

## THEORISING HIP-HOP DANCE IN THE PHILIPPINES: BLURRING THE LINES OF GENRE, MODE AND DIMENSION

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### ABSTRACT<sup>2</sup>

*While Hip-hop is recognised as a global musical culture, few studies have examined its practices of choreography. This essay privileges the ways Hip-hop dancers in Manila theorise their practices through four main aspects—genre, mode, dimension and conflict—in order to draw attention to the principles of meaning-making in contemporary Hip-hop performance. This article suggests that a dance-based system of knowledge is helpful to our understanding of music and performance in Asia and the Pacific because it fleshes out internal discourses of Hip-hop and promotes a mindfulness regarding assumptions around the performing body. Taken as a whole, these aspects help articulate conventional concerns around studying Hip-hop dance. This explanatory framework, hopefully, clears up more room to move when theorising through and about Hip-hop and promotes the critical study of*

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*dance practices in the Philippines with larger implications for contemporary popular music and performance in Asia and beyond.*

**Keywords:** Hip-hop in Asia Pacific, Filipino performance, dance theory, contemporary choreographic practice

*In the context of the full performance of Jan Jan on "Willing Willie," it is exceedingly clear that he was not coerced in any way; that his performance was not lewd or obscene. The Complaint speaks of gyrating movements which, however, are not obscene per se nor suggestive of a sexual or immoral act. Indeed such movements are part of a dance form called "body wave." The "body wave" is no different from the familiar dance moves we have been accustomed to today, such as the "lambada," bellydancing and the "spaghetti" dance. As far as the minor is concerned, he is exhibiting a dance movement. In fact, body wave dancing has become part and parcel of Philippine pop culture. In many town fiestas and private gatherings, adults allow their children to dance in this manner.<sup>3</sup>*

— TV5 Press Statement

## INTRODUCTION

There are perhaps very few ways to make sense of this dance—a clearly distressed six-year old boy simultaneously crying and dancing to African American rappers Snoop Dog and Dr. Dre's song "Next Episode" on one of the Philippines's major television programs. Yet, in April 2011, "make sense" of dance and Hip-hop is exactly what tens of thousands of social media users attempted to do as they consumed and cyber-scolded the noontime game show, "Willing Willie."<sup>4</sup> The show's host, Willie Revillame, coerced a child contestant, to "gyrate like a macho dancer in a gay bar," while he himself

<sup>3</sup> "TV5 Press Statement," <http://www.tv5.com.ph/news/index/96/tv5-press-statement> (accessed 13 October 2011). TV5 is one of three major television networks in the Philippines. Its slogan is "Para Sa'yo Kapatid," which translated in English means "For you, friend." The press statement has since been removed from the company website but can be found on the second URL; "Copy of TV5 Press Statement as of April 7, 2011," 7 April 2011. <http://mykapalaran.blogspot.com/2011/04/copy-of-tv5-press-statement-as-of-april.html> (accessed 8 March 2011).

<sup>4</sup> "Willing Willie" (2011) was a noon-time television game show that features entertainment industry's actors, artists and dancers, and segments in which audience members compete for minor compensation through quiz questions, singing or dancing. It is produced in the Philippines and received global distribution to Filipino diasporic households through various satellite and online platforms.

stood by laughing and mocking.<sup>5</sup> The spectacle attracted just criticism in a peculiar blend of moral righteousness, homophobia and children's human rights advocacy, from the national and diasporic publics that demanded to hold this popular show accountable. On one level, the network's rebuttal featured as the epigraph to this article, is a tired corporate gesture in which ideas about dance, music and performance are managed in order to shield profits, at the cost of validating social and economic inequalities in the Philippines.<sup>6</sup> On another level, the response downplays the uncanny character of the choreography by familiarising the "body wave" in a succession of popular dances; this gesture appears intent on appealing to the vulnerabilities of the postcolonised with a brand of folk nationalism. The "Willing Willie" controversy, its instance of dance and Hip-hop music, begs a serious look at how these meanings fundamentally shape our understanding of global Hip-hop culture.<sup>7</sup>

My main project in this essay represents an attempt to think through this negotiation that the "Willing Willie" controversy reminds us of, what dance comes to "mean," and I will do so by focusing on a cadre of dance artists in Manila. Although Hip-hop is recognised as a global musical culture, scant research has examined its choreographic material and how it offers a vista into the worldviews of Hip-hop practitioners. This essay will seek to respond to this, often subdued, absence by outlining ways Hip-hop dance acquires meaning. In this article, I will privilege the ways dancers theorise their practices as constitutive to one viscerally compelling tactic through which to read more critically and understand better the principles articulating their aesthetic sensibility about the world. This article will assert that a dance-based system of knowledge is helpful to our understanding of music and performance in Asia and the Pacific because it fleshes out the internal discourses of Hip-hop. Put another way, I will suggest the ways people think

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<sup>5</sup> Associated Press, "Philippines TV show pulled over crying boy's dance," *The Associated Press*, 10 April 2011. <http://wonderwall.msn.com/entertainment/philippines-tv-show-pulled-over-crying-boys-dance-1613484.story> (accessed 14 May 2011).

<sup>6</sup> "TV5 Press Statement." In addition to these claims, the network contends that the YouTube and Facebook iterations of the program were "deliberately spliced" and edited to misrepresent what actually happened, and rather, "*the full, unedited recording of the program showed that Jan Jan was clearly and more often 'emoting while dancing' and that when he did cry it was because of the intimidating presence of Bonel Balingit and because he had lost in the game portion of the show.*"

<sup>7</sup> Hooks, B., "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance" in *Feminist Approaches to Theory and Methodology: An Interdisciplinary Reader*, ed. Hesse-Biber, S., Gilmartin, C. and Lydenberg, R. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); The press statement response appears like a failed apology for what bell hook's calls "Eating the Other."

about Hip-hop dance enable and preclude other possibilities of thought and even, other possibilities of dancing.

The issue that I find myself revisiting in the process of thinking through this discourse is the degree to which Filipinos in Hip-hop dance symbolise contemporary postcolonial Americanisation, the cultural globalisation of Blackness, or a transformational cultural movement of their own. To begin its inquiry, this research asks how do dancers think about the contemporary performance juggernaut known as Hip-hop? What makes one system of thought more appropriate, compelling or explanatory than another? Given the prevalence of "authenticity" in New York Hip-hop culture, how do we see different sets of principles undergird Hip-hop practices in Manila?<sup>8</sup> The history, geography and cultural pluralism of the Philippines suggests that response to these queries might arise not from a unifying theory of Hip-hop, but rather, from a piece-meal attempt to critically question our assumptions about theory, dance and power.

My primary goal in this essay alludes to the unfolding of the exceptional explanatory power that Filipino Hip-hop presents as a case study for understanding these intersectional axes. Elsewhere I have discussed the multiple conduits of diasporic and folk dancers that have come to augment the ways Hip-hop in the Philippines flourishes across commercial and educational venues.<sup>9</sup> In top educational institutions, such as the University of the Philippines-Diliman, scholars have included Hip-Hop dance as an integral component of the curricula for more than a decade. Beyond the imaginary demarcations of the nation that even today continue to be disputed<sup>10</sup> and across Asia and the globe, leading dance crews with members of Filipino descent dominate competitions and draw millions of online viewers.<sup>11</sup> While U.S. popular discourse has often asserted the primacy of Hip-hop as a culture and lifestyle inclusive of different types of performance (i.e., music, theatre, turntablism, spoken word, fashion, graffiti), for the Philippines, dance clearly plays a specifically instrumental role. Indeed, the Southeast Asian archipelago's unique historical and contemporary formations of Spanish colonialism, indigenous resistance, Japanese occupation, U.S. military base extra-territorialism, and religious and linguistic syncretism suggest ways in

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<sup>8</sup> Schloss, J. G., *Foundation: B-Boys, B-Girls, and Hip-Hop Culture in New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Dimalanta, J., "The Adaptation and Development of Streetdance in the Philippine setting," M.A. thesis, University of the Philippines, Philippines, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> The most recent international debate has been over the claims over the Spratly and surrounding islands by the Philippines, China and Vietnam. See "China Sends Troops to Disputed Islands," *New York Times*, 23 July 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Richardson, E., "'Yo mein rap is phat wie deine Mama:' African American language in German Hiphop, or identifying the global in global Hiphop," in *Hiphop Literacies* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 76–77.

which a simple theory of Hip-hop as the globalisation of American Blackness might not fully explain what the culture means.<sup>12</sup>

In order to chart the journey this essay undertakes around the edges of internal Hip-hop dance discourse, I will detail four main aspects—genre, mode, dimension and conflict. These seemingly inseparable cohesions of thought about Hip-hop each draw attention to the principles of meaning-making already present in community practices. I will start with a description of genre because dancers use the pliancy of genre to place themselves within and beyond the categorical boundaries of Hip-hop. I will then move toward a lengthier discussion of various modes of activity—*kompot*, *raket*, *klase* and *konsept*. These modes inspire my focus on intersubjectivity and raise questions that effectively undermine an engrained commercial/underground binary. The last two approaches—dimensions and conflicts—are the least drawn-out. Dimensions of dance, or the dance's featured movement, language, music, costume, body, space and socio-cultural meaning, supply theorists with the building blocks for de-essentialising Hip-hop "authenticity" as well as appreciating local and indigenous epistemes. These elements of dance insist on depth and breadth in an activity that is often woefully reduced to a predetermined sequence of physical gestures. Finally, I will describe an example of Hip-hop's conflicts as they articulate the contested natures of meaning-making specific to this cultural practice.<sup>13</sup> Taken as a whole, these areas aim to solidify conventional concerns around studying Hip-hop dance and oddly do so from a place where I find myself regularly opposed to pinning dance down. This explanatory framework, hopefully, clears up more room to move when theorising through and about Hip-hop and promotes the critical study of dance practices in the Philippines with larger implications for contemporary popular music and performance in Asia and beyond.

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<sup>12</sup> I do not mean to suggest that the forces of history overdetermine the cultural practice of Hip-hop but that the culture's complexity is made up of much different components in the Philippines.

<sup>13</sup> This act is not to "validate" their practices in an academic rubric of aesthetics or theory (as if that were possible), but instead to translate their ideas for future community partnerships and pedagogical tools. Moreover, recognising these knowledge systems derived from collaboration, discourages theories made only in the hands of the non-reflexive academic that fails to consider her/his own shifting relationship with race relations and Hip-hop as they mutually inform their work. While often well-intentioned, this kind of theory-making, risks generating more self-indulgence, than help. Rather, as this article implies, theory-makers should grapple with the political implications of their subjectivity, as it can resonate with previous colonizers, collaborators or allies.

## **METHODS**

This article advances its argument largely from interviews and participant observation that I accomplished in the Philippines between February and October 2011. I conducted open-ended and in-depth interviews with Hip-hop dancers. Manila stands as the governmental capital and home to the country's elite universities, and for this reason I chose to focus my efforts within this locale. In part, this "elite" backdrop contradicts the origins of Hip-hop, what is commonly known to emerge from within low-income neighbourhoods by racially, socially and politically disenfranchised African Americans and Latinos in the Bronx, New York in the 1970s. Unlike U.S. Hip-hop, educational and research institutions in the Philippines directly sponsor many Hip-hop dance groups and these crews rehearse, compete and present dance in Manila. This region also exists as the home of the national commercial entertainment industry and major cultural institutions, organisations that also fund and promote Hip-hop dance groups. Every year from September to April, Manila plays host to several national Hip-hop dance competitions and regional competitions that qualify teams to compete at the international level. As a conduit for cultural exchange between the U.S. and the Philippines, Manila plays a substantial role in managing diasporic relations and providing youth with access and exposure to global Hip-hop choreographers.<sup>14</sup>

Most interviews lasted about sixty to one-hundred eighty minutes and focused on the respondent's background as a choreographer and practitioner of Hip-hop dance as well as their thoughts on issues of Filipino gender relations within their dance practices. My interviewee identification process benefited from the direction of Jerome Dimalanta, founder and then director of the Crew, and Chelo Aestrid, of the Philippine AllStars. These two dance companies introduced me to prominent members of the community, including choreographers, dance educators, retired dancers and up-and-coming performers. Even as I thought of myself as fortunately in step with these groups, I faced the overwhelming reality of a divided and geographically scattered streetdancer community. Thus, I made the deliberate decision to diversify my engagement and make certain that I interviewed practitioners of different genres of streetdance—B-boyin', B-girlin', House, (Street) Jazz, Krump, Ladies' Hip-hop, LA style, Lockin', Poppin', Waackin', Dancehall and general Hip-hop. I also made sure that I sought research participants from various dance groups and areas of Manila. In order to learn about the local

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<sup>14</sup> During my 2011 visit to Manila, several Filipino American and Asian American choreographers visited and led special workshops including Gigi Torres (Essence), Paul Ross (Vibe), April Rodriguez (Other Duck) and Matt "Dumbo" Vinh Quoc Nguyen (Poreotics).

Hip-hop dance culture and earn the trust of dancers, I decided to enrol into dance classes across three different studio-dance crew partnerships. These classes allowed me greater access to possible interviewees. Living and dancing (and commuting) in Manila for an extended amount of time allowed me to establish conceptual frameworks about Hip-hop performance in folk terms—naming practices, use-value, and intertextuality inductively collected from fieldwork practices—and in academic terms drawn from existing scholarly research on Hip-hop, dance and the Philippines.

## HIP-HOP STUDIES

Within and beyond the burgeoning field of Hip-hop studies, dance is marginalised.<sup>15</sup> Scholarly studies of Hip-hop have seldom had success in recognising the multiple types of dance beyond b-boying. Even less study has attempted to look at dance practices in the context of the sociologies and politics of Asia and the Pacific, non-normative Hip-hop blocks.<sup>16</sup> This scholarly image of Hip-hop contradicts the reality of a lively community made up of thousands of youth, from Cambodia to New Zealand, Honolulu to Mongolia.<sup>17</sup> In the last decade, a few works have emerged employing various Afro-Asian inter-racial, desi and globalisation paradigms, in order to understand what Hip-hop means for Asians and Pacific Islanders.<sup>18</sup> How does the entrenched marginalisation of dance in the field of Hip-hop provide the means with which to contextualise the types of thinking in Manila later discussed? By the ways dance is theorised, blamed, treated secondary to

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<sup>15</sup> Dodds, S., *Dancing on the Canon: Embodiments of Value in Popular Dance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Osumare, H., *The Africanist Aesthetic in Global Hip-Hop: Power Moves* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Villaruz, B. S. E., *Treading Through: 45 years of Philippine Dance* (Diliman: University of Philippines Press, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> Pabon, J., "Physical graffiti," in *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip hop*, ed. Chang, J. (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 18–26.

<sup>17</sup> Schlund-Vials, C. J., "A Transnational Hip Hop Nation: praCh, Cambodia, and Memorialising the Killing Fields," *Life Writing* 5/1 (2008): 11–27; Kopytko, T., "Breakdance as an Identity Marker in New Zealand," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 18 (1986): 21–28; Marsh, P. K., "Our Generation is Opening its Eyes: Hip-hop and Youth Identity in Contemporary Mongolia," *Central Asian Survey* 29 (3, 2010): 345–358; Osumare, H., "Props to the Local Boys: Hip-hop Culture in Hawai'i," in *The Africanist Aesthetic in Global Hip-hop: Power Moves* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 105–148.

<sup>18</sup> Prashad, V., "Kung Fusion: Organize the 'Hood under I-Ching Banners," in *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001); Maira, S., *Desis in the House: Indian American Youth Culture in New York City* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002); Condry, I., *Hip-Hop Japan: Rap and the Paths of Cultural Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

musical elements, and over-determined by an anti-commercial attitude in Hip-hop studies, the need for complementary research with a focus on dance becomes clear.

More than a decade before Tricia Rose's acclaimed *Black Noise*, British music scholar David Toop attempted to introduce white readership to the Hip-hop world and American rap's multiple voices with *Rap Attack* (1984).<sup>19</sup> While innovative in its ability to situate 1970s' New York-based Hip-hop in the context of African American oral and musical traditions, Toop's treatment of breakdancing illustrates much of the problem dance faces in Hip-hop theory. Toop undermines dance as a legitimate way of knowing through his methodology and sources. For example, in discussion of possible precursors to breakdance Toop turns not to dancers themselves but rather relies solely on the Marshall Stearns and Jean Stearns text, *Jazz Dance* (1968).<sup>20</sup> Toop seems to problematically counter-pose dance and rap elements suggesting that dancers sold out Hip-hop in ways that rappers never did.<sup>21</sup> Toop states,

Breakdancing was the marketing gimmick needed to draw hip hop into the consumer arena; it appealed to young children—regardless of skin colour, class, education, economic status, language, and, to some degree, gender—and it was irresistible to ideas people within advertising agencies. Exotic and spectacular, divorced from its origins in Latin and African-American streetdancing, breaking could sell crisps, beer, cereal, batteries. For the breakdancers, lockers and poppers, their street dancing now had the potential to evolve into a conventional Hollywood career.<sup>22</sup>

In this quote, Toop describes rather than analyses the increased commodity-value of breakdance vis-à-vis rap albums. Toop seems to do so in order to justify the shift in rap between early 1980s and mid-1980s rap, from electro

<sup>19</sup> Rose, T., *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1994); Toop, D., *Rap Attack 2: African Rap to Global Hip hop*, 2nd. ed. (London: Serpent's Tail, 1991). Toop was not alone in his work. Dance critic Sally Banes published a series of articles on breakdancing and popular dance in New York in the early 1980s including "To the Beat Y'All: Breaking is Hard to Do," *Village Voice*, 10 April 1981. However, I choose to discuss Toop's work because it is more representational of a mainstream issue regarding the relationship between Hip-hop music and dance.

<sup>20</sup> Stearns, M. and Stearns, J., *Jazz Dance: The Story of African American Vernacular Dance* (New York: Macmillan, 1968).

<sup>21</sup> Chang, J., *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005). For instance, this acclaimed history of Hip-hop only musters a handful of its hundreds of pages dance (and relies on descriptions rather than dance historical methods).

<sup>22</sup> Toop, D., *Rap Attack 2*, 158.

genre rap like Bambaata's "Planet Rock" (1982) to what was seen then as tougher raps of Run DMC and L.L. Cool J.

While Toop's study historicised rap in reference to West African *griot* tradition, *From Kung Fu to Hip Hop* is M.T. Kato's noble attempt to identify common denominators between Bruce Lee's aesthetic philosophy and that of Hip-hop pioneers. He claims that beneath the iconic swagger, Lee's kinetic philosophy of liberation resonates with Hip-hop's aesthetic sublimation of violence (yet he doesn't explain these two things or how), autonomy of self-expression, transcendence of institutional boundaries, sample-delic source method, and expressed dissent from postmodernism, cultural foundations (African culture, Taoism).<sup>23</sup> For Kato, theory-making involves overlaying foundational concepts from Hip-hop scholarship and journalism, borrowing from both neo-Taoist *Jeet Kune Do* and Black cultural theory, and then performing close-textual analysis of Bruce Lee films.<sup>24</sup> Yet, one of the striking features of M.T. Kato's analysis of films like *Game of Death* (1978) and the way it speaks to issues around thinking about dance in Hip-hop is the insistence on preserving an anti-commercial attitude, one that David Toop's writing expressed decades earlier, such that in order for his ideas to succeed, "the totality of hip hop aesthetics needs to be retained first, against the tide of corporate manufactured representations of hip hop."<sup>25</sup> How such retention of aesthetics might proceed, however, remains to be clarified.

Not all scholars rely on anti-commercial sentiments to evaluate Hip-hop cultural representations. According to ethnomusicologist Joseph Schloss, this attitude relies on a false dichotomy of commercial/underground and exists as a pattern of problematic Hip-hop academic and popular discourse. In his text, *Foundation*, Schloss sets out to clarify the problem and power of Hip-hop—simultaneously understood as a mixed-media cultural practice, rap music and racialised and classed attitude imposed upon a generation of African American youth. Schloss identifies over-emphasis on morality, romanticising "authenticity" and marginalisation of competition as factors in existing Hip-hop discourse that obscure internal issues of Hip-hop. Moreover, the disciplinary conventions of literature, cultural and media studies have left gaps

<sup>23</sup> Kato, M.T., *From Kung Fu to Hip Hop: Globalization, Revolution, and Popular Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 175–178.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. For instance, he says, "To bring back the Taoist framework of Jeet Kune Do in our discussion, the groove may be best described as *wu wei* in a rhythmic motion where transcendence is actualized in a dynamic process of physical, spiritual, and affective involvement with the infinite" (198).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 178.

in research that attends to products over processes. Regarding these types of investigative methods, Schloss writes, "it puts the theory in the hands of the scholar, thus implying that b-boys and b-girls do not have their own theories about what they do, which is clearly not true."<sup>26</sup>

In response to these issues, Schloss offers and examines one particular b-boy theory and cumulative term, "foundation:"

Foundation is a term used by b-boys and b-girls to refer to an almost mystical set of notions about b-boying that is passed from teacher to student. In addition to the physical movements, it includes the history of the movements and the form in general, strategies for how to improvise, philosophy about dance in general, strategies for how to improvise, philosophy about dance in general, musical associations, and a variety of other subjects. The idea that a core b-boy philosophy should be so important that it requires a special term says a great deal about the dance and why it is so significant in the lives of its practitioners.<sup>27</sup>

Re-reading this quote, I cannot help but be reminded that the universalism toward which foundation reaches is one deriving from and engaged, nonetheless with Schloss' particular ethnographic engagement with the New York b-boy community. While I do not find interest in questioning the "almost mystical" set of notions, given its specificity, I do find it important to ground any inquiry into Hip-hop cultural practices in Asia and the Pacific within its own specific social, historical and political contexts, an approach that at least gets us away from the blaming, subordination, and overlay type theorising described earlier. In the next sections, I describe and define various approaches—genre, mode, dimension and conflict—in an attempt to attend to the processes over the products of Hip-hop and co-exist with Schloss' interest in recognising Hip-hop's seldom explored internal artistic discourse, these sections explore the multi-faceted ways dancers make sense of their own performance practices.

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<sup>26</sup> Schloss, J. G., *Foundation*, 8.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

**GENRE**<sup>28</sup>

Although it may seem paradoxical, the pursuit of uniqueness in styles is the very driving force that valorizes the collective identity of hip hop. Propelled by proliferating individuality of styles, the collective identity is constituted not in a static institution but rather in action, in practice, and in a constant movement for evolution.<sup>29</sup>

As M.T. Kato maintains, Hip-hop's cultural engine relies on a practice of movement (of identity) rather than a single, unchanging code. However, dominant modes of understanding Hip-hop have sought to rely on types of categorisation that have been remarkably static and unchanged in their attention to four elements—emcee, deejay, graffiti and b-boying. Practitioners and scholars have long countered this configuration, what I refer to as the Hip-hop "four-mula," because it has failed to reflect the real-world nuances or deal with each element's own histories and integral roles in Hip-hop culture.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the four-mula complies with a purist approach that fails to recognise how the "Hip-hop universe" continues to expand past these elements.<sup>31</sup> Not unrelated to these issues of classification, Hip-hop scholar Michael P. Jeffries reminds us that debates can break down precisely due to misunderstandings related to the borders between the "unstable" subject, meaning and function of Hip-hop.<sup>32</sup> Thus, I find it important to begin disturbing the four-mula with an acknowledgement of how practitioners define and delineate their practices.

Dancers have sought ways to navigate issues of definition in Hip-hop culture, successfully and unsuccessfully, through genre, or types of dance that are constituted by aesthetic, structural, and stylistic attributes. Through these abstractions of a dance's gestural codes and movement profile, dancers make practical discernments about Hip-hop's definition, history and inclusiveness of new forms. Dancers use genre to situate and include themselves in the field of Hip-hop and assert a personal identity vis-à-vis categorical definitions of Hip-

<sup>28</sup> As a caveat, this discussion inevitably fails to address all types of approaches and examples including specific genres (freestyle), modes (clubbin', house parties) and dimensions (online).

<sup>29</sup> Kato, M.T., *From Kung Fu to Hip Hop*, 189.

<sup>30</sup> Schloss, J. G., *Foundation*.

<sup>31</sup> Chang, J., "Introduction: Hip hop Arts: Our Expanding Universe," in *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip hop*, ed. Chang, J. (New York: Basic Books, 2006), ix–xv.

<sup>32</sup> Jeffries, M. P., *Thug Life: The Meaning of Hip-hop* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 23–53.

hop. While interviewees often refer to genre as "styles," such denomination actually downplays the real power and value dancers ascribe to individual genre and inter-genre differences in Hip-hop culture. Dancers often privileged speaking about their practice in terms of style over other categories such as race, gender, nation and class. As such, they are able to situate their artistic practices in relation to those of others in the global Hip-hop culture. One interviewee for instance made sure that I documented his training not from a dancer, but from a well-known *Locker*, in Taiwan. Commonly known as a dance popularised by Don Campbell when he tried to imitate the "funky chicken" dance in 1970's Los Angeles, the genre of Locking is an example of a Hip-hop dance genre that has a specific history and cultural context.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, a genre like Locking has a specific movement profile that features elements such as movement vocabulary (the lock, points and such), movement quality, execution, range of capability, projected affect and visual elements.

The notion that genre like B-boyin', B-girlin', Dancehall, House, Krump, Lockin', Ladies Hip-hop, LA Style, Poppin', Waackin' and unspecified Hip-hop (club dances, New Jack Swing and "choreo") are used to define and self-orient one's place in the Hip-hop dance world is supported by the ways formalised classes are categorised. In each of the three studios or dance schools in which I studied Hip-hop and streetdance in Manila, classes were categorised by genre or innovative variations. For example, at the Groove Central Studio in Manila, course offerings included conventional genres—Basic Hip-hop, Dancehall, House, Breakdanz—and novel courses like Street101, Soul Groove, Swag & Style, Cruisin', Trick Hop, Funk-adelic, Project Groove, Feel Good, Overdrive, Streetbeatz and Laid Back. Courses in this latter group shared in their unique, sometimes experimental, combinations of movement vocabulary, projected affect, attitude and music. For example, Niño Guerrero, teacher of both Cruisin' and Soul Groove, describes his two classes as "LA Style." In regards to LA Style Guerrero states,

Well, before, about ten years ago the most prolific group was the Manouevers, right? They were *the* all-male group here in the Philippines, in Manila. They specialized in New Jack Swing, Old School Hip-hop. Similar to Groovaloos, ... Dance and breakdance combined. And everything was groove-based, nothing was as combined with technique as it is now. Basically, that was where it came from, based dancing on the old school

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<sup>33</sup> Pabon, Jorge, "Physical Graffiti," 18–26.

style, New Jack, some Popping and Locking and then evolved into what we know now as what we call LA style ... For me, it's a combination of technique-based dance moves and groove and well the differences that I've noticed is that it has more form now. Before it was a bit rounder. It had more, it had a constant beat now very lyrical, timing is off the roof, you can count, you can divide one eight and collect sixteen counts and even more. So that's where it came from.<sup>34</sup>

Guerrero's statements theoretically place LA style in relation to domestic (Manoeuvres) and foreign/US (Groovalos) dance groups, existing movement genre, Hip-hop periodisation, shape and tempo. Guerrero's statements also demonstrate the weaker points of relying on dance-based conventions of genre, particularly because common concepts—such as "groove" and "technique"—remain vaguely outlined. Nonetheless, the perceived sequencing from "groove-based" to "technique-based" movement seems to intimate correlation between Hip-hop dance's gradual institutionalisation and LA style's solidification as a genre. Dancers like Guerrero define and redefine multiple genre, thereby revealing the heterogeneity of a Hip-hop dance culture that has been previously misunderstood as made up of the singular dance form, "breakdance."<sup>35</sup>

In part, a difficulty around theorising Hip-hop dance in the Philippines arises from the uncertainty between what is considered "Hip-hop dance" and "Streetdance," two terms that are sometimes used interchangeably, albeit problematically, by some dancers. Genres form the evidentiary basis for which dancers make the categorical distinction between streetdance and Hip-hop and attempt to clarify the misunderstood terms as separate artistic practices.<sup>36</sup> When asked directly about Hip-hop dance and its relationship to streetdance, responses often involved long explanations, which often included a list of the genres that could be considered Hip-hop as opposed to those outside that category. Hip-hop dances include Club dances, B-boyin', B-girlin', Lockin', New Jack swing and Poppin'. In contrast, streetdance as a category of dance, included all of these Hip-hop dances and also dances that exist outside that set,

<sup>34</sup> Nino, G., personal interview with author, Digital recording, Manila, Philippines, 29 June 2011.

<sup>35</sup> Bboy Reflex, personal interview with author, Digital recording. Manila, Philippines, 5 September 2011. Bboy Reflex and several other interviewees refute the term "breakdance" as a term used by media, not actual dancers. These claims are consistent with those featured in existing studies of Hip-hop in New York. See Rivera, R. Z., *New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

<sup>36</sup> Schloss, J. G., *Foundation*, 15.

including Dancehall, House, Krump, Ladies' Hip-hop, LA Style and Waackin'. Regarding the tendency for some to conflate streetdance and Hip-hop, Choreographer/dancer Madelle Enriquez states,

There's a big difference. 'Cause I think I heard the word "Streetdance" from Sir Jerome [Dimalanta] from UP [University of the Philippines] because they mostly specialize in Streetdance. So I guess Streetdancing is very Filipino. It's like a mixture of everything else that's Filipino plus Hip-hop, you know what I mean? For me ... Streetdance can just be like a wide variety of movement. Like what you see on television basically that's, "O, streetdance yan, o streetdance." Tas parang, "O, mag-streetdance workshop ka ba?" ("Oh that's streetdance." Then, for instance, "Hey, are you gonna take a streetdance workshop?") You know back in 2000, they used to call it streetdance workshop. It wasn't really like a Hip-hop workshop. But then when Elite Force came up with their whole DVD thing and their whole old school new school Hip-hop dictionary, all of a sudden like, I guess people knew the difference or were learning the difference between streetdance and Hip Hop. Like there are some dancers who are purists where in terms of Hip Hop so ... "Don't call that Hip-hop, that's not Hip-hop. Call it whatever you want but don't call it Hip-hop." So there, I think streetdance basically embraces whatever it is that's Filipino and Hip-hop at the same time...I think Hip-hop in itself has it's own culture that you have to get into. But then for streetdance I guess it was something that was adapted because before there wasn't any YouTube. There wasn't internet. There wasn't anything. It was basically like streetdance. And then Hip-hop started to come out like people knew about it more. A lot more people are getting educated more. A lot of dancers [are] flying from the Philippines to the US more. So there, I guess with more knowledge comes more responsibility in terms of using the terms.<sup>37</sup>

As Enriquez suggests, the categorisation of Hip-hop and Streetdance was shaped in part by the censure of Hip-hop purists, the flow of "authentic"

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<sup>37</sup> Maria Adelaida "Madelle" E., M. A., Paltu-ob. Personal interview with author, Digital recording. Manila, Philippines, 26 May 2011. Madelle is a former member of the former World Hip-hop Dance Champions, The Philippine Allstars, a prominent leader in the Filipino Hip-hop community, emerging rapper and a working mother.

knowledge in the form of U.S. media as well as foreign training in the U.S., and the active dialogue between participants. By propagating terminology like Streetdance and LA Style, dancers in the Philippines arguably assert a type of localisation to one another that recognises both the historical lineages of the dance activity and an ambiguous blend of national and racial identification ("Streetdancing is very Filipino"). In this way, they are able to circumscribe Hip-hop in an ongoing practice of local dance practices and work their way around issues of Black appropriation underlying purist criticism.

While dancers define and clarify artistic practices, genres are also vehicles for discrediting some dancers as ill-informed and uncool. The ways a dancer conceives of different genres influences how others view that individual's own authenticity and foundation, however narrowly defined. For example, I completed a two-month summer workshop at the Groove Central dance studio in a class entitled "Pop 'n' Lock." Some of my other interviewees discredited such a class because at face value, it misrepresented the reality of Poppin' and Lockin' as two distinct genres, each with its own historical and social context.<sup>38</sup> The presence of such, arguably conservative, reactions suggest that for some there are still clear and definite "right and wrong" ways to theorise genres. Hip-hop dancers might use genre as malleable categories for inclusion like in the ways streetdance is conceived, but they might just as well use genre as rigid definitions for exclusion. While they may not agree upon the same set of rules, dancers in Manila use genre to navigate issues of authenticity in ways that speak to the issues of categorisation beyond the reach of the Hip-hop four-mula.

## MODE

While genres seem capable of encouraging mindfulness about a particular Hip-hop dance's identity, convention and aesthetic forms, the understanding that they provide about Hip-hop dance as a living practice is partial. An issue arises when one attempts to reconcile both an attention to process over product and heed Joseph Schloss' call to put theory back in the hands of b-boys and b-girls. What about the inter-subjective nature involved in negotiating dance as a system of signification in Filipino culture? I am reminded, here, of the ways dancers talk about their peers as *ka-dancers* and the linguistic pre-fix and

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<sup>38</sup> Pabon, J., "Physical Graffiti," 18–26. Poppin' is widely regarded as a popular dance culture that emerged in Fresno, California and Lockin' traces its roots to Los Angeles, California.

subjectivity notion of "ka." Philippine philosopher, Rainier A. Ibana identifies how *ka* reveals the subject-to-subject dimension of things, people, events and ideas that dwell within the shared horizon of Tagalog speakers."<sup>39</sup> Historically situating the pre-fix to founder of the Philippine Revolution, Andres Bonifacio, and the revolutionary organisation, Ibana persuasively argues,

The Katipunero notion of being co-bearers suggests that the western monolithic and linear model of human development can no longer serve as the icon of modernity with the advent of alternative modernities being foisted by progressive Asian economies such as that of Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and more recently, the resurgence on the world stage of the ancient civilizations of India, China and the Islamic world.<sup>40</sup>

Ibana's claims support the notion of defining modes of Hip-hop dance as it exists between people rather than asserted by an individual; thereby situating their practices in a historical worldview of Filipinos.

Unlike genre, an attention to modes of dance allows one to account for the ways through which Filipinos carry out this intersubjective worldview and emphasises how function factors into the manner in which Hip-hop dance gets experienced. Similar to photographers that utilise different modes of a camera to adapt their artistry to different motivations and conditions (night, close-up, overexposure), dancers use different modes of dance to adapt their craft to different activities of everyday life—learning about physical fitness, "breaking into" the commercial entertainment industry, settling rivalries with adversaries, communicating one's unique artistic vision. In order to provide a clearer picture of Hip-hop dance, the next four subsections will discuss modes. *Kompet* relates to the Hip-hop dance community's self-awareness and flexibility to address its own weaknesses. *Raket* allows for a discussion of ways the so-called commercial in Philippine Hip-hop is important in and of itself and it offers nuance to the dominant anti-commercial/underground attitude. *Klase* and *konsept* address modes of dance precluded by this attitude. *Klase* paints a picture around codifying and sorting out genre and their constituent elements at the site of dance education. *Konsept* draws attention to the artistic visions of a Hip-hop dance community in Manila taking place on stage.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibana, R. A., "Grafting Philosophy to the Tagalog Prefix *Ka*," *Kritika Kultura* 12 (2009): 27–60.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 55–56.

## KOMPET MODE

According to Leo James English's *Tagalog – English Dictionary* (1986), "kulang" is the descriptive Filipino term used when something is missing, unbalanced or lacking from what is usually whole.<sup>41</sup> This term also aptly describes the vision that dancers call upon when producing, participating and judging competitions. Many Hip-hop dancers use competitions as spaces where they can have a physical and verbal dialogue about what is missing from their community, what works and what is broken. For this reason, *kompēt*, a subcultural slang and translation for the English word "competition," exists as one of the principle modes of activity in sustaining the creative community. *Kompēt* in Manila also falls in line with what Joseph Schloss identifies as "the purist way to engage with the issues" in b-boy communities.<sup>42</sup> Outside the Philippines, there are many types of Hip-hop dance competition across New York, Jamaica and Germany.<sup>43</sup> Inside the Philippines, there are also prominent competitions for Hip-hop dance, like Skechers Streetdance Battle in Manila, as well as other forms of dance, as in folk-based streetdancing, fluvial parade competitions and mass field demonstrations. There are also Hip-hop dance competitions organised and hosted by university-sponsored dance groups, like Company of Ateneo Dancers' Rhythm in Blues and De La Salle Dance Company-Street's Remix that run according to academic calendars and take place between August and February.

My argument is interested in the types of competitions and battles by which Hip-hop and streetdance is engaged actively as a discursive struggle

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<sup>41</sup> English, Leo James, *Tagalog – English Dictionary* (Mandaluyong City: Cacho Hermanos, Inc.), 359–360.

<sup>42</sup> Schloss, J. G., "I Hate B-Boys—That's Why I Break," in *Foundation*, 108. For Schloss, battling has several benefits including, but not limited to, developing an individual's self-confidence, sense of self, fighter strategies applicable to other contexts, and learning one's strengths and weaknesses.

<sup>43</sup> Schloss, J. G., *Foundation*; Sterling, Marvin D., *Babylon East: Performing Dancehall, Roots Reggae, and Rastafari in Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Johnson, I. K., "Dark Matter in B-boying Cyphers: Race and Global Connection in Hip Hop" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, CA., 2009). Schloss writes about Brooklyn Hip-hop jams in the late 1970s that involved hustle, salsa and funk dance contests for cash and trophies (116). He also describes the Rock Steady Crew's 30th anniversary celebration in New York City (2007) as a contemporary example. For further discussion of dance competitions see Marvin D. Sterling's ethnography of Dancehall Queen Japan in Tokyo (1999) and the International Dancehall Queen Competition in Montego Bay, Jamaica (2004). In the 1990s, various b-boy competitions released video cassettes featuring views into events such as Battle of the Year and the 2005 Battle of the Year was the subject of the Benson Lee documentary "Planet B-boy" (2007). Imani Johnson provides ethnographic glimpses into the role of the cipher in three competitions (U.S. Battle of the Year 2006, Hollywood, California, B-boy All Stars Block Party 2006, Bronx, New York, and International Battle of the Year 2006, Braunschweig, Germany).

between choreographer/coach, performer, audience and judge. These subjects deliberate about dance's value, meaning, and success.<sup>44</sup> For example, managing member of the Philippine Allstars, Lema Diaz recounts her vision in producing the Roots competition in November 2010.

'Cause dance is so big already and one thing lacking is that individual dancers can't dance. It's more of like a group dance but no one is really doing freestyle or no one is really doing the category of what's supposed to be doing. And we're like yeah. It's good to have an event here and have 1-on-1 B-boy. 1-on-1 Locking. 1-on-1 Popping. 2-on-2 House and Hip-hop. And then that night I drew out a plan ... And then we're gonna call it "Roots."<sup>45</sup>

Diaz executed her plan to bring the New York-based Elite Force Crew and other international judges to the Philippines in order to address both the need for exposure to the individuals involved in the U.S. "roots" of Hip-hop and for growth in the local community's ability to dance as individuals. In another type of competition, Capital G's Dance to the Music I and II in May and June 2011, competitors are instructed to bring their own musical track for which they are to battle individually. As opposed to conventional battles, where the deejay selects the musical accompaniment, in this battle each dancer had to dance to both their personal music and their opponents chosen musical track regardless of dance or musical genre. Dance to the Music most clearly addresses the imbalance in freestyle dance capabilities that Diaz earlier expressed, and also addresses the abilities of dancers to elevate their battle planning skills through the strategic use of music (sometimes sharp contrasts to the B-boy musical canon) and compete against dancers that specialise in a different genre of dance than their own. In another battle Freshest Soul in October 2011, a B-boy battle produced by B-boy Reflex, of Tha Project, and Brewing Point Dance Studios, the main battles were complemented by peripheral competitions like "Best Toprock" and "Best Power Moves." While the winners of the main battle rounds were usually those that exhibited a well-rounded head-to-head set, these alternative battles provided a movement-

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<sup>44</sup> Because I was invited to serve as one of the judges for the House of Dance's first competition, Hip-hop Explosion, in which ten different hip hop dance groups competed in Marikina, and for Chosen Ground, an event held by UP StreetDance Club (UPSDC), I was afforded a judge's perspective. From this standpoint, there are often specific criteria that are being evaluated including skill level, precision, technical difficulty, creativity, originality and costume.

<sup>45</sup> Leal Marie (Lema) Diaz, personal interview with author, Digital Recording. Manila, Philippines, 26 May 2011.

themed space for technicians and a free-for-all setting for arguably more "organic" play. In their own ways, Roots, Dance to the Music and Freshest Soul each portray a dance community that possesses the self-awareness and flexibility to address its own weaknesses—individuality, musicality and playfulness—through competition.

### **RAKET MODE**

If the mainstream illusion of Hip-hop reduces its dance cultural practices to only two modes—underground competition and commercial product—then the gap between music and dance as commercial ventures deserves serious thought. If the false dichotomy in Hip-hop from a music-based understanding seems loosely defined in terms of whether a rap artist has a contract with a record label or has "crossed-over" from a local to a mainstream audience, the constitutive terms of "commercial" for dance in Hip-hop seem even less clear. This uncertainty relates from the reality that commodification for dance as a cultural form is inherently different from that of music; the dance industry is distinct from the music industry. For example, unlike the "underground" rapper's mixtape, "underground" dancers do not traffic some analogous product of their crafts through informal economies popularly conceived within the image of "underground" Hip-hop music artists. Nonetheless, because of the pre-existing "anti-commercial" attitude in existing Hip-hop discourse, a practical discussion of the commercial aspects of dance in Hip-hop is often missing.

In line with this issue of seeing Hip-hop not only as a way of living but also a living wage, I find *raket* as a distinctive mode particularly useful for thinking about the commodity-value of dance. This term refers to the dialogue between the client, audience, choreographer and performer. I appropriate the word, *raket*, which seems to have been originally used to describe activities that are more proximate to dishonest or fraudulent business—gambling, pirated DVDs, money laundering, in order to articulate a concept that blurs the lines between informal and formal dance economies and signals the failures of "legitimate" Hip-hop economies. In one sense, *raket* involves the types of dancing in which individuals must participate in order to survive in a severely poverty-stricken country. In another sense, *raket*, is the mode that dancers use to advance the status of dance in relationship to acting and music artistry in the wider entertainment industry. As the Philippine AllStars proclaim, "The

group hopes to elevate the status of dancers in the Philippines, because for too long have dancers been considered second-rate performers."<sup>46</sup> These types of employment widely vary from long term positions as physical education teachers (high schools), dance teachers (arts centers, fitness centers, privately-owned studios and for talent services), television (commercials and "house" dancers on shows like "Party Pilipinas" and "Good Vibes"), live performance (singular event contracts, concert front acts, medium-run contracts) and dancing overseas (Hong Kong Disney, Singapore Universal Studios).

At other times, *raket* (and client interests in particular) can involve the compromise of what are otherwise conventional Hip-hop rules. The ways this occurs in *raket* dancing became clear upon one participant observation incident at a rap music video shoot. This particular shoot involved a rap group from Tondo, widely known as one of the most impoverished and gang-run sections of Manila, and some breakers, including one of my interviewees, B-girl Beatch. In one scene, meant to highlight the cipher, the director instructed the rappers to address the camera while each breaker cipher-ed in the background. The difference remained that each breaker was instructed to perform exactly the same set in the cipher, omitting the usual element of improvisation that theoretically defines a cipher. As such, *raket* dancing gets constituted based upon to what degree the normative elements of the dance are (re)shaped in the service of the product. Perhaps these compromises in the commercial industry, shape the pro-underground sentiment many scholars and dancers privileged. That these dancers almost always participated in *raket* dancing and entrepreneurship perhaps tells us that the false dichotomy of underground/commercial sounds even more false when looking at Hip-hop through dance in Manila.

## **KLASE MODE**

Beyond the underground and commercial, one might wonder where the space exists for discussion about the pedagogical philosophies of Hip-hop dance. How do you learn Hip-hop dance? Does it have to be done in the physical or symbolic "street" in order to be legitimate and valid? I was faced with these questions when I attempted to take my first class in krump, a dance form that originated in South Los Angeles drawing from traditions of clowning and streetdance. The dance became widely popular following the 2003 and 2005 David La Chapelle films "Clowns in the Hood" and "Rize," which chronicled

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<sup>46</sup> "'Beyond Hip Hop' Philippine Allstars Multiply website," <http://allstars2005.multiply.com/> (accessed 26 February 2011).

the emergence from Tommy the Clown's Hip-hop clowning and stripper-dancing to the Battle Zone competition. As I stood in the middle of the studio class facilitated by Phillip "Adrum" Pamintuan in Manila, he began with a discussion of this history of the dance, emphasising the spiritual nature rooted within it and the spiritual communication it provides. Before he explored the energetic movement vocabulary that includes improvised jabs, chest pops and stomps, Pamintuan eloquently expressed the emotional dimensions of the genre and the caveat that krump principles were not originally meant for formal classes. The absence of a pre-determined sequence of movements, presence of mimetic exercises in locomotion and musicality, and Pamintuan's own autobiographical accounts of experiencing the dance all combine to constitute a mode of dance that is widely different from *krump* in its *kompet* and *raket* modes.

As I learned in Pamintuan's *krump* class, educational modes of Hip-hop enable a delineation of genre borders that have important implications for how Hip-hop is understood and misunderstood. As a mode of inter-subjectivity engaged by dancers, choreographers, educational institutions and private commercial studios, *klase* is a way to codify and innovate genre and sort out categories of Hip-hop. *Klase* is also inherently a category for understanding the educational components of the Hip-hop and streetdance community. When I was in Manila, I enrolled into two different Summer Workshops (Groove Central and Brewing Point Dance Studio).<sup>47</sup> There are at least two main types of *klase*—physical education and workshop (studio/crew collaboration). The physical education types of streetdance and Hip-hop occur in secondary and post-secondary school. In this type of *klase*, dancers usually address choreographers as "coach" and coaches usually describe the groups of dancers as schools they "handle." The dancing performed by these students is thereby governed in part by school policies on appropriate dress, gesture and funding, and such. The educational mode of Hip-hop dance thereby presents a fertile mode of Hip-hop seldom acknowledged by popular and academic discourse.

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<sup>47</sup> These courses met twice or three times a week for about two months. I also had the fortune of learn from Mycs and JJ class on Pop 'n' Lock, B-boy Reflex and Phil Pamintuan's class on Collab, Phil Pamintuan's class on Krump, B-boy Reflex class on Breakin', Hitmaster Fish's Poppin' class (American Hip-hop dancer then teaching in Manila), Prince Paltu-ob's Lockin' class, James Wong's Freestyle class and Gino Ong's Waackin' class.

## **KONSEPT MODE**

After a fifteen-hour flight, when I arrived at Manila's Ninoy Aquino International Airport at the start of a nine-month fieldwork trip, I did not proceed to my lodging as one might expect, but rather, I took my luggage with me to a technical rehearsal for *Danz dish*, the sixth annual concert of De La Salle University's streetdance company LSDC Street. The decision to "hit the ground running" afforded me a glimpse behind the scenes at the concerted effort that goes into staging their work for an hour and a half show which premiered 4 and 5 February 2011. I first met the group's artistic director/choreographer, Mary Chris (Mycs) Villosa, in October 2009 during a preliminary research visit during competition season. In February, however, most of the activity in the dance community centred around staged dance theatre productions. While I sat in the Teresa Yuchengco Auditorium, which appeared to seat about 700 audience members, I asked Villosa about the concert and the rationale behind their choreographic decisions to get a better sense of the dancing. She said for LSDC Street concerts in general, their decisions were mostly dependent upon the concept of the show. This year's concept revolved around a year-long desire to integrate a hologram of dance, projected not onto a downstage screen but rather into a mosquito net-like surface that haunted the midstage. For these reasons, I was inspired to identify *konsept*, as a concert mode of dance. *Konsept* represents the dialogue between choreographer, performer and audience in deciding how the dance looks, feels and moves. Unlike *kompet*, *konsept* is not about one's capability measured against another. Unlike *raket*, *konsept* is less tied to the artistic visions of patrons and clients. Unlike *klase*, *konsept* is less about defining what is correct form or style for a particular genre. Rather the *konsept* mode usually privileges an artist's ability to play with an idea, with seemingly no negative consequences, and convey a message with narrative or character development.

The Hip-hop dance community in Manila belongs to a thriving Filipino performance culture that takes place on stage. In a discussion of what constitutes ballet choreography as Filipino, dance scholar Basilio Esteban S. Villaruz discussed the modern theatrical works of Remedios de Oteyza, Generoso Iñigo and Leonor Orosa Goquingco.<sup>48</sup> For example, Goquingco merged ballet vocabulary and folkloric dance subjects with the *Noli Dance Suite* and *Filipinescas*.<sup>49</sup> The *konsept* mode of dance stands as the inter-subjective manner in which dance can best express an artistry relatively

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<sup>48</sup> Villaruz, B. S. E., "The Quest for Filipino Choreography," in *Treading Through*, 232–247.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

unhindered by the corporate interests (*raket*), school policies (*klase*) and judging criteria (*kompot*) of other modes of dance. One example of this mode exists in the University of the Philippines's Streetdance Club's *Street Fusion 11: Re:Connect*, a concert meant to highlight the company's artistic vision—one which both drew from emergent social media and questioned its negative impact on one's connection to a Christian God. This particular example of *konsept* dance strikes me as unique, not because of its overt spiritual nature, as many cultural productions in the Philippines are marked by religion, but because of its final remarkable dance piece. In its conclusion, *Re:Connect*'s cast performed in synchronised fashion with a projected recording of other dancers, each former members of the Streetdance Club that were relocated in the U.S., Canada and the Middle East. According to founder, Sir Jerome Dimalanta:

I just wanted the audience to know how much their club has grown and the history behind it and the people behind it who were there when the club started and where are they now. So I just wanted to showcase that and I wanted people to know that even though these club members or Crew members are already doing their own thing abroad, they're still somehow connected, they still somehow support and encourage the club in its activities and it's one big family. That's one thing about technology, it's bridging the gap.<sup>50</sup>

As Dimalanta expresses, the reasons for their dance-making are intensely social and directed at conveying to the audience a suturing of his dance community. Underlying this narrative lie the political and economic structures of neoliberalism, family reunification and export migration that mutually shape this community's fragmentation. As an example of the *konsept* mode of dance, *Re:Connect* broadcasts the messages and content that continues a counter-argument against Hip-hop discourse's underground/commercial binary.

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<sup>50</sup> Dimalanta, J.. Personal interview with author through video-conference. Digital recording. 21 September 2011.

## DIMENSION

In addition to genre and mode, the next two sections discuss dimension and conflict as alternative ways of thinking about Hip-hop dance. These two sections receive less treatment than the previous essay sections because, while equally valuable, they strike me as demanding less explanation. Indeed, the movement dimension of dance is what comes to mind when most people imagine dance. And still, the categorisation of movement and non-movement dimensions of dance provides valuable information for addressing claims of authenticity and isolating bulk information into smaller parts. As Hip-hop scholar Michael P. Jeffries has held, "social authenticity, racial or otherwise, is dangerous terrain."<sup>51</sup> In Hip-hop dance, issues such as those of race, gender and class have historically taken on a naturalised discourse that differs from other forms of Hip-hop precisely because dance has a different relationship to issues of the racialised body than music. Understanding the dimensions of dance provides source material for thick descriptions of the ways the performance is orchestrated. This categorisation of dimensions is inspired by the studies of two particular Philippine dance scholars, Jerome Dimalanta and Matthew Santamaria. While Santamaria theorises dance with the categories movement vocabulary, costumes and property, music, kinesthetics, kinethics, performance space and performance context to conceptualise the Igal dances of the southern provinces of the Philippines, Dimalanta's substantive thesis, employs movement, language and socio-cultural meaning to provide the first formal study on the adaptation and development of street dance in Philippine society.<sup>52</sup>

These studies inspired my own inquiries into dimensions—movement, language, music, body, costume and "props," space, and socio-cultural meaning—as they add breath and depth to understanding the differences within dance as a culmination of a series of conscious and unconscious decisions. While I saw how genre were most visible in class offerings (i.e., b-boying class) and mode was obvious in the ways dancers spoke about the calendar (i.e., *kompot* season), dimensions were most salient in the ways groups organised their internal labour practices. Crews often have governing bodies that consist of individuals with specific duties. These positions, which designate individuals responsible for costumes and properties, music, conditioning, movement and spatial formations, align with dimensions of Hip-hop and distribute the multiple types of creative labour that constitute a dance

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<sup>51</sup> Jeffries, M. P., *Thug Life*, 68.

<sup>52</sup> Santamaria, M. C. M., *Capturing Pangalay*, 1–165, forthcoming; Dimalanta, J., "The Adaptation and Development of Streetdance in the Philippine setting."

product, concert, class or competition. Music is a dimension that usually involves quite deliberate decision and often gets handled by a group member of high authority, as it can feature preferences regarding musical genre, artist, tempo, rhythm and decision-making powers in musical selection, mixing and production. More unconscious decisions in the cultural practices of Hip-hop can be seen in a dancer's linguistic practices, which include language preferences, naming practices, use of "Hip-hop dance" and "streetdance," and local glossaries. Body-based features and costume-based details can have closer links than with other dimensions. For example, bodily practices—how many physical bodies participate in the dance, why certain physiques are ideal, which body parts are emphasised, height, weight, diet, "conditioning"—can influence proper attire for different modes: competition, concert and rehearsal clothing. The movement vocabularies of various genres often operate in a mutual relationship with spatial qualities of dance such as shape, surface, size, tactility and partnering.<sup>53</sup> Dancers' perception of dance, what it entails, means, motivations for dance, what is significant about the dance and related issues naturally play important roles in composing the dance.

An attention to difference across and within dimensions provides material for examinations beyond self-identification. For example, attention to different dimensions can point to different local, postcolonial and indigenous ways of knowing Hip-hop. During the instances when I spoke English in my fieldwork, I quickly learned that language in these contexts has a specific bodily connotation. Upon hearing me speak English, sometimes audiences expressed personal discomfort and embarrassment upon hearing it and proclaimed that it gives them "nosebleeds" and physically gesture as if to catch blood dripping from their noses. When questioned, none of those using this phrase, "*magno-nosebleed ako*" (I'm having a nosebleed), could pinpoint its origins. It remains to be seen whether epistaxis from English is an actual biological phenomenon. In a country where English is the language of business and legislators often cite U.S. laws to assert authority, it represents the elite, educated class. There is even a local high school with a dance competition that dons the name, Epistaxis, as a riff on this concept. Given that English served as a hegemonic tool of American colonial "benevolent dominance" with the initiation of public education in the early 1900s, "nosebleeds" provide a darkly comic vehicle to deal with the effects of

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<sup>53</sup> For more discussion on space-centred notions for the genre of b-boying, refer to Schloss, J. G., "In the Cypher: B-Boy Spaces," in *Foundation* 94–106.

cultural dispossession and graphically re-figure that colonial violence to postcolonial bodies in the present.

## CONFLICT

It would not be very far wrong to say that social theory sets root only in the soil of social disruption. This seems to be equally true for both practical and professional social theories. The evidence is reasonably clear. Social theories arose in their classic form when Europe was most disrupted by the uncertain progress of the modern world ... Tensions expressed in the master concepts of the great white men—Marx's alienation, Weber's iron cage, and Durkheim's anomie—were felt throughout their societies. What they sensed through the veil of their bourgeois culture was confirmed in other writings, repressed until recently, by social theorists who experienced more directly the brutalities visited on ordinary people for reason of their race or gender—and more.<sup>54</sup>

Charles Lemert articulates an idea of modern social theory-making that informs the ways many individuals think about Hip-hop and streetdance. The last approach that I identify conforms to this "classic" social theory pattern and cuts across the other aspects—genre, mode and dimension—in such a way that makes it difficult to distil one from the other. While the first three approaches can be found in the flyers of studios (genre), daily planners of individuals (mode) and internal constitutions of crews (dimension), conflicts are more amorphous and often abstract. In part, conflicts run counter to the essentialist value of *pakikisama*, or willingness to subordinate one's own interest in favour of support and concern of group harmony, popularised by Filipino structural anthropology.<sup>55</sup> They can best be seen in online forums, documents, literature, theory and political "hot-spots." The conflict approach speaks to what Lemert calls social tensions however within and across Hip-hop dance and streetdance cultures and the internal, arguably "organic," theories worked out by the Hip-hop community. Where theory-making is concerned, these internal conflicts are key to avoiding a continuation of a historical and contemporary colonialist anthropological pattern of imposing academic ideas with a presumptive superiority in knowledge systems.

<sup>54</sup> Lemert, C., ed., *Social Theory: The Multicultural and Classic Readings*, 3rd ed. (Colorado: Wesleyan University, 2004).

<sup>55</sup> Jocano, F. L., *Filipino Value System: A Cultural Definition* (Quezon City: Punlad Research House, 1997), 65–66.

These tensions can come in many forms as they speak across a variety of topics like desire, affect, morality, economics, technology and custom. For example, there is an ongoing divide in the community about what and how Hip-hop history should be engaged. One side of the debate seeks to pay due respect to New York-based Hip-hop history, while the others find more value in recognising that the Philippine's has a Hip-hop history of its own. Another tension that seemed prominent amongst dancers was whether to emigrate for work or struggle to work in the Philippines. On one side, dancers leave their families and dance crews to migrate to foreign countries often accepting dance positions of lower status for better economic compensation and on the other side dancers choose to continue in positions of greater autonomy but lower pay. Whatever the conflict or the side of the debate one finds herself or himself on, centralising these issues as an approach, unlike genre, mode and dimensions, highlights popular dance, music, and performance as a contested site of meaning-making in the contemporary Philippines.

## CONCLUSION

Viewing hula "as a structured movement system" will naturally draw movement forward in ways that inevitably diminish or exclude other facets of the dance. As dance scholars we have a responsibility to think about how we approach and write about this subject, because the written word has the power to fix reality in the minds of readers. Too often it is taken uncritically and gains authority as truth. If we hope to contribute positively to a body of knowledge, we must recognize that our perspectives are inevitably framed by assumptions and approaches unique not only to our general culture but to the culture of scholarship.<sup>56</sup>

While addressing the cultural practice of hula, dance scholar Sharon Māhealani Rowe, encapsulates a challenge similarly faced by the culture of scholarship on Hip-hop.<sup>57</sup> A mindfulness regarding the assumptions surrounding approaches to dance is a responsibility not a prerogative. In regards to Rowe's insight, we might pause to consider how we might re-visit the "Willing Willie" controversy in light of Hip-hop dance. The public outcry to the dancing on the "Willing Willie" program prompted withdrawal by

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<sup>56</sup> Rowe, S. M., "We Dance for Knowledge," *Dance Research Journal* 40 (1, 2008): 41.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

sponsors, denouncement by celebrities and condemnation by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and investigation by The Commission on Human Rights (CHR) and the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board (MTRCB), three national government organisations. Upon visiting the CHR in Quezon City to research the issue shortly after the episode, I was told by officials that the child and his parents were scheduled to receive psychological therapy but had seemingly disappeared. The office suspected that the family merely retreated from the Manila spotlight and back to the rural central region of the Philippines. Given the public response, lack of serious retribution and press statement, it is clear that this case requires more than familiarising the "body wave" in a succession of popular dances that appears to appeal to the vulnerabilities of postcolonial subjects with a brand of cultural nationalism. Recognising the commodification of the Othered, poor, young, provincial body of the boy also requires more than an exercise of moral didacticism. Surely the controversy is indicative of the larger structural and cultural moment for music and performance in Asia, one in which online communities, state institutions and corporations negotiate the very terms of dance and social justice. In this cultural moment, it is increasingly important to come back to the basic assumptions underlying precisely what it means when a body moves, dances, takes the stage, and "waves."

Opening its query with the global circulation of the evocative tears and demonstrative gestures of a Filipino boy on one of the nation's major television networks, this article has sought to outline the various ways that, seemingly unrelated, Hip-hop dance is practiced. Dancers use the pliancy of genre to place themselves within and beyond the categorical boundaries of Hip-hop. Their various modes of activity—*kompot*, *raket*, *klase* and *konsept*—inspire a focus on intersubjectivity and raise inquiries that effectively disassemble the commercial/underground binary. Dimensions of dance offer building blocks for de-essentialising Hip-hop "authenticity" and appreciating local and indigenous epistemes. Their internal conflicts hold out the promise of resisting the vulnerabilities of theory-making. In so doing, this essay holds several implications for the principles underpinning such practices of movement and existing theory on Hip-hop performance. In a sense, when we begin to critically question our assumptions about theory, dance and power, we can clarify bewildering events like the "Willing Willie" controversy. Only then can we continue the historical beat of Philippine revolutionaries through the inevitable "next episode" of spectacted inequality. Only then can we dance to a tempo that stresses everyday and institutional social justice for all.