

**Playing Towards Contact:
Doing Parkour, Bike Trials & *Capoeira***

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Summary of Thesis

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Full title of thesis	Playing Towards Contact: Doing Parkour, Bike Trials & <i>Capoeira</i>

Summary:

This thesis considers the changing ways in which we make contact with the places we inhabit. Taking a lead from long term immersive participation in the practices of parkour, bike trials and *capoeira*, it examines how embodiment and perceptions are wrought. Mixing these practices with recent theoretical advances in human geography, sometimes termed non-representational theory, I argue that such modifications are made through playful re-negotiations with place. The thesis explores this playful and paradoxical process and the emotional engagements that occur within it. These activities necessarily lead to a new quality of contact with place.

The thesis argues for playful participatory engagements with the world. It suggests that moves toward such engagements can learn a lot from activities like parkour, bike trials and *capoeira*.

Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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Statement 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated. Where *correction services** have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s).

Other sources are acknowledged within the text and a full bibliography is appended

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Statement 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outsider organisations.

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Causality is a tricky beast, one which we always seem tempted to tame. We cannot, but we try.

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Preface

Beginnings

Three, two, one: jump back and arrive, mingled...

It is 1997. I am part way through my first year of A-levels and have first got on a bike with the intention of doing some unusual 'moves'. Like most people I had ridden bikes since an early age, but went no further than learning to ride on the road. Now though, after being relatively shocked and surprised at seeing Tom do an endo¹, followed by a hop on the back wheel, I am about to attempt the same. And for me a new world of bike riding is opening up.

Along with some of my school friends, I had gotten interested in mountain biking and had begun doing some off road riding in the Welsh hills near my home. One day out riding, we came up with the idea of riding off the edge of a small retaining wall. Our approach was to ride quite fast, lean back and hope for the best. My dad's borrowed bike did not last very long after that, despite our technique improving somewhat over the following months.

A few years of saved birthday and Christmas money and some casual web design work bought me an 18 inch aluminium framed mountain bike that was superior in every way to the bikes I had ridden before. By today's standards it was totally unsuitable for technical trials riding, that is riding off walls, bunny-hopping up boulders and turning with endos and other manoeuvres. But this bike, for me, marked the beginning of an enduring enthusiasm for trials.

¹ An 'endo' is a common trials movement in which the back wheel is lifted off the ground and the bike can be pivoted around on the front wheel. For further activity specific terms I have included a glossary.

Being a fledgling activity in the UK at the time, my friends and I found ourselves experimenting, and developing movements - all of us eagerly exploring new obstacles and possible ways to ride them on bikes. Though at first we didn't even know what to call what we were doing, we eventually found that 'trials riding' fit the bill. Of course we hungrily consumed every snippet of trials related media we could find. Though sparse at the time, articles in Mountain Biking UK magazine (MBUK) often hinted at trials techniques, and some mountain biking videos had tantalising short clips of trials riding.

Since those early days of UK bike trials, the practice has grown in popularity tremendously. The technology and the techniques have not stopped for a second – such that the things trials riders can now do, is able to astound both the seasoned trials rider and the curious first-time observer. From those hazily remembered days until the time of writing I have practiced bike trials and despite fluctuations in zeal, it has remained a significant part of my life. I have ridden many different bikes to destruction, written internet articles on technical subtleties and movements involved and been sponsored by Brisa bikes, to ride and promote their trials specific-frame, the B26D (the third version of which I still ride). It has influenced the choices I have made and my thoughts about the world. It has even intruded upon my academic work - something of an irony considering my school teachers' aversion to the dangerous and silly 'play-time' activity.

Geography and bikes?

During an undergraduate course in human geography my tutor, Kate Edwards, asked me to write an assignment that listed the ten books or articles I had found most geographically influential – my 'Desert Island Discourses' (an idea she took from Cloke, et al. 2004). When I sat down to list them my thoughts would not stay on topic, but strayed towards the *practice* that I found most influential: bike trials. Jumping my bike over a particular gap, I reasoned, had had at least as great an effect on my understanding

of space as had the confusing texts of academic geographers. A gamble then: change the question - I would, if I could, write an essay on the ten practices (and I included reading academic writing as one) that had changed my geographic outlook. Luckily for me the gamble paid off: practice, it seemed, was in vogue.

With encouragement from various staff members at Aberystwyth, I worked on an undergraduate dissertation based on bike trials. During this project I began to explore a set of theories that might now be roughly termed ‘pre’, ‘more-than’, ‘anti’ or ‘non’ - representational. Here were some theories, it seemed to me, that while exceptionally confusing, joined in with bike trials, as practices that were explorative. I must admit, at that time I did not know what I was doing with these theories: I was not describing, or even particularly understanding bike trials *through* them. They were not a lens that could clarify things. Rather I continued to muddle them together with my embodied practices, a pervading feeling that I was creating something new keeping me going. What that something was I did not and perhaps still do not know.

None the less, this PhD thesis has been carried out and constructed with the benefit of the texts of those famous ‘antiphilosophers’²: Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Gilles Deleuze (whether directly or more often through the insightful exposition and incorporation of their work by other authors). All asserted against the prevailing tradition that our worlds and lives could not be understood in terms of rule-based theorisations. In other words, conventional philosophy, and by proxy most of my broadly ‘representational’ ways of thinking were working from a spectacular illusion. Instead these thinkers came to the conclusion,

that perception could not be explained by the application of rules to basic features. Human understanding was a skill akin to knowing how to find one’s way about in the world rather than knowing a lot of rules and facts for relating them. Our basic understanding was a *knowing how* rather than a *knowing that*. (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1986: 4).

² So called by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986).

‘Knowing how’ was exactly what I had been attempting for as long as I had been riding trials. I had already noticed that I quite literally knew my way around places better after I had ridden trials in them. Through trials I could create a host of imaginary signposts that I would actually remember. That big gap jump with a particularly tricky and gritty take off and nice soft rounded landing edge; leads over to the phone box that we considered one could possibly, though we dare not yet, drop onto from the bus shelter roof; which is right by the long curved curb that is slightly raised and makes a challenging balance beam, and so on.

This way of getting to know my way around places worked so well that I began to deliberately employ it as a strategy when I went to new towns or cities. Regardless of whether I was riding a bike or not, I both deliberately and at times spontaneously, picked out features of places that I could relate to riding, and that therefore stuck in my memory. In this way I found it easier to navigate the complicated warren of city streets and public places that were quite different to the rural landscape of my early childhood. My spatial perception was being ‘trained up’ by my bike trials practice, something surely deserving of consideration.

Parkour

I first became familiar with the term ‘parkour’ when I was doing my undergraduate dissertation on bike trials. At the time I was lucky enough to be house-sharing with a keen climber and general adventurer³: a person who had always poked about in places, clambered over and under and generally found a way to make everyday terrain into unusual and exciting challenges. He saw ‘parkour’ and ‘freerunning’ as terms that more or less fit with what he had always been doing. I held a similar view, but with the ‘invent’ of parkour, we had a hook, a name around which things could adhere. As with

³ Though somewhat clumsy, this word seems to best describe him, his way of thinking and his way of approaching situations.

bike trials the internet provided a medium in which ‘parkour’ ideas flourished. The practice of parkour practically fed into and off this new ability of named identity.

Validated by the knowledge that other people took their play seriously too (they were calling it a ‘discipline’, an ‘art form’, and even ‘a way of life’), it was not long before parkour found its way into my academic work. With the encouragement and guidance of Tim Cresswell, I prepared a research proposal that would look at ‘non-representable places of mobility: parkour, bike trials and tai-chi’. Of course, I did not quite know what that meant. The pitch was based on the promise of adding the gritty first hand experiential to the emerging and supposedly ‘under-empiricized’ non-representational theory. To some degree, and in spite of large changes, that still holds appeal: this thesis is very defiantly about what the three dynamically evolving activities can teach us, and what questions they can beg us ask.

From the time I wrote that proposal, and throughout my masters year I dabbled in parkour with friends, practicing irregularly in Aberystwyth. For some, the idea of practicing parkour in a modest sized town seems strange – parkour is touted as a distinctly ‘urban’ activity⁴: it involved running and jumping across the rooftops of high rise buildings, moving free, while the press of ‘everyday’ urbanity remains constrained below. As I show in this thesis, this distinction does not hold up: there are innumerable landscape features on and in which a person can practice parkour in any town. Indeed, parkour is also practiced in more rural settings, using trees, field boundary fences, gates, farm machinery and buildings, and other natural features. Aberystwyth then, provided ample fuel for our practice of parkour. In short supply though, were other dedicated and experienced practitioners. After my adventuring housemate left Aberystwyth, my group of ‘parkour friends’ were actually martial artists, or trials bike friends. They were people who liked the idea and had a go from time to time, but did not see it as so many faceless forum avatars did: as ‘a way of life’.

⁴ Oli Mould, for instance, considers it ‘specifically as an urban practice.’ (2009: 739).

In response to this dilemma, on Christmas Day 2005 I travelled to Sydney, where I spent three months doing parkour with a much expanded group of dedicated practitioners. During that stay I also attended an intensive ten day dance/movement festival, ‘Stamping Ground’⁵, which for the second year, was running parkour workshops. Enough, for now, to say that this was an excellent experience which broadened my (parkour) horizons significantly. It was also at this event that I first experienced *capoeira*.

Capoeira

I started this thesis with the intention to research three activities – bike trials, parkour and *tai-chi* - with the justification that I would be able to compare and contrast them. As you will have noticed *tai-chi* was dropped in favour of *capoeira*. Despite ‘trying’ *tai-chi* once a week for six months, I did not feel it ‘fit’, with what I was doing. The original rationale was that I would be able to talk about the slow deliberate movements, and the movement of internal energy or *chi*, and this would provide a nice counter-point to the other two supposedly adrenalin filled mobilities. After six months I did not feel any closer to being able to do, or feel, this kind of movement. While I could now move through some of the ‘forms’ well enough, I did not feel I knew them sufficiently to be able to create new ‘mixes’ of theory and practice with them. More importantly, for me, because of the exacting way they were taught, they did not gel with the creative, improvisational element I had been attracted to in the other two activities.

Capoeira though had these qualities in plentiful, yet mysterious supply. As I first experienced it at Stamping Ground, it was a crash course introduction, in which I did one two hour long class each day (I might have done more but at the time I was primarily there for the parkour). After that Australian introduction it was not until much later that it occurred to me that this was something I wanted to incorporate into my research. The game of *capoeira* was an enigma that merged elements of many of the body practices I

⁵ This was an annual event/festival, which was originally specifically for men’s dance, but in latter years became unisex, and began to incorporate other movement based practices. It was held in a small town called Bellingen, some eight hours train ride from Sydney.

was interested in. It involves acrobatics, music, dance and martial techniques in an intriguing mix. The game itself, the *roda*, for which capoeiristas train, usually consists of a circle of *capoeiristas* who clap, play instruments and sing, while two of their number move to the rhythm in the middle. The pair, if experienced, exchange kicks and ducking dodges, and manoeuvre about each other in a seamless flowing improvisation of acrobatics and strategic positioning.

Such *capoeira* play is very often described as a dialogue of movement. If parkour was an activity that was raw, organic, involving the body, some obstacle and little else, and bike trials was a practice in which I could seek to understand the body's integral co-action with technology (the bike), then *capoeira*, I thought, would add a new level of interest, as the individual body attempts to become familiar and move *with* other bodies. The way in which such processes unfolded in a playful, yet learning context drew them together, such that I thought it reasonable to commit to researching and doing *capoeira*.

About a year and a half since first trying *capoeira*, on the 1st of July 2007 I travelled to the city of York, to spend three months practicing with 'Capoeira York': a vibrant and distinctive group, who meet to do *capoeira* each weekday evening. After three months of intensive training, in York, I felt I had begun to understand something of what *capoeira* was about. It was fair to say at least, that I was hooked. On returning to Aberystwyth, I wanted to continue practicing and playing *capoeira*, but there was no local group.

In order to continue I put out a barrage of posters, fliers and university wide e-mails to try and find like-minded people who had hopefully done some *capoeira*, were based in the Aberystwyth area, and were in the same predicament. Meeting with some small success, we had our first gathering one sunny October evening. Four of us assembled at the castle grounds and shared what we knew, had a play and practiced *capoeira* movements.

Following this we began to meet regularly, once a week in a local hall. Soon after that Christmas, we had a good group of about eight people who would come and practice at least once a week, with new people joining occasionally. About this time we arranged to

have my teacher from York come and stay, and give a weekend long workshop, which was also advertised to people who had never done any *capoeira* before.

Following that successful workshop, we eventually increased our training and *capoeira* play to three nights a week, calling ourselves ‘Capoeira Aber’⁶. We organised special workshops, having guest instructors from London, Manchester, Swansea, Liverpool and York.

During these times, and as more people who had not done any *capoeira* came to join in, I found I was often taking on a teaching role (myself and one other capoeirista took it in turns to ‘lead’ the sessions). Though woefully under qualified to teach anything but the absolute and rough basics of *capoeira*, I did have many more years of other martial arts (and some other martial arts teaching) experience to fall back upon. I found, for example, that after some experience I could lead a warm up in an improvised way, taking exercises from other disciplines. To better fulfil this role though, I consumed whatever I could relating to *capoeira*. I borrowed from *capoeira* training books, commercially available DVDs, an endless number of *capoeira* websites and every shred of experience I had had with different *capoeira* teachers (and here my geography based research diary I kept in York came in handy). In short, as with the other two activities, *capoeira* became an obsession.

The PhD

This PhD has been a sequence of living experiments, each undertaken with no control group, or verifiable hypothesis. Instead, they were enacted on the basis that they were incredibly intriguing, and they did not stop throwing up enticing, immeasurable anomalies. The writing process was no different. It was never in the plan, for example, to have a chapter about ‘play’, but after doing the activities, and thinking about what it was that made them, when at their best, so attractive, so empowering, and so involving, I

⁶ Sometimes jokingly suffixed by ‘the orphans’, because isolated as we were in Aberystwyth we had no ‘real’ teacher.

found ‘play’. Here was something I wanted to affirm. Here was, for me, a whole new kind of politics, one which could occupy very different realms – and had already profoundly affected my life and created a fresh and experimental world. A world which was playful and therefore wondrous enough to keep me waking up excited in the mornings.

I only hope to reflect some of this wonder here, as it is wonder, I believe, which is necessary to bring new qualities of contact to people’s lives. Through wonder, places become enchanted; transformed from isolating, lonely and desolate places into places that *involve* the body in their unfolding. It is in *the doing* of these transformations with which the thesis you now read is concerned.

Chapter 1: Introduction

There was a wall. It did not look important. It was built of uncut rocks roughly mortared; an adult could look right over it and even a child could climb it. Where it crossed the roadway, instead of having a gate it degenerated into mere geometry, a line, an idea of boundary. But the idea was real, it was important. For seven generations there had been nothing more important than that wall.

Like all walls it was ambiguous, two faced. What was inside it and what was outside it depended on which side of it you were on ...

The wall shut in not only the landing field but the ships that came down out of space, and the men that came on the ships, and the worlds they came from, and the rest of the universe. It enclosed the universe, leaving Anarres outside, free. (Le Guin 1974:1).

Δ

What if we could play with that wall – jump and hop between freedom, meaning, lines and ideas? If we could make contact with the ‘other side’, all be it less free...

Like the wall in Le Guin’s sci-fi novel, we are daily transected by walls of our own co-production. Some are fantastical constructions, shifting feats of imagination and ingenuity, ones that draw us into their marvellously diverse embrace. Without doubt there are others, blank, bland and seemingly final, but even these lifeless obstructions are but a leap away from showing some interest in us.

Making Place, Making Contact

This work has, on the whole, been a labour of love. From the time I started to ride bike trials, I have been fascinated by experiences of learning to move in new ways. Just as my mountain bike components were broken, changed, swapped and modified, so were the capacities of my body in a state of continual revision. My emotions, perceptions, imagination, and physical make up were radically altered through the three body practices that are the focus of this thesis. Bike trials, parkour and *capoeira* – each of them was at some point entirely foreign and unknown to me. And each, at different periods of time has come to dominate my daily life, tying me into the world in very different ways.

This thesis is an attempt to mix these happening embodied revisions and relations into geographic theorizations of place, practice and mobility. I hope it is now clear this involves first hand, immersive participation in *capoeira*, bike trials and parkour. In learning and regularly practicing these activities practitioners actively connect and make contact with the materialities of place. It is in this, often casually forgotten *contact*, that this study is interested. Such contact occurs in many different ways, be it ‘on the run’, engaged in an exuberant dance, or in fearful static contemplation of an imagined set of movements. All are *with* certain people and places. Each will have its own unique unfolding affects. The commitment throughout this work will be toward finding ways of making contact (and thus making place) in mobile modes that are playful, inquisitive, testy, unsure and emotionally charged. In other words, this performance is interested in experimenting with places and possibilities.

Through immersive participation, I hope to offer a performance which affirms some of the potential of playing towards certain types of contact. Critique and problematization of one linguistically defined and defended logic after another has led us to something of a ‘post-structuralist impasse’ (cf. Friedman 2006). While it is true that such deconstructive critique has been crucial in the sense that it has cleared the ground for new knowledge to

emerge, it has not, it seems to me, been quite so keen to seek knowledges in new engagements with the world that produce new imaginings, times and spaces. Neither does it always take good account of experience, instead it often works from a ‘top down’ approach, pulling apart named ‘institutions’ and behemoth-like discourses.

In geography numerous writers have begun to move beyond a purely deconstructivist approach. Ongoing work in non-representational theory, for example, has given a vibrantly varied set of approaches, which have *added* significantly, acting with a commitment to make “more of the world, not allowing it to be reduced, but rather allowing it to be read and writ large.” (Thrift 2005: 475). This thesis has developed through a belief in the malleability of embodiment, which can, through certain practices, lead to better ways of living with each other. In this, I must admit, I have faith in utopia. Not any single utopia, or utopia as representation, but utopia as multiple process (see Kraftl 2007, Pinder 2002) and utopia as embodied, as flexible idea, imagination and experimentation. Utopia, as dynamic ‘utopic practice’ adds to life, gives it drive and allows it to grip us without denying its messy paradox.

Parkour, *capoeira* and bike trials can all be considered utopic practices. They seek to imagine and change places, to play with our comfortable and secure feelings of what a picnic bench is, of how a human body moves, or of what a cyclist might be. In doing so place can be more multiple, people’s imaginings amplified, and technologies remade. By practicing these ludic activities spatial knowledge is ‘done’ – it is revised, negotiated, unlearned, forgotten, replaced, embedded and complicated. By making new kinds of contact we are co-creating new places as we mess with the materiality we are in. ‘An active body incorporates bits and pieces of the world around it, while its action may be shifted out of the body, excorporated’ (Mol and Law 2004: 53).

An experiential, experimental account of contact with place has allowed me to participate in this process in a way that research based purely on documentary sources and deconstruction, might not. Intuitively we know that when we read an account, or view a film, or see a photograph, that it has happened – it cannot, at that moment at least, see us

(or so we tend to think). Participation is interesting because it is a ‘two way’ process: our own actions often evidently affect that which we are interested in, which in turn, and usually immediately, has its own affects on us. The materiality of an event has great purchase and intensity on the body when it is lived. It is given spatial and temporal context that engulfs us and can, through contact, fuel the imagination and multiply up affect in a quite recursive way. In short, being involved in place gives us the possibility of finding playgrounds.

Enabling possibility and ‘non-representational theory’

Uncovering and enabling possibility, finding new ways to make new kinds of contact that amplify life, playing beyond boundaries – none of these things comes easily to traditional enlightenment thinking. Quite ‘successful’ attempts to form knowledge that is sure and final has given us a host of binaries, and a limited number of cordoned off and set identities. A shared interest in recent geography has been to break down and overcome a Cartesian mind/body duality that has been linked to these structures of knowledge. Such divisions prop up hierarchical social systems and are implicated in much of the social inequality we witness in the world (see Moeckli and Braun 2001, Rose 1993, 1995).

In attempting to make a brake with hierarchical knowledge authors have employed what are often considered to be ‘constructionist’ approaches; that is, methods which tend to ask how, when, where, and by whom, is knowledge about (or in) bodies produced and reproduced (Berger and Luckmann 1967, Cresswell and Dixon 2002, Gergen 1999, Jackson and Penrose 1993). For pure social constructionists there are no ‘truths’ about the world, only more or less persistent belief systems which are, or at least should be, in continual contestation. The spirit of social constructivism is to ask who or what defines categories of people, things and actions (categories as varied as the male, the neighbourhood, disability, science...) and therefore inevitably chooses what is included and what is excluded from those categories (Cresswell 1996, Sibley 1995).

One might be forgiven for thinking that ‘constructivist’ research was strangely named, considering it actually involves a de-construction of knowledge. A process in which the roots of knowledge are uncovered, discursive sites examined, historic distinctions questioned. This way of working can be productive because it takes nothing for granted, and in the process, is itself inevitably involved in the creation of new knowledge. Non-representational modes of thinking build on a similar interest with what is taken for granted about knowledge, but strive to undo the emphasis in the social sciences on representation and the deconstruction of texts. Instead they seek to understand and take account of the performance or ‘doing’ of everyday life (Hetherington 2003a, Rose 1999, Thrift 1997, 2000a, Thrift 2003). Thus, non-representational theories of practice require a shift of attention towards the continual emergence of life in each new moment. We are asked to consider the non-logical, pre-conscious, spontaneous, and un-thought actions which account for the richness and immediacy of embodied existence (Anderson 2006a, Dewsbury, et al. 2002, Latham 2003a, Thrift 2004a, 2004d, Wylie 2005).

Related to this ‘in-place-immediacy’ of the body, another trend in non-representational thinking has been to re-incorporate ‘things’ as productive of, and essentially inseparable from, human lives. The places we inhabit largely consist of non-humans entities, which are too forceful to be entirely ‘social constructs’ (for an alternative view see Harvey 1996). Thus, while the material corporeality of life is being stressed across the board (compare Latham and McCormack 2004, Longhurst 2005), it is worth noting from the outset, that what is termed as ‘the body’ and ‘the subject’ is far from un-contentious. Subjectivity and agency are increasingly being considered to include the object world (Haraway 1991, Latour 1993, 2000, Pile and Thrift 1995, Sheller 2004, Thrift 1994) and the notion of a discrete and bounded body is being quite convincingly challenged (cf. Briginshaw 2001, Longhurst 2001, McDowell and Sharp 1997). In this way the body is an elusive term; exactly what the body is, where it begins and ends, and attempts to address its ‘meaning’, have been numerous and are often ambiguous (Longhurst 1997, Pile and Thrift 1995).

Nigel Thrift, who was the first, and remains one of the strongest and most consistent champions of ‘non-representational theory’ in geography, suggests that a Foucauldian approach to power needs to be tempered with understandings of the body as having “special qualities which flow from its tacit nature.” (1997: 137). Indeed, a new consideration of the human body, including its perceptions and abilities has been prominent in a lot of writings associated with ‘non’ or ‘more-than-representational theory’ (Crouch 2005, Dewsbury, et al. 2002, Harrison 2000, Obrador-Pons 2003, Thrift 1997). The French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1968), has been particularly influential. His phenomenology, specifically his use of the concepts ‘body-subject’ and then ‘the flesh’, sees the body as having irresolvable intelligences that act before deliberative thought. This philosophy has a reasonably long tradition in geography, being used by humanist writers to consider how the human body inhabits, gets to know, and becomes familiar with its environment (Buttimer 1976, Relph 1977, Seamon 1979, Tuan 1974).

While drawing on this rich tradition, Thrift and many others have been keen to move on from humanist accounts, instead calling for a ‘post’, ‘anti’ or ‘trans’-humanist perspective which gives back some sense of agency to non-human animals and things (Massey and Thrift 2003, Wylie 2005). For some authors though, Merleau-Ponty’s ‘body subject’ was already necessarily entwined with, and immersed in, fields of more-than-human relation (Abram 1996). When we consider the body as Merleau-Ponty’s ‘body subject’, it becomes our experience itself and the body itself is:

...my ability to cry and laugh, or to howl at night with the wolves, to find and gather food whether in a forest or a market, the power to walk upon the ground and to imbibe the swirling air. Yet “I” do not deploy these powers like the commander piloting a ship, for I am, in my depths, indistinguishable from them, as my sadness is indistinguishable from a certain heaviness of my body limbs, or as my delight is only artificially separable from the widening of my eyes, from the bounce in my step and the heightened sensitivity in my skin. (Abram 1996: 46).

In David Abram's⁷ theorisation, the body is thus intimately connected with the environment, which is predominantly unmediated by considered logical reasoning (see Seamon 1980). Thinking of the body similarly, authors (such as Crouch 1999, Crouch and Desforges 2003, Ingold 2000, Obrador-Pons 2003) have drawn on the work of Heidegger (and Dreyfus' (1991) interpretations of him), and most notably his notion of 'dwelling', to propose the body as "*involved* in the world in which it extends itself metaphorically, transforming the space, *flirting with space*." (Crouch 2001: 62, emphasis in original).

Through such work we might find a focus on the micro-politics of 'doing' place, and how, through practice, the body engages, discovers, and enacts its environment (Dewsbury 2000, Holloway 2003). Through the notion of 'enactment' non-representational theory is given a way to break free from the continued and supposedly inescapable representation and re-representation that maintain the very situations that the analysis should seek to change (Thrift 2004d). Instead, non-representational theory looks to create knowledge without using dictated or historic definitions and classificatory systems. Rather than taking meanings and representations at face value we should seek to take account of the way they are lived; namely through pre-cognitive body practices. Our way of being in the world is mainly practical, rather than cognitive, and involves a skilful coping or interweaving with our surroundings (Ingold 2000). This being the case, we can say that most social *action* is not accounted for in the social sciences (Harrison 2000, Latham 2003b, Thrift 2000a, 2000b).

⁷ David Abram work is considered throughout and thus follows some brief biographical details. Abram himself has been called an 'ecophenomenologist' (Toadvine 2005), a professional sleight-of-hand magician, a performance artist, and ecological activist. His colourful history, particularly his interest and practice in magic has led to his long standing interest in perception. He has travelled across Southeast Asia, studying with indigenous 'shamans'. This has informed his views of our modes of sensing the landscape, which he considers as being *animate*. His widely acclaimed book, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, deploys a reading of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in an attempt to persuade readers that the so called 'inanimate' is no such thing. He argues in this book and other essays, that every experience of perception is a reciprocating event, which 'proves' the falsehood of thinking of the more-than-human world as unconsciousness and entirely distinct and from humanity.

Now living in North America his work focuses on the ecological repercussions to changes in our perception, and particularly how perception is bound up with our use of writing and language. He is one of the founders of 'The Alliance for Wild Ethics' (the website of which makes available many of Abram's essays), a diverse group of artists and academics working to loosely 'environmental protection' agenda.

For all its emphasis on non or pre-representational embodiment, this work does not, in general, do away with our constructivist understanding. Bodies are not generic, but bear the marks of culturally constructed and contested difference. Modes of embodiment *are* effected by bounded categories, which are performed in certain places, but those categories do not exist outside of individual embodiments of them. In other words, people's notion of what it means to be white/black, male/female, gay/straight, young/old, and so on, makes a material difference, but there is little 'truth' in such categories, which are ideological rather than ontological.

Following Grosz's (1994) definition of the body as more than just a pre-given, or 'raw material', but something that is socially and culturally inscribed, geographers have shown how 'work' on the body (Shilling 1993) can be manifest as inscription in biology. Lynda Johnston (1998), for example, suggests that through the hegemonic powers operating in gym spaces, blatant feminine/masculine bodies are reworked to better fit into a male/female binary. Whilst female body builders disrupt this spatialised binary between the male and female body, they are still considered deviant and out of place because of their comparison to a coherent (if challenged) representational notion of masculinity. Similarly, when we learn bodily practices like *capoeira*, bike trials or parkour, our techniques and embodied habits of movement, are reformulated along different spatial lines.

Constructivist work of this sort is all well and good, but the implicit accusation of non-representational theory is that 'representationalist' accounts, that treat the body as a text to be analysed, can reduce the body to language. Representationalist thinking treats worldly events such as a cartwheel in *capoeira*, or a backhop in bike trials, as texts, which can be read and carefully analyzed. All too easily they deny the fleshy, expressive corporeality of living bodies (Harrison 2000, Longhurst 2001). Here we run into the problematic nature of representation in general, but particularly in relation to bodies: we will never be fully able to communicate an experience, situation, feeling, emotion, event or thing, no matter how technically sophisticated or ingenious our representation. Here,

not only do words ‘fall short’ and fail, but so too do all manner of digital ‘reproductive’ techniques. There is no rewind button for life.

What are we aiming at here then; there is no sense in critiquing the inevitable failure of representation? There is however a need to consider the way we think about and treat representations. Representations only fail, if we ask them to do the impossible (a perfect reproduction), but if we talk of the representation in a pragmatic sense, as something that is better or worse, depending upon its affects, then we may have a way forward. Indeed, representations are most often experienced in a way that is non-representational: they evoke (cf. Laurier and Philo 2006). Precisely because the body is situated, unable to sit above and look down with dispassionate objectivity and view representations, we are ‘in them’ (Thrift 2000c).

If body and space are mutually defining, the body cannot be understood as wholly distinguishable from its environment. Indeed, drawing on a rich tradition of feminist writings on embodiment and performativity (e.g. Butler 1993, Grosz 1994), we are able to destabilise the bounded body’s identity, and make problematic any easy distinction between thought, ‘un-thought’, action and place (cf. Pred 1984). Through its emphasis on sensuous ‘practice’, non-representational modes of working and thinking strive to get around the reduction of the body to atemporal language (Harrison 2007). Indeed, to take better account of the body is not simply a question of addressing the historic primacy of representations and the visual (Rodaway 1994) and inserting the ‘forgotten’ senses, but requires a complete reconceptualisation that prioritises multi-sensual embodied *processes* (Crouch and Desforges 2003, Thrift 1996).

We tend towards objectivity in attempting to match up our mental representations with reality or accept social constructivism’s idealisation of language. Neither of these accounts takes notice of the *actions of the bodies* towards the objects. (Harrison 2000: 507, my emphasis).

Taking heed of non-representational theory, then, involves new awareness of action in the ‘now moment’. We might see the world as in a state of becoming or emergence; a continuous flow of ‘nows’. Bingham (1996) suggests that during such emergence, space changes into place multi-sensually, by the body’s movements in it as well as perceptions of it. Here the body, constitutes place as much as place constitutes the body. Non-representational theory, though, is not so concerned with representing the ‘reality’ of bodies or places, as it is with moving on from the relations and practices between body and place, that brings any such reality into being (Thrift 1997)⁸.

If places and bodies are mutually constituted then inevitably we must ask *how* they are producing each other in this way. Without universalising, such a question becomes very difficult to answer - it will surely be specific to individual places and bodies, and change over time. In place, “all kinds of spatial stories could be taking place at once, and continuous trade could take place between them.” (Massey and Thrift 2003: 288).

These relational practices have been understood and developed using the metaphor of performance. Through performance the body can be said to ‘learn’ the socially correct ways of behaving, as it is ‘internalised’ (Butler 1993, Young 1990)⁹. The way movements are repeatedly performed becomes part of the body which is reconfigured as they are continually performed with other people and places. Whilst those promoting non-representational theories do not tend to use the term ‘the social’, it is clear that situated bodily comportment is learnt and practiced in an inescapably communal and connected way, as bike trials, *capoeira* and parkour can demonstrate.

Such mobile connectivity is not limited only to human bodies (Cresswell 2005). Rather our embodied becoming extends to the entirety of our environment. Practice is filled

⁸ Although it is true that this is often done by strategically deploying representations (academic papers).

⁹ Here I am mainly concerned with performance in the Butlerian sense, in which performances become habitual through re-iteration. However, it is worth noting that performance is a multifaceted term. Thrift and Dewsbury (2000), for example, consider four distinct but related types of performance: ‘performance’ as associated with Judith Butler; ‘performance’ as has developed through non-representational theory; ‘performance’ as in the ‘discipline of performance itself’ (often associated with the writings of Schechner 1988), which they claim to be an ever unstable concept; and finally they consider ‘performance’ as applied to the practice and methods of academia.

with a mutuality that reaches beyond constructed spatial and temporal constraints. In this way the term ‘the social’ may be unnecessarily limiting, but for many it still plays an important, and political, role in formulating certain bodies and places. We must qualify though, that the part played by the ‘social’ is always partial and corrupted by other ‘things’ and technologies (Latour 2000, 2004, 2005).

Drawing on actor network theory non-representational theorists tend to shy away from talk of ‘the social’, for it can never be separated out from the realms of non-humans – that is, the ‘things’ that affect and surround the body. For them the body is immersed in ‘fields of affect’ (Harrison 2007, McCormack 2003, 2005). In other words, every intentional action of the body, in every passing moment, is entangled with, or in part influenced (affected) by, its surroundings, be they people or things. In this sense, having a body is immersion in the world, it is being inseparable, vulnerable and open to the affective fields that swirl around and through (Harrison 2008). As a priority, non-representational theory seeks to acknowledge that these fields of affect are ever shifting, with the movements of bodies and materialities; they are not static or immutable, but to varying degrees, mobile.

When our bodies develop ‘automatic’ habitual ways of moving and thinking (and not thinking), what Paul Harrison (2000) calls the ‘contraction of habit’, we have an inevitable constriction of possibilities. As this thesis is concerned with the ‘questing’ body, the body that is forming new ways and new playgrounds, it shares in the desire of a good deal of geographic research which attempts to ‘break the habit’ – or at least break those which have been unquestioningly and unintelligently inscribed on the body through reiteration of subject and place relations. In order to break this habit there must be other possibilities, other ways of being in the world and it is this that Thrift appears to prioritise over intensively cognitive, deconstructive methods. Thrift proposes a creative and playful body, which is emotional and experimental (Thrift 2004b). Armed with such knowledge, we might think that the body of the academic, of all people, would appreciate this fallible humanness in consideration of its own engagements with the world. But as we are reminded, we too often see the world (with varying degrees of arrogance) as finished, a

sure-thing, predictable, or needing our theoretical structuring to be meaningful: in short, we often delude ourselves into thinking we can know the world (Rose 1997).

Thankfully the ramifications of non-representational theories for future research methods in geography remain muddled and undetermined. Tightly prescribed methodological clarity is something of an anathema to a set of theories which prize experimentation, creative wonder and playfulness, and strive to broaden, rather than narrow possible avenues of investigation (Anderson and Harrison 2006, McCormack 2003, Thrift 1996, 1997, 2004c). Such work seeks to show as false accounts in which bodies, relations or places ever come to rest, are finished or neatly concluded. Rather, non-representational theories delight in the ‘excess’ of the world which is ever in motion and does not simply ‘add up’ (Dewsbury, et al. 2002, but see also Doel 2001).

Despite this, there has been little implementation of non-representational theory in experientially grounded empirical research. Eric Laurier and Chris Philo go as far as to say that, for all their talk, proponents of non-representational theory, ‘tend to migrate towards the philosophy and ethics sections of the library’, rather than involve themselves in the messy jostle of ‘everyday life’ (2006: 361)¹⁰. I find sympathy with this position, to a degree, as exploring philosophical questions with more philosophy, leads to stories, or representations (like some of Harrison’s articles) that do not evoke, because they remain so far removed from what I recognise as ‘life’ (and often hang upon sparse and borrowed empirical examples). Yet we cannot deny that reading and philosophising, no less than any other activity, is a messy and lived process with its own ‘everydayness’.

While the body is the ‘object’ of much of this philosophising, it has hardly seen the revolutionary reinsertion into research one might expect. “Having been what could be called geography’s ‘absent presence’, the body is becoming its ‘present absence’” (Simonsen 2000: 9). This may also be because non-representational theory attempts to create new and unfamiliar vocabularies which might impart a sense of the felt

¹⁰ Though for some examples where this is less the case, see McCormack (2003, 2004), Spinney (2006) and Wylie (2005).

sensuousness of being in ‘enchanted’ hybrid body/place relations (Massey and Thrift 2003). This is not easy. Similarly, it is not easy to conceive of a methodological approach that is truly open and accepts that finding the answers to questions and formulating them often occurs simultaneously and inseparably.

With calls towards a ‘policy turn’ (Massey 2000) and attempts to rematerialize geography (Anderson and Tolia-Kelly 2004, Hoskins 2007, Jackson 2000, Kearnes 2003, Mee and Waitt 2003), our theorizations of the body are attempting to develop new methods that take seriously the politics of everyday life (Pain and Bailey 2004). “Greater understanding of the body requires interaction between theories about the substance of the body and analyses of particularities of embodied experiences and practices.” (Simonsen 2000: 9). In all this, ‘theory’, like the body, is more than one thing at once (Rothfield 2005), and will, one hopes, not remain contained in any particular category or library section for long. Instead, it travels out, mixing indistinguishably with practices that we tend to consider separate, like ‘fieldwork’ and ‘everyday life’.

In what follows, I tend to think of this uncontrollability of ideas and practice in a fairly positive light, for it has the capacity to add possibilities. Possibilities for unique kinds of embodiment, mobility and emotionality, are all being built up as we invent (Thrift 2005). The processes of how, or if, we choose these new kinds of embodiment, are in the balance when we make contact with our environment. It is only in contact that the body is capable of re-inventing itself as it participates in and with.

Through the movements of the body and the powers of speech the subject can *jointly* produce the possibility of converting one spatial signifier into another. New places and meanings, acts and footsteps, meanings and directions are produced and they produce. (Thrift 1996: 16, emphasis added).

Evolving techniques of movement, such as bike trials, *capoeira* and parkour, are additions that allow us to engage in the world differently. In this, difference is something

special, something worth seeking out. That is to say, by changing the way we sense, and the way we make sense, such activities change *everything*.

A note on Contact

New contact is made when we feel, for a split-second, that we participate in the immeasurable. There is no 'point' of contact; it happens, it befuddles our notion of space and time.

Contact can be made with anything; movement, painting, building, memory, tree, body, book... What it will make of us, that is the question.

Contact, v.

1. trans. To bring into or place in contact.

1834 [EDEN](#) in *Fraser's Mag.* XI. 644 The spark and the gunpowder contacted, and acting together, produce the explosion.

2. intr. To come into, or be in, contact.

1883 [H. GREER](#) *Dict. Electr.* 21 To prevent contact with two or more plates at the same time, their contacting portions are so arranged that no two consecutive plates are in the same vertical line.

3. trans. To get into contact or in touch with (a person). orig. *U.S. colloq.*

1927 *Spectator* 6 Aug. 212/2 Dreiser should not be allowed to corrupt his language by writing 'anything that Clyde had personally contacted here'. **1935** [A. P. HERBERT](#) *What a Word!* 100 A charming lady in the publicity business shocked me when we parted by saying 'It has been such fun contacting you.'

(Oxford English Dictionary, Online).

It seems worth noting that the OED also lists 'contact' as a noun, with predictable descriptions of items such as an electrical contact, a person who can be called upon for

assistance, and so on. More interesting perhaps, is the draft addition to the dictionary entry, dated June 2008, entitled ‘contact high’:

‘contact high’: *slang* (orig. and chiefly *U.S.*) a feeling of elation or intoxication influenced by the (esp. drug-induced) behaviour or mood of another person; (also) an instance of intoxication caused by (inadvertent) inhalation of smoke from another person's marijuana cigarette, pipe, etc.

1977 *Oakland (Calif.) Tribune* 3 Sept. B7/2, I felt higher than I had ever been and I had taken no drugs. Was it a contact high from three days around gurus?

(Oxford English Dictionary, Online)

‘Contact high’ makes a reasonable starting point for the types of contact I want to develop and affirm in this thesis. This is a *kind of contact* that makes obvious the way contact has unexpected affects. It also demonstrates the way contact does not necessarily involve touch, although this can often be an important element of contact. Essentially, contact of this kind highlights the permeability of the body. Just as I watch friends ride up a steep grassy bank, for example, I am inevitably now excited by the prospect of attempting the bank myself. My embodiment is enacted with and in contact.

Throughout this thesis, I refer to ‘contact’ and so, following academic convention, feel a pressure to define it here at the outset. But really this is unnecessary, for I use it in no specialised, unfamiliar way. What I do is consider the different and new ways we might make contact. The grassy bank now looks different – a simple example – it now meets my leg muscles from afar with a resonance that wishes to pedal. Place is changed. A new quality of contact is developed. Contact gives us the ability to participate in, modify, perhaps even engineer affect, because affect is more than the personal quality of emotion. Rather affect is a ‘felt but impersonal, visceral but not neatly corporeal, force of intensive relationality.’ (Latham and McCormack 2004: 706).

Though it is not particularly dwelt upon here, it is worth noting affect’s relation to contact. Contact, for me, is the ‘exciter’ of affect, it allows and encourages it. Of course, the trouble with talk along these lines is that, affect, intangible as it is, has been theorized in numerous ways, some of which see it as having little difference to emotion (Davidson and Milligan 2004 cf. Kraftl and Adey 2008, Thrift 2004b). For the purposes of this

work though, where I use affect I have treated it as a type of relational potential. It is thus always in a state of emergence as new configurations of people, things and animals form and reform; their changing contact bringing about moving possibilities and potentialities.

In this way we can start to question the idea of the inanimate. As I show in the subsequent chapters, contact occurs when we are affected by the world. Animals, people, places, and technologies can be understood as entities which are perceived with reciprocity. In other words, the nature of contact can be such that we can feel ourselves moved by, and with things, inane and supposedly inert. As such ‘contact’ like the idea of ‘contact high’, is a moment in which our perception is caught within, and becomes inseparable from, our surroundings.

Perception itself is an inherently relational, participatory event; we say that things "call our gaze" or "capture our attention," and as we lend our focus to those things we find ourselves affected and transformed by the encounter -- the way the blue sky, when we open our gaze to it, reverberates through our sensing organism, altering our mood and even the rhythm of our beating heart. (Abram 2005: 1023).

The limits of this kind of notion, of contact, are its lure as well: that contact is wildly variable. As I go on to discuss using the case studies, the quality of contact we have is *not* something essential to the human body. Rather we are open to the places we participate in, to greater or lesser degrees, and our habits of perception allow places to affect us to greater or lesser a degree. As has become something of a motto for the ‘Alliance for Wild Ethics’¹¹: “We are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human.” Contact, as I will attempt to show through the following studies, is developed, changed and always ongoing.

¹¹ An organisation co-founded by David Abram, that promotes oral traditions, and ethical conduct based on re-discovering first hand, the knowledge of humanities reliance upon the land.

Our abilities to perceive (or not) certain affective capacities of our environments, *can*, but are not necessarily in continual revision. Learning a new movement, depending upon a new technology, or having to bodily deal with the unexpected actions of others, all bring to awareness differing subtleties, and remind us that what is beyond our own bodies is not an objective realm waiting to be disclosed, but is in fact ‘underway’. Shifts of attention and changes to our embodiment give us a way to make different types of contact with animate worldly happenings.

User’s Guide

The thesis can be read in any order. It is structured around the three case studies (chapters four, five and six), each of which provides a way to focus in on changing embodiment and its involvement in place making processes. It is perfectly possible for the user to skip ahead to any of these and come back to the more theoretical discussions in chapters two and three. Each chapter deals with what could be considered discrete activities, but really the contents blend together. All have involved my body as participant and all are on-going. Experiences from one, like ice into hot water, merge with my practice in others - insights from some activity being useful (or not) in others. As such, examples of activities blur between chapters. This is particularly the case with the next chapter, *Finding a Playground*, in which I evaluate some of the different ways in which we think about play.

In this chapter I ask what is important about play. Play can be many things, and in a sense this remains its most alluring power. Welcoming this multiplicity, I argue nonetheless, that play is *better* when it is not overly competitive, but instead when it is based upon developing contact with the world. Through this development, play, I reason, is immensely powerful, as it is capable of writing new scripts, forging new ethics, and enhancing life as lived *with* (as play cannot, I suggest, be done alone).

Neither for that matter, can research be anything but involved. Yet there is a large degree of variance to which one can approach that involvement during the research process. In chapter 3: *Making Methods*, this becomes evident. Here is the place for a discussion of the way in which we *do* ethics just as we make methods. Methodology is no less an embodied activity than bike trials, *capoeira* or parkour, and as such it is worth considering how we develop our *ways of being with*. For me, doing the activities was crucial, because it appeared the best way to be sure that the world was kept free to teach me. “That means retaining difficulties, uncertainties, inaccuracies since mistakes are part of the lesson, proof that the problem can still grip us.” (Thrift 2005: 474).

As it has been noted, activities like these “could be ‘colonized’ by the academic and the intellectual. The ‘play’, the ‘pleasure’ could be destroyed by the intellectual agenda.” (Stephens and Delamont 2006: 335). It is my contention that we might avoid this by treating the methods in the same playful manner the activities themselves can operate. In other words, this thesis ‘write up’ makes requests, as did the research. It begs to be read in a certain way: one that does not hunt after answers, precise and final. Each word or ‘sign’ on these pages, asks to be treated as such – as a pointer to animate knowledge, not to be affixed upon, but to propose possible directions. As well as this, a prime request of this user’s manual, is that the reader imagines *doing* the activities, however unlikely that might seem. Where I write ‘I’, please think of yourself. Approached with such an attitude, this dumb representation may be given to live, and to speak.

There is paradox in such a request, as imagining these activities is closely intertwined with the embodied doing (or not doing) of them. This remains the challenge of representation. Without doing it, how do we know how to feel when asked to think about leaping between two brick walls, grasping the edges, the strain on the muscles, the changes of perspective? Luckily most of us will know what it is like to jump, and what bricks are like, how they can make up a wall, and so on. Although all these things can vary enormously, we are able to piece them together with the help of representations and imagination. However roughly, in a whole body process, we can form a better idea about activities like parkour practice.

Being an art form that requires very little specialist equipment, parkour is used to consider a slightly abstracted ‘raw’ engagement in place. In chapter 4: *Playing with Fear: Parkour and the Mobility of Emotion*, the process of learning the bodily movements themselves is recounted and theorized in some detail, and forms a foundation from which the capoeira and bike trials case studies will build. Parkour and closely related activities like ‘freerunning’ have exploded into public consciousness through commercial media representations and films. Parkour is depicted as a spectacular urban sport that either can or cannot be done. We might, though, consider what has been excluded from these representations: the emotions involved in trying, experimenting, and gradually learning to make contact in places differently. In parkour places are ‘done’ or mobilised in tentative, unsure, ungainly and unfinished ways which can be characterised by a kind of play with architecture.

In this play, places are tried, re-imagined and tried again. In trying new kinds of contact, there is uncertainty and often fear. This chapter is concerned with understanding fear as an important, and not necessarily negative, part of an engagement with place. Here fears can manifest differently, not only restricting mobility, but in some cases encouraging imaginative and playful forms of movement. These kinds of contact construct new ways of knowing and experiencing place. As with *capoeira* and bike trials, in parkour, the body is cultivated, in various ways, to facilitate this trying and re-inventing of place. In common also is the fact that any such cultivation is done *with*, it is a process that reveals the lie of a self-contained or self-made individual.

In bike trials, for example, this becomes more obvious because of the learned reliance upon the trials bike. Appending the body with a technologically complex piece of equipment, one that is under continual revision, links the body into tangible networks of manufacture and design. Thus in chapter 5: *Bike Trials*, I consider the evolution of trials, in which I have participated, over the past 10 years. Changes in styles of movement and favoured riding locations have been mirrored by an array of changes to the bike technologies produced and consumed. The bike geometry, weight, stiffness, and component specification make a huge difference to the practice of trials riding. The co-

evolution of technology and embodiment has enabled riders to move over obstacles, in a way which would have seemed impossible even a few years ago. In the practice of bike trials, the body and bike merge; feeling place through tyres, pedals and handlebar grips.

The way in which the interaction, or as I would have it contact, of such things as bike and body transform perception, was famously noted by the pragmatist philosopher William James¹². James, who made some of the keenest observations to do with the way our attitudes are interlinked with both emotion and perception, claimed that we *learn* to see places in particular ways. For him attitudes were crucial and as an ethical imperative should be brought into conscious reflection:

A man's[sic] Empirical Thought depends on the objects and events he has experienced, but what these shall be is to a large extent determined by his habits of attention. An object may be present to him a thousand times, but if he persistently fails to notice it, it cannot be said to enter into his experience. We are all seeing flies, moths, and beetles by the thousand, but to whom, save an entomologist, do they say anything distinct? (James 1879: 11-12).

For those that look, in most European countries and in many parts of the USA bike trials is now visibly present in cities and towns. Simply put, the practice involves riding a bike up, over, down and around whatever landscape features a rider chooses. The traditional form of mountain bike trials descended from motorbike trials and was generally concerned with activities in the woods and formal competitions on 'natural' courses, over large rocks, steep banks, rivers, and so on. However it is now more popular in urban areas, where riders have, through changes in perception, made obstacles of concrete

¹² William James's thought is particularly relevant here, and to orient the reader some relevant background biographical details follow. James, an American thinker who also spent a good deal of time in Europe, has had an enormous impact on the direction of Western philosophical thought, influencing the likes of Edmand Husserl, Bertrand Russell, John Dewey, and Ludwig Wittgenstein (Goodman 2009). James, well known for his contribution to philosophy (particularly a strand of pragmatism), also studied in physiology, psychology and painting (for a summary of his extremely varied career see Goodman 2009). Indeed, while James may be best known for his philosophy, he had little or no formal training in that discipline. His ideas on emotion (discussed in detail later in relation to Parkour) and his well known 'Stream of Thought' thesis, sees our consciousness as a ceaseless relation to things in the world (James 1890). This makes his thought particularly of interest in our discussion and development of 'contact'.

walls, benches and rails to name but a few. This is known as ‘street’ or ‘urban’ riding as opposed to ‘competition’ or ‘natural’ riding. This chapter of the PhD primarily deals with street riding, but most of the observations and questions asked, could be applicable to both.

Trials riders, it seems, *reflexively improvise* their movements. That is, they spend time considering bike design, material choices, and geometry as much as bodily technique and training practices; all are reflected upon, modified and fed into each and every improvisation. Similarly, the improvised play of *capoeiristas* is at times analysed, down to the micro details of nutrition and acrobatic technique. Chapter 6: *Capoeira: learning to trust a chameleon*, wonders at the way in which *capoeira* practice opens possibilities to make such improvisational movement, in conditions of intense contact with other *capoeira* players.

Capoeira is a body practice that includes varying combinations of dance, martial art, music, theatre, strategy and play. In combining tradition with play, and dance with fight, *capoeira* is left with a profound ambiguity which defies all our efforts to place it into already existing genres (Lewis 1995). Like the previous two practices, the *capoeira jôgo* (game) involves learning unfamiliar bodily movement, and then applying them directly with another body. These commingled movements can unfold in many different ways. I wish to use this study as a way to explore the possibilities for a theory of changing contact, as deployed in the previous chapters.

In this chapter I consider the way players of *capoeira* (*capoeiristas*) communicate and connect through movements (which are diverse and range from cooperative acrobatic improvisations, to, in the extreme, outright fighting). Movements are scripted and improvised to different degrees in relation to the moving place in which *capoeiristas* practice. The most important contact a player has is with the person they are playing with: a kick, directed at a player that does not evade, has a high chance of being ‘pulled’ and stopping short, but there is an ever-present possibility of getting hit. This uncertain risk demands a player move in relation to their partner/opponent. Here I consider the becoming and hybrid movements between two bodies playing *capoeira*. Such

movements however are always place dependent as well as place making: the venue, the time of day, and the people in attendance all add to the mix. The music, for example, which is so crucial to the game, sets the rhythm and on occasion specifically calls for certain types of play.

In this chapter, then, it becomes clear that the body, not only in contact, but forming new kinds of contact, on the go, is involved in the engineering of affect and therefore place. Singers, instrumentalists, spectators, and players come together to form and transform the ambience of place, deliberately engineering the potentialities for movement, play and contact. In doing so, *capoeira*, like bike trials and parkour, has the potential to form long lasting connections with places, people, movements and sounds. In short, it holds many possibilities for cultivating trust between players, whom one might initially think have every reason to distrust one another.

Primarily this thesis research has been based around a general sense of wonder experienced when making new kinds of contact. And here I must concede, unlike many PhD theses, I do not have three, four or even five main questions (although this may have been the case when I was writing funding applications), but a wholly innumerable quantity of questions, that do not stop going on. Just as contact with the world remains, neither do the questions desist – they are constantly generated and explored. And I also have to admit, that most all of them remain inarticulable questions, all be it in an expanded, more varied and detailed form.

All three activities suggest, to me, that we might find value in types of knowledge that account for contact. Taken together, the case studies outline the way in which the mobile body is in contact and in a sense inseparable from the places in which they practice. Each activity feeds into a re-assertion of the importance of play in making new kinds of contact with place. I frame this as a methodological point which suggests the importance of an approach which values not only linguistic knowledge, but those embodied ways of knowing that are forged through playfully seeking out new contact - contact that always exceeds our attempts to represent it. As I show, however, while such practices may fall

outside of our descriptive and linguistic grasp, there is a good deal we can do to improve, try, reflect upon, and share them.

Chapter 2 – Finding a playground

Within play practice is the ever-present possibility of a new “we” being evoked from the “you” and “I”. (Donaldson 1993: 32).

What is Play?

In this chapter I begin to consider theories of ‘play’, a theme which runs through subsequent chapters. In doing so I draw on my empirical research and experiences, traditional ‘play theory’, and the more radical notion of ‘original play’ as advocated by O. Fred Donaldson¹³ (1993). For Donaldson, original play is a birthright of all human beings, who enter the world with a sense of wonder and the innate faculties to connect with the ‘others’ they find around them. Donaldson’s theories chime well with non-representational theory, which has similarly grown from dissatisfaction with modes of knowledge production which attempt to find meaning or truth by recording, representing, categorising, and fixing the process of the world. It is a comparable and deep-rooted unease with such institutionally stagnant methodology that prompted Donaldson to leave his position in the academy and begin a personal quest to redress the culture in which his life had become a ‘will to power’ rather than a ‘will to play’ (ibid. 110).

¹³ O. Fred Donaldson, hailing from California, and now resident of Sweden, has published numerous articles relating to the practice of what he calls ‘original play’. Following a career in academia, it appears that Donaldson came to his concept of original play firstly through his long term practice of the Japanese martial art, Aikido. In an article *On Aikido, Wolves and Other Wildlife* published in the edited book, *Aikido and the New Warrior* (1985), Donaldson reveals some of his first experiences of playing with wolves and other wildlife, describing the way that Aikido and its graceful movements and philosophy of flow were a fundamental and indistinguishable part of his play.

Donaldson has travelled widely, describing himself as a ‘play specialist’ (1993: 116) and running practice based workshops for people of all ages and abilities. His work (or rather play), while certainly unconventional, has largely remained apart from academia. His writing is motivated by a belief in the innate goodness of un-cultured play amongst both animals and humans and a deep desire to promote the ‘re-connective’ potential of play. Like emotions, talk in academia of such intimate feelings of connection, have tended to be considered as ‘soft’ and somewhat ‘unspeakable’, and it is only recently that it is being argued that they should not be excluded from academic investigation.

The word ‘play’ can be taken to mean many different things. One can play with puppies, with ideas, data sets, combinations of materials, words and scales. In short, given a certain ‘spirit’, feeling or mindset, almost any activity can be described as a type of play. What all this play has in common is that it is done, and furthermore it is done *with*. Be it another person, a tangible object, a space, or an illusive idea, play, however defined is always with something. It always involves an expansive (re)forming of connections with the world. As one of the champions of play, Johan Huizinga¹⁴ (1970), has it: play goes beyond conventionally understood physiological phenomena. The reason is that to play is to expansively make contact, and *involve* oneself with place.

Even in its simplest form on the animal level, play is more than a mere physiological phenomenon or a psychological reflex. It goes beyond the confines of purely physical or purely biological activity. It is a *significant* function – that is to say, there is some sense to it. In play there is something “at play” which transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning and action. All play means something. (Huizinga 1970: 1, emphasis original).

The human body that is incessantly moving, always means something (Desmond 1997), but more specifically what does play mean? The obvious answer is that it means different things, in different times and places, to different people. The experience of play is certainly very different from the observation of play, and play will be different when it is done with different things or people. How do we talk about such a wide dispersal of subjective positions – such richly various meanings? Perhaps the answer could be to supplant the abstract notion of ‘meaning’ with a new concept ‘affect’ that might be more amenable to presentation, as opposed to representation (Thrift 2004d, Thrift and French 2002). In this way ‘meaning’ can be unfixed and fluid and our talk about fixed identities begins to become meaningless. We can but strive for the notion of what play might be,

¹⁴ Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens* has been used by many writers as something of a benchmark text on play (see Bauman 1993, Kane 2004, Thrift 1997). It is significant that Huizinga, a professor of History, wrote his theories of play (as being the primary constituent of culture) while he was imprisoned by the Nazis from 1942 until his death in 1945.

what we want it to be. It is in a continual state of becoming and always capable of escaping closed systems and outdoing absolute meanings. Here meaning becomes provisional.

Play's unique and slippery capacity for the inventive, imaginative and ever shifting has historically resulted in it being treated with a high degree of suspicion amongst scholars and 'sensible', right-thinking folk alike. In modernity's project it might be excused as a 'developmental tool' (Hartup 1974), imparting an 'evolutionary advantage' in our young children¹⁵, but it has no place in society for anyone else. For many theorists of play it is a moment of waste. It is not productive in economic, social, or material ways. One might begin here, to see play being defined, not in its own terms, but in opposition to work¹⁶, a distinction that, as I argue, does not stand up to scrutiny. In the experience of play, we are told, there is very little that endures, is of use, or purpose.

A characteristic of play, in fact, is that it creates no wealth or goods, thus differing from work or art. At the end of the game all can and must start over again at the same point. Nothing has been harvested or manufactured, no masterpiece has been created, no capital has accrued. Play is an occasion of pure waste: waste of time, energy, ingenuity, skill, and often of money for the purchase of gambling equipment or eventually to pay for establishment. (Caillois 1961: 6).

Such an assertion is based on a very narrowly construed notion of wealth and capital. The distinction between, and oft-assumed opposition of 'play' to 'work', can be undermined and broken down with relative ease. For those that make a living 'playing' football, or for the computer programmers who might say "I have been playing around with a section of code this morning", or for many others who 'produce' playfully, this distinction clearly does not stand. The category 'work' has never quite completely and irrevocably expelled 'play'. Neither, I wish to argue, has the 'adult', been totally separated from the

¹⁵ Play teaching the idea and principles of 'competition', and the social and the physiological motor skills that allows the child to better integrate into competition based society. This kind of play is a way for children to 'practice' adult roles (cf. Barnett 1990, Isenberg and Quisenberry 1988).

¹⁶ Interestingly, Karl Marx has relatively little to say about 'play' itself (see Small 2005, particularly chapter 6)

playfulness of childhood. Here we can make a distinction between what we typically call play from the more fundamental practice that is playful (whether or not traditionally termed ‘play’). This thesis is more concerned with the playful, than any rigidly constituted notion of ‘play’.

Parkour, bike trials and capoeira can, and have, all been described as forms of play. Yet all three involve a systematic investment of time and energy, which by some schemas of thought could be considered ‘wasted’. I want to argue that this is not so. Indeed, in most cases the energy put into these activities is redoubled as the process of play *with* other people and spaces occurs and is *experienced*. In playful practice the body gains and creates knowledge which exceeds the bounds of traditional representation and categorization. Through play one can and does gain; moments and physical forms are opened out to accrued possibilities. In other words, play has the ability to seriously and enduringly affect the body and the body’s contact with the world. As the chapters that follow demonstrate, in contrast to Huizinga’s theory of play, I argue that play’s impact on the body and its relationality with the world *is* very often cumulative. Not in the sense that it ‘adds up’ or makes cohesive sense, but in that play can build upon its own stories: its intensities are often enduring and shape worlds.

Play is presented to us as an “*interlude* in our daily lives” (Huizinga 1970: 25), as a dissociated frivolity. Similarly in geography literature, it is often segmented off into activities such as tourism that are not ‘everyday’. Despite having vast economic repercussions, play - and certainly play that is not competitive - is routinely treated with cynicism and some degree of fear.

As a regularly recurring relaxation however it becomes the accompaniment, the complement, in fact an integral part of everyday life in general. It adorns life, amplifies it, and is to that extent necessary both for the individual – as a life function – and for society by reason of the meaning it contains, its significance, its expressive value, its spatial and social association, in short as a cultural function. (Huizinga 1970: 27).

Such a view may well have been heartily accepted by academics and educators in regard to children (there is, for example, a large literature that ascribes utility value to play as an activity necessary for correct childhood development (Fein 1981, Piaget 1999 originally 1951, Singer and Singer 1990). And yet play amongst older people (not children) is still treated as purposeless, regressive or worse. Why then, is play “regarded as peripheral to the real business of life, at best adorning a little oil to the wheels of social structure, at worst a trivial distraction” (Thrift 1997: 145)? Possibly because, as Thrift suggests in his essay, play - that is freeform play that has not been co-opted to serve the needs of capital - has the potential to completely undermine the logic of representational, hierarchical, competitive, ‘adult’ life. And yet, this element of play has been all but neglected, not just in geography, but in academic literature in general¹⁷.

Even Huizinga, whose famous work *Homo Ludens* was perhaps the first to convincingly argue the significance of play, focuses his attention almost exclusively towards what he sees as ‘higher’ cultural forms of play. Yet it is clear play does not *require* culture, “animals have not waited for man [sic] to teach their playing.” (Huizinga 1970: 19). And of course, neither does the child need any tutorage to play with the environments they find themselves in. Despite this, competitive rule based play (or sport), which comprises the bulk of what we might call cultural play, has all but dominated the attention of theorists, writers, analysts, and pundits alike. It is easy to see why: rarely do adults play outside of structuring institutions, in an ‘uncultured’ way. For Huizinga and many others, a more ‘primitive’ play – that is play that is poorly defined by rules, language and convention - evades and resists all forms of logical analysis, and has therefore been left a closed box.

...in interpreting primitive play we immediately come up against that irreducible quality of pure playfulness which is not, in my opinion, amenable to further analysis. [Instead] we shall have to speak of contest and races, of performance and exhibitions,

¹⁷ So much so that O. Fred Donaldson, for example, felt it necessary to quit his academic institution to pursue this research. Since then however, non-representational theory and other movements in academic thought have opened up possibilities for engaging such taken for granted activities.

of dancing and music, pageants, masquerades, and tournaments. (Huizinga 1970: 25-26).

In fact, such a distinction is based upon a falsely construed dichotomy between the perfectly ‘primitive’ or ‘natural’ body (something I argue cannot exist) and a ‘civilized’ or ‘cultural’ one. As with so much academic knowledge, here ‘interpreting’ and exploring, has required that the *process* under investigation be amenable to, or frozen solid by, representations (Harrison 2000). It may well be difficult to talk about the ‘fun’ of playing or the ‘creative’ in playing, as they slip away in each moment we try and say of it, it is this thing or that thing – too soon it has become something else. “As a concept, it cannot be reduced to any other mental category” (Huizinga 1970: 21). Here though, and in the spirit of non-representational theory, the goal is certainly not reduction, nor categorisation. Rather it is to ask: can I, and what happens if I do, explode the ‘concept’ or ‘category’ and set forth more possibilities for play?

As such, in this section the reader will not be able to find a definitive version of what play ‘is’, or for that matter what play is ‘not’. Rather, I will attempt to develop the manifesto for play, as advanced by Donaldson (1993), which admits that play cannot be shown, taught, or given – rather it is an unfolding of multiple possibilities which have the *potential* to “transform commonplace into heart-warming spaces.” (ibid: 139). It has no clear boundaries, often being a question in itself, play allows “a process of performative *experiment*” (Thrift 1997: 145).

What I explore throughout is the way play involves contact and, in many forms, a de-centring of the human subject. In the process, play makes clear that our complex and evolving networks are not zero-sum. In competitive sport ‘the game’ encourages us to assume the opposite. Sports have fairly rigid rules, which may on occasion be transgressed and change over time but still to a great extent govern the activity of participants. If sports have their own rules, their own delineated spaces (a pitch, court, pool, ring...) and times, it does not fit together easily with the notion of gratuitous freedom (cf. Bauman 1993). Many commentators on play, including those that consider

mostly ‘cultural play’ and sport, assert that it must be a ‘free’ activity (cf. Caillois 1961, Huizinga 1970, Thrift 1997).

As an obligation or simply an order, it would lose one of its basic characteristics: the fact that the player devotes himself [sic] spontaneously to the game, of his free will and for his pleasure, each time completely free to choose retreat, silence, meditation, idle solitude, or creative activity. (Caillois 1961: 6).

But play as both an expression of freedom and a purposeful activity can have its own discipline. If we affirm play as an activity that *must be with* places, animals, things or people (in other words playmates) then where does this leave our freedom? A ‘pure’ freedom cannot exist while we are acting in contact with the world. Moments of encounter always possess the capacity to exceed (Dewsbury 2000, Dewsbury, et al. 2002). Playmates inevitably constrain as well as create possibilities. In contrast, Huizinga claims that “play can be deferred or suspended at any time. It is never imposed physical or moral duty.” (1970: 26). Asserting the completeness of freedom as Huizinga does, denies the possibility for intimate contact and valorises the passer; the tourist that plays from on high, remaining apart and emotionally disentangled. To become engaged in play is to accept that, at least in part, you will become a decentred subject and therefore not ‘free’ to choose all the conditions of play. Contemporary tourism, a perversion of play for Bauman, tries to unhitch the body from this contact with the world, with ethically significant consequences.

Tourism is no longer something one practices when on holiday... Ideally one should be a tourist everywhere and everyday. In, but not of. Physically close, spiritually remote. Aloof. Free – the exemption from all non-contractual duties having been paid for in advance. Ideally, with the moral conscience having been fed a sure-fire dose of sleeping pills. (Bauman 1993: 242-3)

I deal with the issue of ‘free’ play more in the following chapters, for now what is important is the way in which play is free only in the sense that it has the capacity to

perceive and act beyond socially constructed and accepted norms of behaviour. Such play, as a practice, does not rule out anything, but searches for wonder in embodied engagement. Rather than 'free', we might talk of how play is 'enabling' of both imagination and possibility, as it brings us into fresh contact with the world.

Play as subversive habit?

The 'routine' way we experience day to day existence and form more or less solidified patterns of movements and relations with the world has been critiqued by an array of scholars, from numerous methodological angles. Social conventions and habits of movement and bodily comportment are held up as a distinctly harmful obstacle to positive change (cf. Butler 1990, Harrison 2000, Johnston 1998, Rose 1995, Young 1990).

Conventions make life comfortable: they safeguard life lived in the pursuit of self-interest. It only seems, on the surface that following conventional courtesy is the instrument of togetherness. In fact, separation is the effect. We use conventions as a means for keeping aloof from one another and for insulating ourselves. (Bauman 1993: 78)

For Bauman, it is our taken for granted, routinised relations with each other that detract from something more primordial: the 'unspoken demand'¹⁸ that the Other makes of us to care and 'be for'. Like play, for him, this demand operates outside the function of social conventions. In this way it does not allow one to know with certainty if they are right or wrong. It forces a consideration, and ethical evaluation absent from routinised behaviour. "‘Everyone does it’, ‘This is how things are done’ is the preventative, and effective, medicine for guilty conscience." (ibid: 79). Instead of social norms, he argues, any foundation for the practice of ethics must be more elusive and non-codifiable.

¹⁸ Here he draws on Kund E. Logstrup's (1971) work, *The Ethical Demand*.

Traditional 'ethical systems' it would seem, are deeply problematic, because they are not animated by life, but frozen solid by habitual representational based knowledges (McCormack 2003). For Donaldson, this characterises the way that play has been 'corrupted' by rule based systems. "When 'ethics' arrived, we played fairly- to win at any cost. When kindness dissolved, we played for keeps." (Donaldson 1993: 93).

Activity, movements and ways of thinking, like play, that allow or even valorise, experimentation and uncertainty are an about-turn on traditional value judgments of 'wrong' or 'right' behaviour. As such, there are difficult questions to be confronted. Bauman's commitment to an 'un-spoken demand' does not sit easy with our traditional means of communicating what we want to happen, and what we feel about the way things have gone and are going. How do we make space for 'enabled' thought and doings unfamiliar to us, whilst also coping with the dangers, necessities, and desires of everyday life? In general we make a huge number of implicit assumptions and judgments based on un-thought activity, which are entirely necessary to function as we do. The door is opened before we step through, familiar friends are acknowledged with a particular gesture, to consume food our hands wield utensils 'the way they are always wielded'. Where is the place of play here?

"Do not play with your food!" Survival, one might surmise, is much too serious an activity to play about with. In asserting play, one can be immediately accused of being a malcontent, of being unhappy with the way things are. After all what is wrong with letting habit, our embodied, comfortable, implicit (and often assumed to be 'expert') knowledge do what it does best? Play is possibly unique in its desire for change for change's sake. There does not need to be dissatisfaction with the current situation for the workings of imagination. Yet play is often seen as a behaviour which is deliberately and contemplatively subversive; 'a preformative critique' or 'challenging' for example (cf. Borden 2001, Briginshaw 2001).

"This is not a playground area!"

"This is a cricket pitch, for cricket, not [...words fail] whatever it is you're doing."

“Get Down from there!”

(Three of many reprimands recorded in parkour and bike trials diary extracts. All in Aberystwyth area).

While all these events may have been construed as being in some small way ‘subversive’, they were certainly not done with a subversive intent. Envisaging possibilities, can excite and incite, without any particular gripe. Breaking with the comfort of conventionality can in fact become an effortless habit in itself.

‘Common sense’, it seems, while arguably a necessity for survival, is a jealous knowledge. Transgressions, or experiments in thinking and doing otherwise, as new and evolving embodied movements can show, are not always welcome (cf. Cresswell 2006). Being playful with ‘everyday’, taken for granted, spaces and objects forces a re-conceptualisation, it undermines essentialist positions, proving the pluralism and diversity with which people can engage the world. It reminds us of the *doubt*, which may be experienced as debilitating, but as non-representational theorists (cf. Harrison 2000, 2008) and pragmatists (cf. Diggins 1995, Jones 2008) alike have shown, can invigorate and energise. Doubt asserts that our engagements with the world are not firmly closed and finished, but that we remain receptive to other ways of inhabiting spaces, other modes of mobility, and other ideas and political and ethical positions.

It is reasonable to suggest, that doubt about ones own capabilities and potentiality, can at times be ‘found’ through the imaginings of other ways to be. “Could I do that?”, “Would it be possible to balance on this?”, “What will happen if I do...?” are all calls to doubt, that are not necessarily malcontent, but hold a playful curiosity toward time-spaces that necessitates a continuous re-assessment. While peppered with doubt, play is not ‘free’ in the Huizingarian sense (and therefore is, for him not play at all). This research argues that it is through this process of re-assessment that we find the ability to sense place as a playground.

To find a playground, for Donaldson, one must forget the conventional, and the categories and labels which can mask all other ways to perceive the world. It is also quite a personal affair, in which being open and vulnerable to the idiosyncrasies of place can equally bring forth the specificities of ones own embodiment.

Each playground has qualities found only by being there... I cannot tell you where this will be, you will know when you open up to the possibilities of such places... Playgrounds enchant, teach and astound; follow humbly or you shall learn nothing. Finding a playground is a mutual choosing; it chooses you as you choose it. (Donaldson 1993: 127).

From an individual's perspective this kind of play could, at a push, be considered a form of 'reality-testing' (cf. Winnicott 1971: 131). But the search for a playground, as Donaldson describes it, is less coherently centred and less scientific. Rather it is a move that makes evident the fuzziness which can be too easily forgotten when we use the designator 'I': *It chooses you* as you choose it. Reality-changing or making, then, might be more accurate a phrase than Winnicott's 'reality-testing'.

Donaldson's 'original play' is a departure from social norms and conventions; it is a way of exploring, but also unfolding, the relationship and contact with the other. For him original play seeks escape from culture (however impossible a task), which tends towards apperception rather than perception. For the participant of original play, each interaction should be unfettered by inter-subjective convention. For Donaldson, play is truly 'play', when one is empty of pre-conceptions and approaches situations as a beginner (1993).

How does this fit with activities that can evidently become a fundamental part of people's identity and everyday existence? For some kinds of play, it might seem reasonable to say that it is somehow a separate reality, cordoned off by rules and conventions. But the assumption that we have the ability to dip in and out of the game at will, to restart without consequence (see Bauman 1993, Huizinga 1970), and forget completely any previous game, is to underestimate the enduring affectivity play has on the body.

If reality is oozy, ubiquitous, straggly, splattered all over the place – play is securely protected behind its temporal and spatial walls. Play has its beginning and end, both well marked – with a bell, a whistle, a starter shot, a finish line, the rise and fall of the curtain. It does not begin before it begins and it does not go on after it has ended. (Bauman 1993: 170-1).

And yet Parkour, for example, is not something you do in the morning and put away in the afternoon, it is a move toward an affective state that captures the body and seeks to perceive the world in a different and ever changing way. Here play is not forgotten, or left behind after practice or with the coming of age. Rather it develops, as the practitioner finds new playgrounds, and their body begins to encompass a kinaesthetic sense for listening to places. In parkour, as with many other activities, play is not, cannot, be constricted by time intervals and boundary lines. In parkour, in particular, play is seeking always to move the lines, the play itself could, in fact, be with the lines. Here play is a reality. It is not separable, or existent in an isolated present. It *does* build up and upon the time that becomes spatialised - manifest in the cells of the body, the synapses of the muscles, the blocks of a wall, and the relative positions of things.

The process of play is thus a fully embodied engagement with the world. Even the play of our make-believe or imaginations is grounded in experiential time-space. In such play the tried and tested ‘rules’ that constitute ‘reality’, can be bent and broken, but the elements – the space and time – that constitute that reality still shape the experience. Similarly cultural ‘rules’ endure, even if only through the excitement elected by their absence. As I explore in chapter 5, riders often dream they can do impossible feats on a bike, but all these dreams are dreams made in relation to their intense experiences of contact with the world.

It is clear that imaginary make-believe play - that is sometimes characterised as being a completely free unbound reality unto itself (cf. Dovey and Kennedy 2006) - is in fact, a form of embodiment that cannot be fully abstracted from our ‘witness’ to the physical

world. As theorized here, play involves a contact that tends towards experimentation and discovery. It incessantly asks of reality, “what are you and how can we play together?” In the case of parkour, bike trials and capoeira, each has a historical trajectory that puts a specific spin on these questions but each does not stop. Each of the activities is a committed quest to find new ways to pose and enact the questions.

Playing with discipline

By the time we reach five or so, what was once universally appreciated as our way of being and doing is reserved for recess at school and leftover time at home. Very early in life children learn two things: first, to separate play and work, and secondly that work comes before play. (Donaldson 1993: 53)¹⁹.

Nothing I do is expressive, and it feels like I am shackled with a device that has been designed to sense the enjoyment in movement and respond by sending a shock to the unfortunate wearer. My feet cry in protest with every pivot, squat, or spin. An unbearable strain from a small patch of failed skin. Despite continuing with the play, all my movements are curtailed. What keeps me going on? (*Capoeira diary 7/7/07*).

Reflecting on those moments when it seemed pain should have called a stop and prevented me going on with the activity (and therefore forgoing further physical damage to myself), it was the non-singularity of the moment that carried me forward. The pain, while immediate and intensely present, was not enough to jettison those times and places that inhabit the body, letting it know that this particular pain will be something else: enabling. The past and future times, persistently folding into the living form, have the capacity to make playful even pain. In this instance the screaming from the ball of my foot could not drive out the feeling that what I was doing was worth something, because it was going to be 'fun'. Not only that, but voluntarily enduring the pain would somehow make it more fun²⁰. The expectation was that it would make me more proficient, and better able to play with the others.

At first, any claim that suggests that play can include elements of pain and effort may appear to be counterintuitive (Dovey and Kennedy 2006; Lindquist 2001), and quite a different thing to Donaldson's original play which asks us to be open, in the moment, not

¹⁹ Like Donaldson, I believe that this is the case in the majority of Western schools, but is worth pointing out that there are alternative educational systems, like Steiner schools, that put more value on play.

²⁰ See chapter 4 for more on the way future times inhabit the moment.

clouded by the past or held captive by the ‘cultural’. And yet play does present us with possibilities and futures in which we invest energy. Dissolved in every moment of playful action, however liberated, is our corporeal knowledge of time. We feel the way things are going (Dreyfus 2005), and in doing so we have a kinaesthetic sense of the future. As one feels more, and as certain pains become more familiar – for example regular stretching sessions in capoeira – the unpleasantness of them can change quite drastically. Perhaps one might say they cease being pain at all, but become a managed sensation; part of an embodied strategy (Spinney 2006) in which the emotionality of pain moves in line with the body’s knowledge and engagement in play. Play is thus a learning in which (contra to Huizinga and others) spontaneous desire does not reign supreme. Like almost all activities, play is a journey in which we are continually sensing, evaluating²¹ and re-defining both our destinations and origins.

When I began playing, I felt like a cube trying to become a sphere. I kept bumping my elbows, knees, shoulders and head. My corners were in need of rounding off. I couldn’t roll or fall; I clunked and banged. I got up slowly and went home sore each day. (Donaldson 1993: 51).

It has been said that without discipline and persistent practice in parkour, what you have left is ‘reckless jumping around’²². Similarly, to participate in both capoeira and bike trials in all but the most superficial way requires that the body undergoes some modification. A willingness to train comes dangerously close to the idea of ‘working’ towards some desired embodied potentiality. Play has a very real sensibility and logic of its own – it is not necessarily fearless in a ‘reckless jumping around’ sense. Indeed, it is only by ignoring the regularly denied cumulative element of play that one could think otherwise. Rather play can, and does, become a quest, such that it forces a reconsideration of its stereotypically ‘presentist’ or ‘moment-based’ conception.

²¹ All be it in a non-cognitive way.

²² See, ESPN (2007): *E:60 Parkour Documentary* Accessed: 23/8/08 available from: <http://espn.go.com/video/clip?id=3097213&categoryid=null>

That is not to say that play does not take place in the moment in quite an intense way, instead, and in a quite non-linear way, past and future occupy, and cannot be excluded from that ‘now-moment’. For practitioners of parkour, capoeira and bike trials, new situations provide a way to develop the body’s capacity to play more. While repetition of movements (drilling) can be considered through a distinctly anti-playful lens, the flip side is that not only is each ‘repetition’ slightly different, but each opens out a small (sometimes imperceptibly small) field of new possibility. Taken cumulatively, not only can such ‘training’ become play in and of itself, but it can also create the conditions for making new playful connections with people and places.

I really enjoyed the *roda* today. It has taken a while but I was starting to be able to do some more moves, so I felt I could play a bit with some of the people who have been doing it for a while – it’s just getting that confidence. That was really fun, because they can do things that then mean you can do even more moves. (Jane, in conversation, recorded in *capoeira* diary 12/6/08).

It is about doing everything you can to prepare for a movement, not training until you get it right, but training again and again until it is almost impossible to fail the move. So being a traceur is not about what you can do already, it’s about how determined you are to get there, to add to your parkour. (Josh, in *The Pilgrimage Project*’ Documentary (Germain 2008)).

The activities considered here require a large personal investment, in terms of time, energy and perhaps even emotionality, to achieve sufficient competency to allow for freeform play. Discipline is a way the body learns to cope with the tremendous variety of situations thrown up in play practice. Being an activity that is always ‘with’, each play situation presents many different questions. What will that feel like? How will *x* react when I do this or that? Of course, in many instances these questions and their answers, felt intuitively, are never given linguistic form. This embodied intuition is supported by our ability to exist in the more-than-now moment, so that play can merge with the discipline to which it seems so antithetical.

Discipline gives some kind of order to play. But this is an order that “never hangs over the heads of the players as the laws of society or nature do, but one which is born anew, together with the players’ willingness to obey it” (Bauman 1993: 172). How is it then that pain is a familiar friend (or foe) to the individual seeking to develop skills and bodily capacities in these kinds of activities? My assertion is that it is possible to play with pain and fear - both are able to cast startlingly vibrant colour on the familiar. As one parkour practitioner put it to me, “If it is the few seconds of victory you want, winning a race that sort of thing, then there is not much point in doing this stuff. But if you like practicing and trying new things and working things out, falling off a lot [jokingly laughs], then it ticks all the boxes.” (Gavin, parkour diary 7/1/2006).

Such hardship and ‘order’ is entered into freely and empowers the individual, allowing them to connect in ways that have the potential to re-invigorate their environment. After skills and capacities have developed – when we decide to rest upon our laurels – this element of experience can wither to nothing. Of all three activities researched, none stop, none cease pushing, refining, twisting in new directions, grasping at inspiration from elsewhere, pulling in fortunate mistakes, consciously re-inventing. There is no developed, only developing - “playmate training is a lifelong endeavour” (Donaldson 1993: 218).

Beyond Scripted Play

Discipline makes possible a type of play that can be progressive, and that can be slowly and intimately worked upon. In our absorption and dedication to this or that play we are incrementally improving our mastery at moving in space and manipulating the materiality of the world (Sennett 2008). Discipline of play enables a creativeness that can overwhelm our best efforts to predict it. Play is difficult to command and control, not because it is deliberately subversive, but because it is not made from fixed means-ends

relationships (Huizinga 1970, see also Thrift 1997). The discipline that underpins and becomes so much play is not therefore prescriptive, though it can be suggestive. What makes it different to the discipline that one *receives* from institutional powers, is that it comes from intimacy with the world and a practical dedication to some activity. The discipline of the school master's rod or verbal lashing is a world away from the driving urge that can encourage one to undergo hardship in order to experience new sensuous encounters with things. Ironically, play, an undervalued form of knowledge creation, has the potential for real and enduring discipline, that is far more attentive and focused toward the other than any form of order that is steeped with oppression.

Questing is education at its most intensive – at the depth where the self dissolves – and expansive – at the width where the self merges with the world. Within such octaves of meaning, the real interests of the universe are met, and not superficial, narrow interests of a self and society. There is an urgent need to develop such a belonging consciousness – an awareness of our connection with and participation in the larger world. (Donaldson 1993: 117-18).

It is precisely our participation *with* the world that is at stake when we dismiss play as purposeless and childish. Writing critically of large planned public spaces Richard Sennett, in his 1977 book *The fall of public man*, discussed the death of public space. For Sennett, public space has become a 'traffic-flow-support-nexus', rather than a space to be savoured, enjoyed or played in. These spaces, we are told, are now to be moved through – utilitarian areas that allow the citizen to go from one indoor space to another²³. In short these spaces, for Sennett, do not fulfil the needs of the modern day *flâneur*. As Bauman notes, not all places are equally suited to the activity of the *flâneur*.

Not all streets are [...] the proper grazing ground for the *flâneur's* imagination. First, the pavements must be physically wide enough so that 'hanging around', 'stopping once in a while to look around', be physically possible. Second, there must be enough interest in the street and houses that flank it to allure those who have the time and urge to hang around. (Bauman 1993: 175)

²³ We might draw parallels here with, Augé (1995).

Robbed of the conditions for fine *flâneuring* pastures we are left with meticulously ‘managed playgrounds’. Places planned with singularly ruthless attention to the movement of people for the purposes of profit. These spaces are managed or engineered with an understanding of the affective potential of things. Signposts, flooring materials, lighting, smells, surveillance, and seating – those things that the living body responds to, that do work on our states of fatigue, anxiety, hunger, restlessness, etc. are carefully arranged for the unseen owners of ‘public space’. “Definitely, the street is no longer the *flâneur’s* hunting ground.” (Bauman 1993: 177). And yet the same is true of the indoor spaces specifically connected by these new public highways (cf. Adey 2008).

These indoor spaces, rather than fulfilling the criteria set out above - ‘good to hang around’, ‘correct width’, considered and interesting views, and so on - become, Bauman argues, places in which it remains difficult to retain any sort of multiplicity²⁴. Shopping, and little else is the order of the day.

In fact, the new in-walls haunts are the places of the *flâneur’s* ultimate defeat. The most cherished of *flâneurisme* seductions – the right to write the script and to direct the play of surfaces – has been expropriated by the designers and the managers and the profit-makers of the shopping malls. The scripts are now ready-made, and expert-made, discrete yet precise, and leaving little to the imagination and less still to the spectator’s freedom. (Bauman 1993: 177).

The sanitization of space to allow properly regulated movement, or the regulation of the body by space has other, unexpected effects. Parkour, for example draws off a narrative of freedom, which could in part, be considered to have grown from those padded, risk averse spaces, and from a suspicion of ‘accident equals blame’ mentality. How ‘they’ want you to move is unimportant, finding *your own* way is crucial – risk assessment becomes personal. This has not escaped the notice of corporate media producers, advertisers and other companies that sell ‘play’. Mirror’s Edge, for example - a computer game in which parkour features heavily - invites you to play out the story of a

²⁴ This is an idea that is now quite well contested. See, for example, Cresswell (2006), Merriman (2007).

courier/freerunner, who subverts the evils of a restrictive totalitarian regime (a caricature of the current and real pressures to conform felt by individuals).

Once this city used to pulse with energy; dirty and dangerous but alive and wonderful. Now it is something else. The changes came slowly at first. Most did not realise or did not care, and accepted them. They chose a comfortable life. Some didn't... They became our clients. (Mirror's Edge website 2008).

In this dystopian vision of the sterile city (the 'mirror'), play has been rendered lifeless and illegal. Yet the game is also a portrayal of play itself: it is at the 'edge', 'dirty', 'dangerous' – in other words the 'wonderful' gritty stuff of life itself. To experience this aliveness, is to reject the discipline of the state, and to impose one's own discipline – to reject the easy or 'comfortable' path.

Thus, with a good measure of contradiction we are now regularly sold 'games' with a ready-made map for this freedom. We are invited to play along at playing. To take up someone else's playful discipline from the sedentary and secure comfort of our homes. What Bauman calls 'second-level play', is the most ironic promise of play, stripped of its capacity for particular types of sensuous encounter. In such simulations we are given something quite different. While we explore and possibly enjoy the game world, testing to see what types of virtual movement the games designers now reward, in an obvious way we are, none the less, restricted to playing out someone else's script. The producers and designers take us on their journey, and we play along: 'direction is constant and ubiquitous, though carefully disguised as (managed) spontaneity' (Bauman 1993: 177). And yet, just like the carefully crafted shopping malls, our play is not completely determined. In making contact we are involved in such a way that our imagination can still re-script, and other times and places can also lend a hand in the process.

One of the things we do when we play computer games is work out the rule set, "but in a wider sense we are also figuring out what the game engine²⁵ does, what it wants us to do, how far we can 'get away' with testing the limits of the game code." (Dovey and

²⁵ 'Game engine' simply refers to the core programme or code that is used to run the game.

Kennedy 2006: 41). Probing the edges of this ultimate authority may be entertaining for some time, but its clear cut unfuzziness, betrays its all too impersonal fixity – there are only a limited number of ways to approach objects in the game world. Coins may be used to trade, but rarely can they be juggled with, stacked into a funny shaped tower, thrown about, or jangled round - in many games they remain a non-object – a crucial but dull numeric code displayed in the corner of the screen. This kind of ‘second-level’ play, it seems to me, is more open to the managing and controlling tendencies (cf. Thrift 2004a) of corporate authority and does not fit so well with the liberal promise of play’²⁶.

Play eludes power, rather than confronts it and for two reasons. First, because, as a world of virtual forms, it cannot be commanded in the way that is true of work, since it is not made up of means-ends relationships. Second, because, as a world of virtual forms, it can be described by words but ultimately it cannot be written or spoken. (Thrift 1997: 149)

When embodied discipline is evacuated from play, we may be given a new and imaginative set of possibilities, but all are limiting in their form. It remains a tremendous technical challenge, and something of an ongoing race to develop more sensuously interactive computer games (and interfaces), that better represent and assume our physical and playful encounters. So called ‘massively multiplayer online role-playing games’ (MMORPG) are admittedly a step towards this, in which the unpredictability and idiosyncrasies of human controlled players can be interacted with.

Still there is at least some truth in the adage ‘the media is the message’, and while this play wrestles with technological methods to closer approximate (and in some instances entangle with²⁷) reality, it is worth considering what is excluded from such ‘play’. Thus far, computer games have been hugely successful at enchanting players across the world, and in instances they throw open a whole new politics. And yet, aside from the negative health implications, these games remain more narrowly connected to the sensuous world

²⁶ See Patricia Masters’ (2008) critique of the scholar’s ‘romantic play’ which, she argues, conveniently forgets the cruelty, power relations and danger of play.

²⁷ For example, it is common for online games to link/lock into capitalist systems by having an exchange rate between National currency (real money) and in game currency.

than most. While writers like Bauman might begrudge the lack of participation that new kinds of playground afford us, it is clear that they are captivating for those that apply themselves fully and ‘live out the script’ of *their* imagined characters (even if it is directed from behind the scenes). In this instance then, they can multiply possibilities. Steven Poole puts it thus:

And children have always made up their own ‘explorations games’, playing, for instance, in a deserted house and imbuing it with magical qualities. Now technological prosthesis afforded by video games such as Tomb Raider or Zelda 64 allow such activity to be far more complex and cognitively challenging, so that the game really can, in Walter Benjamin’s phrase, ‘calmly and adventurously go travelling’. (Poole 2000: 176)

We might argue over the ability of a scripted game to enhance complexity and adventure to the extent that Poole claims, but these virtual forms are indisputably created and formed with imagination, and retain that creative power. Whether for the individual they become all consuming games that rule all others (thus forgoing the chance for imaginative encounters elsewhere) or simply another exciting chance to experience that which is unlikely, seems next to impossible to determine and remains a hugely important question, packed with value judgments.

Play, as conceived here, evokes discipline effortlessly because of our desire to involve ourselves with the world and to play a part within it. As Sennett (2008) argues, our play operates in such a way that we can and do *build* relationships with things as well as modifying the things themselves. Just as the bike trials practitioner can develop attachment to the materiality of a well made bike component - one which allows them to ask new questions about space sensed through the bike - so do they move forward embodying the play that had gone before. Their arranging and rearranging of bike configuration, is done as a play that seizes knowledge from engineering, geometry and physics to practical embodied feelings and spatiotemporal competencies. Each incarnation of the modified bike is as much an excited play as the practice of the riders

themselves. Both have no solid end in sight but a commotion of hopes, possibilities and questions that might be raised.

The reality of Wonderland, and the disciplined chaos of play are impossible to penetrate with logical reasoning. These are processes designed to stop thinking. They must be grasped with in terms of another awareness. The most important step in this process is being open to the possibility. Not a given possibility, but any possibility. (Donaldson 1993: 120).

The possibility of play is not ‘given’ but is enacted through contact with the world. It is our so routinely devalued vulnerability that makes this possible. When we *do* vulnerability we valorise the here-and-now realness of that which surrounds us. In the process our play can begin to find new rules. When the entities around us get the first say our perceptions of them can be negotiated and changed. In the pursuit of ‘any possibility’ and the vulnerability it entails, that can draw out the unusual in the everyday – the extraordinary from the ordinary. “It is the individual’s perception *with*, and acceptance of, the uncertainties of existence that moves the ordinary toward the ‘extra’” (Teal 2008: 15, emphasis added).

In an ‘everyday’ and fully socialized world, uncertainties can become harder to find. Spaces become prescriptive through our certain and confident recognition of them. ‘This is a main street’, ‘this is a football field’, ‘a cafeteria’, ‘a car park’; all invoke recognizable use patterns and modes of perception and tend to restrict possibility. For some, play and an emotional attraction to the extraordinary, lead inevitably to a disciplined practice of responding to the ‘any possibility’. In parkour, for example, practitioners make ‘training’ devices from all kinds of everyday objects, in order to develop possibilities.

Discipline is all the time: the way you eat, the way you talk, the way you breathe, the way you stand, the way you think etc...discipline is not so much about imposing something than focusing on what you do and try to give what you do some efficiency and style. So there's no, ‘I focus now because I'm training’. Training is

all the time and never ends, especially regarding the little details of life. If we take a seat, we try to be as silent and light as possible. If we open a door, same... We want to break the daily routine by being aware. That's discipline. (Erwan Le Corre 2004)²⁸.

Play is not in opposition to discipline and order, rather “play emerges out of the harmony of spontaneity *and* discipline.” (Donaldson 1993: 112, emphasis mine). As one commits to play, freedom becomes a continual paradox: “a commitment does not get a grip of me if I am always free to revoke it.” (Dreyfus 2001: 85) Yet a commitment to certain body practices and open attitudes towards space (disciplined vulnerability) can give the individual renewed sensitivity, and bring back the astonishment one might feel upon experiencing certain spaces. This is not a harking toward romantic notions of being authentic; rather it is asserting that possibilities are *given* by the world to the individual through a continued and practiced openness. In such a way the seemingly dull and insignificant things or relations ‘light up’ when we apply our attention and embodied vulnerability to them (Teal 2008).

We might argue over much of Huizinga’s definition and theorisation of play but his ultimate conclusion rings true: that play is a crucial footing upon which civilized society is built, and that in contemporary times (for him the 1940s) these have been eroded by the shift from organic games that are played in communities, towards closed and closely controlled ‘professional’ sports. Not only is this shift notable for the reasons I have outlined above (that such ‘play’ is very much rule bound, tightly goal orientated and scripted), but Huizinga’s assertion has merit in that professional sport is the domain of winners and losers, who take their morality from the game rules, rather than the contact developed in play.

²⁸ Washington Parkour Forum post accessed from <http://www.washingtonparkour.com/Parkour/parcours/habrey1.htm>.

The winner takes all

We decry violence on the one hand, and promote contests that perpetuate it on the other. (Donaldson 1993 :105).

He is just so serious about how he plays, and certainly has a scary glint in his eye. I guess the intimidation can all be considered part of the capoeira game, but he does seem to carry a lot of the unspoken threat through into the actual movements. One bout he was in descended into something approaching out and out fighting – all poise was lost, and Edy stepped in to peel the pair apart - their play turned into close quarters grappling. My sense is that most people, particularly the girls (or at least they are more open about it), try to avoid playing him if they can. (Capoeira diary 23/8/07).

This game, which, while not entirely exceptional, was thankfully one of the only ones I witnessed turning sour. Perceptible during this experience, was the way that each movement tried to dominate and win over the other, each fed into the vigour and violence of the game. The competition, the desire to ‘win’ and the emotions that go with such an interaction became all consuming. As with parkour and bike trials, *capoeira* can be understood, framed and even practiced as a competition. Indeed it might seem unintuitive to think of capoeira as anything other than a competition. And yet my work here is something of a treatise for understanding them as forms of play that accord little or no value to the competitive.

Competition, regardless of the form it takes, is for Huizinga, always play. In the board room, the football pitch or the school quiz, participants are playing with purpose. Similarly, in his influential book *Man, Play and Games*, Roger Caillois (1961) outlines a type of play that wholly relies on the desire of individuals to win. Here playing games is a way of providing a structure that is supposedly absent in ‘everyday’ life. This structure makes participants into contestants while also levelling the playing field with ‘fair’ rules. The outcome of such games should be based on merit and chance, but the virtuous player will swing towards the former, by their desire to win and therefore the practice and effort

they exert. With good rules and proper regulation, Caillois asserts, play, just like the free-market dream, becomes a perfect meritocracy where the best, the deserving, and the ‘self-made’ will take the spoils. This, it might be argued, is as it should be – the fastest, bravest, the most intelligent win the game, progress to the next level, take humanity forward. The losers, whom the ‘winner’ both creates and depends upon, are demoted, put down, and ridiculed accordingly.

For Caillois (1961), competition instils virtue, promotes discipline, loyalty, teamwork and mastery. Essentially it is the mechanism by which we learn the traits most prized, and rewarded in our society. This way of understanding and describing play (competitive developmental) ‘is such that to not accept it would make us seem weak, unsuccessful and even unpatriotic.’ (Donaldson 1993: 72). We are left with a rhetoric of play as progress (Dovey and Kennedy 2006), that fits neatly into a paradigm of global competition. To play for fun or for the moment of encounter itself, rather than the final prestige has become, as Thrift (1997) suggests, almost a deviant act. ‘We have assumed contest to be the basis of life, its moral order and cohesion as well as the source of its vitality and creative powers’ (Donaldson 1993: 105). But if we think of play as a method of making new contact and encounter we require no adversary, teams, or sides. Instead, in play the rules are dissolved and often our dichotomous enemy along with them.

Contests are a centrifugal force, scattering and atomizing people as groups or individuals whose self-awareness depends on identifying others as outsiders. Our very identity is confirmed by the “Game”. Families, clans, tribes, gangs, teams, countries, the list of groups to which we can belong is endless. In order not to be thrown back on our own meagre resources, we cling desperately to those with whom we identify. In a society of contests, people must somehow counteract the experience of their day-to-day existence as losers. The contestant comes to be defined as the sane, well adjusted person. (Donaldson 1993: 73).

As we have seen, play so easily becomes absorbed by capitalist culture, and subverted into work. As easily as computer game gold flows into ‘real-world’ currency exchange rates, other forms of play can, almost imperceptibly, become work - for the next best

bike, car or clothes. Here playgrounds are not made, or discovered, but earned by the well accepted virtue of the contestant.

Playgrounds though, need not be so. Tim Edensor (2005), for example, writes of derelict industrial ruins, often considered a 'wasted space' by right thinking citizens, but which are used for many forms of alternative adventurous play. These playgrounds; unregulated and in many cases un surveilled, give a trove of playful opportunity (see figure 1). They are spaces and things in which the meanings of material objects are unfixed, they can be unclear in their function and 'talk to' our embodiment in inventive ways.

Fitting into neither symbolic nor practical orders, these things have escaped the assignations which previously delineated their meaning and purpose and so we are able to relate to them in an imaginative, sensual, conjectural and playful fashion. (Edensor 2005: 123).

By being in places in a way that allows them to snatch the attention of the inhabitant, that removes us of the often taken for granted context of competition, we become aware of play's productivity. Play allows new surfaces and depths to reveal themselves to us. To play outside of 'the game' we are putting ourselves on the line, we are taking risks because we often do not know just what the world has to say when released from our habitual discriminations of it.

Table 1: What can play be?

Majority of educational, scientific, therapeutic understandings of play	Play with emphasis on finding contact
Valued because <i>useful</i> in: development of child's motor skills'; understanding and integration into competitive 'adult' world (and thus important for economic reasons); helps understanding of social hierarchies; uses up excess energy (a bemusing functionalist assertion, see Hyder 2005);	'Use' always being redefined. 'Value' is in process and is granted to a player through their contact with the world. Disrupts the 'adult'/'child' binary – player becomes a perpetual beginner.
Winner/loser	Player
Life occurs in zero sum systems	World always being made, infinite possibilities
'Strong individual' goal orientated	Goals emerge and morph through discovery of playgrounds
Winning, particularly when the odds are in someone else's favour is more or less equal to virtue	Virtue is extrapolated through quality of contact
Competitive	Experimental
Learning to define personal spaces	Finding connections



Figure 1: Bike trials in Carmarthen's 'industrial ruins'. Author's photo.

Why play?

In play the beauty of the human body in motion reaches its zenith. (Huizinga 1970: 25).

Play is commonly not a time for children and adults to *be* together. Even though adults walk around the same space, there are essentially two different worlds on the playground. Children play, adults have playground “duty”, which is to police and manage children... Adults stand around as if nothing below eye level interests them, wandering aimlessly through children at play, as if all that is called for is judging and warning. Otherwise it is taken for granted that our commitment or participation is never called for. From their vantage points, adults can't see play. (Donaldson 1993: 45-6).

Many theories of play, as Huizinga notes, start from the false assumption that play serves some purpose other than play itself. Be it a biological need, a way to learn skills of adulthood, or whatever. Most critics that have asked the ‘why?’ of play have sought *the* answer through a fixation on the logic of functionality. In general the question has been set firmly in the paradigm of its time. Here, following Donaldson, I depart from the raft of literature analysing play as ‘something’. Instead this work is concerned with the ways in which we connect in new, unknown, experimental ways, with the environments and places we play in. This ‘play’ is a non-representational wellspring which provides contact with the world. Rather than ask, ‘why play?’ we might well wonder ‘what is life without play?’

It is precisely, the ‘primitive’, ‘irreducible’ play which lays at the root, the beginning of contact with the world. Rather than proclaim it off limits, we must ask: how, for so long, have we ignored this vital element: the purely playful, which marks us as beings alive? Donaldson’s caricature of the playground as a space for children, while a tad overstated, has purchase in a society that sees it as distinctly odd for an adult to play outside of organised sports. How do we look over play? How do we ‘forget’ how to play?

Much of the remainder of this thesis is a concerted effort to learn to play. Paradoxically though, ‘effort’, for most, remains caught up with the notion that we first have clear and well defined goals²⁹ and as such has no place being associated with play. As I have argued in this chapter, play as described here is always a learning, questing event. It does not annihilate past or future time-space in its process, and while it is never captive to a singular or static vision, it is paradoxically intertwined, and shares a commitment to produce new worlds.

Playing towards contact, my research has both been a discipline and required discipline. That is because I have not found it easy; I am far from being a perfect player: I find it hard to discover new qualities of contact, being part of a world that harbours so much aggression, misguided fear, hierarchical assumptions and competitively defined identity.

²⁹ It is interesting to note the breadth of different fields of endeavour in which so called SMART action plans are now relatively ubiquitous.

For so many people my age play is like a fight, it is being the best. Much of this is reflected in my own flawed actions and embodiment. Still, my involvement in capoeira, parkour and bike trials has been compromising, has changed the shape, size and compartment of my body and in turn it has helped ‘open’ the places that I now inhabit for different types of contact.

I know Chris is far better than me, but each kick, each dodge and snippet of [capoeira movement] dialogue is still somehow encouraging. I feel like I have learned to read his body language fairly well, and he obviously has me sussed. Though we surprise each other still, they are positive surprises. It is just really enjoyable to play with him. It doesn’t feel anything like a fight, and I feel so much less uneasy. Even the occasions we have hit each other just seem to reinforce that we are playing – fierce, in that we have little to hold back, but also completely like we are helping each other. Creating this movement, feeling, that is exciting, because it is always on the edge of what we can create together. On the edge of what we can do. (Capoeira diary 3/9/07).

“The more we play, the more we let go of those allegiances based on fear. This is exactly what makes play an act of insurrection in a dehumanised world.” (Donaldson 1993: 74). Here Donaldson is talking of a specific type of fear. A fear which springs from isolation, rather than contact with place. A fear which prevents other types of emotional engagements (including other fearful engagements). What if, however, we consider types of fear that connect us to outside entities and environments? Then perhaps fear itself could become an instrument of play, a tool of freedom, rather than slavery. In chapter 4 I consider how fear might become a playmate, an emotional engagement that can and does connect. In Parkour practice, this form of fear becomes a familiar part of practice, which can playfully guide.

Chapter 3: Making Methods

The writing tries not only to accept the risk of sprouting deviant, but to invite it. Take joy in your digressions. Because that is where the unexpected arises. That is the experimental aspect. If you know where you will end up when you begin, nothing has happened in the meantime. You have to be willing to surprise yourself writing things you didn't think you thought. (Massumi 2002: 20,21).

For many scholars, the unambiguous starting point for a methodological approach should be a good appreciation of what the research is aiming to achieve (cf. Shurmer-Smith 2003). Such an attitude sits more than a little awkwardly next to human embodied experience, which is rarely so straightforward. Neither is it a good bedfellow to recent calls in the social sciences that suggest we remain flexible in approach, and do not assume that we can have, at the outset, found 'the question'; often in its formulation we have in mind 'the answer'. In making such assumptions, we risk foreclosing further possibilities and brutalise the multiple nature of knowledge. Non-representational theory, for example, attempts to multiply questions, and to experiment with methods (Thrift 2004d).

In this chapter I attempt to elucidate some of that experimentation, starting with a discussion about the connected nature of embodiment, which is always in contact and vulnerable, but variably so. I then argue that our theories about the world are very much a part of that contact, and consider some of the ways they have mixed with the movement involved in my research. Rather than try to account for or otherwise excuse this intermingling of knowledge and doing I conceive of knowledge as a doing. In the process of 'knowing' the world, so we are 'doing it'. This process is both our legacy and our responsibility and here I consider some ethical implications of whole-heartedly engaging in contact with those networks involved in my research. Following non-

representational theory, this research ‘is an attempt to move off onto new ground where the witness *must* become an observant participant rather than a participant observer’ (Thrift 2004d: 556). Lastly I consider some flexible principles, which have in truth, developed over this research period, as much as they have offered a guiding focus.

Objectivity and Subjectivity in Method: Experiments without a control

I am suddenly and unexpectedly struck so that my mind stops dead and my neck prickles. The tone of sound engulfs me. Gathered in a circle I am practically overwhelmed by the *Mestre*’s first vocals. Despite sounding like an unintelligible cry, an animal roar to my ears, it resonates within me. (Capoeira Diary 4/7/07).

Academics, throughout history and in all fields of research have been moved like this before. Not that one could tell from the average text; it is not (or at least, *was* not) good practice to become so involved, to lose one’s professional distance. Without a critical distance, what distinguishes between our observations (and hence our opinions, theorisations and ethical positions) and the ‘lay-person’s’? Perhaps, as the proponents of ‘public’ or ‘participatory’ geography³⁰ would have it; we as academics are obliged to use our accrued wisdom (that presumably comes from having ‘knowledge’ as a profession?) to help improve and guide the people and lives we research. On the other hand, while we are researching and learning in a particular area it is we who often need guidance. In the unknown lands the academic may find themselves in, it can be *they* who might need lessons in order to learn an unfamiliar technique or method for living or even to maintain their personal safety. We are often, and sometimes uncomfortably, in the hands of those with whom we research. In learning the activities discussed here, I have been both complete novice and guide. The dynamic processes of these multiple positions have been at the centre of my investigation. As the body learns and tries to engage in new realms of interaction, it exposes the experimental quality of life and social interaction. And it is

³⁰ For many references see the Participatory Geographies Research Group (PyGyRG) website: <http://www.pygywg.org/index.html>

perhaps this experimentation that characterises my research methodology and process best.

If my method has been experimental body learning, it seems fitting to start this chapter with a consideration of that which gives us the ability to intervene in, observe, and make judgments about the world around us: the body. This kind of discussion often starts by making the self evident and apparently obvious point: we all 'have', 'are', 'cannot do without' a body (see for example Imrie 2003, Landzelius 2004, Longhurst 1997, Nast and Pile 1998, Shilling 1993). To be *doing* beings we have a body, one which is alive by virtue of its movement. From tissue cells and body fluids, to arms, legs or posture - every 'substance' of the body can, in some way, be considered as a movement. Indeed it is perhaps strange that we think of 'a body' as a thing rather than a doing, a process – life itself. As discussed previously, the plethora of (particularly feminist) research during the 1990s has brought 'the differentiated body' more fully to the attention of human geography. To an arguable extent this has re-invigorated methodological practice, by forcing the academic to consider their own subject position (see Bell and Valentine 1995, Parr 1998, Rose 1997).

The implications, of being a body, being affective and being in place, have also led to a somewhat common (perhaps even compulsory) afterthought in the 'write up' stage of research: that is, qualifying 'findings' with one's subjective position. Making allowances and trying to adjust for the 'partiality' of ones own taken for granted subjectivity. While this has done a lot to make us aware of the kinds of bodies making academic knowledge, it also led to something of a tolerance towards the personal and individualised (so long as it was mentioned in the write up). This qualification varies from a 'standard apology', to a thorough discussion of methodological positionality. As a feminist driven political stepping stone this was crucially important in contesting the taken for granted universality of knowledge. It did not, however, do a great deal to change the *way* we research and participate in the world. It did little, for example, to stimulate research that would be valued for its continued intervention in the 'outside' world as well as the

academy. The way we do research and its 'products' has lagged behind our theories of 'participation', 'non-representation' and 'embodiment' (Latham 2003b, Pratt 2000).

Another reaction to the growing awareness of 'embodiment' has been to rigorously interrogate the 'self'; how one's own subjectivity skews the data becomes important research data in and of itself. Attempts at honest research on the subjective experiences and emotions of being a researcher (Blee 1998, Longhurst, et al. 2008), have made important headway in this regard, helping emotional experience to be taken seriously within the academy (Anderson and Harrison 2006, Anderson and Smith 2001). And yet such attempts are often limited by the process of 'writing up'. At the final stage they suffer the tragic split, in which a person is divided, able to examine their 'emotional' selves from outside and to some degree objectify them, and apply 'rigour' and truth (albeit emotional truth) claims. To make 'data' of ourselves and our process implies an evacuation of lived significance and value, so that, we 'the data' might then be evaluated even-headedly.

This method, however curiously paradoxical, persists because it does have some utility. If we can detach ourselves from our 'research position' we might be more willing to form conclusions that are 'de-centred' and thus make changes to the world that might be less self interested. Still, methods that seek *a* singular objective truth brutalise the world as they separate us from it. In fact, in attempting to 'manage' one's own subjectivity, the danger is that we create another 'us' that is once again freed from earthly engagements and can look down upon the 'self' which is being and acting subjectively. This sort of reflexivity is neatly metaphored by the image of a painter trying to paint a picture of themselves painting that same picture (Heshusius 1994). In such 'recursive paintings', each time, as they try to grasp and represent the scene, it slips further and further into the distance.

A way through this research trap, for Lous Heshusius (1994), can be found in adapting a 'participatory consciousness'. With such an attitude we can escape the pitfall of attempting, but failing to be either objective or qualifiedly subjective. Subjectivity, she

says, *cannot* be easily accounted for or explicitly mitigated against so that knowledge can be more closely identified with reality. In other words, by creating ‘another us’ we are still not able to offer an objective commentary on the accuracy of our methods (ibid 1994). However ‘adjusted’ or ‘unbiased’ an account we try to produce it always comes from somewhere, namely: our own unique embodiment (Haraway 1988, Rose 1997).

Heshusius makes a good point then; we have no such splitting capacity other than those we falsely invent. But in the passage of time, can we not create a distance from our former selves and their entanglements with the world which might open the possibility for more balanced reflection? In the act of writing about something, some event, we are involved in not only presenting it, but in re-enacting and rethinking it. We are telling stories and enacting worlds (Mol and Law 2004). This way of thinking about the written element of our research ‘product’ is participative in that it does not separate out our actions from those of which we might be speaking - thus we are in every sense, knowledge makers not recorders or representers.

Of the three activities here, only capoeira has (as yet) received any significant academic attention. In most of these accounts the body, while fore-grounded as the instrument of activity, is forgotten in a lived sense (Downey 2005 is a notable exception). In much of this work the movements and gestures are carefully examined and codified, into abstract theorisations. Being upside-down, for example, is read as an important cultural symbol signifying the inverted afterlife for African spirituality (see Browning 1997). In this kind of research, movements are used to access some level of reality more real and meaningful than the experience itself. Devoted as it is to delving for a root, a cause, a layer of reality that sits behind and pulls strings, such research can tend to neglect the embodied feelings of doing the activity and the significance of it which is quite literally ‘there’, in continual motion³¹.

³¹ These movements, for some, might well signify certain things, but as embodied practices and in motion, these significances are very likely to change dramatically with time and space, and between practitioners. We might draw parallels here with Nash’s (2000) work on the changing practices of Tango.

The now well asserted mobility and movement ‘paradigm’ (Sheller and Urry 2006) brings us closer to this emergent realm while at the same time presenting academics with a difficult challenge. How do we remain faithful to ‘process’ while respecting the institutionally embedded method of funding, research and publication? We are called to ask if description is enough to justify the position society gives the academic³²? The pressure is on to ‘make sense’ of the world’s process, to analyse and come to a considered conclusion as to how things should progress. In fact we *do* make *sense* of the world in a very literal way, with our corporeal senses, and we do tell stories about those sensuous experiences. Inevitably this process involves us in the world: the starting point in coming to know is ‘not a subjectivity that one can explicitly account for, but is a direct participatory nature one cannot account for.’ (Heshusius 1994: 17). It is, in other words, a contact that cannot be denied.

Defused and Amongst

You must be in it. (Thrift 2000c: 557)

The methods that we use in research cannot be bracketed out from the knowledge itself (Carolan 2007: 1266).

Since the turn of this century there have been various calls to ‘rematerialize’ human geography, to inject a more ‘bump-intoable’, ‘thingyness’ to our theoretical developments (Jackson 2000, Lees 2002). Certainly the solidity of a wall or the slipperiness of a wet railing were hugely significant for my research, but immediately we must temper such calls to ‘rematerialize’ with the knowledge that however hard or sharp ‘things’ are, they do not exist or act alone. Definitions of materiality cannot exclusively relate to the solid and concrete. For geographers like Alan Latham and Derek McCormack (2004), materiality is, from the start, shot through with the immaterial. The

³² One reading of thinkers like Latour is that, primarily, the academic’s role is to attempt to describe networks and little else (Latour 2005).

way we think is not bounded by abstractions that separate off from the 'real'. The virtual and the imagined are always part of the 'material'.

Indeed, in resisting the temptation to cordon off and essentialise supposedly 'concrete' chunks of the world, we come across the fundamental inseparability of the material. If attempts to keep our subjectivity under our own tight management would lead to our separation, and perhaps illusory control of it, so too might the atomization and separation of 'things'. If we can isolate 'the material' (narrowly construed), might it lend us some more control (and perhaps even 'policy relevance')? Such a question turns away from that which lays undeniably at the heart of existence and life: 'we'. The so often bounded and boxed stuff of the world is mutated, and reconfigured by our knowledge making, just as it participates in the process itself (Latour 2000, 2004). In other words, the way we think, feel, represent, and the attitudes we hold towards 'stuff', and the physical 'bump-into-ability' that constitutes our existence, is an emulsion that cannot be separated out, though our attempts to do so clearly have a huge effect.

Being fallible and embodied, as we are, it seems very likely that we cannot conceive of the totality in which we are entangled. Our 'thoughtful' atomisation of the world and its processes could arguably be a completely necessary coping strategy. If processes and events are tied into almost infinitely extendable networks then how do we avoid being overwhelmed by our inability to fully grasp any process? Where do we draw the line, decide enough is enough, focus in and cordon off some element(s) in an attempt to understand them at the expense of others. This surplus, the surplus of the object, extends in all directions, as evidenced by our always incomplete attempts to interrogate and conceptualise things from the subatomic to the infinitely huge. Regardless of the angle we view from or the grip we take on an object, or even the time we spend pouring over its details and texture, our knowledge of it is always incomplete. No object is ever fully assimilated. No part of the object is ever us (Wilford 2008). The surplus of the object will, according to Adorno, always be an intimidating threat to those attempting to apprehend the un-mediated reality of things.

In modern society, argues Adorno (1973), ‘the circle of identification – which in the end always identifies itself alone – was drawn by a thinking that tolerates nothing outside it; its imprisonment is its own handiwork’ (172). This imprisonment appears to the modern subject as freedom – the transcendental ego holds mastery over its world. (Wilford 2008: 414)

It is very easy to say of the material object, that it is fully co-constituted with the immaterial- that is, value judgments, tacit knowledge of its ‘proper’ function or place. Interpretations are what makes certain objects appear as they do. But, as Adorno would argue, it is possible instead that it is the subject who is constituted through its engagement with the material. Can there be consciousness without anything to perceive and be conscious of? Whilst intuitively it would seem that objects do exist without our objectifying of them (‘things’ continue to exist and events transpire in relation to other things even when we are not there to keep an eye on them (Abram 1996)), can the same be said of the Subject? Most obviously, and on a practical level, sustained existence is impossible without the material environments which support every aspect of our lives.

The objects of the world are not a passive backdrop animated only by unfolding human actions. Rather the world exists as a continuous flow of events, each showing the falsity of stable or separable objects. We are both defused and amongst the stuff of the world, in such a way that our sense of what is going on, and our judgments about the world can easily slip into being a judgment about ourselves without us realising it. On the other hand, neither would it seem a sensible idea to supplant our subjectivity with a fixation on the object alone (as if such a thing was possible). Rather it is from the relations and process between, that this research attempts to consider the moments of contact in which all is change.

Contact

Every movement made necessitates a movement in my partner, and yet every move they make forces me to move differently. Each time I play, I am not sure what

makes me do what movement, though I have noticed snippets of trends: I know fast music makes me want to jump about more, and I often follow a kick unthinkingly with a sweep (though sometimes I wish I wouldn't). (Capoeira Diary 12/10/08)

The slipperiness of the boulder adds an interesting twist, such that for once I do not wish for sunny days. Remembered terror is a faint echo now, but still niggles at my forearms and braking fingers. (Bike Trials diary 17/5/2006)

... A small chipping jutting out a few millimetres more than the rest has made a decent sized gash on my hand... Some pain, more anger. I do the move again hoping for calluses to hold up.
(Parkour Diary 13/7/07)

Contact is a common starting point in my research experiences. Indeed, contact in method more broadly seems somewhat inevitable³³, and yet is so often taken away from the traditional output of research. Yet the intensity and durability of contact, the way we move in togetherness with objects and people, is clearly variable and open to dramatic revision. Indeed, I argue that certain types of contact necessitate revision, and that as such, contact is a desirable (inevitable) quality for certain types of research.

In an attempt to stay open to the possibilities of contact, my research was given to something of an unsettlingly unpredictable nature, as I let the people, things, activity and feelings guide me without attempting to maintain 'critical distance'³⁴. Habitual embodied knowledge sits in creative tension with contact, for such practical knowledge must surely shape a good deal of our everyday perceptions and interactions (see for example, Giddens 1984, Seamon 1980). What happens though, when we are deliberately of the intent to augment and modify our practical embodied knowledge? This is one of the main questions addressed in subsequent chapters, but in general, and for the methodology of this research this is not quite rightly phrased because while I was attempting this revision, to various degrees I was also allowing it to *happen to me*. The processes of the groups of people, the friends made, and the objects encountered all directed my changing body.

³³ As some researchers have rightly argued, the nature of our embodied existence means that affective contact is inevitable, even for example, when research is archival based (Rose 1997).

³⁴ Though I did find this hard, particularly in the evenings when writing my diary. It seemed almost that the act of writing itself 'turned on' an insurmountable distance between myself and the days contact, that encouraged me to look down and judge.

While I did find myself adopting certain pre-conceived (and sometimes naïve) ideas about how I would do/train/move in what I thought was an appropriate way, the nature of contact is such that it can exceed embodied ‘projects’, however coherent we think they might be. What will become is never certain (Thrift 2004c). Creativity happens through enchanting contact with the material and immaterial, as histories of once ‘unusual’ activities can show (see, for example, Borden 2001). J B Jackson (1957) discusses the ‘discovery’ of different types of mobility through new (at the time) sports like water skiing and sky diving and reflects on the way participants experience the landscape afresh. This newness, this nowness, where time ceases to become cyclical, is the experience we remember for time to come. Such moments have emotional intensity that flips the body away from unthought routinized mobility. New sensations and aspects of our surroundings become part of our consciousness, movements and gestures, texture of surfaces, distances, and orientations.

As I see it, those who adopted those sports did so because they had had enough of contemplation, and of the old sublimities which a century of poets and painters and musicians had interpreted over and over again. They may have resented the persistent loyalty of their parents to these things, but subconsciously what they wanted was a contact with nature less familiar and less pedestrian in both senses of those words – a chance to experience nature freshly and directly. (Jackson 1957: p203-4).

Here Jackson writes of a sort of reaction against ‘sedentary representations’, and a move to a more participatory mode in which the landscape is remade. Yet Jackson is also careful to clarify that the body is also changed in the process (perhaps the ‘point’ of these kinds of activity) – it is not a one-way assertion of agency over the landscape:

In short, the traditional perspective, the traditional way of seeing and experiencing the world is abandoned; in its stead we become active participants, the shifting focus of a moving abstract world; our nerves and muscles are all of them brought into play. To the perceptive individual there can be an almost mystical quality to the experience; his [sic] identity seems for the moment to be transmuted. (Jackson 1957).

The ability of contact to ‘transmute’ and essentially *modify* the body may be the basis of some of our most useful and communally necessary emotional resonances, such as empathy. To make contact with another is to invoke a shifting of perspective; it is to become a de-centred subject. As such, undergoing contact involves unsettling the normal networks, the taken for granted homeliness of the everyday - as in Jackson’s example, contact hits you. It becomes and moves you.

The process in which things, people, animals, sounds, or ‘objects’ reach out and effect is central to the way the body perceives, and goes on (or not) with practices like bike trials, parkour and capoeira. Following Adorno, Wilford (2008) theorises subject-object relationships, suggesting that objects have the potential to turn subjects into ‘nonidentity’. Nonidentity, for Adorno, is the desirable moments in which object comes to inhabit the subject, and can best be achieved by viewing great works of art or listening to classical masterworks (ibid). We might say that many more everyday objects (what now tend to be referred to as events) have this potential; the ability to startle and strip off preconceptions (or make nonidentity). Certainly there were numerous occasions during my participation in bike trials, capoeira and parkour when I felt struck or moved by a movement, a sound, a bike component...

It should be noted though, that this is not an essential feature of embodiment. In some senses one must work to be moved by objects. Though paradoxically *trying* - in the agency filled, forceful, linear, Western conception - can lead to quite the opposite affect. Deliberate and coherent action, it seems to me, is less easily surprised by events. Having the intent to be moved is one thing, sitting back (in attitude) and letting stuff touch you is another. David Abrams (2006) describes the same kind of thing when talking about how to perceive the world from outside our cloudy preconceptions and linguistic interpretations: “One way is to simply let things be alive. Or, if you don't want to let things be alive, just to allow that things have their own active agency, their own influence upon us, whether it be a slab of granite, storm clouds, a stream, a raven, a spider.” (Abrams 2006). The embodied trying in this sense is like trying on an unfamiliar pair of trousers rather than having a goal in sight and trying to achieve it.

Vital here are the forms of knowing that fail – the ‘nonaccountable’ feeling for an organism or object. The tacit ways of knowing that ‘*want nothing* but in their openness toward, and total turning of attention, can engender a passion beyond desire’ (Heshusius 1994: 18). These are the moments in which you forget yourself. This does not claim that we are then able to *remove* ourselves, our embodiment, and make some claim of absolute truth or reality. Rather in these moments of absorption, reality is no longer to be understood as a truth to be uncovered but as mutually evolving. (ibid. 1994).

While openness to events can tend to circumvent our cultural preconceptions and habitual knowledge, this is not to say that they do not work with this knowledge. For example the sudden surprise felt when an overinflated back tyre slips on a rock, is only a surprise in relation to the full expectation that usually the tyre would stick. Paul Harrison draws on another example, that of a lost wallet. “Imagine you are walking down the road with nothing much on your mind, perhaps it is the end of the day... You put your hand in your pocket and realise that your wallet is missing.” (2000: 503). At this point, Harrison says, ‘a gap opens up, and then an emergent order takes place’ (503). This ‘interval’ contains an abundance of potential possibilities and ways to go on, precisely because the mode of consciousness it brings about is able to side step habitual thought and action (whilst at the same time being dependent on it).

In traditions of science, and to a lesser but significant degree the humanities, such ways of knowing have been all but annihilated by the desire for ‘solid’ knowledge and fixed representation (Harrison 2000, Thrift 1996). The interval is anomalous; it makes research difficult and increases error in the findings. It is exactly what marks life as alive. This research is thus concerned with the process of the anomaly, which is affective as much as it is difficult. The interval is dispersion, it is amid ever-moving materiality, and it evades capture at every turn. Yet it is in those moments in which we become ‘nonidentity’ that we are most susceptible and capable of resonating with changes.

It is a similar affective empathy that I take as a starting point, towards de-centring my account. Or to rephrase, I see no need to emphatically ‘de-centre’ an account that is only

possible by virtue of its immersion in the world. Research undertaken in a spirit of open vulnerability, and research that is happy to be touched and moved, and to engage and play with materialities and imaginations, need not be doubt-ridden with questions of how to ‘write’ the more-than-human world. When we hold out our experience as our ‘truth’, we go well beyond the ‘I’ that takes responsibility for the narrative.

Of course it is *I* who have chosen to assemble the paper in this particular way; it was *me* who experienced these things, but not as an unaffected, unaffecting atom. I am equally assembled and dispersed in this pathfinding process, I precipitate amid tones, topographies, theoretical discourses. (Wylie 2005: 245).

We are necessarily in and with worlds rich in affect. *One* way towards building new configurations within this world does not require a determined shift toward ‘anti-humanism’ or even ‘trans-humanism’, but rather an aspiration to engage the ‘language of human experience’ (Entrikin and Tepple 2006), including their *witness* to the world as well as imagination, emotion, and the wild flights of fancy therein. It seems that methods exploring the haptic (e.g. Obrador-Pons 2007, Paterson 2006) and the rich sensuousness of touch (Crouch 2001, Hetherington 2003a, Lewis 2000), but also those exploring what might be considered less traditionally ‘empirical’ or tangible (e.g. Anderson 2004, Holloway 2003, Latham 2003b) begin to do just that. Here by exposing our experiences of togetherness and our openness and contact with the world it is becoming clear that “humans do not act as subjects in an object world but are constituted as perceiving beings at the interface between subject and object.” (Hetherington 2003a: 1938).

Adapting to mobility in method

As I write this entry, I wonder what exactly I am doing here. What can I hope to know about capoeira compared to the people here who have been doing it for years? While I feel that I have begun to adapt to the new exercises quite well (past experiences definitely helping a lot!), I am so inept at the new movements... The Brazilian-Portuguese songs, the music making and ‘dancey’ element are so foreign to

me. They feel great, when I can lose my self-conscious nerves, and some of the simple 'chk chk - ding - dong dong' tunes are stuck in my head. I still feel a bit lost and far away from the movements and ways of interacting with people that I know. I am quite out of my comfort zone in the capoeira hall; which is exciting, but also quite disconcerting. (Capoeira Diary 1st July 07).

Joining the dance

The activities with which we are concerned here always involve the mobility of other materialities, be they living, inanimate, or intangible ideas, emotions or knowledge. Drawing on the work of actor network theory and hybridity (Haraway 1991, Latour 1993, 2005), Cresswell suggests that "Looking at the mobile subject always involves looking at the *prosthetic subject*." (2005: 448). In this schema, mobility can be seen as breaking, shaping and making networks or assemblages. Comments on internet forums, videos recorded and posted on the internet, complex and dispersed representations, innovative new technologies and embodied techniques all fit into this mutating, growing network.

Take the example of parkour. From the carefully selected footwear, the bag and clothing, to the arrangements of concrete, brick, metal and grass that make possible any form of parkour, the term 'traceur' must always refer to more than the individual body. The growth in popularity of parkour is first and foremost an idea, an imagination of what is, or could be, possible to do with place and the human body. This idea has been technologically dispersed and augmented, primarily through television and the internet. The movements and actions of the traceur are totally dependent on (though not determined by) material objects that are relatively permanent. This raises the question, at what scale do we consider the prosthesis? Or, in other words, just how far do we de-centre the subject?

There is a need for a phenomenology of the practices of mobility which foregrounds not only the body-subject at the centre of the lifeworld but also the objects which inform and shape its movements. Such an approach seeks to understand the

production of space in everyday mobility at the level of the body, but in conjunction with technology. (Spinney 2006: 715).

In considering this Spinney (2006) presents to us his feelings of being a ‘cyclist’, the combined unit of body and bike. In this vein he also talks to other cyclists in the saddle, to keep the context of riding. In doing so the moving place; the heat, pain, rhythm, posture, and richness of cycling are not lost, and retain the potential to evoke. As with all others, this account bears the problem of representation, in that we will never feel the emotions, complexity and depth of the reality that the text attempts to portray. Neither, for that matter, will the author when it is being written and edited. In the words of Latour, “there is no in-formation, only trans-formation.”(2005: 149). None the less, in the effort to be ‘truthful’ (or to try hard not to lie) we can hope to create, with the reader, more productive accounts based on empathy for the emotional contact with place. It could be said of such an account, that it is not an account at all; rather it is a performative call to imagine – to see and to become through the Other.

Throughout this research multiple techniques were used, not to apprehend the mobility in the activities, but to engage and enhance it (though what ‘enhance’ should mean exactly, was often not immediately clear). In this performance, then, in which the mobile body is a crucial part, multiple, responsive and dynamic methods are called for. Putting a shiny but hollow label such as ‘mobile ethnography’ (Sheller and Urry 2006: 217) to these methods seems a somewhat unimaginative way to proceed, given that the methods themselves are in fact continually under revision, and that ethnography has always been a fundamentally mobile technique³⁵. If we are concerned to learn of the continual transformation of movement, as in this case, joining in makes sense. Unfortunately joining the metaphorical or literal ‘dance’, does not mean that we immediately pick up the correct step and flow effortlessly along into the action. We stumble, try out movements, negotiate and wrestle with continually occurring ethical dilemmas and hope that other people and things do not obstruct us in our unsure wonderings too much.

³⁵ Indeed it seems to me that the process of ethnography has long been attentive to the mobile, even if this has not been explicitly written into papers and books (see for example, Herbert’s (2000) emphasis on process).

While the desire may be to unobtrusively flow into the everyday practices of those we research with, this is not normally possible (see section on apprentice methods). In this case, it is also questionable whether such practice would be particularly useful, were it possible.

As researchers that are fully human we change things, sometimes muddling up the already complicated. People talk and respond to us and hopefully, at times, they adjust and adapt for us. The figure of the non-affective, unobtrusive, objective, invisible yet microphone-wielding researcher now seems almost comic. That people react to us is particularly crucial when we are first beginning research, when embodied competencies are relationally quite different to those we seek to research with. Capoeira provides my obvious example: the beginner is most definitely not treated the same, they are carefully negotiated, a ‘task’ that even some experienced capoeiristas find difficult. The way a *capoeirista* accommodates the ‘unknown’ elements³⁶ of a beginner (or in fact of any participant) greatly affects the safety of both concerned.

Yet for the researcher to be amenable to the possibilities of such interactions, still requires openness to difference and a willingness to experiment and ‘try on’ other people’s ways of doing things. In other words, as a researcher, I invite the world to move me, while I understand or even enjoy the fact that, as it does so, I am also moving it. My emotional engagement is a key part of this movement (see chapter 4). This, along with embodied mobility more generally, highlights the difficulty in locking processes into fixed representations and theoretical structures.

Feeling like gagging when we eat others’ food is one of those things that is likely to get written out of research and yet it is exactly the bodily reaction and emotion that needs to be written in... We situate ourselves not as autonomous, rational academics, but as people who sometimes experience irrational emotions... This enables geographers to begin to talk from an embodied place, rather than from a place on high. (Longhurst, et al. 2008: 213).

³⁶ Whether or not beginners will be very forceful, controlled, overly enthusiastic, or shy in their attacks and defences demands rapid assessment, ‘figuring out’ and adapting to.

Such research while often extremely revealing, challenges us with the difficult task of presenting our embodied emotions. The experience of emotions are virtually impossible to disassociate from the context in which they occurred. Thus for presentations such as this thesis, context is crucial, and emotions act as something of a bridge to context (and vice versa). When I read through sections of my diary entries, or I look through my photographs, I am emotively engaged such that the context of places and events are given a life of their own. As such I am involved in a complex process in which what has been is virtually and creatively re-played (in both senses of the word).

I found myself leaning right forward, staring at the details of the pictures as they came up on my PC screen as if half hoping it was all going to come alive again. I feel overwhelmed by each photograph. Why am I so moved? Why am I so concerned? Inevitably this is lived and personal, the divisions between the public and the professional and the private are breached. This is the point and challenge of emotional geographies. (O Jones 2005: 217).

Research that encounters the world in an emotionally mobile way has significant implications for the researcher. It has the potential to teach the researcher more about their own embodiment as it does to inform the participants or the reader of resulting publications (Longhurst, et al. 2008: 14). It gives the researcher the opportunity to re-invent themselves and their relationships. For me, research was not a seamless process or easy manoeuvre: in many instances it would have been far more comfortable to move in familiar ways, to embrace my embodied habitual knowledge. And indeed that appears to be a significant barrier for others too.

The difficulty many students encounter learning capoeira does not arise simply from the dexterity and strength demanded by the techniques; it results, too, from confronting learned inability, shamed inhibition and fearful reluctance to try the unfamiliar. (Downey 2005: 198).

Trying the unfamiliar: such an intense and emotively mixed hurdle. For a few people trying new things might be itself a piece of practical knowledge, acted out day to day, as they instinctively seek new experiences and have the ability to sense new opportunities -

if only vaguely and incoherently – they reach out to grasp them. I am not one of these people; though through a conscious ‘effort’ perhaps I have been moving more towards this way of being in the world. Rather I found that my ‘natural’ instincts tended towards the already known and safely familiar. Much of the effort involved in my learning process was simply trying to forget, bypass and unlearn the habitual ways of moving and acting that prevented me from doing otherwise. Here, adapting to mobility in method involves a determined shift from applying ready made theory to the processes of parkour, capoeira and bike trials, towards an attempt to try out the mobile practices, which included their own philosophies and concepts of movement. As such, and in sympathy with non-representational theory, this research is an “attempt to fight against the terrorised imagination that characterises modern society” by “stressing the primacy of poetic invention” (Thrift 2004d: 89). Because as Thrift argues, this “primacy of poetic invention is a crucial political move” (ibid: 89).

It is impossible, however, to completely disassociate theoretical philosophies from the practice of research. Indeed, I can easily identify my ‘geography’ reading through my diaries. It is clear that many of the observations I made have been noted and recorded in such a way precisely because they ‘fit’ with certain theory. Would I, for example, have been recording my own emotional conditions, or the way things made me feel, had I not had some familiarity with ‘emotional geographies’, or a sense that at some point it would be useful? It seems inescapable that theory can and does affect our perceptions (indeed, the ‘point’ of theory). And yet to be open and to allow the world to talk, it might well be useful to sense the goings on of the world in new and unconditioned ways (and no doubt a certain reading of non-representational theory can help here). It is my feeling that by the nature of the activities themselves and by the dedication to being *involved*, I was able to mitigate against the view from above which is narrowed by the very expert theoretical perspective it takes up. Similarly, though, the involvement and experiences of the pain, exhilaration, exhaustion, fear - the general intensity of the activities - helped ward off any theoretical burden (See for example Wylie’s (2005: 425) anxiety over carrying a rucksack full of hefty philosophy books on his walk). Such a theory-laden body could simply not

have carried its burden through the moments when thought is suspended - the moments when physical demands of the whole body reconfigure its knowledge of space.

Knowledge (is) making

The 'phone box to broken sign post' is irritating me again. It is near enough that it delights in the denigrating challenge; laughing at the edge of consciousness, so that I have to catch myself and stop from being baited. Its intrusive sharpness is antagonistic, and is felt not just through my bike's soft back tyre, but all the really hard parts: the stem, the stupidly designed squarely machined brake lever clamp, and the necessarily sharp pedals. This time I am with my (non bike riding) flatmate and the casual neglect he shows each time we pass this place is always surprising to me, it reminds me that this is not the way it has to be. (Bike Trials Diary 12/6/2006).

Incessantly Knowledge Producing

Knowledge making is what we are inevitably involved with when we do research. Knowledge may not be plucked from the world and put on display, but is instead enacted and produced by more than the human body that routinely takes credit for it. Talk about maintaining rigour, which has been a benchmark of valid research for so long, has come to something of an impasse. As discussed, there is no easy way of allowing for observer bias, no way to get a more self-conscious subjectivity or of monitoring one's more subjective impulses or parts³⁷. When we tell stories about the world we are producing truths in the pragmatist sense of the word.

What we do and what we plan to do, shapes what we perceive and thus what we know and the knowledge we produce about the world (Mol and Law 2004). It follows that if our perceptions of the world are shaped by the training we undergo, the experiences and feelings we have, then so too will the types of knowledge we participate in. When taken

³⁷ As Heshusius (1994) asks, is there any 'part' of us or action we undergo in our name that is not subjective?

up, each of the three activities discussed here have a profound effect on the body's engagement with the world. What is interesting about this is that the activities, despite facilitating knowledge that is not cognitive, are purposeful in their changes. A Mestre of capoeira, for example, if asked, would not hesitate to exhort the changes practicing capoeira has on a person's perceptions of the world, but more than this they will give quite specific examples. These will vary from teacher to teacher, some saying it teaches a 'black African' aesthetic (cf. Downey 2005), but for others it could just as easily be '*malícia*'³⁸, 'cunning', 'comradeship', 'confidence', or 'respect'.

That these activities have the potential to instil such virtues is taken up in subsequent chapters. For now the point is simply that while we engage with the world through movement, our body, perceptions, thoughts and opinions are in the making. We are not dealing with a research object, or set of objects but are concerned with a process or set of processes, our role in which is always fluid and fuzzily defined. Undoubtedly, getting to know the world is acting within it, and so we are immediately called upon to take account of our ethical position, and our potential for doing harm (all must be worked out in advance of course)³⁹. This is exceptionally tricky when we consider the embodied practical and enacted nature of ethical relations that, in practice, always maintain and reserve the right to surprise and exceed.

That research often seeks out the 'unknown' will no doubt amplify the complexity of any moralising. What happens, though, to our methodology when our starting point is a belief that our changing relations amid the world are undeniably messy and life is fundamentally non-coherent? Considering this, John Law asks: "would something less messy make a mess of describing it?" (Law 2003: 2). For Law, most methods fall down because of their attempts to make order and coherent representations. "Somewhat strangely in a way, our instinct was to ask reality to adjust itself so that indeed it could be properly mapped." (Law 2003: 4). Law is not alone in this sort of critique of the core methods used in cultural geography (see for example, Pratt 2000, Thrift 2000b).

³⁸ This will be discussed further in chapter 6, it can be roughly translated as, deception, trickery and misdirection and awareness of those things in others.

³⁹ See section '*On being involved in the ethics of producing worlds*' below for a discussion of this.

Yet in recent years there has been a broadening spectrum of academic work, which varies a great deal in the nature of its engagement with the world. Some still do crave ‘rigour’, repeatability, and universally applicable theorisations. Others are outright dismissive of our ability to make any kind of communicative sense of the world. Another way of thinking, acting and knowing, and the one pursued here, associates truth not with fact, but with *a quality of contact*. Here in a pragmatist move, holding tightly to the notion of accuracy of representation is not the highest goal, rather the inevitability of our inventiveness is accepted and the stories we tell about the world are formulated and judged for the quality of their truth in a pragmatic way. Taking a similar line of thought Owain Jones (2008) demonstrates the compatibility of non-representational theory with pragmatist philosophy.

“Any brief, faint traces of knowledge, politics and ethics which can exist, only take place in and through encounters embedded in temporal flows. In light of this non-modern ontology, ArT tries to *de-represent* knowledge in order to free it up for action.” (Jones 2008: 1605)

Here ArT, what Jones terms ‘anti-representational theory’, is in essence concerned with breaking down habitual knowledge or ‘truth’, removing representations that have had their say, but keep on talking. Rather in a pragmatist line of thinking we ‘try’ to know something, perhaps, when it is that that knowing or belief enhances our interaction with the world – this sort of ‘truth’ ‘works’ for us (Rorty 1991). It is part of our embodied corporeal technique for living in and with the world. In our body’s relations to things and living entities there exists knowledge, which is acted out and in process. As a priority, refining this knowledge represents a critically important and on-going effort. It is not a coincidence that the three activities engaged with here, all have an important similarity, that is, a desire to change our ways of thinking; this involves outright destroying some knowledges (such as ‘the bike is unstable on the back wheel’, ‘riding a bike on that terrain is impossible’) and replacing them with those of ‘our’ making.

It could be argued that there are any number of such activities that are implicitly mixing up received wisdom and knowledge. This is so, such that “we do not have any clear way to locate the boundary between the internal and the external.” (Rorty 2007: 58).

Similarly the body is a blur of process (cf Longhurst 2005, Whatmore 2002) and indeed the lived body is incessant in its production of knowledge in almost all its activities. Yet the extent to which these knowledges are a break with the norm and are a move towards new possibilities is exceptionally variable.

Embracing our ability to make the world rather than to disclose or reveal it

“I remember, soon after starting trials riding I was with a friend, Tom, practicing back-hops on a flat patch of grass. Nearby was a two foot high stone wall, which, as we were taking it in turns with a single bike, I sat on. Tom asked me to move, so he could ride on it. He explained that he was going to hop sideways off the wall, at the same time spinning 180 degrees to land facing the other way. At that point I had not seen anything remotely like that before. I thought it was impossible, I didn’t tell him though, I guess I was clinging to the thought that it just might be. It was incredibly exciting, I couldn’t visualise it, and I really didn’t know what would happen. And when he did it, wow, I was like, ‘I *have* to learn that’.” (Conversation with Jack, essence of which recorded in Bike Trials Diary 22/08/2007).

Rorty suggests we begin creating our own truths, our own distinctions, rather than working from tired and well trodden representations which have, for him, reproduced an unsatisfactory situation. “We have given many of these traditional distinctions their chance. We have debated them ad infinitum, without that having had any practical upshot. So I propose that from now on we focus on other distinctions.” (Rorty 2007: 59). Indeed, it has become apparent that hand-me-down knowledge and truths are very often questionable. They do not make a good foundation for a method of living or for that matter ethical practice because they unthinkingly reproduce (Bauman 1993).

“A civilization that relentlessly destroys the living land it inhabits is not well acquainted with *truth*, regardless of how many supposed facts it has amassed regarding the calculable properties of the world.” (Abram 1996: 264).

It seems that what we are left with is the need to tell stories about the world – always imperfect representations (in the traditional sense of the word) that *have intent*. A story with intent is a performance, in that it is a participant; it is imbued with transformative potential. Of course, not all stories are equal; there are good ones and not so good ones. How do we judge a story, when the benchmark of ‘real’ accuracy is removed and the story, or research piece can be conceived as a performance? My approach to this, like Abram’s, is to be less concerned with literal truths, as with being faithful to the ‘sensuous world itself, and to the life and process that surround us’ (ibid 265). And to make a performance that honours the sensuous, in both the activities under research, but also the audience. In this way metaphor, image, sound and the poetic, all become attractive as performative devices that have the potential to evoke.

This performance cannot be dissociated from the elements of the world that helped bring it into being. Thus while this research has made the world (a grand claim) it does so only in a very partial way, with the world. That is to say, it becomes one small ingredient that changes the taste of the material world. Almost overwhelmingly, the rails, walls, drums and handlebars have been participants in this research process, and should therefore be ‘allowed’ in this performance. But in what form? It is clear that one person’s handlebar is another’s indistinct scrap metal. The process and movement is key to contextualizing the stuff of the world.

To be committed to presenting the sensuous world, we should be involved with the way in which our body makes contact with its environment. Our perceptions, our ‘making sense’ is not static, we have a good deal of embodied knowledge that is involved with making contact. Thus a ‘pure’ phenomenological epoché is disallowed; we cannot exist without our body’s intelligence. I am therefore concerned not just with the sensuous in this thesis, but the way the sensuous interacts and is co-constituted with the materiality of the world. Through an appreciation for this body knowledge making process (contact),

we are hopefully granted more possibilities for making different and new types of contact.

What are the consequences of this knowing? That is the pragmatist question. The logical positivist notion of verification still ‘half stands’ *but within other forms of verification*. The ‘truth’ of a piece of knowledge is more or less the same as the usefulness of knowledge. (Jones 2008: 1607).

This is not to say accuracy is no longer important - in general it is likely that the accuracy of perception will be a key constituent of the value of knowledge in any given context. What it does mean is that accuracy evacuated of process, creativity or context becomes very much less desirable. Here the multiplicity and paradox that abounds in the world are not denied, in favour of the neat and complete. It is a type of knowledge that inhabits the body, enacts changes, and enables actions previously impossible or un-thought: it is a way of amplifying questions and possibilities (Thrift 2004d).

When the purpose of a research performance is to open rather than close down possibilities, when the ‘answer’ to any element of the world is so often an emphatic “it is fascinating, it is complicated, I don’t know for sure”, how do we claim authority? How do we reply to the critic who demands to know the ‘point’ of our research? In a classic poststructuralist move we might ask what *is* ‘the point’ anyway? While I have grappled with the purpose of this research from the start, I think I have finally (and here I must admit I write this after some years of ‘fieldwork’) accepted (perhaps even come to rely on) this persistent anxiety. Essentially, the ‘purpose’ has been exceptionally multiple, and has been distributed amongst the large number of people who became involved in its doing. I have been following, with wonder, three activities that, for me at least, have the potential to continually surprise and enchant the places they take myself and others. Very often it has been an indistinct collection of feelings of ‘how things were going’ that kept me moving on, *sharing* in the testing, and experimentation of these evolving activities.

Being involved: learning and teaching

I've been trying to teach Mike how to do a *meia-lua de compasso*⁴⁰ for weeks. He has managed many variants of movements, all of which only vaguely resemble the kick. I have tried showing it from many different angles, and I have tried slowing it down (which is actually quite hard) and breaking it up into small steps. In the process I feel myself understanding the move better. I noticed that Mike was bending his leg when he shouldn't have been, which led me to question whether I do the same - now I make a conscious effort to keep it straight. (Capoeira Diary 4/6/2008).

When we do not know what we want the output of learning to be, and without concepts and theories to guide, how do we best go about learning something? Eder and Hosnedl in their book *Design Engineering: A Manual for Enhanced Creativity* (2008), attempt to navigate this tricky question by adding creativity onto a complete understanding of conventional knowledge. For them, designing in creativity seems to be an *addition*.

Prerequisite knowledge and personal, psychological, and biological characteristics, possessed by a candidate for admission into the teaching/learning system should be defined. (Eder and Hosnedl 2008: 509).

Caricaturing their proposals, one implication is that before we begin learning we need to know what it is we want to learn. To be a good 'learning person' one should have well defined goals, 'learning outcomes' (ibid.). While goals are clearly useful and necessary, it is paradoxically perhaps, in the formulation and alteration of these goals that the most creative aspect of learning exists. Hand-me-down or tightly conscribed goals can be a useful starting point but inevitably cramp an individual's potential for creative process; a perpetual challenge for educators, who often find themselves unable to react creatively to individual learners, but instead are liable to work through a pre-defined curriculum or syllabus. At its most extreme the teacher finds that the way things are going does not in fact shape the way we move on at all. There is a dislocation in time as pre-planned representations or goals set in paper, often much more durable than stone, steamroller on-the-fly feelings and ideas.

⁴⁰ 'Half moon in a compass' – a spinning kick.

The capoeira experience described above is one of an almost infinite number in which I learned from the process of teaching practice. In ‘trying’ out many different ways to teach a technique I was also playing with the movement itself, fiddling with speeds, focusing on edge-of-perception kinaesthetic details, experimenting with feelings. While always trying for the personal style and inventive movements, all three activities considered here are ones that simultaneously share and teach technique - and become refreshed through doing so. In considering some of *his* philosophy of parkour, Sebastien Foucan⁴¹ suggests that a key principle is that traceurs should freely share what they learn. Yet learning is very often not a deliberate act of receiving technique, but of being open and with others (whether those others are human or not). When I ride trials, it is nearly always with friends, and it also involves watching their technique, their interpretation of possibilities. It involves contact both with them and the elements of space they ride on/over/around. I am, particularly on good rides, continually affected, always reacting and trying⁴² what they propose. They are doing the same, and as such the breakthroughs, the moments of creative redefinition, are distributed amongst us. On good rides, every improvement in technique, and every opening up of the possible, is a shared victory and deserving of communal celebration.

Whatever action we may be capable of is an action that is, as it were, already underway, not only or fully our action, but an action that is upon us already as we assume something called action in our name and for ourselves. Something is already underway by the time we act, and we cannot act without, in some sense, being acted upon. (Butler 2005: p203).

Knowledge here is a shared and creative endeavour. Being more fully involved with who and what is researched means that one does not simply dissect things as they are using a phenomenological, post-phenomenological, poststructuralist, or any other methodology. Instead I have tried to bring capoeira, parkour and bike trials in contact with geography, and in doing so, it is from the practices themselves that I have found clues about what

⁴¹ Sebastien Foucan is an influential traceur who is often contentiously cited, along with David Bell, as the ‘co-founder’ of parkour (see chapter 4).

⁴² Whether that ‘trying’ is in ‘principle’, imagining the movement, considering the risks, or physically attempting to copy.

methods and theories to adapt and experiment with. In a pragmatist sense, theories become “tools, metaphors to be used if we feel they are useful to us. They are not tools for revealing the world but for intervening in it. This applies to geography and all other forms of knowledge making.” (Jones 2008: 1601).

Intelligence is about the capacity to lay out territories of intelligibility, environments which are predictable but which can also compel knowledge, can instruct, can teach, can make all manner of requests for significance. Environments are more than means of testing therefore. They are means of *learning*, of in-forming, if you like. (Thrift 2005: 464).

It is through our embeddedness in our environments that it becomes clear that learning and teaching are a mingled negotiation of knowledge: a never ending performance that, sooner or later, will shock you if you turn your back or look on with arrogant disinterest⁴³. Of course it can take effort to learn or teach, but through intermingling, as a process, they are hugely productive. So much so that mood, emotion, energy and place itself can be creatively changed and augmented. Learning in a way that does work on the body, and learning that involves encounters that enhance the possibilities for action, rather than constrain them, is the type of process aimed for here. It is a process that takes heed of the adage accredited to Confucius (as cited by Eder and Hosnedl 2008):

Tell me and I will forget
Show me and I may remember
Involve me and I will understand
Take one step back and I will act

Stepping back and turning a student loose does not necessarily mean they will act with competence, or with any sense for the possibilities that might be open to them. Also problematic is the order of events, the order of this common (in educational circles) saying, which has been assumed as a given. Being allowed the room to act as a creative subject only comes *after* the necessary learning which must show pretty well how one should act. And yet so much of learning is concerned with ‘trying out’. How do we learn creativity? Fuller participations with the materiality of place is one possibility. If we

⁴³ See Bourdieu’s (2000) ‘scholastic distance’.

design methods that invite full embodied participation, that work on every level of sensuous existence, and that therefore *demand* the body to react with inventiveness, then perhaps we approach a type of education that actually enlivens what scholars have been *saying* for so long: that we need to overcome the mind-body split that so pervades our thinking (for an interesting example in a higher educational context see, Levine 1991, 2006⁴⁴).

On being involved in the ethics of producing worlds

A new political book of spells is being found... And if we are not to be smothered by a pervasive and insidious regime – the more pervasive and insidious because it relies on harnessing our own powers of invention to produce a new ‘post-personal’ distribution of intensities – we must become part of the search for new feats of matter... Can we form a new and uncommon sense? (Thrift 2004d: 96)

Every experiment has an outcome. It makes a mark on the world. Many experiments are improvisations; they are a question of being part of a situation and acting without critical judgment. ‘Without judgment’: the antithesis of ethical behaviour, and yet what we are called to take seriously as a way towards a ‘new politics of generosity’ (Thrift 2004d). The way the body acts when presented with a situation, before deliberative judgment has a look in, the flow of a body with its environment – these are not processes that we can easily cordon off from the domains of representation and critical thought. Representations make reality because they are always lived in a more-than representational way (Laurier and Philo 2006). Thus to write, to spell a word on a page, any word, is quite literally to cast a spell:

⁴⁴ This is the description of a regular credit module run by Donald Levine in the Department of Sociology at The University of Chicago, in which the body is accorded an important place: “20115/30115. *Conflict Theory and Aikido*. The practice of aikido offers a contemporary exemplar for dealing with conflict which has creative applications in many spheres. This course introduces the theory and practice of aikido together with literature on conflict by economists, sociologists, psychologists, and philosophers. We ask: what is conflict? What forms does it take? Is conflict good or bad? What are the sources, dynamics, and consequences of social conflict? How can conflict be controlled? Physical training on the mat complements readings and discussion. *Autumn, 2008*” Source: http://collegecatalog.uchicago.edu/pdf_09/SOCI.pdf.

Today it is virtually impossible for us to look at the printed word without seeing, or rather hearing, what "it says." For our senses are now coupled, synesthetically, to these printed shapes as profoundly as they were once wedded to cedar trees, ravens, and the moon. As the hills and the bending grass once spoke to our tribal ancestors, so these written letters and words now speak to us. (Abram 1996: 138).

Words and language are only some of the 'things' that 'talk' to us; there are many others - our perceptions are beleaguered by the types of contact we make with our situations. Don't we all suddenly notice 'new' elements of the world after we become interested in those things/relations/politics? How then, do we form 'new and uncommon sense'? How do we release ourselves from outworn ways of speaking and doing - of making sense? There are attempts at methods, ways to attune the consciousness and the senses - expertise that is able to 'bypass deliberateness altogether'⁴⁵ (Thrift 2004d: 94). The body, though, remains in some senses deliberate⁴⁶, even if rational judgment may be suspended. While it is possible, with focused attention, to rejuvenate the senses and one's felt awareness to the world (and this has incredible transformative potential), this is ever through the body's knowledge which is, in general and to greater and lesser extents, resistant to instantaneous change (hence people have more or less predictable personalities).

This research is concerned with making those changes, and how to make them well. The ethical dimension of this is to be found in the character of such change. It is in making a change toward the world, extending our senses and possibilities to sense. In doing so this research has experimented, taken risks, and thrown up emotionally intense moments. The same could be said of all but the most inert research. In subsequent chapters I deal further with some of the specifics of these risks and relationships. Enough for now to consider some principles of ethical research that remained throughout.

'Prevention of harm' is held up as the 'gold standard' of ethical behaviour within academia (Herrera 1999). Yet the 'prevention of harm' can as easily become a utilitarian justification for a callused 'prime directive' mentality, dressed up as objectivity or

⁴⁵ Here Thrift is talking about disciplines like Buddhism and its focus on the 'now' moment.

⁴⁶ Even if this is a 'deliberateness' which is a propensity towards spontaneity and 'witness'.

righteousness. Unmasked though, it is a self-denying and negative retreat from the contact which calls us to *be involved* in the lives of those we encounter.

It doesn't seem so clear, for example, that researchers are compelled to engage in fieldwork, and that the options are either disturb or conceal. They don't have to conduct the study at all. (Herrera 1999: 39-40).

As a centrepiece for our ethical stance towards the world, the 'prevention of harm' is based on a logic of negation: that I do all in my power *not to do* harm. Whilst this is immediately problematic due to the subjectivities of harm and harmfulness, this is not primarily what I take issue with. Rather what is so wrong is the absence of any humanity and emotional sophistication. Why is it that we should base our ethical discussions around the prevention of harm, rather than for example, 'love', 'generosity' or 'trust'?

Trust, hope and imagination can, and very often are, profoundly unsettling. Just as visions and performances of utopia inevitably contain an element of danger and risk (Kraftl 2007), engaging openly in a positive relationship requires newness and vulnerability, which open us (and others) up to 'harm'. Or, in other words, it allows us to engage. 'The prevention of harm', as mantra, is wholeheartedly backward-looking, and rooted in a fear that is swollen with homely comfort, fixity, and privilege.

Ethics as rule following demands both that one knows in advance how to conduct one's self in particular situations, and that action is evaluated on the basis of moral codes, ethics as sensibility or ethos demands an openness to the uncertain affective potentiality of the eventful encounter as that from which new ways of going on in the world might emerge. (McCormack 2003: 503).

With the activities of parkour, capoeira and bike trials, in the move from not-being to being, one must *risk* or there can be no activity. While this 'trying' never turns its back on the past, which would quickly lead to disaster, its embodiment is characterised by openness, and play with surroundings that invite what might-be, and what can be imagined. In this play we might find a new ethics of movement.

Chapter 4: Doing Research

What might a new ethics of movement look like in practice? For one, it would recognise that a traditional discussion of ethical issues is somewhat defunct. It seems clear that levels of disclosure, the extent to which those you research with know exactly what you are doing, is a good thing. And yet in practice, as I found with my research, the concept is extremely problematic. As Thrift and others continually assert, to tell a participant, exactly what you are up to, what you plan to write, how you will portray a person, whether you will use certain experiences as evidence, and so on, assumes a rational and future knowing subject, one who is determinedly underway with a perfect vision, a distinct goal orientated plan of action. I certainly cannot claim such a position – indeed as I argue throughout this is somewhat antithetical to my ethical imperative to make contact.

How then do I let participants know, what it is I am doing? First, in the majority of cases it is open for them to see – being a research subject myself, means that in doing movements and actively participating it is clear that I am doing parkour, bike trials, or capoeira, like them. That I am also researching was known to almost all, as it rapidly came up in conversation upon meeting someone. What exactly this meant, I am sure they had only a fuzzy (and probably in some instances wildly inaccurate) concept, but this is to be expected, for much of the time so did I. Indeed, in many instances the research became clearer as I discussed ideas and possible avenues of investigation *with* them. For participants who were interested, talk about the activities, theorisations of them, and even their relation to theories in geography, were a regularly discussed during practice. It would be wrong to think that practitioners of these activities have no interest in philosophising, theorising and exploring the ‘whys?’ of their practice. The practice of bike trials, just for example, is almost never an uninterrupted stream of physical activity. Time is often spent in communal reflection and consideration – there were more than a

few occasions when our talk meandered on late into the night, well past the time that diminishing light made the actual ridding impossible.⁴⁷

This ‘working out’ was, by necessity, all but over during the process of ‘writing up’. A process in which words were put to the experiences I had had with people and places. Photos and diary extracts were deployed, and as in all stories, re-created with a slightly different context. As standard practice, this de or re-contextualisation was furthered by an anonymization of people’s names. When selecting photos, or screen captures, I asked the permission of anyone that featured, as their identities were plain to see. For photos that were not taken by myself, credit is given in the text.

My diary entries, which were written the evening, or the morning directly preceding days of practice, were similarly used. It should be noted that my diaries, while stretching to many volumes, were not exhaustive accounts of everything that happened. Instead, they were a record of what I deemed significant (and often I had no speakable reason why I thought certain things were significant), much of the time this was simply what I remembered at the end of the day. They were also a medium in which I reflected, on events, rather than simply recorded them.⁴⁸

Quotes used throughout this thesis which were taken from my diary, thus do not claim linguistic precision, but do, I believe, bear the communicative truth of events. Journalists the world over (and some academics) are notorious for removing context from quotes, sensationalising, switching a single word to create the meaning they desire. All written quotes taken from oral language, loses perhaps what is most important about communication, the ‘paralanguage’ (Trager 1958): that is, the language in sound that is

⁴⁷ I did experiment with more formal recorded interviews. These were granted and grounded by my practical experiences and I was able to relate personally to much of what interviewees were telling me, and respond with feelings of my own. While there is a sparse smattering of quotes from these more formal interviews in this thesis, my preference was towards diary ‘recorded’ experiences, as described. This way of researching moved lightly with the practice itself and did not give me the feeling that I was contriving to make academic what should be playful. Similarly I experimented with video methods, but decided that the insertion of the recording technology during practice was too intrusive.

⁴⁸ Here we can see the absolutely fundamental role played by emotions in research outcomes, as what is remembered is so very closely tied with that which stimulates us emotionally.

not made up from words. The tone, pitch, intensity and tempo of speech can and often do mean far more than the words themselves. By putting this aside, as we do when we write, radically different stories can be told. My aim with this, as I go on to discuss in my guiding principles of research, was to write as ‘truthful’ a story as I could, while recognising that it is nonetheless still a story.

Working Research Principles

What follows are a number of underlying principles that have been under revision and in-process throughout this project. They have been embodied (some more than others) and have played a significant part in the directions this research found itself going. Each of these ‘theories’ could also be described as a commitment or belief. Such beliefs, as with belief in general, have a profound ability to enact and amplify their abstraction. It was important to be as a ‘sceptic’ to these principles, to keep any ‘principles’ flexible, and under continual scrutiny as they were engulfed in the complexity and process of the world. Throughout the research these principles have been treated in the same way this presentation asks to be: as a fluid process. This process helps augment our sensibilities, but remains elastic, asks not for fixation on particular words or sentences or entrapment by any discrete element. In short, it begs us to treat it as if it would change, given the chance, transform from a representation that is forever orphaned from context, into an animate body, able to move and become emplaced.

i) Playing with method

Play is an invitation to unlearn, to be a beginner. The greatest obstacle to my play is thinking that I already know how. (Donaldson 1985: 140)

As a perpetual beginner, the phenomenologist is one who maintains the constant vigilance which would not let us forget the source and resource of all knowledge and action in life – worldly experience. (Jung 1996: 1, emphasis added)

My attraction to both the concept and practice of play has been continually ‘discovered’ and was a driving force in this project. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the potential productivity of play abounds. For completeness I will also consider it briefly here, thinking through how (or if) we go about ‘using’ play as a method - how can it be strategically deployed to improve lives? If play eludes categorical, economic, and scientific measurement and rationale, can it ever be manipulated in such a way as to be ‘strategically’ deployed? We might say that this would depend on the kind of strategy one was interested in pursuing. In this case, a playful method that attempts to enhance the possible is matched by the activity’s desire for inventive exploration of movement.

The danger is that being truly playful and thus emptied of motive might allow enchanting new possibilities, but what guarantee do we have that these will be positive possibilities? Without a serious and carefully reasoned analysis of situations, don’t we foreclose the chance to influence emerging processes to our liking? Play relinquishes any complete control when it accepts that it can only exist by virtue of its ‘withness’. While for play to happen one can ‘choose’ to make contact with a certain wall, tree, animal, or person, but when in process the choice is never just yours. For me, true control is gladly given up, for the enchantment of ‘being with’. After all, play is not blind to different times. While we are in the process of playing with the world, we are not temporally isolated – the body remains susceptible to the future, and its feeling of the future. Danger and consequence, becomes part of this play.

It is, in fact, seriousness that closes itself to consequence, for seriousness is a dread of the unpredictable outcome of open possibility. To be serious is to press for a specific conclusion. To be playful is to allow for possibility whatever the cost to myself.
(Carse, J. cited in Kane 2004: 345)

‘Whatever the cost to oneself.’ For Kane, this is a key point – play here is a commitment to being aware⁴⁹, an ‘everyday activism’ that can inventively destabilize the taken for granted structures and routines that on the face of it, maintain an individual’s identity and society more broadly. “Once you begin to explore and develop your own ethos of play there is no telling where you will end up. Or who you’ll end up becoming.” (Kane 2004: 345). While this might be something of an overstatement, the sentiment holds: there is a kind of freedom gained through play in which elements recognise and relate to each other as open and vulnerable to surprise. As such, habits, structures, and ‘common sense’ is put into play and given new transformative potential.

In this vein I wish to reject any fixed or static methodological standpoints, accepting wholeheartedly that I can be affected and must ‘act with’ as the world moves; rather than ask the world to move to fit my theoretical/methodological particularities and history. In this case my methodology was experimental in approach, without such a stance place is ‘already found before it is discovered’ (Thrift 2003: 2023).

ii) Vulnerable methods

Silence, O, brother! Put learning and culture away:

Till thou namedst culture, I knew no culture but Thee. (Tabriz in Donaldson 1993: 101).

Emotionally we can engage in place in so many different ways. One particularly bizarre, yet surprisingly common way, is to ignore place as ‘time-space-now’ in favour of re-performing old beliefs and perceptions, almost regardless. In such process, doubt has ceased. Indeed it is only recently that the social sciences have begun to recognize the value of the ‘unhomely’ – that which removes us from our theoretical, methodological, business as usual – our comfort zones – and demands us to ask questions (Harrison 2000, Jones 2008, Kraftl 2007). Doubt opens a space for alternatives, it bids us hear other ideas

⁴⁹ Aware in the sense that contact can be made with ‘everyday’ elements that might otherwise go unnoticed.

and consider other ways of being in the world, no matter the strength of our current convictions.

For Harrison, corporeal vulnerability is an unavoidable aspect of human embodiment. There is much to be said for this argument, but what is of interest here, is whether this is so to varying degrees. It is the case that research can and is carried out in ways that demonstrate, or allow, very different vulnerabilities. This project was continually inspired and moved on by its vulnerable engagement with people and places. My experience has been that the grace of vulnerability is such that not only does it allow for the otherwise unheard or unfelt, but that by forgetting 'myself' I was able to participate more creatively and responsively. If I want to discover, and if I want a shift in action and perception, then I must be willing to put aside my own personal truth and listen and feel truth as it is acted through other materialities. In this way an attitude of vulnerability operates as an *invitation* for interaction. When vulnerable, we open the door to difference.

Hostage to and responsible for that which exceeds intention, corporeality is the first hospitality; it is the very model of hospitality. Before comprehension and recognition, however tacit and subliminal, before representation and thematisation, indeed, before all the phenomena we attribute to cognition and its structures - be they social, semiotic, or somatic - this is the signification or 'signifyingness' of the sensible. (Harrison 2008: 440).

The inescapable 'sensible' comes across as somewhat universal and essential in Harrison's writing. My contention is that it is highly variable, and can be, over time, deliberately fostered and shaped (it is itself vulnerable). In such nurturing we can see the dynamic interplay between what Harrison considers a fundamental fact of corporeality and our thoughts, and more broadly our action in the world. As discussed in the following chapters, our engagement with, and movement in, places has the ability to radically shape supposedly 'fundamental' facets of our embodiment.

Promoting such open vulnerability during research can require methods of its own, and some of the most effective are, unsurprisingly, gleaned from the activities themselves.

These are neither foolproof nor static methods. As a ‘politics of readiness’, being open and fallible initiates the prospect of ‘producing dispositions that are *open to the moment*, able to take hold of accidents and slips, able to draw on skills that can conjure up other wheres’ (Thrift 2004d: 97, my emphasis). Being open to place is the ‘most social’ moment (see Harrison 2008: 442), when the body acts with and in contact.

iii) Placed methods

As I have discussed, place is not just an arbitrary backdrop for human action, but is integral to all our ideas and knowledge. Theory is only useful when given particularity and setting – when it is embodied and hence emplaced. Abram (1996) argues that place-specificity has been undermined by alphabetic writing systems. For him, as a form of participation, reading and writing language ‘displaces older participation between the human senses and the earthly terrain (effectively freeing human intention from the dictates of the land)’ (Abram 1996: 185). Written and spoken language does not necessarily constitute the only way representationalist ways of thinking and doing distance us from the sensuousness of place. Carolan (2007) discusses what he calls the creation of an ‘epistemic distance’ between people and their environment. For Carolan, epistemic distance is perpetuated by several modes of embodiment all of which produce ‘structurally constrained ways of knowing the world’. These must be “‘opened up” if we are to be able to make well informed decisions’ (2007: 1265).

Becoming re-attentive to the richness of place, for Abram, involves recognising the ‘language of places’: that is, the cracking noises of ice on a lake, the whisper of the wind in the trees, the *feel* of the grassy ferns underfoot, the songs of birds, callings of wildlife and so on. More than this though, Abram argues that the living landscape is listening, hearing what we ‘say’. There is a ‘clear sense that the animate terrain is not just speaking to us but also *listening* to us... to listen to the forest is also, primordially, to feel oneself listened to *by* the forest, just as to gaze at the surrounding forest is to feel oneself exposed and visible, to feel oneself watched by the forest.’ (ibid: 153).

For both Abram and Carolan, there is an important environmental agenda for re-engaging people with place. Abram, in particular, begs for a shift of awareness from the more abstract human constructs (literature, technology, industry), towards a re-enchantment of 'nature'. In this research, however, place is re-encharnted and filled with wonderment through a change in attention that is quite different. Bike trials in particular, while sometimes done in the woods, deliberately and creatively uses, perhaps even fetishises, technology (the trials bike) to encounter places. Similarly, an appreciation for unusual spaces, industrial ruins for example, is fostered through parkour and bike trials. Thus while place plays a crucial role in these activities, it is a place that is encountered in certain ways and has certain elements amplified through the activities. As such, the texture and form of place most certainly does touch us as we touch them (as failed attempts attest), and more broadly it is in the contact the body has with place that both are given new significance.

While bike trials, capoeira and parkour 'make noise' in place, they are all fully reliant on the fact that place makes sound back. In short, place talks to us and a large part of the activities considered here are involved with learning to listen to and understand that talk.

iv) Apprentice methods

...it is no longer enough to limit actors to the role of informers offering cases of some well-known types. You have to grant them back the ability to make up their own theories of what the social is made of. Your task is no longer to impose some order, to limit the range of acceptable entities, to teach actors what they are, or to add some reflexivity to their blind practice. Using a slogan from ANT, you have 'to follow the actors themselves', that is try to catch up with their often wild innovations in order to learn from them what the collective existence has become in their hands, which methods they have elaborated to make it fit together, which accounts could best define the new associations that they have been forced to establish. (Latour 2005 :11-12).

Being vulnerable to surprise and attentive to engagement with place is well and good, but this research was also, and in a sense paradoxically, concerned with becoming proficient,

learning techniques of mobility. While much of this process might well be described as creative, it was not a creativity that one body could take credit for. All three activities have a rich and overwhelmingly vast evolution, in which so many actors have played important roles⁵⁰. An apprentice method meant taking the time to carefully watch other people doing the activity. It meant being a perpetual beginner, attempting to start from ‘empty’ and then closely observing and trying other people’s knowledge. Such a method, involved searching out movements and analysing them: relating them in detail to one’s own body. This could just as easily be pouring over the photos and descriptions of a movement in a book, as repeatedly watching and pausing a youtube video, as it could copying a teacher in person.

Every movement that I saw and engaged with was slowly reinvented as I claimed them as my own (cf. Downey 2005). Being an apprentice is not just about blindly following, but about striving for proficiency. It is acknowledging that, no matter how good you think you are, many others have much to teach you, and to move towards perfection in any discipline requires teachers; whether they are a renowned exponent of the art, a concrete block, or a musical instrument. Being an apprentice is knowing with certainty that you don’t know.

Using the process of apprenticeship as a method is not just a way of learning about a certain activity or group, but is a way of learning about the process of learning. It involves working through many instruments of embodiment which, along the way are loosened, toned, and made more versatile. Being an apprentice is questing towards an ever-moving competence, for this kind of apprentice is not content to be a clone – the same as one ‘master’ - but is instead actively seeking out new mobilities, methods and knowledge. It is an attitude that incessantly throws up questions: ‘what might that movement feel like?’, ‘what are my beliefs about this kind of movement?’, ‘what might it be possible to do from there?’, ‘how does that work?’...

⁵⁰ Despite their relatively recent and rapid growth parkour and bike trials have a long and extensive set of inspirations.

The mistaken danger is that the apprentice uncritically holds up a singular person, as a guru or idol. My use of this metaphor involves very little attachment to singular people or things. Instead, recognising the multiplicity of movement, apprenticeship involves a wonderment that does not draw clear limits to possibilities or potentialities. Essentially, such a flexibility and unsatisfied craving for knowledge leads to the notion of *place apprenticeship*, in which nothing in place is excluded from becoming a teacher. Through a commitment to ‘learn from’ we can adapt techniques of mimicry, experimentation and repetition: techniques of movement that have the potential to expose and escape worlds of mirage, of elusory power and shadowy fear. ‘Doing’ and feeling as a body-in-the-moment, or in other words, being fully in place, can help generate more truthful (in the pragmatist sense) realities.

v) *Involvement*

This research has been based upon involvement with activities, people and places, a lot of which is inevitably lost in a ‘write up’ performance of this kind. Organising workshops, running regular informal classes, and the shared everyday learning and teaching of doing the activities, can easily get forgotten. As I type, the ‘talk’ with the world becomes very different: *contact*, it seems, is not really what a PhD thesis structure is setup for⁵¹.

Though the activist-scholar is no longer such a peculiarity (see for example, research from members of the RGS Participatory Geographies Research Group), it is arguably still marginal, and sits uneasily with institutionalised procedures and research routes.

Being involved in this project forced me to consider (confront) the taken-for-granted institutional separations that exist between ‘the academic’, their work, and ‘everyday activities’. As Castree suggests, we can have somewhat separate identities “as ‘ordinary people’ who must shop, eat, rest and play.” (2008: 685). Amongst many of those which do participate, there is a desire to begin this participation with the intent to give the ‘public’ a geographical perspective. From a knowledgeable starting point, that of the

⁵¹ It is often quipped, that the PhD thesis will, at best, be read by a handful of people, most of whom will be concentrating on finding mistakes. This might be the case. For me, this further emphasises the importance of the contact and encounter that makes a thesis possible.

‘professional geographer’, our job, we are told, is to muck in, to show people on the ground what they could do better, how they could change.

Academic/scholar-activism, participatory geographies, and public geographies are all underlined by the desire to study *and change* the intergroup and personal relations that create unequal, uneven, unjust and exploitative geographies. In varying degrees they espouse the need to come together with, to come into contact with, be welcomed by, become affiliated to and/or work alongside publics. (Fuller 2008: 689, original emphasis).

My involved research did not fit easily with that model. It was not driven by an agenda of critique. I cannot claim to have set out with the intention of rectifying ‘exploitative geographies’, for example. What I was doing, I realise, was *affirming* types of practices that had enchanted my experiences of place. While much of this involved a lot of questions, they were not derived for the purpose of critique, but emerged because they possessed – or at least I believed they possessed - in and of themselves, radical potential.

Through participating, “however esoteric our research may be, it acts as a material force within wider society, rather than being - as many of us habitually think - enclaved in obscure journals and monographs.” (Castree 2008: 684). This has been a source of perpetual surprise for me, as people interpret the contact I have with them in their own way, as they live out changing embodied knowledge and identities (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). Through communication (often non-verbal) we were creating alternatives together. Here my research did not cease when the clock struck 5:30, rather I ‘lived it’ every day, reflections of readings mingling into daily practice of the activities, and vice versa.

Photos of Matthew Koziol

Photo 1 of 57 | Photos of Matthew | Matthew's Profile

Previous Next



In this photo: Matthew Koziol (photos)

From the album: "Halloween 2008" by Aron Pajczyk

Added November 1, 2008 - Comment - Like

Write a comment...

Comment

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Report This Photo

Figure 2: Capoeira in student kitchen. I was surprised to see photos on a friend's facebook page showing him (after a 'Halloween night out') sharing with his flatmates some of the practices I had taught him. In turn the photos are now commented on and viewed by many others.

What counts as valid research output is being expanded (see Kindon, et al. 2007) and involvement in research must be measured by more than the ability to achieve some predefined goal (though that is very often a valuable contribution, for example Gibson-Graham 2006). The question is, how else do we judge research? I have no good answer to this question. This thesis presentation is, while perhaps unusual in some modest ways, unexceptional in most others. It is a write up of my experiences, mingled with theoretical ideas that have jostled for attention. The strength of this PhD is ultimately likely to be broken or made through my command of concepts and language. Perhaps, though, writing does reflect something of the quality of our relationships, which in this case were formed with more than 'a public'.

Either way, when engaged in research with a ‘participatory consciousness’, assessment from many different actors (not just judgment from ‘above’) is valuable in moving forward. The emergent relationships formed during research practice have enriched my goings on in the world. As I have participated, I have joined in with the production of knowledge. “If one merges, one can come to know even from silence.” (Heshusius 1994: 18). As I have extended my embodied knowledge into new realms of mobility and made contact in different ways, I have also helped re-invent people (including myself) and places, with new capacities for shared contact and new horizons of imagination.

vi) *Inventiveness*

In a typically pragmatist move, solidarity within humanity is a truth we can invent for ourselves, it is not given a priori, and this to me makes it, and any ethics which might flow from it *more powerful, valuable and worth defending*, than if it is received, as somehow given from ‘beyond’. (Jones 2008: 1608, emphasis original).

There is no ‘true name’ for things; rather everything is, by virtue of its moving togetherness, available for re-definition, for new kinds of contact. And yet the possibilities for this are undeniably limited by a whole range of factors. While the materiality of the world enables our existence, it also constrains it. The question is: to what degree? With any accuracy the answer appears unknowable because of our ability, and the ability of the animate world, to invent. While it takes an imaginative fiction to conceive of a situation in which we ‘*could not do otherwise*’, there are hugely varying degrees to which we can act (incarceration being one of the most obvious ways in which possibilities are constrained, but even then there remains the ability to act in a range of different ways).

Being inventive means not just coping with, but revelling in the force of things and the inventive liveliness in which we participate. In methodological terms it means acknowledging what everyone already knows: that the lively process of the world cannot be sufficiently clamped for mechanistic, law-based ‘truths’ to be relied upon, and thus we

are never relieved of the need to *make* knowledge. ‘Emergence must be understood as a property of the whole that is not shared by, or reducible to its constituent parts’ (Braun 2008: 669). In other words, it is the ‘interaction between’ that constitutes the world. In this way every question is an invention – there are no pre-givens. Every moment of wonder is an experiment, whether it is carried through or not. In interacting with the world, as all its parts are, we are inventing.

Philosophy is not separated from, and experimentations can operate in and between, social science, natural science, poetry, art, politics and literature. The epistemological/methodological divides which currently isolate these approaches are seen as merely 'institutional and pedagogical'. (Jones 2008: 1609)

By remaining flexible in our thinking, not abstract ‘rule forming’, but instead being in wonder as we are ‘with’, we can bring hitherto unexpected parts of knowledge and the world together in productive encounter. We are, with varying degrees of freedom, mixing perceptual elements of the world and forming new lives. What ingredients do we choose to produce that mix? And indeed, how we go about attempting to choose those perceptual ingredients, becomes the question, and one that remains at the centre of this performance.

Chapter 5 - Playing with Fear: Parkour and the Mobility of Emotion

Breaking utopia

On Wednesday the 17th of May 2006, David Belle, a man heralded as a founder of parkour, and now international celebrity, runs towards a solid wall that cordons off an underpass. His movement is purposeful and practiced. All eyes are turned towards him. As he closes on the barrier and jumps, his calloused hands reach out, pushing off the top to propel him over. His trailing foot does not clear the wall; it hits. It pulls his body out of alignment. Travelling at speed and out of control David Belle's back makes contact with the far wall of the underpass and he falls...

He was pleased and excited. After the 'fakeness' of Californian media appeasing performances, the Frenchman said he felt more 'real'.

This scene, watched and discussed worldwide amongst parkour practitioners and enthusiasts, gives us pause. How could the hero of parkour, the symbolic superhuman fail? Watching Belle's body moving in pixilated slow motion, repeatedly crashing on so many thousands of monitor screens, how does this event shape the way traceurs (parkour practitioners) or indeed geographers understand and enact places? How might such two-dimensional clips influence and reveal our emotional, and specifically our fearful, engagements with place?

In this chapter I address to some of these questions by conceiving of parkour as a utopian practice, which while enacted, constitutes an emotionally playful engagement with place. Here the utopia of parkour is a *movement* primarily involving the imagination's intertwining with place. I seek to explore some emotional sense of what connects this

imagination with places, and what makes parkour a powerfully engaging utopic practice. In doing so, I hope to give the reader a feel for the sensuous connectedness of the emotional body; one which can be thrilled after a fall (as with Belle's example above), and one that can laugh with friends after the most demanding and painful experiences. I also hope that in the process I will dispel a seemingly common understanding of parkour as a spectacular finished product (see for example figure 3). By considering some of the emotional specificities of being a traceur that plays with place, I draw attention to what is often overshadowed by a symbolic or visual 'reading' of parkour. The changing embodied movements of parkour can be both motivated by different kinds of fear, as well as a 'method' for altering, unveiling, refining, and layering emotional engagements with places. Emotions here are more than simply something that 'happen to' a body. Rather, when fear is a lived and mobile process it can be considered, cultivated and sometimes even enjoyed. Indeed, in the case of parkour, I argue that fear can be an important element of any notion of the utopic that takes seriously embodied practice and contact with the world.



Figure 3: Sebastian Foucan jumps the Millennium Stadium roof. A typical media representation of parkour (image source: UrbanFreeflow.com)

As Spinney (2006: 713) notes there has been little research carried out that focuses on the sensuous and embodied experiences of different cultures of mobility. While there has been some significant work on practices such as skateboarding (Borden 2001), driving (Edensor 2004, Merriman 2007, Sheller 2004), cycling (P Jones 2005) and walking (Wylie 2005), the practice of parkour gives us an excellent opportunity to examine a rapidly emerging social and cultural phenomenon that is focused on finding new ways of moving the body and of inhabiting public and private space. In this chapter I have three main aims. First, to develop a concept of the ‘parkour body’: an unfinished, ever learning, emotional body that will move away from an understanding of maturity/immaturity as a positive/negative binary. The traceur is ever questing towards new and often fearful movements, many of which are predicated on the attainment of bodily skill. Here, mobile possibilities arise, and new unsure contact is made as spatial imaginings are drawn forth from previous experience and the prior development of bodily maturity and habit. In this case a habitual mobile maturity can come before and ceaselessly blur into a kind of playful immaturity in place. Drawing on the theorisation of the playful in the previous chapter, this chapter considers what it might mean for the playful to begin to be ‘purposefully’ pursued.

Secondly, I wish to show how such playful practice is characterised by a ‘trying’ that is intent on creating futures which dare. The way movements are tried in parkour reveals some of the intimate and profoundly emotional connections traceurs have with their material environments. By considering this changing contact, and describing it in some detail, I hope to work towards a ‘re-enchanting’ of the body in place (Massey and Thrift 2003, Thrift 2004d). Further to this and responding to growing calls in geography that bid us attend to emotions (Anderson and Smith 2001, Bondi, et al. 2005, Davidson and Milligan 2004) and to distinguish between ‘types’ of, and subtleties within emotions (Anderson and Harrison 2006), I consider the flux of experiences that could be described as fear. In parkour, fear can take us in numerous directions; avoiding giving it a purely negative polarity, or defining it in terms of opposites (to hope or fearlessness, for example) (Solomon and Stone 2002), I show how fear can be a highly complex

engagement with place, which can in some circumstances be considered more a playmate than paralyzing overlord. Here affect is mobilised and animated - by way of its contact with place - into emotion, feeling and movement.

Third, a participatory study of parkour and ‘types’ of fear can illuminate the way we move *with* the materiality of the world. Things - that is walls, rails, roofs, trees, etc. - as David Belle hints at in the opening example, can become ‘real’ and raw when we move in new ways with them. I wish to present some new ways people are finding to make contact with their environments. Despite being hugely diverse, the way traceurs practice parkour holds some common threads. In drawing these out I consider how parkour can be a utopian practice, and what it might lend to theories of utopia that have recently started to engage with non-representational theories (see Anderson 2006b, Kraftl 2007, Pinder 2005). The past and future of parkour remains unwritten, and you will not find it here – as an individual practice and as a utopia it is a ceaseless evolution.

Prizing ‘freedom’ of expression and movement, parkour is often intentionally formless, and as such, finding one’s ‘Way’⁵² is a key element of parkour practice. There are few overarching or distinct goals and little set structure, and this opens an almost unparalleled space for play and creative engagements with architecture. I wish to mirror this play, and aside from giving the reader a flavour of the practice of parkour and setting up some theoretical footings, this chapter is an attempt to make a playful, possibly risky, intervention in our almost universally negative understandings of fear in place.

While this chapter is primarily informed by my learning of and immersion in parkour movements and practice, it is impossible to separate this out from the more or less inspiring representations, philosophising⁵³, stories, images and signs, that always have an affective materiality (Latham and McCormack 2004). In other words, such

⁵² Talk about one’s ‘Way’ in parkour is almost wholly borrowed from Japanese forms of Budo, in which certain bodily practices and disciplines (archery, aikido, kendo etc.) come to possess spiritual significance. While ‘The Way’ in Japanese practices is normally quite prescribed, master to student, in parkour this is much less the case.

⁵³ Parkour practitioners often refer to the philosophy of parkour. This philosophy is espoused variously by different traceurs across the globe, drawing on a variety of cultural references, particularly from what can be broadly identified as Eastern philosophies.

representations are often encountered in a way that is *not* representational (Laurier and Philo 2006). They can, for example, evoke unbidden memories, thoughts and feelings (Crang and Travlou 2001, Edensor 2005). What is clear, is that my engagement with parkour, as much as anyone's, is a composite affair, connected much more than one might think through international assemblages of technology (television broadcasting, internet, etc.), which, far from delivering a bland disembodied representation, have stirred up a new world-wide phenomena.

Yet although these representations are important, in this chapter I am not so concerned with 'reading off' some part of this mass of distributed media, but with the body practices themselves, through which this media gains most if not all of its evocative power (for the traceur). Texts permeate the practice of parkour, but are primarily interesting in relation to the practice itself (which includes the 'practice' of such media) – the embodied grounding of their affective potential.

Parkour as utopian practice

I go to meet the parkour group here in Sydney for the first time today. I am nervous about what to expect, even after practicing many of the movements at home, watching many videos and reading about it on the net, there is still quite an unknown element. Their replies to my making contact on the forum beforehand all seemed positive, so that helps. (Parkour diary, morning 5th January 2006)

That was really incredible. Seeing ‘good’ parkour in the flesh is so very different to watching it on video. Very impressed. It was clear that they knew the areas we went quite well - had practiced there before... For me, all is change: I feel inspired; they have not only shown me space anew, but were willing to share it with me, helping with techniques, suggesting lines, and taking me to ‘parkour spots’ I would not otherwise find. While much of what they did seemed completely out of reach for the moment, I feel I have many exciting possibilities to work towards while I am here. (Parkour diary, evening 5/1/2006)

Emancipatory politics calls for a living Utopianism of process as opposed to the dead Utopianism of spatial forms. (Harvey 1996: 436).

Parkour has been variously described as free-running, a type of play, the art of displacement, the discipline of moving from A to B as fast and efficiently as possible, and even as a way of life. In the UK it began to grow in popularity following a BBC ident⁵⁴ which showed a traceur running and leaping across the rooftops of London. This was followed by one of the most defining and enduring depictions of parkour: the documentary film *Jump London*, which first aired in the United Kingdom on Channel 4 in September 2003. It combined stylised footage of a group of French traceurs to fabricate a narrative of three heroes who journeyed to London, revitalizing and transforming the architecture of the city as they went. Early on, the authoritative narrator tells us what parkour is:

⁵⁴ This short clip named “Rush Hour”, first aired in 2002, in order to showcase the new ‘dynamic’ character of BBC 1. This marked a shift in the format of advertising, which also began showing clips of *capoeira* and salsa dancing on the rooftops.

Imagine living in a city where you didn't have to rely on overcrowded trains, gridlocked roads and packed pavements. Imagine having superhero abilities, able to leap from rooftop to rooftop as if nothing, not even buildings could stop you. This is parkour, the anarchic new sport of freerunning. (Jump London Documentary)

However much contested, the hugely influential documentary, along with other representations - from television advertisements and music videos, to blockbuster Hollywood movies and internet forums - has been responsible for propelling parkour into the public imagination. Such depictions of parkour are almost always scripted through with heroic narratives of accomplishment; of highly skilled, mature bodies overcoming the constraints of the environment. The 'armchair view' that one might get of parkour from the media could be misleading because it is finished; it is a fearless and mature product. Out of the many thousands of people practicing parkour worldwide, for the most part we only see images of the few most proficient and experienced individuals performing a highly rehearsed set of body movements in well considered and thoroughly explored environments. Of course, the vast majority of parkour practice remains beyond the mainstream media's focus.

While there exists a great divergence in styles, practice and definition of parkour⁵⁵ (many of which clash with sensational media representations), my contention is that it is essentially a utopian practice intent upon re-imagining place. Not utopian in the sense that it gives any particular clear or finished blueprint for action (as is often peddled by media interests), but that it constantly seeks new ways to playfully move with and re- imagine place. While arguments on internet forums (and in some cases in the flesh) range passionately, attempting to delineate what movements do or do not constitute 'parkour', at base level these arguments seem to be over what form 'parkour' takes as an imperative for certain types of mobility. That is, an imperative to move in, perceive and understand space in certain imaginative ways. We must, then, make a distinction here between parkour as imperative and parkour as practiced. Yet the conception of parkour

⁵⁵ <http://parkour.net/Differences-L-art-displacement-Parkour-t1056.html>.

as a set of ideas and philosophies that can guide or shape future interactions and what ought to happen, is complicated by the strong sentiment of ‘freeform play’ ensconced in narratives of parkour. Each individual’s progression and journey is their own we are told; there is no master plan.

Table 2 - Words of a practice

<i>Pure Parkour</i>	<i>Freerunning</i>	<i>Freestyle Parkour</i>	<i>Yamakasi</i>
<p><i>To move efficiently over obstacles.</i></p> <p><i>Focus on practical training for use in emergency situations.</i></p>	<p><i>Many similar movements, but with more emphasis on enjoyment, play and experimentation. It incorporated acrobatic flurries and other movements that are sometimes considered ‘unnecessary’ for an efficient A to B run</i></p>	<p><i>“The movement we are seeking is beyond limitations, beyond labels, even beyond simple definition. Only within such freedom is creativity unleashed, and so far that creativity has proven hard to restrain.” (Extract from Urban freeflow’s original call for ‘freestyle parkour’)</i></p>	<p><i>Both a group of influential French traceurs, and also sometimes used to describe a practice (ie. ‘We practice yamakasi’) Similar principles to freerunning, with more emphasis on the aesthetics of movements.</i></p>
<p><i>Associated with David Belle. And PAWA (Parkour Worldwide Association)</i></p>	<p><i>Associated with Sebastian Foucan. Came to prominence following ‘Jump London’ TV documentary</i></p>	<p><i>‘Freestyle Parkour’ is a term coined by ‘Urban freeflow’, and strongly allied with the team of sponsored practitioners often referred to as ‘UF Crew’.</i></p>	<p><i>Emphasise the ‘spirit of parkour’, and a dedication to constant training.</i></p>
<p><i>Heavy influence of Method Naturel (as developed by George Hebert). Moral imperative to continuously develop mental and physical capacity, so they are ready to help</i></p>	<p><i>Foucan has consistently asserted a philosophy of ‘the freerun’, which is about following your own path. This can involve long periods of practicing alone, and ‘for yourself’.</i></p>	<p><i>Very much associated with the media and economic representations of parkour. Pushing for sponsors, competitions, and branding. Have led various workshops,</i></p>	

others in any given situation. His motto was “to be strong, to be useful.”

But also shearing and showing what you learn.

and events in London.

Just as in the literature on urban planning, where what constitutes the ‘good’ or ‘healthy’ city has been a long lived debate (Campbell and Marshall 1998, Gunder and Hillier 2007), so parkour practitioners have a distinctive ‘politics of imagination’, however paradoxical this may be. While there are many somewhat divergent views about what parkour is, and should be, there are still continuities (for a review of different terms and common usage see Table 2)⁵⁶. One important commonality is the desire to go beyond movements in space as they are, and to develop the capacity to imagine and do more with the body and its environment. The actual doing of parkour - the practice of the movements themselves - is a tangled becoming of hopes and fears: dreams of movements (and therefore spaces) realised or diminished.

It is a utopian practice in that, by the very act of imagination, parkour is granted spatially transformative powers which can prevent comfortable closure (Parker, et al. 2007, Pinder 2002). Common to some recent work on utopia (e.g. Kraftl 2007, Pinder 2005), parkour is an ongoing process that is inevitably unsettling in its dynamic re-imagination of movement and landscape. Normative conceptions of ‘the good life’ and the ‘healthy functioning human’, permeate traditional utopian visions of space. There is an ‘ought’, a ‘must’, ‘should’, and ‘ensure’ in the imperatives of the utopian city, particularly evident in urban planning processes (Gunder and Hillier 2007). Of course, these are very different from the spatial imperatives in parkour which, as with skateboarding and similar

⁵⁶ Interestingly, such debates are mostly played out when the parkour practitioner is in relative stasis, using a computer. Here the traceur is able to quietly reflect, form allegiances with distant traceurs, and put forward opinions under anonymous pseudonyms. When the body is in motion and ‘doing’ parkour, such politics, though enacted, are harder to make out as interaction is primarily through the movement of the body, rather than spoken or written language. Indeed many of the differences simply do not manifest through the moving practice, which perhaps has more difficulty delineating and categorising.

re-interpretative activities (Borden 2001), as well as many banal embodied practices⁵⁷, exceed the designer's vision of how space 'should' be inhabited.

As Ben Anderson (2006b) notes, utopia has typically been seen as a departure from the 'here and now'. Being placed in the future, it is in this departure, he suggests, that we ascribe a negative or positive opinion (2006: 694). Locating utopia elsewhere than the time-space we inhabit functions to separate and cut us off from our emergent lives, as lived. Drawing on the voluminous writings of Ernst Bloch (1986) Anderson suggests that utopia as a concept "cannot and does not have a unitary meaning or function. To fix it would be to reduce the multiplicity and heterogeneity of utopic processes." (Anderson 2006b: 695). While such a definition remains remarkably open, this seems entirely necessary if we are to move utopia, from a singularly future oriented time-space (as in 'blueprint' utopias), but rather have it occupying both past and present time as well. Certainly 'opening out' utopia in this way seems one necessary step to overcoming the historical 'bad press' of utopia, which has become associated with totalising authoritarian visions which in some instances have been brutally deployed and enforced (Jacoby 2005). Instead, utopianism as an occurring process can challenge 'common sense' ways of living and moving in certain places, through its openness to alternatives (Pinder 2005).

Here utopian can be concerned with historical failures and unrealised hopes as well as fulfilled potentials. Thus, memories inhabit the 'now', breathing life into the possibilities for the future. The failures become important and necessary, in that they 'enable' the prospective imagination to create what still might be. In parkour, for example, if every movement one tried was a conclusive success then there would be no parkour, no 'Way' - the end would be reached. As I will go on to discuss, there would be no fear (or for that matter hope) with which to play.

Such a notion of the utopic is not just a 'vision', but must incorporate a multi-sensual mobility which allows for compound temporalities. It has room to include the hazy,

⁵⁷ See, for example, the activities of The Situationists International, but also activities as banal as taking a different route to work, attempting to cook something new without a recipe, etc.

uncompleted, emotional, indeterminate, sensorial as well as the intuitive. It is a version of utopian practice which does not stand still and “which can agonistically incorporate different voices and ways of being, which is a trajectory rather than a point and which becomes an immanent transcendence rather than a transcendent vision.” (Gunder and Hillier 2007: 478). As such, feeling and contact with spaces is stretched beyond the now moment, to include the ‘not-yet’, immanent future. By virtue of its playful, exploratory movement, the serious traceur is encouraged to think, move and feel the city in new ways.

We need to dream in parkour. Because we are forerunners, so it’s necessary to continue practicing, searching, travelling to discover, meet and share. Compared to other groups, we deeply want to keep in our quest, to be in the right.... It’s the trajectory that interests me. If in each town there are traceurs, persons that feel this freedom sentiment, so it will be won. (Foucan ⁵⁸, personal website).

Here there are no ready made solutions, rather a fluid and uncertain sentiment that drives for exploration, potential, and play. When the traceur attempts to master some movements through space, such mastery, as it occurs (or not), is always accompanied by an emotional refiguring of spatial possibilities. In this sense, parkour as utopian process speaks quite forcefully to an enchanted notion of place which, through wonderment, imagination and participation, is in continuous composition (Crouch 2003, Edensor 2005, Fenton 2005, Thrift 2004d). The extended and serious practice of parkour is always a questing, a search for new and more elaborate imaginings. It is an opening out of possible, but not necessarily attainable, mobilities.

As most parkour practitioners attest, it is not an ‘extreme sport’ or even a ‘sport’ amenable to organised competitions and rules. Instead, the distancing of parkour from ‘extreme sports’ (which are very often characterised by reckless juvenile behaviour (Le

⁵⁸ Sebastien Foucan is an influential traceur who is often contentiously cited, along with David Bell, as the ‘co-founder’ of parkour. He starred in the documentary films *Jump London* and its follow up *Jump Britain*, and is well known for his role in the James Bond film *Casino Royal*.

Breton 2004)⁵⁹, has been a considered move that valorises parkour as a discipline and art form. The philosophy espoused by Foucan, Belle and others is one that does not involve competition with anyone but ones self. As with many physical/spiritual arts, such as yoga, aikido and meditation, the serious practice of parkour involves moves to transcend the ego, unlike many competitive sports that are geared towards building the self, by winning over another.



Figure 4 - Keep Parkour Free campaign signature

The somewhat diverse but affective utopianism of parkour has been mobilised against commercial interests, and those agents who are perceived to commodify the ‘play’ and ‘discipline’ of parkour. In efforts to resist competition, the ‘spirit’ of parkour is often invoked, as being opposed to competitive capitalist rule-based culture. To be “pro parkour” is automatically to be ‘against competition’ (see figure 4). Much of this campaign is directed against the Urban freeflow organisation⁶⁰ which has made sustained moves to incorporate different forms of competitive game into the practice. In an interview with Sebastien Foucan⁶¹, members of Urban freeflow asked:

“Competition. At some point it’s going to happen. If big companies are going to get involved in parkour, they’ll seek to set up comps. Good or bad?”

To which Foucan answered:

“For me, it depends on what kind of competition. I can tell somebody it’s bad because you have ... my erm... my heart to be free. And if somebody wants to do competition, respect your body and your heart and if it’s a show, make it a show for everybody a good show, with my heart you know. I don’t like competition. If in the

⁵⁹ Although many traceurs will acknowledge that their practice requires an ‘extreme effort’. This is often involves “no struggle against a third party, only a commitment to going right to the limit of a personally imposed demand.” (Le Breton 2000: 1).

⁶⁰ Having a large website, and being heavily involved with the media, has made UrbanFreeFlow something of an easy target for parkour purists.

⁶¹ Accessed from <http://www.parkourpedia.com/index.php?id=1,12,0,0,1,0>

future you have a competition maybe I will be like in the organisation. For my philosophy, no competition for me, it's not very good. It's a way for other people.”

Freedom, play, discipline, personal journey - those *ideas* feed into the utopian practice of parkour and are implicitly dismissive of a capitalist, competitive, corporate, work ethic. As many would have it; the ‘spirit’ of parkour is one of cooperation rather than rivalry⁶². Here parkour is about helping each other towards some goal. Georges Hébert's⁶³ motto, “to be strong, to be useful”, has been taken up amongst practitioners with relative ubiquity. Here ‘to be strong’ is not narrowly understood as muscular, but rather as encapsulating the embodied discipline, morality and free flexibility of parkour as a life choice. Indeed, it is in the vague (and often paradoxical) nature of phrases such as this that parkour is granted the openness that allows creativity and diversity to flourish.

Regardless of passionate internet debates, in its physical practice there are less hard and fast rules about what movements or spaces can be inhabited. While the representations of what parkour ‘is’ certainly feed into its physical enactment they themselves take on new meanings as practitioners find new ways to move in and feel place. As a global utopian practice parkour reminds practitioners of the need to develop and cultivate new embodied capacities, which surpass received capitalist subject positions as “entrepreneurs, or employees, or would-be-employees... investors in capitalist firms [or] consumers of (capitalist) commodities” (Gibson-Graham 2006: 9).

“All play moves and has its being within a playground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course.” (Huizinga 1970: 28). Yet the shifting utopian practice of parkour never finalises a map of terrain as interpreted in one way, rather in its practice, it offers possibilities for trying new movements and spaces with the environment. In practice, parkour strives for new feelings and emotions that are

⁶² See for example, a complete statement against competition, made by the Australian Parkour Association at: <http://www.parkourpedia.com/index.php?id=4,26,0,0,1,0>

⁶³ George Hébert was a French physical educator, who in the 1940s and 50s developed what he called the ‘Natural Method’ in which participants cultivated bodily powers by training on obstacle courses and in ‘natural environment’.

normative and performative, sketchy and detailed, about futures which are always already in and of the present.

It is necessary to prevent ‘the good’ solidifying and becoming reified as the exclusive and exclusionary vision of a dominant elite (whether planners, politicians, corporate business people, or residents). (Gunder and Hillier 2007: 480).

In not solidifying ‘the good’, utopia becomes a process in which the means are not disassociated from the ends, the journey that is enacted in the learning of movement and the striving has the power to actualize utopia, even as it extends and modifies it. Parkour pushes us to consider what could be, and forces forward a negotiation of the ‘function’ of spaces. Unlike many political movements, with set visions of how transport, personal mobility or comportment *should* be⁶⁴, parkour is a continuing and unspecified questioning or ideology of the body moving free and finding new ways.

It is a utopia that despite, and because of, its flexibility can actively challenge received wisdom about the seriousness of non-competitive play, as well as the nature of architecture. As Huizinga notes, “Child and animal play because they enjoy playing, and therein lays their freedom.” (1970: 26). And yet only the ‘child’ may practice Huizinga’s free-play. Following the lead of Belle and Foucan and other ‘parkour celebrities’, parkour, while remaining a mostly male practiced art, does for some practitioners, present a life choice characterised by a utopian practice that is a radical departure from ‘sensible’, competitive, economic adulthood as it is normally understood.

Before the internet had become part of the public domain, and before the first utterances of the word ‘Parkour’, several notable figures were doing remarkably similar things to contemporary traceurs. Tony Wolf described to me his experiences with what he had called ‘Skywalking’ and ‘Urban Shugendo’ back in the 1980s.

⁶⁴ See, for example, the distinct utopian visions espoused by such movements as ‘critical mass’ bike rides (Furness 2007).

“In Japan, for example, there's the tradition of Shugendo, which basically translates as "enlightenment through accomplishment". It's like Parkour in that it's not really a religion, more a form of spirituality in which you test yourself through physical feats. Shugenja dangle headfirst off the tops of mountains and sit underneath icy waterfalls and things like that.” (Tony Wolf).

For Wolf, both Skywalking and Urban Shugendo were different terms for a similar thing. Namely, disciplining the body and developing one's skills; it “tested courage, and honed our balance and agility.” (Wolf). What Wolf was doing was developing and testing himself: his everyday life was not ordinary, he craved escape from the mundane, the comfort that had slowly ceased being comfortable. During this time he worked as a stunt man, and in his spare time used the urban architecture as a playground for Skywalking.

Nowadays, amongst other things, Tony Wolf, actively promotes Parkour in New Zealand, Australia, and worldwide through the internet. Another figure, not often acknowledged by either Belle or Foucan amongst their list of inspirations⁶⁵, is the Frenchman Don Jean Haberey. The enigmatic Haberey, now in his sixties, was practicing a style of training in Paris, again in the 1980s, that is similar to what parkour is today. Certainly parkour practice has been, and continues to be, shaped by this man's activities, which have primarily come to light in English speaking parts, through one of his self-described ‘followers’: Erwan Le Corre⁶⁶. Haberey began taking elements of Georges Hébert's ‘Natural Method’ into the urban environment, where creatively adding elements, he began to practice and teach an activity very similar to Wolf's Urban Shugendo. Indeed, the physical practice of parkour-type movements has been with us in many different incarnations well before the term ‘parkour’ became popularized.

“The parkour, is what it is, it never changes, but our ability to connect with that, to think in that language is constantly evolving.” (Germain 2008, The Pilgrimage Project DVD).

⁶⁵ This list includes sources as various as Bruce Lee, David Belle's father, and the Tao Te Ching.

⁶⁶ Erwan Le Corre is an influential French traceur and the founder of MovNat (an outdoor system similar to Georges Hébert's ‘Natural Method’)

This style of training includes more than techniques or exercises. Rather, it involved getting to know the self by entering into new situations that prevent habitual modes of embodiment, and through playful but cautious and present experimentation. Parkour has taken much of this sentiment, which is a disciplined act of play, a continual extension of the embodied learning - one that traditionally ends in the transition from childhood to adulthood.

Moving in disguise

My first telling off doing parkour (why has it, until now, attracted less negative attention than doing bike trials?).

I stand ready and mentally run through the general gist of the move I plan to do. Start moving at a jogging pace towards the highest section of the wall. Out of the corner of my eye I see a figure emerge from a doorway, watching. It registers as a distraction, but I continue, picking up speed, launching towards the wall, foot kicks out and off the wall's surface transforming horizontal to vertical momentum. Just grasp the top with one set of fingers. Scramble, scramble, up, on top.

Now I have the time to look at the figure in the doorway, who comes closer with a scowling face and a prominent ID badge. I quickly lower and jump down to the car park tarmac below. He looks from James to me: two males, mid to late twenties.

“What do you think your doing up there?” He's addressing me. The scene so familiar from trials riding that the question should have been pre-empted. It is not though. It hits: what was I doing up there? Confusion. A few moments... “What do you mean, you just saw every move I made while I was up there”, I want to say but don't. “We were just doing some training” James chimes in – he's a big presence, a big guy ~~that somehow manages not to be intimidating~~ that keeps a cordial manner despite the hostile body posturing of the scowling man.

After asking us for our address, purpose and destination (?), which James seamlessly gives over (fictitiously), we are told to leave, in a savagely polite way that exaggerates every difference between us and this suited and serious man. (Author's diary 14th August 2006)

In general I would tend to suggest that parkour is not, or at very least much more than, a “performative critique of public space” (Borden 2001). It is not, for example, a deliberately rebellious or subversive act when I vault over a rail or experiment with a movement across a wall - there is no malice or prejudice against walking around a railing or strolling by a fence. These are movements traceurs do all the time, between more recognisably parkour movements. Even when they are said to be out doing parkour, there is often much walking, crossing roads, waiting for another person to move out of the way, and so on. Here, then is a key difference between parkour and BMXing, bike trials, or skateboarding. These other activities involve becoming identifiably something else: a

skateboarder or a cyclist. The traceur though, can and very often does move in camouflage.

While white running trainers are common to traceurs, their use is certainly not without exception⁶⁷. In general the clothing is loose, comfortable and casual. Only rarely do practitioners wear clothing with specifically parkour related slogans or pictures (see for example, Urban freeflow's 'Glyph'⁶⁸), and rarer still are these interpreted as such by the general public. The relative indistinctness of the parkour practitioner is an important way in which the movement itself gains impact. As Wolf noted, "no one expects it when a person leaps to a phone box roof and back flips off". It is a movement out of context, and without the usual warnings or signs of a street performer. As an unexpected, unpredicted surprise, the traceur is well out of step with any place ballet (see Seamon 1980). Can it be that this clashing expectation and the subsequent disjunctive meaning it creates in the observer, is doomed to create the moral polarisation of traceur and pedestrian? For me, the experience above came as a shock, the question stuck – what was I doing up there? There was no *point* to my action. Not only was I not participating as a good citizen, but neither was I critiquing, not deliberately resisting, nor performing for an audience. Because I did not have the answer, a logical reason, his question worked as the direct challenge it may well have been intended as. I was just playing, all be it in a quite focused and perhaps deliberate way.

James' response, though, made much more sense. "Training": here was something that could be understood and justified sensibly. Training is a capital investment – a body project. Yet this is somewhat disingenuous, there are many responses to parkour: what for some invites fear and anger, can for others be a source of inspiration and wonder. Perhaps, more than anything it is the unknown, unrecognisable quality that bids for a reaction, whether that be protest, deliberate avoidance, or pleasure. Not so much that parkour is unknown, but the break, the stop or interval that it creates (Appelbaum 1995,

⁶⁷ Indeed, many traceurs interested in Hébert's 'Natural Method' practice barefoot.

⁶⁸ See, http://81.27.111.36/online_store/parkour_glyph_description.htm. This symbol is recognized world wide amongst traceurs, though its meaning varies wildly between groups – for some it has come to represent the 'selling out' of parkour to media and commercial interests.

Harrison 2000) unleashes latent affective potential in places. The change of perspective that occurs through parkour movements is undoubtedly dramatic and brings a choice. Yet, there is no simple answer, no opposites to choose from as in the way that cyclists and cars (Furness 2007) and skateboarders and ‘suits’ (Borden 2001) have been characterised. The traceur in disguise is a shock to behold because they are not examples of this or that. The normal process of seeing is disrupted as expectations are separated from perception in a way that can be disquieting. We need these preconceptions to operate in the world, our sensuous engagement with place is, most of the time at least, reliant on them to make sense of our surroundings. Parkour, then, necessitates a shift in these preconceptions, a change in vision towards what some would consider a more ‘childlike’ curiosity with the world, and the body’s abilities to move in it.

Every kid wants to jump from a wall and climb a tree...it is an instinct of developing physical and mental skills. Why should this stop with our childhood? Because we were always told not to harm ourselves, then to be good at school, then to get a "real" job. uh? Bullshit! We want to feel fully alive, and to experience this fullness, freedom, liveliness within not only our minds, but also our bodies. (Le Corre 2004⁶⁹).

The origins of parkour as utopian practice then, lay in its emotional and sensual depth. While not all movements are immediately pleasurable and very often require a degree of ‘pain’ to learn, practice always includes the experience of moving with space in emotively powerful ways, and the promise of furthering such movements and spaces. Fear is one notable and crucially important emotion that traceurs experience, and it is one which connects them to spaces in very distinct and changing ways.

Awakening from mundane everyday experience, through playful fear and vulnerability toward place, does not dictate or exclude particular styles of movement. The traceur moves effortlessly from walking to running to jumping. The point is that they have

⁶⁹ Originally posted on UrbanFreeFlow forum, now only available as an archive at <http://www.washingtonparkour.com/Parkour/parcours/habrey1.htm>

expanded choice: in every barrier strolled around or overhanging wall passed while walking, there is the latent recognition of their art. Similarly, the vision of the traceur does not act as a relay switch, recognizing new possibilities of possibility only when on the run. Rather, the extraordinary and the possible in place can be embodied and seen in the backdrop of a chanced upon photograph, as easily as the spacings between a table and sofa or the brick wall immediately at hand.

One does not need to be a traceur to recognise such possibilities, but in doing so, and being aware of the fact, we are granted a new insight into our own interaction with place – something that has not escaped the notice of media producers. The computer game ‘*Mirror’s Edge*’, for example, suggests that it is through this re-interpretation “on the edge of the city, you find out who you really are.” (*Mirror’s Edge* website⁷⁰) Through free running, we are told, you can get transcendental knowledge about reality and your place in it. For the makers of *Mirror’s Edge*, this is a story based on breaking free from convention, but one in which they still felt obliged to give a real purpose: that is the character delivers messages. The lead character, as a courier, can serve a client while still reserving the right to critique the conformity to societal norms of mobility: these norms are unambiguously depicted in the game as a prison⁷¹.

Mirror’s Edge developers have coded space in what they call ‘runner’s vision’: a system in which the colour of objects represents the possibility of jumping to them. A crane arm that is ‘in range’, for example, will be coloured red. This ability develops throughout the game as your character progresses, turning more distant objects into potential landing platforms. This seems to me to be quite a clever way of representing the changing places inhabited by a traceur. Such games however, still misrepresent the process of parkour, in their search for the spectacular and instantly entertaining. They have, as Bauman ironically argues (all be it in a different context), prioritised A to B speed along with wilful and agency filled action:

⁷⁰ <http://www.mirroredge.com/ls/en/index.asp>

⁷¹ Numerous ‘cultural products’ have appeared in recent times with similar messages, from *The Matrix* films to parkour documentaries.

The Arcades are no more... Today's action is, after all, different: it is, mostly, about *passing* from here to there, as fast as one can manage, preferably without stopping, better still without looking around. Beautiful passers-by are no more to be seen moving; they hide inside cars with tinted windows. Those on the ground are waiters and sellers at best, but more often *dangerous people* pure and simple: layabouts, beggars, homeless conscience-soilers, drug pushers, pickpockets, muggers, child molesters and rapists waiting for prey. To the innocent who has to leave for a moment the wheeled-up security of cars, or those others (still thinking of themselves as innocent) who cannot afford that security at all, the street is more a jungle than a theatre. (Bauman 1993: 176, emphasis original).

Movement, fear and place making

Feeling so fragile all over. It was as if I could already begin to feel the jagged concrete below crunching through my spine, dislodging vertebrae. Try as I might I could not focus my attention on the goal: a flat pink vertical wall which I wanted to jump to - gripping the top edge with my hands, letting my feet and legs absorb the speed of the impact, before pulling up and hopping over. After some time here considering from different angles, testing the surfaces, watching JZ jump the gap, feeling more and more shaky and sick(!), I moved on without trying it. (Author's diary 8th February 2006)

Natural disasters, transportation accidents, spies, famines and droughts, serial killers, sex addiction, fluoridation, terrorism, rock music, assassination, global warming, Willie Horton, wrinkles, ozone depletion, Satanism, ageing... What aspect of life, from the most momentous to the most trivial, has *not* become a workstation in the mass production line of fear? (Massumi 1993: vii)

It is fair to say that the emotion of 'fear' has a terrible reputation. From the well used mantra, "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself", to the common association of fear with terrorist tactics. Of all the emotions it has, in academic literature, received unrivalled attention (Tuan 1979) and in much of this analysis fear has been cast as the ultimate villain; something to be railed against, out thought, and surmounted so as to minimise its

unhealthy effects and immoral tendencies (see for example, Bannister and Fyfe 2001, Bauman 2006, Brownlow 2005, Katz 2008, Koskela 1997, Nayak 2003, Panelli, et al. 2005, Valentine 1989). In short, fear is very often taken to be the overgrown roots from which stems much human suffering. Some authors go further still.

Evil and fear are Siamese twins. You can't meet one without meeting the other. Or perhaps they are but two names of one experience – one of the names referring to what you see or what you hear, the other to what you feel; one pointing 'out there', to the world, the other to the 'in here', to yourself. What we fear, is evil; what is evil, we fear. (Bauman 2006: 54).

Yet even so called 'irrational fears' often have some foundation in the material world, which *is* awash with real dangers. Something akin to fear can be observed in almost all living animals and provides a useful and necessary survival mechanism (Tuan 1979). In humans' experience of fear, it is when there is a mismatch between 'real' dangers and the danger 'perceived', that the value of that emotion comes to question. For Bauman, and many others, it is our inability to perceive risks and danger with good timing and precision that makes fear an emotion to warrant our concern. When fear is defuse, vague and unidentifiable, it is at its most potent and harmful (Bauman 2006). Our fearful inaccuracy – a fundamental characteristic of humans' inability to know the future – is exploitable, and routinely deployed to bolster, maintain and change webs of global politics, and hierarchies of power and inequality (Robin 2004). Whether specific fears are well founded or not, propagated through global networks or everyday activities or combinations of both, they have a very real materiality of their own (Pain and Smith 2008).

A racing heart, and sweaty, shivering sickness, reassure us that fear is 'happening', but these effects - manifest from molecular reactions in the body – are the *feelings* of fear, which are part of, but do not constitute the whole emotion 'fear' itself. In contrast, William James's (1884) famous theory, sees the emotion purely as the physiological bodily symptoms. For James, emotion occurs not because of a danger or risk perceived, but as a consequence of our bodily reactions towards the danger; that is, the quickened

heart, shallow breathing, etc. “Common sense says... we meet a bear, are frightened and run... this order of sequence is incorrect.” (ibid: 190). Rather, we meet a bear, and the body’s perception of the bear, before thought, causes us to tremble and run – for James the experience of the running and trembling is the emotion fear (James 1884). For him, the movement of the body at various scales, whether it be muscular or cellular, is the emotion.

Our whole cubic capacity is sensibly alive; and each morsel of it contributes its pulsations of feeling, dim or sharp, pleasant, painful, or dubious, to that sense of personality that every one of us unfailingly carries with him [sic]. It is surprising what little items give accent to these complexes of sensibility. When worried by any slight trouble, one may find that the focus of one's bodily consciousness is the contraction, often quite inconsiderable, of the eyes and brows. When momentarily embarrassed, it is something in the pharynx that compels either a swallow, a clearing of the throat, or a slight cough; and so on for as many more instances as might be named. (James 1884: 192-3)

In other words it is impossible to separate out and distinguish between the emotion and the embodied responses we commonly recognise as being a consequence of that emotion. While there is value in such an understanding, I treat emotions as quite a bit more than this. If I have a dry mouth, raised heart rate, and cold sweat, on their own, these do not tell us much. I could have one of a number of different illnesses, for example. The context in which these feelings arise is absolutely crucial. It is true that when I stand at the edge of a drop contemplating a jump, ‘my’ fear is indistinguishable from the shakiness I feel in my hands, my wobbly legs, and the watering of my doubt filled eyes. Yet fear is more than this, it includes the wall I propose to jump to, and the jumps that have come before and that register this one as a possibility. While much of this emotion may well be ‘in action’ before thought and before consciously calculating and understanding the danger, this is not always the case. The emotion still includes more than the physiological feelings, instead I wish to consider fear as an engagement in place.

As with other thinking on fear James’ theory of it easily becomes synonymous with negative, unhealthy physiological feelings. Of course, they are only ‘unhealthy’ when

they are misguided. “If we abruptly see a dark moving form in the woods, our heart stops beating, and we catch our breath instantly and before any articulate idea of danger can arise.” (James 1884: 196). If the form in the woods is our friend then the fear is misguided and our heart jolted for nothing. But if there is a real danger, an attacker that means us harm, then our fear may have served us well. None the less, our feelings might well be resented for casting us as a victim, or for overriding our cognitive function with freezing panic. Either way, paired with this conception is the implicit modernist imperative to overcome fear; through better judgment and more accurate perception, or better still some means that would allow us to wield power over the object ‘causing’ fear.

Such an understanding of fear as an undesirable and negative emotion is built into the way parkour is misleadingly represented and valorised as the spectacular human conquest of fear. While it is not my intention to undermine the aims and strategies of much of the extremely important work that treats fear so (indeed continued research into, just for one example, fear of crime and violence, is clearly crucial), I do however, wish to push open what we take to be ‘fear’, and to make a preliminary attempt to talk about different ‘types’, layerings and nuances of fear. My argument is that in our tracing of fear’s trail, which, by all accounts, has been stretched and broadened to near all pervasive magnitudes (evidenced by the now common usage of terms like ‘culture of fear’), we have as yet neglected the possibility that fear can be more dynamic, multiple and possibly productive than a survey of the literature might lead one to believe.

During my research, as the initial shock of seeing and participating in movements which risked injury and in some cases death lessened, so the fear that accompanied my research changed. My perceptions of the risks involved became clearer, as I practiced, and saw how practice and movement took place. It would be inaccurate and too simplistic to say my fear lessened. As I will discuss, fear began to permeate every aspect of my daily experiences. As with all practitioners of parkour, my emotional engagements with space changed along with my mobility in it. To consider the richness and complexity of certain types of fear will inevitably involve a consideration of the mobility and movement of the parkour practitioner.

Modern life, we are told, is speeding up. It is more mobile and dynamic, in a state of continuous flux and fear inducing flow (Bauman 2006). Indeed time itself pre-supposes movement in all things (Cresswell 2006, Dewsbury 2000). Yet mobility is neither a universal 'good' (Bordo 1993, Massey 1991), nor are similar movements always understood or experienced in the same way. Thus for many academics mobility and the power that it might exercise can only be understood as relational (e.g. Adey 2006, Cresswell 1999, Sheller and Urry 2006). It is the differences in speeds and directions between objects, people, and landscape that affect our relative experiences of mobility and immobility.

Relative velocities, vectors, directions, and momentums is one way of thinking and writing about variations in mobility. Bissell (2007) proposes another, by considering embodied action and inaction rather than relative mobility and immobility. One key difference here - besides Bissell's interest in 'inactivity' that poses some difficult methodological questions – is in the scale of analysis, which for Bissell is the body. This is, of course, inescapably linked to the global mobility of people, technology, information and ideas, which is in turn bound up in changing geometries of power which do make significant impacts into peoples daily lives and emotional experiences (Massey 1991). But this should not mean that the corporeal (in)activities and emotions are understood through an overarching meta theory that automatically ascribes value or power to 'more mobility' at the cost of losing real life human experience (Bissell 2007).

When we consider the emotional content of mobility, each and every movement (and indeed stillness) begins to gather significance. Emotion is entirely necessary to bring contrast to the differentiations, say between the movement of a passenger on a long haul flight, and the movements of a parkour practitioner over a meandering set of walls outside a council office. That is not to say that 'mobility' does not involve more than emotion, only that we find meaning in our experiences of mobility through emotion.

Thus for the purposes of this chapter, emotion lies at the centre of this complex, unfolding and ambiguous relationality which connects the body and its surroundings. It is through movement that our emotions engage the world. In this engagement, emotions shift and change as new contact is made with configurations of materialities, which are themselves (re)formed by virtue of their continuing movement.

Emotions play a crucial part of this ‘interface’. They are a vital element of the connections we have to the world. They are between, in motion and animated by the movements and contact the body has with its surroundings. But emotions also encompass other times and places as they negotiate an engagement with the world. An unforeseen cue, a remembered caress, a painful fall or a harsh word, and we are emotionally moving in a way that brings past movements and materials into the places we inhabit. Emotion *can* comprise of a baffling complex of overlapping events that always have affective potential beyond the time and space in which they once occurred. On the other hand, emotions can be quite fresh – being an experience that is impossible to describe in already available terms, or relate to anything we have felt before.

“I can’t describe it, it just feels like.... Like I have done something... something new, that I didn’t think was possible a few days ago. It’s like scary but not, because I have done it, it just makes me feel new, I can’t describe it. But it is good” – (John, attempting to articulate the feeling of doing a palm spin, recorded in author’s diary)

What is clear is that parkour makes absolutely obvious the need for a consideration of an emotional basis of action. Aside from the (misleading) high profile media activity, parkour befuddles any attempt to describe a rational, economic, or disembodied decision making actor.

Take a very basic example. As Tony Wolf demonstrates well in all his parkour workshops⁷², a bench becomes much more than an object for sitting or resting on. As participants are encouraged to find as many ways of moving over, around, across and

⁷² During my research I attended a ten day parkour workshop run by Tony Wolf as part of the ‘StompingGround’ dance festival in New South Wales.

even under the bench as possible, it takes on a whole new feel. Through continued contact and movement with the bench, the traceur slowly becomes more adventurous, attempting grand leaps and inverted vaults - their familiarity with the form takes on a new life altogether. In this instance the bench facilitates exciting and as yet inexperienced bodily movements and postures in the world. Their emotional disposition toward the bench changes as they watch others, and they themselves move over and about the bench.

Emotions in parkour, as in many social and cultural practices, are not things that simply occur or 'happen to' the body as in James' theorisation. Neither, though, are we in complete control of our emotions, the way we feel and act is not as a sovereign subject, rather places can express more than their human inhabitants might wish from them (Hetherington 2003a, Hoskins 2007). Indeed, it is readily observable that emotions are both mediated and expressed differently through different times, spaces and cultural groups. For example, we tend to learn 'display rules' through which we express and cultivate our emotions in a way deemed socially appropriate (Hochschild 1983). In this way, one can build up behavioural expectations, even of complete strangers, in certain time-spaces.

To put this another way, many emotions are performed; very often habitually acted out without prior consideration. Before we consciously realise it, we can be angry at a driver that pulls out in front of us, or sombre upon entering a quiet church yard. As with much ethnographic research though, doing parkour was a departure from the more routine emotional interactions in daily life. Different and new socio-cultural settings call for a re-examination and to some degree bring into conscious thought the negotiation of emotional relations (Blee 1998). Similarly parkour as a relatively new phenomenon, by its very nature encourages the practitioner to begin this process in earnest. During my research, emotional stances within place shifted rapidly. Engagements with benches, walls, fences and lampposts became charged with complex emotional play. For the first week or so of meeting and practicing with parkour groups, the hours spent doing parkour could be characterised by an almost engulfing range of fears. Here, emotional repertoires and bodily possibilities for movement are exceptionally fluid and interconnected. They

are not so much something suffered by the body; rather we do emotions *with* our surroundings, through our capacity to move. In this sense then any talk about emotional experience is a call for the contact between those people and things involved. No discrete or tidy theory of emotions can do justice to their continual emergence without attending to the mobile environments with which they engage.

Breaking and making movements and fear

The pink wall. When I approach the edge this time it is quite a lot smaller. Even the large steps below look less edgy, less sharp and less likely to do damage. It is in those first instants that I know I will jump the gap, the fear intensifies somewhat, whilst at the same time changing its character dramatically. Much more excitedly now the fear is almost pushing me toward the pink wall, rather than holding me back. I run. Must get the takeoff right; near the edge but not too close, there cannot be a chance of my trainer slipping over the edge when kicking off. But as I approach I cannot look down to check, for I need to focus on the far wall to make sure my hands find their mark and grip well. I have to let up and hope my legs will take off from the right place, and this trust is accompanied by a new surge of fear, a last intense bolt that hits me in the leg as I jump. The first time around, the moments spent in the air are too brief and intense to recall, a haze of adrenaline and fears and pink. After making it once, twice, five times, the fear begins to lessen, back down to ‘background levels’, but it has made a permanent mark on my body, which is now in love with flying toward the pink wall. (Author’s diary 1st March 2006)

The practitioner of parkour is encouraged towards ‘freedom’, to have vast possibilities for movement before them, from which they may playfully select and string together new improvisations in a flowing dance across the urban landscape. Yet the paradox of parkour is that to have a sense for these spatial possibilities, as anything but terrifying dreams, one must drill particular moves repeatedly. In general, the social sciences have considered similar processes of re-iteration, as productive of distinct and often negative performativities (Butler 1990). Such spatial practice leads to habit, and to cycles of

repetition that dull and numb our relations with space. Over time it has the capacity to make ‘normal’ the strange, and unconsidered our bodily comportment (Cresswell 2003, Edensor 2007, Seamon 1980, Young 1990).



Figure 5: Pink Wall: author jumping to wall, photo credit: Sam Saville.

We have been warned of how easy it is to become complicit, to begin to narrow the focus of our attention to what we already know and are comfortable with (Harrison 2000, Thrift 2004c). To attain complete maturity, to be fully cured and set in our habits, is to forget the wonder that drives genuine creativity. If performativity is body-training or the contraction of habit, then to what degree does it afford us ways to understand the possibility of creatively manipulating space and time? We are called to ‘let go’ of regularly repeated relations/representations of space and to attend to the spark of newness

that marks a life as enchanted and lived (Thrift 2004d). Of course, the difficulty is deciding: of what to let go, and of what to keep a hold?

Me: “Don’t you get bored of doing the same move many times?”

James: “Well you know it is just practice, that’s why you’re here right?”

Me: “yeah”

James: “It’s good to train. Each move is never the same anyway. You do it again and again and again, but trying different things. And then it starts getting easy, then suddenly you will see this thing over here, and it might be really scary, but it is a possibility now.”

Parkour as spatial practice is not always the super-mobile practice one might imagine. Hours spent in a relatively small area slowly ‘getting to know’ the space is the norm. Embodied knowledge and familiarity of place is gained as place is *tried*. Here the body, while repeating similar movements many times, is slowly building embodied knowledge of itself and its relation to spatial forms. Yet the doing of this knowledge is always provisional, and not repeatable with perfect accuracy. The parkour body is creatively encountering spatial forms, producing new possibilities as it experiences textures, meets heights, distances, and shapes. As it playfully tests, the body is closely intertwined with places as a sensuous moving subject (Crouch and Desforges 2003).



Figure 6: Getting to know space (author's photo)

On occasion, people would not want to leave an area until they felt they had mastered a certain movement with an object. Practitioners developed attachments to things and the movement possibilities they allow. As I was told by many of the traceurs I researched with, after and during each parkour session, my vision changed. New features popped up in unexpected places: an electricity box to vault, a ‘grippy’ wall to run up, a handy sized barrier with soft grass on the other side to try flipping over. Of course, none of these ‘new’ objects were really new. Rather they materialised into the consciousness as parkour practice permeated the body. Such objects were inspected, tested, felt, rolled over, pushed off of, jumped on, vaulted over. My parkour practice brought to the environment unexperienced transience; where success or partial success at moving in a specific way with a certain object, could lead to a sudden shift – new mobile possibilities unfolded – and more playful options arise. “The impossible recedes, like a horizon, never sets, like a sun. But as it recedes other regions of the world appear.” (Massumi 1997: 761)

Thus, a certain level of maturity of the body to know a certain sequence of movements in relation to some obstacle, leads to a type of immaturity, as the body in its excitement and playfulness finds new mobile relations with materialities. These new relations are unsure, untested, they can even be unrealistic; fearful dreams that excite practice with renewed vigour. Traceurs focused in on micro-detailed aspects of movements, trying again and again. In trying, and being open to space, here ‘trying’ denotes the uncertainty, the imminence, through which the kinetic play of bodies in space are bringing about something new. A tricky balance then: imaginative and playful becoming of mobility that is both ‘allowed’ and threatened by bodily maturity.

“I am really keen on encouraging people to think outside the box, to think about pole swings, and cat walks, and subtle movements that don’t have buzz word names yet. Because, to me, it is not so much about the moves as it is about the movement itself. The moves are infinite, you know, there are a thousand variations on moves. The danger of stereotyping is that it becomes fossilised.” (Tony Wolf, recorded interview)

A degree of embodied maturity though, is needed to move in a way that enables the imagination to take a hold of spatial forms. Bodily maturity, in parkour, is put to play immediately searching out new movements with space. To practice parkour at any level is to be open and vulnerable to space which in turn requires the blurring together of bodily maturity and habit with play and spatial immaturity; neither maturity or immaturity ever being complete.

“You develop what I call parkour vision, you know. Round here people might see just a pretty run down backside of a building, but it’s actually a great playground of rails and pipes, steps – it’s got it all. That’s what parkour does to you. I can’t go many places without seeing some nice looking obstacles.” (Josh, in conversation while showing me round one of his favourite practice areas)

Yet, supposed ‘mastery’ of a certain set of movement cannot easily be tied to the banishment of fear, as was my simplistic assumption when beginning this research. In

parkour, while successful practice (trying, trying, trying and doing) might make place more 'certain' for a time, the new perspective - accompanied by an immature playfulness - leads to greater subtleties and reveals further depth to emotional relations with place. The supposed 'consumption' of architecture is very much a productive activity (Lees 2001; Borden 2001; Llewellyn 2003).

As I practiced I discovered never before noticed architectural features, which came alive with a potential that lent them new emotional intensity. This carried over into my life well beyond my research remit, and my participation in the practice of parkour began to radically affect my emotional engagements with place. In figure 6, for example, as I began to consider the jump between the walls as a real possibility, I also began to cultivate quite a complex array of fears towards this roof gap. During my research I passed this particular gap several times a day (it being right by the front door of the flat I was living in). After first noticing it (in a parkour way), it would not leave. At times, like an un-wanted spectre, it haunted my being in that place. Fear laced every movement I made in its sensorial vicinity. Such fear did not simply repel me though, nor in fact did it remain static for any length of time at all. Here fear was not entirely unpleasant and unwelcome. On occasion I would stand for long periods on the edge looking down, contemplating consequences, where fear helped to sketch out scenarios, some of which made me feel quite sick. Other times I would focus solely on the far edge with a sort of excited expectancy, or I would try to ignore it completely, walking past with a kind of deliberate anger.



Figure 7: Roof gap, haunting drops (author's photo)

It is not unusual in parkour to go through phases during your training where your progression slows down then speeds up. This occurs because it can take time for your mind to catch up with your physical ability. Your body's capability may have progressed to a point where you are aware that you are able to confront obstacles that are more challenging, or techniques that are more complex. However, the hardest part of progression is overcoming your fear -- no matter how capable you are. (Rowlands 2006)

Whilst parkour talk is often superficially about doing battle and overcoming a fearful alter ego, it seems that fear in parkour is more complicated than that. It is dynamic and mobile and it can be layered with other times and spaces, but also other emotions. Emotions like anger, excitement, and joy can all be accompaniments to the fears encountered in parkour. Such emotional layering cannot be totally contained by time or space. And while fear usually proceeds unconsciously it can also be reflected upon, considered, compared and thought through. On one occasion, for example, a traceur wanted to go straight to a very specific location because he had been thinking, and getting excited and anxious about a 'gap to step to ledge' move/architectural form, all day whilst at work.

This makes understandable the zeal with which parkour practitioners declare their dedication to parkour - evidenced by signatures in parkour internet forums that so often take forms like: "Parkour for life!" or "Parkour is the art of movement. It is not a hobby, it is not a sport, parkour is a way of life". Certainly then it is clear that like many other sports involving risk (see for example Le Breton 2000, Lewis 2000), fear, at least certain types of fear, can be enjoyed and can become enmeshed in everyday mobile relations.

Rather than close the book on fear as a fairly simplistic survival mechanism that is relational to danger (produced or otherwise) or some ageless aversion to our own death, in some circumstances it is useful to think about the way we try to cultivate different 'types' or layerings of fears. Differences in fear are more than just variations in intensity. They can have fundamental and quite subtle differences which are crucial to the way we engage in contact with the world. Emotions are a multiplicity of relational judgments, not just reducible to spatial simplicity (e.g. wanting to be distant from some dangerous object). Through its intimate play with place, the practice of parkour is a good example of how people can begin to explore, refine and even enjoy fearful emotions. They become a key through which they engage with place.

'Contact fear' and plastic concrete

He has just made the jump. It is a strange realisation; a 'what am I doing here' moment, when my stomach speaks up telling me this must be a madness inspired misadventure. What I have seen looks impossible; it is genuinely shocking, it strikes at me and racks the body all over. In an instant that person and that place take on a horrifying tint, a wrapping of coarse fear that grates away any bravado or rosy talk about what was planned or the risks involved.

And now it is my turn. The distance shrieks at me, shouts mockingly. Two-facedly it beckons me to the edge, seduces me onward, only to smack back. Eyes water, visual inputs begin to confound my other senses, just how far is it? Can my legs, arms and torso feel a jump of this distance as a possibility? Uncertainty twitches in muscles. The harmony between kinaesthetic and visual experience begins to falter, instead I am made whole precariously, like overly elastic threads holding my 'seeing' and 'feeling' together. Can I trust their communication? This will literally be a leap of faith, a moment that takes fear, hope and uncertainty so close that they blur into each other, even as my everyday senses seem to be coming apart. (Author's diary 16th February 2006).

When Merleau-Ponty (1968) talks about the intermingling of the senses, he suggests that we can see, understand and be with our environments in a haptic way. Similarly and to varying degrees, touch can become a visual experience. Either way, it is always the case that our visual perception is experienced primarily in connection with the rest of the body. Before a linguistic understanding has a chance to take shape we are already *feeling* our environment through our eyes, as well as through our more proximate attuned sensory organs. In this way solidity, texture, surface, and depth can all be felt at a distance. Spatial forms have a haptic presence, and can 'touch' you long before you have come close enough to lay hands on the brick, grass, wall, rail or whatever.

It is the past that comes at the body from the environment. It is in this way a fence or wall can be 'felt' before the hand makes contact, rather the fence is involuntarily remembered. Yet there is uncertainty and misconnection between place and memory.

Multiple temporalities inhabit the present (Crang and Travlou 2001). The place and the intent of the presence in it can stimulate a metaphorical riot of memories jostling about the body, each demanding different perspectives on the same section of space. Riding on the back of memory, fear can lurch up at the sight of what would otherwise be quite benign spaces. At times this fear can drive me forward, experienced as an exhilaration, an enlivening of my body that expands forth and shrouds place in new and playful colour.

Just as new technologies and computer interfaces that work upon the haptic senses can distort and elongate our capacity to 'feel', be touched, and essentially to make contact at a distance (see, for example, Paterson's (2006) analysis of the first 'transatlantic handshake'), so also do augmentations to our bodies – our weight, flexibility, strength, coordination. While new technologies highlight well our changing capacities to feel the presence of virtual and distant objects or people, it is still the case that similar presences can be at least as intensely mutated, enchanted and refigured through decidedly 'low-tech', raw experiences as described above.

Here the experience of the senses do not always 'join up', rather it is left to the body and a 'skilful coping' (Dreyfus 1991) to make sense as best one can of a kinaesthetic experience that might fit jaggedly with the corresponding visual one. Here in each moment "the feeling of how things are going motivates behaviour," rather than any solid or complete idea, image or representation (Dreyfus 2005: 141). Yet the notion that the body is only ever 'coping' can tend to neglect the important role of imagination, creativity and playful interaction. With fear as an engagement with space, in parkour our emotions can be considered less a 'coping', and more a playmate. While I do, to an extent, 'cope' with the disjointedness that can afflict my senses, it is a disjointedness that is sought, fought, rolled around, tugged about and quietly contemplated.

There is a paradoxical element of freedom in this play with fear. While fear moves you on, unsettles, prompts, calls and inhabits place, its callings make *possible* an answer. "Freedom becomes a form of embodied awareness: a choosing to sense and, more

specifically, a choosing to *feel* and *touch* an environment.” (Lewis 2000: 58). Here, fear is felt in quite specific ways, and it is important to distinguish between them.

There can, for example, be a profound ambiguity to the fear. It can protect the body, discouraging it to take up positions or movements that will result in injury or death, yet for some parkour practitioners this type of fear can have quite the opposite effect. It can cloud the senses and form a separator between body and environment. In parkour it can also lead to unnecessary error and a lack of commitment, which jeopardises the success of a movement. This has led many practitioners to suggest that one of the most dangerous aspects to parkour is fear itself (and of course here we are talking about a very specific type of fear). It has an effect on the body that reduces control, composure and coordination. This sentiment was repeatedly expressed by traceurs.

Duncan: “The thing is I *know* I can make that, I have done stuff much bigger before.. It’s so annoying! There’s just something funny about the jutting out lip”

Me: “Yeah, the height doesn’t help either.”

Duncan: “No! Haha. If it was on ground level I would jump it straight off, no problem. It’s so hard to just get over it and give it one hundred percent up here, that’s the problem.”

Despite confusing and in some instances annoying the practitioner, fear is still ‘contact fear’ - it is being and moving *with* entities that are termed ‘other’. Configurations of materialities and the spaces between them become meaningful when they are jointed with emotions. They orient people’s movements, and perception. As I have suggested, with an engagement that is, over time, more or less immature and open towards space, in parkour it is possible to unsettle, change and even wilfully modify this emotional contact.

I had seen my friend jump the gap, and now replayed in my body it churns up my emotions towards the place. The point here is that place is evocative by virtue of its ability to stretch, jump and scratch temporal lineage. With fear as playmate, moments are exploded to include games that span large swathes of time. As an ongoing project, an epic that plays with architecture and contact, parkour brings into awareness our capacity

to cultivate types of emotional engagements. The contact itself is often motivator, but it is one that can be playfully and consciously focused upon and reworked.

Parkour is full of events, where the world expands and shakes with intensity. This is the manipulation of affect. I do not use that term lightly, the danger is that ‘affect’ becomes a vitalist philosophy that posits an unchangeable, amorphous and atemporal field (Kraftl and Adey 2008). Rather affect emerges, and is made malleable, by virtue of the continuous *movement* in the world. In other words, affect is mobile along with the materialities of the world and not at all essential. Presupposing emotion, as a type of potentiality, there is a sense in which the continued *practice* of parkour, calls forth certain strands of affect and weaves them into the emotions that connect the traceur to place.

Thus it is possible for parkour to become a way of retrieving fear from an abstracted, dispersed phenomena. Of wresting emotionality away from bureaucratic controls and complex systems, and placing it within reach, as something immediately ‘touchable’, that can be slowly and intimately worked upon. As an artisan works with base material to shape something new, the traceur works with the environment to help cultivate their emotions. There is a concerted effort to move away from the view of emotions as something that happens to them. Instead they are in a playful process of negotiation, between place and the body. Immature practice produces new fears that connect body to textures, shapes and objects. Such forms are touched and touch back. The practice of parkour encourages an immaturity that allows that touching.

With this immature engagement the body is free to re-interpret space from many different angles, and mobile perspectives. Parkour and emotional play with space makes architects of its practitioners, who can demonstrate well their emotional attachments to configurations of space, and the movements (imagined or otherwise) between them. Figure 8 (a-c) shows some of the many designs, made by various practitioners, for ‘parkour parks’, which they hold little hope of ever seeing realised, but relish in the imaginative play of its virtual construction, whether with pen and paper or three dimensional CAD packages.

The traceur's experience of place can be of a concrete, solid and brutal materiality, that at every turn betrays them, alarming the body and confining its playful aspirations. Yet those same scars can animate the parkour practitioner's engagements, making walls into flow-full mobility, and rails into spinning leaps. "You have to internalise the philosophy - An essential element of learning Parkour" (Sebastien Foucan). Again, we see the way parkour assumes a utopic form: it inhabits the body in a way that orders and organises space. The emotionality and intensity of movement does not cease with the action itself, but infuses the body, so that unpopulated and static lines on a screen become highly significant.

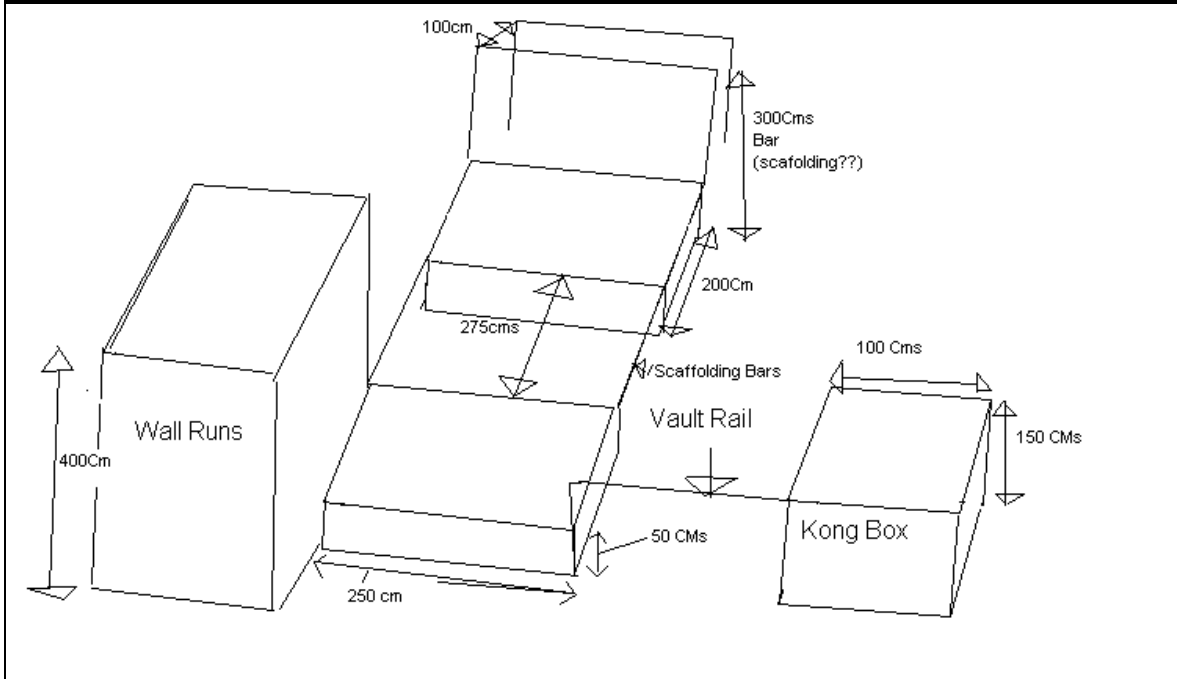
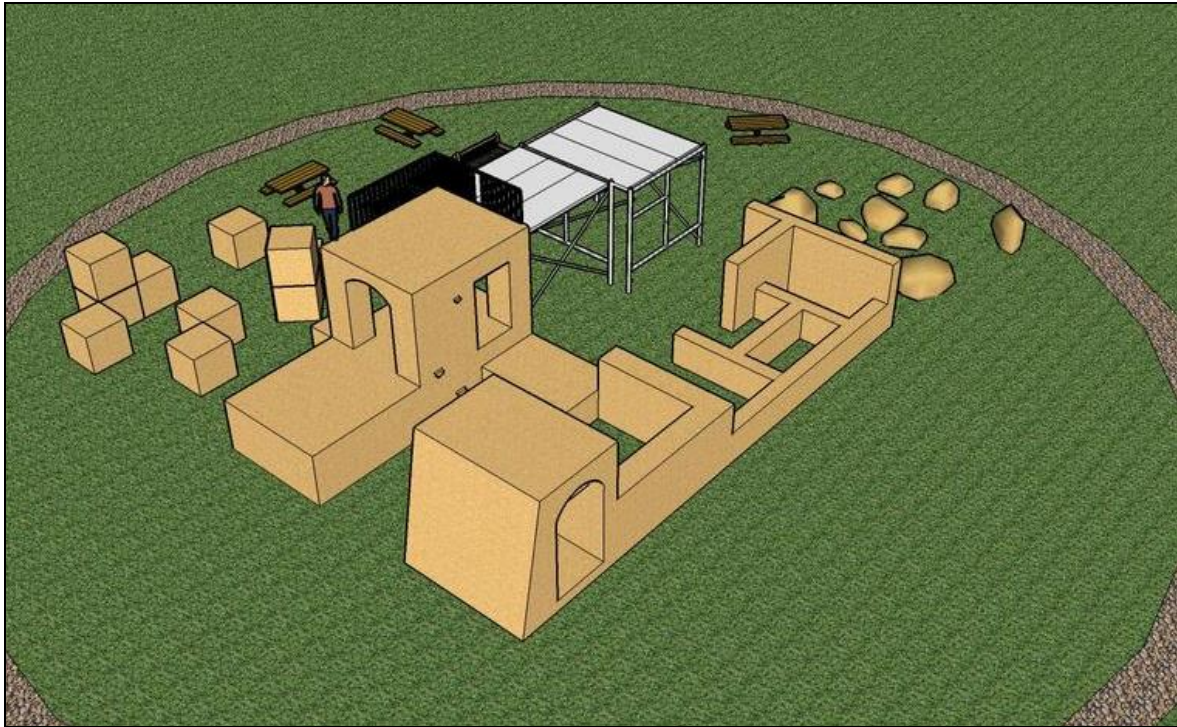


Figure 8 (a): Design and sketches. Made with a variety of different software packages, they vary from the relatively simple to the large scale complex. (source: www.UrbanFreeFlow.com public forum)

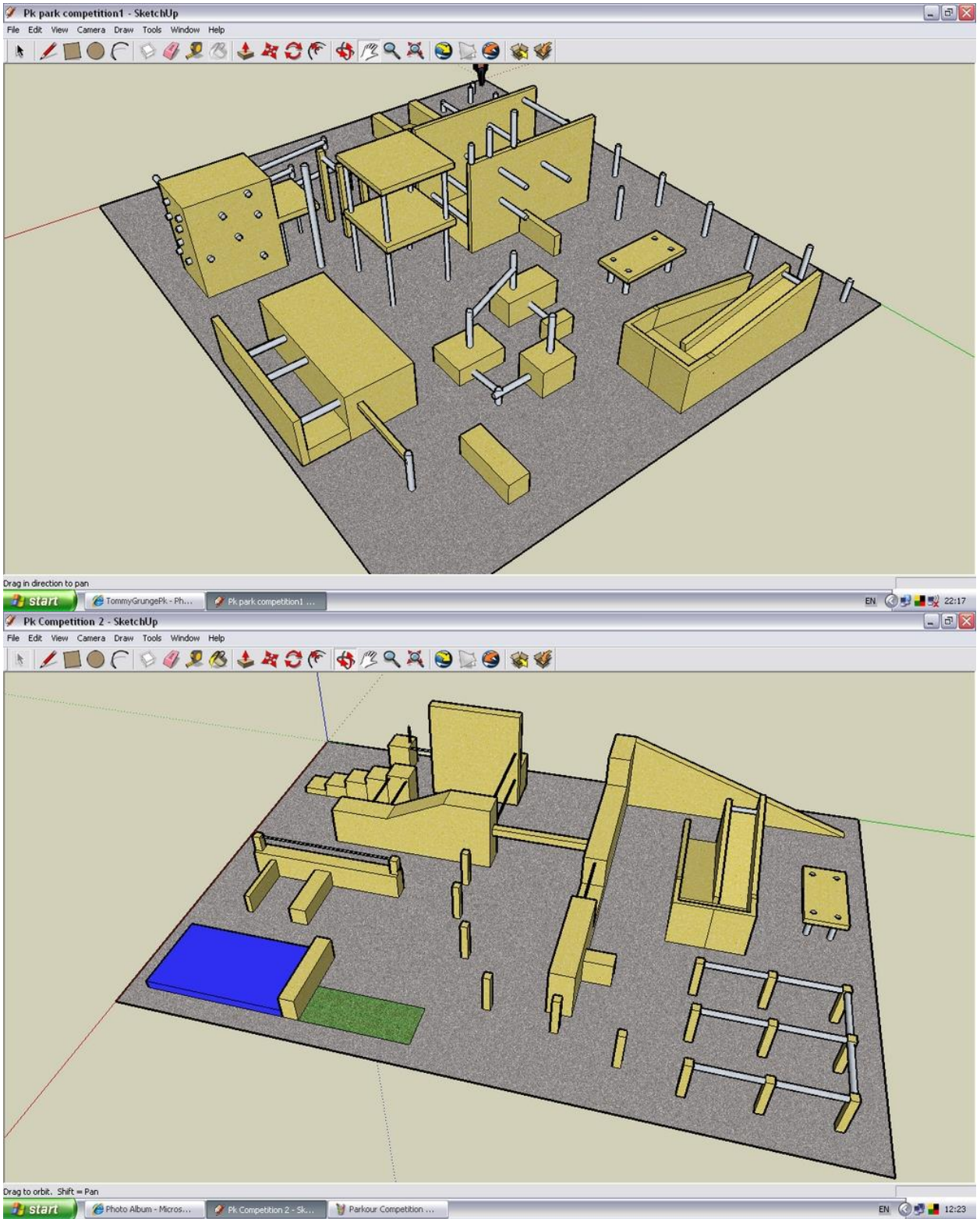


Figure 8 (b): Design and sketches

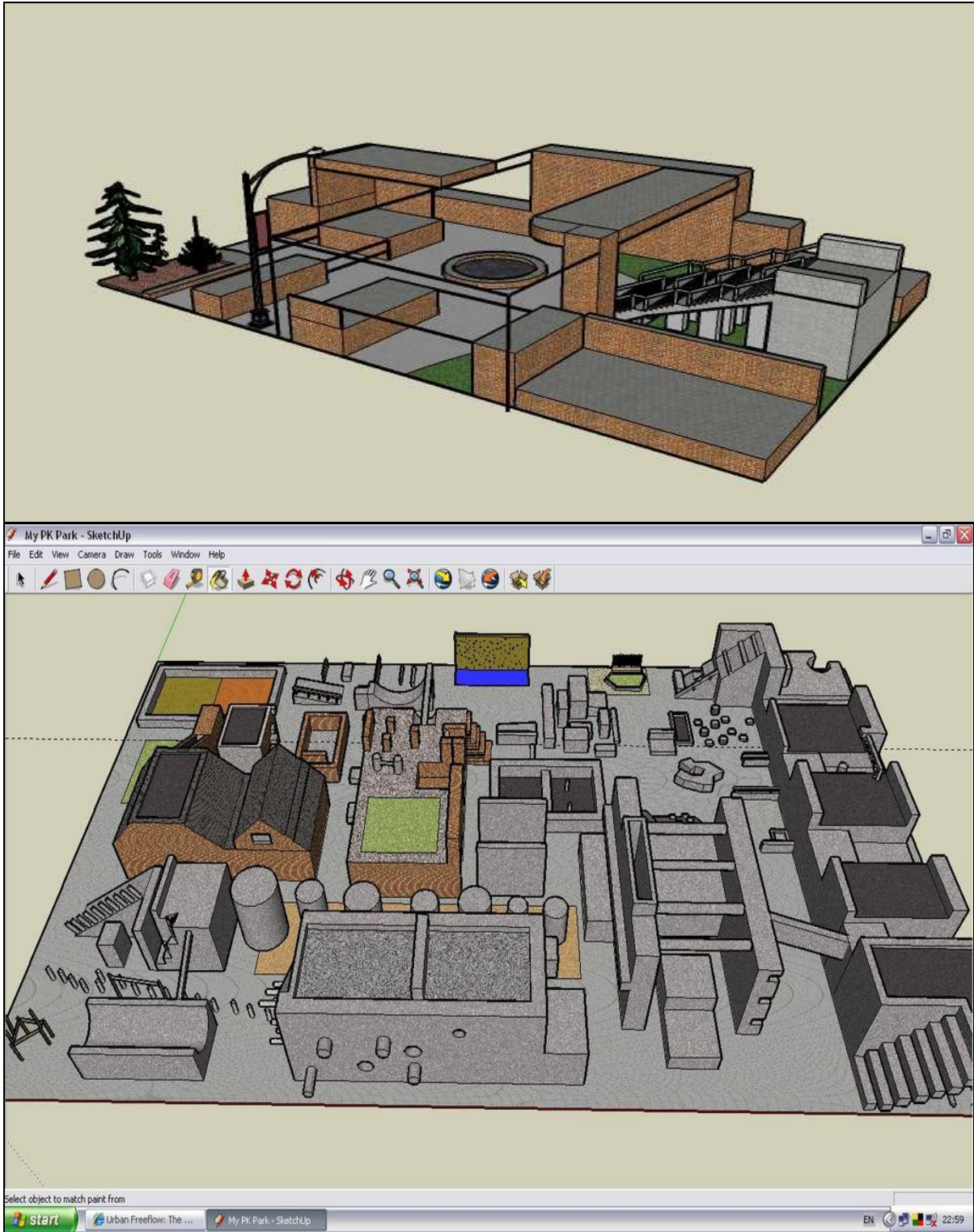


Figure 8 (c): Design and sketches.

Ethics of emotional engagement

It was a fantastic sensation; I moved from one object to the next, uninterrupted, my focus was all about (I didn't want to bang into a passer by) but never holding on to anything in particular for any period of time. I moved from concrete posts, to the strange looking outdoor kitchen, up a wall and along some, through the higher narrower part of 'the kitchen', and slowly jogged out of flowfull steam. It felt amazing. My hands touched, my body crumpled up small, expanded out, bent around. It was the contact; the contact I had with things was precious, but it never lingered, it was always letting go, moving from texture to texture, revelling in the roughness on hand, the shininess of the 'kitchen', the power of the leg, the frightening position of the body. Looking back, it is a feeling that becomes surprisingly sharp when I turn my focus to any part: the first vault over the kitchen; legs push off, body extends fully like superman flying for a split second. The padded bits of my palms go down, the stainless steel makes that noise that only thin sheet steel does, there is an only just perceptible slip on the smooth surface before my hands grip firm, this is unexpected and comes with a pang of panic but is somehow pleasant, knees tuck, hands lift off, fingertips pushing until the last, and I'm running again. (Author's diary, 25th February 2006).

While I completed much longer 'runs' between and through street furniture and buildings, this experience stuck out as a flash of effortlessness. The kind of feeling that often comes, but is soon undermined as I attempt to latch onto it. It was a moment of improvised movement that brought with it a new and welcome place, without prior contemplation and at a running pace. Every part of the environment moved together in an emotionally charged continuum of shapes, textures and sensations. Flow becomes the moment in which there is no longer any discernable 'I' that negotiates or plans paths around objects, rather there is a body that knows at each moment what to grasp, how to slide through space unhindered by obstacles (Sudnow 2001).



Figure 9: Kitchen vault. Photo credit: Sam Saville.

If flow is such a joining it raises awkward questions about ‘free will’ and with it lurks other equally difficult issues to do with ‘moral responsibility’. Without a conscious ‘I’, distinguishable, and containing the agency to act, where or to whom do we look for the cause of certain movements?

If affect is ‘a sense of push in the world’ (Thrift 2004b), then where might we find it other than in the moments that are animated in the contact we have with the world. The encounters with people and things to which we turn more or less of our attention may flow and become before thought, but it is my contention that the togetherness is inlaid with emotional engagements - which go between movement and space. While ‘consciously’ we may not be aware of our movements within a given space, during such moments we have for guidance an emotional engagement. For most of us this

engagement never ceases and while becoming and emergent, it is not haphazardly so. “Emotions, which have so often been treated as opposed to thinking, are paradoxically self-reflexive actions and experiences. But the self-reflection in emotions is corporeal rather than a matter of discursive reasoning.” (Katz 1999: 7). There is a sense in which the emotions themselves are an ethical stance towards space that can be evaluated. Indeed it is precisely our ability to look back and reflect upon our emotions, that gives them a degree of malleability. We can choose to practice or ‘train’ certain emotions. In parkour the emotional connections undone and formed through its embodied actions create new kinds of fear along with new modes of inhabiting place.

Whistling to keep up courage is no mere figure of speech. On the other hand, sit all day in a moping posture, sigh, and reply to everything with a dismal voice, and your melancholy lingers. There is no more valuable precept in moral education than this, as all who have experience know: if we wish to conquer undesirable emotional tendencies in ourselves, we must assiduously, and in the first instance cold-bloodedly, go through the *outward motions* of those contrary dispositions we prefer to cultivate. The reward of persistency will infallibly come, in the fading out of the sullenness or depression, and the advent of real cheerfulness and kindness in their stead. Smooth the brow, brighten the eye, contract the dorsal rather than the ventral aspect of the frame, and speak in a major key, pass the genial compliment, and your heart must be frigid indeed if it do not gradually thaw! (James 1884: 198)

While overstated perhaps, James’ writing has some pertinence. As he would have it, by practicing *movements* we engage in an engineering enterprise, where emotions are a becoming process, to varying degrees, under construction and revision. Unlike James’ theorisation, though, it is clear that in parkour emotions are practiced in an inescapably situated way that requires a consideration of the place. We never act alone when we ‘do’ emotions.

Is it possible then to make emotional acts purposeful? That we are in a world, bombarded with stimuli out of our control, seems to be beyond question. How we encounter the world, the sense, habit and embodied utopic that we respond *with* is inevitably not wholly ours to manipulate. What is clear, is that by deliberately eroding

spatial conventions, in a practice that calls always for ‘more’ ways to move, more ways to ‘progress’, to be ‘strong’ and to be useful, is a platform (however temporary) upon which moral practice can take place.

To be what it is – moral practice – it must set itself standards which it cannot reach. And it can never placate itself with self-assurances, or other people’s assurances, that the standards have been reached. It is, ultimately, the lack of self-righteousness, and the self-indignation it breeds, that are morality’s most indomitable ramparts. (Bauman 1993: 81)

Such moral practice takes and makes relationships that might seem unusual, precisely because it operates with an affinity for movements that break embodied habit (but also make habit in a purposive way). The enduring connections traceurs form with space recur, are reinforced and diminished as practice persists. Choice training spots and playgrounds are missed when they are removed. Several parkour groups have held ‘on-line’ funerals for sets of walls and rails and more generally public spaces that have been bulldozed and re-developed. These mourning ‘ceremonies’ - usually compiled as a web page of photographs and video clips of the space being traversed and played in by traceurs - forms a visual testament to how grand and rich it was, and how gracious a host for the practice of parkour.

Play with fear

I have been one and a half hours on this one sheer grassy/rocky bank in the middle of the countryside. I have gotten to know it well. I shall call it ‘Tree-drop’, for it has a small ash at its highest point. It is kinder than concrete, it has encouraged me to try more. Twice though, I have fallen, the second time resulting in dirt getting in my mouth... For a time Tree-drop is all there is, just me and Tree-drop. I feel I know it, better than most banks or trees. I have felt its height rise and fall, been upside-down from low branches, spun off the top lip, gotten caught by the protruding root bit, then used the same root to push off and reach the second branch... I am alone and playing with Tree-drop and my fear is part of the play – we are juggling it between us. It

keeps me going, taking small risks by trying new configurations until I am exhausted sweaty and getting cold. (Author's diary, 20th December 2005).

The practice of parkour has emotional purchase. As an idea, or ideal, it engages. With fear as playmate, emotion continually shifts in linguistic evading style, as something that moves us on, a craving, an asking, a demanding, a loving and a hoping. Fear can become a familiar link to space, a never ending riddle to solve. In parkour the answer is not to dispense with fear but is found in process, trying, testing, working out, and becoming fluid.

My vulnerability, my existence as a corporeal being, demands this development be made in contact with the world. I am never an isolated entity, cut off and un-affectable. Who can tell what will tender a spark in the imagination next? The mobility of emotionality is played out with unruly intermingling (cf. McCormack 2007). Here my progression and my play with space is made possible when I am open and vulnerable to that spark. But as the terrible and awesome things we are capable of flash before us, what takes hold? How does affect become manifest into emotional engagement? My contention is that by encouraging practitioners to find new ways to experience and move in places, parkour begins to render this process open to revision. Such revisions to our emotional engagements are 'done' through embodied movement. The way we build knowledge of these movements (as discussed in the previous sections), can bring depth and intimacy to our fear. This closeness can render fearful engagements grounded and purposeful, but also makes possible our play with space.

What the moral tales of our time tell us is that blows hit at random, needing no reason and commanding no explanation; that there is but the weakest link (if any) between what men and women do and what befalls them; and that there is little or nothing they can do to make sure that suffering will be avoided. (Bauman 2006: 28).

Here Bauman, reflecting on popular media and television, demonstrates how fear can become less touchable and less an engagement with the world. Parkour practice may reconnect the practitioner in a quite direct way, where the solidity of walls, rails and floors and movements of jumping, vaulting and rolling become, through subtle and

‘refined’ fear, something less shadowy, formless and diffuse, and more something that can be worked upon, played with, and examined. ‘Doing’ these emotions, as an engagement with place, give the traceur what has been considered by Lefebvre (1991) - and many others who have taken inspiration from him - a capacity to be ‘produced’, while they produce.

Borden (2001), in writing a history of skateboarding and architecture, for example, shows how through skateboarding movements architecture can be “compositionally quite distinct from the ordered hierarchies of architecture-as-object, architecture-as-drawing, or architecture-as-idea; [instead] it is a rhythmical procedure, continually repeated yet forever new.” (2001: 262). Here the movement re-produces anew, the body, skateboard and the space.

Architecture is at once erased and reborn in the phenomenal act of the skater’s move. Space, then, is produced dialectically – both outward from the body, and in relation to skateboard and skateboard terrain, each of the last two being erased within the process. (ibid: 108).

Yet, for the scientist, the physical space actually changes very little during parkour - there may be some small traces of rubber sole deposited on the walls or a few grains of material dislodged, but, depending on the surface, such changes are often microscopic. But such small molecular changes can drastically influence a person’s contact with space. Rubber scuff marks on the wall can tell a profound and mobile story for those that have learned to ‘read’ them. While we might casually refer to this as ‘productive’ of space, actually it is the nature of our engagement with space that changes. When I attempt for the first time, but fail to vault a rail, the specifics of that event will cause a radical mutation in my perceptions, and contact with space. My fear forms a very important part of that mutation, as it is my emotional engagement with things that envelopes my perceptions of them.

In experimentation and play there are breaks, fissures and interruptions in the seeming smoothness of emotional engagements with the world. Play in parkour has the potential

to destabilise both the emotion of fear, folding into it feelings of movements that can entice and draw one towards certain special forms and certain styles of mobility. Through my parkour practice I move around an environment in which fear is an engagement, it leaps and bounds before me teasing, questioning, and exposing gaps, textures, corners, crooks, railings and drops.

Much of the research that has shaped this chapter has been an experiment with a vulnerability⁷³ that allows new ways of connecting, and of making moving contact with architectural forms. This is more than a parkour specific point, or even a methodological point. More broadly it is an issue that permeates most of our attitudes and precognitive interactions. It is a call to be open to play, as a practice that can enrich and redefine our existence, one which encourages contact, wonder and the willingness to place a hope in fear. That is de-centring oneself for the purpose of playful interaction. Letting things; stones, walls, trees, bars, grass, ledges, lips, kerbs, grit touch and reshape you, and thus become themselves ‘alive’ in the process. Direct honest feedback is learned, through the senses, in an involved way that demands fear be a type of contact.

Although openness and vulnerability must involve degrees of ‘letting go’, this is always a partial affair. We may not make a pure or atemporal type of contact. The flaw in phenomenological reduction perhaps: that the ‘stripping away’ (epoché) can never be complete – we exist because we have a past. Body-knowledge or maturity is not easily cast off. What is called an ‘immediate’ inspection of a situation, one that does not enrol prejudice (Zaner 1975), is hard to conceive of. Yet as I have argued, here this need not subtract from the possibility of play with fear. Indeed, parkour is a process that deploys maturity *and* immaturity together and inseparably in its questing.

What then does play with fear do to our understanding of the word ‘fear’? Should we be looking towards new words to describe multilayered emotions? *Must* a specific emotion include the place in which it has arisen, as well as the sensations it entails? I have argued

⁷³ Here my vulnerability is very much a condition of my corporeality, as with Paul Harrison’s (2008) paper. Yet the context is quite different, and this is more a type of ‘active’ and even ‘sought after’ vulnerability – a susceptibility to spatial forms that is ‘achieved’ only in conspiracy with purposeful action.

here that the emotion is itself a type of contact with the world and that description of it only makes sense when we account for both the feelings and the place. I leave the question of exactly how we go about describing emotions, what words we use for ‘fear-enchantment’, ‘fear-pain’, or ‘fear-enticing’ for example, as an open one. Only to suggest that words like ‘fear-pain’ will mean most when they have a context with which we can attempt to empathise.

While fear as playmate has been the focus here, equally one could look at the opposite; that is, fear which craves repetitive safety. Acting without openness is to give no potential to place. It is to kill play with fear outright. It fosters a specific fear that closes down human experience with a dullness that describes only one path, only one future which gains empowerment through disenchanting. Towards this passive spectator, fear’s hold can become so routine, its way of touching so familiar it becomes invisible. It hides the possible, masks the fears that can beckon, spin, illuminate, and animate places. In this instance retrieving one’s multiplicity, re-engaging with fear as playmate requires that fear be larger than an embodied phenomena. Instead it is mobile amongst the kong vaults, cat leaps, palm spins⁷⁴. In this sense, for some people parkour can be a way to re-enchant their relations with spaces and ideas. Certainly my parkour and play with the environment have gotten lost together and lead me towards exciting and enlivening engagements with place.

Vulnerability is an incapacity: not, however, as a lack of power but as an ‘un-power’. Vulnerability is not simply the antithesis of strength, imperviousness, or resistance, and to think that this is the case is to continue to mistake the inherent nature of vulnerability for an extrinsic attribute or condition. (Harrison 2008: 427).

I have made a preliminary attempt to run with our widely held understanding of ‘fear’, towards something not quite so static, singular or dishearteningly negative. Through an immersive engagement with parkour, I found fear taking on an array of different textures and colours, many of which were not as unpleasant as has hitherto been theorised. In the

⁷⁴ “Kong vaults, cat leaps, palm spins” are all loose definitions of types of parkour movements.

spirit of the practice which I have been studying (and practicing), I have attempted to think about and articulate these types of fear with a kind of mobile playfulness.

Indeed, it may be that it is in play, and play not just amongst young children, that we can find ways to break out of iterative performances, not only of mobility, but of emotionality as well. Specifically, certain types of unpleasant fear can be supplanted, experimented with and reflected on, through practices like parkour that attempt to cultivate more 'enjoyable' kinds of fear. These fears are not always totally direct engagements (ie. physical pain = a fear) and can come from playful imaginings and various time-spaces. More often though they emerge in the moments of action, when engagements with place shift and are remade ready for a new 'trying' and another round of 'getting to know'.

The plasticity of a place that is under construction by traceurs can be frightening in many different ways. The intimate contact practitioners have with place ties their fears tightly to distance, texture, surface and form. Playing with such contact is a risk that, for many, is seen as unacceptably high: not only does such play have the ability to radically reshape the body's emotional engagement with place; it has the risk of permanently injuring the body itself. For the experienced practitioner though, who has known pain and possibly injury, parkour has lead them to new spatial awareness, and most importantly of all, has given them the ability to participate more deeply in the formation of their emotions and the experience of the places they move through.

But there can be no doubt: there is danger in this path. On my computer screen I see David Belle fall. My thoughts can not be disjointed from the tension I feel in my arms and legs. It is my contact that responds to these images and sounds. I have looked down and seen the danger. A danger that is part of me, for it is I who considers this jump or that; it is a possibility of freedom that fuels my fear.

It is the possibilities and the emotional engagements that connect us. David Bell runs at a hard concrete wall. I know he will fall and I feel slightly sick, for I too have that wall, that void of space to cross or disappear into. In this way our play extends down screens

and wires, until it meets, and I am standing before a wall, any wall, contemplating,
feeling slightly sick. But I get up, excitedly - a safe journey is not always a good one.

Chapter 6: Bike Trials: Designing Imagination?

Back-hopping into trials

Trackstanding again: I'm looking at the supporting post of the rail, shifting bodyweight back and forth with the front wheel turned forty five degrees to maintain my side-to-side balance. A move of the knee, a shift of the hips, a subtle kick on the front pedal, pulling on the bars and I'm up to the back wheel. Rear brake fully locked, we adjust, bike and body sensing the sloping ground underyre. By making small hops on the back wheel we get to the edge of the concrete wall and line up for the gap jump to the railing.

This time the aim is for the post. Nothing else will do, the post means accuracy, control, and the possibility of moving on – of one day removing the safety bars either side – and the thought of being atop one of the smallest possible supports. Front lowers slightly over the gap, weight goes back and down, like a coiled spring. Pedal kick, lunge forward, release brake, hook feet into pedals, push bars up and forward, spot landing, extend leg out to meet the post. Break hard...

Knees bend and back tyre squashes, wrapping its gripping rubber round the post and cushioning the impact. Relief, forced calm and panic mingle in my fingers, brake leavers squeezed with manic force - the brake slipping now would be disaster. I pull back enough on the bars to remain up in the backhop position, before beginning the drop off...

(Bike trials diary 29/08/2007)



Figure 10: Gapping to rail: author on Brisa custom build in Aberystwyth. Photo credit: Adam Gasson.

The 'back-hop' is something of a 'signature move' for trials riding. Mastering the back-hop allows the rider to manoeuvre the bike in a variety of spaces, and on objects that would not support two wheels at once. It is a fundamental technique needed for most gap jumps that do not have a convenient run up. Proficiency in the back-hop opens the door to many more techniques and possibilities for movement. The relatively straightforward idea of hopping on the back wheel of a bike is underpinned by a host of geometric dynamics in which the kinaesthetic senses of the body adapt to the specificities of the bike.

Like a toddler first standing, the learner makes the back-hop look very difficult or impossible. And while development in bike design has radically changed possible back-hop learning curves, for most it still requires significant persistence and determination. Because of this, and because it is such a fundamental movement, of all the common moves in trials the back-hop presents the single largest barrier to would-be trials riders aside from the need for a bike⁷⁵. Once mastered though, riders can make the back-hop look easy and can turn the bike clockwise and anti-clockwise, side to side, forward and backwards. In the back-hop position the bike and rider transform into a new entity able to be with and do space differently than the cyclist who remains on both wheels.

“To begin with it took me weeks just to learn to back-hop properly. I would get home from school and be straight out on my bike. On the first day of trying, I was with Tom, and I did two hops. I could already bunnyhop – I suppose you have to before back-hopping. Anyway, the next day I could only do one hop, so that was a downer. Two days later I got three in a row. The day after my best was five and I couldn’t get past that for ages. After another week or so I had a breakthrough, and got 15 – it just seemed to magically click and I ‘got’ it. I remember feeling pleased all day after that.” (Jack in conversation, recorded in bike trials diary, 3/7/06).

The perception altering process of ‘acquiring’ the back-hop demonstrates well the problematic separation of bike and rider. As the first few awkward hops give way to five or ten hops on the back wheel, the bike is being drawn closer. Just as driving cars can produce the ‘car-driver’ that knows without conscious thought how to apprehend and manoeuvre in certain spaces with a car (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1986)⁷⁶, so too does the trials rider acquire elements of the skills that enable sensing through the machine. Often the ‘magical click’ of developing embodied skill is understood as simply an inevitable progression from conscious incompetence through to unconscious competence, facilitated by intentional practice or doing.

⁷⁵ I have spoken to many mountain bike riders who have ‘dabbled in’ trials but been put off because of difficulties experienced learning the back-hop.

⁷⁶ “The expert driver becomes one with his [sic] car, and he experiences himself simply as driving, rather than as driving a car.” (Dreyfus & Dreyfus 1986: 30).

Indeed, for the brothers Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus (1986) some kind of intentional goal or plan is an essential and powerful strategy which allows us to progress from ‘beginner’ levels of understanding and skill: “A plan causes certain elements of a situation to stand out and thus makes comprehensible what would otherwise be an overwhelmingly complex situation.” (ibid: 47).

Unlike the habitual movements of car driving, the trials rider is not governed by the same restrictions: places to ride change as further embodied skills and new styles are explored. As Dorn (1998) notes of the Dreyfus brothers’ examples, ‘their models assume an equipmental context that is pretty much taken for granted’ (ibid: 196). In other words, the structures and rules governing the activities (they primarily use studies of car driving and chess playing), change very little. (ibid). While much of the Dreyfus brothers’ analysis remains useful in terms of trials, as we shall see, the rider is often looking to change the context of riding. Trials riders tack between fixing context: ‘drilling’ movements so that they are deeply ingrained, and experimenting with obstacles, bikes and movements. In this way there may be a foundation of embodied skill from which place might change. As discussed in chapter 2, finding and actively inventing the playgrounds is crucially part of the riders play *with* machine, bodies and space.

As articulated in the first diary entry, the trials rider, and writing the trials rider, can become a problematic of identity - is it ‘we’ or ‘I’ or neither? That the machine, the bike, is involved in this process is obvious, and as much literature on ‘material culture’ has argued, technology should neither be understood as determining human interactions or as independent from ‘social’ relations (Gibson 2006, Law and Hassard 1999). What is less obvious is the *way* in which bike and rider accommodate to each other, becoming so close that the rider is unable to make contact without the bike. A thousand falls, a thousand gaps, an inestimable number of combinations of bike and rider, begin to produce a distinct set of hybridities carved in biology and machine, but also reaching further out: engineering facilities, design studios, trials communities (virtual and otherwise), trials ‘parks’, magazines, advertising... The production of a ‘trials aesthetic’

while first and foremost shaped through a symbiotic meld of bike and body through space, is surely not isolable from the wider world in which they make contact.

Some Background

“Look at the hills in the distance. I always think wow, cool, it looks like you could gap jump between the peaks of them from here.” (Dave, bike trials diary, 27/8/03)

Bike trials is a very specific kind of cycle riding, and while its practice does share a lot with other ways of cycling, it is different in kind. One obvious similarity is the bike, and yet modern variance between, say, a dedicated trials bike and what is traditionally named ‘a bike’ is large enough that people often react to the trials bike in surprise – the exclamation, ‘that’s not a bike!’ is not rare (though its very incantation marks the machine as something recognizably ‘bike-like’). Since its beginnings bike trials has been in continual evolution – types of movements, techniques, technology, and sociality in and amongst the trials riding communities have not been stable for any length of time. Although there are differences that can be seen right through from individuals’ style to national variance, still we often say of this broad set of activities and technologies, that it is ‘trials’⁷⁷.

Bike trials in Britain has developed in a unique trajectory, as compared with the USA and other European countries. Here I will sketch something of an ethnographically informed consideration of its growth in the UK. In doing so I want to use the notion of contact developed in the previous chapters to help think through how trials riders participate with place. Broadly speaking this chapter paints a positive picture of trials riding as a practice that has something to contribute to the theorizations of geography and our emergent understandings of place and materiality.

The evolution of trials is at once a personal journey and a community in continual transition. Talk amongst riders about the ‘limits of trials’ often turns up comments that

⁷⁷ As with most activities whose practices are continually mutating and developing, there is a good deal of debate and some disagreement about what trials is or should be.

point to the limitations of human physiology, but almost all qualify this with the assertion that when limits are reached new ‘styles’, challenges, bikes and types of riding will keep trials ‘progressing’. I go on to examine how such meanings can emerge in startlingly different ways by body-knowledges that are socio-technological. The kinds of movements we learn from acting *with* and being in contact shape our understandings of space. We have the capacity ‘for picking up not rules, but flexible styles of behaviour’ (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1986: 5) based on the technologies we become involved with.

The trials rider develops an intimate and specific kind of knowledge of certain places. Regular riding spots become known well, but still retain their potential to surprise and challenge (see ‘the separation’). Similarly, objects are never mastered, but remain a play-in-progress, always offering up new sides of themselves and new ways to construe movement amongst them. The trials rider, then, does not for any length of time, attain what Stuart and Hubert Dreyfus (1986) consider to be ‘expert’ skill level.⁷⁸ Flitting moments of ‘expert’ practice might be experienced, in which the rider “simply spontaneously does what has normally worked and, naturally, it normally works.” (Dreyfus 1989: 8). Yet more often the rider is considering the next new obstacle, they are almost always *working up to* and having to reflect and reason out what needs to be done in order to... Though continually drawn by the prospect, they are not masters of space but instead apprentices, manipulating bike and body with some more-or-less distinct aim.

Thus, as with parkour in the previous chapter, we might consider bike trials as a utopian practice. Although there is less a sense of leaders, or ‘founders’ helping to guide practice⁷⁹, and therefore less documented philosophical underpinnings, a similar desire for re-interpretation of mobility and place exists. The sometimes unbidden hopes that orientate riders toward possibilities are not developed in isolation, but like most imagination is rooted in contact with the world.

⁷⁸ Here the skill level is ascribed based on not only the performance as observed from the outside, but primarily from the embodied processes that constitute the activity.

⁷⁹ Though there certainly have been prominent pioneers. Just some are: Martyn Ashton, Martin Hawyes, Hans Ray.

Utopianism, whatever else it may become (ideology or escapade), is at root a *feeling* – the feeling that the world can be remade on awesomely beautiful lines (of which the utopian vision is given a glimpse) and in a way that promises to ennoble human life. (Davies 1980: 407 emphasis original).

Unlike parkour these utopic practices are much more bound to the bike - to technological innovation and experiments in material science, geometry, and mechanics. Bike trials tends to make experimental engineers of its participants. In the section ‘becoming an engineer’ I use the ‘experimental engineer’ as a metaphor, not only to describe the relation of body and bike, but too discuss its use in the way trials riders ‘do’ space.

While riding bikes has been given a significant amount of serious academic attention, most of this research ties tightly into debates on sustainable transport policy, obesity and fitness initiatives (see for example Furness 2007, McClintock 2002, Pucher and Buehler 2008). Valuable though this work is, it is primarily concerned with cycling as transport, and the representations of the ‘cyclist’ are more or less rigidly maintained, with limited engagement with the wide diversity of biking experiences. Some notable exceptions to this literature is the work of Justin Spinney (2006) and Phil Jones (2005), both of whom take a more experiential tack. In writing an account of embodied mobility, Jones’s daily commute becomes much more than a trip from A to B with risk factors. Instead, we are given an account that, although being ‘functional’ (as a regular road ride that fits into transport policy strategy), also exceeds categorization with descriptions of sensations that tell us more about the riding space and journey.

The bicycle allows me to create my own micro-geography of the city, reconstructing various spaces in a highly embodied fashion: the streets with the bad potholes that shake your teeth out; the steep slope where you can get the rush of zipping past traffic queuing for the lights; the high curbs you can jump the bike off to land with a satisfying jolt. (P Jones 2005: 827)

Spinney’s work, like Jones’s, is diverse in its consideration of the ‘bike’, arguing that the meanings of the bike are far more multiple than is regularly acknowledged. He uses the

notion of the ‘safety bicycle’⁸⁰, as an understanding/meaning of the bicycle as standard in geometry, size, style and use. Of course, the ‘safety bike’ is something of a useful (for academics) but fictitious average. It is argued that this representation of the bike, construed at the intersection of machine and thought, has the ability to affect the physical production, use, and re-production of the ‘standard’ bike. Here the bike is solidified primarily in representations - the safety bike does not evolve (Cox and Van de Walle 2007). Indeed, Spinney goes slightly further suggesting that:

As an established technology, the design of the safety bicycle simply reproduces transport as an appropriate mode of movement, effectively concealing the capitalist and narrowly defined ideology of movement which it is the materialization of. Thus the technological ‘closure’ of the bicycle is seen to be less to do with any kind of technological imperatives, rather it has everything to do with political-economic imperatives and how they conceive of movement. (Spinney 2008: 287)

That the bicycle has come to represent transport and green lifestyles (Horton 2006) might seem commonsensical, but not only is the meaning of the bicycle far from certain and its political allegiances more multifaceted (see for example Bijker 1995, Cresswell 2005, Mackintosh and Norcliffe 2006, all of whom demonstrate the bike’s association with women’s liberation movements), but they are also continually being redefined. They are given what Bijker (1995) calls ‘interpretive flexibility’. The bike is constituted with both the mobility of individual bodies, and intersubjectively within communities of riders, as well as non-riders. Similarly the technologies of the bike; its components, geometry and specifications are, in part, constitutive of the movements and place-creating ability of trials riding. This communal way in which trials has developed is discussed later in the section ‘Social Technicity’. Like most forms of knowledge, the embodied techniques of the trials rider are a communal enterprise. Spinney argues that such cycling related undertakings remain marginal as they have too long passed ‘below’ the gaze of academics.

⁸⁰ The term ‘Safety Bicycle’ appears to have been used first by Henry J, Lawson in 1878, to describe his new rear wheel drive bike design, in which the rider was far closer to the ground than on the ‘high ordinaries’ that were popular at the time. Later in 1879 he produced a modified version of the design called the ‘Bicyclette’, a term still used in France to describe the safety bicycle. (Herlihy 2004: 216-17). Subsequently the safety bicycle has come to refer to any bike of ‘standard’ diamond shape and design.

The inability to include bicycles other than safety bicycles - or more accurately, bicycles suited to 'transportation' - is not for any lack of alternative technologies, rather it constitutes a wilful ideological blindness on the part of academics, policy-makers and activists alike. (Spinney 2008: 316).

To call this lack wilful, might be a touch strong, as choices and chances to research more marginal mobilities are embedded in established economic institutions. Nevertheless, Spinney's point has merit, as this marginalized position is mirrored in the actual practice of bike trials. While regular cycling – that is, cycling as sporadic transport, 'A to B leisure', or for the daily commute – has the backing of government bodies, policy documents, and sustainable initiatives⁸¹, bike trials enjoys no such protection. With a few exceptions (see Figure 11 and Figure 13), there are very few public or populated places where the street trials rider can be sure of not receiving hostile attention.

As such bike trials, or street trials at least, occupies a somewhat precarious position, in most instances being a practice of ambiguous legality. As discussed in the next section, the status of bike trials practice is thus interwoven with a performative dynamic, in which 'body image' (see Evans 2006), becomes a concern. While 'performativity' is typically used as a concept in which a person is, at least to a degree, 'unaware', here the gaze of others can turn what would be a habitual performance, into something quite different. When Butler (1990, 1993) discusses the performative nature of gender, for her, bodily identity is reproduced through iterative practice such that the identity comes to inhabit or possess the body. This is a body which performs without realising it is a 'performance'. This kind of performance is very different to a theatrical performance in which the actors are 'aware'. Rather, the body becomes 'identity' and 'object-like' precisely because of cumulative and unwitting performative acts (ibid). Here we might show that performance is always a communal unfolding, which is very much dependent on the specificities of place.

⁸¹ Such as UK's 'bike to work', and 'bicycle sharing' schemes.



Figure 11: Trials park in Sabdell, Spain is currently the biggest in Europe. It boasts many different styles of purpose built obstacles (including an indoors section) and different types of materials. Photo source: <http://www.biketrial-spain.com>.



Figure 12: A typical competition section. Orange and black tape used to designate specific routes. Photo source: Trials-Forum.



Figure 13: Indoor course specially constructed for Bike 2002 event. Photo shows Vincent Hermance gap jumping. Author's photo.

Social Technicity

I am aware of people watching, and I am aware of the noise caused by each move of my bike. Klunk, klunk. Every hop is a cringe that makes the chain slap the bike frame - my rear mech is way too loose. I have been ignoring it for a while, but now, knowing that I am being observed by these people has jolted my senses: it makes me realize that they can hear it, and in turn that it makes my riding seem heavier and clumsier than I would like to think it is. All of which seems to amplify the sound, as I maintain balance on the uneven rocky surface by making little 'correctional hops'. Sound closes in about me, and my ears feel pressured as I attempt to hop up a platform, turning ninety degrees at the same time to face the next obstacle. Hard to

describe – low confidence seems to make my ears go funny, as if I’m underwater...
(Bike trials diary, 4/6/2006).

In his PhD thesis, nestled amongst ethnographic work on cycling, Spinney (2008) includes some relatively short discussions on bike trials. As he discovers, the practice of trials is not something that can be done on a whim – it requires months, if not years to grasp some of the movements. For people unfamiliar with the practice, trials can even seem mysterious: “How do you do that?” is a very common question from children who see trials⁸². But if there is a magician’s ‘trick’ or ‘deception’ involved, it is simply that past practice, failures and accumulation of small successes, remain hidden. In a discussion of his research methods and the benefits of active participation even Spinney writes, “within the remit of this research, it is only trials bikes which are a completely ‘foreign’ object and to this day I still have no idea how riders make them do what they do.” (Spinney 2008: 93).

We can take it as a given that when Spinney describes the trials bike as a ‘foreign object’ he is describing the interaction of bike and rider: the bike-body. The trials bike is not a completely ‘foreign object’ for most people, as it shares enough with more common mountain bikes that it can be readily identified as a bike (see Figure 14, page 166 for a comparison). While it is true that in a relatively short time period, from the mid 1090s on, the trials bike has undergone many changes in design and manufacture, there has been something of a performative imperative not to deviate too far. A rider beginning trials for the first time has the option of two distinct styles of bike: mod or stock. The main difference between them being that a mod (short for modified) bike has smaller 20 inch wheels, compared to the standard 26 inch wheels of the stock⁸³. Mod bikes evolved more specifically from competition trials riding, in which the rider was mainly hopping up, over and down tricky rock strewn sections. Here the smaller wheels and ultimately lighter weight of mod bikes have excelled, to such a degree that they are considered a different class of riding in most all trials competitions.

⁸² My experience is that older people with little trials experience will express the same sentiment and curiosity, but are more restrained and far less likely to blurt the question out, only asking ‘in conversation’.

⁸³ Confusingly, Spinney (2008) describes mod bikes as ‘stock’ and stock bikes as ‘mod’ in his analysis (p290-1).



Figure 14: Stock bikes through the ages. From top down: a) Azonic DS-1 16 inch duel slalom frame: it has no bashguard, but instead an unused 32tooth chainring that has had the teeth ground off. Conventional saddle, 8 gears and suspension forks.
b) Orange Zero: One of the first breed of specific trials frames. Features high bottom bracket, low mini seat, FSA branded cranks and bashguard. c) Zoo piranha 09 frame: modern trials frame, no seat option for low weight and maximum clearance, single gear with small bashguard. Photo credit from top: Tom, author, Laurent.

Alternatively, stock bikes have a number of distinct advantages for street riding, not least of which is that the larger wheels allow them to roll better over bumps in the terrain, making them much more suited to a rolling ‘flowy’ style⁸⁴. As well as being less harsh, and juddery for general riding between obstacles, the larger wheels are more forgiving when gap jumping to a narrow object like a rail – they have a larger diameter and thus do not require the same precision as a mod with 20 inch wheels. For these and other reasons the stock bike has tended to be favoured amongst street riders. It is important to clarify here though, that the stock bike certainly does not go unmodified, it is simply called ‘stock’ in contrast to ‘mod’.

Another reason stock bikes are more popular with street riders has to do with their interaction with non-riders. Just how one perceives others to perceive the self becomes a quite important issue here, for the bike becomes constructed to be an important part of those things that compose the self. Such a sense of self can be quite reflective, contemplative, and, when applied to the trials bike-rider, adjusted accordingly. Riders, for example, were reluctant to move to using small mini saddles, something which made sense in terms of performance: shedding unnecessary weight (unnecessary as the saddle is very rarely used in trials as standing up allows better control, balance and ability to absorb and direct forces with the legs), but left the rider uneasy when observed by the non-trials riding public.

“Ashton⁸⁵ wanted people to think it is normal, the bike I mean. If people think it is something out of the circus, with a really small seat and tiny wheels, they don’t get it, they can’t relate. If it looks like a normal bike then it works. Most people know what it is like to attempt a wheelie, or to balance without going forward, so it is all the more impressive when they see a rider hopping on a railing on the back wheel. They can’t do it but they can appreciate it better if it’s on a ‘normal’ bike.” (conversation with Ben, essence of which recorded in Bike trials diary 2/6/2006).

⁸⁴ As is pushed in Ryan Leach’s film *Manifesto*, in which he rides with as few correctional hops as possible.

⁸⁵ As an influential figure in British bike trials history Martin Ashton appeared regularly in the media, writing a regular column in MBUK and performing trials demos at events and in numerous videos.

While initially resistant to the mini seat trend, when Martin Ashton saw almost all other riders adopt small seats, he did eventually change to ride mini-seat, and in fact later designed a frame (the 'Ashton Justice') which looked very unusual in that it incorporated a minimal 'saddle' into the frame itself. Even now, when many trials bike frames no longer accommodate a seat of any description, riders begrudge the seeming infinitely persistent question: "where's your seat?" Indeed, some riders who would otherwise rather save the weight resort to fitting one purely to avert this question. While this is a somewhat particular example, it highlights the way that riders do often feel themselves to be watched, in a way in which they become associated, attached or even intertwined with their bike. Here we see that: "all relevant social groups contribute to the social construction of technology, [and] all relevant artefacts contribute to the construction of social relations." (Bijker 1995: 288).

The bike, like a person's clothes, becomes an important part of performative practice. Not only this but, as Ashton's changing viewpoints about the look of a bike can show and as other riders often articulate, they are intuitively aware of the public's ability to empathise or not, to understand the difficulty of, and ultimately be impressed or not by certain trials techniques. In other words, as performing movement artists, riders have knowledge about the 'kinaesthetic sympathy' (Jarvinen 2006) that people might feel for their riding.

"I always think about what people must think, when they are watching. It's like, I know when I started [riding trials] I saw stuff half as big as this and thought it was amazing! And like, what would I have thought if I saw myself now, with the stuff we do now? I would have been blown away!" (John, bike trials diary, 2/9/07)

Thus riders often deliberately engineer both bike and movements to make maximal effect of the possible kinaesthetic sympathy of watchers. In some instances this might involve performing certain flashy movements that are not particularly technical or difficult for the riders – but which look most impressive to the non-trials rider. For example, flicking the bike up to the back wheel from a position in which it is resting on the bashguard, is notoriously tricky, but looks particularly unimpressive to a person who has not spent a

long time trying to learn the movement. Here the visibility of 'skill' is a subtle affair, in which much remains hidden to those inexperienced in trials riding, but similarly experienced riders themselves often find it hard to remember the processes involved in learning a movement.

Oppressively 'Embiked'?

"I hate it when people are watching me here, which is annoying because it is such a cool place to ride. It's just, you know that all the grannies are looking out the windows disapprovingly. It's just that feeling of being watched... not like when you, or another rider is watching, obviously. But when someone might just not understand what you're doing because they haven't seen it before. There is just more chance of getting told off... But then other times, like round on the prom, people might watch and approve, so long as you don't bashguard anything, say "well done" or clap, which is cool." (Martin, recorded in Bike trials diary 14/7/07).

As I perform trials movements, feelings that might be described as nervousness or anxiety are often fused into the context of riding. Other people, whether riders or not, affect the sensuous encounter, they intrude upon the body's supposedly 'trained' up capacities. In front of spectators, even a relatively comfortable move can become daunting for a rider used to 'quiet' trials. The influence of other 'watchers' is particularly noticeable when riders are attempting movements at the limits of their ability. Many times I have witnessed riders waiting for cars and even distant onlookers to move on before attempting a particular obstacle. It is as if someone else watching becomes a distraction that will divert an unacceptable amount of attention away from the coordination of embodied movement. It is precisely our capacity of outwardly extending whole-body reasoning which seems somehow to be curtailed by self-consciousness while under scrutinous observation. In such instances, do we consider the body as 'something', do we become, as Iris Marion Young (1990) puts it, a 'body object'?

“I mostly practice stuff I’m not sure of, or haven’t tried before in my garden at home, on my own. It is probably more dangerous that way, but it feels better - you don’t mind cocking up so much. Even if people do watch me when I’m at home, it doesn’t matter so much I can do what I like there.” (John, Bike trials diary 27/08/07).

Similar to Young’s notion of a ‘feminine comportment’ - the thoroughly internalised need to exercise bodily restraint and not mobilise the whole or ‘intentional’ body - it seems that there is a distinct ‘cycling comportment’. That is, a mode of mobility in which ‘traditional cycling’ is expected – a kind of cycling that does not involve dramatic body movements – particularly jumping off the bike (controlled bails). With such an externalized ‘self image’ (akin to that of Young’s), the body must continue to perform its learned inhibitions, and it’s embodied ideas about technology and place. For Young, the cramping of individuality inevitably follows as the body is existent in relation to possibilities but more so in relation to itself and its habits of emotionality and movement. Such an objectified body experiences ‘inhibited intentionality’, and ‘discontinuous unity’ (Young 1990).

As Spinney (2008) shows, however, these types of embodied comportments can vary with place. In his case, London’s South Bank is described as a place in which the practices of BMX and trials riders actually ‘conforms to the social and display aesthetics of such spaces’, and whilst the riding in such places is continually evolving (or for Spinney ‘critiquing’ particular material forms through movement), their practices are much more an expected part of the place. Incidentally South Bank is also a popular parkour haunt and associated with other avant-garde practices. Here the so called ‘subversive’ practice of trials riding and BMX ‘sits more comfortably within such spaces than many accounts suggest’ (Spinney 2008: 232). Still, we can say that most places trials riders move through, are not so regularly inhabited as to become places in which assumptions about any kind of ‘belonging’ can be made.

Indeed, if, following William James (1879), we consider consciousness to be slowly evolved and developed in our limbs and ‘all organs that have use’(ibid: 3), then it may be

fair to accuse this ‘consciousness’ of fickle character, for it leaves us dumbfounded and forces us to resort to reason so frequently. I sense the danger of a movement or the risk of onlookers disapproving and it stops me from simply acting and makes me consider: in these moments intense emotions mix somewhat unsympathetically with reason. My unified ‘expert’ status, as the Dreyfuses (1986) would say, is revoked.

It seems that the consciousness that James talks about, and the ‘expertise’ of the Dreyfus brothers, in which we might effortlessly and rapidly ‘avoid familiar obstacles when we dash to the phone’, or automatically ‘dodge missiles in a familiar video game’ (ibid: 30), are both ways to describe the immersion of the body in time-space⁸⁶. The familiar allows the whole body to extend backwards and forwards in time – *knowing* outcomes, acting with ease and letting them occur. Yet this learned intuition, in trials is often interrupted, and often the very intuitive knowledge itself plays an important part of that interruption. We see an obstacle with little risk or difficulty, and move the bike over it, not with deliberation but a set of familiar feelings. But when we ‘find’ an obstacle and intuitively know that it is on the boundaries of possibility suddenly we are evaluating, consciously comparing it to other obstacles, and rehearsing necessary movements and possible outcomes.

That consciousness should only be intense when nerve-processes are retarded or hesitant, and at its minimum when nerve-action is rapid or certain, adds colour to the view that it is efficacious. Rapid, automatic action is action through thoroughly excavated nerve-tracks which have not the defect of uncertain performance. All instincts and confirmed habits are of this sort. But when action is hesitant there always seem several alternative possibilities of nervous discharge. The feeling awakened lay the nascent excitement of each nerve-track seems by its attractive or repulsive quality to determine whether the excitement shall abort or shall become complete. Where indecision is great, as before a dangerous leap, consciousness is agonisingly intense. Feeling, from this point of view, may be likened to a cross-section of the chain of nervous discharge, ascertaining the links already laid down, and groping among the fresh ends presented to it for the one which seems best to fit the case. (James 1879: 16).

⁸⁶ And see also Seamon’s (1980), time-space-routines.

As mentioned, the same conscious jolting occurs when ‘watchers’ interrupt the flow of intuitive action. I have myself felt relatively easy techniques become difficult while being closely watched. When embarrassment or shame would follow, even ‘safe failure’ becomes very much less desirable and as such familiar obstacles are re-examined, and bike and bodily capacities brought into question – doubts are amplified. When our body consciousness, as James would have it, is shorted out with intensity that has us ‘groping for new nerve endings’, reason regularly (and thankfully) steps in. This is the case whether intuition is interrupted by an inexplicable and indefinable uneasy feeling, the body consciousness itself warning us of the difficulty, or the uncomfortable sense of watchers disapproving, which is of course just as much a learned intuition.

For the Dreyfus brothers such moments, when intuition ‘knows’ to call upon a more reasoned mode of consciousness, mark a regression from an expert skill level, and necessitate the initiation of more ‘rule following’ based action, which dramatically detracts from performance. They cite an interesting example of a flying instructor who, after a long break from piloting himself, finds he must revert to following the analytic ‘rule book’ of how to manoeuvre. Here it is ‘reason’ and the detached rule following, rather than unconsciously and masterfully ‘just doing it’, as he once had, that prevented him from performing as well (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1986: 17-8). The problem with all their examples though, for our purposes, is that they have a distinct ‘rule book’, however abstract it might be. Intensity that stops the rider and practically forces a re-examination of body-space-machine relations, does not (always) result in us falling back on rule-based analytics. Rather, it more or less engages our intuition in *new* ways; ways that play with, make contact afresh, and bid us *try* space out. As James put it, consciousness can become ‘agonisingly intense’, as the body seeks out new perspectives or grasps upon the terrain.

‘We seldom “choose our words” or “place our feet” – we simply talk and walk.’ (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1986: 32). And yet the trials bike and the encounter with both people and place draw forth the need to *reflexively improvise*. Seemingly an oxymoron, reflexive

improvisation is an expression of the ‘time inseparability’ of our embodied action. Here, and as the Dreyfus brothers go on to suggest, ‘deliberative rationality is not opposed to intuition, but based upon it.’ (1986: 205). In this way whole-body reasoning becomes central to the rider’s capacity for re-interpretation of place. It is the repeated experiences – in this case those of being with a bike and moving in certain places - that give foundation to our intuitions and thus our capacity for ‘reason’. In other words, for the experienced rider, embodied reasoning cannot help but take place through, or rather with, the bike. Do we then learn specific kinds of ‘embiked’ reasoning?

Embiked: sounds like a prison – caging our ‘intentionality’ and ‘humanness’. Indeed, it seems that some writers on technology have implicitly come to just that conclusion: all too easily we begin to think of technology like the bike or car as a distancing mechanism, an obstacle to some authentic or more real world, in which the body senses are truer, purer and more primary (compare Augé 1995 and Merriman 2007). That new technology, as a dynamic object, alters or rather co-constitutes perceptions is clear, but that has always been the case. Experience of climbing trees is a contact with the body as readily as scaling a metal climbing frame. Both are interactions amid objects which emerge with our movement and their distinct characteristics. Both shape perceptions and embodied knowledge through contact.

Might it be there are other specific kinds of technologies that require special distinction? For writers like Virilio (1999) the automobile and other motorized and electronic forms of transport and communication (in particular the television) is productive if a certain kind of optically framed experience. Perhaps this is so: it is clear that different textures, materials and configurations of objects stimulate different kinds of sensorial experience, thus we can distinguish between and have quite different affects from say a painting as from a tempting plate of food. It becomes more difficult however, to accept that one experience can be less ‘real’ an encounter than another because here we venture into the realm of ethics and values. In making this extra step we put ourselves on the line, as agents of change – we say of some technology or activity that it is *better* than another – not just different. For example, Phil Jones, in considering the experience of the cyclist,

makes such a claim: that the bike has potential for a more intimate connection than the car.

This Playstation-perception of automotive movement simply does not apply to the cyclist. The physical intensity of the cyclist's experience locates the bicycle in an older transport paradigm – very much the 'equestrian' mount. The sense of speed is very real, with fast-moving air bringing tears to unprotected eyes. The cyclist's fragility seems all the more acute when the slightest miscalculation could send the body hurtling across the asphalt... It is the very sense of danger that makes the speed an exhilarating and *very real* experience. (P Jones 2005: 821, my emphasis).

For him then, the bike, as opposed to the car, is a technology which actually heightens the real immediacy of space. For Jones, riding a bike allows a reality more 'real', an intimacy that is inevitably lost behind a car windscreen. Similarly Virilio, begrudges the loss of 'real' spaces of immediate action, at the hands on new technologies of so-called 'real time' communication (Virilio 1999, but see also Merriman's (2007) critique aimed at this kind of thinking). Following such writers one might be tempted to equate the 'real' with danger, intensity, 'nowness', and the necessity for constant *reflexive improvisation*, and perhaps with good reason, as it seems the most obvious and heart rending interruption to bland, forgettable habitual everydayness. What I wish to suggest, however, is that it is the quality of contact we make with technologies that often gets dubiously referred to as more or less real. To do so we must obviously look to the specifics of contact, in which technologies, people, and places touch us, not always as much as we touch them.

Pedalling Real?

The relative merit of bike components is of great interest to almost all trials riders. Each part of the bike can usually relate to distinct and intense experiences of riding trials - of falling off, or overcoming an obstacle. Most riders can recall some feeling of what it was like to first fit and then ride with this or that component, and will happily discuss their take on the advantages and disadvantages of any given bike part. Geometric forms and material design are carefully considered. For example, how a pedal 'performs' for trials

riding is a complex function of its interaction with the shoe, but also extends out to encompass the crank, the bike, foot size, the body and the terrain. Thus the question is not how does a pedal perform, but rather, what does a pedal enable, what does it constrain, how does it participate in the new landscapes it enacts?

The pedal, like any other component of the trials bike, shapes the rider and the style of riding to such a degree that one might guess a significant amount about the kinds of riding people do from the choice and markings on the pedal. The scratches and wear of parts is particularly telling in this regard; whether a rider is left or right footed⁸⁷, whether they ‘bashguard up’⁸⁸ obstacles, or how smoothly they ride will all be reflected in the material bike. Similarly though, riders carry marks which may be read in a ‘trials way’. Here bikes and riders with so many comingled choices tell a story in which “cyborgs are simultaneously entities and metaphors, living beings and narrative constructions.” (Hayles 1995: 322).

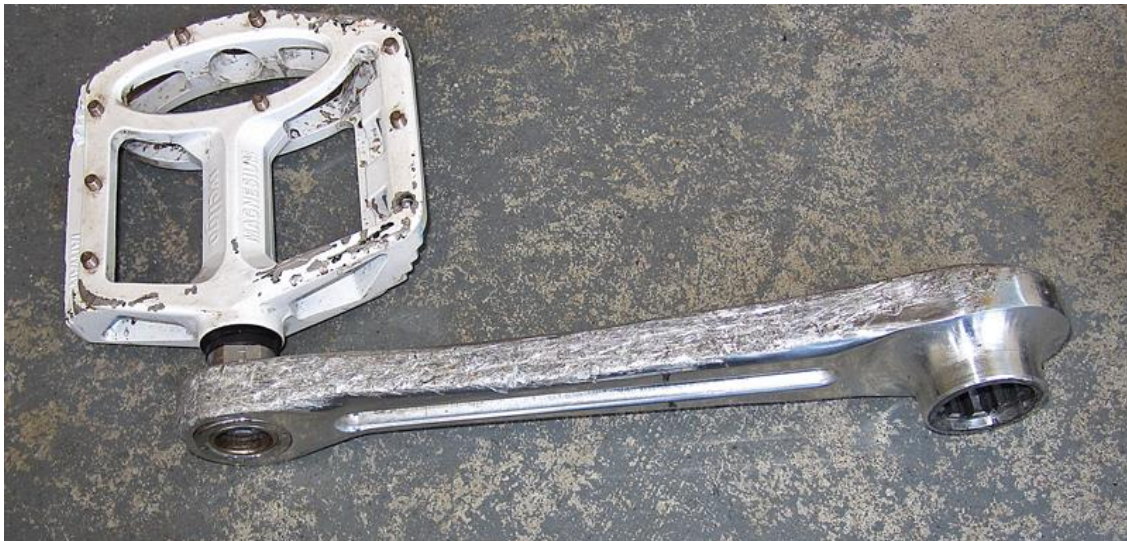


Figure 15: right-side crank arm and pedal. Left footed rider, fairly experienced, good at getting up high obstacles, likes lightweight components over strong heavy ones - likely to be a light smooth rider, keen on tricky technical riding as opposed to ‘big street’. Source: Trials-Forum.

⁸⁷ This refers to the foot that is forward during most trials movements.

⁸⁸ Bashguarding up an object is where the trials rider cannot get straight up to both wheels, instead the bike ends up resting on the bashguard and front wheel. This is an acceptable technique in many trials competitions (but not in Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) competition) and can be both intentional and unintentional. It is often frowned upon during street rides as it can cause damage to the obstacle/street furniture.

Apart from clothing choices and safety equipment, the flesh is sometimes quite literally etched with ‘readable’ signs. So called ‘pedal rash’ – not uncommon amongst trials riders – most often occurs when a rider’s foot slips off the front pedal during a move or a ‘bail out’. The weight still on the back pedal forces the cranks to spin round, smashing the front pedal into the shin, often gouging out long vertical strips of flesh.



Figure 16: Shark Bite pedals. Source: Trials-Forum.

In this instance the rider has to make a judgment of technology based on a set of compromises: the grip of the pedal roughly corresponds to the sharpness of its design. Once popular ‘Shark Bite’ pedals are an extreme choice, supposedly having exceptional grip, but incurring a heavy toll if the rider’s foot does slip. A more common choice is the flat pedal which has a varying number of removable ‘pins’ that dig into the rubber shoe sole (as in Figure 15)

Technologies that are novel – new frame geometry, a fast pickup hub, a different tyre, a change of stem – slowly become, like Mike Michael’s (2000) walking boot, a mundane technology. So incorporated into the body as to be forgotten, taken for granted until

either body or machine fail or otherwise perform in some way as to re-assert the ‘thereness’ of a component. Well-designed components, in particular, merge seamlessly into the body’s range of movement and perception.

What then, can the pedal tell us about the quality of contact a rider has with places? Just as with footwear, once it becomes familiar the pedal goes largely unnoticed, except during falls or bail outs, yet it is always there making a difference. It performs in a certain way, when compared to other pedals of different design, and is thus implicated in the way a rider makes contact with space, and the intuition and emotional judgments they might have about certain spaces. Can we say of a particular pedal that it makes contact of a lesser or greater quality? For the rider, of course, the answer is emphatically yes: one need only use some cheap plastic pedals that will not grip the foot and in turn will not allow many trials movements⁸⁹, to see a variance in the quality of contact. Not being able to move in certain ways changes the way riders perceive and inhabit spaces, in what is, for them, an obviously negative way.

We cannot help but make judgments in this way. Flat pedals are better than clipless, the experience of the car is inferior to that of the bike, television is better than reading, hydraulic brakes are better than V-brakes - all judgements about technologies based on our contact with the world. In this instance the technology of the pedal is integrated with a host of complex relations that riders have with space. This is true of those things that tend to be described/ marketed as the ‘contact points’ of the bike - that is the grips, pedals (and also the saddle for other kinds of riding) – but also of the rest of the bike, and the quality of contact it allows. The body too is able to evaluate its own abilities for making contact with the world, and it is to this embodied, yet ‘embiked’, technology that we now turn.

The human as a technology?

⁸⁹ ‘Front hops’ - that is, hopping on the front wheel only - is a particularly good test of pedal grip, as the foot is continually hooking up and back – a movement all but impossible of slippery pedals.

I finally made it up the sewage wall [a four foot high concrete retaining wall near a sewage works] without using the bashguard today! [...] ⁹⁰ After the first time I just did it again several times – all worked. These were some strange feelings: those similar to techniques used getting up smaller stuff, but different. While I was doing it I could sort of *feel* that I *looked* like Martin. I shift bodyweight right over the front as the front wheel is just clearing the lip of the wall, and just let the back roll up without any brakes. I could ‘recognise’ this body movement as ones he (Martin) does. This might well have to do with the frame-stem combo I am using at the moment: it seems suited for that kind of movement. (Bike trials diary 25/07/06, emphasis added later).

Very little explicit ‘instruction manuals’ exist for bike trials techniques in printed form, and only a few tutorial videos available for purchase detail some of the basic movements. Nevertheless, even without diagrams or formulas to follow, riders learn from each other. Members of the so-called trials community (in Britain we might consider the centre of which to be the on-line forum ‘trials-forum’) carefully dissect movements other riders are doing and showing in edited video clips uploaded to the internet. In this digital video format riders can use freeze frame and slow motion to analyse the techniques of other riders and take what they can from others’ embodied knowledge.

Similarly riders very often ride in groups, not only for company (and in some cases safety), but also because of the improved learning curve. This is not simply a technical matter - rides interact in complex emotional ways, movements may elicit inspiration, curiosity, and outright amazement, but also for competitive riders a sense of disappointment or inadequacy. Either way, many riders espouse the benefits of ‘social aspects’ of riding. The talk (common topics being: discussions of relative merits of certain bike components, riding locations, technique, and past trials experience) is often considered as much a part of riding, as the riding itself. Thus in riding sessions riders communally negotiate the practice ‘trials’, communicating not just with their talk but also with their bike-bodies’ movement through place.

⁹⁰ There is a note in my diary here about how I have recently been most enthusiastically recording events where I manage to do something new (especially where I have not ‘done’ the obstacle before but have been trying for some time). I write myself a reminder to pay more attention to failures.

Riding with better riders will definitely help you improve. Your perception of what is rideable and what can be done will change which can help you progress quicker. But remember there is no quick way to getting good at trials and one person's method may not work for your style of riding, you need to just get out and ride. Videos can give you pointers and breakdowns of techniques, but watching all the videos in the world won't make you good on its own. Try, try, try, *do*..... (Dan, 11/12/06 trials forum).

The trials rider has a 'socially organized competence' (Gibson 2006:172) which comes into existence through interaction with technologies. Riders pay keen attention to the way others approach similar objects – timings, speeds, and all other aspects of technique are watched, often vocalised, but *not* necessarily then translated into doing. One of the problems with Merleau-Ponty's earlier work is that he describes the practices of 'normal' people, whose functioning is smooth and unproblematic; they are mobile in the world in terms of their body's coherent intentionality. Or they have serious neurological dysfunction and are entirely incapable of operating in an everyday capacity. Of course most people do not have perfectly smooth experiences or performances (Shusterman 2005). Instead their performances, their bodies, and their emotional states change over time and place. Indeed bodies in trials, as in other activities are being changed, perhaps even consciously 'worked on' (Shilling 1993), but in all instances, as Dan suggests above, it involves a good deal of *trying*.

One can watch a trials movement several times and, as Spinney found, still have no idea how to do the techniques, what muscles must be called upon and what kinaesthetic sensations 'mean'. As such, less experienced trials riders can watch unfamiliar movements with a sense of disbelief and confusion⁹¹. Out riding with better riders I would often have watched closely how other riders made the movements, yet when considering the obstacle directly, on my bike, I might be completely at a loss. In such circumstances translating the visual into the kinaesthetic seems a hefty task. One way to adapt is to look closely at one particular part of a movement, isolate off the breaking

⁹¹ Interestingly one of the most common responses on trials-forum to new 'paradigm making' videos goes along the lines of, "what just happened?"

finger, the pedal stroke timing, or the approach speed - try to get just that bit right before moving onto some other part of the body.

Through this process of dissecting little bits of visual representations (watching others performing movement in situ or on videos) and then cobbling them together later when actually doing the technique, I can build up a feeling for the body motions. All the while this requires that I move quite unlike Merleau-Ponty's (1962) intentional body-subject. Instead I am always focusing my attention on certain bits of my bike-body, hunting for the 'best' way to receive, interpret and respond to the sensations coming to me from the terrain. This 'best' way comes not just from my firsthand experience, but is complicatedly mixed with sensations encountered while watching other riders.

Figure 17 shows this circuit of watching and doing and breaking habit⁹². What I wish to show, is that whilst the time spent watching other riders either in person or on video may have been, a visual sensory input, they become very much a feeling experience. I did not experience them as representation in the sense of something that can be imaged or visualised, rather as a set of feelings that were happening: the 🤔 and the 🤯 so common in responses to forum posted videos. When I started trials for example, I could relate very little to what I saw happening at (A). The movements had impact, but they were foreign to me, my body had no idea how they would feel or how to perform them. Thus when it came to practice the move (C) I would be quite dumbfounded. Of course, this feeling is not specific to me, in many years of riding, all the riders I have spoken to have at some point felt overwhelmed by an obstacle / movement – unable to easily understand it as a possibility. Indeed, it is interesting to note the how this happens differently when watching videos. Many riders have self-confidently seen obstacles-movements in video, only to find that when they see the place firsthand, with their bike, in place – it can be transformed into a daunting impossibility.

⁹² Use of diagrams can tend to be sterile, straight and clean; suggesting inhuman disembodied understandings of space (Longhurst 2001). I hope though, that the diagrams in this project will be generative abstractions (McCormack 2005), ones which will create modes of understanding the activities which are clearly not 'truthful' in the sense of practicing aikido, but might be a useful emergence form an entirely typescript feel. Like the text, I wish to push the diagram's potential to be 'added to' and 'made' by the reader. Diagrams remain open for interaction, because the possibility to affect, I believe, and as these activities seem to suggest, is amplified by the ability to be affected. A productive and playful negotiation then.

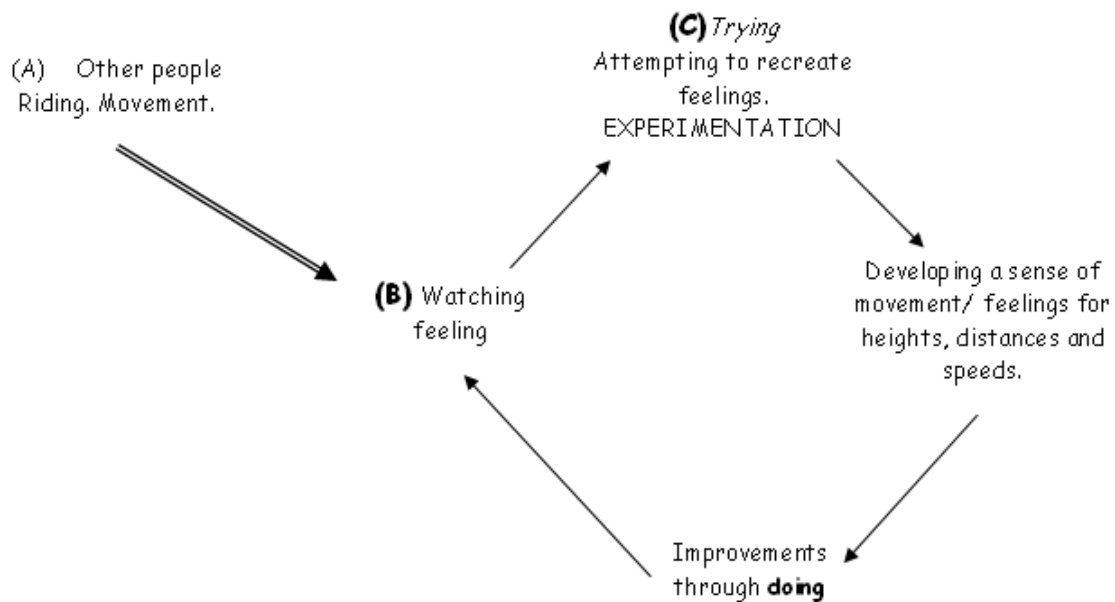


Figure 17: The feeling-doing loop

As with other riders I have found that, through practice, or rather sustained trying, the process occurring at (B) becomes quite different. I *feel* what I see at (A). It would trigger off memories of previous doings that were nothing like pictures, or words, but more like twitching, feeling muscles, which knew the pleasure or pain of side-hopping a certain way, or jumping a gap between walls. I am not always particularly aware of those kinaesthetic feelings; they just occur, and while at times I would ‘form’ the action in my head as language: “so he put his right knee to the side and squatted more back before launching...”, this was rare – language seemed so inadequate for what trials riders are doing. Thus, when it came to (C), it was those feelings which were retraced – I attempted to evoke them once more. It was always an experimental focus, feeling different speeds, distances and intensities. At (C) my feelings were ‘done’ and practiced, the movements no longer static and internal, rather expressed through space with the bike.

After some time once new techniques become less about trying and more a practicing, the failures give way to success – sometimes counted in the number of times out of five or ten one could pull off a certain movement. (C) became more important - the kinaesthetic

dynamics became much more complicated as we progress, because very often the risks are increased. Heights and dangers become immediate. Forging of the body's responses, a process undergone during practice becomes a movement a hundred times, a thousand times. And slowly the bike-body comes together approaching what has been described as the 'body-subject', only to be pulled apart by the new way of being in space.

Because of body subject, people can manage routine demands automatically and so gain freedom from their everyday spaces and environments. In this way they rise above such mundane events as getting places, finding things, performing basic gestures, and direct the creative attention to wider, more significant life dimensions. (Seamon 1980: 157).

In some places, for some actions, the need to focus attention on the body's individual bits recedes and the bike-body moves as one coherent entity. Occasionally a limb will be reminded when it is not moving 'properly', when it is out of tune with the goings on. Pain or failure or both are usually involved but other times friends might point out something in your technique. This brings the offending limb/part back into focus for some time while its movement is worked upon, before once again it fades into unconscious realms. The kind of masterful 'body-subject' of Seamon is a tempting one, a body which is freed up to focus on other aspects of the activity, such as making the move as smooth and soundless as possible, rather than concentrating on the fundamentals of the move - in a sense fine tuning. Even in these instances though, when focusing on individual parts of the body, it is true that this negates the 'un-attention' and unity, obscuring the more primordial body of Merleau-Ponty. But ultimately, such practices are transitory and seem to have as their 'goal' the improvement and heightening of that primordial, intuitive perception. Again, it is only when a certain proficiency is achieved that the body can begin to move unselfconsciously (Malbon 1999).

The box - what an unexpected find! Strange that none of us had ever 'seen' the shiny blue electric box before. It was about three and a half feet high, eight inches across and about five deep, and had a perfect run up. It was not a massively high obstacle to get up, but required a fair amount of precision and it had to be 'back-wheeled' because

there was nothing to put the front wheel down on. Scary stuff. (Bike trials diary 16/9/03).

‘Effortless intuitive perception’, the bike-body’s goal might be, but it is always being seized and surprised by what the fulfilment of that goal means: new places, new distances and new movements, which *do* require effort (or play). Always these new places are arriving *with*: with other riders, techniques, technologies, materials. When a new rubber compound used in a tyre can open up new risky lands, or a new video can unleash a movement previously unconsidered, the trials rider might only be understood as a collective.

Changing technological bike trends and the changes in the types of riding in trials are informed by the communication between riders, and go hand in hand with the re-interpretive utopic nature of trials. As a continual exploration of possibilities for mobility, trials riders invent new techniques and technologies in an inescapably connected way. We live and change as part of cyborg worlds ‘whether we want to or not’ (Haraway 1995: xix). Here the bike could be considered as an object that has ‘embodied within it’ the social relations and riding context that first gave rise to it (Dant 1999). Such inventions come from within the trials community but also from ‘without’, as we become ‘constructed’ as ‘trials riders’ (or just as often as BMXers, trouble makers, or lazy drop outs).

In mounting the bicycle, I was not simply travelling to work, but transforming and reconstructing my body, both literally as I became more physically fit, and also in the more abstract, Butlerian sense... I was being loaded with a whole series of labels: ‘fit’, ‘healthy’, ‘eco-friendly’, ‘sustainable’ (and also ‘mad’, ‘crazy’, reckless’). No longer myself, I was constructed as a cyclist. (P Jones 2005: 814)

As I have discussed, ‘cyclist’ is a very different label to ‘trials rider’. Riding a trials bike and doing trials has measurably different effects. And yet like Jones, we are often taken for ‘cyclists’ and as such simply do not belong in the places we go: a cyclist has no place lingering in little used industrial areas, farmers’ marts, or in pedestrian squares, let alone up on a walls or railings. As classic Butlerian thought goes, in the process of riding, the

‘cyclist’ or the ‘trials rider’ “is both produced and destabilized in the course of reiteration.” (Butler 1993: 10). Thus, while doing trials can redefine what it is to be a ‘cyclist’ (or begin to define ‘trials rider’), so too is its practice susceptible to those pre-existing constructions. Such a susceptibility is manifest in numerous ways. The routes trials riders choose, for example, are often based on feelings and perceptions of the likelihood of certain public encounters: moving from one riding spot to the next, staying long at some but not others, avoiding some altogether. Places laden with associated safety or trouble, understood as fit to be observed doing trials in or not. And it is the riders’ more or less habitual perceptions of the possibilities in place, as well as a whole raft of other, typically unarticulated, emotive judgments – what rideable formations are there? What kinds of body movements/feelings will be involved? Who else is around? What interactions are likely? Is my bike setup for that kind of riding? These are all questions that feed into the riding spots trials riders ‘session’. All performances are materialized. They are compiled in contact, as so many elements of time-space are ‘taken care of’ by intuitive bike-body thought.



Figure 18: Richard with Orange Zero, riding little used areas.

Out of the tension between out and out constructivism and essentialism of sex, Butler produces a theory of performed identity that comes close to approximating this. Here matter is neither solid thing nor cultural embeddedness, but is better understood as emergent process.

What I would propose in place of these conceptions of construction is a return to the notion of matter, not as site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the *effect* of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter. (Butler 1993: 10, emphasis added).

Taking such a conception of ‘matter’ seriously requires that we call to attention those modes of behaviour which can so easily go unnoticed. While the trials rider should probably be considered creative in their systematic development of embodied techniques and accompanying re-envisioning of space, as important is the ‘matter’ upon which such development depends. A trials rider, separated from their bike, moving as pedestrian, is

still a technologically constituted entity in that they will still notice walls of specific heights, rails a certain distance apart, enticingly angled walkways, and so on. Similarly a rider's current 'projects' – the places, movements and obstacles they are thinking about doing – are founded on the permeability of their materiality. In other words, trials practitioners see, touch and feel place with the bike, if not in mind, then in body. Riders can remember many of the moments in which such perceptual foundations were 'redesigned' – but much of the continual practice which ingrains their ways of perceiving place can slip past thoughtful reflection.

“Now I can do it, it just seems easy, but I remember watching Chris doing this [move] and thinking “oh my god, he’s amazing!” I really couldn’t believe he was getting up there on a bike!” (Dave, Bike trials diary, 2/9/05).

The heights of things actually look TOTALLY different to me now 3 years into riding. When I first started, a bench was for sitting on. Riding up behind it the thought of EVER getting near the top was utterly ridiculous. It really did look VERY high, yet now, that same 3ft bench looks like a mere curb. I just sorta 'ride' straight over it. It's very odd. (Prawn, trials-forum.com, 1/12/03).

It is interesting to note the ease with which experienced riders dismiss so much activity, so many hours of trial and error as now being 'just easy'. Shocking flashes mark our bodies but the slow grind of muscles and nerve pathways restructuring can slip by without comment – it becomes 'just who we are'. It seems we forget how *not* to ride a bike. The small gaps and fissures opened by Butler's iteration, the marginal progress, the average days without distinctive incident, all build into the sense of place a rider enjoys or not, whether on a bike or not.

We cannot assume that the (nearly) naked human body is not already a technological artefact, shaped by cultural training techniques and subject to social dynamics, such as learned inhibitions, and accumulating practical knowledge and innovation. (Downey 2007: 203-4).

None of this means that slow development through repetition cannot be exceeded, disturbed or stunned. As a playful and vulnerable entity the trials rider 'cannot be wholly

defined or fixed by the repetitive labour or that norm' (Butler 1993:10). The human as 'technological artefact' is still one which remains unfathomably complex in its evolving contact with place. As such, solidity is, as always, an illusion cast by an underappreciated kind of contact. In trials stability is actively sought, if only to provide a foot-up to another rickety shifting platform.

This instability is the *deconstituting* possibility in the very process of repetition, the power that undoes the very effects by which "sex" is stabilized, the possibility to put the consolidation of the norms of "sex" into a potentially productive crisis. (Butler 1993:10).

The similar disruption of 'the cyclist' might be one thing, but it seems for many trials riders a more desirable outcome would actually be the creation and recognition of a category: 'trials rider'.

When people have seen it before and know what it is, they are usually cool with it. If they can point and say oh look, he's doing trials, that's fine. But so many people just don't know what it is. It's because they don't know what it is. (Richard, in conversation about getting told off for doing trials, bike trials diary, 21,9,04).

People, it seems, are highly suspicious of the body in process. That which cannot be categorised is mobile beyond conventional description, is innately and indefinitely deviant, and is very often made to feel unwelcome (Cresswell 2006). Countering this taken-for-granted ethos of fixity Elizabeth Grosz, in considering the question of how places and bodies are mutually constituted, draws on the notion of a 'body image' (particularly as deployed by Schilder 1978) which is *never* stable or complete. Rather, the body image is plastic and is moulded through the body's day-to-day actions in place⁹³. At the same time the 'body image', for Grosz, coordinates and unifies bodily senses and behaviours. It is not simply the physicality of the body; it also incorporates 'mental' processes as well as times and spaces that might typically be considered as outside of 'the body'. "The body image is not an isolated image of the body but

⁹³ Thus, Elizabeth Grosz argues that the use of groupings or categories like sex, class, race etc. does violence to the world that defies 'common sense' categories, or axes of identity.

necessarily involves the relations between the body, the surrounding space, other objects and bodies, and the coordinates or axes of vertical and horizontal.” (Grosz 1994: 85). Thus while the body image is, at least in part, a product of places and *events*, it also facilitates bodily action, movements, expressions and attitudes towards places and people. Here then, we have our categories carved into our flesh by our contextual emergence – the cyclist, branded by those people who will recognise the shape of a bike and rider, while simultaneously, unbranded by their unusual actions and contextualisation.

By considering ourselves as constituted through repeated actions with spaces, as a reading of Grosz and Butler might suggest, we have a scene set and ready for the ‘post’ or ‘trans-human’ perspective. One in which we can no longer accept the autonomy of the individual, or the human-centred presuppositions of such disciplines as anthropology. From what standpoint we now write remains in the balance. Do we embrace the kind of disembodied subjectivity, in which we are dispersed amongst networks of machines? A profound question for the discipline of geography, for ‘a disembodied subjectivity messes with *whereness*’ (Stone 1995: 398). How do we locate ourselves or others in this technofied dispersion?

Some theorists of ‘cyborg anthropology’ have actively begun to explore “a new alternative by examining the argument that human subjects and subjectivity are as much a function of machines, machine relations and information transfers as they are machine producers and operators.” (Downey, et al. 1995: 343). Such a perspective is attractive because technology is patently involved in every human activity we would care to theorise. A rider can, of course, be conceived of as a cyborg, a hybrid of organic flesh and technology, but could not also the street and the bike and rider? In other words, there is a question about how far we can go with the knowledge that, ‘human agency’ (traditionally construed) ‘serves in the world today as but one contributor to activities that are growing in scope, complex, diverse, and yet interconnected.’ (Downey, et al. 1995: 343). As the study of material culture has repeatedly demonstrated, technology is never developed independently of human society (Law and Hassard 1999). But does, we might

ask, technology still make for separations as well as connections (see ‘The Separation’, this chapter, for more on this)? One possible route through such questions is advanced by Nikolas Rose’s critique of the kind of performativity envisioned by Grosz and Butler:

Rather than an analytic of inscription, in which culture is written on the flesh, I think it is more useful to think in terms of technology... Language, writing, memory can themselves be seen to be elements in a technics, each entailing truths, techniques, gestures, habits, devices as assembled through training and embedded in more or less enduring associations. (Rose 1998: 186).

Thus, for Rose a persons’ relations to themselves are stabilised in various technological assemblages, each rendition of which differs over time-space. The trials rider is always a being-assembled-together with technologies, techniques, configurations of objects, forum posts, bike components, marketing material, videos, designs, and all the rest. As Downey’s (2007) study of the ‘Ultimate Fighting Championship’ shows, so called brute or natural bodily force (including violence) is no such thing. Subtle and seemingly insignificant changes, from clothing, handlebar grips, pedals, to the smallest place-based differences, ‘rules’ and perceived attitudes of onlookers, make a big difference in trials riding, just as they do in the training practices, and essentially body knowledge of many other activities. Downey dispels any thoughts of two bodies ever being in a ‘natural’ fight, showing instead that human interactions are always made with ‘skilled, socialized bodies, tools (some invisible because they are not considered tools) and learned inhibitions.’ (ibid: 207). Downey’s consideration of the body as technology, while a touch formulaic, does indeed seem to show:

that science-like traits and technological processes – experimentation, communal problem-solving, refinement of skills, ‘paradigm’-like framings of strategy, unspoken aesthetic reservations and preferences in solutions, dependence of socially communicated ‘tacit’ knowledge, reconfiguration of the tools for increased efficiency even if those tools include the body itself – are hallmarks of how humans as a species approach even the most basic problems, such as self-defence. (2007: 220).

Always and forever an assemblage - one might well ask then, who or what is doing the assembling? In what order? Where's the logic? Returning to Rose's work we once again see the now popular dismissal of any particular centre, individual, coherence or locus of which we might point at and say, this creates – this creates meaning and it makes significance. After all, why should the combination of stuff we might refer to as 'the trials rider' have any more 'agency' than the materiality which animates him or her?

There is no need to posit any 'propulsive medium' behind all these technologies, no primordial force or desire courses through these assemblages and makes it possible for them to move, act, change, resist, mutate. The 'question of agency' as it has come to be termed, is a false problem. (Rose 1998: 186).

Rather, Rose goes on, 'such capacities for action emerge out of the specific regimes and technologies that machinate humans in diverse ways.' (ibid: 187). Here, if there is any 'agency' at all, it is something that is dispersed amongst, produced in the process of assemblage. The human, and indeed other life, is 'machinated' as readily as a bike tyre is cast in its mould, as willingly as the cassette rotates for the chain or as much alike as the wheel hub, stressed in a complex way by compound forces, its own personal history of metal fatigue, dirty bearings and undue sideways loads. Changes in component bike parts can cause trouble to the 'bike system', as much as the body of the rider: disrupting the accumulated familiar ease with which the bike-body is controlled. For the rider, different components demand a refocusing of attention, a deliberate and conscious re-engagement, which often reduces proficiency. "The conscious use of calculative rationality produces regression to the skill of the novice or, at best, the competent performer. To think rationally in that sense is to forsake know-how and is not usually desirable." (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1986: 36). In our example however, embodied know-how is not forgotten, rather it is re-focused while the body adjusts. These modifications are not calculative, nor do they come from exact or 'case-based' experiences, which never quite match the context of riding as it occurs, and neither anyway does the memory 'store' experience in this way. Rather, the disturbing differences in the bike are accommodated, explored, considered, and modified in relation to places - often with

intuitive rationality - as the body knows kinaesthetically which positions are desirable, but has to *try things* to take them up.

For Rose, agency may be a ‘false problem’, but can we so easily abandon the ‘uniqueness’ with which we may (or may not) explore and interrogate new modes of existence. Pedals, spokes, hubs, gears - it is clear that some of us do find significance in all these processes, beyond machinations, because we have done what they themselves cannot: we have chosen a path of possibilities that led us closer to them. Unlike inanimate stuff we have ideas, emotions, and fundamentally, contact. Thus my approach to the ‘scale of the cyborg’ question, is to be led, not by some innate humanity or immutable sense of ethics, but by the qualities of contact we feel, with things, through the body.

The mind is at every stage a theatre of simultaneous possibilities. Consciousness consists in the comparison of these with each other, the selection of some, and the suppression of the rest by the reinforcing and inhibiting agency of attention. ... As well might one say that the sculptor is passive, because the statue stood from eternity within the stone. So it did, but with a million different ones beside it. ... We may even, by our reasoning, unwind things back to that black and jointless continuity of space and moving clouds of swarming atoms which science calls the only real world. But all the while the world we feel and live in, will be that which our ancestors and we, by slow cumulative strokes of choice, have extricated out of this, as the sculptor extracts his statue by simply rejecting the other portions of the stone. Other sculptors, other statues from the same stone! Other minds, other worlds from the same chaos! (James 1879: 13-14).

Technology or not then, our ability to re-invent ourselves, to find new qualities in the kinds of contact we have with the world, enables us in very unique ways. Trials as an ever-evolving set of practices is driven forward, not by objects themselves, but by those objects becoming technology, and by what we can do with technology, how we become attached to technology, how we move with technology and how we develop techniques to redefine technology. As such, the rider participates amid the assemblage filled world as they design, consciously or not, habitually or not, different ways of making contact with

places. With our experience of contact as playful and mischievous companion the trials rider, is a collective that makes and unmakes bodies, bikes and places.

Becoming an Engineer



Figure 19: Anatomy of a stock trials bike. Labelling: author's, photo credit: Adamantbikes.com

“Have you seen the Brisa frame? It looks amazing. It has short chain stays that are internally reinforced so it ought to be more responsive on the back wheel. The disk mount looks cool, it's a totally different design, the calliper goes in-between the stays instead of just stuck on top, the dropout is a solid machined piece so looks like it might actually hold up running a disk.” (Morgan, *excitedly* in conversation. Recorded in bike trials diary 2/6/2006)

As the pace of trials riding evolution began to far outstrip any reactions amongst the mainstream industrial manufacturers of bicycle components, riders employed a variety of coping strategies to improve their bike's trials potential. Typically street riders started with a standard mountain bike - often ones having frames that were traditionally thought

to be too small for conventional riding - stripped of any unnecessary parts (such as front mechs, shifters, etc.) and made other custom modifications. As the separate disciplines of 'downhill' and 'duel slalom' emerged, trials riders often specked out their bikes with related components, which were not ideal, but were usually stronger and more durable, and more likely to stand up to the rigors of trials. With many of these items, weight was a significant limiting factor in their performance. Make-shift trials bikes incorporated items that were made for downhill racing and advertised as 'bombproof'. At that time this had instant appeal to trials riders, who had found standard mountain bike parts, particularly cheaper ones, fail with alarming regularity. Hubs and other parts of the drive chain were particularly susceptible to the sudden and intense bursts of force involved in 'pedal hop' movements. Even the expensive XTR, top end Shimano hubs were not really suitable because of their slow pickup and lack of strength in the freehub mechanism⁹⁴.

From 1995 to early 2000 this problem was addressed by smaller companies (sometimes referred to as 'off-brand', meaning not Shimano) like 'Goldtech' that found they could produce for this growing niche market, and sell at a higher price point to trials riders who had little other alternatives. Like me, riders, who had experienced hub breakage while riding, would often spend a disproportionately high amount for a hub that would last longer than a few weeks and spare them the potentially spectacular calamity of transmission failure. In early 2000 Chris King hubs which used a completely different mechanism to the typical ratchet freehub became *the* hub to have, if one could afford the price which was around £300. Popularized not just through advertising⁹⁵ but primarily through personal rider recommendations (probably the most influential and far reaching of which were made on trials-forum.com), the rear Chris King hub dominated because the technology was uniquely suited to trials riding (being exceptionally light and strong and featuring the patented 'RingDrive' design which has an almost infinite number of pickup points, compared to Shimano's 17 per revolution).

⁹⁴ Very fast pickup is particularly desirable in trials as the rider is often stopping and starting, making quarter revolution 'kicks' of power. With slow pickup a large part of this subtle movement is effectively lost before the drive is transmitted to the rear wheel.

⁹⁵ Of which there was surprisingly little. If anything the American company seemed initially reluctant to service the UK market, and had major distribution problems.

Historical geographer Glen Norcliffe (2001) concludes, from an examination of Canadian patents from 1868 to 1900 which document many of the changes and innovations in bicycle technology: ‘The evolution of the bicycle was not simply a technical progression, but also an act of social construction embedded in local culture.’ (2001: 87). As we have seen, ‘technical progression’ can only refer to a context: a type of riding, places of riding, size and style of rider etc. Long forum threads detailing potential designs for bicycle components, tests of prototypes, and home made modifications abound. Manufacturers are certainly not deaf to these internet forums. The well known Leeson trials frames, for example, are produced to individual riders’ geometric specifications.

Becoming a trials rider then, is very often also something of a folk apprenticeship in engineering. There was and still is great interest in prototyping and testing new designs: frame geometry, brakes, bashguards, makeshift gear changers and chain tensioners - all undergo sustained experimentation as riders tried to match the mechanical properties of components to their riding styles. In competition riding this was done under the regulations set down by competition organizers, and within the ‘mod’ and ‘stock’ categories. For example, rules stated that the bike must have at least five working gears, which led some riders to produce home-brew shifters that were small, unobtrusive (often being mounted on the chain stay) and light but could only be operated with some difficulty or from a position off the bike. As the trials rider rarely uses more than a single gear many street riders did away with multiple gears all together. Initially they made up single sprocket cassettes by dismantling spare or old cassettes and salvaging the small spacer rings these contained, using these to replace all the cogs aside from one. Manufacturers responded by producing now popular ‘all in one, go single speed’ kits (such as those offered by DMR and Onza brands). These effectively do the same thing but addressed the problems of the single sprocket digging into the freehub body by increasing the area of the ‘mating surfaces’⁹⁶.

⁹⁶ Many ‘everyday’, taken for granted engineering terms, such as this, are in fact gendered and sexualised terms. For more on the way that gendered language travels across scales, and permeates technology see chapter two of Cresswell, T. (2006) *On the Move: The Politics of moving in the Modern West*. New York: Routledge.



Figure 20: The hugely popular Magura HS33 rear hydraulic rim brake, four bolt mount, with home ground rim.



Figure 21: A typical single speed conversion. A short cage road mech acts as a tensioning device. It has been locked in gear with a cut down spoke and the cages have been spaced out to accommodate a wider, stronger chain.

Individual riders, then, are certainly not opposed to modifying their bikes – and such modifications often speak volumes about the way riders approach obstacles. Reducing weight becomes something of an obsession for some. So called ‘gram counters’⁹⁷ commonly drill, grind and machine away what they consider excess material. Everywhere, from the inside of rims to brake boosters, bashguards and even the frame itself is subject to a critical ‘weight saving evaluation’. Here riders chart a fine line between structural integrity and weight saving: ultimately an embodied and emotional judgment (which encompasses technical knowledge) about how the types of riding that will be done and the risks involved. An interesting dialogue between embodiment, mechanics and material science ensues, as riders meld such emotive reasoning with the

⁹⁷ See for example, the exhaustive list of component weights compiled by many riders, who do not have complete confidence in manufacturer’s spec sheets. <http://www.trials-forum.co.uk/forum/index.php?showtopic=9809>

scientific ‘facts’ about relative tensile strengths, dynamic force modelling and so on. Here, statistics and quantified data is imbued with an emotive sensuous quality.

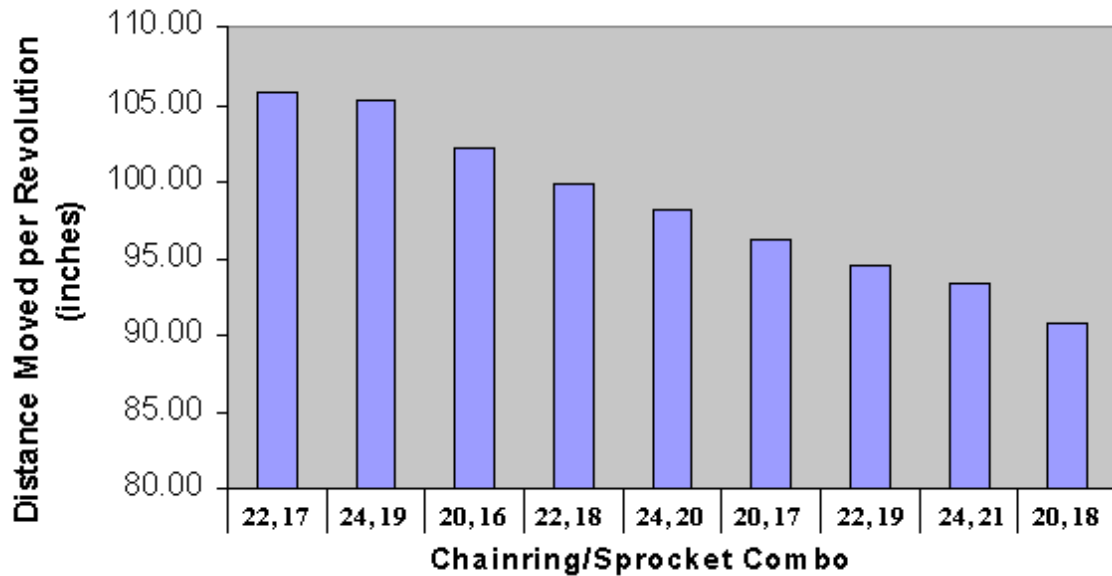


Figure 22: Choosing the perfect trials gear ratio. First figure along x-axis is represents the number of teeth on the chainring, the second is the number on the sprocket. E.g. 22, 18 a common choice, would consist of a 22tooth chainring and 18tooth sprocket.

The many riders that convert from multiple gears to single-speed often refer to tables (Figure 22) as they try different cogs, and relate numbers to changing experiences of place. Single-speed might refer to having only one gear on the bike at any given instant, but it is not uncommon for a rider to dismantle and reassemble different combinations of gears as they progress in trials. In such instances not only does the rider act as bicycle mechanic, but through the tool of the bike they also contribute to the engineering of varying trials spaces. Here the world is indeed being added to as we produce new ways of being with place. Bikes have intent built in. They are designed and redesigned, with specific agendas such that they become, for riders, instantly affective.

A machine in working order functions fatally in one way. Our consciousness calls this the right way. Take out a valve, throw a wheel out of gear or bend a pivot, and it becomes a different machine, functioning just as fatally in another way which we call

the wrong way. But the machine itself knows nothing of wrong or right: matter has no ideals to pursue. A locomotive will carry its train through an open drawbridge as cheerfully as to any other destination. (James 1879: 16).

But it is useful to recognise that ideas *can* be built into objects so that they do behave in certain ways. A train, for example, is built with a track, and more importantly with the idea that the train will go where we want it to because we lay the track in a certain way. The train does a specific set of things, because it has been constructed in a very specific way, so that it has affective capacity. Affect can be engineered through our fated ability to interact with matter (Kraftl and Adey 2008).

James's example is artificial because it is not easily within our capabilities to create such distance between ourselves and technologies, or some technologies from other technologies. If such a manoeuvre were possible, one might argue that in those instances technologies would cease to be technologies altogether. Instead, the bike as a tool is customised in such a way that much of its purpose is also designed in – it will not be lost unless the knowledge of trials riding is also lost. 'Once the creation of work is regarded from an embodied or ethical perspective it is impossible to overlook its social and political implications' (Hansen and Kozel 2007: 208-9). The standards and expectations of the trials bike, although indefinite, are enacted only by the material presence of the bike: the bike not as individual or atomisable by itself, but instead as a confluence of possibilities and material presences (cf. Teal 2008).

In trials, the sedimentation of practice becomes manifest in the object itself as it is selectively mutated to fit a particular body, with a preference primarily for riding style, but also intermingled with this is a 'trials aesthetics'. Components, machined from aluminium can be finished various ways: anodised in certain colours, shot-peened, laser etched, etc. And while each of these has distinct physical and mechanical properties, they, like other engineering considerations begin to mingle with the aesthetic.



Figure 23: Echo Control 09 trials bike, red anodised rims, levers, brake booster and mounts, bashguard, bars, levers and headset. Image credit: Echo Bikes.

Getting Attached

I saw Brian again today. He is still driving round with his new Pace trials frame in the boot of his car - it has been over a month now and he has been off camping and all sorts with it. Apparently he likes to have it close at hand to look at, talk about and show people... Although curiously funny - that he can't stop thinking about it and how he is going to build it up (he is waiting for a set of forks he has ordered) - I do understand. It is a beautiful frame, seemingly a perfect fit for purpose. It certainly is going to be a nice bike when he's built it up. (Bike trials diary 12/4/2006).

“When I’m in school sat in lesson bored out of my head I always think about how I could arrange the tables so they would be good to ride. Try it! I’ve thought of some mint lines out of school tables!” (Planet-x-rider, 22/12/06, trials-forum.com)

A number of box section 7000 series anodised aluminium tubes, externally double-buffed and welded together in something of an irregular diamond shape: an item ascribed with truly aesthetic qualities, by some. Brian’s Pace RC250t trials bike frame, lovingly kept near at all times, in the boot of an old car whose value is less than half that of its resident bike parts. What can we say about a technology which inspires such emotive interactions? The Pace, which was one of the first of a new breed of dedicated trials frames, will extend Brian’s possibilities; it will help him see new ‘mint lines’ in places old and new. Or so we believe...

Out of the infinite chaos of movements, of which physics teaches us that the outer world consists, each sense-organ picks out those which fall within certain limits of velocity. To these it responds, but ignores the rest as completely as if they did not exist.... Out of what is in itself an undistinguishable, swarming *continuum*, devoid of distinction or emphasis, our senses make for us, by attending to this motion and ignoring that, a world full of contrasts, of sharp accents, of abrupt changes, in a word, of picturesque light and shade. (James 1879: 9).

James’ insight is important for geography because it bids us attend to the way the material world, space, objects, and even time, is to some extent *learned*; our ‘facts’ about it change with the development of our senses (and indeed the technological augmentation of those same senses). Riding trials, causes the body to produce new kinds of perception, a bicycle rack can become treacherously thin, and given definition enough to be picked out from across a car park. The senses here are working together as the body looks to encounter that which it perceives so sharply.



Figure 24: Brian and his Pace, hopping from the wall and along the bike rack. Author's photos.

When I see a finely finished shot-peened⁹⁸ set of handlebars then, it is not just with visual acuity that I consider them beautiful, but it is with my experiences of riding; of side-hopping up a wall and being shocked, grazed and bemused by suddenly fractured and yielding handlebars; by the gentle rising curve from the stem clamp to the grips that contains none of the weakening that can occur with steeply bent riser bars; by the proportion I have, handlebar by handlebar, decided would make a bar that you can scoop up forward in a bunnyhop; and I consider them beautiful in the way they angle my wrists so that on pulls and impacts alike the bones are in neutral alignment. In other words they *feel* good based on both my relatively abstract knowledge of metallurgical principles, but also the way they have melded with the intense and visceral contact I have had with places.

“So many things look different. Now that I’ve been riding a year I go back to places that I haven’t been to for a while and suddenly go “wah!” look at the gap/drop or whatever how come I haven’t seen that before. Ever since starting biking I’ve thought it would be very cool to hop on these wooden post things I have outside my house. I’d thought it’ll never happen, but now I’m so close.” (Seb, trials-forum 28/9/03)

Technology does not just contribute to the ‘expressive and emotional texture of peoples lives’ (Hansen and Kozel 2007: 209), rather lives are fundamentally constituted with technology, and to such a degree that the aesthetic sensibilities and creative endeavours which individual bodies routinely take credit for are exceptionally fluid. But while we may be constituted together, we are not determined by technology. As discussed in the previous section while we are in process with them, we also have an unrivalled ability to re-invent, even seemingly static and immutable objects in everyday life. A bike stem⁹⁹, for example, is a particularly solid object. Upon leaving the machine shop, in this case finished with paint, one would think such a specialised item has relatively little room for

⁹⁸ Shot-peening is a metal conditioning process that compresses the surface of the material, making it less susceptible to fatigue cracking and surface scratches. It is done by firing many tiny balls at the material at high speed – this creates a uniquely textured surface finish.

⁹⁹ The stem is the component that attaches the handlebars to the fork’s steerer tube (see Figure 19: Anatomy of a trials bike, page 186).

re-interpretation (if being used on a bike at least). The individual rider however is free to experiment with the height at which it is mounted (by using spaces on the steerer tube). Another option, one that would not have occurred to many, is to flip the stem upside-down.

“It looks semi ridiculous, but it just seems to work, the sidehops are better than with all the other stems I have been using. The mini golf course gap always seems like *the* test, and that just seemed bizarrely easy today, with the Thomson stem and the other one it was fifty-fifty whether I would make it.” (Conversation with Richard while riding – recorded in bike trials diary 23/8/2007).



Figure 25: Richard riding his Orange Zero frame with upside-down stem

Richard's selection of bike stem makes a big difference to the overall geometry of a bike and hence the riding position. A long stem extends the 'front end', and therefore the distance between the handlebars and the pedals. This extension can have the effect of giving the rider more 'leverage' over the bike (often making it feel more controllable when hopping on the back wheel), but at the same time it stretches the rider's body out making the front harder to pull up in the first place.

When Richard turns his new bright yellow stem upside-down and rides, his contact with the bike does not just *mediate* place but co-produces it. His understandings of distances 'the mini-golf course gap' is made *with* rather than through the bike. And yet, just as with more so-called 'pure' body practices (yoga for example), this making can be reflected upon and re-interpreted. Choices about the bike reflect a whole host of considerations, ranging from embodied practice, to social groups and product representations. But this is not all: the inventiveness of trials riding, as an activity that itself strives towards re-making and pushing open limits of possibility, it is always being added to (cf. Bingham 2006, Thrift 2005).

The Separation

Gap jump up from the flat bench seat to the rim of a large circular flower pot (devoid of flowers). The gap to the opposite rim is about 6ft, for me, a reasonable gap considering it is from a narrow take off to a narrow landing. I let the front wheel drop, lower my weight, down and back, preload the pedals ready, and with nearly all my strength pedal kick and jump up and forward.

I hear as well as feel (vibrating up through my foot, ankle and leg) the fracture – sounding like a gunshot the chain shears under the explosive load, attracting the attention of everyone in the vicinity. While this has happened few enough times to be shocking, it has occurred enough that my body has a stock of pre-prepared movements, or attempts at movements which are now underway: bike contact is thankfully lost – pushed aside, my vision becomes inadequate to chart my spinning

trajectory. Fully committed, and now betrayed, my body movements take on a new twist as I move head-first over the opposite edge of the plant pot toward the stone slabs below. As I have done so many hundreds of times in Judo and then later in Aikido, I meet the ground with soft muscles and roll across my back to ‘break the fall’ ... (Bike trials diary, 19/7/07).

Can consciousness increase its efficiency by loading its dice? (James 1879: 6)

While the title of this section emphasizes separation, I want to consider how thoroughly ‘in contact’ trials riders necessarily are. Paradoxically a fall or separation is an effective way to demonstrate this. A bike might be violently discarded, as in the example above (although this is rare), but it continues to participate in determining the actions of the rider. The physicality of the space and its relation to the body becomes of paramount interest. As always, this relation is not split off in time, as a distinct ‘event’, but a shifting of sustained contact. In the most immediate sense the bike colludes with the flower pot, with the concrete, etc, but more than this the bike, for the experienced trials rider, has become so enmeshed in their embodied movements that even falling off becomes a technique.



Figure 26: Flowerpot - chain failure – separation.

Falling off is an inevitable part of learning bike trials, and continues to happen regularly even to experienced riders. In continuing trials, a rider must accept that bike failure is an ever present possibility, and further that unfamiliar movements require *trying*. By trying out technology, inventing, and re-inventing movements, riders do things with bikes that manufacturers and designers simply do not anticipate. Bike components do fail, sometimes with freighting and spectacular results. Even those particularly harsh movements (such as drop offs) that producers do consider are provisioned only as a compromise to the weight and manoeuvrability of the bike. As a particularly mobile technology which interacts in a large range of complex environments and human behaviour, that trials bike *will always* have failures (cf. Perrow 1984). Moreover, because the trials rider is a tightly coupled ‘system’, when things start to go wrong, they often do so very quickly, and very often without the ability of anyone to isolate and fix

the particular component part which has failed (Perrow 1984)¹⁰⁰. In the case of experimental movements the rider may simply not know what failing feels like until it is too late to react.



Figure 27: Broken disk mount, a serious but not uncommon trials related failure. This design attempts to cope with this by using a replaceable mount, designed to break in preference to the bike frame itself.

Of course, there are failures which the rider has become most accustomed to, and can often predictably manage. Paramount amongst these is the failure of riders themselves; when they exert too much or too little force in a certain direction, neglect to brake at the exact time, or misjudge a distance. Many of these failures happen so routinely in the course of learning that that they are ‘coped with’ without undue concern. Similarly, the bike can develop common faults, which can be identified with easy familiarity. Most faults manifest between bike and rider. A pinch puncture¹⁰¹, for example, is an event in which it is not clear where the fault originated – from an old or otherwise defective inner

¹⁰⁰ Perrow (1984), refers to these ‘inevitable accidents’ as ‘normal accidents’. For him, normal accidents occur because of complex systems interacting in incomprehensible ways and the tight coupling of components in a system, which can compound a small failure.

¹⁰¹ This kind of puncture is usually caused by heavy landings in which the inner tube is crushed between the tyre and the rim. This leaves two symmetrical slits in the tube, because of this characteristic pinch punctures are also referred to as ‘snakebite flats’.

tube, from an inappropriate air pressure, from the rider landing too heavily, or from the sharp edge upon which the tyre landed. At this intersection, the trials rider navigates a path, pragmatically learning which kinds of vulnerability play toward their shifting goals.

“The first time I tried a ‘forward-back-hop’ I didn’t have the coordination to put the back brake on after jumping forward, the back wheel slipped straight out from under me, and I ended up flat on my back, completely winded. I didn’t try it again for a few days, but when I did I made sure the brake was on. After overcoming that, it just became this great thing, a great move. And that none of my friends could do it, made it seem cool too [laughs].” (Jack in conversation, bike trials diary, 12/10/06)



Figure 28: Pinch puncture, received from the edge of the wall upon which Mark now sits, fixing a common complaint amongst trials riders

As with parkour, in ‘trying’ in trials we inexorably ‘do’ the unknown and the as yet unfelt. Such a kinaesthetic mystery is complicated in bike trials by the degree to which bike components, and configurations play an active role in the unfolding movements. The body is joined, which makes it particularly open and susceptible to surprise. It may be a rider’s intention to ‘forget’ this complication¹⁰², through both mental exercises, and

¹⁰² The thought that a component could fail at any point is a certainly one that can bring on paralyzing bouts of fear – though again, as with parkour, this is a fear that is not simplistically unwelcome. Rather it is a hugely complex part of the engagement with place.

becoming sufficiently familiar with the bike as to know how it will react in any given system it is a threat of an intention – never to be completed.

Vulnerability cannot be willed, chosen, cultivated, or honed and neither, therefore, does it necessarily or even primarily denote a weakness or a misfortune; rather, it describes the inherent and continuous susceptibility of corporeal life to the unchosen and the unforeseen – its inherent openness to what exceeds its abilities to contain and absorb. (Harrison 2008: 427).

While Harrison's 'vulnerability' appears to be an innate function of living embodiment, there is an element of will and choice to the specificities of embodied vulnerability. This is precisely because exactly what embodiment *is* is not static or immutable. As the hybrid becomes more or less accepted in the social sciences (Haraway 1991), it remains a task of researchers to consider the different ways in which people and objects, animals and elements, are all involved in enacting this hybridity. As a rider 'tests' space it is very often *with* the bike that their vulnerability is expressed.

The integration of bike trials to the body is a good indicator of the way corporeal vulnerability can and does change. The bike leaves a permanent 'imprint' on the body that adds 'roll', 'bounce' and balance to the experience of place. Even when trials riders' body's 'forget' the bike, and walk, to varying degrees, objects and place continue to be encountered in a 'trials way'.

The bread and butter moves, jumping off the back or side of the bike, keeping the bike safe with the handlebars controlled, happens so often I have stopped thinking of it as falling off (though it can be quite dramatic from high stuff). I feel like it has become part of my trials, like any other set of techniques. Still, it evokes disappointment as it always marks a failed attempt, but it is a world away from a real stack.¹⁰³ (Bike trials diary 13/8/03).

Becoming separated from the bike in a failed attempt can charge places with affectivity. Specifics of experiences of falling repeat through time-space: they cannot be contained, however much we may wish it of them. As in parkour moments of failure persist, and in

¹⁰³ "Stack" is a term often used to describe a fall or crash.

bike trials they more or less permanently add the bike to place, the bike becomes an indelible mark in the body's perceptions of texture, shape, and architecture. Regardless of physical presences, when I experience places the bike is metaphorically speaking, *with me* – I am forever falling off.



Figure 29: Obstaclised dreamscape? Brian and the Pace practicing on Aberystwyth rocks.

After a conversation while out riding today (sheltering under the bridge during a rain storm), it turns out that all of us, Brian, Martin, Dave and I, all dream about riding. It seems we have new twists on movements, Brian said that a few times he has dreamt he was backhopping along Aber rocks “for ages, all the way and it felt totally effortless”. [...] For my part, I keep dreaming that I am manualing¹⁰⁴ and that I can just keep going (something I normally have trouble with), And when I wake I think “great! Now I can manual”, but I still have trouble with the move. (Bike trials diary 25/4/04).

¹⁰⁴ A ‘Manual’ or coaster wheelie, is like a regular wheelie, but the rider is not sat on the saddle and not pedalling.

Riding between artist and engineer

I like it [bike trials] because of the feeling you get when you land a sweet line that you've been trying for ages and when people say "that's good". (Chocolatefoot, 19/12/05, trials-forum.com).

Vulnerability, as I have considered it above, is an inevitable encounter with the world, but one full of specificity. Getting on a trials bike, or watching someone perform cutting edge trials, can be like casting a spell on the landscape. The practice of 'trying' and 'being with' afford different qualities of contact, a constituent part of which is our vulnerability toward the world. While embodiment does equate with an inherent condition of susceptibility, the way we make contact with places and technology radically changes the kinds of vulnerability we enact. Whether this falabalism manifests through our changing perceptions of place, an unwelcome uneasiness at being watched, a wonder at certain engineering processes and outcomes, a fascination with design and bike related aesthetics, or even waking dreams of hopping a bike between mountain tops, it is our embodied gift of vulnerability that make possible these kinds of contact.

Anthony Giddens, in developing his structuration theory, stressed the 'essentially transformative character of all human action, even in its most routinized forms.' (1984:117). As Giddens asserts, these routines are made, or done, over time – they are lived. However, saying this is only helpful as part of a theory which also considers the variance between the likelihood of transformative action, and the type of action. Embodied routines, which are acted out with the materiality of places, have a structuring power because they are, more often than not, repeated without thought or critique. The differences between ways of being-with-place are important – contact, as I have conceived it here, can be *more* transformative, because it is less reliant on any unchanging property of humanity, but instead on our ability to *re-invent ourselves with*.

Contact, a quality which can easily be in short supply in a highly routineized life, might still be cultivated. It is open to embodied utopic practices like bike trials, capoeira and parkour, which are always playfully questing. With no fixed or rigid goal, but a plethora of evolving projects, riders are a strongly mobile phenomenon that is engaged in co-designing places by trying things out. Athletes of all sorts might be ‘virtuosos of corporeal alteration, focusing on the body as a functional tool and as the medium of pragmatic self-fashioning’ (Downey 2007: 221), but if so, as this chapter has shown, it is a hybridised re-invention, that is more experiment than completion of per-formed idea(l), more ‘trying for ages’ than doing a ‘sweet line’, and often more gifted than ‘self-made’. The last point might seem antithetical to my argument, but not if we consider that whatever effort we make, or work we do on our body, is not ours alone.

Trials riders can simultaneously be engineers, designers and movement artists because none of these are easily separable. For some, a particular ‘engineering arrogance’, in which we take full responsibility for the way we craft the world, may persist, but for many riders the message from doing trials, from experiencing particular types of contact, has been to abide the unexpected. Mastery of space is sought: ‘try try try *do*’, but every ‘doing’ is a complex contact that is followed by, or rather part of, more trying. However thoroughly we learn (and modify) the beauty of a technology, a movement or a place, chance is never quite replaced by choice. Nowhere near in fact: the contact that we feel and experience as direct, that is, the feedback from the surfaces of rocks, felt through bars and grips, is very adept at linking us into complex networks, often ones we can neither see, or feel in such a direct way. These networks – networks of on-line media, engineering experimentation, photography, bicycle design, movement innovation – are thankfully so vast and so complex that all we are ever engineering, no matter how wilfully, are surprise gifts for ourselves and others.

Chapter 7: *Capoeira*: learning to trust a chameleon

There is noise, exuberance, song and music all about. Squatting down at the head of the circle I face an athletic looking woman of 28 or so years. Beside me the drum is beating, excitedly moving off the rhythm which is carried by the rest of the instrumentalists. I'm not entirely sure of the significance of this and neither have I the time or composure to consider it. Though it does flit through my mind that the drumming is reverberating into me amplifying a pounding heart and a rising 'fight or flight' feeling. The two people playing in the ring - already breathing heavily - seem to respond to the drum call with renewed vigour, exchanging kicks, moving around with acrobatics interspersed with ducking and dodging. Their movement is kept within a circular space delineated by other *capoeiristas*, themselves all singing, clapping and watching the action. One of the two players stops, puts out his hand, which the other shakes, they embrace and move back to the circumference of the circle. Fearful. Excited. I reach out and take the hand offered me. The woman opposite squeezes it with a gentleness and a meaningful smile that reassures me somewhat. I attempt a smile that no doubt reveals something of my nervousness. Keeping eye contact I mirror her movements by doing one slow cartwheel into the centre of the circle. (*Capoeira* Diary 19/7/07, that evening's experiences of entering the *roda*¹⁰⁵)

¹⁰⁵ *Roda* is the term used to refer to both the game of capoeira itself, and the physical formation of players into a circle which has the instruments and *axé* [good energy] to provide a space for capoeira play.

Preconceptions: pre-capoeira class anxiety

In the previous two chapters we have seen how the body makes contact with the world in which it extends itself. Through parkour practice I have tried to argue that the emotion of fear is part of this process and not necessarily a negative one. Many of those fearful engagements also applied to the discussion of bike trials, in which technology and the body is playfully developed by riders as a method of contact augmentation. In this chapter, which will consider the practice of *capoeira*, I further expand the discussion of contact by considering how the body might play towards contact in particularly close proximity to and *with* another, or indeed, many other bodies.

Here *capoeira* is used to play an argument that is fundamentally about listening to place with more than the ear, but with a whole range of learned mobile and embodied techniques. Evasion followed by attack, escape followed by entrapment, invitation followed by trickery, these are characteristic engagements in the game of *capoeira*. Yet I consider a more-than-representational politics of these encounters, which despite the ever present deception, begins to angle towards a type of trust formed through the practice of contact.

Capoeira, a dance, a martial art, and a game, has a long and contested history that can be traced back to the forced movement of African slaves to colonial work colonies in Brazil (Almeida 1986, Fryer 2000, Taylor 2005). As both a ‘traditional’ and a contemporary Afro-Brazilian cultural practice it has become popular across the world. The dance of capoeira originated, so the story goes, as a way for African slaves imported to Brazil to disguise the practice of fighting techniques which could be employed in their struggle for liberation. Whether this is true or not has been a subject of some debate (see Lewis 1992, Taylor 2005). Throughout its historic evolution it has been bound up in struggles over the freedom to move the human body in certain ways. From the enforced slavery in sugar plantations, to the Brazilian state ban of *capoeira*, which lasted from the 1890s to the 1930s, to the practice itself, *capoeira* is fundamentally concerned with claiming, sharing and giving space by moving the body in certain ways.

Despite being able to discern certain trends, pinning down exactly what types of movements and behaviours are ‘correct’ in the practice *capoeira* is a near impossible task. Indeed, its ambiguous mix of dance, fight, play, music and performance, lend it the ability to evade our best efforts to neatly define it or place it into well understood categories (Lewis 1995). There are a number of good scholarly accounts of *capoeira*’s historic development (see for example, Lewis 1992, Taylor 2005, 2007), but this chapter plays off my own *capoeira* experiences and interactions, in Britain, beginning in July 2007, and leading up to the time of writing. As with bike trials and parkour, contact in *capoeira* can cultivate certain emotive attitudes and states of *embodiment-with*. The main function of this chapter is to add to, and consider what, a theory of contact might gain from an explicitly interpersonal endeavour – one in which the body’s development *with* another body, rather than its ‘as is’ quality becomes primary. It explores the possible interactions between people while they are playing *capoeira* together and considers how contact develops through this playful activity.

Play, as I have begun to outline in previous chapters, is a tricky process – one which does not rest, and like *capoeira*, it delights in its ability to defy attempts to define it with language. In the *game* of *capoeira*, uncertainty abounds. *Capoeira* has rules, though they generally remain unwritten (but see Figure 30, page 220), and are rarely spoken. All appear to be subject to contextual revision (see Lewis 1992 for a discussion of the patterning of rules in *capoeira*). In other words, anything goes, except that it doesn’t. This creates a particularly difficult situation for the newcomer to *capoeira* who as well as having to attempt to learn a whole new set of embodied movement styles, is also required to quickly work out an approximation of a shifting rulebook. As I have been arguing, certain habits can detract from the quality of contact we have: in *capoeira* certain habits can be downright dangerous in that they quickly become noticeable facets of a person’s game and are exploited by other players. As we shall see, one cannot easily remain static and prosper in *capoeira*.

How then could such a setting, so filled with deception, trickery and the possibility of violence be a place which can facilitate a quality of contact that might enable trust? It might at first appearances, or even after some time practicing *capoeira*, seem strange that the practice be thought about in terms of friendship or trust. This is, after all, a practice that is historically built around conflict and fighting. It involves two people, who on the face of it, are trying to trick, outdo, or even hit their ‘opponent’. At the legendary *capoeirista* Bimba’s¹⁰⁶ academy in Brazil, the last of his nine written rules declares “It is better to get beat up in the *roda* than on the streets.” And while *capoeira*, as practiced in Europe and the USA, certainly discourages overt and excessive violence during the *roda* (Taylor 2007) it is not unheard of for a game with many unwritten and flexible ‘rules’ to escalate into all out fighting.

Working with the productivity of *capoeira*’s paradoxical nature, we might explore the ways in which places can be deliberately engineered to facilitate playful conversations of movement. Here affect is not only systematically adjusted (Kraftl and Adey 2008) but is also given over to be spun, flipped, absorbed, worked around, sent back and forth between bodies, and in short, played with. The result, I argue, can be remarkably powerful. It can, through continued exploration of moving contact with other *capoeiristas* and changes in body movements and capacities, facilitate the creation of a distinct type of movement for the other. Practice halls can become places of trust for participants: metaphorical laboratories for human interaction which can foster long lasting relationships. In such places, movements and people can acquire an inseparability which facilitates positive kinds of contact.

It is, I argue, the very slipperiness of play that makes possible the implicit trust that can develop between players. In part it is the ever present risk of being hit while playing *capoeira*, or the ambiguous freedom to hit others, which enables and allows the possibility of trust. *Capoeira* play having no formal judges or winners (except in the rare case of organized competitions), allows the participant to choose their own goals.

¹⁰⁶ Mestre Bimba is probably the most famous *capoeirista*, accredited for forming the regional style – a style often, but not always associated with many vigorous fast paced kicks and aerial acrobatics.

Alternatively motivations can come moment to moment from a range of embodied engagements that often occur *with* others. This is one of the elements that makes *capoeira*, as it is practiced in many places, close to becoming the play that Thrift (1997) and others have valorised for its ability to create new moments and “ways of being” less bound by past ideas about places.

The structure of this chapter is born from the format of a typical *capoeira* session. The ‘warm-up’ is followed by a period in which *capoeira* techniques are ‘taught’. This is usually in a copy-cat fashion – the instructor demonstrating and explaining, the students attempting to replicate the movements. Here the body attempts to learn the ‘vocabulary’ of *capoeira*, putting techniques together piecemeal but not normally learning how to implement them in a game or ‘conversation’. Thus, this section will briefly dwell on the way in which ‘technique’ is deliberately passed on and learnt.

Subsequent to this, there is normally a break in the formal class, a ‘play-time’. Instruction stops, and play begins. In these times people stretch, rest and watch, but mostly they play with other members of the class. This section will look to the contact that comes from learning to playfully move with another, deploying body-knowledge in creative interaction.

In the next section, ‘partner work’, we are shown and then practice sequences of movements that are done in relation to a training partner. Here I briefly discuss how contact is modified through scripting and practice. At the last there is a *roda* (the arrangement of instruments and people, and the playing of the game). In the *roda*, I consider the way in which contact can help to develop a place of trust. To begin with though, let us start by preparing the body and warming up to movement.



1. Quit smoking.
2. Stop drinking; alcohol is bad for your metabolism.
3. Do not show off your progression; instead use them as a surprise tool.
4. Avoid conversation during training, instead observe and learn from watching.
5. Always practice the *ginga*.
6. Practice daily the basic fundamentals.
7. Do not be afraid to come close to your opponent – the closer that you get, the more you will learn.
8. Keep your body relaxed.
9. It is better to get beat up in the *roda* than on the streets.

Figure 30: Bimba's Academy Rules. Source: Bahia-Capoeira Blog (<http://bahia-capoeira.com/blog/index.php?itemid=3>)

Warming up

The warm up was comforting in that some of the stretches were familiar to me. The ever present music though, reminded me just how different things were. The warm

up involved skipping while swinging the arms dramatically, walking around on all fours, and other movements that I felt quite foolish doing. (*Capoeira* diary 12/7/07)

In general, a warm up serves to loosen, condition, and prepare the body for strenuous action. As with most martial or performance arts, the warm up exercises in *capoeira* tend to be designed to do more than get blood pumping to the muscles. The movements are done to *capoeira* music, and serve to build a familiarity with *styles of moving*. Being comfortable upside-down and shifting bodyweight between feet, hands, and head with ease are all movement styles developed in a typical *capoeira* warm up. The movements, games, and stretches are mostly things designed to train-up the body toward doing *capoeira*. It cannot therefore always be easily separated from other parts of a session.

This chapter's 'warm-up section' is no different. Thus, by way of preparing for the rest of my discussion, I will briefly consider the need for thinking about that which has traditionally been excluded from academia, but which is developed in any good *capoeira* warm up: an awareness of embodied knowledge, physicality, flexibility, musicality and play.

I begin then, with Merleau-Ponty, and his significant contribution to philosophy and the social sciences: the incorporation of the body. 'In the field of Western philosophy', writes Richard Shusterman, "Maurice Merleau-Ponty is something like a patron saint of the body." (2005: 151). Indeed, the mark of Merleau-Ponty's theories of embodied phenomenology, can be seen across much geographic work that stresses embodiment and pre-cognitive practice (e.g. Dewsbury 2000, Obrador-Pons 2003, Seamon 1979, 1980, Thrift 1997, Wylie 2005). His specific goals for a phenomenology of embodiment owe a huge debt not only to Husserl but to Heidegger (and his notion of 'dasein' or 'being-in-the-world') as well (Carman and Hansen 2005). Husserl proposed a phenomenology that might reveal a realm of pure transcendental subjectivity, a domain of 'ideal essences'. Thus, Husserl's conception of phenomenological reduction was in some senses to escape the worldly body. Drawing on Heidegger, though, Merleau-Ponty (1962) conceived of a 'body-subject' which could direct a person's behaviour intelligently without cognition. The acquisition of 'habit', or the ability of the body to 'cope' with most situations (which

Dreyfus 2005: 145 suggests is better understood as ‘skill’) is, for Merleau-Ponty, an unreflective process. Thus, for him, subjectivity was not primarily located in the mind, but rather in the body (1962).

If, as Merleau-Ponty argues, motility or movement is the more ‘primary form of consciousness’ (Cresswell 2003: 276), then it is a consciousness routed in the living form, the body, rather than in thought. This is immediately attractive to theorists of embodied activities including many sports, dance and martial arts which prize quick un-contemplated movements. Here action can be completely raw, and events can unfold in which the intuition of the body reigns supreme and can act with blistering speed. While a useful and crucial stepping stone, such a theory does not adequately account for the way the body learns these movements, a process which is often highly reflective.

Merleau-Ponty’s focus on the body has, to some degree, suffered unfairly from a critique of human centricism. In his last work *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968) he makes a radical challenge to subject-centred intentionality. To put his argument bluntly, through his concept of ‘the flesh’, Merleau-Ponty suggests that we cannot be considered as isolated entities, rather ‘the flesh’ is a matrix or web that extends beyond the body, and it is in and through that matrix, which one lives. The flesh is not just what we touch ‘outside’ the body, but must include our possibilities for touching, and being touched (cf. Wylie 2006). As movement of materials and bodies in the world is ceaselessly throwing up new possibilities, so the flesh is always in process, and given the capacity to make contact.



Figure 31: Warm up stretching. An Aberystwyth workshop led by Contra-Mestre Parente (of Cordao de Ouro Liverpool / Manchester). 28/2/09.

While the notion of playful contact I have been developing here is drawn from the practice of bike trials, *capoeira* and parkour, it is a concept that can be tried with many other activities in which spatial perceptions are transformed. There is a possible critique, as Cresswell points out, that much recent ‘more-than-representational’ work tends to focus on unusual activities like “political performance art, dance, or graffiti”, in the name of ‘everyday practices’ (Merriman, et al. 2008: 195). It would be fair to say that *capoeira*, in Britain at least, is such an unusual activity. Yet it is often those unusual moments - or out of the ordinary ‘events’ - that are affective, precisely because they are different; an interruption (Harrison 2000). Such events very often force an emotional re-negotiation, which has intensity that endures throughout a person’s life. Similarly, it is in examining unusual activities (which can still be everyday practices for the participant) that we are often given a chance to affirm a different way of doing things as an alternative to critiquing ‘everyday practice’.

Indeed, calls for a so called geography of the ‘everyday’ are always dogged by the need to recognize the vast differences in peoples daily routines and life paths. Transformative events and practices like *capoeira* have the potential to stop a regular pattern, to inspire, and to be remembered, re-imagined, re-told, and mulled over. In short, to drastically affect the lives of those that experience them.

Me: So what first got you into *capoeira*?

Jason: Well I saw this street *roda* in the centre of town, and I was just mesmerised. It was not like any dance or martial art I had seen before. It was just really flowy and I was captured straight away, it was amazing to watch and I just thought “wow! I want to learn that.” (*Capoeira* diary 21/8/07).

In this way such activities can break down the persistent divides between the ‘everyday’, fantasy and reality (Lewis 1999). Such events when re-told or represented are one of our best means of relating to and evaluating theoretical stances. “Small stories should also be treated as entry points to the working out of conceptual ideas in local contexts.” (Lorimer 2003: 214). Through stories we can attempt to put ourselves in other’s shoes, and thus deploy our imagination and expertise from a new and often productive perspective.

Warming up in *capoeira*, attempts to prepare the participant for a similar sort of process. The instructor ‘tells a story’, through movement, and the students quite literally try them out. It is both a gradual ‘getting to know what it is like to...’, which works cumulatively over a long time period as muscles are exercised and stretched, and a more immediate ‘preparing the body to...’. The instructor often demonstrates movements in a bewilderingly lithe manner. A lack of flexibility, in particular, can be a major block to many *capoeira* movements – and thus, as far as many *capoeiristas* are concerned, a cramp on a player’s ability to communicate and express themselves during *capoeira* play.

It is also common for teachers of *capoeira* to tell stories in a more literal way, recounting anecdotes which have lessons about how to train or that contain moral messages. These stories are very often tied to the movements of *capoeira*. The movements and postures of the hands, for example, relate to stories about slaves wearing manacles while they

devised and played *capoeira*. As *capoeira* scholars have noted, the historic accuracy of these stories is often more debatable than is implied by *mestres* (Fryer 2000, Lewis 1992). Though important, in some sense this is beside the point, as the stories are almost always used to enrich the doing of the movement as practiced in the present.

We may never know the ‘true’ origin of *capoeira* movements, but it is clear that students are encouraged anyway, to re-invent, assume, and develop these stories: to make them their own. Unlike many martial arts, most *capoeira* teachers encourage players to develop their own style. As soon as the student has the basics of the *ginga*¹⁰⁷, for example, they are given very little further tuition on the ‘finer points’ of it, as these must be developed in accord with a player’s personality and character. Despite this it is readily evident that a student’s movements and style is often influenced most by their teacher - and in many instances they can be recognised as belonging to certain schools by their style of *ginga*.

None the less, many of the warm up exercises in *capoeira* seem designed to facilitate the individual’s ability to express themselves through movement. Running, skipping, walking on all fours, or any combinations of such movements are often used as warm up exercises. First these are often done as a group, in rows and ordered, under the direction of the teacher, but then often students are told to move how they want and where they want within the space. Coming at *capoeira* with a martial arts background, as I did, I found this quite an unusual exercise, in which I could not help but try my best to do what I thought the teacher wanted me to do – quite unproductive given that the idea is for the student to release inhibitions and express themselves through a set of quite unfamiliar movements. Over time, though, requests to ‘go where you want’ became expected and even relished for the promise they held: of being able to try out new movements, and to turn off conscious thought, allowing the body to move amongst those others.

¹⁰⁷ The *ginga* is the most fundamental movement in *capoeira*. It is roughly equivalent to the ‘base stance’ from which most other movements flow.

Beginning to learn basic *capoeira* movements

When we begin the *ginga*, people often take this to signal the end of the warm-up. After more than a month of regular *capoeira* I would have thought my feet would have hardened up by now, but not so. Yesterday's spin kick marathon has renewed half healed blisters and added a good many more again. The pain is so pervasive, and although my feeling is that my technique has improved a lot it was not evident today. As we started with the *ginga* and went on through some of the basic kicks and *esquivas* [evading movements], I attempted to minimize the screeching pain caused by each twist on the ball of my foot, by finding all sorts of 'ingenious' ways to do the technique wrong. I tried twisting on the heel (making me stupidly off balance) and even jumping round during the armada kick (a point I was corrected on by the instructor – I did not try to explain why I had been doing it that way). (Diary 26 August 2007)

The calls of Cresswell (see Cresswell 2004, Merriman, et al. 2008) and others to take account of the politics of the 'everyday' embodied activities (like doing the dishes, driving to work, etc.) is both difficult and worthwhile. My approach is to begin from a position in which 'taken for granted' embodied competency is an 'unattainable' but desired end-point (see Chapter 3 on utopic practice). Here the journey towards embodied competency is on-going, intense and open ended.

It is precisely this journey I wish to become *involved* with, in order to make new kinds of contact. Yet such a move, as I have shown, is risky, it makes us vulnerable. More than this though, it puts us in positions in which we are affecting others in quite direct ways. The ethnographer Sarah Delamont gives us an interesting account, while researching *capoeira*, of how she became furious with herself for intervening in a situation, to save a *capoeira* player from embarrassment, and missing a 'data collecting opportunity' (Stephens and Delamont 2006: 335). This gives us a valuable insight into the tradition under which she has been trained, but is also somewhat typical of the academic's disposition towards involvement. Of course, my activities by her standards might be outrageously caught up in other people's lives. Yet this is deliberately a story that does not hide the storyteller, or their affects.

Work in geography has tended to undervalue ethnography because it has been seen as too involved and therefore impoverished by subjectivity (Herbert 2000). It seems to me that while we have seen a welcome expansion into the realm of what constitutes valuable experience worthy of research (see for example Anderson 2004, McCormack 2003, Wylie 2005), it is still the case that this type of research tends to involve more time reading philosophy at the expense of less lofty empirical events that also shape people's lives (Laurier and Philo 2006).

It would clearly be hard to understand the subtleties of *capoeira* practice and even the point of certain exercises without experiencing them firsthand (Downey 2002). But does it make any difference if I have a good depth of ingrained body-knowledge, when it must be presented in a text-based format such as this? Hopefully a positive answer lays in the fact that such practice has a widened and intensified range of affects for the body which has learned to move in, what are for most, foreign ways. Involvement is at least one way to avoid what should be the worst of all researcher's "nightmares, that of having taken a long and costly trip only to find out in the end that one has never really [metaphorically] left home" (Katz 1999: 17).



Figure 32: Practicing basic movements: ordered rows in the Buarth Hall, Aberystwyth.

Time in a *capoeira* session given to practicing distinct movements, or sequences of movements, develops the capacity to ‘talk’ to other players. Here we are schooled on basic moves and ways to refine techniques or add expression. Like the first steps of learning a verbal language, learning the individual movements, is like learning some basic vocabulary. During such practice, feelings and muscular contractions and contortions are related broadly to intersubjective affects. A *meia-lua de frente* (a ‘half moon in front’) kick as shown in figure 32, is usually considered a ‘gentle’ kick, described by many teachers as an invitation. Depending on the specifics of execution (such as speed, power, hand position, angle of the foot, height, etc.) it can be an opportunity for one’s partner to enter the game, generally being easy to evade and make a reply. I had it described to me as a movement that says, “Hello, how are you today?”

None of these things are immediately obvious to an observer or even someone who has only practiced these movements individually without explanation. Thus, all the

movements we practice in ordered rows, some basic, others outrageously difficult, ‘say things’. But the movements say very different things to different people, and in the specific context of *capoeira* play. Thus the capoeirista, like the researcher, in learning, doing and feeling these movements can begin to better understand the different ways they can be performed and the different intimations that can be brought to bear during a game. Without deliberative thought, the affective potential of such movements can be assessed, or made sense of. An appropriate movement, learned by rote, ‘on the tip of one’s tongue’, can then be done in response to a partner’s movements.

As many ethnographers have noted, when I participate in activities it makes me infinitely more (though we might say, differently) qualified to talk to other practitioners about their experiences and why they do what they do. In this instance, to communicate and to play with *capoeiristas*, in their language (*capoeira* movement) it is necessary to learn at least the basics of these movements. During my first three months of *capoeira* research it was only by learning these basics that I was invited to informal weekend practice sessions in the park, which often turned into meandering conversations (both linguistic and physical) about the philosophies and movements of *capoeira* play.

Yet the thought of obligation to long hours of practice sits quite uncomfortably with many, if not most, busy academics. Practice based education, or learning by doing, moving and engaging the body *and* all its senses, has for a long time, been devalued, both implicitly and explicitly in academia (Abram 1996, Levine 1991, Rodaway 1994, Saposnek 1985).

To undertake geographical research into moving, dancing bodies is not only to think *about* these bodies: it also involves thinking with and through the spaces of which these bodies are generative. To make this claim is not to advocate a kind of ‘just-do-it’ vision of geography in which we all have to get up and dance. (McCormack 2008: 1831).

Our accounts, questions, arguments, and thoughts should be based on evidence of one kind or another, and it seems likely that when talking about the moving body, one crucial piece of evidence, and one that can be exponentially expansive (because it offers up new

horizons of contact with events and places, people and documentary sources) is likely to be trying the activity itself. This is not always advisable, or even possible. Even in such cases though, we might do well to attempt to ‘walk in the shoes of the other’, even if only in our imaginations - to make contact as best we can. Whether we are evaluating archival sources, or an unfolding mobile practice, our knowledge about it is always partial and exists as a relationship between the contact unfolding and produced.

About two months into *capoeira*, during a break in training, another student, Mark, came over and made a surprising comment: that he thought the movements I was doing seemed to flow much more. This came as quite an unexpected compliment, not least because Mark seemed quite quiet and had hardly said a word to me up until that point. Further conversation revealed that Mark’s biggest struggle since starting *capoeira* had been in becoming less rigid and more fluid in his movements – changing individual moves into movement (a challenge, he claims, was made very much harder by his background in karate).

As talking with Mark emphasised, learning moves, in *capoeira*, only makes much sense when they can be strung together and used in a ‘conversation’. For him, other bodily habits of movement made this particularly difficult. Greg Downey’s (2005) first hand account of learning *capoeira* echoes this, and perhaps there is something to *Mestre Maxwel*’s¹⁰⁸ assertion that British people find that overcoming reserved habits of embodiment is one of the biggest difficulties in learning *capoeira*. As an embodied comportment that does not tend to gesture overly much, or has not been trained in physical theatre or some related practice, one of the consistent challenges for a teacher of *capoeira* in Britain, is in encouraging the student to overcome feelings of shame and embodied inhibitions (Downey 2005).

¹⁰⁸ *Mestre Maxwel* teaches *capoeira* in Cardiff, Bristol and Swansea. He kindly gave a workshop for us here in Aberystwyth, and staying overnight at our house, we had a good amount of time for meandering *capoeira* related conversations.

Play-time

We have a break, which it becomes evident, is not a break at all for most people, as instead of resting they begin to play *capoeira* together in pairs. Like me, some people (mostly beginners) look on sheepishly, not really knowing what to do. Those playing look quite impressive and are weaving in and out of each other, making up mixtures of moves, some, but not most, are recognisable from the class so far. They are pretty much all smiling, and start and finish their play by shaking hands or hugging or both. They look like they are having a lot of fun – wish I could join in, but wouldn't know where to start... (*Capoeira Diary* 12/7/07).

Play casts a spell over us; it is 'enchanted', 'captivating'. It is invested with the noblest qualities we are capable of perceiving in things; rhythm and harmony (Huizinga 1970: 29).

How to move with a person? What to try? What to avoid? How to react? Unanswered questions all, for the beginner of *capoeira*. Through careful observation and gradual experimentation, answers emerge, but through the inevitable and extremely effective process of re-contextualisation that *capoeira* retains, they are continually re-asked. The ambiguity in *capoeira* play lends itself to keeping these questions flowing, and unanswered. Indeed, often the winner or loser in the game of *capoeira* is ambiguous and undecided even when the game ends (Lewis 2000). What movement is good movement is open for perpetual discussion (both physical and verbal).

Different cultures elevate and prize different types of embodied mobility in different kinds of places. *Capoeira*, having its own fragmented and multiple history, its own range of customs, is no different. And yet each *capoeira* club and each *capoeirista* is unique, and *capoeira*, to some degree celebrates these differences. Many movements, for example, while having a roughly similar and recognizable form (so that names can be more or less universal), are still distinctly personal movements. Similarly, impromptu improvisations in both music and movement are highly prized.

This became evident as I experienced more and more *capoeira*. The play of *capoeiristas*, during break-times (which did not normally last more than five to ten minutes) could be framed simply as practice for the *roda*, but it is far more than rehearsal of a familiar game. Rather this was where things were tried, and new phrases of motion, new invitations, traps set and questions asked. Some awkward and unrefined, some polished and extensively developed.



Figure 33: Pair of *capoeiristas*' experimental play. Clashes, surprising flow and unexpected movements can be tried and emerge.

In *capoeira* play, participants are unfinished and remain capable of new intimate connections with other entities. It is this process that we might *try* to attend to. “It is to the uncovering of the *constituting* intentionality itself that the battery of *epoché* and reductions are directed.” (Zaner 1975: 141, emphasis added). It is now recognised, if not wholly accepted, that such a ‘constituting intentionality’, if such a thing exists, is widely dispersed, is not singular or discreetly embodied. As such, conceptualisations of this

intentionality begin to encroach upon theological musings. A small step, perhaps, from what Thrift considers 'bare life', the split second "between action and consciousness which has increasingly become attended to because of our enhanced ability to capture movement." (2004a: 148). Of course, the 'life' in bare life resists any attempt at capture, though new technologies allow us to re-examine and present these realms in significant detail. Such technology can produce (evoke) new fields of perception, and can multiply 'the amount of content that is immediately available to feed our imagination' (Thrift 2005: 473). This type of 'second order' contact is a troubled form of contact: as it tries (with varying degrees of success) to take leaps in time, to contact places now gone. That is not to say it is somehow inherently negative or futile. Imagination is an accommodating host and will entertain new and unique contact, both gone and yet to come. Thrift warns that these technologies encroach into our non-representational experiences, with a distinct and fierce biopolitics. A politics that is very particular in its use of these technologies:

Our perceptions are increasingly becoming instrumentalized. The half-second interval is being trained up. The dark side of this process is patently clear. Our room to play and dream is being cut down. There is more and more habitual look to precocity. Our anticipation is being anticipated. (Thrift 2004a: 161).

A pertinent observation for the *capoeirista*, who trains up their own split-second bodily intelligence so that they might themselves anticipate the anticipation of their play partner. Players need 'play practice' so that they might move play onwards, go bigger and further. Such a play is based on the partial inhabitation of the present with the past. Non-representable contact with the world must, after all, retain an element of the past so that anticipation can function. Like a *capoeira* player though, the nature of contact is such that it can sometimes exceed. Our contact is thus shaped by the ability of embodiment to participate in both the virtual (ideas) and physical realms.



Figure 34: A typical exchange in *capoeira*. 1) Top-left: bent over as if carrying a load is symbolic of the work of a slave, but also functions as an escaping dodge to the kick Max (black trousers) is beginning. 2) Bottom-left: shows the reversal of positions, the deception of the dodge, used to achieve a position of advantage. 3) Right: Position is once more reversed, as Max while crouched shows the ability to sweep the supporting leg away.

The ambiguous ‘idea’ of ‘*capoeira*’, as with ‘parkour’ and ‘bike trials’, is thoroughly lived but also mixed up in a history of invention. Each embodiment of these ‘ideas’, which can to some degree be ‘trained’, will play out different affects when combined with another body. In other words, when two *capoeiristas* play each other they are responding to each other, often before deliberative thought and in a unique unfolding. One prominent ‘idea’ in this form of embodiment is that of ‘flexible response’. Regularly preached in *capoeira* classes (particularly to beginners) is the principle that *capoeiristas* do not block an opponents attack (as is the practice in karate and many other martial arts). Instead the *capoeirista* flows with the movement dodging out of the way,

no matter how awkward the position it puts one in (cf. Capoeira 2006¹⁰⁹). One of the tricks therefore, to being able to create beautiful *capoeira*, is to become comfortable in unusual positions, and to be able to move between such positions with unexpected ease. In doing so one can turn such positions into unforeseen moments of advantage.

This principle, that we might call the ‘flexible response’, has some further subtleties. One is that no part of the body should touch the ground apart from the hands, head and feet. Where rolling would be a convenient escape, for example, *capoeiristas*, go to pains to avoid touching their back or legs to the floor. As with many ritualistic elements of *capoeira* practice, it was explained to me that this tradition stems from *capoeira* played by the slaves, outside on the dirt floor. Falling or allowing the clothes to touch the dirt left evidence that suggested to the slave-masters that they might have been doing something untoward. Similarly if a *capoeirista* got dirt on their white slave’s clothes, it often signified that their opponent had ‘marked them’ – as a kick supplied with inevitably dirty feet would leave conspicuous prints.

Having had variants of this basic story corroborated by several highly experienced *capoeiristas*, and having not found a better explanation for this principle, I would accept it, but with some important qualifications. First, some *capoeiristas* I spoke to about this simply had no good reason for not touching the ground, they did not appeal to the history of slaves. It was still an important stylistic point, though one that they may not have had ‘reasonably’ articulated verbally, but one that, nonetheless, had become a significant factor in evaluation of *capoeira* performance. And therefore, secondly, this seems much more an embodied aesthetic, which has been implied, and trained-in by learning a host of techniques that simply do not involve touching the floor with any part of the body save hands, feet and head.

¹⁰⁹ Somewhat confusingly the author’s name is Nastor Capoeira.



Figure 35: Unusual postures, surprise affects. Pair play *capoeira* in a street *roda* on Aberystwyth sea front prom.

Capoeira play, while involving these historic reasonings, seems to be re-produced and invented, usually without the weight of many years of colonial history. While ritual clearly frames a good deal of *capoeira* practice, it is a ritual that is playfully reconstituted, and deployed in the process of doing *capoeira*. Two players playing in a quick break in a typical *capoeira* class exemplify this. Their time and space is relatively prescribed, but the movements they perform, attempt, and pass back and forth, are made fresh only through the productive capacity lent them by many hours of practice. They become open to each other, one moving away from a spinning kick, moving around and behind, but then once more reversing their movement, without deliberation, in response to the other player's response.



Figure 36: Three of us play at Tan y Bwlch beach. Photo shows the Author playing Alex; photo credit: David Hedley.

In a recent philosophy-thick synthesis Benedikt Korf attempts to bring humanism up to date by theorising the geographic subject as fundamentally ‘open’. The human subject, in his analysis, is not the single cause for spatial action, and yet they do retain the ‘presumption that he or she will change some causal pathways’ (2008: 728) with their co-produced actions. In performing its ‘openness’, human life is grounded in the possibilities for moving with. As two *capoeira* players play, twisting around each other, desperately avoiding some possibilities and moving to positions of others, there is an opportunity for the radical embodiment of this kind of theory.

Identity then becomes a generic construction which involves corporeal activity and discursive practices. This intersubjective sphere derives from interpersonal relationships based on reciprocity.... Free will, then, is not only a neural product

and/or a psychological construct, but equally a social, intersubjective coproduction.
(Korf 2008: 728)

As people play *capoeira* they are not normally in a fight, though they might be throwing kicks or sweeps, but they are learning and moving together. A well timed kick that catches a player by surprise is more likely to be pulled short than not. But this is somewhat besides the point, the kick, in general is not intended as an attack, but an invitation to move together – a call and response, a question to be answered. As we shall see in the following section, *capoeira* players, particularly those who train together in the same group, have no real desire to hurt each other but wish to create movements together, to challenge each other to do what would be impossible to achieve alone.

When we are playing the game and the game is fluid, without “breaks”, without primitive roughness resulting in the need to show that one is “better,” without mediocrity of unconscious ego trips... then we understand what *Mestre Pastinha* meant when he wrote in his manuscripts: “... *muitos admiram essa belíssima luta quando dois camaradas jogam sem egoísmo, sem vaidade; é maravilhosa, e educada.*” Translation: “Many admire this most beautiful [form of] fight when two *comradas* [pals, friends] play without selfishness, without vanity; it is extremely marvelous and educated. (Capoeira 2006: 181).

Partner work: rehearsing play?

“I am no singer. When it is time to sing, I sing, but I am not a singer. When it is time to dance, then let’s do some dancing. But I am not a dancer. If it is time to fight, then OK, I can do some fighting, but I am not a fighter. As *capoeiristas* you are none of those things, but you can do any of them when the time is right. A good *capoeirista* is a chameleon.” (Instructor Varig, of The London *Capoeira* Centre, giving a short talk as part of a workshop in Aberystwyth, *capoeira* diary 12/5/09).

In this section I consider the way the body learns *capoeira* play, other than through doing the play itself. A good portion of most *capoeira* sessions are dedicated to practicing pre-

arranged sequences of movements, with a partner. In this process bodies learn to accommodate, to move in rhythm, not only with the music, but with each other. Movements learned earlier in the sessions are usually incorporated into what are often carefully crafted partner sequences. Here the student repeatedly practices possible sets of movements. The idea being that such scenarios become ingrained enough that the body can perform combinations of them as appropriate during actual play.

All the problems associated with learning a new kind of bodily movement are encountered (see chapters 4 and 5). Converting what one sees the teacher do into movement of your own is very often no easy task. Here practicing with a partner can really help as they, if more experienced, can guide. Their movement forms half of the moving puzzle, and can be used as a cue system for movement. Indeed, this may very well be the goal of this kind of training: to give the student experience of moving in relation to other movements without deliberative thinking. In this case it might be tempting to think of this kind of training as reducing people's creativity, and increasing habitual movement. But as in cases where we learn the grammar of a language, learning the kinds of situation in which it is possible to string certain kinds of movements (or words) together so that they make sense, far from cramping creativity, actually enables *capoeira* play (or literature and poetry).



Figure 37: Partner sequence demonstration. Students watch in a workshop as senior *capoeiristas* demonstrate a combination of kicks and *esquivas* (escaping movements). Buarth Hall, Aberystwyth.

During partner exercises, students are repeatedly told of the importance of maintaining awareness of their partner. This usually involves a commitment to always be looking at your partner, even when upside-down or in the air. Indeed looking in a direction other than at your partner is often taken as an invitation for them to ‘try something’ – and of course, this would often be a trap set for the unwary. With such an emphasis set on vigilant observation and scrutiny of one’s ‘opponent’, it seems counterintuitive that trust would develop between players. But this depends upon what kind of trust we are talking about.

Trust is generally thought of as a good thing because it is often a consequence of another person's behaviour that exhibits 'trustworthiness'. The flip side of this is that trust can be exceptionally undesirable if it is misplaced (Hardin 2006). It is not usually considered to be sensible, for example, to trust someone who would likely knock you over if you took your eyes off them (as one can expect to be in *capoeira*). But it is because we can expect that movement, and because we would be slightly confused and weary should it not come, that *capoeira* can produce trust. Through a continuing context of uncertainty, this is perhaps an unusual kind of trust, one in which we place our own personal safety, one that is never contractually fixed. During play, a 'real' blow *can* come at any time (though there would be repercussions for such an action), and *capoeiristas* are free to spring a trap as much as avoid it.

Partner exercises, though, are generally more structured and one can be confident of several things. One is that you will have the opportunity (or be obliged) to experience both parts of any sequence. If a sequence involves one partner throwing the other to the floor, for example, both parties will experience being thrown as well and throwing. This reciprocal set-up means that if a *capoeirista* does not look after their partner when training, the favour may be returned, when the roles are switched. Instead, what tends to happen is that by practicing together and helping each other 'work out' how the movements go, *capoeiristas* get a feel for how the movements work, but also, develop friendships with those that have helped them towards such understandings.

Throws like *vingativa* (figure 38) can be practiced with varying speed and vigour. Communication through body-language constitutes a continual re-negotiation of how practice should proceed. The person applying the throw can do a lot to minimise risk to their partner. And similarly the person being thrown can cooperate or make it very difficult for the person trying to practice the throw. It is assumed that in standard reoccurring contexts we would be good judges of who is trustworthy (Hardin 2006). But in *capoeira*, particularly for the beginner, the context is not only unfamiliar but changes radically with each change of training partner and each new and unfamiliar set of

movements. What they must depend upon is that they will be able to negotiate times and speeds, as they practice, *with* their partner.



Figure 38: Takedown practice. A capoeira ‘throw’ known as *vingativa*. Laura is about to throw Mathew by twisting her upper torso round, pushing Mathew backwards over her leg.

Training to twist time

When I am at my most exhausted, or most surprised, or lost in rhythm, the movement takes over. My movement comes from something that could be called an unconscious, spontaneous and intelligent ‘body-subject’, but I do not wish to use that term – for the origin of the movement must be both inside and outside the body, and both in and outside ‘present time-space’. In figure 39 I have attempted to give some sense of this. Whilst movement only happens in the now moment (what I have imagined as an enacting (the black centre stretching to infinity – a sequence of nows) it is supported, or brought into existence, by the past and future. The human being will always be as the squiggly lines suggest, uncertain, brought into being *with* feelings, intuition, fluid boundaries and emotional perceptions. For the human subject the past is just as much in a state of contingency and becoming as the future – as soon as we focus on it, it is swallowed by the nowness of that action: it is replaced by a new past that is partially brought about by the feelings compiled in the void. Memory here is crucial element that sustains our ability to act competently in the present; it mixes with place and what ‘might be’ it to shape its emergence.

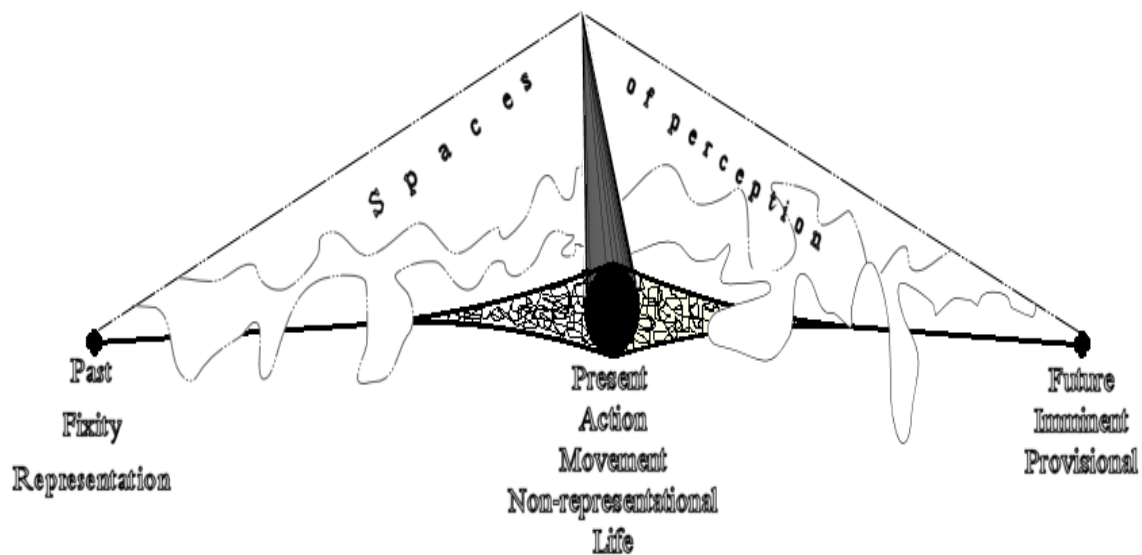


Figure 39: The suspension of action

Practice of *capoeira* has given me a way of examining concepts like memory, time and place, letting me play them out in space. Sometimes, for example, we would practice techniques very slowly and the sense of the movements seemed to be heightened. This can have the effect of focusing kinaesthetic feelings intensely in certain movements. The awareness of the contact with my training partner would increase, feeling every little movement. On these occasions I attempt to feel a certain way – to bring the past closer, bringing feelings of previous demonstrations into existence, and shrinking the thoughts and feelings of what the future holds. Focusing in on individual parts and moving exceptionally slowly, time seems to become so subjective it feels like, at any point, it may seize up altogether. When I reflected on this one evening after a session, it occurred to me that the ‘idea’ of predicting the future just seemed to wink out of perception during training – the feeling of it gone when giving over completely to the movement. Focus was intensified upon every stage of the movements unfolding with my training partner.

Similarly we sometimes practice *capoeira* very fast. Time and space change once more to accommodate this. In reference to the martial art of Aikido, Saotome notes a similar phenomenon.

One point in every movement, one point in every strike, is stillness. Your eye will learn to capture it as a camera shutter captures it... An attack that seemed very fast to you as a beginner becomes slower with practice and experience. Your eyes change, and you see differently. If you continue to train, there will eventually come a time when every attack, no matter how fast, will appear to you as a slow-motion film.

(Saotome 1993: 191)

Here I have been trying to argue that the past only means anything in the present – in the moments of contact through which it is re-negotiated. In this way it becomes obvious how *capoeira* books, videos, and internet representations can be enacted as more than representations. If we conceive of representations in ‘present time’ - and not as simply visual things, but entities that play a part in opening up the void, a part in making the now of each encounter – they are embodied ‘doings’. In the practice of *capoeira* it is clear

that we do not operate with representational based strategies, but instead a skilful embodied coping that draws upon appropriate feelings for the past (Dreyfus 2005).

Creative fluidity, in *capoeira*, is the ability to draw upon those feelings of the past, and mix them together in new ways that are anticipations of the movement of one's partner and the rhythm of the music. Enough to say this is very difficult to achieve, and to perform beautifully with someone else in the actual game, requires more than rehearsal of pre-planned sequences.



Figure 40: Partners practice together. As shown, when the hall space at a premium half the practitioners practice instruments and songs, while half try the movements.

Learning to judge the space and time, control one's own body, and always be on guard for trickery, requires significant patience. Nastor Capoeira (2006), a *capoeira mestre* and author, devised his own partner exercises that were open ended "movement improvisation exercises" (ibid: 283-299). While it may seem like an oxymoron to have improvisational exercises, these are unusual movements that cannot be easily named or classified – being

neither attack or defence but rather *movements with*¹¹⁰. Indeed, there seems good reason for this, as clever and experienced players pay close attention to the movements practiced in conventional ‘partner practicing’ sessions, and later use the movements to their advantage in the *roda*. For example, a regular practicing routine involves a continual exchange of *queixada* kicks and dodges. In the game it is very easy for an experienced player to pre-empt (or even cause) their partners *queixada* kick; with the right prompting the less experienced partner will naturally move into the same sequence they have just been practicing. And of course, rather than continue with the familiar sequence the more experienced player can hope to take advantage of the expected movement, by replying with a sweep or some other unscripted counter.

Thus, as a capoeirista gains basic experience, much of their training really becomes a process of learning abstract principals, rather than an inflexible sequence of movements. Keeping vigilant observation of your partner (see figure 41), attacking their open side, only doing *floreios*¹¹¹ when they can be incorporated into the flow of the game, or moving so that you are too far inside or outside the range of most of their attacks are all examples. More than these technical aspects, though, what these sequences give is an education in the meanings of movements. How a person is likely to react to certain moves: variants of sweeps and throws are experienced firsthand. Through these more controlled interactions one learns what it is like to throw, and to be thrown, and how much force is too much...

Through thoughtful reflections upon these abstract concepts and repetitive practice of them, calculated movements can be turned into routine habits. Each, in practice, is played with, not simply assumed. Looking at your partner, a ‘rule’ continually stressed by instructors, is often ignored by those same *capoeiristas* when they play in the *roda*. Still, if a capoeirista can form enough of these habits, they can begin to string them together, play with them, re-invent them and make them their own, and in the process become what most would consider a good *capoeira* player.

¹¹⁰ These involve things like rolling over the back of a player, leaping behind them, spinning down and round to the side, and so on.

¹¹¹ *Floreios*: acrobatic flourishes. It is often said the danger of *floreios* is that they can lead to a disjointed game in which the ‘conversation’ is broken.



Figure 41: Keeping an eye on partner. An exercise in which pairs move down the length of the hall maintaining eye contact. Movement involves going from face up position (as shown) to all fours, looking between one's legs at partner, and back.

The Roda!

His first kick soars overhead and I *esquiva* down out of the way – it carries an accent I can not ignore. The type of kick (a *queixada*¹¹²) says “hello” but the ‘accent’ tells me more, it says, “I am excited and do not want to go slow for you, you better be ready.” Keeping eye contact with my partner, I kick in return, attempting to make my movements speak with a similar sentiment. He easily moves away, stylishly collapsing his *au* (cartwheel) at its apex, coming down in a dynamic movement that uses one forearm as prop between his body and the floor on which he pivots around swinging his foot back towards my ankles. I take this as an invitation to shift my weight off my feet and still facing him I skip over his oncoming leg into a *bananeira* (handstand). I feel a brief moment of relative stillness that reminds me of floating. From this position I can see he is closing the distance between us, wearing a happy but mischievous smile. I bring one leg down from its inverted position in a kick which he was clearly expecting - he somehow manages to evade it and end up at the edge of my field of vision balancing in a handstand of his own. (*Capoeira* diary 18/8/07).

The embodied expertise developed during bike trials, parkour and *capoeira*, are in a sense unexceptional. In a perceptive appraisal of the *process* in which players of first person shooter (FPS) computer games develop competency, for example, Reeves, et al. (2009) show how the body learns to recognise and react to threats, dextrously managing mouse and keyboard controls with both hands, without the need to consider any individual body parts. Indeed, I am struck by the similarity with which the body’s expertise is linked into the development of what they call a ‘terrain’, a term used by David Sudnow in his account of learning another computer game.

Expertise is choreographing conduct such that individual parts are not the focus but rather the symphony of combined complex activity in a terrain of developing, emergent tactics. (Reeves, et al. 2009: 223).

¹¹² *Queixada* - An outwards crescent kick.

This ‘terrain’, as they note, is about the ability of an expert body to make continual judgments about where to go, what to do next, and so on, based on the *felt* appraisal of the current situation. As in *capoeira*, to be considered good is primarily about one’s ability to know the ‘terrain’, to understand what movements are likely to be followed up with other movements, to realise the options a capoeirista has for moving from their current position, and within the current state of play. *Capoeira* though, is not simply about expertise, but about character, and about fooling about with anticipation and social convention. In this rest of this section I consider the way the *jogo* (game), which is founded on expertise, but derived through play, connects participants and can make large impacts on their relationships and attitudes. Here contact can make lasting impacts, fostering a kind of trust between *capoeiristas*.



Figure 42: *Capoeira Roda*. Participants sing, clap, and play instruments in a circle, creating *axé* (good energy) for the two players. Buarth Hall, Aberystwyth.

From Trickery to Trust

Como vai você, como vai você

Dona Maria, como vai você

Joga bonito que eu quero ver

Dona Maria, como vai você

Joga com calma que eu quero aprender

Dona Maria, como vai você

Esse jogo é Capoeira, não é karate

Dona Maria, como vai você

How do you do, how do you do?

Holy Maria how do you do?

Play beautiful, because I like to watch

Holy Maria how do you do?

Play carefully, because I like to learn

Holy Maria how do you do?

This game is *Capoeira*, not karate

Holy Maria how do you do?

(Common *capoeira* song)

Movements are scripted and improvised to different degrees in relation to the moving place in which *capoeiristas* practice. The most important contact a player has is with the person they are playing with: a kick, directed at a player that does not evade it, has a high chance of being ‘pulled’ and stopping short, but there is an ever-present possibility of getting hit, that demands a player move in relation to their partner. Through doing training sequences together we have seen how trust can be cultivated between two people, helping each other become proficient. In the *roda* though the expectations and customs for action all change.

Imagine being amid roughly twenty five other people, male and female, who are standing side by side forming a circular ring¹¹³. To your left, six or seven people in the circle are playing an array of different musical instruments, one a large drum, which reverberates into your muscles. Everybody is clapping and singing, focused upon you and your partner, willing you to play ‘well’. While being quite nerve racking to begin with, the atmosphere is pounding, along with the beating of your inevitably stressed heart and lungs. This is *capoeira* – the ‘*roda*’ (pronounced *hoda*) defines this circle of bodies, an atmosphere or energy, and the play and process itself.

¹¹³ A circle is reputedly formed for historic reasons: the bodies prevent ‘outsiders’ or ‘slave-masters’ seeing the martial techniques used by the two players. Thus, they might think the players are innocently dancing.

The spatiality to this event is under continual negotiation as, people ‘buy the game’ and players, move around, playing with the space they have, sometimes vying for more, other times relinquishing it to their partner. As an activity it is a ‘spatially nuanced, mobile and non-linguistic conversation’, although I am somewhat ashamed to put it into such dry terms. Rather, I want to say: it is *powerful*, it is exciting, it exceeds, frightens, and exhilarates, it makes me revel in the moment of movement. When I play, and I feel I play well, then I am creating something, participating in the energy of the *roda*. I become uplifted and de-centred. I am completely vulnerable, yet untouchable, because I am more than myself¹¹⁴....

As the reader might have noticed, I simply do not know how to go about ‘analysing’ this phenomena – which is beyond my powers of investigative reason (my linguistic ones, at least). I will have to settle for making some general observations. Vulnerability is crucial to the process of *capoeira* play, one can move around the space of the *roda* in a closed and fully defensive manner, and the movement starts to look like something quite different to *capoeira*. It would not work, it would be sparring, ‘karate style’ (something several popular songs warn against, see above).

When I hear a sound that resonates through my body, with the power of a hundred kicks or *esquivas* practiced repeatedly and now called forth, that same music can not be separated from the urge to *move* and the jumping tension I feel in my body. Perhaps it goes further than that, and perhaps the music is removing that very “I”, the me that it effects, is actually incorporated into the music. When this is accompanied by a group of people arranged in a circle, all directing their clapping, singing and instrument playing towards the unfolding of events, it is perhaps a ‘ring of liberation’ (Lewis 1992) - where one can perhaps forget ‘themselves’, as well as their worldly troubles.

The *roda* provides a direct and lived experience that carries with it an emotional intensity that permeates everyday life. I continually found that in time spent outside *capoeira* sessions I would be reflecting on certain sequences of movements: the way they flow

¹¹⁴ And as I sit typing this, remembering what it is like, I can barely suppress a rising urge to get up and *move*.

together or the way I had interacted with another person. This reflection was not an ‘all cognitive’ affair. Rather, at times I would feel my muscles tingling as I imagined the movement *and the feelings* of the movements, and imagined other alternatives that I, or another player, could have done. Similarly, the contact people make in the *roda* endures, and feeds into the way people understand and participate in places. The embodied politics of playing in the *roda* is a seemingly inexhaustible topic of conversation amongst *capoeiristas*.

In the *roda* performative conventions, learned in earlier parts of a typical training session, are used to ensure that we convey the meanings we wish to (cf. Goffman 1958). Though this process is very often fraught with miscommunication, dangers, and possibly productive confusion. In the *roda* we must learn to ‘read’ the movements of another’s body, as well as the rhythms which guide. By learning to listen closely, and by refining qualities of contact players develop ‘*malicia*’ – for which there is no direct or easy translation to English. Roughly it is the positively viewed ‘cunning’ of a player, their ability to know the intensions of their ‘opponent’. I use ‘opponent’ hesitantly because the two players in a game of *capoeira* are more often good friends than opponents.



Figure 43: Helping up after tripping up. Throws in the *roda*, taken in the ‘spirit’ of *capoeira*, are tests of ‘malicia’, a means to learn how to avoid trickery ‘outside’.

In this playful and somewhat unpredictable context, people learn a lot about each other, but not necessarily, things that one can put to words, though *capoeiristas* often try. A feeling, for example, that someone will try to throw you or that they are trying to lull you with a slow relaxed game, can be difficult to justify, but is, one hopes, based on a sound

embodied logic built up through hours of training and experience of contact with others. What some might call ‘intuition’ is involved in making judgments about the play and sending one’s own body into various shapes and directions.

When play ends, and when the *roda* finished, there are fairly significant changes in embodiment, and relationality between players. Players of *capoeira* make embodied, but still considered and talked over, judgments about the way specific games with specific people went. In the groups with which I researched, participants became friends quickly. Assuming one does not play a highly guarded, defensive game, giving one’s self over to play with another is a symbolic gesture of trust. Certain positions in *capoeira*, particularly those that involve inverted positions, render the body vulnerable to attack in a traditional martial arts sense. In a sense this is a giving up of self, letting one’s self be played with, while one plays – being touched in the act of touching. Particularly for the beginner who is arguably at the mercy of more experienced players, there is a leap of faith to be made, in playing in the *roda*.

Here a wily trust is developed, one that is on the look out for deception, but knows that any such deception will be made in the spirit of *capoeira*, and while it might be undesirable, it is not likely to be overly violent, and is even less likely to be malicious. Trust is given because the past is spatialised into the cells, synapses and muscles of the body, which now identify certain bodies as trustworthy. Intimate and potentially hazardous experiences, in which violence is turned to play, inhabit the bodies of *capoeira* players, lending them a confidence in giving out trust to their *capoeira* companions. Each relies on their fellow *capoeiristas* to produce with them the *axé* that sustains their play. Trust in this case is not necessarily something that fosters cooperative action (cf. Gambetta 1988), although it might well do that, but is a kind of trust which helps players to make fresh contact.

Capoeira is an example of a practice that can embody the kind of play advocated in chapter 2. While far from perfect, when play is neither self-consciously restricted nor competitively undertaken, it can be a practice in which the body moves as de-centred and

open. The trust this can elicit is quite profound and it readily shapes friendship groups and social circles. All of this does not come naturally: a *capoeirista* trains regularly, adding a questing discipline to their play which enables them to make contact in different ways. In training with other people the reciprocal nature of contact becomes clear, and as so many *mestres* claim, can be embodied as a virtue. Play, as I argued in previous chapters, can and does embody an emergent ethics of its own. One which will not sit still but will always listen. In the case of *capoeira*, this play when at its best (when in an ‘open’ kind of contact), forges a trust between participants that can further fuel their playful energy.

This is a trust that is not based on being able to predict another’s actions accurately, but on the shared enjoyment of the fact that play with another is a mystery. And that placing a faith in play as an unfolding practice that is with another, is very likely to lead to new qualities of contact that are quite unspeakable, but possess an energy that keep us wanting to talk about them.

“*Quem vem lá sou eu, quem vem lá sou eu, berimbau bateu, capoeira sou eu.*”

“Who is there? It’s me, who is there? It’s me. The *berimbau* plays, I am *capoeira*.”

(Common *capoeira* song)

Chapter 8: Playing on...

Making playful habits

Stoic philosophers like Zeno and Cleanthes, considering emotion and affective experience at the beginning of the third century B.C.E., realised that any thought or changes in the mind must also be physical material changes. And that any such changes must, as such, be linked to changes in the world outside of the mind (Graver 2007)¹¹⁵. As I have argued throughout, our contact with the world necessitates this bond. Like the stoics, though, I have argued that the nature of affective response is not a ‘natural one’ and neither is it homogenous. The Stoics were committed to producing a comprehensive examination of the various kinds of emotive responses we had with the world, and believed, as I do, that it is possible to cultivate changes to the nature of this contact.

This is a claim I have made throughout this thesis, and one which comes not primarily from philosophy but empirical engagement with parkour, bike trials and *capoeira*. Learning each activity asks of its participants that they consistently engage in the world differently. All three are concerned with a continual development, in which an emotive and imaginative engagement with the world never stops. In practicing, I was offered a way to consider the functioning of emotions: the close internal, yet often mystifying, logic with which emotions play across body and place. It seems clear that, as the stoics believed, emotions constitute an important and shifting perspective on the world.

¹¹⁵ Because, they reasoned, material changes in the world were always a consequence of things acting upon each other. Objects did not move on their own.

For emotions have content: in their character as assents, they make certain claims about the world, although those claims are rarely if ever articulated in our minds in the actual moment of response. (Graver 2007: 37)

Unlike the stoics however, I put more emphasis on *working out* and re-working out what ‘good’ and ‘bad’ emotions might be. In other words, the processes and encounters in which *emotions are tried* becomes crucial. Stoic thought held that both the stuff of the body and mind, and the stuff of that which we perceive, is emergent together (Graver 2007) – but the nature of that togetherness is never static or fixed. Affect, as ‘intensive relationality’, or a ‘sense of push’ in the world (Latham and McCormack 2004, Thrift 2004b), involves the fallible body – one which is always in contact, but is still not necessarily the decidedly ‘open’ body I considered in chapter 2. Being open to place’s possibilities, I have tried to show, involves a willingness to participate in different kinds of contact, which can be cultivated through various playful utopic practices.

Writing at the end of the nineteenth century William James noted how connected our perceptions were to our past experiences and our habits of attention. Similarly in her influential essay ‘*Throwing like a Girl*’, Iris Marion Young (1990), drawing on phenomenology, makes a feminist critique in which the body-subject has ‘inhibited intentionality’ and ‘discontinuous unity’ because of its constant tension with a ‘body-object’. She suggests the body constructed as feminine is constricted, because it is not totally present; it is existent in relation to fewer possibilities because it is existent primarily in relation to itself and habits of the self (ibid.). In other words, learning to throw a ball, one must first *let go* of habitual bodily comportment. Habit then, seems not only to affect our senses, but also our thinking and our movements in the world.

Standing the way one normally stands it is impossible to throw well. For Young, it is as if the body-subject has learnt to treat itself as an object – it is ‘closed’. This is precisely the accusation that non-representational theory makes against the social sciences – that it has forgotten its subjecthood through a ‘closed’ emphasis on representation and re-representation, without acknowledging its creative potential. The charge is that by sketching out static and immobile framings (constructed histories) we are adding

finishing touches that tend to fix and constrain life. Instead, we should heartily accept our part in its painting. By conceiving of our bodies and those that we research with, as enacted, and by recognising that such an enactment will not always conform to history's expectation of the future, we might begin to unfix ourselves and others from the reduction to *either* a body-object *or* a body-subject. Rather than simply being 'objects' of analysis it is possible that practices that playfully *try place* can animate the materiality of the world, in a way that a more objective closed body cannot.

Our body is the only means we have for empathising and connecting, for entering into relations with whatsoever we encounter. This denies us the possibility of making external objective explanation of the world, but demands we participate and speak and act the world from our experiences within it. As David Abram would have it perception is an event of reciprocity, a *connection between*, rather than a traditional *view of*. Such a notion of the body moves us beyond dismissive fearful denials of involvement, of moral distance and neutrality. We are engaged at every level, every scale of analysis should put us in contact *with* our world and its ceaseless activity. Such contact, at its best, involves much more than simply the experience of the actual, but is interwoven with imagination as well as other times and places. When a bike is hopped onto a bollard, it depends upon a kind of contact that is infused with a thousand other trying, and the ability to imagine the bollard as an object that can be 'ridden'.

I have presented three practices which promote this kind of togetherness and contact. Indeed through a playful participatory consciousness, it seems possible that we might have a way to actually *do*, in a very visceral and evocative sense, what non-representational theorists have tended to philosophically espouse with weighty linguistic manipulation. That is, we might multiply up possibilities, and create new kinds of contact. We might, as Thrift puts it, 'summon life' (Thrift 2004a: 162), and in doing so conjure up many more experiences that are brimming with the non-actual (imagination).

The stakes are high, for we, as human beings, seem to become attached to our behaviours. Habit becomes who we are, an inescapably tight clothing that can both help

and hinder our going on. It can become, just like a habitual smoker's desire to smoke, ingrained deeply in our body chemistry and make up. And yet, the smoker can choose to be an ex-smoker at any time, instantly and without delay. Considering habits highlight this ambiguity – we are free agents in that we can in each instant choose to do otherwise (Giddens 1984), and yet the world often seems to move around us, leaving us little control, even of our most intimate and basic features, like choosing when to eat, what clothes to wear, whether we need a smoke or not. In part this is because we are connected, as I have argued, inseparably to the rest of the world. We make contact continually, but not of homogenous quality. The materials and technologies we imagine and physically manipulate blur into our sensual experiences with our environments.

Increasingly human ordinary spatiality has become not just accompanied but suffused by a metrical space made up out of an army of things which provide new perceptual capacities. In a sense, all are joined together in the domain of bare life in a reworking of the verification of anticipations made possible by an informed materiality. (Thrift 2005: 472).

Bikes, trainers, or *berimbaus*, can add to our imaginative capacities greatly, as can our development of embodied stories. Stories shared across internet sites, fictional, linguistic and multimedia, as I demonstrated in chapter 4 on parkour, infuse our bodies, such that they are always with us when we create places to play (both virtual and actual). Such stories are enacted in a non-representational way because we have, to a greater or lesser degree, the capacity to imagine ourselves as the hero of a fictional adventure, about to leap across a dangerous gap, or woo our enemies with beautifully flowing acrobatic movements¹¹⁶. While these imagined stories suffuse our practice, they are open to radically different interpretations and experiential significance. “Language can never exhaust the meaning potential in the experience of movement.” (Lewis 1995: 221).

Play, then, has power. When it comes to our perceptual, place-making embodiment, play can, as I hope I have shown, be a radical method of enchantment. One which has tended to be undervalued and considered innocently frivolous, disassociated from the real

¹¹⁶ In *capoeira*, for example, several popular songs sing stories in which *floreios* [acrobatics] are used to impress and win freedom or esteem without overt violence.

business of everyday life (Donaldson 1993). Play, like imagination, is important, because it permeates our contact with the world, even when we are feeling particularly un-playful.

Imagination had been customarily portrayed as the entertaining of the “nonreal” in opposition to the real world around us. Even the earliest writings of Merleau-Ponty labelled the imaginary as having “no depth” and offering “no hold upon it” versus the perceptual whose “significance encircles and permeates matter” (PP: 323–24¹¹⁷). (Mazis 2008: 146).

But as Mazis goes on to note, in Merleau-Ponty’s later thought (1968) he develops the concept of the ‘flesh of the world’, in which he takes more account of the way our bodies are practically submerged in the material and immaterial. We are, as Merleau-Ponty claimed, touched in the act of touching, and who can say what that touch will mean before it is experienced? In other words, there is no ‘pure’ perception, no embodiment or experience free of cultural ‘contaminants’; stories, imaginings, technological aptitude, or embodied knowledge of movement. All are part of perception (cf. Downey 2007, Ness 2004). Imagination is inseparably with all our experience; like linguistic reason and stories, it is intertwined with our learned methods of sense making. This is why, I find I am able, or rather fated, to navigate urban environments through flashes of bike trials movements and parkour cat-leaps, regardless of whether I am on a bike, out to do parkour, or simply taking a stroll. Similarly the sounds of certain musical rhythms, now become felt as a rush of excitement and as imaginary games of *capoeira* played out in (front of) me. All these non-actual experiences are real. They make places happen.

In perceptions, in memories, and in emotions, there are other significances that can only come into the light of day through the play of imagination, breaking up the usual ways of meaning-making. Some meanings might be more submerged in the background of experience, given the usual emphasis on accomplishing practical tasks, but that does not mean that they are not vital to the overall significance of our surround. (Mazis 2008: 146).

¹¹⁷ Merleau-Ponty (1962) *Phenomenology of Perception*.

Through playful activity, which is less concerned with winning than with inviting and inventing, place becomes involved in our imaginings, and can begin to chop through, or at least, work with, those perceptual habits that have become disinterested in *possibility*. The possibility of living out utopic worlds, in which we are inescapably involved in the epics, the adventures and the excitement, is emboldened through a dedication to play - making it anything but apolitical. Writers like Donaldson might be slightly extreme in their approach, and dedication to a particular, anti competitive kind of play, but perhaps it takes such writers to remind us that play, organised, institutionalised and lacking utopic content, can construct and maintain habitual modes of embodiment just as effectively as its so called opposite: 'work'. Parkour, bike trials and *capoeira* exercise the body in a conventional aerobic and anaerobic sense, but more importantly these activities exercise the body's ability to imagine, participate in, and enchant new worlds.

the number of worlds is uncountable, that is, we change from one to another every moment of our lives (Wolff 2004: 349).

If Thrift (2005) is right, and our proliferation of technology, particularly technologies of communication and mobility, means that the creation of new worlds is beginning to gain exponential momentum, then where does this leave our ability to make contact? How can we make quality contact with so fast a shifting multiplicity? Surely things are changing too rapidly, and networks are too complex for us to grasp any portion of them in a meaningful way? Heidegger (1971) is renowned for a similar anxiety. For him, we have begun to live as 'rootless', unconnected and free-floating entities, who now cannot draw nourishment from our dwelling in place.

All distances in time and space are shrinking. ... Yet the frantic abolition of all distances brings no nearness; for nearness does not consist in shortness of distance. What is least remote from us in point of distance, by virtue of its picture on film or its sound on radio, can remain far from us. What is incalculably far from us in point of distance can be near to us. ... Everything gets lumped together into uniform distancelessness. ... What is it that unsettles and thus terrifies? It shows itself and hides itself in the *way* in which everything presences, namely, in the fact that despite all conquest of distances the nearness of things remains absent. (Heidegger 1971 cited by Harvey 1996: 300).

For Heidegger, ‘authenticity’, a highly problematic term, was found in relatively predictable ‘dwelling’ in a farmhouse in the Black Forest. This makes an authentic life in which place becomes something solid that we can depend upon and can ‘nourish’ (emotionally and spiritually) – a place we have constructed through repetition of our relations with it (Relph 1977). As writers on mobility remind us, this was a metaphysics based on fixity and rootedness (Cresswell 2006), in which imagination, it seems, would have limited use in the day to day ‘nourishment’ one receives from being-in-place. One might think ‘world making’ players of *capoeira*, bike trials and parkour, participate in places with an entirely different outlook. And yet so much of their imaginative play depends upon an intimate getting-to-know of place. As I hope this study has shown, imagination is not just the authority to entertain nonactual materiality, but is strongly tied to all other embodied powers of apprehension. Thus, it is when we have a reasonable grasp of the way we can, and have, moved with certain materials, that we can begin to employ that knowledge together with imagination. In this way imagining and enacting different places is enhanced by embodied knowledge of what places are already like.

Still, it is the case that these utopic practices find ‘authenticity’, not in a place of certainty, but in places of fear, of design, and places of trust based on an undercurrent of unpredictability, rather than inherited and inert knowledge. Here place is ambiguous, not simply two-faced but genuinely alive, buzzing with possible futures. And while “place has to be one of the most multi-layered and multipurpose keywords in our language.” (Harvey 1996: 208), for the player, this is no bad thing. As Harvey goes on to argue (all be it in different terms), we might regard place’s ambiguous multiplicity as advantageous, if we consider how people come to embody knowledge of ‘place’ as it is co-constituted. In other words, place skates between different kinds of materiality, being part idea, part physical, and all the time being re-enacted and emergent.

By playing in this emergence, practitioners of these activities are paradoxically creating rock steady places, in which they know specific distances and textures, all be it from a particular perspective (that of traceur, capoeirista, or trials rider). These places, though,

are only ever launch pads, stable footings for the next leap that tries out new kinds of contact. The player, by participating in utopic practice, can make a habit out of breaking and making embodied habits.

Inventing Contact

Something sees through me as I see. I see with a seeing that is not mine alone. I see, and as I see, the I that I am is put at risk, discovers its derivation from what is permanently enigmatic to itself. (Butler 2005: 202)

There is no need for a singular definition of ‘contact’. Indeed in retaining its multiplicity, ‘contact’ is unfixed, free to develop as it will. The humanist in me might be tempted to conclude that making new kinds of contact, in practices like *capoeira*, bike trails and parkour, is a means of empowerment – a way to wrest back some agency to pursue our own personal projects. Though, as I hope I have made clear, there is little ‘personal’ about making contact. Indeed, the strength of ‘contact’, it seems to me, is that it cannot be ‘personal’ and it does not allow a singular self-contained subject, that can *have* agency, in the way we supposedly own material goods.

In developing ‘structuration theory’ Giddens (1984) critiques Hägerstrand’s time-geography, and makes two points that are relevant here. Firstly, that Hägerstrand’s analysis depends upon ‘agents’ that are “purposive beings in the sense that their activities are guided by ‘projects’ which they pursue.” (1984: 117) But as Giddens argues, the nature of the ‘project’ remains an unexplained assumption and an implicit advocacy of human agency (thus replicating a structure/agency binary that Giddens wants to transcend). A similar critique could be levelled at much humanist (broadly construed) writings that posit an unambiguous and coherent ‘project’ that human agents ‘work’ towards (eg. Pred 1984, Seamon 1979). That we are constituted *with* technologies, objects and environments, denies the perfect unity of any such ‘project’. Even attempts to solidify relationships or ‘goals’ by writing them down cannot achieve separation

(though it certainly can play a large and influential part in peoples lives and the nature of contact). ‘The project’, in other words, is never coherent or complete. This is borne out in the practices examined here, all of which involve a commitment to play with place and in so doing embellish and develop new ‘projects’.

In forming a second critique, Giddens condemns Hägerstrand’s work as being ‘culture-bound’ because of the way he treats the body, focusing particularly on embodiment and materiality as *constraint*¹¹⁸. For Giddens, “all types of constraint... are also types of opportunity, media for the enablement of action.” (1984: 117). Whether a body is primarily constraint or enablement, seems something that will be determined in particular unfolding processes of contact. Like emotion, such a judgment will be an engagement with the world. Attempting to play beyond constraint, as in the cases considered here, is a question of trying places out, and mixing recognised constraints with imaginative perceptions.

With fear, technology and other people as playmates (as in chap. 4, 5 & 6 respectively), there are not five senses but an infinite number, for they are, always emerging in contact with places. They are mixed together, and in process with our emotive engagements to such a degree, that touch, for example, is not necessarily the feeling of a texture by the fingertips, but can instead be an affective response that involves the whole body. As the body finds new ways to make contact, new ways of sensing emerge. Particularly in both parkour and bike trails, our sense of shapes, textures and even time is redefined as objects participate in the practice. Similarly touch is transformed and merged with hearing, and senses of rhythm in *capoeira*. Thus, while there is a good case for a re-assertion of touch into our thinking about geography (Crang 2003, Crouch and Desforges 2003, Hetherington 2003b, Obrador-Pons 2007), it is useful to consider the specifics of the development of kinds of touch, and how they are hopelessly integrated with other senses.

¹¹⁸ While we can say there is no escaping the situation in which we produce research, Giddens’ general point still stands: that Hägerstrand’s is one particular perspective of material embodiment, and there are other equally valid ones.

Indeed, while touch might well affirm a proximal and performative mode of knowledge that breaks with the distance between subject and object (Obrador-Pons 2007) it is still the case that touch can and does happen at a physical distance. We see a ledge that we want to try to reach and it is felt as a nervousness in the arms that may or may not be capable of grasping it. There is then, no ‘raw sense data’ that is not subject to our embodied biases and emotive judgments. Perception of some event as James (1879) asserted, is not disassociated from our whole body’s contact with it.

What does all this mean for non-representational theories in geography? Primarily, I think that a notion like ‘contact’ can usefully be deployed as a device that bids us pay more heed to *the doing* of events. Admittedly contact is a concept which we inevitably understand from a human perspective, but one that, through our perceptions and their mixed-in imagination, we are able to deploy as we empathise with the most unlikely stuff of the world. We are granted transformative powers, to make ourselves a part of that bicycle crank, experiencing those stresses or strains, or we can imagine what it is like to be a ‘superhuman’ able to leap across huge voids. However inaccurately, with the help of the places we emerge with, we can play at making new kinds of contact.

Such ways of knowing and being work to make the experience of place less a spectatorial object¹¹⁹, but instead are modes or attitudes of embodiment that are always *participants with* place. There is a connection between how we perform habitual cultural practices like walking, reading, writing, talking, driving, standing and eating, and our ability to question and wonder at (and with) these practices. Contact, as a flexible engagement in place, is a concept that can be used to bring these things to attention and thus to unfix them. *Capoeira*, bike trials and parkour, it might be argued, are anything but ordinary everyday practices, but then this is precisely the contribution of contact: to bring to awareness the knowledge that there is no ‘normal’, ‘ordinary’ or ‘everyday’ way to be with things. Contact is variable, changing radically with utopic practices like bike trials,

¹¹⁹ Something non-representational theory has continually promoted without giving many empirical examples to fuel our imaginings.

capoeira and parkour, but no less accommodating towards other ways of being with places.

Inconclusive conclusion

The practices considered here do not conclude. They are ongoing utopic practices that neither settle comfortably nor terminate dramatically. Neither do they tie up neatly, producing a crisp and cohesive argument. Because they are involved in playing towards new kinds of contact they are full of energetic paradox. With this research I have not addressed them as entities that can be completed or fully understood. What I have tried to do is explore and affirm certain elements of them, as phenomena that expand the possibilities of being in place.

A possible critique of all this often made in seminar rooms, particularly of non-representational work (broadly conceived), is that it becomes difficult to intervene in a traditional ‘social science’ sense. “Where is the point of entry? How do we critique this?” I can hear Tim Cresswell say. This is a worthwhile consideration, as academics we like to be involved in the negotiation of knowledge. Telling an open ended story makes it difficult for us to find fault-lines in which to construct a critique. How do we evaluate the ‘theory’ if there is no identifiable hypothesis or answer? Appraisals of this kind essentially approach non-representational theory from a specific tradition, in which an individual lays down *an* argument, and defends it. This seems quite different to offering a story, adding or drawing out what insights one can, and laying it out there in the hope that it will not provide answers or settle arguments but make questions.

There are a few questions that I hope have been raised by this thesis: What can play be? Did I play? Do I play? Should I play? What is the nature of contact? How does contact feel? How could it feel?

None are likely to have straightforward answers, and certainly each will be context dependent. What if we treat academic work as having no special position, but instead like a line from a poem, a religious text, an artwork, or a concert performance? All have the potential to evoke, to intervene in, and help to invent the world. Similarly we, as academics, are ‘makers’, and rather than revealing the world we are participating in it. Such participation is always flawed, and therein lays the importance of our talk, critiques and argumentation. At the same time though, it is through this fallibleism and vulnerability that we are granted the ability to participate with the world in the first place. The practices of *capoeira*, bike trials and parkour, are no different: mastery never comes, but is nonetheless sought after for the qualities of contact it can bring.

Glossary of Terms

Parkour

<i>cat-leap</i>	<i>A jump to a wall or other obstacle, in which the traceur lands on the vertical surface – absorbing horizontal momentum with their legs and usually grasping the top edge of the wall with the hands.</i>
<i>kong-vault</i>	<i>A vault in which the arms push off the obstacle to be traversed, and the legs tuck up and between the arms.</i>
<i>precision</i>	<i>A jump to a narrow object like a railing.</i>
<i>traceur</i>	<i>A practitioner of parkour</i>

Bike Trials

<i>American bunny-hop</i>	<i>A type of bunny hop, where the rider coasts at an obstacle at speed, pulls up on the bars and then flicks the back wheel up underneath them. Unlike some other techniques this doesn't involve any pedal strokes to lift the front.</i>
<i>bunny-hop</i>	<i>Any move that involves lifting both wheels off the floor, usually with the intension of getting over or onto an obstacle.</i>
<i>back-hop</i>	<i>Where the rider hops the bike on the back wheel.</i>
<i>blunt, stall or back-wheel</i>	<i>To bunny hop on to an obstacle landing exclusively on the back wheel. Sometimes required if to get onto a narrow obstacle (like a wall) where there is nowhere to put the front wheel.</i>
<i>chocolate foot</i>	<i>The foot the rider likes to have forwards most of the time. e.g. when coasting along with the pedals level the chocolate foot will be forwards.</i>

<i>dab</i>	<i>Where a rider puts just one foot down to steady themselves.</i>
<i>dropout</i>	<i>The part of the frame that the back wheel axel bolts into.</i>
<i>endo</i>	<i>A common trials movement in which the back wheel is lifted off the ground and the bike can be pivoted around on the front wheel.</i>
<i>forward-back-hop</i>	<i>See 'hansing'.</i>
<i>front-hop</i>	<i>Hopping on just the front wheel.</i>
<i>gap / gap jump</i>	<i>To clear (jump over) a gap on a bike.</i>
<i>getup</i>	<i>Getting up onto an obstacle using any form of bunny-hop.</i>
<i>hansing</i>	<i>Named after the famous trials rider Hans Ray, it is a back hop, that also involves moving the bike forwards – it is used to jump gaps. Also often called 'forward-back-hopping' and 'pedal-hopping'.</i>
<i>manual</i>	<i>Also referred to as a 'coaster wheelie', is like a regular wheelie, but the rider is not sat on the saddle and not pedalling – but coasting.</i>
<i>natural riding</i>	<i>Riding on uneven rocky surfaces, logs, steep banks etc. Often this refers to a course, set out upon the terrain.</i>
<i>observed bike trials</i>	<i>A competition, called observed because there is an observer watching counting the number of dabs.</i>
<i>pedal-hopping</i>	<i>See 'hansing'.</i>
<i>pedal kick</i>	<i>A short sharp kick on the pedals that moves the cranks about one third of a revolution.</i>
<i>pinch puncture:</i>	<i>Where the inner tube is slit because it is crushed between the rim and the tyre. Usually happens after hard landings on sharp edges.</i>
<i>snake bite</i>	<i>Another term for 'pinch puncture'.</i>
<i>Stack</i>	<i>Rider unintentionally comes off the bike.</i>
<i>trial / biketrial</i>	<i>An observed bike trials competition. This is where competitors try and complete a series of sections, clearing obstacles with as little dabs as possible. There will be an observer watching each section to count the dabs. The person with the smallest number of dabs wins.</i>

Capoeira

<i>aú</i>	<i>Roughly equivalent to a cartwheel, though there are many different varieties and most are different from a traditional gymnastics cartwheel in that the legs are kept bent.</i>
<i>axé</i>	<i>The energy or atmosphere in which capoeira play can flourish.</i>
<i>capoeirista</i>	<i>A player/practitioner of capoeira.</i>
<i>bananeira</i>	<i>The name for a handstand, derived from the 'banana tree'.</i>
<i>esquiva</i>	<i>Generic term for a dodge or evasion.</i>
<i>ginga</i>	<i>The ginga is the most fundamental movement in capoeira. It is roughly equivalent to the 'base stance' from which most other movements flow. Unlike some other martial arts, this 'base stance', is a moving stance.</i>
<i>jôgo</i>	<i>game</i>
<i>meia-lua de compasso</i>	<i>'half moon in a compass' – a spinning kick.</i>
<i>meia-lua de frente</i>	<i>'half moon in front' – an inwards crescent kick.</i>
<i>malícia</i>	<i>Positive cunning, wily.</i>
<i>mestre</i>	<i>master level teacher of capoeira – the highest grade for a capoeirista.</i>
<i>queixada</i>	<i>An outwards crescent kick.</i>
<i>roda</i>	<i>The game of capoeira itself – see 'roda' section of chapter 6.</i>

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