

*Antony GARDEZ*

*INSA-2*

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## **Comparative study of Capoeira and Breakdance**

*Attention: Mr Alain Souillard  
Cultural Studies*



## ***Index***

INTRODUCTION.....	4
PRESENTATION OF THE CORPUS .....	5
ANALYSIS OF THE DOCUMENTS .....	6
<i>Analysis of the interviews</i> .....	6
<i>Analysis of the videos</i> .....	8
GENERAL LAWS.....	10
CORPUS .....	12
<i>Historical summary of capoeira</i> .....	12
<i>Interview with Mestre Gato Preto</i> .....	13
<i>Interview with Ken Swift</i> .....	17
<i>Videos</i> .....	23

## ***Introduction***

In this essay, we will be considering two forms of art, that we could consider as dances, namely breakdance and capoeira. We will try to understand if there are some links, if they can be close in some ways, and different in some others.

I decided to write an essay on this since I have been practicing breakdance myself for more than five years, and started to learn capoeira this year. Some time ago, I used to think those two arts were quite similar, since dancers perform various acrobatics and get on the floor on a pretty regular basis. I wanted to develop my thoughts on that, try to understand the origins and their influence.

As a matter of fact, I had the opportunity to discover those two arts by myself, by practicing, but I believe that a lot of people do not really know what each of these arts is. On top of that, medias are using breakdance as well as capoeira in advertisings in order to give a dynamic vision of some products, and therefore people only see some parts of it.

Then, I started to look for relevant documents. I knew I would also talk about my personal experiences, but I needed some reliable visions. Therefore, in order to find appropriate documents, I spent a lot of time on the internet. As a matter of fact it would not be easy to find interviews or event reports in newspapers. Even the ones I found on news websites did not match my expectations: indeed, since the journalists did not know very well what they were talking about, it would not have been of great interest for my study.

Therefore I had to explore dancer online communities and websites providing videos. That is how I came up with both of my interviews. As for the videos, that is maybe the part of this essay on which I have spent the more time. After having watched dozens of videos, trying to find really relevant ones, I finally selected one video for each dance.

## ***Presentation of the corpus***

Let us now consider these documents.

The first of the latter is a translation of an interview with Mestre Gato Preto published in Capoeira Magazine number 4. As a Mestre, he has practiced capoeira for more than 50 years and is still teaching it at the age of 70. Through the questions, he tells us what his vision of capoeira is and how he developed it.

Secondly, I wanted to find an interview concerning breakdance that would also contain a global vision from someone equivalent to a capoeira mestre, in other word someone reliable. That is the reason why I decided to study an interview of Ken Swift that was published in Graphotism Magazine number 14 in 1999. I found this article on the online breakdance community BBoyWorld.com. We learn how breakdance started and what it gradually became from one of the precursors.

In addition to those two interviews, given that Ken Swift recalls how breakdance was born, I decided to make a quick historical summary of capoeira, after having read information on various websites.

Let us now focus on the videos. The first fact is that the breakdance video is longer than the capoeira one. Unfortunately I was compelled to choose these two ones to point out the major differences and similarities. The capoeira video is a compilation of extracts from various events. I do not have much information on that one, except the fact that it focuses on Professor Eberson, a capoeirista from Brasilia. It was posted by *Mastabiff* on Youtube.com. Besides, I would like to point out the fact that the breakdance video is an extract from a DVD of the IBE, International Breakdance Event, taking place in Rotterdam. The two teams facing are 'dream-teams' from Germany and the USA. It was posted by the Youtube user *iHATERacist*.

## ***Analysis of the documents***

I would like to start this analysis by comparing the history of both of these arts. It should be noted that even though capoeira is really older than breakdance, we can find some similarities. As a matter of fact they were both born among a specific social community. Capoeira results from the need for slaves to express themselves and escape from their masters. Breakdance was born in the streets of the Bronx, in New York City, surrounded by poverty, blood, burning buildings: people also needed to find an occupation in order to escape. If we take a closer look at the history of capoeira, blood and crime are present too. Indeed it has been illegal for several years due to criminal behaviours after the abolition of slavery.

However, this evolved, and as Ken Swift says he is now performing on stage, in front of various people, dancers or not, getting applause. Capoeira is now taught in various countries around the world. You will agree with me that despite this evolution, traditions are still alive, and that is something I will try to point out in the study of the two interviews.

## **Analysis of the interviews**

To begin with, I would like to insist on one particular point, which is the vision of those arts as real ways of living. According to both the interviewees, their arts are ‘something that you feel inside’ and ‘will never end’.

There are numerous cultural aspects, various signs. For instance, a new capoeirista is given a nickname during a *batizado* (baptism): capoeira has even some religious aspects. Concerning nicknames in breakdance, we get to know that every B-Boy has a specific nickname, and even sometimes various ones. As in capoeira, they can sometimes be made of two parts, the first being ‘little’ or ‘kid’: for instance there are João Pequeno and João Grande in capoeira, Kid Zoom and Lil’ Lep in breakdance. In the latter, it is chosen in an effort to be different, unique, to prove that you create your own style as you create your nickname.

Regarding music, a B-Boy needs music to dance, and that is what helps him create. It progressively becomes a sort of addiction, and I sometimes myself feel a need to get on my hands or dance a little when listening to some songs. Ken Swift indeed tells his interviewer the following thing : ‘I’ll always be a B-Boy, and there’s always gonna be someone out there that could push my buttons, or some music that can push my buttons, and there’s a time when I have no control of myself, and I need to break. Not that I plan it, it’s like yo, I hear shit, I don’t give a fuck where I’m at. If I feel like spinning on my head, or doing a swipe or a 90 or freeze, I’ll do it’. As for capoeira, Mestre Gato Preto mentions some instruments played while

practicing, such as the berimbau. I will get into detail about the relation to music later on, while analysing the videos.

At this point, I would like to say that these arts need perseverance but can help you become a man of wisdom. Ken Swift points out that breakdance helps you know yourself better. He says he is his own best challenge. This is also noticeable in capoeira: mestres such as Gato Preto practice capoeira for over 50 years. They played capoeira to feel better, to express and find themselves. Even when money entered in the roda, the basis was still respect and players still hugged at the end of a game, sharing the money with the other capoeiristas. The vision of money presented in this interview reflects a total disinterest. Players actually never played capoeira in order to earn their living: capoeira is a passion, a culture, a way of life, but is not supposed to replace a job.

Speaking of culture, Hip-hop culture is reflected in Ken Swift's interview by the words and expressions he uses. There is a lot of contractions and slang. This is a reflection of his street culture. Being a B-Boy is being part of this whole Hip-Hop culture. As far as I am concerned, I do not use slang, but I know I am influenced in my clothes and in some of my thoughts by this culture, and I am convinced that this makes breakdance a real culture.

As I said previously, breakdance and capoeira are about wisdom and evolution, through respect. The interviews are really interesting on these points. B-Boys are always in an evolution, always need to battle to show their skills and style. That is the way it was and still is. Each time one does something 'dope', the other wants to do better, and that is how a b-boy progresses and pushes his limits.

During my lessons of capoeira at INSA, I had the opportunity to meet various capoeiristas: a Brazilian one, but also a French INSA student who has been practicing for 4 years and another for 12 years. I noticed by myself that with more experience, capoeiristas get more confident, more fluid, but do not particularly master more movements. I believe that this is a manifestation of the capoeira notion of wisdom. Though they obviously get more skilled, they evolve rather in a cultural and mental approach.

By the way, I would like to point out the different point of view on the learning of new moves. A B-Boy always creates, should never copy: as Ken Swift said, at the beginning, when you asked for a piece of advice, you were considered as a 'sucker'. On the contrary a capoeirista have to learn and master every move: 'capoeira has 180 blows and 180 counterattacks. [...] It is necessary to know, discover, and face all the attacks.'

As mentioned before, Mestre Gato Preto's interview stresses as well the fact that there is some sort of respect, of a hierarchy. As a matter of fact, while telling us how he started capoeira, he mentions numerous famous mestres with whom he practiced, therefore justifying his remarkable evolution, and so does the interviewer. Even in breakdance, there is a respect to original style mentioned by Ken Swift, there are numerous famous old-school B-Boys.

I would like now to draw your attention to these original notions. There is a need to stick to the roots, and the presence of a real heritage. If we consider Ken Swift's definition of what a B-Boy was at the beginning, that is something that perpetuates: as a matter of fact I did practice breakdance on the concrete too, in the hall of the Rouen railway station for several months, forming circles and battling each others.

Finally, I would like to conclude this part of my analysis by stressing the moderate decline of both these arts.

As a matter of fact, Ken Swift deplores that new B-Boys do not see Breakdance as whole but rather as a sport, or a sort of gymnastic. Lots of people only do power-moves, acrobatics. It mirrors the decline of capoeira: new adepts claim themselves as capoeiristas or B-Boys but do not understand the link with music, the link with the origins. I must admit that, as any other beginner, I was quite surprised by the importance of music and singing in capoeira, and when I started breakdance I only wanted to get on my hands. However, I now feel the 'essence' of breakdance, and I gradually learnt to enjoy dancing. This art is about style and dance, not only power-moves and gym. For Ken Swift, winning in a circle or a battle is not getting the votes, it is more about 'ripping the record'. Dancing, musicality is what counts the most. As for capoeira, it would not have survived if capoeiristas had not disguised it as a dance with its music and singings.

### **Analysis of the videos**

In order to understand the way capoeira and breakdance are practiced, we now need to consider the two videos. First of all, let us draw the major guidelines.

In both, we realise that the audience is forming a circle, called 'la roda' in capoeira. People are either standing or sat. A few things more are similar: we can notice that the dancers perform inside the circle, and that there is a sort of confrontation. What I mean is that in breakdance, we have two teams, two 'crews', dancing one at a time. Dancers indeed mostly

perform one by one in front of the rival team, trying to intimidate or impress them. When one of the others is dancing, they also try to distract them. As for capoeira, we also have a confrontation, but people perform together, two by two, using kicks, sweeps, jumps and dodges. We can therefore draw a first conclusion: those two arts are both about a fight. Indeed B-Boys use the word 'battle' to refer to such events, and I would like to emphasize the fact that there is always a speaker to make sure that everything is alright.

Just one more thing, it is quite unusual nowadays to see a battle with no judges, which makes this one even more 'underground', closer to the roots of breakdance.

Secondly, by taking into account the various signs of those videos, we can get some useful information. Let us proceed methodically.

When considering the dancers' clothes, we can realise that there is a large cultural influence. Even though a B-Boy's clothes are totally different from a capoeirista's, we understand that they both follow specific guidelines. The hip-hop culture is widely implemented in breakdance: people wear large clothes, caps, sneakers, etc. Capoeiristas are mostly wearing white pants with a white t-shirt, leaving their feet bare. As I said previously, these cultural aspects are also linked to notions like respect. B-Boys often shake hands, capoeiristas give hugs, even after a tough game as represented at the end of the video.

Another interesting characteristic is the relation to music. In capoeira, music is made by the players themselves, and they also sing. Besides, when entering in a roda, players always meet in front of the musicians. When practicing capoeira myself, I also got to know that when a song is over, players get back to the musicians until another one starts. Afterwards, once in the roda, players practice on the rhythm, which only defines the pace. On the other hand, in breakdance, music is not made by the dancers but by a DJ. However, it is a key element for the dancers that make various moves and dance steps on it.

That leads us to the final point, namely the moves themselves. Both arts are performed standing as well as on the floor or in the air. B-Boys usually dance a little on the music, which shows that style is very important since they all have different steps. Subsequently, as B-Boy Lego and Vausan at the beginning of the video, they do some footwork, that is to say they dance on the floor, and finally they get on their hands and block, thus doing a 'freeze', or they start a 'power-move', i.e. a complex continuous move. By the way, one can notice that every move is decomposed, marked. Conversely, capoeira do not follow a specific pattern since everything depends on the other's movements: if one attacks, the other lean or jump in order

to dodge and then kick back. It is easy to realise that for both of these arts, there is really few choreographies, that everything is improvised: B-Boys adapt on the beat and their opponent's last routine, capoeiristas build on the partner's attitude, and the challenge is therefore to keep on being fluid. Finally, I would like to stress that even though a lot of moves are common, a capoeirista will never fall on his bottom and therefore get booed.

Just one more thing, while watching B-Boy Abi at 5:45, we understand what Ken Swift meant by disrespect and jealousy towards the original style. Of course it is impressive, but this man is not dancing, he is more like a gymnast showing his skills. He does not feel the music, do not express his own style. Those two videos show both traditional and new behaviours. People are still acting as before, about the circles for example, but the place has changed: it is not anymore only performed in the streets, on sand or on the concrete, and it starts to be a sort of show. Dancers are here equally for themselves and for the public, to get applauded.

## **General laws**

To conclude this essay, I will now draw some general laws pointed out by my analysis.

To begin with, let us consider the similarities.

First of all, It should be noted that since there are some acrobatic and complicated moves, capoeira and breakdance could be considered as sports. However, limit these arts to sport would lead to a total misunderstanding. There is indeed a very influential culture behind them, coming from history, but also from a common vision of respect and peace. They are complex arts, linking music, dance, but also fight, and they unfortunately both suffer from an inadequate promotion through the media that promotes aesthetics rather than the various cultural aspects.

Visually, apart from the specific layout in circles and a relative resemblance, there is another similarity: dancers are close to the floor, and this could be interpreted as a reflection of the street culture, of the fact that the first B-Boys and the first capoeiristas did not have anything, and therefore expressed themselves in their environment. Besides, I would like to emphasize that there are no national federation, no real international events, since capoeira and breakdance are still consider as 'exotic' arts.

On the other hand, we can distinguish capoeira from breakdance on numerous aspects.

Firstly, I would like to insist on one particular point, which is their historical difference. Capoeira was born about 250 years ago, and really did help people to survive. Breakdance probably prevented some people to enter criminal gangs, but it has not a so complicated history.

Moreover, there are some practical differences. Capoeira is fluid whereas breakdance moves are jerky, and you will never see a capoeirista perform a power-move or anything on his back. However he will always look at his partner straight in his eyes. There are some more rules or rather habits in capoeira: it is stricter than breakdance where people create their own moves. This is also due to historical facts: B-Boys were looking for a way of standing out, whereas capoeiristas did learn capoeira as a martial art with a specific fighting technique.

Finally, although breakdance battles look like a fight, there is no real one, no contact between dancers. Conversely capoeiristas sometimes really hit their opponent, and even if they keep respect and fun in mind, capoeira has some aspects of a martial art. We should not forget that capoeira can really hurt, really be violent.

One final word. I would have liked to compare my study with at least another one, but it seems that nobody really focused on both capoeira and breakdance.

That is the reason why I wanted to mention a video that could illustrate my analysis, namely a advertising for Nike Football in Brazil, which is the last video mentioned in my corpus. We realise from this document that it is sometimes hard to distinguish capoeira from breakdance, but it could on the other hand be explained by what I have said before, namely the fact that ads only gives a small idea of what these arts are, and if we do not take history and cultural facts into account, they could look pretty similar. This video could lead us to wonder about the influence of publicity on our vision of art and even our vision of the society.

## **Corpus**

### **Historical summary of capoeira**

During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Portugal started to ship western-African slaves to South-America. Since they were from various tribes and regions of Africa, the slaves had to find the most widespread African language in order to communicate between themselves, namely the Yagô or the Yoruba around Bahia. However they were forced to learn and speak Portuguese and forbidden to use African languages. Therefore, they used their native rituals and games but also religion, love of music and dance, and physical skills in order to communicate: it was a fertile basis for what would later become Capoeira.

As a matter of fact, they first aimed at developing a fighting technique from their various skills. Hence Capoeira was originally a martial art. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, once it had become a threat, masters decided to forbid it, and slaves who dared keep on practicing were mutilated so that they could not anymore. Nevertheless slaves started to spread their new art all around Bahia, disguising capoeira with dance singings and rituals. This evolution took mostly place in Quilombos, which were small city formed by slaves who had escaped, such as the one called Palmares. After the abolition of slavery in 1888, the majority of the ex-slaves stayed in Brazil and had to work. Some of them joined criminal gangs thanks to their skills and as a result Capoeira was outlawed in Brazil in 1890. Gang members used to fight for the control of some areas, and the mastery of capoeira was a key element to win. They indeed used to stick a razor blade between their toes to attack opponents, and that is the reason why kicks are so important in capoeira.

During those years, capoeiristas had to keep the tradition alive, and they were therefore presenting it as a folk art only. In 1937, Mestre Bimba, one of the most important masters of capoeira, received the government's permission to open the first capoeira school in Brazil, and it became in 1974 a national sport.

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#### **Sources:**

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<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/capoeira>

<http://www.capoeira-france.com>

## **Interview with Mestre Gato Preto**

### **Mestre Gato Preto, the Voice of Experience**

Capoeira Magazine #4, year 2, pages 8-11, by Roger Spock.

Translation into English: Shayna McHugh from <http://eulanet.sites.uol.com.br/>

Mestre Gato Preto will turn seventy years old on March 19<sup>th</sup> of this year. He has spent over fifty years in capoeira and he's still going strong, giving an example to the newer students. José Luiz Gabriel began Capoeira when he was eight years old. By the time he was twelve, everyone thought that he already knew everything. He did not believe this and kept seeking to learn more, as he does until this day. He never "officially" graduated in Capoeira. He understands that a capoeirista is not a PhD, who learns everything and then graduates in order to exercise his profession. "Capoeira never ends," he says.

After living with other great Capoeira practitioners in Salvador-Bahia, Mestre Gato Preto has become a travelling ambassador of Capoeira, visiting many countries and transmitting his knowledge to young and old capoeiristas in the four corners of the world. In this exclusive interview with Capoeira Magazine, he unhesitatingly shares all his precious experience:

#### **When and how did you first encounter capoeira?**

I began, at eight years old, with my father, Eutíquio Lúcio Góes. He was my mestre. At twelve years old (1941), people thought that I had nothing left to learn. The trainings took place in a small enclosed room. He attacked with a maculelê stick or machete, in order to make me defend myself. When I messed up, he corrected me...until one day when I gave a strong cabeçada and he fell. When he got up, he came running after me, threatening to cut me and yelling: "Come here, boy!" After that he stopped teaching me.

Later I learned with my uncle João Catarino, a student of Besouro, until he died of a haemorrhage. After this period came Leo, Cobrinha Verde, Mestre Waldemar, Mestre Pastinha, and also Gildo, Roberto, and João Grande, who played berimbau and was a very important capoeirista at that time. In the roda, João Pequeno, Moreno, Albertino, Valdomiro, and I made up the bateria.

#### **And your contact with the mestres of the time?**

There were many mestres who played well in Bahia, such as Canjiquinha, Zéis, Vandır, Agulhão, Zacarias, Bom Cabelo. There were also others who were not mestres but who also

played very well, such as Deodato and Bigodinho. All the capoeiristas from Liberdade (the neighborhood of Liberdade, in Salvador), trained by Mestre Waldemar, were good, good, very good! There was a plumber, who died at 28 years old, who was a great angoleiro!

**In those days, who were the most distinguished capoeiristas, in your eyes?**

In my opinion, João Grande, in the inside game. In terms of dancing around, it was this guy Gilberto who took care of himself well and today is very old.

**What was the orchestra of Capoeira?**

Three berimbaus (a gunga, a berra-boi, and a viola), two pandeiros, a bamboo *ganzá* (not a metal *ganzá*), and a reco-reco. The first berimbau played Angola; the second, São Bento Grande; and the third, Angolinha. This was the bateria, accompanied by singing.

**What was the profile of the capoeirista in that time?**

The capoeirista was a worker: a conductor, a sugarcane worker, a dock worker at the port, a stonemason, a carpenter, an electrician, a commercial traveler, a sailor – ultimately, he was a worker who, whatever his job was, played capoeira for love, for leisure, as a type of therapy. The capoeirista did that as a dance, which made him feel well and get what he wanted, through concentration.

**No one earned money? No one lived off of capoeira?**

The money came later, with games in the roda. Someone would place a banknote in the center of the roda on top of a red handkerchief and the capoeirista would have to pick it up with his mouth. The two partners played until one was immobilized with a blow of the foot – never of the hand – and the other got the banknote. It was necessary to immobilize one's opponent to avoid the risk of receiving a kick in the face. After everything, the two players hugged and the money was placed in the cabaça of the berimbau in order to pay for a round of beer, soda, or rum after the roda. This was the only way that money entered capoeira.

**Not even the mestres had capoeira as a profession?**

No one did. They were all workers, they had their professions. Pastinha was a toll collector, and afterwards he went to organize capoeira; Daniel Noronha worked on the dock; Canjiquinha and Caiçara worked in the Town Hall; Paulo dos Anjos worked as a driver;

Mestre Ferreira and myself worked as frame-layers. No one lived off of capoeira. I lived in capoeira during 40 years without earning any cash!

But we learned a lot in those days. A group from Liberdade was brought to visit me in Itapuan and one group played with another. Whoever received a rasteira and fell with their butt on the ground lost the game. Also, one could not dirty the opponent's clothing.

That was bad manners. The mestres embraced and conversed. We played the whole afternoon!

### **And modern capoeira?**

It evolved. To evolve is very good, but it is necessary to have a root, a beginning, so that capoeira does not go down a wrong path, because this art is so rich! Capoeira is your life, my life, and the life of many others. There's no way to control that. It's necessary to control education, so that capoeira does not lose this beautiful thing that it possesses.

### **What does a capoeirista need to become a mestre?**

First of all, graduation does not exist in capoeira. A final point does not exist, because capoeira has no end. It will take you wherever it wants you to go. The same will happen with your son, your grandson, or great-grandson: it goes on and on. Capoeira is universal, it walks, it is dynamic; it doesn't have a "graduation" like the doctor who learns everything, graduates, and goes to work in his profession.

Wisdom is the doctorate of capoeira. In order to achieve it, one must prolong one's life in the art. How? By giving a cord to the boy and letting him train for four years, in order to prepare himself and learn about reality, in order to achieve wisdom. With ten years, he could be a contra-mestre, thorough research and study. Then, with twenty years of experience he may or may not have conditions to be mestre. Everything depends on wisdom, and wisdom has nothing to do with age. The title, given by mestres, of "coming to be ready," may be granted. It does not mean being graduated, because the work and the learning continue. Capoeira never ends, never dies.

Capoeira has 180 blows and 180 counterattacks. One does not learn ten or twelve movements, say that one knows six regional moves and other angola moves and then go around saying that one is a capoeirista. It is necessary to know, discover, and face all the attacks.

Many players don't want to discuss or learn all of capoeira. They thus meet their end, because they will never surpass the minimal amount that they know. The worst off in all this is capoeira itself, because these people end up losing the talent that they do have.

They separate capoeira from its reality.

**You referred to a time in which everyone was friends; there was unity. Today there is much rivalry; a big and strong capoeirista enters in the roda intending to destroy the other player. What do you think about this?**

In those times, the mestres respected each other and encouraged consideration on the part of their students. The guy might be big, like Agulhão, who was two meters tall, or strong like Mestre Waldemar, Traíra, Zacarias, Davi, or Dada – who gave the greatest capoeira show of the time – but there was a control, a respect. Anyone who took a cabeçada fell and got up to shake his partner's hand without aggression or bitterness.

Today I see that there are many people teaching their students to hit, wanting to be the best and filling the heads of those poor students – who don't know any better – with the idea that this is important. These are people who only see the destructive side. The mestres get blamed for the consequences and capoeira ends up unable to show its full potential.

**Did this used to happen among the old mestres?**

No. The only mestres who argued in Salvador back in those days were Canjiquinha and Caiçara, but everything was play-acting, in presentations for tourists. They abused each other in laughter and jokes. The two died on good terms with each other.

Bimba had an academy in the Maciel de Cima and Pastinha had one in the Largo do Pelourinho. Very close to each other. They did not visit each other, but also they did not speak badly of each other's academies. I have with me newspaper articles from 1984 about João Pequeno and João Grande, in Itapuan. One can see how they liked and respected each other!

Caiçara and Canjiquinha were my friends until the ends of their lives. Bimba's students have maintained friendships with me for 45 years. I have no enemies in capoeira and if I did they would not be against me, but against the art. I don't do anything against them.

Some destroy themselves; others reeducate themselves and appear without entering in that treachery.

More recently, I met students who even want to hit their mestres, alleging that they learned nothing. Do you know what this is? Lack of education. The capoeirista has to educate himself in order to respect and be respected.

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**Source:** [http://capoeira-connection.com/Translations/Interview\\_GatoPreto.pdf](http://capoeira-connection.com/Translations/Interview_GatoPreto.pdf)

## Interview with Ken Swift

BBoyWorld.com - May 21, 2006 on 7:36 pm, in *News*

**This article was published in Graphotism Magazine Issue 14 - 1999**

Firstly, my name was Kid Zoom, when I was with the Young City Boys. Then it was Ken Rok, Ken Ski for the Rock Steady Crew battle at the Lincoln Centre, when I was partners with Lil' Lep. Then after that it was Prince Ken Swift, and now it's just Ken Swift.

My history dates back to '78 at a time when you didn't really see it. And when you did see it, you'd be walking down the street and you wouldn't know what was happening, nobody on the outside world knew what was happening in that park, in that lil' circle next to a lil' sandpit, next to a monkey bars. They had loud music, but they didn't know why people was standing in that circle. Well the masses didn't, but in that circle, there was people getting busy, there was people doing stuff on the concrete, to the beat of the music, acting like clowns, acting like stick-up kids, acting like machines, acting like.. B-Boys.

It was about being the best. Better than the other dancers. Dancing to the beat, and making the crowd respond. But it was about playing with the crowd, doing crazy shit. The black kids were the ones that I learnt from but you never learned by asking somebody. Back in the days, it was machoism, it was about that street attitude, that attribute like you ain't gonna sweat nobody.

Who ever had the nerve to say "teach me", was considered a sucker, a lil' bitch-ass punk. So you never asked no one to teach you, you never clapped when a nigga did a good move, you just stood there and acted hard, like it didn't phase you. It was all about attitude, everyone else did the clapping, not the B-Boys. Because it wasn't about clapping, it wasn't no fucking show, it was dancing, "I'm doing what I do". So you had to hold your own, you had to learn on your own from what you saw, and you had to be original, 'cos if you did what you saw you'd be disrespected. You could even get smacked sometimes if you did someone else's move back in the day. So you had to do your own shit and you had to learn the foundation, and flipping it right. For me it wasn't about making the crowd happy, 'cos they didn't know what I was doing anyway. I wanted the B-Boys to say "alright". For me it was like I wanted to please my crew, I wanted my crew to say "Ohhhhh". So I didn't show them none of my shit until a party, or until the jam or until the battle, and I pulled off some crazy shit and I gave

confidence to them and they didn't know it because I would do something in front of them and hype them up to do something. You know I was a beginner and I had a lot to prove you know. I wanted to be up there with the best kids, and I wasn't as good as them, that's all there was to it. So you know, it took me a while, but I started feeling it, and I really started loving it you know. I really loved Breaking man.

### **Who would you say is your main influence?**

There is no main influence. The main influence for me is the music. OK now, as far as persons are concerned there are a whole number of people who influenced me. Some of the main ones were a kid named Grego, from the Executioners, a crew from East Harlem, there was a kid named Shaky, a Puerto Rican kid from Amsterdam Projects, 61st St. There was also the Number One Sure Shot Crew, with Kid Terrific, he's a Puerto Rican B-Boy and they inspired me more 'cos all I saw was brothers, but when I saw Puerto Ricans I felt more comfortable about Breaking. My old brother Speedy, my middle brother Tumir, he's a Graffiti artist from the mid 70's to 80's and he also put me onto the underground scene. Then there was Eddy Ed, Kid Spark, who was down with Rock Steady back in '83, he was my inspiration for Brooklyn Rock.

Later on down the line, there was Maurizio, who was like the second wind. He inspired me. Not only 'cos I liked what I saw, but I felt like...tarnished. Like "I'm bad too!". So he pushed me more to get better. He got down with Rock Steady. He got busy, made his appearance in New York, and fucking blew everybody out of the water, and I felt that I was so wack, that day. But I knew what I had to do. After seeing him, I knew what the journey was gonna be. I said it's gonna be a hard and long journey, but I'll do it. It took me three years, and I did it. It took me three years to find my swerve, my feel.

### **Why are you retiring, and from what?**

I'm retiring from performing on stage. I don't think that my dance gets the respect that it deserves, I've tried for many years to educate people, and I've tried in the scene to educate people. A lot of young kids are pretty ignorant. There's certain people out here that don't know how to pioneer things, and they feed distorted messages to young people. Then there's people who are jealous of pioneers, original dancers, so that then they try to send fucking mixed messages and rumours...and it's corny. You know I'm 32 years old, I'm not a lil' kid

any more. I could put up with that when I was 17 or 18, `cos I was part of it, but as you get older, you see it, and you try to tell the kids, you know? Teach them about self respect, as a person, not as a B-Boy. Because you can't be a respectable B-Boy, if you're not a respectable person. I think I got a good rapport with people in the scene because I try to be respectful. That's because I learned how to respect myself in the last 7 to 8 years, I learned a lot about myself and I'm still learning. To me it's about self-respect, and treating people right. And even if niggas shit on you and fuck you over, it's about staying righteous. Because everybody has their days. Me and you and everything we do in our life, we gonna pay for it some way or another, good and bad. So my choice, it's not everybodys choice, I choose to do the right thing. I wanna do the right thing, for me, first. It may sound selfish, but that's the way I look at it, `cos I need to be happy. And this decision for me, is not bad, it's for a variety of reasons, but I think it's a celebration. It's beautiful that I had a career 20 years long, and it's beautiful that I went up and down on the street, through trials and tribulations and work, blood, sweat and years, and I can say right now, that I'm performing on stage with some of the top dancers in the world, and I'm getting the applause and getting the respect, as a B-Boy, in the scene now, not just a pioneer from Wildstyle. I'm getting the respect `cos I'm showing that I still got a lil' something under my sleeve, and to me, that means more than anything.

As a B-Boy, you gotta deal with the good and the bad in this game. You can have a great day in physical shape, and a fucked up floor, and if you don't know how to adjust to the medium, forget about it. I'm happy `cos I'm here, I'm not hurt, I had fun with the fellas. I think every B-Boy isn't satisfied. You'll always feel you could do better, but I had fun tonight, and I think it's beautiful. People should learn, and try to have a vision for the future of my career. They can say he's not only a dancer that got a lil' fame, but he also was a person that went through the street, and dealt with human things; family, peer group, corporation, anything. I'm a father also and I think it's beautiful that after 20 years, I stop.

I'm not gonna perform on stage no more, but I'll always be a B-Boy, and there's always gonna be someone out there that could push my buttons, or some music that can push my buttons, and there's a time when I have no control of myself, and I need to break. Not that I plan it, it's like yo, I hear shit, I don't give a fuck where I'm at. If I feel like spinning on my head, or doing a swipe or a 90 or freeze, I'll do it. But it's just that I'm making a transition in my life, and do something different.

## **Can you tell me what the `respect` is, that you think the dance is not getting?**

There are so many negative connotations surrounding Hip Hop in general, first of all, with the gangster thing, and the drugs and the misogyny of women, and there's mixed messages going around. You know, out of all the original Hip Hop dances, and Funk dances like Locking, Popping and Boogaloo, I believe that Breaking is very aggressive, and very hard-edged, and I think that people are scared of you. I think that people who don't understand, when they see it, most of the time they're only seeing certain elements of it, so they don't respect it as a dance. They're looking at it as a fucking clown act, or a monkey, or a fucking court jester bouncing on his fucking head. And to me, that's has a lot to do with us, and the media, all combined, because it's about education.

Breaking involves powermoves, to acrobatics, to flips, footwork, freezes, toprock. These are all the ingredients that I think are integral to B-Boying. They all have to be there, I don't dislike any one of them. And the more you have, the better you are. But what I think is that, you know sometimes people be spinning, and some guy's throwing himself in the fucking air on his back or something. And they look at it like... I don't think they wanna see the essence of what's happening. The person's actually hearing a beat, and expressing himself. I think it's saying, these people have this fucking energy, and they're just going crazy.

## **Is this negative view (of Breaking) there because there are very few masters or people who really feel the spirit when they break?**

I think there's a lot of ignorance. I feel there's a lot of people that even know, but they're so fucking jealous of the original style. The original style is so beautiful, and so funky that it don't make the crowd go crazy but half of them fucking people don't know how to find their flavour.

They don't know how to really feel the beat. And I think, inside it bothers them, and they feel proud because maybe they can do something physically that's most probably gonna get the better crowd response because you got 500 ignorant people that don't know what real, true B-Boying is.

So they feel this power, and then when they educate the children, they're gonna tell'em about that (original style). They don't say listen, "before you learn how to walk, you need to crawl". They don't tell'em they should learn the foundation and learn all that bullshit, then that will

prepare you, to go into the fucking next level; powermoves and airmoves and flips. A lot of people just wanna say “fuck that, that shit is old school, it’s wack, it’s about this and that”. Calling it whatever they wanna call it. Some of `em call it, they started coming up with some corny shit. Buckling up with fucking helmets, running everywhere with helmets strapped to their fucking backpacks. To me, it’s straight fucking corny, and you can put it in the magazine like that. What happened to putting a lil’ style, you know? If you cut the fucking very top off the helmet and stuck it in your baseball cap, maybe I’d respect you a lil’ bit more. But hide this shit. Don’t be flagrant. They just flagrant to put on a fucking helmet and buckle up! Now the helmet to me, is very good for breakdancers that wanna learn headspins, because if you do it in the `lab` and use the helmet, it’s gonna let you find your balance, it’s gonna protect your scalp, and it may protect your fucking skull, who know’s? I recommend the helmet in the lab.

But you go to a circle, and you got a community of people that are looking jiggy, and even the B-Boys wanna look fly, and you jump in a circle and you stop, and you buckle your shit, and then you just drop yourself right on to your fucking head and start spinning. To me, it’s obvious that you either haven’t been told, so I give ya the benefit of the doubt, or, you don’t give a fuck what you heard, and you say “fuck all that other shit, I’m gonna do my thing.” And this is what I’m up against a lot. I’m up against people that come to me just because I like footwork, and try to ask me why do I dislike powermoves, and I’m like, `what!?! I love powermoves, they’re an important part of B-Boying. But I’m about C.B.S; Complete Breaking Style, you knowa i’m sayin?`

It’s a complete style. Like you know if you gonna learn about throwing the pitch, you better learn to curve the knuckle, and all the fucking shit that goes into it, so you can throw everything. You know, why do you just wanna learn the fastball? You can get away with that shit half the time, but someones gonna smack the shit out the park when they catch it. If you’re into challenging a drum to try to find that fucking connection with the record; That’s B-Boying.

Rock Steady is a pioneering crew, we’ve laid the foundation whether people wanna accept it or not, people gotta give it up, move on and do their part for the hip hop world. We did our fucking part and still are, and there’s still people complaining. Challenge yourself. To me, the main challenge, is no opponent. I’m the best challenge for me. To me now, I could win or lose, and that means nothing in a battle with an opponent. But winning to me is, dancing to

the beat, in a circle, and leaving the circle saying, `I fucking ripped that record`. That to me, is winning.

The last year, I've been competing with myself. I've been competing with my ego, which is not good. Sometimes when I really have an ego, I try to compete with my ego to calm myself down and realise, I think I'm good, but there's mad motherfuckers out here that are incredible, and to accept that. But also know that, I got a lot of experience man. I may not be the most aggressive guy attacking people, but I can do a lil' battling knowa'i'msayin? I know how to hold mine's. This is the game of life. It's like, you could fucking be the baddest nigga in the world in the boxing ring, but if you get caught with that punch, you're our cold, and it's like Breaking. I like to be a lil' bit confident. Everybody had that thing inside of them that makes them feel like, "I can fuck with him, I can deal with him." And that's what kept me hungry, but I'd rather stop now. I wouldn't wanna stop when I get wack.

**But are there enough forums for people to express themselves with that true spirit, and feel that original style? No one breaks on the street no more.**

There's not a forum, there's community centres and all that shit, never mind that, `cos there's no better feeling than being in a club. Fucking lights dim, going in there and just having people look at you, and that energy is like a forcefield. In the practice hall you're not really gonna feel that adrenaline, and we need more clubs that allow people to break. They don't allow it `cos they think it's violent. But it's all in good fun, it's competition. You gonna learn a lot in life about winning and losing. And the B-Boy in the street battling and everything, it keeps you occupied, and it teaches you how to lose. You can't win until you know how to lose. When you can lose, take it, and go back to the drawing board, that's when you learn how to win.

**How can Breaking in it's true form survive in this era? Surely the social, political and economic situation of the environment was important to it's coming about in the first place?**

If you look at the social/economic situation in the late 50's, 60's and 70's in New York City. There were a lot of people migrating from Puerto Rico, and also coming from South America, Haiti, Jamaica, to the city. The Bronx was the ideal place, with lower rent, but then at the same time, there was a lot of people moving up there. There was 149th St., around 3rd

Avenue, it was called Little Bronx, and at that time there was a whole situation where funding was really bad in the neighbourhoods. I think there was this landlord scheme where landlords were having people burn buildings down to get the money, and you would see rows and rows of blocks of all burnt buildings. These environments were things that kids came out to look at everyday. How you gonna be inspired? And when they heard the music, I think it kinda took'em away from that for that lil' moment, where they can enjoy a song or something. So you're looking at, no outreach programs, no community programs, later for you. So you're looking at kids that didn't have much to do. And the blessing of creativity, from the Almighty was bestowed upon all these people, not only in New York, but worldwide, to really find a way to make the day, try to occupy your time...And look what we did. It's incredible.

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**Source:** <http://www.bboyworld.com/main/?p=37>

## **Videos**

*'IBE 2005 Germany vs USA Part 1 of 2'*

07:13

<http://youtube.com/watch?v=ufPMGWtV8z4>

*'Capoeira – Eberson'*

02:44

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ot7hBY4lQ2c>

*'Break dance capoeira',*

01:44

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xt0vAiMV7gI>