

**Internet Killed the B-boy Star:**  
**A Study of B-boying Through the Lens of Contemporary Media**

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Senior Seminar in Dance  
Fall 2010  
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## B-Boy Infinitives

To suck until our lips turned blue  
 the last drops of cool juice  
 from a crumpled cup sopped  
 with spit the first Italian Ice of summer  
 To chase popsicle stick skiffs  
 along the curb skimming stormwater  
 from Woodbridge Ave to Old Post Road  
 To be To B-boy To be boys  
 who snuck into a garden to pluck  
 a baseball from mud and shit  
 To hop that old man's fence before  
 he bust through his front door  
 with a lame-bull limp charge  
 and a fist the size of half a spade  
 To be To B-boy To lace shell-toe Adidas  
 To say *Word* to Kurtis Blow  
 To laugh the afternoons  
 someone's mama was so black  
 when she stepped out the car  
 the oil light went on  
 To count hairs sprouting  
 around our cocks To touch  
 ourselves To pick the half-smoked  
 True Blues from my father's ash tray  
 and cough the gray grit  
 into my hands To run  
 my tongue along the lips of a girl  
 with crooked teeth To be  
 To B-boy To be boys for the ten days  
 an 8-foot gash of cardboard lasts  
 after we dragged that cardboard  
 seven blocks then slapped it  
 on the cracked blacktop To spin  
 on our hands and backs To bruise  
 elbows wrists and hips To Bronx-Twist  
 Jersey version beside the mid-day traffic  
 To swipe To pop To lock freeze and  
 drop dimes on the hot pavement –  
 even if the girls stopped watching  
 and the street lamps lit buzzed all  
 night we danced like that  
 and no one called us home

- Patrick Rosal

B-boy... that's what it is, that's why when the public changed it to 'break-dancing' they were just giving a professional name to it, but b-boy was the original name for it and whoever wants to keep it real would keep calling it b-boy.<sup>1</sup>

- JoJo, from Rock Steady Crew

<sup>1</sup> The Freshest Kids, prod. and dir. Israel, 1 hr. 34 min., QD3 Entertainment, 2002, DVD.

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## Introduction

The twentieth century could hardly be characterized without a reference to the Internet, a global system of interconnected computers that serve billions of users worldwide. As personal lives are further occupied by this new technology, the Internet has naturally also spread to the realm of education, where teachers have begun to see the Internet as a convenient, effective, and adaptable teaching tool for students both young and older. The American education rests on an oral tradition – teacher-to-student verbal communication is crucial to the system, as the norm of both parties occupying the same physical space. For dance education, this traditional method is even further rooted in the learning process; one would be hard-pressed to imagine a formal dance class in which a teacher is not physically demonstrating, in one form or another, to her students.

In Barnard College's Dance Program, the Internet is utilized in a variety of ways to enhance the learning experience. Increasingly, professors have begun to use websites as legitimate sources of educational material and present websites, such as YouTube.com, as reliable sources of historical and/or international dance footage. This paper seeks to understand the effects of the increasing use of new media, specifically the Internet, on the traditions of b-boying since its origins in the 1970's. I seek first to establish the idea of the b-boy star – the original b-boy who embodies the style and philosophies rooted in the traditions of the 1970's. I will examine each specific element that created this “star” – his way of life, the sacredness of b-boy communities, and the foundational style of his dance form. Then, I will examine how the contemporary media, such as MTV and Reality Television, have presented the b-boy dance form to the American people. Lastly, I will discuss how the Internet undermines the core qualities of a

b-boy with the creation of a virtual space or community for breaking. Ultimately, this paper seeks to understand how the Internet has changed the way that a dance can be learned, communicated, and evaluated by dancers and the rest of the world.

## Background and Origins

The legendary DJ Kool Herc is credited with beginning the breaking movement that we now know as hip-hop.<sup>2</sup> It is said that in the summer of 1974, he would

plug his mobile turntable unit into the power lines at the base of street lamps in the park. Emcees would take the microphones and invite teenagers to break dance on the ground, artists would spray paint graffiti murals onto building walls, and thus Hip Hop was born.<sup>3</sup>

Herc was also first to pioneer the musical break, points in a music record where there was nothing but the beats. Over time, other DJs began to lengthen the breaks in a record, sometimes even spinning tracks exclusively with breaks. These breaks are the key turning point between the end of soul culture and the beginning of hip-hop culture, and they have become known as the original essence of “breakdancing” and the seed of its tradition. As Joseph Schloss, a music professor at New York University, has so eloquently said, “hip-hop music and b-boying were born as twins, and their mother was the break.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Creation Stories**

However, some have refuted that DJ Kool Herc was the creator of hip-hop, insisting instead that he only popularized something that already existed and that he merely brought the

<sup>2</sup> The term was coined by Afrika Bambaataa, the “Godfather of Hip-hop,” in 1979.

<sup>3</sup> Mandalit Del Barco, “Hip Hop Hooray: Breaking into the Big Time,” NPR: Breakdancing. Present at the Creation, <<http://www.npr.org/programs/morning/features/patc/breakdancing/article.html>> (14 September 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Joseph G. Schloss, Foundation: B-Boys, B-Girls, and Hip-Hop Culture in New York (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 19.

hip-hop movement from the underground to the streets. This origin tale of hip-hop culture is spun many ways throughout the hip-hop community, not unlike the origin tales of other oral cultures. Take the term b-boys, for instance. Some say that it stands for Bronx Boy, to signify the geographic roots of the art form. Others insist that it means Break Boy, for the musical breaks to which a b-boy dances, or that it is really Beat Boy, for the beats in every b-boy song.

The same multiple accounts exist for the term breaking. In the 2002 documentary *The Freshest Kids*, interviews with different b-boys showcases various explanations for why the form was named “breaking.” One says the term came straight from DJ Kool Herc's musical breaks; that b-boys would wait until the break in the record to take the dance floor for only a short period of time, until DJ Kool Herc began to spin sets exclusively with breaks. Another says it was because the term was already street vernacular; “breaking” described things that one did beyond the usual. A third says that “break” was used in the sense that someone had reached his/her breaking point and thus began the dance, taking a “break from everyday life [to allow] the dancer to enter a heightened world where ideas about time and space and spirituality and style could be addressed through raw physicality.”<sup>5</sup> Or perhaps the real break was when rival gang members in the South Bronx of the early 1970's decided to take a break from street violence to compete against one another to determine the best street dancers instead.<sup>6</sup> Some also say that “breaking” was given its name because it was dangerous<sup>7</sup> – you could literally break a part of yourself while doing it. The multiple accounts of the origins of breaking are further echoed in the simultaneous use of the words “breaking,” “b-boying,” and “breakdancing.”

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<sup>5</sup> Schloss, 19.

<sup>6</sup> Mandalit Del Barco, “Break Dancers: Who Are They, and Why Are They Spinning Their Heads?” (M.A. Thesis, Columbia University, 1984), n.p.

<sup>7</sup> Del Barco, “Break Dancers,” n.p.

## ***Early Attempts at Going Mainstream***

In fact, the dancers who began the movement in the South Bronx never called themselves “breakdancers” – a term that is purely a media construct. As journalists got wind of the b-boys in the late 1970's, they coined the term “breakdancing” to describe the vocabulary of movements the b-boys did, and to recast raw street dance as a mere form of musical acrobatics.<sup>8</sup> In the 1980's, when the NYC Breakers went on a world tour at the peak of their popularity, they were introduced as “breakdancers” everywhere they performed.<sup>9</sup> Eventually, even the original b-boys were reported “to getting caught up in calling it breakdancing, too.”<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey Greene of Rock Steady, the first ever professional b-boy crew, was quoted as saying, “what [they're] doing through breakdancing, rapping, and graffiti [was] bringing our culture to the world.”<sup>11</sup> The relevance of this statement rests on the fact that he uses the term “breakdancing” and not “breaking” or “b-boying.” Hearing such a pioneer of the dance form use the media-coined term was a sure sign that the dance itself was already commercialized. The moniker, it seemed, was only the beginning of the attempt to mainstream the art of breaking.

A media frenzy launched “breakdancing” into the national limelight, with the art form first reaching mainstream prominence in 1983 with the movie *Flashdance*. Rock Steady Crew, the b-boy group featured in several *Flashdance* scenes, recalls how the lead actress Jennifer Beals ignored them on set until the acclaimed premier of the film launched them into stardom,<sup>12</sup> despite having filmed several scenes together. While other films, such as *Wild Style* (1983), were

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<sup>8</sup> Schloss, 58.

<sup>9</sup> [The Freshest Kids](#).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

released earlier, *Flashdance* was the first to reach the critical masses that enabled the form to break into the mainstream. *Flashdance* appealed to audiences, as well as the critics; it grossed nearly \$95 million in box office and won over ten film awards. Soon enough, breaking instructions and how-to manuals were appearing in national magazines such as *People Magazine* and *Newsweek*.<sup>13</sup> It became so popular that every street corner had a b-boy dancing and so commercialized that companies even sold special cardboard boxes that b-boys could fold up and carry around for street dancing.<sup>14</sup> B-boying was even represented as a true American art form at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics.

The commercialization and popularization of hip-hop reached its apex in the first half of the 1980's, when "Graffiti paintings [were] being sold in SoHo art galleries for up to \$10,000 each."<sup>15</sup> B-boys who had started on street corners in Greenwich Village, breaking on flattened cardboard refrigerator boxes, began to perform to large audiences at Madison Square Garden and some toured even South America and the Caribbean.<sup>16</sup> They went from making \$20 to \$50 a performance to earning tens of thousands of dollars for a single appearance in films, commercials, or on stage.<sup>17</sup>

For instance, 6,000 people gathered at Boston City Hall Plaza to watch a performance by the New York City Breakers in June 1984, while the Swatch watch company sponsored a breaking competition in August of the same year, which was taped for national broadcast. Several soft drink companies including Mountain Dew and Pepsi also featured breakdancers in their television commercials. As early as 1983 the New York City Breakers even entertained at a large corporate party for the brokerage firm Merrill Lynch, Pierce, Fenner & Smith.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Del Barco, "Hip Hop Hooray," n.p.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Kimberly Monteyne, "Hip Hop on Film: Performance Culture, Urban Space, and Genre Transformation in the 1980s" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2009), 222.

To many who pioneered the b-boy movement, these events signified an era of exploitation of the b-boy and of the dance form. Typical was Michael Holman's 1984 TV show *Graffiti Rock*, which modeled itself on other youth dance shows of the times.<sup>19</sup> Holman, having seen the likes of Rock Steady Crew performing and battling in New York City nightclubs, wanted to bring breaking to the public stage. Thus he recruited the NYC Breakers, then called the Floormasters, who may have lacked the style and finesse of Rock Steady Crew, but had an athleticism that translated well to the television screen.<sup>20</sup> They were able to spin longer and faster, giving home audiences the thrill they craved. Holman was seen as promoting “breakdancing” as a flamboyant style of dance and an exciting yet fleeting American fad.

### ***B-boy's Downfall***

The tensions between the original b-boys and the media, between Holman and his NYC Breakers and less commercialized artists, between the outsider and the insider of the hip-hop movement is the result of a group of historically disenfranchised people suddenly launched into multi-million dollar industry. Bombarded by the limelight, the b-boy lost ownership over his own dance form. Where previously he had had complete control of it, choosing where and when he practiced and how it was performed, commercialization placed that authority instead in the hands of the corporate world. When Rock Steady Crew released a number one hit single in London at the encouragement of their manager, many in the b-boy community saw this as a betrayal of what breaking truly was.<sup>21</sup> The problem, as they perceived it, was the change in breaking as it

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<sup>19</sup> Monteyne, 222.

<sup>20</sup> The Freshest Kids.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

moved from the street to the stage. Dance critic Sally Sommer suggested that the dance was being shaped by the media; that once professionals get a hold of a dance novelty, they begin to “adapt, change, bend, twist, and shape it to suit their own needs.”<sup>22</sup> Ironically, it was the media itself that managed to “chill the form,”<sup>23</sup> acting as both an initial promoter and an eventual executioner of breaking's popularity.

It was not long before the public itself began to reject b-boying. The police came down on public performances, handcuffing anyone who danced on the sidewalks. The media turned public attention to the potential health hazards of breaking, reporting multiple instances of b-boy injuries.<sup>24</sup> For example, *The New York State Journal of Medicine* featured an article entitled “Hazards of Break Dancing” in 1984, and the *Journal of the American Medical Association* ran a report called “Breaks and Other Bad News for Breakers” in 1985.<sup>25</sup> Professional dancers, such as Alexis Smith from the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, hoped that breaking was a fad that would eventually pass, blaming the street dancers for taking commercial jobs away from traditionally-trained dancers.<sup>26</sup> Even though *Flashdance* was well received, many other Hollywood studios were watching carefully before introducing more “breakdancing” movies, just in case it was indeed a mere fad.<sup>27</sup> As the media frenzy cooled, breaking also fell from public consciousness as people began to believe it was only a passing trend, ignorant those who continued to practice of breaking in smaller communities. By early 1985,

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<sup>22</sup> Del Barco. “Hip Hop Hooray,” n.p.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> While many articles related the possible injuries and side effects of breakdancing, there was very little written about the negative effects of other kinds of youth dance in the early 1980's. See Monteyne, 221.

<sup>25</sup> AKC Leung, “Hazards of Break Dancing,” *New York State Journal of Medicine* 84, no. 12 (Dec. 1984): 592. G.R. Hansen “Breaks and Other Bad News For Breakers,” *Journal of American Medical Association* 252, no. 14 (1985): 2047.

<sup>26</sup> Del Barco. “Hip Hop Hooray,” n.p.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

the small number who wished to keep the breakdance identity that was important to them, found little audience support. They could no longer use the practice hall and were discouraged by the police from using the city centre. The structure that supported breakdance had disintegrated.<sup>28</sup>

Ultimately, the b-boy himself took responsibility for breaking's disappearance from pop culture.

Blaming commercialization for their downfall, many b-boy crews broke up in the late 1980's,<sup>29</sup>

taking their art off the map.

## The Original B-boy Star

### *B-boying as a Way of Life*

According to some accounts, b-boying actually began much earlier than its public appearance in the late 1970's. Earnest Smith, a jazz historian, describes “a 1903 two-minute film [...] featuring three black teenagers on a city sidewalk”<sup>30</sup> with movement vocabulary similar to that of b-boys. Sally Sommer, a dance critic and historian, says that “the dance form has a tradition 300 years old,” drawing from the traditional dance of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Angola.<sup>31</sup> However, the odds that the boys from the South Bronx saw this old footage or studied this ancient dance are negligible. As Jojo from the Rock Steady Crew says, “nobody even knew what Capoeira was”<sup>32</sup> when b-boying was created in the Bronx. Nonetheless, breaking is built on elements that are common to all forms of dance from the African diaspora; it is easy to spot the traditions of improvisation, circle formations, call and response format, competition,

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<sup>28</sup> Tania Kopytko, “Breakdance as an Identity Market in New Zealand,” *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, Vol. 18 (1986): 27.

<sup>29</sup> *The Freshest Kids*.

<sup>30</sup> Del Barco, “Hip Hop Hooray,” n.p.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> *The Freshest Kids*.

acrobatics, undulations, slides, and complicated body and footwork.<sup>33</sup>

If anything, b-boys today see these links to history as an argument for the natural spontaneity of the form. B-boying was created organically without direct links to Capoeira or other African diasporic forms, yet it still resembles these dances. B-boying features moves close to the ground, because naturally, “before there was concrete, there was dirt.”<sup>34</sup> These close ties to nature, or to what feels natural, build b-boy moves on a foundation of organically generated movements. B-boys often speak about the spontaneous response of bodies to musical breaks; “for any real b-boy, you will feel it in your body, and it'll just make you dance, even when you don't feel like dancing.”<sup>35</sup> Gene Kelly, a veteran professional dancer at the time of breaking's rise in popularity, is quoted as saying, “I love breakdancing. The great thing about it is it's improvisation. It sprang up, literally, from the ground.”<sup>36</sup>

This feeling of a grass-roots movement in breaking was evident during the early years of breaking, when most b-boys were quite young. For example, the president of Dance System #10, Freddy Correa, was fifteen years old and the leader of Rock Steady Crew was only eighteen.<sup>37</sup>

When Freddy Correa first started breaking at the age of fourteen, he said,

You know how many hours a day I practice? I get up in the morning, I dance. While I'm dressing, I dance. I go to school, I dance. I come from school, I dance. I practice dancing with the group, I eat, I dance. Before I go to sleep, I dance. I mean, for me, it's 24 hours a day. If it's something you like, you shouldn't get tired of it.<sup>38</sup>

Crudely put, b-boying is not just a dance, “you gotta eat, piss, drink, think b-boy”<sup>39</sup> to be able to

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<sup>33</sup> Del Barco, “Break Dancers,” n.p.

<sup>34</sup> The Freshest Kids

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Del Barco, “Hip Hop Hooray,” n.p.

<sup>37</sup> The Freshest Kids

<sup>38</sup> Del Barco, “Break Dancers,” n.p.

<sup>39</sup> The Freshest Kids

do it. In the impoverished neighborhoods of NYC where it began, breaking took young boys away from violence and drug trade of the streets; they worked through their anger by battling each other, and they were too busy practicing to be involved in gang warfare. Crazy Legs of Rocky Steady Crew explains that as he was growing up, “you were either watching the pimps and the drug dealers, or you learned from the talented people”<sup>40</sup> to stay away from a life of crime. Afrika Bambaataa, the so-called Godfather of hip-hop, spoke about the hip-hop movement as “culture, peace, unity, love, and fun.”<sup>41</sup>

The rise of breaking can thus be classified as a rite of passage on both the macro and micro level. As previously mentioned, the hip-hop movement facilitated a social transitional period in which teenagers from troubled neighborhoods were able to move away from the violence and despair that plagued their communities. On the micro level, Sally Sommer suggests, the young age of the first b-boys could point to the fact that breaking was a rite of passage for young adults undergoing physical body changes and growing into themselves. B-boys often understand breaking as a natural part of growing up, and as for its hardships, they shrug them off as if “you don't get hurt, you ain't gonna learn.”<sup>42</sup>

This “way-of-life” philosophy could be the primary reason for breaking's separation from pop culture. As breaking declined in popularity in the late 1980's, the growing divide within the hip-hop community between b-boying and music only served to hasten breaking's disappearance from popular media. Hip-hop music and breaking were created simultaneously; when the break was first utilized, rappers would improvise rhymes as b-boys took the floor. The b-boys of the late 1970's often grooved to the hip-hop beats of James Brown, Afrika Bambaataa, and the

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<sup>40</sup> Everybody Dance Now, prod. and dir. Margaret Selby, 58 min., Thirteen/WNET, 1991, videocassette.

<sup>41</sup> The Freshest Kids.

<sup>42</sup> Del Barco, “Break Dancers,”n.p.

Sugarhill Gang. Naturally, the first rap records of the 1970's had a similar way-of-life philosophy embedded in its lyrics – artists would sing about staying out of trouble on the streets and the importance of getting an education. WRKS FM's Disco Four tells his young listeners in “School Beat” to “become a brainy act, go to college. / Don't get mad, don't bug out, / Don't go crazy, don't drop out.”<sup>43</sup> Grandmaster Flash's song “White Lines” warns that “my white lines go a long way, either up your nose or through your veins, / with nothin' to lose except killin' your brain.”<sup>44</sup> This anti-drug message was also incorporated into breaking; Dance System #10 did a routine to “White Lines” that they performed at school assemblies, featuring a dancer pantomiming taking drugs before overdosing on stage.<sup>45</sup> However, feeding off the media attention, rap music began to drift from its roots; instead of singing about parties and clean fun, lyrics veered to being “gangsta” and living a “thug life.” Thus, while b-boying was stuck to its original soundtrack, which was beginning to fade out of fashion, new rap music was gaining momentum in the public eye. The commodification of rap met with little resistance. However, for breaking, it was a completely different story.

### ***B-boy Community as Sacred***

Mandalit Del Barco, a report for National Public Radio, describes typical New York City scenes at the height of breaking's popularity. In 1984, one would see b-boys virtually everywhere, in any public arena large enough to set up a crew, “in front of the metropolitan Museum, along Fifth Avenue, on Columbus Circle, in Washington Square Park, shaking and

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

vibrating and twirling and swirling to the screech-scratch beat and the dee-jay's rap."<sup>46</sup> Breaking is inherently a communal activity performed in two kinds of context – improvisation and battling – where the audience and supporters surround the b-boy in a circle. Breaking is traditionally done in the cypher,<sup>47</sup> the improvisational circle that allows “each soloist to demonstrate his or her skills while encoding gestural messages into the executed movement phrases.”<sup>48</sup> Of this cypher, Romeo Navarro, the founder of the annual B-Boy City competition in Austin, Texas, says, “sometimes, when I get lost, I just go back to the circle. It puts me right back to where I'm supposed to be.”<sup>49</sup> The reverent manner in which Navarro speaks of the circle alludes to the sacredness of the space in which a b-boy dances.

More significantly, b-boys prize the community aspect of breaking as much as the sacredness of the space. B-boys tend to organize themselves into teams or “crews” with identifying names. Crews not only practice and battle other crews together, but b-boys in the same crew also live their lives in sync by hanging out together in the same places every day. B-Girl Emiko explains:

Crews should be just the people who [you] always hung out with. It's not the people who just battle and then say “bye,” you know? You go there, battle together, and maybe after the battle you go eat together. When you're off, maybe go to see [a] movie [or] something like that. That's the way it should be.<sup>50</sup>

A b-boy's crew could be likened to his family, and thus “entering a social circle was almost as

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> The term comes from the Nation of Gods and Earths, a sect that separated from the Nation of Islam in the late 1960's. Gods and Earths use the term *cypher* to represent anything associated with circles or cycles, including the numeral zero, the letter O, and especially the circles of people in which their lessons are propagated. (Source: Schloss)

<sup>48</sup> Halifu Osumare, “Global Breakdancing and the Intercultural Body,” *Dance Research Journal* 34, no. 2 (Winter, 2002): 34.

<sup>49</sup> *Inside the Circle*, prod. and dir. Marcy Garriott, 1hr. 42 min., La Sonrisa Productions Inc., 2007, DVD.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 56.

important as learning the actual moves”<sup>51</sup> of breaking. This tight community not only clearly defined the insider in contrast to an outsider, but it also allowed for different generations of b-boys to interact regularly with each other.

The result is that young adherents who live in New York cannot help but have a deep sense of history, even if they don't consciously realize it. The vast majority of serious b-boys and b-girls in New York have studied directly with the elders of the art form, and even those who haven't are still affected by the presence of these individuals in their environment.<sup>52</sup>

Due to the presence of “elders,” those who created breaking, the breaking community in New York City has an inherent self-policing quality – with even the new generations taking the same traditionalist approach to breaking.

Furthermore, the emphasis on community also allowed for a clear definition of authority within the art form – it was ultimately the opinions of the community that conferred worth on a dancer. Just as the crew must be named, so must a b-boy or a b-girl. Commonly, a b-boy's stage name is given to him by a mentor or another dancer in his community whom he respects.<sup>53</sup> Even in the case that a dancer names himself, the name must still be approved by his peer group; “as a result, the name reflects not only the dancer's self-image, but the fact that the self-image has been verified by the community.”<sup>54</sup> Approval by the community indicates not only an acceptance of the dancer by his or her peer group, but also an assimilation into a whole network of social interactions and artistic choices due to the presence of “elders” within the community.

### ***B-boy Style as Supreme***

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 72.

The term foundation is used by b-boys and b-girls to refer to a set of notions and principles about b-boying that is passed from teacher to student.<sup>55</sup> Foundation is the idea that “b-boying is founded not only upon a series of physical movements, but also on attitude, rhythm, style, character, strategy, tradition, and philosophy.”<sup>56</sup> It ultimately sets clear aesthetic boundaries that allow for future innovation without discarding the movements of the past. Foundation is the reason that it is possible to trace lineages of b-boys and b-girls, where one could clearly see moves that have been passed on to a new generation of dancers. Ultimately, foundation is what makes a b-boy or b-girl who s/he is.

For someone with a proper sense of b-boy foundation, a move that lacks the correct rhythm or character is unacceptable. But dancers who do have a strong understanding of foundation can be boldly innovative, knowing that they are well grounded in the tradition. In fact, when b-boys and b-girls are criticized for being overly abstract or experimental, their first line of defense is usually to demonstrate – either verbally or physically – their knowledge of foundation.<sup>57</sup>

If you ask the old-school b-boys of New York City, their answers will remain the same; in the argument of style versus technique, “style will always win. Always. And that's what a b-boy is: style, not technique.”<sup>58</sup> A reason for the staunch refusal of the term “breakdancer” is exactly this distinction between style and technique. According to b-girl Seoulsonyk, “a breakdancer is someone who doesn't live a b-boy lifestyle,” and the difference becomes apparent in the cypher. She explains:

It's like two people can do the exact same movement, right? [...] And there is a huge difference. Physically, it's exactly the same. But... one is loaded with these symbols and history. And the other one is just movement.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 61.

Thus, b-boy style is often defined as personal flair in an expression of communal solidarity and identity<sup>60</sup> – an attitude that sets a b-boy apart from his peers without subverting the foundation upon which breaking is built. Often, style is also associated with musicality and how well a dancer adapts his original moves to the qualities and the beats of the DJ's tracks.

## Breaking in the Contemporary World

### ***Breaking in New Media: MTV and Reality Television***

From the very beginning, the musical break was the source of inspiration for b-boys; music was the foundation for the dance form. It is impossible to speak about music in the 1980's without referring to music videos. The most popular platform for the distribution of music videos was the television, with the New York City based television network MTV: Music Television being launched in August 1981. While other TV stations would feature regular programs reserved for the broadcast of music videos, such as TVNZ's *Radio with Pictures* which premiered in 1976,<sup>61</sup> MTV was the only TV station to showcase music videos twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. In the early 1990's, many began to consider the videos more important than the songs and saw dance as the heartbeat of the music video.<sup>62</sup> M.C. Hammer, one of the first recording artists to be known as much for his dancing as his songs, explains,

Dance is the whole life of music videos. You play one video that has no dance in it, and it may be sentimental, you may shed a tear. But it's nothing like you feel like you see a dance video. [...] It puts the life into you, it makes you feel good.<sup>63</sup>

Music videos that featured b-boying were able to popularize the art form like never before; the

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<sup>60</sup> Monteyne, 63.

<sup>61</sup> "The Launch of MTV," [MTV – Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MTV#The_launch_of_MTV), <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MTV#The\\_launch\\_of\\_MTV](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MTV#The_launch_of_MTV)> (13 December 2010).

<sup>62</sup> [Everybody Dance Now](#)

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

videos took “something [...] happening in the clubs that middle America is not exposed to, and all of a sudden [brought] it to the masses and [said], 'This is what is happening in America right now.'”<sup>64</sup> For those pioneering the street dance movement, hip-hop, voguing, breaking, and all other forms of street dance were considered as a unity, inseparable by nature.<sup>65</sup> However, media commodification of the hip-hop movement required each to be a distinct style in order to mass market the dance forms. Through videos and television, everyone across America was able to see the latest street dance trend, and as long as it was considered hip, everybody started imitating it too.

In a way, television and especially MTV built the American following for street dance. In addition to the consumption of sensational music videos, audiences at home took part in this dance craze with the production of various step-by-step instructional music videos, such as *Let's Break* (1984) and *Break Dancing: The Mighty Poppalots* (1984). With rising popularity, however, street dance was beginning to face issues of authenticity and originality. Dancers and choreographers questioned if the communication of dance between the streets and the mass audiences was even possible through the medium of music videos, staunchly believing that one still had to go physically to where the dance originated in order to do it correctly.<sup>66</sup>

A landmark video for the popularization of street dance was the music video of Madonna's single *Vogue*, released in the middle of 1990. While it admittedly required someone like Madonna to popularize a club dance like voguing and something like the music video format to give dance the exposure it needs, Willi Ninja, a pioneer of voguing, nevertheless criticized the

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

video format of the dance for its lack of authenticity, explaining that

you're only getting bits and pieces, and elements broken down. They don't let you have your freedom to express what the dance is all about. They just want to market it and commercialize it and get it out there to make money the best way.<sup>67</sup>

With outsiders, like Madonna, appropriating urban dance moves in the studio, b-boying was no longer considered a street dance because it was no longer about crews walking the streets to defend their territory by battling it out in the cypher. The incorporation of street dance into mainstream media only served to dilute the dance form for the community that originated it.

Commercial music videos ultimately only showcased highlights of a dance, similar NYC Breaker's show, *Graffiti Rock*. Audiences at home were not interested in the demonstration of strong foundations or the history and culture of a dance form; they were interested in instant tricks and effects that could astound and entertain them. As Michael Peters, an American dancer who choreographed Michael Jackson's videos, explains,

the music video is indicative of where our culture has gone – instant gratification. My attention is this short, so you better do it really fast because otherwise, I'm gonna hit that remote button and change the channel.<sup>68</sup>

Television programming capitalized on the audience's interest in sensation and instant gratification in the summer of 2000 with the launch of Reality Television and successful shows such as *Big Brother* and *Survivor*. Reality TV steered away from traditional scripting and instead featured ordinary people in a specific situational setting where prizes were awarded. Soon enough, the competition format appeared in the world of dance, and in 2005, the Fox Broadcasting Company launched *So You Think You Can Dance* (SYTYCD). Individual amateur dancers auditioned in major American cities to compete on national TV, and audiences at home

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

eventually chose a winner through a phone and texting voting process.

Since its first season, *SYTYCD* has featured at least one b-boy per season, except in the summer 2009 season.<sup>69</sup> In each case, the b-boy or b-girl is usually portrayed as an “untrained” dancer without the formal background that dancers from other genres enjoy and is often criticized by the judges for this shortcoming. As a result, breaking is indirectly cast as a second-rate dance form, and the b-boys' inexperience have in other genres often help bolster this claim even though none of the other dancers are ever conversely asked to dance in b-boy style. *SYTYCD* choreographers who work with the b-boy contestants often choose to showcase particular power moves or tricks that the b-boy can perform, almost gratuitously, in the middle of a routine of another dance genre. When b-boys and b-girls perform solo routines on the show, it is most often in the context of trying to avoid elimination, and thus they often showcase only their flashiest moves. The demonstrated b-boy style on *SYTYCD* lacks the substance of the culture that the original b-boys prized: musical improvisation, strong foundation, original style, and an understanding of the history from which breaking came.

In 2008, a second dance reality TV competition, *America's Best Dance Crew* (ABDC), hit the air on MTV. *ABDC* is a competition of mainly hip-hop dance crews in which one crew is voted the winner by audiences at home through a process of elimination. This show, in contrast to *SYTYCD*, emphasizes the street roots of each dance crew; many of the crews are depicted as coming from impoverished neighborhoods, not unlike those of the original b-boys, where dancing was a way to stay out of trouble and to seek a better life. All the dance routines on *ABDC* are choreographed by the crews themselves, and thus better showcase their foundation moves and the originality of their style and musicality. The stage in the *ABDC* studio is an apron

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<sup>69</sup> See Appendix II.

stage, a raised platform with the audience on three sides, which better simulates viewership in a cypher.

Despite these key differences from *SYTYCD*, other aspects of *ABDC* nonetheless contribute to the commodification of street dance. For one, the music for each dance crew's own choreography is usually determined by the producers. None of the *ABDC* music showcases any tracks from the so-called “b-boy canon,” composed of musical tracks that act as the framework for b-boy moves because “they combine practical factors that facilitate the particular dance style with socio-historical associations that place any given performance in the context of b-boy history.”<sup>70</sup> Most tracks in the b-boy canon were released during the birth of breaking in the 1970's, and usually feature bongos, fast tempos, percussive use of horn and guitar, use of stop-time at various points in the song, and a formal structure that builds to decisive musical peaks.<sup>71</sup> *ABDC* breaks this significant tradition in b-boy culture by obligating all crews to choreograph their dance routines to current top-40 commercial hits.

Secondly, *ABDC* has helped disseminate the identity markers of the original b-boy through commercial means. To project an image and demonstrate their identity as breakers, b-boys of the 1970's resorted to several fashion markers:

The characteristic baggy trousers were originally trackpants in homemade adaptations made from “parka” nylon. [...] Dancers also wore trackshoes, sweatshirts – especially with American football or basketball motifs – padded nylon jackets and fancy hats, especially baseball style caps with the brim pulled to one side.<sup>72</sup>

However, over the years, the b-boy style of dress has been commercialized and assimilated into the teenage market, thus breeding a generation of “fashion” b-boys – those who dress in the b-

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<sup>70</sup> Schloss, 28.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>72</sup> Kopytko, 26.

boy style – in contrast to “sub-culture” b-boys – those who practice breaking.<sup>73</sup> Today, sub-culture b-boys have long since forgotten about the dress code of the 1970's. For many, “there is NO way to dress as a b-boy. B-boying is what you do and who you are, not how you dress.”<sup>74</sup> The official website of *ABDC* ignores this truth and capitalizes instead on the market for fashion b-boys by offering a line of clothing associated with the show. Several of the dance crews competing on the show, such as the JabbaWockeeZ, have also launched their own clothing line and wear it during their dance performance as a way of advertisement. For *ABDC*'s audience at large, the fashion markers serve to reduce street dancers to one-dimensional costumed characters and these clothes have become the leading brand image of b-boy crews everywhere.

Lastly, *ABDC* judges are themselves commercial dancers, leading a critical viewer to question the validity of their critiques. Since the first season, the judges who have sat on the panel of *ABDC* are: Shane Sparks (choreographer on *SYTYCD*), JC Chasez (singer in former pop group *'N Sync*), Lil Mama (rap artist), and Omarion (R&B artist and former lead singer of the boy band, B2K). These commercial judges nonetheless play a crucial role in authenticating street dance for the American public and in shaping the American dance aesthetic. For the less-informed audience at large, the critiques from these judges are often taken at face value and rarely with a grain of salt, and help sway public opinion of street dance.

### ***The Rise of the Internet as Contemporary Media***

Through Reality Television's format of a voting competition, this new form of audience participation has allowed for public engagement in the previously exclusive world of

<sup>73</sup> Peter Mallouh, “The Turf of the Imagination: An Examination of the B-boys Youth Culture in Metropolitan Toronto,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1995), 66.

<sup>74</sup> The official HOW TO DRESS LIKE A BBOY thread, <<http://www.bboy.org/forums/word-up/103895--official-how-dress-like-bboy-thread.html>> (13 December 2010).

professional dancing. In response to the active nature of the *SYTYCD* and *ABDC* format, audiences began exchanging ideas online, through YouTube video responses and online forum discussions. As television has moved to a more engaging format, the rise in Internet use has allowed viewers increased participation as spectators. The development of the Internet began in the 1960's, and by 1996, use of the term Internet had become commonplace. The popularity of the internet grew rapidly in the 1990's and, by 2010, achieved a 28.7% worldwide population penetration, with a fully 77.4% penetration for North America.<sup>75</sup> Access to the Internet continues to grow at an annual rate of 444.8% worldwide.<sup>76</sup> This rapid expansion of the world's "information highway" has allowed people around the world to connect as they have never done before.

The Internet allows for the creation of a virtual space and for the free flow of conversation anonymously. In virtual forums, users can create accounts that will allow them to engage in discussion with each other their identities. Furthermore, while the Internet began with the same flow of information as traditional media – that is, a one-way flow from producer (usually a large corporation) to consumer (the audience at home), it rapidly shifted to a feedback flow in which consumers could generate their own content. This shift to user-generated content is seen as the creation of next generation of the Internet, Web 2.0, as is the basis for today's popular phenomenon of "social media." Thus, the creation of the Internet allowed for the co-existence of multiple voices from various places and backgrounds. In theory and practice, the Internet has come to promote conversations and debates between users who are knowledgeable and interested in certain specific topics.

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<sup>75</sup> World Internet Usage Statistics News and World Population Stats, <<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>> (10 December 2010).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

## ***Shortcomings of the World Wide Web***

While speaking to a b-boy friend of mine, I accidentally let slip the word “breakdancing” while we were discussing my thesis. He suddenly stopped our conversation and looked at me seriously. “Please, it's breaking, not breakdancing,” he insisted. The unfortunate facts are that little has changed in terms of popular perception of b-boying since the 1980's. A recent *New York Times* article still refers to the art form as “break dancing.”<sup>77</sup> Several recently published books, such as *Social Dancing in America*, survey dance in the past century and use “breakdance” as a blanket term for other forms of dance such as locking, popping, and the electric boogie. In short, “breakdancing” has become the buzz word for all kinds of American street dance with an urban style. Today, one of the first things that a b-boy or a b-girl learns from peers is not to refer to the practice as “breakdancing.” To most, the term is ignorant at best, and, at worst, almost a racial slur. As one b-boy explains,

When I work with people, I make sure that anything they write about me, to pass out to parents or whatever, don't [sic] use that word “breakdancing.” Not even in quotations. Write “b-boying.” [...] I don't breakdance and I don't want to be affiliated with breakdancers.<sup>78</sup>

The conversation I had with my friend would have been very difficult, if not impossible, in the context of interaction on the Internet with an anonymous user. Anonymity is a double-edged sword; it allows for more liberal exchanges of ideas, but it also equalizes authority between users – one user's claims are deemed as legitimate as another's regardless of each user's background. While the Internet allows for multiple voices, these voices are often disconnected from each other and appear fragmented within the bigger picture. For example, it is common for

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<sup>77</sup> Gisela Williams, *In Berlin, Break Dancing to Bach* – [NYTimes.com](http://NYTimes.com), 22 April 2010, <<http://intransit.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/04/22/in-berlin-break-dancing-to-bach/>> (15 January 2011).

<sup>78</sup> Schloss, 58.

users to communicate their thoughts on a certain topic (through a blogging platform or something similar) without thoroughly researching opinions of others. Even in forums, where the website is set up to engage different users in conversation with each other, users will often post their opinions without critically considering others' posts. In this respect, the Internet can appear to be a vast collection of voices crying out independently.

Sometimes, even those who are defending the culture of breaking in lieu of its commercialization make the mistake of using the term “breakdancing.” In an on-line article written by an MIT student, he repeatedly refers to the art form as “break dance” or “break-dancing,” even as he criticizes the media's simplistic portrayal of breaking as mere acrobatics. Ironically, this student chose to title his essay “Spinning Misconceptions: A Look into Break Dancing.”<sup>79</sup> Despite all the technological advances of the Internet, this particular webpage did not have a place where readers could comment, nor did the author leave a contact address. By many standards, the “.edu” appendage of his webpage would most likely, but erroneously, vouch for his credibility. The Internet can thus also allow for an unmoderated environment in which readers and viewers can easily, and sometimes unintentionally, be misled.

For all its convenience as a relatively reliable source of information, the Internet can also contribute to perpetuating misconceptions about breaking. A simple search on Google.com reveals approximately 1.6 million hits for the term “b-boying,” while a search for “breakdancing” brings up over 8.1 million hits,<sup>80</sup> leading the less-informed user to believe that the correct terminology is in fact “breakdancing” instead of “b-boying.” Some of the original b-boys have conceded to the popularity of this term and have already given up trying to change the

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<sup>79</sup> Joseph Cheng, “Spinning Misconceptions,” *Spinning Misconceptions: A Look into Break Dancing*, <[http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21w/21w.731-3/cultureshock/joseph\\_1.htm](http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21w/21w.731-3/cultureshock/joseph_1.htm)> (10 December 2010).

<sup>80</sup> See Appendix I.

popular terminology. Schloss interviewed another b-boy, who bluntly says:

Like, before, you said the word “nigger,” it was like, “Awww, that was a bad word.” But then it's like, now, you say, “Oh, what up, my nigga?” It's the same thing, like breakdancing. If you say “breakdancing,” a lot of people will still be like, “ehh,” but there's not really much you can do about it.<sup>81</sup>

The Internet's ability to facilitate communication is another double-edged sword – while it may serve to disseminate accurate information, it could also easily spread inaccuracies.

Essentially, the real question remains whether it is possible to translate something so inherently built upon community and a way of life into a digital file accessible by all. This kind of dilemma was present even in the earliest days of hip-hop, when artists were faced with the question of communicating the hip-hop movement to the American public. For many, the idea of hip-hop as a mass-consumed product was unthinkable. Chuck D of Public Enemy confessed:

I did not think that it was conceivable that there would be such a thing as a hip-hop record. I could not see it... I'm like, record? Fuck, how you gon' put hip-hop onto a record? Cause it was a whole gig, you know? How you gon' put *three hours* on a record?<sup>82</sup>

Similarly, the only possible way of putting b-boying in the virtual world, then, is the creation of on-line communities in which b-boys and b-girls can engage with one another in a way similar to their interactions in the cypher.

## ***Creation of New Communities***

### **YouTube.com**

One such example of a virtual community is YouTube.com, a video-sharing website in which users can upload, share, view, and comment on each others' videos. Launched in February

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<sup>81</sup> Schloss, 58.

<sup>82</sup> Schloss, 5.

2005, YouTube users had viewed more than 14 billion videos by May 2010.<sup>83</sup> Before the creation of YouTube, there were very few on-line outlets for ordinary computer users to share videos. By simplifying the interface, YouTube has enabled anyone with an Internet connection to share a video with a worldwide audience. In 2008, YouTube was awarded a Peabody Award<sup>84</sup> and applauded for being “an ever-expanding archive-cum-bulletin board that both embodies and promotes democracy.”<sup>85</sup>

There is little doubt that YouTube.com offers a platform for a multitude of voices to be heard. In November 2010, a simple search of “breakdance” yielded over 900,000 hits and another search of “b-boy” returned over 450,000 videos.<sup>86</sup> However, upon closer inspection of the videos, one finds very little evidence of authentic breaking. For the term “b-boy,” the search yields many hip-hop videos that did not contain any breaking, as well as several comedic videos that mocks and satirizes the breaking culture. The quality of the “breakdance” videos is also questionable, as several refer to a dancing baby, dancing fingers, or even humorous failures of b-boys. While some of the comments to these videos offer some sort of critique or insight, these have largely been drowned out by electronic spam and/or nonsensical reactions to the video. In a virtual world in which everybody can post a video and everybody else can write a comment, identifying authenticity and authority becomes nearly impossible as YouTube lacks the self-policing aspects of the traditional b-boy community.

Although a wide range of material is featured, the most visible videos only represent only

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<sup>83</sup> "Press Release," comScore Releases May 2010 U.S. Online Video Rankings – comScore, Inc., <[http://www.comscore.com/Press\\_Events/Press\\_Releases/2010/6/comScore\\_Releases\\_May\\_2010\\_U.S.\\_Online\\_Video\\_Rankings](http://www.comscore.com/Press_Events/Press_Releases/2010/6/comScore_Releases_May_2010_U.S._Online_Video_Rankings)> (11 December 2010).

<sup>84</sup> The Peabody Awards are annual international awards for excellence in radio and television broadcasting.

<sup>85</sup> Rodney Ho, “Peabody Honors CNN, TMC,” Atlanta News, Sports, Atlanta Weather, Business News | ajc.com, 02 April 2009, <<http://www.ajc.com/services/content/printedition/2009/04/02/peabody0402.html>> (10 December 2010).

<sup>86</sup> See Appendix I.

a small slice of this variety. By searching for breaking videos and ranking the results by view count, it becomes apparent that there exists an enormous difference in viewership among just the top fifteen videos, with the top-viewed breaking video receiving seventeen to 100 times the viewership as the fifteenth-ranked breaking video.<sup>87</sup> The results become more revealing when cross-referenced with search results ranked by rating. For the term “bboy”, only one video ranked in the top fifteen in terms of viewership was also ranked in the top fifteen for user ratings, while for the term “breakdance,” there was no overlap between the two ranked lists. These search results reveal that only a small portion of the “voices” on YouTube.com are heard, and these most visible “voices” are surely not the most authenticity and legitimate ones. The Peabody Award notwithstanding, there is far less democracy in action than in theory.

Most importantly, the existence on YouTube of breaking footage has dramatically altered the method by which breaking is viewed. Ultimately, the effect of a video is no match for that of a live performance; as M.C. Hammer explains,

People like the videos a lot, and I enjoy the videos, and you do see the energy, and you can feel it. But not like you can feel it when you come to my live show.<sup>88</sup>

More importantly, in the viewing of a video, the idea of communal consumption and communal authorship is completely negated. Traditionally, b-boys performed in a cypher, among supporters and other b-boys who would give praise or criticism where warranted. With YouTube, the viewing of breaking has become an isolated activity, foreclosing the construction of a coherent community. Lately, isolated viewing of YouTube videos has become more common with the increased affordability of small portable viewing devices, such as laptops and smart phones. Furthermore, the idea of communal authorship, in which the audience can affect the

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<sup>87</sup> See Appendix III and IV.

<sup>88</sup> Everybody Dance Now.

choreographic decisions of the dancer, is lost as YouTube creates an insurmountable gap between the viewer and the performer. Watching breaking on a computer screen forcibly transports the b-boy from the cypher to a makeshift proscenium stage with no audience.

### **Bboy.org and Bboyworld.com**

The discord of voices on YouTube can be filtered in part by two large on-line communities for b-boys – Bboy.org and Bboyworld.com. The discussion forums on both websites features each user with a profile that can be accessed by clicking on his/her username. The profile includes the user's on-line “friends,” number of posts, forum join date, list of uploaded content, mastered dance styles, crew affiliation, and even “respect” points, which are awarded by others in the community for insightful comments in a discussion thread. Where YouTube lacks the ability to indicate the authority of a user, Bboy.org allows the community itself to decide the worth of each member by allowing the community to easily see one user's contribution in quantifiable aspects, such as number of comment posts, photo and video uploads, and “respect” points. This constructed hierarchy within the virtual community mimics the environment of b-boying “elders” within the traditional community, and allows for the word of a veteran member to outweigh the opinions of a newcomer.

Both of these on-line forums also feature a wealth of b-boy footage, either hosted on site or linked to YouTube. Where YouTube fails in monitoring content for quality and authenticity, both Bboy.org and Bboyworld.com have implemented mechanisms that allow users to see only the videos that have the approval of the community. Bboy.org allows users to sort all of its 16,907 videos by “Most Recent,” “Most Viewed,” “Most Discussed,” “Top Favorites,” “Top Rated,” and “Recently Featured.” For a less-informed viewer, sorting and viewing videos ranked

by the “Top Rated” function will provide better and more accurate information on the dance form than videos found on YouTube. By using the same cross-referencing methodology, a correlation between the top viewed and top ranked videos on Bboy.org is evidenced by the same seven videos appear in the top fifteen list for both kinds of ranking.<sup>89</sup> While technology might have been the downfall of YouTube as a functioning community, it allows for policing (video ratings) to affect the choice of viewers at Bboy.org. As a result, there is a markedly higher correlation between videos ranked by rating and videos ranked by viewership for Bboy.org videos than for YouTube videos.

For the original B-boy star, the visual aspect of b-boying was only a small part of the entire art form. The greatest criticism of YouTube is that it doesn't allow for the exchange of ideas that is crucial to the continuation of the b-boy's way of life. Both Bboy.org and Bboyworld.com allow for such additional communication to occur within the community. Bboyworld.com has entire sections of its message boards devoted to the “history of the dance [called] breaking”<sup>90</sup> and “fallen soldiers [...] who scarified them self [sic] for [breaking] culture.”<sup>91</sup> Bboy.org showcases the hip-hop roots of breaking and the unity of the hip-hop movement with discussion forums for popping and locking, graffiti, DJing and MCing, and freestyle rhyme.<sup>92</sup> On-line b-boy forums have thus 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. Questions on Bboy.org and Bboyworld.com range

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<sup>89</sup> See Appendix V.

<sup>90</sup> “Bboyworld Forums,” *Bboy World Com | Bboy Bgirl Source*, <<http://www.bboyworld.com/forum/>> (10 December 2010).

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> “Welcome to Bboy.org,” *Bboy.org | The #1 Bboy Community*, <<http://www.bboy.org/forums/>> (11 December 2010).

from “Performance Bboys vs. Battle Bboys?” to “Five top Korean bboys for all star team” to “Is it possible to do the Windmill without holding the baby freeze?” These on-line communities have also facilitated in physically connecting b-boy communities – b-boys who travel to foreign cities may use this platform as a way to get in touch and train with other b-boys at their new destination.

## Conclusion

### ***Internet Killed the Original B-boy Star***

However, 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 of the late 1970's. In a discussion thread entitled “the difference in battles now compared to bak in da 90s and early 2000s (sic)”<sup>93</sup> with over 15,000 views and 180 posts, many see the divergence of today's breaking from its 1970's roots as a result of the Internet and the increased accessibility for outsiders into the dance form. With the convenience of on-line breaking footage and discussion boards on the Internet, newcomers now have the advantage of quickly and easily learning basic b-boy moves. However, as it is only a few select videos that are viewed over and over again, the Internet has acted as an homogenizer for the form. As upcoming dancers learn foundational moves from the same sources, the learning process that once created different styles now breeds similar dancers.

Traditionally, learning how to break was only possible if one joined a community; finding friends and mentors required effort and pro-activity on the part of a student. The inclusion into a

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<sup>93</sup> “Breaking Discussion,” the difference in battles now compared to bak in da 90s and early 2000s – Bboy World Com | Bboy Bgirl Source, <<http://www.bboyworld.com/forum/breaking-discussion/80701-difference-battles-now-compared-bak-da-90s-early-2000s.html>> (11 December 2010).

social circle of b-boys was seen as a rite of passage of those who wished to learn the dance form. Because today's newcomers have a vast resource into the world of breaking at their fingertips, the previously important aspect of finding and joining a community has now been lost. Some even see this quick-and-easy way into breaking as a disadvantage; without the necessary hardships in learning foundational moves, new b-boys may also be missing the creative process that accompanies the struggle.

In the past, breaking styles differed by geographic regions. New York b-boys focused more on foundation basics, while West Coast b-boys brought in the power moves. Crews from different areas of the world were known for different breaking specialties. Communication between international b-boys was extremely rare; one might hear stories of b-boy battles from across the oceans, but could rarely see and experience it without traveling there. With the Internet, b-boy footage in France could be seen by American in mere minutes of a live performance, eliminating the geographic barriers that created regional distinctions. Furthermore, the Internet fueled the creation of individual international b-boy celebrities – winners of b-boy competitions such as Battle of the Year, UK World B-boy Championships, and Red Bull BC One. With the help of on-line videos, the increased visibility of these winning dancers has created a new generation of b-boys who admire and emulate the styles and unique moves of these role models. This phenomenon of “internet biting,” in which dancers steal moves from other dancers, ignores the importance of original in b-boy culture.

The existence of b-boy celebrities creates a much bigger dilemma for the b-boy community at large. Young b-boys are no longer learning in communities with the presence of b-boy “elders,” but are instead drawn to the fame that could be achieved by participating in such

widely acclaimed b-boy contests. It is no longer enough to gain the approval of one's community, today's cosmopolitan b-boy is seeking the approval of the judges who can grant him/her to move onto the next round of the b-boy competition. With the help of virtual communities, today's b-boy can easily come from a markedly different neighborhood than the original Bronx b-boy of the 1970's. The new b-boy's primary reason for breaking is no longer to stay out of trouble, to release personal aggression, or to resolve inter-crew conflicts. Instead, the motivations of the contemporary b-boy have likely shifted from a personal rite of passage to a desire to gain for himself the b-boy celebrity image and all the rewards the title may bring. B-boys who have noticed this change in motivations lament the "rawness" of the early years in breaking that b-boys today may lack. In a commodified and commercial world of breaking, there is no longer the same personal and emotional stake there once was in the dance.

B-boying as an dance form has now become very high-profile. New media such as the MTV and Reality Television have brought the dance form to the attention of the American public and encouraged its participation in a previously closed dance world. The Internet, with all its promises of a truly global network, has indeed facilitated interactions between b-boys and b-girls across the world. The rising popularity of this new form of media, however, has also induced further segmentation of its consumers. While there are common websites that are almost unanimously used, such as Google.com or YouTube.com, the majority of sites on the Internet remain frequented by only specific groups of people with similar interests. Though the Internet has allowed for virtual communities, such as bboy.org and bboyworld.com, to flourish, it ultimately neglects to bridge the gap between the self-contained nature of bboy.org users and the wider Internet community.

While bboy.org and bboyworld.com are indeed close on-line approximations to the original b-boy communities in the Bronx, the virtual dominance of large websites like YouTube.com has primarily characterized the Internet as a vehicle for mainstream b-boy perceptions and practices. Thus, the Internet has also served to perpetuate myths as well as create new issues of authenticity for the b-boy community at large. Today's mainstream breaking scene is often criticized to be overrun with "e-posers," those who participate in the dance form, with the use of the Internet, but without understanding the cultural and historical baggage of the b-boy movement. Under the many influences of contemporary media, today's breaking scene has drifted far from its 1980's roots as a way-of-life in a tight-knit community.

## Appendixes

### Appendix I: Online Search Hits

NB: YouTube.com search for b-boy yielded large portion of results that did not involve breaking

<u>Search Term</u>	<u># of hits on Google.com</u>	<u># of hits on YouTube.com</u>
breakdance	6,160,000	243,000
breakdancing	8,080,000	101,000
break-dance	2,840,000	290,000
break-dancing	695,000	5,240
break dance	2,840,000	290,000
break dancing	689,500	5,240
<i>Total</i>	<i>21,304,500</i>	<i>934,480</i>
b-boying	395,000	95,300
b-boy	3,690,000	355,000
<i>Total</i>	<i>4,085,000</i>	<i>450,300</i>

### Appendix II: SYTYCD B-boys & B-girls

<u>Show Season</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>B-boy</u>	<u>Elimination</u>
1	Summer 2005	Ryan "Ryanimay" Conferido of Quest Crew	Top 10
2	Summer 2006	Musa Cooper	Top 12
3	Summer 2007	Hokuto "Hok" Konishi of Quest Crew	Top 12
		Dominic "D-Trix" Sandoval of Quest Crew	Top 8
		Sara Von Gillem	Top 8
4	Summer 2008	Gev Manoukian	Top 10
5	Summer 2009	n/a	
6	Fall 2009	Jonathan "Legacy" Perez	Top 8
7	Summer 2010	Jose Ruiz	Top 6

### **Appendix III: YouTube.com Search for “Breakdance”**

Ranked by viewership

<b><u>Rank</u></b>	<b><u>Video Title</u></b>	<b><u># of Views</u></b>
1	Baby break dance	325,200,830
2	best break dance ever.....	24,109,119
3	break dance	15,303,379
4	breakdance	14,163,269
5	Fingers Breakdance 2 (original)	10,532,329
6	Breakdance – Hip Hop Battle	8,743,509
7	Extreme Caterpillar Breakdance	7,166,731
8	Breakdance Competition: Red bull BC One	6,758,236
9	Breakdancing	6,599,790
10	Baby Break Dance	6,255,995
11	Best breakdance ever!	4,332,920
12	break dancing!!!	4,251,842
13	Break Dance Fail	4,133,967
14	The LHD champutee best break dancer is HOURTH	3,902,468
15	Roots of Breakdance (Run DMC – It's Like That)	3,446,227

Ranked by ratings

<b><u>Rank</u></b>	<b><u>Video Title</u></b>
1	Breakdance How To: Airchair Tutorial/Guide
2	Breakdance How To: Baby Freeze Tutorial/Guide
3	Crew breakdance battle in Austria – Red Bull Checkmate 2010
4	Old School Breakdance
5	Korean Breakdancing World Championships
6	Red Bull Breakers Eric B & Rakim, Deekline & Ed Solo, Stanton War
7	parrot dancing breakdance
8	How to Flare Tutorial by Bboy Kiki
9	Headstand push-ups one arm 90 degree on a floor youmove
10	Flashdance What A Feeling – Irene Cara Official Video
11	[APH] Communication Break Dance
12	Marine vs Ugandan Breakdance Video
13	Daft Punk – Break Dancing
14	Ocean's Four Feat Adam Clay – Beautiful Life
15	BB-Breakdance!

## **Appendix IV: YouTube.com Search for “B-boy”**

NB: Multiple results for “B-boy” that did not involve breaking were omitted from this list.

Ranked by viewership

<b>Rank</b>	<b><u>Video Title</u></b>	<b><u># of Views</u></b>
1	B-boy Junior	17,436,711
2	World's Best Break Dancer	5,274,214
3	The LHD champutee best break dancer is HOURTH	3,902,468
4	BBOY	3,295,157
5	Bboy Joker	3,214,970
6	break dancing	3,051,301
7	Planet B-Boy – YouTube Live	2,898,467
8	B-boy Cico	2,710,446
9	UK BBoy Championships 2007 DVD	2,494,933
10	Hip Hop Battle highlights from The Jump Off Aug 07	2,393,423
11	bboy jun	2,100,842
12	Planet B-BOY: Landmark shots. DVD available now!	1,980,765
13	B-boy Stance	1,928,255
14	HOW TO SWIPE w/ Scotty Nguyen – Learn to Breakdance	1,650,045
15	Jalen aka J Styles! 6 year old b-boy!	1,645,420

Ranked by ratings

<b>Rank</b>	<b><u>Video Title</u></b>
1	B-Boy Toyz in Slow Motion (Air Flare & Drill Windmills)
2	Victor Kim – KOREA BBOY BATTLE (Fever Seoul City)
3	CASPER ADVANCED FOOTWORK FUNDAMENTALS
4	B-boy Cloud [Skill Methodz]
5	Jineuf
6	BATTLE OF THE YEAR 2010
7	Bboy Jalen battles Bboy Legacy Behind the Scene
8	Milky vs Lil Demon [BBOY CITY HAWAII 2010]
9	airflares on the ice!
10	How to Flare Tutorial by Bboy Kiki
11	Bboy B.yu Toprock tutorial Pt.2 (¼)
12	B-boy Junior
13	Ktigers vs Bboy
14	B-boy Crumbles
15	Circle Prinz Poland 2008 – Bboy Kleju (Funky Masons)

## Appendix V: Bboy.org Videos

Ranked by viewership

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Video Title</u>	<u># of Views</u>
1	hollowback how to clip	56,124
2	HOW TO: COLLAPSE VIDEO	48,818
3	Toprock Guide	45,378
4	HOW TO WINDMILL (repost)	41,260
5	Sixstep tutorial (for another site)	40,546
6	Uprock Technique	38,406
7	artsy fayth2	27,840
8	BANSHEES NEW MILLS	25,852
9	CoinDrops 2	25,333
10	New Jackhammer	25,269
11	Shadic and Hero Vs Tnesor & Partner Set1	23,535
12	Nike to Pike Thread Guide	22,633
13	Junior (Everyone Should Watch This)	22,428
14	How To Windmill Tutorial	20,437
15	Barrelguide	20,323

Ranked by ratings

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Video Title</u>
1	Toprock Guide
2	artsy fayth2
3	hollowback how to clip
4	1990's.. woooo
5	New Jackhammer
6	HOW TO WINDMILL (repost)
7	04 fayth artsy vid
8	2000!!Check it...
9	crap for your viewing pleasure
10	Sixstep tutorial (for another site)
11	Challenge the guinness vol.3
12	HOW TO USE BBOY MOVES IN SELF DEFENSE!
13	Compilation for Vice Prez =)
14	HOW TO: COLLAPSE VIDEO
15	1handedelbowairflares

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- [Everybody Dance Now](#). Produced and directed by Margaret Selby. 58 min. Thirteen/WNET. 1991. Videocassette.
- [Inside the Circle](#), Produced and directed by Marcy Garriott. 1hr. 42 min. La Sonrisa Productions Inc.. 2007. DVD.
- [Breakdance Step-by-Step](#). Produced and directed by Tane Langton. 6 hr. 40 min. United Breakers Association. 2005. DVD.
- [Planet B-Boy](#). Produced and directed by Benson Lee. 1 hr. 35 min. Mental Pictures/Mondon Paradiso Films. 2007. DVD.
- [Beat Street](#). Produced and directed by Stan Lathan. 1 hr. 45 min. 1984. DVD.
- [Wild Style](#). Produced and directed by Charlie Ahearn. 1 hr. 22 min. 1983. DVD.
- [Flashdance](#). Produced and directed by Adrian Lyne. 1 hr. 35 min. Paramount Pictures. 1983. DVD.
- [Break Dancing: The Mighty Poppalots](#). Produced and directed by Harmony Vanover. 59 min. Vidcom. 1984. Videocassette.

### **On-line Resources**

- <http://www.bboy.org>
- <http://www.bboyworld.com>
- <http://www.youtube.com>
- <http://www.google.com>