Suspending absence
Reflections on SAR2020 and *a future that couldn't happen*
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I was scheduled to facilitate a workshop at SAR2020 under "Various Rehearsals" on parkour, titled "parkour as provocation, process, and practice: a leap". It was about using parkour as a way to respond to the "collective crises we face, [cultivating] a fundamental perspectival shift through dynamic transgressive enaction that subvert and reconfigure the very compositions of individual, research, institution we grapple with" (abstract). It was about how to approach our artistic research (and life-living) with adaptability, emergence, recombinance, iteration, and flow, while also allowing space for deviation and failure. It was about paying attention to your body and your body's habits, about learning to feel and trust your body while simultaneously pushing the boundaries of what we find comfortable and leaning into discomfort.

Then Covid spread over the globe and we were all forced to adapt very quickly to a completely different reality, one that prevented us from moving beyond the confines of our homes, prevented us from being together, and which ultimately led to the cancellation of SAR2020 (among many other events). At (almost) the same time, I severely sprained my ankle, just a few days before the lockdown order for Los Angeles was issued, and could not walk or put any weight on it for a few weeks. Not only was my broader geographic movement limited, but my body suddenly within itself was limited in movement. I no longer had access to parkour as a method of response to crisis.

A lot has happened in the past year. Over two million people have died due to Covid. Black men and women were (and still are being) murdered and denied justice by racist institutions. Global political unrest has threatened (and continues to threaten) democratic societies. The inequities, inequalities, and failings of late stage capitalism have been simultaneously revealed and exacerbated. We were forced to slow down, challenged to reflect on our priorities, our relationships, our desires.

And here we are a year later. A lot has changed in a year for me. I spent five months back in my parents' home, the longest I've spent there since leaving ten years ago. I passed my qualifying exams and became a fully fledged All-But-Dissertation PhD candidate . I shaved my head. My research also pivoted; as I reflected on what I truly care about and how I want to spend my time, parkour as a research object has taken a back-seat.

I recognize that I've had an easier time than many this past year. I've had a secure income, and I (and the people around me) have largely stayed physically healthy and safe. While my ankle still isn't completely healed, I can walk again and do parkour as long as I am mindful of my limits and resting when my body tells me to. I'm currently finishing the fourth year of my PhD, and will be the last year of the program. As I look ahead and try to plan for my own next steps, I find myself in a perpetual state of anticipation, not knowing where the next opportunity or obstacle will come from. Perhaps that's the impact of the past year.

In reflecting on parkour, my body, and the events of the past year, I had forgotten about the multiple temporal scales involved in parkour-as-process. On the one hand, there's a certain directness to parkour; when you're training, nothing else matters but what's directly (materially, spatially) in front of you. "Parkour as process" suggests that outside of parkour, if an obstacle arises, you can immediately address it — you can jump over it, go around it, under it, through it; you are in-motion, in-action. But what happens when you can't immediately address it, when action isn't an option? There are things (a lot of things) out of our control, and we can't always immediately fix or address them, even if we want to. Things take time. To me, this isn't a contradiction to parkour, but rather it suggests (or maybe more precisely is a reminder) that there is a larger temporal scale that parkour can also be engaged in. Action isn't always direct or immediate, but can unfold much slower.

In writing this reflection and looking over the materials I had started to prepare for the workshop, I came across one of the quotes for the workshop that I had selected to use as a prompt and provocation. Discussing the distinctions between bodies, crowds, and societies, Henri Lefebvre states "if there is difference and distinction, there is neither separation nor an abyss between so-called material bodies, living bodies, social bodies and representations, ideologies, traditions, projects and utopias. *They are all composed of (reciprocally influential) rhythms in interaction*" (43, emphasis mine). Perhaps due to the immense physical isolation of the past year, I had forgotten that I participate in multiple interacting rhythms, many of which are out of my control and out of my very human range of perception.

I wish I could wrap this reflection up neatly with a statement about how following or trusting parkour as a process will make everything okay. But honestly, it won't, at least not by itself. The last year has demonstrated that anything can happen, and we'll be experiencing the impacts of the events of the last year for the foreseeable future. However, as Lefebvre notes, our philosophizing doesn't and shouldn't stay in our heads, but is embodied, lived out in practice, manifested in our relations to other bodies, crowds, spaces. Parkour as a methodology and mode of navigating the world isn't simply "decided" at the outset, but is continuously renewed and made palpable in the everyday, both on the daily but also at broader temporal scales outside of our purview. It interacts with other rhythms.

Even though parkour has taken a backseat in my research, parkour is more important than ever to me and my creative practice. While it is no longer the primary research object in my dissertation research, it still guides my research process and life-living. As both a physical practice I engage in and a more metaphorical embodied methodology it reminds me to listen to my body, to pay attention to my limits, and to trust my intuitions. Even as I grapple with its applicability here, to a certain extent parkour has allowed me to take all of the past years' challenges and opportunities as they come, to engage in a process and practice of deviation, adaptation, iteration, emergence, and flow. But I'm still figuring things out, trying to work out how to practice parkour in the larger temporal scales of life. Parkour won't make everything okay, but maybe (I'm hoping) it'll make it a little bit easier.

I've included my notes and plans for the workshop as I last left them without any modifications, even knowing how much more I planned or hoped to add. According to Google's version tracking, the last

change I made to the main workshop planning document was February 4, 2020. Hopefully these documents provide some echoes of a future that could(n't) have been and can still act as provocations or productive obstacles towards a future that is still in formation. I'm always open to talking parkour and experimental/alternative epistemologies, so please reach out if you feel so inclined.

I hope that we can all gather and move together soon.

Works Cited

Lefebvre, Henri. 2004. *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*. A&C Black.

Original conference abstract

A provocation: move from point A to point B in as straight a line as possible, reconfiguring your body as necessary. Parkour is a movement practice that invites its practitioners to navigate the urban landscape by running, jumping, climbing, and vaulting around, across, and through obstacles encountered in the terrain. Its practitioners move in transgressive ways and in spaces that do not prescribe or condone such movement. Despite the linearity of the provocation offered above, the paths enacted in parkour are often anything but, as the environment unfolding before its practitioners offers multiple trajectories of deviation and play. What might this approach offer for artistic research practices? As artistic researchers, how do we remain open to possible deviations and form dynamic modes of engagement? How can we engage in transgressive acts that challenge the hegemonic structures of neoliberalism, patriarchy, racism, and institutionalization that we exist within? I argue parkour offers a mode of response to the collective crises we face, a fundamental perspectival shift through dynamic transgressive enaction that subvert and reconfigure the very compositions of individual, research, institution we grapple with.
This session invites participants into the process of encounter and transgression offered through parkour. The session is divided into three sections. The first section takes on the provocation above and asks participants to move about the space, encountering the environment as it emerges. The second section includes writing exercises in response to the movement and offers additional provocation through passages from Deleuze and Guattari, Rosi Braidotti, Erin Manning, Brian Massumi, and other texts. Participants are encouraged to reflect on their own artistic research practice and how they might remain dynamic with their own work. The remaining time is allotted for discussion where participants share the sensations and thoughts that arise from the session.