

CN D

CALL FOR PAPERS / PARTICIPATION

CONFERENCE

a/c/knowledge :

Hip-hop dances as fields of research and invention

La Villette, Paris – France

4 > 6.12.2025

Bringing together the experiences, backgrounds and knowledge(s) of dancers and researchers, this conference aims to gather and produce scholarship on hip-hop¹ dances, in their various forms and transformations, and through their circulations, influences, tensions and developments over the past five decades. Since the emergence of hip-hop in the Bronx in the 1970s, references to “knowledge” have been at the heart of the movement. Hip-hop dances offer a unique opportunity to examine this notion and its multiple manifestations, negotiations, legitimations and contestations.

Centre national de la danse

CN D

1, rue Victor-Hugo

93507 Pantin Cedex

France

cnd.fr

When hip-hop culture emerged in the Bronx in the 1970s, “knowledge” was considered a central element, alongside DJing, MCing, breaking, and graffiti². Forms of scholarship were thus given pride of place from the very birth of the cultural movement. For hip-hop dancers particularly, the quest for “information”, inside and outside the United-Statesian context of emergence, has been tireless. While this has taken different forms, it has been characterized, in many localities, by difficulties in accessing images of dance, particularly filmed images, by relatively few opportunities to meet with pioneers, and by the transmission of dance practices outside of studios. These conditions have shaped the construction and acquisition of knowledge about hip-hop dances, which for many practitioners, continue to occur in non-academic contexts such as clubs, battles, informal training sessions, dance classes by non-profit and community organizations, and social media platforms.

Hip-hop dances thus offer unique perspectives for examining the notion of “knowledge”, its various manifestations, negotiations, legitimations and possible contestations. But they also help us see the challenges that emerge when attempting to define this notion, as well as the importance of multiplying perspectives. The ambition of this conference is thus to highlight the different forms, names, and modes that knowledge can take within, and about, hip-hop dances. To this end, it draws on the lived experiences, scholarship, and know-how of those who research hip-hop dances – dancers, choreographers, researchers, academics – and makes use of various sources and resources, traditions, testimonies, archives, the internet, etc. This conference intends to map out the diversity of ways in which knowledge can be produced, used, and criticized, but also the multiplicity of actors who can develop and carry out scholarly projects³.

One of the ambitions of “a/c/knowledge : Hip-hop dances, fields of research and invention” is to offer an opportunity for reflection and encounter between “practice-based”, “academic”, “engaged”, “activist” knowledge by making space for diversified modalities of presentation and discussion around hip-hop dances. A second ambition is to contribute to the study of the histories, cultures, and practices of hip-hop dances, particularly in French, as scholarship is currently overwhelmingly anglophone. Whether within hip-hop studies or dance studies, research on hip-hop dances remain rare. They have been studied from sociological and anthropological perspectives, particularly in France⁴, but, here and elsewhere, they need to be better documented from historical, aesthetic, and comparative perspectives. We are also concerned to include and valorize the work of young academic researchers and/or practice-based researchers that remains difficult to access when it is unpublished⁵.

This conference does not aim to define once and for all what is covered by the expression “hip-hop dances”. On the contrary, we foreground a flexible approach that allows us to grapple with different delimitations and interpretations. The lineages, intersections, and genealogies of hip-hop dances may indeed appear in a different light depending on the perspective from which one looks at them. Furthermore, like sampling in music, hip-hop dances emphasize logics of incorporation, transforming what is borrowed while always recognizing the otherness within. This is why this conference encourages decentering, rather than adopting a unified perspective. While recognizing their United-Statesian context of emergence, we also consider how hip-hop dances have been “made in France(s)”, shaped by postcolonial and (post)migratory dynamics as well as by forms of cultural traffic unique to this country’s history⁶. However, this idea of French specificity needs to set against other contexts and approached from a transnational perspective that highlights cross-contextual dialogues⁷. It also seems important for us to move away from narratives and scholarship centering only on urban contexts, national capitals and other metropolises, to make space for rural and regional contexts in our understanding of the multiple dimensions of hip-hop dances. As a general rule, we intend to delve into the tensions that may exist around disparate hip-hop geographies, without necessarily resolving them.

1. The communication for this conference uses “hip-hop” (lower case, hyphenated) as it remains more common in francophone contexts than “Hip Hop” or “HipHop” (capitalized, non-hyphenated) which is increasingly favored in the United-Statesian context, as reflected by the petition brought in 2019 to APA and the Merriam Webster dictionary by Tasha Iglesias and Travis Harris to change its spelling. See Iglesias & Harris, 2022.

2. Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five, 1982 ; Common, 1994 ; Gosa, 2015 ; Perkins, 1996 ; Chetty, Nietzsche, Williams, 2024 ; Poor Righteous Teachers, 1990.

3. Richardson, 2006.

4. Aterianus-Owanga, Milliot, Noûs, 2020 ; Milliot, 1997 et 1996 ; Négrier, Djakouane, Lavazais, Potier, 2018 ; Djakouane & Jésus, 2021 et 2024.

5. Labbe, 2023 ; Mary, 2022 ; Nesti, 2015, Thibaud, 2014.

6. 113, 1999 ; Bisso Na Bisso, 1999 ; Keaton, Sharpley-Whiting, Stovall, 2012 ; McCarren, 2013 ; Rollefson 2017 ; Seyfyu, 2006 ; Tshimanga, Gondola, Bloom, 2009.

7. Aterianus-Owanga, Milliot, Noûs, 2020 ; Aterianus, 2020 ; Barber, Büschges, Mausfeld & Sweers, 2024 ; Johnson, 2023 ; Williams & Singh, 2023.

Finally, organizing this event at this moment in time makes sense within the French history of hip-hop dances : the first hip-hop show broadcast on national television, “H.I.P.H.O.P.,” in 1984, the Regional Urban Dance Encounters in Villefranche-sur-Saône in 1992, the National Urban Dance Encounters at La Villette in 1996, the creation in 2000 and the subsequent worldwide influence of the “Juste Debout” international battle, and the inclusion of breaking at the Paris Olympic Games in 2024. But this conference also arises out of a sense of care towards hip-hop bodies and souls, exacerbated by the deaths in recent years in France of several recognized figures and pioneers of hip-hop dance⁸. A concern about aging “O.G.s”, concomitant with the duration of the hip-hop movement itself, renews the thirst for knowledge, history, and memory. Hip-hop practices continue to rely in large part on oral transmission. However, public history, journalism, documentary and notation projects led by dancers are multiplying, and this conference aims to provide them with a stage⁹. This project was taken up by a programming committee composed in equal proportion of hip-hop dancers and academics, who were fully aware of the issues that the institutional affiliation of a hip-hop conference can raise. During the preparatory meetings for this call for papers, significant time was given over to discussions of fears of appropriation and political instrumentalization within the French hip-hop community. The current climate of mistrust and contestation as well as the historical tensions between French dancers and State institutions¹⁰ were fully recognized. This conference is seen as an opportunity to think through and critically reflect on these relations.

The conference “a/c/knowledge : Hip-hop dances as fields of research and invention” invites a wide range of perspectives, taking into account the diversity of cultural emplacements and historical, economic, political and artistic contexts in which hip-hop dances thrive ; it allows for the crossing of different disciplinary approaches : practice-based research, dance studies, movement analysis, history, anthropology, gender studies, performance studies and sociology, among others. Participants may use different formats of presentation, including performative and dialogic modalities. To expand its reach, this call appears simultaneously in several languages, and invites contributions from, and on, any national, regional, linguistic context.

8. Francis Mbida (Section C) en juillet 2019, Karim Barrouche (Aktuel Force) en octobre 2019, Antonio « bboy Tonio » Mvuani-Gaston (Total Feeling) en septembre 2020, Ousmane « Babson » Sy (Wanted Posse, Serial Stepperz) en décembre 2020.

9. Par exemple, les lives Facebook « French Touch Conscient » de Babson, le magazine « Where We Come From » de Nan's, le blog « Striter » de Kuidee Davis, les documentaires Promesses du sol et Corps électriques de Raphaël Stora, ou le système de notation B.A.-BA de Yugson.

10. Djakouane Aurélien et Négrier Emmanuel, 2020 ; Faure & Garcia, 2007 et 2008 ; Garcia, 2004.

Papers may address one or several of the following axes :

1 - Histories, Memories, Archives

While hip-hop dances were considered, when they emerged, as mere “fads” which would disappear over time, their development over several decades, the passing away of esteemed hip-hop dancers, and the arrival of new generations of dancers, are all leading to questions of history, memory and archives being posed with increasing urgency¹¹. Both memory and history of hip-hop dances rest on the creation and preservation of oral, written, audiovisual, and kinesthetic traces in persons, documents, and places, and often in informal and heterogeneous traditions either tied to institutions or to individuals, both within and outside hip-hop circuits. However, this raises questions of methods, legitimacies, and goals, some expressing a “fear of being forgotten” while others claim a “right to be forgotten”.

— History is often recorded in writing in books, even when it concerns communities in which oral tradition is important. What other formats can be imagined for the transmission of historical narratives about hip-hop dances ? How can we give proper place to the memory of dancers ? What status should be given to lives on social networks¹² ? What relationship do they have with the tradition of call-and-response ? How do the memory and history of hip-hop dance intersect, contradict, and complement each other ?

— What archives of hip-hop dances exist, and what do they teach us ? How can we collect them, make them accessible and valorize them ? In what location(s) or on what platform(s) should they be made accessible ? For which purposes and with which risks ? Who should be entrusted with the archival mission and according to what criteria should archiving take place or not ? How should reproduction and the use of copyrights be approached, particularly when audiovisual archives circulate on social networks ? How can the internet be considered an archive ?

— Who and how is “authority” claimed and produced over hip-hop knowledge(s), histories, memories, and how can it reflect a plurality of voices and experiences ? How does the production of new knowledge sometimes shake up the accepted grand narratives about “origins¹³” ? How can we include, preserve, and analyze the unsaid, the “silent/silenced past”, the forgotten ?

2 - Circulations, Transmissions, Mediations

Knowledge in hip-hop dance has often been referred to as “information”, a terminology which reflects the “information age” in which hip-hop dance culture developed, and which hints at the historical role of media in the transatlantic circulation, and sometimes misunderstanding, of these dances (television shows, films, music videos, music records). Furthermore, and simultaneously, the transmission of hip-hop dances has often taken place in the context of reciprocal relations and obligations between peers and between generations. Such transmissions engage specific processes of learning and knowledge production which are evolving in the digital era.

— How have hip-hop dances been circulating across geographical contexts and what have been the effects on the practices of hip-hop dancers ? What terminologies have been used to describe different modes of transmission ? What roles have films, television, dance studios and the internet played in (re)mediations of hip-hop dance and what tensions and controversies have arisen around this ? How does shifting our gaze from one generation to the next lead to a different picture of the circulation and transmission of practices, as learning moves onto social network platforms, blurring the cartography of origins ?

11. Campbell & Forman, 2023.

12. Steil, 2024.

13. Hammou, 2012.

14. Kelly & Graves, 2024 ; Givens, 2023; Hooks, 1994.

— What pedagogical methods have been mobilized and invented for the transmission of hip-hop dances ? Can we talk about “hip-hop pedagogy(ies)” and what would its/their characteristics be ? In what way are these pedagogies “transgressive” or “fugitive”, reflecting a specific history¹⁴ ? Does the transmission of hip-hop dances rely on specific spaces, forms and rituals ? What self-teaching tools have emerged and how have they been valorized ?

— Hip-hop dances emerged and evolved in contexts of systemic marginalization and injustice, linked to race, immigrant origin and/or working-class condition¹⁵. How are the sociopolitical and historical contexts of these practices recognized and transmitted ? How do they transform when dance environments change and what are the tensions that can arise from this ? What is at stake politically when “aesthetics” of hip-hop dances are transmitted without the “culture” ?

— How is “authenticity” constructed and legitimized within hip-hop dance circuits ? What do debates about “sources” and “copies” tell us about the transmission of these dances ? How has the discourse on “cultural appropriation” circulated outside the United States and what history(ies) does it reflect ? Is transmission and its transformation talked about with the same words in other countries and in other languages ?

3 - Ecosystems, Economies, Politics

Hip-hop dances evolve in ecosystems on multiple scales (neighborhood, city, region, country, international) and as part of different economies. These ecosystems give rise to “communities of practice¹⁶” and shape artistic trajectories by delimiting and conditioning practices and the means they have to deploy.

— What are the spaces of consecration and legitimation of hip-hop dances at different scales ? How can we think about the relationships and tensions between circular, parallel, unofficial, “makeshift” economies on the one hand, and official, market, recognized, institutional economies on the other ? Are there spaces for intersection, friction and hybridization between these different ecosystems ?

— What hierarchies and issues of authority are at play between different ecosystems (stage, battle, school, etc.), and what politics of representation do they entail ? How do processes of racialization, or class and gender assignation segment artistic industries into different sectors that create subgenres ? How do these processes highlight tensions between the institutional and extra-institutional spheres ? What other actors and economies, including illicit ones, contribute to the makeup of hip-hop dance scenes ?

— How do hip-hop dancers navigate between different ecosystems, especially when they have international careers ? How do their transnational experiences shape their professional tactics and strategies ? Do the comings and goings between different scales and economies allow the development of a distinctive perspective or reflexive posture ?

4 - Belonging, Innovation and Hip-Hop Moves

While collective and circular traditions (the crew, the cypher, the tradition of each-one-teach-one, etc.) continue to be perceived as characteristic of hip-hop dances, they intersect with more individual and cumulative processes (making it “in the game”, having a “signature”, etc.). The tensions between tradition and innovation, belonging and emancipation, individual and group, as documented in numerous contexts, offer an opportunity to question the cultural, artistic and aesthetic construction of hip-hop dances differentiating between styles and contexts.

15. Rose, 1994 ; Ndiaye 2008.

16. Wenger, 1998.

— How does the emergence of hip-hop dances in social, recreational and festive dance contexts at a local scale influence, or not, hip-hop dance practices today? What relationship can be traced between the territorial scale of practices and specific forms of hip-hop sociality and being-together? How has the crew evolved as a context for learning, transmission and support? How do different battle modes, shows, stage creations but also new digital practices contribute to building different aesthetics in hip-hop dance?

— What tensions emerge in the trajectories of dancers when they “emancipate” themselves through choreographic, artistic and relational divergences? Given that hip-hop dancers often make use of a sophisticated vocabulary to condemn “copy” in any shape or form, and celebrate the style, originality, and “signature” of particular artists, how can we understand the ambiguous value that is sometimes given to “innovation”? In what ways is there a shift of scale between “copying” (within the community) and “copyright” (outside the community)?

— What is a hip-hop “move” (*geste*), “signature”, or “choreographic style” (*écriture choréographique*)? Is the vocabulary to talk about hip-hop aesthetics borrowed from contemporary dance and are there resonances and specificities for hip-hop dances that go beyond the artistic realm? How are dancers on stage today categorized as hip-hop, without always being perceived that way by their communities of practice? How does the multidisciplinary of hip-hop artists give rise to new forms of artistic expression?

5 - What's in hip-hop's name ?

Debates on hip-hop's definitions and boundaries are ongoing, reflecting hip-hop dance styles' great diversity, their history of multiple transformations, and their emplacement at the crossroads of different perspectives and contexts. This is not just a “theoretical” question, but has major practical implications. The apposition of a “hip-hop” label may determine possibilities of funding, programming, training, and thus raises questions of survival, institutionalization, and appropriation.

— What are the sine qua non conditions put forward, depending on the contexts and points of view, for dances to be considered “hip-hop”? For which actors (dancers, choreographers, institutions), geographical spaces, or generations (including young dancers who can go through other channels of transmission such as classes, studios and the internet)? In what contexts of practice (battle, street show)? Who “validates” such judgements, with what criteria, according to what processes? What place is given to hip-hop dancers' self-definition? What place is given to community definitions? What about expectations to “take part” in “hip-hop culture”? What are the specificity(ies) of hip-hop definitions compared to other communities of dancers, and what are the risks of essentialization or standardization?

— What are the differences between “dancing hip-hop” and “being hip-hop”? What place is given to “technique” and “culture” depending on context, and how can we (re)think and contextualize these understandings historically and geographically? How is hip-hop culture always tied to, marked and defined by social, racial and/or subversive claims and contexts? To what degree are “having an artistic practice” and “participating in hip-hop culture” aligned, and what are the possibilities, the conditions, or the limits of this alignment? What discussions and controversies in terms of funding, programming, and training derive from the use of the “hip-hop dance” label.

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Members of the programming committee

- Philippe «Physs» Almeida, dancer, choreographer, educator, artistic director of MouvMatik, codirector of the degree « Passeurs culturels en danses hip-hop » in Cergy.
- Alice Aterianus Owanga, assistant professor in anthropology, University of Neuchâtel, conducting research on the circulation of popular music and dance on and from the African continent.
- Alex Benth, dancer, choreographer, teacher, French pioneer of street dance, co-founder of the Boogi Saï company, artistic director of Dezequilibre.
- Frieda Frost, bgirl, choreographer, PhD candidate at the Deutsche Sporthochschule Köln and assistant researcher at the HipHop Institute at the University of Cologne, artistic director of the German-Moroccan company Chara and the German collective Nutrospektif, certified international break judge.
- Marina Gomes, choreographer and educator, artistic director of the Hylel company.
- Linda Hayford, dancer and choreographer, co-director of FAIR(E) Centre chorégraphique national de Rennes et de Bretagne.
- Anaïs Henneuse, street reporter, speaker, activist, consultant in strategy of developpement.
- Edwin Hill, assistant professor in the department of French and Italian and the department of American and ethnic studies at the University of Southern California, conducting research on the sonic and musical cultures of the Black Atlantic.
- François Lamargot, dancer and choreographer, founding member of XXth Tribu, artistic director of the Poisson/Buffle company.
- Mahalia Lassibille, anthropologist and lecturer in the dance department of Paris 8 University, conducting research on hip-hop and krump in Dakar.
- Raphaël Stora, dancer, performer, director, author of the documentary web series *Les Promesses du sol* (Arte, 2017).
- Lumi Sow, dancer, DJ and producer, co-founder of the group Sons of Wind.

Scientific coordination

- Laurent Barré, head of Research and Choreographic Repertoires, CN D.
- Laura Steil, Phd in anthropology, researcher at Ferroforum, Luxembourg.

Organizing committee

- Laurent Barré, head of Research and Choreographic Repertoires, CN D.
- Lisa Dulin, head of cultural projects in urban dance, La Villette.
- Céline Gallet, co-director, collectif FAIR-E, Centre chorégraphique national de Rennes et de Bretagne.
- Laura Steil, Phd in anthropology, researcher at Ferroforum, Luxembourg.

How to participate?

The call for papers is open to artists, practitioners, researchers, doctoral students and young PhDs, educators and other professionals.

The conference will be held in French and English, and on-site translation will be provided (other possible languages may be added on a case-by-case basis, please contact us : colloque2025@cnd.fr).

Different formats are possible :

1. Oral presentation (20 min. presentation, then 15 min. discussion) ;
2. Performative/participative format : lecture-performance, collective practice or other creative formats (30 to 40 min.) ;
3. Interdisciplinary panels : artists, educators, practitioners, academics, etc. (between 1 hour and 1 hour 30 minutes for 3 to 6 speakers) ;
4. Audiovisual creation (1 hour maximum) ;
5. Dialogue around a performance with critical and theoretical discussion (1 hour maximum).

Digital formats or innovative digital tools that creatively reverberate with these different modalities are also welcome.

Proposals (in French or English) should be submitted before March 3, 2025, to the following email address : colloque2025@cnd.fr

They should mention :

- the surname, first name, affiliation(s) and electronic contact details of the author(s)
- the title of the proposal
- the format chosen and the axis to which it is linked
- a written proposal of approximately 3000 characters (including spaces), or an audio proposal (mp3) of a maximum duration of 5 minutes.
- a written biographical note of approximately 1000 characters (spaces included) or an audio biographical note (mp3) of a maximum duration of 3 minutes.

Financial support will be awarded to speakers at the conference (excluding tenured academics). Assistance with travel and accommodation costs may also be offered on a case-by-case basis, with priority given to candidates who do not benefit from institutional support.

Selection of candidates and results of the call : April 1, 2025.