Remarks from a lost engagement with the engaging ordinariness of parkour

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Introduction

Before becoming lost, the 'lost ethnography' discussed in this chapter first began to materialise during my doctoral fieldwork; a study concerned with the accomplishment of place in and through everyday activities. Walking through Cardiff Bay, in September 2008, my attention was snagged by a group of five young men gathered on the boardwalk, at the head of the remaining brick dockwall; a remnant from an industrial past rapidly being forgotten, that lines the somewhat predictable regenerated leisure and tourist seafront. Two of the lads were stood atop of the old dock wall, whilst the other two, positioned at the lower level proceeded to perform a series of acrobatic flips off of the four to five metre high wall. A fifth was holding a video camera. There was something in the coordination and form of the movements that displayed they clearly weren't just 'mucking about'. The manoeuvres themselves were impressive enough for me to go over and begin (and record) a conversation. After the usual awkward introduction that I'd been developing, I asked them if they'd mind talking to me about what they were up to. The response from the 'leader' was striking:

> The idea is to flow over the city like a landscape, you know, to move like water.

The skilled practice, the alternative use of materials in public space, and the lay philosophical depth of the account for that activity, were more than enough to catch my interest and, despite being in the midst of doctoral study, I'd decided pretty much there and then that a study of parkour would make for a decent post-doctoral project. On completion of my thesis, a proposal was submitted, receiving positive reviews but, ultimately, no funding. The study ended up, like the other ethnographies in this book, never happening. In this chapter I outline what it was that I supposed might be interesting about such a study, what it might have contributed to the sociology of embodied practices and, methodologically, *how* it was that I intended to go about such a study.

It is, of course, somewhat strange to write about methods in this way, a kind retrospective prospective account, but this chapter serves, primarily, as a means to draw attention to the worth of a fine-grained 'ethnomethodological ethnography' of parkour (or indeed any other such social practice) in its own right. I point to some of ways in which the ethnography of skilled practices equates to more than the sum of the parts. I discuss what such a study would contribute to the dominant understanding of the social life and everyday mobility practices of cities. I also, however, indicate and attempt to avoid some theoretical temptations that may well result in the ethnography 'losing its phenomena' (Garfinkel, 2002; Tolmie and Rouncefield, 2016). That is, I want to discuss, if not demonstrate, here, what it is for the analyst to remain with what people *actually do* in order to bring off whatever activity they happen to be engaged in. In sum, I aim to give a sense what was lost along with the ethnography of the then emerging practice of Parkour.

The chapter is organised in four substantive sections, followed by a concluding discussion. The first provides an ethnographic gloss of parkour and a critical discussion of studies of parkour that *did* happen. I review, briefly, some of the insights produced in and through these theoretically oriented studies and point to how something was still lost despite them

taking place. The second section moves toward outlining what some of the insights that were lost through this ethnomethodologically oriented ethnography *not* happening. In this section, I take up some of the materials – interview-talk in particular – that were resources for existing studies and reconsider them not as insights in to experience or the practice itself but as situated accounts. Here, drawing on Harvey Sacks' (1995[I]) treatment of the 'revolutionary category' of Hotrodding, I discuss the ways in which practitioners 'do' Parkour talk in displaying membership. A third, extended, section moves from talk to various organisational aspects of parkour as a settinged activity. Here I discuss various potential elements of a study of parkour 'from within' and describe some of the orienting questions and interests of the lost inquiry in to the collaborative accomplishment of parkour. This includes a discussion of the potential of the lost ethnography as regards an early engagement with the practice of filming and editing of Parkour and the online sharing and discussion of materials in an online Parkour community. It may seem hard to recall, but video cameras weren't that commonplace at that time, and smartphones were yet to emerge. So this lost ethnography also formed an opportunity to study the adoption and incorporation of web 2.0 digital technology in to youth practices and the collaborative work present in members' observations and analysis of the practice. The chapter concludes with a summary of these avenues of inquiry and closes with a plea for the continued recognition of basic social inquiry and ethnography.

The chapter is an argument for the recognition of the continued role and contribution of basic social inquiry; a contribution often devalued in the context of contemporary pressures upon social science researchers to prove the 'value' of their work. The opportunity to revisit the lost Parkour ethnography is, then, both an outlet, nearly a decade later, for that initial interest and as a critical engagement with some pervading themes and emerging contours of social science research. Above all, I intend the chapter to offer a small encouragement to those starting out on a career in ethnography to have a confidence in pursuing research born of intellectual curiosity.

2. An introduction to Parkour

Parkour involves traversing the urban environment in as fluid a manner as possible, making full use of the material urban environment in the performance of a variety of gymnastic and dynamic manoeuvres. The name itself is a derivative of the French 'parcourir' meaning 'to run through'. Parkour can be understood to be a product of its environment and emerges in the banlieu's of Paris. The architecture of these spaces, memorably providing the 'gritty' suburban backdrop for films such as *la Haine*, is appropriated or transformed as a landscape for and by parkour practitioners or 'traceurs'. Indeed, parkour is widely credited as the invention of David Belle and Sebastien Foucan who made use of the stairwells and walkways of the banlieus to develop what later became parkour and freerunning. From these beginnings, parkour emerges as a 'new' practice that fairly quickly gains global recognition. In the UK, parkour (and Belle and Foucan) feature in television adverts and idents, a documentary called 'Jump London' and a follow-up 'Jump Britain', and the opening sequence to the James Bond film *Casino Royale*.

The visual appeal of parkour – both in terms of the movements themselves and parkour's 'edgy' yet acceptably safe and consumable urban imagery – found it steadily growing in visibility both through mainstream media. This popularity was undoubtedly boosted by the convergence of increasingly affordable and portable digital cameras and the

emergence of 'web 2.0' social media sites such as YouTube on which users could upload and share their own content. As parkour grew in presence and popularity across the world, it became increasingly commercialised (see Mould, 2009), largely through the emergence of 'free-running' which spawned a computer game, various clothing ranges, free-running specific trainers made by well known sportswear brands, and a world championship in which free-runners competed on a stage. It was the original imagery of parkour, however, of 'Jump Britain' and other such films that appear to have captured the social scientific imagination. The dynamic and fluid movement of 'traceurs' across the urban landscape, often artistically shot, with the nimble organic movements of the practitioners juxtaposed with the grey mechanical city seems to offer a new way of seeing the urban – a rehumanising of the landscape and of city rhythms (Stavrides, 2013), a traversing of obstacles and thresholds and of a seemingly endless unfolding of latent possibility.

It is tempting to write of parkour in this theoretical register, as is the case with many other urban practices. Indeed, the practice itself and participants talk of the practice, makes parkour an appealing case through which sociologists, human geographers, psychologists, and others might explore their various interests. Quite ahead of any engagement in the field, one might propose all sorts of analytic and theoretical interests that might be pursued – what would a rhythmanalysis of parkour reveal about the dominant and liminal spaces, mobilities, and temporalities of the polyrhythmic city? What does parkour teach us about embodied habitus? About risk and masculinity or 'edgework'? What of the political economy of space, of mobility? What does parkour enable us to say of imagined futures and design of cities that are more devoted to play than to work? Many of these theoretically appropriate yet entirely conjured themes have been pursued in the literature on parkour. There are other more standard sociological questions too; what type of people or personalities are drawn to risky activities such as parkour (Merrit and Tharp, 2013), how is the interactive and embodied experience of parkour framed and narrated by practitioners (Clegg and Butryn, 2012), what does parkour teach us about fear and emotion (Saville, 2008), about urban space and the event (Mould, 2009)? These are, of course, valid questions for the professional social scientist who have the interests that professional social scientists have – an interest with orders that are seen to surround, frame, constrain or enable, or be reconfigured or exposed by a given practice.

Some of these questions draw obvious parallels with the well-known writings of Ian Borden (2001) on skateboarding as a cultural practice and critique of capitalist dominated architecture and urban space. Skateboarding is, in this writing, imbued with a politics through which skaters and their actions are reformulated as archaeologists of forgotten or neglected city space (p.45), as remakers of those spaces in to meaningful non-commercial places revealing new potential for urban space(s). In a similar register, Atkinson (2009) positions Parkour as a form of 'anarcho-environmentalism' and mode of 'urban deconstruction'. In such studies, skateboarding and parkour are thus granted by the analyst a kind of special status over and above its everyday occurrence and organisation. For example, we can consider what is a perfectly good piece of academic writing from one of the earlier academic treatments of parkour:

> Though Parkour necessarily involves obstacles that must be 'overcome', the goal
> of Parkour is to do this as smoothly and efficiently as possible or, in the language
> of its practitioners, for the movement to be "fluid like water". The experience of

Parkour might, then, be said to transform the urban landscape in to "smooth space", in Deleuze and Guttari's sense of a "field without conduits or channels" [1987: 371], and thus into a space of uninhibited movement, at least in certain ideal moments.

Geyh (2006: 2)

Parkour, like skateboarding before it, is said to 'transform urban space'. We can take further issue with the notion of 'transformation' below but might note for now that 'urban space' comprises emergent radical phenomena and is always ongoingly in the making – by all manner of categories of user. Here, specifically, the doing of – or, rather, experience of – parkour produces a 'smooth space' aligned with Deleuze and Guattari's description thereof. As already noted above, aesthetically parkour can lend itself to been seen in this way. And we might well note the repetition of what the lad told me in Cardiff Bay with what is offered as analysis. What is less clear, however, is what Deleuze and Guattari's notion of smooth space has to do with the doing of parkour and, secondly, methodologically speaking, how such a claim might be warrantable. The issue, from an ethnographic point of view, is that it is not Deleuze and Guattari's sense of things that matters so very much in and for the doing of parkour.

I am not, should this discussion read in this way, simply dismissing any of this good work. What I am suggesting, however, is that whatever reading of parkour that the sociologist or, indeed, ethnographer might pursue, it presumably begins with some sort of observation or (mediated) encounter with parkour as a practice. Yet the fact of the observability of parkour, that parkour *is* observable and thus describable as a specific activity, does not give cause for consideration. It remains a convenience, a resource for theorising. And it is this unmarked character of the possibility of observation that leads to the lived details of the practice and the observation thereof, quickly sliding from view. The point made here is not that such questions as those raised in the existing studies of parkour are not important for sociology. The question – an old question – is whether they matter at all for participants? Certainly I am not arguing that no studies should proceed in that manner. What I am highlighting, however, is that just as with an ethnography that never happened at all, in developing such 'critiques' the lived detail and organisational aspects of the activity – the phenomena – are lost.[1]

Ordinary talk about parkour: what people say, what people do, and what sociologists say about what people say and do

Before arriving at the practice itself, we might begin where many of the studies of parkour begin and end; with talk about parkour. A recurrent pattern in formal social scientific studies is to ask people to recover and tell the experience of an activity in interview before proceeding to a constructive analysis that transcends the talk and the context of that talk. A more recent trend is at the opposite of this continuum where the talk (or rather the 'experience' of interview subject as supposedly accessed through talk) is treated through a commonsense analysis in which interview excerpts are either left to speak for themselves or are enrolled as merely illustrative of whatever the point is that the sociologist employs them

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[1] An example of what a close observational study of skateboarding might reveal is provided by Ivarsson and Greiffenhagen (2015) who, instead, of treating skateboard as a means to write about some other concern, carefully describe the ways in which skateboarders themselves organise turn taking in the use of a skate 'bowl'.

to make. People are given voice, put on the record. And this has its merits, in certain situations. Yet we might also agree that what is gathered in interviews is talk of experience, not experience itself. And so the methodological question turns on the status of that talk and what it is we should and can do with it.

Despite an observable trend of using the label 'ethnography' to cover any work that involves heading out somewhere to spend some time interviewing people, it is probably clear to the readers of this collection that a series of loosely structured interviews or 'conversations with a purpose' do not constitute an ethnographic study. Such studies are an exercise in gathering situated narratives and accounts about whatever it is that that interaction has been organised to produce or 'elicit'. This, of course, can be productive but the relationship between this situated talk and the experiences, views, motives, and perspectives (and so on) that the analysis is often not made explicit. I am not, here, suggesting any simplistic hierarchy between talk (and interview) and action (and observation) (for such a position, see Jerolmack and Khan, 2014). Talk, of course, *is* action. And such 'elicited talk', should not necessarily be disregarded by those interested in members' actual practices but analysed in terms of how participants collaborate to display understanding and make sense to one another in and through category work and the sequential organisation of the interaction *as* an interview (Hester and Francis, 1994; also, Baker, 2004; Housley and Smith, 2012; Speer, 2012).

An interview about parkour provides thus materials for examining how category work surrounding 'parkour' gets done by speakers taken as representative of some category. The rubric from Clegg and Butryn's (2012: 323) study is typical in this regard as participants had to self-identify not only as an 'intermediate to advanced traceur/traceuse with a minimum of three-year experience[sic]' but also "as being willing and able to articulate his or her experiences within the context of a phenomenological interview". A quote from one of the study's participants is, again, similar to the account of young lad with which I began this chapter:

> It's like the embodiment of water. When you can flow across a terrain, and know that each individual obstacle that comes up is going to be easily tackled. And maybe not even easily, but tackled and then continued. It's the most incredible feeling, because you feel light on your feet, you feel light and able to accomplish anything. What it comes down to is that no matter where you go, no matter where you run, no matter how tired you get, if another obstacle comes up, you're going to be able to get over it. And that's just the most liberating feeling of … accomplishment. (James, P6, 21)

In this lost ethnography of parkour, it is unlikely that formal interviews would have been conducted. Nevertheless, I would have, of course, ended up talking with participants about their activities. The analytic interest would, therefore, have concerned the ways in which parkour is discussed by its participants and how such talk gets done in such a way that it is recognizable as talk done by members of that scene. So 'parkour talk' – whether produced in interview or not (although the difference is non-trivial) – can be taken as a venue through to inspect how members differently treat, use, and 'own' particular categories such as 'hotrodders' as opposed to 'teenagers' in Sacks' original discussion (1995: 169-192) or, indeed, between 'traceurs' and 'kids' in Clegg and Butryn's data.

For Sacks, incumbents of the category 'hotrodders' faced an instructive problem in that they wanted to be seen and provide for the seeing of their rebellious activity and 'sub-culture' *as* 'hotrodders' and *not* as 'teenagers in cars' (although this depends on the category status of the observer and is different, of course, if the observer is a 'police officer'). As Sacks notes, 'teenagers' is a category owned and used by adults to describe kids and comes bound up with the things that adults presume to know about kids and their activities. Of course, the interview undercuts this issue somewhat in that people are invited to be interviewed because the interviewer has some interest in them not as a person but as a representative of a category or set of categories is known to have (a 'black female traceur', for example), and the presumable knowledge and experience bound to those categories, whilst excluding others that may well 'correctly' apply to that same person (a 'vegan student').

Still, as Sacks points out, a procedure that seems to be in place for members is to use a 'type' to do category work around their particular activity that – and this is the real payoff – is also available to non-category member observers of the activity. So, members – of the hotrodder category and also, it seems, the 'traceur' category – can do work that provides for a description of their activity not as something done by an individual seeking risk or being rebellious or so on but, rather, as members of a category of which the members determine the sense of what it takes to be a member and what might be known or said about members. In this sense, then talk of 'risk' and specifically how to talk about risk, or 'flow' or 'flight' or 'moving like water' can be treated as predicates of the 'traceur' category through which, in interview talk and elsewhere, members employ ordinary ways of doing being an ordinary parkour traceur. And the payoff of having this category 'out there' in society, means that it is available as a resource for observers to see a 'group of kids doing flips off a wall' as 'traceurs doing parkour' – just as indicated at the start of the chapter.

Significantly, Clegg and Butryn's informants topicalise this matter themselves in terms of the perception of their activity by various categories of 'the public'. What is also interesting, in reading a paper such as that of Clegg and Butryn's that includes accounts from traceurs is that what is reported being said by the traceurs is entirely predictable and maps directly on to the avenues of interest in the lost ethnography. This is worth consideration in two senses, both in terms of the 'telling' of the members themselves (as discussed above) but also in terms of the selection from that talk of fragments that qualify to feature as part of a social scientific account.

Parkour 'from within'
Moving on to consider the activity of parkour itself, this section considers some of the insights that may have been produced in the lost ethnography in relation to the organisational aspects of parkour itself. An immediate focus may be the accomplishment of the embodied movements themselves, and this no doubt is central. Yet, as I go on to outline here, the ordinary doing of parkour necessarily involves a whole range of rather mundane activities if it is to get done at all; activities that do not make the cut in terms of the standard interests of social science. Moreover, I want to briefly outline here some ways in which parkour might be considered within the context of members ordinary methods for seeing and moving in urban public space.

As noted in the introduction to the chapter, the feature of parkour that recurrently underpins theoretical treatments is the readily available and obvious observation that surfaces and objects that 'normally' divide and separate, are, through the movements of the

traceur, 'transformed' in movements that connect and join distinct spaces and surfaces; thus, walls can *lead to* rooftops, fences and barriers *connect* walkways and so on. The material resources are, then, recruited in and through these movements in very particular ways, such that the movement is enabled. In this sense, a reflexive relationship between materiality and action can be observed in motion. And so the urban landscape is transformed (see e.g. Bavington, 2007). But how does this observation itself get done and justified? What is actually being transformed and against what backdrop is that visible?

'Transformative practices' and the ordinary city
When we walk in cities, we walk in a designed environment. A good deal of this design is bound up in common understandings of how to keeping things and people moving in particular ways and prevent them from moving in others. There is a sense in this planning, a sense that is shared with formal sociology, that society stands on the edge of chaos and without various interventions 'order' would collapse (xx – check thisxx, the Rawls chapter?). So, we find that objects like fences, walls, benches, pavements, gates, statues, and so on are readily understood by both designers and users as being tied to particular activities. Viewed from the perspective of the pedestrian – as a category of urban mover – the city has about it an outstandingly overlooked normality. More generally, actions that are seen as 'bound' to given categories, might also be seen as bound to particular spaces or material resources (Smith, 2017). As Ryave and Schenkein (1974) noted, the 'natural boundaries' of everyday life – between the road and pavement, for example – are produced in and through the continued 'normal use' – people walking, pedestrians, belong on pavements – and a disruption to that situated normality can be viewed as an extraordinary event; hence the attraction of parkour, both to practitioners, to marketers and advertisers, and to theorists. The point as regards the observability of parkour is that it is viewable as such against a background contexture of unremarked 'ordinary' uses of public space.

The theoretical framing of parkour as 'transformative' may well initially emerge due to the ways in which the activity forms a kind of 'breaching experiment' in the way it reveals the 'normal' expectations of how, for example, a fence is to be treated. Although parkour is of a different status to Garfinkel's (1967) original breaching experiments, it does, nonetheless, share something of their disruptive quality – the 'gentile anarchism' of the tutorials (Gouldner, 1972). Indeed, this was one of the initial framings I employed in thinking through what might be learned through the ethnography of Parkour. Such a framing is, in some ways, recognized in treatments such as Bavington's (2007), but what is perhaps lost is the sense in which the 'breach' of parkour represents less of a 'transformation' of urban space than a practical and embodied misreading of the 'usual' ways in which members understand and utilize material elements of the scene. And in this sense a study of parkour 'from within' might also reveal much about the ways in which routinely and extraordinarily recruit material resources for the accomplishment of given activities. Whether walking on a pavement or performing parkour moves, members participate in the production of the setting in which they move. And in a more radical ethnomethodological sense, we might consider how the setting activities are themselves bound up with the production of observable order. Much like a workplace, then, we can understand settings and settinged activities as being 'staffed' by their participants (Garfinkel, 2002). And so we begin to see how such an observation is mobilized as a resource, rather than the beginnings of an inquiry. One of the potentially interesting features of parkouris its perspicacity for the study

of the practical organization of bodies in motion and materials in action.

To take this further, it is easy to suggest that an initial key distinction between urban mobility practices such as walking or cycling, for example, and parkour (or, indeed, urban skateboarding or graffiti writing) is the ways in which the latter takes place within spaces designed for that activity whilst the former involves the selection of a particular 'suitable' setting with the necessary 'in built equipment' or the correct 'affordances' that are subsequently repurposed or 'transformed' for the purposes of the 'subversive' or 'transgressive' activity in question. There is also an inbuilt issue with the assertion that walls and fences are actually experienced as 'obstacles' by members in their everyday lives. The problem, analytically speaking, with such a framing is that it treats on the one hand, the 'normal' spatial and mobility practices of any urban setting as unremarkable and, in some senses, preprogrammed whilst, on the other hand, treating the practices of parkour (or skateboarding or BMX riding or graffiti writing and so on) as somehow 'special' and above the mundane, everyday, state of affairs. This is something that I was, and still am, through different projects, centrally interested in – members' shared methods for the practical accomplishment and social organization of space and mobility. There are then, more generalized practical methods that underpin any specific instantiation of mobility practice. Indeed, this is where the generalizability of such a study becomes apparent and possible. One such possible question, and a necessary one, is "how is it that parkour traceurs perceive the urban environment?"

Again, this is something described by one of Clegg and Butryn's (2012: 332) informants who talks of his 'relationship with concrete'. This is an interesting observation, but one that simply gets reported. A proper attention to *how* practical activities come to shape what is available to be seen or, indeed, felt with the hand or foot necessarily engages with broader ethnomethodological questions of how members ongoingly accomplish perception in and through their practical activities. Such questions, again, raises some difficult methodological question in terms of how to 'capture' and analyse these things in action and beyond and without talk. What might have been explored in that lost ethnography, however, is how materials and their status are accomplished *in action*. Thus a 'good ledge' or 'grippy surface' is accomplished in the practical configuration of various 'testings out', past experience and the advice of others, and, ultimately, in and through the accomplishment of the move itself. Rock climbers similarly talk of taking time to 'getting to know the rock' and, even, 'the rock taking time to know you' (see Jenks, xx). Again, these are ways of doing and displaying membership, of talking the activity and doer in to being through particular categorial resources and work. Practically speaking, the hold is only a hold in the course of the traceurs engagement with it. Thus the surfaces are not 'transformed' from one stable 'normal' thing in to another fleeting and dynamic transgressive thing but are rather ongoingly constituted and made salient in and through their recruitment in to a given activity.

Planning for parkour
Spending time with parkour traceurs as they plan their activity would have been instructive in this regard across a number of more mundane aspects than are usually accounted for. For example, as one might assume and as I know from that limited contact with practitioners some ten years ago, no little planning goes in to doing parkour. Again, I'm not suggesting that this is unique to parkour – a family day out is instructive in this regard too (see Tolmie

and Crabtree, 2013) – but there are, of course, practical considerations that are both shared and specific. Moreover, the analytic interest is with how such matters are understood, assessed, and organized by members. Such aspects include checking weather forecasts and making estimations as to the likely friction to be gained between rubber-soled training shoe and the often-slick materials used in urban environments. Obvious elements such as recent or upcoming rain would be considered, but other perhaps less obvious aspects too such as the temperature (rock climbers, and particularly those experienced on grit stone, will recognize this too – and know well that a cold dry winter's day is preferable to a more humid summer's afternoon). And one need not turn to theory to describe the ways in which the planning of parkour is also a rhythmed activity and practitioners employ shared methods of observation and communication for establishing and keeping an updated stock of knowledge of permissible, accessible, and suitable 'spots' for doing parkour. Simply walking with practitioners as they made their way across the city, perhaps recording their talk in relation to the settings in which they moved through, scouting suitable locations would have provided much material for the analysis of the constitution of the perception of the material environment in action.

In terms of the activity itself, other aspects of interest for the lost ethnography involved attending to the progression, or not, of practitioners as they attempt to master increasingly difficult and dynamic moves. It also raises the fact that the ethnography of parkour that stayed with the organisational things themselves might have also proved to be less than spectacular. One might well anticipate relatively few of the 'certain ideal moments' in which traceurs flowed like water across the urban landscape and for more 'less than ideal moments' in which a group of lads hang around by a dock wall trying unsuccessfully to emulate a move they had observed on the internet. One wonders as to the extent to which the theoretical and philosophical treatments of parkour as primarily and inherently related to 'flow' and 'fluidity' are an effect of the representations of the practice in documentaries such as Jump London and the ways in which it features in films and other media? Certainly, ethnographers should not exclude from their analysis, instances where participants find their own activities to be frustrating, or boring, or nothing special – just something to do.

Participation, observation and unique adequacy
In another sense, considering the doing of the practice itself, raises a key question in the planning of the project and, indeed, and immediate response from those that I described it to was whether I myself was going to learn to 'do parkour'. There is not the room (and perhaps this is not the right place) here to enter in to the debate surrounding observation and description and what ethnomethodologists refer to as the unique adequacy requirement, but the question is one that ethnographers should necessarily attend to (see Atkinson and Morriss (2017) for a recent treatment). There are a number of varied and contested positions on associated issues with studying embodied practice and various solutions – Stephens and Delamont's (2006; and Delamont et al, 2017) 'double-handed' ethnography of capoeira is one, with Stephens reporting as a participant alongside key informant, and Delamont writing as an observer; Gary Alan Fine, for another example, recommends the necessity of becoming competent but never become seen to have 'mastered' the practice in question; Paul Atkinson's recent work and 'granular ethnography' (Atkinson, 2017) reports the practical aspects of getting to grips with various craft skills (photography, life drawing, perfume making, and so on), but he would certainly not insist

that one *has* to become competent in a given task in order to observe it. Given what I know about my own physical capabilities and their limitations, I assume my participation would have taken a form closest to Atkinson's position, in that I would have been reporting from the position of someone who had earnestly tried before being content with producing fieldnotes and video materials from the sideline. What the discussion does raise, however, is an important one in the context of the ethnography and phenomenology of parkour and sporting practices more generally. If we take seriously the phenomenological position adopted by a good deal of research in this field, then we need to also consider seriously methods of data gathering, presentation, and analysis that will allow us 'good enough' access to the in situ and in vivo organisation of the activity. And often video may not be the answer. Again, there is not room to discuss this matter further here, but it would seem to follow that members (that is, those with a competency in the practice) will see and learn to see practices in membership specific ways. And the organization of that viewing in context should be a matter for inquiry and analysis. Too often sociologists and ethnographers leave the phenomenology to be done by their informants, simply reporting their observations and descriptions, rather than the methods and practices through which descriptions are done. In this sense, the emergence of what we might call curational and communal digital practices that emerge alongside and are embedded in parkour as a social practice provide a significant opportunity for the analysis of the collaborative accomplishment of members' own analysis of Parkour practice and its meaning.

Seeing and showing parkour as a members' practice
This section benefits from the 20:20 vision of hindsight. It is, in that sense, a little difficult to separate out my analytic interests as they existed in 2009 from how they are now reconstituted in the (re-)telling some ten years later (see also Delamont and Atkinson, this collection). Still, Parkour, along with other practices such as skateboarding and DIY music production gained an increase in popularity and participation through, and also contributed to, the development of online digital communities of practice. In this manner, the lost ethnography would have provided an early opportunity through which to explore the development of DIY online video production, editing, and promotion and discussion. This would provide a site for the description of a whole range of 'new' skills learnt by traceurs and taught to one another. For context or a reminder: broadband is launched in the UK in 2000; MySpace is launched in 2003, facebook in 2004, and YouTube in 2005; mobile phones had integrated video cameras from the mid-2000s; the first iPhone is released in 2007; 4G launches in 2012. YouTube videos, for example, also comprise a constantly growing, global, data corpus through which to access video materials for the analysis of parkour in a way previously only possibly in a large funded project. The availability of such materials thus allows for a kind of DIY form of social research that can, albeit within the constraints of time upon the researcher, proceed without significant research expense.

A second element of this aspect of the lost study was the opportunity afforded by online discussion for the analysis of how members themselves analyse performances of a given practice. This element draws again on Sacks early discussions of members' category work concerning situated conditions of membership. One readily sees this in YouTube 'comment threads' concerning, for example, disputes between cyclists and drivers where commentators take up category positions in relation to who was 'in the wrong'. Online discussion of posted videos by users thus provides for access to the ways in which members themselves 'see' and contest aspects of the practice deemed to be 'good' or 'bad' and,

indeed, (again similarly to the sorts of categorial practices observed by Sacks in the context of Hotrodders and their cars) come to 'rank' various moves and runs. Online discussion threads and forums also provide a site in which members can do ceremonial work in relation to the status degradation and elevation of specific members and, more accurately, specific practices. Fulfilling something of the criteria outlined in Garfinkel's (1956) well known paper on degradation ceremonies, web 2.0 forums provide for successful ceremonies in terms of providing a practically witnessable demonstration of the status of the individual member/practice in the eyes of a digitally dispersed moral community. Something of the affordances of YouTube for analysts interested in accessing the participant's perspective in both these ways, has recently begun to be explored by ethnomethodologists (see, for example, Smith, 2017; Lloyd, 2017; and see Laurier, 2016). These sorts of materials and the multiple and dispersed collaborative accomplishment of membership and categorisation work remains promises to be a rich seam for future inquiries.

Conclusion

The opportunity to return to a project that did not happen is an unusual one. Doing so has proved somewhat cathartic and, I trust, has proved successful in demonstrating – to me at least – that there was something in those initial ideas around studying parkour that were worth pursuing. For readers at an early stage in their career, I hope that the chapter has provided something of a demonstration of how a research project can begin fortuitously and through simply being curious. Something catching the ethnographic eye can be more than enough to begin with; but learning to see is not so simple. Indeed, I hope the chapter has also demonstrated that something catching your eye is not enough in itself. The case must necessarily be described in service of the consideration of an aspect or aspects of human life and social organisation that are involved in the production and observability of the given practice. Ethnographically speaking, concepts and insights from any successful study should be able to 'travel' to different contexts and other cases. What I aimed to demonstrate across the first section of the chapter, however, was some of the troubles that come with using a case to either simply report what was said by informants when asked to say things, or to grant the analyst licence to talk about things that they wanted to talk about. Practices and activities, such as parkour, are often made a convenience of in order to study 'wider issues' such class, race, or gender. Such efforts are often unconvincing in demonstrating much new about class, race, or gender, and what is achieved in that regard often comes at the expense of the description of the detail of the circumstances or context of the study. Although I have only been able to outline what it was that was thought to be worthy of inquiry in a study of parkour, the chapter might also be read as an argument for the value of basic social inquiry and of what might be learned in and through a patient and humble approach that sets out to describe people's methods for producing activities and the sense that those activities have for them. To put things a little less humbly, across the sections of the chapter, I have aimed to highlight how such an attention to members' practices in their lived detail is not a narrow concern but *does* necessarily engage with disciplinary sociological concerns such as culture and identity formation, materiality and mobility, technology and digital society, urban society and so on. I have, of course, said nothing about the impact of the lost ethnography. When 'impact' means making a kind of intervention in policy or economic processes as a direct result of the findings of the research, I doubt such a project would make much impact at all. Indeed, I rather suspect –

and was told as much by a senior colleague prior to submission – that this was a key reason that my post-doc application to study parkour was highly scored but ultimately unfunded. No doubt this situation has been amplified since then. And it would be imprudent for any researcher to simply ignore the 'impact agenda'. Still, I will close with a plea of sorts, to early career researchers and also to those more senior who find themselves in a position to make decisions about what ethnographies and studies get to begin and which become lost before they start. Whether directed to political or economic or social need or not, ethnography – analytic, rigorous, ethnographic inquiry – should be judged and evaluated and ranked on its own terms. It should not, as is too often and increasingly the case, be judged against criteria fit for quantitative sociology or statistics; approaches whose own warrant to study social life is questionable and whose studies often fall short of their own criteria of rigour and validity. Besides, quite beyond any kind of adversarial methodological talk, the ethnography of everyday life, of mundane behaviour and practices, of activities such as parkour, should be valued simply because of the warrant we have to study and describe social life in all its forms. And that, I would suggest, is something that cannot afford to be lost.

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