Fashioning the Hip-Hop Dancing Body: An Actor-Network Theory Approach to “Fresh” Performance Practice

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines how hip-hop dance performance, which increasingly moves into digital and site-specific contexts, is constituted through the material movements of, and connections between, bodies, clothing, and space. The research proposes a new materialist framework and highlights, through the concepts of *assemblage* and *distributed agency*, the constitutive entanglement between human and non-human agencies in live and digitalised hip-hop performance. Actor-network theory (ANT) is engaged as the main conceptual approach to explore the agential capacity of the fashioned, hip-hop dancing body to transform and be transformed by other material actors (actants) in multiple networks of relationships. ANT's core principle of "tracing associations" is used not only to map relationships between human and non-human actors, but also to connect hip-hop to other academic fields – sociology, contemporary dance, performance, costume, and fashion. *Fashion* is approached as an ambiguous term in relation to hip-hop; the complex fashion/ costume distinction is challenged through ANT's concepts of *translation* and *multiplicity*.

The analysis of three hip-hop dance pieces – *The Locksmiths Liiive, Our Bodies Back,* and *The Purple Jigsaw* – reveals the multi-layered and multidirectional realities of contemporary hip-hop practitioners and the histories and concepts that inform those realities. For example, the term "fresh" – a critical material semiotic concept and trope embedded in hip-hop culture that encapsulates creativity, confidence, aspiration, success, and respect – is examined from the perspectives generated by interviewees and observed knowledge of material data gathered via ethnographic research methods. Fashion, through its entanglement with the hip-hop dancing body, is reframed as a mechanism of change that becomes powerful through its spatial and temporal displacement. The hip-hop performer is reconceptualised as a dynamic, *material bodily assemblage* with the capacity to cut through fixed dichotomies that have shaped hip-hop since its emergence in the mid-1970s; most notably the underground/ professional, live/ mediated, and masculine/ feminine dichotomies.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, this thesis is about *matter* amongst matter. It is about connections and relationships between people, “things”, places, and spaces. It is about transformations, power, and our responsibilities to one another in an ever-changing society and within complex cultures and phenomena. I say this to say that such a research undertaking would not have been possible without various academic and cultural institutions, departments and disciplines, colleagues, students, communities, venues, festivals, competitions, dance classes, music, materials, and of course, practitioners, friends and family members. Whilst this is not an exhaustive list, all have helped constitute both this thesis and me as a researcher and writer.

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1 Introduction

This thesis uses concepts from new materialism, assemblage thinking, and actor-network theory (ANT) – interconnected approaches that are responsive to materiality and the immanence of “vibrant matter” (Bennett, 2005), its influences, results and consequences – to better understand the material and spatial workings of hip-hop dance performance. New materialism is a term ascribed to a series of distinctive critical perspectives across the arts, humanities and social sciences that have in common a theoretical and practical “turn to matter” (Fox & Alldred, 2019). As an approach, new materialism is fundamentally concerned with the actant qualities of the material and non-human world and explores relationships between things, objects, phenomena, materialities, and physical bodies. Agency is a core term used in new materialist theory. It is defined in this thesis (see chapter 4, Theoretical framework, for a detailed outline of key theories and concepts underpinning the research) not as something someone has, or something represented in the form of an individual agent, but as an enactment, a “doing” (Barad, 2007).

The research refers specifically to actor-network theory’s notion of “distributed agency”, which sees “actors” (actants) – human and non-human entities that act or to which activity is granted by others (Latour, 1996a) – as unfixed, and views action as produced by the many interactivities between mixed agencies, not by human interaction alone. In ANT – a theoretical and methodological approach developed by French philosopher and anthropologist Bruno Latour, and sociologists Michel Callon and John Law in the 1980s – actants are not objects but rather an association between different elements that in themselves create their own “network”. ANT is engaged as the main approach in this thesis because its concepts of network and distributed agency help to better understand, firstly, hip-hop as a “self-sustaining ecosystem” (Jonzi D, 2017), and secondly, how the hip-hop dancing body is constituted by the objects it wears and the spaces in which it performs.

Guided by the question, *what is the material agency of clothing and costume in hip-hop performance?* the research employs ethnographic research methods to “follow the actors” (Latour, 2005), a tenet of ANT, and describes the constitutive entanglement between clothing, the moving body, and space in the actualisation of dance performances. As I will discuss in later chapters, especially chapter 4, space is not conceptualised in this thesis as fixed or as *containing* objects and subjects. Rather, space is considered a type of networked connection; meaning, entities (human and non-human) engender their space(s) as they interact with one another (Latour, 2009: 142). Using key ideas from post-ANT (also known as “after ANT”) – an orientation which, from the late 1990s onwards, saw ANT scholars focusing more on topological[1] complexity and the notions of multiplicity and fractionality – hip-hop is explored as a *fluid* space in which elements and their spatial relations change. The research maps the material trajectory of key fashion objects associated with hip-hop culture as they are displaced through this fluid form of space. In doing so, the research reveals a significant temporal quality in relation to matter. It highlights that many behaviours from hip-hop history re-emerge in the present through objects, materials, and through performance practices. Thus, time, like space, is defined here as fluid. It is not a generic, fixed, and representational form of time, but rather, time that is “performatively materialized” by matter (Barad, 2021).

Whilst the research focuses mainly on the “behaviour” of wearables in dance performance, it also highlights the enactments of other significant actors in hip-hop networks, such as practitioners, media technologies, and the venues and spaces in which hip-hop dance occurs. The thesis contributes to the fields of hip-hop dance, performance, fashion, and costume by focusing on materiality and highlighting the transformations of matter that hip-hop enables. More specifically, it enlightens on how the fashioned, hip-hop

[1] Topology concerns itself with spatiality, and in particular with the attributes of the spatial which secure continuity for objects as they are displaced through a space. The important point here is that spatiality is not given. It is not fixed, a part of the order of things. Instead it comes in various *forms.* (Law, 1999: 6)

dancing body dissolves boundaries and fixed dichotomies engrained in hip-hop performance practices; namely underground/ professional, live/ mediated, fashion/ costume, and masculine/ feminine.

Aims and objectives

The two aims addressed in the research are:

- To expand dialogical knowledge of hip-hop by foregrounding materiality and highlighting the agential capacity of clothing in hip-hop performance practices.
- To develop an interdisciplinary methodological framework through which the material, social and political aspects of live and technologically mediated performance can be systematically examined.

The objectives engaged by these aims are:

- To employ actor-network theory – and the new materialist concepts of assemblage and distributed agency – to untangle the web of complex relations between body, clothing and space in hip-hop dance and provide a deeper understanding of hip-hop's material workings, spatial dynamics, and socio-political underpinnings.
- To gather observed knowledge of material data from live performances, live-streamed events, hip-hop dance film and photographic imagery.
- To gather, via interviews, the participants' subjective experiences of fashioning the body for hip-hop dance; what they wear and how this impacts their bodily movement in various spaces and performances intended for both live and online audiences.

- To critically analyse data sets to establish recurring themes and provide an accurate account of multiplicities and material agencies[2] in hip-hop dance based on the participants' own situatedness and interpretation.

Exploring hip-hop dance realities through ANT

"By now, hip-hop dance and its myriad articulations constitute a constellation that engages entertainment, competitions, social networking, concert performance, and expressions of social justice." (DeFrantz, 2014: 223)

Hip-hop is a cultural and artistic movement that emerged in the South Bronx[3], New York in the early to mid-1970s. It is primarily based in music but best described as inter-aesthetic and containing four main elements – deejaying, emceeing (rapping), graffiti, and breaking (also known as b-boying, b-girling, and "breakdancing"[4]). Whilst each individual art form has its own rich history worth exploring, this thesis focuses on bodily movement and the dance forms associated with hip-hop. In a similar fashion to Carla Stalling Huntington (2007), author and Africanist scholar of hip-hop globalisation, I foreground the dance and not the music. I do recognise the synergistic relationship between the two and position music as a powerful actant and participant in the hip-hop "network", for without music there would be no dance, and without dancers there would be no music. However, hip-hop scholarship tends to prioritise rap music as the dominant hip-hop experience

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[2] The term "material agency" means a shift from human will or agency to the very materiality of the human body as vibrant and intelligent matter. It also entails recognising some form of agency in non-human actors (Smelik, 2018).

[3] The "battle for origins" is a vital part of hip-hop culture. I must therefore acknowledge here the contingency of certain historical claims, such as the question around hip-hop's origins in the South Bronx rather than other parts of the borough/city.

[4] B-boying/ B-girling and breaking are considered by many in the hip-hop community to be the original cultural terms used to describe the archetypal dance form of hip-hop. A B-boy or B-girl is the common term for an individual male of female who practices breaking. The term breaker is used as a gender-neutral synonym. The popularity of hip-hop in the early 1980s led media outlets to mistakenly label all types of street dance "breakdance" whether it was breaking, popping, locking, or something else (Schloss, 2009; Pabon, 2006; Johnson, 2014). As such, the term appears with quotation marks when used in the thesis.

(Gunn, 2021: 4). When considering why that is, Stalling Huntington – in alignment with certain dance historians and feminist theorists, such as Janet Wolff (1995), who suggest that dance has been categorised as ephemeral and intangible, appealing to the feminine – writes: “I imagine that is because the dance has been separated from the music (language) in a feminizing, maybe trivialising, fashion” (Stalling Huntington, 2007: 8). As such, this thesis explores how hip-hop dance and its histories are produced by an amalgamation of material forces (agencies) that are not only physical, but also extend to the social and cultural.

Scholars such as David Toop (1984), Tricia Rose (1994), Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (2004), Jeff Chang (2005), Nelson George (2005), and Michael Eric Dyson (2007) provide comprehensive accounts of the once-marginal youth culture. Hip-hop literature from the 1980s to early-2000s tends to focus on hip-hop's evolutionary history, cultural politics, and the domestic production and consumption of rap music in the United States. Scholarly accounts after the mid-2000s direct the conversation towards hip-hop's globalisation and discuss the dissemination and commercial mediation of hip-hop and black identity not only through music, but increasingly through film, television, and fashion. But at the time of writing this thesis, dance is the least written about of the four elements of hip-hop. Furthermore, there remains a lack of discussion on the multi-layered and multidirectional realities of contemporary hip-hop dancers, inclusive of their innovative uses of fashion and media technologies to navigate fluidly between multiple hip-hop genres, spaces, and modes of performance, which this thesis addresses.

The umbrella term “hip-hop dance” encompasses a range of social dances – some that were born out of hip-hop, and others that were “adopted into the culture” (Johnson, 2014: 22) – with historical associations to various localities in the USA. One of the shared qualities of these dances lie in their adaptation of traditional African diasporic cultural traditions and aesthetic imperatives. The dance styles briefly introduced here (and discussed more thoroughly in

chapter 2), all play with polyrhythms[5], improvisation, call and response, spiritual communion, and other elements that, though not exclusive to the African diaspora, are central to its aesthetics (Johnson, 2014: 22). The South Bronx phenomenon breaking is the most familiar entry point into the hip-hop dance genre. It is presentational, confrontational, and communal; a battle dance but not exclusively so. Breaking borrows elements from a variety of sources including gymnastics, martial arts, Capoeira, Lindy Hop, and more, but maintains a distinct type of bravado and style that has become its signature (Schloss, 2009; Pabon, 2006). Its name derives from the "break", a brief percussion solo typical in funk music from the 1970s, whose eventual repetition would extend the dancer's opportunities to dance for longer periods of time[6]. The dance incorporates stylised footwork, shuffles, drops, spins of various kinds (for example, head spins, backspins), power moves, and freezes (Banes, 1994, 1981). The California-based "funk styles"[7] of locking and popping were among other social dances captured in the same moment of popular culture. Whilst locking is also presentational, it is bouncy, playful, and exudes a vibrant theatricality. Popping is not the same as locking, though they are often mistakenly combined into "pop-locking", an early 1980s misnomer frequently depicted as an aspect of "breakdancing". Popping is distinct in its combination of a "staccato-like movement with water-like flow" (Johnson, 2014: 23). Chapter 2 provides a more detailed historical overview of these styles, as well as other adopted and invented dance styles from the past fifty years – such as, house, waacking, and krumping – which overlap aesthetically, and are related to one another through hip-hop culture.

This research explores the fluxes and continuities that produce multiple versions and configurations of human and non-human interaction across

[5] A polyrhythm (or cross-rhythm) is a combination of two or more different rhythms layered on top of each other but subdivided in different ways. (beoyondmusictheory.org)
[6] Extending or looping the break and modifying its rhythms with scratching was made possible by new DJing techniques innovated by DJs Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash, Grand Wizard Theodore, and Afrika Bambaataa during basement parties and block parties in the South Bronx. (Johnson, 2014: 25)
[7] The term "funk styles" is used to designate the range of social dances and genres generated out of their relationship to funk music and in counter-distinction to hip-hop. Locking and popping are the two most recognised genres. (Johnson, 2014: 23)

these dance styles, also referred to as "genres"[8], which increasingly move into art and cultural spaces as well as digital and site-specific contexts. Through the lens of materiality (clothing especially), the research considers the paradoxical, yet symbiotic relationship practitioners hold with two domains: what they perceive as "authentic" hip-hop culture – which includes social dance, training, and battling in various public and communal spaces – and the professional dance industry. The trope of authenticity in hip-hop is discussed mostly in the context of rap music (for example, McLeod, 1999; and Neal, 2004). Scholar Kembrew McLeod (1999) defines authenticity in social-psychological, racial, political-economic, gender-sexual, social location, and cultural terms: being true to oneself, being "authentically black," supporting the underground vs. mainstream, promoting hyper-masculine behaviour, identifying with "the street," and understanding the traditions and history of hip-hop culture. Scholars tend to consider how the ideal of a "real hip-hop", in contraposition to "fake" attempts at it, has created a narrative wherein rappers demonstrate their "truthfulness" and credibility in the hip-hop community (Minestrelli, 2016: 124). This ANT research attends to how dance practitioners also strive to maintain social and ideological ties to the hip-hop community, "keeping it real" (Forman, 2021; Williams, 2007) and honouring the culture's histories and values, as the pathways and professional opportunities for practitioners increase; enabling them to occupy spaces previously reserved for dance styles such as ballet, modern dance, or more avant-garde productions.

For example, the transformation of vernacular hip-hop into a theatre art has been pioneered in the UK by Jonzi D[9], revered hip-hop artist, choreographer, and founder of *Breakin' Convention*. Breakin' Convention is a three-day festival of hip-hop dance theatre held in the refined space of Sadler's Wells Theatre in London and is now in its twentieth year. The festival attracts an increasingly international crowd of performers and spectators to celebrate

[8] "Genre" is a term often used interchangeably with the word "style" by hip-hop dancers to delineate their practice (Lorenzo-Perillo, 2013).

[9] Real name David Jones, though he will be referred to throughout the thesis by his professional name "Jonzi D", for which he is better known.

the vitality of recreational and professional dance, music, graffiti and fashion (Prickett, 2013: 175). It has featured dancers and collectives “from around the world and around the corner” (breakinconvention.com) including Ken Swift and Mr. Wiggles (Rock Steady Crew), Poppin’ Pete (Electric Boogaloos), Logistx, ZooNation, and Boy Blue. More importantly, Breakin’ Convention provides key material (live and technologically mediated freestyle and choreographic performances) through which the thesis considers not only developments in the legitimisation and theatricalisation of hip-hop dance and street culture, but also the stretching of boundaries and challenging of stereotypes through the fashioned, hip-hop dancing body.

In addition to theatre, hip-hop dance also finds distribution through television commercials and programs, films, music videos, and concerts, as well as renowned performing arts schools and commercial dance studios – for example, Pineapple Dance Studio (London), and Millennium Dance Complex (Los Angeles), which both offer a plethora of hip-hop and street dance classes led by professional choreographers – and community settings. The latter was my entry point into this research. This thesis is based on the premise that knowledge is situated socially and materially through the cultural life of the hip-hop community. Hence, when undertaking the fieldwork for this study, I understood that my situatedness and active participation in hip-hop culture meant that I was co-creating the research findings with other human and non-human participants in the hip-hop network. Whilst I am not a trained hip-hop dancer, I am situated socially within a network of practitioners and respected figures from the hip-hop scene in Birmingham (UK); including “Nine” (mentor and founder of the hip-hop dance collective, Broken Silence), “Toffee” (dancer and co-founder of Tru Streetdance Academy), Nathan Marsh (choreographer and founder of Marshon Dance Company), and “Shin” (dancer and member of all style crew, Key Infinity). Through these individuals I have accessed dance classes, workshops, and events in settings such as schools, young people’s centres (YPCs), and dance studios intended to empower youth and encourage wellbeing and social cohesion in the community.

Breaking will also make its debut as a medal sport at the Olympic games in Paris in 2024, signifying a milestone for the street dance style created by disenfranchised black and Latino youths in inner city New York. Through the ANT concepts and ethnographic research methods outlined later in this thesis (see chapters 4 and 5), the research describes how practitioners use clothing and other materials to navigate these complex realities, showing that reality is created and "enacted" (Mol, 2002). In doing so, the research expands not only the scholarship on hip-hop, performance, and contemporary dance, but also the limited scholarship on hip-hop's distinctive fashion style and costume.

Fashioning hip-hop dance

Hip-hop has a complex and nuanced sartorial history spanning fifty years. The distinctive way of dressing that emerged alongside hip-hop was the creative response of black and Latino youth whose lives were shaped by, among other things, poverty, forced migration, and racism in post-industrial New York (Rose, 1994). Fashion played a fundamental role during these difficult times for it provided a way for those who had little or no control over their position in society to take control and ownership of their appearance (Jenkins, 2015). The earliest manifestations of what became known as "hip-hop fashion", or "hip-hop style" can be characterised by tracksuits, ball caps and Kangol hats, pristine sneakers, gold jewellery and denim, often in bold, colourful, prints that reflected Pan-African and black American pride (Whitley, 2011; Jenkins, 2015). This unique style allowed the hip-hop generation to strike out against its invisibility. After five decades, the hip-hop aesthetic can still be defined by tension, a subtle push and pull between fierce individuality and a sense of street-level authenticity. Pushing boundaries is an overarching tenet of hip-hop style, and this thesis highlights the conventions and norms around dress that are enacted in a routinised and ritualistic way and sustained by a communal process of "internal cross-fertilization" (Rose, 1994: 35). Furthermore, it reveals how historical concepts, rituals, and dressing practices adopted (and adapted) by contemporary practitioners not

only enable hip-hop performance, but also trouble rigid binaries and preconceived notions of identity, particularly masculinity and femininity.

A central theme and critical concept in this study, one that permeates hip-hop and has both social and material implications, is the term “fresh” – which refers to sporting a “fresh out of the box”, or brand new and clean look (Jenkins, 2015). While this engrained hip-hop practice relates to movement style as well as dress style, I focus on subtle sartorial practices and the creative ways practitioners use clothing and styling to look fresh during dance performance. For example, playing with colour, shapes, and proportions, mixing and wearing garments and accessories in unique ways, customising footwear with colourful shoelaces and intricate lace patterns, and cleaning sneakers with toothbrushes and household products to keep them pristine. I discuss how these strategies – developed by youth from the poorer neighbourhoods in 1970s and 1980s New York as an inexpensive means to stay fresh – have endured and evolved across time and space due to the interaction between humans and non-humans in multiple networks of relationships. From an actor-network perspective, I challenge the oversimplified and stereotypical view of hip-hop fashion as baggy and/ or saggy pants, oversized T-shirts, “bling” jewellery, and sneakers (Morgado, 2007); a look that rap artists and consumers of hip-hop music certainly popularised during the 1980s and 1990s, and was viewed by critics as outside the bounds of propriety, good taste, and generally as “too much” and “ghettocentric” (McLaren, 1997). I examine the hip-hop aesthetic not as a contentious dress style frozen at a specific moment in time, but as a complex, unfixed, social and political entity that encompasses aspiration, inventiveness, customisation, individualisation, and collectivity.

I thus attend to multiplicity, or multiple reality, through an ANT approach in which seemingly disparate enactments of dance, identity, and dress are understood in terms of coexistence and difference, inclusion and exclusion (Mol, 2002). In the empirical chapters I discuss how specific garments, accessories, and performance spaces, “authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, [or] forbid” (Latour, 2005:

72) hip-hop dance. In these chapters, I report on the direct experiences of practitioners and describe how, through their interaction with one another, actants (human and non-human) can make other actants in the network *do* things. More specifically, I discuss the material properties and behaviour of significant fashion items in hip-hop, such as t-shirts, tracksuit pants, hats, and sneakers and enlighten on the reasons why practitioners select and omit them from their bodily assemblages. For example, during a group interview with participants of a choreographers' workshop run by Breakin' Convention at Sadler's Wells, London-based choreographer and performer, "Mr. Ben"[10] explained:

> Footwear can completely change how you dance. I can put on a pair of Hush Puppies […] it gives you the ability to do certain things you wouldn't be able to do in trainers or shoes that don't have so much grip. You're gonna slide more. You're gonna come up from the splits in a particular way. Whereas, with something more grippy, you feel the connection with the floor quite differently. So, it's almost like some feedback from the floor. It kind of manipulates the choices you make. (Ajose-Cutting, 2019)

This insight into the relationship between the moving body, clothing, and the materiality of the performance space expands existing research that tends to approach hip-hop fashion from the perspective of rap music and/ or conspicuous consumption. For example, Suddreth (2009) describes the experiences of African-American males as consumers of hip-hop music and dress; Whitley (2011) highlights hip-hop's "penchant for self-aggrandizement" through designer clothing and accessories between the 1970s and 1990s; Romero (2012), and Lewis and Gray (2013) also discuss the aspirational lifestyle of consumers of "urban"/ hip-hop apparel, but focus on the emergence of American menswear brands founded primarily by hip-hop artists and moguls during the 1990s and early 2000s. Where these scholars explore themes of conspicuous consumption and aspiration in the hip-hop

[10] Ajose-Cutting, B. (2019). Interview by K. Jones, 18 January.

community, my research differs as it connects communities and practitioners both in time (through clothing and embodied references to hip-hop history) and transnationally, through its socio-material analytical lens.

A key objective of this study is to highlight the performative and catalytic nature of clothing in hip-hop. It therefore looks to scholars such as Perry (2008), who states that hip-hop fashion, or rather "black popular style", is a "mode of self-representational practice" that is enacted and performed (Perry, 2008: 643); and Penney (2012), who examines the tension within contemporary hip-hop between the rising popularity of queer-inflected dress styles within the genre and its corresponding backlash, fuelled by those who continue to conflate hip-hop with a hyper-masculine black identity. I will discuss the specific ideals of gender and racial identification that lie at the centre of hip-hop in greater depth in chapter 2. Here I am pointing out that for many performers, the corporeal experience of dressing for hip-hop dance is usually shaped by ideologies and concepts entrenched in the culture, as well as "the masculine history of its organization" (Gunn, 2013). A significant contribution of this research is its thick description[11] of how performers use their fashioned dancing bodies to challenge the normative gendered narratives within hip-hop. Using concepts from the fields of fashion, costume, and performance studies in conjunction with ANT (see chapter 4, Theoretical framework), the research describes how specific clothing objects function during certain types of movement, and how fashion, in its entanglement with the racialised and gendered body, enables dancers to perform, or enact normative and non-normative identities, genders, and sexualities both in physical and digital space.

Spatial complexity in hip-hop dance

An advantage of thinking of hip-hop in terms of networks is that it overcomes the "tyranny of distance" or proximity and offers a notion of space which is

[11] Both ethnography and performance analysis, two methodological approaches used in this thesis (see chapter 5, Methodological framework) require thick description; which takes into account the directly unobservable contextual understandings that make an action or social event meaningful.

neither social nor “real” space, but simply associations (Latour, 1990: 4). To better understand how hip-hop dance practitioners connect and co-exist, I interviewed sixteen participants (see Appendix C) – although, I engaged mostly with five – from multiple genres, communities, and locations. Rather than focusing on geographical definitions of proximity and distance, I explored *networked* connections. I found that elements of hip-hop culture that appeared distant were in fact close when their connections were brought into focus through an ANT lens and through British cultural theorist Paul Gilroy's (1993) concept of the *Black Atlantic* (see chapter 2); which highlights the complexities of identity formation that arise out of various spatial and temporal displacements. I also drew together existing research and dance ethnographies conducted in New York, the birthplace of hip-hop, and other international contexts. For example, Banes (1981), Schloss (2009), and Johnson (2009) describe the informal teaching and learning processes embodied in breaking, the archetype of hip-hop dance, and the freestyle or raw b-boy cypher (improvisational dance circle) in New York. Smith Lefebvre (2011) focuses on b-boy culture in Montreal, Canada, and analyses the cypher as a potential site for situated learning and knowledge creation.

Prickett (2013) considers developments in the theatricalisation of hip-hop culture focusing on hip-hop dance theatre in London, whereas McCarren (2013) analyses the cultural politics and choreographic development of hip-hop as “concert dance” in France. Perillo (2013) examines the various ways that hip-hop dance is practiced in the Philippines, drawing attention to genre and choreography as significant “modes” of contemporary hip-hop performance. From a feminist perspective, Gunn (2021) discusses the invisibility of women in breaking (“b-girls”) and reveals how they respond to gender-based challenges in Sydney, Australia. Fogarty's (2012) research on international b-boy/b-girl networks discusses the process of rapid mediatisation that has impacted breaking and hip-hop culture in recent decades. A more recent study by Zimányi and Lanszki (2020) is also significant because it investigates the influence of social media on hip-hop choreographers and dancers in the context of studio-based dance classes in Budapest, London, and Los Angeles.

The abovementioned studies illustrate the breadth of hip-hop's communities of practice and scholarship. From one region to another, scholars show that hip-hop dance is ‘here’ and ‘there’, ‘local’ and ‘global’. However, a region is a bounded space (Mol, 2018) and while there is a bigger discussion to be had around absolute and relative conceptions of space in hip-hop, this research, as I have stated above, focuses on “networked space” (Law and Mol, 2001) and disavows any fixed, absolute conception of space. The network, as outlined by Latour in early actor-network theory (see chapter 4), is “a concept, not a thing out there” (Latour, 2005: 131) that is used in this research as a syntax, a way of connecting not only elements of hip-hop dance culture, but also different communities and networks of practitioners around the world into one intensely connected network. Whilst I do not attempt to map out this network of connections in its totality, I do highlight links between human and non-human actors and reveal subtle enactments of clothing and the performing body in purposefully selected moments of performance (see Selected performers and performances, p17). ANT’s conceptualisation of the network is useful because it describes both what travels in space – for example, ideas, concepts, and material things – and the performance space itself. ANT has enabled me to examine the potential of many things occurring at the same time and ultimately, present hip-hop as a fluid space in which elements and their spatial relations change. In doing so, fashion has emerged as an energetic and transformative part of hip-hop culture that enables variation without boundaries and transformation without discontinuity (Law and Mol, 1994).

Networks within the network

As mentioned above, the Latourian concept of “network” is used throughout the thesis to refer to the broader hip-hop community; that is, hip-hop as a global entity, a highly connected one, which remains nevertheless

continuously local.[12] Whilst the research examines locations and spaces in which interactions between heterogeneous actors are performed, how they assemble, come apart, and then reassemble, it focuses less on proximity and scale in geographical terms and pays closer attention to the weaving of the network; especially the constitution of innovation in hip-hop dance, its circulation, and the connectedness afforded by media technologies and the Internet. Thus, through the concept of network, hip-hop dance is presented as dynamic, fluid, and ever-changing. It encompasses entities – people, places, (fashion) objects, artifacts, music, concepts, rituals – that take their form and acquire their attributes as a consequence of their networked relations, across space and time, with other entities (Law, 1999: 3).

Despite my "situatedness” (Haraway, 1988) within the hip-hop community for many years, which I discuss more in chapter 5 (Methodological framework), the joint funding award I received from London College of Fashion and Sadler’s Wells – supporting PhD research into historical and contemporary performance practices and cultures – enabled me to engage with Sadler’s Wells project, Breakin’ Convention, the UK’s largest festival of hip-hop dance theatre. Breakin’ Convention proved invaluable for the research as it provided direct access to London’s vibrant hip-hop dance scene and connected me to a range of national and international performers. Furthermore, Breakin’ Convention’s founder and artistic director Jonzi D facilitated much of the data collection process, securing continuous access to events, sharing his hip-hop expertise and social contacts, and showing enthusiasm for the research project. Media technologies, namely the social networking platforms Instagram and Facebook, also played a crucial role in connecting me to performers in different countries and cities. Through these sites I was able to trace connections between practitioners, hip-hop dance genres, and communal and international events, in effect “networks within the network”.

[12] The broader hip-hop community that I refer to (which is at once global and local), is centred on events, specifically festivals, competitions, and “jams”. Participants watch international/ national/ local competitions online, travel to these competitions and jams and make connections with other dancers, which they then connect with online and perhaps later visit (Gunn, 2019: 20).

Hip-hop (sub)genres

A significant finding which emerged from the research data was the importance of genre, a term often used by hip-hop dancers to delineate their practice. Hip-hop subgenres have their own unique histories and intrinsic principles, and are constituted by aesthetic, technical, and stylistic attributes. They provide a means of categorisation for hip-hop dance events, particularly communal classes, competitions, auditions, and showcases. This research offers a fresh perspective on hip-hop for it describes, through dress and other materialities, how its subgenres are flexible and boundaryless, as opposed to fixed and rigid, allowing for multiplicity of identities, opportunities, and hip-hop realities. Genres are defined in this thesis as actor-networks because they encompass relationships between humans, things, ideas, concepts, and spaces, all of which constitute actors in ANT. Focusing on the materiality of hip-hop performance and tracing the material trajectory of dress in contemporary settings led me to identify multiple subgenres that come under the hip-hop dance umbrella. Rather than trying to define and make categorical distinctions between them, the research emphasises three prominent genres: breaking, locking, and choreography (also referred to as "commercial" dance by many practitioners).

The research also explores, albeit less extensively, how dancers use the styles of popping, house, and krump to situate their practice in relation to those of others in the hip-hop network. I provide a lengthier discussion of the technique of breaking as it forms the cornerstone of most hip-hop dance practice, inspires my focus on "fresh" style, and has shaped each interviewee's personal and professional dance experience in some way. Hip-hop theatre is also given precedence, as this context illustrates the progression and fluidity of hip-hop performative practices; more specifically, the blurred boundaries between street, stage, and screen, and between fashion and costume in the last two decades especially. House, popping, and krump are discussed collectively and more generally in the context of competitions I attended, and interviews I conducted during the fieldwork.

Selected performers and performances

In the refocusing of hip-hop dance performance through the lens of matter, this thesis identifies an important shift between the isolated individual (performing body) and its interdependence to a network of human and non-human actors. Each performer is examined as what I define as a *material bodily assemblage*, and each separate performance as a network within the hip-hop network because they consist of more than one actor: human(s) and/or non-human(s) interacting and transforming each other. The research sample, which is outlined in more detail in chapter 5 (Methodological framework), is multi-ethnic and includes individual practitioners (dancers, choreographers, teachers, mentors) as well as collectives and subgroups of dancers from the UK, Barcelona, New York, and Canada, aged between eighteen and fifty-five. The sample is representative of both heteronormative and non-normative gender and sexual identities and participants that typically engage with “old school” hip-hop, b-boying/breaking, funk, and “new style” commercial hip-hop and street dance styles, or a combination of both. To highlight the fine nuances that characterise the complexity of hip-hop dance, I studied the network longitudinally, attending dance events between 2017 and 2020. I conducted most observations in-person at various sites across the UK and in multiple hip-hop performative contexts – primarily, communal and studio-based dance classes, workshops and masterclasses, hip-hop dance competitions and battles, auditions, rehearsals, theatres, and public showcases and festivals.

I delegated some ethnographic activities to a non-academic proxy[13], who collected and recorded material data on my behalf at two hip-hop dance events in New York in October 2017, which supplemented the data I collected in the UK. I discuss the implications of this pragmatic decision in chapter 5 in relation to some of the challenges of conducting fieldwork and

[13] The concept of “ethnography by proxy” is defined as the process of delegating some of the ethnographer’s activities to non-academic participants in the research setting. (Plowman, 2016)

how the data collection methods were carefully considered during interpretation of data. Here I will say that the proxy identified a key research participant at one of the New York events, with whom I have maintained contact through social media and conducted a semi-structured interview via video call. Kamsy Duarte (aka “Flash”) is a b-boy from Manhattan, New York who frequently encounters pioneers of the breaking dance form at community-based training sessions, events, and battles. I consider how his b-boy practice and image – illustrated by a selfie taken on a NYC subway platform whilst wearing an Adidas “3-stripes” tracksuit and sneakers (see chapter 7) – reflects hip-hop’s historical and socio-political roots and illustrates how cultural knowledge can be embedded in the performing body, fashion objects synonymous with b-boy culture, and urban space.

The Coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak and imposed lockdowns in 2020 and 2021 made the continuation of face-to-face research impossible. Whilst localised and national lockdowns began as early as January 2020 in some Asian countries, theatres, dance studios, and other public venues in the UK were forced to close on 16th March 2020 for over a year to prevent the spread of the virus. I discuss the impact of these closures on the dance community later in the thesis. At the point of the closures, I had observed and gathered data from fifteen hip-hop dance events, interviewed five key individuals (some on more than one occasion), and conducted a group interview with twelve practitioners and choreographers. Sadler’s Wells and Breakin’ Convention altered their performance practices during the pandemic and migrated by necessity to the *Digital Stage*, a space mediated by the internet, to both support the dance community and maintain relationships with audiences during the enforced Covid-19 lockdowns. The research is informed by two separate Breakin’ Convention events from this period as both events demonstrate how digital practices engaged during the Covid-19 pandemic redefined the idea of the stage itself and allowed new forms of meeting, collaborating, co-creating, rehearsing, and producing to emerge.

Evolving themes derived from the theoretical framework, contextual research, and the fieldwork informed the selection of three critical examples

of hip-hop dance and choreography, which were produced in collaboration with Jonzi D and Breakin' Convention and performed at Sadler's Wells between 2017 and 2020. These key performances, which are briefly described below, are accessible online and I have included links to videos and recordings in the footnotes of the relevant chapters/ sections.

The Locksmiths Dance Company: Liiive

The Locksmiths is a London-based dance company that explores artistic expression through vibrant fashion and the funk dance style locking. In 2018, the group – comprising Ben Ajose-Cutting, Inga Be, Samantha Haynes, Wataru Ito, Peter Johnson, Fran Barberà Mayor, Laura Poole, Rosie Wilson-Sidlauskas – performed *Liiive* on the Sadler's Wells main stage alongside Jazz Refreshed (stylised as Jazz re:freshed), a London-based organisation and sonic orchestra that supports and promotes young British jazz musicians. This live collaboration, which saw a big band performance with an ensemble of 15 jazz musicians and a specially commissioned score by saxophonist and composer Jason Yarde, celebrated the 15th anniversary of both Breakin' Convention and Jazz re:freshed. Through this piece I explore how contemporary practitioners based in the UK preserve the history and culture of locking, an LA-rooted street dance, whilst simultaneously professionalising[14] the practice through costume, the theatre space, and the live orchestra.

Our Bodies Back

Our Bodies Back is a short dance film by Breakin' Convention's artistic director, Jonzi D and American poet and social activist, Jessica Care Moore (stylised jessica Care moore). The film takes its name from Moore's poem

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[14] Later in the thesis (see chapters 4 and 8), I discuss how the practitioners' language towards clothing often changed when certain professionals, such as artistic directors, stylists and fashion/ costume designers were enrolled (recruited) and became involved in specific events. The sudden shift from using the term "fashion" to "costume" indicated a professionalising of their dance practice. As such, the distinction that I make when discussing clothing for performance is that costume is less about self-styling/ fashioning, and more about preparing the body for performance.

We Want Our Bodies Back, which responds to misogynoir[15] and violence against black women. Through this powerful piece of screen dance, I explore the subtle internal processes, practices, and material agencies involved in the actualisation of virtualised performance. The film was created remotely during the Covid-19 lockdown, amidst global anti-racism protests following the death of George Floyd[16]. Jonzi D directs the film from London, and moore, who is based in Detroit, Michigan, emphatically narrates her poem as three dancers and choreographers – based in Montreal, Canada; Hannover, Germany; and London – perform alternately. I focus on the constitutive entanglement between the body, space, and technology, and discuss how three black women perform their identities and socio-political positions in three separate geographical locations at specific times; yet they are connected and fluid in their ability to transcend spatial and temporal boundaries via digital technologies and the process of collaboration.

The Purple Jigsaw

Created by Scottish choreographer and breaker Emma Houston (aka "Shortbread"), and performed by London-based group, Houston Dance Collective, *The Purple Jigsaw* opposes gender binaries through an amalgamation of breaking and vogue, two distinctly gendered black dance styles that evolved in New York during the 1970s and 1980s. I focus on two live iterations of this choreographic piece and look at how both versions subtly trouble the masculine/ feminine, and fashion/ costume distinctions in hip-hop performance through the subversive use of streetwear and gendered styles of bodily movement.

[15] American writer and activist Moya Bailey first used "misogynoir" in a 2010 posting to the Crunk Feminist Collective blog to describe the specific type of oppression that black women experience often characterised by a combination of racism and sexism.
[16] On May 25, 2020, George Perry Floyd Jr. was asphyxiated by a Minneapolis police officer. After footage (an eight-minute clip) of the murder went viral, protests and demonstrations ensued in many US cities and around the world against anti-black racism and police brutality against unarmed black citizens.

Structure of the thesis

Within this introductory chapter I have presented the research context, aims and objectives, together with the main new materialist approach adopted for the study, actor-network theory (ANT). I have located this thesis in the trajectory of research into hip-hop dance, performance, costume and fashion. I have also situated the human and non-human participants of the study – including performers, interviewees, dress, space, and myself as a researcher – within the hip-hop network. I must point out that I have purposely structured the thesis so that the theory follows on from my contextual research. This is because I selected the ANT approach as a result of looking closely at how dress *behaves* in hip-hop dance. I found that systems that look at hip-hop dance and dress from a distance, without following the actors or being situated within the culture (for example, visual or cultural semiotics), did not support my direction. Hence, this thesis, while deploying ANT and new materialist ideas, places first the contextual chapters so as to foreground hip-hop, its dance forms and dress styles, as the critical phenomena that materially guides the theories chosen.

In chapter 2, I will provide a historical overview of hip-hop culture, its dance forms and African diasporic influences, before focusing on a selection of studies that examine transnational hip-hop dance practices ethnographically. Chapter 3 provides a review of documentary material and previous scholarship on hip-hop fashion and dress. The purpose of these chapters is to position the research in an academic context and highlight hip-hop's socio-political underpinnings and dichotomies as these are critical to the central focus of materiality, multiplicity, and fluidity in contemporary hip-hop performance practices.

In chapter 4, I establish the theoretical framework and expand on the terms and concepts used in the research. I outline my engagement with ANT, post-ANT and assemblage thinking, elaborating on relevant theories and concepts from the disciplines of fashion, costume and performance studies that have guided the understanding of key themes in this study.

In chapter 5, I present the methodological framework as a combination of research methods and approaches that inform the analysis. I outline the main data collection methods – observation, interviews, document analysis – and the implementation of the research, including any methodological and ethical considerations for the study.

In chapters 6, 7, and 8 I present my findings through the lenses of body, clothing, and space, situating the discussion within the theoretical and methodological frameworks outlined in chapters 4 and 5, and the contextual research presented in chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 6 focuses on the material trajectory of performing bodies and fashion objects across genres, venues, and modes of hip-hop dance. It traces connections and maps multiplicities in the hip-hop network. Through an example of hip-hop dance theatre, *Locksmiths: Liiive*, I discuss how practitioners blur the boundaries between the street and stage, fashion and costume, and social and professional using clothing, choreography, and other material actors.

Chapter 7 focuses on the hip-hop performing body in digital space and considers concepts of "liveness" and "digital liveness" through online dance videos, live streamed Breakin' Convention events, and the dance film *Our Bodies Back*. In Chapter 8, I discuss how the group Houston Dance Collective engages clothing and costume in their piece, *The Purple Jigsaw*, to disturb the masculine/ feminine distinction in hip-hop. As part of the discussion of the findings, these chapters articulate how agency is distributed between specific actors and how the material bodily assemblage dissolves several dichotomies entrenched in hip-hop and contemporary dance culture.

In the concluding chapter, I summarise the research findings, propose the contribution to knowledge presented in this thesis, and articulate the implications for the fields of hip-hop dance, performance, costume, and fashion. I evaluate the research process and address the limitations of the study and its actor-network approach. Along with concluding points, I

suggest recommendations for future research into hip-hop and other contemporary performance practices.

2 Hip-hop dance origins and developments

Introduction

This chapter provides a historical overview of the grassroots cultural movement developed in the South Bronx, New York in the 1970s, that came to be labelled as “hip-hop”. It details hip-hop's expansion throughout northern America and how it came to transcend racial, generational, national, and transatlantic boundaries. Although this thesis focuses on dance as a powerful element of hip-hop, it is not my intention to catalogue or trace the histories of every dance form associated with the culture in the following chapter. Rather, I am interested in the history of relevant ideas and concepts from hip-hop discourse; for example, black and African diasporic expressive cultures (DeFrantz, 2012; 2004; Stalling Huntington, 2007), social dance (Hazzard-Donald, 1996), and internationalism (Gilroy, 1997; 1993). I draw together some of these ideas and look to a specific set of authors who examine hip-hop dancing as a social and communal practice. The aim is to better understand how “hip-hop corporealities” (DeFrantz, 2014) and styling strategies from the past emerge in the present and become powerful through their spatial and temporal displacement.

In what follows, I discuss the widening of hip-hop’s geographic and institutional reach, that is, the expansion of both the dance form and the scholarship to countries including New Zealand (Wilson, 2015), Montreal (Stevens, 2008), the Philippines (Perillo, 2013), France (McCarren, 2013; Shapiro, 2004), and the UK (Fogarty, 2011). I point out that despite the growing scholarship on hip-hop dance and hip-hop theatre, the multiple realities of contemporary practitioners and their innovative use of fashion and technology to navigate hip-hop's “complex system of urban movement and participation” (Forman, 2004: 11) continues to be overlooked.

Hip-hop as a social and material phenomenon

Hip-hop began as an artistic and cultural movement in the Bronx, New York, where demographics were rapidly shifting in the early 1970s. The migration of West Indian and Hispanic immigrants to New York City in the 1960s resulted in declining property values and the "flight" of white residents from the central city to its expansive suburbs between 1970 and 1980, which had adverse consequences for the remaining city residents (Rose, 1994). Residential segregation and the phenomenon known as "white flight" has been a topic of interest to social scientists for some time. Dating back to the Chicago School's early research (Duncan and Duncan, 1957; Park and Burgess, 1925), the ecological metaphor of "invasion–succession" has been commonly used to describe the process by which minority entry prompts the systematic departure of white residents, eventually leading to the reproduction of a segregated metropolis. Understanding the dynamics of residential segregation remains an important issue for researchers and policy makers alike (Pais, South, and Crowder, 2009). While it is not central to this thesis, it is important to point out that by restricting access to valuable social, economic, and political resources, residential segregation in the nascent era of hip-hop gave rise to multiple forms of racial inequality, producing effects such as disparities in health and education, income, and mortality rates (Holman, 2004; Rose, 1994).

The African Americans and Latino Americans that remained, or who moved to New York City in the intervening years, encountered many challenges in their neighbourhoods as resources were severely reduced and diverted to the wealthier, whiter communities. Faced with a lack of economic opportunity, as well as rising crime and poverty rates, the marginalised youth in the Bronx and surrounding boroughs began creating their own kinds of cultural expressions. These forms of expression would come together to form the four pillars of hip-hop: DJing, emceeing (rapping), breaking (b-boying /b-girling), and graffiti writing. As these arts became more and more popular around New York, the term hip-hop came to define the overall culture related to all four of the mediums (Lommel, 2001: 20).

The musical style associated with hip-hop is generally considered to have been pioneered in the South Bronx by Jamaican-born DJ Kool Herc when performing at a neighbourhood block party in 1973. The “block party” is a distinctly New York form of celebration that has become a well-known trope in popular culture. In 1970s and 1980s New York it held a special social, political and spatial significance for poorer diaspora communities, who gathered to celebrate their own cultural identities and collaboratively create new musical performance (Warnett, 2016). Herc used an innovative turntable technique to extend a song's drum break by playing the break portion of two identical records consecutively. The popularity of the extended break lent its name to "breakdancing" (Rose, 1994). As mentioned in chapter 1, the term "breakdancing" appears with quotation marks throughout the thesis because, although the term is frequently used to refer to the archetypal hip-hop dance style in popular culture and in the mainstream entertainment industry, "breaking" and "b-boying" are the original terms and are preferred by the majority of pioneers and practitioners (Schloss, 2009; Israel, 2002).

By the mid-1970s, New York's hip-hop scene was dominated by seminal DJs including Grandmaster Flash, Afrika Bambaataa, and Herc (Forman, 2004, Blanchard, 1999). *Billboard*, the music industry’s main trade magazine, documented the rapid spread of hip-hop and “turntablism” (the art of using turntables to manipulate sound and create new music) in a short article titled *B-Beats Bombarding Bronx* (1978). In the article, author Robert Ford Jr. described the localised phenomenon of DJ street parties and the growing prestige of pioneer DJ Kool Herc, whose music and performance innovations were generating excitement in the uptown boroughs of New York at the time (Ford, 1978: 65). Anecdotal accounts of innovators and pioneers becoming local celebrities emerge frequently throughout hip-hop’s histories, as I shall demonstrate in chapter 3 from the perspective of the “fresh dressed” (Jenkins, 2015) adolescents of that era.

In her seminal book *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (1994), cultural historian and one of the pioneers of hip-hop scholarship, Tricia Rose, provides an informed analysis of hip-hop

describing how the sharing of ideas and styles was both a communal, although not always peaceful, and artistic process. While Rose prioritises rap music and focuses less on hip-hop dance practices, she acknowledges the intimate connection between hip-hop's core elements. She explains how stylistic continuities were sustained by "internal cross-fertilization" between rapping, b-boying, and graffiti writing. For example, some graffiti writers produced rap records, while b-boys, DJs, and rappers wore graffiti-painted jackets and t-shirts (1994: 35). Rose also notes how popular New York DJs observed b-boys and b-girls reacting to the instrumental breaks in the records and began searching for the tracks, and the breaks, to please the dancers. This cross-fertilisation is reconceptualised in the thesis as the entanglement and distribution of agency (Bennett, 2005; Latour, 1996b); the latter of which refers to how agency emerges in interactions between humans and non-humans and is distributed between networked people and *things to* co-produce a culture or phenomenon.

Rose, among other authors that have contributed to the historical foundation for the scholarly study of hip-hop – such as David Toop (1984), Forman and Neal (2004), and Jeff Chang (2005) – document how the style of hip-hop that emerged during the "old school" era[17] was unmediated, with most of its practices being taught and performed in the context of face-to-face, or rather body-to-body, socialisation between practitioners. Notably, the term "each one, teach one" is still widely used in the hip-hop community when referring to the responsibility of pioneers and mentors to pass along their knowledge about the culture to the next generation. I discuss in chapter 6 how education, or "foundation" (Schloss, 2009) is vital to a hip-hop dancer's success and is seen as a source of empowerment for practitioners (Fogarty, 2012). Rose provides only a brief definition of breaking, informed by the work of author and music critic Nelson George in his book, *Fresh: HipHop Don't Stop* (1985). Most of the early documentation of the dance form was achieved through media representations of "breakdancing". As I discuss

[17] The old school era of hip-hop typically dates from the origination of the movement in the early 1970s up until the mid-1980s (carnegiehall.org)

below, it was not until the mid to late 2000s that breaking and hip-hop dance gained more academic esteem (Fogarty, 2006, 2011; Stalling Huntington, 2007; Johnson, 2009; Schloss, 2009). More extensive than scholarly accounts are the growing number of documentaries made about hip-hop dances, their social contexts, and their histories (Johnson, 2014: 22).

Hip-hop dance: a culture of cross-fertilisation and co-production

The south Bronx is widely acknowledged as the birthplace of hip-hop, but scholars agree that there is no singular place, time or genre that constitutes “the beginnings” of hip-hop dance. Authorities on hip-hop dances and their African diasporic influences – including Imani Kai Johnson (2014, 2009), Thomas DeFrantz (2014, 2004), Carla Stalling Huntington (2007), and Jorge “Popmaster Fabel” Pabon (2006) – explain that there was simultaneous activity across the US that would collectively assert itself as a shared culture *after* hip-hop came into being. Beyond diasporic influences, which I discuss in the following section, hip-hop dances reflect urban American contexts among culturally diverse, working-class, and working-poor communities of predominantly African diasporic people – including African Americans, West Indians, and Puerto Ricans – as well as small pockets of working-class whites, Mexican Americans, Dominicans, Pacific Islanders, and other ethnicities depending on location (Johnson, 2014: 23). Residing under the hip-hop dance umbrella alongside New York’s native dance forms breaking and uprocking[18], are the California-based styles of popping and locking, which originated and developed on the West Coast in the 1970s as part of the "funk” cultural movement.

[18] Uprocking, or simply "rocking”, is a style of competitive street dancing formed in the early 1970s strictly consisting of movements performed while upright. Typically, opponents faced each other and engaged in a "war dance”, consisting of a series of steps, jerks, and the miming of weapons drawn against each other. Uprocking is performed in synchronisation to the beats and rhythms of soul, rock and funk music played from beginning to end - not just in the instrumental break, as with b-boying/b-girling. Pabon (2006: 22) “Physical Graffiti” in Jeff Chang’s *Total Chaos: The art and aesthetics of hip-hop*.

The term “funkstyles” is used to designate the range of social dances and genres generated in relationship to funk music and in counter-distinction to hip-hop. Funk music is noted for its syncopated bass lines, dynamic percussions, soulful or gospel-inspired singing, and the rhythmic build-up of energy as all the instruments worked together toward an improvisational climax. Locking and popping are the two most recognised genres. Most credit locking to Los Angeles-based dancer Don Campbell, also known as “Campbellock”. Trying to imitate a local dance called the “funky chicken”, Campbell added an effect of locking the joints of his arms and body, which became known as his signature dance (Jonson, 2014; Pabon, 2006). He then formed a group named “The Lockers”, who eventually shared in the development of the dance. The main structure of the dance combines sharp, linear limb extensions and elastic-like movement. The “lock” is a specific movement that holds together combinations of steps and moves similar to a freeze or a sudden pause (Pabon, 2006: 22). During the fieldwork I observed UK-based group The Locksmiths incorporating flips, tucks, dives, and other aerial moves. Reminiscent of the early lockers in Los Angeles, the Locksmiths performed combinations that consisted of a series of points done by extending the arms and pointing in different directions. They also jumped into half splits, knee drops, and “butt drops”, using patterns that took them down to the ground and back up to their feet. The role of clothing and footwear in facilitating these types of movement is discussed in chapter 6.

The popping dance style differs from locking, although they are often mistakenly combined into “pop-locking”, an early 1980s misnomer frequently depicted as an aspect of “breakdancing”, which combined all of the funkstyles (Johnson, 2014: 23). Popping, also referred to as “hitting”, is characterised by abrupt tensing and releasing of the muscles to the rhythm of beats in the music, creating a stop-motion illusion. While the dance is more forceful and confrontational than locking, the transitions between steps, forms, and moves are fluid, unpredictable, and precise, and delivered with character and finesse (Pabon, 2006: 23). As mentioned previously, this thesis does not focus on the differences between hip-hop dance genres, but rather articulates the intricacies through certain material/ fashion objects and

turns toward connections. I discuss in chapter 6 connections between human practitioners and organisations in the hip-hop network, and how Breakin' Convention plays a significant role in drawing together hip-hop and funkstyles of dance. For example, iconic dancers such as Timothy "Poppin' Pete" Solomon – first generation member of the Electric Boogaloos[19] – uses the platform to engage with young poppers, teaching the dance and speaking publicly about its origins. Through Breakin' Convention (and other hip-hop dance events and competitions) I describe the materiality of popping, and how the poppers I encountered tended to dress in a more flamboyant and expressive manner than individuals from other genres. For example, poppers frequently wore suits, button down/ dress shirts, and dress trousers to accentuate sharp, staccato-like arm and leg movements. Strategies such as adding blazers and jackets (for example, bomber, windbreaker, gillet), hats and necklaces, created extra layers that would shake and showcase the "pop" or "hit", the most fundamental move in popping. Furthermore, I describe footwear's ability to enable (or restrict) specific popping moves; for example, how flat shoes with a stiff sole and a strong toe are less appropriate for other styles of hip-hop dance, namely breaking, but facilitate signature popping moves such as sliding, toe spins, and gliding.

The freestyle and social dance form known as "house" – so named for the Chicago club from which it emerged, the *Warehouse* (Kehrer, 2022: 28) – originated from the urban underground club scene predominated but not exclusive to black and brown gay men, and developed through the interchanging creative flows between Chicago and New York in the late 1970s. House is both a musical style and a scene, which encompasses "collective performances" of "individual free-form dance", and originally invited individuals who had been typically double discriminated against by race and sexuality (Fikentscher, 2000). The house scene provided a

[19] The "Electric Boogaloos" (originally the Electric Boogaloo Lockers) was founded in 1977 by Poppin' Pete's older brother Sam "Boogaloo Sam" Solomon, along with Nate "Slide" Johnson, and Joe "Slim" Thomas (Pabon, 2006: 23). The group propelled popping and funk culture in the late 1970s and 1980s, appearing on the American television show Soul Train, and inspiring artists such as Michael Jackson, whose signature "Moonwalk" is closely associated with "gliding", a move from the popping genre.

sanctuary for people who sought protection and belonging with chosen families. The post-Stonewall[20] social dance venues, including the *Sanctuary*, the *Loft*, and *Paradise Garage* in New York, became legendary sites for a freedom of expression through dance in safe, welcoming environments (Johnson, 2014: 24). Waacking – a dance style inspired by drag queens and predominantly female Hollywood luminaries, which utilises large arm movements, expressive hands, strikes (quick outward extension of limbs to accentuate the beat), Hollywood-inspired glamour poses, and the occasional kick (Davis and Weems, 2022) – grew out of similar venues in California.

Where dancers from other genres perform to a hip-hop or funk soundtrack, house is performed to electronic music characterised by tempos sped-up to 120 beats per minute (bpm) or faster to create a “high-energy” sound and dancing experience. It developed as a series of DJ-promoted technological innovations, such as looping, remixing, and adding electronic rhythm tracks. I observed during the research how the fundamental call and response exchange with the DJ and a “full-bodied collective communion on the dance floor” (Fikentscher, 2000), the relaxed movement in the dancers’ upper body and arms, and the emphasis on fast and complicated footwork remains key features of house dance culture. Through the materiality of various performances, I witnessed things and bodies becoming subservient to the rhythm. For example, the behaviour of different types of footwear as dancers sprung from the ground and reconnected with the floor, loose shirts – fastened at the collar with the remaining buttons undone – and dress trousers or harem style pants billowing with the loose movement and carefree twirling of the dancers, while “vocal and instrumental sounds were reduced and reintroduced as rhythmic flourishes and repeated motives”

[20] The 1969 Stonewall riot in New York City, also known as the Stonewall Uprising, or simply Stonewall, is widely celebrated as the beginning of the modern US gay civil rights movement. The spontaneous protests started on 27 June 1969 at the Stonewall Inn, a small gay bar in Greenwich Village, New York, which was raided by NYPD as part of Mayor John Lindsay’s platform for re-election during the mayoral campaign. As an act of resistance against the arrests, continuous oppression, violence, and discrimination they experienced, the patrons of the bar (mainly gay, trans, and young men of colour) erupted into violence (Cannon Poindexter, 1997: 607). The unrest outside the Stonewall Inn and clashes with the police continued for six nights.

(Kehrer, 2022: 29). Although house dance is not a primary focus of this research, its "mesmerising steps and combinations are appreciated here as a kaleidoscope of different cultures" (Moser-Kindler, 2023), borrowing inspirations from Latino dances, African dances, and martial arts.

Breaking is the most familiar point of entry into hip-hop dance. Whilst many scholars have included breaking and b-boying/b-girling in their accounts of early hip-hop, one of the first critics to write about breaking at length was dance historian and theorist Sally Banes. Her landmark article *To the Beat Y'all: Breaking is Hard to Do*, for the *Village Voice* newspaper in April 1981, is cited as having introduced breaking to the general public (Banes, 1985; Hazzard-Donald, 1996). Through this work, and later writing, Banes documented the development of hip-hop culture and pioneered a new way to write about "postmodern dance" as a social phenomenon (Banes, 1985, 1994). Postmodernism in performance is largely a phenomenon of the 1970s and 1980s. As a continuation of dance history and "modern dance" – which emerged in the late 19th-century and opposed the rigid rules of classical ballet, the structured techniques, costumes and ballet shoes – postmodern dance is anti-authoritarian at its heart. In *Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism* (1994) Banes constructs dance history that emphasises *hybridisation* (a characteristic of our postmodern world): the coming together of the new, the blurring of boundaries between popular culture and high art, the burgeoning of interdisciplinary areas, and the juxtaposing of diverse cultures. She positions breaking as postmodern dance as it moves between "high art" and "low art" and between the margins and the centre of society.

After observing breaking in New York for several months between late 1980 and 1981 (alongside photographer Martha Cooper), Banes reported that the intensity of the dancers' physicality gave breaking the power to claim the streets: "breaking is a way of using your body to inscribe your identity on streets and trains, in parks and high school gyms" (Banes, 1981). Similarly, this thesis explores the hip-hop dancing body's ability to claim and transform public spaces, most especially the theatre, through its collaboration with other material actors. Banes presents breaking as a physical version of two

favourite modes of street rhetoric, “the taunt and the boast” (Banes, 1994: 122). She enlightens on the format, or “ritual frame”, in which “burgeoning adolescent anxieties, hostilities, and powers are symbolically manipulated and controlled” (1994: 123). She writes:

> The dancing always follows a specific format: the *entry*, a stylized walk into the ring for four of five beats to the music; the f*ootwor*k, a rapid, circular scan of the floor by sneakered feet while the hands support the body’s weight and the head and torso revolve slowly — a kind of syncopated pirouette; the *freeze*, or stylized signature pose, usually preceded by a spin; the *exit*, a return to verticality and to the outside of the circle. (Banes, 1994: 123-24)

Banes’ article, and other early documentary accounts of breaking – such as *Wild Style* (directed by Charlie Ahearn, 1983) and *Style Wars* (directed by Tony Silver, 1983) – reveal how the addition of cardboard or linoleum as temporary floor coverings to the practice made various new and exciting moves possible; for example, corkscrew spins and windmilling. In chapter 6, I discuss this seemingly ordinary and taken for granted practice, highlighting the agential capacity of materials such as cardboard and linoleum, and describing how these non-sentient actors participate in the performances by enabling and/ or restricting certain types of movement. Furthermore, I highlight the continuation of such practical strategies, the passing along from early b-boys to contemporary dancers via face-to-face interactions and the internet. I explore how hip-hop dance has gradually become more structured and codified yet, breaking as a genre has preserved many of its traditions and aspects of the early hip-hop aesthetic; including approaches to battling, mentorship, fashion, and individual style. Practices from the past – such as cyphering, and the crowd collectively judging while each dancer demonstrates their originality through intricate, witty, and even obscene configurations (Banes, 1981) – re-emerge in the present. Through post-ANT ideas I address this paradox, illustrating how hip-hop is a fluid space that enables variation of these approaches without boundaries, and transformation without discontinuity (Law and Mol, 1994).

“Breakdancing”: misrepresentation of black social dances

Media and commercial representations[21] of “breakdancing”, and several *how-to-breakdance* books from the 1980s (for example, Elfman, 1984; Nadell and Small, 1984) made little distinction between breaking (and its predecessor rocking), locking and popping. These street and social dance forms were combined, linked to other African diasporic movement practices such as Lindy Hop, the Charleston, and capoeira (George, Banes, Flinker, and Romanowski, 1985: 103), and presented to the public. The umbrella term “breakdance” was thus rejected by many practitioners as it represented the media exploitation of their dance and recast raw street dance as a mere form of “musical acrobatics” (Schloss, 2009: 58). Notwithstanding the problematic terminology, the media exposure propelled breaking, locking and popping into the national limelight. By 1984, street dance had reached mainstream prominence and “breakdancing” was featured in news segments, television commercials, music videos, on tours with DJs and rappers, and the opening ceremony of the 1984 Olympics. The dance form was showcased to international audiences via the blockbuster film *Flashdance* (1983) – featuring a short clip of Rock Steady Crew, one of the most recognised and influential crews in b-boying history – and several low-budget, youth-oriented productions including, *Breakin’*, *Beat Street*, *Breakin’ 2: Electric Boogaloo,* and *Body Rock,* all released in 1984.

In her book *Hip Hop on Film* (2013), media scholar Kimberley Monteyne explores the production histories of what she calls the “hip hop musical”, which ranged from independent art cinema to exploitation fare. She argues that the significance of these films, and especially their wide-reaching explorations of the contemporary urban environment, racial inequity, and the perpetually transformative nature of the inner city, is enabled by their protean subject matter and multi-ethnic focus. Her account highlights the

[21] I am referring here to any written, video, and photographic representations of “breakdancing” produced for popular consumption or commercial sale from 1981 to 1986.

“whitewashing” of black culture on film and contributes to discourse on how professionals and institutions co-opted “breakdancing” (a central element of the hip-hop musical), and began to “adapt, change, bend, twist, and shape it to suit their own needs” (Sommers,1984). In his doctoral work on the articulation of hip-hop in the mid-1980s, Aaron Dickinson Sachs (2009) coins the term “hip-hopsploitation” to label this genre of dance themed films. He writes:

> [T]he hip-hopsloitation films were intended to capitalize on the poverty stricken urban New York scene and the youth-of-color oriented hip-hop culture. Hip-hopsloitation tried to repackage hip-hop for consumption by youth, including and maybe even in particular middle class white youth. (2009: 40)

According to Dickinson Sachs, most of the films that comprise what he calls the “hip-hopsploitation film cycle” use narrative as a minor cinematic vehicle to sell a “gimmick” (2009: 41); which, he suggests, resulted in the genre’s failure to develop substantially in the Hollywood establishment. The significance of these films for the research is that they not only directly reference the social and political currents of their social moment, but also the material and aesthetic features. They provide valuable visual evidence pertaining to early hip-hop fashion and costume for dance performance, given that accounts of clothing from the perspective of first- and second-generation dancers are scarce and tend to be anecdotal. Seminal b-boys such as Richard “Crazy Legs” Colon (president of the Rock Steady Crew), Wayne “Frosty Freeze” Frost, Kenneth “Ken Swift” Gabbert, and Jorge “Popmaster Fabel” Pabon have contributed to several documentaries that capture the atmosphere of the early breaking scene in New York, but there are few mentions of clothing from a performance point of view. Still, commentaries in Evan “Israel” Brenner’s *The Freshest Kids* (2002) provide insight into how dancers sewed hand-cut letters and large insignias on the back of clothing to mark their affiliation with a particular crew. This is evident in Tony Silver’s *Style Wars*, the 1983 documentary account of New York’s train-tagging graffiti scene. One of the film’s most iconic scenes occurs at a

dance battle between the Dynamic Rockers and the Rock Steady Crew. These legendary dancers utilise customised t-shirts and jackets to define aspects of their identity as individual b-boys, members of a collective, and to earn the respect of the watching crowd.

In chapter 3, I trace the “do-it-yourself" practice of customising clothing (an art form that is still commonplace in street style and hip-hop culture) back to the 1970s biker-inspired street gang culture/style in New York. I discuss how gang “uniforms” – which consisted of black Lee bell-bottom jeans, biker jackets, and denim jackets with cut-off sleeves (Jenkins, 2015) – displayed insignias on the back, conveying one’s affiliation to infamous gangs such as the *Black Spades*, *Savage Skulls*, and *Latin Spades;* and how the addition of fur collars and patches of flags to garments, as well as rivets and spikes applied with care and intention, further displayed the wearer’s unique flare. In the empirical chapters, I investigate the continuation and evolution of such self-fashioning strategies in hip-hop from a new materialist/ ANT perspective. Through purposefully selected examples of hip-hop dance, I examine wearables as personal, social and cultural signifiers, but more specifically, as material actors that enable (or restrict) different types of bodily movement in different spaces.

Ironically, the media and communications industry became the eventual executioner of “breakdancing’s” popularity, despite having been its initial promoter. Regardless of its prominent position inside the commodity system as a popular practice – albeit with its black cultural priorities and distinctly black approaches taken for granted as a “point of origin […] rendered invisible” (Rose, 1994: 83) – the general public began to reject the dance form by the mid-1980s and b-boys were banned from performing in the streets and public spaces (where the dance form had originated and gained its popularity). Paradoxically, “middle-class housewives and suburban kids could learn to breakdance in their spare time at classes proliferating throughout the suburbs” (Banes, 1994: 144). Breakers were employed to teach the dance in professional dance schools and studios “geared to hip middle-class whites” (Rose, 1994: 50). Nevertheless, articles emerged –

such as “Hazards of Break Dancing” (1984) featured in *The New York State Journal of Medicine*, and “Breaks and Other Bad Breaks for Breakers” (1985) in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* – turning public attention to the potential health hazards of breaking and reporting multiple instances of b-boy injuries. Noteworthy is that many articles related the possible injuries and side effects of breaking, yet very little was written about the negative effects of other types of youth dance in the early 1980s (Monteyne, 2013: 221). Hip-hop pioneer Fred Braithwaite aka “Fab 5 Freddy” attributes this to racism, claiming in an interview[22] (about the birth of hip-hop) that blacks and Latinos were criminalised constantly in the New York press and that the authorities sought to prevent the idea of a community defined by street culture and collective activity on the street (Braithwaite, 2019).

As breaking, popping, and locking peaked in US popular culture, the dance forms flourished internationally; breaking was reclaimed by its creators and developed out of sight into a newer kind of urban culture (Fogarty, 2006). B-boys continued to dance underground where the practice evolved alongside rap music and other hip-hop cultural practices. Breakers had transformed from disempowered, marginalised young people, into “determined agents with physical strength and emotional resilience” (Bode Bakker and Nuijten, 2018: 210), and many practitioners turned their attention to re-instilling the dance with “Black historical and social truths” (Gilroy, 1997: 28). The resulting underground b-boy movement that spread rapidly in the 1990s retained elements of its roots as a social dance form, including cyphers/ circles, battles and a focus on being fresh and original. According to Banes, the invisibility and elusiveness of this underground breaking scene relates to the extemporaneous nature of the original form and also with its social context. Breaking “jams” were not scheduled, they happened when the situation arose. There was no advance notice of a breaking performance, you had to be in the right place at the right time. In other words, you had to be part of the crew system that provided social order among the local youth

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[22] *“Fab 5 Freddy on New York Hip-Hop and the Birth of a Global, Cultural Phenomenon”* interview originally conducted in October 1998 (DJ History) and re-published by Red Bull Music Academy [online] (Frank Broughton, 15 January 2019)

(Banes, 2004: 15). Tight-knit underground breaking communities not only clearly defined the insider in contrast to an outsider, but they also allowed for different generations of b-boys to interact regularly with each other (Banes, 2004; Kong, 2010).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, b-boying pioneers and mentors took up the responsibility of passing along their knowledge about hip-hop and the history of the movements to the next generation. By actively participating in the underground breaking scene and adding their individuality, a new generation of dancers contributed to the culture, its overall movement repertoire and its history. Breaking, much more than a fleeting trend, has created space for identity formation, street-level politics aimed at social change and black self-fashioning in response to structures of oppression (Gilroy, 1997: 28). By engaging in the practice, each participant further develops and *becomes* the culture; collaborating with other actants, entities, and materials in a co-constitutive manner in which "all together the players evoke, trigger, and call forth what-and-who-exists" (Haraway, 2016: 16). The "players", or "actors", in this instance include other dancing-moving humans, material sites and performance spaces, music, clothing, and media technologies.

To examine how hip-hop knowledge is embodied, imbibed in materials, and communicated to other networked practitioners across time and space, it is important to briefly visit the colonial past (which informs the hip-hop dance innovations of the present). In what follows, I highlight how Africanist (meaning African and African American) resonances and presences appear in obvious and hidden areas of hip-hop dance practice. I then look at ethnographic studies of hip-hop dance in geographical locations with no obvious connection to an Africanist movement legacy. The intention is to better understand how hip-hop dance has become a "habitus"[23] recognisable

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[23] In Outline of a Theory of Practice (1977) Pierre Bourdieu provides a framework both for understanding the way that cultural settings (re)produce the means of their own production, and for analysing the effect of this (re)production on the particular subjects of a given 'habitus'. For Bourdieu, the term habitus refers to the collective entity by which and into which dominant social

to a range of practitioners and attendant audiences worldwide (DeFrantz, 2014). I consider clothing's role in creating a notion of hip-hop that *does* something recognisable, or consistent, in its various movement manifestations. I look at how, on the one hand, a "global hip-hop" has shifted its ideological possibilities from an Africanist (and masculinist) sensibility, yet on the other hand, maintains its power to release unprecedented transformations of energy (or agency) through performance.

From Africanist performance histories to global hip-hop corporealities

Scholars concerned with black dance and black expressive cultures gesture towards blackness as an existential and corporeal reality. For example, DeFrantz states that the existence of "core black culture" embraces the performative idioms of black expressive culture – music, oratory, fashion, game-playing, dance – all of which, he says are "generated within the circle that permits and protects"[24] (2000: 11). Stalling Huntington writes that in black dance, gestures of the body are culturally specific; "dance contains statements, interrogatives, phrases and punctuation, strung together uttered with the body that say something by doing something" (2007: 58). She states that Africanist dances are performed, or "uttered", in a socio-cultural set of circumstances – African village, slave ship, plantation, inner city – and function properly only if being read by another literate reader of these types of utterances. This research acknowledges that, to those not familiar with the hip-hop dancing body's "phrases" and "meanings", the dance can appear as "movements without intent that develop out of nowhere and disappear when the movements and the music stops" (Stalling Huntington, 2005: 58). However, through ANT and the concept of the network, it brings connections

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and cultural conditions are established and reproduced. In Bourdieu's words, habitus refers to "a subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class" (1977: 86). These "internalised structures" and "schemes of perception" structure the subject's (shared) worldview and their "apperception" of the world in which they suppose they exist (ibid).

[24] DeFrantz refers here to psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon who writes in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963): "The circle of the dance is a permissive circle: it protects and permits… [Dance] may be deciphered, as in an open book, [as] the huge effort of a community to exorcise itself, to liberate itself, to explain itself. There are no limits inside the circle." (1963: 57)

into focus and looks at how non-human actors contribute to hip-hop's continuous progression from dances created by an oppressed people who used movement predominantly to create community, retain African identity, and relieve the stress of existing in the New World. Furthermore, the focus on transformations and materiality provides fresh perspective on how hip-hop dance with its humble yet vital beginnings, has materialised to become a force with international influence; one that is accessed by cultural outsiders positioned well beyond the circle that permits and protects.

In his book *Black Dance in America*, author James Haskins constructs a thorough chronology of African diasporic dance. He explores the earliest known diasporic dance, covering content from slave ship dancing, up to and including hip-hop dance styles. Haskins writes:

> [D]ance would not only help the slaves to survive in a physical sense in the New World. It would also help them to stay alive in spirit, and that was something that slave masters could not take away from them. And because enslaved Africans brought their dances to the New World, over time their dances, like their music, would have a profound effect on the cultures there. (1990: 5)

Haskins, among other authors (see Dixon Gottschild, 1996; Stalling Huntington, 2007; DeFrantz, 2012; Glass, 2012), describes the "African movement vocabulary", which is characterised by use of improvisation, formations, polyrhythms, percussion, pantomime, and props; though not exclusive to the African diaspora, are all central to its aesthetics (Johnson, 2014: 22). This movement vocabulary frequently incorporates traditional "buck", "wing", and "jig" elements[25] (DeFrantz, 2012) indicative of African American culture. Creating a sense of community and competition are also

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[25] Buck dances, wing dances, and jigs are a trilogy of dances that developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that continue to resonate in African American social dances today. They are characterised by stomping, heavy-footed percussive footwork (buck), flapping motions of the arms and legs (wing), and high energy and fast-paced footwork (jig). Johnson (2014: 31); DeFrantz, (2012) *Buck, Wing, and Jig* (YouTube - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A34OD4eA17o)

identifying characteristics of black expressive cultures. For example, the “ring shout” – a transcendent religious ritual, first practiced by African slaves in the West Indies and the United States – preserved the polyrhythms, pantomime, circle formations, and participation of the community found in traditional African dance (Glass, 2012: 44). A key theme guiding Hazzard-Donald's studies of the ring shout (2011) and the “jook” – an underground cultural institution created by the black working class in 1950s rural South (1990) – is the historical relationship between early African American slave worship (religious and spiritual) and its contribution to both the social and theatrical dance traditions of the United States. She explains that, as marginalised outsiders to American society, African Americans, both free and enslaved, found dance to be an essential element in sustaining identity through both historical memory and cultural practice. She writes:

> African American dance, though modified by the conditions of enslaved labor, maintained its vocabulary, and continued to give meaning to daily life. The movement trajectory, which was both dramatic and mimetic, revealed a story of not only the dancers present, but also their past and future. The dance play or play fragment was a cultural monolog which existed not only in the dancers' consciousness, but was inscribed in the bodies of the performers (2011: 204).

It is in this sense, she argues, that dance assumed an oppositional stance, as well as a “resistance function” in the slave community. Dance was used to both voice the desires for freedom and to reinforce a continuum of resistance which “prepared the community for battle against the harsh conditions of bondage” (ibid). Hazzard-Donald describes how “dances of derision”, directed at slave masters who gathered around to watch the fun but missed the point, served to deconstruct the imposing and powerful presence of whites, and followed in the great African traditional mode of public criticism through dance (2011: 204). Drawing parallels between the athletic practice of breaking and African diasporic traditions, Michael Holman also explains how African American slaves introduced dances that imitated the master's dances

in a mocking and entertaining way, incorporating some of their own moves and rhythms. He describes how, unlike the highly structured and rigidly timed European dances, African dance was about leaps, hops, skips, falls, drops and turns done to unrelenting tribal beats and rhythms. He states:

> From (out of) those new cross cultural dance experimentations and in some of the purely African dances there were styles that resembled and would later, through American dance history, evolve to become the ultimate dance form: breaking. (2004: 33)

Holman references dances such as the “juba”, which was performed by one or more dancers in a circle of male dancers, each one taking his turn to “go off” (ibid). The circle formation and turn taking would later feature in breaking’s most participatory context, the cypher – a circle forming within a crowd surrounding the solo breaker without an imposed orchestration (Stevens, 2008: 175). Holman notes how the slave dance creations caught the attention and notice of the slave owners, who showed favour to the best of the dancers and encouraged competition. Likening this to battle culture in hip-hop, he asserts that every dance form first done by black men has always been about who was the best (Holman, 2004: 33). Despite the universal understanding that competition/ battling is an essential characteristic of hip-hop, the circle in black dance pre-eminently symbolises community and social solidarity. Historically, ring dances were a way for enslaved Africans to exchange the collective cultural expressions of music and dance and show solidarity with other people under colonial rule.

It is not my intention here to make vague links to the distant roots of hip-hop dance. What I am illustrating is that black dance forms remain tactical through the messages and history inscribed on and inscribed by the dancing body’s “products” (Stalling Huntington, 2007: 58). Furthermore, I am interested in the nature of the transmission of these “perceived remnants” (Stevens, 2008: 54) between generations. Hazzard Donald tells us, "Like a language, the basic vocabulary of African American dance is passed along” (1996: 222). Dixon Gottschild (2009) expands, describing cultural

dissemination as "a multi-lane highway with auxiliary routes intersecting at the most unexpected places". In other words, nothing is "pure" anything, we must look at the process of cross-pollination. Cultures and cultural products influence each other in a constant, dynamic flux, even when adherents of a given culture purposefully refute "other" influences, subconsciously cannot face up to them, or simply are ignorant of their existence. Forces, trends, phrases, traits, movement modes— texts, or tropes, in other words—of the various cultures that surround us form the threads with which we weave our "new" patterns (Dixon Gottschild, 2009)[26], or in this case, networks.

Black Atlantic transformations

British cultural theorist Paul Gilroy's concept of the *Black Atlantic* (1993) is useful here, as it helps to understand how experiences of displacement and subjection contribute to constructions of cultural difference, whilst resistance, through black expressive cultures, is revealed as empowering. Drawing from Gilroy, I consider how the agreed upon values and meanings of the *essence* of hip-hop dance are negotiated (as well as embodied, performed, and navigated) by participants of the dance from across the world, even if the essence is imagined to represent a particular locale or a particular understanding of "origins" (Fogarty, 2010: 117).

In his landmark book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) Gilroy highlights the complexities of identity formation that arise out of various spatial and temporal displacements. He offers his concept of the Black Atlantic – a culture not specifically African, American, Caribbean, or British, but a mix of all of these at once – which represents not only the enforced crossing of slaves from Africa, but also return crossings of liberated African Americans in search of education and employment in Europe. According to Gilroy, the idea of the Black Atlantic reveals the

[26] *The Diaspora DanceBoom - Dance in the World and The World in Dance* (2009) catalogue essay available at - https://brendadixongottschild.files.wordpress.com/2010/07/diasporadanceboom9_04.pdf

“complex of difference and similarity that gave rise to the consciousness of diaspora inter-culture” (Gilroy, 1996: 20). Building on Gilroy’s conceptualisation of the Black Atlantic, this thesis argues against hip-hop being viewed as marginal to or derived from dominant national cultures. It turns its attention towards the transformations of matter afforded by routes of movement of black people and black cultural production. From my own situated position as a black woman born and raised in the UK, I recognise that black music and dance has provided me with a means to gain proximity to the sources of feeling from which local conceptions of blackness were assembled. As Gilroy writes:

> The Caribbean, Africa, Latin America, and above all black America contributed to our lived sense of a racial self. The urban context in which these forms were encountered cemented their stylistic appeal and facilitated their solicitation of our identification. They were important also as a source for the discourses of blackness with which we located our own struggles and experiences (1993: 109).

The “urban context” Gilroy refers to in the excerpt above, though geographically distant, is viewed in this thesis as one type of connection. As I discuss later in chapter 4 (theoretical framework), an advantage of thinking through ANT is that it overcomes the “tyranny of distance” and offers a notion of proximity which is neither social nor “real” space, but simply associations (Latour, 1990: 4). For example, US-based activities and elements of hip-hop culture that appeared distant during my youth were in fact close, accessible via material objects (non-human actants) – such as records and CDs, music videos, magazines, posters, and fashion – inscribed with language, history, and meanings. The connectedness to hip-hop and black American culture afforded by clothing will be explored in greater depth in the next chapter.

So far, I have provided an overview of scholarship that foregrounds African and African American beginnings for hip-hop dance styles, I now direct the conversation towards the shifts in circulation that surround these movement forms; that is, the slippage from Africanist performance histories to global

hip-hop corporealities (DeFrantz, 2014). A priority of this research is to shed light on the experiences of dancers “already removed from the realm of the social by virtue of [their] interest in focused aesthetic principles adopted from Western ideals” (DeFrantz, 2001: 3). For example, those participating in professional dance, or “concert dance”, which DeFrantz points out is never vernacular, because “dance that is prepared can only make reference to dance that emerges within the closed black space” (DeFrantz, 2001: 16). Gilroy reminds us that "the globalization of vernacular forms means that our understanding of antiphony will have to change. The calls and responses no longer converge in the tidy patterns of secret, ethnically encoded dialogue" (1993: 110). From a post-ANT perspective, this change in locality that Gilroy predicts is not conceived as a loss. The migration of African diaspora dance forms from the closed circles of social spaces to the open circle (or network), including theatre and the digital stage, allows an opportunity to document hip-hop performance and its vital impact on contemporary culture. Furthermore, exploring how hip-hop dance can expand to accommodate work by choreographers who do not claim African ancestry, through the lens of fashion and costume, contributes fresh understanding for scholars working to construct accounts of the body in motion.

Interestingly, dancer-anthropologist Katherine Dunham researched Caribbean dances and their socio-cultural contexts in the 1930s, implicitly understanding Gilroy’s later conceptualisation of the Black Atlantic as an “intercultural and transnational formation” (Gilroy, 1993: ix). After spending sixteen months in the Caribbean, Dunham came to understand – both intellectually and kinesthetically – the African roots of black dance in islands such as Jamaica and Haiti. From this "physical" understanding of what she considered her cultural roots, Dunham began to develop the first African American concert dance technique (Osumare, 2010). She created “performed ethnographies” (Clark, 1994: 190), staging what Africanist scholar Halifu Osumare describes as “visions of cross-cultural communication” (2010: 1). Dunham’s “research-to-performance" method is important here because it took the creative enactment of ethnography beyond “a mere salvaging of the past” (Osumare, 2010: 7) and placed

various Caribbean dances in dialogue with each other. She attempted to capture the sacred protocol and hierarchy of African-Caribbean religious ceremony, as well as how drumming, singing, and dancing could induce the ecstatic state of trance, thereby transforming the community (Osumare, 2010: 9). Her methodology and teaching from 1940 to 1965 created three generations of knowledgeable performers equipped to transmit theirs and Dunham's understandings of these Caribbean cultures, particularly to US and European audiences. More specific to this research is her participatory approach, which enabled an understanding of the relationships of the dances and their contexts across national boundaries. Hence, this thesis focuses on situated and partial perspectives in order to provide an honest and rich account of hip-hop dance in multiple locations and spaces.

Global hip-hop context: imagined communities and affinities

Though the scope of literature on hip-hop dances is limited, ongoing work broadens the growing body of crucial analyses of hip-hop dance cultures and practices worldwide. This thesis contributes to this area of hip-hop studies by drawing together hip-hop dance forms that have sparked emulation in different locations and spaces and placing them in dialogue with each other through a new materialist lens. A number of works inform this research because they focus on practitioners rather than representational analyses alone, and explicitly utilise ethnography – for example, participant observation and qualitative interviews – as an effective approach for studying breaking as communal, transnational, and as social entanglement. The most influential and comprehensive of which is Joseph Schloss's *Foundation* (2009). Schloss immersed himself in local b-boy practices in New York over a five-year time frame in the early to mid-2000s. My interest in this work stems from his use of observation and deep and extended fieldwork, as well as his emphasis on the body and kinesthetic memory to provide an in-depth account of the core concepts that make up a b-boy or b-girl's dance education.

The book derives its title from the entrenched hip-hop term “foundation”, which refers to a core set of concepts, passed from teacher to student, that b-boys and b-girls are expected to learn as part of their training. Foundation includes the fundamental moves associated with the dance, its history, philosophy, and battle/ improvisation strategies (Schloss, 2009: 12). According to Schloss, “the way the dance is taught exerts a profound influence on the way it is experienced. It affects the way individuals understand the history of the form and their own place in it, the way they express their individual and group identities, and the way they pass this knowledge on to others.” (2009: 41) Important aspects that I deploy from Schloss’s work are the notion of community as social entanglement and his positioning of music and movement as connecting elements that bring dancers (pioneers, teachers, and students) together. Building on these ideas, I highlight how clothing acts as a further connecting element in a “transnational network” (Fogarty, 2006) of hip-hop dance practitioners, and reveal how community is *material* as well as social entanglement.

For example, I examine dancers’ relationships to the spaces within which they operate through their sartorial choices and their selection of “fresh but functional” clothing. Schloss suggests that the way a dancer interacts with the space can be a way of metaphorically engaging with larger issues of history, community, and identity. From the perspective of his informants, he describes how being able to dance on different surfaces is, in and of itself, considered to be a valuable skill in the breaking community. Unlike other dance styles, the ability to contend with unsuitable conditions is viewed as a core aspect of the form; complaining about a poor dance surface would be considered a shortcoming on the part of the dancer, not on the part of the environment (Schloss, 2009: 95) During an interview with Schloss, renowned b-boy and longtime member of the Rocksteady Crew, Ken Swift states:

> You should have moves for concrete, you should have moves for a wooden floor. You should have moves for linoleum. And you should know what works on each. And that knowing, that requires practice.

> Knowing and adjusting to the medium. (Ken Swift in Schloss, 2009: 96)

I learned, through my own qualitative interviews and observations, that in addition to the general value of being able to dance under different conditions, certain surfaces have additional ideological value based on their being viewed as either especially challenging, more traditional, or – in the case of concrete – both (Schloss, 2009: 96). Through discussions about materials and clothing, I learned that a dancer's ability to break on concrete or "rough" surfaces meant they were considered by their peers as technically skilled, "old school", and in control of their bodies. For example, b-boy and mentor Nine[27] explained during a conversation that "footwork came before breaking", and that footwork – movement on the floor with the hands supporting the dancer as they move their legs through a variety of breaking footwork steps – on concrete in a good pair of sneakers was *fresh.* Both Nine and Scottish breaker, Shortbread implied that concrete was more conducive to footwork. They also explained how using temporary surfaces such as cardboard and linoleum compensated for concrete being more unforgiving; these additional materials prevented dancers who unsuccessfully attempted air (acrobatic) moves from sustaining scrapes, sprains and even broken bones.

For Schloss, the *idea* of concrete – and its association with urban environments (literally, "the streets") – has a certain rawness that reads as historical authenticity (2009: 97). Expanding this perspective, I propose that the continued use of cardboard and linoleum in recreational hip-hop dance connects contemporary breakers to historical breaking practices in New York. In *Total Chaos* (2006), hip-hop author Danny Hoch writes how the 1970s saw an acceleration in manufacturing and a proliferation of cardboard packaging that had not been seen before. It was also a time when New York City apartment dwellers were replacing their linoleum floors of the 1950s and 1960s with carpet. He describes how urban youths reappropriated cardboard

[27] Nine (2018) interviewed by K. Jones. 21 January.

and linoleum left out in the streets: “The backspin, windmill, glide, and headspin would not have been invented were it not for young people reappropriating these two mundane items. They certainly didn’t conceive them in a dance studio at Lincoln Center. They defied the ground by spinning on it, on their backs, on their heads, on garbage” (Hoch, 2006: 353). According to Hoch, the conditions faced by working-class inner-city youth of the 1970s and 1980s were not only hardships to be overcome, but also opportunities to be nourished. The raw, street culture and poor socioeconomic conditions that gave birth to hip-hop culture not only provided inspiration for hip-hop; they also provided specific opportunities that creative youths exploited to create their art and their lives. My interest lies in the early breakers’ ability to adapt, overcome, and excel – the whole essence of hip-hop – and how, inspired by this history of resilience, practitioners today continue to create their own environment and use available materials, resources and spaces to creatively express who they are.

The cypher as global connection

A quintessential b-boy environment that Schloss discusses is the “cypher” (or cipher). In hip-hop, a cypher is defined as the feedback circle formed whenever “three or more people gather” to perform, challenge, and empower each other (Keyes, 2002). As such, the cypher is the basic unit of the hip-hop community. It is also defined as the “coded knowledge” created by hip-hop communities (Alim, 2006). The cypher is thus the basic unit of the hip-hop community and the basic unit of hip-hop knowledge. Put another way, hip-hop’s cypher concept recognises how culture and cultural production are mutually constituted. As breaking’s most participatory performance format, not all cyphers are battles; although they do provide a structure for battles. Cyphers create a space and provide a “ritual frame” (Banes, 1994: 123) for performance. The participants inside the circle understand that there is a complex informal etiquette to this dance modality that must be followed. Cypher etiquette has been taught, dancer to dancer, for five decades; again, illustrating continuation between first and second-generation b-boys and

contemporary practitioners. Whilst there is a bigger discussion to be had around the technicalities of breaking and the symbolism of cyphering (Dodds, 2016; Johnson, 2009; Banes, 1994, 1981), this thesis focuses on its subtle materialities and costuming practices. Before describing these internal processes, I must point out the specific format that cyphering follows, as articulated by Banes who observed its earliest manifestations:

> [T]he *entry*, a stylized walk into the ring for four of five beats to the music; the *footwork*, a rapid, circular scan of the floor by sneakered feet while the hands support the body's weight and the head and torso revolve slowly — a kind of syncopated pirouette; the *freeze*, or stylized signature pose, usually preceded by a spin; the *exit*, a return to verticality and to the outside of the circle. (Banes, 1994: 123-24)

Schloss writes that a cypher can be "built" virtually anywhere at any time, all that is required is a group of dancers. He says, "It does not require a stage, an audience, a roof, a dance floor, or even a designated block of time. The cypher's very informality and transience are part of its power; it appears when and where it is needed, then melts away" (2009: 99). While the thesis explores the ephemeral nature of this type of performance, it also considers what happens *after* the cypher has disappeared; that is, how hip-hop is maintained as a community of practice. Interestingly, Schloss points out that the circle is often referred to as "the" cypher, rather than "a" cypher, which suggests that all cyphers are, in some abstract way, connected (Schloss, 2009: 99). He states that when breakers refer to cyphering, they are presuming that the space, the dance, and the relationship between the two are all part of one larger experience, or as I argue in this thesis, a network (or web) of relations between material actants. Cyphering is thus a collective enterprise that mixes improvisation, competition, and mutual support, where everyone is presumed to be an insider simply by virtue of being there. This is a central theme in hip-hop dance scholar Imani Kai Johnson's *Dark matter in b-boying cyphers* (2009). She uses the term "dark matter" to refer to the contextualisation of a connection that collaboration activates into practice (2009: 213). For Johnson, the cypher is "the whole" expressed as the

collectivity of individual contributions. Cyphering is social and is bound up with the possibilities of dark matter – “as connection, communion, a high”. She writes that, “cyphers lend themselves to thinking about global connection as embodied ways of enacting our relations to others, and the possibilities to make the world in ways that are attuned to our passions and our manner of living” (Johnson, 2009: 213). I draw attention to Johnson’s contextualisation of “a connection that collaboration activates into practice”, for this links directly to ANT and the new materialist concept of emergent agency and material being. I contend that through collaboration (between human and non-human actors), and through the cypher – which can also be viewed as network – matter *becomes* (Barad, 2007), and material agencies emerge, as I will discuss in chapter 4.

Johnson and other dance scholars, such as Mary Fogarty, consider b-boying and cyphering as a rich site for the analysis of hip-hop’s globality as they exemplify social interaction – conflict *and* collaboration – through non-verbal forms of communication. These scholars explore how movement radiates connections to others. Building on their work, I suggest that the materiality of the cypher adds unique qualities to social relations “across and through difference” (Johnson, 2009: 202); for example, across race, gender, and sexuality. From an ANT perspective this work contributes to a body of work on hip-hop dance as global connection; that is, as a phenomenon of “international culture” and "global context" (Johnson, 2011: 174). As Johnson writes:

> The "global" is an incredibly heterogeneous conceptual frame composed of various interconnected forces that are at once economic, political, social, and cultural […] "Context" is a conceptually rich idea that attempts to articulate the multi-dimensionality of performance. It lends itself to thinking through the global because it speaks to cultural and experiential knowledges as well as the physical and social planes of performance, interlocking a range of cultural actors in distinct ways. Certainly, it can refer to a particular focal event and the surrounding physical environment, but it also includes social settings and the

background knowledge necessary to understand the dynamics of a particular performance. (2011: 175)

Thus, the term "global context" captures the varied, interconnected, and complex ways whereby the material and social aspects of hip-hop dance overlap within hip-hop communities. According to Johnson, what spectators/ onlookers see is only a portion of the story. I therefore utilise ANT and ethnographic research methods together to unpick the socio-material complexities mentioned above and to provide a sensitive account from “inside” this diverse, transnational field. Similarly, dance scholar Mary Fogarty characterises hip-hop/ b-boying as a “transnational network” in her 2006 study *Whatever happened to breakdancing? Transnational b-boy/b-girl networks, underground video magazines and imagine affinities.* The significance of Fogarty’s ethnographic research lies in her identification of three major transnational channels that dancers used to communicate with each other during the early to mid-1990s: touring, competitions and videos. She writes that, “of these, the first two - tours and competitions - involved dancers travelling to new places” (the movement of dancers through space). The other method of communication included the production and circulation of “underground b-boy/b-girl videos” (Fogarty, 2006: 58). For Fogarty, these transnational communications demonstrate the intersection of video artefacts, travel, and dance. She highlights, for example, how the distribution of video artefacts through various locales was initially made possible through the travels of dancers (ibid).

This thesis examines similar correlations between hip-hop dance, travel and film/ media technologies, but in a more contemporary context given that the advent of the internet has enabled social interaction, teaching and movement of dancers through space on a much wider scale. Fogarty points out that travel by b-boys and b-girls in various countries, including pilgrimages and competitions, facilitated the development of networks between dancers (Fogarty, 2006: 59). While this remains the case, I look specifically at the instrumental role of online film, as well as video sharing platforms and social networks – namely, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram – in the development

of larger and more extended communication channels between dancers especially during the Covid-19 global pandemic; a time of enforced restrictions on travel (see Chapter 7). An important claim that Fogarty makes is that film helps to produce “imagined affinities” between dancers, that is, “identifications expressed by a cultural producer who shares an embodied activity with other practitioners through either mediated texts or travels through new places” (Fogarty, 2006: iv). I investigate in chapter 7 how these “imagined affinities” help to sustain hip-hop culture by generating audio-visual representations of the dance movement and the accompanying dress across geographical regions via the internet. I explore how the creation of the dance film *Our Bodies Back* (2020) – produced remotely but collaboratively during the Covid-19 lockdown, and featuring three dancers performing in Montreal, Hannover, and London – reinforces the idea of belonging to a global hip-hop network, an “imagined community” (Anderson, 2006: 6; Stalling Huntington, 2007), with what Africanist scholar Halifu Osumare refers to as “connective marginalities” (Osumare, 2001: 172).

In the hip-hop network, the connection between dancers meeting (and sharing) online and/ or via international travel is filled with the idea of “nationhood” which anthropologist H. Samy Alim formulates as the *Global Hip Hop Nation*: “a multilingual, multiethnic “nation” with an international reach, a fluid capacity to cross borders, and a reluctance to adhere to the geopolitical givens of the present” (Alim, 2009: 3). Nationhood cultivates belonging to an imagined community due to shared values and interests (Anderson, 2006: 6) between and across ethnocultural lines (Alim, 2009), as between Montreal, Hannover, and London in the case of *Our Bodies Back*. The concept of “connective marginalities” is meaningful here, encompassing “the gamut of culture” (Osumare, 2001: 174), and thus also the multiple cultures in the three abovementioned locations where “class, historical oppression, and generation” (2001: 174) intermingle, exchange, coexist and collaborate. For the performers of *Our Bodies Back* (see chapter 7), the connective marginalities refer to experiences of racial oppression, sexual oppression, and socio-political marginalisation from the black, female perspective. Essentially, these networked actors were able to express

themselves through hip-hop and create connection and belonging through the material – body, clothing, space, technology – across geographical lines.

Hybrid performance space

While scholars such as Fogarty and Johnson continue to address the transnational nature of b-boying, few scholarly studies have had success demonstrating the multiple types of dances beyond b-boying, or the multi-faceted ways dancers make sense of their own performance practices (Perillo, 2013: 75-78). In his 2013 study of Filipino hip-hop dance communities, performance scholar and choreographer J. Lorenzo Perillo found that practitioners often privileged speaking about their practice in terms of style (genre) over other categories such as race, gender, nation, and class. As such, they were able to situate their practice in relation to other practitioners in the global hip-hop dance community (2013: 80). Alongside genre, he highlights *mode* as an important concept that allows one to account for the ways through which practitioners experience hip-hop. He writes:

> 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. (Perillo, 2013: 84)

Perillo's work is significant, firstly, as it promotes ethnography as a tool for exploring hip-hop dance, stating that researchers should position themselves inside the culture to observe the internal “artistic discourse” (2013: 78) or continuities within the practice. Secondly, his research marks a departure from the studies mentioned throughout this chapter because it concentrates on under-researched modes of hip-hop, such as so-called “commercial” dance, hip-hop choreography, and stage performance, in contrast to street

dance or underground b-boying. The author illustrates the development and evolution of hip-hop dance by identifying several categories besides breaking, for example, “dancehall, house, krump, lockin', ladies hip-hop, LA style, poppin', waackin' and unspecified hip-hop (club dances, New Jack Swing and "choreo")” (Perillo, 2013: 80). While it is not my intention to comprehensively catalogue and describe each of these categories, I selectively draw attention to breaking, locking, group choreography and hip-hop theatre in the empirical chapters as they have significant implications for fashion and costume.

According to Perillo, choreographic practices offer a vista into the worldviews of today's hip-hop dance practitioners (2013: 71). He suggests that the dance's socio-material “dimensions” – movement, body, costume, music, space, meaning and values – supply theorists with the building blocks for de-essentialising “hip-hop authenticity" as well as appreciating local and indigenous epistemes (2013: 73). I therefore use the aforementioned dimensions, or elements, to explore the connections between hip-hop dance styles and critically question the mainstream (commercial, professional)-versus-underground (authentic, recreational) distinction, among other distinctions, engrained in hip-hop discourse. Both Perillo and Schloss suggest that it may be more valuable to rethink the distinction between mainstream and underground itself, rather than placing hip-hop in a category that does not fit (Schloss, 2009: 41). For example, I found during the fieldwork that breaking is, for the most part, non-commercial, but not *anti*-commercial; or rather, anti-professional. None of the individuals I interviewed became involved in breaking to make a living at it, however they all acknowledged that the pathways and professional opportunities for practitioners have increased with the advent of the internet especially and the legitimisation and theatricalisation of hip-hop dance and street culture. I therefore highlight these tensions and nuanced realities in the empirical chapters and unpack the ways that practitioners articulate claims for their own hip-hop legitimacy through performances of self, enabled by matter – clothing, space, and technology – in both social and professional contexts. More specifically, I argue for hip-hop's transition from the street to a hybrid

performance space (including digital space), one that allows creativity, performing bodies and objects, as well as cultural and professional processes to enmesh, thus repositioning and reconfiguring hip-hop performance practices in a new materialist context.

Several scholars explore the shift in the cultural landscape of hip-hop and the dance form's entry into mainstream theatres since the start of the new millennium. Writers such as Eisa Davis (2004) focus on defining hip-hop theatre – how it mixes hip-hop aesthetics with theatrical conventions – and canonising important artists working in the genre to date; for example, Philadelphia-based Lorenzo "Rennie" Harris and London-based Jonzi D. Scholars such as Felicia McCarren (2013) and Roberta Shapiro (2004) focus specifically on how "breakdancing" in France has undergone a complex process of institutionalisation. Shapiro introduces "La danse hip-hop" as a term that is homologous to those that designate other artistic disciplines (such as "danse classique" and "danse contemporaine"), which have history, structure, and legitimate places in French society. For Shapiro, the expression "danse hip-hop" not only legitimises, but it also prescribes; with modes of training, organising, producing, and legitimising comparable to those that exist for classical and modern dance (Shapiro, 2004: 11). Dance scholar Stacey Prickett (2013) states that "increased opportunities to view the dance in commercial theatres is a significant step in the evolution and legitimisation of an art form, shifting perceptions in the process" (Prickett, 2013: 175). Interestingly, she notes that pioneers of hip-hop theatre "expose the permeability of "high" art dance boundaries" through hip-hop dance companies and organisations such as *Puremovement* (Rennie Harris), *Breakin' Convention* (Jonzi D), and *Boy Blue Entertainment* (Kendrick "H2O" Sandy).

This thesis reveals how various hip-hop dance practitioners, having learned from other practitioners in the streets or in the community, rather than in dance schools or studios, work to "walk the tightrope between 'the truth of hip-hop' and the formality of the theatre stage" (Prickett, 2013: 176). I discuss in the empirical chapters how performances in theatre spaces such

as Sadler’s Wells and online are often accompanied by alterations to the hip-hop dance form yet remain true to the original style through innovative uses of matter (the dancing body and/ or wearables). For example, adjustments for visibility such as opening out a dance circle are required for theatre and film/ online choreography. These linear formations can result in a different interaction between performer and spectator/ audience, conforming to conventions developed in theatricalised choreography (Prickett, 2013: 177). Furthermore, the constraints of performance space can also impact upon the individual's response to improvisatory moments; a desire to be seen on the theatre stage or on camera can lead dancers to strive for “spectacle” (for example, power moves) instead of simply responding to the music and feeling the beat. I discuss in chapter 7 how traditional breaking techniques, such as “commando” – a transitional technique used in battles where one dancer executes a move, and another dancer begins their set with the same move – show up in the present, connecting new modes of dance performance to historical hip-hop practices.

Whilst I discuss the concepts of digital liveness and intermedial performance more thoroughly in chapter 4, I note here that this thesis views combinations of live and mediatised acts as “hybrid performance space”; that is, creating hybrid forms of liveness, which exist both within and through the technology employed on the “stage”. I draw from dance scholar Sherrill Dodds (2001), who constructs a theoretical paradigm with which to conceptualise “video dance” based on the notions of hybridity and fluidity. Through a post-ANT lens, I consider multiplicity, the role of technology (cameras and smartphones), and draw attention to the vibrant interplay between hip-hop bodily movement, clothing, and screen practices including: raw, unedited, short-form dance videos posted on Instagram; edited/ manipulated "class footages” on YouTube (Zimányi and Lanszki, 2020); and dance film made for the screen. Elements of time, space, location, and the energy of live performance are scrutinised in relation to their potential transformations through the camera’s eye. I explore the ability of screen dance to transcend not only the body’s physicality, but also spatial and geographical boundaries.

The collective body in hybrid hip-hop performance

“Situated bodies are not all situated in the same way […] and merely pointing out situatedness elides the real work of assessing the power differentials that practices like Hip Hop dance move in and through.” (Roberts, 2021: 10)

As mentioned in chapter 1 and explained later in chapter 5 (Methodological framework), this research is based on the premise that hip-hop knowledge is embodied and situated socially and materially through the cultural life of the hip-hop community. Expanding feminist science and technology studies scholar Donna Haraway’s (1988) concept of situated knowledges – her assertion that “partial perspectives” or situated knowledges can provide views from somewhere, rather than nowhere, or rather, an omniscient, human, white, heterosexual male stance (Haraway, 1988: 581) – I draw on the work of dance scholar Rosemarie Roberts, who asserts that situatedness is related to culture and history, margins and centre (Roberts, 2021: 10). In *Baring Unbearable Sensualities: Hip Hop Dance, Bodies, Race, and Power (2021)* Roberts argues that in hip-hop dance, as in other Afro-diasporic dance forms, black and brown bodies carry their racialised histories and sensualities that can be “seen” by moving beyond an ocular centric approach, that is, an approach that privileges the sense of sight. She explains that situated bodies are not all situated in the same way and that the black and brown bodies that have long been “choregraphing a cultural and historical movement” are doing so from the margins (2021: 10). More specifically, she is interested in how embodied knowledge of power, racialisation, and resistance manifests through a “collective body” in hip-hop dance (Roberts, 2021: 10).

Roberts refers to dancer, scholar and social activist Randy Martin’s conceptualisation of a collective body. In his analysis of studio hip-hop dance in *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics* (1998), Martin discusses the relationship between what he calls “composite bodies” and groupings like multiculturalism, nationalism, and imagined communities. These broad, socially constructed categories are important to his thinking

about the body because they are in-motion “cultural processes that emanate from different sources and never fully rest” (1998: 110). He writes:

> It is not a body that is one but multiple, not the neat divide of self and society, of the personal and the mediated, of presence and absence. The composite body is less an empirical type than a heuristic for thinking the physical constitution of complex social relations. (Martin, 1998: 110)

Martin’s composite body presumes the differences of individual bodies and contends with power, particularly through multiculturalism. Specifically, Martin locates notions of multiculturalism within bodies that dialogue hip-hop and differing socioeconomic experiences through aerobics. He suggests that the dancing body’s power is in its ability to negotiate several factors simultaneously, including the manifestation of social norms that typically remain unspoken. According to Martin: “Dance both appears in the conjuncture of imaginary and performative spaces and puts the constitutive features of a composite body on display, for dance is both a bodily practice that figures an imagined world and a momentary materialization through performance of social principles that otherwise remain implicit” (Martin, 1998: 134). In line with this thinking, my research provides empirical evidence of how hip-hop dancing bodies are constituted and the processes by which they become a collective body. Where Martin focuses on multiculturalism and nationalism, Roberts considers individualism, collectivity, difference, and diversity as “in-motion cultural processes” that circulate in and through bodies, against dominant discourses and positions (Roberts, 2021: 12). Like Roberts, I explore the sociality at the heart of the collective body and the connections purposefully forged among hip-hop dancers, but I do this through the material. Using actor-network theory and the new materialist concepts outlined in chapter 4, I argue that a collective body is created when differently situated bodies enact their collective agency in collaboration with non-humans – materials, fashion objects, cultural concepts, and media technologies.

Towards a hip-hop feminist framework

My chosen research sample created opportunities for varying analyses; the performers and performances presented in the empirical chapters reflect a collective body based on differently positioned bodies – women, men, queer, white, black, and Asian – in a global hip-hop network. A shared quality among the practitioners is that they operate in the tension between the dichotomous framing of hip-hop and choreography, often blurring the lines between choreographic and improvisational, individual and collective, and innovation and tradition (Roberts, 2021: 125). In order to identify and document innovation and fluidity, I paid close attention to hip-hop traditions and ideologies that emerged and re-emerged across the data – a persistent one being the heteronormative binary between a female body and a masculine body in performance. Despite the high levels of freedom and experimentation that hip-hop dance inspires, it also frequently generates disciplined bodies and hierarchies which confine individuals to gendered exclusions and inclusions.

It is widely understood that the aesthetics of hip-hop dance, of breaking especially are "steeped in performances of cliched masculinity" (Johnson, 2014: 15; see also Gunn, 2013, 2021; LaBoskey, 2001). For example, in the earliest account of breaking, Banes (1981) highlights the "macho quality" she found embodied in the dance form in terms of its "ritual combat," its "sexual braggadocio," and the "physical risk involved" in executing movements (Aprahamian, 2020: 41). The confrontational and aggressive qualities of breaking have since been examined and found to be more aligned with conventional notions of masculinity than femininity in Western culture. This thesis contributes to a body of work conducted by scholars and practitioners such as Rachael "Ray" Gunn (2021) and Serouj "Midas" Aprahamian (2020), which highlights the challenges women face when taking on a form coded as "masculine". In his article, *There were Females that Danced Too* (2020), Aprahamian seeks to recover the history of women in breaking and considers how perceptions of breaking's gendered past affects its practice in the present. He enlightens on how breaking – unlike other dance forms that

assign specific roles for men and women – allows its participants to share in its movement vocabulary and challenge one another without regard to gender. Through various anecdotal accounts from self-proclaimed b-boys and b-girls in New York's nascent breaking scene, Aprahamian explains that both women and men historically engaged in competitive interaction and displays. For example, young women were deeply involved in activities such as spontaneously challenging and "burning" competitors – a "kinesthetic concept dictated by originality, musicality, wit, and competition" (2020: 43-44). Aprahamian points out that women who engaged in burning did not view their dancing as "masculine" or "unfeminine". Rather, dominant/ Western notions of masculinity and "external values" have been embedded in the practice from those outside the culture (2020: 45).

From her situated position as an active breaker in Sydney, Australia, Gunn highlights both women's inability to escape gendered markers in breaking – for example, the exclusionary term "b-boy" used to refer to breaking practice and related media ("b-boy mixtapes" and "b-boy tutorials") – and the transgressive potential in women's participation in hip-hop. According to Gunn, gender is a "stylised effect" (2021: 12); she encourages researchers to challenge institutionalised positions that reinforce essentialist and dichotomous boundaries and definitions through what she calls a "hip-hop feminist framework" (2021: 4). Gunn refers to Johnson's notion of "badass femininity" (2014), an important concept for this research as it re-signifies qualities typically associated with masculinity through women whose work in dance and music move these gender performances from the margins of society to centre stage (Johnson, 2014: 15). Johnson defines badass femininity as:

> [A] performance that eschews notions of appropriateness, respectability, and passivity demanded of ladylike behavior in favor of confrontational, aggressive, and even outright offensive, crass, or explicit expressions of a woman's strength. These expressions are not aligned with masculinity. They are expressions of femininity that rely

on a brazen and authoritative stance, and are accessed through the permissive space of performance. (Johnson, 2014: 20)

Thus, Johnson, Gunn, and Aprahamian position women hip-hop dancers as more than objects for the male gaze, or objects to be consumed. They situate women as important historical (and contemporary) actors that *produce* hip-hop culture. Johnson's claim of badass femininity is significant as it goes against reading b-girls through masculine categories like that of the "tomboy", the most culturally salient social category available to b-girls (Johnson, 2014: 19). A contribution of this thesis is that it builds on efforts to understand female and feminine masculinities, queer and non-normative masculinities through the fashioned, hip-hop dancing body and the permissive space of performance. A benefit of the ANT approach is that it allowed me to trace associations and connect three of my interviewees to prominent female breakers that remain leaders in the hip-hop community, highlighting not only expressions of badass femininity, but also the connectedness of the global hip-hop network.

For example, Flash revealed during an interview[28] that one of his first teachers in New York was the iconic b-girl Ana "Rokafella" Garcia. Notably, Flash derided himself for his initial hesitance about being taught by a woman and preferring to train with her husband Gabriel "Kwikstep" Dionisio. He expressed pride in his association with two of New York's hip-hop "legends", especially Rokafella. In a conversation with Nine about his involvement in the early breaking scene in the Midlands, he recalled being at jams and events with the UK's first female breaker, Hanifa Queen Hudson, also known as "Bubbles", who danced in the 1980s with a renowned Wolverhampton crew called *The B-Boys*. During another interview, Shortbread described being recruited for an all-female international breaking collective called *Heart Breakerz,* made up of twenty women from around the world, including the UK's Roxanne Milliner, also known as "B-girl Roxy", and Miami-based b-girl Alexander "Ladie One" Graniella. Through these emergent examples, I

[28] Duarte, K. (2018). Interview by K. Jones, 20 January.

discuss in later chapters how b-girls contend with dominant discourses in order to embody non-hegemonic, marginalised femininities; and as Johnson points out, participate in a discourse about women and breaking, whether they like it or not, "just by doing it" (Johnson, 2014: 24).

I discuss in chapter 8 how hip-hop's "inherent masculine qualities" are interpreted differently not only on the bodies of women, but also on the bodies of feminised men. The group, Houston Dance Collective, exemplifies how gender norms in breaking culture – which manifest through established gestural language and "small gestures of humorous or violent retribution", "sexual domination", "shooting", and "chopping off heads" (Johnson, 2014: 15) – can become subverted or otherwise transformed by the fashioned, dancing body in hybrid performance space. Post-ANT's focus on multiplicity, diversity, and hybridity allowed a more nuanced investigation of these dancers' experiences and a better understanding of the varied behaviours, attitudes, and values of different types of people engaged with hip-hop dance practice. I later outline key aspects of the data analysis, most especially how clothing was a significant actor that helped practitioners either conform to, or free the dancing body from prefabricated gendered stereotypes, representations, and solidities. I articulate how clothing, in its interaction with the dancing body in hybrid space, facilitates a queering of hip-hop dance.

In her article, *Dancing Away Distinction*, Gunn (2019) presents the "all style" battle – which incorporates various street dance styles (such as breaking, popping, locking, [freestyle] hip hop, waacking, krumping and house) and intermixes divergent performativities, styles and cultural histories – as "a powerful equalizer" (2019: 21) that diminishes hierarchical distinctions between styles and cultures and reconstitutes hip-hop's rigid hierarchies of gender and sexuality (Gunn, 2019: 13). Gunn states that there are greater reverberations created by the all style battle than merely creating an egalitarian dance floor (though she feels that is still important). Specifically, all style battles transform the perception of gender performance. Through examples of her own all style battling experience, Gunn describes how breaking can be confronted with waacking – a style that queers the very idea

of “man” and “woman” and the power structures that enable (and normalises) cisgender heteromasculine dominance. In this instance, gender performance on the all style dance floor becomes arbitrary, a parody. Thus, the underlying ideologies that normalise the policing of gender performance in breaking are eradicated in all style battles: “the forced interactions and connections with other styles recontextualize bodily performances” (Gunn, 2019: 13). Expanding this point of view, I examine Breakin’ Convention as an “equalizing space”; a space in which ways of moving are vast and diverse, and the performances of bodies are interpreted in significantly different ways. I am particularly interested in the “myriad stylizations of the body” (Gunn, 2019: 19) that occur in hip-hop theatre, and the growing movement of “openly gay” and gender-fluid artists who are pushing the boundaries of the idealised hip-hop body and persona, despite hip-hop’s heterosexist structures. Through an ANT lens (see chapter 4), I propose that *matter* facilitates a critical intervention into these structures.

Summary

This chapter has situated the thesis within the field of hip-hop studies and a growing body of crucial analyses of hip-hop dance cultures and practices. It has contextualised the framing of the hip-hop performer as, what I refer to as a *material bodily assemblage*; which is an amalgamation of material agencies that are not only physical, but also extend to the social and cultural. I have provided a historical overview of hip-hop culture, its origins, associated dance forms, and firmly embedded the aesthetic foundations of hip-hop dance within the African diaspora. This chapter has also drawn together a range of ethnographic studies to highlight the global scope of hip-hop dance practices. It has drawn together multiple dance styles and genres from the past fifty years, alongside their histories, to bring discourses and politics surrounding intersections of gender, race, class, and sexuality to the fore. By exposing hip hop’s embedded dichotomies and rigid hierarchies of gender and sexuality, I have positioned dance as a political practice and pointed to the capacities of the fashioned, dancing body – as “moving matter” – to dissolve distinctions, or simply trouble powerful social processes

enacted on the body. The following chapter turns the conversation towards hip-hop fashion and explores how specific wearables, brands, and ideologies around dress have endured as integral products of the early street dance and breaking scene. Specifically, it considers how they have become powerful material actors in the hip-hop network and in dance performance through their spatial and temporal displacement.

3 Fashioning power and gender in hip-hop

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to identify significant fashion objects and styling strategies from hip-hop's history in order to highlight, in the empirical chapters, how and when they re-emerge in the present. I discuss how dressing “fresh” has remained a consistent creative practice for fifty years, one that enables performance, encourages social cohesion, and the establishment of empowering hip-hop identities. I explore how specific wearables, brands, and ideologies around dress have endured as integral products of the early street dance and breaking scene. Specifically, I consider how they have become powerful material actors in the hip-hop network and in dance performance through their spatial and temporal displacement. To keep this chapter as focused as possible, I have deliberately chosen to only include material – from interviews, documentaries, websites, journalistic articles, and scholarly texts – that prefix the words fashion, dress, style, and clothing with the term "hip-hop". I refer to broader concepts of fashion, dress, and costume that are relevant to my analytical framework in chapter 4 (Theoretical framework).

I must also point out that many of the sources included below use the terms fashion, style, clothing, and dress fluidly and interchangeably when referring to the culture of, and processes involved with, accessing, selecting, customising, and wearing clothes. I delineate the meaning of these topical terms in chapter 4 and clarify how they will be used throughout my analytical discussion. Here, I present what I have found to be the most significant contextualising material relating to hip-hop dress and discuss how it contributes to a deeper understanding of the fluidity of the fashioned, hip-hop dancing body. That is, its ability to dissolve spatial boundaries, and diminish hip-hop's hierarchical distinctions between styles and genres, as well as gender and sexual identities.

Fresh dress

As discussed in the previous chapter, hip-hop was the creative response of black and Latino youth whose lives were shaped by, among other things, poverty, forced migration, and racism in post-industrial New York. The distinctive style of dress that emerged alongside hip-hop played a fundamental role during these difficult times for it provided a way for those who had little or no control over their position in society to take control and ownership of their appearance (Jenkins, 2015). This is a central theme of American filmmaker and journalist Sacha Jenkins' compelling feature-length documentary *Fresh Dressed* (2015), which explores hip-hop's engrained cultural practices of dressing "fresh" – sporting a "fresh out of the box", or new and clean look – and looking "fly" – having the ability to do what no one else is doing, with clothing or otherwise. While scholars discuss how the importance of looking clean – whereby clothing is matching, free of stains, holes, and any sign of wear – is a principle omnipresent throughout African American culture (Chandler and Chandler-Smith, 2005; Miller, 2009; Tulloch, 2016), Jenkins highlights how fresh dress, in its earliest manifestations, allowed the hip-hop generation to strike out against its invisibility.

The documentary maps the rise of hip-hop through the lens of New York street style and offers a vivid and honest account of aspiration, self-projection, and the street-level appropriation of luxury exclusivity. The film is inspired by iconic hip-hop documentaries such as *Wild Style* (directed by Charlie Ahearn, 1983) and *Style Wars* (directed by Tony Silver, 1983), the earliest feature-length films to focus on New York's b-boying and graffiti scene. However, Jenkins' work is unique in that it emphasises dress, the reasons why members of the hip-hop community dress the way they dress, and how this dress was initially a reaction to what was happening in society. The musical luminaries featured in the film, including Kanye West, Pharrell Williams, A$AP Rocky and Nas, and fashion authorities including former editor-at-large of American Vogue André Leon Talley, Italian designer Riccardo Tisci, and urban menswear designer Karl Kani, discuss the attitude, or "cultural psyche" that spawned the distinctive hip-hop aesthetic. A

recurring theme amongst these voices is the centrality of dress in hip-hop and how it allows individuals to represent and define their own presentation to the world. They explain how in the formative years of hip-hop, people who had little money developed unique ways of wearing clothes, which came to be identified in a crowd and allowed them to stand out.

The film provides a snapshot of hip-hop's most memorable styles and trends between the late 1970s and 2010s and explains the meanings behind them. This is much needed insight for this research since my initial investigations into hip-hop dance, discussed in chapter 6, indicated that practitioners are sometimes unaware of the histories that produce their sartorial choices. For example, several dancers I encountered were introduced to hip-hop through "commercial" and streetdance classes and workshops. These sessions tended to focus on a short piece of choreography and/ or preparation for upcoming showcases and competitions. There was no specific teaching of hip-hop "foundation" or history, and certain dancers expressed that their personal style was influenced by those around them, or dancers they had seen in YouTube videos – produced by viral hip-hop choreographers such as, Parris Goebel, Will "Willdabeast" Adams, and Tricia Miranda (see chapter 7).

Fresh Dressed explains how the "do-it-yourself" customising practices that have evolved over time in hip-hop can be traced back to the biker-inspired outlaw style of 1970s street gang culture, which consisted of black Lee bell-bottom jeans, biker jackets, and denim jackets with cut-off sleeves. Jenkins documents how this street gang look evolved, becoming cleaner and more refined in the 1980s when innovators like Shirt Kings and cult designer Dapper Dan began taking what they saw in the black community, remixing it, and turning it into caricature. Shirt Kings, inspired by the bold and colourful graffiti art in the New York streets, emblazoned sweatshirts, t-shirts, and jeans with crew names and "tags" – stylised personal signatures, also known as monikers. They also found irony in the harsh realities of their lives, for example, the 1980s drug pandemic, which they satirised by featuring images of Mickey Mouse smoking crack on their clothing. This thesis highlights how

customisation practices, such as spray-painting and embellishing garments, re-emerge in hybrid, hip-hop performance space. Specifically, it enlightens on how the costume emerging from collaboration between choreographers, dancers, fashion stylists, and clothing designers, embodies histories and symbolic practices specific to hip-hop culture, thus reproduces and strengthens it over space and time.

Many of the trends and fashion staples outlined in *Fresh Dressed* have previously been discussed by scholars including, Polhemus (1994), who mentions b-boys and “fly-girls” in his examination of youth subcultures and street styles; Rose (1994) and Chang (2005), who chronicle the early hip-hop scene but focus largely on its music, politics and implications in black America; and Romero (2012), Lewis and Gray (2013) who discuss the explosion (and eventual implosion) of urban wear but in the specific context of the American menswear industry. What makes Jenkins’ visual narrative remarkable is its postulation of hip-hop dress as a social and political entity. A limitation of *Fresh Dressed*, however, is its examination of hip-hop dress from a localised New York perspective. I therefore draw attention to the work of fashion scholar and designer Van Dyk Lewis, who discusses hip-hop dress in the context of the African diaspora triangle comprised of Kingston (Jamaica), London and New York, and provides an extensive list of fashion objects, trends and innovations that contribute to what this thesis refers to as the “hip-hop bodily assemblage”, a concept which I define below.

The hip-hop bodily assemblage

In his article titled *Dilemmas in African Diaspora Fashion* (2003), hip-hop scholar and fashion designer Van Dyk Lewis contends that the diaspora triangle illustrates contrasting but mutually reliant fashion cultures, and that creative and innovative ideas around fashion are continually transmitted between the locations (Lewis, 2003: 164). He provides an extensive list of fashion objects and trends, designated “diaspora fashion”, that he believes contributed to the (re)construction of identity in hip-hop, amongst other black

cultures, for example, Jamaican dancehall culture, between the late 1970s and 1990s. The list includes many garments and accessories that I observed in hip-hop performance spaces during the fieldwork, such as: t-shirts (often emblazoned with the logo of leading sportswear manufacturers), hooded sweatshirts, windbreakers, tracksuits (Adidas, Puma, Le Coq Sportif, Tacchini), basketball shoes (Converse), sneakers (Nike, Adidas, Puma) with oversized and/ or untied laces, bucket hats (Kangol), Cazals (oversized sunglasses), heavy gold jewellery, baseball caps, basketball shirts, bandannas, and combat boots (Lewis, 2003: 167-169).

A significant point that Lewis makes is that material fashion objects are “encoded” as symbols of the black experience and that “the Diaspora uses its interrelation with fashion objects to signify the Diaspora’s emergent state and as a measure of social well-being" (2003: 173). It can thus be inferred that in hip-hop, clothing is imbued with cultural meaning over time and can reflect, either intentionally or unintentionally, individual and collective experiences. A contribution of this thesis is that it explores, through ANT, how clothing and costume is networked into a wider context both historical and social through its material agency. That is, how tacit knowledge, or embodied cultural knowledge, is transmitted between human and non-human actors and incorporated into material, bodily assemblages which ultimately enable performances. Lewis highlights the role of mainstream media in this process, and how it further situates diaspora fashion’s position by postulating it as a youth culture rather than subculture, even though many followers of New York hip-hop are mature and select various mannerisms of hip-hop fashion as a lifestyle choice (Lewis, 2003: 173). This is an important point given that contemporary hip-hop dance communities are multi-generational. My research considers the role of media but concentrates on new media platforms such as YouTube and Instagram, and how they influence participants from different age groups. I note the similarities and differences in media engagement between age groups and consider how this is reflected in terms of the creation (and presentation) of fluid hip-hop/ social identities through dress.

Implied resistance in hip-hop wearables

In the early New York hip-hop scene especially, youth were required to adopt a sense of resiliency in order to navigate the sometimes-volatile terrain. A tactical way for them to do this was to find strength in numbers and form crews and collectives. These alliances continue to reflect the core values of hip-hop culture, an important one being that one's dress style must always be fresh and dance moves sharp and cleanly executed. Each individual member brings their own knowledge and personality to the crew. What starts off as casual and social practice in the local community, can then evolve into professional practice, performing together and/ or battling other crews in the public sphere. Lewis also discusses the concept of "battle costume" which, according to him, is a diaspora-wide tendency best understood in relation to the paramilitary-style apparel worn by organisations which grew out of the civil rights era (Lewis, 2003: 175). He explains how the collective dreams of many black people in the 1970s were of combating their oppressors. As well as other manifestations, the black liberation struggles of Garveyism[29], and Rastafarianism[30] utilised military dress as a method of crystallising a sense of solidarity, pride, and common purpose among followers (ibid).

According to Lewis, there is implied resistance in the material objects introduced during the 1970s civil rights movement, for example, "combat trousers, battle jackets, and berets", which he claims gave individuals a deeper sense of identity and purpose (2003: 175). This is noteworthy since I observed multiple versions of battle uniform during the fieldwork, with manifestations including matching jackets and t-shirts customised with crew names and other insignia, as well as boiler suits, tracksuits, sneakers and hats. The concept was also mentioned by certain practitioners during

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[29] Jamaican-born Marcus Mosiah Garvey was a proponent of the Black Nationalism and Pan-Africanism movements, to which end he founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League. Garvey advanced a Pan-African Philosophy which inspired a global mass movement, known as Garveyism. Garveyism would eventually inspire others, from the Nation of Islam to the Rastafari movement. (Dorsey, 1991)

[30] Rastafarianism emerged in Jamaica in the 1930's; starting as a dynamic religious movement which, through time, transformed itself into a movement that challenges prevailing social, economic and political orders. (Chawane, 2006)

interviews. For example, New York-based b-boy Flash recalled the "militaristic" training regimen and battle uniforms of his former crew, Soul Circle. He stated:

> It was very intense [...] they trained almost militaristically. You know what I mean? It was... just very, very regimented [...] almost like being in the military. Kwikstep, that was just his mentality. Even when it came to battles, he told us "Make sure when you go to battles, you're wearing this!" These certain colours, almost like, you know, your uniform. For all our battles, we had to wear like blue and white to let people know that that was our crew, that we were here (Duarte, 2018).

I investigate the symbolism behind some of these garments that have endured as integral products of the early street dance and b-boy scene in chapter 6. I observe how, during various stages of performance, these objects act to transform the wearer, the space, and the perceiver. In line with both Lewis and Jenkins, I seek to demonstrate not only how dress allows hip-hop dance practitioners to express their individual and collective identities and be recognised for their originality (which is fundamental to hip-hop's ideology), but also how dress acts as a form of resistance against societal pressures.

Personal aspirations and brand engagement

A key example of how the hip-hop community used dress as a form of resistance in the 1990s and early-2000s, is the introduction (and success) of hip-hop clothing brands. Hip-hop clothing exerted its own influence on the American fashion industry when apparel brands, founded primarily by African American men involved in the rap music industry, fed the demand for the hip-hop aesthetic that had long been creatively mixed with luxury designer labels – such as Gucci, Fendi, Louis Vuitton and Prada – and urban fashion trends by its wearers (Lewis and Gray, 2013: 2). Speaking in *Fresh Dressed* André Leon Talley states that, "a lot of people who are in hip-hop have aspirations

and a lot of aspirations are, can you go into that store and buy that brand?" (Talley in *Fresh Dressed*, 2015). Rapper Rakim Mayers, better known by his stage name A$AP Rocky, reinforces this sentiment stating on film that he has "high-end elite tastes." According to Mayers, and other featured hip-hop artists, fashion labels such as Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Fendi and Ralph Lauren signify success and represent the ultimate in luxury and the life that urban youth aspire to have. Mayers suggests that most urban youth want things they cannot attain, and that "they want to buy into a notion of superiority" (Mayers in *Fresh Dressed*, 2015). However, in the 1990s, various hip-hop artists and designers preferred to cultivate and live an elite lifestyle on their own terms, rather than emulate one (Kitwana, 2004: 114).

The black owned hip-hop brands that emerged in the American fashion industry include Cross Colors, founded in 1990 by designers Carl Jones and Thomas Walker; FUBU (For Us, By Us), established in 1992; Phat Farm founded by hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons in 1992; and Karl Kani by former Cross Colors designer Carl Williams, who launched his own line in 1994. Largely recognised as hip-hop's first fashion brand, Cross Colors paved the way for other black owned brands seeking to sell their products in major department stores. Distinguishable from other clothing brands on the market at that time, it capitalised on the fashion trend seen in New York City subways of wearing extremely oversized jeans, by making baggy jeans with fitted waists. Cross Colors also featured caps, jackets, and t-shirts in a vibrant colour palette. Initially targeted to young black men and women of the hip-hop generation, the line quickly gained popularity with white suburban teenagers as it could be found in many shopping outlets throughout the United States (Jenkins 2015; Romero, 2012). The brand was adopted by various celebrities after being featured in 1990s sitcom, *Fresh Prince of Bel Air.* At a time when celebrity endorsement for brands was new, Cross Colors was able to use Will Smith and other celebrities as marketers for the brand.

The late 1990s and early-2000s saw the introduction of further menswear brands including Sean John, founded in 1998 by music mogul Sean "Diddy" Combs; Rocawear, founded in 1999 by Roc-A-Fella Records co-founders

Damon Dash and Shawn "Jay-Z" Carter; and G Unit Clothing, founded in 2003 by rapper Curtis “50 Cent” Jackson and fashion designer Marc Ecko. By staking a claim in the American fashion industry and turning their labels into multi-million-dollar companies, black business owners and rappers rivalled designers such as Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger, creating label-based clothing their urban customers could relate to. However, the visible success of numerous brands sparked great competition and the hip-hop clothing market became oversaturated (Lewis and Gray, 2013). By the late 2000s, brands experienced declining sales and bankruptcy for various reasons. Some consumers abandoned urban fashion trends after the aesthetics were widely adopted outside the black community by designers such as Tommy Hilfiger and POLO – established white-owned brands that were able to obtain more department store floor space than "urbanwear” brands (Romero, 2012). Other consumers, hip-hop enthusiasts from the 1980s and 1990s began to mature, which was reflected in their style. Brands such as Cross Colors and Phat Farm were unable to keep up with the maturing black consumer (Lewis and Gray, 2013; Romero, 2012). Additionally, hip-hop fashion influencers, such as Jay-Z in the latter part of the 20th century, shifted their style to a more tailored look that included suits and suit coordinates (Lewis and Gray, 2013: 7).

This research acknowledges the rise (and fall) of hip-hop clothing brands as an important part of hip-hop history. It argues that brands are *assemblages* (Lury, 2004) formed by different processes and organisational activities as well as multiple human and non-human actors. In chapter 4, I discuss scholar Celia Lury’s (2004) approach to brands, which helps to understand how assemblages change and are sustained, how they form and dissolve. Drawing on ANT scholars Callon (1998) and Latour (1987), and constructivist philosophers Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Lury conceives brands as *networks of relations* between consumers and organisations and complex objects that are performative, distributed, and relational (Lury, 2004, 2009). Whilst the abovementioned brands (and other athletic brands synonymous with hip-hop, such as Adidas) are incorporeal and intangible, I argue that they are important performing actors in the hip-hop network. Brands help us

to understand how aspects of hip-hop history are embedded in garments and re-emerge, materially, in the present through practitioners' sartorial choices. Furthermore, they can be "a platform for patterning of [hip-hop] activity, a mode of organizing activities in time and space" (Lury, 2004: 1).

Whilst I have drawn attention to the interrelationship between socioeconomic marginality, personal aspiration, and brand engagement in hip-hop, this thesis looks beyond economic marginality and sets out to better understand how other aspects of a dancer's identity overlap and create interconnected modes of discrimination. Specifically, the embodiment of gendered and racialised difference. I must point out that "intersectionality" is relevant here – a term coined by critical race scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to understand overlapping or *intersecting* social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination. Whilst there is a bigger discussion to be had about this feminist concept, I take pause to acknowledge it because Crenshaw introduced the framework to systemically reveal the everyday lives of black and ethnicised women who are simultaneously positioned in multiple structures of dominance and power as gendered, raced, classed, colonised, and sexualised "others" (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). In chapter 7, I explore the personal costs of marginality for black "othered" women through the materiality of the dance film *Our Bodies Back*. I focus on three black, female dancers' agency and subjectivity in relation to decolonising their space on the margin. I consider how marginality, as feminist scholar and activist bell hooks (1991) argues, can be a space of radical location in which women of colour can situate themselves in relation to the dominant group through "other ways of knowing".

Stylin' out

A key theme that I take from *Fresh Dressed* is that superiority in hip-hop starts with your "feet first" (Nasir "Nas" Jones in *Fresh dressed*, 2015), and how "getting fresh" involves the whole outfit being built around a person's footwear. I reflect on the sneaker as a precious cultural artefact in hip-hop

and street culture, which is described by scholar Iain Denny, in his doctoral work on the cultural meanings associated with sneakers and the consumer behaviour of sneaker collectors/ resellers, as an “all-consuming subcultural obsession” that serves as a means to communicate social status, virility, sexuality, and many other qualities (Denny, 2020: 1). Similarly, Yuniya Kawamura, sociologist and author of *Sneakers: Fashion, Gender and Subculture* (2016), explains that for sneaker enthusiasts (or so-called “sneakerheads”), “sneakers are a subtle and a latent expression of conspicuous consumption” (Kawamura, 2016: 3). The more sneakers one has, and the more rare and exclusive they are, demonstrates a person’s cultural knowledge and wealth, which elicits respect. However, inner city youths in 1980s New York had limited opportunities to purchase expensive sneakers, therefore, keeping them fresh for as long as possible became a way to signal status. *Fresh Dressed* depicts how it was common practice for wearers to go to great lengths in attempting to preserve their sneakers in a “box-fresh” state, covering their shoes with plastic bags in poor weather and carrying toothbrushes to clean them.

These strategies for getting fresh and maintaining one’s appearance relate to similar concepts, such as English and Africana studies scholar Monica L. Miller’s concept of “stylin’ out”. In her book *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity* (2009), Miller illuminates the agency of clothing and discusses the black tradition of “dressing to the nines, showing their sartorial stuff, especially when the occasion calls for it and, more tellingly, often when it does not” (Miller, 2009: 1). Although Miller does not give emphasis to the nascent era of hip-hop, her “stylin’ out” concept is representative of the proud and self-styled members of the global hip-hop community. She does refer to “stylistic mavericks” from later decades in hip-hop – such as rap artists Andre 3000 and Sean “Diddy” Combs – who she describes as “self-styling subjects who use immaculate clothing, arch wit, and pointed gesture to announce their often controversial presence” (ibid). I am particularly interested in Miller’s use of the term “dandyism” – a mode of self-presentation which seeks to create a sense of superiority in the dandy himself through scrupulous attention to appearance,

dress, conduct and social standing (2009: 9). Whilst Miller focuses exclusively on the black male dandy and highlights his potential to destabilise norms of masculinity and sexuality (2009: 13), my research considers the possibility of alternative dandyisms – masculine, feminine, and fluid – given the diverse nature of hip-hop dance and its widespread communities of practice.

Carol Tulloch, author and scholar of dress and diaspora studies, reinforces Miller's notion of stylin' out in her critical reflections on dress associated with the African Diaspora. In *The Birth of Cool: Style Narratives of the African Diaspora*, she cites "cool" as being "an expansive diasporic act of black aesthetics" as well as "a critical tool in the projection of the aesthetic of presence" (Tulloch, 2016: 4). Tulloch examines the creative responses, or "style narratives" (2010: 276), of people whose lives were shaped by, among other things, colonialism, forced migration, and racism. For example, 1940s jazz singer and style icon Billie Holiday, who used creative ways to transform and subvert the clothes of white people to make them meaningful to black experience. Building on such theories, I posit that sartorial pride, an awareness of looking fresh and new, and respect for and obsession with specific fashion objects are enduring aspects of hip-hop culture. I investigate, in chapter 6, how these entrenched cultural practices are passed from generation to generation between practitioners and integrated into hip-hop performance, considering not only the agency of the wearer but also the agency of the non-human actors; for example, the sneaker, and the toothbrush which keeps it pristine.

Whilst sneakers provide a way for individuals to locate themselves in the social order through fashion, it is important to recognise the shoe's ability to capture and mythologise key moments in hip-hop history too. In *Sneakers: Fashion, Gender and Subculture*, Kawamura suggests that those outside of sneakerhead culture do not recognise the sneakers' value and only the insiders are able to share their meaning (Kawamura, 2016: 3). This can also be said for specific sneakers within hip-hop culture, the most iconic of which is perhaps the Adidas shell-toe "Superstar". After the release of a track called

My Adidas by Run- D.M.C. – a rap trio from Queens, New York – caused sales of the Adidas Superstar shoe to spike in 1986, the German sportswear brand and the rap group began a highly successful and lucrative partnership, which was the first formal endorsement of a sporting goods company by non-sports stars (Turner, 2015 cited in Denny, 2020: 4). In a 2014 article by journalist Zac Dubasik for *Sole Collector*, a leading source in sneaker news, Run- D.M.C. member Darryl "D.M.C." McDaniels explains that the *My Adidas* record was written in response to a campaign by Dr. Deas, a New York-based community activist who argued that youth in the streets who wore sneakers without shoe laces – a political statement and reference to the "prison style" worn by incarcerated black men – were thugs, drug dealers and the low lives of the community (McDaniels, 2014). According to McDaniels, Run-D.M.C. sought to challenge this view by showing that urban youth could be successful and do positive things through hip-hop whilst wearing sneakers and streetwear; for example, headlining concerts all over the world and performing at high-profile charitable events including Live Aid in 1985.

An image of Run-D.M.C. members Joseph "Rev Run" Simmons, McDaniels and the late Jason "Jam Master Jay" Mizell crouching in front of the Eiffel Tower in Paris on the *Together Forever* tour in 1987, depicts them each wearing Adidas Superstar sneakers and a 3-Stripes Adidas tracksuit accessorised with gold "dookie rope" chains around their necks and black fedoras on their heads. Their image was cemented into popular culture, and it became the accepted uniform of aspiring b-boys around the world. McDaniels explains that:

> Even before we had the record deal, we wore Adidas in the hood. You would save your allowance to get Adidas […] You would just take a job anywhere just to save up enough money to get some fresh, new Adidas. (McDaniels, 2014).

For hip-hop insiders, Run D.M.C's association with the Adidas brand represented the group's identification with everyone else in the street, but

also the prospect of success and wealth. Those who aspired to life beyond their neighbourhood in the mid-late 1980s came to view Adidas as a statement of big dreams that offered the possibility of transcending their current situation (Whitley, 2011: 188). Run D.M.C introduced a blueprint of universal b-boy style in the mid-1980s, and the 3-Stripes Adidas tracksuit remains a fixture in contemporary hip-hop dance spaces, from underground b-boy battles and jams to hip-hop theatre events, and online classes and conceptual videos. My research highlights connections such as these and seeks to articulate the participants' own understanding of the histories that inform their clothing choices. That is, the significance of cultural artefacts like the Adidas tracksuit and what their role is in hip-hop dance communities and performances today.

Sampling, remixing, and subversive styling

Zoe Whitley, curator and author of *Dressing Viciously: Hip-Hop Music, Fashion and Cultural Crossover* – which featured in *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion 1970 – 1990* (2011) the publication that accompanied the V&A exhibition of the same name – discusses how branded goods have shared an affinity with hip-hop since the late 1970s. She explains how European fashion houses such as Pierre Cardin, Louis Vuitton, MCM and Gucci carried grand associations in socially deprived areas of New York in the 1980s, even after some of these brands waned in popularity with their wealthy white customers. According to Whitley, brands that older (white) generations once associated with wealth and the highest social status/ prestige were now being distributed through department stores or knock-off street vendors. Licensed T-shirts, watches, leisurewear and perfumes were particularly prized by urban youths when heavily monogrammed with eye-catching logos, which served to garner recognition from others and support hope of class mobility (Whitley, 2011: 187). The high retail price of a desirable item formed a large part of its appeal, and those who could afford named rather than generic clothing set themselves apart from others in the street. While authenticity was valued, highly visible branding made replicas

acceptable and the more affordable option. Name brands, even if misspelled or bearing an imprecise logo, proclaimed a degree of fashionability and trend savvy.

Hip-hop's creative appropriation of styles in the 1980s to early-1990s further extended to the creation of what would later become known as "urban luxury fashion" (Lewis and Gray, 2013). Harlem-based tailor, Daniel Day, aka "Dapper Dan" claims that he made luxury wear accessible for people in the streets, or as he recalls, "Blackenised it to make it look good on us" (Dapper Dan, in *Fresh Dressed*, 2015). The cult designer signified street luxury by mixing status symbols such as mink, ostrich, crocodile, and python, and re-appropriating high-fashion labels such as Louis Vuitton, Gucci and Fendi. He would rework counterfeit monogrammed Louis Vuitton fabric into a panel of a leather tracksuit or a stripe down the leg of track pants, and Gucci's Gs on a baseball cap or bomber jacket. Essentially, his unique and custom pieces were derived from sampling, remixing, and looping fashion, just as the rappers and emcees were doing with music. Dapper Dan's designs were popularised by major hip-hop artists including Salt N Pepa and LL Cool J, as well as sports celebrities such as Mike Tyson. However, several copyright infringement lawsuits were brought against the designer by luxury brands including Fendi, MCM and Louis Vuitton, which led to the closure of his iconic store in 1992.

In 2017, Dapper Dan became embroiled in a public cultural appropriation debate when a near-copy of one of his designs featured in Gucci's Cruise 2018 collection with no apparent credit to his work. Gucci intercepted public criticism towards themselves by announcing an upcoming collaboration with the tailor, which many viewed as Gucci's attempt to avoid negative press, but Dan himself viewed as an opportunity. In an interview featured in British newspaper *The Guardian* (2017), Dapper Dan contends that his partnership with Gucci has afforded him a global audience and therefore success. He states, "I feel that if I can be accepted by a brand on this level, that sends a message to people of colour all over the planet that we can finally do this" (Dapper Dan cited in Cartner-Morley, 2017). There is a bigger debate to be

had around intellectual property and the appropriation and re-appropriation of Gucci's and Dapper Dan's designs, but my intention here is to acknowledge Dan's significance in hip-hop history and argue for the material agency and transformative power of hip-hop clothing. I use his story to highlight the "do-it-yourself" element of hip-hop fashion as well as the opportunities that are afforded by designing and wearing clothes not necessarily meant for you in unique and creative ways. For example, Dapper Dan's lucrative collaboration with Gucci, the re-opening of his Harlem atelier in 2018, and the publication of his memoir, *Dapper Dan: Made in Harlem* in 2019.

Fashioning "badass femininity"

A more recent exploration of hip-hop dress on film is Farah X and Lisa Cortes' documentary *The Remix: Hip Hop X Fashion*, which debuted at the Tribeca Film Festival on 3 May 2019. *The Remix* unpacks representation in the fashion industry and celebrates the pioneering "style architects" who shaped the look of the New York hip-hop scene in the 1990s and early-2000s. The documentary features interviews with black visionaries including Dapper Dan but focuses on female stylists and designers Misa Hylton and April Walker, whom were both committed to dressing hip-hop's emerging rap artists but were overlooked by the hip-hop industry and the American fashion industry. Prior to *The Remix's* celebration of Walker and Hylton's work, the two stylists were excluded from histories of hip-hop mainly due to mainstream hip-hop being a space largely codified as male, even "hypermasculine" (Whitley, 2011: 191). The film illustrates the different approaches taken by women throughout hip-hop's history, on and off camera, to negotiate the culture's gendered terrain. For example, female artists such as MC Lyte and Queen Latifah chose to obfuscate their sexuality, at least initially, by adopting the prevailing androgynous styles – baggy clothes and "finger waves"[31] – to establish equality amongst their male

[31] Finger waves are a hairstyle characterised by moulding/ setting the hair into S-shaped waves (curls) close to the scalp. The style is synonymous with the 1920s and 1930s – worn by iconic actresses and artists such as Josephine Baker. The re-emergence of the style in the 1990s –

counterparts. In an article titled *Fashioning Power and Gender in Hip-Hop* (2022), writer Angela Tate describes how MC Lyte and other women rappers of her generation wore streetwear that was almost unisex in fashion, and how the addition of large earrings, neatly pressed or crimped hair (often dyed a bold shade of auburn), and pastel colours to their "sartorial repertoire" marked a striving towards a specific expression of womanhood in hip-hop. By the end of the 1980s, female artists, and the first all-female rap group Salt-N-Pepa, provided a new template for women in hip-hop, a kind of "badass femininity" (Johnson, 2014). Instead of adopting the more androgynous style of previous female MCs, Salt, Pepa, and DJ Spinderella announced their presence in sequined jackets, big hats, ripped jeans, and later in loud colours and Afrocentric patterns, spandex, and teased blonde hair (Tate, 2022).

What draws me to Misa Hylton's story especially, is that she was one of the first hip-hop stylists employed during the 1990s to create impactful personae for emerging female artists, most notably Lil' Kim, and openly used what fashion scholar Jennifer Craik (2003) refers to as "techniques of femininity"; which are characterised by "techniques of display and projection of the female body" (2003: 43). For Hylton, the body was a site on which a "hyperfeminine" hip-hop ideal could be assembled. She redefined the idea of what a female rapper could look like, advocating garments such as mink coats and rhinestone-covered bikinis, along with brightly coloured wigs, accessories, and make-up. In a chapter titled *Styling 1990s Hip-Hop, Fashioning Black Futures*, which featured in *Fashion Stylists: History, Meaning and Practice* (2020) edited by Ane Lynge-Jorlén, fashion scholar Rachel Lifter offers the term "creative service work" to describe the invisible creative labour that went into developing a hip-hop artists' visual image in the 1990s. She describes how Hylton and other stylists' creative work involved sourcing and fitting clothes onto musicians' bodies in ways that would be visually stimulating to audiences, in a crowd at a concert or watching

popularised by hip-hop artists of the time, such as Missy Elliott – was aided by a movement towards shorter, more natural hair in the African American community. (Daniel, S. 2017)

television at home (Lifter, 2020: 150). Furthermore, Lifter explains how stylists, more so than other music industry personnel at the time, worked directly on and intimately with the bodies of artists and had to respond to their clients' psychologies, how they wanted to be perceived as artists and people (Ibid).

One of Hylton's most iconic designs was a breast-exposing lilac jumpsuit worn by Lil' Kim to the 1999 MTV Music Video Awards in New York. This particular look was sensationalised by the global press following the event and Lil' Kim's performative critique of gender norms played a central role in the development of her public persona. On one hand, Hylton, although overlooked until recently, played a significant role in the creation of Lil Kim's public image. Hylton thus represents an actor in a network comprising both human and non-human actors such as, artists, designers, stylists, garments/ fashion objects and technologies (e.g. cameras, televisions). On the other hand, the attention garnered by the lilac jumpsuit in and of itself suggests a material agency at play. Lil' Kim's (un)dressed body at the 1999 MTV VMAs refused the objectifying tropes of female representation and more specifically, responded to the contexts of televisual representation of music, through which it would be seen. The lilac jumpsuit with one breast exposed, its nipple covered by a sequinned pastie, accessorised with a purple wig and large platform shoes exaggerated the publicity camera's gaze to the point of its neutralisation (Lifter, 2020: 153). Put another way, the jumpsuit *became* powerful through its entanglement with other forms of matter, allowing Lil Kim to disturb hip-hop's rigid binaries and established hierarchies of gender and sexuality.

So far, I have discussed fashion as an important form of self-expression for the hip-hop generation. I have described a distinctive style of dress that embodies the attitudes and customs of the culture and shown that hip-hop style is not contingent upon any particular trend, yet certain rules of dress have remained a constant throughout the culture's fifty-year history. Anything goes in relation to attire and adornment, with two exceptions; it must be fresh and clean. In what follows, I look at some of the approaches adopted by

scholars whose focus is hip-hop dress. The intention is to highlight the scarcity of academic literature about clothing and costume from the situated position of the hip-hop performing body.

B-boy style

The focus of *Foundation* (2009), as mentioned in the previous chapter, is breaking/ b-boying and its prevalence in New York. Schloss does attend to the matter of clothing in this ethnographic study, stating that b-boys articulate and project their self-image through what they wear. He points out that the art of finding and/ or altering clothing so that it is serviceable for b-boying and also looks “flashy” and “unique” is a subtle one (Schloss, 2009: 78). During the fieldwork for my research, I observed certain dancers’ ability to mediate between these two concerns: combining athletic functionality with artistic creativity. I learned that a breaker’s clothing must allow for an extreme range of motion without binding the body or actually ripping. I discuss this in more detail in chapter 6. I also discuss how breakers often put considerable time and effort into planning an outfit, even if their demeanour suggested otherwise. This attitude of being consciously aware of your image, while at the same time acting unconcerned, is a variation of the “cool pose” – a tactic used by African Americans, primarily males, to project social competence, pride, dignity, self-esteem, and respect (Majors and Billson, 1992). According to Schloss, part of the performance of fashion lies in manifesting the effort that went into one’s appearance while simultaneously appearing not to care whether anyone notices or not (Schloss, 2009: 79).

Highlighting clothing’s role in demonstrating a b-boy’s control of the body, Schloss states that a foundational value of b-boying is that good b-boys and b-girls should be able to dance with the utmost intensity and still have enough control to avoid damaging, scuffing, or wrinkling their clothing. As b-boy “Phantom” explains in an interview with Schloss:

> If I can get down the whole night, and I have white sneakers and didn’t get one scuff on them, then I consider myself the victor […] because

> it's like, 'I got this sucker here trying to battle me. I'm gonna burn him, and I didn't even get my kicks dirty. (B-Boy Phantom cited in Schloss, 2009: 84)

The idea that this reflects – that one should be intense yet totally in control – is at the heart of the b-boy attitude and, for Schloss, is perhaps the single most significant aspect of the overall b-boy persona. Another important aspect of the b-boy persona is their readiness to honour themselves by displaying their name and/ or the name of their crew somewhere on their clothing. Historically, breakers were inclined to personalise everything from jewellery to accessories such as the ever-popular name belt (a belt with a buckle featuring the wearer's name or nickname), as well as clothing. Whilst this was often achieved with iron-on letters and patches on vests and t-shirts, the unspoken message was, "I assume you want to know who I am" (Schloss, 2009: 79). I discuss in the empirical chapters how the personalisation of one's attire remains a significant element of a hip-hop dancer's look, and how contemporary dancers continue the tradition of identifying themselves for the onlookers' benefit.

Fashioning masculinities

In a study titled *Hip-Hop Dress and Identity: A Qualitative Study of Music, Materialism, and Meaning* (2009), Courtney B. Suddreth investigates the role of dress in shaping and expressing identity within hip-hop. Whilst this study differs from my research in that it highlights the experiences of African American men and focuses on the musical element of hip-hop rather than dance, it is significant because it is one of few studies that look specifically at the use of clothing and material objects, including brand name apparel as status symbols within hip-hop culture, and uses in-depth interviewing as a primary technique to elicit the research data. What is also interesting is Suddreth's acknowledgement that hip-hop exists in many different forms and takes on different meanings for different people who identify with it (Suddreth, 2009: 113). She provides an understanding of the personal and

social impact of hip-hop from the perspective of dress and the relatively understudied population of African American men.

A significant finding in Suddreth's study is the pervasiveness of dress throughout the participants' own experiences and their opinion that hip-hop and dress are inextricably linked. She states that, for many of the participants, whose age ranged from 20-43, their first introduction to hip-hop music was an introduction to dress (Suddreth, 2009: 101). Suddreth explains how various hip-hop artists have used dress to "send a message to society" (ibid), particularly in the 1980s when artists focused on communicating membership within a unique subculture and creating a positive means of identification for black men. Her research participants' responses reflect this notion, with several recalling how they emulated the appearance of groups such as rap trio RUN-DMC (mentioned earlier in this chapter) who deliberately used dress as a unifier, but also as a way to distinguish the group and its followers from the mainstream. Another important finding from Suddreth's study is the degree to which the participants incorporated hip-hop styles into their personal appearance, which varied between age groups. Suddreth explains that among the younger research participants aged 20-29, brands seemed to play an important role in developing their personal style and that many looked to hip-hop to see what labels were popular and sought to incorporate these labels into their own dress styles (Suddreth, 2009: 102). In contrast, the older participants aged 33-43 reported that the style of their dress, such as the silhouette, was to some extent influenced by hip-hop but brands were less important than the actual fit of the apparel.

What is evident in Suddreth's study is the tension participants experience between being influenced by wider hip-hop culture and wanting to maintain uniqueness in the face of mainstream hip-hop (Suddreth, 2009: 110). Ambiguity also surfaces from a social perspective, with participants expressing concerns about balancing their individual identities with the collective hip-hop identity; this was particularly present among some of the older participants' responses (Suddreth, 2009: 110). Building on this notion, I describe in later chapters how the practitioners in my study utilise dress to

communicate, manipulate, and even conceal parts of their identity in order to fit with, or challenge, the social expectations of different genres and hip-hop dance environments. For example, when describing their costume for a staged event, Shortbread stated:

> It was meant to be oversized, but my concern was that I didn't want to be drowned in it [...] So yeah it was like a two-piece shirt and shorts. I love two-piece things like that, and I think that's a hip-hop thing. That's a proper hip-hop thing. Maybe it didn't feel as fluid as what I would normally wear but [...] I felt like it was a dope outfit. (Houston, 2018b)

Through similar examples, I explore how dress can help (or hinder) practitioners as they attempt to balance functionality, staying true to their individual identity, and be part of the collective hip-hop community. I address a limitation of Suddreth's study, which is that it focuses on the subjective experiences of black men and neglects the role of dress in shaping and expressing other gender identities in hip-hop.

Another scholar that focuses on the fashioned black male body of hip-hop, or rather, the "iconic, racialised, adorned male body of hip-hop's material and visual culture" is Nicole Fleetwood (2005). In *Hip-Hop Fashion, Masculine Anxiety, and the Discourse of Americana,* Fleetwood points out that scholars have paid little detailed analytical attention to hip-hop's fashion system and that, earlier studies of hip-hop fashion (in the context of rap music) approach it through a subcultural lens, thus relegating it to "one of many practices that mark (and oftentimes romanticize) the cultural movement as distinct from normative American culture" (Fleetwood, 2005: 326). Applying Roland Barthes's (1990) analysis of the fashion system[32] she examines black male fashion and the interplay of masculinity, desire, and national identity. In

[32] In *The Fashion System* (originally published in 1967) Barthes adopts a semiotic (the systematic study of sign processes and the communication of meaning) approach to examine how garments are translated into language. At the heart of his inquiry is the hypothesis that clothing is secondary to the ways in which it can be articulated in the verbal and iconic rhetoric of fashion editorials and fashion spreads" "Without discourse there is no total Fashion, no essential fashion" (Barthes, 1990: xi).

considering the racialisation and masculine construction of hip-hop clothing, Fleetwood critiques notions of "subcultural authenticity", which according to her, reinscribe problematic codes of nationalism and essentialism (2005: 327). As I mentioned in chapter 1 of this thesis, authenticity is a racialised and complex term in hip-hop culture. This is highlighted by Fleetwood, who claims that:

> In the context of race and masculinity, authenticity imbues the subject with a mythic sense of virility, danger, and physicality; in representations of hip-hop, authenticity most often manifests itself through the body of the young black male who stands for "the urban real". (Fleetwood, 2005: 327)

Through the example of hip-hop fashion label Phat Farm – founded by Russell Simmons, the businessman who negotiated the $1.5 million deal between sports brand Adidas and rap trio RUN D.M.C in the mid-1980s – Fleetwood explores how the performance of a racialised masculinity, and the performance of success (material and sexual) are linked inextricably through hip-hop fashion. She identifies baggy jeans as part of the "virulently masculine" style emphasised by Phat Farm. While the company's female line, Baby Phat, sells "highly sexualized" clothing such as "tight-fitting body-suits, miniskirts, and revealing lingerie," the looser-fitting designs targeted at young men are organised around the seemingly masculine principle of "modesty" (Fleetwood, 2005: 332-3). Fleetwood suggests that Baby Phat products – promoted by Simmons' then-wife, biracial (Asian and black) runway model Kimora Lee – construct young women as "trophies" and accessories to the "hip-hop fashioned thug" (2005: 333). Thus, the fit of one's jeans/ pants can be directly linked to broader concepts about sexual objectification, and about gender identity more generally. Fleetwood's discussion of Phat Farm's differing jeans sizes signals how gender norms within hip-hop culture are powerfully reinforced through the materiality of clothing practice (Penney, 2012: 6).

In his article, *We Don’t Wear Tight Clothes: Gay Panic and Queer Style in Contemporary Hip Hop* (2012), media and communication scholar Joel Penney examines the tension between the “queer-friendly" style of certain contemporary hip-hop artists – such as Pharrell Williams and Kanye West – and the “resolutely heteronormative” black masculinity associated with mainstream hip-hop culture. The author first explores the aesthetic and economic motivations of hip-hop music that has recently been influenced by queer music – such as 1980s British electronic pop – and dress styles. He then deconstructs the moment of “gay panic” (2012: 2) within contemporary hip-hop music through his analysis of two media controversies; including online video clips in which rappers Thug Slaughter Force and Beanie Sigel direct their verbal aggression towards fellow rappers who wear tight clothes and other forms of dress associated with queer style, even threatening violence towards them.

Penney’s article is significant because it highlights that the current state of hip-hop as a lifestyle identity is under contestation. More specifically, he does so through the materiality of hip-hop clothing practices. Like Fleetwood, he describes how the gender-specific codes established within hip-hop fashion follow a distinct pattern: “the black male body is cloaked in fabric, often from head to toe, while the black female body is revealed with tight-fitting outfits and positioned as an object of sexual desire” (2012: 5). This pattern is identified in Laura Mulvey’s (1975) feminist theory of cinematic images (and Western visual culture more broadly) as being organised around the principles of the male gaze and the female’s “to-be-looked-at-ness". In other words, patriarchal privilege dictates that men conceal while women reveal (Penney, 2012: 5). Penney also cites the critical feminist scholar Diana Crane, who argues that “tight clothes” (e.g., skin-tight pants for men) “present the male as a sex object,” and therefore present important symbolic “challenges to hegemonic masculinity” (Crane, 2000: 195). My research, although in the context of dance performance, attends to Penney’s contemplation about whether hip-hop’s adoption of queer style is “just a flash in the pan spurred by aesthetic experimentation and commercial pressure” (2012: 11), or if it instead represents a major shift in the politics of gender

and sexuality within the genre. Through the choreographed piece *The Purple Jigsaw* (see chapter 8), I explore the changing dynamics of hip-hop fashion and costume and unpack its strongly gendered symbolism. I describe how some contemporary practitioners use fashion and costuming practices to subvert and reconceptualise masculine and feminine identity.

Semiotic analysis of material things

Fashion scholar Marcia Morgado's study, *The Semiotics of Extraordinary Dress: A Structural Analysis and Interpretation of Hip-Hop Style* (2007) is interesting because it focuses on the conditions and processes that enable the production of meaning in hip-hop rather than on the meanings themselves. However, in contrast with my research, Morgado takes a structuralist approach to semiotics and focuses on identifying the "deep structures" (Chomsky, 1965 cited in Morgado, 2007: 136), that is, the rules and conventions that underlie the surface features of hip-hop dress and govern the production of meaning. Morgado presents a snapshot of hip-hop dress, as if frozen at a specific moment in time, whereas I adopt a more open-ended approach. She describes the structures that supported hip-hop style as a semiotic system during the early 1990s, a time when she believes the style was most contentious. According to Morgado, dress that incites controversy is rife with substance and meaning (2007: 132). She therefore analyses and interprets the structural features of hip-hop dress to understand the "contradictory and incendiary nature" of the style (Morgado, 2007: 134). In doing so, she positions hip-hop dress, designated "extraordinary dress" – which she conceptualises as "a larger category of innovative, novel, and/ or deviant clothing and appearance forms" – in an oppositional relationship with the clothing constituted by conventional, or "ordinary dress" (Morgado, 2007: 148).

Whilst Morgado's focus on the processes that facilitate the production of meaning in hip-hop dress is important, this thesis challenges her attempt to explain, or "make sense" of the dress style. It critiques the structuralist analytical framework she adopts as somewhat reductive and deterministic.

Her approach does not appear to consider multiplicity of significance. It holds the meanings and implications of hip-hop dress to be universal and predictable rather than fluid. For example, when analysing specific characteristics of hip-hop dress observed in the 1990s, such as, “pants so large that hemlines dragged to the ground and crotches extended to the knees” and “excessive lengths of exceptionally long belts” (Morgado, 2007: 132), she argues that these signs in the “hip-hop system” represented violations of conventional dress because they suggestively called attention to the genitals. Morgado offers no alternative meanings as to why clothing and accessories may have been worn in this way, nor does she acknowledge the differences and transformations that have emerged in hip-hop dress over time and across different contexts and specific events. A further example is her assessment of retail price tags intentionally left hanging from garments and worn as accessory items. According to Morgado, the visible price tags suggest that wearers might have stolen these items, leaving their old clothes in a dressing room and exiting the store wearing new replacements, “tags and all” (2007: 145). Whilst clothes were sometimes obtained in this manner during the 1980s and 1990s, one could argue that the trend for keeping the crisp price tag affixed to clothing arose because of the prevalence of both counterfeit and stolen goods in the inner cities of New York. It became a way to prove the cash value and authenticity of one’s outfit.

Despite the abovementioned limitations, Morgado provides a useful and comprehensive model of hip-hop clothing “signs”, and highlights significant characteristics of hip-hop dress including: athletic shoes left untied or tied with complex lacings; oversized shirts and baggy trousers sometimes worn back to front; underwear sometimes visible above dramatically lowered waistlines of baggy trousers and excess belt lengths worn dangling at the crotch; baseball caps turned brim to the back; and retail price tags intentionally worn hanging from garments and displays of copious numbers of luxury (e.g. Gucci, Armani, Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein) and/ or indigenous hip-hop designer labels (e.g. Cross Colors, Karl Kani, Phat Farm) (Morgado, 2007: 132). Her detailed description of what constituted hip-hop dress in the early 1990s highlights a combination of “self” and “code”, hip-hop rules and

regulations. Noteworthy is her claim that clothing elements such as shirts, jackets, trousers, belts, under-shorts, and baseball caps represent "incomplete signifiers" or "sign fragments" in the hip-hop system, for each requires a relationship with a wearer to function as a sign. For example, *oversized* relative to the wearer, *visible* on the wearer rather than hidden, worn *back-to-front*, etc. (Morgado, 2007: 137). Her analysis thus includes layers such as garment-body interaction, garment-garment interaction, and garment-accessory interaction. I attempt to explore these important relationships through ANT, and delve further by including performance space, looking specifically at how dress transforms the body, the dressed dancing body transforms the space, and vice versa. Rather than trying to "make sense" of hip-hop dress in an all-seeing manner, my goal is to provide a rich and nuanced account of the actualisation of hip-hop bodily assemblages and how they are constantly shifting.

Another study of significance is Elizabeth Wilson's doctoral thesis, *Engaging youth on their own terms? An actor-network theory account of hip-hop in youth work* (2015). Wilson uses ANT (and ethnographic research methods) to explore human and non-human relationships; how they actively shape social interactions and social identities amongst New Zealand's youth. Although she focuses on the processes involved in generating youth engagement in hip-hop-youth work activities, she identifies clothing as a non-human actor that is instrumental in conveying one's "authentic hip-hop identity" (Wilson, 2015: 126). Wilson describes how some of the youth workers in her study wore various combinations of hip-hop clothing as a natural extension of their personal hip-hop dress – including "baggy pants, baseball style tops, caps, bandanas, beanies, and sneakers" (2015: 126). Interestingly, she notes how this clothing was subject to shifts as fashions changed, stating that "harem pants and leggings worn with baggy tops" became popular towards the end of her fieldwork (Wilson, 2015: 126). This indicates an awareness of the fluidity of hip-hop and the need for a more flexible approach for studying it, as opposite to Morgado's more structural approach. Wilson further states that hip-hop clothing sometimes constituted a deliberate choice to signify the youth workers' hip-hop allegiance. In these

instances, the clothing “enrolled into a youth work assemblage” (Wilson, 2015: 126) helped to address the young people’s lack of trust in youth work mentors. This is an important finding because it demonstrates that hip-hop dress, as a system or assemblage that is subject to change or modification, can act to create cohesion. I seek to build on this idea in the following chapters and provide deeper insights by considering the congealing of agency between dress, the wearer and/ or perceiver in hybrid performance space.

Another significant finding from Wilson’s study is that “the clothing actor” (Wilson, 2015: 126), or specific dress objects, if not part of the hip-hop fashion assemblage, had the capacity to mark youth workers as inauthentic, which further alienated young people and contributed to non-participation in youth work activities. To illustrate this point Wilson refers to youth workers’ own accounts of failures to engage young people, which noted how dressing “too womanly”, wearing a skirt and high heels, and “power dressing”, wearing a suit and tie with a tie clip, resulted in youth resistance to engage with the worker (Wilson, 2015: 126-7). Wilson argues that in such instances, the non-human clothing actor shaped social interactions by acting in ways unintended by the wearer. She claims that the clothing moulds a particular social identity not only by invoking a situationally irrelevant aspect of self, but also by disrupting or discrediting their presentation of self (Wilson, 2015: 127). What interests me is the clothing item’s ability to act – to influence, allow, restrict and transform the wearer and the perceiver. The failed engagement attempts helped the youth workers learn which clothing actors to substitute and which to enlist into their bodily assemblage as they attempted to engage a wide range of youth. I investigate these issues in the empirical chapters, looking closely at how practitioners successfully, or unsuccessfully, enlist wearables to create a bodily assemblage that engages and transforms other actors and participants in the hip-hop network.

What is also important is Wilson’s observation that the youth workers who were highly invested in hip-hop culture reported success in engaging with young people by incorporating elements of their own hip-hop fashion into

their self-presentation as a youth worker (Wilson, 2015: 128). She explains that sneakers, or “kicks”, sport shoes of sought-after hip-hop styles, such as Nike, Adidas, or Puma, were a common feature of youth work engagement assemblages because they had significant “bridging capabilities” (ibid). Wilson concurs with other hip-hop commentary, stating that sneakers are highly visible non-human actors that circulate in multiple webs of relations and thus can contribute to the enactment of multiple identity positions and hold diverse connotations within youth work assemblages (2015: 128-129). This is not to say that youth workers were able to assume a hip-hop identity by simply associating themselves with these material actors. Rather, the sneakers became effective and initiated connections between youth workers and young people once they were enlisted in combination with other hip-hop practices and actors. Drawing from Wilson, and the actor-network approach, I argue that sneakers and other key non-human actors are “mediators”, actors that change the nature of relationships within networks (see chapter 4 Theoretical framework). I consider this process of mediation not only from the research participants’ point of view, but also from my own perspective as a researcher and participant situated in the hip-hop network. I discuss how the dress objects I brought into my own bodily assemblage had the capacity to facilitate interactions between myself and the hip-hop practitioners under study.

Although dress does not take precedence in Wilson’s ANT-informed research, she explicitly discusses the enlistment of spaces for b-boy practice sessions, which depends largely on the socio-material configuration of a space and the needs of the performers. She describes how b-boys and b-girls identified a floor or flat ground space as a vital actor within the b-boy assemblage, and how the specific material features of the floor were an important consideration since concrete floors, carpet and non-industrial vinyl within various venues all presented challenges in terms of the comfort and injury risk to the dancer (Wilson, 2015: 138). As mentioned in the previous chapter, executing “power moves” – acrobatic moves that involve displays of strength and dexterity – on concrete takes in toll on a dancer’s joints in b-boy training. The b-boys and b-girls in Wilson’s study communicated their

preference for a smooth wooden floor, since objects such as belt buckles and footwear could damage non-industrial linoleum, which was affordable to them but not desirable. Wilson explains how, to counter these challenges, the dancers enlisted material objects, such as puzzle mats to produce suitable practice spaces. This highlights the complexities inherent in the relationships between the dancer’s body, clothing and the material features of venues and performance spaces. I examine these complex relationships further through the concepts outlined in the following theoretical chapter and the ethnographic research methods outlined in chapter 5.

Summary

The documentary and scholarly accounts of hip-hop dress presented in this chapter have contextualised the upcoming discussion about the material agency of bodies and clothing in hybrid performance space. The introduction of “fresh” as an engrained cultural concept and critical actor in the hip-hop network underpins the analysis of performance costumes characterised by tension; a subtle push and pull between practicality, professionalism, and a fierce sense of individuality and authenticity. Key ideas from the hip-hop commentaries presented in this chapter, and the lineage of hip-hop fashion research, inform and support the analytical framework. Specifically, this chapter has revealed the strongly gendered symbolism of dress practices within hip-hop fashion. In the following chapter, I provide an outline of how ANT is engaged to unpack the strategies used by performers to challenge hip-hop's gender-specific codes. The extensive list of wearables and brands identified above help me to define the material, bodily assemblages observed during the fieldwork. Expanding the semiotic approaches used by scholars such as Fleetwood and Morgado, I engage a *material semiotic* approach to analyse some of hip-hop's performing objects and “things”. The following chapter establishes the theoretical framework and outlines this material semiotic approach, including my engagement with post-ANT and assemblage thinking. It draws together relevant theories and concepts from the disciplines of fashion, costume and performance studies that have guided the understanding of key themes in this study.

4 Theoretical framework

Introduction

This chapter provides the theoretical and conceptual framing for this study. In this framing, which draws together the fields of new materialism, fashion, costume, and performance, I highlight the constitutive entanglement between humans and non-humans in the fashioning of the hip-hop dancing body and the actualisation of hip-hop performance. I begin by discussing specific aspects of new materialist theory, focusing primarily on conceptualisations of agency, entanglement, and assemblages. Actor-network theory (ANT) is presented as the main new materialist approach adopted for the research. I outline traditional ANT and post-ANT concepts and methods and explain how and why they are engaged in this investigation. Next, I define key dress-related terms used in the thesis – as delineating their meanings enables a better understanding of the agency of clothing in hip-hop performance – before exploring new materialist readings of fashion and costume. I then discuss applications of ANT and new materialist theory in existing theatre, performance, and dance research; most especially the notion of "performing objects" (Schweitzer and Zerdy, 2014). Lastly, drawing from performance scholarship, I outline relevant principles from black performance theory, and discuss perceptions of "liveness", and "digital liveness", which are engaged in conjunction with ANT to highlight the material workings of power and the distribution of agency across networks, space and time.

Relational materiality

New materialist scholars, from a range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields, routinely emphasise how matter is "alive", "lively", "vibrant", "dynamic", "agentive" and thus active (Schneider, 2015; Bennett, 2010). They take seriously the idea that all matter is agential, and that agency is distributed across and among materials in relation. As such, matter engages with matter as well as with (or without) humans, who are also matter. Scholars Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, co-editors of *New Materialisms: Ontology,*

Agency, and Politics (2010), articulate that new materialists, in their attempts to reposition the human among non-human "actants" (Latour, 1996a) consider the "thingness", corporeality, and materiality of human bodies. They state that humans, whilst being composed of matter themselves, live their everyday lives surrounded by, immersed in, matter. However, no being or object necessarily bears more value (or more agency) than another (Coole and Frost, 2010: 7). Physicist and feminist new materialist writer Karen Barad stresses the non-human aspect of agency, insisting that agency is understood as "an enactment" (2007: 176). For Barad, agency is not an attribute of something or someone, rather it is the process of cause and effect in enactment. She argues that: "Agency is "doing" or "being" in its intra-activity. It is the enactment of iterative changes to particular practices – iterative reconfigurings of topological manifolds of spacetime-matter relations -– through the dynamics of intra-activity" (Barad, 2007: 178).

Barad's concept of "agential realism" provides an ideal perspective to examine the complex materiality of hip-hop dance because it commits not only to acknowledging matter as agential but also to acknowledging matter as *materially* discursive (not linguistic); unsettling the precedent prioritising of language as the sole or primary means to think about meaning making (Barad 2003). Performance studies scholar Rebecca Schneider[33] points out that performance studies, which has only begun to consider new materialism in the last two decades, is traditionally human-centric as an area of scholarship. She writes:

> For most scholars performance is still commonly thought of as work made by living beings who are present in and to time. For most, if living humans are not present to a performance themselves, then

[33] Whilst Schneider (and Andrew Sofer, scholar of English, theatre and performance, cited on p128) returned to a more humanist/ human-centred approach in their later writing, their theorising of *performing objects* is significant because it calls attention to matter as a type of power system. As Schneider states, those in the performance studies space tend to presume there is always a human "in the wings", their human hands "pulling the strings" (Schneider, 2015: 9) and making things happen. However, this thesis considers the human body as moving matter amongst other matter. It challenges the view that matter is simply a puppet and shows that the reverse can happen, in that matter can puppeteer the human.

> living humans must hide somewhere in the wings of actions, or be the ones to ultimately bear agential responsibility for the actions of objects. (Schneider, 2015: 9).

The goal of this research is to reveal how in hip-hop dance practice, different actants, materials and entities contribute to an entangled process of "becoming" (Barad, 2007) with one another in a co-constitutive manner in which "all together the players evoke, trigger, and call forth what-and-who-exists" (Haraway, 2016: 16). Becoming, as proposed by Barad, is ongoing and dynamic and entails material-discursive practices of transitioning from one state to another in space and time (Barad, 2007: 142). It evolves simultaneously with past, present and future reconfigurations of the world. For Barad, rituals of performativity and reconfigurations of personal and social worlds, entangled with each other constitute acts of becoming. She asserts that, matter and materiality are not merely made up of substances and objects, but are dynamic phenomena, "a congealing of agency" brought about by "a stabilizing and destabilizing process of iterative intra-activity" (Barad, 2007: 210). Meaning, different possibilities occur at each moment and come into existence through the fusion of social and material phenomena, which are not distinct entities. From this perspective, I emphasise how fashion (discussed later in this chapter) – through its enmeshment with the body, space, and technology – enables reconfigurations of hip-hop identity and performance, which happen between past and future, the "no longer" and the "not yet" (Braidotti in Tuin and Dolphijn, 2012: 32).

Another appeal of new materialism is that it situates researchers as part of the cultures and/ or phenomena they study. Within the research context, researchers are not separate entities that make decisions outside the event under study or separated from data. The ANT approach emphasises that all bodies (human and non-human) are regarded as relational having no ontological status outside the assemblage that constitutes the event. From the perspective of new materialism, sociologists Nick Fox and Pam Alldred argue that research is not at root an enterprise undertaken by human actors,

but a “machine-like assemblage of things, people, ideas, social collectivities and institutions” (Fox and Alldred, 2015: 3). Matter signifies the subject matter of research, but it also points at (scholarly) processes of meaning-making. As I discuss in chapter 5 (Methodological framework), Haraway’s feminist ontology, her concept of “situated knowledges” (1988) works like an apparatus of producing "a more adequate, richer, better account of a world, in order to live in it well and in critical, reflexive relation to our own as well as others' practices of domination and the unequal parts of privilege and oppression that make up all positions" (Haraway, 1988: 579). Thus, feminist situated knowledges open themselves for new, unexpected, and surprising forms of knowledge production, which may unfold from interrelated material-semiotic worlds. Material semiotics is a set of approaches to social analysis that includes actor-network theory, feminist material semiotics, the successor projects to both these traditions, and a range of related lines of work in disciplines including social and cultural anthropology, cultural studies, post-colonial studies, and geography (Law, 2023). Material semiotics explores how practices in the social world are woven out of threads to form weaves that are simultaneously semiotic (because they are relational, and/ or they carry meanings) and material (because they are about the physical stuff caught up and shaped in those relations). It assumes that there is no single social structure or form of patterning because these material and social webs and weaves come in different forms and styles (Law, 2019, 2023).

Understanding the relational material workings of hip-hop dance necessitates moving away from a framework of “representation”, that is, a *Cartesian* framework of representation, in which the mind and the body are articulated as two separate things; discounting the body as “lesser than” and elevating the mind (Descartes, 1998: 28). In this Cartesian sense, the mind dictates and tells the world what the body *is,* or what other bodies are. Representation, then, is intellectual and can be removed from the materiality of the body. At the heart of Descartes’ philosophy lies his “theory of ideas”, which assumes that we can know physical objects only indirectly, that is, by way of ideas and the thinking mind. This Cartesian line of thinking underlies the perception of non-humans as less than on a hierarchy, things without

mind or agency – a perspective that I challenge through the usage of actor-network theory and purposefully selected feminist new materialist concepts.

I propose a flexible framework that considers the interactions of human and non-human agencies in complex associations and assemblages. I engage largely with Latour, Barad, and Bennett, whose work is influential in new materialist debates as it understands all matter as forces, or actants which assemble into collectivities to express interdependent agency. In what follows, I will highlight the main tenets of actor-network theory as presented by Latour in *Reassembling the Social: An introduction to actor-network theory* (2005); and Bennett's notion of "distributed agency" from her book *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things* (2010). I refer to Barad's notions of "entanglement" and "becoming", as well as the concept of "multiplicity", foregrounded by feminist scholar and post-ANT writer Annemarie Mol. Multiplicity enables rendering hip-hop dance not only as various and fragmented, but also as inconsistent, complex and variously distributed within itself. I discuss in the following sections how multiple versions of hip-hop dance and identity are enacted into being as they are "done" in a variety of different ways. Furthermore, I discuss how hip-hop inhabits multiple topologies; some regional and homogeneous – spaces within which "comparisons make sense and boundaries become possible" – and others fluid – networks in which "everything informs everything else" (Law and Mol, 1994: 659).

Actor-network theory (ANT)

"Why is it that we are sometimes but only sometimes aware of the networks that lie behind and make up an actor, an object or an institution?" (Law, 1992: 4)

ANT, known early on as the "sociology of translation" (Callon, 1986), was initially proposed by French sociologist and philosopher Bruno Latour, together with Michel Callon, and John Law within the domain of Science and Technology Studies (STS) at the École Nationale Supérieure des Mines de

Paris in the 1980s (Almila, 2016: 131). Elements of ANT have since been applied in a range of applied disciplines – including medical science (Mol, 2005), media studies (Couldry, 2008), and human geography (Murdoch, 1998) – however, it is considered to be closer to socio materiality studies. This approach is sensitive to “materiality, relationality, heterogeneity, and process” in relation to what is being studied (Law and Singleton, 2013: 485). ANT’s central argument is that phenomena and cultures, for example hip-hop, are nothing other than patterned networks of heterogeneous materials. It indicates that the stuff of the social is a process of “heterogeneous engineering” in which bits and pieces from the social, the technical, the conceptual and the textual are fitted together, and so converted (or “translated”) into a set of equally heterogeneous products or effects (Law, 1992: 2). According to Latour (2005), nothing exists prior to its performance or enactment within a network of entangled human and non-human actors. Furthermore, everything within the actor-network is a “material matter” because it always takes a material form (Latour and Woolgar, 1979); for example, text, bodies, clothing, technology, and other material things.

ANT deprivileges individual intentionality and potentiality and attests that the connections between heterogeneous actors (actants) – human and non-human entities that act or to which activity is granted by others (Latour, 1996a: 7) – are “mutually constitutive and generative relations [...] which give the constituent entities themselves their qualities, identity, significance and meaning” (Nimmo, 2016, p.xxiv). In this sense, actor-networks, also referred to as “webs of relations” (Latour, 2005), “assemblages” (Bennett, 2010; Law and Mol, 1994; Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) or simply “networks” throughout the thesis, are situated within a particular context where actors emerge and are characterised by their relationships with one another. ANT does not explain in an all-seeing manner why actor-networks exist, but rather describes the fluxes, continuities and becomings that produce them (Latour, 2005: 130). A key principle of ANT is the rejection of essentialism about the nature of actors. As Callon states, ANT “assumes the radical indeterminacy of the actor” (Callon, 1999: 181). From this perspective actors are not predetermined, and their roles are not presumed. Furthermore, ANT does

not claim that non-humans inherently possess agency or do things instead of humans. Nor does it claim that the activities of humans and non-humans are substantially the same kind of behaviour. Rather, agency is “relationally generated”; it is multiplied, divided, distributed, connected, and embedded in coherent frames of action (Nimmo, 2016, p.xxvii). This understanding required me as the researcher to let the actors, animate and inanimate, speak for themselves and approach their relationships without prejudice.

Actor

Whilst actor-networks are assumed to be both “complex and fluid” (Law, 1998), which I discuss in more detail below (see Network, p.103), ANT assumes that if any actor, irrespective of its position in the network is removed from or added to the network, then the functioning of the whole network will be affected (Callon, 1986; Latour, 2005). In hip-hop, network components (actors) can include humans, things, ideas, and concepts. I provide more detail in chapter 4 (Methodological framework) about how I identified the most important actors and material trajectories to follow during the fieldwork. Here I will say that I focused on the activity and association of actors involved in the actualisation of hip-hop dance performance, primarily the dancing body, clothing, floor surfaces/ coverings, the performance space itself, and media technologies. The material semiotic concept “fresh”, which I discussed in the previous chapter, is also viewed as a significant actor in the network. On the one hand, the thesis explores the routinised way in which practitioners “do” things and how the embedding of stylistic practices, concepts and ideas into the material objects themselves helps to sustain hip-hop culture and maintain consistency across time and space. For example, rituals such as cleaning sneakers with a toothbrush and household cleaning products to keep them fresh and pristine, which emerged in the 1970s, have endured in hip-hop for five decades and continue to enable dance performances. On the other hand, it examines the potential of many things occurring simultaneously and presents hip-hop as a fluid space that permits adaptability and response to different contexts. I propose that hip-hop's

established and emergent material practices coexist as dynamic forces in the network, thus enabling the thriving of the form.

More importantly, ANT is used as the main approach in this research to make specific, surprising, so far unspoken events and situations in hip-hop dance visible. As feminist scholar and post-ANT writer Annemarie Mol states, in ANT, “effects are crucial [...] not goals, not ends, but all kinds of effects, surprising ones included” (Mol, 2010: 255). By effects, Mol means both positive and negative reactions, consequences, and outcomes that result from changes, disruptions, and shifts over time and space. As such, this research is not preoccupied with where the activities of actors come from, but rather where they go. It explores how actors are “enrolled” (Latour, 2005) (enlisted) into networks, but mainly how they make a difference and how other actors work to replace the actions of those that are eliminated from the network or setting. Latour’s conceptualisation of the term “mediator” (and “intermediary”) is important here because it draws attention to the myriad mundane ways that non-humans guide and constrain lived experiences. ANT refers to actors as mediators, for they “transform, translate, distort and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry” (Latour, 2005: 39); they modify a state of affairs by making a difference. For example, I describe in chapter 6 how the dance floor becomes an actor when a performer interacts with it, for they must adjust their behaviour, clothing, and footwear to the floor’s “demands” to execute certain movements. What is important to recognise is that, in this framed moment of performance, the performer is not assumed to possess more agency – that is, make more of a difference in the state of affairs – than the floor, the clothing, or the footwear. Non-human actors are not intermediaries (merely vehicles for the transport of pre given meanings or forces), they mediate everyday life through “translation”, the process in which networks evolve and transform.

Translation, argues Law (1997), is about both similarity and difference. This means that when the process of translation happens, some elements change and some do not (Almila, 2016: 134). The notion of translation, as proposed by Michel Callon in *Some elements of a sociology of translation;*

domestication of the scallops and the fishermen of St. Brieuc Bay (1986), suggests that as a network progressively forms, certain actors end up controlling others. According to Callon, those playing the role of the controlling actor develop different strategies to drive the translation in order to enrol and mobilise other actors – for example, a dancer selecting a specific type of footwear and/ or clothing for a performance in a particular setting. Callon explains that translation processes are not always successful. When those who drive the process of translation fail to get other actors to comply with them, a process of dissidence, rather than a successful translation, takes place. Through the lens of translation, I illustrate the precariousness of actor-networks in hip-hop and how all actors must play their part moment by moment for a network to remain stable. In the empirical chapters I describe different types of action and how the behaviour of an actor can be strategic or subservient. I discuss how certain actors "authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, [or] forbid" (Latour, 2005: 72) the actions of others in the network. According to Mol, every time a new case (phenomenon or culture) is considered through ANT, it suggests different lessons about what an "actor" might be (Mol, 2010: 257). The point of this research, then, is not to refine the concept of "actor" or the ANT repertoire, but to enrich it and add layers and possibilities through the cultural lens of hip-hop.

Network

In *Reassembling the Social* (2005), Latour explains that the network in ANT is to be understood not as a stable structure of interconnected points but rather as a description of a "string of actions where each participant [human or nonhuman] is treated as a full-blown mediator" whose role in shaping the course of social life is fully accounted for (Latour, 2005: 128). He refers to networks as "assemblages" – open, transient, unique networks of influence or associations – and asserts that attachments are first, actors are second (2005: 217). Or as John Law puts it, "assemblage is a process of bundling, of assembling, or better of recursive self-assembling in which the elements put together are not fixed in shape, do not belong to a larger pre-given list but

are constructed at least in part as they are entangled together" (Law, 2004: 42). Actors associate with other actors, thus forming a network in which actors are made into actors. But as actors come to participate in different networks/ practices/ "modes of ordering" (Law, 1992) things become complex, the actors start to differ from one network to another. Whilst I have so far aligned the research with concepts that have been temporally described as "early" or "classic" ANT (Baiocchi, Graizbord and Rodríguez-Muñiz, 2013: 330), I will now focus on more recent iterations – often called "after-ANT" or "post-ANT" – which give emphasis to issues of fluidity, multiplicity and performativity (Wilson, 2015).

In line with post-ANT, this research does not attempt to unravel hip-hop dance as one singular network, but rather attends to multiple, co-existing networks in tension. It maps similarities and tensions between different versions of hip-hop dance reality; for example, between breaking (also known as b-boying) and more choreographic practices. In illuminating these diverse versions of hip-hop dance through different material assemblages and arrangements, this thesis creates a nuanced account of hip-hop as a complex, multiple, and fluid phenomena. Incidentally, a number of writers have alluded to the "messy thickness" of hip-hop and the importance of both technical and social elements in the origins and continued performance and consumption of hip-hop culture. For example, cultural theorist Dick Hebdige (1987) and hip-hop writer Jeff Chang (2005) retell how urban youths interacted with sampling machines and turntables and reassembled previous music into new formats to create rap music. Historical and journalistic accounts of the early creation of graffiti and b-boying also refer (although implicitly) to the material agency of things, such as NYC subway trains, spray cans, kung-fu movies, ghetto blasters, linoleum, and sports clothing (George, Banes, Flinker, and Romanowski, 1985; Rose, 1994; Chang, 2005). But, despite hinting at hip-hop's fluidity across time and space, and the important role that non-humans play, such accounts tend to privilege human agency, which does not account for the material agency of fashion in hip-hop.

The spatiality of hip-hop culture and the reverberations between space and the fashioned, dancing body are a primary concern of this research. Since the late 1980s, the cultural practices of DJing, rapping, “tagging” (graffiti writing), and breaking (amongst other hip-hop dance styles) have been performed in the most diverse locales around the world. Furthermore, hip-hop’s influence on mainstream fashion is most evident in the popularity of streetwear globally. While scholarship often views hip-hop as a genuine product of US-American popular culture, critics repeatedly denounce the popularity of hip-hop in their societies as “Americanization”; meaning the devaluation of local culture and customs (Johannsen, 2019: 3). Citing hip-hop scholar Angela Williams (2010), Johannsen states that the dissemination of hip-hop culture cannot only be understood as an American cultural import that has been acquired by youth around the world. Rather, inquiry into global hip-hop movements must begin with the examination of “local-to-local relationships” (Williams, 2010: 68). For example, in her study of hip-hop culture in Australian contexts, scholar Chiara Minestrelli discusses hip-hop as a productive avenue for the creation and diffusion of discourses gravitating around indigenous issues and personal stories (2017: 9). She describes how Indigenous youth embrace hip-hop (primarily rap music) to “document the colonial legacy of dispossession and marginalization”, how hip-hop safeguards the “determined indeterminacy” of cultural loss for Aboriginal communities in Australia today, and how it allows for greater verbal expressivity and hopes of increased recognition within and beyond local spaces (Minestrelli, 2017: 9-10). Thus, Australian indigenous hip-hop is ascribable to the “global context” (Johnson, 2011) described in chapter 2. More specifically, it reflects hip-hop’s “glocalization” (Robertson, 1995), which has generated original discourses, contextual meanings, and “eclectic practices of embodiment” (Minestrelli, 2017: 10). As Minestrelli states, this process of glocalisation engenders active movements departing from “subaltern counter-politics to dominant public spheres” thus encouraging a cross-cultural debate where specific local practices are fostered (ibid).

I discussed in the previous chapter how the globalisation of hip-hop has resulted in its dance forms and aesthetics being sampled, remixed and thus

localised. Whilst I acknowledge hip-hop's drawing together of local and global, I do not dwell on the social and material connections to local surroundings, or the distance between actors, as this matters far less than the strength of their inter-connections (Almila, 2016: 133). This research disavows any fixed, absolute conception of space – for example, a specific region, or "bounded space" (Mol, 2018) – and instead, focuses on networked space (Law and Mol, 2001). As outlined above, the network in ANT is "a concept, not a thing out there" (Latour, 2005: 131). It is used in the research as a syntax, a way of connecting elements of hip-hop performance practice. ANT's conceptualisation of the network is useful because it draws things together, including both what travels in space – for example, ideas, concepts, and material "things" – and space itself. Put another way, the hip-hop network encompasses the varied, interconnected, and complex ways whereby the material and social aspects of hip-hop overlap within dance communities. It includes not only the geographical dimension but also pertains to other socio-political spaces formed by the effects of race and gender.

A significant contribution of this study is its description of how practitioners communicate their racialised and gendered identities and transmit cultural knowledge (often shaped by normative gendered narratives within hip-hop) – including, dance moves and gestures, stylistic practices, concepts (for example "fresh"), and ideologies – "body-to-body", but also via other material actors; namely clothing and media technologies. Chapter 7 focuses on how technologies such as smartphones, cameras, social media, and streaming platforms allow practitioners to create "imagined affinities" (Fogarty, 2006) with other practitioners networked in an "imagined spatiality" (Johannsen, 2019: 9); which can be understood as local in the sense that globally dispersed individuals are able to share, comment and discuss comparable experiences of hip-hop performance and social identity.

Theory (or method?)

Although ANT carries “theory” in its name, Callon, amongst other ANT scholars, asserts that it is not a cohesive theory in itself. It is defined as both a theoretical and methodological approach; a “how-to book”, and above all, a way of looking at the world (Callon and Latour, 1992: 356; Latour, 2005: 142; Law 2009: 141). According to Callon, the fact that ANT is not a theory is precisely its strength. For him, the “radical indeterminacy” of the actor is not a cause for criticism but rather a cause for celebration of ANT’s flexibility (Callon, 1999; 181). This is a sentiment echoed by Mol, who states that ANT does not offer a “law of nature-culture” (Mol, 2010: 261) and that there is no attempt to draw the findings of various studies together into an overarching explanatory framework or grid of perspective. Nor does ANT research attempt to explain causes. The aim is rather to trace effects, which are mostly unexpected. Mol emphasises that ANT-related studies are multiple and diverse, and if studies relate to earlier ones, this is not in order to consolidate or expand on a theory that is thereby rendered more and more solid. Rather, contributions to ANT enrich and gently shift its existing “theoretical repertoire”. She writes: “As the theoretical repertoire shifts, it becomes possible to describe further, different cases and to articulate so far untold events (relations, phenomena, situations)” (Mol, 2010: 262); and so the shaping and layering of ANT continues.

Thus, ANT is adopted in this study, not as a programmatic theory, but as a loose intellectual “toolkit”, or “sensibility” (Law, 2004: 157), something that helps to sensitise us to the complex and multiple realities in hip-hop which might otherwise have remained obscure. Both Latour and Law assert that ANT cannot be explained but must be done (Latour, 2005; Law, 2004). As I point out shortly, a criticism of ANT is that this “doing” is not guided by clear advice on the research methods to be used. However, ANT’s principle of tracing connections between, or “following” heterogeneous actors bears some similarity to the fundamental methodological principles of ethnomethodology (Almila, 2016: 135). Both ANT and ethnomethodology insist on description rather than explanation, and they place primary importance on actors and their interpretations of reality, although ANT understands the actor in a manner different from the ethnomethodological

viewpoint. The methodological implications and possibilities of ANT, and the ethnographic research methods adopted for this study, are outlined thoroughly in chapter 5. For now, I will say that as the researcher I assumed that anything could happen and made no distinctions between reality and its interpretations. My goal was not to provide an analysis of different hip-hop events and situations, but rather to take seriously what the actors said and did; that is, document how certain objects performed/ behaved and how performers described their own practices. I documented non-human actors through the same kind of vocabulary, focusing on garments and material objects that "left traces" (Dankert, 2011). I made clear how they connected to performers and spaces, and the effects/ outcomes that emerged from these connections. In the empirical chapters, I map all forms of relatedness between human and non-human actors, looking beyond simple associations and describing instances of collaboration, clash, addition, tension, exclusion, and inclusion (Mol, 2010).

Critiques of ANT

ANT's principle of attributing agency to all sorts of actors, and "persistently talking about non-human things in terms that would only make sense if they actually were human" (Elder-Vass, 2008: 468-9) has been met with criticism. For example, sociologist Dave Elder-Vass argues that human beings are different kinds of "things" than non-human actors (he uses the example of scallops from Callon's 1986 study mentioned earlier), with different capabilities arising from their different structures and histories. No one who recognises this, he argues, could talk of scallops negotiating. For sociologist David Bloor (1999), attributing "symmetrical agency" to something that only holds causal agency leads nowhere. The problem is that agency often implies intentionality, and critics of ANT argue that inanimate objects cannot have intentions by their very nature of being non-living (Elam, 1999; Winner, 1993). STS scholar Olga Amsterdamska (1990) further suggests that if actors are presumed to have no intrinsic qualities, and if the character of relationships between actors is not important, ANT offers very little explanatory power of the types of actions through which networks are

created. Thus, ANT's "flat ontology", according to critics, "offers no critique and countenances neither alternative nor supplement" (Lee and Brown, 1994: 781), and in its descriptiveness, ANT fails to come up with any definitive explanations of how exactly actors should be viewed and analysed (Williams and May, 1996).

It is further argued that ANT stops short of conceptualising the capacities of bodies, both human and non-human, to affect and be affected (Laurier and Philo, 1999: 1063). Human geography scholar Nigel Thrift states that ANT has neglected "specifically human capacities of expression" (Thrift, 2000: 215). Latour has, in fact, made efforts to conceptualise the emotions and passions of subjects through the notion of attachment, but he takes attachment to arise out of networks as a mediated effect (Latour, 1999: 31). The same is true for Latour's (2004) theorisation of the body – a body circumscribed by the relations that describe it and never exceeding them. I discuss below (see the Agency of Assemblages, p.112) how assemblage thinking helps to assuage the frequent apprehension that ANT treats humans and non-humans as completely symmetric and effaces any difference between the two (Castree, 2002), without taking recourse to reinstituting the unified human actor. By embracing Jane Bennett's notion of assemblage – which follows Deleuzian (1987) assemblage (see following section, Agency of assemblages) – and using it in conjunction with ANT, the research moves away from what British geographer Chris Collinge describes as a "deadpan sense of happenstance" (Collinge, 2006: 250). It reintroduces the human, not simply as a subject that "rules and interprets passive things", but as a co-creator that brings networks into being, however without relying on larger structural forces.

The research highlights how non-human fashion objects, materials, and technologies can exert influence but does not overlook the performer's influence in the network either. The performer's desire/ wish – or "désir" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 6) – is, in fact, considered as a positive, productive force in making assemblages coalesce together. Gilles Deleuze's theory of désir/ desire, developed in *Anti-Oedipus* (1983) alongside his co-

author Félix Guattari, does not refer to one's conscious desires, but rather to the state of the unconscious drives and impulses, which are themselves invested in the social formation that makes that interest possible. He proposed that one's unconscious drives are constructed, assembled, and arranged in such a manner that their desire is positively invested in the system that allows them to have this particular interest. Normally, desire is thought of in terms of lack: if someone desires something, it is because they lack it. But Deleuze reconfigures the concept of desire: what one desires, as always positive.

Another criticism of ANT is that it offers little explanation about processes that come after the establishment of networks; what comes after – the acts of interpretation and attachment – becomes mysterious because, by definition, it cannot be encompassed in an account of how the broad infrastructures of actors and objects have emerged (Couldry, 2008: 103). Early ANT's lack of interest in the possibility that networks and their products go on being reinterpreted long after they have been established is an especially important problem in relation to hip-hop networks, since they produce objects/ phenomena whose main purpose is to generate interpretations – namely, dance and musical performance. One way the research overcomes this problem is by exploring how the practitioners' social and material experiences are shaped by the underlying features of the networks in which they are situated. For example, the empirical chapters explore how hip-hop's political narrative and entrenched ideologies and concepts have enabled and informed dance practices and sartorial choices over time and space. Expressed in these terms, there is a great deal to be learned from ANT in understanding everyday, and often taken for granted, practices within hip-hop.

A political critique of ANT is its eschewal of macro-social categories. That is, it overlooks power differentials such as race, gender, and class, and how they impact on who or what is able, or unable, to form associations in the first place. Amsterdamska argues that how authority is created cannot be explained using the symmetrical tools Latour offers, which seem to trace only

the strength of the connections, instead of their character (1992: 502). From this perspective, focusing on the strength and durability of the network alone disregards all the moral questions related to power. Similarly, Elder-Vass argues that by constantly foregrounding the context-specific actor-networks, ANT lacks a robust ontological foundation for theorising how the emergent properties of social structures imbue the world with lasting states of stability. For him, the powers of social structures both constrain and enable agency and shape it in such a way that structures are either reproduced or transformed over time (Elder-Vass, 2015; 2017).

ANT is, however, ontologically political and there are political implications in its application which cannot be ignored. Its supposed lack of political engagement is addressed by some of ANT's main proponents. For example, Latour attempts to deal with ANT's "problems" (Law and Hassard, 1999), by emphasising even more of a relational stance. He thus reframes the idea of construction in social science as material "assembling" and "reassembling" (Latour, 2002; 2005). Law (1991) argues that accepting "epistemological relativism" does not imply political ignorance, anonymity or neutrality. He suggests that the consequences of "ordering effects" must be understood in terms of inclusions and exclusions that are created as well as their effects. Thus, for Law (1997), politics is about appreciating hierarchical distributions, but also about understanding how such orderings can create specific inclusions and exclusions which are performed in heterogeneous ways.

However, the place where attempts to establish a clear ANT position on politics and political forces is most robustly made is in the post-ANT literature. In collaboration with Law, Mol (2002) asserts that entities are enacted and performed into being through materially heterogeneous practices. By foregrounding connections and material practices, post-ANT enables me to go beyond traditional forms of representation, reinforcing the claim that nothing exists autonomously without relations that sustain entities, which is a clear stance against naturalising ordering or viewing it in a simplistic way. A fundamental and materially pertinent consideration of this thesis is how racialised and gendered environments are embodied by hip-

hop performers. While hip-hop is acknowledged as a global, diverse, and inclusive phenomenon, I identify its power and stress its influence and transportability as a black dance form from the perspective of matter.

Despite the critical readings of ANT outlined above, I use the approach not to pursue merely descriptions or details for detail's sake, but to describe the assembling, disassembling, and reassembling of associations in hip-hop networks. Conceptually, ANT allows me to examine the complexity of the different forces at play in hip-hop performance practice – between performing/ moving bodies, clothing, space, and media technologies – without neglecting their interconnectedness (or tension). ANT is adaptable to this study for it invites researchers to trace ethnographically the complexity and messiness of social reality and encourages particular kinds of descriptions. Post-ANT sensibilities – mainly the appreciation for uncertainty and multiplicity – allow me to map shifting relationships between actors and multiple versions of hip-hop dance, and articulate how new elements are continually being introduced, whilst simultaneously, the network is shaped by hip-hop's underlying history and politics. More importantly, post-ANT provides an opportunity to overcome early ANT's perceived "political neutrality" (Amsterdamska, 1999; Haraway, 1992) and develop more of a substantive political critique in which realities are not immutable, they are shaped, enacted, and contested.

The agency of assemblages

As mentioned earlier, ANT is not the sole source of concern with the place of the non-human in social and cultural phenomena. Whilst it is the main approach adopted in this study, the framework is also informed by "a distributive and composite notion of agency", proposed by political theorist Jane Bennett (2010: 37). In *Vibrant Matter: The Political Ecology of Things,* Bennett develops a theory of "vital materialism" which suggests that a thing's "efficacy or agency depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces" (Bennett, 2010: 21). She speaks of vital materialism as a combined strategy of focusing on commonplace

objects and by adopting anthropomorphism – the attribution of human characteristics, emotions, or intentions to non-human entities – a trope that is widely censured as an essential trait of human arrogance. In contrast, Bennett views anthropomorphism as a useful way of extending the notion of agency to include the non-human. She states: “A touch of anthropomorphism can catalyse a sensibility that finds a world filled not with ontological distinct categories of beings (subjects and objects) but with variously composed materialities that form confederations” (Bennett, 2010: 99). In implementing this strategy, Bennett echoes Bruno Latour’s call for “the Parliament of Things”, a place where both humans and non-humans can be represented adequately (Latour 1993, 144). The point of Bennett’s vital materialism is not to focus or fix agency as an attribute belonging to humans or non-humans. Instead, it proposes an ecological notion of agency, one in which actions and actants are dispersed along a horizontal chain of unfolding phenomena.

Bennett introduces a notion of “distributive agency” in the *Agency of Assemblages* (2005; 2010), which draws from the concept of assemblage developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Assemblage as a concept is not straightforward to define, particularly because it is dense and intertextual, but following Deleuze, Bennett defines an assemblage as:

> [F]irst, an ad hoc grouping, a collectivity whose origins are historical and circumstantial, though its contingent status says nothing about its efficacy, which can be quite strong. An assemblage is, second, a living, throbbing grouping whose coherence coexists with energies and countercultures that exceed and confound it. An assemblage is, third, a web with an uneven topography: some of the points at which the trajectories of actants cross each other are more heavily trafficked than others, and thus power is not equally distributed across the assemblage. An assemblage is, fourth, not governed by a central power: no one member has sufficient competence to fully determine the consequences of the activities of the assemblage. An assemblage, finally, is made up of many types of actants: humans and

> nonhumans; animals, vegetables, and minerals; nature, culture, and technology. (Bennett, 2005: 445)

The similarities between assemblage thinking and ANT are striking. John Law sees them as almost the same, stating, "there is little difference between Deleuze's *agencement* (awkwardly translated as "assemblage" in English) and the term "actor-network" (Law, 2009: 147). Having said that, I must point out that some scholars, such as philosopher Graham Harman, claim that Deleuze and Latour pursue "irreconcilable projects" (Harman, 2009: 30), since early/ Latourian ANT pays little attention to flux and flow. Despite these ambiguous views on the relationship between assemblage thinking and ANT, this research acknowledges the conjunctions between the two approaches, and the promising space in between. Human geography scholars Martin Müller and Carolin Schurr propose three cross-fertilisations that have implications for understanding three key processes in our socio-material world: stabilisation, change, and affect. They argue that:

> First, the conceptual vocabulary of ANT can enrich assemblage thinking with an explicitly spatial account of the ways in which assemblages are drawn together, reach across space and are stabilised. Second, each approach is better attuned to conceptualising a particular kind of change in socio-material relations: ANT describes change without rupture, or fluidity, whereas assemblage thinking describes change with rupture, or events. Third and last, assemblage thinking could fashion ANT with a greater sensitivity for the productive role of affect in bringing socio-material relations into being through the production of desire/wish (désir). (Müller and Schurr, 2016: 217)

According to Müller and Schurr, a cross-fertilisation between ANT and assemblage thinking offers, in a sense, the best of both worlds. Conjoining the two approaches allows making the strengths and sensitivities of each approach work for the other (Müller and Schurr, 2016: 226). While Bennett, following Deleuze, and Latour offer different conceptualisations of the assemblage (actor-network), both introduce the concept of actants as entities

(and forces) to move away from anthropocentric constructs of agency. Bennett, however, advances the notion of assemblage presuming that the “locus of political responsibility” is a human-nonhuman assemblage. In other words, the agency of assemblages of which she speaks focuses on how the productive power behind effects is always a collectivity. She states, “On close-enough inspection, the productive power that has engendered an effect will turn out to be a confederacy, and the human actants within it will themselves turn out to be confederations of tools, microbes, minerals, sounds, and other “foreign” materialities” (Bennett, 2010: 36). Thus, in the context of this research, the human performer is itself an actor-network; a “confederation” of body, clothing, dance training/ techniques, styling practices and so forth, within the assemblage, or network of hip-hop. Whilst Latour’s networks are not fixed, nor are they singular, there is a lingering association between the term “network” and technological systems/ systematic lines of connectivity that makes the concept less appealing to critics. Nevertheless, ANT presents an explicit spatial sensitivity where it refers to scales, distance and topology (Law and Mol, 1994; 2001), in assemblage thinking spatiality remains rather implicit.

Common ground between ANT and assemblage thinking has increased with post-ANT’s turn towards embracing multiplicities and fluidities. By drawing together Bennett’s concept of assemblage and post-ANT’s “fluid spatiality”, this research describes constant actant activity affecting and being affected across space and time. It emphasises collectivity rather than “a collective”, and coexistence as opposed to a “flattened cohabitation of all things" (Thrift, 2000: 215). The research reveals how associations in hip-hop dance networks are incomplete and shifting, however without producing breaks and discontinuities. Through the notion of genre especially, it highlights how actors move in and out of the network, how new relations are forged, and existing ones cut. But instead of disrupting the whole network, this just transforms the resultant actor (Mol, 2002).

In what follows, I illustrate how ANT, with its origins in scientific practice and technologies, is not as intellectually far away from hip-hop, performance,

fashion, and costume as one might believe. First, I define key dress-related terms and concepts used in the thesis before focusing on a specific set of authors that apply ANT and/ or draw on new materialist ideas to understand fashion (for example, Entwistle, 2015; and Smelik, 2018), costume (Barbieri and Crawley, 2019), and performance practices (Schneider, 2015; Schweitzer and Zerdy, 2014). I then outline key aspects from the field of performance studies that are relevant to this study, namely black performance theory (DeFrantz and Gonzales, 2014) and the concepts of restored behaviour (Schechner, 1985), and "digital liveness" (Auslander, 2008).

Fashioning the hip-hop performer

Fashion is by nature temporary and ephemeral, and its mutability makes it a difficult topic to define and to research (Woodward, 2014). Deciding on one specific dress-related term to use consistently throughout the research was an impossible task, mainly because this work embraces multiplicity and challenges preconceptions of rigid definitions and practices. However, to better understand the symbiotic relationship between fashion and performance, it is necessary to be precise about terminology. Carol Tulloch, author and scholar of dress and diaspora studies states that, "terminology orders thought, transfers specialized knowledge, and helps to structure information" (Tulloch, 2010: 274). Fashion, for example, is a term loaded with meanings and associations. Yet, the terms fashion, style, dress, clothing, and costume are often used interchangeably, and their use becomes unclear and vague. Tulloch suggests that "in such instances, reference is being made to the culture and/ or associated processes of clothes, garments, and accessories, but without delineation of the meanings of "style", "fashion" or "dress" within a given context" (Tulloch, 2010: 275).

Whilst I attempt to delineate these terms below, it would be very "un-ANT-ish" (Nimmo, 2011) to disregard the subtleties and shifts in terminology across hip-hop's communities of both practice and scholarship. I will discuss in chapter 6 how hip-hop enables not only transformations of matter, but also

unique fluidity with regard to language around dress. I consider how practitioners alternate between the terms fashion and costume depending on the performance context and intended function of the clothing. I thus move fluidly between the terms fashion, clothing, dress, and costume in the thesis when referring to the culture of, and processes involved with, performers accessing, selecting, customising and wearing clothes in different performative contexts.

Fashion–dress–clothing

A simple and straightforward dictionary definition of the term “fashion” is, “to give fashion or shape to”, or “to form, mould, shape (either a material or immaterial object)”; and “fashioned” means, “wrought into fashion or shape”, “formed with art or skill”, or “having or provided with a fashion (i.e. an appearance, manner, or shape) of a peculiar kind.” (Oxford English Dictionary [OED online], 2023) The term “fashioning” can thus be understood as creating, constructing, forming, producing, and shaping. Conceptually, fashion is regarded in the research as a material and immaterial phenomenon, at once material culture and a symbolic system (Kawamura, 2005). A distinction that I make, however, between fashion, clothing and costume, relates to fashion’s core theme of obsolescence. That is, its temporal or time-based logic of stylistically driven change, in which particular forms, or styles of clothing – for example, shoes, bags, and other accessories – are replaced for social, symbolic, or aesthetic, rather than practical reasons (Wilson, 2003). In her book *Adorned in Dreams* (2003), cultural theorist Elizabeth Wilson defines fashion as, “the child of capitalism, emerged out of everyday encounters, in city streets, as a means of identifying the self” (Wilson, 2003: 13). However, I focus less on fashion as a commercial industry producing and selling commercial commodities, and more on fashion as a “socio-cultural force bound up with the dynamics of modernity and post-modernity; and an intangible system of signification [...] made of things and signs, as well as individual and collective agents” (Roccamora and Smelik, 2015: 2). ANT’s appreciation of multiplicity and complex realities enables an examination of both the materiality of hip-hop

fashion and its more intangible dynamics and underpinnings, such as globalisation and social marginalisation, which were explored in chapters 2 and 3.

Fashion scholar and designer Jessica Bugg argues that the clothed, communicating body is a site for the meeting of fashion and performance practice (Bugg, 2001). She explains that “The worlds of fashion and performance have tended to be analysed and understood in the context of their own disciplines as separate and distinctly different in terms of their design process and intention” (Bugg, 2001: 65). Two scholars that do make explicit links between fashion, performance and performativity are Andrea Kollnitz and Marco Pecorari (2021). They point out that practices of representation and consumption of clothing can be materialised in “extraordinary self-fashioning practices via dress in public arenas but also ordinary and everyday dress practices in private spheres, industry practice perpetuating normative ideologies, or artistic interventions aiming to disrupt hegemony while empowering the marginalized” (Kollnitz and Pecorari, 2021: 3-4). What is notable in both disciplines (fashion and performance), then, is “the use of the body as a catalyst and site through which meaning is created and communicated.” (Bugg, 2001: 65).

Similar to Bugg, sociologist Joanne Entwistle proposes the idea of dress as “situated bodily practice” (2000; 2015). She argues that the body and dress are inextricably linked, both to each other and the society they are orientated to. Her approach “requires moving away from the consideration of dress as object to looking instead at the way in which dress is an embodied activity and one that is embedded within social relations” (Entwistle, 2000: 10). Entwistle points out that what constitutes “dress” varies from culture to culture and also within a culture, since what is considered appropriate dress will depend on the situation or occasion. Drawing from this theoretical thinking, the research describes how hip-hop culture, and different forms of hip-hop dance within the culture, demands its own dress, whether clothing, accessories, or cosmetics. It expands current thinking about dress by revealing how clothing objects not only cover modesty and/ or protect the

body but are also crucial actants that enable transformation through their entanglement with other material agencies. Through ANT, I explore how conventions related to dressing transform the hip-hop dancing body into a powerful societal force and drive it into discourses it has otherwise been absent from, such as theatre, costume, and fashion scholarship.

In its broadest sense, dress serves three purposes: practical functionality (protection from the elements), modesty or display (concealing or revealing parts of the body), and it acts as a means of symbolic or cultural adornment (expressing customs, social status, and identity) (Eicher and Roach Higgins, 1992b). These functions of dress are universal to all societies, although, as stated by Entwistle (2000), what constitutes dress varies from culture to culture and within cultures. In *Dress and Identity* (1992b), authors Joanne B. Eicher and Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins analyse dress as a non-verbal means of communicating identity. They use the term dress as a gender-neutral collective noun to designate either a social group's body modifications and supplements (for example, American dress, military dress, occupational dress, human dress) or those of an individual (for example, that person's dress). They note that although the word may carry either masculine or feminine meanings depending upon certain inflections (dresses), modifiers (a dress), or conversions to verb form (dressing to the right or left), these usages do not conflict with the collective meaning (Eicher and Roach Higgins, 1992b: 16-17). In *Definition and Classification of Dress* (1992a), the authors characterise the dressed person as:

> A gestalt that includes body, all direct modifications of the body itself, and all three-dimensional supplements added to it […] Direct modifications of the body as well as the supplements added to it must be considered types of dress because they are equally effective means of human communication, and because similar meanings can be conveyed by some property, or combination of properties, of either modifications or supplements (Eicher and Roach-Higgins, 1992a: 13).

According to the above definition, dress incorporates object, meaning, and identity. Of relevance to the research is Eicher and Roach-Higgins's notion of dress as an assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body. Dress, so defined, is an accurate and comprehensive term, one that is used throughout the thesis to include direct modifications of the body, such as hairstyles, tattoos, and piercings, as well as garments, jewellery, accessories, and other categories of items added to the body as supplements.

Through ANT the research expands the concept of dress as "bodily assemblage" by including the dress-related ideas, beliefs, values, and practices that emerge from a specific culture and inform those modifications and supplements to the body. For example, the word "fresh" which, "In the inner city, means you have money, and you can afford to buy these products. Beyond that, looking clean and crisp is a big part of the urban aesthetic. Something looking brand new says a lot about who you are" (Jenkins, 2015). The research enlightens on how confidence, aspiration, success, and respect are enabled through fresh dress in collaboration with the dancing body. Through direct engagement with hip-hop practitioners, I reveal how deeply the concept is engrained in the hip-hop dance community and how it produces sartorial choices. For example, in an interview with Nine – a respected b-boy, dance teacher, and mentor from Birmingham, UK – he described the look of his former b-boy crew Broken Silence, stating:

> We had the, you know, the name belts, the Adidas with the chunky laces. We had the ski goggles underneath our necks. How d'ya mean?! [We wore] Kappa. Yo! [We were] Fresh! Because, you know, the fresher you look, the better you perform (Nine, 2018).

While the concept of fresh indicates the aesthetic function of dress, this research also highlights the materiality and practical functions of specific dress objects during hip-hop dance training, rehearsals, and performances. In these instances, I use the word clothing, which generally omits body modifications, to refer to enclosures that cover and/ or protect the body from

the elements and the performance space itself. I discuss how certain types of clothing – fitted, loose, sweat-wicking, long-sleeved – can enhance body shapes and build confidence, but also facilitate and/ or inhibit different types of movement and prevent discomfort and injury in hip-hop dance. For example, breaker and choreographer Emma Houston, aka “Shortbread”, recalled (during an interview in 2018) a group training session that took place in a freezing cold, dusty warehouse in Glasgow. Shortbread described how the dancers enlisted warm, protective clothing, and temporary floor coverings to overcome the poor spatial conditions and protect their bodies from the environment. Shortbread also expressed that clothes for battles and stage performances must be “fresh but functional” (Houston, 2018b), a notion that is discussed in more detail in chapter 6. Put simply, clothing must meet the practical needs of the hip-hop performer, but also enable them to actively construct their identity and be perceived by others as fresh.

I take pause here to point out that, while this thesis attends much more centrally to the significance of materiality and matter than language, it does pay attention to “fresh” as a critical term, material semiotic concept and embedded trope within hip-hop culture. It considers how the word fresh “bends relations” (Haraway, 1997) in various actor-networks. Following Haraway – who argues that tropes are “constituted by bumps that make us swerve from literal-mindedness” and “weave the social into better forms” (1997: 11) – this research “bends” what is usually meant by the word fresh in order to defer the literal and weave the stuff of hip-hop, and our understanding of it, into new forms. In common parlance, fresh is used to describe something or someone new, original, inexperienced or not known before. It can also mean bold, impudent or impertinent. In hip-hop, the word is used informally to mean cool or fashionable; it refers to sporting a “fresh out of the box” (brand new) look (Jenkins, 2015), or executing flawless and clean looking dance moves. By broadening and complicating the term fresh, this thesis reveals a paradox, in that fresh, in the hip-hop context, conveys something newly made *and* preserved all at once.

According to fashion scholar Joanne Entwistle, conventions of dress transform bodies into something “recognizable and meaningful to a culture”; they are “the means by which bodies are made ‘decent’, appropriate and acceptable within specific contexts” (Entwistle, 2000: 324). This indicates that social expectations for behaviour and appearance emerge from the social structure, or rather cultural context, in which we participate. As such, dressing is viewed as predominantly a social activity; it is a way of presenting oneself, one’s social identity to others. In interaction, the hip-hop performer’s appearance, and thus the clothes they wear, are being interpreted, and it is these interpretations in which meanings are established, and on which most initial opinions and beliefs about their hip-hop cultural knowledge and practice are based. Drawing on the work of Georg Simmel (1904), sociologist and dress scholar Anna-Mari Almila highlights that fashion is a means of signifying belonging and difference within a social hierarchy or culture, and states that “what and who is fashionable is imagined by particular people" (Almila, 2014: 55). In line with this notion, Flash explained that:

> In the breaking culture, I can't speak for all, fashion isn't so much emphasised only because of practicality, you know? They don’t [have] too many awesome looking clothes or fashionable looking clothes that we can just really break in and go all out in, as opposed to, you know, poppers, lockers, you know? They can pull that off. We can't look fresh because we're gonna be a sweaty mess, we’re gonna be throwing ourselves all over the floor. (Duarte, 2018)

Flash’s comments reveal, firstly, individual and inter-genre differences regarding practicality/ materiality of clothing and bodily movement. Secondly, reference is being made to the social dynamics of fashion, including how it is imagined and used by individuals (Almila, 2014: 56) in conveying narratives and concepts from and on the hip-hop dancing body. I describe in later chapters how dancers “fabricate” themselves through different types of dress; literally, by covering their bodies in specific fabrics and garments to enable certain types of bodily movement, and figuratively, by constructing a particular image or hip-hop dancer identity. I discuss how they reveal,

conceal, feign, or manipulate various aspects of identity through the fashioned body, in the above instance, a “breaker identity”, but also ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. I focus especially on representations of black femininity, (hyper)masculinity, and non-binary gender identity, illustrating how fashion operates as more than simply “dress” in hip-hop performance. I argue instead for fashion as a mechanism of change in a process of becoming (Barad, 2007).

An actor-network approach to fashion

Although new materialist approaches have gained substantial recognition in social and cultural research, they have received much less attention in fashion studies and vice versa. As visual culture and fashion scholar Anneke Smelik points out, “fashion hardly ever features in scholarship on new materialism” (Smelik, 2018: 34). Applications of actor-network theory in fashion studies and hip-hop studies are even more scarce. However, Smelik argues that new materialism offers fresh perspectives for the study of fashion for two reasons: (1) it rethinks dualisms and (2) it interrogates the notion of *material agency* (Smelik, 2018: 38). To reiterate, material agency means approaching the human body as an assemblage of material forces. It means a shift from human will or agency to the very materiality of the human body as intelligent and “vibrant matter” (Bennett, 2010). New materialism endeavours to rethink dualisms between, for example, the natural and the social, the human and the non-human, the material and the immaterial (Bennett and Joyce 2010). The deconstruction of binary oppositions, which was already at the heart of post-structuralism[34], is further intensified in new

[34] Post-structuralism is a movement in social sciences that developed in France in the late 1960s. It is the result of both the structuralist period of examining sign and structure, and the humanist paradigm of concentrating on the texts, the writers, the readers, and histories. Jacques Derrida, with his deconstruction hypothesis, is one of the most ”praised experts” of the development - along with Jacques Lacan (psychoanalysis), Michel Foucault (philosophy), Roland Barthes (semiotics), Julia Kristeva (social criticism) and Jean-Francois Lyotard (political hypothesis).

Deconstruction, established in *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences* in 1966, is a central critique of certain intellectual and scholarly suppositions that underlie all Western ideas and values. It concentrates on the innate, interior inconsistencies in language and elucidation.

materialism (Smelik, 2018: 38); which is useful for this research as it aims to disturb the rigid boundaries found in hip-hop and enlighten on the interwoven parts of a complex phenomenon.

In *Thinking Through Fashion* (2015), co-edited by Agnès Rocamora and Anneke Smelik, Entwistle explores fashion specifically from a Latourian perspective defining it as materially co-produced in a complex network of interconnected human and non-human actors. Whilst her interests lie generally in the areas of fashion production, distribution, and consumption, she states that: "fashion is very much a culture-nature hybrid itself", one that is "[…] constructed out of natural materials like cotton and silk (as well as synthetics, of course) which are fashioned into garments through a long, complex design and distribution process" (Entwistle, 2015: 272). For her, fashion is the end produce of complex interventions into the natural world and entangled into networks of human and non-human actors around the world, "from water and chemicals to grow cotton at one end of the process, through to hangers and other devices to display clothing on the shop-floor" (2015: 272). Building on this perspective I argue that fashion is more than an "end product" of complex interactions between humans and non-humans. Rather, it is a change agent, "a dynamic and creative force that opens the subject up to a process of infinite becoming" (Deleuze [1988] 1993). In the context of this study, fashion objects are to be understood as "hybrid assemblages of fibres, materials, skin and body that are always in the process of becoming" (Smelik, 2018: 44), or "becoming-with", in Haraway's words (2016: 60). As mentioned previously, the notion of becoming, of process, is central to the understanding of *things* according to Barad (2007). In her view, agency is not an attribute, but fundamentally dynamic (Barad 2003: 818). She argues that matter is "not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency" (2003: 822), which (in the hip-hop network) is often "active, self-creative, productive, and unpredictable" (Coole & Frost, 2010: 9).

The deconstructive hypothesis neither has an idea nor is a type of examination. It is a procedure of deconstructing the text. (Gnanasekaran, 2015: 212)

I discuss in later chapters how fashion is agential because it “does” things to the hip-hop performer, and not just the things they want them to do. For example, a pair of sneakers with a rubber sole might restrict sliding and/ or gliding movements on a particular floor surface, therefore influencing the dancer’s choices around footwear. Agency thus emerges within a web of people and things, for instance a shoe, or floor surface. Drawing on the work of various scholars concerned with “performing objects” and the “theatricality of things” (whose ideas I outline shortly), I illustrate how, in hip-hop performance, objects (wearables especially) are part of the generation and actualisation of the agency of people/ performers and, through their materiality, can carry, thwart or else redirect human agency/ intention (Woodward and Fisher, 2014: 8). I also focus on the life of hip-hop objects and cultural artefacts; that is, the flow of materials, their enactments, and the transformations that garments and stylistic practices engender across time and space. ANT provides a simple methodology for “tracing” these connections, by instructing us to empirically observe and follow the actors, to see where they go, what they do, and what objects they “enrol” into assemblages (Entwistle, 2015: 272).

Entwistle argues that there is more to be gained from considering *all* the objects (human and non-human) assembled in a fashion actor-network than would be in conventional research focused only on the distinctly “social” or “cultural” human actors (Entwistle, 2015: 280). She states that doing an ANT analysis involves “getting your hands dirty” by doing ethnographic empirical work. Interestingly, she follows the trajectory of fashion objects including the “Polaroid” and “portfolio”, which are devices used in the fashion network to not only qualify and re-qualify a model’s “look”, but also shape their career. To understand this process, she says, “you could not merely look at photographic representations, but you would need to see how models are selected, cast, photographed and so on” (2015: 279). While I am not working with models but with performers and their performance costumes, I am following the actants, or rather the “flows of materials” (Ingold, 2010: 4), which enables a better understanding of how certain garments and accessories from the 1970s and 1980s continue to “create alliances and

encounters between fibres, fabrics and bodies; between craftsmanship and technology; and between materiality and immateriality" (Smelik, 2018: 48) in the hip-hop network. As discussed in the previous chapter, my explorations of dress began with the athletic wear and designer brands favoured in the nascent era of hip-hop; printed garments, such as t-shirts and jackets; headgear and accessories; and most especially, sneakers. Paying close attention to materiality and practice – tracing creative styling and customising practices, along with rituals and behaviours around fresh dress back to their origins – has revealed how everyday fashion garments often *become* costume in hip-hop performance practice depending on how, when and by whom they are worn.

In what follows, I outline new materialist approaches to objects and "things" which are significant because they help to account for the behaviour of fashion and costume objects in hip-hop performance and illustrate how object-oriented ontologies (OOO) and methodologies can erode the fashion/ costume distinction (binary).

Performing objects and things

Drawing from new materialist ideas and theorists such as Bruno Latour and Jane Bennett in particular, theatre and performance scholars Marlis Schweitzer and Joanne Zerdy identify objects as collaborators in the performance making process and view object-oriented methodologies as enabling an ethical turn away from anthropocentrism. In *Performing Objects and Theatrical Things* (2014), they reject the (Kantian) binary in which objects are simply observed or experienced by human subjects; instead, they champion the "agentic efficacy" of non-human entities (Sofer, 2016: 682). Of significance to this thesis is Schweitzer's claim that objects allow performance scholars to "touch time, to experience the past in the present and to imagine new futures" (2014: 1). Whilst performing objects are often consigned to the "metaphorical dustbin" after performance – housed in archives, museums, galleries, storage facilities, performance venues and personal collections – Schweitzer and Zerdy argue instead for objects as

vibrant matter, alive and evolving. Building on this perspective, I propose that in the moment of performance, when in motion and in collaboration with other entities, a hip-hop object, such as a classic sneaker, or a piece of linoleum used as a floor covering, is no longer “a remnant of the past” (ibid) but a living thing.

In chapter 5 (Methodological framework) I describe how during the fieldwork, I “moved with the objects as if in a dance and found myself responding to the animated whispers of the entities I beheld” (Schweitzer and Zerdy, 2014: 15). Chapter 6 details how this dance with objects, or “hip-hop artefacts”, allowed me to reimagine historical narratives of breaking and reclaim/ revisit “forgotten” performance/ cultural practices. For example, “do-it-yourself" customising practices – embellishing garments such as shirts and jackets with names and large insignias on the back to show one’s affiliation with a b-boy crew – which can be traced back to the biker-inspired outlaw style of 1970s street gang culture. In her article, *Dances with Things* (2009), Robin Bernstein states that in the “dense interaction” between things and humans, things often script human performance; more specifically, the performance of race. The term “script” denotes not a rigid dictation of performed action but, rather, a necessary openness to resistance, interpretation, and improvisation. She writes:

> When I describe elements of material culture as “scripting” human actions, I am not suggesting that people lack agency. Rather, I am proposing that agency, intention, and racial subjectivation co-emerge through everyday physical encounters with the material world. I use the term script as a theatrical practitioner might: to denote an evocative primary substance from which actors, directors, and designers build complex, variable performances that occupy real time and space. (Bernstein, 2009: 68-9)

That which Bernstein calls a “scriptive thing”, like a play script, broadly structures a performance while simultaneously allowing for resistance and unleashing original, live variations that may not be individually predictable

(ibid). Through the concept of scriptive things, she questions how humans perform with racially meaningful, three-dimensional material culture. Put simply, Bernstein explores how people "dance with things" to construct race. Similarly, I question how things shape human behaviour in framed moments of hip-hop dance activity. I explore how human performers – who are agential – react to clothing, materials and spaces – that are insentient but also active – imbued with political and racially meaningful histories, ideas and concepts. I use ANT as a tool to understand how fashion objects, or rather things, assert themselves within hip-hop. For example, athletic and designer brands, tracksuits, sneakers, and headgear all invite "repetitions of acts, distinctive and meaningful motions of eyes, hands, shoulders, hips, feet" (Bernstein, 2009: 70) in hip-hop performance. These things are important because "they arrange and propel bodies in recognizable ways, through paths of evocative movement that have been travelled before" (2009: 70). I pause the conversation briefly to introduce a relevant concept taken from the field of performance studies, Richard Schechner's "restored behaviour" or "restoration of behaviour" (1985), which proposes that there is no real first time to any behaviour.

According to Schechner, the action/ activity, the habits, rituals and routines of life are "living behaviours" (Schechner, 1985: 35) that can be rearranged, reconstructed, re-emphasised, and reassembled in the same way a film director takes, retakes and edits a strip of film. He writes:

> These strips of behavior […] are independent of the causal systems (personal, social, political, technological, etc.) that brought them into existence. They have a life of their own. The original "truth" or "source" of the behavior may not be known, or may be lost, ignored, or contradicted – even while this truth or source is apparently being honored. How the strips of behavior were made, found, or developed may be unknown or concealed; elaborated; distorted by myth and tradition. Restored behavior can be of long duration as in ritual performances or of short duration as in fleeting gestures such as waving goodbye. (Schechner, 2013: 34)

Drawn together with Bernstein's concept of scriptive things – in which things propel bodies through paths of bodily movement that have been "travelled before" – and the new materialist concepts outlined earlier, restored behaviour helps to understand hip-hop as an open possibility of making and remaking across networks and through material actants. It provides ways to think about how hip-hop dance practices, memories and identities, both individual and collective, embodied and discursive, are constituted through repetitive performances/ enactments not only by human bodies, but also material objects. I discuss in the empirical chapters how, originating as a process, used in the process of training and rehearsal to make a new process (a performance), the strips of behaviour are not themselves process but things, items, "material" (Schechner, 1985: 35). I describe in detail how some behaviours in hip-hop – for example, organised sequences of events (rituals), technical movements, ways of dressing – are networked alongside the performers who "do" these behaviours, and how the units of behaviour that comprise the practitioners under study are not invented by them but are instead created by the collective hip-hop community/ network.

For example, b-boy Flash described how specific clothing, in this instance a treasured Adidas tracksuit, affected his breaking performance. He stated:

> I feel that [if] I look a certain way, for some reason it makes me move a certain way. I was wearing this fresh Adidas tracksuit, and, for some reason, I was moving very old school. You know, everything that I had learnt from OGs, my body just wanted to emulate that. (Duarte, 2018)

Flash's comments imply that breaking/ b-boying is restored behaviour scripted, in this scenario, by the Adidas tracksuit; a significant hip-hop cultural artefact that "prompts, inspires, and structures" (Bernstein, 2009: 74) his performance. There is no real first time to Flash's behaviour, instead he recombines bits of behaviours previously "behaved" (Schechner, 2013: 35) by "OGs", the b-boy pioneers and second-generation breakers from New York who have greatly influenced his own dance practice and identity. In the

empirical chapters I describe how practitioners – networked simultaneously in the moment of performance, and in relation to other performances happening elsewhere and at other times – "get in touch with, recover, remember, or even invent these strips of behavior and then rebehave according to these strips, either by being absorbed into them (playing the role, going into trance) or by existing side by side with them" (Schechner, 1985: 36). Furthermore, I highlight how the work of restoration is continued in the transmission of behaviour from practitioner to practitioner (generally from experienced to novice). That is, via bodies fashioned in subtly different ways during training, rehearsals, and live and mediatised performances. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, a criticism of ANT is that it offers little explanation about processes that come after the establishment of networks. Detailing how fashion "things" store, transmit, manipulate, and transform practitioners' behaviour/ movement, and therefore shape the networks in which they are situated, helps to explain the mechanics of agential materiality.

Interestingly, Bernstein makes a distinction between "an incompetent performer, who cannot decode a thing's invitation to dance" and "a resistant performer [who] understands and exerts agency against the script" (2009: 75). Whilst I do not intend for the word "incompetent" to be taken literally, I draw a comparison here between Bernstein's incompetent performer and the novice hip-hop dancer that may be unaware of the histories that inform their sartorial choices. The resistant performer, for me, represents the hip-hop dancer that asserts agency and uses fashion to enact resistant and creative transgressions. For example, breaker Shortbread performs gender-transgressive choreography on the Sadler's Wells main stage wearing a loose cut, non-descript, white boiler suit. Notably, boiler suits were widely diffused in Europe at the start of the twentieth century, especially amongst mechanics and motor engineers (Williams-Mitchell 1982: 112). The garment is "standard and mass produced and provided a kind of undifferentiated anonymity" (Crane 2000: 89) for the wearer. As such, the boiler suit, which was also co-opted by hip-hop in the 1990s, powerfully scripts, choreographs, directs, and otherwise animates its human collaborator (Schweitzer and

Zerdy, 2014: 6) whose intention is to blur the gender binary. It is a political thing that not only represents a moment in hip-hop fashion history, but also carries the connotation of gender equality. In *The Purple Jigsaw* (see chapter 8), Shortbread and fellow breaker Zana "enrol" (Latour, 2005) the durable garment to protect their gendered, hip-hop dancing bodies as they claim space in a male dominated genre and a performance environment (theatre) that is default middle-class, white, male, and not ordinarily associated with hip-hop.

Another example of resistant performance was Flash's b-boy freestyle on a New York subway platform, which I experienced via his social media page during the fieldwork. His impromptu "throw down" – when a dancer hits the floor and starts breaking – was brief but significant because it invoked a spatial understanding of hip-hop as it reverberated into the built environment/ urban space. Scholars discuss how much of the activity of early adopters of hip-hop culture in New York was a process of reclaiming public spaces (Banes, 1994; Forman, 2004; Chang, 2005). Sometimes this reclamation was achieved through sound – consider the boombox radios popularised in the 1980s – dance, and especially through graffiti writing and "tagging" names and images on/ in public spaces. The use of the subway underscored the urge to manipulate public property and services for the benefit of youth culture and in particular, the processes of self-identification amongst inner city youth (Peterson, 2014: 15). In the empirical chapters, I consider the material agency of the performance space/ venue/ location in its entanglement with the moving body, and the performativity of the clothing. I considered how, in Flash's case, the Adidas 3-Stripes tracksuit he adores reinforces his self-identification as a "New Yorker" and "old school" b-boy due to its links to 1980s breaking culture and the iconic rap group Run-D.M.C.

I turn briefly to the approach adopted by Celia Lury (2004, 2009), who argues that brands are assemblages, and that they are formed by different processes and organisational activities as well as multiple human and non-human actors. While Lury's own interest mainly lies in understanding the brand as an outcome of relations in the cultural economy, her approach can

be expanded to demonstrate how assemblages form and dissolve, how brands change and are sustained. Seeing brands as assemblages, she recognises their heterogeneity and positions them as holding numerous trajectories, which necessitates looking forward as well as backward at different relations and linkages. Drawing on Callon (1998), Latour (1987) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Lury conceives brands as networks of relations between consumers and organisations and complex objects that are performative, distributed, and relational (Lury, 2004, 2009). Whilst brands are incorporeal/ intangible, I refer to Adidas not only as a scriptive thing and performing object/ actor in the hip-hop network, but also as "a platform for patterning of activity, a mode of organizing activities in time and space" (Lury, 2004: 1). As Lury puts it, the brand "is not simply here or somewhere else, but rather is some-thing that emerges in parts" (ibid).

Her approach is useful as it recognises both the agency of objects and people in the shaping of brands and the agency of brands themselves. She suggests that assemblages are fragmented and distributed, but also shared and collectively understood. As discussed in chapter 2, the Adidas brand is lived and embedded in hip-hop activities with a spatial and temporal context. Adidas has a temporal materiality, in terms of looking back from the brand toward the hip-hop cultural practices that shaped it, but also as a forward-looking object, "a set of possible relations and connections" (Lury, 2009: 68). Thus, Adidas is presented in this thesis as a mobile and "dynamic object of knowledge" (Ashcraft et al. 2012: 477) that is in a constant state of becoming and controls work in the processes of production, co-production, and reproduction of meaning. I argue that as a set of relations between material actants which exist in time and survive beyond the performance, the Adidas brand enables continuity and change, sameness and difference, tradition and innovation. It is a dynamic entity often used by practitioners to assert their identities, affiliation with, and knowledge of hip-hop culture.

New materialist readings of costume

Within dance performance, design practice that makes use of everyday garments as costume is a well-established tradition. However, this tradition remains under-researched in terms of its versatility (Helve, 2018: 14-15). An objective of this research is to complicate and disturb the distinction between fashion and costume by focusing on fluidity, multiplicity, different *translations* or transformations of body, clothing and space during moments of hip-hop dance performance. It therefore utilises new materialist approaches to costume – as well as new materialist theories of how everyday entities take on a theatrical life and contribute to spectacular public events – and investigates the conscious and constructed choices in costume within examples of live and mediated hip-hop dance, especially those that possess political themes. Through these examples of dance, I explore how "the costumed performing body represents reality through observation and imitation" (Barbieri, 2017: 167), and how costume helps not only to add everyday attributes to hip-hop performance but also to "materialise flaws, taboos or platitudes of society and the self" (Helve, 2018: 18) by, for example, being worn by a "wrong" body to indicate an incongruous combination of costume and the costumed body, be it in relation to gender, stereotyped imagery or the overall aesthetics of a performance (Monks, 2015: 105, 127). For example, I discuss in chapter 8 how two male performers use everyday fashion objects, the "tank top" and "crop top", as costume to aid them in their destabilising of normative gender categorisations in hip-hop and contemporary dance.

Fashion, as an area of study, is more established and better documented than costume, which remains elusive in scholarly studies of performance and dress (Monks, 2010; Barbieri, 2013, 2017). The two areas are inherently related but do have key differences. The term costume differs from fashion and clothing because it frequently identifies the body supplements and modifications that indicate the ''out-of-everyday" social role or activity (Eicher & Roach-Higgins, 1992b: 10). Costume and performance scholars Donatella Barbieri and Sofia Pantouvaki separate costuming from the practice of

dressing for the everyday. They reclaim costuming as a preparation of the performer specifically for live and mediated performance – which reaches well beyond theatre and drama (Barbieri & Pantouvaki, 2016: 4) – and as fundamental to the way performance is received by the audience. Whilst this thesis does not dismiss the role of costume in pleasing audiences and providing visual stimuli for spectators, its primary concern is the tension and relationships between fashion, costume, the performing bodies (on "stage"), and various performance spaces. Referring to this tension, theatre and performance scholar Michelle Liu Carriger writes:

> Costumes are complicated, not just in the way they need to mediate between moving, performing bodies and the rest of the *mise-en-scène*, but also because of costume's continuities with the equally fraught realm of clothing "in real life." Today the word "costume" in English usually has a very clear meaning: clothing put on in order to appear like someone or something one is not. A costume's theatricality is supposed to be evident – that is, the person in the costume should be recognizable as double, both signifying the thing to which the costume refers *and* signifying that she or he is not *really* that thing. (Carriger, 2017: 42)

Whilst I concur with the first part of Carriger's statement and pay close attention to how costumes can mediate moving, performing bodies, the rest of the *mise-en-scène*, and vice versa, I question her claim that the person wearing the costume "should be recognisable as double" (an actor and a character). I suggest instead that in hip-hop, a costume's "theatricality" can be subtle and not always evident to the perceiver/ audience but *is* recognisable as fresh in its entanglement with the hip-hop dancing body. Furthermore, I propose that everyday fashion used as costume often "draws attention to the performer's corporeal and material here-and-now reality" (Barbieri, 2017: xxii). Put another way, I articulate how seemingly "ordinary" clothing *becomes* costume and can bring forth the "authentic" aspects of hip-hop dance culture; for example, preferred training "gear" and/ or the street-style clothing tradition often associated with random choice. Close

examination of the costumed, hip-hop dancing body through an ANT lens reveals a fresh and often carefully constructed composition; an illusion of a carefree, everyday look which is created through systematic choices that can be traced back to key moments in hip-hop history as well as African diasporic traditions. As discussed in chapter 2, this attitude of being consciously aware of your image, while at the same time acting unconcerned, is a variation of the "cool pose" – a tactic used by African Americans, primarily males, to project social competence, pride, dignity, self-esteem, and respect (Majors and Billson, 1992). I argue that fresh costume in hybrid performance space is "an expansive diasporic act of black aesthetics" as well as "a critical tool in the projection of the aesthetic of presence" (Tulloch, 2016: 4). I suggest that the very act of "thinking about what to wear in a performative context indicates costume", and that costume which makes use of existing, ready-made and, to some eyes, "barely considered garments" should not be dismissed (Helve, 2018: 26). Thus, the term costume is used in the thesis to refer to dress that was planned, was meant to be seen, and meant to be read semiotically as indicative of the genre, performance setting, or the artistic vision of the production.

Barbieri provides an eloquent definition of costume in the introduction to her book, *Costume in Performance: Materiality, Culture, and the Body* (2017). She defines costume as, "a crucial aspect of the preparation, presentation, and reception of live performance, revealing the relationship between dress, body and human existence in a way that causes us to question the extent to which it co-authors the performance with the performer" (Barbieri, 2017: xxii). She argues that costume enables performance, and that it can guide movement, reveal characters, and structure relationships in the temporary space of performance. According to Barbieri:

> Both costume and fashion act through the body, intending to influence behavior and thoughts, and to communicate. In costume this is organized not as a production of personal identity but within a "staged" world governed by its own interior aesthetic logic, functioning as an

ordering principle that evaporates at the end of the performance (Barbieri, 2017: xxiii).

Whilst the research builds on this perspective – proposing that hip-hop is also a “world" governed by its own inner aesthetic logic, driven by the human and non-human elements of the assemblage/ network – it illustrates how networks continue to function and act beyond the performance, rather than “evaporate” as Barbieri suggests above. In a later study of costume and “the performance of matter”, she states that, “adopting a new materialist approach, ‘costuming’ is found to be an evolving and relational form that emerges from a complex process of meaning-making that addresses, through a distribution of agency, how materials connect to wider concerns” (Barbieri & Crawley, 2019: 144). Approaching costume in a similar new materialist way – although I focus on post-ANT's “multiplicity” and Bennett’s “distributed agency”, whereas Barbieri and Crawley prioritise Barad’s concept of “intra-action” (2007) – I explore how clothing practices adopted in the hip-hop network connect to wider societal concerns. I also highlight costume’s constant evolution, the oscillation between what is perceived as everyday fashion and costume for the stage, and how practitioners and the spaces in which they perform facilitate this process of becoming. My attempt to tease apart the “mangle” (Pickering, 1995) of materiality and practice that constitutes hip-hop performance helps to counter the subsuming of costumes into the bodies of performers, which has rendered them invisible in academic discourse (Monks 2010; Barbieri 2013, 2017).

Turning to dance and performance

Overall, this thesis attends to materiality; the materiality of hip-hop is researched with and through the dancing body. The research is not rooted in the field of dance studies, nor is it over reliant on dance theory. It is, however, informed by accounts of black social dance[35] and African and

[35] In *The Black Beat Made Visible* (2004), DeFrantz uses the term "black social dance" to describe dances of the African diaspora not transferred to the concert stage, that is, diasporic dances performed and watched by other participating dancers. He intends for the term "black" to imply a

African American dance (for example, Hazzard-Donald, 1996, 1990; Dixon Gottschild, 2005, 1996; and DeFrantz, 2004). I explore how hip-hop as black social dance delivers metaphors and theories about the world of the dancers collectively and individually, and how this information travels on bodies and materials. For example, breaking – a dance culture impacted and informed by racism, marginalisation, and masculinity – is used to explore oppression of black bodies, queer bodies, the bodies of women, and femaleness. I make clear what type of body I am describing; I define their routine activities, no matter how trivial or important, and look at the collective politics pressing on the bodies. After completing the definition of the body and what it is doing, I look at the assumptions others have for that body and the way that fashion and costume helps the body to say something different depending on the circumstances and contexts.

Applying ANT and new materialist concepts to the practice of dancing allows hip-hop's nuanced qualities and characteristics to emerge and become known. To follow Haraway (2016), it *matters* that embodied movement inquiry, dance and corporeal "utterances" are attended to and selected as the mode of inquiry. It *matters* that this knowledge is employed to relate human- non-human relations physically, corporeally, and reflectively through subsequent processes of analysis and evaluation (Haraway, 2016: 12). Thus, I examine movement as matter. Rather than focus on the choreography itself, I focus on participants' experiences and dance as a powerful, shaping part of hip-hop culture. The research methods outlined in chapter 5 allowed me to examine the various nuances and linkages between hip-hop dance forms with respect to their social and/ or performance settings, as well as styling and costuming strategies. They allowed me to examine how learning choreography (and showcasing improvisational movement) "creates" social relationships, and relationships between people and matter. Below, I outline the elements of performance theory that are

shared cultural and political heritage of Africans in diaspora, in particular those whose ancestors survived the Middle Passage. (2004: 22)

drawn into this analytic framework and engaged to articulate how hip-hop dance performances are (re)produced, transmitted, received, and evaluated.

Aspects of performance theory

Performance studies as an academic field conventionally claims performance as boundless and suggests there is no cultural or historical limit to what is or is not performance (Schechner, 2013: 2). Richard Schechner is central to the development of Performance Studies as a discipline that embraces a range of human activity including for instance play, games, sports, theatre and ritual (Sheperd and Wallis, 2004: 102). He states that: "performance must be construed as a "broad spectrum" or "continuum" of human actions ranging from ritual, play, sports, popular entertainments, the performing arts (theatre, dance, music), and everyday life performances to the enactment of social, professional, gender, race, and class roles, and on to healing (from shamanism to surgery), the media, and the internet" (Schechner, 2013: 2).

Theatre and performance scholar Marvin Carlson's conceptualising of performance helps to narrow Schechner's broad definition. In *Performance: a Critical Introduction* (2017) – in its third edition since its first publication in 1996 – he states that performance requires the physical presence of trained or skilled human beings; the demonstration or "public display of a technical skill" *is* the performance (Carlson, 2017: 3). However, Carlson's definition prioritises human agency in performance. He acknowledges that even in theatre, the subject of how well scenery or costumes perform is often overlooked because the public demonstration of particular skills is the important thing. Challenging this view, the thesis frames costuming as a "critical act" (Hann, 2017). As discussed in earlier sections of this chapter, the research addresses the lack of recognition for the importance of costume in performance by decentring the human and instead, examining the "thingness", materiality and political power of the dressed human body

repositioned among other significant material agencies (Barbieri & Crawley, 2019).

Carlson draws on Schechner's useful concept of restored behaviour in his writing, stating that it points to a quality of performance *not* involved with the display of skills, but rather with a certain distance between "self" and behaviour, analogous to that between an actor and the role this actor plays on stage. Carlson suggests that "even if an action on stage is identical to one in real life, on stage it is considered "performed" and off-stage merely "done"" (Carlson, 2017: 3). Expanding on this notion, I describe how the materiality of clothing and the spaces in which hip-hop dance occurs is instrumental in transforming the practitioner from a "doer" to a performer. In chapter 6 especially, I discuss how the difference between doing and performing seems to lie not in the frame of theatre versus real-life but in an attitude; as Carlson states, "we may do actions unthinkingly, but when we think about them, this brings in a consciousness that gives them the quality of performance" (ibid). Hence, I propose that street and social dance becomes performance when a practitioner *thinks* about demonstrating their fresh skills (and style/ look) to an audience. Furthermore, I argue that streetwear and other wearables become costume when the practitioner thinks consciously about dressing for the performance venue/ space/ environment.

The term performance, then, is used in the thesis to refer explicitly to action and hip-hop bodily movement (technical skill) that is *framed*, rehearsed, presented, highlighted, and/ or displayed to an audience. Sociologist Erving Goffman conceptualises the "frame" as an organising principle for setting apart social events, especially those events that, like play or performance, take on a different relationship to normal life and normal responsibilities than the same or similar events would have as "untransformed reality" outside the confines of the frame. "Performance" Goffman defines as a framing arrangement that places a circumscribed sequence of activity before persons in an "audience" role, whose duty it is to observe at length the activities of the "performers" without directly participating in those activities (Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 1974: 124-57). I attend to various framed events and modalities of

hip-hop dance and consider the implications of new media technologies for performers in the hip-hop network. Before proceeding to the concepts of intermediality and digital liveness, which are included in this theoretical/ analytical frame, I must first introduce aspects of black performance theory, feminist performance, and highlight some overlap in vocabulary between the terms “performance” and “performativity”.

Black performance theory

In *Black Performance Theory* (BPT), editors Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez – scholars in performance, African and African American Studies – undertake a “project of realization, one in which the capacity of black performance is revealed” (2014: 1). Through an anthology of essays written for scholars working on black performance, they contend that “black sensibilities emerge whether there are black bodies present or not” and “while black performance may certainly become manifest without black people, we might best recognize it as a circumstance enabled by black sensibilities, black expressive practices, and black people” (ibid). Drawing from the work of author and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston[36], DeFrantz and Gonzales restate her claim that black performance derives from its own style and sensibilities that undergird its production. Following Hurston, they conclude that black expressive performance “springs from the need to communicate beyond the limited events of words alone”, and that, perhaps the most important quality included in Hurtson’s explicit taxonomy is the “will to adorn” (2014: 3); that is, to make more beautiful or attractive, which relates closely to the concept of fresh emphasised in this research.

DeFrantz and Gonzales point out that black performances are embodied by people of colour and, importantly, others who have access to the

[36] Hurston wrote a prescient short article for the groundbreaking anthology *Negro*, published in 1934. She offered a taxonomy of African American performativity titled “Characteristics of Negro Expression” that referenced sites, modes, and practices of performance. The essay, and its placement alongside the creative writings of other artists and researchers of the Harlem Renaissance era, predicted a broad interest in understanding African diaspora performance. DeFrantz & Gonzales (2014: 2)

constellation of gesture and word that had previously emerged in black communities. They write:

> Academic definitions of performance broaden, to recognise affinities and differences among the location and experience of "black life" in a fragmented, postmodern world. Concepts of hybridity, public spheres, the postcolonial queer black sexualities, and de-essentialized identities enter discussions of black performance, emphasising complexities of theoretical analysis. (2014: 5)

As postulated in this thesis, hip-hop is immediate, necessary, always changing, plural, and inclusive. The culture is not exclusively populated by people of African heritage, even though deeply rooted in the creative and philosophical contributions of people of African heritage from different cultures and locations. Hip-hop is a dominant presence globally, especially among young people asserting their independence and desire for a return to community-based interactions and social justice. Useful to this research is the notion of "black sensibilities", which is embraced by the authors of BPT and used to capture ideas of black performativity. Whilst the concept of performativity is discussed below, particularly in relation to gender, black sensibilities are described as the "enlivened, vibrating components of a palpable black familiar" that demonstrate the micro-economics of gesture that cohere in black performance (2014: 8). In alignment with BPT I argue that black sensibilities permeate contemporary life, the hip-hop network, and are imbibed in material objects and cultural practices. I illustrate in the empirical chapters how hip-hop, "conceived as a flexible platform incontrovertibly black at its root, has become an engine for expressive discovery and marketplace situatedness embraced globally" (DeFrantz and Gonzales, 2014: 8). I pay attention to how black strategies of "talking back" to ever widening hegemonic mainstreams of sexualities, class consciousness, and race are engaged regularly in terms of fashion, physical stance/ bodily movement, and what DeFrantz and Gonzales call the "expansive mutabilities of being black" (2014: 8).

In *Hip-Hop Habitus*, the final essay in the BPT anthology, DeFrantz explores the "slippage from Africanist performance histories to global hip-hop corporealities" (2014: 223) and considers how hip-hop has become a *habitus*[37] – a concept developed by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu which refers to dispositions, attitudes, and values that shape an individual's actions and perceptions of the world – to youth and attendant audiences worldwide. Of particular interest is his discussion around the performance of cool, his assertion that "cool coheres; it reflects and recognizes itself; and its agents perform its presence—and allow it to be marketed— through their affiliations" (DeFrantz, 2014: 225). This research draws parallels between DeFrantz's characterisation of cool and the material semiotic concept fresh so integral to hip-hop culture and performance. As discussed in chapters 2 and 3, the urge for uniqueness (from the mainstream and from other individuals) is the essence of being fresh in hip-hop. Where DeFrantz presents cool as "a performative, an approach to movement or dance that is valued as embodied abstraction" (2014: 225), I explore the various manifestations of "freshness" in the hip-hop network, highlighting not only how this phenomenon is performed, but also how it *emerges* through a congealing of material (human and non-human) agencies.

DeFrantz questions how hip-hop dances might constitute a habitus of physicality that refers to aesthetic creativity as well as a "shared black past" (2014: 227). He refers to Schloss' (2009) study, *Foundation* (discussed in the previous two chapters), stating that it affirms that post-millennial b-boying mobilises its participants to recognise each other, dance together, and affirm a common history, but reveals little about the political capacities of breaking to "transfigure an expansive population of attendant witnesses beyond the

[37] In *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) Pierre Bourdieu provides a framework both for understanding the way that cultural settings (re)produce the means of their own production, and for analysing the effect of this (re)production on the particular subjects of a given "habitus". For Bourdieu, the term habitus refers to the collective entity by which and into which dominant social and cultural conditions are established and reproduced. In Bourdieu's words, habitus refers to "a subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class". These "internalised structures" and "schemes of perception" structure the subject's (shared) worldview and their "apperception" of the world in which they suppose they exist (1977: 86).

terms of participation in the cypher" (DeFrantz, 2014: 228). Schloss's study indicates that for one to materially participate in the culture of the dance, one must become "of" the dance and its culture through extensive training, apprenticeship, and participation. Following the trajectory of clothing and materials across the hip-hop network is a novel but useful way for me to focus my attention and examine such activity. I have found that hip-hop dancing in its many forms offers its participants "a safe communal space that mitigates the daily stresses of life for its practitioners" (DeFrantz, 2014: 228). ANT's injunction to trace associations and follow the actors enables an honest account of the political capacities of the fashioned, hip-hop dancing body to "transform an expansive population of attendant witnesses" (DeFrantz, 2014: 228), which includes participants and audiences in the online space.

I acknowledge that there is a bigger discussion to be had around the shape and feeling of blackness itself, which is its own performative scenario. The experiences of women performers in hip-hop, for example the choreographers/ dancers featured in *Our Bodies Back,* renders the experimentation in knowing blackness and womanhood a feminist critical practice of possibility (Batiste, 2019: 1). The intention here is to point out that black performance produces an aesthetic and experiential space of possibility between ideas and between different types of people. The habitus, DeFrantz writes, becomes the place where hip-hop's masculinist qualities are practiced by an international cohort of youth regardless of place, class, gender, race, sexuality, or, in some cases, ability (DeFrantz, 2014: 241). He states that hip-hop corporealities cohere to define and perpetuate ways of being. Furthermore, the "political import" of hip-hop corporealities is displaced and evacuated so that the gestures can become protected patterns of motion produced spontaneously and without reflection (2014: 241-42). The global hip-hop habitus, then, produces and protects itself without hesitation. However, an aim of this thesis is to reveal how fashioned bodies trouble those "ways of being". In the empirical chapters, I illustrate how moments of unique bodily movement conceived as expressions of singularity, are in fact restored behaviours influenced by habitus. I consider

how performers must know the “norm” in order to challenge its limits through movement, fashion, and costume.

Feminist performance and performativity

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity* (1990), Judith Butler, influenced by philosopher J. L. Austin[38] (1962) – to whom the theory of the “performative utterance”, and “the performative” act is attributed – draws from feminist phenomenology and the field of performance studies and presents the theory that all bodies are gendered from the beginning of their social existence. For Butler, there is no existence that is not social, which means that there is no “natural body” that pre-exists its cultural inscription. This points to the conclusion that gender is not something one is, it is something one does; an act, or more precisely, a sequence of acts, a verb rather than a noun, a “doing” rather than a “being” (Butler, 1990: 25; Austin, 1962). Butler elaborates this idea in the first chapter of *Gender Trouble*, stating:

> Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the

[38] In *How to do things with words* (1962), philosopher J. L. Austin established the understanding that the primary use or purpose of language is not to make statements or formulate propositions; rather, he conceived language as a communication of meaning and intention, which has consequences and effects. Importantly, Austin argued that language is a mechanism through which persons collectively create a social reality. In his analysis of language Austin differentiated between utterances that state something or describe an event that is either true or false—constatives—and utterances that, within the temporality of the utterance, actually *do* something. That is, in the speaking, the utterer participates in an act, which comes into being as a result of the speaking. Sentences such as “I name this ship the Rainbow Warrior”, “I give and bequeath my watch to my sister”, and “I bet you a dollar it will rain tomorrow”, are examples of a type of speech act for which Austin coined the term, “performative”. (Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech*: *A Politics of the Performative*, 1997)

various forces that police the social appearance of gender. (1990: 43-44)

Within the context of a theatrical performance – the staging of a play for example – “acts” are a shared, collective experience encompassing actors and audience; actors embody roles that are scripted and rehearsed; although scripts might be enacted in different ways by different actors, nevertheless those enactments are always constrained to some degree by the terms of the script. Butler suggests thinking of gender as an act in this way. To consolidate their argument, they consult the work of cultural anthropologist Victor Turner. In the essay *Performative acts and gender constitution* (1988), Butler derives from Turner the idea that human life as ritual social drama depends on the repetition of social performances, a repetition that is simultaneously “a reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established,” but one that also secures their legitimation (Butler, 1988: 526). They claim that the same is true of gender; it too is a “ritualized, public performance” (1988: 526), and not, as is often assumed, an individual expression of an inner gender identity. The effect of gender is produced by the repetition of particular bodily gestures, activities and movements, and these repeated gender performances are the mechanisms whereby the dualistic, heteronormative, or presumptively heterosexual, structure of sex and gender is perpetuated, and an individual gender identity created. In other words, gender, and gender roles, are elaborate social performances that one puts on in day-to-day life, the hegemonic versions of which underlay popular conceptions of “man”/ “masculine” and “woman”/ “feminine”. If it is the case that “woman” and “man” are performed and reinforced in everyday life, then it is not just an individual’s own self-conception, but other’s reaction to their gender performances that shapes gender identification (Butler, 1990: 10-22).

Butler later writes, in *Critically Queer*, the last chapter to their book *Bodies that Matter* (1993), that “the reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake” (1993: 234). This statement is made in relation to what Butler elsewhere has called the “bad reading” of the work that emerged out of their

theory of gender performativity introduced in *Gender Trouble*. Gender performativity, Butler states, is misread by some to mean that “one woke in the morning, perused the closet or some more open space for the gender of choice, donned that gender for the day, and then restored the garment to its place at night” (Butler 1993: x). This idea of a subject who has agency – a choosing, or what Butler has called “humanist” subject – is exactly what their theory of performativity seeks to eradicate. In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler explains that “performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate `act', but rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (1993: 2). Meaning, gender performativity is never a voluntary, singular act but rather an ongoing, repetitive practice or process of materialisation or becoming.

Whilst there is a much bigger discussion to be had around gender performativity in the context of hip-hop dance, breaking culture especially, this thesis focuses on how dress is used as a tool in the repeated stylisation of four dancing bodies in *The Purple Jigsaw* (see chapter 8) to disrupt hegemonic gender conventions. The analysis of this performance is informed by the concept of *hegemonic masculinity*, which is understood as “the perpetuation of practices that allow the dominance of men to continue unchecked and has been used to identify the behaviors and practices of men that subjugate femininity and subordinate other forms of masculinities” (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005 cited in Whiteneir, 2016: 78). It is also informed by renowned black feminist scholar bell hooks, who maintains that gender fluidity is possible, however difficult. According to hooks, masculinity can be expressed in multiple ways within a society, but typically one version combines certain traits and is privileged above other enactments of masculinity (2015; 2007). These traits of masculinity, which are viewed as ideal are namely, pervasive misogyny and anti-feminine positions; aggressiveness and a desire to achieve dominance in one’s personal life; stunted emotional expression; and negligence of one’s physical beauty or appearance (hooks, 2007: 107). By indicating that masculinity is variable and heterogeneous, though tiered in a hierarchy that privileges a certain

confluence of characteristics, hooks allows us to understand that gender expression is multiplicitous and continuously changing.

To study hip-hop performance is to set out to understand a complex event that is in-process, that moves and grows over time. However, scholars such as feminist writer Peggy Phelan argue that performance must be experienced "live", that is, in the present, in the physical world, and by extension, "leaving no trace" (Phelan, 1993: 146). Phelan's argument in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993), which is centred on a feminist debate[39], is that performance is ephemeral and cannot be documented; if it is "it becomes something other than performance" (Phelan, 1993: 146). According to Phelan, performance occurs over a time which cannot be repeated. It can be performed again, but this repetition itself marks it as "different". If it is recorded, or mediatised, it becomes something other than performance. The document of a performance then is only a "spur to memory", an encouragement of memory to become present (Phelan, 1993: 146-7). She writes:

> Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being [...] becomes itself through disappearance. (Phelan, 1993: 146)

This suggests that the ephemeral nature of a performance is crucial to its ontology. She claims that although works can be performed more than once, each performance is essentially a different thing. The notion that the exact event in the exact time that it exists cannot be repeated is central to Phelan's

[39] Considering that women are largely unrepresented within society, Phelan's study has an overriding political agenda. Suggesting that women must disappear in order to re-appear within society, or specifically that to regain our sight we must realise that it has been lost, she studies performance, as an ephemeral, disappearing state (Phelan, 1993: 146-49).

argument. These observations raise questions regarding the ontological status of recorded documentation and highlight the significance of “liveness”. For example, can someone say that they have seen a particular performance if they have only seen a video of the event? Following Phelan’s argument, this would not be seeing the performance, as a performance can only exist in the time and space in which it is performed. From an ANT perspective, this research focuses less on what has been seen and instead reveals how the actors connect and how material agencies emerge in the performance making process. Furthermore, it elaborates on how someone watching only the film may not have seen the live iteration of the performance, but will have become a networked actor alongside the performers, the costumes, and the other viewers.

Digital liveness and intermedial performance

As media and performance studies scholar Chiel Kattenbelt points out, media changes and co-relations between media have resulted in new forms of representation; new dramaturgical strategies; new principles of structuring and staging words, images and sounds; new ways of positioning performing bodies in time and space; of creating time-space relationships; of developing new modes of perception; and of generating new cultural, social and psychological meanings (Kattenbelt, 2008: 21). The concept of “intermediality” emphasises the aspect of mutual influence (interaction) and refers to the interconnectedness of modern media of communication. As means of expression and exchange, different media refer to and depend on one another, both explicitly and implicitly; they interact as elements of various communicative strategies; and they are constituents of a wider social and cultural environment. Intermediality assumes an in-between space from which, or within which the mutual affects take place. In this thesis, combinations of live and mediatised acts are seen as creating hybrid forms of liveness, which exist both within and through the technology employed on stage.

Philip Auslander's *Liveness, Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (2008) problematises the apparent binary between the live and the mediatised. Auslander lays the foundation for a homogenised performative state and calls for a "mutual dependence of the live and the mediatized" (Auslander, 2008: 11). Whilst my research acknowledges the temporality and elusiveness of performance (Phelan, 1993), it disturbs the fundamental and "culturally stratifying" distinction between what Auslander defines as "traditionally live theatrical performance" and technologically mediated performance (Auslander, 2008: 108). Through the concept of *immediacy,* he highlights the importance of emotional response, chemistry, and a sense of personal contact between performers and audiences which, for him, define the experience of live performance (Auslander, 2008: 107). Auslander claims that liveness is not an absolute condition but built on audience's affective experience of "what feels alive" (2008: 107). He suggests that one can better understand live and technologically mediated performance in terms of a set of temporal and spatial variables in the relationships between performers and audience than as a settled binary opposition. Building on this perspective, the research seeks to understand relationships between not only the performers and audience, but between the human and non-human actors, including technologies. It eschews oppositional critiques of live and mediated performance by focusing on processes and connections. I discuss how digital tools shaped not only performances, but also my ability to conduct the research itself – its methodology – both through social media and streamed events during the Covid-19 pandemic.

I use the term "live" in this thesis to describe performance situations in which the performers and audience are temporally co-present, in that the audience witnesses the performance as it happens, although they may not be spatially co-present, for example in the case of live streamed events (Auslander, 2008: 60). Throughout the thesis chapters, I discuss significant performances that I experienced live, or rather *in-situ*; most notably, *The Purple Jigsaw.* I also discuss what media scholar Steve Wurtzler refers to as "hybrid events" (Wurtzler, 1992: 87), which are produced by combining live elements with recorded and otherwise technologically mediated ones. I examine the

subtleties of this type of hybridity; for example, the material and stylistic differences between live dance recorded/ captured on video and dance recorded specifically for the internet and the screen.

In chapter 7, I highlight social media’s role in contemporary dance and how recording live performances on devices such as smartphones and digital cameras has become central to the transmission and archiving of the hip-hop dancer. The chapter discusses how various dancers and choreographers use platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook to share work and create a direct and unfiltered link with a varied audience online. The chapter also discusses Sadler’s Wells’ *Digital Stage* and Breakin’ Convention’s virtual festival *Lockdown? Lock-in!* (May 2020), through which I describe how digital practices engaged during the Covid-19 pandemic (from 2020) redefined the idea of the stage itself and allowed new forms of meeting, collaborating, co-creating, rehearsing, and producing to emerge. I highlight how the digital space operates without the same barriers as a physical venue. Through an ANT lens, I focus on the connections that were established between practitioners in multiple locations during the making of direct-to-digital presentation *Our Bodies Back.*

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the theoretical framework and made connections between ideas and concepts from across the disciplines of new materialism, fashion, costume, performance, and theatre. It provided a detailed outline of actor-network theory (ANT), the main approach guiding the research, and new materialist approaches to assemblages and agency. The main dress-related terms were defined to situate the forthcoming discussion of the findings around the fashioned, performing body and blurring the fashion-costume distinction. Fashion and costume were considered from a new materialist perspective before performance and theatrical applications of new materialism and ANT were introduced. Concepts from performance studies and black performance theory were also mobilised to show how hip-hop dance can be conceived as a phenomenon

or doing that incorporates and generates embodied (or tacit) knowledge, movement know-how (technical skill), and a form of corporeality (black sensibilities) that facilitates awareness and understanding of relational encounters between human and non-human actors. The following chapter turns towards the research methods and approaches that inform the analysis. I outline the main data collection methods – observation, interviews, document/ image analysis, and performance analysis – and the implementation of the research, including any methodological and ethical considerations for the study.

5 Methodological framework

Introduction

So far, I have established the aims of the research, which are to better understand the material complexities of hip-hop dance performance, and the capacity of the hip-hop bodily assemblage to disturb fixed social and spatial boundaries within the global hip-hop context. I have examined the lineage of research, as well as non-academic commentaries, on hip-hop dance and dress and identified the need for a more cohesive approach. Through the theories and concepts outlined in the previous chapter, I have put forward the wider argument that hip-hop dance is a socio-material practice in which non-humans also have agency. Actor-network theory (ANT) was presented, not as a programmatic theory, but as a method to reveal firstly, the complex and multiple networks of relationships between human and non-human actors; and secondly, the agential capacity of dress in hip-hop dance performance. This chapter presents the research design for the study and outlines my approach to "doing" ANT research. I discuss ANT's relation to ethnography and highlight parallels between the two approaches. Next, I discuss my researcher position and the implications of my "situatedness" in the hip-hop network from a new materialist point of view. I then focus on the practicalities of the study, the methods used for data collection and how ANT has informed each method. I describe the process of selecting and gaining access to research settings and participants, conducting observations and interviews, collecting documents and cultural artefacts, and analysing live and mediatised performances. I discuss the methodological and ethical challenges I encountered during the research. Lastly, I describe the rationale and the process of analysing the data.

ANT informed ethnography

Although ANT carries "theory" in its name, Callon, amongst other ANT scholars, asserts that it is not a cohesive theory in itself; it is defined as both a theoretical and methodological approach; a "how-to book", and above all, a

way of looking at the world (Callon and Latour, 1992: 356; Latour, 2005: 142; Law 2009: 141). As such, ANT is adopted in this thesis as a “sensibility" (Law, 2004: 157), something that helps to sensitise us to the complex and multiple realities in hip-hop which might otherwise have remained obscure. Both Latour and Law assert that ANT cannot be explained but must be done (Latour, 2005; Law, 2004). Yet, a criticism of ANT (mentioned previously in chapter 4) is that this “doing” is not guided by clear advice on the research methods to be used (Nimmo, 2011: 109). Scholar Anna Macleod (2019) proposes that socio-material approaches to ethnography can help us to explore taken for granted, or under-theorised, elements of a situation (or culture) under study, thereby enabling us to think differently. Macleod argues that ANT ideas, specifically, translate into ethnographic research design; rather than considering an issue (in her case, medical education) as a matter of individual human skill or cognition, researchers should focus on untangling a heterogeneous web of human and non-human, material and immaterial, factors bringing about the issue (Macleod, et al. 2019: 179). Actor-network theory, and other socio-material perspectives, provide tools to attend to the “messiness” (Law, 2004) of the everyday world and all its minute negotiations, translations, and processes. I adopt ethnography as a complementary approach to ANT because ethnographic work is also “messy” and relies on a situated researcher to describe and make sense of a complex field (Hammersley, 2018).

Ethnography, according to sociologist and author John Brewer, involves “the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data” (Brewer, 2000: 10). For sociologist Martyn Hammersley (2018: 4), most ethnographic work shares the following features:

- Relatively long-term data collection processes
- Taking place in naturally occurring settings
- Relying on participant observation, or personal engagement more generally
- Employing a range of types of data
- Aimed at documenting what actually goes on

- Emphasises the significance of the meanings people give to objects, including themselves, in the course of their activities, in other words culture
- Holistic in focus

The above features indicate commonalities between ethnographic work and ANT, for example, both acknowledge the heterogeneity of everyday practices and their interweaving of the social and the material (Law, 2004: 92); both are broadly inductive and place emphasis on the detailed description of what takes place on the ground (Nimmo, 2011: 113). It is this shared focus on practices, and the meanings people give to objects in the course of their activities, that makes both approaches suitable for the examination of hip-hop dance. ANT and ethnography share a common belief that practices themselves are multi-layered and inherently contingent – a "mangle" (Pickering, 1995) of people, things, intent, knowledge, processes, and several other factors. A key objective of this research is to tease apart this mangle of connections and render visible the creative practices, and material agencies operating in the research settings. I will shortly outline the qualitative research methods I used in order to do this: observation, interviews, document analysis, and performance analysis. First, I must address my situatedness in the hip-hop network and establish my position as researcher.

My situated position as researcher

As discussed in previous chapters, this thesis is based on the premise that knowledge is situated socially and materially through the cultural life of the hip-hop community. Hence, when undertaking the fieldwork for this study, I understood that my situatedness and active participation in hip-hop culture[40] meant that I was co-creating the research findings with other human and non-human participants in the hip-hop network. I acknowledge that both my

[40] I have consumed hip-hop music, film, fashion, and magazines, and participated in communal hip-hop events and activities both in the UK and US since the mid-1990s.

identity as a black-British woman and my pre-understanding of hip-hop culture and history, which is expressed partly through my own bodily assemblage – comprised (at the time of the fieldwork) of a short “faded”[41] haircut, fashion accessories, objects and brands synonymous with hip-hop (such as, hats, gold jewellery, eyewear, and Adidas sneakers and tracksuits) – have been advantageous in this ethnographic research process. Not only has my embodied knowledge of hip-hop allowed me to easily connect and build relationships with the research participants, but it has also enabled a deeper level of understanding and interpretation of the research data. From a sociological point of view, my dual identity as a researcher and hip-hop “insider” necessitated a “reflexive”[42] approach. Reflexivity is a process through which researchers consider how their social background, personal characteristics, prior experiences, assumptions, values, and beliefs have impacted on the research process. Whilst I acknowledged these matters and did not take for granted the regularities and “tacit patterns” (Finlay & Gough, 2003; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) – for example, the multitude of gestural movements, facial expressions, clothing and styling practices – deeply embedded in hip-hop dance culture, I was also aware of my entanglement with other networked human and non-human forces and practices. Put another way, I knew that my researcher position stabilised and destabilised in intra-action with a range of other human and more-than-human entities, spaces, and practices (Barad, 2007: 114).

Despite the centrality of reflexivity within qualitative research, feminist new materialist writers have been critical of an over-reliance upon such optical metaphors. I draw attention to methodological principles adopted by Haraway (1997) and Barad (2007), who offer an alternative optical metaphor, namely, that of “diffraction” – an established concept within the physical sciences which refers to the disruption of wave-based systems as they

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[41] The term “fade” originated in black-owned barbershops and refers to a type of hairstyle that is typically characterised by shorter hair on the sides and back. The hair is cut as close as possible with clippers and “fades” or tapers up into almost any length on top. (Gabbara, 2016)

[42] The etymological root of the word “reflexive” means “to bend back upon oneself”, which, in research terms can be translated as “thoughtful, self-aware analysis of the intersubjective dynamics between researcher and the researched” (Finlay & Gough, 2003: ix).

encounter obstacles, to create an observable pattern of interference. For Barad, attending to these patterns not only tells us something about the interfering waves, but also about the phenomenon or "apparatus[43]" that produces them (Barad, 2007; 1998). This disruptive element is, for Haraway, of central importance in the application of diffraction as a methodological metaphor within critical scholarship. She argues:

> [D]iffraction can be a metaphor for another kind of critical consciousness […] one committed to making a difference and not to repeating the Sacred Image of the Same […] diffraction is a narrative, graphic, psychological, spiritual, and political technology for making consequential meanings. (Haraway, 1997: 16)

Both Haraway and Barad propose diffraction as a more situated and responsible mode of knowledge production, one that maps differences as they interfere in practices. Underlying the diffractive approach is what Haraway defines as "feminist objectivity". In her seminal essay, *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective* (1988), she challenges the traditional ways in which science thinks about objectivity and suggests that "partial perspectives" or situated knowledges can provide views from somewhere, rather than nowhere. For Haraway, objectivity is only seemingly neutral and is, in fact, overburdened by power relations. She argues that objectivity seen as impartiality is a perspective that disguises a very specific stance: an omniscient, human, white, heterosexual male stance (Haraway, 1988: 581). In response to masculinist and universalist understandings of knowledge, she proposes a new understanding of objectivity, a feminist objectivity that takes seriously different kinds of knowledges, explicitly recognises that academic work is

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[43] In *Meeting the Universe Halfway* Barad conceptualises "apparatus" as fundamentally a material-discursive dynamic enactment entangled with processes of materialisation: "[A]pparatuses are the material conditions of possibility and impossibility of mattering; they enact what matters and what is excluded from mattering." (Barad, 2007: 148). Apparatuses are not only what has been traditionally understood as the mechanical parts of a system of measurement. They include systems of thinking, objects, spatio-temporal properties, people and more-than-people; they are extremely localised. Apparatuses are phenomena (Barad, 1998: 101-2).

situated, political and partial, and allows researchers to become answerable for what they learn how to see (583).

This revised and enriched concept of objectivity is appropriate for this study because hip-hop, as I have shown in earlier chapters, is an inherently political movement that emerged from the socio-economic material conditions of black and brown urban communities and has a history of marginalising women. This thesis provides much needed insight into the multiple realities that contemporary performers experience and how they subvert and challenge different types of marginalisation through the body, through dress, and through a network of practitioners. I have positioned myself to "see from below", which, by Haraway's definition, is the perspective of those ordinarily subjugated under the masculinist gaze of the powerful "from above" (Haraway, 1988: 584). She claims that seeing from the standpoints of the subjugated enables us to see further and more critically. Although many aspects of the hip-hop network were familiar to me, I positioned myself within a stream of unfolding experiences of performers, allowed the research data to emerge from the materiality of the performances, and observed knowledge of material data gleaned from interviewees. That is, from the perspectives generated by fashioned human bodies performing in space. Thus, the emergent data is not static, but diverse and hybrid. The knowledge I have co-produced is a process of ongoing critical interpretation among fields of interpreters and decoders (Haraway, 1988: 590).

Data collection methods

To capture the unfolding nature of hip-hop dance, rather than a static representation of it, I adopted the ANT principle of following the actor. Latour states that to achieve in-depth understanding of an ever-becoming world, you must "follow the actors themselves" (Latour, 2005: 12) – whether relevant or irrelevant, human or non-human – and follow the "circulating entities" that make actors act (Latour, 2005: 237). Social theorists Adele Clarke and Theresa Montini advise researchers to not only follow "powerful"

actors, but to see “the constructed world metaphorically over the shoulders of all the actors” and observe also the silent, collective actors, meaning those implied by the decisions, even if they did not participate in the action (Clarke and Montini, 1993: 42). An implication of following actors in this way is that ANT researchers can become overwhelmed with data, or that the data spread too thin. I addressed this problem by choosing, from the emergent data, what I felt were the most significant material trajectories to follow – namely the hip-hop dancing body, wearables synonymous with hip-hop (outlined in chapter 3), and specific digital media (online dance videos/ films, and digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook). I set out to build a coherent socio-material description – one that conveys how material actors assemble, come apart, and the reassemble during the performance making process – using the following data collection methods: observation, interviews, and document/ visual analysis. As I stated in the previous chapter, this research is not rooted in the field of dance studies, rather, it attends to the materiality of hip-hop which is researched with and through the dancing body. Whilst I do not employ specific dance research methodologies, I do engage performance analysis as a method to critically analyse both live and mediatised performances. I note here that each of the data collection methods I have listed involve ethical choices, which I discuss later in the chapter.

Observation

According to sociologist Nick Fox, observation is more than just recording data from the environment. He states that, “When we observe we are active, not passive collectors of data […] our brains are engaged as well as our eyes and ears, organising data so we can make sense of them” (Fox, 1998: 2). Perception is thus an important part of ethnographic research. As an observer, and networked participant, I engaged in the activities of the people under study. I became a part of the activities and made a record of what had been witnessed (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989: 6-7). From an ANT perspective, this entailed description of and reflection upon social and non-human interactions. I used a combination of direct and indirect observation in

the field. Direct observation is when the observer is looking at the events happening in the moment of them occurring. Indirect observation is remote, relying on recordings of past events in the form of documentation and videos (Ciesielska et al. 2018: 44). I also used writing – making field notes about events, participants' comments and interview responses, and my corresponding thoughts about this rich data as and when it presented itself – as well as photographing and audio-visual recording to document the socio-material happenings at the hip-hop dance events I attended.

Whilst I actively collected most of the research data myself either in person or virtually, a proxy researcher collected and recorded ethnographic data on my behalf at two hip-hop dance events in New York: *Proovin' Grounds* (2017) and *Breakin' Convention Harlem* (2017). My main goal was to supplement the data I collected in the UK and online with primary data from the birthplace of hip-hop. I hoped to gain, through observation and interviewing, an understanding of how hip-hop dance may, or may not, have changed since its emergence in the city during the 1970s. I wanted to explore the role of materials and dress in New York's hip-hop dance scene. I also wanted to examine how this local aspect of the global hip-hop context uses media technologies to connect with other networked practitioners and share dance and dress practices. I will discuss the implications of using a proxy researcher later in the chapter.

Interviews

In addition to observation as a research method, qualitative interviews provided opportunities to explore in an in-depth manner matters that were unique to the experiences of interviewees, allowing insights into how hip-hop dance is experienced and perceived. Interviews are most appropriate where little is already known about the phenomenon under study or where detailed insights are required from individual participants (McGrath, 2019). My socio-material approach to interviewing focused not on human practitioners alone, but on the everyday minutiae of how people and materials assemble and reassemble into networks in hip-hop dance performance practices. Field

interviews, or quick, informal conversations with participants in the research settings helped me to identify significant participants – dancers, choreographers, event organisers, photographers and videographers – with whom I could conduct more in-depth interviews later. Decisions about whom to conduct further interviews with, when, and where, were developed over time, as was the structure of the questioning. In my personal notes, I reflected on how the interview process itself was socio-material. For example, the email, text message, or direct message (via social media) that was sent to set up the interview; the prior internet search to find the participants' contact details; the recording device, and the method of communication. I also reflected on how the medium of the interview – for example, telephone, Skype, or Zoom – created a greater need to consider materials since, a poor Wi-Fi connection, or weak mobile phone signal sometimes altered or halted the interview process altogether.

Document and image analysis

Document analysis is a systematic procedure that qualitative researchers use for reviewing or evaluating documents, both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material. It is often used in combination with other qualitative research methods as a means of "triangulation" – the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007: 183) – and generally requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). In this ANT informed research, documentary sources and material artefacts collected during the fieldwork – mainly flyers, posters, event programmes, and publicity/ promotional materials (images and videos) – are viewed as agentic in shaping the socio-material world of the hip-hop dancer. I investigate both the predictable and unintended effects of these materials and discuss in the empirical chapters how they often carried practical knowledge, co-ordinated activities, and motivated collaboration. Tracing the agency of these documents and artefacts in the hip-hop network highlighted the active role of media technologies. In chapter 7, I provide a detailed

account of the material properties and significance of hip-hop dance videos especially and the video sharing/ social media platforms they are frequently uploaded to. I discuss the affordances and constraints that shape their use and the ways they mediate performances.

Performance analysis

Performance analysis is adopted as a further method to analyse the use of costume in both live and mediatised hip-hop dance performances. I draw loosely from the semiological analytical framework developed by theatre studies scholar Patrice Pavis (1985). Pavis' "questionnaire" – which was devised to help theatre studies students apply semiological theories to the analysis of texts and performances – is useful as it stresses the importance of verbalising the aesthetic experience and of considering the overall "system" of a production after seeing it. Pavis' approach aligns with the ANT framework for this research as it helps the spectator/ "witnesser"/ researcher "take apart" a chosen performance and examine how it functions as an entity, wherein all the parts join in shaping it and giving it meaning (Pavis, 1985: 210). With that said, this form of analysis felt a bit static as the questionnaire encourages the observer to report on lighting, stage properties, costumes, actors' performances, music and sound effects, and audience as separate elements. I therefore adapted Pavis' model to form a more dynamic and networked analysis, which looks at the shifting interactions between scenographic elements, mainly lighting, costume, and bodies as they move together in the performance space. In my detailed description I document the following:

- *Where the performance takes place*
- *The type of story being told through the costumed, dancing body in a specific space*
- *How music, lighting, costume, and choreography act to create coherence or incoherence*
- *Use of space and spatial forms*
- *Use of colours and their connotations*

- *Costume's relationship to the dancers' bodies; how it moves and "behaves"*
- *Dancers' relationship to the audience*
- *How the audience (and me as a spectator) react to what was happening on "stage"*

I apply the same strategy to mediatised and/ or live intermedial performances – in which there is "mutual dependence of the live and the mediatized" (Auslander, 2008: 11). I include the camera and/ or videographer as material elements that join in shaping and giving meaning to the performance. Whilst I approach the analysis in a systematic way, I appreciate that live performance is elusive, in that the researcher can miss things that occur, or the experience of a performance may not be replicated on another occasion (or in a recording). I therefore reflect on these matters during the process and use performance analysis in engagement with the other qualitative approaches outlined above.

Entering the field: negotiating access

The initial investigations for this thesis began in the digital space, where I conducted research into online manifestations of hip-hop dance. I will discuss these findings in the empirical chapters, particularly chapter 7, which examines digital technologies and hip-hop dance film. Here, I discuss my physical entry to a range of hip-hop dance settings in the UK. The funding partnership between London College of Fashion and Sadler's Wells, supporting PhD research into historical and contemporary performance practices and cultures, provided me with the opportunity to engage with Sadlers' Wells project, *Breakin'* Convention, the UK's largest festival of hip-hop dance theatre. Breakin' Convention proved invaluable for the research, as it gave me direct access to London's vibrant hip-hop dance scene and connected me to other international hip-hop dance practitioners. Breakin' Convention's founder and artistic director Jonzi D facilitated much of the data collection process, securing continuous access to events, sharing his local

and cultural knowledge, using his social contacts, and showing an interest in the research project.

Securing access to Breakin' Convention events was relatively easy, since they were mostly open to the public; although, I did formally negotiate access to two closed/ private events through the Breakin' Convention team. At the commencement of the research project, I was already in contact with several performers, dance crews, and teachers/ choreographers in my hometown of Birmingham – including Kashmir D Leese (hip-hop dancer and frequent judge at national/ regional battles), "Nine" (mentor and founder of the hip-hop dance collective, Broken Silence), "Toffee" (dancer and co-founder of Tru Streetdance Academy), Nathan Marsh (choreographer and founder of Marshon Dance Company), and "Shin" (dancer and member of all style crew, Key Infinity). I learned that several of these practitioners were either attending or performing at the upcoming Breakin' Convention national tour due to take place in Birmingham in June 2017. Intrigued by the interconnectedness between the Birmingham and London hip-hop dance scenes, I contacted Jonzi D by telephone in November 2016, briefly introducing myself and the research project. He invited me to participate in the Birmingham auditions, held at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre on 6th December 2016. After observing the audition process, I conducted a scheduled interview with Jonzi D, which was loosely structured. During the interview I explained the exploratory nature of the research and made it clear that the research focus could evolve over time. I requested Jonzi's assistance in identifying different types of hip-hop dance events for the study, which he agreed to do. Jonzi's status and relationships within the UK and international hip-hop scenes later facilitate both contact and trust between myself and several research informants.

In the first instance, Jonzi directed me to the "upcoming events" page on the Breakin' Convention website, which displayed various UK-based battles, competitions and 'jams' (social events), as well as the annual Breakin' Convention festival and other smaller Breakin' Convention events throughout the year. Jonzi put me in contact with Breakin' Convention's general

manager Michelle Norton, who authorised complimentary entry to the main festival in 2017, 2018 and 2019. I also identified from the website a regional hip-hop dance competition called *Go Hard or Go Home* (GHGH), which took place in March 2017 and served as the pilot study for this research. Upon learning that I was in contact with Jonzi D, and that I had found his event through the Breakin' Convention website, GHGH's organiser Lekan Adebanjo also arranged complimentary entry to GHGH. Another aspect of gaining access relates to permissions around photography and audio-visual recording. In most cases, official photographers and videographers in the field were co-operative in giving me access to their imagery and footage. For example, Lekan directed me to *Funkstylerz TV*, the official documenters of GHGH, as well as Duke LDN, a well-known photographer and performer in London's hip-hop scene. Both Jonzi D and Michelle Norton connected me to Breakin' Convention's digital communications manager, Dave Barros, whose co-operation assisted me in terms of indirectly observing certain performances and analysing event photos and footage later on. However, there were instances during the research process when strict guidelines around photography and recording were imposed by the venue. I will discuss how I overcame these difficulties shortly (see Ethical considerations p.165).

Research settings and observations

As I have previously stated, Breakin' Convention was a conveniently available organisation/ population for this study because I was able to negotiate access through existing contacts and my engagement with Sadler's Wells. Its mission to support and nurture both local and international performers and creators was another part of the appeal. Between March 2017 and December 2020, I collected and recorded ethnographic data from eleven separate Breakin' Convention events – a comprehensive list of events and venues is included in the appendices. My evolving relationships with practitioners in both London and Birmingham opened the door to five other hip-hop dance events, some independent and others publicly funded (see appendix B). For the most part the data collection took place indoors – in public and semi-public spaces such as sports halls, theatre auditoriums and

foyers, and dance studios – although I did observe Key Infinity Crew as and when I encountered their sporadic street performances in Birmingham city centre.

During the fieldwork I produced both reflective and analytical written notes in a small notebook. When visibility was low, for example in a dark auditorium, I used the "Notes" application on my smartphone with the brightness turned down. I noted down snippets of overheard conversations and conversations I had engaged in before, during, or after an event. I noted performances, clothing, and brands that caught my attention and the reasons why. I noted the behaviours and gestures of the performers and spectators, and how people navigated the different spaces either when interacting with others or when alone. These written notes helped me to identify emergent themes around uses of clothing, materials, and technologies in hip-hop settings (see appendix D) – such as performers competing across genres and changing clothes between rounds, the differences in clothing and footwear across dance styles, and practitioners documenting their own performances with camera equipment and tripods. I photographed and filmed most of the public events I attended using my smart phone. I also accessed promotional/ professional photography and film after several events if this was available. I analysed images and film produced by the performers themselves, which I accessed via social networking sites after the events. I triangulated the detailed notes I produced from this imagery with my analysis of the interview data. I will discuss the ethics of using such visual material shortly.

Informants and interviews

The total research sample comprised sixteen emerging and experienced hip-hop dance practitioners: eleven male, four female, and one non-binary, between 20 and 50 years of age. This sample was mostly UK-based, although one participant was situated in New York and two were based in Barcelona, Spain. Seven participants were black or black-British, two were people with a mixed ethnic background, one Dominican American, and six were white. The participants were also of different gender identities and

sexual orientations. Practices and skills within the sample group ranged from artistic direction to choreography and dance across a variety of hip-hop genres including, but not limited to, breaking, hip-hop (freestyle), house, popping, krump, choreography, and streetdance. A total of twelve interviews were conducted during the research, ranging from spontaneous, informal conversations during other activities, to pre-arranged, unstructured and semi-structured interviews out of earshot of other people (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007: 108). A comprehensive list of individual and group interviews is provided in the appendices (see appendix C).

Interviewees were selected with the aim of discussing different modes and styles of hip-hop dance and more specifically, variations in interactions between body, clothing and materials. Through a range of participant voices, I sought to deepen my understanding of the complexities and nuances in hip-hop dance practice and to reveal the material agency of components in the hip-hop bodily assemblage. I identified five key informants during the first twelve months of the fieldwork. Their selection was based on my positive reaction to one, or a combination of the following: their fresh dance and dress style, technical skill and ability, and fluid navigation of multiple hip-hop spaces. Jonzi D introduced me to a further eleven practitioners – participants in a developmental workshop for choreographers held at Sadler's Wells.

The interviews took a relatively unstructured approach to begin with, to build a rapport with the participants. The questioning took a more structured and strategic form towards the end of the fieldwork, exploring how the participants engaged with other practitioners and materials in the performance space. Earlier interviews were open-ended conversations that lasted 20 to 30 minutes. These conversations centered around the different hip-hop dance styles and genres, as this was a logistical aspect of organising and/ or participating in hip-hop events that certain informants seemed to prioritise. The interviews were revealing in terms of the dichotomies that have shaped, and continue to shape, hip-hop dance culture. For example, the *underground/ mainstream* (or "commercial") dichotomy, which relates to historical and more contemporary styles of hip-hop dance; and the *local/*

global dichotomy, which was often used by practitioners as an indicator of success. These insights helped to further develop my interview questions and conversations with the performers further down the line, who readily discussed these matters through the lens of dress in the context of their own practice.

Subsequent interviews were slightly more structured, but still adopted a conversational style. They lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and were guided by themes that emerged from the initial interviews, my field observations, and ongoing analyses of online dance videos. The questions focused more on physical movement and explored how clothing, digital media, different spaces and other hip-hop practitioners affected the informants' own dance and dressing practices. Despite all interviews being broadly guided by the same themes, each interview was different. For example, some informants found it difficult to talk about their relationships with clothing, whilst others could easily articulate how specific garments and dress objects affected their practice. Informants did not talk explicitly about "socio-materiality", but the majority made clear differences between a material object and a (human) social actor. I outline the broad themes that emerged from these conversations and the rest of the material data in the data analysis section below.

Exiting the field: Covid-19 restrictions

With all research there comes a time when the fieldwork must come to an end. Often this is determined by the non-availability of further resources, or the researcher having gathered enough evidence to support the developing of an argument. However, the fieldwork for this research project was halted when imposed lockdowns and restrictions resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic made face-to-face research impossible. Whilst localised and national lockdowns began as early as January 2020 in some Eastern countries, theatres, dance studios, and other public venues in the UK were forced to close on 16th March 2020 for over a year to prevent the spread of the virus. I discuss the impact of these closures on the research participants

later in the thesis, particularly in chapter 7. I will say here that leaving the field so abruptly was difficult for me as a researcher because I had established and hoped to maintain friendships and acquaintances in the UK hip-hop dance community. Certain hip-hop events had become fixtures in my social calendar, and I struggled with the enforced isolation. Sustaining my position as researcher and completing the data collection and analysis process involved working remotely and staying connected to the hip-hop community online.

At the point of the closures, I had observed and gathered data from fifteen hip-hop dance events, interviewed five key individuals (some on more than one occasion), and conducted a group interview with eleven dance practitioners. Whilst the Covid-19 pandemic produced practical and ethical challenges for this research, it prompted me to explore new opportunities for different ways of working. I revisited the material I had collected from previous events – notes, programmes, recordings and photographs – and began to conduct an even deeper analysis of my existing data. Furthermore, the hip-hop communities under study remained resilient and adaptable during the pandemic, for example, sharing their personal practice and moving battles and showcases into the online space, which provided a whole new layer of rich data for the study. Levels of contact with research participants varied between March 2020 and March 2021, but remote contacts were already in place. I thus stayed connected to key individuals and was able to document their behaviour, actions, and experiences of participation during the pandemic.

Data analysis process

Once interviews were transcribed, I began to intensively read and re-read the transcripts, field notes and reflections to gain a holistic sense of the whole set of empirical data collected. When reviewing this data I asked the following set of questions, keeping in mind concepts from my theoretical framework and contextual research, and using dress as a constant filter:

- *What is going on?*
- *What are people doing?*
- *What is the person saying?*
- *What do these actions and statements reveal and/ or take for granted?*
- *How are the humans positioned in relation to the clothing and materials?*
- *What effects emerge through this particular assemblage/ network?*

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, I used relevant questions from Pavis' (1985) performance analysis questionnaire to analyse the hip-hop dance events I experienced. I analysed visual documents such as event programmes and flyers, personal photographs and recordings from hip-hop dance events, and visual material from a range of sources to add another layer of rich detail to the research. I accessed official Breakin' Convention photography, showreels, festival highlights, and promotional videos accessed via their website, digital communications manager, and BCTV, Breakin' Convention's YouTube channel. I also accessed images taken by London-based dance photographers Camilla Greenwell and Belinda Lawley that were available online. I then undertook the process of thematic coding, which is a way of "identifying analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 79), or simply, "organising your thinking about the text and your research notes" (Gibbs, 2007). From this process, the following themes emerged:

- Communal and professional practices
- Events and organisations
- Venues and spaces
- Modes of performance and inter-genre differences
- Training and skill development
- Local and global community
- Key practitioners (e.g., pioneers, visionaries, and local/ global "celebrities")

- Career trajectories and professional opportunities
- Enduring material artefacts, concepts, and practices (e.g. “fresh”)
- Ubiquitous Adidas clothing
- Awareness/ perceptions of body image and bodily movement
- Transformations (of body, dress and space)
- Internet and dance video as a connecting/ communicative device

An effort to select extracts from the interviews that capture the essence of each theme was made during the presentation of findings with the commitment to provide a coherent, logical and socio-material account.

Ethical considerations

The research design, how participant data would be captured, stored and presented, was approved by the ethics committee at London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London, before commencement of the fieldwork. This procedure ensured that the research was ethically acceptable, and that participant observations and interviews were undertaken with due diligence. When recruiting potential participants for the research, I informed individuals that they were free to choose whether they wanted to participate, and that they could withdraw from the study at any point. I provided information about the research purpose and focus, the funding institutions, and provided my contact information. I stated how long interviews would take and gained explicit verbal consent to document interviews using either a digital recorder, the recording application on my smartphone, and/ or handwritten notes – noting down specific points of interest and significant quotes. The primary interviewees – Jonzi D, Emma Houston, and Kamsy Duarte – completed a participant consent form, the template for which was provided by UAL (appendix A).

The participants included in this study were either emerging or established dance practitioners in the UK, Europe, or the United States, all above the age of eighteen. I was unable to fully anonymise the study as I needed to collect some identifying information about the dancers and their practice. I

also conducted a group interview with 11 practitioners, meaning the research design was not conducive to confidentiality. For these reasons, I chose not to replace identifying information about participants with pseudonymous or false identifiers in the written thesis. I informed all participants of this, and they consented to having their names and/ or stage names published. I took care to include no quotes or interview excerpts that contained sensitive information or would cause the participants harm. Despite not collecting the data anonymously, I ensured that it was protected and stored securely on password protected USB drives.

In the case of visual material, I obtained permission from Sadler's Wells theatre, Breakin' Convention, and three professional photographers to include event images and film stills in the thesis. Other visual sources included photos and videos posted to practitioners' own Instagram and Facebook accounts and YouTube channels. Whilst these materials were publicly available online, I sought permission from the practitioners/ account owners where relevant, to include their personal content in the thesis. Notably, it was difficult to access photographs and film from *Breakin' Convention Harlem 2017* because of restrictions around photography and recording inside the Apollo Theatre, New York. However, I conducted a search online and found a limited number of press images to use for my analysis. I also analysed a "supercut" (meticulously edited montage) of a performance by French hip-hop dance group Yeah Yellow, originally performed onstage at the Apollo, and featured in the *Breakin' Convention: Locked Down, Locked In* virtual festival in May 2020.

As mentioned earlier, I appointed a proxy researcher to capture the minutiae of hip-hop dance activity at two events in New York. Humanities and social science scholar Lydia Plowman states that the proxy's "standing in for" the ethnographer has implications for some of the tenets of ethnographic research. For example, most ethnographic work emphasises the mediating role of the researcher in collecting and interpreting data. In discussions of the foundational elements of ethnography, the researcher is frequently conceptualised as an "instrument of knowing" (Plowman, 2017: 444).

However, Plowman argues that "ethnography by proxy" can be a pragmatic response to some of the challenges of conducting fieldwork in certain circumstances and suggests that decentring the ethnographer could lead to a re-examination of the researcher's role (Plowman, 2017: 443). Drawing from Hammersley (2006: 4), she points out that emphasis on the ethnographer as a filter of experience is reinforced by the widely held, and outdated, view that a prerequisite of ethnography is presence. In agreement with Plowman, and from an ANT and feminist new materialist perspective, I maintain that my physical presence was not essential in the New York hip-hop dance settings as my interactions with both the proxy researcher and the New York-based participant (human actants), as well as my access to valuable contemporary and naturally occurring data, was facilitated by technology (non-human actant).

The proxy and I established a line of consistent and sometimes real-time communication via WhatsApp messaging and audio/ video calling. I instructed the proxy to capture photographs and video recordings of their surroundings, collect documents (flyers and programmes) from the venues, and to talk informally to available participants in the settings. During these conversations, the proxy gave a succinct description of the research project, stating that it was an exploration of the relationship between dance and dress in hip-hop. The proxy secured Instagram handles and/ or email addresses for three potential participants, informing them that I would contact them directly to provide a more detailed description of the research. Whilst two out of the three individuals responded to my initial Instagram messages and emails, I maintained contact with only one individual. The proxy was thus pivotal in linking me to Manhattan-based b-boy Kamsy Duarte (aka "Flash"), who became a critical informant for this study.

Summary

This chapter has provided a detailed outline of the methodological framework, the various data collection methods, and analysis procedures. It has highlighted interconnections between ANT and ethnography and used

both ANT and feminist new materialist methodologies – “feminist objectivity” and “diffraction” – to describe my situated position as a researcher in the hip-hop network. Through these concepts I have shown that the researcher’s body is actualised as enmeshed (or entangled) with the practices being studied. The methodological approach presented in this chapter privileges ambivalence and multiplicity (over structure and order) and affords the researcher with possibilities of creating other kinds of knowledge. I have explained how I negotiated access to multiple hip-hop dance events in the UK and how I collected data during observations, and from participants both in-person and via telephone or Skype/ Zoom interviews. I have also described how I adjusted this process during the Covid-19 pandemic – gathering mostly visual data online – before completing my analysis. Lastly, I stated how I addressed the main ethical concerns for this project: voluntary participation, informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, and use of a proxy researcher. Thus, the chapter provides important, transparent information about the rigour and validity of the research. The following three chapters will present the research findings and demonstrate the implementation of the research design.

6 Hybrid space: between social dance and professional performance practice

Introduction

This chapter aims to highlight the value of actor-network theory as a theoretical and methodological approach to explore the ambivalence, multiplicities, and shifts at play within hip-hop's complex and nuanced community of dance practice. Referring to post-ANT's insistence on multiplicity and the potential of many things occurring at the same time, the chapter focuses primarily on the notion of hybrid space – an emergent territory between social (vernacular), competitive, and professional hip-hop domains. Specifically, it discusses how dancers engage stylistic and performative practices, born of hip-hop, to fluidly traverse the culture's multiple boundaries. Through an ANT lens, the chapter looks at several human actors' shifting hip-hop identities. It outlines how clothing *acts* to transform practitioners as they navigate multiple roles (for example, breaker, choreographer, teacher, learner), genres (e.g. breaking, locking, krump), and modes of performance (e.g. training, competition, staged performance). To draw together key ideas and illustrate points raised in the chapter, I conclude with a discussion of the choreographed piece, *Liive*, performed by the Locksmiths Dance Company at Breakin' Convention in 2018. Through this example, I describe how clothing *becomes* costume, and how the black social dance form locking was transformed (or "professionalised") by various material actors, focusing especially on the distribution of agency between the theatre space (including stage, lighting and sound), costumed bodies, and the accompanying ensemble of fifteen jazz musicians.

Hip-hop events: fostering a community of belonging

My initial observations of the UK hip-hop scene, and the activities therein, quickly revealed nuances in hip-hop dance practice. As a situated observer and participant, I established the capacity to see from "the peripheries and the depths" (Haraway, 1988: 583); my position allowed me to identify actors

of interest constituted in multiple webs of relationships, and map hip-hop practices before teasing out the finer details about the material arrangement of performances. As I outlined in the previous chapter, the fieldwork for this research involved direct and indirect observation of multiple layers of hip-hop dance performance – such as, impromptu dance circles (cyphers), organised battles and competitions, community-based training sessions, studio classes, masterclasses, workshops, auditions, rehearsals, and choreographed productions. When describing hip-hop "events", I am referring to experiences that took place in venues including, dance studios, community centres, sports halls, theatres, and outdoor spaces such as parks, and public streets. Irrespective of venue or location, the events I attended shared a common feature in that they served as a continuous celebration of hip-hop and its dancers, who danced in a myriad of ways and for different reasons. I immediately noted the social and communal aspect of each event, how they brought people from different backgrounds and different parts of the world together. Many people from the multi-ethnic, multi-generational crowds had travelled from other cities and countries to compete, perform, or to support other participants, demonstrating that community and togetherness are entangled with the cultural and material experience of hip-hop.

Several informants in this study expressed that they had previously travelled to other cities and countries for events, teaching, and training opportunities. For some dancers, events were a way to learn "foundation" – fundamental dance moves, battle and improvisation strategies, and the importance of originality and inventiveness (Schloss, 2009: 12), the latter of which applies to personal appearance as well as dance technique. Others said that events helped dancers to "build each other up" (Nine, 2017) and connect with other practitioners, many of whom became collaborators and/ or long-term friends. In an interview with Nine, the b-boy recalled how in the 1990s, "Crews and university teams would get together and go out of town… raise money together, get coaches and go to "community-based" events. That's what they called them." Shortbread also shared their experiences of travelling to various international battles and events, which led to their recruitment into an international breaking crew called Heart Breakerz:

> I went over to an event called IBE in Holland […] they called the whole thing “Heartbreak Hotel” […] When they said “go”, you had to go and pair up with the one you best preferred and it was really cool. I entered and ended up winning it with the b-girl from Japan […] I then travelled to LA the following February for their anniversary jam, and then again in the summer. So I've connected with them on three occasions internationally, and then they put me down in the crew about a year ago. (Houston, 20 January 2018)

While this research does not focus on the movement of performers across geographical space (see Fogarty, 2006, for a detailed account of transnational breaking practice), I draw attention here to how events maintain and extend connections between practitioners, who operate in what I refer to as “networked space” (Law and Mol, 2001). I also note hip-hop’s ethos of inclusion, how it promotes a sense of community and encourages participation. Hip-hop dance events not only foster social cohesion, but also support and empower practitioners by providing a platform, allowing them to develop, learn from and collaborate with others, showcase their skills, and express their genre-specific hip-hop identities (I will return to this latter point in more detail later in the chapter).

Merchandise as a mediator of belonging

A significant material actor to emerge from the fieldwork was event merchandise – culture-based apparel and accessories known colloquially as “merch”. As stated earlier, I attended eighteen different hip-hop events. Focusing on the materiality of these environments meant that it was impossible to ignore the ubiquity of merchandise; shared “things” that signified participation, attachment, and facilitated recognition and interaction between members of the hip-hop community. I frequently observed people wearing screen-printed t-shirts, vests, and hooded sweatshirts, as well as hats and backpacks emblazoned with logos and monikers such as, “Go Hard or Go Home” (GHGH), “Break Mission”, and “Breakin’ Convention” (BC). The

unique designs and colourways changed over successive events, adding to the item's symbolic value and status as a token, or souvenir of the experience. My primary concern was the "agentic efficacy" (Sofer, 2016: 682) of this vibrant matter; how these hip-hop artefacts connected people in space, allowed the wearer to belong, but also to "touch time" and "to experience the past in the present" (Schweitzer, 2014: 1).

Figure 1 Breakin' Convention merchandise – Dashiki with 'varsity' typeface/ lettering. Photo: K. Jones

Figure 2 Breakin' Convention brand label. Photo: K. Jones

At Breakin' Convention 2017, I purchased a Dashiki – a loose-fitting tunic style shirt made from colourful printed fabric developed in West Africa – with "BC EST. 2004" screen printed in large white varsity typeface on the front (figure 1). This garment serves as a collector's item, a physical memento and reminder of the experiential encounter. It simultaneously connects me to my West African heritage (Ghana and Ivory Coast), to Breakin' Convention as an experience, and to my peers in the hip-hop community. The Dashiki, which has become unisex wear, is loose fitted, has short sleeves, and a round neckline (figure 2), although traditionally, the shirt has a V-neck with embroidery around the neckline. The colours of a Dashiki also have distinct meanings. Artist Kofi Antubam described a wide range of colours used among some ethnic groups in Ghana and the meanings attached to them in his book *Ghana's Heritage of Culture (1963).* He stated that yellow and gold represents royalty, black represents, night, sorrow and vicious spirits such as death and the devil. Green represents fertility, newness and primness; red represents anger, the art of war, calamity and show of dissatisfaction. Blue relates to love, female tenderness, and serenity. Grey could also stand for

blame and degradation, white represents spiritual entities, like God and deified spirits of the ancestors, joy, victory and purity.

For me, the Dashiki's potent symbolism lies in its association with black and African pride. The garment has influenced black people's politics and thought over time; for example, it was popularised by political organisations and groups such as the Black Panther Party in the 1960s. The Dashiki directly linked the wearer with African heritage which was perceived by onlookers. Its vibrancy, lack of subtly and clear message made it a productive instrument, or rather a performing object, in conveying to the public one's pride in their African identity. The garment was often accompanied by slogans such as "Black Power," and "Black is Beautiful" (Vargas, 2009: 96). As a result, the Dashiki was adopted by hip-hop culture in the 1980s. Sociologists Colin Jerolmack and Iddo Tavory argue, through ANT, that relationships with non-humans can organise one's social position and relations. According to them, non-humans (for example, articles of clothing) "*mold* the social self by structuring how one will be perceived by others and constraining the possibilities for alternative presentations of self, and nonhumans act as *totems* by conjuring up awareness of, and feelings of attachment to, a particular social group" (Jerolmack & Tavory, 2014: 67). In other words, an individual's anticipation of other people's reactions can shape their choice in clothing and can thus provide the materials to mould the social self in ways that set up desired social interactions.

More importantly, this particular cultural artefact demonstrates how Africanist resonances and presences appear in obvious and hidden areas of hip-hop dance practice, can be imbibed in materials, and communicated to other networked individuals across space and time. The Dashiki acts by reminding the wearer that the world is larger than where they are. This alive and evolving piece of merchandise allows members of the hip-hop and/ or Breakin' Convention community to experience the past in the present, connecting them to past events and experiences. The Dashiki connects the wearer to others in the African diaspora – that have shared experiences and "connective marginalities" (Osumare, 2001: 172) – while the "BC EST. 2004"

printed lettering (which signifies the festival's twenty-year history and legacy) also links them to historical "do-it-yourself" customisation practices that were commonplace in street style and hip-hop culture in 1970s New York. An important aspect of the b-boy persona is their readiness to honour themselves by displaying their name and/ or the name of their crew somewhere on their clothing. This was often achieved with iron-on letters and patches on vests and t-shirts, and the unspoken message was, "I assume you want to know who I am" (Schloss, 2009: 79). In the context of hip-hop events, merchandise is an important non-human mediator that modifies a state of affairs by making a difference (Latour, 2005: 39). As an inclusive signifier of group identity and othering of those not belonging to the community, the derived object contributes to the feeling of communal belonging and facilitates recognition and interaction between peers.

Training–competition–performance

ANT proved an effective approach because it allowed me to examine many things occurring in the hip-hop community at the same time and ultimately, present hip-hop as a fluid space in which elements and their spatial relations change. The concept of multiplicity enabled an exploration of hip-hop not only as various and fragmented, but also as complex and variously distributed within itself. Three essential elements, or performative contexts, to emerge from the data were training, competition, and (staged) performance, which were "done" in a variety of different ways and inhabited multiple topologies; some homogeneous – spaces within which "comparisons make sense and boundaries become possible" – and others fluid – networks in which "everything informs everything else" (Law and Mol, 1994: 659). Although it is possible to isolate the study of each of these contexts, I argue that they are inseparable when considering the collaboration between humans and non-humans in the production and continuation of the dance form. Competition is a driving force as it challenges practitioners to keep creating and innovating new dance moves to add to their repertoire (Gorney, 2009), as well as creating fresh looks and outfits that enhance and enable those moves. In order to compete, a dancer must train, and a prominent

structure used for hip-hop dance competitions is a performance based one. For example, crews and dance collectives create choreographed performance pieces that are showcased onstage one at a time. All three elements intersect and actions and actants (human and non-human) are dispersed along this horizontal chain of unfolding phenomena (Bennett, 2005).

When discussing the significance and meaningfulness of the hip-hop community, most interviewees valued the social and collaborative aspect, but were quick to point out how competitive hip-hop dance is. Genre provides a means of categorisation for contemporary hip-hop dance competitions especially. Yet hip-hop styles can be flexible and boundaryless, allowing for multiplicity of identities and hip-hop dance realities. As I have outlined in chapter 2, the thesis traces the material trajectory of dress across a number of sub-genres that come under the hip-hop dance umbrella, but focuses mostly on breaking, locking, and choreography. Popping, house, (freestyle) hip-hop, and krump are discussed more broadly in relation to inter-genre differences in dress, footwear especially. I take pause here to explain that the LA-based dance form krumping was not included in the earlier introduction to hip-hop dances in chapter 2 (*Hip-hop dance: a culture of cross-fertilisation and co-production*) because it did not emerge in South Central until the early-2000s, more than two decades after the birth of hip-hop. “Clowning”, the less aggressive predecessor to krumping was developed by dancer Thomas Johnson, also known as “Tommy the Clown”, initially as a form of entertainment, but later as a response to the 1992 Los Angeles Riots[44]. The style evolved into krumping, which is marked by rapid and sharp contractions of the torso and confrontational but cathartic release

[44] On 3 March 1991, four white Los Angeles police officers were captured on a home video camera beating an African American speeding suspect, Rodney King. Ensuing broadcasts of the tape on national television galvanised public opinion about police brutality and institutionalised racism. On 29 April 1992, an all-white jury found the officers not guilty of crimes against King. Following the announcement of the verdict, riots erupted throughout the city of Los Angeles for several days resulting in 53 deaths, 10,000 arrests, 2,300 injuries, more than 1,000 buildings lost to fire, thousands of jobs lost and an estimated cost to the city of $1 billion in damages. The LA Riots gained a place in history as the worst riots the US has seen in modern years (Matheson & Blade, 2004; Hohman, 2002).

occurring through the intensity of action and emotion (Todd, 2016). It is commonly intended as a positive expression of anger, or a release of the pent-up emotion experienced by the black, predominantly male originators of the dance form that inhabited a notoriously dangerous region of the Los Angeles (Frost, 2016). Later in the chapter, I will discuss how krumpers use certain wearables to enact movements, such as stomps, jumps, chest pops, jabs, and aggressive but controlled arm swings.

Several interviewees expressed that "showing what you've got" and "claiming status" through your dance and dress style is an integral part of hip-hop and has been since its inception. As scholars such as Banes (1981), Rose (1994), and Schloss (2009) have described, early b-boys would hit the floor – either in the street or at Kool Herc' s parties – and each dancer would try to out-do the dancer before him. Aprahamian states that both men and women historically engaged in competitive interactions and displays; for example, activities such as spontaneously challenging and "burning" competitors – a "kinesthetic concept dictated by originality, musicality, wit, and competition" (Aprahamian, 2020: 43-44). Thus, hip-hop dance was founded on the idea of one-up-man-ship, a characteristic that pervades the culture to this day. In order to materially engage in the culture of competition, a dancer must become "of" the dance through extensive training, apprenticeship, and participation (Schloss, 2009). Specifically, the research highlights how clothing (performing objects) are an important part of the generation and actualisation of the agency of performers during this process.

Translation through training and sharing practices

The data analysis was informed by ANT's central concept of translation, which is process oriented and concerned with how actors assemble and connect to one another, and how network elements are organised and converted (Latour, 2005; Law, 1992). A common theme amongst the interviewees was that their assimilation into the hip-hop network was facilitated by friends, relatives, and what they had seen on film and television. Some proceeded to find a local crew to practice with, others

developed their practice by attending dance classes organised and taught by professional dancers, or well-known practitioners in their local community. Nine explained that he first saw b-boying on the British music chart television programme “Top of the Pops” (TOTP) in the early 1980s when he was about thirteen years-old. He stated:

> The news reported a “new dance craze” called breakdancing, but nobody knew where to find it. One of the first crews I saw here [in Birmingham] was a man called Simon Scarlett, he had a crew with about 7 people in Perry Barr “Wildfest Crew” […] Crews would train and battle in the school holidays, nothing planned. Then it was in the clubs. It was footwork before breakdancing [...] “Powerhouse”, all the bad man dem were the top dancers. (Nine 21 January 2018)

Shortbread described the importance of the training environment and how dancers often recruit one another and bring them to training sessions:

> There was this one friend, his name was Rocket, and he still dances today. He's part of the crew called Break Fresh, and he told me, “Would you like to come to this practice that's close by? Because there are teachers there that can actually show you” […] I was part of the scene, because I was training a lot. That's so important for me, the environment and who I'm dancing with […] the vibe. (Houston, 20 January 2018)

Flash described a similar experience. He recalled being invited by a friend to a training session in New York with renowned husband and wife duo, Kwikstep and Rokafella, who are regarded widely as b-boying visionaries. He stated:

> I remember just saying this is getting kind of lonely. Let me give this practice a shot. I go to the practice, and it happened to be Kwikstep and Rokafella […] they have a legacy crew out here that's been around since the 90s. There were the beginners, intermediates, and

> there was the dance circle. […] Practice consisted of warm-ups, then it came to the basic drills for, I guess you could say, all the components of breaking. That's when we would start getting into more advanced and complex movements and stuff like that. (Duarte, 20 January 2018)

The above excerpts highlight, in the first instance, hip-hop's "each one teach one" (Fogarty, 2012) principle, which remains a prominent feature of hip-hop dance even as the practice flourishes across commercial, educational, and digital spaces. I found that knowledge exchange occurs, and dancers are "converted", via a combination of traditional and innovative methods, such as, grassroots training in the community, as well as masterclasses and workshops with renowned/ professional dancers, and more recently, online tutorials and dance "class videos" (see chapter 7). An unexpected link, that illustrated once again the connectedness of human actors in networked space, was that both Shortbread and Flash had taken masterclasses with legendary b-boy Ken Swift, formerly of the Rocksteady Crew. Flash trained with Swift in New York, whereas Shortbread trained with him in Glasgow, Scotland. An online search revealed that Breakin' Convention also hosted a "b-boy fundamentals" masterclass with Swift as part of its 2009 festival in London. Whilst this demonstrates the movement of first and second-generation b-boys in geographical space, and their commitment to preserving and continuing the breaking dance form, of interest here is the interaction between experienced and "top" hip-hop dancers and less experienced dancers; interactions which serve to create the "pioneer", "teacher", or "group leader" as a source of power in the hip-hop community.

From an ANT point of view, I propose that the establishment of such relations of influence, and the resulting emergence of relational agency, are "outcomes" of translation processes (Arora & Glover, 2017: 17). For example, Nine was translated, drawn into the elusive "new dance craze" called breakdancing by the performers he saw on a television show – it is important to note the television itself as a (non-human) mediator in this process – and then by the "top dancers" he encountered in his community.

Both Flash and Shortbread described their training experiences with an attitude of reverence, and placed value on the various individuals who transformed their breaking practice. However, I am acknowledging that their own presence and participation as “students” or learners of the dance simultaneously translated/ transformed the more experienced dancers into “teachers”. Put another way, the power in hip-hop does not *reside* within certain individuals, such as Ken Swift, Kwikstep, Rokafella, or the dancers on a television screen. Nor is it simply attached to practices, or the rules and procedures established by pioneers and continually enforced by participants. Rather, power emerges from the development of relations between human actors, technology, materials, concepts and ideas; through doing and knowing, training and collaborating in a range of spaces and environments. All actors must play their part moment by moment for the hip-hop network to remain stable.

Vital materiality in dance practice

Ground space emerged as a vital actor in hip-hop dance training and performance. Breakers expressed that concrete floors present challenges in terms of comfortability and injury risk to dancers. Flash described the physical demands of breaking, stating, “when you're hitting the floor, almost like slamming yourself against the floor and everything, that takes a toll” (Duarte, 2018). He and other breakers expressed a preference for firm surfaces that allowed them to glide, slide, spin, but also grip the floor during performance. When I asked practitioners from all genres about the role of the performance space and floor surface, they implicated clothing and demonstrated an implied awareness of the complex and symbiotic relationship between the dancer’s body, clothing and the floor. For example, Shortbread recalled a group training session that took place in a freezing cold, dusty warehouse in Glasgow. To overcome the poor conditions, the dancers enlisted warm clothing, hats, and linoleum for the floor. Similarly, Nine described the strategies he adopted during his early breaking practice; such as dancing on cardboard and wearing his “roughest garms” (garments) for outdoor training sessions in parks and school playgrounds during the

1980s and 1990s. Several participants mentioned during interviews that they reserved specific clothes for training, items they are not afraid to wear-out or damage on grass or dirty floors and save their freshest clothes for battles and events.

Figure 3 Temporary cardboard floor covering at Breakin' Convention: Park Jam, London (2019) Photo: Breakin' Convention

What is interesting is the participants' adoption of temporary floor coverings (figure 3), which connects back to the practices of early b-boys in New York who acquired large pieces of cardboard and linoleum to invent and practice flamboyant breaking moves in the streets. When asked about the continuation of such practices, some interviewees reported learning these strategies from documentaries, dominant figures, and original practitioners from the New York breaking scene, most notably Ken Swift; again, indicating hip-hop's "each one teach one" principle. The use of temporary coverings to enable dance practice is one example of how hip-hop encompasses "patterned networks of heterogeneous materials", and more specifically, processes of "heterogeneous engineering" in which bits and pieces from the social, the technical, and the conceptual are fitted together, and so converted (translated) into a set of equally heterogeneous products or effects (Law,

1992: 2). It illustrates a continuation between early hip-hop dance practice and contemporary practitioners through the passing on of such knowledge, it also reveals the relational agency of materials such as cardboard and linoleum, which, by recurring in different geographical and temporal contexts emerge as being foundational to the practice.

Fresh but functional dress

One of the most significant findings was the constant tension, the subtle push and pull between fierce individuality and practicality when dressing for hip-hop dance practice. Nearly all of the participants expressed, either implicitly or explicitly, that clothing for battles and public performances must be "fresh but functional" (Houston, 2018); it must meet the practical needs of the hip-hop performer and allow for the intended movement, but also enable them to actively construct their identity, feel good (confident), and be perceived by others as fresh. This notion highlights that wearables have agency, can exert influence and modify a situation or circumstance. Whilst I am concerned with the specific enactments of these non-human elements, which I discuss in more detail shortly, I do not overlook the human performer's influence in the assemblage either. I propose that the performer's desire/ wish – or "désir" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 6) – and drive to look fresh is a positive, productive force in making the hip-hop bodily assemblage coalesce together. The consensus among the practitioners was that if you look and feel good, you perform better. Flash explained:

> Fashion has a huge impact on your performance and how you feel as a dancer because me, as a breaker, although I do try to get clothes that are comfortable and fitting and things that I can dance in, there are also looks that I try to go for. Because if I feel that I look a certain way, for some reason it makes me move a certain way […] I was wearing this fresh Adidas tracksuit and, for some reason, I was moving very old school. You know, everything that I had learnt from OGs, my body just wanted to emulate that. (Duarte, 20 January 2018)

Flash's statement indicates that the "right" clothing, in terms of both aesthetics and practicality, allows practitioners to feel, act, and move in particular ways. The Adidas tracksuit he mentions acted as a mediator, transforming Flash's dancing body and making him move in an "old school" way. The tracksuit "scripted" (Bernstein, 2009) his behaviour and prompted him to "do" behaviours previously "behaved" (Schechner, 2013: 35) by "OGs", the b-boy pioneers and second-generation breakers from New York who have greatly influenced his own dance practice and identity. It can be inferred that both Flash and the garment are networked simultaneously in the moment of performance, and in relation to other performances happening elsewhere and at other times.

Laura "Sparkx" Poole, a member of the Locksmiths dance company, explained that she dresses according to what makes her feel good, and what she believes looks better on her body. She stated:

> I really enjoy clothes and style as a form of self-expression and yeah, outside of the studio it's kind of the same. But when you come in, it's sort of a mix of what's practical to dance in, but it definitely changes the quality of my movement sometimes. Not so much in how comfortable something is, but how it makes me feel. I kinda feel like sometimes you can put clothes on, and it can help you feel how you wanna feel. (Poole, 18 January 2019)

Sparkx's reference to the studio suggests her participation in dance classes, training, or rehearsals, which stipulate practicality. What was interesting was how the practitioners interacted with certain wearables – that were insentient but also active – during training and rehearsals especially. As mentioned previously, some dancers reserved specific clothing for training and practice sessions. For example, Nine referred to his "roughest" tracksuit, and Flash stated that breakers, "can't look fresh because we're gonna be a sweaty mess, we're gonna be throwing ourselves all over the floor" (Duarte, 2018). However, Shortbread explained that it was down to personal preference. They stated:

> There's some people that will train in their freshest shit and I just think it's crazy. But you know, they'll train in that fresh tracksuit, in their matching everything, because they'll feel fresh at training as well. So, it's also like a personal preference to a certain extent. But usually what you do, you train in your not so good stuff and then for a battle you'll wear your new stuff, your fresh stuff, and that may or may not be compromising in a way for your movement. (Houston, 25 April 2018)

What is implied in Shortbread's statement is that fresh and/ or new "stuff" has transformative power but may compromise movement during dance practice, which was a recurring concern amongst the informants. Practicality and comfortability were contributing factors to the dancers' satisfaction with and selection of clothing as they needed to move freely and comfortably whilst executing complex dance moves. I must note here that I have not engaged with the extensive research around comfort perception and clothing. Although, I have drawn from one particularly useful clothing comfort model – proposed by clothing and textiles scholars Maureen Sweeney and Donna Branson (1991) – as it aligns with ANT in several ways. Sweeney and Branson suggest that clothing comfort has both physical and social-psychological elements, and that the wearer's "filters", such as previous clothing experience, choices for fit, feelings about their body, anticipations, and influence, together with the perceived response to the mentioned elements of comfort, give an individualised assessment of clothing comfort. Most notably, each element is dependent on and affects the other element (Branson & Sweeney, 1991: 100). In concurrence with Branson and Sweeney, the interview responses indicated that previous experiences with clothing, the material properties and fit of garments, as well as how they would be perceived by others were all influential factors in terms of the practitioners' clothing selections.

The abovementioned clothing comfort model was confirmed by several performers, including krumper and choreographer Nicole McDowall, who stated:

> Comfort, like, it's different in like rehearsals, or class, or a cypher. Rehearsals you really are in your comfies. But even then, the t-shirts that look the same are so different, the thickness and how much you sweat in them. Sweat patches. I sweat *so* much. You can't help it. But I know a lot of people that are like, "oh no, I have to wear black because of sweating". (McDowall, 18 January 2019)

Firstly, the practitioner differentiates between contexts and modes of performance, indicating that rehearsals, classes, and cyphers demand comfort. Interestingly, she does not mention battles, or the performance piece, which suggests that other factors, such as looking fresh – or "Buck" (Nash, 2019), krump's equivalent term – might become more of a priority in those specific contexts. Her preference for "comfies" is informed by previous experiences of rehearsing and needing to be able to repeatedly execute complex moves for extended periods of time. She also points out that t-shirts that look the same act in different ways. For example, thicker t-shirts *do* something to the wearer in that they induce more sweating. The notion of the "right" clothes was a common theme among the practitioners. Many spoke fondly of clothing items in relation to sensorial properties; although they found it difficult to verbally articulate this at times and tried to demonstrate with hand gestures and by touching their clothes. They described tactile sensations including smoothness, roughness, scratchiness, softness and stiffness; thermal sensations, including warmth, coolness, breathability, hotness, and chilliness; as well as moisture sensations, such as clamminess, dampness, wetness, stickiness, and clinginess. When describing his preferred clothing, Hector Plaza, a breaker and choreographer from Barcelona, placed value on jeans that stretch. While jeans made him feel confident, they needed to allow for acrobatic types of movement. He stated:

> I prefer to dance in jeans and this kind of stuff. I used to buy these ones [straight leg/ turned up at ankle], but usually I buy women's pants because they are elastic and they stretch […] Yeah, depending

> on the kind of thing I want to make [choreograph], I feel more confident in jeans or these kinds of things. (Plaza, 18 January 2019)

Figure 4 "Vendetta" at Breakin' Convention: Back to the Lab, London (2019) Photo: Breakin' Convention

Krumper and choreographer Joshua "Vendetta" Nash described his favourite track pants and preferred t-shirts for training, stating:

> For me, these are my favourite training bottoms. I've got another pair of Adidas ones, but they flare a little bit at the bottom, and I don't like how that feels. Most of the time, I'll pull up my things and it feels the same. But at the same time, it's just not the same bottoms. So, I'd rather wear these every single day […] I have a box of training t-shirts, and I've got like 5 or 6 that I wear, and the rest just stay at the bottom. I dunno, it's weird like, I don't feel comfortable with my body to dance if I'm not wearing the right clothes. It just makes me feel a bit more confident, I guess. (Nash, 18 January 2019)

The 3-Stripes Adidas trackpants Vendetta describes are a key actant in his material bodily assemblage (figure 4). They not only constitute the "right"

clothing, but also situate him in a network of political and culturally meaningful histories, ideas and concepts. The Adidas branded trackpants, so entangled with hip-hop, invite “repetitions of acts, distinctive and meaningful motions of eyes, hands, shoulders, hips, feet” (Bernstein, 2009: 70). They arrange and propel his body “in recognizable ways, through paths of evocative movement that have been travelled before” (ibid) by other networked hip-hop dancers. I draw attention to his comment about a second/ similar pair of trackpants which he dislikes because they “flare out” at the bottom. This illustrates that successful negotiations between actants can never be assured (Callon, 1986: 10). The flared trackpants disrupt Vendetta’s movement and/ or presentation of self, causing him to take action and pull them up.

Notably, many of the dancers I observed at events customised their outfit by rolling, cuffing, and stacking both, or one trouser leg. The latter is a continuation of the New York trend that was popularised by hip-hop artists, such as LL Cool J, in the mid-1990s. In an interview with *The New York Times,* the late Jam Master Jay of Run DMC stated, “I’ve been rolling up one of my joints", meaning pants, "for years. In the summertime, it's how we rock it. It's the hot hip-hop thing to do." The style is thought to have originated in New York in the 1980s when youths emulated local bicycle messengers who would roll up a pant leg to avoid getting their trousers caught in their bicycle chains (Holloway, 1996). This ritual of performativity conveys the message that the individual is “old school”, but more importantly, it shows that material bodily assemblages are not merely made up of bodies and objects, but are dynamic phenomena “evolving simultaneously with past, present and future reconfigurations of the world” (Barad, 2007).

Transformations of matter in hybrid performance space

Competitions and battles engendered some of the most innovative approaches to fashioning the dancing body. Transformations of body and space occurred continuously at these events. For example, cyphers were spontaneous in their formation; dancers would simply hit the floor and start to

break, with spectators creating a frame for the interaction. They opened up on dancefloors, in theatre foyers, and in the street at any given time. As discussed at the beginning of the chapter, colourful merchandise created a sense of belonging whilst cutting a striking (collective) figure in a multitude of venues. Memorable hip-hop trends and brands from the late 1980s and early 1990s were adopted but also remixed. Spectators and performers alike were swathed in Adidas garments, as well as other recognisable mid-market athletic and streetwear brands, including Puma, Reebok, Nike, Kangol, Fila, Champion, Converse and Vans. I saw various combinations of branded garments situated on these bodies – including, Stussy hats and sweatshirts paired with Nike track pants, Champion with Kappa, and Adidas with FILA; although, people generally adhered to the number one logo mixing commandment, that the two most dominant athletic brands, Nike and Adidas should never be worn together.

The most popular clothing items I documented were, tracksuits, worn as separate pieces or as a set, chino trousers, stretch jeans, windbreaker jackets, hooded sweatshirts, oversized flannel or denim button-down shirts, plain or printed oversized t-shirts, bandana headbands, “beanies” (small, round, brimless hat), bucket hats, visors, caps (flat, fitted, snapback), and leather, suede, or canvas sneakers. People made subtle stylistic adjustments and wore these items in unique ways. Examples include windbreakers, sweatshirts, and long-sleeved shirts tied in various ways around the wearer’s waist, shoulders and neck; hoodies worn with one arm left out of the sleeve; one trouser leg rolled up to the calf or knee or tucked into socks; sleeves/ cuffs of jackets and hoodies pushed up past the elbow crease; and sneakers worn with colourful and/ or mismatching socks and shoelaces.

An argument this thesis makes is that power does not reside in these specific wearables, rather, it emerges through “a congealing of agency” (Barad, 2007: 210), the intermixing and joining of items, hip-hop trends, cultural histories, and divergent performativities. Further, it argues that fresh dressing is a dynamic, and material-discursive process of becoming. A significant finding was that clothes enabled practitioners to transition from one state to

another in space and time (Barad, 2007: 142); to *become* more confident, masculine, feminine, a character, or a dancer from another style/ genre. Several research participants competed and performed across multiple genres. They also adopted different personas and roles within the hip-hop community at different times. I encountered certain individuals on multiple occasions whose roles shifted between competitor, judge, workshop leader, and even photographer/ videographer. While this demonstrated the supportive nature and resourcefulness of the community, I was primarily concerned with how different possibilities occurred at each moment and came into existence through repetitive performances/ enactments not only by human bodies, but also specific wearables.

Material enactments

I established from the data that the movement profile of each hip-hop dance form tended to dictate the clothing choices of its participants. Body-garment fit emerged as an important theme as practitioners paid considerable attention to the fit of garments in terms of both visuality and functionality. When discussing fit with the interviewees, they often used terms to describe pressure sensations, including, “snug”, “loose”, “lightweight”, “heavy”, “soft”, and “stiff”. Oversized, baggy, and sturdy clothes were associated with hard-hitting dance styles such as breaking and krumping; loose fitting and lightweight clothes were associated with more “flowy” styles of dance, such as house and popping; whereas tighter fitting clothes were described by practitioners as looking “crisp” and “together” and suited to styles such as commercial hip-hop and choreography.

I found that breakers, who engaged in lots of floor work, sliding, spinning and rolling, often covered up as much of the body as possible with long trousers, baggy t-shirts and long-sleeved tops to prevent getting burns from the floor. Krumpers were similarly dressed in dark, oversized clothes. However, their dress assemblages incorporated baggy jeans and cargo pants made of stiff materials, and heavy Timberland boots, which emphasised the extreme bodily movements characteristic of the dance. Poppers and house dancers,

on the other hand, tended to dress in a more flamboyant and expressive manner. Button down shirts fastened at the collar with the remaining buttons undone, and dress trousers or harem style pants were frequently worn to accentuate the loose movement and carefree twirling of the house dancers. Poppers wore similar garments to make arm and leg movements look more fluid. These dancers used additional strategies, such as adding jackets (for example, bomber, windbreaker, gillet), hats and necklaces, extra layers that would shake and showcase the “pop” or “hit”, the most fundamental move in popping.

Fresh kicks: sneaker selection, care, and customisation

A common feature across all genres was fresh sneakers, also known as “kicks”. I tended to observe battles and cyphers from the ground up – the complicated footwork, the positioning and actions of the feet – which drew my attention to different types of sneakers and footwear, and how they interacted with floor and propelled the moving body in different styles of dance. Enlisting the right type of shoe was imperative to ensure the practitioners performed well while minimising the injury risk. The main factors that influenced their choice of sneakers were material features and weight of the shoe, the type of movement the footwear was intended for, appearance/ colourway, and price. Dancers in the house and popping genres typically wore flat shoes with a stiff sole and a strong toe, such as Converse and the iconic Adidas Superstar (shell toe) sneakers popularised by rap group Run DMC in 1986. These shoes are less appropriate for other styles of hip-hop dance, namely breaking, because of the thick and inflexible soles. However, they are appropriate for house and popping because the flat sole facilitates signature moves such as sliding, spinning and gliding. Gliding is a movement most associated with popping and is closely related to the “Moonwalk” made famous by Michael Jackson. It is where the feet alternate between toe and heel, while pushing or pulling the feet across the floor to create the illusion that one’s body is gliding in a smooth motion.

Figure 5 "Shin" (Key Infinity Crew) battling in Birmingham, UK, wearing Adidas Gazelle suede sneakers (2019) Photo: Break Mission X B-Side Hip-Hop Festival

Krumpers usually danced in heavy boots, which Vendetta demonstrated by stomping loudly on the studio floor with his Timberland boot to show how krumpers rhythmically drive the foot into and up from the ground in a way that they appear to get their energy from the ground itself. However, other "bulky" shoes, such as Nike Air Jordans and Nike Air Force 1s, also enabled dance moves characteristic of krumping, such as stomping and toe spins. Breakers were perhaps the most vigilant about wearing suitable footwear for dancing. My own hip-hop identity and understanding of hip-hop history allowed me to read subtle clues in the dancers' bodily assemblages, nods to the past that hinted at their genre or style of performance. For example, the Adidas Gazelle (figure 5) and Puma Suede sneakers adopted by many breakers under study are a long-time b-boy favourite because they are flexible, relatively lightweight, and allow for sliding on the tops and sides of the feet. Other sneakers considered good for breaking were Adidas Ultra Boost and similar sock-like shoes that gripped the feet and the floor well and

allowed for sliding, spinning and jumping. These lightweight shoes were also preferred for long rehearsals because they were more comfortable.

When describing the performativity of different types of footwear, Ben Ajose-Cutting, aka “Mr. Ben” – London-based dancer, choreographer, and artistic director of The Locksmiths – stated that:

> Footwear can completely change how you dance. I can put on a pair of Hush Puppies and it gives you the ability to do certain things you wouldn’t be able to do in trainers or shoes that don’t have so much grip and you’re gonna, you know, slide more. You’re gonna come up from the splits in a particular way. Whereas, with something more grippy, you feel the connection with the floor a bit, you know, quite differently. So it’s almost like some feedback from the floor and that relationship with the floor. It kind of manipulates the choices you make […] I find there’s something very specific for me about how grippy the bottom is and how slidy the top of my foot is for the type of footwork that I do […] And then the weight of the shoes matters if you’re like doing flips, right? The momentum of getting yourself up and around, you feel that difference. So yeah, it’s specific in a very practical way. (Ajose-Cutting, 18 January 2019)

Other practitioners highlighted additional material factors relating to footwear, including the depth of the sole and weight of the shoe, which can affect agility; and the shape and height (high/ low cut) of the shoe, which can enable or impede range of movement in the ankle and foot. Sparkx expressed that:

> The height and the support [matters] as well. Like, sometimes if you’ve got like an Air Max or something, that’s got quite a big, *platform*? Yeah, it can be a bit wobbly. And the risk of rolling an ankle changes, depending on how squishy the sole is, and how high the sole is. (Poole, 18 January 2019)

The above accounts highlight the mutual constitution of entangled agencies, and how agencies emerge through a combination of bodily exertion, performing objects, and the materiality of the space. Mr. Ben's example shows how translation occurs; in that, he must adjust his behaviour to the floor's "demands" to slide, to come up from the splits, and to do flips. He enlists Hush Puppies, brushed-suede shoes with a lightweight crepe sole, which allow him to execute moves that are restricted by other types of footwear. In these moments, neither the floor, the shoe, nor the body has more agency; that is, makes more of a difference in the state of affairs. Rather, agency is shared, distributed between the actors involved in that moment of performance.

Dancers and spectators alike wore colourful socks and shoelaces to customise and transform the look of their sneakers and outfits. Shoelaces are an inexpensive means to accentuate a sneaker. The type of shoelace a person chooses is down to personal preference, whether that is based on colour, pattern or material, for example, round, flat, "fat", ribbon, coloured, plain, or patterned. Participants matched the colour of their shoelaces to a different colour in their outfit, effectively "picking up" that colour and making the entire look more harmonious. For example, shoelace colours matched something in their socks, or combined with a colour in their t-shirt, sweatshirt, hat, or bandana headband. Shoelaces in a contrasting colour to the shoe also highlighted the intricate lacing patterns and styles adopted by the wearer. Lacing methods and techniques are another example of embodied practices that have been passed along the hip-hop network over time. In 1970s and 1980s New York, b-boys who could not afford to invest in new sneakers simply changed the look and appearance of a shoe by switching out the shoelaces. Expressions of individuality and personal flair were achieved by leaving shoelaces untied and letting them hang out of the shoe's top two eyelets, or arranging laces into geometrical patterns, such as, the checkerboard pattern in which two usually contrasting sets of laces are used, one set laced vertically, the other laced horizontally.

Another enduring practice that has been passed along the hip-hop network since the 1970s is the cleaning of sneakers (and shoelaces) with an old toothbrush and "safe" household products to transform them and keep them looking fresh (Petchauer & Garrison, 2014: 109). In this instance, non-human objects such as old toothbrushes and shoelaces, recurring in different geographical and temporal contexts, act as mediators because they modify a state of things and make a difference to the performing body and the performance (Latour, 2005: 71). Notably, sneaker care involves both cleaning and protecting the shoes. Certain participants in contemporary hip-hop culture protect their sneakers by coating them with shoe protector products from brands such as *Crep Protect* (the term "creps" is urban youth slang for sneakers), and/ or purchasing crease guards, which are designed to fit comfortably inside the toebox of the shoe and stay in place during movement. However, crease guards are not suitable for hip-hop dance activity as the plastic protector would restrict movement in the foot and cause discomfort to the wearer. Practitioners therefore utilise historical protective measures, such as stuffing sneakers with scrunched up newspaper straight after removal to absorb moisture, hold the shape of the shoe, and prevent toe creases, which is one of the biggest factors that make sneakers look old.

What I am demonstrating through these examples is how agency is distributed between the performer (or wearer), the material objects (sneakers, shoelaces, cleaning products), and the methods of enhancing and preserving footwear. These historical practices – which re-emerge in the present through the sharing of knowledge body to body – constitute important non-human actants, mediators, because they transform other actants in the network and make a difference to the performance. While communicating through these subtle strategies can generate coherent messages immediately decoded by those acquainted with its symbols, more important to this discussion is how fresh dress, its articulation, is inherently complex and everchanging. The remaining part of this chapter describes how fresh dress fluidly transitions from one state to another at different times in hybrid space. That is, how clothing *becomes* costume, and how the hip-hop dancing body constantly disrupts the fashion–costume distinction.

Between fashion and costume for the stage

A key structure that hip-hop dance uses for both competition and live performance is the stage. Originally, hip-hop dancers performed their dance as a solo endeavour, or as part of a crew, almost always through improvisation. The 1990s to early-2000s saw a rise in events and festivals, centred on battles, that were planned, organised, and produced. Some of the most renowned annual hip-hop dance competitions and championships include: *Battle of the Year* (BOTY) – in which regional qualifying tournaments, also known as "preliminaries", are held worldwide culminating in the *BOTY International*, the world finals event; *The Notorious IBE* – an international hip-hop dance festival held in The Netherlands; *UK B-Boy Championships* – which features solo breakers, poppers, hip-hop dancers and b-boy crews from around the world; and *Red Bull BC One* – an international b-boy competition organised by the beverage company *Red Bull*, notable for being the only one of the major international breaking championships to not include a crew event. What is significant is that many performers place high importance on these events – where they are judged based on predetermined criteria such as technical ability, difficulty, and overall impression – and use clothing as a device in their presentations of dance and self. Shortbread's comment that, "you train in your not so good stuff and then for a battle you'll wear your new stuff, your fresh stuff" (Houston, 2018), indicates that in this performative context, everyday fashion shifts, transforms, and becomes something else. Fresh dress that is planned, meant to be seen, and meant to be read semiotically suddenly takes on a theatrical life and contributes to spectacular public events; it becomes costume. When considering the difference between fashion and costume McDowell stated,

> It's like you access different parts of who you are depending on the situation and the context. I mean, even when you don't have, say, a "character", you might have a dance persona, and what you wear

> helps you inhabit that persona for what you're trying to do. (McDowell, 18 January 2019)

During the fieldwork I observed many individuals (at organised events and competitions) changing outfits in bathrooms, hallways, and bleachers (seating) in preparation for battle. What was interesting was how performers would switch clothing and even footwear between rounds, between genres, and between individual and crew performances. This preparation of the performing body constitutes costuming as the selected clothing is fundamental to the way performance is received by the audience (Barbieri and Pantouvaki, 2016). Whilst its theatricality may be subtle in the battle context, the performer's fresh and often carefully constructed composition – the illusion of a carefree, everyday look which is created through systematic choices that can be traced back to key moments in hip-hop history as well as African diasporic traditions – is a variation of the "cool pose", which projects social competence, pride, dignity, self-esteem, and respect (Majors and Billson, 1992). Put simply, fresh costume in hip-hop performance space is "an expansive diasporic act of black aesthetics" as well as "a critical tool in the projection of the aesthetic of presence" (Tulloch, 2016: 4). The unspoken message is "I am here", with the dancer continuing the hip-hop tradition of identifying themselves for the onlookers' benefit.

As stated throughout the thesis, theatres have become popular performance venues for contemporary hip-hop dance pieces. While solo performers do utilise the stage as a performance structure, I was particularly interested in enactments of costume during crew choreography and group dance presented on the proscenium stage rather than in the cypher. During an interview with Jonzi D, he pointed out that as a theatre maker, creating work for the stage brings a different set of considerations in terms of costume from a directorial point of view. He acknowledged that street dance culture – what it means to go to cyphers and battles – is important and influential, but when considering clothing for the stage his main concern was, "what serves the piece?" (Jonzi D, 18 January 2019). This was echoed by other participants who expressed that there are practical considerations when selecting

costumes, but there are also choices within that. There is usually a “vision”, which isn’t necessarily about the individual but about the whole piece. From this perspective, I looked at how dancers navigated tensions and oppositional attributes such as, “discipline versus spontaneity; group identity/ conformity versus individuality/ expressiveness; formality versus informality (Craik, 2003: 130) through costuming practices.

Figure 6 Yeah Yellow performing Yeah Yellow Sunshine during Breakin’ Convention’s US Tour (2017) Photo: Breakin’ Convention

Figure 7 Yeah Yellow performing in customised varsity/ letter jackets (2017) Photo: Breakin' Convention

A common costuming strategy used by groups/ collectives was matching dress, or "sartorial uniformity" (Tynan and Godson, 2019: 2), which crystallised a sense of shared identity, pride, and common purpose among group members as they performed in unison most of the time with breaks where soloists would emerge. For example, Yeah Yellow, a hip-hop dance group from France, performed a twelve-minute piece titled *Yeah Yellow Sunshine*[45] during Breakin' convention's USA tour[46] in 2017, wearing crisp white t-shirts, blue jeans with yellow belts, and fresh white Reebok Classic sneakers with yellow socks (figure 6). The final segment of the piece (the last two minutes) was performed with the dancers wearing customised letter jackets, also known as "letterman" or "varsity" jackets. Each jacket displayed "Yeah Yellow" in varsity chenille lettering across the back with the dancer's name underneath, continuing the hip-hop tradition of personalising clothing with crew names and unique identifiers. A chenille patch with their first initial was also displayed on the left breast (figure 7), highlighting individuality within the group. This baseball-style jacket is traditionally worn by high school and college students in the United States to represent school and

[45] Yeah Yellow: *Yeah Yellow Sunshine*, https://youtu.be/KK-bfQ6658I?si=dxIVulDScSi4xtId

[46] Charlotte, North Carolina; Miami, Florida; Harlem, New York; and Denver, Colorado.

team pride as well as to display personal awards earned in athletics, academics, or activities. It was thus a fitting choice for the performance context and location. For me, the uniformed bodies on stage represent connectedness, control, and confidence. The jackets draw the actors (human and non-human) together and act as a coded representation of an active/ energetic hip-hop lifestyle in which fresh, distinctive clothing is an outward sign of power and pride and a significant part of social life.

The Locksmiths Dance Company: Liiive

One of the most memorable live performances I experienced during the research was a piece called *Liiive*, by The Locksmiths Dance Company, performed at Breakin' Convention (London) in May 2018. That year's festival saw a collaboration between Breakin' Convention and the iconic black British sonic orchestra Jazz re:freshed to mark the 15th anniversary of both companies. Led by musician, composer and producer Jason Yarde, the fifteen-piece ensemble provided the soundscape and physical backdrop for five different acts – Jonzi D, Boy Blue Entertainment (London), The Ruggeds (Netherlands), Mufasa (France), and The Locksmiths (London) – who performed on the Sadler's Wells main stage in turn. I met with four members of The Locksmiths in January 2019 and gathered further insights about the experience and their costuming strategies. My ANT-informed analysis of the live piece, the recording (which is available on BCTV, Breakin' Convention's YouTube channel[47]), and the qualitative interview material, revealed that costume had played a significant role in situating The Locksmiths within the global hip-hop community and a legacy created by Don "Campbellock" Campbell, originator of the locking dance style.

[47] The Locksmiths Dance Company: *Liiive* | Breakin' Convention X Jazz re:freshed Sonic Orchestra, https://youtu.be/xLSr31WQkRs?feature=shared

Figure 8 The Locksmiths wearing zoot suits with various hat styles (2018)
Photo: Breakin' Convention

The key staging elements of the four-minute-long performance – choreographed by Ben Ajose-Cutting, aka "Mr Ben" – are the eight costumed dancers positioned centre stage, the sonic orchestra upstage, smoke effects, and lighting, with colour being one of the most noticeable elements of the lighting and costume design. When the piece starts, the action is beam lit from above with only white light. The bold and colourful costumes/ zoot suits (figure 8, which I describe shortly) stand out in sharp relief against the orchestra musicians seated on a raised, ground lit platform; almost silhouetted in the background as a darker (collective) figure, yet still significant moving matter. The funk music – characterised by syncopated bass lines, dynamic percussions, and the rhythmic build-up of energy – drives the piece and takes the audience on a journey as all the instruments work together toward a frenetic climax. The lighting cues and colours change from red, to blue, to purple, and pink, showing transition between different sections of the choreography. While there appears to be no obvious storyline, the title, "Liiive" – a play on the word "live", which in some hip-hop communities means to love something "full-out" or wholeheartedly – suggests a celebration, time to "go-off" (get "hyped" up) and express oneself freely to the music.

The main structure of the locking dance style combines sharp, linear limb extensions and wave-like movement. The “lock” is a specific movement that holds together combinations of steps and moves similar to a freeze or a sudden pause (Pabon, 2006: 22). Reminiscent of the early lockers in Los Angeles, The Locksmiths include combinations that consist of a series of points done by extending the arms and pointing in different directions. They also incorporate flips, tucks, dives, and other aerial moves; jumping into half splits, knee drops, and “butt drops”, and using patterns that bring them down to the ground and back up to their feet. Specific to the research is how the eccentric clothing, the zoot suits, assert themselves in the performance and script the behaviour and movements of the dancers while simultaneously allowing for resistance and unleashing original, live variations that may not be individually predictable (Bernstein, 2009: 68).

Figure 9 The Locksmiths, key costume elements (2018) Photo: Breakin' Convention

The stylised costumes, brightly coloured suits worn with striped t-shirts, and different styles of hats, constitute vibrant matter that is alive and evolving. Mr Ben stated that the group members chose to stay connected through the *type* of clothing but sought to express individuality through colour (e.g.

purple, green, orange, blue, and yellow) and styling (figure 9). While there is a bigger debate to be had about the politics surrounding the zoot suit – "characterized by a jacket, which extended to the knee or mid thigh, with broad square shoulders, wide lapels, and a nipped waist…. [paired with] exceedingly baggy pants [that] were tapered and cuffed at the hem" (White, 1998: 23) – and its use as a sartorial form of resistance against dominant culture in 1940s America, I focus on the way the wearers' bodies are comported, which was an important element in the overall look. A distinctive swagger, referred to as "cooling it" was associated with zoot suiters (White & White, 1998), which Mr Ben confirmed when he stated:

> I dunno man, you put on like a zoot suit and immediately you're gonna walk differently. It just happens to you […] It's powerful man. You put on like a hat, […] the hat becomes a prop. You know, you can just put a hat on easily, like, already in your head you can become something else I guess. So, it's a method of just getting into that place. (Ajose-Cutting, 18 January 2019)

Mr Ben's comments illustrate how clothing can help dancers to navigate a sense of identity in hip-hop performance; more specifically, a sense of "cool" which is "an expansive diasporic act of black aesthetics" as well as "a critical tool in the projection of the aesthetic of presence" (Tulloch, 2016: 4). On the Sadler's Wells stage the zoot suit is no longer "a remnant of the past" (Schweitzer and Zerdy, 2014), but rather a living thing that helps to generate and actualise the agency of contemporary performers. It makes the wearer move in a particular way; as Jonzi D stated, "You can't walk normal in a zoot suit, all of a sudden, you've just got this flavour" (Jonzi D, 2019). Embedded within the eclectic style and exaggerated silhouettes of the suits were other subtle clues that linked The Locksmiths to a lineage of other lockers. For example, the matching black and white striped t-shirts – which acted by anchoring the whole look and holding the group members together – were a nod back to the early lockers who frequently wore black and white striped socks and matching shoes when performing. Historically, the West Coast lockers cut a flamboyant figure wearing colourful satin shirts with big collars

and neck ties, high-waisted pants with suspenders, and accessorised their outfits with belts, colourful socks, and hats in various styles, including newsboy/ apple hats, trilby hats, and wide brim fedoras. The integration of some of these fashion objects into The Locksmiths' costume assemblage, their very materiality, "carried" the performers' human agency and intentions (Woodward and Fisher, 2014: 8).

Figure 10 The Locksmiths, costume x choreography (2018) Photo: Breakin' Convention

Watching the performance live from the standing section of the auditorium, I was able to see the interactions between the costume and the performers' bodies up-close. Rewatching the recording of the performance and seeing the action from different camera angles further highlighted that the blazers/ jackets were a particularly important part of the assemblage. When The Locksmiths made large movements, while jumping and turning, the jackets

swirled and/ or flared out behind them, creating a larger effect, occupying more space and taking up the stage. In one part of the performance, four female dancers break away from the group and interact directly with the jackets as part of the choreography; holding the lapels and opening the jacket one side at a time to the rhythm of the music, before flicking the tail of jackets out behind them in unison. The overall looseness of the suits allowed the dancers to leap and slide about freely. The garments billowed and accentuated angular movements (arm and leg extensions) which helped the group's presence to grow, as did the linear formations in the choreography. Driven by the live jazz music, the dancers opened out along the stage, split-off, and reformed into smaller groups or merged into singular formations (figure 10). Depth was achieved by changing levels, with some dancers kneeling, sliding, or rolling across the floor whilst others jumped through the air. While the piece was structured, there were several breaks where soloists and duos emerged, and improvisational dancing took over.

As mentioned above, the black and white striped t-shirts anchored the piece, as did the accompanying black and white footwear. Most of the group wore canvas or suede sneakers (Adidas, Puma, Vans), one member wore spectator sneakers in a Brogue style, but all the footwear had a flat sole which facilitated movements such as sliding, spinning, and gliding. As the dancers jumped, slid, spun, and kicked out suddenly, the stark white soles of the shoes flashed through the space highlighting the sharp and jagged, then smooth and flowing movements of the dance form. The hats accentuated head nods and sweeping neck movements which added to the charismatic and fun vibe of the piece. The stage lighting, which was effective in foregrounding the dancers, glinted across the brass instruments, adding more depth and meaning to the piece by drawing together the jazz musicians and the zoot suits performing on stage. Special moments in the choreography, such as the "Soul Train line" – in which all the dancers form two lines with a space in the middle for dancers to strut down and dance in consecutive order – subtly paid homage to Don "Campbellock" Campbell, who performed the dance on the iconic African American focused television show *Soul Train* in the 1970s. Here, choreography worked as a device, in

collaboration with costume and the music, to situate the performers (and the audience) in a network that encompasses material and immaterial, past and present.

In exploring this performance, I have teased apart the “mangle” (Pickering, 1995) of materiality and practice that constitutes hip-hop dance theatre to reveal the transformative power of hip-hop and street dance, and to help counter the subsuming of costumes into the bodies of performers, which has rendered them invisible in academic discourse (Monks 2010; Barbieri 2013, 2017). By highlighting the creative practices and material agencies operating in the theatre setting, I have provided insight into how locking’s continuous progression can be enabled through interactions between body, costume, and space. More broadly, I have shown how vernacular/ African diasporic dance forms have migrated from “the closed circles of social spaces to the open circle” (Gilroy, 1993), or network, which includes theatre and the digital stage (the latter will be discussed in the following chapter). From an ANT perspective, the globalisation of locking and other street dance forms is not conceived as a loss for it allows an opportunity to document hip-hop performance and its vital impact on contemporary culture. *Liive* offers a vista into the worldviews of today’s hip-hop dance practitioners. Its socio-material dimensions – movement, body, costume, music, space, intent, meaning and values – reveal how the performers touch time and honour “the closed black space” (DeFrantz, 2001: 16) from where the locking dance form emerged.

Summary

This chapter has described the ambivalence, multiplicities, and shifts at play within hip-hop’s complex and nuanced community of dance practice by focusing on dress. It has shown the importance of hip-hop events in creating a sense of belonging and connectedness. Specifically, it has described the role of clothing in fostering social cohesion and collective hip-hop identity. Through an ANT lens, I have discussed the transformative power of hip-hop and how it works to translate/ transform key actors (body, dress, space) in the performative contexts of training, competition, and staged performance,

which are all interrelated. Through purposefully selected examples of performance, and the method of rich description, I have revealed how wearables allow contemporary practitioners to “touch time”, to experience the past in the present, and to imagine new hip-hop futures. Further, I have shown how the hip-hop dancing body dissolves the fashion-costume distinction and fluidly navigates the emergent space between professional, theatrical, and social dance. The next chapter focuses on the hip-hop performing body in digital space and considers concepts of “liveness” and “digital liveness” through online dance videos shared to social networking sites, live streamed Breakin’ Convention events, and the dance film *Our Bodies Back*.

7 Hybrid forms of liveness: combinations of live and mediatised acts

Introduction

In this chapter, I present an understanding of dance film and “video dance” (Dodds, 2001) as important representations of the dynamism of hip-hop dance and indicative of a global connection; that is, hip-hop as a phenomenon of “international culture” and "global context" (Johnson, 2011: 174). Firstly, I situate the importance of video dance in a contemporary understanding of visualised culture in virtual space. I discuss how practitioners use dance videos as a means of expression and exchange and to build relationships with others in the hip-hop community via online platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook. Next, I focus on the digital shift as the hip-hop dance community migrated from street and stage to screen during the Covid-19 pandemic. Using Sadler’s Wells’ *Digital Stage*, and the events *Breakin’ Convention 2020: Lockdown? Lock-in!* and *Breakin’ Convention: Social DisDancing* as examples, I describe how practitioners appropriated technology as a creative process and consider how their reconstruction of the traditional stage unsettles the notion of liveness as an absolute condition. Lastly, I apply this understanding to the example of *Our Bodies Back*, a dance film – commissioned by Sadler’s Wells and co-created by American poet jessica Care moore and Breakin Convention’s artistic director, Jonzi D – in which the performance and perception of blackness and womanhood is the central theme. In doing so, I show how technological innovation serves as the means to collaborate, despite spatial and temporal boundaries, and visualise intersecting identities as is articulated by the fashioned, hip-hop dancing bodies and the dance video.

Digital shifts in hip-hop dance

Since the mid-2000s and the development of Web 2.0 – the current state of the internet which facilitates collaboration, coordination and two-way communication negating time and spatial boundaries (Thompson, 2010) – dancers and choreographers have altered their practices and the creation,

production, and distribution of artistic work has increasingly explored digital spaces and tools. Social media platforms such as Facebook (created in 2004), YouTube (2005), Twitter (2006), Instagram (2010), and TikTok (available in China since 2016 and globally since 2018) have become an integral part of contemporary dance culture as they allow for instant, real-time information exchange. The initial research for this thesis began in these online spaces. Before adding further layers and performative contexts (training, competition, staged performance) to the research, I explored representations of hip-hop dance on YouTube especially. Intrigued by how popular Los Angeles-based choreographers – such as, Will "Da Beast" Adams, Rob Rich, Phil Wright, and Tricia Miranda – and dancers – such as, Kaelynn Harris, Jojo Gomez, and Jade Chynoweth – cultivated an immense online presence using the platform (and the #hiphopdance hashtag) as a tool for self-definition and community building, I began to examine the growing number of edited, performance-like, therefore, manipulated hip-hop dance class footages on their respective YouTube channels. In doing so, I found that certain videographers – including Tim "T-Milly" Milgram, "Typo", and Helton "Brazil" Siqueira – were central to the videos' success. "Class videos", so named because they are usually filmed during/ at the end of a dance class, are primarily for the promotion of dance schools and studios, choreographers and dancers, so the creators aim for perfection both in terms of dance and film techniques. The videographers, as well as the camera equipment, are therefore key participants in the creative process, adding the possibility of preserving the dance performance, not only archiving it but making it repeatable to a new audience.

I must point out that in speaking of this type of footage, I am distinguishing it from dance video or dance film recorded by a video camera from a fixed position, and referring to what dance scholar Sherril Dodds (2001) defines as "video dance"; a "genre of screen dance that explores the 'dance-video' relationship" (Dodds, 2001: 69). Whilst I observed many dancers filming their own practice or battle rounds with stationed digital cameras, GoPro (small action) cameras, and smartphones during the fieldwork – to document and share their performances and/ or self-promote online – this chapter describes

the enactments of the videographer and the camera and highlights the power of filming/ editing techniques in video dance. More specifically, I argue for the camera as a co-creator of digital hip-hop dance performance – rather than being a monocular, imposing documentary device – and a non-human mediator that transforms the human performers' behaviour and dressing strategies. ANT creates an opening for regarding technology as one actant entwined in relation with other actants, human or non-human. ANT's conceptualisation of the network is valuable here because it describes both what travels in space – in this instance, class footages, creative concepts, choreographies, and hip-hop fashion objects and/ or trends – and the performance space itself (online, studio, stage, street).

When considering the spatial complexities of hip-hop I found that, through the camera, the dancer's body becomes powerfully immune to temporal or spatial constrains. An advantage of video dance is that it can cut from one venue/space or geographical location to another, the latter of which I shall discuss in more detail later in the chapter (see *Our Bodies Back*). Innovative use of filmic techniques allows the possibility of camera movement even if a dancing body is static; for example, an impression of travel can be constructed as the camera moves around the body (Dodds, 2001: 31). Other techniques such as close-ups, filming from above, or below, also give renewed visibility to hip-hop dance, allowing the camera to focus on detail that the naked eye would not be able to perceive on stage or in the street. The camera also engenders competition. For example, a characteristic of the class video is the "select group", students selected by their teachers to perform in small groups (or solos) in the dance space in front of the camera while the other students watch them. The participants are aware that class videos attract viewers from all over the world and industry professionals from music labels, brands, and companies who might not usually see their talent. Hence, in their attempts to increase visibility, dancers' personalities become bigger, choreographed movements become exaggerated, and clothing becomes costume; in that, dancers intend for their outfits to be seen, they interact with certain garments and even use them as props during the performance. The camera drives this reactive and collaborative competing

amongst dancers. This “battle motif” (Hill & Petchauer, 2013), so distinctive in hip-hop and seen in formats such as cyphers and battles, is ideal to share on social media platforms because it allows self-expression and the sharing of opinions on the choreography and the fashion choices within the dance videos.

The virtualised hip-hop bodily assemblage

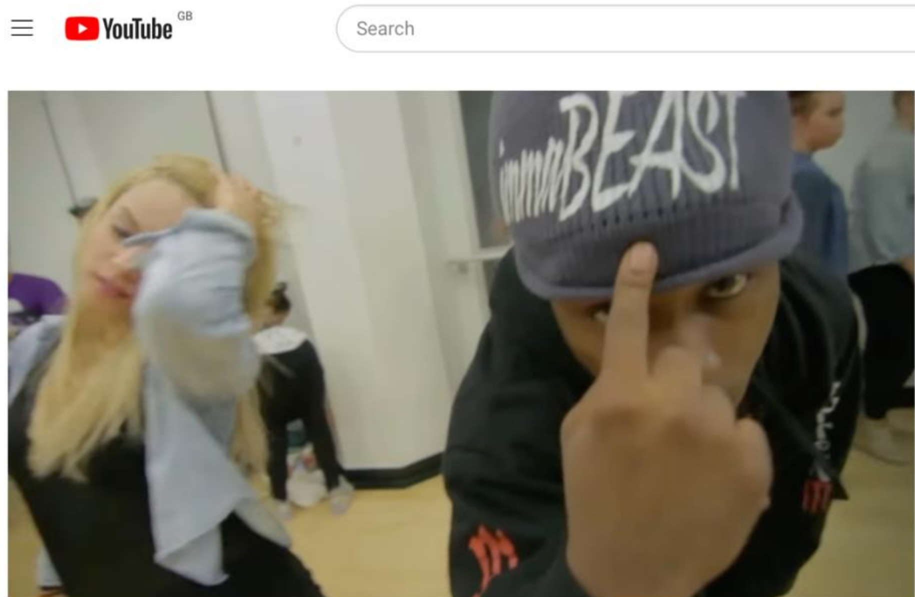

Figure 11 Choreographer Will Adams’ viral dance class video, Upgrade U (2013) Screenshot: Willda YouTube channel

A piece of video dance that galvanised both the hip-hop class video and the choreographer’s work in the online space was Will Adams’ 2013 video showcasing his choreography for Beyoncé’s song *Upgrade U* (2006). The original video[48], shot and edited by Helton “Brazil” Siqueira (@directorbrazil), was viewed more than 114 million times on YouTube (Zimányi & Lanszki, 2020: 98). While the class video was not a new concept, Adams’ content was markedly different from other videos of its kind. Selected dancers – freshly dressed characters who skillfully executed the choreography – were filmed in

[48] The original video is no longer available on Adams’ YouTube channel due to music copyright infringement policies. However, a subsequent edit can be viewed here: https://youtu.be/91jQ72aqvpk?si=-M4u3Q0-etPO2CMJ

groups while their peers looked on from the sidelines. Multiple footages were then edited to make a single compilation video. The studio was brightly lit so the dance activity was clear and visible. The use of basic cinematography, cuts, and alternation of black and white or colour images can be seen (Zimányi & Lanszki, 2020: 98). Notably, the video opens with Adams' face and head closely framed as he points to the logo on his beanie hat, which reads "immaBEAST" (figure 11). The personalised/ customised headgear (merchandise) is the first thing the viewer sees. The unspoken message is, "I'm a beast no matter what" (Adams cited in Burke, 2017), showing the dancer/ choreographer's readiness to honour himself by displaying his brand name on his clothing.

Adams also honours himself by featuring in the video, displaying his abilities as a mover and performing his own choreography amongst a select group of dancers. The success of the video helped to establish Adams' career as a professional choreographer in the United States. He went on to create work for the sportswear brand Nike, the *Step-Up* movie franchise, and appeared as a guest choreographer on the popular American television series, *So You Think You Can Dance*. Whilst I do not deconstruct the class video here, I do acknowledge its power as a self-representation and self-management tool for contemporary practitioners. The more pressing concern for this research, however, is how these uploaded materials provide the means for embodied knowledge to be exchanged between dancers, and for new forms of practice, sharing, and collaboration to emerge (which I discuss shortly in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic). Class videos are just one example of how practitioners get to know and get closer to each other's works from anywhere around the world, and how filmed content can serve as inspiration and a guide in terms of fashioning and styling the body for hip-hop dance.

Figure 12 Will Adams performing with a "select group" in viral dance video (2013) Screenshot: Willda YouTube channel

Everyday clothing/ activewear is a key element in Adams' video and is fluid in that it *becomes* costume in its relation to the performing body and the presence of the camera and the audience (both in the studio and in digital space). The clothes, which could be considered "casual", are meant to be seen and, in some instances, can be read semiotically. For example, Adams wears a white tank top featuring a "Parental Advisory Explicit Content" logo (figure 12); a subtle nod back to the warning label introduced by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) in the late 1980s and placed on many hip-hop audio recordings to warn parents of inappropriate references, such as violence, sexual content, or profanity. Again, this shows the material life of time; how significant moments in hip-hop history become entangled and embedded in the materiality of the culture, and how certain garments (and logos/ brands/ insignia) become transmissive through their temporal and spatial displacement. Several dancers in the video use clothing items as props in their performances and interact with garments whilst executing the choreography; pulling up the low crotch of trackpants, tugging at the hem of shirts, repositioning hooded sweaters that hang from the shoulders, or beanie hats that have slipped over their eyes. These movements become part of the performance and the fashion objects themselves script behaviour (Bernstein, 2009), enabling individuals to

perform their hip-hop/ masculine/ feminine identities and construct an image of “cool” and “fresh” for the viewer’s benefit.

Clothing also facilitates much conversation in the comments section of the abovementioned video. Viewers identify their favourite (and even “cute”) dancers by what they are wearing and refer to specific garments such as “the girl in the purple sweater”, the “guy in the beanie”, or the “Chicago Bulls jersey”. In this way, wearables enable connections and co-presence between spectators/ YouTube users despite geographical boundaries and time differences. Notably, many of these online participants may not be familiar with the hip-hop dancing body’s “phrases” and “meanings”, and for them, class videos and choreography can appear as “movements without intent that develop out of nowhere and disappear when the movements and the music stops” (Stalling Huntington, 2005: 58). However, I suggest that class videos, and the fashioned, dancing bodies therein – imbibed with codes, messages, and black sensibilities – provide fresh perspective on how hip-hop dance with its humble beginnings, has materialised to become a force with international influence; one that is accessed by cultural outsiders positioned well beyond the circle that permits and protects (DeFrantz, 2000: 11). Put another way, the popularisation of class videos demonstrates the shift in circulation that surrounds hip-hop’s movement forms; that is, “the slippage from Africanist performance histories to global hip-hop corporealities” (DeFrantz, 2014). Applying ANT to this medium, and focusing on transformations and materiality, I have found that the *virtualised hip-hop bodily assemblage* has the power to translate people around the world, and translate information from something that is shared, in order to build a connection with others online, into something that *reveals*.

Fluid bodies and objects enacting a fluid form of space

The concept of assemblages is useful when thinking about digital platforms as increasingly important technologies in the production and consumption of hip-hop dance. I was interested in the co-constitutive relationships between humans and non-humans in social networking sites especially, as they

provide a space for dancers to perform their identity, engage with their contacts, and be constantly and selectively connected to others in the hip-hop dance community. I found that social media constitutes an assemblage as it encompasses not only the human participants, but also actors such as value systems, beliefs, experience, knowledge and the digital literacy implicit in or required to engage with these networks. It also encompasses mediators such as space, time, context, as well as mediations and translations of the social media space through "filtering" or aesthetic manipulations of content (Thompson, 2010). Most of the informants for this research expressed that they used Instagram and Facebook to connect and maintain communication with other dancers and spectators, to share practice, new work and information, and to build excitement for upcoming shows and events. From an ANT point of view, I contend that these sites are not merely *containers* for this type of online hip-hop activity. Rather, "online community" is *enacted* as a network of relations in constant flux rather than a predetermined entity. The relationships between heterogeneous actors reflect hybrids, or "socio-technical constructions" (Thompson, 2010: 412), a blending. Particularly interesting is how dancers negotiate the materiality of the dressed body, screens and settings, and present the hip-hop bodily assemblage on photo and video sharing applications.

Exploring various Instagram profiles and interacting with interviewees via features such as likes, shares, comments, "Stories" – a feed in which shared photographs and videos disappear after 24 hours – and direct messaging, I found that the collective experience of hip-hop dance online is fluid, multiple, and by no means singular. Like any actor-network (or assemblage), social media sites are unpredictable and can be fraught with resistances. In her ANT-driven discussion about online communities, scholar Terrie Lynn Thompson states that, "At times, these networks are too porous. Entities are easily hijacked and moved into different configurations which create upsets" (2010: 416). This can be seen in the online hip-hop dance community, for example, in the tensions between "authentic" hip-hop and more commercialised, studio-based versions. A further example is the #BlackTikTokStrike in June 2021 – where black creators on the short video

platform TikTok refused to choreograph new dances in objection to non-black influencers using their work, reaping the financial and personal gains earned from views, but failing to acknowledge or give credit to originators. However, I chose to attend primarily to network elements that have been stabilised, given that a "normal" state of any network is one of flux and unpredictability (Latour, 2005).

Figure 13 Heartbreakerz Crew | Pam Pam X Adidas Originals Falcon campaign (2018) Instagram: @shortbreadthebreaker

Figure 14 B-boy Flash wearing yellow 3-Stripes Adidas Tracksuit and sneakers on a NYC subway platform (2017) Instagram: @mister_do_art

Figure 15 Shortbread wearing 3-Stripes Adidas trackpants and Reebok Classic sneakers while battling (2016) Instagram: @shortbreadthebreaker

Paradoxically, I found dress (specific wearables and sportswear brands) to be one of the most consistent and stabilising, yet fluid and mobile actors across different hip-hop contexts, genres, and personal and professional accounts/ profiles. Specifically, Adidas clothing features heavily in practitioners' shared images and footages from advertising campaigns and

collaborations with brands (figure 13), to "outfit of the day" posts (figure 14), to dynamic shots from events and battles (figure 15). This vibrant clothing matter in its collaboration with the moving body and the various settings and spaces also brings to life short videos, showreels, and shared publicity materials online – e.g. professional photographs, event flyers and posters. Adidas branded clothing (and other wearables synonymous with hip-hop), on the one hand, remains a consistent and embedded part of hip-hop history, and on the other hand, mutates, manifests in different forms, and patterns different types of hip-hop dance activity in networked space.

In highlighting the above, I take the ANT position that fluid objects (technologies, videos, images, clothing and brands) help to enact a fluid form of space, in part due to "mobile boundaries" (Law, 2002: 99). Mol and Law (1994) suggest that social space may behave like a fluid: "neither boundaries nor relations mark the difference between one place and another. Instead, sometimes boundaries come and go, allow leakages or disappear altogether, while relations transform themselves without fracture" (Mol and Law, 1994: 643). Although there is the possibility that actor-networks might break apart, there is something about the fluidity of the objects in the hip-hop network that keep the enactment of the most important relations and conduits intact. Key actants perform in multiple spaces, genres, and contexts, but it is the *relationships* between individuals (teachers, mentors, learners, artistic directors, videographers), material objects, and technologies that stabilise the community and allow the hip-hop network to (re)produce itself and evolve. I further suggest that increased connectivity and communication between dancers online is not afforded by the technology itself, but rather by *sociality* and *materiality*; that is, by socio-material practices. One such practice is event broadcasting/ streaming, in which the digital platform, the apparatus of reproduction (for example, smartphone, or camera), as well as the venue/ location, and fresh dress are constitutive elements of a performer's/ performance's "liveness" (Auslander, 2006: 57).

Moving through a pandemic: online liveness as connectedness

In March 2020 Sadler's Wells announced that it would be presenting new dance content on *Digital Stage,* its free online platform created as a temporary solution against isolation, social distancing, and loss of work during the Covid-19 pandemic. Before this period of confinement, the everyday life of the hip-hop dance practitioner was characterised by intensive training, festivals, live performances, and competitions. To overcome the negative effects on mental, social, and physical health, the collective hip-hop dance community demonstrated remarkable resilience – a foundational element of hip-hop – and adapted to the fastmoving digital environment in response to the closing of venues such as dance studios, theatres, and arenas. Sadler's Wells' digital programme was intended to uphold the theatre's mission of inspiring people through dance in an inclusive and diverse way. It brought dance to people wherever they were in the world and provided content, which served as wellbeing experiences, to artists and audiences alike. At the time of its launch, *Digital Stage* content included: premieres of full-length dance performances; new dance workshops which were specially created for families with young children, and people over the age of 60, to take part in at home; and screendance (video dance), thus providing creative opportunities for choreographers exploring the medium of film. One dance film was released each week and remained available online for seven days. *Our Bodies Back*, which is discussed shortly, was amongst the weekly presentations.

The digital shift mentioned above is not perceived here as something that emerged from the coronavirus pandemic. Contemporary dance professionals have long engaged with digital practices through video recordings, live broadcasts, screendance, and even virtual reality experiences and other digital technologies onstage. Rather, the curtailing of the fieldwork for this research (due to repeated lockdowns and government restrictions in the UK) and the emergence of *Digital Stage* provided the opportunity to explore how hip-hop dance practices, rituals, and rules shifted and were transformed by the appropriation of digital tools. For example, Breakin' Convention transitioned to a virtual festival, which took place on 2 May 2020 online. The

three-hour-long event[49] was broadcast on BCTV, Breakin' Convention's YouTube channel, and viewers worldwide were encouraged to participate and interact with one another in the comments section in real time. In Jonzi D's pre-recorded introduction – a satirical sketch about social distancing in London – he raps, "Isolating but not isolated! We still connect, and we're still creative." The Breakin' Convention merchandise he sports throughout the show (he changes outfits between acts and displays a different item each time he appears on screen) keeps things looking fresh and subtly acts as a mediator of belonging, bridging the gap between himself and other members of the "BC" community.

The virtual festival allowed the audience to relive past Breakin' Convention performances from a different vantage point. Interestingly, the format of the event remained the same; Jonzi D introduced each act (although remotely from his balcony) and provided some background information about the performers/ performances, the line-up included dancers from "around the world and around the corner" (breakinconvention.com), there was even an interval in which footage of iconic cyphers (held in the mezzanine at Sadler's Wells) from previous years was shown. Although the festival was altered in some respects, the familiar structure, the routine and ritualistic behaviour, and memorable performances from Breakin' Convention's history reinforced the sense of community and connection at a difficult time.

Breakin' Convention: Social DisDancing, held at Sadler's Wells in December 2020, was the first iteration of an in-person festival after the re-opening of the venue. The hour-long socially distanced show was necessarily diminished – with a scant audience cheering from behind face masks – but defiant. The small selection of performances (five onstage pieces and two screened films), which focused largely on themes of isolation, struggle, and mental health, expressed the collective fear and frustration felt within the hip-hop community in relation to the global crisis. Experiencing these works in real

[49] A recording of *Breakin' Convention 2020: Lockdown? Lock-in!* virtual festival is available at https://youtu.be/ubPUH8ziuds?si=LkOXGcThwaKANfBv

time, as they were presented, highlighted the hybridity of hip-hop space and the fluidity of the hip-hop bodily assemblage even further. Both *Lockdown? Lock-in!* and *Social DisDancing* revealed new ways of coordinating socio-material experiences in space. They prompted me to consider post pandemic futures for dance practitioners given that co-presence was so easily enabled by online platforms and the internet as an underlying infrastructure.

Specifically, the events reinforced that the relationship of liveness and mediatisation should be viewed as “a relation of dependence and imbrication” (Auslander, 2008: 56) rather than opposition. The different combinations of live and mediatised/ technologised acts revealed a dynamic movement at play; performances felt emergent and immediate in that they were continually coming into being and then disappearing, whether onstage or on the screen. Technology transformed social/ cultural space, and the camera, more than a mere tool of representation and repetition, highlighted and reinforced the primacy of existing modes of hip-hop dance performance (as I will illustrate in the following section through *Our Bodies Back*). From an ANT perspective, I argue that live and recorded performances can coexist as complementary experiences, necessitating no particular effort to distinguish them (Auslander, 2008: 59). Furthermore, I suggest that liveness emerges as an effect, another element in the network that comes into being through interaction and the distribution of agency between people, objects, and technologies in space and time.

Our Bodies Back

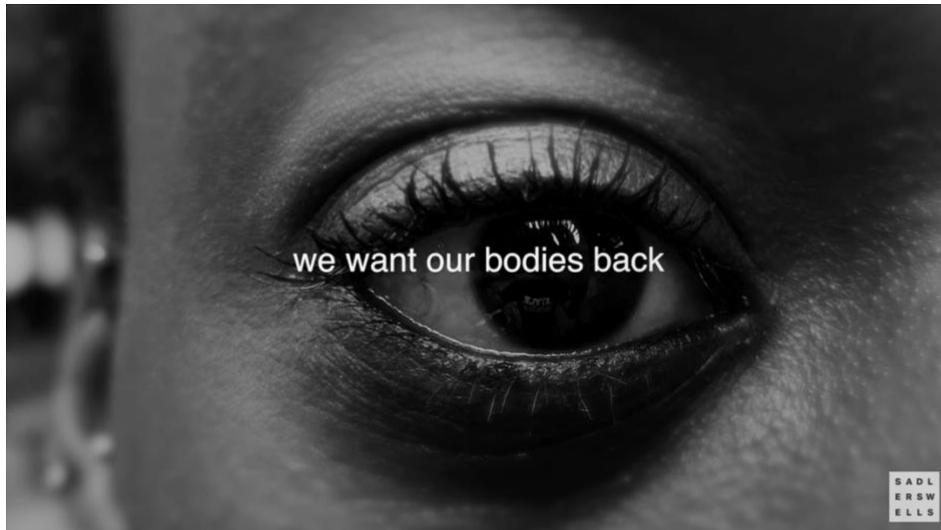

Figure 16 Our Bodies Back (2020) film still/ dialogue inter-title

Our Bodies Back[50] is a riveting black and white dance film that was released by Sadler's Wells in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic. The commission – made in collaboration with Jonzi D Projects and BCTV to highlight the work and contributions of black artists – stages the poem *We Want Our Bodies Back*, the work of acclaimed American poet and performance artist jessica Care moore. I selected this striking piece of video dance for the research as it was produced collaboratively, yet remotely, in the midst of lockdown and at the height of anti-racism protests which erupted following the murder of George Floyd. The film is representative of hip-hop's underlying resilience and social activism. It was directed by Jonzi D and choreographed and performed by three practitioners based in three separate locations: Axelle "Ebony" Munezero in Montréal, Canada; Bolegue Manuela (b-girl Manuela) in Hanover, Germany; and Nafisah Baba in London, UK. With soundscape design from UK-based Saxophonist and MC Soweto Kinch, and an urgent and intense narration by jessica Care moore herself, the political piece demands justice, equality, and respect for black women and speaks out against the realities of anti-black racism, misogynoir and sexual violence.

The three black dancing bodies on screen, linked by choreography and "connective marginalities" (Osumare, 2001), respond to the poetry with

[50] *Our Bodies Back* available at https://youtu.be/JKN2Fq_mcAA?si=3QploBrhnpR12T4v

honesty, grace and power; paying tribute to countless black women who have suffered violence, including Sandra Bland – who died in police custody two days after a routine traffic stop in 2015 – and Breonna Taylor – who was shot and killed by police officers in her home while unarmed in 2020. The layered performances in the film, the relentless pacing of the words, music, and bodily movements leave no room for pause. As a viewer – both at home (watching via *Digital Stage*) and a few months later in the Sadler's Wells auditorium (watching a screening at *Breakin' Convention: Social DisDancing*) – I felt dizzied and disoriented but also empowered. Co-presence, or rather "liveness" was evoked by the expressions of movement on screen. The dancers, and moore herself, carried their racialised histories and sensualities in their bodies (Roberts, 2021) as did I. Tensions over coercive forms of power, dynamics of oppression, and privilege were enacted through the material bodily assemblages, and in the moment of performance, I could relate as a networked (and connectively marginalised) participant. I felt connected to, and translated by, these black women who were "choreographing a cultural and historical movement" from the margins (Roberts, 2021: 10).

Video dance as collaboration: between digital and corporeal storytelling

The technological mediation and collaboration between human and non-human actors result in the construction of a hybrid site and a virtualised dance body that "exposes and plays on the camera through employing it in challenging and innovative ways" (Dodds, 2001: 170). The appeal of *Our Bodies Back* lies in the entanglement of unique camera angles and perspectives, the use of multiple and inaccessible locations during a global pandemic, and the modification of fashioned, dancing bodies and surroundings done through editing. It is not just the physical body that dances in the film, "the camera and the edit are also inextricably bound up with the actual dance" (Dodds, 2001: 170). Camera perspective, location, and editing come together to capture and maintain the spectator's visual attention. Axelle, B-girl Manuela, and Nafisah defy gravity, turn invisible,

reappear, and traverse secluded urban and rural landscapes, inspiring in the viewer a sense of awe and admiration. The use of technology allows the audience to see, up close, rather than to imagine, the dancers' portrayal of pain and trauma as well as pride, power and beauty. The black and white filming technique is distinctive as it creates various effects and reiterates a break with convention. For example, hip-hop performance is typically situated in the bright, synthetic colours associated with graffiti art. On the one hand, shooting in black and white gives *Our Bodies Back* a more "art house", cinematic feel, so that the work has closer associations with a high art aesthetic (Dodds, 2001: 121). On the other hand, it has a unifying effect, bringing together disparate bodies (and embodied experiences), locations, materials and spatial elements for greater visibility.

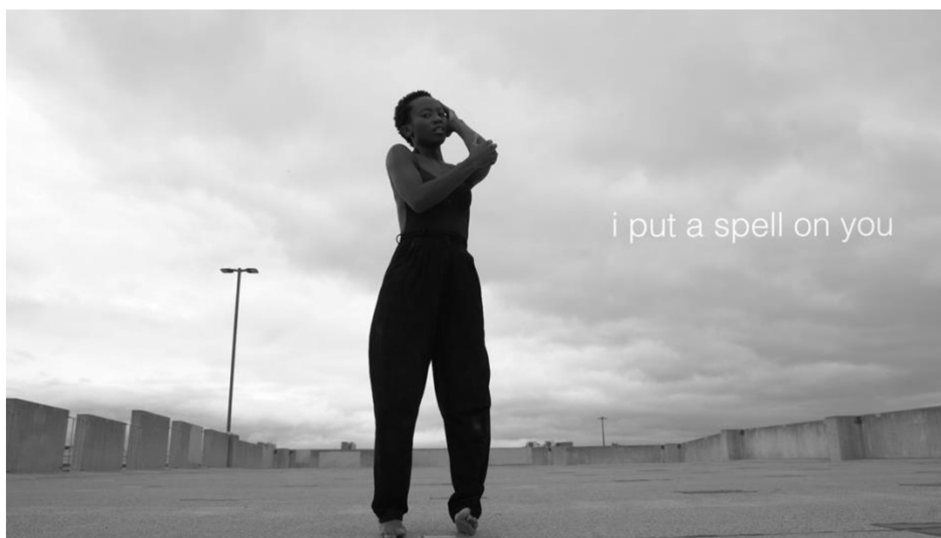

Figure 17 Our Bodies Back (2020) film still featuring Axelle "Ebony" Munezero in Montréal, Canada

Figure 18 Our Bodies Back (2020) film still featuring Bolegue Manuela in Hanover, Germany

Since the screen context differs radically from the live theatre or studio setting, the choice and design of movement is inextricably linked to the filming apparatus. From an ANT perspective, I propose that the transformative power of *Our Bodies Back* arises from “the triadic relationship between the motion of the physical body, the camera, and the cut” (Dodds, 2001: 171). Interestingly, the intervention of technology opens up new choreographic possibilities in the film whilst at the same time, historical, grassroots hip-hop dance practices remerge and inform the film’s digital design. For example, a transitional technique used in b-boy battles known as “commando” – where one b-boy performs a move, and another b-boy begins their set by copying their opponent – is adopted to link the three dancers choreographically throughout the work (figures 17 and 18). The shared ending and beginning of each segment create seamlessness and continuity, a sense of oneness, before each dancer explodes into movement showcasing a different technique: “Nafisah, with her neo-classical lines, Axelle with her emotive waaking arm gestures, and b-girl Manuela with her tricks and power moves” (Jonzi D, cited in Hutton, 2020). The blending of dance and filming techniques such as the commando style and fast cuts, which transport the dancers from one location to another, creates a “collective dancing body” (Roberts, 2021: 12) that is not one, but multiple –

for it presumes and honours the differences of individual bodies – and fluid as it disrupts spatial and symbolic boundaries.

Our Bodies Back is a stunning example of how black artists, and the hip-hop community, continue to find ways to strategically employ dance on the screen (and the stage) as a mechanism to engage broader audiences in discussions about racialised identity, politics, and aesthetics. As Jonzi D explained to me during a conversation, “Hip-hop is social commentary, political, [it] makes us face issues. Power of distribution is key.” (Jonzi D, 2016) In making this film, the collaborators blur the lines between the popular and the experimental to influence the socio-political discourses affecting their communities. The film reveals “black strategies of talking back to ever widening hegemonic mainstreams of sexualities, class consciousness, and race” (DeFrantz and Gonzales, 2014: 8) and more specifically, how matter makes itself felt (Barad, 2003). In the performances, Munezero, Manuela, and Baba’s bodies become moving matter and the screen becomes the medium that enables movement in multiple locations to be seen. To reclaim black bodies and challenge the erasure and silencing of black women’s voices in the arts (and other male dominated industries), the dancers wield their own skilled bodies, relating their physical and emotional fatigue and trauma to others with gripping intensity and arresting presence. Their dance movement can be conceived as a *doing* that incorporates and generates embodied knowledge, movement know-how and a form of corporeality that facilitates awareness and understanding of (social and material) relational encounters.

Figure 19 Our Bodies Back (2020) film still featuring Nafisah Baba in London, UK

Of significance is the process of digital exchange between the practitioners. For instance, the three women choreographed their own material based on repeated readings (and listening) of the poem. Footages were captured via different means; for example, professional/ digital cameras, but also smartphones. The artistic direction and editing were an iterative process of performance, reflection, and adjustment. This hybrid approach is innovative in that it combines bodies, space, music, poetry, technology and filmic techniques into a complexly choreographed whole. The film's design is at once (stylistically) very simple and (technologically) highly elaborate. Despite the apparent minimalism of the dancers' all-black dress, it is somehow that very simplicity that draws attention to what movement can mean. The filmic act of weaving images – for example, Manuela's one-handed freezes, Baba's elegant leaps and jumps (figure 19), and Munezero's flinching body caught in dappled light – conveys dynamic and potential meeting points between materials and movement, between technology and spectacle, and between body and screen. While there are undoubtedly fundamental differences between live performance and dance film, *Our Bodies Back* offers additional entry points into our understanding of the association between moving matter and social activism within the context of hip-hop and black performance.

Summary

In this chapter, I have presented an understanding of dance film and video dance as important representations of the dynamism of hip-hop dance and indicative of a global connection. I have discussed how practitioners use dance videos as a vehicle of expression and to build relationships and communities via the internet and certain digital platforms. I have further discussed how fashioned bodies and mobile objects can enact hybrid space, as well as a hybrid form of liveness and connectedness online. This was evidenced through several examples, namely multi-medial and hybrid events and performances – such as *Lockdown? Lock-In!, Social DisDancing,* and *Our Bodies Back* – which emerged when creative processes and collaboration between practitioners were urgently redefined during the Covid-19 pandemic. Through this discussion (of how existing practices were revised and new ones innovated), I have highlighted not only the resourcefulness and resilience of the global hip-hop community, but also its ability to adapt and transform with the integration of digital technology. By exploring the *virtualised hip-hop bodily assemblage* as a hybrid entity, I hope to have added to the growing body of analysis of contemporary dance on screen. I also hope to have widened the developing field of hip-hop dance studies by providing a conceptual tool for understanding hybrid collaborative practices and how power emerges as an effect of entangled material agencies.

Having thus described the power and fluidity of the hip-hop dancing body in hybrid space, the following (and penultimate) chapter of this thesis will focus on how certain practitioners aim to destabilise rigid boundaries and fixed dichotomies within hip-hop and the wider social context – specifically the binary construction of gender – through dance performance and strategic articulations of the costumed body.

8 Breaking through boundaries: hip-hop and hybrid identity

Introduction

So far, this thesis has explored hip-hop dance performance as a relational process and has defined the performer as a material bodily assemblage – comprised of sentient and insentient matter, cultural concepts and knowledges – which cuts through spatial and social boundaries. In what follows, I give particular attention to the "performative character of relations" (Law, 2007) between the dancing body and dress in regard to the construction of identity. Building on post-ANT's appreciation for fluidity, multiplicity, hybridity and difference, I explore the fluxes and continuities that produce multiple versions and configurations of gender performance in hip-hop dance theatre. Specifically, I discuss my analysis of *The Purple Jigsaw*, a cleverly constructed piece which opposes gender binaries through an amalgamation of breaking and vogue, two distinctly gendered black dance styles that evolved in New York during the 1970s and 1980s. I focus on two live iterations of this powerful work and look at how they were produced through a distribution of agency, mostly between non-heteronormative dancing bodies, specific types of dress and multiple performance spaces. Through this example, my intention is to open paths to new reflections in terms of relationships with dress and the performing body, and how hip-hop and street dance can create a safe space and release dancing bodies from prefabricated gendered stereotypes despite the established norms and rigid categorisations in which hip-hop has set itself up and has been operating for fifty years.

The Purple Jigsaw

Figure 20 Houston Dance Collective performing The Purple Jigsaw at Breakin' Convention, London (April 2017) Photo: Breakin' Convention

I first encountered Houston Dance Collective at Breakin' Convention in April 2017, where the quartet of movement artists – Emma Houston (aka "Shortbread"), Duane Nasis, Raymond Wade, and B-Girl Zana – performed *The Purple Jigsaw* on Sadler's Wells' main stage (figure 20). *The Purple Jigsaw*, which was choreographed by Shortbread and originally developed at *Breakin' Convention: Open Art Surgery*, a professional development programme in January 2017, incorporates breaking and vogue[51] two distinctly gendered dance forms, to explore gender identity, sexuality, and "non-normative choices in dance" (Houston, 2018a). After making initial contact with Houston at the festival and maintaining regular, informal contact with them via social media and telephone, I witnessed a second manifestation of *The Purple Jigsaw* a year later at a London-based event called *Identity* (April 2018); a collaborative event between East London Dance and Tony Adigun (creative director of Avant Garde Dance) celebrating

[51] Vogue is an improvisational dance style that was created in the 1970s by black and Latinx queer folk that were excluded from the white gay spaces of New York. Initially, voguing was based on the creative replication of models' poses in Vogue magazine—hence its name—and gradually evolved into a complicated dance and an integral part of the ballroom—a community-based social event, a place of belonging, and a space for competition amongst the different Houses (families)—as 'a mix of competitive instinct, athletic ability and, above all, a desire to be seen (rather than a desire to become part of the crowd). Lawrence, 2011 cited in Tente, 2021: 61

fashion and dance held at Shoreditch Town Hall. I have also analysed publicity stills for Breakin' Convention and professional photographs of Houston Dance Collective rehearsing the piece at a research and development workshop at Studio Wayne McGregor, a creative arts space in London, two weeks before East London Dance's *Identity* event.

I was drawn to this dance piece because it successfully connected two styles that were created by black and brown minorities in New York yet had previously seen little crossover physically and culturally. I was interested in the possibilities vogue offers for deconstructing normative identities and "becoming-other" (Tente, 2021), and how Houston Dance Collective drew together the freedom of gender expression that voguing and ballroom culture embodies with the intense physicality of breaking to challenge hip-hop's accepted ideology of a heteronormative (black) masculinity. The socio-material dimensions of the piece offered a vista into the gendered subjectivities of the performers. Variations associated with gender and sexuality in dance have emerged from my engagement with ANT and with the materiality of this choreographic work, thus helping to address hip-hop's problematic reliance on binary categories. I discuss these variations in more detail in the coming sections of this chapter and consider the possibility of more useful categorisations that show how transformations occur, rather than focus on gender or predicated ways of behaving or moving.

I will begin by providing rich empirical detail about the original performance of *The Purple Jigsaw* at Sadler's Wells in 2017, before moving onto the extended version performed at Shoreditch Town Hall in 2018. I will focus on the behaviour of specific dress objects and consider how the bodily assemblages on stage were enabled through the materiality of the performances. The description I provide here is informed by my fieldnotes, but also from my close analysis of the live recording of *The Purple Jigsaw*[52] available on BCTV, Breakin' Convention's YouTube channel. The footage has provided a valuable layer to this research and has added depth to my

[52] *The Purple Jigsaw* by Houston Dance Collective, available at https://youtu.be/8HVLYzTScDA

understanding of how connections between bodies and materials are made and remade to produce this type of politically charged work. I discussed in the previous chapter how video dance serves as an important tool and non-human actor in the hip-hop network. Recordings of live performances are also significant actors as they can engender memories of spectatorial experience and/ or feelings of co-presence and co-creation with other humans and materials both in physical and digital space.

Choreographing gender difference

The choreographic piece begins with the stage in blackout as the sound of serene, slow-tempo, Eastern, Oriental music often used for practicing Tai Chi begins to play. The chiming bells reverberate through the dark auditorium, transfixing the audience as a lone figure dressed in white costume strides slowly into view. A spotlight shines down from above, fixing the figure as they pause for a moment, tilt backwards and hold a graceful pose. The figure regains their upright position and continues their measured pacing across the stage while another figure dressed in white comes into view. The second figure moves toward the centre of the space, slowly twisting, turning, and lunging with arms extended out to the sides. Two further figures dressed in white enter the space, stopping intermittently to execute synchronised floorspins, headspins and inversions before moving in slow motion across the floor towards each other and the other two dancers. This initial segment of the performance could be said to follow the traditional format of breaking, the *entry* – a cadenced stylised walk by the dancer into the performance space which allows them time to get in step with the music, take their place "onstage" and set the scene for the showmanship to follow (Banes, 1994: 146).

The four dancers position themselves in a row at the centre of the stage, utilising different levels (standing, sitting, lying on the floor), creating shapes with their bodies and holding static contortions with arms and/ or legs extended in unique ways. The music becomes punctuated with sharp synth/ horn stabs, characteristic of the electronic music created specifically for

voguing and ballroom culture – which incorporates disco, funk, hip-hop, house, and rhythm and blues. Each dramatic accent acts as a cue for the dancers' freeze-frame poses. In hip-hop, it is largely in the *freeze* – an improvised pose or movement that breaks the beat – that each dancer's originality and personal style shines forth. The freeze allows for the greatest range of individual invention and acts as a symbol of identity (Banes, 1994: 148). In *The Purple Jigsaw*, Duane and Raymond use the freeze to emphasise poise and elegance by elongating or contracting their bodies and holding their arms and hands in graceful gestures that portray the fashion models in *Vogue* magazine, as well as regal figures in ancient Egyptian and African art. These moves are juxtaposed by Shortbread and Zana's strength and virility as they hold complex and abstract positions on the ground – such as, headstands, forearm stands and one-handed pikes and handstands – demonstrating virtuosity and at times exaggerated machismo reminiscent of the early b-boys from the New York streets. The voguers embody beauty, and the breakers embody a powerful rawness with neither detracting from the other.

As the music steadily builds, the dancers draw closer to one another, still twisting, turning, sliding and gliding across the floor, coming into a tight group formation. The stage is suddenly flooded with light, the music (and the audience) explodes, and the bodies on stage start to contract and hinge more frenetically, sinking abruptly and then almost instantaneously rising to the syncopated staccato of the music. The subtleties in costume and the dancers' individual styles and identities start to emerge. Both Shortbread and Zana wear crisp white oversized boiler suits made from heavy canvas or denim, with a collar, and button fastenings that extend from the elasticated waist to the throat, paired with plain white sneakers. In contrast with the boiler suits, Raymond wears a sleeveless tank top paired with shorts, while Duane wears a fitted long-sleeved, turtleneck crop top with cargo style trousers. The latter two costumes are decorated/ spray painted with purple symbols and both dancers wear white socks with no sneakers. I will discuss the meaning and differential enactments of these specific dress objects in more detail shortly. Here, I note that the costumes in *The Purple Jigsaw* (1.0)

act by simultaneously stabilising the performance – conveying a group identity with all four dancers dressed in white – and destabilising established categories of masculinity and femininity – indicating an incongruous combination of costume and body by putting specific garments (styles) on the “wrong” body.

Figure 21 Houston Dance Collective’s choreographic formations in The Purple Jigsaw (April 2017) Screenshot: BCTV, YouTube

The tangle of bodies, with various limbs intertwined and others protruding, moves almost as one organism in time with the rhythm of the loud house music. As the lights flash and the formation breaks apart, space is granted for arms and legs to sweep, slice and whirl through the air in clean and dynamic motions. The dancers not only showcase their immense technicality, but they also trouble gender stereotypes and boldly explore sexuality through movement, touch and their bodily assemblages. For example, balancing on their heads, Shortbread and Zana mirror each other with controlled breaking moves, scissoring their legs to the beat as Raymond sensually explores their inner thighs with his hands before they snap closed. Raymond and Duane blur the boundaries even further by performing an extremely feminine style of vogue, “Femme” (figure 21) – which consists of hand/ arm performance, catwalk, duckwalk, and floor performance – before lifting their counterparts from the ground and holding them almost effortlessly

in the air, demonstrating a strength and athleticism typically ascribed to heteronormative masculinity.

As the tempo of the music, lighting, and choreography suddenly intensifies, the energy both onstage and in the auditorium shifts. The audience is enraptured by the group's precision and geometric planning. The complicated movements seem to coincide exactly with the rhythms in the music and they originate in different ways – for example, elaborate floor spins, flips, dips, splits, and tightly coordinated falls to the ground. The sequence combines solo performances, pairings, and the whole group formation. The dancers utilise the space in different ways, sliding, pirouetting and handstand-walking across the floor away from each other and then back again to re-join the group formation, which then transforms seamlessly into new shapes. At the culmination of the performance the tangle breaks apart and the dancers take their positions; standing in a row, fixed by spotlights beaming from above, each performs their last solo in turn. The piece ends with a loud echoing synth stab, which sounds as the dancers execute their final freeze to rapturous applause. The lights fade to black, and the stage is plunged into darkness once more.

Material "doings" and actions

As explained by a range of dance practitioners in chapter 6, certain wearables can allow (or restrict) physical expressions of artistic, social, aesthetic and political values, as well as a sense of belonging and shared identity. Shortbread explained that dress allows dancers to feel, act, and/ or move in particular ways, and while they tend to select items that are comfortable and fit for purpose, they also try to adopt specific looks from hip-hop history to show their affiliation and respect for the culture. In my fieldnotes, I initially documented Houston Dance Collective's costumes as "white uniforms" because they conveyed similar appearance, distinctiveness, and sartorial uniformity, symbolising group membership. However, I soon started to note subtleties and looked for symbolic clues in the costume choices. For example, the white boiler suits (or overalls) worn by Shortbread

and Zana were a subtle but deliberate choice of costume for both performers because the boiler suit, with its loose cut and “no frills” aesthetic, carries the connotation of gender equality. Historically, women who entered the workforce during the industrial revolution wore this workwear staple to protect their own clothing, and their bodies from injury, whilst labouring alongside their male counterparts on the factory floor. The garment, which was standard, mass produced and widely diffused in Europe at the start of the twentieth century, provided a kind of “undifferentiated anonymity” (Crane 2000: 89) for the wearer. As such, the boiler suit, which was also co-opted by hip-hop in the 1990s, powerfully scripts, choreographs, directs, and otherwise animates its human collaborator (Schweitzer and Zerdy, 2014: 6) whose intention, in this instance, is to blur the gender binary. It is a political thing that not only represents a moment in hip-hop fashion history, but also provides sartorial ambiguity in a gendered dance form.

Onstage, Shortbread and Zana adopt what can be referred to in hip-hop as a “battle attitude”, where dancers deploy fresh dress, specific movements and facial expressions – “facial choreography” (Dodds, 2016) – to show charisma, attitude, and energy. The boiler suit is a prominent feature of Shortbread and Zana’s battle attitude/ bodily assemblage. The dancers physically manipulate the protective garment in a distinctive set of gestures and movements, signaling their hip-hop/ breaker identity to the audience. The boiler suits are serviceable to this type of dance as they allow for an extreme range of motion without binding the body or ripping. The pure white colour conveys neutrality but also “fresh”, “clean”. It is indicative of the dancers’ control of their bodies; in that, a foundational value of b-boying is that skilled breakers should be able to dance with the utmost intensity and still have enough control to avoid damaging, scuffing, wrinkling, or getting their clothes dirty (Schloss, 2009). The embellishment of Raymond and Duane’s white costumes (with purple spray-painted symbols and markings) is a continuation of hip-hop’s “do-it-yourself” customising practices seen amongst the early b-boys and dating back to the biker inspired outlaw style of the 1970s New York street gang culture. The purple markings pay homage to Prince (one of Shortbread’s favourite artists/ musicians), who celebrated

and helped normalise gender fluidity throughout his musical career. He eroded the rigid categories of masculine and feminine with his androgynous style and performance costumes; playing with both identities and showing how interchangeable they are (Whiteneir, 2016; Rasmussen, 2023). The spray-painted symbols link the performance to hip-hop culture through one of its creative practices, graffiti, *and* reveal details about the wearers' identities and/ or gender fluidity.

Both Raymond and Duane wore plain white socks with no sneakers, which facilitated the sliding, gliding, and graceful turns and falls characteristic of voguing and ballroom culture. Other garments selected for the performance served a practical purpose – enabling certain types of (gendered) movement – whilst at the same time, were intended to challenge the audience's perception of femininity and masculinity. For example, Raymond's tank top and shorts acted by accentuating his muscular arms and legs as he portrayed more intricate voguing and waacking techniques, emphasising elegance through fluid hand gestures and arm movements. Likewise, Duane's fitted crop top revealed his sinuous, sculpted torso and abs as he gracefully twisted, turned and contorted his body. I was interested in the ambiguity surrounding these garments, and how, combined with other actors, they aided both dancers in their destabilising of normative gender categorisations. Men who wear tank tops and crop tops are often perceived as gay, or "in the closet", or effeminate (Shrimski, 2022). Ironically, sleeveless and/ or crop tops were deeply connected with sports, athleticism and masculinity in the 1980s and early 1990s. Sleeveless tops revealed strong shoulders and biceps, while crop tops extended the male athlete's silhouette and enhanced the size of their torso and muscles. These fashion items have been rejected and re-adopted by heterosexual men in the decades since (Shrimski, 2022). A significant example from hip-hop culture is when rap artist Kid Cudi wore a red crop top on stage at Coachella music festival in 2014, at once reprising the garment (at least for a short time) and demonstrating transformation, a change in contemporary masculinities. I will return to the topic of subversive clothing shortly and emphasise the political dimensions of fashion and costume as embodied practices. First, I will

outline the transformations of matter that occurred in the second iteration of *The Purple Jigsaw*, which was performed one year later at a different venue.

Transformations of body, clothing, and space

Shortbread explained during an interview that *The Purple Jigsaw* is "a theatre piece, but it's also a concept, an idea and a collaborative structure that can be taken into different settings" (Houston, 2017). The goal was to use breaking and vogue as a tool to look at identity and mental health. With funding from the Arts Council England, Houston Dance Collective was able to develop and extend *The Purple Jigsaw* into a twenty-minute piece for an event called *Identity*, a co-production between East London Dance and Shoreditch Town Hall. The event celebrated creativity in East London and explored the relationship between fashion and dance. Directed by professional choreographer Tony Adigun, the event provided a platform for emerging artists from the East London dance scene to showcase their work. Houston Dance Collective was among the four commissioned groups. The overarching theme of the production was "challenging preconceptions of sexual, cultural, gender and ethnic identity" (eastlondondance.org), which was achieved through a combination, and exploration, of hip-hop, krump, waacking and contemporary dance styles. An interesting objective of the event was to challenge perceptions of how dance can be presented. Practitioners were supported in creating work in an unconventional way. They were encouraged to take the space itself into consideration and create something unique and bespoke for the Shoreditch Townhall.

Figure 22 Second iteration of The Purple Jigsaw performed at Identity, Shoreditch Town Hall, London (2018) Photo: Camilla Greenwell

Following a key principle of ANT, I focused on “relations of difference” (Latour, 2005) when analysing this remaking of the piece and considered how new elements in the assembling process introduced new controversies (disputes/ contention) or uncertainties to be explored. Notable differences between the extended version of *The Purple Jigsaw* at Shoreditch Town Hall and the original version performed at Sadler’s Wells one year prior included the group line-up, costume, and the materiality of the performance space. Firstly, a new breaker, Olivia Rufer, had replaced B-girl Zana. Secondly, the costume was markedly different, with all four dancers wearing streetwear items designed by Chinese-born, London-based designer, Feng Chen Wang – and sneakers sourced by stylist, Sabrina Henry. Notably, Duane performed the entire piece wearing a sling (after injuring his collar bone during rehearsals, see figure 22); the sling became a further, but unexpected, material actor in his bodily assemblage, one that restricted his execution of the choreography and therefore modified the whole performance. Thirdly, the performance space was now a Victorian Assembly Hall, transformed by a “thrust” (platform) stage extending into the audience on three sides. This had the benefit of creating a gig-like atmosphere, but also greater intimacy

between the performers and the audience than a proscenium. Lastly, the piece was performed to different music, a new soundtrack of electronic house/ techno music intercut with percussive funk and hip-hop tracks with extended instrumental break sections.

Figure 23 The Purple Jigsaw research and development at Studio Wayne McGregor, London (2018) Photo: Camilla Greenwell

Essential in ANT is the formation of the network and how common understanding of every actor's role is reached. I was therefore interested in how connections were established when a new dancing body became part of the process of developing the piece. During another interview, Shortbread spoke about the introduction of Olivia to the group, describing how her integration involved sharing oral histories, working with a writer and a mentor, and then working collaboratively on the choreography in Studio Wayne McGregor's "White Space" (figure 23) – accessed via the FreeSpace programme which offers studio space to artists for free. I noted their emphasis on finding a suitable performer, someone that complemented and "gelled with" the other participants and the requirements of the piece/ choreography. No less important was the introduction of other actors to the network; the writer, mentor, designer and stylist, but also the rehearsal space

which played a significant role in the development of the piece and its coming into being.

For the new performance at *Identity* to be a success, each participant needed to feel represented by the network and agree with the terms of the collaboration. This process develops via the process of translation (Latour, 2005; Law, 1992), in which actors agree that the network is worth building and defending. This implies a series of negotiations in a process of redefinition in which one set of actors seeks to impose definitions of the situation on others (Callon, 1986: 8). For example, the original members of Houston Dance Collective communicated the message behind *The Purple Jigsaw*, the choreography, and costume ideas to Olivia and the newer collaborators. Meaning, a successful network of aligned interests was created, partly through the drawing together of key practitioners and the translation of their interests so that they were willing to participate in particular ways of thinking, moving, acting, and dressing.

Figure 24 Houston Dance Collective wearing Feng Chen Wang designs at Identity, Shoreditch Town Hall, London (2018) Photo: Camilla Greenwell

Interesting were the negotiations between the performers, fashion stylist Sabrina Henry – who was enlisted by the event organisers to create specific

looks for each dance group and source costumes that could "defy conformity" (e.g. genderless fashion and non-binary outfits) – and designer Feng Chen Wang – whose conceptual unisex designs focus on technical deconstruction and functionality (figure 24). The assimilation of these participants into *The Purple Jigsaw* assemblage seemed to professionalise the practice in the eyes of the performers. Schedules were established, fittings and photoshoots arranged, and Shortbread referred, explicitly and repeatedly, to the outfits as "costumes" because a lot of consideration had gone into their selection and there had been difficulty finding the "right" costumes for the piece before Feng Chen Wang was brought into the fold. This is a further example of how the translation process occurs when making dance performance. Through a series of negotiations, one set of actors (the performers) imposed their definitions of *The Purple Jigsaw* onto another actor (the stylist). Having been translated (converted), the stylist then acted as a mediator, introducing a designer to the assemblage, one whose costumes (and ethos) met the needs of the piece and modified it accordingly. I will now discuss a series of "material moments", describing the performative character of relations between the dancing bodies, new costumes, and the new performance space.

The entanglement of matter and meaning

The second version of *The Purple Jigsaw* began with the same entry as the original piece at Sadler's Wells. However, the lighting for this performance was warmer than the first, affording a greater sense of intimacy in the space as each dancer came into view and started performing to the sound of serene Tai Chi music with bells. Shortbread wore a dark blue co-ord/ two-piece outfit, consisting of a short-sleeved button-down shirt with a collar, and matching shorts. Duane wore blue oversized cargo trousers with ruching at the waist and above the knees. His plain white t-shirt offset the blue shoulder sling holding his arm in an upright, fixed position. Both Raymond and Olivia were dressed in pink; Olivia wore a baggy pink hooded sweatshirt and matching joggers made of jersey material, whilst Raymond wore a lightweight pink gilet with zip fastening at the front, and white trousers rolled

up to his calves to give a three-quarter length appearance. All four dancers wore identical fresh, white Reebok Classic sneakers, which anchored the whole look.

The soundtrack, which was remixed to drive the extended choreography, morphed into a techno track (and later, a Latin Percussion track) with a more urgent and frenetic beat. Bright spotlights illuminated and followed each dancer as they traversed the catwalk-like platform which jutted out into the audience and provided a distinct “fashion show” feel. The music and flashing lights intensified as the dancers positioned themselves in front of the standing audience downstage; the technical/ theatrical elements added to the excitement as the barrier between performer and audience suddenly eroded. The performers’ facial expressions and twitching bodily movements – for example, shoulders shrugging, hands tugging at their own body parts, and pulling their own hair – gave the impression of angst, despair, chaos, and confusion and the audience was rapt. In pairs, Shortbread and Olivia, Raymond and Duane, the dancers physically manipulate their partners’ bodies in time with the rhythm of the music. Standing behind Duane, Raymond placed his hand on top of Duane’s head and moved it in different directions. Shortbread raised Olivia’s arms and let them fall, before manipulating her torso into a forward fold and back to an upright position. These actions, which gave the impression of marionettes being controlled from above, or by an external force, were representative of the constraints and harms of gender stereotyping.

When an upbeat hip-hop track started to play, signalling the final segment of the piece, the dancers’ bodies pulsated, roused by the strong, rhythmic beat of the music. Shortbread and Olivia circled each other as if in a b-boy battle/cypher; they performed synchronised floor spins, backbends, kicks and breaking footwork whilst Raymond and Duane strode gracefully upstage, performing swirling hand and arm movements, turns, dips and falls as they went. The group re-joined upstage and the house/ ballroom music from the first version of *The Purple Jigsaw* at Sadler’s Wells started to play, inciting cheers, applause and whistles of excitement (and recognition) from a large

proportion of the audience. The piece ended with the group performing the same choreographic sequence from the original finale, bridging the two performances and networking them together across time and space.

Deconstructing gendered dance through costume

Mol states that, “Attending to enactment rather than knowledge has an important effect: what we think of as a single object may appear to be more than one” (Mol, 2002: vii). Since enactments come in the plural, the crucial thing to explore is how they are coordinated. From one venue to the next, *The Purple Jigsaw* shifted and transformed; different material enactments enabled the formation of a different assemblage, a new performance. This multiplicity does not imply fragmentation; instead, the performance was made to cohere through a range of tactics, most especially, choreography and the subverting of clothing signifiers associated with normative gender. Returning to Judith Butler’s gender theory (1990), which was discussed in chapter 4, I must re-emphasise that gender is culturally constructed and imposed upon people and is based very much on gender stereotypes. This is indicated by Shortbread, who expressed during an interview that, when growing up, they were “constantly being brought back to [their] gender by others” (Houston, 2018b). Gender is adopted by means of *performing* gender conventions. Thus, one adopts gender by performing what is provided by their surroundings; and the acting as gender ultimately, and subconsciously, becomes part of one’s gender identity.

Significant to the analysis of *The Purple Jigsaw* is the notion of *fashion’s* performativity – also drawn from Butler’s work – which refers to how individual and collective identities are constructed through sartorial choices. As I emphasised in chapter 3 (through various examples from hip-hop’s sartorial history), fashion provides “visual, material, symbolic and narrative spaces within which political issues are performed, articulated and challenged” (Loscialpo, 2020: 3). In their theorising of fashion’s political implications, scholars tend to agree that fashion is “an emotionally charged, highly visual, and embodied practice, which can challenge existing power

structures, re-articulate old and new hegemonies, and even bring change" (Loscialpo, 2020: 3-4). In chapter 4 I discussed how fashion, as an area of study, is more established and better documented than costume, which remains elusive in scholarly studies of performance and dress (Monks, 2010; Barbieri, 2017, 2013). I hope to broaden the discourse on political and subversive dress by including hip-hop and showing that costume is, on the one hand, complicated because of its continuities with the equally fraught realm of clothing "in real life" (Carriger, 2017: 42); and on the other hand, as disruptive and subversive as fashion. As Barbieri writes, "Both costume and fashion act through the body, intending to influence behavior and thoughts, and to communicate" (Barbieri, 2017: xxiii). *The Purple Jigsaw* is unique in that, gender subversion is accomplished by the performers' use of streetwear – which can be conceived as casual or everyday fashion – as costume, and "the intermixing and joining of divergent performativities, styles and cultural histories" (Gunn, 2019: 13).

The battle with the body

Shortbread explained that the piece was fuelled by personal experience, mainly "the battle with the body" and the frustration of wanting to escape from it. Interestingly, what helped them find a new way of "grounding through the body and celebrating the body" (Houston, 2018b) was discovering "the dance" and the community. While hip-hop does not have the best track record of including those outside the "cismale, hypermasculine, heteronormative ideal" (Gunn, 2019: 17), it *is* a space that facilitates togetherness, solidarity, and *becoming*. Similarly, "voguing requires an assemblage, a multiplicity of bodies, and stems from a collective need for visibility, for protest, and for celebration" (Tente, 2021: 72). Through these two empowering dance forms, a queering, or "rescripting" (Neal, 2013) of the accepted performance of heteronormative masculinity took place onstage. Specifically, Houston Dance Collective created something new, a hybrid identity, through the combination of existing things and patterns; and by strategically deploying clothing items (such as, tracksuits, boilersuits, co-ords, and crop tops) to display elements of gender dissidence.

Figure 25 Houston Dance Collective, an entanglement of fibres, materials, skin and body (2018) Photo: Camilla Greenwell

Raymond and Duane's costumes, in conjunction with their bodily movements, provided a compelling counter-narrative to the notion of hegemonic masculinity. In vogue femme, the goal is to be memorable, so voguing performance is aesthetically over-the-top. In their post-humanist writing on vogue and ballroom culture, scholar Christina Tente states that "this exaggeration is translated into an over-the-top celebration of femininity, soft moves, dramatic poses, a mixture of hypersexual energy and naivety, irony, whimsy, and often grotesque aesthetics" (Tente, 2021: 62). Tente also points out that vogue femme is often seen as a way to explore both the feminine and masculine (ibid). The "tight clothes" Duane wore in *The Purple Jigsaw* 1.0 – which, according to Crane (2000), presents the male as a "sex object," and therefore presents important symbolic "challenges to hegemonic masculinity" (Crane, 2000: 195) – accentuated his sinuous body as he performed soft, flowing moves, and dips and falls. Another interesting costuming strategy was the exposing of muscles and volumes of skin (figure 25), which further situated the performers as objects of the gaze.

The intention was to display Raymond's muscular shoulders as he (evoked elements of "traditional" masculinity with his body and) executed impressive arm contortions, also known as "bone-breaking"[53]. Stylist Sabrina Henry's "creative service work" (Lifter, 2020) is important here, as it involved sourcing and fitting the "right" clothes for the performers' bodies in a way that would be visually stimulating to the audience. Not only did Henry work directly on and intimately with their bodies, but she also had to respond to the group's psychologies, how they wanted to be perceived as artists and people. Shortbread implied that a distribution of agency between the group members, Sabrina Henry, Feng Chen Wang, and the designs themselves had taken place. They recalled negotiations over the costumes, a lot of "back and forth" between parties, and in the end, the element of surprise when the pieces arrived. Shortbread stated:

> The baby blue and pink was really interesting, especially with what it's synonymous with and how we could mix that up a bit, but not mix it up in an obvious way. So, we could have even had like me in pink, and Raymond in pink. Kind of just mixing up who is in what colour. But when we got the pieces back, the ones that we could all use, it worked out really well. (Houston, 2018b)

Noteworthy, Shortbread (implicitly) refers to the predominantly Western European and American practice of assigning colour to gender (blue for boys, pink for girls). Their wanting to "mix it up" (but not in an obvious way) is a subversive act in itself. During the same conversation, Shortbread also mentioned that Olivia might not normally wear "an all-pink tracksuit", but it, looked good, served the piece and was comfortable to move in. This alludes once again to the tension between "fresh" and "functional", and shows that in hip-hop performance, costume is negotiated as both a production of personal

[53] "Bone-breaking", is one of the moves in the family of "flexing", a style of street dance from Brooklyn, New York and offshoot of Jamaican dancehall. Bone-breaking is characterised by rhythmic contortionist movement. (Winship, 2015)

identity and within a “staged” world. In both versions of *The Purple Jigsaw*, Shortbread occupied a presentational style that was neither feminine nor masculine, but rather androgynous. Androgynous (or gender non-conforming) can be understood as a presentation that operates within a blending or disavowal of gender characteristics. This sartorial choice is one of the diverse ways in which women negotiate “the masculinist structures of breaking culture” (Gunn and Scannell 2013; Gunn 2016). Moreover, it links back to different approaches taken by women throughout hip-hop's history, on and off camera, to negotiate the culture’s gendered terrain. For example, female artists such as MC Lyte and Queen Latifah chose to obfuscate their sexuality, at least initially, by adopting the prevailing androgynous styles – baggy clothes and “finger waves”– to establish equality amongst their male counterparts (Tate, 2022).

Shortbread’s deployment of a genderless outfit in both performances undermined hegemonic gender ideologies and challenged the behaviors and practices within hip-hop (and breaking) that invisibilise women, subjugate femininity and subordinate other forms of masculinities. With that being said, the non-conformist costume was by no means in opposition to *being* “hip-hop”. Shortbread frequently expressed their preference for something “signature”, a “proper hip-hop” look, which revealed how different aspects of their identity intersect and co-exist; but also, how the intermingling of material agencies can enable empowerment in the moment of performance. Feng Chen Wang’s designs – which are characterised as “boxy silhouettes with careful tailoring, multi-dimensional sportswear, and a color palette of icy blue, pale yellow, and soft green” (fenchenwang.com) – were key participants in the second performance assemblage as the brand itself constituted a “deliberate intervention in the language of gender” (McCauley Bowstead, 2018: 104). The group’s overall look was an eclectic mix of “both elevated designs and more casual pieces” (fengchenwang.com). On one hand, there were Raymond and Olivia’s more relaxed, athleisure pieces; on the other, there were Duane’s more elaborate ruched parachute-style trousers and Shortbread’s structured and tailored two-piece shirt and shorts. The “artistic” look and feel of the

items, paired with the designer’s commitment to breaking free of gender binaries, helped the group to push the boundaries of dance, fashion, and costume so that it became something that is progressive. As Shortbread commented, “The costume being an element, like, an active part of the performance […] It enhances the performance because of what it is.” (Houston, 2018b) Expanding this view, I propose that costume – as an important component in the material bodily assemblage – facilitates a critical intervention into hip-hop’s “dichotomous structures of gender and sexuality that privilege cismale heteromasculine engagement” (Gunn, 2019: 23).

Summary

In this chapter I have built on post-ANT’s appreciation for fluidity, multiplicity, hybridity and difference, and explored the fluxes and continuities that produce multiple versions and configurations of gender performance in hip-hop and contemporary dance. I have shown that despite being seen as rigid forms, gender and gender expression are continuously changing. Through *The Purple Jigsaw*, a progressive hip-hop theatre piece, I have explored how expressions of “manliness” or masculinity can fluctuate between dominant and subordinate, and how gender hierarchies that develop within gender expressions like masculinity relate to femininity and gender non-conformity. The aim of this chapter was to open paths to new reflections in terms of the struggle against hegemony, and how older forms of masculinity are being displaced by new ones. Through the materiality of two specific performances, I have argued that masculinity is variable and heterogeneous, and that gender expression is multiplicitous (hooks, 2007). From an ANT perspective I have highlighted the transformations of matter that hip-hop, and performance enables. Specifically, I have described how the transforming of genderless fashion into critical costume facilitated progressive performances of gender fluidity in networked space.

The main point that can be drawn from this chapter is that matter is a crucial element in the expansion of gender, which is taking place within hip-hop and other gendered dance forms, such as vogue. The current state of hip-hop as

a lifestyle identity is under contestation (Penney, 2012); by adopting ANT, socio-materialist, and feminist new materialist approaches, we can examine and better understand subversive practices that can lead to a transformation of gender understanding.

9 Conclusion

This research has explored how hip-hop dance performance is produced by an amalgamation of material forces (agencies) that are not only physical, but also extend to the social, cultural, and political. It has engaged actor-network theory (ANT) as the main approach to reveal the multi-layered and multidirectional realities of contemporary hip-hop dance practitioners and the histories and concepts that inform those realities. The research has drawn out and pushed further the implications of specific new materialist concepts – namely *assemblage, entanglement, multiplicity,* and *hybridity* – for hip-hop dance as an embodied and lived practice, and as an under-explored area of scholarship. Focusing on the material trajectory of clothing, its entanglement with the dancing body and other networked elements, the research has also reconceptualised the hip-hop performer as a dynamic change agent that enacts fluid identities and a hybrid form of space. In what follows, I conclude the main findings of this research and provide a general discussion that evaluates the research process, notes limitations of this study, and proposes future research.

A fresh perspective on hip-hop

The purpose of this ANT-informed research project was to allow matter its due as an active participant in hip-hop's *becoming* – the ongoing production, shaping and reshaping of the culture. The main aim was to expand dialogical knowledge of hip-hop by focusing on its materiality (rather than linguistics and rap music) and foregrounding dance as a fundamentally multiple, self-organising, dynamic and inventive part of the culture. Little of the published research on hip-hop over the last approximately four decades has focused on the element of dance, and dance studies as a discipline does not frequently prioritise social, popular, battle, or competition dances, which characterise most hip-hop street dances (Johnson, 2022: 2). Thus, hip-hop dances are doubly overlooked. There is also a lack of understanding about the significance of clothing and costume in hip-hop from a performance point of view, as the dearth of literature tends to discuss hip-hop fashion as

conspicuous consumption. By placing hip-hop dance and dress into a new materialist perspective, this research has argued for the performing body as an assemblage of human and non-human actors (actants) and brought it into the fold as *moving matter*. Specifically, the findings derived from observations, interviews with practitioners, and analysis of three significant hip-hop dance pieces has made explicit the hip-hop bodily assemblage as a powerful, unfixed, social and political entity that encompasses history, aspiration, inventiveness, customisation, individualisation, and collectivity.

A further aim of the research was to develop an interdisciplinary framework through which the material, social and political aspects of live and technologically mediated performance can be systematically examined. To meet this aim I have drawn together (in an ANT-like manner) ethnographic research methods, new materialist concepts of agency, feminist/ post-ANT sensibilities – mainly the appreciation for uncertainty and multiplicity – and ideas from fashion, costume and performance studies to formulate a framework that has allowed me to map shifting relationships between actors and multiple versions of hip-hop dance, and articulate how new elements are continually being introduced, whilst simultaneously, the network is shaped by hip-hop's underlying history and politics. The resultant thesis challenges the fields of dance and hip-hop studies to shift their respective perspectives – "from the proscenium stage to cyphers and clubs, or from textual analysis to embodiment" – to discard outmoded ideas and dichotomies – for example "high-low culture divides, or the mind-body split" – and to "trouble value systems that disregard non-Western epistemologies, oral cultures, and embodied knowledges" (Johnson, 2022: 2). The thesis also brings hip-hop and its embodied practices into discourses of dress, disturbing the fashion-costume distinction by illustrating how wearables can become powerful through their spatial and temporal displacement. Put another way, I have shown how clothing is agentic, how it transforms, and how it enables hip-hop practitioners to fluidly navigate identities, genres, and the emergent space between professional, theatrical, and social dance.

Contribution to knowledge and implications of the findings

The new materialist approach adopted in this research, the ANT-derived methodology, adds significance to existing knowledge on hip-hop as it directs attention from rap and hip-hop's discourse practices and instead, reveals the complex, spatial and material workings of a hybrid culture. While this work has attended much more centrally to the significance of materiality and matter than language, it *has* explored how the term "fresh" – a critical material semiotic concept and embedded trope within hip-hop culture – "bends relations" (Haraway, 1997) in various actor-networks. Following Haraway – who argues that tropes are "constituted by bumps that make us swerve from literal-mindedness" and "weave the social into better forms" (1997: 11) – this research has "bent" what is usually meant by the word fresh in order to defer the literal and weave the stuff of hip-hop, and our understanding of it, into new forms. In common parlance, fresh is used to describe something or someone new, original, inexperienced or not known before. It can also mean bold, impudent or impertinent. In hip-hop, the word is used informally to mean cool or fashionable; it refers to sporting a "fresh out of the box" (brand new) look (Jenkins, 2015), or executing flawless and clean looking dance moves. By broadening and complicating the term fresh, this thesis has revealed a paradox, in that fresh, in the hip-hop context, conveys something newly made *and* preserved all at once. I have highlighted that hip-hop's traditions, values, rituals and behaviours are preserved through "mattering" (Barad, 2003) – matter's ongoing process of self-generation – which is continuous and therefore always new.

The methodology deployed in this research has allowed for both the description and analysis of this process of mattering. ANT's instruction to trace connections, to empirically observe and follow heterogeneous actors – to see where they go, what they do, and what objects they *enrol* into assemblages – has highlighted the vastness and interconnectedness of the hip-hop dance network and provided much needed insight into its "endlessly shapeshifting, fragmented, competitive, yet collaborative energies" (Fogarty, 2022: 4). Through this methodological approach, I have shown that matter is

an active factor in further materialisations of hip-hop dance and that all material actors must play their part moment by moment for a network (or assemblage) to remain stable. A strength of this approach is that it situates the researcher as an active, bodily participant in the network and not as a separate entity that makes decisions outside the event under study or separated from data. Informed by feminist material semiotic concepts – such as *situated knowledges* (Haraway, 1988) and *diffraction* (Barad, 2007: Haraway, 1997) – the methodology demonstrates how networked participants, including researchers, produce a more situated, richer, and responsible account, one that maps differences as they interfere in practices. Furthermore, the approach challenges an instrumentalist account of methods as neutral tools for applying theory, resulting in a divide between theory, method and the substantive focus of a research project (Law, Savage & Ruppert, 2011). In so doing, the methodology also challenges an understanding of the empirical world as "out there", waiting to be studied from the masculinist gaze of the powerful "from above" (Haraway, 1988: 584); a binary that itself rests upon a separation of matter into the intentional active human research subject and the passive, inert object that the human animates (Coleman, Page & Palmer, 2019).

The overarching ANT approach, its conceptions of network and assemblage especially, have helped reveal taken-for-granted assumptions underlying the understanding of hip-hop, its participants, and embodied knowledges. It has enabled a better understanding of how hip-hop dance practitioners connect and co-exist, and how different possibilities – for example, reconfigurations of identity and performance – occur at each moment and come into existence through the fusion of social and material phenomena, which are not distinct entities. Using ANT as a lens, I have reconceptualised the human performer as an assemblage of body, clothing, dance training/ techniques, styling practices, rituals and so forth; created by, and operating within, the hip-hop network. This conceptual shift from performer to *material bodily assemblage* extends current knowledge of hip-hop as it deprivileges individual intentionality and emphasises that in cultural phenomena, the body is matter that exists amongst matter. More specifically, the material bodily assemblage

insists that practitioners take their form and acquire their attributes as a consequence of their networked relations, across space and time, with other human and non-human entities. It constitutes a “collective body” (Martin, 1998), a “body multiple” (Mol, 2002) comprised of many different practices, sites and knowledges. While the body itself is not fragmented or multiple, the phenomena that make sense of it and represent it do so in many ways so that the body is lived and experienced in different ways. Through this social, material and relational process, different agencies emerge and interact, enabling specific people and things to become powerful at any given moment.

I have highlighted through various examples that the hip-hop bodily assemblage is political, and that history is embodied and very much alive. This fresh perspective can help to address some of the ideological assumptions that exploit and invisibilise the people, sensibilities, and practices that grow out of hip-hop. In chapters 2 and 3, I pointed out that the politicalness of hip-hop, its defiance and resistance against racism and structural inequality, is entangled with its materiality. I described how the historical experiences of racially minoritised youths from the nascent era of hip-hop are embedded in garments, accessories, and commonplace materials – such as linoleum, cardboard and other temporary floor coverings, which enabled the creation of iconic breaking moves in the 1970s and 1980s – through repetitions of acts and behaviours. By focusing on *processes*, I have provided insight into how vital matter re-emerges in the present and allows today’s practitioners to strike out against their own marginality and/ or invisibility. *Our Bodies Back* and *The Purple Jigsaw*, two distinct yet political dance pieces, have evidenced that hip-hop dance maintains an oppositional stance, as well as a “resistance function” (Hazard-Gonald, 2011) in new (and white/ “high art”) performance spaces, and continues to be utilised as a medium to protest not only against racial discrimination, but also gender inequality and stereotyoing. Through these examples, I have also demonstrated how fluid bodies destabilise boundaries, and trouble easy categorisations and overarching binaries that are explicitly and implicitly

reproduced through hip-hop dance. For example, local/ global, underground/ mainstream (real/ fake), masculine/ feminine, and us/ them.

This thesis strengthens and widens the scholarship on hip-hop and black expressive cultures by providing a nuanced account of how “global hip-hop” constitutes a hybrid space enacted through a blending of the historical and contemporary, tradition and innovation, physical and digital. It has addressed hip-hop’s cultural dissemination and thrown light on the experiences of dancers “already removed from the realm of the social by virtue of [their] interest in focused aesthetic principles adopted from Western ideals” (DeFrantz, 2001: 3); for example, those creating hip-hop theatre pieces and/ or “arthouse” dance film. I have considered the value of the hybrid space that emerges between social and professional dance, documenting how hip-hop practitioners influence each other in a constant, dynamic flux, even when adherents of certain parts of the culture (or sub-genres) purposefully refute “other” influences, subconsciously cannot face up to them, or simply are ignorant of their existence. Specifically, I have argued that nothing is “pure” anything, and that the process of cross-pollination need not be conceived as a negative. From a feminist new materialist perspective, I suggest that “global hip-hop corporealities” (DeFrantz, 2014) and further materialisations of hip-hop dance – such as breaking’s entrance into the Paris 2024 Olympics, online dance, and the emergence of new competition spaces/ formats (for example, the “all-style” battle) – are indicative of hybrid forms of “liveness” and connectedness, and a multiple rather than diluted culture. By attending to these multiplicities, hip-hop’s transformative power and vital impact on contemporary culture becomes clear, as do the transformations of matter afforded by routes of movement of black people and black cultural production.

The empirical stories presented in this thesis – about processes of *translation* (transformation) and material enactments – help to construct not only accounts of the body in motion, but also accounts of dress from the perspective of the performing body. Themes emerging from the interviews with practitioners, observations, and analyses of selected performances have

revealed that fashion is a change agent, “a dynamic and creative force that opens the subject up to a process of infinite becoming” (Deleuze [1988] 1993). I have argued that fashion objects are to be understood as "hybrid assemblages of fibres, materials, skin and body that are always in the process of becoming” (Smelik, 2018: 44), or “becoming-with”, in Haraway’s words (2016: 60). I have told a new story of how situated practitioners (who are agential) react to clothing, materials and spaces (that are insentient but also active) imbued with political and racially meaningful histories, ideas and concepts. In chapter 6 especially, I illustrated how certain wearables mediate belonging, propel bodies through paths of bodily movement that have been “travelled before” (Bernstein, 2009), and allow practitioners to “touch time” and “to experience the past in the present” (Schweitzer, 2014: 1).

I have reflected specifically on the Adidas sportswear brand as a significant remnant of hip-hop’s history; or rather, as a living thing that helps to generate and actualise the agency of contemporary performers. By situating the brand as an assemblage and performing object/ actor in the network, I have revealed its spatial and temporal agency, its influence as a dynamic entity which “is not simply here or somewhere else, but rather is some-thing that emerges in parts” (Lury, 2004) and enables continuity and change, sameness and difference, tradition and innovation. This re-positioning of branded fashion objects – as complex, performative, distributed and relational – offers a new perspective on hip-hop fashion and adds depth to our understanding of the different relations and linkages between consumers and organisations. Recognising the brand’s heterogeneity and numerous trajectories also sheds new light on power dynamics in hip-hop. Specifically, it reframes the issue of corporate exploitation and enlightens on the differences between the supposed “powerful and the wretched” (Law, 1992: 8) – corporations and communities – highlighting differences in the methods and materials that communities deploy to generate themselves.

A key objective of this research was to complicate the terms “fashion” and “costume” (in a feminist/ post-ANT fashion), not to collapse the two conceptually, but to demonstrate hip-hop’s transformative power and the

dancing body's ability to disturb the boundary between both fields. In doing so, this thesis has attempted to counter the subsuming of costumes into the bodies of performers, which has rendered them invisible in academic discourse (Monks 2010; Barbieri 2013, 2017). I have evidenced that in hip-hop performance, a costume's "theatricality" can be subtle and not always evident to the perceiver/ audience. Costume's subtle translation of the dancing body, however, is remarkable for this process enables rituals of performativity (for example, performances of racial and gender identity) and reconfigurations of performance across multiple genres, spaces, and locations. By articulating how seemingly "ordinary" clothing *becomes* costume and can bring forth the "authentic" and historical aspects of hip-hop dance culture, I have shown that costume works in different ways depending on which way it is pointing; for instance, pointing inward toward the body, or networked outward in a global manner. I have drawn attention to the performers' corporeal and material here-and-now realities (Barbieri, 2017: xxii), their "imagined affinities" (Fogarty, 2006) and "connective marginalities" (Osumare, 2001). This research has added significance to performance and costume studies by detailing how networks and their products continue to function, stabilise, and go on being reinterpreted long after they have been established, rather than evaporating at the end of the performance as previous scholarship suggests.

This research also has important implications for the hip-hop community, the dance community especially, which is becoming more diverse in terms of its gender, sexuality, and racial and ethnic makeup. A new generation of practitioners and participants is emerging. Hip-hop is entering and being celebrated in new spaces, aided by technological and media developments which are transforming the practice and shifting spatial boundaries. Overall, my findings highlight that hip-hop is fluid and constantly changing in ways that are complexly entangled. This research provides valuable material knowledge and insight, from a situated perspective, to remind the community of hip-hop's subversive capabilities, its vitality and contribution to contemporary society. Networks of relations must continue to grow and shift in order for hip-hop to (re)produce itself, evolve and create safe, "in-between"

spaces where creativity and originality is encouraged and the values of hip-hop – peace, love and unity – are upheld. One such space is the *Academy Breakin' Convention*, conceived by Breakin' Convention's artistic director Jonzi D. The academy, which offers a free full-time education programme for 16-19-year-olds, will fill a gap in the progression routes for hip-hop artists making theatre. It is one of the major initiatives at Sadler's Wells East, located in East London's recently developed Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. This new space is part of East Bank, alongside the BBC, London College of Fashion (UAL), UCL and the V&A. It therefore presents exciting opportunities for collaboration and innovation between emerging and established creatives, organisations and communities.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

As indicated in chapter 4, there were some potential limitations to consider when adopting actor-network theory as the main framework for this research. Firstly, there was the concern that, in its descriptiveness, ANT fails to come up with any detailed suggestions of how actors should be seen, and their actions analysed and interpreted (Williams and May, 1996). With that said, my intention as a researcher (and networked participant) was always to tell an empirical story and provide a richer conceptualisation of hip-hop dance, rather than interpret or "explain" why the network takes the form that it does. Second, was the concern that ANT's "flat ontology" – its treatment of humans and non-humans as "completely symmetric" (Castree, 2002) – effaces any difference between the two and neglects "specifically human capacities of expression" (Thrift, 2000: 215). To assuage these potential flaws, I reinforced the ANT approach by drawing-in other (feminist) new materialist ideas and concepts – such as Jane Bennett's notion of assemblage – which helped to reintroduce the human participant, not simply as a subject that rules and interprets passive things (Bennett, 2010), but as a co-creator that brings networks into being. I also used multiple sources of data, and multiple methods of data collection and analysis, to increase the credibility and the validity of the research findings.

When conducting the research, I tried to access individuals/ informants with varying social characteristics and levels of hip-hop dance experience to provide a situated account that enlightened on everyday, and often taken for granted practices. Were I to do this research again, I would give (even) more consideration to the sample and its representativeness. Conducting further/ follow-up interviews with the practitioners, and extracting more costume-specific data, might have added something to the analysis. However, the Covid-19 outbreak and subsequent lockdowns in 2020 necessitated adaptions to the research design and the deployment of different strategies. Whilst I had successfully conducted several interviews remotely prior to Covid-19, this method of collecting data became less straightforward during the worldwide crisis.

Overall, the research data emerged from the materiality of purposefully selected live and online performances and observed knowledge of material data gleaned from practitioners situated in different genres, spaces, and geographical locations – including the United States, Canada, Europe, and the United Kingdom. It has therefore provided an honest account of hip-hop dance and dress, as well as a jumping-off point for other researchers interested in the topic. Enquiries into the agential role of everyday dress as costume in hip-hop performance are by no means exhausted by this thesis. There is enormous potential for future research that would advance both costume and dance and more broadly, the field of performance. I suggest that future studies in this area should seek to weave dance theories and choreographic analysis techniques into this methodology, to further examine creative processes and modes of collaboration in performance networks. Future work on hip-hop performance should also include detailed analysis (from a material culture perspective) of material evidence and costumes "retained in their collected and conserved state as fragments of past performances" (Barbieri, 2012). Interactions with, and close readings of, garments and cultural artefacts stored in hip-hop archives would generate rich material data that could help to articulate costume's "complex work", and position hip-hop as a unique context for future costume design work and scenographic explorations.

Based on the ideas and situated knowledges that I have articulated through this thesis, and the energy that I have discovered through the materiality of hip-hop dance, I intend to create a network which nurtures and supports this powerful form and the community it shapes. This research project was conceived in the community. After taking my then 10-year-old daughter to her first breaking class in a school sports hall on a Saturday morning, my eyes were truly opened to the practice. The subsequent research journey has been transformative, and an accumulation and sedimentation of knowledge continues through ongoing questioning and challenging the beliefs of myself and others. Thinking of future outcomes, I would like to bring LCF and its neighbour Sadler's Wells East together through further discourse and practice interventions. For example, I want to develop a workshop – bringing artists, designers and dancers together – or a symposium, which explores how materiality and costume can be at the centre of new directions in hip-hop training that are being proposed at Academy Breakin' Convention.

I would also like to publish this research in the form of a book, one that is accessible to the practitioners and the wider hip-hop community. I want to sensitise people to the richness and connectedness of hip-hop's material forms and practices. Whilst I have chosen specific case studies for the thesis, I have gleaned much more material data from discussions with practitioners and from my observations during the fieldwork. I aim to utilise this material and include more featured artists and case studies in an illustrated publication.

To conclude, there is a great deal to be learned about performance, complex cultures and communities of practice through ANT and socio-material approaches more broadly. Paraphrasing ANT proponent John Law (1990), ANT is not anything in particular (theory or method), it is what it is. But using an ANT perspective, the approach evolves and is defined within its use.

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Appendix A: Research description and consent form

Participant Consent Form

You are being invited to take part in a postgraduate research project, which is being jointly funded by *London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London* and *Sadler's Wells*. The research explores the significance of dress (fashion and costume) in hip-hop dance performance. The aim of the study is to deepen understanding of creative practices in hip-hop and provide insight into the relationships between practitioners, materials, technologies and space.

Before you decide to take part, it is important for you to understand why the enquiry is being done, what it will involve and how your contribution will be used. You may want to discuss it with others if you wish. Ask if anything is unclear or if you would like more information.

The data that you contribute (e.g. interview testimony, video, photographs or other contributions) will be included in an academic thesis.

The thesis will be archived and stored at UAL and may be made available in future to other students within the university and for the public to view both in physical and digital form, within the context of UAL academic research and education.

Your personal data will be anonymised within the thesis unless otherwise agreed on the consent form overleaf. Participants should be advised their personal data may be captured within their contribution and through their experiences.

The data that you contribute will not be used for any other enquiry nor published in any other form other than this thesis, unless additional prior consent is gained.

You can find more information about UAL and your privacy rights at www.arts.ac.uk/privacy-information.

What are my rights as a participant?

- The right to withdraw from participation at any time
- The right to request that any recording cease
- The right to have any data withdrawn and destroyed, provided it can be reliably identified, and provided that so doing does not increase the risk for the participant.
- The right to be de-identified in any photographs intended for public publication, before the point of publication
- The right to have any questions answered at any time.

The purpose of this form is to ensure that your contribution is used in strict accordance with your wishes.

Please sign the form overleaf to confirm you have understood and agree to the above.

Investigator (PhD student): *Kamaira (Kami) Jones*

Email: *k.jones0720161@arts.ac.uk*

Project title: *Fashioning the hip-hop dancing body: an actor-network theory approach to "fresh" performance practice*

Nature of contribution: Delete as appropriate

□ to be interviewed

□ that my voice will be audio recorded

□ to take part in a focus group

□ to take part in a workshop or activity

□ that my photo / a film of me will be taken

□ to be observed and for field notes to be taken

□ for photos / images that I have provided to be used in the essay

□ Any other contribution (please state here)

- I understand that I have given approval for my opinions and other agreed contributions (see above) to be included in the project outputs. Anything I say may be used in academic presentations and papers relating to the project.

□ Tick the box if you wish your contribution to be anonymised (*leave blank if you give your consent to be named in the thesis)*

- What is going to happen and why it is being done has been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions.

- Having given this consent I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I have the right to withdraw from the enquiry at any time without disadvantage to myself and without having to give any reason.

'I hereby fully and freely consent to participation in the study, which has been fully explained to me. I agree to the above as indicated and give my explicit

consent under GDPR Art.6(1)(a) and Art.9(2)(a) for my personal data to be processed by UAL as indicated on this form'

Participant's name
(BLOCK CAPITALS): ______________________________

Participant's signature: ______________________________ *Date:* __________

Investigator's (student) name
(BLOCK CAPITALS): ______________________________

Investigator's (student) signature: ______________________________ *Date:* __________

Appendix B: List of events

1. *Breakin' Convention Birmingham* Auditions: The REP Theatre, Birmingham, UK. 6 December 2016
2. *Go Hard or Go Home* (GHGH): King's Meadow Campus, Nottingham. 18 March 2017
3. *Breakin' Convention 2017*: Sadler's Wells, London, UK. 29 April 2017
4. *Breakin' Convention Birmingham*: The REP Theatre, Birmingham, UK. 2 June 2017
5. *Proovin' Grounds*: PMT Dance Studio, Manhattan, New York. 26 October 2017 (Proxy)
6. *Breakin' Convention Harlem*: Apollo Theatre, Harlem, New York. 28 October 2017 (Proxy)
7. *Identity* (panel discussion): Shoreditch Town Hall, London, UK. 14 April 2018
8. *Identity* (showcase): Shoreditch Town Hall, London, UK. 14 April 2018
9. *Breakin' Convention 2018*: Sadler's Wells, London, UK. 6 May 2018
10. *B-Side Hip-Hop Festival 2018*: Birmingham Hippodrome (and surrounding area) Birmingham, UK. 12 May 2018
11. *Marshon Dance Showcase*: Ace Dance Studio, Birmingham, UK. 31 August 2018
12. *Open Art Surgery 2018* (showcase/Q&A, Lilian Bayliss Studio): Sadler's Wells, London, UK. 15 September 2018
13. *Back to the Lab 2019* (workshop): Sadler's Wells, London, UK. 18 January 2019
14. *Back to the Lab 2019* (showcase/Q&A, Lilian Bayliss Studio): Sadler's Wells, London, UK. 26 January 2019
15. *Breakin' Convention 2019*: Sadler's Wells, London, UK. 5 May 2019
16. *B-Side Hip-Hop Festival 2019*: Southside/Arcadian Car Park, Birmingham, UK. 12 May 2019
17. *Breakin' Convention 2020 Virtual Festival, "Locked Down, Lock-In"*: BCTV/YouTube, pre-recorded performances. 2 May 2020
18. *Breakin' Convention presents, "Social DisDancing"*: Sadler's Wells, London, UK. 12 December 2020

Appendix C: List of Interviews

Jonzi D: Founder/artistic director of Breakin' Convention & hip-hop dance performer (London, UK)

- 6 Dec 2016- face-to-face interview at The REP, Birmingham at 20:00
- 1 Sep 2017- telephone interview at 09:30

Lekan Adebanjo: Director of Go Hard or Go Home (Nottingham, UK)

- 6 Mar 2017- telephone interview at 13:00

Emma "Shortbread" Houston: Choreographer, breaker & contemporary dance performer (London, UK)

- 17 May 2017- telephone interview at 17:40
- 20 Jan 2018- telephone interview at 18:00
- 25 Apr 2018- telephone interview at 13:30

Kamsy "Flash" Duarte: B-boy (Manhattan, New York)

- 20 Jan 2018- Skype interview at 19:00 (UK time)

"N9ne": Hip-hop B-boy & dance instructor/mentor (Birmingham, UK)

- 21 Jan 2018- telephone interview at 18:00

Group interview: 'Back to the Lab' workshop at Sadler's wells, London, UK. 18 Jan 2019 at 13:00

- Jonzi D (lead mentor, Back to the Lab, UK)
- Johnathon Burrows (choreographer & Back to the Lab mentor, UK)
- Anthony Akundayo Lennon (director, performer & Back to the Lab mentor, UK)

- Ben “Mr. Ben” Ajose-Cutting (choreographer & performer, *The Locksmiths*, UK)
- Laura “Sparkx” Poole (performer, *The Locksmiths*, UK)
- Samantha “Sammi Jo” Haynes (performer, *The Locksmiths*, UK)
- Peter “Dynamite Soul” Johnson (performer, *The Locksmiths*, UK)
- Joshua “Vendetta” Nash (choreographer & performer, *Far From the Norm*, UK)
- Jordan “Ruckus” Douglas (performer, UK)
- Agnes “Akness” Sales Martín (choreographer & performer, *La Cueva*, Spain)
- Hector Plaza (choreographer & performer, *Iron Skulls*, Spain)
- Nicole McDowall (choreographer & performer, *Avant Garde Dance Company*, UK)

Appendix D: Data summary matrix

Events

- Go Hard or Go Home (GHGH): "The UK's largest independent dance competition"
  - 18th March 2017 (pilot study, intro to competition scene)
- Breakin' Convention- Main Festival
  - 29th April 2017 (identified Houston Dance Collective- Purple Jigsaw performance)
  - 5th May 2019 (Freestyle Funk Forum, identified Logistx, b-girl from LA)
  - 2nd May 2020 (Virtual Festival, Covid-19)
- Breakin' Convention- UK and US Tour
  - 2nd June 2017, The REP, Birmingham (Regional acts- encountered familiar faces)
  - 27th October 2017, The Apollo, Harlem (Back to home of HH, b-boy pioneers involved in the festival)
- Provin' Grounds NYC
  - 26th October 2017, PMT House of Dance Studio (Proxy made contact with Flash)
- Identity – Tony Adigun and East London Dance
  - 14th April 2018 (followed Houston Dance Collective and purple jigsaw performed in 'new costume'; identified Rugged Estate, Krump group)
- Break Mission x B-Side Festival, Birmingham
  - 13th May 2018 (phone footage of performances, attended with N9ne and encountered other familiar faces)
  - 12th May 2019 (encountered Shortbread in the crowd; Sharifa Butterfly from Breakin' convention main show was also performing; MarshON crew, interesting performance wearing fisherman/bucket hats)
- Breakin' Convention- Open Art Surgery

- 15th September 2018, Lillian Bayliss Studio (Encountered Duke LDN, photog from Go Hard or Go Home, who is also a dancer. Performed an interesting piece directly about fashion)

- Breakin' Convention- Back to the lab- "A hip-hop choreographer's course"
    - Week one 14th – 18th Jan 2019, SW workshop (I attended on 18th and conducted group interview with practitioners)
    - Week two 21st – 25th Jan 2019, LBS (I attended showcase and Q&A on 26th Jan)
- Breakin' Convention- Social DisDancing – Covid-19 "BC Lite"
    - 12th December 2020, SW main auditorium (first Socially distanced event since covid…Identified AIM collective and O'Driscoll collective from Birmingham; Botis Seva FILM and Jonzi's film "Our Bodies Back" great examples of mediatised HH dance).

Performance spaces

- Sadler's Wells Theatre
- Lilian Bayliss Studio (Sadler's Wells)
- Apollo Theatre (Harlem, NYC)
- The REP Theatre, Birmingham
- Hippodrome, Birmingham
- Nottingham University- Kings' Meadow Campus
- Shoreditch Town Hall
- STREET: e.g. High Street/New Street/Hurst Street, Birmingham; sidewalk outside the Apollo theatre in Harlem
- PUBLIC SPACE: e.g. The Arcadian/ "Southside"/ disused Car Park in Birmingham; and Subway stations in NYC
- Dance Studios: e.g. Jackson's Lane, London; ACE dance and music, Birmingham; Robanna's Dance studio, Birmingham; Sadler's Wells rehearsal studios; Studio Wayne McGregor, white space; PMT studio, NYC; Millennium Dance Complex, LA (via YouTube)

Genres

- Breaking/B-Boying
- Streetdance
- Krump
- Funk
- House
- Popping
- Litefeet
- Commercial/choreography
- Experimental HH/hybrid/contemporary/Avant Garde

Modes of performance

- Cyphers/circles
- Battles/competitions
- Hip-hop theatre
- Festivals
- Workshops
- Studio classes/masterclasses
- Jams
- Online/film

Practitioners

- Main informants/contacts
  - Jonzi D
  - Emma Houston aka Shortbread
  - Kamsy Duarte aka Flash
  - N9ne
- Interesting Groups/Troupes/Crews/COLLECTIVES
  - Houston Dance Collective (London collective)

    - Boy Blue Entertainment (London crew)
    - The Locksmiths (London crew)
    - Joshua Nash and Jordan Douglas (Krump duo)
    - Akness and Hector (Barcelona duo)
    - Birdgang (London collective)
    - O'Driscoll Collective (Birmingham duo)
    - Broken Silence (Birmingham collective)
    - Key Infinity (Birmingham collective)
    - ReQuest Dance Crew/Royal Family (New Zealand)
- Key figures/Gatekeepers/Event organisers/Local celebrities/Judges/well-known, respected, and/or professional practitioners
    - Jonzi D- BC
    - Michelle Norton - BC
    - Lekan Adebanjo - GHGH
    - Kashmir D. Lees
    - B-Girl Roxy - Heartbreakerz
    - Kenrick "H20" Sandy- Boy Blue
    - Tony Adigun- Avant Garde Dance
    - Botis Seva
    - Boy Blue Entertainment
    - Bird Gang Crew
    - Natalie Prince- Zoo Nation
    - B-girl Terra and Eddie
    - N9ne- Broken Silence
    - Nathan Marsh -MarshOn
    - Shin Tastic-Key Infinity
    - (Will (Willdabeast) Adams- online/LA)
    - (Tricia Miranda- online/LA)
    - (Phil Wright- online/LA)
    - (Rob Rich- online/LA)
    - (Parris Goebel- online/LA & NZ)
    - (Jade Chynoweth- online/LA)

- Choreographers/group leaders
    - Tony Adigun
    - Kenrick “H2O” Sandy
    - Emma Houston
    - Ivan Blackstock
    - Nathan Marsh
    - N9ne
    - Joshua ‘Vendetta’ Nash
    - Kloe Dean
    - Ben Ajose-Cutting (Locksmiths)
- Stylists/designers
    - Sabrina Henry- London
    - Feng Chen Wang- London
- Artistic Directors
    - Jonzi D
    - Ivan Blackstock
- Videographers/photographers
    - Dave Barros (BC)
    - Funk Stylers Television
    - Duke LDN
    - Pele
    - My Typo Life (YouTube/LA)
    - Tim Milgram aka T. Milly (YouTube/LA)

Dress/costume

- Urban/streetwear/activewear
    - BRANDS
        - ✓ Adidas
        - ✓ Nike
        - ✓ Reebok
        - ✓ Puma
        - ✓ Tommy Hilfiger
        - ✓ Ralph Lauren

        - ✓ Fila
        - ✓ Ellesse
        - ✓ Champion
    - Garments and objects/accessories
        - ✓ Tracksuits
        - ✓ SNEAKERS
        - ✓ T-Shirts
        - ✓ Button-down shirts
        - ✓ Harem pants
        - ✓ Hats- e.g. beanies, baseball caps, bucket hats, etc.
        - ✓ Jewellery- e.g. rope chains, earrings, etc.
        - ✓ Sunglasses/Cazels
        - ✓ Masks- e.g. theatrical masks, face coverings
- Costume/uniform
    - Zoot Suits
    - Masks
    - Boiler suits
    - T-shirts
    - Customised/"letter" jackets
    - Matching tracksuits/streetwear
- Concepts/HH cultural practices:
    - Looking "FRESH", Fly, Dope, "Buck"
    - Garment-body relationships:
        - ✓ Garment/item/accessory removal - before, during, and after performance (practicality, heat/sweating, cold, to look good/change appearance, etc.)
        - ✓ Using fashion objects as PROPS during performance (e.g. masks, garments, hats, sneakers)
        - ✓ Gestures and practices seen during performance (e.g. tying shirts around waist, rolling one leg up, grabbing crotch, pulling on waist band, adjusting/throwing/discarding hats)
        - ✓ Restrictive clothing/accessories (fresh vs function)

        - ✓ Confidence from clothing and/or dress allowing performers to dance a certain way or "get into character"
        - ✓ Dress "serving the piece" and affecting the audience
    - Garment-body-space relationships:
        - ✓ Garments, sneakers, hats, body parts gliding/sliding/resisting floor or surface
        - ✓ Space influences clothing choices- e.g. dancers consider practicalities such as, floor surface, amount of space, as well as type of audience (demographic)

The "piece"/performance

- The choreographed "Piece"
    - Stage
    - Online
    - Class
- The Cypher/circle
    - Social/communal
        - ✓ Developing skills
        - ✓ Building confidence
        - ✓ "Each one teach one"
        - ✓ Proving oneself in public/earn respect
    - Competitive
        - ✓ 1v1 battles
        - ✓ Crew/team battles
        - ✓ Established rules/conventions/judging system
- The HH class- choreographed "routine"
    - Learned quickly and performed at end of class
    - Often filmed for online viewing
    - Hierarchy? i.e. Best dancers chosen to perform for camera (favourites? Local celebs?)
    - Brands are prevalent… bright colours… very aware/conscious of appearing FRESH

    - Clothes tend to double-up as training/rehearsal and performance clothes (i.e. sweaty, but stylish)
- Street performance (inc. busking)
    - Performance space marked out with tape, clothing, collection baskets/containers
    - Bluetooth speaker
    - Film each other with phone cameras, use of personal mini tripods
    - Passing crowd/audience
    - Clothing plain/training clothes (why? Street surface/concrete??)

Stages of Performance

- Training
- Audition
- Research & Development (e.g. back to the lab, open art surgery, and identity)
- Rehearsal
- 'Final' performance (e.g. live, mediatised, or live performance that is filmed)

Technologies and Media

- Tech/Cameras/equipment
    - Smart phones
    - Go-Pro
    - DSLR camera
    - Tripods/ large and small
    - Hand-held gimbals and camera stabilisers
    - Selfie sticks
    - Bluetooth Speakers (replacement for ghetto blasters?)
    - Computers/laptops/iPads/editing software
    - DJ/sound equipment (e.g. decks, mixers, DJ software- e.g. Virtual DJ, songs-USB/cd/record)

    - Theatre lighting/ personal ring lights
    - Projectors
- Media/Documents
    - Photographs
        - ✓ Event photos
        - ✓ Performance photos
        - ✓ Rehearsal photos
        - ✓ Promo photos
        - ✓ Selfies/personal/social media photos
    - Flyers
    - Posters
    - Leaflets
    - Business cards
    - Event programmes/booklets
    - Film/online video/content
        - ✓ Class vid
        - ✓ Audition vid
        - ✓ Performance/battle round(s) vid
        - ✓ Concept vid
        - ✓ Tik Tok /Instagram reels (2019/20+)
        - ✓ Dance tutorial vids
        - ✓ Show reels
        - ✓ Event roundup/recap/ trailers /promo-material
- Social Media Platforms
    - YouTube
        - ✓ Video sharing
        - ✓ Community building, e.g. subscribers
        - ✓ Monetising videos/content
    - Instagram
        - ✓ Live casting
        - ✓ Curated content
        - ✓ Self-promotion
        - ✓ Monetising videos/content

- Networking

- Tik Tok
    - Trends/challenges (taking over '*real'*/professional/trained dance?)
- Facebook
    - Announcements
    - Advertising events
    - Sharing opportunities (professional and competitions)
    - Networking (among older practitioners?)
    - Film/image sharing