

Ciné 1.0: My Playground Transforms the Built Environment | BURNAWAY

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Still from Kaspar Astrup Schröder's *My Playground*, 2011. Still courtesy Modern Atlanta.

Like the battling, uber-stylish street gangs in the 1961 movie musical *West Side Story*, the lithe city folk in *My Playground* leap through Copenhagen's immaculate concrete jungle, run up walls, and sail from stair cases with moves that could have been

choreographed by [Jerome Robbins](#).

The Danish documentary *My Playground* about the acrobatic discipline of [parkour](#) has cross-over appeal for architects, artists, urban planners, and skate punks alike. The film centers on an international cadre of very fit adults who use public staircases, rooftops, construction sites, lamp posts, and any other physical impediment to leap, twirl, balance, handstand, and otherwise transform the built environment into a jungle gym for grown-ups. Meditative electronic music follows the preeminent Danish parkour [Team Jiyo](#) as they perform a startling number of stunts in Denmark and around the world in *My Playground's* examination of the phenomenon.



Kaspar Astrup Schröder, *My Playground*, 2011. Image courtesy Modern Atlanta.

Parkour has been commemorated in countless [YouTube](#) videos and a smattering of narrative films, from the 2006 James Bond film *Casino Royale* to [Anthony Minghella's](#) 2006 *Breaking and Entering*. In such films, parkour's presence might initially be mistaken for a conventional foot

chase sequence, until its degree of graceful athleticism reveals itself. *My Playground* goes one

step further, offering up a stylish tribute to parkour that shows in endless moments of on-the-street footage, the remarkable athleticism of athletes found in Denmark, China, Japan, and the American parkour hotbed of Washington, D.C.

Children navigating city streets in the same way probably wouldn't raise an eyebrow, but parkour's practitioners are out-of-short-pants urbanites who interact with their city in a comparably child-like, playful, creative way. Inventive, exploratory use of space is certainly one of the things we give up when adulthood strikes, but Danish artist, designer and film director [Kaspar Astrup Schröder's *My Playground*](#) makes a powerful argument for the value of play in enlivening city space and rousing its denizens from the dull slumber that defines their interaction with the places they live. It also shows a European sensibility far ahead of an American one in terms of integrating human beings and their urban environments. During several scenes in the documentary, members of Team Jiyo are shown collaborating with architects at the renowned Copenhagen architectural firm [B.I.G. \(Bjarke Ingels Group\) Architecture](#), whose stacked apartment complex and parking deck [Mountain Dwellings](#), have become popular places for parkour to re-imagine city space. Even while B.I.G. founding architect Bjarke Ingels picks Team Jiyo's brains about design, he seems activated and inspired by parkour's goals of creating a city that adapts to human interaction.

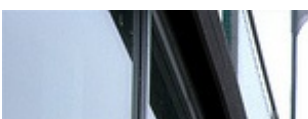


Still from Kaspar Astrup Schröder's *My Playground*, 2011. Still courtesy Modern Atlanta.

The discussions about urban space in *My Playground* between B.I.G. and Team Jiyo would be hard to imagine emerging between American architects and skate boarders or street artists, where hierarchies seem to be more entrenched. Much of the content in this hypnotic

documentary invites similar cultural head-scratching, from the spotless Copenhagen streets, to the cheery wholesomeness of its traceurs, to the nonplussed reactions (or lack thereof) of pedestrians who seem to take men walking on their hands down a city staircase in utter stride.

Some of the film's traceurs express a metaphysical approach to parkour, describing it as "overcoming the boundaries in your head." And while parkour practitioners often speak of the discipline in the kind of philosophical terms found in the martial arts, for the most part *My Playground* is more fixated on the dynamic between architecture and these vaulting, leaping spatial acrobats. Schröder's particular interest in design shapes *My Playground*, which makes the physical interaction between free runners and urban space the bulk of the film—the athletes' bodies like bouncing balls in an old movie articulating architecture's lyrics. Another breed of documentarian might have delved into the lives of the free runners: how and why they took up the sport, or the lifestyles of the people that parkour attracts around the globe. Instead, *My Playground* is defined by a slightly starched conceptual thrust reminiscent of design docs, such as [Gary Hustwit's *Objectified*](#).



Still from Kaspar Astrup Schröder's *My Playground*, 2011. Still courtesy Modern



Atlanta.

One of parkour's more interesting dimensions, especially when strung together into the pure-action sequences in *My Playground*, is how it echoes the wordless ecstasies of dance. And yet parkour is also a visual non sequitur. It exists in a nebulous zone incorporating

elements of acrobatics, military obstacle courses, performance, skateboarding, and flash mobs with their spontaneous eruption of mysterious, coordinated action.

Though *My Playground* doesn't have a conventional narrative structure, preferring instead the back and forth between the free runners in their metropolitan element and various experts musing on the phenomenon, there is a culmination of sorts. The construction of a parkour park in Copenhagen attracts a legion of free runners and traceurs from Germany and England and as far away as Greece, many of whom marvel at the evolution of their sport from street form to domesticated city project.

The Atlanta design and architecture advocates of [Modern Atlanta](#), which has its week-long design celebration each spring/summer is working to continue MA's presence on a year-round basis. To that end, organizers [Elayne DeLeo](#) and [Bernard McCoy](#) are screening [My Playground](#) Saturday, October 1 at 7:30 p.m. at the [Plaza Theatre](#).