A JOURNEY INTO THE CYPHER: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC THESIS ON THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE BREAKING SCENES' COLLECTIVE ACTION

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ABSTRACT

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Break dancing exists in most people’s minds as a dance craze from the 1980’s, but the phenomena is far from dead. How is it that a popular culture survived its perceived death and actually reconstituted itself in an attempt, although conflicted, to retain elements of its past and spread its art form globally? There is a distinct order that plays out in the way of performances by dancers. Like other elements of hip-hop culture, conflict is a prominent feature of these performances. What meaning do dancers assign these performances and the broader space of the “cypher” where these performances are carried out? What role does conflict play in the process of performing the scripts that dancers adhere to? I conducted an ethnographic project where I used participant observation, and both informal and structured interviews, to gather data about the contemporary breaking scene. The results demonstrate that the scene is rich with meaning where dancers are involved in a struggle to represent their idea of the art forms correct representation. While breakers and b-boys agree that break dancers are less valid and authentic in this representation there are strong views on either side as to which of the former is the more appropriate interpretation of the original incarnation of the scene that was found in the Bronx borough of New York in the late 1970’s.
Introduction

Break dancing lives in the collective memory of people as a fad from the early part of the 1980’s. Break dancing is consistently found in nostalgic programming such as VH1’s “I Love the 80’s” and referenced somewhere between parachute pants and Rubik’s cubes. In addition, there are Hollywood films that reference it, describing it as a fad that people choose to remember fondly, but usually with a comedic connotation. These films include such titles as “Kickin it Old School” and “Take Me Home Tonight.” The commercialization of this subcultural scene played a major role in its virtual demise; however, even though I will briefly describe how the scene was exploited, the commodification of the scene is not the focus of this study. What happened to that fad from the eighties? The short answer is the fad went underground and survived, maintaining a scene centered on the dance and its members drive to preserve it in a more historically accurate manner.

In some aspects break dancing remained a fad of the 1980’s, specifically through the media’s misconceptions about its music, fashion, dance and style. It was successfully co-opted by the culture industry but members of its core found refuge across the Atlantic in Europe and then Asia. Once those core members returned from their cultural missionary work break dancing experienced a domestic resurgence that led to it garnering some contemporary commercial appeal, although nothing like what it experienced in the 1980’s. Before I address any substantive matters I will present an outline of the material presented in this paper.

Project Outline

The first part of this paper will illustrate the context for the current state of the breaking scene by describing the historical trajectory of the scene. In order to accomplish this task, it is necessary to describe the scene’s relation to hip-hop. I will review the literature on sub-cultural
studies, followed by a review of the literature on break dancing, but because there is such a limited amount of work I will review literature on comparable subcultures, most notably the punk subculture which has been examined a great deal by the Birmingham School. Whenever appropriate I will discuss the differences and similarities between the punk subculture and break dancing. The literature review will provide a spring board for presenting the theoretical framework that will be the basis of analysis of the data collected during the ethnographic process. These theoretical concepts shall effectively provide insight and explanations during the interpretation of the data, and demonstrate why I have chosen to refer to the phenomenon as the breaking scene rather than a subculture. Finally, I will describe the methods used for this ethnographic project and explain why certain methods were chosen as most appropriate to answer the questions I have raised.

After conducting a literature review of the breaking scene as well as conducting preliminary observations and participating in the breaking scene followed by brief informal interviews with participants I developed questions inductively that I sought to answer via this project. First, and foremost, what meaning does conflict have for participants and what role does conflict play in the scene? In addition, how does the setting affect dancers’ interpretation, not just of themselves but other dancers and audience members, and the performances they accomplish? What meaning do dancers assign these performances? How do dancers explain their interactions in these performances and what is gained, if anything, from these performances? Throughout the research process, questions arose that aided in elaborating on the aforementioned questions, which were devised through careful investigation of the breaking scene and relevant literature.
When dancers perform they do so in a circle constructed by other dancers. Within this arrangement dancers take turns entering the circle and, performing various steps, movements and maneuvers that have been established as part of the scene. Most dancers refer to this space as a cypher. The term originates from the word cipher that is used to refer to zero, the letter “O” or any other type of circle in the doctrine of “The Nation of Gods and Earths” (also known as the Five Percent nation) (Schloss 2009). Members of the Five Percent nation held ciphers throughout New York to spread their teachings. Since break dancing originated in New York many dancers encountered ciphers held by members of the Five Percent nation and the term was then adopted by break dancers and incorporated into their vernacular. This project is a journey inside the cypher to uncover the world that unfolds within that stage. In order to understand this world, it is important to first identify break dancing’s relation to hip-hop culture, the various forms of hip-hop culture and how this relation was developed.

Breaking’s Hip-Hop?

What hip-hop is can vary a great deal based on who the person is answering the question. Hip-hop is rappers exploiting women in rap music videos, parties on $20 million yachts and rappers claiming they are “cop-killers” or they would never “snitch” to the police. It is a “multi-billion dollar industry based on debauchery, disrespect and self-destruction” (Schloss 2009:3). However, hip-hop can also be accompanying a friend to shop for rare funk records, two youth engaged in a dance battle being recorded by more than twenty people via their digital cameras, iPods or smart phones, or dancers performing for a makeshift audience in front of the Highlands complex on Hollywood Blvd.

So why the large discrepancy when referencing hip-hop? Much of the confusion is merely semantic. Hip-hop refers to three different concepts, which although they do overlap, are
distinguishable from each other. These three concepts are: hip-hop culture, hip-hop attitude/generation, and hip-hop commodified. These forms of hip-hop are closely related, but they do not describe similar entities. Much of the confusion surrounding hip-hop results from observers confusing the three kinds of hip-hop, or the terms that represent the three concepts. One of the three types of hip-hop is not any more legitimate than the other two. Actually, the strength of hip-hop lies in the diversity of its concepts and practices and the fact that it encourages criticism, especially internal criticisms.

Hip-hop culture refers collectively to a “group of related art forms in different media (visual, sound, movement) that were practiced in Afro-Caribbean, African American, and Latino neighborhoods in New York City in the 1970’s” (Schloss 2009:4). This term also refers to the events where these forms were practiced and the people who practiced these forms. In addition, the term refers to contemporary activities where members interpret the sub-cultural forms of the antecedents and seek to maintain those traditions. The specific art forms that are related in hip-hop culture are graffiti (visual), DJing, emceeing (sound) and break dancing (movement). These terms, the forms historical development and their relation to each of the other elements shall be further explained in the hip-hop history section below.

The most important feature of hip-hop culture is that it is unmediated. In other words, most of the practices associated with it are shared and passed on through face-to-face interactions. Graffiti and break dancing are not well suited for the mass media, not because they lack appeal, but because they are advertisements without a product (Schloss 2009). However, generally graffiti is represented to mainstream audiences through film and photo. In its original state, graffiti art is temporary and only local. In other words, to gather a first person perspective of the art I would need to travel to the wall or subway train where the art was created. Graffiti art
is distributed widely through other means, yet for adherents of the concept of hip-hop culture experiencing graffiti through film and photography should only serve to supplement a first-hand experience, not replace it. This reality is reflected in the term used to describe this form of hip-hop; hip-hop culture for members of this segment implies an experience that is lived rather than bought and sold. Persons that adhere to this concept of hip-hop understand that hip-hop in general has been co-opted by the culture industry and believe there are members of society that believe they can purchase hip-hop.

The second concept, hip-hop generation is increasingly “used as a kind of loose demographic designation for contemporary African American youth, regardless of whether or not they have any overt connection to rap music or other hip-hop arts” (Schloss 2009:5). In this sense, hip-hop is usually used to emphasize age and class over race when singling out young African Americans either to praise or criticize. The “hip-hop generation,” or having the “hip-hop attitude” has been blamed for the misbehavior of Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick as well as for the lack of discipline among contemporary professional football and basketball players (Schloss 2009). Bakari Kitwana (2002), who coined the term “hip-hop generation” and Jeff Chang write more positively of this hip-hop attitude as bringing together time and race, place, and polyculturalism. The hip-hop generation captures “the collective hopes and nightmares, ambitions and failures of those who would otherwise be described as “post-this” or “post-that” (Chang 2005:2). The hip-hop generation is a fragmented coalition of many fashions, music and consumer habits. It designates the mainstreaming of hip-hop culture and all the people that have come to agree with its media disseminated ideology. However, it too incorporates a critical interpretation of the hip-hop attitude itself. It is a melting pot of ideals that coincide with the increased reach that hip-hop music has attained in the current era.
The final iteration of hip-hop, hip-hop commodified refers to a “form of popular music that developed, or was developed, out of hip-hop culture. This hip-hop, also known as ‘rap music,’ resulted from the interaction between hip-hop culture and the pre-existing music industry” (Schloss 2009:5). This hip-hop features elements of both sensibilities, however in contrast to hip-hop culture, this brand of hip-hop is deeply intertwined with the mass media and its commercial needs because this type of hip-hop does have commodity: rap records, CD’s, MP3’s, ringtones. This form of hip-hop is what young consumers in mainstream America and the global marketplace identify as hip-hop. And although the concept of hip-hop as popular music is commonplace now, hip-hop existed as a culture and performance context from 1974 to 1979, and for many of hip-hop’s early adherents, it was impossible to think of hip-hop as a product. “I did not think that it was conceivable that there would be such a thing as a hip-hop record,” Chuck D of Public Enemy told writer Jeff Chang, “I could not see it … I’m like, record? Fuck, how you gon’ put hip-hop onto a record? Cause it was a whole gig, you know? How you gon’ put three hours on a record?” (Chang 2005:130). This excerpt illustrates the gulf between hip-hop culture as lived experience and rap music or hip-hop as product. Examination of any of the three forms of hip-hop has primarily been carried out through investigation of its material product, and not its experience or cultural form.

While many hip-hop scholars “acknowledge the significance of dance and physicality, very few actually address the body in any depth” (Schloss 2009:9). Both popular and scholarly writers have tended towards this distinction primarily by focusing on the product of hip-hop rather than the process of hip-hop. Why look at the process of hip-hop? Looking at the process of hip-hop rather than the product places culture at the center of analysis and this is the source where I will find the answers to the questions I have asked. The trend of focusing on the product
of hip-hop versus the process of hip-hop is due to hip-hop’s interaction with the popular music industry that resulted in a mass-produced physical product, the rap record, becoming the most widely known characteristic of hip-hop culture. However, this was not always the case. There was a time when all anyone knew about hip-hop was not found on a record but found in the streets, in a tiny seven-mile circle in the Bronx borough of New York City.
Hip-Hop History

“It’s Just Begun”

It has become a myth, a creation myth, that night at the end of the summer in 1973 when DJ Kool Herc made his name at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue two miles north of Yankee Stadium. Clive Campbell first began by DJing during intermissions of the rhythm and blues band his father sponsored. At the same time, youth everywhere were customizing their names and scrawling them across the naked city surfaces. The writers were composing advertisements of themselves to be recognized for their originality, bravado and style. Clive, like many other youth, followed suit and became CLYDE AS KOOL. Fusing this moniker with the playful Hercules he earned while running track and lifting weights he became Kool Herc, the father of hip-hop (Israel 2002, Chang 2004). Herc wanted to distinguish himself from other DJ’s by translating the Kingstonian vibe of sound system DJ’s by incorporating microphones in order to perform shout-outs and little rhymes, eventually developing his own style and creating a larger-than-life persona.

The “Break”

At his early parties, Herc carefully studied the dancers while he waited for the record to finish playing and found that people were waiting for certain parts of the record. Dancers really got wild during a

“song’s short instrumental break, when the band would drop out and the rhythm section would get elemental. Forget melody, chorus, songs – it was all about the groove, building it, keeping it going. Like a string theorist, Herc zeroed in on the fundamental vibrating loop at the heart of the record, the break” (Chang 2004:79).

In the Bronx, all the dancers wanted were the breaks. Because of this, Herc began searching for songs by the sound of their break, records that he would make into his and hip-hop’s signature tunes. These classic breaks that became the foundation for the musical canon of the breaking
scene included songs that can still be heard today: Apache by the Incredible Bongo Band, Scorpio by Dennis Coffey, The Mexican by Babe Ruth and an array of songs from the influential James Brown.

The dancers that came to Herc’s parties and “rocked” those breaks were known as breakers or break boys, the term shortened to b-boys. However, like other aspects of hip-hop, this origin story is not universal and contains points of conflict. Conflict is very prominent in hip-hop culture, and the origin of the b-boy is a certain point of contention. While the majority of the scene’s participants acknowledge this origin story, they also accept that it is contested and understand its inconsistencies. Other theories as to the origin of the term are that it referred to Bronx boys since the dance originated in the Bronx. Therefore, any person doing the dance was assumed to have been from the Bronx (this would have been the case before the dance had spread downtown to Manhattan and the other New York City boroughs). Herc himself has mentioned that it referred to a more introverted approach where it detailed each individuals “breaking point” (Israel 2002). Under this description, the dancer was moved by the music in such a way that it drove them towards this breaking point, making them rock to the beat.

*The Four Elements of Hip-Hop*

Kool Herc established the scene that would eventually become hip-hop culture. However Herc did not accomplish this on his own, and there were two other personalities that largely influenced this foundation, Grandmaster Flash and Afrika Bambaataa. Bambaataa has been recognized globally by the breaking scene as the most influential member of the trinity. Apart from recording the quintessential popping and breaking track “Planet Rock” (1982), Bambaataa is the founder of the Universal Zulu Nation, the first hip-hop institution. (Chang 2004:90)
through which he tries to raise consciousness by preaching the four elements of hip-hop: DJing, emceeing, b-booing, and graffiti writing.

For Bambaataaa, the historical and social context fused the four elements of hip-hop culture into a cohesive communal force. Richie “Crazy Legs” Colon, the leader of the Rock Steady Crew, the most widely known b-boy crew in the world, recalls this fusion of elements in the manner in which he was first introduced to hip-hop culture. Colon’s cousin Lenny Len had taken him to a schoolyard jam on Crotona Avenue and 180th Street near the heart of the “seven-mile circle.” The seven-mile circle was an area in the Bronx, a seven mile radius with its heart at Crotona Park that contained the mid 1970’s scene that would become hip-hop culture. At this schoolyard jam Colon “saw all these kids having fun, comparing the graf on the wall to their books, checking out the whole scene, and it was [his] first time watching the dance with the music being played, so it made more sense. [He] just immediately became a part of it” (Chang 2004:110). Colon had witnessed a jam, or community gathering, where the four elements of hip-hop culture as presented and preached by Afrika Bambaataa were present.

Nevertheless, the elements do exist apart from the whole, and many pioneers that were present during each elements development and advancement question how intertwined the elements actually were and continue to be. While there is a long background of graffiti being an entity unto itself, there was a moment and place where graffiti, b-booing, DJing, and emceeing came together the way Crazy Legs had experienced it, even if only within the seven-mile circle. This momentary junction would forever transform hip-hop culture and each of the four elements even if the synthesis of the elements would cease and survive only in the collective memory of its participants.
The Evolution of Style

By the mid 70’s Hispanics had began adopting the b-boy scene and helped preserve what was viewed by African Americans as a phase or fad. The Hispanics breathed new life into the dance and between 1975 and 1979 crews proliferated, including many crews that were mixed or dominantly Puerto Rican. This era produced the legendary iconic crews and dancers of the b-boy scenes foundation: the Zulu Kings (with Beaver and Robbie Rob), Salsoul (with Vinnie and Off), Starchild La Rock (with Trac-2), the Bronx Boys (with Batch), and the Crazy Commanders (with the infamous “man of a thousand moves” Spy) (Chang 2004, Israel 2002). This generation took breaking from mainly top-rocking to a combination of floor rocking and elaborate footwork, into freezes and spins. All the dancers strived to take their moves to the next level, and all over New York City it was happening. On the west side “Spy had unleashed new styles of flying footwork, propping his body with one hand to generate flurries of legs and feet …Robbie Rob answered with the chair freeze-suspending motion to balance his body upside down on a single elbow and toe point, twisting the rest of his body away to taunt his opponent” (Chang 2004:118). Each display of style was punctuated by a middle-finger attitude as each breaker attempted to demonstrate that their style was superior. Breaking, graffiti, DJing, and emceeing all followed their own track but they were a part of the same line, and by the end of the 1970’s hip-hop was faced with a myriad of possibilities. Would hip-hop decline, because they were and continue to be to this day, for the most part, youth movements and youth is a passing condition? The answer would come not from within the growing culture, but from external commercial interests.

Hip-Hop Meets Capital

By late 1979 rap music was making its way to other parts of New York City via live bootleg tapes of Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaataa and Flash and the Furious 5. Kids in these other
areas were building sound systems and holding rap battles and breaking circles, but in the Bronx hip-hop was a fad that was passing. The audiences “had moved on from Bronx sound-system battles and outdoor jams to the drinking-age uptown nightclubs, depriving b-boys and DJ’s of their competitive setting” (Chang 2004:128) The disco nightclub DJ’s in Harlem found success by adapting the Bronx style rap and mixing techniques, and around this same time independent record producers were scouting the Bronx and Harlem clubs trying to figure out if rap would be financially feasible. Sylvia Robinson was the first to answer that question, via her new imprint Sugar Hill Records, and the first commercially successful hip-hop record “Rapper’s Delight” by the Sugar Hill Gang. Since the group had no regular audience to please or local expectations to fulfill they were the perfect group to vault hip-hop into the realm of pop music. The record crossed over from New York’s insular hip-hop scene to Black radio, and charged up the American Top 40, but to Bronx heads the whole thing was a sham, they knew the rhymes were ghost written and the commodification of the culture was inauthentic. The end of 1979 witnessed the thorough transformation of emceeing and graffiti by capital and authority, but what of the dancers?

The Bronx pre-teens who could not wait to grow up so they could have their own block parties, battles and rock their own style found that by the time they were of age the scene had moved to the clubs. Two years after the Crotona Avenue jam where Crazy Legs had first experienced the four elements of hip-hop he was living in uptown Manhattan on 207th street, and felt he was being cheated of his chance to prove himself. Like a character in one of the Times Square kung-fu flicks he traveled through the city to find and challenge every remaining b-boy and recruited all of them. Rock Steady Crew “revived the dance, canonized old moves and invented bold new ones” (Chang 2004:139). This era of the breaking scene would set the
foundation for its contemporary counterparts. The moves, the style, the music would travel through time and arrive, relatively intact and severely advanced, around the globe some thirty years later.

Henry Chalfant and documentarian Tony Silver put together the classic hip-hop movie *Style Wars*. The film began as a short on b-boying but finances forced a focal shift to graffiti. *Style Wars* still stands as a landmark achievement for hip-hop film and is the seminal documentary of the graffiti and b-boying scenes. More importantly, now that they were no longer invisible these “kids” wanted more. Chalfant had by then put together his “Graffiti Rock” show, where the Rock Steady Crew staged a battle and graffiti was presented on canvas, which would be a prelude to what was to come: the Roxy.

After getting past the ropes, “clubbers stepped up into a long hallway that featured neon-colored graf murals and felt the tricky beats set their hearts to racing. They were stepping into another world” (Chang 2004:174). The DJ would be in the center of the floor on a podium, elevated to rock star status, with regulars Bam, Afrika Islam, Flash, Jazzy Jay and Grand Wizard Theodore. On both sides of the DJ projection screens displayed slides of b-boys, rappers and graffiti art as nearby the Rock Steady Crew held circles all night. The club was a who’s who of glamour (Basquiat, Haring, Madonna, B-52’s, Talking Heads, Bowie and Warhol), and by late 1982 every Friday night had become a required stop for visiting journalists. Roxy allowed people to experience hip-hop without having to go to the Bronx and fear being beat up or stuck up. And sure, plenty of “kids” were getting into places they normally would not have had a chance getting into, but some of the hip-hop heads began wondering what was really going on? Were they being paid fairly or being exploited?
In order to demonstrate how large hip-hop was, the four elements would tour England and France. While the tour started off rather roughly, by the time it reached Paris it had achieved a great deal of success and notoriety. However, when the stars returned to the Roxy the innocence of the moment was lost. After that, everyone had an angle and the stars were being constantly approached by white elites looking to make a film, do a series of shows, or write an article.

*Break Dancing*

After the unexpected success of 1983’s *Flashdance*, which featured Rock Steady Crew rocking to “It’s Just Begun” and body-doubling for Jennifer Beal’s climactic audition, Hollywood decided to cash in. Nineteen eighty-four and 1985 saw a slew of teen-targeted hip-hop exploitation films: *Breakin’, Beat Street, Body Rock, Fast Forward, Krush Groove, Delivery Boys, Turk 182, Rappin* and even *Breakin’ 2: Electric Boogaloo*. The films achieved commercial success, and although they were universally panned they kicked the “break dance” fad into high gear. The New York City Breakers performed at the Summer Olympics in 1984, peddled how-to-break books, and performed at the Lincoln Center Honors. Rock Steady signed a recording deal with Malcolm McLaren’s label Charisma, and commanded performance fees that started at $10,000. Hip-hop had been packaged into a one-size-fits-all fragmented mess. Breaking, DJing, graffiti and rapping were all de-contextualized to aid in the process of commodification.

After *Beat Street* every kid across the country wanted to break dance and authorities everywhere wanted to ban it, but the only thing that could stop the break dance craze was its marketing overkill. The uptown b-boys had set downtown on fire, but found that as quickly as they had peaked, it was all gone. The breakers were angry; after helping rappers build the star they were shooting off into to the clouds with, they were left for dead. After the shows and
money dried up, many b-boys lacking a long-term plan fell hard. Homelessness, drug dependence and a myriad of other troubles followed. Some like Crazy Legs and DOZE survived while others did not. Legs tells of the demise of his friend and fellow Rock Steady member Buck 4, who had accumulated a drug debt and was murdered execution style in his basement (Israel 2002).

Rap was the element which lent itself the most to commercialization. Songs got shorter, raps more concise and the structure resembled pop music more and more (Chang 2004). B-boying which had already died once in New York disappeared again, replaced by a succession of fad dances like the Reebok, Cabbage Patch and Running Man, each disappeared faster than the other leading to breaking itself being looked at as a fad. However, a third-generation of breakers maintained the art form as Rock Steady cells popped up all over the globe (Israel 2002). This global vacation would spawn a breaking resurgence in America that would bring a new generation of breakers who would engage in a treasure hunt of sorts, searching out any and all documentation of breaking hoping to fulfill that need for the real thing.

It was presumed that the dance had died, and would never return. More than ten years would pass before breaking would begin its resurgence in America. The previous paragraph details what were the last words that mainstream America heard about break dancing and the events and people that helped construct and develop the dance and subculture that is the focus of this project. As the above historical narrative of hip-hop culture demonstrates, members of the culture view themselves as participating in a popular culture through their own conscious engagement with its various forms. The term subculture has been applied in various ways to refer to events similar to hip-hop culture, and in the following section I will provide a brief overview of how academics have studied subcultures such as hip-hop.


**Literature Review**

*Subcultural Studies*

There is no agreed upon answer as to what constitutes a subculture, but what does exist is a debate about how scholars make sense of people. In this process of the social construction of a group, many scholars would agree that subcultures are groups where people have something in common that distinguish them from other members of the larger society (Thornton 1997a). The emerging field of cultural studies began in Birmingham England at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in 1964. The goal was to establish research that would combine literary and sociological approaches to develop new theoretical and methodological techniques focused on the study of popular culture (Hall 1980, 1992; Clarke 1991). The problematic of how to construct a non-reductionist analysis of class and culture was tackled empirically in a series of studies on youth subcultures, the mass media, the education system, crime, and the development of the British state. These wide-ranging studies were tied together by viewing culture as a site of struggle for domination (Clarke 1991). However, prior to the establishment of the CCCS, subcultures were being studied; they just were not being studied in the same manner or being referred to in similar terms.

The most common narrative about subcultures is one that casts them as counter to mainstream ideals, non-normative, non-conformist or to use a term applied by others to study subcultures: deviant. While there is some debate over the origins of subcultural theory, there is agreement in the field of cultural studies of the importance of the Chicago School of urban sociology. The Chicago School, which is where subcultural studies has its roots, was interested in exploring this extraordinary diversity in human behavior in large American cities.
Chicago School

The Chicago School refers to several generations of sociologists who shared certain concerns and perspectives about culture and society whom either taught or were trained at the University of Chicago. One of the more influential members of the Chicago School was Robert E. Park, who in his 1915[1984] essay on “The City” implored other researchers to observe and investigate human behavior in the urban environment. Park’s work is exemplary of the work done by other sociologists at the University of Chicago in the manner that they get their hands “dirty” and engage their subjects in an in-depth manner to better understand its participants and develop questions from their point of view.

Drawing from his research on members of gangs in the 1950’s Albert Cohen outlines a series of questions whose exploration is necessary to the development of a theory of subcultures. Cohen argues that “subcultures emerge when a number of actors with similar problems of social adjustment interact with one another and innovate new frames of reference” (Cohen 1955: 13). This idea of collective problem solving became one of the early cornerstones of subcultural theory and the distinction between insiders and deviants is echoed by Howard Becker in his book The Outsiders (1973). Becker combines the dynamics of status and self-esteem with one for deviant symbolic solutions. Becker’s intricate explanation of the symbolic interactions involved in the distinction between “hipness” and being a “square” is a model of subcultural analysis that illuminates many different kinds of music and youth cultures today.

Milton Gordon (1947) was the first scholar to reflect upon the hyphenated term subculture. Gordon states that one of the key improvements that the term sub-culture made over previous formulations of the concept is that it enabled scholars “to discern closed and relatively cohesive systems of social organization which had formerly been analyzed separately with
sociological tools like ‘class’ or ‘ethnic group’” (Thornton 1997b:14). Instead of dividing the population along a single demographic line of inquiry, which at times seemed arbitrary, the concept of subculture allowed for a more holistic integrated appreciation of a “world within a world.” Expanding on the idea of a “world within a world,” John Irwin explores the changing meanings and uses of the term subculture in the context of a more pluralistic and relativistic America. Irwin examines how the term has come to refer to lifestyles, action systems, and social worlds that are not fixed to any specific social group. It is my belief that Irwin’s concept of “scene” presents the most appropriate description of the breaking phenomenon. In addition, the implications of the notion of scene also dovetail into the reasons for using the specified theoretical framework. I will return to Irwin’s concept of scene and present the concept in greater detail.

Jock Young’s (1971) work may be viewed as a bridge between the Chicago School and Birmingham School tradition by embracing a critical Marxist perspective while still maintaining a sliver of the democratic politics of the Chicago School. In The Drugtakers Young integrates Herbert Marcuse’s synthesis of Marx, Weber and Freud, along with Chicago School concerns described above, that enables a dramatic re-thinking of subcultural theory by integrating the idea of capitalism rather than just class into the model. Young characterizes his subcultures as “groups that exist beyond the ethos of productivity, contrasting formal work values like deferred gratification and conformity to bureaucratic rules with subterranean values like short term hedonism and disdain for work” (Thornton 1997b:15). The inclusion of an individual’s position in relation to the means of production as their stated class position and the dynamics of this relation are examined in various degrees by members of the Birmingham School.
The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) was established at Birmingham University in 1964 at a time when researchers there shifted their focus to the study of youth subcultures. This focus on youth, when taking the Chicago School’s focus on a wide range of “deviant” behaviors, narrowed the range of subcultural activity that was to be examined. The Birmingham School was interested with the relations between ideology and form, especially the spectacular forms adopted by subcultures. The Birmingham School’s primary aim was to locate subcultures in relation to working class culture, the “dominant” culture and mass culture (Gelder 1997a). Youth embodied the instability of the category of “class;” as such, youth was emphasized as a “transitional moment, a somewhat fragile point of mediation between the class located identity of the ‘parent culture’ and the increasingly attractive commercialized world of mass culture” (Gelder 1997a:84). In essence, youth is a tension between the old guard and the expressive new cultural forms. Youth is seen as symptomatic of the central contradictions of the time and a person’s identity is created and maintained through the meanings one ascribes to the “raw materials” of existence. Comparable to the various items of popular culture chosen by Barthes in *Mythologies* (1972) youth subcultures could be read as a sort of sign; signs easily understood by researchers at the CCCS. Much of the work carried out at the CCCS is taken as foundational in the larger discipline of Cultural Studies (Gelder and Thornton 1997). The Birmingham school looked at the emerging youth cultures in their new forms and framed them within the broader structures of class, mass culture, gender and ethnicity.

In “Subcultural Conflict and Working-Class Community” (1972) Phil Cohen sets the agenda for the CCCS by arguing that youth subcultures are symptomatic of class-in-decline. When the parent culture of a community is no longer cohesive, youth responds by becoming
subcultural. When referring to youth, the Birmingham School chooses to always focus on working-class youth. Youth subculture then serves as a source of expression and a source for the resolution of the crisis of class. Cohen argues that “subcultural youth exists in an ‘imaginary’ or ‘symbolic’ relationship to class,” where an individual is no longer identifiable by their class, even as that class identity is being reacquired through contested style (Gelder 1997a:85). The reacquisition of class identity is translated into subcultural territory which replaces a sense of working-class community that has been lost. Youth may acquire space for themselves, but members of the CCCS argue that youth subcultures play a conservative role in that they relinquish much of their political power because the subcultural terrain is mostly found in the world of leisure which is far removed, or so proponents of the Birmingham School argue, from the realm of the political economy.

The publication of *Resistance Through Rituals* (Hall and Jefferson (eds) 1976) saw members of the Birmingham School advocate for the routine practices of subcultural groups as a culture of resistance grounded in class relations. Subcultural dress codes, drug use and other activities were symbolic responses to structural conditions such as unemployment, consumerism and alienation. Subcultural resistance imbues its participants with a creative type of agency, but one that ultimately lacks political power. This argument is best illustrated in the discussion on punks in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) where Hebdige describes the way that punks made use of the obscene, fetishistic, and tasteless; the ways that punk dance styles were both minimalist and absurd; the ways that performers lacked formal musical training. Rather than being senseless or infantile symbols, these subcultural codes may be interpreted as intelligent, and creative moments that confronted and inverted mainstream norms and values, where the “sensibility which punk style embodied was essentially dislocated, ironic, and self-aware.
The Birmingham School maintained a consistent focus on working class youth, yet there were points of theoretical and methodological departure from some of its members. Angela McRobbie takes issue with members of the CCCS equating subcultures with boys and in “Girls in Subcultures” (1975) she looks at the subcultural spaces that are available for girls. Changing the focus from subcultures relation to mass culture framed along class lines, McRobbie examines this relation within a gender framework. While her alternative to the CCCS’s masculinist emphasis on ‘resistance’ and ‘struggle” does bring the criticism to light, her substantive topic seems to reinforce the focus of masculine perspectives from within subcultures.

Another member whom departed from the CCCS’s program for research was Paul Willis. Willis, unlike most other Birmingham School researchers, worked ethnographically. In Learning to Labour (1977) Willis explored the issue of class reproduction through a study of working class youths in school and argues that “the lads” rejected the official cultural codes and ideologies of their schools. The most obvious dimension of counter-school culture was personalized opposition to authority “expressed mainly as style. It is lived out in countless small ways which are special to the school institution, instantly recognized by teachers, and an almost ritualistic part of the daily fabric of life for the kids (1977: 11-12). This disruptive behavior was seen as valuable activity within the group, as well as sources of masculinity and prestige. Certain skills practiced at school, such as avoiding work and surveillance would translate to the workplace and have practical use, but these working class youths had at once prepared for and condemned themselves to working-class jobs.

Beyond the Birmingham School

For the most part, researchers at the CCCS agreed that a subculture emphasized style by transforming cultural objects borrowed from the parent culture and/or mass culture to engage in
symbolic modes of resistance. While class was the focal point for most researchers, gender, ethnicity and subcultural identification were also studied. Subsequent researchers expanded on this blueprint many times producing extensive critiques of the CCCS’s methodology and ontology. The main criticisms put forth by critics of the CCCS’s include their privileging of subcultural style as spectacular, their one dimensional view of resistance and their over-emphasis on semiotics. Their semiotic methodology did not allow researchers (excluding Willis) to engage empirically with the everyday social world of the subcultures. Because of this they tend to essentialize the subcultural experience and depict subcultures as cohesive entities while ignoring internal conflict, stratification and points of departure.

Gary Clarke (1981) criticizes Hebdige’s division of subculture from the general public and the way in which he identifies the former as possessing style while the latter being deficient of style. By emphasizing the transformation and re-contextualization of cultural objects within subcultures they omit the possibility of the parent culture or mass culture carrying out a similar bricolage of objects. While Hebdige viewed subcultures as authentic and defenseless against the forces of the culture industry Clark argued that this division between subcultures and mass culture was not as black and white as Hebdige made it out to be.

A similar analytic position was taken up by the CCCS when assuming that subcultures were spatially stagnant and short lived. This view was challenged by Stratton, who looked at surfies and bikers as subcultures that are longer-lasting, self-contained and self-generating (Gelder 1997b). These subcultures are less constrained by location and class and cannot be conceived as resistant because they engage in consumer activity, even if in an alternative way. These subcultures have already been commodified and as such are already engaged in a relation
with the dominant culture. However, the subculture will never be fully incorporated because the mass culture is dependent on it as a source of creativity.

The authors above all complicate the succinctly defined notion of subculture put forth by the Birmingham School. The commercialization of a subcultures style may say more about the subcultures interests in promoting its unique identity and less about the nature of the culture industry which is viewed as inherently exploitative. The author which departs the most from the CCCS’s paradigm and embodies the characteristic above is Sarah Thornton. In her Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital (1996) she replaces the CCCS’s politicization of youth with “an account of the micro politics of the cluster of overlapping subcultures that British youth call ‘club cultures’” (Thornton 1996:148). Thornton posits that subcultures work with media and are not in opposition to them, yet the goal is to have disapproval because approval is the kiss of death for a subculture. Thornton argues that rather than being a homogenous group of youth who recognize their subculture based upon similarities with each other; clubbers more readily identify those who are not part of the club culture than those who are. For this reason, it may be beneficial to compare hip-hop, or more specifically breaking to a similar subculture: the punk subculture. Both the breaking scene and the punk subculture are brought together via micro media, where people come together on the basis of shared taste in music and seek the media’s disapproval, yet the breaking scene and punk subculture also have some subtle points of departure.

Breaking Versus Punk

There is only a very limited amount of literature on the breaking scene and that which does exist describes the scene at the pinnacle of its mainstream exposure [see Garofalo (1985), Sherman (1984) and Meglin (2000)]. These works focused primarily on documenting the
breaking scene and their discussion was largely descriptive rather than examining the scene theoretically or analytically. The following findings are meant to present similarities and points of departure between breaking and the punk subculture. I will present key works, which run parallel between the punk subculture and breaking scene, developed recently on the concept of age, the presence of media in scenes, and gender. Lastly, I will present two topics where the phenomena appear to deviate: the concept of race within the punk subculture and role of music and dance.

Maturing

As first focused upon by the Birmingham School, subcultures were constructed as being primarily youth oriented. The assumption is that once members “outgrow” the subculture new members will replace them or the scene will die. Bennet (2006) describes how older punks tend not to go out as often as younger punks, and though their commitment weakens slightly the punk identity is still well ingrained in their make-up. More than just having to decide whether they continue to participate, transitioning youth “pass through a phase of deep reflection and discouragement about the scene. Yet not all members drop out entirely; indeed most find new expression for their subcultural values as their involvement wanes” (Haenfler 2006:167). The discouragement faced originates in the members realization that the scene has changed a great deal from the time they were first introduced and these feelings must be reconciled by the individual as they readjust to a new role or gradually remove themselves from the scene.

Fonarow (1995) discusses how at punk concerts the younger participants tend to situate themselves closer to the stage and older participants are found near the periphery, and found that “as individuals age, they move back through space until they are aged out all together” (1995:369). Yes, punks get older, interests wane, bodies’ age but punks can enter into other
avenues of the subculture and still be very active especially in influencing newer, younger punks. James Dennis Carroll was a new wave/punk musician whose 1978 autobiography *The Basketball Diaries* was turned into the eponymous 1995 film. Eric Reed Boucher (Jello Biafra) was the lead singer/songwriter of the Dead Kennedy’s and founded the influential record label Alternative Tentacles and ran for the Green Party’s 2000 presidential nomination. Ian MacKaye the founder of Minor Threat and Fugazi, two of the more influential bands of the hardcore and post-hardcore punk scenes went on to co-found and own Dischord Records. The transition that punks experience as they get older exemplifies the importance of the punk ideology. Punks funnel the subcultures ideology and express it through alternative means.

*Media*

Thornton compares subcultures with the art world and posits that both are anti-mass culture, but the art world fear a “trickle down” effect, while subcultures see their problem in a popularization by “gushing up” to the mainstream (Thornton 1996:5). As stated above, Thornton believes that subcultures work with media and the relationship between a subculture and media is much more complex than just blatant refusal. Yet subcultures strive to achieve disapproval because approval signals the end of the subculture as its members know it. The metaphorical death and life of a subculture is discussed in the work of Dylan Clark.

Clark (2003) argues that rather than dying punk faked its own death. He continues by stating that the death of subculture was essential in producing the rebirth of punk. Clark reasons that punk went underground as a reaction to the co-optation of punk by the mainstream media: “Commercial culture deprives subcultures of a voice when it succeeds in linking subcultural style to its own products, when it nostalgizes and trivializes historical subcultures, and when it reduces a subculture to just another consumer preference” (Clark 2003:231). This type of covert
approach allows punks to exist despite the widespread exploitation of any authentic expression by the culture industry, which has presented various inaccurate descriptions of punk, perhaps none larger than the misrepresentation of women.

*Gender Exclusion*

In much of the literature on punk, gender is absent and Reddington (2004) addresses the female origins of punk that had been omitted from writings on the history of punk. Elaborating on the idea of resistance, LeBlanc (1999) outlines how women’s participation is doubly resistant because they not only challenge the social establishment, as male punks do, but they also challenge gender normative ideals within the subculture and society at large. This unique rebellion from the standpoint of women is similar to the varying experiences a white punk may have versus a punk from an ethnic minority group in that ethnic minorities are also rebelling against racial prejudices.

*Race/Ethnicity*

Discussing the Los Angeles punk scene (1977-1983), Traber (2001) points out that the majority of punks are white and these “kids” renounce their white privilege in search of something more “authentic.” Traber builds on the concept of the appropriation of the “Other” (Hebdige 1979) and how by doing this punks identify with minority groups that are oppressed. They discard their white majority privileged status and all that is attached to it (i.e. the American dream). This is problematic because white punks have the ability, unlike the oppressed groups they are emulating, to return to their cozy middle class lifestyle. Ironically by carrying out this appropriation punks are reinforcing the dominant culture they seek to contest.
Music & Dance

According to Straw (1991) a musical scene is that cultural space where a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation. The sense of purpose within a musical scene rests on two terms: contemporary musical practices and the musical heritage that renders this contemporary music activity as appropriate to a given context. Here Straw clearly emphasizes the notion of time and place in music scenes. Place and space is also focused on when describing the structural dynamics of participant organization at indie gigs (Fonarow 1995). When attending indie gigs, participants place themselves throughout the venue arranged in relation to the stage, which is where the band will perform and the source of the music is found. The band or musical act is the focus of the event and the various forms of interaction are carried out in response to the music. The area closest to the stage is where the “pit” is found. The pit is an area where people dance vigorously and jump and push into one another forcefully. This type of dancing is called “moshing” and for members who frequent this area it is the truest form of the punk subculture because they feel if you are not interacting in this way with the music then a person might as well stay home and listen to the music with their headphones (Fonarow 1995). In addition, these same participants take a great deal of pride in the assortment of scrapes and bruises they have incurred, wearing them as symbols of authentic participation. They refer to these injuries as battle scars and the tales of how they were obtained are glowingly recounted.

Members of the breaking scene detail the acquisition of battle scars in similar fashion, wearing them as badges of honor in full display as proof of the time and effort they have put in dancing. Both the punk and breaking subcultures can be viewed as spaces where similar interactions are played out by participants carrying out a type of performance. Therefore, a
theoretical perspective that uses a theatrical based metaphor is well suited to better explain the interaction order that occurs within these scenes.
Theoretical Framework

In the following section I will discuss Goffman’s dramaturgical metaphor, Irwin’s concept of scene and how it helps better explain breaking and finally, Coser’s work on the positive functions of social conflict. From *The Presentation of Self* (Goffman 1959) there are dramaturgical themes we may use for the analysis of everyday social interaction: the performance and impression management. General features found in subcultural scenes include performances, which consist of elements designed to enhance the audiences’ sense of “realness.” Details are essential for the dramatic realization of a performance. However, as will be demonstrated in the results and discussion section later in the paper, authentic performances are contested via the dissemination of various scripts, often times conflicting scripts for performances.

Prior to engaging in impression management there is a stage of examination and deliberation because behavior is not automatic but constructed on the basis of meaning attributed to the definition of the situation (Thomas 1923:41). However, people do not create definitions rather they select among preexisting definitions when determining the meaning of an event or encounter. Information about the setting and other performers helps define the situation and lets others know what to expect and know how best to act in order to call forth a desired response from him/her. It is in the best interest of every performer to control the conduct of others, especially their responses, which is achieved by influencing the definition of the situation and giving off the kind of impression that will lead others to act voluntarily in accordance with the script they are performing (Goffman 1959).

Performances occur as actors attempt to convey a particular impression of both the actor and the social scene. Fronts and other props are embedded in our social worlds and social life is
predicated on the routines that actors select when deemed appropriate. These routines can be referred to as scripts. Actors make props come to life with their presentations. Everyone is always and everywhere playing a role (mostly consciously). This mask becomes our truer self because it is the self we would like to be. A performance is the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers. Goffman recognized differences and limitations and that the “life is like a theater” metaphor should not be stretched too far. Messinger (1962) echoed the point that life is not like a theater but the dramaturgic model is useful as an analytic tool because there is seldom a concrete model present. However, in some life contexts it approaches concreteness.

Irwin argues that interaction in contemporary society is changing and that people today are more often “on.” There has been a significant shift in the phenomenon to which subculture refers (Irwin 1970, 1977). Irwin argues that a better conceptualization of the phenomenon is presented by Shibutani (1955) who argues for subculture as a social world not tied to any particular collectivity or territory. Instead people can simultaneously be a part of multiple social worlds. Subculture consists of these social worlds and a shared perspective that is not attached firmly to any definitive group or segment (Irwin adapts this treatment for his concept of scene). These social worlds are explicit categories, not just to the members of the subculture or social scientists studying them, but also in the minds of the broader population so that mainstream audiences recognize the distinction.

Irwin (1977) attempted to address the previous shortcomings by incorporating the perspective of members of the subculture foremost by using their terminology. Irwin found that there were several folk metaphors that referred to styles of life as things; the most prominent and
current of these being “scenes.” Irwin argued that these styles of life were well known among insiders and outsiders and described it succinctly as something that is occurring at a particular time and place, although it may also be a more permanent lifestyle.

The scene itself provides the scripts for performances. Scripts may conflict with each other depending on the source of the script and its objective. Whether it is occurring at a specific place or a more permanent iteration these variations of scene share three connotations: the lifestyle is an explicit and shared category (by a large segment) and must be so because the term itself connotes popularity, there must be various lifestyles available since there are more than one scene, and commitment to any scene is potentially tentative and variable.

Coser (1956) felt that there was an absence of looking at the positive aspects of social conflict and at the time, the dominant sociological framework of Parsons viewed conflict as having “primarily disruptive, dissociating and dysfunctional consequences and considered conflict primarily a ‘disease’” (1956:21). In essence, society was viewed as a well oiled machine with no place for friction or tension. Coser agreed that conflict is inherent in society; however he argued that some forms of conflict serve positive functions. Coser developed several propositions to explain these positive functions: conflict with other groups establishes and reaffirms group identity and boundaries; conflict with another group serves to motivate group members towards a common goal; conflict is able to bring together unrelated persons or groups. Rather than take his attempt at providing a grand theory I find the work useful in providing descriptions that explain the positive functions of social conflict within the breaking scene.

Concepts

The following are the key concepts that further elaborate the core of the theoretical framework above and aid in the analysis of my data that was developed out of the process of
coding the data and constructing memos. Concepts from Goffman’s dramaturgical framework include: front stage and backstage, role distance, and script (dealing with elements of legitimacy and authenticity). Front stage is where one can find props, appropriate expressions, attitudes that allow the performer to present a desired self image. The front is the part of an individuals’ performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance. The back stage is where performers may knowingly contradict front stage performances that had been carefully crafted. The backstage is a guarded passageway so that the public performance cannot be shattered by an inadvertent look behind the curtain (Goffman 1959:114). For the most part, backstage will refer to the process that a dancer goes through before acting out a role, including, but not limited to deciding what wardrobe to incorporate and what moves to perform. Role distance is consciously performing a role or script at a subpar level in order for the actor to demonstrate that they are not particularly attached to this script, or find it illegitimate.

There is an expected coherence between the setting, appearance and manner of a performance (Goffman 1959). A situation is placed in abroad category that allows a performer to mobilize their past experiences and develop stereotypical thinking. The front becomes a “collective representation” and a fact in its own right, and when an actor takes on an established social role they find that a particular front has already been established for it (Goffman 1959:27). These established fronts are presented in the form of scripts or narratives that advocates for the performance of a certain front. The manner in which a person demonstrates that they are genuine members of the scene is demonstrated through legitimate performances. Legitimacy in the scene is acquired by the continued demonstration or adherence to a legitimate script. During the research process, three different scripts were prominent that I used to develop a classification of
dancers and their performances. These scripts are not taken for granted and are actually highly contested. Scripts provide information for the accomplishment of a particular front, including how to dress, what moves to adhere to, how to interpret the music, hot to battle etc.

I classified the three prominent scripts found within the scene as: break dancer, breaker and b-boy/b-girl. The former relates to a person who does not fully understand yet what it means to exist within the scene and successfully and authentically be a b-boy/b-girl. The latter is used to describe a dancer who embodies the values of the scene and its connection to the overarching culture of hip-hop. It appears as though the more a member gets fully immersed in the scene he/she progresses from one stage to the next. However, this progression should not be assumed to occur and of course, some members progress through quicker than others. The current front stage scene that a dancer participates in is associated with this progression and not all dancers are indoctrinated via the same script, meaning some dancers may be introduced by members that advocate for a specific script.

The above concepts are related to a dancers’ position within the scene. The older dancers I interviewed mentioned feeling isolated early on when they first “discovered” the scene. Not being members of the most authentic stage they discussed a journey they undertook looking for other dancers, stages and scenes. These results led me to inquire further into the historical trajectories of the dancer and the method by which they encountered and became a part of the scene. This process influenced the scripts they learned and they’re progression through the scene and I refer to this process as “quest” drawing a parallel to the quest that Crazy Legs undertook in reviving the scene. I will elaborate the above mentioned theories, concepts and propositions in further detail in the results section where I support them with evidence acquired via the method I implemented to gather data.
Methods

I focused on the meanings that dancers produce through their actions. The interpretive approach rests “upon the premise that human action takes place always in situation that confronts the actor and that the actor acts on the basis defining this situation that confronts him” (Blumer 1969:4). The social world is a meaningful world, where meaning is intersubjective and understood through interpretation. What makes human action distinctive is the “capacity of people not only to understand the world symbolically but also to understand themselves and others as symbolic and symbolic-using beings” (Rock 2001: 29). The interpretive paradigm asks sociologists to understand the meanings people give the world around them and be empathic in the process of interpretation. This method served best to answer my questions because I could not have understood what meaning conflict has for members of the scene without asking them.

I was reflexive in the manner that “investigator[s] seek ways of demonstrating to their audiences their historical and geographic situatedness, their personal investments in the research, various biases they bring to the work…and/or the ways in which they have avoided or suppressed certain points of view” (Gergen & Gergen 2005:1027). Unlike positivist frames that value objectivity, the reflexive approach places the researcher at the center of the research process, and acknowledges that the research process is not objective, that the researcher’s biography and social positions play as much a role as the objects of research. In order to understand the breaking scene, I had to get into the setting, immerse myself into the scene, and thickly describe the field, its many components and my experience. In addition, I entered the field with sensitizing concepts because the constantly changing nature of the field and my understanding of it required me to adapt and “attune” to what I am trying to understand.
By observing participants I was able to discern what things are meaningful and through interviews interpret why these things are meaningful to members. Johnson explains; “deep understandings are held by the real-life members of or participants in some everyday activity, event or place” (2002:106). Since I am not an everyday member of the breaking scene, I gained a deeper understanding of the meanings members’ give their actions and participation by interviewing them. In addition, in-depth interviewing helped me move “beyond the common sense explanation and understanding of cultural forms, activities or artifacts and aim to explore the contextual boundaries of experience to uncover that which is hidden from the ordinary view of outsiders and to penetrate more reflexive understandings of that experience” (Johnson 2002:106).

My observations took place in a public forum, over a period of several months (January 2009 to March 2010), where I attended numerous breaking events and competitions, including Freestyle Session, the largest, most prestigious breaking event in America. These events or competitions were in venues ranging from clubs (during the day), hotel ballrooms, and church gymnasiums. Since the events and competitions are open to the public, any person attending is basically there to either dance as a participant or observe. I also attended several local practice spots for dancers throughout the Southwest (Los Angeles, San Diego, Las Vegas, Central Coast) area. Lastly, I carried out observations where breaking circles spontaneously occur, usually at places that are known where b-boys/b-girls congregate (Funky Soul, Soul Sessions & Root Down in Hollywood). I conducted 10 in-depth, structured/formal interviews with members of the breaking scene. Since I wanted to get as comprehensive a picture of the scene as possible I made sure to observe and interview more than simply the dancers.
I interviewed promoters, DJ’s, dancers and observers. I acquired my ten respondents through snowball sampling methods, or purposeful sampling of breakers at breaking venues. In addition to the ten in-depth interviews I conducted, I also carried out thirty-four in-situation interviews that ranged anywhere from less than a minute to just under ten minutes. These were usually conducted after I approached an individual at an event or practice and asked them a brief question or two about what I was currently observing. Furthermore, in addition to observing, participating, and interviewing dancers, I conducted archival research, examining historical documents and video footage. I viewed more than fifty hours of footage taken at breaking events throughout the world. I believe a great deal in examining the historical trajectory of phenomena to better understand its contextual constraints, and sources of its script, which is why I chose to provide such an extensive historical sketch of the development of the scene. Through the triangulation of these methods I hope that I have interpreted and represented the scene as accurately as possible.

Extending on the notion of representation I have also included a “fictional narrative” in the presentation of the text. The narrative has been drafted from piecing together ethnographic notes with the hopes that reading something closer to a novel than a journal write-up will be a more accurate representation of the phenomenon being studied. As Richardson (2000) points out, despite the contemporary understanding that all writing is narrative writing, there is still a large difference that separates scientific writing from literary writing and that is the claim that one’s work is fiction versus non-fiction, whether the work is actually fiction or not. Rather than pushing the postmodern context of doubt to its extreme and stating that we can never know anything it is much more helpful to adopt the view that the postmodern position does allow us to know something about the world without knowing everything. Qualitative writers now have the
ability to “eschew the questionable meta-narrative of scientific objectivity and still have plenty to say as situated speakers” (Richardson 2000:961). It is essential that we understand ourselves reflexively as persons writing from particular positions at specific times.

Respondents

The following section will briefly describe the respondents with which I conducted in-depth interviews. I chose each respondent in an attempt to gain a wider more thorough understanding of the breaking scene and these respondents are presented here to allow the reader to gain an idea of the various participants and their roles. I feel that every participant’s “take” was invaluable to this study. For those few respondents who preferred, I identified them by their b-boy/b-girl moniker and other dancers were given pseudonyms.

Airdrawn is a Hispanic male in his early twenties who lives in Santa Barbara. He first encountered breaking in middle school and has been dancing for nine years. He has been a member of two crews and indoctrinated various dancers into the scene. He is a college student who still considers himself an active member of the scene although he’s never entered a large scale b-boy/b-girl competition.

Charles is an Asian male in his early thirties. He is a b-boy/b-girl jam promoter from San Diego who puts together jams and competitions. He used to dance more prominently during the early to mid 1990’s and now focuses on putting together events. Through his promotion he has established networks with some of the more influential promoters and dancers in the scene. He has also traveled to some of the largest and most prestigious international breaking events and competitions. In addition to promoting events, Charles is also interested in DJing and often “spins” music at the jams he promotes.
Orkid is a Hispanic female in her late teens who resides in the San Fernando Valley. She frequents many local practice spots and sessions and prefers to attend smaller jams versus larger events and competitions. She has been dancing for a little under three years and is a member of an all female crew who is closely affiliated with her brothers’ crew, and became involved in the scene through her brother and his friends and often practices with them and is tutored by them.

Cosmos is a Hispanic male in his late teens whom is the older brother of Orkid. He also resides in the San Fernando Valley but travels to Palmdale a great deal because some members of his crew reside and have practices there. He has been breaking for five years and is part of a crew named CAB (Counter Attack Breakers).

Marvin is a half Asian half white male in his late twenties who DJ’s and dances at breaking jams and events. He lives in Los Angeles and has been member of the breaking scene for more than ten years, and actually refers to himself as a member of the culture of hip-hop. This is the case because he is fully integrated into DJing and breaking, two of the elements of hip-hop culture.

Zack is an African American male in his early twenties who lives in Los Angeles and has been dancing on and off since he was nine years old. He considers himself an active member of the scene and has been involved for the past four years. He is not a part of a crew and prefers to practice alone and not attend any larger b-boy/b-girl jams or events. He picked up breaking when attending house parties with his older brother (incidentally his older brother does not break).

Fracas is an Asian male, twenty years old and an undergraduate student who lives in Las Vegas. He has been breaking a little over three years and practices with friends and crew mates at the UNLV student recreation center. He has entered various competitions in the area and
traveled as far away as San Francisco to attend jams. He practices a great deal, sometimes practicing as much as six days a week, three hours at a time.

Obni is a Hispanic male in his late twenties who lives in Los Angeles. He too first encountered breaking in middle school and has now been breaking (on and off according to him) coming on sixteen years. He considers himself a student of hip-hop culture, attempting to ingest as much knowledge about the scene and culture as possible. Having been involved in the scene for such a long time, he has experienced and seen a great deal of change.

Metronome is a Hispanic male in his late twenties who lives in the San Fernando Valley. He does not dance as much anymore but still considers himself very much a part of hip-hop culture, although somewhat less a part of the breaking scene. At one point he was into graffiti as well and still carries a certain appreciation for the art form.

Roland is a half white half Hispanic male in his mid-twenties who lives in Oxnard, Ca. He was born in Mexico and he and his family immigrated to the United States when he was fourteen. He picked up breaking after his family settled down in Houston, Texas. After living there for a few years his family moved to California and Roland continued dancing, now going on a little over six years.
Results

The first section of the results will be presented via a “fictional” narrative I have constructed based on stories gathered from my respondents, including those whom I did not conduct in-depth interviews with. The narrative will detail an individual’s “typical” initial encounter and introduction to the scene. I realize that this method extends into the postmodern methodology, however, rather than fragmenting each person’s history and providing a detailed quote to support those assertions; this method will allow the reader to more fully understand the quest my respondents undertook to begin their journey into the cipher.

The Historical Journey

I had seen break dancing growing up. My older cousin did it when I was really young; I wasn’t even in school then, it must’ve been like 1985. I remember it vaguely, but that was the first time I remember seeing it. The next time I saw it was in middle school. On Fridays during the lunch period the school would play music at the schools plaza. One day, while music was playing I noticed there was a circle of people to the side of the quad. I walked over and saw this black kid doing some moves on the grass. I knew he was break dancing, but beyond that I didn’t know exactly what I was seeing. Yet I was fascinated by the whole thing. I remember the song playing while they were break dancing was “Daisy Dukes” by Deuce/69 Boyz (1993). I would come to find later that for their song “Daisy Dukes” Deuce and the 69 Boyz heavily sampled “Looking for The Perfect Beat” by Afrika Bambaataa.

About a month later during recess I noticed some of the same people who had been dancing in that circle had gathered over by the gymnasium where the pole climbing apparatus was set up. There was a twenty foot by twenty foot rubber padded mat that covered the entire area and for the rest of the year this would be the space where the break dancers performed. Two
classmates that were fast becoming friends of mine ended up being the two best break dancers at our whole school. I was captivated by the moves and I thought they were the coolest things I had ever seen and I really wanted to learn how to do them. We were outsiders of sort, because it was just a small group of us in the school who were interested in the moves. That’s what it was all about; the moves. I mean for that first year I only saw people perform the moves to music once. Granted we were not allowed to have music devices on campus. Still, very few of us ever talked about the music.

It was about fame and status and most importantly individuality. Of course, everyone was doing the same moves, but each person did them a little different, and the kids who did them the best or most stylish stood out the most. I actually waited until the end of the school year before I even started learning the moves. To me it was this insistence on not following the crowd, or doing it because other people were doing it. However, I did want to be a part of something that only a few people were interested in. Most of the people at the school saw it as a “fad” but I always thought it was really unique and creative. That is what appealed to me the most, there was nothing like break dancing. Imagine being able to spin on your head, hand or back. So while I waited to try the moves I basically “scouted” the other people. Since it was my friends who were doing the moves, I could hang out with them and study their moves and the way they executed them. By the end of seventh grade I had learned a couple moves and was ready to showcase them. However, to my disbelief, everyone had moved on. Without an audience how could I perform? Yes, the dance was individualistic, me by myself inside of a circle, everyone watching me. Yet it was also collective because you did it for the crowd, for the way they made you feel in that circle.
After hip-hop’s exploitation in 1984-1985 the breaking scene was shattered and like Pompeii, waited to be uncovered under the ash and rubble. As Chang pointed out, the spit-shined commodity that Hollywood disseminated to the world left people craving the real thing. It was there, waiting to be uncovered, but in the meantime dancers everywhere consumed anything and everything they could find about breaking. They found “clues” along their quest to uncover a hidden treasure. These clues usually consisted of videos of breaking. According to Obni he too looked for clues: “I collected all the videos, Beat Street, Breakin & Electric Boogaloo. I mean the movies themselves were sorry as fuck, but we just got them for the moves and to be connected to the culture.” At the time, the films were about the only thing left that kids could look to. In addition, dancers scoured the streets and parties looking for other dancers.

In 1994 and 1995 there was a Los Angeles party scene that was developing. The parties were held at people homes, or sometimes at small warehouse style venues. An assortment of crews and gangs would frequent the parties. The parties also served as a stage for breakers to come and perform. Suddenly isolated dancers found a collective with shared interests. They had a place where they could come test their skills and gain fame by battling others. In addition, they could expand their repertoire of moves by interacting with other dancers.

Just like Crazy Legs did more than twenty years earlier, breakers in this scene set out to find other breakers. They searched for places to battle with and view other breakers. The original Bronx based scene had disappeared and been hidden, buried under metaphorical ash from its own presumed death. However, like Pompeii, the breaking scene was uncovered piece by piece. Every bit of evidence used to fill in the lost knowledge about the original Bronx scene. Sadly, like Pompeii some bits and pieces of the original Bronx scene would remain lost forever in the sands of time. Kids in Los Angeles set up their own parties in much the same way that the Bronx
kids had done decades earlier. DJ’s would assemble sound systems like their early counter parts in the Bronx and advertise them through handmade fliers handed out at school. The fliers advertised the amount of wattage the DJ system was pumping out. The playlist also resembled the Bronx scene as DJ’s were playing the electro hip-hop of Afrika Bambaataa, Nucleus, and Twilight-22. Those songs were for the breakers and people knew that as soon as “Planet Rock” came on a circle was bound to form somewhere. Gang presence and violence was an unfortunate similarity between the scenes, but there were also some differences. The advent of the internet has caused this issue to almost disappear. Now within hours you can view video footage of the latest breaking event. You can see what sort of style is taking place in certain regions, not just in the United States but all over the world. This may be one reason why there has been a large proliferation of styles in recent years. You can also locate dancers in your area much faster as well as locate the dominant script for your regions scene.

The two most distinct differences were the musical selection and the omission of rapping. DJ’s played electro hip-hop, which Afrika Bambaataa pioneered and didn’t play any funk or soul. They didn’t because they did not know that that’s what breakers originally danced to. In addition, there were never any rappers that accompanied DJ’s at these parties. The DJ’s played what the people wanted to hear and at that time electro hip-hop is what the crowds wanted. However, that changed and by 1996 the party scene was largely focused on house music and techno and what would eventually become hard-style house and trance. Yet many of the breakers remained and new ones even arrived: “Yeah I remember the songs would be super-fast and we’d be getting down. I thought it was cool, the music really hyped me up and when I was doing head-spins all I wanted was to go faster” (D-Boy). There was however other outlets and some breakers found them.
Metronome remembers when he transitioned from the house party scene to a different scene that was specifically for breakers.

“I remember it was at the end of 1994 and DJ Hazze put together this little jam at the San Fernando recreation center. I had met some breakers from TWK (The Wrecking Crew) and been practicing with them. My best friend at the time wanted to get in as well and said we should talk to them about getting down and so we did. They all practiced at the park and it was crazy. I mean any given day there would be like forty breakers there just practicing. Everyone there knew about this jam that was coming up and it was huge cus’ people knew there was gonna be a lot of bad breakers there. I mean Hazze himself was bad. He was really good at breaking and popping. That was sick, cus’ at the time you either popped or breaked. You didn’t do both.”

Obni and Marvin also recall attending the event described by Metronome. For them it was their first time seeing different styles. They saw moves and heard music they hadn’t encountered watching any of those “breaksploitation” films. They also saw graffiti painted on canvas being displayed at the event. Obni describes the scene: “Up to that point I always considered graffiti as something that extended from gangs. I knew there was graffiti crews but always thought they were just about putting their names up. This stuff was nasty; these writers could really get down.”

Respondents described a shared feeling that they moved to something more authentic. As dancers progressed from practicing at home to practicing at a spot and performing at parties to performing at small jams they are moving closer to the original Bronx scene. The music is different as well as the style, fashion and moves. Rather than breaking being an isolated scene they are moving towards the b-boy/b-girl scene as a part of hip-hop culture.

“After ‘Represent’ (the name of the park jam “thrown” by Hazze) we attended Radiotron (1995) and it was on then. I mean these were guys that ate, slept and shitted breaking. Watching them just made you want to practice that much harder. Not only that but they were doing all these things we hadn’t even seen. Flips, gainers, mad power moves and so fast and smooth” (Metronome).
As dancers progress through the scene, we can identify each iteration as a stage that is imbued with a script. Dancers learn the scripts and take on roles from that script in order to successfully perform a script. The progression described above details the dancers’ journey along the scenes continuum. As dancers successfully perform legitimate scripts they accumulate status and move towards hip-hop culture. In other words, dancers learn what it is to be a b-boy/b-girl. Ironically they become more authentic by following prescribed scripts.

Scripts

While reviewing the literature on the punk subculture, rebellion and anti-establishment themes carried a great deal of importance. Punks, like breakers also searched for something authentic. However there search took place in the face of the commodity driven culture industry. The breaking scene does not have an “us” versus “them” mentality with regards to mainstream culture. Youth especially are not worried about inauthenticity or commodity. They are just looking for something to be a part of. However, if and when a dancer progresses through the scene and establishes a connection with hip-hop culture then antagonistic feelings are present. These feelings exist between those that view hip-hop culture and not hip-hop commodified (as explained above) as the authentic form of hip-hop. So where does the struggle for authenticity exist in the breaking scene?

Many of the young people that enter the scene are interested in gaining status and fame and are simply interested in the moves. They do not take the time to learn the history of the dance. Essentially the scene as a part of hip-hop culture created a script that original adherents of the art hoped people would adopt. This script like a films screenplay dictates the stage sets and props, wardrobe, dialogue and action sequences. This script is passed down to other dancers by word of mouth. However, not all dancers acquire this script because not all dancers find
themselves in authentic scripts. Furthermore most dancers do not realize they are performing based on inaccurate scripts. As described by Roland he was not aware of one of the major “plot” themes that authentic scripts foretold: “I remember being at a session watching this guy Fabian and thinking he’s sick. I told my friend and he said ‘yeah but he’s all video moves.” Airdrawn had a similar experience: “I remember thinking we’re all trying to do the same moves so what does it matter. Now I understand how different it is but at the time, I didn’t know anything about “biting”, that’s probably why I never reacted to that part in Beat Street.” The part in Beat Street that Airdrawn is referring to is when one of the dancers accuses one of his opponents of biting his moves. The opponent responds by stating that he never bit any moves from him and his moves are not even worth being bit. This leads to a brief scuffle where the two crews then agree to settle things with a battle at Roxy. In the scene, biting refers to the act of deliberately “stealing” other dancers’ moves or style.

Originality is highly valued in the breaking scene, however if a dancer has been performing in a stage with an inaccurate script he would not comprehend the notion of biting. So what exactly is an authentic script? A dancer who strives to fully embrace the scenes values will adopt an authentic script. This includes adopting b-boy/b-girl fashion, valuing originality and creativity, and dancing. When Charles puts together an event this is what he is striving for: “I wanted it to be all the elements. When I first got into hip-hop, I was into graffiti. Then I met some guys who did b-boying and got into that. We got pretty good fast and once we took out everyone in the area we started going to raves, and took everyone out there, but you know, they were like break dancers. We ended up going to the summit and that’s where it was at.” Charles is referring to the second B-Boy Summit that took place in 1995. The Summit was put together by members of the Rock Steady Crew. At that point in time b-boys/b-girls did not have their own
platform where they could assemble, dance and pay homage to the traditional, authentic dance of hip-hop. And who better to demonstrate how this authentic script should be carried out than the Rock Steady Crew.

From 1994 to 1996, the BBoy Summit was the largest and most prestigious event in the United States. It was also one of only a few that even took place. However, its biggest contribution was that it brought together smaller breaking scenes and its authentic Bronx script. Each year the event expanded to encompass more b-boys/b-girls, emcees, graffiti writers, and DJs from around the world. Charles further describes:

“When I went to the second one (1995) there was so many graf writers there, Krylon cans all over the place, dudes wearing face masks and they were spraying pieces right on the walls. The DJ’s were playing these funky hip-hop songs; stuff you didn’t hear on the radio. It was a lot of Rakim, KRS-1, Pete Rock, Big Daddy Kane. And they were really good at scratching, doing tricks. It was a lot of the stuff you see now in turntable battles. But the b-boys stood out the most. The style was mad different and everyone that was anyone was rocking a jersey.”

For breakers on the West Coast the style was very different because they had followed a different style that was scripted by the media. Breaking didn’t spread to the West Coast through its Bronx adherents, it spread through the media. But all the media showed on television or film was the more acrobatic maneuvers and less of the finesse and style. It was easier to show someone spinning on their back and head and get a reaction out of that than showing someone doing intricate footwork and freezes. Because of this you had a dichotomy of scripts and the West Coast was none too willing to have the East Coast dictate how they interpreted breaking. This dichotomy was identified by many dancers as style versus power. Style refers to a script that was pushed by the Rock Steady Crew that emphasized footwork, toprock and freezes. Top rock refers to the dancing up top, and is the closest resemblance of dance to the original rocking style of the Bronx scene. Footwork is any type of movement that a dancer does after top rocking when going
to the ground, finished with a freeze, which is a statue like pose that a dancer enters into following his set as they were frozen in time. Power was a script pushed by the New York City Breakers and adopted by most West Coast dancers, primarily because this was the form that was disseminated by the media during breaking’s media exposure. Power emphasized athletic, fierce movements with a handful of traditional moves: headspin (continuously spinning on your head), windmill (continues backspins), flares (the Thomas flare borrowed from gymnastics), turtles (stabbing your elbow into your abdomen and shifting your weight from one arm to the next and moving your entire body in a circular motion), and halos (a combination of headspins and windmills were you use your arms to help you glide around on the brim of your head). One emphasized athleticism and execution the other style and originality.

Plot Dichotomies

Originality is heavily valued in the breaking scene because it is the clearest way to distinguish one dancer from other dancers. But, if everyone is doing the same moves then how do you distinguish yourself from others? By preaching footwork and foundation Rock Steady maintained that the possibilities were endless for dancers to create new movements or redesign older ones. Power moves were much more restrictive and footwork allowed for a dancer to apply an internal bricolage. Dancers rather than biting moves could take smaller pieces, a sample much like hip-hop music producers sampled old records, and reconfigure them. In addition to their style, Rock Steady did it with their fashion. Its members rocked original Puma and Adidas sneakers, wore basketball jerseys with “Rock Steady Crew” emblazoned on the front and “Easy Rock” or “Asia One” on the back (two of the crews most influential members of the time). For many years, this was the b-boy wardrobe. Obni remembers this shift as well, but with a twist at the end:
“After 1996 when Style Elements took out Rock Steady at the 3rd BBoy Summit, things changed. Rock Steady wasn’t seen as the end all of b-boying. I mean people got the message of the four elements and the music and importance of style, but they weren’t going to necessarily buy into the people. I felt as though some of the members of Rock Steady were just trying to recoup some fame and elders were telling kids how to dance. But yeah looking back they were right, because that was the “right” way to do the dance, but they could have gone about it in a different way”

There is still a dominant script that is pushed by elders. Crazy Legs still has a large voice within the scene, but tends to place himself as the focal point of any discussion. Alien Ness of the Mighty Zulu Kings also pushes the authentic Bronx script but does so in a different manner and with just as much legitimacy. The Mighty Zulu Kings were the b-boy branch of Afrika Bambaataa’s Universal Zulu Nation. That sector of the Universal Zulu Nation had been dormant for some time and Bam wanted to emphasize the importance of b-boying within hip-hop culture. He sought out Alien Ness and asked him to revive the crew. Through the expansion of the crew via the recruitment of some of the worlds’ best b-boys/b-girls this script has reached a large audience and established in the breaking scene a deep appreciation for foundation (footwork, freezes, top rock), musicality (dancing on beat, knowledge of music), style (an emphasis both on the moves you do and how you do them), and an aggressiveness to the dance. In essence, Alien Ness feels as though he is pushing a script that illustrates succinctly what a b-boy should be. In order for an actor to perform his role the stage, props and audience need to be present. The stages are the various b-boy/b-girl events that take place all around the world: Freestyle Session, Out For Fame, BBoy Unit, Battle of the Year, the Notorious IBE, etc.

The actors improvise from the various scripts that exist and construct a relation to the scene through impression management of their role: “I usually go to a jam and rock some black chucks, and grey or black dickies with my crew shirt. Oh yeah and I always bring my spin cap with me, even if I don’t end up using it. I dance how I like. I wouldn’t say I’m this or that, cus’ I
do both footwork and power moves. My thing is to just flow, so everything is on beat and smooth” (Fracas). Fracas is describing the current authentic script which pushes this style of wardrobe: Chuck Taylor Converse sneakers, slacks or pants that look like slacks, many times found in vintage clothing stores and a t-shirt with your crews name on the front and your b-boy name on the back. Cosmos remembers when he’d be in line waiting to get into a jam and there was hundreds of b-boys wearing wind breaker pants, running shoes, and back packs with helmets clipped to the side: “it’s so different now, but in a good way. When I think about it, I must’ve looked stupid. C’mon dancing with a helmet on just to do head spins or mills. It’s pretty fuckin’ ridiculous.” Helmets have disappeared largely from the scene via the script which emphasizes style. You can still see one or two here or there, but the dancer is sure to experience some ridicule.

There is an expected coherence between the setting, appearance and manner of a performance. A situation is placed in abroad category that allows a performer to mobilize their past experiences and develop stereotypical thinking. The front becomes a “collective representation” and a fact in its own right. When an actor takes on an established social role they find that a particular front has already been established for it (Goffman 1959:27). When breakers are indoctrinated into the scene they find that there is already a canon of established moves and ways to perform these moves. Exemplified by the two dominant scripts of breaker and b-boy/b-girl and the division between “style” and “power,” each of these types of dancers conforms to the particular front that has been established for the particular script. For example, a “power” breaker focuses on aerial maneuvers, or power moves, and emphasizes the moves themselves over the rhythm and style of the dance. In accordance with this role, they also dress in athletic gear that does not restrict their movement and do not hold the history or authenticity of the scene in as
high regard as they seek to shift away from the restrictions they believe the authentic scene imposes.

The dance is about more than just doing the moves; it is about the music and style. You have to stay true to the authentic art form. While there is an authentic script that is being pushed by a generation of b-boys who feel they interpret the dance more accurately because they were there when it originally happened, not everyone buys into this script and it is highly contested terrain. Some dancers that are new to the scene and usually younger focus largely on the moves and creating and evolving increasingly dynamic moves. They eschew foundation and focus on combining abstract freezes, and contortions, a style known as “blow-ups.” Scripts that value foundation state that a dancer should integrate “blow-ups” rather than not doing any foundation at all. “Blow-ups” dancers regard foundation as keeping the style stagnant and wish to push the movements as far as they can. According to Roland “other dancers in the scene think “blow-ups” guys are not really dancing, they are just doing a bunch of tricks. To me if they’re not doing foundation then they are not really b-boying. They should just call it something else and go somewhere else and do it.” To them foundation is restrictive because if they want to express themselves creatively, there should not be any restrictions that limit their creativity and originality.

Others counter by stating that emphasizing foundation is not restrictive: “It’s like building a house, you have your foundation and you can still design your home however you want. These guys are trying to build houses with no frame. Eventually it’s going to fall, like a house of cards” (Metronome). It has been stretched even further in recent years, as dancers established a “circus” style that incorporated ever more complex contortions and tricks. The style has subsided some of late but some dancers still perform the “circus” style. The same critique is
pushed against dancers who strictly perform power moves. Both styles are criticized for their lack of musicality and their emphasis on creativity because that is how they demonstrate their individuality. Since both elements are used as a source critiquing how good a dancer is, it is understandable that these would be issues of contention. Both sides put their perspective forward and treat it as objective. However the presentation of scripts is an intersubjective process that rather than being neutral is actually ideologically driven. Themes within the script such as individuality and creativity are points of evaluation.

Creativity and individuality are complicated issues especially since the moves are so similar, it is completely possible that two dancers practicing in two different regions may develop the same move or set of moves. Knowledge of these scripts and adhering to its directions builds a collective identity similar to the cohesiveness of a theater group. Everyone in the breaking scene knows about biting, but dancers obviously “borrow” from other dancers. The point is to do it in a way that facilitates progression because at some point everyone is a beginner with no moves or style. Vengeance of the Boogie Brats and his crew mate Gadgets invented a unique creative style known as “origami,” that influenced a great deal of b-boys. Weary of people biting their style, the Boogie Brats rarely traveled to larger events and never entered any competitions. Vengeance eventually put out a video compilation of his moves and warned dancers not to bite his moves. However, he did state that if dancers saw something they liked they should incorporate it, but “flip it.” He encouraged them to take a move and put their own twist on it. Vengeance was describing the practice of bricolage and how it can lead dancers to develop their own style. Everyone is inspired by other dancers and eventually their own style will evolve. Reveal of the Rhythm Bugz actually adopted a great deal of the Boogie Brats style and went on to be recognized as one of the best dancers in the scene.
Script Production

Having drawn parallels between the breaking scene and punk scene as a frame of reference, an interesting point was raised with the issue of authenticity and its relation to commercialization. In addition to Reveal, hundreds of b-boys have garnered some commercial success in the form of music video and film appearances or apparel sponsorships. Commercialization appeared to be the nail in the coffin for many members of the punk scene because fashion and music had been co-opted. Punks use their wardrobes to form their identity much more than b-boys/b-girls do. Since these props are secondary in the formation of identity many dancers while not encouraging dancers to acquire commercial success, do not denounce them for doing so.

Dancers that have acquired commercial success include members of Super Crew which won the second season of America’s Best Dance Crew. Do Knock of the Battle Monkey’s who won the Star Search grand prize. Various b-boys/b-girls including K-Mel, Flips, Luigi, Kid David, Frantik, Crumbs and Cloud (Cloud has also performed on two tours with Madonna) have appeared in recent films like You Got Served and the Step Up franchise. The general feeling in the scene is that people understand that they are acting out external scripts because they are outside of the scene and have to perform the dance outside of its context. “The way I see it is at least they are using people that are actually b-boys and not just some actors. I mean they still put them stupid actors in there but the really crazy moves are all done by b-boys. If it’s not them it’s gonna be some other goons with no talent, so better that it’s them right” (Zack)? Hollywood’s last attempt at commercializing breaking created a feeling of suspiciousness towards the mainstream. Unlike the punk subculture that projects rebellion and anti-mainstream, the breaking scene welcomes commercial exposure with the caveat that it is represented correctly. Where a
punk band that goes mainstream may lose its credibility within the punk subculture that is definitely not the case for b-boys/b-girls.

Rap was the easiest form of hip-hop to commodify because it had a product. You could sell units whether it is cassette tapes, compact discs, or music files. You can’t sell someone a dancer. But you can put together a show centered on the breaking scene which has now happened twice in Las Vegas. When the New York New York Hotel & Casino opened in 1997 it premiered “Jam on the Groove”: a show centered on breaking with members of 7 Gems, Style Elements and Rock Steady Crew in the cast. Currently the Jabbawokeez, winners of the first season of America’s Best Dance Crew have an ongoing show at the Monte Carlo Hotel & Casino which has met with great reviews. The culture industry can never fully absorb a scene because they depend on the scene as a source of creativity. The culture industry cannot create authentic culture they can only commodify existing cultural forms. As such, they leave enough of the scene in tact to allow for its continued evolution of new forms to be commercialized. These images are disseminated to the public and new members to the scene adopt them as authentic scripts. Because of this, b-boys/b-girls will take steps to distance themselves from new members of the scene who fill the roles of break dancer and breaker.
Discussion

Sitting in My B-Boy Stance

Having touched on it in various instances being a b-boy/b-girl is the most authentic representation of the cultural form that took place in the Bronx as a part of hip-hop culture. There are certain elements that accompany a successful performance of the b-boy/b-girl role. The stage where one performs and the script used vary a great deal. Respondents talked about dancing at house parties, raves, school etc. These are all stages where performances occur, yet all agreed that there is one legitimate front stage and that constitutes where the action takes place. These places are known as b-boy jams and can be held anywhere where there is an adequate floor to allow for the performance. Ideally the venue is a large expansive space with nothing but wood flooring or tile. Unlike its earlier Bronx incarnation the DJ system is set up adjacently rather than at the center of the room. This is done to maximize the space available for performances. Depending on the jam there may be graffiti art displayed on canvas throughout the venue. If the event being attended is a larger competition there will more likely than not be a stage (an actual stage, not the metaphorical type) set up where the tournament style battles will take place. These have been incorporated as the jams grew to the point that attendees were having trouble viewing battles. While dancers attend to compete, they too are also members of the scene who enjoy watching others dance and being a part of the audience and the scene’s collective. As mentioned above, there are three primary scripts that have been identified: b-boy/b-girl, breaker, break dancer. The roles can be viewed as laying on a continuum where the former is the most authentic and the latter the least. The model presented later in this section presents a two dimensional continuum, or a plane of existence where a dancer can find themselves on this plane based on the
script they are influenced by. The two axes are authenticity and legitimacy, and I will elaborate more on these concepts and the relation to the model in the last part of this section.

A b-boy/b-girl adopts the authentic script of valuing knowledge, foundation, musicality and style. Knowledge includes understanding the history of the dance as a way as respecting those who came before you. Foundation means emphasizing traditional styles and sequences of dancing. For example, a dancer will begin by toprocking then downrocking executing some footwork and power moves and finishing with a freeze; the more difficult and aggressive the freeze the better. However, execution is key because b-boys/b-girls value completing a set because “crashing” even on difficult moves is viewed as less stylish. Musicality means you move with the tempo of the music and dance to the rhythm. You receive more praise for a performance if you can sync your movements and especially freezes to the beat of the music. In addition you incorporate the musical soundtrack into other aspects of your life. You know that funk and soul is the music of the scene but do allow for some forms of hip-hop. By style I mean that dancers place as much importance on how an actor performs their moves as just whether they execute them. Does he/she have the aggressive “battle attitude.” The performance is enhanced by the dancers’ wardrobe which consists of the b-boy/b-girl style described above. However the fashion is simply not enough, because any new member of the scene can acquire that wardrobe.

Airdrawn describes the wardrobe issue as such: “I get that younger dancers see the moves and really just want to be a part of everything breaking. So they come to jams and buy all the shirts and accessories and videos. They all just seem to look alike. I mean they look pretty fresh but then they come out and just suck. It seems like they’re so anxious to really be b-boys that they think it’s enough to just dress the part.” Marvin adds: “It’s not just kids though, cus’ I spin at an over twenty-one spot and you see some people there dressing the part then I’ll drop
something sick like ‘Cavern’ or ‘Across 110th Street’ and they won’t know what the fuck is up. It’s not about the moves, just dancing, vibing, having a good time with people, not just standing there looking cool.” Members of the scene that have progressed past the stage of break dancer or breaker will attempt to distinguish themselves from others through the process of role distancing.

Some newer members to the scene do not manage their impression well because they are working with inaccurate or outdated scripts. B-boys/b-girls distance themselves from break dancers by emphasizing their own characteristics but also by downplaying their opposition’s characteristics during battles. B-boys/b-girls will play up their aggressiveness in order to taunt their opponent and get in their head. By critiquing their opponent they are vaulting their style and increasing the distance between their roles. Dancers accomplish this distance a few different ways. The first is by the way they dress. Since this gap can be easily advanced on it is the least resistant way to distance one’s self from a script. The second way is to gain status by being integrated into a crew that already has a great deal of legitimacy. This is accomplished by simply becoming part of a crew that has gained more status but also by interacting more fully with the crews members. “I remember Cosmos was decent when he was down with TWK, but when he got down with CAB he and Magnus just progressed to a new level. It made sense though cus’ they were practicing more often cus’ the crew really pushed them to get better. Plus they learned from better dancers” (Obni). By becoming a part of a collective, the attributes of that collective are steadily imbued onto to each of its members. Of course, you have to move into a crew that is being directed by a more authentic script than the previous crew.

A third way to distance one’s self from a role is to disparage the characteristics of the other scripts. For example, a b-boy/b-girl might ridicule a dancers fashion but more likely he will ridicule their moves, style and musicality. Airdrawn described the way he emphasized his
performance as superior by “mimicking the dancers’ lack of rhythm. I always try to dance on beat and when I battle someone who’s in there just doing moves and not even paying attention to the music I’ll look them in the eye and point to my ear, you know, kinda saying ‘hey listen to the beat.’ Or I’ll go in and mock they’re toprock. It’s a dance. Music is important!” Airdrawn is emphasizing one of the greater differences between breakers and b-boys/b-girls and that is this issue of musicality. Breakers think they understand the meaning of the dance and believe it is all about the moves. The more dynamic and creative aspects are valued over execution and style: “I’ve been to jams where the crowd goes nuts cus’ a guy tried a move that was really difficult and didn’t even land it. He crashed big time. To me you have to catch all your moves, anybody can just fall down” (Zack). The breaking scene like any other subculture, scene or movement has ebbs and flows. There are tendencies and trends within the scene and breakers are criticized as simply following these trends rather than being creative and owning the dance.

Recent trends in the breaking scene have included the emphasizing of certain styles, moves and character. Styles found in recent trends were “threading,” “circus,” and “tricks.” More common have been trends centered on moves such as: airflares, air chairs, elbow freezes, hollow backs and inverted hollow backs. Character trends are rarer but one that did take hold was the above mentioned “battle attitude” aggressiveness. This style was found mainly on the East Coast, primarily in Florida, but spread nationwide as two of Florida’s most well known crews, Skill Methods and Ground Zero Crew gained national exposure through the Out For Fame national b-boy/b-girl tournament. Different regions develop their own scripts as derivatives of the two dominant scripts that guide the scene. The authentic script is not static and is constantly under debate and is a source of conflict. Some dancers choose to blatantly avoid or discard any scripts and do not buy into any of the ideology of the authentic script: “I don’t care bout all that
other crap, bout’ respecting history and doing foundation or dancing on beat. That shit’s fucked up. If I feel the music and I want to go into the circle and tumble (execute a succession of back hand springs and flips) that may not be dancing to you, but it’s my dance” (Russ). Russ has chosen the image of the scene over the ideology of the scene or rather constructed his own ideology based on what the dance means to him. It is of no concern to him what others label him or that he is not remaining true, all he cares about is expressing himself. There are many other dancers that feel the way Russ does. While there is an authentic script being pushed by elders and originals to counter Russ’s ideology, most of the dancers in the breaking scene primarily identify somewhere between the two scripts.

Role Personality

After describing the stage and its various scripts one might think that actors do not have much agency. How can a dancer be part of a scene that just involves them acting out scripts dictated to them by others? Actors are not as passive in this process. They are active participants in the writing of scripts. The more advanced and creative dancers dictate the flow and trends of the breaking scene. Scripts should definitely not be viewed as fixed. Since they are points of contention it would stand that they are much more fluid. In addition, the way a dancer interprets the script and performs his role allows for creativity and agency. For example, a Hollywood actor plays a role as the lead characters best friend. The actor will use all the contextual information to breathe life into his character and make the performance his. The role is the best friend. But the actor makes him the quirky best friend, young at heart, intelligent and successful, deathly afraid of commitment. The actor may even improvise some characteristics not found in the script. B-boys/b-girls engage in a similar process when developing their style and character. How much of their identity is taken up by this character will increase as they move towards
interacting with their audience, or other members of the scene. They may even change their character on more than one occasion as they progress through the scene.

B-boy/B-girl names are a way to enhance the performance of a script and gain legitimacy. In addition, b-boy/b-girl monikers may provide some insight to the script which an actor is reading from or the back stage where they are preparing for a successful performance of a particular script. The name itself and the naming process both build into the dancers’ identity. There are several ways in which a b-boy/b-girl name is acquired. Your alias is given to you by other members of your crew, especially by older generation members of the crew or you can choose your own alias. This process incorporates both your current identity and the identity you wish to project:

“I came up with my own name. My crew was trying to give me some corny names like Tek, or some old school shit with names that end in Rock, like Tek Rock…it actually came about by accident. I always liked this word omni. And I remember seeing it and thinking that is was me, simple, short. I remember the Atlanta Hawks used to play at this arena called the Omni, and it sounded tight, plus I had never heard anyone have the name. You always get people that take on names and they know others dancers out there are gonna have it. Names like Dizzy, Baby Legs, Swift, and Cosmo. There were two guys where we practiced that had the name Cosmo. Real original huh? I also heard my dad use this word obni once, but I thought he was saying omni. I found out he was really saying Ob.N.I. which is Spanish for U.F.O. I felt like at the time it really described me, because I was really quiet, and always in the background and no one ever knew who I was. That is til’ I smashed in the cipher.”

Vietnam rather than being born in the country is a half Asian half African American male who enters the circle “droppin bombs on everyone like Vietnam. My style is very aggressive, I’m coming right at ya’ and if you’re not ready you’re gonna get destroyed.” Many dancers have gone to great lengths to develop a creative alias with which to boost their character. Some dancers take average words and change the letters but keep the same sounds: Juse Boogie (juice), Rainen (raining), Flexum (flex them). There were several dancers I observed where you could
make a clear connection between their characters name and either their physical description or style. Twix is a rather large very muscular African American male. Manson is a tall, lanky skinny white male. IQ was a white male of average built who had a “nerd” appearance. Descriptive names are usually handed out by the members of a dancers’ crew or close friends. Mimek, who developed his own name, recalls when he decided what his best friend Jacques’ name would be: “He’s this fat, white guy with a shaved head so his name had to be ‘Kueball.” Of course there are other facets of the “theater” at play, and these ingredients’ also serve highly important functions for an accurate defining of the script actor’s interpret. These other roles are that of the DJ and the b-boy/b-girl promoter.

The promoter really does carry a great deal of power because he/she is like the stage designer. The promoter chooses the venue, the DJ’s and the types of action that will take place. He/she can put together a jam with music and circles all night, or a competition. Recently jams and events have been increasingly replaced by competitions of various sizes. Dancers can still attend competitions but simply dance in circles and not enter the competitions. In order to reward dancers for their hard work, competitions have come to dominate front stages. Promoters are trying to generate a profit, but since most of the promoters are former dancers they can relate to the b-boys/b-girls: Charles has been putting on jams and competitions for some time now and started to do so because “when I was dancing there was only one jam that everyone went to and that was the Summit. But a few months after the Summit everyone would start slacking because they knew it was going to be another year before the next jam. So I decided to put something on to give people a reason to keep dancing.” Charles’ was expecting close to 150 people to attend and received closer to 500 people. The first event of his that I attended took place at the Alexandria Hotel in downtown Los Angeles and was attended by close to two-thousand people.
He had graffiti displayed on canvas throughout the venue, emcee performances by Supernatural (a highly popular underground rapper known for his improvisational freestyle skill), and Rakim (in many highly regarded people’s opinion the greatest rapper of all time). It was two days (Saturday and Sunday) of open circles with a crew competition ending the evening. First place was $10,000, at the time the largest prize for a b-boy/b-girl completion. There were dancers there from Japan, Switzerland, and all across the United States. One of the things I noticed besides the dancers was the importance of the DJ in the setting.

The role of the DJ seems simple enough, play some music while people dance. But the DJ more than any element in the scene represents the theatrical relation between a performer and his audience. Like a dialectical process the DJ and dancers respond and react to each others action. Like the musical score that accompanies a film or play, the DJ enhances the dancers’ performance. In addition, the DJ contributes to the development of authentic scripts and the scripts legitimacy. With the records he chooses to play the DJ influences the b-boys/b-girls action because they are trying to catch the rhythm of the music. In addition, many dancers will get “hyped” up when certain songs are played that they prefer. Certain songs have a quality to them that elicit these feelings from dancers: “You might be having an awful day or be at a jam and not really feeling the vibe, but then something like “The Mexican” gets dropped and it will change your whole feeling.” When observing the battles for the evening I saw this happen on several occasions. I felt the energy in the room increase immediately and it was not just the dancers but the audience as well. Since the audience is composed mainly of dancers it would stand to reason that they would all respond in agreement because they have internalized the musical soundtrack of the scene or particular script.
There is a certain canon that exists that contains songs that are foundational to the scene, including “The Mexican” by Babe Ruth or “It’s Just Begun” by the Jimmy Castor Bunch. The form is the same fast paced breaks that were played in the authentic Bronx scene. The tempo of the music cannot be changed without changing the dance. For this reason DJ’s never play contemporary hip-hop music because it has been slowed down to emphasize the rapper’s words. This has reinforced the breaking scene’s estrangement from rap music but also helped emphasize the relationship between the dance and its authentic social context.

Much like in the punk subculture, knowing about music that is not marketed or commercialized lends uniqueness to those that possess that knowledge. And in the same way a punk might not tell other’s of a band he/she listens to in order to maintain that uniqueness a DJ will be very hesitant in releasing information about the records he is playing. There are hundreds of thousands of records that have ten to fifteen second breaks somewhere in them and that is the only piece used by the DJ. These records are out there in vintage record shops, or your grandmothers’ basement waiting to be found. If a DJ has a record that no one else has that increases their status and value as an actor. Dancers realize that the DJ has put in work “diggin in the crates” for hours. This is also how a DJ distinguishes him/herself from others and constructs an identity based on creativity. In order to remain unique you want people to know the music but not any information about the record. According to Marvin it is much easier now to find information about music because of the internet and the vast amount of information available. Furthermore there are even phone apps now that can identify songs and artists instantly. “There is this scene in the film ‘Scratch’ where DJ Shadow is shopping for records and because he is a special client he gets to go into this extra room. It’s fuckin’ insane. It’s this room with shelves and shelves of records. Must’ve been like a million records in there.” Marvin is obviously
exaggerating but the point is that there is so much music out there waiting to be found that “new” songs will always be incorporated into the screenplay’s soundtrack.

The scene is about more than just dancing, because performers are also audience members and both audience and performer are essential to convey the successful performance of scripts. The continued success of these performances leads to feelings of social cohesion between members of the scene, whether they perform from a break dancer, breaker, or b-boy/b-girl script. One component that is constant is the “space” where the action takes place and the actor performs. This space is the cypher.

Journey Into…

The cypher is a more recent term that has developed from within the scene that is now used by most members to refer to a dance circle. There is a misconception within the scene that the term was used by Bronx scene b-boys/b-girls, but in fact that is not the case. Alien Ness who was a second generation Bronx b-boy has stated that he never heard the term cipher and the space was referred to as a circle, back in the day. All the respondents I interviewed described the space using the word cipher more often than circle and spelled with a “y”: cypher. A cypher can be constructed anywhere and at any time. B-boys/b-girls view the cypher as the most authentic and raw environment for dancing.

Ignoring for a second the production of legitimate scripts, I have described, dancers constructing cyphers without music or any of the other contextual elements and still valuing that space and process as legitimate. That view more than anything demonstrates how the dance is the focal point of the script more so than the music, fashion or style:

“We were celebrating Fiestas in Santa Barbara and picked this spot right outside of Borders and started busting a little bit. It was close to midnight and the night was pretty much done. There was still loads of people out walking around and I seen this guy busting some moves by himself. I was like fifty yards away from
him and wanted to get his attention. The dude was mostly doing flips; I could tell I could smoke him but it was more about making a connection. B-boys recognize b-boys, you know. So I did my own flip and made sure to stomp really loud when I landed so he could notice me, which he did. Then I did a little bit of footwork and got up. It was not a challenge but more like hey I see you, let's bust together. Next thing you know some guys see us from across the street, they run over and we have the rawest cypher going on, with like eighty people watching us. No music, just us against them, straight up battling on concrete. It’s like we all felt the rhythm of being at a jam, until the cops came and broke it up” (Airdrawn).

Airdrawn described something similar to a group of stage actors dressing in and acting out “Romeo and Juliet” in the middle of Times Square in New York. While there is no physical stage or props to enhance the actor’s performance, the actor’s themselves provide enough of a context to facilitate the successful performance of the script. This idea is even more pronounced in the example described by Airdrawn.

Members of the scene reinforce each others’ performance by defining the situation similarly and the outside audience accepts the performance as legitimate. The dancers and other members of the cypher performed just as they would at a jam. They executed their sets and the sides taunted each other and “attacking” each other in an aggressive manner only to shake hands when the cypher concluded: “It was really hype. Guys were throwing chomp signs and “clowning” moves. I tore the skin off my elbow and didn’t care; it was worth it…after we walked of together giving each other props.” By clowning moves Airdrawn refers to a practice of pantomiming a dancer falling, or slipping. In addition, they critique the difficulty of the dancers’ moves by performing the exact move as a sort of “that shits easy, I can do that move too” (Airdrawn). The “chomp signs” described refer to symbolic gestures such as folding ones arms in front of their body and making a biting motion something similar to the gesture done by the University of Florida Gators fans that extend their arms out in front of them in order to mimic the biting action of an alligator. Another gesture is to take your index finger and place it in your
mouth and pretend that you are biting down on it. These gestures are meant to infer that the dancers think their opponent “bit” or copied and stole those moves or style from someone else.

R.A.W. (Real Authentic Ways)

Cyphers have always been the most authentic space for the dance. Cyphers have also always had a connection with battles. Today you can go to a breaking event or competition and see cyphers happening throughout the venue. You will see dancer’s following a routine where one dancer enters the cypher does his/her thing and exits and another dancer follows. While some cyphers can be emotionally heightened they will never match the intensity found in a battle. In the Bronx scene there was no distinction between cyphers and battles because cyphers only occurred when there was a battle. B-boys/b-girls would carry on as though they were attending a regular party and dance with girl or guys and interact with people. When the breaks came on b-boys/b-girls wanted to rock and eventually someone would go down and a second dancer would respond and initiate the battle. Other dancers followed because dancers normally traveled with their crew members.

As described in the historical section above, the Bronx scene moved downtown and into the clubs, and it was because of Roxy that cyphers and battles became two different things. In order to promote the club more and present all the elements at once, together in unison b-boys/b-girls had to be rocking all night every night. Since it would have been difficult to battle all night cyphers became less intense, more informal and open. Eventually over the years battles were separated into cypher battles and competition battles (I will elaborate on this distinction in the next section). Granted, battles still occurred but there was a difference now. Prior to this development if you saw a cypher you could be sure there was a battle going on: “It was like that for us as well. In middle school when we first started we practiced and hung out, but I wouldn’t
call it a cypher. Those only happened when battles occurred. I remember leaving fourth period on my way to the spot during lunch and knowing if I saw a cypher I better get the hell over there cus’ it could have been one of my boys battling” (Obni). A dancer may be following an authentic script and dressed in appropriate attire but the moves are not seen as intended, or performed at a level that is substandard to an informed audience. The key is to control the audiences’ access to information and remember that the front stage as well as the back stage is not simply a physical space but also a social space, mental space etc. Within the scene dancers who have knowledge of particular dancers’ moves will ridicule a dancer when they have “crashed” or not correctly executed their moves or sets.

The back stage is where performers may knowingly contradict front stage performances that had been carefully crafted. The backstage is a guarded passageway so that the public performance cannot be shattered by an inadvertent look behind the curtain (Goffman 1959:114). In the breaking scene this metaphor can be demonstrated literally in the differences between two actual physical spaces: the practice and the jam. Practices are usually restricted not just from audience members but also from other performers. Practices are where dancers can “crash” on moves and attempt new moves or transitions. They will also many times dress differently than if they were at a jam. Rather than wearing their newest gear they may just throw on a pair of old torn sneakers, sweat pants and a torn t-shirt. They will also take less care in performing a successful “run.” A run is what is referred to as a sequence of moves that are put together for a performance. There is a general sense from dancers that battles change the dynamics of their roles. Battles are where they fully embrace the character of their role and enhance their moniker or alias: “That is where I go to work. I am bringing out my entire arsenal and dropping bombs on you like Vietnam.”

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The aggressive battle attitude adopted by b-boys/b-girls emanates from battles. B-boys/b-girls value the cypher and battling because it pushes you. Some b-boys/b-girls do not consider dancers as members of the breaking scene if they don’t battle in cyphers. The Boogie Brats crew who influenced and inspired a large number of dancers were famous in the scene as cypher assassins. They owned the cypher and never entered organized battles for fear of having their moves video recorded and bitten. They also felt, like many other dancers that cyphers are more authentic and possess a more raw feeling. When they entered the cypher, every time was like a battle to them. Alien Ness echoes those sentiments: “that cypher’s my universe, and I ain’t got no time to like you. If you’re not backing me up, you’re my enemy.” Battles allow crews to adopt scripts from which to read from as well and because of the aggressive nature of battles these scripts incorporate a militaristic metaphor. Roland believes in expressing his aggressiveness via these scripts: “It’s like war, there are no rules. When I’m battling I become someone else. I’ll do whatever it takes cus’ I’m so hyped up. It’s like Bruce Banner and I’m changing into the Incredible Hulk; about to go on a rampage.” Yet there are rules, or at the very least guidelines such as each side gets a round and the next round does not begin until the current dancer completes his set. However, recently these scripts have met with contention as dancers have stretched these guidelines to a breaking point.

**Battle Mentality**

The militaristic metaphor is further illustrated by the identity crews adopt. Several crew names demonstrate adherence to the militaristic metaphor script by implying they are cohesive military troops. Dancers may at times refer to themselves as soldiers having the backs of other members of their crew. Several crews use the terms force or squad: Rock Force, Full Force, Outbreak Squad, and the Squadron. Other crews will use military terms for conflict: Battle
Monkeys, Killaifornia, Head Hunterz, and Battle Born. Lastly, descriptions of battles use words such as burned, smoked, destroyed, murdered, killed and fried. This terminology demonstrates how the dancers “act” out performances by taking on roles during battles that they normally would not employ.

Certain regional scripts have managed to ascend to the larger breaking scene. The hyper-aggressive battle attitude was encouraged by the Florida scene, especially members of the Ground Zero Crew. Dancers from the region would get up in their opponent’s face and shower them with angry scowls. Crew members would be extra loud and animated. This style pushed the guidelines above by implementing a “battle tactic” known as “stealing rounds.” The use of the term tactic by members of the scene further illustrates the influence of the militaristic metaphor. Stealing rounds consist of not allowing your opponent his/her turn before taking your next turn.

Originally this technique was viewed as acceptable if dancers were taking an obscene amount of time before beginning their set. However, the redesigned tactic did not allow anytime for the opponent to begin their round, they essentially attempted to dominate the battle similar to a football team attempting to change the flow of the game by dominating the time of possession giving their opponent less chances to win. Stealing rounds and an aggressive in your face attitude overwhelmed dancers like a blitzkrieg. They also popularized the “feed the cock” gesture as a way to get in their opponents head and insult their style and character. The gesture consists of extending your arm out with your hand positioned as though you are cupping a penis in your hand and placing your hand as close as possible to your opponents’ mouth. Effectively by doing this you are inferring that your opponent is a “pussy.” This is an instance where the hyper-masculinity of hip-hop culture is made clear. Ironically, the masculine script is so dominant that you will often witness b-girls performing the “cock-feed” as well. Once Ground Zero won the
2002 Out For Fame BBoy national championships it validated their techniques in the minds of other dancers. Many dancers began to use the techniques which lead to difficulties in impression management because it appeared the scripts were disintegrating and there really was no order. Yet this is not the case because there is one rule that the contemporary breaking scene adheres to and that is “no touching.”

The aggressive battle tactics that spread through the scene could not change the feelings about the “no touching” guidelines. The script is based on a historical misconception that battling was seen as an alternative to fighting. Many dancers incorrectly believed that battling was established as an alternative way to release aggression towards someone. That is simply not the case. Many fights erupted during or after battles within the Bronx scene even after it first moved downtown into the clubs. Current dancers believe touching will eventually lead to violence and based on the belief that dancing was an alternative to violence they wish to maintain that order. History is filled with traditions that have crystallized on inaccurate accounts. However the misconception has fostered a respect for the space within the cypher and other dancers. Of course, there have been instances where fights have occurred but those have been rare. In instances where fights have occurred b-boys/b-girls are quick to engage the conflict and separate dancers in order to keep the event, jam or competition going.

The “no touching” mandate appears to have been explicitly implemented for competition battles. As such, you will see dancers in cypher battles have more leeway when touching others. The script was spread worldwide in 1998 at the Battle of the Year in Germany. Knowing that they were going to distribute a video of the event the promoters and competition judges used the event as a platform. During the final one of the members of The Family from France touched Jeff from Rock Force Crew. Jeff was popping up from the floor and was touched on his foot and
pushed down towards the floor. Having viewed the footage it did not appear as there was intent to injure or harm, and the touch itself was slight but noticeable. The judges declared that they were giving first place to Rock Force from America because people all over the world were going to view the video and they wanted to send a message that there would be no touching. Events such as Battle of the Year have caused the proliferation of competition battles. They are the dominant form of battling in the breaking scene today mostly because a larger audience can view the battles. Charles understands this because he "knows people come to my jams to dance and have a good time, but I also know that people come to watch battles. That means if they show up and can’t even see the battles they probably won’t come back to the next jam.” Clearly there is a substantive difference between cypher battles and competition battles.

The construction of space is the most obvious difference. Cyphers are usually much smaller, and the emotions heightened. An average cypher is about six feet in diameter. The cypher usually continually shrinks and you will see dancers asking people to step back to allow for more room. One would expect that a cypher would be more heated since the dancers are in a more confined space. Competition cyphers are much more spacious and rarely form an actual circle. Rather it is more like a dodge ball game where you have a crew facing each other on either side to allow the crowd to view the battle. Competition battles are more structured, either limited by time or rounds per crew. While they normally do not get as heated as cypher battles competition battles can get heated, especially after rivalries have been developed between crews. Crews will usually utilize more strategy during a competition even incorporating choreographed routines to demonstrate their group cohesion and creativity to the judges. Despite their difference both competition battles and cypher battles provide the same social function. Battles result in increased group cohesion, identity and creativity.
Battle Consequences

When crews battle each other they are strengthening their group consciousness and awareness of their unique group identity apart from other crews. Coser argues that “conflict serves to establish and maintain the identity and boundary lines of societies and groups. Conflict with other groups contributes to the establishment and reaffirmation of the identity of the group and maintains its boundaries against the surrounding social world” (1956:38). An example of this reaffirmation occurs when dancers seek to first become part of a crew. This process usually occurs one of several ways: a dancer can battle someone from a rival crew, battle members from the crew as a test of skills or battle with the crew against another crew. “I was told I had to battle this dude Ray who was from this other crew, but I was like that fool sucks. I was kind of surprised they didn’t just let me right in. I mean I was better than all but one member of their crew. That’s probably why I never really felt as part of that crew” (Obni). Normally the first two instances are dictated by the crew where the third instance may happen spontaneously at a jam. This scenario played out when Mighty Mouse of the Boogie Brats was being mocked by members of his crew as having never been “officially” initiated into the crew. The crew members stated that in order to be down with the crew he needed to go and battle someone from Bag O’ Trix. Boogie Brats is a crew that resides primarily in Toronto whose main rival at the time was Bag O’ Trix. Mouse’s response was to state that he was already “in” because he had already battled on their side. These reciprocal “repulsions” establish the identity of the various groups within the scene and also help to maintain the overall breaking scene by delineating boundaries between groups and the scripts they perform. By attempting to validate their script over other scripts, crews increase their group cohesiveness and strengthen their group identity as well as their opponents.
One of the propositions described by Coser is illustrated well by the above example of the misinterpreted script of fighting and battling. Coser describes some positive functions served by the expression of hostility in conflict. Conflict “clears the air” and allows for the free behavioral expression of hostile dispositions. This might be thought of as a “safety-valve theory” of conflict, according to which conflict serves as an outlet for hostilities so that relationships between antagonists can be maintained (Coser 1959:39-41). In essence, when crews have “beef” between them battling serves as the “safety-valve” mechanism Coser is referring to. The expression of these tensions allows for both crews to remain as performers within the scene. The belief is that after a battle has taken place the hostilities will have lessened or disappeared completely. One of the crews I observed closely was a group from Simi Valley known as Lost Tribe. They were involved in antagonisms with two different crews that resulted in each of the above scenarios. Around the time, they were young up and coming dancers progressing rather steadily. Because of this they developed antagonism with an established crew and another crew that was also up and coming. The rivalry was much more intense between them and the established crew (LA Breakers). They had several battles and the antagonism persisted and eventually ceased as LostTribe had gained enough notoriety and legitimacy to merit respect from the other crew. BHAM Tribe, which was the other up and coming crew, also lessened its antagonisms towards Los Tribe and the crews actually ended up becoming rather friendly and even entering competitions together as Nappy Heads. Conflict binds antagonists through the formation of a relationship where no relationship previously existed (Coser 1956:128). In this instance, once relations have been established through conflict, other forms of relations may follow.
In another instance Coser states that “conflict with another group leads to the mobilization of the energies of group members and hence to increased cohesion of the group. Whether increase in centralization accompanies this increase in cohesion depends upon both the character of the conflict and type of group” and centralization is more likely in cases of warlike conflict (1956: 95). Essentially by playing up the militaristic metaphor script, dancers inadvertently create altruistic feeling of cohesion, where members believe the crew should be valued before the individual. The centralization of energies leads to a solid group identity where the sum of the parts is superior. Crews that lack group cohesion may actually search out other crews or invent enemies in an effort to maintain unity and internal cohesion. In this instance “the group’s search for enemies is aimed not at obtaining results for its members, but merely maintaining its own structure as a going concern” (Coser 1956:105). This partly explains why established crews will engage in cypher battles less than newly formed crews. Established crews already have a strong sense of cohesiveness. An example of this idea is the rallying cry that some crews use in order to galvanize their purpose and solidarity. By stating that everyone is against them, or everyone underestimates them (pulling the so-called disrespect card) the crew constructs an underdog mentality of us against the world in order to maximize their motivation. This happened when a loose coalition of crews developed what ended up becoming Super Crew (winners of America’s Best Dance Crew: Season 2). At the time Full Force, Knucklehead Zoo, Battle Monkeys and others felt that they could unite against everyone and have so many dancers at their disposal that they would be unstoppable. In this instance it does not matter that these things are not really being said about the crew or that they in fact are favored to win a battle, as they were on several occasions. As support for this proposition Coser provides W. I. Thomas’ theorem that “if men define their situation as real, they are real in their consequences”
Coser reformulates Simmel in presenting the proposition that “struggle may bring together otherwise unrelated persons and groups. Coalitions and temporary associations will result from conflicts where primarily pragmatic interests of the participants are involved (Coser 1956). Of course, such alliances may be perceived by other groups as threatening and unfriendly. This may lead to the creation of new associations and coalitions, thus drawing groups into new social relations (Coser 1956). At one of the largest b-boy/b-girl events, Freestyle Session many of these temporary coalitions occur. Freestyle Session is well known for being a competition where crews or groups of friends will join forces in order to win the competition. Examples of such occurrences have been Souls of Fire (Circle of Fire and Soul Control), Natural Flave’ (Supernaturals and Flexible Flave’), HaviKoro (Havik and K.O.R.O. [Knights of Rhythm Order]) and the above mentioned Super Crew. Super Crew was actually a reaction to other crews that were joining forces prior to them. They viewed the established alliances not as threatening but at the very least as obstacles to victory. Several loose coalitions of friends have gone on to become “official” crews and be quite successful including Rhythm Bugz, Killaifornia, and the Squadron. These coalitions bring dancers together that may not have interacted otherwise. These coalitions usually bring together the best dancers of each crew.

Battles also have one other outcome, and that is that it enhances the creative capabilities of dancers. This occurs first through motivation to win, which leads to an increase in backstage preparation. Secondly, dancers have mentioned having practice battles during backstage preparation where they will spontaneously create a new move, or combination of moves: “At the end of every practice session I always insist on having a battle with someone so I can push
myself. It makes me get hype and I feel like I can come up with more stuff that way” (Roland).

This idea resembles the concept of putting two top students in direct competition with each other so that they can push each other. Even though two dancers may be part of the same crew, this competitive drive will be present and they will push each other, developing their creativity: “Me and my boy Magnus started at the same time, but there was a point where he was just getting really good really fast and that just made me practice so much harder. He was making up all these combinations and little footwork tricks and style and it made me come up with my own moves and style cus’ you never know we might end up battling” (Cosmos). This concept of creativity and progression through conflict may also help explain why crews that had antagonisms towards each other may join forces. Crews or individual dancers may come to a realization that they benefitted from having a clear and present foe and that nurtured a creative element that they may have lost once their foe was removed.

Discussion Model

Based on the data presented demonstrating the patterns and tendencies of individuals within the breaking scene I have formulated a model that describes a participants role and interpretation of scripts. The model describes the level of authenticity a performer chooses to embrace as well as the level of legitimacy the dancer or particular script they are performing from has attained. The three scripts are ideal types constructed for analytic purposes and do not pertain to any particular individuals, meaning a true break dancer, breaker, or b-boy/b-girl does not exist. The scripts fall on a two dimensional plane of existence, where one of the axes is authenticity and the other is legitimacy. A dancer may be placed on the continuum to describe their commitment to a script: for example, the b-boy/b-girl script includes a push for foundation, musicality, and style. In essence, all of my respondents can be graphed somewhere on this plane
of existence, detailing how much legitimacy and authenticity they possess. Figure 1 represents this theoretical continuum containing two dimensions:

![Figure 1](image_url)

Respondents can be placed anywhere on the plane and in all likelihood the majority of members of the scene are located towards the middle of the triangle. There are different paths to each ideal type, and there is no natural progression, even though adherents of the authentic script believe that an evolution of style towards the b-boy/b-girl role is the most accurate way the dance should be represented and feel that every dancer’s goal should be to ascend towards the b-boy/b-girl script. B-boys/b-girls respect the tradition, original values of the Bronx scene and attempt to strictly adhere to the ethos of foundation, originality, musicality and style and attitude. They also more fully understand the breaking scenes cultural bindings to the encompassing culture of hip-hop, and amplify their performances by incorporating authentic wardrobes.

Breakers value some of the elements of the original Bronx scene but do not embrace them all. They still believe fully in the importance of battling and originality but may choose to ignore foundational techniques or musicality. They focus more on the dynamics of the moves and style, but feel restricted by what they believe are constraints on their identity pushed by authentic scripts. They seek to rationalize the style in order to remove bias from judges at competition battles. Since they are so focused on the moves and evolution of creativity they de-contextualize the dance to a certain extent. B-boys/B-girls criticize this view because ultimately
the art form is a dance and if you are not moving to the music then a performer is not really successfully acting out their role. Breakers counter by stating that they value agency and tradition and they are free to interpret the dance however they want. Whichever feelings they choose to express to the rhythm of the music is their dance, and if the music inspires them to enter a cypher and spin on their head that is what dancing is to them.

I believe the dialectical contention between these scripts fosters a creativity that exists within the scene because of this tension. In order to validate their script either side pushes its movement to become more advanced as a way of demonstrating that it is a superior script. The scripts are not mutually exclusive, as members from either camp often borrow elements from opposing scripts because the underlying theme is creativity and style.

Break dancer is used to identify someone who has encountered the dance via some form of commercialized media. They are interested in the moves and have very little recognition that the dance is even linked to hip-hop culture. They invest time and effort in the breaking scene but view it more as an activity they engage in rather than being a part of a scene. They have internalized inaccurate symbols of the breaking scene distributed by media sources. Whether those representations were produced during the breaking scenes great exploitation during 1984/1985 or its most recent contemporary incarnations is not relevant since both eras produced inaccurate scripts that lack legitimacy according to breakers and b-boys/b-girls. Break dancers have very little knowledge of the socio-historical context of the scene and may even believe that it is a “new” phenomenon. They do not understand the importance of music to the dance because they do not know the genre of music that accompanies it. Breakers may choose to reject musicality, but only in terms of the way others dictate how one should dance to the music. They recognize fully the musical score that accompanies dancers’ performances and acknowledges the
musical canon. They agree that they should perform to funk and soul breaks and some genres of hip-hop where break dancers think that commercial hip-hop or electro hip-hop even some forms of electronic pop music are the accurate representation of breaking music.

Dancers can travel along the analytic space through an infinite number of paths and the trajectory can move in any direction. The trajectory should not be viewed as being positive or negative in any direction. In other words, if a person moves from performing between a breaker and b-boy/b-girl to performing between a break dancer and breaker the change in trajectory should not be viewed as a regression. The performance of scripts is an active process and it is for this reason that an actor can choose their own path and scripts from which to act from. I find that rather than taking a distinct point in time, the present for example, and examining an actors’ performance as a type it is more useful to examine a dancers’ arc through their history. Examining dancers via this model is a means to provide an analytic reference and should not be taken as a judgment of an individual’s character or identity.

In order to provide some insight into the ties the breaking scene has to hip-hop culture, I have constructed another model that relates the four elements of hip-hop: graffiti, DJing, emceeing and breaking. Figure 2 represents this model as a continuum:

Figure 2.
The four elements are presented as distinct entities unto themselves meaning that ideally they can exist apart from the others. The center square represents where they all interact together as hip-hop culture. By hip-hop culture I refer to the way I used Schloss’s model of the three variants of hip-hop at large. The model is not fully accurate, but I feel as though most of the layout represents the scenes connections with one another. DJing is obviously most connected with emceeing and breaking which is why I placed it in the first quadrant. Breaking was originally related to graffiti because members of the Bronx scene were both b-boys/b-girls and graffiti writers; often times developing an alias for each scene rather than one moniker for both. The biggest stretch appears to be placing graffiti near emceeing as there is not a strong relation between those two scenes.

Superimposing figure 1 onto figure 2 will then provide a better indication of the breaking scenes relation to hip-hop-culture as well as describe more fully a dancers’ trajectory. Figure 3 illustrates the final model which incorporates the two previous figures.
The x-axis deals with authenticity and from each quadrant the closer to the center (hip-hop) the more authentic the script is. Accordingly, the y-axis deals with legitimacy and the closer to the center the script is it is viewed as more legitimate. As illustrated a break dancer is the furthest from understanding the breaking scenes connection with hip-hop culture or any of the other elements of the culture. A b-boy/b-girl understands these connections and values them while incorporating them as a deep part of their identity. An obtuse angle was utilized so as to more clearly demonstrate how much closer a breaker is being a valid member of the scene, but showing the gap in authenticity between the breaker and b-boy/b-girl scripts. Breakers acknowledge and appreciate the music and role of the DJ which is why they are placed almost as close to that quadrant as b-boys/b-girls. In essence they are aware of the values of authentic scripts but choose to not incorporate them into their role performance. Based on the fact that most of the dominant figures within the scene adhere to the b-boy/b-girl script, rather than placing the breaker equidistant from the x-axis I have placed them slightly lower to demonstrate that because they have much less authenticity than b-boys/b-girls they have slightly less legitimacy within the scene.

The successful performance of scripts may be restricted by time. A dancer may have all the knowledge about the culture and be reading from an authentic script but has not “put in work” yet. This term is described by members of the scene to show that dancers need to get out and interact, battle with others to really develop their identity. That is how they legitimate their role and “earn their stripes.” The militaristic metaphor returns as dancers utilize the terminology as a way of describing a dancer’s ascension through the “ranks.” Based on factors such as which script the actor is reading from or what crew they are practicing with some dancers will progress through the ranks faster than others. Say a break dancer establishes a connection with a b-boy/b-
girl then their path does not necessarily need to go through the breakers path; they can move
directly from break dancer to b-boy/b-girl. Breakers may also choose to role distance themselves
from the b-boy script by outwardly not adopting that wardrobe and creating and popularizing
their own wardrobe and scripts. They do this to demonstrate that their script is just as valid if not
more valid than the authentic script. This also happens during battles as breakers will mock and
“clown” a b-boys/b-girls performance whether by critiquing their wardrobe, style or moves.
Since the performance of scripts is an active process a persons’ position will always be in
constant flow as they reinterpret scripts and creatively adjust to the conflict between scripts.
Conclusion

By way of this project I illuminated the highly misconstrued socio historical context of the breaking scene by describing its evolution and relation to hip-hop culture. I deconstructed hip-hop in order to demonstrate some concepts for analysis by separating hip-hop culture from its commodity form. I reviewed literature on cultural and subcultural studies to better understand how similar topics have been researched before. I used the most appropriate methods suited to my paradigmatic orientation to elicit the richest data. Using the concept of scene helped illustrate the process by which dancers perform because the world today is more pluralistic meaning people now identify simultaneously with a multitude of scenes. These scenes have “loose” memberships, and because people are constantly going from scene to scene they have to “be on” more often. Dancers read and interpret scripts that are disseminated to people through interaction with members of the scene or via mass media outlets. Dancers within the scene aid in the creation and transformation of these scripts and are weary of the influence media have in the production of scripts.

Very little has been academically written on the breaking scene which is evidenced by the fact that I needed to examine similar phenomena in the literature review in order to develop some ideas and themes to understand what I was going to be working with. I attempted to paint a much more full picture of the scene through this research to better understand what exactly happens in the scene and what meanings members assign these phenomena. Since researchers have not examined the scene, I wanted to focus on the subject matter and examine it through a sociological lens. Using literature from relevant sociological paradigms I developed a model to help explain what happens in the scene and why performers act the way they do.
B-boys/b-girls adopt an “authentic” script for their role performances that has been passed down orally from first generation members of the original Bronx breaking scene. They understand the breaking scenes connection to hip-hop culture and value foundation, creativity, musicality and style. Breakers adopt parts of the authentic script and reject others. They focus much more on the moves themselves and less on the lifestyle aspects of the scene. They feel limited by the constraints put forth by authentic scripts. The two perspectives present a dialectical approach through which the scene continues to progress and evolve. Break dancers are newer members to the scene that have read from scripts distributed by the media. They have a limited understanding of the social and historical context of the scene. They do not comprehend that the breaking scene has a connection to hip-hop culture or possess an inaccurate account of this connection. They value the moves but lack the knowledge of some of the more subtle elements of style. Unlike breakers and b-boys/b-girls, break dancers are temporary members of the scene and therefore incorporate less of the scenes values into their lifestyle. They are much less committed to carrying out a successful performance because their identity is not fused with the scene. The two dominant scripts are seen as legitimate but diverge with regards to authenticity. Breakers acknowledge that the b-boy/b-girl script is more authentic but question whether that inherently makes it more legitimate and struggle to validate their own script.

One of the more fundamental elements of the scene is the function of battles as a tool for group cohesion, identity and creativity. Battles further illustrate the performance of scripts as they are highly structured stages of competition. Theatrical metaphors of militaristic themes are embraced by individuals and crews to enhance the characteristic “battle attitude” of the b-boy/b-girl role. Battles serve practical functions such as initiation rights for members, which help increase a crews’ identity by placing them in direct opposition to another entity. Battles
demonstrate the mystical character dancers place on the cypher. The cypher is the front stage where performances are executed and dancers reaffirm their identity and acquire legitimacy for the script they are reading from. Dancers spend countless hours of backstage preparation, to make for certain that they are well prepared whenever they need to battle. Some members go as far as to state that if someone does not battle they are not truly members of the scene.

While I attempted to paint an all encompassing picture of the scene, the research may not represent the sentiments of all members of the scene. While I feel I have developed a model that allows for performers to trace a path of their history from their perspective, I am but one person and I am sure there are themes and patterns I did not extrapolate or failed to emphasize. I understand the role the researcher plays in the collection of data and that my presence in the field influences that space. The research process is not unbiased, yet it is essential that the researcher critically reflect on their role as researcher.

In addition, as I discussed the breaking scene has regional differences. I was able to discuss regional scripts that were able to manifest themselves on the national level but missed those that were specific to certain regional scenes because I was limited to the Southwestern United States. Since dancers travel to other parts of the United States, whenever possible I interviewed respondents from other regions, but not in a formal sit down method. I spoke with dancers from Seattle, the Bay Area, Florida, the Midwest and East Coast. This was usually done while they were just hanging out at the venue. The regional limitations hold true for my observation and participation as well as the respondents with which I conducted in-depth interviews.

Further research should address several issues put forth in this project. Regional distinctions should be examined further and if possible even extended to the international level
because regions like Japan/Korea and Eastern and Western Europe have huge scenes where many of the themes I discussed play out in different ways. Another area that desperately needs to be examined is the issue of gender within the scene, perhaps even as primary focus of a project. While boys and men still dominate the scene there has been a proliferation of girl and women dancers worthy of examination. A much deeper focus on the effects the media have had on the scene should also be addressed especially with all the recent commercial success and exposure many dancers have acquired. The advent of the internet has also changed the scene a great deal and should definitely be an area of focus for research.

I used the concept of scene as an analytic tool to better understand the phenomena. I prefer the concept to that of subculture, but the concept of subculture still has its place and should not be discarded. Muggleton and Weinzierl (2003) along with Bennett and Kahn-Harris (2004) argue that the term subculture is no longer relevant because youth cultures are viewed more and more as groups where intergroup boundary is disappearing. Since youth borrow cultural elements from other cultures the authors argue that individuals traverse subcultural boundaries in a much more fluid sense. Essentially the authors are describing what Irwin refers to as scenes. Similar to how some researchers questioned the Birmingham Schools imposition of subculture on the point of view of the people they were studying I too carried out a similar imposition. In gathering data and constructing patterns I felt the term scene best described the dynamics of what I was observing and participating in. However, my respondents and members of the scene always referred to the scene as their culture. Respondents associated the word scene as having similar characteristics as the term “fad,” which is highly loathed by members of the scene because of the way that breaking was viewed as a fad to the general public in 1984/1985. Lastly, researching the breaking scene from the perspective of the other elements will also help
“fill in the pie” so to speak. It would be interesting to see what rappers or graffiti artists and emcees feel and think about the scene. Having a sample of respondents that incorporates the most well known members of each scene and possibly asking them to have a round table discussion of the historical trajectory of each of the elements and their contemporary situation.

The first thing I discovered along the ethnographic process was the most important thing, and that is that ethnography is a very difficult task to accomplish. Not only does it provide a great method to learn about others, but it is also a method that will help me grow, develop, and evolve both as a researcher and a person. After participating and observing in the field and conducting interviews with members of the field I gained a great appreciation for the members of the field. My research reminded me that sociology is much more connected to humanity and interacting with people in the process of constructing their everyday world, sharing experiences and asking them about those experiences allowed me to really step into their world and understand it much more deeply. I gave them as much as they gave me and because of that I believe this research was a successful endeavor.
References


