Performing the Surplus, Making a Spectacle:

Male Street Dance Crews on Television Talent Shows

by

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Declaration

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Abstract

Since 2008, male Street dance crew performances on U.K. television have burgeoned in popularity due to their displays of athleticism and synchronicity. Despite growth in popular dance scholarship, however, this phenomenon has been overlooked, in accord with the dismissal of spectacle as decorative and superficial. This thesis addresses this absence by presenting a critical investigation into the construction and performance of spectacle by male Street dance crew performances on U.K. talent show competitions. It explores the key concepts that shape the notion of spectacle in relation to televised popular dance, and enquires into how crews manifest these in their performances. It also addresses the extent to which these performers have any agency to resist their status as spectacular.

Drawing upon a screen dance analysis and utilising theoretical perspectives from late capitalism and visual theory, this thesis focuses on 58 performances from Britain’s Got Talent and Got to Dance. Analysis revealed that choreographic and cinematic strategies of virtuosity and excess results in the construction of ‘the surplus’, which in itself aligns with post-Fordist labour practices and spectacle as a condition of commodified society. Crews perform the surplus through their transgression of corporeal boundaries and by performing excess labour in order to register within the media spectacle of reality television. This is expressed through the structure and content of their cinematically edited choreography, their performance of cultural identity and the relationship between technology and the body.

By performing the surplus, crews are reduced to consumable images through the erasure of their histories, labour systems, and the displacement of the human. Dancers challenge this representation, however, through emphasis on choreographic themes and televised rhetorics of physical effort, brotherhood, and human emotion. It is, therefore, the thematic material and the fleshy humanity of the dancer that both registers and resists these performances as spectacular.
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PART ONE: THE RESEARCH ENQUIRY
Chapter One: Introduction

‘I can’t take my eyes off you when I’m watching you’
Amanda Holden, Diversity Semi-Final, 2009

1.1 Street dance and the television talent show

The spectacle begins. A camera crane diagonally sweeps across a blackened television studio audience to centre on a tight huddle of men in a spotlight centre stage circled by red flashing LED lights. ‘Diversity your mission is to win Britain’s Got Talent’ bellows over the Mission Impossible Theme Tune. Synchronised limbs shoot out from the huddle with the group seamlessly transitioning into an apex triangle formation. A unison strike with the arms, feet, and rhythmic accompaniment cuts the camera angles from a midshot into a wide shot and reveals the perfectly kaleidoscopic spatial design of the crew. Diagonal arms rapidly fly across bodies to an operatic soundtrack mirrored by onstage pyrotechnic flares. Swift directional points channel the spectator’s gaze towards a single dancer’s backwards somersault and suddenly all dancers are crouched low on the ground. A crisp moment of silence echoes as a young dancer takes flight, propelling himself backwards off the springboard of another dancer. The dancer lands firmly on the ground, sweeps around to face the camera and shoots backwards to continue the routine. The television studio audience screams with approval and I continue to watch (Author; own words).

Since the Kombat Breakers crew appearance on Britain’s Got Talent (2007-current) in 2007, followed by the high profile win of Diversity dance crew on Britain’s Got Talent in May 2009, Street dance crews have become part of the fabric of U.K. television talent show competitions. Over fifty duet, trio and group performances were recorded between 2008-2013, and crews such as Diversity, Flawless, Twist and Pulse, Chris and Wes, The A Team, Trinity Warriors, Kazzum, Antics and Ruff Diamond have reached their respective finals (see Appx. A for a full index of crew performances). As a popular dance studies scholar with prior academic interest in the male dancing body, as well as a keen consumer (and voter) of the formulaic yet entertaining premise of reality television, the burgeoning popularity of these highly combustible all-male Street dance crew performances quite literally ‘caught my eye’. In these competitive productions, crews perform high-octane choreography
fusing a multiplicity of stylistic dance forms that fall under the media umbrella term of Street dance. These choreographies include funk styles, Hip Hop party dances, breaking, Chicago house dance and nu-Skool Hip Hop choreography (see Appx. B for style terminology). These styles are fused with tight robotic unison, symmetrical group formations, physical explosions through athletic stunts and intertextual references from popular culture.

Crews compete against a variety of diverse talent and dance acts which places Street dance crew choreography in an intense and highly produced competitive environment. The two key competitive platforms for these crews are ITV’s Britain’s Got Talent: the U.K. version of the Got Talent franchise, and Sky1’s Got To Dance (2010-current): a dance talent competition open to all ages, size of groups and dance genres.\(^\text{11}\) In his analysis of the history of the variety show, Oliver Double notes that ‘Britain’s Got Talent has become one of ITV1’s most popular programmes, regularly attracting around half of the total peak-time audience. The 2009 final of this top-rated talent show attracted an extraordinary 19.2 million viewers, and in the course of the series the public cast over four million votes’ (2012, p.7). Street dance crews therefore have the opportunity to gain large-scale media exposure due to the high audience ratings and media focus upon these Saturday night light entertainment formats.

Guy Redden (2008) situates the contemporary revival of the television talent show against popular talent show programmes from the 1970s and 1980s, including New Faces (1973-1988) and Opportunity Knocks (1956-1990).\(^\text{13}\) These programmes showcased talent acts and relied on the studio audience to clap the loudest for their favourite act, or for viewers to send in their choices on a postcard. The shift towards an interactive relationship between audience and the talent shows began with Popstars (1999): a New Zealand television contest that aimed to discover a new pop music group.\(^\text{14}\) Producers gave power to the home viewer through the rapid processing of telephone, text, and online voting: an interactive formula that has evolved on numerous television talent shows that combine ‘elements of lifestyle and reality with the classical talent search’ (2008, p.3).\(^\text{15}\) These competitions follow the traditional sporting structure of heats, semi-finals and finals, with initial open auditions at the beginning of the process. Auditions are pre-recorded and edited, while the semi-final and finals are live recordings in front of a studio or theatre audience. Unlike a sporting competition, contestants perform to a panel of judges who give instantaneous feedback and determine the progress of the act through a
dramatized process of awarding stars, crosses or verbal approval. From the semi-finals onwards, home viewers are given the opportunity to vote for their favourite talent act through telephone, text and web voting whilst also interacting with the show through website message boards, twitter feeds and Facebook posts. These competitions offer a prize for the winner in the form of either a performance opportunity and/or cash. Regardless of the outcome, however, competitors receive valuable media exposure which results in the potential of agency contracts, performances or teaching work.

These programmes are also situated in the context of a twenty-first century global technocapitalist society where social networking, mass consumerism and interactive spectatorship habitually contribute to quotidian life. In this influx of virtual communication (Bourdieu, 1984), Street dance and Hip Hop dance styles hold high cultural capital in the U.K. media landscape, circulating in viral flash mobs, television world record attempts, 3D films, high profile advertising and prime time light entertainment television. Diversity dance crews’ 2012 tour exchanged theatres for arenas, Hip Hop dance theatre shows including Zoonation’s Some like it Hip Hop (2011) opened to sell-out audiences, while Channel 4’s 2011 summer schedule featured Street Summer: a series of urban themed programmes which included a two-part series following the progress of competitive Street dance crews. Hip Hop dance on U.K. screens therefore focuses less on the vernacular origins and emergence of the style, and instead on the polished and tightly choreographed routines originating from dance studios across the country.

1.2 Research enquiry, aims and objectives

Considering the escalating popularity of presenting Hip Hop dance styles in a codified, sensational and competitive television format away from their traditional vernacular practice, it is remarkable that choreographed Street dance on television talent show competitions remains an under researched area of academic enquiry in popular dance studies. Dodds notes that the devaluing of popular dance is a result of the positioning of popular art against the Western dance canon, which she describes as ‘biased elitist and ahistorical’ (2011, p.90). Hip Hop culture also operates through tropes of authenticity. Hip Hop dance practitioners place high value on issues of legitimacy, emphasising the pioneers of the style and highlighting the need to understand the foundations of the stylistic practice. Ken McLeod’s (1999) study of authenticity in Hip Hop music reveals that this emphasis on
authenticity is a reaction to the threat of assimilation and appropriation of Hip Hop, and that the phrase 'keepin’ it real' changes its meaning depending on the context, signifying the avoidance of disassociating from one’s Black heritage, the importance of referencing one’s community, a homage to the origins of Hip Hop culture and the importance of working with independent record labels rather than media corporations. It can therefore be argued that the lack of scholarship is a direct result of the re-presentation of vernacular practices within a choreographed, mediatised and commercialised environment of the reality television format.

While I conduct a full literature review in Chapter Two, it is beneficial to outline the gap in the academic field. A number of researchers have examined dance practice in U.S. and Canadian reality television shows (McMains, 2010; Broomfield, 2011; Elswit, 2012; Boyd, 2012; Weisbrod, 2014; Benthaus, 2015), but they place an emphasis on the interactive structures of the competition, issues of gender representation and the embodied constructions of nationality. While the majority of scholarly attention focuses on the global reality dance competition, So You Think You Can Dance (2005-present), this competition focuses on an assessment of a solo dancer’s ability to embody external choreography provided to them throughout the stages of the competition. Alternatively, the U.K. television talent shows focused upon in this study place emphasis on dancers performing their own unique choreography. While there is a growing concentration of scholarship focusing on the vernacular practice of Hip Hop dance and Hip Hop dance theatre, there is a lack of critical attention to choreography in a commercial environment. The placement of Hip Hop choreography in a codified and sensationalised television programme therefore raises new issues regarding the mediatisation and consumption of the male Street dancer. In addition, previous investigations into vernacular Hip Hop dance have examined the practice as a solo activity operating in the group spatial construction of the cypher (Banes, 1984; Rose, 1994; Hazzard-Gordon, 1996; DeFrantz, 2004). The use of multiple dancers, however, in groupings ranging from duets, trios and larger groups, and collective units of crews, teams and posses are central to a more complex analysis of collective identity in these television formats.

The creation of spectacular images by all-male crew performances is a powerful tool for engaging the voting home viewer, increasing the longevity of both the television series and potentially its respective entertainment channel. The impressive technical precision of highly disciplined bodies, the male dancers’ virtuosic aerial stunts that fly across the stage and the rapidly changing shapes, forms and transitions in the
choreography presents an engaging visual display for the spectator. The layered effects of lighting, camera angles, pyrotechnics and the editing stage in the production process, (which I will describe as the post-production edit), further enhance these performances with continued emphasis on surface, style and presentation. Because of this emphasis on the image, however, little critical analysis is given to the aesthetics of the ‘spectacular’ and the mediatisation of popular dance on television due to the dismissal of these performances as spectacle. In the context of Hollywood cinema, Ernst Lavik observes that ‘the use of spectacle...tends to be conceived of as an appeal to the lowest common denominator’ and that higher value is placed on the narrative of the film rather than its excessive visual displays (2008, p.176). Rosalind Galt mirrors this diminishing of spectacle’s value, stating that ‘the rhetoric of cinema has consistently denigrated surface decoration, finding the attractive skin of the screen to be false, shallow, feminine, or apolitical’ (2011, p.2). Despite this devaluing of spectacle’s aesthetic properties and its lack of attention in academic scholarship, spectacle is still favoured in mass popular culture, evidenced by high television viewing figures, sold out concerts and record breaking box-office hits.

In the genre of reality television where programmes construct an imagined reality (see Ch. 2.5), the notion of spectacle extends further beyond the aesthetic properties of the image. These popular dancing bodies are placed in a framework of evaluation and judged by an expert panel, a studio audience and a remote television audience of millions. Producers heighten the dramatic struggle of the participants throughout their journey in the competition and present these crew performances as consumable products that can be bought into by the general public. This Saturday night prime-time television experience is situated in the overall spectacle of a media saturated contemporary society where real experiences are replaced with dazzling images of artifice. As a consequence of late capitalism, spectacle therefore also refers to an ideological condition of a commodified society whereby social relations are replaced by images (Debord, 1967). The positioning of the popular dancing body as spectacle is therefore a complex balance between the necessity to remain visible within the media spectacle of the competition and the loss of the lived experience of the dancer due to the manipulation of reality and its reduction to spectacle.

Assimilating the key ideas and issues outlined above, I therefore raise the following questions: What are the key concepts and critical frameworks that shape the notion
of spectacle in relation to popular dance practices in televised environments? What are the ways in which dance crews manifest spectacle in their performances on television talent show competitions, and considering the stakes in constructing the body as spectacle, to what extent do these bodies hold any agency? These general questions inform my research, which critically investigates the construction and performance of spectacle in all-male Street dance crew performances on U.K. television talent show competitions. I examine this construction of spectacle in relation to specific foci that arise from an initial analysis of the research field and that reflect emergent themes in the choreography and wider television production. These foci include the choreographic content of crew performances, the multiple representations of identity that occur throughout the programmes and the relationship between technology and the body. To enable me to examine spectacle as both a phenomenon with specific aesthetic properties and as an ideological condition of a commodified society, I also explore the placement of the all-male Street dance crew performance in the media spectacle of the television talent show.

In order to explore these research questions, the objectives of this investigation are to:

a) summarise and critique published material in the multidisciplinary fields that inform research on all-male Street dance crew performances on television talent show competitions
b) critically evaluate the concepts and strategies that inform research on the aesthetic properties of spectacle within a dance on screen context
c) critically evaluate the concepts and strategies that inform research on spectacle as an ideological condition of global technocapitalist society
d) analyse the construction and performance of spectacle in relation to the choreography of the crew performances
e) analyse the construction and performance of spectacle in relation to representations of identity
f) analyse the construction and performance of spectacle in relation to the synthesis between technology and the body
g) analyse the all-male Street dance crew performance in the context of the media spectacle of the television talent show

In order to give these objectives a specific context, this research enquiry focuses specially on male dance practice. While the majority of Street dance duets, trios and
groups in U.K. television dance competitions are formed solely of young male dancers, it is important to note that mixed gender and all-female Street dance performers and crews do exist in these competitions, including all-female crew Boadicea in *Got To Dance* 2012, mixed gendered crews Unity UK in *Got To Dance* 2012 and United We Stand on *Britain’s Got Talent* 2012. In a historical context, Banes (1984) notes that women were absent from breaking in its early development due to the physical risk involved, both from the athletic movement and from the potential eruption of fighting. This approach is distinct from that of Rose (1994), who presents a far less homogenous picture of the scene and states that a small selection of female breakdance crews existed, but were more likely to perform funk styles including popping, locking and electric boogaloo movement. Thomas DeFrantz also notes that since the 1980s, Hip Hop dance’s move into the commercial sphere has moved away from gender categorization and has opened up opportunities for women to access ‘hip hop’s hard edges’ (2004, p.77). While the female Street dancer raises interesting issues around the construction of female identity away from the hyper-sexualised representations apparent in Hip Hop dance music videos, performances of masculinity in popular dance practices also constitute an under researched area in dance scholarship (Burt, 2007 and 2009). The value of focusing solely upon all-male Street dance lies in the consideration of these competitive performances as sites of knowledge formation and the construction of individual and group young Black male identity through performances of spectacle, as well as contributing to the wider field of gender studies (see Ch. 6.2).

In order to critically explore the afore-mentioned research objectives and provide a wide sample of empirical evidence, I will focus on a six year period spanning 2008-2013 and draw from the two key U.K. television talent show competitions: ITV’s *Britain’s Got Talent* between the years of 2007 and 2011, and Sky 1’s *Got To Dance* between the years 2010-2013. These two programmes showcase the widest variety and number of male Street dance crew performances and follow a similar structure in their filming of auditions, semi-finals and finals (see Ch.1.1). This focus on *Got To Dance* in the later years represents the rise in popularity of the show, the increase in the cash prize in 2011, and the dance specific focus of the competition.² I will analyse a total of fifty eight duet, trio and group Street dance performances featured at the audition, semi-final and final rounds of the respective shows (see Appx. A). My analysis centres around recorded episodes of the television programmes themselves, though where required due to availability, I also analyse recorded
footage posted on the programmes' websites and social media video sharing websites such as YouTube.

My research parameters also include an analysis of the wider television mechanisms and event production that accompanies these performances. In her investigation of So You Think You Can Dance, Kate Elswit describes the television ‘package’ that ‘included edited studio clips of the dancers rehearsing, interspersed with shots of them talking to the camera about what they learned and how they experienced the process leading up to the performing the dance before the judges’ (2012, p.135). While disparate in narrative and content, these production choices of the television talent show are key in an analysis of the choreographies themselves, and the creation of the overall ‘media spectacle’ of the show (see Ch. 4.6). This thesis therefore not only presents an analysis of the choreography, the camera work and the edit, but also includes the wider context of the television talent show competition.

1.3 Definition of terms

For the purposes of clarity, I here define my usage of the terms ‘Street dance’ and ‘Hip Hop dance’. In popular media, dance crew performances in television talent shows are labelled under a plethora of media generated umbrella terms, including ‘Street dance’, ‘Hip Hop’, ‘urban’ and ‘commercial’. All these terms are problematic in their reduction of complex artistic forms to stereotypical sound bites. Street dance and Urban dance are particularly problematic as they assume an affinity with an inner-city, underground context and subcultural lifestyle, and this establishes an imagined link between the codified and structured television performances and the dance’s vernacular origins. This varied lexicon is reflective of several areas of confusion: the unwritten and historical context of the various forms, genres and sub-genres of Afro-diasporic cultural practice, the cultural appropriation of these forms and the lack of research surrounding the emerging transnational cultural flows of Hip Hop culture. While the historical origins of breakdance and its early dissemination are prevalent subject matters in academic literature, contemporary U.K. Hip Hop dance culture, the commercialisation of Hip Hop dance, and the emergence of the term Street dance are all under researched areas.

Recognising these issues in classification, I describe, where possible, dance styles in relation to the stylistic terminology arising from populist histories of their origins.
These include Locking, Popping, Roboting and Electric Boogaloo (Funk Styles); Breaking and Hip Hop party dances (Hip Hop); House, Vogueing and Waacking (Club Styles); NuSkool Hip Hop choreography, Krump and Jerking (see Appx. B for definitions). Where unavoidable in the writing, I refer to these vernacular practices using the umbrella term ‘Hip Hop dance’. In the choreographed and television performances of the crews, however, I use the media generated term ‘Street dance’ to refer to the choreographed blend of Hip Hop dance styles with gymnastics, martial arts, musical theatre spatial formations and mimed narrative. This differentiation between Street dance and Hip Hop dance purposely removes the hierarchy that surrounds these performances in relation to their deemed inauthenticity in comparison with ‘authentic’ vernacular practices of Hip Hop dance.

Other terms commonly used in this thesis include the reference to global technocapitalist society. This concept is a specific reimagining of ‘capitalist society’ that more specifically highlights the global flows of digital information, and the breaking down of the inaccurate socio-cultural binary of East and West in terms of capitalist consumption. This term also refers to Luis Suarez-Villa’s (2009) definition of technocapitalism as a new form of capitalism that moves away from manufacturing and production, and instead exploits the intangible qualities of creativity and knowledge. As I will discuss in Ch. 4.3, this emphasis on intangible products is particularly relevant to the commodification of dancing bodies. It is also important to clarify my use of the term ‘dancing bodies’. In line with the disciplinary field of dance studies which positions the body as an active social agent, I use the term ‘the body’ to critically analyse crew performances. This is not to say, however, that these moving ‘bodies’ are not dancers: complex individuals whose movement is situated in a wider human existence tied to experiences of emotion and sensation. Finally, in order to ensure the flow of written expression, this study will make the following abbreviations: Britain’s Got Talent to BGT, Got To Dance to GTD, and So You Think You Can Dance to SYTYCD. Upon using the term ‘male Street dance crews’, I also refer to the all-male gender composition of the crews.

1.4 Research methods

The research methods employed for this study are not based on a single pre-existing model but are a combination of choreographic and on-screen analysis, informed by an intertextual approach. Male Street dance crew performances operate as forms of light entertainment that appeal to a mass television audience,
but are also rich in socio-cultural meanings. Alongside the complex and tightly packed choreographic content of the crew performances, the presentation of the dancers through the television production and the dissemination of the male dancing body through broadcasting to millions in the U.K. demands an analysis of the construction and performance of spectacle that takes into account the choreographic content of the dances, the capturing of the body through camera and post-production edit, the varying narratives of the performances and the intertextual references that can be ascribed to these choreographies. In order to analyse the multifaceted texts of television male Street dance crew performances, an intertextual approach is therefore most appropriate.

In terms of the scrutiny of movement, I will employ Janet Adshead-Lansdale’s (1999) and Lansdale’s (2008) intertextual approach to analysing the dancing body in postmodern culture. I use the term postmodern culture in line with Frederik Jameson’s (1991) and Angela McRobbie’s (1994) understandings of postmodernism as a characteristic of a society that has departed from classical modernist values. Emerging from twentieth century consumer culture and the media industry, postmodern characteristics include the mixing and borrowing of artistic styles and cultures, the emphasis on pastiche and the departure from historicity (McRobbie, 1994). Building on her model of dance movement analysis (Adshead, 1988) and her concept of dance as text (1999), Lansdale (2008) posits that an intertextual approach allows the reader to forge multiple interpretations of the dancing body in different contexts, without making assumptions of artistic intention.\textsuperscript{xii}

Dance...can be seen to be part of a much bigger cultural, political and historical landscape than can possibly be encompassed by our local experience and its forms cannot be seen separately from the shared postmodern culture of the late twentieth century, which has driven industry and technology across much of the world. Our consciousness of this larger world, in an era of globalisation, is inescapably bound up in our contemporary forms of expression...It is the framework of intertextuality that encourages a form of analysis that reaches into these fields yet retains a hold on the form of expression that it considers.

Lansdale, 2008, p.15

Here, Lansdale highlights the pertinence of using an intertextual approach for dance practice in a complex and media-driven postmodern culture while at the same time continuing to place dance at the centre of the analysis. In terms of popular dance, there is also potential for varying and conflicting constructions of meaning made possible through intertextual contemporary popular culture. In her book chapter ‘A
‘streetwise, urban chic’: popular culture and intertextuality in the work of Les Anderson’ (1999), Dodds draws upon Jameson to argue that postmodernism reflects popular culture through its ‘fragmentation’ and ‘commodification’ of contemporary life (p.208). Both popular culture and postmodernism can be characterized as ‘transient and playful’, with a renewed emphasis on the surface and the decentering of the author (p.208). I apply this intertextual approach to my own analysis, with particular emphasis on the renewed importance of the surface due to the focus on the visual properties of spectacle.

This analysis of the choreography will be integrated into a dance on screen analysis of the broader television talent show performance. In the introduction to her book Dance on screen: genres and media from Hollywood to experimental art (2001), Sherrill Dodds states that ‘dance is embedded in the visual fabric of technologies’, indicating the close connection between the moving body and media forms such as advertising, music television, dance for camera, video dance, dance on the popular screen and dance references in popular film (p.1). Dodds describes how the transference of the live body to a screen body is manipulated and distorted through ‘the triadic relationship between the moving body, the camera and the edit’ and that these televisual elements modify notions of space, time and energy (2001, p.89). The positioning of the male Street dance crew performance in a television production is therefore relevant to the analysis of the choreography as crew performances are captured and re-presented through the camera lens and the post-production edit. Spectators witness choreography produced through the eyes of the production edit, whereby the zooming, tilting, panning and dolly of the camera, as well as the post-production manipulation of live and pre-recorded footage, demands a consideration of these stylised televisual effects.

As claimed in Ch.1.2, Hip Hop dance scholarship focuses on the cultural and political significance of the form rather than the aesthetic components of the dance itself. DeFrantz (2004) writes about the ‘corporeal orature’ of Hip Hop dance movement, but does not undertake a lengthy movement analysis of the various styles that feature under the umbrella term of Street dance (p.76). In order to undertake an accurate written portrayal of Hip Hop dance styles, I position myself as expert spectator, as defined by Melrose (2002), due to my embodied knowledge of the styles in question. In order to assist the reader who may be unfamiliar with the dance styles in question, a glossary of recognised terminology is provided (see Appx. B). Due to the evolving nature of the corporeal practice and its emphasis on
improvisation, however, it should be noted that terminology remains contested in the dancing community and these terms should not be read as static or fixed.

The above research methods are supported by informal conversations with dancers, crew members and production editors between 2009 to the present. My position as a dancer, dance lecturer and dance development manager has led to many informal discussions with dance artists who have been involved with reality television competitions, including SYTYCD, BGT and GTD. While my methodology is not reliant on dance ethnography as a research strategy due to the nature of the enquiry, it is important to note that these conversations have provided a valuable behind-the-scenes insight into these productions. In particular, this is due to the fact that backstage and behind-the-scenes access is normally granted only to those taking part in the competition. It is also important to position myself as a spectator in this research on television subjects. While I recognise that my European white female gaze upon majority Black dancing bodies raises issues of hegemony and representation, and that it is never possible to hold a neutral view, I aim to root my arguments in a formalised and objective analysis of the field.

1.5 Critical frameworks

In her critique of intertextual analysis, Lansdale argues that in order to avoid the possibility of too many conceptual frameworks and readings of the dance as text, the intertextual approach must be ‘a process capable of articulation’, where frameworks or critical approaches are carefully chosen in relation to the choreography and the objectives of the research (2008, p.9). Due to the complex interplay and symbiotic relationship between the choreography, camera and post-production edit, it is vital to use an interdisciplinary methodology for this investigation. As demonstrated in Ch. 1.2, the concept of spectacle brings into question both ideas of aesthetics and the economic valuing of the dancing body. I therefore draw upon a range of interdisciplinary areas that are directly applicable for my research context, drawing from a range of critical strategies which have evolved from areas such as the field of philosophical aesthetics and Marxism, as well as concepts that have shaped dance, television and film studies. In terms of my analysis chapters as outlined in Part Two, I specifically draw upon the academic disciplines of film theory, gender and race theory and posthumanist theory to support and inform the specific focus of each chapter.
It should be noted that while the talent shows utilise an interactive element between performer, judging panel and home spectator, I do not attempt to research the affective reaction of the audience or the audience interaction through fan sites and social media. While emerging research focuses on the interactive structure of these television programmes and issues of spectatorship (Benthaus, 2015), I focus on the dancing bodies themselves and the ways in which spectacle is produced in order to encourage the home spectator to vote. While the reactions of the studio audience, judging panel, and the live social media comments of the remote television audience are relevant to an event being deemed spectacular, these are the effects of spectacle rather than its construction and, as such, not the central focus of my study. That is, as every individual spectator reaction depends on their own opinion and socio-cultural background, I do not attempt to presume knowledge of the audience’s reaction, but instead analyse the construction and performance of the images that create such reactions (see Ch.3.2).

1.6 The research trajectory

The structure of this thesis will comprise nine chapters organised in two Parts. Part One will situate the research enquiry, outlining my research methodology, parameters and the critical frameworks that inform my investigation. Part Two will comprise my case studies presented in four analysis chapters. The thesis will culminate in an inter-relationship of the findings in relation to the key research questions.

This Chapter One has identified the aims and specific research questions and objectives, and provided an overview of my methods and methodology. Chapter Two will critique published research in the multidisciplinary fields that have the potential to inform research on Street dance in television talent shows. Initially, the chapter will interrogate writings based on the genre of Hip Hop dance practice in order to situate my own research parameters in relation to this dance style. Writings concerning competition, reality television and dance in reality television will then be evaluated. Consequently, this chapter will enable me to demonstrate gaps in the field of knowledge and in turn reinforce the importance of my own research. In discussing this literature, this chapter will also provide contextual information on each of the chosen subject areas: Hip Hop dance, competition, reality television and dance on reality television.
Following this literature review, in Chapter Three I will evaluate the concepts and critical strategies that inform research on the aesthetic properties of spectacle within a dance on screen context. Drawing upon critical theory derived from film studies, television studies and dance studies, this chapter will identify the role of spectacle as a perceptible mode of eye-catching display and will investigate corporeal spectacle, cinematic spectacle and the relationship between moving bodies, the camera and the edit. In Chapter Four, I will evaluate the concepts and critical strategies that inform research on spectacle as an ideological condition of global technocapitalist society. Drawing upon bodies of thought derived from Marxist and Post-Marxist theory, with particular attention to Debord’s ideas addressed in his ‘Society of the Spectacle’ (1967), I examine spectacle as a condition of a commodified society. This chapter will then draw together my findings from Part One which will inform the approach to the analysis in Part Two.

Part Two of this thesis will begin with Chapter Five: an investigation into the construction and performance of spectacle by way of the choreography of the crew performance. Drawing upon film theory and a dance on screen analysis, I explore the extent to which crews enact the cinematic special effect in their choreography. Chapter Six will present my investigation into how the various representations of identity contribute to the construction of spectacle. Building upon key theoretical ideas surrounding masculinised and racialised identity representations on television, this chapter will question the extent to which spectacle is constructed through the performance of exaggerated personas. Chapter Seven presents my investigation into the relationship between technology and the body. Situating my ideas in posthumanist theory and dance on screen analysis, I examine the extent to which crews construct spectacle through the synthesis between technology and the body.

Chapter Eight will analyse the male Street dance crew performance in the wider context of the media spectacle of the television talent show. Drawing upon my analysis of the previous three chapters and my exploration of the notion of spectacle as a condition of a commodified society, I will investigate ideas of commodification in relation to the male Street dance crew performance (see Ch. 4.3). Lastly, Chapter Nine will revisit the main research questions and identify how each of the related objectives has been addressed in the aforementioned chapters.
Alongside my Master’s dissertation research into how gender is performatively produced, reinforced and destabilised through male neo-burlesque striptease, I have previously investigated other predominantly male dance practices, including how issues of power are constructed and challenged in relation to the 1960s Northern Soul scene, as well as a study into parkour as a socially constructed body.

ITV1’s Britain’s Got Talent began broadcasting in June 2007 and is part of the Got Talent global franchise. Sky1’s Got To Dance began its run in the U.K in 2011 and is specifically a dance competition, allowing competitors a choice in the dance style and genre of their performance.

New Faces was a British talent show that ran from 1973 to 1988. Opportunity Knocks was a series of programmes in which variety and musical performers are judged by the studio and TV audience (British Film Institute Database, 2011a and 2011b). In the case of New Faces, telephone voting was only introduced in the 1980s, with prior series solely reliant on the decision of the studio judges.

Redden states that ‘the new era of talent TV was heralded by Popstars (1999), a public contest to find members for a pop group, which was first aired in New Zealand in 1999 that was franchised worldwide until 2012’ (2008, p.6).


Throughout my thesis I draw upon the U.S. practice of capitalising the word Black. This to signify respect and acknowledgement of the shared historical and cultural affinity of Black communities, as well as to also recognise the generalisation of the term in its inclusion of people from African, Afro-Caribbean and Latin descent.

Rose follows this line of enquiry, positing that the phrase refers to Hip Hop's openness about the difficulties and oppression apparent in Black urban street life, as well as the challenge and rejection of the ‘bling bling’ culture which can be characterised as images of hyper-consumption that suggest illusory levels of wealth (2008, p.134). Tim’m T. West (2005) highlights the paradoxical nature of the concept of real, in that ‘realness’ can never be fully proven, and the precursor phrase, ‘keeping it’, suggests the threat of time and change, and therefore a need to constantly reaffirm reality in an attempt to stabilise the illusion of solidity. He argues that this reveals an anxiety around authenticity, especially with regards to the introduction of white and female Hip Hop consumers as a result of the commodification and distribution of Hip Hop. Consequently, he suggests that in this sense, realness is an ‘enduring blackness’ which is impossible to reclaim or stabilise, and results in the reaffirmation of ‘real black heteronormativity’ by way of exposing outsiders to the Hip Hop community who do not correctly portray the real (West, 2005, pp.172-3). By changing the boundaries and pushing the mantra of ‘keeping it real’, West (2005) suggests that the existing Hip Hop community is attempting to police its citizens in order to maintain its realness.

The term cypher refers to the breakdance circle formed by participants and spectators.

Banes (1984) argues that women in the scene were viewed as masculine or sexually available. In her interviews with the Rock Steady Crew dancers, Rose highlights that the majority of breakdancers had no objections to b-girls performing any movements, while one dancer stated that he was ‘not as comfortable with females exhibiting the level of physical exertion breaking required’ (1994, p.49).
The second series of Got To Dance saw Sky introduce a £250,000 cash prize which UKgameshows claims to be the largest prize offered on a U.K. talent show (UKgameshows, 2015?).

Adshead-Lansdale comments that ‘if any element of a performance- for example an image, a movement, a sound- can be treated as a ‘text’, then each element can be ‘read’, singly or in units, through codes on which it draws. In Dance Analysis this was described as the construction of meaning based on single elements, and on combinations of elements and larger structures which work across sections of the discourse which the dance sets up and which become evident only in performance (1988: 88)’ (1999, p.9).

I draw upon Melrose’s (2002) definition of ‘expert spectator’ to describe a way of seeing specific to a spectator with an embodied knowledge of the dance forms in question. Melrose introduces this idea circa 2002/2003 as part of her own critical paradigm (see Melrose 2007 ‘Confessions of an uneasy expert spectator’ http://www.sfmelrose.org.uk/). In terms of my expertise, I have been a dancer of Hip Hop styles for over fifteen years and have taken classes in funk styles, breaking, and Nu-Skool choreography.
Chapter Two: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

In order to situate this research in its scholarly context, in this chapter I review and critique the literature that focuses on its multiple strands. This chapter also offers, via a discussion of its literature, further contextual information for my research on the history, development, influences and characteristics of the dance forms. I begin by critiquing the key themes of Hip Hop dance scholarship to identify the strengths and limitations of these texts, in order to reveal where my research can contribute. Sections 2.2 to 2.3 focus on Hip Hop as both a vernacular practice, and as a mediated practice on the commercial screen. I will then focus on the topic of dance and competition, paying particular attention to scholarly writings on competitive dance practices (Ch. 2.4), reality television (Ch. 2.5), and the specific context of dance television talent show competitions (Ch. 2.6).

2.2 Hip Hop dance scholarship

Since Sally Banes’ 1981 seminal article in New York’s Village Voice, ‘Physical Graffiti: Breaking Is Hard to Do’, vernacular Hip Hop dance forms, and in particular the east coast style of breaking (breakdance, B-boying/B-girling), have been the focus of a range of populist and scholarly texts. These writings have investigated Hip Hop as both an autonomous art form and as a dance form integrated in wider studies of Hip Hop culture. David Toop (2000) and Jeff Chang (2005) account that breaking was initially allowed to develop untouched and flourish as a Street culture due to the isolation and deprivation of communities that originated in the urban deprivation of New York City’s South Bronx. B-boy crews developed from rival gangs, and both the music and dance gained popularity through house parties, schools, community centres, street corners and parks across the South Bronx. Hip Hop dance’s recorded history relays how Black and Hispanic communities in the 1970s developed an alternative to gang warfare through four cultural styles: DJ'ing, rapping, graffiti and b-Boying (breaking/breakdancing), which as a collective stylistic practice became known as ‘Hip Hop’ (see Appx. B) (Hazzard-Gordon, 1996; Perkins, 1996; Toop, 2000; Fricke and Ahearn 2002; Forman and Neal, 2004; Chang, 2005).
The populist history of U.S. east coast Hip Hop culture positions ‘breakdance’ as the founding style of the ‘urban’ dance movement: an improvised form of physical graffiti that incorporates footwork, floor work and end poses known as freezes (Fricke and Ahearn 2002; Toop 2000; Chang, 2005; Forman & Neal, 2005; Schloss, 2009). Toop’s (2000) historical account observes how the term breakdance developed from the evolution in DJ style, where instead of blending tracks together, mobile DJ’s would extend the drumming instrumental in the music known as the break. The dance itself was a physical manifestation of the Hip Hop sound, and was performed in a circle with the lead dancer(s) from each crew performing in the centre. The basic construction of breakdance incorporated top rock, a rhythmic stepping pattern that allowed the dancer to enter the circle and find the beat of the music, floor work that included six steps (a series of six fast steps performed low to the ground) leading onto power moves which incorporated improvised acrobatics, spins and flips and ending in a freeze (see Appx. B). Tricia Rose (1994) and Thomas DeFrantz (2004) suggest that breakdance was inspired by a multitude of cultural pastimes, including capoeira, a Brazilian dance/martial art form, jazz, tap, Salsa and Asian martial arts inspired by Kung-Fu films.

Whilst these accounts historically situate the dance style and its vernacular origins, they only describe the emergence of Hip Hop culture and the subsequent stylistic pastime of breakdance from a U.S. perspective. They also overlook the integration of other dance styles under the banner of ‘Street dance’ emerging across North America, including the influence of West coast funk dance styles (Popping, Locking and Electric Boogaloo), the house dance club movement from Chicago and New York (Sommer, 2001), the New York gay club dances of Waacking and Vogueing (Waacking, 2011; Bragin, 2014), and the LA South Central practices of Clowning and Krump dance, as seen in the documentary Rize (2005) (Zanfagna, 2009) (see Appx. B). The majority of monographs focus purely on Hip Hop’s musical stylistic elements rather than the movement vocabulary, with any dance references relying on generalised accounts rather than a detailed analysis (Dent, 1992; Dimitriadis, 2001; Rose, 2008). Where research does exist on the above stylistic practices, they feature in journal articles rather than dedicated monographs, as they adopt a case study approach of local sites of cultural practice rather than a wider consideration of Hip Hop’s global position (Garofoli, 2008; Zanfagna, 2009; Batiste, 2014; Bragin, 2014a).
In the British Hip Hop scene, Halifu Osumare comments that ‘England's prominent Caribbean sound-system culture evolved into particular mediations, amplifications, and fractures of U.S. Hip Hop culture, rather than a 'direct one-to-one influence’ (2007, p.78). Both David Hesmondhalgh and Caspar Melville’s (2001) and Andy Wood’s (2009) historical analysis of the British music scene examines how U.S. Hip Hop sounds have been influenced by a cross-fertilization of other Afro-diasporic practices, including reggae and dance hall to produce a complex musical field. The populist history that states Hip Hop culture solely originated from the South Bronx consequently does not take into account ‘the complexity of the international flows of musical culture’ (Hesmondhalgh and Melville, 2001, p.91). The above sources are limited in scope, however, to the development of the musical style and the origins and development of the British Hip Hop dance scene. While I do not attempt to chart the origins of Hip Hop dance in a U.K. context, I will explore the integration of Hip Hop styles in a U.K. televised context through a close textual analysis of crew choreographies in Part Two of this thesis.

Identity construction and the expression of the individual through the stylistic qualities of vernacular Hip Hop dance have been widely theorised, and writings have linked the dance style to the expression of identity, youth cultures and class construction (Rose, 1994; Condry, 2001; Dimitriadis, 2001; Stovall, 2005; Elam & Jackson, 2005). In particular, the notion of Hip Hop dance as a vehicle for the articulation of a strong, masculine presence is a common theme in cultural studies research (LaBoskey, 2001; Hoch, 2005; DeFrantz, 2004). In her article, ‘Getting off: portrayals of masculinity in hip hop dance in film’ (2001), Sara LaBoskey discusses how Hip Hop dance is ‘a translation of gang warfare into the language of dance and physical expression’ (p.114). She links this competitive drive with the affirmation of masculinity amongst its predominantly male participants, and proposes that breakdance provides an opportunity to gain supremacy and respect amongst peers. Danny Hoch proposes that the component of battling signifies ‘resistance, rebellion, mastery of skill, and competition’ (2005, p.361). Breaking was the prime competitive dance, due to the elements of physical confrontation and showmanship, but there are no judges present and victory is decided organically by both participants and side-line viewers (DeFrantz, 2004). Similar to the development of rap battles (Lee, 2009; Samy Alim, Lee and Mason, 2011), the movements of the breakdance battle became more elaborate and inventive as a consequence of the demands of the contest, with elaborations including the progression from breakdance movements
that concentrated on the legs and feet to aerial work and acrobatics, revealing an evolution in the style due to being placed in a competitive format. ii

Banes’ (1984), Rose’s (1994), Hazzard-Gordon’s (1996) historical analyses of breakdance establish that in Hip Hop culture’s early development, the projection of dominance can be viewed as a reaction to the hostility of the socio-economic climate, as crews battled on Street corners to claim territory through the inscription of personal identity onto city surfaces, with freezes acting as metaphorical graffiti tags. iii Male dancers asserted their masculinity by claiming dominance in the b-boy circle through the athletic nature of the movement as well as through improvised freezes that insinuated images of women, the elderly or subordinate animals; the opposites of their projected masculine and dominant image. Both Rose (1994) and Banes (2009) argue that these particular freezes explored the body ‘in a subjunctive mode: things not as they are, but as they might be’, which suggests that b-boys were not only performing physical taunts to the opposing crew, but were also carving out masculine identity through the performance of comedic juxtapositions (Banes cited in Osumare, 2009, p.264). Following this line of enquiry, Hazzard-Gordon’s (1996) analysis of dance in Hip Hop culture asserts that the outwardly aggressive movements of male Hip Hop dance practice provide an outlet of rage for marginalized youth as well as presenting a physical challenge. In particular, she reinterprets Hip Hop dances’ poses of despondency and rejection, such as the crossing the arms in front of the chest, to instead signify masculine affirmation, status and strength. This marking of territory, coupled with the informality and mobility of the dance, gave a voice to the Hip Hop community who were living in social deprivation, and allowed them to make their own challenge to the hegemonic social structure (Osumare, 2007).

These authors establish the important link between the context of competition, the socio-economic climate of the South Bronx and the construction of masculine personas through the vernacular style of breakdance. These observations are particularly important when analysing the spectacular aesthetic of the dance style and the emphasis upon virtuoso athleticism (see Ch. 5.2 and Ch. 6.5). These critiques overlook, however, observations of peer relations and group/crew dynamics, with only Hazzard-Gordon demonstrating how Hip Hop dance influences ‘intergroup dynamics and conflict’ (1996, p.230). In Chapter Six, I will critique these stereotypes of the Black male experience in Hip Hop and will examine how the construction of spectacle re-presents the performance of Black masculinity.
Additionally, the re-presentation of Hip Hop dance from a vernacular style to the tightly choreographed performance in the commercial framework presents new challenges and issues regarding the mediatisation and circulation of Hip Hop dance. This is an issue I will address in Chapter Four.

Alongside the display and recirculation of masculinity, several authors articulate the Afro-diasporic influence upon the development of Hip Hop dance styles (Rose, 1994; Grey, 1995; Gottschild, 1998, 2002, 2003; Hazzard-Gordon, 1996; Lhamon, 1998; Osumare, 2002, 2005, 2007, 2009; DeFrantz, 2004). Rose (1994) observes that the style of breakdance merged popular culture references with other African-American dances, including Lindy-hop, the Charleston, the Cakewalk and the Jitterbug. These Afro-diasporic influences reaffirm Hip Hop choreographer Rennie Harris’s statement that ‘traditional African culture…comes around each time with a different flavour’ (Harris in Gottschild, 1999, p.62). Hazzard-Gordon’s also observes the ‘cyclic quality’ in African-American dance styles, commenting on their hibernation and eventual resurfacing. Rose (1994) links the aesthetic qualities of other African cultural practices to that of Hip Hop sound and motion through Arthur Jafa’s observations of flow, layering and ruptures of line. Building upon the duality of Hip Hop dances’ controlled but relaxed aesthetic, Rose (1994) notes that across breakdance, graffiti and rap, there are moments of abrupt and sharp breaks, layered and reinforced repetition and sustained and fluid motion. Herman Grey (1995) also describes the importance of rhythm in contemporary Black youth culture, exemplified in rap and Hip Hop music, but also highlighted through the bodily actions in Hip Hop dance that are ‘marked by polyphonic and independent movements of various body parts – legs, arms, head, and trunk. They are at once cybernetic, athletic, and erotic in their incorporation of traditional and contemporary elements’ (1995, p.154). This emphasis on the embodiment of rhythm ties in with Brenda Dixon-Gottschild’s (1998) concept of the ‘Africanist aesthetic’, which provides an aesthetic framework to describe the visual properties inherent in African-American inspired dance forms. These qualities include polycentrism and polyrhythm, high-affect juxtaposition, ephebism and the aesthetic of cool, and in these five themes, Gottschild (1998) observes other familiar traits of Africanist qualities, including asymmetricality, looseness, the valuing of repetition, the grounded nature of the movement and the importance of weight in the dance.

Building upon Gottschild’s categorization of the Africanist movement aesthetic in American concert dance, Halifu Osumare (2007) proposes that the Africanist
aesthetic in Hip Hop culture forms a contemporary manifestation of African-based expressivity developed from the transatlantic slave trade and dispersed through the African diaspora. As a result, Hip Hop aesthetics are ‘integral elements in Africanist art and lifestyle that are woven into the fabric of our society’ (p.12). Osumare states that unlike the Western philosophy of separating art from life and body from mind, Africanist cultures embody the everyday lived experience through cultural practice.

The concept of exploring self-identity through cultural practice is central to the African aesthetic and is achieved through a negotiation of self-identity by means of embodied improvised choices and play (Jackson, 2001).

Although the above scholarly works provide strong arguments regarding the presence of an Africanist aesthetic in Hip Hop dance, I would argue, however, that the African aesthetic as a label does not necessarily reflect the contemporary and multi-cultural nature of the dance form as it assumes cultural ownership. In addition, although the Africanist aesthetic highlights the overall qualities of the dance form, it does present a generalised overview of common characteristics which overshadows the nuances apparent in the many strands of Hip Hop dance choreography. Most importantly though, the term fails to acknowledge the various manifestations of an Africanist aesthetic in the trans-national movement of Hip Hop practice, which is especially important when focusing on urban dance practice in the U.K. Due to the parameters of my research, this thesis will not present an analysis of the Africanist-aesthetic within U.K. male Street dance crew performances, but it will draw upon the aesthetic qualities noted in the surrounding literature.

DeFrantz’ (2004) analysis of Hip Hop dance practice in his article, ‘The black beat made visible: hip hop dance and body power’, also highlights the importance of Black social dance as a form of identity construction due to its ‘corporeal oratory’: the production of meaning through the speech-like quality of the movement (p.76). Instead of inscribing meaning onto the dance from an outside perspective, DeFrantz discusses how Black social dance requires a physical embodiment in order for the dance’s full communicative meanings to be apparent. This physical dialogue is communicated through the dance’s visualisation of the beat, accents and phrases in the music, as well as its ability to call and respond. DeFrantz observes that the style originates from the bounce: a physical recoil present in the body. The appearance of power and physical ferocity originates from the amalgamation of the weightiness of the body with the expansive use of space, the emotional drive behind the movements and the driving beat of the music. The physical tightness of the body
combined with the visualization of sharp rhythmic phrases, poly-rhythms and accents, equate to an 'outwardly-explosive directness of precision' (p.74).

These observations of Hip Hop dance provide detailed accounts and movement analysis regarding the aesthetic of the style, and establish the importance of the call and response mechanism in the music and the dance derived from the African diaspora. These observations, however, are rooted in the vernacular practice, as DeFrantz argues that ‘subsequent reproduction of the dances by people looking only from the outside leads to the flat, militaristic repetition commonly viewed in the commercial music video sphere’ (2004, p.68). While this observation highlights the issue of the transformation and the appropriation of the dance style in a mediated form, it subsequently devalues the hybridized and mediated versions of Hip Hop dance presented for public display and entertainment, such as Street dance styles witnessed in televised talent show competitions, and precludes the analysis of these texts. While I will acknowledge in Chapter Six and Chapter Eight issues of authenticity and the cultural appropriation of Black cultural forms as a result of the mediation of Hip Hop dance forms, I will allow a space for analysis of these televised and mediated performances in their new hybridised format.

Another key area of discussion examined in scholarly articles on Hip Hop dance is the transmission of the form through local communities, global migration, media broadcasting and the reimagining of Hip Hop dance in a theatrical context (Osumare, 2002, 2005, 2007, 2009; Fogarty, 2010, 2012, 2014; McCarren, 2013; Prickett, 2013). In Georgina Harper’s Dancing Times interview with Jonzi D: the curator, host and Hip Hop musician and artist who champions U.K. Hip Hop practice, he recalls that ‘in 1983, dance was the first part of Hip Hop culture that grabbed me. seeing someone spinning on their head and doing all these acrobatic moves – as a 13 year-old boy that was just the most exciting thing ever’ (Jonzi D in Harper, 2007, p.13). This statement is important to my own research as he establishes the importance of the visual pyrotechnics of the style in attracting the viewer’s attention. He discounts, however, the mediatisation of the form, stating that a lack of cultural knowledge of the foundations of the style has led to ‘a load of happy, MTV dancers who lack the rawness’ (Jonzi D in Harper, 2007, p.14). This opinion halts analysis of this style of commercialised and choreographed Street dance.
Mary Fogarty’s (2010, 2012, 2014) research on the transmission of b-boy culture provides persuasive discussion regarding the international circulation of embodied knowledge in the breaking community, but overlooks the change and adaption in the commercialisation of the form. In a Western theatre context, Stacey Prickett (2013) writes from a cultural studies perspective on the transmission of Hip Hop dance from its vernacular context to the British stage, referring to the re-valuing of Hip Hop’s cultural capital as a result of its re-presentation. Through her focus on the works of Hip Hop artists Rennie Harris, BoyBlue Entertainment and Kate Prinze’s company ZooNation, she offers a rudimentary background with regards to the mass mediation of Hip Hop through television, films and the Olympics. She does not provide, however, sufficient detail with regards to the aesthetic qualities of these choreographies in a media environment.

Tony Mitchell’s (2001) edited volume, *Global Noise: Rap and Hip Hop outside the USA* remedies the omission of recorded histories of Hip Hop culture outside of the U.S. He reveals that after Hip Hop’s international explosion in 1983, communities initially adopted U.S. musical forms and idioms, but have since incorporated localised aesthetics. It is Halifu Osumare’s (2002, 2005, 2007, 2009) research on the global movements of the Hip Hop Africanist aesthetic that develops a far more nuanced argument and dominates thinking in the field, and has led the way for research into the global impact of Hip Hop dance (Engel, 2001; Perry, 2008; Wood, 2009). Osumare (2007) argues that there are two diverse concepts of Hip Hop circulation: the transnational commercial vehicle of the global pop industry that operates through music videos, international tours and advertising, and the resistant subcultural underground movement network made up of battles, message boards and social experience.41 As a result of both strands, Black and Latino embodied identities are being exported internationally and are being adapted with localised articulation. Osumare’s (2007) observations regarding the transnational capitalist commodification of Hip Hop music and dance are particularly relevant to my own study of Street dance forms situated in a mediated environment. It is this transnational commercial vehicle of Hip Hop circulation that forms the focus of my own study, as I will investigate the relationship between Street dance crew performances and the media spectacle of the television talent show format (see Ch. 8.2).
2.3 Hip Hop on screen

In October 1982, the Rock Steady Crew, a famous U.S. east coast b-boy crew, featured in the film *Flashdance* (1983). This brief appearance on screen fuelled the transnational spread of breakdance, with young people across the globe copying the iconic and athletic body shapes of the dancers. Other ‘breaksploitation’ films of the 1980s included *Style Wars* (1983), *Wild Style* (1983), *Beat street* (1984) and *Breakin* (1984) (DeFrantz, 2014, p.113). Several authors studying the global spread of Hip Hop culture (Condry, 2001; Morelli, 2001; Perry, 2008) propose how the aesthetic qualities of breakdance played an important part in the global adoption of the style. Both Banes’ (1984) and Toop’s (2000) historical accounts of breakdance establish that the athleticism and virtuosic nature of the style instantly appealed to young people internationally regardless of background, status and even gender, and once divorced from its Latina and African-American origins had the ability to sell a wide range of products. While useful to my own research, these studies overlook an analysis of the visual qualities of the form in a dance on screen context. In Chapter Three, I will inquire into the aesthetic properties of spectacle as phenomenon and establish a mode of analysis for examining the popular dancing body in a commercial screen dance context.

Osumare (2007) proposes that the initial explosion of breakdance led to the circulation and re-articulation of a Black cultural aesthetic in Hip Hop culture on a global scale. She notes that MTV culture, the U.S. based production and distribution of music videos to global youth cultures, showcases the powerful spectacle of Hip Hop rap and dance. Through fast-paced editing, mass dissemination and images of rap stars achieving wealth, fame and success through Hip Hop, producers establish the link between global Hip Hop culture and capitalist means of production. This observation is pertinent to my own research in that she begins to establish a link between technocapitalist culture and the spectacular aesthetic of the Hip Hop dance: a concept I will extend in Chapters Three and Four. While Osumare acknowledges the variety of representations of Hip Hop dance in music videos, she does distance her research from the choreography featured in these videos, stating it ‘has little of the grassroots vitality of the Hip Hop dance scene in subterranean global communities’ (2007, p.156).

Several authors also examine how Hip Hop dance styles have changed as a result of their appropriation by the media (Banes, 1984; Dimitriadis, 2001; Huntingdon,
2007, 2011; McLeod, 2009). In her study of Hip Hop dance on screen, LaBoskey (2001) argues that the dance transformed from a vernacular style to a spectacular style when it became choreographed and consumed as commercial entertainment. She proposes that by removing Hip Hop dance from a competitive format and placing it in a meditated film context, the artistic reactions and expressions behind the movements are lost, resulting in dancers having to react with inanimate objects or a camera lens. Osumare (2007) and Rose (1994) establish that Hip Hop's incorporation into mass popular culture is another step in the existing relationship between youth culture, Hip Hop and the commodity system, as Hip Hop culture has always been expressed through the rebranding of its signs and meanings. By placing emphasis on the spectacular elements of the dance, as well as commodifying the image of the form to appeal to a more popular market, Hip Hop dance became extremely profitable as it signified the performance of individuality: a quality that still holds high value media currency in popular culture. Carla Stalling Huntingdon’s (2011) study on Black Social Dance in Television Advertising applies notions of semiotics and commodity theory to a variety of Black social dance performances in television advertising. Huntingdon’s writings on the construction of the Hip Hop dancing body as product are applicable to my own research, and in particular her methodological structure is applicable to my own research regarding the construction of spectacle as an ideological condition of global technocapitalist society. She conducts her analysis, however, from a purely media studies perspective and does not privilege the moving body in her writing. I address this gap in the field by drawing upon critical theories evolved from Marxism while at the same time favouring an analysis of the moving body.

Osumare (2007) also states that the other core appeal of Hip Hop dance as a commodity lies in its embodiment of the notions of ‘Street’ and ‘hood’. These urban labels represent vital material for international industries to market products and lifestyles (2007, p.151). She notes that the Black body is portrayed as a clichéd signifier of the U.S. pop cultural market as a result of the globalisation of Hip Hop. Here, Osumare highlights the threat that the objectification of the Black body will continue the essentialised historical stereotype of the Black entertainer who represents the aesthetic of cool. In this context, she maintains that the multinational appropriation of Hip Hop culture ‘offers no new model for change’ (2007, p.58). In Chapter Six, I will build upon these ideas to question how spectacle is constructed through representations of identity in a U.K. context, with particular focus on the performance of masculinity and the circulation of essentialised images of blackness.
DeFrantz (2014) offers the most comprehensive study of the mediatisation of Hip Hop in his genealogy of b-boy films from the 1980s to the contemporary moment. Focusing on the 'breaksploitation' films of the early 1980s, DeFrantz states that Hip Hop's vernacular origins in the South Bronx offered an urban yet spectacular aesthetic that was easily suited to a teenage demographic who were attracted to Hip Hop's emphasis on individuality and originality. Hip Hop also offered an adaptable and diverse vehicle for Hollywood productions that required minimal rehearsal space, high level performance standards, and did not require 'choreographic authority' (2014, p.121). As a consequence, he proposes that 'in two short years, Hollywood had absorbed popping, locking, and breaking, and transformed an aesthetic constellation of physical practice that spoke to political and social circumstances, to deploy it largely as a containable, shorthand narrative marker of race, class, and upward-mobility aspiration' (p.129). Productions championed the Hollywood narrative model of upward mobility, the exploration of cultural exchange through different dance styles, and the 'underdog rising up against corporate greed' (p.128). These themes can be witnessed in contemporary manifestations of the early b-boy films, including the contemporary long running Step Up Series (2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014) and the British film StreetDance 3D (2010). DeFrantz’s theorisations regarding the mediatised representation of identities in Hip Hop dance on film are significant for my own research. Alongside my analysis of identities in Chapter Six, I will also explore how Street dance crews are represented in the commercial format of the television talent show production in Chapter Eight.

While DeFrantz remains wary of the media influenced incarnations of Hip Hop, he does acknowledge that Hollywood’s appropriation of Hip Hop dance forms enabled a performance platform and a narrative for young people of colour, inspiring the global spread of an international youth culture stylistic movement. These opportunities and conditions, however, were heavily controlled by the Hollywood production team and removed agency and credibility for the artists. He proposes that this formulaic presentation of Hip Hop styles continues to influence ‘the treacly, hegemonic commercial productions of the twenty-first century’ (2014, p.129). In her study of Krump dance, Christina Zanfagna (2009) provides a counter argument to the constructed image of the homogenizing and stereotype inducing Hip Hop music industry, and states that both the media and Hip Hop youth culture depicts consumerism as a form of religion (see Appx. B). Zanfagna argues that despite the appearance of capitalist over-indulgence and stereotypical Hip Hop caricatures,
such as the gangster thug mentality projected through rap music, Hip Hop still generates the appearance of marginality and maintains a serious and ominous presence as it masks a deeper struggle that is both moral and spiritual. Consequently, she argues that the presence of play and competition in Hip Hop are merely transformative devices to ‘transform pain into prestige and pleasure’ (p.349). Her arguments are relevant to my own study as they move away from narratives of a dominating capitalist media production, and instead offer a reinterpretation of the relationship between the media and the Hip Hop dancers. In Chapter Eight, my research will explore the negotiation of spectacle, whereby I examine modes of resistance in these commercial performances against their reduction to spectacle, despite their placement in the neoliberal capitalist format of the reality television competition.

This literature review has so far offered a discussion and critique of scholarly texts that surround the activity of Hip Hop dance. In terms of the study of ‘Street dance’, the media generated term that gained currency in the 1990s used to describe the choreographed style of Hip Hop dance styles witnessed in music videos and in large scale pop concerts, the amalgamation of Hip Hop dance styles in the U.K. scene has been overlooked in popular cultural and performance studies. Numerous journalistic articles and blog entries discuss Street dance/Hip Hop theatre reviews (Mackrell, 2010, 2013a, 2014; Roy, 2010; Jennings, 2011), televised Street dance (Connell, 2009; Day, 2009; Pearse and Brook, 2009; Smith, 2009; Tobin, 2009; Quinn and Hill, 2009; Bradshaw, 2012; Mackrell, 2013) and Street dance films (Bradshaw, 2008; Shoard; 2010), but they do not provide an academic analysis of these forms. Sanjay Roy (2010) describes Street dance as encompassing ‘classic funk (popping and locking) and b-boy styles (breakdancing and hip-hop), club and house dance, MTV-style formation, Vogueing and the explosive energy of Krump. The result is a potent mix, and rhythm is its lifeblood’ (p.1). Drawing upon interviews with Jonzi D and Kenrick Sandy, choreographer of the U.K.’s lead Hip Hop dance company BoyBlueEnt., Roy acknowledges the while prime-time television has become the key platform for Street dance, there is a danger that the style becomes appropriated by the media. While this observation begins to engage with ideas of authenticity and the commodification of Street dance, it is limited in its journalistic style. I will address this gap in the field by providing a critical analysis of the choreographed practice of Street dance on television, rather than focusing on the social and club settings of Hip Hop dance.
In summary, the emphasis upon a cultural studies approach within Hip Hop dance scholarship has removed the body from the analysis, disregarding the importance of the movement vocabulary and the transformation of the vernacular practice into a choreographed form. While the virtuosic elements of Hip Hop are acknowledged in the vernacular style, the deemed ‘inauthenticity’ of the glossy elements of the televised form has left choreographed Street dance untouched by scholarly work. These valued judgments of the televised and commodified style have created a gap in the field, with the purposeful omission of the mass distributed and widely consumed Street dance body. In addition, the situation of popular dance practices outside of the Western art canon has left the aesthetic qualities of Street dance underdeveloped due to the link with the commercialized format of reality television.

I will analyse male Street dance crew performances in their specific context, and will move away from the omnipresent term ‘the media’ to investigate specifically how Street dance forms accommodate and utilise the commercialised platform of the reality television show. In Chapter Five, I will offer a choreographic/dance on screen analysis of these crew performances, and will focus on how spectacle operates in these choreographies. In Chapter Eight, I will additionally focus on the notion of labour and the importance of the crew structure in the construction and performance of spectacle.

Another omission in scholarship and related literature lies is the U.S. centric focus on Hip Hop dance practices with few sources focusing on the U.K. Hip Hop and Street dance scene. This omission is particularly prevalent regarding identity construction in Hip Hop dance, with the majority of scholarship focusing on the projection of masculinity in U.S. breakdance subcultures. My research will not only provide a U.K. centred analysis of Street dance in relation to the construction and performance of spectacle, but will also specifically focus on the construction of masculinised and racialised identities in a television setting. This mediatisation of the Street dance crew by the TV production additionally offers the opportunity to investigate the relationship between technological intervention and the body, both in terms of the relationship between the dancing body and the camera lens, and also the influence of the televiscual medium upon the choreographic product itself. The permeation of technological influence on the choreography through CGI effects and post-production editing remains unaddressed in Hip Hop literature and raises questions regarding the role of the body in televised Street dance. Chapter Seven will address this gap in the field by presenting an examination into the construction
and performance of spectacle in relation to the synthesis between technology and
the body.

2.4 Dance and competition

In order to address the phenomenon of Hip Hop dance practices in a televised and
competitive environment, this review will now critique literature that brings together
ideas on dance and competition. With regards to discussions of non-televised
competitive dance practices, several authors have noted the re-contextualisation of
popular dance in sporting codes of organisation, rules and outcomes. This body of
work examines how competitive dance is linked to the idea of an embodied national
aesthetic, how the relocation of movement practices in a competitive format effects
the aesthetic qualities of the movement, and how the economic structures that
surround the competition influence the dance practices themselves (Martin, 1994,
2009; Stillman, 1996; Foley, 2001; McMains, 2006; Uba, 2007; Hall, 2008).

Amy Stillman’s research into Hawaiian Hula competitions proposes that ‘hula
competitions serve the critical function of stimulating dancers and their supporters to
become involved in cultural expression’ (1996, pp.365-366). Whilst the popularity
of Hula competitions has resulted in the revival of dormant manuscripts and
repertoire, as well as encouraging further participation, there is still a greater
emphasis placed upon visual display rather than the musical and poetic elements of
the form. She observes how the ‘increased demands for physical fitness and body
conditioning, even bodybuilding, are being placed on dancers’, due to the demand
for physical feats and athletic displays in the competition (p.373). As a result of
these feats of athleticism, winning groups not only gain great respect, but
consequently attract new tuition-paying students and gain future paid engagements.

Similarly, Hall (2008) describes how Irish dancers competing in the Gaelic league
are measured on their embodiment of Irishness: an indication of the importance of
nationalism in the form. While the placement of Irish dance in a competitive
framework has led to the style’s ‘high stage of development’ (p.47), Hall observes
that the value of presenting a national aesthetic is in fact replaced by the need to
compete and win the trophies and cash prizes. The emphasis upon winning has led
to a ‘narrowing of style’, as emphasis is placed upon the emulation of the previous
winners’ styles and techniques (p.17). Stillman’s (1996) and Hall’s (2008)
observations of dance competitions reveal that whilst the embodiment of national
identity bears relevance in competitive dance practice, there is a dynamic shift in the aesthetic of the style in order to achieve the associated commodities of trophies, prizes and visual exposure. These studies begin to define the shift in aesthetics of dance practices when placed within the evaluative framework of a competition. These studies, however, fall short of providing specific detail of these aesthetic changes at the level of the body. Prior to my analysis, I will establish the critical frameworks regarding the visual properties of spectacle in a dance on screen context (see Ch. 3.6).

Carol Martin’s (1994, 2009) historical research on dance marathons in the 1930s reveals a similarity with contemporary reality television, as marathons involved a mixture of competition, drama and entertainment. While marathons were publicised as open contests, they were in fact staged events with employed entertainers who performed as regular participants at several different shows. Both audience and performer were aware of the theatricalised nature of the marathons, but entertainment was valued over authenticity. While there were instances of real pain and exhaustion, these were heightened to increase the drama of the event, and the tears, falls, and breakdowns of the contestants were the focal point of the marathon narrative. The heightened narrative in certain dance marathons had direct bearing on the ticket entry fee, as prices tripled as the contest entered its second week, due to the increased intensity and drama of the contest (Martin, 1994).

These competitive events mirrored the reality of struggle of the Great Depression in that many contestants were driven to partake in marathons due to unemployment. Martin (1994) describes this process as parodying ‘social Darwinism’, as the audience witnessed a theatricalised spectacle which placed survival ‘in quotation marks’ (1994, p.xxi). Dance marathons were temporarily situated in the shift from a producer to consumer society: a swing reflected in the structure of the contest where the winners of the dance marathons epitomised the American dream, ‘whereas the losers lived the American real life’ (2009, p.99). The marathons also represented, however, ‘a culture of poverty’ as they relied on an unemployed audience and the financial desperation of contestants (1994, p.41). Martin’s focus on the relationship between the heightened intensity and drama of the dance marathons, the financial structures of the competition and the economic climate of the era shares themes with my own investigation. While she does not use the term spectacle, her discussion of the masking of the reality of the contestants to heighten the drama of the competition is significant to my understanding of spectacle as a
masking of social reality (see Ch. 4.4). These observations highlight the importance of critiquing spectacle as a social condition, as well as the role of the dancer as commodity within the wider competition.

In her book *Glamour Addiction* (2006), Juliet McMains focuses on professional competitive ballroom dance in the U.S. McMains describes how the choreography of DanceSport, the title given to professional ballroom dance competition circuit in the U.S., is strictly governed by its competitive framework. Performances must last two minutes and are performed in the round alongside fellow competitors. Considering the emphasis on regulations and judging requirements, McMains observes, however, that there are no actual published rules and this creates discrepancy and encourages subjective valuing by the judges.\textsuperscript{11} This competitive game element of DanceSport represents the possibility of transformation, as the competition enables contestants the possibility for a change in status and hierarchy in the ballroom dance scene. Because the mechanisms of the competition are in full view of the audience, who are more than often the actual competitors, McMains observes how ‘the physical proximity of desired objects (including people, costumes, money and dance skill) and that which they symbolize (fame, power, recognition, and intimacy) intensifies the promise of eventual accessibility’ (p.4). As there can only be one winner, McMains likens the often unfulfilled aspirations of DanceSport’s competitors to the capitalist system, stating that ‘the DanceSport industry relies on a ceaseless desire to master one’s body, a desire that likewise can never be satiated’ (pp.58-59).

Most pertinent to my own investigation, McMains qualifies the importance of spectacle in DanceSport practice, which she states can be observed in the precision of the dance style, the costume and make up and the presentation of the performance. She maintains that DanceSport’s celebration of the ‘cult of surfaces’ reveals the growing distance between appearance and reality, as these images are representative of the false commodities of fame, power and social mobility (pp.61-62). As its competitors experience the real sensations of touch, physicality and intimate interaction, she proposes that ‘DanceSport answers the mounting need for the real against a growing consumer culture’ (p.62). McMain’s observations are valuable to my own research, as she establishes the competitive dancing body as a desired commodity due to its symbolic representation of fame, power and emotional intimacy witnessed in the aesthetics of the dance. In addition, she discusses the economic structures of the competition, and employs neoliberalist discourse as
discussed in texts on reality television (see Ch. 2.5). In terms of her statements regarding spectacle, however, she does not exemplify how this spectacle is constructed and, importantly, what makes the technique of DanceSport spectacular in its aesthetic. Consequently, spectacle remains a generic term used to describe any element that is exaggerated, pronounced or detailed. In Chapters Three and Four, I will fully explore the theoretical frameworks that interrogate the multifaceted term of spectacle, providing a methodological approach that I apply in my analysis chapters. In particular, I will specifically focus upon the context of dance on screen, and how spectacle is constructed through the moving body, the camera and the post-production edit.

From the above critique of scholarship focusing on dance in a competitive framework, I have established the importance of addressing the increased emphasis on the visual impact of the choreography within my own research. I account this to the intensity of being in competition with other bodies, the tight temporal rules and regulations and the overriding desire to win through the incorporation of feats of agility. In particular, my critiques of Martin (1994, 2009) and McMains (2006) highlighted the importance of situating these competitive performances in the economic framework of the competition, whilst taking into account the contestant’s desire for social mobility through their competitive performances. These research topics, however, do not examine the specific context of bodies in competition within a reality television context. This literature review will therefore narrow its critique to examine writings on reality television, specifically focusing on key texts written on dance in television talent show competitions.

2.5 Reality television

Emerging from the genre of documentary, the term ‘Reality TV’ spans a wide range of television programming, including chat shows, police dramas, ‘infotainment’, game documentaries or ‘game-docs’, lifestyle shows, surveillance programming and television talent shows (Corner, 2002). Reality television programmes were originally studied in the format of documentary realism, which, according to John Corner, took the shape of ‘a set of formal markers in the programme that confirmed that the programme was an ongoing reality, and also provided a rhetoric of accuracy and truth’ (Corner, cited in Hill, 2005). Rather than offering a close textual analysis of the subject, monographs and anthologies focusing on reality television critique wider themes raised in this television genre, including format replication, voyeurism,
surveillance and interactivity (Seiter and Universität Tübingen, 1991; Corner, 2002; Palmer, 2003, 2008; Andrejevic, 2004; Holmes, 2004, 2004, 2008; Murray and Ouellette, 2004; Hill, 2005; Biressi and Nunn, 2005; Escoffery, 2006; Kavka, 2008, 2012). Where there are examples of screen analysis, these investigations predominantly focus on ‘game-docs’ such as Big Brother (1999-current) and Survivor (1997-current), problematizing the artifice of the ‘real’ in the sensationalised and theatricalised television format, as well as the revelation of the self (Fetveit, 1999; Couldry, 2002; Kilborn, 2003; Gray, 2008; Ouellette, 2008).

In this large body of work, key themes relevant to the study of televised talent show competitions emerge. Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn note that in the case of Saturday night peak time talent shows, these programmes become event television: ‘television that attracts huge audiences and becomes part of the popular discourse of everyday life. Like soap operas, the action in shows such as Big Brother is contextualised and amplified by excessive media commentary including chat shows interviews, tabloid newspaper coverage and the circulation of participants images as celebrities, which prompts conversation among fans of characters and their behaviour’ (2005, p.11) This exaggerated narrative of television shows encourages viewers to engage with the programme and vote for their favourite contestants to remain in the show. This observation is relevant to my own investigation, and highlights the importance of analysing these television programmes due to their significance in wider socio-political and cultural society.

Another key issue and/or device used in this genre of programming is audience interactivity. This may take the format of telephone, mobile phone, text messaging, digital TV and internet voting, allowing ‘everyone to gain greater participation in and control over the mediated version of reality in which they are immersed’ (Andrejevic, 2004, p.5). Su Holmes describes the process of interactivity in reality television as the ‘transformative relationship between viewer/user and media form’ and establishes that the purpose of screaming crowds and onscreen audiences in reality television programmes is to visualise the voting public at home (2008, p.15). Andrejevic proposes that this era of televised interactivity challenges the media marketplace, as ‘the tools and means of production are in the hands of the workers’ (p.13). He notes, however, that this process can be exploitative in that while viewers may feel like they have a degree of power, this promise of interactivity ‘serves as a ruse of the rationalization of consumption’ (2004, pp.8-9). In order to make their vote count, an economic exchange must be made, reaffirming the competition’s
neoliberal capitalist discourse. Moreover, audience members are under surveillance in their role as voyeur, as by interacting with the programme, audience information is being gathered and monitored (Andrejevic, 2004). Interactivity, therefore, reveals themes of governance and power in reality television, and power shifts between producers, participants and the audience (Holmes, 2008). In terms of my own research, these studies raise relevant questions about the role of the interactive audience in the televised representation of Street dance crew choreography, and how their remote presence frames the production of spectacle in the dance performances. This is an area I explore in Chapter Three.

In their readings of reality television, scholars also tackle the conceptualisation of fame in reality television and how ordinary people can achieve social mobility through the format of these programmes (Andrejevic, 2004). Biressi and Nunn comment that ‘the quality of ordinariness is constructed by a bundle of recurring testamentary techniques which portray backgrounds, friends and family and the self-commentaries of contestants’ (2005, p.49). Through personal accounts and experiences, references to their home life and their backgrounds situates the contestant in the ‘ordinary’, ready for them to make the transition to the ‘better’ life of celebrity. These studies, however, only focus on the construction of ordinariness in game-docs: programmes where individuals achieve fame and notoriety through intense surveillance. I extend the analysis of ordinariness to the television talent show genre, and I explore this constructed notion in the performances of male Street dance crews in Chapters Seven and Eight.

While useful in their observations of key themes on reality television, the above scholarship privileges an analysis of game-docs, quiz shows and lifestyle television over an analysis of the television talent show. Consequently, authors do not adequately address the specific format of these shows and the mass consumption of talent. Alternatively, Redden (2008) extends his cultural studies analysis of lifestyle television to focus upon this particular format. He situates the contemporary revival of the televised talent show in a long history of competition on television, such as sports, quizzes and game shows, but in particular the popular talent show programmes in the 1970s and 1980s (see Ch. 1.1). Unlike other reality television shows, the talent show rewards ‘deserved fame’: artistic achievement that is far more complex to appreciate and classify in a competitive framework (pp.11-12). There is therefore a requirement for a panel of judges to educate and guide the audience’s decision, which doubles as a vital source of entertainment due to the
opportunity for conflicting decisions. This potential for conflict ties in with the narration of the programmes, which are purposefully structured to enhance the themes of risk, opportunity and chance.

Redden notes that the appeal of these talent searches ‘lies partly in their articulation of aspirational concepts of personhood that are embedded in the broader neoliberal cultural economy’ (p.130). Access to the life changing opportunities offered by televised talent shows is unrestricted in that anyone is welcome to audition, although this ‘vaulting from one side of the hourglass economy to the other’ is in fact restricted and only available to the few (p.25). Similar to the arguments of Biressi and Nunn (2003), these programmes tap into the viewers’ desire to transform their lives and achieve success. This is reflective of an aspirational society that desires a life away from the ordinary, and is exaggerated by the ecstatic and dream-like portrayal of winning. By coupling ordinariness with a dramatic emphasis upon the reality of their experience, the producers carefully build a notion of a contestant’s journey and progression through the programme, constructed through self-commentary and testimonials from friends and family. By celebrating those contestants who prove themselves to be special, these programmes represent working class life as something to be escaped from, which in turn inscribes ‘ordinary’ contestants as inferior. This is an applicable argument to apply to my own research, and I question in Chapter Seven how the construction of ordinariness is then positioned against the spectacular and extra-ordinary performances of the dance crews, who utilise acrobatics and stunts to amaze and entertain the audience. The success of these programmes is therefore linked to the audience's ‘interests in spectacle, character and narrative’ (Redden, 2008, p.140) which informs the impetus for my research to focus on the theories and histories around spectacle and entertainment, both in broadcasting and across other cultural outlets.

In his later work, Redden explores and critiques the notion of labour in television talent shows, and makes the important observation that while hard work is often disguised or masked by the pleasures of spectacle in non-fiction television, television talent shows place labour at the forefront of the programmes. Labour occurs dually, both through the contestants' skill and talent, as well as through the labouring the self through the selling of their personalities. By constructing celebrity personas through the narration of the fortunes of the contestants, these performers can be marketed as products alongside the multiple commodities on offer in the shows, and add to the revenue streams of ‘advertising, sponsorship, license fees,
merchandising, telephone voting, and the record sales and touring income from artists who were previously contestants’ (2010, p.134). As with other workers in creative economies, however, this labour is precarious due to the low wages, long hours and low return on investment. These programmes therefore capitalize on the free labour of willing participants, who enter themselves into these competitions despite the low return on investment. Redden highlights that the production processes of these competitions mirror ‘contemporary employment norms in the cultural industries’, in that labour is marketed as a positive experience by the controlling production, and that the cultural workers suffer poor working conditions and benefits (p.136). Rather than rejecting their exploitation, they instead willingly enter into this area of work due to the prestige and enjoyment offered by these industries. These shows therefore advocate the ideology of working passionately for no return and no security, with only a slim chance of achieving success.

Redden’s arguments surrounding neoliberalist discourses and the dual use of labour in television talent shows are key to my investigations, as he makes the important link between the televised showcasing of talent and the economic modes of production that sit behind these performances. This is a link I will investigate further in Chapter Four and Chapter Eight. His arguments, however, focus on the generic production processes and formats of the shows, and underestimate how might the contestants themselves construct or resist the commodification of their cultural products. Additionally, he draws examples from singing talent shows, such as the U.K. show Pop Idol (2001-2003), and therefore does not explore the relevance of the dancing body situated in the format of the competition. Consequently, I will now focus on the limited scholarly studies that exist on dance in the television talent show context.

2.6 Dance on reality television

Prior to the focus on dance on contemporary television talent shows, this chapter will first discuss literature on televised dance competitions. Julie Malnig (1992) and John Fiske and John Hartley (1993) examine the televised ballroom dance competitions of the Ohio Star Ball and the U.K.’s Come Dancing (1949-1988). Malnig describes the Ohio Star broadcasts as ‘exciting television spectacles, combining theatrical performance with the aura of a sports event’, due to the intensity of 90 second elimination rounds (1992, p.141). Fiske and Hartley (1993) take a more critical approach, observing how Come Dancing packages the
competition and hierarchy present in society in a light entertainment format. They observe how the need for escapism and entertainment through the glitz and glamour of the competition is juxtaposed against the amateur status and social reality of the contestants. In addition, they demonstrate how the judges, score cards, and the marked geographical difference of the ballroom dance teams are all representative of the cultural codes of sport, which they describe as ‘conflict enacted, structured and concluded in a way that signifies many of the tensions in everyday life’ (p.39). Unlike social conflict though, sport offers formalised resolutions that are presented in terms of achievement. Come Dancing therefore reveals the merger between organised conflict and the ‘ritualised social coherence’ represented in ballroom dance practice, replicating the competition and hierarchy present in U.K. culture (p.40). Fiske and Hartley’s critique of Come Dancing acts as both a rare example of analysis of a British television dance competition, and also bears relevance due to the link made between the sporting conflict of the programme and its mirroring of contemporary society. The concept of spectacle and its relationship with the competition, however, is overlooked in their writing.

Amongst the numerous journalistic and populist books and articles written about dance on reality television shows, Marita Cardinal’s (2013) editorial on dance in reality television in the U.S. provides a wide subjective overview of the genre, and describes the dance in question as predominantly ‘popular, entertainment, front-facing, and skill-orientated styles’ (2013, p.9). Lisa Arnett’s (2007) interview with Mia Michaels, a choreographer on the American version of SYTYCD, includes the pertinent comment that Michael’s choreography can’t go to the point ‘where it’s just so internal that they [the audience] wouldn’t get it’ (Michaels in Arnett, 2007, p.92). While she does not elaborate on the meaning of ‘internal’, this brief observation suggests an emphasis on an ‘external’ aesthetic in the dance choreography, in order to reach out and relate to non-dance audiences. This suggestion is not elaborated upon or critiqued, however, due to the publication context.

Journal articles and book chapters on dance in reality television formats have steadily grown since 2011, with predominant focus on competitions in the USA and, in particular, the American reality television series Dancing with the Stars and SYTYCD (McMains, 2010; Broomfield, 2011; Elswit, 2012; Boyd, 2012; Weisbrot, 2014; Benthaus, 2015). My own book chapter on ‘Hip Hop, spectacle and reality television’ (Robinson, 2014) addresses my research subject matter directly through an analysis of U.K. dance crews Diversity and Flawless on BGT and introduces the
concepts of mediatisation, the relationship between music and dance, identity politics, Hip Hop and competition and the commercialisation of the form. The book chapter is intended, however, for an undergraduate reader and therefore does not provide the necessary rigorous analysis and theoretical depth.

Juliet McMain's (2010) book chapter on *Dancing with the Stars* builds upon her analysis of glamour and spectacle in competitive ballroom dance, but focuses specifically on its re-contextualization in a television competition that teams up professional dancers with celebrities. *Dancing with the Stars* adapts the traditional ballroom competition structure by only filming one couple at a time, allowing for prior rehearsal and the choice of camera angles to attempt to create a three-dimensional experience for the viewer. McMains proposes that ballroom dance was always suited to a televised format, due to the ‘accelerated melodrama’ and ‘picture perfect poses’ of the short routines which could hold the attention of the viewer (p.263). She notes that,

Such moments when dancers suddenly suspend their movement in poses that are arresting in display of dexterity and control could be translated into 'jolts' (emotional rushes for the audience members), satisfying the high 'jolts per minute' standard in American television programming’

McMains, 2010, p.263

This system of jolts establishes a useful description of the dynamic and kinaesthetic effect of visually arresting images, but most significantly, makes the link between the aesthetic qualities of television programming and the dance form. This is an observation I will build upon through my own research on the aesthetic properties of spectacle in a dance on screen context in Chapter Three.

In terms of the wider format of the competition, McMains comments that the talent contest is judged by the viewer on the extensive ‘backstage’ coverage and biographical attention just as much as the performances themselves. This is an observation vital to my analysis of the performance of these crews in a televised setting, taking into account the personal narratives of the dancers and the pre-recorded VT footage. Similar to the observations of Redden (2008), McMains also observes that ‘the promise of personal transformation’ through learning ballroom dance reaffirms the American ideal that transformation is achievable through hard work (p.261). While the representation of labour is significant in my analysis, I recognize that the formats of *Strictly Come Dancing, Dancing with the Stars* and
SYTYCD place an emphasis on the transference of embodied knowledge from the production chosen choreographers to the dance contestants. GTD and BGT instead provide performance platforms for dancers to showcase technical ability and choreographic skill, moving away from the idea of personal transformation and placing more emphasis upon the aesthetic qualities of the choreographies themselves.

In terms of SYTYCD, authors predominantly focus on the American and Canadian series’, critiquing issues of gender construction (Broomfield, 2011), the promise of personal transformation in the neoliberal format of the competition, (Foster, 2014, Weisbrod, 2014) the construction of national identity through the varying styles of dance (Elswit, 2012, Boyd, 2012, Quail, 2014) and the global appeal of reality dance franchises (Heller, 2012). Broomfield’s analysis of SYTYCD discusses the policing of masculinity through the judges’ comments. The consistent use of heterosexual partnerships and derogatory commentary regarding the expressivity of the male dancer provides ‘a platform for legitimizing entrenched ideas about gender through popular culture’ (2011, p.125). While specific to SYTYCD, Broomfield’s analysis is relevant to my own research of male dancers on reality television, and concepts of the representation of masculinity and its relationship with spectacle in these programmes will be explored further in Chapter Six.

Both Broomfield (2011) and Elswit (2012) discuss that there is recognition in SYTYCD of viewers voting for ‘America’s favourite dancer’: a subjective category achieved through the judges’ entrenchment of the idea that ‘certain codified styles of dance, music, costuming, and lighting solicit votes more easily than others’ (Elswit, 2012, p.137). Elswit critiques this concept through a SYTYCD duet that deals with the narrative of cancer, examining the performance of emotion and meaning-making through the theatrical mechanisms of the production and through the judges’ influence on the viewers. Importantly, she not only focuses on the labour of the dancers, but also on the labour of spectatorship. She observes how viewers are trained in the process of watching through the relationships formed with the dancers as well as the dance ‘package’. This package consists of the ‘edited studio clips of the dancers rehearsing, interspersed with shots of them talking to the camera about what they learned and how they experienced the process leading up to the performing the dance before the judges’ (p.135). While her comments on the spectator and their role in the programme raise interesting debates in the field, Elswit approaches the programme from a cultural studies perspective, and there is
far more analysis of the surrounding competition production rather than of the specific choreography and performance.

Jade Boyd (2012) and Christina Quail (2014) explore ideas of neoliberalism and the construction of nation with the Canadian version of SYTYCD. Using feminist performance theory, Boyd (2012) examines the performances of SYTYCD as embodied iterations of nationhood and citizenship, while Quail (2014) discusses the framing of the dance in SYTYCD as a cultural product. Through the multiple styles of dance represented on the programme, Quail (2014) observes how the language of dance performs multiculturalism in the programme, whilst the local version of an international franchise creates marketable, yet problematic versions of ‘Canadianness’. While both authors raise pertinent ideas regarding the role of dance in reality television and its construction of national identity, this is not an area of focus for my own investigation due to the specific parameters of my research enquiry. Furthermore, there is once again little focus on a movement analysis of the actual dancing bodies themselves.

Quail’s reference to the local version of an international franchise is explored in Dana Heller’s earlier book chapter, ‘Calling out around the world’: the global appeal of reality dance formats’ (2012) in Oren and Shahaf’s 2012 anthology on global reality television formats. Similar to the observations of Andrejevic (2004), reality television’s global currency and growth across TV schedules lies in its format: cheap but attractive programming that is easy to sell and does not have to use unionised actors and writing talent. Oren and Shahaf maintain that the move to format television, such as the ‘Got Talent’ franchise, is a consequence of the competitive market. There is a requirement for ‘sure fire hits’: popular ideas with proven ratings that generate ‘maximum content hours’ with small production budgets (2012, p.5). The popularity of these programmes lies in the incorporation of local adaption in the shiny and polished format of televised talent show competition. These programmes can therefore be sold across the world and mixed with local production, audiences and material but still regain a transnational relevance. Importantly for my own investigation, Heller situates the body in the media spectacle of the adaptable television format, establishing that ‘the human body is a productive site of global television’s industrial and textual story-telling practices’ (2012, p.53). Dancing bodies remain affordable labour as producers draw from local talent, and can be used to portray essentialised representations of ethnic, cultural and national differences. Heller uses Hip Hop culture as an example of the essentialisation of
African-American bodies, as they represent ‘a consumer lifestyle, a deterritorialised marker of youth, energy, ostentation, and constant rebellion’ (2012, p.44). Heller’s comments are relevant to my own study in that she extends the analysis of reality television to incorporate the globalised and commercial template of the shows and how they operate in local markets. In Chapter Eight, I enquire into the situation of the male Street dance crew in the context of a commercial television setting and how this impacts on the construction of spectacle.

A key scholarly work on SYTYCD is Alexis Weisbrod’s (2014) anthology chapter, ‘Defining Dance, Creating Commodity: The Rhetoric of So You Think You Can Dance’. Weisbrod draws upon her PhD research on competition dance in the United States: a distinct genre of dance in the U.S. that draws upon a variety of styles and is situated in a competitive framework (2010). While she highlights similar themes to other authors, including the heightened sensation created through dance being placed in a competition framework (Martin, 1994; Stillman, 1996; Foley, 2001; McMains, 2006, 2010; Uba, 2007; Hall, 2008), and the essentialisation of dance forms and the objectification of dancers that represent fixed notions of race, ethnicity, class and nation (Boyd, 2012; Heller, 2012; Quail, 2014), Weisbrod directly relates these ideas to Guy Debord’s (1967) concept of spectacle as a condition of a commodified society (see Ch.4.4). She states that the mediation of social relations through images is achieved through the accumulation and consumption of multiple commodities in SYTYCD, including the selling of music, fashion and brands. The dancers are presented as celebrities and this creates social relations between the dancing bodies on screen and the viewers. The dancing body, however, becomes spectacle due to ‘the incomplete picture of its training and experience as presented by the language used by the show’s judges and producers’ (Weisbrod, 2014, p.331).

Weisbrod makes the significant contribution of identifying spectacle as a social condition in dance on reality television, stating how it operates through the creation of multiple commodities in the televised talent show. I build on this observation in Chapter Four and Chapter Eight, where I situate spectacle as a condition of a commodified society. Weisbrod provides, however, a generalized description of the triadic relationship between dancer, camera and edit, and does not explore the relationship between the aesthetic qualities of spectacle and spectacle as a social condition. Additionally, there is once again little analysis of the dancing bodies themselves, with descriptions focusing on the surrounding production and the
critiques of the judges. As previously stated, my research examines the visual properties of spectacle as well as its position as a condition of contemporary society (See Ch. 3 and 4). I also place the dancing body at the heart of my analysis rather than as a quality experienced in the wider production of the televised talent show.

Recent journal articles have also begun to emerge on the subject of dance in reality television. In her study on Turf dancing, Naomi Bragin (2014) makes a brief but important reference to the choreo-centric focus of Hip Hop dance within reality television settings. Bragin maintains that Turf dance: a vernacular Hip Hop style that originated in different areas or ‘turfs’ of Oakland, California, resists what she defines as ‘choreocentricity’ (p.102). This term describes the ‘racialized logic that sustains a Eurocentric discourse of choreography as the standard by which to evaluate peoples and cultures that are non-Western, not completely Western, or antagonistic to Western modes of thinking and being’ (p.102). Applying the idea of choreocentricity to Hip Hop within reality television, she makes the observation that judges in MTV’s America’s Best Dance Crew (2008-2012, 2015) demand crews to be ‘clean’ in their execution of their movement, uniformity and timing (footnote, p.102). She links this policing of style with the cleansing of funky blackness, which she describes ‘standing for everything whiteness does not — the smelly, unclean, super-bad’ (footnote, p.103).

Bragin makes an important and rare reference to the stylistic elements of reality television group Hip Hop choreography, but as this is not the main focus of her article, her brief footnote demands a more in depth analysis. In addition, she analyses these choreographies through the lens of U.S. race politics but does not explore other reasonings or manifestations for the aesthetic properties of the choreography. I build upon this reference in Chapters’ Five and Six and analyse the choreography of the crew performance and the construction of masculinised and racialised identities in the U.K. context of reality television competitions. In particular, I expand on her comments on funky blackness and investigate the role of funk within these choreographies (see Ch. 6.7).

Returning to the analysis of SYTYCD, Elena Benthaus’ (2015) article, featured in in The International Journal of Screendance 5, discusses how moments of suspense in the U.S. version of SYTYCD create the ‘WOW-affect’ (p.11). This phrase refers to the emotional response created as a result of the affective impact of athletic and virtuosic screen bodies featured within the stylised programming of SYTYCD. She
proposes that the WOW ‘gives voice and physical expression to the excess of intensities as a not-yet-cognitive suspended response’ (p.11). Specifically, she relates these emotional intensities to the fostering of international fan base communities on social media. Benthaus’s close descriptions of the emotional reactions of the studio audiences and judging panel are pertinent to my own research, and I undertake a similar analysis in Chapters Five, Six and Seven of the affective reactions of the live audience and judges. While her dense theorisations of affect are valuable when applied to an analysis of the solos and duets of SYTYCD, she places an emphasis on contemporary dance performances that create an emotional intensity and cognitive response. In particular, her analytical examples focus on contemporary dance choreographies and the intensity created through moments of falling off balance, suspension and the muscular tension required throughout the solo. As I will demonstrate in my analysis, male Street dance crews present a divergent aesthetic style within the television talent show due to the crew format of the choreography. Focus shifts from the individual dancers’ intensity of the performance, as discussed by Benthaus, and is instead placed on the overall visual impact of the crew choreography (see Chapter Five). In addition, she does not provide detail as to how these bodies are labelled virtuosic. In Chapter Three, I undertake a critical investigation into spectacles of the body and the relationship between virtuosity and spectacle. Finally she does not explore the impact of these emotional responses in terms of the capitalist regime of the programme. In my research, I directly relate the creation of spectacular images with the neoliberal capitalist context of the television talent show competition (see Chapter Eight).

The final text to be reviewed is Susan Foster’s provocation for the 2015 Performance International Studies decentralized conference, Fluid States: Performances of UnKnowing, titled, ‘Performing Authenticity and the Gendered Labor of Dance’ (2014). While an unpublished work, the eminence of the author in the field of dance studies makes this a pertinent article for my own study. Similar to other authors of dance in reality television, Foster references the ‘brilliant editing, the magnitude of the spectacle and the sheer exuberance of the dancing’, but fails to detail how this spectacle is constructed or how the dance expresses such ‘exuberance’ (2014, p.9). Foster analyses SYTYCD with a focus upon the construction of labour and gender in the programme. Foster acknowledges that the camera angles and edit transform the dancing body, but does not detail how the body appears transformed. In terms of the construction of the labouring dancer, Foster proposes similar arguments to Redden (2010) in that dance is validated as a
form of labour through the programmes 'authentic dedication to work' (2014, p.1). While labour is stereotypically categorised as 'alienated', 'productive', 'useful' and dull in nature, she recognises that dance, however, is categorised as 'engaged', 'non-productive' in its temporary nature, without a clear purpose and is experienced as 'spontaneous, sexy, and fun' (p.2). Drawing upon post-Fordist ideas regarding the all-encompassing organisation of labour in the creative industries (see Ch. 4.5), Foster observes that these dancers go beyond the production of entertainment (immaterial labour) through their emotional and physical investment in the performances. She describes these dancers as 'industrial' bodies: a homogenous and overarching categorisation that groups together dancers working in commercial media, where there is an assimilation of styles, and where dance is used to represent the commodities of youth and heterosexuality (p.5).

While Foster focuses on the aesthetic of this industrial body, an element missing in the majority of television talent show analysis, she describes a simplified account. She categorises the industrial body as 'concerned with its appearance from a front defined by the camera's position', as indulging in the sweat of labour to sell the illusion of vitality, and as performing a highly gendered sexiness. Simplifying these complex bodies further, she states that 'the industrial body loves unison, has little interest in diagonals, prefers to do moves to one side and then the other in order to foreground their rhythmic intricacy, and it locates itself symmetrically in relation to others' (2014, p.6). These ambiguous descriptions suggest a bias against a complex analysis of dancing bodies on the popular screen, as she does not explore the nuances of the styles in question or the extent to which the dancers hold agency over their representation. I address this omission in Chapter Five by providing a detailed dance analysis of the television talent show body, and how spectacle is constructed through the relationship between the moving body and the camera.

Foster identifies four techniques that are used in the competition to create a 'sense of temporal closeness' for the viewer and maintain a continuing narrative of hard work, which include close-up shots, rehearsals, interviews and the filming of the actual dance (2014, p.7). While these categories are useful structures for my own dance on screen research in terms of analysing the production, her argument fails to conduct an analysis of the choreography itself due to her generalised description of the 'industrial body'. She describes each SYTYCD routine as 'rolling off the factory line' due to its fast production, its efficient rehearsal and its polished presentation (2014, p.9). This results in the dancer's estrangement and then
eventual reconnection with their own bodies through the dance itself. Whilst the
notion of dance as a laboured product is useful to my investigation of spectacle in
reality television, I aim to investigate whether these performances hold any agency
in their performance of laboured spectacle (See Ch. 8.4).

2.7 Conclusion

My critical examination of scholarly works focusing on dance in reality television has
offered useful observations and theorisations for my own research. Specifically,
these texts introduce pertinent methods and models for the analysis of dance in
competitive practice, including Boyd’s (2012) situation of the dancing body in the
wider dance event. Heller’s (2012) research in particular is useful in situating the
dance performances in the wider commercial framework of the television dance
franchise. As a result of this emphasis on the wider production, however, the
dancing body is lost in a wider cultural analysis of the reality television phenomena,
and the specific movement systems presented are omitted. With regards to
investigations of spectacle, Weisbrod importantly draws upon the Debord’s concept
of the ‘Society of the Spectacle’ (1967), but her work does not specifically address
the aesthetic qualities of spectacle in the television talent show competitive format.
McMains briefly refers to the heightened visual dynamic created through the
arresting images of the dancers, but does not extend this analysis. Foster makes
the important link between the labour of the dancers and their commodification, but
only offers an inexplicit analysis of the ‘industrial body’. My research addresses this
gap by situating spectacle in twenty first century global technocapitalist society (see
Chapter 3 and Chapter 4) and reveals how spectacle is constructed at the level of
the body and heightened through the television production.

Finally, there is an omission of the analysis of Street dance practices in this
literature. Other than Bragin’s (2014) brief reference to America’s Best Dance Crew
(2008-2015), the U.S. television equivalent of U.K. male Street dance crew
performances, there is no work currently focusing on choreographed Hip Hop dance
practice for the screen. In addition, these critiqued works focus on Hip Hop as a solo
dance activity, and crew performances are not featured in the analysis. I address
this gap by narrowing my parameters to focus purely on the stylistic genre of Street
dance in a U.K. context and its re-presentation by full dance crews in a televised
environment.
This literature review has analysed and critiqued scholarly works focusing on the key areas of my research area: writings focusing on Hip Hop dance and dance in television talent shows. From this analysis I have observed the gaps in the field and will address these in Chapters Five to Eight. Prior to this analysis, this thesis will first situate the aesthetic qualities of spectacle in a screen dance context in Chapter Three, and will then critique spectacle as a condition of a commodified society in Chapter Four.

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1 Chang (2005) posits that Hip Hop culture grew out of socio-political unrest in the South Bronx area of New York. Toop (2000) maintains that the segregation of Black and Hispanic communities in areas of deprivation allowed breakdance to flourish in the initial external influence of downtown Manhattan.

2 Rap battles are ‘competitive verbal duels in which individuals take turns boasting about themselves and dissing their opponents’ (Lee, 2009, p.583). These provide important accounts of competition in Hip Hop culture. Lee (2009) draws upon ethnographic observations to argue that individuals use rap battles as a playful and nonviolent means of solving disputes and gaining respect from peers. Rather than a financial prize, winners earn respect from their peers through their ability to devise fast, clever and well-delivered insults. The ability to keep calm and restrain heated emotions is consequently valued over the break out of violence against the opponent.

3 Graffiti tags are graffiti artist’s signature spray paint motifs, traditionally sprayed on public property.

4 Osumare references the historical theoretical concept of Cartesian dualism, a strand of aesthetics which separates the body from mind (Osumare, 2007, p.26).

5 Osumare (2007) defines the African aesthetic in Hip Hop dance as a continuous method of cultural change that privileges the exploration of the self in the moment through non-verbal methods and through layers of meaning drawn from Hip Hop’s socio-cultural context and its audience.

6 Osumare (2007) develops Gottschald’s (1998) notion of the Africanist aesthetic by using the expression ‘power moves’ as a metaphor to describe both the athletic actions of breakdancers and the currency that Hip Hop has on a global scale. Power is subtly shifted internationally through the diffusion of the Africanist aesthetic by way of global capitalist productions, which includes music videos, films and advertising. These global forms of communication attract and empower youths from a variety of cultures through the athletic and visual appeal of Hip Hop dance, resulting however in the dismissal of local existing cultural, social and economic pursuits. However, she argues that indigenous people are not powerless consumers, as they incorporate and reinscribe new meaning onto imported foreign goods and commodities through what Andy Bennett calls ‘reterritorialization’ (Bennett in Osumare, 2007, p.66). As the Africanist aesthetic has travelled globally, it has created what she defines as the ‘intercultural body’; a physical mapping and exploration of cross cultural currents that allows local prejudices to be privileged in Hip Hop vocabulary through adaptability and appropriation (Osumare, 2007, pp.16-17).

7 Flashdance (1983) tells the story of Alex, a Pittsburgh woman with two jobs as a welder and an exotic dancer who wants to get into ballet school. The Rock Steady Crew was featured in a small scene in the film, where Alex and her friend are walking through the city and stop to watch the breakdancers.

8 Originating in the 1970s, Stillman (1996) observes that Hawaiian hula competitions and festivals serve to present the revived cultural traditions of the Hawaiian Islands. Hawaiian Hula competitions showcase competitive displays of Hawaiian music and dance practices alongside other aspects of ritual and communal feasting, and competitions are run both in Hawaii and on the U.S. mainland.
Irish dancing is regulated and maintained by the Gaelic league, who codify the rules and regulations of the dance form. Hall defines this codification as the 'certification, sanctioning, and otherwise expressing approval of certain people as teachers, adjudicators, and qualified participants in its events' (2008, p.40). By controlling the national aesthetic and structure of Irish dancing, the Gaelic League provide an 'ideological structure' to be adhered to in competition, regardless of local and regional variation (Hall, 2008, p.41).

The Encyclopedia Britannica describes the Great Depression as ‘the worldwide economic downturn that began in 1929 and lasted until about 1939. It was the longest and most severe depression ever experienced by the industrialized Western world, sparking fundamental changes in economic institutions, macroeconomic policy, and economic theory. Although it originated in the United States, the Great Depression caused drastic declines in output, severe unemployment, and acute deflation in almost every country of the world. Its social and cultural effects were no less staggering, especially in the United States, where the Great Depression represented the harshest adversity faced by Americans since the Civil War’ (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2011).

Marathons were popular American endurance dance contests that arose from the 1920s trend of breaking world records, where contestants battled with exhaustion and danced alongside each other for weeks and months at a time in order to be crowned the winner. Martin neatly summarises dance marathons as signaling ‘grit and hope, determination and foolishness, fliam fliam and patriotic bunting, athleticism and a wild mix of musical numbers, good clean fun and off-color jokes, nice “boys and girls” and prostitution, tireless endurance and utter exhaustion’ (1994, p.xv). The dance form itself ranged from ballroom and social dance styles, but towards the end of the marathons would resemble slow shuffles and walking due to the exhaustion of the contestants.

McMains states that judges have little time to make their assessments, so often rely on a couple’s reputation in addition to their ‘footwork, frame, body line, partnering, musicality, athleticism, artistry, and grooming’ (2006, p.32).

As a result of questioning the authenticity of candidates performances, Hill argues that the audience are also questioning ‘the meaning of authenticity itself’, suggesting that the divides between fact and fiction are being broken down and audience are questioning the mechanisms and the mediation behind the performances (2005, p.78).

Key chapters include his anthology chapter, ‘Making over the talent show in exposing lifestyle television’ (2008), and his journal article, ‘Learning to labour on the reality talent show’ (2010).

Come Dancing was a British exhibition dancing series that ran from 1949 to 1998.

In her book 'Dancing till dawn' (1992), Malnig observes that the highly competitive environment of ballroom dance competitions is due to the strict enforcing of rules and regulations by competition organisers. Competitions are structured around consecutive two-minute rounds, where couples are judges on criteria including timing, rhythm, control, accuracy and level of difficulty.

Recent publications on SYTYCD also include Dodds (2014b) scholarship on the choreographic interface and Dodds’ and Cooper’s (2014) study on faces and close-ups in SYTYCD.

Britain’s Got Talent is part of SYCO’s Got talent franchise; an easily reproduced and adaptive framework that is ‘licensed through the international television market for local adaption’ (Oren and Shahaf, 2012, p.2).

Foster’s (2014) provocation is available in word format via the Fluid States 2015 conference website.
Chapter Three: The aesthetic properties of spectacle

3.1 Introduction

As discussed briefly in Ch.1.2, the term spectacle is an inadequate and abstract descriptor. Despite the immateriality of the term, however, spectacle seemingly represents the visual, the extreme, the unexpected, the impressive and the superficial, sparking both outrage and delight in its audiences. Spectacle as a noun is used to describe an impressive and visually stunning event or phenomenon, but as an adjective is used to describe arresting and eye-catching images. Spectacle, as an abstract form of visual engagement that occupies the viewer's eye, takes on an even greater status in western popular culture due to the proliferation of mass audiences accessing digital visual images. These 'spectacles' are framed and transmitted globally via smart phones, televisions, cinemas, arenas and the digital world stage of social media websites. This association with grandeur and mass dissemination renders spectacle as ubiquitous and omnipresent, yet it still remains ambiguous in its application as it possesses both tangible and evasive qualities.

In order to inform my study of this evasive term and its relationship to male Street dance crew performances, this chapter critically evaluates the concepts and strategies that inform research on the aesthetic properties of spectacle within a dance on screen context. As stated in Ch.1.2, the study of the visual properties of spectacle has been traditionally dismissed in academic study due to the devaluing of the decorative. Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle deemed spectacle the 'least artistic' of tragedy's six parts' favouring narrative and spoken word. Consequently, he viewed spectacle's role as entertaining audiences consisting of manual labourers and farmers (Aristotle in Lavik, 2008, p.170). The suspicion of the 'irrational' image that overwhelms the senses of the spectator marks the philosophical 'separation of idea from image' and, as Galt maintains, the origins of western culture's logocentricism (2011, p.2). I address this dismissal in this thesis and begin this chapter by examining writings that discuss visual culture and the concept of spectacle as a perceptible mode of eye-catching display. Due to the multitude of spectacles occurring in the production of male Street dance crew performances on television talent shows, including the choreography, the camerawork and the post-production digital effects, I draw on critical frameworks that discuss spectacle in connection with these elements in relation to the treatment of the dancing body. In particular, I focus on rhetorics of virtuosity and the performance of the grotesque. I
then focus upon writings on cinematic spectacles, concentrating on the notion of cinematic excess as achieved through digital special effects. Finally, this chapter presents a discussion of works that critique the aesthetic properties of dancing bodies on the television screen.

3.2 Spectacle as a visual aesthetic

In the study of visual culture, several authors position the image as holding the representational power to create meaning, induce pleasure and displeasure, and determine social relations (Barthes, 1957, ed. 1993, 1964, 1981, ed. 2010; Mirzoeff, 2002; Cope, 2014). In these studies, the term ‘spectacle’ is used interchangeably as both the generic act of looking and watching, but also as a reference to specific moments of mediation that holds the gaze of the spectator and result in an affective reaction. In his book, *Rite, drama, festival, spectacle: rehearsals toward a theory of cultural performance* (1984), John MacAloon states that spectacle places sight as the primary sense, that spectacular images must be associated with size or grandeur in order to be considered spectacles, and that there must be an acknowledgement of the presence of a spectating audience. There must also be the presence of movement and action, describing spectacle as a ‘dynamic form’ that has the ability to construct and intensify emotional responses (p.245). This final point is an important observation when analysing the construction of spectacle by moving bodies. Whilst MacAloon presents a constructive description of spectacle’s aesthetic qualities and their arrangement, these fixed categories are problematic in the discussion of such an evasive visual quality.

Andrew Darley’s cinematic analysis alternatively defines spectacle as ‘consisting of images whose main drive is to dazzle and stimulate the eye (and by extension the other senses). Drained of meaning, bereft of the weight of fictional progress, the cunning of spectacle is that it begins and ends with its own artifice; as such, spectacle is simultaneously both display and on display’ (2000, p.104). Spectacle, therefore, is at odds due to its dual meaning of both being the aesthetic properties of an event while also being the subject of the event itself. Darley’s rejection of spectacle’s ability to induce meaning, however, continues the devaluing of the study of the visual properties of spectacle. Both Lavik (2008) and Meghan Sutherland (2012) suggest that the problem with spectacle lies with the term’s subjectivity and temporality. Everyone’s experience of spectacle is diverse, and what is considered spectacular has a direct correlation with what is considered ordinary. In his book,
The Spectacle and the Spectator (2009), Kennedy explains how ‘a spectator is a corporeal presence but a slippery concept’, suggesting that viewers of spectacles are not homogenous or standardised groups, but individuals with private and non-uniform experiences and emotions (p.3). A person’s affective response to spectacle will be subjective in relation to their previous viewing experiences, of which there can be no assumption. Spectacle’s uneven base line is also temporally fluid, as ‘what was considered spectacular in one era might seem quite trivial in another’ (Lavik, 2008, p.172). Whilst the high wire feats of the tight rope walker first amazed circus audiences in the eighteenth century, these feats have risen to new levels of wonder in the twenty first century thanks to higher heights, longer distances and more dangerous feats involving skyscrapers, waterfalls and the grand canyon (Smith, 2012). The advancement of skill, training and technological intervention ‘moves the goal posts’ as to what actually constitutes spectacle.

Addressing this subjective response to spectacle, Maaike Bleeker’s research on visuality proposes that ‘what seems to be just “there to be seen” is, in fact, rerouted through memory and fantasy, caught up in threads of the unconscious and entangled with the passions’ (2008, p.2). Bleeker (2008) builds upon Lacan’s theories of the mirror stage and how the body relates to what is seen through the bodily ego. This results in a culturally mediated and assumed image. Considering theatre as a method of ‘staging vision’, Bleeker argues that the observer always sees both more and less than is actually there, as the seeing and the being seen is amalgamated with personal perception (p.16). When watching Diversity’s 2012 GTD showcase performance, my own individual viewing of spectacular feats of skill is further enhanced by the large Olympia stage production and surrounding special effects. My experience of moments of simultaneous unison and stunt work, however, is also entangled with my embodied knowledge of the genre, my previous viewing experiences of Diversity’s work, my academic interest in the subject and my socio-political background, resulting in an impressed, yet dampened reaction to the performance.

In Simon William’s theorizations of human corporeality, he draws upon Drew Leder’s phenomenological principle of ‘dys-appearance’ and states that the body ‘seizes our attention most strongly at times of dysfunction’ (Williams, 1998, p.61). This observation suggests that in times of pain, disability and death, the body holds the awareness of the spectator. In terms of the witnessing of this ‘dys-appearance’, Bleeker argues that the viewer can lose their own sense of embodied presence and
consciousness of the self as a consequence of their absorption and potential transcendence in the viewing of staged images. In performances deemed aesthetically ‘spectacular’, the spectators’ body is therefore experienced as absent from a desired state of normality and is quickly brought to the state of awareness through the viewing of dysfunction.

The above phenomenological research on visuality proposes that the appeal of spectacular performances can therefore be situated in performances of difference. This suggests that the individual spectator’s excitement is brought forth due to the witnessing of bodily skill and technique far beyond the achievements of the common spectator. In his monograph, ‘Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices’ (1997), Stuart Hall raises the question of why concepts of difference and otherness are so appealing in popular culture and mass media. In particular his chapter on the spectacle and the other focuses on the visual representation of racial and cultural otherness. Hall grounds the fascination with difference in linguistics, language, anthropology and psychoanalysis, and states that difference is vital in society as it enables the forging of meaning, the interaction with others through language, the creation of cultural meaning through classification and the establishment of difference through the self with particular reference to sexual identity. Building upon Hall’s and Bleecker’s studies, the witnessing of difference therefore creates the possibility of an affective reaction in the spectator, and establishes the self through contrast and comparison. I will therefore continue this line of enquiry into the concept of difference in relation to the spectacles of the moving body.

3.3 Spectacles of the body

Writings regarding the aesthetic properties of spectacle in relation to the popular dancing body are predominantly situated in historically staged forms of entertainment, such as circus, cabaret, and magic (Darley, 2000; Kershaw, 2003). Theatrical spectacle thrived in the live popular entertainment forms of the late eighteenth century that were ‘designed to stimulate and capture the eye and, often the gut (viscera) as well, rather than the head or intellect’ (Darley, 2000, p.40). Acts such as circus acrobatics, conjurers, vaudeville, puppeteers and burlesque performances placed emphasis on high skill, elaborate props, special effects, tricks and stage devices to produce ‘intense and instantaneous visual pleasure: the production of imagery and action which would excite, astound and astonish the
audience’ due to the implausibility of their performances (p.40). The historic accounts of layered spectacles that induce awe and wonder in audiences draw many aesthetic parallels with the spectacular dance and variety performances featured on contemporary televised talent shows. What separates them, however, is the additional layering of technological intervention and global dissemination, as well as the loss of the direct live experience for the television viewers.

It is from these discussions of performances of high levels of skill and ability that I turn to rhetorics of virtuosity: the ‘going beyond’ of human excellence through ‘hyperdisciplined, hyperlabouring thus hypervisible’ displays of skill (Hamara, 2000, p.147). In his study of the violinist Paganini, David Palmer (1998) situates the appeal of virtuosity in the revelation and transcendence of individual agency: the triumph of artistic prowess that emerged from the renaissance era. Gabriele Brandstetter links the term virtuoso with the extraordinary talents of the solo performing artist in the eighteenth century ‘whose actions…contravene the boundaries of the physically possible while at the same time concealing from delighted audiences the nature of his transgression’ (2007, p.178). Situated on the border between popular culture and high art (Osterweis, 2013), these virtuosic performances can be witnessed specifically in western concert dance, where the ballet soloist was revered for both her levels of skill, her ability to replicate such performances night after night, and her ability to visually distinguish herself from the _corps de ballet_ (Osterweis, 2013, 2014).

In her analysis of Naoyuki Oguri’s choreography, Judith Hamara notes the dilemma of theatrical virtuosity is similar to spectacle, stating that ‘it is a category that seems both empty and too full of representational and explanatory potential’ (2000, p.146). Hamara recognises that while virtuosity may be hypervisible through corporeal labour and control, it still remains unfathomable as its acknowledgment is tied into the agency and socio-cultural experience of the viewer. Consequently, Hamara reconsiders virtuosity from a ‘corporeal and contextual’ act to a ‘technology of translation, a look rebounding between two differently framed bodies into language’ (pp.147-148). This conversation of virtuosity is a result of the call and answer response that is required between the performer and spectator, who communicate through the witnessing of corporeal and contextual difference. As I will explore throughout my analysis chapters, this call and response conversation between performer, judge and spectator is presented through camera angles and post-
production editing that position the judges’ and audience’s reactions immediately after moments of virtuosity (see Ch. 5.4).

In his book ‘Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison’ (1977), Foucault refers to the historic disciplining, coercion and control of bodies through systems of power, as witnessed in training for warfare. Similar to Foucault’s disciplining and control of ‘docile bodies’ (p.138), these performances produce external images of bodily control, efficiency and precision, emulating and surpassing previously achieved artistic performances. The setting apart of bodies through high skill levels, achieved through intensive, repetitive labour, results in the body’s ability to produce images that amaze and astound the viewer. This disciplining of the body is particularly relevant in discussions of Black male performance. Osterweis’s (2013) journal article on virtuosity states that ‘the curious relationship between disciplined perceptions of virtuosity’s excess and the disciplining of the racialized body is such that audiences are often taught to be weary of abundant movement while simultaneously expecting it of black dancers.’ (p.55). The characteristics of virtuosity, including honed skill, execution, charisma, versatility, velocity and the generation of excess, are therefore linked with the depiction of the dancer as ‘other’. Katrina Hazzard-Gordon (1990) reveals how virtuosity and dexterity can be viewed throughout African-American social dance history, including African-American slaves circle dances and 1940s African-American block parties. Osterweis highlights in particular how the ‘highly kinetic choreography’ witnessed within the African diaspora draws traditions from the African diasporas resistance to ‘statis or capture’ (p.68). These complex histories therefore create a performance quality that appears to exceed beyond the limitations of the possible, linking virtuosity with ideas of religion and transience (p.68).

As a consequence of its mediatisation and global circulation, the vernacular hip-hop dancing body, and in particular the break dancing body, can be classified as virtuosic due to the athletic skill, versatility and the velocity required to execute its vocabulary. In her reporting of break dance in 1981, Banes emphasises the ‘flamboyance’ of the style, likening the floor and aerial performances to that of gymasts or circus entertainers (2004, p.18). Observing the bounce, the physical recoil of the body, DeFrantz (2004) situates Hip Hop virtuosity in both the technical skill of the mixmaster and in the powerful ‘weightiness and aggressive physicality’ of the body (p.78). Bodies emulate the sudden change in rhythms and accents of sampled music tracks through isolations and accenting polyrhythms with body parts,
allowing dancers to visualize the beat through a variety of creative means. The Hip Hop dancing body labours through its physical tightness, creating fragmented performances that mimic the rhythms and samples of the mixed tracks. He states that,

This is a virtuosity of precision and attack; of finish joined to flow. The movement startles the viewer with angularity and asymmetry; with an outwardly-explosive directness of precision unknown to earlier black American social dances. 2004, p.78

Here, DeFrantz argues that the hardness and explosiveness of Hip Hop virtuosity is a unique aesthetic of the post-civil rights movement, indicating that Hip Hop’s explosive acrobatics are a physical reaction to the socio-political climate and economic climate of late 1970s Harlem. Toop notes that the use of dramatic acrobatics in breakdance is deemed even more impressive due to the ‘impoverished environment’ and ‘limited resources’ available in their development (2000, pp.144-145). Recollet situates Hip Hop’s visual appeal as ‘rooted in the aesthetic of the city’, linking Hip Hop’s visual flares to an embodied physical replication and reclaiming of the city environment (2014, p.414). As discussed in Ch. 2.4, the placing of bodies in a competition framework places greater emphasis on the aesthetic properties of the choreography. The competitive nature of break dance fuelled the virtuosic elements of the performance, creating multiple head spins, dangerous movements such as the windmill or the suicide, and an ever increasing velocity and ferociousness to the style.

From these studies I observe that the Hip Hop dancing body is situated in a history of athletic and virtuosic excess. This aesthetic quality can be attributed to its roots in competition and its emergence from areas of social deprivation, with dancers pushing each other to achieve greater heights and feats in their practice. Unlike the ballet soloist and the classical violinist, however, I contend that these bodies do not conform to the western art canon’s aesthetic ideals of beauty, refinement and grace, as linked to traditional avant-grade associations of virtuosity. The grounded centre of gravity derived from Afro-diasporic practice, coupled with the polyrhythmic attack and flow of the body in motion, are in opposition with the understanding of virtuosity in European art aesthetics (see Ch. 2.2). In addition, the crew format of choreographed Hip Hop performances does not solely place emphasis on individual flare and ability, as recognised in virtuosity’s association with individuality and the solo artist, but on the abilities of the crew as a whole. Hence, the group led structure
shifts emphasis from the prowess of individual agency, as understood by Palmer (1998), to the dexterity of the collective. On account of this observation, it is constructive to unpack the term virtuoso away from its link with western ideals of beauty.

3.4 Virtuosity and transgression

In his study of human corporeality as a site of transgression, Simon Williams (1998, 2001) draws upon cultural and poststructuralist theory to reconsider the boundaries of the body and to move away from the western (male) perspective of the rigid, rationale, and unpermeable body. Williams describes the ontological body as a transgressive and ‘excessive entity’ that cannot be contained in patriarchal ‘orders’ that seek to confine the body to sociocultural and historical understandings of corporeality (p.59). While poststructuralist theory allows a more positive approach to the re-visioning of the body, Williams also acknowledges, however, that the body is a fleshy, material entity that cannot be completely reduced to ‘imperceptible’ beings (p.77). Building on William’s reimagining of corporeality, it is therefore important to discuss the virtuosic body both in terms of its material defiance of corporeal boundaries and in terms of its potentially transgressive and fluid qualities.

As a definition, the term excess refers to a state of overindulgence, surplus or exaggeration. It is subjectively loaded in its sense of reaching beyond permitted and conservative limitations, and similar to spectacle, there is an understanding of producing too much or going beyond rational need. Following this reimagining of the body as a fluid and ‘excessive’ entity with transgressive potential, the term virtuosity can be understood as a state of moving beyond artistic excellence. Osterweis describes virtuosity as ‘an achievement that lies in excess of the fulfilment of the composition’ (2014, p.74), whilst Virno states that virtuosic performances do not settle into a ‘finished product or into an object which would survive the performance’ (2004, p.52). The virtuoso acts in excess of the fixed boundaries of a performance and requires the presence of an audience to act as witness, due to the lack of a ‘specific extrinsic product’ (p.52). Brandstetter links the implausibility and technical skill of the virtuoso with ideas of ‘the phantasm of the machine’, in both the superhuman and repetitive execution of ability that reflected eighteenth century engine technology (2007, p.185). She captures this enacting of the machine in her description of the artist J.J Grandville’s illustrations of the romantic ballerina:
The sylphide ballerina of Romantic ballet whirls around en pointe in a pirouette. She is the flywheel of this great, general rotation. To her left, legs are moving in grotesque-arabesque poses, having gained their independence as a particularized bodily series. To her right, the human body is transformed into a doll and finally into a spinning top by the speedy mechanics of the turn. This scenario pushes the theatricality of movement, as a figure of virtuoso mechanics, in the sense of Blasis's body code, to the extreme—crossing the line of what is considered worthy of admiration and astonishment towards the grotesque. Grandville's picture stages a fascination with a uniform, inexhaustible and self-regulating mechanics.

2007, p.188

Here, Brandstetter establishes the important distinction of the virtuosic body blurring the boundaries between artistic excellence and the grotesque in its reflection of the contemporary era of mechanical intervention, moving away from the aesthetically pleasing Renaissance ideal of artistic prowess. In a contemporary cinematic example, Ariel Osterweis's analysis of the film *Black Swan* (2010) depicts this crossing over between human and other, referencing the moment that Nina grows wings during her fouettes. She states that this moment marks ‘...the point at which the pinnacle of her [Nina’s] technical achievement coincides with raw animalistic attributes associated with the ecstatic’ (2014, p.74). Virtuosity, as explored by Brandstetter and Osterweis, therefore speaks to ideas of the transcendence from the aesthetics of beauty and grace into the realm of the grotesque through implausible superhuman skill. As a result of these theorisations of the transcendence of the virtuoso into the grotesque, I bring into consideration the writings of cultural theorists Georges Bataille (ca. 1927-1939) and Mikhail Bakhtin (1965, ed. 1984) and their ideas regarding excess, grotesque bodies, social order and carnival.

For Bataille, pleasure is derived from processes of bodily excess and abjection, such as expenditure, sacrifice, destruction and waste. Bataille situates excess as a universal law of nature that does not require yield, but instead breaks the boundaries of the human form through the pleasure of expenditure. For Bakhtin, the ‘grotesque body’ is as an ‘exaggerated form’ (p.18). The grotesque body focuses solely on bodily pleasures and physical excesses, such as food, drink, bodily function and degradation: an open body far removed from the complete and aesthetically beautiful descriptions of classical bodies portrayed in Renaissance art and literature. In contemporary readings of the grotesque, Grosz (1994) maintains that the traversing of matter from the body, including spit, tears, sweat, urine or faeces, induces disgust and fear. This is due to the ‘a horror of the unknown or the unspecified that permeates, lurks, lingers, and at times leaks out of the body, a
testimony to the fraudulence or impossibility of the “clean” and “proper”;’ (p.194). Here, Grosz refers to the need to control, reorder and protect the margins of the body, despite the concept of clean being imaginary constructs. The grotesque body operates, however, in a binary of containment and subversion. Dominant powers viewed the grotesque body as threatening and disruptive due to the grotesque body’s disregard for social conventions. In particular, excessive pleasures highlighted the fragile nature of social control, especially when demonstrated by the under-classes. Carnival enabled a distorted body that transgressed its own limitations: a body that celebrated the aesthetic of mistakes rather than the harmony and unity of order and stability. Importantly, this opportunity for subversion is contained in social control, with carnival operating as a temporary state where social order will be eventually restored.

These theorisations on excess and the grotesque raise pertinent enquiries regarding the Hip Hop dancing body. From a preliminary analysis of Hip Hop dance practices in competition and from the descriptions in Hip Hop dance literature, it can be proposed that the aesthetic properties of the dance style emerge from processes of expenditure and physical excess (see Ch. 2.2). Corporeal function appears to be disturbed as limbs slice and carve through the air as if expelled from the body. Dancers balance and topple from obscure body parts such as their heads, while chest cavities and arm joints appear dislocated and mutilated. Animation techniques give the illusion of the loss of skeletal limitations through fluid arm, leg and torso waving. Gliding allows the feet to slip and slither fluidly across the floor with reptilian qualities, whilst popping electrifies and mechanizes the body. A tension of push and pull exists between symmetrical and asymmetrical design, with dancers playing with angles and clean lines and then distorting them through judders, pops and asymmetrical, gravity defying freezes. Furthermore, Hip Hop as a social dance practice is recognised for its defiance of social control, both in its vernacular origins and in its appeal within global youth subcultures (see Ch. 2.2). These bodies therefore have the potential to operate as excessive in their transgressive technical ability and in their temporary challenge of the social order.

Returning to the establishment of difference, the continued manipulation and defiance of the limitations of the body through Hip Hop dance practice has the potential to transgress the imagined possibilities of the human body and blur the line between the human and the other. In line with Brandstetter’s and Osterweis’s concepts of a virtuosic boundary figure, this state is achieved through the defiance
and manipulation of the physical laws that govern its corporeal abilities. These are key concepts that I will take forward into my analysis of male Street dance crew performances. I will apply this concept of the blurring of the human and other through virtuosity in my analysis chapters as part of my exploration into the ways in which dance crews manifest spectacle in their performances on television talent show competitions.

While these theorisations of the body are significant for the analysis of the construction of spectacle within male Street dance crew performances, it is also beneficial to take into account the dance on screen context of these performances. The digitization and manipulation of the cinematic or televisual image offers further possibilities for the extension of the limitations of the moving body and the transcendence of the corporeal form. Consequently, this chapter will now analyse the relationship between the spectacular and virtuosic aesthetic properties of the dancing body and its manipulation within a screen dance context.

3.5 Cinematic excess

In his work on photography in Camera Lucida (1981, ed. 2010), Roland Barthes refers to the punctum of the photograph: the emotionally affective quality which affects the viewer depending on their personal relation and connection to the image. Subjective to the viewer, this punctum establishes a direct relationship with the viewer through a form of heightened or sensational imagery. While having a personal connection with the imagery can ‘pierce’ the viewer, I argue that the ability to grab the eye of the viewer can be achieved through heightened or sensational imagery that does not necessarily resonate with the viewer at a personal level, but is based purely on visual sensation through a variety of film and post-production techniques. In addition, the still image of the photograph operates differently from the rapidly moving and changing images of the cinematic experience.

In the context of film, Barthes defines the pleasure of the cinematic image as ‘cinematographic hypnosis’: the appeal of watching representations on screen in the dark and obscure space of the cinema (1981, ed. 2010, pp.348-9). In comparison with the live viewing experience, however, the division between the spectator and the cinematic image problematises the notion of spectacle as an awe-inspiring visual experience due to the complex interface between images of the body, recording technology and the spectator. The spectator experiences spectacular
images through the reduced format of the digital screen in remote sites of reception, including the domestic setting of the television screen with the viewer both temporally and spatially separated from the live action (see Ch. 4.6). The recording of the dancing body is additionally problematic, as ‘the condition of dance as elusive, corporeal, immediate expression’ is potentially lost when replicated on film, due to the removal of spatial immediacy, dynamism and the kinetic force of the live dancing body (Brannigan, 2011, p.8). Despite this potential dulling or muting of the spectacular experience, authors including Benjamin (1968), Deleuze (2005), and Causey (2002) address this loss of theatrical presence or liveness. They situate bodies on screen as creating new screened bodies that hold cinematic corporeal presence due to their re-imagining through the cinematic apparatus. Brannigan describes this re-imagining as ‘the genesis of figures that create new experimental and perceptual conditions for the actualization of a sense of presence’ (2011, p.11). McLuhan (1964) establishes that it is the act of mediation that spectacularises both the technological medium and the subject, suggesting that liveness on screen is achieved in mediated environments through the extension and reconfiguration of the material body by the technological apparatus.

In film theory, Kristen Thompson (1986) situates the term ‘cinematic excess’ as the material aspects of a film that surpass the narrative and guide the viewer’s awareness towards the camera work and production. Rather than escapism into the film, cinematic excess instead brings awareness back to the viewer’s experience of watching, as detailed in Linda William’s critique of bodily excess in the ‘low’ cinematic genres of horror and pornography (Williams, 1991). This observation resonates with Bleeker’s arguments regarding the ‘dys-appearance’ through bringing awareness back to the viewer (see Ch. 3.2). Rosalind Galt (2011), however, challenges Thompson’s assumptions that an emphasis on stylistic features results in the exceeding of meaning, and instead values such decorative filming styles as ‘independently meaningful systems that elaborate a politics as much as a poetics’ (p.143). Specifically, Galt describes these heightened aesthetics as including ‘deep colors [sic], arabesque camera movement, detailed mise-en-scène [the design aspects of the film], and an emphasis on cinematographic surface’ (p.11). In her research into spectacular digital effects in contemporary cinema, Kristen Whissel also raises the important argument regarding the importance of these screened aesthetic properties. She states that while ‘the production of affective ‘intensities’, moments of sublime apprehension’, is a key outcome of digital cinematic effects, these effects articulate and expand the
possibilities of viewing and consuming complex concepts and themes essential to the film’s narrative (2014, p.4). These themes also speak to the wider historical context of film’s production. Rather than disrupting the film’s narrative, as stated in historical logocentric understandings of spectacle and narrative, Whissel states that these heightened and spectacular moments of visual effect symbolize and enhance the film’s key thematic concepts, as well as its dialogue and text.

As technologies and production budgets have developed and grown in film and television, cinematic techniques have advanced to include the use of wire removal software, green screens, digital rendering, image based rendering, CGI, digital 3D motion capture and the layering of live action and computer-generated images. Such advanced camera mobility sweeps and zooms the spectator through the filmed action, and rather than merely capturing images in front of the camera lens, these stylistic features become part of the cinematic experience. In his study of visual digital cultures, Darley (2000) states that the proliferation of digital imaging technologies has fuelled the recent contemporary resurgence of spectacle in cinema and television. These include digital special effects and CGI enhancement added in the post-production edit. These technologies, however, reveal similarities with the early emergence of popular entertainment in the nineteenth century due to their heightened use of ‘form, style, surface, artifice, spectacle and sensation’, and a shared emphasis on arresting the senses through a fusion of technique and skill with mediated technologies of representation (2000, p.6). Through the commercial growth and industrial development of television and cinema, art forms such as variety entertainment, circus acts and magic shows have fused with digital entertainment culture and narrative to create a greater sensory experience for the viewer due to the multiplicity of spectacles on display. As Darley notes, ‘whilst we marvel at the spectacle itself we are also marvelling at the skill or technique of the producer (or the production) of the effect as well as the apparatus which is able to deliver it’ (2000, p.56). The proliferation of spectacle in twenty first century global technocapitalist society therefore marks a significant return to the celebration of surface level sensation that excites and astonishes, but with the added layer of digital spectacle.

Whissel (2014) identifies four key styles of visual effect that are accomplished through cinematic digital technologies: ‘the illusion of radical, gravity-defying vertical movement; the appearance of massive digital “multitudes”; the animation of photorealistic digital creatures; and the corporeal and spatial “plastics” made
possible by the morph effect’ (p.13). Firstly, Whissel highlights that digital effect advances have placed greater emphasis upon ‘height, depth, immersion, and the exploitation of the screen’s y and z axes’, creating gravity-defying action and a resistance (p.14). Such emphasis on ‘vertically orientated bodies’ creates breathtaking special effects that signify struggles of power and issues of ascent and descent (p.14). Secondly, she focuses on crowd animation software that generates hordes, swarms and armies in films such as The Lord of the Rings (2001, 2002, 2003) trilogy, and how these effects ‘challenge the association between great numbers and power’ (p.15). Thirdly, Whissel questions the creation of photorealistic creatures, monsters, humanoids and fantasy beings as demonstrating ‘excess life’ through the hyperreal state, raising issues around the instability of the human in advancing technologies. Finally, Whissel focuses on the convention of the morph: the visual effect of a seamless transition from a source image into a target image, as witnessed in films such as Spider-Man (2002), The Incredible Hulk (2008) and The Matrix. Whissel maintains that these effects, often centred around ideas of freedom, go further to mobilize ‘fantasies of transcendence involving any type of rigid categorization – zoological, behavioural, social, spatial and historical’ (p.17). While these four effects are situated in the big budget Hollywood cinematic experience and are only made possible through expensive post-production effects, her four prong analytical model of special visual effects provides a useful structure for analysis, which I will draw upon in Chapters Five and Seven.

From these writings, it is clear that the concept of excess is not only rooted in the notion of a virtuosic body that transgresses corporeal limitations, but also in the cinematic techniques that present and display the moving image. In particular, the continued focus on the cinematic special effect within these writings reveals its established association with the aesthetic properties of spectacle in Western popular culture. I will build upon this connection within my own analysis, and will explore the influence of the cinematic special effect within the choreography of the crew performance (see Chapter Five). Whissel’s and Galt’s studies of the decorative elements of the cinematic experience also demonstrate that spectacle is not merely surface level decoration. The spectacular material aspects of the film instead reveal how an analysis of these elements can enhance and reflect the film’s narrative. These propositions allow my analysis to move beyond an exploration of merely the aesthetic properties of spectacle but to consider the potential wider outcomes and implications of the construction of spectacle within these performances.
3.6 The spectacle of dance on screen

In terms of the relationship between heightened cinematic effects and the moving body, Walter Benjamin’s seminal essay, titled ‘The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction’ (1968), positions the developments of motion capture as ‘enabling a new, deeper way of seeing reality’, and recognises how the specific choice of camera angle and movement action rendered how images of the body are framed and consequently consumed by the spectator (p.236). Through devices such as close-ups and slow motion, the camera lens opens up new possibilities of viewing reality by revealing ‘entirely new structural formations of the subject’ (pp.236-237). While Benjamin refers to some of the specific techniques behind the relationship between bodies and cameras, he does not specifically refer to capturing the moving body on camera. Darley (2000) also posits that spectacle [as a form of visual intensity] is increased and heightened through the relationship between the choreography of the camera and the moving image, although he does not situate examples of moving bodies in his analysis. Galt refers to the creation of spectacle through excessive camera movement playing against ‘similarly spectacular movement of people and objects in the frame’, but again does not provide a thorough analysis of the body itself (2013, p.173).

Several authors have written monographs and anthologies on the capturing of dance practices through the camera lens, focusing on the history and filming of art dance (Mitoma, 2002; Brannigan, 2010; Rossenburg, 2012), the process for choreographing dance for the screen (McPherson, 2006), dance in the Hollywood Musical (Feuer, 1993; Cohan, 2002; Ovalle, 2011) and dance on the popular screen (Kaplan, 1987; Blanco Borelli, 2014). Most pertinent to this investigation, Dodd’s seminal text, Dance on Screen: Genres and Media from Hollywood to Experimental Art (2001), presents a specific method for analysing dance practices on camera.

As stated in the Ch. 1.4, Dodds describes how the transference of the live body to a screen body is manipulated and distorted through ‘the triadic relationship between the moving body, the camera and the edit’ and how these televisual elements modify notions of space, time and energy (2001, p.89). Unlike the fixed audience position of the theatrical proscenium arch presentation of dance, the mediation of the dancing body allows the spectator access to multiple positions and angles of looking, including extreme close-ups of body parts, overhead shots and filming from the perspective of the dancer on stage. This polycentric gaze is ultimately
determined by the production team, who decide how to the cut and frame cinematic bodies. In terms of the modifications of space, these include the shrinking and two-dimensional flattening of the body, as well as the possibility of capturing the dancing from multiple perspectives and distances, including the dislocation and fragmentation of bodies through close-ups. These close-ups also create an imagined intimacy between the spectator and dancer, and reveal far more detailed content than a wide shot would allow. In terms of the manipulation of time, the duration of movements can be both elongated through slow motion editing and sped up through spliced shots and rapid motion editing during post-production, rendering the body to appear superhuman in its manipulation of speed. The construction of the energy of a dance is less measurable due to the conversion of full size, live dancing bodies to flat and potentially dull, poor quality images, viewed on varying screen sizes. Dodds maintains that while the transference of immediacy and ‘kinetic empathy’ is prevented due to the lack of presence of live bodies, this mobility of the camera positions the viewer amongst the action, allowing ‘spectators to feel that they are also participating in a kinaesthetic experience’ (Dodds, 2014a, p.447).

The manipulation of the body through the stylistic elements of cinematic excess can be chiefly witnessed in the American musical theatre films of Busby Berkeley in the 1940s. Berkeley’s films create aesthetically pleasing images and shapes in motion through precision choreography, visual uniformity and strict movement unison of the multiple chorus line dancers. Rubin (1993) maintains, however, that it is the choreography of the camera, or the ‘spectacualisation of the camera’ that amplifies the dancing bodies (p.43). Inspired by the tradition of spectacle as established in the nineteenth century revue performances and in keeping with the modernist aesthetic of 1940’s musicals, cinematic devices included the kaleidoscopic framing of dancing bodies, the visual stylisation of costumes and sets, trick cuts, reverse motion, and elaborate camera movement. These techniques aided in the creation of abstract and mechanical design. In keeping with negative rhetorics of cinematic excess, however, Rubin describes this cinematic aesthetic as steeped in ‘gratuitousness, extravagance, over indulgence’ and the, flaunting of display for the sake of display’ (p.60).

In terms of the use of contemporary special effects and the dancing body, Dodds notes that due to the enhanced visuality of the camera lens and its capacity to 'manipulate movement through its technical apparatus', it has become prevalent to present the body as spectacular (2014, p.448). In particular, this highly stylized
relationship between dance and film can be witnessed in the work of Baz Lurman, and in particular the film *Moulin Rouge!* (2001). In her analysis of the cinematic experience, Clare Parfitt-Brown recounts how Lurman creates an aesthetic of ‘exhilarating edginess’ through his manipulation of the hedonistic choreography of the can-can, the sweeping camera movements across the dance floor, the rapid editing of the frames and the use of computer-generated imagery (2014, p.23). Rather than detracting from the narrative, as described by Thompson (1986), Parfitt-Brown maintains that such a collision of dance and technology invites the spectators to physically engage and experience the bodies on screen through their intensification. The collaboration between dancing bodies and the rendering of the body through film apparatus therefore enhances the spectators’ engagement with the images, creating a ‘sensory encounter’ (2014, p.23).

Returning to Osterweis’s analysis of *Black Swan*, she refers to the dual intensification of images of moving bodies and camerawork, where the film generates ‘synesthetically heightened sensations of experience’ due to the heightened and virtuoso cinematic apparatus and bodily technique (2014, p.79). These technical elements include special effects, close-ups, excerpts of music and distorted sounds that all ‘generate amplified sensation for the viewer’ due to the heightened visuality of the image and the amazement at the technical skill of the body (p.80). Osterweis describes this process ‘as an alternating concealment and exposure of the mechanical’, as virtuosity is apparent in both the cinematic apparatus that captures the images, and in the technical mastery required of the body itself (p.74). Here, Osterweis establishes the importance of analysing both the body and the technical effects that present and frame these moving images. I will build upon this concept in my own analysis of spectacle, focusing on the relationship between body, camera and edit. Osterweis also highlights the continued rhetoric of the body as machine: an observation I will analyse further in Chapter Seven.

In his analysis of the CGI enhanced bodies in *The Matrix*, Derek Burrill observes that the science fiction genre of the film celebrates ‘excessive bodily ability’ as these cinematic bodies must integrate and complement the dazzling complexity and conceptual design of their digital environment (2014, p.246). As a result, these figures defy gravity, dodge bullets and morph into varying forms in order to operate in their CGI created digital environment. Here, Burrill makes the important observation of the relationship between excessive bodies and importance of the setting. This raises the question of whether the context and location of contestants
within the televised environment of showcasing ‘talent’ must therefore complement and enhance the overall media spectacle of the television talent show. This is a concept I will explore throughout all my analysis chapters.

While useful in the descriptions of the techniques used to augment moving bodies on screen, these cinematic bodies, however, operate within a different environment to that of the television talent show. In the context of the television screen, smaller budgets result in modest cinematic effects in comparison to feature films. Jonathan Crary (1984, 2001) argues that the proliferation of television in the everyday lives of people is both a regulating force and a key device in mass distribution. Television does not invest in images, but instead manages and dictates them, which he argues has actually caused ‘the eclipse of the spectacle’: the de-sensitisation of the spectator as a result of the televised mediascape, with images of pornography and violence programmed alongside light entertainment shows (1984, p.283). Spectacle as sensation therefore becomes dulled as a result of the specific programming schedule. Alternatively, Andrew Darley (2000) states that contemporary television programming carefully schedules programmes in a particular order to heighten the aesthetic experience for the viewer. Programmes are punctuated with advertising and news and create a series of dramatic images, colours and shapes for the viewer. The growth of television contributes to a culture of spectacle by placing emphasis on pure sensation and stimulation through a variety of channels and programmes, as well as through the creation of a mass audience without corporeal presence.

The proliferation of television spectacles since the late 1940’s also indicates the changing character of the spectator experience. While the privatisation of the spectacular experience through home television screens increases the spectator’s control of the medium, it similarly reduces the sensual impact of the overall visual digital spectacle due to the temporal and spatial division between the spectacle and the spectator, and the shift away from live theatrical production. Television as spectacle highlights the solitary nature of the consumption of spectacles, as well as the juxtaposition between the spectacle on screen, the domestic informal surroundings of the experience, and the apparatus of the spectacle itself (television screen size, additional digital channels, set top boxes, satellite channels etc.). Unlike the blackened theatrical environment of the cinema and the enhanced size of the cinema screen, the location of television in the home environment therefore equates to ‘a more casual and distracted degree of attention’ (Dodds, 2001, p.120).
The television spectacle has to therefore become even more enhanced in order to compensate for the domestic surroundings and the potential for the distracted gaze of the viewer.

In terms of the filming of dance on television, Rossenbourg (2012) describes how televised concert dance maintains the traditional relationship of spectator and stage through its editing of the performance footage. The post-production edit maintains the real time viewing experience of the dance production through the use of multiple camera angles that capture the audience’s view of the performance. Through their physical presence on screen, the positioning of the live studio or theatre audience becomes part of the overall production. Spliced between shots of the dance itself, the capturing of images of the live audience allows the home spectator to identify the event as a shared experience with other remote audiences (Anderson, 2014). This production choice allows spectators to witness the live audiences’ reactions and aid in shaping their own affective responses to the spectacles on screen (Feuer, 1993; Anderson, 2014). Live audiences therefore become part of the overall dance performance, with their reactions key in the call and response creation of spectacles on screen. As I will demonstrate in my analysis chapters, the production choices of GTD and BGT follow this production choice in their integration of camera shots of both judging panel and live audience.

Music television videos in particular accentuate and enhance the relationship between the image, camera and edit, but with a focus on the visualisation of sound (Kaplan, 1987; Goodwin, 1992; Frith, Goodwin and Grossberg, 1993; Watson, 2008; Railton and Watson, 2011; Dodds and Cook, 2013). Goodwin states that in music television, ‘visual pleasure is present not so much at the level of narrative, but in the making musical of the television image. Television is musiced’ (1992, p.70). He argues that this congenial ‘musicing’ of the image by dancing bodies is achieved through correlating gestures and choreographic routines captured by the edited camera shots, that work together to visualise and accentuate tempo, rhythm, harmonic development and lyrical content. The images created by the dancing body become an important device in visualising sound, and therefore increase the use-value of the musical commodity that is being sold. Similar to the directorial work of Berkeley and Lurrman, the camera movement is ‘choreographed’ through post-production editing in order to further exaggerate and manipulate the moving image. Rapidly edited and fractured images of musicians, singers, dancers, costumes and environments create an abstract visual experience that both visualizes the music
and attracts the viewer's distracted gaze through the splicing of frames. These videos, however, are designed to promote and sell the musical artists and their audio products within a short space of time. Dance, in this scenario, is designed to complement the visual display and musical soundtrack rather than be the main focus of attention.

These chosen accounts of moving bodies and cinematic/televisual effects demonstrate the potential symbiotic relationship between the body, camera and edit in the creation of a spectacular aesthetic. Camera effects amplify and augment the dancing body to engage the viewer, creating a mediated body that appears to surpass corporeal limitations. Virtuosity occurs dually in both the dance and the camerawork, with excessive abilities displayed through both the precision of the screened body and through the accompanying cinematic devices. As noted above, Burrill also introduces the importance of the screen setting to the creation of heightened aesthetic properties. I therefore propose that the surpassing of corporeal limitations through bodily skill, heightened through the cinematic excess of the television camerawork and edit, roots these performances in aesthetics of excess. Dancers and camerawork appear to go beyond the limitations of reality through the labouring of the body and the mechanical intervention of the cameras lens. These accounts, however, do not discuss the specific augmentation of the Hip Hop dancing body, which, as proposed in Ch. 3.4, transgresses the possible through performances of the virtuosic grotesque.

Black cultural expressions, such as b-boying or b-girling, developed simultaneously with the developments in recording technology both in music and film (Scott, 2011; DeFrantz, 2014). Dances were preserved and disseminated across distances and time zones, and could capture the ‘urgency and immediacy of corporeal oratory contained by Hip Hop social dances’ (DeFrantz, 2004, p.76). LaBoskey notes that in the later stages of Hip Hop’s development, the style adapted to ‘interact with inanimate objects or sentient partners, such as the camera or the choreographed move’, as there was a renewed focus on the spectator rather than on the dancers themselves (2001, p.119). This shift from a vernacular practice to a filmed choreography demanded an emphasis on front-facing movement, with the breaking cypher spread out to laterally to face an audience and with gymnastic displays orientated towards the spectator rather than the opponent. In his study of ‘breaksploitation’ films of the 1980s, DeFrantz (2014) refers to the two key angles that have become synonymous with framing Hip Hop on film: the low angle that
allows the viewer to feel as if they are in the breakdance cypher and the high overhead angle that captures the spectacular energy of power moves and floor work, sliced next to reaction shots of audiences engaged in the cypher. These angles were coupled with a number of post-production effects, including saturated colours, flashes of footwork or body parts through physical segmentation, moments of rewind, the transformation of a movement into a ‘vibrating outline of a body in motion’, and the insertion of formless shapes into the frame (p.21). These techniques re-presented the Hip Hop body as a hyper body that towers and protrudes over the audience. While far removed from the live experience, he states that ‘the psychedelic editing style…demonstrates what Hollywood hip-hop will come to value: the dancing labor of young people transformed by electronic effect for a sensational visual image’ (p.121). As I will discuss in Chapter Eight, this emphasis on the visuality of the Hip Hop dancer also has the potential to objectify and economically value the body.

This flamboyant aesthetic constructed between dancer and camera can also be witnessed in contemporary Hip Hop cinematic films and franchises, including StreetDance 3D and the Step Up series. Situated in the formulaic Hollywood narrative of Hip Hop dance films, which DeFrantz defines as ‘community-based social engagement and neoliberal resistance to capital’, these films sensationalise the Street dance body through capturing wide shots filled with spinning, flipping and jolting bodies, with sweeping crane movements flying over aerial bodies battling in the cypher (p.113). Body parts are dislocated through the framing of the camera lens and large production budgets allow for mass unison choreography, elaborate sets and visual pyrotechnics created through gravity defying slow motion. The camera dislocates limbs that fly out of the screen in three-dimensional wonder and frames and camera angles are cut at the same rapid speed as the dance (p.113).

DeFrantz’s accounts of the filming of these Hollywood films reveal valuable descriptions of the cinematic devices used to augment and amplify Hip Hop dancing bodies in motion. His analysis also exposes the historical exploitation of these young agile bodies through Hollywood cinema. In particular, he comments how the reality of these dancers working conditions and their socio-economic situation were displaced for the intensification and augmentation of the Hip Hop dancing image. This observation raises issues regarding the hypervisibility and spectacularisation of bodies, and, in particular, male dancing bodies, who operate outside of dominant society. In addition, while spectacle, as discussed in this chapter, refers to the
heightened aesthetic properties of the image, its association with the superficial and the artifice of the glossy surface also signifies the masking and concealment of the realities that sit behind these images. This raises the question of what is at stake in the presentation of dancing bodies as spectacle and what is lost or hidden as a result of this spectacularisation. While Street dance crews may not be subjected to the same level of mediation as that of the cinematic body, their performance within the commercial format of the reality television show places them in a dramatized and fictitious environment (see Ch. 2.5). As stated by Joy and Sherry, when dance is placed in a commercial setting, ‘the esthetic [sic], cognitive, physical, and emotional effects may be heightened, all without the conscious knowledge of the viewer’ (Joy and Sherry, cited in Walter, 2012, p.21). Consequently, I will analyse spectacle in terms of the aesthetic properties of the image and as a wider condition of a global technocapitalist society (see Chapter Four).

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has critically evaluated the concepts and strategies that inform research on the aesthetic properties of spectacle within a dance on screen context. It is apparent that an analysis of the layered spectacles of dancing bodies on screen demands a consideration of the aesthetics of excess: the establishment of difference through virtuosic performances that appear to transcend the limitations of the physical body and move into the realm of the grotesque. These excessive bodies are further augmented through the cinematic excess of the camera work and intensify the aesthetic properties of moving bodies on screen. As demonstrated by Galt (2011) and Whissel (2014), these heightened aesthetic properties of the screen also have the potential to speak to wider themes within the screen dance context. In addition, the potentiality for the heightened aesthetic properties of the Hip Hop dancing body raises issues regarding the masking of social realities. As spectacle is both produced by and received within specific socio-political conditions, the following chapter will evaluate the concepts and critical strategies that have the potential to inform this research on spectacle as an ideological condition of global technocapitalist society.

1 Lacan’s (1949) psychoanalytical concept of the mirror stage describes a child’s construction of the Ego through objectification. The Ego is the result of a difference between the projection of one’s sensations and one’s perceived visual appearance.
Recollet states that 'visual culture includes the embodiment of the dance form in re-claiming urban landscapes. B-girling/b-boysing represented another cultural element that claimed urban space in resistance to oppressive economic and social circumstances of the late 1970s. Like rap, it also had its origins among black and Hispanic youth from the Harlem, Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens neighborhoods in New York City’ (2014, p.415).

In the final scenes of the film, the ballerina Nina physically transforms on stage by growing black wings instead of arms.

Arabesque camera movement refers to the composed fluid, curving lines of the shot, achieved through the cranes and tracking motions of the camera lens.
Chapter Four: Spectacle as a condition of global technocapitalism

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a critical evaluation of the concepts and strategies that have the potential to inform research on spectacle as an ideological condition of global technocapitalist society. As introduced in DeFrantz’s writings in Ch. 3.6, spectacle as a visual phenomenon has the potential to mask the realities of those that create such amplified images. Ernst Lavik’s article on cinematic spectacle in blockbuster films makes the clear distinction between spectacle as a product of a society saturated with images and the notion of spectacle as a perceptible mode of eye-catching display. Whilst Lavik proposes that these two tranches of spectacle ‘exist at completely different levels’, he states that there is no denying the interplay between visually spectacular images at a micro level and how the proliferation of these images through technological advances results in the commodification of society (2008, p.171). Sutherland’s writing in particular recognises that at the heart of Debord’s (1967) Society of the Spectacle (see Ch. 4.4) lays ‘a particular set of aesthetic relations defined around the distinctly visual and spectacular relations of excess that qualify a representation as spectacular in the first place’ (2012, p.333). As established in the example of Hip Hop dance films (see Ch. 3.6), spectacular images may heighten the visual impact of moving bodies on screen, but these images at the same time have the potential to conceal the realities that sit behind them. I maintain that it is therefore important to investigate the aesthetic properties of spectacle, as well as the notion of spectacle as an abstract notion linked to the accumulation of capital, the global circulation of images and the loss of social reality.

The positioning of spectacle as an ideological concept is predominantly situated in the work of Guy Debord, a French philosopher who was part of the Situationist International movement which promoted radical action through politics and art, and whose writings inspired the Paris workers uprising in the 1960s. In his written and film work, Debord applies the Frankfurt School's Marxist theory of the commodification of culture to enlighten the spectator who has been overloaded by spectacular images. In order to fully comprehend Debord’s ideas and understand the link between a commodified culture and a society reduced to spectacular images, it is valuable to first interrogate the directly related ideas of Marx’s commodity theory and the notion of dance as commodity. This chapter will begin by
critiquing the work of Karl Marx in relation to processes of economic-exchange and the production of commodities, with particular focus on the commodification of the dancing body in Hip Hop. Following an analysis of the Frankfurt schools’ concept of commodity fetishism, this chapter will present a critique of Debord’s (1967) notion of the ‘Society of the Spectacle’ and the erasure of social relations through spectacle. I will then critique theories regarding spectacle in techno-global communications, with particular focus on Douglas Kellner’s (2003, 2005, 2012) notion of Media Spectacle. Finally, I will summarise these ideas and propose their relevance to my research context.

4.2 Commodities and economic exchange

In his critique of trade in Das Kapital, Marx (1867; ed. 1957) defines an object’s exchange-value as the total labour required, calculated against the time spent in production, which is then represented through the currency of money. Through this formulaic process of economic exchange, the product in question becomes commodity: an object that possesses qualities that are subjectively desirable to humans (Marx, 1867; ed. 1957). A commodity trades for other commodities equalling the comparable exchange-value, or, alternatively, for the symbolic representation of its exchange-value (money). This exchange-value, however, varies from its use-value, which Marx describes as only existing through its consumption, and is far more variable in comparison with the fixed exchange-value of the product due to its relation to human needs and desires. Thus, a commodity holds a variable use-value depending on the consumer, a fixed exchange-value based on its labour production, and a price in terms of its projected monetary worth.

While valuable in its explanation of economic capital, this model provides a fixed concept of material commodities, with no acknowledgement of the difficulty of precisely measuring labour-value. Additionally, the exchange-value of a product is deemed the universal measurement of the value of an object, despite the varying material properties of commodities (Dodds, 2011). Marx’s theories of capital are also historically situated in the factory production line, where the worker and product remain tangible. Post-Marxist theorists (Arvidsson, 2006; Berardi, 2009; Suarez-Villa, 2009; Lazzarato, 2014) argue that post-capitalist economies additionally recognise the value of ‘intangible assets’, such as brand, knowledge and flexibility, and situate capitalist discourse in the digital age of intangible products and global communication systems. Economic value can therefore be created through social
exchange and across digital formats where there is no tangible product. These ideas are significant in the understanding the dancing body as commodity, which constructs non-material products through corporeal labour (see Ch. 4.3).

From an advertising perspective, the transmission of products into marketable commodities operate through Ferdinand De Saussure’s (1916, ed. 2002) and Roland Barthes’ (1957, ed. 1993) understandings of semiotics. Meaning is inscribed onto a product through its association and symbolic connection with ‘images, objects, people, emotions or values’, with the commodity both representing the product itself and its symbolic associations (Dodds, 2000, p.16). Developed further through Jean Baudrillard’s (1970, ed. 1998, 1981, ed. 1984) theories of semiotics and his critique of the value of consumer goods in the realm of circulation in consumer culture, images in television or billboard advertisements represent qualities or values that subjectively appeal to the home-viewer and aid them in constructing their own cultural identity. Baudrillard moves away from Marx’s ambiguous notion of use-value and focuses on consumption rather than production. He states that all products symbolically represent a social value and he distinguishes sign value (value in a system of objects) from symbolic value (a value that a subject assigns to an object in relation to another subject). Advertisers appropriate recognisable images and associations from everyday life to assign symbolic value to the product, and as Kellner states in his study of media culture, ‘…symbolic images in advertising attempt to create an association between the products offered and socially desirable and meaningful traits’ (2003, p.248). An advertisement for the product of a diamond ring is therefore situated amongst images and symbolic references to luxury, beauty and eternal love in reference to marriage, while advertisements for Duracell batteries associate themselves with the qualities of endurance, robustness, and reliability. Importantly for my study of spectacle, the semiotic process of converting products into commodities is therefore reliant on still and moving images that grab and hold the attention of the potential consumer.

4.3 Dance as commodity

The dancing body as an active site of socio-cultural and political meanings offers the advertiser an opportunity to instantly associate their product with the socially desirable qualities of youthfulness, vitality and, depending on the genre, sexuality, glamour, beauty and coolness (Engel, 2011). Bodies in motion within advertising
also offer what Ann Beatrice-Scott defines as an 'eye treat' for the consuming spectator as a result of highly energetic and visually engaging performances (2001, p.117). This process places the eye of the spectator at the centre of the commodification of the dancer, and the more visible the dancer, the more likely the viewer will buy into the products on display (Dodds, 2014). Therefore, the dancing body as representative of a commercial product places the aesthetic properties of spectacle at the heart of product advertising. Recent examples of advertisements that use dancing bodies to sell products in the U.K. include the 2014 Lexus IS car advert that featured ballerina Tamara Rojo. Rojo’s poised, controlled and virtuosic performance is utilised in the advertisement to physically represent the same body control as the product in question (Mackrell, 2013). In a different example, the 2014 Cadbury’s chocolate advertisement featured a lip-syncing middle-aged office worker who eats some chocolate and proceeds to sing and dance along in his office chair to the Baccara disco tune ‘Yes Sir, I can Boogie’ (1977). Through shoulder rolls, head turns and shimmies in syncopation with the lyrics, Cadbury creates an instant symbolic association between their confectionary product and the joy and silliness of Keith the office worker’s physical reaction to the chocolate and the song. As well as selling their product, the commercial industry therefore also offers audiences access to a variety of dance genres through the economic exchange of monetary value for labour power. Dodds describes this process as ‘the commodification of popular dance as an embodiment of the economic’ (2011, p.88).

Hip Hop’s stylistic practices, including breaking and its related genres, remain central in processes of economic-exchange and commodity generation. As detailed in Ch. 2.3, numerous scholars (Toop, 2000; Scott, 2001; Rose, 2004; Huntingdon, 2007; Heller, 2012; DeFrantz, 2014; Weisbrod, 2014) identify how advertisers link Black cultural practices with the selling and marketing of desirable commodities. In particular, they reference how Hip Hop dances specifically hold high exchange-value in the commercial market due to the style’s emphasis on visual display (see Ch. 3.3). The high octane visual aesthetic of breaking in the early 1980s initially drew the attention of advertisers and youth cultures alike (Toop, 2000), and Huntingdon states that in a U.S. context, ‘Hip Hop dance has now become the unofficial language of the state to coerce profit making’ (2007, p.33). Here, she refers specifically to the influx of Hip Hop practices in mass cultural consumption, including television, film, advertising, digital media and reality television. While vernacular Hip Hop dancers and scholars alike question the authenticity of these theatricalised, fragmented and mediated images of breakdance, with the term
‘selling out’ used to describe those dancers who earn an income through this type of work (West, 2005; Osumare, 2007), Mary Fogarty (2012) highlights that b-boys and b-girls are in fact highly brand aware, and products such as fashion brands play a major part in Hip Hop culture.

As well as being used to sell products and create commodities through symbolic association, Hip Hop dance itself is a commodity: a desired product that holds an exchange-value and that can be bought into within the commercial market. The most prolific example of the commodification of Hip Hop culture lies in ‘MTV culture’, the U.S. based production and distribution of music videos to global youth cultures (Goodwin, 1992; Osumare, 2007). These videos showcase the visual dexterity of Hip Hop culture through digital broadcasting, as well as firmly linking global Hip Hop culture with capitalist discourse. The commercial success of film and television franchises that incorporate Hip Hop dancing bodies encourages further reproduction, reaffirming mediatised Street dance as a lucrative commodity (Dodds, 2014). ‘Hip Hop dances’ incorporation into mass popular culture is a development of the existing relationship between youth culture, Hip Hop and the commodity system. Its high cultural capital lies in its expression of individuality and its affinity with global youth cultures through its transnational spread via global media and subcultural practices (Osumare, 2007). The breakdance power move of a one handed freeze, for example, is an explosive gymnastic stunt that through its necessary speed and execution demonstrates a high level of skill, labour and technical bodily control. This movement therefore commercially symbolises youthful abandon and carefree risk taking due to the skill and dexterity required in its execution and the high probability of injury and risk to performer. The prevalence of digital representations of freezes in commercial media, such as music videos, television advertising, YouTube clips and televised music, reveals the popularity and high exchange value of this power move, especially when semiotically linked to global corporate brands such as Nike, Apple or Gap (Burgess, 2009).vi The commercial appeal of Hip Hop dance additionally lies in its embodiment of the notions of ‘street’, ‘hood’ and rebellion, as these urban labels represent vital material for international industries to market products and lifestyles (Osumare, 2007, p.151).

Most importantly for this study, the placement of popular dance practices in a commodity fuelled commercial environment, such as the television talent show, demonstrates how multiple products can be sold and co-exist through this commercial platform (Redden, 2010). The television talent show worker operates in
a complex process of economic exchange, whereby labour power, artistic license and creativity is negotiated alongside the ‘regulating and restraining forces’ of the competition and, in the case of *BGT*, the overall SYCO television production (Dodds, 2011, p.65).\textsuperscript{11} While the competitors dance, sing and act for the opportunity to earn the desired commodities of trophies, cash prizes, performance opportunities and the potential of future work and fame, their products symbolically represent a plethora of material and immaterial commodities that can be sold to the audience. In terms of material commodities, these primarily comprise of the workers themselves, who are ‘bought into’ through telephone or text voting by the home viewer in order for them to remain in the competition. Other material commodities advertised indirectly throughout such performances may also include merchandise, fashion brands, music, prizes and geographical locations. These bodies at the same time have the potential to represent intangible commodities of youth, vitality, strength, coolness, fame and market value, as well as access to the artistic genre itself (Malnig, 1992; McMains, 2006; Weisbrod, 2014). In order to obtain the financial rewards of the competition, which Juliet McMains describes as ‘desired objects (including people, costumes, money and dance skill) and that which they symbolize (fame, power, recognition, and intimacy)’, the reality television worker must sell themselves through their performances, both on and off stage, in order to encourage the home viewer to keep watching the television channel and undertake a financial transaction through telephone, text or web voting (2006, p.4). These revenue streams are supported by cross promotion, and can include ‘advertising, sponsorship, license fees, merchandising, telephone voting, and the record sales and touring income from artists who were previously contestants’ (Redden, 2010, p.134). Following the competition, future transactions can then be made on ticket sales, DVD sales and merchandise.

In this complex process of transforming laboured products into commodities, as demonstrated in the above examples, the products in question enter a process of transcendence which Marx (1867; ed. 1957) defines as commodity fetishism. As a result of being presented as a desirable commodity, the product is no longer connected to the original work of the labourer and is instead associated with its monetary value. Commodity fetishism therefore operates by displacing the social relations of labour onto a material object, as well as forging the fantasy of commodity into figure form. In her study of affect and emotion, Sara Ahmed (2000) develops this observation and proposes that the process of commodity fetishism does not simply displace social relations of labour, but in fact completely erases
these social relations. As the moving body is frequently used to create commodities in the commercial marketplace through symbolic association, it is potentially ‘cut off’ from its means of labour production, its histories and its artistic energy (Scott, 2001). As an example, Scott describes how despite the ambiguous and immaterial nature of the ‘dance’ product and its close association with the labouring body, popular dance ‘is utilized as a fixed entity by broadcast and digital media to convey skill, emotion, time, location, forces of nature, social worthiness, and race’ (2001, p.113). To achieve the maximum effect in the given time limit, the dancing body is reduced to its ‘most tantalizing parts’, and advertisers carefully select specific dancing bodies to ensure they hold significance in relation to the commodity brand, and that they can be read quickly in the space of the advertisement (p.113). Here, the actual labour that is required to achieve these performances is displaced and what remains is the commercial value of the dance product. Scott exemplifies this commodity fetishism in her study of Hip Hop dance in Indian television, stating, ‘because the imported moves are inserted without understanding of their prior context, the choreography is, in the end, a massive trophy piece, displaying the production company’s marketing acumen’ (p.120).

From the above theorisations, it is clear that the dancing body presented as a commodity in a commercial setting is at risk of being reduced to a surface level representation that performs spectacular images in order to sell a product. This raises the question of whether performances of aesthetically spectacular feats of ability are the result of a need to be seen amongst the multiple spectacles on display within a commercial environment, or a direct result of the removal of the labour systems, historical backgrounds and agency of the performer. As discussed in Chapter Three, however, these spectacular images are not necessarily shallow in their meaning, as the aesthetic properties of spectacle can also reflect wider issues (see Ch. 3.5). Having established the above concepts of commodities, commodity fetishism and the displacement of the body from its social relations, this chapter now will now relate these ideas to Debord’s theorisations in ‘The society of the spectacle’ (1967) and his following study, ‘Comments on the society of the spectacle’ (1988).

4.4 The society of the spectacle

Similar to Marx, Debord posits that accumulation of capital results in the creation of images, and that because consumer society provides a constant wash of these images, consumers mistake them as a representation of culture. Debord’s argument
centres on the belief that social life is not about living but about having, and spectacle utilises images to dictate what people should consume. In a society ‘dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has receded into representation’ (p.7). As a result of the prevalence of images, social life has moved beyond a state of having, and transforms itself as a state of appearing, where there are no longer originals and real life has become a series of images. As an example, the commodity spectacle of the McDonald's golden arches is an instantly recognisable symbol in contemporary consumer culture due to its global placement in advertising, television, sports events and other media. The symbol itself goes beyond representing fast food, however, and has become a signpost for U.S. culture and its corporate globalization (Kellner, 2003). Debord maintains that this totalizing commodity fetishism has also intervened with social relations, and the spectacle supersedes the need for human interaction. As a result of this total colonization of social life, human fulfilment has become about what one possesses and Debord goes so far as to say that the essential character of spectacle is ‘to be a visible negation of life - a negation that has taken on a visible form’ (p.9). Thus, Debord proposes that social reality has effectively been cancelled out. Spectacle is not simply a consequence of the dominant modes of production and consumption, but the main objective, and in all its forms it has become the universal way of life that alienates the spectator from the real.

Despite his writings originating from early post-industrial French society, twenty first century U.K. culture provides an abundance of examples of Debord’s spectacular society reliant on ‘empty’ images, with television, computers, smart phones and tablets providing a plethora of multimedia to circulate and/or create spectacular commodities. Exemplifying this spectacular condition of society, Jen Harvie cites George Soro’s observations that ‘transactions’ have replaced ‘relationships' in people's relationships with one another (Soros, 1998 in Harvie, 2013, p.47). This argument is particularly relevant in social networking where social media websites digitise social interaction and reduce the body to a profile of computer coding. One of the key issues with Debord’s ideas, however, is that he presents the spectator as passive and accepting of their imagined and hollow constructed reality and fails to acknowledge any agency or resistance (Puchner, 2004; Rosati, 2012; Shukaitis, 2013). While he provides more concrete examples in his 1988 work, his writings remain abstract and void of example. This paints a totalitarian and homogenous overview of spectacle, and he fails to acknowledge any contestations between
different spectacles in popular culture and other areas of society. Consequently, the relevance of spectacle as consisting of aesthetic properties that capture the viewer’s attention is unacknowledged due to the study’s wider view of spectacle as a condition. This raises the important question of whether the subject has any agency over their reduction to spectacle, a concept I will explore further in Chapter Eight.

4.5 The spectacle of labour

As referenced in Scott’s analysis of the popular dancing body in commercial media, one of the central issues raised in the dancing body’s potential reduction to spectacle is that of the erasure of its labour systems. Rather than Marx’s factory worker creating a product through manual labour, dancers labour the tools of their own bodies in order to create intangible and temporary products. As discussed in Ch. 2.5 and 2.6, Redden (2010) and Foster (2015) observe that labour is often placed at the forefront of reality television shows through both the talent on display and through the labouring of the self. This extensive yet free labour is not necessarily rewarded; there is no guarantee that work will equal success as there can only be one winner.

Marx’s study of exchange-value introduces the notion of the alienation of the worker and labour exploitation through his theorisation of the surplus. Complicating his formula for calculating exchange-value, Marx proposes that the concept of surplus-value refers to the increase in monetary value of a commodity due to the circulation and exchange from money to commodity to money (1867; ed. 1957). The key difference between economic-value and surplus-value is a question of labour: the original producer of the commodity generates surplus-value by creating a desirable product, but is compensated less than the value of their creations and the cost of the materials. Thus, surplus-labour refers to the labour that is performed in the creation of this surplus-value. This term is therefore in opposition of the notion of ‘necessary labour’: the amount of labour required in order to produce the means of livelihood.

This concept of surplus-labour is particularly comparable to that of the labour organisation practices experienced in the Post-Fordist era. Moving away from the assembly line production and serial labour of Fordism in the early twentieth century, Post-Fordism instead requires the worker to bring ‘vitality, creativity, flexibility and communication skills’ to job roles (Gielen and De Bruyne, 2012, p.9). While Post-
Fordism offers workers flexible working hours, increased autonomy, and the potential of designing a clear work-life balance, Paulo Virno states that in the Post-Fordist era, 'human nature has become an economic stake. Every aspect of human nature (that we are linguistic beings, the effect of environment on the human species) constitutes raw material for production' (Virno in Gielen and De Bruyne, 2012, p.26). Thus, the extension of labor into all areas of the worker's life blurs the boundaries between labor and leisure. As Jen Harvie states,

work's increased flexibility can alternatively be seen to disadvantage most workers, jeopardising their authority over their work in a market crowded with competitors, relying on the exploitation of many to fulfil the job satisfactions of a few and producing a way of working and living that feels less carefree and flexible and more precarious, insecure and work-dominated

In a dance context, the potential displacement of labour conditions bears increased significance due to the positioning of the Post-Fordist cultural worker and their production of surplus value and surplus labour. These conditions of labour in a neoliberal capitalist landscape, defined as precariousness (1996) by Maurizo Lazzarato, describe the unstable situation of the freelance dance artist working in creative economies. In labour practices of music videos, print and television advertising and televised talent show competitions, the mass circulation and increased visibility of these bodies as commodities increases the dancers’ surplus-value through the process of economic-exchange. This increased visibility is reliant, however, on the Post-Fordist dancer being subjected to long hours, part time, short term or zero-hour contracts, low wages and an often an expectation to receive no remuneration on the basis that the dancer will achieve valuable media exposure. There is also a requirement of the dancer to financially invest in their own talent. Similar to McMain’s observations of ballroom dance competition practices, dancers have to invest in years of dance training, travel, costumes and external competition entry fees to gain recognition and visibility within the industry.

The dancer must also extend their surplus-labor into the promotion of the self through websites, agents and social media platforms, and be at the subjection of the employer with no guarantee of future paid opportunities. While a neoclassical economic approach gives some agency to the labourers who bargain for their wage in a free market (Weintraub, 2002), the popular dance worker earns a low return considering the extreme labour required to succeed in the neoliberal structure of the
competition. Despite the potential of their dispensability in a precarious Post-Fordist employment landscape, reality television contestants continue to enter willingly and enthusiastically into such competitions due to the opportunity of high financial reward and media exposure. While the television production achieves high profits through the use of localised and cheap talent, the contestant willingly invest excess labour and emotional stability into these competitions in the form of long hours of rehearsals, loss of regular income through other means of labour, short contracts and flexibility determined by the wider production, all with a precarious outcome of success.\textsuperscript{\textit{xvi}} It is these conditions of labour, or the potential masking of these conditions through the reduction of the image to spectacle, that I will investigate in my analysis in Chapter Eight.

4.6 Spectacle, television and the media

Several authors (Crary, 1984; Baudrillard, 1970, ed. 1998, 1981, ed. 1984; Darley, 2000; Kellner, 2003, 2005, 2012) place television at the centre of Debord's society of the spectacle. Baudrillard's writings on television state that society has moved beyond a displacement of life via spectacular images, and that society has in fact 'abolished elsewhere', removing any possibility of a return to the real (1993, p.145). In this model of simulacrum, the boundaries between spectacle and spectator are blurred, and television creates a new and hyperreal spectacle in the form of the dissolution and abstraction of the viewers' consciousness and the apparatus of the television screen. In reference to Baudrillard's writings, Andrew Lockwood comments that this disappearance of reality 'spurs attempts everywhere to nostalgically resurrect and retrieve the real', with films such as \textit{The Matrix} (1999) and \textit{The Truman Show} (1998) playing upon this fear of displacement and loss of reality, but at the same time reassuring the public that in 'reality' they have control and agency (2005, p.74).\textsuperscript{\textit{ix}}

Kellner's writings on media spectacle move beyond the consideration of television as a spectacular medium. They draw on the work of Debord (1967) and Baudrillard to argue that spectacle in a media and consumer society saturates all forms of culture, leisure and the wider realms of social life. Kellner defines media spectacles as products of media culture that,

Embody contemporary society's basic values, serve to initiate individuals into its way of life, and dramatize its controversies and struggles, as well as its modes of
conflict resolution. They include media extravaganzas, sporting events, political happenings, and those attention-grabbing occurrences that we call new.

2003, p.2

Cyberspace, multimedia and virtual realities disseminate spectacular events to global audiences. While media spectacles expanded in the 1990s into the arenas of fashion, sports and entertainment, Kellner notes that from 2000 onwards, the Internet, and specifically social networking websites, have created an all-encompassing media spectacle due to the increased potential for the global circulation of information. Through the submissive consumption of spectacles, spectators remove themselves from producing their own life and instead reaffirm the capitalist model of separation by watching the spectacles of social life appear on their television screen and computer rather than experiencing a live event. As contemporary televised spectacles exhibit ‘more hi-tech glitter, faster and glitzier editing, computer simulations, and, with cable and satellite television, a diverse array of every conceivable type of show and genre’, this in turn privatizes the consumption of spectacle and heightens the sensation of separation (p.7).

One example of a previous media spectacle in twenty-first century U.K. culture is that of the Royal Wedding held in April 2011, which produced worldwide media frenzy over the marriage of Prince William to Kate Middleton. The extensive media coverage, the two billion international television audience, the million people who lined the streets of London and the extensive discourse surrounding details of the event, including the dress, the ceremony, the mode of transport and celebrity congregation, all in turn created Kellner’s ‘media spectacle’. As well as the event itself, the media spectacle spread to focus on how individual communities around the U.K. celebrated the event through Street parties and fetes, all with a bias towards an increased level of patriotism. Importantly, Kellner notes that the event of the wedding itself was fleeting and short-lived, which he argues is a consequence of the contemporary moment where time is marked by a series of spectacular media-covered events and the actual event itself is lost in the spectacularisation, suggesting that spectacles as events are not concrete but temporally fluid in their construction.

Another key example of a media spectacle in U.K. culture is that of the opening ceremony of the 2012 London Olympic Games of the 30th Olympiad, entitled ‘Isles of Wonder’.

The ceremony cost 27 million pounds and incorporated actors,
dancers, singers, musicians, drummers, acrobats, stunt men, cyclists, puppeteers, comedians and orchestras, as well as the parade of athletes and flags that marked the formal element of the ceremony. As witnessed in past opening ceremonies, including Beijing’s extravagant performance in 2008, dance remained a prevalent feature within London’s ceremony, with examples including a contemporary dance piece by Akram Khan dance company, a lively jive performed by NHS staff, folk dance styles performed by children and an ode to the history of popular culture conveyed through a variety of social music and dance genres. These televised performances of en masse choreography, heightened by the choreography of the camera and edit, are additionally situated within the overall mega-spectacle of the Olympic Games (Shin, 2012). MacAlloon (1984) and Tomlinson (1996) state that the Olympics as event is the epitome of spectacle due to the emphasis on visuality, achieved through the world wide audiences both physically and virtually present at the games through television broadcasting, the aesthetic transformation of the host city, the meeting of nations, the scale of the security and volunteer task force, the creation of an economic spectacle due to the high monetary value placed on the event, and of course, the spectacular athletic performances themselves. This spectacle works against the ethos of the Olympics, where there is concern for 'order, nobility and taste' in its organisation and presentation, rather than an emphasis on 'gigantism' (MacAlloon, 1984, p.246).

Kellner describes large scale sporting events, such as the Olympic Games, as 'cultural rituals' that 'celebrate their society's deepest values (i.e. competition, winning, success and money)' (2005, p.28). Relating this event to Debord’s (1967) concept of the 'society of the spectacle', national criticisms regarding the cost of the ceremony to the British tax payer in the economic downturn and doubts regarding the impact of the legacy of the Games were quickly overlooked in the U.K. press media coverage of the spectacular performances. From the unpaid status of the dancers, the high profile sponsorship, the high cost to the British tax payer and the importance of both the regeneration in East London and the potential boost to the British economy, the financial valuing of bodies and the emphasis upon consumerism and income generation linked with the event remained key in the construction of the media spectacle. As stated by Astrid Kerston and Christine Abbott, “the purpose of spectacle is to redirect citizens’ attention from structural inequalities to spectacular events designed to subdue social criticism” (2012, p.324). Such masking or redirection therefore plays into the negative dichotomy and devaluing of spectacular action. These images of the popular dancing body are not
only spectacular in their ocular hypervisibility, but also in their symbolic representation of capital and their position in the commercial marketplace. The commodification of the image is totalizing to the extent where the real is eradicated and all is left is a series of images that take on the representation of cultural life.

Despite their apparent grandeur and scale, spectacles also vary in impact depending on the viewer's perspective. In a post-industrial western culture, Baz Kershaw argues that global digitalisation has scaled down the world so that spectacle can occur at the click of a mouse or be over in a matter of seconds. In this era of the ‘miniaturization’, spectacle is instantaneous and personalised to the individual, with news and media events from across the globe easily accessible at the touch of an iPhone icon (2003, p.596). Consequently, media spectacles are less about the size of the event but are more focused on their mass distribution and the speed of the delivery. I therefore maintain that similar to ‘The society of the spectacle’s’ (1967) erasure of the modes of production, histories and values, the media spectacle in fact erases the importance and profile of the actual temporal event, resulting in an immaterial and all-encompassing spectacle.

In terms of reality television, programmes such as the Big Brother series fall into Kellner’s (2003) definition of media spectacle due to their large audience figures, the relentless digital and print media coverage, the contestants drive for celebrity status and the interactive nature of the programmes. Contestants demonstrate the ‘psychopathology of the spectacle’ in that they are driven to participate in reality television shows by economic gain and the promise of celebrity (2003, p.19). In particular, large cash prizes are particularly relevant in popular dance practice, where dancers frequently earn low wages, require an agent to obtain performance work and subsidise their performance work through teaching. Some competitions offer competitors a weekly wage once they achieve a certain level in the competition, so it is in the financial interest of the performers to remain in the competition for as long as possible, as well as to compete for the overall cash prize.Ⅹ Alongside the promise of the winning cash prize, competitors also have the potential of exposure to agents, sponsors and the possibility of future performance and teaching work. Many dancers who gain prominence in televised talent show competitions receive free products to wear during filming, and are offered work in advertising campaigns, films, cruise ships, musicals and other televised talent show competitions.
This neoliberal model of the television talent show has been cultivated by both the U.K.’s New Labour and Coalition governments (Harvie, 2013). Jen Harvie describes neoliberalism as a political ideology that ‘recognizes and prioritises the individual’s right to seek self-fulfilment and to do so in conditions unrestricted by state-institution end regulations’ (2013, p.12). In neoliberal capitalism, however, the individual is free to generate self-reward, but this self-reward in turn produces and increases the profits of private organisations and governments through open market capital circulation (Harvie, 2013). She maintains that neoliberal capitalism was spurred on by mounting state debt and the financial crisis in 2007. This right to self-fulfilment and reward lies at the core of reality television formats, with the individual striving to achieve fame, fortune and social mobility. Participants endeavour to win the desired rewards and prize money offered by the competition, whilst also increasing their celebrity status through media coverage to ensure future employability after the competition. These rewards, however, are diminutive in comparison with the profits of the production companies.

Contestants also become the controlled objects of display and entertainment for the masses, who are paradoxically also under daily surveillance. In his genealogical study of discipline and punishment, Foucault (1977) refers to the changing nature of spectacle in relation to surveillance and control. In comparison with the controlling theatrical spectacles of public executions: events would provoke shock and fear in its spectators, the modern spectacles of control have changed focus whereby the masses become the objects of spectacle themselves through surveillance techniques, such as CCTV camera recordings and online monitoring. The disappearance of spectacle from the public eye highlights the evolution from mass spectatorship, whereby the spectators become the spectacle themselves, with reality television programming exemplifying this contemporary condition. Kellner highlights how the addictive nature of these shows, the process of voting and the large viewing figures indicates a ‘deep-seated voyeurism and narcissism in the society of the interactive spectacle’ and how the spectator is, arguably, looking for elements of themselves in the programmes (2003, p.20). In particular, the 2009 series of BGT sparked international interest due to the YouTube success of Susan Boyle, a Scottish middle aged woman with a surprising singing talent who has since reached international success with four albums. This interest sparked a media event when Boyle started displaying erratic behaviour, and was admitted to a rehabilitation clinic, creating even greater media intrusion (BBC News, 2009).
These programmes additionally display the media spectacle of an adaptable television format that privileges both the local and the global. *BGT* is part of the *Got Talent* franchise: an easily reproduced and adaptive framework that is ‘licensed through the international television market for local adaption’ (Oren and Shahaf, 2012, p.2). As detailed in Chapter Two, Oren and Shahaf maintain that the move to format television by programmers is a consequence of the competitive market, where there is a requirement for 'sure fire hits' (p.5). These programmes must merge popular ideas with proven ratings and that generate 'maximum content hours', yet at the same time achievable with small production budgets (p.5). The popularity of these programmes lies in the incorporation of local adaption in the spectacular and polished format of global wide televised talent show competition, using the local and cheap labour of the reality television worker as the workforce.

From these writings on media spectacle, it is apparent that spectacle on television and in the media operates not only as a visual effect as established in Ch. 3.6, but also as an ideological concept that puts into question the notion of reality and the simulated real. This spectacle separates the spectator from the live event through the physical and temporal partition of the screen. While my research centres upon the talent show genre of television programming, these ideas are important in positioning the spectacles created through the television talent show in the wider programming schedule. Additionally, Kellner’s and Kershaw’s writings question spectacles association with grandeur and instead position spectacle in a digital era as more centred on ideas of speed and distribution. I contend, however, that while Baudrillard’s and Kellner’s theories situate spectacle in capitalist notions of separation and the simulation of reality through the proliferation of images, they offer no agency to the spectator or the televised subject to resist the spectacularisation of the self. They present the spectator and televised subject as submissive to the omnipotent global media machine that suppresses artistic talent and commodifies the subject, whereby the body is reduced to spectacle as a result of the mass dissemination achieved through media intervention. While I would agree that there is the potential to ‘cut off’ systems of labour production due to the presentation of the televised subject as commodity, I also propose that subjects negotiate these hegemonic restrictions of television media production. This is an argument I will develop further in Chapter Eight.
4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has evaluated the concepts and critical strategies that cohere around the idea of spectacle as an ideological condition of global technocapitalist society. It is apparent that spectacle, in relation to popular dance within a commercial context, necessitates an analysis in terms of both the construction of the aesthetic properties of the image and the potential masking of social reality as a result of its commodification. I therefore propose that the dancing body in a commercial setting both performs the spectacular in order to be perceived within the wider media spectacle, but is at the same time reduced to spectacle through the fetishisation of the image. I will address this dual concept in Part Two of this thesis. This chapter has also revealed that spectacle as a condition of a commodified society not only displaces and potentially erases the social relations that create large scale media events, but also cancels out the event itself. Spectacular temporal moments become lost in the global circulation of commodities and in the speed of information dissemination through a variety of media. This raises questions regarding the fixed and static nature of the dancer within this media spectacle which I will address in Ch.8.3.

As discussed in Chapter Three, I propose that popular dance bodies perform excess by accomplishing virtuosic feats that transcend corporeal limitations. These performances are further amplified by the surrounding media production elements and have the potential to create augmented and intensified images for the spectator. This chapter reveals, however, that this 'going beyond' the limitations of the body also applies to the embodying of the economic in a commercial market. The situation of dancing bodies as both desirable commodities and representing qualities that can be associated with marketable products has raised the issue of spectacle’s masking of labour conditions in the strive to produce surplus-value. As discussed in Ch. 4.5, the conditions of the Post-Fordist cultural worker demands labour power that is surplus to that of the necessary labour required for the means of livelihood. By being situated within a precarious commercial context, dancers are therefore going above and beyond their necessary labour requirements. I therefore propose that in order to perform the aesthetic properties of spectacle within a commercial environment, dancers must perform ‘the surplus’. This term refers to the transgression of corporeal boundaries through the virtuosic spectacle of the popular dancing body, but performed within a mediatised environment and commercial marketplace. These performances have the potential to operate as a way of making
visible the moving body in the wider media spectacle of the competition and in the
diluted aesthetic of the television screen. As a consequence of this surplus
aesthetic, however, these bodies are potentially reduced to spectacle in line with
theories of commodity fetishism as discussed in Ch. 3.4. Through a dance on
screen analysis and drawing upon Lansdale’s concept of intertextuality, I will
explore this concept of the surplus within the following analysis chapters.

In summary, Part One of my thesis introduced my research questions and context,
reviewed and critiqued the pertinent literature, established the gaps in the field and
demonstrated how my work aims to address these omissions. Chapter Three and
Four analysed the aesthetic properties of spectacle and its role as a condition of a
commodified society. As a result of this exploration, I proposed the concept of the
surplus, the exceeding of corporeal limitations in a commercialised environment, as
a key idea to apply to my analysis chapters. Part Two of this thesis will examine the
notion of spectacle in relation to specific areas that arise from a preliminary analysis
of these performances. Considering the number and variety of case studies
analysed in this thesis, these areas of enquiry emerge across all crew performances
and will therefore be drawn upon thematically rather than chronologically. Taking
into account the notion of the surplus, these particular areas have the potential to
reveal the construction of spectacle with regards to the aesthetic properties of
excess. I will now apply these ideas to my analysis of the choreographic form and
content of the crew performances in Chapter Five.

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1 Over ten million workers participated in the Paris workers’ strike in May 1968. The civil unrest
began in the student population, who protested against capitalism and consumerism in French
Institutions (Singer, 2002).

2 Debord’s film work includes La Société du spectacle (1973).

3 Advertisements for Duracell batteries have traditionally incorporated a pink bunny powered by
Duracell batteries that outlasts other competitors.

4 In his exploration of ‘breakexploitation films’ DeFrantz states that, ‘throughout the 1990s, a rise in
hip-hop classes and studio-based training practices led to the codification of hip-hop as a form with a
pyramidal structure—something that could be learned from a teacher, rather than developed by artists
involved, as had been the standard of transmission until that time. This shift in teaching and
transmission restabilizes hip-hop as a form that could be controlled by the marketplace; a form
suitable for film production that could be organized and overseen by a hired choreographer or dance
director. Hip-hop dance moves continued to trade in the innovation of practitioners, but over-time,
young artists contributed fewer and fewer movements to the choreographic soup that became screen

7 Dodds states that ‘the recent run of reality television dance shows and feature films that revolve
around Street dance crews demonstrates how the screen media are motivated to reproduce lucrative
commercial models. For instance, the first Step Up (2006) film was produced at an estimated
$12,000,000; its worldwide sales have grossed at $114,194,847; and it was swiftly followed by Step

These high profile brands have used the Hip Hop dancing body in their television commercials in several countries. In particular, the iconic Apple (2002) advertisements of black silhouettes dancing on a coloured background depict various bodily reactions to listening to the iPod.

SYCO is ‘a global music, television and film production joint venture between Simon Cowell and Sony Music Entertainment. SYCO Television is also the owner of the Got Talent television format. Versions of both The X Factor and Got Talent are co-produced by Syco and are shown in more than 70 countries and have won multiple awards including National Television Awards and Baftas (Simon Cowell online, 2013).

After winning BGT in 2008, teenage Street dancer George Sampson was dropped from SYCO management despite producing a best-selling DVD.

The Matrix (1999) follows the story of a computer hacker who discovers that his true reality is a desolate world run by machines. The Truman Show (1998) tells the story of a man who has been living in a reality television show and his gradual discovery that his life is a lie.

The opening ceremony was held on Friday 27th July at the Olympic stadium in Stratford Park in London. The ceremony was directed by Academy Award-winning British film director Danny Boyle, with original music written by electronic music group Underworld. As well as the cast members, the ceremony presented sets and staging, helicopters, vehicles and animals to bring alive the four hour performance. The ceremony was broadcast to 900 million people worldwide, and reviews both locally and internationally praised the vibrancy, originality and eccentricity of the performance, which presented an ‘eccentric and exuberant celebration of British history, art and culture’ (Al Arabiya, 2012).

On 15th December 2012, I informally interviewed male and female members of BoyBlue Entertainment about their experiences in televised talent show competitions. Four of the dancers from different crews and groups revealed that they had been paid to stay on in the semi-final stages of BGT and GTD.
PART TWO: ANALYSIS OF PERFORMANCES
Chapter Five: Spectacle and the choreography

5.1 Introduction

This first analysis chapter examines the construction and performance of spectacle in the context of the choreography of the male Street dance crew performance. As referred to in Ch. 2.6, Susan Foster describes the popular dance body in television talent shows as the homogenous ‘industrial body’: a dancing body that works in commercial settings and enjoys unison, symmetry and side to side movements (2014, p. 5). I will expand upon this simplified description of choreography in a commercial competitive environment and instead provide a detailed movement analysis of the choreographic structure of these less than three minute performances.

In televised dance talent shows, such as SYTYCD and Strictly Come Dancing, contestants perform sequences created by professional choreographers who design works specifically ‘for camera’. Alternatively, dance contestants in GTD and BGT produce and perform their own choreography at each stage of the competition. While some editing choices are made in conjunction with the dancers, whereby the contestants highlight how they wish their choreography to be captured by the camera, the time constraints on television production demand swift external decisions regarding camera angle choices. This choreography therefore includes the artistic imaginings of the choreographer and dancers and the re-presentation of these choreographies through the post-production edit. In terms of my analysis, I will take into consideration individual performances within the crew, the group choreographic structure, the use of dynamics and the narrative content. Drawing upon my analytical lens as outlined in Chapters Three and Four, I will explore the notion of the surplus: the transgression of corporeal boundaries through virtuosic performances within a mediatised and commercial environment. I will therefore conduct an analysis of both the moving body and the production techniques that have the potential to amplify the dancing body.

In order to determine the structure of this chapter, I make the initial proposal that crew performances intertextually reference the aesthetic properties of cinematic special effects. As identified in Ch. 3.5, special effects refer to the optical, mechanical and CGI enhanced visual effects witnessed in Hollywood blockbuster films. Several authors (Darley, 2000; Galt, 2011; Whissel, 2014) align these
decorative film effects with a spectacular aesthetic due to their heightened and exaggerated emphasis of the formal and stylistic properties of images through physical and digital manipulation, both in camera and in post-production edit. Drawing upon this body of work, I observe four key areas where crews have the potential to perform the surplus by physically enacting cinematic visual effects: the emphasis on verticality, the production of the mass, the rapid cutting of the post-production edit and the manipulation of speed and time. I will therefore structure Chapter Five around these concepts and explore how crews reference these aesthetic qualities within their performances. This chapter will first examine the use of the elongated vertical, focusing on the play with gravity and the emphasis on verticality in the choreographic design. This chapter will then present an analysis of the production of a mass crowd effect, focusing on the use of synchronized unison and spatial design. Following an examination of the choreographic simulation of post-production editing effects, with particular attention on the use of multiple Street dance styles and the use of choreographic transitions, I will enquire into the manipulation of speed and time. This includes the use of rapid velocity and extreme slow motion.

5.2 Verticality

As referred to in Ch.3.5, Whissel (2014) observes that since the 1970s, blockbuster films create ‘breathtaking imaginary worlds defined by extreme heights and plunging depths’ (pp.21-22). The exploitation of the vertical axis of the screen not only includes human feats of jumping and falling, but utilises ‘models, miniatures, blue screens, mattes and motion control’ to manipulate characters and scenery along the screen’s vertical trajectory (p.24). With advancements in wire removal technology, digital animation and stunt doubles, spectators witness film bodies that can manipulate their surroundings in the elongated stretch of the cinematic screen. In the television talent show context, production budgets do not allow for the same quality of visual experience, and post-production edits cut between camera angles rather than adding additional digital spectacle effects. I observe, however, that crews intertextually reference the elongated vertical through their use of line, direction, dimension and volume of the stage space, as well as through the continued emphasis on the rise and fall of the body. While augmented further through in-camera techniques and post-production editing in VT segments, it is the bodies of the dancers themselves that create this lengthening of the dimensions of the performance space.
As noted by Prickett in her study of Hip Hop theatre (2013), the opening out of the vernacular cypher into linear formations results in a changed interaction and energy between performer and spectator. Due to their staged presentation, crew performances are re-presented from the vernacular practice of the cypher or the club setting with performances directed towards the judging panel and the television studio audience. Despite the multi-focus of the camera angles, including overhead shots and upstage shots capturing the performers perspective looking out onto the audience, the emphasis on capturing the gaze of the judging panel results in choreography that is purposefully designed for the ‘front’ (the direction of the studio audience and the cameras). This front-facing choreography, as witnessed in musical theatre choreography, is captured and re-presented by centrally positioned mid shots or wide camera shots (Sunderland, 1990). Because of this emphasis on forward-facing motion, a movement analysis reveals that crew performances place emphasis on what Laban defines as the ‘door plane’: the emphasis on the vertical through height and width.6 Similar to the two-dimensional poses featured in ancient Egyptian vase paintings, this aesthetic of ‘sideness’ is crucial in constructing length and width, with limbs and bodies operating along and across a flat wide planes in both gesture, action and spatial formation.

The duet performances of Bionik Funk, Blue Magic, Static Movement, Chris and Wes and Twist and Pulse particularly highlight this use of the door plane, with dancers facing towards the studio audience shoulder to shoulder. They expand their peripheral edges across the stage through their staccato arm gestures which jut in and out of the torso, compensating for the small number of dancers in the crew. Twist and Pulse remain shoulder to shoulder throughout the majority of their audition and semi-final performance, and execute split-second punches, arm waves, torso shunts and low kicks either across the torso or diagonally out to the side. Even at the moment where Ashleigh from the group performs a back flip, the flip is contained in the horizontal line of movement and he lands on the spot, maintaining the two-dimensional arrangement of the choreography. The fixed mid shot of the dancers emphasises the use of the door plane, allowing the gestures themselves to create the movement on screen rather than being further manipulated through the motion of the camera.

In terms of larger crews, the door plane occurs on multiple levels of vertical due to the number of bodies available. Crews position themselves in the powerful position of centre stage and form a series of geometric masses, including rectangular units,
triangular wedges and ‘amorphous masses’ (Blom and Chaplin, 1989, p.189). Positioned at a variety of levels, crews use isolations (with emphasis on their arms, elbows, shoulders and fingers), to rapidly gesture outwards to the side of the ‘stage’, away from the centre of the mass grouping, and then quickly recoil at the same speed. The overall visual effect is a symmetrical and kaleidoscopic presentation that fans in and out, framed by a fixed mid-way or wide shot of the crew, with the grouping filling the television screen. While moments of variation occur in the group, with some dancers positioned on the floor, or with gestures performed in canon, the emphasis is still placed on the concertina effect of the group expanding into the parameters of the upwards and sideways plane.

Crews not only extend outwards and upwards into the door plane, but also vertically in terms of the athletic stunts that involve extreme perpendicular height. These are further enhanced by the camerawork and edit. Both duet and crew performances punctuate their performances with aerial pyrotechnics influenced from breaking, gymnastics, cheerleading, martial arts and tricking. Dancers perform solo stunts both away from the body of the group and also as a collective in unison, with the risk increased by performing multiple stunts over the top of other dancers and being elevated by other crew members to allow more height and multiple rotations in the air. In the last thirty seconds of Ruff Diamond’s semi-final performance on series four, viewers witness consecutive gymnastic displays: a back flip and a round off from a solo dancer, a back flip from standing on the backs of two other dancers, a front flip over another dancer, a back flip performed in unison by three dancers, a back flip propelled from the linked hands of another dancer and finally a solo back flip on the last explosion of the music. During A Team's semi-final performance, one dancer runs in a straight line towards the judging panel, performing a front tuck over another dancer and then continues to complete a full gymnastic floor routine, including a double round off into a full aerial corkscrew and ending standing facing the back of the stage. The camera instantly cuts to judge Ashley Banjo holding his head in disbelief at the stunts just witnessed. These explosive actions provoke such dramatic reactions, as bodies appear to defy gravitational limitations, executing virtuosic aerial stunts usually only achieved through the intervention of technology upon the body (see Ch. 5.4 for a further discussion on the television edit).

Dancers additionally use each other’s bodies to increase the verticality of their performance, utilising arms, backs and shoulders as launch pads in order to achieve a higher vertical plane. In a duet, Urban Jokers semi-final performance incorporates
one dancer leap frogging over another, with the base dancer suddenly standing up at the moment of the jump, launching the second dancer further into the air. In their semi-final performance, Chris and Wes face each other, with one dancer kicking out their foot, and the other dancer using his foot as a lever to vault him into a back flip. In the Kombat Breakers final performance, the crew create a pyramid structure and the top dancer back springs from the top to the floor. Antics crew also incite a surprised reaction from the judging panel in their 2012 audition when one dancer is catapulted into the air by the linked arms of two other dancers. He partially disappears off the wide camera shot due to the height of the stunt, increasing the implausibility of the stunt (see Appx. C Fig. 1). The camera immediately cuts back to Ashley Banjo, who leans forward, slams his hands on the desk and yells out at the implausibility of the stunt. Ruff Diamond perform a similar stunt in their semi-final but achieve even greater heights. One dancer stands on the linked hands of two other dancers, vaults backwards performing a double back somersault and lands on his back. A wide shot taken from stage left captures the sheer height of the feat and also the moment when the dancer falls backwards onto his back, with the camera cutting to judge Aston Merryweather who jumps up and shouts at the level of danger of the stunt.

While the television talent show production does not utilise blue screens or wire removal technology, the positioning of the camera lens heightens this emphasis on verticality. Both BGT and GTD shoot from the lower edge of the stage space shooting upwards, increasing the longevity of the perspective to give the appearance of a higher stunt. These explosive and cinematic moments include the trio A3’s unison performance of a front flip falling into split legs, shot from the foot of the stage and giving the appearance of the dancers falling towards the camera. Similarly, in Ruff Diamond’s semi-final performance, a low camera positioned at the foot of the stage creates the impression of a dancer’s aerial routine almost flying into the camera lens (see Appx. C Fig. 2). This extreme close-up immediately cuts to a long shot of the circular stage capturing the crew judging panel and studio audience, thus contrasting the depth of the perspective with the previous vertical stunt of the solo dancer.

Through their emphasis on verticality as demonstrated in the above examples, I maintain that crews perform the surplus by reaching heights not normally achievable by organic bodies. By filling the vertical length of the screen, and, in some cases, disappearing off the length of the screen, crews ensure maximum visibility through
their virtuosic stunts. What is most relevant about these performances, however, is that crews achieve this verticality through corporeal skill rather than through digital special effects. Camera angles may enrich these performances of the vertical but they do not directly manipulate bodies to go beyond corporeal limitations. Importantly, it is the other members of the crew, as demonstrated in the group stunts performed by Antics in both their 2012 and 2013 performances, which enable the implausibility of the stunt through the creation of human base supports, springboards and vaults.

Whissel states that the use of the vertical with cinema is emblematic of either the protagonists upward mobility or their untimely descent in relation to the ‘historical, familial, and traditional past’ (2014, p.27). In the context of the crews’ competitive performance, I argue that this emphasis on launching upwards into the vertical is indicative of their physical strive and their attempt to be visually present through their performance of the surplus. These vertical feats induce astonished affective reactions from the studio audience and judging panel due to their implausibility and their transcendence from traditional orders of the organic body. Crews act in excess of their staged performances by choreographically mimicking the elongated vertical screen through their physical feats, while at the same time inevitably falling back to the ground.

5.3 The mass

The second choreographic reference to cinematic special effects occurs through the re-creation of the digital multitude, otherwise known as the mass. Judge Aston Merryweather states to Antics after their GTD audition in series four that ‘there was five of you and it felt like there were fifty of you on that stage it was so explosive’ (2013). In a cinematic context, the special effect of crowd simulation, as witnessed in Hollywood blockbuster films such as Lord of The Rings Trilogy (2001, 2002, 2003) and The Mummy (1999), digitally create images of thousands of bodies that fill the cinematic screen. Here, the aesthetic properties of spectacle relate to the mass number of bodies captured in the frame. While crew performances cannot replicate the size and scale of such cinematic digital devices, their choreographic structure, complimented by the television production, reveals a simulation of such cinematic effects. As I will demonstrate, this is achieved through the use of line, direction, spatial relationships and strict unison.
The emphasis on the mass initially occurs at the level of the spatial design of the Street dance crew choreography. In a ten second section of their semi-final performance, Flawless position themselves in a stationary triangle wedge formation, with three dancers at the point on their knees and five dancers standing behind in a staggered line. The camera holds a fixed mid shot of the grouping, and captures the dancers throwing out straight arms in front of the body in canon. This is followed by a series of isolated nods and tilts at the hips, where the floor dancers lean forward and the standing dancers lean out to the side. Finally, the group pull themselves back into formation accompanied by the sound of a piston. This split-second sequence is then proceeded by sharp diagonal arms performed in unison that shoot in and out rapidly on each dancer’s diagonal, followed by a canon tutting sequence using the right angles of the wrists and elbows. In a matter of seconds, the group completely changes formation, with dancers either turning on the spot or swapping positions from floor to standing and vice versa. This spatial transition is so rapid that it would appear blurred to the television spectator. To conclude this segment of the choreography, the groups move as one to three whirring sounds featured in the accompaniment that expand their bodies into the periphery space as much as physically possible. On the first chord, the group lean outwards or fall flat on the floor; the second, the three dancers at the front splay their hands, masking the transition of the dancers behind, and on the third chord, the three dancers at the back are vaulted into the air, with the whole group splaying their arms and fingers out into the side (see Appx. C Fig. 3). This expansion and contraction of spatial formations through concertina style actions allow optimum viewing all crew members and place emphasis on the movement of the entire crew rather than on any one individual dancer. The crew is stretched across the stage within a matter of seconds, creating the appearance of bodies rapidly multiplying before the eyes of the spectator.

Other common spatial formations created by dancers that allow the maximum visibility of the crews include horizontal and vertical lines, several staggered horizontal lines with dancers positioned between gaps, pointed diamonds or apex triangles with a dancer at the tip of the formation either upstage or downstage, and dancers scattered around the stage space but in a symmetrical design. These formations are evenly proportioned across centre stage, with equidistant space between dancers, again allowing for maximum visibility. The cinematic excess of the camerawork enhances these group formations, allowing new perspectives for the spectator that would be unknown to the stationary judging panel and studio.
audience. Bird’s eye view and high view camera angles capture formations such as Ruff Diamond’s splayed out overhead star position in the final of GTD, or the upstage view of one of the Flawless’ dancers encircled by the rest of the crew during their audition. These powerful symmetrical designs provide a solid yet highly visible structure in which to showcase the asymmetrical quality of the movement itself. Similar to the bilateral symmetrical designs of the Rorschach ink blot, these mass geometric spatial formations symbolise strength, stasis and authority. As noted by Doris Humphrey, ‘the armchair promises comfort and support for the symmetrically formed human body; the door is a reassuring framework to go through for the same reason; the Arch of Triumph is a grandiose symmetrical structure inspiring courage and pride in the solid achievements of the country’ (1959; ed. 1997, p.50). Street dance crews utilize these uniform, solid and stable spatial formations in order to ensure maximum visibility of the crew across the stage and in the camera frame, extending their reach across the screen. These formations also position their asymmetric and risk taking choreography: performance qualities derived from the Africanist aesthetic of Afro-diasporic cultural traditions (Gottschild, 1998), in safe symmetrical structures that mirror western ideals of uniformity, cleanliness and precision (see Ch. 6.7 for further discussion on the performance of cleanliness).

Another key element of the choreographic illusion of the mass is the prolific use of strict unison amongst crew choreographies: a technique Blom and Chaplin describe as ‘a highly dramatic tool, powerful and compelling’ (1989, p.191). Across all duet and crew choreographies in both competitions, emphasis is placed on the use of multiple bodies performing identical movement sequence. Crews face the studio audience and mirror the tempo and rhythmic structure of the accompaniment through their gestures and actions. From the beginning of Flawless’s audition, a static fixed shot captures the nine dancers in their triangle formation as they perform a combination of arm pops and waves that spread out into varies directions, whilst remaining perfectly synchronized in their timing. They gradually build up the texture of the choreography with only three dancers performing in unison, and then introduce several others to join in with the same sequence. Similarly, at the beginning of A Team’s audition, the crew perform simple but tightly controlled floor slides, shifts in body weight, quick flexes of the arms and slow and smooth turns, accompanied by the ethereal sound of Eliza’s Aria (2008) by Elena Kats-Chernin. The camera cuts between medium close-up shots of the individual dancers to wide
group shots to capture both the individual labour of each dancer and the overall perfectly timed group syncopation.

In terms of duet performance, Chris and Wes’s audition sees the dancers performing side by side, accompanied by the introduction of Studio Luv (2005) by T-Pain. The dancers perform an identical sequence of floor slides, limb isolations, kicks, chest pops and right angled arm gestures, and emphasises their dexterity through their ability to perform both simultaneously, and in time with the rapid speed and polyrhythmic beat of the accompaniment (see Appx. C Fig. 4). Similarly, the trio A3’s audition includes a mixture of Nu-skool Hip Hop choreography, fast body waving and sharp upper body isolations in exact unison, and only break away from this synchronicity to individually showcase their individual skills. Similar to the symmetry of the corps de ballet or the opera chorus, these crew examples construct an intense visual display through strict unison timing, coupled with the uniformity of their spatial design and costume choice. Instances of unison by the crew include complex arm and footwork sequences performed simultaneously. This creates the impression of a single, strong collective moving as one.

Unison sequences also occur with dancers performing the same sequences but at differing levels or directions across the stage. Abyss’s semi-final performance on BGT includes unison body popping gestural sequences with dancers in both upright standing positions and upside down breakdance freezes, while Antics 2013 audition on GTD includes a powerful unison sequence incorporating breakdance top rock patterns and Krumping throws with the dancer at the front of the stage slowly edging back into the group (see Appx. B). The A Team’s semi-final performance reveals virtuosic moments of unison, with two members of the crew deliver synchronized and symmetrical aerial corkscrews, cartwheels and backflips. Likewise, their audition sees all nine dancers perform a backflip in perfect unison (see Appx. C Fig. 5). Throughout all three of Diversity’s performances on BGT, the group perform sequences in unison that include running on the spot, throwing splayed hands out to the sides of the stage, swiftly opening and closing the legs and falling to the floor. Where there are differences in the sequences, these are designed as a choreographic effect, for example, when Diversity form a triangular spatial formation, dancers throw their outside arms to the side rather than the same arm, creating an opening and closing effect.
This multiplication of dancers through choreographed unison sequences is amplified further by the use of costume and camera angle. In each crew, there is uniformity in the costumes, which range from military uniforms, burglar outfits and cyber robots, to suits, ties and hats, as well as t-shirts, shirts and jumpers with the crew’s logo enlarged on the front. With the majority of unison sequences framed by a long camera shot, this distance between viewer and camera lens not only captures all members of the crew, but also masks any mistakes or variations between crew members, creating the impression of a single dancing entity. Flawless’s final performance demonstrates this uniformity, as all dancers wear identical grey suits, black bow ties, white trainers and trilby hats, and their complex and polyrhythmic unison sequences are filmed from a long shot, creating a homogenous image of the whole group of nine male dancers moving as one, with no differences between each dancer.

As demonstrated through these examples, I maintain that this extensive use of concertina spatial designs, symmetrical formations and precise military-like unison creates and enhances the illusion of a mass unit. While this effect would normally only be achieved through CGI digital effects that create ‘massive computer-generated armies, swarms, armadas, and hordes’ (Whissel, 2014, p.60), crews instead physically reference such an effect through the choreographic structure of their performance. Through their refined skill and rehearsal, crews therefore construct the aesthetic properties of the surplus, the implausibility and excessiveness of their performances that moves into the realms of the grotesque. This state is achieved through the surpassing the limitations of the individual dancer through the use of multiple dancers that amplify, and, in some cases, physically multiply the body across the stage. While illusionary in quality, the multiplication of the body across the television screen amplifies both the number and the status of the crew. Bodies appear to exceed corporeal possibilities through their surplus labour to achieve exact duplication and synchronicity.

5.4 The edit

The cinematic edit in relation to digital special effects is a device frequently used to portray transitional change and the passing of time in narrative film. Through post-production effects, decades can pass in a period of a few minutes thanks to the sweeping motion of the camera, the changing of seasons or the morphing from one scene to another through digital manipulation. Specifically, Whissel (2014)
describes the morph within film practices as the promise of endless transformation, achieved within cinema through the metamorphosis of the source image into a target image, and all achieved within a single scene. The optical result is a ‘display of instantaneous transformation’ that unfolds on screen, with famous examples including the transformation of Dr. Jekyll into Mr. Hyde within Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1931, 1941) (2014, p.131).

As stated in Ch. 2.2, the choreographic blending and mixing of Hip Hop styles is already prevalent in the stylistic practices of U.S. Hip Hop culture, and Rose (1994) highlights that Hip Hop continues to thrive on a process of adoption and fusion. While some crews on television talent shows define themselves as ‘Hip Hop’ due to their referencing of the cultural origins of the style and the influence of their vernacular practice, their televised choreographies draw from a range of vernacular, theatrical and popular culture influences. Movement phrases either showcase styles in a sequential order, or purposefully merge funk styles, breaking, Hip Hop party dances, Krump, house and waacking with NuSkool Hip Hop choreography. While some performances profile a key genre, such as the high-energy breaking performances of the Kombat Breakers in BGT and Trinity Warrior’s routines in GTD, the majority of crew performances showcase a plethora of genres in the two and half minute timeframe of the performances. This presentation of diverse styles and performance strategies creates a collage effect. Small sections of material, movement motifs, stunts and moments of mimed narrative are glued together through split second transitions and changes in musical accompaniment. While often disparate in theme and tone, this quilt like choreographic structure demands the attention of the spectator through its ever changing dynamic, spatial and aesthetic qualities. As I will demonstrate, I maintain that this cut and paste collage effect mirrors that of the cinematic post-production edit, whereby contrasting images, scenes and ideas are spliced together in a montage to enhance the energy and immediacy of the filmic subject.

In Cerebro’s audition for GTD, the crew begin with one dancer held upside down and slowly hinging at the waist, with the other dancers fanning out around the stunt. This sustained pose quickly spreads out across the stage, shifting to a unison sequence of mimetic arm gestures and breaking freezes that physically mimic the song lyrics of Jay Z’s rap song, Off That (2009). Contrasting the down groove of the song, the accompaniment suddenly cuts to Earth, Wind and Fire’s disco anthem, Boogie Wonderland (1979), with the group executing the fast pace funk style of
locking whilst sitting down on chairs (see Appx. C Fig. 6). The directional pointing of the arms, smiling faces and upbeat bounce in the body then shifts in line with the musical cut to Bell Biv DeVoe’s Poison (1990), and the performance of new jack swing. This style of Street dance, an upbeat energetic footwork-based form, became popular in the 1990s and prevalent in the music videos of MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice. Famous movement motifs included Hip Hop party dances such as ‘the running man’ and ‘the hose pipe’. In their transition to their acrobatic finale, the group utilise the 90 degree angled arm and hand formations of tutting while accompanied by electronic generated rhythmic phrases.

This strategy of splicing, especially in the audition stage of the competition, is a direct result of the competition structure. Crews have to demonstrate their physical dexterity and virtuosic skill in a two and a half minute framework. This task is therefore achieved through the performance of several Hip Hop dance styles with rapid transitions in between each style. For example, Flawless utilize the recognizable vocabulary of breaking, house dance, stepping, UK grime and locking, while crews such as Peridot manipulate the body waving and chest and arm isolations prevalent in funk dance styles. Chris and Wes fuse arm waving, jazz dance, house inspired jacking, breakdance freezes and Streetomody in their audition routine (see Ch. 6.6 for more detail regarding Streetomody). Diversity additionally split up their choreography with mided sections of narrative, such as the running towards the finish line accompanied by the Chariots of Fire (1991) theme tune.

Interestingly, this morphing between styles and sections of choreography is further augmented through the competitions’ own camerawork and edit. The mixture of live and pre-recorded material allows additional ‘excessive’ stylistic features in the visible editing process, including slow motion sequences, the rapid cutting of takes in montage sequences and the elements of post-production editing. Such edits include the insertion of computer graphics, such as phone numbers and names of crews, as well as the frequent use of visible transitions in between frames, including dissolving or fading out the frame into the next image. Additional production choices include stage level camera angles that increase the height or implausibility of an already virtuosic gymnastic aerial stunt, rapid cutting of camera angles that further accelerate a fast-paced routine, the double-motion created through a sweeping camera shooting an expansive traveling movement sequence and the insertion of special effects in VT segments that heighten, elongate and increase the velocity of
back flips and aerial windmills through post-production editing. Even in live recorded shows, the running order, camera angles, direction and the insertion of VT segments are pre-set and established prior to filming, ensuring the ability to capture and enhance the contestants’ performances.

At the moment of the split between styles, the camera either cuts to a medium close-up of the judges’ reactions or alternatively cuts to another camera angle or camera movement. The spectator remains mobile through the constant change of camera angles which shifts their perspective from an overhead shot, to a medium close-up of an audience member, to a medium close-up of one dancer and then back to a mid-shot of the crew. In Cerebro’s audition performance, the first two changes of dance style are framed between a close-up of judge Ashley Banjo’s concentrated face. The shift between the Nu-Skool choreography and the locking section involves split-second transitions between a moving floor camera, an overhead crane shot of the dancers and a shot of the judge Adam Garcia nodding his head at the performance. Suddenly the dancers are now performing on chairs with the post-production edit masking any difficulty or upset in the on-stage transition between sections. Here, the impetus of the dance is propelled by the camera movement rather than the stage action itself, with the change in angles and the sweeping action of the floor camera adding momentum to the unwieldy and fluctuating transition between dance styles.

It should be also noted that this editing choice of capturing the judges’ and audiences’ emotional reactions to the choreography not only splices the edit of the choreography but is also vital in the witnessing and presentation of virtuosic difference. Such exaggerated reactions include close-up camera shots capturing miniature facial gestures of wry smiles and the widening of the eyes, to the explosive kinetic gestures of surprise and astonishment, including fist slams, holding shaking heads in astonishment and dramatically standing up and jumping as a result of the athleticism witnessed in the choreography. During Diversity’s audition performance, the camera cuts away from the performance sixteen times to capture either the different judges’ delighted and surprised facial expressions, the hosts shocked reactions and applause, and importantly the studio audience’s applause and standing ovations. These edits punctuate moments of heightened aesthetic display with footage of audience’s cheers, whoops and hollers. In moments where the camera is fixed on the crew, the soundtrack of the performance is broken up with the oral reactions of the studio audience, with back flips and other aerial stunts
inducing shouts and hollers. At the end of the audition, the edit cuts between different camera’s panning across the vast live theatre audience, capturing multiple silhouettes of hands clapping from different areas of the theatre audience.

This televisual device, witnessed throughout all crew performances, stages the sequence as aesthetically spectacular in line with Hamera’s (2000) concept of the two-way conversation of virtuosity (see Ch. 3.3). The camera shots of the judges’ and studio audience clapping, whooping and cheering, placed adjacent to shots of the choreography, provide a visual and oral method of valuing the performance. In Dodd’s and Hooper’s work on faciality in SYTYCD, they state that ‘the screendance face both displays the codes and conventions of the particular dance idiom, and also the compositional modalities of camera work and editing, which re-choreograph faces across new vectors of space and time’ (2014, p.93). These re-choreographed faces are therefore vital in the reading of the aesthetic properties of spectacle in these performances, directly tying images of celebration and appreciation to the crew performances of virtuosity.

In terms of the performance of the surplus, these examples illustrate how crews perform beyond their own corporeality to intertextually reference the spliced and fractured aesthetic of the cinematic edit. The seamless morphing between sections of the choreography, achieved through the labouring of the body and the cooperation of the crew, is further heightened through the post-production edit of the television competition. This edit enhances the speed and fractured nature of the performance and frames individual moments as spectacular through the two-way conversation of virtuosity. The fractured structure and speed of execution of the Street dance crew choreography therefore undertakes a double-mediation: the choreographic design that mimics the identifiable postmodern aesthetic of the cinematic edit, fractured further through the filmic choices of the production edit.

From this close analysis, I also maintain that these performances of the surplus reflect the flows of information in the digital era. In an interview about his Sadler’s Wells festival Breakin’ Convention, Jonzi D describes how Hip Hop ‘connects with the dynamic of contemporary life’, stating the speed at which we absorb information; the flicking between channels - it taps into that energy’ (Jonzi D in Roy, 2010, p.2). Osumare (2007) acknowledges that the fast-paced dynamic and fractured flow of information present in MTV culture has infiltrated global Hip Hop culture, showcasing the powerful spectacle of Hip Hop rap and dance through fast-paced
editing and mass dissemination. Similar to the television spectators flicking through remote control channels of the television and witnessing a series of dislocated and fractured images, the bricolage structure and high speed performances of double-mediation dazzle the viewer with rapidly changing choreographic shapes and images. This double-mediation creates a restless and fractured dynamic for the spectator: a visual excess that shifts in shape, form, angle and velocity approximately every ten seconds. This layering of rapid images through both the choreography and the camerawork caters for the twenty first century consumer/spectator who has a short attention span and consumes images at a rapid pace.

5.5 Speed and time

The final special effect intertextually referenced in crew performances is the manipulation of speed and time. As detailed in Ch.3.6, the post-production edit in dance on screen practices creates what Dodds describes as a ‘hybrid body’: a body that traverses the boundaries of the televisual medium. One of the post-production editing devices used to achieve this hybrid body includes the digital manipulation of time and dynamic quality. Digital effects accelerate bodies to impossible speeds and reduce them to sustained slow motion. In the case of BGT and GTD, digital effects are limited to pre-recorded VT segments, where editors can sustain or fast forward dancers to heighten the implausibility of their performances. I observe, however, that this manipulation of speed and time is already achieved prior to post-production effects. Through their highly laboured and tightly rehearsed choreographies, crews create the illusion of traversing beyond the limitations of physical forces, creating the impression of extreme acceleration and deceleration in the choreography itself.

In terms of constructing the illusion of the cinematic fast-forward, crews express movement at a rapid pace. This dynamic creates what I coin as ‘attention-deficit’ choreography due to the inability for the eye to catch up with the images on screen. Alongside the rapid changes between Street dance styles, as detailed in Ch. 5.4, crews perform this hyperactivity with short ten second sections of movement packed full of gestural sequences, floor routines, and athletic flairs. Dazzling the television spectator with quickness, these displays provide an eye treat for the viewer due to the number of images projected per second. Peridot's audition demonstrates these instantaneous performances of speed in both moments of solo virtuosity and as a group. In breakaway moments by individual dancers, one crew member performs as
many one handed hops on a single arm as fast as possible, while another dancer speedily changes hands while maintaining a baby freeze position in the downstage right hand corner (see Appx. C Fig. 7). As a group, the crew performs a rapid fire of angled arm gestures, with hands and arms flying across torsos, using these blurred shapes to transition from a standing vertical line to a wide splayed-out group formation with dancers lying on the floor. This velocity in the choreography directly mirrors the speed of the accompaniment, marrying sound and image. Fogarty states that in vernacular Hip Hop performances, ‘good performances seem to demonstrate what a dancer is paying attention to in a song. Attentive listening is made both visible and audible to audiences through the competence of dancers to highlight music’ (2014, p.93). This attentive listening by the dancers is used in these performances to enhance the speed of the performance, with fast-paced drum rhythms and high pitched electronic pips and riffs directly mirrored in the crew choreography.

This fast pace is witnessed across all crew choreography, but particularly emphasised in the group unison performances of the larger crews, including Diversity, Flawless, Cerebro, Antics and Ruff Diamond. In particular, these crews enhance their velocity by performing expansive travelling sequences across the stage, weaving in and out of each other at a lightning pace. In their 2012 semi-final, Antics create both speed and texture through the performance of tutting gestures at four different levels. Filmed in a fixed mid shot, the viewer’s eye is pulled across the frame due to the complexity of the rapid gestural sequences. Both Flawless’s and Diversity’s unison routines in their final performances incorporate poly-rhythms across the body, with fast footwork contrasted against asymmetrical arm patterns and changes of direction. In Ruff Diamond’s final in season four, the crew mirrors the repeated Hip Hop lyrics of ‘bounce baby bounce baby’ as they perform sideways travelling low squats in unison, throwing their arms in the air on each bounce. What follows is a complex rhythmic layering of movement. Each crew member dips in and out of unison, changing direction, punching arms that fly in and out of the body centre in differing directions. Each dancer then hits the floor to bounce straight up to their low stance, all punctuating the rhythm of the Hip Hop soundtrack. This emphasis on a fast pace is once again a result of the two and half minute limitations placed by the competition structure. The need to attract the viewer’s attention is paramount, and this is achieved through the rapid execution of movement.
Crews also juxtapose this rapid execution of gestures against their ability to perform in slow motion. The A-Team’s audition juxtaposes the speed of the second half of their choreography by commencing the performance with a sustained and wistful dynamic. Dancers toy with playing cards, throwing out a fast sideways arm gesture on the door plane, but then sustaining their movement with a torso contraction. Tutting arm sequences are indulged so that every angle of the arm can be carefully witnessed, while simple turns are slowly executed through the gliding of the feet, illustrating the extreme control of the dancers’ core stability. This sustained dynamic suddenly breaks with the removal of the dancers’ trench coat jackets, with two dancers executing synchronized and brisk martial arts aerial kicks, leading frame after frame of rapidly produced athletic stunts, solo b-boy power moves and traveling gymnastic floor routines, all performed with split-second timing. This juxtaposition of movement and music is flipped in the final performance on GTD, where the crew perform high velocity stunts to the accompaniment of Maria Carey’s ballad, Hero (1993). Here, dancers create their own rhythmic pace within the structure of the ballad, and accompany the slow and sustained vocals of Carey with triple corkscrews, windmills and travelling aerial stunt sequences. In duet performances such as Static Movement’s auditions in 2012 and 2013, the crew uses the animation techniques of popping and ticking to execute elongated walks forward with minute leg pops and knee jerks jarring the speed. This painfully slow and controlled performance creates the appearance of taking the body beyond the physically possible.

The cutting between camera angles in live performance footage additionally enhances the speed and kinaesthesia of the crew performances. Just as quickly as dancers change between group unison sequences, rapid trio work or solo athletic stunts, the production choices splice these routines, rapidly shifting between the various cameras available in the television studio. The choreography of the camera lens creates another layer of rhythm in the performance. While some camera shots cut on the beat of the music, others move across the soundtrack and choreographic structure of the routines, creating a frantic mood through camera’s panning across the staged action, thus not allowing the spectator to focus clearly on the choreography. In the case of Ruff Diamond’s semi-final performance, the edit reveals a rapid change between a long shot, a close-up shot, a 75 degree angle that pans across stage left and then quickly back to a long shot of the stage, all in the short period of ten seconds. This flitting of camera angles therefore heightens the intensity and texture of the human images on display.
Similar to the other special effects referenced in this chapter, crews appear to transcend the limitations of the body through their use of extreme speeds within their choreography. Crews choreographies perform the surplus by using rapid execution of movement and sustained control to replicate the speeds usually only achievable through the digital intervention of the cinematic post-production edit. Brandstetter states that in the context of the twentieth century shift to image and sound, 'one reads again and again that performing artists now find themselves competing with recordings, that they find themselves in the unfortunate situation of never being able to live up to their own 'ideal' productions' (2007, pp.191-192). In her PhD research on the competition body, Weisbrod also observes the rivalry between the stage body and the mediated body, stating that ‘audiences have a strong reverence for these extreme physical abilities, and anything the competition body can accomplish to meet similar superhuman criteria is met with acceptance and acclaim’ (2010, p.98). By achieving the same feats as cinematic bodies in terms of velocity and dynamic content, but with limited post-production intervention, these crew performances demonstrate their physical prowess and the capabilities of the organic body in a competitive and mediated environment.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has presented an analysis into the construction and performance of spectacle by of the choreography of the male Street dance crew performance. In the environment of the television talent show competition, crews construct spectacle by performing the surplus through their intertextual referencing of the digital special effect. Crews traverse beyond the limitations of the organic body and express movement at a height and pace usually only achieved in a screen medium by post-production editing techniques. In addition, these performances create the impression of the duplication of bodies on screen and physically create cinematic excess through the embodiment of the digital morph. Through this physical referencing to special effects and post-production techniques witnessed more commonly in Hollywood blockbuster films, crews recreate the augmented stylistic properties of the big budget cinematic experience through the dancing body. While performances are further heightened by the double-mediation of televusual production choices of the camera and edit, my analysis reveals that it is the bodies themselves that replicate these special effects. Similar to Darley’s descriptions of layered spectacles witnessed in vaudeville performances (see Ch.3.3), my analysis reveals that televised Street dance crew performances draw from wider media
spectacles in order to construct and perform a spectacular aesthetic. This thesis will now continue my analysis and examine the construction of spectacle by crew performances in relation to representations of identity.

\[i\] During informal conversations with dancers involved with television talent shows, dancers revealed that in some cases the production team worked with the choreographer to decide on the camera angles. In other cases this was decided purely by the external production.

\[ii\] Whissel highlights four key areas of digital special effects in films: the emphasis on the vertical, the morph, the mass and the creation of digital creatures.

\[iii\] In Rudolf Laban’s analysis of the dynamics of space, he describes the door plane as having an emphasis on the vertical and joined the dimensions of height and depth ((Blom and Chaplin, 1989).

\[iv\] Whissel details these effects as ‘motion capture, 3D animation simulation programs such as MASSIVE [Multiple Agent Simulation System in Virtual Environment], digital split screen techniques, crowd simulation engines, motion trees and libraries, and particle animation programs such as Dynamation’ (2014, p.60).
Chapter Six: Spectacle and the representation of identity

6.1 Introduction

Following my analysis of Street dance crew choreography, Chapter Six presents an investigation into the construction and performance of spectacle in relation to the representation of identity in the televised performances of male Street dance crews. As explored in Ch. 2.6, the media spectacle of the television talent show constructs and re-presents contestants with multiple, and often fabricated identity personas. These include the depiction of social class through the situation of the reality contestant as working class and ordinary (Biressi and Nunn, 2005; McMains, 2006), the reaffirmation of heterosexuality (Broomfield, 2011) and the embodiment of nationality (Boyd, 2012; Quail, 2014). In terms of my own study, an initial analysis reveals that the two key areas of identity representation emphasised and reproduced through the television talent show production are depictions of masculinity and blackness. These televised representations of identity are layered in that they occur simultaneously throughout the performances, with intersecting identities constructed through the multifaceted text of the overall television production. Due to the nature of a written analysis, it is beneficial to disentangle these concepts sequentially, while also critiquing the role of intersecting identities.

Primarily, I will present an overview of the key critical theory that addresses the construction of masculinised and racialised identities, specifically focusing on identity construction in television broadcasting, televised Hip Hop dance, and the television talent show. Drawing upon these conceptual ideas, this chapter will then explore the extent to which crews perform the surplus and thus construct a spectacular aesthetic through the performance of exaggerated identity personas. In particular, I propose three key intertextual references that will shape my chapter structure: the hypermasculine superhero, the cartoon character and the Black pop icon.

6.2 Masculinities and racial identities

Numerous authors have undertaken critical studies into the notion of masculinity, focusing on issues of hegemony, class-based masculinities, representations of masculinity in the media and their global circulation (Carrigan, Connell and Lee, 1985; Kimmel, 1988; Brittan, 1989; Roper and Tosh, 1991; Craig 1992; Middleton,
1992; Simpson, 1994; Edley and Wetherell, 1996; Hearn, 1996, 2004; Nixon, 1996; Pyke, 1996; Hooper, 2001; Beynon, 2002; Whannel, 2002; Crewe, 2003). In particular, Robert Connell (1985) builds upon Judith Butler’s concept of the performativity of gender and Antonio Gramsci’s work on class relations, but moves away from masculinity being the sole binary opposite of femininity. Connell proposes the term ‘multiple masculinities’ to recognise the relationship between masculinities and their associated power relations. These terms include hegemonic masculinity (white, middle class males) and marginalised masculinities (ethnic minorities, working class and homosexual masculinities). He situates hegemonic masculinity as representative of the normative ideal of a man and provides a standard against which other men define themselves. In addition, he states that hegemonic masculinity provides a dominant philosophy that legitimises the subordination of women under men. In his revised 2005 theorisations, Connell collaborates with James W. Messerschmidt to examine the construction of power by subordinate and marginalised groups, breaking the assumption that they are oppressed by dominant masculinities. As well as reconsidering the importance of regional cultural representations of masculinities, such as images of famous actors and athletes that are disseminated on a global scale, they acknowledge that masculinities are not fixed in time and are open to change throughout a lifetime, indicating the potential collapse of hegemonic masculinity. These revised ideas are important for my own research in that they enable a study of multiple representations of masculine identity. This notion creates the possibility that ‘marginal’ masculinities can achieve power and status away from the binary construction of white hegemonic masculinity vs marginalised masculinities. At the same time, however, fixed representations of masculinity can still disseminate through global media: a concept I will explore in Ch. 6.3.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) place the body at the centre of their arguments. They state that through the relationship between embodiment and social context, bodies can both reflect and construct social practice. In his study of the male theatre dancer, Ramsey Burt maintains that ‘because the body is the primary means of expression in dance, and because gender is an attribute of the body, dance is a key area through which gendered identities are revealed’ (2007, p.12). The dancing body thus provides an ideal site to examine the cultural construction of gender, as well as providing a site of resistance against normative gender roles. Burt et al. observe that historical representations of masculinity in theatre dance have jeopardised the stability of normative masculine identities through their reflection of
the changing social characterisations of gendered identities (Keefe, 2009). At the same time, however, the male dancer has been historically viewed as a source ‘of unease and suspicion’ which has resulted in limited representations of masculinity on stage and has constructed and preserved the notion of patriarchy (p.7). Theatre dance audiences, choreographers, directors and dancers bring their own set of ideas and experiences regarding masculinity to a performance that constitute a collective discourse regarding masculinity in dance. Burt maintains that the public opinion that all male dancers are homosexual, for example, has consequently led to theatrical displays of aggression and violence to combat the notion of effeminacy. As detailed in Ch. 2.2, these outlandish performances are particularly witnessed in Hip Hop dance practices.

In terms of the study of racial identity, several scholars (Fanon, 1952; Mercer, 1994; Hall, 1997; Gilroy, 1987, 1993, 2000; Benston, 2000; Johnson, 2003; Markovitz, 2011) situate the trope of blackness in the power structures of institutions that appropriate and reaffirm fixed notions of racial identity. In particular, blackness circulates in a multiplicity of practices and is deeply rooted in history, diaspora and corporeal exchange. While a social constructionist’s view of race argues that there is no biological reason for splitting up populations into racial groups, these distinctions and racial categories are still constructed culturally, affecting the lives and welfare of those that fall under those distinctions (Kolko, Nakamura, & Rodman, 2000). Stuart Hall (1997) argues that due to the shifting power relations that operate in binary constructions of difference, racial and cultural identities are devalued and reduced to stereotypical visual representations of otherness. In particular, Hall describes how the notion of ‘Black’ is an unstable entity that has been historically constructed both culturally and politically, resulting in the naturalising link between the cultural indicators of blackness and the body itself.

In terms of the representation of racial identity, several authors highlight the stereotypical depiction of the Black male (Dent, 1992; Elam. and Jackson, 2005; Nakamura, 2008). bell hooks notes that Black men have had little say on their representation, and historical depictions include ‘animals, brutes, natural born rapists, and murderers’ (2004, p.xii). hooks argues that these negative stereotypes continue to determine the representation of the Black male figure. In order to gain visibility in ‘the contemporary world of white supremacy’, these figures must either conform or attempt to work against such undesirable representations (2004, p xii). I would argue, however, that this fixed representation of the aggressive Black male
figure is unstable in twenty-first century U.K. culture due to a gradual shift in public perception and an increased emphasis on equality and diversity in the media. While I acknowledge that these images still operate and circulate in global media (see Ch. 6.3), I will demonstrate through my analysis that there is also the possibility for a more complex constructions of racialised and gendered identities.

6.3 Televised representations of identities

Film and television scholar Richard Dyer (1997) argues that in global media, white is the continual norm that defines all other bodies on screen and televised representations of blackness are situated in the institutional power structures of white discourse. In the U.S., Grey highlights that television is a key shared site for the ‘production, expression, and circulation of contemporary black youth identity’ and commercial culture produces, circulates and enacts blackness as a cultural signifier (1995, p.159).vi The heroic status of Black rappers, the naturalised ability of athletes, the threatening image of Black gang members and the representations of noble African warriors are all stereotypical media representations of Black heterosexual masculinity. Regardless of their differences, these representations of the Black male are grouped together as the same omnipresent Black body in cultural discourses surrounding Black masculinity (Grey, 1995; Yancy, 2008; McCune, 2014).vi In a U.K. context, Malik (2002) maintains that Black popular cultural expressions historically shape and influence depictions of Black Britishness on television. These televised representations aim to demonstrate a corporations’ cultural diversity and, to some extent, the attractive commodity of difference. In her analysis of the televised objectification of the Black British athlete Linford Christie, she argues that ‘the Black body functions as the agent of fascination and desire’, suggesting that the allure and envy surrounding Black male physicality once again reinforces the static and marginalised concept of the essentialised Black male and the passive objectification of the Black male form (p.130). This over-representation of certain images of blackness over others in the media, termed ‘hypervisibility’, speaks to the visual currency of images of blackness (Fleetwood, 2011, p.16). Satirically, the term hypervisibility likewise alludes to the invisibility of the Black subject in other areas of society, reinforcing ideas of blackness as unfinished and incomplete.

This circulation of an enduring blackness is particularly apparent in the televised depictions of Hip Hop dance. As discussed in Ch. 2.3, Osumare (2007) remarks that
the core appeal of Hip-hop dance as a commodity lies in its embodiment of the notions of ‘Street’, ‘Hood’ and ‘marginalised youth’, as these represent vital material for international industries to market products and lifestyles (p.151). The proliferation of Hip Hop as commodity has led to a ‘revision of meanings’: the re-articulation of signs and behaviours by dominant institutions through the appropriation of Black cultural expressions (Rose, 1994 p.41). Most prominently, the Hip Hop dancing body as commodity has come to represent consumable images of ‘blackness’ (Rose, 1994; Scott, 2001; Osumare, 2007; Huntingdon, 2007; Arzumanova, 2014, DeFrantz, 2014). These images include essentialised racial identities that create the illusion of an affinity between global youth culture and an authentic image of Black popular dance. Here, the Hip Hop dancing body in dominant commercial markets becomes a recognisable and easy to read marker of coolness, attitude, music, dress and swagger.

In Scott’s (2001) analysis of Hip Hop in the media, she states that Hip Hop dance is coded as ‘black’ due to its link with the authentic real and its ‘allusion to an imagined ‘black’ popular dance’ (2001, p.113). Drawing upon MC Hammer’s music video and dance routine in U Can’t touch this (1990), she observes that all Hip Hop dance movement, regardless of origin or the ethnicity of the performer, becomes racialised due to the reductive rhetoric of the national media coverage that codes these dancers as ‘other’. This generic othering occurs despite the nuances between original styles and geographical centres of origin. In her analysis of the b-boy/girl cypher, Monroe (2014) raises the similar argument that similar to gender, race is socially constructed through recognisable cultural codes and reinforced through repetition and performance regardless of the racial makeup of the bodies themselves. She argues that the commodification and circulation of repetitive images of blackness in the media has in fact softened Hip Hop’s hard edges. The performance of Hip Hop by the white male no longer causes surprise or alarm but instead continues to re-circulate performances of blackness, revealing the performativity of race. viii

Dancing bodies who perform ‘blackness’ hold cross cultural appeal and high currency in the commercial market, as consumers can buy into an imagined real of Black authenticity and the exotic other. While blackness may not be the immediate association with performances of Hip Hop, the audience’s identity is in fact constructed through the consumption of blackness, allowing these performances in the commercial market to appeal to ‘everyman’ and ‘every-woman’ (Huntingdon,
Regardless of the performers’ skin colour or ethnic background, the
global circulation of Street and Hip Hop dance in music videos, films and advertising
both in and outside of the U.S. market therefore represents the performance of
Black attitude and expression (Grey, 1995, p.155). These arguments are significant
for my analysis of male Street dance crew performances due to the various cultural
and ethnic backgrounds of the BGT and GTD performers. Regardless of their
ethnicity or skin colour, it can be contended from the above writings that the
televised performance of Hip Hop dance techniques recirculates and constructs
representations of blackness. I will apply this concept to my analysis but will
specifically explore how these representations operate in terms of the construction
of the aesthetic properties of spectacle.

6.4 Identity and the television talent show

It is important to note that the racial makeup of performers on reality television is
never overtly declared in interviews or commentary in line with the adoption of a
‘colour blind’ and post racial approach to the production. As Joseph states ‘twenty-
first-century U.S. culture is replete with the idea that we are beyond, past, or “post-”
notions of race-, gender-, and sexuality-based discrimination’ (2009, p.238). This
rhetoric is reinforced through the wide variety of racialised and gendered
representations in western media coverage and programming. She argues,
however, that ‘post-raciality remains embroiled in precisely what it claims not to be’,
that is, an ideology that reinforces and regurgitates stereotypical representations of
gender and race (2009, p.239). While these writings specifically refer to U.S. culture
and are not entirely transferable to a U.K. context, there is an acknowledgement in
U.K. television talent show competitions of the emphasis of a national rhetoric over
the specific presentation of racialised identities.

In line with this demystifying of post-raciality, Broomfield (2011) and Weisbrosd
(2010, 2014) maintain that the Hip Hop dancing body in reality television continues
to reaffirm the image of the Black hypermasculine male. In her doctoral research
into American competition dance, Weisbrosd reveals that it is the judges’ comments
on the U.S. version of SYTYCD that categorise the Hip Hop dance male contestants
as having no formal training, as the style is learnt ‘from the Streets’ (2010, p.166).
These comments reaffirm the constructed stereotype of the oppressed urban
African American male.ix I question this fixed representation of racialised male
identity in a U.K. context, however, and propose that the situation of the male Street
dance crew in the television talent show requires dancers to present multiple identities that will appeal to a wide ranging demographic of viewers. The Saturday night prime time television scheduling of these competitions caters predominantly for a family demographic and the sole presentation of the Black hypermasculine male does not correlate to the widespread popularity of these crews in a U.K. context.

As a consequence of the formulaic structure of reality television, bodies are also required to perform excessive identities in order to sell the self (see Ch. 2.5). While Big Brother style reality television productions provide a platform for the performance of the self through the documentary format of the shows, identities within the talent show production are primarily constructed through the showcase performances, supported by interviews, judging panel conversations and pre-recorded VT footage. This format places the construction of identity in line with the need to achieve visibility and screen time exposure. This situation therefore suggests that dancers are reliant on the heightened aesthetic properties of their choreographies and their narratives to sell constructions and performances of identity. I will demonstrate in the following sections that rather than perpetuating sole stereotypical representations of the urban Black Hip Hop male, male Street dance crews instead perform the aesthetic of the surplus by enacting larger than life gendered and racialised identities featured within their choreographies. In particular, these include the performance and intertextual referencing of the hypermasculine superhero, the performance of the cartoon character and the performance of Black pop music icons.

6.5 The hypermasculine superhero

Prior to the A-Team’s entrance to their GTD series three audition, Mark ‘Swarfe’ Calape, the lead choreographer of the crew, tells the camera that ‘if you believe in superheroes, we are those superheroes, in real life, on stage, right now’ (2012). Swarfe’s bravado complements the dramatic rhetoric required of the television talent show worker, and prepares the home viewer for the extreme physical stunts they are about to witness. At the same time, however, Calape frames the crew in the ideology of the superhuman being, signifying that these dancing bodies push the boundaries of the physically possible into the realm of fantasy through their performances. In another reference to superheroes, Diversity's final performance features directional and rhythmic arm gestures visualise the rap style Superman
quote, ‘Hold up, look up in the sky, is a bird, is a plane, nope’ (2009). Suddenly, the youngest member of the crew reveals himself from inside a bag at the back of the stage wearing a Superman outfit, accompanied by the Superman film theme tune (see Appx. C Fig. 8). The crowd erupt with approval as the young dancer holds a muscle man staged pose, and then disappears back into the group huddle to continue to the next stage of the choreography.

In comic books, cartoons and Hollywood blockbuster cinema, popular culture situates superhero characters, such as Superman or Batman, in a moral framework whereby they embody western ideals of law enforcement and the protection of human citizens. Alongside narratives of an advanced life form that traditionally protects planet earth from evil, male superhero characters are also constructed as the epitome of hypermasculine and hegemonic masculine superiority. Enabled through superhuman armoury, strength, skill and weaponry, the fantasy figure of the superhero amplifies the seemingly naturalised attributes of hypermasculinity. In the U.S., the paradigm between Street dancers as superheroes is already established in the web based television series, The League of Extraordinary Dancers (2010-2011). The narrative situates the majority male cast of Street dance performers as having superhuman abilities, with each Hip Hop dance technique representing a ‘special power’. While the series is not widely recognised in a U.K. context, the concept of Street dancers as superheroes resonates with my analysis of the surplus and the notion of going beyond the possible through corporeal skill in order to achieve visibility within the media spectacle of the talent show. As I will demonstrate, I primarily observe these hypermasculine superhero intertextual references in the practice of athletic stunts, the defiance of gravity, the performance of invincibility, the emphasis on hardness and muscularity and the narrative of the crew performances.

In Trinity Warriors’ audition on GTD series two, the young male dancers symmetrically hit handstands in unison with the punchy and confrontational lyrics of Wiley’s Take That (2009). This stunt sparks an intense domino effect by the other nine dancers who perform six steps, freezes and breakdance power moves sporadically across the stage. Bombarding the viewer with fast-flying images of physical dexterity, the eleven man crew performs a series of flips, hand springs and backward walkovers, amalgamating gymnastic vocabulary, martial arts infused tricking and the flair of breakdance power moves (see Appx. B). After the production edit frames the performance as spectacular by capturing the affective reaction of
judge Ashley Banjo's impressed facial expression, the camera cuts back to the preparation for a high risk stunt. One young breaker is spun around by his hand and foot and thrown forward across the stage, providing the aerial momentum for a cyclonic display of windmills and floor work. The camera zooms in to capture the detail of the solo, and the audience erupts in appreciative whooping and clapping at this impressive opening to the crew's audition.

As established in Chapter Two, b-boys historically constructed the masculinized self through their virtuosic and athletic performances in the cypher, demonstrating strength, power and aggression through improvised floor work and power moves (Banes, 1984; Rose, 1994; Hazzard-Gordon, 1996; DeFrantz, 2004). Rennie Harris (2009) notes that the presentation of Hip Hop dance styles as aggressive and hard-core is a direct result of their placement in a competitive environment, resulting in the global circulation of the image of the hypermasculine Hip Hop dancer. In the televised competitive format, crews re-present this hypermasculine aesthetic in a pre-choreographed format, with particular focus on athletic gymnastic feats. All crews in BGT and GTD incorporate and execute dramatic floor and aerial stunts into their routines, with an emphasis on the verticality of their routines (see Ch. 5.2). In particular, crews demonstrate their athletic prowess through a range of floor and aerial tricks, flips, kicks and aerial twists stunts, drawn from floor gymnastics, capoeira, martial arts, parkour and tricking. For example, Cerebro perform their signature stunt that incorporates one dancer performing a series of linear gymnastic hand springs and round offs over the rest of the crew with the dancer suddenly appearing upright standing amongst the rest of the crew's pyramid formation. Peridot's dancers perform a mixture of tumbles, continuous one handed hops and finishing with a breakdance freeze. These athletic and virtuosic feats are repeated and increase in skill and risk as the dance progresses, in order to maintain the audience's and judges' interest.

While the performance of these stunts display the crews' skill, strength and athleticism, the cinematic excess of the camera lens is also vital in heightening the scale and implausibility of these acrobatic tricks. In Ruff Diamond's semi-final performance on GTD series three, the close-up positioning of the camera at the foot of the circular stage captures one dancer executing a front flip over another dancer, and the underneath angle augments and amplifies the height of the drop to the floor. The camera cuts from a front facing mid shot that encases the whole crew and depicts one dancer preparing to perform a gymnastic sequence upstage. The
camera then quickly cuts to a side camera tightly framed shot of the dancer in mid-air, zooming out to reveal the same dancer completing another back flip over another dancer. Here, the fast cut between cameras provides multiple perspectives of the stunt in full flight, and the movement of both the camera and the dancer enhances the speed of the stunt’s execution. In another example, as two of the A-Team dancers execute their spinning butterfly kicks, the camera cuts to a downstage left floor shot to capture the gravity-defying nature and temporal precision of the stunt. Similarly, Trinity Warrior’s group travelling floor slide into several variations of breakdance freezes is further energised through the smooth stage right panning of the floor level camera. Here, dancers transcend the limitations of corporeal skill by presenting athletic prowess usually only achieved through digital editing and in the cinematic depictions of superhero action sequences.

As referred to in Ch. 5.2, the defiance of gravity is a common theme in crew choreography, which also reflects the intertextual referencing of superhuman skill and ability. In Flawless’s audition, an overhead camera captures the crew in a stationary apex triangle formation while a single lying down dancer upstage centre. He pushes his body weight upwards to balance on his head, remaining there for an unnaturally long pause until inevitably falls forward flat on the floor, maintaining his taut torso and leg position. Back2Back include the same stunt at the beginning of their semi-final performance, accompanied by a deflating sound effect as the dancer eventually falls rigid to the floor. At the beginning of Cerebro’s audition, the single dancer is held vertically in the air and then the camera remains stationary to capture him slowly hinging at the waist, surrounded by the symmetrical design of the crew. In Ruff Diamond’s final performance in series four, five dancers stand in a horizontal line and lean back towards stage left in unison. A single dancer mirrors this off balance lean but in a precarious handstand, pushing the limitations of his own off-balance.

This defiance of gravity often occurs through the performance of one single dancer breaking away from the symmetrical formation of the crew. While Flawless hold a stationary tight triangle formation pointing to the downstage left corner, one dancer spins out from the group in that direction. He performs a gravity-defying split leap into the splits and then pushes up into an asymmetrical handstand and then flips over to the floor. Similarly, one dance shoots out to the upstage right corner from Ruff Diamond’s triangular formation in their semi-final performance to perform an
aerial corkscrew, captured by the sudden cut in camera angles to a side stage view (see Appx. C Fig. 9). These breakaway solos punctuate the performance and provide heightened moments of individual virtuosic skill and risk taking amongst the stable structure of the group triangle. Crews complement and frame these solo performances by pointing towards the performance or ducking down on the spot to reveal the lone performer, with camera angles either cutting into mid shots of the solo dancer, or taking a sideways shot to increase the proximity of the solo dancer to the camera lens. As discussed in Ch. 5., the formulaic and symmetrical spatial patterns of the crew allow the stimulation and excitement of the asymmetrical to feature in the safe and highly visible structure of lines, triangles and diamonds.

Crews also heighten the athletic action of their choreographies at each stage of the competition, with performances increasing in high risk and precarious manoeuvres, despite the high probability of serious injury. Alongside the regular appearance of the breaking move ‘the suicide’ where dancers land flat on their backs from a standing position, Cloud Breakerz crew utilise the Hip Hop dance style of jerking to perform ‘suicide’ style moves in their audition (see Appx. B). Dancers purposely contort their arms over their heads and throw themselves backwards onto their backs, bouncing back to standing. This display of indestructible beings is not limited to animation techniques. Cloud Breakerz display the technique of jerking one at a time, and appear to break bodies through smashing their backs against the floor, appearing to dislocate their shoulder joints, and moving their feet in complex and rapid formations (see Appx. C Fig. 10). This element of high-risk is all too present in some performances, with the five man crew Antics losing one of their crew members to serious injury in training, resulting in them performing in the series three semi-final as a quartet.

In a sporting context, Rebecca Feasey (2008) reads the continuous competitive struggle of male athletes in sporting performances to push themselves harder and strive for success as a reflection of the struggle to achieve hegemonic masculinity, as ‘masculinity is always under threat on the sports field and can always be challenged or attacked’ (2008, p.100). Importantly in relation to the construction of the superhero, Feasey maintains that this strive towards hegemonic masculinity in a sporting context is often deemed as ‘heroic’ due to the withstanding of pain on the sports field (p.99). By presenting themselves as invincible through their athletic ability, these dancers not only strive towards hegemonic masculinity, but also draw attention through a dominating and active performance. Burt (2007) also suggests
that through an active performance, this disallows the male dancer to be viewed in an erotic manner.\textsuperscript{xii}

Dancers additionally perform this hypermasculine superhero aesthetic through an emphasis on physical strength and the hardness of the crews’ dynamic. Specifically, crews achieve this strong and powerful tension in their choreography through the pull and thrust of asymmetric oppositional design, with dancers playing with right angles, clean lines and upright positions and then distorting them through judders, pops, falling off centre and asymmetrical, gravity defying freezes. As stated by Humphrey and Pollack (1959; ed. 1997), the use of asymmetric opposition, the right angled and oppositional position of the arms, is dynamically one of the strongest positions due to the witnessing of energy moving in two different directions both across and away from the body. This dual energy takes the line of the body off centre and provides both tension and dramatic quality to the movement. In every crew performance on both competitions, oppositional arms rapidly shoot out from the torso, with diagonal points, torso tilts and head shifts throwing the centre line off balance. Duets such as Liquid Metallic rely on both dancers to showcase this asymmetric spatial design. In both their audition and semi-final performance, one dancer stands behind the other to create the impression of multiple asymmetric limbs shooting out from the front dancer (see Appx. C Fig. 11).

Alongside the powerful dynamic of asymmetrical oppositional design, crews place emphasis on the hardness of their dynamic quality, achieved through their muscularity and complemented by the rhythmic phrasing of the accompaniment. In Cerebro’s audition, the dancers create a linear canon effect by each rapidly stiffening their prone bodies to physically jolt off the floor in a diagonal line to the even drumbeat of the music. Following this display of core strength, the dancers roll over and perform a controlled push off from the floor to standing in unison, gradually lifting their shirts to display their tightly sculpted torsos while smiling and nodding to the audience and then dropping their shirts back into place (see Appx. C Fig. 12). In Ruff Diamond’s series four audition, a close-up camera shot cuts to a wide shot, which captures the split-second stunt of one horizontal dancer being vaulted vertically from the arms to the stretched out legs of a laying down dancer, maintaining his taut, washboard position. This athletic stunt is accentuated by the ‘ting’ of the high-hat cymbal featured in the rhythmic accompaniment. Later on in the choreography, the crew shuffle laterally \textit{en masse} across the stage. A lone dancer
follows their line of direction across the floor, continuously vaulting himself sideways from a laying down position through the use of his core strength.

Interestingly, Cerebro are the only crew to overtly reveal their muscular form. The lack of references by other crews suggests that the sexual objectification of the male dancer would be unsuitable for the family audience. Furthermore, their stationary display of their physical form would put into question their performance of hegemonic masculinity due to the presentation of a passive rather than an active body. In Flawless’s finale performance in BGT, the crew highlights this taboo in the television format through their narrative of a journalist trying to take a photograph of the winning talent show group. The photographer catches the group with wide leg stances, bent knees, and crossed arms while performing repetitive and purposeful isolated hip thrusts towards the camera, accompanied by rhythmic drum beats. While this overtly sexualised image is potentially alarming to the family audience, the moment is swallowed up in the fast moving pace of the dance and swiftly balanced out by a light hearted, funk inspired homage to James Brown’s I Feel Good (1965) (see Ch. 6.7 for further discussion of James Brown). More importantly, the photographer’s shocked face mimics the potential audience’s reaction, suggesting that the group is making a tongue-in-cheek reference to the sexual potency of the image.

A Team additionally juxtapose the hardness and force of their dance dynamic through the incorporation of an eleven year old girl into the eight male crew. Described in VT segments as ‘the cute one’ (2012), Suki begins the crew’s semi-final performance with a smooth gestural routine accompanied by an acoustic version of Jessie J’s Do it like a Dude (2011). Suki mimics the slow and breathy ‘hey heys’ of the lyrics with two side to side hip thrusts, and while she performs the same low centre of gravity and powerful arm gestures of her fellow crew, there is a lightness to her performance quality. This opening section is quickly juxtaposed with the hyper athleticism of the rest of the crew. As she slides to the back of the stage, a fellow crew member performs a jump tuck over the tiny dancer, continuing into an acrobatic athletic floor sequence of back springs and triple somersaults. Performance scholar Emilyn Claid notes that masculinity and femininity can dually symbolize ‘a range of attributes for dance: power and pleasure, linearity and fragmentation, vertical and horizontal, fixed and fluid as performative devices that interweave on male and female anatomical bodies’ (2006, p.9). While their unison group performances demonstrate the equal ability of the young female dancer in
performing stereotypically masculinised Hip Hop, her age, gender, small frame and light performance quality serve to emphasise the hypermasculinity portrayed by the rest of the crew. The placement of Suki amongst the crew therefore acts as a gimmick within the performance to heighten the crews' performance of force, hardness and power, while at the same time remaining accessible to the family audience.

Richard Dyer’s (2002) research into cinematic and mediated images of men reveals that ‘muscularity is a key term in appraising men’s bodies’ (p.132). A developed muscular frame indicates physical strength and power, and is therefore a key social indicator of masculinity and phallic hardness. Because men have the biological capability to become more muscular, masculinity is also therefore deemed natural and given. Springer states that the erotic appeal of traditionally muscle bound hypermasculine comic-book superheroes is in ‘the promise of power they embody’ (1996, p.99). In cinematic examples, this power manifests in action and violence. Rather than the passive and desirable hardened male body, the camera lens objectifies these figures through their embodiment of brute force. The consistent use of linear and angular body shapes and group formations in male Street dance crew performances not only provides visually stimulating images for the viewer, but also presents the male dancers with a hardened aesthetic quality, physically constructing notions of dominance and hegemonic masculinity through the expansive use of space, as well as through linear shape and form.

Alongside the content of the crew choreography, the television production further frames crews in a hypermasculine and superhuman rhetoric. In both GTD and BGT, the talent show judges’ describe crews with superlatives that emphasise the energy, power and dynamic of the performances. In particular, regular oral reactions to performances include descriptions such as ‘incredible’, ‘mindblowing’, ‘outrageous’ ‘ridiculous’ and ‘effortless’. Phrases such as ‘I dared not even blink in case I missed anything’ heighten the extremity of the body in motion, while adjectives such as ‘jawdropping’, ‘insane’ and ‘ridiculous’ once again emphasises the implausibility of the performances. Judges also describe crew performances using metaphors of force, detailing how crews came out with ‘attack’, ‘hit it hard’, or ‘smashed it out the water’. Even when the A Team utilise a softer dynamic in the semi-final performance, Adam Garcia reinforces their dominance in the competition, stating that ‘you guys do slow lyrical with just as much power and cool and swagger as you do your ridiculous glamour tricks’ (2012). Amanda Holden describes Flawless after
their semi-final performance as a ‘tidy, tight cool bunch of boys’ (2009), while all three judges on GTD describe the ‘hard dance’ dynamic that Antics brought to their semi-final performance (2013). In a sporting context, Feasey (2008) observes that sports commentary uses metaphors to war and weaponry in their description of male athletes and their continued affirmation and strive towards hegemonic masculinity. In the context of reality television, Broomfield (2011) observes that popular reality dance television shows, such as SYTYCD, reinforce normative gender roles through the judges’ feedback regarding the need for strong and masculine performances, which exposes the show’s enforcement of heterosexuality and in turn continues to circulate socially acceptable understandings of gendered performance. These examples of judging commentary therefore not only exemplify and reinforce the construction of masculine power and force witnessed in the crew performances, but also describe the hyperbolic quality of their superhuman athletic feats.

After the audition rounds on both talent show competitions, crews are introduced to the home viewer via a VT segment. These pre-recorded and pre-edited clips briefly profile the auditionees to the home viewer, interspersing previous footage of their dancing with performer and judge interviews. At the beginning of these VT segments, crews are introduced with a pre-recorded, high colour contrast image of the crew in a stationary group tableaux, with the crew's title digitally edited into the frame. Crews are positioned in either a confrontational group tableau with each member staring down the camera lens, or in a slow motion mid-air performing a gravity defying stunt (see Appx. C Fig. 13). The crews' names digitally descend on top of this stationary or slow-motion image accompanied by a loud crash of the orchestral soundtrack. Similar to the embossed logo on the chests of famous Marvel superhero character costumes such as Superman, Spider-Man and Batman, crews create their own inflated superhero brand through a similar device, amplified by the television production. Twist and Pulse wear baggy outfits with a giant T and P. across their chest. Antics, Ruff Diamond and Parallel follow this trend with the crew's giant logos emblazoned over T-shirts, baggy jumpers and basketball vests, while crews such as Peridot and Trinity Warriors opt for a simple logo across their t-shirts and jumpers.

These carefully chosen crew names also construct images of power and dominance through the use of inflammatory, punchy and heroic self-declared titles, including 'Flawless', 'Abyss', and 'Trinity Warriors'. The crew name 'Cerebro' intertextually
refers to the machinery used in the Marvel comics and films of the X men, while the crew name Peridot refers to a precious gemstone. In their pre-audition VT interview, Krysalis describe how their name ‘says we are constantly evolving, getting better and better and bigger and better’ (2013). Recollet maintains that names of Hip Hop dance crews ‘determines their mode of representation to reflect how they want to be seen’ (2014, p.423). These crew names therefore inflate the status of the dancers and continue the superhero rhetoric when inserted in the digitally enhanced VT segments of the television production. Through the cinematic excess of the post-production edit, these digital logos of crew names emblematise the strength, indestructibility, heroism and team work as that of comic publisher Marvel's bands of superheroes, including the Avengers and the Justice league of America.

From the above analysis, I contend that crews perform the surplus, and thus construct the aesthetic properties of spectacle, through the perpetuation of a hypermasculine superhuman identity. Crews go beyond the limitations of the human by mirroring the athleticism, the defiance of gravity and the hypermasculine hardness and force of the fantasy figure of the male superhero figure. These exaggerated and masculinised personas are further amplified through the cinematic excess of the wider production content that further heighten these performances through the judges’ feedback and the edited VT segments. By situating themselves as hypermasculine superheroes, male crews are additionally able to safely perform heteronormative gendered identities in a potentially objectifying mediatised format due to their over exaggeration of hegemonic masculinity.

Importantly, this intertextual referencing of the hypermasculine superhero has the potential to extend the appeal of these choreographies for the home viewer and develop limiting images of the Black male Hip Hop dancer. In particular, the hard attack and muscular power featured in performances of Black British male dance crews, including Cerebro, Peridot and Flawless, have the potential to reproduce and re-circulate the essentialised image of the Black hypermasculine male. Grey describes such images as ‘a spectacle of “hyperblackness”, achieved through the production and circulation of a two-dimensional representation of the young black male’ (1995, p.148). The global circulation and universal appeal of the morally courageous superhero, however, makes a significant departure from the limiting and frequently negative stereotype of the hypermasculine Black urban Hip Hop male, whose typecast image is linked with rhetorics of laziness, violence, thuggery and misogyny (Grey, 1995). By framing these crews as superheroes, these
performances hold the representational power and possibility for ‘fantastic (re) imaginings of black identity’ (Nama, 2011, p.4). In his investigation into Black American superheroes, Nama describes characters such as the Falcon, a superhero who appeared in Captain America in 1969, as a representation of ‘our dreams, desires, and idealized projections of our selves’ (p.2). By placing the young Black male into the moral framework of good vs evil, Black superhero comic characters problematise stereotypical negative discourses and assumptions surrounding Black identity, and jar against the continuation of the essentialised image of the hypermasculine Black male.

6.6 The Cartoon Character

The second exaggerated identity presented through televised crew performances is that of the cartoon character. While the strong, powerful and hypermasculine superhero represents images of dominance and power, this constructed identity cannot work in isolation within the family emphasis of the television talent show. As an alternative to the fixed stereotype of the hypermasculine male, my analysis will therefore demonstrate that crews also present the exaggerated and augmented persona of the cartoon character. In their book ‘Disney animation: the illusion of life’, Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston (1989) reveal that there are twelve key principles in the creation of animation. Amongst these drawing techniques, they include specific references to motion, including the stop and stretch, the pose to pose, the notion of overlapping, the use of timing and, most importantly, the movement quality of exaggeration. Keith Osborn (2015) builds upon these techniques and refers to the creation of a two-dimensional design, the blurring of motion, the movement of multiple limbs and the smearing of the animation. Interestingly, these drawn and computerised animation techniques translate to the embodiment of Hip Hop animation techniques witnessed within male Street dance crew performances. As I will demonstrate, I propose that the constructed identity of the cartoon character is achieved through the going beyond the corporeal form, with an exaggerated emphasis on the two-dimensional flattening and stretching of the choreography, the use of comedic parody and the illusory performance of slapstick and violence.

In Twist and Pulse’s final performance on BGT, the duet enters the stage from above on lowered suspended platforms. As they touch the floor, the dancers use vigorous arm gestures as if they are in dialogue, while a squeaky voiceover states ‘Hey guys it’s Twist and Pulse, the cartoon’. The duet then launch into a series of
rapid angular arm isolations, utilising tutting, body popping and waving to give the appearance of a fast paced physical conversation between the two dancers, who stretch and bend their bodies at a rapid pace in an elastically stretched fashion. Executing rapid arm gestures that shoot out across a horizontal plane side by side while facing the studio audience, Twist and Pulse create the illusion of blurred motion in a two-dimensional cartoon animation, where the complexity of the body is flattened to the properties of the television screen (Osborn, 2015) (see Appx. C Fig. 14).

As discussed in Ch. 2.3, several authors cite the importance of mediated influences in the development of Hip Hop culture, including radio, television and film. In particular, Hip Hop dances historically took inspiration from cartoons, sci-fi television programmes and martial arts films, with dancers attempting to recreate the actions of these mediated bodies. In terms of Hip Hop dance techniques, Judith Mackrell reports how ‘Animation techniques’ specifically claim inspiration from ‘film animation in its use of splashy dramatic poses and jerky, freeze-frame dynamic’ (2015, p.1). As referred to in the example of Twist and Pulse, this mimicking of the two-dimensional screen and the jerky pose to pose performance quality of the televised cartoon character can be witnessed in a choreographed context. Coupled with the use of exaggerated and animated facial gestures, these duets create a larger than life cartoon narrative through the recreation of a jerky, motion blurring (or smearing) performance quality and the exaggeration of the two-dimensional aesthetic properties of the choreography (Osborn, 2015). This performance quality and exaggerated characterisation is replicated in other duet performances, including performances by Chris and Wes, Urban Jokers, Parallel and Bionik Funk. Crews incorporate elastically stretched limbs, blurred arm gestures, the physical overlapping of body parts and the exaggerated performance of unison into their routines, further heightened by exaggerated facial gestures and complimentary sound effects. In larger group performances, choreography also undertakes a flattened cartoonish aesthetic, with crews privileging a linear spatial design. This is achieved in both in their carving of the space and in their throwing of gestures across horizontal and vertical planes. Dancers go beyond the performance of pedestrian movement to instead enact a mixture of rubbery and jagged textures that mimic the exaggerated animation of the larger than life animation.

Similar to the narrative of a cartoon, several duet performances also fuse Street dance vocabulary with parodic intertextual references and cartoon-style slapstick. These groups again include Chris and Wes, Urban Jokers, Parallel, Bionik Funk and
Twist and Pulse, who specifically coin their fusion of Street dance and comedic references as ‘Streetomody’ (2011). While larger crews also feature humour and play through parodic references in their routines, such as Diversity, Flawless and Antics, duet performances require far more emphasis upon characterisation and interaction between dancers in their televised performances. In their final performance, Chris and Wes include a voiceover soundtrack of their struggle to make it in time for the GTD final, and include skits such as falling asleep on each other’s legs, putting on their clothes, mimed exaggerated gestures of searching for the studio location and holding each other when they think they are lost. They also include intertextual parodic performances of judge’s Kimberley Wyatt’s girl band The Pussycat Dolls. In the case of Twist and Pulse’s final performance on BGT, the comedy arises from their parodic performances to a variety of television theme tunes and fast paced drum rhythms. These include referencing spliced musical samples of famous cartoon soundtracks, including Looney Toons (1930-1969), The Simpsons (1989-present), and Scooby-Doo (1969-present). The duet’s performances are also interspersed with their parody of the Cheeky Girls: a British-based Romanian pop duet of identical twins who found fame through reality television. Twist and Pulse wiggle their hips and slap each other’s burns in a hyper feminised parody of the duet. Using rhythmic gesture and popping techniques, they also physically visualise the EastEnders (1985-present) soundtrack, a popular British soap series based in East London. This mixture of popular musical intertextual references, the unpredictability of their song choices and their exaggerated facial expressions results in a playful, fragmented and comedic quality to the choreography.

The use of musical references in crews’ soundtracks is also important in juxtaposing the hard and explosive dynamic of Hip Hop dance techniques with incongruous musical samples. Parallel’s sampling of comedy Hip Hop songs in their semi-final, including television theme tune Fresh Prince of Bell Air (1990-1996) by Will Smith and Jazzie Jeff and Can’t Touch This (1990) by MC Hammer also creates a playful performance that the audience can relate to due to the reputation and popularity of the song choices. In their semi-final performance, Trinity Warriors use House of Pain’s Jump Around (1992) to showcase their unique version of jumping, which incorporates fifteen one handed hops and ending in a one handed freeze position. In terms of the use of parody in group performances, Antics quickly transition from energetic and fast paced Street routines to parody pop singers such as Lady Gaga, Kei$h$a and One Direction by miming to their lyrics and using expressive arms
derived from waacking (2012 and 2013) (see Appx. B). While these parodic moments are designed for entertainment purposes and provide light relief against the hard energy of the Street dance choreography, they also serve to juxtapose stereotypical feminised movements against the culturally coded images of hegemonic masculinity. Such performances neutralise the potentially masculinised movement vocabulary of Hip Hop and Street dance through comedy, and instead create a space of freedom where youthful silliness and play is valued over the hypermasculine performances.

In terms of the construction of juvenile masculinity in a mediated environment, Burrill’s research into video games introduces the concept of boyhood, which he describes as ‘a state that can be accessed by males (and, in a sense, anyone engaged in digital technologies) of all ages to escape the rule-bound nature of work, the community, and other cultural formations. By escaping “work”, the boy can then “play”, roaming the digital jungle gyms of virtual reality, videogames, the Internet, and cyberspace’ (2003, p.3). Burrill argues that the state of boyhood holds important status in the digital sphere, and is both accessed and produced through the subject’s interaction with play. This engagement with a premature state of masculinity speaks to a need for adult men to reengage with youth and virility, which in turn suggests a resistance towards ‘adult’ power structures invading this virtual and imagined space of freedom (2003). While removed in context from the console game, this emphasis on play and games can be witnessed in several examples of male Street dance crew choreography. I argue that these crews enact boyhood as an identity through the caricature of the cartoon, while at the same time creating an experience whereby the viewer can enter into the state of boyhood.

In terms of the commenting upon the wider ‘adult’ power structures of the competition framework, several crews make comedic references to the wider competition structure within their choreography. Chris and Wes parody the GTD production format in their semi-final performance by dancing to the recorded voiceover of presenter Davina McCall. They perform ‘cheesy’ and exaggerated poses at each of the judges’ names, ending with holding the leg out in a cheerleading split on female judge Kimberley Wyatt’s name. Despite the hypermasculine superhero images in their choreography, Diversity pause the action in their final performance to creatively mock the talent show contest in which they are competing. The crew recreate the image of a bad female singer and three judges. In comparison with the sharp angles and wide open stances of their
previous choreography, the ‘singers’ movements are far more expressive, using large circular arm gestures, tilted front knees and nodding head gestures, accompanied by C&C music factory’s *Gonna make you sweat (everybody dance now)* (1990). After the fake singer’s ‘performance’, the crew mimics the *BGT* judging panel, shaking their heads in disapproval and using other dancers’ heads as the buzzers to state their disapproval (see Appx. C Fig. 15). These moments of mimed narrative provide amusing and topical intertextual references for the spectator of the *BGT* competitive format. At the same time, these references comment on the hegemonic structure of the competition. Crews distance themselves from the corporate and dictatorial image of the judging panel and television production team, and thus firmly associate themselves with the adolescent viewer through creative play in their choreography.

Interestingly, these performances of juvenile masculinity by adult crews are juxtaposed against the continued strive for hypermasculinity as witnessed within the performances young adolescent male crews. In *GTD* 2012, Kazzum crew, a group of eight boys whose ages ranged between eleven and twelve, reached the final stages of the competition. Rather than constructing a juvenile masculine aesthetic, the crew mimic the hypermasculine stylistic qualities of adult crew performances, including the use of tight geometric spatial patterns, angled arm sequences and sharp dynamic in the execution of their movement. In addition, Krysalis’s audition performance on *GTD* 2013 showcases a similar aesthetic, with the crew of five dancers aged ten to thirteen dressed in military uniform, and who replicate the hard-hitting power and execution of adult crews such as Flawless and Diversity. While the popularity of these crews lies in their ability to perform an adult aesthetic, their strive for hypermasculinity jars against adult crews comedic parody of a cartoon aesthetic.

By constructing a fluid identity that identifies with the juvenile qualities of the screen cartoon, these crews can also draw upon slapstick and violence in the safe space of the crew choreography. Burrill maintains that young males experience ‘painful and masochistic fantasies’ through activities such as sport, far removed from the military practices of warfare (p.29). Videogames, however, allow a safe space to experience and play with ‘the excesses of masculinity’, such as violence and combat (p.29). In the instance of Street dance in the televised talent show competitions, these cartoon caricatures fuse the potential danger of physical risk through the use of athletic stunts and mimed violence. At the same time, crews create a virtual playscape
through choreographed narratives that allow masculinities to be experienced, but in a safe environment and framed in the playful form of entertainment.

In the middle of their fast arm sequence, Twist and Pulse mime punching each other and consequently appear to knock each other unconscious. Similar to the indestructible nature of cartoon characters, they continue with their routine seconds later, seemingly unharmed. In Parallel’s audition, one dancer stops the action to mime the famous Michael Jackson motif of pelvis thrusts, while the other dancer appears to slap him to make him stop. In the Urban Jokers duet audition for GTD, one dancer strikes the other dancer across the face, who in turn mimes a pained reaction (see Appx. C. Fig. 16). As revenge, the struck dancer then retaliates, manipulating the other dancer’s elasticated body through puppetry, body waving and body popping. As the dance progresses, the comedic fight between them increases, with both dancers using filmic slow motion techniques, shocked and exaggerated facial expressions and aerial kicks to increase the drama of the fight.

These gentle performances of slapstick also extend to more exaggerated images of violence and warfare. In Diversity’s final performance, one dancer leaps to the ground as if he has been shot, accompanied by the sound of gunfire, while the remaining dancers create armour around each other using angled arm positions. Flawless burst onto the stage of their BGT semi-final performance in full military uniform, filling the floor with agilely executed backflips, breakdance freezes, forward rolls and aerial tumbles over other dancers (see Appx. C. Fig. 17). This explosive energy is accompanied by the military drumming of The A-Team soundtrack introduction and a dramatic male voiceover, describing ‘ten individuals who strive to be Flawless’ (2009). Alongside military references including a marching army and a military salute, an imaginary bomb detonates at the end of the dance and the crew explodes outwards from the centre of the stage. Accompanied by the musical reference to the male-orientated action television show, The A Team (1983-1987), Flawless overload the viewer with popular references to military warfare and violence. While these references indicate notions of a heightened and violent masculinity and are potentially alarming to the family audience, they are performed in the safe space of the dance choreography narrative. In the case of Diversity, the fallen dancer quickly stands up and transitions into the next sequence with the rest of the crew, leaving the audience to quickly forget about the mimed physical act of violence they previously witnessed. Flawless stand up unhurt at the end of their dramatic explosion to receive their applause from the studio audience.
In terms of the transgression of corporeal boundaries within the context of the television talent show, this analysis reveals that crews depart from the organic and instead perform the exaggerated and hyperbolic identity of the cartoon character. Through the two-dimensional flattening of the choreography, the performance of a cartoon aesthetic quality, the use of parody and juxtaposition and the performance of invincibility through references of slapstick and violence, crews achieve heightened visibility by enacting larger than life characteristics. In addition, this presentation of juvenile masculinity or ‘boyhood’ departs from the stereotypical identity representation of hypermasculinity and creates a playful and light aesthetic in which audiences can engage. This identity persona also creates a space of freedom and play where crews can distance themselves from the hegemonic power structures of the television production whilst at the same time conforming to their restrictions. This analysis therefore reveals that multiple masculinities are at play within the choreographed performance of Street dance crew performances.

6.7 The Black pop icon

The final exaggerated identity persona which I argue contributes to the construction of spectacle in the male Street dance crew performance is that of the Black pop icon. In particular, I refer to the choreographic and musical intertextual referencing to James Brown and Michael Jackson. These two musical artists hold great reverence in U.S. and global popular culture as a result of their musical and dancing talent, their pioneering influence on contemporary popular music and their historical impact on Black popular culture. In a U.K. context, these late U.S. icons, commonly known as ‘the Godfather of Soul’ and the ‘King of Pop’, continue to hold high cultural value. *Thriller Live-In concert* (2006-current) celebrates the career of Michael Jackson and has been touring across the U.K. since 2006 and running in the London West End since 2009. Additionally, Jackson’s posthumous film *This is It* (2009) grossed £4,877,255 in its opening weekend in the U.K. (IMDB, 2009). Importantly for this research, BBC3 also ran a single series of *Move Like Michael Jackson* (2009), a talent show competition which tasked Street dance crews with creating performances that merged Michael Jackson’s movement style and songs with contemporary Street dance. Interestingly, Jackson has also been aligned with Debord’s notions of spectacle in the edited work of Smit (2012). This is due to the evasive and fluid notion of fabricated reality that constructed his music, his image and legacy, as well as the global consumption of this image. Smit argues this hyper consumption of Jackson’s spectacle is further fuelled in his posthumous career. In
terms of James Brown, his music continued to chart in the U.K. in his later years despite not charting in the U.S. and the James Brown biopic film Get on Up (2014) was met with acclaim by U.K. press.xiii As I will demonstrate, crews construct and perform the surplus through their corporeal and musical references to these prominent celebrity identities. At the same time, these performances create the possibility of constructing and circulating alternative racialised identities to that of the hard and hypermasculine Black male stereotype.

In both their audition and final performances, Flawless mimic the famous stylistic motifs associated with James Brown. In their BGT final, one dancer propels himself from the floor into a shoulder stand, while another dancer grabs his leg and uses it as a tilted microphone stand. The dancer mimes the accompanying James Brown song, I Feel Good (1965) into the dancer’s foot, recreating the image of James Brown’s impassioned performances. Flawless continue the James Brown movement motif references throughout their choreography. These include the famous image of Brown kicking into a leg split to slide straight back up to standing, the opening and closing of the knees (the ‘funky chicken’) and the rapid foot shuffling on the floor (the ‘mashed potato’) (Gottschild, 2000) (see Appx. C Fig. 18). These recognisable motifs and party dances are synonymous with the performance style of Brown and can be witnessed in several crew performances that incorporate funk styles into their choreography. Brown’s sharp twist turn (the jump cross of the feet and the spin on the spot) features in the majority of crew choreography, while Ruff Diamond also reference the split jumps, leg splits and shuffling footwork of Brown in both series of GTD, but especially in their audition in 2012.

The enactment of signature movements can also be seen in crews’ intertextual references to Michael Jackson. In their final performance, Flawless wear Michael Jackson style tipped trilby hats and suits and incorporate recognisable Jackson movement motifs. These include angular knee flicks, back slides (the moon walk), crotch grabbing and pelvis thrusts in their choreography, all accompanied to the soundtrack of Jackson tracks including Smooth Criminal (1988) and Wanna Be Starting Something (1983). Both Ruff Diamond and Chris and Wes make reference to the same famous Michael Jackson movement motif. Ruff Diamond briefly incorporate Jackson’s crotch grab and pelvic thrust in their audition. Chris and Wes begin their semi-final routine with one dancer in an asymmetric frozen pose, while the other dancer mimes the use of a graffiti spray can. He ‘sprays’ the dancer into a series of twisted, distorted shapes to eventually reveal Michael Jackson’s famous
angled crotch grabbing pose. Just as the dancer walks away, the introduction of Jackson’s *Smooth Criminal* plays and the dancer performs two hip thrusts behind his back (see Appx. C Fig. 19). In Diversity’s *Mission Impossible* (1996) themed semi-final, the crew lays flat on the floor, leaving two dancers to lean forward to forty-five degrees while still remaining upright. This movement choice intertextually references Jackson’s famous gravity defying leaning motif. In terms of oral references, Cerebro’s semi-final performance is accompanied by Michael Jackson’s *Working day and night* (1979). Parallel’s audition also features Jacksonesque movement motifs, accompanied by both *Jam* (1992) and *Don’t stop till you get enough* (1979).

Importantly though, these visual and oral references are sampled and spliced in the crews’ contemporary evolutions of Hip Hop dance. In his research into techno music, Williams notes that the lack of recognisable samples in mediated techno sounds reduced its appeal to the African American population, due to its lack of historical Afrocentric musical references that ‘trigger emotional memories/histories’ (2001, p.163). Importantly, these Street dance performances fuse a mixture of electro beats and house dance music with short spliced samples of contemporary and ‘old Skool’ Hip Hop tracks, accompanied by the associated movement style. Here, the soundtrack and dance motifs are used to demonstrate the evolution and creativity apparent in the crew’s choreography. For example, Flawless’ choreography shifts in style to Nu-Skool when Jackson songs are presented in a remixed format. This includes complex arm and step patterns mixed with gymnastic stunts. This splicing of styles both refers back to the past but firmly situating the performance in the contemporary. Grey acknowledges this post-modern physical borrowing and reprocessing of Black cultural expressions, stating ‘contemporary black youth continue to select, recycle, and embellish body movements from different groups and periods, inflecting them with new meanings’ (1995, p.154). This fusion of Black cultural styles mixed, spliced and recontextualised therefore provides a celebratory and historical reference to Black diasporic practice.

I maintain that the insertion of such recognisable movement motifs and sound bites aligns crews with that of the status and creative abilities of these Black pop icons. While it can be argued that these corporeal references act as homage to the late musicians, these references also exemplify the crews’ knowledge of Black cultural styles, influences, fashions and eras. In addition, crews establish that they can achieve the same level of physical aptitude as these famous performers. In their
presentation of a back slide, for example, crews both validate their virtuosic ability to create the impression of seamlessly sliding across the floor, as well as their ability to mimic the creative talents of Michael Jackson. As established in Ch. 2.5, the reality television format constructs crews as ‘ordinary’ in order to chart their development within the transitional format of the competition. By channelling the persona of the Black pop icon, however, crews dismantle this notion of ordinary and instead align themselves with the inflated status of the icon. Crews incorporate these movements into their own choreography and it is this fusion of the contemporary and the historical that demonstrates the crew’s prowess in the competition.

Through this surpassing of the ordinary in their reimagining the iconic popstar, crews also complicate the hypervisibility of the stereotypical Black urban male through their performance of funk. As well as Brown’s signature performance style, his appearances on Soul Train (1971-2006) in the 1970s continued the link between his own creative interpretation of social dances and that of the funk style of Locking: the fun, upbeat party dance created by Don Campbell and the Campbell Lockers in the late 1960s (Lockerlegends, 2011). Jackson also performed the style of locking in his early career with the Jackson 5 and then augmented the freeze frame positions into his own choreography in later performances (McMillian, 2012). Crews include funk styles within their bricolage effect of their routines. In their audition, Flawless pause their split-second athletic stunts and NU Skool choreography to break into a locking routine. Accompanied by the music of James Brown, the crews begin with a sustained unison sequence of points and pauses, slowly rolling their heads and looking up at the camera together. These drawn out gestures continue, followed by small pedestrian gestures of ‘cool attitude’, including exaggerated walks on the spot, swinging arms, straightening a tie, tipping a hat, slowly nodding or smiling and pointing to each other (see Appx. C Fig. 20). Mirroring the rapid change in beats per minute in the James Brown soundtrack, the crew launch into rapid arm paces, locks, kicks, stamps and freeze frame photographic poses akin with the style of locking. As the studio audience screams in approval, one dancer spins away from the crew and performs a giant split leap into the locking splits. In other examples, Cerebro perform arm locking and pointing sequences on chairs while Ruff Diamond perform wrist rolls and fast clap sequences in unison. Chris and Wes perform a lively locking routine to disco theme Chic - Le Freak (Freak Out) (1978), while Parallel visualize the opening introduction of The Fresh Prince of Bel Air (1990) through points, rolls and locks.
Rickey Vincent (1996) describes how Funk music amalgamated Black music traditions such as African percussion, progressive jazz, blues, rhythm and blues and soul music. He maintains that this fusion of cultural influences symbolically rejected the formality and pretence of the Western world and defined Black cultural identity ‘through rhythm, dance, bodily fluids, and attitude’ (p.6). In particular, he describes James Brown’s use of accent on the ‘one’ count in a four beat bar and the driving rhythmic pace of the tracks as both fuelling the birth of soul music as well as making a historic reference to African rhythms, over layered with Brown’s screeching vocals. The incorporation and sampling of funk music occurred during the late 1970’s Hip Hop movement, with older music being mixed, sampled and spliced into contemporary rap songs. Transmitted and spread through the mediated performances on Soul Train, funk music and dance styles signified a fun, relaxed and cool aesthetic but also operated politically as a marker of blackness that referenced Black cultural histories and oral traditions.

In the context of television, Grey argues that this ‘black cultural vocabulary of style’ can be circulated and consumed across a wide range of commercial media, operating as an indicator for the representation of blackness in the televised talent show competition (1995, p.55). As discussed in Ch. 2.6, Bragin notes that the clean lines, uniformity and timing of dance crews choreographies acts as a means to clean and remove the ‘funky blackness’ from Hip Hop dance vernacular styles (footnote, p.103). I observe, however, that crews in fact reference these funk dance styles, but stage them within the clean lines of the Street dance choreography. Crews therefore adhere to the symmetrical and synchronised crew formations required in the competition due to the need for visibility, but at the same time construct alternate Black identities through there references to ‘funky blackness’ of James Brown and the party dance of locking.

These references to funk dance styles therefore act as a means of authentication for the crews and a performance of televised blackness away from the stereotypical hypermasculine Black urban male. In Cerebro’s audition performance, whilst the locking section of the dance is performed in a conventional and technically accurate way using fast transitions between arm points and playful facial expressions, the 1990s New jack swing element of the piece is highly animated and exaggerated, causing laughter in the judging panel and the audience (See Appx. B). Cerebro parodies the media adopted and circulated form of Hip Hop dance from the 1990s, in order to associate themselves far more with the value placed upon authentic and
original Black cultural forms. In Jacqui Malone’s study of Black fraternities and their practice of stepping (1996), she maintains that the appropriation of funk becomes a device in these contexts to celebrate the cultural richness of Black expressive cultures through vivid visual imagery and fun entertainment. By drawing upon ‘authentic’ African-American products, fraternities gain cultural currency through the embodied referencing of an age prior to media intervention (Malone, 1996). Rather than merely reproducing the stereotypical tropes of hypermasculine blackness, I maintain that crews’ performance of funk constructs and circulates a celebration of funky blackness within the constraints of the reality television format.

This chapter section demonstrates how crews perform the exaggerated surplus through their intertextual referencing of the Black pop icons of Michael Jackson and James Brown. These inflated performances, achieved through embodied and musical references to the stars, act as homage and align the crews with the status of two of the most famous Black male popular cultural icons of the 20th century. Crews perform beyond their reality and the constructed reality television image of the ordinary by forging an affinity with culturally recognisable popular images. Through these replicated performances, however, crews also put into question the televised representation of the urban Black male and instead perform the aesthetic of funky blackness, whilst at the same time maintaining the linear and symmetrical structure of their choreography.

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter has presented an analysis of the construction and performance of spectacle in relation to the representation of identity in the televised performances of male Street dance crews. From this analysis, it can be argued that crews construct the aesthetic properties of spectacle by performing larger than life references from twenty-first century popular media. Rather than naturalistic portrayals, crews perform intertextual references of larger than life masculinised and racialised personas. These representations depart from the naturalistic in their portrayal of superhuman abilities, cartoon invincibility and iconic status all of which give the appearance of traversing beyond the corporeal limitations of the televised talent show dancer. These exaggerated identities originate from the choreographies themselves but are further amplified by the cinematic excess of the camerawork and the event TV elements of the television production. Through these spectacular identity personas, I maintain that crews at the same time disrupt the stereotypical
image of the Black hypermasculine urban male. These performances of the hypermasculine superhero, the cartoon character and the Black Pop Icon allow crews to construct and perform multiple representations of identity rather than the fixed stereotype as witnessed in mediated performance of Hip Hop (see Ch. 2.3). The following chapter will now expand my analysis of the construction and performance of spectacle by crew performances, focusing specifically on the relationship between technology and the body.

\[1\] Butler (1990, 1993) challenges the notion of sex as biological, arguing that although there is a link between the sex and gender of a person, gender is in fact based upon social discourse rather than being an inherent, biological characteristic. The reason why sex and gender appear to be linked is because the illusion of an internal organised gender is achieved ‘in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts’ (1990, p.179). Butler argues that society sustains gender roles through historical discourses and institutions in order to contain sex and gender in a binary heteronormative framework. However, by interpreting bodily acts, gestures and signs as unbound and changeable, there is always opportunity for gender creativity away from heteronormative stereotypes (Butler, 1990, p.179). Butler’s (1990) oft-cited theory of gender as a cultural construction is useful to my research as it allows the strong and hypermasculine performances of male hip-hop dancers to be viewed as cultural constructions rather than fixed identities.

\[ii\] Studies have also focused on the performance of masculinities away from the intrinsic link with the male body, including Judith Halberstam’s *Female Masculinity* (1998).

\[iii\] Connell and Messerschmidt conclude that ‘due to the large body of research that builds upon the concept of multiple masculinities and hegemonic masculinity, Connell’s framework has become the main framework for analysing masculinity, and replaces that of ‘sex-role theory and categorical models of patriarchy’ (2005, p.834).

\[iv\] Building upon the critiques of hegemonic masculinity, Connell and Messerschmidt propose four main areas of change; ‘the nature of gender hierarchy, the geography of masculine configurations, the process of social embodiment, and the dynamics of masculinities’ (2005, p.847).

\[v\] Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) draw upon the work of Donaldson and Poynting (2004) to describe how social practices of dominant upper class masculinities such as eating, sports and leisure not only establish their wealth but also reveal subtle power relations of distancing and dominance of other men.

\[vi\] Grey defines blackness as ‘the various productions, histories, images, representations, and meanings associated with black presence in the United States’ (1995, p.12).

\[vii\] Connell (1995) uses the example of Black sports stars to demonstrate how these individual athletes may demonstrate the epitome of hegemonic masculinity, but their fame and wealth is not dispersed down through society to Black men in general.

\[viii\] The performance of Black cultural expressions by white subjects is historically situated in discourses surrounding appropriation and cultural usurpation: the process of white borrowing of blackness in an attempt to transcend whiteness and experience the exotic other (Hall, 1997, Boyd, 1997; hooks, 2004). hook’s (2004) used the concept of ‘eating out the other’ to describe how white appropriation of Black cultural experiences results from a yearning to experience something mutually exciting, threatening and unattainable, represented by the Black other who is consumed by white dominance.

\[ix\] As a result of mass movement to cities and the underdevelopment of urban centres, ‘the idea of the urban has become virtually synonymous with notions of blackness’ (Smith, 1997, pp.2-3). Fleetwood
describes how in hip-hop culture, it is ‘the body of the young black male who stands in for 'the urban real', suggesting the close link between the construction of blackness, the vernacular and urban origins of the subculture and notions of authenticity in Hip Hop (2011, p.152). Leonard states that ‘the constant focus on inner-city play, in video games, on ESPN, and in popular culture, leaves the impression that rather than working, rectifying social problems, and improving the community’s infrastructure, black males are too busy playing’ (2005, p.333). The link with urban spaces and areas of degeneration reaffirms and circulates the image of the Black lazy male with athletic superiority, who in this case would rather be dancing than working.

3 The League of Extraordinary Dancers (2010-2011) (known as the LXD) is a web based that follows the story of two rival gangs who have extraordinary powers in the form of Hip Hop dance skills.

3i Burt (2007) draws upon art history and feminist film theory to investigate how looks and gazes operate in theatre dance, and in particular adapts Freid's (1980) theory regarding the concepts of theatrical and absorbed looking. Burt describes theatrical instances of looking as moments where the spectator's gaze is established by the dancer or the performance, either through intensity, domination or interaction with another dancer. He posits that these devices are more likely to reinforce gender norms than provide alternative ways of interpreting dance, raising the issue of male dancers destablising gender norms in performance.

xii Drawing upon Freud's concept of the phallus, Dyer comments that men work towards the ‘embodiment of the phallic mystique’ through the clenching, hardening and swelling of their bodies, in order to make them appear more masculine and more powerful (2002, p.137). In the media, this hardening of the body is coupled with the appearance of action and control to correspond to dominant ideas of masculinity. However, these efforts are in vain as the penis can never live up to the mythical phallus, so true masculinity is an unreachable goal.

xiii Reviews include Mark Kermode’s (2014) review for the Observer and Dan Jolin’s (2014?) review for Empire magazine.
Chapter Seven: Spectacle and the technofication of the body

7.1 Introduction

This third analysis chapter presents an investigation into the construction and performance of spectacle in relation to the synthesis between technology and the body. Drawing upon Claudia Springer’s definition, I use the term technology in reference to ‘nonorganic crafts, tools, and machines created by humans’ that incorporate ‘mechanical, industrial, and electronic technology’ (1996, p.15). I investigate the extent to which crews perform the surplus through the performance of the organic and the technological. I first critique theoretical concepts that inform an analysis of the technofication of the body, with particular emphasis on the construction of the cyborg (Haraway, 1985; Hess, 1995; Dodds, 2004). Building upon these ideas, this chapter then considers the extent to which Street dance crews embody technological intervention through the techno-corporeality of the body, the construction of meta-bodies, the performance of digital narratives and the manipulation of the post-production edit.

7.2 Technology and the body

Posthumanist and transhumanist discourse situate the relationship between the body and technology as seeking to re-conceive the concept of the human (Gray, 1995; Tomas, 1995; Holland, 1995; Hayles, 1999; Badmington, 2000; Shilling, 2005). These discussions arise from an increased reliance on digital communication, a continued engagement with interactive digital environments and the physical and abstract presence of the organic body in virtual spaces. These concepts open up possibilities of digital hybridity and a fusion between the anatomical form of the body, the mechanical, the digital and the virtual. Donna Haraway’s 1985 seminal feminist essay describes the fusion between human and machine as a cyborg: a hybrid that crosses between social reality and fiction (Haraway, 1985 in Kirkup, G, Janes, J, Woodward, K, Hovenden, F, 2000). She comments that ‘late twentieth century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and eternally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines. Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert’ (2000, p.52). Haraway argues that the physical distinction between reality and fiction has been blurred and demands a reconsideration of corporeal boundaries.
In western popular literature, science fiction and Hollywood films, hyper robotic and CGI manipulated manifestations are imagined through futuristic characters such as the Terminator or Neo from *The Matrix*. These hybrid forms reveal the interplay between machinery, technology and the human body and have become the basis of a populist understanding of the cyborg. This cross between man and machine is visualised through contemporary film portrayals, including the *Terminator* series (1984, 1991, 2003, 2015), the *RoboCop* series (1987, 1990), *Blade Runner* (1982) and *The Matrix* Trilogy (1999-2003). Tomas (1995) and Holland (1995) argue that these mediated human/machine hybrids highlight the concern and fear surrounding the technological body, as well as questioning the boundaries between the Cartesian split of mind/body.

In relation to the dancing body, the interaction with mechanical and digital technology enables the exploration of interactive environments and a reconfiguration of space, time, context and physical ability. These manipulations also put into question the status of the material body in this blurred space. In her research into the video dance body, Dodds (2004) recognises the importance of the interface between body and technology to the field of dance studies, as well as to the wider socio-cultural context. This is due to the renewed focus on the body’s capacity to construct meaning and the possibility of the extension of the material body’s capabilities. The merger between the organic and the machine includes versions of digitally manipulated human portrayals, such as slow motion sports clips, airbrushed photography and music video editing. In particular, music videos showcase the rapid cutting and manipulation of bodies, changes of scenery and costumes and highlight the edited capabilities of the video dancing body to go beyond the limitations of the organic (Goodwin, 1992, Dodds, 2004).

While the term cyborg and its machine-like representations in popular culture suggest a hyper robotic body, Dodds draws upon the writings of David Hess to question this closed definition in the cyborg spectrum. She states that the human body is constantly aided and enhanced through technological intervention, ‘whether in the form of a pocket calculator, a hearing aid or an artificial knee replacement’ (p.164). Hess (1995) defines this subtle intervention between human and machine as a ‘low-tech cyborg’: a classification that recognises any technological impact upon the natural body and the emotional and physical reliance on machines in contemporary society. Dodds therefore posits that ‘the moment a dancing body is positioned in front of a camera, this constitutes a human-machine interface and
hence the video dance body becomes a low-tech cyborg’ (p.165). As the material body does not actually merge with machinery, and technological modifications are not a permanent feature, she describes the video dance body specifically as a ‘prosthetic techno-body’ (p.168). This term recognises the close but temporary intervention of technology on the body.

Haraway’s (1985), Hess’s (1995) and Dodds’ (2004) posthumanist reconsiderations of the natural body and its manipulation through the digital screen bear relevance to my own research due to the continued references to mechanical and digital intervention in Street dance crew performances. As I will discuss in Ch. 7.6, Street dance crew choreographies amalgamate both the human and the digital in pre-recorded VT segments due to the technological intervention through camera movement and post-production editing. As I will argue in the following sections, however, the intervention of mechanical and digital technologies upon the organic body is additionally achieved through the corporeal simulation of technological intervention. I propose that dancers create the appearance of surpassing the limitations of the organic body through their portrayal of robots, machines, computers, avatars and digital creatures. Specifically, I observe this performance of techno-corporeality in their use of Hip Hop animation techniques, synchronicity and machine-like repetition.

7.3 Techno-corporeality

In Peridot’s semi-final on BGT, the narrative of the performance is themed as if the dancers are robotic machines. Accompanied by mechanical sound effects and remixed versions of electrofunk songs, such as Robot Rock (2005) by Daft Punk, Peridot use an amalgamation of muscle shudders, sharp starts and stops, leg pops, chest isolations, gliding of the feet and angled arm lines to create the illusion of nine robots (see Appx. C Fig. 21). Bodily joints and bones appear to dissolve through waving, while fluid actions are transformed into static, mechanical shudders through body popping, creating the illusion of a robotic being. Movements suddenly stop and start as if being controlled by internal motors, or appear to break down and malfunction, with the upper arm taut while the lower arm dangles lifelessly. In their performance of breakdance windmills, a move that requires a centrifugal force and extreme physical effort, dancers’ legs appear stiff and static, and the exertion required to perform such a stunt is masked.
As discussed in Ch. 6.6, I observe that the animation techniques used within crew choreographies aid in the illusionary appearance of a cartoon character (see Appx. B). These techniques, which include the stylistic practices of body popping, waving, gliding, roboting, strutting, tutting, ticking and Boogalooing, originated in the mid-60s in the Bay area of LA by crews such as The Robot Brothers, led by Charles ‘Charles Robot’ Washington (Lockerlegends, 2011). Alongside the inspiration of cartoons, other cultural influences included store mannequins and robot characters as featured on the television series Lost in Space (1965-1968). Specifically, these illusionary techniques tense, release, curve and angle the body away from habitual pedestrian movement, creating the visual effect of technological intervention on the body.

As described in Peridot’s performance, such visceral animation techniques can be amalgamated in street dance choreography by larger crews, but can also be observed in specialist body popping duets and trios. In Liquid Metallic’s semi-final duet performance on GTD, the two dancers achieve a competitive narrative through a call and response structure. One dancer showcases his skill in body popping (the rapid tensing and releasing of isolated muscles), while the other dancer demonstrates his expertise in waving through the smooth fluidisation of bodily joints. After demonstrating their prowess in their individual techniques, the dancers perform a complex, rhythmic ‘tutting’ sequence using a series of right-angled elbows, wrists and fingers to create a series of two-dimensional symmetrical shapes. The mixture of precision and efficiency in their technique, as well as the sharp and angled nature of the movement creates the overall impression of two remotely controlled machine-like bodies. These techniques are also explored in duet Blue Magic’s audition, where the two dancers pass the ability to body pop and wave back and forth through a playful fight, where knocks create reactionary isolations of the chest, head and torso, and punches create slow motion back bends and twist and jerks. Springer states that ‘mechanical technology, with its engines, gears, pistons, and shafts, has been joined and in many ways superseded by the increasingly miniaturized micro circuitry of electronic technology’ (1996, p.39). This shrinking of technology can be witnessed in the control developed over the fast twitch muscles of the dancers, whose own micro-circuitry and micro-isolation of muscles and joints creates the illusion of digital modification.

The performance of these illusionary techniques therefore put into question the corporeality of these bodies due to their realistic portrayals of technologically
enhanced corporeality. Body popping duet Static Movement state in the VT segment prior to their audition that ‘we want [the audience] to question the reality of what they are actually seeing’, making them question ‘what’s going on and how did they do that’ (2012). The duet draws upon the techniques of robotics, body popping, ticking, waving and extreme isolations of the head and chest cavity to create the illusion of cyborgian lifeforms (see Appx. C Fig. 22). Similarly, body popping trio L3gacy’s audition fuses tight hits of the torso and legs with intricate tutting hand gestures. These actions are amplified by a camera medium close-up of judge Ashley Banjo, who yells and retreats backwards in mock horror at the excessive spectacle of bodies going beyond the possible. At the end of their routine, Banjo describes the crew in superlatives, labelling them the colloquial term of ‘ridiculous’ and telling one dancer that his hits are ‘outrageous’ (2012).

Examples of extreme techno-corporeal control can also be observed in the continuous use of perfectly executed group synchronicity that creates the illusion of digitally produced duplicated bodies. Choreographies are rehearsed and refined to the extent where any human error is removed and the crew members appear to be identical copies of each other. As referred to in Ch. 5.3, The A Team’s slow and tightly controlled gliding floor patterns, all performed in equal spatial distance of each other in a symmetrical design, creates the impression of one single body digitally duplicated several times. This is further highlighted by their matching hats, sunglasses, long coats and masked facial expressions. The wide camera shots enhance the digital duplication of the dancers, as they capture their intricate, elongated and controlled contractions and expansions in unison across the stage. The filming of the crew from a wide shot and 45 degree angle masks any individual mistakes or differing facial expressions. After their semi-final performance, Kimberley Wyatt exclaims how their performance was ‘as close to perfection as you can possibly get’, referring to the precision in their performance, their identical and symmetrical positioning in the space and their controlled and uniform performance of slow and sustained glides.

Flawless, as referred to in the title of the crew, also achieve a ‘flawless’ performance through their precision. Rather than the controlled gliding of The A Team, their accuracy lies in the speed of their execution, as well as in how every single crew member is identical in their performance regardless of complexity or speed. In the case of Abyss, their audition fails to impress the judges due to the crew not demonstrating the same level of precision of other previous dance acts. In their
semi-final performance, they compensate for their lack of 'digital' unison by creating a digitally themed choreography with dancers masked by dry ice and strobe lighting to mask inaccuracies.

The continuous use of repetition by crews also creates a machine-like aesthetic. At the end of Abyss's audition, one dancer repeatedly performs back flips across the stage. A Trinity warrior's dancer performs twelve one handed hops in a baby freeze position in their semi-final performance, while a Peridot dancer performs eight one handed hops in a full upright freeze position. In addition, an A Team dancer performs over six identical windmills in time with the musical accompaniment. Human attributes of pain and exhaustion are replaced by machine-like invincibility. While a human body would eventually tire, a machine would remain consistent in its operation. As discussed in Ch. 3.4 in the writings of Virno (2004), Hamera (2000) and Brandstetter (2007), the virtuosic body, through its defiance of gravity and its ability to repeat and reproduce dramatic feats is historically tied to ideas of transcending the restraints of the human body as well as through the hypnotic use of repetition. These performances of repetitive virtuosic acts consequently conjure up representations of the demonic and the mechanical through their performance of excess. While the precarious labour conditions of the dancers themselves fit more in ideas of post-Fordist creative economies (see Ch. 4.5), the serial production line aesthetic of male Street dance crew performances suggests the Fordist aesthetic of the worker who 'repeatedly performs a single task' (Gielen and De Bruyne, 2012, p.8). Consequently, the virtuosic body is presented as the perfect machine, tirelessly working without revealing any effort or fatigue to create the overall product of the dance. Crews therefore display moments of virtuosic and mechanised action through their repetitive performances of stunts.

Similar to the performance of the special effect and the exaggerated caricature (see Chapter Five and Chapter Six), the visual spectacle in these mechanised performances lies in the dancing bodies’ ability to transcend beyond human capabilities. This techno-corporeal mechanical aesthetic creates the illusion of a hyper robotic cyborgian figure that goes beyond the organic and performs in excess of human capabilities, demonstrating extreme corporeal control far removed from pedestrian movement. In anthropologist Marcel Mausse’s (1992) analysis of bodily techniques, he draws parallels between training systems, such as military organizational systems and the assembly of a machine. This equation is due to the fact that both systems strive to achieve efficiency. In her study of humans and
machines, Springer also notes that Victorian industrialization saw the shift from an exploited human labour force to machines that 'improved on what they saw as the deficiencies of human workers' (1996, p.17). In the case of the Street dance crew, the human worker embodies the mechanisms of the machine in order to eradicate 'human' deficiencies, achieving high levels of strength, speed and endurance to simulate the gears, pistons and motors of the crew 'machine'. Crews demonstrate extreme human efficiency through drill-like studio training, rehearsed to the point where human error appears to be removed. This efficiency holds currency in the televised talent show, as crews who do not achieve tight unison, precise stunts and honed bodily technique will not achieve home viewers votes and will therefore fail to progress in the competition.

It is important to note, however, that the notion of the Black male as robot is problematic due to historical discourses of oppression. Huntingdon (2007) likens the exploitation and control of African American slaves by Euro-Americans to the function of robots who have no intelligence of their own, whose function is manual labour and who are operated by remote control. She states that the Hip Hop dance style 'the Robot' can be seen as both an embodied reaction to centuries of 'surveillance and domination' but also as a re-assertion of the physical shift in power, as the dancer is now in control of the body (Huntingdon, 2007, p.76). This concept of control over robots is problematic in this reading of male Street dance crew performances. While crews demonstrate extreme corporeal control through bodily technique and choreographic precision, their fate in the competition is determined externally though their representation and re-presentation in the television production, the influence of the press and other media upon the depiction of the performer, and the television viewer whose vote determines the outcome of the competition.

I instead posit that these performances of futuristic cyborgian characters, achieved through the technofication of the body, offer potential agency in terms of their identity representation in the constraints of the television production. In her feminist study of the gendered cyborg, Balsamo (1999) builds upon Haraway’s concept that ‘cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves’ (p.57). She instead maintains that the redesigning of the body through technological enhancement demands a questioning of the concept of ‘natural’ as well as the body’s ability to inscribe difference (p.57). The disruptive potential of the cyborg collapses the boundaries
between social reality and science fiction and signals the reconsideration of the
material body away from the contested binary identity markers of gender, race,
creed, biology and class. This consideration of the cyborg as ‘belonging
simultaneously to at least two previously incompatible systems of meaning –“the
organic/natural” and “the technological/cultural”’, creates what Balsamo describes
as a ‘boundary figure’: a fluid hybrid design that challenges the fixed notion of
human identity (p.215). The modification of human difference through technological
enhancement disrupts constructions of otherness by blurring the boundaries
between binary discourses that surround the material body, revealing the instability
and shifting nature of identities.

This re-imagining of the material body through science fiction can also be situated in
the discourses of Afro-Futurism: ‘a way of imagining possible futures through a
black cultural lens’ (Ingrid laFleur in Womack, 2013, p.9). Rather than individuals
being confined to stereotypes of Black identity, AfroFuturism breaks down racial,
ethnic and social limitations in order to empower individuals. As an example,
Eshun's AfroFuturist work, 'More brilliant than the Sun..', likens Black culture and its
associated musical products to machines, engines and technologies with the
intention of finding an alternative way to critique electronic music inspired by Afrodiasporic communities. Relating this concept to Hip Hop dance practice, it is
important to note that the Robot came into public consciousness through the
Jackson 5's televised performance of Dancing Machines on the Carol Burnett Show
in 1974, creating the term ‘doing the robot’ (MRDAVEYD, 2013). Michael Holman
states that for Black inner city kids, the imitation of Robots allowed them to 'escape
to a world where everything is perfect, sharp and in control' (Holman, 198-). In
addition, the intertextual references to Michael Jackson's and James Brown's
signature movements in crew performances, as described in Ch. 6.7, can also be
included within this AfroFuturist paradigm. Womack highlights the futurist and sci-fi
stylistic content of Jackson's music videos, and, in particular, his continued use of
'space-era sci-fi dances', including the moon walk and the seemingly impossible
anti-gravity lean (2013, p.149). In terms of James Brown, the funk base line was not
only machine-like in its repetition, but funk and soul artists aspired to free minds
through their 'liberation-tinged space metaphors' taking listeners to a higher state of
consciousness (2013, p.63).

This reclaiming of the future through the theorisation of Black popular expressions
bears a strong relevance to the construction and performance of the cyborg in male
Street dance crew performances. The modification of human difference through technological enhancement disrupts constructions of otherness by blurring the boundaries between binary discourses that surround the material body, revealing the instability and shifting nature of identities. By constructing the illusion of techno-corporeal superhuman cyborgs, crews problematise the stereotype of the essentialised Black entertainer in an attempt to escape the restrictive representation of the hypermasculine Black male.

It should be noted, however, that the potential representational fluidity offered by feminist and Afro-futurist readings of the cyborg are not wholly transgressive due to the reaffirmation of markers of hegemonic masculinity. Despite the seemingly fluid possibilities for representation in the futuristic representation of the cyborg, Featherstone and Burrows (1995) note that while there lies the possibility for identity construction away from the restrictions of the material body, masculinity in popular representations of cyborgs is often conceived as 'near invincible soldiers with hyper-male bodies', reaffirming their strive to achieve hegemonic masculinity (p.4). The emphasis upon 'the invincible armoured man of steel' in mainstream films displays an enhancement of male physicality rather than an abandonment, and this is due to these figures counteracting the feminised internalisation and concealment of electronic technology with the phallic metaphor of the active and aggressive machine (1996, p.10). These over-compensations reveal the fear that 'in a possible cyborg future, biological gender would disappear, rendering patriarchy's centrally constituting hierarchy of masculine over feminine untenable' (Holland, 1995, p.167). Despite the disruptive potential offered by the cybernetic organism, these arguments suggest that it fails to move beyond the binary codes of gender as an attempt to sustain hegemonic masculinity.

While crews adopt and mimic this hyper-masculine and phallic cyborgian aesthetic, I contend that the internalization required in their performances, particularly in their use of animation techniques, problematises this reading of absolute brute force, hypermasculinity and patriarchal dominance through the representation of the two sex model. The internal 'machinery' of the body: the complex electronic circuitry of the nervous system and the explosiveness of the fast-twitch muscles is concealed by flesh and clothing. Similar to a digital computer, this inner circuitry cannot be externally exposed. The performance of micro actions, such as arm or leg 'pops', or the controlled isolation of small or complex body parts, including ribs, shoulders, and fingers, suggest a concealment and internalisation of power, rather than an
overt and aggressive display of robotic strength. These inner workings of technocorporeality instead represent the contradictory metaphor of the ‘feminized’ computer with its ‘concealed, passive, and internal workings’ (Springer, 1996, p.104). In this sense, crews performatively produce Balsamo’s (1999) boundary figure through both their externalisation and internalisation of cyborgian figures, recognising the fixed construction of masculine power and aggression, but countering this performance with the feminised internalisation of power through micro-actions. Thus, crews demonstrate the machinic power and inner circuitry of the organic form rather than a reliance on external technology to create digital manipulations of the corporeal form.

7.4 Meta-bodies

Alongside performances of techno-corporeality, crews also morph into meta-bodies throughout their performances. Here, I describe a meta-body as a mechanically and digitally enhanced lifeform created through the careful layering of several dancers within a gymnastic stunt. Each dancer within the crew becomes the building blocks of a larger structure through the careful layering, balancing and eventual abstraction of body parts. The results of these stunts are mechanical, monstrous and zoological lifeforms that transform several dancers into a single being.

In terms of the creation of machines, Back2Back’s audition creates the comedic image of one dancer riding a bicycle in their audition, using the other four dancers to create the mechanics of the bike itself. Abyss’s audition features the formation of a helicopter, with one dancer elevated above the crew and spinning in the air like a propeller. In their final in GTD series three, Antics merge to form a racing car with one dancer upside down on their head with their legs splayed to create the chassis and two dancers supporting him to form the wheels. In their audition, Diversity press an imaginary button and form a lift that slowly raises the youngest member of the group upwards as he pretends to read a magazine. In their final performance, the crew also create an airplane in flight through their spatial design, emphasized by the background digital screen effects of shooting images of light as if they are travelling at speed. Despite the emphasis on the velocity of their breaking skills, Trinity Warrior’s final performance includes the creation of a photocopier with the mechanics represented through the opening and closing of one of the dancers’ splayed legs, accompanied by a whirring machine sound effect. Cerebro’s stunt of laying down bodies in a line across the floor convulsing up in the air one after
another from stage left to stage right mirrors a piston action, and while Bionik Funk
have only two dancers, they also create a mechanical meta-body. In their 2010
audition, the two dancers join together with one dancer upside down, and then
continuously back flipping, alternating vertical positions and creating the impression
of a rotating cog across the stage (see Appx. C Fig. 23).

These meta-bodies also disrupt and distort the human form to create the illusionary
impression of ‘hypercorporealized’ and zoological lifeforms. Similar to the digitally
enhanced lifeforms witnessed in Hollywood cinema, including Godzilla (1998, 2014),
Alien (1979) and Jurassic Park (1993), crews also utilise the bodies of individual
dancers to create monstrous structures constructed of several dancers. The
mechanical, monstrous and excessive appearance of these gargantuan and
ominous figures lies in the crews’ simulation of surplus limbs and appendages, as
well as their animatronic and animalistic performance qualities (2014, p.96). In the
opening to their final performance on BGT, Diversity use fluid body waving and a
shift in group formation to smoothly morph into a three-tier robot with claw-like legs
and eight spider-like arms. Each dancer creates the legs, limbs and/or heads of the
creature/robot, accompanied by the sound of a whirling mechanical engine which
mimics the transformational sound of robots from the children’s cartoon series
turned-Hollywood blockbuster, Transformers (2007) (see Appx. C Fig. 24). The
Diversity alien form marches and strikes its arms out to the side, accompanied by
five heavy, rhythmic mechanical beats. Later on in their piece, dancers stand behind
each other with their arms overlapping the front dancer. As the soundtrack says
‘breathe’, three six-limbed aliens are revealed through claw like hand movements,
achieved through the opening and closing of each of the dancers’ arms. Peridot’s
audition also creates an excessive ‘hypercorporeal’ being. Dancers walk casually
into a horizontal line, but then wave the lower arms inwards towards a central
dancer, connecting at the elbows. Once the crew ‘plugs in’ the central dancer, the
eight-limbed waving creature leans back, and the en masse arm wave is replicated
in the central dancer’s dislocated isolation of his chest cavity (See Appx. C Fig. 25).

In another example, Antics open their audition on series three of GTD in a tight
huddle on centre stage, while the dancers’ black hoodies and black hats mask their
faces. Suddenly, ten arms appear from the black mass, waving side to side and
shooting in and out like animal spines. In the opening of their final performance in
the same year, a similar device is used where dancers stand in a vertical line with
overlapping arms and open their hands and arms inwards and outwards in a jaw like
fashion, complemented by the front dancer’s menacing expression (see Appx. C Fig. 26). They shuffle round on the spot, and after each dancer reveals themselves, the front dancer mimics breaking his own neck before they launch into their explosive Hip Hop routine. Antics also play with animalesque images in their choreography, creating the image of a snail crawling along the floor in their semi-final performance in GTD series three, and opening their series four final with the crew crawling along the stage floor like insects, captured by the overhead crane shot of the camera.

Through the manipulation of the human form and the morphing into mechanical, monstrous and animalesque beings, crews therefore appear to exceed the limitations of the corporeal form. Similar to the digital computer-generated creatures created in live-action cinema, Street dance crews create menacing and enhanced lifeforms through their embodied live-action performances. This is achieved, however, without the aid of scaled down models, computer scanning, 3D modelling, key frame animation, or animatronics. Similar to the cinematic process of creating compelling digital beings through animation, crews ‘remEDIATE embodied, live-action performances into persuasively vital digital beings’, but achieve this through excessive embodiment rather than through digital intervention (Whissel, 2014, p.91). In her study of digitally enhanced lifeforms in cinema, Whissel highlights the multiple dictionary definitions of the use of the term ‘vital’, which she highlights as ‘associated with organic life and death as well as the optimal functioning of technology’ (p.93). She describes on screen digitally-enhanced creatures as holding ‘excessive… vitality’ due to their surplus bodily excess and the vital spark or flame that brings them to life (p.92). While already alive, crews exceed their humanity and their human form by reimagining this vitality through the careful composition of several bodies to create a hyper-body. The spectatorial fascination of these figures therefore lies in their ability to exceed pedestrian movement and combine human performance with digital and mechanized movement qualities, blurring the line between the ‘animate and inanimate, organic and inorganic, material and code’ (p.92).

7.5 Digital narratives

The performance of techno-corporeality is also enhanced by the creation of digital worlds in the choreography and the surrounding production effects that frame and present the Street dance crew performance. Featherstone and Burrows posit that
the redefinition of the material body enables the possibility to reimagine the body simulated in 'new information-generated environments' (1995, p.2). The term 'cyberspace' suggests a new world where the concept of body can transcend beyond traditional conceptions of the natural body. In particular, the creation of cybernetic environments is achieved in crew performances through narrative, lighting, production techniques and camera work.

Bionik Funk utilise a digital thematic content in their audition for BGT in 2011. Their duet begins with a mimed performance of the two dancers playing a video game. The players are sucked into the game and become the digital avatars of Mario and Luigi, two famous Nintendo video game characters recognisable through their distinctive green and red costuming. The duet uses a fusion of angled arm choreography, body popping and waving to reference their transformation into the digital avatars. The duet recreates two-dimensional images of the Mario brother’s movements, such as diving through obstacles with one dancer creating the tunnels and barriers with his arms. As one dancer scurries across the stage on his hands, the other dancer presses pause and the dancer holds a baby freeze. The dancer holds the power move until a tinny sound clip indicates the releasing of the ‘pause’ and signals that the game can continue. As the dancers move through the game, they recreate the entertaining visual image of Mario swimming, with Luigi performing a series of worms: an iconic breaking power floor move creating the peeling liquid effect of the body from toe to head to symbolise water. At the same time, the character of Mario slides along the floor next to him while performing a swimming back stroke.

In Abyss’s semi-final performance on GTD, the camera slowly zooms out from a darkened close-up shot of a single dancer to reveal the sequential splitting and multiplication of the body into a two-tier flat diamond, a fragmented hexagon, and eventually, the creation of a twelve piece robotic machine. The end pose presents twisted branch-like limbs that spread through the vertical and horizontal axis (see Appx. C Fig. 27). Crew members wear black suits with neon strips that place emphasis on bodily movement rather than on facial expression or attitude. This choreography is set in a wider production that incorporates strobe lighting, dimly lit side lighting, lasers and a back screen projection of advancing neon pyramids. During a synchronised back flip, four CO2 canons shoot vertical jets of steam into the air, while the crew’s final ‘suicide’ jump is performed in time with a white flash of lighting across the stage and the electronic crash of the soundtrack.
This creation of an otherworldly digital environment resonates with the virtual design of *Tron Legacy* (2010), the cinematic sequel to Disney’s 1982 film *Tron*, where a computer hacker is pulled into a digital domain called ‘The Grid’. In the case of Abyss’s performance, the special effects simulate the cold digital atmosphere of a computer programme, while the dim lighting creates ghostly silhouettes of the dancers. Peridot also replicates this virtual environment through stage mediations, with dry ice covering the floor and flashes of strobe lighting as they perform their robotics routine in unison. They perform in front of a background video projection of a green and dimly lit tunnel, while CO2 jet cannons and pyrotechnic effects punctuate moments of climax. A3 also create a dramatic opening to their semi-final performance by appearing in darkness on dimly lit platforms with images of lightning flashing behind them, creating an eerie and other-worldly effect (see Appx. C Fig. 28).

Uniform costumes are also an important element in constructing futuristic machines through the masking of ‘human’ features. In Abyss’s semi-final performance, the use of hazed and dipped lighting creates a silhouette effect of the dancers’ faces, removing all expression and eye contact from the performance. Diversity and Bionik Funk use hats, hoods and caps to shield the eyes, while Liquid Metallic and Peridot wear terminator-style dark glasses to once again remove the gaze and present Thompson’s (1966) contrast of a hot body and a cool face. In Static Movement’s trio audition, Kimberley Wyatt highlights the crews’ ‘crazy sci-fi glasses’ and exclaims that their deadpan expression ‘never faulted’ throughout the whole dance (2012). Exposed flesh is masked by jackets, tracksuit bottoms and boiler suits while white and UV detail on costumes and gloves draws attention to the sharp lines, enhancing the robotic and sharp aesthetic of their performance quality. These design choices provide uniformity for the crew unit, while at the same time enhancing the visual impression of the shift from the organic to the machine.

Similar to Burrill’s ‘aesthetics of excess’ (see Ch.3.6), crews allow greater possibilities for the body to transcend beyond the material form by creating technologically inspired environments and narratives (2014, p.246). Similarly, Featherstone and Burrows (1995) state that the creation of ‘new information-generated environments’ allows wider possibilities for the synthesis between the body and technology (p.2). Returning the concepts of virtuosity, Brandstetter (2007) maintains that the prevalence of virtuosic performances in the late 1800s revealed the Victorian body grappling with the modern mechanised age through
performances of extreme labour. In her forthcoming book chapter on dance in technology television advertisements, Borelli also argues that the dancing body acts as ‘an interlocutor of the negotiations bodies must endure in order to make sense of the increasingly technologically stratified (economically, geographically) world’ (in press, p.9). I therefore argue that crew performances physically negotiate and navigate the contemporary digital age and the situation of the corporeal being within these environments through their continual staging of techno-corporeal performances in digitally themed futuristic environments.

7.6 Post-production edit

As demonstrated in the above analysis, crews in the live context of the television talent show are not engineered or manipulated through post-production digital effects. While the television production re-presents crew bodies through the change in camera angles, camera movements and editing between frames, performances of the surplus are primarily achieved through the strength, speed, effort and training of the crew. The pre-recorded VT segments of the crews, however, enable the television production to digitally manipulate these bodies in order to visually heighten the performances of crews and the narrated drama of the competition. These pre-performance segments squeeze hours of raw footage of interviews, previous performances and judges’ comments into thirty second sequences in order to quickly grab the viewer’s distracted gaze in a short space of allotted time (see Ch.3.6).

Prior to Flawless’s semi-final performance, the introductory VT segment features short bursts of the most explosive moments of their audition routine. These include a brief shot of a symmetrical group formation, a dancer running over the backs of the other crew members and an aerial windmill stunt. For Diversity, the recap of their audition performance in the VT segment before their semi-final condenses the performance into twelve seconds of footage. Viewers witness sped up athletic stunts, explosive moments of unison, reactions of the judges through medium close-up shots, and freeze frames of the group hugging at their reaction to making it through to the semi-final. Ruff Diamond’s VT segment before their final performance on GTD series three is introduced by rapid frames bombarding the viewer in pre-recorded aerial corkscrews, split leaps, falls and the final image of the crew with fists in the air as the words ‘RUFF DIAMOND’ shoot out from the screen. In terms of the re-presentation of these dancing bodies, producers edit together high-affect
moments or ‘jolts’, as described by McMains, of previous crew performances, which include high kicks, spins, flips and a series of aerial stunts (2010, p.263). The televised competition then further enhances this footage through post-production digital editing. Techniques include slow motion, freeze frames, rapid overlaying of footage, high colour saturation and digitally inserted crew names that appear to shoot out of the screen. In particular, GTD’s time freeze technology, introduced in 2013, involves a hi-tech camera technique that captures spins, flips and twists in 360-degree motion, creating the ‘so-called Matrix effect’ (Fletcher, 2013). These camera shots not only suspend the dancer, but reveal a 360 degree perspective of the stunt. This creates a 3D effect for the home viewer bringing them closer to the action, but also replicates the cinematographic techniques usually associated with high budget Hollywood ‘spectacular’ action films (see Chapter Five). These effects are also accompanied by dramatic orchestral soundtrack and sound bites from crews and judges to further amplify the televisual experience.

Importantly, these VT segments further heighten the implausibility of the crews’ performances by juxtaposing the crews’ recreation of a mechanical and digital aesthetic against constructed performances of ordinariness. As discussed in Ch. 2.5, the competitive model of the televised talent show purposefully portrays popular dance as a means of transformation from the ‘ordinary’, increasing the contestants’ opportunities for fame and increased economic worth. As highlighted by Boyd’s analysis of SYTYCD, ‘the ordinariness of the extraordinary performer is emphasised through out-of-studio and backstage camera shots, the close ‘capturing’ of seemingly private moments of frustration, expectation, insecurity, joy, and failure through the fetishization of emotion’ (2012, p.264). This observation suggests that through personal accounts and the selling of the self, references to the contestants’ home life and their economic and cultural backgrounds situate the reality contestant as ‘ordinary’ ready for them to make the transition to the ‘better’ life of celebrity.

In both BGT and GTD, the productions present crew members discussing their competition experience in a stationary interview or through the situation of the crew in everyday geographical environments, such as in small homes, street corners or empty car parks. Crews describe their experiences using personal rhetoric and colloquial language and the everyday location of the interviews continues the class based construction of the notion of ‘ordinary’. These pre-recorded interviews, however, are interwoven with the rapidly edited clips of digitally enhanced virtuosic stunts. Prior to The A Team’s semi-final performance, the VT segment is tightly
edited so that images rapidly change from frame to frame. Initially, the camera captures A Team’s aerial stunts in a studio, sped up and blurred through video editing (see Appx. C Fig. 29). The frame then cuts to their ‘superhero’ emblem appearing on screen in time with the dramatic orchestral soundtrack, with the group in the background performing slow motion windmills and backflips (see Ch. 6.5). This influx of digitally enhanced images then cuts to a sideways close-up shot of two stationary A Team dancers. When asked how they feel about their semi-final performance, they portray their nervousness through their responses and their facial expressions. Such ‘human’ response, achieved through the close-up positioning of the camera, jars against the indestructible and machinic images of the crew witnessed seconds earlier. While ‘ordinariness’ is conveyed through the crew’s accent, status and content of their interviews, the viewer is continuously reminded of the extraordinariness of their physical ability and their potential to transition to a new and improved self through their dancing talent.

In another example, the VT segment before the Kombat Breakers’ semi-final performance creates a punctuated rhythm of interview soundbites and flashes of athleticism. Their stationary interviews create the story arc of the crew originating from a background of economic deprivation. This narrative is interspersed with breaking power moves accompanied by a zooming sound effect. The phrase ‘this is the biggest thing that has ever happened to us’ is spliced and cut next to a sped up aerial backflip (2008). Another dancer describes their aspirations through the edited interview and performance footage as follows: ‘we wouldn’t usually get a chance like this’ (subliminal image of a backflip and zooming sound effect), ‘to let it slip an’ let it go’, (an image of a one handed freeze), ‘it would just be devastating’, (ending slow motion zoom out of the crew) (2008). This careful post-production editing contrasts rhetorics of ordinary human struggle, as presented by the reality television competition, against the extraordinary, machinic and superhuman performances of these techno-corporeal bodies of excess.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the construction of spectacle through the relationship between technology and the body. I examined several examples of where bodies surpassed the boundaries of the human form by means of the synthesis between technology and the body. Through performances of techno-corporeality, the creation of meta-bodies, the narratives of technological intervention and the enhanced post-
production edit, crews constructed the aesthetic properties of spectacle through the removal of the human and the creation of futuristic cyborgian beings that blur the boundaries between the organic and the mechanic/digital. In addition, an analysis of the post-production edit revealed the juxtaposition between the ordinariness of the performers and their superhuman techno-corporeality. Rather than merely surface level decoration, however, these spectacles of the human/machine reveal a negotiation of the corporeal form within global technocapitalist culture and a reclaiming of the future through the boundary figure of the cyborg. In the final analysis chapter I will build upon the preceding analysis chapters and examine the male Street dance crew performance within the wider context of the media spectacle of the television talent show.


ii The Cartesian split is developed from the work of René Descartes and describes a dualism between the mind and the body (Holland, 1995).

iii Rennie Harris defines popping as a dance style that creates illusion. ‘Its objective is to create the illusion that makes you think that you’re doing something that you’re not. And in order to create that illusion, there’s a way you have to think, you know what I mean? Movement is just the manifestation of sound’ (Harris in Chang, 2006, p.67)

iv Operating as both an artistic expression and a framework for critical theory, AfroFuturism, according to Womack, ‘combines elements of science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity, and magic realism with non-western beliefs’ (Womack, 2013, p.9).

v Gabriela Jiménez (2011) additionally aligns the 1980s hip-hop genre, electro-hop, with the AfroFuturist continuum due to the artists’ sonic response to alienation and misrepresentation.

vi In twenty-first century music, popular global Black artists, such as Will I Am, Nicky Minaj and Beyoncé, also incorporate AfroFuturism, cyber culture, and robot/aesthetics as well as a healthy dose of Hollywood sci-fi movies into their music videos (Womack, 2013, p.146).
Chapter Eight: Media spectacle and the male Street dance crew

8.1 Introduction

Building upon my analysis of the construction and performance of the aesthetic properties of spectacle in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, I will now expand my focus to critically examine the male Street dance crew performance in the wider context of the media spectacle of the television talent show. As established in Chapter Four, spectacle does not just refer to the visual properties of an image but also describes an ideological condition of a technocapitalist society overloaded with spectacular images of commerce. In line with theories derived from Marxism, the process of commodification has the potential to displace and erase the social relations and labour conditions involved in the original products creation. Applying this concept to the commodification of consumer capitalism, Debord (1967) maintains that social relations have been completely replaced with images. In his ‘Society of the Spectacle’ and Baudrillard’s (1981, ed.1984) ‘Simulacra and simulation’, reality is substituted with images of artifice. Spectacle therefore refers to a process of mirroring whereby the real is displaced for mimetic and reproducible simulations. In relation to the dancing body, the placement of popular dance styles within a commercial format has the potential to transform live moving bodies into consumable products. In the commodification of the dancing body there lies the possibility of masking and erasing the labour systems, identities and the body itself as a consequence of the process of fetishisation. In line with my critique of Debord’s, Baudrillard’s and Kellner’s theories, however, the notion of resistance against the omnipotent media machine is unacknowledged by these authors.

This chapter will therefore commence by investigating the extent to which crews are commodified through their performances of the surplus and their placement in the talent show competition. I will then enquire into the consequence of this commodification in relation to the capitalist mode of separation. The following analysis will then examine the extent to which crews negotiate their potential reduction to empty spectacle through their choreography and their presentation in the overall competition production.
8.2 The commodification of the crew

As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, Scott notes that the popular dancing body in commercially-led industries is ‘reduced to its most tantalizing parts for the maximum effect in a minimum amount of time and space’ (2001, p.113). In the case of male Street dance crew choreography, these ‘tantalizing parts’ include the performance of high risk gymnastic stunts, the ability to perform in precise unison, the fusion of several styles of Hip Hop dance and the ability to rapidly speed up and slow down the choreography. The two and half minute structure determined by the competition condenses the choreography to its high-affect elements, while the pre-recorded VT segments further compress the choreography into bite-sized and easily consumable images of corporeal flares. As described in Chapter Five, the intertextual referencing of the cinematic special effect in particular places emphasis on the explosive visual properties of the choreography, heightened further by the television edit.

The performance of a spectacular aesthetic is therefore vital in attracting the potentially distracted gaze of the television viewer. Crew choreography must register in the diluted experience of the television apparatus and attract the attention of the spectator who is overwhelmed by mediated images on digital screens. Importantly for their success in the talent show competition, this hypervisible aesthetic, which I argue is achieved through performances of the surplus, enables remote spectators to buy into these performances through telephone, text and web voting. After judges have delivered their feedback to the crews in the semi-final and final performances, digital telephone numbers appear on screen next to the crews, positioning their artistic performance as a product that can be bought into in order to retain the crew in the competition journey. The dancers enhance these sales pitches in order to increase their appeal with the home voter. Crews such as Flawless, Diversity and the Kombat Breakers perform choreographed unison sequences of telephone gestures with their hands, nodding and smiling directly into the camera lens as the numbers and terms and conditions of the competition are read out by the television hosts.

Alongside the choreographic content, the television production purposely presents these performances as products that can be purchased through interactive voting. The inclusion of the crews within digital title sequences, their interviews with the judges, the pre-recorded VT segments, the backstage interviews with hosts and
shots of enthusiastic studio/theatre audience reactions interspersed within the choreography are key in constructing celebrity personas. As discussed in the early work of Dyer (1986) and in Chris Rojek’s *Celebrity* (2001), the status of the celebrity is a cultural fabrication that must be ‘ascribed, achieved and attributed’ (Rojek, 2001, p.17). Barry King (2010) notes that in contemporary media culture the rise to stardom relies upon extensive media visibility. This visibility is vital in attracting branding opportunities. The individual’s artistic talent, or, as King describes it, ‘the original sphere of endeavour’, is only one element that features in the overall marketability of the television talent show celebrity (p.9). Competitors have the potential of exposure to agents, sponsors and the possibility of future performance and teaching work. King recognises that success in the reality television process relies on a ‘passionate expression of selfhood as commerce’: an economic-exchange whereby the self becomes product and is shaped and sold to the market (p.7). King therefore highlights the possibility of carving a career from reality television programmes through the ‘commodification of personality’ where an individual’s values and character are sold onto the public (2010, p.10).

While this packaging and selling of personality is more apparent in reality television game shows such as *Big Brother or I’m a Celebrity… Get Me Out of Here!* (2002-current), crews’ responses and reactions in backstage interviews, pre-recorded segments and conversations with the judges are measured and judged by the television audience alongside their choreographic ability. As discussed in Chapter Four, many dancers who gain prominence in televised talent show competitions receive free products to wear during filming, and are offered work in advertising campaigns, films, cruise ships, musicals and other televised talent show competitions. As a result of their win on ITV1’s *BGT* in 2009, Diversity’s choreographer and dancer, Ashley Banjo, and the crew as a whole, signed an exclusive two-year deal with Sky1 (Sky, 2013a). In addition, the crew released a DVD and embarked on an eleven date arena tour around the U.K in 2012. Tightly framed interviews with Banjo throughout the crews’ journey on the competition, as well as their interviews with the judges post-performance, allowed the television show to construct the dancer as a warm, friendly, down to earth young male who had a talent for Street dance choreography. As claimed in the work of Auslander (2008), the televisual intimacy achieved through performances of the self in close-up interviews allows the audience to access the self of the performer, despite this ‘self’ being illusionary in its mediated construction. This construction of the celebrity resulted in his rise to fame through being awarded a judging position on *GTD* and
the host of shows including Ashley Banjo's Secret Street Crew (2012-2014) and Ashley Banjo's Big Town Dance (2014). By constructing celebrity personas, crews symbolically represent the transformational journey to celebrity stardom.

As well as constructing celebrity personas through the television production, GTD and BGT also position these performances as consumable products through the numerical systems that value the Street dance crew. Immediately after A-Team’s audition performance on GTD, the judging panel finish their standing ovation, quietly sit down, and unanimously award the dancers three gold stars by pushing a button on their panel desk (see Appx. C Fig. 30). This symbolic action signifies to the dancers that they are through to the semi-finals, thus the dancers celebrate with a pre-rehearsed routine and settle to hear further explanation and evaluation from the judges regarding their performance. Prior to receiving any verbal feedback regarding the judge’s evaluation of the choreography, the dance is awarded a numerical value of three gold stars, commencing the reality competition process of the crew’s value being measured in numerical worth. These value systems include levels of applause and cheers, number of stars or crosses, numbers of social networking comments and the numerical number of telephone, text and web votes. Van den Braembussche maintains that while aesthetic value is measured in terms of taste and inspiration, economic discourses situate financial value in terms of ‘calculations, cost and benefits’ (Van den Braembussche, cited in Dodds, 2011, p.92). Dodds (2011) posits that this close relationship between popular dance and its capitalist production marks the popular as inferior in comparison with ‘high art’ practices that appear independent and free of the market. By placing the primary emphasis on the numerical value of the crew rather than highlighting the crew’s creativity or artistic expression, the aesthetic value is symbolically and consistently linked with monetary form. Thus the crew are presented as desirable and commercial products that are financially valued through the structures of the competition.

In addition, the continued intertextual references to large budget films, film characters and cinematic special effects, as discussed in the preceding chapters, not only associates these performances with the cinematic epic but also symbolically links them to the high production costs associated with such effects. Whissel states that ‘cinema’s digital turn and the rise of computer-generated imagery (CGI) are most often associated with the spectacular big-budget digital visual effects that have become a staple of the blockbuster film’ (2014, p.3). By both
choreography and television production mimicking the production effects featured in films and music videos costing millions of dollars to produce, these bodies increase their economic value through their embodied iterations of digital special effects and their increased circulation in the market. Consequently, these excessive performances operate in capitalist flows of information, as the embodiment of production effects witnessed in the Hollywood blockbuster or music video increases the financial worth of these relatively micro media spectacles.

8.3 Spectacle and the capitalist mode of separation

These examples of the commodification of the male Street dance crew raise questions regarding what is at stake as a consequence of this financial treatment and condition of the dancing body. Here, I return to Debord’s concept of the loss of the real through the spectacularisation of society as well as Kellner’s ‘media spectacles’ that place emphasis on consumption rather than the ontological experience (see Ch. 4.4 and Ch. 4.6). I propose that crews are displaced by the products and desirable attributes they represent through the choreography and their positioning as product. As discussed in Ch. 4.3, these include the tangible products of fashion brands and music as well as the intangible qualities of which they represent: youthfulness, vitality, coolness and marketable value. Crews may operate as spectacular in the visual properties of their screen dance choreography, but are at the same time reduced to empty spectacles through the fetishisation of the body as commodity. In particular, I observe three areas where this displacement occurs: the masking of labour, the simplification of complex identities and the loss of the human.

As discussed in Ch. 2.6 and Ch. 4.5, Redden (2010) and Foster (2014) draw upon the notion of labour in their writings on television talent shows, referring to the contestants’ skill levels, the labouring of the self, and the contestants ‘authentic dedication to work’ (2014, p.1). Specifically, Foster (2014) observes that the qualities traditionally associated with labour are diverse from that of the spontaneous, fun and immaterial nature of dance, and the concept of the dancing body as labour provides an insight into labour practices in the commercial market. Consequently, the labour of dance disrupts traditional Marxist theories of the separation of labour from its means of production, as popular dancing bodies operate not only as consumers of products, but also as the producers of the intangible cultural product of the dance itself through their labour power.
I observe, however, that the presentation of the crew in the television talent show erases the labour practices that are required to achieve such performances. Despite crews' laboured displays witnessed in the technical accuracy in their performances of multiple Street dance genres, in the speed of their choreography and in their precision in their synchronicity, crews contrast the effort of the dancers through their nonchalant and relaxed performance quality. During their semi-final performance on season four, Ruff Diamond halt the action of their relentless arm and footwork sequences to hold one hand on their elbow and the other on their chin, and then slowly lean and drop the top hand while gently nodding their heads in unison. This gesture is nonchalant in its articulation and portrays the crew's confidence in their own ability. In Cerebro's audition, the camera cuts into a medium close-up shot to reveal the dancers smiling and nodding despite the physical labour required to achieve their previous stunts of breakdance freezes and headstands. Before their locking routine in their BGT audition, Flawless take a pause to brush off their suits, have a look around at each other, swagger as they walk and appear laidback in their performance, contrasting against the rapid pacing, leg flicks and sharp arm locks of the next sequence.

Srinivasan's (2011) research into Indian dance raises the overlooked concept that it is the intense labour practices of dancing bodies that construct the sculpted aesthetic images, with evidence of sweat, labour and effort disguised through choreographed facial expressions and extreme bodily control. While Marxists consider the body as producing material products of sweat and labour, Srinivasan highlights that dance scholars move beyond this analysis by considering the body as a cultural product that produces its own discourses. She states that 'in the aesthetic realm, audiences are trained not to see the labor [sic] of dance, but they are still consumers of that effort', suggesting that the performance of labour is already a visible, yet masked entity in dance practice (2011, p.12). In the male Street dance crew performance, this masking of labour occurs through the aesthetic of cool: the dancers' juxtaposition of their hot physical exertion with a cool, calm, focused and nonchalant attitude (Thompson, 1966; Gottschild, 1998, 2002; hooks, 2004). Cool, as a visual aesthetic in the performances of male Street dance crews, is constructed through the effortlessness in the dancers' movement, their laidback attitude and their emphasis on style. By removing evidence of effort and labour, the aesthetic of cool operates as a reproducible commodity that consumers buy into through the voting system. These performances therefore mask the sheer labour
and effort required to produce such athletic, virtuosic, and thus excessive performances.

The presentation of the crews in the glossy production of the television show additionally erases these performances of the surplus from their labour practices and the conditions of production. Ruff Diamond’s audition in season four of GTD required the crew to emulate their previous success in series three of the competition, emphasised by their t-shirts emblazoned with the text ‘Guess Who’s Back’. Two dancers begin by performing identical corkscrews at the front stage, accented by the simultaneous booming sound effect in the accompaniment. The camera quickly cuts to footage of Ashley Banjo and Kimberley Wyatt screaming in disbelief and Aston Merrygold jumping up from his chair and running around as a result of his astonishment at the identical feat. The edit cuts to the crew pacing their arms in a locking routine, while two dancers break away from the group and execute a round off into a back flip, accompanied and accented by the appropriately themed Working day and night (1979) by Michael Jackson. The locking sequence continues with the group executing sharp locks, points, and falls to the knees, with each member weaving in and out to form new group space formations. The energy and effort of the sequence is further heightened by a mixture of fast changing camera angle edits, panning motions working against the movement of the dancers and clips of the judges clapping and nodding, acting as the only separation between the high hitting energy of the locking sequence and the complex footwork, floor work and power moves of the proceeding breakdance section. As the dance ends, the group quickly stand in unison and one dancer backflips up from the floor to face the judges. This relentless physical display of hard work and effort is situated against the judges’ excessive reactions which highlights their shock and amazement at the labour they are witnessing.

While the choreography and facial expressions of the crews mask the power and strength required of the dancers, their use of tight unison, symmetry and athleticism can only be achieved through extensive labouring. In the example of Ruff Diamond, this relentless display of hard work and effort is only achieved through intense rehearsal and training. As discussed in Chapter Four, the television talent show worker invests surplus-labour through long hours of rehearsal and low return on investment for the small possibility of a high return in the neoliberal format of the competition. This surplus labour extends into the labouring of ‘the self’ through the selling of their personalities in interviews and VT segments, whereby participants
are not only judged on their 'demonstrations of craft', but also on the selling of persona (Redden, 2010, p.134).

Unlike the reality shows of SYTYCD and Strictly Come Dancing, however, BGT and GTD do not situate pre-recorded VT segments in the locations of dance studio rehearsals. These film locations instead focus around the dancers’ homes, their towns and a variety of urban city environments. The production records interviews with the dancers either backstage while they wait for their turn in front of the judges, or alternatively in the backdrop of the television studio, but rarely in a rehearsal environment. Prior to their audition, The A-Team describe how they wish to make 'magic on stage', referring to the intangible but necessary quality required in these performances. Any reference to the mechanics, time and effort required to create these visually excessive performances, however, is cut from the final edit of the production. This pre-production editing choice removes the means of production from the creation of the glossy and refined finished and polished choreographies presented before judging panel, studio audience and home television viewer. Despite the hypervisibility achieved through the crews’ choreography, its staging in the prime time media spectacle of the television production therefore erases the labour practices that operate behind the creation of this artistic work. Once again, the television talent show capitalises on the excess labour of localized willing participants in order to increase the profits of the production, and additionally erases these labour conditions from the finished product.

The second displacement to occur through the positioning the crew as images reduced to spectacle is the simplification of complex identities. As established in Chapter Six, crews perform excessive representations of identity in their performance of the superhero, the cartoon character and the Black pop icon. Crews go beyond their naturalistic human qualities and instead intertextually reference exaggerated characteristics popular in Western media. These performances register the male Street dance crew as visible in the layered media spectacle of the television talent show while at the same time avoiding reductive depictions of Black male ‘hypervisibility’.

While these caricatures move away from the reductive and problematic stereotype of the urban Black male and provide new possibilities through the exceeding of masculine and racialised stereotypes, they at the same time produce and circulate simplified and easily consumable images of complex gendered and racialised
identities. Through the embodiment of popular and easily identifiable cultural icons, such as the superhero or the cartoon character, crews hold cross-cultural appeal in the mediated competition by performing safe and family-friendly images that can be bought into through the processes of consumption in the talent show competition. In order to operate in the spectacle of the production, the performance of identity is reduced to the presentation of marketable commodities that hold cultural capital. Through the fetishisation and objectification of the Black male figure, complex histories and cultural backgrounds are masked and replaced with excessive exaggerations of gendered and masculinised identities.

The surrounding media production also continues to recirculate and thus reaffirm stereotypical images of the urban Black male. In the VT segments of the crews that are broadcast prior to their competition performances, the production situates the crews in ‘urban’ environments in order to associate the ‘Black’ coded dancing body with ‘the streets’: the mediated stereotype of the authentic origins of hip-hop cultural styles. Flawless are filmed in their imagined home setting, walking around the streets of London in their everyday clothes. This film location geographically situates the crew, reinforced by the inclusion of clips of family and friends in the audience cheering the crew, holding up banners and signs and wearing homemade t-shirts of support. The A Team are depicted rehearsing their choreography outside a block of flats in a concrete open space, suggesting to the viewer that this is where their choreography is created rather than in the dance studio. Diversity are filmed walking over a bridge, looking out at the view: a visual metaphor of their dreaming of a better life. In addition, Abyss walk over a city zebra crossing, while two of their dancers perform hand stands and front flips, and Ruff Diamond are filmed performing gymnastic stunts in a disused factory car park.

In the case of BGT and GTD, crews are therefore geographically situated in false urban environments in order to maintain the illusive stereotypical markers or race and class, with a particular emphasis on the reproduction of ‘blackness’. This production choice also links them with constructed notions of ‘authenticity’ in their performances of Black cultural expressions. As a result of mass movement to cities and the underdevelopment of urban centres, Smith states that ‘the idea of the urban has become virtually synonymous with notions of blackness’ (1997, pp.2-3). Fleetwood describes how in Hip Hop culture, it is ‘the body of the young black male who stands in for ‘the urban real’’, suggesting the close link between the construction of blackness, the vernacular and urban origins of the subculture, and
notions of authenticity in Hip Hop (2011, p.152). Leonard also states that ‘the
central focus on inner-city play, in video games, on ESPN, and in popular culture,
leaves the impression that rather than working, rectifying social problems, and
improving the community’s infrastructure, black males are too busy playing’ (2005,
p.333). The link with urban spaces and areas of degeneration reaffirms and
circulates the image of the Black lazy male with athletic superiority, who in the case
of the television talent show would rather be dancing than working. As stated by
Weisbrod, this assumed lack of formal experience and the link between Hip Hop
and the urban ‘disempowers them from potential transgression’ in the competition,
and situates them as racially marked consumable bodies (2014, p.328).

The positioning of the Street dance crew as a techno-corporeal lifeform, as
established in Chapter Seven, also raises issues regarding the displacement of the
material body in consumer society. Crews juxtapose the spirited and explosive
energy of their choreography with the mechanisation and digitisation of the body,
removing the ‘vital’ signs of life and reducing the body to robotic, mechanical, and
monstrous excessive forms. While the reduction of the body to machine is
spectacular in its creation of illusion, this loss of the human at the same time reflects
the wider displacement of the material body in the global technocapitalist
contemporary moment and the alienation of the self through the privatisation of
technology. In her analysis of digitally manipulated dancers, Dodds comments that
the ‘negation and dismissal of the material body is a somewhat alarming concept for
the dancing body’, as the replacing of the material body to that of ‘a vessel designed
to mediate movement’ devalues the agency and intellectual capabilities of the
dancer (2004, p.162). The performance of the cyborg, therefore, represents a
dichotomy between the representation of superior intellect, and the eradication of
humanity in ‘the dawn of a post human, post-enlightenment age’ (Springer, 1996,
p.19). Crews have to transcend beyond the human in order to be seen in the visual
spectacle of the competition. These performances of the surplus, however, result in
the loss of the human in the global dissemination of the televised body, situated in
the temporally evasive media spectacle of event TV.

This dismissal of the material body to the cyborg is reflective of the digitalisation of
contemporary society: the shrinking and privatisation of social life through television,
video, social networking, consumerism and interactive online communities
(Featherstone and Burrows, 1995). Street dance crews not only perform the surplus
as a consequence of the placement in the media spectacle of the television talent
show, but at the same time operate ‘as’ surplus in the wider structure of the television programme, particularly through the highly labored, yet highly precarious situation in the neoliberal format of the competition. It is the aesthetic of ‘going beyond’ the real: the surpassing of the limitations of the body, the camera lens and the limitations of the competition structure, that exemplifies the commodity fetishisation and the replacement of social relations with transactions as argued in Debord’s (1967) ‘The society of the spectacle’. Returning to Kellner’s arguments on media spectacle, the actual media event is lost and erased in the sea of spectacular images that are broadcast and circulated globally through the extensive press, media and social networking coverage (see Ch.4.6). Kershaw (2003) argues that ‘the magnitudes of power at play in spectacle tend to expel the merely human, to objectify it, to replace it with emblems, ciphers, symbols, and other types of abstraction’ (p.593). The paradox in this abstraction lies in the fact that media technology both ‘shrinks the human to nothing - mere digital information’, while at the same time dispersing the human on a global scale (p.606). The continuous replication of the human body through advertising, television and film has therefore rendered the actual body obsolete from reality, thus masking the human through the capitalist mode of separation (Springer, 1996).

8.4 The negotiation of spectacle

From the above analysis, it can be argued that while crews register as hypervisible and excessive through their choreography, these dancing bodes are reduced to spectacular commodities through their positioning in the commercial format of television. Street dance crews must operate in the constraints of the commercial competition and, paradoxically, be reduced to hypervisible commodities in order for themselves to achieve the ‘desired objects’ of the competition (McMains, 2010). As stated in Chapter Three, however, both Debord (1967) and Kellner (2003) present a totalitarian perspective regarding the reduction of social relations to images in mediated environments. They allow no agency for the performers to illustrate the reality of their experience in the media spectacle of the television production. As a result of my analysis, I instead argue that crews are not completely reduced to simulated spectacle, but instead negotiate their position as commodity in their choreography and in their interviews featured on the television talent show.

In term of the masking of labour and effort within crew performances, the televised representation of the male Street dance crew positions the crew as commodity and
in turn displaces the labour conditions that were necessary to create the choreographies (see Ch. 8.3). Furthermore, the laid back attitude and performance style of Hip Hop dance masks the appearance of labour and places emphasis on the final glossy product. As noted by Foster (2014), however, dance complicates the capitalist separation of production from product, as dancing bodies are in fact both the product and means of production. Consequently, the labour of the dancing body is always present regardless of its commodification. Crews in the reality television competition do not merely labour the dancing body, but create surplus-labour by creating illusionary images that transcend the capabilities of the organic form. In terms of the construction of spectacle through the intertextual reference to the cinematic special effect, the dancer's labour is intrinsic to the production of these embodied iterations of verticality, speed, mass groupings and fractured edits. What makes these performances spectacular, however, is that dancers achieve these feats without the aid of CGI enhancements. In addition, while crew performances offer convincing portrayals of techno-corporeal lifeforms, these performances arise from corporeal control, rehearsal and refinement of technique rather than digital intervention. Unlike the cinematic Street dance dancing body that spins in slow motion in mid-air and demonstrates enhanced power and speed through post-production editing, as witnessed in the Step Up series and StreetDance 3D, the small scale and low cost television talent show production can only digitally manipulate the moving body in VT footage and in some pre-recorded footage. Camera angles and movements enhance the depth, verticality and kinaesthesia of the crew performances in their choreographies, but it is the labour of the bodies themselves that create special effects and cyborgian life-forms through the multiple techniques of Street dance forms and the illusionary animation techniques (see Ch. 7.3).

Through the transcendent possibilities of virtuosic ability, these labouring bodies therefore achieve the same feats as CGI enhanced cinematic bodies but without the aid of digital manipulation. Dancers make visible their physical labour through the intertextual layering of special effects, with the aim of reducing the spectator to a state of ‘dys-appearance’ as a consequence of these corporeal feats (Williams, 1998, p.61). The aesthetic properties of spectacle therefore lie in the spectator’s affinity with bodies that can surpass the limitations of the human form, thus placing the dancer’s ‘human’ labour at the forefront of the performance. This surplus-labour is necessary in the precarious conditions of the neoliberal format of the talent show competition and reflects the uneven distribution of surplus-value from these
television productions. Dancers therefore not only labour in the production of the choreography and the performance of the self, but labour in excess of the boundaries of the competition through their embodied referencing to digital special effects, popular cultural references and cyborgian lifeforms.

As well the performance of surplus-labour in their choreographies, crews also emphasise this excess labour in their interviews. In particular, the testimonials of the groups in pre-recorded VT segments and post-performance interviews with the judges and hosts that place emphasis on the extra quantity of labour that is needed to produce such performances. While popular dance in cinematic and music video formats provide no on-screen opportunity for dancers to speak back to their performances and contextualize notions of labour and effort, the television talent show enables space for dialogue through interviews with hosts, judges and directly to the camera lens, falling in line with the reality television industry standard of the labouring of the self through the selling of personality. While these interview responses are heavily governed by the television production, with the post-production edit carefully shaping the images of reality television contestants, the talent show worker has the opportunity to present their work through the labouring of the self.

Before their audition, Flawless explain to the judges that they ‘rehearse every day, even Valentine’s day’, provoking laughter and nods amongst the other crew members (2009). After their semi-final performance, the crew reiterate that they have ‘been working every day, just, blood, sweat and tears, putting everything we’ve got into it’, while after the final performance, they expand on this reference to intense labour, stating they have had a ‘really really really tough time, we’ve been rehearsing really hard, since after twelve last night, we was just really, been putting in all of our work’ (2009). Parallel breathlessly explain how they ‘pushed themselves so hard’ (2010) after their semi-final performance, while A Team state that ‘we just felt like all our work had paid off’ as a result of getting into the final (2012). These rhetoric’s of labor continue throughout all crew commentary, with each group attempting to distance themselves from images of idleness and to stress the hard work and effort required to produce such spectacular performances.

While Foster (2014) defines commercial dance workers as ‘industrial bodies’ who retain no authority in the media format, I instead argue that it is through the mediated conversation on the television talent show that allows a negotiation of
spectacle rather than a complete reduction to an empty image. While it can be argued that these rhetorics of labour reaffirm capitalist ideology through the programmes’ authentic dedication to work and the marketing of labour as a positive experience (Foster, 2014), crews are not simply reduced to images but situate their labour in the post-Fordist existence of the creative industries.iii

Returning to discussions of identity, the enactment of exaggerated personas drawn from popular culture by the crews presents an alternative to the hypermasculine Black male stereotype so often circulated and reproduced in the media (see Ch. 6.3). These identities, however, continue to simplify complex masculine and racialised identities in order to operate as product within the commercial market of reality television (see Ch. 8.3). In addition, the construct of the urban Black male is still reproduced in the wider format of the television production. In terms of the negotiation of spectacle, I observe that it is the presentation of a collective identity of the crew that challenges their complete reduction to commodified spectacle. The use of multiple dancers, with categories ranging from duets, groups, crews and posses, are central to a more complex analysis of collective masculine identity in these televised formats, especially when situated against discourses surrounding Hip Hop and gang culture.

Issues of identity in vernacular Hip Hop dance practice have traditionally been explored in academic literature as a solo activity operating in the group spatial construction of the cypher (Banes, 1984; Rose, 1994; Hazzard-Gordon, 1996; DeFrantz, 2004). Hip Hop and funk dance styles historically operate, however, in a group or crew formations. These groupings include the Lockers and the Electric Boogaloos performing on Soul Train in the early 1970s, the competitive b-boy crews such as the Rock Steady Crew and the New York City Breakers, and the apex triangle formations of Michael Jackson and Janet Jacksons' background dancers (Lockerlegends, 2011). In her study of the film Save The Last Dance (2001), Arzumanova describes Hip Hop dance crews as ‘the closest image of coalition politics, of collective mobilization and group identity enactment (2014, p.179). As Rose states, ‘identity in hip-hop is deeply rooted in the specific, the local experience, and one’s attachment to and status in a local group or family. These crews are new kinds of families forged with inter cultural bonds that, like the social formation of gangs, provide insulation and support’ (p.34) (Rose in Recollet, 2014, p.422). These group formations carve out opportunities for inclusion for youth in
urban communities and provide a strong support network, providing ‘physical and ideological spaces for the transcendence of struggle’ (p.422).

This emphasis on the collective and the cooperative is particularly apparent through the shared labour of the performance, with each member contributing to the overall choreographic effect. In breakdance crew Trinity Warrior’s audition, individual dancers take it in turns to showcase their athletic abilities. This allows other dancers in the group to recover, frame other dancers, or transition into a space to be ready to perform their own signature breakdance phrase. Two dancers from the eleven man group begin the audition with physically challenging gymnastic back flips, but then remain stationary on their hands and knees for ten seconds allowing two other smaller dancers to backflip off their backs. They stand up and fold their arms in a stationary position, framing the corkscrew and backspin of the young dancer centre stage, and the camera captures their legs moving out of shot. The quick edit between a close-up shot, a wide lens group shot and a panning overhead shot, however, loses sight of the dancers and shifts the attention to the virtuosic abilities of other individuals. This includes one dancer who weaves through the held legs of another dancer and who then bursts into a vertical hand spin. The two supporting dancers direct the gaze of the viewer towards the central action through their complementary stationary poses. While their levels of effort are diverse from those of the younger dancers who perform the virtuosic solos of repetitive breakdance windmills and breakdance power moves, these crew members are still vital in the overall construction of the aesthetic properties of spectacle. The rapid cutting between camera angles and a focus on the most labouring dancers in the edit, however, creates the impression of the whole group constantly labouring through their performance.

In her upcoming publication on dance in technology advertisements, Borelli states that ‘the collective action of dancing together creates new communities that negotiate different ways of being autonomous in capitalism’ forging a ‘politics of togetherness’ (in press, p.7). Like cogs in a machine, each crew member is vital in creating the overall choreographic effect. Similar to the screen dance spectacles of Busby Berkeley, crew choreographies ‘neutralize the value of the individual, emphasising instead the importance of the group’ (Rosenberg, 2012, p.48). Through rehearsal, repetition and improvement, dancers achieve a collective synchronisation in the striving to construct a spectacular aesthetic. As stated in her analysis of masculinities in sporting environments, Feasey notes that ‘teams are routinely
presented as a metaphorical family who strive for a common goal over and above individual achievement’ (2008, pp.99-100). By performing complicated polyrhythmic sequences in tight unison, crew dancers not only create powerful images of bodies moving in congruence, but also present a strong community unit in the Capitalist agenda of the televised competition: a collective whose economic success is only determined by the individual performances of its counterparts.

This emphasis of the collective over the individual through the shared labour of the crew challenges and disrupts the construction of individual Capitalist gain. Osterweis describes the emphasis on the individual as the 'cult of individualism': the selling of the self in order to progress in the neoliberal capitalist structure of the competition (2014, p.71). Returning to her analysis of Black Swan, she states that 'virtuosity emerges through the trope of the soloist', as witnessed in western concert dance and the rise of the principal dancer. This virtuosity is driven by individual capitalist ambition to surpass competitors and achieve uniqueness by being positioned in front of the corps de ballet. In TV concerts and videos, the hierarchy of the celebrity positioned the front of the supporting backing dancers also reaffirms this depiction of hierarchical status, as dancers complement, mirror and mimic their movements at the front of the apex triangle or crowd scene, duplicating the physical presence of the celebrity. Harmony Bench observes that 'this choreographic convention, which is also observed in Broadway and Hollywood dance musicals, can be seen in later music videos by [Michael] Jackson and remains something of an industry standard for musicians who incorporate dance into their music videos and concert performances' (Bench, 2014, p.396). Even in cinematic portrayals of Hip Hop dance, Arzumanova states that 'dance crews exist only in the background [behind the leading actors], with uncertain and uninterrogated fates' (2014, p.178).

In the solo journeys of singing and dancing talent shows, such as the Idol franchise or SYTYCD, emphasis is placed on constructing an affective connection between dancer and viewer as a result of the programme's emphasis on voting for the 'favourite' or 'best' dancer or singer. While Ashley Banjo from Diversity has achieved celebrity status through his portrayal within BGT, the majority of Street dance crews cannot adequately convey individual personas due to the large numbers in each crew. The short length VT segments and post-performance interviews with judges only focuses on one or two key members of the crew, with questions often directed to the collective rather than individuals. The crew format in the television talent show therefore places emphasis on no one dancer, achieving the visually spectacular and
virtuosic aesthetic of the performance through collaboration, cooperation and power in numbers.

Crews also place verbal emphasis on the values of community and friendship in interviews, pre-recorded material and conversations with the judging panel. In VT segments, Flawless present themselves as a close-knit unit by describing themselves as ‘a family with a passion for dance’ (2009). After their semi-final performance, they state that they are just ‘happy to be on the stage with my brothers and my friends’ (2009). Diversity emphasise the importance of community over the desire to win, stating, ‘to be doing this with my brother and my best mates, it’s just the best feeling in the world you know’ (2009). Abyss also state in their audition that ‘we influence each other’ and reiterate in a VT segment before their semi-final performance that ‘we do everything together, play computer games together, go shopping together, make pancakes together’ (2011). Twist and Pulse explain before their audition that they have such a strong bond in their dancing because they are ‘best mates’ (2010), while Kimberley Wyatt describes Urban Jokers as ‘such an incredible team! It’s almost like one person split in half’ (2012). In the VT segment before their semi-final performance, one of the Kombat Breakers states that ‘when I was little I got into trouble a lot around the estate and stuff and I never good behave and stuff and dancing changed my life. These boys are my family, it keeps everyone out of trouble, makes us strive to be something out there that people would talk about’ (2007). When receiving their final comments from the judges, all crews hold on to each other, demonstrating a united front and conveying the message of ‘whatever happens, we’ve got each other’. This emphasis on the cooperative community unit, as well as the brotherhood of the crew over the individual, jars against the reality television neoliberal rhetoric of individual gain. Here, the experience of dancing with family and friends is depicted as holding higher value than that of the success of any particular member of the crew.

It is valuable to note, however, that this construction of a male community complicates the crews’ construction of hegemonic masculinity. Scott Kiesling’s (2005) research into homosocial desire in American college fraternities maintains that male closeness and bonding is a process that needs to be carefully negotiated due to the danger of being read as homosexual, suggesting that men can only achieve homosocial bonds through indirect means, such as competition and camaraderie. The fraternity structure functions as a safe space in which male bonds can be forged without masculinity being put into question. Kiesling (2005) identifies
that this balancing act between male bonding and maintaining a state of hegemonic masculinity is achieved indirectly through activities such as sports or the watching of sports competitions. Messner (1989) also recognises that the rule bound nature of sports offers a safe space for the articulation of masculinities due to the clarification and maintenance of clear parameters. Taking these ideas into account, crews safely portray these close male friendships by constructing bonds through the indirect device of the competition as well as through the stereotypically masculine dance genre of Hip Hop. While the act of dancing places masculinity under scrutiny, the sporting structure of the competition allows a space in which male closeness can be achieved through the construction of homosociality. This homosocial unit is therefore achieved both through the tight spatial formations and strict unison sequences of the choreography and also through the additional declarations of brotherhood in interviews and VT segments.

The continued emphasis on community and family by crews not only reflects the original ethos of Hip Hop culture in its foundational era but also jars against the media spectacle of gang culture, and in particular, the mob violence witnessed in the youth riots that occurred in London and spread across the U.K. in August 2011. The riots were the result of a police shooting of an unarmed man in North London, which sparked a chain reaction of youth attacks across the country, involving looting, vandalism and arson attacks in cities and towns across the country. The riots escalated through the use of social and global media attention, and the youth themselves were spectacularised through the use of CCTV video, mobile phone footage and news crew reporters who captured these moments of violence (Kellner, 2012). Kellner situates the spectacle in the predominantly male copycat behaviour of the glorification of thuggery and ghetto exploitation projected through the media spectacles of Hip Hop culture, which include images in fashion, magazines, music videos, rap music and real life crimes committed by its stars. This resulted in ‘a hypermasculist thug-life vision for men and propensities for violence that could explode at any time’ (2012, p.197). These spectacles of looting and destruction were a direct result of alienated working class youth, predominantly male youth of colour, who have been denied their ‘exaggerated fantasies of male power’ (p.197; BBC News, 2013). This positive rhetoric surrounding the Street dance crew, emphasized in interviews and VT segments, therefore contests the media generated images of egocentric capitalist gangster culture observed in rap music and the depictions of young males of colour in the media. It should be noted, however, that one member of Abyss dance crew was alleged to have been involved
in the riots, problematizing the positive rhetoric constructed through the simulated television spectacle (Pettifor, 2011).

In summary, while the presentation of consumable and easily identifiable identities positions the crew as commodity, crews at the same time negotiate this reduction to spectacle through the continued emphasis upon the importance of the collective. These performances of brotherhood and crew identity in their choreography and emphasised in the wider elements of the television production demonstrates a negotiation of spectacle rather than a complete erasure of the crew into commodified artifice. The competitive and sporting framework allows for a safe space for the articulation of a collective masculinity and these rhetorics of brotherhood and communal experience reflect the communal ethos of Hip Hop culture. These negotiations therefore place emphasis on the humanity of the dancers and their collective experience, jarring against the stereotype of the hypermasculine Black male and the constructed spectacle of fear and destitution as represented by mediated gang culture.

My final observation regarding the negotiation of spectacle focuses on the negation of the human. As stated in Ch. 8.3, the commodification of crew performance displaces the human from the performance and leaves a glossy surface-level image. This fetishisation of the image is further emphasised through the crews’ enactment of techno-corporeal lifeforms. These images erase the human from the artistic product and recirculate ideas of the alienation of the self through the privatisation of technology.

Here, I return to Leder’s concept of the body holding the spectator’s attention at the point of dysfunction (see Ch. 3.2). As described in Ch.3.4, I position the Hip Hop dancing body within the commercial setting of the television talent show as performing the virtuosic grotesque in their continuous display of abilities that go beyond the realms of the feasible. As demonstrated in my analysis of crew performances, these moments of the grotesque manifest in choreographic moments of extreme verticality, impossible speeds, cartoon-like invincibility, animalistic distortions, the appearance of multiple limbs and the simulation of bone breaking. In particular, the creation of meta-bodies distorts the human form to create hyper-bodies that contain excessive vitality. While the human is temporarily displaced in the relationship between technology and the body, these moments of choreographed corporeal dysfunction rupture the glossy surface level image of
spectacle in their performance of the grotesque. In line with Bakhtin's (1965) theorisations, it is in moments of escapism and physical excess that the open and grotesque body can temporarily break away from social control. Kershaw (2003) also posits that it is times of extreme human endeavours, as witnessed, for example, in gymnastics and contortion techniques, that allow an outlet of escapism from the constructed reality of spectacle. By revealing the human through performances of the virtuosic grotesque, crews reveal the aesthetically pleasing image of commodified spectacle as constructed, shallow and false. The escapism of the body into the realms of the grotesque instead allows the human to be made visible within the performances. I therefore argue that it is through performances of difference that reveals the constructed nature of the society of the spectacle.

The humanity of the dancer is additionally revealed as a result of the formulaic structure of the revelation of results. While the dancers maintain a cool and composed aesthetic through their performances, it is in moments of commiseration and jubilation that the spectator witnesses the performance of human emotion. The cold and fixed facial expressions of the robotic and mechanical performances are broken at the end of each performance, revealing their choreographed construction. In particular, the embodied reactions of crews to the voting outcome reveal glimpses of the human in the imagined spectacle, which Boyd describes as ‘the fetishization of emotion’ through ‘moments of frustration, expectation, insecurity, joy, and failure’ (2012, p.264). As The A Team wait patiently and nervously for their audition results, the three gold stars appear, and the crew breaks into smiles, nods, gasps, thumbs up and shoot their hands in the air. These jubilant gestural reactions are closely followed by a celebratory dance routine. In BGT, these moments of celebration and jubilation are dramatized further, accompanied with slow motion close-ups of smiling facial expressions and an uplifting soundtrack, as crews cheer, clap, hug each other and begin to leave the stage. Alternatively, Diversity’s surprised and ecstatic physical reactions to their inclusion in the final, contrast against Flawless’s stationary profile, sombre expressions and light applause at their realisation of not going further in the competition. While these mediated clips of emotion play into the wider rhetoric of the transformation from ordinary to extraordinary, humane reactions by the individual dancers form part of their overall performance in the dramatization of the programme. As discussed in Ch. 2.4, Juliet McMains maintains that the real is experienced in DanceSport through in a competitive environment, ‘the very real sensations of touch, physicality and intimate interaction’ (2006, p.62). Crews may operate in the fabricated reality of the television competition and create
the same fabricated reality through their performances of the cyborg, but their chronological journey in the competition places the human experience and emotion at the heart of the performance.

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter analysed the male Street dance crew performance in the wider context of the media spectacle of the television talent show. Through their performances of the surplus, crews are positioned as commodifiable objects as a result of their choreographic aesthetic, their presentation as celebrity and their economic valuing by the television production. As a consequence of this commodification, the capitalist mode of separation results in the reduction of crews to empty spectacle through the masking of their labour practices, the simplification of complex identities and the diminishing of humanity. A close analysis of these performances and their placement with the ‘event TV’ elements, however, reveals a negotiation of their reduction to spectacle rather than a complete submission to the hegemonic control of the television production. This is achieved through the emphasis on the crews’ surplus-labour, both in their choreography and interviews, and the construction of a collective identity. This collective identity, in particular, jars against the individual neoliberal discourse of the television talent show and the striving for excellence by the solo virtuoso. The emphasis on a homosocial crew identity through choreography and production also allows masculinity to be performed in the safe structure of a sporting environment. Finally, the negotiation of spectacle occurs through the revelation of the human. Through disruptive moments of the virtuosic grotesque and the performance of humanity in key production moments of the competition, the humanity of the dancers is negotiated rather than completely erased within the competition format. This thesis will now present a summary of my findings in my concluding chapter.

\textsuperscript{1} In particular, Srinivasan notes that the historical analysis of Ellen Graff (1997) and Mark Franko (2002) have explored labor and dance through their writings on the labor movement and its inspiration on modern dance.

\textsuperscript{2} hooks describes the historic definition of Cool as ‘defined by the ways in which black men confronted the hardships of life without allowing their spirits to be ravaged. They took the pain of it and used it alchemically to turn the pain into gold. That burning process required high heat. Black male cool was defined by the ability to withstand the heat and remain centered’ (2004, p.147). In contrast with this powerful and centered approach built around oppression, she attacks the mediated version of Black cool attitude, describing it as ‘death-dealing coolness’ connected with displays of pride, arrogance, ‘disassociation, hardheartedness, and violence’ (p.152).
As discussed in Ch. 2.6, both Foster (2014) and Redden (2010) highlight that by validating dance as a form of labour in reality television, these programmes reflect employment norms in the creative industries, with workers entering willingly and passionately into precarious work opportunities due to the potential opportunity on a high return in investment. In his judge’s feedback to Abyss after their semi-final performance on BGT, Simon Cowell states that ‘there is a lot of whinging in the world at the moment, but when you get an opportunity to change your lives, you made the most of it, you stopped complaining, you put in some hard work, and I think you are going to get very good feedback from the audience’, referencing the notable change in effort between their audition and semi-final performances.
Chapter Nine: Conclusion

This chapter presents a synthesis of my findings and draws conclusions from my case studies discussed in the preceding analysis chapters. These conclusions have been informed by pertinent theoretical and contextual discourse and I expand this field by exemplifying the wider theoretical implications of my empirical findings. Through this potential contribution to dance and television scholarship, I also highlight potential future directions of this research enquiry which arise from this research.

The emergence of televised crew performances since 2008 is situated in a televised history of the talent show format (see Ch. 1.1) and a historic reverence of spectacle in popular culture (see Ch. 3.3). This intensified visual aesthetic produced by the dancing body, the camera lens and the post-production edit has opened up a number of pertinent issues and debates in relation to dance and television studies, which are addressed throughout this thesis. The burgeoning popularity of male Street dance crews in television talent shows, countered against the devaluing of popular dance and the dismissal of spectacle in the western art canon, demanded scholarly attention. The general theoretical literature on this subject, and specifically on the role of spectacle in dance television talent shows, remained inconclusive in several key areas. Current studies on Hip Hop dance practice give rise to pertinent arguments regarding the style’s historical development, its role in identity construction, its embodiment of an Africanist aesthetic and its global transmission (see Ch. 2.2). There was a significant lack of attention, however, to U.K. practices, and, in particular, the transmission from a vernacular context to a choreographed format situated in a mediated environment. This neglect of Street dance in academic scholarship and Hip Hop discourse was, I argued, a result of the deemed inauthenticity which arose from the appropriation of vernacular Hip Hop dance practices. Recent literature on dance practices on television talent shows examined the notion of spectacle as a condition of a commodified society (Weisbrod, 2014) and the importance of framing the analysis in the ‘dance event’ of the television competition structure (Boyd, 2012). These, however, did not take into account a close analysis of the visual properties of spectacle created by the body, the camerawork and the post-production edit. In addition, these studies overlooked the relationship between spectacle as an event and spectacle as an ideological concept (see Ch. 2.6).
This study therefore pursued a critical investigation into the construction and performance of spectacle in male Street dance crew performances. This study specifically examined the relevance of this construction in the choreographic content of crew performances, the multiple representations of identity that are constructed through the television programmes and the relationship between technology and the body. This study also explored the placement of the male Street dance crew performance in the wider media spectacle of the television talent show. This study sought to explore these three research questions:

- What are the key concepts and critical frameworks that shape the notion of spectacle in relation to popular dance practices in televised environments?
- What are the ways in which dance crews manifest spectacle in their performances on television talent show competitions?
- Considering the stakes in constructing the body as spectacle, to what extent do these bodies hold any agency?

Televised Street dance crew performances are fusions of dance and television practices and, thus, methods of analysis derived from dance studies and dance on screen studies were used to critically analyse my case studies. Supported by theoretical and contextual studies, these research methods placed the dancing body at the centre of my analysis and demonstrated the importance of conducting an investigation through a close textual analysis of the body in motion. These research methods allowed an analysis of intertextual references which can be discerned in the choreography and the wider television production. These methods also enabled an analysis of the crew performances in the wider context of the global television format of reality television.

Rather than solely considering the notion of spectacle as an abstract condition of Capitalist discourse, this study aimed to make the important contribution in its illustration and analysis of spectacle as a perceptible mode of eye-catching display. An examination of spectacle as both the aesthetic properties of an event or phenomenon (see Chapter Three) and as a condition of a commodified society (see Chapter Four) therefore brought together theoretical concepts from dance studies, cultural studies, film studies, television studies, visual theory, Marxist and Post-Marxist theory. Through an evaluation of the critical strategies that informed my research topic, I therefore established the following key concepts.
Recognising the problematic terminology that surrounds the concept of spectacle in visual theory, as well as the spectators’ incongruent affective reaction to the staging of spectacle, Chapter Three revealed that spectacle is a fluid and evasive term. Through an analysis of theories of visuality and drawing on the historical context of theatrical spectacle, I therefore situated spectacle as a performance of difference. A consideration of virtuosity as the epitome of individual skill and ability, as well as a notion that exceeds fixed considerations of artistic excellence, led to an understanding of the performance of spectacle as the defiance of the organic limitations of the human body. This traversing beyond the fixed concept of the organic was further informed by theorisations of the grotesque: the understanding of an open and transgressive body that defies social control and severs virtuosity’s sole association with aesthetic beauty. These theorisations introduced ideas of excess and the going beyond the social ordered margins of the body.

In terms of the amplification of the body through the cinematic lens, my analysis of cinematic excess revealed that material aspects of film production, including camera movement and design aspects of the filming, place emphasis upon heightened visual qualities in screen mediums. These techniques render new ways of witnessing reality through the reimagining of the image and further augment the capabilities of the screen dance body through the camerawork and post-production edit. The excess of both body and camerawork therefore constructs an amplified screen dance body that appears to defy corporeal limitations. As demonstrated through the theorisations of Galt (2011) and Whissel (2014), this increased emphasis on the surface image of the screen through performances of excess is also emblematic of the narrative and politics of the context of the screened subject, moving beyond the logocentric devaluing of the decorative. The individualistic and domestic consumption of theatrical spectacle in a television context results in the potential muting of spectacle. Coupled with the distracted gaze of the viewer, television programmes must generate the aesthetic properties of spectacle on smaller production budgets. As a consequence, the sensationalised format of reality television incorporates excessive post-production techniques that manipulate and augment screened images.

An analysis of spectacle as a condition of global technocapitalism contextualised spectacle as a condition of a commodified society. Dance embodies the economic through its commodification and circulation throughout global commercial markets (see Ch. 4.2). Specifically, meaning is inscribed onto the body through its semiotic
link with socially desirable images, objects, people and emotions. Hip Hop dance practices in particular have been appropriated in the advertising of commercial products due to their representational signification of youth, vitality and cool. The presentation of the dancing body as commodity is therefore reliant on the creation of visually engaging images that attract the consumer, thus linking the commodification of the popular dancing body with the aesthetic properties of spectacle (see Ch. 4.3).

Through the process of commodity fetishisation, the labour systems that created the intangible product of bodies in motion are displaced as a consequence of the dancing body’s symbolic association with the monetary form. This commodification thus re-presents the dancing body as a fantasy figure devoid of meaning and displaced from its means of production. In the context of reality television, this masking of labour systems is particularly significant in the exploitation of the post-Fordist cultural worker who generates surplus-labour. This labouring above and beyond the requirements of the television production is a result of the lack of financial compensation in the creation of the cultural workers’ product and the precarious labour conditions of the neoliberal competition.

In the wider context of the commodification of culture, my critical evaluation of Debord’s (1967) concept of the ‘society of the spectacle’ enabled an understanding of a constructed reality of empty images whereby transactions replace social relations. While situated in post-industrial French philosophy, these concepts remain applicable to the technocapitalist state of twenty first century U.K. consumer culture. These ideas also extend into theorisations regarding the loss of reality through television (Baudrillard, 1981, ed. 1984) and the loss of the spectacular event itself in Kellner’s (2003, 2005) theorisations of media spectacles. The separation of the spectator from the live spectacular event creates a simulation of reality in a commodified culture and the event itself is lost as a consequence of the speed, distribution and influx of spectacular mediated images. I argue, however, that this complete reduction to a state of spectacle does not acknowledge the possibility of influence and agency on behalf of the commodified subject and/or consumer.

Through my critical evaluation of these key concepts that shape the notion of spectacle, I proposed that spectacle is achieved through the transgression of corporeal boundaries through the virtuosity of the popular dancing body, but performed within a mediatised and commercial environment. I applied the concept of the surplus to my analysis chapters in order to ascertain the ways in which male dance crews manifest spectacle in their performances on television talent show
competitions. An initial exploration of the research field revealed three common areas in crew performances that reflected emergent themes regarding the visual properties of spectacle. These included the choreographic construction and content of the performances, the performance of masculinised and racialised identities, and the fusion between technology and the body.

In terms of the choreographic construction and content of performances, my dance on screen movement analysis revealed that crews construct spectacle through the intertextual referencing of the cinematic special effect (see Chapter Five). Crews create the appearance of transcending beyond corporeal limitations through the embodiment of cinematic visual effects usually only achieved through CGI digital manipulation. In particular, crews create the appearance of achieving extraordinary heights and elongate themselves across the television screen through the prominence of the door plane, the prolific use of athletic stunts and the low placement of the camera lens on the stage. Crews additionally simulate the appearance of the digital multitude through their symmetrical spatial designs, their strict unison and their uniformity in both movement style and costume. The appearance of the cinematic post-production edit is replicated through the morphing between a variety of Hip Hop dance styles, with the television production edit further creating a fractured appearance that I determined as a double-mediation. This editing technique also places emphasis on the two-way dialogue of spectacle and positions performances as spectacular in their aesthetic for the home viewer. Finally, crews replicate rapid and sustained speeds usually achieved through cinematic editing through their physical labour and corporeal control. These speeds are further heightened through the double-mediation and the attention deficit quality of the television camerawork.

With regards to the performance of masculinised and racialised representations of identity, an intertextual dance on screen analysis revealed that crews construct spectacle through their performances of exaggerated personas as recognised in popular culture. Crews recreate images of the hypermasculine superhero through their athletic stunts, their defiance of gravity and their seemingly invincible capabilities. Crews also physically demonstrate the hardness and muscularity of their bodies and draw upon superhero thematic content within the narratives of their choreography. These superhuman abilities are augmented further through the choreography of the camera-lens and the post-production edit., which includes
inflated judges’ commentary and their presentation of the crew in VT segments using superhero tropes and motifs.

This performance of the exaggerated identity persona extends into performances of the cartoon character. Crews construct spectacle by going above and beyond the characteristics of the pedestrian and instead construct representations of juvenile masculinity. As well as the emphasis upon a two-dimensional plane, a cartoonish movement aesthetic, the use of parody and the exaggerated performances of slapstick and violence, crews also comment on the wider power structures of the competition within the safe space of their choreography. Finally, the performance of the Black pop icon through intertextual references to James Brown and Michael Jackson illustrates a homage and celebration of Black cultural expressions. These references also align these larger than life performances with the cultural status of Pop royalty (see Ch. 6.7). Through the performance of recognisable movement motifs, mixed within contemporary choreographic devices and music samples, crews align themselves with the inflated identities of celebrity Black diasporic practices. Crews perform the surplus by mimicking the excessive and physically demanding performances of these Pop Icons, thus forging an intertextual affinity.

In Chapter Seven, I revealed that spectacle is also constructed through the symbiotic relationship between technology and the body. Crews are presented as spectacular through their exaggerated performances of techno-corporeality: the appearance of technological intervention through animation techniques, synchronisation and digital repetition. The simulation of hypercorporealised metabodies additionally disrupts fixed constructions of the organic and instead presents crews as mechanical structures and animalistic monstrosities that demonstrate excess vitality. Crews additionally perform within digital environments as a result of the surrounding effects of the television production. Post-production effects also stage crews as extraordinary beings as a result of the juxtaposition between their techno-corporeal performance and the constructed presentation of the ordinary in pre-recorded VT segments.

The reduction to spectacle: the loss of the original and the alienation of the spectator through Capitalist notions of the separation of reality, also opened up areas of debate in this thesis (see Ch. 4.4 and Ch. 4.6). I explored the stakes in constructing the body as spectacle, and revealed that crews are positioned as commercial products through their increased visibility as a consequence of their
spectacular aesthetic, the continued construction of the celebrity and the valuing of the crew through economic discourse (see Ch. 8.2). As a consequence of the capitalist mode of separation, the media spectacle of the television talent show presents a constructed reality whereby bodies are removed of their complexities and are reduced to glossy surface images due to their situation as commodity. This reduction to spectacle includes the masking of effort and labour conditions, the simplification and continued typecasting of complex identities and the loss of the human as a result of the fusion between the organic and the technological (see Ch. 8.3).

In terms of my research question regarding to what extent do these bodies hold any agency in their commodification, I argued that crews do not passively accept their reduction to spectacle, despite their constructed and mediated performances in the edited television production. Moving away from established understandings of spectacle as a homogenous and all-encompassing ideological condition of society, I maintain that the format of the television talent show allows a negotiation of spectacle. In terms of labour, crews place emphasis on their surplus-labour through the fact that spectacle is also constructed without the aid of digital intervention. While the cinematic excess of the camerawork enhances these performances, they are not reliant on the digital manipulation in order to produce images of special effects, superhuman feats and techno-corporeal lifeforms. The testimonials of the crews additionally reveal a continued emphasis on the surplus-labour of the performances, with crews stressing the large amount of time and effort required in order to create the performances of the surplus. While the Post-Fordist reality of the crew is masked in the production, dancers use the structured format of the television production to voice the reality of their experiences.

I also illustrate that the continued emphasis on the crew structure of the performances, or the collective identity of the group, challenges both the complete erasure of identities to spectacle and the neoliberal cult of individualism that operates in the television talent show. A politics of cooperation emerges through the shared labour of the performance, whose success is reliant on the collaboration of each dancer. Rhetorics of community and friendship are emphasised verbally through VT segments and interviews with hosts and judges, and in line with Kiesling’s (2005) concept of homosocial desire, the sporting framework of competition allows a safe space for these declarations of brotherhood. The performance of the human, or the humanity of the dancer, is additionally revealed
through performances of the virtuosic grotesque. Moments of corporeal dysfunction rupture Western ideals of aesthetic beauty and allow escapism from the constructed reality of spectacle. The performance of emotion through interviews and the revealing of the competition results also places humanity on display, positioning the real in the fabricated representation of reality.

Through the above synthesis of the findings from my analysis chapters, I propose some conclusions regarding the construction of spectacle in Street dance crew performances. Building upon Whissel’s (2014) concept of the emblematic nature of the special effect in cinema, my findings reveal that the creation of spectacular and glossy images reveals wider debates regarding the corporeal negotiation of technology, the potentiality of a fluid gender representation and the performance of aspiration.

These findings firstly reveal the wider influence of spectacle in global technocapitalism on the choreographic aesthetic of commercial Street dance choreography. These crew performances physically mirror and embody the rapid flow of global digital information and dissemination through their corporeal dexterity and the split-second delivery of their choreography. Crews both embody the digital through the performance of techno-corporeality whilst also frame these performances in the fractured aesthetic of the choreography, the speed in their delivery and the recreation of digital environments. Through their need to achieve maximum visual exposure on the television screen, Street dance bodies physically contend and compete with cinematic digitally enhanced bodies through these choreographies of the surplus. In turn, crews both replicate and supplement the constant wash of images made available to the spectator in the global digital age. Rather than merely operating as a glossy commodity in the media spectacle of reality television, the Street dance body instead acts as an intermediary for the understanding of the relationship between digital technology and the organic. While the human experience is displaced in the privatised and miniaturized experience of global spectacle, these crew performances reimagine the organic bodies’ capabilities in the global digital age and the negotiation of simulated reality.

Secondly, these findings expose the possibilities of reimagining identity representations that depart from the fixed stereotypes recirculated within global media regarding Hip Hop dance. As demonstrated in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight, crews perform multiple depictions of masculinised and racialised identities
that move away from the static and reductive images of hypermasculinity and blackness. These include the performance of juvenile masculinity or ‘boyhood’, the collective masculinities of the homosocial crew and the funky blackness that departs from the neat and clean performances of racialised identity. In addition, positive portrayals of the identities of young males, including the moral stance of the hypermasculine superhero and the continued depictions of brotherhood and community, jar against continued rhetorics of mob and gang culture in the British national press. The performance of the surplus, however, also offers crews the opportunity to transcend reductive stereotypes and operate as boundary figures that move away from fixed identity markers, such as the potential transience offered through the performance of the cyborg. These representations therefore present a far more complex understanding of identities in the commercialised field of Street dance performances and demonstrate the importance of a close movement analysis and a focus on the body in the field of television studies.

Thirdly, these performances physically embody the continuing narrative of aspiration. The concept of transition and transformation from the ordinary to the extraordinary is at the heart of the reality television competition structure as well as the performance of virtuosic skill that transcends into the grotesque. In this sense, the notion of the surplus refers not only to the excessive labour and skill required for these mediated performances, but also to the wider mediatised depiction of young men in the U.K. who have been depicted as surplus, alienated and operating outside of the system (see Ch.8.4). Following this line of enquiry, this theme of the possibilities of upward mobility is not only referenced in the formulaic television production but also in the performance quality of the crew choreography. Through their performances of the surplus, crews labour beyond permitted limitations and create the appearance of transcendence to a higher level of ability, despite the restrictions of the organic corporeal form. The crews’ physical struggle and striving to achieve the rewards of the competition is embodied through these performances of the surplus, and, in particular, the elongation of the vertical through virtuosic gymnastic feats of ability. In order to be seen within the media spectacle of the competition, Street dance crews must therefore perform more than they are by way of their labour, technical aptitude, personality and the reimagining of the corporeal form into machines, animals and monstrous lifeforms. While these images are amplified by the camera lens and post-production edit, it is the body itself that aspires through its surplus-labour. These performances of aspiration also continue to increase in aptitude as the crew progresses through the competition, with
dancers achieving even greater heights, lengths and depths at each stage of judgement. Crews additionally construct themselves as finished or completed products of success. Through their intertextual references of achievement, including the embodied iterations of celebrity figures and famous cultural references including heroic status of superheroes and the celebrity status of Black pop icons, crews position themselves as in excess of the ‘ordinary’ persona established through the television production. Aspiration, as the corporeal struggle to achieve economic success, therefore becomes an essential performance quality in the production of spectacle in a competitive format.

This study set out to address significant omissions in academic scholarship through a movement analysis of the choreographic practice of Street dance and a critical investigation of the visual aesthetics of spectacle. In particular, the findings of this thesis make a vital start in probing the potential knowledge that can be gleaned from Street dance choreographed performance, as well as opening up the debate as to the positioning of these performances in the commercialised setting of the television talent show. In this thesis, I argue for the reinstatement of the dancing body at the centre of the televised talent show research and this is achieved in my analysis of the choreographic content and structure of the crew performances. My findings imply that there is academic worth for dance, television and cinematic studies through the application of a close textual analysis of the Street dance body in a commercial format. As popular dance practices in reality television continue to remain an under researched area in dance scholarship, there are also further avenues of study that would be instrumental in expanding the field of knowledge that surrounds dance crew performances. These include an analysis of female dance crews, the performance of adolescence in young crew performances, and the emergence of Street dance choreography in wider competition structures across the U.K. The positioning of U.K. Street dance as a political vehicle for social change is potentially a most significant area of future research. In particular, this is due to the emergence of ‘spin-off’ television programmes, such as Ashley Banjo’s Secret Street Dance Crew (2012-current) and Ashley Banjo’s Big Town Dance (2014).

In terms of the wider findings of this research, the validity of employing an interdisciplinary approach in this thesis also illuminates the distinct yet intersecting discourses that constitute dance on the television screen. This interdisciplinary approach has broadened the contribution of this work, especially with regards to how dance theory and an analysis of the moving body can inform television studies.
Furthermore, I have illustrated the symbiotic relationship between the consideration of the aesthetic properties of spectacle and the notion of spectacle as an abstract condition of capitalism. I aligned Marxist and Post-Marxist theory with concepts derived from visual theory, resulting in my analytical model of the surplus. This dual examination of spectacle paves the way for further research into the role of spectacle in popular culture, and carries significant implications for dance scholarship and television studies with regards to analysing the dancing body in a commercial context.

Finally, this study has revealed the importance of placing the human in the experience of the spectacle. While these bodies are heightened and visually amplified by the televisual apparatus treatment, it is the corporeal ability of the dancers themselves that construct the aesthetic qualities of spectacles. Despite going beyond human capabilities through spectacular surplus performances, there is humanity in the spectacle, achieved through the dancing body and through the wider production structure of the talent show. Spectacle is therefore all the more powerful because these feats are achieved by the dancers themselves. It is therefore the fleshy humanity of the dancer that creates these performances as spectacular. Dancing spectacles are always experienced through the humanity of the dancer, and despite the situation in the framework of the competition, the human is still situated in the spectacle. These conclusions consequently raise a warning to the field of dance studies which over recent years has tended, in its themes and in its language, to reduce dancers to ‘bodies’. While poststructuralist theory puts into question the ontology of the body, and raises the scholarly value of dance theory in academic institutions, this thesis reveals the importance of recognising performances of humanity. Research methods must examine the moving body as well as the human endeavour that constitutes these practices. This study opens the door for this renewed focus on the human experience in the creation of the spectacular, or, more appropriately, the spectacle of the human.
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## Appendix A: Index of male Street dance crew performances

### Britain’s Got Talent

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<th>Semi-Finals</th>
<th>Final</th>
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<td>Five (2011)</td>
<td>Abyss</td>
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<td>Bionik Funk</td>
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### Got To Dance

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<th>Semi-Finals</th>
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<td>One (Winter 2010)</td>
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<td>Urban Jokers</td>
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<td>Four (Winter 2013)</td>
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### Appendix B: Glossary of Hip Hop dance terminology

N.B This glossary lists the popular definitions of key dance styles and movements that fall under the banner of Street dance. However, it should be noted that these terms are not codified categories, as the meanings and terminology surrounding the dance style can shift and change due to the dance styles vernacular context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dance Style</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Breakdance:</strong></td>
<td>Breakdance incorporates toprock, footwork oriented steps performed while standing up; downrock, footwork performed with both hands and feet on the floor; freezes, stylish poses done on your hands; and power moves, complex and impressive acrobatic moves. Also referred to as b-Boying or Breakin'.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cypher:</strong></td>
<td>Cypher refers to the breakdance circle formed by participants and spectators.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Funk Dance:</strong></td>
<td>Funk dance styles originated in California in the 1970s and incorporated the genres of popping, locking and Electric Boogaloo. Styles were showcased on Soul Train; a popular Black music and dance television that ran from 1971-2006.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Glidin’:</strong></td>
<td>Glidin’ creates the optical illusion of the feet gliding across the floor the smooth push and slide of the feet.</td>
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<td><strong>Hip Hop Party Dance:</strong></td>
<td>Hip Hop party dances evolved in the 1980s and included the cabbage patch and the worm. Also referred to as Hip Hop social dance or novelty dance.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>House Dance:</strong></td>
<td>House is a group of club dance styles primarily danced to house music that have roots in the clubs of Chicago and New York. The main styles include footwork, jacking, and lofting.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Locking:</strong></td>
<td>Locking incorporates the fast transition between sustained poses or freezes, with each freeze titled a lock with the Electric Boogaloo using fluid transitions between locks.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Krump Dance:</strong></td>
<td>Krumping is an explosive and emotionally expressive dance style that emerged in LA’s South central district in the year 2000, and is used in battles. Also referred to as clowning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nu-skool Hip Hop:</strong></td>
<td>The contemporary trend of visualising music, rhythm and lyrics in a choreographed format. Also referred to as new style’ or new vibe Hip Hop.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Popping:</strong></td>
<td>Popping involves the rapid tensing and releasing of the joints, known as a pop or hit.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Street Dance:</strong></td>
<td>Street dance is an umbrella term that describes the amalgamation of Hip Hop dance styles and</td>
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</table>
choreography. Also referred to as urban and commercial dance.

**Ticking:**
Ticking is a faster version of popping, creating a rapid succession of jerks in the body.

**Tricking:**
Driven by online video sharing, tricking is a creative fusion of martial arts, breakdancing and parkour that incorporates kicking, twisting, and flipping.

**Turfin’:**
Turf dance creates optical illusions through the body and is used in an improvised format in battles. The style originates from Oakland, California and represents the different geographical ‘turfs’.

**Tutting:**
Tutting is a sub-genre of popping, and involves the intricate angulation of the arm or finger joints at 90° or 45° angles.

**Waacking:**
Waacking is the expressive use of the arms and facial expression. The Waacking/Punk style of Street/club dance, can trace its roots back to the nightclub culture of the late 1960's New York City.
Appendix C: Figures

Fig. 1

Fig. 2
Fig. 11

Fig. 12
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Fig. 24