Parkour is both a movement art and an urban sport, a discipline of movement and self-improvement, where practitioners utilize natural body movements such as running, jumping, and climbing to overcome obstacles, both physical and mental, in the urban environment efficiently and creatively. This phenomenological study investigates parkour practitioners, referred to as traceurs, and their alternative appropriations of urban spaces, defining the essence of their lived experiences. Utilizing the interview as the primary data collection method, as well as first and third person video investigation, data was collected from parkour practitioners and parkour communities from the Midwest in the United States in order to define the essence of their collective lived experiences. The purpose of this study is to understand the contemporary perspective through which parkour practitioners view and experience the urban environment in order to contribute to the scholarly conversation between architecture, parkour, and urban space. The importance and significance of this study is to investigate a contemporary perspective on, and
interaction with, urban space in order to understand this new usage of the city, identifying which urban conditions facilitate these movements so that designers can effectively incorporate this type of movement expression into urban spaces. Employing a qualitative phenomenological research methodology that is built upon the theories and writings of Henri Lefebvre, Iain Borden, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Juhani Pallasmaa, Michel Serres, Bruno Latour, Julie Angel, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and Matthew Lamb, this investigation addresses the main research question: What defines the essence of the lived experience that parkour practitioners have when they alternatively appropriate urban space through the practice of parkour? This study discusses the significant aspects of the experience that traceurs have before, during, and after their alternative appropriations of urban space within the framework of the writings published by these theorists. Discussion is present explaining the preparation that traceurs engage in before executing alternative appropriations, their physical and mental warm-ups, their alternative perspective of the city, their spatial analysis methods, and their interactions with risk, danger, and fear. The resulting descriptive narrative of the experience that traceurs have when they alternatively appropriate urban space is as follows: they feel a calmness and a quietness, a sense of power and weightlessness, a floaty-ness in their body of smooth, serene movement; the world around them falls away and their focus comes to the present moment,
focusing on the aspect of the space they are engaging in the present moment; they experience tunnel vision and have no thoughts; they feel their bodies and hear their breath; their sense of self steps back, removed, giving them a greater feeling of connectedness with everything around them, a oneness with the environment; their focus is solely on their movement and interacting with space, which is accompanied by a sense of euphoria and feelings of freedom; they are enveloped in a flow state. This experience of urban space through a flow state is examined within the framework of Csikszentmihalyi’s discussions on flow. Additional discussion is present explaining the experience that traceurs have when they complete their alternative appropriations, their documentation and sharing of their movements, their experiences of viewing the appropriations of other traceurs, their views and biases towards non-practitioners and authorities who view their movements, and their views on the relationship between their alternative appropriations and legality in the United States. Lastly, one of the most valuable outcomes of this study was the identification of certain urban conditions and elements which make urban spaces more ideal for parkour movements. These elements and conditions include thin low walls, suspended metal bars, multilevel sturdy platforming, railings, small square or circular objects, high walls made of durable materials, accessibility ramping structures, stairs and stairwells, tables, benches, trees, terrain variations, corners, ledges, lines or cracks on the ground,
having many obstacles in close proximity, varying distances between obstacles anywhere from three to fifteen feet, good texture and grip on surfaces, sturdily built objects, older and dirtier appearance to the space, and a spot that is considered public space. Images of urban spaces that have examples of these conditions can be found throughout this document. Designers can utilize these visual examples and explanations of ideal urban conditions to more successfully incorporate the movements of traceurs into urban spaces, giving these spaces a multiplicity of different uses for urban communities which go beyond their normative functions, expanding their provided social services and usage possibilities. Through defining the essence of the lived experience that parkour practitioners have when they alternatively appropriate urban spaces through parkour movements, this study expands upon the current scholarly conversation between architecture, parkour, and urban space, informing designers of which qualities and conditions in the city make these appropriations possible. Understanding this alternative perspective that traceurs have on the function of urban space has the potential to redefine how these spaces are fundamentally considered, understood, and conceived by designers and how these spaces are perceived, utilized, and experienced by urban communities.

*Keywords:* Appropriation, Alternative, Parkour, Phenomenology, Traceur, Urban Space
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE ALTERNATIVE APPROPRIATION OF
URBAN SPACE BY PARKOUR PRACTITIONERS

A thesis submitted
To Kent State University in partial
Fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Science

by

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PREFACE

While studying at Kent State University, I had the opportunity to experience Florence, Italy, along with other European cities and countries, as a part of their study abroad program. While spending a week in London, my travel partners and I took a trip out to Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park to experience the Olympic architecture of the sporting venues. During our exploration of the Olympic grounds, we stumbled upon Tumbling Bay Playground, one of the most elaborate playgrounds I’ve ever witnessed. It was a fantastic playground, one of every child’s dreams. There were tree house structures connected with elaborate netting systems, interactive water elements, sand pits, slides, ladders, and all the wonders a child could ask for. Adjacent to the playground, there was a large sculpture that consisted of two slanted concrete planes that intersected one another. The sculpture is titled Cross and Cave by Heather Morrison and Ivan Morrison.

Figure 1: Re-creation of Paige executing wall run on Cross and Cave sculpture, photo by author
While walking along next to the playground, which was packed with twenty or so children at the time, we walked past the sculpture, and I saw an opportunity for a wall run. A wall run is a movement in parkour where the practitioner runs at a wall, jumps and places a foot on the wall to propel themselves upward to reach the top edge, and proceeds to pull themselves up to the top. As my friend took hold of my bag, I squatted down and prepared my body and mind for this feat of physical exertion. I took off running at the sculpture, placed my foot on it, and launched myself up the plane to the top. Upon reaching the top of the wall, the children on the playground took notice, stopped what they were doing, and began watching intently. I then proceeded to let go of the top of the wall and slide back down the steep slope on my thigh, very quickly returning to the ground. Within five minutes of performing this parkour movement, every single child on the playground was no longer on the elaborate rope structures or inside the tree houses. Every single child was now climbing on the sculpture, attempting to run up it, climbing on it, and sliding around on the sloping planes. Upon witnessing my parkour movements, the children were given a glimpse into my perspective of the environment, and this glimpse was fascinating and mesmerizing enough to coerce all of them off of this amazing playground and onto these simple, intersecting walls. This was the inspiring moment that piqued my interest in the perspective that parkour practitioners have on urban space, and resulted in my current research about this phenomenon. After observing the immediate and powerful response that the children had to witnessing the phenomenon of utilizing spaces and objects in this way, I realized, and began to appreciate, the potential alternative uses that reside within the spaces and objects of the city, waiting to be discovered and experienced.
My passion is creativity in all forms. Ever since I was a young boy, I was fascinated with how the world works and loved to be creative, building contraptions, constructing forts, designing games, climbing, running, and exploring the world. I followed this passion for design and creativity that was innately within, and this landed me in the realm of architecture at Kent State University. During my college years at Kent State, I became interested in parkour, an urban sport and movement art where practitioners utilize natural body movements such as running, jumping, and climbing, to navigate obstacles in urban environments efficiently and creatively. Emerging from the innate interests of my youth, parkour became a very enjoyable activity that I began to practice often, slowly progressing my abilities. Parkour was a great physical outlet, but also a very satisfying creative outlet, since the lack of rules or rigid structure to the practice left ample room for new ideas and inventiveness. Parkour has since become an integral and important part of my life. I have met many of my close friends through parkour and engaging in this discipline has helped me grow as a person immensely. It has given me greater self-confidence, made me more outgoing, and showed me that any obstacle in life can be overcome through hard work and effort. It is a love for movement, a passion for expanding the possibilities of what I can do with my body, and a physically engaging way for me to express my creativity and interact with the city. Practicing parkour developed and cultivated a new perspective for me on how I understood, visualize, and utilize urban spaces.

This is precisely the phenomenon into which this thesis inquires, the phenomenon of alternative appropriation of urban space by parkour practitioners. The objective of this thesis is to utilize a phenomenological research methodology to uncover, isolate, and define the essence
of the lived experience that parkour practitioners have when they use urban space in this way. A parkour practitioner experiencing this phenomenon and using urban space in this way is what those children on that playground witnessed, and it was powerful enough to pull them away from an amazing playground over to a simple pair of walls. That is why I believe it is worth studying. If this phenomenon is powerful and influential enough to elicit that response, one can only imagine what potential it could have if researched, truly understood, and thoughtfully incorporated into urban space design. With this inquiry, the essence of this phenomenon will be defined through the insights, reflections, and collective assembly and analysis of the data accrued from interviews conducted with various parkour practitioners in the Midwest region of the United States. The sections of the introduction summarize the history of parkour as well as the research methodology, terminology, and literature reviewed. The sections that comprise the discussion of findings compartmentalize the phenomenon into its different aspects, explaining each aspect thoroughly, and addressing the different research questions posed. The conclusions section coalesces all of the findings from the data collection into a concise discussion of the findings and suggests further possible impacts that these findings could have in the realm of architecture and urban space design.

Parkour is an urban sport, but it is also a beautiful movement art, and its popularity is growing. It is becoming more and more prevalent around the world. It is being taught in public school gym classes. Gyms and training facilities specifically for parkour are being constructed. Colleges are establishing clubs for parkour. Countries are officially recognizing it as a sport. Parkour is in movies, television, commercials, magazines, and very prevalent on the internet.
Books are being written about it and documentaries are being created. Events, jams, and even international competitions are being held for it. Athletes that train parkour are being sponsored. It is attracting greater and greater numbers of practitioners every day. Communities of people are being built around this practice. It can no longer be ignored or written off as something childish or countercultural. Architecture and urban space is designed for people, for all people, and as Bjarke Ingels once said, “It is our job as architects to make sure that our opportunities for expression aren’t limited, but that our cities match the life we want to live” (Ingels in *My Playground Documentary*, 2009). This emerging contemporary perspective of how parkour practitioners utilize urban space must be researched, understood, and acknowledged to uncover what impacts this type of space usage could have on the future functions of architecture and urban design.
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keeping me sane through the long, arduous transcribing and writing process. I could not have
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INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY
INTRODUCTION

Parkour is an urban sport practiced mostly in urban spaces within cities. It is a movement art and a discipline that emphasizes self-improvement and progressions of abilities, teaching practitioners how to overcome obstacles, both physical and mental, efficiently and creatively. Utilizing natural movements such as running, jumping, and climbing, parkour practitioners explore their cities and their potential, using creativity and their training to move themselves through space. Parkour also deals with the processes of the mind to overcome the boundaries and obstacles in one’s own thoughts, constantly changing, reestablishing, and questioning the perceived limitations and capabilities of one’s own body. Parkour enables children and adults to play without the need for specialized equipment, expensive gym memberships, or dedicated playgrounds. It is a sport that has been claimed to be accessible to everyone, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, wealth, or athletic ability (Toorock, 2013).

Figure 2: Paige Executing Cat to Cat, Kent State University Campus, Kent, OH, photo by author
Parkour was initially established in Lisses, France in 1988 by David Belle, who learned a military discipline of movement from his father, which was utilized by the French Special Forces called *le parcours du combattant* (Lawrence, 2006, p. 2). David Belle’s father, Raymond Belle, was a member of the French Army in the Paris Fire Brigade Unit. In this unit, soldiers were trained to be highly skilled at navigating burning buildings to rescue people from fires. Parcours du combattant is a military training discipline utilized for practicing the overcoming of obstacles quickly, and the training essentially focuses on obstacle course navigation. The intention of requiring soldiers to practice navigating these obstacle courses was to prepare them for the physical requirements of active duty. Navigating the obstacle courses prepares soldiers for maneuvering in live combat areas, for navigating burning buildings, for navigating overturned ships, and for navigating submarines that have become disoriented underwater (WFPF). Parcours du combattant has a spatial awareness aspect to it in that soldiers are required to navigate environments more efficiently through increased awareness and ability of how they can move their body through space and over obstacles to reach their destinations (WFPF). Raymond Belle described his movements in parcours du combattant as “something vital which enabled him to survive and to protect the people he cared about” (Belle, 2011).

Curiosity about the movement practice his father was engaging in, coupled with the boring, small town environment in which David Belle grew up, encouraged him to take an interest in practicing the movements his father performed (Parkour Generations). This practice of movement became known as *Parkour*, and others in the local area of Lisses, France began to take interest in Belle’s movements. A practitioner of parkour came to be known by the French
term *traceur*, meaning one who traces or to trace a path. The term traceur is used throughout this inquiry to refer to a parkour practitioner in a gender neutral sense. The practice was built around three main tenants that the original practitioners of parkour embraced. Those tenants were, and still are, to “Be Strong to Be Useful, To Be and To Last, and To Leave No Trace. Those are the three main tenants of parkour” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 119). In parkour, Be Strong to Be Useful is the mindset the original practitioners possessed. They trained for the purpose of becoming stronger, physically and mentally, so that they may become more useful to others and to the world around them. To Be and To Last focuses on the intention of training parkour for the purpose of being present; To Be, valuing and appreciating each moment during the movements and throughout life in general. To Last is the intention of a continued cultivation and maintenance of both body and mind through training parkour, leading to a physically and mentally healthier life for many years to come. To Leave No Trace focuses on the way in which traceurs go about their practice, meaning that the spaces and objects used for movements shall not be marked up or altered negatively in any way due to their actions. No trace of their presence should be left upon conclusion of a training session. Unlike more abrasive forms of urban expression such as skateboarding or graffiti which intentionally mark up the spaces of the city, traceurs express that they respect the spaces and objects on which they train and try not to damage or alter them in any way in order to maintain the spaces for future use.

Sébastien Foucan was one of the most notable members among the initial group that joined David Belle in his movements. Over time, the number of practitioners in the group increased and the group was formally named the Yamakasi Parkour group, established in Lisses,
France (Lawrence, 2006). The urban spaces and architecture of Lisses made the area very suitable for parkour movements, and there are notable, historically significant training locations there, which avid traceurs often visit. One of the most notable locations is the Dame du Lac, an enormous sculptural rock structure that was utilized to practice mountain climbing. The Yamakasi parkour group frequented this sculpture and used its surfaces and platforms for parkour movements (Parkour Generations). The group participated in numerous documentaries such as *Jump London* and *Jump Britain*, which exponentially increased the fame and awareness of parkour. The practice quickly progressed from this point onwards and gained popularity in Europe in the 1990’s (WFPF).

With the establishment of the internet, and globalization and sharing of cultures and experiences, parkour became virtually a global practice through sharing sites such as YouTube where traceurs uploaded videos of their movements for others to witness. Because of this sharing of parkour movements through the internet, people discovered the practice, and parkour practitioners and communities began to take root in cities all over the world. Many of the parkour practitioners who were interviewed as part of this thesis expressed that finding and watching internet videos about parkour was what first got them interested in pursuing the practice. “He showed me the video, and it was 3RUN’s Evolution video. I watched it, and it was so profound…What came to my mind immediately was ‘This is what I want my life to be about’” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, pp. 116-117). “My friend showed me this video and was like ‘Hey, this looks like the stuff you do!’…So I found out about parkour that way and started training myself” (Graves, Group Interview 1, p. 209). “I saw a video online…of this guy
bouncing around in post-Soviet era brutalist architecture buildings, just doing amazing movement, and I was just totally enchanted with it… and that’s how I got started” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, pp. 162-163). The use of parkour in television shows, commercials, and movies such as *James Bond: Casino Royale* starring Sébastien Foucan sparked the establishment and interest of parkour in the United States (Lawrence, 2006, p. 2). The relatively recent establishment of the sport, coupled with the even more recent establishment of internet sharing sites, has been a major contributing factor to why, comparatively to other sports, very little research has yet to be done on this practice. To my knowledge, prior to this research inquiry, the ways in which practitioners of parkour experience urban spaces of the city from a phenomenological perspective had not yet been studied.

The practice of parkour is very different from other competition based sports such as football, baseball, or soccer. Parkour originated as a non-competitive practice, focusing on the individual and progression of one’s own abilities. It is not about competition with other practitioners or about winning, but about one’s own external, physical struggle for the advancement of their bodily movement, and one’s own internal, mental battle against their perceived limitations in movement. The practice is focused on the progression of oneself and not about an application of skills in any competitive sporting event. Although, as the sport progresses, parkour competitions are becoming more commonplace, moving away from the founding intentions. Parkour practitioners both practice and train. They practice to advance their abilities and train their bodies, as well as minds, to be prepared should a situation arise that requires their parkour movements. “Parkour is really a creative outlet, in addition to being
physical movement, physical exercise, it’s really a creative thing that lets me explore what my body can do” (Hartung, Individual Interview 3, p. 99). “[What inspires me to practice parkour is] I guess just the challenge of it. It’s always fun overcoming anything really, learning new things” (Morell, Paired Interview 2, p. 185). “It [is] about pushing boundaries. It [is] about seeing improvement. It [is] a way to measurably orient yourself in a world where you [can] see that you [are] better than you were before” (Graves, Group Interview 1, pp. 210-211). When practicing, parkour practitioners will typically repeat the same movement many times in succession to increase both their mental comfort with the action and the familiarity of the movement to the body, honing their precision and control of both body and mind. The practice usually occurs in short, episodic moments of appropriation in an urban landscape, which are typically repeated several times until the satisfaction of smooth, clean, precise, and controlled movement is achieved. Parkour as a practice has a roughly established set of movements that have been categorized by practitioners of the sport over time and have been denoted by specific names. This collection or index of movements that are given specific terms includes types of actions such as vaults, leaps, flips, rolls, grabs, hangs, steps, and runs. Several examples of these terms include cat grab, wall run, side flip, kong vault, kash vault, climb up, precision jump or pre, stride, plyo, lache, wall spin, palm spin, wall flip, and the list goes on and on. All of these movements can be searched online, where tutorials can be found explaining step by step how to perform these movements, as well as which progression can be repeated to work up to these moves. These movements are often executed in succession, which is referred to as a line, where the traceur performs several movements, one after another, in an urban space in a continuous
movement. While the established list of movements has been generally accepted by all practitioners of the sport, the list is fluid and open to interpretation by the traceur. Traceurs may add their own unique twist to certain movements or even discover a new bodily movement that has not been conceived of yet, adding another move to the index of the discipline. This fluidity and individuality of style in the practice of parkour leaves ample room for creativity to flourish, especially since no urban space is quite the same as another, meaning that traceurs must adapt to their environments and their own skill levels. This has led to the development of a wide range of styles of parkour, which can be identified and distinguished through different training techniques or foci for each traceur, creating interesting and unique executions and combinations of moves in urban spaces.

The ways in which parkour practitioners perceive and interact with urban environments creates a new perspective from which we can understand urban spaces, and uncovers new potential in the utilization of urban environments. Parkour and architecture, including urban space, are inextricably connected, as parkour is an interaction with the built environment, so it is important to understand how these practices interrelate and how they influence each other.
DEFINING TERMINOLOGY

There are several terms which must be addressed and clarified in order to accurately communicate the intent of this thesis. Those terms include ‘alternative’, ‘appropriation’, and ‘parkour’, or what it means to practice parkour as well as implement parkour movements in urban spaces. The term ‘appropriation’ means to take over something, in this case urban space, for one’s own use, typically without permission. Appropriation of urban space by parkour practitioners occurs when they are out searching for a spot within the city to practice their movements. Borden in *Skateboarding, Space, and the City* defines appropriation as “not the simple reuse of a building or space, but a creative reworking of its time and its space” (Borden, p. 55). The appropriation happens when traceurs use the space for parkour in episodic bursts of movement. When an urban space is discovered that has potential for parkour movements, the traceur will take over the area for a period of time while they practice, depending on the amount of potential in the spot and the intended length of the training session. Some urban spaces, in their layout and design, may present more challenges and opportunities for movements than other spaces, and the amount of potential also depends on the skill level of the practitioner. The higher the skill level of the traceur, the more opportunities for movement there are to be discovered and exploited in urban spaces. Parkour practitioners do not typically ask permission to practice in a space, they simply observe the urban landscape, find a spot, and begin executing their movements. Because parkour, when witnessed by non-practitioners, is typically perceived as dangerous or harmful to oneself, property owners and authorities are generally not very open
to the idea of the sport being practiced on their property because of legal issues. This explains why the appropriation of space is necessary for the sport to take place. The appropriation is the act of the movement itself, the moment when the parkour practitioner physically and mentally engages with the urban space to perform parkour movements.

The term ‘alternative’ is in reference to how the urban spaces are being appropriated by the traceur. This term is intending to bring the focus toward how people use the spaces and away from denoting the physical abilities of individuals. The typical use of urban space corresponds to the ways in which the spaces, and objects within them, were designed by architects to be used by occupants. The usual ways in which society has approximately agreed upon regarding the proper and correct usage of spaces and objects within them is also typically identical to this designed intentionality. For example, handrails are for holding while walking up and down a staircase. A staircase is an object used for the purpose of moving oneself upwards or downwards. A crosswalk is for walking across a street, and a bench is for sitting. A fence is for demarcating a boundary through which one cannot pass, and a door is a symbol for an entry point into a building. Every object within the city has a normative symbol associated with it, similar to a street sign. These normative symbols for usage are culturally known and generally followed or obeyed by society. Henri Lefebvre describes the normative usage of the city in terms of the symbolism of the objects which society places on them:

Architecturally, the city is reduced to an instrument, a juxtaposition of spaces, functions, and elements on the ground, where homogeneity overwhelms the
differences springing from nature and history, and the city appears simply as the likeness of a sum or combination of elements, reduced to the legibility of signs (Borden, 2001, referencing Lefebvre, 2012, pp. 116-126, and Lefebvre 2008, p. 127).

The term ‘alternative’ is in reference to the signs of typical usage of space and objects of the city described by Henri Lefebvre. ‘Alternative’ is denoting a type of space usage that differs from the regular, typical usage of spaces and objects of the city by most people. It is a usage of these spaces and objects in a way that alters and even contradicts their socially given sign and symbol, their purpose for use. This usage of urban space and objects alternatively to their intended functions encapsulates the outcome when traceurs alternatively appropriate the spaces of the city for parkour movements. The usage of urban spaces alternatively occurs when the ‘correct’ utilization of these spaces is challenged by the differing appropriations from traceurs that change the function of the spaces and objects, altering the functions from their intended usage. The ways in which traceurs alternatively appropriate urban space materializes in the usage of these predetermined spaces, along with objects in these spaces, when they execute parkour movements. By using handrails or walls, objects typically used for safety and enclosure, for activities like jumping, climbing, and flipping, a new means for navigating and interacting with the urban environment occurs. In this study, the alternative usage of space and objects that traceurs experience while executing their movements in urban spaces is what is investigated.

The intricacies of parkour, how skills are developed, how practice takes place, and the
implementation of that practice, can be somewhat confusing for those who are not active
participants in the sport. David Belle, the original mind behind the establishment of parkour,
discusses the meanings and workings of the sport in a documentary about his understanding of
parkour. He defines parkour as “a way of adapting to the environment around you, performed on
all types of architecture. It’s working on techniques through physical practicing to get over
obstacles” (Belle, 2011). Common goals in parkour are self-improvement, the progression of
skills, learning new movements, perfecting known movements, and expanding the capabilities of
one’s own body. Similar to other sports such as snowboarding, rock climbing, weightlifting, and
running, the goals in parkour are not about winning or overcoming the skill of others, but a
constant progression, advancement, and evolution of the capabilities of the human body. To
practice the skills and movements of parkour, traceurs will generally gather at a known location
that is ideal for practicing certain movements. Traceurs may also explore and survey the urban
environment to identify spaces with the potential for exercising certain movements. “When I get
ready to train, I have already explored the place and done reconnaissance, so I know exactly
where all the obstacles are. Then I design a practicing plan based on those obstacles” (Belle,
2011). Once a spot is found that possesses opportunities for parkour, the traceur will practice
movements, typically in a repetitive way, continuing to attempt the same actions over and over
again, slowly progressing their skills. The repetition of movements in a parkour spot is how the
traceur increases their skills: “the difference between me and someone who hasn’t practiced is
that I’ve been repeating the same exercise for two months. It’s the repetition that brings
confidence” (Belle, 2011). The repetition of practicing parkour movements is done for the
purpose of skill progression, and this practicing of movements often takes place in the form of a line. A line is a series of parkour moves smoothly chained together in a space. The majority of what is shared through internet sites like YouTube consists of lines that traceurs create through urban spaces. But it is important to note that this linkage of movement in a parkour scenario to create a line should be differentiated from a real parkour situation. A real parkour situation occurs when a practitioner is running away from something or someone, chasing something or someone, or quickly executing movements when situations arise in life. Parkour training sessions are intentional executions of movements in a space to practice them and progress their skills whereas in a real parkour situation, traceurs are not intending to practice parkour movements, but to utilize their skills and training to actively respond to situations where they are needed. Examples of real parkour situations may include events such as someone being robbed and needing to chase down the perpetrator, moving out of the way of an oncoming car, escaping from a dog or person trying to cause harm, or to avoid being late. Essentially a real parkour scenario is when the traceur must utilize their training to move their body to respond to situations outside of intentional training sessions. “In a real parkour situation, where you’re running away or in pursuit, it’s rare that you will have to make a precise jump, but learning precision is essential to mastering your craft, it teaches us control, it teaches us to be decisive, and precision demands a lot of concentration, and when you’ve done parkour, you know exactly what you’re capable of and what you’re not” (Belle, 2011). The purpose of practicing and the repetition is to progress skills, whereas in a real parkour situation, it is no longer about skill progression; it is about the chase, either running away from something or towards something. Many of the skills that
traceurs practice and drill are not necessary in these situations. In parkour, advancing skills can be for the purpose of preparing for possible future chase scenarios of long, continuous runs through a city landscape. But practicing is often simply for the purposes of personal achievement, exploration of movement, advancement of the capabilities of the body, self-progression of one’s own skills, and enjoyment.
METHODOLOGY

For this thesis, a phenomenological qualitative research methodology was utilized to understand and define the essence of the lived experience of the alternative appropriation of urban space by traceurs. Phenomenology is the study of the lived experience of a phenomenon, with the objective of defining the essence of the lived experience. This is accomplished through the compilation of descriptions of the experiences of the phenomenon from many different individuals (Creswell, p. 122). Qualitative research studies are both objective and subjective in nature, and require the researcher to play an integral role in the data analysis to determine the essence of the phenomenon being studied. A phenomenon refers to any type of lived experience, such as the experience of petting a dog or the experience of bungee jumping off a bridge. For this thesis, the phenomenon being studied is the experience that parkour practitioners have when they appropriate urban space for their movements. Following the theories and writings of Henri Lefebvre, Iain Borden, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Matthew Lamb, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Julie Angel, Juhani Pallasmaa, Michel Serres, and Bruno Latour, this study engages with the phenomenological approach to understand the phenomenon of alternative appropriation of urban space by traceurs. This inquiry defines the essence of the lived experience that parkour practitioners encounter when interacting with urban space while practicing parkour. This study utilizes the interview as the primary method for data collection and for understanding the essence of the lived experience. Additional methods of data collection were employed, including video investigation, photography, and urban space analysis, and will be discussed further in the chapter.
pertaining to the procedures for data collection.
DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES AND TARGET POPULATION

This phenomenological study utilizes several methods of data collection in order to understand and define the essence of the lived experience of the phenomenon of alternative appropriation of urban space by parkour practitioners. The primary data collection method implemented was the interview, with the goal of explaining and defining the physical, mental, and possibly even spiritual aspects of the phenomenon. Parkour practitioners from cities in the Midwest were interviewed about their experiences of the phenomenon. Most of the interviews were collected from willing traceurs who participated in one of the three large scale public parkour gatherings called parkour jams that occurred during the data collection phase in different cities in the Midwest. Parkour jams are large scale gathering events when parkour practitioners travel to a location to come together for several days and train parkour as a large group. Jams are typically focused around established indoor parkour gyms in cities and all the traceurs train together both at the gym and around the city at different popular local spots. These three jams occurred in Cleveland, Ohio with Awaken Parkour, Cincinnati, Ohio with Swift Movement, and Ann Arbor, Michigan with Phoenix Freerunning. Other interviews were set up through direct contact and communication, either in person or electronically through email, with specific traceurs prior to the interviews.

Collectively, eighteen parkour practitioners were interviewed for this analysis, including varying ages and years of experience with parkour. All traceurs signed a waiver of participation in this thesis and all traceurs permitted full disclosure of identity and any information spoken
during the interview process, as well as full permission to display any video footage collected of them.

The full interview transcripts utilized in this analysis can be found in the Appendix. Six of the parkour practitioners were interviewed individually, four were interviewed in pairs, and eight were interviewed in groups of four. The results uncovered through the interviews pertaining to different groups sizes were collectively very similar to each other and group size of the interviews did not appear to change the conclusions or explanations of their lived experiences. The following graphs show the spread of ages and experience levels of the eighteen traceurs, Figure 3 and Figure 4 respectively, who participated in this study, sixteen of which were males
and two of which were females.

Figure 3 – Ages of Interviewed Practitioners

Figure 4 – Experience of Interviewed Practitioners with Parkour
It was suggested that there may be variations in the level of detail of the descriptions of their lived experiences based on group size, with groups going into greater depth by building on each other’s thoughts. But the individual interviewees went into just as much, if not more, depth pertaining to the explanation of their experiences as the larger groups. It was found that the data collected from all of the three varied group sizes was cohesively similar, and that individuals expressed many similar experiences and opinions regardless of interview group size. The larger groups tended to have longer discussions on each topic presented to them, and often built on each other’s thoughts, which led to deeper discussions. All interviews, except for one conducted via Skype, were conducted in person with traceurs, either at jams, in parkour gyms, or at their homes. The interviews varied in length depending upon both the size of the group and the amount of depth they went into on each question, ranging from thirty minutes up to four hours.

Upon traveling to the parkour jams, I engaged the parkour community through accompaniment to parkour practice locations and trained parkour movements with the attendees of the jams. Throughout the practice sessions, interview questions, along with the other forms of data collection, were conducted with different individuals and groups of individuals at varying points. These varying points included before practice had begun, during the training sessions, and once the sessions had concluded. All interviews were recorded and documented, both video and audio, using a GoPro HERO4 Black, and then later transcribed. The fully transcribed interview transcripts can be found in the appendix.

The interviews consisted of many open-ended questions that were written so that the interviewees were not swayed in any particular direction or towards any specific responses,
avoiding leading questions. In order to accurately and fully understand the essence of a complex phenomenon, it is most effective to ask open-ended, non-directional questions that are broad and encompassing (Creswell, pp. 138-139). The questions for the traceurs were designed to encourage them to elaborate on and convey their lived experiences when they alternatively appropriate urban spaces. The interview questions evolved throughout the interview process. Certain questions were omitted because they were not producing relevant discussion from traceurs, and other questions were reworded and added. These questions produced more focused discussions on additional relevant data points that were discovered throughout the interview process. All of the interviews followed the specific order of the script and included the following questions:

**Interview Script**

---Initial Warm-Up/Ice-Breaker Questions

- What is your name, where are you from, and how long have you been practicing parkour?
- Tell me your story. How did you initially get involved with parkour?
- What does parkour mean to you and why do you practice it? What inspires you to practice? Do you have a goal/goals associated with parkour?
---Location of the Phenomenon

-How do you prepare to go out and practice parkour? Physically? Mentally? Spiritually?

-Where do you choose to go to practice parkour?

-Why these locations specifically? What qualities of these locations make them ideal for practicing parkour?

---Explaining the Phenomenon (general)

-Can you describe how you feel, physically, mentally, and spiritually, when you are preparing to execute a movement or run a line? Describe your experience when you are preparing to do a move.

-Can you describe how you feel, physically, mentally, and spiritually, when you are in the process of executing a movement or running a line? Describe your experience when you are performing parkour.

-Can you describe how you feel, physically, mentally, and spiritually, when you have just completed executing a movement or running a line? Describe your experience after you have successfully landed the move you just executed.

---Details about the Phenomenon (specific)

-Describe your physical, mental/emotional, and spiritual interaction with urban space when you are executing a parkour move.
---Impacts of the Phenomenon

-What are the physical, mental/emotional, and spiritual effects that you have experienced through practicing parkour? How has parkour affected you physically, mentally, and/or spiritually?

-Are there any additional ways in which parkour has impacted your life?

---Viewing the Phenomenon/ Reactions to the Phenomenon

-How have other parkour practitioners typically responded to seeing you execute parkour movements?

-Have you noticed how non-parkour practitioners, bystanders, typically respond to seeing you execute parkour movements?

-Have you noticed how the police typically respond to seeing you execute parkour movements?

-What is your individual experience, what you think and feel, when you are watching another parkour practitioner perform a movement?

---Documentation of the Phenomenon

-Do you ever document you parkour movements, and if so, how do you document them? Follow up if yes: Do you share your documentation of your movements with others? If so, where/how do you share it?

-How do you feel about the way in which parkour is portrayed on the internet, in movies, and on television?
---The Phenomenon and Legality

- What is your perception/opinion on the element of risk and danger in parkour?
- What is your perception/opinion on the elements of trespassing and legal issues in parkour?
- Describe the typical interactions that you have with police/property owners.

---Wrap-Up Questions

- If at all, how has parkour affected you as a person?
- How has the practice of parkour impacted the way you view or understand urban space, the environment of the city, compared to how you understood it before you began practicing parkour?
- What role, if any, do you think creativity plays in parkour?
- If you could describe what parkour means to you in three words, what would they be?

Another method of data collection used was video investigation. Video investigation was implemented in order to document and convey several important facets of the study relating to the understanding and analysis of the types of spaces in which the phenomenon was occurring. Utilizing a GoPro HERO4 Black camera mounted on a GVB 3-Axis Handheld Gimbal Stabilizing Mount for filming, the complexities of the physical and spatial qualities of the urban spaces in which the phenomenon occurred were documented. Because parkour cannot be practiced without a space in which to execute movements, parkour and the urban spaces themselves are inextricably connected. Therefore it is essential to analyze and understand the
spaces in which the phenomenon occurs in order to fully determine the essence of the lived experiences of the traceurs. Also, some of the appropriations themselves, the parkour movements at the jam events, were recorded. This footage was analyzed to assist in answering the research questions. The filming of the movement was employed in both first and third person modes to record and capture the first person experiential perspective of the traceur as well as the totality of the movements in urban spaces. The first person perspective assists in bolstering the understanding of the personal, intimate experience of the phenomenon, and attempts to convey the feeling of the lived experience of the movements and interactions to non-practitioners. The third person footage serves to enhance the understanding of the first person footage, showing holistically how the traceurs navigate through, and interact with, the urban landscape.

To address the subquestion pertaining to the identification of qualities of urban spaces that create greater potential for the phenomenon to occur, data collection procedures were implemented including photography, video investigation, and compilation/analysis of previously identified parkour locations. Photography and video recordings were used to document certain spaces, objects, and layouts in the environments where the phenomenon of alternative appropriation occurred. Elements within urban spaces were documented and catalogued using photography, video recordings, and analysis of previously identified parkour locations. The compilation of the surveying and photography resulted in the identification of common qualities of urban spaces which saturate them with the potential for alternative usage by traceurs.

In order to address the research questions proposed by this inquiry, parkour practitioners who perform these alternative appropriations of urban space are the target population from which
the essence of the lived experience of the phenomenon has been derived. The sample of parkour practitioners was taken from specific cities in the Midwest region of the United States, including cities in Michigan, Ann Arbor and Flint, and cities in Ohio, including Cincinnati, Cleveland, Akron, Kent, and Columbus. These cities were chosen because of their closeness in proximity to Kent State University and because of their known, well-established parkour communities. The traceurs who were interviewed ranged from ages eighteen to thirty-five, and included both male and female practitioners. The interviewees are predominantly male due to the disproportionately high number of male athletes who attended the parkour gatherings at which the interviews were conducted. The participants were of multiple ethnicities, races, skill levels, income brackets, and backgrounds. The participants also varied in their years of experience with parkour, ranging from less than a year of experience up to nine years of experience. The sampling of the parkour practitioners was selected based upon willingness of participation of the practitioners at the parkour jam events and focused targeting of parkour community leaders and more experienced traceurs with greater experience and connection with the sport. Some traceurs were chosen intentionally, either for their known longevity of experience with parkour or for their positions as leaders within their local parkour communities. These specific traceurs were targeted for these reasons because they are more involved in the sport and have been for a longer period of time than other, newer practitioners. The longevity of their involvement with parkour gives them a more extensive involvement with the phenomenon, providing them with a wider range of experiences from which they can cogitate on. Their extensive involvement with the sport allows them to speak about their experiences in greater depth and thought, going into greater detail than
other practitioners that have not dedicated as much time and energy into parkour. The intended audience for this phenomenological study includes parkour practitioners and organizations, the parkour community, architects and designers, urban and city planners, and other phenomenological researchers.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

It is ideal for phenomenological qualitative inquiries to have a single main research question accompanied by several subquestions which support and further specify the primary question (Creswell, pp. 140-142). For this phenomenological investigation, the primary research question is directed at the moments during the alternative appropriations of traceurs, their lived experience of the phenomenon:

-What defines the essence of the lived experience of traceurs when they alternatively appropriate urban space through the practice of parkour?

This main research question is supported by six subquestions which reinforce the understanding of the phenomenon. The subquestions focus on the experience of the preparation of the traceurs directly before they experience the phenomenon and their experience directly after experiencing the alternative appropriations of urban space:
---Before Experiencing the Phenomenon:

- What are the qualities and aspects of urban spaces that traceurs identify which create a greater potential for alternative appropriations?
- What roles do risk, danger, and fear play in the traceur’s preparation for the experience of the phenomenon?
- How does experiencing the phenomenon impact the traceurs’ understanding of the city and urban space? How does it change their perception?

---After Experiencing the Phenomenon:

- How are the events when traceurs are experiencing the phenomenon perceived by other traceurs and onlookers as explained from the perspective of traceurs?
- What are the legal issues associated with appropriating urban spaces in this way, and how do authorities/property owners respond?
- How is the phenomenon documented and shared with others, and what are the intentions of sharing this documentation?

The purpose of these subquestions is to further investigate the primary research question from several different angles of inquiry for the purpose of establishing a better overall understanding of the entirety of the phenomenon. Asking these questions seeks to understand the phenomenon from different perspectives and to grasp the full significance of the experience on the lives of the traceurs who engage in the practice of parkour. These subquestions also intend to
discover in what contexts the phenomenon is more likely to occur, as well as inquiring into how the phenomenon is documented and shared with others. Additionally, these subquestions address the question of how the perspectives of traceurs are impacted by practicing parkour, and inquire into the elements of risk, danger, and fear which are commonly attributed to the sport by the media and by non-practitioners. The procedures implemented for data collection were chosen for the purpose of answering these questions in order to uncover the essence of the phenomenon, establishing an understanding of alternative appropriation of urban space by parkour practitioners.
PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Architects, designers, and urban planners currently design for the normative usage of urban spaces. But the newer, innovative, contemporary ways through which parkour practitioners alternatively appropriate and interact with urban space to encourage creativity and play have yet to be introduced into the range of perspectives through which urban spaces are designed and understood by these professions. Reintroducing play into the lives of adults through physical engagement with space can be reinvigorating, as “aspects of play can sometimes be the remnants of earlier ways of extending a direct relation to the cosmos” (Lefebvre, 2008). Traceurs, through their unique appropriations of space, do not simply observe and walk through urban spaces. They physically engage their environment, transforming these normative, bland social spaces into engaging, dynamic, repurposed, and interesting spaces where interaction, exploration, play, and creativity thrive. The intention of this phenomenological study is to understand and define the essence of the lived experience of the phenomenon of alternative appropriation of urban space that parkour practitioners experience.

In order to generate a meaningful, effective, substantive conversation between parkour and architecture, it is necessary to first establish parkour, and the experience that traceurs have when they appropriate urban space, in a framework of scholarly, in-depth research. This inquiry aims to uncover and define the essence of the lived experience of what it is to perform parkour movements in urban spaces, the essence of the experienced relationship between parkour practitioners and urban spaces when they are performing movements. The purpose and intention
of this phenomenological study is to define the phenomenon of alternative appropriation of urban space by parkour practitioners with the larger objective of contributing to the framework through which a scholarly conversation between parkour and architecture can continue to develop. Conceiving of urban spaces through this new perspective that parkour practitioners have experienced is a completely different viewpoint for designers to consider when envisioning the functions of urban spaces within the city. It is important to define how this new perspective relates to architecture and to understand what impacts this new perspective could have on the design and function of urban space. The normative urban public spaces, typically parks of grass, trees, and benches used primarily for walking and sitting, are transformed into immersive, sensuous, interactive, phenomenologically engaging social spaces when traceurs alternatively appropriate them through their movements.

Architects and city planners have only very recently begun to consider and discuss the implications of a conversation about the intersections and interactions of parkour, architecture, and urban design. Bjarke Ingels, a famous Danish architect from Copenhagen, engaged in conversation with members of Team JiYo, a widely known parkour group also from Copenhagen, in a documentary created by Team JiYo titled *My Playground*. In the dialogue, Ingels expressed that “there is an overlap of what we are doing and what you are doing” (*My Playground*, Ingels, 2009). He explains how “architecture is the art of creating the setting for human life” and that “architecture in the means and the goal is the maximum evolvement of human life” (*My Playground*, Ingels, 2009). Through architectural design, Ingels is “trying to bureaucratically plan it, whereas Team JiYo is just doing it guerilla style” (*My Playground*, 2009).
Ingels, 2009). Many of the buildings designed by Bjarke Ingels Group challenge or defy the traditional conventions of architecture similar to the ways that parkour challenges the traditional functions of urban spaces and saturates them with new potential. Klaus Bondam, the Mayor of Technical and Environmental Administration in Copenhagen, explains that he likes “to see that the spaces in the city are being used, because that is what they are there for. There is no doubt that if there is a lot of positive behavior in our city’s space, then that behavior will take the positive power within that city space and get many more people in that city space with positive behavior, which is certainly something that parkour can contribute to, because it gives us something to look at” (My Playground, Bondam, 2009). The positive energy and spectacle of parkour has the potential to reinvigorate city spaces by creating an invitation for others in the local community to either watch or take part in the spectacle and event that parkour creates. Signe Hojbjerre, a member of the Team JiYo parkour team, explains how “when you show that you look at the urban space and value it in a certain way, and when other people see that and also value it, it then becomes even bigger, and becomes a way of creating your own identity” (My Playground, Hojbjerre 2009).

Defining and understanding the essence of this perspective through which traceurs view and utilize urban space, and incorporating this new perspective in the designed spectrum of usage for these spaces, could create more evocative, engaging, community spaces. Additionally, the underutilization of certain areas of urban spaces can be ameliorated by taking into consideration this new perspective when designing left over space within cities. Often times there are areas of the city which are underutilized that can result from certain urban planning design
implementations or from the necessary elements of a city which are not perceived as suitable for public space, such as alleyways, backsides of buildings, and service areas. It is often in these underutilized, unattractive, left over spaces of the city where traceurs find opportunities for movement, creativity, and play, as I have experienced over my many years of training. Through the perspective of the traceur, all spaces of the city contain value and potential, providing these underutilized areas with value and usage. In Copenhagen, the Danish architectural design firm Kragh and Berglund created a project called Plug N Play which uses parkour as a means to give value and usage to planned building sites prior to the start of construction. They designed and implemented temporary sport parks in these cleared building sites, placing designed parkour equipment in this area for practitioners to use while the spaces were sitting vacant, unused, waiting for construction to begin. Upon the start of construction, the sporting parks are removed and placed in new locations, temporarily imbuing these would-be useless areas of vacant city property with value and usage through parkour and other sports. Through the practice of parkour, all of these underutilized spaces of the city are once again given value through the perspective that traceurs have on urban space and the ways in which they alternatively appropriate them for their use.

Through the perspective of the traceur, one is able to visualize both the possibilities for use and the value in all spaces of the city. Designing with this perspective in mind, that of the traceur and their appropriation of space through alternative use, could result in spaces that generate greater community engagement and positive social activity. Exploring and defining the essence of this new perspective and experience that traceurs have concerning both urban space
and the city is essential to understanding the possible future developments and evolutions of the functions of urban spaces. As Bjarke Ingels explains, as architects, “our intention is to open up for more possibilities, and then it’s great if the city and buildings meet what wasn’t expected, the unforeseen, the spontaneous, what’s coming. Life in the city is always evolving and it is our job as architects to make sure that our opportunities for expression aren’t limited, but that our cities match the life we want to live” (*My Playground*, Ingels, 2009).
LITERATURE REVIEW

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is an approach to how the world can be observed and explained by the individual, interpreting phenomena through lived experience. It is a study of the phenomena of the world, defined through human interaction in an attempt to expose the essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon (Creswell, pp. 122-142). Phenomena are defined as experiences that we engage and interact with, visually, physically, mentally, spiritually, and experientially. This sense perception, our interactions with the world around us through our consciousness, the ways in which we experience a phenomenon through our body, mind, and senses, creates lived experiences which can be understood and studied through compiling shared perceptions of a collectively experienced phenomenon. Through compiling the phenomenological interactions that humans have with a phenomenon, the essence of 'things' can be understood through the way in which they exist in the collective consciousness and interactions of human experiences (Welton, 1999).

The theorist and philosopher who first defined and established phenomenology as a term and a field of study was Edmund Husserl. This field of study makes a point of defining things, or phenomena, removing all preconceived notions about these things, and instead embraces the challenge to determine the true nature of things, the essence. The philosophical stance of Husserl was that all objects or things deep down have an essence to them, which can be deduced
phenomenologically through lived experience and interaction with these things. He philosophized that every object has a core to which predicates attach, defining what the object is to us based upon those predicates. Husserl refuted psychologism, taking the discussion of consciousness away from the scientific workings of the brain and towards an understanding of human perceptions that was more subjective but still objective (Welton, 1999). He wanted to establish a field of study in which human consciousness and perception could be investigated in a way that was scientific, but not in the technical sense. He intended to find the science of science, abstracting all sciences to find common pure logic between all of them (Welton, 1999). He was a follower of Descartes, but believed that Descartes did not take his inquiry into human consciousness far enough because he never investigated beyond the natural attitude of dualism, meaning that there is the self and the objects outside of the self, and that they are separate. Husserl argued that consciousness and the objects being perceived were all part of the same, connected mental process, the act of perceiving and the direction or target at which the act is aimed, the noesis and the noema respectively (Welton, 1999).

Transcendental Phenomenology was established from this inquiry, and led to Husserl’s Transcendental, Phenomenological, and Eidetic Reductions. His Eidetic Reduction is a strategy of getting to the essential truths, to get to the essences of things, and to get away from particulars (Welton, 1999). His intention was to determine a scientific and objective strategy for getting to the essences of lived experiences, but objectivity must simultaneously have intersubjectivity (Welton, 1999). This intersubjectivity could be attained through investigation and understanding of the Transcendental Ego, which consists of multiple lived experiences of different people who
have all experienced a common phenomenon (Welton, 1999). Through an objective analysis of all of these collective, subjective lived experiences, it becomes possible to determine the underlying essence of the phenomenon in question, this shared experience. These ideas assisted in the establishment of Ontology, which is defined as the study of being, or the understanding of what lived experience truly is (Welton, 1999). Phenomenology, as a method of inquiry, attempts to find true ontological meanings by stripping things of preconceived understandings or scientific assessments and gets down to the essence of the thing. This is accomplished through intersubjectivity, the documentation of many subjective descriptions of different conscious, perceiving minds all experiencing the same phenomenon, which are then analyzed to determine the essence (Welton, 1999).

The primary phenomenological theorists who have influenced architects and informed them about the field of phenomenology are Juhani Pallasmaa and Christian Norberg-Schulz. These theorists were inspired by the works of both Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the ways in which they defined and explained phenomenology (Pallasmaa, 2012). The phenomenological application in architecture refers to how people interact with built spaces and materials, physically, visually, and experientially (Pallasmaa, 2005). The architectural concepts of this discipline relate closely with those of Place and Space in architectural theory, placing the focus of experience on human perception (Pallasmaa, 2005). Phenomenology and Humanism also closely relate, reciprocating the focus on the individual and how they perceive their environment. This human perception is the description of our conscious experience and thus defines the method of phenomenological inquiry. Phenomenology cannot be categorized as
either a scientific study of objects or subjects, but instead the investigation and understanding of the lived experience of conscious interaction with objects and space (Welton, 1999).

The theoretical orientation of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in regards to phenomenology supported that the human body, with its physical nature, was a part of the material world, and that the mind is only able to realize itself completely through its interaction with the material body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Therefore, the body and mind act as one, existing and experiencing space and phenomena together, and constituting the self, which, by extension, also becomes a part of the material reality of existence. This notion of lived experience, the constant phenomenological interaction that humans maintain with the physical world, inextricably connects the human mind and body with the physical world. Merleau-Ponty’s writings and theories on the construction of the human experience, human perception, and human consciousness play a significant role in defining and establishing a framework for explaining how people interact with the built environment.

Michel Serres focuses his writings on the human body and the senses with which the body uses to understand and interact with its environment. Serres’ writings provide insight into how the physical, sensorial interaction between experiencer and experienced, the person and the urban environment, can be understood and conveyed through description to uncover the essences of these interactions. Bruno Latour addresses his spatial and existential theories on human existence and consciousness in his writings. Latour provides insight into the more spiritual, intrinsic nature of experience, dealing more closely with the connections that people feel with the object they experience and with each other. Investigation and understanding of the writings and
language of these philosophers and phenomenologists for this thesis have contributed to the grounding of the study in an existing theoretical, scholarly framework, within which the phenomenon of alternative appropriation of urban space can be properly defined and understood.

Parkour

The essence of Parkour rests in the physical and mental interaction of the human body and mind with the environment in which one moves. The phenomenological interaction that humans have with space has existed since the beginning, as human beings have always used and interacted with spaces and their environments physically, mentally, and spiritually. But it was not until the late 1980's in Lisses, France when the sport of Parkour was formally established by David Belle. Parkour emphasizes the intimate relationship and connection that the human body has with the world around it. The act of practicing parkour can be categorized as an alternative use of space, creating new potential for the use of these spaces, uses which the spaces are usually not designed or intended for. Parkour uses the urban landscape and built environment as an object of interaction and a means of transportation or movement of the body from one position to another in an efficient, controlled, smooth, thoughtful movement or series of movements.

The practitioners of parkour are few and far between, making the awareness of the sport somewhat disparate, which tends to produce prejudices about the traceurs that are perpetuated by mass media. The sport appears dangerous and life threatening for many people who witness these alternative uses of space, and for others, witnessing these movements becomes a form of
live entertainment, similar to a street performer. Evidence of these social biases about parkour are reaffirmed through how the sport is currently perceived by law enforcement, by the legal system in the United States, how it is used in movies and pop culture, the responses from bystanders that the traceurs who participated in this study reported experiencing, and personal experience from practicing and studying parkour. Studies have been performed which focus on the commonality of different injuries sustained during practicing of the sport (Taylor, 2011, Miller, 2008, Merritt, 2013, Marchetti, 2012). Other studies have been explored through writing and documentaries with the purpose of explaining the meaning behind the movements, attempting to reshape the public image of the sport through explanation and understanding (Angel, 2011, 2016, Saville, 2008, Ameel and Sirpa, 2012, Wanke, 2013). The intentions of many of these studies is to cultivate an understanding of what parkour is and what traceurs are trying to achieve in an attempt to combat the negative stereotypes of parkour perpetuated by the media and the internet. The current public image of parkour is generally one of danger and risk, painting the traceur as a daring stunt performer with no regard for self-preservation, seeing the movements as taking unnecessary, irrational risks. The general trend of most documentaries created by well-known athletes in the parkour community, such as Mark Toorock, David Belle, and Daniel Ilabaca, consistently support that the sport is a discipline of body, mind, and spirit. They equate the alternative interactions with urban environments to a sense of freedom from the designed constraints of society. They claim that this freedom of movement has spiritual, life changing capabilities for practitioners as they unlock the potential of their bodies and discover the potential of urban spaces.
Other theoretical and practical research projects have investigated parkour as a method of place making, examining how individuals or groups adapt urban spaces to satisfy their needs. Studies about the physical nature of the bodies of traceurs and how they compare to non-practitioners have been conducted, as well as the feasibility of parkour as a type of regular exercise. The psychological association that parkour has with self-preservation, risk, and safety has also been investigated, identifying the importance that developing these mental qualities plays in the sport. The majority of the studies, theses, and documentaries that have been done about parkour mainly focus on the practitioners themselves, concentrating on physical aspects of parkour, how the sport is practiced, the social image of the sport, and the intentions behind practicing it. They do not delve into the lived experience of the interaction with space, which is the gap in the literature that this thesis is addressing.

Julie Angel is one of the most prominent writers who focuses on the mental and physical relationships that parkour practitioners have with urban space. She has written two noteworthy texts, *Breaking the Jump: The Secret Story of Parkour's High-flying Rebellion* and *Ciné Parkour: A Cinematic and Theoretical Contribution to the Understanding of the Practice of Parkour*. The first text delves into the mental struggles and complexities of *breaking the jump*. *Jump breaking* is the act with which traceurs must constantly engage to overcome mental barriers and allow their bodies to execute movements. Essentially, this is a situation in which the mind does not believe that the body is capable of performing a certain parkour movement, and as a result, the traceur is unable to commit to the move and execute it. Jump breaking occurs when the practitioner is able to overcome their mental barriers and doubts, and finally attempt the
movement. Mental barriers are created by one’s own perceptions of what they think they cannot do, even if they are capable of performing those movements. After that initial conquering of mental doubt and uncertainty, the process becomes about repetition of this movement until the body and mind become comfortable and familiar with it, knowing it is well within one’s range of possibilities. These mental perceptions of the relationship of the body to urban space are discussed further in the data analysis section from the information collected through interviews with parkour practitioners.

Urban Space

Henri Lefebvre’s writings on the city concentrate on the understanding and interpretation of the interaction of the user and the city environment. Within the city environment, urban spaces play such a significant role in a wide variety of subject areas pertaining to the successes of a livable city. It is in these spaces where the culture, activity, and life of the city are provided the opportunity to manifest, creating an environment that fosters community growth, relationships, and provides a venue in which people can have a voice. Geographer Ash Amin theorizes about the role urban spaces play in the establishment and definition of regional and local cultures within the urban context. In his thesis article, Collective Culture and Urban Public Space, he explains how urban spaces provide the stage for self-expression and activity, which, in turn, creates the vibrancy of community and lifestyle for neighborhoods and even cities as a whole (Amin, 2008).
This concept of the individual taking over public urban space and appropriating that space to their needs is representative of Tactical Urbanism, where individuals within an urban environment have the power to go out and occupy space, appropriating these spaces for their own self-expression. Holistically, the sum of these individual acts of self-expression facilitated by urban spaces adds up to the culture and community of a place. Iveson discusses these concepts of Do-It-Yourself Urbanism and tactical urbanism in *Cities within the City: Do-It-Yourself Urbanism and the Right to the City*. Alternative appropriation of urban spaces by traceurs aligns with this category of tactical, cultural, personal adaption of these environments. Herein lays the potential for a completely new take on urban space. By looking at these urban spaces from the perspective of how they are used alternatively by traceurs instead of how they are typically used, new potentials can be discovered for these spaces. These discoveries could increase the capabilities and the utilities of urban spaces and what they can really do for a community, a city, and a culture, providing opportunities for physical expression, play, creativity, community building, spectacle, fuller utilization, and greater appreciation for all spaces of the city.

Whyte explains visually in his documentary *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, just how much of an impact these conditions of open, occupiable public space within the urban context can have on the successful creation of a cohesive, interactive community. Pia Allerslev, the Mayor of Culture and Leisure in Copenhagen, proclaims that “the city should have spaces with room for the unorganized and spontaneous. [She] think[s] that’s a good philosophy. Let’s make a usable city. Let’s build the city so it’s usable for the groups of people we haven’t thought
of before” (My Playground, Allerslev, 2009). Bjarke Ingels, an architect and the creator of Bjarke Ingels Group, explains that his intention as an architect is “to give our architecture many layers from the beginning instead of just one single function, and these many possibilities facilitate even more possibilities than we had imagined. It’s a way to make it even more diverse, from the beginning” (My Playground, Ingels, 2009). Jens Kramer Mikkelsen, the Managing Director of Copenhagen City and Port Development, claims that “parkour is a fantastic activity, that matches the development of the modern and urban city, and [he] think[s] it’s important to focus, not on the organized, but unorganized part of it. What can we do while we are building the city? Use spaces that aren’t being used yet, and create some life and traditions, before the spaces turn into construction sites, and test different possibilities of activity” (My Playground, Mikkelsen, 2009). There are hidden potentials in urban spaces which traceurs tap into when they execute parkour movements, and through their own personal experience, they reshape the way they interact with, think about, and occupy urban spaces. In order to be fully understood and utilized, it is necessary for this unique perspective on the urban environment to be explored and understood so that it may be applied intentionally in urban design development plans and become more than an unintended use of existing space.

Iain Borden’s groundbreaking 2001 text delving into the relationship between skateboarders and the urban landscape was very influential and helpful in establishing the theoretical and linguistic foundations for describing the similar relationship that parkour practitioners have with urban spaces. He explains that “architecture is constituted by the discourses and practices of social life. Architecture is not an object but a process, not a thing but
a flow, not an abstract idea but a lived thought” (Borden, 2001, p. 9). Borden argues that the historical context of conceptions and experiences of space does not adequately represent the constantly evolving realm of architecture. It is how society and people produce these spaces through usage that truly constitutes them.

Architectural history has not yet turned from conceptions and meanings of space, or experiences of space, to consider the production of space. To do so requires going beyond objects to processes, where architecture’s role in social reproduction is not limited to the spaces it provides or the way it is used, but involves representations embedded in architecture, in codified conceptions of space, in ideological and experiential as well as material aspects of building use (Borden, 2001, p. 9).

This similar way in which skateboarders produce space through their use of the city relates very closely to the actions of parkour practitioners when they utilize urban spaces and obstacles. The relationship between the architecture of the city and the skateboarder generates a deeper connection for the skater with the environment. “It is the intersection of the moving body and the physicality of architecture…unlike the scopic-dependence of the tourist gaze, user and architecture come together to create a new spatial event, an occupied territory. Architecture is at once erased and reborn in the phenomenal act of the skater’s move” (Borden, 2001, pp. 107-108). This elaborate relationship between the skateboarder and the urban landscape, their deeper
and intimate experience of the city, recreates the purposes and functions of the city and its architecture.

In his book, Borden often references the writings of philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre, who philosophizes extensively on spaces and objects of the city, how users interact with them, and how the city is experienced. He expresses that “the urban [environment has] lost the characteristics of the creative oeuvre and of appropriation, failing to replace the symbolisms, times, rhythms, and different spaces of the traditional city with anything other than dwelling units and the constraints of traffic” (Borden, 2001, p. 190, referencing Lefebvre, 1996, pp. 127-128). He is arguing that this banal normality of the city is becoming overpowering, shunning and rejecting any countercultural activities that challenge these socially accepted norms. It is these countercultural, alternative social activities that break the mold to create revolutionary city spaces. “Any revolutionary ‘project’ today, whether utopian or realistic, must, if it is to avoid hopeless banality, make the reappropriation of the body, in association with the reappropriation of space, into a non-negotiable part of its agenda” (Borden, 2001, p. 109, referencing Lefebvre, 1992, pp. 166-167). This reappropriation of the body and space is essential to bringing life back into the social spaces of the city, and “it is through revolt against normative spaces of representation that there is the ‘prospect of recovering the world of differences – the natural, the sensory/sensual, the sexuality and pleasure’” (Borden, 2001, p. 89, referencing Lefebvre, 1992, p. 50). With this revolt against the normative, “a ‘sensuous geography’ [is] created by a phenomenal experience of architecture, “a ‘sensory space’ constituted by ‘an “unconsciously” dramatized interplay of relay points and obstacles, reflections, references, mirrors, and echoes’”
(Borden, 2001, p. 35, referencing Rodaway, 2011, and Lefebvre, 1992, p. 210). Understanding the importance of the engagement the user has with design, with both architecture and urban space, is vital to creating successful designs that have positive impacts on the communities in which they are built.

The ways in which parkour practitioners appropriate urban space is a type of creative and revolutionary production of this space, and “architecture and the urban realm are identified as the locus of this potential revolution, not as a building programme or drawn projects but as the texture, the ‘possibilities machine’ appropriated by its residents. Architecture should be at once perceived, conceived, and lived” (Borden, 2001, p.12, referencing Lefebvre, 1992). Architecture and urban spaces are meant to be interacted with using all of the senses, and in order “to fully engage with architecture as a reproduction of the rhythm of urban life, one must not…stand outside a building and stare at its façade, but go be inside and outside of it as when [standing] at a window or balcony” one must completely engage with the architecture to fully experience it (Borden, 2001, p. 112, referencing Lefebvre, 1996, pp. 219, 229). Without allowing for this full engagement of architecture and the city, the full potentials of these social spaces are not utilized to generate positive impacts on the people, communities, and social climates of the city.

“Architecture…reproduces itself within those who use the space in question, within their lived experience” (Borden, 2001, p. 214, referencing Lefebvre, 1992, p.137). Through the actions of parkour practitioners, architecture is experienced to a fuller extent. Their actions transform the space into something beyond what it was before. It is through these actions that the potential of spaces can be uncovered, and these “actions are important not for their production of things, but
for their production of meanings, subjects, relations, uses, and desires” (Borden, 2001, p. 12, referencing Lefebvre, 1992). When parkour practitioners appropriate urban spaces, their actions are changing the meanings of the objects in the spaces and generating new potential for designers to consider. When referring to skateboarders, Borden explains that “these are…bodies which actively do something, which have a dynamic operation in the city, and which thereby transform everyday life into a work of art” (Borden, 2001, p. 12, referencing Lefebvre, 1992). In a similar way, the movements of parkour practitioners can be viewed as an artistic and deliberate expression of movement, a kind of dance with the city.

Like skateboarding, it is common to practice parkour in public spaces to avoid issues with police and property owners, where freedom of expression is allowed and encouraged. “It is in the open, public space of streets and squares that counter-cultural activities most readily take place, as these spaces are not yet dominated by the state” (Borden, 2001, p. 187, referencing Lefebvre, 1969, pp. 71-72). Both skateboarding and parkour are often labeled as counter-cultural activities due to the alternative ways in which these sports utilize the spaces of the city, going against the grain of how society intends for these spaces to be used. Although similar in their alternative perspectives on the usage of the city, parkour and skateboarding differ significantly in how practitioners of these sports view the spaces and objects within the cities based upon the interview data when compared with the writings of Borden. Skateboarders are often more damaging and harmful to city spaces, taking pride in leaving their marks and scuffs from their boards as a symbol of their presence in, and dominance over, these spaces (Borden, 2001). Whereas parkour practitioners respect and value these spaces, seeing them as training partners,
canvases for their artistic expressions of movements, and often trying to adhere the Leave No Trace tenet of parkour philosophy. The writings of Iain Borden and Henri Lefebvre discussing the normative nature and function of the city and its parts became a very influential perspective through which the movements of traceurs were framed, contrasting the normative usages of the spaces of the city with the alternative ways in which traceurs utilize urban space.

**Assessments**

The designed and built world, urban spaces more specifically, currently account for the normative usage of these spaces. But designers have yet to consider the implications that alternative appropriations of urban space, by groups of people such as parkour practitioners, could have on design. Generalizing and discounting the appropriation of urban spaces in alternative ways as risky and dangerous quickly excludes a vast range of possibilities and design implications for use of these urban spaces, isolating a valuable and different perspective on the potential of the urban environment. By omitting this alternative perspective from consideration and from the workings of design, a vast opportunity is overlooked. Urban spaces have the potential to be even stronger communal and cultural generating tools within the urban context, and this new perspective of the traceur is a meaningful perspective through which urban space can be reevaluated. The way in which traceurs, utilizing their entire bodies, interact physically and mentally with urban space is a dialogue between human and environment. This dialogue between human and environment, when perceived from this new perspective, can have far
reaching effects for the undiscovered capacity and capabilities that urban spaces truly possess, to create a greater sense engagement within a city and encourage the growth of stronger, healthier, more connected communities.
DATA ANALYSIS
INTRODUCTION TO DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter encompasses the cumulative analysis of all of the information collected through the interviews that was relevant to the main research question and sub-research questions, contextualizing this analysis of data within the writings and theories of philosophical authorities as well as analysis through subjective discussion and criticality. To define the essence of the lived experience when traceurs alternatively appropriate urban spaces, as well as to answer the subquestions of the inquiry, the interviews with traceurs were transcribed, compiled, and collectively analyzed to extract the essence, addressing all research questions posed. All data concluded and summarized from the interviews pertaining to the lived experience of the phenomenon was parsed out into three separate sections which formulate this chapter. The experience of the phenomenon was subdivided into three sections: preparing to experience the phenomenon, experiencing the phenomenon, and reflecting on the experience of the phenomenon. Each of these three sections comprises all of the relevant conclusions drawn from the interviews pertaining to that specific stage during the experience of the phenomenon. These three sections contextualize the corresponding conclusions relevant to each stage of the experience within the writings of the philosophical authorities on which this thesis was built. For certain aspects of each of the three stages of the experience of the phenomenon, criticality and subjective discussions are contributed to the analysis in order to clarify certain points, discuss the aspects of the experience in greater depth, and/or to address opposing viewpoints. All data collected and presented in this section follows IRB protocol. All traceurs were thoroughly
informed of the purpose and goal of the thesis, as well as the interview process, before being interviewed, as well as engaged in the signing of consent forms. All participants granted the researcher full allowance to use any and all names, quotes, photos, or videos collected from the interviewees for this thesis. All quotations and citations in this chapter that give reference to the interview data refers to the separate document containing the interview transcripts. All page numbers and interview number signifiers refer to the order in which the transcripts appear in the separate document. The following is the holistic explanation and discussion of the experience of the phenomenon of alternative appropriation of urban space by parkour practitioners.
PREPARING TO EXPERIENCE THE PHENOMENON

Initial Preparation

The preparation process for experiencing the phenomenon of alternative appropriation of urban space begins long before the traceur is staring down the movement they plan to attempt. The traceurs prepare their bodies before they venture out to practice their movements, eating healthy meals, drinking plenty of water, and making appropriate clothing choices for the current weather. “I try to hype myself up for it, get ready to go and eat a good healthy breakfast” (Morphy, Group Interview 1, p. 213). “I try to drink water and…I eat, and I try to not eat something that’s going to suck to have in my stomach…I look outside and make clothing choices based on temperature and whatnot” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 24-25). Traceurs sometimes watch parkour videos online before going out to train, looking for inspiration to hype themselves up or for information regarding specific movements they intend to practice. “I…look at videos of just insane moves that I hope I could get one day” (Guzman, Group Interview 2, p. 234). “Sometimes I’ll watch a video of a guy doing what I want to work on for the day” (Koehler, Group Interview 2, p. 233). Depending upon the religious views or spirituality of the traceur, they may pray or perform other religious actions before engaging in their training. “Spiritually, I pray…What I pray now is that I pray in appreciation, like ‘Thank you for a well-functioning body, and I pray that I can have it still after this session. But if not, thank you. I’m glad I could enjoy it’” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 26). Traceurs sometimes follow daily
exercise routines to keep their bodies conditioned and ready to perform parkour movements. “I have a routine that I try to follow,…something that conditions my body to be able to do parkour moves. I try to keep up with that so when I do go out and train, I’m strong and healthy, and capable of practicing” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 84). Upon completing their preparations, the next step for the traceurs is to travel to a location where the training can take place.

Identifying Urban Conditions

In order to find locations that are suitable for practicing parkour movements, traceurs will often go to previously utilized spots, spots which are recommended by other traceurs, either from friends or via online forums, or simply walk or drive through urban spaces looking for opportunities. The interviewees were questioned about this visual and physical surveying of urban spaces that they engage in when searching for training locations. Their responses addressed the first research subquestion pertaining to the qualities and aspects of urban spaces which create greater potentials for the phenomenon of alternative appropriation to occur. The ideal physical conditions identified by the traceurs which they look for in a suitable training spot include thin low walls, suspended metal bars, multilevel sturdy platforming, railings, small square or circular objects, high walls made of a hard material, accessibility ramping structures, stairs and stairwells, tables, benches, trees, terrain variations, corners, ledges, and lines or cracks on the ground. Several of these conditions were identified prior to the interviews through a
collective visual analysis of many parkour locations taken from online parkour forums, reaffirming the specified ideal conditions for parkour movements. In addition to these physical obstacles, the traceurs also identified other conditions of urban spaces which make them ideal for parkour movements. The other ideal qualities of a parkour spot include having many obstacles in close proximity, a lack of people, close proximity to the traceur, good texture and grip on surfaces, sturdily built objects, older and dirtier appearance to the space, and a spot that is considered public space.

Image 2: Thin Low Walls, Railings, High Walls made of Hard Material, Terrain Variations, Grand Fountain, Flint, MI, photo by author
Image 3: Multilevel Sturdy Platforming, High Walls made of Hard Material, Stairs, Dirtier Appearance, Many Obstacles in a Close Proximity, Grand Fountain, Flint, MI, photo by author

Image 4: Small Square or Circular Objects, Trees, Many Obstacles in a Close Proximity, University of Cincinnati Campus, Cincinnati, OH, photo by author
Image 5: Ledges, Terrain Variations, Ramping Systems, University of Cincinnati Campus, Cincinnati, OH, photo by author

Image 6: Terrain Variations, Multilevel Sturdy Platforming, Stairs, Cincinnati, OH, photo by author
Image 7: High Walls made of Hard Material, Good Texture on Surfaces (Concrete), Railings, Suspended Metal Bars, Cincinnati, OH, photo by author

Image 8: Ledges surrounding gardens, Tables, University of Cincinnati Campus, Cincinnati, OH, photo by author
In addition to these spatial conditions and qualities, another very critical aspect of ideal parkour training locations is negative space, the distances between obstacles and objects. The capability and skill level of each traceur varies, and therefore certain urban spaces or conditions may or may not be suitable for training based upon this negative space. This same concept of negative space is present in skateboarding: “both the presence and absence of architecture are engaged with when calculating certain movements on a skateboard. Both the walls and the gap between are equally important” (Borden, 2001, p. 107). A traceur must measure their abilities up against the spaces in which they train, meaning that some obstacles may be too far apart from each other to be usable for certain movements. In these situations, the traceur must either be creative to find a different way to use the obstacles to train a different movement or move to a more suitable location where the obstacles are closer together. The same scenario can occur in the alternative sense when a traceur finds a training spot where the obstacles are too close together and everything is within their skill level, providing little opportunity for challenge. Traceurs seek challenge. They seek new urban conditions that push the boundaries of what they are capable of, and through this challenge, they increase their skills in the sport. If the obstacles in a space are too close together, the space may not be challenging enough for the traceur and, similar to the previous scenario, the traceur will either have to be creative and discover new ways to challenge themselves with what they have or find another location with greater distance between obstacles. It is for these reasons why the negative space between the obstacles is equally as important to the obstacles themselves in ideal parkour training locations.

Only through practicing parkour can traceurs learn to visualize which spaces and
obstacles within those spaces can be utilized for parkour movements. It is through training that traceurs discover which qualities about certain spaces make them more or less ideal for alternative appropriations. This understanding of space and objects goes beyond the physical forms and materialities of these obstacles, including the negative spaces between them as well. Merleau-Ponty explains that space in itself can be identified as a form of experience, becoming more than just the physical obstacles presented to the observer (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). The spatial relationships, including negative space between the obstacles, can only be discovered and understood through the use of those objects, by moving the body around the space and interacting with those objects (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Translated into the experience of a traceur, they cannot understand the potential for movement that the space provides by simply observing it visually. Their bodies must interact with the space, move through it, feel the surfaces, pull on the railings, and only then can they uncover the relationships between the objects in a space. Upon revealing the spatial relationships of the objects through sensory perception and engagement, the traceurs are then able to make judgments about the functionality of the space and how ideal it is for practicing their movements. These judgments are defined by Merleau-Ponty as perceptions of the relationships between objects within the field of perception of an individual (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). These judgments are neither solely logical nor sensory in nature, but a combination of both thoughtful reasoning and lived experience that amounts to something greater (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). When traceurs make judgments about obstacles and the distances between them, evaluating which movements they are capable of executing considering the given conditions, their judgments are based off of sensory evaluation, reasoning, and past experience.
The judgments are carefully calculated assessments built from a wide range of different methods of evaluation to determine the possibility of successful completion of certain movements.

**Designing for Movement**

As discussed earlier, the type of alternative appropriation of urban space that traceurs engage in is rarely understood or acknowledged by designers of urban spaces, especially in the United States. Because this type of space usage has only recently begun to occur in the United States, urban spaces have not and continue not to be designed in a way that is mindful and aware of this type of space usage. As parkour grows and becomes more popular, the phenomenon of this type of alternative appropriation of urban space will become increasingly common as well, and designers will need to start taking this type of space usage into consideration when designing urban public space. In order to effectively and mindfully accommodate for this type of alternative appropriation of urban space by traceurs, there are several strategies, layouts, materialities, methods, and other design guidelines which designers can follow to create urban spaces that allow for these appropriations. By incorporating some of the elements, objects, and conditions which the interviewees identified into urban spaces, they can accommodate for these types of movements.

To makes spaces more suitable for parkour movements, elements can be included such as thin low walls, suspended metal bars, multilevel sturdy platforming, railings, small, low square or circular objects, high walls made of a hard material, accessibility ramping structures, stairs
and stairwells, tables, benches, trees, terrain variations, corners, ledges, and lines or cracks on the
ground. An ideal parkour location should have several of these objects concentrated in an area
where they are in close proximity with varying distances between objects, ranging from one to
fifteen feet. These objects within the space should be constructed out of a durable, textured
material that has good grip for hands and shoes and is not easily damaged or marked up, such as
stone, cement, rock, concrete, wood, or brick, all with rough rather than smooth textures. The
objects should be securely constructed, ensuring they do not shift or fall apart so that people
practicing parkour are less likely to injure themselves. The objects in the space should also be
specified to handle certain loads that would potentially be applied to them through parkour
movements, including forces such as impact loads, pulling forces, and pushing forces. For
example, railings should be designed and installed to resist the impacts from precision rail jumps
so they do not move, bend, or break when impact forces are applied to their center. Also, ideal
parkour spaces should be open to the public, designed and intended for pedestrian use.

Designer and theorist Juhani Pallasmaa emphasizes the importance of creating a sensory
experience of architecture for the user, denouncing the surfacial nature of ocularcentrism
(Pallasmaa, 2014). Ocularcentrism can be described as a solely ocular focus when designing
space, prioritizing the design of visual stimuli while, as a result, depriving the other senses of
experiences or perceptions (Pallasmaa, 2014). Pallasmaa argues that through this focus on visual
stimuli in design, architecture is not experienced in a way that is as complete because of the
sensory deprivation that ocularcentrism creates (Pallasmaa, 2014). Lefebvre maintains similar
thoughts, concluding that “modern architectural space tends to concentrate on the visual, on
objects and surfaces, ignoring the space of the body” (Lefebvre, 1992, p. 200). By designing urban spaces that welcome physical interaction, touch, movement, and play, communities in cities can once again utilize all of their senses when experiencing space rather than just prioritizing visual stimuli. “Space-production cannot...be reduced to theories of it, but must be seen as a process involving not only theories but also practices, objects, ideas, imagination, and experience” (Borden, 2001, p. 11, referencing Lefebvre). All of these elements are important components in conceiving and designing successful, functional urban environments.

Incorporating movement and play into urban space is necessary because “we have to have freedom of movement, we have to be skillful, we have to be flexible, we have to be able to speak freely without any of the other constraints of veridiction” (Latour, 2013, p. 347). “Space emerges as an ideological as well as material social production,...differential space – where differences are not only tolerated but also celebrated and emphasized” (Borden, 2001, p. 12, referencing Lefebvre). This space for expression, movement, and difference is what gives people a sense of freedom, community, and relief from the stresses of the city, providing space in which they can further define their identity. “The architecture of the city can be the means by which social relations are constructed. Practices such as skateboarding therefore suggest not only the redistribution of urban space according to the maxim ‘to each according to his needs’, but also the reformulation of the self according to the physical potential of the built environment” (Borden, 2001, p. 243, referencing Lefebvre). Through designing urban public spaces that can be utilized for parkour movements, the creation of spaces that encourage physical intimacy and interaction, providing room for freedom of physical expression, can be accomplished.
Pallasmaa argues that because of this trend towards a heavy focus on design for visual stimulation, our visual sense is becoming detached from our other senses, depriving us of a complete, fuller experience of architecture and allowing for no emotional dialogue with space (Pallasmaa, 2014). To provide the conditions which generate this fuller experience of space, architects can choose to create spaces that encourage both visual and physical interaction through their design choices, because “the way that...spaces are set up will inform, or give us an expectation of, how we’re supposed to interact with them” (Lamb, 2014). Through their designs, architects typically have premeditated intentions about how they envision a space to function, where people are supposed to walk, look, and sit. “These spaces are designed intentionally to give us experiences, or designed to elicit certain experiences from us” (Lamb, 2014). These planned choices about space are expressed and communicated through the physical manifestations of their intentions in the built environment. People are aware of, and often follow, these designed architectural cues that guide them through space, directing them and informing them what to do and how to behave. “Architecture communicates to us just as it communicates to the traceur, it will communicate expected behaviors” (Lamb, 2014). In an identical process, architecture communicates to the traceur which movements the space is providing for, encouraging them to alternatively appropriate it in certain ways. “Traceurs have a very intimate relationship with space and architecture, the reason being is that they are connected to it, corporeally they are connected to it, they feel it, they’re in it, and they work with it. Architecture communicates to them the types of moves and types of behaviors that it will require for them to move through that environment” (Lamb, 2014). Certain obstacles, materials, layouts, and
spacings when filtered through the ability of the traceur can signify through parkour vision which types of movement challenges the space affords. “If they are in a more tight-knit space, there is going to be more climbing, more vaulting, for height instead of for length, and if they’re in a more loose space, a more open space, it is going to require more running and more jumping across gaps” (Lamb, 2014).

Image 9: Tight Space, University of Cincinnati Campus, Cincinnati, OH, photo by author
By choosing to design space with this type of physical engagement in mind, architects can provide for and encourage people to experience space on deeper, more intimate levels. Through designing space in ways that intentionally incorporate physical interactions involving the totality of the senses, the alternative ways in which traceurs appropriate space will become increasingly commonplace, and “the more we experience these interactions, the more it develops a value or an expectation of behavior” (Lamb, 2014). When the designs of the spaces begin to conceptually support physical interaction with the urban environment similar to the ways which traceurs engage it, their alternative appropriations become more acceptable and understandable in the public eye.
Through alternative appropriations of urban space, traceurs develop emotional bonds, memories, and relationships with spaces and objects, and it is through their holistic sensorial interactions with these spaces that these deep bonds materialize. This experience of the city through a totality of the senses is typically not how the modern city operates, usually emphasizing visual stimulation prioritizing consumption. “Abstract space, beyond a commodity itself, is also the medium of exchange, and this is increasingly the model for the city, where all buildings and spaces are considered as opportunities for commodity exchange and purchase, such that exchange value is so dominant over use and use value that it more or less suppresses it” (Borden, 2001, p. 238). Like street skaters, traceurs are not concerned with the passive visual stimuli of commodification and are instead enveloped in their own physical and experiential relationship to urban space through movement. “In the face of such commodification, street skating does not consume architecture as projected image but as material ground for action and so gives the human body something to do other than passively stare at advertising surfaces; its motility creates an interest in other things, materials, forms, and in the skater’s own physical presence in the city” (Borden, 2001, p. 239). The experience of urban space for traceurs, as well as skaters, occurs through a full bodily engagement with spaces, objects, textures, and the materiality of the city. “The skateboard run is...distinct from the routinized, meaningless, passive experiences which [the city] usually enforces; it is a total focus of mind, body, and environment to a level way beyond that of the dead consumers” (Borden, 2001, p. 200).

Pallasmaa supports the idea of a haptic city over the modern city, a city which can be touched and experienced in more ways than just visually, as vision has become the dominant
sense that society stimulates while touch has been suppressed (Pallasmaa, 2014). Hapticity is described by Pallasmaa as a “sensory mode that integrates our perceptions of the world and ourselves,” and it is through this tactile sensory interaction that we grasp an understanding of the world (Pallasmaa, 2014). Through solely vision, we cannot fully grasp or experience the world, and it is only through the collective usage of all of our senses that we can holistically experience space (Pallasmaa, 2014). Pallasmaa provides an example of the experience of walking through a forest, detailing how our sense of smell is stimulated via the trees, plants, and wind, how our sense of sound is stimulated by the crackling of sticks and leaves beneath our feet and the air blowing through the trees, how our sense of sight is satisfied as we are completely enveloped in the environment, and how our focal as well as peripheral vision is occupied completely by the forest (Pallasmaa, 2014). Through a stimulation and acknowledgement of all of the senses, a space is complete and can be experienced holistically, which is why consideration of these other senses is vital in the design process (Pallasmaa, 2014). Pallasmaa explains how it is necessary to stimulate all senses, especially tactility: “the primacy of the tactile sense for complete and satisfying architectural experiences has become increasingly evident...Even visual perceptions are fused and integrated into the haptic continuum of the self; my body remembers who I am and where I am located. My body is truly the navel of my world, not in the sense of the viewing point of a central perspective, but as the very site of reference, memory, imagination, and integration” (Pallasmaa, 2014). By designing urban spaces that take into consideration our other interactive senses besides only vision, we can create more experientially enveloping environments, and designing spaces with parkour in mind can be a strategy utilized to achieve this outcome.
Currently in the United States, because there are very few, if any, public spaces designed for the alternative appropriations of traceurs, public spaces that are suitable for this type of movement already exist and are utilized by traceurs. This means that the requirements of a decent parkour spot are nothing drastically different from existing spaces. But by mindfully incorporating these slight changes when designing urban spaces, the ways that traceurs use the city can be brought into the intended scope of usage for these spaces. Following these guidelines, parkour can be successfully incorporated into any new or existing public space. "Fifty percent of our population currently lives in an urban environment, and in thirty-five years, that is going to jump to seventy-five percent" so clearly we need to reevaluate or think differently or change our points of view about how we can use urban space and what sorts of things we can do differently with space" (Lamb, 2014, referencing Gumpert). By designing spaces and objects with multiplicity of use as opposed to singular usages, urban spaces become dynamic, interactive, inclusive, multipurpose environments, providing room for a plethora of different activities and forms of self-expression, increasing the potential social services they can provide for local urban communities.

When Alternative becomes Normative

As a direct result of this discussion on space designed with parkour in mind, a particular question arises that must be addressed: if space becomes intentionally designed for the appropriations of traceurs, such as indoor parkour gyms or outdoor parkour parks, or if a space
takes this type of usage into consideration during the design process, are the appropriations of traceurs still considered alternative usages in these cases; and furthermore, are the movements in these spaces still even considered parkour at all? To understand this query, it is important to first discern what specifically makes parkour what it is. Parkour is about overcoming physical and mental challenges through executing a movement or series of movements to transport the body through space and over obstacles using a roughly established set of codified movements known and practiced collectively by traceurs, established based around the natural movements of the human body through space. By this definition, whether those movements from that shared set of moves are being executed in an urban space or in a parkour gym, the act of overcoming challenges through executing those movements is still considered parkour.

Parkour began in urban spaces, as traceurs creatively reinterpreted the normative usage of objects to find alternative ways which those objects could be used for training and for movement. The parkour gym is a relatively new development for the sport, as the majority of these gyms did not exist several years ago, and the gyms are still not common enough in the United States to support the needs of traceurs. Because of this, traceurs tend to train the same way they did from the beginning, by going out into urban spaces and looking for movement opportunities, appropriating spaces in alternative ways. The purpose of the parkour gym is to replicate conditions found naturally in urban spaces, bringing them together to create many of these different ideal parkour training conditions in close proximity to one another in a singular space. The parkour gym is essentially a reinterpreted version of a city and its objects, brought together to create vast opportunities for challenge and movement, similar to the way which a skatepark is
a collection of urban elements brought together and reinterpreted for skating. “Skateparks replicated and extremitized the terrains found within the modern city, enabling a new form of spatial engagement to occur, offering a controlled social space where police would not interfere” (Borden, 2001, p. 90). In a space designed for parkour, a parkour gym or a parkour park, the typical objects that can be found in a city, walls, railings, bars, edges, corners, stairs, and ramps, are taken out of context and reconstructed, reorganized, and rebuilt in a way that is suitable for parkour. The objects and conditions that are being relocated into a parkour gym are generally similar to those found in the city, but the difference is that these objects are being constructed with parkour movements in mind. The modifications pertain to how these objects occupy a space and how they operate functionally when physically interacted with through parkour movements. Unlike the unstable handrails, shifting concrete walls, and slick surfaces of the city, the objects in a parkour gym are purposely constructed in a sturdy way in order to resist the loads which parkour movements subject them to, and are made out of materials that have good grip. The objects are also spaced at specific varying distances from each other in order to make movements possible and to create challenge for traceurs of varying levels of ability. So overall, the objects found in a parkour gym are not drastically different from those found in urban spaces. The major differences are the layout, the sturdiness of the obstacles, and the grip of the materiality.

Even though a parkour gym is specifically designed for the movements of traceurs, it is just an agglomeration of different elements taken from the city that can still be creatively interpreted in many different ways, similar to a skatepark. “Skatepark forms do partially determine skate moves, but also a process of resistance and re-creation occurs as they challenge
themselves, creating new lines and new moves in the skatepark” (Borden, 2001, p. 104). So while a parkour gym may be designed and arranged in a way that purposefully creates premeditated opportunities for certain parkour movements, this space can still be creatively and uniquely utilized by traceurs in the same way that an urban space can. The type of space in which the appropriations are occurring, and what the designed intentions of the space are, do not change the fact that these movements through space that traceurs are performing are in fact parkour, requiring the traceur to develop creative ways to navigate space regardless of whether that space is an urban space or a parkour gym.

Image 11: Suspended Metal Bars, Multilevel Sturdy Platforming, High Walls made of a Durable Material, Phoenix Freerunning Academy Parkour Gym, Ann Arbor, MI, photo by author
Image 12: Thin Low Walls, Multilevel Sturdy Platforming, High Walls made of a Durable Material, Phoenix Freerunning Academy Parkour Gym, Ann Arbor, MI, photo by author

Image 13: Multilevel Sturdy Platforming, High Walls made of a Durable Material, Suspended Bar Systems, Corners, Ledges, Swift Movement Parkour Gym, Cincinnati, OH, photo by author
What this change in type of space does affect is whether or not these movements can be considered alternative. In an urban space where there are stairs, railing, and benches meant specifically for walking, holding, and sitting, the appropriations of traceurs are considered alternative uses of these spaces, because they were not meant for running, jumping, and climbing. But in the case of a parkour gym or an outdoor parkour park, these spaces are designed specifically for this type of usage by traceurs, and thus their appropriations are no longer alternative; they become normative. Because the spaces are specifically designed for this type of usage, the movements of traceurs are normative usages of the space, using the obstacles and objects for precisely the purpose they were meant for. In the case discussed above, that of an

Image 14: Thin Low Walls, Railings, Suspended Metal Bars, Swift Movement Parkour Gym, Cincinnati, OH, photo by author
In a space that is not designed solely for parkour but at the same time takes the movements of parkour into consideration when making design decisions about the space, the movements of traceurs are neither completely alternative nor normative. In this case, the appropriations of traceurs become secondary uses of the space. By incorporating and welcoming the opportunity for traceurs to appropriate an urban space that is not designated a ‘parkour park’, the space provides for a multiplicity of different uses rather than a singular use. In a dynamic space such as this, there may be handrails and walls meant to guide people through the space, but these handrails and walls are built in such a way that they are both functional for non-practitioners and ideal for parkour movements as well. Because the space is designed for both normal usage and usage by traceurs, the normative usage of the space becomes primary and the appropriations by traceurs become secondary, a recessive, but still viable and intentionally designed for, way to use the space. The appropriations by traceurs are secondary uses of the space in this scenario because if this usage was the designed primary usage, the space would no longer be a typical urban space; it would be specifically designated as a parkour park.

While the designated type of space is not significant in determining which movements are considered parkour and which are not, it is significant in determining what qualifies as an alternative usage of space. In a parkour gym, the appropriations by traceurs are normative ways to use the space. In urban spaces designed with parkour movements in mind, providing the
proper conditions for these appropriations to take place while still providing the normative functions of a typical urban space, the appropriations of traceurs become secondary. Only in an urban space that is solely designed for normative usage is when the appropriations of traceurs become alternative. It is important to reiterate that this thesis is not investigating the experience of traceurs when they are executing movements inside a parkour gym or in parks specifically designed for parkour. The intent and focus of this thesis is to investigate, understand, and define the experience that traceurs have when they alternatively appropriate urban space through parkour movements, targeting the experiences they have when they are using urban space in alternative ways. While the lived experience of traceurs may be similar when practicing in designated parkour areas, the focus of this thesis remains fixed on traceur’s experiences in urban spaces where their appropriations are considered alternative.

Criticality of Alternative Appropriation of Urban Space

As a practicing traceur, one must engage with urban spaces in alternative ways in order to execute movements and progress skills. But is this type of usage beneficial and positive for a city and its spaces, objects, people, and communities, or is this usage negative, harmful, and disruptive? In my opinion, the actions of traceurs walk a fine line between these two opposing viewpoints, and it really depends on how the traceur conducts themselves and goes about their training. Because the spaces and objects within cities are not designed for these types of alternative appropriations by traceurs, objects can be damaged and surfaces can be marked up,
ruining or devaluing the normative function of the space. If traceurs do not properly check surfaces and objects before appropriating them for training, they risk damaging property and ruining the aesthetics of a space. Although the majority of traceurs adamantly assert that they try to avoid property damage while they are training, property damage still happens, and this is definitely a negative impact that urban spaces will inevitably sustain in some way from this type of usage. The damage and devaluing of city spaces can be alleviated simply by incorporating the alternative appropriations of traceurs into the spectrum of designed intentional usage for these spaces. Objects such as handrails, benches, or walls can be specified to resist the loads exerted from parkour movements, which would mitigate and minimize most damage that the alternative appropriations could cause. Because it would not be feasible to modify every urban space according to these guidelines, the responsibility still rests with the traceurs themselves to use spaces in a way that does not damage property and does not leave a trace.

In addition to the possibility of damaging spaces, the appropriations of traceurs do have the potential to incite public unrest and cause a disturbance. Because parkour is a newer sport that is still developing in the United States, many people are unfamiliar with the practice, and seeing these types of movements being performed in city spaces may come across as discomforting, disruptive, or startling to some individuals. Often times through my own training over the years, I have encountered concerned citizens that see my actions as suspicious or abnormal activity, possibly seeing the way I am using space as a signifier that I am mentally unwell, under the influence of drugs, or attempting to commit a crime. Because they are sometimes unfamiliar with parkour, people can see the movements as reckless, endangering, and
unnecessarily risky. These situations often arise when someone witnesses alternative appropriations and are unaware of the sport and how parkour practitioners train. In similar situations, witnesses might fear that the practitioner is going to injure themselves and possibly sue someone. It is when these types of situations arise that the police often get involved, which creates a scene and places additional stress on law enforcement, which negatively impacts the community because they are preoccupied with the traceurs instead of with other situations that need their attention. Traceurs can work to fix or minimize these negative situations by having conversations with onlookers to explain parkour and their appropriations, as well as training in less crowded areas where the risk of injuring someone else or causing a disturbance is not as likely. Additionally, if their movements are making people uncomfortable, it is best to respect the opinions of others and simply move to a different location to train, diffusing the situation. Because some people might be unfamiliar with the sport, training in a way that is mindful and respectful towards the perspectives of the people around can reduce the occurrences of these negative situations. The alternative appropriations of urban space by traceurs do create the possibility for several negative impacts on the city and its communities, but many of these negative impacts depend predominantly on how traceurs conduct themselves when practicing their movements in urban spaces.

Along with the possibility for these negative influences on city spaces and communities, the alternative appropriations of urban space by traceurs can also have positive outcomes and effects on a city. Through seeing and using the spaces of the city in these alternative ways, traceurs give back value and use to neglected urban spaces and conditions. This value creation
through the care and usage of forgotten, leftover spaces within cities gives these spaces a purpose and meaning. Traceurs value their training locations because they view them as dance partners, tools for improving their abilities. They often form bonds with these spaces and as a result, they usually take care of those spaces, picking up trash, keeping them clean, and maintaining them for their continued use in their training. This not only expands the possibilities and functions of leftover space, but existing space as well, as many different spaces of the city are utilized for these alternative appropriations.

Image 15: Abandoned, Unused Urban Leftover Space, Grand Fountain, Flint, MI, photo by author
In addition to value creation and expanding the functionality of these spaces, traceurs also imbue urban spaces with positive energy and spectacle through their movements. From personal experience, watching other traceurs attempt and successfully complete challenges in urban spaces is inspiring, exciting, and very entertaining to witness. Practitioners are generally very positive and enjoy their training sessions, finding happiness and satisfaction in moving their bodies, overcoming mental obstacles, and completing physical challenges. This positive energy and spectacle adds additional layers of social benefits to spaces, giving people something interesting to observe, drawing people out into spaces to take part in the event created by their movements and giving them a reason to occupy these spaces for longer periods of time.

Image 16: Creating Spectacle through Alternative Appropriation, Paige Executing Wall Run, Cincinnati, OH, photo by author
Image 17: Creating Spectacle through Alternative Appropriation, Paige Executing Wall Run, Cincinnati, OH, photo by author

Image 18: Creating Spectacle through Alternative Appropriation, Paige Executing Wall Run, Cincinnati, OH, photo by author

Image 19: Creating Spectacle through Alternative Appropriation, Paige Executing Wall Run, Cincinnati, OH, photo by author
When this opportunity for spectacle is designed into urban spaces, traceurs become comparable to skaters in a skatepark, imbuing spaces with energy. “Skateparks and ramps...provide a theatre for the display of skateboarding in which skateboarding and its body movements became spectacularized” (Borden, 2001, p. 90). By utilizing leftover space and drawing more people out into public spaces, traceurs could potentially be making city spaces safer through the elements of energy and spectacle they introduce, because people are less likely to commit violent crimes when there are more people around. A leftover space such as an alleyway between buildings in a city theoretically becomes safer when occupied by traceurs, because there are people occupying and using the space. Traceurs often occupy and train in these spaces because their movements are not widely accepted by the public, driving them to practice in unused spaces where their movements go unnoticed. When an urban space is left vacant, there is a greater chance that a violent crime might occur there as opposed to a space that is actively being used by the public, so having traceurs occupying these spaces regularly could improve this issue.

While proposing that appropriating leftover space for parkour may make city spaces safer is a speculative potential benefit to alternative space usage, the benefits proclaimed by traceurs to their mental and physical health were supported by the interviewees. The impacts the traceurs noted from regular alternative appropriations of urban space through parkour movements were overarchingly positive in nature. The traceurs expressed that through their regular lived experiences of the phenomenon, they have become more confident, more outgoing, more motivated to achieve their goals, healthier, happier, stronger, and more capable. Their experiences of the phenomenon have helped them grow as people, made them who they are,
changed their lives, helped them move towards self-actualization, made them more outgoing, made them more able to overcome obstacles, physical, emotional, and situational, in their lives, and taught them how to take calculated risks and overcome their fears. Through their experience of the phenomenon, they have made many close friends, overcome difficult personal issues in life such as depression and addiction, increased their spatial awareness, become more creative, gained an increased level of trust in themselves, improved their movement abilities, and now strive to seek and overcome challenges in life. The traceurs have also incurred injuries and feelings of depression and sadness when they are not able to experience the phenomenon. The experience of the phenomenon has brought people together and formed communities around that shared experience, and these benefits can be disseminated to others in urban communities who choose to become involved with parkour, either through practicing the movements or through the spectacle these movements create. Alternative appropriations through parkour movements are a traceur’s way of expressing themselves within a public space, and this expression has the potential to provide some or all of the benefits discussed above.

Physical and Mental Warm-Up

All the traceurs emphasized the importance of stretching before beginning a training session in order to be safe and avoid injuries. “I’ll warm up. I always like to warm up, I never just jump into my movements. I always start with some type of joint mobility and stretching. Because again along with those tenants, To Be and To Last. You train in a way that you’re going
to be able to do this for the rest of your life, not just today and tomorrow, but to the end” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 120). “We start off all of our training sessions with foam rolling, followed by stretching, followed by dynamic joint warm-ups, followed by activation exercises, followed by low intensity activity moving towards high intensity activity” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 166). This stretching is often accompanied by the performance of smaller, easier parkour movements to warm up the traceur’s bodies and minds. “I start with slower, milder movement and slowly increase power. I warm up my body through movement” (Peveley, Group Interview 2, p. 234). “I’ll start playing with smaller movements, build up to the things I have on my mind that I want to achieve, smaller progressions” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 120). These smaller movements warm up both the bodies and minds of the traceurs, preparing their bodies for the physical exertions and their minds for seeing the environment from a parkour perspective, as well as preparing the mind to engage with risk and fear. “My mental preparation is that warm-up, too. That warm-up is mental and physical. Just as my knee won’t let me just chuck something big when I first walk up, my brain doesn’t really want to either. I shouldn’t do that to my brain either. So it’s good for my brain too to start with something small, like I said a pre (precision jump) and I just do it over and over…Start warming up physically and your brain will follow” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 26). Upon completion of all the preparation and warmups, both physically and mentally, the traceurs begin surveying locations and spaces, looking for movement opportunities and challenges.
Alternative Perception of Urban Space

In order to identify movement opportunities and challenges in urban spaces, traceurs must develop what they call *parkour vision*. Parkour vision refers to the perspective that traceurs have when they observe urban spaces, identifying opportunities for alternative appropriations of those spaces for parkour movements. “With parkour vision, you don’t have to follow the prescribed route, you have options, you can kick off a wall and grab another wall and climb up...It gives us options and ways for us to see space differently” (Lamb, 2014). Learning to see the city from this perspective takes practice and can be accomplished through a combination of several methods. A traceur acquires parkour vision mainly through regularly practicing parkour in urban spaces, helping them to get an idea of which movements they are capable of executing and which urban conditions provide the opportunities for those movements. Traceurs can also learn how to see spaces in this way by observing the ways that other, more experienced practitioners use space, either through online videos or through training in spaces with others. “Parkour can teach us a lot about city space and how to look at it differently” (Lamb, 2014). By observing other traceurs, practitioners can learn to see the city through their perspective and eventually see the city from that perspective themselves, identifying additional opportunities for movement that they previously may not have realized.

The interviewees were questioned about their alternative perspective on urban space, addressing the third research subquestion asking how experiencing the phenomenon impacts the traceur’s perception of the city. Through regular appropriations of urban space in this alternative
way through parkour movements, traceurs expressed that they have developed parkour vision, seeing a deeper level of potential for parkour movements in every space. In addition to parkour vision, they explained that they have developed better spatial awareness, a greater appreciation for architecture, a sense of value for all of the spaces of the city, a better relationship with physical objects, and a better understanding of heights, distances, materials, and textures. Lamb describes his experience of moving through a parking garage: “you feel the materials, you can feel the concrete, it’s kind of slick and dusty and oddly cold” (Lamb, 2014). This intimacy with, and understanding of, materiality that traceurs develop is comparable to the experience of the skater. “The city is presented to the skater as a preexistent object, who negates it through its opportunities and specifically through exploiting the texture of that space. This focus on texture gives skaters a different kind of knowledge about architecture, one derived from an experience of surface and material tactility” (Borden, 2001, p. 194, referencing Lefebvre, 1992, p. 57). “The microarchitecture of surface grain, asperity, cracks, and ripple become evident, translated into body space through judder, slide, and grip” (Borden, 2001, p. 35). Through their tactile interactions with space, traceurs augment their visual understanding of space by extension. Pallasmaa explains that “all the senses, including vision, are extensions of the tactile sense; the sense organs are specializations of skin tissue, and all sensory experiences are modes of touching, both literally and metaphorically, and thus related to tactility. Our contact with the world takes place at the boundary line of the experiential self through specialized parts of our enveloping membrane” (Pallasmaa, 2014).

In addition to their tactile and visual interactions with objects and materials, traceurs
move their bodies through space, experiencing new locations within the city, revealing new perspectives through this journey. “Parkour has the potential to really change our points of view about things...by getting the body to places it hasn’t been before to see things that we haven’t seen before” (Lamb, 2014). Encountering these new perspectives is important in altering how traceurs see the city, because “your point of view and position of the body changes how you see an object...because how we interpret something or how we perceive an object is really based on our point of view, and changing our point of view becomes very important specifically with urban space” (Lamb, 2014). It is through this movement that traceurs gain a fuller understanding, experience, and appreciation for the city, because “for a perception to take place, continuous movements and adjustments are necessary” (Latour, 2005, p. 169). The most fundamental level required is the movement of the eye, scanning, observing the world, collecting data. From this initial stage, the perceptions of the eye are reinforced, strengthened, and further investigated through the movement of the body; “we have to commit to a new movement of exploration in order to verify the overall quality of all the links” (Latour, 2013, p. 460). “We cannot express [space’s] relation to ourselves in any other way than by imagining that we are in motion, measuring the length, width, and depth, or by attributing to the static lines, surfaces, and volumes the movement that our eyes and our kinesthetic sensations suggest to us, even though we survey the dimensions while standing still. The spatial construct is a human creation and cannot confront the creative or appreciative subject as if it were a cold, crystalized form” (Borden, 2001, p. 106, referencing Schmarsow, 1893). The collective experience and perception established by the combined movement of the eyes, body, and physical interaction with space through the skin
verifies and reinforces one’s observations and perceptions of the city. “The less we just stare at the hammer-thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is – as tool” (Heidegger, 1962). By physically interacting with materials and objects through touch, as well as moving their bodies through space, traceurs learn about their environment in greater detail, developing a deeper relationship with the city, which translates to additional degrees of information that are recognized during visual observations of urban space.

Through their physical and mental interactions with space in these alternative ways, traceurs learn to experience the city in a fuller way, transforming their experience from passively moving through the city to an active engagement with it. When discussing the skater, who experiences the city in a way very similar to the traceur, Borden explains that “vision is...reconfigured from passive reception, dominant sense, and detached abstract meditation into an integrated and lived everyday epistemology; for the skater, every aspect of the city street becomes a window from which to contemplate and engage with the unknown city” (Borden, 2001, p. 204, referencing Lefebvre, 1996, p. 224). “Architecture produces living bodies, each with its own distinctive traits...it reproduces itself within those who use the space in question, within their lived experience. Of that experience, the tourist, the passive spectator, can grasp but a pale shadow” (Lefebvre, 1992, p. 137). “Metropolitan dwellers are simply witnesses to the functioning of the city, where the experience of urban space is like that of the museum, with visitors’ bodies controlled by an organized walking of contrived route, speed, gestures, speaking, and sound, a cotton wool padded TV programmed world” (Borden, 2001, p. 190). In order to
truly experience a space, one must use the space, not simply observe the space from a distance. When interacting with the city, traceurs do not simply walk through space as if it was a museum, passing quickly from one place to another. Like skaters, traceurs spend a far greater amount of time perceiving, analyzing, and physically interacting with urban space than most non-practitioners. “Skateboarders tend to occupy urban spaces for longer periods of time than the typical pedestrian quickly passing through, also using spaces outside their conventional times of use” (Borden, 2001, p. 198).

Referencing the dynamic ways in which skateboarders use the city, similar to the appropriations of traceurs, Borden explains that “these are bodies which are actively doing something, having a dynamic operation within the city, and transforming everyday life into a work of art” (Borden, 2001, p. 12, referencing Lefebvre). Philosopher Michel Serres explains that this important physical interaction between body and world occurs through the skin, which he refers to as ‘contingency’ (Serres, 2009). Contingency can be defined as mutual touching; the body touches the world just as the world touches the body, and through this interaction, a sensual experience unfolds (Serres, 2009). When traceurs physically engage with urban spaces, their bodies, shoes, and skin are, in a sense, bonding with the spaces, mingling with them, creating a deeper level of understanding for the traceur about these spaces. By interacting physically with space and objects, it is a way for a person, in this case for traceurs, to be amidst the world, mingling with it as opposed to standing before it, observing, and this mingling is essential for acquiring knowledge about the world (Serres, 2009). Through their physical interactions with space, traceurs are gaining further knowledge about the city, materialities, objects, and spatial
conditions.

According to Merleau-Ponty, conscious experience of space is neither exclusively sensation nor interpretation, but a combination of both sensing and reasoning, and these factors overlap and influence one another (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Through training parkour and alternatively appropriating spaces for their movements, traceurs physically and mentally engage with the city in a more complete way, feeling surfaces, grabbing and tugging on objects, rubbing the soles of their shoes against walls, gauging distances, and imagining movement possibilities. The experience of existence involves both consciousness and the presence of inanimate objects, and therefore the body, itself being an unconscious physical thing, is inextricably part of the experience of the body moving through space (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). The conscious mind and physical body are experientially connected, meaning that the mind’s perception of the experience of the body in turn influences the perceptions of the mind as the body moves through space, engaging in sensory experiences (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Because of the extensive, intimate levels of physical engagement with the city and its spaces, the sensory, bodily experiences that traceurs have through their alternative appropriations strengthens the experiential bond between mind and body, giving traceurs a fuller understanding and experience of the city. Through language and vision of the self, one can only see the world, but through the movement and interactions of the body, one can visit and experience the world in a more complete way (Serres, 2009). By physically interacting with the space, moving the body in, around, and through the space, one can truly visit a space, gathering together and enhancing all of the other senses (Serres, 2009). When visually observing a space, these visual observations are enhanced through
movement, giving traceurs an expanded and more thorough perspective and understanding of the spaces of the city.

When traceurs move themselves through a space, visually, they experience many new, different perspectives of the space, continually learning more about the space through their movement. This type of experience contrasts with other more typical experiences of the city which are predominantly visual, aural, and audible. Serres argues that the lack of this fuller experience of space is the fault of language, which has petrified the body, replacing the physical and visual interactions of body and space with words (Serres, 2009). By discarding the parasitic obstruction of language and bringing our focus back to sensorial experience through touch, sight, sound, smell, and taste, we can begin to experience the world as we once did, intimately and completely (Serres, 2009). So rather than just passively walking through the city going from place to place, traceurs are often visually, physically, and mentally engaging with the city as they move through it, learning more about these spaces and experiencing them in a more complete way. They are almost constantly aware of their surroundings, observing and experimenting, both mentally and physically, with the opportunities for alternative appropriation that the city has to offer.

Perception is always focused through attention on particular objects or spatial conditions within the perceptible field of the observer (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Because traceurs are almost constantly analyzing spaces and objects for their movement possibilities, they continually maintain their attentive focus on their surroundings. It is through this perception of our surroundings that we develop experiences which consequently shape our conscious actions,
which reaffirms that the self cannot be separated from our perceptions (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). This perceptive focus on the spaces of the city generates a more active mental engagement with the physical environment for traceurs. Traceurs feel a deeper connection with the urban spaces of the city through their physical and mental interactions with them, and this changes their state of mind from passively moving through the urban landscape to actively engaging with it, making them more aware of everything around them; a fuller, more intimate experience of the city.

Through bodily experience, we give our perceptions greater and fuller meanings beyond those established solely by thought (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). It is through this bodily experience that we establish expressive movement which is an essential component in how we perceive the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Through conscious observations of a city, we choose to take certain actions based upon those observations, impacting how we experience space. For traceurs, they have a fuller understanding of space because of their constant physical and mental engagement with space which influences how they choose to interact with the city. Additionally, through these experiences, traceurs sometimes develop bonds and memories with spaces, and through their perspective, these spaces transform from simple walls and railings into dance partners and tapestries for their creative physical expression.

To visualize the usage of spaces through this alternative perspective requires creativity and experience that can be acquired through consistent alternative appropriation of space through parkour movements. During the interviews, traceurs were asked about the role that creativity plays in their alternative appropriations of urban space. The traceurs expressed that the experience consisted of many different levels of creative expression. There is creativity initially
in the experience, as a creative premise is required to see urban spaces and objects from this new perspective. It takes creativity to reinterpret the use of an object designed for a specific purpose, such as a bench used for sitting, and conceive of the alternative ways in which it can be used as a tool for training and movement, such as using the bench as a platform to flip off of. Furthermore, there are additional levels of creativity, the creativity in moving one’s body through space, of how one chooses to interact with the objects in that space, of how that movement is captured through film, and how that movement is presented through a parkour video to an online audience. Parkour was described by the traceurs as being an almost perfect balance between creativity and discipline, challenging their bodies through increasingly difficult movement and using their creative perception of urban space to come up with new and interesting challenges to complete. By learning to use and see space through this creative, alternative perspective, traceurs develop a more intimate, active relationship with urban space and the city.

**Mapping the City from an Alternative Perspective**

For traceurs, they do not envision a city in the same way that a typical person would imagine it, concerned with street names, shopping locations, parking, public transportation services, and food vendors. Traceurs are not interested in the city as a whole, on a macro scale, and are instead transfixed on the micro-conditions created by the architecture of the city and the designs of urban spaces. Like skateboarders, traceurs interact with the city experientially through their movements, often completely engaged in the present moment during their alternative
appropriations. The city is not recorded by the skateboarder in the sense of a surveyor mapping a place or a historian documenting a city (Borden, 2001, pp. 226-228). The skateboarder is concerned with the present moment, the here and now, concerning themselves with the immediate object and their experience of it, which is reborn daily through new experiences and repeated experiences of the same places (Borden, 2001, pp. 226-228). They do not try to understand the city or document it, simply experience it and live in the moment (Borden, 2001, pp. 226-228). Traceurs are exponentially more concerned with the grip and materiality of certain walls and the distances between them than they are with mapping the city as a unified whole. They are concerned with very specific, localized elements within the urban fabric, much like a skateboarder. “Skateboarding...suggests that cities can be thought of as a series of micro-spaces, rather than comprehensive urban plans, monuments, or grand projects” (Borden, 2001, p. 217). Skaters attempt neither to see the city nor to comprehend it as a totality, but to live it as simultaneous representation and physicality (Borden, 2001, pp. 217-227). In mapping, the city is understood through a single aerial glance, but skateboarders understand a city as a collection of disparate objects and experiences (Borden, 2001, pp. 220-227). In much the same way, traceurs, when observing urban spaces that are ideal for practicing parkour, are not concerned with mapping the city, but simply with experiencing space. Traceurs will often exclaim that the city is their playground, because they see the city as a uniformly endless series of unlimited possibilities for movement and play. Borden identifies that skateboarders have a similar outlook on the urban landscape, explaining that “space becomes a uniform entity, a surface on which to skate. All urban elements are thus reduced to the homogeneous level of skate-able terrain, for anything is
part of the run...From this macro-conception of space, skaters oscillate to the micro-conception of the architectural element; they move from the open canvas of the urban realm to the close focus of a specific wall, bench, hydrant, curb, or rail” (Borden, 2001, p. 195). On a macro-scale, traceurs do not map the city but see it in totality as a playground providing them with unlimited opportunities for movement. While on a micro-scale, traceurs prioritize the experience of distinctive, localized urban conditions. If traceurs were to map a city, it would look somewhat similar to the mapping techniques that Borden describes for skaters. “Skaters’ representations...have more in common with the Situationist tactics of the dérive, détournement, and psycho-geography, ‘maps’ composed from the opportunities offered by the physical and emotional contours of the city, and, above all, enacted through a run across different spaces and moments” (Borden, 2001, p. 223, referencing Debord, 1955, pp. 5-8 and 1958, pp. 50-54). If traceurs were to map a city, it would be a layout of specific locations and urban conditions within the city which provide movement opportunities. This map would likely be somewhat incomprehensible to non-practitioners, graphically lacking the expected qualities of a map. The expected presence of roads and buildings would be replaced with a considerably greater focus on disparate urban spaces and conditions which no regular map would emphasize or even potentially show at all, along with pathways across the urban landscape that no untrained person could utilize.

Traceurs do not envision urban space as a totality, but as a series of spaces and opportunities to physically engage with space through alternative appropriations. Like skaters, traceurs are concerned with the holistic sensorial experience of space through physical
interaction, play, and exploration. “The skateboarder’s highly integrated sense of balance, speed, hearing, sight, touch, and responsivity is a product of the modern metropolis, a newly evolved sensory and cognitive mapping; the aim is not only to receive the city but to return it to itself, to change the nature of the experience of the urban realm. Sound, touch, and even smell combine with vision to render architecture into a full body encounter” (Borden, 2001, p. 202). Traceurs, like skaters, experience urban space in a fuller way, utilizing many different senses besides sight to develop intimate relationships with the objects, materials, and textures of the city. They experience the city in episodic moments of appropriation, employing sensory and cognitive mapping through their physical interactions with space.

Movement Preparation

When the traceurs do find a challenge or an opportunity for alternative movement, they initially assess the movement by comparing it to their perceived level of ability. If the traceur decides they are fully capable of executing the movement and they are confident in their ability to complete it successfully, there is not much preparation required, and they can just execute the movement. This is often the case with perceptibly easier movements that the traceurs execute regularly. “So first you make the calculation, and my goal is that if it’s not big for me, then it shouldn’t be scary for me, and just outright pretty much do it” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 34). “If it’s a move or something that’s not really too challenging, I don’t have to prepare. It’s kind of second nature. I kind of just do it” (Hartung, Individual Interview 3, p. 100). “When I’m
training the easier moves, it’s just reaction at that point” (Peveley, Group Interview 2, p. 238). If the traceur perceives that the movement is close to, or outside of, the limits of their capabilities but still might be possible, they begin to analyze the space more closely. “I always check my space beforehand. I make sure that the objects I am using are sturdy” (McNabb, Individual Interview 6, p. 146). “If I’m going to do a roof jump or a big jump or something like that…I’ve scouted out the jumps multiple times before” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 170). This process of evaluating the movement they want to attempt can take anywhere from a couple of minutes to years of contemplation.

But in any case, what I do is, the initial stage is just looking at the jump, whatever it is, and figuring it out. What’s the distance? How big is it? Is it big for me or not?…figuring out exactly what you’re up against. And that may be exploratory. That may have happened years ago. Some things, I scoped it out a long time ago, and I’ve known for a long time how big it is, thinking ‘I can’t do it yet. I can’t do it yet. Okay, I think I can now.’ Or it could be that I come to spot I’m training in, just walk up on things that are immediately like ‘I wonder if I could?’ and you start to assess it (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 33-34).

During this process of evaluating the movement and scouting out the space and objects necessary for the execution, a point of decision occurs when the traceur decides whether or not they are going to attempt the movement. “There comes a point of decision, which is kind of a gut thing to
the extent of either ‘yes it is’ or ‘no it isn’t’ within my abilities…Years of training have gone into me deciding whether or not I’m capable of it. But the experience of it is still very much like a gut feeling, because even though the training has gone into it, the training all leads up to that moment to where you look at it, and you’re like ‘Yes’ or ‘No’…And if I get it in my head that I can, then it starts a process” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 34). Understanding whether or not they are capable of successfully completing a movement they are unsure about is an important product of regular training. Regular training allows the traceur to gain a fuller understanding of their abilities, and this will prevent them from misjudging jumps and executing movements they are actually not capable of, resulting in injuries.

Upon making the decision to attempt the movement, the traceurs typically begin warming up their bodies for that specific movement. “While I’m preparing, it’s more kind of processing the moves I need to do and asking myself if this is something I should be working on today. ‘Do I feel like I am warmed up for this?’” (Rujiraviriyapinyo, Group Interview 2, p. 237). “I usually practice doing the move, like try to go into it but not follow all the way through, just to prepare for it and progress” (Chalifour, Group Interview 1, p. 215). “You start prepping to go for it, and that’s when you do some warmups. Maybe you try to do some similar movement to make sure that you’re ready for that so it’s not just like a cold catpass or something. Do some other ones, smaller, to make sure that you’re feeling the push. If it’s a jump, do some other jumps, or some precisions, or do something else precision-wise to make sure you’re kind of on that day” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 35). In this phase of physical preparation for the movement, the traceurs expressed that it is important to be aware of how accurate they are with their movements.
on that particular day. “And it’s good to…have warmed up and trained, to know how mentally
‘on’ you are, because sometimes you’re physically able to do something, but mentally not at that point, because maybe you’re having an off day. You’re not hitting things the way you should be, and then you need to know to walk away” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 35). To be
‘mentally on’ refers to being in the right state of mind while practicing parkour so that one is focused on the movements being performed, and that these movements are being performed with the same level of accuracy and precision which they normally are. Certain factors may result in traceurs not being mentally on their game, such as a stressful situation in life causing them anxiety and distracting them, other people watching them, taking their attention away from their own movement, or they may just be having an off day and are struggling more than usual to overcome mental barriers. When traceurs are mentally on their game, they are focused on their movements, not distracted, and able to visualize and successfully perform at their current level of ability. Traceurs must also assess if they are physically on their game as well before attempting a new challenge where risk of injury is involved. Being physically ‘on their game’ means that the traceur is executing and landing movements how they expect to. If they are struggling to complete certain movements that they are normally capable of, traceurs will determine that they are not physically ‘on’ that day and will likely not attempt newer risky movements. Traceurs may not be physically on their game because of a recent injury that they are still recovering from, because they are sick or were recently sick, or because they are just having an off day.

If the traceurs determine through this warmup that they are mentally on their game, physically executing similar movements accurately and that they are adequately warmed up, then
they begin to figure out the logistics and mechanics of the movement they want to attempt. “You get warmed up for it…and then I start looking at it and I start figuring out my steps into it, how much speed I need into it, and I start thinking about the real mechanics of it. Then you start digging in to ‘Alright, I’m literally going to go for this, how am I going to go for it?’” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 35). “You touch the walls, you get a sense of it, you stand at the edge of a jump or run up to it or something like that, kind of get a feel for it. You start to, kind of like the blind men feeling the outside of the elephant; you’re trying to just figure out ‘What is this thing that I’ve encountered?’” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 170).
Image 21: Pinkley feeling out a Running Pre, University of Cincinnati Campus, Cincinnati, OH, photo by author

Image 22: Guzman evaluating a Front Flip, University of Cincinnati Campus, Cincinnati, OH, photo by author
Image 23: Traceur feels wall and assesses grip with shoe in preparation for a Wall Run, University of Cincinnati Campus, Cincinnati, OH, photo by author

Image 24: Traceur feels texture of wall in preparation for a movement, University of Michigan Campus, Ann Arbor, MI, photo by author
In addition to evaluating what is needed to complete the movements, the traceurs also often consider and incorporate possible bail routes should the movement not go as planned. A bail route or option is a planned course of action should the traceur make a mistake in the middle of a movement, planning other movement options to escape without sustaining injury from the bailed or failed attempt. For example, on a precision jump to a railing, the traceur must be prepared should they overshoot or undershoot the jump, planning a series of movements that they could execute should this happen so they can safely exit the bailed movement without injury. “What do I need to do to be able to do it?’ Also I’m considering what my bail options are” (Rujiraviriyapinyo, Group Interview 2, p. 237). Traceurs will often use the length of their feet to step off distances between obstacles, as they have developed a sense of their capabilities of movement relative to the lengths of their own appendages through their training. From the beginning of time, man has always measured the world using his body by moving it through space, calculating incremental distances based off of the proportions of the limbs (Pallasmaa, 2014). Traceurs engage in exactly this type of behavior when investigating a space for movement opportunities. They tug and pull on surfaces, scrape shoes against materials, determining the feasibility of movement by moving their bodies through space, physically interacting with them to discover their hidden potential. After adequately understanding all of the mechanics of the jump, feeling the surfaces, warming up, stepping things off to determine distances, and assessing how mentally and physically on their game they are, the traceurs prepare to execute their movements.
The Moments before Execution

All of this preparatory work leads up to the moment when the traceur stands staring at the obstacles, contemplating the movement. “You do whatever steps and think whatever steps you need to, and then all that leads up to the point where you’re standing back for the run up and you’re looking at it. You’ve done all the groundwork, and now nothing stands between you and doing it except for the decision to go. Everything is prepared. And that is where I want to be really calm” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 35). Typically in this moment, when the traceur is staring down the movement, they assess their body to see how they feel, which is used as an indication of whether or not they should attempt the movement. “I do try and assess ‘How am I feeling right now? Am I shaky? Do I feel adrenaline going through my extremities? Can I feel it in my fingers? Am I warmed up?’ All these things” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 36).

Image 25: Paige staring down a Wall Run prior to Execution, University of Cincinnati Campus, Cincinnati, OH, photo by author
Some traceurs even go as far as taking their pulse to know whether or not they should attempt a movement, and if their pulse is above a certain threshold, they walk away. “You want your heartrate down” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 36). In this moment, traceurs want to be calm and centered, relaxing into themselves and preparing their mind and body for the movement (Koehler, Group Interview 2, p. 236). Less experienced practitioners may attempt to get their adrenaline going in this moment, which experienced traceurs say is not a good way to practice. “I used to…get to that point where I had to make the decision to go, and I’d amp myself up…and then I would do a back tuck to try and get myself excited…to get my adrenaline up or something, and then try and chuck for it. And that does not lead to good technique. If my adrenaline’s going, I have bad technique, or more likely I’m going to have bad technique. I’m going to have less control” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 35-36). “You need to be able to look at yourself realistically, ideally, comfortably, in a humble way, so you’re not just like ‘Alright! Rahhh! I can do this!’ and just throw yourself at it, because that doesn’t work. You have to be very thoughtful, methodical. You have to know what you’re doing. It’s very intentional” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 171). Part of maintaining a calmness and centeredness is clearing one’s mind of all thoughts, focusing entirely on the movement they are about to perform. “I try to get clear. I try not to have anything in my mind, because that’s when I feel like things go wrong” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 123). “You kind of flush out everything around you and you’re really concentrated on this move that you’re doing, because you want to get it…You realize all the potential risks and you take it all in” (Dye, Group Interview 1, p. 214). At this point, when the traceur is calm, centered, clear-minded, and feeling comfortable in their body,
they begin to visualize the movements they are about to execute.

This visualization was described by the interviewees as a way of mentally seeing oneself go through the series of movements and successfully execute the alternative appropriation. “[I am] visualizing it before I do it. I am kind of putting myself mentally in that whole run before I physically put myself in the whole run, mentally preparing where I am going to put my steps, if I bail, what position is my body going to be in if I have to do that, how can I save myself? It’s like a whole mental strategy that’s built up…It helps me think about body positioning” (Peveley, Group Interview 2, p. 238). “I like to visualize myself doing movements it in my head five, ten, twenty times” (Morphy, Group Interview 1, p. 215). “When I’m trying to go for a jump, I close my eyes and I try and watch myself do it in first-person…and I try to picture doing it perfectly and nailing it. Sometimes I’ll stand there wrestling with myself…I’ll have trouble seeing it in my head, or I’ll not land it, and I’ll play it over and over again until I do it right in my head” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 37). “Sometimes I think about it but then I think about it too much sometimes and I have to step away” (Hartung, Individual Interview 3, p. 100). By imagining themselves execute the alternative movements successfully, the traceurs are able to wrap their heads around the movements they are about to perform, increasing their understanding of the movement.
Libby Torchia describes that when a traceur is staring down a movement they are about to do, they get a certain look of intense focus on their face, which is typically a signifier that they are going to follow through with the move. “When they are coming up to the jump, you can see it in their face. So they come up to the jump five times and you know they’re not going to do it because they don’t have that face. And that last time they come up, they have this focused look, like they’ve got tunnel vision; their whole body is primed and ready. They’re not paying attention to anything else, and then they do it. But without having that...face, they’re not keyed in, they haven’t committed. At least for me, the level of commitment is needed” (Libby Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 172). The ability for traceurs to wrap their minds around movements they
are about to perform becomes easier and faster the more times they are exposed to that scenario. “Eventually, you get to know the path that your mind takes, and then it becomes much faster, much easier. That’s how you see people doing amazing, big things, it’s because they’ve done this and they know” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 173). “All of this last bit hopefully happens really fast, that’s my goal” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 36). This mental process of visualizing the movement can be difficult for traceurs, especially if they are struggling with emotions of fear or nervousness about a particular movement because of their lack of preparedness, knowing the risks and dangers involved.

Contemplation of Risk, Fear, and Danger

In this moment of contemplation when the traceur is standing, staring at the obstacles in front of them, they may experience a difficult inner struggle with their own fears and doubts. “Before [jumping], you’re encountering fear, you’re encountering hesitation” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 171). “It could [be] a really intense experience of facing fear…Sometimes it’s a battle, like when you’re facing a jump and you’re scared, you can’t overcome your fear. My current thinking is…if you’re not able to overcome your fear in that moment, then you should walk away, because you should have trained in such a way that you’re not that scared in that moment” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 41). It is in these moments before experiencing the phenomenon of alternative appropriation of urban space when risk, danger, and fear are introduced into the situation.
These elements of risk, danger, and fear associated with alternative appropriations of urban space by traceurs are examined through the second research subquestion inquiring about the roles that these factors play within the experience. Through a collective analysis of the feedback from the interviewees combined with personal experiences of the phenomenon, the feelings of fear and elements of risk and danger that traceurs experience when preparing to execute parkour movements were identified and explained. Risk, in this scenario, is defined as the possibility that something could go wrong and result in injuries, and this is very carefully calculated by traceurs. Distinctively different from risk, danger is the chance for serious consequences, bad injuries, or even death should the movement not go as planned. Risk is assessed through the comparison of the traceurs perceived capabilities to the capabilities required to successfully complete a movement. There is often a difference between a traceur’s perceived abilities and actual abilities, and evaluating this difference when measured up to the movement they are attempting is how the traceur assesses risk. This difference between mental perception of capability and actual physical capability is also what results in feelings of fear. Fear arises from the mental perception that the traceur is not capable of successfully completing the movement because they are not physically capable. Fears can be valid and are healthy to have because they keep the traceur from getting injured or killed, but these fears are often mentally constructed barriers arising from thinking that they are not capable of performing a certain movement when they actually are physically capable. The traceurs must overcome these fears to increase their abilities and progress their skills. The traceurs explained that it is important to create a relationship with fear to understand when it is valid and when it is a boundary that they
can push. Building this relationship with fear takes time and injuries can happen in the process, but the goal in the alternative movements is to complete them successfully without injury. Traceurs do not purposefully put themselves in danger, and this danger and risk they are engaging in is subjective and changes from person to person depending on skill level. Parkour has injuries but it is no different from any other sport. Traceurs engage in healthy risk-taking behavior through their appropriations, developing that relationship and better understanding of risk, fear, and danger. People in American culture tend to avoid fear, danger, and risks, therefore have an underdeveloped relationship with it, but the relationship with fear, risk, and danger that the traceurs are developing through their experiences of the phenomenon is preparing them to be ready for other situations in life. These feelings of fear and overcoming of risk and danger occur most commonly in the moments directly before the traceur engages in the experience of the phenomenon of alternative appropriation of urban space.

The traceurs expressed that facing this fear regularly causes this process to go faster and faster, and the nervousness, fear, and hesitation that is often felt before a jump is not as paralyzing. “The more you do it, you get to know the pathways of fear in your mind, and it becomes easier and faster to navigate it” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 173). “I used to get scared back when I was less experienced, but now it’s kind of more like a calm silence” (Koehler, Group Interview 2, p. 236). At some point during the visualization stage, the traceur is able to adequately understand the movement and see themselves completing it successfully in their mind. In that moment, they must overcome their fears and nerves, and either commit to the movement and execute it or walk away. This experience is referred to in parkour as breaking the
Jump or jump breaking and is a concept that comes from the founders of parkour. “[The founders of parkour] found that there were certain challenges that were more intense than others, and they had to prepare themselves for it mentally and physically. That came to be known as ‘breaking the jump’. So you had to break through the barrier of your own hesitation, fear, and lack of preparedness. You had to break through that barrier to achieve the jump and to be able to complete the successful movement” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 169). Jump breaking is that process of overcoming fear, doubt, and mental barriers in one’s own mind to successfully execute a movement. Julie Angel’s research in parkour delves into the complexities of this experience of jump breaking, and can be referenced in greater depth in her book Breaking the Jump: The Secret Story of Parkour's High-flying Rebellion. Jump breaking can be an intense experience of facing fear, evaluating risk, and performing in the presence of danger, pushing the body and mind to overcome difficult physical and mental obstacles in order to attempt certain movements.

Traceurs commonly face these mental barriers caused by fear, risk, and danger when they are engaging in edgework. Edgework refers to a type of training in parkour when practitioners work on expanding their abilities beyond their current limits, targeting specific movements that are on the edge of their capabilities and comfort zones. During a training session, traceurs can choose to execute movements that they are confident or semi-confident in, working to perfect these movements which they are already capable of. But when traceurs train in ways where they engage in edgework, they are working to expand the abilities of their bodies to encompass movements that they are not currently able to achieve. It is during this edgework when traceurs
most commonly experience feelings of fear because the movements they are attempting to execute are new to them and beyond their perceived abilities. Edgework is a common type of training that is also present in skateboarding. “The space of the edge...[is] not just a quantitative dimension, nor just an experiential engagement between skateboarder and architecture, but simultaneously more meaningful: the symbolic limit of danger and achievement, the boundary and terrain deepest within the skater as well as the furthest limit of his or her externalized activity, representing ‘the act of skateboarding as throwing one’s self out of control and then attempting to pull it back in’. The edge was the physical and personal edge, the space and moment of confrontation between the self and the external world” (Borden, 2001, p. 38, referencing Thrasher, 1986, p. 35). Through this edgework, traceurs learn to control their fears in response to the presence of danger and risk, expanding their abilities in movement.

Criticality of Engagement with Risk, Fear, and Danger

When practicing parkour in urban spaces, it is inherent that traceurs will have to engage in risk-taking behavior, encountering fear and possibly danger in the process. But is this engagement with risk, danger, and fear a healthy practice for traceurs to be experiencing and what kind of impact does this have on them and bystanders? One of the stereotypes of parkour is that practitioners are reckless, leading to regular injuries. While the first part of this statement is untrue for the majority of practitioners who train in a very mindful, thoughtful, and intentionally careful way, many practitioners have incurred injuries from using urban space in alternative
ways, myself included. Even though traceurs try to avoid injuries, they still occur periodically as a result of their movements. While the alternative appropriations of urban space that traceurs engage in are providing them with certain personal benefits and helping to further their skills in parkour, they are still, to some degree, taking unnecessary risks that are leading to injuries. These injuries can range from harmless scrapes and bruises to serious trauma that requires medical treatment, possibly even becoming life-altering in some cases. Additionally, witnessing traceurs make mistakes and incur injuries could be traumatizing to bystanders or to other traceurs depending on the severity of the injury. Considering the potential negative impacts that experiencing urban space in alternative ways can have on the bodies and long term health of traceurs, it becomes questionable whether or not this type of space usage is healthy and productive to be engaging in. Are these regularly occurring injuries associated with the sport worth the risk?

Similar to the earlier discussion about the impacts that this alternative usage has on urban spaces, communities, and people, I believe that, again, the evaluation of the worthwhileness of a traceur’s engagement with risk, fear, and danger depends on how the traceur conducts themselves, how they choose to practice, and their reasoning behind their movements. As articulated by the interviewees, risks can be taken in parkour movements while still avoiding and minimizing injuries if they are executed in a mindful, carefully considered manner. In a culture that tends to avoid and shun risk, these calculated, intentional appropriations of urban space can be a healthy and productive way for people to learn how to interact with and manage risk. This physical and mental engagement with risk that traceurs experience before attempting parkour
movements is transferrable to other situations apart from parkour, giving traceurs experience should they need to evaluate risks in other aspects of their lives. But this can only be accomplished through training in a mindful, careful way. When traceurs practice in a more reckless manner, such as attempting movements they are not ready for and pushing themselves to execute dangerous, risky movements without much preparation, they are not learning how to engage with risk in a healthy, productive way, and are more likely to suffer debilitating injuries.

Along with the experience of engagement with risk through alternative appropriations of urban space, the aspects of fear and danger are also present. When taking risks, there is always the possibility of fear manifesting in the mind of the risk-taker as they contemplate the possibilities should the outcome not go as planned. For some people, traceurs and non-practitioners alike, their fears can be paralyzing and very difficult to overcome, both in executing parkour movements and in daily life situations. Fear can be crippling for some people, preventing them from making important life decisions. Touching on this aspect of fear, Lamb explains that “overcoming fear in our minds is just like overcoming the physical obstacle presented to us, such as a roof gap...If you can come to grips with that fear and get over mental obstacles in parkour, that can translate into other aspects of your life as well” (Lamb, 2014). Through a healthy, regular engagement with fear and risk-taking through executing parkour movements, alternative appropriation of urban spaces can be a very positive, helpful way for people to learn how to navigate their fears and learn how to overcome mental barriers.

But while learning to control and manage one’s fear seems like a valuable skill, it can sometimes result in a disintegration of fear altogether, which can be dangerous. Having a good
sense of self-preservation, respect for danger and risk, and some fear is healthy, both for traceurs and non-traceurs alike. By regularly engaging with fear through alternative appropriations of urban space, traceurs may become immune or numb to those feelings of fear and lose sight of what is dangerous and what is not. By learning how to navigate the mental pathways of fear in their minds and getting faster and better at it through regular practice, traceurs sometimes develop excessive confidence due to this lack of fear. This overconfidence may lead to traceurs attempting unnecessarily dangerous movements which could result in serious injuries, and this is not a healthy way to be engaging with urban space as a traceur or to be living life in general. While learning to overcome fear can be empowering and helpful for traceurs, there is a possibility that they could develop a lack of fear altogether and feel like they are invincible, immune to injury, which may lead them to attempt needlessly risky or dangerous movements, resulting in injuries. Therefore, the worthwhileness of risking injury to alternatively appropriate urban space through parkour movements returns to the mindset of the individual traceur and how they choose to train. Are they thinking about their long term health or just about showing off for others in the current moment? Are they internalizing the situation, carefully considering the risks, and planning their movements, or are they just carelessly throwing themselves into situations without thought? While taking risks by using urban space in this way can be a positive, healthy method for interacting with risk and fear, there is the possibility that this type of space usage could become harmful and unhealthy for traceurs, resulting in injuries and reckless personal endangerment.
The Decision to Execute Alternative Appropriations

At this moment of decision, the traceurs described a sort of ‘click’ in their mind or a gut feeling inside them that would determine whether or not they were going to follow through with the movement. “Then suddenly your brain just clicks and it either says yes or no. If it’s no, you walk away. If it says yes, it’s like ‘Okay!’ and you just lean in and you go, and it happens!” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 38). This click that the traceurs experience is a result of the collective execution of the previous stages of preparation and often a successful visualization of themselves completing the movement they are attempting.

When it feels right, it clicks. It’s like ‘Yes! I did it!’ and I open my eyes, I take a deep breath, and I go…And in that moment, there’s a calmness…an acceptance. Up until that point, things can be a little tense, and that is the final decision, when I see it and I know that I will do it. It’s like a prescience in a way, like seeing into the future…Like a click almost. It’s a very sharp snap in your brain from between when you’re assessing a jump and when you decide that you not just can, but you will do it…So that moment is almost seeing into the future, because it hasn’t happened yet, but there is a deep certainty that it will within seconds!...It’s very, sort of, filled with acceptance. The jump has not yet happened, but it has already happened. Because the click has already happened, your brain and your mind and your heart and your body have already all accepted the inevitability of the jump,
that you will and you must follow through. And so then, it’s kind of calm…‘Okay, I played it in my head. I know what it’s going to look like and I know what it’s going to feel like, and now I just ride it out.’ And you just accept it (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 37-38).

Two of the interviewees similarly described this experience of the ‘click’ in their minds, this internal, gut feeling of when to execute the movement, as being like surfing. “It’s a body thing. You feel the jump…It’s like a wave that develops inside you, and then you catch the wave, like a surfer” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 172). “When you’re surfing, you can’t fight the wave…You have to just go with it. So that’s a lot of the mindset that I have towards the movement. You can’t fight momentum” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 124). The momentum the traceurs feel in their mind and body will either tell them to execute the movement or to walk away. “If I’m not feeling it, I walk away from it. Come back and try it another day” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 124). In this moment, standing at the edge of a jump and deciding whether or not to go, waiting for this wave of inevitability and momentum to wash over them, the traceurs need to understand how their mind works and know what they are doing. “If you’re standing on the edge of a jump, and if your brain gets to the point where it starts doing this to you…you need to trust your brain! This is why it’s so important to train, because your brain needs to know what it’s doing, because it will make a decision!” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 37). This is why the traceurs put such a strong emphasis on training, because it is important to understand how the mind functions and responds when placed in this type of
scenario. That moment when the ‘click’ happens in the traceur’s mind can come and pass, and then they have missed their opportunity to execute the movement. “You can miss that moment. It can happen, and if you don’t take it, then it doesn’t happen and usually you may not be able to do it after that if you don’t take the chance when it comes” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 38).

When the click has happened and they have made the decision to go, “you just think about absolutely nothing and most of the time your body will just do what it’s supposed to do” (Morphy, Group Interview 1, p. 215). “You slow your heart down and take a deep breath, you look at it, and your brain says ‘yes’, and everything goes silent, and you go! That moment is so pure and amazing” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 16). In this moment when the traceur has made the decision to go, they no longer visualize the movements they are about to engage in; they just execute. “‘Think before you jump, jump without thinking.’ So that’s the little bit of difference. You do think…before you go…but when you’re actually jumping, you don’t think about it at all and you do totally let go” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 86). After successfully visualizing the movement, getting the internal click in their mind that tells them to go, and making the decision to ride the internal wave of momentum and follow through with the movement, it is in that moment when the traceur begins to experience the phenomenon of alternative appropriation of urban space.
EXPERIENCING THE PHENOMENON

Experiencing the Phenomenon

During their experience of the phenomenon of alternative appropriation of urban space through parkour movements, the traceurs expressed that they feel a calmness and a quietness, a sense of power and weightlessness, a floaty-ness in their body of smooth, serene movement. “It should be really serene,…the run and the movement and everything up to the completion of the execution is just a float. It’s all very smooth and calm” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 39). “You’re calm and you hear your breath and you’re moving and it’s smooth and floaty, and you just want to feel power. You want to feel a swell and a push of the right amount of power. It’ll feel really good if it’s just the right amount. If it’s really big, then maybe it’s your full power, giving just everything! Or if it’s a really technical thing, it may feel like a push up to the right point, like push right up to a line, and right there is where you want your power” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 38-39). The world around them falls away as if they have tunnel vision; all they can feel is their body and all they can hear is their breath. “It’s kind of like you’re in a tunnel and everything goes really quiet. I’m not looking at anything else…So you go through that tunnel and it’s all calm and floating” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 39-40). “The world falls away. I don’t get tunnel vision, but almost like tunnel vision in on whatever I’m focusing on. I don’t really hear anything else other than my breathing, and I can feel my body
tensing and settling,…It’s almost like you’re removed from yourself or that everything else just falls away” (Libby Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 172).

The traceurs explained that the feeling in the moment of their alternative appropriations of urban space is a sense of self dropping away and a greater feeling of connectedness with everything around them. “The self kind of falls away. The focus becomes solely on the movement” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 170). “You have that connectedness with everything around you, a sense of euphoria, accomplishment, that sense that you are reaching self-actualization. You are achieving your potential, and realizing it through effort and hard work” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 171). “It’s just a sense of freedom. It’s a sense of weightlessness. It’s a sense of oneness with the environment when everything links up” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 124). This sense of self dropping away and feeling of oneness with everything is referred to by the traceurs as being in a flow state, in the zone, completely focused on their movements.

Figure 5: Paige executing Cat to Cat, Kent State University Campus, Kent, OH, photo by author
Figure 6: Wolfe executing Strides to Precision Jump, Kent State University Campus, Kent, OH, photo by author

Figure 7: Paige executing Wall Run, University of Cincinnati Campus, Cincinnati, OH, photo by author
Figure 8: Guzman executing Front Flip over gap, University of Cincinnati Campus, Cincinnati, OH, photo by author

Figure 9: Paige executing Precision Jump, Kent State University Campus, Kent, OH, photo by author
A flow state is a state of being where one is completely focused on the work they are currently engaged with; they are completely absorbed by the work. Flow states can be achieved in almost any type of work or activity. In parkour, flow state is achieved during the execution of parkour movements.

I think you can often get into what’s called a Flow State…It’s something that requires effort that’s right about at your max level, and basically what you do is you just fall into the work, and the work itself becomes intrinsically rewarding, and that brings with it a sense of wellbeing, a sense sometimes of euphoria, and also a stepping back of the sense of self. So it leads to a broader sense of connection with the world around you and in the work that you are getting done…Think about other sports…hockey or baseball, they might call it the zone, you’re in the zone. It’s basically that exact same thing. That’s the sort of thing, like a good triple play in baseball, it’s just smooth and effortless and the same thing happens with parkour. You’re flowing through the moves, the obstacles are coming easy, and you’re feeling really in touch. It’s when the body is leading and the mind needs to step back a little bit (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 167).
The theorist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has written extensively on this experience of a flow state that can be achieved through engaging in many different types of tasks. Csikszentmihalyi explains that flow happens “when a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). It is likely that one will enter almost automatically into a flow state effortlessly and spontaneously while performing a task (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). This is precisely the situation which traceurs are often engaged in, faced with great physical and mental challenges that require tremendous mental focus to execute successfully. It is more likely that a person will enter into flow when a high amount of skill is needed to complete a task and when there are high levels of challenge present (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). When traceurs are practicing easier movements that do not require much mental or physical preparation, they will be less likely to experience this flow state because the levels of skill and challenge are not as great. The interviewees were asked to describe their experience of alternative appropriations of urban space in situations where they were training movements at the edge of, or even slightly beyond, their perceived skill level. It is during these training sessions requiring extreme focus and concentration to execute movements when traceurs described that they most commonly enter into a flow state.

According to Csikszentmihalyi, achieving a flow state can only occur for someone who is engaging in a task which they are highly skilled and well-trained at (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). If someone is not experienced at performing a certain task, achieving a flow state in that task will be much more difficult because they will not be able to get out of the intellectualization of what they are doing. Because they are not experienced with a task, in order for them to perform this
task successfully, they must constantly be analyzing and contemplating their actions, meaning that they cannot easily enter a flow state. For this reason, when experiencing urban space in alternative ways through parkour movements, in order to enter this flow state, traceurs must practice parkour regularly or at least often enough to acquire some skill at the movements. For people that do not practice parkour who are not traceurs, using space in ways similar to traceurs on random occasions will likely not give them the same experience of flow state which traceurs have when they appropriate space. Achieving a flow state when alternatively appropriating urban space requires effort, skill, and challenge that are at or near the maximum level that a traceur is capable of, requiring intense focus and concentration.

As a result of this intense focus and concentration required by traceurs to ensure their movements go as planned and to prevent injuries, they described their sense of self stepping away as they metaphorically fell into their movements, letting their bodies and training take over. “When you get to that zone, your body and your mind has to enter a state that’s less and less thought or analytically oriented, and you kind of have to get out of that intellectualization of what you’re doing and kind of let your body take over. I think that is one of the things that trigger Flow State which is a really interesting psychological phenomenon. I think parkour, more than a lot of other sports activities, can induce that, and I think that’s one of the reasons why it’s so attractive” (Graves, Group Interview 1, p. 216). “You’re so focused on the actual movement that there is no process of thinking about it. The training takes over…That’s when that sense of self steps back. You don’t really say ‘I am doing this jump’, it is like after you complete it, you’re like ‘Ah, I did that jump!’ But for that moment while you are doing the jump, there
wasn’t an I...The body is kind of leading that because it happens so fast that it has to be training, it has to be reflexive” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 171). The stepping back of the self and abstention from the intellectualization of what they are doing causes the traceur to enter this flow state, this zone where they are fully engaged in the present moment, each individual movement, and let their body lead them reflexively through their alternative appropriations. “It feels free when you get to the point where you’re not necessarily thinking about what you’re doing. It’s like your body just kind of takes over and you just enjoy the ride” (Morphy, Group Interview 1, p. 217). While engaging in alternative appropriations of urban space, “that mental aspect just kind of leaves, and it becomes just execution and reaction. That’s where I get to find out what I’m really capable of because there’s no mental act, it’s just ‘execute’” (Peveley, Group Interview 2, p. 238). During their experience of the phenomenon, the interviewees described that this sense of self steps back while the body takes over, and upon completion of the movements, the self steps back into place, changed slightly through the process. Providing further insight into this retraction and reintroduction of the sense of self, Angel explains that “parkour is an activity that allows participants to experience the ‘flow’ state, one that involves a letting go of the sense of self, then experiencing a re-enforced sense of self after an activity that involves entering the flow state has occurred” (Angel, 2011). Through their experience of alternative appropriations of urban space, traceurs lose their sense of self temporarily, only to have it return in a more solidified form, reinforcing their identity through movement and overcoming challenges. This change that traceurs experience through their movements “is tied up not just with the re-perception and subsequent alternative use of space, but [also with] the nature of the challenge
experienced in parkour and developing the skills to exercise control in difficult situations” (Angel, 2011). Because traceurs must break jumps by overcoming fear and hesitation in order to commit to certain movements and complete challenges, they become transformed through the crucibles of their experiences. Borden describes a similar situation where skaters feel that they are reborn anew through their experiences: “skateboarding is nothing less than a sensual, sensory, physical emotion, and desire for one’s own body in motion and engagement with the architectural and social other; a Ballardesque crash and rebirth of self, body, and terrain” (Borden, 2001, p. 135). This experience alters their identity, however slightly, and gradually prepares traceurs for other similar situations they may encounter apart from the practice of parkour, teaching them how to face fear, overcome hesitation, and commit to movement, physically, mentally, and situationally throughout life.

During this experience of alternative appropriation of urban space, traceurs expressed that they felt a sense of weightlessness, power, euphoria, and freedom. Csikszentmihalyi refers to these feelings during flow state as ‘ecstasy’, which he describes as a mental state which can be identified by the sense that one is no longer taking part in everyday routines, but stepping out of them into an alternate reality (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). This experience of ecstasy can be an intense experience where one may feel almost as if they themselves do not exist while in this flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). This phenomenon of the feeling of the non-existence of the self is exactly what the traceurs described during their experiences when they alternatively appropriate urban space. Because of their intense focus on their movements, there is no room left for conscious thoughts relating to the self or the body. When a person is involved in a task that is
fully engaging, they have little attention left to dedicate to the awareness of bodily feelings or notions of the self; their identity disappears from conscious thought (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). Because the task requires extreme concentration and focus, the mind cannot simultaneously feel and be aware of one’s own existence, and therefore those feelings of the self and of existence temporarily cease (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). For traceurs, the intense focus and concentration required to overcome difficult physical challenges when alternatively appropriating urban space causes them to lose their feelings of the self in their efforts, entering a flow state where they experience this ecstasy and euphoria.

It is sometimes the case when traceurs train their movements that they do not become completely enveloped in this flow state, training on the cusp of those feelings of euphoria and ecstasy. These zones just outside of the experience of flow state are referred to by Csikszentmihalyi as the zones of Arousal and Control (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). In the zone of arousal, the challenge which one is engaging in is substantial enough to induce flow but the level of skill required by the individual is not high enough (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). Traceurs can become enveloped in this situation when they find an opportunity for movement in urban space that provides adequate challenge but they lack the skill needed to complete the challenge. In the zone of control, the amount of skill possessed by the individual is high while the challenge presented to them is not difficult enough (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). In parkour, this situation can occur when traceurs are training in a spot that does not offer challenges that are difficult enough for their advanced abilities in movement. If all possible movements that a traceur conceives of in a space are well within their scope of ability, there is less challenge present, which requires less
concentration from the traceur to execute movements. Typically in order to induce a flow state, there needs to be a good amount of challenge present in the situation which requires a well-practiced set of skills to complete (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). The presence of reasonably difficult challenge combined with a trained set of skills provides the ideal setting for one to become enveloped in a flow state.

This experience of being in flow is described by Csikszentmihalyi as having several common feelings associated with that mode of being. When in flow state, one is completely enveloped in what they are doing, focusing and concentrating on the task at hand, experiencing ecstasy in the process (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). In this mode of being, one knows exactly which actions must be taken to complete the work, and this knowledge comes from the high level of skill that one possesses, which provides confidence in knowing that the task is possible (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). Also present in this experience is, again, this notion of the self dropping away, a feeling of becoming part of something larger (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). Additionally, through this intense focus on the task at hand and on the present moment, the experience of timelessness is another commonly reported feeling during flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). This idea of timelessness and intense focus on the present moment was reciprocated by the interviewees when describing their experience of alternative appropriation of urban space. During this experience, the traceur is fully engaged in the present moment, focused on every movement and obstacle as they come to them; they are focusing on the present moment and not on the next move or on the end result. “‘Take each step as it comes. Execute each step perfectly, but only the one you’re doing now. Don’t try and think ahead to doing the next one perfectly, do
the one right now.’ And that’s literally each step after step. That is why I think, part of why there’s this feeling of calmness and flow, because even though you’ve accepted the end result, you’re not looking at it. Each step comes and you take it and you do each step perfectly” (Foster quoting Daniel Ilabaca, Individual Interview 1, p. 40). “I have no expectations, no matter what happens, the fact that I already committed and did this movement, that’s success” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 123). The traceurs hold themselves to no expectations of a successful completion during the movement. In this flow state, their thoughts are entirely focused on the present moment when the mind steps back and the body and the training take over. Lastly, this state of flow offers intrinsic motivation, and becomes rewarding in itself (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). As the traceurs described, this state of flow during their experience of urban space provides them with feelings of euphoria and is intrinsically rewarding.

An important aspect of what induces flow state and makes this experience of flow so rewarding is when the task at hand is something that is very enjoyable to the individual (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). For traceurs who practice parkour regularly, tackling challenges to develop their skills, thoroughly enjoying the sport and the movements, entering into a flow state occurs very frequently, bringing much happiness to these practitioners. In this happiness and enjoyment lies the occurrence of optimal experience based on flow, “the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). Through engaging with, and overcoming, challenges and experiencing this flow state, traceurs feel a great sense of happiness and satisfaction through their alternative
appropriations of urban space.

The Significance of Space in the Experience

The objectives for traceurs when they engage in alternative appropriations of urban space through parkour movements are typically to overcome challenges, advance their abilities, and generally better themselves through this experience. The goals in their training are very personal, working to better their mind and body through movement, focusing exclusively on the betterment of the self. This intense focus on the self in parkour may lead to the conclusion that the spaces in which these appropriations occur do not matter at all, as it is only the body, mind, and movement of the traceur which are significant in this experience because of the personal nature of their goals. But this conclusion that space does not matter in the experience fails to recognize and comprehend the essential role that space plays in the movements of traceurs.

When describing their experience of the phenomenon, the interviewees explained that everything around them drops away and their focus stays on the present moment during their movements. This does not mean that the space in which these appropriations are happening drops away and is no longer important. It means that the focus of the traceur intimately and specifically focuses on the aspects and obstacles of the space they are engaging with in the present moment. It is not a focus on the space as a whole, but a focus on very intricate details and specific portions of the space which the traceur is utilizing for their movements presently. Traceurs also explained that during their alternative appropriations, the sense of self drops away
and there is no longer an ‘I’ while they are executing movements. Everything becomes reactive and reflexive, relying on their training to carry them safely and efficiently through their appropriations. In these moments, the traceur’s focus is entirely on their movement and the space through which they are moving. They become their movement in a sense; they become a dynamic part of the static environment. There is no intellectualization of what they are doing; they are just moving through space. They become one with the space, a dynamic aspect of the static environment around them, interacting with it and becoming part of it through movement. The space is their dance partner, their challenge to overcome, their companion in their pursuit of betterment of both mind and body.

Parkour, from its humble beginnings in Lisses, was always about overcoming challenges. Without urban spaces and obstacles for traceurs to creatively reinterpret through parkour vision, there are no challenges, no obstacles to overcome, and no opportunities for betterment. The challenges that traceurs struggle, both physically and mentally, to overcome are created by space and are discovered through their unique alternative perspective. Space is the medium which provides challenges and opportunities for movement, and without space, parkour could not exist. Parkour is about the creative movement of the body through space, and without the spaces themselves to provide obstacles to navigate and challenges to overcome, there can be no parkour. Space and parkour are inseparable; you cannot have parkour without the spaces in which it takes place. Similarly to basketball, the movements of the players and the ball are the dominant, dynamic aspects of the sport. But the static, spatial elements of the game are just as important and integral to making the gameplay possible. Without the hoop, the boundaries of the court, and
the markings on the floor, the game could not be played. These static, spatial elements provide the structure and rules around which the game was created. In a similar way, the movements in parkour were established based upon the interaction of the body with different spatial conditions found in the city, resulting in the roughly established global terminology for these movements. So while the focus of traceurs may be on their movements and betterment of both mind and body, the urban spaces in which these movements occur are what make the interactions possible in the first place.

The urban spaces of the city are an inseparable component of the alternative appropriations that traceurs engage in through the practice of parkour. The space is their dance partner. Even though the spaces themselves are not moving, they are still providing the surfaces and obstacles for traceurs to push off of, to pull on, to jump off of, and to climb up. The traceur is the dynamic partner while space is the static one, but they are partners, and the dance could not take place without both partners being present during the interaction. Simply because the space is static and the traceur is dynamic does not make the space any less significant than the traceur.

Space fulfills a unique role, and makes the experience of alternative appropriations of these spaces by traceurs possible. Space is an integral, necessary component of the experience. Parkour cannot exist without the space to provide the context in which the movements can take place. Space is an immensely important aspect of the experience that traceurs have when they execute movements.
Contextualizing Alternative Appropriation

During the experience of the phenomenon, the traceurs are interacting with spaces and objects in alternative ways. These objects have normative usages dictated by designers and the general agreement of society. A bench is a place to sit, a sidewalk is a place to walk, and walls or fences are barriers to walk around or guide people on a certain path. These objects of the city have normative uses; they are signs that signal a certain meaning, purpose, and way that they are intended to be interacted with. “City spaces are designed to get us to do all kinds of things. We see the signs and the symbols, we have the streets and the sidewalks, and all of those things are put together to give us a shared sensibility of the space, so we all have this shared sense of how to use it and the behaviors that are expected. Often these expectations and how they’re set up are most visible when they are violated,...it is actions that are counter to what we expect in that space (Lamb, 2014). Because the movements of traceurs break this codified usage of the city, traceurs may be looked at in a negative way for not using the space as intended. But these uses are dependent upon context. For example, a ramp near the entrance of a building is clearly placed there for the assistance of people in wheelchairs or for people who struggle to walk up stairs so that they can gain access to the building. Take that same ramp and place it in a skatepark and the normative, designed usage changes completely. No longer is this ramp meant to make a place more accessible; the ramp is now intended to function as a surface on which skaters can ride and perform tricks. The context around an object, the surroundings in which it is placed, determines which uses are normative and which uses are alternative.
Similarly to the ramp in the skatepark, a handrail located in an indoor parkour gym takes on a completely different meaning than a handrail in a typical urban space. A handrail in an urban space is an object meant for assisting people with walking, denoting barriers, guiding people through space, and protecting people from falling over ledges. A handrail placed in a parkour gym is a tool for movement, meant for vaulting over or jumping upon. The context of the handrail being inside a parkour gym changes its normative usage. Therefore, using a handrail for parkour movements when it is located in a parkour gym is not an alternative way to appropriate the object; it is the normative way to use the object, which it is designed for and how it is supposed to be used. For a non-practitioner, being placed in the context of a parkour gym and seeing a handrail may confuse them. If they are not familiar with the movements of parkour, they will not understand the purpose or normative way to use the handrail until they observe a traceur utilizing it for movement. In any urban space, if a non-practitioner sees a handrail, they can understand it; they know what the normative function is and how to use it properly. But inside a parkour gym, in a new, unfamiliar context to them, non-practitioners would not understand the purpose of the handrail, although they may suspect that it is not there for the purpose they assume when they see it anywhere else in the city. The non-practitioner knows only the normative usage of the handrail when it is placed in the context of an urban space, while the traceur possesses a very different mindset.

When a traceur sees a handrail in an urban space, they can see the normative usage for the handrail, which is to be used for the functions discussed previously, and they learn this usage by being part of society like non-practitioners. But through the cultivation of parkour vision over
years of training, traceurs also see the alternative ways which the handrail could function for executing parkour movements. These visualized alternative uses for the handrail are not necessarily incorrect usages, just different than the uses expected by the general public. “There are rules that we learn and expectations of behavior in city space, and parkour directly challenges that, sort of points to it as arbitrary. There is nothing necessarily natural about a sidewalk; we sort of make the rules about what these things mean” (Lamb, 2014). Society has created a city of symbols and signs which people operate within according to the expected behavioral interactions with these conditions. “A handrail is a highly functional object whose time and use are wholly programmed. Like sidewalks, benches, trash cans, and traffic lights, these are all signals, material elements within an urban semantic field of precise and imperative utilitarian objects that condition us and with which we cannot converse. Such elements have no meaning, only imparting a message” (Borden, 2001, p. 191). Like parkour, “skateboarding counters signal architecture with a body-centric and multisensory performative activity, and with an indifference to function, price, and regulation, creating new patterns of space and time, and turning the signals of the city into ephemeral symbols of everyday meaning and duration” (Borden, 2001, p. 229). The alternative appropriations of traceurs through parkour movements challenges and disobeys the codified usage of space, similarly to how “skateboarding challenges the notion that space is there to be obeyed, and that we exist solely as efficient automata within the processes of exchange and accumulation” (Borden, 2001, p. 231). The way that traceurs see and use the spaces and objects of the city is alternative to the expected, signified uses of these spaces. Whether in an urban space or in a parkour gym, traceurs, through their parkour vision, see the
opportunities for movement that a handrail provides for them. Traceurs always see the handrail as a tool for movement regardless of context while also understanding its normative function in urban spaces whereas non-practitioners will either see the handrail for its normative usage in urban space or not understand how it is meant to be used when observed in a parkour gym.

Experiencing the Phenomenon Continued

The traceurs described that entering a flow state and experiencing the phenomenon was generally a very calm, serene event. But if a mistake is made during the movement, this calmness can quickly be replaced with feelings of fear. “Things can happen in midair or something goes wrong when you’re doing it and then that can get really terrifying, but often not…Sometimes something goes wrong but…you don’t get that scared and you’re just like ‘Oh well. Too late already’ and for some reason it’s kind of okay. Sometimes something can happen where you think ‘I’m about to die’ in midair, and you kind of get a chance to think about that” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 39). Typically this should not happen as long as the preparation for the jump was done correctly and the mental visualization of the movement was successful. The experience of being in the flow state of the movement and interacting with urban space in this way was described by the interviewees as being very enjoyable and satisfying. “As you do the movement or whatever it is, the jump or the kong or whatever, it’s just fun because it’s already happening! You don’t necessarily have to feel scared” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 39). “It will spike off different chemicals in your body like adrenaline and different things” (Poprocki,
Individual Interview 2, p. 86). The traceurs also explained that during this experience is when their true potential comes out and they see what they are really capable of. “This is where all your hidden potential can come out and it’s kind of artistic in a way. You go to one move and you transition to another one and then another one, and it just keeping going and going…It’s really fun just to be able to interact in ways” (Dye, Group Interview 1, p. 216). “To kind of just feel that unchecked physical ability just happening is eye-opening for me as an athlete to experience” (Peveley, Group Interview 2, p. 238). They experience a calmness, a quietness, a sense of power and weightlessness, a floaty-ness in their body of smooth, serene movement, a sense of euphoria and freedom. They have no thoughts, they are completely focused on the present moment, their sense of self steps back and their bodies and training take over, and everything is reactive and reflexive. They feel a sense of oneness with the world around them and everything around them drops away except for the object they are engaging with in the present moment. This is their flow state. All of this focus on the present moment, the leading of the body, the reaction and training taking over, the stepping back of the self, the calmness, the power, and the serenity carries the traceur through their alternative movements until they finish executing their planned sequence.
Reflections of the Experience of the Phenomenon

Completion of Movement Execution

Upon completion of their alternative appropriations, the traceurs described a sense of the self stepping back into place and once again becoming aware of their surroundings. “When you land, then there can be kind of like a roar as you become aware of what’s going on around you afterwards, depending on the setting. There may be people cheering you on or whatever. Or if it’s by yourself, it’s just kind of like you come out of a tunnel” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 40). If the execution of the movement was successful, the traceurs often feel a great sense of accomplishment and happiness. “If I complete the move successfully, it does feel awesome! It’s an accomplishment. I feel good” (Morphy, Group Interview 1, p. 217). “There is a satisfaction in knowing that I am able to do more with my body” (McNabb, Individual Interview 6, p. 146). “I feel great, a sense of accomplishment!...just really good!” (Hartung, Individual Interview 3, p. 101). “It’s empowering too! After you do something like that, you just find a different kind of strength that you didn’t really know you had” (Barber, Paired Interview 2, p. 192). “You feel really good when you do it. You were able to do it, you feel a sense of accomplishment, a sense of euphoria” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 170). “Once I stick it and I do it cleanly, that’s when I feel happy, proud” (Koehler, Group Interview 2, p. 236). “In parkour, there’s such a sense of accomplishment and reward for attaining something good, being able to do something well, looking back and being like ‘I couldn’t do that and now I can’...that reward

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system…something physical where you can still feel that sense of accomplishment” (Graves, Group Interview 1, p. 218). This sense of happiness and accomplishment is brought about by the experience of flow state and a successful execution of their movements. “In the long run, optimal experiences add up to a sense of mastery–or perhaps better, a sense of participation in determining the content of life–that comes as close to what is usually meant by happiness as anything else we can conceivably imagine” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009).

If the movement the traceur attempted was not successful, they still described feeling happy and satisfied for attempting it, but would try to understand what went wrong. “If you didn’t make it…you could still be happy! You didn’t hurt yourself and you tried it and you have the opportunity to try again” (Poprocki, individual Interview 2, p. 86). “If you don’t land it so well, depending on how many times you’ve tried, it could be frustrating or you try to imagine ‘What did I do wrong?’” (Morphy, Group Interview 1, p. 217). “It doesn’t matter whether you achieve it the first time or not, are you able to do it again? Are you able to be safe enough that you can attempt this over and over and over again? Until you finally realize, this is how to do it” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 124). The traceurs find happiness even in failed attempts because as long as they train in a safe way to avoid injury, they can always try again and get better. They can also find satisfaction in committing to attempting the movement mentally, meaning the mental barriers they faced initially become less imposing after the first attempt.
Image 27: Traceur failing Front Flip attempt, University of Michigan Campus, Ann Arbor, MI, photo by author

Image 28: Traceur failing Wall Run attempt, University of Cincinnati Campus, Cincinnati, OH, photo by author
Regardless of whether or not the movement was successful, the traceurs expressed that they typically want to execute the movement again. “A desire to do it again…to feel it again. It’s like I always want to feel that. And you know I could see where people would think of parkour as ‘Oh, well you guys are a bunch of adrenaline junkies’. It’s not the adrenaline that I am feeding off of; it’s that sense of oneness” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 125). That sense of the self dropping away and being entirely engulfed in the present moment, feeling one with the environment of the city, is the feeling that the traceurs seek to find again. “It’s always a feeling of ‘I think I want to find that again’. And maybe not in the same movement, maybe in something different” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, pp. 125-126). The traceurs are often not satisfied with one successful attempt, because they are concerned with mastery of the mind and body. “‘Once is never, twice is clever, three times forever’…If you can do it cleanly three times in a row, your body understands it, your mind understands it, and you can dictate to your body ‘I want you to do this thing’ and it knows it…You’ve achieved it, but you haven’t attained it…But if you can actually attain it by doing it over and over and over again, that movement then becomes part of you” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 138). Through disciplined repetition of movements, traceurs perfect their skills and expand their abilities.

This sense of accomplishment the traceurs feel after successfully completing an alternative appropriation of urban space is accompanied by a sense of purpose and value. The success they have experienced through completing a new movement is accompanied by the satisfaction that all of their training in parkour led up to that point and it paid off in the moment of successful appropriation.
The joy of that moment is one of the best, because everything built up! And it’s not just your preparation that day, and it’s not just overcoming your fear of it, it’s also all your years of training up to that. It’s kind of like in a way, you feel like your whole life led to that moment sort of, like everything was preparing for that moment of execution where you became, and you worked, and you trained, and you built, and you were changed to be the person that, in that moment, was able to do that thing. And that is a great feeling of success, but more than that, of joy and purpose in being! Everything that I built up to came to this moment and I have fulfilled it! (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 40).

Csikszentmihalyi explains these feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction that people experience after operating in a flow state: “we have all experienced times when, instead of being buffeted by anonymous forces, we do feel in control of our actions, masters of our own fate. On the rare occasion that it happens, we feel a sense of exhilaration, a deep sense of enjoyment that is long cherished and that becomes a landmark in memory for what life should be like” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009).

Through overcoming mental barriers and achieving success in his movement, Foster described this experience as one of becoming a new person upon completing a challenge, transforming himself through his movement and increased ability.

I have become this person. A minute ago, I was not this person that could do
this…and now I have become that person…There’s a movement there. It’s like you’ve changed as a person because of the jump you just did, and you’ve now become a different person. You’ve transformed. And so that’s why you constantly chase that next one, is because it’s movement! You’re changing, you’re becoming, you’re growing as a person each time as you land it. So there’s a really great feeling! I love it! (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 40-41).

Julie Angel discusses this feeling that Foster expresses of transforming into a new person after completing a new movement challenge through his alternative appropriations of urban space. “The heightened physicality and aim of controlling the body and its emotions, coupled with the creativity of producing new realities of movements, explains why many traceurs describe parkour as a transformative practice; people feel changed by their experience of doing parkour” (Angel, 2011). Through completing new challenges and progressing their abilities, traceurs not only grow as parkour practitioners, they grow as people, finding their identity. There is a movement occurring in the act of their appropriations, and that movement is more substantial than just the change in physical positioning of the body. “Every leap across a discontinuity represents a risk taken that may succeed or fail;...the result of this passage, of this more or less successful leap, is a flow, a network, a movement, a wake left behind that will make it possible to define a particular form of existence, and, consequently, particular beings” (Latour, 2013, p. 100). Through their movements, traceurs define their existence, their identity, who they are, and who they have become, transforming themselves through their alternative appropriations of
urban space. “Being-as-other can gain its subsistence through the exploration of alterity, through multiplicity, through relations” (Latour, 2013, p. 279). The transformations that traceurs experience deals “not only [with] their perceptions of space and the things they do in them, but it is the perception of themselves, their identity, the confidence and ease that they feel as a citizen, that is expanded and becomes more complex as a result of doing parkour” (Angel, 2011). Serres argues that through play and physical engagement with the world, the body transforms itself to become a more complete version of itself (Serres, 2009). During this play and physical engagement with urban space, traceurs are entirely enveloped in the present moment, and it is through this experience of intense focus and precision that they grow and change, finding their identity. “If ‘I’ and ‘you’ are to emerge, a new flow of being is needed; being that offers the gift, the present of presence” (Latour, 2013, p. 374).

When traceurs complete a new movement or challenge successfully, it can be a very empowering experience for them. They have succeeded in overcoming their fears and mental obstacles to get themselves to execute the movement, and after executing that movement successfully, they have demonstrated to themselves the progression of their abilities. By completing physical challenges that become progressively more difficult, traceurs witness themselves improving and performing movements that they were previously not capable of, and this experience of measured improvement can be very empowering. Overcoming obstacles, completing challenges, and executing movements that they may have thought were impossible a year earlier, traceurs, through their training, are learning how to overcome challenges with hard work and perseverance. This same mindset that traceurs learn through the practice of parkour can
be applied to other aspects of their lives, accomplishing feats that they never thought could have been possible. Learning to overcome challenge, mental barriers, and fear to accomplish previously unthinkable feats is why parkour can be such an empowering experience for traceurs, and why many of them continue to practice.

**Viewing of Alternative Appropriations**

During the interview process, traceurs were questioned about how they perceive other traceurs performing movements and how they perceive other non-practitioners who respond when witnessing them personally perform movements. When traceurs view other traceurs experiencing space in these alternative ways through parkour movements, they feel a sense of happiness, inspiration, amazement, and motivation to engage in that experience themselves. They are supportive, cheer for the traceur, encourage them, motivate them, and respond with positivity regardless of the skill level of the traceur they are watching. They analyze their movements and assess to see whether they could achieve them themselves.
Non-practitioners respond in many different ways to witnessing these alternative appropriations of urban space. Some non-practitioners reportedly respond with fear, anger, and concern, while others respond with compliments, happiness, awe, and appreciation. It was expressed by the interviewees that unhealthier non-practitioners who are in wealthier areas, typically older adults from roughly ages forty to sixty-five, will often respond in a similar negative way. Traceurs claimed that this group of people typically responds with fear, projecting their perceptions of danger, risk, and fear onto the traceur, calling the police, telling them to stop, fearing that they will hurt themselves, thinking that they are doing something illegal or trespassing, and/or are upset because they perceive them to be using the space incorrectly. Other
non-practitioners will sometimes encourage traceurs to execute a movement they deem risky while giving excuses as to why they would not try parkour themselves. Upon contemplation of these conclusions, it is important to reiterate that these assessments were concluded based off of a collective analysis of conducted interviews with traceurs combined with personal experiences from training in public spaces, meaning that these observations are biased. They reflect the perceptions of traceurs describing how they perceive non-practitioners to be responding to their movements.

**Biases of Traceurs about Non-Practitioners**

Many traceurs practice parkour regularly and often times the sport becomes their primary extracurricular activity, while, to some traceurs, parkour is everything. Parkour for these practitioners has become a way of life, a means of providing for themselves, and has had an immensely significant positive influence on their lives. Because of all the positive benefits that traceurs receive from parkour and the movements associated with the practice, they are often avid advocates and supporters of using space in these alternative ways through parkour. Therefore, because of their strongly held beliefs about the sport constructed from their personal experiences, they may be critical or judgmental of people who do not see the value or purpose in using space in these alternative ways. This judgment and criticality of non-practitioners can surface when encountered by people who do not understand their movements and order them to stop because they perceive the movement as being dangerous or incorrect. Through parkour,
traceurs learn to overcome their fears and advance their physical abilities to be able to perform amazing feats of physical and mental challenge, exercising their bodies and minds through the process, becoming healthier, stronger, and mentally in control of their fear. For this reason, when non-practitioners witness the alternative appropriations of traceurs and vocally respond with fear or anger, traceurs perceive these people as having lesser control over, or experience with, managing their fears. Traceurs also tend to perceive these people as being unhealthy because they have not put in the same effort that the practitioners have to train their bodies to be capable of these movements that non-practitioners perceive to be dangerous. Mastering the movements of parkour is no easy feat, and all traceurs have put in many countless hours of strenuous effort and work to be able to perform the movements they can with their bodies. Through this hard work, respect is earned among practitioners in the community, and this explains why traceurs may not have a very respectful image of non-practitioners who have not put in the same work to advance the capabilities of their own bodies and minds. For traceurs who have put in the time and effort to increase their physical capabilities to the point of being able to perform these movements, they perceive them as being very normal movements that most people should be capable of learning through training. So when a non-practitioner responds with fear to these movements that traceurs view as being completely normal, the traceurs perceive that person as being unhealthy because they cannot perform the movements themselves, which causes them fear.

Because parkour is a way of life for some traceurs, some practitioners could be classified as ‘true believers’ of the sport, meaning that they perceive it to be the one true path, and may
perceive anyone who disagrees with the practice as being misguided or not living in the correct way. This mindset, coupled with the perception that to be healthy, one should be able to perform the movements of parkour, can create negative biases towards non-practitioners, and introduces ego into the situation. When traceurs make judgments about non-practitioners, claiming that they are making excuses as to why they cannot attempt parkour movements or that they are unhealthy or not in control of their fear, traceurs are making comparisons between themselves and others. They are comparing their own capabilities and training to another person who is not as physically capable as them, making negative judgments about those people who take issue with their alternative appropriations. In this sense, traceurs are comparing themselves to non-practitioners and thinking of themselves as better, healthier, or stronger because of their capabilities in movement. So while these perceptions of non-practitioners by traceurs may be accurate and true to some degree, it is important to keep in mind that they are laden with bias.

Perception of Legal Perspectives on Alternative Appropriation

In a similar realm of thought, traceurs were also questioned about their perception of the relationship of alternative appropriations of urban space to liability, legality, and responses from authorities. Traceurs explained that the alternative appropriations of urban space are often seen as a liability risk or an illegal activity, especially in high crime areas. Police will often ask traceurs to stop what they are doing, leave the area, or are told they cannot do that. Police will also sometimes see the value in the alternative usage of urban space, cheering them on and
encouraging traceurs to continue their training. The interviewees reported that police interactions have seemingly become more positive over time for traceurs. When approached by police, traceurs emphasize that they do not run, they explain that they are not trying to damage property or hurt anyone, they explain parkour to the officers, they are respectful, they leave if asked, and they try to leave a good impression because they feel that they represent the entire parkour community. The police are generally reasonable towards the alternative appropriation of space through parkour movements and traceurs have worked hard to establish good relationships with police, college campuses, and property owners. In the United States, this negative legal perception associated with parkour movements is perceived by traceurs to stem from a cultural issue where there is a lack of personal responsibility for incurred injuries, a sue first attitude, and a strong sense of individuality and private property.

Discussion of Additional Biases held by Traceurs

Relating back to the previous section about biases held by traceurs, some of these biases can again be identified in the responses when the interviewees were asked about liability and its relationship to parkour movements. For traceurs, when they execute movements in urban spaces, they are taking full responsibility for their own safety. They thoroughly check the space before executing movements, ensuring there are no loose railings or unstable surfaces, and they carefully go about their training in ways to minimize injury. So when a traceur does get hurt, it is typically their own fault for either failing to execute a movement properly or for not checking a
space adequately prior to their executions. Because of this mindset, one of taking full responsibility for one’s own actions and injuries when moving through space, traceurs will often feel that injuries sustained from moving through space are one’s own fault alone, and therefore people should have no reason to sue. Because people may sue for injuries that could have been avoided if they had practiced parkour and were in better control of their movement, traceurs view this as not taking responsibility for one’s own actions, using the space as a scapegoat to blame for their own physical shortcomings or poor decision-making. In many cases of sustained injury, it may be true that the space itself is actually at fault for causing harm to people, with carpets not being adequately secured down, ice being present on a staircase, or a shelf collapsing because of structural deficiencies. But even when the space may have actually been at fault and suing is a completely reasonable action to take in the situation, traceurs may still hold the belief that the person should have trained their body in a way to be able to navigate the space and avoid injuries. In this sense, traceurs hold a bias towards the legal system in the United States because instead of encouraging people to take responsibility for their own actions, the system makes it easy for people to sue for damages, which has been a very commonly exploited legal action for people that injure themselves on the property of others.

Also, because traceurs view their movements as being completely natural and reasonable for anyone to learn, they often disagree with police when they are told that their movements are not appropriate and should be taken elsewhere. These movements may be normal for traceurs, but for the general public, they may seem dangerous or risky, discomforting to be around, which is often why police get involved. While alternatively appropriating space in a parking garage,
Lamb explains a scenario he encountered: “these guys look at me really strangely ‘What’s this guy doing? Is he out of his mind?’ The reason those looks come about is because the expectations of that space, what you expect to see there, that violates that script. We see the stairs, we see the parking garage, and we sort of know what is supposed to happen there” (Lamb, 2014). Because traceurs use space in ways that are alternative to their normative functions, their movements are likely to draw attention from the general public who may find them disconcerting. “Parkour looks odd because it’s at odds, or it’s incongruent, with the rules that we made up for that space” (Lamb, 2014). When someone is using a space in a way that police or the general public find confusing or dangerous because it does not match their perceived proper way to use the space, they often feel the need to get involved or to notify law enforcement. With their deeply invested involvement in the sport, the presence of biases about parkour and how the legal system reacts to the types of movement associated with the sport comes as no surprise. These biases must be taken into consideration when assessing the legal responses to alternative appropriations of urban space through parkour movements.

Traceurs will often profess that parkour is for everyone and all it takes is time and effort for anyone to learn. But this bias that anyone is capable of practicing parkour is not necessarily true. There are certain limiting physical and mental factors which can make learning the movements of parkour difficult or even impossible. Certain diseases, injuries, impairments to bodily function, weight, and age can hinder one’s ability to learn parkour. Despite some of these hindrances, there are examples of elderly people learning parkour in the UK, people without limbs training in the sport, and people with other physical or mental ailments who still manage to
train perfectly fine. Although there are always exceptions to these categories, the sport still requires practitioners to be physically capable of movement, meaning that young, healthy, athletic people are most likely to participate in the sport. These physical requirements for practicing parkour are generally reflective of most communities of people who train. Traceurs are often young men and women who are healthy and maintain an athletic build, but yet the biased opinion that parkour is for everyone still persists.

**Documentation and Sharing of Alternative Appropriations**

When questioned about the conclusion of their experience of the phenomenon, the interviewees were asked about how they document their movements, along with where and why they choose to share these documentations with others. The traceurs expressed that without documentation and sharing of parkour videos online, there would be no parkour, because this is part of the conversation through which the greater parkour community can engage with each other. A similar situation arises in the documentation and sharing of parkour movements as in the documentation and sharing of skateboarding movements: “the skateboarders’ move is a reperformance of the imagery that they see in magazines and videos, and hence is a unit of exchange between each other. In performing the move, skaters are therefore at once undertaking a directly experienced action while also projecting an image of themselves as seen by both themselves and others. The skater’s move is at once action, image, and social relation, and is also at once a local and globally dispersed phenomenon” (Borden, 2001, p. 262). Posting and
watching parkour videos is a way to move with someone on the other side of the world. It is a way for traceurs to share their progress, learn from the movements of others, and take part in the global parkour community. Traceurs document their movements through film, sharing it online and through social media for the purposes of showing other traceurs what they’ve been working on, to inspire others to start or continue to train, and to participate in that global conversation of movement.

It is important to have good intentions behind filming, making it about sharing and not about boosting an ego. For some traceurs, sharing videos of their movement with others online
can become about showing off and not about simply sharing their progress. This mindset of only executing movements to show off for others can also occur when training in person with other people around. Having this mindset of only attempting movements to perform for others is a somewhat irresponsible and dangerous way for traceurs to practice parkour because it takes their focus off of their movements. They become concerned with eliciting certain responses from others and ensuring that others witness them perform a movement, which can be distracting and cause traceurs to execute movements they may not be ready for, resulting in injuries. A similar situation can develop when traceurs are performing for a camera. Traceurs may want to land a difficult movement on camera so that they can impress others online, but traceurs must ensure that the camera does not push them to perform movements they are not ready for, otherwise injuries will happen.

This online sharing of parkour documentation or completion of movements in person can become about competition between traceurs, and this competition can be healthy or unhealthy. Unhealthy competition between traceurs can materialize in a variety of ways. Traceurs may compete with each other when training in the same location or through online videos. In person, a traceur may complete a move that another has not yet attained, and competition may cause the other traceur to push themselves to attempt the movement even if they are not ready for it. This can quickly cause injuries to practitioners and is not a healthy way to train. Parkour, from its conception, was always about overcoming one’s own fear and hesitation to complete new physical challenges. It was about the self versus the environment, not about the self versus another practitioner. This same unhealthy way to practice parkour can occur through online
videos where traceurs may compete by trying to perform similar movements of other traceurs or to use the same space from another traceur’s video in a more advanced way. But this competition can be positive and healthy for traceurs to take part in as well. In person, traceurs can push off of each other to advance their abilities, so when one practitioner completes a challenge, it gives the other motivation to complete it themselves. Online, seeing another traceur use the same space in different ways can be inspiring and help them to see new opportunities in spaces.

Another potential caution of sharing parkour documentations online is the possibility that children or youth will view these videos and attempt to replicate the movements themselves, causing injuries. Without providing the context of the long hours of training and progression that went into achieving certain movements, children, teenagers, and young adults who view these videos online may not realize the difficulty and danger of the movements. But this potential consequence is not unique to parkour videos, as many different forms of media portray people engaging in activities that are dangerous and could be replicated by youth in unsafe ways.

Traceurs also document their movements to see what they are doing wrong, for posterity, to see their progress over time, and to compile them into artistically beautiful pieces of film that convey the experience of their movement to others.

Completion of the Experience

Finally, after attempting or successfully completing their movements and finishing the training session, the traceurs once again stretch to cool down their bodies. “Then I’ll stretch after,
because the recovery part is just as important as anything” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 121). One of the three tenants of parkour, To Be and To Last, instructs on the goal of longevity, to be able to perform these movements throughout life. This is why stretching before and after a training session is important to traceurs, because it helps them avoid injuries and condition their bodies to be able to endure the movements of parkour. Through their training sessions, traceurs are continuously developing their physical abilities while cultivating other important life skills simultaneously, developing their identities. “Parkour is not an endpoint, it is not an answer per say, it is more of a journey, it is a tool we can use to more critically engage our lives” (Lamb, 2014). The practice of parkour is not an isolated, singular experience; it is a constant, repeated effort to better oneself, and through movement, this objective is pursued. At this stage of the process, the experience of the phenomenon, before, during, and after the appropriations, ceases until the next time that the traceurs venture out into urban space, seeking, through their alternative perspective, new opportunities for movement that the spaces of the city have to offer.
SUMMATION
Epilogue

Through the data collected from interviews conducted with eighteen traceurs from the Midwest region of the United States, the objectives of this inquiry were accomplished and the research question and subquestions were answered. All of the information acquired through the interviews was analyzed, coded, assembled, and discussed to define the essence of the lived experience that parkour practitioners have when they alternatively appropriate urban spaces of the city through the execution of parkour movements. The main research question and the six subquestions were answered, explained, and discussed in the data analysis section of this thesis. The lived experience that traceurs have when they are alternatively appropriating urban space through parkour movements was broken down into three phases: preparing to experience the phenomenon, experiencing the phenomenon, and reflecting on the experience of the phenomenon upon completion of the movements. The following is a collection of brief but inclusive summaries of the results, conclusions, and discussions of all sections contained in the data analysis chapter.

Preparation Summary

Traceurs prepare their bodies before practice by eating healthy food and stretching, along with other regular exercise routines. They sometimes watch videos of parkour to get inspired or research a movement they want to practice that day. Traceurs then venture out into urban space,
looking for ideal conditions and obstacles, including thin low walls, suspended metal bars, multilevel sturdy platforming, railings, small square or circular objects, high walls made of a hard material, accessibility ramping structures, stairs and stairwells, tables, benches, trees, terrain variations, corners, ledges, lines or cracks on the ground, and a space that has many obstacles in close proximity, a lack of people, is in close proximity to them, has good texture and grip on surfaces, has objects that are sturdily built, has an older and dirtier appearance to the space, and a spot that is considered public space. When identifying an ideal training spot, the distances between obstacles, or negative space, is just as important as the obstacles themselves. The distances between obstacles determine what movements are possible when the traceur measures their ability level up to the layout of the space, determining what they can and cannot do. They must be creative in spaces where objects are too far apart or too close together, either coming up with different movements to train or developing ways to create more challenge respectively. Otherwise traceurs must move to a different location that fits their ability level. Traceurs learn to see space for its parkour opportunities through regular practice of parkour in urban spaces. These evaluations of the suitability of spaces for parkour movements are a full body engagement with the space that employs a totality of the senses. The judgments they make about these spaces are both logical and sensory evaluations determined through lived experience. This full body engagement with space provides traceurs with freedom of movement and expression, contributing to the formulation of their identities.

Parkour is a very new, growing practice, and in the United States there are very few, if any, urban spaces designed which take the appropriations of traceurs into consideration or which
encourage physical interaction with space. Urban spaces tend to prioritize visual interactions through the provision of visual stimuli. By designing spaces where parkour and other physical interactions with space can take place, urban spaces can become more engaging and multifaceted. Urban spaces can incorporate the appropriations of traceurs into the design by including some of the elements listed above which traceurs seek out, by creating a density of many obstacles in close proximity, by making objects in urban spaces robustly and out of materials with good grip that cannot be marked up easily, and by designing objects to resist impact loads from parkour movements. In urban spaces, it is important to create a sensory experience that is more than just visual, encouraging physical engagement through touch and play. Visual stimulation has become the dominant way to experience space while touch has become suppressed. Spaces communicate expected behaviors and how they are meant to be used by people. Through design, architects can create spaces that encourage the usage of space in more physical ways. In the same way, architecture communicates with traceurs, indicating through its forms and placement of elements which movements can be executed in a space and how to navigate it. If spaces are designed with parkour in mind, the movements become more commonplace, becoming more acceptable and understood as a result. Urban spaces are already used for parkour, so the requirements to make spaces more parkour-friendly are not drastically different from how spaces currently are, requiring only minimal changes. Space can only be experienced holistically through the engagement of all the senses. Successful spaces that generate holistic sensorial experiences can be created by designing space with a multiplicity of different uses in mind, and through incorporating the appropriations of traceurs into the design of
Through inquiring into the experience of the alternative appropriation of urban space by parkour practitioners, two important questions emerged; is space that is designed for parkour still considered alternative use and are the movements still considered parkour in a space specifically designed for it? It was specified that the practice of parkour is signified by a collection of codified movements associated with the sport and how one utilizes these movement to navigate space; this is not dependent on the designed intended use of the space. It was also specified that a parkour gym or a parkour park is just a reinterpretation and conglomeration of certain elements taken directly from the city. When practicing parkour in a parkour gym, the movements of traceurs are no longer alternative because the space is designed for that type of use. Their appropriations become normative. In an urban space where parkour is incorporated but not the primary use, their appropriations become secondary to the normative function of the space for non-practitioners. Their appropriations are only considered alternative when practiced in urban spaces that are not designed to be used for parkour. It was clarified that the intent and focus of this thesis is to study the alternative appropriations of space by traceurs, meaning that this thesis is not inquiring about the experiences of traceurs when executing movements in parkour gyms. This thesis is only inquiring about the experiences of traceurs when they are executing movements in urban spaces where their usage is considered alternative.

A point of criticality was discussed about whether or not these types of alternative uses of space have a positive or negative affect on the city and on people who take part in these appropriations. The conclusion drawn was that whether the impacts caused by the traceur are
positive or negative depends on how the traceur conducts themselves in their training. If they are careless and reckless, they can damage property or cause a disturbance for people who are unfamiliar with parkour and its movements. Their appropriations can be seen as a crime and a liability risk, preoccupying law enforcement and keeping them from other matters. People may be afraid that they will injure themselves or others when using space in this way. To minimize these issues, traceurs can train in areas where they are less likely to cause a disturbance and explain what they are doing to confused people. The affect that traceurs have with their training on the city depends on how they conduct themselves and how they choose to go about their training. The determined ways in which alternative appropriations could positively affect the city are as follows: they give value and use back to leftover, unused space of the city, they bring positive activity and energy into the space, and they introduce spectacle into urban spaces. This element of spectacle gives urban spaces additional social functions, drawing more people into the space, keeping people in the space for longer periods of time, which provides opportunities for community development and socialization, and could potentially be making the city safer due to the increased levels of activity the movements bring. Traceurs also reported a copious number of personal benefits received through the regular practice of alternative appropriations of urban space for their physical health, mental health, and general well-being.

When an adequate training location has been found, the traceurs begin preparing for movement with stretching and small movements to warm up their bodies, avoiding engaging in movements before they are physically and mentally prepared for them. Through their warm-up, they start to see the opportunities for movement that the space provides. This visualization of the
opportunities for parkour movements in spaces is referred to as parkour vision. Parkour vision is acquired through regular training of parkour or by watching other traceurs use space. The interactions that traceurs have with space give them an improved physical relationship with the city, better spatial awareness, and a better understanding of materials and textures. Their experience of the city involves all of their senses, not just sight, which results in traceurs having a fuller experience of the city than most non-practitioners. Through their movements, new locations and perspectives of the city are revealed to traceurs, changing their point of view, giving them a more detailed experience of the city. In order to truly experience space, one must use the space, not just observe it. Through their physical interactions with space, traceurs develop bonds and memories with spaces, viewing the city as a dance partner. Truly experiencing space requires a combination of sensing and reasoning, because the experiences of the body influence the perceptions of the mind. Typically, sight and language overpower our experiences, inhibiting our other senses. To see and experience the city in the way that traceurs do requires creativity and regular practice, and there are many different levels of creativity imbedded in parkour. The practice was described as a perfect balance between discipline and creativity.

Traceurs are not concerned with the city as a unified whole in the typical sense. They view the city as one continuous playground that provides unlimited opportunities for movement, play, and physical expression. Traceurs are concerned with the micro-architecture of the city, with the materialities, distances, textures, and forms of immediate objects that they are experiencing in the present moment, finding creative, alternative paths through space. They are
concerned with experiencing the disparate objects and spaces of the city unfrequented by the public. If traceurs were to map the city, their maps would emphasize unusual areas of the city, atypical from the common surveyor map, depicting routes and pathways through space only navigable by capable traceurs. Traceurs are not concerned with street name or destinations, but with sensorial experiences of the city through physical interaction, play, and exploration.

When traceurs find an opportunity for movement or challenge, they compare the skills needed to complete these movements to their currently perceived level of physical ability. If they determine that they are capable of completing the movement, they can execute it without much thought or preparation. There comes a point of decision for the traceur when they either decide yes, they are capable of the movement or no, they are not. This decision is always a result of all of their collective training but feels to traceurs like a gut instinct. Through regular training, traceurs develop a better understanding of the capabilities of their bodies and can make more accurate judgments of their abilities. Upon making the decision to attempt the movement, traceurs begin performing similar movements to the ones required. During this stage, traceurs assess if they are physically and mentally on their game, determining if their body and mind are adequately prepared. Once they are warmed up and have determined they are on their game, they begin to assess the logistics and mechanics of the movements, checking surfaces and objects for stability and grip, planning bail routes, and using their body to check distances. When the traceur completes the preparation and are ready to execute the movement, they find themselves standing, staring down the obstacles they are about to engage with.

In these moments before execution, staring down the obstacles and assessing the
movement, the traceurs want to be really calm and centered. They assess their bodies to
determine how they are feeling. The traceurs explained that they do not just throw themselves at
the obstacles; they are very thoughtful and methodical in order to prevent injuries and improve
their chances of completing the movement successfully. They try to clear their minds and focus
on visualizing themselves successfully completing the movement, putting themselves mentally
through the whole run before they experience it physically. Traceurs get faster and better at this
visualization the more often they experience it.

During the moments before they experience the phenomenon, traceurs often have an
inner struggle with their fears and doubts because of the risk present in the situation. Traceurs
define risk as the possibility that something could go wrong and cause injuries while they define
danger as the possibility for serious consequences should something go wrong, such as severe
injury or death. Traceurs assess risk by comparing their mentally perceived level of physical
ability with the level of ability needed to successfully complete the movement they are assessing.
Fear arises when there is a gap between their mentally perceived physical ability and the ability
required to execute the movement, when traceurs think they are not physically capable of
completing it successfully. This fear is healthy because it comes from a desire for
self-preservation which keeps traceurs from getting hurt, but this fear can also be a mentally
constructed barrier. When the actual physical abilities of traceurs are higher than their perceived
physical abilities, mental barriers form and cause fear that is irrational. In order to progress their
abilities, traceurs must overcome their fears. Through regular training, traceurs develop a
relationship with fear, knowing when the fear is legitimate and when it is irrational. Traceurs do
not purposefully put themselves in danger and the perceptions of danger and risk are subjective; they depend on the person or the skill level of the traceur. Through regularly engaging in healthy risk-taking behavior, traceurs become better at overcoming fear and hesitation. After successfully visualizing themselves complete the movement, they must break the jump, overcoming their fears and hesitation to commit to executing the movement. Traceurs often encounter this when training near or slightly beyond the perceived edge of their capabilities, referred to as edgework.

Engaging with risk, fear, and danger can be a potentially harmful experience and it is questionable whether or not this type of space usage is positive and healthy for traceurs. Traceurs often suffer injuries from practicing parkour which are caused by these unnecessary risks that they take. Witnessing traceurs sustain injuries through their movements could be traumatizing for other traceurs and bystanders, and the regular occurrence of these injuries makes the claimed long term health benefits of practicing parkour seem questionable. Whether this engagement with risk, fear, and danger is positive or not again depends on how the traceur goes about their training, whether they are reckless or mindful in their movements. Alternatively appropriating urban space through parkour movements can be a productive way to engage in healthy risk-taking behavior, becoming applicable to other aspects in life. Fear can be paralyzing for some people in life and parkour can teach them how to control and get past their fears. This control over fear that traceurs learn can be harmful if they eliminate fear altogether, becoming overly skilled at mentally navigating fears, resulting in overconfidence. This overconfidence can result in traceurs putting themselves in dangerous, excessively risky situations that they should
not be in. It again falls on the individual practitioner to make decisions about how they choose to train; they can choose to train in ways that are healthy or in ways that are harmful.

When traceurs make the decision to execute an alternative appropriation of urban space, they feel a click in their minds that tells them to go, usually happening as a result of the previous steps of preparation and a complete, successful visualization of the movement. They feel a wave of inevitability, acceptance, and momentum come from within during these moments. It is important to train regularly to understand how one’s mind works so the mind does not tell the traceur to execute when they are not physically capable, causing injuries. Traceurs learn how their minds work through regular training. This click the traceurs experience in their minds can come and pass, a missed opportunity to execute. When the click happens and the traceurs make the decision to go, they think of absolutely nothing, and they begin to experience the phenomenon of alternative appropriation of urban space through parkour movements.

Experience Summary

When experiencing the phenomenon, traceurs feel a calmness and a quietness, a sense of power and weightlessness, a floaty-ness in their body of smooth, serene movement. The world around them falls away and their focus comes to the present. They focus on the aspects of the space which they are engaging in during the present moment. They have tunnel vision and no thoughts, their minds entirely focused on the movement of the body. During the movements, traceurs feel their body and hear their breath, and the feeling of the self disappears. They
experience a greater feeling of connectedness with everything around them, becoming one with the environment. Their focus is solely on their movements and interacting with space, and this is accompanied by a sense of euphoria and a feeling of freedom. They are enveloped in a flow state.

A flow state is when one is completely focused on the work one is engaging in. This state is often achieved when traceurs execute movements, brought on by stretching the mind to its limits. Traceurs push their minds to the limits with the great physical and mental challenges they engage in, requiring tremendous mental focus. Traceurs usually experience a flow state when training more challenging movements that require ample concentration and focus. In order to achieve a flow state, one must be engaging in a task one is highly skilled at where a significant amount of challenge is present. When in a flow state during the alternative appropriation of urban space, the sense of self fades as the body leads and training takes over. There is no mental capacity left to contemplate the self because traceurs are entirely focused on the movements and the space. Upon exiting a flow state, one is often met with a reinforced sense of the self when it fades back into place, forming a firmer sense of identity for the traceur through this experience. Traceurs feel transformed through their appropriations. Sometimes traceurs do not experience flow because they are operating on the cusp of flow, in either the zone of arousal when they do not possess the required skills to complete the challenge or in the zone of control when they have the skill but the challenge is not great enough. During their movements, traceurs take each moment as it comes with no expectations about outcomes. The experience of being in a flow state offers intrinsic motivation to traceurs and is rewarding in itself. Flow is often achieved with
tasks one finds enjoyable. The enjoyment experienced by traceurs during flow brings about feelings of optimal existence where nothing else seems to matter because of the joy they are experiencing through their movements.

The goals that traceurs have in their experiences of movement are usually personal in nature, relating to the betterment of the mind and body. But space still plays a very critical role in this experience. Everything around the traceurs drops away during their movements, but their focus becomes intensely fixated on specific areas of the space that they are interacting with in the present moment. They are entirely focused on the space and their bodily movements through it, experiencing each obstacle as it come. Traceurs become a dynamic part of the static environment. It is through the usage of space in alternative ways that traceurs better themselves. There could not be parkour without the spaces in which the movements are performed. Space creates the challenges to overcome, and without spaces and obstacles, there is no challenge. The space is their dance partner, without whom there could be no movement, no dance, and no parkour.

Spaces and objects of the city have symbols which communicate to users how they are supposed to be used. Traceurs break this codified usage of these objects and their symbols, but the symbols depend on the context in which the objects are found. A handrail in the city has a different symbol than a handrail in a parkour gym. The use of a handrail in a city for parkour movements is an alternative use of that handrail while in the context of a parkour gym, this is a normative use of the handrail. Non-practitioners only see the handrail for its normative use in the context of the city and do not understand the handrail in the context of a parkour gym unless they
witness its use. Traceurs always see how they can use objects for movement, and they also understand the normative functions of those objects when found in the city.

The calmness of the experience that traceurs described could be replaced with fear should an accident or mistake happen during their movements. But this should not occur if the traceurs properly prepared to engage in their movements. Overall, traceurs described their experience of flow state when alternative appropriating urban space for parkour movements as enjoyable and satisfying, uncovering their true potential during these movements. Their experiences while in a flow state carry traceurs through the movement or series of movements until they are complete.

Reflection Summary

Upon completion of their movements, traceurs described that their sense of self returns, once again becoming aware of their surroundings. They feel a sense of happiness, accomplishment, and euphoria if their movements were successful. This experience of a successful execution of their movements is empowering for traceurs. The success of the movement establishes a sense of mastery, which, by extension, generates feelings of happiness for traceurs. If their movements were unsuccessful, traceurs still feel happy and satisfied for attempting the movement but try to understand what went wrong. As long as they are able to attempt the movement again, the traceurs described that they felt adequate satisfaction alone in overcoming their initial mental barriers to attempt the movement. After completing their movements, regardless of whether they were executed successfully or not, the traceurs explained
that they usually want to execute those movements again, or another movement, in order to feel the flow state and once again experience that sense of oneness with the world and city around them. Traceurs strive to complete movements successfully multiple times, achieving mastery of the movement through repetition. The traceurs expressed that they experienced feelings of purpose and value when comprehending how all of their training throughout the years has led up to their successful completion of each new movement. Traceurs become gradually transformed through their movements into new people. This physical movement of alternative appropriations translates to figurative movement in life, contributing to the further development of the self and personal identity. By engaging in alternative appropriations of urban space, traceurs learn to overcome challenge through hard work and perseverance, which is empowering for them.

When traceurs watch other traceurs alternatively appropriate urban space through their movements, they feel happiness, inspiration, and motivation to experience space in this way themselves. Traceurs are generally supportive, encouraging, and positive when responding to the movements of other traceurs, regardless of the skill level of practitioner. Traceurs also tend to analyze the movements of other traceurs to understand how they could perform those movements themselves. When witnessing alternative appropriations of urban space by traceurs, some non-practitioners respond with fear, anger, and concern while others respond with compliments, awe, happiness, and appreciation. Traceurs indicated that the negative responses are most commonly received from older, supposedly unhealthy adults aged roughly forty to sixty-five when they train in wealthier areas where they encounter these types of people. This group of non-practitioners often projects their personal perceptions of fear, danger, and risk onto traceurs,
calling the police, telling them to stop, and fearing that they will get hurt. Non-practitioners will also occasionally think that traceurs are doing something illegal or become upset because they are perceived to be using the space incorrectly. Other non-practitioners may encourage traceurs to execute movement they think are risky while making excuses why they cannot practice parkour themselves. It is important to consider that these observations of non-practitioners are derived from the perceptions and opinions of traceurs, meaning that they are biased.

For many traceurs, parkour is a way of life, and they adamantly support the use of space in these alternative ways through parkour movements. For this reason, traceurs may be critical and judgmental of people that do not share their views about the benefits of using space this way. This criticality and judgment often occurs when non-practitioners try to impede or prevent traceurs from executing their movements and from using space in alternative ways. Traceurs train their minds and bodies to be capable of overcoming fear and to be able to perform these advanced movements. When non-practitioners respond with fear or anger towards movements by traceurs which they themselves consider perfectly normal and safe, traceurs see these people as not physically capable or as in control of their fear. These criticizing non-practitioners have not trained in a way to prepare their bodies and minds to be able to safely perform parkour movements. Learning parkour is a difficult task that requires many long hours of hard work and dedication, which creates mutual respect among traceurs. But for non-practitioners that have not put in the effort to train their bodies and minds in this way, traceurs may not have as much respect, especially when these people criticize traceurs during their training sessions. Traceurs are more likely to be judgmental towards non-practitioners that have not trained in this same way.
yet feel the need to intervene and interrupt their training sessions because of concerns for safety or out of fear. Movements that are completely normal for traceurs while, to non-practitioners, seem dangerous sometimes results in traceurs seeing these non-practitioners as being unhealthy and less capable. Some traceurs see parkour as the one true path and feel that everyone else is missing out or incorrect in their beliefs if they do not put in the effort to train their body and mind in this way. These select traceurs may think that to be considered healthy, one must be able to skillfully perform parkour movements. These comparative thoughts introduce the ego into the perceptions of traceurs when they begin to compare themselves to other non-practitioners in this way. Traceurs that think in this manner may believe they are healthier, stronger, and more capable than non-practitioners. While many of these statements by traceurs may be truthful, honest, semi-objective observations, they still contain an element of bias.

The alternative appropriations of urban space by traceurs are often seen as a liability risk or an illegal activity, especially in high crime areas. During interactions with authorities, police typically tell traceurs to stop what they are doing and to leave the area. Traceurs explained that sometimes police cheer them on and are encouraging. Over time, traceurs claim that interactions with law enforcement are becoming increasingly positive. When encountered by police, traceurs articulated that they do not run, they explain that they are not trying to damage property or hurt anyone, they explain parkour to the officers, they are respectful, they leave if asked, and they try to leave a good impression with law enforcement because they feel that they represent the entire parkour community. Several interviewees explained that their local parkour communities have built and cultivated working relationships with authorities over the years. The negative views of
their movements are theorized by traceurs to emanate from cultural issues in the United States, from the regular practice of people suing for injuries and not taking responsibility for their own actions as well as from the importance and value placed on private property rights. Traceurs also expressed that the significance placed on private property rights in the United States makes their training difficult and often leads to negative perceptions of their alternative appropriations from the perspective of non-practitioners.

Traceurs hold biases concerning legality similarly to how they hold biases towards non-practitioners. Traceurs take responsibility for their own movement and injuries because of how they train, so they often look at people who sue for injuries as not taking responsibility for their actions, blaming others. Traceurs may believe that these people suffer injuries because they do not train in a way to prepare themselves for those types of situations. This lack of responsibility for one’s own incurred injuries is often redirected into blame on the space and on the designers of the space, when instead traceurs believe one should take responsibility for one’s own mistakes, physical shortcomings, or poor decisions which resulted in injuries. Even if the space is truly at fault for causing injury, traceurs still may believe that they should have trained in a way to respond properly in a given situation to avoid injuries. Traceurs see the legal system in the United States as a method for avoiding responsibility for injuries incurred from one’s own mistakes, making it easy to blame and sue others instead. Traceurs see their movements as completely natural, so they disagree when police say they are inappropriate. These movements may seem dangerous, risky, and be discomforting to non-practitioners, which is often why police get involved. The movements of traceurs violate the expected normative usage of spaces and
objects of the city, causing unsettling feelings or confusion for non-practitioners. Traceurs often
profess that parkour is for everyone, that anyone can practice. But there can be certain physical
and mental barriers that prevent people from participating in the movements of parkour. There
are exceptions where people are still able to train somewhat despite these hindrances, but these
cases are rare. Traceurs are predominantly young, healthy, athletic individuals, and this is
reflected by the majority of parkour communities; yet this bias that parkour is for everyone still persists.

Without documentation and sharing of movements online through parkour videos, there
would be no parkour. Sharing of videos is a way for traceurs to connect to the greater, global
parkour community. Sharing videos of their movements is a way for traceurs to move with other
traceurs around the world. Through online sharing of documentation of parkour movements,
traceurs share their progress with others and learn movements from watching other traceurs
execute them. Many traceurs share documentation online simply to show what they have been
working on and to inspire others to train. This sharing of documentation should be simply about
sharing, and traceurs caution to be mindful that this sharing does not become about boosting
one’s ego or showing off. Performing movements for the purpose of recording them on camera
or to impress others can be dangerous. This takes the focus of the traceurs away from their
movements and can cause injuries. Sharing of documentation or training in person can become
competitive between traceurs. This competition can be either healthy or unhealthy competition
depending on the circumstances. If one traceur successfully completes a movement the other is
not prepared for, this may result in the other traceur pushing themselves excessively to attempt
the movement anyways, resulting in injuries. Parkour has always been about an internal battle with the self, not about competition with others. Parkour is about overcoming one’s own fears and doubts. Competition can often be healthy when traceurs encourage each other and overcome challenges together. When one traceur successfully completes a challenge, it can inspire and motivate the other to break down their mental barriers and achieve the movement as well.

Another caution of sharing parkour documentation online is that children could see these parkour videos and attempt to replicate the movements, injuring themselves. But this is not exclusive to parkour and can happen with any type of easily accessible media. Traceurs also document their movements to see where they are making mistakes in a movement, for posterity, to see their progress over time, and to compile them into artistically beautiful pieces of film that convey the experience of their movement to others.

At the conclusion of their training sessions, traceurs stretch to cool down their bodies. One of the common goals in parkour is longevity; traceurs want to be able to perform these movements for the rest of their lives. Common goals that traceurs continually strive for are the cultivation and progression of physical and mental abilities, as well as the development of other important life skills, through regular practice of their movements. Through their alternative appropriations of urban space, traceurs are constantly forming and evolving their identities through movement in a continuous effort to better their bodies and minds, reinforcing their sense of self.
Final Thoughts

The discipline of parkour, along with its alternative appropriations of urban space, is becoming increasingly popular in the United States, and parkour communities are continuing to grow. As the sport increases in popularity, the shortage of urban spaces that are suitable for this type of usage will become increasingly apparent. Architects and urban designers need to recognize this new type of emerging space usage and consider this group of people when designing public spaces within cities. The traceurs described how the practice of parkour can have many potential benefits for the communities it is introduced into, including both personal and social benefits. Parkour is a great physical outlet for people to get exercise, learn how to engage in healthy risk-taking behavior, and experience urban spaces in a more complete way, utilizing all of their senses. For adults, parkour teaches how to deal with risk, with danger, and with fear, and is a rewarding physical outlet for children, teens, and adults. Traceurs generally have great appreciation and care for urban spaces, viewing them as training partners and tools through which they can better themselves. Traceurs give greater value and use to urban spaces in addition to leftover spaces of the city, and through their movements, they introduce spectacle into these spaces, creating a more diverse social functionality. Parkour is often described by traceurs as being a sport which is a great equalizer because no equipment is needed apart from the spaces of the city, meaning that theoretically anyone can begin practicing. Providing urban spaces for parkour to take place can be an effective way to bring people in a community together, both physically and socially, through their shared experiences of movement. All of the benefits
that the traceurs experienced from practicing parkour can be multiplied and employed to build better, more connected communities, and all that is required to accomplish this is the provision of spaces where this emerging form of human expression can occur.

The intent of this research was to understand and describe the experience that traceurs have when they alternatively appropriate urban spaces of the city through parkour movements, and this goal was accomplished. But the greater purpose and projected influence of this inquiry goes beyond simply describing the essence of a lived experience. This thesis is an informative document which should be utilized by non-practitioners and aspiring traceurs to learn about parkour, the experience of alternative appropriations of urban space, and the greater purpose and intent behind these movements in order to create a greater understanding and awareness of parkour. This narrative description of the different aspects of the experience can also be used by traceurs to help them better understand and learn about their own experiences, giving them the words to express their feelings and thoughts about their movement. Lastly, let this thesis be an informative tool for designers and architects to both learn about the alternative ways in which traceurs utilize urban spaces and understand how to create spaces with certain conditions that provide the opportunities for this type of physical expression through movement. Architecture and urban spaces are designed and built for people, and it is the responsibility of designers and architects to embrace change, understanding and catering to the evolving ways in which people are using space. Through expanding the functionality of urban spaces by designing them with a multiplicity of different possible uses, including the physically engaging, alternative ways in which traceurs appropriate space, architects can create spaces in the city that provide increased
social functionality, encouraging physical interaction and expression. It is in these public spaces of the city where people express themselves, where they develop their identities, and where communities are built. By incorporating the alternative ways in which traceurs appropriate space into the designed scope of usage for urban spaces, architects can create multifunctional, inclusive, spectacular, physically engaging environments that build stronger, healthier, more connected urban communities.


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APPENDICES
INTRODUCTION TO APPENDICES

In order to define the phenomenon of alternative appropriation of urban space by parkour practitioners, as well as to answer all research questions posed, the interview scripts were analyzed collectively. Initially, all transcripts were individually coded to group information according to the different topics inquired through the research questions. The primary topics into which the transcript data was sorted were as follows: preparing to experience the phenomenon, experiencing the phenomenon, and reflecting on the experience of the phenomenon. These three topics were entirely discussed and expanded upon in the Data Analysis chapter of the thesis and are not part of the Appendix. The secondary topics into which the transcript data was sorted were as follows: perception of urban space, ideal urban conditions for parkour, impacts on traceur’s lives, viewing the phenomenon, documentation and sharing the phenomenon, legality and the phenomenon, risk/danger/fear and the phenomenon, and creativity and the phenomenon. These secondary topics are summarized and discussed in the Data Analysis section, but the entire analysis of the information pertaining to these categories from the interview data is located in Appendix A. The tertiary topics into which the transcript data was sorted were as follows: getting started in parkour, motivations for practicing parkour, goals in practicing parkour, the meaning of parkour to traceurs, parkour described in three words, representation of the phenomenon in the media, community and the phenomenon, and potential benefits of the phenomenon. These topics were omitted from the Data Analysis because of their lack of relevance to the main research question. Extraneous discussion and complete analysis of these tertiary topics can be referenced
in Appendix B. Appendix C contains the full interview transcripts from the traceurs which includes the six individual interviews, the two two-person interviews, and the two four-person interviews. All page number references to the interviews throughout the thesis refer to the page numbering of the interviews in Appendix C.
APPENDIX A: RELEVANT INTERVIEW DATA ANALYSIS
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EFFECTS OF EXPERIENCING THE PHENOMENON ON THE PERCEPTION OF URBAN SPACE

Parkour and urban space are inextricably connected, as the movements of parkour were founded and sculpted around navigating urban obstacles. Through practicing parkour, the relationship that traceurs have with the urban landscape has developed, evolved, and changed. This section addresses one of the six subquestions of the inquiry pertaining to urban space: How does experiencing the phenomenon impact the traceurs’ understanding of the city and urban space? How does it change their perception? The interviewees explained how their perception, understanding, and appreciation of urban space had changed from before they began practicing parkour compared to their present perspective.

The most notable change identified by almost every traceur that participated in this inquiry was the shift in perception regarding the potential usage of the city. After finding and training parkour, the practitioners explained that their observation of urban space always related back to the movements of parkour. “You’re constantly looking at things from a parkour perspective…so everything is always an obstacle. Everything is always a game or a challenge, and you’re looking at how you can use it for parkour” (Morell, Paired Interview 2, p. 206). “You don’t see benches, you don’t see tables, you don’t see bars, you see a lache to pre to kong to something else. You see movement everywhere, and opportunity everywhere!” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 141). “Where someone sees a handrail, we see an obstacle, and that obstacle we can go over 20 different ways” (Barber, Paired Interview 2, p. 191). The normative
functions of objects and spaces of the city are replaced with movement possibilities learned and practiced through the discipline of parkour. “It has me constantly daydreaming, and envisioning myself in the environment and how I can use that environment…I’ll look at walls or handrails or trees or hills or whatever as potential obstacles to express myself on, to climb, to balance on, or to do certain things in a row…It’s a playground. Everything has turned into a playground. The world is your playground now” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 97). This parkour perspective is often referred to as parkour vision, a term that refers to the lens through which parkour practitioners visualize and perceive urban spaces. “You see urban space in just a totally different way… It’s not like parkour vision is something you have to focus on to make it happen, it’s just there” (Pinkley, Individual Interview 4, p. 110). “It’s just sort of a different lens through which you can observe and everybody has their own lens and has their own experience” “and that lens, you can’t shut it off, you can’t take it off. It’s always there! Walking down the street, it’s always on” (Graves and Morphy, Group Interview 1, pp. 218-219). Parkour vision develops and grows along with the skill levels of the athletes. As a traceur begins to acquire greater capabilities of movement, the possibilities of how their body can be moved around in urban spaces become more dynamic, allowing for a wider variety, and greater potential, for movement, expanding the opportunities that traceurs perceive in these spaces.

The movements and perceptions of parkour practitioners challenge the fundamental understanding and usage of urban space and the objects within those spaces. Society dictates certain socially accepted and agreed upon ways in which urban spaces and specific objects within those spaces are meant to be used by the public, but even though “maybe the space wasn’t
designed for this…I’m now repurposing it” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 174). “I don’t adopt your assumption that walking around the fence or touching the fence is any less valid or more valid than jumping over a fence.’ It’s that reinterpretation, that new perception of this social understanding of what a space should be” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 178).

Traceurs professed that just because a certain space or object was specifically designed for a certain purpose, there is no reason why it cannot have additional purposes, functions, or modes of interaction. “You know, humans created these spaces and humans can use them in different ways than what they’re meant to be used for. So that’s cool, you get to be creative in how you’re using the space” (Hartung, Individual Interview 3, p. 101). “Parkour challenges the norm in saying ‘You say that the utility of a stair set is to walk up and down, and I say there are other uses.’ I’m interested in exploring those other uses. A handrail for you is purely a regulation and for safety and what not. And…an architect might kind of get creative and be like ‘Well this is a safety regulation, but I’m going to also make it a part of the design and I’m going to have it fit in,’ and that’s really cool to have it fit in in an artistic way but also fulfill the requirement. But I take it a step further and say ‘Not only those, but how about its functionality and utility in an alternative sense?’” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 74). This reinterpretation and different perspective on city spaces and objects within those spaces exposes a new level of potential imbedded within them which traceurs explore and engage through their movements.

Several of the traceurs acknowledged that, from a very young age, they always perceived space and objects of the city somewhat differently from others and used them in a way similar to how they use them now for parkour. But parkour “just expanded that vision. So it gives me a
new relationship with what I see in the environment that’s what I want which includes me as a part of it” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 97). Because parkour has a roughly established index of movements that the majority of practitioners are aware of and understand, the movements the traceurs engaged in during their younger years now had meanings and terminology assigned to them. “I had terminology to put to what I was seeing, that’s when I felt like parkour vision truly took over, and that change in your perspective of what the environment has to offer, what the environment actually is, and your ability to move through it and interact with it. It changes, immensely” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 141). The shared terminology and knowledge of the movements of parkour allows traceurs to collectively see similar challenges and similar movement opportunities in urban spaces.

This connection with urban spaces through movement is not only visual, but further accentuated through physical intimacy with spaces, objects, and materials of the city. When investigating spaces or objects on which to execute parkour movements, traceurs often physically interact with them prior to executing their movements. “I like to walk the space and I actually like to just check the surfaces. How much do they grip? Are they falling apart? Am I going to injure myself? Just making sure it’s safe” (Morphy, Group Interview 1, p. 218). “I’ll touch things, walls and rails…to see how they feel, and I’ll shake things and tap on walls…I’ll scrape my shoe against it to see how grippy the wall is and what that would feel like. That helps for when you’re just out training, because you can just see things and think how they probably feel” (Morell, Paired Interview 2, p. 195). This physical relationship with the materiality and structure of the objects and spaces of the city further strengthens their bond with it, giving them a
deeper, fuller experience of urban space, a more active and mindful engagement with the city.

You’re a normal, everyday person, walking down the street looking sort of down, looking at the ground, looking straight ahead, and then you look at a parkour person. They’re looking everywhere. They’re touching the railings; they’re giving them little shakes. So that’s what it is. It’s this ‘I’m passively moving through it’ to ‘I’m actively interacting and appreciating the space’. That’s the subtle shift, but it’s all very important because it’s everything that follows from that (Joe Torchia referencing quote from Williams Belle, Paired Interview 1, p. 184).

This shift in perception and interaction with the city, from passively moving through it to actively engaging and appreciating it mentally and physically, leads to a fuller experience of urban space, and through this fuller experience, traceurs acquire a more intimate relationship with it. “That’s a good type of extrapolation of parkour. As we train on stuff, we better understand our relationship to it; what it is to us and what we are to it, what we can do with it and what we need it for in order to traverse it” (Morell, Paired Interview 2, p. 196). The traceurs expressed that this intimate relationship with urban space has given them increased spatial awareness, and increased understanding of distances, heights, and materials. “You’re a lot better at judging things, like height and distance and the way things are going to feel, and how you can move yourself around them. I have better spatial awareness now…You’ll catch yourself feeling walls and things to feel how they are…[Parkour] definitely helps you learn characteristics of
walls, of everything you feel” (Morell, Paired Interview 2, p. 205). “Parkour completely changed the way I view buildings, the way I view architecture, the way I view spaces now. I am so much more space-oriented and space-aware” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 28). This increased understanding of materials and elevated spatial awareness contributes to the deeper, more intimate relationship that traceurs develop with urban space and the objects of the city.

Several of the traceurs conveyed that the profundity of the relationship they have with urban spaces sometimes goes beyond the physical and mental into the realm of the emotional and spiritual. They sometimes develop bonds with the spaces in which they train, and those bonds can be emotional and sometimes spiritual bonds. “I come to that spot every single day, and I train there for like two hours a day…I know every surface of that environment. Where is it slick? Where is it sturdy? Where does it rock? Where is there uneven ground? I know all of those points on this environment because I’ve been there so many times! This rail is like my best friend!” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 123). “I tend to view the space as a training tool and as a partner” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 173). “With parkour…we’re not trying to dominate something. We’re trying to dance with it and have a relationship with it. So we’re not punching an object, we’re dancing with an object! You know, having this relationship with inanimate things and it can be a spiritual experience” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 87). The spaces sometimes take on a dynamic personality and have a much deeper meaning to the traceurs because of their perspective and how they use the space. Traceurs often associate memories, events, emotions, and personal accomplishments with certain spaces and objects of the city. “It’s not just a spot. I link past memories with each spot. Some spots are nostalgic to me.
I also link past movements with spots” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 29). The objects and spaces of the city become a part of their past and shape them into who they are. The traceurs expressed that this can become the case with any part of the city, especially underutilized areas of the urban landscape. “Often times in parkour, we don’t train where there are tons of people using the space. Usually these are spaces that are forgotten, are not very well-traveled, not really taken care of, and we take them and we repurpose them. This isn’t just a dilapidated wall; this isn’t just an ugly urban space. This is a tapestry for my dance, for my movement, for my betterment” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 174). Parkour practitioners give meaning and value to these underutilized spaces, using the urban environment in a fuller, more complete way. “[Training parkour] makes me feel like I’m really using the space, which is good because some urban space doesn’t get used. Especially in the way that parkour practitioners use it. So a lot of urban space is unused, you kind of just look at it. But if you actually use the environment, it feels good that you’re actually using it” (Hartung, Individual Interview 3, p. 101).

The unused, poorly maintained areas of the city, which the traceurs claim are often the sites for their expression, movement, and creativity, are valued, appreciated, and respected by them. “[Parkour] made me appreciate different urban spaces more because I am now actually noticing them, and noticing the details” (Hartung, Individual Interview 3, p. 104). “You really begin to appreciate spaces in different ways, and I think that’s a really good perspective for us to learn” (Pinkley, Individual Interview 4, p. 110). The traceurs not only expressed their appreciation for specific spaces, but their new-found appreciation for buildings and architecture as well. “My appreciation of buildings is not just one-dimensional, it’s multi-dimensional
because of all these ways in which I appreciate it in a more physical way” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 75). “It gave me appreciation of distance…It gave me appreciation for material” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 75). “Parkour has transformed my understanding and appreciation for architecture” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 28). This value and appreciation of the city and its spaces and objects acquired through practicing parkour has given traceurs an immensely different perspective and relationship with urban space.
IDEAL URBAN FEATURES AND CONDITIONS FOR THE PHENOMENON

The movements of parkour are typically practiced and executed within the urban spaces of the city, but there are certain particular features that traceurs look for when choosing an ideal space for training. These qualities make certain spaces more appealing than others, and this section defines the spatial qualities that are ideal for parkour movements. The purpose of inquiring about the specific features of the urban landscape, and why certain objects and spaces are better equipped to be appropriated in alternative ways by traceurs, is to answer the research: What are the qualities and aspects of urban spaces that traceurs identify which create a greater potential for alternative appropriations? This question was investigated and answered through two different strategies: 1. visual analysis of a wide variety of different notable parkour spots around the world, often made famous through online videos, and 2. the interview process with traceurs.

In order to identify the specific urban features which were more beneficial for parkour movements, many popular parkour locations were identified and analyzed. This first step into investigating the subquestion occurred prior to the interviews with traceurs. The inventory of different parkour locations was collected from around the world, consisting of over eighty spaces in total. The spaces that were analyzed included purpose-built indoor parkour facilities, purpose-built outdoor parkour parks, and preexisting conditions in urban spaces that have been commonly appropriated by traceurs. These spaces were analyzed to identify similar features that were present in many of the parkour spots. Seven different features were identified that were
commonly found in many of the parkour locations. The first condition that has been found to be favorable for parkour movements is freestanding thin, low walls which can range anywhere from three inches high to four feet high and are typically less than a foot thick. The second condition found to be conducive to parkour movements is metal bars that are either suspended above the ground between five to ten feet or existing as an independent system of interconnected bars. The third common parkour-friendly condition is multilevel platforming, consisting of several differing levels in close proximity to each other that could be constructed of stone, concrete, or grass terraces. The fourth condition common among popular parkour locations is metal railings and handrails that have a thick cross section, usually rounded, and sturdy enough to take impact. The fifth condition commonly found in notable parkour environments is low square or circular objects, typically 1’ x 1’ or smaller with a height of one foot or less, that are in close proximity to one another. The sixth condition is high walls, with a height of five feet or greater, constructed out of a hard material, like stone, brick, or concrete, which have an elevated platform or roof at the top. The seventh and final condition identified through this analysis to be conducive to parkour movements is accessibility ramping systems that have either metal railings or concrete dividers lining the sides of the ramps. Through the collection and analysis of a wide range of parkour locations, this first strategy was successfully utilized to identify the most common features within urban spaces that make them more favorable for parkour movements.

The second strategy, which was employed after the first strategy of urban space analysis was completed, was to interview traceurs about the features, conditions, qualities, and aspects of urban spaces that make them more ideal or less ideal for practicing parkour movements. When
identifying certain features, many of the mentioned features matched the findings of the initial first strategy of urban space analysis. “I look for walls, railings, bars…rocks…hip high walls” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 32, 75). “Walls that are close to each other, I look for rails, handrails…Also different levels” (Hartung, Individual Interview 3, p. 100). “Handrails and random concrete blocks” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 84). All seven features identified were also mentioned by the traceurs during the interviews, but the traceurs identified additional features and conditions which were not previously considered. In addition to the first seven features, traceurs also identified stairs or stairwells, trees, furniture such as tables, benches, or flowerpots, terrain variations, corners, ledges, and lines or cracks on the ground to all be additional urban features that they often utilized to train parkour.

The traceurs also emphasized qualities and aspects of the spaces that make them ideal for parkour that went beyond just the physical objects in the spaces. Traceurs explained that it is vital for a good parkour training spot to have several instances of these types of features in close proximity to one another. “I’m looking for distances in-between objects. It’s not just the object. It is very much as much about the distance it is from any other object. Absolutely about distances” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 31). Guzman often practices on playgrounds because there are “so many different types of structures that you could use” in a close proximity (Guzman, Group Interview 2, p. 235). McNabb “train[s] at the gym now just because of the amount of obstacles in a small space” (McNabb, Individual Interview 6, p. 144). For the traceurs, the distances between objects are just as important, if not more important, than the objects themselves, because these distances determine which movements they are capable of executing
depending on their skill level.

While proximity of obstacles to one another is important, it is also important that the spots are within a reasonable proximity to where the traceurs live. “There are common spots that I go to now just because they have a large number of training spots within a close proximity” (Rujiraviriyapinyo, Group Interview 2, p. 235). “I’ll pick spots that are maybe not that amazing because of proximity” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 31). Depending on where the traceur lives, access to better training spots might be difficult, especially in suburban or rural areas where density decreases. In that situation, the ideal training spots become those closest and most accessible to the traceurs.

The actual materiality and texture of the objects and features in urban spaces also plays a significant role in differentiating between a good and bad parkour training location. “Got to pay attention to if it’s a cement wall or brick wall. Is it painted? Is the brick painted red? Is it painted cement? What kind of cement is it? Is it rough cement? Some of these cements have a kind of dust on them on the outside which makes them terrible. Some cement has a lot of sand in it, really sandy. Some is textured intentionally, which is beautiful!” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 31). The materiality and texture of the objects changes the amount of grip that the traceur is able to acquire with their hand and shoes, meaning that the texture has the potential to render a seemingly great object useless. This analysis of texture and materials is typically a physical interaction with the objects by the traceurs in which they touch, grab, step on, and jump off certain things to determine the grip. Other traceurs noted the importance of ground material, preferring to practice more difficult movements like flips on softer ground surfaces such as grass,
wood chips, or dirt.

In addition to the texture and materiality of objects, traceurs expressed that one of the most important aspects of the objects on which they perform movements is the durability, strength, and sturdiness of the objects. Part of the process of investigating a newly found parkour space is to check the surfaces and objects to ensure they are sturdy enough to absorb impact without breaking. An object that is not firmly cemented down could move and pose a serious threat to a traceur if they use it for training. “Railings that are put in that are not put in well, or sturdily, drive me crazy! Like put this in well and it would be sweet! But now it’s just a danger to me” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 75). It is equally important to traceurs that the objects within the spaces are securely fastened in place so that they do not move during movement executions and potentially cause injuries. It is also important to traceurs who train later in the day that the spaces are well-lit so that they are able to see the obstacles clearly.

Another deciding factor for whether or not a space is suitable for the alternative appropriations of urban space by parkour practitioners is the number of people who frequent the space. The traceurs explained that typically, they prefer to practice in spaces where there are not many people around because training in crowded areas can be problematic. “Often times in parkour, we don’t train where there are tons of people using the space. Usually these are spaces that are forgotten, are not very well-traveled” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 174). When there are many people around in a space, it makes it more difficult for the traceurs to execute movements because there are more dynamic factors to be mindful of. People can be distracting and get in the way - physically and mentally - while traceurs are attempting to execute
movements, which could result in accidental injuries to themselves or others. “I like it when there are not a lot of people around either. When there are a lot of people around, there are a lot of eyes watching, sometimes I get a little nervous and get that anxious feeling. So open space, minimum people, I feel comfortable” (Barber, Paired Interview 2, pp. 195-196). When executing movements while people watch, traceurs explained that it felt similar to public speaking in the sense that they were performing for those people, which puts additional pressure on the situation. For those reasons, urban spaces that are less frequented by people were identified as being more ideal for practicing parkour movements.

With further discussion beyond the specifics of the objects and features within spaces, the traceurs also explained certain overarching qualities and conditions about the spaces themselves that impact how favorable they are for training. The type of space, whether it is considered public, private, or in a gray area between the two, drastically impacts the likeliness that a space is suitable for parkour training in the United States. Legal issues, law suits, and property rights are much stricter and more common in the United States than most European countries, and therefore many of the traceurs emphasized their intentions to stay away from private property and only train in public spaces. “There has been a lot of work in the parkour community to move away from [trespassing] and to move towards areas that are either on public property or public spaces, where trespassing is not as big of an issue and sort of falls away into the gray area of the law” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 181). “We keep it on public property because we don’t want to break the law, we don’t want to set that kind of image” (Morphy, Group Interview 1, p. 226). The majority of traceurs do not wish to break any laws or get into trouble for practicing,
which is why spaces that are deemed public are generally better training locations than private spaces. Also, training in areas that could possibly be considered trespassing and could potentially be illegal puts additional stresses on the traceur during the training session, which is not ideal. “I mainly just train in a public space where, if I’m allowed to walk around and feel comfortable, I think that also means I’m allowed to do a handstand and feel comfortable. Just because I’m standing or in a handstand or balancing instead of sleeping or something, I think we should be allowed to be able to express ourselves in different ways if we’re allowed to be there” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 95). Training in public spaces that are pedestrian focused were described by the traceurs as being the most ideal setting for parkour training to occur. Because the spaces are public and pedestrian focused, traceurs can practice their movements with less stress or worry about breaking laws or being kicked out. Practicing parkour in spaces designed to be used by the public for outdoor activities are typically more accepting towards the usage of space in these alternative ways.

When asked about the qualities of urban spaces that are more conducive for the phenomenon of alternative appropriation by parkour practitioners, the quality of the spaces in general became an important discussion point. The state the space is in as a whole often impacts how likely the traceur will be kicked out or get in trouble with authorities. The traceurs explained that older, grungy spaces were better for their usage because newer, cleaner spaces will often be watched more closely, meaning that they will be more likely to run into a confrontation while they are training.
There’s an amazing spot at Akron’s Children’s Hospital which is new…I don’t train there very often…even though it’s beautiful and I kind of want to train there a lot, I don’t, because it’s so nice, and it’s in a nice area, I know I’m going to get myself in trouble. I’ve been kicked out, not at that spot but a spot really close to there, by the Akron Children’s security, and I don’t want to be kicked out of that spot because it’s so good…So actually it has deterred me from training there because it's so nice. My favorite spots in Akron are kind of abandoned, old…architecture…I stay away from areas that would be a really good training spot physically because of reasons like that…I like to pick grungy spots (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 29-30).

The newness and sleek-ness of spots typically means they are more difficult to traverse and also more able to be marked up by the movements of the traceur. One of the founding tenants of parkour is to Leave No Trace, meaning that in one’s training, one should not damage, mark up, or lessen the quality of appearance of a space through their training. They should leave the space as they found it, if not in better shape than before they trained there. In brand new spaces, often times they are sleek and shiny, making it more difficult to follow this tenant. Also, the sleek-ness and newness of the space typically will not have the imperfections and oddities that Foster says he enjoys about some of the older, grungier spaces of the city. “I’ll be looking for cracks or crevices. Any kind of blemish or imperfection, interestingly enough, and that goes back, I think, to why I like gritty areas” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 32). The newness of the architecture
means that it has not yet been weathered or affected by time or the elements, commonly resulting in very slippery, smooth surfaces. “New buildings are often really sleek. Everything is slippery. There aren’t any cracks or crevices, nothing to get a grip on, literally or metaphorically! You can’t catch a break at all on some stuff!” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 32). Foster also expressed that he experienced noticeably different reactions to his movements depending on the type of areas in which he trained. When training in a low income area, he described that the people who he engaged in conversation there are not likely to take issue with his movements (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 48). In contrast, the reactions to his training in spaces located in middle to higher income areas of the city was often more confrontational and disruptive to his training (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 48-49). People more often gave Foster a hard time in wealthier areas as opposed to poorer areas of a city, meaning that a traceur may also choose spots to train with this knowledge in mind. From this discussion, it was concluded that the age, condition, and location of the spaces in general also plays a significant role in identifying optimal spaces in which the phenomenon of alternative appropriation of urban space can occur.
IMPACTS OF EXPERIENCING THE PHENOMENON
ON THE LIVES OF TRACEURS

As part of an additional angle of inquiry into the phenomenon, a question was posed regarding the impacts of the experience of alternative appropriation of urban space, asking how it affected the lives of the traceurs outside of this experience. The purpose of this inquiry was to collect data for the purpose of articulating a discussion about the possible impacts that incorporating these types of parkour-conducive spaces could have on local communities. Through a consistent and regular interaction with the experience of alternative appropriation of urban space, as well as being involved with the philosophy and community of parkour, traceurs identified specific and general impacts which these experiences have had on their lives. The traceurs identified how the consistent experience of the phenomenon impacted them physically, mentally, emotionally, and as people in general.

The majority of the impacts identified by the traceurs were overarchingly positive in nature, with few, but still present, negative impacts. The traceurs expressed that the phenomenon of alternative appropriation of urban space experienced through practicing parkour was a helpful tool to grow as a person and that almost anyone is capable of taking part in this activity. “I think it’s a sport like any other, but I think for certain populations, for certain people that are attracted to it, it has tremendous benefits. I think that it is something that is approachable and available to almost anyone” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 165). “[Parkour] hasn’t made me who I want to be yet because there’s just a long way to go…But I think that parkour is definitely going to be
a good tool to grow” (Morell, Paired Interview 2, p. 197). “I’m definitely much different than I was before I started parkour. A lot of things in your life change through parkour and embracing the philosophy” (Pinkley, Individual Interview 4, p. 110). This accessible path of growth through parkour is open for anyone to participate in because parkour is purely about movement of one’s own body through space. This path of growth can have incredible and extensive benefits associated with it for practitioners.

It’s one of many disciplines…that people can find a way into where they can find a path to self-actualization. It’s a path that teaches confidence. It builds strength. I think for a lot of people who come into parkour, they come into it not having had a background in a lot of team sports. Typically, they may be a little bit antisocial or a bit of a loner. Maybe they don’t have well developed social skills. And parkour, at least the way we practice it and the way that I have always been encouraged to teach it, has these ideas of humility, altruism, effort, and self-reliance at the core of it. So I think it’s a very safe place for someone to come and develop not only as a person physically, but also mentally, emotionally, and socially (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 164).

Many of Torchia’s listed benefits were also expressed by other interviewees. In addition to providing a possible path to self-actualization that includes all these potential benefits, parkour is also a great physically engaging and rewarding activity to practice. “The more I train with it, the
more I see the benefits it can bring to people, as people, especially young kids, are spending less
time outdoors” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 164). “I think that reward system is one of
the reasons why [videogames] are so popular…Everyone plays games. And I think so much of
that has to do with their ability to give you tangible rewards and filling a list of accomplishments
that you can see. I think that while that has its benefits, finding something like parkour that’s
more based in reality and more active can be a really fun thing, especially for kids…something
physical where you can still feel that sense of accomplishment” (Graves, Group Interview 1, pp.
217-218). Parkour allows traceurs to see progressions in their movements as they increase their
skills which can be just as satisfying, if not more satisfying, than the rewards that youth achieve
through videogames. The physical nature of the sport provides a path to experience all the joys
of personal achievement while simultaneously making the practitioners stronger and healthier
physically, which is why many coaches and parkour gym owners very much encourage children
to give parkour a try. The physical benefits traceurs receive from training parkour are not unlike
other sports, but the traceurs expressed that they have experienced benefits uniquely associated
with parkour that they have not experienced in other recreational activities. “Seeing your body
and mind changing so much in such a short time span is great. The changes throughout my
training in parkour are so much greater than what I’ve seen in almost any traditional sport”
(Rujiraviriyapinyo, Group Interview 2, p. 247). Pinkley explains that parkour has done so much
more for him than just improve his physical health, “[Parkour] has taught me a totally different
philosophy. It has helped me mentally and physically. I think it also helps bring people together.
That probably comes back to self-improvement rather than competition” (Pinkley, Individual
Interview 4, p. 115). The meaningful emphasis that parkour places on tangible achievements and self-improvement as opposed to competition, coupled with the physical and social benefits of the sport, results in many practitioners highly endorsing the discipline and recommending that others, especially youth, start training.

The traceurs proclaimed a wide range of benefits that they have received from practicing parkour, engaging with the phenomenon of alternative appropriation of urban space. A major point of importance, discussed earlier in the section on the relationship of risk, danger, and fear to the phenomenon, is the development of that relationship with fear and engaging in healthy risk-taking behavior. As discussed previously, the ways in which American society culturally responds to risk, danger, and fear is typically with avoidance, attempt to sanitize them from our lives, especially in the case of children. Joe Torchia explained that through attempting to sanitize risk from our environments, American society is taking away the opportunities for people, children especially, to engage in healthy, productive risk-taking behaviors, which creates problems for them in life when they are presented with risks, dangers, and fears that they don’t know how to manage (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, pp. 182-183). One of the most widely acknowledged benefits of parkour is providing that access to healthy and productive risk-taking behavior, experience of failure, interaction with danger, and facing of fears. “Parkour is wonderful in that it teaches you self-reliance, and it teaches you how to safely, reductively deal with risk in a progressive way” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, pp. 182-183). “I wish that more people would do parkour... because I think that there’s something to be learned there [regarding the relationship between fear and danger]. You have to go and live your life despite fear and
despite danger. You can’t always hide from danger and you can’t always run from your fear” (Foster, individual Interview 1, p. 71). The emphasis that the traceurs placed on the importance of dealing with risk, fear, and danger, as opposed to attempting to eliminate it, is one of the most beneficial aspects they argued parkour has to provide. Foster recounted his experiences of being a very scared person before training parkour, identifying intense situations where he was faced with fear and was unable to move or make decisions because that fear paralyzed him (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 42-45). He had not yet developed an intimate understanding of his own fear through parkour, and engaging in alternative appropriations of urban space on a regular basis directly helped him to understand that fear and overcome it. “Parkour changed my life…I can now confidently say that I know how I will respond in the face of fear, because I do it regularly…I’m no longer concerned that I’ll be paralyzed. That knowledge I think is one hundred percent because of parkour, because of movement…Not moving is death. I was afraid, and therefore I didn’t move, and movement has overcome fear for me, and I didn’t do it by just muscling through…I did it by training” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 44-45). Foster says that the way he overcame the fear in his life was through movement, through training parkour, and that movement is the solution when faced with fear, both physically and when situations or issues arise in life. “I think parkour is amazing for anyone if, for no other reason than simply a life lesson in learning how to face fear…If a person is a timid person, start training parkour! I think it will help you in your life as a person, help you to overcome that! If you struggle with being afraid, then yeah, train parkour!...If you want to become a bolder person, it’s great” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 67-68). Developing that relationship with fear, risk, danger,
and with your abilities to move are valuable benefits to be learned through parkour. “I think that element of danger and having an understanding of your own abilities is important in parkour, and if you don’t have that, then you’re missing out. There’s a really big benefit” (Graves, Group Interview 1, p. 226). Through learning to overcome fear through movement, traceurs acknowledged that not only were they better equipped to deal with situations involving these factors, but also that this experience of facing those internal conflicts increased their self-confidence.

By repeatedly facing challenges where risk, danger, and fear were present, persevering and overcoming those physical and mental obstacles, this process gave many traceurs increased self-confidence that transferred to other types of obstacles they encountered in life. “Once you have the philosophy of overcoming obstacles and goals, you can apply it to a lot of other things in life” (Pinkley, Individual Interview 4, p. 110). Poprocki recalls his realization of the transferability of the skills he was learning through parkour to other aspects of his life.

I have gained a lot of benefits from training parkour because once I started to overcome physical obstacles, then it gave me confidence that I could do other things in my life. But it really took me being able to climb over a wall to show me that, because at first, I couldn’t climb over a wall and it was very humbling to realize that. I thought I could, and then I realized I couldn’t. I tried and I wasn’t able to and I thought ‘Oh this is really strange, I always thought of myself as a strong person. Why can’t I climb up this wall?’ And I was really frustrated. But
then I worked at it, and over time, I got better and better. That’s how I learned that I could take it and carry it over into other aspects of my life as well (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, pp. 86-87).

Through repeated engagement with overcoming physical and mental obstacles in parkour, many practitioners gained a significant amount of self-confidence. “I think I have more confidence. I think parkour really boosts your confidence in yourself” (Hartung, Individual Interview 3, p. 102). Morell explains that through developing an intimate relationship with risk, he is able to cultivate a mindset where risk is almost completely mentally removed from executing parkour movements, and this has given him increased confidence and trust. “I love that mindset because that really changes the way we look at things. It just really gives you more confidence and more trust in yourself” (Morell, Paired Interview 2, p. 204). This increased self-confidence also resulted in the practitioners being more open to mindfully engaging in other types of risks in life. “I think definitely it has made me more confident. And I just try new things now, because why not?” (Morphy, Group Interview 2, p. 227). “It has made me a little bit more ‘risk-taking’. Maybe not bigger risks, but I’ll be like ‘Yeah, I could try that’” (McNabb, Individual Interview 6, p. 156). Through these alternative uses of urban space, traceurs have developed the self-confidence and trust in themselves to adequately manage risk and overcome obstacles in other areas of their lives.

The traceurs also expressed that this regular engagement with urban space in alternative ways through parkour has changed their perceptions of themselves. “Parkour has really redefined
how I feel in my body and how I interact with my body…Parkour has opened up this whole realm for me and I now define myself as being strong; I now define myself as being very capable. That carries over into a lot of my work, professional work, and just how I feel on a day to day basis. I feel much more capable, and I think that that’s all secondary to parkour and the level of fitness that it’s enabled me to have” (Libby Torchia, Paired Interview 1, pp. 174-175). “I definitely pushed myself past where I thought I could be. I became stronger, I became more physically aware of my body and how I can move safely” (McNabb, Individual Interview 6, p. 146). Engaging in alternative appropriations of urban space has made traceurs view themselves and their bodies in a more positive light, as being stronger and more capable through their progressive training of overcoming obstacles with parkour.

This noticeably increased confidence and perceived personal capability through regularly overcoming obstacles in parkour has led many practitioners to more enthusiastic pursuits of their goals in life. “It has made me really go after my goals. It has made me want to keep doing this forever!” (Dye, Group Interview 1, p. 220). “It kind of hammered home the idea that everything is tough until you do it. It’s attainable” (Hartung, Individual Interview 3, p. 102). After overcoming challenges in the form of alternative appropriations of urban spaces, traceurs often enthusiastically seek other challenges in their lives to overcome. “It has created kind of a reorientation of the way that I perceive challenge. One of the main things that I like to have my students practice is changing the mindset from thinking ‘Oh, that’s hard, I don’t want to do it’ to ‘Oh, that’s hard, it’s going to make me that much better!’…What happens if you only do easy things in life? You don’t get any better, you don’t improve. Nothing happens…Seek the
challenge. Seek difficulty” (Graves, Group Interview 1, pp. 220-221). Parkour instills a sense of motivation and drive for traceurs to pursue challenges, because they are making themselves better and better with every challenge and obstacle they overcome when alternatively appropriating the urban environment. “I was really unmotivated, and parkour made me just so much more determined, not to just get better specifically with freerunning and movement, but in my whole life. And now I’m so much more motivated to do more than just the standard” (Guzman, Group Interview 2, p. 238). “If you don’t have the vision and the drive to change, you’re not going to be able to accomplish anything. You can’t just all of a sudden change. You have to have the vision!…That’s the mentality that you have to have [in parkour]…you can apply that to anything in life if you put your mind to it” (Pinkley, Individual Interview 4, p. 111). In the same way that they assess physical challenges, breaking them down until they are able to complete them, traceurs can implement and execute this same strategy in any situation that life presents. “You can approach ‘How do I need to overcome this? This is my goal. Okay well I need to do this, and once I figure out this thing, alright now I need to do this, now that I understand this, I can do that and this, okay, now here’s the harder part, alright I can do this, now I’ve got to do these and that, and then I’ll be able to achieve my goal.’ But I have to do the work…That’s the hardest thing is doing the work for some people” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 127). Through repetitive engagement with urban space in this physically exertive way, traceurs learn the necessity and satisfaction that comes with putting in that work to achieve their goals in movement, and situations in life are no different. This same mindset learned and practiced through parkour, as well as the three core tenants of the discipline, can be applied just
The mindset that goes into achieving just small movements can be taken into anything, into school, into work, into relationships…you can take all three of those core beliefs into a relationship. Be strong to be useful. If you can support that person, if you’re strong enough to support yourself and them and realize that they’re going through this thing and they need either space or they need comfort, or they need the ability for you to adapt and be flexible and be strong. And then To Be and To Last. How are you going to work on that relationship so you can have this strong relationship forever as opposed to short term? To Leave No Trace. Leave no negative impact upon that relationship. As long as you have both come away from it saying ‘I’ve learned something, I’m stronger, I’m better, and I’m more knowledgeable’…That is a successful relationship…[Have] that mental stability and take that and don’t just use it for the physical movement, but for other things in your life too. Like I said, whether it be work, whether it be school, it’s the same (Skowronsksi, Individual Interview 5, pp. 126-127).

While the mindsets and thought processes learned through parkour are essential to the movements of the discipline, those same concepts can be applied to many other facets and situations in life.

While much of what is learned through parkour and the alternative appropriations of
urban space applies and benefits other areas of the lives of the traceurs, it is important not to forget that those benefits also reside simply within parkour itself, with the physical movements. Many traceurs spoke of the benefits of their increased abilities to perform movements and the satisfaction they experienced through their increased physicality. “I’m in the best shape of my life even after all that. Physically, it has had its benefits” (Morphy, Group Interview 1, p. 220). “I’ve gotten a lot longer of a jump I think!” (Hartung, Individual Interview 3, p. 102). “You just want to do more. It’s that I do want to be able to do more and you want to practice and get better at everything” (Chalifour, Group Interview 1, p. 220). “I was heavily involved in long distance running…I found so much more satisfaction through parkour. It was the same kind of mental and physical challenges that I was trying to address” (Rujiraviriapinyo, Group Interview 2, p. 239).

Through consistent training of parkour movements, it was not surprising that increased ability to perform parkour movements was a very commonly proclaimed benefit of practicing the discipline.

Apart from physical and mental benefits, some traceurs acknowledged the emotional benefits that parkour has had in their personal lives. “I just think the movement helps. Whether it’s emotional or spiritual, whatever I’m going through, motion helps that. It helps my brain and my heart when I seek mobility and I become more able to process the situation. If I can’t handle something, I’ll go out and train for a while. Then I can take a step back and start thinking ‘Okay, how can I handle this?’ Because at the end of a training session, I’m really calm usually. I’ve had a good session. I’m kind of cooling down, and then I’m very calm and serene and contemplative. I think about life or about whatever the problem is that’s going on” (Foster, Individual Interview
“For me, parkour, especially if I train by myself, can be very meditative, it can be very relaxing…it can be very meditative, very soothing, helps relieve stress” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 166-167). The intense focus required when alternatively appropriating urban space forces the traceur to be present, fully engaged in the current moment, and this can take their minds off of other situations or issues in their lives, allowing them to come back to those thoughts after training with a renewed, calmer perspective.

Traceurs also discussed that parkour has instilled in them a renewed value for their health and given them better judgment. “I definitely became a lot more interested in my health, like long-term health of my body” (Pinkley, Individual Interview 4, p. 110). “It has also put a nice, solid head on my shoulders from high school until now, growing me into this person that I am now” (McNabb, Individual Interview 6, p. 156). Other practitioners expressed that parkour has been an enjoyable creative outlet for them to engage in. “Mentally, parkour is a really nice creative release. So I really enjoy it; it’s just kind of a break from non-parkour life” (Hartung, Individual Interview 3, p. 99). “Personally, I feel that…parkour…is how I choose to express my creativity” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 98). The freedom of movement, and the ability to appropriate urban space in an infinitely different number of ways, transforms the city into an endless canvas for expression of creativity through movement.

In addition to the mental benefits already mentioned, traceurs also proclaimed that they had developed better awareness of what goes on around them since they began frequently engaging in alternative appropriations of urban space through parkour. “I think it makes us more observant, at least about our surroundings” (Morell, Paired Interview 2, p. 207). “It has just
expanded my awareness of a lot of things. It has given me awareness beyond what I had before I started practicing, especially in my mind. I have much more acute awareness of what’s going on and how it’s working and how it feels” (Graves, Group Interview 1, p. 220). With that increased awareness of one’s surroundings, it helps traceurs to be in the current moment more often and appreciate the present. “Live in the moment and enjoy the ride. You know, obviously set goals for yourself but yeah, that’s pretty much it” (Morphy, Group Interview 1, p. 227). The lengthy number of different benefits, physical, mental, and emotional or spiritual, that the traceurs mentioned did not only pertain to internal or physical benefits, but also included external benefits.

The traceurs elucidated that they had also experienced several common external benefits from practicing parkour and executing alternative appropriations of urban space regularly. Many practitioners have built strong friendships with other parkour practitioners through bonding over their shared alternative appropriations of space through parkour, and this has helped them to become more outgoing, social people. “I’ve always wanted to be a little more outgoing and it would definitely help. It already has. Parkour has for me…even outside of parkour, it’s easier to talk to people now” (Morell, Paired Interview 2, p. 201). “I found most of my friends through parkour…I’ve met pretty much everyone I know now, everyone I talk to, care about, through parkour. I think it really has helped me grow out of my shell and be less shy” (Koehler, Group Interview 2, pp. 238-239). “[Parkour] provides a group of like-minded individuals” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 164). By engaging in risk-taking, facing danger, and facing fear together with others, many of the traceurs have developed close friendships with one another, and this
bond through movement helps them as individuals to become more confident and outgoing with others. Experiencing alternative appropriations of urban space and looking at those spaces from that perspective has uncovered all of the opportunities and possibilities that exist to better oneself through challenge. “It has honestly shown me that opportunity is everywhere. The way that I look at life now is that there are no obstacles in life anymore; there are only opportunities to better yourself” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 140). Other traceurs simply stated that since they began practicing parkour, they can always find something to entertain themselves wherever they are. “I guess with parkour, I always have something fun to do” (Morell, Paired Interview 2, p. 197). “No matter where we go, we’re never bored” (Barber, Paired Interview 2, p. 197). Many traceurs also make a living through parkour, either through owning gyms or teaching as coaches, and they considered that to be a great benefit for them because it is their livelihood. “I got my first job because of parkour” (Koehler, Group Interview 2, p. 238). While the traceurs did express a predominantly greater number of benefits to practicing parkour, they also mentioned some negative aspects to regularly experiencing urban space in this way.

A very common and obvious negative impact that many traceurs mentioned was associated with regularly experiencing alternative appropriations or urban space through parkour movements was injuries. Through practicing parkour, it is inevitable that occasionally a traceur will misjudge a movement or an error will occur during an execution of a movement, and when this happens, the traceur typically incurs an injury. Injuries are an accepted part of the learning process in parkour, and they can be minimized through proper training technique and a methodical progression of skills. “I’ve had several injuries, little ones like ankle sprains and that
sort of thing and a big one, a herniated disk in my back. But you learn from it, and you learn to be smart. You learn to take care of yourself and build yourself up” (Morphy, Group Interview 1, p. 220). In addition to injuries, traceurs also expressed an element of sadness or depression when they are unable to train, whether it’s because they are busy or recovering from an injury. “It affects me emotionally and mentally when I’m not able to teach or even practice on my own. Being stagnant is not an option for me. I have to be doing something” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 121). Because of the love that many traceurs have for their movements, it can sometimes be difficult, mentally and emotionally, for them to go for periods of time without training.

Overall, the impacts that the traceurs described parkour having on their lives were predominantly positive in nature, with the only real negative impacts being injuries and the emotional discomfort associated with a lack of ability to train. Among the more experienced practitioners, there was a very cohesive, unanimous perception that parkour had drastically improved their lives.

Essentially it’s what’s made me who I am today. It’s my career, it’s my job, it’s how I define myself, it’s how I fit into my social circle. On a personal level, I think it has helped me to learn more about myself. It has given me a sense of confidence, motivation, and self-reliance that I don’t think I had before. I think that’s common among most teenage young men who are growing up into adulthood, and for me, parkour was my path for discovering who I was, and
coming into myself (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 174).

In a way, parkour changed my life and parkour kind of saved my life in that sense. I was worried and afraid that I was going to fail in life sort of, purely because of being unable to move. And yeah, parkour taught me [how to move] (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 46).

It has changed my entire life!...Finding parkour was like finding my people, because it was all a bunch of other open-minded individuals that didn’t take the societal norm of ‘this is how you be, this is what you do’. And it kind of steered my life in a whole new direction. I’d always then want to find a person to share these stories, experiences, wanting other people to find the same joy that I found in it. And that’s where teaching kind of came in and became very rewarding for me...It’s immensely rewarding! I’ve had numerous heartfelt messages from students that have told me that I’d changed their lives. It has just been amazing. I never would’ve thought that I’d be where I am now (Peveley, Group Interview 2, pp. 238-241).

Through parkour, traceurs learn control of both their body and mind, and this can be very beneficial for people who are struggling with addictions, depression, anxiety, or other personal issues. The benefits that parkour provides were even characterized by some practitioners to be
life-saving.

I’ve heard people go as far as to say that parkour has saved their lives…because they were going down the wrong path, and then they found this outlet and it brought them back into a positive way of approaching things in their lives, how they’re look at things. Whereas they could have fallen into drugs and other bad things, and that would have just put them down a road where they would not have been positively affecting the world or themselves if they would have continued to follow that path. Now that they have parkour, and they have a community to be a part of that is so supportive and understanding of what it is that we are trying to achieve, it’s that support system, that ability to come together, and that physical outlet too I think is so important (Skowronsiki, Individual Interview 5, p. 126).

It was life changing. For me particularly, it helped me overcome very hard things that I was dealing with that aren’t related to parkour. Things like alcohol addiction, depression, just not having my life together, being kind of clueless and aimless, searching for something. That’s how I was before parkour. So since learning parkour, all of those things have changed, even though it’s just a physical movement art. It greatly changed me as a person, as a whole, in general. It helped me with all of the hardest things you could dream of really (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 95).
Parkour, as a sport, as a discipline, and as a lifestyle, has had so many positive and beneficial effects on traceurs. The numbers of overwhelmingly positive and valuable benefits were expressed with great passion by the traceurs that participated in this study. For many of the traceurs, it was difficult to express just how much of a positive impact parkour has had on their lives because it fundamentally changed who they were and built them into the people they are today. When ask how parkour has affected him, Poprocki attempted to summarized this undefinable, positive impact that parkour has had on his life, which very closely represents the essence of what parkour means to many practitioners.

[It has affected me] in so many ways that it’s unbelievable how much it does affect me. It’s like I don’t even know where to start. But I can kind of generalize overall. More happy, healthy; more physically in shape; more mentally in shape; more confident; more devoted, dedicated, disciplined. There’s a lot, there’s a lot there! But it’s always an ongoing thing that will always bring these rewards and gifts from training, and sometimes I’m not sure what they are until after the fact. Then it’s like ‘Oh, training helped! I realized this thing or how to think about my life, or these other things in my life, this other way.’ Every time you go out to train, it’s like it’s something new, there’s some kind of new benefit (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 88).
REACTIONS TO VIEWING THE PHENOMENON

To more completely understand the experience of the phenomenon of alternative appropriation of urban space by parkour practitioners, it is beneficial to also investigate how this phenomenon is perceived by others, both by traceurs and non-traceurs. This section addresses one of the research subquestions of the inquiry: How is the event when traceurs are experiencing the phenomenon perceived by other traceurs, onlookers, and/or authorities? The perception of authorities relates more closely with trespassing issues and legality and will be discussed later. This section focuses on the part of the subquestion inquiring about how the practitioners of parkour view the appropriations of other practitioners and their experiences of reactions from non-practitioners who view their movements.

When traceurs were asked how they typically responded to seeing other traceurs appropriate urban space in alternative ways, or how other traceurs respond to them, they discussed several commonly experienced reactions. Almost every interviewee expressed that there is a sense of inspiration, amazement, and happiness when they witness other traceurs executing their movements. “It’s inspiring, regardless of what level they’re at. It’s inspiring to see someone who’s new who’s working through stuff and it’s inspiring to see someone who’s a master of their craft. I feel like you can learn the same amount from both. The next main thing is that a lot of people will see someone who can do something and that’s discouraging because they think ‘Oh, I’m so far away from that.’ But again, it’s a mindset shift you have to make to being inspired because some day, you’ll get there” (Graves, Group Interview 1, p. 223). “Definitely
there have been people that have told me ‘Wow, your movements are really graceful!’ They get
inspired, you know!’” (Skowronsikki, Individual Interview 5, p. 128). “It makes me want to train so
that I could become better” (Pinkley, Individual Interview 4, p. 112). Upon witnessing the
phenomenon, the traceurs feel inspired by the movement and this inspiration often ignites a drive
in them to train, to better themselves and advance their abilities in movement. Many traceurs
who are also parkour coaches conveyed this same sense of happiness and joy when someone
they were instructing landed a move they were attempting. “It’s very rewarding to watch people
get something for the first time. As a coach, it’s the most rewarding experience and it’s the best
part. You know, you’ve given them a cue and then all of a sudden they get it, and it’s a great,
rewarding experience” (Libby Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 179). Witnessing another traceur
break through a physical or mental barrier to achieve a movement was described as being a very
rewarding experience for the traceurs to take part in, and almost as satisfying as completing the
movement themselves. “It’s great to get it yourself! It’s almost equally good to get it through
someone else you’re teaching or someone else you’re training with. It’s awesome to see
somebody land something! You almost just get it by osmosis or by association! Like ‘Yes! You
did it!’ I really enjoy that too” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 41). The emphasis on how
much happiness it brought some of the practitioners was also a commonly expressed reaction to
seeing traceurs move their bodies through space in alternative ways.

Oh it makes me so happy. It makes me so happy because I feel like the world is
changing. I feel like people are becoming more aware of what we’re capable of
doing. Not just physically, but mentally, and what we’re able to endure, because a lot of parkour isn’t just ‘can you do that movement’, it’s ‘can you do that movement over and over and over again until you get it right, until it feels right, until you have that mental stability to commit to that action, until it feels perfect?’ I feel like there’s a lot to it. So when I see someone doing stuff over and over and over again I’m like ‘Yes, thank you, thank you, you’re living the dream!’ That’s all I want, is just for people to have that understanding for themselves, so that way it can be passed on to others. When I see that, it brings me happiness (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, pp. 133-134).

In addition to the feelings of inspiration and happiness the interviewees expressed, they also emphasized the immense presence of support, positivity, and encouragement they give to, and receive from, other traceurs. “It doesn’t matter what level you’re at, they’ll always cheer you on” (Chalifour, Group Interview 1, p. 221). “I’m one hundred percent about cheering them on and being encouraging and supportive and help them, whatever level they’re at” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 54). “They’re always positive with their feedback, always encouraging” (Hartung, Individual Interview 3, p. 102). “It’s really positive and encouraging. People will cheer! Sometimes you even feel awesome” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 47). Regardless of skill level, the traceurs expressed that the support and encouragement they received was consistent. “People recognize what goes into it and the relativity of it; the fact that to one person, it is a monumental challenge to them. I think more than a lot of other activities,
parkour really recognizes it. They see everyone as an individual and they recognize that each individual has their own scale of challenge for them” (Graves, Group Interview 1, p. 222).

“Somebody can be a lot better than you, but they’re happy for you because they were once there too themselves” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 89). Many parkour practitioners grew up teaching themselves, starting from scratch with no knowledge of the discipline or its movements. They worked their way up to get to the level of skill they are at currently, and they recognize and appreciate this struggle because of their own personal experience. Because they too went through this struggle to learn at one point or another, they appreciate and commend others when they see them engaging in that same struggle, pushing themselves to become better. “I think for the majority of people who train parkour, we like to see other people succeed or try. So if we see another person doing that, we’re happy for them and we cheer them on and try to motivate them! And it doesn’t even matter what their skill level is. We have lots of people with different skill sets, but everybody just likes to see somebody else try and give it their all. We applaud that” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 88). Regardless of skill level or difficulty of the movement, traceurs support and applaud others who engage in these alternative movements and share in the happiness and joy of the successes of the traceur next to them. “For the most part, the parkour community is always very supportive of everyone. The camaraderie of it, whether someone is trying a big jump, whether it’s me or someone else, or whoever it is, it’s the first time they tried it. Most people in the group will all kind of go crazy for the person! If you’re the person, it feels great, and if you’re the person cheering them on, it still feels great because you’re sharing that success with them” (Peveley, Group Interview 2, p. 241).
It was disclosed that there are some exceptions to that support and positivity, and the traceurs concluded that it was most likely rooted in jealousy relating to the ability to achieve certain movements. “98% of the people I train with are 100% supportive…And then there’s that last 2% who I’m still friends with but are more of the jealous type a little bit” (Guzman, Group Interview 2, pp. 240-241). “There is some jealousy that can happen, but at the same time I think that’s also kind of seeded in the fact that they want to be able to do that. So when they see you doing that, it might appear as if they’re jealous, but you’re actually kind of pushing them to better themselves” (Peveley, Group Interview 2, p. 241). Jealousy can occur when traceurs compare themselves to others and feel resentment towards them for being capable of achieving a movement when they themselves are not yet capable. This jealousy is usually not visibly present during group training sessions, but sometimes the frustrations of a traceur in trying to achieve a new movement can be redirected at others who are already capable of achieving that movement. This is when jealousy can become an issue. Although jealousy does happen, this comparing of the self to other traceurs typically occurs in a more positive way. Traceurs see the capabilities of others and compare their own abilities with them, but not always in a spiteful way.

Traceurs described a type of mental analysis that they often engage in when witnessing another traceur perform movements. They attempt to absorb and analyze the movements they just witnessed, measuring their own skills up to those movements to assess if they are capable of performing them. “I’m kind of analyzing what they do and seeing how I could do that” (Hartung, Individual Interview 3, p. 102). “I don’t compare myself to the other person, but I compare myself to the move” (McNabb, Individual Interview 6, p. 151). This comparison of personal
ability to certain movements is not based in jealousy, but in curiosity and desire to attempt those movements to better oneself as a traceur. “I think that one of the main things with parkour is that you have to make it about you overcoming something. In parkour, it’s not about you overcoming someone else’s jump or something. It’s about overcoming your own obstacles and pushing your own limits” (Pinkley, Individual Interview 4, p. 110). This analysis of the movements of other traceurs also provides insight into a different and new perspective on the spaces in which they are training, allowing the traceurs to see the environment in another way. “One of the biggest things when training with other people is trying to see the environment differently than another person that you’re training with. Just finding challenges within the environment, and trying to visualize things you can do through another person’s perspective…learning to understand each other’s thought processes, the way we each view the environment” (Rujiraviriyapinyo, Group Interview 2, pp. 241-242). For some traceurs in specific training sessions, sometimes it’s “less about the actual reaction to what the person is doing and more about figuring out what the thought process was behind their moves” (Rujiraviriyapinyo, Group Interview 2, p. 242). By looking at the environment through the perspective of other parkour practitioners, it helps the traceurs visualize new possibilities for movement within spaces. The types of reactions and experiences that traceurs have, when other traceurs witness their movement or when they witness the movements of others, was conveyed as being relatively similar in all situations as opposed to when non-practitioners witnessed their movements.

When the public, onlookers/non-practitioners, witness the alternative appropriations of urban spaces, the interviewees expressed that their reactions varied greatly from person to person
and from training spot to training spot. The most typical response the traceurs received from non-practitioners was a command or request for them to stop because they thought the traceurs were going to hurt themselves and that their actions were not safe. Dye and Skowronski said that many people will tell them “‘Stop that! You’re going to hurt yourself!’” and “‘Get down from there, you’re going to get hurt! What are you doing up there?!’” (Dye, Group Interview 1, p. 222, and Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 122). Often times, non-practitioners think that what the traceurs are doing is dangerous and that they are going to injure themselves or others through their actions. Foster expressed frustration with this reaction because he explained that “people walking down the street, they don’t know my ability. All they do is they make assumptions based off of how they feel and who they are, they look at me and they say ‘That was very dangerous!’ They don’t know that it’s actually not” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 70-71). The fact that non-practitioners often place their judgements of what is and is not safe onto Foster seems ridiculous to him. “It’s really ridiculous for someone to freak out when they see you do something. That’d be like me freaking out if I see someone walking! Like ‘What are you doing!? Stop! Stop! You’re going to hurt yourself!’ They’d be like ‘Why? I’m safe!’ and you’ll be like ‘Have you heard the statistics of the number of people that fall while walking?’…That doesn’t mean you shouldn’t do it! Okay, just because someone died doing something doesn’t inherently mean it’s dangerous” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 69). Foster explains that the notion of placing one’s personal standards for what is and is not dangerous onto strangers is not rational, and expressed his frustrations with non-practitioners who feel the need to do this while he is training. He also acknowledged that the tone of voice and the way in which people often express
their concerns for safety feels as though it is not out of concern for his safety, but out of anger and for their own satisfaction of seeing him comply to their demands.

People say ‘Get down from there!’ People say ‘That’s not safe!’ They love to say ‘That’s not safe!’ And they say it almost like they’re not looking out for you, it’s just like anger! They’re like ‘You’re not safe and that hurts me somehow’ which is really weird. It’s not like ‘Oh my goodness that’s not safe! I want to make sure you’re okay!’ It’s usually like ‘Hey! That’s not safe!’ and you’re like ‘Okay.’ ‘That’s not safe! You have to stop!’ ‘No I don’t.’ And they somehow feel like, for them, you have to stop for them because you’re unsafe. I don’t know. It’s really weird. It’s like a really cultural thing. We have a sense of entitlement or I don’t know what it is. We have to somehow make sure that other people are following what we want (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 48-49).

The culture of the United States and the entitlement of some Americans in getting what they want and instant gratification may play a role in why non-practitioners often react to parkour movements in this way. This feeling of unsafe behavior is a common reaction to the alternative appropriations of urban space of traceurs by non-practitioners, and it is typically rooted in a lack of understanding of parkour and a fear regarding that lack of understanding.

The interviewees explained that this lack of understanding of what parkour practitioners are doing causes them to have this fear. “They can’t handle the idea of fear, either within
themselves or from me! And so people will take it upon themselves on my behalf. Like if I’m doing something that they think is dangerous, then they’re afraid, and because they’re afraid, they’re angry, and they’re angry at me and they want me to stop…They need to understand that their fear and my fear are different. Just because you’re afraid doesn’t mean I’m afraid” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 68). “People push their fears that they have themselves onto others, because maybe they know they can’t do it, but they have no idea what I can or can’t do” (McNabb, Individual Interview 6, p. 156). This lack of knowledge about parkour and lack of knowledge of the abilities of the traceurs leads to misunderstandings concerning the safety of the movements being executed by practitioners. Poprocki explains that the likeliness of alternative appropriations of urban space eliciting this type of response from onlookers increases depending on the state of health or ability of the individual observing the phenomenon. “I’ve noticed that the unhealthier somebody is, and the more unable they are to move their own body, they’re afraid that you can’t do what you’re doing…So they’re afraid you’re going to get hurt and you’re going to hurt others or whatever, because they are not able to climb over a wall. They never balanced on a handrail before. So they think what you’re doing is extreme, and really it could be very normal and regular for the average person to do! They just haven’t been exposed to that” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 89). Another perceived cause for this type of response from onlookers acknowledged the significance of the age of the non-practitioner and the era in which they grew up. “People respond with fear…especially older people, but older as in an adult” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 48).
There seems to be a gap, maybe people born in the 40’s 50’s 60’s, who didn’t quite understand it, maybe kind of in that baby boomer era. But we noticed that the people who were older than that, the parents of that generation, they grew up playing like that, like running through the streets, climbing on trees. And they understood it and they think it’s great. So often times, the seniors and the older people, they understood it immediately. The kids, the younger people, they get it. And there’s just that little gap of people who just are like ‘No, you shouldn’t do this, this is improper. This doesn’t match with these set expectations of things we already have. This is not football, this is not soccer, and this is not baseball.’ So since they cannot categorize it, somehow then they are afraid of it. You don’t understand it so it’s easy just to be like ‘Well you’re jumping on this fence because you have no respect for this fence or for the people who use this fence, or for the people who built this fence.’ It’s like ‘No, no, no, I appreciate all of those things!’ (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 177).

Because many people do not yet recognize parkour as a sport and are unfamiliar with it, many traceurs are met with fear and anger by non-practitioners due to the perceived dangers of their movements and their seemingly disrespectful and ‘incorrect’ usage of space.

This perceived misuse of space and the objects of the city often upsets non-practicing onlookers and causes them to feel obliged to inform traceurs of their ‘incorrect’ usage, and that it is their civic duty to correct them. “They feel that they have to keep me safe in their mind
because if they don’t, then they’ve failed humanity” (McNabb, Individual Interview 6, p. 156).
“When I play on rails, people will say ‘Oh, that’s not what that’s for’” (Skowronski, Individual
Interview 5, p. 122). “You’ll get someone who just feels like it’s their right, responsibility, and position to inform you that what you are doing is absolutely not allowed and you can’t be doing it, and ‘How dare you!’ But then you’re like ‘But you’re just walking down the street, this isn’t even your building! You have nothing to do with any of this! You are just some pedestrian. Why do you feel the need to insert yourself here?’ And so I think we’ve all had experiences like that” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 178). The alternative appropriations of spaces contradict the socially accepted norms for the usage of these objects, and therefore onlookers will often perceive the movements as being somehow illegal. “When someone sees us climbing on a building, they often assume that we are doing something illegal and also endangering to ourselves and others, or that we are breaking in to steal something” (McNabb, Individual Interview 6, p. 150). Foster identified this issue of pedestrians dictating to others how they should be using space as a larger, cultural issue in the United States when compared to other countries. “People will be really opinionated. Even young adults will just really think they know. I don’t know if it’s a cultural thing, I think. We’re talking about in America. It’s different in different countries for sure” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 48). This entitlement of onlookers to inform traceurs that they are using spaces and objects incorrectly may also be related to the wealth and income level of the people in a certain area.
People in the hood are chill! People are encouraging in the hood. People may yell ‘You’re going to hurt yourself! You’re going to kill yourself!’ People will yell that, but they don’t get angry at you, and they don’t tell you not to, they just tell you that you’re being stupid, which I don’t mind. That’s their opinion. They’re fine to say that…People in those areas will often be really encouraging! In the wealthier areas, people like to tell you what to do, and they’ll tell you that you can’t do that. And you ask them why and they don’t have a reason, they just say that you can’t. ‘Well you can’t. It’s wrong’ (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 48).

Foster argues that people who live in wealthier areas feel they are more entitled to tell you what to do and how to use a space, and that this phenomenon is more common in the United States. While some interviewees reported overwhelmingly negative experiences with onlookers such as these, others declared that they had mostly positive interactions with non-practicing pedestrians.

The traceurs described encounters with pedestrians who were fascinated by their movements and wished to see them again. “Most of the time they are fascinated and they usually stop and stare” (Hartung, Individual Interview 3, p. 102). “You think ‘Oh that person might not like or understand what I’m doing’ but they are so interested and so happy” (Morell, Paired Interview 2, p. 200). “Some people are like ‘Woah! What!? Do it again!’” (Dye, Group Interview 1, p. 222). “They’re inspired! They’re inspired by it” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 128). In many situations, pedestrians complimented the traceurs on their abilities and would often express their thoughts on how good a contestant they would be on obstacle course racing
shows. “More and more now, people will say something about American Ninja Warrior. I’ve had people come up and tell me I should do it. Like lots of people do that” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 50). As parkour has become more widely known, the frequency of pedestrians who have no idea about the sport has decreased compared to when the sport was newly introduced into American society.

I feel that the public now is more educated about parkour and freerunning when they see it, so they don’t have the ‘what is that?’ kind of view versus when I was training early on, there was a lot of ‘What are you doing? Why are you up there? You could get hurt!’ Some of that still exists today, but it’s probably more often like ‘Oh, are you guys doing parkour or freerunning?’ And if they don’t know about any of that, then it’s ‘Oh, are you guys doing Ninja Warrior stuff?’ And I think there are a lot of people that do support us, saying ‘I could never do that’ or ‘I can tell that takes a lot of skill’…Some people look at it and see an appreciation to it (Peveley, Group Interview 2, p. 243).

Other non-practitioners appreciate the effort in their training, recognizing that the traceurs are training parkour, and they see the value in what they are doing. “You have people who think it’s awesome. They’ve learned and maybe even tried it themselves, which is pretty cool. But I would say that last group is the minority, a much smaller amount” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, pp. 89-90). “There are people that’ll talk to me and think that it’s really good that I’m doing it”
This group of non-practitioners who understand and appreciate the efforts that traceurs put in to advance their abilities in movement is small. But the traceurs are confident that this group of informed people is growing larger and that the public is becoming more aware of what parkour is and why traceurs are alternatively appropriating urban spaces. They seem to hold this opinion because of the changing ways in which people have been reacting to their movements over their years of training.

Another common reaction described by almost every interviewee was a neutral reaction where non-practitioners would encourage the traceurs to execute a movement, commonly a backflip. “‘Do a backflip!’ I always get that one” (Dye, Group Interview 1, p. 222). “Ugh. ‘Do a backflip!’ Everyone says it, you know it. You’ve heard it” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 48). Non-practitioners, who are often not very well-informed about parkour, will see a traceur training and encourage them to be reckless by shouting the name of a move they know is risky, which is often a backflip. “Some people just want to see you try something crazy. So that’s why there’s the stereotypical response, somebody yells ‘Do a backflip!’ because that’s all they know. They know it’s risky and dangerous and they want to see you try it instead of them trying it themselves” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 89). People who respond in this way to seeing traceurs out practicing likely have a misinformed perception of what parkour is, often thinking that it is about being reckless and engaging in dangerous stunts, hence their responses encouraging traceurs’ perceived ‘risky’ behavior.

Some non-practitioners occasionally engage in dialogue with the traceurs and either make excuses why they could not practice parkour or conclude they would injure themselves if they
tried. “One of the things people say when they first see me doing what I do, they’ll just be like ‘Oh I would hurt myself’” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 94). “They think ‘Woah! That’s crazy, I could never do that!’ So then I usually ask them ‘Oh, do you want to try it?’ And they usually say ‘No, no, I couldn’t do that’” (Hartung, Individual Interview 3, p. 102). It is common for pedestrians to claim that they are capable of doing the things that traceurs are doing but then make physical excuses relating to bad body parts or age when asked if they would be interested in trying to learn.

The other thing people do is people will say ‘Oh, I could do that.’ Or they’ll be like ‘Oh, I could do that if…’ and they have an excuse. People will say ‘Oh, I’d do that when I was younger.’ Lots of guys, if like an older guy…30’s, 40’s, maybe even 20’s…a guy with a girl, classic situation, and they see me do something, and the girl’s like ‘Woah! What was that?’ and the guy’s like ‘Oh yeah, that’s parkour. I totally would do that. I used to do that stuff back when I was younger, but I’d throw my back out now.’ People always make these physical excuses…‘I would totally do it but I can’t because of this…’…Or people would be like ‘Oh, I’m too old to do that.’…People make excuses for it all the time. It’s just sad. I always try to talk people into it like ‘No, you should just try it! I didn’t think I could do it when I started! I was terrified of a backflip! I dreamed that one day maybe I could do a backflip. Now I’m doing doubles! You just have to work your way into it.’ But yeah, that’s what you hear (Foster, Individual Interview 1,
Many experienced traceurs argue that one is never too old to learn the movements of parkour, and that injuries can be avoided through slow progressions to increase skill level. But many onlookers feel the need to make excuses for why they cannot engage in these movements.

In the same way that non-practitioners will often claim to have the ability to perform the movements and make excuses for why they cannot at that time, these certain people will also sometimes attempt to belittle the disciplined training of traceurs by being dismissive about their movements. When witnessing alternative appropriations of urban space by parkour practitioners, non-practitioners will occasionally dismiss the movements as if they were easy and unimpressive, or as if they were inappropriate or childish, and not give the traceur any respect as an athlete. “Some people look at it and see an appreciation for it. Other people look at it as just jumping around being kids, not taking it seriously” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 243). Foster describes how he has experienced onlookers watch him perform incredibly difficult movements and be unimpressed and never satisfied.

People also will be unimpressed! It is interesting how unimpressed people will be sometimes. Like you do one thing, and for a second they’re impressed, and then they want more. It’s like an instant gratification…They don’t want to do it themselves, and being impressed doesn’t lead to respect. I feel like people are so used to being impressed, and I don’t know if it’s the internet or videogames or
what it is in our culture or whatever but I feel like they, for a second, they’re like ‘Woah, that was sick! Wait, do something better!’ And then you do a jump and they’re like ‘Oh, wow. (unimpressed)’ And then they’ll be like ‘Wait, can you do it bigger?’ You do a backflip and they’re like ‘Do a double!’ And it’s like ‘What!? Are you not happy with my sacrifice?!’ (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 50).

People also respond really flippantly…It’s like dismissive…A person, who ‘knows’ what it is, is like ‘…that’s parkour. Oh I know what that is.’ And it’s weird because they get some kind of delight, or they feel important, almost as if by just knowing what it is, then they somehow get to be cool for knowing it. It’s almost like they’re doing it because they know what it is. They’re like ‘Oh, that’s parkour, it’s just parkour. Yeah it’s like jumping around and getting from A to B.’…It’s all very interesting! (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 49-50).

This lack of respect and view of parkour as something that is childish and inappropriate for adults to engage in will often come from parents of children at parks, playgrounds, and other public spaces where the traceurs train. With parents, the traceurs described that the reactions they received were mixed, with some parents ordering them to leave because they were perceived to be bad influences on their children, and other parents getting excited and asking if they would teach their kids parkour. “Parks, playgrounds, you have to be careful. Parents can get upset.
Parents can be super cool. I’ve had some parents get really excited and be like ‘What are you doing?! My son really wants to do that! Can you teach him?’ And then sometimes some parents get really angry and they’re like ‘Why are you in a park? This is for children!’ I’ve had dads get mad at me for being in a park, and get really pissed and say ‘Oh, this is for kids. You’re not a kid, get out of here’” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 49). Joe Torchia owns a parkour gym in Columbus, Ohio and has had very many positive experiences with parents who bring their children to the gym to train fairly often. “Parents, again, if we see them more than once, it’s because they like it, they support it, they see their kids getting something out of it, and they recognize the value that it has” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 176). Overall, this range of different reactions from non-practitioners towards alternative appropriations of urban space by parkour practitioners predominantly resulted in negative experiences for traceurs, but also some positive ones as well. As parkour progressively becomes more common, the familiarity of pedestrians with the sport and its purpose will ideally continue to lead to greater levels of understanding, appreciation, and respect for the movements of traceurs and the discipline of parkour.
DOCUMENTATION AND SHARING OF THE PHENOMENON

The phenomenon of alternative appropriation of urban spaces by parkour practitioners has been shared globally since the internet became available, and this has contributed to the awareness of the sport and the ever increasing number of practitioners dedicated to training around the world. To the discipline of parkour, the internet was and still is an integral component of how it was discovered, spread, and shared on a global scale. As part of the interview process, the traceurs were asked about their own personal reasons and tendencies with documenting and sharing their movements. The purpose of this inquiry addresses the subquestion pertaining to documentation and distribution of the phenomenon: How is the phenomenon documented and shared with others, and what are the intentions of sharing this documentation? The interviewees explained their motivations, reasoning, documentation methods, sharing methods, and what this documentation means to them and what they think it means for the sport of parkour.

Parkour, as a sport and a discipline, grew with the internet and through the internet, and there would not be parkour as it exists today without the presence of this global sharing platform. The majority of the interviewees, specifically the older, more experienced traceurs, recounted that they initially found out about parkour through the internet, from people sharing videos or uploading them to parkour forums. If not for the access to these online videos, many of the traceurs that practice today around the world would never have discovered parkour. “The phenomenon of parkour videos is really interesting, because without it, there is no parkour. Parkour was born on the internet. It would be impossible without it. It’s really kind of a modern
sport in that way. It used to be that you’d have to go on parkour forums, and if you made a video, you spent like a month collecting footage and you spent a couple of days editing it, and then you uploaded it and you posted a link, and people would have to download it and watch it all the way through, and it was a whole process” (Graves, Group Interview 1, pp. 223-224). With the introduction of other video sharing sites and social media, such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat, uploading and sharing parkour videos became easier, and the types of videos trended away from long, high quality productions to shorter clips uploaded more frequently. “YouTube [became] the main source and streaming the videos made it easier to watch. So the tendency became shorter and shorter and shorter videos. And then over the last few years, with Instagram, with Facebook, with Snapchat and things like that, the parkour video has become a shorter and shorter medium. And now it’s mainly clips, and there are fewer and fewer high production long duration videos that come out anymore” (Graves, Group Interview 1, p. 224). This global sharing of movement through social media and online sharing sites is primarily responsible for the spread of parkour around the world and the growth it has experienced in the number of athletes that take part in the discipline.

Through the process of viewing and sharing videos of each other’s movements through these online, global platforms, the parkour community grew. “It’s a conversation. It’s a big way that the parkour community is a community, it’s through video!” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 55). By watching videos of traceurs training and executing alternative appropriations of urban spaces, other traceurs around the world were able to bond with each other through the video documentations of their movements. “It’s a sharing in the community! It’s a way to move with a
person on the other side of the world, or with people more broadly! It’s to share a video of your movement, and then somehow, even though you’re not physically present, you can still share and experience in that together” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 55). This sharing and watching is how the individual parkour communities around the world came into existence. People anywhere that had access to the internet could now find parkour and start their own local communities of practitioners while still feeling like they were a part of this greater global community. “I watched these videos of guys from around the world but I had never met any of them, but all these people, I sort of feel like they are friends of mine because I’ve watched their videos for years” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 5). Not only did these initial parkour videos spread awareness of the discipline, they also inspired many people to begin training and take part in this global sharing of movement. Foster describes his deep appreciation for those initial parkour videos that were being circulated online and how they inspired him to begin and continue to train parkour for many years.

Watching other people is deeply inspiring to me. It’s what got me here! It’s what got me doing parkour in the first place. I would not be doing parkour if I hadn’t been able to watch videos of other people doing it, and specifically people doing it in a way that just blew me away! ‘It’s so beautiful! I want to be able to do it like that!’ So it’s huge that they took the time to make those videos. I am deeply appreciative! I owe a debt to them for filming themselves, interestingly enough! I am so thankful, and I don’t think they were being arrogant to do that. I think that I
am just really appreciative! And in that same way, not that I am as good as them or that I am at that level, but in as much, in my own small way, I want to offer that as well. I don’t know that I’ll ever have that effect on anybody, but as much as I appreciate it from them, I feel like I owe it to attempt the same (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 56).

The inspiration and excitement that these videos brought to people around the world is largely responsible for the vast number of traceurs practicing today.

When asked about the specifics of how the interviewees documented and shared their movements with others, all traceurs who documented their movements did so through film and shared the clips via social media and the internet. “Usually I don’t often document them, almost never. But when I do, I’ll use my cell phone” (Hartung, Individual Interview 3, p. 103). “The same way everyone does now…you record them on your phone” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 180). “YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, those are pretty much the standard places” (Rujiraviriyapinyo, Group Interview 2, p. 247). The reasons why the practitioners chose to document and share their movements varied. Many traceurs explained that they simply wished to share what they were working on with the community as a way to pass it on to others and potentially inspire them to train. “I like making videos that are more chill and not like ‘Ooh look at me! I can do this!’ It’s just like ‘Ah, this is what I’ve been doing’” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 25). “I get to a point where I think ‘Yeah, I’m going to film something’, something that inspires me enough to film it so I can pass it on to others” (Skowronska,
Individual Interview 5, p. 121). This inspiration that other traceurs in the parkour community receive will often lead to discussions and conversations about the movements, and result in renewed interests and drives to go out and continue practicing movements themselves. “When I do film something good that took me awhile to get, I’ll post it online and I’ll have a lot of comments and people who know about it all in my inner circle, and I may inspire other people to try similar things” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 92). Poprocki recalled a recent event where he had posted a video of one of his very high wall run accomplishments on social media and instantly witnessed first-hand the inspiration it brought to the people around him.

I went into work and people were talking about [the video] at work and at the gym that I work at, she teaches little girls, and they were like ‘We saw that! We want to be like you!’ And they started running up the wall in the gym. I was like ‘Wow, I’m witnessing that inspiration!’ I filmed that, I did that, I uploaded it online, and now I’m constantly hearing from other people how much they thought that was awesome and now I’m actually seeing little girls get inspired and try it because I did that! (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 92).

This sharing of accomplishments and training helps to establish and maintain communication with the local parkour communities in which people are involved, and maintains communication with larger, global communities as well. Because parkour practitioners, even in local communities, do not always have the opportunities readily available to train with others, the
sharing of videos is a way for the traceurs to keep in contact with each other and train together virtually.

Some traceurs expressed concerns that can potentially arise through filming and posting of videos when it is done for the wrong reasons. Criticisms can arise if one begins uploading videos for the wrong reasons, such as to show off or to boost one’s ego, and it is important to be honest about the purpose for uploading content. “People criticize, ‘Why are you filming yourself? That’s arrogant. You're just trying to show off! You’re just trying to film yourself looking good and post it so people think you’re cool.’ And there’s a caution there. I think that can happen. I think, yeah, you need to be careful to make sure you are aware of ‘Is this about pride? Is this about showing off?’ And if so, yeah, that’s corrupting your motive, like I talked about before. But mostly, I think hugely in the community, it’s not a pride thing. It’s a sharing in the community!” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 55). Several traceurs expressed that filming could quickly become a negative aspect to one’s training if done for the wrong reasons, and they sometimes struggle with the choice of whether to film during training sessions or not. “I also go through a lot of times when I don’t film anything at all, and I’ve personally been at odds with that because I like doing things without the camera. You do it for yourself and there’s no pressure and it feels freer” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 92). During the data collection process, one of the methods used for this thesis was filming of practitioners executing movements. When a camera is introduced into the environment during a training session, there is often an added pressure placed on the traceurs because they are not only training, but performing for an online audience. For this reason, every interviewee filmed for this thesis was required to
complete an area of the consent form that specifically addressed the added pressure of a camera and if they were comfortable being filmed while practicing. Having a camera at a training session has the potential to take the focus away from training and practicing movements and instead brings the focus to creating short clips to upload, as well as performing for an audience. There are both benefits and cautions when filming movements and sharing them via social media that traceurs must be mindful of to continue practicing in a healthy, productive way.

Another commonly indicated advantage or reason for filming one’s own movements was to review certain movements the traceur is struggling with to help them visualize their errors and fix mistakes. “Normally if I document it, it’s for me. It’s mostly for viewing my movement…so I can see what I’m doing. Sometimes you can’t feel it quite right and you need to be able to look at what you’re doing. And now that I have footage of it, I can see ‘Now that’s what I’m doing wrong’ and I’ll try and fix it” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 180). “If I’m having trouble with a movement, I’ll film it and try and analyze it and break it down frame by frame and work out what I’m doing wrong or where it’s falling apart” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 56). Traceurs also tend to film certain movements for themselves so that they can look back on the footage months or years later to see their progression. “Being able to look back at older videos…and seeing where you’ve come, how much both your physical and mental progressions have grown, is incredible. Just literally seeing your body and mind changing so much in such a short time span is great” (Rujiraviriapinyo, Group Interview 2, p. 247). “I film to show progression…I love being able to have the old footage…It’s really great to see the progress!…I film now, in some ways, just for the posterity of it; ‘I’m not going to share this with anyone. I’m
just going to film this clip and save it so that a couple years from now, I can go back and watch it and see the changes” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 55-56). Traceurs will also film to document specific memories of training in a certain spot or with a group of people as a way of documenting their journey. “I document a lot more when I travel because it’s not so much the physical thing that I’m trying to capture, it’s the feeling of what it was like to train in that space… with these individuals… to share this experience with random strangers… That’s what I like to document, the journey, the journey through the movement” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 134).

In addition to documenting movements for personal analysis or posterity, some traceurs explained that they filmed for promotional reasons and because of their passion for artistic expression through film. “Normally if I document it, it’s for me… The other times I do it are for the gym, for marketing, and we also do it sometimes for our YouTube channel for educational videos” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 180). “Our training is both a discipline and an art. It has been referred to as a sport, but especially when you film, it changes it into an art… because you’re recording it and documenting it. Then you make it into an art form that then you can work with in the form of film… I enjoy… that artistic part… I have been inspired by videos that I thought were beautiful, not just the movement, but the filming, the overall experience of watching it” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 56-57). “I want to be able to [make a beautiful video] to convey that experience, that emotional and physical experience of movement through film in a way that a person sitting somewhere else on the other side of the world can feel that with you!” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 58). The act of filming parkour movements adds
another level of creative expression to the movements themselves, residing in how the traceur chooses to artistically capture and display those movements to a global audience. The many facets of filming, documenting, and sharing parkour movements through social media and other online platforms has contributed immensely to the continued establishment of parkour around the world. Without the ability to share videos of these alternative appropriations of urban space, parkour would likely not exist in anywhere near the same capacity that it currently does.
RELATIONSHIP OF THE PHENOMENON TO AUTHORITIES, LIABILITY, AND LEGAL ISSUES

The ways in which traceurs alternatively appropriate urban spaces with their movements is not a very commonly witnessed or happened-upon event in the United States. Because of the uncommon nature and lack of significant presence of the sport, parkour is often received with skepticism, confusion, and fear by pedestrians, property owners, and officers of the law. Since the early beginnings of parkour, practitioners have faced issues with people, police, and property owners who lack understanding of what they are doing and order them to stop or leave. These types of reactions from authorities when they witness the phenomenon of alternative appropriations of urban space by parkour practitioners is an integral component in understanding how the phenomenon is viewed from the perspective of non-practitioners. This section addresses the research subquestion dealing with the perceptions of authorities and legality: What are the legal issues associated with appropriating urban spaces in this way, and how do authorities/property owners respond? The traceurs shared their past experiences with law enforcement offices as well as their perceptions on trespassing, public space, and other legal issues pertaining to their alternative appropriations of urban space.

Almost all of the interviewees acknowledged they have had interactions with the police and/or property owners during training sessions, and have experienced both positive and negative interactions. Many traceurs have had the police called by pedestrians or property owners because they perceived that their movements were dangerous, they thought that they
were not using the spaces appropriately, or that they perceived their movements as suspicious activity. “Usually if the police get involved...a person has called the cops on you because they see you doing something potentially dangerous and they’re either worried for you or maybe that person doesn’t think that you’re using the space the way it should be. Usually the police or the property owner will tell you ‘You can’t be here’” (Dye, Group Interview 1, p. 226). This situation typically resulted in the traceurs being asked to leave the area or cease executing their movements and told to do it somewhere else, especially when they are approached while training in places deemed private property. “If they get a call of someone on private property, they pretty much have to ask you to leave, regardless of if you’re doing anything wrong or not” (Rujiraviriyapinyo, Group Interview 2, p. 244). Parents in parks or other public spaces will occasionally call the police for fear that they are a bad influence on their children, sometimes making it difficult for traceurs to find a location to train. “People would call because they were afraid for either my safety or I guess their kid’s safety, or that they didn’t want their kids trying stuff that I was doing” (Pinkley, Individual Interview 4, p. 111). The police will often tell them “‘this isn’t the right place for that. Go to a park.’ I’ll be like ‘Oh, but I’ve been kicked out of parks because then parents get upset and the police say you can’t train in this park. Go somewhere else.’ You know, it’s a catch 22...You get kicked out of different places. You get the cops called on you by people. People will just call for whatever reason” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 51-53). When approached by police, some of the practitioners explained that they have experienced predominantly negative interactions, being arrested or detained for questioning. “I literally cannot count the number of negative [experiences with police] I’ve
had…I’ve been searched, patted down, they think I have drugs, I’ve been thrown up against a wall and searched, I’ve been freaked out on, I’ve been chased, I’ve had cruisers come in from all directions with guns and dogs and tasers. I got arrested for being on a roof” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 51). Because the police and the general public are not used to witnessing these types of appropriation of urban spaces, they cannot categorize it, which can result in feelings of fear, associating the movements with crime or ill intentions, eliciting these types of aggressive responses from authorities.

The practitioners noted that the attitude of the police and how one should respond to them can be discerned by observing the way in which the officers approach the scene. “You can tell from the way they approach as to whether they’re interested…or if they’ve gotten a call and they’re coming to investigate, or if they’re coming specifically to kick you out. It’s usually pretty apparent what their stance is” (Rujiraviriyapinyo, Group Interview 2, pp. 244-245). “Their body language when they are approaching you says a lot. If they’re on the radio, looking at you like you’re up to no good, you know to handle with care” (Peveley, Group Interview 2, p. 245). The traceurs also identified that the police are less likely to have a problem with what they are doing if they “spot you on their own…if they are being called, then they are more likely to see what you are doing as a crime and be a little bit more aggressive and heavy handed and more agitated” (McNabb, Individual Interview 6, pp. 149-150). The likeliness of police seeing alternative appropriations of urban space as a crime was expressed to often differ based upon the overall crime rates in the areas where the training takes place. “I have friends that live in a lot less nice areas of the country, places that have a lot more issues with vandalism, people breaking into
properties, and general aggression towards police. I find that when we are encountered in those spaces, it is far, far more likely that they are going to be approaching you without respect or interest. They just want you to leave” (Rujiraviriyapinyo, Group Interview 2, pp. 244-245).

Because of higher rates of crime, it is logical that police would be less open to the idea of using space in this alternative way since it could be misinterpreted as criminal activity, such as vandalism or attempted burglary.

In the United States, another common issue with police with liability concerns. As a reason to ask traceurs to cease their movements, police in the United States will often reference lawsuits, suing concerns, and property damage for why their actions are not appropriate. “They are concerned that we are going to damage the property and hurt ourselves and sue the property owners” (McNabb, Individual Interview 6, p. 150). Situations were described where the police appreciated the training the traceurs were engaging in, but felt that it was necessary to stop them because of legal issues. “We understand what you’re doing. We’re very glad that you’re doing that. But I have to tell you to stop, because of the law, because of lawyers, because if you get hurt, people can sue” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 90). While often times the alternative appropriations of urban space by parkour practitioners are understood and appreciated by the police, because of the legal system in the United States and the fears of lawsuits, police often feel compelled to ask traceurs to cease training and disperse.

Concerning the actual legality of the movements that traceurs are executing, Foster has attempted to engage in conversation with law enforcement to understand why the movements are viewed as illegal, but he is often met with resistance perceived to relate to an issue of authority.
“They generally respond by saying ‘You can’t do that’, whatever it is, and then if you try and have a conversation and ask why, I think it usually becomes an authority issue for them and they just need you to back down. You cannot, I cannot set up a situation where I try to prove them wrong” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 51-52). The reason for why the alternative appropriation of urban spaces by parkour practitioners is viewed as being illegal could possibly stem from an overarching social perspective pertaining to the ‘proper’ usages of space, which the movements of traceurs do not match.

When dealing with situations involving law enforcement, property owners, or distressed citizens, the traceurs unanimously and emphatically emphasized the importance of being respectful and not acting like an idiot. “The vast majority of parkour practitioners are very respectful and they’re not going to run, they’re going to try to explain themselves” (Graves, Group Interview 1, p. 227). “How I respond to an officer…is always being respectful. Don’t run if you don’t need to” (Koehler, Group Interview 2, p. 244). “As long as you’re respectful, there are never really any issues as far as what I’ve had happen” (Rujiraviriyapinyo, Group Interview 2, p. 244). “It’s important to treat [police] with respect” (Peveley, Group Interview 2, p. 245). “One thing that I’ve always taught the community [in Hawaii] and that I’ve kept in my mind is to just be respectful, no matter what” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 130). They also adamantly articulated that when confronted by law enforcement, do not make a big deal about leaving, and do what they say. “If they want you to leave, you go” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 90). “If they ask you to leave, you leave. It’s not a big deal” (Dye, Group Interview 1, p. 226). When engaging in conversation with law enforcement, the traceurs
explained that they want to have a calm interaction with them, avoid confrontational language, attitudes, or actions, and that if they do this, the police are generally very reasonable. “You don’t argue and don’t use obscenities” (McNabb, Individual Interview 6, p. 150). “Not acting like an idiot goes a long way!” (Peveley, Group Interview 2, p. 246). “In general, as long as you have an open conversation and say ‘This is what we use the space for, if you want us to leave, we’ll leave. We were not trying to be disrespectful’, and present yourself as a human and not some sort of cretin. Their job is not to just be mean…They are generally reasonable. And if they want you to leave, then respectfully leave! Don’t make a big deal out of it, and that’s one of the keys to creating a good relationship” (Libby Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 178). In the event that a traceur is approached by police, they explained that it is an ideal opportunity to try to explain parkour to them and educate them about what it is that traceurs are doing with their movements. “If they come to you, and they give you the opportunity to educate them or talk to them about what it is that you’re doing, take that. Engage in a conversation! Don’t be aggressive in the dialogue though. Be calm, be respectful...It’s about cultivating that understanding of what it is that we are trying to achieve” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 130). “I always try and be really respectful...I try to just have a conversation and I try to help them understand better, because I hope the next time they run into someone doing parkour, they’ll have a little more of a positive response than they had with me” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 53). One of the primary reasons why the traceurs advocated so strongly for showing respect to police and property owners was that they see themselves as representatives for the rest of the parkour community. They felt that how they individually respond and interact with law enforcement
officers will dictate how those officers interact with other traceurs in the future. “Whatever you do, they’re going to have that impression for the next practitioner, and it’s your responsibility to make sure that you leave them with a good impression so they just don’t automatically treat others with that negative mindset” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 133). “I always try to remember if ever interact with cops…that I and anyone else doing parkour, represent the whole parkour community. So depending on if they’ve seen any parkour athletes before in life, the way that you interact with them, that will put a kind of seed in their minds as to how everyone else in the parkour community acts” (Guzman, Group Interview 2, p. 246). The traceurs hope that by leaving positive impressions on police and property owners, and trying to educate them about the nature of the discipline, parkour and its practitioners will gradually become associated with being respectful and well-meaning from the perspectives of police officers and property owners as opposed to destructive and reckless.

Many of the older, more experienced traceurs who took on roles as local parkour community leaders explained that they had worked to develop positive, working relationships with law enforcement, property owners, and college campus security or building managers. “Trying to maintain that relationship with the University of Cincinnati…that has been very important to me” (Peveley, Group Interview 2, p. 245). “By the time of the end of our time training at Ohio State University, we had working relationships with the people in the buildings, with the campus police department” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 177). “When we first started the parkour club at the University of Michigan, we actually had a meeting with the public safety department, campus police. And we told them ‘We’re going to be out here, this is what
we’re doing, here’s some information’ and they were super accepting, which was great, and we’ve maintained a really good relationship to this day” (Graves, Group Interview 1, p. 227).

“Here in Columbus, we’ve worked hard to establish a very positive relationship with the community and with the police” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 178). Through putting in an effort to explain to communities, authorities, and building owners about what parkour is and the purpose behind the alternative appropriations of urban spaces that the traceurs engage in, the public has become much more accepting and understanding towards the movement and towards parkour.

Despite the many negative interactions the traceurs described when confronted by police and property owners, they also recalled positive past experiences. “[Police] realize this is not something that’s damaging, it’s not something that’s bad, it’s not countercultural. It’s a new thing. It’s a reinterpretation of a lot of different things. Martial arts, gymnastics…But it’s not harmful” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 177). “I’ve had a pretty good relationship with police in general” (Graves, Group Interview 1, p. 227). “It has gotten to the point where the cops will show up and they know what you’re doing, they’ve dealt with it so many times before, so at this point, they usually just tell us to ‘Be careful, don’t hurt yourselves, have fun’ and they leave” (Morphy, Group Interview 1, p. 226). As time passes, police have become more aware of parkour through their repeated interactions with practitioners, and the positive, respectful interactions they have had when dealing with them has started to change the way they view the sport. “I have actually had a lot of positive conversations with police officers where they get it. They understand because they are actually healthy themselves, and they’ve trained and done
some things like this in their training…They’d rather you being doing this than drugs or being in a gang, all of these other things that they have to deal with” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 90). The police realize that the alternative appropriations of urban space by traceurs are not harmful or ill-intentioned, and they expressed that they would rather have people, youth especially, involved in a discipline like parkour than with drugs or other problems they deal with. The interviewees recalled individual events when police officers even joined in on the cheering when traceurs overcame a challenge “This spot (right where we were) is right across the street from the police department, and we’ve done wall runs out on the other side of this wall that required people to start their run to the wall in the middle of the street. Five, six cops are out there watching us and cheering the guy on when he gets to the top! They knew that we were watching for traffic and training safely and everything else, and they just kind of let us do our thing!” (Peveley, Group Interview 2, p. 246). At the Cincinnati Parkour Jam, an event where data was collected for this thesis, the large number of practitioners training together on campus was approached by law enforcement officers and their response was very positive towards what we were doing. “[The police officer] said ‘Cool. I respect what you guys do. It’s a cool sport. It looks like you’ve got this event under control so I don’t want to get in your hair more than I need to be, but just make sure that the kids remain safe and that’s all I ask.’ And he let us carry on. Forty, fifty people on campus doing parkour and we’re allowed” (Peveley, Group Interview 2, pp. 245-246). While many traceurs have experienced a number of negative encounters with police and property owners, the more recent engagements they have had with them tend towards conversation, understanding, and approval of the movements they are engaging in.
In general, the reasons why parkour is often viewed as illegal, even when practiced in public space, has been met with confusion and skepticism by some traceurs. The doubt often focuses on the misunderstanding of essentially this: how high is too high to be standing and what movements are okay and what movements are not?

When you really break it down, they’ll be like ‘You can’t be up on a wall.’ ‘Why not?’ ‘Well it’s not for that.’ ‘Well these benches, I can be on this bench, right?’ ‘That’s okay.’ ‘How high is not okay? Can I stand on a curb? Okay, well a curb is only three inches but what if it’s four inches?’ ‘That’s fine. Obviously four inches, that’s silly!’ ‘Oh well this little wall is only like a foot.’ ‘Well oh yeah sure you can be on that.’ ‘Well what about two feet?’ You know, you have to be careful not to be belligerent, but it’s a logical progression to make a point which is that there’s no law against this because it’s not illegal, but it strikes them as illegal somehow (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 52).

When traceurs perform parkour movements in public spaces, when the practitioner is training safely and taking care not to damage property or put anyone else at risk, there is nothing inherently illegal about what they are doing. This dynamic between perceived illegality and actual illegality is often frustrating for traceurs, as they are told to stop executing their movements but not offered sound, legal reasoning for why they must do so. The interviewees also expressed that public space should not have restrictions placed on it if the movements and
activities you are performing in those spaces are not harming anyone or anything. “If I’m allowed to walk around and feel comfortable, I think that also means I’m allowed to do a handstand and feel comfortable…I think we should be allowed to be able to express ourselves in different ways if we’re allowed to be there” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 95). “The sense of freedom that we have as individuals, we should be free to climb, to explore, as long as we’re not harming the property or other individuals or even ourselves” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 139). “I think that public space is public space, and if you’re doing parkour in public space then you should have the right to do it there. That’s why it’s public space” (Hartung, Individual Interview 3, p. 103). Freedom of expression, when not endangering or harming others or property, is legal in the United States, but occasionally law enforcement officers or pedestrians will view this type of alternative appropriation of urban space to somehow be illegal to the frustration of traceurs.

The traceurs believe that the issues emerging with the perceived illegality of the appropriations of spaces by parkour practitioners emanate from a larger, cultural issue in the United States regarding the perception of public space and ownership. “The legal thing represents a bigger, cultural perspective. In general, I think people in Europe are more open to the idea of collective ownership, or the idea of being public, public space and allowing interaction with strangers in that sense. America, and I think this is deeply cultural from our start, is very individualistic and very much about private property and private ownership” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 72-73). The individualistic nature, perception of private and public ownership, and ‘sue first’ mentality in the United States seems to lead to these issues of the
general public and police seeing parkour movements as being illegal or legally dangerous for property owners. This seems to result in confusion and misunderstanding by law enforcement and the public about how public space should be used, what is appropriate, what is legal, and what is illegal. “In the United States, we have a lack of public space that can be used publicly. Private rights here in this country and the litigious nature of our country, how quick people are to sue for injury and negligence and things like that. We have that feeling very much of being an individual here” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, pp. 181-182). The individualistic, sometimes selfish, mindset of Americans, coupled with the fear of being sued and the commonplace practice of suing others for injuries, encourages people not to take responsibility for their own actions. Often in the United States, people will be quick to blame others for personally obtained injuries to receive compensation. “I feel like, in our society (in the United States), we often times do not give [people] a lot of responsibility for their own actions. We say ‘Well the reason you hurt yourself on this playground is because the playground was manufactured incorrectly or because the ground was too hard. And since someone could have realized that this ground was too hard and could’ve hurt you when you fell on it, therefore it’s not your fault, it’s the person who made this, it’s the person who designed it’” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 182). This attitude of deflecting blame for injuries onto others through legal means is a commonplace practice in the United States, and when people or property owners or police witness parkour practitioners alternatively appropriating urban spaces, they sometimes project that attitude onto them. They see their actions as a lawsuit waiting to happen, because if the practitioner injures themselves while training on someone’s property, they understand that the traceur could sue the property
owner. Therefore, the common response to seeing a traceur execute movements is to tell them to stop because they do not want them to get hurt and sue someone. “In America, there is a very ‘sue first’ attitude. People are worried that I may hurt myself doing something, that I may make a mistake, slip on ice or water and land on concrete and hurt myself, and other people may be like ‘Alright I’m going to sue’. But with me and the group we have, when we hurt ourselves, we ask ourselves ‘What did we do wrong?’ Not looking around thinking who am I going to blame… If I didn’t check [the space] properly, if [something] wasn’t anchored down properly, or if something was broken, or wasn’t welded properly, I’m not going to blame the person that was doing their job. It could be an old structure that was sitting there for a long period of time. I need to check it first before I throw my bodyweight at it. When I hurt myself, it’s my own fault” (McNabb, Individual Interview 6, p. 151). Traceurs understand the risks they are taking when executing movements, and if they make a mistake or get injured, even if it is the fault of the property or objects in the space not being securely built, the traceurs will still accept the blame for their injuries. They are the ones who chose to execute the movement and they are the ones who may not have adequately checked the space beforehand to determine if it was safe. This commonplace deflection of blame onto others, the litigious nature of our society, and the cultural views on public and private property in the United States often lead to misconceptions about the danger and illegality of alternative appropriations of urban space by traceurs.

The traceurs expressed that they wished the culture and societal perspectives on public space and legality were different than they are, and that people would be more open to the ideas of collective ownership and freedom of expression on public property.
America...is very individualistic and very much about private property and private ownership. And people feel strongly that they have the right to literally shoot you if you’re on their property...People...in America...they really get angry for no reason (if you are standing up on a roof). Even if you’re literally being the most respectful as you possibly can, you’re not damaging anything, you’re not doing anything wrong or even dangerous, you don’t even have to be doing parkour, you’re just standing there, people get really angry! They’re like ‘Get off!’ That is upsetting. I wish that people were more open to that. I wish that law enforcement was more open to that (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 72-73).

Often when people in the United States are presented with an unusual activity that they perceive to be dangerous that they are unfamiliar with, like the alternative appropriation of urban space by traceurs, instead of communicating with those people and gaining an understanding for what they are doing, they are often afraid of it and would rather bring law enforcement into the situation. “People see you doing something that they think is dangerous, they don’t understand. Their first instinct is to call the police” (Morphy, Group Interview 1, p. 226). The interviewees expressed that they wished people in the United States would be more open-minded about the usage of space, and instead of calling the police when they see people using space in a way that they are not used to, go up and have a conversation with the traceurs and build that understanding.

Because of liability issues and the legal concerns with trespassing and private property, traceurs make a substantial effort to keep their training in public space and away from private
property or areas where they perceive a problem could arise. “I think there has been a lot of work in the parkour community to move away from [trespassing] and to move towards areas that are either on public property or public spaces, where trespassing is not as big of an issue and sort of falls away into the gray area of the law” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 181). By making an effort to keep training in public spaces, traceurs do what they can to try and obey the laws, and try not to create disturbances or issues by training in places that could cause problems. “And also just not training in areas where you obviously shouldn’t. Like don’t train on a federal building, don’t train at a school when school is in session, don’t go on top of buildings if they are being used and there are people walking around and you’re creating a disturbance and you’re worrying people. Don’t do it if it’s obviously not safe. Don’t do it if you shouldn’t be there” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 178). Because this type of appropriation of urban, public spaces falls into the gray area of the law, it is the most ideal location for practitioners to train their movements without intentionally breaking laws. As parkour grows, this gray area of the law dealing with the proper usage of public spaces still persists as an issue, and Joe Torchia explains “that’s why we are opening gyms, why we are trying to build parks. But we have to realize that none of that existed [when parkour was starting out], and there weren’t places to train. So your only choice, if you wanted to actually do this, was to trespass or was to do something slightly illegal, but to do it in as respectful a way as you could” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 182). Most traceurs do not intend to purposefully break laws or get into trouble. The majority just want to practice their movements, advance their abilities, and obey and respect the laws while doing it.

The traceurs conveyed their efforts to obey laws and be respectful of others and their
property, as well as trying not to create dangers through their training. “I don’t want to cause any trouble. I don’t want to break any laws. I want to be respectful to the law and my city and my community, the greater community. So I don’t purposefully try to trespass. I don’t break into places and I don’t go anywhere that I shouldn’t” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 95). “I don’t really support trespassing or climbing onto buildings and stuff like that, because it doesn’t belong to you…I want to be as respectful as possible because I want to have the opportunity to have parkour be perceived as this holistic discipline where we are respectful, compassionate, and considerate of what it is that we’re doing and what we are trying to achieve” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, pp. 138-139). If the traceurs are creating danger or breaking laws by training their movements, they view this as not training in the proper way. “If we’re creating a danger, we’re not training the right way” (Pinkley, Individual Interview 4, p. 112). However, certain interviewees such as Foster adamantly professed that parkour is not the issue, and that the culture and society in the United States is wrong for seeing parkour as a criminal activity. “I think society is wrong on this and I’m going to stick it to the man. But I have to respect differences, and that’s one that I need to respect. I need to respect people’s private property for sure. If it bothers them, then I need to get off their land and respect that. But yeah, I wish that people would have more acceptance of that” (Foster, individual Interview 1, p. 73). Overall, the traceurs explained that most importantly, they wanted to respect the rights, property, laws, and opinions of others and not train in a way that causes any harm to anyone or anything. Traceurs are determined to change the perspective in the United States on their alternative appropriations of urban space from one of illegality, liability, and carelessness to one of mindfulness,
responsibility, and respect for others and their property.
RELATIONSHIP OF THE PHENOMENON TO RISK, DANGER, AND FEAR

While understanding the physical experience of the phenomenon of alternative appropriation of urban space by parkour practitioners is essential to defining the essence of this phenomenon, it is only a portion of the overall experience. The physical spectacle of these alternative appropriations of urban space by parkour practitioners is often what is emphasized by the media and pop culture. But equally as important to the physical movements in determining the essence of the lived experience, if not even more crucial, are the mental aspects of the experience. When traceurs are alternatively appropriating space, not only do they engage physically with the environment, but also mentally and emotionally. This mental realm of the experience is where traceurs engage with their own perceptions of risk, danger, and fear, which are integral aspects of these appropriations of urban space. While the media may depict traceurs as reckless, adrenaline junkies with no regard for self-preservation, the reality is quite the opposite for the majority of practitioners. Traceurs, on a regular basis, engage in healthy, calculated, risk-taking behavior, careful evaluations of danger, and develop considerable intimacy with, and understanding of, their own fears. This section addresses the subquestion pertaining to the relationship between the phenomenon and risk, danger, and fear: What roles do risk, danger, and fear play within the experience of the phenomenon of alternative appropriation of urban space by traceurs? The interviewees explained their relationship to risk, danger, and fear, as well as the differentiations between these terms, in the context of alternative appropriations of urban space.
Risk, as defined by traceurs and understood in the context of parkour, is the possibility that something could go wrong where one does not complete a movement correctly which often results in an injury or a bail. “Risk, I would say, is the likelihood of being hurt” (Pinkley, Individual Interview 4, p. 113). “Risk is the sense of ‘Oh, what could happen?’” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 137). The possibility that something could go wrong during the traceur’s alternative appropriations of urban space is a constant variable that cannot be fully taken out of the experience. “Always a risk. There’s always that risk…and you just have to overcome that” (Barber, Paired Interview 2, p. 203). “Risk, risk is always there. It is one hundred percent always there” (McNabb, Individual Interview 6, p. 154). Risk is very important and necessary for traceurs to be aware of when they execute alternative appropriations in urban space because it is a way for them to mentally measure the likelihood of injury and progress their abilities safely. While risk is a very important and necessary part of executing these movements, risk can be minimized and reduced through disciplined physical and mental training of the body and mind. “It’s not as risky if you train yourself efficiently to be able to do these movements, to cultivate that awareness, that understanding, and you execute it” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 138). While it is beneficial and effective to minimize risk through consistent training, risk in itself is nothing more than a measuring and comparing of one’s actual ability physically to one’s perceived ability mentally. “It’s a perceived risk, like the idea of risk, but that’s what we’re training for” (Morell, Paired Interview 2, p. 203). In that sense, the level of risk associated with a movement is not necessarily real but only perceived, and by cultivating a synchronization between perceived ability and actual ability through disciplined training, a
traceur can almost eliminate the factor of risk altogether. “There’s no risk if you don’t want there to be. If you know the movements and you trust yourself, there shouldn’t be a problem. If I can walk on a ledge 1ft wide down here, I can walk on a ledge 1ft wide up there on the roof. It seems scary, although it’s the same exact thing. So there’s really no risk” (Morell, Paired Interview 2, pp. 204-205). The cultivation of that synchronization between mind and body gives traceurs a very clear sense of what they are capable of doing and what they are not, and if they are capable, they can execute those movements with minimal to no perceived risk. This complex mental development is often overlooked by the portrayal of parkour in mass media and the focus falls upon the physical movements, while the carefully articulated mental calculations are usually not acknowledged. “It’s like you’re mentally calculating the physics of it. The amount of force and angle required to propel your body to the exact distance to land and control that landing on that rail at height is amazing. It’s taken for granted when we’re doing it, but when you look at the mental processing that gets you there, it’s incredible” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, pp. 232-233). Risk is subjective. A jump or movement that may be risky to one practitioner could be perceived as being no more dangerous than walking down the street to another. The risks that traceurs engage with are predominantly well thought out, carefully calculated decisions, which may appear to be rash and reckless, but are actually accomplished through a very methodical mental process. Traceurs engage regularly in healthy risk-taking behavior during every training session, constructing a better understanding, relationship, and comfort with taking risks. This disciplined, regular engagement with risk-taking is not pointless and can help better prepare them for other situations in life.
Yeah, and to face [risks in executing parkour movements] isn’t stupid. That’s what people think. It’s not stupid. It’s a calculated choice! It’s worth it! I am safer…because, name a situation, whatever it is, I’m more physically and mentally prepared for it…I am statistically less likely to get hurt or injured or killed, because I train things like balance all the time with parkour. If I’m on a sheet of ice in the winter and I slip, my body and mind are prepared for that kind of situation, for absorbing impact, whether I roll out of it or try to catch my balance, whatever, I am safer! I’m less likely to get injured (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 71).

Engaging in healthy risk-taking behavior through disciplined training of parkour movements prepares traceurs, physically and mentally, to better react in situations that life presents to them when an element of risk is involved.

When traceurs first begin practicing parkour, they have often not adequately developed that relationship with risk and there is a disconnect between what they can do physically and what they think they are capable of mentally. If a traceur mentally perceives that they are capable of doing something when they are not actually capable of physically doing it, injuries happen. Some of the interviewees explained that when they first began parkour, they experienced injuries until they were able to more closely synchronize their actual and perceived capabilities.
So risk and fear are necessary, but I personally found that taking it in small dosages is the best way to do it. When I first started training though, that wasn’t the case, and I immediately learned the hard way. As I was learning what I could and could not do, I just immediately tried some very difficult things that I was not capable of doing. That’s when I had my injuries, right off the bat. But then after those experiences, I realized that I needed to work on my technical skills first before I tried bigger things. That’s the reason why I hurt myself because I didn’t spend a lot of time learning the smaller things, and exercising and developing my body to be able to do those things. So after that, I was pretty much good, and I haven’t had too many injuries at all since then (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 94).

An emphasis was placed on younger, newer practitioners, identifying that they have often not developed this relationship with risk and commonly injure themselves as a result. “Especially when working with a lot of youth…they don’t have the awareness of risk and don’t understand that they can hurt themselves” (McNabb, Individual Interview 6, pp. 151-152). This common issue of enduring many injuries early on in training eventually leads to the realization of the importance in building up a good technical base in movement, working on progressions to slowly increase skills and reduce injuries, both during parkour training sessions and during daily life.

The best way to engage in healthy risk-taking behavior in parkour is to slowly build up to
larger, more difficult movements through progressions of learning smaller, easier movements that one is more capable of achieving. Through this method of progressions, injuries are reduced, which, contrary to the common perception of the media, is one of the main goals in practicing parkour, to minimize injuries. “Parkour isn’t about falling or getting hurt but still completing a challenge. It’s not about that. It’s about practicing and practicing so you won’t hurt yourself!” (Pinkley, Individual Interview 4, p. 114). “I also have the mentality of ‘It’s not worth it’ sometimes. I would rather have a body that is fully functional to enjoy all the different possibilities of parkour than to risk it all on this jump when I know I’m not ready for it” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 14). When an injury is sustained through executing alternative appropriations of urban space, the progression of ability in the traceur’s movements is halted or even regressed during the healing process, and traceurs tend to avoid this scenario at all costs. The concept of slowly progressing one’s skills instead of jumping into a situation they aren’t physically and mentally prepared for is essentially the same logical mindset that one would take on with any other activity. “You just don’t go too crazy. Like don’t try to do a full (backflip with a complete 360 twist) off of something if you’ve never done one before, you should try it first in a foam pit” (Chalifour, Group Interview 1, p. 225). “Say you have your 12 year old kid and he wants to play football. You get him all the gear; let him join the school team or whatever. You wouldn’t strap him up and send him to the Super Bowl. He’d get killed! It’s the same thing. You’re not going to climb five stories in the air and try to flip off something your first day. You just do a little shoulder roll in the grass and work your way up” (Morphy, Group Interview 1, pp. 225-226). This same concept applies identically to parkour in that as one is learning the risks of
movements of the sport and understanding one’s own abilities, they will slowly begin to build up to bigger and bigger movements of increasing difficulty. “A lot of the times what I’ll try to do is I’ll practice things that I’m very likely to mess up on, but I’ll practice in a way that if I do mess up, I’m not going to fall three stories or something. And I think that’s one of the things that one, people assume parkour is and two, it’s because of that why they think parkour is so dangerous and it shouldn’t been seen that way. You can even jump across some crazy gap and it could be safe, but that’s only going to come by practicing in places where you’re not going to get hurt if you mess up…So if I’m doing anything dangerous where there’s a risk, it’s going to be something that’s well within my range of control, whereas if I’m just practicing in a not very risky situation, I’ll try to push my limits. But that’s the main difference between pushing you limits and just smashing them” (Pinkley, Individual Interview 4, p. 114). Traceurs are intimately aware of risk in their training, and understand their capabilities in movement, allowing them to train in a safe and productive way, working through progressions and increasing their skill level.

When engaging with risk while executing alternative appropriations of urban space, traceurs often attempt more difficult movements when they feel they are ready, and the larger and more difficult a movement is, the higher the risk of injury. “If I do a bigger movement, it would be moves that put me at a little bit more risk for injuries” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 121). But parkour, just like any other sport, has the potential for athletes to incur injuries. “Falls will happen. Injuries are going to happen, but it’s the same with every sport” (Koehler, Group Interview 2, p. 249). “In any sport, there is a chance or a risk of injury. It’s just about minimizing the risk, which a lot of people in mainstream media don’t understand”
The media often hastily equates the injuries of people who train parkour as the sport itself being risky instead of the ways in which those individuals chose to practice the sport. “If a powerlifter lifts 400 pounds with an arched back, they are going to get injured. If they have a braced back, they’ll be fine. It’s the same thing with parkour. People think ‘Well, I’m going to do this jump’ and they just throw themselves at it like WAHHH and then land, they’re going to crush their spine” (Koehler, Group Interview 2, pp. 249-250). Whether it is parkour or any other sport, although there are exceptions, the risk typically resides in how an individual chooses to practice that sport and is not always inherent within the sport itself. When compared with other sports, the injury rates in parkour are statistically much lower. “The injury rates in parkour are quite low. There are not many studies done so far but from one of the few studies I’ve seen, injury rates are actually the equivalent of women’s softball. Much lower than other sports like major league baseball, football, gymnastics, cheerleading; safer than women’s field hockey. You know, it looks risky taken out of context” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 183). The traceurs argued that this lower rate of injuries in parkour compared to other sports was due to the nature of how the sport is practiced. “Football…is more dangerous than parkour because it’s a contact sport. No matter what, you’re eventually going to get hit somehow. Whereas in parkour, you can decide how hard you want to train” (Guzman, Group Interview 2, p. 250). The practice of parkour is purely individualistic in that it is the traceur and the space. Their safety is not reliant on, or hindered by, anyone but themselves. Traceurs also do not rely on external equipment for safety, meaning they have full responsibility for their own safety and do not need to be concerned with a skateboard breaking on a jump or a helmet falling off in football.
“Even like skateboarding or BMX, you are relying on your bike and board to not break. You’re sacrificing part of your control to your equipment. When you do something like jump up some stairs with parkour, it’s only me. It’s my responsibility alone to do it” (Koehler, Group Interview 2, p. 250). The individuality and full responsibility that the traceur takes in their own safety and risk-taking without relying on equipment is part of what makes parkour statistically safer than other sports. As an integral part of the experience of the phenomenon of alternative appropriation of urban space through parkour, risk is constantly present, assessed, and understood by traceurs.

Similar to risk, and also present in some alternative appropriations of urban space by parkour practitioners, is danger. Danger arises in situations where a parkour practitioner is attempting to execute movements with potentially severe consequences should something go wrong. “Danger is the sense of ‘If you fail this, there is a serious outcome’ as opposed to risk. If you are doing something building to building, like a 10ft jump building to building, that’s dangerous. A 10ft jump that’s only like 2ft or 3ft off the ground, that’s risky…There’s still the risk of the slip or the fall, of getting injured, but you’re not dead. Now if you’ve trained that and you’ve done that movement a million times and you’ve executed it so much, that bigger movement from building to building isn’t so dangerous necessarily. There is still the danger of what could happen if that goes wrong” (Skowronsiki, Individual Interview 1, pp. 137-138). While risk and danger are related, risk is the possibility of getting hurt whereas danger is associated with a likely serious or life-threatening scenario should the execution of the movement not go as intended. Dangerous situations are engaged with extreme caution by the majority of traceurs, and when engaging in a dangerous situation, extra steps are usually taken to ensure complete
confidence in the movement before attempting it. Traceurs will often work to minimize danger, either through repetitive training working up to a bigger, more dangerous movement or through planning bail routes should something go wrong. “Is it dangerous? It can be, but if you train your body and train your mind to think fast enough and be able to move fast enough with those thoughts, then most movements that I would even think of putting myself in, I know I could get myself out of…I think danger cannot be omitted from it, but it can be changed. It can be managed” (McNabb, Individual Interview 6, 154-155). Through the progression of one’s training, certain movements can become less dangerous as confidence is gained in the movements and synchronization between mind and body is strengthened, meaning that danger is a subjective measure by which certain movements are personally assessed. “Danger is subjective, like ‘Are you in danger?’ And people put that on you, and you can’t do that. You can’t really assign to someone else what danger they should be afraid of or able to handle, or that they should respond to” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 69). Because danger is subjective, others cannot judge for the traceur what is and is not too dangerous for them to attempt. Only they know their own capabilities and can most accurately assess the likeliness that they will successfully complete a movement. Although the alternative appropriations of urban space by parkour practitioners may seem dangerous to someone who does not practice parkour, the simple differentiation in the perceptions of what is and is not dangerous causes this to occur. The traceurs argued that yes, while parkour has elements of risk and sometimes danger to the movements, it is not unlike any other activities in life.
Everything is dangerous! Everything is dangerous and nothing is dangerous, in a way. In life, you can die doing anything! If you really tried to never do anything dangerous, you would die from not doing anything! Your life would literally be impossible, it’s not possible. You cannot remove danger from a human life. It is part of life, it’s part of existence, by definition. That’s what, more and more through our culture, we try and do to our kids. I’ve read some very interesting articles about this, about education, and about how we are obsessed with protecting our kids, protecting people from this and from that and from the other, and always trying to put more and more things in place, whether physical or laws or rules or regulations, to protect from this and to protect from that, and you can’t do it indefinitely. Eventually, kids are going to be in these like astronaut suits with globes on their heads and they won’t be able to do anything for risk of this or that!...Is [parkour] dangerous, and whether you want to go statistically or simple calculably as far as your abilities, for me to do an eight foot precision jump is not dangerous. Nine feet, a little more dangerous. Nine and a half, more dangerous. Like at height, I could do an eight foot precision ten stories up, and it’s not that dangerous for me. For a person that’s new to parkour, very dangerous! For a person that has never done parkour, idiotically dangerous! Just why would you do that? Just don’t do that! And see, there’s me saying ‘You! Don’t do that!’ because I know the risks of this and I’m telling you that I think that’s very dangerous for you. And I’m saying that about your ability, it’s that situation compared to your
ability that’s dangerous (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 70).

Danger and risk are part of the human condition, part of life. We, as humans, take risks every day, in driving cars, flying on planes, riding bicycles, even walking down the street. The only thing that differentiates an unlicensed, untrained person driving a car from a licensed, trained person driving a car is the ability level of the driver. If a person is a poor, constantly distracted driver, then driving for them is more dangerous than for someone who is a skillful, mindful, and aware driver. In the same way, a person who has never trained parkour who jumps from roof to roof is being very dangerous whereas a dedicated, disciplined traceur jumping from roof to roof can actually be quite normal for them. Danger comes down to perspective and ability level in parkour, which can be steadily increased through disciplined, progressive training.

It is not the objective of traceurs to put themselves in danger, and this is often the inaccurate portrayal that the mainstream media tends to emphasize. “I’m not trying to put myself in danger; I’m not trying to put other people in danger. I’m trying to cultivate an awareness of what it is that I’m capable of doing here and now in this moment and what I can do tomorrow as well” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 128). To improve their skills, traceurs often navigate around the edge of their personally perceived abilities, carefully and thoughtfully trying to slowly push their boundaries to increase their skill level and abilities. By training at a level within their capability but close to the limit of the movements which they perceive to be able to execute safely, traceurs increase their comfort zone and improve, and this is referred to as edgework. “You get to know yourself better at that edge. It’s called edgework, and you get to
know yourself better through that edgework. And eventually, a jump break is not as big of a deal in a way because you know” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 173). Often the phenomenon of jump breaking occurs during this edgework, and a jump break is overcoming self-doubt or fear rooted in a certain movement, committing to the movement, and successfully getting one’s mind and body to execute the jump. Through careful navigation of edgework and jump breaking, traceurs progressively expand their abilities and confidence in certain movements. In order to engage in this edgework in a safe and productive way, “you should know yourself, and you should know what you cannot do, know what you can do, and work on what you can do, but just try to push yourself a little harder to things that you cannot do. I feel like that is the perfect formula where I don’t get hurt, but I constantly improve” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 94). If done properly, navigating the outer edge of one’s comfort zone in movement through edgework will not result in injuries. While engaging in this edgework, it is unavoidable that, as the traceurs work on movements they are not yet comfortable with performing, they will encounter and have to deal with fear.

Fear often manifests itself in parkour when traceurs assess the risks and danger of a movement they are attempting to perform. Similar to risk, fear arises out of the gap between a traceur’s perceived ability mentally and actual ability physically to execute certain alternative appropriations of urban space, and also arises with the perception of how dangerous a certain movement is. “People aren’t afraid of walking, even though as a baby when you’re first starting, it’s kind of a wild ride there for a while…But people aren’t afraid of walking because they are able to do it physically, and mentally know that they’re prepared and able to do it. Mentally, they
are confident. There’s no difference in that from any other movement! It’s purely that relationship between your body and your mind. ‘How able am I physically? How able am I mentally?’” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 69). Fear is caused by that gap in perception when a traceur wants to attempt a movement but in their mind, they are not confident that their body is capable of achieving it. But as the traceurs articulated, there is a difference between fear and danger, because often times the fear they experience is unfounded and irrational. They must gain control and understanding of their fear to prevent it from hindering their progression in the sport.

“You realize all the potential risks and you take it all in. There’s a difference between fear and danger. It’s up to you to control it. You know what you can do and what you can’t do” (Dye, Group Interview 1, p. 214). “You think about [fear], but you can’t let it control you. The fear, in a sense, it’s there. It’s always there. But you have to control it. You have to control that feeling of fear” (Barber, Paired Interview 2, p. 204). It is very important that traceurs get to know their fear and develop an intimate relationship with it and an understanding of it, because that irrational fear can stop them from progressing their skills. “The difference between fear and danger. People don’t understand that at all. Just because they are afraid, they then think it’s dangerous. I said fear is good, because you need to know your fear and know where it’s at and you need to understand it, your relationship with it. You need to know, when fear arises, if it’s because of a gap between your physical and mental ability, or whether it’s you being irrational” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 69). But this fear is also what keeps traceurs alive. It’s the mechanism of self-preservation that instills fear into the mind of the traceur to keep them from executing a movement they are not physically capable of performing. This is why it is essential
for traceurs to develop an intimate relationship with fear, because they need to know whether those fears are legitimate or whether they are false perceptions holding them back, knowing when to push past them and when to walk away.

My fear is important for me in my training! I need to be conscious of that mind and fear and where I’m at, like ‘Is this fear healthy because I shouldn’t do this move, I’m not ready for it? Or is this fear a boundary that I can push? I’m capable of this but I fear it anyways because that fear is irrational.’ The problem of fear arises when you have a gap between your physical ability and your mental perception of your physical ability. If you’re physically able to do something, but mentally unable, then you’re afraid of it. If you’re physically and mentally able to do something, completely, then there isn’t really fear necessarily! Or there shouldn’t be fear in that situation. Everything is just doing what you know you’re able to! (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 68-69).

So people push past their fear, and some people are good at it. And maybe, I don’t know, it’s hard for me to remember, but when you’re just starting, maybe you do have to do that, because you don’t have any way to get around it. And it depends on the person…Some people are more fearful and I think they need to be able to push. Some people are less and they maybe need to not push as much. If they’re afraid, then maybe they should walk away because, you know, they’re not ready
for it. But there is an importance in knowing the difference between fear and readiness, although they’re connected, because fear is a natural response that you need. You need fear to keep you from things, from killing yourself! (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 42).

It is when traceurs first begin to engage with their fears, measuring their physical abilities against their perceived mental abilities, that they develop that relationship through pushing their bodies to successfully execute movements they are afraid of. Because it takes time to develop and understand one’s relationship with fear and one’s own physical capabilities, many traceurs will often incur a larger number of injuries near the beginning of their training in parkour before they have developed this relationship. Fear is an integral aspect to the experience of alternative appropriations of urban space by parkour practitioners, and it is something that must be understood and mindfully overcome by every traceur.

It is important to develop this relationship with fear, not only in parkour, but in life, because like parkour, there are risks and dangers in life that cause feelings of fear to arise. Through parkour, traceurs develop that relationship with fear and become more adept at navigating and overcoming these feelings of fear in their minds.

The more you do it (engage with fear), you get to know the pathways of fear in your mind, and it becomes easier and faster to navigate it…If I could relate it to a corridor, you know, I go down, take the first door on the right, walk through, take
the next door, and then out to the left. And the first time, you’re checking right, left, do I go down this corridor, do I open this door? But eventually, you get to know the path that your mind takes, and then it becomes much faster, much easier. That’s how you see people doing amazing, big things, it’s because they’ve done this and they know (Graves, Group Interview 1, p. 173).

Parkour, unlike many other sports, has this aspect of fear that must be managed, controlled, and understood in order to take part in the alternative appropriations or urban spaces. “With parkour there’s an element of fear, of discomfort, and the unknown, that doesn’t necessarily exist in a lot of other sports…you have to understand and deal with that fear and if you let it creep too far in, then you won’t succeed” (Graves, Group Interview 1, p. 215). Through constant interaction with fear, traceurs become more skilled at managing it and are able to push past it more often while attempting movements that they are afraid of but still capable of doing.

If you let it creep in too far, it manifests itself. But in a lot of other of the more traditional sports, there isn’t as much of that element of fear that you have to deal with, and it’s there, but not in the same way. I think that’s one of the things that sets parkour apart, and one of the things that makes it so attractive to people is when you start to develop that relationship with fear, when you start to kind of nudge up against the edge of your bubble and your comfort zone. Then you feel yourself expanding. You feel your abilities expanding (Graves, Group Interview
Parkour is unique in that it teaches practitioners how to engage with their fears in a safe, healthy way, encouraging them to expand their comfort zone through daily engagement with fear. As Graves discussed, this aspect of the sport that is somewhat unique to parkour, a healthy and regular engagement with fear, is partially why so many people have been attracted to the discipline since its conception.

The lack of healthy, mindful engagement with, and avoidance of, fear in the culture of the United States is seen as a major problem to traceurs. From their perspective, American society mobilizes all possible assets to avoid or sanitize fear from people’s lives, especially youth, instead of teaching them to deal with it and understand it by engaging with their fears regularly.

“Fear; people don’t understand fear in our culture and in general. People don’t think about it. People haven’t thought through their response to it. So what people do when faced with fear is, first of all, their gut instinct, and secondly, cultural response, like however we’ve been taught…or by the environment or by circumstances or whatever else. But however we’ve been taught to respond to fear, that’s what we do. And the response that people have is to shun it” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 68). The traceurs explain that shunning and avoiding fear and danger is not a healthy way of interacting with those emotions and perceptions. People will inevitably have to face fears and dangers in their lives. It is important to understand their own fears and engage with dangers while learning how to effectively assess and respond to those emotions and perceptions. Without previous training to cultivate a healthy relationship with
those perceptions, people will not be adequately prepared or equipped for situations in their lives that involve fear and danger.

I think we have sanitized environments from risks, and we’ve prevented children, especially young people, from engaging productively in risk-taking behaviors. That leads to kids who are perfectionists, who maybe don’t do their work because they are afraid of failure; they have high expectations of themselves, and they get really frustrated with themselves. They aren’t familiar with failure, they aren’t familiar with consequences, and they’re not encouraged to encounter those things or to deal with risk in a way that’s helpful, or to take personal responsibility for themselves and their actions. So I think that parkour is wonderful in that it teaches you self-reliance, and it teaches you how to safely, reductively deal with risk in a progressive way. So we start from the ground up and we build our way up. We empower them with the skills, strength, and techniques they need to be able to move safely and to analyze their environment well. So while yes, they are taking risks and there is an element of danger, it is an understood risk, an understood danger. If people who are kids, children who maybe do not have that ability, that’s what we, as coaches, are there to help provide and help teach them. Often times you’ll see in our gym and in our training environments people who can’t break a jump, and we say ‘Hey, if you’re not ready, don’t do that, maybe come try this’. That’s why, again, when we put the emphasis on the person, on the
community, and we teach the values, and we teach the processes, you have a helpful environment. You’re not trying to artificially construct something that is somehow impervious to all possible outcomes. That’s not realistic, that’s not the way things work. So instead, you need to make this something that’s intrinsic, internal, and that builds upon itself, and is self-reinforcing (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, pp. 182-183).

Through repeated engagement with danger and risk-taking, traceurs learn to accept and deal with failure, and how to push through challenges to progress their skills and abilities. This same concept of experiencing failures, engaging with risk-taking and danger, facing fears, and overcoming challenges which is learned through disciplined practice of parkour applies to almost any other situation in life. While risk, danger, and fear are essential and unavoidable obstacles that one must engage with and manage when executing alternative appropriations of urban space, it is not unlike any other scenario in day to day life.

The alternative appropriations of urban space performed by parkour practitioners are no more or less dangerous than any other activities that people engage with in life where risk and danger are involved. “I think there is risk and danger in parkour, but I don’t think it’s greater than anything else we do, whether you’re driving a car or anything else. The risk is what you make it and it’s hard to make parkour very risky if you don’t want it to be” (Hartung, Individual Interview 3, p. 103). “It doesn’t matter if you’re doing parkour, you just know what you can and you can’t do” (Dye, Group Interview 1, p. 225). The injuries that traceurs incur while executing
these movements are often caused by the gap in perception between physical capability and mentally perceived capabilities. This mental aspect to parkour is where traceurs encounter fear, risk, and danger, which can all be managed and minimized by how a traceur goes about their training. “You have to have the self-awareness to minimize danger and risk” (McNabb, Individual Interview 6, p. 149). Through careful, mindful, and calculated engagement with risk and danger, traceurs learn to overcome their fears through regular executions of alternative appropriations of urban space.
RELATIONSHIP OF THE PHENOMENON WITH CREATIVITY

Parkour is described by practitioners as being both a discipline of movement and an art of movement. These two facets of parkour, art and discipline, combine in a synchronous way to establish a framework in which creativity can thrive. The traceurs emphasized the crucial and significant role that creativity plays in their alternative appropriations of urban space. The ways in which the traceurs express their creativity through their alternative movements was described as having multiple layers of creativity embedded within their actions. “The creative potential of both being creative within your own body and with how you interact with your environment, all comes together with the potential for amazing creativity!” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 81). Creativity and parkour are inseparable, one cannot exist without the other, and while the research subquestions did not aim to address the relationship of the phenomenon with creativity, it was found through the data analysis that creativity is an essential aspect of these movements that needs to be discussed. The traceurs expressed that creativity was an integral aspect to their movements and that they could not define parkour without including creativity. “If somebody asked ‘Well, what is parkour?’ …I have different key points that I just want to hit every single time. And creativity is definitely one of those things…but it’s a broad term. But it does, I feel, encompass the complete aspect of it. You’re just moving; you’re creating. I used to be more visual I guess, where I painted all the time, but now I feel that I’m a movement artist. Now my art, my canvas, is the world instead of a blank canvas…and my paint is my movements and my actions” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, pp. 97-98). Similar to other athletic activities like
dance, martial arts, or gymnastics, parkour is a physical artistic expression and the alternative appropriations of urban space that parkour practitioners execute are the manifestations of that physical, creative expression.

Creativity is a necessary and inherent aspect of parkour, because without creativity initially, parkour would not exist. The alternative appropriations of urban space are themselves creative reinterpretations of space and objects of the city, and therefore creativity is required to see spaces and objects from this new perspective. “Creativity…is maybe inherent in the sense that you have to accept a creative premise to start with for parkour. You have to start by accepting ‘I’m not going to use the standard. I’m going to challenge the standard and do something a little different’” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 79). Through regularly engaging in alternative appropriations of urban space through parkour, traceurs begin to develop and expand this new perspective, seeing greater and greater numbers of different potential movement opportunities in spaces and objects. “When you start training, your mind starts warming up and your creativity muscles sort of get stretched out and start working, and they you’re like ‘Well that’s not just a corner. I can grab that corner! Can I move my body around that corner? That’s not just a handrail; that’s a foothold! What if I can get my finger in this one crack and then reach the corner with my toe?’…And suddenly, these things are not just what they seem! They’re so much more!” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 81). This new, creative perspective that traceurs develop towards the usage of urban space through cultivating parkour vision, seeing opportunities for parkour movements in spaces and executing them, becomes an exceptional combination of physical exercise, creative expression, and disciplined training towards
self-improvement, both physically and mentally.

While creativity is an inherent and necessary part of parkour, parkour is not equivalent to creativity. Creativity is a facet of parkour, in addition to other facets of the sport, such as challenge, discipline, achievement, and overcoming mental barriers. “Parkour is faceted in many ways because it can be just…the discipline of it and the challenge of it, which, in a sense, can kind of be there for any jump…You could just spend your whole parkour career working disciplined training trying to make jumps bigger. But, there’s so much more than that available…People describe parkour as creativity…I would say more that it is a facet of it, a facet which I greatly enjoy, but there are other facets too. A facet of discipline, of achievement, of challenge. Those things can kind of interweave with creativity but they’re separate” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 78-79). While there are many facets to parkour, creativity is the facet through which traceurs re-envision urban space and identify new methods, movements, and routes for physically moving their bodies through it. By engaging in parkour without utilizing the creative facet of the sport, traceurs argue that one’s movement is being limited by the lack of creativity in their training. “If you don’t have the mental flexibility to be creative, you’re limiting your potential within your movement” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 141). This balance of creativity and disciplined training come together in parkour. Practitioners can be creative in the ways that they challenge themselves through discipline, finding creative ways to make jumps or movements more difficult to increase their skill level and abilities. Through creativity, traceurs can also focus their training on developing creative new movements instead of discipline. What traceurs believe to be the most rewarding and enjoyable experience while
training parkour movements is when they combine that disciplined training with their creativity.

I think that parkour is a great meeting point between discipline and creativity. It is like…strength training, purely on the achievement-based side of it, like lifting weights. There’s nothing really creative about lifting weights! You follow the rules, everyone does the same thing. You bench, and you’re not going to be like ‘Oh, you bench? How do you bench? Let me show you my bench technique!’ You know, nobody is getting creative with their benching technique!…Parkour has that discipline to it. ‘Let’s all work on precision jumps.’ There’s a best technique. You’re not going to creatively come up with an alternative technique which is better. But then it perfectly and fluidly flows from that discipline right into creativity, because you can include as much or as little of that creativity, or as much or as little of the discipline, as you want. So you see people on the whole spectrum, from people that are training who are all about the creativity, and in the most pure form, that might be floor movement…you could just stand in a patch of grass with literally no obstacles and just do a flow where you’re just moving your body in a creative way and coming up with new ways to move around. The in-between point between that and the discipline of ‘I’m going to do this jump over and over and over again and try to improve my distance’ is like when I go out to train, and this is what I really started to enjoy, is combining my discipline of jumping with creativity of movement in finding new ways to jump! I’m still
challenging myself in the jumping and power, but also challenging my mind and
discovering a new approach and a new angle,…and making connections between
this and that and using this piece of architecture or this structure in a new way
(Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 79-80).

This balancing of discipline with creativity is a unique aspect to parkour that not many other
practices or sports have, which attracts a large amount of people to parkour. Being able to
creatively come up with new ways to move one’s body through space while simultaneously
challenging oneself through disciplined training, improving skills and creatively expressing
oneself at the same time, is a very enjoyable, invaluable experience.

In order for traceurs to engage in that multifaceted experience of discipline and creativity,
they must locate spaces that have the means to facilitate these types of alternative appropriations.
This can sometimes prove difficult, especially for traceurs that live in less dense suburban areas
with few urban public spaces. Because it is often difficult for traceurs to find ideal spaces in
which to practice parkour, they are often challenged to use their creativity to analyze the spaces
that they do have available to them from this new perspective, through parkour vision,
identifying potential for movement anywhere they can find. “Just be creative with the spaces you
have, looking at them in different ways so the training isn’t always the same…just being
creative, especially in places where there aren’t a lot of good spots or they’re just spread out”
(Pinkley, Individual Interview 4, p. 108). “You have to get creative with what you have. If walls
are really close together, do something different. If they’re far apart and you can’t do the jump
between them, do something else. Try to find another way to use them” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 75). “I’ll go to a spot that I haven’t been to in a long time, where I know there is a limited number of things that can be done there, and try to push myself creatively so that by having few options, it forces me to get more creative” (Rujiraviriyapinyo, Group Interview 2, pp. 235-236). The difference between finding training spots in urban spaces and training in parkour gyms was also discussed. “In here (Parkour Horizons Parkour Gym), I can put [the environment] together however I want and if I have an idea, like I want to make this for the kids or for the adults or whatever I can do that. But outside, it forces you to find things. It forces you to use your creative part of your mind” (McNabb, Individual Interview 6, p. 159). The adaptability of parkour gyms allows traceurs to rearrange the objects in the space to suit their needs, which is why training in gyms can be safer and more comfortable. But in urban spaces, that ability to modify the environment physically is lost, and the spaces can now only be modified mentally with how the traceur perceives the opportunities presented by the spaces for alternative appropriations. “I can find creativity in the most mundane things” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 125). After regularly engaging with this mindset and viewing urban spaces and objects through this perspective, traceurs became more adept at identifying opportunities for movement everywhere they go.

When traceurs locate a suitable spot with the potential for alternative appropriations of urban space, the potential movements that can be executed in that space can be limitless through creativity, even with only a singular obstacle. “The more creative you are, the more options you have to overcome an obstacle” (Morell, Paired Interview 2, p. 207). “There is so much you can
do; there are so many possibilities. You can just find a regular flat wall and do twenty different kinds of moves on just one wall…It’s unlimited” (Barber, Paired Interview 2, p. 207). Limited spaces to train encourage traceurs to get creative with their bodies, forcing them to come up with new and interesting ways to appropriate the spaces that are readily available to them. Foster explains how it is possible to train in the same spot using the same obstacles and endlessly discover new ways of moving one’s body around and through that space; also it is possible to take any movement learned through parkour and apply it in any other space that is found (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 80-81). “You can be creative in your own body…you can start applying [a movement] in unique ways and be creative in that way, and then you can do everything in-between!” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 80-81). From the perspective of a traceur, the possibilities for creative expression of movement that lay dormant in the spaces of the urban environment, waiting to be utilized and experienced, are endless.

Because humans are all unique and the index of movements in parkour is fluid and subjective, no two traceurs move or perceive opportunities in space quite in the same way. Every traceur approaches urban space in their own way through their personally developed alternative perspective that is filtered through their individual skill level, past experiences, and creativity. “I think one of the things that makes parkour so unique is that the environment is different, and everybody can not only do moves differently on that, but also the way that people choose to interact with it can have so many different forms of expression. The way that I approach the same kind of space is different from the ways that Matt, Ethan, and Kato challenge themselves in a space. Each of us has very different styles and thought processes and ways of pushing
ourselves” (Rujiraviriypinyo, Group Interview 2, p. 242). “Everyone’s got a different mindset. Everyone sees something differently” (Barber, Paired Interview 2, p. 207). “You’re always coming at something a little bit differently than someone else” (Skowronsiki, Individual Interview 5, p. 142). The room for creative expression and creative interpretation of the movements of parkour, as well as how obstacles and spaces are utilized, combine to create a tremendous amount of potential for creative expression.

These opportunities for creative expression in parkour are amplified exponentially through the ways in which traceurs choose to artistically document and share their alternative appropriations of urban space through film. “The creative potential of both being creative within your own body and with how you interact with your environment, all comes together with the potential for amazing creativity! And then you can add the creativity of artistic expression of how you then present that! And then the creativity of recording it through film and making a video out of it! On so many layers, then, you have the potential for creativity! You have the potential for your location, picking your location, how you then analyze and approach your location, how you respond to your environment, the movements you choose to use in that environment, the creativity of how you change those movements to fit your environment, and then how you record this and how you present it and all of those things! It’s like creativity galore, all over that whole spectrum!” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 81). As mentioned in the previous section, many traceurs expressed that they had become more creative in all aspects of their lives through training parkour, and it is because of these rich, extensive layers of creativity that the sport provides. “I think that it opens up the mind. Parkour is a great encourager
of creativity, and I am probably a more creative person because of training parkour” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 81).

The numerous layers of creative expression that parkour offers can be accessed by anyone, specifically adults who may lack an outlet through which they can creatively express themselves in a physically healthy way. “[Parkour] is an outlet for adults to play where there aren’t very many other outlets for adults to play in that physical way. So it’s a great creativity outlet” (Hartung, Individual Interview 3, p. 104). “I love being creative. I love being a creative person, and then once I found that I could use my creativity in this way (through parkour), I’m happier and healthier because I get rewards of my body being in better shape, my digestive system working better, and my brain working better. All these things because I’m being creative with my body” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 98). Parkour provides practitioners with a physically involved, healthy, creative outlet through engagement in alternative appropriations of urban space.

I think parkour is an amalgam, a mash up of a lot of different things…of gymnastics and martial arts, but also breakdancing, dance, tricking, and all of these are just movement expression, the movement art forms. So that creativity, that interaction between your environment and your own ability, that reinterpretation, that spontaneous element of play and discovery, that’s all part of it. It’s a wonderful creative outlet. And, you know, when you’re training in the best places, it’s almost like the way a set form of a sonnet forces the poet to be
able to hit a certain form, and that, in a way, can almost create more creativity. There are certain bounds, certain form on it, that force you to move in certain ways. But with that, it allows you to reinterpret and re-approach it in new ways (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 184).
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GETTING STARTED IN PARKOUR

Parkour is unlike most typical sports in that it is rarely taught in schools, hardly ever appears on television or on sports networks, is not commonly witnessed being practiced in public, and is not very well-known or understood by the majority of the population. It was asked of the traceurs how they ended up getting started in a sport as scarcely known or practiced as parkour, and the most common recollection of their initial finding of the sport was through online video sharing sites such as YouTube. “I saw one of Tempest Freerunning’s videos on YouTube and it looked very similar to the things that me and my friends were already doing, so we just kind of took it from there and kept doing it” (Dye, Group Interview 1, p. 209). “He found a parkour video, and he was like ‘Bro, I think you’d really be into this’… and I watched it, and it was so profound…What came to my mind immediately was ‘This is what I want my life to be about’. It was that profound” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, pp. 116-117). Many of the practitioners expressed a moment of awe and amazement upon witnessing the movements of parkour for the first time, and many of the interviewees explained that they had previously been engaging in this type of movement prior to finding parkour online. “I would always jump around when I was younger… But I saw that (parkour video), and I was just mind-blown! I thought ‘This guy is superhuman! I want to be like that guy!’ I said ‘This is my mission in life, to be like that guy and be able to do that!’” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 1-3). Upon discovering parkour, many of the interviewees immediately engaged in the sport, practicing it themselves with whatever they could find.
This self-driven learning process of teaching oneself parkour has become one of the common threads that binds together communities and friendships of people that have found parkour. It was explained that “there’s an identity there…because you learned through the same process” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 5). Because many of the older, more experienced traceurs did not have access to parkour gyms or coaches when parkour was first spreading through the internet, many of them were self-taught, and this has created an experiential bond between them because of their shared experience in that learning process. “We all went through the same sort of evolution or metamorphosis…I meet someone else who’s trained for a similar amount of time as me, and we’ll have gone through the same stages…So we’re at a similar point, which is really cool because we identify with each other immediately” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 5).

Another way in which people found parkour, which was more common amongst the younger, newer practitioners, was through either finding someone who already trained parkour or by visiting a parkour gym. “I kind of just went to a parkour gym and I learned from some people there and really liked it and just kept doing it ever since” (Koehler, Group Interview 2, p. 229). “I got involved because of Forrest Paige, one of my friends who did parkour and I was kind of interested in it and I kind of inquired with him to see more about it and see what parkour is all about” (Hartung, Individual Interview 3, p. 99). As parkour became more popular in the United States, it became more prevalent online, in movies, and on television. This led to the increasing interest in the sport and resulted in the establishment of parkour gyms and parkour communities around the country, as well as groups on college campuses, through which many of the newer
traceurs got involved in the sport.
MOTIVATIONS FOR PRACTICING PARKOUR

Upon discovering parkour through online video sharing sites, parkour gyms, and through meeting other parkour practitioners, the traceurs continued to engage in their training for various reasons that have changed for them over time and with experience. Parkour is a very intricate sport and “there are so many different aspects of parkour and so many different facets that people are attracted to” (Graves, Group Interview 1, p. 210). When starting out, many traceurs indicated that they wished to train parkour because they thought it looked cool and wanted to be cool. “When I started, and I think this is a common evolution, it was purely about ‘Oh, that’s cool! I want to be cool. Therefore, I want to do that.’ And that was my original motivation” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 6). “When I first started out…I just wanted to be cool” (Morphy, Group Interview 1, p. 211). Eventually, as the traceurs gained more experience with the sport, their motivations for practicing moved away from the cool factor and towards other aspects.

A common sentiment toward parkour, and reasons for wanting to continue practicing it, focused on the enjoyment and love of the sport, on the love of movement and the freedom that the movement brought along with it. “As I did it, I started to just love it! It wasn’t for the coolness of it, and it became less and less for the ego of it, the ‘I want to be cool’ and more and more it just became ‘This is really fun!’ “ (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 6). They expressed that the freedom that comes with the movements of parkour is part of their motivation to continue their training. “You’re basically cultivating your own freedom by training and studying this discipline” (Skowronska, Individual Interview 5, p. 117). The “love for the sport” is what
keeps many of the traceurs involved and motivated to practice (Morell, Paired Interview 2, p. 189). “For me, parkour is really a creative outlet…it’s really a creative thing that lets me explore what my body can do” (Hartung, Individual Interview 3, p. 99). Simple love and enjoyment of movement, freedom of expression, and creativity were all very common reasons for continued practice of parkour.

The traceurs also expressed the enjoyment of the discipline and challenge of parkour, and satisfaction of pushing their minds and bodies to become stronger, safer, and more agile. “For me, I’d say [I practice] just to better myself. I want to get better at moving. I want to challenge myself in new, exciting ways” (Barber, Paired Interview 2, p. 186). “It’s always fun overcoming anything, really, learning new things. You get to push yourself to do better things” (Morell, Paired Interview 2, p. 185). The satisfaction and pleasure in creating or discovering challenges for oneself and engaging in disciplined physical and mental work to overcome those challenges is what has encouraged many traceurs to continue practicing parkour. “So for me…[it was] always about seeing what my body was capable of handling and…parkour [has] lots of different kinds of mental and physical challenges to overcome” (Rujiraviriyapinyo, Group Interview 2, p. 230). Gradually through training, a traceur is able to consistently face challenges presented to them by obstacles and spaces and progress their abilities to the point of overcoming these challenges. The obstacles that are engaged with and overcome are not only physical objects, but also mental barriers and perceptions of themselves and their own capabilities. “I was very much attracted to the philosophy behind it and I was attracted to this idea of bettering yourself through movement and challenge and progressive training” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 164).
This increased physical and mental development of one’s abilities through disciplined training leads to a fuller understanding of what one’s body is capable of, forming a more accurate relationship between ability and perceived ability, between body and mind.

Another commonly expressed reason for continued engagement in parkour dealt with health and longevity. Traceurs value the health benefits from the physical exercise that parkour gives them, and continue to practice with the intention of maintaining physical health and ability of movement throughout the course of their lifetimes. “I train parkour for my health and happiness…I kind of envision myself being older and still in shape, happy and healthy, because I train parkour all the time!” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 83). Through constantly engaging one’s body with these movements, the thought is that the continued exercise and synchronization of body and mind, as well as capabilities of movement, will continue to endure throughout the rest of one’s life. This concept falls back to the second part of one of the three original tenants of parkour, To Be and To Last, which encompasses the philosophy that one trains parkour to maintain one’s body, health, and ability to move throughout their entire life. In order to maintain one’s health, some practitioners emphasized the importance of “[figuring] out how to do movements safely” (McNabb, Individual Interview 6, p. 143). Many traceurs support that maintaining this physical and mental training will enable them to move more freely throughout the entirety of their lives, leading to a better quality of life.

On a spiritual level, several traceurs identified a deeper connection with religious beliefs that they found through parkour. Similar to Daniel Ilabaca’s relationship with God that he has found through parkour, Andrew Foster explained how, in a way, he practices parkour to feel
God’s pleasure (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 21). The purity and intimacy with space that they have experienced through parkour evokes a spiritual connection with deeply held religious beliefs. Richard Skowronski expressed that “religions follow certain tenants, certain beliefs, and certain moral standards, and parkour has all of these things…I practice parkour, and that’s my religion” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 119). To some traceurs, parkour is more than an activity or hobby. It is a way of life, a spiritual experience, and a way of experiencing God’s pleasure.

One of the other more common reasons identified for why traceurs continue to practice parkour is because of the parkour community. “As I got more into it, I learned the community aspect of it and that’s another big driving factor” for why he continued to practice the sport (Rujiraviriapinyo, Group Interview 2, p. 230). The support, inspiration, and positivity of the parkour community encouraged many traceurs to continue pursuing the sport, because “it’s great to be around all these other people that can do amazing things” (Pinkley, Individual Interview 4, p. 106). Poprocki described how he was seeking out something to inspire him, something to become a part of, and found that that in parkour, which is part of why he continues to practice it. “I was trying to find a community of people that I was inspired by, with the goal of hanging around them to better myself as a person and become more healthy and talented and skilled in all the qualities that I wanted in myself” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 83). The inspiration and support that traceurs give and receive by being part of the community is another very significant factor in why they choose to continue practicing parkour.

The final reason, more commonly expressed among the more experienced, older traceurs,
for ongoing participation in parkour is to give back to the community through protecting and serving others. Andrew Foster explains that “[he] love[s] the idea…that ‘I have trained in such a way that when a situation in life arises, I can save someone’s life. I can do something worth something. I can do something of value, something beautiful with myself, with my body’” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 20). By continuing to train one’s body and mind through parkour, both the body and mind gain experience dealing with situations, and should one arise, a traceur has the ability to use their training to help serve others. The traceurs also emphasized the importance of serving others through teaching, coaching, and inspiring others to learn parkour so that others may better themselves through the discipline as well. “I loved it so much that it changed my life and I wanted to help inspire others, so I decided to change my career to a parkour coach” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 83). “I love teaching though. That’s ultimately why I continue to practice, is to create an understanding for myself and to help others realize their own potential” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 118). “It’s my livelihood; it’s a passion that I help teach and share with others” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 164). The idea of using parkour to serve others relates back to one of the three founding principles of the parkour, Be Strong to Be Useful. Skowronski explains that having the knowledge about parkour and passing that knowledge on to others, so that they may learn and better themselves, makes him more useful. Through serving others, both physically and through teaching about parkour, many of the more experienced practitioners expressed the value and usefulness of their participation in serving, and that this service has become one of the overarching reasons why they continue to practice.
GOALS IN PRACTICING PARKOUR

In parkour, practitioners have a wide variety of goals and aspirations in the sport, some being very simple and others complex and far-reaching. The most common goals proclaimed by the traceurs that participated in this study emphasized wanting to continue maintaining a level of health, happiness, and ability to move, while gradually improving their skills so that they become better than they were the day before. “My goal right now is just to be better like all these good people training around me” (Chalifour, Group Interview 1, p. 211). “Everyone’s main goal should be to be better than they were yesterday, in order for your training to develop you” (Dye, Group Interview 1, p. 211). In a similar aspiration, other traceurs had “goals of wanting to be able to do certain moves, certain parkour movements” (Hartung, Individual Interview 3, p. 99). The value placed on progression of skills, movements, and capabilities was the most commonly documented goal among practitioners.

Some traceurs had goals of competing in international parkour competitions and becoming professional parkour practitioners while others hoped to one day become coaches or open their own parkour gyms to make a living off of the sport. “I used to think I wanted to be a pro…but I’d like to be sponsored to go to international jams. But it’s not the main focus anymore” (Morell, Paired Interview 2, p. 187). “[One of my goals] is to somehow make a living off of parkour that is teaching it or owning my own gym” (Guzman, Group Interview 2, p. 231). “My goal is that I actually want to become an instructor as well. That’s my set goal right now is to be certified” (Dye, Group Interview 1, p. 211). Through obtaining a certification to teach
parkour, traceurs can pass on their knowledge of movement to serve and help others, giving them the ability to better themselves as well and recruiting more people into the discipline.

On a broader scale, several of the more experienced traceurs advocated that their most important goal was to combat and defeat false, negative stereotypes of what parkour is, attempting to reframe the meaning and understanding of the discipline in the societal view. “The larger goal is to kind of defeat the stereotype of parkour because the biggest thing as an instructor that I hear is ‘I could never do that’ or ‘I need to get in shape first’…But anybody can do the basics of parkour and start learning, at any fitness level. So that’s what I’m trying my best to combat” (Peveley, Group Interview 2, p. 232). “My main focus is bringing awareness to parkour, and building an awareness of the way parkour truly is, which is to…combat a lot of the misconceptions of parkour, in not only those who do not practice, but for those who do as well…We want to educate them (traceurs) as well, and really distance ourselves from people who practice in a negative way” (Graves, Group Interview 1, p. 212). Many of the more experienced traceurs who participated in this study were coaches, gym owners, and leaders in their respective parkour communities, and they adamantly professed the importance of combatting and defeating negative stereotypes of parkour that are based in false perceptions of the purpose and techniques of the discipline.
THE MEANING OF PARKOUR TO TRACEURS

When asked about the meaning of parkour, many of the traceurs who were interviewed for this thesis indicated that this meaning was not constant, but changed as they spent more and more time with the discipline and became more experienced. “It’s evolved in my mind and in my heart, what it is to me. That evolution is not that the thing itself has changed, it’s more like my maturity and my understanding of what it truly is has changed” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 4). Similar to the evolution of the reasoning for why they practiced parkour, many of the traceurs initially viewed parkour as something that looked cool, and that was the meaning they ascribed to it. As their training continued, many of the traceurs described that the coolness was no longer the influential factor for why they trained, and love of the sport and challenge became the dominant reasons for their continued participation. For some of the more experienced traceurs that reached this stage in their relationship with parkour, it was then that meaning of parkour to them became a part of who they were and how they defined themselves. “It has definitely become a part of my life compared to when I first started out and I just wanted to be cool… I don’t know what I’d be doing if I wasn’t doing it. It’s what I do!” (Morphy, Group Interview 1, p. 211). Parkour, to them, has become their livelihood, a way of life, and many of them have committed their lives to the discipline, opening gyms, traveling around the world to teach others, and spending the majority of their time developing their abilities. The meaning for them has grown far beyond just practicing for the purpose of looking cool. It has become such an integral and important part of their lives that they cannot imagine life without ever having begun
their training. “Parkour is a discipline and it’s an approach, but it’s an approach which I have embraced, and has since become part of my approach to everything in life. It’s not just physical obstacles. Parkour, as a discipline, has seeped into my person, my identity, and my perspective on life” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 17). “Parkour has become a lifestyle. Honestly, I don’t know what else I’d be doing” (Dye, Group Interview 1, p. 210). It was commonly expressed that the relationships between the traceurs and parkour developed in similar ways over time among all practitioners. In the early stages, parkour was simply a way to show off and be cool, which eventually, after being practiced long enough, became more of a lifestyle and an integral part of who they were.

Some of the more experienced traceurs described a further stage in their relationship with parkour, when it moved from being a lifestyle to an obsession for a period of time. “It was still kind of like an obsession for me, in that as I started to love it, and then I started to enjoy the discipline and the challenge, I became obsessed with it to the point of ‘I have to do this. If I don’t train, I’m miserable. If I don’t progress, I’m miserable.’ And I started to exclude other things and only did parkour and it damaged other things in my life. It took over” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 6). A couple of the more experienced practitioners disclosed that the appeal of the challenge and discipline resulted in parkour becoming an obsession to the point that it became “something that was a part of me, and it became everything for a while” (Graves, Group Interview 1, p. 210). Foster was eventually faced with the realization that parkour had become an obsession and was more or less forced to choose between parkour and the people in his life. “That really hit me because I thought ‘Do I have to pick between people and parkour?’ I didn’t
want to hurt the people in my life. So that really made me question it, and I thought ‘Maybe I’m doing this wrong. Maybe this is an obsession and not a love’” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 7). During this stage in the progression of what parkour meant to the practitioners, where it became an obsession, often this was the stage when injuries began to occur, some being very serious.

As parkour progressed into an obsession for some practitioners, some explained that they began devoting the majority of their time to training, often resulting in overtraining and incurring injuries. Foster described a serious injury to his knee where he misjudged the take-off distance from a wall for a double speed vault, which resulted in his knee slamming into the edge of it. “I was injured for a long time, and that was another big point of change for me concerning my relationship with parkour” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p.11). The seriousness of the injury for Foster forced him to face the reality that he may have to give up parkour, and he was faced with the question of whether or not he could envision life without it. “I realized that it had moved in my life from being something that I wanted to do to something that I enjoyed and loved, to something I was driven to do, to something I was obsessed with, and then it had gone to literally my life” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 12). He described how being faced with his injury made him realize something very important about what parkour meant to him. “That’s when I did eventually come to the acceptance that I could give it up…I think that was important for me, because I made that decision of ‘There is something worth living for more than this.’ And then I could come back to parkour with a new perspective of ‘It isn’t everything. But it’s a part of what I’ve been given. It’s a huge blessing’” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 12). The experience of
the injury brought Foster a new level of appreciation and meaning in the sport, impacting his training style and mindset towards parkour. He explained that as his knee slowly healed, he began to appreciate even the smallest, simplest movements in his training, and he no longer felt compelled to push himself to the point of injury when attempting to overcome new challenges. “I gained a new respect for [parkour] ‘If I blow this, I’ve already been injured for a year and a half, I can’t risk it. I will do whatever it takes. If the jump is stupid, I’m not going to do it. If I shouldn’t do it, I’m going to walk away. It’s not about ego. It’s not about being the best. It’s that I love this thing, and I don’t want to lose it. It was taken away from me, and it has been given back to me. I am going to appreciate it’” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 13). If an obstacle or challenge was too difficult, instead of pushing himself continuously to overcome it, he now maintained the mindset of “‘I don’t have to get it this week. I could get it next year!’ I have that mentality now! I also have the mentality of ‘It’s not worth it’ sometimes. I would rather have a body that is fully functional to enjoy all the different possibilities of parkour than to risk it all on this jump when I know I’m not ready for it” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 14). This deeper level of meaning was expressed by the more experienced traceurs that had been faced with potentially career ending injuries in parkour.

As the traceurs became more involved with the sport, encountering injuries and certain levels of obsession with parkour, they came to the realization that parkour was not everything. It was simply a part of life, and they were thankful for being able to still practice it and pass on their knowledge of movement to others. “I gained a new level of love for it in the knowledge that I might not always have it, and that it isn’t mine to keep. It’s something I’ve been given. It’s a
blessing that I’ve been given in my life, and as long as I have it, I will love it, and I will enjoy it, and I will use it to its full potential, but knowing that it’s not mine to keep, and then each moment is cherished” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 12-13). This appreciation for simply being given the gift of movement opened up a deeper, more intimate level of meaning for what parkour meant to some of the traceurs. They explained that with that gift comes a responsibility of using the gift well and not taking it for granted.

The ability to move is a gift, the gift is responsibility. What do you do with that gift? Do you squander it? Do you throw it away? Do you crush it, destroy your body for no purpose? Or, do you take that gift and sculpt something out of it? Do you train and build this body and mind that works together in this beautiful way to be able to achieve incredible things? And in that way, take the gift, and you have to then be able to use it to serve. So I think that parkour, my reasons for doing it, are because I love it. I just love moving, because it’s a gift I’ve been given, and I want to appreciate and respect the gift. I don’t want to squander the gift (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 21).

The deeper level of meaning for the more experienced traceurs that encountered this stage in their training was a viewpoint and understanding that parkour is a gift which they have been given. They realized that that gift also comes with a responsibility to use it well and to serve and better others by passing on their knowledge of movement to newer, less experienced
practitioners. At the very root of parkour is movement, and it is a thankfulness for this ability to move, as well as a responsibility to pass on this knowledge of movement, that experienced traceurs have grown to realize is the meaning for why they continue to practice parkour.

The underlying root that parkour is built upon is movement, and that movement holds tremendous value for traceurs, physically, mentally, and in their lives beyond parkour.

The things I’ve learned about movement apply elsewhere in my life. I think movement is essential to the human condition. It is part of the definition of what it means to live. If you are a living being, you move, and I think that that is the start of the power and beauty of parkour, and why parkour is transforming people’s lives. In our day and age, parkour is so, so important and huge, because in a culture and a community and a context where we, more and more, move less, I think we’re dying in a way. We’re killing ourselves. Every moment that you are motionless, you’re stagnant…Water, in that it is moving, it is live giving… you drink from moving water, you don’t drink from stagnant water, because stagnant water is death. And I think there is really something deep in that. Movement is life, or movement is essential to life. You, as a person, to live, you need to move, both physically and as a person in your life. Either you move forward in life, or you become stagnant, and you rot and die…So I need to move physically, but also with my training, how am I going to progress? I want to move in my training…I want to have progressed and transformed as a traceur. And then as a person, am I
growing as a person in my life? Am I becoming more mature? Am I becoming more loving? Am I becoming more honest? Do I have more integrity?...Am I growing? Am I moving? If I’m not moving, I’m dying...I was talking to Daniel Ilabaca...and he was saying if you watch people, you can see their heart in their movement. He was saying that you have to move with purpose. The people who are beautiful to watch...[are beautiful] because they are moving for something, and that something can’t just be ego. It can’t just be yourself. It has to be moving for something beyond yourself. I think there is something really deep in that too. Movement requires a destination or a direction at least. It’s impossible to move without a direction...So if I am going to move in my life, I have to be moving towards something, and in my parkour movement. Why am I moving? What am I moving towards? When I do this line, and I’m sprinting, I’m flying, I’m diving...in a sense, I’m just diving to that obstacle, but in a deeper sense, I need to have a purpose for why I’m moving (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 17-19).

At its core, parkour is movement, and this movement, that is learned, practiced, and refined through disciplined training, is not only physical movement, but mental, emotional, and spiritual movement, as well as movement in life and as a person. They explain that the relationship they have grown with the movements in parkour has sculpted them into the people they are today, and they would not be the same without it. “That consistency [in training] is so important if you want to keep moving. Movement is life, and if you stop moving, you die. You have to keep moving”
(Barber, Paired Interview 2, p. 189). Foster explained that there is a certain beauty to the movements of traceurs when they are moving for a purpose beyond themselves, which again relates back to one of the three founding tenants of parkour, Be Strong to Be Useful. “If you’re moving with love and moving towards, I don’t know if it’s God or people, but towards some purpose beyond yourself in this life…that is the beauty of that classic line, ‘Be Strong to Be Useful’. I think that I move to be useful, and not in…a physical, brutal way of just usefulness, but in a bigger, more broadly reaching way. ‘Be Strong to Serve’ maybe would be the way that I’d like to say that” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 19). Parkour, and the movement at the root of the practice, has become important to experienced traceurs, as many interviewees professed that the purpose in their movement was now to serve others and pass on their love of movement and all of the benefits that go along with it. Movement is an essential part of life, and through parkour, traceurs have been able to experience and express this movement, learning to move physically, mentally, and as people in their lives.

The significance and value of what parkour means to the traceurs who practice the discipline cannot be adequately stressed. Parkour, to some traceurs, is everything. It is a way of life, a belief system, a future, a career, a family, a way to serve others, and a way of maintaining one’s own health and happiness. “Parkour…[is] a gift. It’s an ability to move that I’ve been given, and it’s amazing! I never want to underestimate that again, or underappreciate just how beautiful it is to be able to move. Every day that I’m alive and can move, I’m so thankful, no matter what the movement is, no matter how simple or little it might be” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 16). Parkour is movement, mentally, physically, and metaphorically, through life.
Through engagement with this movement art, parkour practitioners are developing and transforming themselves physically, mentally, and as people. “Every time you land something, it changes you, and I think that starting small, and every training day from when I started until now, has helped to change and build me into the person I am. It has completely transformed me. I am so much a different person than I was, and than I assume I would be, without having trained, without having done parkour” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 41).
PARKOUR IN THREE WORDS

One of the challenges asked of traceurs during the interview process was to try and describe what parkour meant to them using only three words that could be either a phrase or individual words. All of the words were compiled and placed into a word generator on Wordsift.org to create a visual graphic of the collective vocabulary that traceurs used to describe what their discipline meant to them. Several practitioners struggled very greatly with this exercise, only being able to come up with one or two words and others choosing not to participate because of the difficulty of proclaiming everything it meant to them with so few descriptors. The results are shown in Figure 10 below.

Figure 10: Visual assembly of traceur’s vocabulary describing the meaning of parkour to them; the commonality of words increases with size; Movement was the most commonly expressed word
REPRESENTATION OF THE PHENOMENON IN THE MEDIA

As parkour began to grow as a discipline through the internet, the awe and amazement that the movements of traceurs evoked in viewers caught the attention of popular forms of mass media, such as movies, television, and other online media sources. While discussing the public perceptions of the phenomenon of alternative appropriation of urban space, many of the traceurs spoke extensively about the issues with the representation of the discipline to the general public through the media. The importance of viewing alternative appropriations of space by traceurs from a societal perspective was discovered to be just as important to individual perceptions of the movements, and also heavily influences the views of individuals about the sport. The interview process exposed a broader viewpoint that further addresses the research subquestion: How are the events when traceurs are experiencing the phenomenon perceived by other traceurs and onlookers as explained from the perspective of traceurs? The discovery and discussion broadened this question to additionally ask how the phenomenon of alternative appropriations of urban space by parkour practitioners is perceived and represented by the media. This interesting addition to the original subquestion delves into a larger perspective beyond that of the non-practitioner to encompass the societal, pop-culture perspective on parkour.

When asked about their opinions of the public representation of parkour in forms of mass media, many of the traceurs expressed that the exposure and inclusion of parkour in movies and television was partially beneficial to the sport because it spreads awareness that parkour exists. “I think that it is definitely giving exposure to the sport which is helping to draw interest to the
YouTube training videos and the gyms” (Peveley, Group Interview 2, p. 249). “People are starting to recognize it. It’s getting out there, more and more each day…so it’s kind of cool to see it in movies” (Dye, Group Interview 1, p. 224). But the traceurs explained that not all exposure is necessarily good. The ways in which the media portrays parkour often do not positively or accurately represent the philosophy of parkour and thus leads to public misconceptions about the discipline. “Some of it’s good; some of it’s not so good. They focus a lot on the physical aspect of it which is what you can see, so it’s what you’d expect them to do. And unfortunately, a lot of the times that leads people to believe that it’s this daredevil, dangerous thing that it really isn’t. But yeah, you should see some awareness as a result” (Morphy, Group Interview 1, p. 224).

Often times in movies and television, parkour practitioners are portrayed in the roles of criminals, thieves, or reckless adrenaline junkies that break laws and have little regard for consequences of their actions. “They show traceurs as being these reckless, arrogant adrenaline junkies” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 65). Several interviewees had a particular point of contention with a somewhat popular movie about parkour practitioners called Tracers. The main characters in this movie are criminals that work for a crime boss who steal from people and rob banks, using parkour to navigate the city and escape crime scenes with their stolen goods. “If you’re talking about Tracers or any other parkour movie, it’s about like ‘Hey! I want that! I’m just going to go take it and use parkour to run away!’ That makes us look bad, like we are thieves” (Koehler, Group Interview 2, p. 248). “When I first saw that coming out, and I saw people in my community getting excited for it, I asked them ‘Why? What are you excited about?’ ‘Oh! For exposure! People are going to get to know about it!’ But if all they know is that
you use this to rob banks or to get your own personal gain as opposed to assisting others, that’s not what you’re promoting with this film” (Skowronsksi, Individual Interview 5, p. 135).

Television shows and movies often escalate the drama and extremeness of parkour in order to make content that is more appealing to people, and this results in a misrepresentation of parkour to the public. “On TV, they want to make a show that’s shocking that gets your attention to watch, so they might try to twist the facts to make it seem more dangerous. They’ll use their own terminology to describe the sport or what people are trying to accomplish with it” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, pp. 93-94). Many of the traceurs took issue with movies or television shows that take their discipline and portray it being used in a criminal or reckless way, but also conceded that the exposure gives parkour more presence and results in more people becoming aware of its existence.

In reference to the internet and the portrayal of parkour online, the traceurs expressed similar issues with the accuracy and types of parkour videos that were being popularized. “YouTube has done a great job of spreading parkour as a video, a type of mainstream entertainment, but it has not done a good job of spreading parkour as a training technique and a mentality” (Peveley, Group Interview 2, p. 232). Many of the videos online that claim to be parkour videos are often produced for the purpose of getting many views, not focused on the movement or the discipline, and are typically not made by traceurs.

Internet is all about views now. It’s about numbers so the more views, equals better. That’s like how it functions, and I think that’s tragic because the beautiful
things, the good art, is lost in the numbers…The top videos from this year, Minecraft Parkour and Pokémon Parkour…they’re not parkour videos. They’re not made by traceurs, not made for traceurs. They’re not about the movement. They are one hundred percent about the views. It’s like they’re prostituting themselves to whatever the public wants, which is taking two hot-button words and putting them together, Parkour and Minecraft. Oh my goodness, the views it will get! Millions. So they’re not good movement…Those aren’t the beautiful pieces of parkour art; they’re purely the view-getters. Those are what are on the internet, but get the views and therefore get known, and get money and get respect and get success, and therefore get more. And it repeats itself…They’re monetizing it. They’re a sellout…I’m frustrated with the internet for making those the more viewed, because the beautiful videos out there don’t get viewed. The ones that get viewed are what I said, those ones that just kind of use the words that are going to get clicks. Clickbait (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 59-60).

The growing emphasis on clickbait titles and monetization of online media has caused many of the high-quality parkour videos produced by well-known traceurs, as well as videos that represent and profess the philosophy, to fall under the radar of public perception. “There are plenty of channels on YouTube that are about the actual philosophy of parkour, but they’re just not as big of channels” (Pinkley, Individual Interview 4, p. 113). “I would like to be able to communicate through video with people all around the world, so I’d like my video to be viewed
in the way that I watch guys from Russia’s videos. I’d like to see each other’s videos so we can kind of communicate through that. I feel like I’m handicapped in that I don’t communicate because my video is just one of millions out there that people don’t watch necessarily” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 63). Foster argues that the increasing output of clickbait parkour videos produced by non-practitioners is hindering the global conversation among traceurs because quality videos that emphasize the purpose of the discipline and beauty of the movement are being covered up by the mainstream monetization of parkour. “The media wants to present something that people can latch on to, and can do so quickly with a short attention span. They are actually not necessarily interested in presenting the whole story” (Graves, Group Interview 1, p. 225). The media tends to focus on producing content that will better attract the attention of the general public, generating more publicity, higher viewership, and greater profits.

This monetization and clickbait trend in the usage and representation of parkour is perhaps most evident in the form of parkour fail videos. These videos depict accidents and injuries of people claimed to be training parkour by the video creator. These videos are predominantly shared by people who are not traceurs and the clips in the videos usually do not depict actual parkour practitioners, just people taking risks and injuring themselves. “A lot of the stuff on the internet that keeps getting shared is by people who don’t train, who just want to see bail videos of people falling and hurting themselves, and they know if they upload that to their channel, they’ll get a whole bunch of views. And then people will just think that’s what parkour is. But that’s not what parkour is. That’s what most people don’t see. People want to see you getting hurt. That’s not what parkour is. That’s just a reflection of what gets a lot of views on the
internet” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 93). By compiling and exploiting videos of people getting injured and labeling it ‘parkour fails’, people online are able to bolster their view count by associating a hot button word like parkour with videos of people injuring themselves, whether or not they are actually injured through training parkour. “People love seeing people being stupid, that’s why Fail videos get so many views. People just love to see people be stupid, love to see people get hurt” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 64). This taints and misconstrues the meaning of what parkour is, and the public associates the sport with these graphic videos of people injuring themselves who, in reality, usually have nothing to do with parkour. “You watch a video of a drunk dude trying to jump off a railing and fall in a pool, and then you watch a video of a traceur slipping on a jump and hitting his face and getting bloody, and you’re like ‘Oh, those guys are both idiots…it’s some fad of stupid people throwing themselves and getting hurt.’ You don’t realize that you watched two completely different things…They haven’t trained, they haven’t done any of the things that we do to prepare or respect a jump. They just throw themselves at it. It just breeds that viewpoint, and it’s popular so it gets hits” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 66, 61). In the majority of the popular parkour fail videos, the people injuring themselves are not traceurs, and to the public eye, there is no different between the two. The interviews advocated that the discipline of parkour itself is not what is dangerous, even when the videos of the fails are by traceurs, and that the real danger is the ways in which those people chose to train their bodies. “Half the people in those videos probably didn’t train parkour at all. They were probably just trying to jump across a roof…and some people who think of parkour only think of that and say ‘Oh, parkour is what’s dangerous,’ as opposed to the attitudes of the
people in those videos…Those videos kind of create that mentality that parkour in itself is
dangerous instead of how a person decides to train parkour” (Guzman, Group Interview 2, p.
249). “We don’t just do tricks to go and hurt ourselves. We’re not trying to do crazy roof gaps
that we’re not ready for. If you watch YouTube videos of people doing flips over roof gaps,
people think ‘Why would they do that? It’s stupid.’ But they don’t see the years of training that
went into it” (Dye, Group Interview 1, p. 222). These online videos of seemingly high risk,
dangerous movements of traceurs are often misinterpreted as being risky and reckless. But the
reality is that often times years and years of training have gone into building their abilities up to
the point that they are able to safely perform advanced movements. The purpose and reasoning
for the continued presence of fail videos that misrepresent parkour and its practitioners are often
for the purpose of appealing to the general public to amass views and profit from the videos.

The ways in which parkour has been incorporated into movies and television through
stunt work was also criticized by the traceurs who participated in the interviews for its
misleading and exaggerated depiction of parkour movement. “Movies like *Tracers* or *Brick
Mansions* that show parkour; it’s hard to say whether it’s good or bad. I think it’s alright because
it shows it to a bigger audience, but it’s still kind of similar to the YouTube stuff. It’s just used
for the action and the excitement and doesn’t really teach anybody about the sport” (Pinkley,
Individual Interview 4, p. 113). The stunts shown in movies that are filmed to resemble parkour
are often faked using camera angles and props like crash pads and wires, which does not respect
the capabilities of actual traceurs who can execute similar movements because of their
disciplined training. “They cut landings, they’re not showing actual movement. They show a
jump from one angle and they don’t show the landing, so there’s a huge mat there, and then they cut and show a close-up of feet dropping into the shot and hitting the ground” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 65). The way in which parkour is often discussed in relation to these films discredits the efforts of traceurs in their training when they equate stunt work to disciplined parkour training.

It’s stunt work. It’s not true parkour…what you see on the screen…Two people can do the same exact movement and one is doing parkour and one isn’t…Just because you vaulted over a wall doesn’t mean you’re doing parkour. Stuntmen don’t do parkour…It’s all about the mentality in my mind, and the mentality is completely different…With stuntmen, it’s all about getting the take…The joy I get from hitting a jump and sticking it…they don’t have that…For them, it’s about ‘Did you get it on film? Did you get the clip?’ …You can’t just pick up parkour for a movie and do it. It takes years of discipline to learn (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 63-65).

Foster explains that while some movies do hire actual traceurs to execute the filmed movements, the majority of the ‘parkour movements’ in movies and television shows are often done by stuntmen who do not actually train parkour. This is sometimes perceived as disrespectful to the efforts of traceurs who work hard to train their bodies because parkour is just relegated and equated to stunt work for action scenes in movies.
The ways in which parkour is implemented in movies is very similar to how martial arts fight choreography is done. Similarly to the actors performing in fight choreography, the ‘parkour practitioners’ or people doing ‘parkour’ in the films often do not actually know or practice the sport. “While parkour athletes are still getting very much involved in stunts, I would still say that parkour in movies and TV and in advertisements isn’t genuinely what parkour is. It is more similar to martial arts fight choreography than it is to actually training to do the moves. There is a big difference between action scenes and actual parkour” (Rujiraviriapinyo, Group Interview 2, p. 248). Also, the unrealistic portrayal of some parkour scenes in films contributes to the idea that parkour is extreme and very difficult to learn, which can deter people from trying it. “I feel like it takes away from the potential of what we could have with parkour because it gives you that unrealistic sense of ‘I can’t do that’. But when you see an actual person doing it, you start to have more confidence and think ‘I can do that!’” (Peveley, Group Interview 2, pp. 248-249). Through actually training of parkour with instructors or through tutorial videos, the realization that the basics of parkour do not match what is typically seen in movies becomes apparent to people initially getting started in the sport.

In addition to film, parkour has also become synonymous with the recent advent and popularity of different obstacle course racing shows and competitions. “It’s getting popularized by things like Spartan Race, Tough Mudder, YouTube, videogames, movies; it all has parkour in it. I think it’s something that you are just going to see more and more” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 176). While parkour practitioners may sometimes participate in these obstacle course racing competitions, parkour is often incorrectly equated to the movements people
perform in those events. The general public, similar to the indistinguishability they tend to have between videos of people hurting themselves and traceur fails, commonly neglects the differences between parkour and obstacle course racing. Skowronski emphasized that the differentiation between parkour and obstacle course racing competitions rests in the motivations and reasoning behind the movements.

You get things like American Ninja Warrior and you get these other competition based things that, to me, doesn’t go along with the philosophy of what this movement started out as. Yeah, you’re pushing yourself and you’re trying things…[but] what does it promote? It promotes you being better than others. It promotes the acceptance that it’s okay to push yourself to the point of injury as long as you win. Is it worth it?…Yeah you get a trophy, but what about the rest of your life? (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, pp. 134-135).

Obstacle course races and physical game shows like American Ninja Warrior promote competition and comparison of one’s own movements to other people, whereas parkour is a self-focused discipline. Parkour is about overcoming one’s own mental obstacles and improving one’s own skills to complete physical challenges. Therefore, equating parkour to competition-based activities like obstacle course racing contradicts the founding principles and philosophies of the discipline and distorts the meaning of parkour.

These misleading, dismissive, and sometimes disrespectful ways in which parkour is
often represented in the mainstream media contributes to a lack of respect and value given to what traceurs do. “If you’re a snowboarder, and you’re on TV for an interview, they will refer to you as an athlete and give you the respect that they would give to an athlete, because our…culture respects athletes…Parkour doesn’t get that respect. It’s not viewed as a sport. It also doesn’t get respect for being viewed as an art. It gets neither” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 66-67). The way that the media views parkour translates to how the public perceives the discipline as well, categorizing it as more of a fad than a sport. “Parkour was interestingly referred to…in The Office…[as] ‘Parkour, the internet fad of 2008, where you get from point A to point B as creatively as possible’…So I think that’s interesting that, to pop culture, it’s viewed as a fad. There are many ways it is misrepresented. People don’t take it seriously, from start to finish, for many reasons, because things like that are said…It’s frustrating, and it’s not taken as a sport. It’s not seen as a sport” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 65-66). But despite all of the somewhat negative ways in which parkour has been portrayed in movies, television, and online, the traceurs recognize that there is an ever increasing awareness of the sport and a growing number of people who see the value in parkour and understand what it is truly about.

The interviewees expressed optimism about the future of how parkour will become understood and appreciated by society. “Parkour isn’t super well-known right now. I think as a movement, we are slowly but surely growing. So yeah my only hope is that as parkour grows, people will actually start to know people who train parkour, and through them they’ll learn more about what the philosophy is” (Pinkley, Individual Interview 4, p. 113). “The good thing though is that eventually if you’re outside and you keep training and you keep on talking to other people
who train that have been doing it longer, eventually you’ll understand the more true and helpful paths of parkour” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 93). Despite the negative depictions of parkour by the media, the traceurs confirmed that the image and portrayal of parkour has been getting steadily better with time. “It has gotten a lot better over the years. The portrayal of parkour has gotten a lot more complete” (Graves, Group Interview 1, p. 225). There was also emphasis placed on the role and responsibility of currently practicing traceurs to inform and teach others about parkour so that the parkour community as a whole can work to combat misconceptions perpetuated by the media. “I think we all need to do our part to try and help get the word out there, first of all for awareness, people don’t know what it is, and secondly for misunderstanding, they think they know what it is but they don’t, and thirdly for representing it well and putting our best foot forward and not having some people speak for us who are not really presenting it in a positive light. So it’s like a battle, and we’ll see. I think eventually, slowly, little by little, it’ll become more understood and more accepted” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 67). The traceurs were optimistic that the positive benefits they have experienced themselves from training parkour will eventually be recognized and appreciated by society, gaining them the respect and understanding they strive for.

It used to be that the perception was that this was a daredevil, risky, adrenaline junkie, destructive sport, and that’s what I saw back in 2005, 2006. I think nowadays, perception is a lot different. We work with non-profit organizations, we work with schools, we work with community organizations, festivals,
libraries, community centers…It’s now recognized to be a good, positive thing, not like it used to be. I think overall, the perception is generally good, especially amongst educators, people who are involved with fitness and child health…I think the perception of it has largely grown positive. I think more and more, the perception of it in movies, videogames, and things like that, while yes spectacular, yes extreme, yes hyped up, you’re going to get that with anything right? You’re going to get that with anything, especially with something as rich as parkour (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 180).
BUILDING COMMUNITY AROUND THE PHENOMENON

A notably important aspect to the phenomenon was identified through the interview process which was not addressed by the research subquestions, and that aspect is the parkour community. Groups of traceurs come together within geographical areas to practice parkour together, developing a bond through their alternative appropriations of urban space. These communities are formed out of the shared love for parkour and for movement, varying in sizes anywhere from a couple practitioners to hundreds depending on the area where the community has developed. The interviewees spoke extensively and positively about the experiences they have had with the parkour communities that they have been a part of.

The traceurs described the community as being very positive, supportive, encouraging, understanding, non-judgmental, helpful, accepting, and welcoming to all people of all skill levels. “The community is again very supportive, very encouraging, very welcoming, and people want you to succeed. They want you to have fun” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 175). “Encouragement…Overwhelming encouragement! That’s the community! That’s the vibe. That’s everyone. And like I said, second best to executing something yourself…is watching someone else do it! It’s great! Everybody encourages everybody else, everybody is cheering for everybody else on a whole” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, pp. 46-47). “Overall it’s really great!…It’s a really amazing thing where people accept you. There is a greater connection. Politics, religion, all the other things that a lot of people fight about all the time, don’t necessarily matter anymore in the parkour community” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 96). “Everyone
“is always willing to help!” (Morell, Paired Interview 2, p. 186). “The way that the community reacts is always really very supportively. If you’re having trouble, they will lend a hand and try to give you some advice. If you do something, they’ll get excited for you” (Morell, Paired Interview 2, p. 199). “Being around the community, there’s no judgment” (Barber, Paired Interview 2, p. 201). “I’d say for the most part, the parkour community is always very supportive of everyone. The camaraderie of it, whether someone is trying a big jump, whether it’s me or someone else, or whoever it is, it’s the first time they tried it. Most people in the group will all kind of go crazy for the person! If you’re the person, it feels great, and if you’re the person cheering them on, it still feels great because you’re sharing that success with them” (Peveley, Group Interview 2, p. 241). The parkour community is very encouraging and supportive of other traceurs engaging in alternative appropriations, regardless of skill level. They are generally an open-minded group of people that are welcoming and accepting of differences. They support each other and they are always willing to help each other, and being a part of a parkour community feels like having a second family.

There is competitiveness in the parkour community, but usually in a positive sense. “There is competitiveness in the parkour community but not in a negative way” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 47). The community is focused towards cooperation to achieve personal growth in skills as opposed to measuring those skills up against another person or team. “It’s not necessarily a competitive community, more about cooperation” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 89). The traceurs push each other to be better, building each other up by sharing in the experience of alternative appropriations of urban space. “We grow together…Everyone is
getting better together. It’s a sport against yourself, not against others. We are kind of like just one big team” (Dye, Group Interview 1, p. 221). “We try to bring each other up because we like to train with other people. The more people out there training, the more fun it is for us! That’s how communities are grown” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 88). “Parkour isn’t about being better than the person next to you. It’s about being better than the person you were yesterday. It’s about cultivating that better self. You can help the person next to you” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, pp. 128-129). Through this shared experience of breaking through mental barriers and conquering their fears together, parkour communities build up camaraderie between practitioners. “The camaraderie I have with these guys…means a lot to me” (McNabb, Individual Interview 6, p. 144). Because engaging in parkour movements is a very mentally and physically exerting experience, traceurs often cultivate close bonds with one another through this shared physical and mental challenge. “With physical labor, you bond with people so well when you work together. That’s another thing that’s beautiful about parkour because I think it’s the same thing, because parkour is physical work. You’re lifting, you’re pushing, you’re jumping, you’re pulling, you’re doing things that are very physical and hard, you’re sweating. Doing that with another person, there’s a bond that comes out of that” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 23).

Often times it’s really nice when you have a partner to train with, someone who’s right about at your level, because you guys can push off each other. And then be like ‘Okay, I’m doing this’ and then as soon as they say that, you’re like ‘Well,
now I have to do it, I have to step up too.’ It’s like a solidarity thing…I recognize that you are willing to push yourself, and who am I, if not your friend, if not your training partner, if I don’t join you in pushing yourself in that way. Giving yourself in to that effort, you know ‘I am going to be here to support you, and we’re going to do this together, and together we hopefully will achieve something that maybe individually we couldn’t, or that I wouldn’t have done’ (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 171).

By training with other traceurs at or near one’s own skill level, they are able to come together to achieve movements that, alone, they may not have been able to accomplish. Foster expresses that “there is something really cool about going for a challenge together” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 23). Many of the interviewees that had previously trained with partners or other traceurs expressed similar feelings of being able to achieve more through that shared movement. “We approach the space differently, but end up coming together on the different obstacles and challenges, and it ends up being me pushing him and him pushing me and we both become stronger through that process” (Peveley, Group Interview 2, p. 243). The camaraderie and teamwork that the parkour community provided through support and encouragement of ubiquitous self-improvement for all members is part of what the traceurs argue makes the community so amazing to be a part of.

The parkour community does not only exist in person, but through a global network kept alive and thriving through parkour videos. Traceurs use videos as a way to bond with each other
from around the world, and this is discussed further in the section pertaining to the
documentation and sharing of the phenomenon. When asked about documentation of his
movements, Foster explained that “that’s part of the community! That’s a huge part of the
community!…It’s a conversation. It’s a big way that the parkour community is a community, it’s
through video!…I think hugely in the community, it’s not a pride thing. It’s a sharing in the
community! It’s a way to move with a person on the other side of the world, or with people more
broadly! It’s to share a video of your movement, and then somehow, even though you’re not
physically present, you can still share and experience in that together” (Foster, Individual
Interview 1, pp. 54-55). Through video, localized parkour communities can interact and
experience movements of other communities together virtually, connecting themselves with the
greater parkour community. Often these localized parkour communities will release compilation
videos of different athletes in their group to show other communities what their community has
been doing through movement. This sharing of movement through film helps to inspire others to
join parkour communities and to contribute to that global movement.

This global community of parkour practitioners forms a sort of universal bond between
all traceurs through their shared love and passion for movement. Anyone who practices parkour
is typically welcomed into local communities by other traceurs when moving to new places and
during their travels away from home. “I’ve shown up in a city before and needed a place to stay
and I just posted on Facebook ‘Hey, I’m in town and I need a place to stay. Can anybody help
me out?’ And somebody in parkour did!…I got to travel around and I do that here. I’ve had
people travel from other places. I’ve had someone from Germany and they stayed here at my
house for a few days…So it’s just wonderful to have that community. If you really wanted to, you could just travel around and stay at people’s houses. They’ll feed you food, they’ll be nice to you and take care of you the best they can” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 96). Because parkour is not a very widely practiced discipline, finding others that also practice it is like encountering an old friend that you’ve never met. Their shared love for movement instills a bond between traceurs that is reinforced through both local communities and the greater, global parkour community.
POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF DESIGNING SPACES FOR PARKOUR

As parkour continues to grow in the United States and an increasing number of athletes join the discipline, practitioners will encounter an increasing need for usable public spaces where they can practice their movements. “We have something like over two thousand people in our system (signed up at the Parkour Horizons Parkour Gym). So it’s not like this is some crazy thing that only a few people recognize, it’s becoming more and more popular. I think if you’re under the age of, you know, 25, you know a parkour practitioner, you know what parkour is, and it’s just getting more and more popular. It’s getting popularized by things like Spartan Race, Tough Mudder, YouTube, videogames, movies; it all has parkour in it. I think it’s something that you are just going to see more and more” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 176). Rarely, if ever, are designers of urban spaces aware of this type of alternative space usage, and even scarcer are the number of urban spaces designed with this type of usage in mind. As the ways in which human beings express themselves in public space evolves, it is the responsibility of designers to be aware of these new forms of expression and to provide urban public spaces that support them. As Bjarke Ingels articulated, “our intention [as architects and designers] is to open up for more possibilities, and then it’s great if the city and buildings meet what wasn’t expected, the unforeseen, the spontaneous, what’s coming. Life in the city is always evolving and it is our job as architects to make sure that our opportunities for expression aren’t limited, but that our cities match the life we want to live” (Ingels in My Playground Documentary, 2009). The forms of expression within city spaces are changing and evolving through parkour, and it is important
that these new ways of expression are understood and considered. In the same way that public parks and spaces are commonly used for walking and sitting, they are becoming more commonly utilized in alternative ways by traceurs as well. It is important for designers to consider all facets of the communities in which they are designing public spaces, because those spaces are utilized by everyone. Public space is how people living in communities freely express themselves in the United States, and it is important to consider how the ways which people express themselves are changing.

According to the interviewees, incorporating parkour into city spaces can have many potential benefits for local communities and for the people who get involved with the discipline. Comparatively, Americans are very concerned with safety and liability, and Joe Torchia explains “I think that’s a shame, because some European countries don’t follow that same setup. I see much healthier communities there, and you don’t see people as afraid to try new things, to do new things. I think it’s one of the shames about our culture it that it’s impulsive to say ‘Stop, don’t’ instead of thinking ‘Okay, well let’s explore and let me help you,’ and I think that’s a problem. But yes, that’s why we are opening gyms, why we are trying to build parks” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 182). The increased concern with safety and liability in the United States creates communities and people within them who are not comfortable with engaging fear or taking risks. This is especially evident in children with overly protective parents that attempt to eliminate risk from their lives. Parkour can be used as a way to expose children to healthy risk-taking behaviors through simple movement, as well as providing a physically engaging activity. “If you take a kid who isn’t outside much, doesn’t have a good sense of
balance, proprioception, coordination, strength, and you begin to teach them these [parkour movements] and it’s fun, it’s kind of cool, it’s challenging but also very rewarding, I think it can be a beautiful sport for a community and for individuals” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 165). The movements of parkour are essentially natural body movements that can be seen in the play behaviors of children, and can be a great way for kids to engage in physical activities to stay healthy and active while learning to evaluate risk and develop a relationship with it.

Parkour can also provide these skills, healthy risk-taking behavior, physical exercise, and engagement with fear, to adults as well. “It can be intimidating. Like gymnastics, it has that level of disconnect between the beginners and the high level athletes. But if you look back to the day to day, week to week, hour to hour work that is being done in a parkour class or a parkour practice, it’s something that is beneficial and approachable for anyone. Because it’s just your own movement, it is something that can be progressed or regressed, no matter your skill, strength, or level. It’s just movement through space. Almost everyone has the ability and the capacity to move through space” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, pp. 165-166). Parkour requires no specialized equipment, no prior training, and no need for advanced athletic skill, just simply the ability to move. In this way, the traceurs explain that parkour is a sport that is accessible to almost anyone. “Parkour is kind of like a great equalizer. One of the great things about it is that it’s free, so it’s a great equalizer. Unlike any other sport, all you need is a pair of shoes and you can do parkour. That’s what makes it really unique. So it’s kind of like an equalizer in that it’s for all walks of life…That’s a really beautiful thing and that’s really unlike any other sport. Like with basketball, there are basketball hoops everywhere, but you still need a
ball, and with parkour you need even less than that. Not even shoes, you can do it barefoot” (Hartung, Individual Interview 3, pp. 103-104). Anyone with the capacity to move can learn parkour and better themselves, physically and mentally, through parkour, which is why it could be a great way to bring communities of people together through their shared movement.

As parkour grows and becomes more widely practiced in the United States, traceurs will increasingly encounter a lack of public spaces in which to train. Currently, traceurs already explain that finding urban spaces that are suitable for parkour movements has proven to be difficult. “Outdoors I would have to go from area to area to spots that were miles apart to find areas that were usable for my skill level at the time…especially because traveling expenses make it difficult unless you live in a medium to large city that is denser like Chicago” (McNabb, Individual Interview 6, p. 144). “Now in the United States, we have a lack of public space that can be used publicly” (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, pp. 181-182). As the population of people that practice parkour increases, finding locations to train in urban spaces will become an increasingly difficult challenge for traceurs. By designing urban spaces with this population of people and this type of space usage in mind, city planners and urban designers can increase the opportunities for parkour movements within the urban environment, providing practitioners with more spaces in which to train and express themselves through movement.

Unlike more destructive forms of expression in urban spaces such as skateboarding or graffiti, traceurs value their training spaces and take care of them. “With parkour, it’s something a lot similar (to skateboarding) but we’re not trying to dominate something. We’re trying to dance with it and have a relationship with it. So we’re not punching an object, we’re dancing...
with an object!” (Poprocki, Individual Interview 2, p. 87).

I tend to view the space as a training tool and as a partner. So there are these things in parkour that we call ‘Leave No Trace’ where you don’t destroy anything, you fix any damage, like if you scuff up a wall, you need to wipe it down and stuff like that. The idea is, we care very much, I care very much, about that spaces that I train in, that my students train in, because these are the tools that they’re using to develop themselves, physically, mentally, emotionally. If I lose this tool, it’s a loss to them and to us, so you want it to be something that endures, that lasts, that you’re taking care of. So you’re not looking to vandalize, you’re not looking to trespass; you’re not looking to destroy anything. You know, quite the opposite. You want to preserve, protect, utilize, and watch over the space (Joe Torchia, Paired Interview 1, p. 173).

Traceurs value their training spaces and see them as training partners, so they want to take care of those spaces, keeping them clean and intact so that they can continue to use them to better themselves. “Every month, we would have a specific jam where we’d go out and clean up a different park in Oahu to show that we were here to give back to the community and not to take from it” (Skowronski, Individual Interview 5, p. 129). “I may leave shoe marks or a footprint on a wall, which sometimes, yeah there will be a rubber strip that is really unsettling and you need to get it off. Those footprints, you need to try to wipe them down” (McNabb, Individual
Interview 6, p. 158). Traceurs do not try to damage property with their movements, and when they do accidently damage property, it very much matters to them. When property is accidently broken, this sometimes results in injuries to the traceur, which they are trying to avoid. When traceurs break or damage property, it is very upsetting to them, not just because they want to obey the laws and feel bad for damaging someone else’s property, but also because then the training spot is ruined. Foster described an incident when a wall he was training on broke because of his movements. “First of all, I got hurt, but more upsetting to me was that now the wall was ruined! I felt terrible because I damaged property and I actually put it back and tried to piece the whole thing back together and put it back in place” (Foster, Individual Interview 1, p. 77). This respect and care that traceurs have for the urban spaces in which they train gives additional value to, and appreciation for, these spaces, especially in the case of urban spaces that are abandoned or rarely frequented by the public.

Parkour is generally relegated to the spaces of the city that are abandoned, unkempt, and not in regular use by the public. Through parkour, these forgotten spaces of the city are given care, respect, appreciation, and use by traceurs who value them as a training tool and partner in movement. “We, as practitioners, see this place and we’re like ‘Oh man, this is so cool, I love this!’ And I’m sure a lot of people see it as an eyesore” (Graves, Group Interview 1, p. 219). The discipline has taught practitioners to see value in every space, because there is always a creative new usage for every space of the city when perceived from that alternative perspective. “It just taught me to learn to see spaces differently, and through that, I’ve then gained kind of an appreciation of the beauty of simple things” (Rujiraviriyapinyo, Group Interview 2, p. 253).
Through parkour, traceurs have gained an increased appreciation for the city and all of its spaces and objects, viewing them as partners in movement and the canvas for their creative expression.

Traceurs respect and value the spaces in which they train, and providing additional public urban spaces in cities could potentially have the many benefits for local communities that the practitioners articulated. The multifaceted, alternative ways in which traceurs utilize urban space creates greater value in these spaces and enables them to perform more social functions for local communities. As our forms of expression and creativity evolve, it is the responsibility of designers to acknowledge and consider these forms of expression when implementing designs for public urban spaces within cities, understanding the potential positive impacts that emboldening these forms of expression can have on urban communities.
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS
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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Individual Interview 1: Andrew Foster

Me: Alright let’s get started! So can you state your name, where you’re from, how old you are, and how long you’ve been practicing parkour?

Andrew: My name is Andrew Foster. I’m 27 years old. I’m from Akron, Ohio. And I’ve been training parkour for 8 to 9 years now.

Me: So tell me your story. How did you initially get involved in parkour?

Andrew: My story! Well, let’s see. I would always jump around when I was younger. I really enjoyed it. I remember in middle school, I was home schooled, and I would go in my backyard. I’d finish my homework and my mom would be like “Go play outside!” So I’d go in the back yard, and I would get boards, we had these old boards back there, and I’d lay them out in the yard and I’d run and try to jump from one board to the other and see how far apart I could get them. And I remember taking a tape measurer out there to measure it. I would be like “Yes! I got 15 feet today!” I wasn’t really allowed to play sports. My family was focused on academics and music. So it was kind of not reputable, according to my dad, to play sports really. So I didn’t know that that was actually like a thing, that long jump was a thing. So I just did whatever I could. I did that, and I would jump over things. I’d stack up cushions in my parent’s basement and try to jump over them, or over the couch. I used to try and jump, for a while at least, I got into jumping down the stairs. I would put cushions from the couch at the bottom of the stairs and I would start from the first step, then the second step, and it was dumb because I couldn’t roll out of it. There was a wall at the bottom of the stairs. I would like body slam the wall!

Me: I jumped down the stairs like that too when I was younger!
Andrew: My mom would be like “Andrew! What are you doing!?” “Nothing.” I got second from the top, which is hard because the ceiling sloped, so I had to duck my head and try and dive! Looking at it now, I don’t know what I was thinking! I was having a great time! So I did that. And for years, I’d go out in the woods and try to jump over streams. I wasn’t good at jumping, like I couldn’t jump that far, but I didn’t know that, because I had no one to compare myself to. So I just loved it, I enjoyed it. So I did that, and then I went to college when I was 17. It was my freshman year, and there was a guy in my dorm who I started hanging out with who was another nerd like me, and I started working out a lot. I would go to the gym and lift, and he wanted me to teach him how to lift. So we’d go do that, and then we’d come back to the dorm after dinner, and we’d go down to the basement. We’d be down there at like 2am when everyone had gone to bed, and we started collecting furniture from all over the dorm, and we’d stack it and jump over it. We would try running jumps, we would literally try to figure out the most we could do by distance, I think we jumped a couch and two chairs end to end, and then we’d try to stack up the highest thing and we jumped over an upright piano. He was shorter than me but he had a really good jump! He would float over stuff. That was a lot of fun. It was like the most fun I had ever, I loved it! I didn’t call it anything. I remember doing my first plyo jump, because there was a handicap ramp in the basement of the dorm, so it was sloped and it would get higher. We started at one end and tried to jump up onto it, and then we started to work our way up it. We were getting up to neck height ploying up onto it. That was training, but I didn’t call it anything, I just kept doing it. Also in high school, I tried to teach myself how to do flips because I wanted to learn. I was a lifeguard, so I tried to do backflips into the water on breaks. And I tried to do it in the deep water, and then I’d work my way up the dock, trying to get shallower and shallower. But I never did it in the sand at that point because I was really scared. It was terrifying! I
remember trying to get myself to do them at home. When my mom was gone, at my house, I would take my mattress off my bed and bring it downstairs, and there was a step from the kitchen down into the family room, and I’d put the mattress so it was same height, and I would run and do front flips off of there. I could land those sort of, and then I tried to do a backflip but I was terrified! I remember standing there for probably literally 30 minutes, shaking, trying to get myself to do a backflip. I was like “I know that I can just do this, I can make myself,” and I couldn’t. I was so upset at myself. I was like “I’m a coward. I can’t do this.”

Me: Mental blocks!

Andrew: So upset! So anyways, I did all that, and then I got to college. It was also my freshman year, when I was jumping over stuff, that someone in the dorm said “Hey, have you seen the Urban Ninja video?” I told him “No, I haven’t.” This would have been in 2007. Yeah this was Fall of 2007. So that’s ten years ago that someone showed me that video. So I guess I’ve been training maybe 9.5 years, I don’t know. It’s hard to say. That was the first time that I saw what could be called parkour. I saw the Russian Climber video, which is Oleg Vorslav, and then, to this day, I don’t know who that guy was in the urban ninja video, but everyone knows it, everyone’s seen it. Like half the people I talk to are like “Oh, the Urban Ninja video is the one I saw first.” But I saw that, and I was just mind-blown! I thought “This guy is superhuman! I want to be like that guy!” I said “This is my mission in life, to be like that guy and be able to do that!” So then I started making leaf piles out in front of the dorm and try to do front flips into them. I’d try all kinds of stuff. Then I went home on a break from school, and I hung out with my brothers at my parent’s house and I was like “Hey guys, have you ever heard of this thing called parkour?” “No.” “Ah, I’ll show you! Let’s go do some parkour!” So we went over to the school by my parent’s house, and there was a picnic table there, and we just took turns, by two brothers
and I standing there, we would run and try to kong over it, and try to dash, kash, speed vault, just all the vaults! We’d be like “Oh dude, can you double kong it long ways?” It was a tiny little picnic table. We have footage of it actually, it’s hilarious. So anyways, that was my first straight up training session where I was like “I’m going to go out and train parkour with my brothers.” And then I went to the Middle East on a study abroad, and I met some guys from Algeria, and they had also seen some of the YouTube videos and they were talking about them with me and I was like “Oh, well I do parkour!” “You do parkour?! We like to do parkour! Let’s go do it!” So we went out, and it was weird because there weren’t really wall spots, we went to a place by the university that had sand and there was a wall and some trees. We tried to jump the wall, and I was trying to teach them flips in the sand, but I was scared to do it myself. I think I was really scared because of my past experience with backflips. I think I tried one but I bailed. Oh no wait I think I could do a backflip at that time, because at that point, I had also joined the Miami Club Gymnastics team at the university. So then this kid taught me how to do backflips and then I started working on everything myself at the gym. I taught myself a backflip, front flip, I was trying all kinds of stuff at the gym, like twisting and double fronts and stuff. So then that upped my flip game. So yeah, that’s how I got into parkour!

Me: Nice! So what does parkour mean to you and why do you practice it? What inspires you to practice it?

Andrew: Well, it’s evolved in my mind and in my heart, what it is to me. That evolution is not that the thing itself has changed, it’s more like my maturity and my understanding of what it truly is has changed. I was actually thinking about this the other day. So I coach gymnastics, and gymnastics, or other disciplines or sports, like martial arts is a great example, everyone studies under an instructor or like a style. So it’s like “Oh, you do Wushu” or “You do Muay Thai,” and
then you identify with someone else because you’re like “Oh, you learned the same structure that I did!” It’s like you have an immediate understanding, like “Oh, you’re from Dojo Whatever and you probably got yelled at and had to do the same things” or whatever. So there’s an identity there, but because you learned through the same process. But I feel like parkour is a step further than that because people learned, at least my generation, and I think it’ll be different for this next generation of parkour runners coming up where the youth actually have parkour gyms and parkour coaches, but my generation never had that. The people that I meet who started around when I did, we all kind of have the same story. We didn’t have anyone to teach. We taught ourselves, and the cool thing is that, I keep finding this more and more with everyone I meet, we all went through the same sort of evolution or metamorphosis. Like I was saying, my maturing, I see that with other people! I meet someone else who’s trained for a similar amount of time as me, and we’ll have gone through the same stages. So we’re at a similar point, which is really cool because we identify with each other immediately and are like “Yeah” and it really clicks and you talk and you’re like “Oh, you hit that point too and you had that?!?” Everyone has this kind of similarity, and no one taught it to us, but even though we’re all independent and separate, and even though for years I felt like I was sort of in my own bubble, I was in Akron, Ohio, I didn’t know anyone else that trained except my brothers, it was just me and my brothers, and I watched these videos of guys from around the world but I had never met any of them, but all these people, I sort of feel like they are friends of mine because I’ve watched their videos for years, and I’ve never actually met them, but even though I was in this sort of bubble, I’ve recently got to merge my bubble with other people’s bubbles. I got to meet some people around the country and internationally a little bit, not as much as I’d like to, but a few, and the people I meet, it keeps being like even though we each grew up in our own bubble of our own little world
of parkour, when we emerged and came together, we were like the same! We still have arrived at the same point. But yeah, it’s so cool! I love it! But in any case, when I started, and I think this is a common evolution, it was purely about “Oh, that’s cool! I want to be cool. Therefore, I want to do that.” And that was my original motivation, and that motivation leads to “I want flips. I want flips. I want big things. I want big jumps. I want big flips.” You know?

Me: Yeah!

Andrew: That’s how I started, and I only did technical things because I was scared to do bigger things, or like I couldn’t do bigger things. I’d try and get hurt or something like that. So that was my motivation. Then as I did it, I started to just love it! It wasn’t for the coolness of it, and it became less and less for the ego of it, the “I want to be cool” and more and more it just became “This is really fun!” and I started to fall in love with the challenge. I loved the grit and the push of “I want to get this move, and I will not quit until I get it.” And you try and you try and you try and you fall and you fall and you fall and you fall and you fall and you get it. “All is right with the world. In this moment, I am so happy! I don’t care if I die right now, I’ll die happy, because I got that move.” It didn’t matter what it was, it could be the littlest thing. So yeah, it was this evolution of starting to appreciate these other things about it. But it was still kind of like an obsession for me, in that as I started to love it, and then I started to enjoy the discipline and the challenge, I became obsessed with it to the point of “I have to do this. If I don’t train, I’m miserable. If I don’t progress, I’m miserable.” And I started to exclude other things and only did parkour and it damaged other things in my life. It took over and I wanted to be the best at parkour, and I knew I wasn’t, but I was like “I’m going to fight to be the best. I don’t have the most talent, but I can try. I’m going to give it everything I have. I’m just going to try and try.”

People I loved, the people in my family, friends and stuff that I should have been loving and
investing in them and caring for them and our relationship, I just started to, and I wasn’t aware that I was doing it, but they’d be like “Hey, do you want to hang out?” “Yeah sure! I’m going training! Come train with me!” And they’d come train with me, and they didn’t really want to train, but I’d be like “Yeah let’s hang out! Wait, let me do this precision jump real quick, I can get it.” Then, like 40 minutes later, I’d be like “Got to get this pre!” and they’re just standing there in the freezing cold, and I’m like “Just one more try, just have to stick this.” And they’re kind of like “Can we go now?” I didn’t realize I was hurting people, I was just kind of bludgeoning past it in my own obsession of “I want to be the best.” That was like an era I would say, and then I had some things happen in my life that kind of made me question what I was doing. Some people in my life that trained with me, and I would get everyone that I could to train with me, my family, my brothers, my sister, I got all the friends that I could, I tried to get my fiancé at the time to train with me, anybody I could, I’d be like “Let’s train. Come train. Parkour is the best! All I want to do is parkour!” and I didn’t realize! I thought they liked it! I never realized a lot of them just did it for me, just because I wanted to. So I developed what I thought was a good group. We had a community. “Parkour! Everyone loves parkour! Parkour is the best!” And then it started to fall apart. Eventually some things happened with people and I felt kind of hurt. “Oh, people are dropping away and they don’t want to do this.” Then it hit me that they don’t really actually love this thing. And then they were kind of giving me some ultimatums of like “I want to have a relationship with you, but I don’t want to do parkour. You have to pick.” And that really hit me because I thought “Do I have to pick between people and parkour?” I didn’t want to hurt the people in my life. So that really made me question it, and I thought “Maybe I’m doing this wrong. Maybe this is an obsession and not a love.” I was seeing it as a passion. And it’s interesting, those two words, what is the difference? I was thinking of it as a
positive thing, and I’d always tell people “Oh, parkour is such a positive thing in my life! It’s so
good!” But the people close to me would hear me say that, and one of them said “I don’t see that.
I think it’s a bad thing in your life because it’s tearing you away from the people you love.” And
that sucked to hear. I was like “Oh, oh no.” So then I felt like I had to choose and that really hurt.
That hit me hard. I kind of backed off of training for a little bit. I was struggling with that,
understanding that choice, trying to figure it out, when I went to the Middle East. I tried to start, I
wanted to start a non-profit organization using parkour as a way to reach out to refugees and
people in tough situations in the Middle East, especially youth, kind of being inspired by what I
saw Parkour Gaza doing. My dream was to be able to go to Gaza, and I wanted to be able to
bring the resources with me through starting this kind of organization and through donations and
stuff, to be able to start a parkour gym and parkour community and facility and a whole
organization because I knew that they couldn’t. They didn’t have the resources. They don’t have
anything there. They’re training off of chunks of blown up concrete and whatever they can get
their hands on, and I wanted to do that. The idea started out, and it was awesome. It was going to
work. It was amazing. I was connecting with and meeting all these people, trained with all these
guys. I spent several months, just every day, going out to parks, in the streets, teaching young
guys, teaching kids parkour, and there was a huge response! I went to Egypt, I went to Morocco,
I went to Jordan, to try and teach people, teach, train, met some people who I’ve watched their
videos for years. It was really inspiring! It was really cool to meet them in person! They didn’t
know me, but it was awesome to train with everyone. It was interesting at that point because
here, my brother was always my training partner. Like I said, I was in a bubble, and I was in that
bubble, except it was also the people that I got to do parkour with me and then my brother. My
brother was the person who was at my level, and he and I went back and forth training. If he got
something, I had to get it. If I got something, he had to get it. Neck and neck, we would fight for stuff, and he always teased me for not being technical enough. When we started off, I think with the evolution we are talking about, he went through it sooner than I did, and he was like “Dude, let’s do techy stuff” and I was like “No, let’s do big stuff.” He was like “Let’s do jumps” and I was like “Let’s do flips.” So I, always in my head, was thinking “Oh, I’m not very technical. I’m not very good.” Then I went to the Middle East and I was trying to be more technical. I was trying to work on that because my brother, I had to catch up with him. So I was like “I have to change the way I train. I have to work on my technique, work on sticking things, work on being more precise, and not as much on flips and stuff.” And I was trying to do that and I was making some changes, and then I went to the Middle East and suddenly I was Mr. Technical. All these guys are just chucking themselves, and I was the voice that said “Alright, well let’s work on this catpass pre over here on a railing.” “Woah, I’ve never done that before!” So it was weird. I was teaching, and I was this foreigner that came in as a guest, and I would go to jams and stuff and they were like “Oh, there’s an American guy here and he’s going to teach us some stuff!” Then I would end up teaching people really technical stuff, focusing on basic technique, on jumps, and they’d always asked “Oh, can you do this flip? Can you do that flip?” and I’d be like “Well why don’t we work on a jump?” It was weird! But anyways, I was there and I got an injury. I was doing a photoshoot with a friend and I did a big drop out of a parking deck up like a story, a big story drop to concrete, and I couldn’t hit and roll out of it because there was a wall right there and there was a weird situation with some piping, and I didn’t prep properly for it, I was cold, it was dumb. But I hit too much on my heels and bruised my heel. So I had that injury and then some really tough stuff happened in my personal life at that time, and I couldn’t train for a while. That summer, my brother and I went on a road trip to APEX (National Parkour Jam) and I had
been dreaming of going to APEX, and I couldn’t train. I had to just film my brother while he trained at APEX, and just destroyed moves, and I couldn’t train. I was miserable. We met Dylan Baker. I wanted to hang out and train with him, but you know, you roll into a new setting, and there’s someone really good there and you’ve seen their videos. My experience is that that best way to talk to them is to train with them for a little bit, but it depends on who they are. Some people are really chill and they’ll talk to anybody, but often, you kind of have to prove yourself a little bit to earn the chance to converse with them in a meaningful way. I didn’t want to walk up and fanboy him, but I’ve watched his videos for years and I really wanted to talk to him, but I was just a turd. I couldn’t do anything because I was injured. He said hi, and I was like “Hey are you Dylan Baker?” and he’s like “Yeah”. So he didn’t talk to me almost at all, which really sucks. I really wish I could’ve talked to him because he seems like a really cool guy from what I see of the stuff he posts. Anyways, that happened, and then that Fall, which would have been two and a half years ago, I was doing a late night training session by myself. My heel had just about healed up, and I was by myself in a parking lot with a little set of walls, and I was doing double kongs and I decided to try a double speed vault. I had never tried one before, and I was like “Oh, it shouldn’t be too bad. I just have to go full power first try and float over and I’ll be fine.” I didn’t have a big run up because my truck was right there. It was a short run up and I remember I prepped before it, “Okay, I’m going to take these steps, come in, it was a low wall, so I’m going to come in here, put my hand here, swing my leg, and float over it.” And I went for it hard, but my last step was too close to the wall, and at full speed, slammed my kneecap right onto the corner of the brick wall. Right on my kneecap, smashed it. It was bad. It hurt really bad, and I was worried I broke my kneecap. It was gushing blood, but that was just superficial. I was worried about what was inside. I didn’t know. I thought it was broken and I limped my way to
the car and I had to go pick my wife up. I was limping around for a couple weeks, but the cut healed up, and I started training on it, and it hurt. I decided that it wasn’t broken because I could walk on it.

Me: Yeah.

Andrew: So I was like “Oh, it’s bruised, it’s just bruised. Bruises heal. I’ll just train light on it.” So I started training on it fairly soon, and I trained on it, and trained on it, and the bruise healed. When I would touch it, it wasn’t sore to the touch, but whatever had happened inside was still going on. That ended up in a two year long saga of my left knee recovering slowly. I even did physical therapy. After a year of training on it, the pain was too much and I finally went to a physical therapist. And I went to the physical therapist for 6 months and that didn’t help at all. So then I started looking stuff up and found some information about squatting down and stuff, and some exercises, and I started doing that, and that, I think, is what helped it heal. But I was injured for a long time, and that was another big point of change for me concerning my relationship with parkour, because I tried to train through the pain, and I tried to still train like I used to, and this was in my transition time. I was trying to train more technical stuff, but I still wanted to go for big things, and I kept doing stuff I shouldn’t have on my hurt knee, doing it anyways. And I’d do it, land it, but it hurt.

Me: Ouch.

Andrew: I was coaching up at the gymnastics gym at that point, and I was still flipping a lot on it. I filmed my big gym video on that knee injury.

Me: Oof, ouch.
Andrew: I just did everything on trampolines and mats and stuff. I was like “Eh, it’s okay.” But eventually, I got to a point where I felt like I had to face the question of “What if I could never do parkour again?”

Me: Wow.

Andrew: “What does that mean to me? Is that just going to crush me?” I felt like I couldn’t live. I was falling apart, praying to God, “Please! I’ll do anything! Just let my knee heal!” I felt like I wasn’t getting any answers. “What is this? I just want to train! I just want to train!” I just wanted to be able to do a precision jump, and I couldn’t do a precision. I could not do standing pres. I was doing flips. I was doing weird jumps. I was doing dumb things. Height drops! So stupid! But I couldn’t do a standing pre because it hurt so badly. I came to the point where I was like “What if I have to give it up? What if there is no solution for this injury and this is it for life?” And that really made me rethink what I thought parkour meant to me. I didn’t want to think about life without it, and that is when I realized that it had moved in my life from being something that I wanted to do to something that I enjoyed and loved, to something I was driven to do, to something I was obsessed with, and then it had gone to literally my life. I don’t know what life is without parkour, because I view it as too big. If I’m in a parking lot, I doodle around on the curbs. If I’m walking across something, I hop, I jump. I flip every day. I just enjoy flipping a lot. I’ll just flip. Sometimes I’m walking by myself and I think “I’m going to do a flip.” I enjoy it so much. I was thinking “What would I do if I can’t have this?” And that really shook me up. I was trying to think, if my body is crippled, or recovering in some way, am I going to be okay and be able to keep living? That’s when I did eventually come to the acceptance that I could give it up. I wouldn’t die. I wouldn’t just implode. “There’s more to life than this. There are things worth living for.” I think that was important for me, because I made that decision of “There is
something worth living for more than this.” And then I could come back to parkour with a new perspective of “It isn’t everything.” But it’s a part of what I’ve been given. It’s a huge blessing. As my knee then started to heal, the pure joy that I found in the simplest moves was huge! I gained a new level of love for it in the knowledge that I might not always have it, and that it isn’t mine to keep. It’s something I’ve been given. It’s a blessing that I’ve been given in my life, and as long as I have it, I will love it, and I will enjoy it, and I will use it to its full potential, but knowing that it’s not mine to keep, and then each moment is cherished. I really enjoy going out and doing the littlest things. And that has helped in so many ways! It has helped my mentality, it has helped the training. I’ve become a much more technical person in my training. I go out now, and because I’ve been injured, I actually had to take two months completely off of training and I thought I was going to die! I had to completely stop all flips and all jumps and all training for two months. All I could do is upper body workout stuff, and that was the only thing that kept me sane. I have to move! If I don’t have parkour, I’ll still be doing something. I guarantee that! If I am paralyzed from the waist down, I’m going to be doing upper body workouts like nothing else. If I’m paralyzed from the neck down, I’m going to be doing head rolls, I don’t know, something! Whatever I have, I have to move. So yeah, I was just doing upper body workouts. But then after that complete freeze, then I started some recovery and I started to see progress. I gained a new respect for “If I blow this, I’ve already been injured for a year and a half, I can’t risk it. I will do whatever it takes. If the jump is stupid, I’m not going to do it. If I shouldn’t do it, I’m going to walk away. It’s not about ego. It’s not about being the best. It’s that I love this thing, and I don’t want to lose it. It was taken away from me, and it has been given back to me. I am going to appreciate it.” It has made a new mentality for my decisions in jumps, like what jumps I do and what jumps I don’t. I am much more okay with walking away. I was not okay with walking away
when I first started. When it was an obsession, I had to get it. I would not walk away. At one point, I would destroy myself before I walked away from something that I thought I could do.

And now, I’ll go out and train. I find a jump I want and I want it bad, and I don’t get it, I’ll walk away and think “It’s alright. I’ll come back another day. I’m 27. I have the rest of my life to get this jump. I don’t have to get it today. I don’t have to get it this week. I could get it next year!” I have that mentality now! I also have the mentality of “It’s not worth it” sometimes. I would rather have a body that is fully functional to enjoy all the different possibilities of parkour than to risk it all on this jump when I know I’m not ready for it. And also, I’ll enjoy the littlest things.

Through that year of injury, my brother was gone and everyone I trained with was gone, and I was by myself for almost a year of training, and I did a lot of solo training. And before, I had always trained with people, like my brother, friends, and it was always about pushing each other. It was always about “Okay, I’m going to go for this! Hype me up! I’m going to go for it! Let me do a backflip to get my energy up and I’m going to chuck myself at it! Ahhh I’m going to get it!” Then I didn’t have anyone to amp me up. I’ll always go for things more if my brother is by me. But it used to be that his support was what got me to do things. That was the way I did something. “Oh I need my brother here.” And now after this injury and a long time of training a lot of solo stuff by myself, now it scares me a little bit more to train with my brother, because I know I’ll go for more, and I’m not always sure I can. The purity of the mental state of being in your own zone and really focusing and just knowing where you’re at, I like that experience, and being with my brother throws in another factor. Don’t get me wrong, I love training with my brother!

Me: Yeah!
Andrew: And it pushes me in different ways that I need, so I don’t think that training by yourself all the time is that good. I think it’s good to have a mix of both. Yeah, so I gained this appreciation of being able to go out for a session, when I’m not feeling good or I’m not feeling powerful, and think “Today, I’m not going to do anything big. I’m maybe not going to do any flips. I don’t want to take any impact,” or if it’s rainy out and it’s slippery. But I’ll still go out and I’ll train. I’ll go to a spot and find the weirdest little things. I just delight myself for like two hours, just doing this, that, and the other.

Me: Yeah!

Andrew: Popping around, coming up with weird little things. Also, it has changed in my training where I’m becoming more disciplined and thinking about the long-term. It kind of hit me after that injury, and I thought “Okay, I’ve been training for years now. In my community, I’m one of OG’s now. I’m one of the people who have been training the longest in this area, in this community.” Even when I travel outside the community and go to jams and stuff, often I am one of the people that has been around longer, even though I’m kind of newly emerging. I should be thinking long-term. I had such a short-term training perspective for a long time. Like I said, it would be like “If it’s going to happen, it has got to happen today!” And now, I think “I’m going to train now for things next year.” My training now, I have a schedule; I have to stick 10 running pres off of each leg, because I want to be ambidextrous. Working ambidextrous, I have to stick 20 to 50 standing pres in a row, just nice and clean, working on just that good tech, which is a different kind of training because you’re not amped up. You’re not going for anything big. You’re not going for anything new. You’re doing the same pre over and over again, and it’s not usually a big or hard pre per say. It’s repetition, which you think would be boring, but I love it, in a different way! It’s about really honing in and training yourself, and I love it both in the
moment, I enjoy it, but also long-term. It’s so much better then, in situations where I do want to go for things in one shot, I look at it and I’m like “Okay, I can stick that, and I can stick it right now.” Before, I’d look at something and think “Oh! Well I’ll try and get my feet on it, then I’ll try to blow over it, and then I’ll spend 45 minutes trying to stick one.” Now I think “If I can hit it, I can stick it.”

Me: Yeah!

Andrew: “If my feet can get to it, I can stick it. I should stick it first try.” It has really changed the way I view things and how I view training and stuff. It has made me much calmer. Training by myself and everything has made me calmer. So after all that, that’s a long explanation, but what parkour means to me is this. Parkour isn’t a thing in and of itself. It’s a gift. It’s an ability to move that I’ve been given, and it’s amazing! I never want to underestimate that again, or underappreciate just how beautiful it is to be able to move. Every day that I’m alive and can move, I’m so thankful, no matter what the movement is, no matter how simple or little it might be.

Me: Right!

Andrew: This is something really cool that I was actually talking to Mat Poprocki about the other day. We were talking about meditation and he was talking about walking, and he was saying this feeling that you can get from a big jump, that moment before a big jump, when you slow your heart down and take a deep breath, you look at it, and your brain says ‘yes’, and everything goes silent, and you go! That moment is so pure and amazing, and he said you can have that moment in each step, you just have to learn to be able to get there. And I’m learning about that, but I think that that’s true because I see that in my training even though it has gotten smaller and smaller, in terms of the moves I’m doing. You can have the same beauty of focus and discipline
and training and movement, all in a little thing. So I feel like I appreciate any movement now, any movement. I don’t think of parkour as a thing. I talk about it like it’s a thing, like “Oh parkour is this” or “Parkour is that.” But like I said, from coming from the point of feeling like I lost it, and coming back to it, and also coming from the point of seeing it become an obsession and the problem with that, everything in my life is all a continuum. How I spend my day and who I am is all intertwined. It’s not separate. I don’t have categories. You can’t categorize. I thought I could categorize. I thought “This is my parkour part of my life, these are my relationships, and this is my responsibilities” and they’re all different parts, and I was thinking “Oh, I want parkour to take up 70% and then I’ll leave the other 30% for other things.” And I didn’t realize 70% was taking over. What I’ve realized now is that you can’t compartmentalize. But also, because they’re together, because they bleed into each other, I see parkour in everything. Parkour is a discipline and it’s an approach, but it’s an approach which I have embraced, and has since become part of my approach to everything in life. It’s not just physical obstacles. Parkour, as a discipline, has seeped into my person, my identity, and my perspective on life. I see lessons I’ve learned from movement apply in my relationships, in emotional things, in spiritual things, in relational things. I constantly see overlap, and I see that nothing is separate from each other. A life lesson, whether it be learning it when you’re jumping between bars or whether you learn it in a relational situation, it is still the same. It applies to broader things than that. And another thing is that parkour is a discipline of movement, so therefore movement is the root. A lot of what I’m saying is really just about movement. I’m saying appreciate each movement, whatever it is, even if it’s walking. The movement is bigger than just physical movement too. The things I’ve learned about movement apply elsewhere in my life. I think movement is essential to the human condition. It is part of the definition of what it means to live.
If you are a living being, you move, and I think that that is the start of the power and beauty of parkour, and why parkour is transforming people’s lives. In our day and age, parkour is so, so important and huge, because in a culture and a community and a context where we, more and more, move less, I think we’re dying in a way. We’re killing ourselves. Every moment that you are motionless, you’re stagnant. We talked about flowing like water. Water, in that it is moving, it is live giving. Moving water. This is a basic survival skill in the wilderness for even a caveman; you drink from moving water, you don’t drink from stagnant water, because stagnant water is death. And I think there is really something deep in that. Movement is life, or movement is essential to life. You, as a person, to live, you need to move, both physically and as a person in your life. Either you move forward in life, or you become stagnant, and you rot and die. I think about my training, like how am I progressing? I want to move physically every day. I want to move my body. If I don’t jump or run or leap or crawl or climb or flip or something each day, I get a little crazy. I’m like “I have to move today!” Sometimes I have days where I don’t get to move and I get twitchy and I start to get really grumpy, and I’m like “Yeah, I’m going to go train for a while.” I come back and I’m like “Phew! I’m so much better!” So I need to move physically, but also with my training, how am I going to progress? I want to move in my training. I don’t want to be the same traceur today that I am next year. A year from now, I want to have moved forward! I want to have progressed and transformed as a traceur. And then as a person, am I growing as a person in my life? Am I becoming more mature? Am I becoming more loving? Am I becoming more honest? Do I have more integrity? There are these things that I want to be. Am I growing? Am I moving? If I’m not moving, I’m dying. I think that people think “Oh, I’ve hit a certain level of maturity” and I see this in myself, the temptations within myself when I graduated from college, it’s like “Oh, I’m an adult now. I’ve done these certain ‘things’
that make me mature and make me an adult.” And then they think “Oh, I can stagnate.” You
don’t say that to yourself, but in a way you do. You’re like “I can chill here, I can stay this way.”
And I see people that are heading into their 40’s and it seems like they haven’t changed since
they turned 25, because they’ve hit ‘adulthood’ and they think “Alright, I’m good.” For me, no,
each day in my life, I want to be moving. I want to be in motion towards something. And that,
the last thing that I said I think is the heart of it all. I was talking to Daniel Ilabaca, and he was
talking about movement in parkour, and he was saying if you watch people, you can see their
heart in their movement. He was saying that you have to move with purpose. The people who are
beautiful to watch, their movement is just beautiful, is because they are moving for something,
and that something can’t just be ego. It can’t just be yourself. It has to be moving for something
beyond yourself. I think there is something really deep in that too. Movement requires a
destination or a direction at least. It’s impossible to move without a direction. The definition of
movement is you go towards something or away from it. So if I am going to move in my life, I
have to be moving towards something, and in my parkour movement. Why am I moving? What
am I moving towards? When I do this line, and I’m sprinting, I’m flying, I’m diving. Like yeah,
in a sense, I’m just diving to that obstacle, but in a deeper sense, I need to have a purpose for
why I’m moving.

Me: Yeah.

Andrew: And that gets to your second question of why I do parkour.

Me: Yeah, like what goals do you have associated with parkour as well, long-term or short-term?

Andrew: Okay. I really like the organization that Jessie Peveril started in Switzerland. His group
is called Move With Love, and my belief is that the thing that shows in someone’s movement is
if they’re moving in that direction. If you’re moving with love and moving towards, I don’t know
if it’s God or people, but towards some purpose beyond yourself in this life. You know, what am I looking for? Am I doing something beyond just serving myself? And that is the beauty of that classic line, “Be Strong to Be Useful”. I think that I move to be useful, and not in like a physical, brutal way of just usefulness, but in a bigger, more broadly reaching way. “Be Strong to Serve” maybe would be the way that I’d like to say that. I think it has the same intention to it.

Me: Yeah, yeah.

Andrew: But I think that my purpose in moving is to serve. I think that the reason why I find joy in movement, the reason that it’s so, so beautiful, is that moment, like I was describing before a big jump or that moment I was talking about earlier with dive kongs, that moment in the air where you’re just flying towards the other wall, the beauty of that I think is because there is something deeper in that ability. It’s not pointless. This is, to me, why I don’t like videogames, even though I enjoy videogames. I see them as, in a sense, an addiction. They’re fun, and the same drive in me that likes challenge and like to beat something like I do in parkour, that gets me with videogames. I can get sucked into a videogame, and I don’t emerge! But I haven’t played since college, and I don’t want to, because I know that I would really like it and really have fun. But I think that that is a certain kind of motion. You’re physically sitting, just in a chair, which is terrible. Well, you’re moving your thumbs. But in your mind, your mind is moving as your character is moving. It’s motion, but it’s not towards anything. I think it’s kind of like just running in a circle with videogames, because there’s no greater purpose. You can try to find a way to have your gaming be a benefit, like to be with a community, or something. I don’t know. But even if you manage to kind of get it to work, but thinking in a deeper way, in a very literal way, you’re doing nothing.

Me: Yeah true!
Andrew: But parkour, in a very literal way, you are physically doing something, and I think that can transfer over. I love the idea, which I think is at the heart of a lot of people in parkour, like the founders, like David Belle and those guys, have this in them, that “I have trained in such a way that when a situation in life arises, I can save someone’s life. I can do something worth something. I can do something of value, something beautiful with myself, with my body.”

Me: Yeah!

Andrew: The same way that I was saying this body is a gift, the ability to move is a gift, the gift is responsibility. What do you do with that gift? Do you squander it? Do you throw it away? Do you crush it, destroy your body for no purpose? Or, do you take that gift and sculpt something out of it? Do you train and build this body and mind that works together in this beautiful way to be able to achieve incredible things? And in that way, take the gift, and you have to then be able to use it to serve. So I think that parkour, my reasons for doing it, are because I love it. I just love moving, because it’s a gift I’ve been given, and I want to appreciate and respect the gift. I don’t want to squander the gift. There is a quote from Eric Liddell, I don’t know if you know who he is. He was a runner. He was the first man to run a sub-four minute mile. He’s from England. There was a famous quote, “I run to feel God’s pleasure.” And I think there’s this idea, I think you could look at the science of it and say “Oh, it’s endorphins,” but there’s a bigger picture of meaning and purpose in life. I would say the same about parkour. I think that there is an ultimate beauty. There is a good-ness in taking what you’ve been given and using it well. I think that that is inherent in anything. I think that is why people find joy in art, in being an artist. As a musician, that’s why I find joy in playing music. My parents wanted me to pursue music as a career, and I had some opportunities that I turned down in my musical career as a classical musician. I played classical piano for, I don’t know, 7 years or 12, 13, 14 years or something, I don’t know it’s hard
to remember. I decided that I didn’t want to pursue it as an occupation. I just didn’t like the
gruelly-ness of the work to it. But to this day, there is something really nice about it if I’m
having a really rough day. This is funny, but more and more, through the years as I’ve fallen in
love with parkour, if I’m having a rough day, I go out and train. But something I also do, and I
used to do a lot more, is I’ll go and I’ll play music. I’ll go and sit down at the piano. I’ll just be
by myself. And this is it, it’s not about other people. I’m not about people listening to me and
telling me that it’s good. It’s not about being known. I don’t need anyone else to know what I
was playing. I don’t need anyone else to appreciate the beauty of it. I feel like it’s purely me and
God. I’m just enjoying what He’s given me, enjoying that I can play this. It’s a gift to be able to
play music. There is something beautiful about just enjoying the gift. I think that, in and of itself,
is a purpose. So I’d say I do parkour for that reason alone. If, for no other reason, I think there is
value simply in taking what you’ve been given and using it well, because it sucks to take
something good and then use it poorly.

Me: Yeah.

Andrew: And I think we know that as humans just in general. You get upset if you know how to
use something and you see someone else using it the wrong way or not using it at all and you’re
like “Aww c’mom it could be so much better!” I think that’s true of our bodies! I get upset when I
see people not using their bodies. There is something that is just good about using it well. It’s a
job well done. There is reward enough in that! In that same way that there is a good hard day’s
work, I feel the same about my body with parkour. A good, hard day’s training is like “Yeah. I
used my body well.” So I train for that reason. I do parkour for that reason. But I also do it to
move like I said earlier, to have movement in my life, both literal and metaphorical. And then
finally, I think that my goals in general, my purpose, is what I would like to do with my life. At
the end of my life, I’ll look back and think “What did Andrew Foster do?” I would like people to be able to say that “Andrew Foster loved people, that he loved and served other people.” That I gave myself, I sacrificed myself and I gave what I had, and what I’d been given, to others. I think parkour is my gift that I have been given, well one of them. I have been given many gifts. I don’t want to underplay that. I think God can give you many gifts, many ways which I can give and serve others. But parkour is one that I’m especially passionate about. But again, like I said earlier, I don’t want it to become the only thing. But I’ve been given this, and I’d like to be able to say that I used it to serve others. And that’s why, to circle backwards to earlier, to move with love, I think that there is a purpose in moving to love others. And that’s why I think it is really important that we challenge ourselves about training differently, to not be so self-focused in my training. When I do a solo training session, I’m just kind of channeling those other things that I described, purely moving for the sake of moving, and loving and appreciating what I’ve been given. When I’m training with other people, that’s my chance to move with love and serve others. So at jams and stuff, I don’t want to be just focused on myself and what I can do, I always want to be kind of outwardly focused, and there is a different kind of movement to that. You may not do the biggest things when you’re at a jam, I’m not going to go for my max stuff when I’m around other people. But I’ll go for stuff with people. There is something really cool about going for a challenge together. Maybe I won’t even go for a challenge. I’ll go for something that I already sort of mastered, and I’ll be helping someone else with it, teaching. Or there is also this thing where you see people film lines together. There is a beauty about moving with another person. I think that there is something to that too. The beauty I’ve described of a job well-done in myself, taking the body that you’re given and using it well, that’s multiplied exponentially when you do it with another person! So if two people do it together, it gets even better! So there is
something really cool about moving together, and that’s why there’s something about working with other people. Like with physical labor, you bond with people so well when you work together. That’s another thing that’s beautiful about parkour because I think it’s the same thing, because parkour is physical work. You’re lifting, you’re pushing, you’re jumping, you’re pulling, you’re doing things that are very physical and hard, you’re sweating. Doing that with another person, there’s a bond that comes out of that that’s really cool. So that’s why I move, and those are my goals. I think that’s it, that gets it all.

Me: Perfect. So on a typical day, how do you prepare to go out and practice parkour, physically, mentally, or spiritually?

Andrew: Physically, I try to drink water and make sure I bring bottled water with me. It sucks to train if you’re thirsty!

Me: Yeah!

Andrew: I eat, and I try to not eat something that’s going to suck to have in my stomach. So if I eat a big, greasy breakfast, then I try to train, it sucks. I don’t focus on that as much as some people, and I’ve recently thinking about maybe trying it. I don’t like to focus on food. I like to enjoy food, and that’s why I don’t want to micromanage it. I think that’s what holds me back from being more disciplined about food. I’d rather not have to calorie count. People spend, I feel like, a lot of brainpower on their food choices, which maybe is important. Maybe I’m going to reach a point, like I was talking about with maturity, maybe I’m going to mature to a point where I think that that is more important and I’ll find that I should be doing that. But where I’m at right now, I’m becoming more and more able to discern and have the self-control to look at food and say “I know this is going to feel good later” and eat that. I used to be in the moment. I didn’t even think about how I’d feel in the future, and I was like “In this moment, I’m going to eat that
because I think that will taste the best. It’s the most delicious.” Now I’m more and more able to find that what tastes the best to me is what I know is going to be good for later.

Me: Yeah!

Andrew: I want my brain and my stomach to get in sync on that point, and be like “No, eating an orange now should be delicious because it’s going to feel good later, and eating nachos now is not going to be delicious because it’s going to feel terrible later.” So anyways, I eat, I drink. I’m trying to stretch more, but I don’t necessarily do that to prepare. I pick a spot, figure out where I’m going to go. I look outside and make clothing choices based on temperature and whatnot, and based on where I’m going to go. I might try and hit some people up and see if I can train with them or I might decide to do a solo training session, and that would also decide where I’m going to go. I’ll often post like “Hey, I’m heading out to train, anyone want to join me?” To no avail usually but I try! I make a decision about whether I want to bring my camera or not, because that does change the training session. More and more, either it’s a filming session or it’s a training session. I used to try and have it always be both. Actually now I have been getting more into training. That (the camera sessions) would go down a dark path, because the camera was there, I had to do big things. Then I wasn’t doing them for the right reasons. Then it would suck and it wouldn’t be good. But now I’m better about filming something that isn’t, I don’t think, anything amazing. Not to impress anybody, just because I would like to record it and maybe I’ll make something out of it. I like making videos that are more chill and not like “Ooh look at me! I can do this!” It’s just like “Ah, this is what I’ve been doing.” But yeah, I’ll make a choice about the camera, and clothes and stuff, and then I go out. That’s physically I guess.

When I get to a spot to train, I warm up. That’s a big thing I took away from my injury with my knee. Now, even though I said it’s healed, I must warm up. I can’t go for something big cold. It
will hurt. So it’s a good thing to keep me humble. My knee keeps me humble sometimes! It holds me back from doing things, especially in settings where I want to show off or I want to do something big to impress people, my knee won’t let me, and I think that’s good! It keeps me humble! Sometimes I’ve been around people and I feel like they don’t know what level I can train at because they’ve never seen me doing it, and I need to be okay with that. They can think that I’m not good, that’s fine. I don’t have to try and impress them. It also keeps me good in my training because it makes me take my time and be careful and warm up properly. I usually get to a spot, I put my bag down, and I go into a squat, and I squat for a while, and I shake my legs out. I hop around a little bit. I usually find a little, small, tiny pre, or actually recently it’s been like a little stride. Usually I make up a stride. I’ll be like “Oh, I’m going to go here, I’m going to take two steps, and then hit that curb over there”, just little strides on the ground, not even at height. And I’ll do that, or I’ll pick a small pre and I’ll stick it over and over again until I’m warm, like literally hot and sweaty, and then usually my mind starts to wander. I’ll pick a number, like “I’m going to get 20 or 30 sticks in a row”, and I’ll do those to warm up on a small pre, something simple. And then when I hit 30, immediately I’m like “I hit my challenge”, and then I’ll look around and be like “Alright.” And then my brain starts going and I’m like “Ooh, what about that? That looks like a cool challenge!” And I try something else, and that leads to something else, “Oh, what about this? I could add this to that!” And the next thing I know, I’m in a full-on training session, coming up with ideas. That’s how I prepare physically. Mentally, I don’t prepare for training. I prepare for other things like filming or if I were to do like a performance or something, that’s different. But to train, I think my mental preparation is part of the process. My mental preparation is that warm-up, too. That warm-up is mental and physical. Just as my knee won’t let me just chuck something big when I first walk up, my brain doesn’t really want to
either. I shouldn’t do that to my brain either. So it’s good for my brain too to start with something small, like I said a pre and I just do it over and over. My brain warms up too I think. Like I said, then when finish doing that, my brain starts going crazy with ideas. But when you first walk up to a spot, you sometimes don’t have any ideas going on. You just walk up and you’re like “I don’t know, what should I do?” I feel like my answer to that, to being mentally cold, is to start warming up physically and your brain will follow. So I’ll do a pre, and if it’s not a pre, it’s a vault, and I’ll just do that vault a couple of times, see what happens, and something always happens. I always have an idea somewhere for something, no matter how little the spot is or what it is. I always start and I’ll be like “Okay, what if I do this?” So that’s what I do mentally. Spiritually, I pray. I pray before I jump. What I pray now is that I pray in appreciation, like “Thank you for a well-functioning body, and I pray that I can have it still after this session. But if not, thank you. I’m glad I could enjoy it.” So yeah, I don’t know. I think about wanting to be safe and praying that I be safe, but I feel like not even as much, mostly just appreciation. And also, like I said earlier, like if I’m really upset, I’ll go out and train. That’s a little bit different, but I train to calm down, or not calm down, I just think the movement helps. Whether it’s emotional or spiritual, whatever I’m going through, motion helps that. It helps my brain and my heart when I seek mobility and I become more able to process the situation. If I can’t handle something, I’ll go out and train for a while. Then I can take a step back and start thinking “Okay, how can I handle this?” Because at the end of a training session, I’m really calm usually. I’ve had a good session. I’m kind of cooling down, and then I’m very calm and serene and contemplative. I think about life or about whatever the problem is that’s going on. I love, after a training session, to go to a spot. I love going on a roof somewhere. I try to not do that, especially after getting arrested and stuff. I try to be respectful of the law, but if there’s any way to get on a
roof that’s legal, I’d love to get up there. Somewhere high, on anything high, and sit. After a
great day training, there is nothing better than to just sit and watch the sunset, chill somewhere,
eat some fruit, and sit. I have a favorite spot in Akron that I like to go to after training. I’ll go
over there and there’s a nice bench with a view of the city and the sunset in this little park and
I’ll just chill. Actually, I don’t sit on the park bench. I either climb up and sit on the fence or I
climb up over the fence and sit on this wall because it’s more fun! It’s a big drop so you’re just
dangling your feet off the edge and you chill there. That’s my post-training calmness.
Me: So when you’re going out to train, where do you normally choose to practice and why those
spots? What qualities of the spaces make them good for performing movements?
Andrew: There we go! Here comes the architecture!
Me: Haha yeah!
Andrew: I don’t know what I’m talking about with architecture too much. My brother is in
architecture school so I’ve learned a lot from him. I know vastly more than I used to, which isn’t
saying much because I used to know nothing. But I’ll say this. I think parkour has transformed
my understanding and appreciation for architecture. I had zero appreciation for architecture
before parkour, other than aesthetics, like if I thought something was pretty or beautiful as a kid.
But from parkour, parkour completely changed the way I view buildings, the way I view
architecture, the way I view spaces now. I am so much more space-oriented and space-aware.
My space awareness, I think, and I noticed this and this is why it’s kind of cool for me to hang
out with architects, architects are spatially aware in a way that average people are not. We have a
joke in the parkour community, nobody looks up. Nobody ever looks up! People don’t look up in
life. They don’t! They look at the ground or they look in front of them. You can sit on a roof
directly above people, you can sit on a roof directly above a cop, and they don’t see you! People
don’t look up in their lives. And I think that says something, like there’s something deep and metaphorical about that that we could talk about for hours! But I love that architects will look up because they are appreciating what they’re looking at! Architects are always looking at buildings like “Woah, look at this or that!” I feel like I identify with them in that way because of parkour. I’m constantly looking at buildings. I’m constantly, anywhere I am. I’m driving, I’m checking the angles, and I’m looking at this or that. I have literally so many times like stopped, pulled a U-turn, gone back and parked and walked, like “I have to check the grip on that wall.” Or you’re like “How far is it between those two walls? Can I make that? I have to go check!” Then I go take my steps and measure it out, and I’m like “Oh, ooh, this is good!” Or like checking a railing, like “Oh, is this a sturdy railing?”, so many different things. I’ll pick a location based on closeness of people in proximity, whether it’s to myself or if I’m training with someone, I find some place where maybe we can meet in the middle, or a spot that I think they would appreciate. I pick something based on “I think that they may like this type of training today.” I’ll try to pick a spot that caters to that. In my head, I have a databank of spots, local spots. I was actually trying to compile it. I was working on it for the Akron Movement Family page and I’m slowly putting up pictures of spots. I want to get a nice collection so that people, and the newer people coming in to the community, could just look up and have the addresses and some pictures of the location, and be like “Hey, this is a good spot for this” or “Check this spot out for that.” But in my head, I have a bank of spots. So when I’m going to train, I start flipping, in my head, I start flipping through the cards. “Oh, what about this one? Eh?” And it’s not just a spot. I link past memories with each spot. Some spots are nostalgic to me. I also link past movements with spots. So “Oh, this is such and such spot, because I did that there three years ago. Five years ago, way back when, I did this there!” And I have favorite spots. Favorite spots are usually based on my
feelings about them, whether it’s memories and stuff or I think that it’s a really good spot, just because of the architecture, just physical nature of the structure, or because of the way that the space feels, which is obviously connected to the architecture. And I’ll say this, I like gritty spots! I’m not talking in the aesthetic of what people might assume in wanting a beautiful space. There’s an amazing spot at Akron’s Children’s Hospital which is new. Their new thing has these great descending walls. Amazing stride possibilities, all kinds of nonsense could be done there. I haven’t even begun to tap into the potential there! I’ve only trained there a couple of times. I don’t train there very often. My reasons are, even though it’s beautiful and I kind of want to train there a lot, I don’t, because it’s so nice, and it’s in a nice area, I know I’m going to get myself in trouble. I’ve been kicked out, not at that spot but a spot really close to there, by the Akron Children’s security, and I don’t want to be kicked out of that spot because it’s so good that I don’t want to be kicked out of it and have to worry about it. So actually it has deterred me from training there because it’s so nice. My favorite spots in Akron are kind of abandoned, old, just architecture that I think is from like the 80’s, like brutalist style stuff, like cement block stuff. Often it tends to have good grip. It can have bad grip. I could go on tirades to architects about my being upset with certain eras in American architecture for the materials they use and why they’re so slippery! I get so upset! But brutalist stuff often has interesting wall things that will sometimes have good grip. But there are some spots in Akron of that style of architecture and people think they’re ugly, they’re abandoned, and nobody goes there. There are some areas in like ‘the hood’ where I like to train because nobody bothers me! These old, bubsy dudes will come by and be like “That was awesome!” They’ll come over and be like “Oh, when I was younger, I would do that!” Like “Alright! Yeah man!” “Do that again, man! Do that again!” That’s so great! You go to like nice areas, and these ladies come by and are like “What is he doing?” They start staring at
you and they may mutter something. They may not say anything, but they’ll not say anything and call the police on you! Or they’ll come by and be like “You can’t be doing that!” and you’re like “Why?” “Well it’s not safe!” “I’m perfectly safe! I know what I’m doing, I’ve been training this for years. I’m an instructor. I know what I’m doing. It wouldn’t be safe for you to do it! You’d break your hip! But I’m okay!” But they can’t handle that! So yeah, it’s weird, but culturally, I think it’s for cultural reasons and for architectural reasons maybe, I stay away from areas that would be a really good training spot physically because of reasons like that. Yeah, I like to pick grungy spots, and I like to pick spots that are close to me. One thing I really like in Akron is being able to run from my house. This is a great warm-up! I go out my door and I run to a spot, it’s like a mile away, and take a jog there. By the time I get there, I’m warmed up! I’m ready to go and I can start doing stuff! My muscles are all warm and I’m ready to start training. I really like that, so I’ll pick spots that are maybe not that amazing because of proximity. And then I will pick spots for specific things. My database also includes my spot where I want to do my double side, and the really good double kong spot, and the same height kong pre that I found, and that one dive kong I’ve been doing, and the spot where I want to do the stride with the rudy, and that one cat leap I’m thinking about, and that one other cat leap I already did. So I will also think “Eh, what kind of day is today? Do I want to do this?” Then I’ll pick a spot that fits that. Me: So what objects or conditions do you look for in order to do those types of moves? Andrew: Walls, number one, walls. Got to pay attention to if it’s a cement wall or brick wall. Is it painted? Is the brick painted red? Is it painted cement? What kind of cement is it? Is it rough cement? Some of these cements have a kind of dust on them on the outside which makes them terrible. Some cement has a lot of sand in it, really sandy. Some is textured intentionally, which is beautiful! I love those people, whoever they are, I love you! Some are really, really smooth,
which is terrible. Fencing, railings, what kind are they? How well are they attached? How close are they to the ground? How close are they to each other? I’m looking for distances in-between objects. It’s not just the object. It is very much as much about the distance it is from any other object. Absolutely about distances. I’m always calculating, and in my head with this database that I have, I’m also thinking about distances. All those spots would not be the spot they are if they were not the exact distances. Like precisions, I have different precisions in my head, and I know the biggest one in the area. I can name you immediately, right now, the biggest pre I’ve done and exactly how far it is. And it’s literally that, because it’s a matter of inches, which, ironically, the biggest one I’ve done in the area is because, it would be shorter by a couple inches and it would not be the biggest one, except that one of the two walls is failing. It’s a short brick wall in a flowerbed and it’s falling outwards so it’s actually bigger because the one wall is kinked out. Yeah, I’m also looking for structural safety. There are some spots in Akron that would be beautiful except that they are either made with the wrong materials or that they’re not safe or not structurally sound, and it really sucks when you find those spots. You get so excited for a minute, and then you’re like “Dang it, I’ll die if I try to do this. This railing is literally wobbling around. This stuff is slippery and this wall is crumbling apart.” So I look for walls, railings, bars, oh, if you find a bar, that’s just heaven! Bars are hard to find! With the architecture in this area, bars are rare. So bars, and I also look for trees. Always interesting to find a tree intertwined with something. Trees, rocks, very interesting if you can find a rock that combines with something else. Again, it’s all about distance! A rock on its own, what are you going to do with that? It depends how big it is. You can do flow stuff, work on things on or over or around it. If it’s a certain type or angle, you can do flips off of it, or jump off of it and certain things like that. I’ve gotten more and more into climbing, so I also do enjoy cracks. I’ll be looking for
cracks or crevices. Any kind of blemish or imperfection, interestingly enough, and that goes back, I think, to why I like gritty areas, I like things that are not put together because part of why certain spots in Akron, or areas in Akron, are terrible is because, some new buildings, they build a new building and you’re like “I can’t wait to see what architecture they put in there, maybe they’ll put in something cool!” New buildings are often really sleek. Everything is slippery. There aren’t any cracks or crevices, nothing to get a grip on, literally or metaphorically! You can’t catch a break at all on some stuff! So I’m looking for imperfections sometimes, or blemishes. Also, random objects, sometimes they’re unanticipated, but those are like the coolest lines! Whether it be a light fixture, or a light pole, or a table, or a bench, or a little flowerpot, or a little bolt in the wall, or a hook, or a little lip or edge, or anything. I look for all of those things.

Me: Cool! So can you describe, physically, mentally, spiritually, how you feel when you’re staring down a movement that you are about to do, how you feel while you’re in the flow state doing the move, and how you feel after you’ve completed the move successfully?

Andrew: Before, there are various stages of before. Kie Willis, I don’t know if you’ve seen the video he posted, it’s really difficult. It’s a huge catpass pre at IMAX. Huge! It’s disgusting! He was the first guy in the world to ever do it, one of the first to stick it. He was just a kid, a 16 year old kid! It was disgusting! He posted the video of it, and it blew everyone’s minds. It’s insane! It’s like a joke! It’s like when, you know, you’re out training and you make a joke like “Dude, haha, what about this pre to a double front out?” Literally it’s one of those, but he actually did it! And what’s so cool about parkour is, he described it, he’s been training that spot for years with Phil Doyle, and they literally joked about it, like “Dude, haha, what if we did this?” And it’s so cool to see him do that! It is so inspirational because I have seen that! I’ve had spots where something was a joke, and years later, I’m now able to do what I thought was a joke, on a small
scale, you know. But he took it to a huge level! Anyways, he made a video of behind the scenes of him doing it, and it is a very mental jump. It has huge consequences, on both sides! He can’t overshoot too much and he can’t undershoot. To overshoot could result in an ankle injury, to undershoot, that’s a huge drop. So he talked about how he did it, and it was really interesting. But in any case, what I do is, the initial stage is just looking at the jump, whatever it is, and figuring it out. What’s the distance? How big is it? Is it big for me or not? You know, figuring out exactly what you’re up against. And that may be exploratory. That may have happened years ago. Some things, I scoped it out a long time ago, and I’ve known for a long time how big it is, thinking “I can’t do it yet. I can’t do it yet. Okay, I think I can now.” Or it could be that I come to spot I’m training in, just walk up on things that are immediately like “I wonder if I could?” and you start to assess it. So first you make the calculation, and my goal is that if it’s not big for me, then it shouldn’t be scary for me, and just outright pretty much do it. But I think you’re asking about something scary.

Me: Yeah!

Andrew: Or pushing myself. With that, I still assess it, I try to figure it out if it’s within my ability, and there comes a point of decision, which is kind of a gut thing to the extent of either ‘yes it is’ or ‘no it isn’t’ within my abilities. More and more for me, in a way it’s more gut, and in a way it’s less gut. It’s less gut in that more and more training has gone into the decision that I’m making. Years of training have gone into me deciding whether or not I’m capable of it. But the experience of it is still very much like a gut feeling, because even though the training has gone into it, the training all leads up to that moment to where you look at it, and you’re like “Yes” or “No”, “I can do that” or “No I can’t”. And if I get it in my head that I can, then it starts a process. And my brother always talks about this with me because he has a good mental game,
and he always talks about how he’s scared. He’s scared that one day he’s going to get it in his head, he’s going to have that moment where he looks at something and assesses it, and he’s going to get it in his head that he can when actually he can’t. He said he’s terrified of that, because then he knows he’s going to fall off a roof. He’s going to follow the steps and he’s going to go through and he’s going to try for it. So it is really critical, that first decision point of “Can I do this or not?” It is important later on to have a safety net, like a back door, a safety release! But if I decide “Okay, I seriously think I can do this”, then you start prepping to go for it, and that’s when you do some warmups. Maybe you try to do some similar movement to make sure that you’re ready for that so it’s not just like a cold catpass or something. Do some other ones, smaller, to make sure that you’re feeling the push. If it’s a jump, do some other jumps, or some precisions, or do something else precision-wise to make sure you’re kind of on that day. And it’s good to have trained, to have warmed up and trained, to know how mentally on you are, because sometimes you’re physically able to do something, but mentally not at that point, because maybe you’re having an off day. You’re not hitting things the way you should be, and then you need to know to walk away. But yeah, you get warmed up for it, whatever it is, and then I start looking at it and I start figuring out my steps into it, how much speed I need into it, and I start thinking about the real mechanics of it. Then you start digging in to “Alright, I’m literally going to go for this, how am I going to go for it?” You do whatever steps and think whatever steps you need to, and then all that leads up to the point where you’re standing back for the run up and you’re looking at it. You’ve done all the groundwork, and now nothing stands between you and doing it except for the decision to go. Everything is prepared. And that is where I want to be really calm. This has been an evolution for me, because I used to not do a lot of that legwork. I did it differently at times and I would do some of that legwork of figuring things out and knowing all
that, prepping, but I’d get to that point where I had to make the decision to go, and I’d amp myself up. “Okay, okay, you’re going to go for this! You’re going to go for this! Yeahhhh! Dude I’m going to go for this! Dude film me! Dude, dude, do you think I can do it? I think I can do it! Okay, I’m just going to go for it!” I would do that, and then I would do a back tuck to try and get myself excited or do something to get my heart going, to get my adrenaline up or something, and then try and chuck for it. And that does not lead to good technique. If my adrenaline’s going, I have bad technique, or more likely I’m going to have bad technique. I’m going to have less control. Dylan Baker said some really good stuff about this, and he’s kind of the king of this stuff, and again, I’d love to talk to him about it. You want your heartrate down. Kie Willis, in that prep video I was talking about, he said he takes his pulse to know whether or not he should do a jump. He has a cutoff. If it’s above a certain rate, he walks away. That’s his rule for himself. I haven’t taken it to that point! Maybe I should. I’d like to know myself that well. But I do try and assess “How am I feeling right now? Am I shaky? Do I feel adrenaline going through my extremities? Can I feel it in my fingers? Am I warmed up?” All these things, and then you’re like “Okay, I’m going to walk up.” I often turn away now, and I picture it. I’m not looking at it, I’m looking away and I’m picturing it. And all of this last bit hopefully happens really fast, that’s my goal. More and more recently, I’ve been able to do this. Do all that prep stuff, that may take a little while, but often if I’m with people, they may not know that I’m doing that prep stuff. I’m scoping stuff and kind of doing some things, and in my head, I’m prepping for this jump I spotted earlier, and I’m just kind of working my way up to it. So sometimes, people that are with me may have the experience that they think I did something really fast because, to all their knowledge, they may not have known the prep work that was going on before, and then I may walk up and be like “Dude, can you film me? I’m going to do this.” And it depends on how big it
is. If it’s a small thing, I may actually literally be going at it pretty fast because I know that I’m going to be okay and I know that I don’t have to do very much prep because I’m already ready. Yeah, but with something big, all of that happens, and then hopefully, I’m standing there, I’m like “Okay I’m going to do this.” I close my eyes, I picture what it’s going to be like, and I try to do it first-person in my head. I used to do it in third-person. The guys from Parkour Origins up in Canada, and they do weekly vlogs about this, and they were talking about how they view a spot. One of them is a photographer, and he said “Oh, I always view it letterboxed! I’m always viewing it from a camera” which is interesting, because I kind of look at things sometimes like that too. When I’m trying to go for a jump, I close my eyes and I try and watch myself do it in first-person, so I see exactly what I would see. My hands out in front of me, I don’t necessarily see my legs if they’re behind me. If I have to reach out, I see myself reach out in front of me, and I try to picture doing it perfectly and nailing it. Sometimes I’ll stand there wrestling with myself. This happens more with flips. But I’ll have trouble seeing it in my head, or I’ll not land it, and I’ll play it over and over again until I do it right in my head. And then when it feels right, it clicks. It’s like “Yes! I did it!” and I open my eyes, I take a deep breath, and I go. That’s usually what it is. And in that moment, there’s a calmness or like an acceptance. Up until that point, things can be a little tense, and that is the final decision, when I see it and I know that I will do it. It’s like a prescience in a way, like seeing into the future. It’s weird because when I first started training, I used to experience this in kind of a different way but I still had it, like a click almost. It’s a very sharp snap in your brain from between when you’re assessing a jump and when you decide that you not just can, but you will do it. And that’s even more of what my brother was talking about that scares him, because if you’re standing on the edge of a jump, and if your brain gets to the point where it starts doing this to you, and you’re standing on the edge of a jump, you
need to trust your brain! This is why it’s so important to train, because your brain needs to know what it’s doing, because it will make a decision! Depending on what kind of personality you are and how confident you are in yourself, like my brother is very self-confident, he could kill himself, because if his brain says he can do it, he’s going to do it. If he’s standing on the edge of a jump, no matter how disgusting it is, and if he stands there and the click happens in his brain, he’ll do it. So sometimes you’ll look at a jump, especially a standing jump where you don’t have to do a run up, run ups are different, run ups change things, run ups you have time to bail or time to get messed up. Between when you start running, you need to make sure, you shouldn’t have to, but if you’re not in the right mental state from where you start running to when you get to the object, you can lose it and have to stop because you lost your click. But when you’re at a standing jump, your toes are over the edge, and you’re looking at it and you’re in position, and you’re looking at it and you’re brain is kind of arguing. You may lean forward a little bit, or back, to look at it from a different angle, something about the angle with your eyes, and then suddenly your brain just clicks and it either says yes or no. If it’s no, you walk away. If it says yes, it’s like “Okay!” and you just lean in and you go, and it happens! So that moment is almost seeing into the future, because it hasn’t happened yet, but there is a deep certainty that it will within seconds!

Me: Right!

Andrew: You can miss that moment. It can happen, and if you don’t take it, then it doesn’t happen and usually you may not be able to do it after that if you don’t take the chance when it comes. But yeah, with a running jump, that moment happens before you start running, and it has to happen before you start the run on something big. Before you start your run up, you have to have already decided that you’re going to do it. Then, I guess the run is like a flow state. It’s
very, sort of, filled with acceptance. The jump has not yet happened, but it has already happened. Because the click has already happened, your brain and your mind and your heart and your body have already all accepted the inevitability of the jump, that you will and you must follow through. And so then, it’s kind of calm, and that’s what it should be, hopefully, is really calm on your run up. “Okay, I played it in my head. I know what it’s going to look like and I know what it’s going to feel like, and now I just ride it out.” And you just accept it, and you’re calm and you hear your breath and you’re moving and it’s smooth and floaty, and you just want to feel power. You want to feel a swell and a push of the right amount of power. It’ll feel really good if it’s just the right amount. If it’s really big, then maybe it’s your full power, giving just everything! Or if it’s a really technical thing, it may feel like a push up to the right point, like push right up to a line, and right there is where you want your power. You push that and you run, and then as you do the movement or whatever it is, the jump or the kong or whatever, it’s just fun because it’s already happening! You don’t necessarily have to feel scared. Now things can happen in midair or something goes wrong when you’re doing it and then that can get really terrifying, but often not. It depends. You can think you’re going to die in midair. That happens. Sometimes something goes wrong but you don’t get that scared and you’re just like “Oh well. Too late already” and for some reason it’s kind of okay. Sometimes something can happen where you think “I’m about to die” in midair, and you kind of get a chance to think about that. But yeah, it should be really serene, and if you’ve done all your prep work right, and your brain is on and your body is on, and everything is working the way it’s supposed to be, the run and the movement and everything up to the completion of the execution is just a float. It’s all very smooth and calm, and you just move and you’re there. Also, it’s kind of like you’re in a tunnel and everything goes really quiet. I’m not looking at anything else. You’re not necessarily looking
ahead. You’re very focused, but like in the moment of where you are. This is something that took me a while to learn that I’m still learning. Something that Daniel Ilabaca said to me while I was training with him that really challenged me was that I was having difficulty with some of the movements because I was looking ahead to the obstacle and my tunnel vision was like a telescope. I was looking at my destination and I was ignoring the steps that it would take me to get there, and then not executing the move properly. So my run up was like a mess, I’m stutter stepping or whatever, and I’m not putting the power and everything into it. So he said “Take each step as it comes. Execute each step perfectly, but only the one you’re doing now. Don’t try and think ahead to doing the next one perfectly, do the one right now.” And that’s literally each step after step. That is why I think, part of why, there’s this feeling of calmness and flow, because even though you’ve accepted the end result, you’re not looking at it. Each step comes and you take it and you do each step perfectly if you can, but like I said, with the right amount of power and everything. You feel it build so that when you get to the point where you’re actually doing the movement that you’re running into, you have already built everything up. It’s like a ramp. You ramp up to it and then it’s just float. So you go through that tunnel and it’s all calm and floating. When you land, then there can be kind of like a roar as you become aware of what’s going on around you afterwards, depending on the setting. There may be people cheering you on or whatever. Or if it’s by yourself, it’s just kind of like you come out of a tunnel and there’s a bright light and you’re like “Oh!” You kind of look around, and depending on how big it was or whatever, you may be like super stoked! And that is the joy. The joy of that moment is one of the best, because everything built up! And it’s not just your preparation that day, and it’s not just overcoming your fear of it, it’s also all your years of training up to that. It’s kind of like in a way, you feel like your whole life led to that moment sort of, like everything was preparing for that
moment of execution where you became, and you worked, and you trained, and you built, and you were changed to be the person that, in that moment, was able to do that thing. And that is a great feeling of success, but more than that, of joy and purpose in being! Everything that I built up to came to this moment and I have fulfilled it! I have become this person. A minute ago, I was not this person that could do this, yet, and now I have become that person. So, like I was saying about movement earlier, there’s a movement there. It’s like you’ve changed as a person because of the jump you just did, and you’ve now become a different person. You’ve transformed. And so that’s why you constantly chase that next one, is because it’s movement! You’re changing, you’re becoming, you’re growing as a person each time as you land it. So there’s a really great feeling! I love it! Oh, it’s great to get it yourself! It’s almost equally good to get it through someone else you’re teaching or someone else you’re training with. It’s awesome to see somebody land something! You almost just get it by osmosis or by association! Like “Yes! You did it!” I really enjoy that too.

Me: Cool! So we kind of already talked about this but are there any other ways that you didn’t mention that parkour has affected you physically, mentally, or spiritually?

Andrew: Yeah I talked about that a lot didn’t I? Let’s see. Yeah I didn’t talk about fear. Oh I didn’t talk about a lot of stuff actually. I talked about my relationship with it. But yeah, it has affected me. Well hey, I just said it! Every time you land something, it changes you, and I think that starting small, and every training day from when I started until now, has helped to change and build me into the person I am. It has completely transformed me. I am so much a different person than I was, and than I assume I would be, without having trained, without having done parkour. So one of the biggest things is fear. What I just described, I didn’t describe it really this way, but to another person, it could have been a really intense experience of facing fear. And I
just described it as kind of a really joyful and beautiful kind of thing to be able to go through. And that’s what you want it to be, but sometimes, sometimes it’s a battle, like when you’re facing a jump and you’re scared, you can’t overcome your fear. My current thinking is more and more that maybe if you’re not able to overcome your fear in that moment, then you should walk away, because you should have trained in such a way that you’re not that scared in that moment. That’s where I find myself at now, more and more. And I don’t know fully because I’m not the best. Some guys are. Like Dylan Baker is one of the best, physically and also mentally! He’s done some crazy stuff! Like I don’t know if you’ve seen the Manhood video, his fail. Catpass cat leap from the wall of a parking deck, top story of a parking deck wall across a gap with a five or six story drop under him, to catch a wall, and he hit his knee on the kong. It’s like literally the worst case scenario that you think about and dread and you think “Oh, if that happens, I will die.” That happened to him. He was going for this and he hit his knee on the wall as he konged, hit his knee, flailing through the air six stories up, and caught, full extension, caught his hands on top of the other wall and body slammed the other wall and hung on and pulled himself up. Me: Sketchy.

Andrew: Literally, people filming it were like “He’s dying, he’s going to die.” He thought he was going to die. Everyone thought he was going to die. So people push past their fear, and some people are good at it. And maybe, I don’t know, it’s hard for me to remember, but when you’re just starting, maybe you do have to do that, because you don’t have any way to get around it. And it depends on the person. Like some people are more fearful and I think they need to be able to push. Some people are less and they maybe need to not push as much. If they’re afraid, then maybe they should walk away because, you know, they’re not ready for it. But there is an importance in knowing the difference between fear and readiness, although they’re connected,
because fear is a natural response that you need. You need fear to keep you from things, from killing yourself!

Me: Yeah!

Andrew: But yeah, I was a really scared person. I told you, as a kid, when I wanted to do a backflip, I spent probably like thirty minutes standing there shaking trying to get my body to do it and I couldn’t do it. And that was really frustrating to know that “I think I can physically do this, why can’t I make myself?”

Me: Right.

Andrew: That’s the wall you hit. And I had that, and I had an experience. I read all these books as a kid. I was a huge nerd, and I’d read, read, read. I was always reading these books of adventures of these knights and, I don’t know, heroes and stuff doing these great and brave things, and I was like “I want to be one of them.” But then, I would just sit and read. I wouldn’t go out and do anything. I’d just read about it. And I had this moment when I was a kid, or maybe a teenager, I don’t know. It was Christmas day, and there was a wreath on the table, and it was old so it was pretty dried out, and there were candles in the wreath, and the candle burned all the way down and it caught on fire!

Me: Uhoh!

Andrew: And we were sitting out opening presents, and then someone, I walked into the dining room, and then someone yelled fire and I looked and it was catching the table on fire. And I was standing like three feet away, and I just like, you hear fire, I was hit by sheer terror! I had been at my friend’s house when our friend’s house caught on fire and their house burned down and we ran out of the house and watched the house burn down.

Me: Wow!
Andrew: So I had some experiences with that and so I knew, and my heart just dropped and just raw fear hit me, like cold fear. And I was just frozen staring at this flame, and I was standing right there, and I just didn’t do anything. I was just paralyzed. And I didn’t realize but everyone was kind of screaming “Andrew! Grab the water and put it out!” There was a water pitcher right there. And my sister came running from the other room and grabbed I think a thing of orange juice and poured it over it and put it out. And then I kind of came to, and I was horrified! That was it! That was my moment! I’m like a coward! I’m afraid! I didn’t do it! I did nothing! There was the crisis before me to save my family, the house was going to burn down, and I couldn’t move! I started freaking out about it. I’d lay awake at night in my bed thinking “I’m afraid, why am I afraid? I’m going to be a failure in life because a moment is going to come where my brother is out in the street or something and trips and he’s about to get hit by a car and I’m watching it happen, and I could dive out and save him but I won’t because I’ll be frozen by fear!” And I was so upset. I played these scenarios in my head, you know? My dad is a pretty fearful or timid person. I was kind of raised that way to think like “Always be really careful, and ooh don’t do that!” That’s why my brother got in so much trouble because he wasn’t, he would just do stuff, and my dad would be like “What are you doing?! You’re going to kill yourself!” Anyways, so yeah I was afraid and I knew it, and I was upset. “I’m not going to be the hero. I’m going to be the coward in the story who didn’t do anything who should have.” And that deeply upset me. I was really upset about that! And I didn’t have a solution to it. I was like “I don’t know what to do. I don’t know how to fix it, because it’s out of my control. I froze. It wasn’t like I chose to not do anything. I just froze up and didn’t do anything.”

Me: Yeah, you just couldn’t.
Andrew: And then yeah, I was trying to do this backflip and I froze up, and I was like “Why am I freezing up?” So all that to say that parkour changed my life from that! I can now confidently say that I know how I will respond in the face of fear, because I do it regularly. And I have now had situations in my life where intense stuff happened, and I looked at death in the face and I said “Okay.” And I know now that I don’t have that fear anymore. I’m not afraid that I won’t do anything. I’m afraid that I may do the wrong thing, or may make the wrong choice or regret what I did, but I’m no longer concerned that I’ll be paralyzed. That knowledge I think is one hundred percent because of parkour, because of movement. So this gets back to what I was saying earlier. Being stagnant is death. Being frozen is death. Not moving is death. I was afraid, and therefore I didn’t move, and movement has overcome fear for me, and I didn’t do it by just muscling through. I didn’t do it by just somehow managing to unfreeze myself, because I couldn’t! It was like a gut thing. It was beyond my control. I did it by training. I started training. I started doing little things. It was the little jumps that I was scared of but I wasn’t so scared that I was paralyzed. I was just scared, and I overcame that fear, and that ability to learn to overcome that fear then taught me to then start to overcome a little bit larger fears, and a little bit larger fears. And I started to gain this relationship with fear where it wasn’t like this monster that I had no control over that would just come out of nowhere and just paralyze me. It was now, it was my friend and my enemy that I knew, I battled it every day. I knew it and we kind of had a relationship. And I would constantly go out to train and I would be like “Okay, I’m going to face a fear today, but it’s a little one, and I can work my way through it.” And yeah, I started to be able to move and I was no longer paralyzed! I could move! And that changed my life. It transformed my life, not just movement in that way, but movement in other ways. I also was a person who was paralyzed in general, like in decision-making and what I wanted to do with my
life. I was trying to decide about going to college and I didn’t know and I wanted someone to make the decision for me because I was paralyzed. I had thoughts. It wasn’t that I didn’t have thoughts, but when it came down to it, I just didn’t do anything! I didn’t apply to schools. I didn’t make phone calls. I didn’t put in applications. I just froze. I was just paralyzed. And parkour, I think, helped me then to start doing things in my life. I think, in a way, the answer to fear is movement. I have learned that if I just freeze, if I don’t know what to do in life or in a situation, not acting doesn’t help. Just freezing and thinking “Oh no! Oh no! I have to make the right choice here! I don’t know what to do! Do I do this or that? I don’t know!” Non-action doesn’t help. I’ve learned, I think, from parkour to just move, to move forward, to do something, and something will follow that. Something else will follow, and then the next thing, and then the next. You don’t have to look ahead to the obstacle. You just take the step before you. That really changed me. Then I went to the Middle East and had some experiences there. I had a day where I thought someone was going to kill me.

Me: Oh crap!

Andrew: Yeah I met this guy, and it’s kind of a long story, it’s crazy, but it was really intense. It was a really intense situation where I was told “Oh, this guy wants to kill you” in the Middle East. I faced that and I had another time, two different times with the military, one in Egypt in the desert and had this facedown with this whole station of guys with a tank and a machine gun and everything, and I was taken out of the bus I was in and taken in and interrogated kind of. Another time when I was training parkour actually, and I didn’t know I was on the military land, and they freaked out and arrested us and took us into this compound and I had to meet with this general and they were grilling us trying to figure out who we were. They said we were spies because we had this camera and we were filming. And yeah, really intense stuff, and I wasn’t
scared the way I used to be, because, I don’t know, it’s each obstacle as it comes. You just face it. So yeah, in a way, parkour changed my life and parkour kind of saved my life in that sense. I was worried and afraid that I was going to fail in life sort of, purely because of being unable to move. And yeah, parkour taught me that.

Me: Cool! That’s a crazy story!

Andrew: Yeah! I’ve got some stories!

Me: So, how have other parkour runners typically responded to seeing you execute movements?

Andrew: Encouragement. Yeah. Overwhelming encouragement! That’s the community! That’s the vibe. That’s everyone. And like I said, second best to executing something yourself and that feeling at the end is watching someone else do it! It’s great! Everybody encourages everybody else, everybody is cheering for everybody else on a whole. You know, there may be exceptions to that, but on a whole that’s how it is.

Me: Yeah.

Andrew: And that’s the community that’s grown. You train with someone who’s brand new and they may come to it with a different approach. There may be people that aren’t really in the community. I’ve trained with some people who weren’t part of the parkour community, they don’t know other people, they don’t train with other people really, they don’t know videos, they haven’t delved in like I have, sort of. And you go and train with them, and I wouldn’t call them traceurs. They’re not part of the community, and they would have a different vibe. They might be critical or they might be purely about showing off or one-upping. Like you do something, they have to do something better to beat you. Don’t get me wrong, there is competitiveness in the parkour community but not in a negative way like that. I have experienced a little bit of that, but I would say it’s not from other traceurs. But yeah, it’s really positive and encouraging. People
will cheer! Sometimes you even feel awesome, not just because you got your thing. But like I was in Phoenix recently for the parkour jam, and I got there, met all these people, and I was one of the more experienced people at the jam. I mean like I said, I’ve been training seven or eight years, I don’t know. A lot of the people were fairly newer to the sport, different training levels, all kind of different training levels. It was really cool, like the whole spread from like really new to like pretty experienced. But I was going for a couple things that were pretty fun. Like one was a really cool challenge, and everyone else was pretty scared to do it, so I was like the only person, but then everyone just kind of stopped training and all started cheering for me! Like the whole jam! So by the time I did it, the whole jam was cheering for me! And that was really cool! It was a really encouraging experience! Everyone was like “Come on Andrew!” and everyone like knew my name then after that because everyone was cheering for me so everyone kept hearing my name, so then the rest of the jam, I kept trying to meet people and they already knew my name! Like “Oh! Hey Andrew!” “Wait, who are you? Hey! What’s your name?” But yeah, people are really encouraging!

Me: Cool! So how have you noticed non-parkour runners, like bystanders, typically respond to seeing you do parkour?

Andrew: Ugh. “Do a backflip!”

Me: That’s a classic.

Andrew: Everyone says it, you know it. You’ve heard it. Yeah people respond with fear, like I said earlier, especially older people, but older as in an adult, people will be really opinionated. Even young adults will just really think they know. I don’t know if it’s a cultural thing, I think. We’re talking about in America. It’s different in different countries for sure.

Me: Yeah.
Andrew: And it’s different in different communities in America. Like I said, I train in the hood. People in the hood are chill! People are encouraging in the hood. People may yell “You’re going to hurt yourself! You’re going to kill yourself!” People will yell that, but they don’t get angry at you, and they don’t tell you not to, they just tell you that you’re being stupid, which I don’t mind. That’s their opinion. They’re fine to say that. Actually I think that’s great that they think that. But yeah people in those areas will often be really encouraging! In the wealthier areas, people like to tell you what to do, and they’ll tell you that you can’t do that. And you ask them why and they don’t have a reason, they just say that you can’t. “Well you can’t. It’s wrong.” People say “Get down from there!” People say “That’s not safe!” They love to say “That’s not safe!” And they say it almost like they’re not looking out for you, it’s just like anger! They’re like “You’re not safe and that hurts me somehow” which is really weird. It’s not like “Oh my goodness that’s not safe! I want to make sure you’re okay!” It’s usually like “Hey! That’s not safe!” and you’re like “Okay.” “That’s not safe! You have to stop!” “No I don’t.” And they somehow feel like, for them, you have to stop for them because you’re unsafe. I don’t know. It’s really weird. It’s like a really cultural thing. We have a sense of entitlement or I don’t know what it is. We have to somehow make sure that other people are following what we want.

Me: Right, obeying the law.

Andrew: Yeah. People also just say, it depends where you are, parks, playgrounds, you have to be careful. Parents can get upset. Parents can be super cool. I’ve had some parents get really excited and be like “What are you doing?! My son really wants to do that! Can you teach him?” And then sometimes some parents get really angry and they’re like “Why are you in a park? This is for children!” I’ve had dads get mad at me for being in a park, and get really pissed and say “Oh, this is for kids. You’re not a kid, get out of here.” I don’t know. People also respond really
flippantly. Sometimes you’ll see, and this is really funny when it happens in a group, a group will walk past, and you hear a muttering “Oh, did you see that?! Wait, wait, watch this!” And someone in the group gets really excited about it! You can tell that they’re like “He’s a ninja!” And then it’s funny if someone in the group ‘knows’ what parkour is. They’ll like, as soon as it happens, they’re like “Oh, no, no, I know what that is, that’s parkour.” It’s like dismissive. The one person is excited! They don’t know what it is, but they’re like “Dude that’s sweet!” And then another person, who ‘knows’ what it is, is like “No, no, no, that’s just parkour, that’s parkour. Oh I know what that is.” And it’s weird because they get some kind of delight, or they feel important, almost as if by just knowing what it is, then they somehow get to be cool for knowing it. It’s almost like they’re doing it because they know what it is. They’re like “Oh, that’s parkour, it’s just parkour. Yeah it’s like jumping around and getting from A to B.” You’ll hear them like give a description! It’s all very interesting! And then they’ll mutter and walk away. Someone may yell “Hit a backflip!” or like “Oh, but can you do a backflip?” Or, more and more now, people will say something about American Ninja Warrior. I’ve had people come up and tell me I should do it. Like lots of people do that. I had a police officer come and tell me I should do American Ninja Warrior. People also will be unimpressed! It is interesting how unimpressed people will be sometimes. Like you do one thing, and for a second they’re impressed, and then they want more. It’s like an instant gratification. Like they don’t want to do it themselves, and being impressed doesn’t lead to respect. I feel like people are so used to being impressed, and I don’t know if it’s the internet or videogames or what it is in our culture or whatever but I feel like they, for a second, they’re like “Woah, that was sick! Wait, do something better!” And then you do a jump and they’re like “Oh, wow. (unimpressed)” And then they’ll be like “Wait, can you do it bigger?” You do a backflip and they’re like “Do a double!” And it’s like “What!? Are
you not happy with my sacrifice?!” I don’t know, they get weird! The other thing people do is people will say “Oh, I could do that.” Or they’ll be like “Oh, I could do that if…” and they have an excuse. People will say “Oh, I’d do that when I was younger.” Lots of guys, if like an older guy, like older as in adult like 30’s, 40’s, maybe even 20’s, people in their 20’s say this and it drives me crazy, people in their 20’s, a guy with a girl, classic situation, and they see me do something, and the girl’s like “Woah! What was that?” and the guy’s like “Oh yeah, that’s parkour. I totally would do that. I used to do that stuff back when I was younger, but I’d throw my back out now.” People always make these physical excuses, like “Oh yeah I totally would have” or “I totally used to do that” or “I did that all the time, I used to jump around like that. I’d do all that stuff.” Or they’ll be like “I would totally do it but I can’t because of this…” you know?

Me: Yeah, I’ve heard that a lot too!

Andrew: Or people would be like “Oh, I’m too old to do that.” Or “I can’t because of this” or “because of that” or “I would.” Yeah, people make excuses for it all the time. It’s just sad. I always try to talk people into it like “No, you should just try it! I didn’t think I could do it when I started! I was terrified of a backflip! I dreamed that one day maybe I could do a backflip. Now I’m doing doubles! You just have to work your way into it.” But yeah, that’s what you hear.

Me: So how do police typically respond to seeing you perform parkour movements?

Andrew: Negatively. Overarchingly negative, with some positive experiences. I said that one cop asked me, I was training in the police parking deck in Akron, and I was feeling bold that day. I don’t know why. It was snowy and cold and outside it was icy and I couldn’t train outside, and it was an indoor place because it was in this parking deck. Many cops came by, and two different cops talked to me. One was a little skeptical, but he said it was alright, and another one got
excited and told me I should go on American Ninja Warrior. That was one positive cop experience. I think I’ve had like three positive cop experiences, and I literally cannot count the number of negative ones I’ve had. I tried to count one time and it’s ridiculous, like a lot of negative ones. You get kicked out of different places. You get the cops called on you by people. People will just call for whatever reason, I don’t even know what. I’ve been searched, patted down, they think I have drugs, I’ve been thrown up against a wall and searched, I’ve been freaked out on, I’ve been chased, I’ve had cruisers come in from all directions with guns and dogs and tasers. I got arrested for being on a roof. Yeah they generally respond by saying “You can’t do that”, whatever it is, and then if you try and have a conversation and ask why, I think it usually becomes an authority issue for them and they just need you to back down. You cannot, I cannot set up a situation where I try to prove them wrong. I have to set it up purely as an inquiry or a discussion where “Of course you’re right, but I’m just curious to talk about this and of course I’m going to go away and of course I’ll do whatever you say sir, but why can I not be on that wall?” And, you know, when you really break it down, they’ll be like “You can’t be up on a wall.” “Why not?” “Well it’s not for that.” “Well these benches, I can be on this bench, right?” “That’s okay.” “How high is not okay? Can I stand on a curb? Okay, well a curb is only three inches but what if it’s four inches?” “That’s fine. Obviously four inches, that’s silly!” “Oh well this little wall is only like a foot.” “Well oh yeah sure you can be on that.” “Well what about two feet?” You know, you have to be careful not to be belligerent, but it’s a logical progression to make a point which is that there’s no law against this because it’s not illegal, but it strikes them as illegal somehow. They’re like “It’s not okay.”

Me: Haha yeah so when is it not okay?
Andrew: I had to do a probation class after I got arrested and everything and this probation officer, it was a cognitive restructuring class, which, if you think about that, it’s brainwashing. They’re trying to rewire your brain. Anyways, what they told me is that antisocial behavior is what they said I was doing, and that antisocial behavior, whether that is drugs, whether that is alcoholism, whether that is theft, whether that is being on a roof, or jumping apparently, that they’re not good for society and you need to stop, basically. That’s the most detailed answer I’ve gotten. Usually with police officers it’s just a very general excuse. Or they’ll bring up liability, that’s a big thing they bring up. “Oh well you’ll get sued, can’t be having people getting sued.” Oh also the appropriateness, “This isn’t the right place for that. Go to a park.” I’ll be like “Oh, but I’ve been kicked out of parks because then parents get upset and the police say you can’t train in this park. Go somewhere else.” You know, it’s a catch 22. So appropriateness, yeah, and then safety. “Oh you need to be safe and that’s not safe.” And then at the bottom line is just social pressure of “Well it’s just not right. It’s just not okay.” For no specific reason, it’s just ‘not okay’. So yeah, generally negative, but I always try and be really respectful, and like I said, I don’t try to say that they’re wrong. I try to just have a conversation and I try to help them understand better, because I hope the next time they run into someone doing parkour, they’ll have a little more of a positive response than they had with me.

Me: Yeah, a little more understanding. So what is your individual experience, what do you think and feel, when you’re watching somebody else do parkour?

Andrew: It depends. It all depends. It’s varying experiences. If it’s a friend, then yeah. If it’s my brother, my training partner, and I know him really well and I know his training. I’m very intimate with his movement. It’s like I know it, and I know how it’s going to look and what he’s capable of, so I get really excited if he does something that I know is stretching for him or
difficult, or like something he hasn’t done before, and I’m like “Woah! Woah!” You know, yeah. So yeah, if I know them well, it could be kind of like almost watching myself because I really know it. Someone I don’t know at all is very different. Then it’s like is it in a video or in person, that’s really different too. Video, I’m more focused on the aesthetic of it, thinking about how it looks. I do have an opinion, I always have an opinion about what I see. “I liked that” or “I didn’t like that” or “I thought that was really steezy and that was really smooth or really clean.” I was talking to you earlier about some people I watch, and even though they’re doing really difficult things, I don’t like their style or there’s something that I don’t enjoy about their movement as much and I don’t necessarily like watching. Some people I don’t really like to watch, maybe because I disagree with their philosophy. I think that what I mentioned earlier, about what Daniel Ilabaca said, is that you can see in someone’s movement, you can see their purpose. I think that’s very true, and there are some people I don’t like to watch because I feel like I see their motive or their purpose behind it and I don’t agree with it. I don’t think it’s good, or that there is no purpose to it, and they’re just moving without purpose. And then there are some people, even if it’s very simple things, it’s not high difficulty or it’s not really impressive per say, I love watching just because you can see the beauty in it! You see their purpose, and it’s just good! You know? Some people I like to watch because I think it’s beautiful. I have some people who, anytime they release a video, I immediate watch it. I cannot wait to see more!

Me: Bart van der Linden!

Andrew: What a guy! So yeah, in person, yeah, it’s definitely more about trying to be encouraging and cheer someone on, even if maybe I don’t agree with their movements per say. You know, it’s not like I would watch a video of them necessarily, but when I’m in person, I’m one hundred percent about cheering them on and being encouraging and supportive and help
them, whatever level they’re at. Whether they’re better than you or worse than you at whatever it is, and ‘better than you’ and ‘worse than you’ is subjective too because it’s all a spectrum and perspective. You might be better at this skill but they’re better at that skill or whatever. But yeah, no matter what level they’re at, cheer them on to something, to progress, to movement, to getting better.

Me: So do you ever document your parkour movements, and if so, how do you document them and where do you share them?

Andrew: Filming, baby! Oh yeah! Of course! That’s part of the community! That’s a huge part of the community! As I said, growing up in a bubble with just myself, I wasn’t in an area with other people. Well at first, I didn’t film for a long time, and that helped create the bubble. I wasn’t able to share. It’s a conversation. It’s a big way that the parkour community is a community, it’s through video! So people criticize, “Why are you filming yourself? That’s arrogant. You're just trying to show off! You’re just trying to film yourself looking good and post it so people think you’re cool.” And there’s a caution there. I think that can happen. I think, yeah, you need to be careful to make sure you are aware of “Is this about pride? Is this about showing off?” And if so, yeah, that’s corrupting your motive, like I talked about before. But mostly, I think hugely in the community, it’s not a pride thing. It’s a sharing in the community! It’s a way to move with a person on the other side of the world, or with people more broadly! It’s to share a video of your movement, and then somehow, even though you’re not physically present, you can still share and experience in that together. So as soon as I could get a camera, which my brothers and I saved up and bought a GoPro as soon as we could which was years ago but pretty early on, still we had been training for a while before we got it. But yeah, I got a GoPro but then my brother kind of really took over and he did most of the filming and editing,
and it wasn’t for a long time, many years later, that I got my own. He eventually got a really nice camera, a Canon T3I, and when he got that, then he was like “Oh, you can have the GoPro.” So then as soon as I got the GoPro, it was like a whole new world opened up for me because then I started trying to learn how to edit and learn how to film, so I had to learn and I didn’t know what I was doing at all. But I would take it out and I’d film, film, film, film, film, whatever I could. Lengthy, lengthy shots I’d take for stuff. But it really helped! I document to share with others, but I also document for myself, definitely to watch myself, to replay and analyze what I’m doing. And I film to show progression. It’s positive in many ways to film now and film a year from now, it’s awesome to see the difference! I love being able to have the old footage I do, because as much as I watch the old footage, I’ll be like “Ooh what am I doing?” It’s really great to see the progress! I wish I had more old footage! I wish I had been able to document sooner to see! It would be great to be able to see footage from that first day of training with my brothers jumping over a picnic table! I’d love to see that progression and change! But yeah, I film now, in some ways, just for the posterity of it; “I’m not going to share this with anyone. I’m just going to film this clip and save it so that a couple years from now, I can go back and watch it and see the changes.” Sometimes I’ll film a specific movement. I’ve been trying to do this more and film it when it’s bad, and then work on it and work on it and work on it, and then film it again and try to see the progress. It’s cool. But also, if I’m having trouble with a movement, I’ll film it and try and analyze it and break it down frame by frame and work out what I’m doing wrong or where it’s falling apart. “Where is the mistake?” But also there’s an artistic side to it. I definitely am, like I said, trying to get more into filming and trying to learn about filming and editing. I want to make beautiful videos because, I didn’t really talk about this, but watching other people is deeply inspiring to me. It’s what got me here! It’s what got me doing parkour in the first place. I would
not be doing parkour if I hadn’t been able to watch videos of other people doing it, and specifically people doing it in a way that just blew me away! “It’s so beautiful! I want to be able to do it like that!” So it’s huge that they took the time to make those videos. I am deeply appreciative! I owe a debt to them for filming themselves, interestingly enough! I am so thankful, and I don’t think they were being arrogant to do that. I think that I am just really appreciative! And in that same way, not that I am as good as them or that I am at that level, but in as much, in my own small way, I want to offer that as well. I don’t know that I’ll ever have that effect on anybody, but as much as I appreciate it from them, I feel like I owe it to attempt the same. That’s as far as just inspiration, but also as far as art. I do think movement is art in many ways. Our training is both a discipline and an art. It has been referred to as a sport, but especially when you film, it changes it into an art more and more, because you’re recording it and documenting it. Then you make it into an art form that then you can work with in the form of film. I like that! I enjoy that part of it, that artistic part, and I try to train movements, like I said, I work on them to try and make them look like what I think is more beautiful or more steezy, to, you know, have a certain aesthetic to them. I have been inspired by videos that I thought were beautiful, not just the movement, but the filming, the overall experience of watching it. So your previous question about how it feels to watch other people, I have one video specifically that I really like, I have many videos I like, I could name top videos for a long time, I’ve spent a lot of my life watching videos that have really inspired me, and I could name top ones for different reasons. Some of them are terrible quality, like you can barely tell what’s going on, but I like them because of the movement in them. Some of them are not just training videos, they’re more. They’re a piece of art in themselves! There may or may not be that much movement recorded in them per say, but for me, my favorite ones are where those two things come together, and it’s
both a beautiful piece of art and beautiful movement. And I can name my favorite video. It is the GUP video, ‘You Are Your Own War’ is the name of it. Pretty sure that’s it. The music is so good, it’s so good, and the opening shot, I freak out about this shot. I think it’s the most beautiful thing! It’s so good! He’s up on the roof at the Manpower Gap, the big roof gap, and he flows into it. It starts from black, fades in, and there’s no music for this opening sequence. It’s all just sound. They filmed and recorded the sound of his movements, so it’s grit, it’s ‘scratching’, the sound of gravel on his hands, the scraping and pushing of his show on the cement and the gravel and his breathing as he’s running and moving and his clothes swishing. The filming is very tight angles, so you can’t see the full movement so, from a purely documentation standpoint, I’m not actually seeing the extent of his movements. But it’s really close and it gives you a feeling, like you feel like you’re moving with him because it’s so tight on the camera that it’s like this movement is happening in the camera. It’s really close. You only see a portion of his body as he’s moving. And he does this jump and this move down, and then he slides down in and hops up to the edge of the Manpower Gap and hits the jump in a line, like boom, boom, up, float through the air, he’s like flying away from the camera and he hits it and then it cuts to the other side filmed from the bottom and he hits and rolls. And the gravel is like ‘pshhhhh’ and he gets up and he starts sprinting away and it follows him and he does a whole line. He jumps over the edge on the other side of that building down into a stairwell, drops, does a pre to a railing, drops down, turns around, drops again, and it cuts again, it does a couple more cuts, and he goes down the stairwell. It’s all one continuous line from way up top, and the big gap is in the middle of the line. And then at the bottom, he drops on the stairwell and opens this door, and it follows him and looks through the door as the metal door swings shut behind him, and it swings shut and
shuts with a bang, and as it shuts, it goes black! And then ‘GUP’ in white letters comes up and
the music starts! And you’re like “Oh my goodness!!”

Me: So good!

Andrew: As you can tell, I really like that clip! But anyways, yeah, to me, that right there is one
of the ways. If I could make a video that beautiful, it would be amazing! I want to be able to do
that, to be able to convey that experience, that emotional and physical experience of movement
through film in a way that a person sitting somewhere else on the other side of the world can feel
that with you! I think the goal for me of making a video like that, is to try and help someone else
experience the emotion that I’m feeling.

Me: Cool! I still have the video of my very first barrel roll!

Andrew: Oh yeah?!

Me: It was horrible!

Andrew: Nice! Got to keep it man!

Me: Right across my back! I got my sister and I was like “Hey could you film this? I want to see
what it looks like.” I was playing Assassin’s Creed and I was like “Let me go try this in the
family room!” I cleared the table out of the way and tried it and just kind of crashed on the
ground, tumbling around on the floor.

Andrew: That’s awesome man! Dude you have to cherish that clip!

Me: Yeah! Not deleting it!

Andrew: Yeah!

Me: So how do feel about the way in which parkour is often portrayed in the media, like on the
internet, in movies, or on television?
Andrew: Internet, movies, television, okay. Internet is all about views now. It’s about numbers so the more views, equals better. That’s like how it functions, and I think that’s tragic because the beautiful things, the good art, is lost in the numbers. Like that GUP video, it has a lot of views, but if you were to look at top view parkour videos, I’m sure it’s not even remotely close to some other videos that I could name which I would speak of pretty disparagingly. Honestly, top video, I actually heard this recently from the STS guys, Origins Parkour, they were talking about filming yourself. They were talking about top videos and he did a search, put in parkour and searched by number of views. The top videos from this year, Minecraft Parkour and Pokémon Parkour, which are both, I’m pretty sure, are both Devin Supertramp videos. Very well filmed, I mean he’s got insanely nice camera equipment, and he has cool ideas, but they’re not parkour videos. They’re not made by traceurs, not made for traceurs. They’re not about the movement. They are one hundred percent about the views. It’s like they’re prostituting themselves to whatever the public wants, which is taking two hot-button words and putting them together, Parkour and Minecraft. Oh my goodness, the views it will get! Millions. So they’re not good movement. The Pokémon one is actually a guy who’s really good but it’s like him and another guy, I don’t remember who the other guy is, and Ronnie Shalvis, Ronnie Streetstunts. The two of them are in onesie Pokémon outfits and they’re just running around doing flips and stuff. And then the other one that, overall, gets huge hits is Assassin’s Creed parkour video, Devin Supertramp again. He knows how to do it; he knows how to get the views. Those aren’t the beautiful pieces of parkour art; they’re purely the view-getters. Those are what are on the internet, but get the views and therefore get known, and get money and get respect and get success, and therefore get more. And it repeats itself. Things like that are, to me, kind of an offense to parkour because they’re not really it. They’re monetizing it. They’re a sellout. And
hey, you know, I’m not saying those guys aren’t good guys. I respect them. They got the opportunity, and it’s hard to say no. I’m not sure if I would say no if asked “Hey, do you want to make this video?” So I don’t think it’s their fault. It’s more that I’m frustrated that that’s what gets the views. I’m frustrated with the population as a whole. I’m frustrated with the internet for making those the more viewed, because the beautiful videos out there don’t get viewed. The ones that get viewed are what I said, those ones that just kind of use the words that are going to get clicks. Clickbait. And then there are Fail videos. I think the number one thing that people that don’t do parkour, don’t know what parkour is, what they have seen is Fail videos. Everybody has seen a parkour fail video, and that also really bothers me, because…there are so many reasons behind why that bothers me and there are so many layers to what I think is bad about it. It misrepresents what we do and misrepresents the community. It misrepresents the movement. In many ways, often most of the fails, a huge number of the fails aren’t by traceurs. It’s from some drunk guy who got wasted and is like “Bro, check it out! I’m going to like try and jump this gap! I’m going to jump from this balcony across to that one!” Just people doing stupid things. They haven’t trained, they haven’t done any of the things that we do to prepare or respect a jump. They just throw themselves at it. It just breeds that viewpoint, and it’s popular so it gets hits, and if you make a fail video, you get hits! So it’s hard not to give in to that. And it’s not that that’s bad either, and again, I wouldn’t rag on someone if they make a fail video because if it’s actually traceurs, I’ll watch a traceurs fail video. If it’s just a ‘whatever’ fail video, I won’t watch because you see horrible things, disgusting things. Horrible, horrible bails. Really brutal. Just people getting demolished, and I don’t want to watch that because it’s going to get into my head and it’s going to kind of freak me out. You know? I like watching bails from experienced traceurs because they’re very informative. They’re awesome to watch because usually, it might be a
horrible mess-up, but they’re okay because they bailed properly and they did it well and they absorbed the impact and they knew what to do and you can learn so much from watching fails like that and learning how to fail, how to fail well, how to mess up and be okay. But yeah, the internet is like mostly both of those and it sucks that that’s what gets the views. And then besides that, what becomes popular is like Jesse La Flair style whatever. There’s a population of young people out there that, per our culture, are looking for flash, they’re looking for show-off, and they’re looking for color. Literally his videos are, from a design perspective, painful to look at. They’re garish colors, like bright neon yellow and orange and pink and green, like literally neon spirals. I think his thumbnails for his videos are usually his face like “Woah!” and then it’s like “Webster Tutorial!” and it’s all in bright pink and neon green or something. It’s painful to look at! You’re scrolling and it’s like ‘AHH’ and it blows out at you. And then just the persona. My brother has met him and said he’s actually a chill guy, so I don’t know if it’s him that’s a turd or if it’s just the persona he puts off because he knows it’s successful. And if so, I guess it’s working for him but I don’t respect it, just this kind of cocky show-off kind of approach. It gets you huge views. He has been training for like four years or something, not that long. His jumps are not the biggest, his tech is not the best, his flips are not the biggest or the best, his power is not the biggest. In every category where you could categorically compare athletes and say who is better, by far he’s not up there that much. And my brother was talking to him and he literally said this. He was like “I’m not the best.” He comes up with weird things, like you could say creativity. He does come up with new things. But he is world-famous! He’s renowned, and it’s because people don’t know what the best is. You have to have been like me, you have to have spent years on the internet following people to know who’s out there, to know that Oleg Vorslav, who hasn’t put out a video of himself training in years, is still probably one of the world’s best
lache guys, hands down. Him and Jim Hogarth, those two guys literally put videos out almost never. The only people that know those guys are people that are in the community and really know. The millions of young teenagers who are getting into parkour never heard of those two guys and probably never will, because they don’t put out big flashy videos and they don’t do clickbait. Literally, neither of them has actually put out a video in a long time. Jim put out a video two years ago. Oleg has been like seven years. They’re two of the best guys in the world and yet no one is watching them. Jesse La Flair, he puts out what people want and he gets the views. They want a persona, they want fast pace, thing have to be quick, you have to keep the attention span. And guys like Ethan from Cincinnati, I think he taps into that. He’s a young guy. He wears bright colors. I think he knows what he’s doing to get views! He presents himself in a way. He’s got a fun personality so he does vlogs and people seem to like vlogs. I think that’s popular. He has vlogs where he talks to the camera and he’s like “What’s up guys! It’s Non-Stop Parkour!” And then he does moves that people want to see, you know?

Me: Right!

Andrew: And he’s really talented! He’s a really talented guy! He’s a beast! But I think he gets thousands of views. I know, now I sound like a grump for saying that since my videos get like sixty views. And I’m not saying I’m better than him. I think he’s a lot better than me in a lot of ways. He’s really talented and I think he’s going to get ridiculously good too I think. But, you know, I try really hard and I put a lot of work into a video and it doesn’t get views, and I’m kind of aware that there are things I could do that would intentionally get more views, but I’m being a stickler and I’m like “I’m not going to do that because I disagree with it.” I want to put out what I think is quality content, and if it doesn’t get the views then, you know, that’s okay. I’m not in it for the fame. I’m not in it to be known. I would like to be able to communicate through video
with people all around the world, so I’d like my video to be viewed in the way that I watch guys from Russia’s videos. I’d like to see each other’s videos so we can kind of communicate through that. I feel like I’m handicapped in that I don’t communicate because my video is just one of millions out there that people don’t watch necessarily. But anyways, that’s the internet. TV and movies, then it’s stunt work. It’s not true parkour, honestly, what you see on the screen.

Stuntmen have been doing things for years. Two people can do the same exact movement and one is doing parkour and one isn’t. That’s what’s weird about it. Just because you vaulted over a wall doesn’t mean you’re doing parkour. Stuntmen don’t do parkour. Some stunt people may have started to train parkour because they realize “Oh, I can learn from this.” But the mentality, it’s all about the mentality in my mind, and the mentality is completely different. Some videos that are out there really show this because with stuntmen, it’s all about getting the take. “I do whatever I have to do to get to the point to get this shot on camera and that’s it. That’s success. I have achieved it.” The joy I get from hitting a jump and sticking it, like I was talking about, they don’t have that. It’s different. For them, it’s about “Did you get it on film? Did you get the clip?” And it doesn’t even have to be real. Maybe there are wires, maybe there are pads, maybe they’re not actually even doing it and what ends up getting shown on the screen, they did a different jump and they cut them and green screen it and put something in the background, whatever. They just need to get whatever looks cool on film. So movies, it’s stunt work, and you know, some movies have hired actual traceurs. Casino Royale with James Bond is the classic one. Sébastien Foucan was in that, and that’s a sick scene. I think they did a pretty cool job with that. But it’s also funny to watch because there are things in there that you can totally see, if you know what you’re watching, that you’re like “Eh come on. That jump was not actually big, they’re just picking angles that made it look big” or “His tech on that was really bad.” It gets to you. And
then there are absolutely terrible movies out there, like *Freerunner*, which was filmed in Cleveland, which is horrific. It came out years ago. Dylan Baker was in it. Ryan Doyle was in it. King David, a bunch of early guys. Anyways, filmed in Cleveland years ago, and first of all, it was just a painfully bad film as far as art goes. It’s not art. It’s bad. Bad acting, bad plot line, just painfully obnoxious and hard to watch. But then also it’s just stupid, the plot line, and then I feel like parkour is misrepresented in it because it’s these adrenaline junkies just being crazy. And that’s to the advantage of the media. Again, it goes back to views. What sells? What do people want to see? People love seeing people being stupid, that’s why Fail videos get so many views. People just love to see people be stupid, love to see people get hurt, and they like to see people be crazy. So you need to make parkour look crazy, or freerunning look crazy, for it to sell. So if you say “And now we will have these highly skilled and disciplined practitioners who, although it might look like a risky skill, are actually executing things very safely through a disciplined environment which they’ve trained for years in order to achieve this level of mastery, much as a Kung Fu master might train.” You can give this big explanation, you know? And people will be like “Oh, okay.” Or you can be like “And now these freerunners, these death-defying stuntmen who will hurl and throw themselves over horrifying drops!” And people will be like “Woah!!! Hardcore parkour!” You know, it gets views. It’s like a self-fulfilling cycle. It makes itself worse. So there’s that, and then it gets misrepresented too. It’s not what it says it is, like the movie *Tracers* that came out recently. First of all, the main actor ‘trains in parkour’ to do some of his own stunts, but you can’t just pick up parkour for a movie and do it. It takes years of discipline to learn. And then secondly, he wasn’t doing his own stunts and it was a stunt double and they cut landings, they’re not showing actual movement. They show a jump from one angle and they don’t show the landing, so there’s a huge mat there, and then they cut and show a close-
up of feet dropping into the shot and hitting the ground and rolling. Drives me crazy! Anyways, and then, yeah, the attitude of it and everything, they show traceurs as being these reckless, arrogant adrenaline junkies. So yeah, the media is rough and misrepresents and stuff, and it’s hard to feel like you’ve put a good face out there too because parkour also gets bad press constantly for being dangerous. People will write just anything about parkour out there, and then you don’t have a way to combat it. How do you disprove it? People have to give it a chance to find out. People have to give you the benefit of the doubt of actually watching it to know. People don’t know. And then it’s just flippant. Parkour was interestingly referred to, I’ve heard it in The Office, which is probably the number one way that people know what parkour is, they yell “Hardcore Parkour!” And in that episode of The Office, where Michael finds out about it, he comes in and he’s like “Parkour!” and he’s running and kicking things. Then it cuts to Jim in the other room and he’s explaining and he’s like “So, Michael just found out about parkour. Parkour is basically a way to get from A to B.” But then he’s like “It was the internet fad of 2008” is what he described it as. That’s literally what he says, “Parkour, the internet fad of 2008, where you get from point A to point B as creatively as possible and Michael just found out about it.” It’s not 2008 when this episode came out. It was like 2011 or something. So I think that’s interesting that, to pop culture, it’s viewed as a fad. There are many ways it is misrepresented. People don’t take it seriously, from start to finish, for many reasons, because things like that are said. Also because of Fails. You know, you watch a video of a drunk dude trying to jump off a railing and fall in a pool, and then you watch a video of a traceur slipping on a jump and hitting his face and getting bloody, and you’re like “Oh, those guys are both idiots.” You know, “Oh, parkour is just stupid.” And that’s it. “Oh, it’s some fad of stupid people throwing themselves and getting hurt.” You don’t realize that you watched two completely different things, you
know? So it gets dismissed and people are like “Yeah, it’s just whatever.” So yeah, sorry I got on a rant there, but it’s just frustrating!

Me: No, that’s okay! That’s the information I need!

Andrew: It’s frustrating, and it’s not taken as a sport. It’s not seen as a sport, which is frustrating for, like, the STS guys from Origins. They’re talking about working to make the North American International Parkour Championships, NAIPC, that they run every year, they’re trying to make it into a really acknowledged event that has more weight to it. They’re trying to take the sport in the direction of having competitors that are respected by the sports community and taken seriously by the sports community in the way that some other ‘extreme sports athletes’ have achieved, like snowboarding. If you’re a snowboarder, and you’re on TV for an interview, they will refer to you as an athlete and give you the respect that they would give to an athlete, because our culture respects that. Our culture respects athletes. If you’re a football player, you just get free this, free that, and everyone loves you. And to a lesser extent with extreme sports, but even so, it’s still respect. Parkour doesn’t get that respect. It’s not viewed as a sport. It also doesn’t get respect for being viewed as an art. It gets neither. It’s a lose-lose you know?

Me: Right.

Andrew: And it’s frustrating, especially for people in the community that are trying to get that. I think we all need to do our part to try and help get the word out there, first of all for awareness, people don’t know what it is, and secondly for misunderstanding, they think they know what it is but they don’t, and thirdly for representing it well and putting our best foot forward and not having some people speak for us who are not really presenting it in a positive light. So it’s like a battle, and we’ll see. I think eventually, slowly, little by little, it’ll become more understood and more accepted.
Me: I hope so too. It’s part of why I want to do this research project, so that the architectural community can start to think about somebody other than just the regular people when they’re designing buildings.

Andrew: Yeah!

Me: There are other people out there that use spaces differently. Maybe you should consider them too! So we talked about this earlier a little bit, but what is your perception on the elements of risk and danger in parkour? Is there anything else you want to talk about?

Andrew: Yeah! I just want to say more about fear, since I talked about me personally; I talked about the growth you can have through parkour. I think parkour is amazing for anyone if, for no other reason than simply a life lesson in learning how to face fear. And like I said, training parkour I think has transformed my life in other ways, in helping me to respond differently to difficult situations and to respond differently with fear. So I think it’s awesome! If a person is a timid person, start training parkour! I think it will help you in your life as a person, help you to overcome that! If you struggle with being afraid, then yeah, train parkour! I think that’s awesome! If you want to become a bolder person, it’s great. But also, another thing that is important is to understand fear; people don’t understand fear in our culture and in general. People don’t think about it. People haven’t thought through their response to it. So what people do when faced with fear is, first of all, their gut instinct, and secondly, cultural response, like however we’ve been taught by actually literally being taught or by the environment or by circumstances or whatever else. But however we’ve been taught to respond to fear, that’s what we do. And the response that people have is to shun it. You know?

Me: Yeah.
Andrew: So, like I’ve talked about earlier about how people respond to us when we do parkour, they can’t handle the idea of fear, either within themselves or from me! And so people will take it upon themselves on my behalf. Like if I’m doing something that they think is dangerous, then they’re afraid, and because they’re afraid, they’re angry, and they’re angry at me and they want me to stop. That’s a weird cycle that just happened there.
Me: Yeah, it bothers them so much.
Andrew: Yeah. And the thing is that they need to understand several things. One, they need to understand that their fear and my fear are different. Just because you’re afraid doesn’t mean I’m afraid. And should you be afraid and should I be afraid? My fear is important for me in my training! I need to be conscious of that mind and fear and where I’m at, like “Is this fear healthy because I shouldn’t do this move, I’m not ready for it? Or is this fear a boundary that I can push? I’m capable of this but I fear it anyways because that fear is irrational.” The problem of fear arises when you have a gap between your physical ability and your mental perception of your physical ability. If you’re physically able to do something, but mentally unable, then you’re afraid of it. If you’re physically and mentally able to do something, completely, then there isn’t really fear necessarily! Or there shouldn’t be fear in that situation. Everything is just doing what you know you’re able to! You know, people aren’t afraid of walking, even though as a baby when you’re first starting, it’s kind of a wild ride there for a while, you know? But people aren’t afraid of walking because they are able to do it physically, and mentally know that they’re prepared and able to do it. Mentally, they are confident. There’s no difference in that from any other movement! It’s purely that relationship between your body and your mind. “How able am I physically? How able am I mentally?” And so in that way, it’s really ridiculous for someone to
freak out when they see you do something. That’d be like me freaking out if I see someone walking! Like “What are you doing!? Stop! Stop! You’re going to hurt yourself!”

Me: “Get down on all fours!”

Andrew: They’d be like “Why? I’m safe!” and you’ll be like “Have you heard the statistics of the number of people that fall while walking?” Like, you know, okay yeah, people die walking from tripping! That doesn’t mean you shouldn’t do it! Okay, just because someone died doing something doesn’t inherently mean it’s dangerous. And that’s the other thing, the difference between fear and danger. People don’t understand that at all. Just because they are afraid, they then think it’s dangerous. I said fear is good, because you need to know your fear and know where it’s at and you need to understand it, your relationship with it. You need to know, when fear arises, if it’s because of a gap between your physical and mental ability, or whether it’s you being irrational. But danger is different, because danger is subjective, like “Are you in danger?” And people put that on you, and you can’t do that. You can’t really assign to someone else what danger they should be afraid of or able to handle, or that they should respond to.

Me: Yeah, what is danger? What is it?

Andrew: Well yeah, because everything is dangerous! Everything is dangerous and nothing is dangerous, in a way. In life, you can die doing anything! If you really tried to never do anything dangerous, you would die from not doing anything! Your life would literally be impossible, it’s not possible. You cannot remove danger from a human life. It is part of life, it’s part of existence, by definition. That’s what, more and more through our culture, we try and do to our kids. I’ve read some very interesting articles about this, about education, and about how we are obsessed with protecting our kids, protecting people from this and from that and from the other, and always trying to put more and more things in place, whether physical or laws or rules or
regulations, to protect from this and to protect from that, and you can’t do it indefinitely.

Eventually, kids are going to be in these like astronaut suits with globes on their heads and they won’t be able to do anything for risk of this or that! So to put your view of what’s dangerous onto somebody else doesn’t work. I mean you can have your opinion, but unless they’re under your authority, and that’s a different conversation, but a random person walking down the street and seeing you, they just decide that what you’re doing is dangerous because to them, it would be, or to their own calculation. And there are several layers to that. One is the calculation of is it dangerous, and whether you want to go statistically or simple calculably as far as your abilities, for me to do an eight foot precision jump is not dangerous. Nine feet, a little more dangerous. Nine and a half, more dangerous. Like at height, I could do an eight foot precision ten stories up, and it’s not that dangerous for me. For a person that’s new to parkour, very dangerous! For a person that has never done parkour, idiotically dangerous! Just why would you do that? Just don’t do that! And see, there’s me saying “You! Don’t do that!” because I know the risks of this and I’m telling you that I think that’s very dangerous for you. And I’m saying that about your ability, it’s that situation compared to your ability that’s dangerous. People walking down the street, they don’t know my ability. All they do is they make assumptions based off of how they feel and who they are, they look at me and they say “That was very dangerous!” They don’t know that it’s actually not. And sometimes I’ll do one thing that is, for me, pretty dangerous, because at my ability level, it’s really pushing myself, and they don’t know it’s dangerous, and then I do another thing that’s not dangerous to me and they freak out because they think that is dangerous, because it’s a misperception. They don’t understand the difference. So that’s just the whole relationship there, between danger and fear and trying to understand that better. I wish that more people would do parkour, and that people and society in general could understand parkour
better, because I think that there’s something to be learned there. You have to go and live your life despite fear and despite danger. You can’t always hide from danger and you can’t always run from your fear.

Me: Yeah, you have to face it.

Andrew: Yeah, and to face it isn’t stupid. That’s what people think. It’s not stupid. It’s a calculated choice! It’s worth it! I am safer, ironically I am so much safer, than all those people that yell at me about being dangerous, because, name a situation, whatever it is, I’m more physically and mentally prepared for it than they are. I am statistically less likely to get hurt or injured or killed, because I train things like balance all the time with parkour. If I’m on a sheet of ice in the winter and I slip, my body and mind are prepared for that kind of situation, for absorbing impact, whether I roll out of it or try to catch my balance, whatever, I am safer! I’m less likely to get injured. So the fear that they have for me is actually irrational.

Me: Cool. So do you want to say anything else about the elements of trespassing and legal issues with parkour?

Andrew: Yeah. I wish that our culture was different with that, because it’s very cultural and societal. In England, number one, the society views it a little differently. I’ve seen videos. People do still get angry, but in general, rooftop videos all the time from England, and there’s not a big fuss about it because they view property differently. They view architecture and property and ownership a little bit differently, and it’s more acceptable there, culturally, to be on roofs. And I think each culture is different. If you go around to another country, you need to figure out how people view the usage of public space and semi-public space. What is the definition of public space? In Europe, from what I understand, the interior of a building is considered private and the exterior is considered public to an extent. So I saw a release about some people who got angry at
Tim Shieff when he posted a video training on rooftops, and he was on the roof of a public building, in some town, I don’t remember what town he was in, but he’s from Derby in the UK, and he was training around town and he filmed a nice video and he was up on this roof. Then it was posted, and he’s somewhat of a public figure so people know, and so it got to the news agencies and stuff and it was shown on television or whatever, but then people in the community got angry and were writing to the police, saying he should be charged with trespassing. The police released a statement, the chief of police said “We cannot charge him with trespassing because he was just on the roof, he didn’t enter the building.” That’s crazy! I was charged with trespassing for being on the roof of a building! That’s it! And I was charged with attempted burglary for being on the roof of a building! I didn’t enter the building! I was on the roof, but that’s a huge difference right there. So, I wish that people viewed that differently, because that’s not just a legal thing. The legal thing represents a bigger, cultural perspective. In general, I think people in Europe are more open to the idea of collective ownership, or the idea of being public, public space and allowing interaction with strangers in that sense. America, and I think this is deeply cultural from our start, is very individualistic and very much about private property and private ownership. And people feel strongly that they have the right to literally shoot you if you’re on their property.

Me: Yeah! It’s crazy!

Andrew: I’ve had a guy threaten to shoot me when I was on a roof and it was pretty intense! But in a sense, I’m not bothering anyone. They’re choosing to be bothered, and I wish that that was different culturally. I was thinking about it, and to be fair, I would have to uphold that standard myself. If someone was on my roof, would I be okay with it or would I be angry?

Me: I’d go join them!
Andrew: Yeah! I mean, I could see if I think my property is being damaged, I would be upset. I’d be like “What are you doing? Stop damaging my property, that’s wrong.” But otherwise, I’d like to think that I’d have the openness to be like “Oh, enjoy yourselves!” But people don’t have that in America. They really get angry for no reason. Even if you’re literally being the most respectful as you possibly can, you’re not damaging anything, you’re not doing anything wrong or even dangerous, you don’t even have to be doing parkour, you’re just standing there, people get really angry! They’re like “Get off!” That is upsetting. I wish that people were more open to that. I wish that law enforcement was more open to that. But we have to deal with what we have, and I am trying to be more respectful of that. I did kind of have a mentality of like “Eh, stupid society.” And don’t get me wrong, society really frustrates me, and I like being countercultural. There’s a part of me that likes disagreeing with society. I think society is wrong on this and I’m going to stick it to the man. But I have to respect differences, and that’s one that I need to respect. I need to respect people’s private property for sure. If it bothers them, then I need to get off their land and respect that. But yeah, I wish that people would have more acceptance of that.

Me: So is there anything else you want to say about how parkour has impacted the way you view and understand urban space, the environment of the city, compared to before you started practicing?

Andrew: Yeah, I think that it has changed, or that I would have a different perspective for sure without parkour in that my appreciation, first of all, I have more appreciation. I think I already mentioned that earlier, but I just really love seeing a good building! There are various meanings to that. Aesthetically, sure, but also interesting, like what does it have to offer as far as alternative approaches to things? Parkour challenges the norm in saying “You say that the utility of a stair set is to walk up and down, and I say there are other uses.” I’m interested in exploring
those other uses. A handrail for you is purely a regulation and for safety and what not. And, you know, an architect might kind of get creative and be like “Well this is a safety regulation, but I’m going to also make it a part of the design and I’m going to have it fit in,” and that’s really cool to have it fit in in an artistic way but also fulfill the requirement. But I take it a step further and say “Not only those, but how about its functionality and utility in an alternative sense?” I think it would be super cool to see architects thinking like that. Distances are a big deal to me.

Sometimes I’ll get really upset. And this is a little closeminded of me. I need to be more open about it, and I’m more open about it now than I was in the past. In the past, I was looking for specific things of certain distances. If a pre was not nine feet, then I was upset. If it was ten feet, I was upset because it was too big to standing jump for me, and if it was under nine feet, then it was too small and wasn’t hard enough. You know, like “Aww, these walls would be sick but they’re only seven feet apart. This is kind of lame. I wish it was bigger, then it would be a legit jump.” Or I’d be like “Aww, it’s just too big, I can’t do this jump!” So distances are a big deal to me, and I wish there was a way to tell architects “Please can you put more nine foot distances!”

Or, you know, distances that have meaning to me because of my relation to them. But you have to get creative with what you have. If walls are really close together, do something different. If they’re far apart and you can’t do the jump between them, do something else. Try to find another way to use them. But yeah, it gave me appreciation of distance for sure, in that way. It gave me appreciation for material. I talked about before with the slipperiness and grippy-ness being applied to materials. But then also texture. I appreciate building based on texture or structures or materials or walls or whatever. Texture of a wall or of a railing or of flooring or of anything! It has made me more utilitarian. I get annoyed with architectural features that are there but unusable because of how they were made. For example, a common thing to see is metal flashing,
particularly now. It is really common to see a brick façade with metal flashing, and it annoys me for many reasons. I’m annoyed by the façade because I know that it’s structurally not very good and it worries me because I don’t want to damage it. But the flashing, because it’s almost something that you can use, but it’s not usually, because it’s weak and floppy and if you try and grab it, it’s not strong enough to hold you up, and it’ll bend but you don’t want to damage it, all these different things. If only it was more rigid, then it’d be a cool little crimp and you could do something with it. You could catch it on a cat leap and push off of it, stuff like that. Railings that are put in that are not put in well, or sturdily, drive me crazy! Like put this in well and it would be sweet! But now it’s just a danger to me and it’s stupid, like why even put this thing here if it’s not well anchored down. So yeah, just stuff like that. I feel like my appreciation of buildings is not just one-dimensional, it’s multi-dimensional because of all these ways in which I appreciate it in a more physical way. So yeah, and American architecture in general is more disappointing. European architecture, for some reason, they just put in features that are awesome to train on! They like decorative, or seemingly decorative, hip high walls. They put them in all over the place! So people train on them and they’re awesome for jumps! In America, I tend to see either a very minimal amount of features, like nothing to jump on. Literally everything is slippery and it’s a building with straight sides with no holes and no grips and no nothing, and no little ledges or anything. Or some architect was like “Ooh! Let’s put something interesting!” but then it’s not robust or not strong or able to be used. It’s a really dinky little odd thing. People will put in a ledge on a building, I don’t know what you’d call it, I don’t know what the architectural term for it is, but you’ll have one story and then you have a parapet or something, that strip around the top edge, and it’ll be put at a slant so you can’t grab it, or it’ll be made out of the most slippery
material or the flimsiest material. I don’t know, it seems like, one, that things aren’t made with long lasting intent, and two, not made with robust material that you can use.

Me: Yep, that’s classic America for you.

Andrew: Or three, designed in a really weird way. “I see you architect. I see you were getting creative with this, but dang it, I wish you made it a little bit differently and I could jump on it.” Those things get to me. But just in general, I’d say hugely I regret not studying architecture in school. I’m jealous of my brother who’s studying architecture, and I wish that when I was going to college, I was in the parkour community and in parkour enough to have gained some of this appreciation, and then I might’ve pursued it. Before my brother went to architecture school, I literally knew nothing about architecture. I had lots of thoughts on architecture purely because of parkour, and it’s a very different lens to come at it from than other people. It would probably be really weird for an architect to talk to me at that stage. Now I’ve heard enough from my brother to kind of know how to converse a little bit better about architecture. But at that point, I literally knew nothing about architecture but I knew a lot about parkour and my opinions on architecture were based on parkour. It would’ve been a pretty interesting conversation for me and an architect to talk! I knew what I liked and what I didn’t! I was like “I hate that building” and he might be like “Oh, I hate that building too. I don’t like the design of this part or that part.” And I’d be like “Oh, I was just talking about the grip on the wall!” But it’s funny the ways in which it has changed it, but it has also then, because of my appreciation, I really appreciate buildings, I want to see quality, I want to see long lasting, good materials. There’s a spot in Cuyahoga Falls, classic training spot from back in the day with my brother, we used to go there and there were these walls and they have a top piece on them. They’re cement walls with railing and then the top is this, what looked like, cut granite topping to them. It’s actually like this, like a ridge of
granite that goes along the top that’s like a cap to the wall. And we would train on these walls and it was weird to jump on them because they had that point and they were slanted on either side, but, you know, it’s like a different obstacle, and in some ways it was nice because you could hit at an angle, hit the slope. So yeah it was interesting to train on them. It was a great training spot. We loved it! And then one time I was doing a cat leap to one of them, and I cat leaped and grabbed the top of the cap, and literally a four foot chunk of the cap section just cracked off and the whole thing slid off and fell on top of me and broke on top of me! It just broke in two or three pieces on top of me! I fell back on the ground and it just broke over me! Terrible! First of all, I got hurt, but more upsetting to me was that now the wall was ruined! I felt terrible because I damaged property and I actually put it back and tried to piece the whole thing back together and put it back in place. We didn’t go back to train there again. I was like “We can’t come back here.” First of all, we damaged it and I felt bad. I was like “Maybe we should try to leave money to pay for it.” I didn’t, and I’m a little ashamed that I didn’t do that. I probably should have. But yeah, we came back like a year later, because I always drive past that spot and think “Ugh, oh that spot! I wish I could train there! It’s so cool!” But I went back and looked and they had cemented it back together, the pieces that I put back in! There was even a little wedge that cracked off and I put it back in and the three pieces that I pieced together were all cemented back together! They didn’t replace the whole thing, they just put it back on. But yeah, I was upset because that’s bad architecture, that I could break it just by grabbing on to it. It was upsetting. I felt like it was weak and poorly made. But yeah, just in general, my appreciation is so high! I would be interested, even if you take parkour out of it now, and purely talk about a building without thinking about the parkour aspects, which is impossible for me to do, but even in that way, I have now gained an appreciation for architecture! I like quality, I like well-made, I
like well thought out stuff, I like things that have something to them, like some kind of purpose and design. It’s just cool to see that.

Me: Cool! So what role do you think creativity plays in parkour?

Andrew: Oh! Well there are different layers to that. Parkour is faceted in many ways because it can be just, like I was talking about, just the discipline of it and the challenge of it, which, in a sense, can kind of be there for any jump. When I first started training, I trained a lot of standing precision jumps, and a lot of my training was that I’d go to a spot and I thought a spot was just junk unless it had a good precision. I didn’t train other kinds of movement. If I was like “Oh, what’s a good spot to train at?” I’d be like “Well where’s a big precision?” That was my definition! But that’s pretty uncreative. Even within that one movement, there was still challenge. I just wanted bigger and bigger gaps to work on. So I’d get that achievement and success from hitting a bigger precision. If literally all parkour was was doing bigger and bigger jumps, I’d probably still do it! It’s enjoyable! And then you take that and spread it out over the many different movements, and you have a lot to work with! You could just spend your whole parkour career working disciplined training trying to make jumps bigger. But, there’s so much more than that available. So I think creativity is not…some people describe parkour as creativity as an essential part of it. I would say more that it is a facet of it, a facet which I greatly enjoy, but there are other facets too. A facet of discipline, of achievement, of challenge. Those things can kind of interweave with creativity but they’re separate. I mean, I don’t know, I guess you could say that it is maybe inherent in the sense that you have to accept a creative premise to start with for parkour. You have to start by accepting “I’m not going to use the standard. I’m going to challenge the standard and do something a little different.” And in that sense, yeah, it’s kind of maybe always there. And even in the most basic way, it exists in creativity of location, purely in
coming up with spots to train, because, like I was saying, if literally all parkour was was big precision jumps, you’d get creative trying to find bigger ones! I always get creative trying to find a way that I could get a distance between two objects that is literally one inch bigger than the last one I found, because if there are standardized distances in architecture, it’s hard to find a certain precision. There are lots of precisions that are nine feet; not as easy to find a precision that is nine feet two inches. I find precisions that are nine and a half and ten, but what about ten feet two inches? Ten foot three inches? You know, you can get creative trying to find an angle or whatever. But I think that beyond that, like I described of my training, my experiences of preparing to train and going out to train, I think that parkour is a great meeting point between discipline and creativity. It is like working out, strength training, purely on the achievement-based side of it, like lifting weights. There’s nothing really creative about lifting weights! You follow the rules, everyone does the same thing. You bench, and you’re not going to be like “Oh, you bench? How do you bench? Let me show you my bench technique!” You know, nobody is getting creative with their benching technique! It’s like yeah, you bench so you do it this way. Parkour has that discipline to it. “Let’s all work on precision jumps.” There’s a best technique. You’re not going to creatively come up with an alternative technique which is better. But then it perfectly and fluidly flows from that discipline right into creativity, because you can include as much or as little of that creativity, or as much or as little of the discipline, as you want. So you see people on the whole spectrum, from people that are training who are all about the creativity, and in the most pure form, that might be floor movement. People talk now about flow, like “Oh, I put together this movement flow” and you could just stand in a patch of grass with literally no obstacles and just do a flow where they’re just moving their body in a creative way and coming up with new ways to move around. The in-between point between that and the discipline of “I’m
going to do this jump over and over and over again and try to improve my distance” is like when I go out to train, and this is what I really started to enjoy, is combining my discipline of jumping with creativity of movement in finding new ways to jump! I’m still challenging myself in the jumping and power, but also challenging my mind and discovering a new approach and a new angle, and “What if I connect this to that?” and making connections between this and that and using this piece of architecture or this structure in a new way. So yeah, it’s interesting because you can be creative in your own body, and some people, their training is like “I came up with this new move!” and they’re on a classic wall. Like this one guy from Russia, he always posts videos from the same spot on the same wall, and it’s just grass and then there are stones that are a retaining wall. It comes up to the stones and then there’s a drop, like three feet, and then more grass, and he posts from this spot all the time. But what he’s doing is getting creative with his body! The location or the obstacle has not changed; it’s very simple and uncreative in itself. But he does this flip, the standard flip, but then adds a certain twist to it or makes a change. You can also be creative in taking the same movement and applying it in different places or in different ways to different obstacles, or between or within obstacles. So you could take a front flip, just your regular old standard front flip, and you can start applying it in unique ways and be creative in that way, and then you can do everything in-between! So the creative potential of both being creative within your own body and with how you interact with your environment, all comes together with the potential for amazing creativity! And then you can add the creativity of artistic expression of how you then present that! And then the creativity of recording it through film and making a video out of it! On so many layers, then, you have the potential for creativity! You have the potential for your location, picking your location, how you then analyze and approach your location, how you respond to your environment, the movements you choose to use in that
environment, the creativity of how you change those movements to fit your environment, and then how you record this and how you present it and all of those things! It’s like creativity galore, all over that whole spectrum! So yeah, I think that it opens up the mind. Parkour is a great encourager of creativity, and I am probably a more creative person because of training parkour. And it’s weird, I almost train creativity now! Like I was saying when I warm up my body, then I warm up my mind. It’s cool when I go to a spot and at first you don’t see anything. You just see what you’re supposed to see. You see what society says, and you’re just seeing the usual things, like “Oh, that’s just a railing and that’s just a stair, and that’s just a corner.” And then when you start training, your mind starts warming up and your creativity muscles sort of get stretched out and start working, and they you’re like “Well that’s not just a corner. I can grab that corner! Can I move my body around that corner? That’s not just a handrail; that’s a foothold! What if I can get my finger in this one crack and then reach the corner with my toe?” You know! And suddenly, these things are not just what they seem! They’re so much more! So yeah, I think all of that! That’s what I think!

Me: Nice! So final question! It’s a tough one! If you had to describe what parkour means to you with only three words, what would they be? It could be three separate words or a phrase.

Andrew: Hmm, this is a tough question. I’m very verbose as you’ve noticed so it’s difficult to narrow it down haha!

Me: Haha yeah!

Andrew: I’ll talk for a long time about something! It’s hard to pin it down in three words.

Me: Yeah it’s tough!

Andrew: I’m just going to try to condense everything I said down into three words! Trying to describe it as a definition or trying to say what it means to me?
Me: What is means to you.

Andrew: What it means to me?

Me: Yeah.

Andrew: Oh okay. Movement, Joy, and Love!

Me: Awesome! Alright! Well thank you very much for taking the time to interview with me! I really appreciate it!

Andrew: Yup, yup! For sure!

**Individual Interview 2: Mat Poprocki**

Me: Alright, so can you state your name, where you’re from, how old you are, and how long you’ve been doing parkour for?

Mat: My name is Mat Poprocki. I am 35 years old. I’m from Ohio, and I’ve been practicing parkour for around 4 years.

Me: So tell me your story, how did you initially get involved with parkour?

Mat: Well I found it on the internet, but I was seeking out something. So at the time, I was trying to find a community of people that I was inspired by, with the goal of hanging around them to better myself as a person and become more healthy and talented and skilled in all the qualities that I wanted in myself. I tried to seek out a group of people that already had these things and become like them. I just found YouTube videos and a Facebook page about parkour and I reached out and connected with the people in the city I was living in and then met up with them and it changed my life!

Me: Awesome! So what does parkour mean to you and why do you practice it? What inspires you to practice?
Mat: A little kid actually asked me recently if I ‘have’ to do parkour. If I ‘have’ to! And I said “Well, I train parkour for my health and happiness, so if I want to be healthy and happy, then yes I have to train parkour, but it is very fun and so I do it for that reason as well.”

Me: That’s funny!

Mat: Yeah!

Me: “Why do you have to do it?” So do you have any goals associated with parkour? Short-term, long-term?

Mat: Yeah! Short-term, my goal is that I want to coach more parkour classes myself. After learning parkour, I loved it so much that it changed my life and I wanted to help inspire others, so I decided to change my career to a parkour coach, which is more of a long-term thing. But the goal now is just to be able to teach more classes, and in the future, see where that takes me. I kind of envision myself being older and still in shape, happy and healthy, because I train parkour all the time!

Me: That’s one of my goals too! I want to be able to keep doing this my whole life. I still want to be able to do flips when I’m a grandpa!

Mat: Haha, yeah!

Me: So how do you typically prepare to go out and practice parkour? Physical, mental, or spiritual preparations?

Mat: So I do have a routine. I have a routine that I try to follow to keep my strength up. So I stretch in the morning for 20 minutes, and then each day, I have two things to work on, whether it’s pushups or pullups or squats, it’s something that conditions my body to be able to do parkour moves. I try to keep up with that so when I do go out and train, I’m strong and healthy, and capable of practicing.
Me: Cool, so where do you typically choose to go practice parkour and why these locations specifically?
Mat: Well I do practice stuff around the house. I’ve been doing it more recently because it’s winter and so I have some stuff in the basement that I train on.
Me: Yeah! I saw it online!
Mat: Yeah! So I train down there. The second place is a park that I go to and it’s two blocks away. So I’ll train in the woods, and there are some urban things that have been left there, like there are handrails and lots of stairs and ledges and different things.
Me: Kind of like it was just left to rot?
Mat: Well over here there used to be this river and there were boats that traveled through there or whatever, and now it doesn’t exist because that was a really long time ago. So there are just handrails that are scattered in the woods!
Me: That’s funny!
Mat: Yeah! Handrails and random concrete blocks and stuff! So I run over and train there. But what makes me feel like I am really doing parkour and training parkour is when I go to downtown Cleveland. That is the highlight of the training, when I really feel that I’m in the environment. Even though in the woods it’s still parkour, downtown is more in the urban realm thing and that’s where I have the most fun. I feel the most pure, I guess, when I’m downtown.
Me: Yeah and you get those huge wall runs!
Mat: Yeah!
Me: What was that like 12 or 13 feet?
Mat: I don’t know! I didn’t measure it!
Me: It was so tall! It was more than double your height!
Mat: I saw it, and I thought I couldn’t do it, and I continued along. And then I was like “Wait a minute, let me try it.”

Me: “Let me just attempt it.”

Mat: Yeah, and I came really close, and I was like “I have to film this, I want to film this! Just do it!” And I did it and I even surprised myself with that one!

Me: Yeah that was high! Was it a pretty grippy wall?

Mat: Yeah it was nice. My training prepared me for that. It was awesome. I went out that day, and I haven’t been doing that much outdoor training because it’s been winter, but I’ve been conditioning at home, and I said it to the two people I was with at the time, I was like “Wow! I think my workouts, my training at home, are paying off right now!”

Me: That’s good! My friend Erik and I have been trying to do a lot on conditioning, trying to be consistent the whole break, so we’ll see what happens when the season starts up again!

Mat: Cool!

Me: So can you describe how you feel, physically, mentally, and spiritually, when you’re staring down a parkour move, preparing to do it?

Mat: Well, I feel like I’m more alive and I’m living life to its fullest because I have to be focused and in the moment. So that’s not the time to think about what you want to eat later or what bills you have to pay. You have to just be there in the moment, and those kinds of situations force you into that kind of thinking. And then also it will spike off different chemicals in your body like adrenaline and different things, serotonin, to get you hyped up and ready to go and do it. So that’s how I feel. I feel that I’m living life to its fullest. I’m living in the moment, and I feel good.
Me: Cool! So how do you feel, physically, mentally, spiritually, when you’re actually going through the moves?

Mat: Ah well yeah kind of what I just described. There is a quote. It’s “Think before you jump, jump without thinking.” So that’s the little bit of difference. You do think a little bit more before you go, thinking “Yeah I don’t know, should I do this or not?” But when you’re actually jumping, you don’t think about it at all and you do totally let go.

Me: Interesting.

Mat: But even before or after, you still don’t want to be thinking about other things separate from what you’re doing, right before you’re about to go!

Me: Yeah! So how do you feel after you’ve successfully completed a movement, and it was successful and the way that you wanted to do it?

Mat: Well the similarities are I guess, before, during, and after, I feel like I’m living life to its fullest and that I’m in the moment. Those things carry through, and that’s why I enjoy doing parkour so much. I guess afterwards, you feel more accomplished. If you didn’t make it, the stunt that you wanted to do, maybe you could still be happy! You didn’t hurt yourself and that you tried it and you have the opportunity to try again. So either way, I feel a lot of happiness, even if I don’t make it or if I make it. But I have gained a lot of benefits from training parkour because once I started to overcome physical obstacles, then it gave me confidence that I could do other things in my life. But it really took me being able to climb over a wall to show me that, because at first, I couldn’t climb over a wall and it was very humbling to realize that. I thought I could, and then I realized I couldn’t. I tried and I wasn’t able to and I thought “Oh this is really strange, I always thought of myself as a strong person. Why can’t I climb up this wall?” And I was really
frustrated. But then I worked at it, and over time, I got better and better. That’s how I learned that I could take it and carry it over into other aspects of my life as well.

Me: Awesome! So can you describe your physical, mental, or spiritual interactions with urban space when you’re doing parkour?

Mat: There is a relationship. I’m trying to think of the best way to describe it. There’s a documentary, People in Motion. Have you ever seen it? It’s a documentary about parkour.

Me: No but I’ll definitely check it out.

Mat: Yeah it’s one of the best documentaries about parkour. Somebody in it talks about how when some people get angry and they get upset and they get mad, they punch things, inanimate objects. Like they’ll punch the wall or kick something.

Me: Yeah letting out that stress they feel.

Mat: Yeah but they’re trying to feel powerful! They want to overcome something. With parkour, it’s something a lot similar but we’re not trying to dominate something. We’re trying to dance with it and have a relationship with it. So we’re not punching an object, we’re dancing with an object! You know, having this relationship with inanimate things and it can be a spiritual experience. I could say nature but in this case it’s urban, so I guess we’re speaking with the universe or physical objects.

Me: Interesting! So what would you say are the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual effects that you’ve experienced through practicing parkour? How has parkour affected you?

Mat: In so many ways that it’s unbelievable how much it does affect me. It’s like I don’t even know where to start. But I can kind of generalize overall. More happy, healthy; more physically in shape; more mentally in shape; more confident; more devoted, dedicated, disciplined. There’s a lot, there’s a lot there! But it’s always an ongoing thing that will always bring these rewards
and gifts from training, and sometimes I’m not sure what they are until after the fact. Then it’s like “Oh, training helped! I realized this thing or how to think about my life, or these other things in my life, this other way.” Every time you go out to train, it’s like it’s something new, there’s some kind of new benefit.

Me: Awesome. So how do other parkour runners typically respond to seeing you execute movements?

Mat: I think for the majority of people who train parkour, we like to see other people succeed or try. So if we see another person doing that, we’re happy for them and we cheer them on and try to motivate them! And it doesn’t even matter what their skill level is. We have lots of people with different skill sets, but everybody just likes to see somebody else try and give it their all. We applaud that. We try to bring each other up because we like to train with other people. The more people out there training, the more fun it is for us! That’s how communities are grown.

Me: Yeah, if no one is around that trains parkour, you’re kind of stuck by yourself.

Mat: Which I do train alone a lot.

Me: Yeah that kind of happens sometimes.

Mat: I feel like it is a unique thing with parkour because when I first started, I was just telling this story yesterday, I first started to learn parkour with people who were very talented and they were cheering for me! And I thought they were mocking me because I was not used to people doing that!

Me: Wow!

Mat: My mentality was “You are way better than me, and you’re cheering for me? This has to be an insult!”

Me: Right! You have to be making fun of me because I’m not good!
Mat: Yeah! I just started! But I was blown away and it opened up a million possibilities. Like no, somebody can be a lot better than you, but they’re happy for you because they were once there too themselves.

Me: Right, they all recognize that.

Mat: Yeah, and that it’s not necessarily a competitive community, more about cooperation.

Me: So how do non-parkour runners typically respond to seeing you do parkour?

Mat: Oh, well quite the opposite! I mean some people just want to see you try something crazy. So that’s why there’s the stereotypical response, somebody yells “Do a backflip!” because that’s all they know. They know it’s risky and dangerous and they want to see you try it instead of them trying it themselves. And then you have other responses. I’ve noticed that the unhealthier somebody is, and the more unable they are to move their own body, they’re afraid that you can’t do what you’re doing, that you’re in the same boat, that you can’t do it.

Me: That makes sense.

Mat: So they’re afraid you’re going to get hurt and you’re going to hurt others or whatever, because they are not able to climb over a wall. They never balanced on a handrail before. So they think what you’re doing is extreme, and really it could be very normal and regular for the average person to do! They just haven’t been exposed to that. And then you have people who think it’s awesome. They’ve learned and maybe even tried it themselves, which is pretty cool. But I would say that last group is the minority, a much smaller amount. The larger group is the people who are unhealthy themselves and they never understand what’s going on, so they are fearful.

Me: Right, they probably picture themselves up there and think “Oh no, no”.
Mat: Yeah! “I wouldn’t want to be up there. I would die, so you’re going to die! Humans have never done backflips before or any flips, or balanced on anything. This is crazy!”

Me: So I don’t know if this has ever happened to you, but how have police responded to seeing you do parkour?

Mat: Kind of the same response as the general public, except I’ve never had any police officers want to try to do parkour!

Me: Aww that’s unfortunate!

Mat: Yeah, it’s sometimes very negative, but I have actually had a lot of positive conversations with police officers where they get it. They understand because they are actually healthy themselves, and they’ve trained and done some things like this in their training. Whether it is a police officer or fire fighters, they’ve done things similar to parkour in their training so they understand that humans are definitely capable of doing this. They’d rather you being doing this than drugs or being in a gang, all of these other things that they have to deal with. The hard part is that they’re not allowed to say it’s okay, for them to just say that. They’ll come up and they’ll say something like “We understand what you’re doing. We’re very glad that you’re doing that. But I have to tell you to stop, because of the law, because of lawyers, because if you get hurt, people can sue, because of our healthcare system, we have to tell you to stop.” So we’ll just politely accept that and leave and say “Okay, well thank you.” If they want you to leave, you go. So I have kind of slightly convinced them, officers. At first they told us “Leave. You can’t be here.” And then I explained what we’re doing, and that we’re not trying to hurt anybody or anything. And I’ve police officers agree then be like “Okay, well as long as you don’t break anything and stay out of people’s way, you can carry on.” So we reach some sort of agreement.
Me: Yeah, I feel like they could use that. If police officers knew parkour, they could catch people faster or be able to get out of situations easier.

Mat: Yeah.

Me: So how do you normally respond to seeing other people do parkour?

Mat: Well, sometimes I just see people doing it and they don’t really know what they’re doing. It’s not that they’re trying to do parkour, but they might actually be jumping over a fence because they have to jump over a fence. And I always love seeing that because I’m like “Oh, that person’s actually doing parkour but they don’t even know what’s going on and they’re just trying their best.” So I’ll notice it and I notice that kids do it a lot too, where you’ll have a family walking to their car with the kids and adults, and the kids always want to go over things and through things, and the adults all want to take the sidewalk or the specific path you’re supposed to take. So I love watching that when I can, people doing it on their own without even thinking, and see if they are doing any of the specific movements that we learn how to do. And it is the case a lot of the times, especially with kids! They’ll do movements and not even know! Nobody has even taught them how to do a kong but they might just automatically do it naturally because that’s the most efficient way to get over something. That’s just the way they thought for themselves to get over it!

Me: Right it’s already in their heads.

Mat: Yeah. And then I see people who are actually really training parkour, and then I instantly just go over there and talk to them. They probably noticed me training too. Then it’s just a merger of our groups and we start training together.

Me: So do you ever document your parkour movements, and if so how do you document them?
Mat: Yes. I had a GoPro that I would take around with me when I went outside to go train and I would just set it up somewhere and film things if I got close to getting something (a move) that I really enjoy. Right now, I’m just using my cell phone, just setting somewhere. But I also go through a lot of times when I don’t film anything at all, and I’ve personally been at odds with that because I like doing things without the camera. You do it for yourself and there’s no pressure and it feels freer. However, when I do film something good that took me awhile to get, I’ll post it online and I’ll have a lot of comments and people who know about it all in my inner circle, and I may inspire other people to try similar things.

Me: Right.

Mat: Just very recently, I filmed myself doing a wall run in Cleveland, and you instantly brought that up when you came over, which was a shock to me!

Me: Right!

Mat: I went into work and people were talking about it at work and at the gym that I work at, she teaches little girls, and they were like “We saw that! We want to be like you!” And they started running up the wall in the gym. I was like “Wow, I’m witnessing that inspiration!” I filmed that, I did that, I uploaded it online, and now I’m constantly hearing from other people how much they thought that was awesome and now I’m actually seeing little girls get inspired and try it because I did that! They wanted to be like me and tried to run up the wall!

Me: Yeah! That encourages them to want to do it too!

Mat: Yeah!

Me: There are a lot of different reasons for why people share their footage.

Mat: Yeah, it’s definitely not easy to have a clear path of how to do it, you know?

Me: Right.
Mat: I battle with it all the time. I recently deleted Facebook off my phone and turned off my Instagram account and now I only make like one post a week. But I still keep it around to stay connected with the community.

Me: Right. So how do you feel about the way in which parkour is portrayed in the media, like on the internet, in movies, or on TV?

Mat: Well it’s hard. I think if you do parkour for a long enough time, you’ll figure out and eventually come to a realization that you can’t trust the media. I think a lot of people already understand that and know that. But it’s really easy to see something for the first time and believe it, believe whatever you hear and see for the first time. That’s your first exposure to parkour. So that’s particularly hard. The good thing though is that eventually if you’re outside and you keep training and you keep on talking to other people who train that have been doing it longer, eventually you’ll understand the more true and helpful paths of parkour. A lot of the stuff on the internet that keeps getting shared is by people who don’t train, who just want to see bail videos of people falling and hurting themselves, and they know if they upload that to their channel, they’ll get a whole bunch of views. And then people will just think that’s what parkour is. But that’s not what parkour is. That’s what most people don’t see. People want to see you getting hurt. That’s not what parkour is. That’s just a reflection of what gets a lot of views on the internet, on TV, and different things. On TV, they want to make a show that’s shocking that gets your attention to watch, so they might try to twist the facts to make it seem more dangerous. They’ll use their own terminology to describe the sport or what people are trying to accomplish with it.

Me: Right. So what is your perception or opinion of the elements of risk and danger in parkour?
Mat: So I told somebody the other day that you should know yourself, and you should know what you cannot do, know what you can do, and work on what you can do, but just try to push yourself a little harder to things that you cannot do. I feel like that is the perfect formula where I don’t get hurt, but I constantly improve.

Me: Right, that makes a lot of sense.

Mat: So risk and fear are necessary, but I personally found that taking it in small dosages is the best way to do it. When I first started training though, that wasn’t the case, and I immediately learned the hard way. As I was learning what I could and could not do, I just immediately tried some very difficult things that I was not capable of doing. That’s when I had my injuries, right off the bat. But then after those experiences, I realized that I needed to work on my technical skills first before I tried bigger things. That’s the reason why I hurt myself because I didn’t spend a lot of time learning the smaller things, and exercising and developing my body to be able to do those things. So after that, I was pretty much good, and I haven’t had too many injuries at all since then. One of the things people say when they first see me doing what I do, they’ll just be like “Oh I would hurt myself.”

Me: Haha, “Oh there’s no way!” You have to build up that base!

Mat: Yeah! It’s how you go about it. It’s how you progress. You train progressively. You work on progressions.

Me: So what’s your perception on the elements of trespassing and legal issues with parkour?

Mat: Yeah, that’s a hard one because I don’t want to cause any trouble. I don’t want to break any laws. I want to be respectful to the law and my city and my community, the greater community. So I don’t purposefully try to trespass. I don’t break into places and I don’t go anywhere that I shouldn’t. There are people who do, but I just choose not to because of my age and I have
definitely before in the past when I was younger, but I don’t want to deal with the trouble right now. So I mainly just train in a public space where, if I’m allowed to walk around and feel comfortable, I think that also means I’m allowed to do a handstand and feel comfortable. Just because I’m standing or in a handstand or balancing instead of sleeping or something, I think we should be allowed to be able to express ourselves in different ways if we’re allowed to be there. So I do that.

Me: Yeah, public space is public space.

Mat: Yeah.

Me: So if at all, are there any other ways, that we haven’t covered already, that parkour has affected you as a person?

Mat: Well it was life changing. For me particularly, it helped me overcome very hard things that I was dealing with that aren’t related to parkour. Things like alcohol addiction, depression, just not having my life together, being kind of clueless and aimless, searching for something. That’s how I was before parkour. So since learning parkour, all of those things have changed, even though it’s just a physical movement art. It greatly changed me as a person, as a whole, in general. It helped me with all of the hardest things you could dream of really.

Me: That’s great! So how do you feel about the parkour community, all of the people involved with it?

Mat: I think overall it’s really great! It’s really something that I’m just trying to build here in my own area because I’ve got to travel around and I’ve witnessed it in other places thriving. It’s a really amazing thing where people accept you. There is a greater connection. Politics, religion, all the other things that a lot of people fight about all the time, don’t necessarily matter anymore in the parkour community. I’ve shown up in a city before and needed a place to stay and I just
posted on Facebook “Hey, I’m in town and I need a place to stay. Can anybody help me out?”
And somebody in parkour did! Somebody was like “Oh you can stay at my place or so and so’s place” or something like that, and I got to travel around and I do that here. I’ve had people travel from other places. I’ve had someone from Germany and they stayed here at my house for a few days, and I knew just before, a friend of a friends was like “Hey! I have a friend that’s doing parkour and traveling around America and needs a place to stay for a couple of days! Can you host her?” And I said “Yeah, totally!” And then another one came! She had another parkour friend who needed a place too! So it’s just wonderful to have that community. If you really wanted to, you could just travel around and stay at people’s houses. They’ll feed you food, they’ll be nice to you and take care of you the best they can.
Me: Yeah, I’ve experienced that too!
Mat: Yeah, it can exist in other communities and in different things but we have that in our community, in the parkour community, and it’s a beautiful thing!
Me: Yeah I agree. It feels like if you go to a place and you do parkour, then all of a sudden it’s like “Oh, you’re one of us.”
Mat: Yeah!
Me: No questions asked. So how has practicing parkour changed the way that you view urban space from before you started practicing until now?
Mat: So, it has me constantly daydreaming, and envisioning myself in the environment and how I can use that environment. Say I’m a passenger in a car and we’re driving around. I’ll look out the window. I’ll look at walls or handrails or trees or hills or whatever as potential obstacles to express myself on, to climb, to balance on, or to do certain things in a row. Maybe I’ll jump here, climb over that, and drop down. It’s a playground. Everything has turned into a playground. The
world is your playground now. I used to skateboard when I was younger, so I did have that vision where sometimes I would see a handrail or stairs or something and I would envision myself skateboarding down that. However skateboarding is very limited, more limited than parkour, with the different objects and things you could do. So there were ledges, stairs, handrails, some walls that were slanted or something like that and it was narrower. You could kind of imagine doing it on everything, but it would be particularly hard to actually pull it off. However with parkour, there seems to be no boundaries whatsoever. You can do parkour in an empty room with nothing at all in it or you could do it anywhere that you could possibly exist, you can do parkour there.

Me: Yeah there are always some options.

Mat: Yeah! It just expanded that vision. So it gives me a new relationship with what I see in the environment that’s what I want which includes me as a part of it.

Me: Right. So what role do you think creativity plays in parkour?

Mat: A great deal. If somebody asked “Well, what is parkour?” the definition that I have, well I have different key points that I just want to hit every single time. And creativity is definitely one of those things. When I hear somebody else’s definition, and then they bring in creativity, that’s a good thing and that explains a lot, but it’s a broad term. But it does, I feel, encompass the complete aspect of it. You’re just moving; you’re creating. I used to be more visual I guess, where I painted all the time, but now I feel that I’m a movement artist. Now my art, my canvas, is the world instead of a blank canvas or a square, and my paint is my movements and my actions. At first, I was very confused about why I kind of stopped painting when I started learning parkour more, and then I realized it was just the same thing. I love being creative. I love being a creative person, and then once I found that I could use my creativity in this way, I’m
happier and healthier because I get rewards of my body being in better shape, my digestive system working better, and my brain working better. All these things because I’m being creative with my body. I’m like “Wow! I’d rather do that than sit in a chair and look at paint for a few hours.” There’s nothing wrong with painting. I still love it! Sometimes I see artwork that is very moving to me, and I still really appreciate it and love it! I understand to other people, that is their creative outlet. That painting is the most beautiful thing for them, and that’s what makes them happy. But me personally, I feel that I have found that in parkour, and that is how I choose to express my creativity.

Me: Cool. So if you had to pick three words that represent what parkour means to you, what three words would you choose?

Mat: Praising, Vision, Art, even though creativity and art are very similar, but that was fun! To try to sum up something that’s very complex in three words!

Me: Awesome! Well thank you very much for interviewing with me!

Mat: Yeah for sure!

**Individual Interview 3: Erik Hartung**

Me: Alright let’s get started. Can you please state your name, where you’re from, how old you are, and how long you’ve been doing parkour for?

Erik: I’m Erik Hartung. I’m from Kent, Ohio. I’m 24 years old and I’ve been doing parkour for 2 years now.

Me: Nice, so tell me your story. How did you initially get involved in parkour?

Erik: Honestly, I got involved because of Forrest Paige, one of my friends who did parkour and I was kind of interested in it and I kind of inquired with him to see more about it and see what
parkour is all about. And yeah, from there it involved into actually doing parkour, trying to immerse myself in it.

Me: Nice! So what does parkour mean to you and why do you practice it? What is your reasoning for wanting to do it?

Erik: For me, parkour is really a creative outlet, in addition to being physical movement, physical exercise, it’s really a creative thing that lets me explore what my body can do and also explore new environments. I like that parkour allows you to be able to practice anywhere, so you can explore new environments and practice movements that are familiar to you in environments that aren’t familiar, and grow your skill set of movements.

Me: Cool! So do you have any goals associated with parkour? Like long term or short term or anything?

Erik: I have certain goals of wanting to be able to do certain moves, certain parkour movements. But when I initially started out, I guess the long term goal was just to be more agile with my movement and be more aware of my surroundings. Parkour definitely helps a lot with that. But yeah, short term goals are to be able to do certain parkour moves.

Me: Sounds great. So how do you prepare to go out and practice parkour, physically, mentally, or spiritually?

Erik: So how I prepare is that I always bring Band-Aids and water! Band-Aids, water, and shoes that I can move in and appropriate clothing for the day. But mentally, parkour is a really nice creative release. So I really enjoy it; it’s just kind of a break from non-parkour life.

Me: Right, college thesis life!

Erik: Yep!

Me: So where do you normally chose to go practice parkour?
Erik: I choose urban spaces and I look for certain things like gaps between walls that are close to
each other, I look for rails, handrails, I look for things that are going to be challenging to achieve
for me. So if I could imagine running up a wall and grabbing something, and if it’s just slightly
higher than I think I can do so that it’ll be a challenge, then that’s a good thing for me to do.
Parkour is about overcoming challenges.
Me: Right.
Erik: Even though it’s mainly about overcoming physical obstacles, challenge kind of goes hand
in hand with that. Yeah, so rails, gaps, and yeah those are probably the most important things.
Also different levels and corners and things.
Me: Yeah. So can you describe how you feel physically, mentally, spiritually, when you are
staring down a movement, preparing yourself to do a parkour movement?
Erik: Yeah. So physically, I always kind of limber up and stretch a little bit. I always stretch
before I do parkour, I should’ve mentioned that before. And then mentally, if it’s a move or
something that’s not really too challenging, I don’t have to prepare. It’s kind of second nature. I
kind of just do it or try it. But if it’s something that’s going to push my boundaries, then
sometimes I think about it but then I think about it too much sometimes and I have to step away.
Me: Haha yeah!
Erik: I like to challenge myself with moves that I think aren’t too far away from my attainment,
even though you have to push the boundaries a little bit.
Me: Yeah you don’t want to kill yourself!
Erik: Yeah!
Me: So how do you feel, physically, mentally, spiritually, during the movement when you’re
executing it?
Erik: I feel really good usually! It’s nice to do explosive movements. A lot of parkour involves explosive movements which are good exercise. So I usually put in a lot of force to make the move work. You do as well as the amount of work you put into it. But yeah it feels really good! Sometimes it’s tough on the knees, but yeah!

Me: Yeah it can be tough on the knees for sure! So how do you feel, mentally, physically, spiritually, after you’ve completed the movement successfully?

Erik: I feel great, a sense of accomplishment! And yeah just really good!

Me: Cool! So could you describe your mental, physical, and spiritual interaction with urban space when you’re doing parkour moves?

Erik: It makes me feel like I’m really using the space, which is good because some urban space doesn’t get used. Especially in the way that parkour runners use it. So a lot of urban space is unused, you kind of just look at it. But if you actually use the environment, it feels good that you’re actually using it. It’s surprising to me what you can do with certain things. That’s why it’s surprising to watch what professional parkour runners, traceurs, can do.

Me: Right, yeah!

Erik: So learning new movements, it really pushes our creativity. You know, humans created these spaces and humans can use them in different ways than what they’re meant to be used for. So that’s cool, you get to be creative in how you’re using the space.

Me: Cool. So what are the mental, physical, or spiritual effects that parkour has had on you since you started practicing?

Erik: I’ve gotten a lot longer of a jump I think! I think I have more confidence. I think parkour really boosts your confidence in yourself. It kind of hammered home the idea that everything is tough until you do it. It’s attainable.
Me: Right! You just have to try it out!

Erik: Yep!

Me: Cool. So how have other parkour runners typically responded to seeing you execute moves?

Erik: They’re always positive with their feedback, always encouraging.

Me: Cool. So how do you notice non-parkour runners or bystanders typically responding to seeing you do parkour?

Erik: Most of the time they are fascinated and they usually stop and stare. And they think that even with easy moves, or things that seem easy to me now, they think “Woah! That’s crazy, I could never do that!” So then I usually ask them “Oh, do you want to try it?” And they usually say “No, no, I couldn’t do that.” So yeah, that’s usually how it goes.

Me: So how have you noticed police typically responding to seeing you do parkour?

Erik: I haven’t really been doing parkour that much where police are around. One time there was a kid who called the police because he saw us doing parkour and thought it was something else. But I actually haven’t been in a situation with the police.

Me: Cool. So what do you think and feel when you’re watching another parkour runner do parkour movements?

Erik: I’m kind of analyzing what they do and seeing how I could do that.

Me: So do you ever document your parkour movements, and if so, how do you document them?

Erik: Usually I don’t often document them, almost never. But when I do, I’ll use my cell phone.

Me: Nice. How do you share that footage with others typically?

Erik: Mostly via SnapChat.

Me: SnapChat, cool. So how do you feel about the way in which parkour is portrayed on the internet, in movies, or on television?
Erik: I think parkour is portrayed as something that is a dangerous activity that is only performed by professionals. But I really think that’s a misconception. That portrayal on TV is star shock type of a view on what parkour is.

Me: So what is your perception or opinion on the elements of risk and danger in parkour?

Erik: I think there is risk and danger in parkour, but I don’t think it’s greater than anything else we do, whether you’re driving a car or anything else. The risk is what you make it and it’s hard to make parkour very risky if you don’t want it to be.

Me: So what is your perception or opinion on the elements of trespassing and legal issues with parkour?

Erik: I could see how parkour could intersect with trespassing if people climb buildings. That’s trespassing and there is definitely an intersection there. But parkour doesn’t have to involve trespassing. I think that public space is public space, and if you’re doing parkour in public space then you should have the right to do it there. That’s why it’s public space.

Me: Haha yeah definitely! So are there any other ways that parkour has affected you as a person that we haven’t already covered?

Erik: I’ve made new friends with people that I wouldn’t have expected. Parkour is kind of like a great equalizer. One of the great things about it is that it’s free, so it’s a great equalizer. Unlike any other sport, all you need is a pair of shoes and you can do parkour. That’s what makes it really unique. So it’s kind of like an equalizer in that it’s for all walks of life, and so you meet and see all walks of life doing it. That’s a really beautiful thing and that’s really unlike any other sport. Like with basketball, there are basketball hoops everywhere, but you still need a ball, and with parkour you need even less than that. Not even shoes, you can do it barefoot.
Me: Cool! How has practicing parkour impacted the way that you view or understand urban space, the environment of the city, compared to before you started practicing parkour?

Erik: Doing parkour has definitely affected my awareness of urban space, where before I would just walk by something and now I think about how I could use that space in parkour. It made me appreciate different urban spaces more because I am now actually noticing them, and noticing the details. Whereas before, it was just a bench or it’s just a rail next to a ledge that I would have to walk around to get where I was going. Now I can use those things to go through them, between them in new ways, jumping over stuff.

Me: Awesome! What role do you think creativity plays in parkour?

Erik: I think creativity plays a big role. I think it plays the largest role, more than any other aspect of it. It’s an outlet for adults to play where there aren’t very many other outlets for adults to play in that physical way. So it’s a great creativity outlet. And people are always coming up with new moves, making new content. They want to push the envelope of what parkour runners can do with their bodies in their own creative way. And there’s no goal that everyone is focusing on, it just kind of spreads out in all different directions.

Me: Awesome. So in three words, they could be separated words or a phrase, can you describe what parkour means to you?

Erik: Okay so I would just say Overcoming Urban Obstacles.

Me: Nice! Alright thank you very much!

Erik: No problem!
Individual Interview 4: Brian Pinkley

Me: Alright let’s get started! What is your name, where are you from, how old are you, and how long have you been practicing parkour?

Brian: I’m Brian Pinkley. I’m 18 years old. I’m from Highland Heights, Ohio and I’ve been doing parkour for almost three years now.

Me: So tell me your story of how you got started with parkour?

Brian: I’m really not specifically sure what got me interested in parkour to be honest. I know that my friend showed me some videos in like 2004, 2005 or something. But at the time I never thought I’d be doing that sort of stuff. I guess videogames and stuff kind of got me into it because I really liked Assassin’s Creed!

Me: Haha yeah! Same here!

Brian: When I started it, I was kind of just trying to teach myself at a park that was nearby. Yeah so I basically did a bunch of solo training for about a year and a half I guess. A lot of that was either just experimenting and watching videos online and trying to do what they do. I think it was about that time when I went out to California because of my job. I have family out there and my aunt found this parkour group meet-up thing and I was like “Oh, cool!”

Me: Nice!

Brian: I’d never been to one. So they had about 10 people or something, but they had the meet-ups like every week, so that was cool.

Me: Yeah, consistent.

Brian: Yeah. So that was probably my first real exposure to other people doing parkour. And then after that, I guess I kind of got sad because I had to go back home to Ohio and I was like “Aw man, now I’m all alone again.” When I was out in California, I learned a lot. There is
definitely a place for solo training and I think there’s a place for group training too and have
events with it.

Me: Right.

Brian: Then, I guess I went back to California for the summer and then I came back for the
winter. I got a lot of training in just this past year. I was actually trying to get a parkour group
together but I never really got that far.

Me: Yeah it’s hard to find people that are interested in training consistently.

Brian: Yeah. I was at the park by my house, and I actually saw someone doing parkour and he
apparently went to this gymnastics gym but they had parkour lessons. It wasn’t like Swift
Movement or any of the established parkour gyms. It was a basic gymnastics gym. So you could
do vaults and stuff. It still wasn’t bad, but it wasn’t ideal.

Me: Right.

Brian: Then when I was looking at colleges the past summer, I found out a lot more about the
actual parkour gyms. Above the Bar, Swift Movement, and I don’t remember what the other one
is. But yeah, that’s kind of how I got started.

Me: Cool. So what does parkour mean to you and what inspires you to go practice?

Brian: It’s actually kind of interesting because I was thinking about this the other day. You
know, it’s fun for me, but I was thinking about why. I think the reason that I like it is because it’s
like a challenge. I’m not super spiritual or philosophical about it, but I understand the idea of that
stuff and parkour. I mean, to an extent it’s great to be around all these other people that can do
amazing things. It’s like “Yeah, I can do this or that, what can I do?” Even if it’s not the same
thing as the other people, you can apply the same ideas of practice and conditioning to your own
training.
Me: Yeah, it’s cool to see what other people can do.

Brian: Yeah. One of the things that I just don’t understand how people do is those really far kong vaults and stuff. So yeah, I like to train with the community.

Me: Awesome. So how do you typically prepare to go out and train parkour?

Brian: I mean, generally I just go right into it and start training. But other than that, I try to get myself to do warm-ups and I need to do them more, just more extensively.

Me: Right.

Brian: I’m pretty good about doing stretches and stuff afterwards. I usually start with light practice and do easy moves to start out. So many of the stupid injuries I get are just at the beginning of practicing. Once I start getting into it, I don’t mess up as much, but I have to be careful starting out sessions. I have to get into the mood while I’m warming up.

Me: So which locations do you typically choose to go to practice parkour and what qualities of the locations are ideal for parkour?

Brian: Well, since I’m getting back into parkour, there are so many places to do it on campus. That’s like my main training area. I’ll usually go to places that I’ve trained in the past. So I used to be in the suburbs so there weren’t very many great spots. So you have to kind of go around just looking for them. I think that’s something I really realized about two months before I came to college. The park right by my house has had enough of me playing around on it! So I was trying to go when there aren’t people, but the people don’t like it. Anyways, so yeah I would go to other parks in the area and there were some good places but they were a little farther away than the park right near my house.

Me: Right. In the suburbs, you have to just find anything that you could do. The suburbs where I grew up were pretty bare, not many spots to train.
Brian: Yeah. The hard thing is if you’re starting out training in the suburbs. You don’t even have parkour vision starting out. So you don’t really know what to look for. So I don’t know what kind of advice I would give to people just starting in the suburbs. Even if you’re in an urban area, you just have to find spots and watch videos to see what you can do and just be creative with the spaces you have, looking at them in different ways so the training isn’t always the same. One of the things I did a lot was that I got a lot of balancing practice. Just the curbs on the sides of the streets, I would run along the curbs.

Me: Yeah there’s never a shortage of those in the suburbs!

Brian: Yeah I know! So one of the things that I kind of wanted to do, if I could find a railing that was low to the ground, was practicing stepping up onto it and walking along that. It’s still scary because you’re walking along on a rail, especially if you fall and you’re a guy, it could really hurt! So yeah, just being creative, especially in places where there aren’t a lot of good spots or they’re just spread out.

Me: Yeah that makes sense. So could you try to describe how you feel, physically, mentally, and spiritually, when you’re staring down a parkour move and about to do it, and how you feel during the parkour move when you’re actually performing it, and then how you feel afterwards when you’ve finished the move?

Brian: So, before I do it, especially if it’s a move that I know I can do but I’m just afraid to do it, there is just a lot of visualization. I’m just thinking “Well I’m going to land here,” just kind of picture how I’m going to land and how I’m going to transition to the next thing. I think there’s room for practicing spontaneous movement, without thinking about it much at all before you do it. But also, you should have a plan. That’s going to help you do what you’re trying to do. It
helps with flow. So most of the time, yeah I’m probably imagining how I’m going to do something, how I’m going to transition. You have to have a goal basically.

Me: Right.

Brian: You try to match that goal and if you can do that, you can do anything. So during a jump or flow state or anything, the main thing is just concentration. I guess it’s kind of like a videogame but it’s not a videogame. A lot of the enjoyment comes from accomplishing your goals. I enjoy the movement too, but when we were jumping down that ramping area with all the precisions, we had more fun while doing it than when we got to the end. When we got to the end, we were like “Ah my legs are so sore but I want to keep on doing this!” I wouldn’t say that soreness is super fun, but once you get close to the end, it’s like “Okay, I’m doing this, I’m almost there!” So yeah I think mostly concentration, or in that case, more like endurance!

Me: Yeah seriously! There were so many precisions there!

Brian: Yeah! That’s a great spot!

Me: Yeah!

Brian: And then, I kind of touched on this, after it’s like did you achieve the goal you were going for, did you accomplish it? You’re accomplishing what you set out to do, or getting closer to it, so that one day you can either do what you’re trying to do or apply what you did to another move, anything else that is similar. So yeah!

Me: Right! Cool! So can you describe your physical and mental interaction with urban space when you’re doing the moves?

Brian: Yeah, it’s definitely different. The weirdest thing about it is that it’s so hard to look back and try to think about objects like you’re a ‘parkour muggle’ (someone who doesn’t train parkour). I can’t see an object without seeing things I can do on it. Like if I’ll just be on a car
ride somewhere, I’ll be looking out the window and imagine a little guy running around and think “Oh, he does a vault there! Then a double kong!”

Me: Yeah just seeing all the possibilities!

Brian: Yeah! You see urban space in just a totally different way I can assume, because people are so surprised when they see someone do something. I can’t really remember if I was able to see things the way I do now. It’s not like parkour vision is something you have to focus on to make it happen, it’s just there.

Me: Yeah, it just starts happening?

Brian: Yeah. So you really begin to appreciate spaces in different ways, and I think that’s a really good perspective for us to learn.

Me: Cool! So what are the physical and mental affects that parkour has had on your life?

Brian: I’m definitely much different than I was before I started parkour. A lot of things in your life change through parkour and embracing the philosophy. I don’t know if I found the philosophy in parkour or not. Did parkour get me into the philosophy or did the philosophy lead me to parkour? I don’t know! But once you have the philosophy of overcoming obstacles and goals, you can apply it to a lot of other things in life. I definitely became a lot more interested in my health, like long-term health of my body. One of the main things right now is that I want to get over my inability to eat more food because I’m not a very good eater.

Me: I’m with you on that! Eating is so hard!

Brian: Haha! I’m a picky eater, so I just don’t eat that often. So I just need to get over that obstacle. I think that one of the main things with parkour is that you have to make it about you overcoming something. In parkour, it’s not about you overcoming someone else’s jump or something. It’s about overcoming your own obstacles and pushing your own limits.
Me: Yeah!

Brian: Like with the food thing, I went to a food therapist to try and fix it. If you don’t have the vision and the drive to change, you’re not going to be able to accomplish anything. You can’t just all of a sudden change. You have to have the vision! I’m saying this without having really changed my diet a whole lot, but I know that that’s the mentality that you have to have. So yeah, you can apply that to anything in life if you put your mind to it.

Me: Nice! So how have other parkour runners typically responded to seeing you do parkour moves?

Brian: I’m not really sure because I have trained by myself a lot and I don’t have a whole lot of interaction with parkour jams. I’m not really sure.

Me: Alright, well how do bystanders normally respond to seeing you doing parkour?

Brian: They’re usually surprised. That’s pretty common with parkour. Like I’d want it to be more mainstream but I don’t know if the philosophy would stay a part of it.

Me: Yeah that’s a good point.

Brian: But to go in that direction of it being more well-known would be better I think, more public acceptance. There are people that’ll talk to me and think that it’s really good that I’m doing it, but then there are other people that are afraid for safety reasons. I understand it, especially because I was living in a place where no one knew what parkour was. So they were thinking “What’s this kid doing? He’s going to hurt himself!” So I understand it.

Me: Yeah. So I don’t know if you’ve ever been in this situation before, but how have police responded to seeing you do parkour?

Brian: Yeah that happened once at the park near my house. Basically, people would call because they were afraid for either my safety or I guess their kid’s safety, or that they didn’t want their
kids trying stuff that I was doing. So I think that was really the only time. Other than that, I haven’t really had any other interactions with police. Actually I was kind of surprised, and I don’t know if I really even agree with what was happening, but out in California, there was a big meet-up and some of the people were actually going out into the road. There were cars there but I was like “Eh, I don’t know about this.” The police were actually pretty cool about it. But I think there is a limit. If we’re creating a danger, we’re not training the right way.

Me: Yeah that makes sense. So how do you think and feel when you’re watching someone else do parkour moves?

Brian: It’s weird, because when you see something that’s so much different than the way you would do it, it surprises you. It’s the same concept, but it’s so different! When you see someone else do the jump, it’s totally different from when you are about to do the jump. When I watch a lot of parkour videos, I think “I wish I could be that good,” but also you shouldn’t try to compare yourself to the other person like that. It’s not like I wish I was that good, but it makes me want to train so that I could become better.

Me: Right! It inspires you to keep doing it!

Brian: Yeah!

Me: So when you’re doing parkour, do you ever document your moves? And if so, how do you document them and where do you share them to?

Brian: I did a little bit, but I haven’t really recorded much at all. I have a Sony Action Cam that I use to film stuff sometimes.

Me: Cool, so how do you feel about the way that parkour is portrayed on the internet, in movies, or on television?
Brian: There are definitely three main groups of people that view parkour. There are people that do parkour, and understand the philosophy, I mean to an extent at least understand the philosophy. Then there are people that enjoy parkour but have never tried it. And then there are the people who would be the ones that like to search up parkour fails. I think that the way we train, at least to the largest group of people meaning the public and most videos on YouTube, looks like it is about the big jumps and the big drops. And that’s not the philosophy. But I don’t know what we really need to change for the philosophy to be understood more.

Me: Right, because they have to be pretty involved with parkour to understand what it is.

Brian: Yeah. I mean there are plenty of channels on YouTube that are about the actual philosophy of parkour, but they’re just not as big of channels.

Me: Right because they’re not just a bunch of big flashy jumps.

Brian: Yeah. So a lot of people are going to see you and think of those popular videos and tell you “Oh! Do a flip!” Or do this ridiculous jump. But that’s not what this is about. So I don’t really know how much that will change, if it’s going to change at all. My hope would be that that does end up changing as parkour spreads more and becomes more common.

Me: Yeah and more people learn about the real philosophy behind it.

Brian: Yeah. Parkour isn’t super well-known right now. I think as a movement, we are slowly but surely growing. So yeah my only hope is that as parkour grows, people will actually start to know people who train parkour, and through them they’ll learn more about what the philosophy is. In terms of movies and stuff, at this point, I think that a lot of the movies like Tracers or Brick Mansions that show parkour; it’s hard to say whether it’s good or bad. I think it’s alright because it shows it to a bigger audience, but it’s still kind of similar to the YouTube stuff. It’s just used for the action and the excitement and doesn’t really teach anybody about the sport. Maybe one
day they’ll make one of those movies for parkour like those football or baseball movies where you really get to see what it’s all about.

Me: So what is your opinion on the elements of risk and danger in parkour?

Brian: Basically the practice I try to stay with is that I try to practice things that I am able to do. Risk, I would say, is the likelihood of being hurt. There is a difference between risk where it’s “Hey, you have a good chance of really hurting yourself.” You might not hurt yourself but you have a good chance of hurting yourself vs. messing up. A lot of the times what I’ll try to do is I’ll practice things that I’m very likely to mess up on, but I’ll practice in a way that if I do mess up, I’m not going to fall three stories or something.

Me: Right!

Brian: And I think that’s one of the things that 1) people assume parkour is and 2) it’s because of that why they think parkour is so dangerous and it shouldn’t been seen that way. You can even jump across some crazy gap and it could be safe, but that’s only going to come by practicing in places where you’re not going to get hurt if you mess up.

Me: Right, so the chance that you would mess up on the big jump is really low because you’ve been doing that forever.

Brian: Yeah. So if I’m doing anything dangerous where there’s a risk, it’s going to be something that’s well within my range of control, whereas if I’m just practicing in a not very risky situation, I’ll try to push my limits. But that’s the main difference between pushing you limits and just smashing them.

Me: Yeah! Just not caring at all and just throwing yourself at stuff.

Brian: Yeah! So parkour isn’t about falling or getting hurt but still completing a challenge. It’s not about that. It’s about practicing and practicing so you won’t hurt yourself!
Me: Right, because what’s the point if you just hurt yourself every time?
Brian: Yeah that’s what I think one of the stereotypes is. People are always like “How many bones have you broken?” And I’m like “Well I haven’t actually broken any.”
Me: Haha then you’re like “Wait, I thought you did parkour though?” So how has parkour affected you as a person?
Brian: It has taught me a totally different philosophy. It has helped me mentally and physically. I think it also helps bring people together. That probably comes back to self-improvement rather than competition. The parkour community is pretty open-minded, at least from my experience. I’m sure there are probably groups out there that are less so, but in general they are as a collective movement.
Me: So how has parkour changed the way that you view urban space from before you started practicing to now?
Brian: It seems a lot different. I don’t remember that well, but I don’t think I saw a railing and think “I want to balance on that” or “I want to do a vault over that” or do all that stuff with it. You see it in a totally different light. One of the things you do notice a lot more is the changes in elevation and the edges it creates. If I see anything like that, I think “Oh look, a parkour spot!” It’s just really cool to be able to see a place and think “Hey, I can jump from here to here and hang on this and swing to that and run up here and go across this and wall run up here” and stuff like that. Yeah there are so many more opportunities, and I hate to be cliché, but it’s like the world is your playground!
Me: Right! So last question, if you could describe what parkour means to you in three words, what would they be?
Brian: I’d say Movement, Creativity, and Challenge.
Me: Nice! Well thank you very much for interviewing with me! I really appreciate it!

Brian: Yeah! No problem! Time to get back to college work!

Me: Yeah definitely!

**Individual Interview 5: Richard Skowronski**

Me: What’s your name, where are you from, and how long have you been practicing parkour?

Richard: My name is Richard Skowronski. I’m originally from Ohio, I grew up in Columbus, I’m 26 years old, and I’ve been doing parkour for 10 years now.

Me: So tell me your story, how did you initially get involved in the sport?

Richard: Well my origin story, I guess, would be that I’ve always kind of done movements like this. I’ve always explored my environment in a different way from other people and it has always been clear to me that that was so, ever since I was younger. I was always climbing, exploring, playing, looking for other creative ways of interacting with my environment that other people often wouldn’t see. Then as I got into college, I had some previous sports background. I did wrestling in middle school and in high school, and that was really the only sports discipline that I had gotten into that made me feel more physically active and feel like I was a part of something. But I didn’t agree too much with the competitive nature of that sport. So when I got into college, and I was still exploring my environment in the same way that I always would, I met a friend, and he’s really big into YouTube and finding things and searching up stuff. He would see the way that I would interact with the environment and play and just be who I was. And he found a parkour video, and he was like “Bro, I think you’d really be into this”. I was going to school for photography at the time, and that’s what I wanted to be is a photographer. I loved the aspect of being able to see something, capture it, and be able to convey whatever
feeling, emotion, idea, or just imprint that that initial moment made on me, I could capture that and pass that same thing on to someone else. So when he showed me the video, and it was 3RUN’s Evolution video, I watched it, and it was so profound. The first thing that came to my mind wasn’t “Oh, this is cool, oh, I didn’t know people could do that”, because I knew people could do stuff like that and I knew it was cool, so those initial thoughts didn’t come to mind. What came to my mind immediately was “This is what I want my life to be about”. It was that profound. So, pretty much that day, I watch that video two more times, and then I told my friend “Let’s go outside”, and I just started learning it. This was my life now. It wasn’t just the ability of them to do these things; it was the fact that they didn’t have to ask permission of themselves, of the environment. They knew themselves well enough that they were able to have that sense of freedom and understanding. They could just be, and do what they wanted, how they wanted to do it, in the environment that they wanted to, and that’s the freedom that I wanted. It’s that awareness, that freedom.

Me: What does parkour mean to you and why do you practice?

Richard: That’s a really good question. Kind of to piggyback on what I was saying before, parkour is freedom to me. My Instagram tag is ‘Movement Is Freedom’ because I do believe that. If you can move in any way, if you are able to interact with your environment and others in your environment, you’re free. You are the one that’s making the decisions to either choose to interact with the environment this way, or choose to interact with this person in that way. It’s completely up to you. You’re basically cultivating your own freedom by training and studying this discipline (parkour).

Me: Yeah, like the older you get, you start to not be able to move as well and your freedom is kind of restricted because you can’t get to places you used to be able to.
Richard: So, in that mindset, I would disagree, because even though your movement may be limited, your ability to get through your environment should not be limited. You should be able to figure out “These are my limitations, how do I overcome them and get to where I want to be? That’s my destination. Nothing should be able to stop me no matter what my limitations are.” You see these people that have no arms and no legs and are climbing mountains and doing all this amazing stuff.

Me: Yeah! Have you seen that Nike commercial of that guy climbing a mountain?

Richard: Yeah, I think that just came out recently. The limitation is only what you put on yourself. Society tries to dictate a lot of what we are limited to do, but that’s not the case, only if we allow those limitations to be put upon us. I feel like parkour helps you to cultivate and realize that freedom to make your own decisions. So I consider parkour to be freedom, and you’re cultivating that awareness and that understanding of how much freedom you actual want to have. You can dictate that. What was the other part of your question?

Me: Why do you practice parkour?

Richard: Oh yeah, so pretty much for that freedom! Those are my own personal gains; that’s what I see. I love teaching though. That’s ultimately why I continue to practice, is to create an understanding for myself and to help others realize their own potential.

Me: Right, sort of like photography, you take a picture and see the potential in other things.

Richard: I want to be able to pass something on. It’s not just for me. If we go to the core tenants of what parkour’s philosophy is, ‘Be Strong to Be Useful’. Well, I’m strong enough to do these things for myself, and I have the capability to pass on knowledge, so doesn’t that make me more useful (as a teacher)? Can’t I be useful to other people, and create in them the ability for them to be more useful to themselves and others?
Me: Right, you pass it on and it keeps going.

Richard: Exactly. So that’s why I continue, is to be able to pass on knowledge and help others realize the potential they have inside of themselves.

Me: So would you say that is your ultimate goal in the sport?

Richard: Yes, yeah. Be strong to be useful, to be and to last, and to leave no trace. Those are the three main tenants of parkour. It’s funny because people will ask me “What religion do you practice?” or “What religion do you follow?” But to me, I don’t really follow any religious creed or tenant or belief. I was brought up Catholic, but I had so many issues within the church and with the way that they were kind of being critical of me and how they treated my family for certain reasons. And I thought “What is going on? I thought we were supposed to be kind to each other.”

Me: Yeah, like “Why am I being forced to believe something I don’t agree with?”

Richard: Yeah! So then when I came across parkour, I thought “Well, all these religions follow certain tenants, certain beliefs, and certain moral standards, and parkour has all of these things, and I agree with them way more than anything else, more than what anyone else has presented to me.” The closest thing I would think would be Buddhism, because in Buddhism, you can be any religion you want and still be Buddhist also because it’s not a religious doctrine.

Me: Right, it’s not exclusive.

Richard: Right, it’s about how you approach the world.

Me: I’m actually a Buddhist also so that’s funny!

Richard: Cool! Cool! Awesome! So I don’t practice Buddhism or anything, I practice parkour, and that’s my religion. People are like “Oh what religion are you?” and I’ll be like “Uh I’m a Traceur.”
Me: So on a typical day of practice, how do you prepare to do parkour?
Richard: A typical day of personal practice, or when I’m teaching others?
Me: Probably personal practice.
Richard: Okay. Personal practice, it usually starts out with me watching videos. I’ll be on Instagram or I’ll be on YouTube and I’ll see something that someone else is doing and think “Wow, that’s legit! I want to try that! I know myself well enough that I should be able to do that movement.” I have a lot of friends that are parkour practitioners obviously, that I’ve met through travels, and they do some incredible things. I think “I know that person” or “I know that spot” and it’s a feeling of “Ooh I’ve worked on that before and I want to try that again”. Or you see these guys coming out with brand new movements that you never even considered, like the one we worked on today in class! It’s so simple, but has other purposes it can be used for.
Me: Right! I never would have thought of that as a move!
Richard: So I’ll be inspired by watching a video or I’ll be already out in an environment and get pumped about a spot, “I want to train at this spot!”
Me: Yeah you get inspired by a place you find.
Richard: Right! So I’ll warm up. I always like to warm up, I never just jump into my movements. I always start with some type of joint mobility and stretching. Because again along with those tenants, To Be and To Last. You train in a way that you’re going to be able to do this for the rest of your life, not just today and tomorrow, but to the end.
Me: Right yeah, if you just throw yourself off a roof and get injured, you’re done.
Richard: Yeah, so I’ll always warm up. I’ll start playing with smaller movements, build up to the things I have on my mind that I want to achieve, smaller progressions, and then once I feel comfortable, then I’m like “Alright, let’s throw all this stuff together”. It’s kind of similar to how
I teach the classes too. I always show a basic progression, or I’ll show you guys “This is what I want us to do at the end”, and then we’ll work up to that. And then, I do limit myself a lot in my own personal training, I have to admit. Because as an instructor, I feel like I have a responsibility to others and not just myself. If I do a bigger movement, it would be moves that put me at a little bit more risk for injuries.

Me: Right, and then if you get injured, you can’t teach others.

Richard: It affects me emotionally and mentally when I’m not able to teach or even practice on my own. Being stagnant is not an option for me. I have to be doing something. Then, you know, I go through my movements. Once I feel like today has been a good day, if I get to a point where I think “Yeah, I’m going to film something”, something that inspires me enough to film it so I can pass it on to others, that will usually tell me “Alright, I’ve done good today”. And then I’ll stretch after, because the recovery part is just as important as anything.

Me: Yeah, got to get all the lactic acid out of your muscles.

Richard: Right, take care of your body!

Me: When you pick spots in urban spaces outside, what do you typically look for when choosing a spot?

Richard: I typically look for mundane things. Honestly, I try to find the most simplistic things within a spot, like where there are only two rails and a ledge, or a parking space, or a parking barrier and a tree or something. Somewhere where anybody else would walk by that spot and think “There’s nothing here” and move on. It’s like “Man, you have no idea what’s right here until you’ve spent an hour just trying to get used to that space!” Because sometimes, those have been the best training sessions that I’ve ever had, it’s something so simple.

Me: Right, those tiny little finds.
Richard: And to go along with that whole reason I was even into photography was being able to pass on a mindset, a belief, an idea, or a feeling. If I could get people to look at the environment just a little bit differently from how they normally do, that’s success to me also. To get someone to be like “What?! No way!” you know? Being in Hawaii, there have been times where, there’s a section near the beach on Oahu at Ala Moana Beach Park, where there are these 8ft tall pillars. They’re probably 4ft by 4ft and square on top, maybe a little less, probably 2ft by 2ft, and I’ll climb up on top of them, do a handstand on the 8ft tall pillar, or just stand up there. And there have been days when I am doing movements, and I have people that walk by. One woman got mad at me! She just started yelling at me! “Get down from there, you’re going to get hurt! What are you doing up there?!” And I was like “Woah, woah, woah, calm down! I understand and I appreciate your fear for me to make sure that I stay safe, but I’m not hurting anybody else, I do this every single day, I have built myself up to be comfortable being up here. I understand you. I wouldn’t put myself in a situation where I felt like I was going to get hurt. Do I want to push myself and challenge myself, yes, but this is my responsibility, not yours. Thank you for your appreciation.”

Me: Right, if you’re concerned, move on.

Richard: Exactly. Like “I hope you have a wonderful day, but I got this. Don’t you limit what it is that I want to do.”

Me: Yeah, that’s happened to me too. Bystanders have told me “Hey! That’s dangerous! Don’t do that again!”

Richard: Right! Or when I play on rails, people will say “Oh, that’s not what that’s for” and then I say “Well, how do you know? Is that just because society has dictated that that’s what this
railing is for, to use as a guard rail to guide you into this structure or to offer assistance to those who are not able to walk on their own?”

Me: Yeah, who says that needs to be the only use?

Richard: Exactly! The other thing too is if I come to that spot every single day, and I train there for like 2 hours a day, and these people only walk by once a week or so. I know every surface of that environment. Where is it slick? Where is it sturdy? Where does it rock?

Me: Right, where is the handrail going to come out of the wall?

Richard: Right? Where is there uneven ground? I know all of those points on this environment because I’ve been there so many times! This rail is like my best friend! Gary and I, we hang out all the time!

Me: Haha! Yeah! “You don’t even know him! Don’t act like you know him!”

Richard: Yeah haha! And then people start looking at me a little bit different. They’re like “Alright, weirdo.”

Me: “I’ll just leave him to it.”

Richard: Yeah!

Me: Can you describe how you feel physically, mentally, and spiritually, when you are preparing to perform a parkour movement and thinking about a movement you are about to do?

Richard: Hmm, so describe how I’m feeling when I am preparing for a move.

Me: Right. Maybe something you haven’t done before or some new thing you’re about to try.

Richard: I try to get clear. I try not to have anything in my mind, because that’s when I feel like things go wrong. There is a song that I listen to called ‘Vipassana’ and it’s by Macklemore, and he has a line in there that I really like. “Expectations are resentments waiting to happen.” So I feel like if I have any expectation about what it is that I want to achieve and I don’t meet that
standard, I’m going to resent not being able to do that anyway, right? So if I have no
expectations, no matter what happens, the fact that I already committed and did this movement,
that’s success. That’s what I share with my students too. It doesn’t matter whether you achieve it
the first time or not, are you able to do it again? Are you able to be safe enough that you can
attempt this over and over and over again? Until you finally realize, this is how to do it. Here’s
how I do it correctly. Here’s how I do it efficiently every single time. So I try not to have any
expectation or thought in my mind of like “Ooh, I’ve got to get this!” or “Today’s the day!” No,
if I’m not feeling it, I walk away from it. Come back and try it another day.
Me: Right, don’t try and force it.
Richard: Right! And this goes back again to my time being in Hawaii, I taught a lot of surfers
stuff too. When you’re surfing, you can’t fight the wave or anything. You have to just go with it.
So that’s a lot of the mindset that I have towards the movement. You can’t fight momentum. It’s
going to take you where it wants to take you. You either ride the ride with it, or you figure out a
way through that, where it’s like “Okay, I want you going this way. Alright, well I don’t
necessarily have to go that specific way the way you want me to. I can find a way to go that way,
the way I want to come out of it and then go in this other direction.” You realize, “This is where
I’m going, how do I want to get out of it though?” (Referencing surfing and riding the waves).
Then you can kind of dictate that.
Me: So can you describe how you feel, physically mentally spiritually, during the movement,
like while you’re executing a line or a series of movements?
Richard: Free. It’s just a sense of freedom. It’s a sense of weightlessness. It’s a sense of oneness
with the environment when everything links up and you’re just like whoosh boom pop tap bang
whoosh swap turn alright boom pop pop done. That was cool. And it was like nothing. I don’t feel
physically exerted or exhausted. Everything linked up and that was my flow state, my moment of connectedness with the universe.

Me: Like smoothly navigating the world!

Richard: Yep!

Me: Can you describe the feeling that you feel, physically mentally spiritually, after you’ve completed the movement and you’re standing there thinking “That’s it, that’s what I just did”, taking it all in?

Richard: Definitely a sense of accomplishment. A desire to do it again, you know, to feel it again. It’s like I always want to feel that. And you know I could see where people would think of parkour as “Oh, well you guys are a bunch of adrenaline junkies”. It’s not the adrenaline that I am feeding off of; it’s that sense of oneness. That sense of ‘I don’t need to ask permission or to realize oh, I’m doing this wrong this way. And I can find creativity in the most mundane things too. I do a lot of rock stacking as well. It’s a meditative process for me. If you can find a way to get all of these mundane objects, that to anybody else look plain and like there is no use for them, and I can create this structure that looks so visually appealing but has so much purpose. I really consider rock stacking and parkour to have a lot of correlations. One, you’re focusing on balance, two, you’re focusing on creativity, look for things in small objects, and then you have to be okay with failure. That stack is going to fall so many times until you find that exact balance where everything links up, that flow state.

Me: The perfect center.

Richard: Right. Yeah, just trying to find creative ways of playing with the rocks, changing things, shifting things somewhat differently, taking the five same rocks that you stacked up apart and then putting it back a different way.
Me: Yeah keep playing with it until it works.

Richard: Exactly. So those are the type of things where you’re just searching for that sense of oneness. After I complete it, yes, there’s that sense of accomplishment, but it’s always a feeling of “I think I want to find that again”. And maybe not in the same movement, maybe in something different.

Me: Right, you could do the same route a different way.

Richard: Exactly.

Me: So are there any additional ways that we haven’t covered so far of how parkour has impacted your life?

Richard: I’m not sure if this gets touched on a lot, but the ways that I’ve seen it (parkour) affect not only myself but other people, like the people I teach and the people back in the community in Hawaii too, is that I’ve heard people go as far as to say that parkour has saved their lives. Either because they were going down the wrong path, and then they found this outlet and it brought them back into a positive way of approaching things in their lives, how they’re look at things. Whereas they could have fallen into drugs and other bad things, and that would have just put them down a road where they would not have been positively affecting the world or themselves if they would have continued to follow that path. Now that they have parkour, and they have a community to be a part of that is so supportive and understanding of what it is that we are trying to achieve, it’s that support system, that ability to come together, and that physical outlet too I think is so important. And the mindset that goes into achieving just small movements can be taken into anything, into school, into work, into relationships. When I say relationships, people are like “What are you talking about?” But you can take all three of those core beliefs into a relationship. ‘Be strong to be useful’. If you can support that person, if you’re strong enough to
support yourself and them and realize that they’re going through this thing and they need either space or they need comfort, or they need the ability for you to adapt and be flexible and be strong. And then ‘to be and to last’. How are you going to work on that relationship so you can have this strong relationship forever as opposed to short term? ‘To leave no trace’. Leave no negative impact upon that relationship. As long as you have both come away from it saying “I’ve learned something, I’m stronger, I’m better, and I’m more knowledgeable.” Even if it ends, there is still something that’s gained, and there is no negative residual impact that is left from that.
That is a successful relationship.

Me: Yeah, that definitely crosses over, I can see that.

Richard: Yeah, so I feel like having that mental stability and take that and not just use it for the physical movement, but for other things in your life too. Like I said, whether it be work, whether it be school, it’s the same.

Me: Right, the same mindset.

Richard: Exactly. You can approach “How do I need to overcome this? This is my goal. Okay well I need to do this, and once I figure out this thing, alright now I need to do this, now that I understand this, I can do that and this, okay, now here’s the harder part, alright I can do this, now I’ve got to do these and that, and then I’ll be able to achieve my goal.” But I have to do the work, you know. That’s the hardest thing is doing the work for some people.

Me: Right, because if you do a parkour line, you have to do this move to this move then you have that real high climb to a pres and then you’re good.

Richard: Yep!

Me: So how have other parkour runners typically responded to seeing you execute movements?
Richard: Positively! I get a lot of good feedback. People are always really impressed with what it is that I am able to achieve. I try to be a really humble individual, like I try not to take too much praise because yeah, I’ve done the work to get to where I am, but that doesn’t mean that they can’t do it either. I try not to let people put me on a pedestal. I prefer it when people see me fail because it lets people know that I’m still working. Just because I’ve been training as long as I have or because I do the things that I do or because things look so graceful and easy for me doesn’t mean that I haven’t struggled through my own movement. It has all helped me to become who I am today, and I want all of those challenges to better my life. If it were easy, I don’t think I would appreciate it as much.

Me: Yeah, what’s the point if it’s easy, right?

Richard: Yeah. So definitely there have been people that have told me “Wow, your movements are really graceful!” They get inspired, you know! Even in the open gyms and the classes we have here, if I do something and people see it, they’re like “Oh! Alright I want to try that!” Like that move we did today in class with the one thing and you were like “Oh! Wait a minute!”

Me: Haha yeah exactly! I was like “Oh! I can see how it flows through now!”

Richard: Yep!

Me: So we already covered this a little bit, but how do non-parkour practitioners typically respond to your movement?

Richard: They’re inspired! They’re inspired by it. Some people, like I said, are opposed to it because they are not knowledgeable enough about what it is that I’m actually doing, or they’re coming from their own background of not understanding what I’m trying to achieve. I’m not trying to put myself in danger; I’m not trying to put other people in danger. I’m trying to cultivate an awareness of what it is that I’m capable of doing here and now in this moment and
what I can do tomorrow as well. Touching back a little bit further, one of the things that I really like about parkour, I was saying that I wasn’t too into the competition sports, whereas parkour isn’t about being better than the person next to you. It’s about being better than the person you were yesterday. It’s about cultivating that better self. You can help the person next to you, you know what I mean?

Me: Yeah, you fight together to better yourselves.

Richard: Yeah. So that’s what I love so much about parkour, the thing that immediately got me to think “This is the thing in my life that I never want to lose”.

Me: I don’t know if this has ever happened to you, but how do police typically respond to seeing you do parkour?

Richard: So this is something that I do have actually a bit of experience with being in Hawaii, because I started the parkour community there with my friend.

Me: Right, so the people were pretty unaware of it before you started it probably.

Richard: Yeah, we were the only ones doing it, and so we had a lot of contact with police. One of the things that helped though was that we were in the newspaper a lot. We were in the newspaper and in the local news a lot!

Me: Really?! Was it in a good way?

Richard: Yeah! In a good way! We had people be like “Oh, what are you guys doing? Oh, that’s exciting!” So yeah, within the first two months of us training, I think we were in the local paper four times and the local news three times. We were on a local late night talk show called ‘Late Night with Danny Bumatai’. And then within two months after that, we even did a McDonalds commercial. Oh, and we were in Honolulu Magazine also, in an article about 101 things to do when you’re on Oahu is to come and train with us. So we kind of had a lot of people looking our
way already. We also kept true to that ‘Leave no trace’ aspect. Every month, we would have a specific jam where we’d go out and clean up a different park in Oahu to show that we were here to give back to the community and not to take from it.

Me: Yeah it’s not like skateboarders who just wreck things and get yelled at by cops.

Richard: No. I’ve had that before though! I was training on the federal building which is why they came out pretty aggressive. But we were training and a dude comes out and says “Alright, give them to me, give them to me! I want them right now!” And we were like “What are you talking about?” “Your skateboards, give them to me!” and we were like “Dude, we don’t have any skateboards.” and he was like “No I saw you guys moving around here” “Yeah, we are just doing it with our bodies.” and he was pretty surprised. So the one thing that I’ve always taught the community there and that I’ve kept in my mind is to just be respectful, no matter what. If they come to you, and they give you the opportunity to educate them or talk to them about what it is that you’re doing, take that. Engage in a conversation! Don’t be aggressive in the dialogue though. Be calm, be respectful. “Oh, this is what I’m doing. I’m trying to be more fit and just trying to realize what I can do with my environment. I’m not trying to hurt anyone or destroy the property. I even clean up this area every day that I come here to give back to it.” And then if they’re like “Oh that’s fine, whatever, whatever, but because of liability, you can’t be here,” then it’s “Thank you so much, have a wonderful day” and move on.

Me: Yeah, don’t make a scene.

Richard: Yeah, come back another day. Try again, you know. The more exposure they have to it and they see that you’re respectful about leaving, then they might be like “Oh, you come here, you clean up, you watch out for other people, you’re not trying to harm anyone, come and be here, please”. They know who you are now. It’s about cultivating that understanding of what it is
that we are trying to achieve. I had another incident though where we were in this public park and it was me, one of our female practitioners with a couple other people who were training and a cop comes up and he was talking to her at first, and I could see that she was feeling really uncomfortable because he was being kind of aggressive. He was saying things like “What are you guys doing? You can’t be here, this is a blah blah blah”. So I walk over and I’m like “Oh hey, how’s it going?” and he keeps talking to her and doesn’t even acknowledge me when I’m asking him questions. And he’d respond to her when I asked him a question. And I think it was because he was local and I was not, and there is that sense in Hawaii where you have all these foreigners come through and just take from Hawaii and don’t give back.

Me: Yeah because it’s such a great vacation spot and everyone is always going there.

Richard: Yeah, and the other thing too is about how Hawaii came to become a state within the US. It was a monarchy to begin with. They had their own system set up. Their agricultural system was far beyond anything the colonists had ever experienced.

Me: Yeah, great climate!

Richard: And the other thing too was that Iolani Palace on Mount Oahu actually had electricity before the White House did.

Me: Wow, that’s pretty impressive!

Richard: Right! So they had it all together, and they didn’t believe in owning land, which was why it was so easy to take stuff from Hawaiians. Because they thought that nobody owns it, it belongs to all of us. We all just take care of it, we take from the land and we give back to it and that’s it. That’s why it was super easy. So what happened was the US came along and they were like “We want you to become part of the US” and they were like “I don’t know, I don’t know”. So what they ended up doing was they held the queen captive at her palace for a week, and then
forced her to sign a treaty with the US to become a part. But, it abolished their monarchy. They were no longer allowed to rule their own state, and I believe that they outlawed the use of the Hawaiian language as well. So yeah, there is a lot of resentment from the Hawaiian people towards the US because of how they were forced to become a part of this nation. There is a lot of resentment towards that, which is why my focus with the Hawaii parkour community was to be able to give back to Hawaii. That’s all I want, is to have a community here. We don’t want to take anything. We want to be here, we want to share with you, but we don’t want to take anything. We just want to give back. So that day, when he was giving me grief and only talking to her, was because she looks more local than I do. So I was talking with him trying to explain and he said “Hey, I don’t have time for your gift of gab okay!” And I was like “Oh, alright okay!” But eventually we came to a conclusion where he was like “Oh, well you know you’re not supposed to be here” or whatever and “You know you’re trespassing” and I told him it was a public park so not necessarily and he said “Oh but you cannot block the door because it’s a fire hazard” and I was like “Well there’s another door right here, and if something like that were to happen, of course we wouldn’t block people exiting the building, we would only even assist”. That was when he was like “I don’t have time for your gift of gab” or whatever. So you’re not wanting to engage in an actual dialogue about this, you just want to be the dictator and for us to just move along, but I’m not. I’m not just going to let you tell me what to do with no reasons. So on the other side of that, there was one time when we were having a ‘leave no trace’ jam in downtown Honolulu, and we were cleaning up this park. And there’s a fire station right there on the corner too and we were climbing the side of that building and someone called in on us. So we were flanked by three patrol car that had come up to the park. The first patrol car got out and he came over to me first and he was like “Oh, hey how’s it going?” “Hey, it’s going really well, just
having a little clean up here” “Are you guys doing parkour?” “Yeah!” “Oh, that’s cool!” “Yeah we’re actually just doing a jam here today trying to clean up and leave this park better than we found it” “Oh, I think that’s so great!” He watched us do a couple movements. “Yeah we just got a call that some people were climbing the side of the building over there, so if you guys could just not do that so we don’t get any more calls, we can at least say if anyone calls in that oh, yeah we’ve gone down, we’ve talked to them and everything’s okay” “Wow, I appreciate that so much, thank you!”

Me: Yeah, then you get to have a dialogue at least instead of them just yelling at you to get out of there.

Richard: Yeah! He was great, he said “I think what you guys are doing is great. Keep up the good work.” “Thank you so much.” Before the other two patrol officers were even able to come up, he walks over to them and waves them off, and was like “No, it’s cool, they’re good, I talked to them”. We didn’t have any issues the rest of the day. That’s the type of interaction that we need to have. Give the police quick, concise answers if they are upset. Don’t drag it out, don’t try to talk for a long time. Real short. But the police got called out because someone thought that we were doing suspicious behavior, and I can understand why some people are fearful in this day and age of terrorist type attacks, but the fear is only based off of my physical appearance more so than what I’m actually doing. And it just comes down to respect, I think. As long as you have that sense of ‘can I educate you, can we talk about this?’ If not, “thank you, have a great day”, move on with your life. Because whatever you do, they’re going to have that impression for the next practitioner, and it’s your responsibility to make sure that you leave them with a good impression so they just don’t automatically treat others with that negative mindset.
Me: So what has been your individual experience, what you think and feel, when you are witnessing other people do parkour?

Richard: Oh it makes me so happy. It makes me so happy because I feel like the world is changing. I feel like people are becoming more aware of what we’re capable of doing. Not just physically, but mentally, and what we’re able to endure, because a lot of parkour isn’t just ‘can you do that movement’, it’s ‘can you do that movement over and over and over again until you get it right, until it feels right, until you have that mental stability to commit to that action, until it feels perfect?’ I feel like there’s a lot to it. So when I see someone doing stuff over and over and over again I’m like “Yes, thank you, thank you, you’re living the dream!” That’s all I want, is just for people to have that understanding for themselves, so that way it can be passed on to others. When I see that, it brings me happiness.

Me: Do you ever document your parkour movements, and if so, how?

Richard: Mostly video. I’ll film training sessions or I’ll film lines that I do, or I’ll have a specific intent as to what it is that I want to get across, and I’ll pass that along. I have my own YouTube channel and on Instagram I do that as well. Especially when I travel. I feel like I document a lot more when I travel because it’s not so much the physical thing that I’m trying to capture, it’s the feeling of what it was like to train in that space, what it was like to train with these individuals, what it was like to share this experience with random strangers that just saw me doing this thing that stop to even offer to film or to participate in it! That’s what I like to document, the journey, the journey through the movement.

Me: So how do you feel about the way that parkour has been portrayed by the internet or in movies or in the media in general?
Richard: That’s a good question. I feel like it’s not being portrayed in the best way possible as of right now. I feel like people are trying their best, but because it is a discipline that involves this ‘high risk high danger’ mentality that a lot of people only focus on, you get things like American Ninja Warrior and you get these other competition based things that, to me, doesn’t go along with the philosophy of what this movement started out as. Yeah, you’re pushing yourself and you’re trying things. Let’s talk about the Olympics for example. I would not like parkour to become an Olympic sport. No, I would not like that.

Me: No, I agree.

Richard: No, because you look at all these other disciplines and you look at competitions, and what does it promote? It promotes you being better than others. It promotes the acceptance that it’s okay to push yourself to the point of injury as long as you win. Is it worth it?

Me: Yeah because what’s the big deal about winning?

Richard: Right?? Yeah you get a trophy, but what about the rest of your life? You know what I mean?

Me: Yeah, you do gymnastics when you’re a kid, and you can’t walk when you’re 30.

Richard: Right. So that’s what I don’t so much accept with the portrayal of it. And to go to an even further extreme, and I haven’t seen this movie and it’s mainly because I refuse to, it’s the movie Tracers. When I first saw that coming out, and I saw people in my community getting excited for it, I asked them “Why? What are you excited about?” “Oh! For exposure! People are going to get to know about it!” But if all they know is that you use this to rob banks or to get your own personal gain as opposed to assisting others, that’s not what you’re promoting with this film.

Me: Yeah you’re promoting the wrong message.
Richard: Yeah! I can’t consent to that. I can’t be a part of it. Again, Red Bull competitions. I can’t participate or even get excited about that. The movements you guys are doing, how you’re pushing yourselves, that’s great. Good job. I’m so for it. That fact that you’re finding a way to find financial stability doing the thing you love, good on you. I will not be a part of it because you are promoting putting poison into your body and saying that it’s okay for others to do the same because it might make you better. And that’s not the case at all. If anything, it’s making you worse, internally at least. I want people to be motivated to do things by things that aren’t necessarily monetarily driven. You need to find motivation from within yourself.

Me: Right, money is not happiness.

Richard: Right. I’m not a very rich individual. I don’t have a lot of money in my bank account. But I’m successful because I’m able to be a part of this community, to be a part of the Hawaiian parkour community, to be able to travel. I went to Spain for two and a half months traveling and teaching out there. I’ve taught at a private boarding school on the big island teaching parkour there for a five day event. That was amazing teaching middle schoolers like that.

Me: You can be rich without having money, money does not equal richness of life.

Richard: Yeah, and I went to Spain with 150 Euro for two and a half months and I made it the whole two and a half months, and I left Spain after spending all 150 Euro, I left Spain with 180 Euro. I only paid for a place to stay 7 nights out of the whole time that I was there. You don’t need money to have wonderful experiences.

Me: Definitely not.

Richard: That’s kind of what I feel is being promoted right now, and I feel like American Ninja Warrior is being portrayed almost as this thing greater than parkour but I view it in reverse. I think parkour is greater than American Ninja Warrior. You have this warped wall that’s 15ft
right? And yeah it’s awkward to get a negative, but with that initial run up, you have way more steps you can take to get up that wall. As opposed to doing a 15ft warped wall, can you get up a 15ft flat wall? I can, because I’ve trained to do that!

Me: Also you can see in their movements, everything isn’t really clean. It’s just kind of like they’re stumbling through barely making it.

Richard: But when you look at these parkour practitioners that come in that already have this base knowledge, and they float through it!

Me: Yeah there is such a difference; there is so much of a difference! It’s like day and night. Every time I hear on the show “And he’s a parkour coach” I’m like “Wait what?” and I watch more closely, and he has like the perfect flow and everything looks smooth. You can tell the difference.

Richard: Yep. So I’m all for people finding ways to live their dreams, but the other thing I encourage people to do is to ask why. Why that path? Why are you doing it this way? Why do you even want to train this movement specifically today? Is it because you are feeling it and you want to achieve that? Is it because there’s this hot girl over there that’s watching you and you want to impress them?

Me: Haha, yeah is it because all of your friends are around you?

Richard: Exactly! Be honest with why it is that you want to achieve that movement today, and then go forward with it! If you can be honest with yourself, it doesn’t matter about anything else I feel. It’s like as long as you know “This is why I’m doing this thing”.

Me: What is your perception or opinion on the elements of risk and danger in parkour?

Richard: This has been brought up for me a couple of different times. So I’m certified to teach by both Parkour Generations and American Parkour, and they bring it up similarly, but it seems like
they kind of have different takes on it slightly. I can’t speak to the detailed differences. It’s just through my experience going through that. But risk is the sense of “Oh, what could happen?”

Danger is the sense of “If you fail this, there is a serious outcome” as opposed to risk. If you are doing something building to building, like a 10ft jump building to building, that’s dangerous. A 10ft jump that’s only like 2ft or 3ft off the ground, that’s risky. It can be risky, right? There’s still the risk of the slip or the fall, of getting injured, but you’re not dead. Now if you’ve trained that and you’ve done that movement a million times and you’ve executed it so much, that bigger movement from building to building isn’t so dangerous necessarily. There is still the danger of what could happen if that goes wrong.

Me: Yeah you miss your launch foot or something.

Richard: But I feel like it’s not as risky if you train yourself efficiently to be able to do these movements, to cultivate that awareness, that understanding, and you execute it. And then we have another saying that we use in the parkour community, “Once is never, twice is clever, three times forever”. That’s why, with our drills too, I’ll always say “We are going to do this three times.” If you can do it cleanly three times in a row, your body understands it, your mind understands it, and you can dictate to your body “I want you to do this thing” and it knows it.

Me: Right, as opposed to those videos online where someone just throws some crazy trick and they land it once, but try that a second time and see what happens.

Richard: Yeah try that again. Do it again and stick it. That’s why once is never, even if you get it on film. Yeah you got it. But you’ve achieved it, but you haven’t attained it.

Me: Yeah you’ve achieved it by chance maybe.

Richard: Yeah. But if you can actually attain it by doing it over and over and over again, that movement then becomes part of you, you know what I mean?
Me: Right, then it gets added to your utility belt of movements.

Richard: Yeah.

Me: What is your perception of trespassing or legal issues with parkour?

Richard: So this is where I think I differ from a lot of practitioners. I don’t really support trespassing or climbing onto buildings and stuff like that, because it doesn’t belong to you. In the notion of abandoned places and stuff like that where it’s not actively being used or anything like that, I’m a little bit more lenient.

Me: Right because who is going to care?

Richard: As opposed to abandoned places and stuff like that, there are leniencies where I’m like “Alright, that place isn’t in use, you’re not trying to damage the property, you’re not trying to harm anyone.” It’s not being used by anyone else. It can find another purpose, like how Gasworks was repurposed into a park. I think those types of things are wonderful. But with actual private property and things like that, I want to be as respectful as possible because I want to have the opportunity to have parkour be perceived as this holistic discipline where we are respectful, compassionate, and considerate of what it is that we’re doing and what we are trying to achieve. However, there are these moments where we’re allowing society to keep us in this box because people own things and “This is mine! Not yours!” Whereas, even in Hawaii, I want to go on certain trails, I want to do certain hikes, I want to explore certain things, but it’s like “No! It doesn’t belong to you!” I want to be able to have this positive representation of what we are, as free spirits, as human beings, as people of this earth. The sense of freedom that we have as individuals, we should be free to climb, to explore, as long as we’re not harming the property or other individuals or even ourselves. Why not? What harm is it really causing? But there’s that fear.
Me: Yeah, it’s like they want to control everybody and make them do certain things and live a certain way.

Richard: Right, and that’s where I’m torn. I’m torn. I personally wouldn’t go and do it if I was with other people that I felt comfortable with. There are things that I would love to participate in and I see pictures of and I see videos when I think “That’s sick! I’d love to be up there and experience that!” But I don’t want to do it at the expense of others. So that’s my take on that.

Me: So we already talked about this a little bit but are there any other ways that parkour has affected you as a person?

Richard: It has honestly shown me that opportunity is everywhere. The way that I look at life now is that there are no obstacles in life anymore; there are only opportunities to better yourself.

Me: Yeah everything can be navigated!

Richard: Exactly! And one of the things I tell my students too is that I don’t consider missteps or slips to be incorrect movement. I don’t like that terminology. I don’t believe in mistakes. I only believe in opportunities for creative exploration. When your foot slips out, where’s your momentum taking you? Some things that come out of slips are the most amazing things I’ve ever seen! And the other thing too is that if you don’t dictate to someone what it is you’re trying to achieve in that line, and you have a slip or a misstep, and you are able to come out of that and do something different, if you hadn’t told someone that that was not intentional, that just happened, they would think that’s just part of your movement. That’s what I want people to believe every single time that I do something. That was intentional. I go into my movement thinking everything’s on purpose. Everything is on purpose, and I try to use no negative terminology. Because what I hear people say is when they have an idea of “I’m going to do this line, this to this to this to this” but that third movement isn’t what they wanted, they don’t finish out
the rest of the route. They’re like “Nope no no nope no”. And those words, no nope nope stop no, that stops you from continuing through the movement. Give yourself permission to explore it further. Yes, what next, you know?

Me: Yeah, just because you don’t get it perfectly the way you envisioned it doesn’t mean it’s wrong!

Richard: Exactly! So the opportunity for creative exploration I feel is really the best part of that.

Me: How has parkour impacted the way that you understand and view urban spaces, like when you’re walking through a city?

Richard: Totally changed it! We talked about parkour vision. You don’t see benches, you don’t see tables, you don’t see bars, you see a lache to pre to kong to something else. You see movement everywhere, and opportunity everywhere! And I don’t know if you were like me when I was growing up, but when I was riding in the car, I would have my little shadow friend that would be running across the rooftops as you were in the car with your parents. Or even the little guy that you would make with your fingers (runs around with two fingers). I always had that individual with me. My view of the environment was always different but when I found parkour, and I had terminology to put to what I was seeing, that’s when I felt like parkour vision truly took over, and that change in your perspective of what the environment has to offer, what the environment actually is, and your ability to move through it and interact with it. It changes, immensely.

Me: So what role do you think creativity plays in parkour?

Richard: Everything. I feel like if you don’t have the mental flexibility to be creative, you’re limiting your potential within your movement. Which is why I feel like gymnastics suffers because it’s rigid and it’s the same movements over and over and over again! You look at these
lines that they’re doing in their gymnastics routines, it’s like I saw that last year, you know. Yeah they’re doing bigger flips, they’re doing different movements, but it’s generally the same floor routine. It’s generally the same balance beam routine. It’s generally the same uneven bars routine. You’re looking for those similar movements. Sometimes you do get that ‘Oh man this person is a wick! They have figured out a new way of incorporating that so differently!’ But I feel like that’s where parkour differs, because it’s always new, it’s always different, you’re always coming at something a little bit differently than someone else, even within yourself and seeing other people too.

Me: Last question! If you could describe what parkour means to you in three words, what would they be?

Richard: I think it would have to be the three words that we put with the parkour community in Hawaii, because we have a shirt and we have three words on the back that we want people to understand about what we’re doing. Health, Mindfulness, Community.

Me: Awesome! Well thank you very much that was a great conversation!

Richard: Yeah! You’re welcome!

**Individual Interview 6: Henry McNabb**

Me: First off what is your name, where are you from, how old are you, and how long have you been practicing parkour?

Henry: My name is Henry McNabb, I’ve been doing parkour on and off for six years, and I’m 21 years old and I’m from Florence, Ohio.

Me: Tell me your story how did you initially get involved with parkour?
Henry: I started doing parkour when I was, probably about 17 or 16, I started with Parkour Horizons, a Columbus group. We started outside on the Ohio State University campus. I joined in three years after they had started. I was into gymnastics and baseball when I was in high school until I hurt my shoulder and they told me it would be a very expensive surgery; probably never going to play (baseball) again. Well I’m not going to pay for it because I’m not going to go into professional baseball so I ended up starting in a new sport and I switched high schools. I found this activity (parkour) on campus, about a 5 mile bike ride from my house, so I said “yeah I could go out there” and I found this group and I’ve been with them since then, training off and on.

Me: What would you say parkour means to you when you practice it?

Henry: I think it has definitely changed from when I started to now. When I started, it was all about doing something that was cool and new that not a lot of people did. I was the only person at my high school.

Me: It was kind of the same for me.

Henry: So I did it, and now it is definitely my activity of choice.

Me: So now everyone just classifies you as the parkour guy?

Henry: Yeah.

Me: What inspires you to practice parkour?

Henry: I would say it’s just I want to learn new things, and I want to figure out what new things I can get my body to do, and figure out how to do movements safely. Also being able to take that movement and teach it to other people.

Me: Yeah teach them something new also.

Henry: Yeah, so being able to share skills with them.
Me: Do you have any goals associated with parkour?

Henry: I would say my ultimate goal is to not get hurt.

Me: Nice, self-preservation!

Henry: Yes! Self-preservation! Being able to move freely and safely throughout my life no matter what obstacle is in my way, whether that be physical, mental, or emotional obstacles. Just be able to explore my world.

Me: Right, I could definitely see it (parkour) branching into other areas of your life. You get older and you can’t move around your house as well as you used to but if you have a parkour background in movement, you have a higher level of movement and you can keep that going. When you are getting ready to practice parkour, how do you prepare for it physically, spiritually, or mentally?

Henry: I would definitely just warm up, just get my body ready. I’ve noticed that as I’ve moved out of being a teenager, that when I get hurt, I hurt longer.

Me: Where do you choose to practice parkour most often?

Henry: In this facility (Parkour Horizons Parkour Gym) is where I train now. Before that, it was mostly on campus (OSU) or downtown. I train at the gym now just because of the amount of obstacles in a small space. Outdoors I would have to go from area to area to spots that were miles apart to find areas that were usable for my skill level at the time. So now, just especially because traveling expenses make it difficult unless you live in a medium to large city that is denser like Chicago. Columbus is a little bit more spread out.

Me: Could you describe how you feel physically, mentally, and/or spiritually when you are preparing to execute a parkour movement?
Henry: Yeah it really depends on who I’m with. If I’m with some of the guys from the gym (Parkour Horizons), it’s different just because I was so young when I started that these were the people I was training with who were adults and I considered myself a child at the time. Some of them are now coaches in this group and would say “You can do this Henry” and I did it, I was not doing it to impress them, but doing it because they told me that I could. The comradery I have with these guys and the push to show these people that I can train with them means a lot to me. They were college students at the time and I was a sophomore in high school and for whatever reason they are letting me stick around and try to push myself to try bigger and larger obstacles. When I am training by myself, it is definitely more internal.

Me: What goes through your head when you are about to do a move?

Henry: It would definitely depend on the move. If it’s something with height, it is a lot more of “how could I hurt myself” and going through the mental checks of “is the ground wet, how far is it, what’s below me, what’s above me, what’s around” because if I do fall and incapacitate myself, is there anyone around that can call 911? Is there anyone around that would notice? Am I going to be here for a while, being completely hurt and stuck there? Who knows I’m here? Does my mom or my family know that I’m out training and where exactly I am?

Me: Yeah if you are out by yourself, you’re in trouble if something like that happens.

Henry: Exactly.

Me: Can you describe the feeling that you have, mentally or physically, during the move, like when you’re vaulting or doing some parkour movement?

Henry: It really depends if I’ve done it before. If it is brand new to me, I will definitely be more focused. I am definitely focused on just this part or this one particular part of the move and what I have to do to keep myself safe. But if it’s something I’ve done before, even just a couple of
times, then I am more relaxed knowing that I have already done it and gone through the motions of it. When I know I am really good at it, I almost don’t even pay attention to it. But usually I am focused on which one of the moves is the hardest for me.

Me: Can you describe the feelings that you have after you have completed a parkour movement, say a new movement that you’ve never gotten before and land it?

Henry: For new movements, it definitely goes depending on how I achieve the move. If I achieve it with perfection, then I think “that it was too easy”. If I can do it the first try, it is just too easy. I can make it quicker or find some way that the move becomes larger. But at the same time it is also a feeling of “I did that with no problem” or “no mental or physical issues” knowing that I may be better than other people. At my age, there are some people that can’t do these moves. They can’t move their bodies to the extent to which I can, which I know that I am not at peak physical ability even for my age range or size but I can push myself to do these moves. There is a satisfaction in knowing that I am able to do more with my body.

Me: Can you describe your interaction with space when you are doing parkour?

Henry: My interaction with space, that includes going through mental checks. A big thing that I like to do that I haven’t always done is that I always check my space beforehand. I make sure that the objects I am using are sturdy because I know that I am a larger guy and I have a lot of weight to throw around. Just because someone of a similar size of me can do a move on an obstacle, doesn’t mean that I could also because they may be much lighter than me. It may be since I could have much more force that I could knock something off or cause something to fall off. But yeah, just figuring out what I can do with myself in those spaces and not hurt myself.

Me: How has parkour affected you mentally or physically in your life overall?
Henry: When I first started out, I was doing baseball and I had just finished baseball for the spring when I hurt myself. So I definitely moved from sport to sport. I was already at a lower level of activity that I wasn’t okay with. All I did was baseball, and now I wasn’t doing baseball anymore. So I got into parkour and I got into it so heavily that I was training five days a week at least. And through parkour, I definitely pushed myself past where I thought I could be. I became stronger, I became more physically aware of my body and how I can move safely. Baseball, and in general, many high school sports teams push you to try to be as strong as you can, and not really to be strong and be healthy. You have to figure out what you can do to push yourself past your own limits, but don’t hurt yourself, because these isn’t very much health in injuries. Other sports focus on being competitive during the sport and not about how healthy you are and how your life is around it.

Me: I felt that way too. I played soccer and our coaches would just push us and push us, but I felt like I wasn’t doing anything and wasn’t having fun anymore because it was all about competing and winning, and that’s when the fun of the game was lost and I quit. Apart from the physical movement, is there any other awareness of your body? Is there any other ways that parkour has impacted your life mentally?

Henry: I definitely went from “I play baseball and do other activities” to “I do parkour”. At the time, the only people who knew parkour knew about it through YouTube, and I saw these videos. I think people would assume things about what I was doing and make it much larger in their heads than what I would say I was doing. I would say “I train parkour” and they would have a preconceived notion of what that is based off of YouTube or little things that they’ve seen or heard, thinking of people that are jumping off roofs. Some of those things I have done, but those videos show what people have learned over years and years and years, and that’s actually not
what I am practicing to be able to do. I’m not training to do the biggest jumps or make the
biggest moves. The point of my training is to be healthy and be able to move my body through
space. So I guess that was really the big thing, to be able to brag that I was the only person there
that did parkour. People would ask “Oh where do you do this at?” and I would say “Oh I do it on
campus” and that I was training with college students, not hanging out with high schoolers.

Me: How do other parkour runners typically respond to seeing you do movements when you are
training with other people?

Henry: I think it depends on what the movements are. There are some base movements that
everyone is almost expected to be able to do. I think it’s different for every person. I don’t do
flips barely at all, because they’re a big thing and they’re flashy, they look cool, and you can do
them almost anywhere. Not that I don’t feel safe doing them, I just don’t have an interest in
doing them. I’ve never learned them, I’ve never pushed myself to train them. There are certain
moves that, it’s not that I won’t do, it’s just that I don’t train that movement. I don’t train the way
that other people think I should train. It’s all about what I think I would need and what I want to
train. So when people see what I do, I do some things very well. I’m really good at balance, and
at smaller moves, whereas some of our other practitioners are better at bigger moves. They are
doing these big jumps where I may not be as good at it as they are but I know what I can do and I
am willing to grow that but not to the point where some of the other people are at.

Me: So like working on the details and refining them, like barrel rolls, being one of the simplest
movements, are being perfected enough because people don’t train them enough. Those are just
as important as any flashy move for safety and impact absorption.

Henry: Yeah that’s definitely where I am at, at the stage of perfecting.
Me: When you do those types of movements, how do parkour runners normally respond to seeing you do that?

Henry: I definitely think that a lot of people do big moves to be impressive and I do small moves to impress myself. So people will sometimes be like “Oh Henry that was cool!” and talking up what I was doing, and I do like that, I don’t not like it. But I’m not in the sport to be flashy. I love to be able to show people something that is brand new, like this is the simplest little vault to get over this low wall or standing pres.

Me: Yeah, my friends, I showed them a kong vault, which is like the simplest thing, but they struggled with it so much because it’s such a weird movement that you aren’t used to.

Henry: We should practice everything, every move the same number of times, but there are some moves that, in my head, I think “I don’t need to know that, there are plenty of other moves that I can do that I can do better because I’ve practiced them more”. They have the same outcome, and get me over the same obstacle and they have the same amount of momentum, if not more. So there are some moves that I see and don’t practice and think “I don’t need to know that”. I think that is a personal issue for me, that I need to train everything equally and not just what I think I can train and what I train a lot of anyway.

Me: When you are out training or in the gym, how do bystanders that aren’t parkour practitioners typically respond to seeing you doing parkour?

Henry: So that’s a big thing that I like to show other practitioners, and all the parents and people who aren’t necessarily training, that we are being safe. A big issue for younger guys is that they want to do moves that are big to impress their friends. You may see someone that is your age that is doing something much bigger than you can do, like a backflip or a really long running precision jump, or a kong, or any move, and there are a lot of younger men who believe they can
do that without any training. We all need to be safe. A big issue with kids is that they often try these moves knowing that the coach is right there, but we may not always be able to help them, and that’s when you hurt yourself. You have to have the self-awareness to minimize danger and risk, and at the same time know that the coaches aren’t always going to be there.

Me: Have you ever noticed how police respond to seeing you do parkour?

Henry: I think it definitely depends what you are doing at the time of when they approach you, and also a big thing I’ve noticed is that if they spot you on their own, and not being called, if they are being called, then they are more likely to see what you are doing as a crime and be a little bit more aggressive and heavy handed and more agitated. When someone sees us climbing on a building, they often assume that we are doing something illegal and also endangering to ourselves and others, or that we are breaking in to steal something. So it really matters how they come to see us. If they are just driving around and happen to see us, they might stop and say “Hey guys, you’re being dangerous” or “You’re not allowed to do that here” because it’s private property or trespassing. But if they are called to us because there is a distressed citizen who saw us doing this, then they are usually a little more uptight, and usually a little bit more aggressive with their words. How you react to them also influences the situation, like if a cop or a pedestrian says “Hey you aren’t allowed to do that here”, then you move on and go train somewhere else.

You train something else somewhere else because there are a million places, just like in here (Parkour Horizons), and they might be a little bit bigger or a little bit smaller, but you don’t argue and don’t use obscenities and don’t push it to somewhere where you may not know where it is going to go. You have control of yourself, you don’t have control of the other person. So if it’s a cop, or a distressed citizen, you don’t know how their day has been, or if they’re aggressive, or if they have a weapon they can injure you with, or who they are. If they are a cop,
you can see that they’re a cop because of a badge or uniform or the car. But if it’s a citizen, you
don’t know if it’s an owner or a security guard. Just apologize and move on. If you are polite to
the person, maybe they will let you continue to use the area. Be safe instead of escalating the
situation. A big thing we have noticed is a lot of campus security at Ohio State University. Police
officers who aren’t called usually come at the situation as if we were skateboarders, and
centered that we will hurt ourselves. And we tell them that we have been doing this awhile, and
they are concerned that we are going to damage the property and hurt ourselves and sue the
property owners. In America, there is a very ‘sue first’ attitude. People are worried that I may
hurt myself doing something, that I may make a mistake, slip on ice or water and land on
concrete and hurt myself, and other people may be like “Alright I’m going to sue”. But with me
and the group we have, when we hurt ourselves, we ask ourselves “What did we do wrong?”
Not looking around thinking who am I going to blame. “Oh my coach told me to do this and it
was too difficult, it’s his fault”. It’s not a big thing that I am saying other people do. In my head I
see this structure that I can climb on and that’s really cool. If I didn’t check it properly, if it
wasn’t anchored down properly, or if something was broken, or wasn’t welded properly, I’m not
going to blame the person that was doing their job. It could be an old structure that was sitting
there for a long period of time. I need to check it first before I throw my bodyweight at it. When
I hurt myself, it’s my own fault.

Me: That’s the same way I feel about it. If I hurt myself on someone else’s property, I’m not
going to be angry at them for me getting hurt. You know, I’m practicing a sport where injuries
happen if you make a mistake. It happens in any sport. If you get hurt playing soccer, you don’t
sue the stadium that you’re playing in, you just accept it as a liability of the sport. When you
witness other people doing parkour movements, how do you react to seeing that? How do you react to seeing other people do parkour?

Henry: It depends a lot about the movement. If it’s a movement I’ve never done, I think “Oh I could do that” or “Oh I don’t think I could do that” or “I know that I cannot do that because I am not that person”. I think it goes through stages of “Wow, that was cool” to something different that I’ve never seen before, or “That was impressive”, “Could I do that? Yes or No?” and I don’t compare myself to the other person, but I compare myself to the move. I try not to judge the person because they can do something better or worse than me. Especially when working with a lot of youth, they can do things that are much bigger than I expect and much faster than I expect and learn so much faster. Like I said before, they don’t have the awareness of risk and don’t understand that they can hurt themselves and be out of work or something. They have the thought that “Oh if I hurt myself, then Mom will be there and I’ll be okay”. Whereas for adults, if I have a broken arm, it means I can’t work.

Me: Do you ever document your parkour movements? And if so, how do you document them?

Henry: I don’t normally. I sometimes take videos of myself because just for me, it feels like they are more of a document of my personal achievements, maybe because they aren’t as flashy as other people, but I am just doing this (training parkour) for me and not for someone else to witness it.

Me: Do you ever have someone document a movement, like film it, so you can see how your body moves so that you can review it?

Henry: I have done that before in the past. Usually when that happens it will be someone else just filming themselves of another practitioner doing a move and have them send it to me so I can watch it. I don’t really have any videos of myself on my phone or on any of my cameras. So
usually if I am recording, it is for someone else and I might jump in after them, because I don’t think it is necessary to film myself. It’s also like, in my head, if I want a video of it, I want a video from every direction, because then I am only getting the angle view of this one take-off. But then if I move the camera to a forward view that sees me head on, it’s not the same one. So if I videotape the move from different angles, they don’t look the same. And I’m not seeing the same video from three or four directions. So then I might confuse myself and think “Oh, in that first one I landed really well, and the second one I didn’t land very well” but then which video goes with which one. Then I am unsure of what my body position is.

Me: That is definitely a limitation of filming; you can only get one side of the move and not the whole movement. A lot of times I’ll document things, not to show off, but to show other people what I am doing with my body and hopefully inspire other people to see this and make them think “Wow, that’s cool, I want to learn that” and get people excited about it by showing them footage of big movements or some exciting line of different movements. If you can get people excited about it and interested through film, it will hopefully grow the community and the number of people involved in parkour. So how to you feel about the way that parkour has been portrayed on the internet and on YouTube?

Henry: I actually have a lot of issues with it. A lot of ways videos are filmed and a lot of ways that people show their abilities, like I love to see other people’s abilities, like “Oh that guy may be able to do this amazing thing that I may not be able to do”. But for me, I’m in a good place where I know my abilities compared to a high school or maybe a middle school parkour runner who may see this video and may not realize just how much work went into training for this 20ft jump or 20ft fall even. And they may go out, and may not do something that big exactly, but they may go bigger than they are capable of, and try to replicate it, even at a smaller size. But they
may hurt themselves. And it may be one of those things where they do it once and do it really well and do it again and they hurt themselves and then they are out of the game for good. They hurt their leg or their knees and they’re done, they can no longer train. So I think the YouTube videos and whatever media that I really like to see are the ones where they start out at that big move and then go back to show them failing the move and attempting it over and over and working up to the big move. I really like the videos that start out showing them making mistakes, or not really mistakes but growing. And obviously it’s hard to do, but show us the growth over time. It takes years to be able to train your body to take that much force on your joints. A lot of YouTubers and people who take these videos change them and cut them to take out all the lame parts and show the 15 second shot of the perfect move. Some of the guys in these videos are out of the game because they did this move, and did it a couple too many times and now they are injured. It becomes an issue, where obviously I’m not a full grown adult yet, but in my head I feel like I’m pretty set in my understanding of what I am capable of. So I can see that “Oh, that is a crazy move” and when I see those videos, I think to myself “I want to see what it took to get there, where did he start, was that something he just did the first time and now he can’t do it anymore because he’s hurt? Or did he train for months or years or decades even to get to this point. He must have started when he was really young and now he’s so strong”; just being able to show that someone off the street may not be able to do some of these things or all of these things just because they don’t have the flexibility or the muscle memory. Just being able to show that if a guy jumps off a third story and lands and rolls out of it, showing statistics from the CDC for what is the length of a dangerous fall. 12ft is like the maximum height for a full grown male where it is injury to death. That’s enough force that you could injury your legs or your body or your brain as well. You can die from that. Which, in ‘normal person sense’ is quite large, but in
parkour video sense, that’s not big at all. These videos don’t show the training that these guys go through to make their bodies strong enough to do these things.

Me: What is your perception and opinion on the elements of risk and danger in parkour?

Henry: Risk, risk is always there. It is one hundred percent always there. Our number one thing we tell practitioners is that this is a risky business. Is it dangerous? It can be, but if you train your body and train your mind to think fast enough and be able to move fast enough with those thoughts, then most movements that I would even think of putting myself in, I know I could get myself out of. I have trained myself to be able to think quickly enough, like “Oh, I’m going to fall now, what are the steps that I go through that I have trained over and over again with my body and my mind, thinking oh, I’ll catch that bar as I fall past it just to slow myself down, and if I let go of this bar, I may slip off and fall and get hurt and may be dead.” So I think danger cannot be omitted from it, but it can be changed. It can be managed. The danger level and the risk levels are like a graph that adds up to 100%, so you can be 90% risky and 10% dangerous. So yeah there is a 90% chance that you could hurt yourself with a mild injury like a sprained ankle, and then danger is where you truly just did not think of something that goes wrong, like you fall through a window or off a building. You might fall in a way that you can’t get yourself out of.

Me: What is your perception or opinion on the elements of trespassing and legal issues with parkour?

Henry: Like I said earlier, there is a lot of “How do you respond? Is it marked with ‘No Trespassing’? Do you have permission to be here? Does someone have ownership over this property and are they liable?” This could even be an issue if you are on a campus building or in a public park and someone says “Hey this is my property” for whatever reason. You don’t know if
it’s true, if they are managing the land and if it’s truly private property, then you just move on. Obviously the legal issues come in when you are doing something and you hurt yourself and then people can sue. If I was a judge for that case, I would be like “It’s your fault, you hurt yourself on this property”. Of course I have a very warped opinion of what’s safe and what’s not safe, and keeping yourself from hurting yourself or others, but it definitely comes down to if you’re doing something illegal, you are doing something illegal, and you can’t really argue with that. Sure in my mind I might not think this is illegal, but if someone else thinks it is, then maybe it is. I would much rather move on than argue. It hasn’t happened to me yet where I’ve been chased or anything like that, but if they want to cause an issue, I would either defend myself or use the skills that I’ve learned to quickly exit the scene. I wouldn’t run from a police officer, but if I feel that I am in harms’ way, I am going to use my skills and abilities to keep myself alive. I don’t feel comfortable having someone yelling at me because I am so young so that if someone else sees me, they would assume that I am a large high school student. And it’s because a lot of people assume that if you are climbing on a building, you are a child. You are not using that adult part of your brain that says “This can be harmful” and people that have that part of their brain under control would be like “Yeah, I could hurt myself, but I know what I’m doing”. A lot of people assume that “Oh, this person is either going to hurt themselves on purpose”, like they are suicidal or that maybe something is wrong with them because they don’t see that this is dangerous. That is a big problem with society, and how parkour will fit into society. People push their fears that they have themselves onto others, because maybe they know they can’t do it, but they have no idea what I can or can’t do. They feel that they have to keep me safe in their mind because if they don’t, then they’ve failed humanity.

Me: If at all, how has parkour affected you as a person?
Henry: It has made me a little bit more ‘risk-taking’. Maybe not bigger risks, but I’ll be like “Yeah, I could try that”. It has also put a nice, solid head on my shoulders from high school until now, growing me into this person that I am now. And seeing something and thinking “Oh, I can definitely not do that, that is not something that I would be willing to try because I might hurt myself”. It has become such a big part of my life and I’ve done it for so long, and I’ve stayed relatively injury free and haven’t seriously hurt myself. So far, with parkour, even though I got into rock climbing and I hurt my hand, and it’s still hurt so I can’t do pull-ups and I can’t do cat hangs right now, which are important parkour moves. My biggest parkour injuries so far, and it’s been a long time since I’ve been training and for a while there I was training really, really hard, has been sprained ankles, hurt wrists, or maybe a hurt thumb. No doctors or hospitals required for any of them. But it really shows me that I can hurt myself in baseball and that really doesn’t even do anything, and it’s usually because I didn’t warm up properly. That is really something I learned from high school sports is that we never warm up enough. You might run your laps around the field but you didn’t warm up your arms or your shoulders properly. It was all about lifting heavy weighs with our bodies and being able to run fast and that’s all you needed in baseball. It’s not functional fitness, it’s fitness for this specific purpose, not for anything else.

Me: How has practicing and participating in parkour changed the way you view urban spaces within cities?

Henry: Yeah so that’s a big thing that I’ve noticed myself, is that when I walk around, I’ll be looking at the tops of second story buildings. But what I like to say is that I don’t have a fear of heights, I have a fear of falling. Not even all falling but just falling improperly, and falling to where I can’t catch myself, or for whatever reason if I can’t get my feet under me or fall to my back and can’t absorb the force. I look at the tops of some sort of buildings and I climb on top of
the posts that have the street lights on it or like on one of those crosswalk signs, and I’ll climb up those. It will mostly be the kind of thing where I climb up and then climb back down sort of thing or I’ll climb up the side of building until some person says get off that and then I’ll climb back down. It’s just like a “Ope, I’ve been spotted”. If I am doing something sneaky or sly, then I just wasn’t sneaky enough and I either made too much noise or didn’t hide in the shadows. I didn’t thoroughly check my environment and look to see “Oh, there’s a lady across the street staring out of her window looking directly at me and I just wasn’t paying attention to that”. Just kind of observing my surroundings and noticing that “Oh, these sidewalks or these edges of the street are the perfect distance for me to jump from one to the other, or the bushes are the perfect height that I can run and jump over the bush and land on the other side and precision. A big thing that we like to say in our group is “If you step on a plant, for every foot fall, you have to do a push-up. So not grass or anything like that, but a big thing about parkour is that you might be jumping over people’s flowers. If you kick that flower head off, that ruins the look of the flower. If that happens once, and there are enough flowers there, it doesn’t really change the scenery at all. But if you are going to sit there with you and your friends or you by yourself for a long period of time and you kick all the flower heads off, then someone has the right or the reasonable reason to be upset with you. You’re damaging their property. Someone took the time to plant the flowers or to prune or whatever. I have a personal issue where if I’m training and I see that and I’m like “Oh shoot, I knocked that thing over”, I’ll try to put it back up or figure out if I’m at a park, I call someone and tell them that this is dangerous, because this is really loose or this traffic sign is really loose or this pillar or whatever. I broke a bench one time, and called to see if there was someone who would be able to fix it and if I could pay for it to be fixed, or if I can fix it
myself, or if there is someone from the town that can mark it so people know not to sit on it or use it.

Me: Yeah sometimes skateboards will just go out and wreck stuff and leave it there.

Henry: Yeah, and that’s the big thing, is that the most that will happen with me is that I may leave shoe marks or a footprint on a wall, which sometimes, yeah there will be a rubber strip that is really unsettling and you need to get it off. Those footprints, you need to try to wipe them down and hide them away so that they are not in public view. If you leave footprints enough, and people start complaining about it, then police or other people may now have a reason to stop you. It might be that “Oh, there is someone in this area, and it may not even be you, who broke a window with their foot” and you might be the next person they see in that area and they might think that you must’ve been the person that did this and then you’re blamed for it. So I think that’s everything that I like to tell some of the younger practitioners, that if you break something, you tell your parents, and they can go and find someone that is like a security guard or a police officer or a maintenance person if it’s private property. If it’s something that I can hurt someone, I might have to move it somewhere or turn it another way. Like the bench that I broke, I moved it in a way to make it obvious that you should not sit here. If I move on without telling anyone, and not leaving it marked or anything, and someone hurts themselves then that is your fault. Someone sitting on the bench might be someone who is already injured or someone who may be older and may end up getting stuck there or get hurt. Yes I broke the bench and hurt my ankle and I had a light sprain and that’s all, whereas someone else might fall back and hit their head. I took that bench and broke it entirely, broke the entire back off of it so no one would lean back on it and no one else would come and jump on it and actually seriously hurt themselves. I broke part
of it and I broke it enough that it was unsafe so I broke the whole thing and left it for the maintenance guy to come and fix.

Me: What role do you think creativity plays in parkour?

Henry: So a big thing with this environment (Parkour Horizons Gym) is that since it’s all changeable it is definitely a lot different than it is outside, but I wouldn’t say that it’s better than anything outside. In here (Parkour Horizons Parkour Gym), I can put it together however I want and if I have an idea, like I want to make this for the kids or for the adults or whatever I can do that. But outside, it forces you to find things. It forces you to use your creative part of your mind to be like “Oh, I could totally do that” or “I should try that that”. These things are different, and if I’m outside with a group of people that are smaller than I am, then it makes me think “Oh, I can jump to that because I am tall and I can reach it”, but maybe these six year olds can’t. So I have to think about it from their perspective and think about what their bodies can do and how much weight they can hold, and is it a functioning grip at the top or is it flat, is it smooth, is it rough. If they rub their pants against it, or their shoulders or their knees, are they just going to tear up their knees or their pants, or am I going to get parent complaints? We’ve done that, I’ve done that personally. I’ll see my pants and think “Where the hell did these holes in my knees come from? Now all my pants are ripped up and I need a new pair of pants now.”

Me: So are there any other topics or anything else you personally want to discuss about parkour that we haven’t already covered?

Henry: Yeah, so I guess the biggest thing I say is that every time I hurt myself, I blame my mom. Every time I left the house, my mom would say “Be safe” and I would be paying attention to that and wasn’t paying attention to what I’d be doing. And it was never a big thing, I never broke my arm or anything like that, and it’s not a true excuse, it’s just something that I say. I normally
would leave before my mom would get off of work, and a couple of times when she’d get off, she would say to me before I left “Okay be safe!” And then somehow I would be thinking of that and think “Is this safe?” and it’s just a joke that I like to say. It’s interesting here because the parents don’t usually just show up outside and drop their kids off, they usually come inside to hang out and watch. Sometimes you see the moms gasp and wince and things like that, and I’ve noticed it with the little guys I would work with and teach. If they get hurt, I’m not stern with them per say, but I’ll be like “Are you okay?” and won’t come at it with a lot of emotion. And they might whimper or might actually be hurt, and I take them over to their mom or their dad and let them swaddle their kid. But for me, they know that if they hurt themselves, they need to tell me. If they say “Hey, I’m actually injured, that actually hurt,” then I can ask them “Okay, do you need and ice pack or do you need to see your mom”. When the parents are watching, and a kid hurts themselves, I’ll ask if they are okay, and they’ll be like “Yeah” but the second they look over at mom they start balling. Part of their pain reaction is that they want mom to hold them, whereas if mom wasn’t there or nearby, it is different. It’s not necessarily that their mom is there, but the visual distance of being able to see their mom, and normally the kid will jump right back up and get back to it. So I teach all of our parkour classes for the younger athletes, and they know that if they hurt themselves, I’ll be like “Oh, why did that happen?” and they’ll be like “Oh, it was because I lost my balance or because it was slippery because my shoes are wet” and for whatever reason, some of the younger guys, even if they are four or five, they’ll be like “Yeah, it’s because of this”. They know why and they figure it out, and that’s because we’ve trained them and taught them about that. We’ve told them “Oh, watch out for your shoes, if it’s raining outside, try to make sure you dry off your shoes, slide them on the floor really well because they need to be dry”. For the guys that swing around on the bars, they flip themselves
around them and we’ve had a couple injuries with them where they flip around the bar and hold on to the bar as they go underneath it instead of some of the other kids who aren’t strong enough, and they’ll swing around it and as soon as their weight hits the bottom point, they’ll fall and hit the floor. It will only be maybe 3 or 4 inches from the ground, so they just bounce and say “Ow”, and they didn’t hit their head and just landed on their butt. And they’ll know that “Oh, I didn’t hold on tight enough” or “I need to grab it with both arms”.

Me: That’s a good skill to teach them early on, because now they are more perceptive of their own movement, and what is dangerous and what’s not.

Henry: Right. And it’s also a big thing that a lot of kids know when they need help. So I’ll be nearby watching, and there may be five or six of them or more that I’m working with, but I’ll be nearby and wait until they say “Henry help”. And I might put my hand underneath them to spot them but I won’t touch them. I will be close enough that I can snatch them if they completely just bail and snatch them up before they hit the ground. And having me there with my hand on their back or close by will make them feel safe with that. But I’m not controlling them. I’m not holding them and doing it for them. A big thing is that when we are balancing on little rails, I would hold their hands when they are really new and can’t do it, and I’ll do noodle arms with myself so that I’ll be holding them but I’ll be wiggling and that forces them to still mostly balance on their own. So it’s hard for some kids to go from me holding their hand throughout the course to them doing it by themselves.

Me: If you could describe what parkour means to you in three words, what would they be?

Henry: I would say Strength Through Movement

Me: Strength Through Movement, very cool. Well thank you very much for taking the time to interview with me!
**Paired Interview 1: Joe Torchia and Libby Torchia**

Libby: My name is Libby Carstensen (later and currently married to Joe Torchia) and I’m 27. I’m from Toledo, Ohio originally and I moved down here (Columbus, Ohio) for school and I have been practicing parkour for three years.

Joe: My name is Joe Torchia. I am 28 and I am from Columbus, Ohio and I’ve been practicing parkour for 10 years.

Me: Awesome! So tell me your stories, how did you guys initially get involved in the sport?

Joe: Well, initially I got involved because I saw a video online back when Google Video first launched, and they had the top 100 videos of the month or the day or something like that. One of the videos was a video of this guy bouncing around in post-Soviet era brutalist architecture buildings, just doing amazing movement, and I was just totally enchanted with it. I watched it probably a hundred times and I should my friends and everyone else. I didn’t realize that it was a thing (parkour). Basically, two things happened. One, I started finding other videos like it, and that eventually led me to a forum called parkour.net. That was one of the first parkour forums where people were sharing things. So once I got on there, I realized that parkour is a thing, it’s a sport, it’s a practice, it’s not just some random guy running around, and that was just one video. That guy’s name is Oleg Vorslav who is now a pretty famous parkour practitioner. That was one of the first videos, called Russian Climbing, in the pretty early days, an early video. And that’s how I got started. That summer I was working on a construction crew and we were building condos, and I was looking at the condos and I was like “Wow, this half-built condo looks a little bit like this dilapidated Russian Architecture. Alright, I bet I could jump from this patio to that patio,” and I did and I just fell in love with it. Just a little 5ft jump 2ft off the ground, but I thought “Wow, so cool”. I was an athlete, I played hockey, I played tennis, a multisport athlete in
high school so it was something that I really loved. And then hockey was over and I was starting college and looking for something new, and parkour just kind of fell into my lap and I went with it. So the next couple of days, I went out to a local elementary school which was right next door to my parents’ house where I grew up, and I just went out to the playground and started moving around. And that was it, that’s how I got started.

Libby: I got started when I was a freshman at OSU. I had a friend who I played sand volleyball with, and then he brought me along to parkour club at Ohio State University as kind of the equivalent of what he was interest in. So I came for parkour and was completely destroyed the first day because I had zero upper body strength, which then encouraged me to come back because I refused to be beat by it, and I just kept coming back to it.

Me: What does parkour mean to you guys and why do you practice it? And also do you have any goals associated with it?

Joe: I might get into a lot of trouble for this answer. My answer has evolved over time. When I first started parkour, I was very much attracted to the philosophy behind it and I was attracted to this idea of bettering yourself through movement and challenge and progressive training.

Nowadays, I own a parkour business, I teach kids, and I’ve been doing it for 10 years. I’m as good as or better than I hoped that I would be when I first began, still nowhere as good as the best people. But back when I started, someone doing a climb up well was mind-blowing! It was like “How did they do that!” The sport has come a tremendous amount of way. So what does it mean to me? It’s my livelihood; it’s a passion that I help teach and share with others. I think to me, it’s one of many disciplines such as martial arts, sports, whatever, that people can find a way into where they can find a path to self-actualization. It’s a path that teaches confidence. It builds strength. I think for a lot of people who come into parkour, they come into it not having had a
background in a lot of team sports. Typically, they may be a little bit antisocial or a bit of a loner. Maybe they don’t have well developed social skills. And parkour, at least the way we practice it and the way that I have always been encouraged to teach it, has these ideas of humility, altruism, effort, and self-reliance at the core of it. So I think it’s a very safe place for someone to come and develop not only as a person physically, but also mentally, emotionally, and socially. It provides a group of like-minded individuals. We used to say that parkour was nerds who like to work out. These are the people who like read the Spiderman comic and were like “That! I want to do that!” So yeah, I think it’s very much a kind of niche sport, but I think it’s very good. The more I train with it, the more I see the benefits it can bring to people, as people, especially young kids, are spending less time outdoors. You (Libby) were just telling me that kids on average spend less than 30 minutes of activity outside per week or something like that, especially inner city kids. I think parkour, you know parkour requires no equipment, it requires no structured setting, just your imagination, your body and a willingness to apply yourself and to go out and have some creativity and do a little work. And that’s the other thing, it’s work but it’s also play, right. So you look at the natural play behaviors of kids, what is it, it’s running, jumping, climbing, leaping, bounding. So those are the natural movements that we as a species use to survive plenty. I think it makes perfect sense that the movements you see in parkour are just refined play behaviors. That’s all we’re doing. So if you take a kid who isn’t outside much, doesn’t have a good sense of balance, proprioception, coordination, strength, and you begin to teach them these things and it’s fun, it’s kind of cool, it’s challenging but also very rewarding, I think it can be a beautiful sport for a community and for individuals. I’ve seen that with kids, especially ones that have ADD or sensory processing disorders. That sort of tactile interaction with the environment seems to really help. It gives them that sort of feedback. That kinetic sense of their body in space, and it seems to
settle them. We’ve had lots of people say that “This is what we do in our occupational therapy, but it’s (parkour) just a little bit more, and it’s a little bit more self-directed.” So this kind of comes back around, what is parkour, what is my philosophy of parkour? I think it’s a sport like any other, but I think for certain populations, for certain people that are attracted to it, it has tremendous benefits. I think that it is something that is approachable and available to almost anyone. And what really matters is the way in which it is presented and the way in which people are brought into it, because it can be intimidating. Like gymnastics, it has that level of disconnect between the beginners and the high level athletes. But if you look back to the day to day, week to week, hour to hour work that is being done in a parkour class or a parkour practice, it’s something that is beneficial and approachable for anyone. Because it’s just your own movement, it is something that can be progressed or regressed, no matter your skill, strength, or level. It’s just movement through space. Almost everyone has the ability and the capacity to move through space.

Me: Any additional input or does that pretty much cover it?

Libby: That was good, that pretty much sums it up!

Me: On a typical day of parkour practice, how do you typically prepare to start practicing parkour, physically, mentally, or spiritually?

Joe: For me, we start off all of our training sessions with foam rolling, followed by stretching, followed by dynamic joint warm-ups, followed by activation exercises, followed by low intensity activity moving towards high intensity activity moving to specific drills, skills, or themes that we want to train that day or that I want to train that day. For me, for my personal training, I spend a lot of time on strength and conditioning and flexibility work. So I’d say I might do a strength and conditioning session and then move to a training session, or I might do a training session and
then move to a conditioning session, or I might alternate days. In terms of mentally, it doesn’t really require much preparation, at least most practices. The only exception to that is a very high level training session where, if I have an idea in mind of a few big movements or a few really challenging routes that I really want to practice, then naturally you bring a bit more focus to it and a bit more intensity, and you are a bit more serious about the training. Instead of just, I don’t want to say going through the motions, but instead of just kind of getting there and putting in the work, you’re adding that little extra attention and focus to it. Spiritually, I think there’s that mind body nexus sort of mental, emotional, if I could call that spiritual. I guess for me, parkour, especially if I train by myself, can be very meditative, it can be very relaxing, I like the endorphin release.

Me: Yeah, I agree, same here!

Joe: Yeah! If I’m practicing something like balance, again it can be very meditative, very soothing, helps relieve stress. And then if I’m doing something where I am pushing myself or challenging myself, I think you can often get into what’s called a Flow State. This is actually a physically described state by some practitioners so I would recommend looking into Flow State. Often times in a flow state, it’s basically that you can achieve a flow state in anything. You can achieve it with working on your term paper. You can achieve it playing chess, running, cutting vegetables, anything. It’s something that requires effort that’s right about at your max level, and basically what you do is you just fall into the work, and the work itself becomes intrinsically rewarding, and that brings with it a sense of wellbeing, a sense sometimes of euphoria, and also a stepping back of the sense of self. So it leads to a broader sense of connection with the world around you and in the work that you are getting done. And I think if you speak to a lot of parkour practitioners, they might not be able to describe it in that sort of academic way, but that is often
times what they are feeling. Think about other sports right, hockey or baseball, they might call it ‘the zone’, you’re in ‘the zone’. It’s basically that exact same thing. That’s the sort of thing, like a good triple play in baseball, it’s just smooth and effortless and the same thing happens with parkour. You’re flowing through the moves, the obstacles are coming easy, and you’re feeling really in touch. It’s when the body is leading and the mind needs to step back a little bit. And I think that is very much it.

Me: Where do you typically choose to practice parkour?

Joe: My gym, almost all the time, almost exclusively my gym now.

Me: How about any outdoor locations that are commonly used?

Joe: So this is funny because for 10 years I’ve trained outdoors. Nowadays, I just train in the gym, and now it seems so stupid because it’s my job. When I have free time, I don’t necessarily go do parkour; it’s what I do 5, 6, 7, 8 hours a day. So when I have a chance to do something else, I typically do something else.

Me: Yeah you wouldn’t want to do the same thing all the time. It would get monotonous.

Joe: Yeah. Even no matter how much you love something, you need to give it a break. But when I used to train outdoors frequently, I just trained on what was near me. So when I picked up parkour, I was a grad student at college. I was a college student, so often times I trained on college campuses or at parks.

Me: So what qualities of the spaces did you typically look for if you are trying to spot a location to train?

Joe: Well this is one of the reasons why parks and universities were often very good, was because they’re designed for pedestrian use. So areas that are pedestrian focused tend to be very good, and also areas that tend to have, I would look for them, areas where the terrain was not flat
where you had different levels. So you’d need to have things like retaining walls, barriers, things like that, stairwells, or ramps. These are the things that create an interesting environment in which to move, where there are things you can interact with.

Me: Right, because if it’s just flat, you can’t do much.

Joe: Exactly. So you need to have a good mix of the horizontal and the vertical space, and then ideally some density is also nice. So you want to have a lot of things very localized, because there is no point in vaulting over a fence and then running 300 yards just to step onto a rock. Density of obstacles or of an environment, multiple levels, pedestrian focus, tends to be the best spaces.

Libby: And solid rails, not the wiggly kind.

Me: Can you try to describe your physical, mental, spiritual, emotional state when you’re preparing to do a parkour movement?

Joe: So the biggest thing in parkour, is something called ‘breaking the jump’. ‘Breaking the jump’ is something that comes directly from the founders. It’s actually one of those things I want to push more forward. Parkour started off as childhood games and feats of strength among a small group of individuals that were being trained from a variety of different family members that came from military training. So practices like parcours du combattant, le mythe naturale, and some other kind of sport backgrounds. So these kids, they’re challenging themselves, can you pick up that rock, can you run 100 miles, can you do this jump, can you do it back to back? They found that there were certain challenges that were more intense than others, and they had to prepare themselves for it mentally and physically. That came to be known as ‘breaking the jump’. So you had to break through the barrier of your own hesitation, fear, and lack of preparedness. You had to break through that barrier to achieve the jump and to be able to
complete the successful movement. So for a while, several years at least, a lot of parkour runners would just do big jumps, they would just work themselves up to bigger and bigger jumps. And that’s kind of what we see now, is huge, big jumps and stuff like that. There is a lot of discussion about why they went that way, what they were looking for. At the time, they were talking a lot about why they were doing this, but it was kind of retrospective.

Me: Right, they didn’t really understand why they were doing what they were doing.

Joe: So they all had their own different reasons (for why they were training parkour). But the one thing that I keep hearing in my conversations with them, and through Julie Angel and her research with them, one of the things they talk about is that Flow State. That sense of flow. As your level increases, to get that sense of flow, to achieve that, you need to continually train right up against your level, or slightly beyond it. As a process, that automatically moves towards the development of the intensity and the difficulty of your movements.

Me: Right, slowly increase your skill level little bit by little bit.

Joe: Right. And then the other part is this. So when you are doing these jumps now, it is something big, it’s something often times scary. So one, you feel really good when you do it. You were able to do it, you feel a sense of accomplishment, a sense of euphoria, again kind of that flow state, because you have to focus so hard, so intently. The self kind of falls away. The focus becomes solely on the movement, and so on and so forth. So why do the jump? What am I looking for? What am I going through? So that’s what breaking the jump is. So typically it’s like a rooftop. So if I’m going to do a roof jump or a big jump or something like that. What I tend to do is this, and I’ve scouted out the jumps multiple times before. Often times they talk about you don’t go to a jump and go “That one”. Normally it’s during a training session or that day you’re walking by and all of a sudden it speaks to you, and you’re like “Oh! I didn’t see that, that’s a
thing I could do!” And you just kind of put it in the back of your mind. Then as you come back again and again and pass by it, you think “Oh man, maybe”, and you start picturing yourself doing it. You go up, you touch the walls, you get a sense of it, you stand at the edge of a jump or run up to it or something like that, kind of get a feel for it. You start to, kind of like the blind men feeling the outside of the elephant; you’re trying to just figure out “What is this thing that I’ve encountered?” That’s kind of the first part of it, the discovery of it. Then at some point, you’ve already made the decision to do the jump, you just recognize it, and you’re like “Oh man, now I have to do this.”

Me: Can’t pass up the opportunity!

Joe: Can’t pass it up! Often times it’s really nice when you have a partner to train with, someone who’s right about at your level, because you guys can push off each other. And then be like “Okay, I’m doing this” and then as soon as they say that, you’re like “Well, now I have to do it, I have to step up too.” It’s like a solidarity thing, right. I recognize that you are willing to push yourself, and who am I, if not your friend, if not your training partner, if I don’t join you in pushing yourself in that way. Giving yourself in to that effort, you know “I am going to be here to support you, and we’re going to do this together, and together we hopefully will achieve something that maybe individually we couldn’t, or that I wouldn’t have done.”

Me: So how do you feel when you’re in the moment doing the move?

Joe: Honestly, again it’s that zone, it’s that flow. You’re so focused on the actual movement that there is no process of thinking about it. The training takes over and that’s pretty much it. That’s when that sense of self steps back. You don’t really say “I am doing this jump”, it is like after you complete it, you’re like “Ah, I did that jump!” But for that moment while you are doing the jump, there wasn’t an ‘I’. I am making sure I am putting my foot here; I am making sure I land
here. The body is kind of leading that because it happens so fast that it has to be training, it has to be reflexive, especially when you are at that higher level. So that’s kind of what happens. It’s nice because one, you have that flow experience, that sense of self drops away and you have that connectedness with everything around you, a sense of euphoria, accomplishment, that sense that you are reaching self-actualization. You are achieving your potential, and realizing it through effort and hard work. Also, before it, you’re encountering fear, you’re encountering hesitation. So you need to be able to look at yourself realistically, ideally, comfortably, in a humble way, so you’re not just like “Alright! Rahhh! I can do this!” and just throw yourself at it, because that doesn’t work. You have to be very thoughtful, methodical. You have to know what you’re doing. It’s very intentional.

Libby: Yeah I think it’s interesting when you’re watching somebody break jumps because they get a different face. When they are coming up to the jump you can see it in their face. So they come up to the jump five times and you know they’re not going to do it because they don’t have that face. And that last time they come up, they have this focused look, like they’ve got tunnel vision; their whole body is primed and ready. They’re not paying attention to anything else, and then they do it. But without having that jump-breaking face, they’re not keyed in, they haven’t committed. At least for me, the level of commitment is needed. They’ll be moves where Joe is like “Oh, you can do that”, and I know mentally I can do it, but I will come up to it five, six times and think “Oh no no no I just can’t do it”. And then that last time, the world falls away. I don’t get tunnel vision, but almost like tunnel vision in on whatever I’m focusing on. I don’t really hear anything else other than my breathing, and I can feel my body tensing and settling, and then I go. But it’s a very different experience than your run-of-the-mill jump, vault, anything like that. It’s almost like you’re removed from yourself or that everything else just falls away. So
instead of me disappearing, everything else disappears. That’s how I have experienced jump breaking.

Me: One time I had to jump across this huge gorge and there was like a 60ft drop. It was in the woods and the edges just kind of sloped down into the pit, and I had to clear this thing because I was stuck out there because the way I jumped down, I couldn’t get back up. So I was standing there looking at it for like 10 minutes; and there was this one instant where I just felt that I could do it and thought “GO” and I just went.

Joe: That’s what I’m talking about, it’s a body thing. You feel the jump.

Libby: Yeah, you’re prepared.

Joe: It’s like a wave that develops inside you, and then you catch the wave, like a surfer. Yeah, so that’s exactly what it is. You know it.

Me: Yeah, I’ve experienced it!

Joe: You’ve experienced it!

Libby: I think it is kind of similar to, back when I did a lot of endurance running, and kind of that similar feeling when you’re completely exhausted at the end of your run, and you’re 100 yards away from the finish line, and then all of a sudden your body picks up and you just go, go, go. And you finish it and you didn’t think you had that capacity anymore, but all of sudden your body says “I’m just gonna go”. That’s kind of the same endorphin kick you get from breaking a jump.

Joe: Yeah, and then I think the more you do it, you get to know the pathways of fear in your mind, and it becomes easier and faster to navigate it. So you get to know yourself better at that edge. It’s called edgework, and you get to know yourself better through that edgework. And eventually, a jump break is not as big of a deal in a way because you know. If I could relate it to
a corridor, you know, I go down, take the first door on the right, walk through, take the next
door, and then out to the left. And the first time, you’re checking right, left, do I go down this
corridor, do I open this door? But eventually, you get to know the path that your mind takes, and
then it becomes much faster, much easier. That’s how you see people doing amazing, big things,
it’s because they’ve done this and they know.

Me: Can you describe your physical, mental, spiritual interaction with urban space that you have
when you’re out practicing parkour?

Joe: I think, on the whole, I tend to view the space as a training tool and as a partner. So there are
these things in parkour that we call ‘Leave No Trace’ where you don’t destroy anything, you fix
any damage, like if you scuff up a wall, you need to wipe it down and stuff like that. The idea is,
we care very much, I care very much, about that spaces that I train in, that my students train in,
because these are the tools that they’re using to develop themselves, physically, mentally,
emotionally. If I lose this tool, it’s a loss to them and to us, so you want it to be something that
endures, that lasts, that you’re taking care of. So you’re not looking to vandalize, you’re not
looking to trespass; you’re not looking to destroy anything. You know, quite the opposite. You
want to preserve, protect, utilize, and watch over the space. Maybe the space wasn’t designed for
this, but I’m now repurposing it. Often times in parkour, we don’t train where there are tons of
people using the space. Usually these are spaces that are forgotten, are not very well-traveled, not
really taken care of, and we take them and we repurpose them. This isn’t just a dilapidated wall;
this isn’t just an ugly urban space. This is a tapestry for my dance, for my movement, for my
betterment.

Me: What types of effects has parkour had on your life, physically, mentally, spiritually?
Joe: Essentially it’s what’s made me who I am today. It’s my career, it’s my job, it’s how I define myself, it’s how I fit into my social circle. On a personal level, I think it has helped me to learn more about myself. It has given me a sense of confidence, motivation, and self-reliance that I don’t think I had before. I think that’s common among most teenage young men who are growing up into adulthood, and for me, parkour was my path for discovering who I was, and coming into myself. Yeah for you (directed at Libby), you were already a bit older when you started parkour, so I don’t know if that was the same for you?  
Libby: Yeah! So I guess parkour for me, parkour has really redefined how I feel in my body and how I interact with my body. So previously, I was very much a distance, endurance type of athlete; not very interested in strength, not very interested in having explosive movement, and I kind of said you know “I just don’t do those things”. Parkour has opened up this whole realm for me and I now define myself as being strong; I now define myself as being very capable. That carries over into a lot of my work, professional work, and just how I feel on a day to day basis. I feel much more capable, and I think that that’s all secondary to parkour and the level of fitness that it’s enabled me to have, which is not something I would’ve necessarily had in mind with this position towards endurance sports.  
Me: Opened your eyes to all of these other skills you can gain.  
Libby: Yeah! The thing you were saying about how you interact with your environment, I do notice that it depends on what clothes I am wearing. If I go out wearing workout clothes, then I identify things to do parkour on. But if I’m wearing professional clothes, then I look at a handrail and think “That is a handrail, it is for my hands” and I don’t even really identify parkour opportunities. This is something I think the more you practice, the more it doesn’t matter what you’re wearing.
Me: It doesn’t matter if I’m wearing skinny jeans or athletic shorts. I’m still going to kong vault this.

Libby: Yeah, exactly!

Me: How have other parkour runners typically responded to seeing you guys do parkour movements when you’re training with other people?

Joe: Supportively. Positively. At least in our group and in most I’ve traveled to pretty widely, UK, Canada, Seattle, Colorado, New York, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Chicago, in these places that I’ve traveled to and trained parkour, the community is again very supportive, very encouraging, very welcoming, and people want you to succeed. They want you to have fun, they want to be welcoming.

Libby: I enjoy training with Joe because I feel like the one thing he doesn’t recognize about himself is that when he trains, there is kind of a wow factor, especially for the younger kids, like the 13 year old boys, and they’re like “Big Joe is doing his big movements!” and all this other stuff, you know. They are very supportive, and he has this kind of majestic air about him. So I think that’s kind of a fun perspective for me to be able to see, and then to see them (the kids) idolize and want to train to be able to do those things.

Me: Right, and be inspired by what he is doing!

Libby: Yeah, exactly! Like with him (Joe) and Richard and some of our more advanced coaches, when people watch them train, they don’t immediately think “I can do that”, but they think “Wow! That’s something I could aspire to.” So I think that’s a fun and interesting perspective.

Me: Yeah, inspiring little kids to keep progressing and keep coming back for more!

Libby: Yeah, definitely!
Me: How have you noticed non-parkour practitioners responding to your movements? So maybe like parents of the kids or people on the street that happen to see you training.

Joe: We have a very biased perspective because the people we see regularly are the people who love it, who understand it, who support it. Parents, again, if we see them more than once, it’s because they like it, they support it, they see their kids getting something out of it, and they recognize the value that it has. And we have something like over 2000 people in our system (signed up at the Parkour Horizons Parkour Gym). So it’s not like this is some crazy thing that only a few people recognize, it’s becoming more and more popular. I think if you’re under the age of, you know, 25, you know a parkour practitioner, you know what parkour is, and it’s just getting more and more popular. It’s getting popularized by things like Spartan Race, Tough Mudder, YouTube, videogames, movies; it all has parkour in it. I think it’s something that you are just going to see more and more. Previously, when parkour was new, there was a lot less understanding about what it was. People didn’t know what it was; they didn’t know what to call it. You got looked at a little weird; and you had to get a little bit of a thicker skin because people would just stop and stare at you. So if you got a little weirded out by having people watching you train, it makes it difficult. But mostly all of the experiences that I’ve had have been very positive.

By the time of the end of our time training at Ohio State University, we had working relationships with the people in the buildings, with the campus police department. We once spent a time with the group training out on some railings in front of the big building on one of the major streets on campus, and a cop pulled up and said “Oh hey, are you guys just doing something innocuous like parkour?” and we said “Yes, that’s exactly what we are doing!” and we knew at that point when the cop was calling parkour innocuous that they realize this is not something that’s damaging, it’s not something that’s bad, it’s not countercultural. It’s a new
thing. It’s a reinterpretation of a lot of different things. Martial arts, gymnastics, acrobatics, free
climbing, building; it’s a reinterpretation of a lot of those things. But it’s not harmful. A lot of
the time, there seems to be a gap, maybe people born in the 40’s 50’s 60’s, who didn’t quite
understand it, maybe kind of in that baby boomer era. But we noticed that the people who were
older than that, the parents of that generation, they grew up playing like that, like running
through the streets, climbing on trees. And they understood it and they think it’s great. So often
times, the seniors and the older people, they understood it immediately. The kids, the younger
people, they get it. And there’s just that little gap of people who just are like “No, you shouldn’t
do this, this is improper. This doesn’t match with these set expectations of things we already
have. This is not football, this is not soccer, and this is not baseball.” So since they cannot
categorize it, somehow then they are afraid of it. You don’t understand it so it’s easy just to be
like “Well you’re jumping on this fence because you have no respect for this fence or for the
people who use this fence, or for the people who built this fence.” It’s like “No, no, no, I
appreciate all of those things!”

Me: If this fence wasn’t here, I couldn’t be doing what I’m doing!

Joe: “I don’t adopt your assumption that walking around the fence or touching the fence is any
less valid or more valid than jumping over a fence.” It’s that reinterpretation, that new perception
of this social understanding of what a space should be.

Me: How have you noticed police typically responding to your movements?

Joe: Very positively! Yeah here in Columbus, we’ve worked hard to establish a very positive
relationship with the community and with the police.

Me: Have you ever had any negative experiences?
Joe: Yeah, I mean every once in a while there are a couple negative experiences. You’ll get someone who just feels like it’s their right, responsibility, and position to inform you that what you are doing is absolutely not allowed and you can’t be doing it, and “How dare you!” But then you’re like “But you’re just walking down the street, this isn’t even your building! You have nothing to do with any of this! You are just some pedestrian. Why do you feel the need to insert yourself here?” And so I think we’ve all had experiences like that.

Libby: In terms of the police or security officers, I would say in general, as long as you have an open conversation and say “This is what we use the space for, if you want us to leave, we’ll leave. We were not trying to be disrespectful”, and present yourself as a human and not some sort of cretin. Their job is not to just be mean, you know. They are generally reasonable. And if they want you to leave, then respectfully leave! Don’t make a big deal out of it, and that’s one of the keys to creating a good relationship.

Joe: And also just not training in areas where you obviously shouldn’t. Like don’t train on a federal building, don’t train at a school when school is in session, don’t go on top of buildings if they are being used and there are people walking around and you’re creating a disturbance and you’re worrying people. Don’t do it if it’s obviously not safe. Don’t do it if you shouldn’t be there.

Libby: Don’t be an idiot!

Joe: Don’t be an idiot. Don’t mouth off to people. Don’t be angry at people. Don’t be defensive. Don’t hurt plants. I see a lot of people, like young kids especially, and they’ll just run roughshod over landscape and think “Oh too bad”. I understand that that’s thousands of dollars’ worth of plants and that’s not reasonable to step on, you can’t destroy that. Basically just be a reasonable human being.
Libby: Be a human!

Joe: Be a human!

Me: How do you respond to seeing other parkour runners doing their movements?

Libby: So long as they’re being a normal human, very supportively!

Joe: Very well, very well!

Libby: I love watching people train; I love watching people progress. Especially since we’ve been the gym, we get to see a lot of people who are really stepping up and progressing their movement, and it’s just really fun to see. It’s a recent experience for me, exploring all the new different parts of parkour. It’s very rewarding to watch people get something for the first time. As a coach, it’s the most rewarding experience and it’s the best part. You know, you’ve given them a cue and then all of a sudden they get it, and it’s a great, rewarding experience.

Joe: I think, for me, I’ve been doing this a long time now, and I’ve had students that started training parkour in middle school and now are in college and they coach for me. So I’ve seen them grow up and that’s a very rewarding experience, seeing a kid grow into a young man, and come into their own self, and help them to develop in that way. So hopefully I’ve gleaned some positive values onto them.

Libby: And to be able to give back to the community.

Joe: Yeah, to be able to give back to the community.

Me: Do you ever document your parkour movements? And if so, how do you document them?

Joe: I mean, the same way everyone does now, right? You record them on your phone. Normally if I document it, it’s for me. It’s mostly for viewing my movement. So I’ll ask a friend “Hey, could you film me doing this?” So I can see what I’m doing. Sometimes you can’t feel it quite right and you need to be able to look at what you’re doing. And now that I have footage of it, I
can see “Now that’s what I’m doing wrong” and I’ll try and fix it. The other times I do it are for the gym, for marketing, and we also do it sometimes for our YouTube channel for educational videos.

Me: How do you feel about the way that parkour is typically portrayed in media, or the internet, or movies?

Joe: You know, it used to really bother me. I think the perception of it has changed as well. It used to be that the perception was that this was a daredevil, risky, adrenaline junkie, destructive sport, and that’s what I saw back in 2005, 2006. I think nowadays, perception is a lot different. We work with non-profit organizations, we work with schools, we work with community organizations, festivals, libraries, community centers. You know, it’s now recognized to be a good, positive thing, not like it used to be. I think overall, the perception is generally good, especially amongst educators, people who are involved with fitness and child health, teachers, educators. I think the perception of it has largely grown positive. I think more and more, the perception of it in movies, videogames, and things like that, while yes spectacular, yes extreme, yes hyped up, you’re going to get that with anything right? You’re going to get that with anything, especially with something as rich as parkour, in terms of how spectacular it can be, you’re going to get it, and that’s what’s going to be glorified. Nowadays, what I like is that things like Ninja Warrior or Spartan Race are now coming more into the forefront. Like in videogames, they are saying this is a way to move across space, or this is a way to challenge yourself, and they’re presented with a selection of moves. I think a lot of early parkour practitioners had this idea that parkour was something that was theirs, and their interpretation was the right, proper, correct interpretation, and that the way they viewed it and the values they brought to it, the spirituality that they had with it was the only way, and this was the way. People
were very much against competition, they were very much against people sharing it, charging for it. We got in a lot of trouble the first time we charged for an event; we had massive uproar from communities all over the country. That’s because, you know, these are a lot of young guys typing on their keyboard and thinking they’re awesome. A lot of people, especially when it first started, used parkour as a way to define themselves. And unfortunately, also set themselves up, in their own mind at least, to be higher or better than someone else, and they used it to like pick off people. So I think that was something for the parkour community that was really negative, and wasn’t good for the community. And then there was the media edge of it. So it goes both ways. Nowadays, it’s settled out, and I think more people just chill out about it and do their own thing, and it works out just fine.

Me: We sort of talked about this already, but is there anything else you want to say about the elements of risk and danger, or trespassing in parkour?

Joe: Yeah! Yeah, I think there’s no doubt that parkour definitely, by strict legal definitions in the United States at least, involves an element of trespassing and illegality in the way that it’s typically practiced outdoors. I think there has been a lot of work in the parkour community to move away from that and to move towards areas that are either on public property or public spaces, where trespassing is not as big of an issue and sort of falls away into the grey area of the law. Now in the United States, we have a lack of public space that can be used publicly. Private rights here in this country and the litigious nature of our country, how quick people are to sue for injury and negligence and things like that. We have that feeling very much of being an individual here. I feel like, in our society, we often times do not give them a lot of responsibility for their own actions. We say “Well the reason you hurt yourself on this playground is because the playground was manufactured incorrectly or because the ground was too hard. And since
someone could have realized that this ground was too hard and could’ve hurt you when you fell on it, therefore it’s not your fault, it’s the person who made this, it’s the person who designed it”. Libby: It’s not ‘your’ fault that you hurt yourself; that you jumped off the top of this. Joe: And I think that’s a shame, because some European countries don’t follow that same setup. I see much healthier communities there, and you don’t see people as afraid to try new things, to do new things. I think it’s one of the shames about our culture it that it’s impulsive to say “Stop, don’t” instead of thinking “Okay, well let’s explore and let me help you,” and I think that’s a problem. But yes, that’s why we are opening gyms, why we are trying to build parks. But we have to realize that none of that existed, and there weren’t places to train. So your only choice, if you wanted to actually do this, was to trespass or was to do something slightly illegal, but to do it in as respectful a way as you could. I think you’ll see that change, and as it changes, it will be another thing to accept parkour more. Then, in terms of risk and safety in parkour, I think again, this is an area where maybe we’ve gone a little bit too far in our paradigm. I think we have sanitized environments from risks, and we’ve prevented children, especially young people, from engaging productively in risk-taking behaviors. That leads to kids who are perfectionists, who maybe don’t do their work because they are afraid of failure; they have high expectations of themselves, and they get really frustrated with themselves. They aren’t familiar with failure, they aren’t familiar with consequences, and they’re not encouraged to encounter those things or to deal with risk in a way that’s helpful, or to take personal responsibility for themselves and their actions. So I think that parkour is wonderful in that it teaches you self-reliance, and it teaches you how to safely, reductively deal with risk in a progressive way. So we start from the ground up and we build our way up. We empower them with the skills, strength, and techniques they need to be able to move safely and to analyze their environment well. So while yes, they are
taking risks and there is an element of danger, it is an understood risk, an understood danger. If people who are kids, children who maybe do not have that ability, that’s what we, as coaches, are there to help provide and help teach them. Often times you’ll see in our gym and in our training environments people who can’t break a jump, and we say “Hey, if you’re not ready, don’t do that, maybe come try this”. That’s why, again, when we put the emphasis on the person, on the community, and we teach the values, and we teach the processes, you have a helpful environment. You’re not trying to artificially construct something that is somehow impervious to all possible outcomes. That’s not realistic, that’s not the way things work. So instead, you need to make this something that’s intrinsic, internal, and that builds upon itself, and is self-reinforcing.

Me: Yeah I like to say I’m taking calculated risks, because everything you do it going to be somewhat risky. So walking down a set of stairs has some element of risk, you could slip and fall. But it’s in your experience to calculate your risk to know that you won’t get hurt.

Joe: I think also, the injury rates in parkour are quite low. There are not many studies done so far but from one of the few studies I’ve seen, injury rates are actually the equivalent of women’s softball. Much lower than other sports like major league baseball, football, gymnastics, cheerleading; safer than women’s field hockey. You know, it looks risky taken out of context.

Me: How has parkour changed the way you view urban space? Like from before you were training to now?

Joe: There’s a quote from Williams Belle, who is one of the founders related to David Belle, his cousin. There is a documentary called Generation Yamakasi, and in it he describes this very thing. They ask him “What’s the difference?” And he says if you’re walking down the street, and you’re a normal, everyday person, walking down the street looking sort of down, looking at the
ground, looking straight ahead, and then you look at a parkour person. They’re looking everywhere. They’re touching the railings; they’re giving them little shakes. So that’s what it is. It’s this ‘I’m passively moving through it’ to ‘I’m actively interacting and appreciating the space’. That’s the subtle shift, but it’s all very important because it’s everything that follows from that.

Me: So what role do you think creativity plays in parkour?

Joe: A big part! I think parkour is an amalgam, a mash up of a lot of different things, right? Of gymnastics and martial arts, but also breakdancing, dance, tricking, and all of these are just movement expression, the movement art forms. So that creativity, that interaction between your environment and your own ability, that reinterpretation, that spontaneous element of play and discovery, that’s all part of it. It’s a wonderful creative outlet. And, you know, when you’re training in the best places, it’s almost like the way a set form of a sonnet forces the poet to be able to hit a certain form, and that, in a way, can almost create more creativity. There are certain bounds, certain form on it, that force you to move in certain ways. But with that, it allows you to reinterpret and re-approach it in new ways.

Me: If you guys had to describe what parkour means to you using three words, it could be a phrase or three different words, what would they be?

Joe: Art of Movement.

Libby: I agree, Art of Movement.

Me: Alright! Thank you both very much for taking the time to interview with me!
Paired Interview 2: Ishmial Morell and Brandon Barber

Me: First off, could you tell me your names, how old you are, where you’re from, and how many years you’ve done parkour?

Brandon: I’m Brandon Barber. I’m from Oxford, Michigan. I’m 23 years old, and I’ve only been doing parkour for about a year.

Ish: I’m Ishmial Morell. I’m 23 and from Caro, Michigan. I’ve been doing parkour for about 6 years.

Me: So tell me your stories, how did you first get involved in parkour?

Ish: Internet. Just following YouTube and looking up videos, and Jackie Chan, I guess, was before that. I’ve always watched him doing his movements.

Brandon: For me, a little bit of martial arts got me into moving around a lot.

Me: Nice, which one?

Brandon: Tang Soo Do, I did three years of Tang Soo Do. I just really enjoyed moving around and when I got done doing stuff like that, I found parkour and I really enjoyed that and I started getting more into that. Moving around, rolling, and jumping around and climbing!

Me: What does parkour mean to you guys? What inspires you to practice it?

Ish: I guess just the challenge of it. It’s always fun overcoming anything, really, learning new things. You get to push yourself to do better things, even if you’re not the first one to do it. A lot of times you see people do stuff and you have some kind of urge to want to do it, and it feels really good when you get it, a big sense of accomplishment.

Me: Yeah because it’s still your first time doing it!

Brandon: For me, I’d say just to better myself. I want to get better at moving. I want to challenge myself in new, exciting ways, and I like how it’s not really competitive, but at the same time it
is. You see someone else do something and you want to do that, and you want to get better. Then 
that person sees that you’re getting better and they want to challenge themselves, just gradually 
building each other up.

Ish: Yeah, it’s your community. Everyone as a whole wants to see people get better for the most 
part.

Brandon: I do like the community too. The community is really cool because it’s not like we’re 
going to class and we’re just going through the basic motions. We can work on what we want to 
work on, and then someone else gets to help you improve.

Ish: Everyone is always willing to help!

Brandon: Yeah, everyone’s got a tip that could help you jump higher or make your landings 
better or just rotate faster, and you’re always learning. I learn something new every day.

Me: Yeah even with people that just started parkour, they could say “What about this?” and a 
parkour runner could think “Ah! I’ve never thought about it like that!”

Ish: I tell people, my brother and sister, they don’t do parkour, yet they fix things for me. I ask 
them “Can you watch this?” and they’re like “Yeah it looks like you’re doing this wrong” and 
I’m like “Well what do you know it works!”

Me: Yeah, movement is kind of universal! Everyone knows how to move!

Ish: Yeah! It’s pretty cool!

Me: So do you guys have any goals associated with parkour, like long term or short term?

Brandon: Well I’d like to keep doing it until at least I’m 30. I want to keep going. I just got into 
it. I’m 23 years old, but I’m just starting out and I want to get better and I want to keep going and 
I want to push myself. I want to be doing flips and tricks on concrete and feel confident about it
and make it look effortless. I want to get to that level, and that’s my goal. I want to be
comfortable in any surrounding.

Ish: I don’t know. I used to think I wanted to be a pro, and I still work, I actually do some stunts
and stuff like that but I’d like to be sponsored to go to international jams. But it’s not the main
focus anymore I guess. Now it’s just to do it. Maybe the goal is now to learn how to train a bit
better so I can just keep progressing. I just want to progress as much as I can and not stop,
because part of the problem is injuries. I know you can learn to get around that, but injuries are
inevitable. That’s maybe the goal, just to progress and continue without injuries and keep getting
better.

Me: Yeah, keep being consistent. So when you’re getting ready to go out and train, how do you
prepare physically, mentally, or spiritually to go practice?

Ish: I know your (Brandon’s) training methods are maybe a little bit different than mine. I think
you’re better at training than I am, as far as being consistent.

Brandon: Consistent, yeah. I guess to get ready, you have to have the right mindset. You have to
go in thinking “I want to do this today.”

Ish: Yeah, have something specific in mind.

Brandon: Yeah, you usually have something specific in mind that you want to focus on and the
rest of it is just to have fun. But I usually want to nail at least one or two things, and repeatedly
practice and practice and practice. Before I even get into it, I know “That’s what I want to do; I
know I want to do that”. And before I even get ready to do any of those tricks, I always have to
do a consistent warmup. I want to make sure my body’s warm before I even do anything because
I want to avoid injuries and stretching is really important. There has been times where I’ll come
out of a landing badly and all that, and I want to make sure I’m loose; I’m comfortable; being
comfortable in your own body. If you don’t feel comfortable in your own body before you do things, you’re not going to feel comfortable doing the trick, and that’s the important thing.

Me: Yeah, that’s where injuries happen.

Brandon: That is where injuries happen, yeah.

Ish: Yep. As far as physical preparation, I always warm up and do smaller movements and that type of stuff. I guess that sometimes I focus on certain parts of my body, like if something hurts that day, I’ll try to work on it a bit more. If I’m going to be using a certain part of my body more for what I want to train, I’ll warm it up a bit more. Like if I’m doing bar stuff, I’ll warm up my arms a lot more than my legs. Mentally, I just try to go into it with a happy mindset. I don’t want to be stressing out. I don’t want to force myself to train, because that takes the fun out of it.

Me: Yeah, and the next time you might not want to go out as much.

Ish: Yeah. Try to stay happy. I try and focus. I don’t always have something in mind that I want to train, or even if I do, I don’t always train that. Sometimes I’ll go out and I’ll do one move of what I want to train, and then I’ll see something else and be like “Oh, I’m going to try that!” And then I just end up doing that for the whole time. It’s sporadic, which I think is good and bad.

Me: Yeah, it’s part of the sport, to just get out there and just see what opportunities are around.

Ish: Yeah. So there’s not as much preparation on my part, just to warm up. Other things like the mental and spiritual aspects kind of changes as I train. The fear aspect and the physical difficulty of what I’m trying to demand of myself; if I’m really asking a lot, I’ll feel a lot more mental and spiritual struggle.

Me: Right, to drive yourself.

Brandon: Right, and I want to touch on that. Some days I do have to force myself to get up and go out and train sometimes.
Ish: Oh yeah, definitely.

Brandon: Some days I’ll be sore or I’ll have an injury, but even taking like 2 or 3 days off just because you have a stubbed toe or bad fingers, you have to get out there, you have to keep going, keep pushing yourself. You have to work around it, because that consistency is so important if you want to keep moving. Movement is life, and if you stop moving, you die. You have to keep moving.

Ish: You just have to go into it with love, you know?

Brandon: You do, you do.

Ish: Love for the sport, because I know what you mean, but definitely don’t make it a thing. If you go out because you don’t want to train, you have to try to focus on why you’re doing it.

Brandon: Right. There’s that purpose.

Ish: That kind of mindset. “I’m here for a reason, and it’s not just to learn this trick or that trick, but it’s because I want to get better” like you said.

Brandon: Yeah, and it feels good to get that feeling of when you want to get better and then all of a sudden you see that progress. You go outside, you’re in the grass or on concrete, playing around learning that trick, or you get that extra step and you grab that ledge, and it feels good.

Me: Nice, so where do you typically choose to practice parkour when you go out?

Brandon: For me, I like to practice in the grass. Honestly, in my front yard I feel pretty comfortable working on tumbling, working on flips; just regular old rolls. I like the grass. It’s more realistic as opposed to the gym, but I like to train in gyms too because being safe is the most important thing. It’s not like we can wear a helmet then go outside and do all these tricks and be okay. It’s not like that.

Me: Yeah, you’d have to wear full body armor or something like that.
Brandon: Yeah! It doesn’t work like that.
Ish: Yeah really!
Me: Then you can’t do anything!
Brandon: I like to train in the grass because that gives us the most realistic feel, you know. We don’t get that springboard floor to give us that extra lift. So out in the grass, it’s you and the ground. You have to muscle it up, you have to focus. I do like to train in gyms because in there, you can work on things that you’ve never tried on the grass. You have the ability to use the foam pit, a crash pad, and you can really push yourself which is nice.
Ish: Yeah, you’re really able to push yourself.
Brandon: And when you do go to the gym, the nice thing is that there are other people, and that’s when you meet the community. That’s when you actually get to learn stuff and you get to meet new people.
Me: Yeah and see what they do.
Brandon: Yeah, and then that’s when you get to mess around the most too. You get to go to the gym, you have your 2 or 3 goals that you want to focus on, and get those out of the way and then you get to hang out with some people, and you’re all just trying something different. You’re all like “Woah! I saw you double in, back out, I want to try that!” Or you could be like “I’m going to go throw a double front on the trampoline, why not?” It’s fun, you know. It’s fun having the people there, and especially at the gym when you’re with the community and you’re trying a new trick for the first time and you’ve never done it, and you go for it and everyone is just so excited for you. That’s a really good feeling.
Ish: Yeah, it is really good. I agree with everything you said. But I like to just train everywhere. I know you do too (Brandon). I like to train everywhere. I don’t have a favorite spot or anything. Every place has something new to offer.

Me: What kind of qualities do you look for?

Ish: Well, where I live, the spots are few and far between. So as far as in my area, I just look for anything! You know what I mean? I’m just looking and looking to see if I can find something that I’m interested in. Or if I only see one good obstacle that really kind of speaks to me, then I just try to walk through there. Maybe that might dictate a lot of my training.

Me: Right, utilize it as much as you can; the maximum potential.

Ish: Yeah. Work with what you’ve got.

Brandon: Right. Where someone sees a handrail, we see an obstacle, and that obstacle we can go over 20 different ways.

Me: Right, lots of different things you can train.

Brandon: Right.

Me: So can you describe how you feel, physically, mentally, spiritually, when you’re staring down a movement, about to do something?

Ish: Like a move with more pressure?

Me: Yeah, like a big move.

Brandon: Anxious, would be the word. So many emotions come to mind when I’m trying something new. Definitely that little bit even if you’ve trained it, that little burst of energy that you feel in your heart. You have a little sweat going, your blood starts flowing, but at the same time, you’re a little scared. But you know that if you just commit to it, you’ve got it. When you do the trick, it’s like nothing else matters. There are no people around you, there’s just you and
that obstacle, and you just stare it right in the face and you go for it. Whether you sink or swim, you have to go for it, and it’s do or die. But if you do it, it’s a really good feeling.

Ish: Yeah! It really is!
Brandon: Yeah! If you do it, you don’t die (jokingly)! It’s just such a good feeling! It’s like the whole world doesn’t matter except for that moment when you land it, when you’re on your feet, that you walked away.
Ish: It’s a really good feeling.
Brandon: Yeah! It’s a really, really good feeling. It’s really hard to describe it. I don’t know. It’s like trying something new for the first time, and you’re like a little kid again. It’s just a different kind of feeling. It is really hard to describe. It’s anxious, it’s fun, it’s exciting, it’s scary!
Ish: Yeah it is.
Brandon: It’s empowering too! After you do something like that, you just find a different kind of strength that you didn’t really know you had.
Me: Yeah! “I didn’t think I was capable of that, but now I’ve done it!”
Brandon: Yeah! Then it’s on to the next challenge! I guess it’s what keeps us going in a sense.
Ish: Yeah that thrill.
Brandon: Yeah that thrill kind of keep you going because once you find that trick that’s so hard or that you’ve never done and you do it, you get that feeling. You want to find some other move to give you that feeling again. I think that’s what pushes us to keep trying harder and harder things, is that we like that feeling. We want to feel that anxiety, that little anxious feeling. But at the same time we want to have that strength.
Ish: And relief, after the anxiety is over.
Brandon: Yeah, for sure!
Ish: I hate that feeling of being so excited that I’m maybe shaking and sweating, I hate that!

That’s where you feel like there’s no control. That’s what the feeling of fear is.

Brandon: You need to break it.

Ish: Yeah, when you finally step past that and finish the move, it goes away. It’s just such a good feeling. The fear is gone.

Me: Right, because you’re done with it and you know you’re capable! Can you talk a bit more about how it feels when you’re going through the motions of the movement?

Ish: Things slow down. It might sound a little cliché, but that’s what happens. Time isn’t really there. You’re standing there, you get excited, and personally sometimes I get sweaty hands and I shake a little bit if it’s big enough. It just depends on the movements, just trying to dictate the movements, and it just slows down, and you have to convince yourself sometimes to just go. If it’s going to happen, you have to convince yourself to do it; you have to find the reason for doing it. Sometimes, if you think about it, there’s really no point in me doing this, but there is! There’s something in your spirit that wants you to get past that. So once you commit to that move all the time, there won’t be that excitement, that fear. You kind of have to push yourself a little bit because inside your head it says “You can’t do that, wait” but you need to do it. So in the moment, there are a lot of thoughts, there is a lot of thinking. “What if I fall, what if this could happen?” So many things could happen and you can picture them, especially if you’re getting over a mental barrier. “What if I land on this and I slip off or my foot slips off over here, or what if I don’t slip? What if my ankle twists?” You can’t think about all of those possibilities so you have to push those out of the way. You have to trust yourself and just know that you can do it. If I’m thinking those thoughts, I try and think of how I’m going to catch myself. “Okay here’s how. If I don’t land this move first the way I want to, I’m actually going to do this instead of that. Or
even if I do fall, I’ll just do a pk roll out of that.” But I think about what I’m doing as I do it. I try not to get too excited, because the excitement can go away when you’re about to do it and then just kind of attack you. You just have to stay calm all the way through the movement.

Brandon: I don’t know about you, but usually before I even do a trick, I do think ‘worst case scenario’. “I could bail and land on my butt or I land on my shoulder, I have to roll out of it.” I always have a step by step process of what I have to do. I always think, like before I go to do a flip over something, I’m always thinking “What motions, step by step by step by step, do I have to do to do it.

Ish: You try to prepare thoroughly.

Brandon: Right before you do it, as you’re prepping yourself for it, you’re thinking “Alright, what do I have to do? How’s it going to look?” You think about it from your perspective running into it, and then you look at the outside perspective of being a guy watching it. “How’s it going to look?” And then you think about “Alright, how’s it going to look if I mess up and how am I going to fix that?” And then when you step up and you’re staring down the path that you want to do, you’re looking at that obstacle, and you have to think “What am I doing? What steps do I go through? Stay low, extend, reach, tuck, grab your legs.” I’m really going through every single step. In your head, you’re thinking “Hit, tuck, open,” and you really break it down in your head however you feel. But up to that point, you’re thinking of 20 different scenarios, and then you get up there and it’s the same as doing any trick. You get up there and you forget about all the bad. You just focus on what you need to do.

Ish: Yeah, I don’t really think about other people when I’m doing something big enough.

Brandon: Yeah, I don’t think about the other people, but I always think about it as if I’m looking at it from two different perspectives. I’m looking at it from my eyes before I do it, and then I
want to imagine how someone else would see it, you know? Like how far do I have to go to make it look right?

Ish: Oh I see.

Brandon: I imagine a third person view, and that way I can really get the perspective.

Ish: Just another perspective. You’re seeing yourself doing it basically.

Brandon: Yeah. I’m always thinking to myself “Did that feel good? Did that look good? How was my landing?” I want to have this kind of outside perspective too. Even if it’s a trick I’ve done 100 times, I know there’s always room to make it better.

Me: Cool. So can you describe your physical, mental, and spiritual interactions with the spaces in which you’re executing movements? What is your relationship with the spaces around you when you’re practicing parkour?

Ish: Physically, I move around and feel them. A lot of times now, I’ll just be walking about I’ll touch things, walls and rails and stuff to see how they feel, and I’ll shake things and tap on walls and stuff. I’ll scrape my shoe against it to see how grippy the wall is and what that would feel like. That helps for when you’re just out training, because you can just see things and think how they probably feel. So you feel things. Mentally, sometimes I find myself just kind of standing, even if it’s in the middle of a training session, just standing there just thinking about the area and looking at it. And I’ll picture a hundred different movements up this wall or over this obstacle. I’ll just be in the zone, just thinking about the space.

Brandon: I feel very similarly to what he said. In a space, physically, I love open space. Open spaces, I don’t know what it is. It’s just a really relaxing feeling. I love wide open areas. I mean I like obstacles, don’t get me wrong. They’re fun, they’re challenging. But in open areas, I just feel comfortable, just a really nice, easy feeling. I like open areas and I like it when there are not
a lot of people around either. When there are a lot of people around, there are a lot of eyes watching, sometimes I get a little nervous and get that anxious feeling. So open space, minimum people, I feel comfortable. I like it. It doesn’t really matter what kind of space either. An open field gives me the same kind of feeling as an open park or an open concrete walkway. It just feels good to open up and relax. I do find myself putting my hands on rails and shaking them, grabbing stuff, or just touching concrete walls to see if it’s a smooth texture or if it has that rough kind of feeling to it, just to touch it. I don’t really think about doing anything on it sometimes, I like to appreciate the wall and how nice it is.

Ish: And that’s a good type of extrapolation of parkour. As we train on stuff, we better understand our relationship to it; what it is to us and what we are to it, what we can do with it and what we need it for in order to traverse it.

Brandon: Yeah! We see more out of it too. We touch something and all of a sudden we’re like “I can really push off of that and step off of it and do a cool trick or move off of it”. That’s the physical.

Me: Yeah, like a smoother surface you touch with your shoes and they slip off and you think “Oh! Nope. No wall runs on this!”

Ish: Even then, you just try to understand what you have to do to use it still!

Me: Yeah! I have to really put in a lot of impact to get the friction.

Ish: That’s the frustrating thing about some of the stuff where you don’t think there’s anything you can do with it. That kind of frustrates me.

Brandon: Yeah definitely!

Ish: There has got to be something I can do! There has got to be some way up! That really pushes you. It’s like a challenge, but you have to change.
Brandon: Yeah a challenge.

Ish: You have to change somehow. There is no looking at that wall the same.

Me: So how has parkour changed or impacted your lives apart from the sport?

Ish: Well back home, I’m that cool guy that does parkour! I don’t mean this group (the MIPK community) but up where I live, no one else does it. So people are like “Oh, you flip right?”

Me: Yeah! It’s like the same as me! I’m like the only one at my college that I know of that does parkour.

Ish: Yeah, so it’s kind of your identity, unless you’re doing it with other people. How it changed? I don’t know.

Brandon: I don’t know. Ish, you’re not much of a cocky guy at all. You’re very modest.

Ish: Thanks you just made my day! Just made my day haha! I guess with parkour, I always have something fun to do.

Brandon: Yeah! Right! No matter where we go, we’re never bored. Always, always find a spot where you can do something related to parkour, whether it’s just rolling or jumping or climbing.

Ish: Yeah, but it hasn’t made me who I want to be yet because there’s just a long way to go.

Me: Yeah, it’s a journey.

Ish: Just in every aspect that. But I think that parkour is definitely going to be a good tool to grow.

Me: So how have other parkour runners typically responded to seeing you do movements?

Ish: When you fall, they laugh haha!

Brandon: If you land a big trick, they’re cheering you on.

Ish: They are just laughing all the time!

Brandon: It’s true, we’re always goofing off.
Ish: It’s good, yeah. There’s a lot of support for each other.

Brandon: Yeah it’s real positive. There are never really any negative vibes from really anybody ever. If someone does mess up, it’s a little frustrating but it’s not like anyone ever blows up or throws anything or starts cussing up a storm. Usually, you know, you get frustrated and you walk away from that and then you come back to it when you feel comfortable. And if you are frustrated too, it’s nice to have somebody to help you too, because that same thing I said earlier, having that other person’s perspective can help change your move to make it better.

Me: Yeah like maybe somebody else that is a higher skill level can come over and be like “Oh, just throw your arms a little bit higher and you’re good,” and then it’s fixed.

Brandon: Like I said, I’m really new to the sport. I’ve almost been doing it for a year, probably 10 or 11 months as of right now. I’ve committed to it. It’s kind of almost a job for me now because I actually coach it too. So I’m doing it every day which really helps my movement. But when other guys, since I’m so new to it, when they see me, I like to talk a lot and tell them that I haven’t been doing this for so long so I’m trying these new tricks, and when I see something new, I’m like “I want to try that, can you help me out?” I’m always looking for advice. I’m always looking for a new way to do something better. I’m always looking to improve on my old stuff. You know, whether it’s a front flip or getting better at a roll, even trying stuff on concrete too. It’s different. You have to have that other person’s point of view to help get you up and over the hump. Watching and having those guys around helps and it’s fun. Being new to parkour, to learn do those cool tricks, you get a lot of cheers now and again. And then there are times when you do end up beefing it, and they ask if you’re okay. And I wouldn’t say that everyone’s worried or…

Ish: They’re concerned.
Brandon: they’re, well I guess they are concerned, but I think they’re more concerned about you mentally. There are some people that would be like “Woah!!” and run to them.

Ish: Yeah we won’t expect the worst. We’ll just make sure that you’re okay.

Me: Yeah or if they need to go to the hospital or something.

Ish: Yeah. I can’t see what’s really wrong with you right now, like if you didn’t land right.

Brandon: Yeah usually if someone does beef it, we’ll watch for a second, and no one is too quick to be like “Oh are you okay? Are you okay? Do you need ice?”

Ish: Not much overreaction, unless it is really bad.

Brandon: Yeah we’re not really fazed by bad things I guess. When someone does beef it, we’ll watch, we’re concerned, but we’re not fazed by it. We’re not like “Oh man, I’m not going to do that.” If anything, some people are like “Man, I want to try that”.

Me: Yeah, like when they’re really close.

Brandon: Yeah definitely. You know, when you see someone else, you want to help them out, you know? It’s not like you want to come over and lecture them, but you want to help them out.

Ish: Yeah so the way that the community reacts is always really very supportively. If you’re having trouble, they will lend a hand and try to give you some advice. If you do something, they’ll get excited for you.

Brandon: Yeah, mentally and physically, they’re willing to help you. No one wants to see you discouraged. Everyone wants to stack each other on their shoulders. I watch Ish and he’s awesome! Everything I see this guy do, I’m always telling him he does it perfectly, he’s doing awesome, he’s doing great!

Ish: Yeah he’s so cool, so awesome (sarcastically).

Me: So how do non-parkour practitioners typically respond to seeing you do movements?
Ish: Really, it’s hard to say. It’s always different. Sometimes you’d think “Oh, that person might like what I do” and then they end up being mad at you or something. Other times it’s the opposite. You think “Oh that person might not like or understand what I’m doing” but they are so interested and so happy.

Brandon: I even have mixed feelings about it. I definitely sometimes get it into my head that some people are looking at me like “I don’t like what he’s doing. He shouldn’t be doing that around here or around my kids”. Sometimes it actually makes me not want to train, especially by myself. Sometimes I’ll be at a school or near a park and I’m doing nothing. And all of a sudden I look around and I see something or some benches and think “I really want to do a trick on that”. But I’m by myself and I look around and there is nobody else to train with and nobody else who does parkour, and I don’t want to go out and be the guy in the field doing crazy flips and tricks and have everyone’s mom be talking bad about me.

Ish: Right. It is kind of tough to do things by yourself sometimes, or at such a busy spot.

Brandon: Yeah.

Ish: But I also like that (training alone at a popular spot) because it’s kind of another obstacle mentally because it can make you scared in a different way.

Brandon: Yeah, yeah, and you have to get over that too!

Ish: Like public speaking, you know? It’s being in front of a crowd. It’s a whole different kind of thing. And trying to do that (train in those conditions), it can be a big letdown or it can be really supportive to you because people react differently. Sometimes it just kind of ruins your day, but sometimes people just start complimenting you and watching and pulling out their phones and they think it’s so cool.
Me: Yeah, like back in the day, before I found a team, I was always just trained by myself and I always felt really weird. I always felt like I was the mentally insane guy jumping on a wall and people are always like “What the heck is he doing?” I’m training, you know!

Brandon: Yeah, “You’re like 20 years old! You’re playing on stuff like a little kid!” “Hey I’m having fun!” But someone else might be like “That guy is weird.” I don’t know why, but I feel like it does kind of bother me though in a sense, the whole judgment thing. Being around the community, there’s no judgment. It’s nice, because everyone just wants to have fun, and that’s what makes it great about being with the community. But by yourself, it is a different mindset. It is like public speaking. It really kind of puts you in your shell and you’re a little nervous.

Ish: That’s what I like about it though because I’ve always wanted to be a little more outgoing and it would definitely help. It already has. Parkour has for me, because I didn’t know anybody and I started coming to these jams by myself and I had to meet people which was kind of tough.

Me: Right, I didn’t know anybody when I got here either, just dropping in.

Ish: But it’s easier now.

Me: Yeah, we have something to share with each other (parkour).

Ish: Yeah, even outside of parkour, it’s easier to talk to people now which is really cool, and it’s a goal, one of my life goals to be more outgoing.

Me: Same here haha!

Brandon: I’m working on the whole outgoing thing right now. This is actually my first parkour jam so I’m new to the community. I haven’t met very many of these guys. I’ve trained with guys in my area, which is like two or three guys at a time, but I’ve never been in a group of like 10 or 20 guys, just training and doing tricks and just doing whatever we can. I like the mindset of the group though. The mindset in the group just makes it feel so much more accepting.
Ish: Yeah it’s such a good positive reinforcement.

Brandon: It is.

Ish: Yeah, because you’re with a community and everyone’s happy. Especially because we’re in a happy place and we’re all taking a break from work and doing parkour together. And everyone is being nice to each other so you start to automatically think that everyone walking by is going to be nice to you too, and you want to meet them.

Me: Yeah! Show them a cool precision jump!

Ish: Yeah, yeah! “Hey man, want to learn parkour?”

Me: So how have police typically responded to seeing you guys do parkour?

Brandon: Yes, I remember when I first got into parkour, I was actually training by myself in a park, just on a bench actually, just a regular old bench next to some grass. I was practicing some dive rolls. I wasn’t doing anything crazy. No flips or anything, I wasn’t even at that stage. And the guys who manage the park told me, and there was no one else there either, they told me I couldn’t be doing that, that I needed to leave, and that I was too old to be there.

Me: “You can’t roll around”.

Brandon: Yeah. It actually left a really bad taste in my mouth. I guess that’s where that feeling came from of not liking when people watch me.

Ish: I haven’t had any bad experiences like that.

Me: I’ve been accused of throwing rocks at windows before.

Ish: What?! That’s not parkour!

Brandon: Yeah, I guess that’s probably why I have that bad taste in my mouth. Just the guys who were running the park, they were the guys doing the maintenance and all that, they were driving
around in a golf cart, stopped, watched me do a dive roll, and they said “That was cool but you can’t be doing that, you have to leave”. That was about the worst experience I’ve ever had.

Ish: See, that’s not bad man!

Brandon: It isn’t, but when you’re by yourself…

Ish: You’ll learn to appreciate people that are like “Oh, I like that but you can’t do it here”.

You’ll learn to appreciate that, because some people just jump on you! “Stop doing that!!” About a month ago, I had an experience with someone. She came out of the building I was training behind and she just had an attitude about it. She wasn’t nice about it. I kept just saying I was going to leave but she just kept going saying “If you don’t…” and I already said I was going to leave and she said “If you come back, the cops are going to be waiting for you”. I’m like what okay just let me leave already! It happens sometimes. In certain spots I’ve had negative experiences where people have just not given me any leeway and don’t want to talk to me. But sometimes it’s different. Like one guy came up to me and said “Hey, do that again, I want to see it!” and that was it.

Me: Ah, more accepting.

Ish: Yeah. And it’s not about the area that I went to; it’s about the attitudes of the people. I’ve had both good and bad experiences in the same area. If you’re literally on two different sides of the same building, on one side the cop is yelling at you and the other side they are saying “Oh, that was cool!” So that’s pretty much what I’ve experienced.

Me: So what is your perception or opinion of risk and danger in parkour?

Brandon: Always a risk. There’s always that risk. You know, you just take that wrong step, there could be a little pebble that just throws off everything. But there’s always risk, and you just have to overcome that.
Ish: It’s a perceived risk, like the idea of risk, but that’s what we’re training for.

Brandon: Yeah! It happens.

Ish: It does, it can.

Brandon: You think about it, but you can’t let it control you. The fear, in a sense, it’s there. It’s always there. But you have to control it. You have to control that feeling of fear, and you take the risk. Because if you don’t, then how are you going to get better? The longer you wait to do something, the harder it is to do.

Me: Definitely.

Brandon: You can’t get better unless you try, and if you don’t try, you’ll never know. You have to go for it. Step by step you know? Whatever it takes. If you have a goal and you want to reach it. If you don’t go for it, you won’t get to that goal.

Ish: It’s just the simple risk vs. reward.

Brandon: Yeah, you take no risk, you get no reward.

Me: Yeah, that’s life right? You take risks in life otherwise you’re not going to have a very interesting life.

Brandon: Right. You can’t just stay in your house all day. You can’t let that fear control you either. The fear is there, you know? It’s there, but you can control it.

Ish: Yeah, Daniel Ilabaca made that one video Choose Not To Fall. You should watch that (directed at Brandon).

Me: Yeah! It’s so good. If you’re afraid to fall, you fall because you’re afraid. Everything is choice.

Ish: Yeah, that’s basically it. It’s really cool, you should watch it. But that’s basically what I’m saying, is that you don’t fall if you don’t want to. There’s no risk if you don’t want there to be. If
you know the movements and you trust yourself, there shouldn’t be a problem. If I can walk on a ledge 1 ft wide down here, I can walk on a ledge 1 ft wide up there on the roof. It seems scary, although it’s the same exact thing. So there’s really no risk. There shouldn’t be a risk because you should know that you can do it and you should just do it. And if you just do it exactly how you know to do it, then there’s no risk, and you won’t fall. But if you accept that you could fall, then there’s risk. I love that mindset because that really changes the way we look at things. It just really gives you more confidence and more trust in yourself. It’s just how it should be.

Brandon: That’s so true! There is no falling. Just don’t think about it.

Ish: Yeah as long as you’re paying attention, you should be able to do it.

Me: So we already kind of touched on this but how has parkour, since you started practicing, impacted the way that you understand urban space and the way you view it and interact with it compared to before you started practicing it?

Ish: It has changed a lot. Like I was saying, you’re a lot better at judging things, like height and distance and the way things are going to feel, and how you can move yourself around them. I have better spatial awareness now. When you are trying to move through a space, you don’t have to try as hard. At times, when you’re moving through a space, not all the time but a lot of the time, you’ll catch yourself feeling walls and things to feel how they are, even if you’re not looking at them. My reflexes are better now.

Brandon: Yeah, we have Spidey-Senses. Well, moving around in urban spaces and environments definitely helps you learn characteristics of walls, of everything you feel. I now look at things differently, like how I can use a wall to my advantage, for moving on it, for moving up it, to go jump off or whatever. But also, just looking at the urban spaces that you have gives you an idea of what you can do and what you can’t do. I would love to be able to be Spiderman and jump
20ft. That would be awesome. But I can’t, so now I have to think about what my limitations are, what can I do in this space? How far can I go? How far can I push myself?

Ish: I like parkour, because it helps us with better knowing ourselves.

Brandon: Yeah, we’re really learning to know ourselves. It’s reality, it’s space, it’s real. This isn’t a videogame or a television show. We really have to take into perspective that this is an open area, I need to be focused and not get hurt. I need to stay in the moment. It’s not like “What am I going to do after this flip? What am I going to do before I do this flip?” In that space, you have to be in the here and now, and you have to know your limitations. But at the same time, you have to push it. You have to go for it, and you find that right in-between spot, and that’s where you want to be. You want to be at that limit and maybe just a little farther.

Ish: Also, you’re constantly looking at things from a parkour perspective. Parkour Vision they call it?

Me: Yeah!

Ish: So everything is always an obstacle. Everything is always a game or a challenge, and you’re looking at how you can use it for parkour.

Brandon: Everything’s a playground.

Ish: If you do parkour, it’s always like that.

Me: Sometimes my biggest motivator to throw a move is to pretend like zombies are about to eat me, so it makes me not think about the move as much as like “I have to do this to survive! I’m going to do it!” And then it happens.

Brandon: Right!

Me: So I lived in New York City for a little bit, and every time I walked to work, I’d look at how I could climb the sides of buildings to escape zombies.
Brandon: Yeah, like how can I get on this building to escape these zombies?

Ish: I think it makes us more observant, at least about our surroundings, because sometimes I’m talking to people and I stray and look past them at other things going on.

Brandon: Yeah, I find myself walking down the street and looking at things and thinking how I could get on top of that. Not that I do it, but I want to.

Me: So what role do you think creativity plays in parkour?

Brandon: Yeah, huge! Everyone’s got a different mindset. Everyone sees something differently.

Ish: The more creative you are, the more options you have to overcome an obstacle.

Brandon: Right. Creativity though, it definitely comes from our little bag of tricks. You know, everyone has their bag of tricks that they choose to have, whether it’s a palm spin, wall backflip, or precision jumps. Everyone has got their thing. So that does limit us in our creativity, depending on how we train and what we train, but it’s unlimited. There is so much you can do; there are so many possibilities. You can just find a regular flat wall and do 20 different kinds of moves on just one wall. Then you add something to that. You put a box in front of it or off to the side of it, and all of a sudden you go from 20 to 150 or 200 different moves you can do.

Me: Yeah! There are so many options!

Brandon: It’s unlimited, you know? And then from there, you just want to keep going. You want to add more and more and more, and you start putting more stuff in the way, then it’s unlimited. There are so many different things you could do.

Me: If you guys had to summarize what parkour means to you in three words, it could be separate words or it could be a phrase, what would they be?

Ish: Only one is coming to mind for me. It’s just growth.

Me: Growth.
Ish: Yeah.

Brandon: Challenge.

Ish: Yeah.

Brandon: Challenge. Fun.

Ish: Definitely Fun.

Brandon: It has got to be fun. If it’s not fun, what’s the point?

Ish: It should be fun!

Brandon: I mean we’re not really making money with this, so it better be fun! It’s hard to just pick three words. I’m thinking three words, Fun, Athletic, Challenge. That would be the way that I would describe parkour. It has got to be fun, you have to be in good shape, and there has to be a goal in mind, something to challenge you and there has got to be some kind of progression too. It has to be fun, athletic, challenge.


Me: Awesome! Thank you both very much for taking the time to interview with me! It was a great discussion!

**Group Interview 1: Travis Graves, Chris Morphy, Donovan Dye, and Nicole Chalifour**

Me: So first of all, could you all state your names, where you’re from, how old you are, and how long you’ve been practicing parkour for?

Donovan: I’m Donovan Dye. I’m 20 and I live in Wixon, Michigan and I’ve been doing parkour for about 3 years.

Nicole: I’m Nicole Chalifour. I’m from Highland Michigan, I’m 20 years old and I’ve been doing parkour for one month.
Travis: My name is Travis Graves. I’m 28 years old. I grew up in Ann Arbor, Michigan. I live in Washington D.C. and I’ve been doing parkour for 10 years.

Chris: My name is Chris Morphy. I am from the metro Detroit area. I’m 23 and I’ve been doing parkour for about 3 and a half to 4 years.

Me: Awesome. So tell me your stories, how did you get involved in parkour initially?

Donovan: I was about 8 years old and I saw one of Tempest Freerunning’s videos on YouTube and it looked very similar to the things that me and my friends were already doing, so we just kind of took it from there and kept doing it.

Nicole: I started when I met him (Donovan)! He got me into parkour!

Travis: A friend of mine showed me a video. At the time, there were only a few little parkour-ish videos. It was Urban Ninja and Russian Climbing.

Me: Oh yeah, Russian Climbing, scary!

Travis: Basically my friend showed me this video and was like “Hey, this looks like the stuff you do!” I didn’t know anybody else tried that stuff. So I found out about parkour that way and I started training myself. Pretty soon after, I started the University of Michigan Parkour Club and ended up training with a bunch of people who were students there. In 2008, I moved to Washington D.C. to pursue parkour full-time teaching people.

Chris: I was a senior in high school, not very athletic but I was on the soccer team, and I wanted to learn to do something cool if I ever got a goal. So I thought “Oh, I’ll just learn to flip!” So I went on YouTube and was like “Alright let’s see how to do a front flip because it seems like the least scary one.” While watching videos, I saw these tutorials by this guy named Mark Toorock and I was like “Okay, what is this about? He seems like a strange dude.” So I was like okay. I tried it with a couple of my friends and we went to a park just to try it out ourselves.
Me: Yeah, follow the videos.

Chris: Yeah, we kept falling, learning, and getting hurt and about four years later, still falling and getting hurt but having fun.

Me: Cool. So what does parkour mean to you guys and why do you practice it?

Donovan: Parkour has become a lifestyle. Honestly, I don’t know what else I’d be doing. I was never really interested in sports growing up. Everyone played football and stuff and I was that weird kid doing parkour jumping on stuff. I had the most fun when I did it. That’s why I still do it, because it’s so much fun.

Nicole: I do parkour to work out and I keep practicing it to get better at moving around.

Travis: What’s really interesting is that there are so many different aspects of parkour and so many different facets that people are attracted to, and that’s really what defines the person’s style. Some people start out like “Oh, I really want to be able to do flips, do cool stuff, impressive things!” And then that’s kind of their focus. People who are like “It’s an awesome way to work out and exercise,” it doesn’t feel the same way. It feels more like fun and play in that case. Those people are both practicing what we call parkour and yet they look so different.

So, for me, parkour was always just there, even before I knew it was a thing.

Me: It was just how you interacted?

Travis: Yeah, something that was a part of me, and it became everything for a while. For me, it was about pushing boundaries. It was about seeing improvement. It was a way to measurably orient yourself in a world where you could see that you were better than you were before.

Me: Yeah, visualizing that improvement.

Travis: And then I got really into the instruction and the teaching. Nowadays, I don’t practice very much myself. I’m mostly focused on teaching.
Me: Sharing it with other people and getting more people involved with it.

Travis: Yeah. So I instruct classes at the gym. We do kids after school programs at a number of different schools, and basically my role is more of an instructor or ambassador rather than a practitioner anymore. The other thing I do is I have an instructor certification program. So that’s kind of how it fits into my life.

Me: Nice.

Chris: Yeah I would say it has definitely become a part of my life compared to when I first started out and I just wanted to be cool. You know, I was in high school, got to impress everyone and throw some tricks, flips, that sort of thing. I almost never do flips anymore. I could care less for them really. But yeah, somewhere along the way it just stopped being “I’m doing this because I want to be cool” to “I want to be in shape, I want to throw all that stuff.” People ask why do I do it, and I just don’t know anymore. I don’t know what I’d be doing if I wasn’t doing it. It’s what I do! I don’t know what else to do. And the teaching, like Travis was saying, I’ve gotten into that at a gymnastics center where they have a parkour program. I actually got to do the APK certification in January and I met Travis there. I learned some pretty cool stuff, so yep.

Me: Sweet! So what goals do you all have in parkour?

Donovan: Well everyone’s main goal should be to be better than they were yesterday, in order for your training to develop you. My goal is that I actually want to become an instructor as well. That’s my set goal right now is to be certified.

Nicole: My goal right now is just to be better like all these good people training around me are.

Chris: My goal is just to be doing this when I’m 50. Still be able to jump around. Take care of myself.

Me: Longevity!
Chris: That’s my goal. If I’m still doing this in 30 years, I’ll be happy.

Travis: For me, right now, my main focus is bringing awareness to parkour, and building an awareness of the way parkour truly is, which is to say to kind of try to combat a lot of the misconceptions of parkour, in not only those who do not practice, but for those who do as well.

Me: Yeah. I think it’s an issue when people see parkour as a criminal sport or as vandals being risky for no reason, but that’s not really how it is.

Travis: Right, and like I said, there are people who do practice that way.

Me: Right, they just throw big moves and get hurt.

Travis: Yeah, and we want to educate them as well, and really distance ourselves from people who practice in a negative way.

Me: Right. So how do you guys typically prepare to go out and train for parkour, physically spiritually or mentally?

Donovan: I try to go train almost every day. There are days when I’m like “Eh, I’m exhausted, not really motivated.” But there are days when nothing can stop me from training. I stretch and warm up. Just try to go through what you’re working on and do it better.

Nicole: For me, when I go to the gym and train, I always want to train in that environment with other people around.

Me: Yeah definitely, having other people around. I went to Tempest Freerunning a couple months ago, and having all these parkour around, this is like the most parkour runners I’ve seen in one spot before, there is so much more motivation to try new moves and improve.

Donovan: Yeah, the parkour community, it’s incredible. It’s the best!

Me: Yeah! So how do you two prepare to go train?
Chris: It depends on what I plan on doing that day. You know, if I just want to get a workout in, I’ll just go out and do it. If it’s a big trick or a big move, I try to hype myself up for it, get ready to go and eat a good healthy breakfast. The longer I’ve been doing this, the longer my warmup session seems to last. When I first started, it was get to wherever you’re going, the park or whatever, and you start. And now it’s like “I’ll take 5 minutes to warm up” or “I’ll take half an hour to warm up”.

Me: Yeah. If you’re all limbered up, you’re not going to hurt anything.

Travis: Yeah I find most of my practice nowadays is more in strength training and recovery than anything else.

Me: That’s important too. That’s what keeps you going!

Travis: Yeah exactly! So I find myself taking more and more and more time with stretching, with strength training, with doing all of the physical recovery. Your body becomes less and less resilient, and you spend more and more time warming up.

Me: Cool. So how do you determine which locations to go practice at when you go out to train? What do you look for in a good spot?

Travis: It’s really interesting, because for us, it’s so intuitive. We’ll see “Okay, yeah that’s a parkour spot, you can do things there.” And sometimes there will be spots that look really good, and you get there and you look around and think “Well, that’s a little too high to do that, too far to do that, and I didn’t realize that that was there,” and maybe it’s not such a great spot. But it’s interesting to try to really define what makes a good parkour spot. I think different levels where there are elements of verticality, and different ways to access different locations.

Me: Yeah, so lots of vertical variations.
Donovan: If I’m walking down the street, I’ll notice a spot and think “That’s cool!” But even if I’m walking down the street and there are lines on the sidewalk, it’s something to jump to. I think you can do parkour just about anywhere, anytime, like lines in the parking lot, like paint. It’s everywhere.

Me: Yeah, a visual challenge.

Donovan: Yeah.

Chris: A nice thing about having a large, close community like we have in Michigan is that if you want a new spot to train, just hop on Facebook or Instagram or whatever and be like “Hey guys, where do you train?” And everyone will give you a list of spots from people who go there.

Me: It’s never a letdown! So can you guys describe how you feel physically, mentally, and spiritually, when you are preparing to do a parkour movement?

Donovan: Focused. Focused, very focused. You kind of flush out everything around you and you’re really concentrated on this move that you’re doing, because you want to get it, you know? You realize all the potential risks and you take it all in. There’s a difference between fear and danger. It’s up to you to control it. You know what you can do and what you can’t do.

Me: Yeah, because the last thing you want to do is hurt yourself.

Donovan: Yeah.

Me: Lose months of training time.

Chris: I like to visualize myself doing movements it in my head five, ten, twenty times.

Me: Same here!

Chris: Every little detail. And then when it’s time to go you just think about absolutely nothing and most of the time your body will just do what it’s supposed to do.
Nicole: I usually practice doing the move, like try to go into it but not follow all the way through, just to prepare for it and progress.

Chris: Definitely. Progressions are life!

Donovan: Progressions are life!

Travis: It’s interesting. With parkour there’s an element of fear, of discomfort, and the unknown, that doesn’t necessarily exist in a lot of other sports. I think the real exceptions are rock climbing and …

Me: Skydiving or something?

Travis: Yeah, yeah I would say something like that. Maybe like big wave surfing or something like that, where you have to understand and deal with that fear and if you let it creep too far in, then you won’t succeed.

Me: Right, fear of failure will make you fail.

Travis: Exactly, yeah. If you let it creep in too far, it manifests itself. But in a lot of other of the more traditional sports, there isn’t as much of that element of fear that you have to deal with, and it’s there, but not in the same way. I think that’s one of the things that sets parkour apart, and one of the things that makes it so attractive to people is when you start to develop that relationship with fear, when you start to kind of nudge up against the edge of your bubble and your comfort zone. Then you feel yourself expanding. You feel your abilities expanding, and when you get to that zone, your body and your mind has to enter a state that’s less and less thought or analytically oriented, and you kind of have to get out of that intellectualization of what you’re doing and kind of let your body take over. I think that is one of the things that triggers Flow State which is a really interesting psychological phenomenon. I think parkour, more than a lot of other sports activities, can induce that, and I think that’s one of the reasons why it’s so attractive.
Me: So let’s talk a little bit more about the Flow State. So it’s like the feeling of when you’re doing the movement. So tell me about your experience of being in the movement!

Donovan: Flow State. This is where all your hidden potential can come out and it’s kind of artistic in a way. You go to one move and you transition to another one and then another one, and it just keeping going and going. And then there you go, “Look at this crazy dude doing all this cool stuff!” Flow State. It’s really fun just to be able to interact in ways that people don’t. Everyone interacts with things differently. Like if I were to do a move from here to here, and someone else would do a move from here to here, it’s so nice to see the different variations of the tricks people can do. It’s the way people’s mind works. You understand how differently you can interact with an obstacle.

Me: Yeah you can see the variations in hand and foot placement and how they navigate.

Donovan: Yeah. If I were to do a jump over here, someone would maybe do a dive roll or maybe a flip to get over here.

Me: Yeah you can see different possibilities in the same space.

Donovan: Yeah.

Me: So how do you guys feel when you’re in that zone of movement?

Chris: It feels good. It feels free when you get to the point where you’re not necessarily thinking about what you’re doing. It’s like your body just kind of takes over and you just enjoy the ride.

Me: Cool. So can you describe physically, mentally, and spiritually how it feels right after you’ve completed the movement?

Donovan: Sore I would say, after a long day of training, just like you would be after any other workout. But then the next day, you’re stronger, you’re stronger than the last time. Then when you go do it again, you are slightly less sore. Yeah it’s a good workout.
Nicole: So I just started to learn how to do everything and a month ago I couldn’t do a kong and yesterday I was doing kongs and it felt really exciting. I feel like I can do more things now.

Me: Nice. There were things you didn’t think you were capable of before and now you can! It’s not that difficult, it just takes practice! So how would you guys describe the feeling after you complete some awesome move?

Chris: Yeah, if I complete the move successfully, it does feel awesome! It’s an accomplishment. I feel good and want to try it again and do it every single time fluidly. If you don’t land it so well, depending on how many times you’ve tried, it could be frustrating or you try to imagine “What did I do wrong?” That’s why I like to record myself a lot of times just so I can see it.

What needs to be done differently? And even then, sometimes it’s exciting to try again and get a little closer each time. But overall, as long as you’ve worked hard and your goal is met or that you at least tried your best, you’ll end up being satisfied. You’ll impress yourself.

Me: Put the work in, got it done.

Travis: Yeah, whether or not you complete the move!

Me: Right!

Travis: In parkour, there’s such a sense of accomplishment and reward for attaining something good, being able to do something well, looking back and being like “I couldn’t do that and now I can”. I think that reward system is one of the reasons why games are so popular, videogames and things like that. Whereas, in the not so distant past, videogames were kind of relegated to a subculture or nerd-culture sort of thing, and now it’s so ubiquitous. Everyone plays games. And I think so much of that has to do with their ability to give you tangible rewards and filling a list of accomplishments that you can see. I think that while that has its benefits, finding something like
parkour that’s more based in reality and more active can be a really fun thing, especially for kids. We’re growing up now in this age of technology.

Me: Yeah it gives them sometime through which to actually engage in the world and has some kind of benefit.

Travis: Exactly. Yeah, something physical where you can still feel that sense of accomplishment.

Me: Can you guys describe your physical and mental interaction with urban space that you have when you’re doing parkour?

Donovan: Like at a spot like this? (referencing Flint Fountain in Michigan)

Me: Yeah, how do you physically and mentally interact with the space?

Donovan: When it’s the first time I’ve been at a spot, I kind of just stand and observe everything and look around to see what I can do and what I can’t do.

Me: Right! Scope it out.

Donovan: Then I just go around and do some things and think “Oh, I never thought of that”.

Chris: Physically, I like to walk the space and I actually like to just check the surfaces. How much do they grip? Are they falling apart? Am I going to injure myself? Just making sure it’s safe, especially on a wet day like this, it’s really important. Mentally, I just check out all the possibilities of my skill level matched up to the obstacles, and that’s pretty much it.

Travis: It’s just sort of a different lens through which you can observe and everybody has their own lens and has their own experience. For us, we can look at a space like this (Flint Fountain) and there’s potential for a whole bunch of different things and it’s different, you know. I think a lot of people who practice parkour, especially those who are newer and just starting to see things, will put a lot of emphasis on that being like “Oh, this is so mind expanding! It’s like a different way of seeing; it’s like a better way, and everyone else is blind to it!” Whereas, really everybody
just kind of has their own way of seeing things from their own experiences. If I was a concert
director, I would put the stage over there and over here could be this and you could have people
here watching. Not something that we would necessarily see, but it’s a different lens, a different
way of seeing things. The more experience you have, the more of a bigger picture you have.
Me: Yeah, the more experience with parkour you have, the more you start to see the possibilities.
Travis: Some of those things are conflicting, you know? We, as practitioners, see this place and
we’re like “Oh man, this is so cool, I love this!” And I’m sure a lot of people see it as an eyesore.
Me: Right! Yeah, people walking by thinking “Oh, look at all this ugly concrete”.
Travis: Yeah, it looks like some Soviet era…
Me: Fascist architecture or something.
Chris: And that lens, you can’t shut it off, you can’t take it off. It’s always there! Walking down
the street, it’s always on.
Me: Three summers ago I lived in New York City and every day when I was walking to work,
I’d think “If this was the apocalypse and there were zombies everywhere, how could I climb this
building or this building as fast as possible?” Yeah, it’s fun to see the world that way. So how
has practicing parkour affected you guys physically, mentally, or spiritually in any way?
Donovan: It has made me really go after my goals. It has made me want to keep doing this
forever! It’s the best thing I could imagine. So that definitely has an effect on me. I don’t know
what else I would be doing so yeah.
Nicole: You kind of change; you just want to do more. It’s that I do want to be able to do more
and you want to practice and get better at everything.
Travis: It has just expanded my awareness of a lot of things. It has given me awareness beyond what I had before I started practicing, especially in my mind. I have much more acute awareness of what’s going on and how it’s working and how it feels and what I have to do to fix it.

Chris: The physical standpoint, definitely it has been a rollercoaster ride. I’d say when you first start out, and I see a lot kids and I used to be this way too, when they start out, it’s all about you watching some amazing video and try to replicate it because you’re never going to die (sarcastically). That’s like the mindset. So, I’ve had several injuries, little ones like ankle sprains and that sort of thing and a big one, a herniated disk in my back. But you learn from it, and you learn to be smart. You learn to take care of yourself and build yourself up. And yeah, I’m in the best shape of my life even after all that. Physically, it has had its benefits.

Travis: It has created kind of a reorientation of the way that I perceive challenge. One of the main things that I like to have my students practice is changing the mindset from thinking “Oh, that’s hard, I don’t want to do it” to “Oh, that’s hard, it’s going to make me that much better!”

Me: Right.

Travis: You know, seek the challenge. Seek difficulty.

Me: Yeah because if it’s easy, then what’s the point?

Travis: Yeah. That’s the thing! What happens if you only do easy things in life? You don’t get any better, you don’t improve. Nothing happens.

Me: Yeah! So when you’re doing parkour, how do other parkour runners typically respond to seeing you do movements?

Donovan: I almost brought that up before. Like how she (Nicole) was talking about how she was getting her kongs yesterday, it doesn’t just affect the person that’s doing it, it affects everyone in the group who is there! We grow together. Everyone is really elated that you got that move, that
you keep doing it and doing it. Everyone is getting better together. It’s a sport against yourself, not against others. We are kind of like just one big team.

Me: Yeah! Everyone is working towards general self-progression in their skill.

Donovan: Yeah.

Me: That’s the same way as when I was at Tempest Freerunning, when I threw a move I had never done before, everyone was cheering me on! And then I’d see some other moves, and some other guy throws this huge pre to a lache and it’s crazy and everyone starts cheering. Yeah, all that energy in that space gets you going.

Donovan: It does!

Nicole: It doesn’t matter what level you’re at, they’ll always cheer you on.

Chris: One incident I remember that reminds me of that, it was years ago, Freedom Freerunning Academy was the name of the gym but it’s not open anymore, but I remember I was there during an open gym and there were just all these amazing people there doing all these flips and twists and everything. And there was this one guy, you could tell he must’ve just started, he was a little overweight, and there was just this wall that was probably less than 7ft tall, and he just spent half an hour trying to get up it. And, you know, people were encouraging him, giving him tips and pointers and all that, and everyone is super encouraging! Someone lands their first B-twist and they’ll be like “That’s awesome!” And then after 30 minutes, this guy finally gets over this 6ft wall, and the entire gym is silent and then everyone just starts cheering for the guy. To one guy, it’s the easiest move in the world, but if you put the work in, you gain that support.

Me: Right, gain that skill!

Travis: Yeah, people recognize what goes into it and the relativity of it; the fact that to one person, it is a monumental challenge to them. I think more than a lot of other activities, parkour
really recognizes it. They see everyone as an individual and they recognize that each individual has their own scale of challenge for them.

Me: Yeah, I agree! So how do you guys typically have bystanders reacting to your movements, people that have nothing to do with the sport?

Donovan: It goes both ways.

Travis: Yeah, there’s such a range, yeah.

Donovan: It goes both ways, definitely. Some people are like “Woah! What!? Do it again!” and others say “Stop that! You’re going to hurt yourself!” People don’t look at it the same. We don’t just do tricks to go and hurt ourselves. We’re not trying to do crazy roof gaps that we’re not ready for. If you watch YouTube videos of people doing flips over roof gaps, people think “Why would they do that? It’s stupid.” But they don’t see the years of training that went into it.

Me: Exactly! They just see the final product.

Donovan: Yeah. They’re not just getting lucky. They’ve been training for that forever.

Nicole: People ask if you’re in gymnastics a lot. They ask if I do gymnastics.

Chris: Yeah “Do a backflip!”

Donovan: “Do a backflip!” I always get that one.

Me: So how do you guys think and feel when you’re watching somebody else do a parkour movement?

Travis: It’s inspiring, regardless of what level they’re at. It’s inspiring to see someone who’s new who’s working through stuff and it’s inspiring to see someone who’s a master of their craft. I feel like you can learn the same amount from both. The next main thing is that a lot of people will see someone who can do something and that’s discouraging because they think “Oh, I’m so far away
from that.” But again, it’s a mindset shift you have to make to being inspired because some day, you’ll get there.

Me: Yeah you can see where you could be.

Travis: Yeah.

Me: Cool. So do you guys ever document your movements, and if so, how?

Donovan: Mostly videos.

Me: Mostly videos?

Donovan: Yeah. I would say it has grown exponentially over the years. There are all these videos exploding up everywhere. YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, everywhere.

Me: So how do you guys share videos typically when you do record?

Nicole: Show people in person.

Donovan: Yeah I show people and they show me so I can see what they’re working on and they see what I’m working on. “Oh no way! You’ve been working on flips wow good job, you just got this!”

Travis: The phenomenon of parkour videos is really interesting, because without it, there is no parkour.

Me: Right!

Travis: Parkour was born on the internet. It would be impossible without it. It’s really kind of a modern sport in that way. It used to be that you’d have to go on parkour forums, and if you made a video, you spent like a month collecting footage and you spent a couple of days editing it, and then you uploaded it and you posted a link, and people would have to download it and watch it all the way through, and it was a whole process. And then YouTube took over from there. YouTube was the main source and streaming the videos made it easier to watch. So the tendency
became shorter and shorter and shorter videos. And then over the last few years, with Instagram, with Facebook, with Snapchat and things like that, the parkour video has become a shorter and shorter medium. And now it’s mainly clips, and there are fewer and fewer high production long duration videos that come out anymore. They still exist and they’re still out there, but that’s kind of the evolution of it. It’ll be interesting to see where it goes. If it tends more towards longer videos again or how it’s going to work.

Me: Interesting. So how do you guys feel about the way that parkour has been portrayed in movies or online or in the media?

Donovan: I personally love it, because people are starting to recognize our sport.

Me: Right, it’s getting more attention.

Donovan: Yeah. People are starting to recognize it. It’s getting out there, more and more each day. Parkour is becoming a popular type of sport now, so it’s kind of cool to see it in movies and be like “Oh no way! I do that!” It’s relatable.

Chris: It’s about what you’d expect. Some of it’s good; some of it’s not so good. They focus a lot on the physical aspect of it which is what you can see, so it’s what you’d expect them to do. And unfortunately, a lot of the times that leads people to believe that it’s this daredevil, dangerous thing that it really isn’t. But yeah, you should see some awareness as a result and see where it goes.

Me: Yeah, see how it keeps evolving.

Travis: It was in parkour, especially at the beginning, that I learned how little truth is in journalism. Just doing interviews and then seeing the end result and it’s nothing like what I said or what happened. So it has gotten a lot better over the years. The portrayal of parkour has gotten a lot more complete. But it’s still that the media wants to present something that people can latch
on to, and can do so quickly with a short attention span. They are actually not necessarily interested in presenting the whole story. Like he (Chris) said, more just kind of the visual aspects of it, which has been great for a lot of the practitioners who are able to work on stunts and things like that. It’s (Parkour) just in everything now. Just to be able to say ‘parkour’ and have people know “Oh, that’s what you’re referring to!”

Me: Everyone directs me to The Office. “Hey have you seen that scene in the office?”

Travis: Yeah, I don’t think I’ve ever seen that yet, thank you you’re the first one to show me that (sarcastically).

Me: So what’s your perception or opinion on the elements of risk and danger in parkour? I know we touched on it a little bit before.

Donovan: It doesn’t matter if you’re doing parkour, you just know what you can and you can’t do.

Nicole: You just don’t go too crazy. Like don’t try to do a full off of something if you’ve never done one before, you should try it first in a foam pit.

Donovan: Progress up to it safely.

Chris: I mean, in any sport, there is a chance or a risk of injury. It’s just about minimizing the risk, which a lot of people in mainstream media don’t understand, how it’s described to people who tell me “You’re going to get yourself killed!” Well, I mean, say you have your 12 year old kid and he wants to play football. You get him all the gear; let him join the school team or whatever. You wouldn’t strap him up and send him to the Super Bowl. He’d get killed! It’s the same thing. You’re not going to climb five stories in the air and try to flip off something your first day. You just do a little shoulder roll in the grass and work your way up.
Travis: I like that metaphor. Like I said earlier, I think that element of danger and having an understanding of your own abilities is important in parkour, and if you don’t have that, then you’re missing out. There’s a really big benefit.

Me: So can you guys describe any interactions you’ve had with police or property owners in the past?

Donovan: Yeah. Usually if the police get involved, it’s maybe a public place. Like a person has called the cops on you because they see you doing something potentially dangerous and they’re either worried for you or maybe that person doesn’t think that you’re using the space the way it should be. Usually the police or the property owner will tell you “You can’t be here” or they’ll ask you a bunch of questions like “What are you doing here?” Just things like that. If they ask you to leave, you leave. It’s not a big deal. But it does happen. It’s one of those things.

Chris: It used to happen a lot all the time when I would go out to train. You know, we keep it on public property because we don’t want to break the law, we don’t want to set that kind of image.

Me: Ruins the sport.

Chris: Ruins the sport for everyone. But yeah, it’s just that people see you doing something that they think is dangerous, they don’t understand. Their first instinct is to call the police. And the more it happens, nowadays, it has gotten to the point where the cops will show up and they know what you’re doing, they’ve dealt with it so many times before, so at this point, they usually just tell us to “Be careful, don’t hurt yourselves, have fun” and they leave.

Me: Wow, that’s good!

Chris: Which is good, you know? Back in the day when I first started, they would make you all sit on the curb and get everyone’s names, information, “Show us your ID’s.” “What did I do wrong? This is not private property.”
Me: “You’re not allowed to flip here!”

Chris: “Well you could land on someone!” “There’s no one around.”

Travis: I’ve had a pretty good relationship with police in general, because the vast majority of parkour practitioners are very respectful and they’re not going to run, they’re going to try to explain themselves. When we first started the parkour club at the University of Michigan, we actually had a meeting with the public safety department, campus police. And we told them “We’re going to be out here, this is what we’re doing, here’s some information” and they were super accepting, which was great, and we’ve maintained a really good relationship to this day. I think that productivity is something that goes a long way. For the most part now, it’s pretty much just property owners who are like “We don’t want people here” and they’re going to boot you out. Other than that, most of them are pretty cool about it.

Me: So if at all, how has parkour affected you all as people?

Donovan: It changes who I interact with. I find myself hanging out with more freerunners. It has helped me build friendships. I just extremely love it.

Me: Yeah you have a fun hobby and then people share it, boom, best friends!

Donovan: Yep!

Chris: You definitely meet a lot of interesting people, people you never would’ve said a word to if you didn’t both do parkour. But yeah, I think definitely it has made me more confident. And I just try new things now, because why not? Live in the moment and enjoy the ride. You know, obviously set goals for yourself but yeah, that’s pretty much it.

Nicole: I’m still new at it but I’m meeting a lot of new people!

Me: So if you could describe what parkour means to you in three words, what would they be?

Travis: I refuse to do this exercise. Too many words!
Donovan: Well one would obviously be fun.

Nicole: Powerful.

Donovan: Oh that’s a good one!

Nicole: Motivation.

Donovan: Motivation. Motivation is the reason why I do parkour.

Me: Nice!

Chris: Overcoming Obstacles.

Travis: I can’t contain it in three words.

Me: Okay that’s fair! Alright well thank you guys very much for taking the time to interview with me!

**Group Interview 2: Matthew Peveley, Seth Ruji, Ethan Guzman, and Kato**

**Kochler**

Me: Thank you all for participating! Could you all state your name, age, where you’re from and how long you’ve been doing parkour?

Seth: My name is Seth Ruji. I am 23 years old. I’ve been training for 6 years now. I am from Connersville, Indiana.

Ethan: My name is Ethan Guzman. I’m 19. I’ve been doing parkour for about 2 years now, and I’m from Cincinnati.

Kato: My name is Kato. I’m 18 and I’m from Edina, Minnesota. I’ve been doing parkour for about two and a half years.

Matt: My name is Matt Peveley. I’m 30 years old. I’m from Cincinnati, Ohio and I’ve been doing parkour for 12 or 13 years.
Me: So tell me your stories. How did you initially get involved in parkour?

Seth: I initially got involved with parkour when I was younger. I was always watching Ninja Warrior and shows like that and watched a lot of YouTube videos. Then I took a trip to Seattle and I did parkour at a gym there and really got into it.

Ethan: A few years ago, I was obsessed with Assassin’s Creed. At that time, I was just looking up Assassin’s Creed videos and I found Ronnie Street Stunts parkour tutorial videos so I went out and tried what he said to do and started learning parkour.

Kato: I kind of just went to a parkour gym and I learned from some people there and really liked it and just kept doing it ever since.

Matt: So I’ve been doing skateboarding, BMX, rollerblading, for quite a while and always had a knack for climbing, jumping, exploring. As young as 6, 7 years old, I was already climbing on rooftops. So there wasn’t really any limits for me with my environment, I just did what I did. I continued to do so whether or not I had a skateboard or rollerblades with me or a bike. When I first started out doing it, I called it freestyle walking. That name is sometimes thrown around in the beginning, because we didn’t know what else to call it. I was eventually able to do a front flip on skates out of a quarter pipe, and that led me to be able to say “If I can do that on skates out of a quarter pipe, I can probably do that on the ground.” Then I taught myself front flips, and some kid comes in my classroom and says “I found this video of this guy that does what you do” and he showed me it, and this was before YouTube. You actually had to go to a website, download the mp4, and then watch it. It was maybe a .mov file or whatever it was at the time. It was David Belle kind of mix video before he did this other sweet airman video he made with this guy named Seth and there was that Eminem soundtrack in the background. Then at the end of it, it had a link to parkour.net and had links to some other parkour websites and that led me to all of
these other videos. Which then led me to Urban Free Flow which led me to other people, and fast forward to now and here I am.

Me: So what does parkour mean to you guys? What inspires you to practice it?

Seth: So for me, before I was a parkour athlete, I was a long distance runner, and I knew that was always about seeing what my body was capable of handling and just learning to find my own limits. So the transition to parkour from that was very similar, just it became a lot more of a mental challenge. With running, it’s a lot more of creating yourself physically. There are mental limits, but it’s a lot easier to push through that in running as opposed to parkour where you have lots of different kinds of mental and physical challenges to overcome. So that was kind of my reason for getting into it. And then as I got more into it, I learned the community aspect of it and that’s another big driving factor.

Ethan: Okay so I need more time, anyone else want to go?

Matt: Take your time! Kind of to piggyback off of what Seth said, it has been a journey of self-discovery. Growing up, I had aspirations of being a stunt man. And Power Rangers was super big when I was growing up, and I’d see all these stunts and always assumed that there were just mats and wires or things helping these people run up walls and do backflips and everything else. And through parkour, I discovered some of these talents and tricks are actually genuine. My body was capable of that, so then it became about a mastery of my body and mind.

Ethan: Okay, so to put it in a more simple way, I think of parkour as a way to evolve and feel satisfied with yourself. I played videogames all the time before I started parkour. I would feel kind of satisfied while playing, but afterwards I ended up feeling like I didn’t accomplish anything. But it was when I actually started parkour that I actually felt satisfied. I felt satisfied
learning the move and I felt satisfied afterwards, knowing that I was making myself better in real life instead of just in some videogame.

Kato: For me, in parkour, it feels great when you learn something new or break a challenge. I think I’m always constantly pushing for that feeling. But I only get that every so often. I come from a martial arts background, and it took discipline and concentration which is why parkour was so appealing to me and why I do it.

Me: Awesome! If at all, do you guys have any goals in the sport at this time, either long term or short term?

Seth: At this point, I kind of have two primary goals. One of them is to just try to inspire people to try parkour and explore their movement, which I why I started the parkour gym in Cincinnati. The other is just to continue that competitiveness that I’ve always had with myself physically and to complete more challenges and get over more obstacles in my training and keep progressing.

Ethan: Okay so I have three specific ones. So the first one would be just experiencing or possibly going to the Red Bull Art of Motion (international parkour competition). Just to have that experience would be amazing, whether or not I was competing in it. The other one, similar to what you said, is just to get parkour to be more mainstream, because not too many people know about it. And the last one is to somehow make a living off of parkour that is teaching it or owning my own gym.

Kato: The goals I have are focused on the community of parkour as well. I want to get more people involved in parkour and I am trying to get Minnesota on the map so that it is known for parkour is a big goal for me. But one goal for myself is to really work on my technique so that one day I could be as good as these fellows (points to Matt, Ethan, and Seth).
Matt: I would say that I’ve got two goals. One of them is entirely selfish, which is to master my mentality behind training so I know what’s physically possible and be able to execute on that knowledge and not having fear. So my whole last year was mainly about pushing those limits, figuring out what I can do and what I can put my body into or throw my body at while still pushing my limits but knowing that it’s still going to be okay in the end. That’s the thing that helps me progress, knowing the outcome before I even commit, and being ready for that outcome. The larger goal is to kind of defeat the stereotype of parkour because the biggest thing as an instructor that I hear is “I could never do that” or “I need to get in shape first”. YouTube has done a great job of spreading parkour as a video, a type of mainstream entertainment, but it has not done a good job of spreading parkour as a training technique and a mentality. So people see fight scenes and stuff and they’re like “Oh! Martial arts, that’s awesome!” They don’t realize that martial arts also have this training regimen to it and got to that point. Martial arts have been established for so long. It has been done for thousands of years and people realize that it takes a lot of work to get there, to the point of what they see in these videos. The training ideology behind parkour is the same way, although most of the general population doesn’t think that it’s that way. So they see the end result and just think “I can’t do that”. But anybody can do the basics of parkour and start learning, at any fitness level. So that’s what I’m trying my best to combat.

Seth: One more thing I’ve got to add, it’s fun to see what our bodies are really capable of. I think that parkour in itself has pushed the human limits so far in the past 5 to 10 years. It’s just amazing to see what we’re capable of. It’s just really exciting to see where it’s going and seeing what people are learning to do.
Matt: It’s like you’re mentally calculating the physics of it. The amount of force and angle required to propel your body to the exact distance to land and control that landing on that rail at height is amazing. It’s taken for granted when we’re doing it, but when you look at the mental processing that gets you there, it’s incredible.

Me: So how do you guys typically prepare to go out and train parkour, physically mentally or spiritually?

Kato: Well, I train a lot in a gym, so I usually start with a warmup for about 20 minutes depending on what I’m doing that day. Sometimes I’ll watch a video of a guy doing what I want to work on for the day. I try to supplement 2 hours of directional training towards certain moves to pump myself up and an hour for warming up and stretching afterwards. So yeah, that’s pretty much it.

Ethan: So physically, specifically when I’m training alone, I do two 10 minute warmups. One is focusing on the joints, the wrists and ankles and things like that, and the second one focusing more on muscles so that I feel like I am more ready if something bad actually was to happen. I don’t expect anything bad to happen, to have to bail or anything like that, but if it did, I would be ready. You basically want to get out of any situation without injuries. And I would say, to motivate myself, I also just look at videos of just insane moves that I hope I could get one day.

Seth: For me, physically, I don’t particularly do a whole lot to prepare myself actually. Every morning I do leg stretches, ankle rotations, just a lot of limbering up. And then prior to actually training, usually I’ll just start training by doing smaller milder movements, kind of just going through a decent run-through of all the basics. That activates every part of the body, that way everything is really warmed up. As far as actually deciding what to work on, either I’ll just pick a category of styles of moves or I’ll just look at the environment and see what inspires me that day.
Matt: I would say mentally, when I’m preparing for training, like I said earlier, I just kind of think about where my limits are at and what I’m comfortable with that day. If it’s something that breaks that, I have to figure out how to overcome it, and try to push through that mental barrier. Then for physical warmups and stuff, similar to Seth, I try to do light warmups and just kind of progressively increase my training. So I start with slower, milder movement and slowly increase power. I warm up my body through movement. I’ve got kind of two ways in which I begin training. One is the inspirational route where I just see a spot and I’m really inspired to train there. That’s how I found this spot is I was driving up this road and I looked over and I was like “That looks like a really interesting spot to do parkour!” Then I got out and I trained here for about an hour and a half to two hours until I was dead tired and I told a bunch of people about it and got some more people here. And then the other is challenge based training where somebody that I’ve seen, either online or training with in person, does a challenge that I would do something similar to, and that kind of motivates me to actually complete that challenge, that aspect of training that I haven’t been working on. Two specific examples that I can think of are dive rolls, an area that everyone who knows me knows that I’ve pushed a lot but that’s all due to Tom Kepala from Origins Parkour, and his training technique would be that he would just be out and see dive roll opportunities and did them. I thought “That’s really awesome! I also like rolls. That’s a good way to challenge myself.” And I progressed to basically be on his level. Just knowing what my weaknesses are and trying to build them up.

Me: So how do you determine which locations to go practice at when you go out to train? What do you look for in a good spot?

Kato: I train specifically in like three places. One is this plaza in Minneapolis that is really good. I go there to work on my wall runs and precision movements. The second is University of
Minnesota campus. It’s another really good spot. There is just everything there in a close
together area that lets me train lots of different things. And the third place is at the indoor gym,
Fight or Flight Academy.

Ethan: I used to always just look for playgrounds to train at. I used to think that it was more
because there were so many different types of structures that you could use. But one thing that
started lacking was my mental side to be able to take those moves onto concrete. So I’ve been
working on learning to do these moves on concrete for the past year, and trying to train on more
building type places like on University of Cincinnati campus.

Seth: For me, doing coaching, I spend 6 days in the gym (Swift Movement), so most of my
training is done in the gym, but I still train outside as well. There are common spots that I go to
now just because they have a large number of training spots within a close proximity. But the
other thing that motivates me is just thinking about certain moves that I want to try that day, and
I’ll pick specific spots or a spot that I know will have the opportunities to work on the move that
I want to work on. Or I’ll go to a spot that I haven’t been to in a long time, where I know there is
a limited number of things that can be done there, and try to push myself creatively so that by
having few options, it forces me to get more creative.

Me: Nice! How about you Matt?

Matt: Well you can tell that Seth and I train a lot together. It’s pretty much the same thing for
me. The University of Cincinnati is probably one of the regular spots that I train at. One reason
for training there is the density of spots, but it’s also well-lit at night, and that’s when I have the
majority of my free time to train. And in the summers in the Midwest, it’s very very hot during
the day so at night, it cools down so I try to go to more well-lit spaces. But Cincinnati has the
benefit of being a very hilly city, so that provides a lot of changes in the terrain and that creates
spaces like that where they have to create architecture that fits the terrain. And thus all of the
different height obstacles in the architecture provides training spots to use.

Me: Awesome. So can you guys describe how you feel physically, mentally, and spiritually,
when you are preparing to do a parkour movement, when you are doing the movement, and after
you’ve completed it?

Kato: I’d say I’m at that level where I can just kind of see a move and do it, as long as I think I
can do it. Sometimes I have to push it a little bit if I’m a bit unsure. I used to get scared back
when I was less experienced, but now it’s kind of more like a calm silence. It’s not a feeling of
nothing, but would silence be an emotion? You know what I mean?

Me: Yeah, kind of!

Kato: Like a calmness or centeredness. Then once I make it and I stick it, or just go for a
precision and bounce back, I go and try it again until I get it. Once I stick it and I do it cleanly,
that’s when I feel happy, proud, yay!!! But usually I just get in the zone. I just really focus.

Ethan: So before I go for a move, while I’m preparing, probably the emotion that I feel the most
is being nervous because that’s just my reaction right now at this stage of my training, but I’m
not too nervous because I know how to bail out of it. Then when I go through with the move, it’s
more of just a rush of adrenaline. Just everything is happening so quick, it’s kind of hard to tell.
But as long as I commit to the move, whether I don’t stick the precision, if I fall back, or if I land
on my back, I still committed to it and that’s what matters.

Me: Right. You at least went for it and tried it out.

Seth: For me, at this point, it really varies based on what I’m doing. Most of the lines I come up
with are progressions. There isn’t a whole lot of trying to do things that I don’t think I can do.
Pretty much I feel like at this point, my body is capable of just about everything that I try. It’s
just a matter of what’s safe. So most of the time while I’m preparing, it’s more kind of processing the moves I need to do and asking myself if this is something I should be working on today. “Do I feel like I am warmed up for this? What do I need to do to be able to do it?” Also I’m considering what my bail options are. But for the most part, it’s more of just the knowledge of knowing what I’m capable of. It’s less so being nervous, although there are several things that I need to work through that make me feel like that. But there’re a lot more things I know that I can do, and it comes down to just executing. Even things that I am genuinely scared of, I no longer feel like the scariness of it is hindering my ability to do it. It’s more of just that that is a known fact. As far as completing them, it really depends on the difficulty of the challenge, obviously. But some moves I am super stoked that I got, and other days I’m like “Yeah I feel good about that I guess, it’s a way to do that that I’ve never done before” or “I’ve never thought of that before.” It really varies depending on what kind of mood I’m in or what kind of a day I’ve had training. I just try to have fun with it.

Me: Cool, that makes sense.

Matt: So I would say the biggest thing mentally that I do while executing a parkour move or attempting one is visualizing it before I do it. I am kind of putting myself mentally in that whole run before I physically put myself in the whole run, mentally preparing where I am going to put my steps, if I bail, what position is my body going to be in if I have to do that, how can I save myself? It’s like a whole mental strategy that’s built up. On an easier move, not so much. When I’m training the easier moves, it’s just reaction at that point. So I’m really only talking about where I’m pushing myself. But even for longer runs where I’m doing a lot of simple things, that visualization helps prepare myself mentally a bit, foot placements and everything else. It helps me think about body positioning. But there’s a different aspect of the mentality that I want to
bring in, because it’s entirely different, and that’s competition. I’m not a big freerunner; I don’t do a lot of the flips. The competitions I do for parkour are more speed based. And as much mental prep as I put into it, as soon as they say go, that mental aspect just kind of leaves, and it becomes just execution and reaction. That’s where I get to find out what I’m really capable of because there’s no mental act, it’s just ‘execute’. The first competition where I really felt that, I didn’t really know whether to be scared or to be excited. I fully intended to do this kind of move or this kind of foot placement in practice, but when I did it, it just happened and I did something different and it worked. It was efficient! To kind of just feel that unchecked physical ability just happening is eye-opening for me as an athlete to experience.

Me: Very interesting! So has practicing parkour affected you guys physically, mentally, or spiritually in any ways?

Matt: It has changed my entire life!

Kato: I came all the way from Minnesota to be here. It’s a big deal for me because it’s hard for me to travel. But yeah, I got my first job because of parkour, and found most of my friends through parkour. Yeah so I was probably set on getting a desk job, going to college, and just living a boring normal life. I’ve met pretty much everyone I know now, everyone I talk to, care about, through parkour. I think it really has helped me grow out of my shell and be less shy. I used to be really shy. But now I just shout at everyone and sometimes bite them haha. But yeah, it has probably changed what I’m going to be doing when I’m 80.

Ethan: Okay so very similarly to him, I was also planning on having a desk job, maybe possibly a doctor or accountant, something like that. My family was really pushing for that. And then after finding parkour, well before that, as I said before, I was really unmotivated, and parkour made me just so much more determined, not to just get better specifically with freerunning and
movement, but in my whole life. And now I’m so much more motivated to do more than just the standard, like a desk job. For many people with a desk job, that is a blessing. But I really feel like my future career will be somewhere along the lines of freerunning and parkour.

Me: That’s great! I’m glad you are striving for a better future for yourself!

Seth: For me, my kind of life plan when I was in high school, when I was heavily involved in long distance running, I really had a vision for running my entire life at that time. I was running around 80 miles per week, and I wanted to be a track coach. When I started doing parkour, that was my senior year in high school, went off to college, and continued to do parkour, and then I kind of stopped doing distance running. I got a minor injury that didn’t physically keeping me from distance running, but it was more that I just, from that point on, I found so much more satisfaction through parkour. It was the same kind of mental and physical challenges that I was trying to address. Then that led me into the parkour community, which, the biggest change I would say is just an exposure of getting to be around some other people who have so many different lifestyles. I have friends right now that are driving around living in a van or are writing a book. I know people who have lived in the woods for a few months or just hitchhiked across the country or are literally just traveling around the world doing parkour. So it’s great seeing so many people who are so open to different lifestyles rather than just the standard family, going on vacations. Life can be a vacation. So yeah, just live it how you want to live it and enjoy it. Sometimes you just have to follow your own path.

Matt: I had a similar plan to everybody else. Growing up, I had this grand plan that I was going to be an electrical engineer and I loved electronics and everything else so I figured why not. The computer industry was budding and becoming an actual thing. Software development was happening. Web design was picking up. Online gaming was emerging. So I was like “Computers
man, these are going to be my life.” I was good at it! So that’s what I had dedicated my life to. At the same time though, I had always been equally as determined to climb and explore my environment. So I had this opposition in my life of the nerd who also climbs and explores and never really fit into most social circles. So I was that kind of chameleon as my brother in law called me. I would just blend in with everybody because I didn’t have my own group. Finding parkour was like finding my people, because it was all a bunch of other open-minded individuals that didn’t take the societal norm of ‘this is how you be, this is what you do’. And it kind of steered my life in a whole new direction. I’d always then want to find a person to share these stories, experiences, wanting other people to find the same joy that I found in it. And that’s where teaching kind of came in and became very rewarding for me. I started off as a tumbling coach, knowing full well that I wanted to teach parkour and everything. But that was kind of my foray into teaching and being a coach. It really stuck with me. I like to see students surpass me in some aspects and become their own athletes. It’s immensely rewarding! I’ve had numerous heartfelt messages from students that have told me that I’d changed their lives. It has just been amazing. I never would’ve thought that I’d be where I am now.

Me: So how do other parkour runners typically react to seeing you perform parkour movements?

Kato: I mean, I’m a pretty mediocre athlete. I think the only thing I can really do is to stand out more than others. I can be pretty weird sometimes and people think I’m 12. The reaction I get when I do a sweet line is usually like “What was that? (amazed) That’s a thing?” But yeah that’s pretty much it.

Ethan: So in the past year, I’ve learned a lot of moves I never even thought I would even try to go for when I first started. And when I would land something, 98% of the people I train with are 100% supportive. They’re like “Oh my gosh, you’re doing amazingly! You’re going to go really
far!” And then there’s that last 2% who I’m still friends with but are more of the jealous type a little bit. But I’m still trying to figure out if they’re just trying to be funny or if they are actually just jealous or not.

Matt: I’d say for the most part, the parkour community is always very supportive of everyone. The comradery of it, whether someone is trying a big jump, whether it’s me or someone else, or whoever it is, it’s the first time they tried it. Most people in the group will all kind of go crazy for the person! If you’re the person, it feels great, and if you’re the person cheering them on, it still feels great because you’re sharing that success with them, whether or not it’s a jump you’ve already done or one you’re working towards. And to Ethan’s point, there is some jealousy that can happen, but at the same time I think that’s also kind of seeded in the fact that they want to be able to do that. So when they see you doing that, it might appear as if they’re jealous, but you’re actually kind of pushing them to better themselves.

Me: Yeah it’s inspiring!

Matt: Yeah, because everybody is on their own mental level, as far as where they’re at and what they are willing to do from their training. So to get there and see somebody else clear that mental hurdle, it could make people a bit jealous sometimes. For most people, I don’t think there are really any true haters that are like “Arrgg, you shouldn’t do that!” More or less, it’s that they wish they could do that so they’re a little salty. And they’ll either get there one day, or they’ll continue to be salty and it’ll hold them back.

Me: Yeah, they just have to focus on themselves and not compare their skills with others so much. So how do you guys typically respond to seeing other parkour runners perform movements?
Seth: One of the biggest things when training with other people is trying to see the environment differently than another person that you’re training with. Just finding challenges within the environment, and trying to visualize things you can do through another person’s perspective. I’d say that thought process is what kind of leads a lot of people, who either were doing the move or are challenging other people to do the move, and if it’s something that is their style, just learning to understand each other’s thought processes, the way we each view the environment. Because I think that in itself is what makes parkour such a unique sport. Similar to skateboarding or Trick Biking or BMX, any one of those sports, it’s about the thought process of how you’re going about it. It’s not like gymnastics where the environment is the same every single time you do it. I think one of the things that makes parkour so unique is that the environment is different, and everybody can not only do moves differently on that, but also the way that people choose to interact with it can have so many different forms of expression. The way that I approach the same kind of space is different from the ways that Matt, Ethan, and Kato challenge themselves in a space. Each of us has very different styles and thought processes and ways of pushing ourselves. So to bring that back to the reaction side, I’d say when other people are training with me, I feel like we focus more on their thoughts, how the other person focuses on their own thought processes. I’d say it’s less about the actual reaction to what the person is doing and more about figuring out what the thought process was behind their moves.

Matt: Yeah, it kind of becomes like a puzzle, where everybody is working on the same puzzle but everybody has a different perspective, and through sharing your perspective with them, it helps them solve their piece of the puzzle. Like Seth said, we all have our own styles, and that changes our approach to our training and everything else. Particularly, Seth has a lot of power in jumps and trains a lot of that mostly, whereas I do a lot of technique and weird tight space stuff.
So we approach the space differently, but end up coming together on the different obstacles and challenges, and it ends up being me pushing him and him pushing me and we both become stronger through that process. The reactions between us are typically like “Seth, how did you …

Seth: Place your steps or get up to that point?

Matt: Yeah or “Where did you put your foot for that?” or “How did you shift your weight?”

There is sharing on how we made it happen versus what exactly we were doing.

Me: Right. So how do non-parkour runners, bystanders, typically respond to seeing you perform movements?

Matt: “Do a backflip!!”

Kato: “Do a backflip!!”

Me: Haha, that’s a classic!

Kato: “I’m calling the cops!”

Matt: I feel that the public now is more educated about parkour and freerunning when they see it, so they don’t have the ‘what is that?’ kind of view versus when I was training early on, there was a lot of “What are you doing? Why are you up there? You could get hurt!” Some of that still exists today, but it’s probably more often like “Oh, are you guys doing parkour or freerunning?” And if they don’t know about any of that, then it’s “Oh, are you guys doing Ninja Warrior stuff?” And I think there are a lot of people that do support us, saying “I could never do that” or “I can tell that takes a lot of skill.”

Kato: “Oh, you’re so talented!”

Matt: Some people look at it and see an appreciation for it. Other people look at it as just jumping around being kids, not taking it seriously. Perspective plays a big role, whether or not you’re the person doing it or the person viewing it.
Ethan: Yeah, that’s basically it!

Me: Excellent! So how have police typically responded to seeing you guys do parkour movements?

Kato: I’ve been approached by the police. The officer came looking for a confrontation and I wasn’t doing anything wrong. He came up and yelled “Get down from there right now!” And so I complied and climbed down and went up to him, and he said they got a call about someone climbing things. So I told him what I was doing, and he let me go and just told me to not climb on that anymore. But how I respond to an officer though, is always being respectful. Don’t run if you don’t need to. If you feel like you can get out of the situation safely, then there is no reason to.

Seth: My impression of police or security or whatever is always typically that you can tell from the way they approach as to whether they’re interested or they’re just sitting there watching, or if they’ve gotten a call and they’re coming to investigate, or if they’re coming specifically to kick you out. It’s usually pretty apparent what their stance is. Just by the way they approach or even when they are still in their car, even then you can usually just tell by the look on their face what their reaction is. I always try to approach them first, just casually go over there. I’ll say hi and they’ll ask what you’re doing, then explain that I’m just training parkour, pushing my body and just having fun exercising. Most people are completely cool about it. But occasionally there will be one, particularly if they get a call of someone on private property, they pretty much have to ask you to leave, regardless of if you’re doing anything wrong or not. It is technically trespassing if it’s private property. Even public property is a little difficult sometimes. But generally, as long as you’re respectful, there are never really any issues as far as what I’ve had happen. Maybe two or three got into an argument and were dead set on getting me to leave. Some of them just won’t
even listen to you, but I think part of that is that we’re not in a particularly bad area. I have friends that live in a lot less nice areas of the country, places that have a lot more issues with vandalism, people breaking into properties, and general aggression towards police. I find that when we are encountered in those spaces, it is far, far more likely that they are going to be approaching you without respect or interest. They just want you to leave. Sometimes they ask nicely, other times not so much. It really depends. And when you consider what they’re going through as well, I can kind of understand where they’re coming from. I would just try to be polite and respectful about it. They’re just trying to do their job.

Matt: Yeah, pretty much agree with everything Seth said. It’s important to treat them with respect. Their body language when they are approaching you says a lot. If they’re on the radio, looking at you like you’re up to no good, you know to handle with care.

Kato: Right, keep your hands out of your pockets.

Matt: Right. Out of the long, long time that I’ve been training here, at other jams, other spots, colleges, you know their security has the right to ask you to leave if they want to. So trying to maintain that relationship with the University of Cincinnati for example, that has been very important to me, which is why I’m a real big asshole to anybody I see that’s breaking the rules. If someone is jumping on a roof, I will be an asshole to that guy so that he knows not to be on the roof. He’s going to ruin it for the rest of us, and once that goes away, it’s going to be really hard to get back. So for example, yesterday at the jam, that was a completely improvised event at University of Cincinnati, we didn’t have to give them a heads up or anything, and when they approached calmly and friendly and said “Yeah I got some calls about some kids being in some potentially dangerous spots, just wanted to come out and see what’s going on.” He asked if I was the one running it and I told him that it was a community driven event and that I am the leader.
He said “Cool. I respect what you guys do. It’s a cool sport. It looks like you’ve got this event under control so I don’t want to get in your hair more than I need to be, but just make sure that the kids remain safe and that’s all I ask.” And he let us carry on. 40, 50 people on campus doing parkour and we’re allowed. So just using common sense helps avoid a lot of disputes. Like if there was an event going on nearby where there is an influx of the public where they’re having to do crowd control already and you’re training right next to there and producing another distraction to the group, then they’re going to be more inclined to ask you to leave. But if you find an area that’s not being as actively used, you’re going to run into a lot less problems. For example, this spot (right where we were) is right across the street from the police department, and we’ve done wall runs out on the other side of this wall that required people to start their run to the wall in the middle of the street. 5, 6 cops are out there watching us and cheering the guy on when he gets to the top! They knew that we were watching for traffic and training safely and everything else, and they just kind of let us do our thing! Not acting like an idiot goes a long way!

Kato: Right! Don’t be dumb, or you’re going to be having problems.

Matt: Well you’ll have less problems.

Ethan: Yeah so like how the cops will react, I think they basically summed it up. But I always try to remember if ever interact with cops, I haven’t had any interactions with them so far, that I and anyone else doing parkour, represent the whole parkour community. So depending on if they’ve seen any parkour athletes before in life, the way that you interact with them, that will put a kind of seed in their minds as to how everyone else in the parkour community acts.

Me: That’s a great point! So do you guys ever document your parkour moves? And if so, how do you typically document them and share them?
Seth: YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, those are pretty much the standard places. There are known challenges throughout the world that have an almost historical meaning to the parkour community. But in general, some people choose to film their training, and others don’t. It kind of depends on what your motives in parkour are. I feel like everyone is pretty much the same in that regard. People either film or they don’t, whether it being because they want to become known in the parkour community or if they are training just purely for personal reasons. What do you guys think?

Kato: I think pretty much that’s it!

Ethan: I mean, I film as my main way to get to know how to get better at moves. I share through YouTube mainly, and Instagram also sometimes. I definitely don’t do it to show off or anything, I just like to share what I’m doing and see myself doing the moves.

Seth: Yeah, being able to break down every detail. Also being able to look back at older videos, I watched a couple of my videos back from like 5 years ago, and seeing where you’ve come, how much both your physical and mental progressions have grown, is incredible. Just literally seeing your body and mind changing so much in such a short time span is great. The changes throughout my training in parkour are so much greater than what I’ve seen in almost any traditional sport. Traditional sports have become so refined that for almost everything there is a best way to do it. There are so many years of documentation of other sports that, at this point in parkour, we just don’t have. We don’t have enough data. We don’t have enough practicing people. It’s starting to get to where we’ve got people doing more and more research, but it’s still just such a new activity that is constantly changing. The things that are happening now in parkour are entirely different from what parkour was 10 years ago. If you compared videos from now to videos from 10 years ago, you probably wouldn’t even consider it the same sport.
Me: Yeah, the new things that people are learning to do with their bodies are incredible! So how do you guys feel about the way in which parkour is portrayed in the media, like movies, television, on the internet?

Seth: It depends on which media you want to talk about!

Kato: If you’re talking about something like The Avengers or like some unlucky fella falls off a building because he was ‘doing parkour’ and went to the hospital. If you’re talking about Tracers or any other parkour movie, it’s about like “Hey! I want that! I’m just going to go take it and use parkour to run away!” That makes us look bad, like we are thieves.

Seth: I’d say also at this point, while parkour athletes are still getting very much involved in stunts, I would still say that parkour in movies and TV and in advertisements isn’t genuinely what parkour is. It is more similar to martial arts fight choreography than it is to actually training to do the moves. There is a big difference between action scenes and actual parkour, but often times when you’re filming a set scene, you’re going to be doing the exact same thing 30 times to get the shot exactly right. You’re going to be doing the same thing consistently. With parkour, there is also that repetition of movements over and over until you get it just right, so there is not necessarily a big difference between that and parkour. But while I do think that they tie into each other, I don’t think that they are really the same thing.

Matt: I would say that the portrayal has gotten a little bit better over the years, but it is still very off. They try to make something look like it’s parkour, but really it’s a faked jump. Recently, that parkour video of that girl in Paris has been going around and it started off really nice but then once you looked a little bit deeper, you could tell that they were using video effects for some of it, they faked a couple of the shots by throwing the camera, and not really giving credit to the sport because there are athletes that are capable of doing that without the magic. I feel like it...
takes away from the potential of what we could have with parkour because it gives you that unrealistic sense of ‘I can’t do that’. But when you see an actual person doing it, you start to have more confidence and think “I can do that!” And even as a higher level athlete, like Seth nailing a jump in front of me, gives me more confidence to do that jump. But going back to when I was younger, I thought stunts were all faked and they had to be done that way. And when I found out I could do them, that was a different mentality change of how I could progress as a stuntman or an athlete. So Hollywood is going to be Hollywood. There’s nothing that can really be done about that. They are always going to go for what looks coolest, whether or not it’s the practical use of parkour. But I think that it is definitely giving exposure to the sport which is helping to draw interest to the YouTube training videos and the gyms.

Ethan: Yeah, on YouTube specifically, when I was a beginner, I would always see suggested videos, parkour fails, and it would just piss me off so much because I kind of knew that half the people in those videos probably didn’t train parkour at all. They were probably just trying to jump across a roof. Yeah, and some people who think of parkour only think of that and say “Oh, parkour is what’s dangerous,” as opposed to the attitudes of the people in those videos.

Kato: Yeah, falls will happen. Injuries are going to happen, but it’s the same with every sport. ACL injuries are one of the most common injuries in football and so are concussions. What’s the difference between shin splints or a meniscus tear here and an ACL tear or concussion there?

Ethan: Yeah, those videos kind of create that mentality that parkour in itself is dangerous instead of how a person decides to train parkour.

Kato: Like even if a powerlifter lifts 400 pounds with an arched back, they are going to get injured. If they have a braced back, they’ll be fine. It’s the same thing with parkour. People think
“Well, I’m going to do this jump” and they just throw themselves at it like WAHHH and then land, they’re going to crush their spine.

Ethan: Haha, yeah! Also football, and anyone can argue with me on this, it’s just my opinion, is more dangerous than parkour because it’s a contact sport. No matter what, you’re eventually going to get hit somehow. Whereas in parkour, you can decide how hard you want to train.

Matt: I started teaching at a gymnastics gym and got that whole “You guys are dangerous! You guys are crazy! You guys are reckless!” I’m like “You’re a gymnast. You do back tucks and tumbling passes on a 4 inch wide balance beam 4 feet off of the ground, and you’re talking to me about what’s dangerous?” In parkour, it’s like yeah, somebody could do that if they wanted to, but it’s their option, it’s not part of their mandatory learning. So if somebody wants to take it to that level, they can, but it’s not like “If you want to get better, you have to!” But if you want to do a level 9 gymnastics routine, you’re throwing your back handspring back tuck on a balance beam. You have to. With parkour, it’s you and your environment and it’s your own mentality. And with football, it’s you on a field with 11, 12 other people with their own mentalities and they might be in a bad mood. They might get pissed off if you tackle them or you run into them and just slam you into submission. There is nothing that you personally have control over in that situation.

Kato: Even like skateboarding or BMX, you are relying on your bike and board to not break. You’re sacrificing part of your control to your equipment. When you do something like jump up some stairs with parkour, it’s only me. It’s my responsibility alone to do it, not yours or anyone else’s.

Matt: That is ultimately why I started freestyle walking, because I got tired of keeping up with the skateboard and having to work with what the skateboard could do. That’s just another thing
that I have to have. I can do jumps and challenges on my feet with my own body and not have to
need a bike or skateboard or rollerblades, getting new bearings because these are starting to wear
out. It’s like “Oh, I just have to give my knees some rest. They are a little achy,” and that’s it.

Me: Awesome! So how has parkour impacted the ways in which you view and understand urban
spaces compared to how you understood it before you started practicing?

Kato: Before, I would look at this space and think “Oh, it’s just a city space” and now I look at it
and think “Oh cool, look at all those jumps I could do!”

Matt: Yeah as I’ve said, I’ve always said that I have a very different view of the environment. I
was buildering before I knew what buildering was, and the same thing with parkour. I would say
that parkour just accentuated that perception even more to where, instead of just looking at
climbing a structure or just trying to create that climbing challenge to reach the top of the roof
and get to the view, it became more about how else could I use the space apart from climbing.

What other ways of interacting are there?

Ethan: Yeah, I’m pretty sure all of us can relate to this. When I’d see a flight of stairs, I’d think
“Okay, I walk up those.” I see a bench “I sit on it.” But now, I’m like “Okay, how can I use this
to do something really awesome and really challenging.

Matt: “That bench is really close to that tree, I bet I could grab that tree branch from the bench!”

For me, the way that I started originally training, I didn’t know I was training. I was just doing it
for fun. I would see how many stairs I could jump up. It started as just a stupid game and then,
I’m jumping up 8 steps and learning how to jump. My track coach always asked how I’m so
good at jumping when I’m never at practice! But as part of your research, I assisted Andy Day
who runs a website all about structures and climbing. The Contemporary Art Center of
Cincinnati did an exhibit called Buildering, Misbehaving the City. So it was all about alternative
uses for architecture, not necessarily for movement, but through art or whatever else might be presented. The way that Andy Day got involved was because they used the word ‘Buildering’. But it didn’t actually focus on any buildering. The actual use of the word buildering was climbing urban structures. So they got in this Twitter battle between him and the curator, and he was asking “How are you using this word to legitimatize your exhibit without actually including it in your exhibit?” The curator kind of just wrote it off until they got into this really intellectual debate about the word, the etymology of buildering and everything else, and so the curator says “Well how about I fly you out here and you can give a talk about buildering?”

Me: Nice!!

Matt: So they brought me in to talk about parkour and how parkour related to their exhibit and they told me “Hey, we’re bringing in Andy Day, would you mind picking him up from the airport and showing him around?” So I’m showing him around Cincinnati, taking him to all the parkour spots, Eaton Park with the retaining wall which actually has bouldering and climbing routes posted on websites. Some urban structures have their own climbing routes, and I didn’t know that until Andy had told me that. So he’s like “You know, I came to Cincinnati expecting to have to explain what buildering was and didn’t expect to find anything, and here I am getting picked up by a guy from the airport who not only knows buildering spots but has been doing it for most of his life!” It was kind of surreal to see that shared perception. It just happened, you know?

Me: Yeah that is pretty crazy!

Matt: Yeah, the Egyptians and the Mayans building pyramids at the same time half way across the world from each other. It just works. Same mindsets.

Seth: Or aliens!
Matt: Or I’m an alien and Seth’s an alien. That aspect of it has probably been the most surprising.

Seth: I’d say my basic summary of it, to put it simply, is just having Tetris syndrome, which is basically where Tetris players will get to a point from playing Tetris so much that they literally see things in real life and visualize putting them together. That’s a real thing that you can look up! It exists!

Matt: Yes! It is for professional Tetris players!

Seth: Basically, parkour has led me to do the same thing. I see a space and I instantly visualize what things I could potentially do with it, whether it’s even physically possible or not. It just taught me to learn to see spaces differently, and through that, I’ve then gained kind of an appreciation of the beauty of simple things. But yeah, another thing is just how other people see spaces who aren’t parkour athletes, but they’ll see parkour athletes and also see the spaces they’re in and now that parkour is much more mainstream, people who see parkour now are also seeing and are able to recognize what spaces are interesting parkour spots potentially.

Matt: Yeah now the average person will be like “Hey, I know you do parkour and I saw this spot you might want to check out!” It’s like “Congratulations on looking for that dude!”

Seth: Yeah!

Matt: “I would not have expected that from you!”

Seth: Right.

Me: So if you guys could describe what parkour means to you in three words, what words would you choose?

Ethan: Parkour For Life!

Matt: I would say Self-Discovery, Control, and uh I don’t know!
Kato: Leap, Friend, Fun!

Seth: For me, pretty similarly to the others, Community, Creativity, and Determination.

Me: Alright awesome! Thank you all so much for taking the time to be interviewed! I really appreciate it!

Matt: Thank you!

Seth: Great conversations!

Kato: Game over!

Ethan: Watch my YouTube channel, Non-Stop Parkour!