UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL

BREAKING DOWN THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN
BREAKDANCING AND B-BOYING:
A GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH

MÉMOIRE
PRÉSENTÉ
COMME EXIGENCE PARTIELLE
DE LA MAÎTRISE EN DANSE

PAR

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JANVIER 2014

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Table of Contents

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude empirique qualitative explore comment les danseurs montréalais au Québec (Canada) estiment que leur expérience incarnée de la danse b-boying diffère des représentations commerciales du break dancing des années 1980. Elle utilise pour ce faire l'approche méthodologique de la théorisation ancrée ethnographique (*grounded theory ethnography*) qui intègre des entrevues qualitatives, l'observation participante, une revue de littérature et d'artéfacts, ainsi que la notation chorégraphique inspirée de l'analyse du mouvement de Laban et des *5 Elements of Battle Style* d'Alien Ness.

Retenant l'approche de la théorie ancrée proposée par Kathy Charmaz, je me suis inspirée de l'analyse de la danse de Suzanne Youngerman pour développer un cadre conceptuel qui explore les éléments choréologiques, sociologiques et symboliques de ces deux danses.

Dans un premier temps, je présente les différences structurelles et stylistiques entre le b-boying tel qu'il est pratiqué à Montréal et le break dancing tel qu'il est représenté dans les films hollywoodiens et dans les guides pédagogiques publiés de 1982 à 1986. Dans un deuxième temps, je m'appuie sur la théorie du soi-objet (*self-as-object*) et du soi-agent (*self-as-process*) de George Mead, ainsi que sur la notion d'*habitus* de Pierre Bourdieu afin de démontrer que le b-boying n'est pas une forme de danse en tant que telle, mais plutôt une expression de l'identité qui passe par la pratique de cette danse. J'introduis le terme du « *self-as-dancing-body* » (soi-dansant) pour traiter de cette manifestation unique de l'identité sociale qui se construit et s'exprime dans l'adoption d'une forme de danse et dans l'intégration de sa communauté. Enfin, j'étudie la notion de « *realness* » ou d'authenticité artistique et culturelle dans le b-boying. Je démontre que la perception du break dancing en tant que « fausse » représentation du b-boying sert de repère à partir duquel les b-boys et les b-girls de Montréal peuvent évaluer leur propre performance ou celles de leurs pairs ainsi que leur engagement à l'égard de la culture hip-hop.

Mots-clefs : B-BOYING, BREAK DANCING, THÉORISATION ANCRÉE, INTERACTIONNISME SYMBOLIQUE, IDENTITÉ SOCIALE, AUTHENTICITÉ.

ABSTRACT

This empirical study investigates 'b-boying', the original dance form of hip-hop culture, focusing specifically on how it differs from popular representations of 'breakdancing'. I employ a methodological approach known as grounded theory ethnography, and use qualitative interviews, participant observation, artifact collection, literature review, and movement notation inspired by Laban Movement Analysis and Alien Ness' 5 Elements of Battle Style to explore how dancers in Montreal, Quebec (Canada) feel their embodied dance experience of 'b-boying' differs from commercial representations of 'breakdancing' from the 1980s.

I follow the grounded theory approach as described by Kathy Charmaz, and draw from Suzanne Youngerman's approach to dance analysis to develop a conceptual frame work that explores the choreological, sociological, and symbolic elements of these two dances.

First, I present the structural and stylistic differences between b-boying as it is practised in Montreal, and breakdancing as it is represented in Hollywood movies and instruction manuals produced from 1982 to 1986. Next, I draw from George Mead's theory of *self-as-object* and *self-as-process*, as well as Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*, to argue that b-boying is not a dance form per se, but rather an expression of identity through dance practice. I introduce the term '*self-as-dancing-body*' to discuss this unique manifestation of social identity that is constructed and performed through participation in a dance practice and community. Finally, I investigate the notion of 'the realness'—or artistic and cultural authenticity in b-boying. I argue that the perception of breakdancing as a 'false' representation of b-boying serves as a bar against which b-boys and b-girls in Montreal can measure their own or their peers' performance of the dance form and commitment to hip-hop culture.

Key Words: BREAKING, BREAKDANCING, B-BOYING, GROUNDED THEORY, SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM, DANCE ANALYSIS, SOCIAL IDENTITY, AUTHENTICITY.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

How does a dance form acquire its name? Or perhaps I should ask: how does a dance form acquire more than one name? In the 1970s, African-American and Puerto Rican youth in the South Bronx created a street dance form that became a key element of a new expressive culture known as hip hop (Chang, 2005; Pabon, 2006). Since its creation, this solo, improvised dance has commonly been referred to by three different names: b-boying, breaking, and breakdancing. In the 1980s, it simply became known as 'breakdancing' after a number of b-boys appeared in popular movies and music videos (Stevens, 2008). From the early to mid-1980s, these young dancers (known as 'b-boys') and their spectacular dance movements were used to sell everything from music, to clothing, to various food products (Fogarty, 2006).

But by 1986, the media and entertainment industry became oversaturated with images of breakdancing, and the public eventually grew tired of the dance (Fogarty, 2006). For a time, the media turned its attention away from the dance, and breakdancing seemed to disappear from mainstream North American culture (Banes, 1998; Fogarty, 2006; Gilroy, 1997). But though their dance was no longer popular in the general public, many b-boys continued to travel throughout the world, transmitting their art form to a new generation of dancers. Today, b-boys and a growing number of b-girls can be found across the globe, practising together and battling each other as they preserve and refine their art form (Fogarty 2006; Osumare, 2002).

In recent years, several prominent pioneer b-boys have rejected the word breakdancing, claiming the term represents the media's exploitation of their dance and culture. These dancers insist that anyone who truly loves the dance will refer to it

by its proper name: b-boying (Schloss, 2009). Similarly, many dancers in Montreal, Canada—where this study took place—have followed suit, and feel that breakdancing is an inauthentic term created by the media that represents the commodification[1] of their dance and culture (Stevens, 2008, Smith Lefebvre, 2011).

But what exactly did b-boys and b-girls believe had been commodified? Was it the actual movements of b-boying they felt had been appropriated, or was it rather its aesthetic values or social practices? As I began this study, I questioned the meanings of these words: was the distinction between b-boying and breakdancing a theoretical one, or were there actually observable physical differences between the two? Were b-boying and breakdancing the same dance form, two versions of the same dance form, or two completely different dances? If they were different dance forms, what qualities or activities distinguished b-boying from breakdancing, and on whose authority? In this thesis, I begin to examine these questions.

1.1 Problematic

1.1.1 Origins of the Question

I became aware of the b-boying versus breakdancing debate though my first hand experiences as a b-girl in Montreal. When I started learning this dance in 1998, it was by taking a 'breakdancing' class. I learned moves such as 'top rock', 'footwork', 'spins', 'tricks' and 'freezes', and was taught to use these movements in a structured, improvisational manner. Although my teacher started calling me a 'b-girl' after I had been coming to classes and practices for close to a year, he still referred to what we were learning as breaking or breakdancing. I do not remember him saying that the dance I was learning was called b-boying—or even 'b-girling' for that matter.

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[1] The *Oxford Dictionary* identifies the word commodification as a derivative of commodify, which it defines as a verb meaning "turn into or treat as a mere commodity" (Commodify, 2010).

It was only in 2001, when I began to travel to national and international breaking competitions—commonly known as battles with the hip-hop community—that I noticed a number of b-boys and b-girls were opposed to using the word breakdancing.[2] Some dancers argued that saying someone was breakdancing was a way to question that person's commitment to hip-hop culture, or imply that he or she was ignorant about the history of the dance.[3] Saying that someone was breakdancing also suggested that the person in question was not a good dancer, or did not understand how to properly execute the dance form. For many dancers I spoke to, the word breakdancing represented the media's misrepresentation and entertainment industry's exploitation of young dancers in New York City during the 1980s, and the assimilation of their dance and lifestyle into mainstream, popular culture.

But what was interesting to me was that dancers in Montreal took the b-boying versus breakdancing debate so personally. Why would the perceived exploitation of b-boys and b-girls from New York in the 1980s continue to offend a new generation of dancers in another city and country, more than thirty years after the birth of hip-hop culture? What was it about b-boying that connected dancers in Montreal to pioneer b-boys and b-girls from New York City on such a personal level? I wondered, was b-boying actually a dance form, or was it an 'embodied' practice' (Fogarty, 2006, 2010; Johnson, 2009; Osumare, 2002) through which these dancers had assumed a shared social identity?

And in regards to the question of identity, what did the gender-specific term b-boying mean to female dancers? If the proper name of the dance was b-boying, but a female dancer was known as a b-girl, was a woman b-boying or b-girling when she

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[2] It is possible that these discussions were happening earlier than this and that I was simply not aware of them; Fogarty (2006) remembers these types of discussions taking place in Toronto in the late 90s.
[3] The use of 'breakdancer' as a derogatory term is discussed by Johnson (2009), Schloss (2009) and Smith-Lefebvre (2011).

danced? It was this question concerning the shift towards a gender-specific term that I originally intended to use as the starting point of this study. In the spring of 2011, I began to investigate what effects (if any) the word 'b-boying' had on female breakers in Canada (Simard, 2012).

Unfortunately, as Chevrier (2000) points out, "all research is born of an intriguing question. But... one must ask the right question" (p. 51).[4] As I tried to understand how b-boying and b-girling might possibly differ, I realized that no one I spoke to could explain what the differences were without first addressing the issue of what distinguished b-boying from breakdancing. It became clear that I could not yet understand how b-boying was transformed by the participation of b-girls because I did not yet understand how b-boying differed from breakdancing, or why b-boys and b-girls in Montreal had come to reject the term breakdancing in the first place.

1.1.2 State of the Question

Much of the recent research that has been conducted on b-boy culture confirms my observation that, for many b-boys and b-girls, the term breakdancing has come to represent the appropriation of their dance and culture by mass media and the popular culture industry. Fogarty (2012a, 2006), Johnson (2009), Pabon (2006), Rivera (2003), Schloss (2009), Smith Lefebvre (2011), and Stevens (2008) all identify breakdancing as an umbrella term created not by dancers but by the media in the 1980s to describe a number of different dance forms practised by young dancers in New York City and suggest that insiders of the b-boy community frown upon the use of the term. As Rivera (2003) explains:

> Many dancers today, among them Rock Steady Crew members, say they prefer not to use that term [breakdancing]. Even though many of hip hop's pioneers accepted the term for a while during the 1980s, they have since reclaimed the original terminology and rejected

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[4] Translated from French by the author: « Toute recherche se construit à partir d'une question intrigante. Mais... il faut savoir poser la bonne question » (Chevrier, 2000, p. 51).

'breakdance' as a media-fabricated word that symbolizes the bastardization and co-optation of the art form. (p. 72)

While many authors do make statements similar to Rivera's, they do not all agree on what the proper name of the dance form is: some suggest that b-boying is the proper term (Schloss, 2009), while others prefer to use the term 'breaking' in order to avoid the gender questions brought up by the gender-specific nature of the word b-boying (Johnson, 2009; Stevens, 2008). Some simply use b-boying and breaking interchangeably (Fogarty, 2006, 2010, 2012a; Kong, 2010; Pabon, 2006; Smith Lefebvre, 2011).

But if the name of this dance was indeed b-boying, why had it come to be known as breakdancing? Unfortunately, the history of hip-hop has been described as "a riddle wrapped inside an enigma stuffed inside a mystery hidden in a sock" (Kugelberg, in Schloss, 2009, p. 125). Little documentation exists from the early days of hip-hop culture, and the history of breaking is primarily based in an oral— and highly debated—tradition (Chang, 2005; Pabon, 2006). Thus, it is no surprise that there has been confusion surrounding the name of the dance since the media took notice of it in 1981. When Banes (1994a) first encountered young b-boys in New York City, she said they referred to their dance by a number of terms, including: "'B-boy', 'rocking', 'breaking', or even 'that kind of dancing you do to rapping'" (p. 127). Schloss (2009) has proposed that earlier forms of the dance were referred to as "burning, downrocking, going off, scrambling, the boyoing, and probably quite a few others" (p. 58).

But as breaking grew in popularity, Banes (1994b) and other writers (Hager, 1984; Holman, 1984) began slowly referring to the dance as 'breakdancing', although it is not clear who initiated the change in terminology. As Johnson (2009) explains: "In the media short hand for street dance in the early 1980s, 'breakdancing' became a

catch-all for a variety of distinct dance techniques that then lost their specificity, becoming 'styles' of 'breakdancing'" (p. 17). Similarly, Schloss (2009) has stated:

> When the dance became a fad in the '80s... it was assigned the term *breakdancing* by cultural outsiders who wanted to give it a broader appeal. Exactly who it was that initiated this change, and exactly why they thought the term *breakdancing* would be more appealing than *b-boying*, has been lost in history. (p. 60, italics in original text)

While there may be no clearly documented reason for this change in terminology, what is clear is that it was not b-boying but breakdancing that became a household name almost overnight. In the early and mid-80s, several Hollywood movies featured young dancers as protagonists in formulaic 'rags-to-riches' storylines (Bruckheimer, Simpson, & Lyne, 1983; Firstenberg, 1984; Lamas 1984; Lathan, 1984; Silberg, 1984) inspiring people around the world to become breakdancers themselves (DeFrantz, 2004). Countless 'how to breakdance' books (Alford, 1984; Dunnahoo, 1985; Elfman 1984; Watkins & Franklin, 1984; Hager, 1984; Haskins, 1985; Holman, 1984; Knoppers, 1984; Marlow, 1984; Nadell & Small, 1984) were published over the same time period that offered step-by-step instructions on how to achieve that dream.

Today, many dancers and academics dismiss these media and commercial representations as 'inauthentic' portrayals of b-boying and believe these movies and texts exemplify the problem with the term breakdancing since they offer misrepresentations of hip-hop culture, blur lines between several dance forms, and make dubious claims on the origins of breaking (Stevens, 2008). I suspected, however, that these representations of breakdancing from the 1980s could be crucial to understanding b-boying today in Montreal because, as Thornton (2005) has stated, "the social logic of subcultural capital reveals itself most clearly by what it dislikes and by what it emphatically isn't" (p. 191). By following Thornton's line of thought, I wondered if the Montreal street dance community's rejection of the term

breakdancing could be seen as a sort of definition of b-boying *via negativia*—that is, a statement of what b-boying disliked and emphatically was not. As such, I suspected that by trying to understand what the word breakdancing meant to dancers, I would perhaps be able to better understand and describe b-boying as well.

1.1.3 Research Question

Even with the growing number of studies on b-boying and street dance culture, I have not yet found a study that has empirically investigated what b-boying actually is, or that explained, concretely, how it differs from breakdancing. Considering the prominence of the b-boying versus breakdancing debate in the Montreal street dance community, and the lack of research in regards to the subject, as well as the importance of understanding the symbolic meaning human beings attribute to the activities in which they engage (Mead, 1967), it was clear to me that the first question I needed to pose was: From the point of view of b-boys and b-girls today in Montreal, Quebec, what is 'b-boying', and how does it differ from 'breakdancing'? Since it was my intention to investigate this phenomenon in the empirical setting, a secondary research question that seemed important to address was: What do b-boys and b-girls in Montreal do, and why do they do it? By beginning this study with these conceptually open questions, I was able to follow an inductive approach in my research and address concepts as they emerged from the empirical setting, rather than testing hypotheses based on pre-existing theories derived from studies on other lifestyle communities (Carter & Little, 2007).

1.1.4 Limitations of the Study

Of course, this study has limitations. First, I must stress that my goal was not to answer epistemological questions of what b-boying 'ought' to be; rather, the purpose of this project was to conduct an empirical study on b-boying that aimed, as Becker (1996) puts it, "to describe what is done under that name" (p. 54). When considering the fact that b-boys and b-girls have rejected the term breakdancing

because they feel that the word misrepresents their dance practice, it seemed logical to me that I had to start by trying to understand and describe b-boying <u>from the point of view of dancers themselves</u>. The theories presented in this thesis should in no way be seen as universal 'truths'; rather, I recognize the complex and highly subjective nature of the phenomenon I am studying, and hope that the case theory I present here may serve as a reference point that inspires future researchers to conduct their own studies in order to confirm or refute my conclusions.

As such, it should be clear that I am not attempting to produce an all-encompassing definition of what b-boying is, neither as a dance form nor a transnational lifestyle practice. Not only was this not the aim of this study, but I also believe that it would be impossible to create a definitive checklist of things all dancers around the world 'must' do to participate in the breaking community. Rather, I am merely trying to understand how b-boying exists for dancers in a specific time and place—that is, b-boys and b-girls at the present time in Montreal. Dancers in other cities or countries, or dancers at different points in their careers, may see the differences between b-boying and breakdancing in different ways. A comparative analysis of how b-boys and b-girls in different cities, or of how older and younger dancers choose to name and define their dance practice would be of great interest to me. For the moment, however, these discussions are beyond the scope of this study.

Another limitation is that of the distinction between b-boying and b-girling: the question of whether women are b-boying or b-girling when they dance is of great interest to me, and is one upon which there are a number of highly conflicting views. Some women I have encountered refer to their dance practice as b-girling, while others insist that the proper name of the dance is b-boying, regardless of the gender of the dancer. While I have started to address the effects of the gender-specific term b-boying on female practitioners (see Simard, 2012), this question is a complex one that reaches far beyond the scope of this present study, and that I intend to address in a

future research project. Despite the questions that arise about the gendering of 'b-boying', I have chosen to include the voices of men and women in this study for two reasons: first, as Schloss (2009) has noted, b-boying is often considered an unmarked term that can refer to the dancing of men and women; and second, as McRobbie (1984) has mentioned, the female participants of lifestyle communities are often excluded from cultural and sociological consideration. While this study is not explicitly of a feminist nature, post-structuralist feminism is a lens that informed the choice of participants and interpretation of the data.[5]

Finally, while I conducted interviews in both French and English, the question of the differences between breakdancing and b-boying lies inherently within the confines of the English language. Although dancers in Europe have developed translations for certain breaking terms in a number of different languages,[6] Francophone b-boys and b-girls in Montreal predominantly use English terminology to discuss their dance practices. Though I would be interested in eventually investigating if the distinction between the terms b-boying and breakdancing is more or less important to Anglophone, Francophone, or Allophone[7] b-boys and b-girls in Quebec, or how dancers in other countries understand these terms, I did not specifically consider the mother tongue of dancers as a factor in the selection of participants, or in the analysis of the data.

1.2 Chapter Summaries

According to Morse and Hupcey (2002), "qualitative inquiry that commences with the concept, rather than the phenomenon itself, is subject to violating the tenet of induction, thus is exposed to particular threats of invalidity" (p. 68). As such, I begin

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[5] For a more in-depth discussion specifically on b-girls, please see Guevera (1996), or Ogaz (2006).

[6] For example, see Shapiro (2008) for a discussion on hip-hop dance vocabulary in France.

[7] In Canadian English, the term Allophone is defined as "a person who comes to live in Canada, especially Quebec, from another country, whose first language is not French or English" (Allophone, 2013).

by laying out my qualitative research design in Chapter 2. I conducted this study following a methodology known as grounded theory ethnography (Charmaz, 2006). Qualitative one-on-one interviews, participant observation, artifact collection, and movement analysis were used to collect data, allowing me to examine both the structural elements of the dance form and the sociological activities associated with this dance community. I conducted thirty-five qualitative interviews with dancers who had participated in the Montreal breaking community and identified themselves as b-boys or b-girls, or had identified themselves as b-boys and b-girls at some point in their lives. The data was analyzed using the grounded theory constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2006); open coding of interview transcripts and field notes was accomplished using MaxQDA11, a qualitative data analysis software program. Axial coding and memo writing allowed key concepts to emerge, which in turn were used to generate an emerging case theory. I also discuss how my dual position as both a b-girl and researcher shaped and affected the study.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the key concepts that emerged over the course of the study, and the theories that helped me develop my understanding of b-boying as a multi-faceted phenomenon. In keeping with the grounded theory methodology, these theories were not imposed on the data, but rather were borrowed to understand themes that came up over the course of my fieldwork. The chapter is split into three sections, based on the three concepts I identified as central to b-boying: first, I discuss b-boying as a dance form. I borrow from Suzanne Youngerman's (1975) definition of dance to develop a three-point analysis of the choreological,[8] sociological, and symbolic elements of b-boying. Second, I draw from Mead's (1967) theory of the self-as-product and the self-as-process, and Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* (2011) to

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[8] Kurath (1956) defines choreology as "the science of movement patterns" and specifies that a choreological study "deal[s] with any characteristic and expressive movement, utilitarian or artistic" (p. 177).

suggest b-boying can be understood as an expression of social identity. Third, I address the concept of authenticity in b-boying, in both its cultural and artistic sense.

Chapter 4 presents the results of the study in three parts: first, I discuss the structure and style of b-boying as a dance form. Next, I examine the sociological dimensions of the dance, and discuss social activities in which b-boys and b-girls in Montreal partake. Finally, I explore the symbolic meanings the participants in this study attributed to their dance practice. Here I discuss the concepts of identity and authenticity in b-boying, in relation to the theories discussed in the previous chapter. All three sections examine how the lived experiences of the participants in b-boying differ from their conceptions of what breakdancing is. At times, I draw from media and commercial representations of breakdancing from the 1980s to provide concrete examples of these differences.

In Chapter 5, I conclude the thesis by reviewing the major themes I explored in this study. I argue that b-boying and breakdancing are two distinct dance forms, which share a certain movement vocabulary, but that differ in aesthetic values and symbolic meaning. Next, I propose that b-boying is not a dance form per se, but rather an expression of social identity in the present moment. Finally, I argue that b-boys and b-girls in Montreal use the concept of 'breakdancing' as a bar against which they can measure and judge their own authenticity within the dance form and culture.

1.3 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter I have laid out the origins of my interest, central questions, and limitations of this project. In the next chapter, I will discuss the research approach I employed to conduct this study.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH DESIGN

In this chapter, I discuss the epistemology, theoretical groundings, methodology, and methods used to conduct this study, and the reasoning behind those choices. I also address the ethical considerations I had to undertake in this study, and my position as an insider and outsider to the community I am studying.

2.1 Type of Research

2.1.1 Qualitative Research Approach

Qualitative research methods were employed in this study. According to Creswell (2009):

> Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particular to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data (p. 4).

Creswell (2007) adds that the aim of qualitative research is paying "closer attention to the interpretive nature of inquiry and situating the study within the political, social, and cultural context of the researchers, the participants, and the readers of the study" (p. 37). Unlike quantitative researchers who generally employ deductive reasoning, and aim to prove pre-determined hypotheses by conducting reproducible experiments in controlled environments, qualitative researchers more commonly employ inductive reasoning, to understand the meaning human beings attribute to their actions in their natural, or empirical settings (Carter & Little, 2007). While quantitative social scientists generally focus on analyzing numerical data in order to produce a generalized, statistical representation of a social phenomenon,

qualitative researchers wish to understand the nuanced complexity of certain individuals' experiences of the phenomenon under study. This involves "reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation, and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges" (Creswell, 2007, p. 39).

2.1.2 Epistemology: Social Constructionism

Since qualitative studies aim to present reality from the participant's point of view, and many qualitative researchers are self-reflexive and transparent about the role they play in the collection and analysis of data, there has been much discussion surrounding the 'subjective' nature, and thus the 'validity' of qualitative findings from the positivist world of natural sciences (Becker, 1996). However, Crotty (2011) points out that qualitative approaches have also historically been employed in positivist social science research; he and others (Carter & Little, 2007; Feast & Melles, 2010) argue that the popular view of quantitative research as objective and qualitative research as subjective is misguided. Rather, he proposes that this is not a question of which research approach an individual chooses to employ, but rather a matter of the epistemological world-view one adopts.

Epistemology is defined as "the theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope" (Epistemology, 2012). Put differently, it is a "way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know" (Crotty, 2011, p. 3). Actively choosing an epistemological stance was an important step in the research design, since, according to Feast and Melles (2010) it "defines what kind of knowledge is possible and legitimate" (p. 2). As such, we understand that my epistemological stance has shaped the way I perceive 'reality', and defined what I was able to accept as the 'truth' in regards to the phenomenon in question. This in turn informed which theoretical perspectives, disciplinary traditions, methodology, and methods I employed throughout this study to unveil the 'true' nature of b-boying.

In this study, I have adopted a social constructionist world-view. Social constructionism is based on the work of sociologist Karl Mannheim, who first proposed that 'knowledge' was not an objective truth, but rather a product of social interactions (Gergen, 1999). Berger and Luckmann (1967) pushed this idea further, suggesting that it is not only knowledge that is socially constructed through human interactions, but also 'reality' as it is experienced in an everyday sense. They proposed that reality is not only *constructed*, but that it is also *constructive*; that is to say, that once constructed, reality acts back on, and influences, those who have defined it. They argued: "While it is possible to say that man has a nature, it is more significant to say that man constructs his own nature, or more simply, that man produces himself" (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 49).

Crotty (2011) defines constructionism as:

The view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context. (p. 42)

Crotty stresses that from the constructionist perspective, 'truth'—or meaning—cannot be created out of thin air, as it is neither fully objective nor subjective. He explains that while the physical world does exist outside of human experience, "the world and objects in the world are indeterminate. They may be pregnant with potential meaning, but actual meaning emerges only when consciousness engages with them" (Crotty, 2011, p. 43). Additionally, he argues that for 'social' constructionists, human beings do not construct such meanings independently from each other, but in relation to both the physical world and their existing social norms and institutions. He explains:

We are all born into a world of meaning. We enter a social milieu in which a 'system of intelligibility' prevails. We inherit a 'system of significant symbols'. For each of us, when we first see the world in a meaningful fashion, we are inevitably viewing it through lenses bestowed upon us by our culture. Our culture brings things into view

for us and endows them with meaning and, by the same token, leads us
to ignore other things. (Crotty, 2011, p. 54)

Similarly, Creswell (2009) specifies that 'social' constructionists not only attempt to understand the phenomenon in question through the experiences of individual participants, but also focus on the specific cultural contexts and social structures that continually re-construct and transform those views. Thus, one understands that social constructionists understand and accept reality from multiple, overlapping points of view that cannot be extracted from either the physical world or social and cultural norms. Burr (2003) adds that researchers who adopt the social constructionist world-view must accept at least one of four key assumptions: that one must take a critical stance toward taken for granted knowledge; that knowledge is historically and culturally specific; that knowledge is sustained by social processes; and that knowledge ultimately influences social action (p. 3-5).

By actively adopting a social constructionist world-view, I acknowledge that I did not intend to 'discover' one objective, universal 'truth' of what b-boying is though this study. Rather, my aim was to understand how certain individuals in a specific time and place—today in Montreal—defined and experienced b-boying as a phenomenon in a social context. This allowed me to accept that the world in general, and the Montreal breaking community specifically, is comprised of multiple realities constructed by the interactions human beings engage in with each other and their environment. As such, I did not see the sometimes opposing or conflicting opinions of the participants as flaws in the data that needed be smoothed over, but rather as evidence of the richness and diversity of the lived experience of the phenomenon in question.

2.1.3 Theoretical Perspective: Symbolic Interactionism

According to Crotty (2011), a researcher's theoretical perspective is "the

philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria" (p. 3). My study was conducted from the standpoint of symbolic interactionism, which is a distinctly pragmatic perspective rooted in the writings of American behavioural psychologist George Mead, presented in a posthumous collection of essays entitled *Mind Self and Society* (1967).

The term symbolic interactionism was first coined by American sociologist and Mead disciple Herbert Blumer (1998, 2004) to describe the work of a number of pragmatic philosophers, sociologists, and social psychologists including Mead, William James, John Dewey, James Baldwin, Charles Cooley, and Robert Park. According to Blumer (2004) his theoretical perspective was based on the fundamental notion that:

> Social life is an infinitely extendable complex of collective endeavours with indeterminate vectors, involving the formation of shared understandings and definitions about what is going on and how future actions might be made relevant and sensible in the light of continually emerging situations. (p. xvi)

While Mead (1967) never used the term symbolic interactionism, Blumer (1998) based this theoretical perspective on three premises present in Mead's writing:

> The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. [...] The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (p. 2)

From the symbolic interactionist perspective, human society is not only understood through observable action, but also by the meaning that individuals and social groups attribute to these actions. Through each interaction—either with other human beings or simply objects existing in the natural world—individuals re-examine and redefine both their understanding of themselves and the world around them (Crotty, 2011).

Much like social constructionism, symbolic interactionism views reality as being not only constructed but constructive, since the meaning that human beings attribute to their actions will necessarily prepare them for future social interactions (Blumer, 2004). Additionally, it is an approach that places the sociological self and human agency at the centre of all social organizations. As Blumer (1998) explains:

> In place of being a mere medium for operation of determining factors that play upon him, the human being is seen as an active organism in his own right, facing, dealing with, and acting toward the objects he indicates. Action is seen as conduct which is constructed by the actor instead of response elicited from some kind of preformed organization in him. (p. 65)

It is important to understand then that symbolic interactionists do not generally seek to conduct a critical analysis of a social phenomenon as feminist scholars or critical theorists would. Rather, they seek to explore the phenomenon through the meanings that the individuals in a given social group attribute to their individual and collective actions in a specific place in the present time (Crotty, 2011). Of course, this does not mean that the participant's point of view should be seen as the 'truth' in regards to the phenomenon under study; rather, it simply means that the researcher must take the participant's point of view seriously, and treat it as a valid way of conceptualizing the phenomenon.

2.1.4 Related Research Disciplines: Sociology of Dance, Popular Culture Studies, Dance Studies

This study has been influenced by a number of researchers who have contributed to the field of the sociology of art. Howard Becker's *Art Worlds: Updated and Expanded* (2008), Janet Wolff's *The Social Production of Art* (1984), and several works by Pierre Bourdieu (2011; 1993; 1984) helped me map out my understanding of the role of art, and thus dance, in society. Like Becker (2008), I argue that: "All artistic work, like all human activity, involves the joint activity of a

number, often a large number, of people. Through their cooperation, the art work we eventually see or hear comes to be and continues to be" (p. 1). I agree with his stance that to study art making from a sociological perspective necessarily means developing "an understanding of the complexity of the cooperative networks through which art happens" (ibid). Similarly, Wolff (1984) has proposed: "Understanding art as socially produced necessarily involves illuminating some of the ways in which various forms, genres, styles, etc. come to have value ascribed to them by certain groups in particular contexts" (p. 7).

Additionally, Helen Thomas's (1995) approach to the sociological analysis of dance has been particularly informative to me. She argues that the ephemeral nature of dance presents certain challenges for those who choose to study it from a sociological perspective. She explains:

> The socio-historical and aesthetic dimensions of a phenomenon like American modern dance cannot and should not be reduced to a single dimension. This irreducibility follows on from a contention that dance is primarily a mode of reflexive bodily communication that generates meaning through it's specific form. That form... exists in its own space and time. That is, unlike a painting or a novel, the dance work is never fixed at any one point in space and time but is always in the process of becoming the work itself, from the beginning to the end. In that sense each and every dance is unique. The view taken here is that dance does not simply reflect reality but, rather, it creates its own life-world through its form; it transforms reality into its own particular context. (p. 26-27)

While Thomas (1995) is speaking specifically of her research on Western concert stage dances, her statement could easily be applied to the study of any dance form, including b-boying. She proposes that the challenge that sociologists who choose to study dance face is two-fold in that "the intent is to maintain the integrity of an interpretive sociology as a mode of seeing and analyzing the social world on one hand and, on the other, the specificity and reflexive character of dance as an art form" (p. 22). In this study, I followed Thomas' advice, and examined b-boying and

breakdancing from both 'extrinsic' and 'intrinsic' perspectives: the extrinsic approach examines the social context in which a dance develops while the intrinsic approach addresses the technical and aesthetic elements of the dance itself.

The field of Popular Culture Studies also informed this study, in particular by the works of Thornton (2005, 1996), Bennett (2000), and Fogarty (2006, 2010, 2012a, 2012b). Popular Culture Studies is a discipline that has its roots in the tradition of urban ethnography first developed at the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago (Gelder, 2005a). At the start of the 20th century, sociologists from the Chicago School turned their attention to the different social 'types' who inhabited the city: hobos, gang members, recent immigrants, and delinquent youth. According to Bennett (2000), however, by the 1960s, researchers in the United Kingdom at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at Birmingham University began to turn their attention away from criminals, and focused their attention towards the study of deviance in "style-based youth cultures, such as teddy boys, mods, rockers and skinheads" (p. 17), arguing that "the deviant behaviour of such youth cultures or 'subcultures' had to be understood as the collective reaction of youth... to the structural changes taking place in British post-war societies" (p. 18). Seminal works such as Hall and Jefferson's edited anthology *Resistance Through Rituals* (1976) and Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) laid the groundwork for a generation of cultural theorists who examined "popular media, popular culture, literature, and everyday life" (Gelder, 2005b, p. 81) in order to produce "analyses that read these things ideologically, since culture here is always taken as a matter of (class) conflict" (ibid).

In more recent times, however, the subcultural theories developed by the CCCS have been criticized for a number of reasons, including: the lack of attention paid to female participants of youth subcultures (McRobbie, 1984); imposing utopic symbolic meanings to the fashion or behaviour of youth without taking into account

the meanings that youth ascribe to their own practices (Cohen, 2005); and the tendency to focus only on the most visible or 'authentic' members of a subculture, thus ignoring the diversity of opinions and social practices that take place in a given social group (Clarke, 2005). Indeed, Bennett (2000) has argued that by moving away from subcultural theory and towards the examination and analysis of 'lifestyles' instead, researchers can better understand how lifestyle cultures manifest themselves differently in different locations around the world by considering how "young people take the cultural resources provided by popular culture industries and use the prescribed meanings attached to such resources as templates around which to construct their own forms of meaning and authenticity" (p. 27).

In regards to the study of dance, sociologists and cultural theorists have also been criticized for analyzing the social environment in which a dance is created or performed, while paying little attention to the dance itself (Stevens, 2008). As Sklar (1991) points out, in the study of dance "it is necessary to know not just that a person is winking, but *how* he is winking" (p. 6, italics in original). With this in mind, it is clear that although this study includes an analysis of the social realities and cultural practices associated to b-boying, I also needed to examine the dance form's movement vocabulary and aesthetic norms. This links my study to the field of Dance Studies, particularly the American traditions of dance anthropology and dance ethnography. Sklar argues, "dance ethnography is unique... because it is necessarily grounded in the body and the body's experience rather than in texts, artefacts, or abstractions" (1991, p. 6). In many ways, this project resembles dance ethnography since it proposes the use of an interdisciplinary, mixed-method approach in the collection and analysis of data, including participant observation, interviews, artifact analysis, and movement analysis (Thomas, 2003).

2.2 Methodology: Grounded Theory Ethnography

B-boying is a complex phenomenon that encompasses elements of artistic creation, cultural expression, and the construction of identity. Faced with the complex and interdisciplinary nature of these phenomena, I chose to employ a mixed methodology to conduct this study. Much of the recent research that has been conducted on breaking and b-boy culture has been ethnographic in nature; Creswell (2007) describes ethnography as "a qualitative design in which the researcher describes and interprets the shared and learned patterns of values, *behaviors*, beliefs, and language of a *culture-sharing group*" (p. 68, bold italics in original text). Ethnographers attempt to produce what Geertz (2001) called a 'thick description' of a culture; that is, a description not only of the behaviour of a given cultural group, but also of the meaning individuals attribute to their actions.

However, while thick descriptions of social structures can provide insight into the lives of marginalized cultural groups, ethnography has been criticized by some since researchers tend to "neglect the theoretical relevance" (Snow, Morrill, & Anderson, 2003, p. 182) of the behaviours they describe, and because of the methodology's "relative dearth of systematic procedures for analyzing field data in a fashion that facilitates theoretical elaboration across sites" (ibid). Laureau (1996) warns that even the most accurate, vivid description of a culture may leave readers (or worse, thesis supervisors!) asking the dreaded question: "So what?" (p. 221). With these critiques in mind, I realized that while this study may follow the ethnographic tradition, it was not my goal to simply produce a 'thick description' of b-boy culture. Rather, I hoped to "move beyond description and to generate or discover a theory, an abstract analytical schema of a process" (Creswell, 2007, p. 63)—the process in this case being the act of b-boying. As such, I employed a research methodology referred to as 'grounded theory ethnography' (Charmaz, 2006).

Grounded theory is a methodological approach invented by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, which they first presented in their book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967). At a time when positivist views and quantitative research approaches dominated sociological research, Glaser and Strauss' approach provided a clear, rigorous frame with which to conduct qualitative research. Grounded theory was innovative in that: 1) it called for the simultaneous collection and analysis of data through a 'constant comparative method', wherein the comparative analysis of data categories was used to advance the researcher's theoretical understanding of the phenomenon in question; and 2) it "advocated *developing* theories from research grounded in data rather than *deducing* testable hypotheses from existing theories" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 4-5, italics in original text).

While Glaser and Strauss' (1967) original methodology was prescriptive in terms of which methods researchers should use to conduct both the collection and analysis of data, Charmaz (2006) outlines a more flexible, interpretive approach to this methodology. Charmaz's approach is often referred to as constructivist grounded theory—she emphasizes the subjective nature of reality, and sees research as a social construction in which both the researcher and participants are actors (Creswell, 2007). Along with others (Snow, Morrill, & Anderson, 2003), she proposes that researchers can combine ethnographic and grounded theory approaches to conduct what she calls 'grounded theory ethnography', which she explains:

> [G]ives priority to the studied phenomenon or process—rather than to a description of a setting. Thus, from the beginnings of their fieldwork, grounded theory ethnographers study what is happening in the setting and make a conceptual rendering of these actions. (Charmaz, 2006, p. 22)

By combining ethnographic and grounded theory methodologies, and considering the historical, structural, and symbolic elements of the culture, I was able to develop an

inductive research design that allowed me to more fully comprehend how dancers in Montreal understand and define b-boying.

2.3 Methods

One of the quintessential characteristics of grounded theory is the concept that 'all is data' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For this reason, grounded theorists generally employ a combination of methods to collect various forms of data. My fieldwork began with a pre-study I conducted on b-girls in Canada in the spring of 2011 (Simard, 2012), and ended with the writing of this thesis in the spring and summer of 2013. Over the course of these two years, I collected data in a number of different ways, including: qualitative interviews, participant observation, collection of artifacts, literature review, and movement observation and notation. Gathering multiple types of data from different sources allowed me to cross-reference and triangulate, which not only provided a rich data set, but also helped ensure I did not come to generalized conclusions based on the opinions of a small number of participants (Weiss, 1995).

2.3.1 The 'Field': Montreal's Street Dance Community

In this study, the 'field' was the Montreal street dance community in general, with a main focus on the locations and situations where breaking was the predominant dance form performed.[9] Limiting myself to interacting only with b-boys and b-girls was a task easier said than done, since the breakers often socialized with other types of dancers, such as poppers, lockers, waackers, house dancers, and contemporary dancers. Additionally, some of the b-boys and b-girls I met practised other dance forms as well. Bigger organized competitions often offered battles in several different forms, or featured 'showcase' performances by local hip-hop dance troupes. But there were still clear boundaries between different dance communities: for example, dance practices and rehearsals were mainly confined to dancers who

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[9] For a brief historical overview of the Montreal breaking community, please refer to Annex A.

performed a single dance form, perhaps due to conflicting musical preferences, or different ideas of how to use and negotiate shared space. Whatever the reason for these divisions between the different street dance communities, it is safe to say that they did exist. When possible, I focused my attention on the spaces and social situations where the dominant dance form being performed was b-boying.

2.3.2 Participant Selection: Initial Sampling and Theoretical Sampling

At first, I recruited dancers for this study through convenience sampling, meaning I approached dancers to whom I had immediate access. The initial participants were dancers I had met through my own participation in the Montreal breaking community. Potential participants were contacted in person, by email or telephone, or through social media sites such as Facebook. The initial participants were not chosen for my aesthetic preference for their personal dance style, nor because they were 'professional' or 'amateur' dancers. They were selected for two reasons: first, because they could be described as 'experts' in their experience of the phenomenon being studied (Morse, 2011)—meaning they identified themselves as b-boys or b-girls, and were involved in some aspect of the local, national, or international breaking community (for example, by participating in or organizing battles, attending practices, teaching classes, or doing stage performances). Second, these initial participants were selected simply because they were willing to participate in my study: I did not pressure any dancers to participate, and if a particular b-boy or b-girl did not respond to or refused my initial request for an interview—or said yes to the interview but then was never available when I tried to schedule a time to meet—I simply moved on and asked other dancers if they would be willing to be interviewed.

As I followed the grounded theory methodology—meaning I collected and analyzed data simultaneously, key concepts and categories that emerged from the coding and analysis of data began to emerge from the initial interviews and

observations. Therefore, a second round of 'theoretical sampling' was required to recruit participants who could provide knowledge on specific themes or topics. According to Creswell (2007), theoretical sampling entails recruiting particular individuals whose perspectives could bring depth to the conceptual categories emerging through the study. I relied on 'snowballing' techniques to conduct the theoretical sampling, meaning I drew on the suggestions of initial participants, and my own observations in the field, to identify new potential 'experts' who could be beneficial to the study.

Charmaz (2006) cautions that theoretical sampling "pertains only to conceptual and theoretical development; it is not about representing a population or increasing the statistical generalizability of your results" (p. 101). Since the purpose of this study was to put forward a theory on the meaning that b-boys and b-girls in Montreal attributed to their dance practice, and not to produce a statistical analysis of the demographics of the city's breaking community, participants were not sampled on the basis of biographical factors such as race, gender, age, or socio-economic status. In the end, the participants in this study were a mix of Francophone, Anglophone, and Allophone men and women of various racial, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, who ranged in age from approximately 20-50 years old.

While there are varying opinions of how many participants should be included in a grounded theory study,[10] most methodologists agree that the researcher must continue sampling until he or she reaches 'theoretical saturation', which is when methods of data collection cease to provide new relevant information in regards to the phenomenon under study.[11] I would estimate that over the course of the study I interacted with and spoke to well over a hundred dancers, if I include those I formally

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[10] Several texts suggest interviewing between twenty and sixty individuals.
[11] See Charmaz (2006), Creswell (2007), Corbin & Strauss (2008), and Glaser & Strauss (1967).

interviewed, as well as those I observed or spoke to informally in public settings such as jams and organized battles.

2.3.3 Qualitative Interviews

I conducted thirty-five formal interviews with b-boys and b-girls in Montreal from the spring of 2011 until the spring of 2013. Most of these interviews were conducted face-to-face, although some interviews (seven) were also conducted through "take home interviews" (Fisher, 2012) in which dancers answered a list of questions I sent to them, either by email (six) or by making an audio recording of their answers (one). These qualitative interviews provided a first hand account of the participants' lived experiences as b-boys and b-girls, including the activities in which they participated to construct and maintain this identity and of the beliefs they held pertaining to these activities. The newest dancer I interviewed had been breaking for only two years, while the most experienced dancer had been involved in the Montreal street dance community for over thirty years.

Additionally, I interviewed B-boy Alien Ness—president of the *Mighty Zulu Kingz* and author of the book *The Art of Battle* (2009)—twice in New York City in July 2011. According to Schloss (2006), Alien Ness is "one of b-boying's most vicious warriors and also one of its most respected diplomats" (p. 27). Ness is a highly respected b-boy who has taught classes, judged battles, and won competitions across the globe (Ness, 2009; Schloss, 2006). Additionally, he is one of the only b-boys to have written and published a book on breaking. The primary purpose of these interviews was to develop a deeper understanding of some of the theories Ness presents in his book, which will be discussed in section 2.3.5. However, our discussions also provided me with important information about the history of breaking, and brought a number of interesting concepts to my attention that I was able to address and explore in later interviews.

Formal interviews lasted from a half hour to two hours, and were conducted in a variety of locations, such as coffee shops, restaurants, dance studios, private homes, parks, and classrooms at UQAM, depending on where the dancer in question wanted to meet. Audio recordings were made of all the interviews to ensure accuracy in the transcripts. Follow up interviews were scheduled with some participants as the study advanced and new concepts emerged; other participants were contacted by email in order to answer follow up questions.

I conducted interviews using a combination of techniques described in Robert Weiss' *Learning From Strangers* (2007), and Pierre Vermersch's *Entretien d'explicitation* (1994). [12] While they are complimentary, these two interview techniques differ slightly in approach and method: for example, Vermersch suggests the interviewer focuses specifically on asking what individuals did, and how they did it, while Weiss is also interested in asking why participants did what they did. Another difference is that Vermersch recommends encouraging participants to describe past lived experiences in the simple present verb tense, while Weiss recommends using the simple past tense. However, both are introspective approaches, and insist that the interviewer avoid questions about general beliefs on the phenomenon in question. Rather, they both propose that the interviewer should guide participants to describe, in minute detail, concrete memories of past, lived experiences during which the phenomenon was experienced. Weiss (1995) explains:

> While questions about concrete incidents... may be answered from
> more than one perspective, they are less likely to be modifiable by the
> interviewing context. Thus, we will obtain more reliable information
> and information easier to interpret if we ask about concrete incidents
> than we will if we ask about general states or about opinions. (p. 150)

My training in Vermersch's (1994) techniques proved to be particularly useful at times, as it made me aware of how often and easily interviewees can slip into

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[12] While I have no formal training in Weiss' technique, I completed a training course in Vermersch's techniques at UQAM in the fall of 2011.

providing contextual information, theoretical conceptualizations of the topic in question, judgments of a situation, or information about what they intended to do, as opposed to describing what had actually happened in a given situation (p. 44-49). Being aware of these tendencies helped me focus my questions on my participants' actual lived experiences as b-boys and b-girls, as opposed to their ideal conceptualizations of what b-boying 'should' be. By drawing from these two different yet complimentary techniques, I was able to develop a flexible approach to conducting interviews, and adjusted my style of questioning depending on the participant's responses and the direction the interview took.

The participants were asked questions about their experiences as dancers in the breaking community, such as: their personal dance history, training approach, aesthetic preferences, and social practices in the dance context, as well as the mental and material actions involved in the activities they associated to b-boying and breakdancing. While I initially used a guide to structure interviews,[13] my line of questioning changed with every participant, and later interviews served to flesh out the concepts that emerged during the initial ones. Dancers were also told they did not have to answer any questions they did not feel comfortable answering, and that they could choose to end the interview or even withdraw from the study at any time.

It should be noted that most of the younger dancers (eighteen to twenty-five years old) I approached over the course of my study were not interested in being formally interviewed, and that the majority of the dancers I have quoted in this thesis are over twenty-five years of age. While I do not know the exact reason why younger dancers did not want to be interviewed, I have some speculations as to their reasons: first, many of the dancers I spoke to expressed concerns about how hip-hop is often misrepresented by academics and journalists—a few participants even jokingly

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[13] See Annex B for the initial interview guide.

warned me that I had "better get it right". Thus, I suspect that younger b-boys and b-girls I did not know very well might have seen me as another outsider trying to appropriate their culture. Additionally, Schloss (2009) has argued that hip-hop culture and the breaking community place great importance on the notion of respecting one's elders and correctly knowing the history of the dance. Similarly, a few of the younger dancers I approached suggested that I should talk to someone older or more established in the community instead. One young dancer told me he did not want to be interviewed because he "might not say the right thing". Whatever their reasons, when dancers seemed apprehensive or unsure about being interviewed, I respected their wishes and did not push the matter.

2.3.4 Participant Observation

Fogarty (2006) has argued that participant observation is a key method of data collection in the study of dance, as it allows the researcher to engage in "nonverbal communications essential to dance knowledge but often difficult to articulate" (p. 47). Observations took place in a number of contexts and spaces, such as: practices; dance workshops; organized judged battles; outdoor festivals; hip-hop and funk nights at bars and nightclubs; and even in the context of non-dancing social gatherings, such as get togethers in dancers' homes or going out for a meal after a practice or battle.[14] Generally, I attended and observed events that one of the dancers I had interviewed was attending or participating in; observing the participants in their social interactions allowed me to see some of the concepts we had discussed abstractly in action.

Practices were observed at a number of locations, including: *Shauna Roberts Dance Studio, DissTorsion Dance Studio, Urban Element Dance Centre, Café Graffiti*, the lobby of the *AMC Forum* (a shopping and cinema complex in the west end of Montreal), private lofts, and dancers' homes. Additionally, as I had access to

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[14] When observing semi-private or private environments such as practices in private lofts or studios, I only identified dancers who agreed to participate in the study in my field notes.

studios at the UQAM dance department, I often invited participants to come practice there on days when no other studios were available.

Battles took place at dance studios, community centres, nightclubs, and show venues. These battles were organized by b-boys and b-girls themselves, or outside show promoters. Battles occur frequently in Montreal, and I had the chance to attend eighteen competitions from January 2012 to May 2013.[15][16] I did not take field notes on site while conducting observations, since I felt it might make participants uncomfortable; rather, I took the time to complete my field notes at home immediately following every observation period.[17]

A final way I conducted observations was by participating in online discussions with other b-boys and b-girls through message boards and social media websites such as Facebook. Increasingly, b-boys and b-girls use the Internet to share knowledge, exchange opinions, and even learn various dance techniques or battle strategy. For example, *MTL Bboying* is a Facebook group where dancers share information about upcoming competitions; *Funktreal QC History* is another group dedicated to sharing knowledge, photos, and videos relating to the history of b-boying in the province of Quebec; YouTube and Vimeo are video hosting websites on which many dancers post and discuss footage from their recent battles, practices, and performances. By including these online sites as part of the 'field', I was not merely trying to access a larger number of participants; rather, I was acknowledging one of the ways that b-boys and b-girls in Montreal interact as a community.

At times in my fieldwork I positioned myself as a b-girl, and engaged with the Montreal breaking community as a dancer: I practised with the participants, entered

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[15] See Annex C for a list of battles I attended.

[16] I decided to include field notes I took at *House of Paint*, a battle that took place in Ottawa in August 2012, in the analysis since many of the dancers I had interviewed attended or participated in the event.

[17] See Annex D for an example drawn from my field notes.

battles, took classes and workshops, and was even invited to judge an event. At other times, I positioned myself as a researcher, choosing to sit out of activities in order to watch events unfold. I chose to go back and forth between these two approaches to participant observation because as Schloss (2009) has argued: "unmediated hip-hop, by definition, cannot be understood without becoming personally involved in it" (2009, p. 8). Using this dual approach, I was able to observe the phenomenon from the participants' point of view, while developing an embodied understanding of the concepts that were emerging from the interviews and observations.

2.3.5 Movement Observation and Notation

Most of the studies that have been conducted on b-boying have focused on historical, social, or cultural aspects of the dance, and paid little attention to the technical or aesthetic elements of the form itself. Of course, this problem is not unique to the study of street dance: art sociologists have often been criticized for paying too much attention to the situations and institutions where art is produced while paying little attention to the "features of the art object itself" (Wolff, 1981, p. 31). Some researchers have given broad overviews of the movement vocabulary of breaking (for example, see Banes, 1994a; Fogarty, 2012a; Pabon, 2006; Schloss, 2009; and Stevens, 2008), but these descriptions are usually a few paragraphs at most and do not do justice to its diversity and complexity. Additionally, I have yet to find a study that attempts to provide an accurate description of how the movement or physical stylization of b-boying differs from the descriptions of breakdancing that can be found in the numerous instructional books and videos from the 1980s. As such, I felt that some particular attention had to be paid to how I observed and noted the actual movement vocabulary of b-boying.

Many dance researchers (for example, Youngerman, 1975; Reynolds, 1972) recommend the use of a notation system such as *Labanotation* to document the choreological factors of a dance. However, as Youngerman (1975) has pointed out:

It is true that there are Western movement biases inherent in the techniques, just as there are ethnocentrisms built into Western music notation. This point has not been emphasized enough. Researchers should not only be aware of the Western body baseline of the notation systems, but should also recognize that although a specific notation may accurately describe how a movement looks, it may not reflect the way the movement is conceptualized by the dancer and the rest of the culture members. (p. 119)

This considered, I preferred to follow Kaeppler's (2001) proposal that dance forms should be described and defined "based on the movement concepts of the holders of a movement tradition" (p. 51) and not on "outside observers' ideas about movement differences" (ibid). So instead of simply using one pre-existing movement analysis system to describe b-boying and breakdancing as dance forms, I borrowed vocabulary from three different approaches: 1) the vocabulary the participants used to describe their dance; 2) elements of Laban Movement Analysis (LMA); and 3) Alien Ness' (2009) theory of the *5 Elements of Battle Style*.

My first priority was to capture the language and terms used by the participants. As such, I used what Charmaz (2006) referred to as "in-vivo" coding during the analysis of the interview transcripts.[18] She explained that in-vivo coding is a technique where the researcher does not impose category terms or codes on the data, but instead lets them emerge during the analysis by drawing directly from the language used by the participants themselves. By paying close attention to the language the participants used to describe their dance, I hoped to develop a qualitative vocabulary that captured the implicit aesthetic values of b-boying.

Of course, part of the problem with dance research is "the frequent inability of informants to verbalize or even consciously recognize exactly what qualities are valued" (Youngerman, 1975, p. 122). This is why movement analysis frames were

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[18] The coding process will be discussed further in section 2.4.1.

developed in the first place—and why they remain particularly useful in dance-based research—since they provide a qualitative vocabulary to describe movement. When the participants' terms were not self-evident or required further clarification, I drew from the vocabulary of LMA to further develop my qualitative descriptions.

Based on theories developed during the early 20ᵗʰ century by choreographer Rudolf Laban, LMA is widely recognized as an important tool in the analysis and description of human movement (Schwartz, 1995). It proposes a common language that movement analysts, choreographers, dancers, teachers, and dance therapists, amongst others, can employ to explain and dissect individual movements or movement phrases, and to discuss their associated qualities (Alter, 1991). LMA is a system based on the consideration of four main concepts: Body, Space, Effort, and Shape. Schwartz (1995) has described these four concepts in the following manner:

> [A] particular way of understanding and viewing the body (Body); dynamic qualities through which the body moves (Effort); the space within which the body moves (Space); and the way in which one's body shapes itself in space (Shape). (p. 26).

More specifically, in LMA:

a. **Body** refers to what parts of the body are moving, and in what sequence. Body can also refer to the dynamic alignment, points of initiation, and global phrasing of the movement (Tremblay, 2007).
b. **Space** is primarily a question of where the body is and travels in space in terms of planes, directions, facings, and levels (ibid).
c. **Efforts** are "inner attitudes expressed and embodied outwardly in movement as an observable change in one or more of the dynamical motion factors of flow (free or bound), weight (light or strong), time (sustained or sudden) and space (indirect or direct)" (Madden, 1990, p. 1). The analyst can also pay attention to the phrasing of a movement sequence, or the variation of the Efforts through time.
d. **Shape** is "how the body forms itself in space" (Dell, 1977, p. 43), and is divided into three subsections: shape flow (respiration, opening and closing of the body); directional movements (arc-like or spoke-like); and shaping (the body's adaptation to the three dimensional nature of space, and if a movement gives the sense of gathering or scattering).

I could have conducted this notation and analysis using the tools proposed by LMA alone, but I know that "the ethnographer is required to see movement from the point of view of the 'other' person who is performing it" (Thomas, 2003, p. 87). In keeping with my desire to highlight the theories that b-boys themselves have of their dance practice, I organized my observations in regards to the stylistic elements of b-boying using Alien Ness' (2009) *5 Elements of Battle Style.*[19] Based on ancient Chinese military strategies proposed in *The Art of War* (Sun Tzu, 2006), Ness's 5 Elements theory suggests that a well-rounded b-boy should possess:

a. **Earth, or** floor moves. This is anything a dancer uses or approaches in the low space. This includes "DROPS, FOOTWORK, LEG STEPS, THREADS, BODY ROLLS, BACK ROCKS, ROLLS, TRACKS, [and] SOMETIMES HEAD SPINS" (Ness, 2009, 14th page, 3rd paragraph).[20]

b. **Air**, meaning air moves, or movements that happen in a high space. This includes "FLIPS, SWIPES, FLARES, CONTINUOUS BACKSPINS, HALOS, AIR TRACKS, AIR FLARES, 1990'S, ELBOW SPINS, SWIRLS, AND SOMETIMES HEAD SPINS (DEPENDING ON HOW YOU GET INTO THEM" (Ness, 2009, 15th page, 2nd paragraph).

c. **Fire**, or a dancer's energy. It is the force with which dances attack their movements, and their attitude, both mentally and physically. It also relates to the dancer's spatial orientation and physical control, and her ability to improvise.

d. **Water**, meaning the dancer's flow, and the smoothness with which he or she transitions from one movement to another. It is also the phrasing and timing of movements.

e. **Ether,** which is the element that holds the other four together. It is a dancer's rhythm or musicality.

I met with and interviewed Ness in New York City twice in July 2011 to discuss his theories in order to deepen my understanding of his system. Since his theory was developed as a battle strategy, Ness only described these categories as he

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[19] There are no page numbers in *The Art of Battle*, which poses a difficulty for citing the book properly. The 5 Elements of Battle Style are listed on the page 14 and 15 of the book, in Section One.

[20] The entire book is written in capital letters, and will be quoted as such.

believed they should be used in a <u>competitive</u> setting. For example, in regards to Water, Ness says "EVERYTHING SHOULD HAVE A CONTINUOUS FLOW, WITH NO HESITATION FOR A SET UP" (Ness, 2009, 15th page, 3rd paragraph). However, for the purposes of dance analysis, one could also explore opposite manifestations of Water, which could be described as interrupted or restricted flow.

As opposed to relying solely on one pre-existing framework, I combined elements of these different approaches to movement analysis to allow for an approach to movement notation that was precise yet grounded in the aesthetics of breakdancing and b-boying. In doing so, I avoided falling into the trap of "moving dance research towards an eloquent but esoteric turn, creating an increasingly closed system of dance discoursing (difficult to comprehend, for instance, for dance practitioners who are not scholars)" (Davida, in Stevens, 2008, p. 12).

I compared data drawn from media and commercial representations of breakdancing from the 1980s (movies, articles, and instructional books and videos) to my observations of Montreal's b-boy community to understand if and how the two differed. Videos of battles I had attended were reviewed online after the fact when they were available, in order to ensure that movement notes I took from fieldwork observations were as precise as those based on the video artifacts of breakdancing.

It must be noted that movement notation and analysis is a highly complex process, and mastering systems such as LMA usually takes several years of formal training. I am not claiming that I am an expert in LMA or Ness' theory of 5 Elements, or that this study presents an extensive movement analysis of b-boying. Rather, I have borrowed tools from these systems to enhance my qualitative description of b-boying as a dance form. I hope that my descriptions can serve as a starting point for a future researcher who will conduct a more thorough movement analysis of b-boying.

2.3.6 Literature Review and Artifact Collection

There is a growing body of both academic and popular literature on the topic of b-boying, as well as an increasing number of visual artifacts of the dance. Since it was my intention to uncover the beliefs the participants held in regards to their own practice, the data collected through literature review and artifact collection was not weighted as heavily as data I obtained through my own observations and interviews in the analysis. However, the data collected from texts and artifacts proved to be highly valuable for a number of reasons, such as: cross-checking statements made by the participants concerning historical events; providing me with a visual reference for concepts that had been brought up in interviews; and developing my understanding of what 'b-boying' and 'breakdancing' are. I drew texts and artifacts from three different sources: popular sources, academic sources, and b-boy/b-girl sources.

2.3.6.1 Popular Sources

Most of the early documentation of b-boying was achieved through the media representations of 'breakdancing'. Numerous newspaper articles, television specials, how-to-breakdance books, Hollywood movies, and music videos from the 1980s provide the earliest traces of the dance. A number of articles on breakdancing and street dance culture by Banes—which are available in her book *Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism* (1994)—were also considered. Although, many dancers consider that most of these artifacts grossly misrepresent b-boying, they were examined in order to understand why b-boys today in Montreal reject these representations of 'breakdancing' as being 'inauthentic'. Local libraries, Internet databases, used bookstores, and online auctions were searched to locate many of these artifacts of breakdancing. Video artifacts were also found on video hosting websites such as YouTube. Additionally, some participants generously allowed me to look through their own collections of books, articles, and videos from the 1980s.

While Charmaz (2006) recommends that texts and artifacts should be included as data, she warns that they should not be seen as more neutral or objective than data collected through interviews or observation. Although artifacts can provide trace evidence of past experiences, one must remember that they were produced for a reason—in this case for commercial sale—and cannot be considered outside the context for which they were created (Creswell, 2007). That said, the popular source artifacts not only helped form my understanding of what 'breakdancing' is, they also allowed me understand how the historical knowledge, cultural practices, aesthetic values, and technical elements of b-boying were transmitted throughout the world.

2.3.6.2 Academic Sources

Once a rarity, academic texts on hip-hop culture have become more common over the past two decades. While many academics continue to confuse b-boying with other forms of street dance, there is a growing body of research that acknowledges that b-boying as a specific, unique dance form, with it's own history, movement techniques, social practices, and aesthetic codes. Recent works by Fogarty (2006, 2010, 2012a, 2012b), Johnson (2009), Osumare (2002), Pabon (2006), Schloss (2009), and Smith Lefebvre (2011) have begun to untangle some of the confusion between b-boying and other dance forms, and have added to my theoretical conceptualization of b-boying as a multi-faceted social phenomenon.

Schloss' *Foundation* (2009) is perhaps the only academic book that has been published to date that focuses solely on b-boying and not street dances in general. This ethnography of the present day b-boy/b-girl community in New York City provides a vivid account of the theoretical and philosophical discourse that takes place within the b-boy community. Schloss touches on a number of subjects, from dancers' musical preferences to the spaces where they train. He also brings up questions surrounding the differences between b-boying and breakdancing (see p. 58-67), although it is not the focus of his work, and he does not analyze the question

beyond a theoretical level. However, his discussion of the b-boying versus breakdancing debate highlights the importance that dancers attribute to these two terms, and shows that the preoccupation of understanding the difference between the two is not an isolated phenomenon in the Montreal breaking community.

Fogarty's work (2006, 2010, 2012a, 2012b) has been highly informative to this study. Fogarty is perhaps the scholar who has published the most literature on b-boying to date, and similar to me, she puts a heavy emphasis on understanding b-boying and b-girling from the perspective of the practitioners themselves. Her investigation of how b-boys and b-girls in the 1990s created 'imagined affinities' with dancers whom they had never met in person—but rather had only seen in home made 'video magazines'—highlights to which point b-boys and b-girls used mediated sources to construct their understanding of themselves, their dance practice, and their community (2006, 2012a). Her examination of the ways in which b-boys and b-girls interact with mediated images of their dance led me to suspect that media representations of breakdancing from the 1980s could not simply be dismissed as 'inauthentic' representations of b-boying; rather, I suspected that understanding the symbolic meaning these artifacts of 'breakdancing' had for dancers in Montreal could provide key information on how they viewed their own dance form and practice.

Closer to home, Stevens' *Breaking Across Lines* (2008) is an ethnographic examination of the Montreal breaking community that pays specific attention to the 'translocation' of the dance from the 'vernacular' to the 'performing arts' context. Additionally, Stevens begins to map out the origins of breaking in Montreal, drawing parallels from the history of hip-hop in New York in the 1980s. Smith Lefebvre's *B-boy Dance Cipher: An Innovative Knowledge Community's Shared Activity* (2011) is another study on the Montreal breaking community, which examines cyphering as a site where informal learning and knowledge creation can take place. Although neither study directly addresses the question of the differences between b-boying and

breakdancing, they were both informative to this study in that they allowed me to see gaps in the existing knowledge surrounding b-boying in Montreal, highlighting questions that needed to be addressed.

2.3.6.3 B-boy/B-girl Sources

The documents and artifacts that are produced by b-boys and b-girls in regards to their own dance practice and culture are often overlooked in academic circles. However, Fogarty's research (2006, 2012) highlights the importance of understanding how b-boys and b-girls used media channels to resist assimilation into popular culture. Additionally, she has argued that many b-boys and b-girls have over the years become 'amateur' researchers, documenting their local, national, or international histories by tracking down old photos and video footage, seeking out pioneers to interview them, and sharing knowledge through social networking platforms (Fogarty, 2010). Ness (2009) and Pabon (2006) are two examples of these b-boy researchers.

The primary b-boy/b-girl artifacts I considered in this study were video documents Montreal dancers had made of their practices, battles, and performances, and shared on public video hosting websites such as Vimeo and YouTube. These videos became incredibly useful in this study for several reasons: first, because I preferred not to video tape events I was observing myself, since filming distracted me from the event itself and prevented me from interacting with dancers on site. Second, they allowed me to see what the participants believed was important to document at an event, instead of deciding myself what was important to observe. Third, dancers I interviewed often spoke of battles I had not attended, and these videos provided me with visual representations of the events the participants were describing. Fourth, having access to these videos allowed me to review dance sequences repeatedly and compare them to the video documents of breakdancing from the 1980s.

2.4 Analysis

One of the unique features of grounded theory is that data collection and analysis occur simultaneously, meaning the analysis of data begins as soon as the study does (Creswell, 2007). Grounded theorists analyse data using a 'constant comparative' method, a process by which different units of data are compared to each other in order to allow their theoretical meanings to emerge (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I compared data collected from the media representations of breakdancing to the data pertaining to the lived experience of b-boying in Montreal; interview data to observation and artifact data; and data sets provided by different participants to each other. Additionally, I continued to practice and attend battles even after my fieldwork had 'officially' finished and I began writing this thesis, since I felt it was important to remain engaged with the participants and retain an embodied experience of the phenomenon as I moved into the final stages of analysis.

2.4.1 Coding Process

The interview recordings were transcribed, and the transcriptions returned to respective interviewees, who were welcome to review the document, and revise or remove statements if needed. The thirty-five transcriptions and my field notes from observation periods underwent a process called coding. As Charmaz (2006) has explained, coding is the process of "naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data" (p. 43). Coding is the first step of analysis in grounded theory, and is a three-part process which consists of: 1) line-by-line open coding, where the researcher works not from preconceived categories or concepts, but discovers concepts which emerge from the data; 2) selective coding, where key concepts central to the research question are selected for further investigation; and 3) axial coding, during which the researcher looks for ways to make theoretical connections between different categories. One could describe initial coding as the process by which the researcher takes the data

apart, selective coding the process of sifting through to identify what is important, and axial coding the act of putting it back together in a coherent way (Charmaz, 2006, p. 47-63).[21]

Grounded theorists would have once done this coding process by hand, literally writing codes in the margins of printouts of interview transcripts, and then cutting up the transcripts and separating statements into different folders to identify key concepts (Creswell, 2007). While some researchers still choose to work this way, I coded the data using a computer program called MAXqdall. Using this computer program did not eliminate the process of coding, or automatically sort the data for me; it was simply a more efficient way to store and sort the coding system, as it allowed me to quickly pull up all the data in a given category as I moved from the coding process to the next step of analysis: writing analytic memos.

2.4.2 Analytic Memos

Memo writing is central to grounded theory analysis; analytic memos can be seen as the link between the data and the theory since they "catch your thoughts, capture the comparisons and connections you make, and crystallize questions and directions for you to pursue" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 72). Saladaña (2009) describes analytic memos as "a place to 'dump your brain' about the participants, phenomenon, or process under investigation by thinking and thus writing and thus thinking even more about them" (p. 32). By writing memos, the researcher is forced to actively engage with the data, and can thus refine research questions, review interview strategies, dig theoretically into a single category, or find links between several categories. Memos can be informal reflections drawing directly from interviews, or longer reflections on literature or theories surrounding a topic (Charmaz, 2006).

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[21] Please see Annex E for an example of line-by-line coding drawn from an interview transcript.

In keeping with the constant comparative method of analysis, memo writing began early in the research process, and took the study in new directions, which informed and altered how subsequent interviews and observations were conducted. Memos were also coded using the categories developed through the coding process; however, it is important to note that the memos were only coded to help me organize my thoughts, and that they were not considered as data.

2.4.3 Generating Theory

The purpose of this process is to eventually generate a theory on b-boying that is grounded in the beliefs that b-boys and b-girls hold about their dance and culture. Instead of trying to 'force' a phenomenon to fit with a previously existing social theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that theory should be built from the ground up, meaning from data collected and analyzed through empirical study. From their positivist perspective, they argued that universally applicable mid-level or even grand theories could be 'discovered' by employing their methods, theories that could later be used to explain other unconnected social phenomena (Charmaz, 2006). However, in keeping with my social constructionist world-view, I do not believe that by generating a 'theory' of what b-boying is today in Montreal, I have discovered a universal, generalized explanation or 'truth' of this phenomenon. Rather, I agree with Charmaz (2006), who defined an interpretive theory as "the imaginative understanding of the studied phenomenon. This type of theory assumes emergent, multiple realities; indeterminacy; facts and values as linked; truth as provisional; and social life as processual" (p. 126).

2.5 Ethical Considerations

The methods of data collection and analysis proposed in this study were approved in accordance with the requirements of UQAM's policy on the ethical conduct of research involving human subjects. All subjects who were interviewed or observed in semi-public or private environments during the course of the study were

required to sign consent forms.[22] They were informed that they did not have to answer any questions they did not wish to. If they wanted to tell me something 'off the record' during the interview, we either stopped the recorder, or the statement was omitted from the transcript. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they wished. Recordings of interviews or observation periods, transcriptions, field notes, and analytic memos were all stored on an external hard drive, which was kept in a locked safe in my home.

While participants were given the option of remaining anonymous or being referred to by a pseudonym, many of them did not choose this option. This is perhaps because the discourse surrounding b-boying is still mainly rooted in an oral tradition; as such, dancers were eager to share their knowledge and beliefs concerning their culture, and to receive recognition for their contributions to their community. However, I agree with Fogarty (2006) that b-boying is "a culture where status, egos and competitions have real and embodied effects" (p. 56). For this reason, I did not include any quotes in which participants discussed personal differences with other dancers from the community. Additionally, although I spoke with a number of dancers at public events such as competitions, I did not directly quote anyone with whom I had only had informal conversations.

2.6 Role of the Researcher: Examining the Insider/Outsider debate

The question of whether researchers should position themselves as 'insiders' or 'outsiders' in the community that they are studying is a highly debated one. While classical social scientists may have tried to make themselves as 'invisible' as possible to the community they were studying, many contemporary fieldworkers actively engage with the communities they study, or even choose to study their own cultures (Goodwin & Horowitz, 2002). Such is the case in this study, where I have chosen to

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[22] See Annex F for an example of the consent form.

investigate a culture and artistic practice in which I have participated for fifteen years. While I am not from Montreal, this city has been my home since 1996. I started breaking in 1998, and have travelled extensively in North America and Europe, participating in battles, attending conferences, and performing in hip-hop and contemporary dance festivals. I have helped organize a number of practices, club nights, and battles in Montreal, and taught weekly breaking classes at *Studio Sweatshop* from 2004 until 2009.

As such, I am in many ways an insider in the community I am studying. This affected my research in a number of positive ways. For example, my approach to conducting fieldwork leaned towards the 'participant' side of the participant-observant spectrum: I engaged with b-boys and b-girls by practising with them, attending battles that they were entering, and taking classes that they were teaching. I also entered five battles over the course of the study, as I felt it was important for me to have an embodied sense of the dance in its various contexts. Additionally, being a b-girl removed virtually all problems related to 'entering' the field, since as an insider I did not need special permission to attend practices or battles. Moreover, I met all the participants through my own participation in the breaking scene; they ranged from one-time acquaintances to close friends. My personal relationships with the participants were a strong point in this work: they were more than happy to participate in the study, and were incredibly honest and generous with their responses to my questions. They welcomed me into their homes and practice spaces, shared video footage with me, and introduced me to other dancers who became participants.

My insider status, however, was also limiting at times. As I have been active in the Canadian breaking scene for the past 15 years, I was present at, or had knowledge of, many events that the participants recounted in interviews. When they knew this, some dancers seemed to feel awkward answering questions to which they believed I already knew the answer. Although I may have my own memory or

interpretation of a given situation, the goal of this research was not to 'prove' a predetermined hypothesis based on my own experiences or beliefs, but to understand what b-boying is, and how it differs from breakdancing, from the point of view of the dancers in this study. As Fogarty (2006) has explained of her own dual role as a b-girl and academic, my work "dances a fine line between a dialectic of experience and interpretation... being an insider to a lifestyle culture requires an explanation about what assumptions this embodied experience and identification bring" (p. 37).

Yet, in some ways I am an outsider to the community I am studying. As a White, 36-year old university-educated woman, I may not entirely fit with some people's view of what a street dancer is. As a multi-generation Canadian who grew up in small towns and rural communities across Quebec and Ontario, I don't know what it is like to grow up as a visible minority in a large urban centre. And as a mother and fulltime university student, I am not as implicated in the Montreal hip-hop scene as I once was. Although I continue to identify myself as a b-girl, I am aware some readers may question my right to claim my place as an 'insider' in the breaking community. To address such questions, I would echo McCorkel and Myers (2003) by stating: "the researcher's status as both an outsider and insider is constantly shifting as relationships are continually negotiated during fieldwork" (p. 204). Throughout this study I exercised "strong reflexivity" by examining "how aspects of identity can both impede and facilitate different forms of understanding" (ibid). I recognize that my position as a researcher does not make my views neutral, and that my sex, race, ethnicity, age, and socio-economic status affect the way I have conducted this study, and the how the participants responded to me.

2.8 Chapter Conclusion

There are no universal rules as to how qualitative research should be conducted; however, many methodologists (Bloor, 1997; Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 2011; Goodwin & Horowitz, 2002; Tracy, 2010) agree that the best

way to address questions of credibility is by being clear in the process, transparent about goals and beliefs, and self-reflexive in regards to how one's taken for granted knowledge affects the collection and analysis of data. In this chapter I have identified the epistemology and theoretical groundings underlying this study, described the methodology and methods used, and acknowledged that my research is a social construction in which I am an active player. I reaffirm my social constructionist stance, acknowledging the objective and subjective nature of this research, since "subjectivity does not disquality work as scholarship or science as long as data gathering procedures and values are both made explicit" (Bana Zinn, 1979, p. 213).

CHAPTER 3

KEY CONCEPTS

This chapter examines the key concepts that emerged from the constant comparative analysis of the data, or the 'conceptual framework' I developed over the course of the study. Jabareen (2009) has defined a conceptual framework as:

> A network, or 'a plane', of interlinked concepts that together provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon or phenomena. The concepts that constitute a conceptual framework support one another, articulate their respective phenomena, and establish a framework-specific philosophy. (p. 51)

Jabareen stressed that in a grounded theory study, the conceptual framework cannot be imposed on the data, but must be constructed from concepts that emerge from data, or are drawn from the examination of existing literature, discourses, and practices surrounding the phenomenon (p. 53).

According to Charmaz (2006), the conceptual framework helps "locate your manuscript in relevant disciplines and discourses" (p. 169). The literature and artifact review, field-work, and personal experiences as a member of the breaking community allowed me to see that b-boying was much more than just a dance form, but rather encompassed elements of artistic expression, social interaction, construction of identity, embodied experience, and cultural authenticity. As I began to understand b-boying as a complex and multidisciplinary phenomenon, I turned my attention to a number of other disciplines—including sociology, popular culture studies, and dance studies—in order to better understand the concepts that were emerging from the data.

This chapter is split into several sections: I begin by developing working definitions of the words breakdancing, breaking, and b-boying, lest I defeat the purpose of this study and find myself falling into the trap of using them interchangeably as other academics and journalists have. These definitions were developed in relation to the existing literature on breakdancing and b-boying, cross referenced with statements made by the participants during interviews. Building from this first step of analysis, I continued to collect and analyse data; through the constant comparative method I identified three overarching categories of concepts surrounding b-boying, which I named: 1) B-boying as Dance; 2) B-boying as Identity; and 3) B-boying as Authenticity. The rest of the chapter will examine these categories, and the subcategories of concepts that they include. Please note that while I have divided these concepts into three separate categories for the sake of clarity, they overlap in practice, and must not be seen as mutually exclusive.

3.1 Working Definitions of Terms

3.1.1 Breakdancing

As previously discussed, many b-boys and b-girls today in Montreal reject the term 'breakdancing' because they feel it represents the media exploitation of their dance during the 1980s. This perception was clear in many of the interviews. For example, B-boy Scramblelock told me: "It's a media term, it was a way to promote it to the masses" (Scramblelock, interview with the author, March 2012). Several participants echoed this statement, telling me that breakdancing was a term invented by the media in the 1980s, and felt that the word reflected the kind of dancing seen in movies or instructional books and videos from that time. As such, I looked to media representations of the dance form from the 1980s to better understand what breakdancing was.

In 1985, Banes gave this definition of breakdancing:

> Breakdancing (also known as rocking) is a form of competitive, acrobatic, and pantomimic dancing. It began as a game or friendly contest in which Black and Hispanic teenagers outdid one another with outrageous physical contortions, spins, and backflips, wedded to a fluid, syncopated, circling, rocking motion executed close to the ground. (George, Banes, Flinker, and Romanowski 1985, p. 79)

One must note that Banes did not distinguish between breakdancing and its predecessor: rocking. Additionally, she went on to add that breakdance included other dance forms such as electric boogie, popping, and locking (p. 109-110), and made links between breakdance and other Afro-diasporic dances and movement practices such as Lindy Hop, the Charleston, and capoeira (p. 103). Thus, from Banes' definition, the word breakdancing can be understood here to mean a combination of several different street and social dance forms.

Similarly, many of the how-to-breakdance books from the 1980s clearly present 'breakdance' as an amalgamation of several different dance forms. For example, Elfman (1984) defined breakdance as a combination of three different dances: breaking, uprock, and Electric Boogie (p. 11). Dunahoo (1984) made similar claims, stating: "Some dancers still talk about uprock, floor rock, and electric rock. But most people combine the moves and call the mix breakdancing" (p. 5). While Elfman and Dunahoo's terminology differ slightly, their descriptions of movements make it clear that what they call uprock is a combination of top rock and rocking; breaking is floor work, freezes, and power moves; and electric boogie is a combination of movements drawn from several different West Coast funk style dance forms, namely popping, locking, and the robot.

Thus, the term breakdancing can be seen as an umbrella term to refer to the combination of dance forms that is typically depicted in media and commercial representations of street dance from the 1980s. When I say media and commercial representations, I am referring to any written, video, and photographic representations

of breakdancing produced for popular consumption or commercial sale from 1981 to 1986. Some of the dancers I interviewed thought that the term breakdancing could be used today to describe the type of blending of street dance forms seen in Hollywood films such as *Step Up* (Fletcher, 2006) or *You Got Served* (Stokes, 2004).

3.1.2 Breaking

It should be noted that while most of the b-boys and b-girls I interviewed preferred not to use the word breakdancing to describe their dance, they did not all agree as to what the correct name of the original dance of hip-hop culture was: some of them preferred to use b-boying while others insisted that breaking was the proper name. While these debates still rage over which name is more authentic, most hip-hop pioneers accept the term 'breaking' as one of the correct names of the dance form. Pabon (2006) has proposed that the word 'breaking' was a slang term commonly used by youth in New York City during the 70s and 80s to describe actions performed with great intensity. Alien Ness agreed with Pabon, explaining:

> It really meant doing anything to an extreme. For instance, if I came home at three o'clock in the morning, and my mom starts screaming on me, yells, catches a fit.... the next day I might tell my friends 'Yo, I got home last night and my mom was breaking on me!' (Alien Ness, interview with the author, July 2011)

Pabon (2006) has stated that the term breaking had more than one meaning in the 80s, explaining: "Break was also the section on a musical recording where the percussive rhythms were most aggressive and hard driving. The dancers anticipated and reacted to these breaks with their most impressive steps and moves" (p. 19). As such, breaking can be understood both as an extreme dance performed at high intensity, and as a dance performed to the break of a song.

Fogarty (2012a) has defined breaking in the following manner:

> Breaking is a style of dance that involves a particular set of structured components: a clean entry and toprock (the dance done upright), get

downs (how one drops to the ground stylistically), downrock (footwork on the ground), freezes (holding a pose or position for a few seconds), power moves, air moves, routines with other b-boys or b-girls and exits. The dance is competitive, and crews 'battle' each other, though it is also performed in showcases, street shows and for theatrical audiences on stage. (p. 451)

Fogarty has specified that her definition of breaking excludes other hip-hop dance forms such as popping or locking. This is a clear difference from Banes' (1985) definition of breakdancing, which included these other forms. Since most of the dancers I interviewed also felt that a distinction needed to be made between breaking and other hip-hop or funks style dances, I will follow Fogarty's definition and use the term breaking to describe the original dance form of hip-hop culture, performed as described above.[23] While I use the terms breaking and b-boying in this thesis, it should be understood that I use the term breaking when talking specifically about the dance form itself, and not the social practices associated to the dance.

3.1.3 B-boying

If breaking is a dance form, and breakdancing is a media constructed umbrella term for several dance forms, what does that make b-boying? Is it simply a synonym of breaking, or does it mean something different all together? Unfortunately, the word b-boying was not defined in any dictionary I consulted over the course of this study. Even in academic texts that take the time to define terms such as b-boy, breaking, street dance, and breakdancing, the word b-boying is almost never specifically addressed or explicitly defined. Unable to find a dictionary or academic definition of b-boying, I turned my attention to defining the root of the word: b-boy.

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[23]As the focus of this study is not simply to describe breaking, but rather to understand the differences between b-boying and breakdancing, I will not give an in-depth description of this movement vocabulary here. However, I have provided a detailed description of these movements in Annex G for those interested in better understanding the basic movement vocabulary of this dance form.

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines a b-boy simply as "a male who engages in the pursuit of hip-hop culture or adopts its styles" (B-boy, 2011).[24] This definition does little to clarify the question at hand, and in fact leads to more confusion as it is not clear if the word culture is being used in its artistic sense as "the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively", or in its sociological sense as "the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society" (Culture, 2010). *Green's Dictionary of Slang* (Green, 2011) provides a slightly more elaborate definition: "Coined in 1975 to describe those who followed DJ Kool Herc of the Hevalo Club in New York; generally accepted as abbr. beat-boy; a black male teenager, focused on rap music and the ghetto street lifestyle" (p. 277-278). The issue with this definition, like the first one, is that it proposes that anyone interested in hip-hop culture could call himself a b-boy. While the term b-boy was used by some writers in the 1990s to describe rappers, black inner city youth, or members of the "hip-hop generation"[25] most of the pioneers of hip-hop agree that in order to be a b-boy or b-girl, an individual has to perform the dance form known as breaking (Schloss, 2009).

   Fogarty (2010) has defined a b-boy as:

   Someone who breaks. Originally in hip-hop culture this meant a 'break boy': someone who 'gets down' (dancing) to the break of a record. In breaking culture, a b-boy is someone who does a style known as breaking or b-boying/b-girling or 'breakdancing.' (p. iii)

Fogarty's definition highlights that a b-boy is somehow linked to a specific dance form. It is important, however, to note that a b-boy is an individual who performs the dance form, and not the dance itself. Thus, from a grammatical perspective, I find it difficult to define b-boying simply as a dance form, since continuous verb forms

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[24] I found it interesting that this same dictionary did not have a definition of 'b-girl'.

[25] For example, see George (2001) who defines a b-boy as an "African-American character type... molded by hip-hop aesthetics and the tragedies of underclass life; [...] he combines the explosive elements of poverty, street knowledge, and unfocused political anger" (p. 2).

(verbs ending in -*ing*) are used when the root verb is in an ongoing state. Conjugating a verb in a continuous tense does not alter the meaning of that root verb, it simply notes a change in the time frame in which the action is happening. As such, if we consider <u>b-boy</u> to be the root of <u>b-boying</u>, and combine these three definitions to understand a b-boy as an individual who develops a sense of identity by breaking and through his participation in hip-hop culture, it becomes clear that b-boying must be defined as the b-boy in process, or an ongoing state.

Thus, I begin by recognizing the word b-boying as having two different working definitions: first, as a synonym for breaking, in reference to the original improvisational dance form of hip-hop culture; and second, as the act of participating in the ongoing activities and practices associated to being a b-boy or b-girl. This second usage becomes particularly important to understand in Chapter 4, where we will see that the participants at times applied the term b-boying to situations or activities that were not directly related to dancing.

3.1.4 Additional Terminology

Several other terms specific to breaking and hip-hop culture need to be reviewed here, as they will be used frequently in the next chapter and might not be known to readers unfamiliar with hip-hop culture. First, street dance does not literally refer to people dancing in the street, but primarily to a category of un-institutionalized social dances of Afro-diasporic origins such as breaking, popping, and locking. Street dance is often used interchangeably with the term hip-hop dance, although today hip-hop dance is more often specifically attributed to the frontal, choreographed, unison dancing seen in hip-hop and pop music videos (Stevens, 2008). Moreover, it is important to understand that the term 'hip-hop' itself can be used in several different manners. In addition to describing a dance form, Schloss (2009) points out that the word hip-hop is often used in three other senses: first, in the sense of the original hip-hop culture, which is "a group of related art forms in different

media (visual, sound, movement) that were practiced in Afro-Caribbean, African American, and Latino neighbourhoods in the 1970s" (p. 4); second, in reference to hip-hop music—also known as rap—which is "a form of popular music that developed, or was developed, out of hip-hop culture" (p. 5); and finally, to describe the hip-hop 'attitude' or 'generation', or "a kind of loose demographic designation for contemporary African American youth, regardless of whether or not they have any over connection to rap music or to other hip-hop arts" (ibid).

Battles are competitions between two or more dancers; these competitions may either be organized, judged events that happen in front of a non-dancing audience, or spontaneous challenges between dancers that take place at a practice, jam, or nightclub (Ness, 2009). Practices are scheduled times where b-boys and b-girls gather in a studio, community centre, or loft to dance together in a non-competitive fashion. The purpose of a practice is, as the name suggests, to practice dancing; individual dancers might practice to work on their own skills and movement techniques, or crews might practice together to create group routines for shows or battles. Jams are events where b-boys and b-girls get together to dance in a social context; organized or spontaneous battles might take place at a jam, or the jam could simply have been organized to give the community a chance to dance non-competitively with a live deejay. Cyphers are dance circles in which b-boys and b-girls take turns dancing in an improvised fashion (Johnson, 2009). Please note that all these terms will be examined more thoroughly in Chapter 4.

3.2 B-boying as Dance

According to Kealiinohomoku (1983), "the word dance, itself, is never adequately defined to apply cross-culturally through time and space" (p. 541). With this in mind, one could ask what I mean when I speak of b-boying as a 'dance' form? In order to answer this, I must begin by explicating what I understand 'dance' to be. As it was my aim to generate the most complete case theory possible, I referred to

Youngerman's article *Method and Theory in Dance Research: An Anthropological Approach* (1975), which provides a complete, yet straightforward, definition of what dance is:

> Dance, in any society, is a multi-faceted phenomenon. For the purposes of analysis, however, dance can be separated conceptually into four general aspects. First of all, it exists in time and space as a dance—a physical phenomenon and cultural product. Second, it is made visible as dancing the manner in which it is performed. Third, a dance is an event—a behavioral process which takes place in a particular cultural context. Finally, dance exists as a body of concepts and feelings—the cognitive and affective dimensions that are associated with dance on each of the other 'levels'. (p. 117)

Youngerman's (1975) definition is helpful in that it identifies and defines several distinct yet overlapping concepts central to dance as a phenomenon. She uses these concepts to propose a research approach that can be used in the study of dance:

> The field of dance research should therefore cover all these broad areas: (1) the formal aspects of the dance structure- what is performed; (2) the behavior involved in realizing the structure, or performance 'style' - how the movement is accomplished; (3) the interaction of the social and cultural factors surrounding the dance before, during, and after the performance—the who, when, where, and why of the dance event; and (4) the role of dance in the culture in its normative, aesthetic, and symbolic dimensions - the 'meaning' of the dance. (p. 117)

Following Youngerman's suggestion, I will now discuss how these four concepts relate to my own understanding of b-boying as dance.

3.2.1 Choreological Aspects

3.2.1.1 Dance as Structure

Kaeppler (2001) has defined the structural elements of a dance as "building blocks—the essential elements that determine how a specific dance is constructed and how dances differ according to genre" (p. 52). Kröschlová (1992) has noted, that the structure of a dance does not just refer to the actual movements. She explains: "A

dance is indeed the sum of movements; but the form must be seen not just as the sum of movements, but as the way in which these take place in time and space" (p. 6).

Reynolds (1972) elaborates on this, suggesting a number of factors that can be observed when noting the structure of a dance, including: the number of participants; the group formation and connection between participants; the type of movement; the direction of movement (subjective for the dancer); floor patterns (objective in space); rhythm dynamics; and structure of musical accompaniment (p. 122).

3.2.1.2 Dance as Style

Kaeppler (2001), Kröschlová (1992), Reynolds (1972), and Youngerman (1975) all argue that it is necessary to note both the structure and style of a dance if one wishes to fully understand its form. According to Kaeppler (2001), the distinction between the structure and style of dance is one that is difficult to define, and often overlooked by dance academics. She defines style as "the way of performing and embodying structure" (p. 62), and refers to linguistic distinctions such as Saussure's distinction between *langue* (language) and *parole* (speech) to explain the difference between the two: in dance, structure can be seen as what is said, while style is how it is said (p. 53). Kaeppler argued that structure and style are interwoven to define a dance form. Similarly, Youngerman (1975) noted: "the division between structure and performance is especially artificial; they are opposite sides of a coin (p. 121).

Youngerman (1975) explained that style could be analyzed on several levels:

There are four different kinds of performance 'style': (1) the individual or personal manner of performance; (2) the social style that might differ according to sex, status, age, or social group membership; (3) the style of the dance idiom; and (4) the cultural style. (p .121)

It is important to note here that Youngerman is proposing that there is a difference

between an individual dancer's personal style and the generally accepted style of the form within a culture. She argued that this is because an individual dancer's style is the result of both their personal and cultural identities. Desmond (1993-1994) argued it is important to study the style of a dance not just for its aesthetic value, but also because "Like Bourdieu's concept of 'taste', movement style is an important mode of distinction between social groups and is usually actively learned or passively absorbed in the home and community" (p. 36). For the purpose of this study, I have focused primarily on understanding the general cultural style of b-boying in Montreal, while noting some personal variations discussed by the participants.

3.2.2 Sociological Aspects: Dance as Social and Cultural Interaction

Since Kealiinohomoku's (1983) examination of ballet as a form of 'ethnic' dance, a number of dance scholars have come to the conclusion that all dance forms must be seen as culturally situated (Davida, 2011). However, I hesitate to define dance as 'culture', since, according to Johnson (2000), culture is "the accumulated store of symbols, ideas, and material products associated with a social system" (p. 73). Johnson notes that examples of the material elements of a culture would be the foods, products, institutions, and environments it produces, while the non-material elements would be the symbols and ideas—such as attitudes, beliefs, values, and norms—that shape the lives of the people who share the culture. It is important to note that Johnson also specified that "culture does not refer to what people actually do, but to the ideas they share about what they do and the material objects that they use" (p. 73).

I will remind you here that "qualitative studies are not generally about 'attitudes', 'norms', 'roles', or other abstract concepts, but more about what people actually say and do in specific places and institutions" (Goodwin and Horowitz, 2002, p. 35). This is why I prefer to see dance as cultural or social <u>interaction</u>. This is based on:

> (1) The realization that dance is socially learned behavior and therefore cannot be studied in isolation from its cultural environment; and (2) the

recognition that dance is an *ongoing behavioral and conceptual process* and not a static composition of movements. (Youngerman, 1975, p. 124, italics added by the author)

Since the aim of this study was not to describe b-boying as a structure outside human existence, but to understand how b-boys exist in and interact with each other within that culture, I focused more on the social behaviour of b-boying—that is, the things b-boys and b-girls actually do—rather than the culture that surrounds b-boying—or the ideal values that shape the behaviour. This is in line with Blumer's (2004) symbolic interactionist view of human group life. Following on the theories of self and society developed by Mead (1967), Blumer argued: "society is seen in terms of action—the fitting together of the lines of activity of individual members" (Blumer, 2004, p. 69). He elaborated:

> Human group life consists of interaction between human beings. Regardless of where we look, whether in the home, neighbourhood, market place, courts, churches, schools, parliamentary assemblies, factories, business offices, banks, stores, playgrounds, and the meeting of friends, we see people acting toward one another and responding to one another. (p. 23)

Blumer (2004) argued that there were two different types of action in human group life: individual action, and joint action. He defined individual actions as actions performed by one person, while joint actions involved the activity of more than one individual. An individual action could exist in and of itself, or several individual actions might happen simultaneously to constitute a larger social activity. According to Becker (in Blumer, 2004) this idea of joint actions is central to the symbolic interactionist perspective, as well as the sociological approach to the study of any given phenomenon. He explained:

> Blumer's most striking concept is the idea of the collective act: Any human event can be understood as the result of the people involved (keeping in mind that there might be a very large number) continually adjusting what they do in the light of what others do, so that each individual's line of action 'fits' into what the others do. That can only

happen if human beings typically act in non-automatic fashion, and instead construct a line of action by continually taking account of what others do in response to their earlier actions... To complete the system, human beings can only act in the way the theory requires if they can incorporate the responses of others into their own acts and thus anticipate what will probably happen. If everyone can and does do that, complex joint acts can occur. (Becker, in Blumer, 2004, p. xv)

I would like to clarify that I use the word action in its ongoing state to mean "process or performance", as opposed to the "completed phase, unit, result, or end-state of a course of acting" (Harrington, 2006, p. 1). It might be better to use the word 'activity', which the *Oxford Dictionary* defines as "the condition in which things are happening or being done" (Activity, 2010). Indeed, Becker (2008) has stressed the importance of looking at social activities in process, as opposed to simply examining the results or products of said activities. He argued: "sociological analysis consists of finding, step by step, who did what, how they accomplished the coordination their activity required, and what came of their collective activity" (p. xii).

Finally, it is important to remember that, as Kaeppler (2001) has argued, dance is not as a universal symbolic form, but as a form of social interaction that occurs in a culturally situated time and place, since "structured body movements differ radically according to the occasion or event when they would be embodied" (p. 50). Understanding the situations, spaces, and ideas that define b-boying as a culture cannot automatically explain the actions or behaviour of the individuals who belong to that culture; however, we cannot fully understand their actions without considering these factors.

3.2.2.1 Improvisation

As discussed in Chapter 1, b-boying is a 'freestyle' or improvised dance form. The Oxford Dictionary states that the verb 'improvise' means to "create and perform (music, drama, or verse) spontaneously or without preparation" (Improvise, 2010). In

regards to dance, De Spain (1997) defines improvisation as "non-choreographed, spontaneous dancing as developed and practiced within the modern and post-modern dance traditions of the United States and Europe" (p. 5). Blom and Chaplin (1982) have highlighted the importance of spontaneity in modern dance practices, arguing: "improvisation is a way of tapping the stream of subconscious without intellectual censorship, allowing spontaneous and simultaneous exploring, creating, and performing" (p. 6). Similarly, Sheets Johnstone (1981) has proposed: "dance improvisation is unique in the sense that no score is being fulfilled, no performance is being reproduced" (p. 399), adding that the goal of improvisation in post-modern practices is to "dance the dance as it comes into being at this particular moment at this particular place" (ibid).

Montuori (2003), however, argues that improvisation is rarely completely spontaneous; rather, he proposes that it is "a constant dialogic between order and disorder, tradition and innovation, security and risk, the individual and the group and the composition" (p. 246). Using jazz music as an example, he argues that the goal of improvisation is not to create something completely new and spontaneous, but rather to generate "the unpredictable, the unusual, the unforeseen, within the pre-existing structures of the song form, navigating the edge between innovation and tradition" (p. 239).

In the 1960s and 1970s, many White post-modern dance artists (such as Steve Paxton, Trisha Brown, Yvonne Rainer, and Richard Bull) borrowed these notions of integrating structure and spontaneity explored the notion of 'structured' improvisation; unlike earlier forms of free improvisation, structured improvisations had elaborate rules or 'scores' to guide the participant's movement explorations, making them more appropriate for performance settings (Foster, 2002). According to Foster (2002), however, structured improvisation in post-modern dance of the 60s and 70s differs from jazz improvisation in that post-modern dance artists aimed to

create or compose new and innovated scores for their improvised works, whereas jazz musicians relied on pre-existing musical frameworks—or jazz 'standards'—to guide their performances. As Faulkner and Becker (2009) explain:

> [J]azz players routinely play versions of songs they already know or whose form they can guess at, substituting melodies composed on the spot for the original, but always keeping in mind that those melodies ought to sound good against the (more or less) original harmonies of the song, which the other players will be (more or less) expecting to be the foundation of what they play together. Jazz improvisation, then, (more or less) combines spontaneity and conformity to some sort of already given format. (p. 41).

Additionally, while Foster (2002) notes that individual 'free' improvisation in modern and post-modern dance is often an individual practice, used as "a tool for movement invention, self-discovery, or self-conscious spontaneity in performance" (p. 24), Becker (2000) argues "collective improvisation [in jazz]… requires that everyone pay close attention to the other players and be prepared to alter what they are doing in response to tiny cues that suggest a new direction that might be interesting to take" (p. 172).

Indeed, Foster (2002) argues that most research on improvisation in the field of dance studies focuses primarily on European and American concert stage dance approaches to the practice, ignoring the methods and aesthetics of improvisation in Black vernacular dance tradition. Similarly, Jackson (2001) explains: "in black vernacular dancing, improvisation means the creative structuring, or the choreographing, of human movement in the moment of ritual performance" (p. 44). Jackson proposes that improvisation in Black vernacular dances is intrinsically connected to musical performance, and consists of spontaneously choreographing movement performances within the existing movement vocabulary of a dance form through three processes, which he describes as: "*repeating* (to intensify the experience); *braiding* (to produce complex, interwoven dynamic contrasts); and

layering (phrasing to create a sense of flow, juxtaposition, overlap, or continuity between actions" (p. 46, italics in original text). Additionally, he notes that improvisation in a number of Black vernacular dances features ritualized social interactions, namely:

> *Battling*, or social competition among performers; *call-response*, signified variously in couple dancing and circle dancing (within which the traditional divisions between participant and observer are broken down as the soloist dances in mounting response to the interaction of a fully engaged chorus; *precision- work*, including line dancing, stepping and showmanship in tap; and *jamming*, or ecstatic, continuously changing, unpredictable group interaction. (p. 46, italics in original text)

Similarly, Valis Hill (2003) has argued that improvisation in vernacular dances often includes an element of challenge or 'call and response', with dancers improvising in response to movement proposed by an opponent, musical rhythms, or audience responses.

3.2.2.2 Competition

According to Schloss (2009), "battling [competition] is foundational to all forms of hip-hop, and the articulation of strategy—'battle tactics'—is the backbone of its philosophy of aesthetics" (p. 10). As Ness (2009) puts it, "without battling, b-boying itself would not exist. Every aspect of the dance was created for competition, and every move is judged according to its effectiveness as a weapon" (Back cover, 1st paragraph). Indeed, the social importance of competition—or battling—in b-boying and other Afro-diasporic dance forms has been discussed at length by a number of hip-hop and dance scholars (for example, Banes, 1994a, 1994b, 2004; DeFrantz, 2004; Fogarty, 2010; Guzman-Sanchez, 2012; Ness, 2009; Schloss, 2009; and Stevens, 2008). For these authors, the battle is still and will always be the heart of hip-hop culture: the struggle for stylistic supremacy—or the quest to be the best—is the goal that many b-boys and b-girls still strive to achieve. As such, Fogarty (2010)

has argued that any theorization on breaking must examine "how a competitive aesthetic is constructed and enforced by participants" (ibid). Additionally, DeFrantz (2004) has argued that competition in street dance practices does not only impact the competitors themselves or established community experts, but can affect on the community at large, since "in competitive strains of black social dance, there is no balloting or predetermination of the winner; victory is conferred intuitively by all the participants" (p. 73)

Of course, competition exists in some way or another in other forms of dance: for example, Wulff (1998) discusses competition in professional ballet companies, noting that 'healthy competition' can often motivate dancers to improve their technical or performance skill (p. 80). However, Wulff was primarily investigating social competition between dance professionals within a company seeking to secure job positions, not the kind of participation in formal, organized competitions that one sees in sport, or the kind of improvised call-and-response battling that Jackson (2001) notes in Black vernacular dances. This is perhaps because, as Fogarty (2010) points out, "Competition is rarely associated with 'ideal' descriptions of art" (p. 18). Indeed, Lapointe-Crump (2007) argues that there is a surprising lack of literature that directly addresses formal competition in Western concertized dance practices, stating: "Whereas ample historical evidence shows the compatibility and growth of the arts from prestigious contests dating hundreds of years, a shroud blankets contesting and dance" (p. 4). She elaborates:

> For as long as I can remember, dance as an art form and the word 'competition' are not spoken in the same breath. To do so cheapens dance, reducing it to a kind of crude commercialized combat. Artistic intention and expression are destroyed when dancers prepare tricks and a kitsch routine to win prizes. Art on the other hand is a free, open experience bound up in the uplifted thought and vivid emotion. Devoid of meaningfulness, competitions are incompatible with art. (Lapointe-Crump, 2007, p. 4)

Indeed, even in literature on social dance practices, one can often notice efforts being made to distance or distinguish dance from competition: for example, their ethnographic examination of the meaning that older dancers (60 years or more) in the United Kingdom ascribe to their ballroom dance practices, Cooper and Thomas (2002) stress that one must make a distinction between 'social' and 'competitive' ballroom dance practices (p. 691-692). Similarly, in a study on Irish step dance, Foley (2001) makes an interesting distinction between competition dance culture, or a "mainstream accepted canon" (p. 34) and what she refers to as "marginalized dance practices" (ibid), which she identifies as vernacular manifestations of the form, primarily in rural settings. Foley argues that formal mainstream competitions add to the globalization and commodification of the dance form, which can lead to a standardization or homogenization of diverse techniques and aesthetics; however, she also points out that such competitions also bring more visibility to marginalized dance practices, leading to a renewed interest in the practice. Additionally, she proposes that formalized competition leads to both a valorization of traditional techniques (which can mean gainful employment for previously unknown pioneers of the form) and creative interpretations of the form, since "dances that were successful in competition established a constantly changing kinetic vocabulary that negotiated between already established movements and novel innovative ones" (p. 36),

Finally, it must be noted competition exists not only in formalized settings, but also in many daily social interactions. As Wenger (2008) has noted: "most situations that involve sustained interpersonal engagement generate their fair share of tensions and conflicts" (p. 77), adding that "disagreement, challenges, and competition can all be forms of participation [in a community]" (ibid). It is important to understand that while some might view competition or conflict as a negative form of social interaction, Wenger proposed that competition was not only an essential element of social interaction, but also in community building, since "negotiability—and thus contestability—is at the very core of the social nature of our meanings… we

construct even our shared values in that context [of negotiation] (p. 213). Berger and Luckmann (1967) have suggested that social competition is one way in which an individual's competence in a given field can be tested, and argue that this kind of social competition may have many different outcomes: for example, highly competent experts may emerge, who possess the skills to maintain pre-existing modes of operation, or practitioners may be required to develop new competences in order to respond to evolving demands of the discipline in question.

3.2.3. Symbolic Aspects: Dance as Meaning

Of course, the meaning of social interactions cannot be unearthed through empirical observation alone, since "no amount of behavioural evidence can determine that a person's words mean one thing rather than another—it is always possible to construct alternative and incompatible 'translations' of the evidence" (Blackburn, 1996, p. 541). Indeed, Harbonnier-Topin and Barbier (2012) have noted that in order to understand the meaning the individual ascribes to a given dance interaction, it is necessary to ask the individual directly about his or her experience (p. 6).

As a non-verbal, embodied means of expression and interaction, dance is a phenomenon full of symbolic meaning. Youngerman (1975) explained:

> Dance can symbolize many types of ideas and activities. Emotions, cultural values, personalities, social activities, animal movements, religious beliefs, and so forth, can be symbolized in dance, both in its scenario, if it is a narrative dance, or strictly through movement. On a deeper level, dance may involve a symbolic transformation of human thought processes in a manner similar to that postulated for myth. (p. 12.)

From this statement, we see that dance can hold a number of different meanings for any given individual. But it must be understood that, from the symbolic interactionist point of view, meaning is not inscribed in the structure or culture of dance itself, but instead emerges from the interactions of the individuals who practice it (Blumer,

2004). Thus, the meaning of dance—like the social and cultural interactions from which that meaning comes to exist—is situated in a specific time and place, and cannot be seen as being universal.

For example, Kaeppler (2001) has discussed how while in many societies dance is seen as a form of non-verbal communication, this does not mean that the meaning of the dance does not change or evolve over time:

> Dance, or structured movement systems, may be universal, but dance is not a universal language. Structured movement systems can only communicate to those who have 'communicative competence' in this cultural form for a specific society or group. Dance can be considered a 'cultural artifact'—a cognitive structure that exists in dialectical relationship with the social order and that both are understandable. (p. 50)

Of course, this is true not only of dance, but of any symbolic system including language. While meaning may seem to be more explicit or fundamental in systems of verbal communication, Blackburn (1996) has noted that all communication is based on the meanings that individuals attribute to symbols (verbal or non-verbal) in a specific space and time. As such, in b-boying, the meaning emerges not from the dance itself, but from the symbolic meaning that individuals ascribe to it.

3.3 B-boying as Identity

The interviews brought to my attention that for most of the participants, b-boying was not just a dance but also a social practice that gave them a sense of identity, or of who they were. Indeed, the importance of being 'one's self' in b-boying came up over and over again. For example, Dingo, a Black b-boy in his early thirties, explained that he thought he had always been a b-boy, but that at a certain point he had not yet realized it (Dingo, interview with the author, December 2011). Dr. Step, also a Black b-boy in his early thirties, agreed, stating: "What is a b-boy? It's who I

am" (Dr. Step, interview with the author, October 2011).[26] Cleopatra, a Vietnamese-French Canadian b-girl in her early thirties, said she had never wondered if she was a b-girl or not until her identity was put into question: "I've never really asked myself that, if I was truly a b-girl... just recently, because of you [laughs]" (Cleopatra, interview with the author, October 2011).

This notion of b-boying as providing a sense of identity has been discussed at length—if in different ways—by a number of pioneer b-boys and hip-hop scholars (for example, see Banes, 1994a; Fogarty, 2006, 2012; Johnson, 2009; Kopytko, 1986; Ness, 2009; Schloss, 2009; Smith Lefebvre, 2011; Stevens, 2008). For example, Banes (1994a) spoke of the performance of identity in some of the earliest articles she wrote on breaking, stating "Breaking is a way of using your body to inscribe your identity on streets and trains, in parks and high school gyms" (p. 122). Osumare (2002) has proposed that improvisational street dances such as breaking are particularly important sites to examine the construction and performance of self, since "[street] dance improvisation allows for the minute-by-minute negotiation of personal and collective identity—the playing of the many rhythms of the self" (p. 41). Additionally, Schloss (2009) has highlighted that the competitive nature of b-boying plays and important role in a b-boy or b-girl's sense of self, arguing: "b-boys and b-girls are battling for that most elusive prize, a sense of self. They have developed sophisticated and nuanced strategies for achieving this goal, and they apply these strategies both inside and outside of the cypher" (p. 124). Similarly, Ness (2009) has stated that in a breaking battle, "THE REAL BATTLE IS BETWEEN YOU AND YOURSELF" (8th page, 2nd paragraph).

In a 2011 interview, pioneer b-boy Ken Swift discussed his own experiences with this phenomenon of 'b-boying as identity'. When asked what the best way to

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[26] Translated from French by the author: C'est quoi le b-boy? C'est qui je suis. (Dr. Step, interview with the author, October 2011)

become a b-boy or b-girl was, Swift replied:

> You've got to be yourself. That's the best advice, because you want to
> be yourself in your rawest form. You want to be completely you... At
> the end of the day you have to be yourself, that's when you really
> experience the true benefit of this dance... I tried to look like [other]
> dudes when I was a kid, but over the years... I'd say I've learned how to
> be Kenny, and that's really a big deal (Ken Swift, in TankTekNYC,
> 2011)

Like the participants, it is clear that b-boying had given Ken Swift a means of
understanding and expressing who he felt he truly was. It was not always clear—
either in the literature or the interviews—if the sense of self was a social self dancers
felt they had constructed over time through dancing, or an 'authentic' self they had
unearthed through this dance practice. It was clear, however, that b-boying was
closely linked to a sense of being a unique individual, distinct from all others.

Of course, the self and the notions of personal and social identity are
complicated concepts that have been investigated at length in a number of academic
fields. There are at this point, as Codol (1980) puts it, a "kaleidoscope" of
converging and contrasting theories that exist in regards to the self (p. 153). A simple
definition of the word 'self' is that it is "a person's essential being that distinguishes
them from others, especially considered as the object of introspection or reflexive
action" (Self, 2010). But how exactly this distinguishing essence comes to exist, or
what importance it plays in the daily experiences of the individual actor, is not so
easy to define or understand. In keeping with my social constructionist epistemology
and symbolic interactionist theoretical perspective, I have drawn on sociological
theories of the self for this study, which see the self primarily as "something that
emerges as meaningful in the context of symbolically mediated action,
communication, and interaction" (Adkins, 2006, p. 540). On a practical level, this
means that I have not concerned myself with abstract psychological theories of the
mind; rather, I have focused on schemes developed from the observation of

manifestations of personal and social identity in the empirical world. Particularly, I have drawn from Mead's (1967) sociological theory of the self, derived from his observations of human beings in everyday life. In Mead's scheme, the self is seen as being two-fold: it is both an 'object' and a 'process'.

3.3.1 Self-as-Object

First, the self is the 'object' that a human being makes of himself or herself. Blumer (1998) defines objects as "human constructs and not self-existing entities with intrinsic natures. Their nature is dependent on the orientation and action of people toward them" (p. 68). He elaborates:

> We are accustomed perhaps to think of 'objects' as the hard and physical things in our world, such as a table, a hammer, a building, and the like. Mead uses the term in a broader sense to mean anything that can be referred to or designated—a chair, a house, a horse, a woman, a soldier, a friend, a university, a law, a war, a meeting, a debate, a ghost, a task, a problem, a vacuum, and abstract things such as liberty, charity, intelligence, and stupidity. In this legitimate sense of being anything that can be designated or referred to, objects may be material or immaterial, real or imaginary; may be placed in the outer world or, as in the case of a sensation or a pain, lodged inside the body; and may have the character of an enduring substance such as a mountain or be a passing event such as a kiss. (Blumer, 2004, p. 39)

According to Blumer (1998), when Mead claimed that the self was an 'object', he meant that individuals could interact with themselves as they would any other object, in that "the human being may perceive himself, have a conception of himself, communicate with himself, and act toward himself" (p. 62). Blumer explained:

> Obviously, human beings can, and do, think of themselves as being a given kind of object. The human being may see himself or herself as male or female, young or old, rich or poor, married or unmarried, as belonging to this or that ethnic group, as a banker or a homemaker, as a scholar or an athlete, as one who has suffered misfortune, is respected, or ill-treated, as one who has a mission, and so on. The point here is not that the individual is necessarily any one or several of these different kinds of persons, but that the individual sees himself or

herself as one or more of them. The individual thus makes an object of himself or herself and by doing so, acquires an ability to act toward himself or herself much as with regard to anything else that becomes an object for the individual. (Blumer, 2004, p. 58)

Additionally, Codol (1980) proposes that as with any object, the self is an object onto itself, and is distinct from all others (p. 154). The self is an object in that the individual perceives it as such, and is able to distinguish itself from other individuals and the world around him or her. This, he argued, is achieved through a process of differentiation, wherein the individual is able to recognize how his or her own biographical features—such as race, age, sex, gender, socio-economic status, and so on—and ideas differ from those of another object or person.

What should be clear here is that the self-as-object—or the 'Me' as Mead called it (1967, p. 173-178)—is a social self. To Mead, the self is not a thing human beings are born with, but rather that developed over time through the individual's interactions with him or her self, others, and the world of objects and institutions in which he or she lived. He argued the self "arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process" (p. 135).

In order for this internal sense of self to develop, Mead (1967) observed that individuals needed to see themselves in relation to the 'generalized other', and learn to see themselves as others did, or from an outside perspective. He argued that this process started at an early age as children engaged in role-play, and addressed themselves—through language or gesture—from the point of view of another person. He proposed that it was in taking on the role of the 'other'—for example, by pretending to be a parent, teacher, doctor, etcetera—that children learned to see and address themselves from this outside perspective. As such, the self-as-object or 'Me'

can be understood as a 'self-for-others', or "the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes" (Mead, 1967, p. 175). Mead elaborated:

> In so far as the individual arouses in himself the attitudes of the others, there arises an organized group of responses. And it is due to the individual's ability to take the attitudes of these others in so far as they can be organized that he gets self-consciousness. The taking of all of those organized sets of attitudes gives him his 'me'; that is the self he is aware of... that immediately exists for him in his consciousness. He has their attitudes, knows what they want and what the consequence of any act of his will be, and he has assumed responsibility for the situation. (Ibid)

A number of different theories exist pertaining to how exactly the process of recognizing oneself as an object takes place.[27] Lengthy discussion also exists on the social 'strategies' human beings employ in the negotiation of their personal and social identities (Camilleri, 1997). In this study, I was not interested in arguing that one of these theories was more 'valid' than others, since I preferred to discover what strategies b-boys and b-girls actually employed in the process of socialization. I call on these existing theories merely to highlight the fact that in a sociological scheme of identity, there can be no concept of self without recognition of—and recognition by—others (Dubar, 2000).

It is important to understand that I have not drawn on theories that claim that the self is simply imposed on the individual by external social structures. The symbolic interactionist views the self as possessing agency, or having the capacity "to choose between options and the affect outcomes, whether physical or social" (Jary, 2006, p. 8). Indeed, the individual is not forced to accept the other's view of him or her, and may instead choose to refuse the identity imposed by others (Dubar, 2000, p. 109). Neither do I accept that the self is a mere result of, or response to, the

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[27]For example, see Cooley's Looking Glass Self (1902), Lacan's Mirror Stage (1966), Becker's Labeling Theory (1997), Goffman's dramaturgical analysis of self (1959), Stryker's Identity Theory (1968), or Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory (1979).

individual's physiological attributes and social environment. Rather, I agree with Mead (1967), who argued that the self is the result of individuals' interpretations of their organism and world, and the meaning they attribute to their various social and physiological factors. The self is not a mechanical product of the individual's race, ethnicity, age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, or socio-economic status; nor is it simply an organized structure of the various social norms, values, motives, desires, or attitudes the individual has internalized. Instead, the self-as-object develops from the meaning that individuals attribute to their personal characteristics through the act of self-reflection, and their interpretations of themselves and the world around them in regards to the generalized social attitudes of the culture in which they live.[28]

3.3.2 Self-as-Process

While Mead (1967) did regard the self as an object, this does not mean he saw it as a finished product. As should be evident by now, his scheme dictates that the in-depth investigation of identity cannot simply focus on the individual self, but must consider also the other individuals, objects, institutions—or the social system—in which the self is constructed. But if we accept that the self-as-object is the product the internalization of meanings an individual has constructed through his or her interactions with others in his or her social system, yet recognize—as Blumer (2004) has discussed—that action is not a mere by-product of an external social structure but the very foundation of human society, it is clear that the self is not only an object, but also as a self-in-action, or a self-as-process.

Mead (1967) referred to this self-as-process as the subject of the individual, or the 'I' (p. 173-178). The 'I' is the individual's response to the 'Me', or to the

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[28]Of course, there has been criticism of theories that distinguish between the person and the self. For example, Hume has pointed out that: "the self was never given as something of which a person could be aware, since the being that was aware was that very self" (Harré, 2006, p. 426). While metaphysical discussions on awareness and consciousness are of a great interest to me, they are far beyond the scope of this study. As such, I have—for the time being—accepted the notion that the self is something of which the individual is capable of being aware.

generalized attitudes of the society in which he or she lives. Unlike the 'Me', of which the individual is always conscious, the 'I' exists only in the present moment. According to Blumer (2004):

> The 'I' refers to the human organism in action at any moment, but especially at the points at which the organism is launching itself into action; the 'Me' is that action viewed by the organism from the standpoint of a generalized other. The 'I' springs from the organic disposition or readiness of the organism to act. The 'I' in action is, accordingly, giving expression and release to organic impulse and tendency and is seeking to attain fulfillment or consummation. (p. 65)

As such, the 'I' only comes into existence the moment the individual moves from considering what to do into action. So while one might expect 'Me' to respond to situations or stimuli in a certain manner, 'I' can always respond in original and unexpected ways. As Mead (1967) explained:

> [I]t is the presence of those organized sets of attitudes that constitutes that 'Me' to which he [the individual] as an 'I' is responding. But what that response will be he does not know and nobody else knows. Perhaps he will make a brilliant play or an error. The response to that situation as it appears in his immediate experience is uncertain, and it is that which constitutes the 'I'. (p. 175)

Blumer (2004) elaborated on the spontaneous nature of the 'I':

> [T]he 'I' carries the germ of unpredictability; while the 'Me' outlines and structures the situation to which the 'I' responds, one cannot be sure what that response will be. One does not have direct control over one's 'I' since one can note one's 'I' only after it has appeared or begun to express itself. (p. 67)

Blumer (2004) stressed, however, that the while the 'I' may act spontaneously, it is always acting in reaction to the 'Me', or the individual's concept of self-as-object that he or she has constructed in regards to the views of others. He explained:

> To see oneself as doing something or about to do something puts one in the position of judging the action or prospective action, of inhibiting or facilitating it as the case may be, of devising a plan of how the action is to proceed, and of controlling the action by the plan. (p. 66).

Thus, we can see that any manifestation of the self-as-process—meaning any response of the 'I' in the present moment to the 'Me'—is both influenced by and will have immediate influence upon the individual's conception of self-as-object. As such, we understand that in noting this distinction between 'Me' and 'I', Mead (1967) was not arguing for a dualistic opposition of structure and agency; rather, he proposed that this back-and-forth, self-reflexive dialogue between 'I' and 'Me' was the basis of the individual's concept of self as well as the world in which he or she lived. So as opposed to structuralist views of identity, many sociologists today argue that the construction—and re-construction—of identity is a never-ending process of interactions that continues throughout the individual's lifetime. Throughout their lives, individuals are constantly engaging in new interactions, which create new meanings that in turn inform future actions (Adkins, 2006).

In the past, many sociologists have argued that the construction of the self took place mainly through face-to-face interactions with other human beings (Berger and Luckmann 1967). But Lury (2011) has proposed that due to technological advances in today's global society, the self is no longer simply defined "with reference to the internal properties of consciousness and self-knowledge but is externalized and achieved via experimentation with (non-human) objects" (Adkins, 2006, p. 540). A number of studies suggest that this is the case in b-boying, where the dance was initially and continues to spread around the world through media sources (Fogarty, 2006, 2012a; Kong, 2010; Stevens, 2006). As such, it is important to pay attention to both face-to-face and technologically mediated manifestations of the self-as-process in the b-boy community.

3.3.3 Self-as-Dancing-Body

One weakness in Mead's (1967) scheme—and much of the classical sociological discussion surrounding identity—is that the self is still seen as a psychological entity separate from the physiological body of the individual. For

example, although he acknowledged that the individual experiences physiological instincts and urges—such as hunger, fatigue, or sexual stimulation—Mead believed that the self was not the result of automatic responses to such stimuli. Rather, he argued that the self was the result of the individual's conscious decisions of how to respond to such urges (Blumer, 2004). This view is still obviously rooted in a dualistic division of the mind and body, and it is clear that while Mead recognized the body as an important tool in the construction of identity, he still placed his concept of self in the realm of intellectual, and not physical, consciousness.

This is a major flaw in Mead's (1967) theory: if we follow his logic that human action is not a mere by-product of social structure, but the very foundation of the self and human society, how can the physiological organism—or in simple terms, the body—not be a central element of the self? Of course, Mead was not the only thinker of his time who showed a preference for mind over body: as Cooper Albright has pointed out, the Western understanding of selfhood is still influenced by what Elizabeth Grosz referred to as the "profound somatophobia" of certain philosophers (Cooper Albright, 1997, p. 6). Cooper Albright explained:

> If Plato is one of the earliest proponents of this dualistic philosophy [of mind versus body], Descartes is one of its most famous theoreticians, for he not only distinguished mind from body and consciousness from the natural world, but he also considered the self as an exclusive function of the mind, pulling subjectivity completely away from any aspect of bodily existence. (ibid)

While this dualistic division of mind and body is still present in many theories of personal and social identity today, over the years many dance researchers have argued for a more holistic, embodied approach to the understanding of self, a self that I will refer to as the *self-as-dancing-body*. For example, Cooper Albright (1997) examined how dance has the unique ability to highlight both the integral role of the body in the construction and performance of self. She argued that dance is a site of intersection between the product and process of the self, or as Mead (1967) referred

to it, the 'Me' and the 'I':

> Unlike most other cultural productions, dance relies on the physical body to enact its own representation. But at the very moment the dancing body is creating a representation, it is also in the process of actually forming that body. Put more simply, dancing bodies simultaneously produce and are produced by their own dancing. This double moment of dancing in front of an audience is one in which the dancer negotiates between objectivity and subjectivity—between seeing and being seen, experiencing and being experienced, moving and being moved—thus creating an interesting shift of representational codes that pushes us to rethink the experience of the body within performance. In a historical moment when the 'body' is considered to be a direct purveyor of identity and is thus the object of so much intellectual and physical scrutiny, a moment when academics and scientists, as well as artists and politicians, are struggling to understand the cultural differences between bodies, dance can provide a critical example of the dialectical relationship between cultures and the bodies that inhabit them. (Cooper Albright, 1997, p. 3)

Here we must remember that, as Thomas (2003) has argued, dancers' bodies are "transformed physically and aesthetically through training and practice" (p. 111). Similarly, Cooper Albright has noted, "daily practice structures a physical identity of its own making" (1997, p. 5). Indeed, the rigorous bodily training involved in dance practice could come to transform the individual's body and sense of self. As such, there is a clear link that can be made between the self-as-dancing-body and Bourdieu's (2011) concept of the *habitus*. According to Bourdieu, the habitus is a system of habits, customs, and dispositions that the individual develops over the course of his or her lifetime. He explained that the habitus is a:

> [S]ystem of lasting transposable dispositions, which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to analogical transformations of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems. (p. 82-83)

Lury (2011) has specified that the habitus is not simply a series of beliefs or mental attitudes, but in fact manifests itself in the physical realm. She explains:

> Habitus is evident in the individual's taken-for-granted preferences about the appropriateness and validity of his or her taste in art, food, holidays and hobbies. It does not simply refer to knowledge, or even competence or sense of style, but is also embodied, literally. That is, it is inscribed in the individual's body, in body size, shape, posture, way of walking, sitting, gestures, facial expression, sense of ease with one's body, ways of eating, drinking, amount of social space and time that an individual feels entitled to occupy; even the pitch and tone of voice, accent and complexity of speech patterns are part of an individual's habitus. (p. 90)

While Bourdieu (2011, 1984) argued that the individual's habitus developed primarily in childhood through family interaction and schooling, Osumare (2002) has suggested that, through the practice of b-boying and social immersion in hip-hop culture, a b-boy or b-girl can alter his or her habitus, and develop an 'Intercultural Body' that shows the traces left by both the dancer's personal and indigenous identity, as well as the internationally accepted aesthetic values and practices of b-boying. Osumare defined the Intercultural Body as "synthesis of globally proliferating popular culture body styles with local movement predilections that have been present for centuries" (2002, p. 38), and argued that it is "a tangible result of the globalization of American pop culture in general and hip hop subculture in particular" (p. 32). Additionally, she proposed that this Intercultural Body created by b-boying manifests itself most readily in the moment of dancing, when the b-boy or b-girl enters the cypher to perform his or her improvised solo, since "dance improvisation allows for the minute-by-minute negotiation of personal and collective identity—the playing of the many rhythms of the self" (p. 41).

All this considered, I am suggesting here that the self-as-dancing-body is both the tool and the product of b-boying, and becomes a site of negotiation of the dancer's unique identity through the interaction of the self-as-object and the self-as-process.

As such, by examining the self-as-dancing-body, we can not only understand the meanings attributed to the bodies of b-boys and b-girls in Montreal, but also "the ways in which these [meanings] are inscribed on and through individual bodies, as well as the perceptions and experiences of those living in particular bodies" (Potts, 2006, p. 164).

3.4 B-boying as Authenticity

Discussions surrounding the notion of 'authenticity' are present in much of the existing literature on b-boying (for example, see Banes, 1994c, 1998; Fogarty, 2010; Guzman-Sanchez, 2012; Stevens, 2008; Schloss, 2009), and are also found in broader discussions of the influence or impact of the media on hip-hop culture (Hess, 2005; Judy, 2004; Kelley, 2004; McLoed, 1999). Similarly, authenticity is a subject that came up in almost all of the interviews, and I observed dancers engage in debates over what 'real' b-boying was—as well as who in the community was 'real' or 'fake'— on a number of occasions during my fieldwork. Whether these scholars and dancers agreed with Banes' (1985) assessment that the media had watered down what she had seen as an 'authentic' folk dance, or Fogarty's (2010) position that these kinds of discussions are often based on little more than personal taste or value judgments, the participants in this study so obviously associated b-boying to a sense of being real or authentic that I felt the concept needed to be examined further.

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines authenticity as being "the quality of being authentic" (Authenticity, 2010). The word authentic, however, has a more complex definition. It can at once be taken to mean: 1) "of undisputed origin and not a copy; genuine"; 2) "made or done in the traditional or original way, or in a way that faithfully resembles an original"; 3) "based on facts; accurate or reliable"; and 4) "(in existentialist philosophy) relating to or denoting an emotionally appropriate, significant, purposive, and responsible mode of human life" (Authentic, 2010). Thornton (1996) has argued that much of the confusion surrounding the notion of

authenticity in the humanities and social sciences stems from the fact that scholars tend to use the term ambiguously, and confuse the various definitions. She proposed that researchers must distinguish and examine at least two types of authenticity:

> The first sort of authenticity involves issues of *originality and aura...* the second kind of authenticity is about being *natural to the community or organic to subculture...* These two kinds of authenticity can be related to two basic definitions of culture: the first draws upon definitions of culture as art, the second relates to culture in the anthropological sense of a 'whole way of life'. (Thornton, 1996, p. 30, italics added by the author)

Taking Thornton's advice, I will discuss these two manifestations of authenticity—artistic and cultural authenticity—all while noting how they relate to one another.

3.4.1 Artistic Authenticity in B-boying

Taylor (1992) proposed that judgements of artistic authenticity in the performing arts surround two major questions: first, whether a work or composition is performed as the artist originally intended it to be; and second, whether or not the performance is a proper representation of a given genre or style, in relation to certain technical requirements or aesthetic values. In cases where an actual manuscript or score of the work exists, Taylor suggested that:

> An important feature of authenticity of performance is that the composer or playwright's specifications should be understood and followed as they were originally intended-interpreted, therefore, in terms of the practices and conventions for the writing and performing of music or drama which prevailed at the time. (p. 28)

But as Thomas (2003) argued, "we cannot possibly know with any degree of objective certainty the composer's true intentions in creating the work, or what the audience felt when it heard it for the first time" (p. 127). Similarly, Leduc (2007) has proposed that since artistic authenticity can be judged on a number of different social and historical factors, it is unlikely that a work of art can be authentic or in authentic in relation to all of these factors. As such, we understand that while authentic

recreation may be the goal of the performance of a past work, it is "an ideal that will seldom be achieved in practice" (Taylor, 1992, p. 27). Human error, differing opinions in regards to notation, changes in technology or social norms, and even too much knowledge of the artist or the work can alter contemporary recreations of historic works. For example, Taylor (1992) argued:

> [I]t is not possible for us today to experience works by Bach or Shakespeare as they were experienced by the composer's or writer's contemporaries, since our experience of the works is inevitably influenced by our knowledge of subsequent developments in music and drama and by our current beliefs, concepts and habits of perception. (p. 28)

According to Hess (2005), authenticity in hip-hop is "conveyed when an artist performs as a unique individual while maintaining a connection with the original culture of hip-hop" (p. 374). Similarly, Peterson (1997) has argued that in popular music, artistic authenticity is judged on: "being *believable* relative to a more or less explicit model, and at the same time being *original*, that is not being an imitation of the model. Thus, what is taken to be authentic does not remain static but is renewed over the years'' (p. 240, italics in original text). However, it is important to remember: "Dance exists at a perpetual vanishing point. At the moment of its creation it is gone" (Siegel, in Leduc, 2007, p.77). According to Thomas (2003), dance as an art form exists not in objects or scripts but only in the time and space of the present. As such, artistic authenticity is a particularly fluid notion in dance (Leduc, 2007). Thus, we understand that the question of what constitutes an artistically 'authentic' performance of b-boying is constantly being debated and renegotiated within the breaking community.

Finally, in considering the ephemeral nature of dance, Leduc (2007) has proposed that for a dance to be 'authentic', dancers cannot simply recreate the movements, but must—in the present moment and through the act of dancing—invest themselves personally, emotionally, and physically in the work. She proposed that

when dancers invest themselves as such, it is possible for them to experience a trance-like *state of authenticity* (*état d'authenticité*), which she defines as a: "state of total concentration, often associated to a moment of grace or ecstasy, which the interpreter may experience in action—while he is dancing—and which manifests itself by a release of unpredictable and uncontrolled unconscious materials" (p. 4-5). [29] According to Siikala, in the state of trance, the individual experiences "modifications to the grasp of reality and self-concept, with the intensity of change varying from slight alteration to complete loss of consciousness" (Siikala, in Cauthery, 2012, p. 323). However, Leigh Foster (2003) has argued that dance improvisation does not create a loss of consciousness; rather, she proposed that it allows individuals to gain access to another state of consciousness, which requires an elevated level of awareness that is:

> [...] both mindful and bodyful. Rather than suppress any functions of mind, improvisation's bodily mindfulness summons up a kind of hyperawareness of the relation between immediate action and overall shape, between that which is about to take place or is taking place and that which has and will take place. (p. 7)

From these examples, we can draw several points: first, that artistic authenticity is judged on a performer's ability to maintain a connection to and demonstrating a proficiency in the methods and traditions of the art form, all while adding his or her own personal style or interpretation to the performance. Second, that over time, these personal modifications—or even errors—in interpretation may be integrated into what is understood as the standard form, and change a community's perception of what makes an artistically authentic interpretation of an artistic work or form. And third, artists may experience a transcendent state of authenticity, or an altered state of awareness in performance or practice settings. If we remember

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[29] Translated from French by the author: "état de totale concentration, souvent associé au *moment de grâce ou d'extase*, dans lequel peut se trouver l'interprète lorsqu'il est en action, en train de faire la danse, et qui se manifeste par un relâchement de matériel inconscient, imprévisible et incontrôlé" (Leduc, 2007, p. 4-5).

Thornton's (1996) definition of artistic authenticity, it is easy to see that all three of these factors relate to the aura and originality of the art form.

3.4.2 Cultural Authenticity in B-boying

Cultural authenticity, or the idea that certain individuals are 'natural' members of a given culture, subculture, or lifestyle scene, is a highly discussed and debated topic in the fields of subcultural and popular culture studies. In some ways, cultural authenticity is related to the artistic authenticity. Becker (2008) has pointed out that:

> Wherever an art world exists, it defines the boundaries of acceptable art, recognizing those who produce the work it can assimilate as artists entitled to full membership, and denying membership and its benefits to those whose work it cannot assimilate. (p. 226)

According to Becker, the assessment of an individual as an 'authentic' member of a given art world could depend on his or her ability to show a knowledge of and technical proficiency in the techniques and methods of representation historically associated to the art form in question. Similarly, Fogarty (2010) has argued that in b-boying, cultural authenticity is judged in part on a dancer's ability to produce an artistically authentic performance of the dance form.

However, the notion of cultural authenticity is also based on questions surrounding the age, race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, and socio-economic position of the participants in a given community (Thornton, 1996). In the growing body of literature on street dance culture, many scholars still see b-boying primarily as an expression of social identity, and argue that it is a dance form and lifestyle culture that appeals mainly to young men, particularly those of African-American or Afro-diasporic descent, or from socio-economically depressed communities. Specifically, it is often understood that b-boying was created by young African-American and Puerto Rican men in response to the economically depressed socio-political climate of the Bronx in the 1970s, or that it is a new variation in a long

genealogy of Afro-diasporic 'vernacular' or social folk dances. Many scholars have looked for parallels between breaking and dance forms such as flamenco, salsa, capoeira, jazz dance, and tap (For example, see DeFrantz, 2004; Hazzard-Donald, 2004; Rajakumar, 2012; Stevens, 2008; and Thompson, 1996). Johnson (2009) has argued that while b-boying is today an increasingly transnational and inter-cultural phenomenon, it cannot be divorced from its race and class based roots.

However, as Grazian (2004) has argued, cultural authenticity:

[I]s not so much an objective quality that exists in time and space as it is a shared belief about the nature of the places and moments most valued in any given social context. Likewise, since authenticity is as subjective as any other social value, it follows that different kinds of audiences measure authenticity according to somewhat divergent sets of criteria, and therefore find it in somewhat remote types of cultural experiences. (p. 32-34)

Similarly, Bennett (2000) has pointed out the transnational nature of contemporary hip-hop culture, highlighting that: "the definition of hip hop culture and its attendant notions of authenticity are constantly being 're-made' as hip hop is appropriated by different groups of young people in cities and regions around the world" (p. 133). Moreover, according to Johnson (2009), while race and nationality based skill assessments are still common in the international b-boy community, cultural authenticity is also judged by the social activities in which dancers participate, and the beliefs that they hold or adopt. She has argued that many breakers believe "anyone can participate in the culture, as long as she drops a b-boying approach. In other words, the culture is universally accessible, but not universally understood. There are principles attached to the dance that matter in its performance" (Johnson, 2009, p. 151). Thus, we see that a dancer whose biographical features do not immediately grant him or her cultural authenticity in b-boying can gain the status of being 'real' through implication in the community. Indeed, as previously discussed, Osumare (2002) has argued that though the practice of b-boying and participation in

the social activities associated to b-boy culture, dancers can develop an Intercultural Body as they adopt and internalize elements of global hip-hop culture.

Of course, this need for diverse groups of people around the world to redefine themselves as culturally authentic or 'real' within the hip-hop community highlights a desire not to be seen as 'fake'. Thornton (1996) has argued that is because 'real' participants in a given subculture or scene are always defined in comparison to 'fake' members. In her study on rave culture in the UK, she examined the divide between 'underground'—generally considered to be 'real'—and 'mainstream'—understood as 'fake'—club culture, and discussed how individuals must attend certain events, adopt certain aesthetic and cultural values, and adjust attitude and behaviour in order to be seen as card-carrying members of the community. Drawing from Bourdieu's (1984) notion of 'cultural capital', Thornton argued that a person's 'subcultural capital'—meaning their value in the subculture, and subsequent right to claim the status of being 'real'—is always understood and defined in relation to what it is not.

It must be noted that Thornton's (1996) position is that this distinction between 'real' and 'fake' is in many ways artificial, and that the relationship between 'underground' and 'mainstream' subcultures is a complex one in our post-industrial consumer culture. Similarly, many hip-hop scholars disagree on the purpose and importance of these discussions surrounding cultural authenticity in the hip-hop community. For example, Hess (2005) and McLeod (1999) have proposed that race and class-based discussions surrounding authenticity are a strategy that African-American rap artists have used to resist the appropriation of their culture and art form by White American society. However, Kelley (2004) has proposed that the notion of over cultural or 'ghetto authenticity' is also a tool used by academics and the media to construct and sell representations of 'authentic' hip-hop to the general public. He explained: "anthropology, not unlike most urban social science, has played a key role in marketing 'blackness' and defining black culture to the 'outside' world" (p. 119).

While Kelley acknowledged the importance of recognizing the biographical features of a performer's identity, he argued that these features should not be seen as more important than the artistic performance itself:

> [W]hen social scientists explore 'expressive' cultural forms or what has been called 'popular culture' (such as language, music, and style), most reduce it to expressions of pathology, compensatory behavior, or creative 'coping mechanisms' to deal with racism and poverty. While some aspects of black expressive cultures certainly help inner city residents deal with and even resist ghetto conditions, most of the literature ignores what these cultural forms mean to the practitioners. Few scholars acknowledge that what might also be at stake here are aesthetics, style, and pleasure. (Kelley, 2004, p. 120)

Wherever these authors position themselves, what can be drawn from these examples is that cultural authenticity can be understood both in regards to the biographical features of the participants, as well as in relation to their artistic and technical proficiency in the dance form, and their knowledge of and implication in the social interactions associated to b-boying. By adopting this broad view of cultural authenticity in b-boying, I was able to better contextualize and understand the participants' sometimes contrasting views in regards to the concept.

3.5 Conclusion

While Glaser and Strauss (1967) intended grounded theorists to use their methods to generate new theories in the social sciences, I am aware that very few Master's students can hope to generate a completely original grand theory of a phenomenon in the context of a single study. In this chapter, I have presented the some of the key authors and concepts that guided me through this study. As opposed to imposing a pre-existing theoretical frame on the data, I used the grounded theory method to design a conceptual framework based on the findings of my fieldwork.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I present the results of this study in relation to the key concepts identified in Chapter 3. Given the broad nature of my research question, and the significant amount of data collected, the results of my fieldwork will be presented and discussed in several parts: first, I give a detailed account of the participants' perceptions and my observations in relation to the choreological differences between b-boying and breakdancing as dance forms. As noted in Chapter 2, I borrow Alien Ness' (2009) 5 Elements of Battle Style frame and elements of LMA to give more precision to my descriptions. Second, I examine the sociological aspects of b-boying, and provide a description of the key social activities I observed my participants engaging in. Third, I examine the symbolic meaning the participants attributed to the various activities in which they engaged. Throughout the chapter, I discuss how the dancers I interviewed in Montreal believed b-boying differed from breakdancing, and draw examples from both my empirical observations and media representations of breakdancing from the 1980s to illustrate these differences. I alternate between presenting raw data, analyzing it, and discussing possible interpretations in relation to the key concepts I presented in Chapter 3.

4.1 Choreological Aspects

As discussed in section 3.1.1 and 3.1.2, the choreological elements of b-boying are the structural and stylistic components that make up the dance form itself. Again, I must stress that while I will discuss the structure and style of the dance form separately for the sake of clarity, the two are inherently intertwined, and must not be seen as mutually exclusive.

4.1.1 Structure

4.1.1.1 Movements

> *B-boying is a dance; it came out of New York City. It's connected with hip-hop culture. It's one of the early hip-hop dances, and it incorporates different footsteps and thread patterns and body movements, like freezes, power moves, air moves. (Scramblelock, interview with the author, March 2012)*

The movement vocabulary of b-boying can be broken down into several categories, including: top rock, floor work, power moves, and tricks (Fogarty, 2012a; Stevens, 2008). These general categories of movements—particularly top rock, floor work, and power moves—are often referred to as the 'foundational' movements of the dance form, although as Schloss (2009) has noted, foundation also "includes history of the movements and the form in general, strategies for how to improvise, philosophy about the dance in general, (and) musical association" (p. 13).

As discussed in section 3.1.3, many pioneers of the dance form have suggested that the terms b-boying and breaking can both be used to describe the original, improvisational style of hip-hop culture (Fogarty, 2012a). Similarly, many of the b-boys and b-girls I interviewed told me that when it came to defining the dance form they practised, they might use the terms b-boying and breaking interchangeably. Most of them, however, felt that it was important for dancers to draw from the entire movement vocabulary of the dance, and not just focus on certain elements of the dance, if they wanted to call what they were doing b-boying.

In contrast, many of them felt that the word breakdancing might be used in current day practice to describe a dancer who focused only on the more acrobatic or spectacular elements of the dance, such as power moves, flips, or tricks. As Vicious, a Latino b-boy in his mid twenties, explained: "A lot of people say 'oh breakdancers are people who just do extravagant moves'... you know like power moves and all of

that" (Vicious, interview with the author, July 2012).[30] Prototype, a Black Francophone b-boy, agreed, stating: "Breakdance, in popular culture, means spinning on your head. And that's it. That's, that's what breakdancing is: spinning on your head and doing explosive movements" (Prototype, interview with the author, June 2012).[31] Similarly, Asyan, an Asian-French Canadian b-boy in his early thirties, told me:

> If I see a guy on stage, who just throws a head spin, and then just does a flare, and I can see that he doesn't do any top rock or any of the other bases of the art form... well that for me would be breakdancing. In the sense that, sure, this guy learned a bit, he said: 'wow, that's cool, people like that! It's impressive. I'll do just that [the move]'. And I can see that he's mastered some moves, but he's left the rest aside. To me, that's breakdancing.[32] (Asyan, interview with the author, March 2012)

Additionally, some of the participants felt that the term 'breakdancing' might be used to describe a style of dancing that mixed a number of different street dance forms, such as popping, locking, breaking, and hip-hop. Several of them noted that they had developed this impression from seeing media representations of breaking that also included movement vocabulary from other dances. I reviewed a number of popular artifacts of breakdancing from the 1980s in order to see if I could identify differences between b-boying and breakdancing on a structural level. Indeed, it was evident that b-boying as it is practised today in Montreal and breakdancing as it is portrayed in these artifacts have very different movement vocabularies.

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[30]Translated from French by the author: Ça dit beaucoup, genre, comme, ah les breakdancers, c'est ceux qui font juste des moves extravagants, tu sais des power moves et tout. (Vicious, interview with the author, July 2012)

[31] Translated from French by the author: Breakdance pour le monde populaire, ça veut dire *tourner sur la tête*. Pis c'est ça, là. C'est ça le breakdance : tourner sur la tête, faire des mouvements explosifs. (Prototype, interview with the author, June 2012)

[32]Translated from French by the author: Si je vois un gars qui est sur une scène qui se tap un headspin, pis qui va faire juste un flare, pis j'vois qu'y a même pas de top rock ou aucune base de son art... bien pour moi ça va être du breakdancing dans le sens que, oui, le gars a appris, qui a dit « wow, ça, c'est cool, le monde aime ça, c'est impressionnant. J'vais faire juste ça. » Pis j'vois que le gars a bien maitrisé ses affaires, mais il a laissé tout le reste de côté? Pour moi, c'est du breakdancing. (Asyan, interview with the author, March 2012)

Most of the how-to-breakdance manuals from the 1980s present breakdancing as an amalgamation of several different dance forms, including breaking, uprock, and electric boogie. For example, Elfman (1984) provides clear definitions of these three 'elements' of breakdancing: first, he defines breaking as "the gymnastic and acrobatic aspect of Breakdancing", and explains that it includes movements such as "Floor Rock, Handglides, Backspins, Headspins, Windmills, and Suicides" (p. 11). In contrast, he defines electric boogie as a standing dance consisting of moves such as "the Wave, the Tick, the Mannequin, the King Tut (or Egyptian style), the Pop, the Lock It, and the Floats or Glides" (p. 14).

Elfman (1984) and other authors of these how-to-breakdance books spend much more time describing the standing, robotic movements drawn from electric boogie than the vocabulary of breaking or uprock. At least half of the movement instruction that is presented in these how-to-breakdance books consists of small isolations of the head, torso, and limbs, accentuated by rhythmic body pops and occasional arm waves, with the dancer in a vertical, upright standing position. In contrast, I observed that b-boying in Montreal consists largely of floor work, freezes and power moves positions the dancer's body in a low level, close to the floor, for which dancers require an engagement between their core and extremities in order to properly execute the rapid level changes and weight transfers between the legs and the arms. Thus, one can see that the movement vocabulary of b-boying is much closer to Elfman's description of breaking specifically than his global definition of breakdancing.

Breakdancing's favouring of spectacular gymnastic movements and the blending of different dance forms is also obvious in the Hollywood movies such as *Breakin'* (Silberg, 1984), *Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo* (Firstenberg, 1984), *Delivery Boys* (Handler, 1985), *Body Rock*, (Epstein, 1984), and *Fast Forward* (Poitier, 1985). Not only do the dancers often repeatedly perform power moves such as windmills—

for example, there are twelve shots of windmills in just the opening credits of *Delivery Boys*—but they also continuously switch back and forth between movement vocabulary sourced from popping, locking, breaking, waacking, and street jazz.

For example, in a club scene in *Body Rock* (Epstein, 1984), the main character asks the audience: "Do you want to see some breaking?" When the spectators respond enthusiastically, the Body Rock Crew start their dance performance, but end up doing very little breaking movement. Most of the dancers in the movie are poppers and lockers, and use a combination of vocabulary drawn from these two funk style dance forms. There are almost no movements drawn from breaking here, except towards the end of the scene when two dancers in the group execute a few power moves such as head spins, swipes, and windmills.[33] Similarly, in *Fast Forward* (Poitier, 1985), there is even less movement vocabulary drawn from breaking: most of the dancing in the movie is in fact street jazz combined with a bit of popping and locking; the only breaking movements used are the occasional top rock steps and some head spins in the final sequence.[34] The movement vocabulary shown in these media representations of breakdancing barely resembles the movement vocabulary used today by b-boys and b-girls in Montreal; as such, we can begin to understand why b-boys and b-girls in Montreal feel that the term does not properly represent their dance form.

4.1.1.2 Number of dancers

Most often, b-boying in Montreal is practised as a solo dance form, meaning dancers take turns and perform their freestyles or sets one at a time. This does not mean, however, that when one person is dancing, all others present automatically become spectators; indeed, there can be more than one solo happening independently at a given time in a given space. The number of dancers participating in a given

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[33]This scene can be viewed at Trash Divine (2009).
[34]The final scene of *Fast Forward* can be viewed at Vouluweb (2007).

dance event—that is practice, cypher, jam, or battle—can vary from a single dancer practising alone in his living room to hundreds of dancers forming dozens of dance circles at a larger breaking competition. Thus, the number of solos occurring simultaneously could range from one to several dozen to one hundred, depending on the size of the dance event and the number of dancers present.

For instance, at practices at *Disstorsion*, the long narrow configuration of the studio only allowed for three or four dancers to be practising simultaneously, with the other b-boys and b-girls waiting their turn along the sides of the room. But the studios were larger at the practices I organized at the UQAM dance department, which allowed for several dancers to perform solos simultaneously; the b-boys and b-girls present would often form cyphers and take turns sharing a specific space, but could also choose to wander off to another area in the room to perform their solos on their own. It is important to note, however, that while more than one dancer might have been performing his or her solo at a time, they are still solos, and are not generally meant to interact with or compliment each other.

I did, however, observe b-boys and b-girls using short unison or partnering routines and 'commandos' in performances and battles, thus leaving the usual solo format of the dance aside momentarily. In unison routines, two or more dancers would be performing the same sequence of movements simultaneously; partnering routines involved two b-boys or b-girls supporting each other as they engaged in a series of threading movements and dynamic freeze positions. A single routine might incorporate both unison and partnering, and generally only lasted between 30 and 45 seconds, with dancers positioned either side by side, or one in front of the other.

Commandos are short interactions used to switch dancers during a battle. According to Ness (2009), commandos come from a style of cyphering pioneered by a crew called the *Crazy Commandos*, who:

USED TO OVERLAP THE PREVIOUS MEMBERS' RUN - IF A CREW MEMBER WAS ENDING IN A MOVE SUCH AS A 3 STEP, A SECOND MEMBER WOULD COME IN WITH A 3 STEP AND HOLD THE TEMPO WITH THE FIRST DANCER FOR A SECOND OR TWO BEFORE THE FIRST DANCER EXITED, LEAVING THE SECOND DANCER BEHIND TO FINISH THE RUN. (Ness, 2009, 46th page, 2nd paragraph)

The commandos I observed during my fieldwork usually involved two dancers performing a single move such as a front roll or repeating a simple footwork pattern together. Many crews also used short 10 to 20 second routines to join the two dancers' runs. Some crews might use a commando at the end of a routine, thus prolonging their round in a battle. For example, at *Can I Get a Soul Clap* in April 2012, Tricky and Koopa, two Asian b-boys from the crew *Closet Monsters* performed a short partnering routine that ended with a commando in which another member of their crew slid into the space in order to continue the round as they slid out.[35]

Here we can note another difference that can be observed between b-boying and breakdancing in media representations of breakdancing from the 1980s: unlike the solo format of b-boying, breakdancing is often presented in a duo or group format. Even when dancers are performing individual solos, they are often doing so in large groups, with all the dancers dancing at the same time. For example, in the final battle scene in *Breakin'* (Silberg, 1984), the three main characters and their opponents are all dancing at the same time as they face off against each other, instead of taking turns to dance one after the other.[36] At times they are performing group unison choreographies, and at other times they are dancing their own solos at the same time. Later, the protagonists perform a group choreography that they have prepared together for an audition that also consists primarily of unison group choreographies and simultaneous solos.[37]

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[35]This battle can be viewed at Bboybourrik 972 (2012).
[36]This scene from can be viewed at Babygurl 05 (2009).
[37]This scene can be viewed at Floridaphill (2012).

4.1.1.3 Relationship to Spectator

B-boying can be called a social or participatory dance form as opposed to a presentational one. As Stevens (2008) puts it: "The activity of dancing is processual, part of an entire life-style, rather than product-oriented" (p. 110). Unlike in ballet or contemporary dance, where performances are often created in advance and viewed by non-dancing spectators, in b-boying performances are created spontaneously on the spot, not only by the performers, but also <u>for</u> the performers (Smith Lefebvre, 2011). What I mean by this is that, in most contexts, the majority of the spectators of the dance are the dancers themselves: when one b-boy is breaking in a practice, jam, or battle, many of those who are watching him are often not idle spectators, but other dancers eagerly awaiting for their own turn to dance. Fogarty (2010) has noted that even at organized battles that are open to the public, the audience is often made up of older or retired dancers who no longer compete themselves, but still support the scene; this means that even spectators who are no longer active b-boys or b-girls still share an embodied experience with the dancers they are watching. As such, in b-boying the divide between performer and spectator is not a clear or fixed one; rather, the relationship between who is being watched and who is watching is constantly evolving as dancers first take centre stage, then step back and watch their peers, students, mentors, or opponents perform.

In contrast, this sense of exchange or call and response between dancers that is present in b-boying in Montreal is often lost in popular representations of breakdancing: if we remember Asyan's statement in section 4.1.1.1, his example of breakdancing was based on watching someone dance on a stage, or in other words, being a spectator of a representational dance form. Many of the dancers I interviewed made similar comments, explaining how they associated the term breakdancing with a presentational dance seen on stage, in films, or on television performances of the dance. This is perhaps because, as Stevens (2008) has noted, stage performances

featuring breaking are not usually presented only to b-boys and b-girls, but instead to non-dancing spectators who want to be impressed or entertained by the athletic, spectacular movements of the dance form. She explained: "Aggressive movement will give the spectator a feeling of danger, despite being safe in their seats" (Stevens, 2008, p. 181). In these representational contexts, she argues, spectators are not welcomed to join in and take a turn on stage; rather they are expected to enjoy the performance from the safety of their seats.

Indeed, in most of the media representations of breakdancing, the dancers are performing, battling, or even practising in front of a viewing, non-dancing audience. For example, in *Flashdance* (Bruckheimer, Simpson, and Lyne, 1983) we see a large crowd gather to watch and cheer for a small number of b-boys and boogie-boys cyphering on a street corner.[38] Similarly, in *Breakin'* (Silberg, 1984), a large crowd gathers to watch a heated battle between two crews—*TKO* and *Electro Rock*.[39] In both these movies, the dancers were determined in advance, and the performance space is not open to audience members who might want to jump in on the action. As such, unlike b-boying—where there is a constant exchange between who is watching and who is performing as b-boys and b-girls take their individual turns to perform in the cypher or in a battle—in breakdancing we could argue that there is a clear division between the spectators and the performers that offers less possibility for this kind of exchange.

4.1.1.4 Use of Space

Generally, I observed b-boying in Montreal being performed on the spot, or at least in a small and contained space. As Schloss (2009) has argued, that breakers strive to be "totally intense yet totally in control" (p. 84). Similarly, while many of the movements of b-boying are large and explosive, I noticed that it was usually

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[38] This scene can be viewed at Sadisticpork (2011).
[39] This scene from can be viewed at Babygurl05 (2009).

frowned upon if a dancer lacked the bodily control needed to keep these movements on the spot, and thus ended up travelling too much in space. Typically, the performing b-boy or b-girl danced in the middle of a circle (or cypher), which his or her fellow dancers formed around him or her. At the beginning of their runs, dancers could either enter directly into the centre of the space to begin dancing immediately, or they might walk around in a circle once or twice as if to map out the dance area before starting.

Given the nature of this circular dance space, as well as the circular patterns created by both footwork and spinning movements, the b-boy or b-girl who was dancing did not face a specified 'front', and changed facings throughout his or her set. This could either happen spontaneously as a result of the circular patterns created by the moves, or because dancers chose to change facings on purpose in order to direct their attention towards a particular spectator or opponent. I remarked that dancers' focuses tended to gravitate inwards or towards the floor unless they were making a conscious effort to keep their gaze fixed on specific spectators or points in space. When the run was finished, the b-boy or b-girl would either turn to exit the circle, or might back out, keeping his or her focus towards the centre of the circle and the other dancers. After their turn, dancers either reclaimed their spots on the edge of the circle after dancing, or sometimes were forced to move to a new spot on the outside because the spectators' positions had shifted, and their original spot was no longer available.

Of course, I noted that b-boying was not always performed in the round; at times, the circular formations were forgone for a more linear, frontally focused, direct placement. For example, during battles dancers more often placed themselves on opposite sides of the dance floor and faced in towards each other. If it was a solo battle, the dancer would often stand directly opposite his or her opponent, or might pace from side to side in order to avoid making direct eye contact with said opponent.

In a crew battle, the two crews typically stood in lines facing each other, although some crews tried to come up with a more original group formation.

The circular configuration of b-boying was also abandoned during formal performances where the dancers' movements had to be oriented towards an audience. In these situations when b-boys and b-girls had to direct their movements towards their opponents or spectators, footwork patterns or spins were sometimes modified to ensure proper facing, and freezes that were normally simply timed with the music in freestyle cypher environments were positioned at different angles to ensure they were properly seen by judges, opponents, or spectators.

A final condition I noticed that altered the spatial configuration of breaking was the presence of mirrors in a practice space. In rooms in which there were large mirrors, dancers tended to forgo the circular and indirect configurations of the dance, instead directing their focus and attention towards their own reflection in the mirror. For example, there are mirrors running the full length of one wall at both *Shauna Roberts Dance Centre* and *Disstorsion Studio*; at practices in these studios, b-boys and b-girls tended to direct their top rock, footwork, and freezes towards the mirror rather than executing moves towards the side or back walls. The dancers waiting on the sides for their turn to dance also tended to line up along the back wall of the studio facing the mirror instead of standing around in a circle. Some even ended up watching their peers dance by gazing into the mirror and watching the dancer's reflection. Some b-boys and b-girls told me that they hated practising in spaces with mirrors since they did not like how it changed their configuration in space, while others enjoyed the instantaneous feedback it provided them on their dancing.

Although b-boying in Montreal is primarily performed in the round—with waiting-dancers-slash-spectators standing all around the b-boy or b-girl who is performing—breakdancing in movies and books from the 1980s is almost always

performed in a frontal manner, with dancers either facing each other in a battle, directing their focus towards an audience, or even looking directly towards the camera. This spatial relationship between performer and spectator in breakdancing re-enforces the division discussed in section 4.1.1.3: the circular configurations in which b-boying is usually performed adds to the participatory nature of the dance, whereas the frontal configurations seen in media representations of breakdancing frame the dance as presentational (Stevens, 2008).

Additionally, whereas the circular, 360° configuration of b-boying gives a sense of three-dimensionality to the dance, and highlights the dancers' arc-like sweeping limbs in their floor work and power moves, breakdancing appears two-dimensional, and is thus more suited to the frontal, standing movements of electric boogie. This change in spacing configuration greatly distinguishes breakdancing from b-boying not only because it encourages dancers to choose movements that are more appropriate to a frontal configuration, but also because it removes the social, exchange-based aspect of the dance, and frames breakdancing as a presentational dance that is performed for a passive viewing audience. However, I noted that the presence of video cameras affected the spatial configurations of b-boying as well, as dancers tended to direct their movements towards the camera in situations where they were being filmed or filming themselves dancing. As such, one could argue that the frontal versus three-dimensional configuration is not a difference between b-boying and breakdancing, but rather a necessary adaptation of dance for film.

As far as levels in space go, both b-boying and breakdancing use the high, mid, and low levels in space. B-boying favours the use of low space with its emphasis on floor work; top rock is performed standing at mid level; and flips and certain power moves require the dancer to push off the ground with his or her hands or feet, and thus make use of the high space. Breakdancing, with its emphasis on aerial and power moves, and use of standing movements drawn from electric boogie, is

performed primarily at the mid and high levels. Many of the dancers I interviewed noted that a key structural difference between b-boying and breakdancing was that breakdancing lacked the floor work that was favoured in b-boying.

4.1.1.5 Improvisational composition

Most of the b-boys and b-girls I observed over the course of my study did not create fixed choreographies that they set and rehearse in advance; rather, they used the movement vocabulary of the dance form to make up their phrases spontaneously as they danced. While I did observe dancers using fixed footwork patterns such as the 6-step, or making up mini-sets—short sequences of three or four adjoining movements that they rehearsed and integrated into their floor work—most of the participants told me they strived to spontaneously combine the basic movements and formations of the dance in new and exciting ways.

It is important to note that the freestyling that takes place in b-boying is closer to the improvisational format of jazz music (Faulkner & Becker, 2009) or other afro-diasporic dances (Jackson, 2001; Valis Hill, 2003) than it is to improvisation that takes place in contemporary dance. In contemporary dance, the dancer's goal of improvisation is often to spontaneously create movements or movement sequences that he or she has never done before; here, improvisation can be used as a way to warm up the body, a tool to get away from choreographic codes, or a way of opening one's self up to new movement possibilities (De Spain, 2003). In b-boying, however, dancers use improvisation to show their personal style while maintaining a close relationship to the basic format and vocabulary of the dance (Shimizu & Okada, 2012; Stevens, 2008). Indeed, most of the dancers I interviewed spoke of the importance of respecting the original format of the dance, and said that it was crucial for dancers to master the foundational movements of b-boying—or already existing top rock, floor work, freezes, power moves, and tricks—before trying to create new movements or personal variations of the form.

Additionally, as Jackson (2001) has described in other Black vernacular dance practices, improvisation in b-boying is often done in a dialoguing or 'call and response' manner (Johnson, 2009), particularly in organized or impromptu battles. An initial b-boy or b-girl sets the stage with a run, and the next dancer responds to what has been proposed, by complimenting or contrasting—and hopefully surpassing—the movement, rhythm, or energy presented by the initial dancer. Similar to in tap dancing (Valis Hill, 2003), b-boys and b-girls may also respond to the 'call' of the music, or the accents and rhythms they hear in the music that is playing, which they either chose themselves in the context of shows and practices, or which was selected by the deejay at a jam or battle.

The bodily precision a dancer needs in order to make these split second decisions—whom to respond to, with what movements, and on what beat—is not a skill that occurs naturally or spontaneously in b-boying, but rather is developed over years through the intensive training of specific movement patterns. I observed dancers breaking down and repeatedly practising the same complex footwork and top rock patterns, power and freeze combos, and different entries into movements, in order to have the physical strength and control required to use these movements in their improvisations. Additionally, several b-boys and b-girls told me that they also had to familiarize themselves with the musical patterns commonly present in hip-hop and break beat music in order to be able to predict changes and accents in the music.[40]

I noticed that more experienced dancers were usually more at ease freestyling, and more likely to combine movements spontaneously, where as the less experienced ones often made up specific choreographed 'sets' of movements which they would then practise over and over again. Of course, there were often times when all

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[40] This need to memorize musical patterns is also discussed by Fogarty (2010) and Schloss (2009).

dancers—no matter their experience level—let go of the freestyle format of b-boying and opted to choreograph their runs. While it was unusual for dancers in Montreal to create and rehearse an entire set, it was not uncommon for dancers to put some thought and preparation into what movements they would include in a given run, particularly in show or competition settings. For example, in battles where dancers could not know in advance what kind of beat they would dance to, several b-boys and b-girls told me they did not choreograph their full sets, but might choose two or three key movements that they would try to integrate into each freestyle. Several dancers told me they used this kind of structured improvisation as it allowed them to improvise to the music, all while keeping track of what movements they had already used in order to avoid repeating themselves in their runs. Most of the b-boys and b-girls I spoke to said they did not like to choreograph their entire runs for battles because they felt it would prevent them from reacting properly to movement cues from their opponents or accents in the music.

For formal shows where the music was determined in advance, several dancers told me they might choreograph their runs from their first steps of top rock through to their final freeze. Some dancers said they liked to choreograph their sets for shows since they wanted to make sure that all of their moves were done at the right angles to ensure that the audience could see them properly. Others said they did so because they felt that by knowing what they were doing in advance they ran less risk injuring themselves by going into an unexpected movement. One b-boy in his late twenties even told me that he choreographed his runs for shows since he believed that the audience would not understand the complexity of freestyling, and that he felt he did not want to 'waste' any of his good moves for these kinds of performances. But whatever their motivations, several dancers told me that the goal was to be so well practised in the choreographed set that it came off as if it were improvised, meaning they wanted to maintain the spontaneous energy and excitement of freestyling in their sets, and did not want their dancing to look too clean or rehearsed.

Here, we can observe a similarity between b-boying in the context of formal stage shows and the participants' impressions of breakdancing in that many of the participants thought that someone who was breakdancing would more likely be doing choreographed sets than freestyling. Several participants told me the word breakdancing made them think of dancers who were very rehearsed or lacked the spontaneity that made b-boying exciting to watch. Similarly, in many of the representations of breakdancing from the 1980s, dancers are often performing choreographed routines instead of freestyling, even in their individual solos. For example, in *Breakin'* (Silberg, 1984), we see the main character Kelly repeatedly practising the exact sequences of movements that she later uses in the movie's second battle scene; indeed, she uses the same movement sequence—back handspring to kick-splits—twice during the same battle. Similarly, in *Body Rock* (Epstein, 1984), one of the characters, Magic, repeats the same movement sequences in several different scenes. While in my fieldwork I did observe dancers at times practising certain movements or sets of movements over and over again, I did not see dancers doing the exact same set more than once at a public event such as a battle or jam.

Finally, while most of the participants said their aim was to improvise as often as possible in their dancing, many of them admitted that at times they found it hard to let themselves go, and ended up reverting to pre-existing patterns that they knew they could execute with precision. Many said that they found it easiest to truly freestyle in more relaxed situations such as practices and jams, or when they were actually a bit tired or even angry. Most of them felt it was harder to let themselves go in the competitive environment of organized battles, and that the stress of wanting to win a battle made it difficult for them to improvise.[41]

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[41] See Shimizu and Okada (2012) for a detailed analysis of the percentage of new discoveries versus fixed patterns used by b-boys and b-girls in various improvisational settings.

4.1.1.5 Section Summary

In this section I presented some of the structural elements of b-boying, including its movements, solo format, social/participatory form, non-frontal and multi-levelled use of space, and improvisational structure. I also discussed ways the participants felt that b-boying differed from breakdancing, and drew on media representations from the 1980s to highlight these differences. For the sake of clarity, I have listed some of these structural differences between b-boying and breakdancing in Table 1 (see next page).

Of course, not all the dancers I spoke to felt that b-boying and breakdancing were different dances on a structural level. For example, Bourrik, a Black b-boy originally from Martinique, explained:

> They use the same [dance] technique, except a b-boy will go deeper with it. [...] A breakdancer, he will perform well technically, like in the video [he's watching], version A. But the b-boy... can see that we can do version B, version C, version D. So after that he can do variations. So if they both do the move together... the b-boy will put more passion, and show a keen interest to understand 'ok, I'm doing a move, but what can I do with this move? How can I mix it up?'[42] (Bourrik, interview with the author, July 2012)

For Bourrik, it was not the structure of the dance that made b-boying and breakdancing different; rather, it was the style, or the manner in which the dance was performed that made the difference. As such, I will now turn my attention to the stylistic elements of b-boying.

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[42] Translated from French by the author: Ils utilisent la même technique, sauf que le b-boy va plus en profondeur. [...] Le breakdancer lui il a bien performé, techniquement, comme dans la vidéo façon A, mais le b-boy... il peut voir qu'on peut le faire de façon B, de façon C, de façon D. Donc après, il peut le varier... Donc ils vont les deux [faire les] moves ensemble... le b-boy va mettre plus de passion et puis plus d'engouement à comprendre, OK là je fais le move mais qu'est-ce que je peux faire avec ça ? Comment je peux le mélanger ? (Bourrik, interview with the author, July 2012).

Table 1: Structural Differences Between B-boying and Breakdancing

	B-boying	Breakdancing
Movements	• Movement vocabulary drawn from breaking	• Movement vocabulary drawn from uprock, electric boogie, and breaking, with emphasis on power moves and aerial moves
Number of participants	• Solo • Duo, trio, or group in battle or performance settings	• Solo or simultaneous solos • Duo, trio, or group in any context
Relationship to spectators	• Participatory dance form • Constant flow of change between performers and spectators in most contexts • More fixed relationship between performer and spectator in staged performance contexts	• Presentational dance form • Fixed relationship between performers and spectators in most contexts
Use of space	• Non-frontal, 360° facings and indirect use of space in practice/cypher contexts • Frontal, linear facings and direct use of space in performance or battle contexts • Changes of levels: use of high level (power and aerial moves), standing mid-level (top rock), and low level (floor work)	• Frontal, linear facings and direct use of space in most contexts • Favours mid-level (standing movements from electric boogie) and high level (aerial and power moves)
Compositional format	• Improvisation favoured in most settings • Choreographed movement sequences used in performance competitive settings	• Choreographed movement sequences used in most contexts

4.1.2 Style

If we consider Bourrik's comment in the previous section, he believed it was not so much the movements themselves that distinguished b-boying from breakdancing, but rather the manner in which those movements were performed. Many of the dancers I spoke to echoed this statement, and felt there was a tangible, energetic difference that could be observed between someone who was b-boying and someone who was breakdancing. While many of the participants felt that this distinction was difficult to describe, they all believed that it was something they could either see or feel in other dancers. Alien Ness explained, "I'm gonna sum it up in one word: swagger. It's the total difference between a b-boy and a breakdancer. Swagger" (Alien Ness, interview with the author, July 2011). He elaborated:

> This is going to sound really really petty, but you know what I look for? I look for two things: how a person walks and how they hold their hands... what they do with their hands when they dance... I can tell what's fake, I can tell what's practised, I can tell what's forced, I can tell what's not natural, and I can tell what's that person... it has nothing to do with moves. (Alien Ness, interview with the author, July 2011)

Although they did not all use the same word to describe this energy, it was mentioned by almost everyone I interviewed; some referred to it as rawness, soul, flavour, or funk. Overall, this essence seemed to be expressed in a dancer's attitude, and was identifiable in his or her posture, breath, and relation to gravity. Bounce, a mixed-race b-girl in her thirties, compared this energetic difference to the distinction between someone who does ballet and a ballerina, or someone who does yoga and a yogi (Bounce, interview with the author, April 2011). Thus, one difference that could be noted between breakdancing and b-boying is that the former is a movement system that a person executes, while the latter was a way of moving that an individual had practised so long that it becomes integrated into his or her 'natural' way of moving.

Thornton (1996) has pointed out that "music is perceived as authentic when it rings true, feels real, when it has credibility and comes across as genuine" (p. 26). Similarly, the notion of b-boying being 'natural' or having an aura of authenticity, and breakdancing being 'fake', or a copy or reproduction of the form came up in a number of interviews. Scramblelock, a White b-boy in his early thirties, used this metaphor to describe the difference between b-boying and breakdancing:

> If you go to LA, and you get tacos from a food truck, a Mexican food truck, you know? People from Mexico who've come to California. You get Mexican food from a food truck and it's the ILLEST food ever. It is raw, fresh; the ingredients taste so good. But then you go to Taco Bell. It's like comparing Taco Bell to real Mexican food from a Mexican food truck or something like that. To me that's the difference. I think that's the best way of explaining it. (Scramblelock, interview with the author, March 2012).

According to Scramblelock, b-boying was something real, fresh, or authentic, while breakdancing was a pre-packaged, mass-produced reproduction of the dance. In short, he felt that breakdancing lacked an essence or flavour that b-boying had.

Defining this style or essence that distinguishes b-boying from breakdancing is difficult in part because b-boys and b-girls are encouraged to develop their own personalized style in the form. Additionally, many dancers proposed that an individual could develop more than one style, and emphasize different movement qualities depending on the situation in which the dance was performed. For example, Dr. Step told me:

> I was always a kid who liked playing roles. So I could put all the different types of personalities that I had inside of me—jealous, sad, timid, hot, cold—into this! It was like. It was like a frame. It was like a paintbrush that could give me all sorts of new options.[43] (Dr. Step, interview with the author, October 2011)

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[43]Translated from French by the author: J'ai toujours été un jeune qui a aimé jouer des rôles. Alors, je pouvais mettre tous ces types de personnalités en moi—envieux, triste, frileux, chaud, froid—dans ça! C'était comme un cadre. C'était comme un pinceau qui pouvait me donner plein de nouvelles options. (Dr. Step, interview with the author, October 2011).

Since it would be impossible to give one all encompassing description of the style of b-boying as it is practised by every individual dancer in Montreal, what will follow in this section should be seen as a general overview of the preferred cultural style of b-boying—defined in part in relation to how it differs from breakdancing—that I observed being performed over the course of this study. In this section, I have used Ness' (2009) 5 Elements framework to organize and present the data. By using this lens to organize the analysis of my observations of both the breaking community in Montreal and the media representations of breakdancing from the 1980s, I was able to identify a number of clear elements that help us better understand this subtle essence, or stylistic difference between b-boying and breakdancing. Additionally, I make reference here to Brenda Dixon-Gottschild's (1996) qualities of Africanist aesthetics in order to highlight some of the unique stylistic qualities of b-boying.

4.1.2.1 Fire (Rawness)

While many authors have spoken at length about Thompson's (1973) concept of the "aesthetic of cool" as being an essential quality of the Africanist aesthetic in Afro-diasporic dances such as b-boying (for example see Dixon-Gottschild, 1996; DeFrantz, 2004; Stevens, 2008), I observed that b-boying in Montreal is much more hot than cool, and more in line with Alien Ness' concept of the element of Fire. Far from displaying what Dixon-Gottschild described as "an attitude... which combines composure with vitality... carelessness cultivated with a calculated aesthetic clarity" (Dixon-Gottschild, in Stevens, 2008, p. 26-27), most b-boys and b-girls in Montreal displayed an intense, aggressive drive in their dancing.

In part, this Fire is a feeling or a state of being more than a concrete movement quality. It is the intention behind the movement, what many of the dancers I spoke to referred to as a burning desire to represent one's self by dancing to the best of one's ability, and not caring what anyone else thinks of you. A dancer's

Fire is not the representation of this intention, but rather its embodiment. And instead of the cool state of carelessness that Thompson (1973) proposed, this fiery state could better be described as a state of 'aggressively not caring'. Indeed, several of the participants discussed how working on actively not caring about what other people thought of them had improved the way they danced.

In interviews, many of the participants referred to this aggressive state of not caring as 'rawness' or 'being raw'. In her own study on cyphering, Johnson (2009) has described rawness as: "eternally present tense, an unrepeatable combination of overt yet controlled performative aggression" (p. 6). When asked to describe what he meant by rawness, Scramblelock explained it like this:

> I don't give a fuck. Straight up. That's what it is. People who don't give a fuck. They know who they are and they don't care what anybody thinks. The whole idea of a b-boy with phat laces, a Kangol hat, graffiti on their jacket, they stuck out from the normal people. They were wearing who they were on their back. And they were proud to show it. They didn't give a fuck what people thought. That's what it is to me. Rawness in street dancing is someone who doesn't give a fuck. But not in a way that it's disrespectful. It's like: 'this is me. Take me as I am.' And that's it. Take it or leave it, you know? (Scramblelock. interview with the author, March 2012)

Rawness often came up in interviews when older dancers were talking about how aggressive the hip-hop scene had been 'back in the day' when they started dancing in the 80s or early 90s. As Alien Ness explained:

> You gotta remember, the original b-boys was outlaws, stickup kids, street kids. They did drugs; they got drunk... they did all sorts of weird shit that made them wanna think about TWISTING their bodies in these weird ways. Spinning on their fucking heads! You know? (Alien Ness, interview with the author, July 2011)

For Alien Ness, the rawness of breaking came from the dance's roots in gang culture; while he felt that the scene was not as aggressive as it had been in the 70s and 80s, he believed that that aggression had become embedded in the aesthetic of the dance.

Many of the participants echoed this statement, and felt that rawness was a quality that was particularly important to embody during battles. Rawness was not only aggressive, but was also linked to the notions of pride, confidence, individuality, and living in the moment. It meant being proud of who you were, having the confidence to share your individual style with others in a spontaneous manner, not caring what people thought, and being ready to take on anyone who got in you way.

When I asked him if he could describe rawness for me in terms of movement qualities, Scramblelock told me that it was coming right at you, aggressively floating in a direct yet smooth manner, and connected to a dancer's use of breath or chest. Due to the direct effort emphasized here, it might be more accurate to describe Fire as having gliding quality rather than a floating quality. Similarly, a number of participants felt that it was a quality that originated in the sternum or solar plexus. I also observed that a swing or relaxed quality in the limbs and spine that conveyed the sense that the dancer was not trying too hard to impress with his or her movements, but just simply doing them to the best of his or her abilities.

Additionally, rawness was more evident in movements that were sudden as opposed to sustained, particularly footwork patterns, drops, freezes, and flips performed at a fast pace, with either with an impulsive attack or an impactive finish. Moreover, the Fire quality was more intense at times when dancers were direct in both their use of space and their attention—that is, when they aimed their movements and focus towards a specific point or person. As such, Fire was often more evident in battle settings, where dancers used direct movements, which they projected in a linear fashion toward an opponent, as opposed to in a cypher where the movement might be more circular and the dancer's focus indirect.

In comparison, many of the b-boys and b-girls I interviewed associated breakdancing with something less raw, and more watered down or commercial.

Several participants referred to breakdancing as 'corny' or 'cheesy'. If we examine media representations of breakdancing from the 1980s, we can see where this impression came from: the Fire or rawness so important to b-boying is often less apparent or has been completely removed from the style of dancing. For example, in *Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo* (Firstenberg, 1984), we see a large group of smiling, fluorescent clad youth joyfully skipping down the street, dancing with police officers, city workers, and old ladies that they meet along the way.[44] Similarly in the how-to-breakdance books and videos, the dancers are always smiling, getting along and enjoying themselves. While most of these books acknowledge hip-hop's roots in gang culture, they often try to play this aspect of the culture down, assuring young readers (and their parents) that breakdancing is no longer 'dangerous', either socially or physically (See Figure 4.1 to see the cover of two such books).

On a movement level, this toned down Fire made for a less direct energy coming from the chest or sternum, a more upright, vertical posture, and bound Flow and muscular tension in the arms that made them appear stiff. While the movements were often still direct, the movements were more segmented, and floating or gliding quality was not as evident. Additionally, movement phrasing varied less between impactive and impulsive, and was more consistent; as such, it lacked some of the spontaneity or excitement created by rawness. Finally, it could be said that while rawness in b-boying was about embodying an attitude or intention, which produced an aggressive movement quality, breakdancing seemed more shape oriented, or focused on recreating the form of the movements as opposed to their energy.

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[44] This scene can be viewed at Patsworld007 (2012).

Figure 4.1 Front covers of two 'how-to-breakdance' books, depicting dancers who display very little Fire or rawness. (Elfman, 1984; Alford, 1984).

4.1.2.2. Earth and Air (Grounding and Rebound)

Overall, earth moves (or floor work) could be described as grounded, meaning that they are performed with more of a functional weight as opposed to a heavy one. B-boys and b-girls are constantly pushing away from the floor, using both their hands and feet to work against the pull of gravity. The body rarely crashes down to the ground on purpose; rather, most movements require dancers to react to the ground with a spring or recoil motion. Air moves (or aerial and power moves) also have a similar recoiling or pushing away from the ground as earth moves, as well as lighter or more floating quality at times. Power moves in particular display a centrifugal type of force: a gathering in and tightening of the body that results in an outwards, circular scattering or release of energy as the legs and arms whip back out, often extending to the end of their reach space.

Sudden movements are often used in both air and earth moves to give a sense of urgency to the dance, and there is a continuous play between the sharp spoke-like and sweeping arc-like movements of the legs and arms. Additionally, the global phrasing of movement is multiple, meaning many movement phrases could overlap or occur simultaneously. There is also often sequencing between body parts, and one can clearly see the movement travel from the point of initiation through the rest of the body. For example, in head spins, it is a swing of the legs that initiates the movement, but the hips, torso, shoulders, and head do not turn simultaneously or individually afterwards. Rather, they follow in sequence as the movement travels from the base of the spine through to the head.

With Air and Earth moves alike, the idea is that the dancer must engage his or her core, and achieve a 'total body connectivity' (Hackney, 2004, p. 14) in order to perform them in a powerful yet controlled fashion. Alien Ness discussed importance of core connection at length:

> It's your center of balance, that's what proper form is. A lot of people start breaking before they get their center of balance. Before they know where they're comfortable in. You know? The most important position in breaking is this right here [gets down on the floor, crouched in footwork position, heels off the ground balancing on balls of feet]. Right here. This? This is proper form in breaking [starts doing footwork]; everything comes out of here. This is proper form. This is where the whole form comes from. If you can explode from here, you have really good form. There's really no such thing as a 'power move'... power moves don't require power: [they] just need balance. (Alien Ness, interview with the author, July 2011)

Indeed, I noted that dancers needed an awareness or embodied sense of their use of breath, and an attention to the connection between the core and the extremities, the upper and lower body, and cross-lateral connections of the torso (opposite shoulder to hip) or extremities (opposite hand to foot) in order to execute movements with precision and control. Of course, some dancers lacked these connections, and I did

see some dancers throwing themselves to the floor, crashing suddenly and purposefully into freezes for dramatic effect. However, most of the dancers I spoke to said they aimed to—and preferred watching dancers who could—display finesse and control in their movements. Several participants also told me they did not want to be too 'clean' or 'technical' in their movement either, and that these bodily connections and sequencing of movements ideally needed to be accomplished in a loose or freely fluid fashion.

One of the major differences that many of the participants mentioned between b-boying and breakdancing was that breakdancing often lacked this kind of attention to body connectivity, and thus did not have the same grounded, bouncy, recoiling quality as b-boying did. For example, DangerVic, a White b-girl in her mid-twenties, told me that breakdancing made her think of people doing freezes "with, you know, their back arched and their face pressed against the ground" (DangerVic, interview with the author, March 2011). For DangerVic, breakdancing made her picture dancers who lacked the force or recoil to fight against gravity, and instead let their weight fall passively into the ground.

If we move our attention back to media representations of breakdancing, we can understand where DangerVic got her impression from: many of the dancers in the breakdance movies and how-to-breakdance books did not display the control or core connection Alien Ness spoke of, and often crashed their movements. For example, in the club scene in *Body Rock* (Epstein, 1984), we see one of the b-boys landing so hard on his back out of a kip-up that the camera shakes from the impact.[45] Similarly, in the opening credits of *Delivery Boys* (Handler, 1985), two dancers do a front flip, and land flat on their backs without any recoil or effort to absorb the shock.[46] Similarly, though many of the 'how-to-breakdance' books warn dancers to take

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[45] This scene can be viewed at Trashdivine (2009)
[46] This scene can be viewed at Mitsumitsun (2011)

precautions to warm up properly and the time needed to develop the strength required to execute more difficult movements, the dancers demonstrating the movements are often pictured in awkward, potentially dangerous positions. In Figure 4.2, we see a young dancer attempting to do a head spin: while the image shows that the dancer has changed his position—and thus assumingly managed to spin on his head—it is clear that there is no active connection between his core and the movement of his head or legs, and that he is focusing on turning without giving particular attention to the position of his limbs in relation to the spine.
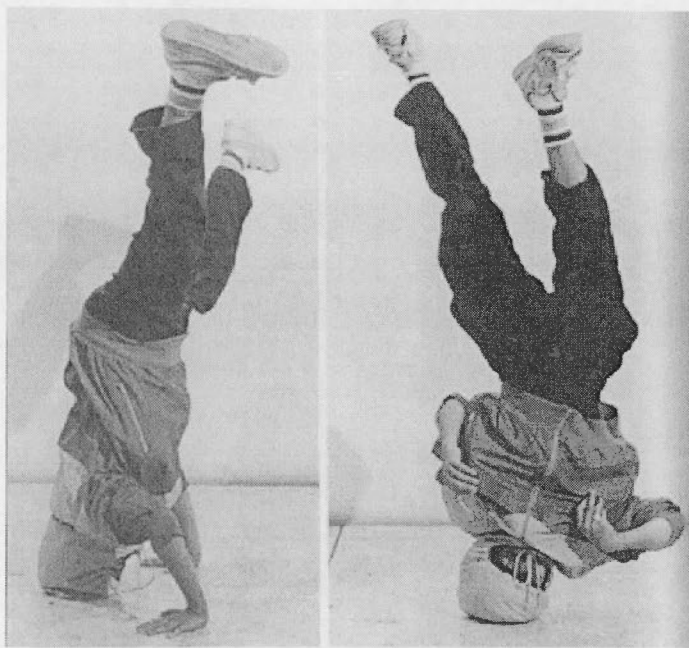
Figure 4.2 A young dancer demonstrating a head spin in a 'how-to-breakdance' book from 1984 (Dunahoo, 1984, p. 40).

4.1.2.3 Water (Flow)

Most dancers I spoke to preferred—or at least aimed—to use a free flow in their dancing. This observation was much in line with Alien Ness' description of the Water element, in which he suggests that ideally, all movements should flow into each other with no set ups or hesitations (Ness, 2009). Given the highly physical and difficult nature of b-boying's movement vocabulary, fluidity was not something that

appeared to come naturally or easily; indeed, I observed dancers practising various drops, footwork patterns and different transitions into power moves or freezes over and over again until they were able to get in and out of their movements with precision, grace, and control.

However, I noticed that a dancer's ability to control and alter the flow of their movement was also important: if dancers were too free and continuous in their sets, it meant that they were not hitting any accents or responding to specific melodies in the music. For example, Cleopatra spoke of a recent practice where she was trying to address this problem during our interview:

> A habit that I have that I've been trying to break is that I always go in the same continuous flow. Like capoeira, I don't know if you know what I'm talking about. It's always the same direction. And I have a series of movements that kind of go well together, so it's kind of easy to get back into them. So I'm trying to break that [habit]. And one of my runs [at the practice] was very one directional. I would catch myself and try and go the other way, so I was switching directions. And then I was hitting these random poses [to break the flow]. (Cleopatra, interview with the author, October 2011)

Cleopatra felt that when her flow was too free, her dancing became repetitive and lacked variation; instead, when she consciously controlled her flow, and broke it at appropriate moments, she felt her dancing was more dynamic and powerful. Thus, I would suggest that the ideal flow in b-boying is perhaps not simply free, but rather free with the ability to instantaneously switch to bound. This back and forth between free and bound flow is in part what gives the element of excitement and surprise to the dance. In order to exert these rapid changes in fluidity, I again noted that many dancers initiated their movements proximally, or from their core (abdominals, shoulders and hips), as opposed to distally (hands and feet), thus maintaining a better control over their bodies.

Additionally, I noticed that the switch between bound and free flow was particularly important in movements that had variations in their speed or timing. This was particularly true in movements that accelerated or decelerated. For example, in a backspin the dancer can enter the movement quickly with a pull of the hand on the floor and swing of the legs as he or she transfers his or her weight across the hip to come onto the back, then spinning on the back using the momentum generated in the entry. However, as the movement loses this momentum, the body slows down. If the dancer were to continue to freely follow the flow of the movement, he or she might simply slow to a halt when the movement came to a natural ending. By alternating to a bound flow and stopping the spin dramatically in a freeze on the right beat of the music, the dancer demonstrates that he or she is in control of the movement, and aware of the position of the body in relation to space and the music.

Where the importance of free flow was most evident was in the transitions between different movements. How dancers would get from their footwork to freezes, or from up to down, was a place where they could make personal, stylistic innovations in the form. Dancers who hesitated or stumbled between their movements or movement phrases during competitions were often mocked by their opponents or the spectators, and many of the dancers I spoke to said that a choppy entry into a freeze or power move could be enough to lose a close battle. In contrast, in movies featuring breakdancing from the 1980s, we often see the dancers setting up for their moves, or pausing before launching into flips or freezes. For example, in the second battle in *Breakin'* (Silberg, 1984), the female protagonist does a series of swipes and aerial cartwheels where she pauses and sets up between each movement. While her movement perhaps lacked fluidity because she was not as skilled as the other dancers in the scene, it was clear that her execution was good enough for the spectators, who cheered enthusiastically.[47]

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[47] This scene from can be viewed at Babygurl05 (2009).

This observation of the attention that b-boys and b-girls in Montreal pay to the fluid transitions between their movement contradicts Dixon-Gottschild's (1995) often mentioned Africanist aesthetic quality of 'high-affect juxtaposition', which she defines as "mood, attitude, or movement breaks that omit the transitions and connective links valued in the European academic aesthetic" (p. 107). In fact, I would argue that b-boys and b-girls in Montreal aimed not to omit transitions, but to integrate them so seamlessly into their dancing that they seemed to disappear. Moreover, this lack of connective flow between movements is more apparent in representations of breakdancing from the 1980s, where dancers might switch from a sharp locking movement phrase, to a smooth waving movement, into an explosive power move without any sort of transitions between the different movement qualities. Indeed, the constant negotiation between free and bound flow reminds me more of another one of Dixon-Gottschild's qualities of Africanist aesthetics—embracing the conflict, which she defines as "a precept of contrariety, or an encounter of opposites" (1995, p. 107). However, I feel it more accurate to describe this quality as reconciling the conflict, since the goal in b-boying is not simply to pass from smooth to sharp movement qualities, but to do so in a seamless and controlled fashion.

4.1.2.4 Ether (Musicality)

As many scholars have noted, b-boying is a percussive, polyrhythmic dance form, and is intrinsically connected to the music to which it is performed (Fogarty, 2010; Schloss, 2009). Unlike in ballet or contemporary dance—where artists have long argued that dance should not simply be seen as an extension of music, but as a distinct and independent art form[48]—almost all of the b-boys and b-girls I spoke to saw b-boying as an embodied expression of music. For example, DangerVic told me:

> I can't stand when I see people dancing and they're doing sets, and the music doesn't matter at all because they've already planned to do this

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[48] See Lifar (1935) for this kind of declaration.

> 30 or 45-second routine. Where the music doesn't matter because it's a choreography. (DangerVic, interview with the author, March 2011)

Indeed, I would say that musicality—or Ether as it is referred to in Ness' (2009) 5 Elements frame—was by far the most prominently displayed element in the stylistic preferences of b-boys and b-girls in Montreal, and also the one over which dancers had the most fiercely contrasting opinions.

In Montreal, b-boying is most commonly performed to break beat music. This was most common at jams and battles, where it was not unusual to hear classic b-boy songs such as Babe Ruth's *The Mexican*, The Jimmy Castor Band's *Just Begun*, The Incredible Bongo Band's *Apache*, or any number of tracks by James Brown.[49] At practices, there was more variety in the type of music b-boys and b-girls danced to: for example, many dancers also liked to dance to 80s and 90s hip-hop, although it was rare to hear contemporary hip-hop tracks being played. I also on a few occasions heard dancers ask if they could put on 'power move' music, by which they meant faster, more aggressive techno or drum'n'bass music. One b-boy even told in his late 20s me he liked practising to songs by rock bands such as Led Zeppelin.[50]

However, no matter what the musical genre, the songs that were selected for battles and practices generally featured particular break beat drum rhythm. Benny Lava, a deejay who was playing at a number of the public battles I attended, explained that these types of drum breaks could be found in various musical genres, such as classic breaks, hip hop, soul, and Latin rock. Fogarty (2010) described the typical break beat found in b-boy music as such:

> A break beat sample will have a pulse, and a clear count of (usually) four pulses in a group (bar), with four, or multiples of four groups (bars) making up the whole sample. However, the rhythms of these samples are complex, with cross- and syncopated accents. Knowing

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[49] See Schloss (2009, p. 17-39) for a discussion on songs that are part of the 'b-boy canon'.
[50] See Fogarty (2010) for a discussion of different musical tastes at practices in different cities.

the break beat involves not just being able to count its groupings and its length, but also being able to resolve out the different phrasing accentuations that are contained within it. (p. 78)

Alien Ness (2009) adds that these pulses that Fogarty mentioned can be divided into two basic categories: the 'boom' (or bass drum) and the 'bap' (or snare drum). Schloss (2009) compares this boom-bap rhythmic pattern to the 'one-two-cha-cha-cha' pattern common in mid-twentieth century American dance music.

The 'boom-bap' rhythmic structure is particularly evident in top rock and footwork patterns of b-boying, where dancers could step out on different beats to accentuate their movements. At times, spectators would emphasize this rhythm by clapping or yelling 'huh!' in time with the snare. Some dancers tried to be crisp with their steps, and would hit the beats with a sharp impact, while others were a bit looser in their bodies, and used the beat as an impulse that provoked their movements. Within a single run, there could be any number of contrasting rhythmic phrasings— continuous or staccato footwork, the accelerating and decelerating spinning power moves, and impactive freezes. Most of the dancers I spoke to felt that a skilled dancer should be able to play with rhythmic qualities in all the elements of their b-boying, including their power moves and freezes.

Here we can note a difference between b-boying and breakdancing, in that breakdancing is often shown being performed to disco-funk, electro-funk, or 80s pop music, rather than break beats or hip-hop. For example, in *Breakin'* (Silberg, 1984), we see the three main characters practising to Rufus and Chaka Khan's hit R&B single, *Ain't Nobody*. Later in the movie, they perform a choreographed routine to the dance-pop single *There's No Stopping Us*, by Ollie & Jerry. Several movies featuring breakdancing from the 1980s similarly feature pop songs with post-disco, constant rhythms, as opposed to the more complex polyrhythms found in the breaks of classic 70s break beat songs. As such, individual solos and group routines in these

films place more emphasis on following a constant, four-four beat, as opposed to exploring the subtle and unexpected accents found in a classic break beat.

Of course, as Fogarty (2010) has pointed out, "Dancers may respond to the music in different ways, emphasizing, synchronizing with or counterpointing the inner complexities of rhythms with different moves or steps" (p. 80). Apart from dancing 'on the beat', I noted that certain dancers were also interpreted and embodied other elements of the music, such as a guitar solo or the flow of lyrics. These more open interpretations were particularly evident when b-boys or b-girls were dancing to hip-hop—which is generally slower than break beat music and where dancers could pay more attention to the lyrics of the song—or in songs that had clear instrument solos, such as the horn or bass solos in *Funky Nassau* by The Beginning of the End.

Some dancers were able to react to and interpret more than one element of the music at a time. For example, in her top rock, Lynx, a White b-girl in her thirties, would often maintain a steady boom-bap pattern with her feet, but use her arm and hand gestures to follow or accentuate different instruments in the music. Here the movements in her legs might be more sharp or crisp, while her arms and hands would have a looser, free quality to them. Another dancer who frequently varied his rhythmic patterns was Soul Step of *Legz Crew,* a White b-boy in his late twenties: he would commonly change the speed of his movement and tonicity of his body depending on what musical instrument he seemed to be following at the time. For example, during the final battle at *Le Centipede* in March 2012, he transformed a long note in a horn solo into a winding slow motion set of footwork, and a syncopated guitar riff into a sharp, jerky, and angular top rock set. His frenetic and wild performance in the finals earned him a special mention from the judges, even though his crew did not win the battle in the end.[51]

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[51] This battle can be viewed at Legzcrew (2012).

In contrast, many of the commercial representations of breakdancing feature choreographed dance sequences, which are at times performed out of sync with the music that is playing. For example, Dunnahoo (1984) suggests that dancers should rehearse choreographies and movements without music to perfect them before trying to execute them to the beat. Even when dancers in these representations were dancing on beat, they did not always hit the accents in the song that is playing: for instance, in a subway battle scene in *Beat Street* (Lathan, 1984), the two crews face off against each other with a choreography of flips and uprocking. However, the choreography was clearly not performed to the song that is playing during the filming, since their steps are not on beat, and their explosive movements do not correspond with the accents in the song.[52]

Schloss (2009) has observed that the preference for classic break beats in b-boying is not purely a matter of personal musical taste, but also in a way a requirement imposed by the dance's movement vocabulary. He explained: "tempo is important to almost all dance forms, but it is all the more so with b-boying since many of its moves consist of jumps, hops, and shuffles that incorporate leaping or falling" (p. 31). However, Schloss suggests that over time, favouring certain beats:

> ... makes it difficult to dance to songs that do not fit the [rhythmic] pattern, especially songs that are too slow. The speed at which gravity acts on the human body alone exerts a decisive influence over which songs can be used. [...] Due to the nature of the movements, the music cannot be significantly sped up or slowed down without altering the form of the dance. (Ibid)

Here, Schloss introduces the idea that there is 'right' and 'wrong' music that b-boying can be performed to. Similarly, Fogarty (2010) suggests that musical preferences are not merely a matter personal preference, but rather a reflection of cultural or social values. She argued that:

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[52] This scene can be viewed at Atcoates (2007).

> [A]lthough [musical] tastes are understood as individual passions, related to dance activities and developments, the cultural codes of breaking often demand an adherence to an individual musical judgment of 'right' and 'wrong', or 'good' and 'bad'. (p. 70-71)

In addition to there being 'right' and 'wrong' songs to dance to, I also noticed that an individual dancer's interpretation of that song could be judged as right or wrong. For example, during battles, b-boys and b-girls would often mock each other for not dancing on beat: if dancers did not finish their runs on a particularly obvious accent in the music, their opponent might tap his or her ear to indicate that the dancer hadn't been listening to the music. Additionally, some dancers would even stand on the sidelines when it was not their turn to dance and mime how they felt the beat should be interpreted; if their competitor did not hit beats they felt were important, they would be sure to indicate their disapproval. For instance, at *Born to Serve* in October 2011, Cleopatra performed a set of footwork and swipes that received an enthusiastic response from the spectators and event emcee. However, when she continued dancing through an obvious accent in the music, her opponent shook his head in disapproval and turned to the audience as if to ask them to notice her error. Unfortunately for him, the judges seemed to side with Cleopatra's musical interpretation, and her crew won.[53]

Finally, I remarked that dancers who went too far off the basic rhythmic pattern of the music in their interpretations were often accused of 'not listening to the music': some of the dancers I interviewed felt that those who tried to hit too many beats could end up looking out of control or messy. Others said that if a b-boy or b-girl tried to follow sounds or instruments that were too subtle, it became hard to see that they were still dancing to the music. For example, Krypto, a White Jewish b-boy in his late twenties, told me he felt that his peers often unfairly criticized him for not listening to the music when he danced:

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[53] This battle can be viewed at Agentlynx (2011).

> I think that I was always driven by the music; there would be a huge difference if I were just dancing in silence at a battle. I feel very pumped up by the beat. And sometimes I feel different things. Like I feel that certain songs, like depending on the lyrics... music can evoke different things emotionally. I've found ways... to get to different states, depending on the emotion that that I'm reminded of when I hear a song. [...] Sometimes I would look back at the videos of what I was doing and I wasn't able to really see their criticism, cause I would think that what I was doing was on beat. I think that it was harder for them to interpret what I was doing as being on beat. A lot of breakers will more often pause to emphasize a beat when they hit it. I don't know, maybe my movement would move through it too much or maybe be a bit too spastic or maybe have too much resonance, so it would be tougher to understand because it wasn't falling so squarely on a beat. (Krypto, interview with the author, August 2012)

We can see that Krypto felt he did in fact dance to the music, just not in a way that was easy to understand or generally accepted by the community. His statement illustrates Fogarty's (2010) assessment that "musicality is not only a feature of the performance of dancers, but is also a value judgment made about dancers' expressive capabilities" (p. 79). As such, we understand that in b-boying, musicality, or musical competence, is not only a stylistic feature of the dance, but can also be seen as an expression or rejection of the implicit aesthetic values of the larger community.

4.1.2.6 Section Summary

In this section I have presented several stylistic elements of b-boying as it is practised today in Montreal, using Ness' (2009) 5 Elements of Battle Style to highlight some of the key stylistic elements of b-boying, including: rawness, or an aggressive but floating/gliding, direct energy that is identifiable in the dancer's breathing and posture; initiation of movements from the core that leads to a total body connectivity; overlapping, sequential patterning of movements; resisting gravity with a recoil from the floor; alternating free and bound flow of movements; and a deep, embodied connection to music. In contrast, I argue that breakdancing in popular representations from the 1980s employs a more vertical posture; lacks core to

extremities connections; surrenders to gravity in an impactive manner; lacks free flow in the transitions between movements; and is often performed without regard to the music. Please refer to Table 2 for an overview of these stylistic differences:

Table 2: Stylistic Differences Between B-boying and Breakdancing, outlined using Ness' (2009) Five Elements of Battle Style

	B-boying	Breakdancing
Fire (Embodied state)	•Rawness: energy oriented, aggressively floating, direct yet smooth, use of breath, relaxed posture, placement of sternum, sudden movements, play between impactive and impulsive movement phrasing.	•Commercial: shape oriented, direct without smooth quality, upright, vertical posture, consistent phrasing
Earth and Air (Low and High movements)	•Total body connectivity •Rebound in movement: pushing away from floor	•Segmented movements between core and limbs •Giving in to gravity: crashing to the floor
Water (Flow)	• Reconciling the contrast: dynamic changes between free and bound flow to add suspension to movement	•Embracing the contrast: sudden switches between free and bound flow
Ether (Musicality)	• Movement as embodiment of music • Polyrhythmic play between different parts of body • Importance of executing movements with musical accents	• Movements executed independent from music • Following constant rhythm • Executing movements in relation to musical changes or accents is less important

4.2 Sociological Aspects

In the previous section, I examined some of the choreological differences that the participants identified between b-boying and breakdancing. However, not all the dancers I spoke to believed that these choreological elements were really the difference between b-boying and breakdancing. For example, Elon, a Swedish b-boy who had been living in Montreal for a number of years, explained:

> Let's say someone that just goes in the circle and does a bunch of power moves and he doesn't even do top rocks. He doesn't even dance basically! People would call him a breakdancer. But I mean, I don't know who invented that... anyway, I know that that's what people call it. I would just call that person a toy, you know? That's what we used to call those people. I used to do graffiti, like tagging and shit, and that was basically just what we called someone who was wack. Like, if he's wack, he's wack. But anybody can be wack. I was wack, you know? Everybody was wack at one point in their lives, and if they want to call people that are, are trying to break, but they don't really DO IT... if they want to call them breakdancers, it's fine with me, but I don't really use that word. (Elon, interview with the author, March 2012)

From this statement, we can see that Elon did not think that dancers who just focused on power moves were 'breakdancers'; rather, he just thought that they were dancers who did not fully understand what b-boying was yet. He explained that, to him, b-boying was more about participating in the breaking community, and "getting to that level of knowledge that you actually know what it [b-boying] is" (Elon, interview with the author, March 2012). Several b-boys and b-girls I spoke to echoed this statement, telling me that b-boying was not so much a dance form, but a way of life that required participation in a certain number of social and cultural practices. As such, I will now examine the social activities and interactions I observed b-boys and b-girls partaking over the course of this study. Additionally, I will discuss how the participants felt these social practices differed from those of breakdancing.

As I coded the interview transcripts and field notes, I identified a number of different general categories of activities, which I labelled as: *learning, practising, cyphering, battling,* and *non-dancing interactions.* In this section, I will discuss these five categories of activities. Again, while I have divided these activities into separate categories, we will see that they do indeed overlap with each other, often occurring simultaneously or in relation to each other.

4.2.1 Learning

The first thing that one must do in b-boying is learn how to do the dance. The b-boys and b-girls in my study had been introduced to breaking in a number of different ways, from teaching themselves, learning independently with friends, taking structured classes, or learning from YouTube tutorials. In general, dancers who had been dancing longer had either taught themselves from snippets they had seen on television or in movies, or had learned from friends or older siblings, while those who had been breaking less than ten years were more likely to have taken organized classes from a teacher or learned from YouTube. Overall, I identified what I saw as four major stages in the process of learning b-boying, which I coded as *observing, mimicking, doing,* and *understanding.*

4.2.1.1 Observing

During the *observing* phase, individuals had initial contacts with the dance, and observed it, either through popular sources such as music videos or films, by seeing someone break at a hip-hop event or a show, or by meeting a b-boy or b-girl in person. For example, Sancho, a German b-boy who had been living in Montreal for five years, told me that breaking intrigued him the very first time he saw it:

> I started dancing in 1992, me and my cousin we used to go to a community centre and at that community centre... that was the first time I saw b-boys. And I was inspired right away. I was really shy at that time, and they were all older. I was 11 and they were 16, and already a group. They [knew] each other and they would get down. Some of them had their crew already, so I didn't just show up there and,

you know, get down. I was just watching them for weeks, seeing what they do, how they get down, how the whole thing works. (Sancho, interview with the author, August 2012)

Sancho's observation period lasted only a matter of weeks before he started breaking himself; other dancers, however, had much longer observation periods. For example, DangerVic had observed breaking for years before trying it herself:

When I was in grade six or seven I had a boyfriend who was a b-boy. They were just little kid b-boys; they couldn't really dance. They just liked to do windmills and stuff like that. And I thought it was cute and fun. And throughout high school, and after high school, I always had a love for hip-hop music. I don't know if you know the *Rascals*, they're a Canadian hip-hop groups from BC, and they have like a couple of b-boys in their group. I saw some of their music videos and there were b-boys in them... when you like hip-hop there's always this image of b-boys and b-girls around. But I was never fully into the dance, I tried it a couple of times, you know, everybody tries to do the freezes, and we can all do the coffee grinder! But I never got into it. (DangerVic, interview with the author, March 2011)

Unlike Sancho, DangerVic was in contact with hip-hop and observed her friends breaking for years before she became interested in learning the dance herself. Thus, the observation period could be seen as the time where an individual's interest in b-boying is germinating, but it is not yet clear if anything will come from that interest.

A longer observation period such as DangerVic's was not uncommon: many of the dancers I interviewed had been introduced to breaking as children through movies like *Flashdance* (Bruckheimer, Simpson, and Lyne, 1983) or *Breakin'* (Silberg, 1984), but had not actually taken up the dance until later in life. For example, B-girl Bounce explained that she first saw breaking as a child, although at the time she hadn't really been interested:

I was probably six [the first time I saw breaking], and it was probably in the movie *Flashdance* I would say. And I was actually signed up for a breaking class, but then my parents took me out because they were sure we were going to spin on our heads... I think I went to one class actually. I do remember going to one class, and yeah, I was taken

out of it. It's kind of funny how all these years later I actually went back to it. (Bounce, interview with the author, April 2011)

Bounce had first been introduced to breaking as a child, and had seen it in movies and music videos throughout her life. However, she told me that it was not until she was in university when she met some b-girls and finally saw the dance live that she was really 'hooked' by the form. It was at this point that she moved into the *mimicking* phase of learning.

4.2.1.2 Mimicking

Mimicking is the time period where individuals are seeking out information about and instruction in breaking technique—either first hand or through mediated channels—and try to recreate the movements and attitudes they observe. Similar to Bounce, Scramblelock explained that he had heard about breaking as a child from his uncle; however, it was only in high school after seeing b-boys in music videos such as Run DMC's *It's Like That* that he became interested in learning the dance himself. Initially, he tried to practise the moves he had seen on his own, with little success. Living in a small town where no classes were available, and not knowing any other b-boys in the area, he explained that:

> [T]he only way I was able to learn was looking on bboy.com; it was an Internet forum that had [instructions on] 'how to do the 6-step' and 'how to do the windmill'. So I had learned from reading instructions of how to do it on the Internet, and there weren't many videos, so if any videos did show up on line you had to study them. I remember there was a guy from DC who actually had an animated GIF of someone doing a windmill... it was like, step by step [demonstrates movement with finger motion]. So it was kind of hard to learn. (Scramblelock, interview with the author, March 2011)

It is important to understand that during this *mimicking* phase of learning, Scramblelock was trying to mimic or recreate breaking from the examples available to him. He added that whenever possible, he recorded music videos featuring

breaking that he saw on television in order to re-watch and study the movements. B-boy Asyan also remembered initially learning how to break from watching underground breaking videos and music videos he had recorded from the television:

> It was crazy. You had to do 'play/stop' [laughs]. And if you were lucky and you had a good VCR, and there was a slow motion [button]. But if you didn't have one it was like [tapping finger quickly on the table] 'play stop play pause play pause play pause play pause play pause play pause play pause play pause play pause!' Oh and then you rewind but you went to far back, so you had to fast forward, then you stopped. Playpauseplaypauseplaypause... and then you were like 'oh, ok!' and then you rewound... rewind rewind rewind! Until you understood, or started to understand the mechanics of the movement. But hell, there were no classes, no one was saying 'come take this power moves class', you know? [54] (B-boy Asyan, interview with the author, March 2012)

Several dancers described this 'play/pause' approach to learning, and most of them stated that it was something they had done with friends in the privacy of their homes. As Omegatron, a Black b-boy in his early thirties, explained: "we were still 'closet breakers', breaking in my basement, just practising a little bit and doing our stuff, not even really understanding what we were doing" (Omegatron, interview with the author, August 2012).

It is interesting to note that several of the b-boys and b-girls I interviewed told me that they thought that during these first two stages of learning, what they were doing was not b-boying, but rather breaking or breakdancing. When I asked him what he was learning from the tapes he had watched, Asyan explained:

> It was breakdancing... I just started practising all the time, wherever.

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[54] Translated from French by the author: C'était fou, tu faisais play-stop [rires]. Pis mettons si t'étais chanceux pis t'avais un bon vidéo, y'avait comme un slow motion... mais si tu n'en avais pas c'était comme [super vite en tapant le doigt sur la table] play stop play pause play pause play pause play pause play pause play pause play pause play pause play pause. Pis là tu rewind, t'allais trop loin, la t'avançais, t'arrêtais, Playpauseplaypauseplaypause... pis la tu dis « ah, OK », pis là tu veux reculer, recule recule recule. Fek tu commençais à comprendre la mécanique du mouvement, tu sais ? Mais 'sti, y'avait pas de cours, y'avait personne qui disait « vient, y'a un cours de power », tu sais ? (Asyan, interview with the author, March 2012).

> Trying to figure my stuff out, practising power [moves]. Because at first what you really work on is power, you know? At first, guys, we don't really understand... you just want the flashy stuff. How could I say this? The gymnastics side. It was, you know, flares, windmills... everyone wants to do the windmill at first. Spiders, jackhammers, swipes, that's what interested me at first.[55] (Asyan, interview with the author, March 2012)

For Asyan, what he was doing at first was breakdancing, because he only focused on the spectacular or acrobatic movements of the dance, and did not yet fully understand or appreciate its complexity. He was still at a point where he was *mimicking* the form, and had not yet begun developing his own practice within it.

Another approach used by some dancers during this *mimicking* phase of learning was taking classes in a structured studio environment. Cleopatra explained that after she first saw b-boys and b-girls dancing at raves and parties in Ottawa, she looked for classes so she could learn how to break herself:

> I don't know how I inquired, it's kind of a blur, but I got told about these classes, at Dance Educators in Ottawa, which were on Rideau Street, given by two CFM [Canadian Floor Masters] guys. Jeffery and Willy, I don't know their last names. That's where I learned my first 6-steps and my first freezes. I remember learning 6-step time and getting it really fast, before everyone in the class [laughs]. I started doing it really fast and I was like oh my god I can do this, I can be good at this! I think I want to do this!! So I continued, and I met a lot of people through this dance. I met Little Bear and she asked me to be in her crew *UpsideDown Squad*. (Cleopatra, interview with the author, 2011)

Since Cleopatra was already taking modern dance classes through her high school at the time, she felt comfortable learning how to break in a structured class environment and progressed quickly. However, in her statement one can see a transition between

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[55]Translated from French by the author: C'était du breakdancing. J'commençais à toujours pratiquer, n'importe où. Asseyez de trouver tes affaires, pratiquer des powers. Parce qu'au début on pratique surtout des powers là. Au début, les gars, on ne sait pas trop. Tu veux le tap-à-l'oeil, genre, comment je pourrais dire ça ? La gym un peu. C'était plus, tu sais, les flares, windmills... tout le monde veut le windmill au début. Les spiders, les jackhammer, les swipes... c'était ça au début qui m'appelait. (Asyan, interview with the author, March 2012)

the second and third phase of learning, where she moves from simply *mimicking* or being a student of the dance, to actually *doing* the dance, or meeting other dancers and publicly participating in her local street dance scene. I will now discuss this third step of learning.

4.2.1.3 Doing

Schloss (2009) has pointed out "while knowledge about many elements of hip-hop—rap music, especially—is primarily developed through television, radio, the Internet, and recordings, b-boying is almost always learned through personal interaction" (p. 40). Since Cleopatra had been learning how to break by taking classes, she had already had a certain kind of interaction with other dancers; however, she made a distinction between the time period where she was simply a student taking classes, and when she joined a crew and started participating in her local breaking community. Similarly, DKC Freeze, a Black b-boy in his forties, told me that b-boying was not something you could learn in a class, explaining: "I'm not into studio teaching. It's so much [in] the studios now. There's so many dance classes. Too much fake... anybody can be a teacher today" (DKC Freeze, interview with the author, June 2013). According to DKC Freeze, b-boying was something that was learned not in a dance class, but through integration into and participation in the breaking community. Similarly, Smith Lefebvre (2011) has argued: "Legitimate participation [in the breaking community] involves gradually learning the behavior expected during face-to-face cipher interactions" (p. 81). While Smith Lefebvre focuses on cypher interactions in her own study, I would argue that all first hand contact with the breaking community deepens a new dancer's understanding of the practice, and facilitates his or her transition from the *mimicking* phase to the *doing* phase of learning.

Interestingly, it was during this third phase that several of the dancers I interviewed told me they felt they had stopped *breakdancing* or *breaking* and started

b-boying. What they meant by this is that they felt it is the act of going from simply learning a dance form to participating in a community. Put another way, they felt they had gone from practising a dance form to developing a dance practice. While most felt that one could learn the dance form through mediated sources or by taking classes, they believed that it was through interactions with members of their local breaking community that you began to see b-boying more as a way of life. This is not unusual since, as Bourdieu (1984) has proposed, learning the cultural manners, norms, and values of a given social group requires "repeated contact with cultural works and cultured people" (p. 66). More specifically, Smith Lefebvre (2011) has noted that public interaction is crucial to any learning process, since tactic—or implicit—knowledge "exists within the individual. The roots of tacit knowledge are the individual's actions and commitment to a particular context" (p. 50). Thus, she argues that for b-boys and b-girls, participation in the community is an important step in learning, since "in these social contexts, individuals transfer tacit knowledge, create a common understanding and mutual trust" (p. 51).

Over the course of my fieldwork, I observed Tina, a French-Canadian b-girl in her early twenties, transitioning from this second to third phase: Tina was a student in the undergraduate contemporary dance program at UQAM, and had initially taken a seven week initiation to breaking class from B-girl Lynx in January and February of 2012. Although Tina had a background in gymnastics and had taken hip-hop dance before, Lynx's course was the first time she was really exposed to breaking (Tina, personal communication with the author, March 2013). Once the session was over, she continued taking Lynx's classes at another dance studio for some time, and helped organize workshops with other b-boys and b-girls for students in UQAM's dance department.

The first major change in Tina's behaviour was that she stopped just taking classes and started attending practices at *Disstorsion* on a weekly basis. Soon after,

she also began attending local breaking events, and participating more often in the cyphers before and after the organized battles at larger events. By the summer of 2012, she had entered a few smaller battles, and even travelled to a major b-boying event in Boston. She also started showing more of an interest in learning the history of the dance, and in knowing more about the other elements of hip-hop culture.

At first, a couple of the other dancers from UQAM who had also been taking classes with Lynx showed the same enthusiasm as Tina did for breaking. However, she told me that most of them eventually stopped practising, either due to injuries or because they did not have enough time to dedicate to learning a new dance form. As one can see, not everyone who had gone through the *observing* and *mimicking* phase with Tina had moved on to the *doing* phase. Many of the dancers I interviewed echoed this statement, telling me they had originally started breaking with friends who 'hadn't taken it seriously' and quit dancing after a while. Bourrik had an interesting hypothesis as to why not everyone could make the transition from *mimicking* to *doing*—or breakdancing to b-boying:

> I think there is a lot of people who 'breakdance' and just use it [the dance]. They're opportunists, they see a move, they see a trick, 'Oh, that looks like a move that's in style, everyone is doing it. It's cool, I'll do it'. And they'll do it for a year, two years, three years, four years... and oh 'I'm not good yet, I wanted to be good right away. Ok, well I can't do it, I'll do a different dance'. And they cut out. Those people are everywhere right now. But I've always been a b-boy; I've always stayed. [...] For most breakdancers, this is just a passing fad, for a little while. You're a breakdancer for a few years, but you're a b-boy for life. I started with a lot of other dancers. And slowly but surely there were fewer of us. And as there were fewer of us I could see who was real.[56] (Bourrik, interview with the author, July 2012)

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[56] Translated from French by the author: Je pense qu'il y a beaucoup de gens qui font du breakdance qui s'en servent. C'est comme des opportunistes, ils voient le *move*, ils voient le truc, oh ça a l'air d'être un move à la mode, tout le monde le fait. C'est cool : je le fais. Ils le font pendant un an, deux ans, trois ans, quatre ans. Oh je vois que je n'suis pas encore bon, j'aurais voulu être bon tout de suite. OK là je peux pas, OK là je vais dans une autre danse et puis là ils coupent. Et ces personnes là, en ce moment ils sont partout. Puis moi je suis toujours resté b-boy, je suis toujours resté là, [...] La plupart des breakdancers, c'est passager, c'est un petit temps. On est breakdancer pendant quelques années, on est

From Bourrik's comment, we can see here that he makes an interesting distinction between breakdancing and b-boying: the former was an activity a person might engage in for a few years before moving on to a new activity, whereas the latter was a life-long passion. As such, he felt it was normal that not everyone would make the transition from *mimicking* to *doing*, since not everyone who took up the dance was committed to being a b-boy.

While a few of the dancers I met were completely self-taught, most of them had had mentors who helped them with this transition from *mimicking* to *doing*. Indeed, most of the participants talked at length about their mentors, and felt compelled to name and show recognition for those who had taught or guided them. For example, Omegatron told me that he felt he had really started b-boying when he and his friends had started training with an older b-boy named Walken:

> How did I know I was a b-boy? When I was 14 years old, Walken came at my house... he was the first b-boy I ever saw in my life. It was a surprise that my big brother did for me, cause to my big brother I was a wannabe [laughs]. He said, 'I'm gonna show you man, you guys are doing your little *Smurf*[57] thing; you're in the park thinking that you're all good? Watching the movie *Breakin'* a hundred million times a day, thinking that you're good? Ok, watch this, I'm gonna bring a guy man who goes to clubs, destroys them, and then leaves. You'd never know he was there'. I'm like, what?
>
> This guy [Walken], he used to be one of the best in Montreal, period. For his time, you know? So I knew I was a b-boy when him and his friend challenged us. They said: 'Ok, you guys are ok... but what you guys are doing here, you need to bring it to the streets, you need to bring it outside, and not care about what people are going to say or think, that's the realness. You need to live that, you know, live and breathe that'.

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b-boy à vie. Je pense que c'est ça. J'ai commencé avec plein de danseurs et au fur et à mesure des années ça se réduisait. Et puis quand ça se réduisait, là je voyais qui étaient des vrais. (Bourrik, interview with the author, July 2012)

[57] Smurf, or Smurfing, is the French term for the 1980s dance Electric Boogie (Shapiro, 2008).

So basically that's how it started. We decided to go to a spot in Montreal where it's crowded, downtown Montreal, next to McGill [University]... and there was so many people, so so many people! And what happened was that we did our thing [danced], and it was the first time in my life I saw people stop and look at our cypher, then shake our hands, say hi, and then they leave... we're like, wow, we didn't know that it was really alive! And I was part of it for the first time. And I said, I'm not a coward! Like, the first time it's like an adrenaline rush, the first time you go in you're like 'what's gonna happen?' And all your friends are like looking at you, cause it was the three of us: me, Michael, and Richard. And Walken, he was our mentor. And he was there doing his thing, and not caring. He was really killing it; it was really amazing. So we were like, oh my God, how could we top that, you know? It was really hardcore! So basically, we went in, and the first time I went in it was this adrenaline rush, and then when I went in after again, I wanted more and more and more, it felt really good.

And Dazl came in, and he was like, he was a real b-boy him. He... came in and did his thing for a few minutes and then he left. Other people came in and did their thing in that cypher. And when that night was over, I knew that after that day I would never be the same guy again. That Jonas, little Jonas Napoleon [his real name], I would never just be that guy no more. It was over. It was an icebreaker for me, and after that, you know, I took the ball and just ran with it. I just never came back home. (Omegatron, interview with the author, July 2012)

From Omegatron's statement we can observe a number of things: first, that he felt that meeting his mentor Walken—and being challenged by him to dance in public—had been a pivotal moment in his learning process. Second, that the recognition he received from his friends, his mentor, and the public had all informed his understanding of what b-boying was. Third, that having the chance to meet and interact with other b-boys such as Dazl—a well known dancer at the time from *Flow Rock Crew* whom he saw as a 'real' b-boy—had been a key factor in convincing him he wanted to take his dancing further. And forth, that the experience had fundamentally changed his perception of self, both in relation to dancing and the world. In many ways his comments again highlight the importance of social interaction in not only the process of learning, but also in the construction of an

individual's perception of self in relation to his or her social group. Indeed, as Fogarty (2010) has argued, "performances in public are actually central to the learning process" (p. 151). Additionally, as Schloss (2009) has argued:

> [P]ersonal interaction is also important because the way the dance is taught exerts a profound influence on the way it is experienced. It affects the way individuals understand the history of the form and of their own place in it, the way they express their individual and group identities, and the way they pass this knowledge on to others. (p. 41)

Thus, it is through these public interactions with other b-boys and b-girls that dancers come to a final step of learning, which I identified as *understanding* what b-boying was, if not universally at least for themselves personally.

4.2.1.4 Understanding

Smith Lefebvre (2011) has argued that in any learning process, "an individual must do more than simply imitate explicit knowledge. To internalize it as expertise of one's own requires action, reflection, and practice" (p. 53). Similarly, many of the dancers I interviewed felt that the *understanding* stage of learning—during which dancers develop a deeper theoretical reflection of their own dance practice—was the most important, and the hardest step to achieve in the learning cycle. A number of the dancers I interviewed stated that they had been dancing for a number of years before they really understood what b-boying was. For example, Elon told me he and his brother had been breaking for years before he really had any sort of meaningful interactions with other b-boys, and thus felt in retrospect that he hadn't really understood what the dance was at first:

> Elon: We were trying to break. But we didn't have anyone to teach us. When you're a kid, you see something, and you think you understand it, and you think you're doing the thing. And we called it breakdancing because we didn't really know the difference at that time.
>
> Helen: What kind of stuff were you doing?

Elon: Well, like walking on my hands, trying to do some top rocks. I guess we were doing James Brown splits. I remember also, we would go to the little school dances, and we would do some little battles. But the thing is, there was not really anyone breaking. I mean not in my surroundings. So we would just put some steps together. Like, we would go to the ground and stuff, but we weren't doing proper footworks. And we were mixing a little bit of house [dance] that we didn't know was house but I learned later that it was. Just whatever we saw. Michael Jackson, James Brown, whatever we would come across. But... I think I didn't actually learn from someone until later. Maybe I was around 15 when I learned my first 6-step... when I learned some proper foundation. (Elon, interview with the author, March 2012)

At first, we see that Elon felt that any street dance movement was part of breaking and could be mixed in any way. But as he met and interacted with other dancers who were able to correct him, he understood that there was actually a structure to breaking, and a 'proper' way to dance. Interestingly, many of the b-boys and b-girls I interviewed told me that they had thought they were good breakers until they had had these interactions with other dancers; they explained that once they started *understanding* what b-boying was, they had realized that they still had a lot to learn when it came to dancing. For instance, DKC Freeze—one of Montreal's only veteran b-boys from the 1980s who is still actively participating in the breaking community today—explained it as such:

When you start, you start with mistakes. When you start dancing or rapping or being a doctor or anything, you make mistakes. You're not good, you know? I was shit! When I look at that footage from the 80s, I look like shit! Some people will go 'oh that was sick, I love the way you danced in those times'. Yeah, but in those times I was kind of confused, you know? I didn't know what I was doing. I tried... 'Yeah but it's just the vibe that you had!' Yeah, we had a vibe, but we were shit! And I know it! I didn't know in those times, I thought I was the shit! You always think you're the shit, but for real you're not... You're just shit [laughs]. So you learn, you learn. And at a young age, I wanted to know. I wanted to know the realness. I wanted to learn, that's why I went to New York, that's why I went to the field, why I talked to those people [pioneer dancers], why I did all that, just to learn. And when I got better and I understood more, I did competitions. I challenged people, and I won competitions. (DKC Freeze, interview

with the author, June 2013)

For DKC Freeze, travelling to New York, meeting pioneer dancers, and entering battles had all been factors that had deepened his understanding of his dance practice. Similarly, many of the dancers I interviewed associated this fourth phase of learning to the point when they started entering battles or travelling to national or international jams and competitions; they felt that their understanding of what b-boying was had changed through the discussions and other social interactions that these events had afforded them. Like DKC Freeze, some felt that their understanding of b-boying had changed because of meeting pioneer dancers, and learning more about the history of the dance. Others felt that it was receiving recognition for—or criticism of—their dancing from b-boys and b-girls outside their community that had helped deepen their understanding of b-boying as both a dance form and a lifestyle. Additionally, most of the dancers I spoke to said that having this knowledge, or an understanding, of what b-boying was not only enriched their experience of participating, but also made them better dancers. DKC Freeze explained:

> It's gonna bring you more to the realness. You know? Cause you gotta find your way in that movement. People say 'you gotta find your own way'. Yeah you gotta find your own way, but from the truth! You've got to find out, in anything. That's why you got school, that's why you got things like that, is to find out. And to me, anybody who goes to the source, and the knowledge of the real past, it's gonna make you a better dancer. It's gonna make you understand more. (DKC Freeze, interview with the author, June 2013)

For some of the dancers I interviewed, this idea of not simply *doing* the movements, but *understanding* the meaning and history behind the movements was perhaps the greatest difference between b-boying and breakdancing. Indeed, several participants told me that they considered knowledge to be the fifth element of hip-hop, and essential to the practice of b-boying. This is an important point to understand since, as Schloss (2009) has pointed out:

> [T]he idea that b-boying is founded not only on a series of physical movements, but also on attitude, rhythm, style, character, strategy, tradition, and philosophy makes a profound statement about the way b-boys and b-girls wish their art to move forward. It saturates movement with history and sets clear aesthetic boundaries for future innovation. (p. 51)

By recognizing knowledge and an understanding of the dance form as a key element that distinguishes b-boying from breakdancing, b-boys and b-girls in Montreal try to create a clear distinction between their own dance practice and commercial representations of the form, all while inscribing the knowledge they have acquired through their years of training into their bodily practices.

4.2.1.5 Learning as a Cyclical, Never Ending Process

Finally, it must be noted that while I have distinguished between these four stages of learning—*observing*, *mimicking*, *doing*, and *understanding*—in theory, they are in fact completely intertwined and overlapping. As Stevens has noted:

> As all dancers, breakers are eternal students; their learning never ends. Every time breakers dance or watch others dancing, they are re-evaluating and refining their movement possibilities. Informal instruction is continuous. This informal instruction can happen in the home, at jams specifically organized for practices, and on the dance floor. (Stevens, 2008, p. 121)

For most of the dancers I interviewed, these stages of learning were not linear but cyclical; they felt they were eternal students of the dance and would never have finished learning about b-boying. Many of them continued to take classes or workshops to gain knowledge on hip-hop culture or improve their movement techniques, even if they had been dancing for more than a decade. Several participants also told me that as they got older, major life events such as serious injuries, having children, career changes, or simply getting older had forced them to reassess their understanding of what b-boying was to them, and had completely changed their perspectives on what role dance played in their lives.

Many of them also felt it was important to 'give back' to the community, and share the knowledge they had acquired with younger new younger dancers. Indeed, Fogarty (2012b) has explained that many b-boys and b-girls adopt the saying 'each one teach one', by which they mean "if you have had the opportunity to learn, you are obliged to teach another what you have learned" (p. 58). She notes that older b-boys and b-girls will mentor younger dancers not only in the movement techniques of the dance, but will also pass on aesthetic values and musical tastes. Additionally, she points out that younger dancers in turn encourage older participants to stay involved in the community. This cyclical learning pattern initiates new, younger dancers into the community, all while keeping older dancers central to the continued life of the dance form; thus, both teacher and student gain from the experience, and ultimately deepen their respective understandings of the dance.

As such, one can see that in b-boying, the process of learning is a never-ending cycle that both forms individuals in a dance practice, and strengthens the community's base of knowledge in regards to the practice. As Hakkarainen and Paavolahas (in Smith Lefebvre, 2011) pointed out, learning is: "a process of innovative inquiry in which the aim is [to] progressively refine knowledge artifacts and engage in long-term processes of expanding community's knowledge and competencies" (p. 76). Old school New York City b-boy Anthony Colon summed the cyclical nature of learning in b-boy/b-girl culture up well when he said:

> Battle, learn, but also teach. Don't just take…. It's like, if your taking the harvest, and you constantly eat from the harvest but you don't replant. You don't have nothing to harvest any more. And that's the thing with hip-hop: a lot of people, they take, take, take, but they're not replanting what they're taking…. My thing is that I always tell them: teach everybody…. Because the main thing is that hip-hop, breaking, graffiti is about the people. (Colon, in Schloss, 2009, p. 40)

4.2.2 Practising

Practices are scheduled times where b-boys and b-girls gather in a space to dance in an unstructured yet orderly fashion to, as the term suggests, practised their dance form. A b-boy practice should not be confused with a ballet or contemporary dance *rehearsal*, where dancers might be directed by a choreographer or rehearsal director to create or work on a specific, set choreography. At the b-boy/b-girl practices I observed, every dancer was generally in charge of deciding not only what movements or skills he or she is going to work on, but also how he or she will work on those movements and skills. In my fieldwork, I attended two different types of practices: open practices and private practices.

4.2.2.1 Open Practices

Open practices took place in community centers, dance studios, and in the lobby of the AMC movie theatre. At these practices, there might be anywhere between two and forty dancers practising in the same space. While non-dancing observers might not be welcome at some of these practice spaces, they were generally open to anybody who wanted to come dance, no matter their skill level. It was not uncommon to observe beginner and expert dancers practising side by side.

Some open practices were free of charge, while others—mainly those held at dance studios—cost a minimal fee of two to four dollars for two hours of studio time or more. Some locations held practices at specific hours at the same time every week: for instance, there were practices Mondays and Thursdays at *Disstorsion*, Wednesdays and Sundays at *Café Graffiti*, Fridays at the *Downtown YMCA*, Saturdays at the *Cote-des-Neiges Community Centre*, and throughout the week at *Urban Element*. Other studios allowed dancers to practise whenever the space was not rented or being used for a class: for example, Shauna Roberts, the owner of

Shauna Roberts' Dance Center, let dancers know what times her studio was available for practising every day though her Facebook status.

4.2.2.2 Private Practices

Private practices, on the other hand, were usually only open to members of the same crew and their friends and guests. At times, these practices also took place in community centers and dance studios, or they could be held in private lofts and dancers' living rooms. For example, I attended several private practices at Pam Rocks', a Jewish b-girl in her early thirties, home; Pam Rocks lived in a loft, and had an open space with a wood floor that was large enough to accommodate a circle of about five or six dancers. She would contact the group of dancers she wanted to invite either through email or Facebook, inquiring if anyone was around that day and "free to jam". The invited b-boys and b-girls responded to indicate whether they could come or not, and a time to meet would be set based on everyone's availability. Sometimes guests would ask if they could invite another friend to the practice, but it was generally left up to the host to have the final say on who was invited to attend or not. Because she travelled a lot for her work and was not often in town, Pam Rocks told me she liked these smaller practices since they gave her a chance to catch up with friends while working on her dancing (Pam Rocks, personal communication with the author, September 2012).

Some participants told me their crews held private practices in order to prepare for battles and shows without letting other crews know what they were working on, or to build on the connection between dancers in the group. For example, Afternoon, a Black b-boy in his late twenties, explained:

> We have practices where we're just gonna be working on routines. So ideas for shows, concepts for dancing as a team. So we can have some sort of a unity. Then there's the times where we're just gonna work on physical stuff, meaning we're just gonna do drills, to make sure that we have a common [movement] base. (Afternoon, interview with the

author, March 2012)

Others said they preferred private or at least smaller practices because it allowed them to concentrate on the task at hand, and not get distracted by what was going on in the room. Some dancers felt that since b-boying was highly competitive, it was good to work on new material in private before trying out bringing it to an open practice.

Finally, I noted that dancers who were getting over injuries, or just hadn't had time to train for a while, told me they preferred to attend private practices while they got back into shape. For example, one b-boy in his late 20s told me he could not go to open practices while he was getting over a knee injury because he was afraid he would feel impatient watching other dancers practising, and end up trying to do movements he was not yet strong enough to do. Similarly, Radio, a Jewish b-girl in her thirties, said that while she was pregnant, she preferred practising in a smaller group because the energy of the bigger practice made it difficult for her to hold back:

> When I go to practices that are open practices where there could be like thirty or forty people in the room, and there's let's say five or six cyphers going on, there's an energy in the room that's really strong and dynamic. You can have all different levels from beginners to intermediate to expert, to people coming in from out of town, well-known people... I usually go to those big practices and only just recently because I'm pregnant, I realized it was dangerous for me. Not because somebody could bump into me and not because somebody's foot will fly. It's dangerous for me to go into those bigger practices because I won't be able to control my ego. I'll be so excited and become unconscious of myself by some young kids doing some moves that... And if I'm in the room with these forty people, I feel like I'm not at the same level I used to be and that makes me feel like I'm in competition with them. Which drains me of my joy... it just makes the whole experience a bummer. So if I go to the small practice where it's just four of us, close friends in a room, I'm really I'm getting what it's supposed to be. (Radio, interview with the author, March 2012)

4.2.2.3 Approaches to Practising

During both open and private practices, I noticed that some b-boys and b-girls stayed very focused on the task at hand, and would dance almost non-stop for two or three hours. Some of these dancers would share a space and take turns dancing with each other in a cypher fashion; other dancers preferred to find their own spot in the room to practise their moves or sets alone. For example, at a practice I attended at *Café Graffiti*, most of the b-boys and b-girls took turns dancing in one large cypher in the centre of the room; however, two less experienced dancers—perhaps because they were too shy to freestyle alone in front of the group—were in the front of the room by the door working on specific foundational movements such as the 6-step and basic freezes. One of these dancers eventually joined the cypher; he watched from the side of the circle for a while, and then went into the centre once to do a set I had seen him going through on the side earlier on in the practice. The other dancer did not join the main circle at all, and continued to practise by herself on the side of the room.

In other instances, it was the more experienced dancers who withdrew themselves from the group to practised on their own. This was perhaps because they did not feel inspired by the other dancers present, but I suspected it could also possibly be because they wanted to be as efficient as possible during their practice, and spend as much time dancing as possible. One b-boy in his late 20s told me that he did not like sharing a circle with more than three or four other people, since it meant he would spend a great deal of his own practice time waiting to take his turn.

Of course, not all the b-boys and b-girls I observed took practising so seriously; some dancers trained at a more relaxed pace, taking time to stretch or talk to friends between sets. Lazy Legs, a White b-boy in his late twenties, joked that he was a "social b-boy", explaining that, "When I go to practices I like to talk. I talk a lot [laughs]" (Lazy Legs, interview with the author, August 2012). For Lazy Legs, a

big part of what he enjoyed about practising was not just the dancing itself, but also the social interactions it permitted him to have with his friends and fellow dancers. However, he was quick to stress that he believed that his dancing improved from these conversations with and observations of other b-boys and b-girls. Several b-boys and b-girls echoed this statement, and told me just being present at a practice could bring them a deeper understanding of their dancing, whether they actually danced or not. Thus, we see that activities such as observing and sharing knowledge through conversations are as important as the physical part of training. This is not unusual, since "face-to-face interactions create knowledge through situated action in a particular time and place" (Smith Lefebvre, 2011, p. 51).

But what exactly goes into the physical training involved in b-boying? B-girl Lynx provided a detailed description of her typical practice routine:

> Usually how I train is that for 20 minutes, I'll do an actual physical warm up: running or rotating my body parts. Then I'll do top rock for about 20 minutes, depending on how long I have to practise. After that I'll start working on top rock and go downs, and then top rock and footwork. Or just footwork, because footwork is so exhausting. And then I'll start working on sets or patterns that I have in my footwork, and repeating them. (Lynx, interview with the author, November 2011)

I observed dancers training in this highly structured way at many practices. As Lynx described, many b-boys and b-girls take some time to warm up with top rocks and stretching, and then proceeded to go through the basic categories of breaking movement, such as top rock, footwork, freezes, spins, power moves, and tricks. Some spent time working on creating and repeating choreographed sets of movements on their own or with a partner, while others spent most of the practice cyphering with other dancers. At times, dancers would videotape themselves practising, and then sit and watch the video in order to see how well they were executing their sets.

Several participants explained that, due to the incredibly physically difficult nature of b-boying, they needed to follow strict training schedules in order to maintain a certain level of technical proficiency in their dancing. For example, B-boy Prototype told me that it was hard to evolve as a dancer without intense practise:

> I've rarely seen it, a b-boy who is talented who hasn't really worked for his stuff. Rarely. Sure, some people have natural talent, but like it or not, they have to really work to get what they want (in b-boying); you don't get good from one day to the next.[58] (Prototype, interview with the author, June 2012).

Indeed, Fogarty (2012b) has noted that, especially as they get older, b-boys and b-girls must develop a "disciplined and self-regulated training regime" (p. 57).

For the most part, b-boys and b-girls used practices to train both the structure and style of the dance. For example, Cleopatra explained that, to her, reviewing of the structural elements of breaking took up a large part of her practice:

> You go back to your original form, so your techniques, your footwork... you do a checklist, kind of like a ballet bar, of all the footwork you know that you remember, that you've seen lately. You review all your vocabulary, as much as you can. (Cleopatra, interview with the author, October 2011)

However, Cleopatra added that on top of the technical part of her practising, she also spent part of her practice 'freestyling' or improvising with the different movements, and trying out a variety of stylistic interpretations of the form. She explained:

> When I go to practice I usually session, and try to tell myself to just freestyle and dance to the music and find myself in a place I've never found myself... and from that point on, where can I go that's new? (Cleopatra, interview with the author, October 2011)

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[58] Translated from French by the author: J'ai vu ça rarement un b-boy qui est talentueux pis qui n'a pas vraiment travaillé pour ses affaires. Rarement. Il y en a qui étaient vraiment talentueux, mais veut, veut pas, il fallait qu'ils travaillent vraiment pour avoir qu'est-ce qu'il veut : tu peux pas y arriver du jour au lendemain. (Prototype, interview with the author, June 2012)

Several participants made this same distinction between practising their breaking technique and 'just dancing'. Afternoon explained his logic for the two approaches:

> You can only train your technical side by doing technical stuff, and you can only train your dancing by dancing. But in the moment, you can't say to yourself 'ok I'm going to be very technical'. It doesn't happen, your brain is not wired to act like that. So whatever effort you've put working on the technical side, It's going to show when you're going crazy because your body goes into default mode and it goes into what it knows best. So if you've been working on stuff, it's going to show in the way it is delivered. (Afternoon, interview with the author, October 2011)

For Afternoon, practising his technique served his freestyling because when he went to dance in public, he would have practised his techniques so much that he would not have to think about what to do next; his body would just know what to do. Lynx agreed, stating: "Repetition is the key to everything I think, because repetition is the way that your body remembers" (Lynx, interview with the author, November 2011).

I often observed dancers at practises switching between practising their technique and practising their freestyling: for example, it was fairly common to see Bounce, who was particularly methodical in her training regime, repeatedly drilling certain freezes, footwork patterns, or power combos that she would later spontaneously integrate into her freestyle sets. Sancho told me he believed that by practising and perfecting their breaking technique, b-boys and b-girls expanded their expressive potential in freestyle moments:

> What I love about breaking is that there's no rule about how to do it in a way. It's not so academic that you have to go to school to learn it, you know? [...] At the end of the day you do what you want, you create what you want. You do what you feel like you want to, the style you want to break or the things you see that inspire you. It's not A to Z... it's more like, it's like a toolbox. For me it's almost like Photoshop: it just gives you tools. It's a tool. Photoshop gives you a base and you can do whatever you want with it. And breaking is exactly this for me: it gives a frame. It just gives you tools and you can work with this. It

gives you backspins and 6-steps and top rocks, different categories. But from that I think you can just create whatever you want, you can just mix it up. (Sancho, interview with the author, August 2012)

4.2.2.4 But What Are We Practising For?

One must wonder, though, what is all this training leading towards? Does it have a purpose or end goal? One might assume that b-boys and b-girls practise to prepare for other activities such as battles and shows. Indeed, in many of the breakdancing movies from the 1980s, we see dancers practising primarily to prepare for battles or performances. For example, *Breakin'* (Silberg, 1984), *Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo* (Firstenberg, 1984), and *Body Rock* (Epstein, 1984) all feature scenes where the main characters are practising madly to prepare for their 'big break': a battle, audition, or crucial performance opportunity. Similarly, most of the how-to-breakdance books encourage young dancers to practised in order to perfect their moves and routines for specific goals such as entering battles or mounting performances with friends to make money. But some of the dancers I spoke to said they mainly practised for fun, to keep in shape, or to spend time with friends. Some admitted they rarely performed or entered battles. Those who did enter battles did not always make it through the qualifying rounds, let alone win; others who did win often felt one should not focus on practising just for the purpose of winning a battle. For example, Vicious told me:

> I'm not a person who's going to practise for an event, and do choreographies, and say 'ok, we're going to win, and we're ready. We're really focused!' Because then for sure they are going to be so focused on wanting to win that they won't be paying attention to the music anymore... That's not me, you know?[59] (Vicious, interview with the author, July 2012)

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[59] Translated from French by the author: Moi je ne suis pas la personne qui va pratiquer pour un évènement, pis faire les chorégraphies, puis dire : « OK, On gagne, pis on est prêt. On est vraiment mindé ». Parce que là c'est sûr ils sont tellement *mindés* à vouloir gagner qu'ils portent plus attention à la musique... Ce n'est pas moi, ça, tu comprends ? (Vicious, interview with the author, July 2012)

So if the purpose of practising wasn't simply to prepare for battles, what motivated dancers to invest so much of their time in these rigorous training sessions? Some of the participants stated that they loved practising because it was less stressful than battling, and allowed them time to freestyle or improvise, and 'just dance' without any particular goal they were working towards. Indeed, several dancers told me that the unstructured moments of freestyling were the ultimate goal of breaking, and said their dancing was most fulfilling in those moments. Indeed, as De Spain (2003) has noted, for many dancers "the primary purpose of improvisation is simply to experience themselves improvising" (p. 27). So, if one considers that a large part of the goal of practising is to improve one's technique in order to gain the bodily control required for freestyling, but that in the end most of the time a b-boy or b-girl spends freestyling is in practices, then we can see that for many b-boys and b-girls, practising is actually an important social activity that exists in and of itself.

4.2.3 Cyphering

Cyphering is a social activity that b-boys and b-girls generally regard as being particularly important to their dance practice (Fogarty, 2010; Johnson, 2009; Schloss, 2009; Smith Lefebvre, 2011). As Schloss (2009) has noted, "B-boys and b-girls view the cypher with an almost mystical reverence, befitting its status as the most authentic, challenging, and raw environment for b-boying" (p. 99).

Cyphers are the circular formations in which b-boys and b-girls take turns dancing one at a time in an improvised fashion. The term comes from the word 'cipher'—which is defined both as "a secret or disguised way of writing; a code" and "a zero; a figure 0" (cipher, 2010)—that was originally imported to hip-hop culture by emcees who had adopted the philosophies and way of life of a group known as the *Nation of Gods and Earth* (NGE), or the *Five Percenters* (Johnson, 2009; Schloss, 2009; Smith Lefebvre, 2011). Johnson (2009) explains that in the NGE philosophy:

The term cipher is defined by its shape, a 360° circle. The reference to degrees is important as Five Percenters define the cipher as 120° of knowledge, 120° of wisdom, and 120° of understanding, which all carry particular meaning in their philosophy. Ciphering among Five Percenters also refers to standing or sitting in a circle and speaking with one another to 'build' intellectually among those schooled in their 'Lost-Found' lessons, which incorporate a coded use of numbers and letters. (p. 4)

Johnson (2009) notes that while the concept of cyphering in b-boy culture comes from the NGE's approach to ciphering, each should be seen as a distinct practice with its own social interactions and symbolic meaning—not to mention a different spelling. She argues that for b-boys, "cyphering refers to the act of building collectively through the back and forth exchange in the circle" (p. 5). While this concept of a back and forth exchange is central to Johnson's concept of cyphering, it should not be confused with the competitive back and forth exchange that takes place in battles; however, both spontaneous and planned battles can and often do occur in cyphers, and cyphers almost inevitably form at jams, practices, and battles.

4.2.3.1 An Activity Within an Activity: Different Kinds of Cyphers

Cyphering is an activity that occurs during other social activities; I observed dancers cyphering—and cyphered with them—in a number of different contexts, such as organized battles, practices, after-parties, club nights, on the sidewalk, and even in their own living rooms. When cyphering, I noted that the dancers were generally freestyling—or creating spontaneous runs—instead of executing clearly choreographed sets. These runs tended to be complete, but quick and to the point, with dancers paying close attention to being rhythmic in their top rocks and footwork, and executing their moves and freezes on the various accents in the music. Usually, if dancers made mistakes or did not execute a movement as expected, they did not

stop their run and walk out of the circle; rather, they tried to cover up by integrating the error into their run and creating a new transition into the next movement.[60]

At practices, cyphering tended to happen in an orderly fashion, with the dancers often establishing and following a loose order in their turn taking. For example, at one practice I attended at *Disstorsion*, there were three different cyphers that dancers were practising in along the length of the room. Due to the limited space available in the room, once the dancers had decided which circle they were practising in, they did not tend to jump around the room to different circles, but stayed in that one cypher with that one group of dancers for the duration of the practice. This ensured that any given b-boy or b-girl did not monopolize the floor time, and that all dancers got to take turns in a fair and orderly fashion.

Of course, cyphers were not always so orderly in practices: some dancers— impatient for their turn to dance—liked to hop from cypher to cypher, stealing turns whenever they saw the chance. Dancers who did not respect the unspoken rules of space sharing were usually either the most highly skilled or experienced dancers in the group—whom the others often deferred to out of respect—or newer, less experienced b-boys and b-girls that did not yet understand the etiquette of sharing confined dance spaces. While more experienced dancers were usually left alone and allowed to set the tone for a given circle or practice by dancing where and when they pleased, the less experienced ones were sometimes told to wait their turn, called out in spontaneous battles, or even cut out of cyphers by the other dancers closing ranks and not giving the intruder time or space to jump in.

At jams or organized competitions, cyphering was much more spontaneous, and could happen at any moment during the event when dancers came together in a

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[60] Several dancers referred to this process as 'crash and create'. For a better understanding of this concept, see Fogarty, Moss, and Patuelli (2012).

circle to dance. It tended to occur more between rounds at competitions, but some dancers were uninterested in watching battles, and continued to cypher throughout the night, away from the main action in the corners of the room. Cyphering might begin when group of dancers actively chose to form a circle together in the middle of a given space, or when a single b-boy or b-girl decided to get down and others gathered around to see what is happening and get in on the action.

For example, at *Can I Get a Soul Clap*, a competition in April 2012, I was standing on the side of the room with Benni, a French Canadian b-boy in his late twenties, when he started top rocking casually on a break between the battles. As he finished his set, he looked at me and gestured as if to suggest it was my turn to dance. I accepted the invitation, and jumped into the space between us, top rocking before I dropped down to the floor. Soon, b-girls Radio and DangerVic walked over and joined us, and the four of us formed a circle on the side of the room near the bar. By the time I went in to dance a second time, a half dozen b-boys and one more b-girl had joined the circle, ready to take their turns. After watching a few more rounds, I decided it was time to see what else was going on in the room and left my spot on the periphery of the circle. By then, more dancers had joined the cypher, and everyone's attention was fixed on the action in the centre of the circle; nobody noticed my departure from the group, and the cypher continued without me. As Schloss (2009) has observed: "The cypher's very informality and transience are part of its power; it appears when and where it is needed, then melts away" (p. 99).

Additionally, the cyphers at competitions were generally more urgent than in practices; dancers seemed more eager to jump in quickly after each other, almost as if the competitive environment spurred dancers to actively fight for their chance to dance. For example, at *Le Centipede* in March 2012, dancers began cyphering the moment the preliminary round of battles ended and the host called for a break. The most eager dancers flooded the centre of the room, forming a tight-knit circle around

the area where the battles had been taking place; the dancers in this cypher were mainly veteran dancers of the scene and their students. The energy here was intense and the rounds were short, with a new b-boy jumping into the cypher almost before the last one had finished his set. There was no organization to the turn taking as there was at the practice cyphers I described earlier; dancers took turns when they felt inspired to do so, and were confident enough to claim the dance floor before someone else did. Often, two dancers would try to enter at the same time, and there would be a moment of uncertainty as to who was going to claim the space; ultimately the faster and more assertive b-boy would claim his turn in the cypher, forcing the other to step back and wait for another opportunity to dance. In one of these instances, two dancers bumped into each other and faltered for a second, uncertain as to whom would continue. Bounce, the lone female dancer participating in the cypher, took advantage of their momentary hesitation and dove straight into the center of the circle with a round of footwork, thus successfully stealing the round from both of them. The on-looking dancers cheered, applauding her quick thinking and confidence.

More than once over the course of the evening at *Le Centipede*, I observed b-boys and b-girls unsuccessfully attempting to take a turn in the heated, main cypher, only to be cut off by other dancers who were more assertive or faster to claim the space. Those who could not get into the cypher either accepted the role of observers of this central cypher, or eventually gave up and moved away to form new cyphers around the sides of the room. I moved over to one of these side cyphers where a group of b-girls were dancing. At first, the energy here was a bit less aggressive; I had the impression that this cypher was more an equal exchange between friends than a showcasing of skills by each individual dancer. However, when a few younger b-boys joined the group—perhaps thinking that it would be easier to take turns in a cypher made up mostly of women—the b-girls sped up the pace at which they jumped into their freestyles, overlapping the ends of each other's runs as if to prevent the b-boys from invading their space.

Sometimes at battles, the further away a cypher was from the centre of the room, the more relaxed it seemed to be. For example, at *Bragging Rights*, a competition at the Downtown YMCA in January 2013, a group of dancers were practising at a leisurely pace in the lobby, taking turns trying out moves without worrying about putting them into the context of a complete set. One of these lobby dancers, an Asian b-boy in his early 20s, told me he was just staying warm for his next battle, and that he did not want to 'waste' any of his good moves or sets by jumping into one of the more heated cyphers. He explained that if he tried to dance in one of the cyphers in the main room, he might get swept up in the excitement of the exchange and end up doing moves he intended to save for the competition.

4.2.3.2 A Place to Face One's Fears and One's Self

Osumare (2002) has proposed that the spontaneous, improvisational quality of b-boying makes it the perfect site for the expression and negotiation of self in the present moment. This is particularly true in cyphering practices, where b-boys and b-girls must spontaneously draw from the body of implicit knowledge and movement techniques they have acquired through years of training every time they step in the cypher. Many of the dancers I interviewed agreed with this notion, and believed that cyphering allowed them to express themselves in a pure and deeply personal manner. For example, Dr. Step explained that in a cypher:

> A b-boy doesn't think: he reacts. If you think, you don't feel good, so you have to assimilate and react to what your body has to say. So I had to become one with me... the only thing I have to do is be one with me, and my next movement is going to be me, *not just recreating what someone else does. I had to walk my own walk. It's ok to be inspired [by others], but be yourself.*[61] (Dr. Step, interview with the author, October 2011)

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[61] Section in italics translated from French by the author: Pas genre récréer ce que quelqu'un d'autre fait... marche comme que toi tu marches... tu peux être inspiré [par les autres] mais reste toi-même. (Dr. Step, interview with the author, October 2011)

As Smith Lefebvre (2011) has observed, however, the cypher is also a site where "an individual confronts inner demons, publicly testing and releasing the self *under the watchful gaze of the community*" (p. 73, italics added by the author). As such, cyphering can be intimidating, as it becomes a site where b-boys and b-girls must not only face their fears, but also be vulnerable in front of their peers and opponents alike. Indeed, while most of the dancers I interviewed told me they believed that cyphering was the ultimate expression of b-boying, many also told me that it caused them stress at times: the pressure of having to spontaneously create a run that was original, dynamic, and to the music—all while their peers and opponents were watching—could be a daunting and impossible task. As Johnson (2009) has observed that in cyphers there may be "unseen forces, manifesting on the surrounding bodies as tension, frustration, and anger that hampered one breaker's dancing and incited others" (p. 10).

Several b-boys and b-girls confided that they at times worried that others were judging them—and their dancing—as they watched from the sidelines. A few even suggested that this fear of 'messing up' or the pressure of wanting to do 'something good' had at times prevented them from cyphering in public situations. In fact, on more than one occasion I noticed a less experienced b-boy and b-girl stop cyphering once a more skilled or highly respected dancer joined the circle they were dancing in—even in informal situations such as practices.

It is interesting to note, however, that while several dancers expressed they at times feared they were being judged by the community when they cyphered, I rarely observed dancers passing explicit negative judgment on each other in these non-competitive social interactions. On the contrary, I found that b-boys and b-girls were generally either supportive of each other, or simply non-reactive towards another dancer's rounds. Despite the competitive nature of b-boying, and the fact that heated

confrontations are not uncommon at jams and battles, I only heard b-boys specifically booing or explicitly putting down another dancer in a cypher three times over the course of my fieldwork. As several b-boys and b-girls explained to me, perhaps most of the worry about judgment came not from the community but in fact from a person's own insecurities about his or her own dancing. By participating in cyphers, b-boys and b-girls learn not only to express themselves through their dance, but also learn to see their dancing—and ultimately themselves—as their peers do. As such, cyphering allows b-boys and b-girls to develop a deeper understanding of themselves, and acquire unique expressive strategies that may help them overcome fear and self-doubt, even in non-dancing situations. As Smith Lefebvre (2011) explains:

> Interpersonal relationships situated in a raw b-boy cipher have the potential to become a resource for b-youth to foster more meaningful relationships with themselves, rather than a context whereby they concentrate solely on absorbing and deepening prevailing cultural practices. (p. 76)

4.2.3.3 Cyphering: Dance to Express, Not to Impress

Stevens (2008) has proposed that cyphering is the activity where the participatory nature of b-boying is most evident; as opposed to organized battles or stage performances where the spatial or compositional structure of the dance might be altered to suit the needs of a non-dancing public, cyphering is "a dance between dancers, not intended to be seen on stage, as a performance" (Stevens, in Smith Lefebvre, 2011, p. 71). Indeed, many of the b-boys and b-girls I interviewed believed that the purpose of cyphering was to express one's 'self' and exchange with other b-boys and b-girls—and not to impress non-dancing spectators.

This distinction between dancing to express and dancing to impress was noted by some of the participants as another difference between b-boying and breakdancing. For example, Bourrik explained:

> A b-boy who goes to a regular [non-b-boying] party, he won't show off. I honestly think that a real b-boy won't go on the rooftops and

scream 'I'm a b-boy!!' Because he knows deep down in himself that he's a b-boy, so he doesn't really need to impress people. Whereas a breakdancer, he'll show up somewhere... and if he has the occasion to show off, he will. If there's a couple of girls, or some people watching him, if he can show off, he will. But why would you do that in people's faces? Because b-boying is based on exchange. So if you go somewhere and no one is dancing, what's the point of dancing? It's to impress. You're just dancing like a show off. But it's really not the place for that. You understand? It's really not the place for that.[62] (Bourrik, interview with the author, July 2012)

For Bourrik, b-boying in general, and cyphering specifically, was about expressing himself to his community, and exchanging energy with his fellow b-boys and b-girls. As such, he saw dancing in 'regular' or non-breaking situations to show off or impress other people as 'breakdancing'. Several of the participants echoed this statement; although she did not explicitly use the words 'b-boying' and 'breakdancing', Lynx told me: "there's the scene that's about doing spectacular stuff, and then there's the scene of people that are into real expression and dancing" (Lynx, interview with the author, November 2011). Lynx went on to explain that cyphering was a more suitable mode of communication than battling was for those who were focused on expressing something through their dance, because "there's no way of categorizing that value [in a competitive setting]. Like... who can get the prize for the most expression?" (Lynx, interview with the author, November 2011)

It is important to note, however, that just because some of the dancers I spoke to valued self-expression over trying to impress others with their dancing, it did not

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[62] Translated from French by the author: Un b-boy qui va dans une fête normale, il ne va pas show-off. Moi je pense sincèrement qu'un vrai b-boy, il ne va pas crier sur les toits que « je suis un b-boy ». Parce qu'il sait au fond de lui-même qu'il est un b-boy, il ne va pas vraiment essayer d'épater le monde. Alors qu'un breakdancer il va arriver quelque part, il va peut-être pas le dire mais s'il a l'occasion de show-off, il va le faire. Si y'a deux trois filles, y'a du monde qui le regarde, s'il peut show-off il va le faire. Pourquoi tu le ferais en face des gens ? Parce que le b-boying c'est basé sur l'échange. Tu vas dans une place où y'a personne qui danse, c'est quoi le but de danser ? Tu commences à danser comme le show off. Tu comprends, c'est pas vraiment la place pour ça. (Bourrik, interview with the author, July 2012)

mean that they wanted their expression to go unrecognized. As Stevens (2008) has noted: "Breaking is not a dance of anonymity, it is a dance of spectacle; it is a dance to be seen, of individualism, of display of one's virtuosity" (p. 175). Several b-boys and b-girls mentioned that one of the reasons they felt that cyphering was the ultimate experience in b-boying was that it afforded them the opportunity for their expression to be witnessed by their community. Additionally, some of them felt that as they waited their turns to dance on the sidelines of a cypher, they supported other dancers' expression of self by acting as witnesses of this expression. Thus, we see that cyphering is an activity that feeds both the dancer and the observer—as well as the community—through the improvised act of dancing.

4.2.4 Battling

Battling is probably the social activity associated with b-boying that is most accessible to cultural outsiders: unlike practices that usually take place in smaller or semi-private events only attended by b-boys and b-girls or other members of the hip-hop community, and cyphers that are hard to get in on if you aren't dancing, battles often take place at outdoor festivals or on stages at formal competitions that are open to the general public.

4.2.4.1 Battle Formats

Battles happen in a number of different ways: they can be organized, judged competitions that dancers must officially sign up for to participate in; 'call-outs', wherein one dancer or crew challenges another to a face off; or, spontaneous battles that take place in the cyphers at jams or competitions. Dancers could face each other one-on-one, in duos, trios, or crew versus crew, either for cash prizes or simply for 'bragging rights'—or the pleasure of saying that you are the winner. In organized competitions, the battle is divided into rounds. Here, the 'call and response' nature of b-boying is obvious: one dancer goes in and executes a run that the next dancer must respond to in some way, either by matching the first dancer in his or her style and

moves, or offering up something completely different. However, in a spontaneous battle, it is more a case of 'call and response and response and response', with dancers continually trying to outshine the b-boy or b-girl who passed before them.

Organized competitions generally charged an entrance fee of between five and thirty dollars; the money collected at the door helped pay the winner's prize, the judges' salaries, the cost of renting the location where the competition was held, and the promoter's fees. For the most part, these battles followed an elimination format similar to that in sporting events: if too many competitors entered, there was a preliminary round to choose the top sixteen or top eight contestants. The chosen contestants then faced off against an opponent in a battle that was either timed, or set up so that each dancer or team got a certain number of rounds each—generally between one and three. The judges chose a winner, who moved on to the next round to battle again. Competitors were eliminated until only two remained, who then faced each other in the finals. The winner of this final round was officially declared the winner of the competition, and awarded a cash prize, a trophy, or clothing from sponsors.

An exception to this usual set up was the 'Seven to Smoke' battle format, which was used at *Tales From the Breaks* in November 2012 and the *South Flavour Jam* in April 2013. In a Seven to Smoke, one dancer took the 'winner' position and the seven others lined up as challengers on the other side of the dance space. The dancer at the front of the line danced to challenge the dancer in the winner's spot; the dancer in the winner's spot responded with his or her round. The judges voted as to whom had won the round: if the challenger lost, he or she moved to the back of the line and the next challenger came forward to battle the dancer in the winner's seat. If the challenger won, he or she took the winner's spot, and the defeated winner went to the back of the challengers' line, and the next challenger stepped forward to battle the

new winner. This cycle continued until a given dancer had won seven rounds, at which point he or she was declared the winner and the battle was over.

4.2.4.2 Judging

The judges at organized competitions were usually either veteran dancers from the Montreal community, or guest celebrity b-boys from out of town that the event organizer had invited (and paid) to come. Some event organizers try to be 'fair' and invite judges from different crews or who specialized in different aspects of the dance—for example, there might be one dancer who specializes in footwork and musicality, and another who specializes in power. Others simply invited judges that they liked and respected, or judges who were well enough known to attract b-boys and b-girls to the jam. Either way, most judging systems seemed to be completely subjective and based on the individual preferences of the person judging: none of the battles I attended over the course of my fieldwork followed any sort of set judging systems that looked for specific or fixed criteria. Rather, most of the battles relied on what one dancer jokingly referred to as the 'point' system: on the count of three, each judge simply pointed to the dancer whom he or she thought had won.[63] Generally, organizers tried to have an odd number of judges to avoid ties, but when ties did occur, each team was given an additional round in order to determine the winner.

Of course, b-boys and b-girls often complain about the subjective nature of judging, sometimes claiming they had been 'robbed' if they felt they had not moved forward in a round because the judges had a bias against them or their style of dancing. At a few events, organizers responded to these complaints and tested out alternative judging systems: for example, at the *Afternoon Jam* in May 2012, it was the other competitors who decided who had won during one round, and the audience who voted for the winner in the next. At *Tales From the Breaks* in October 2012, the

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[63] This approach to judging is also discussed by Fogarty (2010).

b-boys and b-girls in the audience were asked to vote for a winner of a round when the judges called a tie. B-boy Dingo told me he had tried out a number of different judging systems at the battles he had organized over the years; once he had even tried letting dancers judge whether they felt they had won or not (Dingo, interview with the author, December 2011). However, none of these alternative approaches to judging had been particularly successful, and the three judge 'point' system remained the judging approach most commonly used in Montreal.

4.2.4.3 Friend or Foe?

At times, battles could be friendly encounters between respectful opponents: for example, in the top rock finals at *Juste Debout Montreal* in January 2012, the two competitors—Samo and Lady C—were smiling and seemed much more like old friends than bitter rivals as they battled to see who would win first place. Another example of this kind of friendly competition was at a practice I attended at *Café Graffiti* in August 2012: B-boy Omegatron asked all the dancers present to partake in challenging a b-boy who was celebrating his birthday that day to a battle. The young b-boy was turning twenty-one, and Omegatron said he had to do his 'birthday rounds', meaning he had to battle the other dancers present for twenty-one rounds, or one for every year of his age. I joined the rest of the dancers present, and we formed a cypher where the young dancer faced us one after another in this friendly but intense competition. By the end, he was exhausted but happy that he had accomplished his task, and his fellow dancers applauded him for accepting the challenge.

Other times, battles became heated clashes between aggressive rivals. For example, at *Tales From the Breaks*, a spontaneous battle erupted between members of *Legz Crew* and *Sweet Technique* before the competition had even formally started. Both crews were dancing in the same cypher when two dancers began taunting and egging each other on for a reason that was unknown to me. Quickly, everyone else stopped dancing, letting the two b-boys take each other on in this raw cypher battle.

However, after a few rounds, tempers flared as the two dancers continued to jeer each other, and for a moment it seemed like this raw cypher battle might actually lead to a physical altercation between the two groups. In an attempt to diffuse the situation, Vicious grabbed my hand and pulled me into the cypher, twirling me around in a couple of salsa steps before letting go and motioning for me to take my turn. His plan worked: introducing a new (female) dancer to the cypher neutralized the intense and competitive vibe that had appeared so quickly between the two crews. By the time B-boy Skywalker—the event organizer—made it over to the circle to see what was happening, the battle was over and dancers were back to cyphering in a more relaxed fashion.

4.2.3.4 Stage Battles or Cypher Battles? A Question of Taste

Battling was the social interaction of b-boying upon which dancers in this study had the most diverse and at times conflicting opinions. For example, some believed that battling, not cyphering, was the purest form of expression for a b-boy or b-girl. Alien Ness explained to me that this was true for him when he started breaking in New York City in the 1980s:

> In my days it wasn't all cyphers, that's a misconception. 'Oh, cyphers is the real shit', and 'the real b-boying happens in the cyphers'... no, the real BATTLES happen in the cyphers. Yes, the real battles. And the real b-boying is the battle. In my day there was no such thing as a cypher. If I went to a party and I got down, you would never see another dude walk up to me like 'Yo! You break? I break! What's your name?? My name's is such and such! Let's break together! Let's go cypher!!' No! Back in the days, if one person went down, he got praised. If by chance there was another b-boy in the room that was not his crew, it was that b-boy's duty to smoke whatever was in front of him. So when the other b-boy would come out, there was no clapping... there was more the crowd looking at the first b-boy, going OOOHHHHHHH!! It didn't even matter if he was better than the other b-boy. To come out after another b-boy, in the eyes of everybody— even the non-b-boys, just the regular people at the parties and the jams, even in their eyes—somebody coming out after somebody else was a direct challenge. (Alien Ness, interview with the author, July 2011)

While most of the b-boys and b-girls I spoke to agreed that battling was essential to their dance practice, many disagreed as to the format and context in which these competitions should take place. Some felt it was important to focus on entering organized battles, and told me they tried to travel to national or international competitions whenever possible in order to build a name for themselves and 'represent' their crew and city as much as possible. Others, however, felt that the 'real' battles went down in the cyphers at jams and after parties, not on the stages at organized competitions. Several b-boys and b-girls also noted that participating in organized battles was a very different experience than participating in cypher battles. Alien Ness reflected as to why organized battles and cypher battles seemed different:

> In a contest, your opponent ain't really your opponent. It's just somebody that got picked out of a hat at the same time as you. Really. Nine times out of ten, it's the same people you chill with at the practice spot. In a contest, it's really about the judges. I mean... I still do it with the battle mind state, you know? Where it LOOKS like it's me and my opponent, but it's really me and the judges. The only time it's me and my opponent is in a cypher. When there are no judges. It's just me and him. I don't even care what the crowd thinks. It's going on. My opponent knows what's going on. That's all that matters. (Alien Ness, interview with the author, July 2011)

For Alien Ness, his focal point and intention was different in a stage battle and a cypher battle. Similarly, many of the participants said that battling was different in the two contexts, and that it was difficult to excel at both. For example, Bourrik told me he preferred cypher battles, and explained that his experience at a competition that had tried to combine both cypher and stage battling had only re-enforced his belief that the two were completely different practices. He explained:

> The competition was on two days: the first day was the qualification, and the second was the big competition. And the second day went very badly [for me]. But the first day, it went really well. But the two days were completely different; the context wasn't the same. The first day... it was in a in a cypher, it was in a circle... you had to fight just to get in. There was an exchange [between dancers] and it was

serious. And this went on for a number of hours, so you really had to go for it. And that night I really felt like a b-boy, because I was being myself, I went in when I wanted to go in. If the music told me to do something, I did it.

But the next day, it was totally different. The next day it was like, there was lighting, ok they call a dancer. 'You, come!' Then we call another dancer, 'you, come! And be quick!' This battle the next day was a stage battle. And that second day, I didn't dance well; I wasn't comfortable. And the people who won, who danced well the second day, they were the ones who danced poorly the first day. It's funny because the dancers who danced well the first day, they all lost the second day, all of them.

And afterwards, I was talking with the dancers; we could see that some dancers were more comfortable with certain types of competitions than others. Each person can have a different vision, but I really felt like a real b-boy [the first day]; there were no cameras, I don't have a video of that night, but I know that I danced like crazy; everyone said so. And from the scores, I was in the top three. But the next day, I was in 16th place. And honestly, I felt even more like a b-boy when I could admit to myself: 'so what?' I didn't win the battle, but I know that I ripped it. I danced, I expressed myself, I did what I needed to do, and that's that. At the end of the day, we are all dancers, we respect each other, and we exchanged something. And that battle inspired me: it inspired me to concentrate on competitions that are like the first day. I really learned that [in b-boying] there are certain things I like, that are more important to me than others.[64]
(Bourrik, interview with the author, August 2012)

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[64] Translated from French by the author: La compétition était sur deux jours, le premier jour c'était genre qualifications, le deuxième jour c'était la grosse compétition. Et le deuxième jour ça s'est mal passé. Mais le premier jour, ça s'est super bien passé. Mais les deux jours étaient complètement différents, le contexte n'était pas le même. Le premier jour... c'était dans un cypher, c'était dans un cercle... c'était très dur parce que c'était dans un cercle, fallait se battre pour rentrer, y'avait un échange et puis c'était sérieux. Et puis c'était pendant un nombre d'heures, donc fallait vraiment y'aller à fond. Et dans cette soirée-là, je me suis vraiment senti comme un b-boy, parce que j'étais moi-même, je rentrais quand j'avais envie de rentrer, la musique me disait de faire quelque chose, je faisais quelque chose. Le lendemain, c'était totalement différent. Le lendemain c'était genre : grosse lumière, ok on appelle un danseur, toi, viens. On appelle l'autre danseur : « toi, viens... » et tout de suite! C'était un stage *battle*. Et le deuxième jour, j'ai mal dansé, je n'étais pas confortable. Les gens qui ont gagné, les gens qui ont très bien performé le deuxième jour, c'est eux qui ont très mal performé le premier jour. C'est drôle, parce que la plupart des danseurs qui ont très bien performé le premier jour, ils ont tous perdu le deuxième jour. Tous. Tous tous tous tous. Et après, je parlais avec les danseurs, on voyait qu'il y a quand même des danseurs qui sont plus confortables avec un type de compétition que d'autres.

To Bourrik, there was something less raw, and less authentic, about organized stage battles. Some of the participants echoed this statement, and felt specifically that larger battles where most of the spectators would be non-dancers were too 'commercial', or somehow less authentic and not connected to hip-hop culture. For example, Scramblelock explained:

> Nowadays, you have all different levels of events. You could have a local event showcasing amateurs like younger talent, people who are just starting out in the scene. You could go to an event mixing both; you would have high level and younger level. You could have an event that's purely international, having guests come in for different events. And now even within the b-boy scene, you're seeing different levels of maybe what you would call 'realness'. Right? Or, that, that rawness of it. Because you can go to big events that are filled with street dancers but still has some commercial aspect to it. Or you can go to a local jam that's put on by somebody in a gym, or somebody in a club, like something small, and you might think 'oh, that's raw, that's real'. (Scramblelock, interview with the author, March 2012)

Some of the b-boys and b-girls I interviewed echoed this statement, and recounted battle experiences that they felt were less 'real' or 'raw' as Scramblelock put it. For instance, Cleopatra recounted the first battle she had ever done, where the spectators—and even competitors—had been asked to sit down in order to make it easier for the audience to watch:

> We were wearing a number, so when we went in they would know our names and say 'Oh, this is Cleopatra'. It was a circle. The judges were behind. They were behind on chairs, and everyone was sitting. I just remember everyone sitting, like at least three, four rows of people sitting.

Chaque personne a sa vision différente, mais moi je me suis vraiment senti un vrai b-boy (la première journée)... Puis y'avait pas de caméra, je n'ai aucune vidéo de cette soirée, mais je sais que j'ai dansé comme un fou et tout le monde me l'a dit et puis parmi les scores j'étais parmi les trois premiers. Et puis le lendemain j'étais le 16e. Puis justement, je me sentais encore plus b-boy quand j'ai pu admettre que : « *and so what ?* » Je n'ai pas gagné le *battle*, mais je sais que j'ai tout déchiré. J'ai dansé, je me suis exprimé, j'ai fait ce que j'avais à faire, puis je pense que c'est ça. À la fin de la journée on est tous des danseurs, on se respecte, on a échangé et puis ce *battle*-là m'a inspiré, ça m'a inspiré à me concentrer sur des trucs, à des compétitions qui sont plus du style de la première journée. Donc là maintenant j'ai vraiment vu que y'a des choses que j'aime, qui sont plus importantes pour moi que d'autres. (Bourrik, interview with the author, August 2012)

And then there were people lined up along the bar, cause it was small. And then... yeah... it wasn't like one after the other, like one [dancer] would go in and then they'd sit. [Laughs] And there'd be a large gap and someone else decided to go in. I remember one of my sets, that I was totally facing them [the judges] like I was doing a show; it was kind of funny. (Cleopatra, interview with the author, October 2011)

It is interesting to note that Cleopatra felt that the competition was more like a show than a battle; additionally, she remembered that she had not been freestyling but had actually choreographed all her set. Here we can see a link between these larger, commercial competitions and the differences between b-boying and breakdancing that were discussed in section 4.1.1. As we saw, many of the participants felt that breakdancing was more frontal in spacing, favoured spectacular movements, was choreographed rather than improvised, and presentational instead of participatory. And although no one I spoke to actually said that these bigger commercial events were examples of 'breakdancing', many of the participants felt they were somehow not 'real' representations of b-boying. As such, one could argue that at a smaller, underground event, one might see a better representation of what the participants viewed as 'b-boying', while a larger commercial event might be an ideal place to see a live version of what they viewed as 'breakdancing'.

In the end, however they felt about battles—and whatever context they preferred to battle in—almost all the dancers I spoke to said that they thought that like it or not, battling was a central social interaction of b-boying that had taught them more about their dancing and themselves than simply taking classes, practising, or even cyphering could. As Fogarty (2010) has noted, "battles push people to improve continually and raise the bar" (p. 283). Similarly, I am arguing that it is the competitive nature of breaking that keeps it fresh and forces dancers to be innovative with their individual interpretations and expressions of the dance form. In many ways, it is battling—and the desire to be and do one's best—that keeps dancers in the

Montreal breaking scene on their toes, and motivates them to continually work on innovating and perfecting their art form.

4.2.5 Non-Dancing Interactions

I asked Lazy Legs to walk me through what happened at a battle, and he told me this:

> The battle only lasts five minutes, but you're actually in the battle or in the event for four hours or more. And that's what the culture is all about. That's where you have to understand the culture to be able to enjoy an event at that magnitude, where there's hundreds of cyphers everywhere you go. Because for an outsider, they're going just to watch the event... that's one thing. But to actually enjoy the whole experience I think you have to understand why you're enjoying it. (Lazy Legs, interview with the author, August 2012)

Lazy Legs went on to list a number of activities to me that he felt were central to battling—and b-boying for that matter—none of which directly involved dancing, such as: travelling to new places, meeting new people, waiting in line-ups, having conversations with other dancers, and going for dinner after jams.

Over the course of my fieldwork, I often observed b-boys and b-girls engaging in these non-dancing interactions. For example, after practices or battles, dancers often went out to a restaurant or back to someone in the group's house, either to eat or—in the case of older dancers—to grab a drink and socialize. These social moments could be a chance for crewmates to catch up, or for b-boys and b-girls from different crews to get to know each other off the dance floor. Of course, as might be expected, b-boys and b-girls do spend an enormous amount of their social time discussing b-boying: past battles were reviewed and analyzed, information about the history of the dance shared, personal stories swapped, and musical preferences or other opinions on various aspects of the dance were discussed and debated, at times into the wee hours of the morning. However, conversations that sometimes started

about b-boying often lead to other topics, such as personal goals and aspirations, difficult life choices, spiritual beliefs, and artistic or aesthetic visions.

Most of the dancers I interviewed felt that a number of these kinds of non-dancing activities and conversations were essential elements of b-boying; for many, it was non-dancing activities that contributed to their sense that b-boying was not simply a dance form that they practised, but in fact their culture and way of life. In many of the interviews, it was clear that the participants viewed b-boying as much more than just a dance form; rather, they saw it as a process by which they learned about themselves, built friendships, and deepened their connection to their community. For example, Vicious told me of a trip he had taken to Toronto, not for a battle but just to visit and hang out with some of his crewmates who lived there:

> It wasn't for a competition; it was really just to spend time with them, because we wanted to. Usually, I'll go up for the weekend with the boys, but it's because there's a jam. So we arrive on Friday and then the jam's on Saturday, and we go to the jam. In a jam, it's different: there's lots of people, you're not just with your boys. So we said, I'll come for a week, and we'll just chill and have fun. We went to the beach, to restaurants, we went out to break in bars, and we had the best time in the cyphers. It was the best, you know? We were just vibing. I didn't win a competition or anything, but I feel like my dancing evolved.[65] (Vicious, interview with the author, August 2012)

As can be seen in his statement, Vicious felt that his dancing had improved simply by spending time with his crewmates and bonding with them. Similarly, Afternoon told me that he made efforts to hang out with his crewmates outside of

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[65] Translated from French by the author: Ce n'était pas pour aucune compétition ; c'était vraiment juste pour passer du temps avec, parce que c'est ça qu'on voulait. Normalement, j'y vais une fin de semaine avec les boys mais c'est à cause qu'il y a un *jam*. Fait que là comme vendredi on arrive, le *jam* c'est samedi, pis on va au jam. Dans un *jam*, c'est différent ; il y a plein de monde, Tu n'es pas vraiment juste avec tes boys. Genre, on s'est dit « on vient une semaine là, on va juste chiller », on va s'amuser ; pis on est allé à la plage, dans les restaurants, on a fait du break dans des bars, pis c'étaient les meilleurs moments dans les cyphers. C'était le *best*, tu sais? On était en train de *viber*. Je n'ai pas gagné aucune compétition, mais ma danse elle a évolué, tu comprends ?
(Vicious, interview with the author, August 2012).

simply going to practices and events because when it came time to battle, they had to know they could count on each other for support:

> We have crew get togethers... just us getting together, either going out to dance, go see a movie, just spending time together. I believe that's what creates a bond between us. Cause yeah, we work hard and we practise, but we're friends. So I can't be like 'yeah you're my friend, but I don't have time to spend with you we just practice and then that's it!' We spend time together. If someone has an issue, we're gonna help him out. For example, when someone from the crew was moving [to a new apartment] everyone went and helped lend a helping hand. Stuff like that. (Afternoon, interview with the author, March 2012).

Like Vicious and Afternoon, many of the dancers I interviewed noted the importance of building friendships or family-like bonds between crewmembers, since they felt that it ultimately improved the way the group danced together and helped them win battles. As B-boy Tyquan, vice-president of the *Mighty Zulu Kingz*, explained when asked how his crew was able to win so many high level competitions:

> It's that family chemistry that lets us do that. I've seen a lot of crews, super crews as they call it, where it's a bunch of high skill people that enter battles together, but there's no chemistry there. You can have a superstar crew but if there's no chemistry, it's not gonna work out. You've gotta have the same minded type of people with a certain chemistry in order to form like Voltron [laughs]. (Tyquan, in Simard, Hodac, Martinez, and Martinez Jr., 2012, p. 6)

As such, we can see that the non-dancing interactions that take place in b-boying are not just a matter of hanging out and having fun, but rather integral to building both the personal skills and group dynamics needed to survive in this highly competitive dance community. As Maida put it, "It's the part I like, the community aspect... you know that everyone will still be talking to each other after the battle even if we were all frustrated before [laughs]" (Maida, interview with the author, April 2011).[66]

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[66] Translated from French by the author: C'est ça que j'aime, le côté communauté... tu sais que tout le monde va encore se parler après le *battle* même si tout le monde était frustré avant [rires]. (Maida, interview with the author, April 2011)

4.2.5.1 B-boys or E-boys? B-boying in the Age of the Internet

In today's age of tech savvy, Web 2.0 social media users, it would be impossible to deny that the Internet has become a site of social interaction for b-boys and b-girls around the globe. As Fogarty (2010) has argued: "b-boy forums, blogs and websites have allowed newer dancers to become introduced to aspects of the culture" (p. 290). Similarly, Kong (2010) has argued that "on-line b-boy forums have... become instrumental in connecting dancers from around the world in conversation with each other and allowing them to discuss questions pertinent to the continuation of their art form" (p. 30). Indeed, Tyquan explained that the *Mighty Zulu Kingz* rely heavily on Internet modes of communication such as Facebook and Skype to keep in touch with their one hundred and thirty five members around the world (Tyquan, in Simard et al., 2012, p. 4).

All of the participants in this study engaged in some sort of Internet interactions that were associated to their dancing. For example, as was discussed in section 4.2.1, some of the participants had initially been introduced to b-boying—and even begun to learn how to do the dance—through the Internet. I also noted that b-boys and b-girls in Montreal frequently engaged in Internet discussions—either on message boards, YouTube channels, or Facebook groups—to talk about the history of the city's scene, post footage from their recent show or battles, or give their opinions on various topics relating to the local, national, or international breaking scene.

What is perhaps most interesting about these virtual interactions is that, while face-to-face conversations usually took place between friends or at least friendly acquaintances, online debates involved dancers who might never interact in person. As such, opinions here often diverged, and much like in cyphers or battles, these discussions could become heated. For example, following the *South Flavour Jam* in April 2013, an anonymous YouTube user posted a video putting down one of the

dancers whose crew had made it to the top 16.[67] A b-boy posted the link to the MTL B-boying group on Facebook, and a debate unfolded over what some dancers saw as preferential treatment from the judges towards certain dancers or styles of dancing. Others saw the video as a simple case of certain b-boys being sore losers, and felt that putting down other dancers online only caused problems and divided the scene. Regardless of how they felt on the subject, dozens of b-boys and b-girls chimed in on the conversation, leaving hundreds of comments on the post over the next two days.

Kong (2010) has argued that: "despite the facility of communication these on-line communities have afforded b-boys around the world, they are still no replacement for the pure physical connection between breakers in the traditional community space" (p. 31). Similarly, some of the dancers I spoke to felt it was best to ignore Internet debates, referring to dancers who posted on message boards but never battled or came out to jams as 'e-boys'[68] 'breakdancers', or 'fake' b-boys. This is perhaps in part because, as Frith (1986) has argued, popular cultures have historically valued face-to-face contact over mediated contact; here, he proposes, "the implication is that technology is somehow false or falsifying" (p. 265). Frith argues that technology is perceived not only as opposed to nature, but also as being opposed to community, and the very notion of art itself. Thus, much like with media representations of breakdancing from the 1980s, we understand that for some b-boys and b-girls, Internet manifestations of their dance form are seen as false or inauthentic.

Fogarty (2010), however, has noted, "the Internet has enabled participants who have not had an opportunity to tour or travel a forum to have their voice heard" (p. 290). Similarly, some of the b-boys and b-girls I interviewed felt that online discussions and interactions were important to the community since they brought issues in the scene to light, and gave newer or younger dancers a chance to voice their

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[67] This user removed the video from YouTube the next day.

[68] Fogarty (2010) and Kong (2010) also note the use of this term.

opinions in a public forum. And while much of the discussion that went on in Internet debates did simply dissolve into dancers 'trash talking' or insulting each other, some b-boys and b-girls did manage to make good points, and offered constructive suggestions on how to improve the Montreal breaking scene.

Either way, it is important to note that Internet debates were one of the only ways that many dancers from different or rival crews had of interacting directly with each other off of the dance floor, and thus ultimately contributed to the flow and sharing of knowledge within the community. Additionally, considering these virtual spaces as sites of b-boy interactions gave a sense of the enormous number of dancers in Montreal who practised b-boying within their own social group, but might not always come out to all the bigger jams or events, as well as the diversity of opinions that existed in regards to the dance.

Additionally, it is important to remember that Internet discussions are not face-to-face conversations that after the fact exist only in the memories of those people who were present at the time of the discussion. Rather, Internet conversations become records or visual artifacts of the Montreal breaking community that can be revisited and reviewed over time. In many ways, the Internet provides the only visual and text based traces of b-boying, whose history still exists primarily in an oral tradition. This is significant when we consider that there is, as McRobbie (1984) has argued, a "deep imbrication between visual texts and lived experience" (p. 141). Even though she assesses that the interpretation of a text is a unique, and somewhat private experience for each individual, McRobbie (1984) proposes that:

> [V]iewing experiences are just as lived as kicking a ball around the football pitch or going out dancing. Similarly having watched, looked at or read some text is not the end of the story. That experience frequently floods into the more social sphere... This is because it is these more private actions which form part of daily linguistic exchange, which in a social setting act as mediators in the building up of common or shared knowledge. (p. 142)

For McRobbie, texts—no matter their format, and no matter how inauthentic or mundane they may be—create the opportunity for exchange of knowledge through social interaction. From this point of view, we see that how individuals interact with and react to texts is just, if not more important than the text itself. As such, the importance of Internet debates does not lie in their authenticity or in their ability to accurately depict b-boying or hip-hop culture; rather, their importance lies in the meaning dancers make of them, and the discussion they create in the social sphere of the b-boy community.

Finally, some dancers felt that, like it or not, the Internet had become part of contemporary life, and consequently b-boying. For example, Asyan told me:

> Everything's evolving. The world is evolving; media is evolving. Facebook, that didn't exist [before]. The Internet, Twitter. Twitter is wack but we don't really have a choice, you understand? It's a mode of communication, and it's evolving. So the dance is going to evolve too. Breaking is evolving.[69] (Asyan, interview with the author, March 2012)

Afternoon echoed Asyan's statement, explaining:

> I think [it's] for the better. We just don't know how to use it yet. We are more connected. We have more resources. People that complain about stuff changing, well you know what? Stuff is going to change. There's a new iPad that's' going to come out, it's no big deal [laughs]. You need to adapt! This is the problem: the system before was made so that you didn't need to adapt. You just needed to know, and then you were safe. But now, information and things change so fast that the key in the world right now is no longer information, cause it keeps changing. It's adapting. If you're able to adapt then the world is yours. If you're not, then you're going to be bitter for the rest of your life. I'm a hardcore technological user; I just changed my Blackberry to the NEW one, like the latest one that came out, cause mine broke. And mind you it's the new one and I love technology, but I'm like, man, I kinda miss

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[69] Translated from French by the author: Toute évolue. Le monde évolue, les médias évoluent. Facebook, ça n'existait pas, Internet, Twitter. Twitter c'est wack, mais c'est rendu t'as pas de choix ! Tu comprends ? C'est un moyen de communication, pis ça évolue. Fek, la danse aussi évolue... le break évolue. (Asyan, interview with the author, March 2012)

my old Blackberry. I gotta get USED to this one, you know? So it's the same thing, you got to get used to things. Now, we're able to have international events bringing people everywhere from around the world. We can see what people are doing. And people are complaining, they're like, 'oh it's making it too accessible'. And I'm like, what's wrong with accessible? (Afternoon, interview with the author, October 2011)

Much as dancers used home made video magazines in the 1990s to share knowledge about their dance form (Fogarty 2006, 2012a), Afternoon believed that Internet interactions could be beneficial to b-boying since they provided the opportunity to meet and exchange with b-boys and b-girls around the world. Additionally, it is interesting to note how he believed that, over time, b-boys and b-girls were adapting to changes in technology, and using them to their own advantage. This is not unusual since, as Thornton (1996) has argued: "At first, new technologies seem foreign, artificial, inauthentic. Once absorbed into culture, they seem indigenous and organic" (p. 29). She adds that, once naturalized, "technological developments make new concepts of authenticity possible" (ibid).

Indeed, one should remember that, as Frith (1986) has pointed out, hip-hop culture is itself the result of advances in sound recording technologies, which independent artists used in innovative ways to create the unique, expressive community from which b-boying was born. So while Kong (2010) has argued that the Internet has been detrimental to b-boying—asking "whether it is possible to translate something so inherently built upon community and a way of life into a digital file accessible by all" (p. 26)—I am arguing that it is not so much the platform itself that is harmful but rather the way some people might use it. As legendary b-boy Ken Swift has stated: "The Internet can build or destroy: it depends on who's putting what up" (Ken Swift, in TankTekNYC, 2011).

4.2.6 Section Summary

In this section, I have identified some of the key social activities associated to b-boying, including learning, practising, cyphering, battling, and non-dancing interactions. Additionally, I have examined how the participants believed the social actions and interactions of b-boying differed from those associated to breakdancing. Overall, we can see two major differences between the two: first, that b-boying is a dance form and lifestyle practice which is adopted through first hand, continued, 'natural' contact with the community, while breakdancing can be learned from and practised through virtual, scholarly, mediated channels; and second, that b-boying is a process based activity, meaning participation is the goal in and of itself, while breakdancing is product oriented, meaning it is practised in order to achieve specific personal, social, or financial goals. For the sake of clarity, I have summarized some of the key differences in Table 3 (see next page).

Table 3: Sociological Differences Between B-boying and Breakdancing

	B-boying	Breakdancing
Learning	• Through mediated sources and face-to-face contact • Dancers must learn movements, as well as the history and meaning of those movements	• Through mediated sources • Focus on learning movements, less importance given to knowledge or history
Practising	• Practising for specific goals such as battles or shows • Practising for the purpose of physical training • Practising as an important activity in and of itself	• Practising for specific goals such as battles or shows • Practising for the purpose of physical training
Cyphering	• Dancing to express • Exchange based	• Dancing to impress • Presentation based
Battling	• Smaller competitions with raw battles that are closer to a cypher format • Large competitions with stage battles • Combination of the two	• Large competitions with stage battles, transformation of structural elements of the dance to improve spectators' viewing experience
Non-Dancing Interactions	• Central to skill development as they build stronger bonds between crew members • Allows for exchange of knowledge/information • Creation of 'new authenticities' with virtual interactions through mediated sources such as the Internet	• Non-dancing interactions not seen as being a central part of the dance • Virtual interactions through mediated sources such as the Internet

4.3 Symbolic Aspects

In the previous section, I outlined some of the main social activities that dancers in Montreal engage in when they practice b-boying. However, we should remember that from the symbolic interactionist perspective, the importance of social activities lies not in the activities themselves, but in the meanings individuals and communities ascribe to those activities, and how those meanings then inform future actions (Mead, 1967). Thus, it is important to understand why b-boys and b-girls in Montreal engage in their chosen social activities in order to move from the observation of the community to the task of understanding b-boying as a social phenomenon.

Stevens (2008) noted that b-boying is "at once a physical activity, a leisure activity, a social activity, and an artistic activity" (p. 134). This considered, understanding why b-boys and b-girls engage in this practice can become a difficult task. As I coded and reviewed the interview transcripts, I was often struck by the complexity of the belief systems that b-boys and b-girls had developed in regards to their dance practice; additionally, it was not unusual for dancers to contradict each other and even themselves when they tried to explain why b-boying was so important to them. In this section, I will lay out some of the key symbolic meanings that b-boys and b-girls in Montreal attribute to their dance practice, and examine how the felt b-boying differed in meaning from breakdancing. Working from the two key categories of concepts identified in Chapter 3, I will examine b-boying as an identity, and b-boying as an authenticity.

4.3.1 B-boying as Identity (or 'This Is Who I Am')

4.3.1.1 Self-as-Object

Many of the dancers I interviewed felt that b-boying provided them with a sense of identity as a b-boy or b-girl, and the means or opportunity to discover, reinvent, or simply be 'themselves'. Many of them told me that through b-boying,

they had developed a specific b-boy identity or 'alter ego', and had given themselves or taken on a dance name they felt was reflected in their dancing. It is interesting to note that the participants had very different ideas on how their sense of self as a b-boy or b-girl had developed: some of the participants believed they had always been b-boys and b-girls, and had merely discovered it through their dance practice. For example, Dr. Step told me:

> The b-boy is inside you; the seed is in you. You'll have to learn what it is before knowing if you are a b-boy or not. Me, I fell [into b-boying], and that seed was in me. And it was that seed that made me go searching for what it [b-boying] is.[70] (Dr. Step, interview with the author, October 2011)

For Dr. Step, the potential of being a b-boy had always been inside of him, and his b-boy identity had brought him to seek out breaking in the first place. Others felt the opposite: that it was the dancing—that is, actually practising and performing the movement techniques of the dance form—that made one a b-boy. Several participants spoke at length about the years of practise time and hard physical work that they had had to put in, and felt they had reached a certain level of technical proficiency before they felt comfortable calling themselves b-boys or b-girls.

Some of the b-boys and b-girls I spoke to believed it was their social interactions in the breaking community that had formed one's sense of identity as a b-boy or b-girl. For example, Sancho explained that:

> Breaking made me a b-boy, but also, my surroundings, and the people I used to hang out with. We all studied the same thing and shared the same knowledge and passion in a way. It's a school for life... you go through and you learn about your opinion, and where you want to go... I think I'm the person I am today because of the people I used to hang out with back in the day, my crew. Just to see how these people think

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[70] Translated from French by the author: Le b-boy est en toi; la graine est en toi. Tu vas apprendre c'est quoi avant de décider si tu es un b-boy. Moi je suis tombé, cette graine était là. Et cette graine a fait que je suis allé à la recherche de savoir c'est quoi. (Dr. Step, interview with the author, October 2011)

and what drives them, you absorb that. You take that and you grow with that community. And that's very important. That's one thing that makes you a b-boy: that unique experience of sharing something with your friends... If you're good or bad [as a dancer], that's another story. But you share the same passion with the people you like, and it forms you as a person. (Sancho, interview with the author, August 2012)

For Sancho, his identity as a b-boy had developed through his interactions with other dancers in his community, and from the knowledge he had internalized from those interactions. Indeed, as Johnson (2009) has argued:

> B-boying enacts Hip Hop aesthetics, history, and socio-cultural conditions through practices like cyphering that exemplify social interaction—conflict and collaboration—through non-verbal forms of communication. Movement radiates connections to others. (p. 201)

Here, we can see that the sense of self that Sancho is discussing here resembles Mead's definition of the self-as-object, or the sense of self that the individual develops as he or she learns to take on the attitudes and beliefs of the generalized other. Mead (2002) argued that: "selves only exist in relation to other selves" (p. 185); however, he specified that an individual developed his sense of self-as-object not in relation to humanity at large, but specifically other individuals within his or her own social group. He explained:

> He [the individual] is a member of the community, but he is a particular part of the community, with a particular heredity and position that distinguished him from anybody else. He is what he is in so far as he is a member of this community, and the raw materials out of which this particular individual is born would not be a self but for his relationship to others in the community of which he is part. (Mead, 1967, p. 200).

Overall, for Sancho, coming to understand himself in relation to the "generalized social attitudes" (Mead, 1967, p 260) of his community—or the unwritten aesthetic and social rules of the breaking community—had been a positive experience of personal growth. However, many of the participants noted that expressing one's self freely was not always easy or a positive experience, since the

construction and expression of self occurred under the watchful eye of the community. For example, Radio told me that she often imagined how others would react to her dancing while waiting on the side of a cypher:

> It's my turn... and everybody is watching you. They're doing nothing else but standing and looking at you. They're not looking at their phone; they're not even really talking to each other. They're standing there quietly looking at you. That's very intense! So in that moment, I have to go deep inside of me and there's all of these little sentences that pop up. Like 'you did that move already! They're going to laugh at you! They just think you're doing the same move every time'... this internal critic, this saboteur manifests itself. So there I am trying to have this moment and I hear the saboteur saying all this stuff. The volume is turned up on the critic's voice. And so I have to deliberately say to that critic in my mind, 'no, let me... I wanna dance! It doesn't matter! It's ok to do that move again. You're fine just the way you are!' (Radio, interview with the author, March 2012)

Radio's comment highlights the fact that by participating in b-boying, dancers internalize the attitudes of their peers and community, which in turn alters their sense of self and shapes their ability to express themselves. There is an important point to note here: according to Mead (1967), it is not the attitudes of others that defines one's sense of self, but rather one's own interpretation of how others see him or her in a given situation. This difference is clear in Radio's statement: it is not how others actually react to her that makes her question her dancing. Rather, it is her response to how she imagines others responding to her own imagined actions that guided which choices or strategies she saw as appropriate. We see that, from Mead's perspective, she is object to herself in that she is able to "approach or address (her)self from the standpoint of a collectivity or, more exactly, from the standpoint of an organized context of interrelated activities of others" (Blumer, 2004, p. 60).

Finally, let us recall that, according to Mead (1967), the importance of noting that individuals could see themselves as objects was that they could make themselves to focus of their own attention or actions. Blumer (2004) elaborated:

> In being an object to oneself, one can address one's self or act toward it, and, in turn, respond to that approach or action. The means are thereby provided for one to engage in interaction with oneself in a manner similar to one's interaction with others. Just as one makes indications to others in talking or acting toward them, and as one responds in turn to their indications, so may one make indications to oneself and respond to these indications. (p. 63)

If we again take the example of Radio's imagining of how others in the community will react to her dancing, we can clearly see that she is making herself the object of her attention. In viewing herself as she imagined others in the community would, she passed judgment on her options of potential actions, and thus provided herself with a means to respond to these judgments with various strategies or plans of action. She could note what she imagined her immediate response to these judgments would be, and thus consider whether or not she was satisfied with her response, or whether she wanted to devise a plan to change her course of action.

Another example of dancers considering themselves from the perspective of the other I noticed was that b-boys and b-girls often wanted to know who would be judging the event, or who else was entering the battle, before deciding to enter a given competition. Indeed, Ness (2009) suggests that dancers should:

> UNDERSTAND THE INDIVIDUAL JUDGES AND THEIR LIKES. THIS RULE WILL HELP YOU TO UNDERSTAND WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE TO WIN A BATTLE, OR WHAT CONDITIONS WERE AT PLAY IN THE EVENT OF THE LOSS OF A BATTLE. (Ness, 2009, 37th page, 2nd paragraph)

Some b-boys and b-girls I spoke to said they wanted this information in order to prepare for the battle, and even to know whether they should bother entering or not. By knowing who would be judging the event—and who else would be participating—individuals were able to consider their own dancing in relation to these other individuals, and thus imagine themselves engaged in various plans of action depending on the opponent or judge they would be faced with. In doing so, the

dancer is making an object of him or her self, and devising his or her plan of action in relation to the generalized social attitudes of the community.

Here, I have argued that a b-boy or b-girl—or the identity that dancers develop through their participation in their breaking community—is an example of Mead's (1967) concept of self-as-object. But what happens when we put this self, the b-boy, into action through the act of b-boying? In the next section, I will examine the passage from being a b-boy to the act of b-boying, or the passage of the self-as-object to the expression of the self-as-process.

4.3.1.2 Self-as-Process

It should be clear, from the social activities described in section 4.2, that b-boying can be understood as a series of both individual and joint actions in which b-boys and b-girls engage collectively. But Wainwright, Williams, and Turner (2005) have argued, for many professional dancers, dance is not simply what one does, but rather what one is. Similarly, Dr. Step told me: "[Through b-boying] you're trying to discover who you are, not what you do... you think a lot about what you do. But the goal is to find out who you are. Straight up. Me, this is what I am; it's not just what I do. I am this"[71] (Dr. Step, interview with the author, October 2011).

This specification that b-boying is something one is—as opposed to just something one does—is an important point to understand: I noted that many of the participants did not discuss b-boying (or b-girling) as an external process or activity by which their sense of self had developed or was expressed. Rather, many of them saw b-boying as a continuous expression and renegotiation of the self in the present moment. In other words, b-boying was not only a process through which one could construct a b-boy identity, but was that very sense of identity put into motion.

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[71] Translated from French by the author: Tu cherches à trouver qui tu es. Pas ce que tu fais... tu penses beaucoup à ce que tu fais, mais le but c'est de montrer qui tu es. Point. Moi je suis ça, ce n'est pas ce que je fais. Moi, je suis ça. (Dr. Step, interview with the author, October 2011)

Here, we can draw a parallel between b-boying and Mead's concept of self-as-process. As we have seen, the self-as-object—or the 'Me'—is the understanding of self that the individual develops through interaction with his or her community, and by internalizing the values and beliefs of others. It is the self of which one is conscious, and that sets the individual's plan for action. As Mead (1967) has proposed: "the 'me' (is) setting the situation to which the 'I' responds" (p. 277). The self-as-process, however, is the self in action, or more precisely, the self at the moment in which it launches into action (Blumer, 2004). Blumer explains: "The 'I' springs from the organic disposition or readiness of the organism to act... The 'I' stands for the outward thrust of the organism in action—it occupies the position of the subject or the actor in action" (2004, p. 66).

According to Mead (1967): "The 'I' reacts to the self which arises through the taking of the attitudes of others. Through the taking of those attitudes we have introduced the 'me' and we react to it as an 'I'" (p. 174). As such, we see that the self-as-object and self-as-process are continually engaged in a co-dependent, cyclical relationship: individuals make objects of themselves by internalizing the attitudes of their community, and then use this sense of self to imagine themselves in and plan for future interactions. In b-boying, dancers are engaged in this continuous cycle of interacting with their self-as-object and self-as-process. Standing on the edge of a cypher, dancers not only observe their fellow dancers, but also view themselves as an object, and imagine jumping into the cypher in order to make judgements and plans in regards to what course of action they will take in their own round. Similarly, in battles, b-boys or b-girls must imagine how they will respond to their competitor's call. But in the moment that they step into the circle to dance, these b-boys and b-girls might lose their nerve, slip and fall, get swept away by the music, or be overwhelmed with a sense of confidence that allows them to dance in a completely unexpected manner.

For example, Radio described a moment in a battle where she had tried to plan what she would do in her round, but surprised herself by doing something completely different in the heat of the moment:

> It's really happening fast, there's a lot of adrenaline rushing, it's not normal thinking. Your head is rushing really fast and you can't really make thoughts. What sometimes I've found a successful thing to do right before I go in to improvise when I'm battling is prepare like, a few key moves—maybe the way I'll get down onto the floor, maybe one or two things I'll do, and how I'll get out, but the rest is totally improvised. I couldn't even do that. Everything just like kind of went blank actually, and going blank took me out of the part of my brain that usually is overstressed, and allowed something else to happen. (Radio, interview with the author, October 2011)

We can see that Radio had tried to use the structured improvisational strategy of choosing a few key movements for her run in the battle, but was unable to follow her plan and had improvised in a spontaneous and unexpected manner. As Mead (1967) has argued, "It is because of the 'I' that we say that we are never fully aware of what we are, that we surprise ourselves by our own action" (p. 174). Indeed, several dancers I spoke to recounted similar experiences, telling me that they at times tried to plan their rounds in advance for cyphers or battles, but would often get lost in the moment they were dancing and end up doing something completely unexpected. Some of them viewed these spontaneous expressions of self as positive experiences: if we remember the discussion of practising and cyphering—particularly in sections 4.2.3.3 and 4.2.3.3—we will recall that many of the b-boys and b-girls I spoke to viewed the spontaneous and unpredictable freestyle moments in b-boying as the moments where they were expressing themselves in a pure and genuine manner.

At other times, however, dancers expressed anger or frustration about not having done what they 'meant' to do when they danced. This was particularly true in battle settings, where cash prizes were at stake, and reputations could be established or destroyed with a well or poorly executed round. Indeed, on several occasions I

noticed dancers being agitated after battles, and heard them complaining about how they had 'messed up' their round. For example, after *Gravity Rock* in August 2012, I congratulated a b-boy in his late twenties for his performance in the battle, telling him I thought he had danced very well. He thanked me, but expressed frustration about not winning his round, even though he told me had tried to do what he thought the judges would want to see. We understand that this b-boy had devised a battle plan based on how he imagined the judges would evaluate him, indicating that he was able to see himself as an object, and consider or evaluate his own dancing in regards to the attitudes of his community. And yet, when he launched himself into action, he had been unable to execute his plan as intended—perhaps because he had not actually danced the way he intended to, or perhaps because he had actually miscalculated what the judges would be looking for.

Finally, it is important to understand that any expression of the self-as-process in the present moment ultimately affects the individual's understanding of self as an object, and thus informs his or her plans for future action. As Mead (1967) explained it: "The 'I' of this moment is present in the 'me' of the next moment" (p. 174). So, for example, the b-boy discussed above who lost his battle would take this loss forward with him, and consider it when preparing for his next competition. One could hypothesis on a number of ways in which this experience might influence his future actions: it might make him decide that he was 'robbed' of his victory, and he might begin to see himself as an underdog of sorts. Or it may make him decide to re-evaluate his decision to play to the judges' preferences, and encourage him to dance for 'himself' in the future. He might get angry with the judges in question, and call them out in a spontaneous battle the next time he saw them, or he might withdraw from the scene out of frustration. Perhaps his loss would inspire him to practice more for his next battle, or perhaps he would decide that winning was not so important after all, and simply focus on having fun with his dancing.

Whatever the case may be, we understand that by reflecting back on their experiences of self-as-process, b-boys and b-girls further construct their sense of self as object, and thus reconsider, alter, and refine their plans for future action. So while Johnson (2009), Osumare (2002), and Smith Lefebvre (2011) have argued that the improvisational nature of breaking makes the dance form an ideal tool with which individuals may express themselves in the present moment, I am arguing that b-boying is not a dance form per se, or a tool to be used in self-expression, but rather the very expression of self in the present moment. B-boying is the act of engaging in a specific set of meaningful social interactions in the dance setting, which leads the dancer to continually respond to and refine his or her self-as-object social identities in a present and authentic manner. This may seem like a minor distinction, yet it is an important one: to many of the participants, b-boying was not just a dance form, but rather a site where they could draw on their understanding of their self-as-object, and express themselves as unique individuals in a spontaneous and unpredictable manner.

4.3.1.2 Self-as-Dancing-Body

It is perhaps difficult to understand how in order to discover who they 'truly' are, b-boys and b-girls felt they had to put their bodies through years of intense physical training. Yet, as Fogarty (2006) has pointed out, cultural meaning is "inscribed on the body and formed through body practices" (p. 97). Indeed, Cooper Albright (1997) argued that dance training causes changes not only in individuals physical appearance, strength, agility, or posture, but also to their sense of self.

Many of the dancers I interviewed spoke of how they believed the sense of self one developed in b-boying was a unique way of being-in-the-world that directly related to their continuous practice of the dance form. Bourrik perhaps expressed this idea best, when he told me: "b-boying is kind of a bunch of little habits that have

become a part of your natural life, coming from a dance form that is breaking"[72] (Bourrik, interview with the author, August 2012). Much like Bourdieu's (2011) notion of habitus, we understand that for Bourrik, b-boying was not a dance form per se, but a naturalized way of being-in-the-world that he had developed and continued to express through his dance practice. I have referred to this sense of self as the *self-as-dancing-body*: it is not simply an intersection of Mead's (1967) self-as-object and self-as-process, but an embodied, unique expression of self, which is developed and expressed through the physical and social act of dancing.

According to Wainwright, Williams, and Turner (2006), "the habitus is not simply a state of mind, it is also *a bodily state of being*" (p. 537, italics added by the author). The idea that b-boying was more than the physical mastering and performing of a particular set of dance movements, but rather a way of working on one's self by integrating those techniques with one's sense of identity came up in a number of interviews. Many of the dancers I interviewed believed that through b-boying, they were not only working on their bodies, but also bettering themselves both as individuals and members of their community. As Afternoon told me:

> Dancing makes you reflect on your physiology. And you cannot spend time thinking about your body and your movements without thinking about yourself. So it puts everything into question. And if one needs to get better, then everything needs to get better. So I think it [b-boying] brought me a lot, and it made me a better person. (Afternoon, interview with the author, October 2011)

For Afternoon, the sense of self he had developed from b-boying was a holistic one that united mind and body through the act of dancing. Indeed, many of the participants felt that through this self-as-dancing-body, they were able to express feelings or emotions through their bodily movements that they might not be able to

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[72] Translated from French by the author: Le b-boying c'est une espèce de petites habitudes qui sont rendues dans ta vie naturelle, à propos d'une danse qui est le break. (Bourrik, interview with the author, August 2012)

communicate otherwise. As such, we see that his self-as-dancing-body became a site where the self-as-object and self-as-process united, and where self-expression and self-improvement became possible through the act of dancing.

As Wainwright et al. (2005) have argued, the sense of self that develops through a dance practice is intrinsically tied to the act of dancing itself. In their studies on professional ballet dancers, they have argued that the dancer's habitus becomes intertwined with his or her sense of identity, until "being a dancer becomes the core of that person's embodied identity" (p. 56). As such, these authors have argued that physical setbacks that prevent the individual from dancing (such as injury) are not only a threat to that individual's career and livelihood, but also to that person's sense of who they are in the world. This, they explain, is because "if dancing fills your life, or even more so, if dancing *is* your life, then not dancing inevitably results in feeling lost and full of emptiness" (p. 53, italics added by author).

Similarly, Fogarty (2012b) has noted that in b-boying, many dancers "could not imagine their lives without this dance at the centre of their identity" (p. 65). Indeed, several of the b-boys and b-girls I interviewed told me they had suffered periods of self doubt—or even depression—during periods where they had not been able to dance due to injury, illness, or time and social constraints such as work or family commitments. For example, Maida, a b-girl originally from Martinique in her mid-twenties, exclaimed: "I think I stopped dancing for three weeks once, I went crazy [laughs]" (Maida, interview with the author, April 2011).[73] Similarly, Prototype told me:

> I tore my Achilles tendon. I had to stop [dancing] for seven months. I got bigger; I gained weight. None of my moves were sticking. A lot of people thought I was finished because of that. I think that was the

[73] Translated from French by the author: « Je pense qu'une fois j'ai arrêté de danser trois semaines, j'suis devenue folle [rires] » (Maida, interview with the author, April 2011).

hardest time of my life; I think that's when I was the most miserable.[74] (Prototype, interview with the author, June 2012)

From Prototype's statement, we can see that not only was his sense of self threatened by not being able to dance, but also his sense of self worth, and his sense of mental well being. Indeed, it has been noted that an individual's physical recovery from injury or illness is often faster—and less difficult—than his or her recovery from the psychological damage the injury creates (Wainwright et al., 2005). And while Prototype's injury had only forced him to take a temporary break from dancing, several dancers told me that ageing was one of the realities they dreaded most in b-boying, since getting older often meant accumulating more injuries, having less energy, and having less time to dedicate to dancing. As Sancho told me "It's actually going to be insanely hard for me to face the fact that [one day] I cannot break as much anymore. That's one thing that's going to destroy me mentally more than anything else" (Sancho, interview with the author, August 2012).

According to Fogarty (2012b), as b-boys and b-girls get older and can no longer actively dance as they once did, they often turn to other activities such as deejaying, judging competitions, or teaching in order to continue participating in the scene. Here, an interesting point can be noted: many of the dancers I interviewed felt that if they were no longer able to dance, but continued participating in the community, it was possible that they would still be b-boys (or b-girls). For example, Sancho believed he would still be a b-boy even when he stopped dancing:

> In my heart I think I would be, yeah. Cause I would still keep track of the scene, I would still watch videos, and follow events, and still look up who is on top of the game. I think even if you do 25 years of gymnastics and at one point your body can't do it anymore, you're old...

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[74] Translated from French by the author: Je me suis déchiré le tendon d'Achille. J'ai dû arrêter pendant sept mois. J'avais grossi ; j'avais pris du poids. Tous mes *moves* rentraient plus. Il y avait beaucoup de monde qui pensaient que j'étais fini à cause de ça. Je pense, c'était le moment le plus dur de ma vie ; je pense que c'est là que j'ai été le plus malheureux. (Prototype, interview with the author, June 2012)

you still follow up with that, you still watch Olympics, maybe you become a coach or something. Because how can you commit twenty-five or thirty years to something and then just drop it and let it go and forget about it? That would be really weird, no? (Sancho, interview with the author, August 2012)

However, most of the dancers I interviewed stated that they would no longer be *b-boying* if they stopped dancing. As such, we can understand again that while being a b-boy is a sense of identity that one develops through the social activities associated to the breaking community—including the act of dancing—b-boying is, for many b-boys and b-girls in Montreal, expressed through the dancing body, and which only exists in the present moment. As such, b-boying can be understood as a unique manifestation of Mead's (1967) self-as-process, which I have referred to as the self-as-dancing-body. It is a sense of self intrinsically tied to, and only possible to express, through the act of dancing in the present moment.

4.3.1.4 B-boying as A Unique Frame of Mind

Beyond the act of dancing, some of the dancers I interviewed felt that b-boying was not even a dance form or practice, but rather a particular worldview or frame of mind that one developed from practising a dance form, and participating in the hip-hop and breaking communities. From this perspective, one could argue that in a way, b-boying is an epistemology of sorts, if we remember that I defined epistemology as a "way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know" in Chapter 2 (see p. 13): it is a world view or way of perceiving reality, which develops through participation in the dance practice and community. For example, Alien Ness told me "Everything I do I do from a b-boy's perspective" (Alien Ness, interview with the author, July 2011). He elaborated:

I don't believe in 'I'm a doctor by day, and on the weekend, I go to events and I'm a b-boy'. You know? If that's the case, even as a doctor, when I walk down the hospital halls, people are still gonna look at me and be like 'this nigga's got swagger! He's a b-boy, he's ghetto, he's something!!' Just the way I walk down the hall, I'm always going to be

a b-boy. (Alien Ness, interview with the author, July 2011)

To Alien Ness, everything he did was done from the b-boy perspective, since his b-boy identity has less to do with executing particular movements or participating in certain cultural practices, and more to do with the state of mind that he had developed through this practice. Again, we can draw a parallel to the habitus in that "habitus is the outcome of the sedimentation of past experiences, shaping the agents' perceptions and actions of the present and future and thereby moulding their social practices" (Wainwright et al., 2006, p. 536-537). As Bourdieu (2011) argued, habitus are, "systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (p. 72, italics in original text), adding that a person's habitus was "the basis of perception and appreciation of all subsequent experience" (p. 78). Thus, by internalizing the knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs of the breaking community, Alien Ness used his b-boy habitus or frame of mind to guide him in every aspect of his life, including non-dancing actions and interactions.

Similarly, some of the dancers I interviewed echoed this statement, saying that b-boying was an attitude or state of mind that could be applied to any activity, dance related or not. For example, one b-boy in his early thirties told me he used his b-boy mentality to help him be a better player in his hockey league. A b-girl in her mid 30s told me she approached stressful or difficult situations at her work the same way she would approach entering a cypher. Dingo described this b-boy frame of mind in a more abstract way, explaining that, to him, b-boying was:

> [D]oing what you want the way you want. I feel like that's really being a b-boy... even if it's not relating to dance, you know? Having the philosophy or the soul of a b-boy, or the essence of a b-boy. I feel that's the essence of a b-boy: doing something you don't know what you're doing, or how exactly you're doing it, but you're just doing it and you don't give a fuck. You're just going at it and it is what it is. (Dingo, interview with the author, December 2011).

We see that, for Dingo, b-boying was not a dance form; rather, it was a unique way of thinking, which had developed from his dance practice, but that now allowed him to believe anything was possible, and thus wander blindly, take risks, and, even accept failure, in all aspects of his life. Scramblelock agreed, explaining:

> You feel it. I don't wear a nametag that says, 'I'm a b-boy!' It's in me. It's that mentality; it's that feeling... I think it's being confident in yourself and knowing who you are. Having your own style, having own flavour. (Scramblelock, interview with the author, March 2012)

That Dingo and Scramblelock associated the b-boy mentality with a sense of confidence and pride is not unusual since, according to Schloss (2009), "the aesthetic of the dance not only encourages confidence; in many circumstances, it actually demands it" (p. 100). Alien Ness explained where he believed the b-boy frame of mind had originated:

> A b-boy's perspective is a war perspective, a warrior's perspective. That's another thing that people don't get. B-boys is the LAST of the true Bronx warriors. Before that you had the street gangs. That was meeting and going head-up, and fighting for their territory and for their colours, and for their pride, and for their recognition. And immediately after that, you have this hip-hop thing. And it was the b-boys that was going from hood to hood, same thing, challenging other gangs so to say. You know? And going head up with them for the exact same things: *for respect, for power, for recognition.* (Alien Ness, interview with the author, July 2011, italics added by the author)

For Alien Ness, there was an urgency to b-boying—and thus this frame of mind one develops through the practice—that came from the dance's socio-economic roots. Moreover, Smith Lefebvre (2011) has argued that the need to accept one's self is particularly true due to the improvisational nature of the dance form. She explains: "In the cipher hub, dancers think on their feet, improvise, draw on strengths under pressure, face inner fears and cope with one self" (p. 73). Thus, b-boying can be seen as a process that allows individuals to work through insecurities and confront limitations, and ultimately accept themselves and express who they are. But if we remember that, as Wainwright, Williams, and Turner (2006) have shown that, in

ballet, habitus is, "both a medium and outcome of social practice" (p. 537), then we can see that b-boying is also the unique state-of-mind that develops from that process.

4.3.1.5 A Way to Claim a Space in Society

Of course, the individual cannot remain an individual, and must also recognize that he or she is a member of a community or society in order for the self to develop. Mead (1967) argued that the internalization of community values was not only crucial to the individual's sense of self, but also to his or her membership in the community since: "until one can respond to himself as the community responds to him, he does not genuinely belong to the community" (p. 265).

Throughout this chapter, I have discussed the intrinsically social nature of b-boying: indeed, if b-boying is less about practising a specific dance form and more about participating in a particular lifestyle community, it is logical that interactions with other dancers and non-dancers within the community are of the utmost importance in regards to the individual's concept of self. This is logical since, according to Bourdieu (2011), the habitus develops through *the dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality*" (p. 72, italics in original text). Stevens (2008) has noted how important b-boys and b-girls in Montreal feel it is to be recognized by their peers, particularly in regards to receiving recognition from older, pioneer dancers.

Similarly, many of the participants discussed how a need for communication or social validation was an important symbolic aspect of b-boying to them. While most felt that b-boying was something one did first and foremost for one's self, some also felt it was important that this expression of self occurred in a public context, and acknowledged by others within the community. For example, Elon felt that public interactions and recognition were an important part of b-boying:

It's important to be accepted by your peers. It's a culture that you

want to be a part of. If you're just by yourself training all the time
and you never jam with people, what's the point? That's the fun of it,
to train with other people... it's fun to dance by yourself, and work on
things, but I think a big part of it is the social thing. (Elon, interview
with the author, March 2012)

For Elon, we see that part of the pleasure he had in b-boying was from
interacting with his community and feeling that he was part of a culture. Indeed,
many of the dancers I interviewed spoke of the importance of this social aspect of b-
boying: here we can recall Omegatron's distinction between a 'closet breaker' and a
'real b-boy' in section 4.2.1—or the difference between someone who danced in
public versus someone who just danced in his own room or basement.

Of course, it is not unusual that b-boys and b-girls feel the need to have their
expression of self recognized by their peers, since as many authors have noted, b-
boying—and hip-hop in general—has always been about inscribing one's identity in
the public sphere, and being recognized by one's community (Banes, 2004; Chang,
2005; Hazard-Donald, 2004; Rajakumar, 2012; Smith Lefebvre, 2011). As Banes
(2004) explained: "breaking is a way of claiming the streets with physical presence,
using your body to publicly inscribe your identity on surfaces of the city, to flaunt a
unique personal style within a conventional format" (p. 14). Similarly, Alien Ness
explained that, for him, breaking was originally about:

Getting your name to ring bells. In my days, that was the goal: that
ghetto celebrity status. People were talking about you, whether good or
bad, they're saying your name. So even if they say, 'yo, Alien Ness is
an asshole, he did this and that!' you know what? They're feeding my
b-boy spirit. (Alien Ness, interview with the author, July 2011)

It is interesting to note that, for Alien Ness, even a negative acknowledgement of his
dancing or identity validates his feeling of membership in the community. Of course,
this makes sense since, as Mead (1967) argued, acknowledgement of one's actions by
the community was a sure sign that the individual was in fact a member of that

community: were Alien Ness not in fact a member of the b-boy community, other dancers would have no need to acknowledge him at all.

Indeed, Mead (1967) believed that membership in a community was two-fold, and that both the individual and the community needed to recognize the individual as a member of the group before he or she truly belonged to said community. He proposed that it was not only the recognition of the individual by the community that was important, but rather the individual's ability to internalize the community's general social beliefs that was crucial to membership, since: "The question whether we belong to a larger community is answered in terms of whether our own action calls out a response in this wider community, and whether its response is reflected back into our own conduct" (p. 271). As Sancho explained:

> I'm sure everybody works hard on that, to be recognized in the scene. Like, you've been breaking for years and nobody gives a shit? That's not cool, you know? [Laughs] You want to be recognized for what you do. That's a big part of breaking for me, to be recognized as somebody who has the knowledge. That people know you have done a lot in the scene. (Sancho, interview with the author, August 2012)

According to Thornton (2005), public interaction is integral to acceptance into any given community or culture since it "builds further affinities, socializing participants into a knowledge of (and frequently belief in) the likes and dislikes, meanings and values of the culture" (p. 184). But more than simply being recognized by their own community, and enforcing the meanings and values of the culture, many of the dancers I spoke to felt through their dancing, they strived to received public acknowledgement from, and become renown[75] in society at large in order to 'make their mark' on the world. For example, Cleopatra told me:

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[75] Lang and Lang distinguish between the use of the terms 'recognition' and 'renown' in regards to artist's reputations, explaining that "recognition refers to the esteem in which others in the same 'art world' hold the artist" (Lang and Lang, in Fogarty, 2010, p. 288), while "renown signifies a more cosmopolitan form of recognition beyond the esoteric circles in which the artist moves It is measurable by how well a person is known outside a specific art world" (Lang and Lang, in Fogarty, 2010, p. 289)

> I hope people will remember my name still when I'm old. There's not a lot of b-girls, and I'm good [laughs]. I don't know... I hope people remember. I'd like to be remembered. I mean, I'm not a scientist; I'm not an Olympic athlete or anything. I don't feel like I'm doing huge things for society, but if what I'm doing is having an impact on the breaking scene, at least I've done something with my life, you know? And maybe not just the breaking scene, but in dance in general. (Cleopatra, interview with the author, October 2011)

For Cleopatra, her dancing was a means to inscribe her identity not just in the memories of the members of her own community, but also she hoped into the consciousness of society at large. Several participants echoed this statement, suggesting that for many b-boys and b-girls, their dancing was not only a means to achieve 'ghetto celebrity status' within their own community, but a way to reach out and connect to society on a larger scale.

Finally, it is important to remember that from the social constructionist standpoint, social interactions are not just a matter of society acting on and forming the individual, but also a chance for the individual to shape his or her society. As Mead (1967) has stated: "We are not simply bound by the community. We are engaged in conversation in which what we say is listened to by the community and its response is one which is affected by what we have to say" (p. 168). Most of the dancers I interviewed believed that b-boying was actually a means by which they could make positive changes within their community or even society at large by challenging certain attitudes and stereotypes through their dance.

Indeed, many of the participants worked as educators in community youth outreach programs, and believed that they could have a positive impact on society by using b-boying to teach young men and women about self-respect and cooperation. For example, B-boy Lazy Legs felt that the work he did teaching youth and adults with physical disabilities how to dance could help society recognize that these individuals were not 'disabled', but rather 'otherly-abled' (Lazy Legs, interview with

the author, July 2012). More indirectly, many of the b-girls I spoke to felt that whether or not they specifically meant to, their participation in breaking and b-boy culture was a way to challenge sexist attitudes or gender stereotypes they encountered in their everyday lives. Although most of them told me it was not particularly their intention to fight for a recognition of women's rights through their dancing, some b-girls felt that simply by expressing their sense of self through their dance practice, they were able to shift societal attitudes towards women.

In the end, no matter what their motives were, it was clear that most of the dancers I interviewed felt that through b-boying, they were able to communicate with their society, thus both informing and being informed by the world around them. Here, we can note another clear difference between the participants' impressions of b-boying and breakdancing. We are reminded that whereas some participants felt that breakdancing was about doing flashy moves and dancing to impress others, most of them believed that b-boying was about interacting with one's community or even society at large, and making an impact on the world in which they lived.

4.3.2 B-boying As Authenticity (or 'The Realness')

'The realness' is a subject that came up frequently in interviews. I did not directly bring up the term in my questions, but many of the participants mentioned it. In most interviews, the concept of the realness first came up after I had asked the participant to explain to me what breakdancing was, and how it was different from b-boying. Realness was said to be one of the main qualities that distinguished 'real' b-boys from 'fake' b-boys, or breakdancers.

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines 'realness' as a derivative of the word 'real', which means: 1) actually existing as a thing or occurring in fact; not imagined or supposed; 2) (of a substance or thing) not imitation or artificial; genuine; and 3) complete; utter (used for emphasis) (Real, 2010). It is interesting that the participants

often chose to use the noun the 'realness' over simply using the adjective 'real', and that it is not prefaced by the ambiguous pronoun 'a' but the definitive, singular 'the'. As such, to say that someone was <u>the realness</u> was not a passing comment, but a strong defining statement as to who and what that dancer was. The realness encompassed several concepts related to the definitions of cultural authenticity, and artistic authenticity discussed in Chapter 3.

4.3.2.1 Participation

Many of the b-boys and b-girls I interviewed felt that the realness was about 'living the life', by which they meant participating in and loving both the breaking community and hip-hop culture. As Asyan put it, you knew you were the realness once b-boying became your all-encompassing passion: "It's when I said to myself 'it's what you think, what you eat, what you shit [laughs]'. When it's what you dream about, you know what I mean?" (Asyan, interview with the author, March 2012).[76] Several participants said that to be the realness you had to participate in the social activities of b-boying that were discussed in section 4.2, meaning you had to attend regular practices, attend or enter local and international b-boy events, listen to hip-hop or break-beat music, and hang out with other b-boys and b-girls. You were part of the 'scene', and also worked to advance the scene by teaching, organizing events or workshops, and 'repping' your crew or city. You would know the history of your local scene, and of hip-hop in general, and adopt the 'b-boy mentality' discussed in section 4.3.1.4, or the attitudes, knowledge, and values commonly shared in the b-boy community.

Schloss (2009) has argued: "b-boying and breakdancing do not represent different attitudes on the part of the *observer*, but on the part of the *dancer*" (p. 61,

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[76] Translated from French by the author: C'est quand je me suis dit... quand tu penses à ça, quand tu manges ça, quand tu chies ça [rires]... quand tu rêves ça... tu comprends ce que j'veux dire ? (Asyan, interview with the author, March 2012)

italics in original text). Similarly, several dancers I interviewed felt that part of being the realness was your motivation behind b-boying. For example, Elon explained that, for him, the realness was:

> That you're doing it out of love for it, and not out of... [pause] out of guilt, let's say. I mean that's a strong word, but let's say, 'I have to practice today cause I have to be THIS good'. I mean, it's good that you're pushing yourself, but you have to remember to have fun. I feel like most people start doing this because they are somehow drawn to this. Because they like to do it. Not because... 'Oh, I wanna be FAMOUS!' Or 'I'm gonna start because I wanna WIN!' I'm sure there's people like that, I just don't know them. I mean, it's a DANCE. It's an art. You dance because you love to dance. You love music. And then definitely there's some people that just wanna do big tricks, and they, they want to do the hardest tricks, and they have a different mentality. And I think to each their own. You can do whatever you wanna do. I'm just saying what I think. (Elon, interview with the author, March 2012)

According to Elon, being the realness meant b-boying because you loved it, and not because you wanted to get famous or do impressive movements. Many of the dancers I spoke to echoed this statement, and associated 'breakdancing' to those individuals who were not committed to the breaking or hip-hop community, and wanted to use the dance to their own personal advantage, but did not participate in or give back to the community. For example, Radio explained:

> A b-boy is somebody who's dedicated most of their life and their time [to the dance] even when they're not dancing. The reverse [a breakdancer] is somebody who just thinks it's cool and novel, and wants to learn a few moves... somebody who's just interested in, 'wow, I want to learn how to do the worm', and 'wow, let me do a windmill'. Sure they might learn a few moves and they might be able to do those moves better than a b-boy. But they're just as into soccer and video games and whatever. It's not the glue that holds their life and their identity together. (Radio, interview with the author, March 2012)

Additionally, several participants believed that because they did not actively participate in the community, breakdancers would lack some of the knowledge about

the dance form and culture upon which b-boys and b-girls placed so much value. For example, Bourrik told me:

> Someone who breakdances, sure he's a dancer, but he just does the dance part of it, that's it. He's not a b-boy. A b-boy is someone who's in the culture. He understands what it is. Because if you say you're a b-boy, you know it stands for break-boy. And you know it stands for break-boy because they danced on the breaks of the songs. I don't think a breakdancer knows that. Ask a breakdancer why breakdance is called breakdance, and he won't even know.[77] (Bourrik, interview with the author, July 2012)

According to Bourrik, a breakdancer's lack of knowledge about the history of the dance showed a lack of respect for the culture, and a lesser dedication to or passion for the practice. Lazy Legs, however, had an interesting reflection on this difference between b-boying and breakdancing. He explained:

> I was a breakdancer in the beginning, I think everyone starts off as a breakdancer. Breakdancers are attracted just to the moves. They're doing it not knowing why they're doing it; they're doing it to show off. They're doing it to challenge themselves, or just so they can get that windmill so they can say 'I got a windmill.' But the moment where you start living that life… those experiences start becoming the b-boy way or lifestyle. All those little things accumulate, and one day, you just wake up, and you're like 'I'm a b-boy.' When everything about breaking is your priority. (Lazy Legs, interview with the author, July 2012)

For Lazy Legs, breakdancing was not a negative thing, but a gateway that had allowed him to find his way to b-boying. Several of the participants echoed this statement, telling me that they believed that they started off breakdancing, but that with a continued dedication to the dance practice and community had transitioned to b-boying. Thus, for some of the participants, the distinction between b-boying and

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[77] Translated from French by the author: Quelqu'un qui fait du breakdance, oui c'est un danseur, mais c'est quelqu'un qui fait juste le côté danse. Point. Ce n'est pas un b-boy. Un b-boy c'est quelqu'un qui est dans la culture. Y'a compris qu'est-ce que c'est. Par ce que quand tu dis que t'es un b-boy, tu sais ce que c'est un break-boy ! Et tu sais pourquoi c'est break-boy, parce qu'il y avait le breakbeat, et quand c'était le break là les danseurs venaient. Mais je ne pense pas qu'un gars qui fait du breakdance il sait ça. Demande à un gars de breakdance, pourquoi le breakdance s'appelle le breakdance, il ne va pas savoir, tout simplement. (Bourrik, interview with the author, July 2012)

breakdancing had less to do with how the dance form was performed, and more to do with the motivation behind the movements.

4.3.2.2 Race, Age, Gender, Class: "This Is 'Our' Culture"

According to Fogarty (2010), "Authenticity is a value judgement about participation in b-boy culture, *alongside an underlying judgement about belonging and ethnicity that underwrites all exchanges*" (p. 263, italics added by the author). Similarly, Johnson (2009) has argues:

> Racial and ethnic identity also acts as a means through which people are able to stake claim to a privileged understanding of b-boying. This suggests that there are multiple cultural 'insider' perspectives that are informed by race, ethnicity, and class. (p. 153)

Indeed, for many of the dancers I interviewed, their sense of cultural authenticity or realness was also linked to their biographical identity markers, such as their racial or ethnic background, gender, age, and socio-economic standing.

Much has been written on the links that can be made between b-boying—and hip-hop culture in general—and African-American culture or Afro-Diasporic traditions (for example, see DeFrantz, 2004; Gilroy, 1997; Rose, 1994; Schloss, 2009; Stevens, 2008). According to Hess (2005):

> Hip-hop authenticity is rooted in African-American rhetoric; its emphasis on the performer's staying true to himself grows out of black rhetorical traditions such as testifying and bearing witness, in which the authority to speak is negotiated through claims to knowledge gained through lived experience. (p. 375)

While Johnson (2009) does agree that b-boying is predominantly understood as an African-American or Black dance by the general public, she has also noted that more than making claims of authenticity along lines of race, ethnicity, or class, b-boys and b-girls speak about the b-boying being a part of "our culture"—or a unique branch of

hip-hop culture that belongs specifically to those who practice the dance form known as b-boying or breaking. She explains:

> This idea of 'our dance' is fluid… [It] allow[s] people to stake claim to the dance relative to their personal background or histories in multiple and overlapping ways. It is not an 'our' that excludes others' participation in the culture. Instead claims to 'our culture' suggest a privileged sense of b-boying's and particularly cyphering's essence. […] Ultimately 'our' is about a claim to some kind of understanding about the nature of b-boying, some essential quality that 'we' can recognize because of our backgrounds or how we grew up. (Johnson, 2009, p. 154-155)

I noted that some of the dancers I spoke to made efforts to relate to their own biographical identities to this notion of b-boying as 'their dance'. This is perhaps in part because very few of the dancers I interviewed could claim a direct connection to New York City's original hip-hop culture, since most of them had only started dancing in the 1990s or 2000s, and had originally been introduced to b-boying through the media. Indeed, DKC Freeze, a Black dancer in his forties, was one of the only dancers I spoke to who had been active in the Montreal street dance community since the early 1980s. He told me that he had first seen breaking as a child during a family trip to New York City:

> In '79, '80, the first time I went to New York, I saw some guys spinning on their backs. I thought he had a plate on his back and he was spinning on the plate. I didn't know! I thought it was impossible to spin on your back, so when I came back [to Montreal] I tried. I run into the concrete and I jump onto my back and try to spin. And I didn't spin! [Laughs] I just stopped!! Krrrack! And got a big mark [on my back], I still got those marks! (DKC Freeze, interview with the author, June 2013)

DKC Freeze's story—and the scars he has to back it up—strengthen his cultural authenticity since it proved he had a connection in the dance form before it became popular in the media. However, this claim to realness is also linked in part to his racial identity, since he explained that:

> Black or Latino dancers, they were the ones who brought this [breaking] from New York. Families. You know, a lot of Haitians and

> Jamaicans have family in Miami, or New York, or Cali, or Boston. So they would bring the knowledge from the States, they brought it here. That's how it came really. (DKC Freeze, interview with the author, June 2013)

Because he was Black and had family in New York City, DKC Freeze had direct contact with b-boying before other dancers in Montreal. While his claim to realness is primarily based on participation in the culture, his racial identity provided him the opportunity to participate in the first place. It is important to understand here that I am not arguing that DKC Freeze's racial identity gave him some sort of 'natural' dancing ability that his dancers of other racial backgrounds did not have; rather I am arguing that the social opportunities he had to make early contact with the dance were, at least in part, connected to his racial identity.

Interestingly, DKC Freeze and most of the Black dancers I interviewed were the ones who made the least effort to link their racial or ethnic identities to their b-boy/b-girl identities, perhaps because as discussed earlier, the connection is implied in the much of the discourse surrounding the dance. Those dancers who did not have these racial or ethnic connections, on the other hand, often made efforts to link their identity markers to their claims that this was 'their dance'. For example, some French Canadian b-boys I spoke to felt they had a connection to hip-hop because the African-American and Latino percussive rhythms of break beat music related to traditional French Canadian folk or jig musical patterns. Others made class based associations between the French Canadian people's historical struggle as a minority and socio-economically deprived group to the struggles of African-American and Latino youth in New York City in the 1970s and 1980s. Also, many of the dancers I interviewed were either new immigrants to Canada, the children of immigrants, or came from mixed ethnic or racial backgrounds, and some said they felt more connected to the values of hip-hop culture than they did to the values of either Quebecois or Canadian culture.

According to Johnson (2009), b-boying is also seen "as a 'poor folk's thing, emphasizing class over race" (p. 154). Indeed, class was another social marker that several of the participants used to justify their claims to cultural realness in b-boying. Some of the dancers I spoke to felt that b-boying was best understood by individuals who had experienced some sort of social or financial struggle in their upbringing, and talked about their financial hardships—either as children or in their adult life—as one of the reasons they felt so connected to hip-hop and b-boy culture. This was often coupled with a belief that b-boying was best learned in an un-institutional, peer-to-peer environment, since institutional learning was seen to imply privilege that went against the class based roots of the dance form.

Moreover, a few of the participants told me that they had questioned their own cultural authenticity in b-boying at various points in their dance careers due to their socio-economic standing. Particularly as they got older, some b-boys and b-girls told me that life changes such as having a family, career choices, and improved socio-economic standing had made them question if they were truly the realness or not. One b-boy in his late 20s told me he felt that his realness was often questioned because he came from an upper middle class background and had a university education. Another b-boy told me that he had noticed that some of his friends pretended they came from a poorer background than they actually did, or tried to play down their education in order to claim they had closer links to hip-hop culture. Similarly, Hess (2005) has argued that White emcees use claims of "class struggle to counter hip-hop's representations of white privilege" (p. 372). Indeed, while some see b-boying as a universal practice that anyone can participate in (Johnson, 2009), in this study cultural authenticity seemed to be most often attributed to individuals who came from more depressed socio-economic backgrounds.

Gender was an issue over which some of the female participants felt their realness had been questioned or challenged over the years. Because 'b-boying' is generally thought to be a dance performed by men, some of the b-girls I interviewed felt that because they did not look the way observers expected a breaker to look, others feel free to question their 'authenticity' in the dance, or right to participate in certain cultural events. For example, several of the b-girls I spoke to recounted situations where they had been told they should not have entered a given battle because it was advertised as a 'b-boying' battle. Lynx thought that some of the problem of excluding women from the community came from the division of the terms b-boy and b-girl:

> Look at how everything is named: Bboyworld [.com]? B-boy spot? B-boy jam... where in that did you include me? If we're gonna use these terms—b-boy and b-girl—if I'm gonna use that to describe myself, why don't you include it anywhere? If I started making a [Internet] forum called B-girl world? [Or threw a] B-girl jam? Guys would automatically think that they weren't invited. They'd be like, 'oh that's for girls'. So why don't you flip it and see how I feel? (Lynx, interview with the author, November 2011)

Although some of the dancers I interviewed felt that b-boying was an unmarked term that included female participants, Lynx's point that men would never refer to their dance practice as 'b-girling' highlights the fact that b-boying is still a gendered term that implies that male practitioners are more authentic than their female counterparts.

Finally, it must be mentioned that since b-boying has become a global phenomenon—which is practised around the world by men, women, and children from different socio-economic groups—Fogarty (2010) has criticized the continued focus on b-boying as a primarily African-American, masculine social practice:

> Besides denying the biracial identities of many of the most influential participants in the dance, this construes the dance as organised around ethnicity. However, as has been seen, breaking is organised into a hierarchy of skills, and all issues of belonging are centred fundamentally on this premise. A better question might be to ask how

individuals and groups, in various countries and with uneven access to resources, have maintained a dance form through *international networks*? And how have these networks been informed by a 'belonging' that is organised around musical tastes and dance practices, alongside identifications beyond gender, ethnicity and class? (p. 182, italics in original text)

With these questions in mind, I will move my focus from cultural authenticity to artistic authenticity in b-boying.

4.3.2.3 Respecting the Form

As Becker (2008) has pointed out, cultural authenticity is also judged on artistic authenticity, or on the individual's ability to understand and adhere to the aesthetic values of a given art world. In regards to hip-hop arts, Schloss (2009) has argued: "once the rules of the form had been established, other options [are] then accepted or rejected based on their perceived compliance with the aesthetic expectations of the form" (p. 70). Almost all the participants said that to be the realness, you had to know the 'proper form' or the foundation vocabulary of breaking, and be able to perform all elements of the dance (top rocks, footworks, freezes, spins, and power moves). But more than knowing the proper form, some of them felt that someone who was the realness probably excelled at breaking as a dance form. For example, Elon suggested that anyone could call himself a b-boy if he chose to, but others might not consider him to be one if he did not dance well:

> If you say you're a b-boy, it's not really up to anyone to say you're not. But at the same time, for other people to actually respect you as a b-boy... or, if you say 'ok, I'm a b-boy' and I see myself as a b-boy... or, for other people actually see you as a b-boy is a different thing. Cause for other people to see you as a b-boy, you kind of have to have some sort of skill level. (Elon, interview with the author, March 2012)

So while a b-boy or b-girl could live the life and love hip-hop, his peers might not see him as real if he or she did not dance well. Several participants mentioned that in Montreal, b-boys who had a traditional East Coast or New York City style of

dancing—or who focused on style and musicality—tended to be seen as being more 'real' than those who deviated from the norm by focusing on power moves, personal creations, and tricks.[78] For example, Krypto told me that his authenticity had been questioned at times because his personal dance style deviated from the aesthetic 'norms' of the community:

> I do consider myself a b-boy but I'm not too bothered that some people might think that some of what I do isn't b-boying. It might bug me for a moment at an event if I lose a battle and then I hear it's cause they see what I was doing as contemporary dance mixed with acrobatics, but I'm not too concerned with the question of if I'm a b-boy or not. For me, I'd like to continue doing what I feel is interesting for me to be pursuing. (Krypto, interview with the author, August 2012)

Krypto's statement brings up a number of interesting points: first it reminds us, as Fogarty (2010) has pointed out, that authenticity is not an objective fact but a subjective value judgment based on personal and cultural tastes; second, that various levels of judgment are at play in evaluating who is 'real' and who is 'fake'. Here, we see that even though Krypto continued to participate in the social activities associated to b-boying such as battling, he felt he was at times judged as inauthentic or 'fake' at times because he did not conform to the generally accepted aesthetic values of b-boying. And third, that certain individuals within the community carried more 'subcultural capital' as Thornton (1996) has called it, and thus felt they were permitted to make judgments on who they saw as 'real' and who they saw as 'fake'.

Indeed, as Fogarty (2010) has argued, "the ties between authority, authenticity, performance, and judgement are bound quite strongly" (p. 257). And if realness—or cultural and artistic authenticity—is judged on whether or not a dancer is 'good', one must ask, who has the authority to decide what 'good' is, and what standards or criteria are used to make this decision? This was an issue that several participants discussed at length. For example, Asyan questioned what motivated people to label

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[78] Please see Johnson (2009) and Stevens (2008) on the 'power versus style' debate

others as being 'real' or 'fake', stating: "a lot of the time there are people who are just saying 'oh you're not like me, so you're fake'... that means they're saying they are the one who is real".[79] (Asyan, interview with the author, March 2012).

Drawing from Becker's (2008) work, Fogarty (2010) reminds us here that: "members of art worlds, and various contending groups, tend to undermine each other or compete for dominance. In doing so, aesthetic beliefs are used to convince others of the legitimacy of a particular school, artist, or group" (p. 289). Indeed, Asyan's point was that using aesthetic judgments to call someone fake was a tactic certain individuals use to position themselves as experts in the community, or as those who know the 'truth'. As such, we understand that when dancers said that others were not the realness, they implicitly suggested that they themselves were.

4.3.2.4 Making It Your Own

Some of the participants felt that authenticity in b-boying should be based on a person's passion for the dance, and their participation in the community; these dancers argued that judging authenticity based on how someone danced went against the core values of b-boying. For example, B-boy Lazy Legs said:

> You've got certain people on the scene who are trying to tell you what a b-boy should be. To me being a b-boy is about being yourself. Yes, there's rules to the game; there's etiquette to it. But it's about keeping it real and being yourself. And I'm respecting the game and innovating it with my own ideas. I'm just going forward with it; I'm not trying to take anything away from breaking. If anything I'm trying to add to it and create a new legacy, do new stuff with it. So I've gotten people [back in the day] telling me that I'm not a b-boy because of my style, cause I didn't do footwork, and because I didn't listen to the music. And you know, at that time I probably wasn't a b-boy. I was uneducated; I didn't know what the culture was about. But I know enough about the culture now, and I've experienced enough that anyone that tells me I'm not a b-boy now, to me, those people are not

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[79] Translated from French by the author: Souvent y a des gens qui disent « ah, t'es pas comme moi... fek c'est faux »... Ça veut dire que lui, il se dit le vrai. (Asyan, interview with the author, March 2012)

b-boys. Cause who are you to judge what a b-boy is and what a b-boy isn't? (Lazy Legs, interview with the author, August 2012)

Lazy Legs' statement brings up another interesting point: the idea that it is important to take the structure of the dance and 'make it your own'. This is an important point to note since, as Thomas (2003) has argued, "the idea of producing an exact copy... can lead to the ossification of a lived tradition" (p. 143-144). Similarly, while all of the participants stated that the physical work of mastering the basic structure of breaking was important, most of them felt that the realness was not so much about physically recreating an exact replica of the dance, but more about mastering certain techniques in order to adapt the dance to one's own body, aesthetic preferences, and sense of self. Scramblelock referred to this ability to let one's self go as 'letting loose', and explained the concept using this metaphor:

Wanting to learn and be a good student to learn everything there is about the dance, [it's] kind of like being a computer where you take it all in. Like you've spent ten years of your life downloading all this information. Right? And now it's in you and it's here [points to head], but it's not processed, it's there, but it's catalogued. And now you just need to let go of that, disconnect that cable, and just kind of let it flow freely. You spend all this time learning your foundations, and you should always still keep learning, and add to it. But there comes a time where you actually have to just forget the structure now that you've developed something. And start playing with it, so that it becomes a part of you. (Scramblelock, interview with the author, March 2012)

While Scramblelock thought it was important to know and understand the foundations of breaking, he believed that being the realness was about arriving at a place where one could let go of the techniques and play with the form in an original way. Cleopatra echoed this statement, adding that she sometimes felt her potential for personal expression was stifled by the community's focus on preserving the 'authentic' or 'correct' format of the dance:

I feel my best when I'm going out of the box a bit and being myself, which is what I was doing when I started, I was trying to figure out what was my style, what's the way I move. And it's not necessarily doing chair freezes all the time. I think that's still valid, I'm still b-

girling, 'cause it's my expression. You still have to find your own style. (Cleopatra, interview with the author, October 2011)

To Cleopatra, there was a paradoxical relationship between these two levels of artistic authenticity in b-boying: she thought that it was important to be 'herself' in her dancing, but also felt that if she respected the foundation of the dance too closely, and tried to recreate the original form as much as possible, she might not be able to express who she truly was. This is not unusual since dance artists who seek to reconstruct dance works in an authentic manner must find a balance between "the concern to get as close to the original (however that is defined) as possible" and "the inevitability of interpretation in reconstruction" (Thomas, 2003, p. 141-142). As such, we understand that in b-boying, to be seen as authentic from an artistic perspective, dancers must find a balance between respecting the foundation of the dance, all while adapting the form to their own bodies and aesthetic preferences.

4.3.2.5 B-boying as Authentic Experience

Many of the participants spoke of b-boying as an authentic experience, or a state of authenticity. By this they meant that b-boying was a means to bring their attention and consciousness to the present moment. Many of them felt that when they were truly freestyling, they could to let go of conscious thought and connected with a sub-conscious or pre-conscious part of themselves. On several occasions, discussions about improvisation ended up soliciting descriptions of moments when the participants believed they had had trance-like, out of body experiences while dancing. This sensation was described as rocking the beat, connecting to the music, being in the zone, being in a fog, or locking into 'the grid'. Similarly, in her own research on rave culture, Gore (1997) has argued that dancing can induce trance-like states where "Lines of flight are opened up and a process of deterritorialisation set in motion which may lead to a deconstruction of subjectivity, experienced as feelings of dizziness, vertigo, disappearance or loss of self" (p. 53).

As many authors have noted (see Johnson, 2009; Schloss, 2009; Smith Lefebvre, 2011; Stevens, 2008), most of the dancers I interviewed felt that it was easiest to achieve this state of authenticity in cypher or other non-competitive environments, since the stress or pressure of having to 'perform' well in a battle could prevent the experience from happening at all. However, some of them spoke of experiencing these moments of enlightenment in other situations, such as practices and battles. For example, Radio described a moment in a battle where she felt the music had carried her to another state of consciousness:

> I danced in, I stepped in to the beat, and the beat was something different. It was like a drum, funky... I felt the music, I liked it, so somehow my body just started, like, absorbing all the energy that was around me and instead of bad energy working against me in terms of anxiety the way it usually does [laughs]. I used it and let go and just kind of moved my body around to the music. It felt good. And later I watched the video and it looked really good which I wasn't thinking about that then, I didn't think it looked good, it just felt good. (Radio, interview with the author, October 2011)

Radio felt she had gotten so caught up in the music that she had released her anxiety about battling. She was unaware of her movements, and had been unable to decide what movements to do. Similarly, Leduc (2007) argued: "In the state of authenticity, the interpreter does not reflect on what he must do, he does it without questioning, like a spontaneous reaction"[80] (p. 187). Indeed, the importance of 'not thinking' came up in a number of interviews: many participants compared this improvisation-induced state to being in a meditative one, and said that when they were in this state when they were not fully aware of what movements they were executing.

Like Radio, many of the participants also felt that 'connecting to the music' was an important factor in achieving a state of authenticity in b-boying: most said this

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[80] Translated from French by the author: Dans l'état d'authenticité, l'interprète ne réfléchit pas à ce qu'il doit faire, il le fait sans se poser de questions, comme une réaction spontanée. (Leduc, 2007, p. 53)

state was most easily achieved if they tried to follow the music, and draw directly from its energy to feed their dancing. This is not unusual since, as Winkelman (1986) has shown, auditory stimulation can be used to induce trance states. Similarly, Gore (1997) has argued: "dancing, meditation, and listening to music are [also] known to alter the chemistry of the brain and to transform consciousness" (p. 53). For example, Vicious described his experience of the state of authenticity as: "those moments where you aren't thinking about anything, but you're just dancing with the beat" (Vicious, interview with the author, July 2012). [81] It is interesting to note that Vicious does not mention dancing on the beat, but with the beat, suggesting that in this state felt that he embodied and became one with the music. Similarly, Smith Lefebvre (2011) has proposed that: "when driven by the music, breakers enter a zone where their authentic selves flow here and now. In this transcendent zone, barriers that inhibit a heartfelt sensitivity to gifts received in the cipher dissolve" (p. 88-89).

However, several participants told me that in these moments of authenticity, they needed to draw heavily on the skills they had developed through the intensive physical training they engage in during practices (which were discussed in section 4.2.2). For example, Lynx said she felt free in these moments of authenticity because she felt she could trust her body to take her where she needed to go:

> I'm not thinking about where my hands are going; I'm not thinking about the technique. I feel my way through the movement. So it's like, I'm... maybe allowing myself to feel complete. Whereas sometimes, my thinking is blocking that feeling. So when I just allow the feeling to come through and flow, then I'm not thinking about where my hands are going they're just going. I'm just doing movement that my body already knows. (Lynx, interview with the author, November 2011)

According to Foster (2003), all dance improvisation relies on the performer's technical proficiency: "Improvisation makes rigorous technical demands on the

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[81] Translated from French by the author: « ces moments-là genre, quand tu ne penses à rien, mais tu es juste en train de danser avec le beat » (Vicious, interview with the author, July 2012).

performer. It assumes an articulateness in the body through which the known and unknown will find expression" (p. 7). To Foster, dance improvisation (or the release to the unknown) is rendered possible through years of dance training (which provides a known). It is interesting to note that in order to truly improvise, the dancer must both have acquired great technical skill and mastery of his or her body, and yet have the ability and willingness to let go of that technical skill and knowledge in order to be open to the possibility of following the unexpected. Leduc (2007) suggests that this dual relationship between the mastery of technique and the release of technique is central to experiencing the state of authenticity; she argues that it is through years of rigorous physical and technical training that they are able to develop a profound awareness of themselves and their bodies in movement that dance artists develop an awareness of and openness to the unpredictable and the unknown.

Indeed, while many of the participants related these moments of authenticity to 'not thinking', it was obvious that they were highly observant of their bodies and movements; some of them had surprisingly detailed recollections of their physical sensations in these moments. For example, I asked Radio if she could give me a more detailed description of her moment of authenticity, to which she replied:

> Radio: I like, hollow out, here... [touches chest and sternum, and hunches shoulders forward and pushes chest back]. I hollow out my solar plexus. And I kind of make a ball over myself and I shake my body to find the music, and maybe even close my eyes... It's almost like taking it in, absorbing the funk or the letting go, you're just like, ok huh huh huh huh [shakes shoulders/arms, in time with the 'huhs'] shake, and you shake it out, and from that place, maybe like a little hunched over, and maybe a bit more in touch with your hips, some energy starts to flow there. It's like a hollowing out, opening up of a channel, which allows me more to get out of my head and into my body. I'm not the 'I', you know? I'm losing myself, my identity, to let the music literally pass through you like a tube. So it feels like you're hollowing out, so that' there's more of a chance for the music to enter.

> Helen: Ok... So the music enters? Do you know where it enters?

> Radio: I guess it's coming in like a beam, right into my chest, then it goes all the way down my body, down into my, down my thighs, down my knees, and passes into my feet. And then from the floor up also, back the other way. (Radio, interview with the author, October 2011)

For Radio, her moment of authenticity was connected a physical sensation that initiated in her sternum and passed down through her body into the floor and back. Several participants described similar sensations: some mentioned a sensation of energy emanating from the sternum, and felt aware of their breath in these moments. Others spoke of a lengthening in the spine, and feeling like the top of their head had opened up to let the music enter. Several dancers mentioned a feeling of weight in the arms coupled with a sense that their feet were floating or gliding across the floor.

Although many of the participants spoke of the importance of these moments of clarity, most of them admitted that much of the time they spent dancing was not actually spent experiencing such moments, but rather chasing after them. For instance, Radio told me that the moment she was describing above had only lasted a few seconds. Scramblelock explained that when he experienced these moments, it was only when he reflected back on the situation that he became aware of them:

> You just can't describe it. You're living in that moment, and you're not stopping for a second to analyze it. You're in that moment one hundred percent, so if you have to describe it, you have to step away from it for a second, right? And then you're not actually in that moment any more... you realize it after things have kind of stepped down, or somebody mentions something to you to bring you back... like, 'oh how did, how did you do that?' And I'm like 'do what? What are you talking about?' Or you watch your footage after and see like, oh, that's something different. I didn't know I was doing that. (Scramblelock, interview with the author, March 2012)

Like Radio and Scramblelock, many of the participants said that these moments of clarity only lasted a few seconds, and that when they realized they were experiencing one, the moment was over. This is not unusual since, according to Louppe (in Leduc, 2007), being in a state of authenticity supposes: "being present to

the present" (p. 185).[82] Similarly, Mead (1967) has argued that any action is a "living act which never gets directly into reflective experience. It is only after the act has taken place that we can catch it in our memory and place it in terms of that which we have done" (p. 203). Several dancers told me that although they strived to achieve these moments of clarity in their dancing, it was not something you could actively pursue, as it was the meditative act of 'not thinking' that allowed one to access them in the first place. Indeed, as Leduc (2007) has noted: "the state of authenticity surprises and is not deliberate" (p. 185).[83] Several participants told me that there was something almost addictive about chasing after these moments of pure improvisation, and that their quest to experience these moments of authenticity and embodiment of the music kept them so committed to their dance practice.

Some of the participants believed that experiencing these moments of authenticity gave them not only a deeper understanding of themselves, but also a profound connection to other b-boys and b-girls. For example, Vicious explained:

> It's hard to really explain those moments, but they're our best moments, you know? Other b-boys understand, 'You know, when you can't feel anything anymore?' 'Yeah, yeah, I know what you're talking about'. But someone who doesn't know it can't really understand. It's almost like meditating. You close your eyes, listen to the music, and you let yourself go. I know you don't close your eyes in breaking [laughs] but it's almost like that. It's your moment of peace. No, not a moment of peace, a moment of liberty. [84] (Vicious, interview with the author, July 2012)

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[82]Translated from French by the author: « être présent au present » (Louppe, in Leduc, 2007, p. 185).

[83] Translated from French by the author: « l'état d'authenticité surprend et n'est pas réfléchi » (Leduc, 2007, p. 185).

[84] Translated from French by the author: C'est dur à vraiment comme expliquer ces moments-là, mais c'est nos meilleurs moments, tu sais? Entre b-boys, on va se comprendre. « Tu sais là, tu sais quand tu ne sens plus rien ? Oh ouais, oui, je sais de quoi tu parles ». Mais quelqu'un qui ne sait pas, il ne va pas trop comprendre. C'est quasiment comme méditer. Tu fermes tes yeux, écoutes la musique et pis laisses-toi aller. Je sais que tu ne fermes pas tes yeux dans le break [rires], mais c'est quasiment ça. C'est ton moment de paix. Non, pas un moment de paix, mais un moment de, de liberté. (Vicious, interview with the author, July 2012)

We see that Vicious felt that in these moments of authenticity, he was able to connect with himself, all while building a stronger connection with his community. Similarly, Leduc (2007) has argued that in the state of authenticity, not only do individuals feel they have a profound awareness of themselves in the present moment, but also that they are also connected to the people and the world around them. If we consider Vicious' statement in relation to Mead's dual scheme of self-as-object and self-as-process, we can see that while in the state of authenticity, the 'I' and the 'Me' are in perfect harmony, thus uniting the individual's action in the present moment with his or her internalization of the community's values. Mead explained:

> It is where the 'I' and the 'me' can in some sense fuse that there arises the particular sense of exaltation which belongs to religious and patriotic attitudes in which the reaction which one calls out in others is the response which one is making himself. (Mead, 1967, p. 273)

Finally, many of the dancers I interviewed believed through these moments of authenticity, b-boying became a way to connect with and draw energy from a greater force or being on a spiritual level. For example, Krypto told me:

> It's a kind of celebration. And I feel that for a lot of breakers in that celebration there's a kind of a religious experience sometimes. I think it's what people look for in religious experience: a feeling of connection to something great. (Krypto, interview with the author, August 2012)

Like Krypto, many of the dancers I spoke to believed that experiencing these moments of transcendence made b-boying more than a dance form, or even a community or culture; rather, they felt that their dance practice provided them with a spiritual experience of sorts, through which they could connect to a greater presence.

I am suggesting that the sense of authenticity that b-boys and b-girls experience through their dancing are moments where the self-as-object and the self-as-process are united through the self-as-dancing-body, where the dancer's mind, body, personal, and social selves align as one. It is in these moments that b-boys and b-girls not only feel able to express 'themselves' most freely, but also that they are

most successfully meeting the general social and aesthetic values of their community. When these moments occur, b-boys and b-girls can experience a sense of spiritual enlightenment, and a connection to a power greater than themselves. According to Mead (1967): "This, we feel, is the meaning of life—and one experiences an exalted religious attitude. We get into an attitude in which everyone is at one with each other in so far as all belong to the same community" (p. 274).

4.3.3 Section Summary

In this section I have laid out some of the symbolic meanings that the dancers in this study associated to b-boying, focusing primarily on the notions of b-boying as an expression of identity, as well as b-boying as an experience of authenticity. I examined five manifestations of identity, which I referred to as the self-as-object, the self-as-process, the self-as-dancing-body, a state of mind, and a way of claiming space in society. Additionally, I discussed five manifestations of authenticity in b-boying, which were based on: participation, biographical features, artistic proficiency in the form, the ability to make it 'your own', all of which come into play in the 'moments of authenticity', where the dancer is able to connect with the music and express him or her self in a genuine and unrestricted manner. Finally, I identified some key differences between b-boying and breakdancing—namely in the dancer's intention behind or commitment to the dance practice—and discussed some of the contradictions the participants felt existed in the discussion of who was 'real' and who was 'fake' in the community. Please see Table 4 on the next page for a summary of key points.

Table 4: Symbolic Differences Between B-boying and Breakdancing

	B-boying	Breakdancing
Identity	• Identity constructed through internalization of community values and beliefs • Identity tied to and expressed through the act of dancing • Develops distinct frame of mind or world view	• Dance practice not necessarily connected to sense of identity
Authenticity	• Dance for the love of dancing • Actively participates in and contributes to the community • Excels at b-boying as a dance form • Values all elements of the dance; uses foundational format of the dance but adds personal interpretation to make the dance 'their own' • Gains deeper understanding of self and strengthens bonds with community through embodiment of music	• Dance as means for personal, social, or financial gain or improvement • Less involved in the social activities associated to the community • May be associated to a lower skill level • Focuses on preferred elements of the dance form (generally power moves and tricks); may perform movements well but not necessarily in a manner that follows the foundational format of the dance

4.4 Chapter Conclusion: Initial Outline of a Theory on B-boying

In this chapter, I have drawn from data gathered from my fieldwork in Montreal, as well as my analysis of media representations of breakdancing, in order to examine both the concrete and imagined differences between b-boying and breakdancing. Throughout the chapter, I have presented several key points that emerged through the constant continuous analysis; these points can be used to develop an emerging grounded theory on b-boying.

First, I propose that b-boying and breakdancing are in fact two different dance forms. While they share the common movement vocabulary of breaking—that is, top rock, floor work, power moves, and tricks—they differ greatly in a number of ways, including: how the vocabulary is used (using full range of movements versus favouring more acrobatic movements), number of participants (solo versus group), relationship to the spectator (participatory versus presentational), use of space (non-frontal and dynamic level changes versus frontal and mostly standing), and compositional format (improvisation versus choreographed sets). Using Ness' (2009) frame of the *5 Elements of Battle Style*, I have highlighted some of the stylistic differences between b-boying, arguing that, for the participants, there is a tangible energetic difference between b-boying and breakdancing, which comes from: a direct, aggressive use of space; a total body connectivity with moments initiating from the core as opposed to the extremities; smooth transitions between movements; the ability to control the flow of movements by alternating between bound and free flow; a rebounding or recoiling push away from the floor; and a sense that one is embodying the music—that is, that one is not dancing <u>on</u> but <u>with</u> the music.

Second, I illustrate that b-boying is a set of social practices, all centered around the learning and performance of—and reflection upon—an improvisational,

participatory dance form. It is a lifestyle, a cyclical system of learning and knowledge creation, and a process of self-confrontation that takes the form of a series of individual and collective acts. While activities occur primarily through face-to-face contact, b-boys and b-girls have begun to use virtual platforms such as the Internet to create 'new authenticities' in their practice. B-boying is a process-oriented activity, where for many dancers the end goal of the activity is simply to partake in the process itself. In contrast, some participants felt that breakdancing was a product-oriented activity, geared towards mastering certain movements or techniques in order to accomplish specific goals such as executing particular movements or winning competitions for personal, social, or financial gain.

Third, I argue that b-boying is an expression of self in the present moment, which is made possible through the act of dancing. Drawing from Mead's (1967) dual scheme of the self-as-object and the self-as-process, as well as Bourdieu's (2011) notion of habitus, I propose that the self developed and performed through b-boying a multi-layered social self: dancers activate their b-boy/b-girl identities (or their self-as-object) through the process of b-boying (which is their self-as-process). The sense of self which is developed and expressed through b-boying is both a somatic self linked to the embodied experience of dancing (or a *self-as-dancing-body*) and a unique world-view or frame of mind (the b-boy mentality) that can be used in or applied to other, non-dancing, interactions. Moreover, the sense of self that is developed through b-boying is a social self, which is constructed by and constructive towards both the b-boying community, and society at large. From the symbolic interactionist standpoint, the self is not a fixed structure but an ongoing and ever evolving social process (Blumer, 1998). Similarly, the sense of self developed and performed through b-boying is not an objective, essential identity, but a subjective self that the individual constructs, deconstructs, and reconstructs throughout his or her lifetime. It is a social process or strategy in which individuals engage, which provides them with an understanding of their self in action. In short, b-boying is

something that a person is. In contrast, breakdancing is something a person does. It is an external process in which an individual can engage, which is not necessarily connected to that person's sense of identity, or way of being in the world.

Finally, I propose that b-boying is a sense of authenticity. It is about being true to one's self and one's culture, and dancing for the love of the dance, and not for personal or commercial gain. It is a cultural authenticity that is evaluated both on a dancer's participation in the culture, as well as his or her biographical features, including: race, ethnicity, age, gender, and socio-economic status. It is an artistic authenticity, which is based on both dancers' mastery of the dance form, as well as their ability to take that form and make it their own. It is an authentic experience or state of authenticity, in which individuals become one with their sense of self, their community, the music, and an energy or being greater than themselves; it is a communion of sorts, a process through which dancers make sense of the many facets of the self. In contrast, breakdancing was seen, by some of the participants in this study, as an inauthentic reproduction of b-boying that seeks to reproduce the form, without the knowledge or symbolic value associated to the practice.

But as Peterson (1997) argued:

Authenticity is not inherent in the object or event that is designated authentic but is a socially agreed-upon construct. [...] It is continuously negotiated in an ongoing interplay between performers, diverse commercial interests, fans, and the evolving image. (p. 15-16)

As such, it is important to understand that my desire to explicate the differences between b-boying and breakdancing is not ultimately to draw a definitive line between the two, or objectively label b-boying as a 'true' expression of self, or 'real' or 'good', and breakdancing as 'fake' or 'bad'. In a way, b-boying needs breakdancing, as it provides a clear example against which b-boys and b-girls in Montreal can measure their own and their peers' 'realness'.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Gilroy (1997) has suggested that dance academics need to be quick to theorize popular dance practices, since they tend to disappear as quickly as they emerge. In regards to b-boying, I see this proposition as particularly problematic since, as Schloss (2009) has pointed out, most hip-hop academia is considered "laughable by the hip-hop community" since it "put[s] the theory in the hands of the scholar... implying that b-boys and b-girls do not have their own theories about what they do" (p. 7-8). B-boying did not in fact disappear as Gilroy suspected it would; rather, it has become a global phenomenon that is practised by dancers around the world (Fogarty, 2006, 2010, 2012a, 2012b; Osumare, 2002; Schloss, 2009). So one must wonder, do the hastily developed theories on b-boying that continue to be applied in academic circles actually represent the lived experiences of b-boys and b-girls today in Montreal? Or have these theories become two-dimensional caricatures of b-boying just as the media representations of breakdancing had in the 1980s?

Like Fogarty (2010), I believed it was time to re-evaluate existing theories that continue to define b-boying simply as a homogenous expressive youth culture and that I needed to apply a fresh aesthetic and sociological eye towards the field in order to understand b-boying as it is currently practised in Montreal. With this study, I have used an empirical, inductive approach to discover how b-boys and b-girls in Montreal define—and thus perform—their own art form. I have brought to light some of the implicit and subtle beliefs that these dancers hold in regards to their own practice, and have begun to develop a theory of b-boying that is grounded in the participants' perception of the phenomenon. While I have ultimately drawn on a

number of theories from hip-hop studies and outside hip-hop culture in this thesis, I have prioritized the voices of the participants, in order to highlight the complexity of their beliefs on their practice.

When I started this study, I was primarily interested in understanding the observable structural differences between b-boying and breakdancing as dance forms. At first, I thought I could limit myself to describing and analyzing the movements, actions, and activities associated to b-boying, or what dancers were actually doing when they were b-boying. On a practical level, this meant focusing my attention more on what dancers did, and how they did it, rather than on why they were doing it. But as the study advanced, I realized that in order to understand the differences between b-boying and breakdancing, it was also important to understand the symbolic meaning that dancers attributed to the two terms. Using the grounded theory ethnography methodology (Charmaz, 2006) allowed me explore the multiple facets of this phenomenon.

I have argued that b-boying and breakdancing are in fact not the same dance form, but two distinct dance forms. They overlap in their use of the movement vocabulary drawn from breaking, but which differ in their use of this vocabulary, as well as their use of space, number of participants, relationship to the spectator, compositional format, and style. Moreover, I have proposed that b-boying is not simply a dance form per se, but also a series of social interactions, and a complex and ongoing expression of identity that is primarily developed and performed through the practice of a dance form called breaking, and through participation in greater hip-hop culture. This self is both a product and a process, and a holistic expression of identity that unites mind, body, spirit, and community through what I have termed the *self-as-dancing-body*. Finally, I have suggested that b-boying is a sense of 'realness', or an artistic and cultural authenticity, as well as an authentic, trans-like state. B-boys and b-girls use the concept of 'breakdancing' as a bar against which to measure their own

realness, or the realness of other dancers in their community. While this distinction between 'real' and 'fake' is in many ways false or constructed (Thornton, 1996), it is still a judgment of taste against which dancers in this community consider their own identities. Indeed, no matter how they felt about the b-boying versus breakdancing debate, all of the participants in this study had at least heard of it, and had an opinion on the issue. As such, the distinction between b-boying and breakdancing can be seen as one of the strategies that b-boys and b-girls in Montreal use to distinguish who is an insider and who is an outsider to their community.

Over the course of this study, some dancers—and several well meaning friends whom I tried to explain my project to—told me that b-boying and breakdancing were 'just words', and that I should not worry about them so much. And yet, it is clear that these words hold vastly different meanings that b-boys and b-girls in Montreal hold close to heart, and use to define their dance practice, as well as themselves and the world in which they live. Indeed, we should remember that: "words mean what they do because of what speakers of the language do with them" (Blackburn, 1996, p. 541). As such, the words that b-boys and b-girls use to label themselves and their dance practices are the way in which they communicate what they believe to themselves, their community, and the world in which they live.

Of course, this study only represents a small sample of the infinite opinions and experiences pertaining to how the lived experience of b-boying differs from the media representations of breakdancing in the 1980s. One must remember that my social constructionist stance allows for the possibility of multiple realities. As noted in Chapter 1, dancers in different cities or countries, dancers who have a different mother tongue, older or younger dancers, and male and female dancers may have experienced the phenomenon of b-boying in different ways, and may have different attitudes towards the word breakdancing. Indeed, many of the dancers I spoke to stressed that they could 'only speak for themselves', and not for how other b-boys

and b-girls might feel on the question of what b-boying was, or how it differed from breakdancing. Thus, we understand that b-boying is a highly personal process, and that each individual experiencers this phenomenon in a unique way.

As such, both the opinions of the participants and my preliminary theory of b-boying should not be seen as a universal 'truth', and the results of this study cannot be seen to represent the generalized view of the phenomenon in the international breaking community. Of course, the goal of qualitative studies is not to produce generalizable statistics (Creswell, 2009); rather, the aim here was to provide a detailed description and conceptualization of the diversity of opinions in regards to the matter, and to outline an emerging theory of b-boying. Much as Fogarty (2006, 2010, 2012a, 2012b), Johnson (2009), Ness (2009), Osumare (2002), Schloss (2009), Smith Lefebvre (2011), and Stevens' (2008) work has informed this study, I hope that my understanding of b-boying can serve as a point of comparison for future studies on b-boying in other communities or social contexts.

When I started this project, I believed I had narrowed my investigation down to a small and manageable subject. In the end, I discovered that I had asked much too broad a question, and that I could not be able to touch on all the topics that came up. This study has highlighted the complexity of b-boying, and points to the need of additional research on this phenomenon. Several of the concepts highlighted in this thesis could serve as the object of study in future empirical or interpretive research projects in a number of different fields including, but not limited to:

- Movement Analysis (further examination of links which can be made between Laban Movement Analysis and Alien Ness' 5 Elements of Battle Style; detailed movement analysis of the vocabulary of b-boying);
- Sociological or Cultural Analysis (examination of how various biographical features such as age, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, mother tongue, ability, or socio-economic status affect b-boys' and b-girls' understanding of their dance practices and the b-boying/breakdancing debate; examination of the power dynamics

within the b-boy/b-girl community, and of how cultural 'rules' or norms are established and re-enforced; the effect of the Internet and social media outlets on b-boying, and how dancers use these platforms to create new sites of social interaction; the importance of choosing one's dance name in the development of b-boy/b-girl identity);

- Phenomenological studies (on the state of authenticity in different social settings such as practices, cyphers, battles; how outside observers receive perceive, or receive a dancer's performance; the moment when the dancer transitions from spectator to performer as he or she steps into the cypher);
- Pedagogical studies (further investigation of the learning cycle of b-boying; examination of pedagogical tools that teachers and mentors employ to train new generations of dancers; examining the modes of the sharing and transmission of knowledge within the community; considering if training in other dance or movement forms aids or hinders the learning of breaking).

As I come to the end of this thesis, and look back on the richness and the diversity of the topics which have been covered, it is evident that, as Schloss (2009) has argued: "B-boys and b-girls are people who are attracted to a practice that they view as complex and powerful and sophisticated and spiritual" (p. 156). In conclusion, I leave the reader with a final citation from Radio, which eloquently sums up the complexity of this phenomenon as an artistic and social practice:

> I found a method of self-expression and a culture that contains me... It gives me a time and a space to express myself within a certain framework and structure, that challenges me regularly on many levels. Challenges me physically, artistically, but also in my self and my psychology. In my ego. It gives me an opportunity to see myself in action: to see my ego in action. So it really makes things very clear for me, how sometimes I can be. And then, in seeing that, I can be in a dialogue with myself. So it's just this beautiful opportunity that allows me so many things. And not only that, I have my friendships in this form. It's a living breathing art form. It forces me to evolve, and it's a discipline that I can't see myself letting go of up until the age of eighty, ninety, or a hundred years old, god willing. I want to challenge myself to continue, to represent, and be myself while other people are being themselves in this artistic environment that's that totally improvised. So... no way in hell would I ever stop. (Radio, interview with the author, March 2012)

ANNEX A: A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE MONTREAL BREAKING COMMUNITY

Like in many cities around the world, breaking originally came to Montreal primarily via mediated images of the dance and hip-hop culture. West coast funk style dances such as popping, locking, and the robot arrived in Montreal first; many young dancers—initially of primarily Afro-diasporic origins—learned these styles by watching television shows such as *Soul Train* (Stevens, 2008). Tash, a Black locker who was part of the locking crew *Comedy's Gang* during the 1980s, remembered:

> I would watch it on TV, you know like when first 1 saw Michael Jackson on *Motown* 25 and they first did the Moonwalk with Billie Jean? 1 remember just watching it, freaking out - the next day everyone that had seen it at school, we were all trying to do the Moonwalk. And then there were these two boys that actually got it and we're just like, 'oh my god, how are you doing this?' And then they were teaching us. And basically it was always by memory, we would watch [TV obsessively]. (Tash, in Stevens, 2008, p. 84)

Many dancers, however, were also exposed to street dances first hand during family trips to the United States. Veteran Montreal b-boy DKC Freeze explained: "A lot of Haitians and Jamaicans [in Montreal] have family in Miami, or New York, or Cali, or Boston. So they would bring the knowledge from the States, they brought it here. So that's how it came really" (DKC Freeze, interview with the author, June 2013). Similarly, Real, a Black street dancer who has been dancing since the late 70s, told me that his dancing had been influenced both by the media, and first hand experiences:

> We would practice in our basements. That was how we learned moves; [we] watched videos, watched videotapes! Cause every time we would travel to the States, we would videotape the shows, so we could come back and watch [to see] what's the latest style, what's the latest fashion. (Real, interview with the author, March 2012)

Like Tash, DKC, and Real, young people around the city were busy trying to learn these new dances that were popular on television. But rather than simply copying and recreating what they saw on the screen, put their own spin on the moves and took to the streets, the nightclubs, and the stage, expressing themselves through their dance. By the late 70s and early 80s, Montreal was home to a number of street dance crews, including *Cosmic Force, Vision Force,* and *The Shaka Brothers* (Stevens, 2008).

Many young dancers in Montreal also learned about the down rocking and floor moves of breaking from the popular media (Stevens, 2008). According to DKC Freeze, by the time movies such as *Wild Style* (Ahearn, 1982) and *Flash Dance* (Lyne, 1983) hit theatres in the early 80s, Montreal street dancers were already eager to incorporate the new and dynamic floor moves into their dancing. He remembers that at a screening of *Wild Style* in 1982: "When the movie stopped, people screamed and got up and freaked! We freaked at every little thing we see these guys did" (DKC Freeze, interview with the author, June 2013). Express, a dancer who was also a member of *New Energy*, has remembered being equally excited when he saw the movie *Flashdance:*

> I can remember, we [me and DKC] went to see *Flashdance*... I swear... I don't know how many times we saw that film! We paid [for it] over and over and over! Just to see that little part that was how many seconds?? You know, it's a two-hour movie, and [we went back] just for that little part that was a few seconds of breaking. And that first day, we came out of the cinema... and right away we were trying to do the spins and stuff like that, right in front [of the cinema]. (Express, in Dundas, 2012)[85]

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[85] Translated from French by the author: Bon, j'me souviens... on a été voir *Flashdance*. Je te jure, je sais pas combien de fois qu'on l'a vu le film. On a repayé, on a repayé, on a repayé... juste pour voir ce p'tit bout de combien de secondes ?? Tu sais ? C'est un film de deux heures, pis on est allé pour voir ce p'tit bout de quelques secondes de break. Pis... on est sorti devant le cinéma... pis tout de suite on essayait de faire les spins en avant là...

With the popularity of breakdancing in the media, youth in Montreal inevitably took up the dance. *Cosmic Force* and *Vision Force* added floor moves to their repertoire, and new crews with names such as *Galactic Crew, Future Wave, Mystic Crew,* and *New Energy* popped up across the city (Dundas, 2013). Indeed, DKC has estimated that by 1984, there were somewhere between fifty and one hundred breaking crews in Montreal; at the time, these young dancers weren't too concerned with differentiating between various forms such as breaking, popping, and locking; like the dancers they saw in the movies, they mixed these techniques into the mishmash style known 'breakdancing' (Stevens, 2008).

New Energy was arguably the most successful and best known breaking crew in Montreal during the mid 80s: they won a number of organized battles in the early and mid 80s, including a now legendary battle that *Much Music* hosted at the *Spectrum* in 1984 (K, 2005). For a time, these young b-boys were able to earn a living by performing as back up dancers for live acts such as James Brown, before Expos' games at the Olympic Stadium, and on a number of television shows (Dundas, 2012).

But by 1986, the media's interest in breakdancing had waned. As DKC has put it: "In 86, it just died... it just died, and I don't know why" (DKC, in Miller, 2004). At the same time, musical tastes had changed, and new dances such as House and New Jack Swing had become popular in the nightclubs. B-boying all but disappeared in Montreal for a number of years, while hip-hop dancers such as Angelo Ameur, Shauna Roberts, Victor Lee 'Boogie V' Izzard, and Real were regular fixtures in this new club and hip-hop dance scene (Real, interview with the author, March 2012).

But by the early 90s, breaking was slowly making a comeback around the world; DKC recalls that in 1994 a friend brought him a video of B-boy Storm from Germany:

> I looked at that tape, and I was like 'B-boying's back? Breaking's back?? I'm back!!!' I was so happy... when I saw that tape, I said, ok, breaking's back. That means the whole time I was doing it, and it wasn't in style, and people were telling me 'What are you doing? That's a dance for little kids'... well now I was like, yo, it's back. And slowly, I started seeing people [doing it]. (Dundas, 2012)[86]

Indeed, breaking was making a slow comeback in Montreal. *Down Rock Complex* and *Dope Squad* were two of the first crews to form in this new generation of early 90s Montreal b-boys (Miller, 2004). By the mid 90s, other crews such as *Golden Breakers*, *Scalp Hunters,* and *Sub Connection* formed and were performing and battling again (Stevens, 2008). The scene was growing, and a b-boy called Goldylocks started organizing large scale breaking competitions around the city in 1995 (Silverman, 1999).

Things were changing quickly in the Montreal breaking scene: by 1996, *Dope Squad* had dissolved; *Down Rock Complex* added new members and become *Flow Rock Crew*; and members of *Golden Breakers* and *Scalp Hunters* recruited up and coming dancers from *Sub Connection*, and came together to form *Tactical Crew* (Omegatron, email communication with the author, June 2013). Ultimately, it was an on-going rivalry between *Flow Rock* and *Tactical Crew* that dominated the Montreal breaking scene throughout the mid and late 90s, and the two crews engaged in a number of long and heated battles (Miller, 2004).

Indeed, by the late 90s, there was once again a sharp rise in the public's interest in breaking. This time period from around 1996 to 2000 marks the birth of Montreal's third generation of b-boys, and suddenly, breaking classes and practices

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[86] Translated from French by the author: J'ai regardé ce tape-là, pis j'étais comme *« B-boying's back? Breaking's back?? I'm back!! »* I was so happy... quand j'ai vu ce tape-là, j'ai dit, ok, *breaking's back.* Ça veut dire que tout le temps que j'l'ai fait, pis j'étais pas à la mode, pis on me disait « Qu'est-ce que tu fais? C'est une danse des p'tits jeunes... », ben là j'étais comme, *yo, it's back*! Pis lentement, j'ai vu du monde [le faire]. (Dundas, 2012)

popped up all over the city in order to meet the demand of young adults eager to learn the dance. For example, B-boy Walken opened a dance studio, *MTL Breakers*, in the Belgo Building on St-Catherine Street in 1997 (Ben Saãdoune, 1997); *Flow Rock* offered classes at the Cote-des-Neiges community centre; and Shauna Roberts organized breaking classes and practices at the Rock Gym that were run by a number of different b-boys over the years—including Irvin 'Dazl' St-Louis from *Flow Rock*, and later on Jonas 'Omegatron' Napoleon and Michel 'Prince Dope Step' Athis from *Tactical Crew*. In a few short years, the number of crews in Montreal jumped from three or four to over twenty (Silverman, 1999), and dancers faced off in battles at events such as *Rock On* (1997-2000), *Cream* (1998), *Swirl* (1999), and *Strictly Breaks* (1999).[87] Omegatron remembers that groups such as *Rainbow Crew, Chief of Technics, On Point Crew, Flip Side Crew, Illegal Kombination, Lunatic Breakers, Wreck Crew, First Class, Illusion Breakers, Floor Masters, Red Force, Red Mask, Fast Step Troop, Illmatic Styles,* and *Area 51* were but some of the crews that came out of the Montreal breaking scene during this time period (Omegatron, email communication with the author, June 2013).

The 1990s also saw the birth of Montreal's first major wave of b-girls. Pearl Pat and Mook were two early b-girls who started breaking in 1993, and Pearl Pat remembered *Conspicuous Click* as being Montreal's first official all-female crew, and was active around 1995 and 1996 (Pearl Pat, email communication with the author, May 2013). In 1997, several independent b-girls (including Blazin'[88] and Nadia Moussa) trained at the Rock Gym with members of *Tactical Crew*. The same year, Tash—who had continued locking since the 80s—started breaking, and eventually joined *Flow Rock* (Tash, email communication with the author, March 2011). *Ellementale-5* formed in 1998, and quickly became Montreal's best-known all-female

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[87] In Stevens' account, she proposes that *Strictly Breaks* took place in 1998. However, one of my participants shared a photo with me in which we see a t-shirt from *Strictly Breaks* with the date March 19th, 1999.

[88] Blazin' moved to Toronto in 1998, and went on to co-found the all b-girl crew *Shebang!* in 2000.

crew (Stevens, 2008). Their presence—along with the open classes and practices they organized at the House of Pride loft and the Concordia Vic Gym from 1998 to 2000—encouraged other women to start breaking, and the number of b-girls in Montreal grew rapidly. In 2000, members of *Ellementale-5* joined forces with another all-female group—*DysFunkShn Crew*—and a couple of independent b-girls to form the *Solid State Breakdance Collective*, a performing group and support network with the mandate to encourage female dancers in the Montreal breaking community.[89]

The Montreal breaking community has continued to grow in the 2000s. While some crews from the 90s came and went, many of them continued to battle, perform, and teach. New crews—such as *Legz Crew, 701 Squad, Sweet Technique, Fresh Format, Deadly Venoms, Overev,* and *Legendary Crew*—hit the dance floor and faced off at yearly events such as *War is War, Under Pressure, Gravity Rock, Who's Hungry,* and *Braggin' Rights*; at monthly jams like B-boy Skywalker's *Callouts*; and at weekly club nights like *RockDeep Tuesdays* and *Throwdown Tuesdays*. Professional dance companies such as *Rubberbandance Group, Solid State,* and *Destins Croisés* produced professional stage performances mixing street dance with contemporary dance, which toured throughout North America and Europe.

Today, the b-boy/b-girl scene is once again nearing the size it was in the 1980s, and continues to evolve. Many of the crews that formed during the late 90s and the first decade of the 2000s continue to train and battle, and new crews such as *Cypher Sons*, the *AMC Forum Crew,* and *Stylz Corrupt* are starting to make their mark on the scene. Other crews have merged and continue to operate under new names: for example, *Red Mask* and *Illmatic Styles* joined to become *Illmask*, and *701 Squad* and *Overev* united as *Closet Monsters*. Additionally, today many dancers

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[89] I was a founding member of both *DysFunkShn Crew* and *Solid State*.

choose not to join crews, but simply operate as free agents, teaming up as needed to enter battles or do shows. More and more dancers are travelling battles in Canada and around the world, and competitions such as Alexandra 'Spicey' Landé's yearly event, *Bust a Move*, have grown over the years, and have drawn international attention to the Montreal street dance community.

ANNEX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Name of interviewee:
Date:
Location:
Start time:
Finish time:

Introduce research purpose and methodology

Thank you so much for agreeing to speak with me today. Our interview is part of my research on the dance form called b-boying or breaking, and commonly known as "breakdance". I have noticed that there are an increasing number of conversations in the b-boy community as to if the word "breakdancing" is an accurate representation of this dance and culture. But most of the books and papers I have read so far in preparing for my research don't put an emphasis on the theories that b-boys and b-girls themselves have about their dance, so I would love to hear what you have to say about this topic.

The purpose of my research is to examine how a lived dance culture is different from the way it is represented in the mass media. My main interest is to understand if differences exist (or are perceived to exist) between the media and commercial representation of "breakdancing" from the 1980's and how this dance is practised today in Montreal, Canada.

Sign consent form

Please take the time to read over the consent form, and tell me if you have any questions.

Dancer's personal biography:
- Can you walk me through the history of your dance career or practice?
- What type of movement/dance training did you have before you started breaking? (e.g. sports, martial arts, other dance forms, dance in social/cultural/family settings)
- How were you first exposed to breaking?
- How did you learn how to break?
- How do you/did you participate in the breaking community?
- Has your participation changed over time? How?

General beliefs, theories, philosophies about b-boying and breakdancing:

- What is b-boying to you? How do you define it?
- What activities, values, or techniques do you associate with b-boying?
- What is your definition of breakdancing?
- Does breakdancing differ from b-boying? How? Why?
- Which word do you generally use to describe this dance, in general and in relation to your own practice? Why do you prefer this term as opposed to others?
- When did you first become aware of a distinction between b-boying and breakdancing?
- How did you find out about the distinction between the two? What made you aware of it?

Concrete examples and material:
- At what point did you start to think of yourself as a b-boy or b-girl? What was the process you went through to identify yourself as a b-boy or b-girl?
- How did you know that you were a b-boy or b-girl?
- Can you describe a recent experience when you felt you were truly b-boying? What happened? What did you do? What did you feel or think?
- How did you know you were truly b-boying in this situation?
- Think of an actual dancer you have recently seen whose dancing is, for you, a good example of b-boying. Can you describe the way he or she looks and dances, and his attitude?
- How do you know this person's dancing is a good example of b-boying?
- Can you think of a concrete representation of what you would define as breakdancing (book, film, performance, video, specific dancer etc.)? Can you describe what the dancers look like, what they do, how they move?
- How do you know that this is breakdancing (and not b-boying)?

Wrap up:
- Do you have anything else to add?
- Are there any important issues you feel we haven't addressed

ANNEX C: LIST OF BATTLES ATTENDED

1. *War is Raw*, TELUS Theatre, January 2012
2. *Juste Debout Canada*, Centre Sportif UQAM, January 2012
3. *Centipede 2*, Urban Element Dance Studio, March 2012
4. *Can I Get a Soul Clap*, Théâtre Plaza April 2012
5. *Afternoon Jam*, Fresh Paint Gallery, May 2012
6. *Skillz-o-Meter 2*, Air de Tango, May 2012
7. *Bust a Move*, La Tohu, May 2012
8. *Hey Zulu*, Soul Sessions Studio, June 2012
9. *Under Pressure fundraiser*, outdoor event on Rue St-Catherine, July 2012
10. *Jam Session: Graffiti Edition*, Cabaret Underworld, August 2012
11. *Gravity Rock*, outdoor event, Centre Communautaire de loisir de la Côte-des-Neiges, August 2012
12. *House of Paint*, outdoor event, Ottawa, September 2012
13. *Rhythm in the Ring*, Tristar Gym, Sept 2012
14. *Tales from the Breaks*, Disstorsion Dance Studio, November 2012
15. *Bragging Rights*, Downtown YMCA, Jan 2013
16. *South Flavor Jam*, Centre Communautaire de Carignan, April 2013
17. *Bust a Move*, La Tohu, May 2013
18. *Legz Crew Anniversary*, Cote-des-Neiges Community Centre, May 2013

ANNEX D: EXAMPLE OF FIELD NOTES

March 24th, 2012, Le Centipede (2on2 Battle, Urban Element Dance Centre)
Organized by Sweet Technique. Section of field notes taken after battle.

-The prelims are over. Omegatron, the host of the event, calls for a 10-minute break before next round.
-Short discussion with Bounce and Radio about crews that made it through to the next round. Radio notes that there is a preference for dancers who are very rhythmical and do more East Coast, New York style "foundational" dancing. Not very many power or aerial moves in prelims. Perhaps dancers were holding back for the finals?
-Music playing is mostly classic break-beat, some instrumental hip-hop.
-Open cyphers form quickly. There is one main cypher on the lino where the battles were taking place. About 15-20 dancers circle around to take turns to dance. Mainly men, Bounce is the only woman participating. Mix of ages, from maybe 14-late 30s. Mainly French being spoken, but people in the cypher aren't talking much, everyone is focused on dancing. Bounce mentions that the surface is not ideal, very slippery.
-I am watching, but as I am not dancing, I keep getting pushed back by dancers who are eager to get in on the action. I have to move to the other side to get a better view.
-White b-boy in his early 30s?, shaved head, clean cut look, 5'7"ish, stocky build. Footwork set. Short set but powerful energy, attacking movements. Very fast.
-White b-boy, mid-30s, 5'11"ish, encourages two younger dancers to get in. I think he is their mentor the way he is coaching and watching them. He sees me and says hi, asks how I have been, but without really taking his eyes off the cypher.
-Bounce has gone in a lot. She is the only woman participating in the cypher
-Younger b-boy dancing, maybe early 20s? Asian, thin, maybe 5'5". Set of freezes and tricks. He's smiling. Next b-boy comes in before set is over. Early 20s, Black, very fast, a lot of energy. Musical in top rocks, big jump, lands freeze on beat. Observers cheer.
-Two b-boys enter cypher at same time and bump into each other. They both hesitate for a moment, not sure who is going to take it. Bounce slides between them and takes the round. Observers cheer. White b-boy, long brown hair comes in next.
-I don't dance in this cypher. The energy is very intense, hard to get in. Everyone is hungry to dance, rounds are overlapping each other. I have been practising a lot lately, but I feel intimidated by this cypher. I am not sure who I am afraid of looking bad in front of, but I feel anxious about dancing in this cypher.
-It's hot in the room. I walk towards the lobby to get a bottle of water.
-The room is quite full, there are 2 other cyphers at the back of the room towards the door, and a live band set up on the far side of the room. Is it for the battle or perhaps after party?
-I have to pass through another smaller studio to make where there are open cyphers, 8 dancers in 2 cyphers. I stop to talk to a Black b-boy in early 30s, 5'6", Francophone. Stocky with dreads, he smiles a lot. He is warming up. He talks about his daughters. Another b-boy walks up, White, late 20s, 5'10", short brown hair. Gives me hug, introduces me to his girlfriend. He's bilingual, switches back and forth between French and English.

ANNEX E: EXAMPLE OF OPEN CODING DRAWN FROM INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Codes	Interview Transcript
• Picking up moves • Mimicking • Thinking you know • Meeting other dancers • Being Mentored • Foundation	Participant: I was just dancing, taking a little bit here and there, what I thought it was, you know? [Pause] But then, I met this guy, like ten years older than me. He taught me some of my first foundation…
	Interviewer: Do you remember the stuff he was teaching you?
• Learning: Being mentored • Foundation • Showing technical knowledge of dance • Thinking you know • Not wanting to conform • Understanding	P: Yeah, he was teaching me like 3-step, 6-step, baby freezes… I remember learning some basic top rocks. I think he taught me Salsa Step. Very basic stuff. But to be honest I don't' remember being too interested in learning at that time. I guess I didn't really understand it, cause I was young and I was super hyperactive [I laughs]. I just wanted to flip around basically.
	I: Ok
• Having your own style • Meeting other dancers • Thinking you know • Questioning identity • Understanding • Foundation	P: So I was kind of dancing my own way. And then when I got quite a lot older, I guess around 18-19, I met some actual b-boys. I thought I had been b-boying for years, you know what I mean? I thought I had been breaking. But I guess I didn't really know that much foundation. But you know, everyone sucked at one point I guess [laughs].

	I: And how did meeting them… what did it make you…
• Practicing/Hanging out with friends • Not wanting to conform • Having your own style • Different ways of learning • Foundation • Different ways of learning • Being judged for not conforming to aesthetics • Feeling disrespected	P: We would just, we were just training together. And for a long time I remember I didn't want to learn too much foundation or stuff like that. I kind of wanted to create my own style. I know a lot of people, like, either they start by learning foundation and they go that way. Or they start by just liking to dance and exploring. And I think I was more like that, you know? And… it wasn't until later that I felt… I didn't… I felt like a lot of people didn't , well I don't know if it was true, but I felt that they didn't respect me.
	I: yeah?
• Wanting to learn more • Wanting to learn • Being mentored • Knowing history • Getting the story 'right' • Understanding	And I think it came to a point where I was just like, I can dance, I can do my thing, but I also want to be able to do it. I want to learn more about it. More the history. My friend, he was always talking about the history and stuff. About things like who started it and all those things. But… I had learned certain things but I think I didn't really understand the true form until later, you know?
	I: You, you said you didn't think they respected you?
• Judgement by the community	R: Well yeah, I think it was a little bit narrow minded, the scene at the time. A lot of people

- Different schools of thought - Being mentored - Having your own style - Respect from participation - Being judged for not conforming to aesthetics 'That's not breaking' - Understanding - Practicing - Doing it for the 'right' reasons 'Foundation is the key to creativity' - Proper form - Having your own style	were taught by the same people, and I was taught by another guy. And I was kind of going my thing. I feel like a lot of people did respect me, cause I had a lot of friends, and they were respecting me for doing my thing. But some people were like, 'oh he's not breaking, he's doing some weird shit'. And I think that maybe that made me drill foundations really hard. Not because, I don't know if it was the right reason, but I'm really happy about it now, cause I find, like, foundation is the key to creativity. It builds your form, your style. And then you build your own style on top of that.

ANNEX F: CONSENT FORM

Project Information:
You are invited to participate in this interview as part of an ethnographic research project on the dance form called b-boying or breaking (commonly known as "breakdance"). The purpose of this research is to investigate the differences (real or perceived) that exist between media and commercial representation of "breakdancing" in the 1980's and b-boying today in Montreal, Canada (technically, culturally, and aesthetically).

Procedures:
If you have agreed to participate in this study, you will be interviewed, either in person, by telephone, or via Skype. The interview is expected to last approximately sixty minutes. I will ask you a number of questions; I trust that you will answer these questions truthfully, and within the context of your personal experience. You are not obligated to answer any of the questions if you do not wish to. If you do not want to answer a particular question, just let me know and we will move to the next one. If you answer a question and later feel uncomfortable with the information you have provided me with in my research, let me know and I will destroy those segments of the recording. If you change your mind at any point during the interview and no longer want to participate in the study, let me know and we will stop. I can provide you with a copy of the transcripts from the interview, and you are welcome to review and revise your responses if you wish. This interview could be recorded for the purpose of clarity in my citations. If you would like to tell me something off the record, please let me know and I will stop recording. If you are not comfortable being recorded, let me know, and your answers will be presented more as general statements than as exact citations.

The data collected in this interview will be conserved and kept confidential. The only people other than myself who will have access to audio recording or the transcript of the interview will be Nicole Harbonnier-Topin (my research advisor and head of the graduate dance department at UQAM), and Kathleen Fallon (professor in the Sociology department at McGill University). The data collected will be analyzed in the research pertaining to my written masters thesis, and could potentially relate to my future PhD dissertation. Your answers in this interview could be used as written citations in my thesis, or as general examples in order to support my conclusions. With your permission, I may contact you for additional information if clarification is required on any of your answers. The information you provide will not be used for any purpose other than my academic research without your knowledge and written consent. You can ask to be cited using a pseudonym instead of your real name, or can choose to be referred to as an anonymous respondent in my thesis if you prefer. If you ask to be identified by your real name or a pseudonym, all of your facts, statements, and theories will be properly credited to you.

Benefit of participating in this study:
By participating in this project, you can help to provide enlightenment on the material practices, and the theoretical and philosophical discourse that exists in the b-boy community.

Aspects of your role and ideas about these issues will be included in a historical, socio-cultural, and aesthetic narrative.

Risk of participating in this study:
While I assess that participating in this study does not present a risk to you, I am asking you to share information about yourself, your experiences, and your opinions. You should be aware that the information you provide could be made public, and that I will be interpreting your information using certain analytical frames. If there is anything you do not wish to share, please do not feel compelled to do so.

Contacts and Questions:
If you have any questions or would like additional information about this research, please contact me, Helen Simard, by email:
Helen.simard@gmail.com

Please make sure you have read this form and asked any questions that you may have before agreeing to participate in this study.

Statement of Consent:
I consent to participate in this study, and understand that my answers will be used for the purposes stated above.

Name _____

Phone/email _____

Signature_____

Date _____

Do you give me permission to make an audio recording of this interview? ☐yes ☐no
Would you like to see a copy the transcripts from your interview? ☐yes ☐no
May I contact you with follow questions after our interview? ☐yes ☐no
Do you consent to being identified in my research? ☐yes ☐no

If no, indicate if you would like to remain anonymous or be referred to under a pseudonym:

_____

PLEASE NOTE:
If there are any specific stories that you want to share with me about your experiences as a b-boy, or if you think there are any pressing matters we have not covered, feel free to tell me before we complete the interview. If you think of such stories or issues after the fact, please let me know and we can either schedule a follow-up interview, or you could send me the

information by email. And if you know any other b-boys who might want to participate in my research, please feel free to pass my email along to them.

Thank you so much for your time and participation in my research!
Helen Simard

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights or welfare as a participant in this research study, please contact the McGill Ethics Officer at 514-398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca.

PLEASE KEEP A COPY OF THIS FORM FOR YOUR RECORDS

ANNEX G: DESCRIPTION OF MOVEMENTS

Top rock

Top rock[90] is done in an upright, vertical standing position, with the dancer keeping his or her weight primarily on the ball of the foot to allow for rapid weight transfers in the steps. Although the body is vertical, the spine is not rigid or erect as it would be in classical ballet; rather, there is a loose, almost bouncy quality in the body, as if the dancer were suspended from above and floating above the floor like a string marionette. Many top rock steps follow a 'two-step' pattern: the first step being a tap of the feet or a jump on the spot, with the second step as a step away from the body's centre, which could be to the front, back, or either side. The moving foot might cross centre to step to an opposite corner—for example, the right foot could step to the front left corner. In a workshop he taught in Montreal in June 2012, Eric 'Tyquan' Hodac of the *Mighty Zulu Kingz* described the floor patterns of top rock as being part of an eight-point grid. He told the students to bounce in the middle of an imaginary square for their first step, and to reach out to touch one of the following eight points with their foot on the second step: front left corner, front centre, front right corner, side left, side right, back left corner, back centre, and back right corner (Tyquan, communication during workshop, June 2012).

Because top rock is generally performed at a quick pace, the weight is never fully transferred over to the foot that is stepping out. As such, the dancer is able to quickly shift his or her weight back to the original position. In these two-step patterns,

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[90] Top rock in b-boying should not be confused with Rocking, which is another dance form that developed in New York City during the 1970s. The two do share a certain vocabulary since Rocking predates breaking, and both were influenced by previous social dance forms such as salsa and the hustle; however, in rocking these steps are performed in a more relaxed or grounded fashion, and are interspersed with 'jerks' and 'burns', which are more energetic or spastic movements. For a more in-depth discussion of the distinctions between rocking and b-boying, see Schloss (2009), p. 125-154.

the accent is often heavier on the second step. The arms may follow this same rhythmic patterns—crossing and opening in time with the feet—or the dancer could choose to create a polyrhythmic contrast between the arms and legs by moving the arms faster, slower, or through the music while the feet maintained a steady beat. The dancer might also change his or her facing by adding turns or pivots into the steps, or the torso and hips could turn in opposite directions to create contrast in the body. Although a number of established top rock steps—such as the Indian Step, Charlie Rock, Bronx Rock, and Z-step—do exist, dancers can choose to combine, break down, and reconfigure them in any number of combinations.

Floor work

Floor work—or Earth moves as they are called in Alien Ness' (2009) 5 Elements frame—is any movement where the body comes into the low space, lower than a standing position, and where the hands, legs, back, or chest might come into contact with the floor. Floor work can be divided into several subcategories, including but not limited to: drops, footwork, and certain freezes.

Drops

Drops, or go downs, are the moves that allow dancers to move from a standing position down to the floor. They are not repetitive movements in the way that top rock, footwork steps, or power moves are, but are instead 'one offs' used as transitions to bring the body into the low level in space. Drops are often used at the beginning of a set when the dancer transitions from top rock to footwork; however, a dancer might also use a drop to come back down from a flip or air move, or to get down dynamically from an air move at the end of a set to come into a final freeze position. Some drops—such sweep-ins, back sweeps, corkscrews, and knee drops—can easily be used to get directly and efficiently into the crouching position of footwork, while others—such as coin drops and suicides—bring the dancer more dramatically to the floor, where he or she ends up either lying on his or her front or

back. While there are specific drop moves such as those mentioned above, any movement could be considered a drop, as long as the dancer used it to go down to the floor.

Footwork

· Footwork—or down rock as it is sometimes called—is the elements of b-boying that most distinguishes it from other movement systems and dance forms. While top rock has drawn from other social dances, and some of the acrobatic power moves and air moves resemble flips or kicks seen in gymnastics or martial arts, to my knowledge there is no other dance form that puts so much emphasis on movements where the feet are moving at high speed while the dancer is in a crouched position, primarily supporting his weight or her with the strength of the arms.

The starting position for many footwork steps has the dancer in a crouched position, hands off the floor, with his or her weight shifted onto the balls of the feet with the hips hovering slightly above the heels. From here, the dancer can sweep the right leg forward to hook it around the left ankle below the knee, shoot both feet out directly forward with his or her weight on the heels, shift from side to side with a kick switch of the feet, or even walk around his or her pivot point in a grapevine 'forward, side, back, side' pattern. Whatever the case, these rapid weight transfers of the feet require the dancer to throw his or her body off balance and thus force the dancer to support his or her weight with the arms in order to allow the legs to quickly shuffle around in a circular pattern.

The '6-step' is one of the best-known footwork patterns, and is called so because it is comprised of a series of six steps. We can use the eight-point grid floor pattern described in the top rock section in order to understand this movement pattern. I will describe this movement as it is performed counter clockwise:

1. Starting in the centre of this grid in the basic crouch position described above, the dancer must first his or her weight slightly onto the right leg so that he or she can swing the left leg out in front, towards the front left corner before sweeping it around to the front right corner in an arc-like movement and hooking it in front of the right ankle. As the leg sweeps around to the right, the dancer places his or her left hand on the floor in the front left corner in order to support the weight of the body.

2. Keeping the right leg bent at the knee, the dancer reaches the right foot directly back to plant his or her weight on the ball of the foot as it steps into the back right corner.

3. Immediately afterwards, the dancer reaches the left foot across the center to the left back corner, again placing the weight on the ball of the foot so that it is in line with the right. Here, he or she places the right hand down in the right front corner. In this position, the dancer's weight is evenly dispersed between the hands and feet, with arms extended and legs bent at the knees and hips, and the chest and hips are facing the floor.

4. Now, the dancer lifts the left hand off the floor and steps the right foot forward across to replace it in the left front corner. Here the dancer places his or her weight more on the outside of the right foot than on the ball of the foot; this places the hips in a better position for the next step.

5. The dancer steps the left foot forward directly under the hips, shifting the body back into a more upright squatting position. This brings the dancer's weight off the hands back into the legs.

6. The dancer lifts the right hand from the floor as he or she swings the right leg in a large arc across the front, from the left to right corners with a back sweep before finally circling it back into the initial crouching position. These last two steps are accomplished with a rapid 'shuffling' motion of the feet and a bounce of the hips.

While some dancers I spoke to said that the 6-step is the basic footwork pattern from which all others can be derived, others argued that the original b-boys had no set steps, and that it is better to try to understand and play with variations of different elements of footwork—such as sweeps, hooks, spins, and shuffles—instead of recreating a fixed footwork pattern. For example, Alien Ness told me he did not teach set footwork patterns such as the 6-step to his students. He explained:

> In my days, no one taught you footwork step by step. You know? You just saw it, you understood it, you picked it up, and everybody had their own way of doing it... everybody. I've never done a 6-step in my life; you look at the typical Alien Ness footwork, one rotation is, what, twelve or thirteen steps? For one rotation! Some people take three steps, or four steps, or six steps for one rotation, but I'm taking thirteen! And trying to cover the same amount of space in half the time, just to look as fast as everybody else... so when it comes down for me to teach steps, what I do is I teach the evolution of the dance. From the beginning, to the end. And then everybody understands the CONCEPT of the steps. (Alien Ness, interview with the author, July 2011)

Whether a b-boy or b-girl's footwork was formal, set step patterns or an improvised combination of different elements, I did note that that how his or her body was positioned and aligned in footwork was incredibly precise: first of all, it seemed it was much easier for dancers to control their movements if they kept their heels off the floor. This way, the hips were lifted away from the floor, which allowed dancers to transfer more of their weight into their hands. If the dancer's pelvis sagged down towards the floor, it was difficult for him or her to build the spring or momentum required to perform these patterns at high speed. Also, I noticed that in footwork, the palm of the hand did not generally lay flat on the floor; rather, dancers placed their hands with the palm lifted, supporting their weight just with the pad of the thumb and the fingers flat on the floor in hyperextension. This hand position allowed dancers to extend through the arm, and use the muscles of the shoulder girdle to push their weight up and away from the floor.

Freezes

Freezes are, as the name suggests, positions in which the body is frozen or paused for a moment. Amidst a fast paced set of rhythmic top rocks, frenetic footwork and free flow of spinning power moves, b-boys and b-girls use freezes to show that they have control over their bodies and movements. In a freeze, the dancer comes to a grinding halt, with the legs twisted into an impossible position on a precise beat or accent in the music—perhaps, for example, the exact moment that James Brown sings 'huh!' Freezes most commonly involve the entire weight of the body balancing on a specific body part, such as the head, shoulder, or hands.

For example, in a chair freeze on the right side, the dancer's body is supported by the right arm, left foot, and the back of the head: with his or her elbow jabbed into the small of the back, the dancer places the right hand flat on the floor. Placing the right side of the head on the floor, the dancer turns his or her face, shoulders, and hips up towards the ceiling as much as possible. Next, he or she must lift the right foot up off the floor, and rest it over the left knee, while the left foot stays firmly planted on the ground. Here, the angles at which the limbs are bent is of utmost importance, both technically and aesthetically: the elbow of the supporting arm must be bent so as the forearm is perpendicular to his body; the hips must be lifted high enough so that the supporting leg is bent at the knee at a 90° angle; and the feet of both the supporting and resting leg are flexed, not pointed. However, it is important to understand that while specific freezes—such as the chair, baby, or turtle—are seen as part of the 'foundation' of breaking, many of the dancers I spoke to felt that any bodily position could become a freeze if it was held for more than a few seconds.

Other kinds of Floor Work

There are of course other kinds of floor work, such as different kinds of rolls and tracks. Back-rocks are a type of floor work where the dancer lies on his or her back with the hips lifted, and rocks side to side performing rapid footwork like kick-

switch patters in this horizontal position. Threading is another style of floor work in which the dancer wraps his or her arms and legs around different parts of the body in a fashion that in reminiscent of a piece of tread being pulled through the eye of a needle. For example, the dancer might hold on to his or her left foot with the right hand and 'thread' the right foot through the opening created between the two. Or he or she might sit on the floor, plant the right foot on the floor and thread the left leg through the opening created between the right foot and the body. Threads are often done lower to the ground than the crouching level of footwork, either in a seated or horizontal position. They can, however, also be used in complex footwork patterns, or even in air moves.

Power Moves

Power moves are the most spectacular and acrobatic movements in the b-boying vocabulary; they are also perhaps the most recognizable, at least to members of the general public. Certain power moves—such as head spins and Thomas flares—have been borrowed from other movement traditions, while others—like windmills, 1990s, and air flares—are original movements that were created by b-boys for their own dance form.

Although many of these power moves are performed at great speed with the body rotating in the air and the legs overhead, dancers cannot simply 'throw' their bodies into the movement and hope for the best if they wants to avoid bruising or injuring themselves over time. Rather, these dynamic movements must be integrated—meaning the trunk and extremities are working together—in order to create an illusion of ease and weightlessness. In most power moves, the dancer must engage his or her core and the use momentum created by repeatedly whipping the arms, legs, shoulders, or hips to keep the body in a continuously rotating or spinning action. This requires a coordinated effort between the upper and lower body: for example, in windmills, there is a specific timing between the push of the arms, whip

of the legs, and turn of the head that allows the dancer to spin across the back and through a freeze position while maintaining the legs in a 'V' position off the floor. Most of the b-boys and b-girls I spoke to told me explained that although power moves could take many years and great effort to learn, once you knew how to do them there was a certain ease in executing them; many compared the sensation of properly performing a power move to what they imagined flying felt like.

While flips and aerial moves are not exactly the same as power moves, power moves are also generally be understood as Air moves in Alien Ness' 5 Elements frame, due to their similarly explosive quality, use of the high space, and inversion of the body's normal alignment. Where power moves differ from flips, however, is that flips tend to be used as accents or one-offs much as freezes or drops are, while most of the dancers I spoke to felt that power moves were most impressive when a dancer was able to repeat or combine them in creative or original ways. For example, many dancers told me that simply performing a repetitive basic windmill would no longer be enough to win a battle today in Montreal; rather, they felt that a b-boy would have to fluidly get in and out of his windmill from his footwork, combine it with other power moves such as head spins or flares, and finish it off dynamically in an intricate freeze if he wanted to impress his peers, competitors, and judges.[91]

Tricks

The idea of how movements are integrated into runs brings us to the final category of movements that must be addressed here: tricks. Tricks are harder to define than the other movement categories since they include a wide variety of movements. They are not seen by some dancers as part of the foundational movements of b-boying, but rather as personal creations each dancer can add to his or

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[91] Interestingly, the same rule does not seem to apply to b-girls: even though there are quite a few high-level b-girls in Montreal, both dancers and spectators are still impressed when a female dancer does a single repetitive power move such as windmills, swipes, or head spins.

her own movement vocabulary (Stevens, 2008). Some of the b-boys and b-girls I interviewed saw tricks as being part of what they referred to as 'circus style' b-boying, where dancers focused more on perfecting the technique of individual movements than on how to integrate them smoothly and rhythmically into a full run. As b-boy Sancho explained: "When you put every 'dance' aspect of breaking aside (musicality, footwork, top rock flava, etc.) all that's left is executing moves or flips. You just focus on technique! [It] becomes like gymnastics, just flashy moves" (Sancho, email communication with the author, March 2012).

Thus, what seems to define a trick is not so much the movement itself, but the intention behind the movement: they can be seen as on one-off accent moves, performed independently from the other elements of b-boying, either for the purpose of distinguishing one's style from other dancers, or to 'impress' spectators or judges. They are the movements that b-boys and b-girls use for dramatic effect, or to get that instantaneous "OOOOOOHHHHH!!!" reaction from the crowd. As such, a power move or freeze—or even perhaps a top rock step—could be seen as a trick if it were just used for impact and was not properly integrated into the dancer's full run.

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