

# Animating the Real: Illusions, Musicality and the Live Dancing Body

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## Abstract

Animation film frequently uses dance and choreography as part of explicit scenes to help assist with and compliment the narrative. Although animators frequently acknowledge relationships between dance and animation, scarcely any scholarly work considers how animated film principles are used and applied within live dance performances. Additionally, although many scholars discuss the relationship between live dance and music and similarly animation and music, rarely has the collision of all three been scrutinized. In this article, I draw upon principles from animation film and choreomusical scholarship to show a complex relationship between the real and the pretend in a solo street dance performance. Based on detailed movement analysis of a short solo dance performance by Isaac "Turbo" Baptiste, I discuss the ways that moving image can influence live dancing bodies and create endless possibilities for choreomusical play.

**Keywords:** Isaac "Turbo" Baptiste, musicality, choreomusical, animation, street dance, popular dance

*"Oh" spontaneously taps his six feet-like tentacles, one by one in time with the beat of the music. He attempts to physically suppress this with his hands by covering each moving limb in turn, but the infectious movement continues and spreads uncontrollably up through his body and head as he exclaims "Involuntary physical response!" A series of exaggerated dance movements then follow: a quick sequence of angular robotic arm isolations to embody a matching pattern of snare drum beats show his unstoppable connection with the music. He twists his head to create a 'fixed point' and his body then follows repeatedly, creating a bizarre game of chase between body parts. His long flexible ears ripple in smooth waves, which he attempts to stifle by tying them in a tight knot. Each limb and body part develops a life of its own, as Oh's first encounter with popular music literally moves him.*

In this scene from animated feature film *Home* (2015), a comic and unusual relationship between musicality, the animated and the actual is created, as popular dance movements are parodied by this alien character as he navigates his first human

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experiences on Earth. More remarkable still, is the presence and influence of *animation* in this scene (referred to in italics throughout to distinguish from animated film), a popular dance style where live dancers aim to imitate and appear as animated characters with their movements. Ironically, Oh performs animated *animated* dance movements to express an inexorable reaction to popular music, which creates an amusing blend of the real and the pretend. Illustrated in the example above, is the inclination to identify with the anthropomorphic qualities of well known and loved animated film characters. It is less common, however, to reflect on the ways in which this process may also work in reverse. More specifically, it is rare to consider the ways that animated film characteristics and techniques may also be traced through the moving body of the live dancer. In this article, I investigate animated film principles and musicality in a live dance performance involving *animation* and closely related illusory movement styles.

From Gene Kelly in *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) to the opening sequence in *La La Land* (2016), popular dance has enjoyed a long history in Hollywood films. Many animated films also present choreographed dance scenes in a similar format, such the use of tap dance in *Happy Feet* (2006) and large ensemble popular dance scenes in *Madagascar* (2005). These examples are among many animation films that feature dance scenes explicitly and deliberately. Animation has a robust foundational association with dance and choreography, as even in its basic form it is described as "movements-that-are-drawn" or "drawings-that-move."<sup>1</sup> Animators frequently discuss the importance of dance and choreography in their practice,<sup>2</sup> yet few scholars discuss the impact of animated film techniques on the live dancing body<sup>3</sup>. Studies that explore *animation* as a dance form in any capacity are also scarce<sup>4</sup>, and *animation* is a dance style that takes inspiration directly from animated film.

Animated film "references (and simulates) 'reality' and yet surpasses it, presenting scenarios that we [the viewers] recognize as simultaneously other and the same"<sup>5</sup>. It is a broad term to describe a wide range of filmic techniques, approaches and formats, including cel animation (where each frame is drawn by hand), computer generated imagery (CGI) and stop-motion animation. *Animation* in dance involves the imitation of stop-motion animated characters and their movements<sup>6</sup>, and has close links to film and cartoon animation, popping and street dance styles. According to Kenneth A. Priebe, stop-motion technique "requires a person to literally place a puppet in their hands and bring it to life, frame by frame"<sup>7</sup>, creating a flick-book animation style. In its simplest definition, popping involves the contraction and release of the arms, chest and neck muscles along with extension of the legs in time to the music<sup>8</sup>, and generates an illusion where the whole body pulses like a drum-skin once struck. The style of *animation* also involves creating illusions with the body that make a dancer appear "to look unreal" or animated<sup>9</sup>, with a particular emphasis on character development. Dancers who specialize in popping often draw from *animation* and other closely related movement styles such as waving, as a part of their dance technique and training. Although often mixed interchangeably, they have different foundational

principles. These dance styles form part of a large cluster of African and Latin diasporic dance practices, which are often referred to collectively as street dance<sup>10</sup>. There are convoluted and extended debates about what differentiates popping, *animation* and other closely related movement styles, which are beyond the scope of this article to discuss<sup>11</sup>. It is generally agreed and widely acknowledged that *animation* took some of its original inspiration from 1950s/60s 'dynamation' or 'claymation' style of animating, developed by Ray Harryhausen<sup>12</sup>. *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* (1958) and *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) are frequently mentioned examples, where character inspirations included the cyclops, the seven-headed hydra and an army of skeletons<sup>13</sup>. Some dancers deem *animation* to be a very specific technique akin to the claymation style of stop-motion, whereas other dancers argue that it should be used as a more flexible term to describe a whole collection of illusory movement styles<sup>14</sup>.

The dance style of *animation* attracted a surge of media attention when commercially successful dancers featured in various international televised competitions, including Cyrus "Glitch" Spencer as a finalist in the American 2012 season of *So You Think You Can Dance*<sup>15</sup>. The form is sometimes referred to in the media as 'dubstep dance,' since many dancers selected dubstep style music for these performances, mixing different styles of dance associated with popping and *animation* and pairing them with complex rhythmical features. Despite a more recent boom in popularity, the history of *animation* long precedes these recent examples in popular culture, and many dancers including Flattop, Mr. Animation, Bopping Andre and Boogaloo Shrimp are credited as pioneers<sup>16</sup>.

Both animation studies and popular dance studies confront significant challenges in the academy in relation to their scholarly value. The field of animation studies has faced a long-term struggle for legitimacy within film scholarship<sup>17</sup>, which is a challenge all too familiar for popular dance practices within the field of dance studies<sup>18</sup>. For example, close relationships between sound and movement in animation and popular dance practices have frequently been disregarded and deemed unworthy of intellectual study<sup>19</sup>. This is perhaps as a result of attention to experimental contemporary dance and film work, which often diverts from an intimate relationship with music. Curiously, many scholarly references only focus on the rejection of musicality as a principle of post-modern dance, rather than any detailed discussion of the term itself, its application or uses<sup>20</sup>. The connection between movement and sound is a fundamental aesthetic in both animated film and popular dance, and paramount to any detailed analyses of both practices.

In the UK, there are several dancers who are acclaimed for their skills and talent in *animation*, and many of them are part of a collective called Pro-Motion, headed up by dancer and choreographer Brooke Milliner and founded by Rob Pountney of ProDance<sup>21</sup>. This collective has produced several short films with witty and innovative choreography that feature the style of *animation*, along with varied and bold uses of theme, costume, location, filming and editing techniques. Although these examples

have excellent potential for analysis, I have deliberately chosen to focus on a recording of a live dance performance with minimal technology, editing or other production elements for my analysis. This is in order to focus on how the filmic techniques are cultivated through the live dancer's movement alone. As technology becomes increasingly sophisticated, the development of advanced motion capture software has the potential to create fascinating interactions with the live dancing body in various performance contexts. Scholars have investigated blurred lines between the animated and the live dancer in performances that combine the two mediums<sup>22</sup>, with a range of discoveries emerging as a result of interdisciplinary blended approaches. In this article, however, I focus specifically on techniques and principles associated with the popular dance form of *animation*, investigating the ways that animated film characteristics and principles are embodied in live dance performance, without technological intervention.

This article presents the illusory potential of the dancing body, through the analysis of specific principles informed by the fields of choreomusicology and animated film studies. I will conduct an analysis of a solo performance by Isaac "Turbo" Baptiste (Turbo), to consider the ways in which the presence of the animated in the actual creates potential to produce illusions of a pretend character, through which sophisticated uses of musicality can be achieved. First, I address a few of the complexities associated with musicality. Second, I discuss animated principles that are specifically relevant in *animated* performances. Third, I identify three important attributes of the performance that contribute to the bending and distortion of reality: i) the uses of character and a cartoonish body; ii) the use of humor and comic devices; and iii) choreomusical play.

## The Trouble With Mickey-Mouse

Mickey-Mousing is a concept that is used to describe dance and music that closely "mirrors" one another, with a particular focus on rhythm<sup>23</sup>. The term was developed specifically in film studies, and was given its name due to sound and music being directly synchronized with movement and image in original Mickey-Mouse cartoons. Despite its frequent use in many forms of dance and other art forms involving moving image, Mickey-Mousing is riddled with negative associations. Scholars such as Barbara White have challenged the tensions surrounding close sound and movement relationships, arguing that this device is usually discussed with resistance to "the loudness and intensity we experience when sound and movement join together in glorious excess"<sup>24</sup>. White argues that "understandable dread" emerges when attempting to analyze the impact of one art form upon the other, and a fairly sinister agenda involving the devaluation of popular art forms underpins this<sup>25</sup>.

Animation has a complicated and troubled history with race, with overt racial stereotyping prevalent in early Twentieth-Century cartoons<sup>26</sup>. The question of race is

implicit in the presentation of Mickey Mouse himself, where his white gloves signify blackface minstrelsy, despite an insistence that this design was for technical practicalities to help animators<sup>27</sup>. Non-white characters were often offensive and stereotypically presented, such as the "jive-talking crows" in *Dumbo* (1942), with one even named 'Jim Crow' in the film. Furthermore, some characters were so problematic that they were removed, such as "Sunflower the Centaur" in *Fantasia* (1940). This character was offensively portrayed as "a textbook example of the "pickaninny" caricature", and was subsequently erased altogether from the 1960 re-release due to "shifting, civil-rights era sensibilities"<sup>28</sup>.

Issues of race and class are also interwoven through the negative connotations of Mickey-Mousing as a choreomusical device. Eurocentric value systems often underpin close music-dance relationships and choreomusical scholarship, despite notable exceptions from the field of ethnomusicology<sup>29</sup>. Mickey-Mousing has a common association with popular entertainment for children and the cartoon world, and when the device is used by choreographers, it has led to accusations of laziness and simplicity<sup>30</sup>. Juliet McMains and Ben Thomas partially contest this, arguing that when used selectively, Mickey-Mousing or "isolated conformance" can be more effective than when used continuously<sup>31</sup>. They support their claims by selecting from a wide range of examples that encompass popular dance forms, including brief references to Gene Kelly and Lil Buck's *The Swan* (2011)<sup>32</sup>.

In street dance cultures, the nuances and complexities of close dance-music relationships are widely accepted, and binary thinking about dance and music as separate entities is discouraged. The close relationship is valued as a fundamental part of street dance styles whereby dance and music are inseparable, evolving from African and Latin diasporic forms. Uses of rhythm and polyrhythm are also fundamentals of African aesthetics<sup>33</sup>, and the active and detailed practice of listening is a part of learning the dance styles for both freestyle and choreographed performances<sup>34</sup>. This training however, does not often take place as part of a syllabus or institutional setting, leading to misconceptions about the dances being "non-technical", when there is in fact a large degree of technique involved<sup>35</sup>. Different musical styles have specific signifiers for street dancers. For example, a track with funk influences and a strong emphasis on the backbeat (two and four of each musical bar) might indicate popping, whereas a faster electronic track with a constant hi-hat in between beats could signify house dance<sup>36</sup>. In this paper, I argue that Mickey-Mousing is employed strategically by street dance performers both as a choreographic and improvisational device, with the potential to alter the spectator's experience of listening.

### **Animated *Animated* Principles**

The 12 Principles of Animation were developed at Disney Studios in the 1930s, and were created as a "benchmark for 'good' animation"<sup>37</sup>. They are as follows, with brief

explanations added for context<sup>38</sup>: I will italicize the principles throughout the article to make them easier to identify.

1: *Squash and Stretch*: Gives a moving object or character "gravity, weight, mass and flexibility".

2: *Anticipation*: Preparing for action, making movements look "more realistic".

3: *Staging*: Drawing attention to what is important within a scene.

4: *Straight Ahead Action and Pose to Pose*: Two approaches to drawing animated movements.

5: *Follow Through and Overlapping Action*: The process by which some parts of an action continue to move, even after the action has ended.

6: *Slow In and Slow Out*: Adding more frames at the start and end of an action.

7: *Arcs*: The natural path that objects follow, when moving.

8: *Secondary Action*: Smaller actions used to "emphasize the main action".

9: *Timing*: Using correct timing to make movements look realistic.

10: *Exaggeration*: Altering movements "just beyond what's possible" to make them more dynamic.

11: *Solid Drawing*: An understanding of how to draw in three-dimensional space.

12: *Appeal*: Designing and developing characters to "appeal" to audiences.

A selection of these animated movement principles can be translated to the live dancing body<sup>39</sup>, which I refer to as 'real' throughout, with "more flesh and substance" than animated characters on screen<sup>40</sup>. *Anticipation*, for example, refers to the preparation that is required before the next action takes place. This allows for the consideration of tiny movements that happen in the spaces between bigger movements, and how they are performed musically. Another example is *secondary action*, which is when smaller movement details are added to enhance believability of the overall illusion that is being created. Other principles can be applied more obviously in the character development and performance of a dancer, such as *appeal* and *exaggeration*. The suggested principles of animation, along with other concepts from the cartoon world such as "the take," described as "a moment of extreme surprise"<sup>41</sup>, create fascinating potential for dance analysis.

## Turbo's Solo

*This section is best read while watching Turbo's solo from Breakout - The Solo's (2011)*<sup>42</sup>. Due to the choreomusical intricacies discussed, I've included some video time codes to aid the reader.

An established dancer and entertainer often well-known for teaching and battling in house dance, Isaac "Turbo" Baptiste (Turbo) is a skilled practitioner who has impressed audiences for several years with his musicality. He reached the finals of *Got to Dance* on Sky 1 in 2011, and has appeared in many hip hop dance theatre productions such as 'The Mad Hatter' in *The Mad Hatters Tea Party* (2016-17) at the Royal Opera House, as part of Zonation Dance Company. Despite several commercially successful projects and ventures, a much smaller-scale solo theatre performance by Turbo forms the basis of my analysis. *Breakout - The Solo's* is an event that was established by Deja Vu Entertainment in 2010, aiming to give artists the opportunity to perform short solo pieces of work in a small theatre setting.

Turbo's performance at the 2011 edition of *Breakout - The Solo's* is set to a recording of *4 Mains* composed by Wim Mertens. This piece of music features piano played by four hands, and has minimalist stylistic influences, including a melodic foundation where small motifs develop through repetition and variation throughout. Although there is a consistent melodic pattern to follow in the track, the use of frequent cross-phrased rhythmic patterns add complexity. This is an unconventional choice of music for a street dance performance. It has none of the standard drum kit sounds such as the bass drum, snare drum and hi-hat, and features only piano. The movement style is difficult to categorize firmly in this piece, as there are notable influences from various street dance forms throughout. However, the consistent use of detailed isolations, illusions and animated effects to specific musical features make this a compelling choice of performance to analyze.

Turbo creates a series of illusions and imagery throughout this three-minute solo, and his *animating* body heightens and exaggerates musical complexities. He performs the piece effortlessly, with relaxed facial expressions and a seemingly casual approach. His effortlessness is juxtaposed with complicated polyrhythms, fast rhythmic footwork and expert body articulation and control. Consequently, a remarkable contradiction emerges where there is no trace of the physical exertion or effort required, and manifest in this is the "aesthetic of the cool"<sup>43</sup>. This concept, developed by Robert Farris Thompson, suggests a rich area of studies in relation to visual art, music and dance in the Black Atlantic world. There are many applications of the term in a vast range of artistic contexts, but it can be identified when "composure and vitality" combine in a dancer's performance<sup>44</sup>. The troubled historical relationship between animated film and race that I discussed earlier, demands rethinking when animation is transferred to real bodies. I want to acknowledge the racist legacy of animated film, which is present

in any discussion of animated principles in live dancing. In this analysis I focus on the movement, musicality and animated principles, rather than an in-depth study of this problematic history. This decision reflects my current expertise, but is also an important limitation of this writing. In this work focusing on Turbo, who is Black British<sup>45</sup>, the troubled history and erasure of race endures through the embodied history of animated film, yet is made visible in his performance of the dance.

Turbo embodies the dominant melodic line through the use of complex isolations and polyrhythmic patterns. He employs his body as a toolbox, isolating and using a range of different limbs and joints. It is often unclear as to whether what we are witnessing is improvised, or pre-choreographed; a mixture of the two seems probable due to uses of theme and variation focusing on different body parts. Turbo demonstrates a skillful ability to isolate parts of his body where there is an extensive movement range in the joint, such as the hands and fingers. This enables him to illustrate the way that the rhythms are *contained* in every part of his body. He quickly establishes a democratic use of his body<sup>46</sup>, where many unusual body parts are isolated in the performance. The dance contains remarkable detail, especially when he shakes the individual joint or body part in question with precision in time with the vibratory 'trill' in the music. This musical motif repeats eight times in total using different melodic notes, and Turbo shifts the location of this 'embodied trill' to coincide with different limbs and joints. He often uses the fingers and hands to create a tracing affect in order to *exaggerate* the part that is being articulated, almost as if an invisible string attaches his hand/fingers to other parts of his body. A pull and push on this invisible string triggers the heel of the foot to be released and pushed back to the floor, for example, appearing as if the hand and fingers are physically manipulating and taking control of the other body parts. He draws attention to each body part, as the audience are invited to follow the pattern of movement around the body. This guide functions similarly to *secondary action* in animated film, enriching and emphasizing the illusion and embodiment of the trill that he generates. Familiarity and predictability reside in the repetition of rhythm in both the movement and the music, but melodic changes and different body parts create variation. It is almost as if his body parts become individual characters, each with their own utterances, battling against one another to be the most articulate.

As a result of Turbo's effortless, relaxed performance quality, the spectator's reading of the moving body – rather than facial signals – helps them anticipate what might happen next. For example, the use of a trigger, or preparatory movement is commonly used throughout the piece to create a sense of choreomusical *anticipation*. He uses movements of the chest and torso through controlling his breathing pattern in order to build suspense at the point that a new musical phrase is about to begin. This is akin to a singer controlling breath to prepare to begin a new line. An example can be found at 00:40, where the shoulder rotates and the chest lifts as he fills his lungs with air, just before the next musical and movement phrase begins. A brief, alternative performance quality emerges here. He appears to feel and experience the movements more fully or deeply, and even briefly glances towards different body parts to acknowledge their

use. There is a sense that the body moves more as a unit rather than the disconnected parts that are dominant in other sections. This is further emphasized later in the piece in a similar section where he closes his eyes and appears to be deeply immersed in the movement and at one with the music. Here, his head moves with the rest of the body, in conjunction with the pathways and curves that the movements take. The change in expressiveness is similar in the music at this point, which increases in volume as Turbo's movements also expand in size. An extended melodic line coincides with a longer succession of movements, which climbs and falls in pitch repeatedly. This combination creates fullness and connectivity in the performance, which is juxtaposed with his nonchalant, relaxed facial expression. It initiates a switch from the illusion of disconnection that is created earlier, to a more integrated performance that presents his body a single expressive unit. As a spectator, I am reminded of Turbo's real body, which moves congruently as if all his body parts are now 'behaving'.

In the piece Turbo skillfully and consistently uses the music and movement to create complexity and simplicity, and repetition and variation. During one section (00:54), the melodic motif is repeated eight times in total. The rhythm in the music remains constant and so does the rhythm of his movements, so it is the melody and body parts that continue to change and build. With each repetition, he becomes more creative and experimental with his movement choices, until it feels as if he has exhausted all possible choices of body parts. By the seventh repetition, he has his left elbow resting on his left raised thigh and his chin in his hand and uses a jittering movement with his elbow along his thigh to his knee, a similar effect to that of a flip-book animation. Just when the spectator's gaze is fully engaged and tuned in to absorb what is happening, his movement is interrupted by a small action. The sudden shift is evident from a combination of the slowing tempo of the melody, the rhythm of the melody falling on basic whole counts, and the simplicity of the gesture being performed. In one moment, he uses only the fingers of his right hand in isolation, which immediately follows the most physically expressive section where the whole body is in use (02:44). This abrupt switch from the use of the whole body performing fully integrated movements, to the sudden use of only the fingers on the right hand with an aloof expression is quirky, and the audience laughs. Musically, the melody follows a similar pattern to create an unanticipated shift to a softer, lower pitched motif with a much smaller range. These moments create what might be described as a choreomusical anti-climax, starting by gradually building complexity and ending in unexpected simplicity. Here, tension is built by Turbo to create the expectation of a 'beat-kill' – a moment where the dancer is in complete synchronization with the music, often at the point of a musical climax<sup>47</sup>. In these moments, the intense cycle of choreomusical tension and resolve is disrupted playfully. A cheeky sense of character emerges, where Turbo spontaneously disturbs the building illusions, acting as a reminder that he is in charge of what the audience sees and hears.

In the performance, Turbo often uses a cartoon-like animated effect, which evokes laughter from the audience. Turbo also showcases the extent to which he can control

and articulate parts of his body, by isolating parts of the body not normally isolated in dance. He even moves individual pectoral muscles (01:47), and also moves his mouth and tongue (02:50) in time with the music. In this brief moment, his pink tongue suddenly appears and rolls rhythmically like a small hidden creature popping out of his mouth, as if he is trying to prove that any part of his body can become animated and dance on its own. There is frequent use of *the take* to surprise the audience, to produce unexpected moments of Mickey-Mousing, for example during the subtle movement of the pectorals. In the moments preceding this, Turbo performs a series of fast gestures with the hands, arms and legs, then suddenly relaxes in a standing position with his gaze directed over his left shoulder; seemingly disinterested in his body. It is at this moment that he performs the series of alternating pectoral isolations in a rhythmic pattern to the music. As this becomes fully noticeable, the moment has ended, and the spectator is given the impression that he doesn't notice this happening. Slapstick humor emerges through a bizarre moving body part with a life of its own, connotative of a pantomime and the classic "he's behind you!" joke. He uses pauses and syncopation intelligently in several places in the piece in connection with cartoonish humor. At one point, Turbo uses three small runs to travel towards stage right and after this he simply lets his weight shift backwards, almost as if he is catching his body up with his feet to create *overlapping action*. There are other similar moments where it seems as if he is tripping himself up through catching the syncopated rhythms, synonymous with "creeping gravity" that is often used in cartoons<sup>48</sup>. He creates suspense as he transfers his body weight over his toes to give the impression he might fall forwards, and then catches himself in time with the music using what could be considered a pedestrian run. The pedestrian movements that he uses are often *exaggerated* and happen in rhythmic synchronicity with the music, which he builds into a cycle of tension and resolve.

The deployment of *animation* and an animated, cartoon quality consistently highlights and stresses moments of choreomusical acuity during the piece. Turbo frequently uses *exaggeration* through moving joints and limbs in unexpected and surprisingly flexible ways. He also gradually transforms into a cartoonish posture to appear as an animated character. This posture involves a wide stance where the feet are slightly turned in, the shoulders are rolled in and forwards, the head extends out so that the neck is elongated, and the hips jut out to the back. Turbo holds this posture whilst performing movements with the arms and hands, employing waving technique to extend out towards the audience and back four times. The strange contorted shape of his body seems to draw more attention to the movements, and this is heightened by the way that the movement synchronizes with the music along with the satisfying repetition in both the movement and music. He also uses a strobe light effect, where the pace of the main melodic line is suddenly slower and follows a series of even quavers (half-beats). During this short sequence, Turbo breaks down his movements into equidistant smaller actions. It takes eight movements to bring his hands up the front of his body and t-shirt towards his hat, for example. This creates an illusion of slowing down time, due to the stop/start effect of the strobing technique that looks like a film that is being

paused and played continuously. The slower rhythmic high-pitched pattern that is played over the faster bass riff also contributes to a sense of decreasing speed. The overarching tempo doesn't actually change, as the supporting layers of the music continue at the same speed and rhythmic pattern. It is a combination of the even quavers in the melody blended with the strobing effect that momentarily appears to stretch and extend time.

For the majority of the piece, Turbo experiments with the dominant melodies, but there are also parts where he references other layers of the music that have a supporting role to the melodic line. One example, is when he references the three bass notes by pressing his right foot three times into the floor whilst keeping his arms and upper body in a fixed angular, grounded position (02:56). His foot presses into the floor almost as if he is pressing the note himself, like a foot pedal. These three bass notes occur consistently throughout the whole track, but it is only at this moment that our attention may be drawn to them. The musical idea is therefore "amplified" through this movement<sup>49</sup>. Furthermore, this particular moment happens fairly close to the end of the performance, serving as a reminder of the endless potential of musical and movement choices to the point where I imagine that every body part and rhythmic possibility has been exhausted. The solo ends fairly abruptly after a complicated series of hand and finger gestures, with an image of Turbo with his arm outstretched and index finger pointing towards the cheering audience.

## Conclusion

The practices of animated film, *animation* and musicality expose an interesting relationship between the imagined and the actual in this short solo dance performed by Turbo. His body parts come to life, ranging from shoulders and hands to pectorals, fingertips and the tongue; each part acting as a character in itself and outshining the previous in a competitive battle style, which is apt for a dance performance of this genre. Turbo's skillful musicality shifts and disrupts cycles of tension and resolve, distorting my perception of timing and rhythm. He physicalizes less prominent sounds in the music, providing a visual representation of its detailed subtleties, almost like a dancing conductor. The precise timing and use of humor pays further homage to animated film principles, and suggests that Turbo cannot always control his unruly body parts, because they have a life of their own. When watching this work, the audience might 'suspend their belief'<sup>50</sup>, as the restrictions of human movement are provisionally forgotten. As a spectator, I am temporarily convinced by the presence of an animated dancing body, through my investment in the physical illusions that Turbo performs.

The original motivation for this research was sparked by my fascination with animated films, and the connection to my practice as a dancer, enjoying movement styles related

to street dance, popping and *animation*. Additionally, I work with many students on the undergraduate dance programme at The University of East London, and have observed their interest in an expanding range of popular dance forms, about which there are few scholarly resources. Furthermore, I identified the need to find suitable approaches to analyze popular dance forms, valuing close and intricate music-dance relationships. In this case, the *12 principles of animation* provided a lens through which to appropriately scrutinize a popular dance practice. The approach also derives from popular culture, privileges sound-movement connections, and has a similar struggle for legitimacy. The value of many popular dance practices in screen contexts such as television, social media and in film have been explored by scholars extensively<sup>51</sup>. However, the impact that film histories, apparatus and techniques have on live dancers without their mediated presence needs more scholarly attention. As a result, we might consider a wider range of popular and street dance practices, and the ways that they are influenced by different popular screen and film principles. I hope that this work might lead to a wider range of approaches, and ways of investigating the value of the nuanced, detailed movement histories and practices of popular and street dance styles.

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### Author Biography

Dr. Jo Read is Senior Lecturer on the undergraduate dance programme at the University of East London and is also a practitioner in the dance field. She recently completed an AHRC funded PhD at De Montfort University, exploring choreomusicality in street dance practices in the UK. As a dancer, Jo has a keen interest in street dance forms and particularly focuses on litefeet in her current training. She has performed in various projects as part of hip-hop dance company Boy Blue such as *Emancipation of Expressionism* (2017), and also reached the finals for the 2v2 litefeet battles at *Litefest* 2019. Jo is currently beginning research for a new choreographic project called *Dancing With Endo*, which focuses on working with professional dancers who also have endometriosis.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Cholodenko in Coyle, *Drawn to Sound*, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Aloff, *Hippo in a Tutu*; Purves, *Stop Motion*.

<sup>3</sup> A few notable exceptions include Takiguchi, *Michael Jackson's Performance of Difference*, which includes analysis of Michael Jackson's illusory dancing abilities, and Goldmark and Keil, *Funny Pictures*, which includes movement analysis of Charlie Chaplin.

<sup>4</sup> JRock Nelson, *Animation Lesson (Part 1)*; Mackrell, *Animation dance: hip-hop's living cartoon marvels*.

<sup>5</sup> Coyle, *Drawn to Sound*, 5.

<sup>6</sup> "Lesson in Animation Dance Style (JRock)."

<sup>7</sup> Priebe, *The Advanced Art of Stop-Motion*, xvii.

<sup>8</sup> Therealnessdance.com.

<sup>9</sup> "Lesson in Animation Dance Style (JRock)."

<sup>10</sup> I have observed that street dance is a term that is used amongst dancers in the UK, to describe a range of different dance practices. A few examples commonly practiced by UK dancers include popping, locking, hip hop, litefeet, breaking, house dance, waacking and krump.

<sup>11</sup> "Otis!" Otis Funkmeyer discusses many aspects of these debates on his public youtube channel, such as showing video footage from the 1970s and beyond, the historical origins of some of the movements, and their definitions. Evidence of various debates can also be found amongst poppers on many social media platforms, including the public Facebook group, "Whats Poppin."

<sup>12</sup> "Lesson in Animation Dance Style (JRock)."

<sup>13</sup> "Boppin Andre. Basics of Animation." Boppin Andre demonstrates different animation concepts, including the famous Cyclops character from *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* (1958).

<sup>14</sup> u/sanlands. "What is Animation?"

<sup>15</sup> Others who have found fame through similar platforms include Brian "Chibi" Gaynor, Jade "Soul" Zuberi and "Dytto."

<sup>16</sup> "Lesson in Animation Dance Style (JRock)."

<sup>17</sup> Coyle, *Drawn to Sound*, 5.

<sup>18</sup> Malnig, *Boogie, Ballroom*; Dodds, *Dancing on the Canon*.

<sup>19</sup> White, *As If They Didn't Hear*; Aloff, *Hippo in a Tutu*; Coyle, *Drawn to Sound*.

<sup>20</sup> Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, xxii. I included a discussion of the term 'musicality' in my PhD thesis, focusing on its use and meanings for street dancers in the UK. Read, *Cadences of Choreomusicality*, 45-54.

<sup>21</sup> "Pro-Motion." Other well-known dancers in this collective include Shawn Aimey, Nicholas Marvel, Harry Popper and Rikoshay. Although there are many practicing female poppers and *animators*, this is notably disproportionate to the number of male dancers who become prominent or leading figures in the style. Recently formed all female A.I.M collective (formed by Shawn Aimey) are a notable exception, along with other UK-based female dancers such as Paris Crossley, Vicky "Skytilz" Mantey and Natalie McParland.

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<sup>22</sup> Birringer, *Dance and Media Technology*, Blanco-Borelli, *Oxford Handbook of Dance and the Popular Screen* Brennan and Parker, *Animating Dance and Dancing with Animation*.

<sup>23</sup> White, *As If They Didn't Hear The Music*, 67.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Sammond, *Birth of an Industry*.

<sup>27</sup> Sammond, *Who Dat Say Who Dat*, 145.

<sup>28</sup> Watson, *A Short History of Race in Animation*.

<sup>29</sup> Nor and Stepputat, *Sounding the Dance, Moving the Music*.

<sup>30</sup> Aloff, *Hippo in a Tutu*, 76.

<sup>31</sup> McMains and Thomas, *Translating from Pitch to Plié*, 210.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 213-214.

<sup>33</sup> Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence*, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Although these concepts are imperative to any understanding of the popular dance forms in question, it is also important to question the unique British and Black British aesthetics, which emerge in the practice and performance of street dance forms in the UK. As the majority of available and aforementioned literature focuses on popular dance in an American context, this is often overlooked. Thomas Defrantz asserts that Black British dance has different "concerns" to Black American dance, and Akinleye notes a "distinct lack of acknowledgement" of "being British" when performing dances related to the African Diaspora. Defrantz in Akinleye, *Narratives in Black British Dance*, ix. Akinleye, *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>35</sup> Bragin, *On the Front Porch*. There is a vast range of activity fostering street dance cultures in London, which ranges from organized classes in studios such as Base Dance Studios in Vauxhall, training meet ups in public and private spaces (previously at venues such as Trocadero, Charing Cross Station and the Southbank Centre), organized battles and competitions (e.g. Juste Debout London) and theatre and outdoor events (e.g. Breakin' Convention at Sadler's Wells Theatre).

<sup>36</sup> Bosse, *Bodies of Sound*, 43. Bosse describes this similarly here in relation to ballroom dance styles.

<sup>37</sup> Bishko, *The Uses and Abuses of Cartoon Style in Animation*, 24.

<sup>38</sup> Coron, *Understand Disney's 12 Principles of Animation*.

<sup>39</sup> "The 12 Principles of Animation with Commentary." In this video, Otis Funkmeyer discusses the importance for dancers to understand these principles and apply them to their practice.

<sup>40</sup> Bouldin, *The Body, Animation and the Real*, 48.

<sup>41</sup> Bishko, *The Uses and Abuses of Cartoon Style in Animation*, 27.

<sup>42</sup> "Turbo [Breakout - The Solo's]"

<sup>43</sup> Farris Thompson, *Aesthetic of the Cool*.

<sup>44</sup> De Frantz, *The Black Beat Made Visible*, 69.

<sup>45</sup> Turbo prefers to describe himself as "a person of culture", and noted the many cultural influences that contribute to his identity as a performer. Turbo, message to author, 26 February 2020.

<sup>46</sup> Osumare, *The Africanist Aesthetic in Global Hip-Hop*, 51.

<sup>47</sup> There are other variations of this term that have the same meaning. I have come across this described as 'beat-matching', 'beat-freaking' and a 'blow up' amongst dancers, often when describing moments of musicality in a battle.

<sup>48</sup> Anon, *Gravity is a Harsh Mistress*.

<sup>49</sup> McMains and Thomas, *Translating from Pitch to Plie*, 210.

<sup>50</sup> Bishko, *The Uses and Abuses of Cartoon Style in Animation*, 24.

<sup>51</sup> Blanco Borelli, *Oxford Handbook of Dance and the Popular Screen*.

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