/stuntman crossover appeal of parkour's own archetypes, Sebastien Foucan and David Belle, particularly with their respective, reflexive, fictional appearances in *Casino Royale* and *District 13* – role-playing duplicities that will be discussed at further in length in Chapter Two – Keaton, Chaplin and Lloyd all choreographed and performed their own stunts. Indeed, as film critic, Roger Ebert observes, Keaton himself doubled for some of his on-screen cohorts, undertaking physical gags and risks on their behalf[33], as well as personifying quasi-acrobatic risk within his various roles throughout his acting career. His very appellation, 'Buster' was apocryphally coined by Harry Houdini in honour of Keaton's congenital aptitude for taking the fall from during his early familial involvement in vaudeville. In 1914, Keaton told the Detroit News:

> The secret is in landing limp and breaking the fall with a foot or a hand. It's a knack. I started so young that landing right is second nature with me. Several times I'd have been killed if I hadn't been able to land like a cat. Imitators of our act don't last long, because they can't stand the treatment.[34]

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[33] Roger Ebert, "The Films of Buster Keaton (1923 - 1928)", November 10 2002, accessed 4 October 2010, <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20021110/REVIEWS08/40802001/1023>.
[34] "PART I: A Vaudeville Childhood", Busterkeaton.com. <http://www.busterkeaton.com/bio1.htm. Retrieved 2010-02-17>.

As such, Keaton's ostensibly hapless pranks are belied by his gymnastic expertise – the fall as a symptom of humorous fallibility, yet executed with deceptive, verité immediacy through choreographic grace. This pre-echoes the later, performative sentiments of David Belle, who would exhort the conversion of the everyday fall or mundane trip into a seamless, acrobatic gesture, and the transformation of a familiar humiliation into a smooth move.

However, Keaton and his contemporary comics' work in this sense is more about an elaboration of the hitches that arise in everyday than a concealment of them under the auspices of making-do with the volatilities of quotidian locomotion. The booby-trapped mise en scène in silent comedy and the clumsy ballet of its inhabitants engender the sort of *schadenfreude* inextricably linked with its spectatorial humour. As the composer, Cornelius Cardew observes, failure operates as a heuristic catalyst, existing in relation to the futility of goal-setting. He continues:

> Nature has no goals and so can't fail. Humans have goals, and so they have to fail. Often the wonderful configurations produced by failure reveal the pettiness of the goals. Of course we have to go on striving for success, otherwise we could not genuinely fail. If Buster Keaton wasn't genuinely trying to put up his house it wouldn't be funny when it falls down on him.[35]

The scene Cardew refers to is from the 1928 film, *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* in which the protagonist stands with his iconic stone physiognomy in front of a teetering house during a cyclone, before one of its facades falls onto him. He is only saved by the second storey's window being pane-less, immaculately positioned as though to slide over him like a giant hula hoop. This architectural coming to life, and the protagonist's distinguishing foibles within the wider landscape of incipient urban modernization serves as a metaphor for the anxiety of modernity as a staged moment of incipient chaos, and

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[35] Cornelius Cardew quoted in Cornelius Cardew, Howard Skempton, *Howard Skempton's Cardew Retrospective*. Radio documentary. (United Kingdom: BBC Radio 3, 2001).

near catastrophe. The silent comedians' physical agility and exertion seems to be displayed merely as an emergency response to the maelstrom chaos of the metastasizing modern world that envelops them, and in Keaton's case, his stone physiognomy sets up an intriguing dramatic irony, belying the kaleidoscopic fervor and humorous juxtapositions that would be lampooned in Chaplin's *Modern Times* and later, in Jaques Tati's *Play Time*.

Keaton's ostensibly shell-shocked appearance in the collapsing, modern *mise en scène* might be seen as a representation of Georg Simmel's theorising of the psychological alienations and dislocations felt in the overloaded urban arena. Simmel argued in his 1903 essay, "The Metropolis and Mental Life", that in order to function in this saturated realm, the modern individual must adopt a symptomatic 'blasé' attitude of almost automated indifference to the rising commotion of everyday life:

> The psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists in the *intensification of nervous stimulation* which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli[…]The essence of the blasé attitude consists in the blunting of discrimination[…]The meaning and differing values of things, and thereby the things themselves, are experienced as insubstantial.[36]

This prerogative of drifting insouciance also prompted the emergence of the silent comedian's contemporary, civic entity, the flâneur, whose serene skepticism and cool analysis of the washed out labyrinth around him was participatory in its flux but equally remote and abstracted in his critical distanciation.

Such a phenomenology appears in contrast to the traceur's rapid and commanding incursion into the city's strictures – a role-reversal between the city as an animist thing in both early 20th century theoretical and cinematic accounts and its inhabitant as a

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[36] Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life", in Kurt Wolff (Trans.), *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York: Free Press, 1950), p.409.

seemingly passive drifter. Both prototypical players rehearse a mastery of and over the city, but however physically agile, Keaton and his contemporaries – including the literary flâneurs as espoused in Benjamin and Baudelaire – seem to only just miraculously evade the imminent collapse of the cities around them, in an accident-prone, but equally serendipitous, comical grappling and circumvention of the city's hazardous architectural impediments. In turn, they question urban modernity's rhetoric of prosperity. Practitioners of parkour, on the other hand, are seen to galvanize and mobilize the city through their own initiatory rites of athletic passage, and seek to expose and perforate the stationary facades and specious impasses of their own surrounding, urban enclosures.

This is not to say that the silent comic does not share an impulse with the parkouriste in his transgression of the orthogonal, pedestrian limits of the city, it is merely that his antics seem to be at the mercy – however actually aggressively rehearsed their stunts are – to the whims of the modern Moloch in which they are comically ensnared. He traverses both x and y axes and toils riotously against the force of gravity as both an ideological and physical threshold, only with less lithe, acrobatic élan than the traceur, and instead do defying gravity is merely subjected to it in exponentially funny ways. For example, In Harold Lloyd's *Safety Last* (1923), the protagonist, the Naïve Boy must scale a multi-storey store in order to complete a publicity stunt intended to be performed by his friend real human fly within the narrative in order to solicit the cash prize to impress his visiting Girl. The entire film consists of his cringingly slow ascent, and ongoing, spectacular threat of his falling both to his imminent death and thus back to the start of the narrative of his courting prank. While Lloyd's humour is predicated on his

theatrical provocations, Keaton wrings his from a bodily placidity and poker physiognomy, even while appearing in rapid plummet. As Ebert continues:

> He falls and falls and falls in his movies: From second-story windows, cliffs, trees, trains, motorcycles, balconies. The falls are usually not faked: He lands, gets up, keep going. He was one of the most gifted stuntmen in the movies. Even when there is fakery, the result is daring.[37]

The first chapter of this thesis will introduce the discipline and philosophy of parkour as it has developed through home videos posted on the internet by a growing, global community of rookie traceurs, elaborating on this rhizomatic desire and 'drive' for a playful, urban straying, and taking the idea of this historical stroll itself for a more energetic and acrobatic roll. I will look at these 'direct' representations of parkour, while acknowledging the problematic of analysing and 'capturing' parkour within the re-played context of the edited frame. I will also study the body of movements that define parkour as a discipline, scrutinizing a type of 'taxonomy' of tactics, tricks, and moves that destabilize the very notion of parkour as a truly errant practice.

In Chapter Two, documentaries about parkour will be analysed. Here, the problem of making transparent the elusive nature of the traceur's mutable motion is exacerbated in an edit that seeks to further summarise its sub-cultural scribble within narrative 'leaps' that seek the attention of a sedentary audience desiring information supplied through ubiquitous, stylised visual presentation. I also want to look at the incorporation of this discipline into fictional narratives like *District B13*, and how its portrayal is itself played out in entertaining sequences predicated on the verisimilitude of the actor/character's performances; their 'for-real-ness', uneasily aligned with a stunt aesthetic and a rapid edit that traces the traceur into his labyrinthine routes of escape. At the same time I will look

[37] Roger Ebert, "The Films of Buster Keaton (1923 - 1928)".

at the way advertising makes the desire for this flight a utilitarian thing, re-incorporating the viewer/spectator's analogous desire into the desire for its material product, and I wish to scrutinize this assimilation, while referencing Lefebvre's notion of a 'fruitless' productivity.

In my third chapter, I will look at the fictional embodiment, the seeming, visual display of all that a philosophy of parkour might appear to be: the pure stasis of the superhero's seamless mobility in the CGI[38] city, his or her own drastic appearance in its corrupted milieu, and his or her palliative, but threatened Samaritan role in saving the city-as-protagonist from the threat of an equally 'reckless' criminal stranglehold. I will address this prevailing kind of benevolent deviance in character portrayals within films like *Casino Royale*, *The Matrix*, *Spiderman*, and *Batman*: the way these performances provoke and capitalise on our own desire for flight, for free motion through urban space within the coordinates of a seductive artifice that presents the viewer/spectator with a totalising and tantalising vision of escape – ultimately re-wired to a strategy of the sedentary, domesticated *dénouement*. If parkour is as much about the landing as is it is about the free-flight, then its fictional incarnation in the feature film illuminates this terrestrially sensible moment as crucial to the resolved plot of an other-wise 'roller-coaster ride' through the spectacle-city.

In my conclusion, I wish to outline both a poetics and a politics of everyday life as both inscribed and circumscribed by what de Certeau would call the 'murmured'[39] utterances of the traceur's inventive, pedestrian sensibility, before forming a theory about

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[38] Computer-generated imagery.
[39] De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p.200.

the way transgression and transcendence of a lateral, urban grid re-stylises our seemingly formatted encounters with power as it materialises in everyday, urban experience.

Film and television's displacement of the parkour player and his or her virtual surroundings is an intriguing re-telling of the practice's alternative designation as *l'art du déplacement*. The efficiency in both filmic parkour and the 'real thing' is reciprocal: film enacts and re-enacts an economy of somatic movement by splicing the actor-traceur into an always-presentness, discarding the vacant bits of a take that would drag down the dynamism of both the kinetic narrative and its foreground action. Just as the traceur eliminates the messy, pleonastic steps between expansive walls and the open terrain beyond, acting out de Certeau's previously quoted notion of spatial asyndeton, the filmic edit-cuts, as seen in Belle's three-minute, condensed trip home from work in "Rush Hour" creates an analogous abbreviated sense of spatial immediacy.

'Real life' parkour, in reciprocal and almost synergistic fashion, reciprocates, or perhaps even replicates this efficiency by attempting to operate in a state of similar, *horror vacui* hyperactivity. However, this attempt is Sisyphean. The thoroughly gravity-ridden traceur or traceuse invariably remains stuck within the limited latitudes of the everyday, always hinged upon the inevitable hangover or after-effect of his or her expectant ascension. The apparent one-off-ness, the improvisation of his or her various enactments and en-counters is valorised but also doomed to repetition not only in the filmed and replayed frame, but also as a practice rehearsed and refined ideal in everyday life.

My own encounter and reencounter with the rubbish bin from the opening sequence of this thesis is a distinct epitomising of parkour's 'real life' grounding. The slalom-like arrangement of the concrete articles prompts a cognitive speculation about their circumscription, a reverie about the possibilities of circulation, but remains ensconced in this very thesis as an academic, rear-vision reminiscence – not a practical hurdle that I have successfully surmounted. For me, as a budding traceur, parkour is largely a cognitive mapping out of things that can't and shouldn't be done, a series of spatial phantasms envisioned while simultaneously executing moves that are often beyond the limits of bodily resources and the law itself.

Parkour presents an intriguing test of physical and normative thresholds, as when I am confronted by the three-meter, razor wire-adorned gate that protects the entranceway to our department's rehearsal and studio space in Christchurch's city centre. The gate – erected after persistent vandalism and eventual arson in a plastic skip in the enclosed alleyway – is a typical erection against the threat of delinquent youth against inner city businesses.

My choice when I arrive at the gate is to use my delegated key – which bestows on me the authority and legitimacy of an enrolled postgraduate – or to anarchically scale it: to climb onto an adjacent ledge, reach up and lunge over the razor wire before landing on the other side, as if role-playing the profile of one of whom against which the gate was built. Ultimately, this minute, tactical gesture is a truly private act, as it usually occurs beyond the surveillance of any potential passer-by.

But when I choose to balance myself between the wall and the gate, to climb, hop and place myself in that lofty, often-hazardous position, I experience a wasteful danger, a

playful echoing of the enviable shapes contorted by those aforementioned on-screen traceurs, albeit with the haptic, corporeal consequences usually edited out of various premises becoming an acute experiential focus: the scraping and scratching of the razor wire on my exposed ankles, and the twisting of the same joint when I land on the grimy, hard surface of the other side.

Chapter Two

"Parkour Is", "The Chase", "Evolution: Le Parkour" and "David Belle Fall"

Verité download:

'Direct' representations of parkour in YouTube videos

Parkour at its base is a practice in which individuals race, leap, climb and otherwise use their bodies to travel across the urban environment in ways that run counter to everyday pedestrianism. It is both an augmentation of daily sentience through exaggerated yet fluid movements of gymnastic proportions, and a distillation of what might be deemed the essential components of operating under one's own steam. It is at once a physical discipline and a metaphysical pursuit, aimed at treating the walls, railings and gaps of the city not as insurmountable obstacles but as catalysts for action. The relative individualism and isolationism of the practice means that there is no audience per se. Rather, spectators are generally accidental audiences, passers-by, who catch glimpses of the traceur in transit without the kinds of explanations or exegeses that a formal performance frame would offer. As such, it is perhaps obvious that capturing and transmitting images of parkour has become the domain of YouTube clips, generated for the most part by cellphone and other digital cameras. These clips often purport to show us 'real' parkour, unmediated by the narrative conventions and illusions of filmmaking.

This chapter looks at what might be called 'direct' representations of parkour on YouTube, as a way first of seeing and analyzing what the 'accidental spectator' might see and then of beginning to explore the problematics of 'capturing' parkour within the re-played context of the edited frame. By looking at selected YouTube clips, I will also be

able to begin the work of studying the body of movements that define parkour as a kinesthetic discipline and scrutinize a type of 'taxonomy' of tactics, tricks, and moves that can be seen to destabilize the very notion of parkour as an errant practice.

The YouTube material situates a stationary viewer-spectator, planted or hinged somewhere along the axis of the performing traceur's impressive, yet elusive, trajectory. The captured image offers the YouTube spectator a privileged site-line from which to view the respective move or trick. The 'home-made' parkour clip almost invariably takes the form of a vertiginous montage, through a geographically displacing, ultimately disorienting cutting of disparate shots from mixed locations into one, a-spatial yet serial frisson. The acrobatic arcs that the performers are seen to make across the filmic frame thus appear to 'speak for themselves' as though enunciative gestures of pure action, kinetic figures that, unlike the FX-bound Spiderman, seem to function autonomously as energetic agents of full and elegant force unharnessed by the dramatic announcement of a swooping camera.

Parkour subjects thus take on a documentary persona – generic (like the cheetahs in nature documentaries), and as such, they become almost anonymous. They are seen fleetingly as lithe silhouettes sliding across the stark facades and cornices of various architectural *mises en scène*. The familiar wobble and shake of the camera is an index of the videographer's seemingly unrehearsed and stationary visual pursuit of the mobile subject across his or her handheld frame. The camera's very apprehension – in both senses – of the apparently improvised 'scene' that takes place before and symbolically within it remains distinctly paradigmatic of a verisimilitude inextricably linked with a universal 'home' movie imaginary that is uploadable in all its seemingly unadulterated

intimacy. The proceedings of YouTube parkour are exponentially more entertaining on the same terms as the teen confessional. The YouTube framework situates the performers in their 'natural habitat' which is increasingly inextricably linked with its rise as a defining medium that enables the viewer-spectator to 'broadcast yourself' under a tellingly performative brief.

Parkour appends itself to a putatively public space while simultaneously puncturing and punctuating this very urban fabric through peripheral acts of alert reverie and balletic and ballistic disappearance. The so-called public access of the YouTube phenomenon is a fascinating vehicle that mirrors and perhaps incorporates, however problematically, parkour's own leak to and from the public/private divide in a way that also reflects postmodernist preoccupations with similar hierarchical boundaries. YouTube's self-publishing and social networking methodology further unfastens the fallacious belt that Adorno and Horkheimer saw the 'Culture Industry' having wrapped around the creative economy.[40] As such, the 'YouTube Moment' supposedly plays out as a 'classic', random occurrence yet is reincorporated as a spectacular ubiquity by and in its very branding.

The videos of parkour shared on YouTube can be seen as rudimentary transcripts of an escalating subcultural custom. As cultural practices, parkour and YouTube fundamentally occupy much of the same terrain, compressing, condensing, reducing and extracting everyday moments and movements into seeming seamless crossings of conventional boundaries. YouTube representations of parkour habitually utilize the familiar special effects of commercially available, commonly pirated and increasingly sophisticated (so as to plague a pro-am hierarchy) digital editing software – both to

[40] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1969).

enhance the predestined edit and decorate the live action with a complimentary, 'contemporary' visual sensibility. At the same time, they remain ostensibly raw documents: preparatory exercises for a continual, comparative play both on and off screen. They are artifacts that, through their sheer proliferation and documentary reproduction of street-level matter, cache and promulgate the very ontology of parkour. Through their simultaneous fidelity to the real-time experience of parkour and its lubrication via stock software effects, YouTube produces the sharpness of parkour as a re-definable and reproducible series of seemingly kinetic images.

Some of the videos posted by users to YouTube employ the thread of a narrative chase – something crucial to parkour's constitutional mode of flight, of which I will discuss later from an elaborated narratological perspective in mainstream cinema. But parkour is typically framed as a purely gymnastic, stunt-oriented series of acts that traverse the filmic frame in quick succession, trick-after-trick occurring over an assortment of urban tableaux in an almost delirious gamut-climbing of prescribed physical engagement. This is predominantly symptomatic of the discipline's relative incipience and developmental stage as a sub-cultural and stylistic phenomenon.

In these videos, the body is seen to be stretched to its limits through an array of dynamic, airborne maneuvers that defy prosaic notions of gravity through the ostensible effortlessness of their execution. Exhibited in countless definitive show reels of inspirational athletic accomplishment, the performing traceurs in these YouTube videos outline a choreographic nomenclature that draws an array of somatic potentialities into a classificatory register. Here the very concept of parkour begins to be negotiated over a

proportional 'terrain' which bleeds between the 'real' and the 'virtual' realm of YouTube's embedded ubiquity.

In this shaping of a physical vernacular, however exceptional and indeed stickily elite, parkour's movements might be seen to re-inscribe and re-invent the very bodies that act them out on a fluid yet regimented basis. Parkour finds its fitting provenance in *le methode naturelle*, or the Natural Method of Georges Hébert, an early twentieth century former naval officer and military theorist and under the influence of the strategic Romantic drifter, an ideology of the 'noble savage' – the pure outsider, idealized and marginalized by his romantic encounter with the force of civilization. "The final goal of physical education", wrote Hébert, "is to make strong beings. In the purely physical sense, the Natural Method promotes the qualities of organic resistance, muscularity and speed, towards being able to walk, run, jump, move quadrupedally, to climb, to walk in balance, to throw, lift, defend yourself and to swim".[41] This pedagogical drive to corporal perfection is of course dressed in a whole Vitruvian history of the body as an opaque, wholly sealed unit, a superior textbook outfit entrenched in the teleological account of sort of chauvinist philanthropy cultivated against a wider backdrop of a kind of catastrophic damoclean modernity.

Hébert's body is wrapped up in a historical dressage itself so volubly dissected in Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. Here, Foucault is largely quoting from the 1693 *Milice française* as he maps a genealogy of the soldier's somatotype – its carving-out as an etymologically infantile silhouette approaching from a formative horizon:

> "The signs for recognizing those most suited to this profession are a lively, alert manner, an erect head, a taut stomach, broad shoulders, long arms, strong fingers,

[41] Georges Hébert, quoted on "Parkour & Free Running", accessed 1 June 2010, <http://pkfrinternational.com/directory/parkour/freerun/parkour-free-running.html>.

> a small belly, thick things, slender legs and dry feet, because a man of such a figure could not fail to be agile and strong"; when he becomes a pike-bearer, the soldier "will have to march in step in order to have as much grace and gravity as possible, for the pike is an honorable weapon, worthy to be borne with gravity and boldness." By the late eighteenth century, the soldier has become something that can be made; out of formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit; in short, one has "got rid of the peasant" and given him "the air of a soldier."[42]

The physical enhancements seen in Hébert's Natural Method mirror this shaping of what Foucault calls the 'docile' body. What the latter would deem the canalization – indeed the televisual *channeling* – of heterogeneous bodies through the institutional frameworks and bureaucratic networks of modern surveillance "based on a system of permanent registration",[43] is a panoptic apparition that haunts Hébert's *Parcours du Combattant*, the obstacle course of his invention used as a perennial fixture in military training since. This architectonic structure forms the etymological roots of a practice that will later appear to interrogate the very idea of the planned, the deterministic, the routine or prescribed route.

If the traceur's transversal of the city might be framed as transgressive, deviant and defiant of the boundaries enforced on pedestrians, it is also very possible to see that path as an obstacle course, at base no less determinant than what one might encounter in military training. The traceur's discipline adheres to a sort of curricular constraint, less about liberation than a mastery, which turns his extemporaneous 'letting loose' into a drilled, kinetic recital. This process of 're-iteration', as Stephen John Saville observes, "is perceived as productive of distinct and often negative performativities. Such spatial practice leads to habit, and to cycles of repetition that dull and numb our relations with

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[42] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.135.
[43] *ibid*, p.96.

space. Over time it has the capacity to make 'normal' the strange and unconscious our bodily comportment".[44]

"Parkour Is" is a clip made by the Wellington filmmaker, Parapraxis, for the crew, Physical Graffiti,[45] and acts as a promotional and introductory affirmation of their status as parkour pioneers in New Zealand. The three-minute presentation begins with the sliding of superimposed, post-production block-capital text over a concrete carpark fascia. The edgy, titular pronouncement's ellipses trail off as an athletic, burly young man of Pacific descent appears singlet-clad, striking a preliminary pose that's split up by multiple, time-warping edited stutters and shutters. The electronica soundtrack combines sophisticated syncopated beats and re-constructed glitches and samples from Satie's *Gymnopédies*. This imbues the opening scene with a sense of sophisticated and expectant kinetic urgency, akin to a music video with its rapid cuts and corresponding aural rhythms. The traceur performs a series of limbering twists that are embroidered by numerous jump cuts. These seem to diagrammatically 'prepare' his body as a kind algorithmic mechanism within the frame, much like the way the bodies in *The Matrix* seem hinged upon endless elastic virtual axes in their various passages of flight.

He then performs a 'vault', or what in the French nomenclature is named the *passement* – the swift moving over of an object with the placing of hands onto the obstacle and the following through with the rest of the body into an ideally graceful arc.

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[44] Stephen John Saville, "Playing With Fear: Parkour And The Mobility Of Emotion" in *Social and Cultural Geography*, Volume 9, Number 8 (London: Routledge, 2008), p.899. The word, 'parkour' is a deliberate distortion of the French word 'parcours', meaning a route, journey, the course of a river, or a course in the sense of a golf course.

[45] "Physical Graffiti: Parkour Is', accessed 4 May 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1mX6g3z_yQQ>.

From one cut to the next, his gesture is revealed to be in harmony with three additional traceurs who appear performing the same trick from the storey above. A slowly panning wide shot captures the quartet landing with choreographic precision before again jump-cutting to their collective descent down another façade. The traceurs appear both rising and falling in varying speeds by a tilting camera, their bodies seemingly flung along an indulgently fictional axis by the devices of slow and reverse motion.

The carpark's exterior next appears as occupied by the group of lingering traceurs, now observed by four peripheral onlookers and a floating, secondary camerawoman. The surface of the building again is shown with a superimposed, synthetic claim: "Parkour is SAFE…". In the foreground, we see the somewhat forced comedy of a traceur brushing aside imaginary bits of detritus in the group's potential landing zone. This odd scripted gesture nevertheless reveals some of the calculation and precision with which the performance has been composed for the camera and refers to the more rehearsed, non-improvisatory aspects of parkour. This glimpse of the work of parkour, its fore-play, is, however, highlighted by its very brevity and a kind of spectacular delicacy.

There is something quietly haptic in the minute details of this group's generally more gestural performance. The ensuing extreme close up of one traceur tying his shoe laces similarly serves as a counter-play to the dramatic pragmatism of their superhero leaps and the here/gone transience. As with Goffman's notion of the backstage,[46] such moments in the YouTube film provide glimpses into the preliminary gestures that are not part of the narrative of flight per se, but work with the more heroic, action-driven images to remind the viewer that these are real people doing apparently precarious stunts but within a disciplined, 'safe' framework.

[46] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Anchor, 1959).

A voyeuristic zoom then reveals the determined countenance of another traceur bracing himself in preparation for a jump from the same carpark terrace as in the opening moments. This zoom further emphasizes the whole motivational enterprise and sense of dedication in parkour that these actors stand (in) for. The traceur's ghosting and shadowing of the imminent airborne enactment, his weighing up of the potential dangers involved, and the apparent virtuosic effort seemingly required to pull the stunt off imbues the scene with a sense of suspense, but it also dilutes the immediacy of the following jump. The traceur is shown vaulting over the carpark precipice, his dynamism qualified by more integrated digital text that finishes off a declarative yet cautionary sentence – "…if you train hard" – regulating the production of free-flight as a sanctioned ritual of certification, pay-off standardization and effected reward. This is further illustrated by the traceur as he appears relaxed and convivial immediately following the jump and jump-cut roll. Parkour here appears to be a rite of fulfillment and satisfaction, yet remains a somewhat intractable initiatory scheme for the on-looking spectatorship.

The group of traceurs then vaults down along the wide staggered balustrade of a concrete stairway in quick succession, and again a sliding superimposed text appears, this time pronouncing democratically "parkour is for everyone". This pronouncement belies the very image of the traceur's seemingly incredible prowess – which is not the same as everyone else's. But it also re-situates parkour in the same world that the rest of us occupy, repositions the traceur's action as something everyone might desire to do, and reconstitutes the transcendent premise of parkour as a extra-daily activity. We might not be able to surpass our physical limitations when encountering the stairway, but in identifying with the traceur, we can imaginatively circumnavigate the normative

parameters of purposeful descent and ascent. As a result, the stairway becomes more than just a stairway, and the act of getting from one level to the next acquires meanings beyond the functional. It may indeed be most efficient to walk up or down stairs the way everyone else does, but "Parkour Is" invites us to see the stairway alternatively as a launching pad for extraterrestrial hocus-pocus.

By proclaiming a democratic ethos, "Parkour Is" appears to offer everyone (from the virtuosic practitioner to the aspiring bystander) the potential for a radically differentiated line to be taken in, or indeed *from* everyday locomotion. The sentiment that "parkour is for everyone" is an animated appeal for its promulgation as a pervasively innovative pastime. But there is something apologetic in its rhetorical 'waiting behind' for the slow spectator to catch up in both symbolic and literal tenses. This extrapolation, indeed the very espousal of what parkour 'is', at least within the context of what could be called the YouTube edutainment video, is a further rooting of a practice that is paradoxically defined by its very elusiveness, supposedly unhindered by the semantic and rule-bound fields that phenomena such as sport occupy.

In an illustration of the next computer-generated subtitle that reads, "parkour requires precision", a shirtless traceur is seen leaping from a stationary position on a stone column to another in a namesake move that French nomenclature calls the *saut de precision*. His body is seen to be repeated across the screen, rendered similarly to the subjects of Eadweard Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Marey's early proto-cinematic chronophotography, where figures' movements are scientifically dissected into still frames that convey motion through static repetition of shifting positions in each successive frame. The traceur appears in a similar classificatory and diagnostic order,

distorted as it has been by the lens of *The Matrix* and other films that exploit the cinematic body as a gravity-irrespective object through such devices as 'bullet time', portraying precision through an analytical frame that seeks to purify it as a transparent bodily process. The precision entailed in his arc cut across the frame is stylistically calcified into a collage-like chain that seeks to reveal the mechanics of its anatomical curve, advancing the tutorial fashion of the video at large, again equivocating between the pure forensic accessibility of parkour as an exercisable, hospitable terrain, and its equal impenetrability through an identical forensic excellence.

The subsequent montage reveals various traceurs in fluid acts of gamut-scaling passage, captured in transitions from point to point by the filmic transitions that reinforce the transfer from location to location. The sights and sites here soon become familiar, executed and delineated within a confined spatiotemporal ambit, the same three or four Wellington settings used on recurrent basis, yet fractured by both the cinematographic and choreographic diversity at play. The practice of filmmaking here leaks through the visual frame as a relatively slow-moving procedure that, while appearing in an attempt to 'catch up' with the ostensibly elusive and evasive acting traceurs, or merely catch a glimpse at their retreating exploits, re-incorporates them as necessary exhibits within the ensconced logistical frame-work of the film's production.

The traceur's flowing through, across and away from the screen gives the impression of an agent *in medias res*, captured in the middle of his fast career, his route appearing to cut across the latitude of the filmic composition. However, the camera's stationary locus becomes just as much about the 'action' as the traceur's appearance within its coordinates. And while the metastasis of digital moviemaking has appeared to

democratize the fabrication of moving images, particularly through its mobilization as an increasingly miniaturized apparatus, it remains an inherently fixed representational paradigm, and in performing their tricks for the camera, the traceurs must time their moves in order to be caught by the camera at the respective apexes of their various tricks and moves.

Just as the YouTube parkour film accentuates the traceur's movements through space, through cutting and other editing strategies, making them seem more like flight and less like earthbound acrobatic exertion, so too these films expand our vision of the spaces the traceur encounters. In this expansion, parkour becomes a 'journey', set both down and out over a terrain spatially stage-managed in the same way as the mise en scène is in the constructed world of film. The traceurs as actors are positioned and presented in an analogous adventure-world, made to look – alongside scenery and properties – like inhabitants of a convoluted diorama that is virtually so much more than the sum of its parts in the filmic edit.

Space in the so-called documentary vision of the YouTube parkour film is hyperbolic. In order to 'inhere' the idea of a constitutional efficiency in the traceur's trajectory, the YouTube film seeks to *enlarge* the actual ground covered during the shooting stages. It repeats varied tricks from different angles and, in the process, erases a sense of overarching spatial orientation on the part of the viewer. As the traceur seeks to smooth obstacle-space into a linear A-B condensation, his YouTube incarnation negotiates a much more tortuous terrain; a plain square is transformed, indeed transmigrated, into a circuitous route looped over and over – morphed to make it seem like a labyrinth of architectural impediments and expressionist angles to be superceded

with equally angular grace and quick dexterity by the traceur. Live flow is substituted for a more comprehensive *view* or *vision* of flow, which is in fact a syntactic or syntagmatic rupturing and subsequent reconfiguration the body's prostheticized manifestation in the oblique *plot*.

This short-cutting, this kind of *alla breve* that multiplies space through this very subtraction, crops up in another video put together by Parapraxis in a location I am familiar with as a physical pedestrian and somewhat unhinged practitioner of parkour. The stylized safety demo of "Parkour Is" gives way in a non sequitur leap to the dramatized thrill of "The Chase."[47] In "The Chase", the same cast is seen advancing across the scenic, limestone parameters of the Civic Centre in Wellington. The seemingly logical linearity of the chase is challenged by its compacted confinement to the square as a book-ending but amorphous visual setting. Rather than simply chasing each other across the square – or just stopping and fighting in thanatological stasis – the actor-traceurs are seen hurdling through an array of evasive tricks on undulating vectors that appear on a higher plane. Here they set the empty square against its boundaries, through the editing process as much as, or more than, through their actions, making a drama of the pediments, balustrades and monuments that frame the square.

"The Chase" shows how much of parkour is not directed towards purposeful action per se, but rather for the 'pure' pleasure of movement. The traceurs expend energy for its own sake, in a way that Caillois recognizes as a central value of play – its wastefulness.[48] The sense of freedom in the YouTube film is constructed for its audience, in the same way that Spiderman's swings through the city are made to convey

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[47] "The Chase", accessed 7 July 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qLkv6nP044&feature=related>.
[48] Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), p.5-6.

the exhilaration of only slightly tethered flight. But in capturing the traceurs' movements and shaping them for the viewer, "The Chase" makes the ephemeral experience sustainable – a shared entertainment rather than a solitary pursuit, repeatable rather than singular, for the actor as well as the watcher.

In "Parkour Is" one dramatic panning shot shows the traceurs in a series of uniform crisscrossing precision jumps, here viewed from a dramatically low angle that depicts them flying precariously overhead, revealed against the angular façade of a modest skyscraper, buttressing the vertigo of their airborne acts as indisputably urban effects. Then, in the video's visual pièce de résistance and central pedagogical affirmation, a traceur is freeze-framed in a vault and encircled by cerulean and winged heraldry, composed again out of a digital superimposition that makes him appear avian in this very immobilization. The digital text now reads, "parkour is free", pointing to the virtual crest's iconography of freedom and alate escape. Riffing upon one of parkour's central tenets, the subtitles continue in mock-commercial rhetoric, "no admission fee; no joining fee; no weekly subscription" – somewhat unwittingly and unnervingly reflecting upon the video's own programmatic prospectus of parkour as a discipline of equivocal libertarianism within the ornament of an albeit disproportionate aerobics. Parkour is thus framed as a type of corporate leisure without the exasperating economic concomitants, a sort of anti-club in its very plea for the viewer to join in the aerobatic fun.

The video returns to its original setting, showing one traceur briefly loosening for another pending jump, his familiarly eager lineament – again seemingly symptomatic of timed and paced endeavour – paying off in customary fashion as he performs a cat leap from the carpark onto an adjacent ledge. This further underlines the causal relationship

between ‘having a crack’, and the gratification of flight – and its somewhat hopeful attendant, alighting – as a premise of attack and release. We see that he wants to fly, but that he also needs to land safely. The litigious notion of freedom as an (after) effect of warranted escape from the delimitations of planned space is once again re-circuited and recruited into the disciplinary dressage of the organized, sport-like regime.

This pre- and de-scribed emancipation is also bound to an aesthetic excellence that is balletic. The repeated cat-leap of the traceur flying in slow-mo puts him in a state of poetic and seemingly eternal gravity-irrespective stasis. This is subtitled by more floating digital text that reads, “parkour is beautiful”. Such an aestheticization of the traceur’s compelling athletic soar and its almost apologetic qualification of parkour’s otherwise intrinsic detour around the various linear precincts that define ambulated quotidian flow, is a reduction and re-definition of its deviation as visual ornament that indeed embraces and ornaments the series of backdrop porticos. It appears to embellish the architecture’s very framed and framing im-pulse through its complementary *flow*. That is, the traceur’s movements are seen to harmonize with an apparently preventative civic vista by gracing the flat cinematic surfaces of the setting with equally apparent composure and composition. The traceur’s range of mid-air summits here become less about perambulation and circumscription – rendered in the glut of cuts as series of preternatural bodily juxtapositions from sharply framed flat space – than a consensual subscription to the scripted pattern that architecture itself pans out / plays out as a representational entity. Architecture itself excels by appearing to support – albeit as a flat, traversed surrounding – the traceur’s parabolic ascension. As such, buildings appear to float with the traceur in the similarly buoyant panning shots that trace and isolate his

sympathetic lines upon orthogonal, diagrammatic edifices. Not just stumbling blocks but catalytic monuments and pedestals that *join* the traceur in his snapshot journey across their attractive physiognomies, buildings become literal centerpieces that the traceur accentuates in his harmonic contour overlay.

The aesthetic turn in "Parkour Is" summarizes the practice as an umbrella urban solution to all terrene pedestrian frustrations. Parkour becomes a kind of total art work equipped with an arsenal of physiological appurtenances designed to overcome these humdrum impasses that stagger the everyday. The video is fittingly punctuated by a traceur's cushioned landing in a lawn-clearing in the square, where he appears static centre-frame before committing to a maneuver that is split into a triptych of identical bodies via warped and warping digital post production. In the traceur's alighting, his coming to rest – however hurriedly – parkour becomes a sanctioned and legitimated return to the terra firma, a grounded and down to earth transaction with an every present and trampoline-like platform. At the same time, the cropped, smooth grass of the lawn is a reminder of the latent let-down, ever present under the surface of the traceur's arc; parkour's rite of escapism is pulled again toward the tethering umbilical terrain.

The emphatic last strains of movement in "Parkour Is" happen in ultra slow mo. The earlier hooded traceur exits the frame behind more superimposed script that reads, "parkour is the art of movement". Then, circling back to their self-attested avant-garde operation, the last digital caption announces "Parkour is Physical Graffiti" in a reflexive reference to the overarching act of parkour as an illicit and thus subcultural de facto act of bodily inscription on the surfaces heretofore as an aesthetic playground of civic capital flow. In this process, of course, the crew itself describes itself as the embodiment of such

an edgy practice, logically coming to the conclusion of a video that has run the urbane gamut from pedagogical edutainment to roaming declassified cool.

The notion of an inscribed, scriptural interfacing or interfering with the architectural milieu is further played out in a YouTube submission called "Evolution: Le Parkour"[49], aptly subtitled "Dudes fiddling around with buildings" from 3Run. 3Run is one of a myriad of self-styled organizations who function as much avatars of parkour on the internet as street-level exponents of a globalized, pedagogical Parkour. "Evolution: Le Parkour" opens with a crepuscular tracking shot – presumably from an automobile – along a sun-kissed lattice of a British motorway. This is revealed as an almost transcendental architectonic horizon within a flurry of dissolves and chanting choral polyphony from a presumably lifte soundtrack.

Out of this exposition emerges a pixelated figure of an assertive man – albeit reduced in the distance of the wide angle shot – in his early twenties, standing motionless on a brick wall. He is poised/posed in dark, athletic attire, ninja-like, his image composed against the London Eye, itself a totem of touristic panopticism against which this clip endeavours to slide up against in activist panache. He pounces like a cat – in a move called, appropriately, the 'cat leap' – on the first down-beat of the abruptly modified audio track. The music turns to a pulsing dance piece, embellishing the traceur's charged transfer from point to point in a cadential outbreak of juxtaposed and puzzling angles that follow in hasty and incongruous succession. The traceur is then seen to perform a

[49] "Evolution- Le parkour", accessed 7 December 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IjQxIRWZu0c>.

sequence of cat leaps from wall to unacquainted wall in an almost metronomic horizontal to-and-fro across the frame.

Next materializing upon a lofty balustrade à la David Belle in a gracefully inverted handstand, the traceur is captured as an almost yogic silhouette, beheld contemplatively from a low angle, in precarious yet elevated, even spiritual re-pose. As in the BBC commercial, where David Belle appears gargoyle-like over the stop-start cacophony of the British commute below, this image of the handstand provides a necessary rhythmic respite from the unremitting pulse of everyday life and a breather from the traceur's own on-screen kinetic turbulence. The lull upholds the believability of the video's narrative by showing the human need of the hitherto outwardly invincible actor to pause and silently contemplate his surroundings, while simultaneously retreating inwards as a brooding force within the humdrum urban tumult. The repeated jump-cut accentuates the traceur's resourceful spontaneity and seeming desire to be everywhere through its very syntactic accumulation; the static shot of the handstand is a caricature of the traceur putting his feet up at a serene altitude, however edgy.

While the music stays anomalously pumped during this ostensible interlude, the traceur is conceived as simultaneously triumphant and pensive, framed at the zenith of his collected ascents like a climber hanging out at the summit, exhausted yet relieved. The static shot shows the traceur engaged in one of a line-up of 'moves' that require muscular patience and dexterous motionlessness in place of high-speed élan. In the YouTube clip, the movement becomes a moment of dramatic stasis, deployed as a narrative mechanism that mitigates the previously nonstop action with a novel temporal texture. The handstand's punctuation of the plot evokes the panoramas in *Batman* and *Spiderman*

which reveal their respective protagonists in condensed scenes of isolated, panoptic reflection upon the cities below. In these nocturnal, voyeuristic depictions, the superheroes appear as sanctioned vigilantes bearing the inverse weight of the world upon their shoulders.

In the YouTube video, the traceur occupies a similar position of sublime eminence over the receding terrestrial city. He is here seen to master the city, as the flâneur masters the city through equally vigorous, though pre-eminently cerebral acts of ambulation. As the latter is perennially cognizant, attuned to his enveloping milieu, the handstanding traceur appears almost Buddha-like in his distanciated immersion, effaced by the very monumental architecture he seeks to outperform, yet mimic through his erect arrest. It is a pose of eye-catching limberness, also producing an effect of grandstanding heroism that is appositely empty as a terminal cue in its apparent infringement of parkour's directive of acute efficiency. Of course, it's not that long before the YouTube traceur is reintegrated in the flow of the narrative, taking flight like *Spiderman* or *Batman* back into the textual confines of the cinematic urban adventure.

The traceur is immediately joined by two companions of similar physique, springing up in a brisk queue, executing various somersaults in rapid succession and clearing a row of street furniture through low vaulting *passements*. The trinity rushes towards and then over the prone camera, leaving a vacant angular shot of the sky lingering behind after their flyover. This shot is used to exemplify parkour's evasive, sky-bound design, the traceurs' triplet leap is made to look like a disappearance, an illusive breaking away from the frame and the continuing of their ever-receding and undetectable journey. This passing-over the obstacle – which is here embodied by the camera as a

reflexive pediment, a measured and explicitly *placed* object – is both a rupturing of space and a segueing back up of it in what Zoe Laughlin refers to as "sewing the city".[50] A "jump is never an end in itself", adds Sébastien Foucan, "what we call a 'following' is needed after a jump, to be able to link with another move, to be always active".[51]

Space, as such, is played out in parkour's various inter-sectional and vital flows as a limitrophe sport, a de-constitution of boundaries within the city as an orthogonal and seemingly impenetrable framework of rigid cartographical thresholds. The traceur aims to both dis-integrate and fracture these verges, while passing through, around and over them as gracefully and indeed, as seamlessly as possible. It is in this fraught liminal carrying-out that he both underscores urban fortification and reduces it to an ornament – however definitive – in his sinuous tracings. Becoming an embodied line between the here and there, between points A and B, a now and a future then, the traceur embosses a spatiotemporal juncture, becomes an inter-section himself by linking normatively disparate locations. He plays out, utters a physical syntax by annexing architectural dis-junction and relating it through his very trespass. He makes-believable the continuum between two supposedly contrasting nexuses, re-articulating their respective timespaces on a psychogeographical continuum, forming a proximity between them.

This flowing or threading of space, this almost consolidatory act of constructive deviance, or diversion, becomes most visible when looked at within a YouTube scenography. The traceur's performative dialectic between rupture and linking itself becomes a product of an analogous filmic process that takes the actor-traceur's synecdochic rush across the frame for a *mid*-flight extract and cuts into another follow-on

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[50] Zoe Laughlin, *Sewing the City*.
[51] Sébastien Foucan quoted in *ibid*.

antic. Flow becomes an interstitial act of the editing meme: the cut, through its very constitutional rupturing, dividing. As the stylized documentation of the YouTube remains under the auspices of a visual record or profiling of the urban discipline – captured through live tracings of seemingly spontaneous but performed flow – what would remain a continuity error in the rehearsed and multi-take structure of the feature film narrative is endemic. Such a seemingly erroneous occurrence is re-deployed as a central constituent of YouTube Parkour's (stylishly) jagged flow.

The edit in the YouTube representation of parkour performs its own efficiency, literally cutting corners in its own syntagmatic/syntactic reduction of the tracer's extended 'take' by selecting and displaying its highlights, its featured exertions, its focal points over and over. YouTube parkour typically becomes a terminal yet cyclic spectacle, efficient antics that are indexed as the phenomenon's traits become sampled and looped. The refined and defined extremity of the subject's moves are propelled in the rapidity of edits that play out with serial incessancy and persistence. The body itself becomes less an agent of pure migratory flux than a mediated object itself boosted by the sheer intensity of the edit's repetitive haste. A set of undifferentiated bodies are submitted to a flickering palimpsest of *jump cuts*: an express arrangement of exceptional, literal leaps that are pushed together in an oscillating present, where the still frame is occupied by a set of eloquently contorted bodies engaged in and as a range of actions that become homogenized, regimented and normalized in their stylistically proximate ordering.

It's an almost hyper-real concatenation. The montage brings the radically separate bodies and geographical settings into one immobile locus of optic focus and superimposes them over one monolithic set of embedded coordinates. The extremity and

aestheticized excess of the traceur's supererogatory ambulation is augmented or at least prosthetically enhanced by the edit's very abbreviation of the traceur's longer flow. It surgically extracts the essential, illustrative manifestations of parkour as an observable recital of extra-ordinary acts. The idea of an immediate or indeed, 'direct' – a professed unmediated 'encounter' with the very practice that is itself making a visceral claim in every day life to unmediated and direct experience – is here a lot knottier than it seems. It reveals the paradox of the YouTube representations as being texts convoluted and miring, but also as texts more aligned with the synecdochic and equivocal virtue of capitalism as a short-circuiting enterprise. Parkour both contests this route-inized and concurrently inert scheme, while mimicking it through spatial short-cuts in its own expanded and condensed course.

The traceurs' flyover of the anchored camera in "Evolution: Le Parkour" is a textbook embodiment of this equivocal mapping that is Janus-faced in the way it cuts space in half as a contracting and protracting gesture. The traceurs' egress in, over and out of frame is an incised spatial abbreviation itself, cut into two consecutive shots as a customary filmic ligament. But the live-action of their choreographic path is somewhat misplaced. They approach the camera as leviathan figures, looming as they do over the purposefully marooned camera. They emerge daunting in their serrated drawing-near. But this very serration, and their overbearing physical advance – which is fore-grounded as formidable, quasi-superhuman in its orientation – comes off over-wrought and over-determined: less an act of physical finesse and efficient maneuver than a heavily-built human juggernaut making its way arbitrarily towards the viewer. Such a shot reveals the physical resistance at play in a practice made spectacular through it ostensible stasis

within the edited frame of the YouTube video. By appearing awkwardly designed, the traceurs' flyover in "Evolution" – an eponymous pointing to a disembodied levitation beyond its own quotidian stranding – becomes more of a burdened leap, its scission by the filmic cut only tempering the burdened countenance of the collective leap.

These interstitial instants seem like delayed responses, almost lethargic in contrast to the imminent cuts they'll be ultimately committed to. They appear as if in slow-mo, atrophied, not in a diminutive way, but as wasted and wasteful bodies refusing to adhere to the sleek paradigm of the reflexively quick shuffle of the YouTube edit. They slide-up against the slick and sleek edit, interrupting the prima facie flow of their edited incarnation, sacrificing the nominal stream and steam of parkour's art of displacement for a leaked verisimilitude that seems less faithful to the re-enactment of it as a progressive form. The computer-generated reverie created through increasingly sophisticated editing techniques that replicate the textual imaginary of the neo-narrative economy of Hollywood cinema, while seemingly bolstering the traceur's body as a perfected outline against a retreating urban surface, is actually a 'self'-destructive vision, an enjambment in space of a supple and ideally alate force that wishes to fly like a bird in the same manner as a ufological Superman. The traceur, in the same fashion as all superhero protagonists, tout court, seems to want to dissolve *through* the obstacle-realm he encounters on an incessant basis, and the YouTube video replicates this algorithmic aesthetic as an etymological, ethereal flight of fancy. Parkour becomes 'beautiful' through this transcendence literally *over* the city's algorithmic plain.

But what if the traceur is seen to fall, to fail? Now renowned for its spectacular candor and the unassuming nature of its leading character, the "David Belle Fall"[52] video inserts a new trajectory into the post-narratives of flight and aspirational transformations of the YouTube domain. Famed for his invention of parkour and his celebrated and apparently congenital dedication to the virtues of virility espoused by Georges Hébert, Belle is seen as a sort of metonymy for parkour, its spokesman and patently unfailing avatar. In "David Belle Fall", Belle falls back down to earth as an Icarian hero, his wings clipped by the inextricable constraints of gravity.

The YouTube video is constructed from the first person perspective of an eyewitness to Belle's seeming faux pas. In it, Belle is seen to trip over a stairway gully and then plummet down the two and a half meter drop, landing abruptly and heavily on the concrete, with the cameraman fittingly positioned underneath as though to catch the sort of flyover discussed earlier. The opening titles of the video read, "Instantly he pointed to me and said to put it all over the internet, so everyone can see him fall and see that he is human and falls just like everyone else out there, that he's no different at all… and still on such a simple jump a mistake can happen … that's how real parkour is and that's why everyone has to be careful doing it and make sure".

Belle's pedagogical position is here re-affirmed by his very modest re-take on his own spectacular blunder. His reflexive assertion of the witnessed and captured 'accident' as the 'real parkour' is reinforced by the clip's repetition in slow-mo, the slowed gasps of the live onlookers and the crack of his body's impact on the hard and visibly unsafe surface below. There is immediacy in the unprepared photographical frisson as he trips

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[52] "David Belle Fall", 2006, accessed 1 January 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Kh8NeG9wf8&nofeather=True>.

into the gully. The inter-titles continue: "He spoke so fast, and so happy. He continued to be so excited… He said this is what he lives for, this realness, this feeling of life that his life is real, that things can happen, that life is unpredictable". As Belle explains elsewhere, "It was the end of the day. I was just doing stuff with a bunch of kids. I fall all the time — I fall like the monkeys — but it never shows up on film, because they just want the spectacular stuff".[53]

The traceur who is beheld in a downtime slip-up, or muck-up of this floating paradigm is seen to mess with YouTube's cerebral optic scratching – rather than cutting – against the vicarious oneiric vision of the YouTube viewer/spectator. The holistic, over-arching and arcing aesthetic is picked apart, its airborne tapestry grounded in a-typical bathetic fashion. The archetypal fall of the hero is evoked in the somewhat sluggish actions of the actor-traceur who fails to execute the expected respective athletic aesthetic of his nominated trick / track. There's a quasi-thanatological vision in the YouTube traceur's desire to seek flight, if not from, then through the obstacle-field he is euphorically filmically filed in, and the ectoplasmic and ectopic will to seep, leak or smash through the looming barrier without visceral consequence is Sisyphean, doomed, like the superhero, to failure.

The "David Belle Fall" clip's seemingly passive resistance to what geographer Stephen John Saville refers to as depictions "almost always scripted through with heroic narratives of accomplishment,"[54] tears the absorbent fabric of the purportedly documentary methodologies of the YouTube 'armchair view'. Such texts for Saville

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[53] Alec Wilkinson, "No Obstacles", *The New Yorker*, 16 April 2007, accessed 18 September 2010, <http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/04/16/070416fa_fact_wilkinson>.
[54] Stephen John Saville, "Playing with Fear", p.892.

appear 'finished',[55] hermetically sealed in their hermeneutic containment of parkour as a traceable, calculable, circuited product. Re-presented parkour's refinement of what is a self-fashioned, refined art of movement is undone by the heuristic kinetic sluggishness and lack of grace – however controlled – that is our lot in everyday ambulation. The traceurs come back down to earth. The distinction of parkour as transformative and re-figurative of flat encumbering space is muddled and muddied on its marooning in the lapse-frame of the YouTube video.

As the most visible and most photographed proponent of a perfected and influential urban practice, Belle, when he falls, unfastens the captivating precision beheld in the lion's share of highlighted YouTube show-reels. The exhortation makes Belle's erroneous performance in the fall video appear almost as a scripted trip, a rehearsed plunge for the purposes of provoking an ineluctable immanence and immediacy of the accident in pervasive, terrestrial and extra-terrestrial movement. Falling over is made poetic in this transposition, less a route to humiliation than a form of escape and visceral re-integration into the annoying 'flow' of the banal course of everyday life. It seems like an inversion of parkour's very epistemology of escape and levitation, by which parkour is reintegrated, recruited, re-circulated back into a quotidian realm, made indistinguishable from the domestic terrain of solemn undertakings haunted by the annoyances of inertia.

Belle does not fall only once. He performs modesty and self-deprecation, repeating the fall later in another YouTube video as a practiced, comical turn of phrase, tripping in feigned distraction and following through gracefully by rolling and returning upright further down the carpeted interior. His trivial trip appears to illustrate the imminence of a balletic posture bearing in and on all of our mundane maneuvers, flawed

[55] Saville, "Playing with Fear", p.892

or not. Belle's amiable and candid reflection upon the banality of such ordinary and seemingly misguided slippages of the feet is an exhortation for the empowering nature of such maladroit everyday practice, rather than its normative humiliation. There remains an element of spectatorial *schadenfreude* in seeing the various slip-ups on screen, regardless of how premeditated they may seem upon reflection.

The curiosity sparked by the other's fall is as much wrapped up in the transmittable sadomasochistic rites of flaunted, performative rough-and-tumble play and the exhibitionist challenging of the elements that are now the domain of a generation predicated upon rapid widespread social networking loci, post-Jackass representational paradigms. The self-sacrificial style and iconoclasm of such stunt-like antics also foreground what art critic Rene Daalder calls a more "timeless subgenre in the conceptual art movement that revolves entirely around gravity".[56] Referring to extreme sports, acrobatic ballet, bungee jumping and *Jackass* itself, Daalder describes a mode of performance that are so many acts of "human defiance against a power much greater than ourselves, which puts us at the edge of mortal disaster while simultaneously providing us with the thrill of being alive".[57]

There is also an urban puerility, a return to Benjamin's analogous Berlin Childhood beheld in these genres that seek the 'inner-youth' manifested in one's seemingly random jaunt in the jagged city zones. Parkour's seeming virtuosity and predication on refined, disciplinary, almost ascetic temperament, chimes uneasily with this quasi-Dionysian losing-oneself. Belle imbues this straight-edge scheme with an

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[56] Rene Daalder, "Bas Jan Ader in the Age of 'Jackass'", in *Contemporary Magazine*, Issue 60, February 2004, accessed 5 January 2010, <http://projects.renedaalder.com/43708/Bas-Jan-Ader-in-the-Age-of-Jackass>.
[57] *ibid*.

avant-garde sense of chic innovation, adding an unflustered sense of apparel to its somewhat po-faced sense of 'errance', both in its sense of applied, conscious and conscientious trespass, and its seeming inversion – 'mere' childish idiocy.

YouTube representations of parkour purport to provide a transparent transcript of the practice's aerobatic and elusive itinerary through what is a resolutely urban landscape. This very elusiveness is captured, however, as a trope within the coordinates of a relatively sedentary cinematographic frame, limited to an invariably shaky panning and titling shot, but made to seem kinetic through the angled variation of the later edit. The YouTube clips make a claim to following and tracing the traceur, but they literally and quite equivocally *plot* the traceur's blocked – in the rehearsed, thespian sense – trajectory. The viewer's very perspective or orientation on this trajectory is framed and plotted-in by, the edit; the traceur's run never occurs in autonomous real-time away from the synchronization of what here looks like a linear screen-play. His path is indeed plotted, situated as his performance is by the dramatizing cinematographic perspective. While his trajectory seems to cut across the axis of this filmic sight- and site-line, it is merely book-ended by it. The traceur's live-act is clipped in a cut that appears to illogically follow a continuous course.

The YouTube video plays out over a sort of terrain vague, a series of spaces that come together in the post-production tapestry of accumulated cuts, which give a rhythmic impression of the practice's constitutional flow, while simultaneously rupturing its acting subjects' live-actions through this serial spatial quantification. Space in the YouTube clips is tessellated, sewn together as the traceur is seen to thread his own way through the

furrowed seams of the undulating urban fabric. The traceur in the YouTube videos is predominantly revealed as a gymnast, affixed to the not-quite panoramic latitudes the film occupies, somersaulting what might be deemed an interiorized filmic field.

There is both a stylistic and structural analogy between parkour and its stimulated and simulated abridgement through its filmed incarnations. This analogy is a temporal one, a syntactic mirroring, where the traceur's cuts through space are seen both to inform and to be informed by the scissions that occur on his body's dynamic and sinuous engagement during the edit. The cut both in playful, live parkour and in re-played spectacular parkour is an embroidering gesture, which abuts habitually disjunctive nodes in space, while committing and commuting an act of montage that creates a 'third meaning' in the polysemic expansion of their new relationship.

Such an act is thus equivocal as a condensing and aggregating re-routing. That is, in drawing corporal connections or joining dots between spaces, by doing interstitial tricks, and establishing a course flanked by two points in urban space as acquainted inter-sectional loci, the traceur might be seen to invent a somewhat surplus passage, a commercially untenable and clotted channel. This reveals the paradox of parkour as both a facilitative, cartographical solution to the city as a rigid grid of capital 'flows' in what Zygmunt Bauman calls 'liquid modernity[58], and as something that accumulates *over* that urban template as an additive entity unit, or cuts *through* it to separate and to create extra conduits in its own previous nisus to 'fluid' standardization.

Within this contradiction lies the conception of parkour as an enunciative form of everyday life, refracting – as abbreviation and extrapolation – the more ordinary, slang perambulations described by Michel de Certeau. As Sally R Munt suitably points out, de

[58] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (London: Polity, 2000).

Certeau "offers us the urban mise-en-scène as productive" [59], a kinetic mixage of intersecting yet singular points of view and multiple inestimable circumlocutions. As de Certeau himself suggests,

> The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, so no matter how panoptic they may be: it is neither foreign to them (it can take place only within them) nor in conformity with them (it does not receive its identity from them). It creates shadows and ambiguities within them. It inserts multidinuous references and citations into them.[…] These diverse aspects provide the basis of a rhetoric.[60]

This spatial rhetoric is elliptical, punctured and punctuated by fractured recollections and intersecting, fractal memories, embossed in polysemic tales and oral laggings and catch-ups. For de Certeau, its two main devices are synecdoche and asyndeton, grammatical maneuvers that "select and fragment the space traversed […] skipping over links and whole parts that [they] omit. From this point of view, every walk constantly leaps, or skips like a child, hopping on one foot".[61] The traceur repeats this contraction and conjunction, through his slalom-like and speech-like slippages through the textual delimitations of the city-sentence, performing on the margins of its syntax in a sort of elevated soliloquy.

Yet, like the equivocal bodily cuts that function as simultaneous embellishments and reductions of the spaces the traceur confronts, synecdoche and asyndeton appear as differing, syntagmatic functions. As de Certeau continues,

> Synecdoche expands a spatial element in order to make it play the role or a "more" (a totality) and take its place (the bicycle or the piece of furniture in a store window stands for whole street or neighborhood). Asyndeton, by elision, creates a "less," opens gaps in the spatial continuum, and retains only selected parts of it that amount almost to relics. Synecdoche replaces totalities by

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[59] Sally R Munt, "The Lesbian Flâneur" in Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Jane Rendell and Alicia Pivaro (eds.), *The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), p.257 - 258.
[60] De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p.101.
[61] *ibid*.

> fragments (a less in the place of a more); asyndeton disconnects them by eliminating the conjunctive or the consecutive (nothing in place of something). Synecdoche makes more dense: it amplifies the detail and miniaturizes the whole. Asyndeton cuts out: it undoes continuity and undercuts its plausibility.[62]

As such, parkour can be seen to slip in-between the city-text's proprietary grammar and become in Munt's phrase, an anti-text. "Things *extra* and *other*", writes de Certeau, "insert themselves into the accepted framework of the imposed order."[63] This is an interstitial sort of graffiti inflicted upon the edifice surfaces of capital, a "ghostly orality"[64] emitted and uttered discreetly, but simultaneously superfluous and accumulative. "The surface of this order is everywhere punched and torn open by ellipses, drifts, and leaks of meaning: it is a sieve-order."[65] These are mnemonic inscriptions; their illegible and amnesiac genealogies are aerobic, refusing to be written *down* in panoptic and authenticated historiographies.

The resistance to this linear and historicist reduction, to the textual streamlining of parkour's equally refined and solitary cityscape bender is also an invocation of the flâneur's own psychogeographical anamnesis, his archeological jaunts upon the palimpsest strata of the city as an accumulation of debris, rather than a straightforward, told tale. As Frisby asserts, "The calm, measured narrative unfolded by the story-teller is to be replaced by the frantic, immediate language of the journalist as rag picker".[66] While a methodology of such re-collection points to a peripatetic mode of non-representational theoretical ambling, it also informs the utter synchronicity of the tales told in contemporary pot-boiling and scopophiliac cinema, where scenarios are played out in serial abundance, a concatenation of non-sequitur sequences in an incessantly shifting

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[62] De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p.101.
[63] *ibid*., p.160
[64] *ibid*.
[65] *ibid*.
[66] David Frisby, *Cityscapes of Modernity: Critical Exploration* (New York: Polity, 2002), p.172.

spatiotemporal mise en scène in a chain of presences, that gratify in their very spectacular immediacy. Not told as classical grand narratives in the traditional filmic way, they seem to unfold as narrative instants full of the elliptical conjunctions-only, premises, precisions in their computer-generated impulse, short-takes and post-MTV abstraction, music videos in lyrical abbreviations of wider, opaque meta-narratives.

YouTube replicates this lexical cut-up, informed by the micro-scoping in on the action of the superhero film. YouTube's parallel syntax pulls the colloquial body back into its own shortcutting brief. The traceur may be seen to act out the enjambments and caesurae that are the poetic tracings of his spatio-linguistic trajectory, but they remain syncopated by the beats perpetrated by the propulsive filmic cutting, and indeed, surgically and prosthetically processed in the edit.

Things seem perpetually *in medias res* in the YouTube portrayals of parkour. The traceur is continuously beheld as though in the middle of his over-arching path through the horizontal mesh of the frame. His off-the-record tricks supposedly occur on a continuum that isn't seen to start anywhere, in the same way that the city is never seen to begin. Both the traceur and the city appear ceaselessly per-mutated through the diverse vocabularies that seek to define them in prismatic fashion. This in-betweenness is a linking facet to both the practice and performance of parkour on YouTube. Parkour's performative and narrative ligature seems to embody the trope of the rhizome that for Deleuze, "has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, *intermezzo*. The tree imposes the verb "to be," but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction 'and…and…and…".[67]

[67] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.25.

Such a grammatical no-when and -where itself appears syntactically situated alongside de Certeau's own linguistic orientation and applies to parkour as a quasi-schizophrenic elegance in its shift seemingly incompatible clause to spatial clause. "This conjunction", continues Deleuze, "carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb, 'to be.'" He adds:

> Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for? These are totally useless questions. Making a clean slate, starting or beginning again from ground zero, seeking a beginning or a foundation – all imply a false conception of voyage and movement (a conception that is methodical, pedagogical, initiatory, symbolic…proceeding from the middle, through the middle, coming and going rather than starting and finishing**…** establish a logic of the AND, overthrow ontology, do away with foundations, nullify endings and beginnings.[68]

This seems to be the edited logic of parkour, at least as it is seen in the *in medias res* vignettes displayed on YouTube. In the gratifying and spectacular proximity, the vertiginous lack of closure in the looped permutations of the trick-after-trick, the syntactic 'and' in the YouTube videos become aggrandizing, accumulative narrative chartings of extra-ordinary acrobatic expressions, idiomatic re-lays piled in synchronic, displaced and replaced immediacy for the viewer's own vicarious panoptic gratification.

Caught at the apex of his scripted and truncated tracing, the actor in the YouTube parkour clip is captured at the point at which and, using Deleuze's words, "where things pick up speed… *between* things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other way, a stream without a beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle".[69]

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[68] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.27.
[69] *ibid*., p25.

Yet there are the moments in the YouTube videos which drag out these transient in-between moments, and forcefully enough, become the most rhizomatic instants and instances that the rapid edits let through as most evocative of parkour's potential for actual interstitial insubordination. Through slowness, through the pause, through the accidental staccato of the anti-choreographies that stumble like aleatory caesurae into the poetic currency of a film/space lexicon, parkour articulates the most acute potential for radical bodily re-orientation, re-enunciation and ultimately, in that 'decisive' Bhaktinian carnivalesque pirouette, renewal. Thus, the seeming anti-theses of parkour – inertia, the accident, the fall, slowness, lateness – and these phenomenological lacks' concomitant heurisms, points to its most radical and amorphous facet. The traceur here takes the flânetic turtle for a metaphorical stroll. And while the vicarious modes of spectatorship remain entrenched in a *schadenfreude* set upon the mis-take, the mistake remains the most truly visceral flash within a persistently screened-out YouTube world of rapidity and episodic surging.

"Speed accomplishes the attenuation of mass and extended substance"[70] writes Steven Connor in his essay on Samuel Beckett. In the YouTube texts, such an attenuation feels like a kind of bodily emaciation, a retreat in its very extra-ordinary polishing, its ascent and descent along edited vectors that seek to define its standardized limits in the edited systematic. In contrast, what de Certeau might call the 'stutter' in a fortuitous turn of delinquent phrase, is an acutely embodied voicing, a pre-verbal speech act that is sublime in its out-cried expression.

The tripping and crashing body in pain spells out in an equally lexical cadence, the

[70] Steven Connor, "Slow Going" in *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 30 (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2000), p.154.

haptic nature of the obstacles the traceur confronts. This reintroduces the conflict to be had in the dialogue between the sinuous, kinetic body and the obstacle-path en-countered. The falling traceur consumes time and tests patience – both of capital as a network of abstracted informational flows and quantifiable commutations and of the viewer wishing to see a screened 'embodiment' of nominal 'parkour', hinged as it is on the keywords typed into internet search engines.

The accidental body of the stuttering traceur resists definition, interrupting the resolution of YouTube's own textiled digital semantic. He performs an ellipsis that is topographical, cartographical, choreographic and cinematographic. But instead of spatiotemporal asyndeton, this aching gesture is a long-winded route to a confused and confusing making-sense, a rigmarole and deviant rupturing of the normative disciplinary regime of the heroic narratives that underpin parkour's masculine rites of performative public-city. As Connor continues,

> It seems to be precisely the uninterpretability of slowness that has made it so important in the art of that - what is the wrong word exactly? - rearguard, that avant-garde which, finding itself humiliatingly outstripped by a culture in which acceleration has become the dominant value, began to look for ways of turning from speed or promptness, or punctuality; an art that wanted to try to stop being on time; hence musical minimalism, and especially the excruciating phase-experiments of Steve Reich, and the rent, discontinuous fabric of the work of John Cage and Morton Feldman, and the confrontation with slowness of Michael Snow's Wavelength. Slowness is not representable. Representation is an effect of punctuality, or promptness, of the ravelling or puckering of time. Slowness testifies to asynchrony, a failure to meet up, or come together. Speed is inflammatory, infectious. It makes demands of me, it tugs me out of my time and into its time, its more than time. It calls me into its synchronicity, telling me I will be able to be able to be at speed, to be at one with what breaks exultantly with mere being, to be merged with its ecstatic going out from the mere condition of going on. Slow going is always the failure to be there, to have been there, in that condition of slow going that will have been going on, as we so serenely say, all the time.[71]

As such, slowness adheres to a rhizomatic notion of mis- or dis-placement, getting lost in

[71] Steven Connor, "Slow Going", p. 155.

the convoluted disorientations that inform the puerile and surrealist errances of both the flâneur in "Berlin Childhood" and in the Situationist *dérive*, in its warped and warping re-configuration of a malleable and drip-like city cartography.

The 'unpracticed' in-between moments of the traceur's *ritardando* are seen to splice, or inter-cut the imperative of sanitary proportions in the YouTube cut. The cut, of course, is a version of something in film, for example the 'Director's Cut' is seen to be a director's definitive vision. Slowness in the YouTube parkour film interrupts the constitution, the make-up the cosmetic transcription of the subjects' movements. They map time in a more tangible way than the ceaseless flow of the normative YouTube edit. Slowness maps time in a way recognized by Lyotard as:

> The constitution of the present instant […] already demands a retention, even a minimal one, of various elements together, their 'constitution' precisely. This microscopic synthesis is already necessary for the slightest appearing. For plunging into the pure manifold and letting oneself be carried along by it would allow nothing to appear to consciousness, nor to disappear from it for that matter, appearing not even taking 'place'. This place is due to a synthesis, that of apprehension, which as it were hems the edges of the pure flow and makes discontinuous the pure continuum of the flow while making continue the pure discontinuity of its supposed elements. In short the river needs a bank if it is to flow. An immobile observatory to make the movement apparent. [72]

In the terms put forward by Roger Caillois in his study of play, the wastefulness of parkour is revealed through the slow motion replay of the accident.[73] The mistake becomes a sign of ludic expenditure, an exertion without aerobatic closure, repeated for its own sake; a momentary repudiation of the disciplinary frame.

YouTube representations of parkour can thus be seen to reveal the contradictions between flight and constraint, between play and work, and between organic movement and constructed kinesthetic. YouTube is complicit with parkour in reconfiguring the

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[72] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Conversations on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1990), p.159.
[73] Roger Caillois, *Man Play and Games*.

relationship of the view to the city environment, vicariously surmounting obstacles, collapsing distances, confronting the geometrics of the city and reshaping the proscenium of pedestrian experience. Like Harold Lloyd's comical mishaps, David Belle in his "Fall" demonstrates parkour's playfulness, a desire for the accidental and improvisational against the hegemonic wall both of the city and the YouTube form. It introduces a vicariously felt realism that circumvents the prescribed rites of safety and contrivance of parkour as sport or as curriculum, putting safety last and making the possibility of self-destruction liberating.

Chapter Three

Jump London, "Top Gear: Peugeot 207 vs. Parkour", "Nissan 'Shift'" and *District B13*

"This is a story of a journey": Parkour's narrative assimilation

The impact of my landing beyond the gate described at the conclusion of Chapter One illustrates an acute contrast between the concrete physicality of the manoeuvre I performed, and the cushioned experience produced by film and other media representations of such a reiterated act. The impediment of the gate is adapted as a springboard for a however awkward manoeuvre. It is a punctuated accomplishment, a solitary staccato act spliced into the routine commute instead of a catalyst for further elevated antics. The once-ness of this act seems to undermine the constitutional flow of parkour, but such an ostensibly crucial constitutional ligature is mostly symptomatic of film's very re-production of parkour and its ontological set-up.

In this chapter, I will examine how film and other media attempt to construct and capitalize on parkour as an often solitary and brief transgression, or series of such. These representational constructs appear to open up a practice that is paradoxically secretive and very much public, while limiting and containing it, and thus undermining its potential to realize its constitutional transgression.

Film *makes* and *remakes* parkour, through its faultless screening of the practice's distilled idiosyncratic traits. Ironically, the only space in which to examine the traceur or traceuse in action is the deracinating, reshaping and freeze-framing space of the media

through which his or her movements are converted and ultimately transmitted with uniform brilliance. The frame provided by the media replicates the social constraints parkour initially appeared to rail against. While inextricably linked with and echoing the ubiquitous imaginary that permeates around images broadcast on media, the tangibility, the irritation and slight rigmarole imposed by the gate incident I used as an example in my introduction is indicative of a more authentic parkour, however fragmentary and elliptical any viewership of it would be.

In this chapter, I will examine representations of parkour where it is hailed as such, including the documentary, *Jump London*, the parkour-narrative film, *District B13*, and some advertising and TV spots ("Top Gear: Peugeot 207 vs. Parkour" and a Nissan ad starring David Belle), through which parkour is commercialized and capitalized upon as a bodily spectacle. In analysing these texts I wish to come to an understanding of how parkour both defines and is defined by these texts, and what occurs to its own fledgling social objectives and styles through this shift from real-life exertion to mediatised and narrativised reproduction.

Mike Christie's 2003 Channel 4 documentary film, *Jump London* begins with a series of ambient, out-of-focus shots of anonymous children playing around energetically on rooftops, walls, and along street-side balustrades.[74] Their desultory movements are accompanied by an abstract dance soundtrack that further evokes a primordial exposition that is nostalgic and foreboding of the 'event' that will ensue. A dramatic, female presenter soon appears in voice over, setting the impending scene for the action to come:

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[74] *Jump London* Dir. Mike Christie. Perf. Jerome Ben Aoues, Sébastien Foucan, and Johann Vigroux. DVD (United Kingdom: Channel 4, 2003).

"This is the story of a journey – A journey that begins on the rural edge of a Parisian suburb and culminates in an unprecedented trip across the rooftops of London's most famous landmarks". During this expository narrative, the footage cuts from the reflective sepia-tinged archival footage of the street kids to a smooth tracking shot across the roof of the Saatchi Gallery, with the Thames and the Big Ben beheld beyond in a majestic tableau, replete with sunrise.

A panning shot then reveals Sébastien Foucan hand-standing on another riparian balustrade, before cutting to an as-yet unnamed architect in his studio, saying, "to go from a to b, the thing that gets in the way is the buildings". This montage embeds the dramatized genealogy traced throughout the impending feature narrative, paralleling the implied impoverishment of parkour's provenance to its illustrious emergence, and final aspirational manifestation in the illustrious city of London. Parkour's coming into fruition could thus be seen in this opening transition as being inextricably linked with its scripted and televised appearance in Channel 4's portrayal: it is a quasi-fictional, mythological exegesis of free running and parkour as a hitherto exotic, closed text, literally emerging out an fuzzy formative sequence: "*This* is parkour", the narrator exclaims, "the anarchic new sport of free running".

The film then shows an excerpt of Foucan's performance in the Nike Advert, "Angry Chicken", in which he is portrayed as a 'young man' being pursued by the commercial's eponymous and comical villain. Foucan is seen jumping from the first floor balcony of an inner-Parisian tenement before rolling onto a quad of grass below, before a cut reveals the chicken – presumably being thrown from the same point by an invisible assistant – leaping after him. The authoritative voice-over reappears against a series of

spectacularly comical encounters between Foucan and the chicken, the former's athletic escapades undermined by the latter's nonchalant tracing and catching-up to his otherwise brilliant movements. "But free running is more than just a heart in mouth spectacle put together for advertisers," continues *Jump London's* female presenter, "It's a discipline; it's about clearing all obstacles in your path; it's about being free in towns and cities designed to contain you".

Jump London's endeavour to present parkour as a raw pursuit beyond the confines of both the obstacle-city and the stylized frame of the television advertisement is part of its very documentary verisimilitude and appeal. The film lends credence to its showcasing of parkour as a hitherto 'unseen', underground phenomenon. From its primordial, out of focus exposition – reinforced by chilled-out mood music that provides an impression of 'the past' and the authentic origins of this nascent, localized sport – to the localized re-enactments that are central to *Jump London*'s launching pad premise, the film commits its own framing and reframing of parkour.

Documentaries such as *Jump London* zoom in and distort the free-runner and traceur's spatial-temporal routes, superimposing a cohesion and spatial continuity over a subject that is often pausal in its otherwise rapid passage through the city. This is an importing and implanting of a storied causality and dramatic intrigue upon the subject's potential for transgressive disconnectedness. In comparison to the silent films of Keaton, Chaplin, and Lloyd, which might be seen to retain much of the *verité* of the stunt through long-takes and spectacular but fragmentary acrobatic acts, the documentary translates the fragments of parkour's stuttered but supple transfer through the city's anfractuosities into a calibrated and serialized flow.

Jump London's narrative evolves over an otherwise seemingly typical, civic day, with various iconic landmarks set up as locations in and through which the featured free runners execute and accomplish their various, choreographed aerobatics against a day's unfolding, represented by the appearance of a superimposed clock counting down throughout. The filmmakers' – and by implication the viewers' – challenge to the free runners in the words of its narrator, "is to bring free running to the rooftops of London's most famous landmarks" with the city's architecture providing them "with a stage, and it will be used for a performance unlike anything that's ever been seen before". This pronouncement is delivered against a hip-hop backing track, and occurs over a panoramic shot of an arterial road cluttered with idling vehicular commuters – a combination that is reminiscent of the juxtaposition that is set up between David Belle's birds-eye-view-like anti-commute over the impeded traffic below in the BBC advert. The three featured free runners, Jérôme Ben Aoues, Sébastien Foucan, and Johann Vigroux, stand beside each other on the cusp of a building – again, like gargoyles or Batman – surveying the congested scene below, while the camera zooms and tilts up to illustrate the magnitude of their ascent, and their implied liberation.

The documentary then cuts to a ground-level tracking shot behind the trio "getting a feel for London", as the narration continues, with the free runners clinging precariously to a brick wall, before one of them latches onto a lamppost and makes his way effortlessly up the three-meter structure, and another leaps in with parallel grace along a series of waist-high posts. Addressing the camera, Foucan blows on his fingers, in a comic foreshadowing of his triumphant facing of the city's filmic challenge before him. He then performs several precision jumps on a pedestrian balustrade, as the documentary

cuts to an elderly pedestrian looking on in bemusement, and before carrying out a back flip, scales the wall and finally slides down the same lamppost. "We see the city as a playground", Vigroux says, as he continues walking along the balustrade alongside his compatriot, "I think living in big cities like London is a crazy life; people don't look around them; they go straight, they go to work then go home to sleep; then wake up; it's not pleasant…we see the city as a playground". As Vigroux finishes, a cutaway to a close-up reveals a resident peeking disgruntledly through curtains, presumably on the opposite side of the street.

As with the BBC's savvy presentation and representation of parkour as a radical pass-time in the David Belle commercial – supposedly differentiated from the 'mainstream' channels it endeavours to distinguish itself from – *Jump London* sets up its eponymous city as a dramaturgical stage for the free runner and traceurs' stylized contraventions of normative pedestrian 'flow'. The film's producers and auxiliary crews participate in the narrative events as location scouts and liaison officers, "convincing some of London's greatest landmarks to open their doors and rooftops", as the narrator continues. As the music shifts to an epic, contemporary piano overture, and a castle is shown in the panning distance, this scene-setting narration continues:

> It's going to be a tall order to persuade some of Britain's most famous institutions to agree to have the free runners performing, often at roof level. One place that has attracted the free runner's attention is one of the grandest buildings on the Thames. Until three years ago, Somerset House was government offices and closed to the public. Their reaction to our interest in their roof was not unusual.

The filmmakers and producers play an intermediary role between the buildings' authorities and the free runners/traceurs, while contributing to their scripted transgression, or as the architect, Will Alsop posits in the film, the "corruption" of these buildings' encoded functions, with the roof of the Somerset, for example, "not being seen

as a functional element". The Pet Shop Boys' Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe also make an appearance, further theorizing the "accidental" quality of parkour and free running's creative abuse of the prospective locations' intended application. The film's use of such British luminaries further consolidates the cultural credibility of the production, the architect and musician's popular and cool punditry operating as an endorsement of the film and its featured subject, and ratifying the practice's evident retrieval within the popular, cultural imagination.

Absorbing free running and parkour's radical chic into its own purportedly groundbreaking, administrative and narrative premise, *Jump London* preempts its central subjects' ability to demonstrate this very chance-oriented flair. The crucial irony in the documentary's presentation of this putatively unplanned style, is its very laying out and planning of what the free runners and parkour can and can't do within its cinematographic, choreographic and precautionary frames. The film's central narrator and the crew, as self-conscious 'behind the scenes' performers, play onscreen parts that are as marked as Foucan and his deuteragonists' characters as free runners and traceurs. In its directorial and choreographic foregrounding, the film continues to re-orient and upstage the performance of free running and parkour, supplanting any prospect of a raw or untreated engagement with the surfaces the traceur might seek beyond the theatrical transparency of the production.

One of the less spectacular but most decisive moments of *Jump London* is the preliminary location scouting that takes place at the prospective filming locations, and involves the health and safety consultants, remaining film crew and Foucan and his co-stars. As the narrator intones, "before any buildings will give permission for death-

defying antics, the free runners have to visit each location to work out their potential moves", before Foucan continues, "it's all about experience; with practice, the eye comes to analysis: 'here is a good location; here is not; here is a location which is rich in obstacles'; The more things there are jump over, the more fantastic it is for free running…". This negotiation suggests less a captured manifestation of an accidental encounter and negotiation of an untested, potentially perilous urban situation, than a rehearsed and perfected act upon a mapped-out stage, replete with multiple camera set-ups, building access consents and the opportunity for re-takes. In this setting, the free runners become stunt men, instructed to hit their mark and heed to the directors' calls of 'action', and, as the narrator concedes, "every move and jump the free runners want to perform must be carefully looked at by Jason White, a veteran blockbuster of movies including *Living Daylights*, *Aliens*, and *Indiana Jones*".

As Clem Leneghan, health and safety consultant qualifies, "no matter what safety measures you put in place, and how much planning goes into it, you still think 'this is inherently dangerous'". Leneghan's sentiments reinforce the film's wider equivocation between its legitimization and harnessing of the otherwise disorderly choreography of the practice, and parkour's maintenance as vestigially 'dangerous' as a spectacle despite its filmic and logistic incorporation. This equivocation doubly mires the idealism of parkour's off-screen mirage, both recuperating and reducing it as a confined spectacle, embellished but slowed down through the cinematic gauntlet of *Jump London*'s narrativised safety etiquette.

While the groundwork of stunt coordination and monitoring is being observed, Foucan maintains "that a principle of free running is that you must always go forward;

there is always a path. From this point here you can arrive at that point there. Whatever the path may be you never go backwards". These contradictory sentiments are voiced as the free runners and the film crew are seen ghosting and blocking their prospective moves in reiterative and pre-emptive idled gestures on the rooftops that they will soon be filmed, supposedly embodying Foucan's teleological, physical ethos. "Free your mind" Foucan then says, slowly advancing and reaching out towards the precipice of a rooftop, surrounded by the film's crew and imitating Morpheus' analogous appeal to Neo in *The Matrix*. Such comic oddities further suggest that *Jump London* is as much a fictionalization of parkour and free running in its construction and stylization of the practice, as is its integration within narrative films that I will soon discuss.

The cast and production crew's administrated intervention across the architectural stages of London is also theatrical, as representatives from the Globe Theatre and the National suggest, respectively:

> I have to say we normally say no to everything that doesn't have some connection to Shakespeare, but we decided that this was so exciting, so different and so theatrical, I suppose, in the way that they're approaching it, that we had to be involved. [75]
>
> In a strange way, it's rather in keeping with what we do at the National, and we haven't always maintained our performances on the stages. I expect it's pretty much at the far edge of what we've done in the past, but we were keen to see what you did.[76]

With the secretarial and logistical scene set, and against a overnight time-lapse panorama of the city, the narrator explains, "By the end of June the 16th 2003, Sébastien, Jerome and Johann would have jumped London: over a dozen locations, three Frenchmen and a performance that speaks for itself"'.

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[75] Gerry Halliday, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, quoted in *Jump London*.
[76] John Langley, Royal National Theatre, quoted in *Jump London*.

'Jumping London' assumes a mastery of and over the city's totality, and the imminent day's compressed countdown as the narrative chronology within which the cast completes their delineated 'journey'. While spelling out the prologue for us as a televisual audience after the fact, the 'live', theatrical audience will supposedly witness the location filming as the 'accidental' happening that has been promised to us heretofore. As the narrator announces, "the details have been kept secret. There'll be no press and there'll be no safety nets". Again, paralleling the equivocal sentiments voiced earlier by the film crew's safety consultant, the security of the rehearsed and sanctioned live event – which itself is a narration of an oblique, off-screen referent – is dovetailed with the filmed will to a however qualified 'danger'. This notion of danger is again seen through and after an opaque filtering down from the actors' mimicry of their extra-diegetic 'expertise' in parkour. It is a practice that hypothetically operates beyond the parameters of the press and safety nets; however *Jump London* effectively scripts itself in as both surveillant documenter and safety consultant, doubly contradicting its own attempt at providing a raw artefact of parkour as the 'real thing'.

Over a trance soundtrack, subtitles – "5.30 am, Dawn, London" – appear against still shots of empty streets, offices, and underground car parks. A close-up of one of the free runner's feet reveals him balancing on a balustrade, before a cutaway shows a cameraman adjusting his camera and lens and rehearsing a panning shot in the distance. Further subtitles – "7.34 am, Rush Hour" – appear against a slow-shutter shot of pedestrian commuters walking across the frame like translucent ghosts, as the soundtrack becomes more spectral and ebullient in its crescendo. The pedestrians are captured in an abstracted, time-lapse montage of prismatic reflections, before the film cuts to the free

runner, Johann, walking across the apex of the Somerset House – "125 ft" high, as the subtitles report.

In contrast to the post-production blur of the masses that swarm below, the free runners are presented in unaltered footage, as though to illustrate their meditative remove from the repetitive chaos of the literal rush below. The various camera angles are predominantly stationary, excepting the occasional slow zoom on the approaching free runners in long shots positioned on the building's rooftop, with each of the athletes emerging from one border of the frame before exiting the other. Many of the cinematographic angles are also extreme long shots of the Somerset's parapet and dome, foregrounding its monumental relief and its dwarfing of the figures that quickly appear along its edges before leaving the frame vacant and reappearing in the next shot.

The readymade architectural set is here seen to dominate the ant-like bodies that appear on its spectacular exterior, suggesting both the traceurs' submission to grandeur of the *mise en scène*, and their rhizomatic punctuation of its monumental stillness. The traceurs thus appear both empowered and disempowered, eclipsed by the film's affectionate treatment of the edificial 'backdrop', and turned into mobile decorative spectacles, shifting along its orthogonal facades.

At 8.50 am, the free runners enter Trafalgar Square, leaping along stone posts before camera-snapping tourists, and strolling police officers, who are seen looking back in an isolated cutaway. A time-lapse shot of vehicular traffic precedes a shot of The Mall at "9.22 am" as the titles again note. An interior office shot is punctuated by one of the free runners, who sprint past the window to the evidently premeditated bewilderment of its occupants. Onlookers look up out of similar inquisitiveness at Foucan, who is caught

from above in a tracking shot along the building's rooftop edge. Comic relief is provided as Foucan circles the top of The Royal Albert Hall, as an onlooker yells out to the free runner, "How did you get up there?" to which Foucan responds, "I don't know". In this exchange, Foucan's character conveys a sense of effortless, extemporaneous humour, even as he appears to stand precariously on the building's roof. This further reinforces the film's portrayal of free running and parkour's central characteristics of intuition and instinct, despite the moment's patent premeditation.

The run's concluding movement involves each of the trio slowing his sprint down in sequence along a long rooftop promenade of the Tate Gallery, before arriving and halting at the building edge's balustrade, standing – again, gargoyle-like – in quiet contemplation, facing the setting sun. This shot is lit as a romantic, fading ochre and ends in a nocturnal fade-to-black. As far as the film's premise and the narrative 'journey' is concerned, the trio has hereby conquered the city and its motionless grandeur, transcending the rush of its crowds through its elevated and prearranged trespassing of its architectural limits. But for all its foreplay commentary and narrated oath of breathtaking flight, the centerpiece exploits of the athletes are comparatively tame, especially when seen alongside the roving *verité* of the aforementioned YouTube clips, and the digitized stunt work and post-production embellishment of the feature films I will discuss further in Chapter Four.

The most daring move executed in *Jump London* is a choreographic facsimile of David Belle's lofty, archetypal handstand in the Channel 4 advert, with Foucan seen in an identical pose at the Saatchi building. As such, the relative lack of spectacle in *Jump London* is due to the reflexive diligence of its production crew: the discourse played out

between them and the building representatives as a continual negotiation for access to their architectural and cultural space upstages and largely pre-empts the eventual – and supposedly central – journey of the free runner protagonists themselves.

However agile in the execution of their co-directed moves, they play an effectively passive role in their overall placement within the city's physical iconography, with the lion's share of the action occurring as tracking shots alongside the free runners at roof level. As mentioned earlier, the narrator refers to this milieu as the 'stage' upon which the actor-free runners execute their physical lines as a stage, and while supposedly publicly unannounced, the action occurs as though on an albeit highly raised architectural dais, at which a curious public audience spectates from their ground-level remove. Despite the numerous camera set-ups, the narrative action occurs on a pretty flat terrain, with much of the cinematographic undulation occurring merely between the orientation of the 'accidental' audience-public below, and the free runners above.

In this context, the free runners might be seen to perform a sort of balletic ornamentation *of* the iconic buildings, the latter becoming characters activated by the silhouetted figures that are glimpsed as though sliding along their architectural precipices. Such activation resembles the commercial personification of the marketable commodity in product advertisements, in which the superstar brings to life the said product with their auratic presence – say, Tom Cruise's bearing of a Tag Heuer in a television advert resembling *Mission Impossible*, in a transferral of some of his role's vigilante machismo onto its Swiss steel surface, or the seductive cultural capital of L'Oreal lipstick made tangible through the modelling of Lisa Evangelista, Penelope Cruz or Beyonce. This intertextual pollination assumes an audience's familiarity with the various scripted,

fictional and mythical subtexts and para-texts, invariably orientated around the featured model-luminary activating the product. There is a similar assumption with the cast of *Jump London*, which is seen performing albeit less familiar, stereotypical acts on the buildings' rooftops, and in this sense, may be seen less as 'corruptions' of the featured, architectural domain than lubrications and facilitations of their surfaces as marketable items, especially within the filmic/televisual frame of *Jump London*.

The cast of *Jump London*'s enactment of parkour for the camera, the adjacent live audience, and the documentary's wider, televisual audience might be seen to be a prescribed re-enactment of the sport's physiological signatures, and an imported recitation of its indexed moves onto the film's featured *mise en scène*. As such, the free runner's casting and placement in this context would appear to belie parkour's stray tenets of 'chance', urban negotiation and confrontation – and herein lies the representative stalemate in which any and every exhibit of parkour is necessarily embedding and oxymoronic – but *Jump London* engages a double handling of the practice's interventionist schema by situating its nominally free runners against an elevated, planar backdrop, orientated linearly and paraded at a remove from the prospectively forked trajectories and pedestrian bustle of the ground-level run.

In addition to the film cast-crew's scripted, logistical anxiety, and the narrated subplot of tangential danger (however prevented by the very ubiquitous safety measures in place), and the choreographic backtracking that occurs in advance of its 'featured' event, the free runners traverse the mapped-out platform as a series of individuated theatrics, strung together later in the edit, as if to make the architecture tessellate together as one, unified podium. While imposing narrative continuity on what might otherwise be

the differentiated flow of the free runners through a mosaic of metropolitan interiors and exteriors – as discussed earlier – the film homogenizes, and thus further rearticulates, London's predominant narrative of timeless architectural poise, with the free runners further activating this landscape through the analogous grace of their edited continuum of manoeuvres.

The potential political ramifications of the traceurs' shifts through the diegetic premise are displaced by their own characterizations as individuated, superhero-like bodies and protagonists, cast within the sentimental spectacle of an overarching linear catharsis against the constructed cityscape. The commodification of parkour seems to play on the political and social through its supposed, pioneering documentary *verité*, but equally works by creating protagonists and conventional subject narratives that belie the intuitive politics of movement, which might exist outside the filmic trappings of storied condensation.

The film ends with a move towards a pop ontology and legitimization of free running and parkour as heretofore-undefined phenomena. Foucan has the final words, reclining in a park at the film's close: "In the future I hope there will be lot of free runners, and I also hope we will be taken more seriously than in the past, and that everybody will understand the philosophy of free running. I hope it becomes recognized as a real discipline". His designation of 'real discipline' is ambiguous, but as the narrator suggests earlier, "free running is a dangerous and extreme activity. If it is ever going to become accepted, even as a specialist sport, Sébastien and his team must look to the history of other dangerous activities, such as scuba diving to find a way to regulate its development".

As I have discussed, this regulation is integral to the documentary's own narrative of caution, and as such, becomes a sort of censorship of parkour and free running as an otherwise splintered, urban movement, with the film's central characters becoming ambiguous and divisive mascots for a nebulous practice that follows 'no rules' and therefore no judiciary leaders, codes or models. Foucan and his associates appear specialized in their manifestation of what 'real' parkour might be, and as the health and safety consultant adds,

> The free runners have got what we call in the legal sense, the competence to do this kind of activity, which means they've got the skills, they've got the experience, and they've got the training – this is virtually all they do with their time and all they do with their lives they know how to do it, they're safe to do it. If you don't have the competence you shouldn't be doing it, so don't.

This professionalist and authoritative framing of parkour, and its dressing in legalese – an extra distraction from parkour's inherent contestation of legal and proprietary space – is a further institutionalizing and cloistering of an otherwise radically exterior practice. However, even beyond the prophylactic representational frames of *Jump London*, parkour remains inextricably linked with an athletic refinement that often occurs outside of the 'natural habitat' of the urban realm itself. This exists as one of parkour's fundamental paradoxes: while the traceur or traceuse's mode of operation is to adapt and improvise within contexts of architectural encounter, he or she draws upon a lexicon of physiological techniques that are often rehearsed within orthodox gymnastic environs.

The relative luxury of such rehearsal – the space and time in which to sharpen skills to be ultimately traded beyond the walls of the gym – appears to sit incongruously with the supposed immediacy*, in situ* urgency, and illicit border crossing of the street-bound traceur. If parkour exists as a utilitarian way of moving through the city – a mode of trans-port that cuts efficient lines across and through the exasperations of normalized

cartography, then the time devoted to cosseted training for this 'way of being' would be deemed 'lost' and counter-productive to parkour's *raison d'être* of continuous, adaptive flow.

As part of its valedictory summation of parkour and free running, *Jump London* also takes a cursory, comparative look at skateboarding as an antecedent, subcultural practice, with the cast seen reminiscing at a skate-park, observing its activity from the top of a half pipe. "At the beginning", Vigroux suggests, "skateboarding was a new way to move differently in urban environments, so I think skateboarding and free running have points in common". The park plays a telling role here, operating as a designed and delimited nexus for skateboarding's own glossary of tricks and hive-like play – a centralized and incorporated civic site that consolidates what might be an otherwise rhizomatic dispersal of civil disobedience and resistance. The skate park is a contradictory node: both a purpose-built, cartographical and ergonomic playground that consciously aids the skater's endeavours – instead of the presenting of an *ad hoc* impedance for its parturient wrangling elsewhere – and as a regulatory theme-park, an accommodating space that potentially ghettoizes skateboarding's otherwise disruptive and unplanned metastasis beyond the park's parameters.[77]

For the film cast in its final leisurely excursion, the park functions as a convenient arena in which skateboarding's apparently configured, disciplinary gestures are put on display, and with which the free runners – and by implication the film-makers and -viewers – can identify and thereby orientate a legible case for a parallel, municipal assimilation of their newer, fledgling practice. As *Jump London* looks over the shoulder

[77] For further discussion on this issue of the politics of skateparks, please refer to Francisco Vivoni, "Spots of Spatial Desire: Skateparks, Skateplazas, and Urban Politics" in *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* May 2009 33: 130-149, first published on March 23, 2009.

of Foucan and his cohorts while they enact free running and parkour as a dressage upon the city's choreographed stage, the skatepark appears as a representational condensation and centralization of skateboarding's own variegated stylistic.

The film here foregrounds free running and parkour's additional desire for a sanctioned, centralized space of its own, a proscenium it could collectively 'claim' and reciprocally embody, operating as a dispossessed, untraceable, and constitutionally hard-to-pin-down phenomenon heretofore. This very play-grounding of the practice would doubly belie parkour's ideal, homelessness, however, presenting a dedicated zone designed to a practice that instead, supposedly treats the whole city as a ludic continuum, attention-deficit to the regulations of its ubiquitous, partitioned spaces. The formatted parkour or free running park would therefore be even more contradictory than the skatepark's miniaturizing and transposition of its own objective demographic.

While Foucan suggests earlier, "you just have to act like children" in order to fulfill parkour and free running's psychogeographical and ludic impulsion, his appeal for institutional recognition is more of a contradictory call for delimited and contained leisure than for a puerile emancipation from the restraints of adulthood in the city. His contradictory sentiments perhaps diminish the potential political implications of parkour, reducing it to an idealized but less observed child's play, instead of foregrounding the freedom of child's play in contrast with the constraints of adulthood. As Paula Geyh observes,

> Parkour effectively remaps urban space, creating a parallel, "ludic" city, a city of movement and free play within and against the city of obstacles and inhibitions. It reminds us that, in the words of the philosopher of urban space Henri Lefebvre, 'the space of play has coexisted and still coexists with spaces of exchange and circulation, political space and cultural space'.[78]

[78] Paula Geyh, "Urban Free Flow: A Poetics of Parkour", in *M/C Journal*, Volume 9, Issue 3, 2006, p.10.

The prospective creation of a delineated zone for the practice of parkour would be a superfluous appendix to a cityscape that the traceur or traceuse sees as ubiquitously playful, and in which he or she slips between the doppelganger roles of pedestrian conduct and athletic syncopation. Parkour treats the city's spatial hierarchies and privacies with transgressive indifference, 'sewing' – in Zoe Laughlin's words – its architectural skin together, and performs a momentous threading across its urban fabric. Parkour transforms the city into what Iain Borden –with reference to skateboarding – calls a "concrete playground of immense potential",[79] provisionally appropriating regulated space for its own plural but synchronized rites of play.

This appropriation without custody over its immediate terrain mirrors de Certeau's hailing of walking as a practice of everyday life that transfigures 'places of command' into spaces of temporal use. For de Certeau,

> The walker transforms each spatial signifier into something else […] He thus makes a selection […] whether by making choices among the signifiers of the spatial 'language' or by displacing them through the use he makes of them. He condemns certain places to inertia or disappearance and composes with others spatial 'turns of phrase' that are 'rare,' 'accidental' or 'illegitimate.'[80]

The city is not only a place to be read but, but a space for encoding and decoding – a physical reinterpretation of its physical, syntactic copy. In the same fashion as de Certeau's walker, the traceur commits a disorientation of space, a 'cacography' or misspelling of normative spatial syntax, an ellipsis of its received, linear imperatives. De Certeau calls such an elliptical approach to space 'asyndeton' – a way of "opening gaps in the spatial continuum" and "retaining only selected parts of it".[81] Parkour's 'art of displacement' – its drive for locomotive efficiency and cutting of corners in its shifts

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[79] Iain Borden, *Skateboarding, Space and the City*, p.226.
[80] Michel de Certeau, quoted in Emma Cocker, "Desiring to be Led Astray", *Rhizomes*, 2010, accessed 4 October 2010, < http://www.rhizomes.net/issue21/cocker/index.html> .
[81] *Ibid.*

through and across urban space – evokes de Certeau's walker's contractions of convoluted space, appearing to read between the lines of partitioned urban thoroughfare and making its own selections and omissions in a swifter and more gymnastic manner.

Parkour's skipping out, over and through its encompassed routes, and its *in medias res* approach to its own lateral narrative leaps also echoes Deleuze's call for a rhizomatic unfolding:

> A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, *intermezzo*. The tree imposes the verb 'to be,' but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction 'and…and…and…' This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb, 'to be. Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for? These are totally useless questions. Making a clean slate, starting or beginning again from ground zero, seeking a beginning or a foundation – all imply a false conception of voyage and movement […] Proceeding from the middle, through the middle, coming and going rather than starting and finishing establish a logic of the AND, overthrow ontology, do away with foundations, nullify endings and beginnings… The middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed. [82]

Jump London's narrative logic differs entirely from this call for an intermediary and extemporaneous motion, beginning with the film narrator's bombastic initiatory summoning of the hatchling phenomena of free running and parkour, through to the journey-oriented traversal of the film's staged plot and the conclusive triumph of its final scenes and sunset closure. The documentary uses the tropes of fictional suspense and catharsis as a dramatic vehicle for parkour's scene of spectacle and at points, blurs between fiction and documented verisimilitude in its storytelling. *Jump London*'s dramatization and consequent mythifying of parkour abstracts the urban practice's infra-ordinary potential to raid and belie the scripted "cartographic impulse"[83] of urban planners and authorities. The film repetitively emphasizes the peril its central characters'

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[82] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* pp.6-7.

[83] Bryan Reynolds and Joseph Fitzpatrick, "The Transversality of Michel de Certeau: Foucault's Panoptic Discourse and the Cartographic Impulse", in *Diacritics* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, Volume 29, Number 3, Fall 1999), pp. 63-80.

encounter, while belying this supposed danger through its incongruously prophylactic backdrop of contingency plans and cautionary rhetoric.

The dramatic logic of *Jump London* is further underlined by its own sequel, *Jump Britain*, in which the same cast appears against the wider, eponymous landscape, suggesting the geographical expansion of the aspirational, global phenomenon. The sequel reconstitutes many of the stylistic traits of the original – with the foregrounding of the production crew's logistical labour, and the cast and crew's location scouting being an integral part of a narrative that continues to dramatise and hyperbolise performances of parkour, while simultaneously taming and delimiting it within its playback.

If *Jump London* is a non-fictional text indexed and imbued with the stylized facets of dramatic fiction, then *Banlieue 13* – or *District B13* is it is known to English-speaking audiences – is a dramatic fiction permeated with the reflexive, non-fictional subject of parkour – enacted by the archetypical, luminary traceur, David Belle.[84] Belle's performance onscreen shifts in and out of alignment with his extra-diegetic 'character', twinned with his side-kick co-hero, Damien, played by Cyril Raffaelli. If putative documentaries such as *Jump London* are seen to use real-life characters to buttress their own textual fictions, then *B13* incorporate Belle and Raffaelli in a parallel way, except as further, intertextual embeddings, used as 'real' life identities to create the film's patent fictional heat.

Belle plays the central role of Leito, a citizen of the film's titular Parisian ghetto, isolated as a high-risk precinct by the government to supposedly curb the epidemic rise in

[84] *District B13*. Dir. Pierre Morel. Perf. Cyril Raffaelli, David Belle and Tony D'Amario. Europa Corp. DVD (France: TF1 Films Production and Canal+, 2004).

crime. He plays an ethical, vigilante punk, first seen in his high-rise state-housing tenement, hurriedly discarding packets of cocaine in his bathtub. The film's edits are heavily stylized and temporally distorted, its exposition dominated by multiple, computer-generated crash zooms through a dense urban mise en scene of dilapidation, ubiquitous graffiti and grime. This induces a stereotypical dystopian vision of urban vice and decay, with the Steadicam advancing rapidly through burned out cars, to children passing drugs, feudal gangs patrolling building entrances, homeless denizens in burning corridors.

The stark but oneiric drift through Leito's apartment building is interrupted by the noisy and abrupt arrival of a yellow Subaru Impreza, which pulls up next to the building's guarded entrance. Its towering driver, K2, confronts the building's guards, requesting to see Leito and recover the stolen drugs. A cavalcade of similar, decorated sports cars soon appears, occupied by gun-wielding gangsters, who infiltrate the building alongside K2. The gangsters arrive at Leito's door and prepare to ram it in but he preempts the raid, flying through the door from the other side and using it as a ramp to walk over them and proceed slalom like down the corridor towards the camera. The assailants fire at Belle, but K2 yells, "Do you wish me dead!? I want him alive". Belle grabs the ceiling-mounted sprinkler railing to launch himself onto the shoulders of an approaching gangster and twisting over another and sprinting further down and around the corner of the corridor, with K2 yelling, with almost comic and clichéd relief, "I want him alive". Belle advances through the building with fluid grace, turning the corners of the corridor through airborne hangs from the sprinkler system, treating it like a jungle

gym, as the camera and his would-be assailants are left behind almost haplessly in his wake.

Leito then considers descending the building's staircase in his escape, but in a decisive moment, hangs from the sprinkler railing and lithely swings through an extremely narrow window at the top of a locked, apartment door, appearing inside next to a sleeping, elderly couple in bed. The comparatively sluggish assailants shoot the door open to gain access, and follow Leito to the exterior balcony, where he has already jumped to the next level, forcing them to retreat back inside and negotiate the stairway.

Leito then appears above the camera in extreme slow motion, leaping out prostrately from the lower floor's balcony to latch onto a convenient, supine rope, narrowly escaping the reach of an assailant, who falls onto a car stories below. Leito is revealed in a graceful swing on the rope around the cornice of the building, before using the support to walk along the façade and kick the outreached head of a gangster from another balcony. Leito's maneuver echoes the isomorphic, gravity-irrespective moves performed by Neo and Trinity in *The Matrix*, except here, Belle is performing the action and as both stuntman and on-screen actor, even if the rope appears as a sort of visible, prosthetic prop. "He's on the roof!" another gangster cries, as his mob awkwardly descends the stairs, while K2 arrives at Leito's bathtub, seeing the remains of the discarded drugs and muttering, "mother fucker". These pausal utterances by the assailants occur as Pavolvian breathers from the otherwise muted chase scene, however augmented by its pumping, dance sound track. The almost monosyllabic exasperation in these intermittent cries further underlines the villains' relative ineptitude in their ill-fated pursuit of both Leito – as diegetic, anti-heroic protagonist – and Belle, in his extra-

diegetic reprisal of moves performed in his BBC commercial. He is seen climbing over the rooftop's precipice, before sprinting and mimicking his climactic BBC leap across two adjacent roofs with slow-motion ease – revealed in a range of Skycam angles and desaturated hues that also echo the tropes utilized in the BBC advert – while the gangsters run into trouble in their ghosting, with one of them landing with an awkward, amplified crunch at the other side.

Leito is then seen descending the interior stairway of another building, cat-leaping his way past more thugs on his way down, with one of them tripping into the belly of the stairway and falling to his dramatic demise below. Leito leaps from another balcony, before appearing in a tracked sprint across more adjacent rooftops, and jumping – in an additional, extreme slow-motion mirroring of a moment from his BBC commercial – to a lower terrace, accompanied by his own, drawn out groan, to emphasize his climactic exertion. His assailants arrive at his departure point, and cry, "fuck", again with almost comic futility. The fugitive is seen from their perspective, running into the distance across the dense, rooftop scenery, before a ground-level pan and tilt slowly traces his leaped passage from the second floor of a car park, over another fence, then onto the ground before running out of the frame. This final, six-second shot is the longest in the chase scene.

In the opening chase scene, Leito's evasive feats expose the structural porosity of the featured architecture, moving in and out of its openings, and repurposing its ergonomic logic with agile flair. The fugitive illustrates his acquaintance with the architectural terrain in his evasion of the armed, but comparatively clueless gangsters. Leito and Belle's martial damage is largely inadvertent, with the injuries sustained by his

rivals invariably caused by their own luckless attempts to apprehend him, and their various, ensuing demises. Belle performs as both onscreen stunt man and dramatic character here, executing his impressive maneuvers without the use of wires; while his attackers' exaggerated falls make liberal use of safety measures ironically to aid their own entertaining and hyperbolic falls. Parkour's predisposition for the *chase* is premiered in this film, adhering to the action hero feature logic of choreographed suspense and inevitable triumph, manifested as escape for Leito as parkouriste.

Parkour is an ideal vehicle for Leito's virtuous and anarchistic liberation from the walled confines of B13, as the practice's own passive-resistant ethos is predicated on escape and the ideals of freedom from urban confinement. The walls that surround the district serve as a metaphor for the boundaries that Leito continually endeavours to transcend throughout the film. However, Leito's athletic ability and tactical intuition requires the supplementary virtues of his sidekick – the undercover police officer, Damien, who is introduced to the viewer in a hoax prison break-out in order to duplicitously recruit Leito to penetrate the gang lord, Tata's HQ and retrieve a supposedly stolen nuclear bomb. "Escaping from jail is easier than getting into Borough 13", Damien's governmental boss observes, prior to the agent's mission.

Played by real-life martial artist, stuntman, traceur and Belle-associate, Cyril Raffaelli, Damien is an appropriate foil for Leito's punk etiquette, legitimizing their paired up rebellion through his state-approved but ultimately renegade exploits. While both accomplished in the field of parkour, their auto-choreography positions Belle/Leito in the foreground as protagonist and traceur star, and Damien/Raffaelli as martial arts aggressor.

When the pair attempts to ascend the final stairway of Tata's industrial mansion in order to rescue Leito's sister and defuse the bomb, they are confronted by the 'present' their nemesis has installed in advance: a beastlike, bearded villain, guffawing comically and framed from a super low angle to emphasis his creatural disproportion. The villain appears as though a 'boss' in the final stage of a video game, a seemingly insurmountable obstacle. Damien attempts a flying kick – captured in slow motion – at the beast's stomach, but he falls back heavily to the ground, before rolling away and narrowly avoiding the downward thrust of a ladder clasped in the giant's hands. The undercover cop proceeds to throw large bricks at his assailant, but the latter merely pulverizes and bounces them off with his fists. Damien is then punched by the monster, and again ducks away to narrowly miss a hurled brick that collides with a vertical beam before smashing it to bits. During this altercation, Leito is seen on the periphery, standing out of the fight in classic, sidekick and tag-team distress. However, as Damien is floored again, Belle latches a rope around the villain's arm, swinging through the beast's legs, over some slates and flips over the villain's head, wrapping the rope round and round and then again, under his legs, until he is confusedly immobilized, standing haplessly in the middle of the warehouse.

Throughout this exchange, the villain is treated as though an architectural fixture, with Belle wrapping and worming his way in and around the monolithic body with parasitic ease, echoing his earlier, intestinal gestures in his expository escape at the high-rise tenements. The altercation also appears to serve as an allegory for the traceur's alert transcendence of the built edifice, with Belle reversing the ensnaring trend of architecture and literally bringing his adversary to the ground. He is then seen motioning to Damien,

and the latter flies in – again in dramatic slow motion – to land another brick on the villain's scalp and topple the moaning figure to the ground. "Where did you learn that?" Damien asks. " I read it in an angler's magazine," replies Leito, in a Parthian shot of self-deprecating, reflexive artisanese that both undermines and highlights his professionalism as an off- and on-screen parkour expert and hero.

While *Jump London* and *Jump Britain* both sequence parkour within narratives of urban aspiration and topical documentary appeal, employing conventional story-telling conventions to do so, *District B13* incorporates the practice as a popular signifier within its total, cinematic fantasy. Parkour's cultural realism adds to the film's edgy verisimilitude, authenticating its stunt work and retaining the integrity of the martial arts genre. As journalist Craig Reid reports,

> With the nature of Belle's daredevil attitude and Raffaelli's circus adventurism, one of the major concerns that [Luc] Besson and Morel had was safety on the set. 'David and I showed them demo tapes of what we did live,' Raffaelli says with a straight face. "In my demo, I do a somersault from one building to another, on the 15th floor. No mattress, no nothing. We have absolute confidence in ourselves […]During the shoot, they explained to us that they had to set up nets, mattresses and cables. We tried to negotiate, explaining that we had already done it without them. The production heads reminded us that we're the leading male actors, and that if one of us got injured, the shoot was done for. So, at the outset, they said 'no' to everything, but with my constant discussion, we finally managed to swing them over to our way of thinking. And what you see on screen is 90% real without any special effects'.[85]

As with the free running and parkour documentaries, this kind of preliminary negotiation is symptomatic of parkour's inexorably prophylactic framing in its representative dramatization, whether putatively non-fictional or cinematic. Instead of its thematic repetition and reiterative replay, however, films such as *B13* present parkour as a

[85] Reid, Craig. "Spiderman is to Peter Parker as District B13 is to "parkour", accessed 5 July 2010, Kung Fu Magazine, <http://www.kungfumagazine.com/ezine/article.php?article=666>.

synecdochal getaway ornament within a wider, cathartic narrative of escape and romantic transcendence.

Documentary zooms in and repeats parkour's corpus of tricks, almost diagnostically, while films such as B13 (as well as films later discussed, such as *Casino Royale*), knowingly employ the practice as spectacular device, predicated on the energy of its 'cameo' once-ness – repeated throughout the film, but captured as a breathtaking initiatory action, or as in the chase scene's interstitial, *in media res* rush. *B13*'s cinematic dramatization also underlines parkour's *raison d'être* of flight, namely from the face of nominal, civic authorities – Belle is on the run from both the corrupt police force and the city's gangster militia.

While compared to contemporaneous martial arts films such as *Ong Bak*, *B13*'s innovation relies on parkour's featuring as an inertial eschewal of stylized combat, transferring its visceral enjoyment towards rapid evasion, a sort of passive martial engagement. Leito/Belle's soap-like resistance to internment and literal 'beating' of his adversaries thus becomes its compelling focal point. His acts of escape are not typical symptoms of emasculatory passivity, but as novel, charged parades of masculinity and urbane primitivism. This evasion, again functioning synecdochally for the cathartic liberation of the film's oppressed denizens, is applied with an analogous sense of frenetic, quickly-cut editing style and urgency to the established trope of the car chase sequence.

The rapid frames and transitory form of the edited chase scene is an appropriate medium for the traceur's inherent, mirage-like flow, and in *B13* – in addition to other films discussed shortly – an elliptical balance is struck between revealing the twinned protagonists' impressive acrobatics and tracing their tantalizing, fleeting passages. Even

as the Belle and Rafaelli block, rehearse and recite their moves within a strictly ordained *mise en scene*, and their singular takes are transposed into a string that supplies them with a continual, entertaining uniformity, the final sequences, such as the one described above, afford an immediacy and elliptical directness that documentaries like *Jump London*, and perhaps even nominally raw configurations such as YouTube documentation lack.

B13 encourages its audience to engage both illusory and concrete subjectivities as it blurs the reflexive boundary between actor, stuntman and choreographer, its liminal oscillation between Belle and Raffaelli's on and off-screen avatars offering a plausible mirage of at least vicarious escape. The viewer receives a more ambiguous hailing in the "Top Gear" television segment, "Peugeot 207 Vs Parkour", which features a race between the eponymous, featured car and two anonymous traceurs, in order to evaluate – with the show's typical sense of piece-to-camera humour, if the vehicle in question is "any good".

The programme begins with the series' characteristic revealing of its featured car, in this case, the shiny Peugeot 207, divulged in short-focus, primordial slow zooms and sleek macro-lensed tracking shots across its pool-blue body. Indeed, the car appears anthropomorphically to the strains of brass fanfare as though in a rite-like birthing of it onto both the filmic and market scene. "You get more space and more toy, but you have to part with more money", the driver and narrator co-star, James May states, facing the dashboard-perspective frame. "To see if it's worth it, I'm going to test this glorious city car on the streets of Liverpool, and to spur me on a bit, I'm going to have a race; and it's

against the latest French development in urban transport solutions: a couple of young men in silly trousers".

Against the auto-porn of the car's glorified, and almost operatic introduction, the denigrated and anonymous traceurs appear silly indeed, viewed through the driver's window against Liverpool's city background, and framed in eager, childlike poise for the consciously absurd showdown. May, "possibly the slowest driver in Britain", as the short's tagline runs, then signals to the runners, "3…2…1…Go" and the race begins, with May driving the car into a car park, with the runners in parallel, leaping through an opening in the barricaded wall, as the camera jerks and cuts angularly, switching between black and white and over-saturated stock. A sign reading, "No pedestrians on ramps" is then revealed as the traceurs are seen running past the frame and the sign in comic disregard, and the stock again changes to digitally simulated film grain, before a cut returns to a smoother tracking shot alongside the Peugeot, driven down the ramp by May, who continues his monologue to the passenger-perspective camera: "I should probably explain that these are not just any young men; they are masters of something called parkour". The traceurs are then seen cat-leaping over the bonnet of the car, as it brakes abruptly. May sighs before continuing, "It's a French invention and involves *that* sort of thing – running around the city, leaping across buildings and benches". His monologue is inter-cut with more skew-whiff photography of the traceurs descending the carpark, before he ironically intones, "you know, keeps them off the street".

The traceurs then exit the car park with tandem, bird-like leaps, flipping onto an adjacent roof. The edited angles capture their moves from the perspective of the car park against the iconic metropolitan background, to the subsequent, lower angle of the roof

exhibiting their mid-air flight, and finally, quick successive angles from ground level showing the amplified impact of their landing. The timing of the edits and the introduction of symphonic rock music further underpins the irony of the traceurs' entry onto the street, directly after being sarcastically undermined as private, adolescent hobbyists. The rival car and traceurs are then pitted in a thirty-second, classical race montage, the revving of the car matching the dramatic soundscape of the traceurs' run, and the sharp, continuity-irrespective angles revealing both car and runners with vivid zooms, fast panning shots and further, stylistic stock-degrading. The style of photography throughout echoes that of previous films and media already discussed, such as *Jump London*, "Rush Hour" and *District 13*.

The race for May, in his Peugeot, "will be about six miles; their journey of course is pretty much as the crow flies". As he says this, a crow is seen flying over head, while the traceurs vault from another car park's second story balustrade, onto telephone booths and onto the ground, as a visibly gathered crowd looks on. Further inter-cuts juxtapose the right-to-left motion of the traceurs with the opposing direction of the driver, and capture supposedly unwitting and disgruntled onlookers witnessing the unfolding race. "So anyway, the car", continues May, as the film reveals him from different angles inside it:

> Well, it's got a nice driving position; its steering is nice and weighty; the seat is excellent and there's quite a bit more "vroom" in here than in the old one. But there is a problem, something you really feel on the city streets. You see, because the 207 is bigger and it's stuffed with more gizmos and more safety equipment it's almost three hundred pounds heavier than the old car.

May's sentiments about the car are exacerbated by the contrastingly featherweight movements of the traceurs, who are then shown leaping over diners at an outdoor café, with several of them seen visibly bracing themselves a split second before the respective

actions take place. A crash zoom and accompanying musical pause reveals a disapproving elderly lady turning to see the traceurs cat-leaping more balustrades and disappearing out of the frame. “It’s really sluggish low down and that’s annoying”, continues the driver, before appearing at a red light and frustratingly thumping the steering wheel.

The soundtrack suddenly returns to raw Foley treatment, as the traceurs are seen leaping over another balustrade and dropping to the ground beside an escalator in an interior shopping mall. Momentarily, only the muzak of the mall’s loudspeakers, and the thuds and scrapes of the traceur’s landings and take-offs are heard, a static interior shot behind mannequins showing the traceurs rapidly passing by. A close-up of a traffic light’s transition to green accompanies May’s aggravated relief: “yes, we’re off”, he says, before being seen, from the inside of the vehicle, confusedly and comically asking an elderly pedestrian for directions. The sudden absence of the musical soundtrack, and the continuing inter-cutting of the rapidly cut dash of the traceurs – with one stop-motion sequence of shots superimposing their airborne arc over a Subway store, emphasises the frustrating contrast for the mired driver. Handheld footage then shows May pointing out of the driver’s window towards the traceurs, flipping and sprinting alongside the car on a sidewalk. “There they are”, May observes, “they look as though they’ve nicked something.” “But I didn’t catch them for long”, he narrates over the next shot of him marooned in standstill traffic again, before lamenting, “Oh, *please*”, with another musical pause exaggerating the ticking of the car’s indicator as it waits at another set of lights.

The music then resumes as May cries out, “come on we’re not all shopping”, as the traceurs are seen jumping over civic security guards and their parked car. The music

builds dramatically, as May continues sardonically, "I'm not going to be beaten by some prepubescent teenagers in camouflage trousers… I must have averaged 10 or 12 miles – I should win". His increasing frustration and the sarcastic suspense of the rivalry is created through the speeding up of the cutting between their seemingly ubiquitous progression, and his road-bound indolence, caught at another set of lights and then a turning bus. "They are not here", he then declares triumphantly, as he pulls into he plaza and stops next to the destination - "no sign of combat trousers: that is a victory for beer guts over washboard stomachs fashionable cloths from army surplus shops and stupid expensive trainers. Here I am, in my tatty jeans and my old biff-about shoes with the broken laces and I've won!" However, the camera then pans and crash-zooms up to the clock tower to reveal the one of the traceurs hand-standing – in yet another scene that mirrors the archetypal stance of Belle in the BBC commercial – and the other looking victoriously over the city below, gargoyle-like, reminiscent also of the Batman-esque poses struck in *Jump London*. The music then builds to a climactic coda, with the final, stationary wide-shot showing the majestic clock tower against the expansive urban cityscape beyond.

While maintaining its characteristic, ironic ridicule towards the vehicles it appraises, the "Top Gear" segment also retains its featuring and albeit barbed endorsement of the eponymous protagonist – the Peugeot 207. The short is narrated from the driver's seat, with the show's co-star addressing the audience as prospective, future consumers. The anonymous traceurs feature as exotic, opaque characters that 'spur' on the main character of May and his vehicle. The Peugeot is shot with a sycophantic, saturated lens and animistically romanticized through 'facial' close ups that frequently pan across its sleek, artificially perspiring body. The segment operates as a showcase for

both the car and the practice of parkour, but while the latter's cameo is heavily stylized – via a more fake entropy and 'urban' grunge that is reminiscent of its treatment in the *au courant* vehicle of *Jump London* – it is comparatively a mere backdrop cameo which functions as a foil for the luminary automobile's appearance.

"Peugeot 207 Vs. Parkour" scripts an acquiescent edition of parkour that participates – by performing in the diegetic 'race' – in a normalized sentimentalizing of the featured vehicle. As such, the traceurs feature as a secondary, voguish lifestyle within the narrative. In the same way that London's architectural monuments are activated in *Jump London* documentary, the ensemble of the Peugeot and parkouristes activate the architectural and commercial milieu through which they move, providing a reciprocal, mobile 'vroom' to the ubiquitous shopping precincts throughout, and the interior mall the traceurs pass though in almost sublime placidity. Their run through the mall is not presented as a disruptive annexing of the cloistered arcade, but as a flow of stasis, embellishing its serene ambiance. While May later frustratingly cries out, "we're not all shopping", his caricatural rage is delivered with irony, as he remains marooned in the sea-like gridlock of the commute, a ground level incarnation of the distant traffic seen below David Belle in the BBC documentary.

Parkour's service of a vehicular cool in the short is an appropriate symbolic enclosing of parkour in film and media depictions of the practice, especially ones that operate under the auspices of documentary verisimilitude. As in *Jump London*, parkour actions are opened up and repeated in the representational framework of "Top Gear", but this time behind and as a pedestal for the showcase scenario of the car, which further defers and domesticates the haptic nature if its off-screen execution.

While the traceurs play the role of the car's opponent in the race, the two parties remain reciprocal forces of a contained and idealised notion of speed, with the race being mapped out in advance. As in *Jump London*, the rapidly edited passage of the traceurs becomes a prostheticised and concatenated linear flow from the start, with the driver and presenter's count-in, to the theatrical finish line of the clock tower, with its bombastic soundtrack and sweeping wide shots that foreground the runners' triumph. As Paul Virilio writes,

> If all automotive vehicles – terrestrial, marine and aerial – are now less 'mounts' in the equestrian sense than mounts in the optician's sense of frames, it is because the self-propelling vehicle is becoming less a vector of physical movement than a means of representation, the support for a more or less high-speed optics of the surrounding space.[86]

In the "Top Gear" short, both parkour and the automotive motion of the featured car – with its evaluative presence hinged on its perceived speed and efficiency – are modelled around the kind of 'perspectival hallucinations' Virilio refers to: representational models of speed that are interactive and experienced by proxy by the viewer in sedentary spectatorship – manufactured predominantly through the syntax of an edit that offers an illusion of depth and continuity through its very seguing of discontinuous, spatiotemporal liveness. Parkour is presented as a corresponding 'transport solution' to the automobile, and its flawless progression and eventual conquest in the "Top Gear" race illustrates a scripted precision and chimerical version of the practice – edited together as a 'perspectival hallucination'.

David Belle's appearance in the 2007 "Nissan 'Shift'" commercial is also complicit with this screened phenomenology, the celebrity traceur supposedly embodying

[86] Paul Virilio, *Polar Inertia* (New York: Sage, 2000), p.22.

the eponymous product's virtues, which appear in sleek, dissolving text at the ad's ending: "Inspiration … Convention … Exhilaration … Style … Originality… Passion… Individuality". In the same fashion that the free runners and traceurs starring in *Jump London* are made to activate its cityscape through their energizing, platform-like feats, Belle's auratic presence in the Nissan commercial imbues the advertised car with his reciprocal dynamism, despite Belle only making an implied appearance in the actual vehicle.

The commercial begins with the featured Nissan pulling up abruptly outside a presumably Parisian apartment tower, with Belle then appearing shutting the driver's door and looking up to see a young woman on her balcony looking down at her watch in disdain and shrugging her shoulders before retreating inside. Belle is seen quickly advancing towards the building through the windscreen of the car, and climbs the gas meter and the fire escape before landing on the balcony and picking a flower. A wide, tilting shot then reveals him scaling down the various balconies, before he performs a double back flip onto the ground, his landing concealed by the car. A subsequent cut shows the impact in close-up before he rests his hand on the car and presents the flower to his impressed date as she approaches the car. Against jump-cuts of the Nissan being driven through the city – as though a driver-less, animist automaton – the voice-over announces, "The Nissan V6 Ultima: Change the way you move through the world".

This first-person maxim promotes an ambition to 'move' as Belle does, especially for prospective consumers of the car. While the logic of this transferral of Belle's extraordinary gymnastic capability to the movement of the invisible driver *in* the Nissan is somewhat non-sequential, his topical superstar endorsement of the car, and its sensual

animism – as it is seen in the ad's closing shots – reciprocally lubricate the marketable niches of hallucinatory speed and mythical grace. For Belle's body to be equated with the chassis of the Nissan, however, is a contradictory submission that seems to undermine the radical, revolutionary zeal of parkour as a haptic and adrenalised experience, adhering to the physical 'equestrian mount' of Virilio's supposedly archaic locomotion. Mediated versions of parkour quantify the practice otherwise, with its logic of motion ironically more like that of the automobile. As Peter Jukes writes,

> The principle of mobility for all is at the core of the American dream of freedom, and it is no accident that this dream expresses individual liberty primarily in the language of motion. Liberty is a right of way, a right to go about your business without let or hindrance […] Personal progress becomes a matter of being the fast lane, in the driver's seat, getting on, overtaking as many others as you can […] The car confers not only the illusion of mobility once out of the metropolis, in the suburbs; but cocooned behind metal and glass, it protects its occupants from the shout in the street, the possibilities of social experience. […] The supremacy of movement in the city radically changes our conception of space. Travelling from A to B on the path of least resistance, the important factors are distance and time, not depth: anything outside the line of your progress becomes flat, insubstantial. [87]

As with *Jump London* and *District B13*, the Nissan advert displaces the idea of speed from the visceral equestrian-mount flow of parkour to the car's smooth passage through the streets in which the chase-oriented narratives play out. The *mise en scène* of the city is seen to be mastered by and mastering the traceurs who perform within. As Jukes further elaborates,

> Urban life is made, like the 'rallies' and car chases climaxing so many movies, into a series of anarchic trajectories. Individuals collide like so many sub-atomic particles. Space becomes as fluid and contingent as the futurists saw it, its three dimensions superseded by two: distance and speed. Film provides an analogy for this new spatial order; so does modern musical time. […] motoring adds to a feeling of unreality in a city. Though the car increases one's power over the outside world, it reduces sensitivity to it. In the telematic bubble of the automobile, the vistas that slide over the windscreen are like back projections in the movies: they create the impression of a 'reel' world rather than a real one. On the freeway, the prime public space, social interaction takes the form of a

[87] Peter Jukes, *A Shout on the Street*, p.228.

> collision of interests – a sudden impact. Recently, the frustrations of the rush hour have led to a spate of 'freeway shootings'. From a distance, inside the car, the city looks like a crystal fairground; in reality it is hard and sharp. The car creates an impression of a 'reel world', and now the pedestrian has adopted this habit. Previously the city as compared to a theatre: men and women were actors, the street was a stage. But the visual regime of intimacy, integrity have more in common with close-up, 'method' film-acting than with dramatic masks.[88]

While parkour's admission into the flat stasis of commercial space might appear to be action-packed, with it depictions – in John Saville's words – "scripted through with heroic narratives of accomplishment; shot through with supercession, refinement,"[89] the practice's performative incorporation into such space anaesthetizes the hardness and sharpness of its actual interaction within an aleatory architectural ecology. The mediatisation of parkour replicates the carceral effects of the contemporary city's vehicular hegemony. "The idea of the commercial is to show a world without boundaries"[90], says Mike Byrne, a creative director with Nike's ad agency Wieden + Kennedy, but such a generic appeal to an indolent sense of the extraordinary is a reductive symptom of the casual limitlessness of the perspectival hallucination, itself deferring the intensity of parkour's actual physicality and force.

That parkour entered into the popular imaginary through media such as Nike's Presto commercials – which assume a latent energy in their showcased apparel that is again activated by its luminary wearer – is a preventive irony. Similar to the stasis of filmic car travel, the inevitable marketing of 'supplementary' clothing and shoe lines for parkour as a style – The Nike advertisements and Foucan's collaboration with K-Swiss on a free running shoe in 2007, for example – suggests an animistic couture of

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[88] Peter Juke, *A Shout on the Street*, p.228.
[89] Stephen John Saville, "Playing with Fear", pp. 891-914.
[90] Mike Byrne, quoted in Michael Kaplan, "Social Climbers", *The New York Times*, 9 March 2003, accessed 10 March 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/09/magazine/social-climbers.html?src=pm>.

transcendent newness, adorned through a logic of kinetic purity that neglects the physical marks and scuffs of actual, somatic encounters with the city.

Parkour's representation as a cached, unified style in films such as *Jump London* and *District 13*, and adverts such as the Nissan "Shift" commercial, contrasts with its processual and heuristic everyday manifestation, even if this manifestation is only meant to happen in the most transitory fashion – subject to the most evanescent glances of the fixed, perspectives of an unquantifiable public audience. While the traceur continually hassles and endeavours to overcome the obstacles it encounters, it is not as glossily automated as apparel adverts would imply.

Apparel functions in such texts to reciprocally activate and be activated by its luminary wearer – on one parkour-apparel series' case, Sébastien Foucan, who also serves to 'activate' the eponymous cityscape in *Jump London* – which in turn is seen to reciprocate, and even upstage their own actions. The static apparel advert might appear to be the most contradictory representation or effigy of parkour, with its framing of the athlete in an immobile space – reduced, as Jukes suggests, to the physiognomy of his or her intertextual countenance, appearing in facial close-up , as opposed to being manifested in his or her constitutional, athletic space.

However, this freeze-framing would only appear to be a logical endgame of a gradual slowing-down (even as speeding up) of the body and its diagnostic contortion in narratives that cut between 'real-life' reference and fictional embellishment, namely in the films discussed heretofore. In the ensuing chapter, I will examine how parkour's ideals of kinetic liberation are both hyperbolised and disappeared through this form of

‘slowing down’ – again focusing on the translation of parkour’s invisibility into the simultaneously slower yet quicker, and more visible yet ectoplasmic film space.

Chapter Four

Casino Royale, *Spider-Man*, *Batman Begins* and *The Matrix*

"The un-walling of the wall":

Parkour's allegorical ghosting in the SFX blockbuster

In this Chapter, I will read a parkour-esque choreography into the ec-static manoeuvres performed in the films *Casino Royale*, *Spider-Man*, *Batman Begins*, and *The Matrix*. Such films may appear to inform and be informed by the emergence of an aesthetic – or perhaps a *genre* – of parkour, which adheres to the 'law of physics', while simultaneously seeking to transcend that very law. As Eyal Weizman writes, "the almost palindromic linguistic structure of law/wall binds these two structures in an interdependency that quite literally equates built and legal fabric. The un-walling of the wall invariably becomes the undoing of the law".[91] In their respective trespassing for varying ends, both parkour and superheroism operate on both sides of this separatrix, also seeking to fluidly challenge the near-anagrammatic structure of property/propriety.

As both superhero and the traceur seek to exceed narratives and 'typecasting' of confinement in everyday space, they become further enmeshed; and as films such as *Casino Royale* increasingly crib visual riffs from the somatic medium of parkour for a payoff of critically perceived 'grittiness', the latter aspires to the proverbial, ectoplasmic weightlessness and chameleon ubiquity of the superhero narrative and their ideological, textual rites of good and evil.

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[91] Eyal Weizman, "Lethal Theory", Roundtable: Research Architecture, accessed 1 October 2010, <roundtable.kein.org/files/roundtable/Weizman_lethal%20theory.pdf>.

An early sequence in Martin Campbell's 2006 prequel to the James Bond saga, *Casino Royale*, involves a free running chase between the film's protagonist – played by Daniel Craig, in his Bond debut – and the Bomb-maker objective, Mollaka – played by the traceur and free runner, Sébastien Foucan. The chase begins with close up shots of a mongoose and snake fight in the centre of a crowd. Mollaka is seen reveling in the crowd, watched by Bond and his associate, Carter, who gives their surveillant pursuit away by drawing his gun and failing to lower his hand from his earpiece. "Holster the bloody weapon, Carter; I need him alive", Bond says into his earpiece, as he stands in cool detachment from one of the watch towers overlooking the fight ring. Bond's request for Mollaka's live seizure echoes the criminal assailant's sentiments in *B13*, where Belle is to be detained in the same manner, and in the same way, serves to necessitate the ensuing, and correspondingly convoluted dramatic chase. This convolution ironically both contradicts the rites of efficiency that Foucan, as traceur might enact, but also offers a wide, cinematographic and choreographic field for its breadth of tricks to be established and reiterated as spectacles within the frame.

As Foucan's fugitive character turns quickly away from Carter, pumping symphonic music abruptly swells, punctuating the chase's commencement. Rapid pan-shots, and then a low-angle tilt trace Mollaka's bat-like jump into the fight ring, before a cut to the cobra, which snaps at his feet accents his analogously snake-like departure. Carter then falls into the ring and lets off a hapless gun shot, before the crowd scampers in collective tumult. In this animal tumult, Mollaka is immersed as natively conversant and reflex-oriented to the swarm around him, while Carter's fumbling chase reveals an unwitting denizen in hapless pursuit, akin to the gangsters' fallible pursuit of Leito in

B13. Mollaka is seen from behind making his way through the dense gathering, before an emphatic cadence in the music and a cut to a wide shot reveals Bond, who still on cool, sedentary watch, turns to give inevitably more successful chase. A bird's-eye-view wide shot tracks along the market-bound pursuit, with the percussive sounds of their movements heavily amplified. Foucan is then seen in profile, monkey-jumping through a car's driver door and out the passenger's in another analogous gesture to the one seen in *B13*, but which augments and embellishes rather than streamlines his fleeing passage.

Bond is followed by the camera in another rapid tracking shot, with the music's shift towards primitive, percussive styling adorning the visual transit into a jungle-like zone, and further reinforcing the intuition of Foucan's territorialized native-ness. Rapid cuts switch between Bond and Mollaka throughout the forest, before Foucan emerges and performs an effortless leap onto the top of a fence, before following through and darting through a cascade of falling sand left by a moving crane in an adjacent construction site. Bond's scaling of the fence appears more concerted and visceral, his exertion accented by more vocal amplification, in an embodiment that ironically overshadows the almost invisible and effortless grace of Mollaka's permeation of the obstacle.

Bond is then seen eyeing a convenient bulldozer. The significance of this close-up on his observant countenance is set up against the ostensibly intuitive determination of Mollaka, who is mainly revealed in wide shots that reciprocally animate his shifting figure through the *mise en scène* but give nothing away about his facially or optically expressive direction. Bond's close-up gaze indicates a kind of cerebral mastering of the scene, with pivotal instrument-props seen from a corresponding, photographic distance, undermining the villain's ability to cover physical distance through his photogenic

athleticism. Bond operates from the position of retinal, surveillant power, even as he is situated as a denizen throughout this foreign reconnaissance. Mollaka's localized actions as a native accustomed to the scene's territory are in their own way, uncharacteristic, with his evasive flight appearing as purely instinctive and frantic, choreographed with a sort of fidelity to parkour as a enactment of split-decision myopia to the immediacy of proximate obstruction.

Mollaka is seen then cat-leaping (another visual animal homology) a car-barrier, before hiding behind a pile of construction pipes and unholstering his gun while preparing to fire. The camera meanwhile pans aimlessly around him to reveal apparent desertion and corresponding liberation from Bond. However, in an explosive and almost comic re-entry, the agent is seen commanding his annexed bulldozer through the entire scene, smashing through corrugated iron, wire fences and gigantic plumping in a rejuvenated pursuit of the guerilla, who fires several futile shots at the protagonist. The sequence cuts between the animal like scamper of Mollaka and the phlegmatic countenance of Bond in his driver's seat, piling dust and detritus towards the dwarfed fugitive, reinforcing the phlegmatic command (not only optic and strategic, but additionally mechanic) Bond has over the situation in response to Mollaka's handicapped inheritance from the extra-diegetic Foucan. Foucan's animal-like, bi-pedal power is outrivaled but the supererogatory efforts of Bond, whose machine-enhanced passage suggests a clinical flawlessness that is only diluted through his humanized grunts throughout the sequence. Throughout the undulating litany in which Bond emerges predictably victorious over Mollaka, the cinematography sympathizes with the former's machine-prostheticized heroics, ultimately elevating and hyperbolizing them as super-

heroic, despite the apparent rawness of his manoeuvres. In contrast, Foucan's passage is made to appear *au natural*, in continuing fidelity towards the cross-pollination of real-life parkour.

Mollaka subsequently cat-leaps onto the steel skeleton of an half-built structure, the camera spiraling up beside him as he ascends with seamless dexterity. Bond is then seen running up the shaft of a nearby crane, the music again shifting abruptly to dramatize the visual crescendo. Bond is then seen struggling in his leaped clearing of the final chasm between the crane and the structure. One of the site workers appears, lunging at Mollaka, but the latter kicks him off the edge, with the worker falling to the ground and dropping an object that ignites on the ground and sends an explosive flume of fire up the structure, while Bond ducks behind one of the supporting poles. Mollaka narrowly avoids Bond's grasp, but manages to evade him by jumping onto a crane-suspended carriage of poles, his leap revealed in five disparately framed shots, including a cut away to the gathered workers looking up from below. The filmic audience is made to empathize with this upward-looking perspective, viewing Mollaka as an avian specimen in balletic contortion, before being brought back to parallel elevation with Bond's ironically more amplified, masculine grunts.

As Foucan is seen from above climbing the crane wire, Bond takes a long run-up along the narrow structure to perform the same leap. His landings again appear humanized through the amplification of his expressive grunts, as opposed to the dead-run, superhuman flight of the fugitive. Bond's next tactic is more like the latter's weightless ascension, as he appears with his arms spread wide like Superman, after kicking a switch that releases the crane's load and pulleys him up to the same height as Mollaka. In this

way, Bond's intimacy with the mechanical conveniences are made to appear commanding and almost god-like, his body sometimes appearing in almost prosthetic immersion into the various objects' surfaces.

A flyover shot and further crescendoed music subsequently reveals the two rivals balancing along the elevated, horizontal shaft of the crane, enhanced by a full 360º fly around. Foucan takes aim and fires at Bond as they stand on the crane, but his canister is empty – again, suggesting his imperfect instrumental interfacing alongside Bond's mechanical enhancement – and he throws the gun at Bond, before receiving it back with more force, falling and clinging precariously to the lower boom of the crane. A series of further, dramatic flyover shots reveals Bond and Mollaka's hand-to-hand combat in dramatic elevation and wide-angle remove. This both emphasizes the suspense of their ascent and prospective fall, while paradoxically distanciating the embodied combat from the lens, and miniaturizing their mirrored feats along the crane boom. While the fight's height implies the literal climax of both the sequence and the extra-diegetic apex of Foucan's albeit fictionalized free running ascent, it is reduced by the cinematographic removal and classical circulation around the characters' Lilliputian moves.

The musical score pauses in several crucial places, as Foucan/Mollaka is seen in pondering close up, before performing three distant leaps onto lower platforms within the construction site. This rare close-up of the villain foreshadows the significance of the looming leap, its flight captured in near-silence and with slow-motion grace. Bond's following attempts are more harrowing, his first jump from the crane witnessed from a similar angle to Foucan, but his landing again illustrated as struggle through its grunted amplification. He lands heavily on his back, and from his point-of-view we witness

Mollaka disappearing into the distance, before Bond shakes his head and again grunts in an almost comic, pausal respite. Foucan is seen leaping down an elevator shaft, while Bond takes an apparent short cut to come within tantalizing distance of his target.

A tracking shot then follows Foucan performing an analogous cat-leap to the one performed by Belle in District B13, but in contrast to the latter's successful evasion, Bond again risibly undermines Foucan/Mollaka's efficiency by smashing through the same the wall with his entire body, his slowed-downed groans amplified as he bursts through. Foucan/Mollaka executes further ostensibly effortless leaps onto lower platforms, with slow-mo and almost spring-like agility. But his seeming escape is again preempted after Bond is seen glimpsing an elevator control panel, before whacking the switch with a convenient wrench and descending on a scissor shaft to the same level as Mollaka. Brisk dolly-shots trail both characters onto the busy surrounding street, before a cut to placid pan reveals the Nambutu Embassy, which Foucan enters by foot. Bond jumps and clings to a vehicle that tracks alongside Mollaka from the outside of the compound, before leaping into the compound and entering the office where Foucan has sought asylum. In a flurrying montage, the compound's guards open fire at Bond as he attempts to leave the building, detaining Mollaka by the scruff of the neck and dragging him out at gunpoint to the embassy's courtyard.

Bond's Parthian shot is typically profligate, unfeasibly escaping the egregious torrent of shots to merely pause at the courtyard gates, shoot Mollaka and another conveniently placed prop – this time an explosive gas tank – and disappear in the retreating haze. Bond's powers throughout this sequence are made to migrate between a mechanically enhanced domination, a martial embodiment, and a retinal, strategic

calculation of his own impending obstructions. He is thus presented as a quasi-superhero, the aurally amplified physicality of his leaps and falls and contradictory 'real-ness' in comparison to Mollaka/Foucan's freakish, airborne grace serving to set the two apart in the good versus evil face-off. Bond's invincible rampage and eluding of ubiquitous gunfire serves to further highlight his superhuman physique, even as he is not seen to perform the sort of stunts enacted by Foucan, in his own illegitimate excess as an on-screen villain/traceur. Ironically, Bond is also seen to transgress both legally and physically in his sortie on the embassy grounds, his vigilante trespassing functioning as a superhero-like *force majeure* that is righteous in its 'democratic' perforating of the embassy's borders and impediments.

Casino Royale's integration of parkour into its action-packed expository sequence echoes the use of the real-life urban pursuit in films like *B13* but its brief, singular scripting into the Bond film is in exclusive, ornamental service of the fiction's apoplectic and critically acclaimed action. In place of the developed, overarching characterizations in the aforementioned films, particularly in which Belle is situated in the intertextual interstice between on and off-screen roles throughout, Foucan's ephemeral cameo functions to vary and make more visceral the Bond film's choreographed action. Parkour and free running's reification through Foucan's performance in *Casino Royale* creates a reciprocal verisimilitude for Daniel Craig's part in the chase, transferring the continuity of the real-life free runner and traceur's stunt work to the lead character's own countenance. However, Craig's reinvention of the Bond character from its debonair charisma of earlier versions to the brutal sophistication enacted in *Casino Royale* also functions to foil the animal temperament of the Foucan character, who is depicted as a

silently anonymous, scar-faced native on the run, albeit conversant with cellular technology. Throughout the chase scene Foucan's savage but elegant physicality is pitted against the clinical and engineering élan of Bond, who makes up for Foucan's patently superior gymnasm with his own brand of machine-assisted short cutting.

In contrast to the earlier Bond films, however, Craig introduces an embodied sense of exertion to the film's otherwise hyperbolic premise. His physicality has thus been described as follows:

> For a long time now, the James Bond franchise has been operating with a license to overkill. That license has been revoked by "Casino Royale." It doesn't even feel like a Bond film as we have come to expect them, in their numbing, increasingly gadget-dependent gigantism. No death rays from space this time. No invisible car. For once, most of the laws of physics are given due respect.[92]

Much of this celebrated credibility might also be credited to Foucan's featuring in the film, and the reciprocal somatic display put on by Craig as a more muscular manifestation of the Bond character. However, Bond's receptive utilization of the various, make-do gadgets conveniently situated within the *mise en scène* of the chase still transcends Foucan's supererogatory physical penchant for escape, regardless of the verisimilitude of the latter's flight. While only making an eight-minute on-screen appearance in one scenario, Foucan plays yet another Bond villain with an idiosyncratic asset at his disposal – here, a topical physical ability used as a token *raison d'etre* for the hot-blooded sequence.

Despite *Casino Royale*'s putative rawness, however, the chase is imbued with a characteristic excess that exhibits the series' familiar farce, and Foucan/Mollaka's superior athleticism is predictably undermined by the little *dei ex machina* that facilitate Bond's progress through the sequence. Parkour's edited manifestation in Foucan's on-

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[92] Michael Phillips, "Deal us in: 'Casino Royale' birthplace of a brilliantly back-to- basics Bond", in *Knight Ridder Tribune Business News* (Washington: November 16, 2006), p.1.

screen takes might be seen to be doubly ruptured, with the flair of his movements during each phase of the chase's narrative punctuated by the return to featured close-ups of Bond's cool and focused chase. This litany involves the supposedly raw, stirring feats of Foucan/Mollaka's performance, the momentary threat of his escape from Bond's clutch, and the latter's repeated catching-up through bravado ingenuity – and usually explosive reentering of the scene, particularly with his vehicular bulldozing through the construction-site cordon. Foucan's attempt to take sedentary cover in this latter episode is a telling inconsistency that belies parkour and free running's will to progressive movement, reflexively scripted in to allow Bond to cover lost territory. Regardless of this stutter in Foucan's movement, however, Craig is seen to perform Bond's own sort of constitutional efficiency, and ends up taking more short cuts than the fugitive in the chase, catching up at every turn through narrative short-cuts that are both edited into the plot as props and edited out as elliptical cuts of live-action.

The elliptical narration of the chase sequence appears to reinforce the reification of parkour's flow through its edited concatenation, drawing both Foucan and Craig's performances into spatial and temporal proximity, ironically propelling Bond's stoic advances and literally cutting the gap between him and Mollaka. This abbreviated proximity buttresses both the suspense and absurdity of the chase, with Foucan/Mollaka's synchronic flights becoming disproportionate to his overall distance from the protagonist assailant, and Bond's propelling throughout becoming a series of successful non sequiturs.

In *Casino Royale*, the 'filmic' and its attendant ciphers, which include temporal ellipses and stunt-man prostheses, are seen to surpass the 'real'. This overarching

displacement of the off-screen referent through the filmic apparatus is a salient point that repeatedly manifests in my own analysis as it moves past Bond's mechanical and filmic enrichment to Foucan naturalised limitations as a purely 'real' bi-pedal fugitive. Throughout, film first seeks to capture and capitalize upon the transgressive, liberatory trajectories of parkour and then demonstrates its containment, or limits, with film (as a technology, like Bond's bulldozer) staging itself, in essence, as victor.

While Foucan – as one of parkour and free running's most luminary avatars – might appear to embody an apotheotic version of the practice in his run as Mollaka, his representative – or even totemic – performance is presented as inadequate in the face of Bond's evidently more practical and sophisticated, righteous chase. The translation and choreographing of Foucan's off-screen forte – contextualized as a stylized, villainous primitivism – is cancelled out by Bond's prostheticized and improvised procession. Parkour's anti-materiality thus provides a novel ornament for the scoptic non-advancement of the film's plot, becoming a decorative device diminished through an edit in which Bond – handicapped and equipped by temporally truncating edits and expedient narrative props – emerges victorious through his own parkour-esque trespassing on the native villain's supposed sanctuary, the Nambutu Embassy. Bond's final incarceration and dragging-out of Mollaka might appear to also be another symbolic snaring of parkour as a novel but villainous and derisory tactic that is no match for the near-flawless clairvoyance of the Bond protagonist.

Casino Royale's assimilation of parkour as a topical, real-life pursuit into the decorative spectacle of its fictional premise helped play – alongside Belle's BBC advert and *Jump London* – a mainstreaming role for the practice, and situated its street-wise

aesthetic alongside that of the franchise's superheroics, both reciprocally reinforcing each other as mutually reinvented embodied and imaginary models of entertainment. The superhero genre, in retrofit turn, has widely been credited with broadly influencing the development and emergence of parkour. The drive for escape through flight shares a commonality between the traceur and the superhero – an escapism that is further shared by an audience who yearns for an analogous, if vicarious diversion through what is played out on screen. Many of the moves performed by the traceur are isomorphic with the ones historically witnessed in various, superheroes' adventures. For example, as Paula Geyh observes, in the "Rush Hour" advert, the protagonist's undressing "inevitably evoke[s] images of Clark Kent stripping down to his Superman costume,"[93] and as Dr. Craig Reid titles his review of Belle's other acting performance, "Spider-Man is to Peter Parker as District B13 is to 'parkour'".[94]

Many of the archetypal and reiterated movements performed in pivotal moments throughout these works – as well as other texts discussed, such as the "Top Gear" feature, *Jump London* and *Casino Royale* – echo the equally archetypal poses struck by the proverbial superheroes: The handstands performed by the central characters in the above examples echo the elevated, gargoyle-like soliloquies of Batman; the slow-motion underbars performed in many of the works discussed as placid, pausal moments of graceful descent evoke the flights of stasis of both Superman and Spider-Man.

Both the traceur and the fictional superhero aspire to a supererogatory transcending of the bodily limits of the everyday, with the latter often breaking out of the

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[93] Paula Geyh, "Urban Free Flow: A Poetics of Parkour" in *M/C Journal*, Volume 9, Issue 3, Jul. 2006, p9.
[94] Dr. Craig Read, "Spiderman is to Peter Parker as District B13 is to 'parkour'", Kung Fu Magazine, accessed 1 January 2011, <http://www.kungfumagazine.com/ezine/article.php?article=666>.

quotidian mundanity and into their excessive part-time existences through serendipitous accidents, such as Spider-man's radioactive bite.

As Belle's performance in the BBC advert suggests, the traceur also takes time-out to activate the Other of his or her everyday locomotive habits, with Belle – like Superman – undressing after a normative day at work to take a rooftop detour over and across the gridded commute played out in wide angle remove below, but returning home to the normative, habitual framework of the televisual synecdoche of BBC. That Belle was initially in discussions with Sam Raimi, the director of *Spider-Man*, about playing the role of the main character's double – "that was a childhood dream, to be in a Spider-Man costume"[95] – and that he eventually turned down that opportunity – "now I'd rather appear on a poster with my own name, not as a character, saying 'This is me performing'" – is a piece of trivia that feeds back further into the reciprocal superhero-traceur dynamic, with Belle's personal branding – its own humanized franchise – in an intertextual dialogue that leaks between the territories of fiction and non-fiction: the childhood Belle influenced by Spider-Man; flirting with playing the double to its later, on-screen fictional incarnation; subsequently peeling off the costumed possibility for the 'real' Belle ("This is me performing"), that is itself a superhero role played out as a currency in popular imaginary fiction.

Spider-Man appears to be a remnant of the most visible contours of parkour: its executed glossary of airborne gymnastics and apparent, buoyant aerobatics. However, the superhero traverses the line between being lawful and anti-lawful, mostly for reasons beyond his character's control. With his vengeful penchant for the chase and his web-

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[95] Alec Wilkinson, "No Obstacle", *The New Yorker*, April 16 2007, accessed 1 January 2011, <http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/04/16/070416fa_fact_wilkinson>.

secreting inheritance – which operates metaphorically both as a rhetoric of incarceration and as a prosthetic 'vehicle' that aids the arachnoid's predestinate leaps – Spider-Man performs a totalizing role as righteous, municipal hero, ghosting the proper space of law enforcement and creating the kind of architectural homogeneity and theoretical detachment that de Certeau refers to, through his webbed and digitized, urbane tracings. The very appended filmic structures and digitized props that propel Spider-Man through his constructed and mastered element are the same structures that fasten him down to the edificial mise en scène that he is supposed to transcend. The traceur, by comparison, relies putatively on their body's gymnastic self-augmentation of its various encountered surfaces, even as his or her movements are spliced together, short-cut and made continuous through edits that are equally simulative.

Peter Parker's epiphanic run as the prototypical Spider-Man in Sam Raimi's eponymous film happens after a successful overcoming of a school bully in the school corridor – his victory being met with typical jeers of 'freak', despite his total surpassing of what formerly earned him that dubious accolade. Parker is seen retreating and seeking down a dark alleyway, before glancing up towards a spider crawling in its web, spun amongst razor wire in a cornice beside the alley entrance. A dramatic, brass-heavy staccato emerges on the soundtrack as the camera reveals – in extreme close up – razor-like bristles coming out of the character's thumb. Parker is subsequently seen looking up in a low angle shot, directly up a tall, brick wall, the rising camera tracing each expressive ascension of the wall in slow, wandering tilts and pans, its expressionist angles and amplified palm-on-brick impact building the suspense of the scene as an emergent and tentative rite-of-passage, the comic bonhomie of the actor's face

reinforcing Parker's excited apprehension. The brass-music accents echo the visual pace of the tentative climb, becoming an equally comic ostinato as his childlike grin widens, while the camera slowly swoops around him, with the wall itself appearing to tilt on its own independent axis. Both the musical and cinematographic stylization is made to appear hyperbolic here, directly referencing the comic-book provenance and camp transposition into the motion and sound of its filmic incarnation. The wall's tilting gives away its own cinematographic trickery, expressionistically imposing the incipient superhero's psyche of the on the flat surface of the filmic frame, while equally exposing his parkour-like overcoming of the vertical hierarchy of the wall.

The artifice of his filmic propelling through the artificial ecology of the *mise en scène* is self-conscious, and knowingly references itself into the narrative, in contrast to filmic portrayals of parkour with a surfeit of counterfeit rawness. In this way, *Spider-Man* might appear to be more playful than other filmic incarnations of athletic 'excess', with the hyperbolic expressionism of Raimi's lens operating in comic, gestural tandem with the central character's emergent, superpower inheritance.

Parker is subsequently seen looking down past the low-angle camera, before adolescently exclaiming, 'Wooooooah!', as though to transpose the textual grawlixes of his comic book manifestation. He is then seen airborne in flying arc-like across screen, against the clear blue sky – another shot that self-reflexively exposes its own blue-screen technicality – before fast tracking shots capture his point-of-view running flight over the brick tenements below. His seemingly plastic body appears in a wide-shot that tracks his malleable procession in front of the iconic New York City cityscape, with a simulation of the Twin Towers subtly included in the left hand side of the frame as Parker exits at

screen-right, furthering the comic artifice of his and the audience's corresponding imaginary milieu. Birds take flight as he lands on another building, with his undulating run and warped flight seen in almost two-dimensional relief – the birds operating as aspirational totems for his impending, airborne transcendence.

The frame's two-dimensionality is broken by a low angle that captures him look over the lens, continuing to cry out in wonder, before another amplified landing and a return to the horizontal tracking framing, another bird alighting as he takes off again, this time directly towards the birds-eye-view shot in an almost supine, slow-motion, kicking leap. The ensuing close-up shot holds Parker's apparently ecstatic face silhouetted against the same, crepuscular cityscape, his arms flipping and out of frame in comic hyperbole, before the next shot sees him flying over a low-angle take of children skipping in a ground-level courtyard.

The euphoria of Parker's flight is suspended as he arrives to a dramatic intersection overlook, his point-of-view tilting to the gaping, traffic-strewn street below, before a cut exposes his pensive face in close-up, looking down at his hand in revelatory, exaggerated amazement, and then closing his eyes. This pausal moment echoes the portentous, liminal moments captured in films and television spots such as *Casino Royale* and "Rush Hour" – the former revealing both James Bond and the villain, Mollaka in respective close-ups contemplating imminent, slow-motion leaps, and the latter seeing Belle, looking pensively across rooftop precipice in preparation for the advertisement iconic extended jump. These decelerations are made as rhythmic interludes which punctuate the other rapidly edited and choreographed content, and emphasize it by mere, patient contrast, the ensuing scenes being comparatively augmented as leaps of stylized

magnitude.

A giant advertising billboard for a radio station on the opposite side of the street ironically reads, “Traffic is Fun”, with an air conditioning unit suspended from a crane just beyond. The music crescendos in a series of failures to project his web, before he finally succeeds, with the music climactically shimmering in his close-up drop from the ledge of the rooftop. A dramatic wide-pan follows his screaming path across the street in further two-dimensional flatness, before a drawn-out series of cuts circulates between a close up of his feet, to the rapidly approaching billboard, his comically terrified countenance and intense close zoom to his mouth, before he is silenced on amplified impact with the billboard. The film then cuts to a nocturnal shot of him arriving punch-drunk home to his Aunt and Uncle’s house, to witness the paintjob he has neglected through his aerobatic discovery.

Parker’s prototypical flight before he receives his doppelganger christening as Spider-Man appears in the narrative gap between the episodes of school bullying and the predominantly computer-generated presentation of his final coming-of-age transformation later in the film. The maiden run is made to look frivolous, with the character’s expression and cartoonish vocal foley as overdetermined as the plastic-like manoeuvres he is seen to perform on the city roof tops in his flat, expository run. The run’s predominantly comic style appears as though in a comic strip, with parts presented in left-to-right bodily procession, with the character’s limbs flailing in hyperbole, a bodily blurring that evokes the camera-shuttered diagnostics of a Futurist painting and functions as much as comic allegory for movement as literal, filmic motion. The reflexive nods to the film’s original source – the namesake Marvel’s comic book series –

simultaneously exaggerate the physical antics of its central character, and belie the believability of his filmic flight through the flatness of its presentation as a digitized choreographics, the posthumous addition of the Twin-Towers and other on-screen details reinforcing the film's planar artifice as a vehicle for *Spider-Man*'s spectacle of movement.

Parker's full transformation into the eponymous character later in the film involves a cinematographic transformation into a more dynamic, computer-generated environment, that – while more two-dimensional as an almost total simulation of the city and it's arachnid superhero's vectors within it – seeks to present a more enriched, totalizing immersion for the viewer and its ironic suspension of disbelief under the renewed and refined character's paradigm. Notably the first sequel to the film is called *Spider-Man 2.0*, implying a further enhanced 'version' of the both the film's prosthetic, CGI theatrics and the character's own aesthetic and acrobatic development within this scheme. Thus, as the film becomes more unreal through its digitization, the actions of its protagonist become increasingly developed as a breathtaking, seemingly visceral gymnastics.

As both film and as synechdocal character, *Spider-Man* is made to become more and more impressive as the diegetic narrative and the film series progresses, in a crescendo of technical superimpositions and marionettized variations and magnifications that propel the character's body through the virtual *mise en scenes*. The audience is taken for this ride in vicarious repose, its polysemic desire for a sort of scopophiliac liberation from the entrenchment of everyday life through the airborne purity screened by the predominantly digitally costumed *Spider-Man*, a vessel for Peter Parker's own skinned,

virtual liberation from his adolescent alienation.

The scripted coincidence and narrative crux of Parker's uncle's killing, and the ensuing police-radio locating of the suspect leads to the film's first chase scene, in which *Spider-Man* demonstrates his newfound acrobatic facility in a martial context. His narrative trajectory here becomes that of the active, vengeful chaser, in contrast to the pure waste of his adolescent, weightless frolicking on his ability's discovery, and also to what the traceur would deem his or her constitutionally evasive run *from* the pursuer, as seen in Foucan's transition from superstar free runner to fleeing, Hollywood villain.

While Spider-Man appears in an archetypal onscreen incarnation of the sort of vector-less, and quasi-ectoplasmic travel that the traceur aspires to, the latter's flight is as evader, rather than as the vaunted and ultimately sanctioned vigilante that both Spider-Man and – as soon discussed – Batman perform as in their exemplary trackings through the city as crisis. However, both respective protagonists are made to cross across the story-lines of good and evil that both films construct, in order to reinforce the ambiguity psychological predicaments that uphold the narrative suspense and inevitable catharsis. Spider-Man might appear to operate on the Janus-faced threshold between what de Certeau calls the "scopic and Gnostic drive"[96] of the rooted normative, juridical and surveillant civic powers, and the "immoderate" pedestrian utterances which play out in illegible labyrinthine patterns below. As de Certeau elaborates:

> I wonder what is the source of this pleasure of "seeing the whole," of looking down on, totalizing the most immoderate of human texts. To be lifted to the summit of the World Trade Center is to be lifted out of the city's grasp. One's body is no longer clasped by the streets that turn and return it according to an anonymous law; nor is it possessed, whether as player or played, by the rumble of so many differences and by the nervousness of New York traffic. When one goes up there, he leaves behind the mass that carries off and mixes up in itself any

[96] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p.92.

> identity of authors or spectators.

Spider-Man and its central character's weightless, wireless flight becomes a mobile, but equally sedentary retinal observation in this way, and is seen to fulfill a sort of sanitation of the Manhattan bustle below through its elevated detachment. Spider-Man is subject to our own spectatorial repose from behind the carapace of the screen, sharing his voyeuristic flow over the flattened out, vague terrain below. As de Certeau continues,

> An Icarus flying above these waters, he can ignore the devices of Daedalus in mobile and endless labyrinths far below. His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was "possessed" into a text that lies before one's eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god. The exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive: the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more.[97]

While made to manifest in synchronically errant manoeuvres that cut through the geometric and totalizing birds-eye-view right angles of the Manhattan grid (*Raimi* and de Certeau's urban models stem literally from that city), Spider-Man's positioning – both narratively as moral superhero and as literal, prostheticized acrobat – also functions with the retinal omniscience and panopticism of Certeau's city planner, scoping out the distant lattice of streets below to trace his various mapped out paths of flight. In addition – particularly in the initial chase and capture of his uncle's apparent killer – Spider-Man's flights occur mainly in parallel with the paved streets and linear traffic, albeit in elevated analogy. The homicide suspect is seen escaping in a car ("we got the shooter; he's in a car heading south on Fifth Avenue; three cars in pursuit), with Spider-Man at rooftop-level pursuit, at one point resting sculpturally on a spire – another gargoyle-like stance that echoes the analogous, nocturnal silhouette set by Batman – as the seemingly airborne camera sweeps majestically around him.

While his pursuit is framed in further, ubiquitous expressionist angles that tilt and

[97] De Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, p.92

pan around his seamlessly darting figure, the chase remains bound to the cartographic limitations of the avenue, largely seen from Spider-Man's inertial point-of-view, and inevitably ending at the street's closure. In this respect, Spider-Man – while seemingly transgressing across airspace, conforms to traffic flows in his tracking down, with his very 'tracking' suggesting a scriptment and labanotation of movement that further symptomizes his optical mapping of the virtual milieus he traverses.

Spider-Man adheres to the elliptical rules of parkour, shortcutting his way to the scene of the crime by literally flying through city and turning its towering matrix into a plastic slalom course with the aid of his prosthetic web. But Spider-Man's 'antics' occur in isolated fits, motivated by the crime he is invariably attending to, as opposed to the theoretical *point*lessness in parkour's own flight, and the web itself is a testament to Peter Parker's heroic accountability to New York City. In *Spider-Man 3*, the protagonist receives the keys to the city after saving the police commissioner's daughter from a fatal office-tower fall and celebrates a patriotic, city-wide festival in his temporarily narcissistic honour. Later, in combat with the Sandman, he cries, "I guess you haven't heard, I'm the sheriff around these parts", further reinforcing his role as sanctioned vigilante, and illustrating his equivocal slip between anti-physical and -statutory law and legitimatize transgressor in the face of the film's contemporary romance.

Spider-Man is not seen to perform as outlaw by intuition – or even under the specious auspices of anthro-arachnid primitivism – but instead, the film foregrounds his and the film's valorized desire for cathartic domesticity. His flight is thus presented as both constitutionally exhilarating and terrifying, as a transgressive rite of passage that might actually contradict Parker's un-costumed, un-embellished value system.

Parker's uncle's repeated refrain of wisdom, "with great power comes great responsibility" also operates as a narrative *fait accompli* that prompts Spider-Man to utilize his powers in a virtuous manner that is ultimately law-abiding, and appended to the symbolic rites of perennial familial ensconcing – also reiterated by the overarching plot of Parker's ultimately reciprocated and domesticated love for Mary Jane.

Through his seamless linear flights, Spider-Man endorses the specious notion about the contemporary city being a unified, threaded-together edificial whole, again, pre-echoing the traceur's segueing of disparate, heterogeneous space into the ontology of its 'a-b' pragmatics. The traceur and Spider-Man perform this trajectorial unification in a fashion that is merely planted on the pre-fabricated nodes of the city infrastructure – the monolithic, virtual facades of the city becoming destinations for Spider-Man's web-dispensing take-offs and alightings. The city itself is seen in singular relief, without the populated and messy multiples of ground-level activity that de Certeau saw as being perceived from above as a sanitized totality.

Spider-Man's digitization of the city and the titular character's key-stoned motion through its planar zone is both a post-production and caricatural activation of its photogenic countenance, with the filmic remodeling of a patriotic, post-9-11 New York City receiving a stimulation that is analogous to the aforementioned, embodied activation of the featured cityscapes in parkour and free running films such as *Jump London*. Paradoxically, however, Spider-Man seeks to *dissolve* this very city, spinning his fluid and flexible web through an architectural framework that is made malleable and extraneous as a largely digital comic book maquette. The production of his speed is not only achieved through the edit of a disparate series of takes from different vantage points

– as in the manufactured flow of the traceur in film such as *Jump London* or *Casino Royale* – but is produced as a computer-generated and hyperbolic continuum of illusory weightless motion. *Spider-Man* – in both filmic and caricatural senses – might thus appear to fulfill the type of disappearing of both the city and the body that the traceur seeks to attain in his or her own, various transfers, even if still stuck in Virilio's 'equestrian mount' of bi-pedal movement.

Spider-Man's disembodied flight through the screened city's fictionalized ambit further evokes the automotive motion of the Nissan car advertisement discussed earlier, another symptom of the aerial abstraction of de Certeau's Icarian optics, an environment of movement that becomes static through its virtual purity. As Joan Ramon Resina and Dieter Ingenschay observe,

> Architecture has become more obsolete as the sole or even primary medium for visualizing the city. The image of the contemporary city is not only mediated by a variety of communications media but actually emerges through them increasingly, it is generated by the techniques of mechanical reproduction and manipulation in the service of urban marketers.[98]

Foregrounded in his airborne solitude, Spider-Man's hyperbolic arcs also eclipse evidence of other bodies' movement within the film's urban *mise en scène* – performing a sanitizing role that further symptomizes de Certeau's vertical gnostic vision, a role that is doubled in the central character's 'cleaning up' of the entropic and crime-ridden city streets. Like Foucan and Belle, Spider-Man might appear to carry out a supererogatory locomotion, but the latter reduces both his own body and his surrounding milieu into a kind of kinetic pleonasm, a knowingly blue-screened vector, almost undermining the very necessity to fly in such a manner. For Virilio, the vector is – as McKenzie Wark explains,

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[98] Joan Ramon Resina and Dieter Ingenschay (eds.), preface to *After Images of the City* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), p.5-6.

> a term from geometry meaning a line of fixed length and direction but no fixed position. [He] employs it to mean any trajectory along which bodies, information or warheads can potentially pass. Vectors are potential trajectories. The gift of technology to strategy is ever faster, ever-longer vectors, with greater and greater acceleration.[99]

As Virilio himself continues, "Where the polis once inaugurated a political theatre, with the agora and the forum, today there remains nothing but the cathode ray screen, with its shadows and spectres of a community in the process of disappearing."[100] The city is a 'gearbox full of speeds', a 'hierarchy of speeds', appropriately returning to the automotive ideology of motion described in relation to Belle's incorporation within the *dromos* of the Nissan advertisement. In film such as *Casino Royale* and *Spider-Man* (as well as in the aforementioned, "The Chase" and *Casino Royale*), this logic becomes what Virilio dubs 'dromology' – the logic of the chase – which might be seen to transpose parkour's desire for speed and efficiency within the fictional context of martial pursuit and retreat.

Again, Spider-Man appears god-like in his prosthetic and digital suit, transcending axes of gravity in a way that is comparable to the characters in *The Matrix*. The pure fiction of his artificial trajectories might directly oppose the embodied pressures which arise in the practice of parkour, with the traceur making a range of concerted and visceral acquaintances with the architectural surfaces he or she faces throughout his or her various gymnastic trips – even as he or she dreams of an imaginary parallel of ectoplasmic glide. As Anthony Vidler writes,

> The history of the bodily analogy in architecture, from Vitruvius to the present, might be described in one sense as the progressive distancing of the body from the building, a gradual extension of the anthropomorphic analogy into wider and wider domains leading insensibly but inexorably to the final "loss" of the body as

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[99] McKenzie Wark, "On Technological Time: Cruising Virilio's Over-Exposed City", *Arena*, No. 83, 1988, accessed 1 August 2010, <http://www.evolutionzone.com/kulturezone/futurec/mwark/mwark.virilio>.
[100] *Ibid*.

an authoritative foundation for architecture.[101]

Spider-Man's synthesized desire to displace the orthogonal jurisdiction of city planning and its own entrapping web is a spectacular plea to an audience who experience his CGI-catalysed flight through the city in a quasi-first-person, subjective manner, taking in the blurred landscape from the elevated, vicarious perspective of the protagonist himself. The central character's acceptable civic disobedience is played out in sensual vignettes that don't advance the overarching narrative, but accumulate the film's spectatorial wonder for its empathic audience. In the same way that both the action hero and the parkouriste might be seen to perform escape in the city, the film's audience is offered this very opportunity by way of seductive proxy.

While filmic parkour seeks to produce a verisimilitude through edits of the traceur's flow, Spider-Man is framed in an incredible series of lithe airborne arcs that seldom suspend disbelief – in fact, to an extent, mock it, through comic book hyperbole. However, as in a video game, the flight simulation of its CGI and gravity-irrespective cinematography, the film makes a physiological appeal to audiences to identify with the subject's airborne point of view. The narrative production of a game-like environment encourages a spectatorial response played back out in everyday, embodied rites, such as the encounter with the bricolage of the sidewalk slalom at the start of my own thesis' account.

Spider-Man and the traceur's on-screen performances remain symbiotic through the syntax of their respective editing narratives, whether temporalized through the use of cutting, or through the former's totalizing, computer-generated 'stunt work' – which reinforces the hyperrealism of their respective caricatural flows. The take-off from one

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[101] Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1994), p.70.

point to another operates as an initiatory gesture for documentary and fictional traceur, as well as fictional superhero, but also as an in-between sleight, with both occurring as reflexive narrative situations – one as a sort of interjective and interceptive *in media res*; the other, a textual and typically cinematic exposition. Filmic 'plots' in this context become spatialised, with the spectacle of both the traceur and the superhero's screened out orientations becoming the synchronic, optic locus around which their texts spin, the overarching saga being synecdochally absorbed in the instantaneity of their highlighted manoeuvres. Even the filmmaker, Jean-Luc Godard's once radical notion that a film could contain a beginning, middle and end, but not necessarily in that order, has been antiquated by the emergence of a game-like, open-ended serialism that relativizes narrative progression in its reiterative and sequenced choreographic re-play.

Filmic acts of parkour and superheroics are seen to enact a narrative fragment that appears as a spectacular transfer, fulfilling the former practice's *sine qua non* 'a-b-ness' – a rhetorical spatial movement that implies alphabetical linearity, but easily reversible as binary nodes for coming and going in energetic, virtual style. "In a Late Show culture like our own," writes Frederic Jameson,

> the elaborate preparations we used to require in order to apprehend a series of images as a story of some kind will be, for whatever reason, unnecessary […] Everyone who still visits movie theatres has become aware of the way in which intensified competition by the film industry for now inveterate television viewers has led to a transformation in the very structure of the preview. The latter has had to be developed and expanded, becoming a far more comprehensive teaser for the film in store for us.[102]

Jameson's epitaphic impulse regarding the preview's territorialism has perhaps been fed back into the diegetic, intertextual timeline of the film spectacle itself, with the volatile schizophrenia of the trailer becoming a reiterative feature within. "The preview is all you

[102] Frederic Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings On The Postmodern, 1983-1998*. (New York: Verso, 1998) p.155.

need," Jameson continues, before elaborating:

> You no longer need to see the 'full' two hour version (unless the object is to kill time, which it so often is) […] In contemporary action film, the former story has become little more than a pretext on which to suspend a perpetual present of thrills and explosions. It is thus the images of these which is provided in the seemingly brief anthology of shots and highlights offered in the preview, and they are fully satisfying in themselves, without the benefit of the laborious threads and connections of the former plot.[103]

The metastasis of text messaging, tweeting, and indeed, the viral uploading of cell phone- and mini-DV-produced parkour video demos re-circulates as a set of abbreviated lexical styles into the longer narrative chronologies of feature films. These abbreviations may appear to parallel the shortcutting and elliptical aspirations of parkour, with the film's vignette-like structure mainly predicated on an episodic core of apoplectic action sequences.

Spider-Man's preview-like make-up emerges from a saga whose denouement could end at any point on its narrative, but plays out in a perfunctory major-studio *longue durée* gratifying the audience's contradictory desire to 'kill time', which is itself both an immersion in the film's elliptical ecology an a symptom of disembodied convolution. *Spider-Man*, *Batman* and *The Matrix*'s respective narrative evolutions in sequels is a poignant drawing out of their diegetical dromos, however, their own franchise-based prosthetic extensions serve a wider archetypal reverberation, as a recital of genre formulae throughout.

This archetypal hemorrhaging points to a narrative crisis that *Casino Royale* seeks to redress – with supposed success – through its featuring of parkour's so–called obedience to 'the laws of physics'.

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[103] Frederic Jameson, *The Cultural Turn*, p.155-156

While not using literal parkour in its own narrative framing, *Batman* was critically acclaimed for a comparable approach to presenting the visceral body in motion, reframing the formerly camp, one-liner franchise character in an umbral chiaroscuro, as a laconic anti-hero. He is seen engaging in hand-to-hand battle as much as being propelled along by his proverbial prosthetic gadgets and the film's re-booted Batmobile, which is even provided its own back-story verisimilitude as a shelved US military archetype. The film begins with a prison fight scene between the self-exiled Bruce Wayne and a gang of opposing inmates, its brutal framing and cutting, and its setting in mud establishing the overarching grittiness of the action narrative.

Christian Bale's prototypical encounter as Batman with Gotham City's Commissioner Gordon is immediately followed by the former's hasty rooftop retreat and flight from its lofty edge. But, as with Bond's grunting pursuit of the fleet-footed villain, Mollaka, in *Casino Royale*, Batman's descent ends with an amplified tumble on the fire escape stairs levels below, with the camouflaged figure coming to terms with his unwieldy, but convincingly physical landing. This type of transparent narrative investment in the grappling development of both lead characters' superhero specialties engenders a corresponding spectatorial sympathy for their weaknesses and eventual transcendent strengths. This intimates a shift towards a representation of the heuristics of physical movement that much show-reel parkour skips in its own extraordinary *horror vacui*. The feature film premise provides an exploration of the central character's psyche, and in doing so, substantiates their various motives for taking flight, with the audience's own vulnerable desires for a virtual, accompanying circumvention. True to the the back-storied verisimilitude of Nolan's *Batman*, the central character responds to his awkward

landing by requesting sartorial gear that will aid his subsequent flight: "I'm carrying too much weight. I need to be… faster".

Nolan's *Batman* is shot and edited with a stylized realism, enriching the prequel and its central character's back story with narrative minutiae, particularly the fleshing out of the provenance of his martial prostheses and gadgetry – developed and reconfigured from the neglected, subterranean subsidiary department of Wayne Enterprises, under the supervision of Lucius Fox. Both *Spider-Man* and *Batman Begins* (as well as its 2008 follow-up, *The Dark Knight*) contain explicit post-9/11 ambiences, the former with its artificially produced Twin Towers and ubiquitous American flags, the latter with its justification of the exceptionalist use of "a city-wide surveillance system created through high-frequency sonar signals captured from millions of cell phones, allowing Batman the power to visualize the locations of criminals throughout the fictional city of Gotham."[104]

Batman operates in the quintessential darkness of the nocturnal criminal milieu, with his scenes shot in a concomitantly dark chiaroscuro that suggests his evasion of optic tracing – by both film, and the city's authorities – and familiar bewildering of his often-hapless opponents in his phantom-like ambushes, the character also operates from the position of de Certeau's elevated voyeurism, with his radar apparatuses and gargoyle-like observation of the dispersed action below. Yet, despite the unsettling, simplified parallels with the Bush administration's illegal wire-tapping in the epoch of the 'war on terror', Batman operates – in analogy to terrestrial/avian oscillations of the traceur – in the Janus-faced axis between that Icarian surveillance and subterranean rhizome. The metaphysics of Batman and parkour's pursuit might be seen to also parallel the praxis of

[104] "Dark Knight surveillance", Critical Commons, accessed 9 June 2011, <http://criticalcommons.org/Members/ccManager/commentaries/dark-knight-surveillance>.

the Israeli Defense Forces' high-tech, legally dubious 2002 invasion of Nablus, as described by Eyal Weizman:

> Although several thousand soldiers and several hundred Palestinian guerrilla fighters were maneuvering simultaneously in the city, they were so "saturated" within its fabric that very few would have been visible from an aerial perspective at any given moment. Furthermore, soldiers used none of the streets, roads, alleys, or courtyards that constitute the syntax of the city, and none of the external doors, internal stairwells, and windows that constitute the order of buildings, but rather moved horizontally through party walls, and vertically through holes blasted in ceilings and floors. This form of movement, described by the military as "infestation," sought to redefine inside as outside, and domestic interiors as thoroughfares. Rather than submit to the authority of conventional spatial boundaries and logic, movement became constitutive of space.[105]

This 'walking through walls', as the blogger, Best Home, elaborates, might be seen to be a kind of 'militarized parkour',[106] with films such as *Casino Royale, District 13* and a plethora of other, contemporary films exploring the same rhizomatic, ballistic economy of architectural penetration and reordering that enacts the desire – including my own, at the beginning of this thesis – to breach the city's divisions and partitions by not merely leaping and over-coming, but through actual, tunneled, ectoplasmic invasion.

In contrast to Batman's supposedly visceral, rhizomatic jaunts through concrete, architectural fissures, *Spider-Man* – with reflexive, camp decorum – loudly exploits its provenance in the phantasmagorical and two-dimensional page of the comic book. Its adaptation is literally over the top, with the hyperbolization of its central character's elevated, but two-dimensional loco-motion ironically fabricating an imaginary vector-based format for the bodily mimicry of parkour as an inextricably choreographic and photographic thing.

The fictional New York City newspaper, the *Daily Bugle* and its constantly irate editor-in-chief, J. Jonah Jameson, function as a reflexive symbol of the paradoxical

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[105] Eyal Weizman, *Lethal Theory*, p.53.
[106] "Nakatomi Space", accessed 25 June 2010, <http://besthome.onsugar.com/Nakatomi-Space-15799167>.

endeavour to capture Spider-Man on film for the purposes of newspaper ratings and to fuel the editor's contradictory sentiments about the central character as a "menace to the city". Peter Parker, as a freelance employee who desires full-time work for the *Daily Bugle*, responds to an assignment to photograph Spider-Man through a series of sequences that involve his setting up of a timed shutter in front of various crime scenes in which he frames his photogenic captures. These montaged scenes become a kind of show reel in the same manner as the film-making traceur who captures his or her own tricks on camera as later edited archival evidence of something that is almost impossible to see otherwise and elsewhere.

The nature of Spider-Man's evidence is later inverted as literal evidence of his maliciously alleged, criminal conduct with an associate freelance photographer at the firm producing supposed evidence for publication in the film's second sequel. Peter Parker's consumption by the dark, narcissistic power of a black extraterrestrial blob causes him to smash the camera of his rival and subsequently expose the evidence as photo-shopped. This cosmetic fakery diegetically parallels the near-inability to photographically capture Spider-Man – and by further allegory, parkour and free running – as a raw, documentary whole, instead being portrayed within the simulated logic of the filmic edit, and in *Spider-Man*'s case, near-complete computer-generated virtuality.

In this way, film appears to produce the city, and both the superhero and traceur's embodied reciprocal actions within it, being a doctored medium for the spatial and temporal condensing of otherwise stretched out acts. "Modernity and its modern stage, the metropolis", as Ramon Resina and Ingenschay observe, "feature two new qualities:

abstractness and an accelerated rhythm of encounters"[107], with the photographic image incorporating that fragmentary temporality, and film later temporalizing it through what Benjamin called the "dynamite of the tenth of a second," pseudo-scientifically zoning in on erstwhile invisible phenomena. Through this genealogy of mechanical reproduction and reorienting of the receding referent, physical locomotion becomes stuttered and paused through the diagnostics of the frame, ironically quantifying the continuum of the run into motorized and later digitized optic fragments, paradoxically belying the imperative of seamless flow that both the traceur and Spider-Man supposedly seek to abide by. Equally, such mechanization constitutes the weightless movement that both character and practice aspire to – their flight manufactured through the representative of syntax and cosmetic of their edited reconfiguration.

This serialization of spurious on-screen flow is central to the Wachowski brothers' blockbuster, *The Matrix*, with its acclaimed adoption of chronophotography – the use of multiple cameras in centripetal fashion to simultaneously capture the various actors' bodies in motion, being reconstituted as an illusorily single circular track around his or her stop-motion figure in post-production. This circular orientation suggests the actors' liberation from the spatiotemporal domain of the pursuant cops, but also as panoptic subjects on the display in the petrifying cinematographic lens. The most complex and developed characters in *The Matrix*, as Andrew Shail observes, "are simultaneously those presented as marionettes,"[108] implying the physiognomic distortion of what we see as the 'laws of physics' in everyday locomotion:

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[107] Joan Ramon Resina and Dieter Ingenschay, *After Images of the City*, p.219.
[108] Andrew Shail, "'You Hear About Them All The Time: A Genealogy of the Sentient Program" in Stacy Gillis (ed.), *The Matrix Trilogy: Cyberpunk Reloaded* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2006), p.30.

> ‘Real' films and animated films have long been differentiated by the fact that for animated films, unlike with live-action films, every frame is a single shot. By returning to the multiple cameras in a line set-up chronophotography, bullet-time animates a figure in precisely this way and produces the narrative event around the movement of a single body. The animated figure of bullet-time is both a repetition and reinforcement of the conducting of cinema in such a way as to render real bodies as animated figures, one of the documentaries on the first film explaining that bullet-time 'takes on the attributes of full-cell animation, only with people, not characters.[109]

The disciplinary puppetry that Gillis identifies in the node-like observation of the chronophotographic circulation is redolent of the docile body of Foucault’s analysis, witnessed in the cinematographic Panopticon at the exact point of their visual emancipation from the incarcerating Matrix. This mode of diagnostic photography echoes – as does Spider-Man in one of his prototypical flights – a Futurist or Cubist painting that seeks to capture its subject from a plethora of angles and perspectives – a spatial refraction that reflects the modernist preoccupation with the populous kaleidoscope of concomitant urbanization and the parallel rise in surveillant technologies that capture the tracked subject from a similarly ubiquitous chain of sight-lines and site-lines.

The multiple-camera positioning also echoes – along with the post-production effects of the aforementioned YouTube clips – the photographic processes of Eadweard Muybridge, in which his subjects – both animal and human, but made more taxonomic through his overall titling of his project, *Animal Locomotion* – were seen in serial poses throughout the respective frames, reanimated, in predestinate, puppet-like fashion, *ex post facto*. The bodies in these films appeared to be less motivated by their own agentic apparatuses than the apparatus of their subsequent montage, and the revelation that Muybridge freely edited what appeared to be raw, documented action. With the continuous and reversible circling of the gravity-irrespective hackers in *The Matrix*, their

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[109] Andrew Shail, “‘You Hear About Them All The Time”, pp.30-31.

movements seem propelled along by the innovation of the spatiotemporal bending rather than the characters' own hacking of the diegetic, titular matrix. In this way, *The Matrix* enacts an enhanced suspension of gravity that is similar to the key-stoned CGI apparent in Spider-Man's fluid hyperbole, but also the ostensibly rawer montages seen in parkour documentation and narration in films discussed earlier, such as "Parkour Is", "Chase", and parkour's narrative extensions in documentaries like *Jump London.*

But if *The Matrix* as film is a stylistic bubble for the airborne and plastic acts seen to be performed by characters within, its actors' preliminary training regime for the film remains an extra-diegetic narrative that preempts a spectatorial blasé to the kaleidoscopic stasis on screen. As Gillis elaborates,

> Such filmic paratexts as knowledge of Reeves, Fishburne and Weaving's martial-arts training preparation have also long been fundamental to evidencing[…]The epistemological endeavor of cinema as distinct from simulation. Labouring this sense of film production as a logistical and physical endeavour de-emphasizes the extent to which the cinematic body is an effect of the apparatus, thus again fantasizing it as previous to filming. A crux of the first film is that the body in the Matrix is not just the avatar of the mind transcending its meat in cyberspace. The loosely-explained logic of injuries sustained in the Matrix having effect in the real world actually shows that the Wachowski's take significant pleasure in the mistaking of the cinematic body for the pre-filmic body: like viewers imputing cinematic effect to the pre-filmic body, they either understand or want the body in the Matrix to be the real body.[110]

This cross-pollination of moving and moved bodies as both virtual and visceral entities throughout *The Matrix* – both on and off-screen – is indicative of wider leak between the acting and enacted body in filmic representations of corporeal practices that dissolve the gridded, planar rigmaroles of quotidian psychotopography – at the same time as falling prey to another type of grid in their filmic harnessing. As both parkour narrative-film and documentary fictions contaminate each other through their reciprocal narrativisations and intertextualities, performing bodies emerge as both filmic and pre-filmic, inside and

[110] Andrew Shail, "'You Hear About Them All The Time", p.30.

outside the theatrical texts that contain them. The body's heurism confounds the narrator's various attempts to conceal of smooth over the actors' somatic mis-takes, even as both agents struggle for an appearance of efficient refinement, whether it be through the basic currency of the cut to omit the slow ligatures and outtakes from parkour on YouTube to *The Matrix*'s post-stop-motion and *Spider-Man*'s smooth CGI.

The caricatural accident operates both narratively, with characters such as Peter Parker – who, on his prototypical airborne excursion, is seen screaming and stumbling, albeit with synthetic fluidity – and Bruce Wayne – who, dressed in ninja-like, umbral garb, jumps and falls with amplified force on a nearby fire escape in his retreat from Commissioner Gordon's office – negotiating the spurious prospect of their bathetic moral and physical downfall; and interstitially, with almost invisible accidents occurring within the faked disorder of the scripted action, stuttering within the overarching smoothness of the linear narrative.

In the regimented, rehearsed, filmic practice of parkour – particularly with its ambition for transparency, and seemingly wire-less, force-less and ground-less rules, as well as its influence by the cinematic gravity-irrespective flight of the superhero genre – the fall, as an unwilled but inevitable error, an accidental errance, is indicative of somatic agency in its concrete engagement with the city it seeks to escape. Failure in parkour – the trip as opposed to the sinuous, gymnastic detourn – is, in part, an inadvertent refutation of a CGI-influenced way of moving. The Eros of CGI and the enjambment of the neo-narrative is to fly like a bird, or dissolve through orthogonal city space, as I wished to move ectoplasmically through the obstacle slalom at the start of my thesis. While this sort of ec-static drift of relatively immobile dromos implies a melting and

plasticity of motion, it is the haptic, heuristic and errant negotiating and negations of mapped urban space that engender a further radicalized, plastic reordering. The errance of the trip or fall both represent an attempted overcoming of a functional obstacle and a simultaneous undermining of its dividing, functional enterprise through the traceur's doubly accidental smudging of the encountered surface, as in "David Belle Fall".

While provoking an energy of fallibility in a practice that is widely seen to be a mode of bodily perfection and linear efficiency that becomes its own methodological analog to the imperatives of efficiency in urbanization and contemporary cartographical flows, a destructive impulse haunts the spectatorship of parkour's demonstration of parkour's staccato failure. Its screened, and occasionally live performance is dangerous – prone to the impressive collapse of its equally spectacular ascension. The slip-up in filmed parkour engenders a sort of *schadenfreude* in an audience that widely orients itself around YouTube videos of awkward trips and general, 'fail' culture. In this context, another one of parkour's visually identifiable tropes of ascension becomes spectacular in its entropic reversibility.

However, as with the comic aesthetic of failure within silent films addressed in Chapter One, risk – and its twinned effect, the fall – is an imperative of the processual tactics of parkour, set up as a heuristic improvisation amongst the spuriously fixed and strategic surfaces of modern urbanity, even if this sense of improvisation is qualified by the discipline's self-identification with standards of safety and contingency implementations, as heavily observed in *Jump London*.

The stoppages evident in the Channel Four documentary are incorporated into its screenplay to both buttress the spectatorial suspense and to validate the practice within its

own legitimate, dramaturgical premise, while feature films such as *Spider-Man* and *Batman Begins* use their protagonists' respective rites of passage to display a humanist shift between their moral quandaries – synonymous with their dramatic, physical plummets and nadirs – and their airborne narratological-somatic summits. The cathartic *dénouements* of both the documentary and superhero texts act as reentries into the diplomatic symmetries and peaceful halcyons of their narrative beginnings, foregrounding the simultaneous nuisance and exhilaration of the narrative take-offs. This book-ended settling runs counter to the idealism of parkour's identification with equilibrium through continual movement, and yet, the way such movement is defined, refined and packaged in redemptive linear constructions serves to inflect and re-generate the shared desires between superhero and parkour-esque ecstasy.

Parkour is thus made to conform to the a-b plot of its representative dramatisation, even as it seeks to resist the analogous, linear cartographies of the street's own predominant ideological 'flow'. The constitutional 'a-b-ness' of parkour is meant as a creative, amnesiac en-countering of wider, orthogonal urban narratives, as a way of getting from one microcosmic threshold to another, but becomes a mere extra-ordinary enhancement of what the practice sees as pedestrian conformity. In Ian Borden's words (with parallel reference to skateboarding), parkour might be seen to have "a history, but is unconscious of that history, preferring the immediacy of the present and coming future".[111]

As I will discuss further in my conclusion, such a physical myopia, or tunnel-vision, seeks to exclude all that is superfluous and convoluted in everyday pedestrian locomotion, as it is apparently cartographically dictated. But it often contradicts itself in

[111] Iain Borden, *Skateboarding, Space and the City*, p.1.

much of its own frequently augmented exertion, and neglects the subtler forms of both short-cutting and wastefulness of walking in the city – two modes that seem opposed but are equally entwined as they are unconsciously practiced by traceurs and apparently compliant, flâneur-like pedestrians.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Slowing down and stopping:

Parkour's in-between acts on the soft peripheries of representation

Parkour might appear to perpetrate a purposeful, spatial dis-orientation, subjecting the commonplace to scrutiny by the ambulatory alienation of the traceur's *dérive*-like peregrinations. Vantage points and filmic points-of-view are supposed to be turned into oblique refractions of space through impulsive angles of flight. As the Surrealist, Louis Aragon wrote with regards to early twentieth century peripatetic existence in the metropolis, "new myths spring up beneath each step we take; a mythology ravels and unravels."[112] The traceur ostensibly provides a similarly alternative version of the city through his or her own errant surveillance of its rapid, vorticist scheme.

For Rebecca Solnit, this "voluptuous surrender"[113] and immersion in the unscrambled present within which the traceur might endeavour to operate is a way of losing oneself in order to discover an unexpected, unaccustomed-to spatial presence. As Benjamin elaborates, "not to find one's way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal […] but to lose oneself in a city – as one loses oneself in a forest – that calls for quite a different schooling".[114]

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[112] Louis Aragon, *Paris Peasant*, quoted in Charles Harrison, *Art in Theory, 1900 - 2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p.455.
[113] Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (New York: Viking Adult, 2005), p.75
[114] Walter Benjamin quoted in Emma Cocker, "Desiring to be Led Astray".

In the same manner as the flâneur, the traceur might appear to perform this getting-lost, what Emma Cocker refers to as the "desire to be led astray".[115] But such a willing disorientation also seems to jackknife with the practice's own desire for efficiency and its linear mode of transit from 'A to B' – itself an increasingly conventional imperative in everyday urban life. This is an underlying paradox encountered repeatedly throughout my own investigation of the practice's potentially radical intervention into a multitude of places – both geophysical and cognitive – that attempt to accelerate in their own, efficient ways.

Played back within the representational frameworks of the various video clips, adverts and films that I have discussed heretofore, parkour is diagnostically slowed-down, through the use of multiple-takes and slow motion to produce an effect of acceleration in its re-assembly. Even as examined in the YouTube clips that purport to provide a documentary sense of athletic and acrobatic verité, the various traceurs' bodies largely yield to their own spatiotemporal reconstitution in the post-production repetition of their otherwise 'raw', initial actions. It is the making-visible of these parkour subjects, and their aesthetic and political symbiosis with superheroism as it manifests in films such as *Spider-Man*, *The Matrix*, and even parkour-superhero crossover narratives such as *B13*, that undercuts the practice's idealistic, constitutional desire for disappearance within what it renders a malleable, fluid urban environment.

The delineation of the traceur's movements in the YouTube clips such as "Parkour Is" and "The Chase" is a symptom of the optics of power that Foucault sees as objectifying subjects that in this case, ostensibly wish to remain invisible, even while performing paradoxically spectacular, and very visible actions. As Foucault continues,

[115] Walter Benjamin quoted in Emma Cocker, "Desiring to be Led Astray".

> It is the fact of being seen uninterruptedly, of always being able to be seen, which maintains the disciplinary individual in his subjection. Examination, observation, is then the technique whereby power, instead of emitting the sign of its force, instead of imposing its own mark on its subjects, seizes them in an objectifying mechanism.[116]

While constructing an imaginary and reiterative space for parkour's indexable canon of already-stylized moves, film's mechanical – and by proxy, what Foucault would analogously observe as the medical – apparatus incarcerates its subjects through its deceleration of their performances as viewable and re-viewable displays of radical, urbane gymnasm.

As the notion of the 'real-world traceur' is dissolved through his or her entwining in the ineluctably reifying processes of parkour's ubiquitous representation and reciprocal relaying through popular media such as the texts discussed in my own descriptive analysis, his or her own very active editing of the city as a linguistic series of cartographies is subsumed within the edited coordinates of the media itself.

If parkour is a form of graffiti, as suggested by the self styling of the Physical Graffiti crew that appears in the "Parkour Is" YouTube clip discussed in Chapter Two (as Norman Mailer has suggested, the writer's "presence [is] on their Presence… hanging your alias on their scene"[117]), then film and various other media's containment, editing and re-presentation of parkour could be seen to be a proprietary re-appropriation of traceurs' bodies back in the predominant, ideological Scene. While not totally nullifying the radical intent and gestures of the receding 'originary' actions of parkour, filmic representation of the practice performs its own re-utterances of the actions played out

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[116] Michel Foucault quoted in Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn*, p.106.
[117] Norman Mailer, quoted in Dick Hebdidge, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p.3.

within, re-directing and re-shaping its pliant figures for the purpose of its condensed, recuperative Scenes of spectacle.

Following de Certeau's reading of tactical pedestrian locomotion as linguistic creation, we might 'view' the traceur's interstitial jump-cuts as acts of tmesis – the interjection of radical embodied slang into the properly formed sentences of planned pedestrianism. As Helen Woolley & Ralph Johns observe – extending Bourdieu's own use of linguistic metaphor – this positional slang is

> often reviled yet necessarily open[s] up exciting new possibilities, enriching the vocabulary. It seems more appropriate to say that the social world is policed by economic language. The authoritarian voice attempts to control the lexicon, banning promenade drinking or erecting 'No Ball Games' signs, but finds its dictionary constantly in need of update".[118]

However, traceurs' endeavour to radically detourn the scriptural economy of the partitioned urban realm for their own ludic purposes becomes repurposed itself within the filmic construct, which performs its own more formalized, lexical re-edits of both its subjects' elusive movements, and of metropolitan space itself.

Parkour commits an erasure on and of the city, disappearing into its interstices and dissolving its architectural membranes and ligaments. The traceur alights on and leaps from each wall, cornice and balustrade as though interfacing with the quasi-abstract planes of a jungle gym. However, the 'real world' cuts that the practice's bodies perform either for or behind the lens remain elusive and untrackable without the heavily stylized and very directed cuts of the mechanisms of the various media discussed in my thesis.

The filmic cut is itself a disappearing of the city, and executes its own extracting and erasure of the interstitial spaces the traceur exists in while *not* in flight, pulling his or her undulating rhythmic interfacing with the city – rests and gymnastic stutters included –

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[118] Helen Woolley and Ralph Johns 'Skateboarding: the City as a Playground', Journal of Urban Design, Vol 6, No. 2, 2001, p. 211.

creating a dromological vacuum of concatenated, performative histrionics in a planar, cinematic realm of movement as stasis-on-screen. If the surface of the spuriously fixed and commanding architectural order is – in de Certeau's words – "everywhere punched and torn open by ellipses, drifts, and leaks of meaning",[119] then film seeks and often achieves a re-fixing and seaming of the spatial pores opened up by the traceur's originary, 'flowing' manoeuvres, even as they are performed for the camera in isolated, strategized takes.

Parkour's idealism arises from an acutely contradictory desire to escape the delimiting conceptual parameters of the contemporary city, while being inextricably linked with its own representation on film – itself a delimiting, architectural construct that provides a simulated tracing of the traceurs' various indexical 'evasions'. Film zooms and zones in on parkour as a unified face-off with the city as a belligerent conglomerate of authoritarian partitions and repressive, panoptic forces, and indeed, if parkour is ever even glimpsed, glanced at, or even experienced beyond filmic coordinates in its idealized, constitutional flow, it is itself defined and delimited by its own physical taxonomy and stylized aerobic rhetoric.

From its active and conceptualized inception as a subcultural mode of slipping through the interstices of the predominant cultural fabrics that it views as oppressive, parkour begins to carve out its own space within this decreasingly interstitial realm. Even if inevitably rarely extricated from its freezing in ubiquitous media representations, parkour's self-identification as a rebel lifestyle is itself a setting-up of a spatial capital that becomes increasingly homogenous in its characteristic and exclusive set of gestures,

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[119] Michel de Certeau, quoted in Helen Woolley & Ralph Johns, 'Skateboarding: the City as a Playground', p.211.

even as they are often only half-viewed in their receding execution.

If parkour is to be seen as an 'other space', in the same manner as Foucault's theoretical heterotopia – a 'heterogeneous site' that is a conceptual-imaginary juxtaposing in a 'single real place' of serial spaces that are in themselves incompatible[120] – it is a space that once sighted, cited, and re-cited, as the heterotopia is in the work of Foucault, it is "no longer the lacuna it once was", as Steven Connor points out. "Once such a heterotopia has been named", he continues, "it is no longer the conceptual monstrosity which it once was, for its incommensurability has been some sense bound, controlled and predicatively interpreted, given a centre and illustrative function".[121]

For me, it is the moments that occur as excesses or shortcomings *within* the categorical undertaking of parkour – those unnamed failures, which, whether included, or (more frequently) omitted from the filmic flow of parkour, exist as ruptures within its ontological and filmic paradigms – that retain an obfuscate fluidity not apparent in the ironically flowing, transparent, and paradoxically traceable manoeuvres 'properly' otherwise performed by the traceur. The accident in parkour demonstrates the processual, heuristic quality of its interaction with the seemingly regulated spaces of the city, and in its regimented, rehearsed, and filmic practice – particularly with its nisus to transparency, influence by cinematic gravity-irrespective flight – the fall, as an unwilled, error, an accidental errance, is indicative of more agency as a concrete engagement with the city it seeks to escape.

Failure in parkour – the falling, tripping, physical stutter, as opposed to the sinuous, gymnastic detourn – is, in part, an inadvertent refutation of both the

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[120] Benjamin Genocchio, "Discourse, Discontinuity, Difference: The Question of 'Other' Spaces" in Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson, *Postmodern Cities and Spaces* (London: Blackwell, 1995), p.37.
[121] Steven Connor, quoted in *ibid*. p.41-42.

concatenating and smoothing-over of the filmic cut and its logical supplement, CGI. The desire of both filmic mechanisms and their viewers' reciprocal aspiration is of a spatial enjambment – to fly like a bird; or even in the manner I opened my own thesis, with a wish to dissolve through two ostensibly banal points. However, these imaginary foundations are merely a catalyst for their jeopardized, and sometimes slow physical embarking, as experienced in my eventual, awkward execution of the slalom between the looming lamppost and trash can.

While purporting to function as the radical alternative to the predominant architectural narratives of division and channeling in the modern city, parkour plays into a popular account of urban life as one of acceleration. It is the multiplicity of paces and rhythms, within the city – especially the eclectic range of psychogeographic *slownesses*, as legendarily symptomatised by the flâneur – that remain beyond the retinal imperative of both the conceptual city and its diagnostic filmic manifestation. For Henri Lefebvre, "no camera, no image or sequence of images can show these rhythms"[122], for their reductive filmic coding inevitably smoothes over and abridges the multiple, storied *durées* that take place in constantly shifting, morphing and indeed, fluid ways. As Steven Connor elaborates, "Slowness is not representable. Representation is an effect of punctuality, or promptness, of the ravelling or puckering of time. Slowness testifies to asynchrony, a failure to meet up, or come together".[123]

This failure performs an evasion of its own that remains beyond the filmic frame, its lateness, desultoriness and fortuitous dawdle creating an inefficiency – something anathema to parkour – and a playful waste that softens the city and opens up possibilities

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[122] Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996), p222.
[123] Steven Connor, "Slow Going", p.154.

for a multiplicity of differences and becomings. Every acceleration, even in the dromological lexicon of parkour, is accompanied by an inevitable deceleration. It is this kinetic undulation, even as it comes to an often infuriating, seeming standstill or trough in everyday life, that turns the city soft.

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