

# **PARKOUR, DEVIANCE AND LEISURE IN THE LATE-CAPITALIST CITY**

# EMERALD STUDIES IN DEVIANT LEISURE

**Series Editors:** Thomas Raymen, Plymouth University, UK; Oliver Smith, Plymouth University, UK; Steve Redhead, Flinders University, Australia.

The *Emerald Studies in Deviant Leisure* series examines the relationship between commodified leisure and harm. The series provides a forum for publications that explore the harms of commodified leisure against a wider backdrop of consumerism and global capitalism. The series transcends disciplinary boundaries and will publish work from the fields of Criminology, Sociology, Youth Studies, Leisure Studies, Tourism Studies, Cultural Geography, Urban Studies and more. The series publishes monographs, edited collections and short books (ranging from 20,000 to 50,000 words). Proposals from early career researchers are particularly welcome.

# **PARKOUR, DEVIANCE AND LEISURE IN THE LATE-CAPITALIST CITY: AN ETHNOGRAPHY**

**THOMAS RAYMEN**

*Plymouth University, UK*



United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited  
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2019

Copyright © Thomas Raymen, 2019  
Published under exclusive licence by Emerald Publishing Limited

**Reprints and permissions service**

Contact: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. Any opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the authors. Whilst Emerald makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of its content, Emerald makes no representation implied or otherwise, as to the chapters' suitability and application and disclaims any warranties, express or implied, to their use.

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-78743-812-5 (Print)  
ISBN: 978-1-78743-811-8 (Online)  
ISBN: 978-1-78743-986-3 (Epub)



ISOQAR certified  
Management System,  
awarded to Emerald  
for adherence to  
Environmental  
standard  
ISO 14001:2004.

Certificate Number 1985  
ISO 14001



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*Dedicated to Sam and Oscar, for putting up with me.  
To the memory of Professor Steve Redhead and his intellectual spirit.*

*This page intentionally left blank*

# Contents

List of Figures	<i>ix</i>
Acknowledgements	<i>xi</i>
<b>Chapter 1 The ‘Paradox’ of Parkour</b>	<i>1</i>
<b>Chapter 2 Moving with the Times: Parkour, Leisure and Social Change</b>	<i>21</i>
<b>Chapter 3 Ultra-realism, Parkour and Capitalist Ideology</b>	<i>43</i>
<b>Chapter 4 Movers and Shakers</b>	<i>63</i>
<b>Chapter 5 Zombie Cities</b>	<i>85</i>
<b>Chapter 6 The Parkour City</b>	<i>101</i>
<b>Chapter 7 ‘Sorry Lads (But I’ve Got to Move You On)’</b>	<i>125</i>
<b>Chapter 8 Conclusion and Futures</b>	<i>145</i>
References	<i>157</i>
Index	<i>169</i>

*This page intentionally left blank*

# List of Figures

Fig 1.	Discovery	3
Fig 2.	Authorised Busking Spots in Newcastle	91
Fig 3.	The 'Double-Kong' Wall is the First to Go Down	119
Fig 4.	The Discovery Spot Today	119
Fig 5.	One of the University Spots	121
Fig 6.	Under the Beach, The Cobblestones	151

*This page intentionally left blank*

# Acknowledgements

This is a research monograph that took five years in the making, dating back to the beginnings of my doctoral research. Gratitude is owed to a number of people who have been instrumental at various stages of this project. First thanks must go to my doctoral supervisors, Kate O'Brien and Roger Smith. You allowed me to take my PhD in a direction that was drastically from the original project and trusted me to follow my own nose. I know that many PhD students are not so lucky.

A great deal of appreciation must go to everyone at Emerald Publishing for making my first foray into book writing such a smooth process. Specifically, thanks to Philippa Grand for showing an interest in the work of deviant leisure and being so enthusiastic about commissioning the book series and to Rachel Ward for being patient with my missed deadlines.

Thanks also to friends and colleagues who are too numerous to mention. Special thanks to Steve Hall and Simon Winlow who provided enormous intellectual inspiration and continue to offer personal support, wisdom and encouragement. Steve Redhead and Tara Brabazon offered support and enthusiasm from half a world away that provided a brilliant shot of confidence. James Treadwell, Alex Hall, Jo Large and Tammy Ayres have provided plenty of laughs and support along the way and listened to lots of frustrated rants.

Thanks to the entire Criminology and Criminal Justice (CCJS) team at Plymouth University for offering me my first gig in academia and being great colleagues. In particular, thanks to Zoë James for an immense amount of support that often goes unacknowledged in the background. Special thanks must also go to Oliver Smith. As a colleague, a co-writer and a friend, his help has been invaluable in developing the ideas in this book and carefully reading over draft copies of the manuscript. It's been a pleasure to develop the deviant leisure perspective with you over a few beers and chicken wings. I owe you so many pints.

Thanks to my Mum and Dad who show unwavering encouragement and enthusiasm for my work. Does a free copy of this book count as a legitimate Christmas present this year?

Most importantly, thanks to my partner, Sam, who has made huge sacrifices and provided an enormous amount of love, support and a healthy dose of perspective when needed. You have listened to me talk about parkour and deviant leisure more than anyone ever should. Thank you for being so patient and understanding; I do not care to think where I would be without you. Thanks also to

## *xii Acknowledgements*

Oscar for being the cutest form of book-writing procrastination. You two are everything to me.

Lastly, I will always be grateful to the Newcastle parkour community and every person I spoke to during this research. There's not a book without you. Thanks for bringing me into your group, teaching me the ways of parkour and tolerating my curious interest in your lives. I doubt that you'll like everything that follows in this book, but I did my best to tell it like it is.

## Chapter 1

# The ‘Paradox’ of Parkour

It was a sunny but bitterly cold afternoon in the autumn of 2014. ‘Ziplock’, who had been a primary gatekeeper into Newcastle’s parkour scene just a year earlier, had already text me earlier in the morning to ask if I was coming out. I’d checked the parkour community’s Facebook page and there was no discussion of a change of plan, so I assumed the traceurs would all be meeting at the usual Saturday morning spot. I threw on some loose jogging bottoms and my trainers with their thinning soles and headed down to ‘Discovery’ at midday for the Saturday jam. Discovery was the usual meeting spot, the spiritual ‘home’ of the local parkour community and they had been coming here for years. Over the course of the research, the traceurs – the name given to the practitioners of parkour and freerunning – would moan and argue about an over-attachment to the Discovery spot. However, it maintained its place at the heart of the community and for a good reason. It would come to be sorely missed at the end of my ethnographic fieldwork when it would be flattened by a construction crew and cease to exist as a point on the map of the parkour city. I always enjoyed the walk up to the Discovery spot. It evoked a certain familiarity and comfort as you rounded the corner to see the traceurs standing atop the Discovery walls. A lot of the usual lads were there: Sonic, ZPK, TK, Franny, Chez, Dee, EJ, Walker, Ty, Charlie, Huse and Vase.

The traceurs were an entirely unthreatening lot. They had innocent faces and fashionable floppy hairstyles which bounced around as they jumped between the Discovery walls. They were all relatively young and skinny looking kids; looking more like they should be studying for their General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) or asking for pocket money rather than working and living through their early twenties. Not armed with a sociological eye, the traceurs often mused that they would get moved-on because their parkour ‘look’ would get confused with a ‘gang’ look: baggy jogging bottoms with loose t-shirts, vests and heavy hoodies with graffiti font styles on the front. Of course, I knew the story was far more complex than a simplistic ‘moral panic’ argument (see Atkinson & Young, 2008; Wheaton, 2013). Besides, to anyone who gave even half a look, it was quite clear that they were not the stereotypical ‘troublesome’ and intimidating kids who have become the ‘folk devils’ of the twenty-first century, making most of the people walk quickly and avoid eye contact. They were polite and considerate to other passers-by, adhering to parkour’s rarely spoken ‘code of ethics’ to not disrupt or leave any trace on the spot they were using. They would wait for passers-by to go before doing a particular line or jump; and they would say hello to people and interact with their small children who looked on bemused as one of

the traceurs somersaulted in the air. They were polite and deferential to spatial authorities, calling security guards ‘sir’ and eloquent in their attempts to negotiate more time on a particular spot. Unlike the characters in Ilan (2015) or Fraser’s (2015) recent ethnographies who occupy a much different form of ‘street habitus’, they were not interested in the performance of muted and dismissive non-engagement with authorities. They certainly weren’t the kids I encountered during a previous life working in Youth Justice who would hang around outside local shops and youth centres armed with small knives, drinking cheap beer and spirits, smoking and snorting illicit drugs and looking for confrontations with strangers over slights real or conjured. In contrast, this group of young men were armed with Nikon DSLR cameras and preferred to swig coconut water and eat bananas. When anyone arrived at the start of a day of training, they would go around and hug each member of the group before stretching and warming-up.

Anyone with the most basic understanding of parkour could immediately see the traceurs’ attraction to the Discovery Museum spot. There was a vast array of low walls and ledges, all on different levels with varying gaps between them, which offered a multitude of possibilities for movement. The spot was bordered by the outer-wall of the museum, and the windows were intersected by drainage pipes and covered with window-bars – both of which provided something to grip onto as you jumped towards them. EJ was using these to try and do a long circling line around the whole spot. The windows had slanted stonework beneath them, which allowed for solid foot-placement, well within leaping distance of the low walls and ledges. EJ could stride between each wall and finally leap onto the slanted stone, touching it only for a moment to push back off and twist his body to leap back onto the walls again. The low walls were made of an exceptionally smooth orange brick which had its virtues and failings. This brick surface was almost impossible to navigate effectively or safely if wet. On the plus side, they would dry very quickly which, in Newcastle where it rains predictably, was a priceless attribute. This is the kind of corporeal knowledge the traceurs developed around the intermesh of flesh and stone, mapping the parkour city accordingly across the seasons. The spot was compact, low-risk and central – perfect for a meeting spot to warm-up, get loose and start the day (Fig. 1).

To describe it with less sentimentality, the Discovery spot was situated in the middle of a car park. To anyone but the traceurs there was nothing special about it. Situated on the fringes of a dense and compact city centre, the central train station was less than a quarter of a mile away and the spot was encircled by an array of consumer possibilities. The Discovery spot is located in the midst of Newcastle’s NE1 Business Improvement District. There is a Holiday Inn Express immediately across the street where you would always see large groups of drunken out-of-town revellers who have come to experience a weekend of pre-packaged risk-taking and hedonism in the city’s now-infamous night-time economy (Hollands, 1995; Hollands & Chatterton, 2002). In the same privately run plaza is a towering building of luxury apartments where I lived for one year of this research. As you enter the lobby, there is a memo on the notice board



Fig. 1.1: Discovery. (Photo Credit: Thomas Raymen.)

from the building's tenants committee regarding a petition to the council about increasing the controls, restrictions and policing of people entering their privatised bubble within the city centre. The notice implores residents of the building to join them in their activism against 'young people loitering and skateboarders in the car park area, excessively loud music, screaming and shouting in the street and other loutish and anti-social behaviour'.

Adjacent to Discovery is a long stretch of takeaway restaurants where people line up for food and taxis at the end of their nights out. Directly across the street to the right is a popular nightclub in Newcastle's burgeoning LGBT nightlife scene, which, if one follows the street down, is the beginning of a buffet of pubs, bars and clubs of all varieties. About 400 yards away in the opposite direction is a Dance gym that organises and hosts dance classes in a variety of genres for some controlled, fee-paying leisure and creativity. Further, beyond that, if one looks closely between the apartment complexes, cranes and hotels, you can see the top of St James's Park – the iconic home stadium of Newcastle United Football Club. Given its location and its status as the 'home' of the local parkour community, the Discovery spot is arguably symbolic of the tensions around 'public' space,

#### 4 *Parkour, Deviance and Leisure in the Late-capitalist City*

legitimate leisure and freedom in contemporary post-industrial city centres with which this book is concerned.

After we've all warmed up and trained a little at Discovery, we pick up our bags and head-off through the city centre towards Haymarket, getting ready to hit some of the spots towards the north end of town. We only walk for about a minute, crossing the main road from Discovery and into the plaza area of the hotel and luxury apartment buildings. TK spots some disused scaffolding on the side of the apartment block. When linked up to a set of walls which run down the ramp to an underground car park, the scaffolding makes for a pretty cool spot, with plenty more to do. Nobody seems to be here, so we set our bags down and the traceurs start climbing all over the scaffolding. TK picks out a line *through* the scaffolding, quickly using a series of swings and vaults to run the gauntlet through the scaffolding. Ross, EJ and Ziplock go over to the ramp, testing out the best possible lines across. The other traceurs start looking for lines to do, telling Ty and EJ to see if they can get from one spot to another in only two or three moves. We've used this plaza spot before, but never with the scaffolding. It makes for a whole new spot, and the usual spots up towards the university and Haymarket can wait for a bit after we've explored a little. Rest assured, we won't be able to stay here for long.

After snapping a few shots, I start to train. I touch the stonework to feel its texture and judge the height of the various walls. I stand in front of the first wall of the car park ramp and leap vertically off two feet to land on top. The balls of my feet touch the wall and I quickly jump again to clear the metal handrail running through the middle of it. I precision jump onto the wall in the middle of the ramp, which divides the lanes, then leap again diagonally and catch myself on the far wall. My foot is pressed against the face of the wall as my hands grip the top ledge with my knuckles whitening. I push myself up and run towards the top wall emblazoned with 'Grainger Town' and run up it, catching myself on the top hand rail. I pull myself up, swinging my legs up through my hips and over the handrail in one smooth motion, dropping down onto the other side and rolling-out. I do this line three or four more times, seeing which moves work best and getting it 'smooth', avoiding any stutters or hesitations. EJ likes it and tries it himself with the aplomb of a more experienced and gifted traceur.

Beneath us, on the ramp to the underground car park, Vase and Franny are shooting clips for a 'promo' video for their fledgling parkour clothing line. Vase stands on the ramp with his head down, wearing one of their bespoke parkour hoodies with the hood up. His legs are spread apart and his arms are down at his sides with clenched fists, striking a pose that looks almost like *Ironman* preparing to take off. Franny carefully positions him at the entrance in order to get the right lighting contrast between the daylight and the darkness of the underground car park. This is to capture the transgressive and gritty 'urban' aesthetic around which they're marketing their bespoke parkour products. Vase sprints off down the ramp as a shadowy figure, illuminated only by the fluorescent lights above. It strikes me that the shot seemingly has nothing to do with parkour. That doesn't matter according to Franny, because 'this kind of shit sells'.

Less than 10 minutes go by and a security guard rounds the corner, whilst a restaurant worker comes out from across the street. Both tell us to move on.

The traceurs do not protest, gathering their bags and cameras saying 'no problem'. Huse asks the security guard politely if he minds giving us just 'one more minute' in order to film Ross's line across the ramps. He almost sounds like a child asking their parents to let them stay up just a little whilst longer before going to bed.

This is the urban cultural lifestyle sport of parkour and freerunning. The traceurs move throughout the city finding spots and constellations of physical structures, which, combined with the bodily movements of parkour, make for spaces of play, enjoyment and exploration. Most simplistically, it is a physical training methodology in which one uses only their body to overcome physical and mental obstacles in urban space and travel from point A to point B in the most direct and efficient way possible, irrespective of what is in one's way (Angel, 2011; Belle, 2006; Mould, 2009). Traceurs saturate the full volume of spaces, thinking about how to utilise the body and all of the physical structures within the urban landscape to connect space through creating direct and efficient 'lines of flight'. This can involve running, striding, vaulting, jumping, climbing, balancing or any other physical movement to move from one point to another. Nothing is off-limits; oftentimes, traceurs derive most pleasure from touching those parts of the city which otherwise go untouched.

This book is based upon two years of participatory ethnography within Newcastle's parkour scene. It draws on original ethnographic and interview data with members of the local parkour community and its associated professional coaching company, which was founded and run by the more senior traceurs in the community. The Newcastle parkour community is relatively modest in size in comparison to other cities, which have larger but more fragmented parkour communities. Like any leisure practice, people drifted in and out of the parkour scene during my research. Overall, I met hundreds of traceurs throughout the course of the ethnography. Some people I saw only once or twice, others more sporadically with several months between meetings. Therefore, this book is predominantly based upon the core of approximately 30 traceurs who were a consistent presence within the local parkour community. Nevertheless, it is also informed by all of the other traceurs that I met and interviewed on our trips to major parkour events and on our travels to train in other cities in the UK and beyond.

Parkour, in its pure non-commodified sense, is a spatial practice that is anti-theoretical to the purposeful hyper-regulation of our contemporary urban centres of consumption (Hayward, 2004, 2012a). As such, it is spatially marginalised, excluded and policed by waves of private security teams and police, who would move them on by invoking the familiar phrases of 'you can't do this here' or 'that's not what this place is for'. However, it is also a practice that was governed with significant inconsistency and ambiguity. This is rarely acknowledged within the existing academic literature on parkour or other forms of spatial transgression. Over the course of the two-year ethnography that forms the basis of this book, the traceurs developed relationships of spatial compromise with many security guards. They would politely negotiate for more time on particular spots. They would leave spots when particular parts of the city were busy and return when they were quiet; traversing the cityscape according to their own 'parkour map of the city' that was informed by a situated knowledge of the temporal rhythms

and flows of urban business, consumption and the shift patterns of friendly security guards. The overall tone of proceedings was, as Franny so eloquently put it, 'don't fuck it up'. The traceurs wanted to maintain what precious little pockets of temporary spatial legitimacy they found in Newcastle's city centre and surrounding areas. In the early days of our fieldwork after being moved on from a spot after five minutes, I asked another participant, EJ, if it annoyed him. He shrugged, responding, 'Nah, no sense in getting pissed off about it. Nothing's gonna change. Besides, we actually know some of the security and they're not all bad. Best just say 'no bother' and pack up and move on'. The traceurs I met had no interest in unsettling the status quo in any meaningful sense. In so many ways, they wanted to be a part of it; and, in so many ways, they were.

As my ethnography wore on, this truth was captured by the observation that many of the traceurs were also low-level entrepreneurs with varying levels of success. As we will see in the later chapters of this book, they attempted to start their own parkour coaching companies, clothing lines and fee-paying gyms. They used their parkour skills to try and get work in advertising commercials or as stunt athletes. The others who were not key players would often join in and perform in exhibitions or help out for a bit of money on the side; getting their coaching badges from parkour's governing body, ParkourUK. Parkour's transgression of the hyper-regulated city's spatial norms afforded its practice a veneer of authentic urban rebellion and transgression, which the traceurs could employ to market their associated entrepreneurial endeavours. Many scholars of parkour and urban transgression more broadly have mistaken this to be a genuine form of politicised engagement, which has been co-opted *away* from parkour by large corporate behemoths (Atkinson, 2009; Bornaz, 2008; Daskalaki, Stara, & Miguel, 2008; Ferrell, 1996, 2001). Whilst that may have been true once upon a time, what we are dealing with now is not the issue of *co-optation* and incorporation, but that of *precorporation* (Fisher, 2009). In a world in which consumer capitalism ideologically privileges the cultivation of unique cultural identities which help to distinguish the self from the 'mainstream' (Hall, Winlow, & Ancrum, 2008; Miles, 1998), parkour's shift into an entire cultural lifestyle can be seen as pre-emptively shaped by the values of consumer capitalism and thus *always-already* susceptible to marketisation. Nothing sells better in hyper-regulated cities than an alleged critique of hyper-regulated cities; and traceurs and freerunners all over the world, including those in my sample, have actively solicited parkour's drift into the mainstream.

The majority of the traceurs in this study were in their early twenties. They were all trying to negotiate the increasingly difficult transition into adulthood, the challenges of which are exacerbated by living in a region such as the North East of England and suffering the misfortune of going through this life stage in an era of austerity, economic precarity and shrinking opportunities of job satisfaction and financial stability (Cederstöm & Fleming, 2012; Lloyd, 2013). The traceurs generally welcomed parkour's commodification in hope of stemming the anxiety-inducing insecurity and indignity of monotonous zero-hour contract work, which saps the soul without filling the pocket. For many, the opportunity to use parkour as a way to make a meagre living allowed many of these young

twenty-somethings to preserve culturally relevant identities and abide the 'cultural injunction to enjoy' (Žižek, 2002a). Simultaneously, they could also achieve some of the traditional markers of adulthood without descending into the 'dog's life' of nine-to-five anonymity that doesn't chime with the cool individualism of consumer culture.

Again, this is an aspect of parkour's practice that has gone almost entirely unacknowledged. This is in part due to the fetishistic attachment to the concept of 'resistance' that has been popular within criminology and the social sciences since the likes of EP Thompson (1971, 1991) and the work in the Birmingham School Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Hall & Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979). The assumption that the subject is naturally resistant to all forms of authority and control has been problematised at length elsewhere (Hall & Winlow, 2007; Hall et al., 2008; Hayward & Schuilenberg, 2014; Heath & Potter, 2006; Smith, 2014). This book continues and deepens the problematisation of existing conceptualisations of resistance in Chapter 3; particularly in its application to parkour. Such perspectives cannot explain the overwhelming *commitment* to consumer capitalism's symbolic order. Conveniently, the more entrepreneurial side to these practitioners of spatial transgression has consistently flown under the radar. This book draws upon ultra-realist criminological theory's appropriation of *transcendental materialism* (Johnston, 2008) in order to explain how the traceurs *actively solicited* and embraced parkour's commodification and drift into the mainstream (Hall, 2012b); situated against the backdrop of larger political-economic forces and pressures of identity and youth transitions.

However, this eschewal of the entrepreneurialism of cultural lifestyle sport practitioners – and an acknowledgment of the paradox of parkour more broadly – is also a methodological issue. The vast majority of the ethnographic and qualitative research on parkour, freerunning and other cultural lifestyle sports has overwhelmingly focussed upon their immediate practice in the city. They have explored the various embodied, affective, political and spatial aspects of parkour's practice as an endless symbolic battle of spatial contestation (Angel, 2011; Atkinson, 2009; Bavington, 2007; Bornaz, 2008; Brunner, 2011; Chiu, 2009; Daskalaki et al., 2008; Ferrell, 2001; Garrett, 2013; Kidder, 2013; Lamb, 2014; Saville, 2008). However, the participants in these research projects always seemed to be shadowy, incomplete and one-dimensional characters. Within these studies, there seemed to be a dearth of any biographical background or exploration of the wider pressures, hopes and anxieties that were present in their lives and how this shaped their motivations and desires.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>This is not to criticise other researchers for failing to garner this deeper insight into the background lives of participants. This research was completed in my early twenties and as such, I shared a broad congruence in age and life stage with my participants, which allowed for this kind of access into their wider lives. This presence within the wider orbits of the traceurs' lives would simply not be available to researchers who were even in their early thirties. Therefore, it is only logical that much academic research on parkour has been limited to a more surface-level focus on parkour's practice in the city.

To me, it was clear that in order to give a more critical and in-depth account of parkour and the deviant-leisure nexus, I could not limit and isolate the study of parkour to my participatory ethnographic experience of its practice in the city. It could not be divorced from the wider orbits, challenges and desires in the traceurs' lives. This, therefore, necessitated not just practicing and observing parkour and understanding the 'taste and ache of action' (Wacquant, 2004). It required going deeper into the lives of my participants *outside* the parkour jams, training sessions and exhibitions. In the course of this research, I went to birthday parties and met their families and girlfriends. I went training or got beers with them when those girlfriends became ex-girlfriends. I travelled with them; helped them move house and prepare for job interviews; assisted in the production and editing of videos or the administrative work of their small businesses. For all intents and purposes, I was a regular feature in their lives as much as any of the other traceurs. Indeed, one of the traceurs lived on my sofa for a longer period than I would have liked. In the countless conversations and interviews I had with them, I asked them about all of these issues. In doing so, I gained an insight into their hopes and aspirations for parkour, and the role parkour occupied within the wider orbits of their lives.

I maintain that this more fluid ethnographic approach is not only truer to the method itself, but also provides a more well-rounded account of parkour's practice. After all, the practice of parkour is described by many scholars as a *lifestyle sport* (Wheaton, 2013): a term that suggests a form of 'serious leisure' that is all-encompassing (Stebbins, 2007), thereby necessitating an inquiry into its wider influence in people's lives. To focus exclusively upon the practice of parkour in the city is more likely to retard the study of parkour than illuminate it. The methodological fixation with the immediacy of spatial practice has inevitably led to what this book argues to be ill-theorised accounts of parkour and other forms of spatial transgression. As Hayward and Schuilenberg (2014) have argued, the tendency is to lather a spatial practice with a heavy sheen of deviance and resistance that is asserted more than it is evidenced; whilst eschewing a more complex understanding of the integrated relationships between deviance, conformity and the transgression of spatial rules in late capitalist cities and consumer culture.

Far from being an anti-capitalist or 'resistant' population, the traceurs were fully immersed within and committed to the flexibilised lifestyle and affective labour involved with the prosumption of late-capitalism; part of the continuous blurring of work and leisure (Stebbins, 1995; Toffler, 1980). The traceurs certainly bemoaned the homogenous, hedonistic and sedentary nature of mass culture, preferring to espouse and identify with a life of movement, artistic creativity and the fortification of body and mind through physical and mental self-improvement. The embodied and corporeal elements of parkour's practice were undeniably important in their motivations. However, it would be a mistake to see this pseudo-philosophical worldview of existential self-discovery as a rejection of consumer capitalism. This mode of socio-cultural liberalism is equally at home within consumerism's malleable ideological remit, constituting an individualistic form of perpetual distinction from 'the herd' upon which consumer capitalism is based (Miles, 1998). Furthermore, as the likes of Christopher Lasch (1979) have

observed, the proliferation of a 'therapeutic sensibility' of lifestyle leisure forms can be traced back to the 1970s. After the traumatic failure of radical political change in the 1960s, transformative politics gave way to the transformation of the self. Lasch (1979, p. 4) argues that the consumer citizens of post-industrial Western nations have retreated into individualistic preoccupations:

people have convinced themselves that what matters is psychic self-improvement: getting in touch with their feelings, eating health food, taking lessons in ballet or belly-dancing, immersing themselves in the wisdom of the East, jogging, learning how to relate .... Harmless in themselves, these pursuits, elevated to a program and wrapped in the rhetoric of authenticity and awareness, signify a retreat from politics and a repudiation of the recent past (Lasch, 1979, pp. 4–5).

Consumer capitalism has commodified and thrived on such a therapeutic sensibility, as this socio-cultural liberalism of individual freedom and autonomy constitutes the cultural logic which justifies and reflects the economic liberalism of free-market capitalism (Milbank & Pabst, 2016). This book positions the underlying philosophy, motivations and desires of the traceurs as fundamentally wrapped-up with these complex political-economic, cultural and psychological processes that have evolved over the last 40 years. The processes Lasch (1979) speaks of above are arguably more pertinent in the twenty-first century than they were in the 1970s. Late-capitalism has made work more scarce and precarious than it has ever been in recent memory (Cederström & Fleming, 2012; Lloyd, 2013). It has made transitions into adulthood immensely difficult, characterised by a series of interruptions, reversals and failures. Simultaneously, consumer capitalism's worship of the symbolism of youth has created an infantilised culture that encourages individuals to create unique cultural identities; identities, which must also be disposable or highly adaptable to the ever-shifting ground of late modern consumerism. Consequently, this book rejects the popular reading of parkour as a form of anarchic performative resistance against the late-capitalist city and consumerism's homogenised mass culture. The practice of parkour did not *deviate* from the ideological and cultural values of consumerism. In more ways than not, the practice of parkour as it is currently constituted is a form of *hyper-conformity* to those very values.

Therefore, this book offers an important contribution to criminology's 'spatial turn' and the theorisation of spatial transgression. At the surface level of first appearances, it would seem that a criminological analysis of parkour is relatively straightforward and bereft of any new insights into contemporary society and the landscape of deviance and the city. Traceurs in the UK are a group of predominantly white, male and, in some areas, middle-class young people clad in baggy hooded jumpers, jogging bottoms and trainers. They wander around the city, subversively re-appropriating urban space; yet, another form of alleged urban anarchy and resistance that would not be out of place in Jeff Ferrell's (2001) *Tearing Down the Streets*. Their exclusion from urban space would appear to be the usual

story, rooted in a misunderstanding of these young people and their transgressive practice; yet, another unfair moral panic that inaccurately demonises young people (Atkinson & Young, 2008; Wheaton, 2013). However, this book suggests that there is a *paradox of parkour* that has yet to be adequately theorised. Quite simply: why is parkour excluded from urban space despite its hyper-conformity to the central values of consumer capitalism and its increasing celebration within mainstream media, advertising and commodified sport and lifestyle markets? Drawing upon original ethnographic research based upon two years of immersion within parkour communities in the North East of England, the fundamental objective of this book is to elucidate and untangle this paradox of parkour and explain its ambiguous, contradictory and ever-shifting status as illegitimate ‘deviance’ and legitimate leisure.

The central argument is that this ‘paradox’ of parkour is a product of late-capitalism’s own making. As neoliberal capitalism underwent its programme of mass deindustrialisation and offshoring of labour, Western economies underwent a shift in emphasis from production to consumption. This created the conditions for an identity and lifestyle-oriented consumer capitalism, which required a cultivation of desire for ‘unique’ cultural identities and experiences of which parkour and freerunning are two amongst a plethora of examples. Simultaneously, however, something had to be done with the defunct post-industrial cities of the UK. Post-industrial city centres were ‘regenerated’ as hubs of culture, shopping, restaurants and the night-time economy (Smith, 1996; Zukin, 1995). The twenty-first century ‘creative city’ combined these new urban economies of consumption and culture with new forms of luxury accommodation as they vied for the hand of the ‘creative classes’ of affluent young professionals, artists, hipsters and expanding student populations (Florida, 2002; Mould, 2015). The city underwent a process of privatisation, sanitisation and spatial fortification as part of its shift from ‘municipal socialism’ to ‘municipal capitalism’ (Minton, 2012; Winlow & Hall, 2013); creating a city made up of hyper-regulated spaces of pseudo-privatised sovereignty. This is the ‘concept city’, what Hayward (2004) has described as the city according to architects, urban planners and landowners. The concept city, buttressed by neoliberalism’s emphasis on strong private property rights, endeavours to achieve what Hayward (2004, p. 140) describes as a ‘semiotic disambiguation between place and function’. Consequently, contemporary capitalism must simultaneously promote desire for cool and culturally relevant lifestyle identities such as parkour whilst also harnessing and directing these energies into particular spatial contexts, prohibitively if necessary.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that this ‘paradox’ of parkour is not a problem that capitalism needs or seeks to resolve. This is the second crucial aspect to the central argument of this book. The ‘paradox’ of parkour (and other similar forms of spatial transgression) is a *productive and functional tension* that is a vital component of consumer capitalism’s ideological apparatus and a key element in parkour’s burgeoning popularity. The paradox of parkour is useful for capitalism at two interrelated levels. The first is how parkour’s spatially performative ‘critique’ of the hyper-regulated city is reflective of Žižek’s (1989) reversal of ideology. For Žižek (1989), ideology operates at the level

of *action* rather than *thought*. We *know* that capitalism is an unfair political-economic system geared towards moving wealth upward. We *know* that it harms the environment. We *know* that it creates asocial city spaces and urbanisation that is geared purely towards capital circulation and shallow consumerism. However, in our daily lives, we get on with the business of being good capitalist citizens by behaving and acting *as if we did not know* these traumatic truths. Consequently, it is necessary for capitalism to 'allow' dissent and a surface-level of resistance (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005). The tolerated nuisance of parkour in urban space creates a soothing, reassuring effect whereby it appears that there are people *fighting back* against the system and holding it to account. The postmodern subject is a sceptic. They have not been duped by capitalism's siren call. They are people who *believe in the social*. They stop and gather to take pictures and videos. They may even share those videos on Facebook attached to an impassioned status; or talk to their friend or partner about how wonderful it is in self-congratulation of their enlightened worldview. All of this occurs before going on to shop in the malls, drink in the chain bars and eat in the over-priced restaurants of the sanitised asocial spaces of urban Business Improvement Districts. Capitalism is totalitarian in a different way to Stalinism or fascism. It openly welcomes and allows micro-forms of dissent and self-critique. This acts as a form of psycho-social bargaining; as a redemption for its subjects in order for them to continue on acting as good consumer-citizens and behaving *as if they did not know* about the environmentally, politically and socially corrosive effects of our political-economic order. Furthermore, as we have already discussed in this introduction, this transgressive 'resistance' is then re-packaged into a profitable commodity. In a consumer capitalism predicated upon individual distinction and not just 'keeping up with the Joneses' but staying ahead of it, practices such as parkour become 'just transgressive enough to be cool' (Fenwick & Hayward, 2000). Consequently, the 'paradox' of parkour becomes even more paradoxical. For it is not a paradox at all, rather a functional and deliberate outcome of capitalist ideology, which is predicated upon a series of engineered contradictions.

### **Methodological Note: 'Choosing' Ethnography**

When reading criminology and sociology, ethnographic studies captured my imagination most and appeared to reveal the greatest depth of understanding, texture and nuance of the relationship between macro socio-economic structures and their manifestation in the micro-context of everyday life (Adler, 1993; Armstrong, 1998; Bourgois & Schoenberg, 2009; Contreras, 2013; Corrigan, 1979; Ditton, 1977; Ferrell, 1996; 2006; Hobbs, 1988; Parker, 1974; Winlow, 2001). Moreover, the ethnographic method held the greatest 'logic of appropriateness' for achieving the objective of this research (Greener, 2011). This immersive approach not only gave me the opportunity to *feel* parkour in an embodied sense, but it also gave me the opportunity to speak to security guards and observe how the traceurs were inconsistently tolerated and excluded from urban space. In the words of Whyte (1959), it revealed insights and lines of questioning that 'I would not have had the sense to ask if I had been getting my information solely on an

interview basis'. Insights such as the lived spatial dynamics of parkour's practice and control, how the flow of a parkour jam interacts with the 'rhythms' of the city and dances around its ever-shifting and 'alive' consumer economy; and how this contributed to its spatially and temporally negotiated legitimacy and illegitimacy (see Chapters 6 and 7).

Therefore, the 'choice' of research method was never open to much debate. In fact, it was never much of a choice at all. Despite all of the academic arguments in favour of ethnography and my own epistemological leanings, the decision to engage in an ever-shifting role of *total researcher*, *researcher participant* and *total participant* (Gans, 1967) was actually dictated to me by the traceurs themselves. For example, 'Ziplock' was a senior figure within the NPK community, who warmed to me earliest and with whom I became closest throughout the ethnography. When I first discussed the possibility of doing research on parkour and freerunning, he was enthusiastic and eager, prompting discussions whilst we were out on jams and engaging the other traceurs in discussion. In many ways, his actions took a lot of pressure off me as the ethnographer in that I didn't have to be as conscious of negotiating that fine line between getting meaningful data and worrying about disillusioning the traceurs by asking a curiously high-volume of questions. How much of this was due to his general excitement to talk about parkour, and how much of it was a conscious effort to help me out, I'll never know. What I do know is that despite his generosity, his conditions were clear and uncompromising from my first outing with the traceurs as 'a researcher'. 'We don't carry any passengers', he told me. 'You've got to do what we do and train as we train. You don't get to just stand around and watch because you're doing research. You've got to be a freerunner'. This was a view firmly held by the rest of the community as well. When I first met Franny, a Yorkshireman, in October 2013, he was astounded that a social scientist would be alongside him atop a building doing a 'roof mission'. After a moment's consideration, however, he saw the basic sense in the method, albeit without any discussion of epistemology or methodology: 'I guess you can't know 'owt about it unless you've done it though can yer? How can you write about it and understand it if you don't know what it feels like?'

Moreover, everything about my own 'social script' demanded this total participant approach. I completed this research in my early twenties during a period where I was in good physical shape and broadly of a similar age to many of the participants. To the traceurs, I was a young man equipped with the physical tools to do the lines and runs; capable of absorbing the scrapes, sprains and knocks that inevitably occur in a practice like parkour. During the early stages of the research, I was still attempting to follow the orthodox lessons of methodological how-to textbooks, which imbue ethnography with a warning towards that unfortunate phrase of 'going native' in reverence of the myth of 'objectivity' (Hammersley, 1992; see Ancrum, 2012, for a critique). In my mind, I was the researcher-traceur, but certainly researcher first. Whilst I was figuring out how to navigate the messy array of participatory roles (Adler & Adler, 1987; Gans, 1967), I came to realise that the traceurs did not care about my professional or research identity one bit. Nor would they give me the time to figure it out. When I was out with them,

I was out as one of them. Contradicting Polsky (1971) and drawing on the words of Winlow (2001, p. 17), if I wanted the research to have any chance of success 'I damned well did have to pretend to be one of them'.

This precise statement was expressed by Winlow when considering the methodological quandaries of his research on crime, bouncers and his use of violence. Ferrell (1996, 1998) found it necessary to avoid hiding behind the label of researcher when confronted with arrest with other graffiti writers in a back-alley, spray paint in-hand. In Treadwell's ethnography into football hooliganism, he had to draw upon his natural physical and cultural capital and respond to situations of confrontation just as any participant would (Williams & Treadwell, 2008, pp. 64–65). Similarly, Wacquant (2004) discovered that in order to develop any respect and gain analytical depth to his study of a Southside Chicago boxing gym, he had to get in and 'glove up' amongst the other fighters. It would appear that the immersive participation and willingness to sacrifice one's body and safety is a fairly common necessity for researchers studying hyper-masculine environments. This seems to particularly be the case for those involving risk and significant amounts of 'bodily capital' (Wacquant, 2004), especially amongst young male researchers who share a certain amount of biographical and physical congruence with their participants. The willingness to fully participate was vital for the ongoing viability of the research and, as we shall see in later chapters, its value was significant. Notwithstanding these methodological positives, it was also important for my ongoing health and safety. The research was always going to demand a certain level of participation and as any traceur will tell you, to practice parkour half-heartedly and fail to 'commit' is the quickest way to serious injury.

Ethnography undeniably has its detractors around issues of validity, 'objectivity' and issues of generalisation. These debates have been discussed in-depth elsewhere, and I have no intention or desire to re-hash them here in an argument that will never be resolved (see the following for more on this debate: Ancrum, 2012; Bryman, 1988; Cicourel, 1967; Ferrell & Hamm, 1998; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Pink, 2008). Suffice it to say that all research methods have their situated utility when appropriately married to its theoretical and research objectives. The objective of this book was to understand not only the spatial dynamics of parkour's practice in the city, but also the role of parkour in the wider lives of my participants in order to properly untangle and explain its complex position at the nexus between spatially illegitimate 'deviance' and legitimate commodified leisure. Quite simply, a broad ethnographic approach which incorporated participation, observation and unstructured interviews provided the best means to accomplish such objectives.

## **The Research Environment: From Coal to Culture**

The city of Newcastle upon Tyne is a natural location for this study and perfectly encapsulates some of the themes addressed by this book around the shift from industrial modernity to post-industrial late modernity and consumer culture. However, it would be misleading to suggest that my choice of Newcastle upon Tyne as a research site was entirely deliberate and strategic. Indeed, there are

many larger parkour communities in the UK. Judging on my two-year ethnography in which I followed the Newcastle parkour community throughout the UK and beyond, Newcastle's parkour community is of a middling and respectable size to other cities. It pales in comparison to that of London, where the parkour scene is less centralised and more fragmented with a number of different groups. More opportunistic than strategic, Newcastle afforded the opportunity to engage consistently rather than sporadically with a strong and centralised parkour community in a distinctly urban context. All that was required was a short move up the train line from Durham to allow my research to be less structured and more natural in which I could respond to a text message or group Facebook chat organising an impromptu jam, roof mission or exploration of a new spot. I rented a small flat merely 30 seconds away from the Discovery spot and got on with the research.

However, in many ways I could not have 'chosen' a better city than Newcastle in which to conduct this research. From the earliest stages of my fieldwork, I was already re-contextualising the practice of parkour within consumer culture and the evolution of leisure and transgression in contemporary Western society. However, my experience of present-day Newcastle, contrasted against its rich urban history, cemented my spatial and criminological theoretical perspective. Newcastle and the North East of England have been described as 'textbook' examples of deindustrialisation, urban renewal and the contested transitions of Fordism to post-Fordism, modernity to late modernity and industrialisation to consumerism (Robinson, 2002). In this regard, Newcastle, along with the other post-industrial cities visited by the traceurs such as Glasgow, Leeds, Sunderland and Liverpool, perfectly encapsulate the profound shifts in global capitalism and the attendant changes to work, leisure, culture and urban space. These processes are so important to the paradox of parkour that the city of Newcastle almost acts as a character in its own right throughout this book, and it is for precisely this reason that I decided not to disguise the location in which this research took place. Whilst all of the traceurs in this book have been given fictional pseudonyms and the name of their local parkour coaching company has been omitted; it would have been difficult to tell the story of this ethnography without also being explicit and open about the urban context in which it took place. Therefore, it is worth taking a brief look at the history of my research site in order to understand its present, and the traceurs place or lack thereof within it.

Newcastle upon Tyne is an archetypal post-industrial city, which has been transformed in a number of ways through the departure of traditional forms of industrial employment. Primarily, this has stemmed from the shift in global energy markets alongside capital's need to 'discipline' a strong industrial labour force and move production elsewhere as a means of avoiding capitalism's embedded inclination to crisis (Byrne, 2001; Harvey, 2014). The departure of industry from many cities in the north of England has effectively re-written the entire character and reality of the urban experience along with class, work and leisure as these cities struggle to move from industrialism to post-industrialism. This underpinning historical context has been a feature of many studies around crime, criminal markets, leisure, youth and the city (Fraser, 2015; Hall et al., 2008;

Hayward, 2004; Hobbs, 1988; Hobbs et al., 2003; Smith, 2014; Winlow, 2001; Winlow & Hall, 2006). As Robinson (2002) has pointed out, it is impossible to talk about Newcastle without talking about its industrial history and its long, drawn-out decline.

Whilst wishing to avoid historical simplicity, the North East's natural endowment of coal is central to any understanding of the North East. Coal became a vital resource for Great Britain's world-leading industrial economy as collieries sprang up all over the North East coalfields, shaping the vast conurbation of neighbourhoods and communities in Newcastle and North Tyneside. As Byrne (1989) points out, it would be a mistake to think of Newcastle in dichotomous terms of the central districts as being urban-industrial and the peripheral communities of North Tyneside as rural and agricultural. A significant proportion of the peripheral areas were in fact coalfields. It was this coal that powered the myriad related 'staple industries' of 'carboniferous capitalism' such as iron, steel, shipbuilding and engineering, which relied heavily on the banks of the Tyne as central docks (Robinson, 2002). Newcastle struggled with issues of housing to cope with the increase in population as industry demanded more labour, resulting in an undeniable reality of urban poverty. However, for the most part, the organised capital and labour up until the 1920s meant that Newcastle and North Tyneside was a place of rising prosperity, characterised by 'high wages and rough and ready urban conditions' (Byrne, 1989, p. 43). Whilst this declined with the depression in the 1930s, the industrial sector recovered in the post-war era, peaking in the early 1960s. As Byrne (1989) points out, in 1966, 71% of the Newcastle and North Tyneside population worked in the manufacturing and industrial sectors such as mining, metal manufacturing, engineering, shipbuilding, construction and transport. This declined to 63% in 1976 and even more steeply to 52.4% in 1984. Mining declined by over 50% between 1966 and 1976, steadily declining after that through 1984. After 1976, manufacturing fell by over a third and continued to steadily decline in accordance with the emergence of neoliberal economics and the Thatcher government (Hollands & Chatterton, 2002). This is a shift born in part out of the switch in energy markets to what was then relatively cheap imported oil (Byrne, 1989). But, as Harvey (2014) observes it was also part of a larger crisis that emerges from the internal contradictions of capital, in which there was an excessive power of labour in relation to capital accumulation.

The story of neoliberalism has been well-rehearsed elsewhere (Harvey, 2005); acutely detailing the rise of Thatcherism, Reaganism, the offshoring of industry, the disciplining of labour and the West's shift to a post-industrial economy based upon debt (renamed credit) and consumption (Horsley, 2015). It is unnecessary to rehearse these discussions here; particularly when other chapters do so in significant depth as it pertains to the evolution of leisure markets and the real economy. What this meant for Newcastle, however, was a drawn-out urban and regional crisis. Issues of economic decline, unemployment, social decay, crime and homelessness have been the key characters; the coping with which Robinson (2002) argues has been the theme of the region over the past four decades. The answer for Newcastle has been to regenerate and remodel the city as a buzzing metropolis in which to live, work and play (Hollands & Chatterton, 2002). This is part of the broader Creative City model, which

invests in cultural institutions, the arts, the beautification of public spaces and massive consumption centres through a need to attract large sums of finance capital under the buzzwords of ‘creativity’ and culture (Mould, 2015). This is a pattern that many British cities such as Sheffield, Birmingham and Leeds have followed (Harcup, 2000; Webster, 2001) in addition to cities around the world. Urban development corporations have transformed Newcastle’s Quayside from a desolate industrial wasteland to a thriving life and leisure hub, with luxury flats alongside popular vertical drinking establishments such as the Slug and Lettuce and Pitcher and Piano. The Metrocentre, the out-of-town shopping mall just a quick train ride away, has been described as quintessentially British in late-capitalism (Winlow & Hall, 2013). It was once the second largest in Europe and still attracts numerous tourists, visitors as well as hometown consumers. The Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, the Sage building, which holds a number of concerts and cultural events and the city’s booming and now-infamous night-life all make up a city of surface-level diversity contributing to Newcastle and Gateshead being anointed as a European ‘Capital of Culture’ in 2008. Tourism in Newcastle brings in approximately 2 million visitors every year, with 69.4% of jobs in Newcastle in the professional, administrative and service and leisure economies. Compared with the statistics on industrial and manufacturing employment given earlier, these statistics are a clear indication of Newcastle upon Tyne’s shift from coal to culture. This has been part of a wider ‘return to the centre’ of cities and the changing function and nature of urban space (Zukin, 1995).

This is clear evidence that space is more than just an inert material backdrop, but that modern capitalism has survived in part through the continuous (re)production of urban space to mop-up surplus capital (Harvey, 2012; Smith, 1984). As we will see in greater detail later, Winlow and Hall (2013) argue that post-industrial cities made the shift from municipal socialism to municipal capitalism, in which space, housing, development and entire urban economies and budgets were thrown into the competitive arena of the market. The effects of this urban shift and its influence upon changing spatialities and the governance of urban space will be discussed in greater depth in Chapters 5–7, specifically in relation to parkour. However, for now, it suffices to note that the regeneration of Newcastle around the leisure, culture and consumption industries is reflective of the wider evolution and primacy of leisure and desire in the contemporary political, social and economic context. It is this evolution of leisure, in accordance with wider socio-economic change and a shift in worker-consumer subjectivities, with which the following chapter is concerned. This forms part of the wider backdrop to explain the emerging attraction to cultural lifestyle sports such as parkour not as part of a timeless and seemingly natural desire to seek thrills; but as a clear and coherent consequence of shifts in the global economy and consumer capitalism’s liberalisation of desire.

## **Chapter Outline**

I have tried to sketch out a basic outline of the arguments to come in the following pages, but it is useful to offer a very brief commentary on the structure and content of each chapter before progressing any further. This book can broadly be

understood as divided into two parts. The first half of the book is predominantly theoretical, with excerpts of interview data and ethnographic field notes scattered throughout in order to provide tangible empirical examples to illuminate the more complex and seemingly abstract theoretical ideas. The second half of the book is more heavily ethnographic, operationalising the theoretical ideas presented in the early chapters and exploring how they operate within the real lived experiences of my participants, the parkour community and urban space more generally.

Chapter 2 offers a broad theorisation of the changing nature of leisure and identity in late-capitalism, situated against the backdrop of the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism and the drastic socio-economic changes in work, leisure, culture and identity. Specifically, it problematises some of the base assumptions and defining characteristics surrounding leisure; namely, its association with freedom, autonomy, enjoyment and its contradistinction from 'work'. The chapter looks at how parkour embodies and reflects many of the changes to leisure to display how it is a product of its historical moment and works in concert with global capitalism's economic, cultural and ideological forces. Chapter 3 critically engages with existing criminological and sociological theorisations of parkour and other forms of spatial transgression, and problematises their *domain assumptions* about human nature, subjectivity and the relationship between structure and agency. It introduces ultra-realist criminological theory and its roots in transcendental materialism's theory of subjectivity in order to provide an underlying theoretical framework that can understand the multi-faceted cultural and corporeal motivations for parkour's practice. Ultra-realism's incorporation of the *unconscious* and how it shapes subjectivity offers a vital contribution that enables us to push beyond notions of resistance, moral panic and 'edgework' in a way that can acknowledge parkour's cultural conformity and, consequently, the 'paradox' of parkour more generally. Most crucially, this involves a problematisation of the concept of social deviance and its ongoing utility in the present context.

Chapter 4 moves into the more ethnographic part of this thesis. This chapter operationalises the earlier theoretical discussions to contextualise the role of parkour within the pressures and realities of the traceurs' lived experiences of post-crash consumer capitalism. More specifically, it looks at the 'labour' of parkour as work and leisure. Chapter 4 moves beyond the immediacy of the parkour 'jam' and goes deeper into the wider lives of the traceurs. It interrogates the myriad desires, pressures and conflicts involved in their precarious transitions into adulthood, and the role and meaning parkour occupies in their lives as they attempt the existential tightrope walk of achieving traditional markers of adulthood whilst preserving the unencumbered and culturally relevant lifestyles of youth. This chapter documents the traceurs' various entrepreneurial efforts to set up parkour companies and clothing lines, engage in stunt work and achieve greater status within the British and global parkour scene through advertising and social media productions.

Chapter 5 'Zombie Cities' begins to discuss the issues of space and control by offering a theoretical appraisal of our contemporary city centres. It looks at the transformation of post-industrial cities such as Newcastle in the context of neo-liberalism, urban regeneration and the rise of the 'creative city' model (Mould,

2015; Smith, 1984, 1996). Previous literature has discussed the hyper-regulation, sanitisation and asocial nature of contemporary cities in terms of ‘dead’ or lifeless spaces (Atkinson, 2017; Augé, 1995; Davis, 1990; Jacobs, 1961; Minton, 2012). This chapter nuances the argument by exploring how cities attempt to mainline a veneer of life and ‘the social’ into the dead-zone of contemporary ‘public’ space; creating a strange urban ambience of *living-death*. The chapter demonstrates how the zombification of urban space is vital to the ‘symbolic economy’ of the city (Zukin, 1995) and how parkour fits in and is used within this urban milieu.

Chapter 6 builds upon these spatial discussions to include a consideration of the body and parkour’s embodied practice. It looks to how the traceurs engage with the city in their spatial practice, specifically how they move throughout the interstices of urban space accordance with the spatial and temporal rhythms of flows of urban consumer centres. Therefore, this chapter looks at how traceurs ‘map’ the city, producing and super-imposing their own alternative cartography according to the dominant spatio-temporal rhythms of consumption as a form of spatial-corporeal transgression (Kindynis, 2014, 2018).

Chapter 7 builds upon the spatial discussions in Chapters 5 and 6 and draws upon original observations and ‘walking interviews’ with over a dozen security guards in Newcastle upon Tyne and explores the incoherence and ambiguity with which parkour was policed and controlled by private security teams. The chapter suggests that the contemporary city reflects the wider contemporary culture of liberal individualism, in which space is fragmented and privatised into ever-smaller micro-spheres of spatial sovereignty in which rules, prohibitive signs and the policing of urban space are shaped by a conflicting myriad of privately defined spatial interests, which contributes to a significant ambiguity and uncertainty surrounding what is legitimate and illegitimate in urban space. In doing so, it forces us to question and reappraise explanations of parkour’s policing and governance, which are rooted in highly emotive accounts of ‘moral panic’ or ‘revanchist’ forms of spatial exclusion.

This book undeniably takes a critical line of argument. It does not attempt to romanticise parkour and freerunning or its practitioners. Nor does it afford its practice much radical, transformative and political clout. Of course, this is not what I had hoped to find. At many times during the course of this research, my more liberal side desperately wanted to find genuine and authentic resistance within their practice. In fact, I entered the field a devout cultural criminologist and expected to find political resistance *everywhere*. But, to do so would be a case of ‘confirmation bias’: discovering what one wants to find rather than what is actually there. If the political left is to discover any meaningful impact it must be more critical in its self-evaluation. It must understand how the micro-forms of resistance that it tends to celebrate work hand-in-glove with capitalism’s economic system by adhering to a fully commodified and culturally included logic of socio-cultural liberalism. At times, colleagues have said that this critical line of argument made it appear as if I did not *like* the practice of parkour or the participants in this study. To ‘like’ or admire one’s participants within criminological research seems a strange requirement. Nevertheless, beneath the pessimistic tone that characterises a surface-level analysis of this text, it is

within the overall argument and demand for a more ambitious politics and diagnosis of leisure, capitalism and ideology that I hope you discover the book's truer optimism. The critique and dismantling of the ideas and perspectives that dominate leftist discourse are not defeatist, but optimistic. Abandoning left-liberalism's fantasy-world of organic resistance and acknowledging, with honesty, the post-political landscape of contemporary cities constitutes an important first step towards the imagination and renewal of a properly social civic life and, if we are lucky, the return of real politics.

Lastly, before progressing on to the substantive chapters of this book, I feel it is imperative to be clear on one vital point. This is *not* just a book about parkour. Rather, parkour should be viewed as the ethnographic lens through which we can discover broader insights into the state of work, leisure, cities, transgression, capitalist ideology and an ontology of the subject. This is perhaps quite clear already from the pages above. Nevertheless, in the pages that follow, we will often take lengthy theoretical detours into the complexities of these fields in order to lead us back to an improved and more sophisticated understanding of parkour and freerunning, which can also say something more broadly about the nexus between deviance, leisure, harm and consumer capitalism in contemporary urban contexts.