

INTERVIEW

BOUNDARIES BETWEEN
LANGUAGE AND BODY

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Crossing boundaries between language and body

Breakdancing, gangsta rap and hegemonic masculinity

Political scientist Dr Bettina Lösch from the University of Cologne talks to Frieda Frost, Murat Güngör and Hannes Loh about identitarian attributions and gender roles in the hip hop scene. The discussion will oscillate between scepticism and confidence, convention and possibility, past and present, body and language. The historical dimensions of breakdance and rap enter into a dialogue with the boundaries and dreams of a deeply ambivalent culture.

Bettina Lösch: Murat and Hannes, you have been exploring the connection between hip hop, migration/diaspora and empowerment for many years. In your current work "From guest worker to gangsta rapper?", you even build a bridge from the labour recruitment agreements of the 1960s to German street rap. It becomes clear that this is a very male-dominated narrative - starting with the labour migrants who appear as second-generation fathers, through the sons who helped shape hip-hop culture in Germany in the 1980s and 1990s, to the current gangsta rappers. Is hip hop male? Is this hip hop story masculine or is your narrative masculine?

Murat Güngör: We have been working on narrator roles. And the most dominant narrator role in this

Rap history is male. In addition, the approaches to hip-hop culture - record companies, publishers, booking companies, recording studios, etc. - are predominantly male-dominated and we are historically following this line. We are aware that there are also other spokesperson roles in this narrative and that it is not enough to present just two or three female protagonists. We are following this trail - but with the intention of uncovering the contradictions and gaps in this narrative.

Hannes Loh: Of course, our approach to the history of hip hop does not show all facets. For as long as hip hop has existed, people have been enthusiastic about this culture - men, women and everything in between. And when we talk about hip hop as a culture, we have to make the effort to look at the spokesperson roles and approaches to the individual elements of this culture. What was it like in rap? What about DJing and graffiti? What do we know about breakdancing? How do young people today come to become MCs? What role does language play in this process, which is central to rapping, and what does it mean on the other hand when - as is the case with breaking - the body and its movements take centre stage? Does language reproduce the prevailing conditions rather than movement? Why are certain moves perceived as masculine and others as feminine? And has this always been the case? There are various origin myths and sometimes I hear that hip hop culture was pure and good in its beginnings and opened the door to everyone. That's certainly true for certain historical moments - but I think that in most cases such a perspective is not true.

has more to do with the longing of those who spread such stories of an ideal beginning.

Bettina: Frieda, how do you see the narrative from your perspective? You work and research gender issues in the field of urban dance^[1] and hip-hop culture. What are the approaches to breakdancing?

Frieda Frost: You shouldn't glorify the beginning or the present. Breakdancing, in the scene we call it breaking^[2], for example, was and still is very male-dominated - and this is true wherever breaking takes place. For about 10 years now, however, there have been a larger number of B-girls, and the number is growing. These dancers have undoubtedly changed the culture of breakdancing. In the narrative about the early days, however, there is hardly any room for women. The decisive factor here is who tells this story and from what perspective. Which accents are set, what do I emphasise, what do I leave out? When I tell this story as a scientist or dancer, I bring in a female perspective and make female protagonists visible. Overall, however, it remains a male-dominated history and a male-dominated culture.

Murat: I remember a lecture you gave, Frieda, where you talked about the composition of juries at breakdance battles. And here, too, it was and still is the case that it is mainly men who sit in judgement and decide who is ultimately successful. It is precisely these functions of inclusion and exclusion by the jury that also influence the aesthetic forms of

dance changes. Power relations are thus inscribed in both the dance and the body.

Frieda: This leads to a problem: some of the judges at breakdance battles are men who have no idea how to judge a woman who is dancing. It happens that male judges judge the B-girls^[3] on their looks instead of their skills and only a few think about whether they judge B-girls differently from B-boys (or not) and what criteria they use. Dance has its aesthetic foundations, and every judge should be able to base their judging criteria on each dancer as an individual - male or female. Unfortunately, B-girls still have to fight against being seen as less competent as a judge or less strong in battle and constantly have to prove themselves in order to gain the same acceptance as a B-boy. Since most of the event organisers and people who decide who sits on the jury at their event, which dancers are invited and which system is used for the battles are men, it remains difficult. Unfortunately, some influential people and organisers still see "female" breaking as not relevant enough or unattractive, or think that women are not competent judges - a bit like women's football. There is hardly any awareness within the scene that this can be a problem at all. That's why it's fundamentally difficult for women in breaking to get into roles where these mechanisms can be interrupted. You actually have to keep drawing attention to it, provoking discussions and personally approaching the women.

The organisers should be approached by the B-girls themselves and should campaign for sensitive handling and the use of women as judges so that B-girls can get into relevant positions. Then women in the scene can in turn become role models for the upcoming B-Girls. In 2018, however, there were two events that provoked change: At the RedBull BC One World Final, there was a separate B-Girl category for the first time and at the Youth Olympics in Argentina, where breaking with "Breaking for Gold" for the first time, B-girls and B-boys were equally represented and danced in individual categories as well as together in teams^[4].

Bettina: You just said that there are different forms of expression. What does that mean? I would have thought there was no difference at all whether it was a man, a woman or someone else breaking.

Frieda: Yes and no. They are not different forms of expression, they are one and the same dance style, but they can be interpreted in different aesthetic ways.

It is not easy to put movements into words. Let me illustrate this with an example: When I started breaking in 2001, power moves were state of the art, i.e. everything where you turn on your hands, your back, your head and which is very acrobatic.

If you want to break as a woman in this situation, you realise that you can't perform these power moves in exactly the same way as men do. You're not quite as fast, you don't jump quite as high and you have a different centre of gravity. You learn from dancers who have different physical requirements to you and have to work out for yourself how the technique works with your body. Here you realise that your body has a

difference. For many girls, breakdancing wasn't very interesting at that time - partly because it was difficult to get into. When new styles of music came along and the whole thing became funkier, dancier and more creative, the focus shifted: it became important to relate more clearly to the music when dancing. The musical replaced the acrobatic and this changed the dance style and also the approach. Because everyone can express themselves by dancing to the music and contributing their creativity. Suddenly it didn't matter whether it was a man or a woman dancing, because it was all about your individual style and creativity. Physique no longer made the difference - and I also refer to "different bodied persons", i.e. people who have different physical characteristics, who are missing an arm or a leg, for example^[5]. The breaking community became more colourful and diverse and enabled everyone who wanted to dance to take part. Today I can set my own priorities according to my own interests. Some still mainly train power moves, others focus more on musicality or creativity. As a woman, I used to have to imitate masculinity as well as possible to gain respect, but now I have the choice to opt for an aesthetic expression that suits me. I can consciously incorporate moves with a feminine connotation, such as softer movements or hip swings, both as a woman and as a man. So there are not directly different forms of expression of "masculine" and "feminine" in breaking, but in my opinion individual aesthetic interpretations of the dance style, and these can be interpreted far more freely today. Nevertheless, the movements are still dominant

has a masculine connotation and the feminine connotation causes irritation for some.

Murat: In the USA, there have long been artists in rap who play with such boundaries and cause irritation through their staging. The artist collective Odd Future, for example, deconstructs conventional masculinity quite clearly, plays with differences and is very successful with audiences. And major artists such as Frank Ocean from the USA are also experimenting with ambiguous statements on homosexuality. It seems to me that playing with and irritating gender identities in the German-speaking rap scene, on the other hand, has only been developed a little further.

Hannes: Perhaps the huge success of cloud rap in Germany has changed something. On the one hand, musically, because the sound of Yung Hurn, LGoony, Rin etc. has become slower and more spatial, and on the other, because of the soft, nerdy demeanour of its protagonists, who teeter somewhere between ironic inwardness and broken masculinity. These rappers start to sing, play with their voices, become more expressive and creative, and with some artists this has something that transcends gender. To me, it seems comparable to what you just said, Frieda, about the musical turning point in the breaking scene. However, many of these artists' lyrics are just as sexist as those of other rappers. I wonder whether it's the sound that makes the music or whether a sexist punchline simply remains a sexist punchline. Does it make a difference whether, on the one hand, Haftbefehl raps harshly and unequivocally "I fi cke the

Bitch!" and on the other side a cloud rapper who looks like the bassist from Tocotronic, singing the same introverted thing to himself? To me, this seems to be a male strategy of appropriating new progressive trends, making them their own and ultimately reselling them as a male product - similar to the way capitalism embraces and commercialises rebellion.

Bettina: If we assume that gender is not natural but socially constructed, then the male/female binary also becomes questionable. Masculinity and masculine forms of domination are not necessarily linked to men or the supposedly male gender, but are an expression of a patriarchally structured society. In this sense, masculinity is a principle of domination and order that can be embodied by everyone. Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell uses the term "hegemonic masculinity" to describe a social practice in which the socially dominant position of men in relation to non-men and marginalised masculinities is achieved and maintained. Frieda, I heard you say that in breakdance you question a certain form of hegemonic masculine representation - and in doing so have not only given women new freedoms, but also men. Because bodies are different and there were certainly also men who were physically unable to fulfil the acrobatic demands you mentioned.

Frieda: Yes, I think so too. Breaking is very diverse today. I see it as an aesthetic opening, as movements can be introduced today that are not

are no longer part of the classical repertoire and have female connotations and/or are inspired by other forms of movement - arm and leg movements from urban dances such as voguing and waacking or rolls, jumps or turns from the contemporary dance repertoire^[6]. However, the new movements must be incorporated into the particular aesthetic of the dance.

Because these aesthetics or aesthetic criteria have a history behind them that goes back 50 years and defines the dance style. They must remain, without them it would no longer be breaking. These are, for example, dynamic changes of movement, turns, stops and counter-movements, changes of level and a 360° spatial orientation, the combination of toprocks, footworks and freezes to the music that sets the tempo and rhythm and, of course, dancing in the cypher and competing in the battle. Breaking is constantly evolving through the introduction of new movement repertoire and individual aesthetic movement approaches, but the characteristics of the movements and the music remain and provide the structure. Everything I introduce has to be integrated into this structure. Basically, every further development is a questioning of the existing characteristics and therefore an aesthetic negotiation process. And this is not accepted by everyone. There are enough critics in the scene who say: "you dance too feminine" or "that's no longer breaking". These negotiation battles are fought over and over again. The new generation of B-girls in particular is causing irritation in the breakdance scene, because these girls are self-confident and don't give a shit about what the scene's internal authorities deem appropriate. It's a bit like SXTN

Mentality. These b-girls post revealing pictures on Instagram because they want to and at the same time they demand that the b-boys respect them in battle just as much as anyone else - because battle is battle and it doesn't matter what someone posts on Instagram^[7]. What's happening right now is exciting. My generation of B-girls has learnt breaking mainly from men and is more influenced by a male narrative. The new dancers know other role models and have partly learnt the dance from women who have already changed breaking in their own way. This leads to a different self-image of participation. These B-girls do not have the feeling that they have to live up to a standard - they show their real attitude to life in dance and are not interested in what others think. The exciting thing is that this appearance initially causes irritation in many men and then often provokes enthusiastic support or strong resistance. They realise that these women are bringing something new to the table and thus shaking up the old structures. Some find this very good, others don't. In 2017, for example, there was a situation at an international battle where two b-girls upset their male opponents, two renowned b-boys, so much with their female provocations that they ultimately won the battle against the b-boys^[8]. Normally it happens the other way round: the B-boys try to unsettle the B-girls with sexist gestures.

Hannes: There's an interesting parallel here to a situation in battle rap. In 2017, the DLTLTY battle, a format in which every form of insult and offence was

discrimination is allowed, Lübeck rapper Pilz took on Nedal Nib from Hanover. Pilz won the battle with clearly sexist lines such as "*the victim gets fucked, I ask who's the cunt of us*", or "*everyone says you make women lesbian with your little willy*". Pilz even used sexist rhymes with a racist twist: "*may I also be your Muslim wife, I'll carry your aldit bags into your house, and if it's okay with you, I'll go to the mosque for you, but only if you fuckme on the prayer rug.*" It was mainly lines like this that were met with great enthusiasm by the almost exclusively male audience. Nedal Nib was no less sexist in his attacks, but Pilz was more brutal on the bottom line and may have surprised her opponent and thrown him off his stride. How do you categorise such a spectacle? Is it female empowerment because a man is being beaten by a woman with masculine-hegemonic means and weapons? Is this an art project intended to shake us up and make us think about such perverse logic or is it simply profane sexism performed by a woman? Pilz herself claims in an interview with the taz: "The action took place within the art form of battle and I was an art figure in that sense. You don't go to a boxing match and then complain about violence." That doesn't convince me. My impression is rather that the amount of sexist thoughts on our planet has not diminished after this battle. I have to admit, though, that this performance irritated me and made me think hard about it. However, I'm not sure whether this battle is comparable to what you,

Frieda, described earlier.

Frieda: Yes and no. What's happening in Breaking at the moment is this: women are not only appropriating the They don't just adopt the "masculine" and "feminine" movements that already exist, they also bring in what they already have: their very individual attitude. B-girls no longer take into account how others might interpret their appearance and attitude. They show themselves, their personality and femininity - sometimes raw, combative, sweet, sexy - and have the opportunity to try out and stage themselves anew time and again. Their skills and self-confidence create the space for this, as do the growing number of international events that create platforms for B-girls. What women in breaking used to have to fight for, this new generation of female breakers simply takes.

Murat: I wonder whether a label like "female Breaking" can become a trap. It reminds me of the development in rap in the 1990s, when women in German rap were appropriated and marketed under the category of "women's rap". Record companies think here - even today - in categories of a product that can be differentiated from other trends, a kind of branding that levels. Many women had no interest in this labelling and resisted it. Such a label might make a female MC visible, but only through essentialist glasses. That's how I felt with my own band when we suddenly appeared on the record shelves under "Oriental hip hop".

Ultimately, it should be about what an artist has to say that's new or what's on offer aesthetically and not about the fact that you're a woman who raps.

Frieda: When I talk about "female breaking", I don't want to create a new category. I'm referring to the concentrated innovative power of B-girls within the community and not an aesthetic category. Nowadays, B-girls often join together in breaking crews or on social networks. They are still constructive competitors, but they join forces, as in the "Bgirl Sessions" network. On the one hand, this pushes and strengthens the idea of female breaking, and on the other, it creates a free space that benefits everyone. It's true: We differentiate between b-boys and b-girls. However, this doesn't mean ascribing a certain dance style to them, just labelling them as dancers, and I think that's different to what you've described.

Bettina: I also think that despite the need to critically scrutinise and deconstruct binary categories such as male/female, they are far too powerful socially for us to be able to deny them. They are used on a daily basis and reproduce social inequalities again and again - that's why they have to be thematised and we can't pretend they don't exist. Murat and Hannes presented three female rappers in their lecture: Lady Bitch Ray, Schwesta Ewa and SXTN. And these artists were presented together because they are women. However, it became clear that all three are completely different rappers.

and provide different answers to similar challenges.

Murat: But they are still summarised as a deviation from the norm. They are presented as *rappers*, just like you, Frieda, are presented as a *breaker* and invited to discussions as a *speaker*. And the idea behind this is that you can speak more authentically about certain topics as a woman.

Bettina: That is precisely the homogenisation and naturalisation that ultimately constitutes sexism. The individuality of an artist takes second place when she is invited because she is a woman. If the woman is merely the counterpart or the objection to the male, the individual is concealed and the idea that women do certain things better or worse or differently is put forward. On the other hand, the masculine represents the norm and does not have to justify itself.

Frieda: I can tell you an anecdote about that: I once watched a workshop led by an internationally renowned b-boy. There were both men and women there and after a while the b-boy categorised the dancers according to their dance aesthetics, e.g. dynamic dancer, creative dancer, etc. He then called all the female dancers and told them: "Here you go, you're the dancers. Then he called all the dancers and told them: "So, you are the girls, you have finesse." So the B-girls were categorised in one and the same category, even though they all danced very differently - namely in the "gender" category instead of an aesthetic one. The idea behind this is that all women have a

are particularly good at something, simply because they are women. I know these attributions myself and they can be quite positive. For example, they say: You're great at dancing to music, you have finesse, funk and precision. This is said to women to whom this applies, but also to those who have nothing to do with it, or who have taken years to acquire these things.

Murat: On the other hand, gender doesn't play a role for the men because that's the norm. In your example, Frieda, the workshop leader paid attention to the style of the B-boys and put the groups together that way. The norm is male; it is a male-dominant speaker role that is not questioned. This also applies to art and culture in general. It is telling when one of the most famous contemporary German painters such as Georg Baselitz stands up and says that women are not as good at painting and that this is a fact. This is the concentrated arrogance of a male position of power that also defines aesthetics and taste. Furthermore, when we suddenly introduce women in our lecture, it stands out because a deviation from our narrative emerges. When an artist like Joseph Beuys does crazy things, nobody insinuates that he only did it because he's a man! He doesn't have to justify his art on a level of gender identity. And you also find that in the rap context. Gay or queer artists are then perceived under this label.

Frieda: I find it interesting that it changes at a certain point. If an artist is particularly extraordinary and dazzling, people don't care what sexual orientation is represented. Such a person is then no longer seen as a spokesperson for their group, but as an extravagant phenomenon - in a certain way as the embodiment of pure art. That would be inconceivable in Breaking. Of course, we also have gay B-boys in Breaking. But they would never come out. I don't know any B-boys who came out during their active time. Conversely, there are some dancers who have admitted their homosexuality after their active time - just like in men's football. On the other hand, some b-boys see the option of b-girls being lesbians as a possibility and have fewer problems with it. This is probably the stupid reverse conclusion: If a girl is interested in a male-dominated sport, then it's no big surprise if she's into women. But I think there's a process going on here when rappers or b-boys are put in a situation where they have to question stereotypes. Sit them down at a table and encourage them to reflect their statements, their world view.

Many things are simply not scrutinised and are ingrained in everyday life, education and convenience. We should let people have their say and trust them to realise that thinking outside the box is an attractive prospect. I have had positive experiences with this. People often simply don't think about stereotypical attributions, and when this is pointed out, many are very surprised by the existing problems.

Bettina: In its beginnings, Breaking was a story of the self-empowerment of young, marginalised men. Many elements in Breaking point to a domestication and ritualisation of struggle. From a certain point onwards, more and more women took part in this culture. Was this perhaps perceived as a threat by the b-boys because they feared that they would lose the proletarian, ritualised masculinity they had just achieved through the b-girls? After all, the B-girls were questioning norms and styles that were part of the men's empowerment strategy.

Frieda: I'm not sure about that. I think at this point the patriarchal social structure has a big influence on what women have to do and what is considered suggestive. In the early 1970s, it was mainly the young brothers of gang members who danced. They were part of the gangs as dancers, but not directly involved in street fights. B-girls, such as the Zulu Queens, already existed at this time. However, the New York gang scene was extremely characterised by the physical dominance of men and it is not surprising that a dance culture emerged on this basis that adopted these male-connoted forms of movement - albeit in a ritualised form.

Other influences can be traced back to martial arts, superhero comics or music legends - here, too, it was primarily male protagonists (such as Bruce Lee, Muhammad Ali, James Brown, Spiderman or Superman).

Hannes: Rap and breaking undoubtedly come from a very violent, male-dominated milieu. The documentary "Rubble Kings" (2015) by Shan Nicholson gives a good impression of the interaction between structural violence and individual self-assertion, from which parts of hip-hop culture ultimately emerged, using the example of the development of street gangs in the South Bronx in the 1970s. However, it is important to distinguish between how these issues were negotiated when the scenes developed as a subculture below the mainstream radar and how things changed when rap and breaking were commercialised as street cultures. This is when the mechanisms of capitalist commercialisation come into play and narrow pigeonholes are constructed. If "women's rap" functions as a label to make money, then this label is constructed.

If the sexist, homophobic and sometimes racist staging of gangsta rap leads to more sales, then this is how the artists are constructed by the companies. This is where it becomes tragic, because many artists go along with it and accept the pigeonhole they are put in. Tricia Rose has described this as the phenomenon of "Shrinking box" described: Your drawer is already small and you do everything you can to make it even smaller because you want to conform to expectations even more - until you end up stuck and completely unable to manoeuvre. Instead of going the other way round: You take on the small drawer of the record industry and make sure that it gets bigger bit by bit.

Frieda: The narrative changes as soon as you are perceived from the outside as a representative of something. Then you are the woman who is supposed to talk about Breaking or the woman who sits on the jury. Only in the second instance are you seen as an artist.

Hannes: Just like Murat and I thought: For this topic, it makes sense to have Frieda on the panel. Although we also wanted you to join us as an expert on Breaking and its history.

Frieda: For me, it's also an opportunity, because the enquiry went to the "artist" or the I'm an "expert" and I can raise and discuss exciting questions. It's just important to me that people realise that when I'm in the training room, I don't care whether I'm a woman or a man - I'm training.

Murat: On the other hand, you can reject the attribution of acting as a spokesperson for women.

Bettina: That has something to do with the question of who has the power of interpretation. If Frieda is invited as a woman and is expected to fulfil this role, it's probably not so easy for her to avoid it.

Hannes: Does that mean that men and women can speak equally authentically about, for example, the history of women in hip-hop culture? Do both have the same power of interpretation or is there a power imbalance?

Murat: There is a power differential that is graded. In the context of Western industrialised societies, the white, bourgeois, heterosexual man with economic power is at the top of the food chain in the context of this theory, because he has the most far-reaching power of interpretation. This then descends along the categories of "class", "race", "gender" and "physicality". In the rap context, things look a little different. Because there we are usually dealing with a proletarian-migrant masculinity that presents itself as hegemonic. This is an insecure, broken masculinity that has to make do without economic power and also lacks the classic father narrative. There are countless rappers who have written touching songs for their mum - but the father is a blank space. In my opinion, the brokenness of this masculinity is reflected in the oversized bodies of many rappers. Behind the broad shoulders and massive muscles is the fear of not being seen and failing. In an actual position of power, such a comic-like pumping up of your own body would be nonsensical. But if you lack this position, you need a symbolic place where you can make up for it.

Hannes: For the situation in the USA, the Afro-American intellectual Ta-Nehisi Coates takes this consideration to the extreme, claiming that the militarisation of the black male body is a desperate attempt to defy the existential dependency on a white superiority - a superiority that is capable of destroying the black body at any time.

Murat: If, because of your proletarian background and your diaspora experience, you have nothing else but your body, then your body becomes a compensation strategy. This shows a blatant demarcation from the woman's body and ultimately the claim to dominate femininity. On the other hand, these men naturally realise that their patriarchal dividend is dwindling. In a modern capitalist service society, muscle power and lone wolf attitudes are hardly successful strategies any more. It's all about teamwork, co-operation and flexibility, and suddenly the pumped-up alpha males are being overtaken by other men and women. But gangstarap is also a compensation strategy for young men from the classic middle-class milieu, as they also recognise that women in the service society are questioning their previously privileged positions.

This anger and frustration is then channelled into the consumption of music that brings women back into a patriarchal and sexist world view. Such productions offer links to the New Right, as conservative role models of gender, power and authority are invoked here.

Bettina: With reference to the Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci, hegemonic masculinity is understood as something that - in analogy to class relations - characterises social *gender* relations. What you are talking about, Murat, makes perfect sense: the masculinity that is at stake and in danger of being lost is staged in an oversized way. In this struggle

This confirmation is needed in order to achieve social hegemony.

Hannes: On the other hand, does that mean that female artists like Schwesta Ewa or SXTN act according to the logic of hegemonic masculinity in this game and try to pocket the biggest dividend within this system? Or do we need to differentiate? In the case of Schwesta Ewa, it is clear that she actually uses the same vocabulary as her male colleagues and her logic of devaluation is often conventionally sexist.

Murat: I think it's different with SXTN. With SXTN, you realise more clearly that they unsettle and irritate boys. However, you also have to realise with SXTN that the attention they attract is mainly due to a sexist perception. On their latest album, the group also has lyrics where they make fun of affected masculinity. However, the focus of attention is not on such lyrics, but on songs in which they make sexist stigmatisation their own.

Frieda: It's no different for me. I celebrate SXTN, but some of their lyrics irritate me. They use words that I don't find self-empowering and that I wouldn't adopt for myself, simply because I've experienced them as swear words. But I realise that younger women talk differently to me and judge such words differently. That reminds me of what I described earlier: This younger generation has a different relationship to self-dramatisation. They see that

without the heavy meanings we attach to things and simply choose what suits them at the time.

Bettina: The question is, do the female rappers want a piece of the big cake or are their lyrics also to be understood as a subversion of male domination? I think it's important to differentiate: When is a production, a culture resistant, uncomfortable and when does it merely serve the interests of the mainstream and capitalist exploitation?

Murat: With this attitude, we can ask SXTN: Is it subversive for young women to confidently present themselves as call them "cunts"? Does that change society? Does it shift positions of power? Or, on the contrary, does it reinforce attributions?

Hannes: That reminds me of a panel discussion in the Mouson Tower in Frankfurt that Murat organised in December 2017. Some schoolgirls from Murat's school spoke about SXTN and said that they celebrate the songs and sometimes call each other "cunt". An older woman, perhaps in her 60s, was very outraged by this and accused the girls of discrediting feminist achievements. But the girls were quite reflected and said: If boys talk to us like that, it's not possible, it's something completely different! I have had a similar experience in my workshops with school classes: many young women experience SXTN as empowering and make a very clear distinction between what they like about Juju and Nura's music and what is being criticised by men.

attribution is brought to the group from outside. It is particularly exciting when these students discuss with their teachers and basically explain in a very differentiated way what they like about SXTN. The aesthetic quality plays a role here, but also the female self-confidence with which SXTN take the right to hedonistic partying and go wild with their friends. There is no question that SXTN also repeat sexist stereotypes in many moments - on the other hand, I find the demand for such female artists to behave in a consistently non-sexist way strange.

This is a criticism that sets its standards far above the creative horizon of many female artists and is therefore always right. Yet the reality is more complex and contradictory. In his history of ideas on racism, Ibram X Kendi aptly describes how many people who have provided important anti-racist impulses have behaved in a racist manner at other times. It is the same with SXTN and Schwesta Ewa and certainly with most of us: we develop our world view from contradictions that we find in society, but also in ourselves. And we realise how stimulating such an inconsistent appearance is by how much we are currently thinking and discussing about SXTN.

Bettina: From a critical social science and feminist Marxist-inspired perspective, I believe that social (power) structures such as capitalism, racism, patriarchy or masculinism determine us, but do not over-determine us. As subjects, we also have

subverting possibilities. In the attribution of the role sex plays for women, there are, in short, two dominant masculine images: viewing women as "saints" or as "whores". Either the woman is stylised as incapable of satisfaction (in Freud's sense), who is only there for the benefit of the man and his satisfaction. Or, as the flipside of this, she is depicted as a slut or a whore, as a sexually overstimulating woman, so to speak. Both images exist as male fantasies in numerous novels, films and songs. Women's self-determined sexuality is not envisaged here. Now the question is whether, for example, slutwalks, i.e. demonstrations where the participants deliberately stage themselves as "sluts", or something like calling themselves "cunts", having themselves photographed with dildos etc. merely remains within the framework of these male fantasies, reproducing sexist and misogynistic images, or whether this can be understood as a subverting contribution to the self-determined sexuality of women. I can understand that in the binary juxtaposition it is perhaps more appealing to stage myself as a slut instead of being portrayed as fundamentally frigid or passive (in the figure of the saint). But in the end, it may all remain a decal of masculine domination and fantasy. This is comparable to internalised racism. As long as racism exists as a social system of order and as a social structure, I am involved in everyday racism. Instead of the "Either" (saint, passive, serving) and the "Or" (whore, slut, snotty words) the ambiguity. All of them are neither one nor the other. But I would also be interested to know why

is this form of absolutely violent sexism and this blatant homophobia in the genre of gangsta and street rap being vigorously maintained? We now have social changes like "marriage for all", but something like this is not reflected there.

Murat: This is about absolutely archaic masculinity. In a traditional Kurdish/Turkish society, the "Babo", as glorified by Haftbefehl, is the deeply backward role model of a clan leader who controls and directs. It is an extremely conservative construction of masculinity that perceives female self-realisation and homosexuality as a threat and aggressively excludes them. And as far as violence is concerned, we must not forget that hip hop emerged from a primordial soup of violence - physical violence and structural violence on all levels. Against this background, the battle principle in rap and breakdancing can be understood as a domestication and ritualisation of real violence.

Hannes: At that historical moment, the banishment of real violence into the language and body movements of the battle could be seen as progress. In the archaic age of hip hop culture, even this violent language was a step towards pacification. However, we must not forget that this process initially took place behind closed doors and was not yet part of capitalist valorisation. At that time, rap was neither on disc nor on MTV, but the MCs faced each other at jams and spoke to an audience. When this historical situation is abandoned and the lyrics

and productions are reproduced millions of times and consumed by kids all over the world - then something decisive changes: The self-empowering, the originally vital function of battles and violent language etc. becomes alienated from itself and - similar to Max Weber in Protestant ethics - becomes a "steel-hard shell" that no longer understands itself. Another point that is often forgotten: Gangsta rap can only be understood if it is also viewed from a classist perspective.

In the summer of 2017, Murat and I were invited to a panel discussion on gangsta rap organised by the Socialist Youth - the Falcons. The organisers subscribed to the naive idea that gangsta rappers are representatives of the proletariat and therefore potentially revolutionary subjects who have merely fallen prey to false consciousness. Murat and I rejected this thesis and described the gangsta rappers as a kind of class spokesmen for the lumpen proletariat, dodgy existences, gamblers, hustlers, pimps, etc.

In other words, people who have descended to or come from the lowest rung of society and who do not engage in any typical form of wage labour. Karl Marx had little love for these "lumpen" and described them as unreliable, passive and reactionary. Even today, his descriptions still fit the protagonists of street rap pretty well. But such a label overlooks the subversive potential of this ostracised underclass. Because gangsta rappers (also) tell stories from the margins and from transit. They embody - despite all the heterosexual unambiguity on display - the in-between and the in-between.

they irritate mainstream society with their behaviour. When I wrote an article about Sido's first album "Maske" in INTRO in 2005, I chose the headline: "The avant-garde function of the lumpenproletariat". I was going pretty far out on a limb with that, but I still find the idea productive today. In 2018, Marcus Staiger linked this lumpenproletarian perspective on gangsta rap with the pioneer of decolonisation, Frantz Fanon, and with the Black Panthers in the social science journal "Das Argument" - a bridge that I find very appealing. Whether we can therefore actually trust gangsta rappers and the milieu they represent to have an emancipatory force is another matter. Today, many protagonists of the gangsta rap scene find themselves in a completely different predicament: if they refuse the white (male and female) perspective on their own circumstances, if they do not tell the usual clichés about their block, their sexuality and their manners - the horror stories about sex and violence that a bourgeois society always likes to hear from the precariat - then they may be excluded from commercial exploitation. The proximity to the block, to the milieu, to the shadow world - all this is not just staging in gangsta rap, but a sociological fact and cultural capital at the same time. Xatar's father may be a conductor, but Xatar grew up in a socially precarious environment. So it's no wonder that it's mainly young men on the lowest rung of society - often with direct diaspora experience - who characterise this genre.

Murat: A Xatar who would focus on a differentiated analysis of hegemonic masculinity in his lyrics would in all likelihood have little success with this topic in the mainstream. People don't want to hear that from Xatar, they want to hear it from Sookee. This in turn has something to do with the racist view of the protagonists. On the other hand, rap does not have the exclusive right to capitalise on sexism and violence. Many pop songs are not without their rights in this context - but then we often have nice, catchy melodies and it's easier to consume.

Bettina: I still see a difference: rap, especially gangsta rap, claims a special degree of truthfulness on the one hand, and on the other, the legitimisation to speak from an oppressed social position - in other words, to be self-empowering. Against this background, how can I justify oppressing and threatening others? There is no such claim in pop.

Murat: That's not an automatism. People who have experienced oppression don't automatically have to be more empathetic towards people who are also exploited. Behind this is a romantic, romanticised view of hip-hop culture, which many consider to be particularly resistant and rebellious per se. Rap and gangsta rap in particular are conservative when it comes to identitarian attributions. That's no great surprise. The interesting question is why this music is successful with young people who don't come from this milieu. In my opinion

This is an expression of a reactionary backlash. On the shelves of department stores, toys are more gender-differentiated than ever before. The desire for clear role models seems enormous. Gangsta rap with its archaic force fits in well with this.

Bettina: In some countries today, we have greater choices, more freedom and greater visibility of queer life, for example, on the one hand, and on the other hand, a strengthening heteronormativity, including homophobia and a hardening of the gender binary. I think we should emphasise the social structures more, and not just the responsibility of individuals. We all live in a society that standardises and also deforms us through its sexist, racist and economic (class) structure. We are constantly reproducing these structures and realities. The longer we stay in our role and live with the identitarian attributions from outside, instead of throwing them overboard, the more difficult it is for us to get out of these social mechanisms.

Frieda: Is that really the case? Am I not better able to reflect these deformations when I have achieved a certain standing in the scene? I remember that the question of how I felt as a B-girl in a male-dominated culture used to annoy me incredibly. That was always the reason why people wanted to interview me. Incidentally, that hasn't changed to this day. However, I have now achieved such a standing as a B-girl that I no longer feel I have to represent the female role - neither internally nor externally. Today I want to break conventions and

Question traditions, reflect issues and change them in my favour. That's the point where you can expand your pigeonhole, your "shrinking box", into which they initially put you. Today I think about gender in breaking - but in my own way. I exchange ideas with younger B-girls and talk to them about how to assert yourself and approach things with confidence. I have a dual role - on the one hand I'm an active dancer, on the other I'm a scientist who researches breaking culture. That's a blessing and a curse. Because I already know that there will be people from the scene who won't or don't want to understand certain topics that we are discussing here, or who understand them differently than I intend.

Hannes: Murat and I are familiar with this suspicion: Who is talking to the outside? How is the sacred community portrayed? Is secret knowledge being revealed? The hip-hop scene is sensitive and doesn't want to be reminded of its own flaws. Especially not by spoilsports from within its own ranks.

Bettina: I see you as very differentiated and supportive. Your aim is to get to the bottom of things, to understand them and not to discredit hip hop. You open people's eyes and thus broaden the meaning of this culture. Finally, I'm interested in the question of utopia, of the spaces of possibility in hip hop culture. Does it exist? Does hip hop have a vision of a different life, of co-operation and community? What transcending moments does this culture have to offer?

Murat: The question of utopias and spaces of possibility in hip hop culture is difficult to answer, as people quickly start to idealise, glorify or even distort. I find that new artistic spaces emerge through creative coincidences, border crossers, networks, courage, social currents, open structures and exciting places. These are aspects that cannot really be controlled or demanded. I see it as our task to put together a few pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that can possibly be put together in the future to form a bigger picture that makes precisely such new spaces possible. This also involves a battle over the meanings of words. Sexist, racist, patriarchal power relations are not only conveyed linguistically and structurally, but also through the body. Anything that irritates and creatively shifts these levels is interesting for a utopia. Against this background, I find an artist like Mykki Blanco exciting, for example, who questions all hegemonic concepts of masculinity and gender and thereby readjusts our ideas. But also older artists like Big Freedia from New Orleans, who explored the gender boundaries of rap with her danceable bounce music in the early 2000s and also collaborated with greats like Beyoncé. The two New York artists Princess Nokia and Angel Haze, who are now also being recognised in the mainstream, are also inspiring.

Hannes: When thinking about community, I have to be careful that I don't become a victim of my age and take a romanticised look back at the good old days of the old

School. Back then, not everything was as great as we sometimes report today. Nevertheless, the aspect of self-optimisation and the performance ethic in large parts of the current rap scene irritates me. For me, this is also an expression of neoliberal desolidarisation, in which the individual fights to be successful at all costs. The development of battle culture also reflects this movement. The new no-limit formats are producing MCs who do not shy away from sexist and homophobic, racist and anti-Semitic punchlines. In general, current battlerap no longer seems to be able to do without group-related misanthropy. In discussions with younger people, I realise that they have a more relaxed view of it and assure me that such battles are basically not misanthropic, but great fun. What never ceases to amaze me is the fundamental openness of hip hop and its power to connect with supposedly completely different things. I was deeply moved by the joint programme that the Cologne rap crew Microphone Mafia put together with Auschwitz survivor Esther Bejarano and her son Joram. The Mafia have played hundreds of concerts with the Bejaranos in recent years and have shown their audience in an impressive way that their common denominator is unbending humanity. When hip hop opens up to such spaces, it becomes big, it becomes utopian.

Frieda: Individualisation has increased in the breakdance scene, but the crew idea is still there. In a way, the old school idea of breaking has been preserved, because you have your crew or the

local breaking community with whom you train together and prepare for battles. And team battles have always been an important and integral part of competitions, even if 1vs1 battles dominate today. Because breaking is based on movement, you can't avoid training with others, learning things, being taught and passing on knowledge and skills. All of this strengthens the community spirit. Learning breaking on your own by watching tutorials on YouTube just doesn't work. But I would like to say something about Bettina's question about utopia and the transcending moments of our culture: Breaking is part of the urban dance scene. These are dances that originate from the urban centres of America, mostly with a connection to the Black community and with foundations in Afro-diasporic cultural traditions, (local) movement and pop culture. These dances carry the idea of peace, love and unity - an idea that is by no means a reality in all these scenes. But it exists as a utopia. There is a longing to realise this dream. The various urban dance styles have moved closer together in recent years. For example, there are the waacking and voguing dances that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s in the LGBT community in the USA. Waacking is a disco dance from the West Coast that derives its poses and emotions from dramatic film scenes. In voguing, the dancers imitate the movements of models, including those from the fashion magazine Vogue, and combine them into a dance system - very straightforward and orientated towards "typical" female poses. Voguing and waacking have now found their way into the battle system of urban dances.

There, for example, there have long been all-style events with house, breaking or hip-hop dance as categories, within which competitions are fought out between the participants. In Germany, for example, Amigo from the Flying Steps was one of the first to organise an international all-style event that also included voguing as a battle category. The voguers and waackers then appear at these battles - a colourful, often queer community that experiments a lot with clothing and bodies - and really mix up the scenario. The protagonists of the different dance systems look beyond each other's horizons. That is very inspiring. Moving closer together, opening up and getting to know each other, discovering similarities - a journey that is always worthwhile. Not just in hip hop.

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Big Freedia
Frank Ocean
LGoony
Lady Bitch Ray
Microphone Mafia
Mykki Blanco
Nura
Odd Future
Mushroom
Princess Nokia
Rin
Schwesta Ewa
SXTN
Yung Hurn
Xatar

Glossary:

Masculinity
masculine
domination
hegemonic masculinity patriarchy
Sexism

Racism

Class/classism

Battle: Competition between two dancers or teams against each other, usually in a knockout system

Cypher: dance circle formed by those around and in which the dancers dance together in a dance dialogue rather than against each other

Toprock: Steps in the standing position with which a B-girl or B-boy usually introduces their solo (e.g. Indian step, crossover, salsa rock)

Footwork: Steps on the ground (e.g. six-step, CCs, kickouts)

Freeze: Movement in which you pause briefly, "freeze" (e.g. baby freeze, air freeze)

Powermove: Rotational movements that rotate around a body axis (e.g. windmill, airflaire)

Urban dance: collective term for dances created in urban areas in the USA by people of colour and based on Afro-diasporic cultural traditions, a specific music genre and current local and pop-cultural influences (e.g. breaking, hip-hop dance, house, locking, popping, krumping, waacking, vogueing)

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Hannes Loh (1971*) is a teacher and systemic counsellor. As an author and journalist, he focuses on the development of global hip-hop culture with an emphasis on migration, empowerment and didactics. He has published several books on this topic.

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Together with Hannes Loh, he wrote the non-fiction book "Fear of a kanak planet - HipHop zwischen Weltkultur und Nazirap".

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^[11]Urban dance is a collective term for dances created in urban areas in the USA by people of colour and based on Afro-diasporic cultural traditions, a specific music genre and current local and pop-cultural influences (e.g. breaking, hip-hop dance, house, locking, popping, krumping, waacking, voguing)

^[12]Breaking, b-boying or b-girling are the terms used within the scene for the dance style that developed as the dance element of hip hop culture in New York in the 1970s. "Breakdancing" is a term created by the media that is now in common usage.

^[13]We refer to the dancers in breaking as B-girls and the dancers as B-boys, the "B" probably comes from "beat" and "break".

^[14]www.breakingforgold.com, www.redbullbcone.com

^[15]The Australian artist "Roya the DestRoya" from Australia and the international dance company "ILL-Abilities" with its motto "no excuses, no limits" (www.illabilities.com) show that anything is possible with "different bodies" in breaking.

^[16]Examples: B-Girl Kastet/3:16 Crew (RU), B-Girl Viola Luba/Gang Ganrena (D/BRA), B-Boy Chey (ESP), B-Boy Bruce Almighty/Momentum Crew (PRT)

^[17]Examples of B-girl empowerment include the @Bgirlsessions channel and www.bgirlsessions.com (NL) as well as the Heartbreakerz crew with B-Girl Roxy (USA/UK), Minzy from the Flying Steps (D/F), B-Girl Ami/Good Foot (JAP), B-Girl

Paulina/Breaknuts (PL), B-Girl Jilou/Jimakeno or B-Girl
Vanessa/Floorrippers (PRT)
📺 Youtube: ProDance TV, World BBoy Classics 2017,
Roxy & Vanessa vs Igri Bozz & Assasin

WWW.MURATUNDHANNES.DE
