Urbanism and Hip Hop Communities of Practice

The spatiality of hip hop offers interesting insights into the dynamics of the city, as they are closely related to territory. According to Tricia Rose (1994: 25), the development of hip hop is bound up with the postindustrial city of New York. John Mollenkopf and Manuel Castells (1991) adopt the term "postindustrial" to describe transformations occurring with respect to employment away from manufacturing toward corporate, public, or non-profit services, and the concomitant transformation of workers from industrial manual labourers to professionals, service workers, and the like. Under postindustrial conditions, Rose refers to global forces that continue to shape the contemporary urban metropolis. While Rose explicitly refers to the United States, much of those socioeconomic forces restructuring urban America since the 1970s are operative elsewhere in more recent years, including in Vietnam. Progress in telecommunications, the new international division of labour, the increasing power of finance over production, and migration patterns are all forces relevant to the shaping and restructuring of urban space in Vietnam.

After phases of de-urbanization in Hanoi, and zero urban growth in Ho Chi Minh City (Murray and Szelenyi 1984), Vietnam's cities became the primary sites of rural-urban migration. The implementation of the Doi Moi economic reform program by the VI Party Congress in 1986 initiated the development of a private sector economy as well as Vietnam's integration into the world economy. In order to attract foreign direct investment, the government fostered the development of industrial zones on the peripheries of the country's major cities. Vietnam soon replaced China as a production site for labour-intensive export industries due to low wage levels. Today, Vietnam is an important site of production for the international garment, textile, and footwear industry. In recent years, more and more companies specializing in electro-technics moved to Vietnam, with one prominent example being Samsung, which manufactures parts for mobile phones. Of course, the devel-

opment of an export-oriented economy requires a large work force. The relaxation of the household registration system, which used to regulate access to employment and social services, particularly resulted in the more or less free choice for citizens to choose their employment and residency. Vietnam's capital Hanoi, and the economic hub of Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) in the south, have become particularly densely populated, as these cities expand into the hinterland due to the high influx of new residents. Additionally, public-private partnerships as well as transnational enterprises participate in the overheated real estate market, shaping and restructuring the urban built environment.

In recent years, an active public sphere has emerged in both cities, negotiating urban redevelopment between the private sector and the state, frequently succeeding in putting contested development projects on hold (Gillespie and Nguyen 2018; Kurfürst 2012; Labbé 2011). The country's rapid economic development resulted in social stratification with an emerging urban middle class. Social security is on the state's agenda, but state measures so far only consist of health insurance, maternity protection, and accident insurance. What is more, a great portion of the population, particularly those working in the informal economy and ethnic minorities living in the highlands, remains excluded from the social security system. In Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, growing inequalities materialize in infrastructural development, particularly residential areas. Erik Harms (2016: 5, 21) captures the development trajectory in the idioms of "luxury" and "rubble." Luxury refers to the spaces of exclusive spectacle, where residents claim the importance of "civility" – a form of citizenship that ultimately hinges on the exclusion of others. Rubble, conversely, implies the devastation, displacement, and eviction that accompany urban redevelopment under capitalism, leaving undercompensated those who are dispossessed from development sites for the greater good of capitalist profit maximization. Jenny Mbaye (2014: 402) ultimately links the spatial practices of hip hop to experiences of social and urban marginality, defining hip hop in cities of the Global South as "political action redefining the spatial structure and the social order of the city." In other words, hip hop seeks to reclaim urban terrain, making it work in favour of populations that have been marginalized or dispossessed by substantial urban transformations (Osumare 2001; Rose 1994). In Vietnam, as I will show in this book, the spatial practices of hip hop dance are particularly embraced by members of the middle class, who diverge from conventional life styles, as they frequently seek to

make a living from dance, and thence find themselves in precarious working conditions, albeit holding a university degree.

Hip hop's practices related to territory and urban space are diverse. Rap lyrics convey a politics of belonging, when rappers cite land marks, streets, subways, and so on in their neighbourhoods. Soundscapes of neighbourhoods and cities are often recorded and interlooped in rap tracks, creating a signaling effect for those who know the area. Torsten Wissmann (2016) differentiates between three different sounds in urban soundscapes: keynote, signal, and soundmark. The keynote can be understood as the background sound of a society, a sound that is frequently heard, against which other sounds are perceived. An example in rap tracks would be the noise of the ever-running trains and subways across train racks. In the case of Hanoi, the continuous honking of motor scooters could be regarded as a keynote. A signal, by contrast, comprises sounds that are consciously perceived by urbanites. The signal is a sound that carries a specific meaning, like church bells of the Cathedral in my home town of Cologne, or the constant recitation of songs in Cologne's vernacular language (Kölsch) during Carnival celebrations. In Hanoi, the recitation of Buddhist mantras on weekends and the 1st and 15th of the lunar new year are signals. Along more secular lines, the announcement of the latest prices of agricultural products or hygiene measures through public loudspeakers count as signals. Soundmarks, finally, are those sounds unique to a particular community or neighbourhood. Soundmarks are of cultural and historical significance, as they create a sonic sense of place and of belonging. Acoustic ecology, according to Raymond Murray Schafer (1969), further classifies sounds according to their sources, thus distinguishing between human, natural, and mechanical sounds. Breaking and hip hop dancing generally transform sonic experiences into bodily movements, embodying the metaphors induced by the sound.

This is particularly the case with mechanical sounds. Mechanical sounds of drums and beats incite b-boys, b-girls, and poppers to perform robot-like movements or to pantomime gunshots fired from a rifle. As a consequence, hip hop sonically marks and appropriates territory and place. Additionally, dancers convening in the cypher occupy public space, giving it new meanings and introducing new movement repertoires, while often challenging codes of conduct in public space. The most visible and tangible art of hip hop is graffiti writing. Writers create pieces in liminal, often moving spaces such as highways, trains, and public transit, while tagging walls of buildings, monuments,

and sculptures. The writers thereby literally mark territory. Accordingly, hip hop is ultimately linked to space and place.

The general idea of space as relational and socially produced, pioneered by Henri Lefebvre (1991), is referenced in diverse discussions of space and place across the social sciences. Acknowledging the relationality and social production of space, Doreen Massey (2005: 140) comprehends places as processes. For Massey, places are articulated moments in social networks, experiences, and understandings. Yet, many of these relations and experiences are constructed at scales larger than what is defined as a place itself in a specific moment, whether a park, street, or entire region. With this understanding, she opens toward an extroverted understanding of sense of place, acknowledging place's interlinkages with the wider world, resulting in an integration of the local with the global. In a similar vein, Edward Casey (1996) emphasizes the gathering power of place, considering places as events, by which he means that places are in a constant process of redefinition. The processuality of place is further outlined by Ingold (2008), who argues that places do not exist so much as they "occur," as they are produced through movement. In the hip hop community of practice, places are constantly created through dance moves and the gathering of members in the cypher. The cypher is a recurrent trope in hip hop vernacular. In academic literature, attention to the cypher focuses on the cultural practice of rap. Cyphers are conceptualized as speech events, demonstrating a vast range of linguistic creativity.

> "The cipher is where all (or some combination) of the Hip Hop cultural modes of discourse and discursive practices—call and response, multilayered totalizing expression, signifyin, bustin, tonal semantics, poetics, narrative sequencing, flow, metaphoric and hyperbolic language use, image-making, freestylin, battling, word-explosions, word-creations, word-pictures, dialoguing other voices, talk-singing, kinesics—converge into a fluid matrix of linguisticcultural activity." (Alim 2006: 97)

While this reading of the cypher involves a strong sociolinguistic focus, I am particularly interested in the spatial arrangement and materiality of the cypher. For dance, the cypher is a spatial practice and arrangement, medium of communication, mode of cooperation and competition, token of community, and sequence of learning. Dancers convene in a circular formation, taking turns practicing, freestyling, and dancing. The orientation of the cypher is centripetal, with all dancers facing the middle. The circular spatial configuration is not only emblematic of the cypher, but is, in fact, a cross-cultural

phenomenon, found in diverse forms of performance. For instance, for many practitioners of the Afro-Brazilian martial art capoeira, the *roda* or "wheel" represents the most traditional form of the practice. The roda is as much a space as an event. The circular space is marked by the bodies of spectators, musicians accompanying the "game," as well as practitioners waiting their turn to enter the game. Like the cypher, the roda is a sonic event, as the music guides actors as to when they should start and stop matches, and informs them how to play (Downey 2002: 491). Likewise, the *randai* of the Minangkabau of West Sumatra is a hybrid theatre form that has been described as "arena theatre" by Minang cultural commentators. Arena theatre denotes the randai's circular staging. The randai is usually performed late in the evening in the village plaza. The circular alignment of bodies, constituting a human border that delineates the stage, is the *lingkaran*. The lingkaran is the ring of eight to twelve players who constitute the circular formation of the randai. Made from human bodies, this circle allows the public to approach the stage from all directions. In sum, the circular assemblage of individual bodies is indexical of martial arts and dance forms in diverse cultures. Such circular formations offer space for social learning and the sharing of knowledge and innovation. Moreover, in an urban context, the spatial practice of the cypher marks the appropriation of public space, rendering otherwise marginalized bodies visible and audible within the city's public spaces.

In fact, hip hop involves multiple senses as it is just as much about visuality as it is about sonic, haptic, kinesthetic, and thus other sensory experiences. More than the senses, it is also about things difficult to express in words, which the dancers I talked to often described as "feeling," "emotion," "love," or *đam mê* in Vietnamese, which refers to indulgence and passion. In this sense, the study of hip hop culture generally, and dance in particular, opens to interesting insights about multisensory perception. Being interested in human perception generally, Ingold (2000: 287) most prominently challenges the assumption that vision constitutes the one dominant and objectifying sense. To the contrary, he suggests that we consider vision in its interrelations to other senses. Indeed, the Western dominance of vision and ocularcentrism has been recently challenged by cross-cultural analyses.

In socio-cultural anthropology, the ethnography of the senses has evolved since the 1980s, researching and acknowledging local senses and sense-making, even questioning the Western five-sense model. In *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, Sarah Pink (2015) calls for the senses to become part of ethnographic practice, rather than being mere objects of ethnographic inquiry. More than

a method of data collection, she considers sensory ethnography to be open to and opening toward new ways of knowing and forms of knowledge production. In human geography, the merits of a multisensory approach have been recognized, particularly with respect to studies of place and space. Accordingly, Pink (2015) reconsiders ethnographic practice through phenomenological theories of place and the politics of space, as such an approach "recognises the emplaced ethnographer as her- or himself part of a social, sensory and material environment and acknowledges the political and ideological agendas and power relations integral to the contexts and circumstances of ethnographic processes." (Pink 2015: 25). In other words, as the researcher learns and knows through her experiencing body, ethnographic experiences are embodied. Ethnography, in fact, is a sensuous way of knowing (Conquergood 1991). Drawing on the aforementioned phenomenological approach to place and thus the body, Pink proposes two concepts of sensoriality. The first is "sensory subjectivity," implying that ethnographic research is always subjective, which makes it necessary for the researcher to reflect on her role in the production of ethnographic knowledge. The second concept of "sensory intersubjectivity," referring to the corporeality of sensory experiences and their coming into being in relation to a material environment. Such sensory intersubjectivity is crucial when considering dancers' interactions with the material infrastructures in and upon which they dance.

According to Monica Degen and Gillian Rose (2012), the materiality of the environment together with actors' embodied practices and perceptual memories create particular senses of place. Their reference to materialities and memories indicates that sensory perception is mediated by different and continuously shifting spatial and temporal practices. Memories thus intertwine with sensory experiences. Methodologically, Degen and Rose approach urbanites' sensory perceptions – or intersubjectivity, in Pink's terms – via the walk-along. The walk-along builds on Margarethe Kusenbach's street phenomenology of the go-along, which is a research method for assessing manifold spatial practices, relations, and memories. According to Kusenbach (2003: 463), the go-along stands out from other ethnographic methods, as it enables ethnographers "to observe their informants' spatial practices *in situ* while accessing their experiences and interpretations at the same time."

I first encountered young people dancing in the streets during my research on public space in Hanoi between 2007 and 2008. Since that time, I developed a deep interest in youth activities in public spaces, as I observed transformations affecting major public spaces, such as Ly Thai To Garden, the Lenin

Monument, and more recently the Soviet Vietnamese Friendship Palace. All of these spaces were either planned and built during the French colonial period or in the period of socialist urban planning. When Hanoi was founded in 1010 as a political and sacred centre of the first centralized Vietnamese state, Dai Viet, urban spaces were created and coded according to their functionality and exclusivity. For instance, the rectangular walled compound of the royal citadel was only accessible to the king, members of his family, as well as high-ranking mandarins. With the construction of the commoner's city along the banks of the Red River in the 15th century, markets formed outside the citadel's main walls. Other than these markets, geographic and symbolic centres where strangers could meet remained absent from the urban landscape. Places for social interaction, such as Buddhist pagoda, Confucianist temples, or communal houses only existed at the communal or neighbourhood level. However, these were primarily sacred spaces, and access to them was granted on the basis of age, gender, and social status (Drummond 2000). As a consequence, the construction of squares and parks, such as the contemporary Ly Thai To Garden or the Lenin Monument, introduced new categories of urban space to Hanoi.

The introduction of public spaces went hand-in-hand with the overall transformation of the indigenous urban landscape, thereby demonstrating the power of the French colonizers over the local population. After declaring independence from France in 1945, the colonial regime was replaced by the one-party rule of the Communist Party. With this change among the political elite, the urban planning regime also changed. After periods of de-urbanization and zero urban growth during the two Indochina Wars (1946–1954 and 1968–1975), the party-state remained dominant in defining Hanoi's urban landscape until the 1990s. The primary function of public space in socialist Hanoi was to demonstrate and symbolize the state's power. Public spaces served as stages on which to assemble and control the masses. However, since the introduction of the Doi Moi economic reform program in 1986, which initiated private sector developments and began integrating the country into the world economy, citizens have come to challenge the state's predominant power to shape the urban landscape. As Li Zhang (2012) notes of post- or late-socialist countries, urban space in such contexts becomes a prominent arena for the articulation and negotiation of social aspirations, lifestyles, and class identities. In Hanoi, urbanites contest the state's power by appropriating former spaces of officialdom. In fact, they make these official spaces public by conducting their everyday routines within them, using these spaces for

private activities such as walking, exercising, cooking, eating, and drinking, nurturing children, and so forth. Moreover, public spaces, such as streets and sidewalks, are often appropriated for private economic activities like petty trade (Drummond 2000; Kurfürst 2012; Kurfürst 2019; Kim 2015; Thomas 2002).

According to Michel de Certeau (1984: xiv), everyday practices are spatial practices that lie beyond the control of the state. They are sometimes modes of resistance that are able to evade discipline from within the sphere of their exercise. Peter Goheen (1998: 489) emphasizes the "unreadibility" of everyday practices by the state, highlighting their subversive potential. Such unreadability recalls DeFrantz's arguments about the public and private transcript of dance. Likewise, the meanings of hip hop's diverse dance styles are not easily decipherable by the state, or even by passers-by assembling and watching such dance performances in public space. What is more, the appropriation of public city space does not only depend on the (un)readability of the practices themselves, but it is also dependent on more general forms of control exercised over urban public space by authorities. In fact, public spaces are marked by a continuum of state control and surveillance, with some public spaces offering more freedom to perform recreational and social activities than others. In their analysis of "Youth-driven tactics of public space appropriation in Hanoi," Stephanie Geertman et al. (2016) explain that the municipality of Hanoi assigns different categories to public space, which define or delimit the activities that can be carried within them. In most cases, the category of public space is deducible from the Vietnamese term for public space. For example, the full Vietnamese name for Ly Thai To would be *vườn hoa Lý Thái Tổ*, translated as Ly Thai To Garden. The Urban Planning Law of 2009 attaches particular relevance to open green spaces, and includes public gardens together with large squares, green spaces, water surfaces, and open space areas in its list of urban design objects required in the city. The *Public-Use Greenery Planning in Urban Areas: Design Standards* (Article 3.1) define public gardens as "green areas [of a few hectares or less] mainly for pedestrians to stroll and relax during short periods of use" (Pham and Labbé 2018: 174). A further category of public space is parks. The *Design Standards* define parks as "large green areas serving the goals of outdoor activities for the entertainment of urban residents, for mass cultural activities, contact with nature, and improvement of material and spiritual life;" (Pham and Labbé 2018: 174). An example of such a park would be Thong Nhat Park (*công viên Thống Nhất*), located south of Hoan Kiem Lake.

However, the municipality identifies a further category of park, namely, cultural parks (*công viên văn hoá*). Formally, recreational activities are prohibited within cultural parks. An example of such a cultural park would be the Lenin Monument located at Dien Bien Phu Street, opposite the UNESCO heritage site of the royal citadel. The overall outline of the public space is triangular. The area is comprised of a wide-open space made from stone, housing a statue of Lenin, as well as a wooden pavilion in the park behind the monument. Originally built during colonial times, as a memorial to those who had fought for France, the party-state chose to replace it with a statue of Lenin in 1985, thereby following the model of many other socialist countries at that time (Logan 2000: 198). The Lenin Monument, consisting of a 5.2 metre high effigy of the founding father of the Soviet Union, stands on a 2.7 metre high stone pedestal that was erected in the park. In theory, youth should not be allowed to practice around the Lenin statue (Geertman et al. 2016). In practice, however, the Lenin Monument is used for diverse activities, such as badminton, skateboarding, ballroom dance, economic activities, and so forth (Kurfürst 2012; Thomas 2002). Acknowledging that space for youth activities is limited in the densely settled city of Hanoi, municipal authorities tolerate use of the Lenin Monument for diverse youth activities, while maintaining that this arrangement is only temporary. What is more, these activities are easily forbidden when state festivities occur, or when considered inappropriate by the authorities (Geertman et al. 2016). Against this background, the persistence and gradual growth of dancers occupying these official spaces is all the more astonishing.

Ly Thai To Garden is located right in Hanoi's historical centre on the banks of Hoan Kiem Lake. Built by the French in the 19th century, it was one of the first Western public spaces introduced to a society in which only exclusive spaces previously existed, access to which was granted on the basis of social rank and gender (Drummond 2000: 2381). The city's precolonial urbanism was defined by the triple structure of the royal citadel, the commoner's city on the banks of the Red River, and an agglomeration of villages located west of the royal citadel. As I have argued elsewhere, Hanoi's urbanism was characterized by the tripolarity of the sacred, official, and profane. While the royal citadel constituted the sacred and political centre of the city and the country, manifest in the rectangular outline of the royal city, the commoner's city was a sphere of profane production and reproduction. In the precolonial city, public spaces, as spots for strangers to mingle, hardly existed (Kurfürst 2012: 35; Nguyen 2002: 280).

French colonial urbanism with its Hausmann-style, tree-lined boulevards, parks, and public spaces completely transformed the indigenous urban landscape. Consequently, Paul Bert Square developed in 1890 and named after the recently deceased Résident Général Paul Bert, provided a new category of space in the colonial city, which invited encounters among individuals from different social strata, ages, and genders. The physical structure of Paul Bert Square linked the main institutions of colonial power, including the town hall, the treasury, and the post office, as well as the *Résidence Supérieur* (Bourrin 1941: 50; Service Géographique de l'Indochine 1902). The square consisted of a wide space with a statue of Paul Bert facing Hoan Kiem Lake, and a pavilion where, between 1897 to 1934, military concerts of the *Garde Indigène* were held on Sundays (National Archive Nr. 1, Toa Doc Ly Ha Noi, No. 2940 and Series G-X, No. 005015). The statue of Paul Bert was erected on July 4, 1890 at the exact same site where the statue of liberty had stood before. The statue of liberty was again moved to the pagoda in Hoan Kiem Lake (Bourrin 1941: 48). In other words, the colonial power took a religious symbol and superimposed a profane icon on it, thereby demonstrating its overall domination over the indigenous population. After the country gained independence from France, the square was named Ghandi Park to honour the good relations with India at that time. However, after a public debate about the park's name among Hanoians and intellectuals, the municipality changed the name and erected a statue of King Ly Thai To, the first king of a centralized Vietnamese empire following 1,000 years of Chinese domination, and the founder of Hanoi in 1010, at the site where the 19th-century statue of Paul Bert once stood.

Today, the public space is made up of two different kind of materialities. First, the square housing the king's statue is made from stone, offering a flat surface for dancing. Second, located behind the statue, there is another small square made from stone, housing the ancient pavilion with a wooden roof. From there, a concrete path leads into a small park with benches for recreation. In 2007 and 2008, when I first encountered hip hop dance practices in Hanoi's public spaces, b-boys mostly gathered in front of the statue. At the time when I conducted my field work, members of the MiNi Shock and FIT Crews were regularly practicing on the platform, starting late in the afternoon. They got to know each other from practicing in this shared space and were very open to newcomers. According to crew members, the site became more crowded each day.

At the same time, female dancers who were members of Big Toe Crew regularly gathered in the ancient pavilion behind the statue. Upon their arrival

at the park, they swapped their school uniforms for sweatpants and tummy tops. Ten years later, when I returned for my fieldwork on hip hop in Vietnam, I recognized Mai Tinh Vi from a photo that I had taken in 2008. In the meantime, she had become one of Vietnam's most renowned hip hop dancers and b-girls. In 2007 and 2008, a gendered division of spatial practices at Ly Thai To Garden could be observed. At that time, mixed-gendered groups were almost entirely absent. Instead, groups consisted of either young men or young women. While the b-boys mainly gathered in front of the statue, the b-girls occupied the pavilion to practice. Since the girls often assembled right after school, the wooden pavilion provided some shade, especially in the hot and humid summer months. Neither space was exclusively used by either male or female dancers, but if both groups were present, they would usually retreat to their regular spot.

By 2018, the situation had slightly changed. First of all, dancers would start mingling much later, starting around 8 or 9 p.m. Second, both b-boys and b-girls – although the majority was still male – jointly occupied the flat, smooth surface directly in front of the statue. This part of the square is slightly elevated from the main square with a staircase leading toward the statue. By contrast, the park behind the statue was frequented by different aerobics, dance, and sports groups, mainly consisting of middle-aged women except for a small group of girls who practice K-Pop dance. Considering these locally concerted actions, it becomes obvious that each activity group, whether aerobics, gymnastics, K-Pop, and so on, occupies their own spatial niche, practicing separated from the other groups. Sonically, the non-routine visitor to these public spaces will be overwhelmed by the cacophony produced by competing amplifiers. However, for the everyday users of these spaces, it is far from a competition over whose amplifier is the loudest, as they are capable of focusing on their immediate sonic environment, produced by their own music and their own bodies. The soundscape becomes even denser when different groups that frequent the square need to withdraw from their particular spot and rearrange, as occurs when their activity spaces are cordoned-off or occupied by an official stage. Such interruptions of urban routines occur frequently around Ly Thai To Garden, as it is a common stage for official celebrations such as the Liberation Day of Hanoi, celebrated annually on the 10th of October.

Compared to 2007 to 2008, not only has the gendered appropriation of particular spots of the square changed, but so too has the time for the main activities. While previously, practice would often start at daylight, now the

practice period has shifted to later evening hours after school. Starting at 8 p.m., dancers with different levels of skill and experience come together to practice, carrying a portable music player with them. Breakbeats play the entire time. Although the music is quite loud, and the usual curfew in Hanoi for bars and coffee shops is around 10 p.m., breaking after 10 p.m. is not prohibited. In 2018, like to 10 years prior, the two official guards monitoring the space showed more interest in the dancers' bodily contortions than in preventing them from dancing. One of the guards in charge of Ly Thai To Garden regularly works from 5 to 11 p.m. between October until December.[11] His working hours indicate that the park patrol time has been adjusted to accommodate dance practices taking place there, as breakers would usually go home around 11 p.m. In contrast to members of other "street disciplines" (*bộ môn đường phố*), such as traceurs or skateboarders, who are perceived as disturbing or even damaging the urban environment (Geertman et al. 2016), dancers are not perceived as such. In the past decade, on the contrary, they have assembled a growing public with more and more passers-by interrupting their daily routines to watch them dance, and more young people joining in to practice themselves. In contrast to the early years, when breaking used to be prohibited in public spaces, the number of dancers mingling around the Lenin Monument and Ly Thai To Garden has increased since the 2000s. The only space dancing has been banned from is the Soviet Vietnamese Friendship Palace, although it is one of those spaces where hip hop dancing in Hanoi began.

The Soviet Vietnamese Friendship Palace is located at Tran Hung Dao St. 91, close to the central train station. It is situated at the former site of the colonial exhibition and market centre (*Nha Đấu Xảo*), which would later become the Maurice Long Museum of Indochina. Built by French architect Adolphe Bussy, the colonial exhibition hall housed the *L' Exposition de Hanoi* from 1902 to 1903. During the Japanese occupation of Hanoi in the 1940s, the occupying forces placed military personnel and supplies there. The edifice was completely destroyed at the end of World War II. Palace construction started in 1978, the same year the Socialist Republic of Vietnam signed the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union in order to guarantee bilateral economic cooperation. The edifice is located close to the office of the central party committee of Hanoi, and was a gift of the central committee of

11 In our conversations he did not mention the dancers, practicing right next to us, at all, but rather talked about his family, while showing an interest in Germany.

Soviet trade unions to the socialist state. The construction projects were part of the city's overall transformation to socialism. With assistance from Soviet architects, particularly Gragold Grigorievich Isakovich, the urban landscape was to represent the ideological and economic vision of the Socialist Republic (Anon. 1962; Logan 2000: 186, 194). The palace architecture followed the model of the Moscow Palace of Labour in modern constructivist style, offering lecture halls, theatres, and meeting rooms (Logan 2000: 183). Large official celebrations take place there, such as National Independence Day on September 2nd. As such, it symbolizes the socialist state's power. However, this icon of officialdom is, or at least used to be, contested by young dancers who practice alongside the palace's outer walls. On the front, stone pillars line the left and right corners of the rectangular palace structure. The colonnades along the palace's outer walls offer a dry, open space for practice during the monsoon season, while offering shade from the sun in the dry season. The flood lights on the corner of the building, and the lamps in the colonnade ceiling, offer enough light in a city where the sun regularly sets around 6 p.m. Since dancers usually gather in the evening, the flat, cold, stone palace floor provides ideal infrastructure for dancers. The materiality of the palace, together with the embodied practices and perceptual memories of the dancers, create a particular sense of place. Hoang Phuong, a female hip hop dancer, explains that she liked to dance here because the place had a good "spirit." It reminded her of the first dancers who practiced in this very space, creating a place for hip hop in Vietnam.

The *cung* (palace) or *cung xô* (Soviet palace) – as it is colloquially referred to – used to be a popular space for young people to mingle in the evening. The first hip hop dancers, such as Phuong Silver Monkey and Thanh C.O., practiced there regularly. Thanh C.O. is the leader of C.O. Crew, which was founded in 2001, originally under the name C.O.L.D Crew. However, they changed the crew's name to C.O. in 2007 as other dancers found the name too long, and often called them "C.O." The C.O. Crew regularly practiced in the house of culture (*nhà văn hoá*) at the palace. While most of the dancers assembled in the gallery in front of the palace, the C.O. Crew had a small studio in the back of the edifice. As more dancers from different dance styles joined, it became very crowded and some groups did not clean up after practice. Therefore, the state seized control of the place again. For several years now, dancing has been prohibited in the colonnades. A sign reads that all "activities of freedom" (*hạnh động tự do*) are prohibited. The sign implies that all self-organized rather than formally sanctioned activities are prohibited in

Colonnades along the Soviet Vietnamese Friendship Palace

Source: Nils Kurfürst (2018)

the space. The assembly of young dancing bodies in front of the socialist icon is apparently considered a thread to the urban order. Nonetheless, hip hop's past and present remain inscribed into the space via graffiti.

The right outer wall is an evolving palimpsest of tags from various writers. The tags display quotes from hip hop vernacular, such as 'CYPHER,' 'CREW,' 'HIP HOP DONT STOP…'. While cypher and crew refer to the spatial practice of dance, and the social organization among hip hop practitioners, "HIP HOP DONT STOP…" is a common rap lyric line and the title of a CD compilation of

Graffiti along the palace's outer walls

Source: Sandra Kurfürst (2018)

hip hop classics published in 1997. Consequently, while ephemeral embodied practices have been banned from the palace, the tags invoke dancers' perceptual memories. Furthermore, the tags and graffiti that cite hip hop vernacular link the particular place of the palace to places beyond, as suggested by Massey (1994). In other words, the palace constitutes a node within a wider network of local and global places, which are frequented, and in the process created, by hip hop dancers. As shown in subsequent chapters on particular dance styles, local practitioners who started out dancing at the palace also gathered and practiced around the Lenin Monument and Ly Thai To Garden. At the same time, international hip hop dancers, such as from Germany, come to these places to exchange movement vocabulary with Hanoian dancers.

Moving from one public space to another, dancers in Hanoi create intimate, affective spaces in what is otherwise the anonymous environment of the late socialist city.

> "Over time, technique creates 'vernacular landscapes' within urban environments. (…) It organizes relationships across culture and class to form affective environments, geographies of the heart. The vernacular landscapes constructed through dance technique are literal and psychic spaces for the daily,

> routine time and talk that bind practitioners to one another." (Hamera 2007: 60-61)

In other words, the publicity of performance is crucial to sharing and exchanging bodily knowledge, and to creating and maintaining social relationships.

Social learning

In this book, I argue that distinct communities of practice have evolved in Vietnam since the 1990s in relation to hip hop's four cultural practices, with a focus on the community of hip hop dancing. Originally, the communities of practice concept developed as a theory of learning from the collaboration between sociocultural anthropology, namely, anthropologist Jean Lave, and educational theorist and practitioner, Etienne Wenger, at the Institute for Research on Learning in Palo Alto (Duguid 2008). In their 1991 book, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, Lave and Wenger identify "legitimate peripheral participation" as determining membership in a particular community of practice. Through participation, newcomers are integrated into social relationships, learning as much about the social relations they become a part of as they learn about a particular craft or practice. As a result, learning takes place in "real-life settings, under real performance requirements on actual individuals" (Fuhrer 1993: 179).

Crucial to such an understanding of learning is the concept of apprenticeship, introduced by Lave in the 1970s to overcome the formal-informal divide in educational and learning theory (Lave 2011: 21). Decades later, in her 2011 monograph, *Apprenticeship in Critical Ethnographic Practice*, Lave elaborates on apprenticeship as both a research method and object of study, drawing on her research on apprenticeship among Vai and Gola tailors of Liberia. At the time when she began this research, there was a rigid dividing line between what was called "formal" and "informal" education. In the 1970s, cross-cultural psychologists assumed that only formal education and schooling could result in generalizable knowledge that could be transferred to new domains. By contrast, informal education was considered to be based on everyday life experiences, and thus bound to merely reproduce traditional, allegedly context-bound knowledge (Lave 2011: 19). Against these ideas, Lave offers a complex account of local educational practices to question what at the time was the

mainstream account of "non-schooled" and informal education (Gibson 2011: X, foreword in Lave 2011). Starting from practice theory as a theory of relations, Lave (2011: 3) "began to consider seriously the possibility that learning, knowledgeability, skillfulness, whatever else they might be, are always only part of ongoing social arrangements and relations."

While many dance students engage in self-learning through online tutorials, the sharing of bodily knowledge primarily occurs within master-student relationships as well as among peers within crews. Newcomers learn basic dance techniques through legitimate peripheral participation, by copying and mimicking the so-called "old timers" (Lave and Wenger 1991). According to Hamera (2007: 6), techniques are "codes of governing and standardizing dance practice," rendering performing bodies legible. Newcomers who have been initiated in movement vocabulary eventually become advanced students, who are then able to develop their individual styles. The final stage of initiation is crew membership, which is crucial to identity construction. In this regard, Wenger emphasizes trajectories through different levels of participation in the community, as well as the existence of internal structures, such as periphery and centre (Cox 2005: 531-532). In the hip hop dance community, I have identified three different relationships or trajectories through which newcomers move from the periphery to the centre, with the centre defined by membership in the dance crew:

a) Master-student relationship
b) Appointment by the crew leader
c) Formal recruitment process

These categories are not exhaustive, but rather dynamic. Sometimes these forms of recruitment are combined or overlap with respect to individual dancers, since an individual can be a member of multiple crews.

Master-student relationship

Newcomer to the hip hop dance community in Vietnam explained that they first participated in dance classes in dance studios or in public spaces. Many explained that they chose their teacher themselves. Some personally approached a well-known dancer, or someone they had seen performing in public space, either by directly asking them to be their teacher, or by signing up for their dance class. Hoang Phuong, a female hip hop dancer and co-owner of the Wonder Dance Studio in Hanoi, recalls how Phuong Silver Monkey used to dance to music from big loud speakers in the lobby of the Soviet Vietnamese Friendship Palace. Training in public, he made his actions "visibly-rational-and-reportable-for-all-practical-purposes," and thus accountable to others (Garfinkel 1967: vii). Phuong Silver Monkey introduced a new bodily practice to the city, thereby unsettling extant movement repertoires within public space. Furthermore, he made his bodily practices reproducible to others, enabling them to engage in a mimetic process that Marcel Mauss (1973: 73) referred to as "prestigious imitation." As they admired his bodily movements, Hoang Phuong and a friend approached him, asking him to be their teacher. In the context of capoeira, Downey (2002) makes similar observations, noting that beginners imitate those players whose movements they admire most. However, students of hip hop are merely able to choose their own teacher, as the master-student relationship requires mutual agreement. Thus, Phuong Silver Monkey, in turn, asked the two girls to perform for him, before accepting them as students. As the master-student relationship was agreed to, they started practicing indoors in a rented room. Then, after a year of practice, the group moved outdoors to the Lenin Monument. As more people joined the class in public space, they finally founded New York Style Crew. Initiated into the practice, and practicing ever since, Hoang Phuong was able to develop her own style, eventually becoming a renowned hip hop dancer, as will be seen in more detail in the chapter on hip hop dance. Today, Hoang Phuong has students of her own, a group of girls who have been following her for almost three years. Together with these students, she founded the hip hop crew Wonder Sisters, which is the counterpart to the popping crew, Wonder Brothers, headed by the co-founder of the Wonder Dance Studio, CK Animation. Despite her personal success and reputation in the hip hop dance community, she still refers to Phuong Silver Monkey as her teacher, addressing him with the proper honorific Vietnamese term, *thầy*.

This lifelong master-student relationship is idiosyncratic to the hip hop community of practice, as even famous dancers still refer to themselves as students of their teachers. However, this relationship is also related to the particular status of teachers in Vietnamese society. Since education is highly valued among other status markers, teachers enjoy elevated social reputations in Vietnam. Even if students become more successful than their teachers, they would still refer to the teacher as "master" (*thầy/cô*), and to themselves as "student" (*em*), maintaining and reproducing the asymmetrical relationship between master and student. The special role of the teacher is also manifest in the annual Teacher's Day. On November 20, students throughout the country pay tribute to their teachers, visiting them at home, writing them letters and greetings cards, and presenting them with flowers. Such tributes are also paid to dance instructors on Teacher's Day, as dance teachers post photos of the greetings they received from students on Facebook and Instagram, while students wish them well online.

Like Hoang Phuong, Nguyet (aka Waacking Howl or WHowl), and her husband Bi Max chose Phuong Silver Monkey as their teacher. Having previously engaged in other dance styles such as waacking and breaking, they set out to learn hip hop. Nguyet remembers how, in the beginning, she thought her teacher was too "cool" to talk to. It was after when she joined his class that she noticed that he was not as aloof and distant as she had expected. What began as a master-student relationship for Nguyet and Bi Max soon turned into crew memberships. Today, hopes for continuity in the crew rest with Nguyet and Bi Max, who recruit new and younger members. However, Nguyet is not only a member of New York Style Crew, but also of Soul Waackers, a waacking crew founded by C2Low. What is more, Nguyet teaches her own class comprised of six female students twice a week in the evening. Thus, students become teachers and thus multiply the training of other dance students.

Mai, like Hoang Phuong, was just 12 years old when she decided to learn hip hop dance. She accompanied a friend to the Soviet Vietnamese Friendship Palace in search of a teacher. She first approached the ZickZack Crew that was practicing there. However, as she explains, they were too "cool" to let her join and just ignored her. Mai then approached another crew, the N-least Crew, but they also did not welcome her. In 2004, finally, Mai went to Big Toe Crew, which let her join their dance exercises. The leader of Big Toe, Thanh (aka LionT), trained her together with another girl. After training, Mai watched members of the Big Toe 3 Team practice together, hoping that one day she

would become a member of the team.[12] Overall, Mai identifies the master-student relationship as the best way to learn dancing, especially compared to a dancing class. As a newcomer to the hip hop dance community, she suggests, it is best to choose one or two teachers and to practice regularly with them over long periods of time. Interestingly, she does not refer to Thanh as her teacher, but rather sees him as a "leader" since she identifies as a member of Big Toe Crew.

In summary, the examples discussed above illustrate elected master-student relationships. With the increasing commodification of dance practices, however, master-student relationships are increasingly being mediated as economic relationships. In other words, master-student relationships are increasingly structured by economic exchanges, especially as manifest in commercialized dancing classes.

Many of the dancers I talked with were either full- or part-time dance instructors. Mai regularly offers a beginner hip hop class at the Cun Cun Studio on Thai Thinh Street. Every three months, she starts a new beginner's class, while also teaching an advanced class. In autumn 2018, when I was studying with her, she led a beginner's class on Tuesday and Friday evenings from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Overall, the class lasts three months. The fee for one month is 500,000 VND, 1,200,000 VND for three months, and a single class for 100,000 VND. After the first lesson, she asked people to sign up and to pay the fee in cash. Mai's class had 11 members on the first day, seven of whom were female including a girl who was 7 or 8 years old, and four male, all of whom were around 20 years old. While we were practicing the final moves, members of the advanced class often arrived early. Mai explains that, in the last two years, many students sought her out as their teacher. She is aware, however, that those joining her evening classes have little spare time for dancing, especially for the beginner's class. By contrast, those joining the advanced class that starts at 8 p.m. are regular students, who regularly hang out with Mai and also practice together outside the formal class setting.

In sum, the master-student relationship also lays the groundwork for crew membership. In many cases, crew members were initially students of more advanced dancers, oftentimes crew leaders, and would later join the crew after practicing together for a couple of years.

12 At that time Big Toe had three sub-groups, divided into Big Toe 1, Big Toe 2, Big Toe 3, according to the level of practitioners. Big Toe 1 comprised the old timers or "big ones" as Mai puts it.

Appointment by the leader

The second process for integrating newcomers is by invitation from a crew leader, which often depends on long-term personal relationships. Renowned practitioners of particular dance styles approach individual students, or a group of students, to invite them to join their crew. C2Low, one of the first waackers in Vietnam, started a free waacking class at the Lenin Monument, in order to motivate others to learn waacking. By teaching and practicing with others in public, he made his actions accountable to and repeatable by interested others. Nguyet was first invited by C2Low to join his Soul Waackers Crew. As she and her husband were seeking to learn another dance style, they joined Phuong Silver Monkey's hip hop class. After practicing with him for some time, Phuong Silver Monkey finally asked her and Bi Max to join his crew, New York Style Crew. While her crew membership appears to have been a long process involving regular practice, Nguyet recalls the moment she "officially" joined the crew. This moment was defined by the collective decision to join a showcase battle in Singapore, for which Phuong Silver Monkey, Bi Max, Nguyet, Thanh Phuong, and a few others recorded a video to submit to the organizers. This joint enterprise gave them a sense of mutual belonging, which finally established the crew.

Nam, the leader of the popping Funky Style Crew, started practicing in a dance studio before joining the Wonder Dance and Milky Way Crew. His own crew practices every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday evening at 7 p.m. in Nghia Do Park located along Cau Giay and Nguyen Van Khuyen Streets. Like Phuong Silver Monkey and C2Low, Nam makes his practice visible and accountable to others in public space, which is how he was approached by a young woman named Phuong. When I met Phuong at the Ho Thanh Cong popping battle for the first time, she had only been practicing popping for two months. She asked Nam if she could join his crew, so he invited her to practice with them. Nam himself does not see himself as much as a teacher, but rather as the crew leader (*nhóm trưởng*).

CK Animation also integrates former students into his Wonder Brothers Crew. Nonetheless, he differentiates between the process of becoming a member of Wonder Dance Studio and the process of becoming a member of his crew. To participate in a dance class, it is sufficient to sign up at the studio and pay for classes. To become a crew member, by contrast, requires a longer period of apprenticeship, practice, and hanging out. In fact, CK Animation identifies the following as requirements for a new crew member: regularly

hanging out together, "playing" (*chơi*) or dancing with each other, and being really good at training.

Tien, a young dancer from Ninh Binh, practices with a member of the TiTan Crew, one of three local hip hop dance crews in Ninh Binh Province, north of Hanoi. TiTan Crew is from the province's capital city, Ninh Binh, wheareas WinDy Crew is located in the provincial city of Tam Diep, and yet another crew in Hoa Lu. By 2018, TiTan Crew had already been around for 11 years. The crew features two dance categories, breaking and freestyle. Hip hop, waacking, and popping dancers come together in the freestyle category. Tien explains that, since the crew specializes in breaking, there are only a few female members, including two b-girls, two female hip hop dancers, and one female waacker. Apart from the members, the crew has more than 50 students. Before becoming a student to one of the crew members, Tien already had dance experience, as he is also a member of his high school's dance club. However, in the school's dance club, they mostly did choreographies for graduation or Teacher's Day.

In September 2018, Tien responded to a post that the crew left on Facebook, seeking to recruit new students (rather than members) to train, since the crew wanted to push hip hop in Ninh Binh City. While he studies with a crew member, this does not automatically imply crew membership, which is why Tien carefully distinguishes between the crew's students and members. For instance, as a newcomer, he became the student of a female crew member who specializes in waacking. In order to become a crew member, he first needs to become a good dancer, and then be accepted by the rest of the crew as a whole. When asked about the recruitment process, his teacher explains that hip hop is as much a profession as it is a lifestyle. Therefore, it is important that community (*cộng đồng*) builds around the dance style. She affirms that all crew members jointly decide who to accept into the crew.

Consequently, the selection and integration of new crew members is a collective process. Formally, the leader appoints new members, but eventually the crew decides as a collective. In the Soul Waackers Crew, the leader calls on his students to join the crew, but the other crew members have a say in the decision, as well. Crew members primarily evaluate proposed newcomers on the basis of skills and social factors. For example, one indicator is if the newcomers "play" well with other crew members, and whether it feels good playing together. Other factors are whether newcomers appear to be hard working and take crew practice seriously. The examples of the Wonder Brothers, Soul Waackers, and TiTan Crews demonstrate that the integration of newcomers

into a crew does not solely depend on skills and techniques, but also on social fit.

Formal recruitment process

Some crews initiate formal recruitment processes, organizing casting events. Usually, such casting events are advertised on the crew's Facebook page. The crew will set a date, inviting all interested dancers to participate in the casting process at the crew's training facility. During the audition, newcomers are asked to perform while the crew members judge them according to their dance technique and performance. Such recruitment processes mostly seem to be initiated by crews that have been in existence for quite some time, and have received a certain reputation within the community of practice. These crews frequently participate in dance battles.

The Milky Way Crew, one of Vietnam's oldest popping crews, initiated such a recruitment process in March 2019. For this purpose, Mai Tinh Vi, who is not a member of the crew herself, together with the crew leader TF Star, and two other dancers, produced a live video on Facebook, inviting interested dancers to participate in the casting. The live video lasted 77 minutes, and they took questions from dancers interested in crew memberships. Interested dancers were able to post questions in the live chat, while the crew members responded as music played in the background. They repeatedly mentioned that a crucial condition for crew membership is fitting in socially with the crew. These social aspects of membership were explained by other crew members as the willingness to hang out with each other, including beyond crew practice meetings. In fact, crews often post photos on social media of their get-togethers for dinners, lunches, or weekend trips. While there are no financial requirements explicit in crew membership, the visual markers of hip hop apparel, such as sneakers, baseball caps, t-shirts, and the like, imply a requirement to make financial investments necessary to be visually recognized by peers. What is more, except for the first generation of dancers, such as Thanh, Phuong Silver Monkey, and later Mai or Hoang Phuong, who learned to dance in public space, the recruitment of new dancers often occurs in dance studios, access to which requires financial resources. Accordingly, while crews appear to be open to newcomers, and the community of practice is rather inclusive, certain financial investments and resources are implicitly required for participation, beyond skills and technique.

Social learning, social responsibilities

Overall, the master-student relation appears to be key to integrating newcomers into the community of practice. As indicated by the concept of social learning, the role of master is not reduced to the sharing of knowledge and training of skills, but also involves social responsibility. Masters teach their students bodily skills, techniques, and kinesthesia, while sharing their knowledge of the history of a particular dance style with their students. But more than that, teachers also provide mental and emotional support to students, for instance, when they join a battle for the first time. When I first met CK Animation at the Ho Thanh Cong popping battle in October 2018, he had not come to participate in the battle himself, but to watch and support his students. As we talk, two male students approach him, and say, "Chào anh." Their greeting indicates a hierarchical relationship, as they use the honorific second person address, *anh*, which signals the higher status of the addressee over the speaker. This honorific address is further supported in the gesture of shaking hands, as students hold their right arm with their left hand, while shaking their teacher's hand. One of the students tells CK Animation that he is scared. CK Animation answers in a very friendly and calm manner, suggesting that there is no need to worry. Accordingly, teachers support their students emotionally and celebrate their success. Several teachers celebrated students' regional, national, and international successes on Facebook, posting photos of master and student together during award ceremonies or right after battles.

Apart from offering mental and emotional support, teachers also feel social responsibility with respect to their students' livelihoods. Thanh reports how proud he was when Big Toe Crew won a lot of competitions, becoming top 5 in the world. Yet, at the same time, he felt bad because he was not able to provide stable income for his crew members and fellow dancers. At the height of success, the crew finally broke up in 2011. Afterward, many former members stopped dancing altogether, looking for other jobs to make a living. Reflecting on this time, Thanh locates the reason for the crew's disbanding in the inability to make a living from dancing. This is why he decided to open a dance studio, inviting former crew members to become teachers in his studio. Some of the old members still work in his studio, teaching and practicing, but no longer participating in battles. He wants to make a difference for the "new generation," as he calls it, giving them the opportunity to dance and generate an income while still going to school. Some of his current students are

still in school at only 16 years old. In the evening, they teach a class at his studio, then practicing themselves after class, before returning to school the next morning. For Thanh, it is important that they are independent, not needing to ask anyone for money to support their ability to dance and travel abroad to participate in battles.

Students, in turn, look up to their teachers as role models. One locking student considers her teacher both an inspiration as well as her caretaker, saying that he "not only teaches us how to dance, he also teaches us how to live." Her statement hints at how hip hop is not only a bodily practice, but a way of life shared by the members of the community of practice. Furthermore, her statement points to the importance of trust in the master-student relationship. Of course, trust must be established and maintained among master and apprentice. But with more children and teenagers attending dance classes, the building of trust among teachers and parents likewise grows in importance, as well. A young girl and sometimes a small boy participated in Mai's class, and both were always accompanied by their mother. Thanh likewise explains that some parents bring their children to his dance academy, as they used to dance with him in the past. Other parents bring their children because they want them to become professional dancers, while others know that Thanh can provide them with a job. He narrates the story of a former student who wants her daughter to become an internationally successful dancer. At ten years old, her daughter had already won a major freestyle and waacking event in China. In other words, Thanh's reputation as a skilled dancer, as well as provider for his students, facilitated parents' trust in his ability to take good care of their children.

In sum, as indicated by Lave and Wenger, the master-student relationship is as much about learning a particular practice – in this case, hip hop, waacking, popping, locking, or breaking – as it is about learning and being integrated into social relationships. Teachers like Thanh, CK Animation, or C2Low not only see their role in mediating bodily skills, and conveying particular movement vocabularies, but also in providing emotional and mental support to their students, and potentially even financial autonomy, as in the case of Thanh.

Social learning and material infrastructures

Social learning in the form of peripheral legitimate participation mainly occurs in public spaces. Public dancing attracts others interested in the bodily practice, thus facilitating social interaction. Ethnomethodology has been influential in studies of situated social practice, and aiming to understand ongoing local productions of social order and meaning. Ethnomethodology assists in understanding orders and rules, and how to deploy them toward one's own ends. For instance, in his account of how to cross an underregulated crossroad "Kincaid" in Oregon, Kenneth Liberman (2013) studies the methods actors adopt to make their way through such complexity and crowd. According to Harold Garfinkel, one of the founders of ethnomethodology, interaction requires work or effort in order for actors to produce a mutually intelligible social world. Such work encompasses "a public, visible, and orderly passing back and forth of recognizable sounds and movements," and, as such, it can be studied in empirical detail (Garfinkel and Rawls 2005: 7). Actors working together within a shared field of practice assign public and mutual meaning to actions in order to produce witnessable orders.

In the communities of hip hop dancing, the production of such public, visible, and witnessable orders frequently occurs through interactions in public space. As I show throughout this book, most of the dancers that are well-known today started out practicing in public. More precisely, they participated legitimately in peripheral public space. Both Mai Tinh Vi and Hoang Phuong first came in touch with the embodied practices of hip hop when they watched the 1st generation of hip hop dancers' practice outside the Soviet Vietnamese Friendship Palace. Likewise, Nguyet participated in her first waacking class at the Lenin Monument. Although Mai's first attempts at legitimate peripheral participation with the first two breaking crews she approached were unsuccessful, she nonetheless got a glimpse of what was going on. In contrast, Hoang Phuong was able to watch Phuong Silver Monkey, who is said to be the first hip hop dancer in Hanoi, as he practiced outside the palace and eventually asked him to be her teacher. Training in public, Phuong Silver Monkey made his bodily practices observable by and reproducible for others, enabling them to engage in a mimetic process. Having learned from him, today Hoang Phuong owns her own dance studio and is the leader of an all-female hip hop crew. Accordingly, social learning within the community of practice takes place through publicly situated and shared practices. Apart from the accountability and reproducibility created by dancing in pub-

lic, a further quality assigned to public space is kinesthesia. As stated earlier, WHowl's class takes place once a week outdoors at the Lenin Monument. In her choice of location, she pays attention to the sensory experience of public space, stating that the kinesthesia experienced by practitioners differs from the dance studio, as no mirror is available to control the movement. Yet, apart from this learning process in which the situatedness of action becomes tangible, her explanation about the differences between spaces also involves processes of place-making. Similar to how Mai and Hoang Phuong recall their experiences at the palace, Nguyet likewise remembers how she first got in touch with waacking in this same space. To Nguyet, the Lenin Monument is emblematic of waacking. Therefore, she is eager to maintain Lenin Monument as a "traditional space of hip hop" in Vietnam. Similarly, Hoang Phuong used to take her students to either the monument or the pavilion at Ly Thai To to practice hip hop dance. That was before she owned her own studio and was able to teach her students indoors. Yet, she explains, she sometimes still takes her students to practice in public at Lenin.

The Halley Crew, a renowned Hanoian breaking crew, likewise started out training at the Soviet Vietnamese Friendship Palace. After watching the b-boys from Zic Zac Crew train at the palace, Hoang C-Floor decided to found the Halley Crew. The crew founder is very fond of the crew's diversity, stressing that no one is alike. That is why they are a very "colorful" group (*có nhiều màu sắc*) that harmonizes well with each other. In 2015, Halley Crew regularly gathered in front of the palace in the evening. The dancers assembled on the rectangular square in front of the Soviet-style building, which offers an open space for the b-boys and b-girls to practice. The social community and space mutually constituted each other through this very practice. Breakers usually convene to practice in a circular cypher where individual dancers exchange their latest moves. Yet, given the architecture and morphology of the space, they did not create circular formations but rather rectangular assemblages. Three different socio-spatial formations emerged, which differed according to the performative vocabulary and physical skills of the practitioners. The beginners and newcomers practice together, as do intermediate dancers, as well as the advanced or old timers. The result is three different spatial configurations in which dancers exchange dance moves according to their skill levels.

Only those with advanced techniques and styles are able to join the Halley Crew. In other words, dancers move from the periphery to the centre, as they become old timers over time.

In conclusion, dancing in public is as just much about a specific sensory experience and thus a sensory mode of learning as it is about social learning. Training in public, dancers make their actions visible, accountable, and thus reproducible. This is not only the case in Hanoi, but also in provincial cities like Ninh Binh. A female waacking dancer from Ninh Binh City recalls when she encountered hip hop's corporeal vocabulary for the first time as a little girl, when her father took her out for a stroll in the park. What is more, while practicing in public space, members of the dancing community signal that they are open to newcomers. Several dancers explained that everyone interested in dancing is welcome to join. This was already the case 10 years ago when I interviewed the b-boys who regularly hung out around the Ly Thai To statue. In fact, the integration of newcomers frequently occurs through legitimate peripheral participation in such public spaces. This openness and inclusiveness are essential features of the community of practice. However, in order to enhance their bodily skills, most people agreed that it was important for them to identify one crew member to serve as their teacher. By learning from this teacher, they might one day gain access to the crew. Thanh explains that, within Vietnamese breaking crews, respect is paid to the older crew members and that many crews are hierarchically organized (Margara, Van Nguyen 2011). Such social hierarchies in dance are expressed in the sociospatial configurations of dance communities. Moreover, hierarchy within the crew and their collective practice become tangible through students' and newcomers' demeanor toward the elders. Hierarchy manifests itself in what Erving Goffman (1986: 4) refers to as "supportive interchanges," such as greeting ceremonies. Before joining dance practice or a battle, students approach their teacher, shaking their hands with their right hand, while bowing slightly before the elder. Accordingly, hierarchy is expressed both in terms of demeanour and body postures, as well as in spatial orientation. The deferential behaviour to dance elders, and the movement from the outer circle to the inner circle of the Halley Crew, recalls Deborah Durham's depiction of the circle of men in Botswana. Durham (2004: 593) demonstrates the operation of hierarchy and generation in the context of the circle, in which men convene on the occasions of funerals and weddings. First of all, younger men who want to pay respect to their seniors would approach them in a deferential manner, allowing the seniors to lead in conversation and greeting. Second, young men will start by sitting outside the inner circle of elderly men, and then, by the age of 30 – sometimes earlier, sometimes later – move into the inner circle, not as deferential as they used to be. Consequently, the achievement of seniority through

age, accolades, or performance becomes manifest in space. Additionally, hierarchies are enacted verbally, through the use of honorific forms of first- and second-person address in Vietnamese, which indicate status differentials between teacher or crew leader and their students and other crew members.

Overall, crew membership is not always performed verbally. One example can be drawn from the B Nashor Crew, which is one of the most recent open style hip hop crews in Hanoi. All the crew members have a dance name, including Nashor, as a suffix or prefix. Main protagonists are Mia Nashor and Mai Tinh Vi. In fact, Mai Tinh Vi is the only dancer who does not use the Nashor particle, possibly because she has already been known under her dance name for several years. Whenever they recruit new members, they will be assigned the family name Nashor. What is more, the B Nashor crew makes extensive use of the hashtag #family. The family metaphor appears to be a cross-cultural practice in the social organization of hip hop. For instance, Ian Condry (2001: 237) characterizes the organization of Japanese hip hop as "loose groups of 'families' (*famirii*)." In Japanese rap, a family consists of a collection of rap groups headed by a famous rapper with a number of protégés. One of the first popping crews in Hanoi, the Milky Way Crew, likewise fashions itself as a family, including when recruiting new members in the process described above. Since its beginning, diverse subgroups with different dance styles have flourished under the umbrella of the Milky Way Family.

Power and language in communities of practice

Similar to its implications for the field of social learning, the introduction of the concept of communities of practice to linguistics likewise challenged long-established ideas, concepts, and ideologies of language. Language was long thought of as a bounded system consisting of grammar, vocabulary, and structured sounds, which were distributed across spatially discreet entities, as represented in the concept of a "speech community." According to Duranti (2001: 18), a speech community denotes the boundaries of what should be studied as a unit, while Hymes (1972: 54) defines a speech community as "a community sharing rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech, and rules for the interpretation of at least one linguistic variety." What Hymes calls linguistic variety is embedded in knowledge of how to engage in communicative practice (Eckert and McConnel-Ginet 2003: 56). The conceptualization of language as a speech community is best exemplified in the linking of a par-

ticular language to a nation-state. With the rise of the nation-state in the 19th century, language was apprehended as spatially fixed to a particular territory (Gal and Irvine 1995; Taylor 1990 cited in Blommaert and Rampton 2011). Jan Blommaert and Ben Rampton (2011: 4) refer to this idea of language as an "ideological artefact" operating in the "apparatus of modern governmentality." In fact, a vast amount of literature has been produced on language ideologies deconstructing the idea of such distinct languages. Against this background Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet (2003: 57) comprehend of speech communities as shared practices within socially and geographically defined communities, yet instead of considering these practices to be spatially fixed to particular territories, they suggest that the boundaries of such communities are fluid, depending on the level of specificity one is looking for. Turning to more concrete social collectivities based in everyday practice, they call for attention to communities of practice. Already in their 1992 article, "Think practically and look locally: Language and gender as community-based practice," Eckert and McConnell-Ginet discuss communities of practice with respect to language, gender, and power, defining a community of practice as:

> "(…) an aggregate of people who come together around some enterprise. United by this common enterprise, people come to develop and share ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values – in short, practices – as a function of their joint engagement in activity. Simultaneously, social relations form around the activities and activities form around relationships. Particular kinds of knowledge, expertise, and forms of participation become part of individuals' identities and places in the community." (Eckert and Mc Connell-Ginet 1992: 464)

Instead of replacing the concept of speech community with community of practice (Blommaert and Rampton 2011), they draw our attention to the interconnections between the two. The authors argue that ways of speaking are most closely coordinated at the level of the community of practice, while drawing on repertoires from broader and more diffuse speech communities. At this interface, communities of practice refine the practices of speech communities for their own purposes. In this sense, communities of practice assist scholars in rethinking traditional notions of community and identities, such as gender, since the boundaries of such communities of practice are determined internally, "through ethnographically specific social meanings of language use" (Bucholtz 1999: 214; Eckert and McConell-Ginet 1992). Combined with ethnographic research, the community of practice approach allows scholars to ex-

amine both the actions of individuals, and the structures that are thereby (re)produced as well as resisted and subverted.

Mary Bucholtz (1999: 221) suggests that the community of practice concept is valuable as it enables "researchers of socially situated language use to view language within the context of social practice." Accordingly, communities of practice develop among groups of people responding to a shared situation. People engage in practice together because they share an interest in a particular place at a particular time. Through such mutual engagement, communities of practice can produce certain ways of pronouncing things, nicknames, or specific forms of greetings (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003). In the Vietnamese hip hop dancing community, such specific ways of talking evolve at the interface of the Vietnamese speech community, and the transnational hip hop community of practice.

While sociolinguists have shown great interest in hip hop, and particularly rap, they have seldom included the community of practice concept in its analysis. In *Roc the Mic Right! Language of Hip Hop*, H. Samy Alim (2006) conceptualizes the Hip Hop Nation as a speech community, examining how Hip Hop Nation language builds on and simultaneously expands African American oral traditions. The term Hip Hop Nation recalls the aforementioned discussion by Blommaert and Rampton on the pairing of a particular language with a particular nation-state. However, here nation refers to a self-chosen and appropriated term. That the Hip Hop Nation exists well beyond the boundaries of a nation-state is exemplified by the idiom "Global Hip Hop Nation." While drawing on linguistic anthropology, and understanding language as social practice, Alim stresses that Hip Hop Nation Language is rooted in Black Language (BL) and communicative practices (Spady and Eure 1991; Smitherman 1997; Yasin 1999). However, taking a Global South perspective to hip hop reveals an interesting symbiosis. While the uptake of English terms such as beat, flow, or battle, and particular phrases such as "yo yo yo!," is a common practice among members of the Vietnamese hip hop community, Vietnamese practitioners still adhere to the hierarchically structured linguistic system of Vietnamese, particularly when it comes to first and second person address.

This is particularly interesting since the community of practice approach has been criticized for its failure to allude to power differentials, especially in the field of sociolinguistics. The volume, *Beyond Communities of Practice: Language, Power and Social Context*, edited by David Barton and Karin Tusting (2005), contributes to this discussion by embedding the communities of practice concept in theories of language use, literacy practices, and discourse.

Drawn from disciplines such as linguistics and educational research, the authors allude to conflicts and questions of power arising in communities of practice as well as to the significance of the broader social context.

Understanding language as social practice, linguistic markers such as the use of honorific forms of first and second person address helps to identify power asymmetries within the Vietnamese community of hip hop. In general, the concept of communities of practice has been criticized for suggesting a romantic assemblage among equal peers (Cox 2005). This idea of peer interaction is emphasized when looking at forms of second person address frequently used in the English or German community of hip hop, since both languages employ kin terms such as "bro" or "sis" or the German terms *Bruder* or *Schwester*, that imply parity of status. However, the use of such kin terms in peer interaction does not work well in Vietnamese. On the contrary, Vietnamese kin terms are deployed to convey status asymmetry (Sidnell and Shohet 2013).

In the hierarchically ordered social system, self-reference and second-person address are always produced relationally within the speech event. As a result, the terms deployed to speak of oneself and to address the other shift according to who participates in the conversation, according to respective ages, genders, and other markers of social status. Before a conversation in Vietnamese actually begins, interlocutors who meet for the first time would frequently ask "How old are you?" in order to establish age-appropriate forms of address. These forms of address representing status are also held up in Vietnam's hip hop community. However, these forms of address are gradually refined, as the following cases illustrate.

In the master-student relationship, the proper way for a student to address the master in Vietnamese would be *thầy* for male and *cô* for female teachers. By contrast, the teacher (whether female and male) would address students using the term *em*, which literally translates as "younger brother" or "younger sister," and is the proper address for pupils at a certain age. In the Vietnamese hip hop community, these formal forms of address can be used, as well. However, as they signal some form of social distance, they appear to primarily apply in social situations where the age difference between master and apprentice is quite high (as among adults and children), or when the relationship between master and apprentice remains more technical, lacking a social dimension.

In what follows, I present some examples to illustrate two different situations. First, a higher age difference exists between teachers and students in

the New York Style Crew. In an effort to recruit younger dancers, the crew has invited children to practice together with them during practice. When Nguyet and Bi Max practice with them, the children call them *cô* and *thầy*, while they address the children in turn using the kin term *con*. *Con* literally means child and is used by parents to address their children, whereas children would refer to themselves as *con* when talking to their parents. The reason that they do not refer to students as *em*, as Nguyet explains, is that they are only ten or eleven years old. In a conversation with Nguyen Ngoc Binh, a linguist at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Hanoi, he explains that *con* is used as a second-person address for children in kindergarten, whereas students are called *em* at school. In the southern Vietnamese dialect, *con* is also used to refer to students in school, then the proper relations of address would be *cô-con*.

Second, the pronouns *cô* and *thầy*, as well as *em*, are used in situations where the social connection between teacher and student appears to be lacking. CK Animation, who teaches popping classes to both children and adults, differentiates between students he is close to and students that are not close to him. While the first category of student calls him *anh*, or "elder brother," students who are more socially distant address him with *thầy*, "teacher." But what happens when the teacher is younger than the student? This scenario is exemplified in the relationship between Nguyet and her teacher C2Low. In a Facebook post, she reacts to a photo that he has posted by using the term "teacher" to address him. In his response, C2Low, who is roughly four years younger, addresses her with the term *chị ạ*, or "elder sister." The emphasis on age is conveyed by his amendment of the second person address *chị* with the term *ạ*, which in Northern Vietnamese, is a polite form of addressing interlocutors of higher status, such as those older in age.

Thanh, recognized as one of the founders of hip hop dance in Vietnam, is referred to by members of the community as *Đại*, which translates as "grand." In conversations where he was not present, my interlocutors would also refer to him as OG, which is an American English term that stands for "original gangster," indicating a classic or old-school style. But nowadays, OG can simply be used as an abbreviation for "original" (Urban Dictionary 2019).

While the above analysis of pronoun use in the hip hop community alludes to existing status asymmetries, and variously indexes social proximity or distance among members of the community, I will now turn to the linkage between language and gender.

Several sociolinguists have deployed the community of practice concept in their analysis of language and gender (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992, 2003; Bucholtz 1999). Locating language within embodied selves, the community of practice concept presents a theoretical entry point for feminist researchers interested in the gendered body. Furthermore, the community of practice approach focuses on identity, allowing researchers to ask how speakers use language to project identities, for example, as gendered beings. As a consequence, the community of practice can be constituted around a social practice, no matter how marginal it may be from the perspective of the traditional speech community. This is especially important for inquiries into gender, since women and other groups that do not conform to dominant gender identities have frequently been defined as marginal to vernacular speech communities (Bucholtz 1999: 204, 208).

Such a marginal position of women is represented in the Vietnamese speech community, where young women and girls occupy the lowest positions within the sociolinguistic hierarchy, as they are mostly addressed as *em*. For this category of young people, no gendered identity exists at all. Young males and females are likewise addressed as *em*. Only if a woman is older than her interlocutor, the terms of address change to value her older age, as in *chị* (elder sister), *cô* (aunt, young lady), or *bà* (grandmother, lady). When a man and a woman are of the same age, and in a (conjugal) relationship, gender outweighs age. Shohet and Sidnell (2013: 622) describe the sociolinguistic framework for Vietnamese "in which neither age nor generation matters so much as does the (conjugal) gender hierarchy in which a man is traditionally the master of his wife and superior to other women of a similar age." Even if the woman in a relationship is older than her husband or boyfriend, the man is addressed with the senior pronoun *anh*, while the woman remains his inferior as *em*, thus maintaining the gender hierarchy.

This gender hierarchy appears to be maintained in Vietnam's hip hop community. This becomes particularly evident when considering social media, where a common form of addressing community members is *anh chị em*, abbreviated *ace*. In Vietnam, *anh chị em* is an inclusive term for addressing members of different genders and age cohorts. However, in the community of practice under consideration, while *anh chị em* is similarly abbreviated as *ace*, it is even further abbreviated as *ae*, omitting the *c* that stands for *chị*, which is the proper form of address for females of higher age or status. This change suggests that men still constitute the majority in the community of

hip hop dancing, and that women continue to occupy an inferior position in the Vietnamese speech community.

However, while there appears to be considerable overlap between the wider speech community and community of practice under consideration, the community of practice simultaneously offers novel possibilities to address other dancers as peers, thereby reworking linguistic hierarchies in the speech community. One possibility to overcome the dilemma of peer address in Vietnamese is the use of first names, which can replace first and second person pronouns and thereby circumvent pitfalls of status, gender, and age difference. As I show in the chapter "BREAKING," male community members applied this strategy to express their respect for a renowned female dancer who was younger than them. Consequently, the Vietnamese speech community and hip hop dance community frequently overlap, particularly with respect to the maintenance of the hierarchical social order. Nonetheless, power asymmetries can be overcome in the community of practice, for instance, through self-reference and second person address, as I show throughout this book.