

ALL STYLES ALL STARS: JAZZ FUNK BURN¹

Jared Jonathan LUNA

Choreomundus – International Master in Dance Knowledge, Practice and Heritage
1101, Quezon City, B101, Hardin, Bougainvillea, Philippines
E-mail: luna.jaredjonathan@gmail.com

Abstract: As a cultural movement with a global reach, hip-hop and its assimilation outside America draws discourse from globalised perspectives. At the same time, African-American vernacular dances such as breaking, krumping, locking, vogue among others, often classified under hip-hop or street dance, have received scholarly attention in the past few years. This project is concerned with how hip-hop and street dance freestyle improvisations are shaped and localized in a post-American-colonial setting. Based on a two-month fieldwork in Manila, Philippines, this research analyzes the All Styles Battle as a convergence of various assimilated movement systems, and local dance practice. The methods implemented in gathering data include formal and informal interviews, and participant observation. This paper draws out evidences of the recurring negotiations between practicing pure *versus* hybridized versions of hip-hop and street dance genres with the help of movement analysis. By incorporating elements such as ‘Burns’, dancers in Manila are able to adapt modified versions of street dance genres to activities such as battling in street dance. As such, this research also touches on pertinent issues within hip-hop discourse as it aims for a deeper understanding of cultural production, assimilation, authenticity and intangible cultural heritage.

Key words: hip-hop dance, street dance, popular culture, dance battle, competition

INTRODUCTION

At the third floor of a building at an executive private village in Quezon City, Metro Manila, a girl donned in a pair of blue loose trousers and a white top taps her feet on the floor; open–close–open–close. The people around her cheer while she makes a half turn to face a man, who carefully watches her dance. As she steps forward, she whips her arms, flips her hair and sways her body while being guided by the music of a famous pop star, that was blasting on the speakers; ‘what you are... what you are... baby’. Seven persons,

¹ This paper is a shorter version of a larger research project ‘All Styles All Stars’. Specific sections of this paper were taken from different chapters of the said Research Project.

who were seated on chairs right across the dj attentively watch as the girl continues filling the circle with her energy and presence. Until at one point, she looks at the man who was watching her. He is in shock as the girl points at him with her left arm. She twirls her right arm, whips it forward then shakes her head and right hand mockingly as she stares out into space. ‘Womanizer oh... you’re my womanizer baby.’

The scene comes from a type of competition called an All Styles Battle. In this competition, a wide array of music is played – from funk to disco, 90s hip-hop, house music, Jamaican dancehall and even recent popular music. Moreover, an assortment of dance styles ranging from hip-hop to popping, locking, breaking, jazz and even those without clear inclination to dance genres radiate in the circle. As the music and the dancing are as varied as the other, one fact is clear and that it happens in the context of a dance battle which points to hip-hop dance and other street styles or African-American vernacular dance.

One of the aims of this paper is to analyze dance and performance in hip-hop dance and street dance in the Philippines, a former colony of the United States of America. The Philippines maintains a strong relationship with the US as economic, political and socio-cultural influences have entered the country through Manila. Understanding dance performance and movement in a post-colonial American setting may bring forth discussion about globalization and cultural diffusion.

While past researches about street dance and hip-hop dance in the Philippines favored linguistic evidences, analyzing movement in the performance may affirm a perceived conflict in the use of purist and hybrid/adapted forms of hip-hop dance. Investigating the All Styles battle is a starting point as according to Joseph Schloss, a scholar who studied the breaking culture in New York, the performance in a battle is a reflection of the interaction of the aesthetic expressions of a dance culture.² Jonathan David Jackson, who had written about African-American vernacular dance, adds that the daring characteristic of freestyling cultivates invention and evolution of new dance steps and forms.³ By examining the appropriation and localization of dance forms that permit new ways of dancing, through dance analysis, issues of conflict, authenticity, in different contexts such as competition, education, and stage performances may be addressed. This paper explores the All Styles battle as an intersecting point of appropriated dance forms and local dance practice. How does the All Styles battle reflect hip-hop dance and street dance freestyle in Manila? How does the street dance community in Manila define ‘All Styles’? Recognizing that hip-hop dance and street dance are foreign dance genres appropriated in Manila, how is the appropriation of the dances reflected in the context of this type of battle? What elements and characteristics of the performance reflect the levels of appropriation? Based on a two-month fieldwork in Manila, I will analyze one performance in a dance battle which will shed some light on these issues.

² SCHLOSS 2009.

³ JACKSON 2002.

A CHANGING DANCE LANDSCAPE: STREET DANCE IN MANILA

Despite the seemingly lacking scholarly attention towards street dance and hip-hop dance discourse, two research projects have taken account of the emergence and continuous development of the dance in the Philippines, particularly in Metro Manila. Jerome Dimalanta, founder of The Crew and the UP Street dance club as well as a former street dance professor in the University of the Philippines, puts forward that street dance is the result of appropriation and adaptation of hip-hop dance from the USA. In his text, he articulates that ‘Hip-hop dance lost its symbolic meaning when it was adapted and developed into street dance in the Philippines’⁴. As the changes in the form of the dance induced by the alteration of hip-hop dance from a social practice to entertainment on stage and other media documents, so the change in the form of the dance, mixtures of local terms and hip-hop dance lexicons reflect the conceptual reconstruction of street dance in the Philippines. In this case, street dance in the Philippines takes inspiration from hip-hop dance and other vernacular dances from America which is fused with Jazz and other styles of dance often taught and practiced as choreographed routines in dance studios; not in actual streets or block parties.

In a more recent study Lorenzo Perillo, after nine months of fieldwork in Manila, comes up with four ways to theorize street dance and hip-hop dance in the Philippines: ‘Genre’, ‘Mode’, ‘Domain’ and ‘Conflict’. Perhaps an overarching concept within Perillo’s theorizations is Michel Foucault’s conflict theory, which is a more abstract and salient means of theorization as it has less concrete forms of manifestations within the dancers and the community. One of the conflicts central in the Philippines and Metro Manila is the view about hip-hop and street dance where one end of the spectrum values street dance as a localized form while the other asserts the adherence to the hip-hop tradition, which originated in New York.⁵ This conflict touches upon what Perillo calls ‘Genre’. A reference to dance ‘styles’, it is a set of labels which dancers use to identify themselves with. At one point, genre refers to structured movement systems circumscribed with performance aesthetics that are rooted in history and cultural contexts, such as breaking, locking, krumping, voguing and house. At another, genre refers to localized and appropriated fusions of dance forms.

While the conflict in lexical use in street dance and hip-hop dance draws perspective from ‘Genre’, the transformation in hip-hop dance’s social context may be seen in ‘Mode’. It is a concept which seems to break the existing dichotomy of an underground and a commercial, so engrained in the discourse among hip-hop practitioners and scholars especially in the field of rap and music. Perillo discusses four modes: ‘Kompet’, ‘Klase’, ‘Raket’ and ‘Konsept’. This paper will focus on ‘Kompet’ as the competitive mode within which conflicts in ‘Genre’ manifest.

⁴ DIMALANTA 2006: 56.

⁵ Although varying opinions are shared about what constitutes hip-hop dance and street dance in Manila, in this paper, hip-hop dance will refer to street styles or dance genres with their own aesthetic, movement vocabulary, rooted in African-American contexts. Although some styles like krumping, waacking and vogue are not necessarily hip-hop, the use of hip-hop dance shall reflect the purist side of the dance community where these dances are used in contexts of dance battles. At the same time, street dance shall refer to adapted and modified genres inspired by hip-hop dance and street styles as discussed by DIMALANTA (2006) and PERILLO (2013) (as novel courses). These genres are often viewed as commercial or mainstream.

Table 1. This table shows the dichotomies and existing conflicts between the linguistic and socio-cultural adaptations in street dance and the emerging communities which favor hip-hop dances and similar genres

Areas of conflict	Street dance as an adaptation	Hip-hop dance
Language and vocabulary: Genre	Fusion of dance forms	Sub-communities/crews, that focus on specific genres
Language and vocabulary: Mode of performance	Choreography, staged	Freestyle, improvisation
Socio-cultural context: Competition	Dance competitions/contests	Dance battles
Socio-cultural context: Income generation	Commercial/industry	Underground
Socio-cultural context: Social function	Entertainment	Community building

KOMPET MODE

Kompet, a Filipino slang for competition, is the venue of criticism and evaluation of the situation of the dance community, by the dancers themselves. The conception of freestyle competitions, such as Roots, Dance to the Music and Freshest Soul, is a response to the observed lack of opportunities for individual dancers. Roots, in particular, was partly meant to introduce the knowledge of hip-hop dance, which comes from America. These competitions not only promote individual dancing but were also the pivotal points of shifting towards a freestyling dance community which focuses on authentic hip-hop dance knowledge.⁶

According to Marika Karlajaine, who had researched on Irish step dance, competitions are ‘activities that are directed towards a standard or a goal, according to which the individualized performance is compared and evaluated in relation to other chosen individuals’⁷. Dance battles, which in literature are often seen as fights⁸, hold a special characteristic between what MacPherson, Curtis and Loy⁹ would describe as direct combat and aesthetic competitions. Direct combat competitions take form in martial arts where the competitors engage in contact with each other. The aim in these competitions is to beat the opponent by inflicting pain through one’s actions, whereas aesthetic competitions are competitions where the performances of the parties are compared with each other based on defined standards.

In a dance battle, competing parties take turns performing. The party not performing watches and attempts to outdance his opponent during his turn. In the end, the winner is determined either by the members of the audience or by a set of judges. Joseph Schloss,

⁶ PERILLO 2013.

⁷ KARLAJAINÉ 2009: 86.

⁸ SCHLOSS 2009; FOGARTY 2009; ZANFAGNA 2009.

⁹ MACPHERSON – CURTIS – LOY 1989.

who had worked with b-boying in New York, notes that battles are personal and intimate events. These competitions are usually organized by the dancing community in order to resolve existing conflicts. He then brings up the dance contests which are purely aesthetic competitions organized by a third party. In dance contests, groups of dancers are given time to perform a choreographed routine, which will be evaluated by a set of qualified judges. The winner is determined through a set of criteria where scores are involved. Battles and Dance contests according to Schloss later on gave way to what he called the modern b-boy battle. In a modern b-boy battle, the entire competition consists of several dance battles with set number of rounds where competing parties are allotted a limited time to perform. Winners of the smaller dance battles compete against each other until the champion emerges.¹⁰

THE 'ALL' IN ALL STYLES

In hopes of defining the term All Styles and setting the parameters of what dance genres are included in it, dancers, dance teachers and battlers were asked about what they think defines the All Styles in the All Styles battle. Observations and my own knowledge as a practitioner aided in identifying these categories. Based on the information gathered, there were varied opinions of what dance genres belong in the 'All Styles'. These answers may be categorized into three kinds of genres. The first category is what most of the dancers called 'Street Styles'¹¹ or Street dance genres, dance genres which have specific aesthetics in the performance and which originated in specific cultural contexts in the African-American cultural history. Some dancers, however, mentioned that some dance genres, which have specific performance aesthetics but were not African-American in origin, may belong to All Styles. This included the Jamaican dancehall, ballet, jazz and contemporary dance. A number of dancers were more open to the categories such as dance labels without specific movement vocabularies and performance aesthetics but were based on a certain character or attitude. This third category was similar to what Lorenzo Perillo classified as 'novel courses' in dance studios in Manila. These 'genres' 'shared in their unique sometimes experimental combinations of movement vocabulary, projected affect, attitude and music'¹². This category included swag, jazz funk or femme, and LA style. These categories, often marketed in dance studios and seen on TV, are often labeled as commercial dancing whilst battling and solo improvisations in specific dance genres are considered underground.

¹⁰ SCHLOSS 2009.

¹¹ It shall be noted that at this point, there still are varying opinions of which dances are hip-hop and which are street styles. Genres which belong in this category were identified as hip-hop old school and new school, breaking or b-boying, locking, popping, krumping, waacking and voguing.

¹² PERILLO 2013: 80.

JAZZ FUNK NARRATIVE

The girl at the beginning of this paper is Chloe Chotrani. She is an upcoming dancer in the freestyle community in Manila. She was once a member of a team that represented the Philippines in the World Hip-hop Dance Championships. What makes Chloe interesting is her style of dance. Although she does practice hip-hop and dancehall, she also associates herself with jazz funk, which is considered as a style of choreographed movement sequence which projects a feminine character, often incorporating elements of jazz dance. Some of the choices for jazz funk choreography usually include songs by pop stars such as Britney Spears, Lady Gaga, and Rihanna, among others.

Chloe describes that she has such a very distinct style and characteristic to dancing that even though she performs hip-hop, dancehall or jazz funk, she says ‘they’re all very similar... yeah coz, I give off a very feminine energy and everyone knows that. So even if I do hip-hop, jazz funk or dancehall, it’s still that feminine energy.’ (Chloe interview 2013) In addition, Chloe views the All Styles battle as the personal expression of dance styles which a dancer pursues.

I think in the Philippines, all styles is really your personality. Like in terms of hip-hop or whatever you’re studying whether it’s locking, popping, jazz funk, whatever... yeah. How you take those styles, and how you interpret it, yeah. Basically your own flavor. For me that’s all styles.¹³

At one battle called PHiercest, Chloe competed against Christian, a waacker, for a spot in the top 8. The second round of their battle was a Britney Spears song entitled *Womanizer*. The text of this song was about the singer, Britney Spears loathing her lover for ‘womanizing’ or being sexually involved with other women outside of their relationship.

In Chloe’s performance, there did not seem to be any kind of specific dance genre which stood out. Rather, her dance seemed to be what she described to be as very feminine or close to what others would describe as jazz funk. There was an absence of a hip-hop groove which favors the down beat. Her dancing followed the regular beats of the track with little syncopation at the end of every other musical phrase. Most of her movements included hair whips resulting from a series of bending her torso to one direction and then quickly bringing it back up. She also touched the different parts of her body while her hand softly caressed her torso and her arms as if embracing and projecting her femininity.

The highlight of Chloe’s performance happened in the refrain of the song where the text read ‘Womanizer, woman womanizer, you’re a womanizer oh! Womanizer oh! You’re a womanizer baby...’. In this part of the song, Chloe began her dance phrase with her back facing Christian. She then made a half turn and immediately stretched out her left arm, pointing at Christian. She made two steps forward, as she flicked her left hand. She then twirled her right arm backwards and then swung it forward – her palms now facing Christian. After that, she turned her body ninety degrees clockwise as her left hand kept pointing towards Christian. As this happened, she rotated her palm which created the impression of shaking her hands as she shook her head.

¹³ Chloe interview 2013.

In this short segment Chloe was able to change the meaning of the text of the song and her performance. By pointing at Christian, she made her point that she wants him to look at her as she was about to say something. She solidified this by performing a backward twirl with her other hand, which people associate with waacking and in the context of this performance, Christian. She then threw her hand forward, abruptly cutting the motion of the twirl as if attacking her opponent and then shook her hand and her head as if mocking him. The direct references to Christian were validated by his reaction of shock and surprise – he also made a reference to Chloe and her hair in the following round as a kind of revenge. What happened was a semantic transformation of the song where initially, womanizing, an expression of masculinity through infidelity, was commented on by Britney Spears. In the context of the performance, Chloe made a comment about Christian where at one perspective, the movement phrase meant that Christian, a biologically male, cannot and will not be a woman like Chloe.

Although Chloe's performance did not seem to follow the vocabulary and performance of a specific genre, the way she transformed the meaning of the song follows an aesthetic in battling which attacks her opponent. As previously mentioned, battles resemble fights where the movements performed act as gestures directed as a form of non-contact physical attack. However, another kind of offense is through parody or word play, which Chloe demonstrated. Some dancers would refer to this as a burn which Schloss defines as 'dance moves that insulted or topped other dancers'¹⁴. The burn is usually a gesture or a series of actions, which has the purpose of attacking the persona of the opponent. Chloe was able to burn Christian with the help of creating complex associations between her movements, her opponent and his dance style and the text of the song.

INNOVATION OR RECONCILIATION WITH TRADITION?

Within the continuous development of street dance and hip-hop dance in Manila, a direction towards an authentic hip-hop begins to become recognized, especially through the dance battles which feature improvisation and more individualized performance. However, the conception of the all styles battle and the performances similar to Chloe's challenges the direction of the changing landscape of street dance performance. The dichotomy of authentic hip-hop dance which comes from America and street dance as a Filipino adaptation of hip-hop dances are at a blur.

Street dance or 'novel genres' of street dance such as jazz funk were taken from the studio and choreographed group dancing into forms of individual improvisations. The performance – from an entertainment and staged setting – appears on a more social and interpersonal context. The genre undergoes changes in structural composition, regulatedness of music and dance phrases and fixity of movement patterns while a modified movement vocabulary, one that is hip-hop-inspired and projects an effect is maintained. In Chloe's performance, jazz funk, a choreographed genre, was not only individualized, the inclusion of the burn – an interaction of text, movement, music, context and a collective

¹⁴ SCHLOSS 2009: 69.

knowledge about the practice of street dance and its practitioners allows her style of dance to be somewhat realigned with hip-hop dance. In addition, the use of burns in jazz funk and other novel genres may be viewed as a creative innovation which forgoes the fixed relationship between music and dance.

While the context of street dance returns to more interpersonal activities (battling as opposed to group dance contests), the superstructures which guide and inform these modes may have changed, where at times these super structures may matter more than the actual dancing. I will end with a quote from Jane Desmond stating that ‘If dance styles and performance practices are both symptomatic and constitutive of social relations, then tracing the history of the dance styles and their spread from one group or area to another, along with the changes that occur in this transmission, can help uncover shifting ideologies attached to bodily discourse’.¹⁵

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¹⁵ DESMOND 1993: 38.