

Dear LUTSF,

Many thanks for giving me the opportunity to study free running alongside some of the top free runners in the world. It was an insightful and rewarding experience that influenced my self-development, movement capacity and career perspective.

Please find enclosed the report of my experience as a participant at Tempest Free running Academy in LA. I attended a summer program from 30th July -10 August 2012. The academy enabled me to enhance my skills, understand free running in depth and locate therapeutic aspects that could be targeted specifically for wellbeing.

Just to recap, Parkour is the movement discipline of getting from point A to point B in the quickest most efficient way, using running, jumping and climbing, overcoming any obstacles in all environments. Free running is a style that runs alongside parkour but isn't bound by efficiency and speed therefore it allows complete freedom of movement. Both are a mind frame which allows you to overcome mental and emotional barriers through building strength, taking risks and facing fears.

Whilst there are set physical fundamentals to aid this purpose, once learned each individual finds their own path and way of moving. A strong emphasis is placed on developing physical and mental strength for the purpose of achieving our full functionality and potential. Ultimately it is a way of life that can allow us to be more capable, useful, free and safe. The motto of parkour is '*be strong to be useful*' and a person who practises parkour or freerunning is called a Traceur.

The scholarship allowed me to investigate and explore some of these themes in depth. This led to my assurance and understanding of the therapeutic qualities this artform naturally embodies. In turn this gave me the confidence to postpone my MA Dance Movement Psychotherapy degree at Roehampton University until 2013 and start my own company fusing parkour and dance for well-being and performance purposes.

The report contains highlights and insights from my journey. I hope you enjoy reading about my mini adventure but more so understand that next time you see someone jumping from buildings, they may be participating in a self-improving activity rather than reckless behaviour.

Thank you for your wonderful support.

Love, Peace, Strength,

Jade Shaw

Lisa Ullman Scholarship Report 2012

From Beats and Breaks to Flow and Flips

Hip hop is a life style from the music you play to the clothes you wear, to the attitude you adopt and the culture you immerse yourself in. Street dance (within the hip hop culture) is an underrated dance genre of which some of the most breathe taking styles have emerged and positive social change taken place. I was a bgirl (female who undertakes breakin) in the culture and lived my life within the street dance scene for over 10 years training, teaching and traveling to events.

However during the past few years I have felt the need for something different that develops my physical, psychological and spiritual sense of self. For some people this can be achieved within some street dance styles. However personally I felt I outgrew the competitiveness, ego side of the scene and became aware that it didn't fit with my own ideals of self-development anymore.



Then I found Parkour. Drawn like most people to the seemingly super human magnificent feats, it wasn't long before I discovered it was much more than jumping off rooftops as the media often depicts it. It's a lifestyle that embraces anyone without question, develops your physical and mental capacity and allows exploration into your outer and inner landscape. The motto of Parkour is '*be strong to be useful*', useful to yourself and others. As a Buddhist this really resonated with my values and I quickly realised how parkour is like moving meditation, being aware and completely in the moment. As a person who struggles to sit still this was my answer to challenging the mind and body.

The Journey

I arrived in LA on 30th July 2012 and was very excited about being in America and training at one of the top free running gyms in the world. I quickly realised that my accommodation was 3 hours away by public transport (only 45mins by car). Unfortunately this influenced how many times I attended the academy in the first week. However during the second week after building friendships I was able to get lifts back from the venue and train more frequently.



Tempest Freerun Academy

Tempest freerun academy is a playground of parkour heaven. Nate wessel the famous Xgames ramp designer must have been in a lucid dream or on acid when he designed it. A Nintendo Mario land, Ninja Warrior replicas and a giant whale foam pitt are nestled in seemingly multi-dimensional space of levels, axis's, and walls that makes you wonder what minotaur lies within this labyrinth.



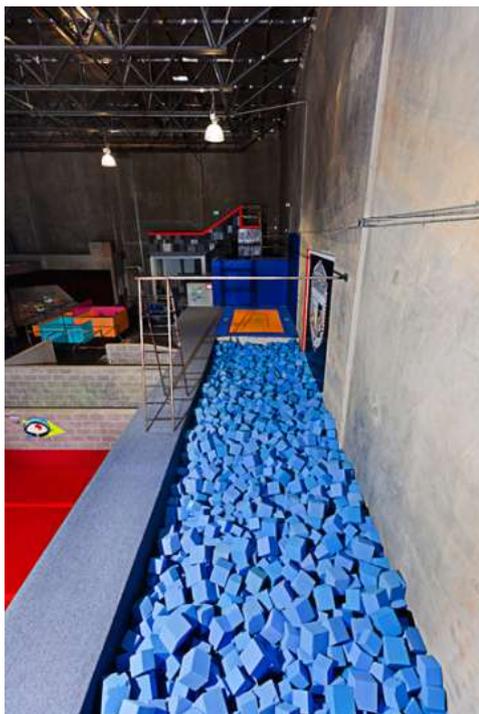
After a few classes I realised that minotaur was fear. I took part in the beginners and intermediate free running class every day and stayed for open sessions. At the academy they have a band system where different coloured bands recognise your level of ability. These denote what activities you're allocated in the classes. After attacking movement easily I quickly got promoted to the second band. I went from being one of the strongest in my group to one of the weakest as the movement became more challenging. Strength and power was my weak spot but it was fear of falling that held me back the most. Luckily the soft sprung floor and foam pit allowed my mind to take some risks but they were always well within my physical capability.

I quickly became focused on attaining particular moves which only repetition and conditioning would eventually allow. An example of this is in my private sessions (I had four). I had wanted to focus on achieving one or two somersaults as this was an area of free running I hadn't prioritised before. However it became clear I was wasting time learning basic technique I could obtain from any gymnast instructor. Therefore we started looking at flow combinations and footwork, achievable skills in the timeframe I had which I could take away and enhance my practise with. I quickly realised I love this way of moving. It comes naturally to me and feels right in my body. Working on these

aspects allowed me to experiment with one piece of apparatus, challenging my creativity and thinking.

A regret I have is that during my time at this venue I didn't 'play' very much in the space. I took part in class and focused on a movement or particular obstacle. I later realised that when

improvised movement exploration comes into play, your body finds a way to travel through the environment, flow naturally develops and your own creative movement emerges. Individual style develops that is unique to your body, way of thinking and moving. Play is a key element in parkour and is something that should be a core value in any parkour class. This is a lesson I will take away with me for my own practise and that will influence how I explore new environments.



Realisations and Revelations

I really should have had a conditioning plan in place before the trip. Although I knew a certain amount of strength and stamina was needed for some of the movement what I didn't realise was how my body would respond to such intense amounts of high impact physical activity. I knew the technique of some of the movements but was physically unable to achieve them due to lack strength.

I became fascinated at how freerunning and parkour can transform ANY space. By using the body to play, explore and adapt changes not only the observer's perspective of the environment but also the traceurs. As a traceur when you see your surroundings from a different view point something psychological shifts, being above everything makes you feel free and limitless (particularly more so in urban environments where you don't realise how much you feel caged in by the walls of the city). Also when you develop what traceurs call '**parkour vision**' you begin to see obstacles as opportunities and architecture as a chance for movement. In the mind's eye the architecture is removed and replaced with a course of movement. This made me think how one could use the architecture purposefully to transform space, shift perspective, engage wonder and influence society.

Parkour is very safe and outdoor and indoor training are very different ball games. Indoor you take more risks due to the nice safe sprung gym floor and mats (despite most accidents occurring indoors precisely for this reason!). Plus your choices and perspective is limited. Outdoors everything is solid concrete, you measure your risks with increased awareness and only undertake movement's within your capacity. Which is why, despite the publics on going concern for a traceurs safety and the commercial industries exploitation of it as a seemingly reckless activity, it is actually very safe. It's often uneducated traceurs that take haphazard risks; these are the ones who sustain unnecessary injuries. That's not to say if you're conscientious you will never get an injury, like any sport challenging yourself plays a large part. However during this trip I realised that parkour effects your awareness, you become more alert.

Risks must be taken to move forward. When impeded with a wall, obstacle or by a fear that stops you moving forward you must measure the risk with awareness and build the courage to tackle it. Even if you fail you learn from your mistakes, recognise the faults of the action and learn how to bail out of movement safely. You can then make mindful changes. To not take risks is to remain safe but stagnant, in the long run it will impede whatever progress you wish to make because to achieve there needs to be change. Without taking risks you cannot make change and will not discover what you are capable of.

There is a set of skills you work on in free running to enable you to become an efficient traceur. Four of these are: **precision**-landing controlled from one specific spot to another (precision jumps) and knowing where to precisely place your body in order to overcome the obstacle, **touch**-landing quietly, controlled and softly absorbing impact and moving unheard like a ninja, **speed**-overcome obstacles quickly, **flow**-moving fluidly from one obstacle to the next. My strength is flow, making smooth transitions from one place to another, following the pull of energy and gracefully traveling over the obstacles. This would make sense with my background being in dance.

Make friends with the obstacle and it will be easier to overcome! I did this by literally rolling all over the obstacle exploring its magnitude and proportions with my body. If your body feels it knows the obstacle well it adapts better. This prompts a little less fear and knowledge of the dimensions giving it a seemingly more 3D effect then by simply standing and observing it from a distance.

Free Running as Therapy?

From observing, participating in and exploring free running during my time in LA, what stood out for me was how most of the traceurs appeared to be free-spirited, adopt a positive outlook and seem to have a zest for life. This is something that I have encountered before in the free running/parkour community. I feel that developing the body and one's movement in such a way as to push your physical and mental limits dramatically increases the capacity of the mind and body. This in turn builds an abundance of strength with which a feeling of safety, self-belief and freedom flows.

For regular practitioners who engage every day in facing fears, overcoming obstacles and taking risks, constant mental barriers are being broken. Obstacle's become opportunities for challenge and gateways to new paths and new perspectives. Therefore not only does your perception of the environment change but your view on challenge and overcoming adversity manifests into a positive and beneficial personal attribute. Exploring the outer landscape allows you to traverse your inner landscape and get to know yourself.

Harvard research has shown that 21 days of repetition of a new action is enough to create new neurological pathways in the brain. It's well known that 10,000 hours of practise is enough for the brain to perform the action without thinking and be completely embodied but with just half the amount time the actions and thoughts become habitual tendencies. Therefore, in dealing with fear it seems that parts of the psyche generating fear and anxiety could become integrated with the inner self within months not years. Psychologist Carl Jung described the fruition of this as individuation - full psychological wholeness, when the relationship with the conscious and unconscious mind is complete.

It is only once the self is integrated that you can be fully in the moment, completely aware with a sense of lucid clarity. This aspect is vital in the precision, control and measurement of risks in free running and draws parallels with meditation. This is why I think free running is a form of movement meditation; you have to be absolutely in the moment and let go.

The inner and outer exploration, shift of perspective, confronting fears, overcoming obstacles, taking risks and broadening of awareness that is undertaken in parkour and free running can transform and heal people's lives.



Conclusion: Sky's the Limit

My overall aim was to gain a deeper understand of free running, increase my skills and capacity as a traceur and investigate how it could be used as a form of movement psychotherapy. From my experience I gained invaluable insights and evidence for my suspicions that it could be used to help people from all walks of life. So much so I have set up my own company *ParkourDance* that fuses dance and parkour for purposes of wellbeing and performance (see information and link to website on page below).



I am currently working with a social worker to develop a *ParkourDance* program for disengaged young people in pupil referral units called *The Hero Within*. The program looks at themes such as identity, relationships, communication, motivation and engaging self-belief. It aims to help give young people strength and insight to overcome problems, realise their dreams and integrate back into education, work and society.

As part of the company another program I am looking to devise soon is *Young at Heart* a regular course for people over 60s. Physically this looks at improving joint strength, coordination, mobility, memory, spatial awareness and balance through gentle and gradual exercises. However mentally it encourages play, self-expression and engaging with the environment, something some older people may avoid due to fear and change. But perhaps most importantly it will bring older people together to build friendships and provide a support network.



After a few requests from colleagues and friends I have also started to set up a professional *ParkourDance* performance company. The dancers will focus on transforming unusual, mundane and unloved places into spaces of beauty, energy and life. By reforming and revolutionising areas that are usually cemented by everyday expectations, the company adjust architecture, shift audience perspective and inspire positive personal and social change.

I have taken a huge risk by dropping most of my current teaching work and post phoned my MA in Dance Movement Psychotherapy to set up *ParkourDance*. I needed the time and energy to make it happen. It's still in the early stages but I have belief that it will grow and help transform people's lives.

I am particularly grateful to the Lisa Ullman Foundation as I would not have been able to afford this life changing trip had it not been for their support. Thank you, I hope you have enjoyed reading about my experiences.

Love, Peace, Strength, Jade.

ParkourDance Company

ParkourDance is the UK's first company to fuse the ethos and technique of parkour with the medium of dance for well-being and performance purposes. This unique collaboration of disciplines encourages exploration, self-expression and strength through moving in relation to the environment, body and mind.



OUR VALUES

- ✓ **Strong body, strong mind, strong life**
- ✓ **Obstacles are stepping stones of accomplishment**
- ✓ **Face fears and find freedom**
- ✓ **Play, explore and discover the environment**
- ✓ **Be unique, find your own path**
- ✓ **Dare to dream - transcend your limitations**

THE PARKOURDANCE WAY

We believe that the life improving qualities of parkour integrated with the creative outlet of dance will enrich, enable and strengthen people's lives.

We seek to accomplish this by delivering workshops, courses and projects to a diverse range of people, regardless of age or ability, in education and community contexts.

We do this by fusing elements of parkour with dance and use the principles of parkour for movement stimuli. Such as:

- Overcoming obstacles - physical and mental
- Facing fears
- Measuring and taking risks
- Play and exploration
- Discovering and adapting to the environment
- Challenging and transcending your physical and mental limitations

Workshops can be developed purely for well-being aspects, to build to a specific performance outcome, or a combination of both. We tailor our projects to the specific needs and requirements of each group.

Watch our showreel to see what we do!

www.parkourdance.co.uk