

Punking: How appropriation revitalised it and the role institutions play in the protection and longevity of this elusive art

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ABSTRACT

From the streets of Los Angeles in the early 1970s, a dance style named Punking emerged. This occurred at the height of the civil rights movement in the underground LGBTQ+ clubs of LA by a group of BIPOC queer men. A blend of sharp, exaggerated poses and movements borrowed from Hollywood films and pop culture became an art form that reflected their identity and encapsulated the escapism and liberation of a group of young queer people growing up in an environment where being queer was illegal and dangerous.

By the late 1980s and 1990s, the dance faded, but it still influenced dance styles such as jazz, house, and even vogue. In the early 2000s, interest in the dance was reignited. However, its name and origins remained elusive, prompting an investigation into its history, shifting narratives and exclusion from dance history. In this article, I will explore how a dance form becomes lost in translation and how this dance can be preserved and introduced into institutionalised spaces to offer resources and legal protection for an art form on the verge of erasure from history.

SAMMANFATTNING

På Los Angeles gator i början av 1970-talet dök en dansstil, vid namn Punking upp. Det skedde samtidigt som medborgarrättsrörelsen tog fart. I de underjordiska HBTQ+-klubbarna i LA var det en grupp BIPOC-queermän som utvecklade Punkingen. Det var en blandning av skarpa, överdrivna poser och rörelser inspirerade av Hollywood-filmer och popkultur. Där och då skapade de en helt ny konstform som speglade deras identitet och som i sin tur blev en politisk frihetsrörelse för en grupp unga queermänniskor som växte upp i en miljö där det var olagligt och farligt.

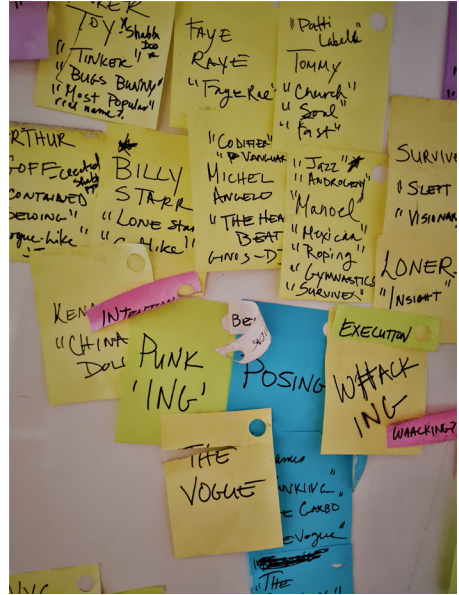
I slutet av 1980-talet kom dansen att bli mindre framträdande och det höll i sig under hela 1990-talet. Stilen glömdes bort. Influenser fanns kvar och de påverkade utvecklingen av jazzdans liksom stilar som House och Vogue. Punkingen kom alltså att påverka dansens olika uttryck i praktiken men i danshistorieskrivningen blev den aldrig inkluderad. I min text kommer jag att diskutera kring frågor som hur en dansstil kan glömmas bort för att ett antal år senare återigen bli viktigt att bevara. Jag kommer även att belysa vikten av att dansstilen introduceras till fler och får de resurser som behövs för att återerövra en status som konstform.

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Whacking in Performance Illustration,
credit: Carol Davis



Vision Board Credit: Alyssa Chloé

Prologue

In January 2003, I arrived in New York City to begin an adventurous new chapter in my personal and professional life. I was struggling to navigate New York and adjust to the intensity of life in a new city while searching for my dance community. During this period, I immersed myself in the underground world of street dance culture among elite street dancers, whose talent was boundlessly creative and inspirational.

Despite the city's reputation as a hub for the arts, competition is fierce, and finding a place in the dance community was both thrilling and a battle. However, after several encounters, I was introduced to a dance

style that would both fascinate me as a dancer and redirect the trajectory of my path. The New York version of this style, simply called "Waacking", was a dance that originated in the US West Coast city of Los Angeles. During my time there, I witnessed how this style was slowly being reintroduced into the mainstream of the commercial dance world at schools like Broadway Dance Center.

This is where my story and journey begin. I ultimately engaged in 20 years of deep research into this style to connect with the heart and roots of this timeless artform that would transform my artistic practice. This is an also artform that, from my

observation, has become overshadowed by a barrage of misinformation; misrepresentation and the popularity of dances fueled by machismo, such as breaking, popping, locking, hip hop and house.

1. Introduction

This article intends to illustrate the story of Punking's origins, which have been hidden due to the stigmatisation of its roots, misinformation, and fragmentation. The present article also explores how

this artform has shaped my artistic practice, personal narrative and consciousness of the ethical ramifications of representation. This is an investigation of the development of this artform, from the underground to the mainstream, as a modern-day example of how the appropriation of art creates shifting narratives that impact access to the cultural aspects of dance. Lastly, this article discusses how institutions can be crucial in

Soul Sessions, Oslo, Credit: Ortenheim



archiving and researching history by helping preserve the remnants of this dance's legacy.

My interest in, practice of and research into this artform's culture and history led me to numerous encounters; experiences and conversations with the pioneers, masters and, from my perspective, geniuses of this art. These experiences set my trajectory for the last 20 years, enabling me to reveal and elevate Punking's hidden history while finding my own voice within it. Ultimately, my artistic journey involves the deepening of my knowledge of a hidden subculture, which has not only transformed me but also empowered me to be more authentic, compassionate and empathetic as an artist. By integrating the lessons and experiences of the subculture into my artistic practice, I am motivated to create work that is meaningful, powerful and relevant to a wider audience.

1.1 The Renaissance: The Early Roots of Punking/Whacking/Waacking

In the aftermath of the civil rights movement, 1970s Hollywood was brimming with an explosion of new dances generated by inner-city BIPOC youth who were driven by the need to escape and express themselves. Social dances, from 'soul dance' to 'locking' and 'popping', would become emblems of identity and pride for marginalized youth and cultures confronting the challenge of surviving the sociopolitical unrest within their neighborhoods. While the emergence of dance TV shows, such as 'Soul Train' and 'American Bandstand', exposed and introduced this counterculture revolution to the US and the world, bringing mass attention and fame to its originators and practitioners, one style would remain largely underground and underexposed due to the rampant homophobia of the era (George Cassidy, 2019).

The dance style termed Punking, later referred to as Whacking, was birthed adjacent to the locking movement in the underground LGBTQ+ clubs of Los Angeles by a group of young, BIPOC (black, indigenous,

and people of color) homosexual men. They named their dance Punking as an attempt to reclaim the homophobic slur 'punk' and transform it into something positive, a dance style. Between 1972 and 1976, Punking flourished at the height of the emerging soul and disco era, which was characterized by sharp, exaggerated poses and strobe-light movements inspired largely by Hollywood silent films and other imagery. Their collective inspiration was drawn from a range of sources that reflected the pop culture of the era, combining dramatic storytelling, gymnastics, martial arts and other influences that merged into an artform that was a reflection of their identities (Vargas, 2022). Gradually, this dance became an expression of their liberation as young queer people who resisted the Sodomy Law, which banned homosexuality and forbid dancing with people of the same gender in open, public spaces in California until 1976 (Weinmeyer, JD, 2014)¹. Despite these circumstances, they continued to dance in homosexual clubs, such as Paradise Ballroom, Ginos and Ginos II, and introduced their style to heterosexual clubs throughout the LA area, seizing the attention of many dancers and choreographers in the LA dance industry while simultaneously opening a door for other underground LGBTQ+ movements and artforms, such as vogue and ballroom culture, to emerge and receive recognition in mainstream culture (Wikipedia, 2023).

Occasional TV, stage and film appearances alongside music artists such as director/choreographer/singer Toni Basil, Diana Ross, Grace Jones, David Bowie and Madonna would introduce elements of the dance to a wider audience, fueling its popularity beyond the clubs. Soon, well-known, established street dancers would adapt and rebrand the dance under the name and spelling Waacking to separate itself from the original culture and stigma surrounding its queer roots (Vargas, 2022). Despite the dance's growing popularity, its influence on music videos and increased media attention being paid to street dance culture,



Originators of Punting/Whacking in Toni Basil at The Roxy, 1976; Credit: Toni Basil.net

Birdseye View, Exposé: Punting: An American Classic, Insideout Studios



the story of its origins and creators remained invisible due to a lack of representation and the reluctance of prominent spokespeople to bring their stories to the public (Vargas, 2022).

By the late 1980s and 90s, the dance continued to be performed in music videos, underground clubs and shows, despite the disappearance of many of its creators due to incarceration, violence and the looming AIDS crisis, which ravaged the LGBTQ+ community. By the mid- to late 90s, Punting slowly became a silhouette of its past glory, while remaining a subtle influence on other dances, such as street jazz, house and even Vogue, until the early 2000s, when a new generation of dancers began to reintroduce it publicly in New York City's underground house and hip hop clubs and battles.

Dance events all over the world, particularly in Europe and Asia, have embraced this style and included it within their competitions, workshops, showcases and education since its resurgence in 2007. However, while interest in the dance has reemerged, the history of this expression and its originators remains elusive due



*Photo Collage with Pioneers
Credit: Alyssa Chloé, Ana Sanchez, Lovisa Silverberg,
Sapphire Lounge, NYC*

to the appropriated practices and altered narratives surrounding its origins and creators. This shift in its history has been a key example of how appropriation has contributed to the survival and accessibility of the dance for a new audience, as a significant concern arises from the lack of proper acknowledgment and understanding of its history and originators. These shifting narratives have prompted an investigation of its origins.

2. Presentation of the Practice

In this section, I will present my investigation, focusing on four practices and methods that I explored and

researched from 2003 to 2023. The origins of my research stem from my background as a trained dancer in modern and jazz and my introduction to the underground street dance community of NYC. This research encompasses experiences in New York City and Los Angeles as a practitioner, choreographer, and teacher. Throughout this period, I also had the privilege of studying, interviewing and immersing myself in an emerging community alongside a diverse

group of influential artists who played a pivotal role in globalizing the artform. This experience allowed me to witness firsthand how the narratives evolved and shifted during the process of globalisation, as well as to explore the dance's roots via multiple perspectives.

2.1 Language

Throughout this investigation, several terms and names are used for the dance, which are based on the geographic location the dance represented, the time and era of the dance and the evolution of the style. For example, while the dance was simply referred as Waacking or Whacking commercially and globally, dancers based in California who witnessed the dance from its genesis in the LGBTQ+ underground clubs in the 1970s often refer to the dance by its original name, Punking or 'Punking, Posing, Whacking'. Another name for this dance is The Vogue. This language has become integral to defining and differentiating between the various generational hierarchies of the practitioners of the style, from the original inventors of the style to the pioneers who learned the dance directly from the originals to its modern-day, global incarnation.

2.12 The Foundation of the Practice

The foundation of this practice stems from various methods, techniques and philosophies that connect with the physical and emotional aspects of the dance while incorporating reference points from TV, films, pop culture and artwork. The blending of these elements serves as a template with which to express an individual story through the integration of the elements of posing, behaviour, movement and space. In addition to these elements, the rhythm, sharpness and emotional connection within the movement also contribute to the execution of the dance.

The combination of these influences allows participants space in which to experiment with various identities, characters and expressions.

Within this practice, improvisation and individual interpretation are encouraged, allowing dancers to infuse their unique personalities and stories into their performances. Therefore, the dance is an expression of the individual, as compared to styles that rely heavily on choreography and dancing in unison.

This form of expression serves as a catalyst, manifesting uniquely within various gendered bodies. As a woman working within this practice, my initial experience revealed an intensified representation of femininity, evoking a profound sense of physical empowerment. Conversely, in my observation of my male counterparts, this art form elicited a physical response that revealed vulnerability and sensuality. The harmonization of these qualities appears to embody the very essence of this dance, seamlessly blending classic elegance with contemporary vigor.

Another notable characteristic of this practice is the importance of club culture. The atmosphere of the club, from the music to the energy, all became integral to understanding and connecting with the style, particularly as someone from another era and region. While the studio offered space to practice and perfect choreography, practicing in the clubs, on the floor, and perfecting my moves in front of dance legends such as Tyrone Proctor, Archie Burnett and others provided an atmosphere for me in which to experience the dance's liberating quality. Based on the concept 'Each one teaches one', these exchanges were a conversation about movement, bridging and shared experiences through dance and movement among generations.

2.13 Media Research

In addition to studio classes and workshops, my research included watching and examining TV footage of variety shows that featured many LA dancers, such as 'The Midnight Special', 'Hot City' and 'The Big Show', and music videos from various musical artists, ranging from Toni Basil and Jody Watley to Paula Abdul. However, the main sources of footage featuring

the creators of the dance are *Diana Ross, Live at Caesar Palace*, and early Grace Jones TV appearances. Until 2023, these sources of footage would remain the only known documentation of the originators shared publicly.

3. Methods

In this section, I will describe the most notable teachers and methods that had the most influence on my practice, as well as my personal impressions and reflections on these experiences. The duration of these studies is from 2003 to 2023, and they occurred in New York City, Los Angeles and Europe. This research is the result of a combination of participating in dance classes/workshops, interviews and ongoing dialogues, as well as my own experience as a practitioner.

3.1 NYC Underground/Brian Green

My first experience witnessing this style was in spaces in the underground clubs of New York City, where it thrived as a nod to the nostalgia of the previous generation of dance and music that emerged from the soul and disco era. This style resembled a freer form of jazz dance that was blended effortlessly with other styles, such as locking, house, lofting and street jazz, and was considered part of New York's underground house dance culture. As a newer generation of house dance enthusiasts began to flock to these underground spaces, the exposure of Waacking generated wider interest. At the forefront of teaching this style to the younger generation was dancer/choreographer/teacher Brian Green. Green began incorporating the style into house classes in the now-defunct New York Dance landmark Fazil's in the early 2000s. Fazil's was an old dusty studio in the heart of Manhattan that had been occupied by greats ranging from tap dancers to street dancers and even martial artists, such as Bruce Lee. These classes had begun generating sufficient attention and interest among students to offer weekly classes and workshops in more commercial studios,

such as Broadway Dance Center and Peridance Dance Center.

Through Green's efforts, the recent resurgence of interest in this style has sparked numerous inquiries about its origins, historical context and references. While glimpses of the style were captured through video documentation from 1980s TV shows and films, the available information regarding its origins remained a mystery, leaving many unanswered questions even for Green himself. Questions such as *Where does it come from?*, *Who were the originators?*, and *Who and what influenced the development of this style?* began to emerge among newcomers to the dance, necessitating Green's effort to invite its pioneers and originators to New York City. This inclusive approach aimed to foster an environment of education and collaboration, inviting contributions from those who played significant roles in shaping the art form. Through this collective endeavour, the goal was to piece together a comprehensive historical timeline and shed light on the rich heritage of this dance style for the new generation.

3.2 Ana Lollipop Sanchez: Punking + Posing = Whacking

Ana 'Lollipop' Sanchez, an esteemed street dance pioneer from Los Angeles, is renowned as a trailblazer for women in street dance. In 2003, she returned to the mainstream after receiving a personal invitation from Brian Green to judge The House Dance Conference. During her visit, she introduced her unique approach to the style she referred to as 'Punking/Whacking', which she had pioneered after learning directly from the originators of the dance in the 1970s. This was the first time the name Punking was introduced to the dance scene of NYC. Collaborating closely, Green and Sanchez embarked on a fruitful partnership spanning from 2003 to 2007. Sanchez conducted workshops and performances, delving more deeply into the LA roots of the dance and unearthing valuable insights about

its origins. Their collaborative efforts significantly contributed to expanding the knowledge base and understanding of this art form.

Our dialogue and training within this practice and style continued from 2005 to 2011. I dove deeply into her methodology, called *Punking + Posing = Whacking*, while introducing her approach to NYC within my practice, classes and workshops. Among the methods she introduced was an exercise she referred to as 'a reflection of a feeling', which was a blend of movement and the in-depth analysis of images from film or photographs, which served as references for her approach. She also shared in-depth anecdotes about the originators' approaches and contributions. These specific influences served as a foundation, which was integrated into her evolution within her style, combined with influences from her background in salsa, soul dance, martial arts, and locking. Beyond the originators of the style, she also studied imagery and performances from Hollywood actresses such as Rita Hayworth and Cyd Charisse.

Within her practice, an overarching emphasis was placed on the significance of clothing as an extension of the movement. While working with her, she actively incorporated a diverse array of garments, such as jackets and scarves, into our lessons, aiming to explore their potential within the dance. The utilisation and control of attire could be used to accentuate specific movements or poses.

Overall, from the strategic utilisation of space to the thoughtful selection of clothing, organic behaviours and gestures, and the cultivation of an unabashed emotional connection to the music, each element played a pivotal role in interpreting and embodying the essence of the dance. Listening to music through an emotional ear and connections to one's deepest emotions, as compared to simply hearing and moving to beats, were essential to the physical expression of the sound. Through an exploration of her methods, this became the foundational structure of my practice.

This comprehensive understanding allowed me to reintegrate my music and utilise my own inspirations and background, seamlessly amalgamating all these elements with my personal movement vocabulary.

3.3 Adolfo 'Shabba-Doo' Quinones: Shway Style or Shabba-Doo's Way

Adolfo Shabba Doo Quinones, a trailblazing figure in street dance, is renowned as a founding member of the Soul Train Gang on the popular TV show 'Soul Train.' Additionally, he gained prominence as one of the Original Lockers and achieved fame through his leading roles in the movies *Breakin and Breakin 2*, in which he portrayed Ozone. Notably, during the evolution of the Punking/Whacking style in the 1970s, he emerged as the first notable heterosexual dancer to master this style, a revolutionary feat in 1970s Hollywood, which was known for its pervasive homophobia and closeted culture.

Quinones's artistic journey led him to blend elements of punking, locking, soul dance, and salsa, accompanied by incorporating masculine gender expression, as compared to the more feminine expression of the originators. His approach garnered significant attention and widespread appeal among the mainstream public, eventually becoming popularly referred to as Waacking or the Shabba-Doo, a clear separation from the dance's queer roots in the media.

In later years, from 2005 to 2012, he developed his comprehensive methodology known as 'Shway' (Shabba Doo's Way), which intricately wove together Punking/Whacking, soul dance and locking. This intensive training program aimed to help dancers deepen their understanding of his methodology, which included codifying the style. From 2008 to 2009, through extensive conversations and training, we diligently explored and experimented with his techniques, which he referred to simply as 'Shway' or 'Shway-Style Waackin', refining the associated vocabulary before introducing it to classes worldwide.

Similar to Sanchez, Quinones's style had evolved by amalgamating elements from the original expression of Punking, imagery from masculine figures in Hollywood and his unique interpretations of locking and soul dance. From my perspective, they shared similar foundational influences and had a profound influence on one another. He was the yang to Sanchez's yin.

Central to Quinones's method was his philosophy of ESP, which stands for emotional, spiritual and physical. The 'emotional' facet encouraged dancers to connect and express themselves viscerally and uninhibitedly through movement. The 'spiritual' dimension emphasised the interconnectedness of all beings and their connection to something greater. Lastly, the 'physical' aspect focussed on developing the physical prowess and strength necessary to dance to one's fullest potential.

Although this dance was originated by homosexual men, Quinones insisted on dispelling the misunderstanding that one's ability to dance well is connected to one's sexual identity. He emphasised that understanding the style depended on two factors: how well one understands the inner workings of the dance within a cultural perspective and how one relates these ideas to one's own identity and expression. These philosophies helped me experience his approach to its fullest and delve into my own story through movement. Throughout the training, we would explore these concepts through different types of music, emotional conversations and dialogues that tapped into our inner psyches, as well as intense physical training that became a psychological and physiological test.

Within his understanding, his method was the adaptation of the dance style known as locking, which he insisted I learn and incorporate into my practice. From his perspective, to be able to merge the hypermasculine expression of locking with the feminine expression of Punking/Waacking offered a balanced yin-yang effect, with locking offering a

physical power base and Punking/Waacking providing fluidity and elegance. This combination helps to stimulate and control the flow and momentum of the style, as compared to allowing the dance to control the person.

I also believe that actively exploring the feminine and masculine qualities and energies of the style was a way to access and express these traits safely, without judgment or the threat of being stigmatised for being perceived as a 'homosexual'. This also could have been a tool via which to access the feminine. I also believe that this combination is what appealed to male dancers becoming more interested in the style because locking was closely more associated with male dancers than women in the 1970s.

Notably, the emphasis on storytelling through behaviour and acting was emphasised, in addition to the physical movements. From my perspective, his exceptional skill lay in his capacity to assume and embody various characters, seamlessly integrating them into 'vignettes' and 'scenarios' interwoven throughout the dance. The foundation for this was Sanford Meisner's acting approach, which centered on the concept of 'acting truthfully under imaginary circumstances.' The incorporation of these acting principles illuminates the initial Punking/Whacking style, employing visual elements and movies as a guide to embodying characters and integrating them into the dance.

The integration of this concept, as a practitioner, was revolutionary for my practice, as it was the key to making this dance relevant to my personal experiences and inspirations while honouring the integrity of the core elements of the dance. This also gave a deeper insight into the inner workings of the original expression. The introduction to these acting methods was groundbreaking for me, as it introduced me to dance as a medium for acting and storytelling, transcending mere movements and steps. Being able to connect and tap into the deepest, most profound

aspects of our human experiences, from the joys to the traumas, and transform them into movement and expression is an ultimate goal of this practice, as is the mastery of being vulnerable while expressing movement, even while in character.

In his words, 'Within the pain, in the eye of the storm, is where real art exists, when you are alive at that moment and can feel real pain, can you appreciate real happiness.'

Between 2008 and 2010, I assumed the role of the inaugural instructor to introduce Shway's style and methodologies to the dance community in New York City, specifically at Peridance Dance Center. However, as profound as his methods and teachings were, I became increasingly aware of a concerning shift in his narrative that marginalised the contributions of the originators in favour of financial gain and the protection of Quinones's own legacy. This observation prompted an examination of the concepts of ownership and the evolving narratives surrounding original artforms. It led me to question our responsibility to safeguard the legacy of the original creators, particularly when most of the originators are dead. I contemplated how these changing narratives could impact the integrity of the dance form in the long term. Does this shift empower the dance's evolution, or does it lead to the erasure of the originators from its history?

3.4 Viktor Manoel: Punking: Action + Reaction = Movement

About 7 years after what has now been termed the resurgence of Waacking and several of its pioneers being reintroduced to the new generation through workshops and dance events, new perspectives, methods and alliances emerged to introduce the style globally. This allowed cultures and generations far removed from the style's origins and roots in LA's gay underground to access it. Soon, many international students began to flock to NYC to train and research, seeking mentoring and opportunities to introduce

the style within their own countries. While a new generation of dancers began to adopt and represent the style internationally through the emergence of the collective known as the *International House of Waacking*, led by 'Soul Train' pioneer, Tyrone Proctor. Several conflicting messages concerning the dance's name, histories, originators and references emerged from this collective, which created a direct conflict between New York City and Los Angeles regarding these themes and issues. From my perspective, I witnessed the narratives of the dance shifting in favour of upholding the legacy of the individual and protecting their resources, rather than the art form itself. The scene was rapidly becoming divided and fragmented, with conflicting narratives and misunderstandings surrounding the dance itself and its representation.

Viktor Manoel is a dancer, choreographer and athlete from Mexico who is based in LA. He had established himself as an esteemed influencer in the LA jazz dance scene and dance industry. Before he entered the jazz world, he was the only remaining original Punker from the collective of men who created the artform itself. At the age of 17, Manoel was introduced to Punking and the friends creating it at LA's Paradise Ballroom. Drawing from his background in Mexico's Ballet Folklórico, where he performed the Deer Dance, Manoel instantly connected to what his friends had termed Punking.

His background as an originator led him to an opportunity to tour with music icon Grace Jones and, eventually, David Bowie on the Glass Spider Tour. After incredible success in the industry, he walked away, as he witnessed the raging AIDS crisis cast a shadow over the entertainment industry. He turned his attention to charity and the health and wellness field.

In 2010, famed director/choreographer Toni Basil invited him to contribute his recollections about his time as an original Punker in the 1970s and dance history for her upcoming book on the history of street dance. This meeting launched his return to the dance

world, this time to connect with a new generation searching for answers and insight into a dance that had fallen into a state of chaos. In 2011, I invited Manoel to come to NYC to participate in the Circle of Dance, a workshop and discussion I created to speak about the origins of Punking/Whacking, as told through the voices and gaze of artists from LA, through three different perspectives: that of an originator, that of an observer and student and that of a choreographer. The panelists for this event include Toni Basil, Ana Sanchez and Viktor Manoel.

Throughout this discussion, Manoel is quick to strip away the narratives that have emerged in the modern-day Waacking community, which center on a romanticization of disco, glitter, fabulous outfits/costumes and glamour. His explanation of the style emphasizes the dance being 'an expression from oppression' that uses movement as a means of escaping the hardships and dangers of existing as a gay man in Los Angeles in the 60s and 70s. The gay clubs became a safe space and offered protection, escapism and a chance to express oneself freely away from the homophobic gaze. He speaks of how he and his friends grew up in the housing projects of LA, with aspirations of finding success in Hollywood (Circle of Dance, 2011).

Manoel is also very specific about the term 'Whacking', including its spelling, origin and position within the context of Punking. According to him, the word 'Whack', which means to strike with force, was borrowed from the onomatopoeia of the 1960s TV series 'Batman' and was the second element to evolve after posing. He went on to further explain that Punking is the dance's original name, which encompasses both posing and whacking elements. From his perspective, the dance has evolved from the original expression of 'Posing', which included posing, the usage of space and athleticism, to its commercialised version, 'Waacking', which placed heavier emphasis on arm movements. The name was changed to detach the dance from its

queer roots and thus provide access to those outside of the circle, allowing them to dance socially and professionally. He also explains that there was a distinction and hierarchy in terms of which names were used and how. According to him, Punking was the name used by the originators of the style, while the dancers who were outside their circle were Whackers or Waackers, a term that they borrowed after overhearing the originators describe their movement.

In his class, rather than teaching steps, his approach centres on offering the tools to help dancers connect internally and thus express themselves and experience the original essence of the style. He describes this as 'using physical artistry to create beauty out of the ugly'. He gradually guides students into the energy of the dance through tasks and exercises to ignite emotional vulnerability by connecting deeply to music. Unlike most dance styles, in which the dancer simply dances to the beat of the music, in Punking, the music serves as a soundtrack, supporting one's story through movement.

The origins of the movement itself stem from his method known as Action/Reaction = Movement and Gender Savageness, which was the fusion of both masculine and feminine energy, imagery and essence in a provocative manner. References are also a key component of his method and include a book of classic photographs of Dietrich, Garbo, Joan Crawford and Gloria Swanson, called the Four Fabulous Faces, which he describes as their 'bible'. In addition, art deco paintings by Erté; silent films; gymnastics; ice skating; one's own culture and the music curated by the famed DJ and original punker MichaelAngelo all contributed to its aesthetic, expression, and execution, resulting in a full artform that the originators termed Punking as a way transform the negative connotation of this word into a positive one.

This soundtrack created by Michael Angelo used the musical breaks from soul records, dispelling the myth that disco music was the dance's soundtrack.



*Exposé; Punking; An American Classic,
Credit: Insideout Studios*

Among the songs used were ‘Papa Was a Rolling Stone’, by the Temptations, which emphasized the posing element; ‘The theme from Shaft’, for rhythm; ‘Beyond the Clouds’, by Quartz, and ‘Just As Long As We Are Together’, by Prince, which highlighted all the dance’s elements.

There is an emphasis on the foundational element of the style, posing as a frozen behaviour, as well as the execution of the pose as a jump cut, with a strobe-like rhythm and effect. In his approach, one notable characteristic stood out—the playful exploration of gender expression and performative. As students traversed the dance space, their movements were infused with exaggerated gestures and behaviours, purposefully defying the rigid gender norms and roles entrenched in hip hop culture.

4. Examination of Methods from LA to NYC

As a practitioner and observer, here is my initial

impression of Manoel’s information about previous methods learned from the NYC and LA experiences. Collectively, NYC and LA emphasise of the club atmosphere as a foundational point for the style and a space for complete freedom of expression.

However, in NYC, there was no awareness or understanding of the elements, the direct influences, or even the original name or vocabulary that emerged from LA’s scene. The majority of the information was delivered from the media’s perspective, which, in my opinion, was very limited because of the dance’s origins within homosexual underground club culture. Also, the influence of NYC’s hip hop battle culture, vogue and ballroom has increased over time as battle culture has become the standard and structure for how the dance is presented, performed and experienced. This stands in stark contrast to LA’s original presentation and experience of the dance, as a collective group of individuals performing together. In my opinion, this shift has drastically transformed the dance’s initial goal of ‘conquering sound’ into one of conquering another dancer. Due to this, the essence of its original style has been stripped away, which has also contributed to the fragmentation of the culture. This has created debate among its practitioners regarding what is most valued in the representation of the style, the importance of recognition or validation from a contest or the roots of the dance itself.

Regarding the methods of LA artists (Sanchez and Quinones), here are the similarities I could draw out:

1. The dance is a cathartic tool via which to transform painful experiences and use them as an initial driving force of the dance.
2. The fusion of both masculine and feminine energy, which were all accessed and explored in various ways, is crucial. In the case of Sanchez and Quinones, this occurred through their mastery and usage of locking and martial arts techniques.

3. Hollywood's visuals and imagery serve as a template for inspiring character and behaviour.
4. The emphasis is on the concept 'me against the music'. In other words, dance is a battle between the individual and the music, as compared to a battle between two individuals.
5. The importance of bringing one's own individual expression or emotional experiences to the dance is the aim, as compared to imitating another's steps or patterns.

The differences or the conflicting messages were as follows:

1. The sources on the influences on the dance, Sanchez and Quinones themselves were not able to completely identify, for example, the books, films, and TV shows that directly impacted the dance's evolution.
2. The names and vocabulary used to name the style and its elements, how they are used to differentiate between themselves in a hierarchical context (i.e., originator versus student) and how they define these terms (i.e., Pinking, Waacking and Shway) differ.
3. The music specified by the original expression of Pinking, as compared to music used by dancers outside their circle (i.e., instrumentals, disco, songs with lyrics and house), differs

4.1 Overall Interpretation and Application to Practice

Throughout my investigation of this dance from multiple perspectives, I have continued to ask myself, as both a practitioner and researcher of Pinking/Posing/Waacking, the following questions:

1. How easily and quickly can a dance form be obliterated due to shifting narratives and the detachment of its original social-political context?
2. How do names and narratives shift once they

become commercialised and commodified?

3. What role can institutions and archival practices play in the preservation of art forms such as this, which are birthed in underground scenes, and can protective legalities succeed when support from the artform's evolved community is fractured?

Within my practice, the methods I have explored have unlocked ways of expressing the dance without losing the integrity or essence of its style. By understanding the essence of the art form, I came to realise that it is truly an expression of the individual and that, to actively contribute to it, one must be willing to boldly and honestly express oneself, as well as to show vulnerability.

The various methods that I have learned have allowed me to draw inspiration from influences from my past, from pop culture and imagery to music. Over the years, my practice has evolved as an amalgamation of the methods used by my mentors; the influence of pop culture from my era; and the rich dance cultures of NYC, LA, and Europe. My style has evolved by infusing NY's club culture with LA's foundation and techniques and applying these methods within Europe's street-dance and performing-arts scenes. Using these tools, I can continue to expand my practice and adapt to settings ranging from street dance to contemporary dance, while remaining authentic to the dance I have studied and performed.

As a member of NYC's dance scene, I have witnessed how this community has influenced the exposure of and access to the style. Many dancers from all over the world travel to NYC to research its history, as well as for training and to compete in events, despite the dance's origins in LA. For many like myself, NYC is where they are introduced to this dance.

However, this perspective raises questions regarding authenticity versus evolution, particularly within the global community, which has been largely influenced by and loyal to NYC culturally, even if

its representation of the style and narratives are contradictory to the dance's LA culture. In addition, while there have been several well-established choreographers and dancers who have claimed to be relevant to the dance's history through their association with the originators and/or their role in popularising the art form itself, many of them are unable to fully answer or agree regarding the answers to the following questions:

What is the original name of the dance ?

What are the direct references of and inspirations for the style?

In my opinion, this has created a cycle of misinformation that has overshadowed the legacy of the originators' contributions to the dance world and continued to fuel the shame and stigma surrounding its roots in homosexual culture. This has also contributed to how the world continues to benefit and borrow from the style without having to fully acknowledge or address the original creators' contributions or influences within choreography or history more generally.

Manoel's reemergence as the last originator of the style has offered vital information and insight into the dance and culture's elusive history, inspirations, and language. However, I believe that a lack of access to documentation for this information has created several challenges regarding his message being fully understood and embraced by the "Waacking" community. From my perspective, this nonacceptance has fuelled a competitive dynamic between the original culture versus its evolution within a global community that has been built largely loyal to NYC perspectives and ideologies, despite documentation regarding the dance's LA roots, history, and timeline.

Manoel has addressed this in 'Waacking Sharing', a 17-minute film commissioned for Russia's

IHOW (International House of Waacking) Chapter. 'By using the word "Punking", you are giving respect back, to our gay culture, I think my friends who are always on my mind, deserve a little respect. All our originals were "Punkers", for me "Waackers" are those who learned the dance. But now, "Waackers" are people just doing an element (arms), and "Punking" is the entire original gay style' (Waacking Sharing, 2022).

Despite Manoel's efforts to share his story and encourage many to use the name Punking as a means of validating the original creators, many dance events and competitions all over the world, from NYC to Europe to Asia, remain hesitant to embrace this name.

Many of these events draw hundreds of dancers from all over the world. They are searching to connect and represent the international Waacking community throughout NYC, Europe, and Asia. Instagram sites such as *Waacking*, *dance and Waackingworld* use their platforms to feature the latest battle videos and choreography from all over the world, generating over a hundred thousand followers and views. New shows such as 'D.I.S.C.O.', by choreographer Josepha Madoki, tour Europe, lifting the narrative of Waacking, as a full-fledged glamorous, flamboyant gay dance of the 1970s driven by disco music and rotating arms and performed in military precision. However, with no public acknowledgment of Punking in these instances, there is a clear indication of perpetuating the dance's detachment from the original name, culture, and history, which can be perceived as a form of obliteration. I believe this is due to a desire to protect their resources and reputation within the community and thus gain a wider audience base.

5. How can institutions offer protection to ensure the longevity of the artform?

Art forms such as music and literature often involve borrowing or using the components of an original expression, whether this is a melody, a lyric, or a plot

point. In many cases, this practice is protected legally, and compensation is issued to the original artist through royalties, licensing fees, or other forms of payment. In some cases, sampling has offered artists more longevity, relevance and financial security in recent days (Music & Sound Effects, 2022).

However, in dance, these legalities do not exist regarding movement vocabulary beyond a choreographic context, particularly such movements originate in a subculture. It is the responsibility of the community to uphold the tradition and vocabulary of these dances through oral history, education, and practice. Due to access to social media, many street dances and their creators are often supported and defended in rapid succession, including TikTok creators. (Harvey, 2021). Some cultures, such as ballroom and vogue, have become globalised and mainstream and are committed to protecting themselves from misrepresentation in the media.

However, unlike most dances that emerge from these subcultures, the lack of documentation, the stigmatisation of its roots, fragmentation, and constant changing of narratives have left Punking and its creators on the verge of erasure from history. Ironically, this has been driven by the community that has borrowed from and developed because of it. From my perspective, due to this lack of support, institutions will continue to play a large role in the protection and preservation of this art form through documentation and archiving.

An example of this is the multidisciplinary avant-garde performing arts venue known as The Kitchen, which is located in NYC's Chelsea neighbourhood. In 1981, a dance program entitled "Street Dance LA," which was presented by director/choreographer, Toni Basil, represented a historical review of and attempt to conserve dance styles that emerged from LA's early street dance movement (1971 to 1981) and included the originators and inventors of the dance. This program featured a young dancer by the name of Andrew Frank,

who is cited in the written program and bio as an inventor of Punking/The Vogue and is shown demonstrating and discussing his style with clarity, intention, and humour. Consequently, the term used throughout the film, when referring to the dance is 'Punking' or 'The Vogue'.

According to one review of this show, 'Andrew Frank could follow a slinky move with a defiant one, and Miss Basil's (Toni Basil) explanation that his kind of dance flourished in the homosexual clubs made his delight in physicality an applied gay liberation manifesto' (Anderson, 1981). This reflection of this evening provides a notable glimpse into the original style's history and inventors, which have remained largely hidden from the public. Today, this film remains part of The Kitchen's archive, as well as part of the permanent exhibition at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles. Archival practices of these kinds of performances reinforce the importance of institutions such as The Kitchen and The Getty Museum hold regarding the longevity, preservation, and accessibility of historical documentation of the vital voices in this dance's history.

In the case of Punking/Whacking, I believe in using institutionalised spaces to finally redirect the needed resources to support artforms like this, which come from disenfranchised, marginalised groups. Like many indigenous artforms, its creations have been sampled, renamed, and recycled without their creators' consent. Do appropriation and evolution have a place in the preservation of lost artforms and history? In this case, they do. Appropriation has continued the legacy of an expression that has been rebranded to encourage the worldwide acceptance of this dance. Through retrieving and managing archival images and movement material and publishing articles that focus on this particular history, it will begin the long-overdue process of documenting this particular moment in dance history while also gradually decolonising and deconstructing the outdated structures and gazes long held against artforms that develop outside traditional

institutional standards. This is long-overdue retribution and a progressive step for a culture that has long been silenced due to timing, stigma, and fear.

6. Update

In May 2023, Exposé Dance Festival's, 'Punking: An American Classic' became the first event in the world exclusively branded under the name 'Punking' in Sweden. Under its program '*Punking: From Its Roots to Evolution to Archiving as a Practice*', I was granted permission to share the filming of the Kitchen's 'Street Dance LA' for the first time in Europe. This film premiered to an audience of dance researchers and educators from all over the world, including Punking originator Viktor Manoel. For the first time in 40 years, Frank's dance and interview were introduced to a new generation of dancers eager to hear his story, which has been long shielded from the world. Throughout this event, dancers were also given a rare opportunity to learn directly from Manoel himself, as well as his protégée, Lorena V, and witness a cross-generational perspective on Punking/Whacking, from its original generation to its evolution.

In September, Europe was also offered another opportunity to learn more about the originators of the dance at Italy's Eleganza Waacking Festival, which hosted a seminar with the legendary choreographer and street dance historian Toni Basil, herself, who, for the first time, would share her heavily guarded personal archive footage of the creators of Punking/Whacking publicly.

With a 90-euro admission fee and a strict no-camera policy, the audience was treated to never-before-seen footage and photographs from her six-decade career that have been newly digitalised and cleaned, along with anecdotes about the performers themselves and her creative process, emphasizing how they continuously evolved and grew as they incorporated new elements and movements from the emerging culture into their styles. Included in this seminar was footage from 1976's *Toni*

Basil Live at the Roxy, which was the original Punkers', or Vogues', first professional appearance, to 1978's *Toni Basil's Fox Venice Show* in LA, which was the original inspiration for Diana Ross's widely acclaimed performance of 'Love Hangover' at Caesar's Palace; 1977's 'Toni Basil Special', an unsold TV pilot for the ABC network; and a portion the aforementioned film, The Kitchen's '*Street Dance LA*'. In addition to these films, Basil shared a series of her groundbreaking Pre MTV music videos and other TV appearances, fusing the artforms of street dance (a term she coined) and ballet in her productions. When asked about the names 'Punking' versus 'Whacking' or 'Waacking', a hugely debated topic of discussion throughout this festival, she simply replies as follows: 'It's up to the guys. It's not my division' (Basil, 2023).

Endnote

1 A sodomy law is a law that defines certain sexual acts as crimes. The precise sexual acts meant by the term sodomy are rarely spelled out in the law but are typically understood by courts to include any sexual act deemed to be 'unnatural' or 'immoral'. In practice, sodomy laws have rarely been enforced against heterosexual couples and have mostly been used to target homosexual couples. In California, the sodomy law was banned in 1976.

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BIOGRAPHY

Alyssa Briteramos is a freelance dance artist/choreographer/educator from the USA. She is based and active in Sweden and on the international dance scene. She has studied and worked in New York and Europe for 20 years. Furthermore, she became widely known within the NYC 'underground club'/street dance culture within numerous styles, including Punking/Whacking and Vogue, through multiple perspectives and is a leading force in her generation for the mastery of this artform. In addition, she is a purveyor of these art forms from NYC's and LA's underground club scenes in Europe. She has judged, taught, and organized numerous street dance events and battles internationally. In her practice, she explores themes of intuitive movement using behaviour, language, and expression

as a physical archive of storytelling. Because she has a background outside of institutions, her goal is to use her practice to challenge the norms of the existing structures and hierarchies in Swedish performing arts. She has been awarded numerous work and cultural grants from the Swedish Artists' Committee and within her region. She has collaborated with several artists, ranging from contemporary choreographers to street dancers. Currently, her work in the multi-award-winning dance film, *Elements: Beautiful Untrue Things* has been shown in multiple film festivals in Sweden and internationally, including both the Gothenburg Dance Film Festival and the Stockholm Dance Film Festival. alyssachloenyc@gmail.com