Artpradid, V. (2025). 'What are you willing to give away?' A Qualitative Exploration of Ontology and Ownership in Internet Dance with Three Hip-Hop Dance a Artists. *Tánc és Nevelés. Dance and Education, 6*(1), 95–110. https://doi.org/10.46819/TN.6.1.95-110

"WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO GIVE AWAY?"

A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF ONTOLOGY AND OWNERSHIP OF INTERNET DANCE WITH THREE HIP-HOP DANCE ARTISTS*

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Abstract

This paper discusses selected findings from *Moving Online: Ontology and Ownership of Internet Dance* (funded by AHRC AH/W01002X/1). Dances are frequently copied, reperformed, and adapted with or without permission, raising important questions about ownership, appropriation, and acknowledgment (Adalpe Muñoz, 2023; Boffone, 2021; Bench, 2020; Davis, 2022; De Frantz, 2022; Johnson, 2021; Kraut, 2016). Through interviews with three Hip-Hop artists who share their work online, this study examines the ontological foundations of dance created for online consumption. In addition, the creative, socio-cultural, financial, and legal implications of online sharing on artists' ownership are also discussed. Initial findings show that while understanding ownership and the nature of the 'thing' (creative output) that is created varies from artist to artist, there are genre-specific determinants, such as the Hip-Hop 'sampling' culture and the generation-based etiquette around 'biting' that has developed. This variation, specificity, combined with the complexities of online sharing, can lead to ownership disputes, particularly when financial stakes are involved.

Keywords: dance, online, ownership, ontology, Hip-Hop

N.B.: Key points from this paper were presented at the 1st International Conference on Dance and Digitalization (ICDD 2024) on 29th November 2024, hosted by the Hungarian Dance University.

1. CONTEXT

This paper shares some of the qualitative findings from *Moving Online: Ontology and Ownership of Internet Dance*, a project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and led by Hetty Blades, in collaboration with project partners One Dance UK and Sadler's Wells.

The foundations of the project and qualitative methodology are based on Blades' interest in exploring "questions about how online dances are understood, described and exchanged" (Moving Online, n.d.). These questions engage with concepts of

* The first version of the English manuscript was received on 27 January 2025. - https://doi.org/10.46819/TN.6.1.95-110

ontology and ownership, as well as creativity and authorship, which are examined through interviews with three Hip-Hop artists.

Before analysing the interviews, it is important to briefly define the terms *ontology* and *ownership* in the context of this project. Referring to Blades and Artpradid (2024),

> The term 'ontology' [is used] in line with how it is used in analytic philosophy as concerned with the nature of things, in this case, dances (Davies, 2011; McFee, 1992, 2011, 2018; Pakes, 2020; Pouillaude, 2017). [With ownership,] …we are interested in the ontological positions that underpin both copyright law and extra-legal mechanisms for managing dance ownership, including social norms and expectations.

For a more in-depth understanding of how the terms *ontology* and *ownership* are approached in the project, please refer to Blades' (2022) paper 'Ownership, ontology and the contemporary dance commons'.

The *Moving Online* project funded three commissions in Indian, Hip-Hop, and contemporary dance practice. Principal Investigator Hetty Blades and Research Assistant Lily Hayward-Smith conducted observations during the development and rehearsal sessions of these commissions, with the aim of developing an understanding of the ontology and ownership of dance practices as they transition to the online context.

- Dance artist and anthropologist Anjana Bala released her film 'Optics' on the Sadler's Wells Digital Stage platform[2]. There are two versions: one with and one without audio description.
- 'As Within, So Without' was choreographed and performed by Brooke Milliner. 'As Within, So Without' premiered online and was accompanied by a discussion with Brooke Milliner and Hetty Blades during a podcast with The Capsule (published on YouTube on 16 December 2024)[3]
- The contemporary dance commission 'Spectator on Your Self' was choreographed by Kat Hawkins (also known as K Bailed). The online launch on the 10th of December 2024 included a discussion with Kat Hawkins[4]. The recording will be made available on the Moving Online website.

Apart from funding three commissions in Indian, Hip-Hop[5], and contemporary dance practices, the project also includes interviews with artists from these spaces with the aim of addressing the following research questions:

1. What kind of thing is an online dance?
2. Is dance online a different thing to dance offline?
3. Do the aesthetic and cultural histories of different dance forms mean that each produces a different kind of thing or are all online dances one kind of entity?
4. How does dance's ontology shape social practices around ownership online?

[2] https://www.sadlerswells.com/digital-stage/meet-the-rose-choreographic-school-cohort/
[3] https://youtu.be/f6R_upZuNpM?si=gCQuhETV1Y_VBZd6
[4] https://movingonline.coventry.domains/artist-commissions-3/film-launch/
[5] 'Hip-hop evolved from African and Latin diasporic forms, and the term not only comprises breaking, locking, popping, house, and hip-hop social dances, but can also include waacking, tutting, krumping and other associated forms' (Dodds, 2016: 64-64)

5. How can ontological understanding support artists when sharing their work online?

(Moving Online, n.d.)

2. METHODOLOGY

Ethical approval for the project and data collection was provided by the Coventry University Ethics Committee. We interviewed 16 people across 14 interviews. One was a group interview and one participant responded over email.

Joining the project in May 2024, I conducted interviews with three UK-based Hip-Hop artists who share their work online. To maintain their anonymity, they are referred to as HH1, HH2, and HH3 in the transcriptions and analysis.
The semi-structured interviews were guided by a set of questions developed by Blades:

- What is it that you create through your practice?
- What terms do you use to describe the outcomes of your practice?
- What are the contexts that you share these outcomes in?
- How do you recognise when an outcome comes into existence?
- Where does it exist?
- At what point do you recognise there being something that is owned?
- What are you willing to give away?
- What, if anything, do you expect in return?
- (How) do your answers to these questions differ for online and offline contexts?
- How have your experiences of practices around ownership differed (or not) between contexts?
- What role does community play in the making and sharing of your work?

These can also serve as valuable questions for artists and practitioners to reflect on in their own work.

In my cross-analysis of the interview transcriptions with the three Hip-Hop artists, I allowed the interviews to establish their own exploratory space, but with a lens to specific to Hip-Hop. In the process, I identified three research questions specific to Hip-Hop practices:

- For Hip-Hop artists who share their work online (but not exclusively), what are the 1) ontological foundations, 2) qualities, and 3) parameters of dance created for online consumption?
- How do these ontological foundations, qualities, and parameters relate to these artists' understanding of ownership?
- What conceptualizations of ownership might be specific to Hip-Hop culture?

The term "ontological foundations" as used by Blades draws on analytic philosophy, which considers the nature of things. In this view, "foundations" encompasses the factors that determine the nature of things. In the context of the present study, this refers to the nature of dance created for online consumption and the factors that

determine this nature. Considering the factors that determine the nature of online dance, a key question emerges: what kind of "thing" is it for these artists?

The following section discusses the themes and sub-themes arising from the analysis of the three interviews.

3. THEMES AND SUB-THEMES ARISING FROM THE ANALYSIS

Table 1 provides an overview of the themes (i.e., ontological foundations, qualities, and parameters) and sub-themes identified through the analysis of the three interviews with the Hip-Hop artists. Each sub-theme will be illustrated with an excerpt from the interview transcriptions, as well as a brief discussion of the excerpt.

Theme A: Ontological Foundations
Sub-themes: time (existence), space (limits and limitlessness of online dance), nature of the sharing platform, centre of engagement (Who? How?), cultural elements such as religion, community, and generational differences

Theme B: Qualities
Sub-themes: the act and journey of moving, inspiration, the role of the 'fun' and the 'social'

Theme C: Parameters
Sub-themes: ethical accountability, relationships (friendships), value, pedagogy (is it related to teaching/learning?),

N.B. The themes and sub-themes are related to Hip-Hop-specific ways of understanding ownership and subsequently the dance culture's sharing practices online. These will be discussed in the section titled 'Hip-Hop-specific ways of understanding ownership in sharing practices online'

Table 1. An overview of the themes and sub-themes arising from the qualitative analysis of the interview transcriptions

3.1 Theme A: Ontological Foundations

Under the broad theme of ontological foundations, sub-themes include exposure time (in-person vs online; time during which to the work remains accessible), space (the limits and limitlessness of the online space), nature of the sharing platform, centre of engagement (Who is at the centre of the dance – the audience, artist, or both?), and cultural elements such as religion, community, and generational differences.

3.1.1 Exposure time

HH2 spoke about the fleeting nature of a live performance as compared to the apparent permanence of any dance shared online:

> …when you're delivering in person, the pressure is probably just within that moment of the performance time – within the hour of the show… When it's online, it's more of like, permanent, it's always there. People will see how many people liked it. Is it popular? In some ways, it indicates how successful it was [which] shouldn't really be the case… And you don't know when they're gonna watch it as well. You could have posted this last year, maybe [they'll watch it in] five years' time.

What is also notable is the unknown aspect of when and where an online performance will be viewed. Furthermore, an artist is likely to never know who will watch their creative output. The infinite and unknown online viewer/actor of the dance "commons" or "common" (Bench, 2020, p.4; Blades, 2022, p. 128; Burt, 2017) adds an additional layer of complexity to – and potentially expands – the commons' or common's space and time. "With its roots in medieval land sharing, the term [*commons*] has come to mean a shared resource of a community, including knowledge or language… [applicable to] …the freely available resources and knowledge of the dance community" (Frankfurter, 2019, pp. 98-99). Bench uses Hardt and Negiri's (2009) notion of the "common", where entities of the "common" "…are collectively generated and … [produced] rather than discovered, [deeming] the common [as] neither public nor private" (Bench, 2020: p. 5). Both usages are comparable to a fourth dimension – a 'unified spacetime' (Blackburn, 2022) – that three-dimensional entities cannot see, but may have an awareness of. Bench's "common" is associated with her discussion of circulation of dance videos online as "key for dance in public" (Bench, 2020: p.64), where "the public refers to sites in which heterogeneous individuals gather and coexist while remaining strangers" (2020: p.64).

HH1 noted how short-form dance performances shared online, particularly on platforms that are dependent on short clips, such as Instagram, required an immediacy of the spectacle, or what the participant referred to as the "wow thing". As HH1 stated, "So, I feel like [with] online dances … it's meant to be… from the very start to the very end, it has to be a wow thing… and something that captures the moment."

In this sense, online dance is both long-lasting in terms of potential viewer exposure and instantaneous in terms of its massive impact. Aldape Muñoz's (2023) article 'Love and Theft in Dance Economies' discusses the idea of a dance *lasting* in relation to its visibility. When it is viewed, its visibility renders it durationally present for as long as it is experienced. It exists for a longer period of time than it would have were it not being viewed. Regarding short-form contemporary dance shared online, Aldape Muñoz notes that the underlying desire is "to be visually captured", which is accompanied by "a desire to control the dances after they have been generated" (Aldape Muñoz, 2023, p. 228). In my interviews with the three artists, there was a notable awareness of these desires to simultaneously be visually captured and to maintain control over their work. As a consequence of these desires, artists were also aware of the need to establish parameters for ownership and authorship.

3.1.2 The limits and limitlessness of variables in online dance

Related to the exposure time of dance shared online are the conditions of its existence in relation to permanence and repetition. HH 3 states that

> …with online you can screen record you can watch something over and over. So, these, these ideas, these works are more permanent, and it's potentially more exposed to being copied to, a more exact degree because people can watch it, watch it, watch it and where… in theatre, when something has to be experienced, fewer times, or observed fewer times, if someone was to take elements from it, it's more about the how they perceived it or an essence. Because you can't see…, you can't repeat it and observe it over and over and over again, to the point where you could copy something exact. Physically speaking, anyway.

The notion of exact copying embodies both limits and limitlessness. On the one hand, it restricts the creativity of the copier, but on the other, it extends the *life* of the movements that are copied.

3.1.3 Nature of the sharing platform

During a part of their interview on the distinction between "TikTok dancers" and "dancers", HH1 explained how TikTok as a platform has created a separate category of dancers shaped by the short video format, the sharing mechanisms, and the popularity pathways and potency of the app. HH1 notes that

> …we've all struggled to get to where we are, and someone could just come in one weekend [share a video on TikTok] and he's famous and you're like, huh? I've been doing this for 10 years and what? But then… it's the generation we're in and it doesn't mean it's a bad thing. It is what it is. And as a dancer you just need to be adaptive. Look for something you can hold on to because dance is more... It's your life really.

HH1 acknowledges that while the fast-track route to fame that TikTok facilitates is not inherently negative, dancers need to adapt accordingly while also being clear about their motivations to engage in dance. HH1's emphasis on clarity of purpose reflects concerns about a sense of ownership of particular styles or forms, which is challenged when individuals achieve success in an area without deep-rooted experience in its practice. This status as an outsider may be perceived as signalling an unclear purpose, especially to dance artists who have dedicated significant time in that area.

3.1.4 Centre of engagement: Who is at the centre of the dance – the audience, artist, or both?

When asked about the *outcomes* of their practice, HH2 highlighted the ways in which their desired outcomes manifest through audience responses and feedback. The audience experience could even be perceived as being equally important as the dance artist's creative practice itself. As HH2 explained,

> I think in some ways that sharing actually echoes their kind of effort in delivering. Yeah, kind of saying, I hear you, I understand that. You're telling

> us this story. Your message is clear. I think that's a that's a really interesting part. And I think that really, probably, where that [outcome] really exists. And I think that's actually what drives a lot of dancers and artists to create [and then to share].

I then probed further; referring to an online context, I asked, "So does it [the outcome] exist without the people around you? Or does it exist in a different way?", to which HH2 responded

> It probably does exist as well, I think those outcomes, but I think it's probably harder to see. Or maybe I think we become less aware of it. Yeah, I think when it becomes online, then you can see who's liked it, you know, you can see who's maybe interacted, but you don't know how, how exactly they're feeling it? You know, did they really get the message? Did make them feel sad? I don't really know when it's online.

The unknown impact, response, and reach of an artist's practice remain valid, though intangible outcomes, particularly if the artist prioritizes connecting to their audience through their storytelling.

3.1.5 Cultural elements such as religion, community, and generational differences

Anthropologists describe culture as "the dynamic and evolving socially constructed reality [made up of shared sets of values, ideas, concepts, and rules of behaviour] that exists in the minds of social group members" (Hudelson, 2004, p. 345). HH2 underscores the distinction between drawing on generational artistic traditions to tell one's story and the originality of the story created through drawing on these traditions:

> So let's say if I bring in something from whacking… from people who have been doing whacking, in I didn't create whacking because people have been doing whacking. It's from, you know, when they were dancing back in the days, in the culture, but obviously, I can add in, you know, like a small twist, or the way that my body interprets it. Yeah. So I think I don't particularly own whacking, but I do own the way that I am using whacking to tell a story.

In a temporal sense, HH2's perspective is rooted in a historical and collective sense of time, as well as the tangible movements passed down through generations. When HH2 stated that they "didn't create whacking because people have been doing whacking", they acknowledge they do not own the moves. However, they can assert ownership over the specific ways in which their body interprets the moves.

HH3 notes the importance of the community in shaping their current practice. The notion of needing the community to "bounce off to exist" is temporally significant in the online context, where the community is often unknown or more distant than in traditional dance contexts. As shared by HH3,

> within street dance, but it is a community dance practice. It wouldn't exist without community. And it's one of those things that requires lots of people and like bouncing off to exist… it needs community to exist. And yeah, like, I wouldn't keep doing it if there wasn't community.

This idea also links back to Aldape Muñoz's (2023: p. 231) discussion on visibility and lasting, suggesting that if a dance is not in collaboration with others in some way, it ceases to exist in a meaningful way.

3.2 Theme B: Qualities: The act and journey of moving, inspiration, the role of the 'fun' and the 'social'

The sub-themes have been combined within this theme as interviewee responses often addressed multiple sub-themes simultaneously.

The term *qualities* refers to actions, notions, textures, and feelings that characterize the nature of online dance, as well as its connection to lived experience from which it emerges. Qualities include the act and journey of moving and dancing as an entity in itself. This includes purpose, inspiration, and role of fun and social interaction in the artist's practice. Examples and explanations of these terms will be provided.

HH2 elaborates on the importance of being able to share their own experiences and create shared experiences for audiences, highlighting how online platforms allow the audience member to experience "the same thing":

> …in terms of online dances, where you're sure that that's when people interact, you're like, when you try to create something or you're trying to share something, you genuinely want people to see that. And then you want them to feel something that you wanted to tell them or at least certain at least kind of experiencing the same thing… So, I think probably that's one place that does this.

For HH2, the experience of their online audience when watching their performance is of central importance, emphasizing that the act of sharing experiences is paramount to their practice.

In terms of inspiration, HH3 distinguishes between someone being inspired by HH3's work and performing it while acknowledging that it is not their own:

> I've noticed there's also a line between, like, inspiration and theft, as well, and that layer too, and people who reference me as, as a source of inspiration, or something to learn from, I think I really appreciate that. But also, there's a, I think that person is also responsible for understanding that that my expression is not theirs. And I think to create the best work, you should just stay true to your own.

The responsibility of acknowledging whether a work is one's own or someone else's lies with the dance artist sharing the work, rather than the individual who served as the source of the inspiration or learning.

HH2 explains that the primary purpose of dance is to bring people together. They note the importance of deep connections within local communities, which help foster collective engagement. The emphasis here is on human interaction regardless of cultural boundaries. This differs from the earlier sub-theme of cultural elements, which are grounded in a shared or sharing culture:

> …when it comes to bring people together, you need to have deep roots into the local area. To know, what does this person do? What kind of strength do they have? What can you bring together? So, I think it really goes back maybe to like, originally dance is bringing people together? Yeah, Doing all of that together.

Individual dance artists may bring unique talent, strengths, and skills, but ultimately their impact depends on the artist's ability to harness these qualities in a social capacity.

3.3 Theme C: Parameters

Parameters refer to the aspects that artists tangibly or intangibly use to determine the boundaries of the online dance spaces that they create and share. Parameters arising from the analysis of the artists' interview transcriptions include value, ethical accountability, relationships, and the degree to which the space and experience has a pedagogical impact.

3.3.1 Value

For HH1, the value of their practice is derived from the effort they put into the work that is shared. They explained it in the following way: "So the value that comes with the ownership is like, you know it's, it's like, it's all the psychological process of it… how much you've worked hard for something. And because of sacrifices and hard work, you have value for it."

The recognition of their hard work is an expectation that HH1 holds for those who engage with their work. It resembles an expectation of reciprocity, where a lack of respect for their invested effort is outside of the parameters of value that they have established. As HH1 explains,

> It's not something you're just gonna let people, you know, toss around, because now it's my thing. Am I gonna just, you know, let you do anything you want to [or] … look down on my work?... I'm not gonna let you do that. Like, where were you at 3am when I was rehearsing? Or where are you at 4am when I couldn't sleep, because I haven't completed my piece… it's just sort of that sacrifice… that sort of value we add to our hard work. It's what makes us… it's what gives us the… That's where ownership comes from that. To me, that's where it comes from. The amount of work we've put in.

Disrespecting the value of the effort that the artist has exerted is related to the ethical accountability of all the stakeholders involved, particularly those consuming the shared practice, and how they interact with it.

3.3.2 Ethical accountability

Ethics are defined as "standards of responsible [behaviour] and professional integrity" (Dubnick, 2003, p. 405). Accountability can be broadly described as the ability to take responsibility for one's actions and decisions. Ethical accountability, therefore, encompasses the standards that are generally excepted and expected by a particular group or community surrounding professional integrity and responsibility for actions and decisions made.

When discussing the responsibility that other artists or audiences have towards another artist's shared practice, I asked HH1 about the line differentiating inspiration and ownership. In response, HH1 reflected on their own development as an artist, acknowledging how they had been inspired by another artist and considering the possible consequence of that inspiration on their own originality and accountability:

> Sometimes we get too into someone [and] we evolve based on [that someone's] own… metric, you know, based on what they've done... So whatever it is you're doing now looks like it's not original. Well, it can't be original, but it's just that you [have] to be honest, when you get inspired by someone, and you take them as a role model, you watch the videos, you go to their Instagram, you, you know, try to mimic every single thing they've done because of your love and admiration for them. Or even if you stop doing all that, sometimes you tend to act like them.

HH1 went on to share an anecdote of how this inspirational flow backfired on them:

> There was a dance [that Artist X who is a main source of inspiration for HH1] did in 2020. I did a dance before he did. And I was like, you know, I sent it to his DM. And he saw it and, replied, like, whoa, this is actually dope, you know? [It] gave me like, more confidence. But then… he also did a dance in that same period. And the move he did is my move. And it looks like his work because that's what he does, [that's] how he would do it… And now it's like, I can't claim it because it's his.

HH1's anecdote suggests that Artist X, who has been the source of HH1's own inspiration, showed a lack of ethical accountability and overstepped HH1's parameters of ethical accountability.

3.3.3 Relationships

I asked HH1 about some of the videos on their Instagram page, noting that several other people appeared in the videos, all performing together. I inquired about the nature of ownership in these videos that featured multiple people.

HH1 responded as follows: "Okay, because for every one that was in that video, yeah, if you go to each one's page, they only post their own parts. If you say, who does it belong to? It belongs to me." I followed up on HH1s response by noting that it seemed as though HH1 was doing a favour for everyone involved by sharing the full video and tagging them.

HH1 explained that, in this particular instance, the informal, shared ownership occurred as the dancers were friends and the context was a freestyle dance practice. However, HH1 noted that, generally, "when people do group dances, they tend to post their own part. And, you know, because that's where they want to show their audience more of themselves. If they're gonna post someone else, it has to be a paid advert. Yeah, it's a crazy world we live in really."

HH1's observations about friendship and how posting "someone else's" videos (i.e., those not considered friends) could constitute a commercial transaction emphasise the significance of relationships in shaping practices related to sharing, acknowledging, and crediting online dance on social media platforms.

3.3.4 Pedagogical impact

In my interview with HH2, the pedagogical impact of the online space and experience emerged as a key parameter in determining what is considered acceptable to share. It should be noted that HH2 regularly teaches dance and has many individuals who

could be considered their students. Interestingly, HH2's discussion about pedagogical impact did not stem from a teacher's perspective, but from the perspective of an artist who not only teaches but also learns from other artists. As HH2 states,

> … Obviously there are people who are teachers. I can teach somebody else as well. But I think there's always something you can learn from somebody else… I think that's probably the biggest difference with dance and other industries… Even though they're not a teacher, there's always something that they can share... And [if] they're doing it in a cypher or in a freestyle, you're like, Wow, that's a really cool way of interpreting the music. Yeah. So, community is absolutely huge.

Identity labels such as 'teacher' and 'student' are loosely attributed and porous in manifestation, allowing for cases in which a teacher becomes a student and vice versa. In this way, the roles of teaching and learning can flow between each other.

Furthermore, HH2 described the vital role that a regular group of dancers and a connected community had on their journey as a dance artist. As HH2 recalls,

> When I took on dance a lot more seriously – like five years ago or so – it was really going down to the studio, and seeing people there sometimes weekly, sometimes every day?... But you at least see the same group of people every week. People coming here to dance… You want to learn from each other. We want to learn from [each other], even as teachers. I think it was really that sense of like, community that really gave a lot of us, or definitely me, motivation. And I think I really enjoy [that] aspect…

HH2's explanation of the importance of learning from other artists, participating in a shared space, and fostering a sense of community evokes Burt's (2017, p. 4 as cited in Blades, 2022, p. 125) concept of the *knowledge commons*. Whilst the context of Burt's discussion was contemporary dance, the notion of "sharing of physical resources such as space and through the sharing of artistic practices" (Blades, 2022, p. 126) resonates with what HH2 described above.

The following section relates the themes that arose from the interviews with the Hip-Hop artists to conceptualizations of ownership that appear to be specific to the Hip-Hop communities that these artists belong to.

4. LINK TO CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF OWNERSHIP IN ONLINE SHARING

Whilst not identical, it is interesting to note that the themes (A, B, and C) and sub-themes discussed in the previous section share parallels with the "four implicit rules" for "fair sharing" identified by Blades (2022) "that govern the circulation of both works and practices within the areas of contemporary dance practice', which are 'acknowledgment, adaptation, quantity, and community" (pp. 128-129). For example, the nature of the sharing platform is related to the various approaches of adapting other artists' shared work, which may involve modifications of the newly learned movements.

Given the parallels to contemporary dance practice, what distinguishes Hip-Hop-specific understandings of ownership when sharing dance practices online? Certain shared, organised activities within Hip-Hop culture serve as gateways for

understanding ownership that may inform the sharing of Hip-Hop practices online. These manifestations include cyphers, battling, and *biting*, a nuanced aspect of battling. The dance circle – literally a circle made up of dancers – forms a shared space for battling to take place.

Johnson (2011) positions the dance circle, commonly referred to as a *cypher* by dance artists, as a space of participatory and cultural significance in Hip-Hop culture. It is also linked to the practice of battling. Johnson describes the cypher as

> a competitive space wherein breakers take turns dancing in the middle while surrounded by onlookers. Each turn in the circle is an opportunity for breakers to one-up each other or perhaps just their own last performance. Cyphers typically prompt competition, sometimes erupting into battles—performative duels between individual breakers or their crews. (2011, p. 173)

The concept of *performative duels* in the context of battling disrupts the notion of individual ownership of movement, given the expectation to incorporate the movements of another dancer. HH3 discusses movement ownership (or of its absence) within a battle space, noting that dancers

> can literally take someone's move and do it back to them to… undermine or to then one up them by taking that move, showing you can do it, and then doing it better as a way to as a tactic to go into them. And in that case, I think judges or audiences wouldn't recognize that so much as a theft...

Whilst the term *biting* in Hip-Hop can be defined as movement theft, the act of "taking that move, [and] showing you can do it… better", that is, taking a movement that originated from someone else and creatively developing it further. HH2 explains that with this nuanced form of battling-based biting "you're responding to someone, [you're] taking that move, developing it, that would be seen as something [of] a skill, like, to be praised within that context". This aligns with philosopher Jim Vernon's argument regarding the origins of Hip-Hop, which "began with the construction of an aesthetically enveloping environment within which creative feats of skills were performed to gain honor[sic], respect, and thus community standing" (Vernon, 2021, p. 15). The complexities of movement-use in battling are not dissimilar to the sharing, consumption, and remediation of dance challenges on social media platforms like TikTok, regardless of the dance style, genre, or culture. While competition and challenge appear to create a space where biting or re-interpreting are acceptable, Blades and Artpradid (2024) emphasise the importance of the simultaneous awareness of "a dancer [owning] a sequence of movement and also [acknowledging] the authorial contribution of each person as they interpret it" (conclusion).

However, when sharing dance online – particularly via social media – acknowledgement through crediting and tagging are expected practices tied to ethical accountability and the recognition of the value of another individual's creative output. This recognition is expected, regardless of the time that has passed since the original post and the subsequent posts that reference it. For a more focused discussion on crediting on TikTok, see Trevor Boffone's *Renegades: Digital Dance Cultures from Dubsmash to TikTok (2021).*

In discussing the use of someone else's movements in the context of battling, HH2 also noted how "ownership of someone else's movement is just restricted to those 45 seconds", describing that use as a kind of "creative device… a responsive device of taking something and expanding it… and then throwing it away? The throwing away is important, as well."

What is noticeably absent from the interviews with the three Hip-Hop artists is any discussion of financial gain or legal complications in the sharing of work online. Instead, their conceptualization of ownership focussed more on ethical accountability, recognition, and crediting. These foci suggest perspectives on giving away that align with Mauss' (1954) anthropological notions of gift giving in return for symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). What the Hip-Hop artists 'give away', when understood as gifting, 'integrates both the free gesture of generosity without any prospect of return, as well as the advantage, in terms of power, that results from the more or less obligatory gratitude on the part of the recipient' (Guéry, 2013, p. 575). See also Bench (2020) and Leach (2014) for further discussion on dance's circulation in relation to the gift.

For Leach (2014), the circulation of dance functions as a gift exchange, creating "long-lasting relationships between the giver and receiver" (Blades, 2022, p. 10, discussing Leach, 2014, pp. 467-468). Bench discusses the gift in relation to the notion of the commons – a sharedness. Bench "draws a distinction between that which is offered as a gift and that which is 'given'", that is what is broadly available because it is already held in common" (Blades, 2022, p. 10, discussing Bench, 2020, p. 141). The cypher, meanwhile, embodies "a competitive space wherein breakers [dancers] take turns dancing in the middle surrounded by onlookers… sometimes erupting into battles – performative duels between individual breakers or their crews" (Johnson, 2011, p. 173). At the heart of cyphers are "community and reciprocity" (Ozelkan, 2022, p. 741), creating and reinforcing long-term relationships within the community. The community and shared performative practices are the foundation of the norms, expectations, behaviours, and practices that make up that which is already held in common. One of the Hip-Hop artists that was interviewed (HH2) illustrates how the foundational movements in whacking can be understood as given, but their individual "twists" and "interpretations" can be understood as a "gift".

> So let's say if I bring in something from whacking… from people who have been doing whacking. I didn't create whacking because people have been doing whacking. It's from, you know, when they were dancing back in the days, in the culture, but obviously, I can add in, you know, like a small twist, or the way that my body interprets it. Yeah. So I think I don't particularly own whacking, but I do own the way that I am using whacking to tell a story.

HH2 emphasises that whacking was drawn from those who performed the move before, and there are elements of whacking that are understood to be shared by all who practice it. That constitutes the given, while the gift is that which each individual contributes to the culture.

The contexts – such as battling, cyphers, historical legacies, and intergenerational transmission – may be specific to Hip-Hop, but the ontological foundations underlying ways of understanding ownership appear to be shared across not only social dances in person, but also in social online dances.

5. LINK TO WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING OWNERSHIP

It is useful to consider how the findings from the interviews about the online space and its associated sharing behaviours resonate with the notion of the "common" (Bench, 2020, p. 4). This is particularly valid for Hip-Hop communities and culture due to its social and participatory nature, where understandings of ownership are complex and multilayered. The commons as a model of organisation and resource sharing is distinctive from models based on "extractive neoliberal financial logics" (Bench, 2020, p. 4). Boffone discusses, in relation to Bench's work on dance online, how virality on TikTok "creates a sense of co-ownership that, in turn, creates community. That is, by engaging in TikTok trends, we all take ownership in them, canonizing them and cementing their place in popular culture. Ownership, therefore, is how TikTok becomes culture. [Repetition] is how it stays that way." (Boffone, 2022: 9)

Based on the interviews, the two models can co-exist, allowing for open sharing of online dance that are open to all while creating financial benefit for the individual who created the online piece. An example of this is the monetization scheme on Instagram for professional accounts. which is determined based on the number of accounts reached, accounts engaged, followers, and views and plays per post, amongst others (Instagram 2024). The active creation and circulation of content in this shared space can generate value in the form of financial benefit. The logic is simple – more engagement leads to greater financial returns (within the constraints set by the platform).

Further, it may be useful to consider the social ontology of "money" or "currency". Hindriks (2024) outlines "four alternatives to the view that money is always a concrete object" (p. 15). These include money as "an abstract object… a property of an agent… a concrete object in some cases and an abstract object in other cases… [or it] is a concrete object in some cases and a property of an agent in other cases" (p. 15).

The root of the word *currency* means "to flow" or "to run", which offers a broader perspective on the flow of resources, especially in relation to the sharing that takes place in a "participatory commons" or "common". As in dance, this flow of "currency" is also ephemeral and intangible in the sense of Hindrik's (2024) four alternative views and applies to dance practices shared online. While this fluidity may be considered by some to be a weakness in financial or legal terms, for dance artists and practitioners, this state of continual movement can be seen as a definitive and affirming aspect that reinforces the motivation behind their practice.

The value inherent in what is created through dance, regardless of its circulatory context, continually shapeshifts throughout its life journey. The true currency of dance may be found in its ability to harness its ephemeral nature to engage with and shape the apparatuses of capture (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988) – mechanisms and structures developed by the state to control people, labour, and exchange within which its human creatives attempt to navigate.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the findings from the thematic analysis of three interviews with three Hip-Hop artists, exploring their understandings of the ontology and ownership of their practice. The main themes – ontological foundations, qualities,

and parameters – were discussed alongside their corresponding sub-themes, with supporting quotes provided from the interviews.

As a discussion point to the themes, the findings were positioned in relation to the notion of the open-sharing, social, and participatory commons, one that also allows for financial gain. In this financial context, considering alternative understandings of currency – as both abstract and concrete – illustrates how online dance has expanded the ways artists think about what they own and how they own creative practices shared via the internet.

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