Communities of Risk, Identity, Youth and and Civil Disobedience: Parkour, Skateboarding, Skywalking as Rebellious Play

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Abstract

While contemporary literature champions the biological, psychological, and sociological benefits of play, the ability of play to represent civil disobedience is rarely examined. In short, there is limited literature on investigating the question - what does it mean to play as rebellion? This paper outlines the shared characteristics of three forms of play, parkour, skateboarding, and skywalking as rebellious activities. It is suggested that their shared characteristics and relationship to risk, authority, authenticity, and documented civil disobedience are core to the identity of disobedience.

Using commercial video games based on real-world risky-play, the research illustrates how this play embraces civil disobedience. Each is about playing against authority. The paper offers an analysis of parkour-focused digital play, skateboarding video games, climbing games and a case study in the Storror parkour team and its streams, highlighting the intersection of literature from sports studies, game studies, social science and architecture within this domain.

Keywords: civil disobedience, play, digital games, parkour, skateboarding, skywalking

1. Introduction

It is often recognized that how a society plays indicates much about its culture, values, and traditions. It is likewise evident that how its players engage with a society indicates much about that society. What's less often asserted is how the play of countercultures and alternative play spaces indicates much about the culture in which they exist. When players engage it play at society's limits, what do we learn and what is evoked by such experiences?

This paper explores several informal play activities that share characteristics in their demographics and community culture. These include parkour, skateboarding, and skywalking, all of which are offered in real and digital worlds. Parkour is the play activity of moving rapidly between structures by running, jumping, climbing or acrobatics, typically in urban landscapes. A variety of commercial games like Mirror's Edge (Electronic Arts, 2008) and independent games, like Canabalt (Semi-Secret Software, 2009) helped popularize such play in digital games. Skywalking is the practice of climbing high structures, such as skyscrapers or bridges, unassisted and untethered to take pictures from grand heights. Skywalking's origins are typically attributed to Russian teens who began posting photographs of their activities around 2011. Digital games dependent on high climbing mechanics, like Uncharted 4 (2016) and long running franchises like Tomb Raider (1996) and Assassin's Creed (2007) employ mechanics similar to Skywalking, although the risk to players and the rules of disobedience are admittedly different. Skateboarding, with its more than 70-year real world history and a digital game history dating back to at least the game, 720 in 1986 (Atari), is common enough that its definition seems unnecessary. In short, these are play activities typically deemed dangerous and youthful. They are also play activities which are well documented and center on a culture of photographic and video documentation, making them accessible candidates for play study and academic evaluation.

It seems that this is some of the first work analyzing such play from the perspective of games scholars. Anthropological and sociological work has been done examining the cultures and societies that form around some of these types of play. For those unfamiliar, Brooke's The Concrete Wave (1999) provides an appropriate orientation of the evolution of skateboarding and Gilchrist's Lifestyle sport, public policy, and youth engagement (2011) does a great job of outlining Parkour's emergence. Outside of popular media, there is little written about skywalking other than Deriu's, Don't Look Down (2016).

For philosophical foundation, it is useful to take the seminal philosophical perspectives of Roger Caillois (1961) and Huizingha (2014). Most importantly, both

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assert that play is outside ordinary life, necessitating a clear limit or edge between play and non-play. From this perspective, play ends at the moment that play no longer remains a safe experience or one in which ordinary life is inalterably affected. These modes of risky play assert themselves into ordinary life at that margin. Much like the culture jamming work of the Yes Men (Hynes, 2007) or the social commentary of mockumentaries like Borat (Rosenbaum, 2006) such play blends ordinary life with the players' activities.

The rise of high-risk skateboarding emblematic of modern-day skateboarding, found its birth in the California suburbs among the cement of drained pools, parking lots and railways of office buildings (Brooke 1999). In this case, the play space is the ordinary life of suburban landscapes, the edge is irreparable harm or the real-world game-over of arrest. Skywalking uses built spaces intentioned not for play, but for work, monument, or other ordinary functions. While skywalking doesn't take the mundane place as it's play space, it takes the ordinary life and perspective of these buildings to new heights. Parkour turns pedestrian spaces and ordinary rooftops into playgrounds. Where the Yes Men and Borat play with people, these activities play with space. In particular, these activities play with ordinary space.

Caillois secondarily identifies play as unproductive (1961). Since that work, much has been written about the productive aspects of play as practice for the brain (Brown 2009) and its developmental and social benefits (Ginsburg, 2007). However, less has been discussed about the play's political power. This is especially true when play is examined beyond the performance arts. That is, contemporary literature champions the biological benefit of play and at times, the sociological and anthropological, but not the political or demonstrative value. In short, there is little literature on investigating the question - **what does it mean to play as rebellion?** While civil disobedience is often identified as inaction, a sit-in or refusal to act as required, there is little writing about the *play-in*. What does it mean to play as revolt or rebellion, to create civil disobedience through play?

This paper takes as its example play in public space as a means of asserting power over places. While explicit claims of power of place through play are sometimes made by Jane McGonigal (2003) and other designers of alternative reality games, there is a rarely cited historical and contemporary precedence for such play. That is, engaging in play in a place to assert that play is not merely possible in that place, but necessary. Unlike the politics of an alternate reality game, which layers a fiction on top of place or asserts that it is only a game, players in parkour, skateboarding and skywalking in public space are taking more substantial risk and a more targeted stance against the authority of space. Public spaces rarely sanction against games, especially alternate reality games, but they explicitly prohibit certain types of play. By analogy, to fly a kite in a park that prohibits it, is to explicitly revolt against the rule of law. To imagine flying a kite in that same park, or to rally thousands to play a game that mimics the flying of kites, is potentially subversive, but no matter the scale, it is not an explicit revolt against the rule of law.

As such, those who play at skateboarding, parkour or skywalking are not instrumentalizing their play as purposeful play. Instead, the play functions as play in place. Beal, for example, notes that, the "subculture of skateboarding is described as one form of popular culture that resists capitalist social relations, and the skateboarders' particularly overt resistance to an amateur contest provides a framework for characterizing their daily and more covert behaviors of resistance" (1995).

It is therefore not the claim of this writing that the youth that engage in such sport are aiming to consciously thwart government or make political statements. Instead, they are employing the rarely highlighted power of play - the power of play to disarm. Their play raises questions that destroy the validity of such rule of law. Each successful ollie chips at the claim, as does each jump between rooftops and each awe-inspiring photograph from a skyscraper's antenna. Skateboarding is prohibited because it is dangerous, but each success contradicts the legitimacy of that claim. Despite the obvious risk, skywalking reveals not only its possibility, but that there is something very beautiful behind the myriad of do not enter and prohibited signs. In each of these cases those who successfully ignore the prohibition of play in space, reveal the existence of something more exciting and demonstrably innocuous, despite warnings to the contrary. Such play exposes another truth beyond the realities authority mandates.

2. Unifying Skateboarding, Parkour and Skywalking

This paper uses the formal framing of games and play offered in Doing Things with Games, Social Impact through Play (Grace, 2019). This framing defines games as the concert of 5 elements; territory, implements, inventory, competition, and rules. While none of these play activities is a game, such framing supports a formal analysis of the key elements of such play. Focusing on territory, is particularly important as it functions as both the locus of play and the implement through which play is conducted.

It's important to note that all these activities require little financial investment, as the implements of play are low or no cost. To become a skateboarder, a player need only purchase or inherit a new or used skateboard. Parkour's primary implement is the territory or buildings players scale, jump or repel from. Skywalking, because it relies on access to buildings, requires little expense other than building admittance charges, the camera used for documentation, and the fines of such play.

This is distinct from other high-risk play activities which require a relatively high financial commitment to engage. Other high-risk activities, such as base jumping or skydiving, are not only more expensive (average cost for a kit is $7000.00 USD) they are more apart from ordinary life. BMX racing and tricks, while nearly as low cost as skateboarding, also carries with it specific spaces (e.g. the BMX track) and a less persistent history in the mundane experience of urban life. Its nearest logical neighbor is the urban bicycle rally more commonly known as a critical mass. The critical mass, however, often requires urban permit and adherence to vehicle rules. Its elements of social revolt are mitigated by government and structure. Critical masses take place in neighborhoods on prescribed roads on permitted routes. Other play, such as street racing or Saudi Arabian drifting (al-Otaibi, 2010), require the use and destruction of high value assets (cars and trucks) also limiting audience and access.

With little financial investment, Skateboarding, Parkour and Skywalking, can be cheaper than any video game console or mobile game. Of course, they require one very high toll. They tax the body and at times, the mind. These activities do require high physical labor, often employing acrobatics that would be surprising even in the digital space. The activities of such real-world play are so impressive that they have inspired digital play complements, such as Mirror's Edge (2008), the historical classic Skate or Die (1987), the Tony Hawk Franchise games, and incorporation of such play in (Respawn, 2014) and Assassin's Creed (Ubisoft, 2012). Arguably, skywalking finds its complement in the acrophobic scenes of games as far ranging as Rise of the Tomb Raider (2005) and Journey (2012).

In the case of skywalking, it is admittedly arguable which came first – digital game scenes or skywalking photos. Unlike other phenomena such as NPC streams (Forbes, 2023), in which real world people mimic the behaviors and automated speech patterns of non-player characters, the predecessor for Skywalking is less clear. It is reasonable to assume others had climbed buildings and documented such play before games offered it, but the documentation of this play is scant in academic publication (Murray, 2023). Perhaps the earliest photographic example of note could be attributed to the publicity seeking, widely popularized photograph, Lunch Atop a Skyscraper, depicting 11 iron works eating lunch on a thin iron beam more than 800 feet above New York City (Gambin, 2012). The history of parkour and skateboarding, however, is much more evident, as each has a 15 year or greater history preceding comparable digital games.

These activities are also unified in their inherent risk and penchant for danger. This is, as Brian Sutton Smith describes it, part of risky and deep play (2006). Each offers a mundane equivalent, but the heart of such play is in its flirt with risk and danger. Millions of people have walked along the designed promenades of the world's tallest buildings, walking in safety along the Sky Deck of Singapore's Marina Bay Sands or dining comfortable at the top of Chicago's Hancock skyscraper. Those activities are not skywalking. Millions of people have rolled comfortably along a suburban street on a skateboard, but in the eyes of skateboarding, that is at best the start to the play and sport of a skater. Children hopping between couch and loveseat, playing *the floor is lava* are not playing parkour.

The element of risk turns scaling heights from mere tourism to skywalking. Risk turns the play of skateboarding from ordinary to spectacle. Any jump becomes far more interesting when it involves the risk of falling to one's death or employs the acrobatics of a Cirque Du Soleil performer.

It is these elements, the low cost of entry to play and a relationship to danger that not only unify these three modes of play – they enhance its propensity for offering a distinct brand of political statement. These characteristics allow players to move their play into spaces quickly and easily (in comparison to a surfboard, hang glider, or car). It also allows for a few key elements of civil disobedience. It is also worth noting that while such play does involve an adenylyl inspired activity that digital games might pursue, they are not particularly common play experiences in games. This lack of pervasiveness may hint at the distinct character of these unique play activities which differentiate them from less marginalized types of risky play (e.g., car racing, sports, war, etc.).

3. Risk

Risk can be a way of asserting authority over those who assert authority over you. From a childhood tantrum of holding, one's breath in protest, to playing chicken with two thousand pounds of steel in a car race, humans use risk to assert authority over themselves and sometimes even others. For the

adolescent, it's likely obvious that taking risk is a part of a practiced entrance into adulthood. Risky behavior is not only poorly controlled by a developing mind (Galvin, 2007), it's also a way of asserting departure from the safety of a mitigated life and protected childhood. Risk, unlike other characteristics of adulthood can be taken. It is much harder to take authority, wealth, status, freedom, and certain levels of autonomy.

As a philosophical practice, one could assert that in societies that afford many similar restrictions on individual authority, wealth, status or autonomy, such revolt through a person's risk becomes apparent. This line of logic reads that when a government controls too much of your autonomy, you seek autonomy elsewhere. Risking your life for something you desire allows you to assert your control. It can even be placed in opposition to wasting your life for something you don't desire.

In this framing, skywalking can be dialectically opposed to the mundane ordinary life of risk aversion. Skywalking is the proverbial rock star, with all the danger and possibility, compared with the archetypal accountant, who trades the safety of the mundane for the placid, if not purposeless, life. This is one way of reading the activities of a skywalker or parkour master, who's Internet fame comes with all the danger and possibility of a modern-day rock star.

But such a reading centers the activity too simply on the player. Play occurs in society, and it is as much a product of player abilities as it is a product of the society that produces it. There is, obviously, an audience for this play. An audience that not only streams the videos but shares the photos via social media and often sees aspiration in such activities. The activity of seeing others do such work makes it seem that much more possible. It makes the play inviting, despite the risk and diminishes the perception of risk on each successful completion. **In this way, play brings possibility into view.**

There's also a clear experience. These high-risk activities could be emulated in utter safety, with green screens and Photoshop, but they are not. The players, it seems, are engaged by the guttural experience of it. It is not enough to emulate; they must experience the real risk and danger. This is Sutton Smith's rhetoric of self in full effect (2006). The risk and danger are part of the ludic experience. A flirt with danger is uniquely engaging. This is also in opposition to much of the literature on play, which claims that play must not only be out of ordinary life it must be conducted in a safe way and a safe space. Viewers of any of the videos produced by these individuals will notice few knee pads, climbing gloves or helmets.

This is also in sharp contrast to the many professional sports, which as part of public campaigns, mitigate risk to set what is generally perceived as a good example. Generally, most public, and professional sport increases its safety protocols, making each decade a more risk-mitigated play environment than the last (Timpka, 2006).

It is also important to note that in the history of some of these activities, such as skateboarding, communities look to disarm such play by locating it in specific domains. So, for example, the easiest community measure for handling the rogue risks of skateboarders is simply to create skate parks. This is a strategy of disarmament through separation. By greatly overstated analogy, such effort works like imprisonment or asylums. The risk to society is taken away, by locating it elsewhere. General society has deemed this play inappropriate for normal society, so such play needs to be placed elsewhere and taken from the pedestrian experience of the everyday. Yet, one could claim that what makes such play even more enticing is the lure of breaking the rules. So, for example, skateboarding in a place that hoisted signs against such behavior is perhaps more exciting than skateboarding in a city-sanctioned skate park.

While parkour parks and skateboarding parks can be created, skywalking is much harder a play problem to relocate. Its play is so completely tied to its use of space that there is no easy way to located it elsewhere. It also provides the greatest sense of risk among the trio. The ultimate risk in this perspective is death, but it's also what makes the practice so alluring to the voyeurs who watch it. It is this risk of death, while at play, that fixes humanities collective gaze at tight rope walkers, lion trainers or race car drivers.

But skywalking offers yet another analogy that is rarely touched upon – discovery and exploration. Skywalkwers are not merely adrenaline junkies or performers. The early skywalkers were exploring spaces beyond the ordinary experience of every day. They became famous because they explored the experience of the urban landscape in ways the rest of the world had not. They take photographs from the precipice ends of the landmarks most people photograph from officially marked angles in the safety of the unprohibited. From such a perspective, skywalking is not merely a pursuit of risk, it is an urban exploration.

Yet, more than exploration, it is a firsthand, unmitigated experience. If one has the means, a drone can provide equal vistas, but nothing rivals experiencing it firsthand. To skywalk, one must evade police and security and risk an ultimate price. Recall that for the first to engage in this playful work the only known payout was the experience itself. Tik-tok and

Instagram reels created a broader audience for such play, but they did not create the desire to perform.

Risk is a clear element of such play and its draw. As with many play scenarios and effective game designs, there is a balance between risk and reward that compels the player. The risk of failing to land safely, is balanced by the experience of doing something remarkable and landing safely.

4. The end of a Playful Life

In his exuberant book championing play, Bernie Dekoven offers this observation about playfulness (2002)

Following a playful path is not as much about being playful as it is about your being aware of playfulness: your own playfulness, of wherever you see manifestations of playfulness. It's about noticing playfulness, noticing when you're not playful, noticing when you're not as playful as you want to be, or wish you were, or wish you had been.

What happens when playfulness is prohibited in a space perceived as having potentials for play? If the brutalist, concrete architecture of the entrance to a government courthouse looks like a playground for skateboarders or parkour athletes, what does it mean to explicitly prohibit that space as being perceived as such? Likewise, what happens when their play is taken from the space. Where once there were skateboarders riding the rails, there are pedestrians walking in and out of the courthouse. That is to say, one of the most effective ways to remove the power of play from the ordinary, daily experience of people is to remove it from the everyday experience of players and non-players. Locating, or more commonly relocating, it into a distinct play space does so efficiently and effectively.

Consider when many players engage in such play. Such public play is commonly employed by players at the end of a play-rich childhood and on the edge of what is perceived as a likely play-deprived adulthood. The public player is often a teen who is flirting with adulthood but departing from the social norms of a play-rich childhood. This transition is not only enforced by adults, but by the peer group which is also attempting to understand the new rules of the next phase of their lives. At the very least what such players demonstrate is the reluctant pull of a playful life, as they assert publicly the value and experience of that world they are likely to leave behind.

It's also useful to think about the physicality of such play. Those who engaged in such play are publicly displaying the intersection of childhood and adulthood. They are demonstrating characteristics and behaviors ascribed to youthfulness, such as playfulness, lack of responsibility, detachment to consequences, etc. Yet they are also combining key elements of adulthood, such as being at one's physical prime, being independent, demonstrating authority and commanding one's own life.

5. Performance, Documentation and Authenticity

It is evident that such play often works against social or political prohibitions. To play, one must walk past do not enter signs, trigger door access alarms, and evade authorities. What's more important to note is that they do so publicly, blatantly and while documenting this rule breaking. Players record their play, creating evidence not only of their play, but also of their civil disobedience. As such, there is ample resource from which to study this play.

Players of these activities are very concerned about the image projected by their play. They are aware of two publics - the public performance in real time and the recorded public performance. Whether YouTube video, digital selfie or VHS Camcorder recording, the evidence of these forms of play are well-documented.

Even as part of the less digitally mediated past of the skateboarding culture, what's evident is a concern for authenticity. Hence the offense of being *a poser* - or one who fakes what one doesn't have. The value of authenticity is one of the key elements of skateboarding culture (Beal and Weidman, 2003). This interest in authenticity pervades all these activities. Those who shoot parkour video, also share their mistakes as varied fail videos. The lure of skywalking is in the authentic risk, climbing without a harness, standing on the edge without a net.

The challenge here is of course in determining how much of this rebellion is a product of youthful angsts and peer pressure, and how much of it is open declaration of revolt. In the end, the locus of motivation for the play matters far less than the play itself. It is public, it is in opposition to social norm, and it is in full revolt to civil prohibitions. It does, at the least, insert play in what is socially deemed as non-play spaces.

6. Civil Disobedience

The history of each of these play activities is rich with the brand of civil disobedience that puts the player's play above civil law. Of these three, the history of Parkour is perhaps the most evidently political. As Atkinson (2009), Lamb (2014) and Guss note, parkour was from its early 90's origins, political. Whether or not those politics form an "anarcho-environmental" movement (Atkinson, 2009) is up for

debate, but the politics of using space officially sanctioned for non-play is clearly at the center of the parkour community's activities.

It is no surprise then, that the digital games that depict these play activities are also centered on the tension between the activity and authority. Mirror's Edge (2008), often identified as the ultimate digital parkour game, has a narrative about evading government surveillance (Ciccoricco, 2012). The parkour dependent mechanics of Sunset Overdrive (Insomniac Games, 2014) aim the player at destroying the authoritarian might of a corporate system. Even the themes in Ghostrunner (One More Level, 2020), which include ascending the superstructure of humanity in search of a truth everyone knows and no one admits, hints at a distrust of the political and social structures that preserve the status quo. In each of these parkour focused games, the player subverts authority through their play.

The digital precedent of skateboarding is more complex. The design of the most popular franchise in skateboarding simulation, Tony Hawk's Pro Skater's (Neversoft, 1999) routinely offered skateboarding out of context, offering players conveniently retrofitted public and private space without evidence of any other inhabits or non-player characters. For years, within the most popular skateboarding video games, there was tension between public and private space because other people simply didn't exist. Early Tony Hawk games simply offered a play space and evaluation of how well the player engaged with that space.

The lack of others in itself may be meaningful for the way it positions the player as the center of the world and ignores the needs and literal existence of others. However, Tony Hawk's Underground (Neversoft, 2003) introduced narrative plot that notably focuses on individuality from its first-time-for-the-franchise use of character customization to the narrative arc of the player's rise to status. Other popular skateboarding games, like Mike V: Skateboard Party are notoriously individual experiences lacking any sense of community or public in their standard play. Pocket Gamer's review of the game comically notes "although there's a mention of a *Party* in the title, this is very much a solo affair - with only the ability to compete on leaderboards, or spam Twitter and Facebook with updates on your progress, to combat the loneliness" (Devlin, 2012).

From this perspective, Skateboarding video games, seem to have been less eager to embrace the anti-government, civic, or civil disobedience of real-life skateboarding. This characterization may have to do as much with the real-world politics of games blamed for anti-social behavior, Tony Hawk's branding and the commercial nature of games (Bennet and Lachowetz, 2004). The challenge designing games true to the culture of these types of play is that modern games are subject to board rooms and investors. It is difficult for institutions to create anti-institutional media without abstracting them toward science fiction or projected future.

What's left then are games with a similar spirit, but slightly different real-world equivalent. Jet Set Radio Future (Smilebit, 2002), for example, carries the same themes of evading authorities as Mirror's Edge, but uses in-line skating and graffiti in place of skateboarding for acts of disobedience.

The experience of skywalking is perhaps most like the dramatic experience of adventure games like Tomb Raider and the high wire runs of first-person shooters. Yet each of these is a constructed space designed for such an experience. The player of a Tomb Raider game goes only where the authority, the system and its designer's allow players to be.

This is why, for each of these video game equivalents, thwarting the prescribed play space may be the most anti-authoritarian experience of them all. In constructed spaces, perhaps it is the glitch or the critical disobedience to the system that offers the most evidence of the spirit of their real-world equivalents. Gualeni champions the potential for glitches to "stimulate critical thought and make us suspicious of the stability and validity of our world views" (2016). Westecott, Esptein and Letich note that "when politically motivated the game glitch aims at disturbing the hegemonic structures of normative game culture" (2014). Perhaps the opportunity for civil disobedience in game play is in the glitch. The gameplay recording of creating game glitches may be tantamount to recording skateboarding where it is not allowed or jumping between buildings. There is documentation of the edge of prescribed play and embrace of play where it was not intended.

Interestingly, the acts of civil disobedience in this space are not only public, but they are also well-documented. Because so much of the culture of these activities is about recording and sharing the failures and success, it seemed appropriate to do a simple ethnography of them through the videos they share. The secondary benefit of this approach is that doing so allows the research to be informed by those elements that are most projected by the player community. In short, it's like reviewing a highlight reel as a means of peeking into the world of such play.

The pioneering play activities of Sébastien Foucan, Jérôme Ben Aoues, and Johann Vigroux are well-documented in book (Greek, 2015) documentary film (Christie, 2005) and the blockbuster film, Casino Royale (Campbell, 2006). As such their play has been the frequent focus of academic research already and is

less than ideal for ethnographic analysis due to the commercial packaging of such play. Both their films, Jump London, and Jump Britain are focused free-running which some interpret as an offshoot of parkour. Instead, the parkour athletes of the self-described Storror Team seems an ideal case study from which to observe and analyze the political tensions of the sport.

6.1 Case Study – The Storror Team.

The team of eight from South of England, are most noted for their parkour videos in Malta, Hong Kong, India, the United States and Seoul. In 2018, they were deported from India for their parkour activities. The team is comprised of Callum Powell, Sacha Powell, Max Cave, Benj Cave, Drew Taylor, Joshua Burnett-Blake, and Toby Segar.

In much of their documented play, the threat of being caught is present. One of their videos, garnering more than 10 million views, conveys the tensions of their play on top of Hong Kong Rooftops (Storror, 2017). With the energy of body cameras and handhelds, they sneak into a private rooftop to play. Before long, it goes badly, as many of these videos do. Callum narrates on camera:

> "So, um, we've just been caught up on the roof, but it's like one of the best roof spots we've been on for roof jumps. I still want to do it, but we've been caught by security. So, I'm going to hide here. The others have ran now, but I'm gonna wait it out. Hopefully I can get out the bottom and film it. There's security up there on another rooftop over there, but they can't get to me because they have to do a roof gap, so I'm safe as long as I stay here"

There is a particularly political tension in their play that they themselves do not acknowledge. They are playing, against the law. But they are playing often against the law as British nationals in former British colonies or protectorates (save for Seoul). As British nationals, it is evident there is a political history and the historical tensions that may remain with it. Indeed, the majority of its 8 members are of European decent, playing often in non-European countries.

The power dynamics, and the history they offer, are unavoidably intertwined with the unique privilege of their birth. The risks to body and rights, are protected by political systems and social systems. They are not playing in their own backyards, but in someone else's. This play is not only at physical and political edge, it's also at the edge of responsibility. While lacking physical safety nets, they remain protected by the politics of being UK tourists.

This is exceedingly apparent in the videos posted to YouTube and other outlets, which not only demonstrate Parkour, but also champion the violations. As part of their documentary, Roof Culture Asia, the film makers offer a video of their subjects evading Hong Kong (Storror, 2017) police to accompany the myriad of other such videos, largely un-staged, by others. It is this documentation and continued violation of civil law that demonstrates the character of such play. These players are not engaged in hurting others but risking themselves in the pursuit of "mere" play.

The work to subvert authority is not only a byproduct of the play, but an active part of it. To parkour well, one must accept the risks of authoritarian reprimand. In their feature length documentary about their exploits in Asia, one of the athletes claims with all the bravado of extreme sports- ""everything's against you, time, security, the weather – everything is against you, there is nothing that goes your way" (Cave, 2017) (Cave et al, 2017). This voice over is layered on top of shots of one of the team members being escorted into a police vehicle. While this documentary is like all such films, designed to make a claim. It is that claim that is worth examining. The players are breaking the law, they are getting arrested, and that is an important part of the sport of parkour. A significant portion of the sport is the civil disobedience that accompanies it. Of course, that civil disobedience is part performance and at a much lower political risk than the average Hong-Kong protester in 2020.

7. Race and Civil Disobedience

The context for this play is not without it's obvious socio-political and racial tensions. The aforementioned videos, for example, feature Caucasian players in Asia. Were these players Chinese, jumping rooftops in Hong Kong, would they be met with such tolerance? If they were predominantly African-American on the rooftops of any US city, would their play be viewed as play or suspected as something criminal?

How interesting then, that civil disobedience's history is often synonymous with racial tensions, as a strategy employed by Gandhi to fight British-Indian inequality and abuse, and again by Dr. Martin Luther King to fight racial segregation in the US. Civil disobedience as play, is less rarely ascribed to sport and play, despite the obvious history of the many racial and gender firsts in professional sports (e.g., Jackie Robinson in Major League Baseball or Kathrine Spitzer in the Boston Marathon).

The same tensions have been documented as the history of skateboarding (Carr, 2010) in varied communities around the world (Nolan, 2003). Yet, what is perhaps distinct to skateboarding is the clear

racial tensions ascribed to its community's identity (Brayton, 2005). If skateboarding carries with it the racial politics of its U.S. origins, the next obvious question is to ask how the Russian history of skywalking, or the French history of Parkour play to their contemporary relationship to race and civil disobedience?

Unfortunately, there is little space to cover such ground in this paper but suffice it to say that there are an estimated 35,000 parkour players (BBC, 2014). The fact that they are teaching it in some UK schools has resulted in a more diverse community of players than the others (BBC, 2014). Whether all players are subject to the same tolerances in sanctioned and unsanctioned areas of play continues to be debated.

Obviously, the tradition of civil disobedience has been ascribed to wider ranging and noble efforts, such as civil equality. However, what's interesting is this contemporary play's effort toward civil disobedience. It demonstrates play in the face of civil and political opposition.

8. Conclusion

One clear problem with this analysis is the reality that many of these play practices are dominated by males. Parkour is perhaps involved in the more distinct and complicated gender dynamics of the three (Wheaton, 2016). Watching parkour videos or skateboarding videos doesn't demonstrate the work of many women. This could be attributed to a variety of cultural norms, particularly in Western cultures, that identify coming of age differently for males and females. For males it's often about taking authority and asserting dominance. For women, many are encouraged toward socialization, community, assumption of what is coarsely noted as female responsibility. None of these even touches on the complexity of intersectionality and of recognizing that binary gender norms are in themselves questionable. The maleness of such activity, if true, is concerning in that if these public space play activities are demonstrative of rebellion, there surely must be similar rebellion occurring in female identifying communities.

It's also important to note that many of these activities are the manifestation of entitlement. They declare that it is an individual's right to be playful in public, even at the risk of others. It affirms that those whose job it is to protect such properties have less right to do so than those clever enough or brazen enough to evade or ignore their authority. It does what many such activities can do. It demonstrates that if you are lucky enough to be born with a few characteristics, physical prowess, the right race, the resources to have space and time to engage in such play – then the world becomes your oyster. Your play and the right to do so, supersedes someone's need to take a nap in a park, complete their work in an office building, or otherwise meet their goals. This is where every civil servant and lawmaker has hit the conflict. How to reconcile a manifest destiny of such play with the many needs of others that use the space?

This is where the politics of such play, collide with the history. Globally, if you are not of certain communities, the appropriate race, if you do not have the right look, or were not born with the right physical abilities this play is not for you. It is not for you because you will look suspicious before you ever make it to a rooftop. It is not for you, it reads. The risks are too great in a world that may have biases toward your starting at a disadvantage. It's also managed by the range of culturally allowed forms of play. To play by blasting music and dancing to it are culturally disallowed, in the same public space in which the whine and chatter of skateboards is allowed. Parkour becomes trespassing, sometimes on socio-political lines. The definition of a gang often divides on racial lines, not activity or group size.

Yet, despite these realities there is a clear type of civil disobedience expressed through such play that is worth investigating. It's willingness to risk life and limb in pursuit of the play state offers fodder for understanding how play functions. While obviously players don't solely engage in such play to thwart the authorities that prohibit it, it's important to note how the social prohibition, self-efficacy, and desire to play not only express themselves but persist in each generation of risk-seeking play. It's also worth noting how society attempts to navigate these forces, often by offering them elsewhere in designed play spaces. This compartmentalization of play space repeats other efforts to manage specific communities by mitigating them to state-sanctioned place.

Herein is where digital games further complicate notions of civil disobedience in the real world. Rallying a squad of players to transgress game rules, offering for example a flash mob dance party instead of engaging in the kill-or-be-killed dynamics of battle royal games may result in the digital equivalent of arrest – banning from game for disrupting other player's experience. Any play, which breaks the intended rule and declares another form of play within the created space, might serve as the simplest way to interpret the link between digital game civil disobedience and real-world play. Playing differently than the intended structures of play encourage is perhaps the closest approximation of civil disobedience in a game. Such examples include playing as a pacifist in a first-person shooter or as a photographer of landscapes in a similar space. But building a game sot

support such activities (Pinchbeck, 2009) eliminates the opportunity to disobey its system through such action or inaction. What this also means is that for any game that is designed to offer the experience of such case studies as skateboarding or parkour, there is no digital civil disobedience through their intended play. Since the algorithmic rules of the game space are their rules of law, the paradox remains that the least likely equivalents for civil disobedience are spaces designed for such play. Instead, one must parkour in a game not intended for it, skate where skateboards might not exist, and climb heights not normally revealed.

What then remains in the digital world is arguably, the space of cheats, hacks, and glitch. As discussed earlier, glitch may encourage critical thought but is perhaps more akin to exploiting law to highlight legal inefficient. In could merely foster an opportunity to critique the law or algorithmically law, less than exploit the power and impact of civil disobedience. What's left then is cheats and hacks to do the digital world equivalent of the real-world play. That is, to make the game afford what it didn't be design, by inserting skateboards where they lacked, adding the ability to traversing urban landscapes and creating exploits for climbing where the game did not intend.

In such cases, the result might result in a player being banned. Which unsurprisingly, might be the closest such players can get to a civil disobedience cost. Being omitted from the play space, or having a virtual character destroyed has a clear cost, especially when considering the psycho-social ties players have to their avatars and the communities through which they connect in games.

Ultimately, there are many questions left to answer. What does such play say about contemporary society and the engaging qualities of risky behavior in and outside of digital worlds? Do we retreat to such play when we feel the world is losing its authenticity? Does virtual reality's risk-free environment amplify a hunger for a risk-full play? Is such play a response to the politics of control or a revolt the safety of a western, middle-class childhood? How does one reconcile claims of protective nanny states, of generations that have been protected from any harm on playground or classroom, with that same generation's desire to take far more extreme risk? This paper does not aim to answer these questions, but merely to raise them as perhaps indicators of a greater pattern in play and its relationship to the society in which it exists.

Admittedly, research on these practices could be augmented with analysis of fringe sports and activities, like extreme ironing, that share evident attributes with Skywalking. They could also be further explored with counter-culture play associated with distinct ethnic communities and subcultures. Future work could include analysis of alley dice games, of flash mobs, and even of the asymmetrical play of urban graffiti.

More importantly, there is a question that should be raised about the societies from which this play is generated. Is high-risk play the product of over emphasis on safety, on the machismo of male dominance, or a revolt to the armchair safety of digitally mediated play? Is it an innocuous manifestation of historical patterns and the needs of the human psyche or the harbinger of more? The goal of this writing is not to answer such enormous questions, but instead to encourage further research into these play practices as means for asking deeper questions about play, players, and society

10. References

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