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# Tracing the Traceur

DISCOURSES OF AUTHENTICITY AND  
COMMODIFICATION OF PROFESSIONAL  
PARKOURISTES

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Tässä tutkimuksessa perehdytään diskurssianalyysin keinoin jyvaskylälaisten ammattilaisparkouraajien näkemyksiin siitä, mikä määrittelee autenttisuutta parkour-kulttuurissa. Erityistä huomiota kiinnitetään parkouraajien tapaan arvottaa ja arvioida autenttisuutta suhteessa lajityhteisön voimakkaaseen kasvuun, popularisoitumiseen ja alati lisääntyvään kaupallistumisen, tavarastumisen (commodification) sekä urheilullistamisen vaateeseen. Tutkimuksessa luodaan myös katsaus kielten rooliin autenttisuuden luomisen välineinä.</p> <p>Tutkimus nojaa haastatteluaineistoon, joka on kerätty maaliskokuussa 2016. Haastateltavia oli 4. Haastatteluaineiston pohjalta kerättiin diskurssianalyttisin keinoin tietoa siitä, miten autenttisuus ja arvottaminen rakentuvat parkour-kulttuurissa. Diskursseissa havaittiin aiemmankin tutkimuksen huomioita, yleis-parkourillisia asenteita ja arvoja, jotka liittyvät lajin filosofiaan, juuriin, perinteisiin ja vastakulttuurisuuteen. Kielenkäytölle annettiin vain vähän autenttisuutta lisäävää merkitystä, mikä on vaihtoehtolajeissa (esim. skeittaus, bleidaus) epätyypillistä. Tavarastumisen ja kaupallistumisen suhteen haastateltavat rakensivat vastakkainasetteluita vapaan lajikulttuurin ja hyvien arvojen sekä turmelevaksi katsotun ”ulkopuolisten” ja ”rahavallan välille”.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen pohjalta vaikuttaa siltä, että parkourin määrittelyjä ja tiukkoja rajanvetoja pakeneva luonne ammentaa kuitenkin runsaasti arvoja lajin juurista ja traditiosta, joita pidetään tärkeinä kiinnekohtina ja ohjaavina suuntamerkkeinä lajikulttuurin muutoksenkin keskellä.</p>	
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## 1. A FOREWORD

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The present MA thesis discusses the meanings *traceurs*<sup>1</sup>, or people engaging in *parkour*, regard as authentic traits, values and practices, especially in the context of commodification and ownership of parkour, and what values and functions they attach to language(s) in relation to authenticities in parkour and the practice in general. The study is conducted among traceurs Jyväskylä, Central Finland, and overlaps with different academic disciplines: discourse studies, alternative culture and lifestyle sports studies and youth research. I will present the reader with key concepts of parkour and the discipline's<sup>2</sup> history, previous studies and the methodological framework as well as the data, analysis, findings and implications for future research.

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<sup>1</sup> *fem. traceuse, also "parkouriste". Literally "runner". Finnish "treissaaja, trasööri, parkouraaja". Finnish parkouraaja is translated as parkouriste, a term used in English but in lesser extent than traceur. It does, however, retain the original for used by the interviewees.*

<sup>2</sup> It is problematic to refer to parkour as "sport" and English is unfortunately unimpressive in its ability to concisely describe physical activity. Finnish *laji* or *liikuntamuoto* do the job nicely. Parkour is "sports-like" (Wheaton, 2013, Atkinson 2009) but traceurs would be reluctant to describe it as a sport as it lacks and disdains many key concepts such as competition, scoring and winning that are common to most traditional sports.

I would like my reader to know that I am not an active traceur, although I have participated in free-to-join training sessions known as “jams” and practiced certain basic techniques on my own. However, I am not (at least yet) a goal-oriented traceur and do not consider myself as such. I occasionally climb trees, vault fences, cliff-hang and woodland-crawl, but still feel that I mostly represent the faculty of armchair academics (despite my eyes having adopted something known as “tracer’s gaze”, that is, a tendency to notice interesting and potential parkour spots). I am an interested outsider and an explorer approaching a *terra incognita*. This gives me the disadvantage of not being thoroughly familiar with the subject, so I may be unable to recognize all meaningful and interesting elements in the data. It may, however, bring up wholly new outsider’s insights to the subject. Sometimes it is best to look from afar to see more clearly – and then dive in head-on. *Allons-y!*

## 2. PARKOUR: THE ART OF MOVEMENT

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The word *parkour* may rouse images of urban daredevils, who defy the towering heights of the cityscape, jump roofs, scale walls and industrial cranes, and recklessly risk their necks in performing the most outstanding stunts for fame and glory. Further, it is sometimes associated with crime, cat-burglary and vandalism and tool for intrusion and escape (Wheaton 2013:78–79).

However, the essences of parkour are very different, although these concepts elusive and under constant debate even within the communities. Despite advanced traceurs performing potentially dangerous, yet thought-out and carefully planned runs featuring difficult, demanding and straining leaps, jumps and landings, many parkouristes would resent the idea of boastful, dangerous and possibly illegal tricking as the *purpose* of parkour. They would rather emphasize friendly setting of challenges, responsibility to self, others and the environment, development of self, perseverance, and other

profound, philosophical, (life–style) aspects of parkour, such as maximal freedom, creative thinking, connecting with the environment, mind and body and overcoming one's limitations<sup>3</sup>. There is also a growing number of people engaged in parkour, who seek better health and new forms of exercising. For them the philosophical aspects are perhaps secondary, but this would require a completely another study

The obvious starting point would be name itself: “Parkour”. With a distinctly French “clang” to it, the word is believed to be a neologism: a conscious deviation and abbreviation of *parcours du combattants* or a military obstacle course. This coinage is usually attributed to David Belle and Sebastien Foucán, two of the original traceurs. The term is apparently predated by *L'Art du Déplacement*<sup>4</sup>, which is still used by the group that later became known as *Yamakasi*. The somewhat martial roots of the name; and indeed the ethos as will be shown below, are buried deeper in history than the urban environs of Lisses.

Parkour itself is a rather young discipline (as pointed out by Varonen, [2004: 8] it originated in the 1980s), but it can be tracked much further back in time. The philosophical tenets of personal growth and the revered ideals of gracious, effortless and efficient movement in any given environment backtrack much further. As stated out by professional parkouriste/freerunner Sebastián Foucan (Christie 2003), the physical foundations of the practice lie in the primal hunt of the genus *homo*. The philosophical tenets of gracious, effortless and efficient movement in any environment as a tool for self–betterment and cultivation of virtues can be traced to the turn of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The propagator of these ideals was Georges Hébert (1875–1957), a French Navy officer and a physical educator. During his tours of duty, he witnessed and was impressed by the fluid, natural movement of the aborigines in the French colonies and began to adapt his experiences and notions into a training regime he called *Methode naturelle*<sup>5</sup>, which was also influenced by other physical and health educators of the time (Atkinson & Young, 2008: 61, 2009: 2–3).

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<sup>3</sup> More of these aspects can be found in the section *Analysis*. For those interested in academic sources, I recommend Atkinson (2009), Varonen (2004) and Wheaton (2013).

<sup>4</sup> literally “The art of movement”

<sup>5</sup> lit. “The natural method”

According to Atkinson, Hébert's experiences in a rescue effort on the island of Martinique after a natural disaster convinced him of the intricate connection between resilience and altruism and led him into by what he saw, emphasizing the natural movement and abilities of the human body, for example running, swimming, fighting, climbing and jumping, and utilizing them in the training of French soldiers (Atkinson & Young 2008: 61).

Hébert, however, did not limit his method to exclusively military settings, nor did he view it as a merely physical exercise: it was also a process for the mind and spirit. He considered the individual's movement and unity with their surrounding environment, and the gradual personal and physical improvement as crucial aspects of his method, seeking to achieve what seems to be his fleshed out variation of the Latin phrase "*mens sana in corpore sano*": strength, agility and physical prowess paved the way for building a better person. In essence, Hébert insisted that traditional, competitive sports diverted individuals from balanced development of the body and moral integrity (Atkinson & Young, 2008: 62). Hébert was convinced that the virtues of utility and sense of duty grew out of strength and determinacy, which were born out of facing and overcoming one's emotions and physical limits such as exhaustion, tiredness, fear, doubt and aggression encountered during strenuous physical training in natural environments which acted as the opponents for the trainee (Atkinson & Young, 2008: 62–63). This goal of cultivation idea he phrased as: "*Etrê fort pour etrê utile*", or, "*Being strong to be useful*" (ibid.). The motto was adopted by the Yamakasi group in the 1990s, the name of the group reflecting Hébert's ideal as "yamakasi" is a Lingala<sup>6</sup> expression for "being strong in one's person" (Cheung, 2015: 24).

According to Atkinson (2009), Hébert's method was well received by the French military and utilized in the conflicts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, becoming a valuable asset for the French troops fighting in the jungles of Vietnam in the First Indochina war. During this era, David Belle's father, Raymond Belle, born and raised in *l'Indochine*, was introduced to the method and later returned to France, worked as a firefighter and passed his knowledge of the *Methode naturelle* to his son and his

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<sup>6</sup> A Bantu-language spoken mainly Central Africa (namely within The Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic and Angola)

friends, who in turn applied them into the milieu of a suburban concrete jungle. In an interview, David Belle renounced being a “founder” of parkour, and rather described himself as a “protector of an art he inherited”<sup>7</sup>. This group of young boys laid the foundations for the modern, diverse and constantly changing parkour landscape of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It took, however, almost two decades for parkour to start spreading outside France in any significant quantity. I would like to point out, though, that the origin story of parkour is somewhat obscure and has a pinch of legend to it, so one has to be careful not to take it as a given.

The turning point for parkour’s breakthrough into wider knowledge was the year 2003, when the discipline was introduced into the English sphere through Mike Christie’s BBC 4 documentary *Jump London*, followed by *Jump Britain* two years later. The discipline also arrived in Finland around the same time, and the Finnish Parkour Association was founded in 2003<sup>8</sup>, although it is unclear who were the first practitioners and in which city. Jyväskylä, however, has become one of the central hubs for parkour in Finland very early on, and is also the location where the present research was conducted. Currently parkour is gaining popularity in Finland, and according to media sources<sup>9</sup> there were around 5,000 active parkouristes in Finland in 2015. The number has likely gone up since. Parkour is also gaining popularity in education and city planning: for example some schools have introduced parkour, or elements of it, to physical education classes, and the *traceur*-run Parkour Academy offers introductory courses to schools<sup>10</sup> and parkour parks have been built in many Finnish cities, although the community still widely utilizes locations (known as “spots”) not specially constructed for parkour training.

It must be stressed that defining, or rather, describing, parkour is difficult, as it constantly evolves, reforms and changes. In fact, there

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ijDdrtI2aJI>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.parkour.fi/yhdistys/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-8063399>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.karjalainen.fi/uutiset/uutis-alueet/maakunta/item/56157-liikuntatunneilla-mennaan-aiempaa-enemman-lajirajojen-yli>,  
[www.parkourakatemia.fi/palvelut/opetusta-tilauksesta/](http://www.parkourakatemia.fi/palvelut/opetusta-tilauksesta/),  
<http://www.opettaja.fi/cs/opettaja/jutut&juttuID=1408917930682>



are no textbook definitions or clear divisions as to what constitutes parkour – something previous research repeatedly addresses (see for example Ortuzar, 2009: 54, Cheung, 2015). The art borrows and mixes elements from other disciplines, sports and regimes and has its own intracultural flows and trends, local variations in relation to its purpose for the practitioners (it may be a hobby, a life–style sport, a profession, a political manifesto or all the above and then some) and a varying degree of organization. This is further muddled by the ongoing, sometimes bitter debates, arguments and rivalries between “the Foucan camp”<sup>11</sup> (i.e. Freerunners) and those claiming to perform original parkour, although it seems that elements of these two variations have also intermingled; and at least my interviewees appeared rather frustrated over the whole issue. Usually, however, freerunning and parkour are thought to be set apart by their different approaches to their common roots, parkour being usually described as being less spectacular and more practical when compared with more acrobatic and style-oriented freerunning. Trying to thoroughly explain the differences between the variations of the discipline would mean jumping into a pit of quicksand: different parkour websites give different descriptions, others are clearly biased towards one approach or another and the futility to academically discern the matter is evident as there are no definite authorities that could guarantee the righteousness of one view over another. Academic sources support this view; some traceurs would be adamant that only the original Lisses approach is correct, others, following the tradition of David Belle<sup>12</sup> leave defining parkour and its meaning to each individual (Cheung, 2015), and, as pointed out by Atkinson (2009: 5), some people consider only the Hébert's *Methode naturelle* as valid and everything else unorthodox. Still others would be critical of these strong divisions and dub them “elitist” (Cheung, 2015: 26).

This ongoing dispute emerged already in the late 1990s as media and advertisers grew more interested in the new sport and it was implemented into commercial use. This period saw David Belle

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.worldwidejam.tv/foucan.jam.parkour.html> . This is hardly a neutral and certainly not an academic source, but illustrates the biases and standpoints still present within the global parkour/freerunning scene.

<sup>12</sup> However, Belle did refer to parkour appearing on film and other media as “prostitution of the art”.

leaving the Yamakasi as Sébastien Foucan and him disagreed about the nature of parkour, and caused Belle to make bitter announcements about what he considered "Prostitution of the art" (Atkinson & Young, 2008: 62). Despite the definitions and debates, parkour, freerunning or *L'Art du déplacement* should be understood as a very unrestricted form of physical exercise in which the parkouriste interacts with the usually urban environment and utilizes it for moving in innovative and preferably, but not always, effective way<sup>13</sup>. These terms have been and are also used today interchangeably, although there is a strong ideological debate surrounding this issue as is testified by the comment section of any parkour/freerunning video on YouTube and parkour-oriented social media communities. It also shows how obscure, legend-laden and complicated topic parkour's history and origins really is. Finding definitive answers is difficult, biases are obvious and origin stories vary in detail, even between academic sources.

Like any cultural phenomenon that has evolved rather freely, naturally and without strict authorities, the origin stories of parkour resemble urban folklore: changing, spread on the grapevine (or tarmac cracks) and turning into something shared by many – but possibly controlled by no one. It fits many slots of academic categorizing, and yet evades them: it has been seen as a counter culture resisting capitalist and consumerist hegemonies (Atkinson, 2009), a "sports-like" lifestyle culture (Wheaton 2004, 2013) and as an urban physical discipline and urban youth cultural phenomenon (Ameel & Tani, 2007). It has also been portrayed as a style oriented and "cool" youth culture in the media (Atkinson & Young, 2008: 62).

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<sup>13</sup> As pointed out by Cheung 2015, many traceurs seek for *maximum obstacles* to tackle, even though this is often not the most effective route for traversing the landscape.

### 3. TALKING THE TALK, WALKING THE WALK: AUTHENTICITIES IN ALTERNATIVE CULTURES

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In the present thesis I set afoot to answer the following questions:

1. *How do traceurs manifest their traceurness in the interviews and how do they approach authenticity, especially in terms of ownership and commodification? What constitutes “real parkour” for them?*

2. How do traceurs view language(s) in relation to parkour in terms of value and function: what purposes, if any, does language serve in the practice?

Before answering the research questions above, it is necessary to delve deeper into the world of alternative sports cultures and the topics at hand, as, on more than a few occasions the terms *alternative sports* and *alternative culture* have emerged, but the meaning of this term may be obscure. Drawing on Itkonen and Nevala (1991 in Harinen et Torvinen. 2015a: 41), alternative sports can be defined as physical activities which emphasize life–style aspects, experiences and self–expression over competitiveness and hierarchies, even though certain sports categorized as alternative rely on competition and may follow a strict set of rules. According to Harinen and Torvinen (2015b: 48–49) alternative sports also present a strong sense of community and unity<sup>14</sup> between the practitioners, often value openness and tolerance, detest rules and restrictions (at least those written and enforced from the outside, although in–group social control exists and may be in fact quite strong and somewhat contradictory to the ideals<sup>15</sup>) and feature a decent amount of rebellion or resistance against consolidated, conformist mainstream culture. This position is manifested as a

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<sup>14</sup> The “us” (vs. “them”)

<sup>15</sup> For further information on sub/alternative cultural hierarchies and control, see Rannikko 2018.

”martyr ethos”, i.e. the view that the culture is being tragically discriminated against by the mainstream and forced to the fringes – and is the fuel without which the alternative communities could not go on and would be torn into the mainstream Harinen et al. (2015: 57). I would like to point out that this is not *necessarily* the case, and there may be a good connection between the mainstream and an alternative culture with constructive dialogue and cooperation; even though Alternative cultures often have tense relations with the mainstream culture and tend to invest much effort to distinguish and differentiate themselves from it. To reach this, alternative cultures generally develop a distinct appearance, slang and jargon, strong inter-group values and may seek to confront the *status quo* or have enmities and hostilities with either the “establishment” or other cultural groups. However, research has noted that modern youth and alternative cultures are not nearly as closed and polarized as they used to be: identities and authenticities have become fluid and blurred and different alternative cultures mix and mingle more freely.

Some examples of alternative sports/sports-like cultures are skate- and snowboarding, BMX-biking, roller-derby, boulder-climbing (i.e. bouldering) and parkour. It should be noted that even though the present thesis discusses parkour, a significant number of references are made to previous studies considering skateboarding. Even though there are differences to skateboarding and parkour (for example the latter does not utilize equipment but only the human body in interaction with the usually urban environment), the comparison is not too far-fetched. Both cultures (see Harinen et al 2006, 2015) are mostly urban, free from strict rules and struggle for the right to innovatively use the cityspace in unorthodox and untraditional ways, making them public and open for all forms of activity. As pointed out by Pennycook (2010: 60), Ameel & Tani (2007) and Harinen et al. (2006), these cultures aim to transform the city into an environment of new types of being and doing and turning idle spaces into fields for play, exercise and self-expression.

Alternative sports and alternative cultures are regarded such because they usually distinguish themselves from the surrounding society and prevalent methods of production via means of bricolage<sup>16</sup>, dress, looks, and speech – the last including for example slang, jargon and cryptic expressions which are difficult for outsiders to understand (See for example Harinen et al. 2006, Harinen and Torvinen, 2015a). There is also a strong sense of "living" the culture and expressing oneself through it. Participating in an alternative sports/alternative cultural community is usually a significant building block of an enthusiast's identity (Harinen et al. 2015: 44); it is typical of the participants to *live* their hobby much more than just "do" it: it is a way to form and manifest identity, and to organize one's worldview, values and aspirations, even though it should be noted that as communities grow older, and larger, the lifestyle elements may start to diminish and become more marginalized. Commercialization also steps in if there is any potential for financial gain. This is also true for parkour.

Currently parkour in its different forms is rapidly spreading into popular culture, becoming a staying element of its cultural aesthetics. In the lieu of this, parkour is facing stronger pressures for sportisation, branding and consuming, and therefore needs to take stances on questions regarding authenticity, ownership and identity and how or whether these processes of sportification and marketization should be controlled, resisted or propagated. In other words, parkour is going through a process of *commodification*.

Commodification refers to the transforming of ideas, cultural phenomena or inventions into tradable, consumable goods or using them to sell new or already established products. In the context of (alternative) sports it means for example developing and selling equipment and accessories (such as skateboarding shoes, snowboards

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<sup>16</sup> A fancy word for "DIY"

et cetera) or advertising (among other things) soft drinks, clothing and smartphones and even baby products<sup>17</sup>, in a process of cultural appropriation dubbed as the “age of lifestyle branding” (Klein 2000, in Wheaton and Beal, 2003: 156). Lifestyles are increasingly becoming tools for selling products, identities and authenticities, and elements from alternative cultures are mainstreamed into the consumer culture.

In the context of parkour and its cadet- or co-branches some examples of the sportisation-commodification process are the annual Red Bull *Art of Motion* competition, now-defunct and notorious *Barclaycard World Freerun Championships* as well as the utilization of parkour (or at least elements of it) in the popular culture. These media and market scenes include (but are not limited to) documentaries (the coolness-factor emphasizing *Jump London* and *Jump Britain*) cinema (e.g. *Yamakasi*, *Tracers*, *Freerunner*, *007: Casino Royale*), video games (*Mirror's Edge*, *Assassin's Creed*, *Dishonored*, *Brink*) and commercials (*Rush Hour* for BBC, *Nike Presto* line of training shoes, and a comical spot for Finnish *Pantteri*<sup>18</sup> brand of sweets). In the wake of this trend, parkour has become more widely known among the public, including people not active in the practice –and the fact that parkour is being diffused into other cultural products and trends tells of its acknowledged potential to be profited from and to be used as a commodity, or an object of trade.

The idea that authentic culture is somehow outside media and commerce is a resilient one.

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<sup>17</sup> Libero brand of diapers launched an extreme-sports themed special edition in 2018, in a calculated attempt to reach the skateboarding, bouldering and BMX-biking consumers who want to drape their toddlers in their own youth nostalgia and alternativeness. Whether this can be read as an implication regarding the respect felt towards these alternative cultures by the marketing office is a matter I leave you to ponder.

<sup>18</sup> Finnish for *Panther*.

In its full blown romantic form, the belief suggests that grassroots culture resist and struggle with a colonizing mass-mediated corporate world. (Thornton, 1995 in Wheaton and Beal, 2003)

Instead, the commodified and mediated cultures are often active participants in the process and either promote it or resist in their own ways, creating new trends, forms, interpretations, expressions and meanings that are spread in the media (and other markets, N.B.) (Skelton and Valentine 1998, Gillespie, 1995, in Wheaton and Beal 2003: 158). Commodification and its challenges to autonomy and authenticity are much more complex than just forcefully objectifying and exploiting a cultural phenomenon: rather there may be elements, trends and goals that are contradictory, transforming and constantly re-shaped (Thornton 1995); all prominent traits of parkour.

As pointed out by Wheaton and Beal (2003), the whole process of commodification and the aspects of consuming may become a discourse and a tool which the (alternative) culture uses to its own ends, something that was also referred to by my informants. As noted by Angel (2011: 236), being active in the capitalist sphere also open new opportunities for alternative culture participants to build a profession around their interests and influence the culture and the markets around it, that is, have their own “nexus of production” (Day, 2010 in Angel, 2011: 236). Sometimes these nexuses are defended with a vehemently aggressive devotion: for example, Jake Phelps, the editor-in-chief of a well-established *Thrasher* skateboarding magazine attacked non-skating celebrities for wearing magazine’s merchandise apparel as fashion items, referring to them as “fucking clowns” and calling for “blood and scabs” as true manifestations of skateboarding culture<sup>19</sup>. In addition to judging and disapproving of “posers” taking the style and identity of an alternative culture (cultural

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<sup>19</sup> *Hypebeast*, Sep 26, 2016

appropriation), the cultural group may also condemn outsider brands and even peers attempting to enter the markets and turn their cultural experience into a product or some other means for making profit. In the parkour communities the competitive events mentioned above have sparked heavy and contentious criticism and mutual hostility between the organizing groups and the traceurs resisting such tournaments; despite the different approaches to profiting from parkour and utilizing it in media, for example, certain core values were globally viewed as being eroded (Angel, 2011: 201–202). Authenticity, cultural production and ownership go hand in hand –and the discourses of these form the backbone of the present paper.

Human activity is hard to evaluate without looking into language and its role in it. Most cultural communities, whether alternative or, for example, professional, tend to form and create in–group languages and specialized jargon which is used for communication within the group and often, especially in the context of alternative cultures, to separate the group from others, in other words: to create an in–group which is surrounded by the out–group and thus reinforce and construct a shared identity between the members (see Toriseva, 2008: 276). Harinen et al. (2006) found out in their study of Finnish skateboarders that members of this culture considered their own language, own insider’s vernacular, and different ways of manifesting themselves to the surrounding society an important aspect of their skaterhood and identity. In fact 57.4% of the participants in their survey considered inside jokes and skating jargon as important for creation of a shared group identity and social experience and for building a barrier against the outsiders. Mikola (2000) and Cheung (2015) both mention language and clothing as being means of manifesting the “real” self in alternative cultures, setting the boundaries between posers and authentic members of a community.



As pointed out by Widdicombe and Wooffit (1995: 5) subcultural languages (slangs) and jargons are channels for expressing identity, group and authenticity: they are central to many alternative cultures and a way to maintain the cohesion and self of the group despite the pressure and presence of the more mainstream culture or other alternative cultures. Toriseva (2008) discusses the importance of this jargon in creating a discourse and for positioning the readers of skateboarding–magazines into the larger context of skateboarding culture, as insiders who know the cryptic meaning of the special terminology and slang. Peuronen (2008) described the code–switching and language–mixing practices as important for creation of groupness and shared on–line identity on an extreme–sports web forum. Further, Lehtonen (2015) examined the language practices of multi–ethnic youth groups in Helsinki and the way varying linguistic resources (for example immigrants' vernacular) were used by members of different groups to maintain and build their personal and group identities, to define the borders of their groups and to include and exclude people from the groups. These findings are revealing in regards of the meaning of language in youth and alternative cultures and cast doubt on the apparent rejection or at least cold–shouldering of language within parkour communities. It should be noted, though, that interview data is only suitable for charting the values and attitudes regarding language, slang and jargon, whereas ethnographic long–term, observation and recordings–based data would be best suited for examining the actual language *use*.

In the context of youth cultures and many other instances, English is a widely used and central language of communication and identity building due to its wide spread and strong hegemony especially in the Western culture. Leppänen (2007) discusses the importance of the English language in youth cultures. She points out that in the context of youth and sub (or alternative) cultures, English is increasingly a language used not only for communication but also to signify

belonging to any number of cultures; it conveys “values, lifestyle and allegiances” (Leppänen 2007: 149–150) and is thus an integral part of many youth cultures and interest groups. Leppänen (ibid.) notes that English has become a common good which is borrowed for different uses in most (but not all) youth cultures, even though the degree to which this is done varies greatly from brief utterances and expressions to highly specialized terminologies and slangs, elaborate language mixing (see Peuronen 2008, Westinen 2015, Pennycook, 2007) as well as to primarily English–language communication which can be witnessed in for example online gaming and other digitally conveyed cultures.<sup>20</sup>

It is important to remember, however, that youth (or alternative) cultures may also *resist* trends, whether those of fashion, consumerism or language (see Bucholtz 2000: 282), naturally, as has been discussed above, differentiation from others always includes some form of resistance, but linguistic resistance is, according to Bucholtz (ibid.) a popular tool for this. Even though her brief argumentative article discusses linguistic (phonological, n.b.) change fostered by youth cultures, different forms and uses of language, for example vocabulary or a natural language resisted. It is not always the case that speaking is important. It may also be silence or rejection of group–specific language that matters – and this would be reflected in talk; in the discourses of the people participating in a group and the way they describe, analyse and evaluate their experience and views regarding their cultural space.

In wider context of sports language has been studied more than among alternative sports. As pointed out by Keränen (2012) the number of studies in Finland considering sports language is limited and research has mostly focused on media's use of language in sports reporting or

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<sup>20</sup> N.b: most cultural groups are nowadays more or less present in the Internet also for purposes of communication, networking and spreading of information.

has concentrated to sports specific terminology. Keränen's 2012 thesis discusses the language attitudes and perceived use of language in women's ice hockey teams. It should be noted that even though ice hockey can hardly be considered an alternative sports, women's ice hockey has subcultural elements to it as the rink is considered a masculine territory and ice hockey is an "unfeminine" sport: therefore the sex/gender of the female players and their need to justify their gender-bending player identity has an effect on their language use and the functions and values it conveys.

Hakala (2006 in Keränen 2012) has discussed the sports language use in his article "Puhetta perkele!" and considers the sports-language a special way of speaking typically used within the sporting context: it is necessarily not an integral part of a person's everyday/non-sporting repertoire, but significant during the performance, game or, if this idea is expanded to alternative sports and alternative cultures, in the contexts and situations in which specialized vocabulary and inside information is needed. It should be remembered, though, that team-sports (whether hockey, hurling or *Counter Strike*) require more language use than individual sports, because group work demands more communication.

For example, parkour is principally an individual form of exercise which does not necessarily require a group, organization or peers, but is often done in groups of varying sizes, creating the situation in which such specialized language use naturally would emerge. The second research question aims to shed light on this aspect of parkour. However, to understand how language may affect parkour in Central Finland, it is necessary to take a brief look at the history and present state of Finland's linguistic landscape with special attention given to English and the original language of parkour: French.

#### 4. LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE: FINLAND

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As the present thesis focuses on an alternative culture with roots in the French sphere of influence with ties to the English areas of the world and practiced in Finland, it is necessary to take a brief look at the linguistic topography of Finland. As will be seen in the analysis of the data and the relevance of different languages to the practicing of parkour, I believe that some background information regarding the prevalence, history and current position of both indigenous and foreign languages in Finland is needed. Despite being of a relatively small population and quite distant from the rest of Continental Europe, Finland has never been completely peripheral: it has had strong ties to both East and West and is currently a nation with an increasingly diverse linguistic ecosystem (the only ecosystem with any growing diversity, by the way).

Finland has two official languages: Finnish and Swedish, but the law recognizes the indigenous people's language rights (the Saami languages) as well as autochthonic<sup>21</sup> languages: Romani (with its variations), Karelian as well as Finnish Sign Language and its Finnish–Swedish counterpart. The law does not, however, define “minority languages”. English is widely known by the population. Even though English is not recognized as an official language in Finland, it has thoroughly infused into the Finnish culture as is the case in the global West and in many other parts of the world, too. English is a global language, spread all around the world and is spoken by hundreds of millions of people as a first language, with even larger numbers of second or foreign language speakers. It is a common language for business, entertainment, communication and so

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<sup>21</sup> Autochthonic language is one that has existed in a geographical/cultural area for a longer period of time among larger languages.

forth. It would also be difficult to talk about the "English cultural sphere" as this sphere is so widespread and so well-integrated into many other cultures that clear distinctions would be artificial and not reflective of the reality; English is a commonly owned language: it is not separated into one geographical or cultural area, nor are its native speakers (Moore and Varantola 2005: 134, Leppänen et al. 2008: 13–14).

Even though English is not the language commonly used between native Finns for interpersonal communication (even though this does happen at workplaces, for example [see Leppänen et al 2008: 19]), it is increasingly used at work, advertising, scientific publishing, entertainment and communication. Finland is a country with no remarkable historical ties (e.g. direct trade or colonialism) to the European breeding grounds of English or the Anglo-American culture; English has a history as a foreign language in Finland, meaning very few native English speakers have lived in the country and the language has never had an official status in for example administration, even though currently it is common to find public information and state-services also in English. The global spread of Anglo-American (pop) culture and media has increased the influence and prevalence of English in Finland, spanning across most walks of life and being present in most youth and alternative cultures. In the context of this thesis it is also necessary to look at the French language and its history as well as its present existence within Finland, as French is the original language of parkour and therefore a probable source of inspiration and authenticity for Finnish traceurs. Currently French is a marginal language in Finland: Today there are French schools in Finland, mainly in the capital area and the western coast, but the language is not as commonly studied or spoken in Finland as English or even German: In 2011 it was learned as the first foreign language by only 0,8% of children in the primary education, and on the higher levels as second or third foreign language French is still

small compared to English with the numbers (male and female students combined) reaching 4,4% (Kangasvieri et al 2011: 10–11). It is, therefore, interesting to see, whether special value is given to French in the parkour scene, and is it deemed a necessary or welcome addition to one's parkour experience.

In the context of the present study it should be noted that many youth and alternative cultures use English either alongside and mixed with Finnish (and other languages spoken) or give prestige to special terminology and inside-vernacular which often stems from the English language (see e.g. Toriseva, 2008, Mikola 2003: 33). This is mostly due to many alternative cultures originating in the central areas of the English language or in regions under strong English influence, although the Internet also plays a leading role in the predominance of English, as a large quantity of material published online is in the English language which is also commonly used as *lingua franca*. However, in the current study the community under scrutiny practices an alternative culture that originated in the multi-ethnic Parisian suburbs and has spread from France into the United Kingdom: it has arguably been *mediated* by the English culture and language via personal contacts and the Internet into wider knowledge. In the Finnish context this creates an interesting three-faceted situation: French sport with French terminology mixing with English, other languages and eventually, Finnish. It is an interesting come-together of three very different languages: a Germanic and a Romance world language meeting a very regional, Fenno-Ugric language with the different cultures also meeting. Language-wise there are at least three different resource-pools which can be used to convey meanings, to create identities, to form authenticities, to communicate and to organize the individual's or group's parkour experience. The traceurs' view on the role of language is an interesting turf to scrape at, especially due to the somewhat reluctant attitudes thought to be held towards naming and verbalizing the practice by parkouristes.

It is also interesting to look at the possible values and prestige attached to the language resources at play: as pointed out by Pennycook (2007), English is often prestigious in those communities that have their origins in the Anglo–American culture; for example the hip–hop scenes in Asia utilize English in their lyrics and slang in an attempt to connect with the roots of hip–hop culture. It is possible that similar prestige is attached to English, or perhaps even more so, to French among traceurs in Finland. However, as will be discussed below, some traceurs have a reputation as being adamantly reluctant to name, categorize and verbalize parkour in fear of turning it into a stagnated, traditional sport with a strict set of techniques, tricks and rules. From a linguistic standpoint, parkour is an exceptional alternative culture and the reported attitudes towards language set interesting premises and pathways for research.

This contextual relationship between language and identity/authenticity can also be tied to the view of language as a local practice: as discussed by Pennycook (2010: 6, 9), language is not a strict system which exists as its own, but closely tied into social activities which are all in a continuum of local (whether national, ethnicity or for example family–level) views, values, and histories: therefore, language is never universal but has a wide variety of meanings and interpretations attached to it. For Pennycook (2010: 25–26), language practices are tied into “bundles” which differ from one another in relation to time and place: for example, different languages or variations of a language may be used when training a sport with advanced peers or instructing a beginner, or if one wants to utilize an example given by Pennycook, in the banking practices of a linguistically diverse area versus those of a (predominantly) monolingual one. Even though the present thesis is not strictly linguistic but focuses mainly on the authenticity and commodification discourses of the local parkouristes, certain noteworthy functions of language emerged during the analysis of data –and their ties to locale

appeared to be significant for the identity and authenticity of my Finnish interviewees.

Pennycook goes further (2010: 31) by stating that in order to inspect the language as a practice, it is necessary to remember that even though language is a social construction (see above), it is the *consequences*, i.e. what is achieved via the use of language that matters; he argues that focusing on what type of ideologies, standpoints, identities, statuses *et cetera* are built by choosing and using language is a crucial point of interest. As the present study focuses on a practice that is mostly located in urban environments, it is necessary to dwell longer in the insights provided by Pennycook (2010) regarding the matter. Pennycook points out that the cityscape is a field of constant reimagination: urban forms of culture (the examples used by Pennycook are Hip-Hop, graffiti and parkour) transform the city and its structures into platforms for movement, self-expression and art – they become vessels for what Pennycook (2010: 60) names “redesigns of the urban dwellers”. The city, its structures, spatial dimensions, materials and surfaces become the tabula for creating identities, for making claims and for reflecting the reality.

But what does this all have to do with language? Living and doing in a city (or any other environment for that matter), moving between places (whether by walking the streets, cycling the roads or scaling walls and jumping fences) or just being somewhere is hardly linguistic, in fact, at the first glance, the language aspect appears non-existent, unnecessary even. However, being and doing can be seen as being discursive, relaying and creating meanings and social situations through action, interaction, speech and positions. Pennycook (2010: 63), elaborates on this by stating that language is at the very core of all spaces and of all doing: the action, for example the tracing or practicing a vault combined with language (for example, names of techniques, shields denoting a parkour training facility, shirts



manifesting one's traceurness, the linguistic choices while practicing, instructing someone etc.) all give meaning to places and situations and cannot be completely understood without taking into consideration both the space and the language. Pennycook goes even further in his analysis of the meanings and language (or rather, semiotics) in the cityscape by discussing the moving nature of elements in the city: people move, images move, language, written on buses, T-shirts and other apparel or spoken on the phone or face-to-face moves: language is intertwined with motion and places – as is parkour. And in the context of the present thesis the way both natural languages and the interviewees' verbalizations of their views on the values, ethos, philosophy, functions of language and movement as a statement surface from the depths of the research data lead into a deeper understanding of the parkour culture and the multi-semiotic, diverse and complex discourses it contains and is built upon.

## **5. COLLECTING THE DATA: INTERVIEWING**

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I have chosen a set of thematic interviews as the primary method of data collection for my thesis. This approach has certain advantages: it allows the interviews to be more flexible than structured, question centered interviews or surveys, that present all interviewees with identical questions with pre-determined selection of answers from which the interviewee is to choose the most accurate one: this approach is based on the idea that questions and answers are understood identically by all individuals (Eskola and Vastamäki 2001: 26–27). Structured interviews and surveys are formulaic and usually do not allow any changes. While this provides the researcher with more easily comparable and analysable information, it also limits the possibilities of focusing on different aspects of the phenomena under

scrutiny, as the emphases and attitudes the interviewee might have, do not surface.

A thematic interview makes it possible for the interviewer to modify the interview “on-the-go”. This means that even though the questions and themes, although preferably based on and guided by theory and previous research, revolve around relevant topics, they are not necessarily crucial for an interviewing session: something may be omitted, expanded or added in relation to what the interviewee emphasizes or is interested in talking about within the framework of the study (Eskola and Vastamäki 2001: 26–27, 33) it is important, though, to strive for covering all the themes defined in the research question/interview–structure in order to keep the interviews coherent and comparable. Neglecting the themes may have disastrous effects on the results as some important and interesting topics might be absent from the final data, seriously hampering the analysis. However, it is necessary for the interviewer not to participate too much, not aggressively press questions left unanswered or avoided by the interviewee and to hold the strings to prevent the interview from gliding off the target (Eskola and Vastamäki 2001: 35–36). It should be noted, however, that semi–structured interviews are dynamic and the themes discussed and the information received may vary greatly – interviewees may have little knowledge about some topic, or they may find the situation difficult. Many aspects are at play and it is not uncommon for an interviewer to realize during the analysis of the data that some interesting and relevant discourse marker or hint was ignored and thus the data often does not answer some puzzling question; instead it presents the researcher with a new one.

## **6. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

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The interview data was analysed using Discourse Analysis (DA), which is noted for its versatility. As the main method for data–

collection was interviewing and the interviewees are experienced parkouristes, some of whom are the pioneers of parkour in Finland, there are likely different discourses regarding authenticities in relation to parkour. attitudes towards the importance of languages in parkour may also vary from one interviewee to another. As pointed out by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009: 227) there is an interest in the field of discourse analysis on “new developmental tendencies” and contradictions. As the present study focuses on an alternative culture which is rapidly evolving (see Harinen & Toivanen 2015b: 50), perceptions of authenticities, identities and values may be changing and give valuable and interesting new information regarding these processes.

DA is also, as pointed out by Potter and Wetherell (1987 in Kvale and Brinkmann 2009: 227–228) a method that allows a researcher to approach what is being said or written “as is” and not from the perspective of trying to evaluate some claims to be more true than others: rather the meanings can be found through scrutiny of what is included and what is omitted instead of trying to determine whether a statement is true. Jokinen et al. (2000) define Discourse Analysis as a “loose theoretical framework” (2000:18) which takes a constructivist approach to language. This means that language is considered to be an inseparable and intergral part of the human society and the construction and organisation of it and always highly contextual: meanings and values are created in relation to the social and material surroundings and the concepts familiar to any given culture or group (for example, the “daily bread” in the Ndonga translation of the Lord's Prayer is “daily gruel”, as bread is an unfamiliar concept in the language).

Discourse Analysis holds that language, even the most mundane expressions and meanings attached to words implicate the norms and “normality” in the surrounding world –words are loaded (see Jokinen et al. 2000: 19). DA, in other words, sees language as a social,

flexible, changing, interactional and discursive system of meaning-making, organizing thoughts and ideas and making claims about the world. (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2009: 12–13, 16–17). In the field of DA, language is considered a tool for communication, describing and organizing the world and representing social relations and identities (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2009: 15). As identities and authenticities are presented in discourses, DA can be used to focus on the production of the self (see Jokinen et al, 2000: 21). In the present thesis this means the ways in which the interviewees evaluate and scrutinize authenticity in relation to being a traceur and in connection to the cultural (and material) ownership of parkour.

This diversity of perceptions of one's identity, authenticity and the tools with which it is constructed is a central topic of interest when DA is used to study identity construction: identities are seen as contextual and different aspects of identity or even different identities may emerge even within the same identity (see Jokinen et al. 2000: 37–39). As has been pointed out by Blommaert and Varis (2011), this is true with authenticity also. This contextuality of both identity and authenticity can be illustrated by conceptualizing a hypothetical athlete who can be simultaneously or in different contexts a professional sprinter, a coach, a representative of the sport, an advertiser for sports-equipment and a promoter for an international brand of something delicious and refreshing. As pointed out by Blommaert and Varis (2011), despite the multitude of identities and authenticities humans face and engage in every day both consciously and unwittingly, there is a core element to it: enoughness. Authenticity is flexible. In Blommaert & Varis' example a person may be a vocal advocate of the Green Party and still drive a diesel car, but not being authentic enough (i.e. breaking the values, norms and contextual criteria) or trying too hard may demolish one's authenticity—at least in the eyes of one social group. In the analysis of the data one will soon notice that authenticity in parkour appears to be a flexible aspect, but it is still present in the practice, the ethos (philosophy and values) and

the discussions regarding the future of the sport and the way it is performed and developed. It should be noted, as has been remarked by Paltridge (2016: 24) that identities, in all their flexibility, are formed interactively between members of a, say alternative cultural community – but also the outsiders and encounters with them. Paltridge (ibid.) calls this the process of “two-way construction”. It takes (at least) two to tango: identities and authenticities exist in an endless combination of different cultural, environmental, spatial and linguistic contexts. In the present thesis this is observable in the stance the interviewees take towards traditional and organized sport, commercialization and profit-making and the developments in the field of parkour.

Discourse analysis offers certain benefits to a researcher: it is a flexible and widely used method. The main focus is on social interaction and the context in any given data pool and the research findings made out of it (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2009: 166). Using discourse analysis for method requires 1) breaking the data to smaller units to be scrutinized and possibly experimenting with different angles to find the most useful and fruitful ones (a process which should be amply documented, even if these phases do not make it into the final version of the paper) 2) study, comparison, interpretation and synthesis of the units to find the pieces of information relevant to the context and research questions of the study (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2009: 166–168).

It is also crucial to self-reflect and analyze one's work, decisions and thought processes, that is, to keep the research transparent and easily accessible to readers and the scientific community in order to ensure reliability (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2009: 168). As discourse analysis and semi-structured interviewing (see above) are both qualitative methods, reliability and objectivity are clearly defined issues. As pointed out by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009: 228), a discourse-analytic perspective, when utilized carefully, and the

understanding of both the interviews (and the participants), as socially constructed and evolving events and entities rather than constant, unchanging beings removes (or, at least alleviates), some of the objectivity/validity problems; people are not objective, neither are their opinions or views. The phenomenon and its meanings, how they are constructed and understood by people and what these conceptions imply about the "big picture" are central. The basic concept is that both the researcher and the subject inhabit a world and a society created by human thought, actions and meanings: the humanimal is not studied as a biological creature; what is important is what it makes out of the world and its phenomena (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2009: 139). In the present thesis, the discourses under scrutiny can be tied to discourses previously recognized by research focusing on parkour (see Wheaton 2013, Ch.5), especially to discourses regarding *sportisation and anti-sports attitude* and the *philosophy* aspects of parkour.

I would also like to draw attention to the fact that a discourse-analytical study is a process of constant changes and reformulations. Paltridge (2016: 205) emphasises the fact that a preliminary topic of interest and the initial research question often are not fully compatible with one another: the data may not give answers to the question or gives new, perhaps unexpected coordinates by which to navigate, resulting in an orbiting course around the topic, slowly descending towards the crust and core of the theme under analysis. The present thesis certainly proves the point: what started as a vague and shapeless idea of studying language in parkour, trans-morphed into a sociolinguistically oriented research about the ideologies tied to language and, after revising and re-orienting, moulded into the present thesis discussing the authenticity and being real in terms of commodification and sportisation, taking into limited account the role of languages and also the attitudes towards the values generally regarded as being central to the ethos of parkour.

## 7. PRESENTING THE DATA

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The data consists of four thematic interviews that were recorded and transcribed. All interviews were conducted in Finnish, the native language of the interviewees, they would have been able to provide information in English but it would have been artificial and contrived to interview them in a language which may be lacking in expressive power for them. The interviews are 30–90 minutes in length and were conducted during the early to mid–spring in Jyväskylä. During the initial phases of data collection, I also photographed and filmed training sessions and participated in open training sessions known as “jams” to get first–hand experience of parkour practice. I soon noticed, however, that I had difficulties in adequate conducting of such ethnographic data collecting and also had few opportunities to actually go on extensive field trips (although I was suggested to give the recorders to the subjects for their training sessions. I however lacked such resources and it would have been difficult to get quality recordings in a situation in which the traceurs constantly move, risking damaging the equipment or affecting the quality of recorded files –as well as possibly hampering the movement of the parkouristes). The participants in these jam–groups also vary from time to time, and minors may also be present, setting difficulties to recording of the persons.

Even though these fragmentary pieces of data collected during the probing field trips did not make it into the final thesis, these excursions and participating in the jams gave me insights regarding the practice, allowed me to test different methods for collecting data, enabled me to discard the methods which were not feasible with my skills, experiences and resources and also allowed me to familiarize myself with some members of the local parkour community. As a result, I did not feel a total outsider and felt welcome. Generally the

fact that I displayed academic interest towards parkour was rather warmly welcomed.

As has been mentioned above, I decided to collect the data by interviewing willing members of the parkour community. I wanted to interview experienced traceurs who are legally adults. Originally I was supposed to give them pseudonyms for the final thesis, but after asking for their consent, decided to instead use their first names<sup>22</sup>. Some of them have previously participated in studies (see for example Varonen, 2004) and are well known within the national, and to some extent, the international scene. As the topics discussed are not controversial or confidential either and threatening to anyone's safety, privacy or legal rights, anonymity is not crucial here.

After transcribing the data, I classified and gathered it into thematic sections as follows: *Language*, *Commodification/Ownership*, *Ethos/Philosophy* and *Practice/Experience*. This was to help me identify what similarities and differences the interviewees had in their voiced opinions and views regarding these aspects and allowed me to place them into the wider context of authenticity. It also helped me to contextualize and compare the data with the findings made by previous parkour-related studies and to imbed them with the generally recognized (see Atkinson, 2009, Wheaton 2013, ch.5) discourses prevalent in parkour.

It should be noted, that all interviewees are males, and 20–40 years old during the time of interviewing. Their educational background varies considerably from second degree education to university level. It should be remembered, though that there are also prominent female parkour experts such as *traceuse*, researcher and filmmaker Julie Angel, whose doctoral thesis *Ciné Parkour* was the first thorough

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<sup>22</sup> Please note that the data was collected and consent was asked before the GDPR act took effect in the EU.



English-language description of Parkour as it was in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century and who has since conducted extensive research, documenting and writing in the field of parkour. There are also female parkour instructors in Jyväskylä, and globally the parkour community strives to attract more female practitioners; the discipline is gaining foothold among women in Iran, for example, and is spreading across the globe, pulling in also female practitioners. This trend has also been noted by Angel (2011: 219), who noted that at the time of writing, the UK scene, while predominantly male, had about 20 % of female practitioners.

Despite this, it should be remembered that Parkour has its Parisian roots in a dominantly, if not exclusively, male circles and it draws from military training regimes, giving it a seemingly masculine background. However, as recorded by Wheaton (2013: 75–76), the parkour community welcomes females and revers traditionally “feminine” traits<sup>23</sup> such as support to others instead of die-hard competition and values recognizing emotions such as joy and fear while also promoting equality among practitioners, whether experienced or a rookie. Wheaton (ibid.) shows, however, that certain overtly masculine (and criticized) traits are also present in the parkour culture, such as demonstrating one’s musculature even in cold weather (one of my interviewees referred this practice somewhat jocularly as “skin power”).

I would like to remind the reader, that parkour is not prohibited from females, nor would have finding *traceuses* been impossible. However, for the purposes of the present study I approached and selected my interviewees based on their background in the culture as I was looking for very experienced semi- or fully professional traceurs

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<sup>23</sup> I realize dubbing one trait masculine and other feminine is somewhat problematic, but to be able to deal with things, some distinctions and compromises have to be made.

who could give insight both into the earlier phases of the practice in Finland and the current situation. I was also looking for people who are still active in the cultural politics and development of parkour in different ways. My interviewees are also either current or previous members of the board of the Finnish Parkour Association<sup>24</sup> and have participated in the founding of both it and the Parkour Academy, have indisputably pioneered parkour in Finland or have otherwise worked extensively within parkour community, fulfilling the above criteria.

The first parkour professionals in Finland and worldwide were also males and my interviewees claim that most traceurs still are, even though the number of female *traceuses* is growing. For the present study's purposes these individuals were, in my opinion, the best choice. However, research into female and mixed-gender groups' parkour experience and values would be a welcome addition into parkour-studies. Taking sex and gender into account in parkour research could bring new insights into themes such as female empowerment, female alternative sports practices et cetera. New venues are open for researchers to pick up.

## 8. ANALYSIS OF DATA

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As stated above, the data was classified into different thematic categories connected to authenticity. These analytical categories are: *Language*, *Commodification/Ownership*, *Ethos/Philosophy* and *Experience/Practice*. In the data the instances of these themes usually surfaced in connection and affecting each other (for example, an interviewee discussed the language use and tied it into the theme of ownership), so it is necessary to remind the reader that these categories are overlapping and not fully discernable from one another.

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<sup>24</sup> Suomen Parkour ry.

They should be treated as rough analytical aids which give form to a very complicated phenomenon and sprawling interview data. However, I aimed at making the categorizations as clear as possible. Excerpts falling under *Language* are the ones which treated any language themed topics: slang, uses of language, value given to language etc. *Commodification/Ownership* is a large thematic block: it contains excerpts discussing for example entrepreneurship and business within the parkour scene, parkour competitions, and cultural and material ownership of the art. This category overlaps closely with *Ethos/Philosophy*, which was used to classify such aspects as what constitutes “real parkour”, the values attached to tracing and the lifestyle aspects attached to it. The *Experience/Practice* –block handles mostly narratives given by the interviewees regarding parkour and their experiences with it. This category is rather vague and often flows in the background of other categories, as the interviewees voiced their own opinions and views drawing examples from their past experiences regarding training, being introduced to the practice, negotiating the back–alleys of professionalism or participating in parkour–business, organizational work and other topics relevant for the study.

It is important to note that much of the data had to be omitted: a large amount of information accumulated from the interviews, but including it all would not be feasible nor practical or relevant. At the initial phases of data collection when I was still unsure of the type of data I would use, I gathered different types of information: vocabulary, slang, jargon etc., and attempted to focus more on the language aspect. As it occurred to me that it was not practical to do an observation–participation study in terms of my resources, and as it became clear during the first interview that analyzing language practices or use of it in relation to parkour would be difficult via interviews, I swung towards discourses of identity and language attitudes. Having collected the data and going it through I realized that it constantly veered towards themes of authenticity in relation to ownership,

sportization and commodification – prompting me to push aside much data regarding discussions of the history of parkour–jargon and other possibly interesting but presently irrelevant sections of the data. It should be noted, however, that some aspects of terminology–related interview sections survived: I deemed the notions regarding the *meanings associated* with the use of terminology drawing from different source languages so interesting that omitting them would have removed a relevant aspect of the research, effectively amputating elements of authenticity and identity building practices from the paper. My interviewees seemed to give special value to the Finnish language and were proud of their Finnish coinage and translations of the terminology, so I deemed it to be an authenticity factor for them, albeit not necessarily a dominating one: as will be seen, the attitude towards language is at the least mixed. From the *a priori* –themes the relation of language use with parkour survived. The authenticity in relation to commodification and ownership of parkour surfaced from the data *a posterior*.

The parkour communities around the world are notoriously reluctant to give strict definitions of the art, and even if they do, the views may vary strongly. As has been pointed out by Cheung (2015: 40), parkour culture offers great liberties for interpretations regarding what the culture and its values mean to each practitioner. This allows for personal negotiations of how much time one invests to parkour and whether a (professional) traceur seeks for commercial sponsors or utilizes their skills on the markets. It also enables a parkouriste to vary their level of attachment to the parkour culture and take their personal stances regarding it, modifying the personal parkour–identity and the notions of authenticity. Therefore, it is important to remember that the findings in the present study cannot be treated as being applicable to all parkouristes worldwide, nor in Finland, which is something my interviewees also pointed out during our discussions.

## 9. THE FUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE

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As I was preparing for the research, I believed that as an alternative culture originating in France, the country and its language might carry special value for traceurs. Quite unsurprisingly I discovered that France and French had certain prestige, although the French language was not deemed a necessary addition to a traceur's repertoire, unless one wanted to communicate with the original traceurs in their native language – and convey different, somewhat ambiguously defined meanings to other members of the community; an interesting aspect which will be elaborated upon more in the analysis and conclusions.

French appeared as a tool for gaining better understanding of the art of parkour, its origins, philosophy and ethos. This is illustrated in a below excerpt from Panu, a traceur in his early twenties. It should be noted that he is the only interviewee who claims knowing French, although he describes his skill level, perhaps somewhat humbly, as “mediocre”, explaining that he is able to have basic discussions with native French and to discuss parkour with French traceurs.

Excerpt 1.

Q: Do you think French is important for a parkouriste?]

PI: Personally I think it's important to remember the discipline's roots, to know how it began. And all the terminology has been in French and even today some of it has stayed that way.

This excerpt, albeit short, shows an inherent connection between the French language and the value it has for the interviewee in terms of allowing traceur to remember *the roots and origins of the practice*. It is important to note that origins, such as history and roots, are always important to communities, whether alternative, mainstream, *national et cetera*, and are a source to look for inspiration, knowledge, justification and points of reference. In terms of alternative culture, knowing the roots also leads down the stream of authenticity as it ties the present to the past and into a common background: history builds generations, and generations build history. This small excerpt seems

to imply that the French language has a special value for the interviewee, allowing him access the parkour culture and connect with it more closely. It should be emphasized that this value is recognized by other interviewees, too, but they do not claim to know the language. They do, however, note the honorary function the French terminology (and perhaps even the wider knowledge of the language) has in the parkour circles, especially in professional spheres and among more advanced traceurs.

Excerpt 2.

Q: And like, you said that France is, is a spiritual home, perhaps, or a spirit, spirit, place for finding the spirit, so do you think –I might’ve asked this before– but do you think the French language has some importance to people like that.]

JJ: Aaaa, no, I wouldn’t see it as, that it would be central. There are, *there are like hobbyists who, like, emphasize the tradition a bit, for them it might have, they may like purposefully use the French terminology and I know some guys who are like that. That they use it, like, also when instructing, but, but, they’re pretty rare.*

Jaakko denies the French terminology as being central for the practice of parkour but does recognize it being important to a minority of parkouristes as a conveyor of *tradition*. It also seems that tradition and passing the linguistic legacy on when instructing suggest that for some traceurs the linguistic choices are conscious, reflect their values and are a tool for being more authentic or connected with the original mindset<sup>25</sup> and localities of parkour, in a similar vein a Finnish hip–hop artist would borrow African–American slang to feel more connected with the global hip–hop culture.

Later in the interview we returned to the topic of French language and terminology and Jaakko opened the theme more, hinting that the

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<sup>25</sup> It appears as though the original parkour terminology truly does stem from a mindset emphasizing utility and minimal defining of movement through words: my interviewees note that the original terminology does not evolve much and only discerns between certain leaps, *passements* and other movement categories rather than trying to pinpoint each variation of a basic technique. Definitions are seen as limiting.

French terminology and French language may have functions as an identity/authenticity tool and a professionalism marker.

Excerpt 3.

JJ: Sometimes, sometimes you hear French used as a a, or, or if, if you want to give cr– if you want to honor the, like, estab– or the, the beginning. Then it might be that, if you are in a, in like an organization –and a like, professional level that you are on a seminar or such. Those are organized every now and then. Then there might be someone who uses like French, French terminology just to, sort of, just to, as a small nod into that direction.

Q: So you could see an honorary function in it?

JJ: yeah.

This exchange reveals interesting functions for the French language and terminology: its use may be connected into conveying and presenting a professional identity in seminars and other professional settings, as well as tying the present state of parkour to its tradition, and, again, positioning the speaker into the continuum and history of the discipline, possibly enhancing one’s authenticity among peers, signaling expertise and knowledge. The French terminology is also tied to the notion of “purism”, which in this context is a mindset or attitude emphasizing what could a more correct or original approach to the discipline.<sup>26</sup> The fact that knowledge, expertise and respect towards the origins of parkour are signaled with language and terminology choices suggests that one can gain or at least strive for greater (sub)cultural capital and acceptance within the scene and are perhaps seen as more authentic traceurs: according to Rannikko et al (2013: 15), traditions and different ways of communicating one’s respect towards them is a key element in building subcultural authenticity.

Excerpt 4.

[All is... I think that here English and Finnish are happily used and mixed together. Like some like kind of purist guys sometimes use

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<sup>26</sup> “Correct and original” as deemed by the community or certain members of it – not as my personal opinion on the matter.

French (terminology) and use “Arm Jump” for “cat leap” or somehow, to give respect into that direction. Saute de Bras, a.k.a käsihyppy or kissanloikka or cat leap or arm jump.

Purism is a theme Perttu repeatedly returns to, also in a critical manner, and seems to connect it with both language used in parkour and the definitions regarding the practitioners. He makes notion of the mixing of languages and terminology, hinting that the language and terminology choices are not a central aspect in practicing parkour and building the culture in the every day setting, but still acknowledging the function of conveying respect and purist mindsets for some traceurs.

Excerpt 5.

PP: Yeah, who is, is it like a parkouriste, engaged in a hobby? How do you define “being engaged”. We already circled around that theme, like if you only participate in instructed sessions, or if you train every day, but what if you train once a month or twice a year? Are you engaged then? What makes one a parkouriste? Is it the mindset, or wherer you train or – is it like, it’s a quagmire, really and if you had to look at it, for example, by only including certain kinds of hobbyists and make a division. But, if, but, but luckily I do not feel compelled to do so, phew. I can think of a person being a parkouriste or help and offer services to people who are interested in parkour, whether they trai once a year or not. There are people who visit the annual Supreme Parkour Armageddon and don’t really practice that much rest of the time. Is that wrong? Aboslutely not, in my opinion. It’s damn great that they pop in then!

In this excerpt Perttu discusses the difficulty of defining a parkouriste or making divisions between traceurs. For him, making these definitions based on someone’s level of experience, frequency of training etc. is difficult, and he is reluctant to make such distinctions, claiming that he is “lucky not to feel compelled to do so”. Discursively this statement seems to position himself into the overall ideal of an open, free-to-join, welcoming and unregulated parkour culture, which allows for different approaches and levels of engagement. Perttu also seems to have a practical stance: him being capable of accepting different practitioners as traceurs also enables him to offer services and help a larger segment of the parkour community, from what could be called hardcore enthusiasts to more casual and occasional hobbyists, which naturally has both financial



(teaching and promoting parkour is his work) and cultural implications (growing the parkour community serves, at least in my interviewees' opinion, the interest of the parkour culture in general and increases its influence and power over matters regarding its future). Even though we will see later that perseverance and long-term commitment to the practice is valued, the theses of equal participation and freedom of joining the culture, as well as the general reluctance to make strict definitions about anything related to parkour means that making or ignoring distinctions is left to each individual.

It is interesting that only one interviewee claims to know French, suggesting that knowing the language is not that important. However, all my interviewees either reminisce their own experiences with original French traceurs or refer to the values and places that are original or traditional. Ville, a traceur in his late twenties, points out in his interview, that while knowing French is not necessary, it allows for better access to the culture.

Interestingly, language seems to play minor role in authenticity for traceurs, although it would be a stretch to claim it has no authenticity-building purpose *at all*. They see language as a useful tool for discussing parkour, instructing others and increasing its visibility and approachability. They admit that the specialized jargon and terminology may be difficult for a non-traceur or newcomer to understand, but they do not see it as a protected property or a device deliberately used for building barriers between the “in-group” and “the others”. When asked about the possible necessity of knowing a certain language, or the terminology, Jaakko seems to find the idea strange.

Excerpt 6.

JJ: No, I don't think that's relevant. It [terminology n.b.] comes with time, training and talking to other enthusiasts. No, nobody's... It's, it's a completely strange idea, surprising really. It has never occurred to me that it would be relevant. But of course, for some martial arts, for example, it is commonplace to learn the techniques and their names.

## Excerpt 7.

VL: mmm, I haven't even thought about that aspect before. Well, I don't know if it is terminology used like consciously—deliberately so that it opens or closes the group. — at some point I realize that I'm talking in terms these people have never heard, they have no idea what they mean. In that sense it might be excluding to some, if they don't like, if they don't know about it. But it's not conscious and I haven't noticed like, in Finland, anything like that between different groups...

VL: — — (when) an official group communicates in the public, is presented in the public life, it is positive to use uniform Finnish terminology. Because that creates, it shows the professionalism of the discipline, or like, it is like, it does good for the public— for the increase of awareness. — — But if you are acting as a representative, if you are giving a presentation about the discipline, then at least I pay closer attention to what language I'm using when talking about the discipline. And I think that should be done. Then you only use the Finnish terminology. Or if you use foreign-language terminology then you must give some background for it. —

Here a professional traceur, who works in the organized circles, expresses interesting views regarding the use of Finnish language and Finnish terminology. It is understandable that the parkour organizations, who work closely with for example manufacturers of outdoor training equipment and playground-designers, different public and private sector organizations and for example boards of physical education, would emphasize the use of clear and approachable language. It should be noted that the Finnish Parkour Association does not demand the use of Finnish terminology (see Parkour Akatemia website) from its members but calls for coherent use of Finnish terminology in its own materials. Ville, however, seems to take the use of Finnish terminology in earnest and sees it as a tool for increasing the public awareness of parkour and giving it a more professional status in official settings. It is evident that the Finnish language is not as important for the *practicing* of parkour as it is for *advocating* its public image and out-group relations.

Finnish has important uses outside the immediate communication, too, as it has value in conveying identity and cultural meanings. According to them, the Finnish scene is quite exceptional in its use of home-coined terminology, although it seems that the language choice is not very relevant in everyday parkour and is left to each individual's

own preference. Rather it is the professional and instructional contexts which appear to be more Finnish-oriented, at least as reported by my informants. As I have no actual footage of training sessions it is impossible to evaluate the prevalence and coherence of Finnish terminology in formal settings, although based on everyday experience it is likely that there are deviations from the norm. Whatever the reality may be, the Finnish terminology has its own special value for my interviewees as a tool of professionalism and is also a source of pride and certain uniqueness. Jaakko elaborated on the topic:

Excerpt 8.

JJ: Personally I think Finland is quite exceptional for using the Finnish (terminology) and it wasn't used that much, despite for some techniques, but we have been sowing it around and I, I might have been there to influence the attitude-climate a little. Like, at some point we told our instructors to use whatever they want, but be aware that the Finnish (terminology) exists now. And, and, surely, it has long-term effects, us speaking to children's and youth-groups – sorry– using Finnish terminology, so, then, then it starts to, they take it further and before long there's a generation using the Finnish terminology. I'm somewhat, well, not a patriot, but a bit li-, like if we don't cook up new words into Finnish and make a Finnish terminology, it surely won't exist in the future either, and there'll be, there'll be a certain field of language which is not spoken about in Finnish. That's of course, I've graduated with Master's in the Finnish language, and a bit, not, not biased but in a way, it would be a pity if, if parts of language are cut off because they just don't, the vocabulary does not exist.

Even though this answer is rather personal as Jaakko elaborates on his own educational background and language-related values, it is interesting that he sees the Finnish terminology as an important and exceptional, unique aspect of the parkour-scene in Finland. He clearly gives special value to it, (which is natural as he has participated in its creation), and sees it as a necessary addition to the Finnish language – and perhaps as something that adds local flavor, value and identity to the Finnish scene. This seems apparent in his notion of the long-term effect of using Finnish terminology in teaching parkour: the creation of a generation which is aware of and is using the Finnish terminology, thus building a nationwide or at least a local tradition and legacy. It seems that the Finnish parkour terminology might have

an identity and language/cultural politics aspect to it, adding a splash of uniqueness into the Finnish parkour community existing within the global parkour sphere. As suggested by his university degree in the Finnish language, he is more than likely interested in the overall development, evolution and change in the Finnish language as well, and might seek to affect it in a way which he sees as positive, beneficial and enriching. In this sense it is also justified to say that at least for this individual the creation and development of Finnish terminology is also a matter of influencing the language on a larger scale, tying it into a wider context of language politics. Quite interesting, really, for a sports culture which is often presented as being suspicious towards language, terminology and definitions. In summary it is justified to propose that, at least in present context, the language, although presented as playing little role in the *practicing* of parkour is, quite consciously and deliberately used as an identity–building instrument with functions of honoring the roots and pioneers of parkour attached to it. The French language and French terminology seems to reflect one’s professionalism, expertise, reverence – and to some extent independence, as can be seen in the statement that people training in a “more traditional way” possibly create their own jargon, although it is pointed out that modern parkour vocabulary is often based on English, possibly due to its hegemony in the virtual communities, in the media and as an international lingua franca (especially in the global west). The United Kingdom is also a prominent parkour hub, thus increasing the influence of English language within the culture.

For my interviewees Finnish is a language used primarily in instructional and representational, official settings and when reaching out to the public, but not a vehemently pursued or enforced aim. It still seems to carry certain localizing and identity–building functions, giving a sense of uniqueness and specialty to the Finnish scene, yet being used in moderation as can be seen in the fact that the name of the practice was never translated by the early parkouristes in Finland

to avoid confusions, wrong associations and also as a possible means of resistance to attempts to license and commodify the name, a notion that will be further analyzed in chapter 11.

## 10. MAKING THE BREAK: PRACTICE, ETHOS AND PHILOSOPHY

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The block finding pathways for authenticity rooted in the practice ethos and philosophy is a large one and as has been stated above, overlaps with other categories of analysis. I wanted, however, to form a chapter for this large and wide and somewhat blurred class to maintain coherence and give a more followable structure to the present thesis, allowing the reader to better trace the thought and findings without the need to constantly backtrack between chapters.

Even though parkour is not strongly language-oriented alternative culture, it has a language of its own which is not a spoken language at all but is still used to make statements and convey meanings. This is *movement*, the very core of the physical execution of parkour, and a source for identity, authenticity and signaling. Jaakko discussed this aspect of parkour and seemed to be very conscious and knowledgeable about the underlying meanings movement, repertoire and choices of technique had for parkouristes.

Excerpt 9.

JJ: Then there's like, like back in the day, something was done, something that was done in the early days is now seen as stupid or somehow, like, "That's banal, we don't do that no more";; stuff typical for other sports, like for example grabs. And parkouristes might have been performing those in the early days too. As you vault something you grab your toes or ankle And for some reason that is regarded as utterly silly. I sometimes have people do them on purpose, because, it annoys me that the culture develops so that certain ways of doing are dissed or such norms are formed.

Even though not discussing linguistic aspects of parkour, this practice-related answer sheds light into the ethos and values of

parkour which Jaakko deems valuable for the sustained freedom of expression within the culture – and also for its development and evolution: he aims criticism at the practitioners aiming to discourage certain, perhaps old and previously popular but conversely also new ways to interpret and perform parkour which would be contradictory for the practice's self-stated values of equality, experimentation and non-normativity. He also brings in the influence of other sports, something that must be looked at from an authenticity and identity point of view. As Ville clarified his attitude towards parkour and other similar, physical self-expressionist activities such as capoeira:

Excerpt 10.

VL: I, I in a way, if I do capoeira for example, or start a new hobby it is also in a way parkour because I think that it serves the same skills. And in the end, umm, when you consider the art of movement, then, then like moves and techniques and types of different sports vanish and in the end they are just different methods for achieving the same skills and in the end all names disappear on the grand-master level. heheh.

This is an interesting and important note regarding the practice and its supposed authenticity: parkour freely borrows, mixes and reinterprets the repertoire, assets and techniques of other sports and physical arts combining them into a composite with no clear distinctions between the sports or the origins: as Hébert wanted to re-introduce, utilize and encourage the primal, instinctive human movement in his disciples, so it seems that for parkour, rooted in *Method Naturelle*, it is equally important to combine and reform practical, useful and expressive elements of (alternative) sports and arts into a new, postprimal composite of philosophy and physical movement, allowing for breaking free from frameworks, distinctions and nomenclatures, leaving only movement and an optimal, ever-developing, mentally and physically strong individual flowing through the usually urban landscape and its concrete and abstract barriers. Jaakko mentioned in his interview that many parkouristes participate in capoeira, tricking (a combination of acrobatics and martial arts techniques), breakdance and other such ethnic and urban arts. It seems that within parkour

syncretism is an essential and protected, revered aspect of the practice allowing for it to develop and to avoid stagnation, bringing new elements and innovations to the practice. Of course, one must bear in mind that parkour is so flexibly and diversely interpreted that different “schools” have evolved, and while some of them may welcome and embrace influences, interpretations and inter–alt–cultural references, others may as well have adopted a more purist approach, possibly rejecting influences that do not suit their view of parkour, such as extensive acrobatics and other “impractical” elements. There are no clear, definitive answers here, but the samples above illustrate the multiple perspectives and opportunities for interpretations offered by parkour to practitioners – and also serves to reveal the conscious utilization and choosing of these different viewpoints to shape and create authenticities. However, before moving on, I want to take a look at the extralinguistic communication of values and cultural preferences. I draw on Jaakko’s interview once more as he dived into the undercurrents regulating and reforming the practice and was able to give rather elaborate answers regarding these matters.

Excerpt 11:

JJ: —Yeah, yeah, yep, all of them in a way they are signs, especially for other practitioners. And especially choosing your techniques is some kind of, like, statement and perhaps a message—

Q: You just said that when [tehcniques featured in] videos become extensively similar, people begin to consciously avoid doing them so that they do no get stuck. Is the key idea here the “not getting stuck” that matters?

JJ: Yeah, yeah, maybe. It would be really fun to take, like, videos from different periods and check which techniques are repeated and how the trends go there. Because there certainly is, like, there clearly are like some that do well at one point and then people take distance from them and go into another direction.

In this case Jaakko discusses the trends within parkour and the related video–culture. He points out that there are tendencies which change over time; and often consciously: when the trend becomes stagnated, traceurs innovate, re–shape and consciously divert from the fashion in order to avoid being constrained. Jaakko also considered these

changes in one's repertoire and preferences as messages to other traceurs. Although he did not illuminate the communicative function of movement, it possibly is related to self-expression and signaling one's affiliations and ethos: for example, preferring the most efficient techniques over more elaborate and aesthetically oriented moves or vice versa. This in turn would signal one's philosophy and views of what is authentic and desirable in parkour to other practitioners as well as offer movement material to be utilized by others.

If innovation and evasion of the quagmires of cultural stagnation were important to my interviewees, another heavily emphasized aspect of parkour culture, which has also been noted in previous research and is stressed by the practitioners themselves, is the ethos of responsibility. This encompasses concern over oneself, others, and the training "spots" and includes not only safety but a gregarious, welcoming and humble attitude. These facets of the parkour philosophy are exemplified and analysed below.

Responsibility and safe, sensible practicing of a potentially dangerous exercise was regarded as concordant with the overall meaning and ethos of parkour, with unnecessary risk-taking and breakneck stunts being shunned, even condemned. Jaakko gave an example of this social policing by relating to an incident he had witnessed online:

Excerpt 12.

JJ: What is tremendously positive is that even though you push your limits to the extreme, and take the movement combos all the way to, in a way on the limits of risking your life. But then clearly reckless risk-taking is practically almost always condemned. Not for making a cool, good performance that's solidly done with good technique, in which, like, the risks are there and everyone realizes that risk, but which is a controlled performance: that gives you recognition on the web. And in different, different social media, media But then if, if someone does something reckless, it's a, it's a pretty fine line between something being reckless or not, but somehow you always see that that guy does not know what he's doing. Like, he does something that he does not master, and that gets condemned pretty quickly...

Of course I can give..., a good example is this bloke who dive-rolled from a fucking high. And like, he practically slammed on his back, and got up and then they pogoed around, happy to have survived.



And that was shared and, on the Facebook at least, and everyone was like, like “Fuck man”. Like, that’s ... Like, it was absolutely inconceivable that he managed to do it, alive and without injuries, but, but even then everyone realized that it was the wrong kind of, in a– in a way wrong kind of risk–taking.

This answer nicely summarizes many different aspect of parkour: spectacle, that is, sharing one’s performances on social media and peer–regulation: the condemnation of a performance which is seen as being above the level of the performer. Although taking risks is necessary in order to develop and to “break” the jumps in parkour, to overcome one’s limits and to tackle the physical and psychological obstacles, the parkour community appears to be very critical of rash actions and practitioners rushing for fame rather than patiently honing their skills and planning in advance. However, this probing of boundaries and testing of one’s abilities is also seen as risk–taking, even to the “limits of risking your life”, however, this attitude is combined with the idea(l) of gradual progress, not skipping steps. Risk and danger are connected to the philosophy of parkour: to enhance oneself, one has to reach for greater heights and face risks but should do so in a conscious and deliberate manner. Acknowledging one’s limits and discerning between the necessary, protective limits and the unnecessary mental obstacles is appears to be a key idea in parkour and one of the strongest norms within the practice. In fact, it seems that one of the few written “rules” of parkour is that of responsibility and minimizing of risk to oneself, others and the environment. Jaakko describes this ethos of safety and minimizing of risks, as well as the community’s vigilance at recognizing dangerous and irresponsible behavior as “tremendously positive”, giving great value to the common upkeep of the values. Deviance and breaking of both subcultural and mainstream social norms and laws is potentially harmful to the practice itself, harming its reputation and legitimacy. Furthermore, parkour is becoming more organized and comes more in contact with mainstream institutions, underage hobbyists and the general public, so negative interactions with these parties would not serve the interests of the culture. Although parkour is confrontationist

as it (and most other alternative sports) challenge the conventions of using public space, it must also conform to certain rules and norms to avoid bans, negative publicity and moral panics (Rannikko et al 2013: 12, Rannikko 2018: 50). It seems that challenging the norms is authentic but it must be done in a way that is respectful, i.e. not harmful to the culture, other people or the training environment<sup>27</sup>: it is not so much about “conquering” the space; rather it is about re-claiming, redefining and sharing it so that public space becomes a common ground for human activity (see Rannikko 2018: 50).

Dislike and rejection of irresponsibility and lack of humility is tightly interwoven with authenticity and core tenets of parkour practice.<sup>28</sup> Ville had his own notions regarding this matter, implying that responsibility and humility are crucial for the life-long development of a traceur, and thus a key element of the practice:

Excerpt 13.

VL: My opinion is that it really depends on, not on what you say you're doing, but, umm, on the individual. There just are individuals who train irresponsibly and those who train responsibly. And I appreciate those who train responsibly. So that they take care of their bodies and keep healthy and are still out there [doing parkour] at fifty, 'cos you don't do this for a few years, flashing nice tricks, gaining fame and glory and then sink into footnotes, the goal is, it is, like, a lifelong process after all.

This excerpt crystallizes something essential of what is valued and important in parkour: it is the process of bettering oneself that is aspired towards, not necessarily being the best in the eyes of others (although, as is evident in the excerpts below, experienced and skilled parkouristes gain admiration and fame. It would be false to say that performance and being visible and looked up to were not important

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<sup>27</sup> Rannikko (2018: 50) also points out that parkour, having been influenced by military training exercises has militant, masculine and disciplined undertones to its philosophy.

<sup>28</sup> “Pride goeth before the fall” (a common misquotation of Proverbs 16:18) is more than suitable here.

part of the parkour culture, its manifestations and the expression of self – after all most forms of self-expression are aimed outwards, to an audience).<sup>29</sup> However, commitment to long-term development is valued more than reckless and spectacular antics and daredevil risk-taking, which may bring fleeting glory after which the daredevils “sink into the footnotes<sup>30</sup>” whereas painstaking training brings more lasting appreciation within the culture. It is the right way and seen as authentic. It is also noteworthy that there is a hint of normativity which defines authentic versus inauthentic practice: one’s verbal claims are not as important as the way they do parkour.

Jaakko returned to the theme of humility later in a slightly different context, but this exemplifies how important the realization of one’s current limitations and the need for committed training is:

Excerpt 14.

JJ: You constantly make and create something new and set new challenges, so you will fail, and that’s why you have to be a bit humble. And humility, certain kind of humility is part of the philosophy also. Bragging, and boastful speech and discourse is not typical to parkour...

As parkour is practiced in a variety of environments, it is not too surprising to find that certain locales are seen as meaningful not only on a personal but perhaps on a more collective level. I presumed that the original spots in France might carry special significance to the parkouristes I interviewed, and their answers clearly indicated reverence, admiration and special value given to these places, especially when visiting them with the French pioneers of parkour and

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<sup>29</sup> Jaakko referred to this (somewhat jocularly) as “skin power”, making a note of the habit of taking off shirts even in cool weather to reveal the musculature and shape of body. He also noted that creating and sharing videos online is an important aspect of the parkour culture, questioning the credibility of claiming parkour as being solely performed for oneself as a method of personal development. The attitudes and views certainly vary.

<sup>30</sup> “Sic transit gloria mundi” – a proverb not misquoted

experiencing the spots hands on. This is also true for training with the pioneers in other localities, as is illustrated by the excerpts below.

The authenticity in practice – and to some extent the locales in which parkour is trained – were evident in the answers given by Ville as he talked about his training trips outside Finland. When asked whether he had trained abroad he listed the locations:

Excerpt 15.

VL: I trained in Denmark for a longer period of time, for four months, in a boarding school which offered parkour as a subject or as a form of sport. It was training centre for athletes. And then I've visited Paris, France on a training trip. And Germany. And Norway. I think that's all of them.

—And denmark was a breaking point. Not a “breaking point” in a negative sense but it affected my training and I was influenced by their way of training and their training culture which was somewhat different from what I had grown used to in Finland.

When I noted that out of these locations Paris was the only city he mentioned, Ville exclaimed:

Excerpt 16.

VL: It was only city I mentioned! Yeah, I noticed that too, others were countries, but I had [mention] Paris, well it's special, yeah sure it was. Going there was a strong experience. We actually had one of the original parkouristes guiding us. Yeah, yeah like...

Q: Who guided you, if I may ask?

VL: Laurent Piemontesi

Q: I see.

VL: He was there challenging us, so you the special opportunity to get know him and go with him to some of the spots that you've seen in videos a long time ago. So there's... a hint of fanboy-vibe there. But because it was probably the most intensive training week I've ever done, and I exceeded myself in many ways. So in that sense it was a very strong experience.

It is not uncommon for people to give special respect to persons and locations seen as original or authentic. However, Paris, its traditional parkour spots and the fact that he could train with a revered traceur who participated in pioneering the practice altogether seemed to be of great mental value to him. If training in Denmark positively influenced his training, visiting Paris and meeting an original

*Yamakasi* member was psychologically meaningful return to parkour's roots. Paris is a "special place" for traceurs: something my other interviewees also noted. As Jaakko put it:

Excerpt 17.

JJ: It's, It was, it's kinda like.... How would I describe the present situation (of France)... It's, I'm not sure if "Relic" is a bit bad choice of a word, it's tone is a bit wrong, but it is, it's kinda like a spiritual, that's what you go to look for there...

But yeah, France ain't France ain't... People often go there to visit the legendary first spots just to find, to get some of that spirit, but parkour travel is different today. Young guys visit Spain quite often. Barcelona is popular with our folks. And Germany, Denmark and Britain are also popular.

Interestingly, the words chosen by Jaakko reflect the spiritual and religious, philosophical realms: France has lost its status as a central hub for parkour practice to other cities in Europe (and in Asia and Southern America, too) but is still an important source of inspiration and nostalgia. It is a strong cultural nexus in the multifocal and diverse world of modern parkour.

Perttu also reminisced his experiences with the original traceurs and elaborated on the influence they and meeting them has had on his own parkour experience. The cultural differences in practicing and the example, thresholds and challenges set by the original, skilled traceurs is something he and my other interviewees seemed to greatly appreciate. One could argue that even though the French are not necessarily the leaders of the modern parkour culture, their example and achievements serve as a guiding beacon for at least some parkouristes today.

Excerpt 18.:

PP: Well, umm, sure it's meaningful to me, of course, like them, French parkouristes and through it (parkour) the French culture, how it has influenced it (parkour), I , I don't know. But sure it's been inspirational being there, meeting French parkouristes for the first time. I saw Thomas des Bois in London and I got to know other French guys too. And they were, some of them were visiting Finland in 2015, and they surely trained differently, they, they trained fucking hard. They did like, and the *Yamakasi* still do, like completely insane muscular endurance exercises, which are completely pointless in a biological or excersice sense, haha. But those (exercises) teach

perseverance. And they give you a special kind of feeling, cat-walking— for half a kilometer. “We did this as a group”. Yeah, it has certain vibe to it, it does create, it creates a sense of communality. And whatnot. And there was, there were also very, I mean they had been training for ten years already, so there were some absurdly skilled guys there when compared to the rest of the world. The, the, the time when, when Thomas, or Toma, came to the jams in London for the first time, That blew everyone’s mind. ‘Cos, ‘Cos he was doing things no one had ever done before. We did them soon afterwards, sure, but he was clearly ahead, like, ahead of us in many things. So, so, ye. yeah, the French have, have had a strong influence. Not anymore as much, because there are already very skilled people elsewhere, too, and they have never really organized themselves well. I don’t know if that’s because of their personality or what, but they’ve never been good at that.

Perttu’s lengthy answer was enthusiastic. He referred to visiting France and meeting French parkouristes and training with them as inspirational and “mind-blowing”. He expressed great admiration towards the perhaps excessively strenuous training, camaraderie and skills of the French parkouristes he had met and trained with and saw them as forerunners for himself and other parkouristes. This of course is neither surprising nor a new phenomenon: it is a universal fact that all cultures and groups tend to give respect to their pioneers and mentors. It is interesting that both Jaakko and Perttu make note of the somewhat waning influence of the French traceurs as proficiency and skills are more evenly distributed and the culture has become more organized.

## **11. “OWNING” PARKOUR: COMMODIFICATION AND AUTHENTICITY**

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In this section the chosen excerpts illustrate the stances and attitudes the interviewees held towards the commodification, sportisation and pursuing commercial activities in and around parkour. These samples go to show the diverse and sometimes contradictory views and approaches and the extent to which the roots and ethos of parkour affect the professional parkour scene, at least in the present case. However, parallels may be drawn from parkour communities and

parkour-related business around the world and other alternative sports cultures such as skateboarding and BMX biking.

Two of my interviewees elaborate on the criticism they met when founding the Parkour Academy. Even though they did not go into details, describing the discussions and angry feedback they had received from “purist and patriotic young men” who “blamed us of spoiling parkour because we bring it to common people” and criticized them for “asking that much money for training, even though we did not ask that much when compared to say, dancing schools and such”, they gave very interesting notions about their responses to the criticism. There was a certain notion of envy in the community “It’s easy to get offended when money steps in, and there might be fear for a new thing, and envy *those guys have the guts to do that, they can live off of this, which would be my dream-job too.*” It is not uncommon for such criticism and discontent to rise within a culture whenever the “hobby” turns into a profession or play is combined with labor (“playbor”). One of my interviewees compared the most vehement critics to “patriots” (see below) drawing an interesting notion towards jingoism and aggressive nationalism – reluctance to change and to allow people to interpret the shared culture in a way they wish. This is, however, not surprising: it is commonplace in most cultures, whether alternative or not, to both seek connection with the roots and origins as well as develop new approaches and ideas.

Excerpt 19.

JJ: We’ve had openly disgruntled if not hostile e-mails from young, like patriotic parkouristes [blaming us] of spoiling this. Saying that our work somehow, in an indistinct manner, pollutes parkour as we bring this to the common folks and that the culture and spirit will disappear, even though we consciously keep up the creative ethos, and openness and sociality of parkour. It was a tad surprising that these attacks occurred, but, there’s a place for them all (?). And it doesn’t hurt the discipline that there are more people engaged in parkour and it is officially recognized, as it presently is. And the latest survey, asking kids what they want and 100.000 say they want parkour. So that means, like, like... If we, who come from within the culture, do not do this, then someone else with less knowledge and experience about this culture, someone not knowing enough in order to filter in the correct, the so called correct or rather, the original

mindset, will. Then it might be a health-club entrepreneur or someone else, who says that “well, there’s a niche. I’ll take a hold of it and grab the money.” They have a different viewpoint. We want to keep up a culture, and a certain kind of culture...

In this excerpt Jaakko contrasts two different pressures they encountered while founding the Parkour Academy and starting to gather fees from people interested in training parkour at their facility. There is the inside opposition towards parkour as a business, coming from *patriotic young parkouristes* who, according to Jaakko, attacked the idea of introducing parkour to the wider public and voiced *distress over the perceived vanishing and pollution of the culture*, contrasting the original and authentic, independent and non-organized parkour culture with the threatening outside which will stain and leech the community and its spirit, clearly fearing that the authentic culture will be destroyed (something that has been happened to other alternative cultures and sports too). This exemplifies the subcultural need to antagonize the mainstream in order to stay alternative and free. Jaakko, however, ties the foundation of the school into a wider context: parkour is increasingly popular and has gained visibility anyways (through media for example), and he sees the Academy, being founded by *people from inside the culture* as a means of *defending the authenticity*. He makes a reference to them striving to protect a *certain kind of a culture*, the ethos, values and *the so called correct or original* mindset of parkour in a sphere of growing commercial and popular interest. This clearly indicates that the traditions and the supposed original ways of doing parkour are valued and seen as worthy for protection and handing to the next generation of parkouristes. However, it also seems to indicate that commercial pursuits and organized practicing is a potentially useful and perhaps unavoidable tool for reaching these goals. As will be discussed below, the line between excessive and acceptable commercialization and utilization of parkour is a fine one. It seems that as long as the motives driving the organized teaching and commercial pursuits are “pure” it can be seen as being compatible with the parkour culture.



This discourse is opposite to the one emphasizing the total freedom and lack of organization seen as the authentic and traditional way of doing parkour by some parkouristes, who Jaakko deems to be “somehow patriotic”, i.e. protective and perhaps opposed to change in the parkour culture –even if the change could serve to preserve the values of the culture in a time of growing popular attention and demand. Wheaton (2013: 90), points out that similar conflict has risen also within capoeira–communities worldwide. Despite being different disciplines, the reflection of these trends emerging in parkour and capoeira is not far–fetched: capoeira culture is divided between those seeing formal organizations and teaching as contradicting the spirit of free participation and liberty found in capoeira, whereas those depending on capoeira as an employment tend to advocate formal organizations (ibid.). It seems that the ownership–commodification–preservation discourses and conflicts around them have similar roots, motives and outcomes in the parkour culture, too. If we accept the non– or even anti–organizational approach emphasizing training solo or in small, tightly knit communities as the most purist form parkour (and this is problematic as there is very little saying as to what even constitutes parkour for it has no strict guidelines), it is still noteworthy that similar values seem to be held up by my interviewees, who make a living out of teaching and spreading parkour but also have their own roots in the unorganized first wave of parkour in Finland.

At the very core, the discussion about the organized, popularized, centrally taught parkour being compatible with the parkour culture is intertwined with the traditions, changes and shifts in them and consequently, differing views and opinions of what is authentic and where the borders between “selling–out” and staying true to the core values of the culture lie. In the case of parkour this is naturally a difficult topic for the practitioners to answer or at least to come unitedly in terms with, as the conscious openness to interpretations,

increasing popularity, change in the founders' attitudes towards organized practicing<sup>31</sup>, and reluctance to define and be defined causes fragmentation in culture which is already decentralized and evolves freely.

However, if my interviewees have faced criticism for establishing a parkour school and the attitudes within the global parkour scene are fragmented on the themes of recreational, professional and organized practicing of parkour, excessive purism and intentional emphasis of lifestyle aspects of the parkour culture are met with sarcasm and criticism, too. When asked if parkour is a lifestyle, Perttu gives a two-sided answer: for him the question is a repulsive one, although he notes that parkour may become a significant, habit-changing practice for a *traceur* – and it should be noted that the philosophical aspects of parkour emphasize the positive changes the practice is supposed to have on an individual's mind and body. On the other hand he approaches deliberate and rebellious, self-assertive lifestyle-attitude with wry humor and slight scorn.

Excerpt 20.

PP: I try to, I don't know, ss, this is I mean, this is an emotional reaction, opening this is shitty, or I mean, it is a shit job to try to rationalize this. Cos it, somehow it, 'cos, coul-, maybe there's something like, for me it has a bit of like, for me the lifestyle has, like, idolizing. Or, teenage-boys', like, "Don't you come yappin' at me, this is a lifestyle". Hehehe, like, C'mon! Heheh, and, and anyways, like, that, that, may- maybe it has some, like, subcultural thing attached to it, that we hav- that we are like this and, so, so we, we want to belong into something just for the belonging's sake. Or something, I get some negative connotations from that lifestyle-thing. And like, trivial defining of oneself or (other) things. Be what you are and get your self-esteem somewhere else. Hehe, like, do you like have to define it so much.

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<sup>31</sup> See Wheaton, 2013: 89 on how categorizing parkour as a form of "art" has settled some of the disputes as "arts" are not "sports" (although this is debatable as aesthetics are integral to many sports such as gymnastics and dance -and aesthetic beauty may be found in basically any sport in the form of skilled and technically pure performances).

Here the most significant part is Perttu's critical notion of arguably the *belonging for belonging's sake*: trying to show off and be original perhaps without the orientation to better oneself. His example of a teenage boys' arrogance "don't you come yappin' at me" seems to contrast the humility and responsibility emphasized as core values of parkour with anti-social and antagonistic attitude seen as harmful for the parkour culture. Perttu also points out that deliberate defining of parkour as a lifestyle is trivial and unnecessary and is a negative way to build one's self-esteem. Similar views have been expressed by Atkinson's interviewees in his 2009, even though their approach to parkour was perhaps more philosophical and certainly more anti-organizational. It seems, however, that critique of parkour as an ego-building tool, at least if excluding others and using parkour not to develop oneself but as means to gain fame at the cost of others is met with criticism and scorn as it breaks the norms and values commonly found within the parkour culture. It seems that belonging to a culture just for the belonging's sake is seen as limiting to one's development as a person. When I pointed out that Perttu's view is an interesting one, as parkour as a culture emphasizes freedom and being liberated he stated:

Excerpt 21..

PP: Yeah, yeah yeah, but if you say that I'm a parkouriste, it's my lifestyle then you make helluva lot of defining.

Again, the reluctance to strictly define the practice surfaces. Even though my interviewees would happily describe themselves as being parkouristes and professionals at that, they still have strong opinions regarding something they see as unnecessary and excessive defining. Trying to be cool and special without giving regard to the lifelong commitment to bettering oneself is something Panu also commented on. When asked if there have been disputes or conflicts in the community due to the increasing popularity and organization of parkour, he noted:

Excerpt 22.

PI: Yeah, back in the day, when it was still a very small phenomenon, some hobbyists like quit, because it was no longer such an underground thing but it was already in wider knowledge so that it had become mainstream and they did not think it was cool any more

Although Panu does not explicitly criticize people for quitting parkour he has a critical view of their motivation to quit practicing. The growing popularity of parkour had made it a mainstream phenomenon and as such was no longer a cool thing for the quitting persons to practice: it appears Panu sees these people as having been committed to the parkour scene for identity–building purposes rather than wanting to develop themselves. It is important to realize that Panu does not say that higher level of organization and growing popularity of parkour were seen as inapplicable to the *values and ethos* of the parkour community but rather, the people who quit practicing did it, in Panu’s opinion, out of personal, identity and uniqueness of self–related reasons. When I asked Ville about the subversive and rebellious side of parkour, he answered:

Excerpt 23.

Q: Mmm, yes, yes. Yeah. How’s... you said earlier that there’s a sense of responsibility in training in Finland: that property, public spaces and your own bodies are not damaged. So, well, is there like, parkour is often presented as, or especially media supports the image of parkour as a rebellious sport. So do you think it is a form of rebellion?

VL: In one sense it’s rebellion. Ummm, surely it is rebellion against the [conventions of the] use of public space. But I personally think that its strenght is that it is not aggressive rebellion. It’s empowering and liberating rebellion. And in that sense it may also be seen as rebelling against the whole structuralism of the western society. Just because you don’t need, like, huge settings to excersise in but you can do it anywhere you like, by your own means: there’s no rules, in a way there are no right or wrong. So, in that sense it rebels against those things. And that’s what gave birth to it. That’s the basis of it.

Ville’s answer reflects the values of parkour, and the notion of adapting to one’s environment and surroundings, turning it into something that can be utilized. He sees parkour as a rebellion which enables the practitioners to take control of space and question the rules and structures of the *western society in general*. It should be remembered that western societies are generally thought of as being very free and in a sense the fact that parkour, despite attempts, has not

been forcefully regulated by the authorities or been banned also shows that parkour, despite its risks and potential to clash with the norms of the society, is tolerated by the “structured and regulated” western society. However, Ville suggests that the rebellion in parkour is not about turning the system over nor destroying it, rather it is about questioning, trying and bending the, often unwritten, norms and rules which govern for example the so-called proper use of public space and the ownership and control of it – and not only streets and parks, but specialized gyms and sports-halls too. As Ville notes, parkouristes do not need huge settings (for example fields or stadiums) to practice, nor do they require strict rules and referees to control the event. One could argue that this is also a somewhat anti-capitalist or anti-ownership stance: it is hard to regulate and exploit something which by its very nature is fluid, changing and pursues freedom from restrictions. However, one should not idealize this ethos too much: money always finds a way and so does the regulation of what I would call “Freedom sports”.

It is interesting that the “common folks” –discourse appears to have been surfaced in the criticism. As pointed out by Panu, when asked whether the spreading of parkour into larger segments of the populace has caused conflicts:

Excerpt 24.

PI: Sure, there still are people in Finland who only train by themselves, who don't seek company and, like, don't like this kind of organized activities. But, but there appears to be only few of them.

Interestingly Panu describes parkour as having become mainstream and this popularization as a factor in causing some early adopters to quit the discipline: for them, it seems, parkour lost its novelty value and alternative coolness factor. Currently the increasing popularity –or more accurately its side effects–have caused much stir and unease in the global parkour community: the question is not about parkour being more mainstream, popular and acknowledged and therefore “uncool”; rather it is the attempts to profit from and license the practice which

has electrified the communities to organize, attempt maintaining autonomy and boycotting the most blatant attempts of “banking in the popularity”, drawing in parallels with other alternative and extreme sports cultures, such as BMX biking which has allegedly been targeted by constant attempts to be licensed and ceded under the authority of the UCI or *Union Cycliste Internationale*. This has been used as an example in the Parkour Research community on Facebook as an example of the processes the parkour community is facing now (digBMX.com).<sup>32</sup> To preserve their independence and to resist the shift towards an internationally controlled parkour practice, national parkour associations have emerged, even though it is likely they have different goals, orientations and emphases. However, the fragmentation and local organization appear to have a potential as hubs of resistance, being better able to form, keep up and conduct boycotts, campaigns and preservation of what they see as original and positive parkour culture.

The attitude towards commercialization may appear contradictory: on the one hand the commercialization of parkour is opposed, but on the other the parkouristes themselves build a business and employment around it. It should be pointed out, however, that this is not a totally unprecedented approach, as is illustrated by an interviewee in Wheaton (2013: 77): “It’s not about *not* promoting big companies, it’s a question of trying not to promote things that are damaging to an individual, promoting healthy lifestyle, a kind of ethical lifestyle”. A similar vein is present in my interviewees’ approach to the theme: by teaching parkour to children and adults and by seeking to promote the discipline, one can share the good and positive aspects of it.

Excerpt 25.

JJ: It’s somehow sad, having my own socia circles fileld with stories of joy of exercise having been killed off that early on. That, thad

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<sup>32</sup> DigBMX.com: Why we need to keep the UCI out of BMX, accessed 9.3.2018

doesn't help, and then there's a lot of clamor about our national health being a disgrace and the costs it causes and it being a priority issue. Now we see a good tendency, we are going into the right direction and it's been realized and, and like, there were the results of that large survey asking young people what they want to do, so, that is the right direction, asking what you want, what you want to— or— how you want to exercise and what do you wish. So that, that's a good thing, but.. yeah. But if we go back to having an agenda, then maybe it could also be having it readily available for everyone and also like, preserving the, relaxed, creative, uncompetitive attitude in exercise.

Both Jaakko and Perttu saw advocating parkour culture as inherently positive on a larger scale. Perttu referred to physical exercise being beneficial for general well-being and Jaakko thought it curious that people are being criticized for not taking enough exercise and for the detrimental effect on national health this has, while traditional and organized sports and the uninspiring and off-putting atmosphere of physical education does and has not helped to alleviate the problem, whereas parkour could offer some solutions, as it is more relaxed and creative,

Commercial pursuits (such as utilizing parkour skills and adapting its aesthetics in commercials, cinema and theatre), business (parkour schools, public performances) and co-operation with for example different corporations and brands is something parkourists have been doing for quite some time and do not *necessarily* see as detrimental for parkour. The line is a fine one, but it seems to fit the current age of torrential fluctuation of identities and authenticities and the blurring of clear distinctions, as was the case with Blommaert and Varis' (2011) hypothetical Green Party voter who chooses a diesel car and may appreciate a fascist author's work from a pure aesthetic point of view. Similarly the attitudes towards commercial gain and co-operation within alternative sports cultures, including parkour, change, vary and sometimes contradictorily coexist. Naturally there are individuals and groups within the global parkour scene who are strongly opposed to all marketisation of parkour, but presenting itself as very consciously open to interpretations and different approaches, parkour has evolved into a multifocal discipline with a growing

number of emphases and meanings; an aspect which has been previously recorded and specified by, e.g. Wheaton (2013).

One reason for this somewhat baffling cavalcade of opinion and treacherously difficult cultural terrain is that the discourses regarding the essence of parkour appear to be tightly knit around indefinability: certain values are highly regarded and clearly seen as original and worth protecting, but there seems to be no strict rules demanding zealous anti-commercialism or prohibiting parkour-related business pursuits or livelihoods, leaving the culture very open for reinterpretation and even unwanted exploitation, although it seems that there is a widespread *although not unanimous* sense of opposition towards excessive outside influence, control and utilization of the parkour culture, despite the internal disputes and arguments. This has been illustrated by Angel (2011: 201), who points out that co-operation with corporations and brands regarded as exploitative or seeking to sportisize the practices, hence breaking the (unwritten) norms and values of the parkour communities worldwide have drawn aggressive criticism from within the culture and given birth to bitter conflicts and discord both inside the culture and with the so-called outside parties. Commercial activity around parkour is a difficult question for the parkour communities and may attract negative attention from within the culture if deemed inauthentic or jeopardizing the integrity and continuum of the traditional values which act as an invisible hand<sup>33</sup> guiding the practice despite its numerous and constant reinterpretations and organic evolution over time.

Having first-hand knowledge and experience of this underlying tension within the parkour community in Finland, Jaakko suggests that by at least partially controlling the means of producing parkour services, the culture may in fact be conserved and protected from the

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<sup>33</sup> "invisible" in the sense of these values being somewhat unwritten and passed on in social interaction.



outsiders; those who do not have “*enough knowledge and experience of this culture*” and who would rather see the popular interest in parkour as merely a “*niche to profit from*” without focus on the ethos and philosophy. He clearly pits these two powers – parkour culture and the outsider–controlled markets – against one another. He recalls having been blamed for polluting the parkour culture by participating in the founding of a parkour school, even though he portrays it as a protective barrier keeping ignorant exploitation of parkour out of the culture and community. This frame – or positioning oneself in relation to a certain phenomenon (see Paltridge 2016: 30–32) – is utilized by all my interviewees in varying extent. However, it appears to be a useful and necessary tool for them in validating and rationalizing their own views and coming into terms with the tradition, changes and reformulations of parkour culture and their own roles in these processes.

Later we see fatalism in Jaakko’s approach to the sportisation of parkour:

Excerpt 26.

JJ: And perhaps, in parkour, something that’s been struggled against, and that is a struggle already lost, is that competition and competitions have not traditionally been part of parkour. Later it has stepped in, and it’s big money that brings it in—

-- They look for new entries and new sports, and if a sport is non-competitive and competition does not fit in it, they make it fit. And that’s... well, you can only whine. Either you get on the barricades or co-operate. By trying to preserve as much of the principles that... well, by doing what can be done.--

Jaakko treats the sportisation and commercial exploitation of parkour as inevitable, accusing the *big money* for doing so and notes that their influence and power is so strong that the struggle to keep parkour as non-competitive is already a battle lost. It should be noted that many would argue that competitive parkour is not parkour, and Jaakko seems to agree with this, although he sees the capitalist logic and profit-seeking as being too powerful and hegemonic to be defeated. One “can only whine”. Questions are

not asked, when money talks. One could see the above as a manifestation of the “martyr ethos” (See Harinen et al. 2015), but it is a common fact that money brings power.

However, it is also true that parkour is very open for definitions and descriptions and the whole identity of a traceur is subject to change, interpretation and personal preferences, allowing the communities to change the way parkour is practiced – and thus enable new approaches to work as a form of resistance. However, being undefined and reinterpretable at will can also be seen as a threat for the autonomy of the culture: As has been noted above, the word “parkour” nor the culture itself are registered intellectual property, so the power to define and radically (even forcibly if necessary) modify parkour seems to lie with those who have the largest pool of financial and organizational resources: it is possible to market, sell and promote views and perceptions and the choice may well lie with the wealthy and well-organized corporations and entities. Jaakko’s ponderations are somewhat ambiguous, but the passage in which he contemplates the possibility to either get on the barricades (and fight another, potentially losing battle against the *big money*) or to co-operate and seek to preserve the values that can be preserved suggests that authenticity, which is always in a flux, may be preserved by taking part in the planning of parkour competitions and having a word in the sportisation process, again controlling certain aspects of cultural production, similarly to his rationalization regarding the founding of a parkour school. However, Jaakko does not seem reject the possibility of cultural resistance and protest either, although it should be remembered that cultural resistance may take form of co-operation also, by allowing the resistant party to affect the process.

The sportisation of parkour is also briefly, but adamantly discussed by Perttu:

Excerpt 27.

Q: How about this, I mean, this might again be more connected to the definition of the discipline or something, maybe identity also, but well, is parkour sport?

PP: Noo- no.

Q: No?

PP: If I had to give a yes or no answer, I'd say no. If I had to analyze it further, I might say it is physical exercise. It's movement. But within it, the thing I want to exclude because of like ethical reasons is competition. Yeah, you don't compete in it. In some ways, if you see it so, training to be better than others is part of the definition of sports. I'd like to keep it out of our, our parkour. Because that's what I find to be good in it. Will there be parkour competitions one day? Well, there have been Freerunning-competitions. An international Parkour Association hasn't been formed. That could get into the Olympics Committee as representative of parkour and bring the competitions in. If those competitions are organized, there'll be much bad in them. Lots of good. And if competitions are held, then then I prefer organizing and planning those competitions with a good crowd of parkouristes with good values than give them to be organized by some wastrel. Because, it may be, like, even if it s a competition, it may cherish the good values at least in some sense, or not at all.

Q: So, in a way, if it gets to competitions, then the competitions should be in the hands of those who, kind of, know the discipline or who at least truly know it, so that it is not just some outsider (organizing the competitions)?

PP: Yes. Yes, like that.

Perttu's answer to the question whether parkour is a sport evolves into an analysis of how parkour is not a sport and how this non-sporting ethos is valuable. Perttu refers to parkour as "our parkour" suggesting that it belong to the "us" and not "them", the outside or people seeking to sportisize parkour: parkour seems to be a shared property of the inside group and those willing to enter and interpret it in relation and reverence to the mythical *original* forms.

However, he does recognize the possibility of future competitive parkour events and notes that there would be also "lots of good" in them, holding open the option of people from within the parkour culture, who possess adequate amount of knowledge and "good values", participating in the planning of the competitions to have a say in the ethos-side of the competitive events. This reflects both the

reluctance to surrender developing of parkour to outsiders and the will to influence the way parkour is sportisized, if that becomes relevant.<sup>34</sup> He voices concern over the possible disappearance and misunderstanding of parkour, referring to the outsider organizers – people who presumably have no respect for or knowledge about the values of the practice – as “wastrels”<sup>35</sup>. Interestingly he does not outright condemn competitions, even though he seems to find them distasteful and unnecessary: again, parkour’s openness to interpretations as well as the observed realities of the world surrounding parkour come to play, in a vein similar to what has been speculated by Wheaton (2013: 90) to be ahead for the parkour culture in a form of fragmentation and branching. A similar trend has been predicted by Atkinson and Young (2008: 60). However, the attitude towards this increasing diversity of people and attitudes engaged in parkour varies: on the one hand the growing popularity is a threat to its values and creatively channeled resistance –on the other hand this expansion to the mainstream is an opportunity; as Jaakko noted:

Excerpt 28.

JJ: --and it doesn’t hurt to have more practitioners and it’s like acknowledged by official parties too, as it nowadays is. And the latest survey asking kids (what they want to do in PE classes) and a hundred thousand answer: parkour--

Even though Jaakko is somewhat vague in his notion of parkour benefiting from increased popularity and acknowledgement from

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<sup>34</sup>N.B. During the time of writing, Parkour Championships was launched by the and Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG) and was competed in at the annual Festival International des Sports Extrêmes (FISE) at Chengdu, China, which sets interesting new lines for the future of parkour and its definitions. It is no longer a question of whether parkour becomes sportisized, but rather, how thoroughly sportisized it will become.

<sup>35</sup> It should be noted that Finnish “huithapeli” is a slight pejorative used for a careless, non-competent, air-headed individual, resembling “blockhead”, “bungler” or “clodpoll”. It is not an easy expression to translate and is highly contextual in nature. “Wastrel” is a dictionary-translation found at MOT Online dictionary.

official parties (such as authorities, governmental institutions, educators, media etc.) I cannot resist to speculate on basis of secondary sources<sup>36</sup> what he might mean: it is possible that he is tying these processes into the wider scale of “ownership” within parkour – a community which manages to govern itself, utilizes tools and at least a certain degree of authority to define and organize its values autonomously, maintains mutually beneficial relationships to official bodies and creates its own culture is more resistant to outside influences and attempts to be vassalized by for example the International Federation of Gymnastics as it already has occupied the spaces and formed the ties which the large federations quite possibly need in order to influence and rule over parkour. However, this speculation should be seen as a synthesis of the undercurrents present in the wider discussion regarding the commodification, sportisation and ownership of parkour. Nevertheless, it goes to show that at least the Finnish scene appears to be aware of the power potential of a larger community and co-operation with parties not directly related to the practicing of parkour.

It should be noted that there are numerous different opinions surrounding competition in parkour; particularly whether competitive parkour may be called parkour in the first place, whether one has the right to compete in it and whether the traceur community should resist, co-operate or seek to diplomatically influence for example the International Federation of Gymnastics or other organizations seeking to utilize and modify parkour into a more structured, competitive sport. Complex discussions regarding these matters can be found on Facebook-group named *Parkour Research*, a community ripe for future research.

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<sup>36</sup> Facebook’s Parkour Research -community.

Despite the fact that parkour culture and communities are facing the challenges shared by all alternative sports at some point of their lifespan, including rampant capitalism and attempts to profit from the increasing popularity of the practice, Perttu voiced the inherent resilience of the culture against exploitation.

Excerpt 29.

PP: In the beginning the Finnish parkour-scene also showed pretty strong anti-commercialism. And, and that's in a way completely fine. And I think it's very positive in the sense that if someone claims that you need these shoes to do parkour, well, that's complete bullshit. And you gotta give them the finger. That's not how it goes. Parkour has the foothold here, because you need nothing to practice. You don't need facilities, no reservations, no equipment. You don't need a team nor a coach. So who can come demanding that "you have to pay me before you can train (parkour)". We can offer services if people want to purchase them. But it, in a way.. you can never completely commercialize this because you don't need a snowboard.

This stance seems to reflect the idea that it is difficult, perhaps even impossible, to own and thoroughly exploit parkour as its lack of traditional structures and material requirements liberate it from the confinements of typical commercial pursuits. It seems that at least for this interviewee, the anti-ownership statement is ingrained within the very way parkour is practiced. He does, however, call for resistance in the face of exploitative attempts, calling pursuits to commercialize parkour through sales of equipment or demanding payments *bullshit* and demanding rejection of such ideas. However, he does not see working in the commercial spheres as negative, but suggests that using parkour-related services (such as participating in parkour courses) should be optional and voluntary: however no commercial actor should be given the power and authority to make demands or press claims regarding the way parkour is practiced. By comparing the supposed liberty-potential of parkour to snowboarding (a multi-billion dollar industry), Perttu contrasts two alternative cultures and points out the presumed uniqueness and greater freedom of parkour.

Perttu's view that selling parkour services to willing customers is acceptable is rather typical of alternative cultures, especially after they have reached maturity, a more stable foothold and recognition. As

pointed out by Beal and Wilson (2004: 32–33) this trend is visible in many alternative cultures and is especially well manifested in skateboarding: financial pursuits motivated by greed are scorned and bashed, but making a living out of a hobby and acting in the commercial sphere is seen as a necessity, acceptable employment and a means to control and spread the culture, its concepts, trends, values and ideas.

It is also interesting that the battle for ownership and legitimacy has been fought on linguistic level too. Perttu explained how, after they had begun doing parkour in Jyväskylä, they were encouraged to coin a catchy and descriptive Finnish name for the sport:

Excerpt 30.

PP: Parkour as a word. It was a choice made at the very beginning that we don't want to translate it. It was just because doing so would evoke wrong associations. Like whatever that association would be, that was created, the it, it would go a bit awry. If it was "katuhypely" or "kujajuoksu", these were pondered upon back in the day. The associations would be, would be fucked up.

So we wanted to keep it as parkour. –he sometimes tried to pound it into our heads that "Now you gotta give it some like, like, some enticing name" Like "Street Acrobatics" or "Katuakrobatia" or whatever, "So you'll get it through to people more easily", but, no, no, we didn't really want to do that. It, it was somehow a strict principal we drew right from the very beginning and I find it very successful.

Perhaps that also, but, then of course it has those, like, fucked-up aspects to it too. Like for instance the guys in Denmark talk about Street Movement. These days it might be that firm of theirs. But at some point they were pretty happy using it, 'cos David Belle had some plans for owning the word parkour and so on. So that has also, that has naturally set like, set like those copyright-related challenges, whatever you choose. But, yeah and someone claimed they owned the word parkour but that could never pass, 'cos the word had already become so common that it was regarded a common word, not a word someone could own.

Even though parkour is not seen as inherently rebellious activity, at least in a destructive or antisocial way, it does have elements of manifest to it, and these anti-structural, anti-sports elements are something Jaakko regarded highly:

Excerpt 31.

JJ: But yeah. Non-competivity and creative movement in the sense of everyone's movement being equally important and meaningful is what enchanted me in this discipline. Like, whoever comes to the spot, they are taken in and their participation –well, of course there are the toughest guys who get the most attention and who are gawked at the most– but people are excited by everyone's participation, and everyone's allowed to train. And it's done together, not so that someone's success is at the cost of others. In sports clubs competition is so central. They line up six-year-old kids, take one half and tell them that “OK, you're in the team, you're the ones we invest in. You are allowed to do sports with us and pay the membership, but we're not really interested in the rest of you.”

Jaakko contrasts the ethos of free and equal participation directly with the competition and eliminations-based logic of for example team sports. All my interviewees, as well as the examples found in previous research (see for example Angel [2011], Wheaton [2013], Harinen & al. [2015]) emphasize the importance of egalitarian participation and openness over competition and winning others as a central aspect in the social relationships and operation within parkour culture. It seems that for my interviewees parkour is an alternative to the traditional sports that are perceived as harsh and feeding negative relationship toward others, i.e. winning at someone's cost. Jaakko also seems to build a discourse of anti-sports and anti-exploitation by noting that children are ranked and the weaker individuals eliminated from the team, the promising talents becoming assets to be invested in and allowed to “pay the membership” while others are discarded. Atkinson and Young (2008: 59–60) report very similar attitudes in the parkour community they observed: Torontonians rejected organized, “late modern sports” as “contrived, unnatural, overregulated and heavily constricted by the exclusionary codes and practices”, taking this as a manifest of typical demeanor for what they call “resistance subcultures”. It is also an example of the “fuel” alternative cultures require to maintain their authenticity and to remain alternative, avoiding identification with the mainstream: and its conventions which it aims to resist, break or distance itself from (Harinen et al. (2015: 57). In the context of the discourse of equal participation and appreciation of everyone's movement and performance, Jaakko's



opinions support the view that authenticity in parkour is deeply rooted in these values. In fact at one point, while discussing the nature of parkour, he remarks:

Excerpt 32.

JJ: The way newcomers are spoken to is very polite, it varies, but it's quite considerate and it reflects the common understanding of making mistakes: and that's what so great about this. You constantly make and create something new and set new challenges, so you will fail, and that's why you have to be a bit humble. And humility, certain kind of humility is part of the philosophy also.-- Bragging, and boastful speech and discourse is not typical to parkour. Well maybe, maybe you'll see chest-banging and victory signs in some Eastern videos, but it's not typical.

This reflects, again, values considered traditional and original in parkour, which, albeit having evolved into different branches and also becoming a more casual hobby with less lifestyle or philosophical meaning to many practitioners, during its early years emphasized a warrior ethos of humility and growth through suffering and struggling, placing the humility and encountering and eventually (hopefully) overcoming the obstacles into a philosophical continuum tracing back to Hébert. To be authentic and a real traceur, it seems, one has to know their limits and recognize the fact that there are always higher obstacles to overcome and respect others taking the path. Notably, Jaakko explicitly states that humility is part of parkour's philosophy, that is, the core lines of thought guiding the practice despite its different interpretations and emphases emerging over time and in different locations.

It is clear that the attitudes towards sportisation, ownership, commercial pursuits and authenticity is convoluted and contradictory at the least, but this complexity can be understood by looking at the motivations behind it: acting within the mainstream culture and the commercial spheres, parkour faces processes and challenges similar to other alternative cultures and the practitioners have to come into terms with their will to make a living out of what they have originally started as a hobby as well as trying to preserve the values and ideas they respect. They must also remain alternative despite being active

and existing within the mainstream and capitalist territories, that is, they have to maintain a level of authenticity that is authentic enough for the community and themselves.

## 12. CONCLUSIONS

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Going through the rather large amount of data and selecting the most relevant excerpts from a sprawling and intriguing mass of information has been an arduous, frustrating and sometimes nerve-wrecking engagement. Fluctuating between different and ever-changing, re-emerging and mutating focal points of research, so common to discourse-analytical studies, has also presented its own problems and challenges. I am, however, pleased with the results dug out from the entangled brambles of initially confusing data. In this chapter I aim to draw and tie together the analytical categories into a cohesive set of conclusions as well as re-capping the potential avenues for future research. A discussion of shortcomings and limitations of the present thesis is also included at the end of the chapter. In this section the separate analytical classes have been combined so that a more complete picture of the diverse and complicated, often intertwined and corresponding aspects of authenticity in relation to commodification and language is formed.

Authenticity in parkour appears to be a very complex and fine-grained issue, which is very difficult to thoroughly summarize. As I was looking mainly for the building of authenticity in relation to the rapidly changing and growing parkour culture which also is becoming more commercialized and mainstream, having spread its underground roots nearer the surface, I was able to identify certain core discourses and positions towards these processes from the discussions I had with my interviewees: however, in doing so I had to take in account also a wide variety of elaborations and notions my interviewees made about the ethos, philosophy and “purpose” of parkour as these core values appear as guiding beacons for their practice and the attitudes they hold

towards the different trends, including the (outside) pressure to spread and develop a more commercial and governed parkour culture as well as negotiate the changing cultural landscape of the parkour practice.

As I began the long process of writing the present MA thesis, I was interested in the functions language(s) have in parkour. I did not, however, want to make a listing of terminology, as those serve very little purpose other than recording vocabulary of a group at one point in time, nor did I have the means to analyze the speech and interaction during parkour sessions, so I decided to go for a more attitudes-based research. Even though my interviewees could elaborate on the use and function of languages, even the history of terminology and some in-group slang, they themselves did not seem to give overly strong value to language. In fact they reported that language plays very little role in making distinctions or creating group identity or personal authenticity – which probably is not quite as true as a traceur “inside the box” would think, and certainly is a somewhat simplified perspective as will be shown below. They did, however, elaborate on the values of parkour, the ethos and philosophy of the practice, the contradictions within the culture, the relationship towards capitalism and business ventures, the role of parkour in the society and many, in my opinion, vastly more interesting and relevant aspects of parkour, pushing my research interests into a new route. The authenticity and stance towards commodification as main interest topics surfaced somewhat *a posteriori*. Even though the function of language in creation of authenticity within parkour is still present in the final paper, it took a smaller portion, losing ground to the notions of authenticity in terms of ethos, philosophy, practice and their relationship with the increasing popularity and the subsequent market interest and attempts to commodify and sportify parkour. The intricate and complex, even contradictory co-existence of an alternative culture and the fine line being alternative, mainstream, independence and selling-out were so fascinating that the main interest of my research fluctuated and finally changed. My research process would have benefited from more

focused setting of research questions early on as well as, possibly, a larger or at least more diverse pool of data and informants. Including female participants could have revealed different perspectives to authenticity in parkour. Had I been aware of the Parkour Research group on Facebook at the beginning of my research journey, I could have been able to investigate the discourses prevalent in the international discussions regarding the future of parkour and the commodification/sportification processes it faces. For future research this group, should its members be willing to participate, could prove fruitful. Generally speaking, research into authenticity, subcultural capital and commodification of parkour would benefit from focusing also on the minorities present within the practice, whether these minorities be sexual, gender, ethnic etc.

### Language and Authenticity

Language(s) have a minor but not insignificant role in building authenticity in parkour culture, at least as reported by my interviewees. Interestingly the Finnish language appeared to be a source of certain pride to my interviewees, especially Jaakko who has expertise in linguistics and has made a significant contribution to the Finnish terminology. However, he was not the only one to report that they liked to have Finnish terms and considered Finnish an important means of communication in official and instructional settings. Jaakko also expressed a language-policy approach, considering it a shame not to have Finnish terminology and vocabulary for a cultural phenomenon, which is rapidly growing and gaining visibility. The French language also reportedly possesses value in professional and advanced traceur circles, being used to signal one's expertise and knowledge and to bow at the French roots and pioneers of parkour. Still its role was seen as limited, which was somewhat surprising. The fact that my interviewees, except for one, did not report any knowledge of French sets forth interesting implications about the

limited relevance of French for the practice. However, French was also thought of as an asset for gaining deeper knowledge of the philosophy of parkour and for communicating with the original traceurs, many of whom are apparently not fluent in English. Paris and its legendary “original spots” were also revered as places of pilgrimage: they were reported as being sources of inspiration and tapping into the spirit of parkour and offering powerful and worthy experiences, even though Paris was also considered a “relic”, having lost its number one position to other cities around the world. Still it held a “special” status for at least one of my interviewees and two of them remembered fondly the memories of training with original French pioneers of parkour, hence lending strong cultural and authenticity value to the origins of the practice, despite its evolution and reformulations. Even though only one of my interviewees said he knew French, and none of them regarded knowing the language or visiting France as being necessary for doing parkour (which complies the idea of freedom and lack of *musts* in the practice), they thought remembering the roots of the practice as being important, and referred to the original values and ethos of parkour as their source of inspiration and also one motivation behind the establishing of the parkour academy as well as organizing the activity on an association level. One of them even noted that despite participating in the creation of a Finnish terminology, he and his peers never wanted to coin a Finnish name for the practice, both to tie the Finnish branch of parkour into the original roots and the global scene, to avoid confusions and to resist attempts of licensing the name, adding a pinch of struggle into the language-and-naming aspect in the parkour culture. The language and terminology choices appear to signal one’s attachment to the culture and the stance towards it, French terminology being considered somewhat purist. Purism is a form of cultural protection, resistance to change and perhaps unwanted developments in any given sphere: it seems that one can claim, gain and attempt to collect subcultural capita, and admiration with their

language choices. This is an aspect of parkour that should be studied more. Even though my interviewees did not report strong dislike of naming techniques and “moves”, they saw excessive naming as unnecessary: even though the communicative and instructional purpose and use of naming techniques was recognized, too detailed naming (such as giving a vault a different name based on whether one starts it with the left or right foot) was thought of as being unnecessary. Ville even pointed out that it is one thing to instruct a friend and use names of techniques when going through a route, and another to look for

Excerpt 33..

VL: “perfect places for a 360 rocket–vault. That sounds like skate– or snowboarding and for me at least, that’s not the point.”

The English language featured as a tool and a lingua franca within the global scene, citing the internet culture and widespread influence of English as main reasons for its prevalence within the modern scene. It was not, however, given strong special value, nor was it seen as being necessary for the average practitioner to know. It seems that parkouristes value practice over prattle.

However, the relationship between parkour and language is not this straightforward. The interviewees appeared rather reluctant to *define* the practice, noting that it *evades* definitions. Elusiveness seems to be an important perk of parkour: by consciously avoiding strict definitions as to what constitutes parkour and its movement repertoire, the practice maintains its openness to interpretation and evolution. It seems that defining of parkour is not so much about what it is but rather what it is not: my interviewees did not think parkour as a sport and valued its non–competitive and quite unregulated nature as distinguishing it from traditional, organized sports – a stance reported in previous research, also (See Angel 2011, Atkinson, 2007, Rannikko, 2018). One interviewee even referred to parkour as being a method which allows him to recognize and overcome obstacles, both in the environment and in life outside tracing, lowering the threshold

to offering help to friends and strangers and beating mental obstacles and hindrances. He also reported that on a grand–master level (which of course is unattainable as human development is a “life–long process”) all definitions between different sports and techniques disappear. All participants reported parkour as being an important part of their everyday life, offering them a meaningful hobby, a means to evolve as humans and as a source of employment and income. All interviewees saw parkour also as a positive force in the society with potential to alleviate social issues such as public health and empowering individuals through a positive form of rebellion, and challenging the use of public space.

#### *Authenticity in Ethos and Practice*

Even though the interviewees were not too keen to explicitly define what kind of parkour is real or authentic (although the authenticity was present in their statements), they shed light on the values and ethos affecting the practice. Responsible training, taking care of oneself and others, knowing one’s own limits and embracing the life–long nature of the process of a mental and physical growth were reported as being central to the practice. Challenging the prevalent norms of space and societal (and sport–related) structures (such as competitiveness and ownership) were also seen as being part of the parkour culture, although not necessarily vehemently pursued. Interestingly, despite being a “life–style sport”, there were also opinions against excessive or self–righteous life–style attitudes which were viewed as negative and feeding arrogance – and thus contradicting the humility in face of challenges and obstacles. Perttu referred to the question “is parkour a life–style” as his “least favorite” question as he got “negative vibes” from the lifestyle–label, equalizing it with arrogance and pride. He also saw it as being limiting to one’s freedom, noting:

Excerpt 34.

PP: “if you say I’m a parkouriste and it’s my lifestyle you do helluva lot defining”.

This suggests that parkour should not become a means to an end, lending to personal prestige and hubris, but rather, a tool for physical and mental well-being and a life-long journey towards greater heights and self-development. It is noteworthy, though, that my interviewees did not voice strong *demand* of such commitment, but gave space for differing levels and frequency of participation: Perttu, for example, noted:

Excerpt 35.

PP: There are people who visit the annual Supreme Parkour Armageddon and don’t really practice that much rest of the time. Is that wrong? Absolutely not, in my opinion. It’s damn great that they pop in then!

This illustrates the fluidity and looseness common to the postmodern (youth) culture, which is described as “porous” (Rannikko 2013: 5). Even though the view that cultural groups are more loose today than before has been criticized as alternative sports and alternative cultures often require commitment (see for example Rannikko 2013, 2018), it seems that loose commitment is present in parkour culture, too. Whether this is a new or growing trend within the culture stemming from the increasing numbers of practitioners is something that could be investigated in future research. It would be interesting to know, does the age and numbers of participants in an alternative culture serve to reduce the commitment levels as new interpretations and ways of doing become more plentiful and accepted, creating new implications regarding authenticity and identity. It has been noticed in research (for example Rannikko, 2018), that alternative sports cultures tend to have age-based hierarchical structures, but the above question could be explored.

Thus it seems that commitment and investment in the practices are valued, but participants move more freely between groups and hobbies, may drop in or out at will and return later or never, if they so choose. As has been pointed out above, parkour is a syncretistic



discipline, which borrows, mixes and relabels techniques and styles from other urban cultures, so it seems natural that parkouristes move between different cultures and may be more active in one activity and less so in another.

Even though my interviewees are active parkouristes and have also found employment from parkour, they seemed to be aware and accepting of the different levels of interest and commitment to parkour. Ville, however, made a distinction between hobbyists and more goal- and philosophy oriented parkouristes, and Panu noted that some early participants quit parkour altogether when it started to gain popularity and was no longer edgy, cool and underground, but had become “mainstream” and thus no longer offered subcultural authenticity points and capital. Jaakko and Perttu also reported that founding the parkour academy attracted fiery criticism from some parkouristes accusing the founders of ruining parkour by bringing it to common people and polluting it. This notion of cultural tainting brings us to the theme of authenticity in a culture that is facing pressure to commodify and sportify.

### Commodification and Ownership

The attitude towards commodification, sportification and commercialization of parkour was twofold: on the one hand it was seen as negative, unwanted and threatening to the integrity and authenticity of the practice, but it was also seen as an inevitable outcome of a growing popularity of a culture in a world dominated by “the big money”. However, commercial activity stemming from within the parkour culture itself, such as offering instruction and teaching, was reported as one method for protecting the culture from outside invasions and exploitation. Wheaton (2004: 50) has pointed out that this is a strategy utilized by skateboarders, for example, to negotiate their position and redefine their practices and existence in a heavily capitalist sphere of commerce and business. Even though my interviewees did not take a strong anti-commercial stance (after all

they instruct and promote parkour) exploitation and excessive commercialization was heavily criticized. Competitions and sportification of parkour was also seen as negative, even though one of my interviewees noted that if parkour is to be made into a sport, then the competitions should be planned with experienced and fair, well-spirited parkouristes and not by outsider “wastrels”, even though he did not see this as wanted, but would rather see parkour remaining uncompetitive due to what he referred to as “ethical reasons”. As has been pointed above, parkour values the tenets of non-competition and equal participation – ideals common (but not always achieved) to most alternative sports cultures and one of the core points distinguishing itself from the traditional, competition and winning oriented sports. It is necessary for parkour to remain non-competitive even as it grows more popular, to maintain its alternative status and ability to challenge trends, traits and characteristics of the traditional sports which are regarded overly regulated and serious.

The above values and ethos contributes to the notion of authentic parkour: behavior and conduct contrary to these would be a breach against the, mostly unwritten, norms of the parkour community. Similar values and philosophical standpoints are also found in most other alternative sports (or disciplines) (see Wheaton 2004, 2013, Harinen et al. 2015, Rannikko, 2018) and indicates that parkour shares a very common ground with many alternative sports with similar notions regarding authenticity. The values of non-competitiveness, equal right to participate, dislike of sportification and outside exploitation of the parkour and the parkour community are very similar to those expressed in other alternative sports. The challenges met by parkour are very similar to many extreme and action sports, which have become institutionalized and part of the capitalist underground mainstream, that is, culturally and financially appropriated and marketed commodities which are sold to large segments of population with the enticement and cool-factor of individuality and coolness (Giardina and Donnelly, 2008: 78–79).

While doing background research for the present MA-thesis, I expected not to find strong divisions between “us and them”, as parkour culture presents itself and is reported as being very open to new members and interpretations. Even though this appeared to be true – or at least an ideal held high by my interviewees also – there was certain alternative or subcultural antagonism towards the traditional sports and their supposed hierarchies and limited opportunities for equal participation as well as strong dichotomies between the parkouristes seeking to preserve and support the original and good values of parkour and the possible outsiders entering the culture and its business opportunities for only financial gain. “Big money” was portrayed as a powerful actor dictating or seeking to set the new rules and frames for parkour and its future, signaling anti-capitalist, or at least anti-corporative ethos, although, as has been pointed out above, parkour is not necessarily aggressively anti-capitalist as long as “good values” are respected and promoted (Wheaton 2013: 77) and there was certainly a strong doubt towards the ability of outsiders to steer parkour into positive new ways. It seems that at least my interviewees had to balance a fine line between the alternative and mainstream, capitalist sphere and independence not tainted by money. As has been noted above, establishing parkour schools and increasing public awareness on a more organized level was thought to make the practice more accepted (social control within alternative sports serves the same purpose, as has been pointed out by Rannikko, 2018), approachable and easier to protect from the outside exploitation which could be ignorant about the values and ethos of parkour or seek to make huge profits and commodify the practice. However, strong opposition or antagonism towards other alternative sports cultures, although interestingly one of my interviewees reported that the syncretistic and all-encompassing nature of parkour seeks for a situation in which all distinctions and names for techniques and sports disappear. The establishment was not antagonized either, although slight criticism towards the limitations regarding the use of public

space (a common motif to alternative cultures and sports) was expressed. However, parkour's subversive and rebellious aspects reported being positive and empowering, not negative and destructive.

To summarize: it appears that at least for my interviewees, the notion of authenticity in parkour is rooted in the origins and "original values" of parkour: freedom, mental and physical well-being and growth, responsibility towards oneself and others and certain amount of humility, that is, realizing one's limitations and overcoming them through hard work. These are values commonly found in parkour communities around the world. Language(s) play a minor, but not insignificant role, even though it seems, at least based on the interviews, to be less important for parkouristes than for many other alternative (sports) cultures, youth cultures and subcultures.

It is also clear that the insiders (traceurs) claim authority and a level of "ownership" over the practice and the direction it should take in the future. Even though the original "street phase" (a term I borrowed from Rannikko, 2013: 4) of parkour is passing as the discipline gains popularity and visibility and is more organized, the values and subcultural confrontation towards exploitation, regulation and rampant capitalism are still presented as the guiding principles even in an age and environment in which the maturing culture has somewhat moved onwards from the full independence and has taken more professional forms, even engaging in business and overt participation in the public sphere, including city and recreational area planning, social and youth programs and PE classes at schools. It seems that despite all the contradictions and complexities, the ethos voiced is still, regardless of all the reinterpretations, changes and evolutionary steps: *Être fort, pour être utile.*

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## 14. APPENDIX: INTERVIEW EXCERPTS IN FINNISH

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### Excerpt 1.

H: Onko tota toi ranskan kieli sun mielestä niinku tärkeä parkouraaajalle?

PP: No mun mielestä on tärkeää muistaa ne juuret sieltä lajista, niinku tietää mistä se on lähtenyt. Ja kaikki nää termit on niinku alunperin ollu ranskankielisiä, ja nykyäänkin jotkut niistä on pysynyt.

### Excerpt 2.

H: Ja tota sanoit tosta että Ranska on paikkana sellanen henkinen koti, ehkä, tai semmonen hengen, hengen hakemisen paikka, onko sun mielestä— saatoinkin kysyä tän aikasemmin jo— mutta onko siun mielestä esimerkiksi ranskan kielellä ihmisille jotain merkitystä silleen.

JJ: äää, ei emmää näkis sitä semmosen että se olis niinku keskeisenä. On, on semmosia niinku harrastajia, jotka ikäänku korostaa vähän sitä traditiota, niin niille sillä saattaa olla että ne saattaa käyttää niinkö tarkoituksella ranskankielistä termistöä ja tiiän joitakin tyyppisiä jotka on semmosia. Että opetuksessaki käyttää niinku mutta mutta tota aika harvassa ne on.

### Excerpt 3.

JJ: Joskus, joskus niinku kuulee ranskan kieltä käytettävä sillä tavalla, tai siis, tai jos siis jos halitaan antaa kun., osottaa kunnioitusta sinne niinku perstaj. tai sille, sille alulle. Nio sitten saattaa olla että ja jos niitä jossain niinku nimeonomaan sellasella niinku organisaatio. ja semmosella niinku ammattilaistoimijatasolla, että jos ollaan jossain, joss on vaikka joku seminaari tai tämmönen. Niitäkin joskus on. Ni siellä saattaa olla että joku käyttää niinku ranskankielisiä, ranskankielistä sanastoa ihan vaan vaan sen takia että ikäänku vaan pienenä kumarruksena sinne suuntaan.

H: Eli sillä voidaan nähdä sellanen kunnioitusfunktio?

JJ:Joo

### Excerpt 4

PP: Kaikki on.. musta tuntuu että täällä käytetään englantia ja suomea sekasin, ilosesti. Et jotkut niinku semmoset puristin oloset tyypit käyttää välillä ranskankielistä ja käyttää cat leapista termiä "Arm Jump" tai niinku jotenki kunnioittaakseen sinne. Saute de Bras, eli käsihyppy eli kissanloikka eli cat leap eli arm jump.

### Excerpt 5.

PP: Nii, kuka on. Onkse niinku parkourin harrastaja? Mites sit määritellään harastaminen. Vähän sitä jo sivuttiin, että jos sä käyt vaan ohjatuilla tunneilla, jos sä treenaat joka päivä, vai entäs jos sä treenaat kerran kuussa tai kahesti vuodessa. Ootsä harrastaja. Mikä tekee parkouriaan? Onkse ajattelutapa vai se miten sä harjottelet vai missä sä harjottelet vai et– että se niinko, se on vähän niinko loputon suo ja jos pitäs vaikka tutkia jotenki, johon otetaan tietynlaiset harrastajat. ni sit pitäis vetää joku leikkuri sinne. Mutta, jos, mut, mut niinku mulla ei oo onneks semmosta tarvetta, huh–huh. Että mä voin niinku jotenki pitää parkouriajana tai auttaa tai tarjota palveluita niille ihmisille, joita se kiinnostaa, harrastaa ne sitte kerran vuodessa tai ei. On semmosia, jotka, semmosia niinko parkour–tyyppisiä, jotka tyyliin kerran vuodessa käy Supreme Parkour Armageddonissa, eikä juuri muuten harrasta. Onko se väärin? No ei se todellakaan, mun mielestä. Helvetin hienoo että käy sillon.

#### **Excerpt 6.**

JJ: Ei, mun mielestä se ei oo oleellista, se vaan tulee sieltä sitä myöten ku harjottelee, ku harjottelee ja puhuu muiden harrastajien kanssa. Joo, ei oo mitään semmosta että ketää... Iha–ihan vieras ajatus, oli yllättävää ylipäätään, tai ei o tullu mieleenkään, että näin olis, mutta tokihan jossain kamppailulajeissa on iha selkeetä, että opetellaan liikkeitten nimet ja että mitä ne liikkeet on.

#### **Excerpt 7.**

VL: Mmm, tota aspektia en ees oo ajatellu aikasemmin. No enmmä tiiä onko silleen, käytetäänkö sanastoo niinku tiet– harkitusti silleen että se sulkee tai avaa ryhmää. –sit jossai vaiheessa havahtuu että mä puhun tällasilla termeillä mitä nää ihmiset ei oo koskaan kuullukkaan niillä oo mitään hajuakaan mitä nää tarkoittaa. Et ehkä siinä mielessä se on varman poissulkevaa osalle, et jos ei ne niinku oo, niin tiedä sitä. Mut eii siinä sellasta tietosta enkä mä oo huomannu semmosta niinku vaikka Suomessa eri porukoiden välillä semmosta... –

VL: Virallinen taho on yhteyksissä niinku julkisessa, julkisessa elämässä näkyvillä, niin siellä on hyvä että käytetään niinku yhtenäistä suomenkielistä termini-termistöä. Koska se luo semmosta, se on kuitenkin lajin semmosen professionalismmin näytämistä, tai semmonen, että se oo semmosta niinkun et se on hyvää sille julki-tunnetuuden lisäämiselle. Mutt mulle on sit ihan sama mitä ihmiset käyttää omassa harjottelussaan. Mutta ehkä se menee niinku astetta pitemmälle vielä myös, et sit ku sä oot ohjaaja, tavallaan niinku, et vaikka sä et oo jonkun yhdistyksen virallisena julki... et oo niinku kertomassa julkisesti asioista. Mut jos sä oot aina nii on vähä niinku edustustehtävissä, nii pitämässä lajiesittelyä tai muuta, nii kyl mä ainaki ite sellasesa tilanteessa kiinnitän enemmän huomiota siihen kieleen mitä mä käytän lajista. Ja mun mielestä nin myös pitäisi tehdä. Että sillon vaan käytetään sitä suomenkielistä terminologiaa. Tai jos käytetään vieraskielistä, niin sille pitää antaa vähän taustoja.

#### **Excerpt 8.**

JJ: Suomi on musta aika poikkeuksellinen että täällä käytetään suomenkielistä ja, ja ei täällä paljon käytettykään, muuten ku joissakin liikkeen nimissä, mutta me ollaan vähän viljelty sitä ja mä, mä oon saattanu siihen asenneilmastoon vähän vaikuttaa. Että, kyllä me puhuttiin meidän ohjaajille jossain vaiheessa, että saatte käyttää mitä haluatte, mutta olkaa tietosia, että ny on ikäänku olemassa

suomenkielistä. Ja, ja, tokihan, sillä vaikutetaan aika pitkälle jos me puhutaan lastenryhmille ja nuortenryhmille –anteeks–suomenkielisellä termistöllä, niin tota, niin niin sit se alkaa, ne vie sitä eteenpäin ja ennen pitkää on sukupolvi, joka käyttää suomenkielistä termistöä. Mä oon vähän, en nyt patriootti, mutta vähän semmonen niinku, et tavallaan jos me ei sepitetä suomeen uusia sanoja ja tehä suomenkielistä termistöä, niin sitten ei jatkossa ainakaan ole, ja on tietty, tietty kielen osa–alue, josta ei suomeks puhuta. Se on tietenki, mä oon suomen kielestä valmistunu maisteri, ja vähän tälleen, en, en asenteellinen, mutta tiettyssä mielessä silleen, että ois sääli jos, jos kielestä leikkautuu osa–alueita pois sen takia että niit ei vaan sinne, ei oo olemassa sanastoa.

### Excerpt 9.

JJ: Sit on, sit on semmosia niinku– tavallaan et joskus on ehkä tehty jotain sillo alkuaikoina tehty jotain, mikä nykyään koetaan niinku ikäänku typeräksi tai jollai tavalla sellaseks niinku et "toi on banaalia, ei tolleen enää", ja et sit semmosia toisissa lajeissa tyypillisiä, niinku viakka joku gräbit. Ja niitä ehkä alkuaikoina parkouraaajat niinku teki. Tehdessään ylitystä niin ottaa gräbin johonki varpasiin tai nilkkaan. Nykyään sitä pidetään aivan typeränä, jostai syystä. Mä josku teetä niitä tahallaan, siis silleen, että musta on jotenki niinku ärsyttävää, että, että joku, et se kulttuuri menee semmoseen, että ikäänku jonkinlaista tapaa tehdä jotain asiaa ni ruvetaan dissaamaan tai tulee sellanen normi.

### Excerpt 10.

VL: – –Mulle, mulle tavallaan, jos mä käyn vaikka capoeiraamassa, alotan jonku uuden harrastuksen, niin sekin on tavallaan niinku parkouria joo, koska mä ajattelen että se kehittää niitä samoi taitoja. Ja sitte lopullisesti, öö, ku puhutaan liikkumisen taidosta, niin, niin sieltä häviää tämmöset eri lajien, eri lajien tavallaan liikkeet ja tekniikat ja tyylit ja ne on vaan eri menetelmiä saavuttaa se sama taito, jossa loppujen lopuks sitten kaikki nimet häviää semmosessa suurmestarivaiheessa. Hehehe –

### Excerpt 11.

JJ: —Niin, niin, joo, et jokainen, merkkejähän ne tiettyssä mielessä on ja varsinki toisille harrastajille. Ja nimenomaan tällasta, että mitkä liikkeet valitsee on jonkunlainen semmone niinku kannotto ja ehkä viesti.

H: : Just tossa sanoit, että jossai videoissa rupee näkymään hirveesti samaa, nii ruvetaan tietosesti välttämään esimerkiksi etten, etn jämähdä. Onkse ajatus vähän "etten jämähdä" nyt sit siihen mikä on nyt se.

JJ: Joo, joo ehkä. Ja ois, se ois hirmu hauskaa kerätä niinku, tiettyltä eritellyiltä ajanjaksoilta videoita ja kattoo, mikä siellä toistuu ja että miten ne, ne virtaukset siellä menee. Koska niissä selvästi on niinku, selvästi on semmosta semmosia niinku et jotkut onnistuu tiettyyn aikana ja sit niistä mennään pois tiettyyn suuntaan.

### Excerpt 12.

JJ: --mikä on tietysti hirmu positiivista, on semmonen... (PORA), et, vo... Ootellaan nyt toi pora (H: hehe). Et vaikk ahaetaan tota, haetaan äärirajaa, ja mennään sinne niinku et, ja liikeyhdsitelmissä mennään niinkö ihan sinne semmoseen, että tavallaan hengenvaaran rajoille. Mut sit semmonen selkee, yltiöpäinen riskin ottaminen, se tuomitaan melkeen niinku käytännössä aina. Et siitä ei, et ikäänku se että pistää jonku coolin, hyvän suorituksen, joka on hyvällä tekniikalla ja vahvasti tehty, niinku jossa on ikäänku riskit on olemassa ja kaikki tajuaa sen riskin, mutta se on hallittu niin, siitä, siitä ikäänku saa kiitosta tuolla netissä. Ja eri, eri somessa, someissa. Mutta sitte, sitte jos joku tekee jotain älytöntä, se, se on aika hiuksenhieno se raja, että millon se on älytöntä, mut jotenki aina hahmottaa, että toi ei nyt oo ton tekemisensä tasalla. Et se tekee jotain, mitä se ei hallitse, niin se aika nopeesti ruvetaan sit niinku, sen, se tuomitaan—

Tietty voin, hyvä esimerkki oli semmone, joku kaveri teki semmosen niinku dive-rollin iha helvetin korkeelta. Ja silleen niinku käytännössä melkeen mätkähti selälleen ja nousi sieltä ja sitte ne onnessaan siellä pogoili kun ne oli selvinny siitä. Ni se, sitä jaeltiin ja, tuolla Facebookissa ainaki, ja kaikki oli silleen et, niinku, et "ei vittu". Että, että nyt... Sillä tavalla et ihan jotenki käsittämätön juttu, että se ylipäätään niinku sai tehtyä sen, elävänä tai loukkaantumatta, mutta, mutta silti niinku kaikki tajus, että toi oli nyt niinku sitä vääränlaista, tietyl- tietyllä tavalla vääränlaista riskinottoa.

#### **Excerpt 13.**

VL: Mun käsityksen mukaan ni, enemmän se riippuu siitä, ei siitä mitä sä sanot että sä teet vaan siitä että mitä, öö, niinku yksilöstä. Että on vaan yksilöitä, jotka treenaa vastuuttomasti ja yksilöitä, jotka treenaa vastuullisesti. Ja mun silmissä mä arvostan niitä jotka treenaa vastuullisesti. Silleen että ne huomioi oman kroppansa ja pysyy terveenä ja vielä viiskymppisinä on tuolla niinku, koska ei tätä tehdä sillee niinku muutama vuos ja väläytetä hienoja temppuja ja saaha mainetta ja kunniaa ja sitte hävitään jonneki tuntemattomuuteen, vaan tavoitteena on se, että se on kuitenkin niinku koko elämän mittane niinku prosessi se.

#### **Excerpt 14.**

JJ: Mut sit taas niinku, sit taas niinku tavallaan ulospäin ja semmosille uusille se on, se on hirmu kohteliasta ja sellasta et se taas ikäänku vaihtelee se , mutta aika huomaavaista ja semmosta, et siinä ehkä jokainen hahmottaa että, ja on mokaillu jossain vaiheessa, ja, ja se onki, onki hienoa tässä, että kun tehään koko ajan ikäänku luodaan uutta ja uusia haasteita niin , niin niitä epäonnistumisia tulee myös sitä mukaa koko ajan li- ni sit siitä joutuu olemaan vähän nöyrä.

#### **Excerpt 15.**

VL: Mä oon viettäny Tanskassa pitemmän jakson, neljä kuukautta, semmosessa sisäoppilaitoksessa, missä pysty opiskelemaan parkouria aineena tai niinku lajina. Se oli urheilupuisto siis. Ja sitte mää oon käyny Pariisissa treenaamassa, Ranskassa. Ja sitte Saksassa. Ja, Norjassa. Norjassa, siinä ne taitaa olla.

On ollu, tosi paljonki. Esimerkiksi sen neljän kuukauden Tanskanpätkä oli semmonen iinku, semmonen breaking point, tai ei niinku breaking point huonossa mielessä, vaan jotenki muutos niinku sitä ny sanotaan. Siellä tota, joo. Tavallaan ku harjotteli niiden kanssa, niin



imi vaikutteita siitä harjittelukulttuurista, jossa korostu vähän eri asiat ku mitä täällä Suomessa oli saanu tota oppinsa alkuun.

**Excerpt 16.**

VL: Minkä sanoin kaupungin! Joo, mä mietin kanssa, muut oli maita, mutta Pariisi piti, no se on erityisluontonen, niin siis olihan se. Siihen liitty aika paljon latausta sinne mennessä. Meillä oli itse asiassa oppaana siellä yks näistä alkuperäisistä harrastajista. (H: Aaa, joo.) Joo, niin niin, tota.

H: Jos saan kysyä, niin kuka oli oppaana?

VL: Laurent Piemontesi

H: Ahaa.

VL: Oli siellä meidän kanssamme haastamassa, niin siihen liitty sellanen erityisjuttu että sai tutustua siihen ihmiseen ja mennä sen kanssa sellasille spoteille, joita on nähny joissain videoissa kauan sitten ni, onhan ... siinä on semmonen pieni fanipoika-meininki kanssa mukana, mutta koska se oli varmaan intensiivisin harjotteluviikko mitä on ikinä tehny, niin silleen ylitti itsensä monessa suhteessa. Niin kyllähän se oli silleen tosi vahva kokemus.

**Excerpt 17.**

JJ: Se on, se oli, se on semmone... Miten mä sen nykyään näkisin, ni se on semmonen no, mä en tiedä onko "reliikki" vähän semmonen huono sana, mutta vähä väärän sävynen, mutta siis se on, se on tota, siellä vähän, se on semmonen henkinen, henkinen jonkunlainen et sieltä lähetään hakemaan senmmosta niinku -- Mutta et joo, ei Ranska, Ranska oo sillä lailla, se.. siellä käydään niillä, niillä legendaarisilla ensimmäisillä spoteilla monesti treenamassa että ihan vaan ikäänku, ikäänku saa, saa jotenki sitä henkee sieltä mut kyl se niinku, kyllä se niinku on muuttunu se ikäänku parkour-matkailu toisenlaiseksi. Täältä, täältä esimerkiks nuoret miehet käy aika paljon tuolla Espanjassa. Barcelona on semmonen, missä meiltä käy paljon väkeä. Ja Saksa ja Tanska ja Britannia on kans ihan vahva semmonen.

**Excerpt 18.**

PP:

No, öö, onhan sillä mulle merkitystä, totta kai, sillä on niinku ranskalaisilla parkouraajilla, ja varmasti sitä kautta sillä ranskalaisella kulttuurilla, miten se siihen onkaan vaikuttanut, en, en tiedä. Mutta kyllähän sitä on inspiroiduttu siellä, kun on treffattu ranskalaisia parkouraajia. Ensimmäisen kerran Lontoossa näin Thomas des Bois'n ja, ja tota sitä kautta tutustuin muihinkin ranskalaisiin, ja ne oli 2015 Suomessa oli jo joitakin vierailulla, ni kylähän ne reenas eri tavalla, ne, ne reenas ihan helvetin kovaa. Ne teki niinko, ja Yamakasit tekee edelleen, semmosia ihan päättömiä lihaskestävyysreenejä, niissä niinko ei oo niinko liikuntabiologisesti mitään pointtia. Mun mielestä. Ja monien liikuntabiologiien mielestä, he. Mutta tota, ne opettaa sinniä. Ja tuleehan niistä erityinen fiilis, ku sää veät puol kilometriä kissakävelyä. Tulee, että porukalla tehtiin tämmönen. Ni onhan siinä meininkiä, kyllähän se luo, luo yhteenkuuluviasuuden tunnetta. Ja mitä vielä. Ja sitten, se, sitten siel oli vielä tosi, kyllähän siellä oli treenattu jo kymmenen vuotta, ni siellä oli ihan järkyttävän taitavia

kavereita verrattuna muuhun maailmaan. Se, se, se niinko se kerta, kun Lontoon jameihin tuli Thomas, eli Toma, ensimmäistä kertaa. Ni, se räjäytti jengin pään siälä. Koska, se tek- se teki semmosia juttuja, mitä kukaan muu ei tehny vielä. Tehtiin ne sitten kohta perässä, joo, mutta se oli selvästi meitä niinko ede- edellä monessa asiassa. Ni, ni- ky- kyllä niillä ranskalaisilla on, on ollu tosi iso vaikutus. Ei enää, samalla tavalla, koska muualla on jo niinko tosi taitavia ja sitte nei ei oo koskaan jotenki organisoitunu hyvin. Mä en tiedä, että onko se niitten niitten tota, luonteessa vai mikä siinä on, mutta ne ei oo ollu siinä jotenki hyviä.

Excerpt 19.

JJ: Meille on tullu joskus semmosia niinku avoimen narkästyneitä, ellei jopa vihamielisiä sähköposteja semmosilta nuorilta, ikäänku patrioottisilta parkour-harrastajilta, et me pilataan tämä homma. Et me tehdään työtä joka jotenki, ikäänku, ei oo tarkasti määritely, mutta me vaan jotenki saastutetaan tämä, silleen että kun me tuodaan tämä tavallisille ihmisille ja ei, siinä ei pysy se kulttuuri ja henki, vaikka, vaikka me niinku tietosesti pidetään sitä yllä, parkourin luovaa henkeä ja avoimuutta ja sosiaalisuutta. Mutta jotenki, jotenki tota, se tuntu vähän yllättävältä, että semmosia hyökkäyksiä tuli, mutta mutta tota, mutta kaikile, mutta niill eon sijansa, ja se ei tee lajille huonoa, että sit harrastajia on enemmän ja että se on ikäänkuin jostain julkiseltakin taholta tunnustettua, ninku se nykyään alkaa olla. Ja tää viimesin tutkimus, jossa kysyttiin lapsilta, satatuhatta vastaa että parkouria. Niin, niin tota, siihen ei, niinkö tavallaan, sit jos me ei tehdä sitä ikäänkuin jotka ollaan tavallaan tultu täältä lajikulttuurista, niin sit sen tekee joku muu, jolla ei oo niin paljon tietoa ja kokemusta siitä, siitä kulttuurista, joka pystyis ikäänku ujuttaman sen oikeen, "oikeen" niisanotusti "oikeen" tavan, tai siis sen alkuperäsen tavan ajatella. Et sit se voi olla joku, joku kuntokeskuryrittäjä tai joku muu, joka ikäänku sanoo että tossa on markkinarako, mää rupeen tekeen tota, ku ei sitä kukan tee ja otan sieltä sen rahan pois. Eli ajattelee sitä vähän toiselta kannalta. Me halutaan pitää yllä kulttuuria ja tietynlaista kulttuuria—

Excerpt 20.

PP: Mä yritän, mä en tiä ss, siis täähän on siis tunnereaktio, tätä on paska avata, tai siis, paska jotenki järkeistää. Ku se, jotenki se, ku, kul- ehkä siin o jotain semmosta niinko siihen liittyy vähän semmosta niinko mulle, mulle semmosta siihen elämäntapaan semmosta niinko ihannointia. Tai semmosta teinipoikien semmosta, että "Älä tuu mulle huutelee, tää on elämäntapa". Hehehehe, et C'mon! hehe Ja, ja muutenki semmosta että että, eh- ehkä siihe liittyy jo, just jotain semmosta alakulttuurijuttua, että meiän pit- me ollaan näitä, nii, nii me me halutaan kuulua johonki sen kuulumisen takia, tai jotai, jotai negatiivisia konnotaatioita mulla tulee siitä niinku elämäntapa- asiasta. Ja semmosta niinko joutavanpäivästä itsensä tai asioiden määrittelyä. Että. Oo mitä oot ja hommaa se itsetuntos jostai muualta. Heheheh. Että tarviiko sitä niinko sit niin määritellä.

Excerpt 21.

PP: Joo, joo, joo, mutta jos sä sanot että mä oon parkouraja, se on mun elämäntapa, niin sä määrittelet vähän helvetisti.

**Excerpt 22.**

PI: Joo, jotkut harrastajat aikanaan kun se oli vielä tosi pieni juttu ni sitten muutaman vuoden päästä niinkun lopettivat koska se ei ollut enää niin "underground"-juttu vaan se oli jo niin suuressa tietoisuudessa et se oli jo meinstriimiä ettei se ollu niiden mielestä kuulua enää.

**Excerpt 23.**

H: Mm, hjo, joo. Joo. Mites, sä sanoit tossa että Suomessa on tollanen vastuullinen harjoittelutapa, ettei rikota paikkoja, ei julkisia paikkoja eikä omia paikkoja. Nii, tota, onko niinkun, parkourissahan hyvin usein annetaan kuva sellaselta, tai varsinkin mediassa elää kuva sellasena kapinallisena lajina. Nii onko se sun mielestä kapinaa?

VL: Tietynmielistä kapinaa. Ööö, kyllähän se on ihan niinku sen julkisen tilan käytön kapinaa. Mutta mun mielestä sen vahvuus on siinä, että se ei oo sellasta aggressiivista kapinaa. Vaan se on semmosta voimauttavaa kapinaa ja semmosta niinku vapauttavaa kapinaa. Ja siinä mielessä sen voi nähdä niinku myös koko länsimaalaisen yhteiskunnan niinku semmosta strukturalismia vastaan kapinoivana. Ihan sillä että, että ei tarvita, niinku hirveitä puitteita harrastaa liikuntaa, vaan sitä voi tehdä iha missä halutaan, ihan omilla ehdoilla, ei oo sääntöjä, ei oo tavallaan oikeeta ja väärää. Nii, nii, kyllähän se sitä vastaan on kapinaa. Ja sieltähän se on myös syntyny. Siltä pohjalta.

**Excerpt 24.**

PI: Ja sitten kyl Suomesta löytyy vielä sellasia tyyppejä ketkä niinkun treenaa ihan vaan niinkun omissa oloissaan, ei niinku hakeudu muitten kanssa, ja niinkun eivät pidä tällasesta järjestäytyneestä toiminnasta. Mutta, mutta niitä tuntuu olevan varsin vähän.

**Excerpt 25.**

JJ: se on niinku jotenki surullista, kun lähituttavapiiri on täynnä niitä tarinoita, että se, se, liikunnan ilo on tapettu siellä niinku jo sen ikäsenä. Ni, ni se ei niinku, ja sit vöyhkätään, että kansanterveys on surkeessa jamassa, ja tulee kuluja ja sit ku, et ku sille pitäis keskeisesti tehdä jotaki. Nyt on ihan hyvä tendenssi, nyt ollaan menossa hyvään suuntaan ja se on niinku ymmärretty ja, ja just tommosia, ku se iso tutkimus tuli, että nuorilta kysyttiin, mitä ne haluaa, ni, ni tota, se on oikee suunta, että kysytään että mihin, mihin te haluatte k- tai millä tavalla te haluatte liikkua ja ja mitä te toivotte. Nii tota, se on, se on hyvä juttu mutta, joo. Jos manifestiin vielä palataan niin ehkä, ehkä myös tuo että, että ois niinku vapaasti kaikkien saatavilla, ja ja se olis niinku, siinä säilytettäis semmone, semmonen rento, luova, kilpailematon meininki, meininki siinä. Liikkumisessa.

**Excerpt 26.**

JJ: Ja sit ehkä se, mikä parkourissa -toki sitä vastaan ollaan sit kamppail- niinku se kamppailu on hävitty jo, mutta tää siis, ku kilpailu ei oo kuulunu ja kilpailutoiminta organisoitunu, (H: Olinki kysymäsäs tosta ku sanoit että tämä on urheilua.) Organisoitunu kilpailutoiminta ei oo perinteisesti kuulunu lajiin. Sittemmin se on siihen tullu, ja on ja.. on isoja, isoja rahavoimia jotka, jotka sen sinne tuo ja mahdollisesti ihan niinku tonne niinku olympiatasolle—

-- Mutta sis, tot silleen että, et ne, et ne hakee sinne uusia avauksia ja uusia lajeja, ja sit jos siinä ei kilpailla ja se ei sovi siihen, niin sit siitä tehdään semmonen, et se sopii. Ja siinon vähän sit, siin ei auta ku vikistä. Joko nousta barrikadeille tai olla mukana. Silleen et yrittää säilyttää mahdollisimman paljon sitä periaatetta, mikä mikä niinku... Tehä mitä on tehtävissä -- .

### Excerpt 27.

H: Mites sitte vielä, siis tää liittyy tavallaan ehkä enemmän lajin taas määrittelyyn tai muuhun, ehkä identiteettiinkin toki, mutta tota, onko parkour urheilua?

PP: Eee–ei.

H: Ei?

PP: Jos pitäis vastata joo tai ei niin sanosin ei. Jos pitäisi analysoida pitemmälle niin niin voisin sanoa et se on liikuntaa. Se on liikkumista. Mut siinä se minkä mä haluan sulkee siitä pois niinko jotenki eettisistä syistä on se kilpailu. Niin, siinä ei kilpailla. Jollain tapaa jos näin halutaan niin liittyy urheilun määritelmiin, et sitä harjoitellaan sen takia että ollaan parempia kuin muut. Mä haluaisin sen meidän, meidän parkouristamme pois. Koska se siinä mun mielestä on hyvää. Tuleeko parkour–kilpailuita joskus? No Freerunning–kilpailuita on ollu. Kansainvälistä parkour–liittoa ei olla saatu aikaseks. Joka, jonka vois sitten Olympia–komiteaan tulla parkour–jäseneks ja sinne ottaa kilpailut. Jos sinne tulee kilpailut niin niin siin on paljon huonoa. Paljo hyvää Ja jos sinne tulee kilpailut nii nii mieluummin mä olisin tekemässä niitä hyvällä ja hyvät arvot omaavalla parkour–porukalla niitä kilpailuita suunnittelemassa kuin antasin ne jollekki huithapelille tehtäväks. Koska ne voi olla niinku, vaikka ne onki kilpailut, ni se voi olla joko niitä hyviä arvoja vaaliva ees jossain mielessä tai ei ollenkaan.

H:Tavallaan silloin se jos mennään siihen että kilpillaan ni silloin se kilpailu pitäis olla niiden käsissä jotka tavallan tuneen sen lajin tai ainaki jota todella tuntevat lajin, et se ei ole vain ulkopuolinen?

PP: Niin. Niin, tällaista.

### Excerpt 28.

JJ: -- ja se ei tee lajille huonoa, että sit harrastajia on enemmän ja että se on ikään kuin jostain julkiseltakin taholta tunnustettua, niinku se nykyään alkaa olla. Ja tää viimesin tutkimus, jossa kysyttiin lapsilta, satatuhatta vastaa että parkouria –

### Excerpt 29.

PP: Mutta alussa Suomessaki parkour–skenessä aika vahva semmonen kaupan– kaupallisen toiminnan vastustus. Ja, ja tota, mikä on tavallaan hihan fine. Ja se niinko on erittäin hyvä mun mielestä siinä mielessä, että jos joku lähtee väittämään, että tarviit nää kengät että sä voit parkourata, ni sehän on ihan paskaa. Ja semmoselle pitää näyttää keskisormea. Et, et näin se menee. Parkourilla on siinä mielessä jalansija tässä, että et sä tarvi mitään, et sitä voi tehdä. Sä et tarvi harjoituspaikkaa, et harjoitusvuoroo, et harjoitusvälineitä. Et tiettyä porukkaa, et valmentajaa. Ni kukapa siinä voi tulla sanomaan, että "hei, sun pitää maksaa mulle rahaa, että sä voit tätä treenata". Voidaan tarjota palveluita, jos ihmiset niitä haluaa ostaa. Mutta sitä,

tavallaan, sä et voi sitä läpeensä kaupallistaa koskaan, koska sä et tarvi lumilautaa siihen.”

**Excerpt 30.**

Parkour sanana. Se oli heti alussa valinta et sitä me ei haluta kääntää. Se oli ihan sen takia, et sit se lois vääriä mielikuvia. Et mikä tahansa se mielikuva ois, minkä se luo, ni sit, se menis vähän pieleen. Et jos se olis vaikka "Katuhyppely" tai "Kujajuoksu", näitä miettiin joskus. Ni mielikuvat menis, menis vituilleen.

H: Niin, aivan.

PP: Et se, se haluttiin pitää parkourina. Vaikka se on niinko hankala sana ja tai, tai vierasperäinen sana ja sit se ei niinko jää ihmisten mieleen välttämättä kovin helposti. Et sit, mo- monesti, ei ehkä enää, mut ni- joku aika sitte vielä ku sano parkour ni ihmiset oli sillee "mitä" ja ku vähän selitti ne oli sillee "Aa, nii joo se." Et se nimi ei ollu jääny mieleen. Se on tavallaan niinko, vaikka toi Tervon Erkki joka on siis telinevoimistelun ää,miten se nyt sanois, kansanomaistamiselle tehny urauurtavaa työtä, et mite s- miten sitä voi sitte harrastajaryhmissä reenata, miten kehitysvammaset voi reenata, sehän on ihan maailman huippu siinä. Ni se joskus koetti meille tolkuttaa että "Teiän pitää nyt keksiä sille joku niinko, niinko, vetävä nimi." Joku "Street Acrobatics" tai "Katuakrobatia" tai mitä ikinä, että "te saatte niinku sitä helpommin läpi", mutta ei, ei, ei me sit jotenki koskaan haluttu sit siihen lähteä. Se, se oli jotenki alusta asti tiukka periaatteellinen linjanveto, mikä on ollu mun mielestä tosi onnistunu.

H: Kyllä. Ja samallahan se sitoo, tavallaan, näin ku mä lähden yhdistelemään asioita, niin voisko sanoa, että se samalla yhdistää sen osaks sitä niinku sen tavallaan lajin -parkourin- jatkumoa niin, että se on selkeesti nimellä sama ilman että sille on toinen nimi. Oottekste, ettei tarvi ajatella että onks tää sitä vai mitä tää on.

PP: Ehkä myös sitä, mut sit toki siin on myös semmosia niinku vittumaisiakin puolia. Et vaikka Tanskan jätkät puhuu Street Movementista, nykyään se on ehkä se niitten firma. Mut ne oli jossai vaiheessa iha tyytyväisiä, ku ne käytti sitä, ku David Bellellä oli jotai omistusaikkeitä parkour-sanaa kohtaan ja niin edelleen. Että sit sekin, sekin on tottakai niinkun tommosia, tommosia niinku tekijänoikeudellisia haasteita laittanu, minkä valitsitkaan. Joo, jao joku väitti omistavansa parkour-sanana, mutta se ei koskaan pystyny mence läpi, koska se oli jo yleistyny niin paljon, että se koettiin niinko yleissanaksi, eikä sanaksi, mitä joku voisi omistaa.

**Excerpt 31.**

JJ: Mut joo, se semmonen kilpailumattomuus ja semmonen luova, luova liikkuminen siinä mielessä, että kaikkien liike on yhtä tärkeetä ja yhtä merkityksellistä, ni se on se, siihen mä ihastuin ite tässä lajissa. Että jotenki kun sinne jamipaikalle tulee kuka tahansa, ni se

otetaan siihen mukaan ja se sen tekeminen on myös silleen että--- tokihan siellä niitä kovimpia jätkiä, niin toki ne saa eniten huomiota ja niitten tekemistä katotaan eniten, mutta kaikkien tekeminen, jokainen saa treenata ja, ja, ja jokaisen saavutuksista ollaan innoissaan. Niinku yhdessä, ei silleen, että toisen onnistuminen on toisel- toiselta pois. Ja se...

: Meillä sit, se, se , meillä on tai to- seuratoiminnassa on sit taas se, että kun se on niin keskiestä se kilpaileminen, et sit siellä kuusvuotiatia lapsia laitetaan riviin, ja otetaan siitä puolet, että "okei, te tuutte kilparyhmään, tai et teihin me ruvetaan panostaan. Te saatte vielä harrastaa meillä ja smaksaa harrastusmaksuja, mutta ei meitä oikein kiinnosta teidät muut".

### **Excerpt 32.**

JJ: . Mut sit taas niinku, sit taas niinku tavallaan ulospäin ja semmosille uusille se on, se on hirvu kohteliasta ja sellasta et se taas ikäänku vaihtelee se , mutta aika huomaavaista ja semmosta, et siinä ehkä jokainen hahmottaa että, ja on mokaillu jossain vaiheessa, ja, ja se onki, onki hienoa tässä, että kun tehään koko ajan ikäänku luodaan uutta ja uusia haasteita niin , niin niitä epäonnistumisia tulee myös sitä mukaa koko ajan li- ni sit siitä joutuu olemaan vähän nöyrä. Ja tietynlainen semmonen nöyryys, nöyryys kuuluu siihen filosofiaankin. Et semmonen uho, ikäänku semmonen uho-kielenkäyttö ja diskurssi ei kyllä parkourissa ole tyypillistä-- tota, että ehkä vähän jossain, joissain noissa idästä tulevissa semmosissa videopätkissä semmosta tämmöstä, että taputellaan rintaa ja, ja näytetään voitonmerkkiä, mutta ei se kyllä tyypillistä oo, että.

### **Excerpt 33.**

VL: "nyt mä etin spotin missä mä voin tehdä täyellisen kolmekuuskyt rocket vaultin", nii sithän se kuulostaa joltain skeittaamiselta tai lumilautailulta, jotka sitten mun mielestä ainakaan mulle ole pointtina siinä harjoittelussa.

### **Excerpt 34.**

PP: Joo, joo, joo, mutta jos sä sanot että mä oon parkouraja, se on mun elämäntapa, niin sä määrittelet vähän helvetisti.

### **Excerpt 35.**

PP: On semmosia, jotka, semmosia niinko parkour-tyyppejä, jotka tyyliin kerran vuodessa käy Supreme Parkour Armageddonissa, eikä juuri muuten harrasta. Onko se väärin? No ei se todellakaan, mun mielestä. Helvetin hienoo että käy sillon.