

Popping and Locking

“Originally, ‘popping’ was a term used to describe a sudden muscle contraction executed with the triceps, forearms, neck, chest, and legs. These contractions accented the dancer’s movements, causing a quick, jolting effect. Sam’s creation, popping, also became known as the unauthorized umbrella title to various forms within the dance, past and present. Some of these forms include Boogaloo, strut, dime stop, wave, tick, twisto-flex, and slides.” (Chang 2006: 23).

The styles of locking and popping are closely related, as both involve bodily techniques in which one body part remains stationary, while another part moves (Banes 2004). Popping originated in California and is contemporaneous with waacking. Mainly danced with funk and hip hop music, popping is a style most often practiced in “hetero-oriented” spaces (Bragin 2014). Funk music is considered the progenitor of hip hop, standing in an uneasy relationship with disco music and its associated dance style, waacking. Consequently, popping and breaking are often found in combination with one another, whereas popping is seldom combined with waacking.

Hanoi Popping

Popping, together with breaking, are the most popular dance styles in Vietnam with the most practitioners. Vietnam has well-known poppers such as CK Animation, TF Star, Sin Boogie, and Kirby, all from Hanoi, and Rufu and MT Pop from Ho Chi Minh City. In Hanoi, there are currently some 200 poppers. One of Hanoi’s oldest popping crews is the Milky Way Crew, which was founded by TF Star, whose real name is Vu Tung Phuong. In an interview, TF Star recalls how he came into contact with the style in October 2004. Two

months later, he founded a dance group at his school together with friends. This school dance group laid the foundation for the Milky Way Crew. Since its founding, the Milky Way Crew, very much like Big Toe Crew, has developed various subgroups, all focusing on one particular style. One of these groups is the Funkstyle team. In 2009, TF Star and his group joined Big Toe. Since then, they have focused on becoming professional dancers. In Hanoi, the Lenin Monument has evolved as an icon of hip hop in general, and popping in particular, as dancers regularly train together there. On 1st June 2011, the Funkstyle team celebrated its 3rd anniversary at the monument. Hoa Duc Cong, known as CK Animation, was one of the first members of the Milky Way Crew's Funkstyle team. Born in 1991, he was 27 years old when I first met him, about to get married and shortly thereafter to have a baby boy. Cong has been popping half of his life, starting out around the age of 15 or 16. At that time, he explained, popping was hardly known in Vietnam, so he began dancing alone or with others, anywhere he could. Like many others, he often practiced at the Soviet Vietnamese Friendship Palace. In 2008, he joined a group at the palace, and learned a style of popping that was referred to as *Việt Style*. Since then, CK Animation has developed his unique style, becoming one of the most famous poppers in Hanoi. In fact, his alias is indexical of his style, since CK specializes in what is called animation. Animation is a particular style of popping, consisting of jerky movements by rapidly contracting the muscles. According to CK, animation particularly involves moving the torso, and bringing it to an abrupt halt. Animation is frequently compared to robotic movement or figures in stop motion animation.

CK promotes and supports the local popping and hip hop scene. For instance, he normally serves as an MC at the local waacking event, Hallowaack, promotes his fashion label called Chatko, and produces promotional dance videos with Mai Tinh Vi. In November 2019, he was invited by the TiTan crew to serve as a judge in Ninh Binh Province. He also travels widely within South-east Asia, such as to Malaysia and Singapore, although he has yet to travel to Europe or the U.S.

Together with Hoang Phuong, CK Animation co-founded the Wonder Dance Studio where he teaches popping. Later he founded the Chatko Studio. Apart from co-founding these studios, CK Animation also created the Hanoi-based Wonder Brothers Crew. The crew's name first signifies its relationship with the Wonder Dance Studio, and second its all-male membership. The crew has approximately 10 members and regularly meets three or four times a week, around 8 p.m. at the Lenin Monument. CK Animation carefully

differentiates between his students and fellow crew members. In order to become a student, those interested in popping merely need to register at his studio. But in order to become a member of his crew, they need long-term experience, dedicated practice, and they must be able to “play” (*chơi*) or work well with the other crew members.

Minh Anh, aka MA and Dung, aka Andrew, are members of the Wonder Brothers Crew. They explain that they chose to dance for fun (*cho vui*). They like to dance to funk, rap, and Viet Rap. Linh, also known as Linh Ping, is a young woman affiliated with the crew, though not a member. Linh is the only woman who regularly hangs out with male poppers from Hanoi. While Bi Max introduces her as his student, she says that she trains with Wonder Sisters, with Hoang Phuong. Linh wears wide joggings, a wide white t-shirt, and a baseball cap. She sells clothes at a clothing store at Pho Hue Street. She also works as a dance instructor at Chatko Studio, teaching the “hard class.” In order to promote her class, she posts videos on YouTube. In 2019, she posted choreography of her class dancing to the latest song by Tien Tien, an upcoming Vietnamese singer and producer from Ho Chi Minh City, who collaborates with Den Vau and Suboi, among others. Linh also taught a “sexy dance” class at Unison studio, and acted as a female dancer on rapper Richchoi and Duy Tuan’s music video, *Hư Quá Đi* (What a nasty boy/girl). Richchoi is an upcoming, although controversial rapper from the Northside, making his first underground success with the track “Vinagang,” which since its publication in 2018 has reached more than 7 million views on YouTube. The track is a parody of Lil Pump’s track “Gucci Gang,” published in 2017.

I met Linh Ping, MA, and Andrew for the first time at the Ho Thanh Cong Battle in Hanoi on a sunny Sunday in mid-October 2018.

Ho Thanh Cong

In preparation for my first popping battle ever, I faced the epistemological question raised earlier, of how to write and speak about dance. The question is epistemological insofar as it alerts us to different knowledges and diverse ways of producing knowledge. In particular, the question raises the problem of how to represent somatic and kinesthetic understanding into verbal discourse. Following sensory ethnography, scholars suggest alternative forms and formats to generate and represent knowledge, such as in dance (Foster 1995; Spry 2006). In fact, my participation in the large-scale popping event

Bi Max, MA, Quan Ten, Linh Ping and Andrew

Source: Sandra Kurfürst (2018)

was the result of an attempt to bring together two worlds, perceived as separate, in scholarship and dance. Sharing an interest in youth and public space, my Vietnamese colleague and friend Tuan approached a Hanoian dance crew through a younger relative, and asked them to join a workshop at the Vietnam National University on youth, dance and public space. In response, the dance crew members suggested that they would not know how to present their work to academics. Instead, they asked us to join their dance practice, and talk to them while dancing. That is why I found myself together with Tuan, and his eldest son, on a Sunday in Ho Thanh Cong Park, attending a popping battle. The battle is organized by DOD Crew, which regularly practices in the park, and is scheduled to start at 2:30 p.m. Usually a dance contest in the middle of the day would be unthinkable in Hanoi, but since it is already mid-October – commonly said to be the most beautiful time in Hanoi – the sun is no longer so strong. Ho Thanh Cong, as the name indicates, is a lake surrounded by urban green situated between the large Lang Ha Street and the smaller Thanh Cong and Nguyen Hong Streets in Hanoi's Ba Dinh District. Entering the park from the gate at Lang Ha Street, one hour earlier than the scheduled start, the organizers had already gathered to set up. Opposite the socialist-style yel-

low entrance gate, a small pond and stones arranged according to feng shui principles welcome the park visitors.

DJ and MCs at Ho Thanh Cong Battle



Source: Sandra Kurfürst (2018)

In front of the stone, a sign indicates the name of the park. The organizers are busy transforming the pond-stone arrangement in a backstage for the popping battle, while they turn the paved space between the entrance gate and pond into the dance floor. As we enter, they are hurriedly running cables and fixing them to the technical equipment. Although the battle will not start for another hour, small groups of dancers, most of them boys aged between 18 to 24, have already gathered. They sit and chat or practice dance moves in the shade of a pergola covered with blossoms. Among the young men are members of the Wonder Brothers Crew. Seven of the ten crew members will join today's battle. They all wear wide trousers, sneakers (Vans, Converse All Star), XXL t-shirts, as well as baseball caps. One of them wears a t-shirt with "WONDERFUNK" printed on the front, advertising the local event. Even Linh, who usually posts images of herself wearing figure-hugging outfits, wears Adidas joggings, an XXL t-shirt, and a baseball cap. As I talk with them, the square gets more and more crowded. In another corner of the park, members of the Funky Style Crew, three boys and two girls, gather and chat. The group is headed by the 22-year-old Nam, known as Popsnap, who wears a red

bandana around his head, an XL blue t-shirt, and baggy jeans with sneakers. Nam started out popping with the Wonder Dance Studio, and later joined the Milky Way Studio. As a consequence, he considers CK Animation from Wonder Dance Studio, and TF Star from Milky Way, as his teachers, pointing out that the Milky Way Crew is the first popping crew in Vietnam. Together with his crew member Dung, known as ANG, he studies at the University of Transport and Communication in Hanoi. Dung both studies and works to maintain an income. Manh, known as PAC, is 19 years old and also a member of the crew. Manh studies at the University of Industry in Bac Tu Liem. Phuong, is a female member of the crew, who only recently joined and had been practicing with them for two months by the time I met her. Phuong is an example of how newcomers choose their own crews and teachers, as she asked Nam to become a member of the crew. Phuong has rather short hair, wearing a ribbon around her head. She wears a large blue long sleeve shirt, black joggings, and black Converse All Stars. Over her shoulder, she wears an Adidas supreme bumbag with Bart Simpson print. At 23-years-old, Thuy, known as THIT, has already finished her university studies. She and Phuong are the only female members in a crew of eleven. Nam explains that usually more men practice popping than women. All of them introduce themselves, using their legal name, and only offer their alias when I explicitly ask. The only member without an alias is Phuong, as she only recently joined the crew. Her newcomer status becomes clearer as she does not participate in the battle preliminaries, but has instead come support her fellow crew members. Phuong chose popping because she enjoys it and it helps her relax (*đễ thoải mái*). Mahn, the youngest crew member, explains that he enjoys popping as it makes him physically stronger. The crew regularly meets three times a week, on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday evening at 7 p.m. in Nghia Do Park west of Hanoi. The last 30 to 45 minutes of practice are carried out in a cypher, marking the ritualized organization of dance practice (Hamera 2007). Mirroring the rhythms of everyday life, the cypher itself is cyclical, heralding the end of the day and marking the time when everyone says farewell and returns home.

As we talk, the crew members get restless before the preliminaries start at 2:30 p.m. Already during our conversation, more and more young people assemble, standing in small groups where they finalize their moves. Although the crowd is mostly young men, more and more young women enter the park, although most will remain spectators. They sit around the dance floor on the ground, or in the small chairs of an ice tea stall. The dance floor distinguishes

Funky Style Crew

Source: Sandra Kurfürst (2018)

itself from the rest of the park's morphology through several, almost intangible markers.

First, the dance floor's demarcation results from the alignment of bodies. Much like the Minang *randai*, the popping battle stage is in a circular configuration. Both performative acts are marked by a centripetal orientation, as the arrangement of human bodies around the dance floor discloses the central stage. In the *randai*, the *lingkaran* is a ring formed by eight to twelve players, who sit to the side during scenes or perform *galombang* dance sequences during songs. Mahjoeddin (2016: 362) describes the *lingkaran* as a "liminal membrane" that spatially demarcates the borders of the acting area. In a popping battle, the dance area is likewise marked by a liminal membrane. The composition of this membrane varies, as members of the audience shift from being spectators to dancers as they are called onto the floor. This circle of bodies is interrupted by the stone-pond arrangement noted earlier. Second, the dance floor unfolds from the MCs' and judge's vantage point, from their position in front of the large stone – the "backstage" – that faces the entrance toward Lang Ha Street. Third, the dance floor is made from an acoustic field, which emanates from the physical location of the DJ and his equipment, particularly the two music boxes oriented toward the entrance gate. The DJ literally occu-

pies the back stage, since he positions himself slightly behind the MCs and the judge, using the stone pillar – which indicates the park’s name – as the DJ desk, where the Numark mixer and tuner are situated. A black umbrella protects the technical equipment from the sun. There are two large speakers to the DJ’s left and right, on the elevated stone in front of the park sign. A cable running across the lawn connects the musical and technical infrastructure to the electricity. Members of the organizing committee must constantly ensure that nobody steps or falls on the cable in order to keep the electricity running. As a result, the dance floor is created in the nexus of a liminal membrane that is constituted *corporeally* by the dancers and spectators, *visually* from the vantage point from the MCs’ and judge’s position, and *acoustically* through the DJ’s laptop, mixer, and speakers.

Dance floor at Ho Thanh Cong



Source: Sandra Kurfürst (2018)

Today’s judge is Sin Boogie from EccentricMindz Crew, a renowned popper from Hanoi. Two male MCs – whom I will see again as participants in the Red Bull Battle a week later – are hosting the battle. The dancers participating in the popping battle learned about the event from social media. Potential participants needed to sign up online, via Facebook, and then “check-in” once they have arrived at the park. Upon check-in, each dancer receives a number by which they will be called to the dance floor. Naturally, the dancers do

not know whom they will battle in advance. Only if another dancer's number is close to theirs, they might have a chance of battling one another. Prior to the start, the MCs briefly explain the battle rules, with each dancer having 45 seconds to perform. By contrast with breaking, where dancers will probably stop on their own after a minute or so owed to the physically challenging and exhausting movements, other dance styles require a preset time for each dancer. Otherwise, dancers could dance on and on.

The first MCs call the first round of dancers to the floor, using the alias that the participants registered with. For each round, ten dancers are called onto the dance floor, and the MC instructs them to align in two opposite rows of five, facing each other. On being called, the dancers step forward from the crowd and begin lining up to the judge's left side. When this left row is filled with five people, the remaining five dancers will form a line on the judge's righthand side. In other words, the ten dancers form a second liminal membrane, whose composition alternates with each round. The dancer positioned closest to the judge on his left begins, and is then followed by the dancer standing to their left. For each dancer, the second MC keeps time on his phone, counting down the last five seconds after which the popper has to exit the floor and reintegrate into the second membrane. The first MC will then call out the next dancer who takes the centre, sometimes commenting a particular move with a shout out. The dancers all take turns popping clockwise until all ten involved in the round have finished.

The last round of preliminaries stands out from the previous rounds, since not ten but rather fifteen dancers participate. The first MC instructs them how to line up using the microphone. This time, however, the dancers form a rectangular with three sides, opening toward the judge. During the entire battle, the judge stands or sits with his back leaned against the large stone, eyes directed towards the dance floor, taking handwritten notes for each dancer. Most dancers try to align their movements toward the judging gaze of Sin Boogie, yet not all are able to do so, as having the main audience to their backs can cause confusion. Newcomers to the popping community particularly struggle with the orientation of their performance. On the one hand, they are aware that they need to align to the judge's view since he decides who will dance in subsequent rounds. On the other hand, they orient towards the audience, which consists of friends, crew members, and peers.

While the preliminaries are still running, more and more people that regularly frequent the park for sports and social activities enter the park, as Hanoi's parks in the autumn become crowded around 4 to 5 p.m. An elderly

man, dressed in sportswear, was somehow able to traverse the liminal membrane of the spectators, suddenly finding himself in the middle of the dance-floor, heading towards the judge. A member of the organizing committee approaches him, gently escorting him away from the dance floor. A young man stands with his baby next to the DJ and watches the show. An older woman, standing close to me, verbally assesses the performance of one of the female poppers, while cab drivers and female vendors climb up the gate at Lang Ha Street to watch the show. The owner of the local ice tea stall has offered her little stools for the audience to sit on. On one occasion, the battle needs to be interrupted due to technical problems.

The preliminaries end around 4 p.m. Of the roughly 100 participants, only four are female, but they receive as much applause and verbal support from the crowd as their male counterparts. Backstage, next to the DJ, judge, and MCs, I also meet CK Animation, who does not participate in the battle himself, but is here to support his students. While we talk, his students continuously approach him, greeting him with polite handshakes, bowing a little, and addressing him with *anh*. One of the students says that he is very anxious. CK responds in a calm and friendly manner, suggesting that there is no need to worry.

Ho Chi Minh City Popping

Like Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City also has a vibrant popping scene. The Ho Chi Minh City's X-Clown Crew specializes in four styles, including popping, hip hop, house, and krumping. The X-Clown Crew was founded on 30 April 2009 (YouTube 2014). April 30 is a symbolic date in Vietnam, particularly for Southern Vietnam, since on 30 April 1975, Saigon was seized by Northern Vietnamese troops, ending the Vietnam War and resulting in the country's reunification. The day is a public holiday, immediately followed by Labour Day on May 1st, another symbolic holiday in support of socialism. While April 30th celebrations are staged in public spaces of major cities, urbanites increasingly use these short holidays for leisure activities and travelling (Kurfürst 2012). Accordingly, the young people founding the crew chose April 30th, possibly because of its national symbolism but also because it is a day off from school and work. The crew features renowned dancers, with one of the male dancers having been the 2014 winner of the Vietnamese TV show, *So you think you can dance?* Another dancer is Minh Tuan, known as MT Pop, well known in Viet-

nam and abroad for his popping style. In January 2019, MT Pop won the Juste Debout popping battle in Bangkok and received a free ticket to participate in the Paris finals in March 2019. Juste Debout is touted as the biggest hip hop dance competition worldwide, featuring categories as diverse as locking, popping, hip hop, and house dance. Qualifying rounds take place all over the world. The winner of a regional qualifying competition is invited to participate in the final battle held annually in Paris, France. MT Pop frequently travels abroad to participate in international popping battles, particularly in Europe and across East Asia, frequently visiting Japan. On the whole, the crew has approximately 10 members, three of them female, but only one of the three women engages in popping. Both in Vietnam and around the world, female poppers are rather rare.

#Femalepopper

Delphine Nguyen from France, also known as Dey Dey, is one of the few internationally renowned female poppers. She is the winner of the UK B-Boy Championship solo popping battle of 2009 and Juste Debout in 2010. What is more, she is the first female World Popping Champion. Dey Dey has a Vietnamese family background, but was born and raised in France. Moreover, she was also born into hip hop, as she explains in an interview with Red Bull. She started hip hop dancing at age eight, as her two big sisters were already dancers and her two big brothers were DJs. Dey Dey specializes in locking and popping, focusing on funk style (Kawalik 2018; Vibe 2017). Asked if she ever felt outnumbered by men, she answers:

“I never really felt any difference. Is it because I come from a family where there’s a lot of men? I grew up with four brothers, so I don’t know if it’s because of that. Even being in hip hop culture back then when it was mainly men, I never really noticed.” (Kawalik 2018)

Her assessment is shared by many female dancers in styles otherwise dominated by men in Vietnam, who agree that the gender imbalance in their dance style was not an issue for them. When Dey Dey was the first woman to ever win the world popping championship, she received great applause as a woman changing the game. However, she also received negative comments from male peers, who downgraded her win by attributing it to her sex, rather than her skills, technique, style, and performance. She recalls how disrespected she felt

both as a woman and as an artist in those moments. But rather than giving up, she decided to train even harder, signing up for Juste Debout, the biggest 2 vs. 2 popping battle in the world. Her fortitude paid off, as she won the battle, making everyone acknowledge that she did not win the first or second time because she was a woman, but rather because of the level of her performance (Vibe 2017). Dey Dey is aware that many male competitors are intimidated when facing her in battle. Together with friends, she established an all-female crew called Zamounda Crew. Talking about her crew members, she emphasizes the intimate relationships they have as friends as well as the intersubjective depth, energy, and confidence they experience when dancing together. While highly successful, Dey Dey confirms that there are only a few female poppers around, particularly at the highest levels. She lamented that at the largest popping competitions there would only be one woman at most, and sometimes whole line-ups without a single woman. As she is successful, she has often been invited to top events. For instance, after winning at Juste Debout, Dey Dey served as a judge herself. For her judge demo during the Juste Debout Netherlands Tour in 2016, Dey Dey dressed in black Puma sneakers, black trousers, and a long blouse that very much resembles the Vietnamese *áo dài*. The *áo dài* evolved as a dress for Vietnamese women at the beginning of the 20th century. Beginning as an elegant apparel during the colonial era, its meaning shifted during the subsidy period (*bao cấp*), representing feudalism that needed to be abolished. In the 1980s and 1990s, the *áo dài* developed into a national symbol of the stylized Vietnamese woman. This process was particularly promoted by the Vietnamese diaspora residing in the U.S. From there, the *áo dài* was taken up in Vietnam as well as an index of authenticity (Leshkovich 2003; Lieu 2000). Consequently, for an internationally renowned French-Vietnamese female popper to wear an *áo dài* blouse indexes the transcultural circulation and uptake of objects, in this case fashion items, as pointed out by Larkin (2013).

Dey Dey also travelled to Vietnam to lead popping workshops. A female popper named Vy, known as Rufu, joined one of the workshops in Ho Chi Minh City. Today, Rufu is the only female popper of the famous X-Clown Crew, performing solo and sometimes jointly with MT Pop. Before starting her popping career, Rufu already had an affinity towards physical challenges, as she exercised aerobics for ten years. When she entered high school, she learned about popping from her friends. On her first encounter with popping, she did not like it very much because the style seemed difficult, especially for a girl.

But as she realized that there were no female poppers in Vietnam, she took up the challenge to become a female popper.

Rufu explained that she likes a challenge. If something is particularly hard and difficult, she wants to learn even more, as she explained to me. When she started popping around 2010 and 2011, there were not as many workshops offered by international dancers in Vietnam as there are today. That is why she researched popping on the internet, particularly by watching YouTube videos. After training for six months, she finally joined her first battle, where she was among the top 16 and finally lost to a male popper. However, she won the second event that she participated in. This time, the judge of the battle was an international female popper from France of Vietnamese origin. She explains that many female dancers visited Vietnam, such as Dey Dey and her sister Cathy, as well as Sonya who is also from France and specializes in waacking and popping. Rufu learned more about popping by participating in their workshops. She was also briefly a member in another crew, but stopped practicing to focus on graduating from high school. When she enrolled to attend university, however, she came across the X-Clown Crew. Since the crew had many great dancers among its members, she longed to become a member herself. In 2012, she finally joined the crew, which is led by DoDo. To become a crew member, she did not have to undergo a casting process, but was accepted outright. Rufu started with an EB-style, the signature popping style of the Electric Boogaloos from Fresno, California. In discussing how the style was brought by OGs from the U.S. to East Asia, mostly Japan and Korea, she says that she first practiced the EB-style, but then got interested in others, too.

Apart from Rufu, there are not many female poppers around. She explains that while Hanoi has a few more female dancers than Ho Chi Minh City, they are not full-time dancers. At the time of our conversation, Rufu had just taken on a full-time job working in an office during the day, while teaching classes at night. A significant part of her life, Rufu is eager to keep dancing. Dancing keeps her active, confident, and happy, she explains, “because when I dance, I feel happy.” While she has a full-time job, she teaches three evenings a week and on the other three she practices with her crew in the park. Acknowledging that she is tired from work, and that her time for dancing is limited compared to her time at university, she puts all her effort into crew practice. Rufu participates in local dance battles, like the Together Time in Ho Chi Minh City, as well as in international dance competitions like the Juste Debout in Bangkok. At age 17, she has already travelled to Singapore where she stayed with local dancers to participate in a popping event. Like other dancers, Rufu agreed

that it is not only difficult to make a living from dance in Vietnam, but it is also difficult to join international dance competitions, as Vietnamese dancers hardly ever received sponsoring.

International competition thus requires long-term planning, as dancers must earn money to cover their travel expenses. Nowadays, Rufu travels abroad about twice a year, and it is important to her that she is able to finance her travel abroad by herself. That is how she maintains financial autonomy from her parent's household, while simultaneously proving to her parents – who were sceptical of her passion for dance – that she can earn money from dancing. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Rufu stayed in Malaysia for several months, participating in the local hip hop scene. Aiming to develop the Vietnamese hip hop dance community and to make it known worldwide, Rufu hopes to invite more international dancers to Vietnam in the future. What is more, Rufu's aim of fostering a multitude of dancers is more specific than the visions of her other contemporaries presented in this book, as she focuses particularly on female dancers. Acknowledging that women tend to engage more often in waacking or hip hop rather than popping, since these dance styles are all related to “girl style,” she emphasizes that she wants more women to practice popping. That is why she teaches a popping class that is primarily attended by girls. Yet, she is aware that some girls only join her class for fun. But in order to develop their skills and technique, she requires her students to spend a lot of time dancing, and to finally take popping seriously.

In sum, Rufu is aware of being one of the few females in Vietnam (and basically around the world, as the interview with Dey Dey suggests) practicing in the male-dominated space of popping. She is the only female member of X-Clown Crew who participates in popping. Moreover, she also engages in infrastructuring work, especially by training and teaching popping to girls. Very active on social media, particularly Instagram, Rufu frequently tags her photos and videos with #femalepopper and #rufupopping, with the latter combining her dance name and style. The use of English in her posts and hashtag metadata indicate her goal to reach the international dance community, as her public presence is not limited to the Vietnamese speech community. While social media is often described as a non-place, Rufu's social media presence shows how language-use shifts according to her positionality and audience—all hallmarks of social situation in (virtual) place. During her time in Malaysia, for example, she mostly posted in English, whereas in

Vietnam she uses Vietnamese. The hashtag #femalepopper, however, is never translated and remains in English.

In the Vietnamese English advertisement on Instagram for a September 2020 dance class, Rufu does not differentiate between beginners or advanced dancers because “experience is never enough.” In this class, she promises to show students the difference between foundations, style, and technique. She particularly reaches out to the “young generation,” and in particular “all female friends,” who wish to learn how to pop. Rufu’s posts are always liked by renowned male poppers like MT Pop and CK Animation.

Rufu is not alone in her wish to recruit more women into popping. In 2019, she was invited to the Revolution competition in Malaysia to judge popping and all other dance categories. Organized in Kuala Lumpur, the Revolution 2019 competition aims to connect older and younger generations of dancers so that they may share experiences and inspire each other. The guest line up for popping is comprised of two female poppers out of a total of four. Ker Qian from Malaysia and Ari from Vietnam were the two female guests, whereas Boogie Legz from Vietnam and Chong Jun were the two male guests. Moreover, all three judges at the event were female, with Rufu among them. Rachel Ng, one of the organizers, announced on her Facebook site that Rufu would serve as a judge, with the line:

“Do not limit yourself because you are a woman, you are capable in dancing any style!! Girl power”

Dancers in Malaysia also organize an all-female popping battle, Host of the Dames, or H.O.T Dames, in order “to unite and create a platform for the ladies in our dance community” (Facebook 2020). The event took place in February 2020 in Petaling Jaya, a large Malaysian city near Kuala Lumpur in the state of Selangor. Once again, Rufu was invited to judge to the 1 vs. 1 popping battle. In July 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Rufu reminisced about the event, posting a video of her judging a performance at Host of the Dames earlier that year, writing:

“Online battles are great but

I miss jams

I miss battles

I miss classes

Throwback to the last and great event before MCO @hostofthedames2020”

H.O.T Dames was the “last and great event before MCO,” or the Movement Control Order implemented by Malaysia’s federal government on 18 March

2020. As in many other places around the world, the MCO was a preventive measure to curtail the spread of COVID-19, prohibiting large gatherings of religious, cultural, and sports activities, the closure of all kindergartens and schools, as well as the restriction of all international immigrants and tourists arriving in or visiting Malaysia. When the MCO was implemented, Rufu was still living in Malaysia, posting videos of her training alone at home or outdoors on the sidewalks.

Infrastructuring work

Like the other dancing communities presented in this book, the popping community also seeks to create platforms to recruit newcomers and for fellow dancers to meet. One such event is called Wonder Funk. The boundaries between styles in the hip hop community are blurred, as the annual event features both two vs. two popping and freestyle battles, thus bringing together poppers from Hanoi and elsewhere with dancers of other styles. The event organizer is the Joy Funk Team, a loose affiliation of people dedicated to the popping community. Each year they invite a famous international dancer to the event to lead a workshop. One of the main organizers is Kirby. However, the last event took place in 2018, as Kirby stopped organizing Wonder Funk since opening his own dance studio, the Low Rider Studio. Nonetheless, Kirby's Low Ridaz Crew still invites internationally renowned dancers to Hanoi. In September 2019, for example, Kirby organized a workshop with Jr. Boogaloo, a celebrated old school popper from Oceanside California. Participating in battles, and teaching diverse popping styles like boogaloo, tutting, waving, animation, strutting, and more, Jr. Boogaloo was invited to give a workshop in Vietnam. The workshop venue was in the New Urban Area of Trung Hoa Nhan Chinh, and the early registration fee was 500,000 VND (18 Euro), while the normal fee was 700,000 VND (26 Euro).

Another important popping event in southern Vietnam is Together Time. According to its mission statement on social media, Together Time aims to develop the popping community in Vietnam. Taking place annually in Ho Chi Minh City, Together Time was first organized by the Ho-Chi-Minh-based BDM Studio in late October 2018. Together Time features both a popping battle and a freestyle battle. Poppers from Hanoi associated with CK Animation, accompanied by Linh Ping, travelled to Ho Chi Minh City to participate in the battle. Mai served as a judge at the event. That year, MT Pop from X-Clown

Crew won the popping battle, and has participated in Together Time since its foundation.

Locking

The locking community is still quite small in Vietnam. Therefore, lockers often connect with dancers from other dance styles, mostly popping, while participating in freestyle categories at dance events. Other crews integrate locking into their dance routines. The Streetdance Crew, founded in 2003, already drew on the diverse expertise of its crew members to integrate different dance styles. While some practiced hip hop and house dance, others specialized in locking. C-Lock is one of the locking old timers in Hanoi, as he has been practicing for more than 10 years. He learned locking from Chunky, founder of the Lion City Lockers in Singapore. Chunky first learned to lock by watching online videos and was later mentored by the famous Taiwanese locker, Aga. In East Asia, Taiwan used to be ahead of Singapore in developing a vibrant locking scene, but more recently Singapore has caught up. Chunky built up the Lion City Lockers Crew, organized local locking events such as the Lockdown, and hosted the international dance event, Lock City (Teo 2015). As of 2018, C-Lock was the only locking teacher in Hanoi, where he regularly taught a beginner class in the dance studio. Later that same year, he was also teaching at CunCun Studio on Thai Think Street, the same studio where Mai teaches her beginner and advanced hip hop classes. C-Lock is teacher of Yen Hanh, a female locker from Hanoi.

“I keep on locking although I can't spend a lot of time on it since I have to work and make my living, but locking is always a part of my life. Yeah, I think it is one of the things that I live for. I live for locking, for dancing, for dancers, for my friends, for everything I have – dancing has given me a lot of things. Dancing made my life more colourful and meaningful.” (Yen Hanh, female locker)

Mai introduced me to Yen Hanh, together with Nguyet, as a female dancer representing funk style. Yen Hanh was born in 1994 and has been living in Hanoi for almost six years. She moved from Ha Tinh Province to study tourism and hospitality management. During her studies, she participated in the university's dance club, which offered sexy, urban style, and hip hop dance, although most students practiced choreography. Initially, Yen Hanh

had planned on learning popping, having learned about popping both on television as well as from the old timers of the Milky Way Crew, TF Star and CK Animation. A friend who practiced both popping and locking introduced her to C-Lock, who would eventually become her teacher. This was around 2012. When Yen Hanh first encountered locking, she felt that it was really the right dance style for her, as it resonated with her personality: “I really like the vibe of locking, it’s very fun and really peaceful. (...) It’s like me, because I like something really peaceful and really fun too, like breaking or hip hop. Yeah, so I started locking, and I really feel like I’m following what I love.”

Yen Hanh started attending C-Lock’s class in the dance studio, and they later moved to the Lenin Monument. In locking, she prefers and specializes in Japan style. C-Lock, together and some of Yen Hanh’s popping friends, chose – what they believe – was a Japanese dance name for her. As they were searching for something similar to her Vietnamese name, they suggested Harin, which similarly starts with Ha-.

Coming from the Central Vietnamese Province of Ha Tinh, Yen Hanh participated in her first battle in 2013, in Vinh City. Together with two poppers from Vinh City, she joined the 3 vs. 3 freestyle battle. This first battle was unforgettable to her, as her team came in second place. “I’m so shocked about it because I’m very new. I don’t know how to battle, I just dance with all my heart.” While she was not the only woman participating in the battle – the other female participants specialized in girl style or popping – she was the only female locker present. Although she faced social pressure from many people telling her that she could not continue to practice locking, she continued nonetheless, and was quite successful. Ignoring social expectations, and eventually becoming economically independent, she travelled to Singapore to join a large locking battle and was ranked in the top eight of 60 lockers. The battle judge was Patrick Pires, known as P-Lock, a renowned locker from France. Reaching the top eight in international competition, Yen Hanh was convinced that she could continue locking successfully. She has participated in multiple battles ever since.

Yen Hanh is the eldest of two sisters, and lives together with her sister in Hanoi. Leaving their parents in Ha Tinh Province to study at the university, they initially rented a room together. Five years younger, her sister is still studying at the university, but they both share a passion for dancing. Her sister practices breaking with the Big Toe b-boy class. When asked if she influenced her younger sister to engage in hip hop dancing, she insisted that it was her sister’s choice, and that she admires her for breaking: “I really like

breaking, b-boys, and to watch them. I think it is so pretty, you know, so powerful.”

Growing up in the 1990s, Yen Hanh used to listen to U.S. and European funk and disco music (James Brown and Bonnie M.), together with her father. Eventually, the music fostered an emotional connection between Yen Hanh and her father. She admired her father's taste in music, and she explains, “Now I can feel him.” Although sharing the same taste in music, her father did not approve of his daughter's passion for dance, instead wanting her to settle down. In fact, her parents do no longer need to worry that dancing will keep her from things like having a career, since Yen Hanh strictly balances work with her passion, as she suggests. She works fulltime for an online fashion company. When we meet one Thursday evening for coffee and conversation about locking, I find her busy at work on her Mac Book in a cosy coffee shop on Ba Trieu Street. She affirms that she really likes her marketing job and wants to advance in her position. Before holding a fulltime position, however, she used to practice every evening. As she is now too busy with work, she only practices with others twice a week, on Monday and Tuesday evenings at the Lenin Monument. For the lockers, the Lenin Monument has also evolved as a symbolic site, as it is the place where C-Lock's class used to take place. Due to her job, she also carefully chooses which international events to participate in. When all of her friends were already planning trips to the January 2019 *Juste Debout* competition in Bangkok, and later to Singapore in March 2019, Yen Hanh was still indecisive. She jokingly explains that she first has to organize her work so that she can dance during her holidays. Perhaps more importantly, like most dancers, she has to finance trips to international dance competitions on her own.

While she does not “officially” belong to a particular crew, she has friends from C-Lock's class with whom she plays together. They call their group Funky District. Much like in the case of the CunCun Crew, introduced earlier, the group's name arose from necessity. As they decided to join an underground battle as a team, they had to register with a team name. C-Lock's Singaporean teacher finally came up with the name Funky District. The name and naming process are once again indexical of the values, as well as the spatiality, of their community of practice. First of all, “funky” refers to the music to which locking is performed, as well as to the style to which it belongs, as locking falls under the umbrella of funk style. Second, “district” is an administrative unit, both within Vietnamese cities and provinces. However, since the Singaporean locker previously chose names related to urban space (Lion City Lock-

ers), and locking generally is associated with the city (e.g., the international event, Lock City), Funky District suggests reference to an imagined urban neighbourhood. What is more, the naming process also reveals institutional requirements for formal participation. What started out as an informal group of friends was formalized by assigning a name to the group in the process of signing up for a collective competition.

Apart from Funky District, Yen Hanh is connected with dancers of other styles, too. For instance, she got to know Mai – whom she refers to as elder sister – in 2015, when they were practicing soul dance with a group of friends at Mai’s CunCun studio. She also dances with Nguyet, a close friend with whom she has participated in 2 vs. 2 battles under the team name “Da Twin.” They came up with the name since everybody says they look alike, which is not only attributed to their physical appearance but also to their similar movement repertoire, as both are engaged in soul dance and funk style. In 2016, she participated together with Nguyet in the Urban Jam competition’s freestyle category. After the battle, one of the judges, an OG from the Hanoi breaking scene, invited her to serve as a judge for a youth dance event. The event was organized by Blue Dragon in Hanoi, a non-profit organization supporting children from poor families.

Apart from participating in local battles, Yen Hanh occasionally travels abroad. As suggested above, Singapore is an important destination for her and other lockers. She has been to Singapore twice. Much like for hip hop dance, Singapore has evolved as a hub for locking. Yen Hanh counts more than 1,800 lockers in Singapore, far more than in Vietnam where she is only aware of approximately ten lockers. She explains that Singapore appeals to famous international dancers, and therefore the Singaporean hip hop community is able to organize many large dance events, which are particularly attractive to dancers from the Southeast Asian countries like Vietnam. Before the COVID-19 crisis hit, several low budget airlines used to run daily connections from Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to Singapore.

While locking is commonly danced to funk music, Yen Hanh likes listening and dancing to rap music, as well, including Viet rap. When I asked about her personal connections to rappers, DJs, and graffiti writers, she recalls hip hop’s four elements, suggesting that b-boys and b-girls are more likely to be engaged in them. She explains that the culture of funk is different, characterizing it as *hiền*. While *hiền* translates as gentle and virtuous, it is also an adjective commonly associated with femininity. For instance, one of the three Confucian submissions that specify three types of women’s obedience to men

is referred to as *mẹ hiền*, meaning virtuous mother. Nonetheless, funk, and particularly locking, is a style in which men predominate, at least in Vietnam. Among the few lockers in Vietnam, and Hanoi in particular, Yen Hanh is one of the rare female dancers. One of her friends used to practice locking with her, but she quit dancing in favour of her career. That is why Yen Hanh appreciates her female peers, Mai and Nguyet, who specialize in other dance styles but also practice locking. Yen Hanh hopes to see the locking community grow and flourish, which is why she frequently participates in battles, to make other dancers aware of her style. Although she is often approached by others to teach locking classes, she is unable to teach while working full time. Sometimes she offers informal instruction to friends, beginning with grooving. She explains that many people know about locking because of grooving, since it is foundational to locking. To Yen Hanh, it is important to extensively practice the basics, which is why in the beginning she always focuses on grooving. She notices that after a few sessions repeating the basics, many students lose interest and drop out of class. She explains: “And the younger ones, I can feel that they don’t want to spend the time. So, I think that’s one of the reasons why people don’t continue practicing locking. And it’s so sad, because I want more lockers.” Generally, Yen Hanh finds the idea of community, and sharing her passion with others, to be an important feature of hip hop, which is why she enjoys sharing her knowledge about locking with others. After acting as a judge for the Blue Dragon kids breaking event, for example, she taught the children about the history of locking, as she enjoys sharing the life she leads with others.

