

Re-making the city

Description

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Cities play host to a range of spatial activities that are at the edge of civility. Such practices are inconvenient to some, often hazardous, opportunistic, unofficial, and occasionally entertaining. Think of graffiti, skateboarding, rooftopping, parkour, free running, begging, busking, sleeping rough, demonstration, and occupation.

Such marginal spatial practices appropriate places and city paraphernalia in ways other than their sponsors, designers, legislators, and polite civilian users intended. In fact these practices challenge the concept of intentionality in the design of streets, buildings, parks and malls.

Some people, for some of the time and with different motivations, will find ways to subvert the normal, sanctioned and official usage of a thing. They see different affordances in everyday objects.



PK vision

In an academic article about parkour, Jeffrey Kidder notes how: â??individuals appropriate physical space and transform it into something useful from their perspective. Handrails become slides; gridlocked streets become mazesâ?• (244). He recounts his own foray into the pastime of parkour (PK). After a while you start to develop â??PK vision.â?•

> â??Suddenly, the low and wide wooden posts that lined the parking lot jumped out at me. They were about two feet off the ground and five feet apart, and they would be an ideal place for practicing precision jumpsâ?• (246).

For the neophyte *traceur* (parkour practitioner) new relationships between objects, and their affordances, start to assume prominence. I assume such transformations come with acculturation to any urban practice: the jogger who starts to see the world in terms of uninterrupted paths and circular routes, the cyclist who assesses the city in terms of gradients and congestion, the rough sleeper who thinks of the city in terms of shelter, security, invisibility.

We are all traceurs

> â??traceurs are remaking the cityâ??turning bland structures like ledges and walls into objects of play. And this play is not only enjoyed by traceurs; it is consumed by others as wellâ?• (247).

So those of us who know about parkour, chance upon groups of traceurs, who see their representations in film and online, and in particular designers who reflect on its spatial implications, are all under the influence of parkour, along with many other marginal urban practices.

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Such remakings of the city are not just foibles in perception by individuals, but are a feature of the shared perception of a group: â??PK vision does not solely reside in the eye of the individual traceur. It is a collective process that comes about as traceurs interact with each otherâ?• (247).

Kidder relates the practice to online videos, which are after all the main source of inspiration for parkour: â??the traceurâ??s imagination is inspired from images and texts circulating within the virtual worldâ?• (248). Such marginal urban practices are in wide circulation and colour the way many of us see the city. They also bring into question our usual ways of seeing. The city is after all made and remade through many perspectives. No doubt there are other perspectives yet to find expression, and yet to provide overt influence on the design of cities.



References

- Atkinson, Michael. 2009. Parkour, Anarcho-Environmentalism, and Poiesis. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, (33) 2, 169-194.
- Kidder, Jeffrey L. 2012. Parkour, the affective appropriation of urban spaces, and the real/virtual dialectic. *City and Community*, (11) 3, 229-253.

Notes

- The first image is a street in the suburbs of Cardiff (City Road). The second is under a bridge in Warsaw.

Category

1. Architecture

Tags

1. city
2. parkour
3. traceur

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