



PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE

FROM STREET DANCE TO HIP HOP: PERFORMANCE AS A TACTIC TO MAINTAIN CULTURAL MEANINGS

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ABSTRACT

This text historicizes the concept of street dance (*dança de rua*) by showing distances and approaches in relation to hip hop. For this purpose, the analysis starts from the cultural history of street dance in the city of Uberlândia, Minas Gerais (Brazil), to understand the complex relationships that gave meaning and form to the practice of street dance between the 1980s and 1990s. In a first step, I investigate the various perspectives that permeate the bond between the popular dance and dance festivals, well as between the city neighbourhoods and dance clubs. In a second step, the analysis shifts to the cultural performance that allowed street dancers to migrate to the so-called hip hop dance. Analysing street dance and hip hop considering their ruptures and continuities, the text intends to contribute to studies dedicated to the presence of dance in the construction of urban identities.

Keywords: Breaking, culture, hip hop, street dance, performance.

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The academic study of peripheral dances in the urban environment, and their symbolic and scenic aspects, has grown over the last 10 years in Brazil. This boost, to a large extent, is one of the effects of new undergraduate dance courses over the last decade due to the Federal Universities Restructuring and Expansion programme (REUNI). Public and free higher education institutions have taken an important role in this process since the interest in researching dances in peripheral environments has mostly come from people who somehow developed experiences with dance in non-central places in their cities before entering university. Therefore, such a context has also about a decentralization of dance subjects, as they started to be seen as worthy of study inside the academic environment.

Something that caught my attention in this growing movement is the recurrent and indiscriminate use of the terms “street dance” and “hip hop”. Many publications use the concept of “street dance” as a synonym for the concept of “hip hop dances”. For example, this can be seen in the work of Patrícia Lauxen and Silvana Isse (2009), Renata Miranda and Vera Cury (2010), Ana Cristina Ribeiro and Ricardo Cardoso (2011), Analú Santos (2011), Cléia Camargo (2014), Katielle Soares (2015), Jéssica Barrios (2016), Adriana Correia, Carlos Alberto Silva and Nilda Ferreira (2017). However, none of these studies present research and criticism on the concepts of ‘street dance’ and ‘hip hop’. Their analytical focus is limited to the descriptive aspect of the dance practice.

On the other hand, I have found two works that have tried to explain the concepts with care and reflection – these are the monographic works of Laís Torres (2015) and Vanessa Garcia Santos (2016). Torres’ (2015) concern was to structure a hegemonic history about these peripheral dances. She conducted interviews with hip hop dance makers such as Henrique Bianchini, Franka Ejara, André Bonfim (Jaspion) and Ivo Alcântara. Interweaving the collected testimonies, the author concluded that the term street dance “is fraught with prejudice” (Torres, 2015, p. 35, *my translation*) and is gradually being replaced by terms such as urban dances, street dances or hip hop dances¹.

Santos (2016) followed the same methodological procedure as Torres (2015) of conducting interviews with performers, but she decided to choose different locations and generations to engage with. She found out that the change in nomenclature also corresponds to a change in the dance itself and its practices. However, Santos (2016) attributes this difference in dance practice to the lack of information, in an effort to frame street dance within what the author calls “practices linked to Hip Hop” (p. 69). In this sense, Santos (2016) elaborates the premise that street dance is something that emerged from hip hop, but that “practitioners did not know how to name that new form of dance that emerged” (p. 69), and for that reason they called it street dance.

However, aside from these understandings about the notions of street dance and hip hop, a previous historiographic study (Guarato, 2008) states that both concepts describe different practices, which have common aspects, but they are not the same. In order to understand these differences that make street dance and hip hop different, it is healthy to understand that the concepts have their own history and must be thought of

in their own time, intertwined with culture through the social relations that forged them (Bakhtin, 1993). Within such a frame, it can be implied that both the concept of street dance and hip hop were proposed, and used, in different situations, different places, at different times and had the objective to name different practices.

To explain this process further I present the historical configurations of street dance in a specific location, the city of Uberlândia in Minas Gerais, between the 1970s and 2000s. I use interviews carried out between 2005 and 2008 for my master's study in social history at Federal University of Uberlândia. Dancers who were active between the late 1970s and the first decade of the 21st century were interviewed. These dancers provided reports and explanations regarding how they understood the dance they practiced, and the methodological procedure was guided by the oral history (Portelli, 1997) to understand the cultural meanings of such manifestation and its changes over time. All the interviews were all conducted in Portuguese, and I translated them to English.

In a second step in this article, I demonstrate that the practice of hip hop – taking breaking as an example – has always been understood as something aesthetically distinct from street dance. In the final stage of this text, using cultural studies and studies of cultural performances, I demonstrate how and why it was possible to treat dance works that have different aesthetic forms as synonyms. With this explanatory exercise, I intend to contribute to the understanding that the knowledge elaborated by street dance is not direct heirs of a tradition from the United States of America (U.S.A), as they possess knowledge arising from rearrangements between senses and aesthetics. I also intend to contribute to the understanding that the strengthening and expansion of breaking on a global level is a result of complex cultural relations when viewed from a local standpoint, in this case, from a city in the interior of Brazil.

The concept of street dance²

Street dance is a form of dance exhibition that gained visibility throughout the 1990s in Brazil through competitive dance festivals. However, street dance does not have a fixed and discernible origin. Therefore, it is important to analyse the local specificities of the cultural configurations that enabled the forging of what was known as street dance. Firstly, it is worth mentioning that street dance consists in bodywork mainly performed by popular, peripheral, and black populations, as they deal with different types of dances from a specific *cultural matrix* (Martín-Barbero, 2003, p. 324)³, that is Afro-descendant and from the U.S.A. All mentioned, this came to be a *mix* of different techniques and ways of dancing but presents strong evidence of bonds with dances such as popping, locking, breaking (recognized as dances originating from hip hop), modern jazz dance, and funk.

Nightclubs have been a key context for the emergence of street dance. In the narratives that were collected from street dance creators in the city of Uberlândia, the nightclubs Buriti and Casa da Calçada were highlighted as meeting spaces for the sociability of children and young people as locations for self-recognition. In these nightclubs played music by groups and artists such as: Jean Knighth, Kc & The Sunshine Band, James Brown, Jimmy Bo Horne, Kool and the Gang, Barry White, Billy Paul, Earth Wind &

- ▶ Fire, Malcolm McLaren, Marvin Gaye, and SOS Band. These names are associated with funk and soul, along with gestures and black power aesthetics from the late 1970s and the early years of the 1980s.

To meet this demand of young dancers, Jorge Pires, owner and disc jockey of what was the nightclub Buriti, started the “dancing porridges”, held every Sunday. The objective was to perform songs from a repertoire that “played in the club, but did not play in radio” (Pires, 2007, personal communication). A weekly moment was created where children and young people - “all these people, black people, and also white” (Teófilo, 2007, personal communication) - met to dance funk. At the time, there were not many places working with this approach. Within such “porridges”, the quantity of people and enthusiasm of the regulars caught Jorge’s attention, who in March 1980, when “seeing the group that danced more, those who stood out from others, I decided to hold a dance contest” (Pires, 2007, personal communication).

It was in this environment of dance clubs that the first dancers and the first street dance group of Uberlândia emerged: Turma Jazz de Rua, an initiative of Wesley da Rocha (Chocolate), Ismael da Silva (Branca de Neve) and Mamede Aref. They were partly motivated by the interest in participating in these contests that were being promoted for more than four years. Inside the contests, an environment was created in which “nobody liked to lose” (Pires, 2007, personal communication). People, weekend dancers at the time, began to become organized in groups and to schedule rehearsals during the weeks before the contests.

In such an environment of dances to be different became a requirement for dancers to achieve prominence in competitions. To achieve this difference, Turma Jazz de Rua started to incorporate modern jazz dance in its theatrical configurations for musicals (Stearns & Stearns, 1994), looking for gestures, moves and movement that were typical of scenic dances. The main access with this form of dance was through films such as *All that jazz* (1979) and *Chorus line* (1985).

Movements and gestures of jazz dance were appropriated as part of a context of the possibilities of a young audience, as they “tried to make academic jazz without attending to the academic environment. We did it our way” (Aref, 2005, personal communication). Therefore, it is to be acknowledged that this is a dance where the social conditions made a difference from the beginning. The assimilated movements included the way of walking, running, and exercising the body. In these dynamics of appropriation, the dance format underwent changes, the style was recreated, giving rise to what they called street jazz.

Dances originating from hip hop⁴ were also bodily references assimilated in the early 1980s by the uberlandian dancers, and such dances experienced great visibility in the mass media during this period. In Uberlândia, there was the importance of the screening of *Breakin’*, a film from 1983 (translated to *Breakdance*, when the film was released in Brazil). Nelson Triunfo’s Funk & Cia group (1979) also appear as a reference through

the soap opera *Partido alto*. On national television funk dancers who used hip hop dance steps inspired the dancers of Uberlândia, more precisely those of the Turma Jazz de Rua who “copied that; we did the same thing” (Rocha, 2006, personal communication).

The then rising world pop star Michael Jackson was also one of the main references for the beginning of street dance practice. His music videos and clothing, the dancers’ spatial organization, movements that mix freestyle, tap, jazz, popping, locking, funk and soul, all influenced street dance practitioners in Uberlândia (Guarato, 2008). As an example, there is the work of Grupo Família Brilho Negro, who performed cover choreographies of their North American idol, Michael Jackson.

Image 1

Presentation of the Turma Jazz de Rua (Jazz Street Gang) inside the Pedal Nightclub in 1987. (Image from Mamede Aref’s Private Collection)



Despite the noticeable participation of the mass media, and the reproductive aspect of dance steps during the 1980s, the dancers residing on the peripheries of Uberlândia did not have systematic training, thus information was appropriated and performed by the popular sectors⁵ of the city. These aspects gave rise to a plurality of ways of rearranging information from funk, modern jazz dance, and from the dances originating in hip hop. That is how street dance came to be, through what Michel de Certeau (1998) called “cunning”, which is related to unauthorized ways of action⁶. Therefore, street dance is characterized by no need to replicate the past or fundamentals. Rather, its specificity resides in the aesthetic possibilities of remaking dances.

▶ However, as much as street dance aesthetically pluralizes the possibilities, there are still common procedures and practices of people who go to the same environments, which helped to build aspects of identification between practitioners (Thompson, 1998). In such spaces, social meanings were forged, which gave support and meaning to street dance practices for its participants. Within the investigation for this article, four main characteristics have been captured that are viewed to be attributed to street dance by its dancers during this period, namely:

1. Social prominence in the environment where the dancer lives. Dancing has become a way to be seen in society, be noticed, gaining prominence among friends, relatives, neighbours and especially among the young women, through clothes, slang, and movements.
2. Street dance appears as a “messiah”, the saviour of the poor and oppressed, mainly in reports of leadership characters, because through such dance one could pass time or get away from drugs and life in crime.
3. Dance as a device to avoid material problems, by feeling far from them, as a form of outburst, evading or escaping dilemmas and struggles of everyday life.
4. As a concentration of the previous three points, competitions in local dance clubs worked as a legitimizing element of success, respect, and authority among street dance peers in the city.

The combination of these four factors composed what Raymond Williams (1979) characterized as *structure of feeling*, where street dance can act as a space that mediates interests, expectations, and desires of those who practice it. It gives meaning to practices insofar as it makes it possible to observe how values and meanings are lived and felt, constituting a series of elements with “specific internal relations, at the same time engaged and in tension” (Williams, 1979, p. 134), thus defining such social experiences in process. In this way, people not only practice and consume street dance, but they also construct meanings to it over time.

Dance festivals and the development of more meanings to street dance

In the 1980s there was the development of meanings about street dance, and they spread in Uberlândia. However, it was only in the 1990s that street dance acquired the aesthetic/scenic contours that allowed it to be defined as street dance. In short, until the 1990s the expression “street dance” was not used to describe the dancing activities of the popular strata in the urban environment. The use and dissemination of the term street dance has been spread through the structures of competitive festivals and worked to categorize a dance which, until then, had no precedent.

According to local documentation, the first participation of a street dance group in festivals was in 1989, at the III Festival de Dança do Triângulo (a regional dance festival) and the only group that participated was the Turma Jazz de Rua.

As there was no modality foreseen for a type of dance that was unprecedented in the atmosphere of dance festivals, the group participated in *Our concour* until 1992, when ▶

▶ the festival management decided to institute a specific modality in 1993, called Popular Dance/Jazz de Rua. The aesthetic diversity and the cunning manipulation of dance references – previously highlighted – that street dance groups presented at festivals can be seen in the article of the critic Marcelo Castilho Avellar (1994) where he questions:

(...) to which extent elements of other languages will continue to enter street jazz, before its vocabulary simply do not expand anymore, thus it starts to be "contaminated", and loses its identity. (...) if the core of street jazz is its constant transformation, for how long will it be possible to preserve it as a dynamic process, pure energy, without which it loses its *raison d'être*. (Avellar, 1994, p. 3)

Parallel to the aesthetic-formal changes, I am interested in this moment to notice that when the relationship with the dance festival environment was established, the groups came across the biggest and best structured means of propagating of technical and aesthetic hegemonies in the field of dance - as an art - in the city, which promoted transformation in this popular manifestation. Not only aesthetic, but also sociocultural transformation. Since 1993, o Festival de Dança do Triângulo has become a central stage for local groups to hold their competitions. It can also be considered that throughout the 1990s, spaces that forged hierarchy within street dance were gradually transferred to the field where dance hegemony took place, in Uberlândia, represented by festivals. In this context of socio-spatial changes, and of the change in popular attention from nightclub competitions to festivals, aesthetic experiments for the stage started to be made in the proscenium format.

Image 2

Presentation of Família Brilho Negro at the 1st SESC Dance Competition (Regional), with the choreography *Desafio*, in 1992. (Image from Silvana Aparecida Ferreira's Private Collection).



Dance held in squares, schools and clubs was no longer in the spotlight. The stage, following the "black box" model, with its scenic resources, became the place of desire ▶

▶ for popular dancers. Therefore, it was at festivals that dialogues with new aesthetics and hegemonic arrangements lead to change in street dance customs and practices. A significant contribution in this process came from comments and information passed on by dance specialists who attended festivals and issued opinions and suggestions, such as teachers, company directors, theorists, specialized critics, choreographers, and renowned dancers in the field of dance. This interaction between street dancers and the dance festival over the years has brought about changes in the way of dancing. In some cases, these changes were reported not only as interferences, but as mandatory transformations.

We danced for 10 minutes without repeating any movement, we did our montages, we created our clothes, we were the teachers themselves and the body of the ball was us. So it means: there was no one to manipulate and make us a puppet. (Aref, 2006, personal communication)

However, the relationship with the festival environment demanded dialogue with issues that were alien to street dance, such as: eight counts as a form of choreographic structure, the establishment of themes for choreographies, and the subsequent communication regarding costumes, soundtracks, scenery, scripts, lighting – in short, aspects that concerned the presentation in the proscenium arch space, or Italian “arco scenico”. Likewise, the requirement to conduct research for composition gradually turned into a demand as well.

More than transgression in choreographic aspects, the main change in street dance which now will be discussed is the construction of new meanings. Such meanings both relate to expectations and are motivations for dancing. Motivating factors were previously mentioned (leisure and pleasure, recognition of the community, coping with exclusion, escaping from vices and crimes, distancing from problems and, lastly, competition) and now there is also the desire to survive by doing what one enjoys, that is, “making money from it” (Aref, 2006, personal communication). It was a time when “we danced a lot, but just in exchange for snacks as we promoted our work, [and] our biggest concern was trying to enter the dance market” (Rocha, 2006, personal communication).

The relationship of popular dancers with the environment of dance festivals created an atmosphere of expectation. In the early 1990s, on the nights when the street dance groups performed, such spaces were filled with locals there to watch the dancers’ performances. But the festival spaces were different. There were media involved, businessmen, local government, dance groups and companies from all over Brazil and a group of reviewers considered to be experts in dance understood as art, who made up an analytical and critical audience, thus generating an atmosphere of anxiety and tension for competitors.

The stage presented the chance of success and social mobility, an ideal pursued by many who worked in other services and dedicated themselves to rehearsals for hours on end, but due to the festivals the dancers began to want to survive economically from dance, because as the director of Grupo Família Brilho Negro, Luis Antônio de Oliveira (2006, personal

▶

communication) explained: “I was so happy to do that, that I wanted to live on that”. This means the local status and the pleasure of dancing were no longer the only elements at stake for those people who danced street dancing. More importantly, now they were foreseeing their future and the prospect of professionalization. It was necessary then to try to be the best, so to be seen and admired, to win the competition, and the audience, to convince the judges of the quality of the work and, of course, to win the festivals.

Such new motivation was told by de Oliveira (Luizinho), who highlights how “people were pursuing professionalism, perhaps [the person] was not recognized as such, but acted as such, worked as such (...) to be better today than yesterday” (Oliveira, 2006, personal communication). Also, the quest to be better was related to (and at the same time it fed) the dynamics of the competitive environments of nightclubs, which existed before they joined festivals. As highlighted by João Batista Amorim (Joãozinho) who explained: “because in street dancing one wanted to be better than the other” (Joãozinho, 2006, personal communication). However, from 1996 onwards, there was a double process that led to a gradual decrease of the volume of people from popular sectors who dedicated themselves to street dance. Such decrease appeared to be the result of two factors:

- a. The format of the Festival de Dança do Triângulo changed, and it stopped being competitive in 1996, adopting the dance show model. Consequently, the festival lost its attractiveness to those within socially and economically disadvantaged positions in society, as highlighted by Carlos Aparecido dos Santos (Carlim Grafiti):

It happened until '95, then there was no more prize at the Festival de Dança do Triângulo. Then people got demotivated, you see? Because they wanted to dance so they could win first place, take a trophy home (...) So now, you see, today there is just half a dozen people. (Carlim Grafiti, 2006, personal communication)

- b. In the pursuit for professionalization there was a constant recommendation from critics and scholars who attended the festival for the need for street dance groups to conduct research in dance in the search for a contemporary dance aesthetic. Aiming for recognition as dance professionals and artists, some street dance groups and dancers started to dialogue with other references and meanings in dance that were different from those that had until then guided the feeling structure that gave shared values to street dance. This was the case for those such as Vanilton Lakka, Cláudio Henrique Eurípedes de Oliveira, Wagner Schwartz (who together formed the Grupo Werther Pesquisa em Dança, in 1997) and the Cia de Dança Balé de Rua. From contact with specialized critics, popular dancers began to dialogue with requirements from outside the artistic field (Guarato, 2013). As they came closer to other practices and ideas on dance, the way of thinking and doing dance of these artists changed. Thus, they achieved recognition in the artistic field, but at the same time other street dancers rejected such processes, as they did not dare to try contemporary dance and wanted to keep their customs.

Image 3

Grupo Werther in presentation of the choreography Sturm und Drang at Teatro Rondon Pacheco / Uberlândia, 1999. Image belonging to the private collection of Vanildo Alves de Freitas (lakka).

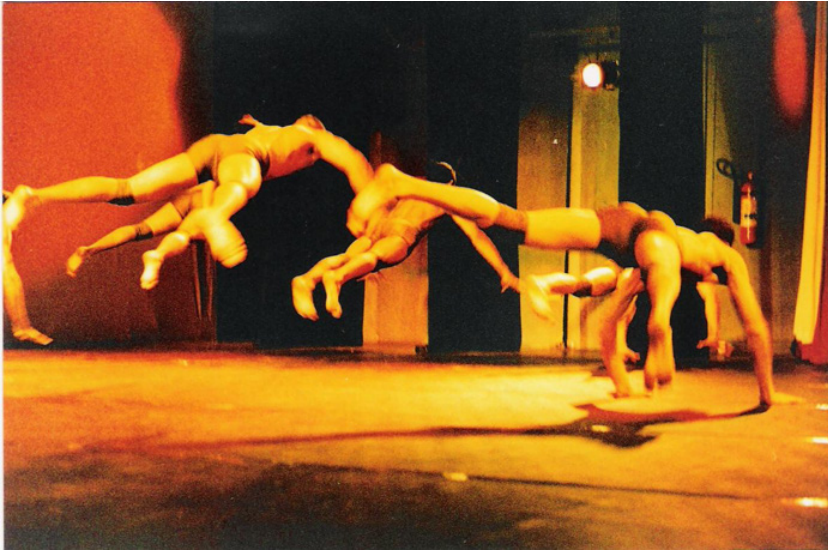


Image 4

Cia. de Dança Balé de Rua in presentation of the choreography Bagaço at the 19th Endança, 2004. Credits: Rodrigo Zeferino.



▶ **To perform to preserve: Hip hop to maintain customs**

Facing power relations at festivals between knowledge, popular culture, and the artistic conception of specialized critics, street dance dealt with a situation where dancers either adapted to the requirements, stopped dancing, or even migrated to other cultural practices. In festivals, there was a clash between different kinds of education in dance - the popular and the scholarly. The latter was not able to understand the former, and, to a large extent, the reciprocal was also the case. In the unequal game of forces, yet again the popular side proved to be complex and dynamic, as they performed their existence to maintain their own historically constructed cultural values.

Among the cultural performances held some of the people who were street dance practitioners now found in hip hop a way to lighten the shock of symbolic values that occurred in the festival environment. In the late 1990s, hip hop (with emphasis on popping and breaking dances) provided a foundation of meanings, and the dynamics were similar to the meanings historically attributed to street dance by its members in the 1980s and 1990s - hip hop worked as a foundation. One could, then, be against transformations in street dance, which came from the guidance of specialized critics or by experiments in contemporary dance. If, on the one hand, the innovations proposed and encouraged by the specialized critic is a rupture with a “straight jacket” (Vianna, 1992, p. 12, my translation), on the other hand they promoted a social and cultural disconnection from popular manifestations, as they dealt with forms, values, and concepts that are disconnected from their sociocultural reality.

Such groups of people, who shifted their bodily activities to hip hop, understood the message from the experts as a recommendation: “forget everything you know” (Rocha, 1997, p. 6), but those dancing street dance were not willing to simply forget, noting that: “we had our world, we did it there and that was it. And we were not forced: look, you are going to do that there” (Aref, 2006, personal communication). Cloifson Luiz da Costa (B.boy Chiquinho) experienced all these changes closely. He started street dance in 1994, a time when this practice was growing, and until 1999 he remained at Balé de Rua Dance Company. In 1999, he abandoned street dance to dedicate himself to the study of *break* (mainly popping and breaking). He explained:

I left Balé de Rua because the direction began to change, you know! So, the first contact with contemporary dance was interesting, it is quite valid to study contemporary dance. But the group started to focus a lot on this aspect, then we started to forget a lot of stuff(...) it became distorted, and I started feeling like a fish out of water with that whole story. (B.boy Chiquinho, 2008, personal communication)

Performing culture to maintain values, the popular practitioners found in the practice of breaking a safe place from the norms of the artistic field, assuring they could make autonomous decisions about what they danced, as they valued “the stand of people who are not giving a damn if the work goes to a renowned dance festival or not” (B.boy Chiquinho, 2008, personal communication). If, on the one hand, the specialized criticism of the time assumed that “the dancer uses his body to ‘tell’ something” (Katz,

1995, p. 10, my translation), on the other, those subjects who started their practices through street dance believe it is “important to think dance and study dance, but there are times when you just want to dance” (B.boy Chiquinho, 2008, personal communication).

However, hip-hop dances (popping, locking, and breaking) that became the target for the then street dancers, present a system that did not exist in street dance. These dances were elaborated with fundamental ideas which offered the basic steps and created codes, rules, and nomenclatures, widely disseminated, and formatted by the practitioners⁷, making a difference where: “So the street dance on stage suffers a lot of influences and another thing is the b.boy” (B.boy Chiquinho, 2008, personal communication). There is a format to dance breaking and the variations in this dance cannot neglect the so-called basic movements.

One may not say that hip hop started to be practiced in Uberlândia in the second half of the 1990s, considering that such dance had been performed since the early 1980s, but in a fragmented way. Starting in the mid-1990s, some people started training only in breaking. As street dance groups became outdated, several dancers decided to dedicate themselves specifically to the breaking technique. That was when a crop of b.boys with a high level of improvement appeared; among them, prominent names such as Samuel, Alan, Gladistone, Caetano, Fabrício, Bazé, Tipé, Tuzinho, Book, William, Jorlan, Pébão, Vanuso, Flavin, Som, Camonha, Carlím, Calango, Euripinho, Claudão, Bionicão, Sandrão, Lelegume, Candango, Ostim, Kim, Kiki, Chapisco, Diamante / Dinei, Cloudes, Márcio Leandro (Marcinho), Jacaré, Adriel, Chiquinho and others. It was also on this circuit that groups of b.boys emerged, such as the DMB Group (Defensores do Movimento Break - Defenders of the Break Movement) and Filhos do Ghetto (Sons of the ghetto). Subsequently, these two groups merged, forming Udi Força Break, a crew that existed until the beginning of this century.

The aesthetic arrangement of hip hop dances and the format in which they are displayed is also different from the spatial-scenic-choreographic organization of street dance. The wheel distribution (named as cypher) is the predominant spatiality, and the individual performance of the dancers is what stands out. However, even with all these formal differences there is an element that was decisive for dancers to shift styles: the main characteristic of hip hop dances, especially breaking, is the duel or the dispute, which are called “battles”, to see who is the best. In breaking, competitiveness was and still is the driving force.

Therefore, competition is an element that provides a link between street dance and breaking, and competition has functioned as an element that allows us to recognize what Richard Schechner (1981) describes as restored behaviour: “Restored behavior offers individuals and groups the chance to go back to what they were before – or even, and most of the time, to recover what they never were” (Schechner, 1981, p. 3). When performing their culture and the ways of dancing, the popular class dancers performed behavioural reconstructions and formal rearrangements due to the cultural interactions experienced by the people in the specific place and time in which they lived.

When investigating the peripheral neighbourhoods of Uberlândia, such as Tocantins, Planalto, São Jorge and Seringueiras, it was found that regardless of whether or not people have access to the city centre and/or to the neighbourhoods where funk and rap clubs were located, the dancers residing in the same neighbourhood powered a competitive sociability. Carlim Grafiti highlights:

The dispute was always between us, right? The kids here, nobody came to teach us, you know? Then we were on the break, we used to carpet the street to learn how to spin... on the grass, we hurt our shoulders, heads and the biggest motivation was between us, you know? That dispute business, each one wanted to be more. So, there was always no.1, no. 2, and who was the last one. (Carlim Grafiti, 2006, personal communication)

Like street dancing, breaking dancers were motivated by the existence of dance clubs, with Flash Danceteria standing out during the 1980s and 1990s. In such places there were weekly meetings between dancers from different neighbourhoods of the city and the various *rachas* (a term also used to refer to battles) were held. Such events gave dancers motivation to improve their performance during the week to surprise the wheel when the next weekend would arrive with difficult movements. The result was the maintenance of the competitive sense and a development of the technical specificity of the dancers in Uberlândia. As Samuel da Silva (b.boy Samuca) points out,

Because of this rivalry, guys trained like crazy (...) if suddenly a guy made a better move than us or that we didn't do yet, we trained like crazy. Some stuff that people sometimes spent 5, 6 months to learn, we struggled to see if we could catch it from one Saturday to the next. So, when I arrive next Saturday, I get there and make this move to burn the guys. (b.boy Samuca, 2006, personal communication)

In addition to the nightclubs there were the “break meetings” which were held on the first Sunday of each month at Teatro na Arena (located in Praça Sérgio Pacheco), downtown. This was a place that became the focal point of events related to hip hop between 1996 and 2001. Such meetings were organized by Samuel da Silva and later by Mamede Aref⁸. Therefore, in addition to competitions, the very dynamics of decentralized functioning where the power to dance, improve and compete gives autonomy to the individual – in contrast to festivals – is similar to the street dance environment before festivals, and similar to the structure of feeling forged in non-central spaces of the city.

Image 5

Alan Kardec (B.boy Alanzinho) performing a Thomas Flare at Flash Danceteria around 1998. Image of Keila Noemy da Silva's Private Collection.



Image 6

Cloifson Luiz da Costa (B.boy Chiquinho) performing a freeze in 2007. Image of the Private Collection of Cloifson Luiz da Costa.



- ▶ Lilian Vilela's (1998) conclusions, when investigating peripheral dances in the city of Campinas, also seem to resonate with the meaning of belonging and participation from Uberlândia's breaking dancers. Vilela identified that in the city of Campinas that street dance practitioners "instead of relying on principles of individualization, they start to experience a sense of group identity through a collective emotion" (Vilela, 1998, p. 50, my translation). It is from this perspective that breaking practitioners see hip hop, and from it they sought a collective behaviour achieved through dance, with historically instituted symbology that permeate human relationships, such as love, work, family, circles of friendship and their related practices.

I don't see, for example, in contemporary dance, [the presence of] some pre-established stuff that I don't know of, that will really influence me in life. I'm not talking about dance, but life as a whole. And people already have a different attitude towards this, from the way of walking to the way one behaves before society. (B.boy Chiquinho, 2008, personal communication)

Therefore, local customs that are manufactured and shared, are made from the body. That is how such customs and practices they last, through the performance of their own culture. The street dancers drafted their own laws, established rules that were made public – not by written documents, but by the sounds of "boos", applause, obeisances and shouting among peers. Their punishments were mockery, non-recognition, shame in front of the group and spectators. Understanding this process shows us the importance of recognizing the embedded performances that Diana Taylor (2013) called *repertoire*.

In this sense, dancing and understanding local dance history (or histories) can never be limited to an exclusive understanding of subjects with aesthetics or scenic aspects. Bearing in mind that repertoires are a living flow of meanings and that "performance transports memories, states political claims and expresses a group's sense of identity" (Taylor, 2013, p. 19, my translation). To look at the specificities of cultural relations leads us to understand that even when new gestures, techniques, knowledges, and senses are incorporated, the forged meanings about dance can remain the same, showing how culture is performed through bodies in order to last.

Understanding a little about street dance and hip hop

Despite the different definitions that the concept of street dance receives in the available literature, it can be understood that this variety of definitions is due to the absence of historical analysis on the specifics of this concept and the dance practice that it designates. Street dance is something used to explain a different performance from that of hip hop dances. Despite finding narratives that treat breaking dance like street dance, we tend to understand that the concept is not suited to describe the literalness of a place where one dances. The term street dance was created and is used to designate a particular aesthetic and a set of meanings created and shared among its makers, therefore a type of knowledge in dance that has peculiarities.

This distinction is more easily recognized by people who experienced street dance during the 1980s and 1990s, as highlighted by the B.boy and rapper Gilmar Gomes ▶

- Machado (b.boy Candango), who, coming from the city of Brasília, where he had already had contact with hip hop, especially breaking, did not immediately understand what the dancers in Uberlândia did and how they organized what was called street dance. B.boy Candango (2005, personal communication) points out that in the 1990s “there was already a lot of dance groups here, right. The guys said it was hip hop, but they didn’t even know what hip hop was, actually it was a dance group, you know. The guys did some crazy dance there, there were several groups”.

There are differences that stress the formal distance between street dance and hip hop. However, street dancers and street dance groups refused other interpretations to be placed on them and what the dance market presented, all that coming from the dialogue with specialized critics. In this way the street dance dancers found in breaking practice a way to maintain, share, and perform cultural customs. This situation can be read as “a rebellion against institutions and representations that become ‘un-believable’. It’s a refusal to the un-signified” (Certeau, 2005, p. 33, my translation). Such a refusal can be seen in identification symbols, in the distinctive aspects to tell the best group from the others, and in the belief shared by the subjects who practice certain dances or who share a theory-methodology on dance that might be different from that held by the so-called “dance specialists”.

Roughly speaking, when street dance became a part of festivals a contrast was noticed between the incorporated knowledge of the popular and the knowledge about dance – both in how dance was transmitted through bodies and how it was written about. When entering festivals street dance dancers were no longer able to be autonomous regarding their dances, and they could not use their knowledge or their invented tradition to bring legitimacy to their authority over their dance. Through their repertoires, popular class performed their dances to “preserve a sense of community identity and memory” (Taylor, 2013, p. 48, my translation). Those who practiced street dance, and whose cultural needs are now met with breaking dance, continue to insist on preserving symbolic and aesthetic values historically forged and shared among their peers. While they rejected the artistic criteria disseminated by the artistic field, the dancers chose breaking dance as a coherent way of maintaining the meaning of their dances and the links with popular culture and daily life.

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ARTISTS, COMPANIES AND BANDS MENTIONED IN THE ARTICLE

Adriel Dias (B.boy Adriel)

Alan Kardec Silva (B.boy Alanzinho)

Alcides Jose (B.boy Lelegume)

Altenir Roberto Mendes (B.boy Jacare)

Balé de Rua Dance Company

Caetano

Carlos A. Santos (Carlím Grafiti)

Cláudio Henrique Eurípedes de Oliveira

Cloifson Luiz da Costa (B.boy Chiquinho)

Cloudes Bernardelli (B.boy Cloudes)

Defensores do Movimento Break Crew- Defenders of the Break Movement

Euripedes Alves (B.boy Euripinho)

Familia Brilho Negro Group

Filhos do Ghetto Crew

Funk & Cia group

Gilmar G. Machado (B.boy Candango)

Gladistone

Ismael da Silva (Branca de Neve)

Jaltair R. Teófilo

João B. Amorim (Joãozinho)

Jorge D. Pires (Jorge Som)

Jorlan (B.boy)

Kleber da Silva (B.boy Bionicao)

Luiz A. Oliveira (Luizinho)

Mamede Aref

Márcio Leandro (B.boy Marcinho)

▶ Marlon Nascimento (bboy Baze)
Michael Jackson
Moacir Kiki
Nelson Triunfo
Samuel Silva (B.boy Samuca)
Sandro Ferreira (B.boy Sandrao)
Turma Jazz de Rua
Udi Força Break Crew
Vanildo A. Freitas (Lakka)
Vanuso (B.boy)
Valdinei Silva dos Santos (B.boy Diamante/Dinei)
Wagner Schwartz
Werther Pesquisa em Dança Group
Wesley Rocha (Chocolate)
Wesley (B.boy Tipe)

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Breakin': Breakdance: o filme. (1984). Directed by Joel Silberg. EUA: Entertainment Home de MGM, 1 filme (90 min), VHS, son., color.
Chorus line: The movie. (1985). Directed by Richard Attenborough. EUA: Embassy Associates. 1 film (113 min), VHS, son., color.

MINI BIOGRAPHIES OF THE INTERVIEWEES

Carlos A. Santos (Carlim Graffiti). (Personal communication, May 15, 2006). *Face-to-face interview with the author.* 43 years old at the time of writing this article, he was a street dancer during the 1990s and after the year 2000 dedicated himself to graffiti art.

Cloifson L. Costa. (B.boy Chiquinho). (Personal communication, October 18, 2008). *Face-to-face interview with the author.* 43 years old at the time of writing this article, he was part of Cia. de Dança Balé de Rua until 1999. After 2000 he began to dedicate himself exclusively to breaking.

Gilmar G. Machado (B.boy Candango). (Personal communication, July 19, 2005). *Face-to-face interview with the author.* 45 years of age at the time of writing this article. b.boy and rapper. He learned to dance breaking in Ceilândia (a satellite city of the federal capital Brasília) and moved to Uberlândia in the late 1980s.

Jaltair R. Teófilo. (Personal communication, January 08, 2007). *Face-to-face interview with the author.* 57 years of age at the time of writing this article. He was a dancer in dance circles and funk contests at the Buriti nightclub.

João B. Amorim (Joãozinho). (Personal communications, December 15, 2006). *Face-to-face interview* ▶

with the author. In memorian. He would be 50 years old at the time of writing this article. He was a dancer, director, and choreographer of the Família Brilho Negro group.

Jorge D. Pires (Jorge Som). (Personal communication, January 08, 2007). *Face-to-face interview with the author.* 70 years old at the time of writing this article. He was the owner and deejay of the no longer existing nightclub Buriti. Currently works with rental sound equipment for events.

Luiz A. Oliveira (Luizinho). (Personal communication, November 16, 2006). *Face-to-face interview with the author.* 47 years old at the time of writing this article. He was a dancer, director and choreographer of the Família Brilho Negro group.

Mamede Aref. (Personal communication, November 29, 2006). *Face-to-face interview with the author.* 52 years old at the time of writing this article. Deejay, rapper, b.boy, was a dancer, director, and choreographer of the Turma Jazz de Rua between 1983 and 2000.

Samuel Silva (B.boy Samuca). (Personal communication, May 16, 2006). *Face-to-face interview with the author.* 43 years old at the time of writing this article. He was a b.boy power move and rapper during the 1990s and early 20th century.

Vanildo A. Freitas (Lakka). (Personal communication, April 01, 2006). *Face-to-face interview with the author.* 44 years old at the time of writing this article. He was a b.boy, dancer and choreographer for several street dance groups during the 1990s. At the end of this period, he started to develop works in contemporary dance.

Wesley Rocha (Chocolate). (Personal communication, December 11, 2006). *Face-to-face interview with the author.* 52 years old at the time of writing this article. One of the founders of Turma Jazz de Rua, a group in which he worked until the mid-1990s. He then joined the Cia. de Dança Balé de Rua until the early years of the 20th century.

NOTES

- ¹ Hip hop is characterized by a network of artistic and cultural manifestations that are: master of ceremony (MC), deejaying, break and graffiti. Therefore, the so-called dances originating from hip hop are embedded within the break category, namely: popping, locking and breaking.
- ² In Brazil, the literal translation of the expression into Portuguese is “dança de rua”, and is used more frequently.
- ³ Martín-Barbero uses the term *cultural matrices* not to refer to the evocation of the archaic, but rather to the process of referring to elements of tradition that dialogue with the present, as with the concept of *residual*, proposed by Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature*.
- ⁴ The expression “hip hop dances” is often in dispute. Different aesthetics of American peripheral dances are in constant conflict between its practitioners (and reformulation) in an attempt to define what belongs or does not belong to the idea of hip hop. However, in the 1980s the dances that were recognized as hip hop dances were grouped under the umbrella of the term break, which were popping, locking, and breaking. To specifically designate these first three dances, the term “dances originating from hip hop” has been used.
- ⁵ Throughout this text, the term ‘popular’ designates people who are linked to historically economically disadvantaged segments of society, and their cultural values are often treated as ‘lower’ within social hierarchy.
- ⁶ Cunning is a metaphor used by Michel de Certeau that means production of “invention”. Certeau speaks of astute, stubborn procedures, which escape the discipline on the body announced by Michel Foucault, without leaving the field where such discipline is exercised. We have an anti-discipline, carried out by consumers, the “unknown producers” (Certeau, 1998, p. 49), who delineate cunning practices coming from other practices related to other agendas.
- ⁷ The codification of hip hop dances was and is still being made by its practitioners.
- ⁸ There is a record of a similar meeting in the same place in 1992. But it was a sole event.
Cf: Encontro de 1992: Dança de rua começa a ganhar maior público. *Correio do Triângulo*, Uberlândia, 11 fev. 1992. p. 11. Cultura; Dança deixa os palcos. *O Triângulo*, Uberlândia, n. 8106, 06 fev. 1992. p. 10. Variedades.