Freeform Bruk Up: A State of Being

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Abstract

Freeform Bruk Up: A State of Being offers a personal exploration into the revolutionary culture and practice of Bruk Up, specifically focusing on Freeform Bruk Up, a street dance form that transcends 21st-century dance technique. Rooted in Afro-diasporic culture, Freeform Bruk Up—born from Jamaican Dancehall and expanded within the streets of Brooklyn—embodies a unique fusion of cultural history, individual identity, and radical movement expression. Through my firsthand experience with one of its pioneering practitioners, Albert "Ghost" Esquilin, I uncover how it challenges traditional dance paradigms, creating a powerful aesthetic that moves beyond mere physical technique. Rather than simply executing codified steps, Freeform Bruk Up requires an embodied state of being—one in which movement flows not from a predetermined form, but from the dancer's inner essence and identity.

The work reflects on how Freeform Bruk Up redefines what it means to dance authentically in the 21st century, focusing on the blend of improvisation, spirit, and personal expression that forms its foundation. Freeform Bruk Up is not about replication; instead, it's about tapping into an individual's unique cultural and emotional forces, making each gesture, movement, and performance unpredictable, raw, and alive. This cultural phenomenon transcends the constraints of standardized technique and offers an approach to dance in which imagination, selfhood, and cultural identity shape the very form of movement.

Drawing on the history and lineage of Bruk Up, the article demonstrates how the dance form has evolved within the context

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of Afro-Caribbean diasporic culture, particularly in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Bed-Stuy. This cultural backdrop, combined with the shifts in musical influences from Dancehall to Hip Hop, R&B, and Flex Dance Music (FDM), has reshaped the language of Freeform Bruk Up, allowing for greater fluidity and hybridity. Through my own embodied practice, observations, and conversations with Ghost, I reflect on its capacity to blend physical and metaphysical elements, and consider how it resonates with the broader reimagining of dance as a living, evolving art form that transcends traditional technique and embodies the intersection of identity, culture, and expression.

Keywords: Bruk Up, Freeform Bruk Up, dance, technique, street dance, Brooklyn, Bed-Stuy, New York, Ghost, Albert Esquilin, metaphysical technique, state of being, identity, African diaspora, Jamaica, George Adams, Bed-Stuy Veterans, culture, history, Kingston, ghost walk, possession, transcendence, 21st century, BSV, imagination, hybridity, reinvention, innovation, Flex Dance Music, Hip Hop, R&B, concepts, mind states, self-expression, Dancehall, non-Western

Introduction

April 25, 2024. I thought my screen was glitching. A jagged, stuttered voice—deep, guttural, unmistakably of Afro-Caribbean descent—ripped through the speaker of my phone, fractured by heavy bass and gunshot-like percussion. I couldn't understand a word until a pause gave way to a single, unmistakable phrase: *BRUK UP*. The voice sounded gnarly and raw. My eyes squinted, and I instinctively pulled my phone closer. A dark figure was *moving*. Draped in black, loose clothing, his silhouette rippling with each flicker of movement. For a split second, I questioned my perception. His body fractured into still frames, as if the video itself were corrupted—freezing mid-motion. I restarted it, expecting a digital error. But then I saw it—this wasn't a malfunction. This was *insane control*. His neck, head, and torso darting with tension, in sync with the distorted vocal introduction, isolations so precise they

felt like digital artifacts. Then the beat dropped, a huge weight shifting in the music, and his body physically collapsed into it. His rib cage articulated the drop, sending waves through his legs as they began to glide over the floor like a snake weaving itself through sand, drowning into the sound like a body sinking into deep water. Every movement existed in frames, like stop-motion animation brought to life.

Yet, despite the fragmentation and tension, everything *flowed*. Every gesture was a sentence leading to another in a seamless story. He looked fake—the illusion was relentless. *He became the music*—a literal living sound wave. The vocalist's cadence shifted, and his body adjusted frequencies, a wave of motion rolling through every inch of his body. His fingertips, like claws of a beast, dictating the motions' directional shifts so clearly, but never predictable. The music was unfiltered—gunshots, heavy bass, unexpected distortion, explicit language. The back beat, or heart of the music had a steady pounding rhythm that seemed to be the body's road map. My face involuntarily twisted into a frown of disgust—not repulsion, like most would assume, but that deep, guttural response that street dance-affiliated folks have when witnessing mastery…the nastiness of it, the brilliance. The frown grew, stretching wider as disbelief settled in. He was effortless, a puppeteer of perception. His movement dictated my gaze. I felt my eyes darting from one side of the screen to the other, directing me to the micro-articulations of his chest, the deep undulations of his waist—a dirty wine infused with a contorted animation that defied natural motion. Otherworldly. Every nerve in his exposed arms fired with precision. His face, also exposed—stark against the darkness of his clothing. A gold chain reverberating violently against his chest, punctuating every pop, every stop, every gravitational shift and drop. His head and hands darted with the sharpness of a bird observing its surroundings. His fingers commanded the space. The subtlest twitch in his hands dictated the pathways of his energy.

I remember feeling tight in my chest after watching that video over twenty times. It was like my ribs were on fire, a heat spreading through me that I couldn't quite place. Normally, I would send a cool video to

a friend, something worth sharing—but this was different. I almost felt like I had to keep it to myself, like it was *sacred* somehow, like I needed to sit with it and unravel it on my own before I could let anyone else in.

The image of him lingered in my mind. His presence haunted me—not just the physical precision, but the hypnotic aura beneath the motion. There was something philosophical about his approach, like the movement was rooted in a concept—a deliberate manipulation of perception and reality. A deep curiosity took hold of me. I caught my own body subtly trying to reenact what I had seen—those fragmented gestures, that impossible control. My arms, my shoulders, my chest—searching for that sensation and articulation. Again and again, I referred to the video, hungry to decode it. The shapes and pathways were traceable, but his presence—his aura, the character behind the motion—felt unreachable. What style of dance is this? His ability to shift fluidly from one aesthetic to the next suggested a form or technique I couldn't fully define. With every replay, I felt a rush of inspiration and an urgency to understand what had just been revealed to me. Whatever it was, whatever he was, it was singular: inimitable and untouchable—his and his alone.

Seeing this for the first time was more than an introduction to a dance style—it shifted my understanding of dance technique itself. I've studied a range of street and club dance forms rooted in the African diaspora—such as Hip Hop, popping, animation, house, waacking, and jazz dance—alongside Western concert dance forms such contemporary, modern, and ballet—each shaped by recognizable *external* foundations, focusing on placement, body alignment, and technical execution. To me, these forms have always carried a distinct identity. Each one speaks a clear, singular movement language that I've come to recognize through my study. In most dance forms I've encountered, whether street styles, club dances, or Western concert techniques—there's a physical foundational structure, a vocabulary of movement that can be taught, repeated, and refined. Technique, in this context, has often meant precision, control, and alignment with a particular standard. It's what gives a form its recognizable shape,

and what allows someone to say, "This is Hip Hop," or "This is ballet." Personal expression is paramount in most Afro-diasporic forms, and *sometimes* welcomed in Eurocentric forms, but it typically comes after the *step*—layered on top of the form like flavor on structure—like an enhancement. The essence of self becomes an accessory.

But what captivated me, what felt new, wasn't just his ability to shift between multiple external forms or techniques, it was the *state of being that drove* the form, the internal force guiding its pathways. His presence felt like the technique itself, as if his inner world was the foundation of the form and the movement merely the extension. From one moment to the next, I found myself trying to name what I was seeing: "Oh, he's doing animation. Wait…is that Krump? No, now it's waving. And now he's gliding across the floor. Actually, is he doing Flex dance?" There was no single technique that stayed in place. The only constant was he—his energy, his presence, his *state of being.*

Until that point, I had always understood technique as the consistent through-line- of a form—the recognizable vocabulary that gives it physical movement structure and identity. This experience disrupted that notion completely. Can technique be a state of mind? A mode of being? A felt sense of self shaping the form from within? Perhaps the state of mind or being *was* the technique, shaping the form from the inside out—a fusion of mental intention, embodied presence, and multi-layered execution. Maybe this form wasn't about executing conventional, categorized, and replicable shapes at all. Maybe the external form was simply an extension of an internal identity, a technique rooted in the non-replicable expression of self.

Why was this so significant? I realized that movement, when driven by a deeply rooted sense of self, naturally draws from a range of lived experiences and embodied histories. It made sense that his dance resisted easy explanation, description, or categorization. As a biracial woman of African American and white European descent, I see aspects of myself reflected in that kind of fusion—where identity is not singular or fixed, but shaped by a convergence of multiple cultural narratives.

My background in both freestyle and improvisation, across Western and non-Western dance forms, has allowed me to recognize that what he was expressing wasn't merely a blend of physical practices—it was a layered, multidimensional conversation between spiritual, cultural, and ancestral worlds. Still, I recognize that what I was witnessing was not simply reflective of hybridity, but something more rooted: an articulation grounded in Africanist aesthetics and philosophical approaches to movement, where the dancing body becomes a vessel, and the form is shaped from the inside out. Witnessing him in this moment pushed me to reflect not just on the technique, but on what animates it: a non-replicable essence that emerges from within, carrying histories, spirits, and meanings that extend beyond what the eye can *see*. It wasn't just that I saw myself in it, but that I began to see how much more there was to understand.

His name was *Ghost*. But his *being* wasn't just personal—it was part of something much larger. It carried with it a culture, a community, and a name: *Bruk Up*.

The Roots and Routes That Led Me Here

I wasn't even looking for Ghost when I found him. I was actually looking for more information about the cultural lineages embedded in my own dance practice. I've been in community with Afro-diasporic movement forms for most of my life, and much of what I've learned was passed down from my elders orally, through experience, conversations, shared spaces. However, I've always been eager to dive more deeply into Jamaican Dancehall traditions specifically, and how it connects to my personal artistry. Shaped by sound system culture, reggae, and the everyday realities of urban life, Dancehall has always been more than a music genre—it's a living archive born in the late 1970s and early '80s out of Kingston's working-class communities.[1] Through its movements and rhythms, it encodes stories of survival, resistance, creativity, and

1. Sonjah Stanley-Niaah, *Dancehall: From Slave Ship to Ghetto* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2010), 3.

joy. Scholars have identified Dancehall as a space where performance and identity converge, offering both aesthetic innovation and socio-political commentary.[2] It's a form that carries weight—politically, culturally, and spiritually—through the body.

Widely recognized as a foundational figure in Dancehall, Carlene Smith was crowned Jamaica's first National Dancehall Queen in 1992, a title that marked a significant moment in the genre's history.[3] Much of my research led back to her, and my search confirmed that she was still deeply active. I messaged her on Instagram, and to my surprise, she responded by sharing her WhatsApp number. We exchanged a few messages, and I asked if she'd be open to connecting over Zoom. At the time, she was touring internationally, and with her packed schedule arranging a meeting proved difficult. That lead eventually tapered off, but I still felt fortunate just to have made that first connection. In Afro-diasporic movement traditions, elders are not only carriers of knowledge—they are living archives. Reaching out to her felt like part of honoring that lineage, even if it didn't result in a long exchange.

My next lead was George "Bruck Up" Adams, a name I had come across while exploring Smith's social media network. It seemed that the two were often mentioned, honored, or shouted out together on social media by others in the community. It became clear that Adams had influenced the development, evolution, and global reach of Jamaican Dancehall culture, particularly through something called "Bruk Up." I had never heard of Bruk Up before. The YouTube and Instagram videos I watched revealed movement that was foreign but at the same time, strangely familiar—soulful, grounded, fragmented, weird—and somehow playful at the same time. It didn't look like anything I had encountered before, yet it resonated in a way I couldn't explain. I wanted to know more, and that curiosity led me to reach out to Adams directly.

2. Donna P. Hope, *Inna di Dancehall: Popular Culture and the Politics of Identity in Jamaica* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2006), 17.; Stanley-Niaah, *Dancehall*, 8.

3. Jamaica Gleaner, *Five Questions With Dancehall Queen Carlene,* The Gleaner, May 28, 2021, https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/entertainment/20210528/five-questions-dancehall-queen-carlene.

I messaged him on Instagram, just as I had with Smith. I introduced myself, shared a bit about my research into Jamaican Dancehall's cultural roots, and asked if he'd be open to connecting. To my surprise, he replied with his phone number. Like Smith, Adams felt like another essential node in a larger web of cultural transmission—one shaped by mentorship, oral history, and inherited practices. That next night, around 11:30 PM, my phone rang.

"It's Bruck Up,"[4] a thick Jamaican accent crackled through the static.

It was Adams. I was starstruck.

We spoke for about thirty minutes. He was clearly busy—bouncing between countries, projects, and performances—but he still took the time to call me. He seemed genuinely pleased to hear about my interest in Bruk Up.

At one point he asked, "What is it you're trying to learn about Bruk Up?"[5]

"All of it, if you have the time," I said.

He replied, "My schedule is tight right now, but maybe in a couple months I can reach back out. For now, keep doin' what you're doin'. I'm happy to send some resources your way."[6]

He spoke with the authority of someone who had lived this culture for decades. "I've been doing this Bruk Up thing for many, many years," he said. "But there are others too…people who really do this tradition in the States."[7] That moment shifted something for me. In so many Afro-diasporic forms, transmission doesn't follow a single straight line—it branches, travels, reinvents. To truly understand Bruk Up culture, I'd need to look not just to the originators and elders, but also to those who've carried and transformed it elsewhere.

I thanked him. I didn't know if he'd actually follow up, but I took his advice seriously and kept digging. As I scrolled through tagged videos and photos of Adams on Instagram, I looked for others in his community who danced Bruk Up. One name kept popping up—a

4. George "Bruck Up" Adams, phone interview by author, April 15, 2024.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.

figure credited in countless "#BrukUp" videos. This is how I found Ghost—not just through an algorithm, but through the living traces of cultural transmission. Video after video showed him dancing, animated and almost creature-like, moving in circles of people or alone, always with the #BrukUp tag. I went to his page. **April 25, 2024:** That's when I saw Ghost for the first time.

BRUK UP

Derived from Jamaican Patois, *Brukup* means "broken." Its origins can be traced back to George "Bruck Up"[8] Adams, a Kingston native who transformed a childhood ailment into artistic power. A bone infection left him with a limp, but instead of seeing it as a limitation, he built a style around it. His movements—jerky, fragmented, unpredictable—reflected his own body's realities and mirrored the "broken" quality suggested by its name. What began as personal expression evolved into a fully formed dance language, mirroring the "riddims" and stories of his world.[9] What drew me into Adam's story was this affirmation that "flaws" can be superpowers, and that the body, regardless of its struggles, autonomy, and experiences can tell personal stories no one else can.

As a street dance tradition, Bruk Up thrived in informal, communal spaces where dancers exchanged, challenged, and celebrated their artistry. Its historical roots lie in Dancehall and Jamaican sound system culture, a vibrant movement where music, dance, and identity are constantly in conversation.[10] The dynamic street atmosphere nurtured an ever-evolving language of resilience, storytelling, and self-expression, keeping Bruk Up alive as both a cultural practice and, more importantly, a personal means of reinvention.

8. Adams used a 'C' in his stage name.
9. Sky Dylan-Robbins, "Five-Borough Freestyle: Bruk Up," *The New Yorker*, April 14, 2015, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/five-borough-freestyle-bruk-up.
10. Boyd, Joe."How Jamaican DJs Gave Rise to Disco and Hip-Hop," Vanity Fair, February 12, 2023, https://www.vanityfair.com/style/story/excerpt-jamaica-djs-gave-rise-to-disco-hip-hop.

As I described Adams dancing earlier, I was struck by the raw energy and unpredictability of his movement. I could now recognize how he drew inspiration from a wide range of sources, blending Jamaican Dancehall with Hip Hop, pop culture, and contortion-like illusions. His signature *shoulder pop*,[11] born from his own fragmented aesthetic and physical ailment—became a defining element of Bruk Up's external physicality. But these movements alone didn't define his dance. What made it unmistakably his was the *him* inside the movement—the character he became, the quirks, the facial expressions, the internal dialogue, and the aura he summoned into his dance.

It wasn't until Adams immigrated to Brooklyn in the early 1990s that Bruk Up began to evolve and take on a second life. In Bedford Stuyvesant (Bed-Stuy)—a dense, diasporic hub for Black and Afro-Caribbean cultural exchange—he continued to share the culture of this form, adapting it to a new environment. Those who embraced it nurtured, reshaped, and kept it alive, transforming it into an underground language of its own.[12] More than a dancer, Adams is an entertainer, musician, and cultural force. His performance in Busta Rhymes' "Put Your Hands Where My Eyes Can See" marked Bruk Up's first major appearance in commercial media, spotlighting the form on an entirely new stage. While often credited as the "founder" of Bruk Up, his role was not only generative but also generational: he served as the bridge between the form's Jamaican roots and its evolution in the urban landscapes of New York.

The Vanguard

In any cultural movement, there are those who push boundaries and reshape tradition. These figures—vanguards—lead the charge into new territory. One of the most pivotal figures in that transformation was Albert Esquilin—known as Ghost or Ghost of New York. Born in 1984 to a Cuban and Puerto Rican family and raised in Brooklyn, Ghost encountered Adams at a critical time. He was raised in the heart of the city's street dance

11. Dylan-Robbins, "Five-Borough Freestyle."
12. Dylan-Robbins, "Five-Borough Freestyle."

scene, where he became an Original Gangster (OG) and a key figure in shaping Bruk Up's evolution. He absorbed Bruk Up firsthand and became a vessel that carried the form forward. Ghost did not simply preserve Bruk Up—he revolutionized it. He stood at the crossroads of past and future, helping bridge the exchange between Adams and a new generation.

Ghost was one of several key figures who helped establish a crew that carried the lineage of Bruk Up forward in the late '90s while forging a new path—The Bed Stuy Veterans (BSV). Their roots in Bed-Stuy remain physically inscribed in the neighborhood, as shown in Figure 1, which captures the BSV etching outside the former Slaughter House gathering space. Ghost and the BSV played a major role in turning movement lineage into something boundless through the emergence of *Freeform Bruk Up*—a term they coined to signal a new phase in Bruk Up's evolution. What followed was a shift that expanded both the music and the movement itself.

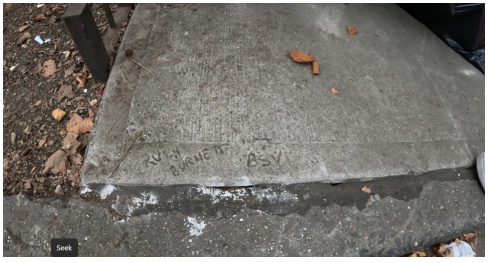


Figure 1: Etched Bed-Stuy Veterans (BSV), Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn. Photograph taken by author.

What I've come to understand is that Freeform Bruk Up emerged as a new branch or sub-genre of the Bruk Up tradition in the late '90s, early 2000s. It was no longer solely an expression rooted in Jamaica, shaped by Adam's fragmented aesthetic and the Afro-diasporic physicality driven by Jamaican music. In Freeform, the musical influences widened, creating space for more voices, more interpretations, and more entry points into the form. Hip Hop, R&B, Pop, Rock, and Flex Dance Music (FDM)—a distorted, electronic remix style pulling from pop culture tracks and samples—all began to shape the soundscape.

That expansion didn't just change the music. It shifted how the dance moved, what it could express, and who could step into it.

As I watched clips and listened to those involved in this practice, I started to see how this shift opened up the form's imaginative possibilities. The movement was no longer tethered to one cultural rhythm, but guided by many. Dancers began embodying a wide range of characters and auras—ghostlike, glitchy, regal, animalistic. Each mover seemed to be pulling from something deeply personal, while still connected to a shared cultural lineage that made space for continual evolution. What I've come to understand is that the Africanist roots of Bruk Up don't disappear in Freeform—they *generate* possibility. They invite invention. This foundation doesn't limit expression; it expands it, offering a framework through which dancers can imagine and animate entirely new forms.

Freeform practitioners like the BSV members embraced that hybridity. They manipulated and reshaped motion freely, pulling from the multiple movement languages and identities they carried. Yet, what kept it undeniably Bruk Up was the animating force behind the movement: the belief that dance doesn't emerge solely from external shapes or sounds, but from within—from one's anima. That principle continues to echo through Freeform today. The form doesn't ask dancers to replicate—it invites them to respond, to contribute, to pitch in. In Freeform Bruk Up, movement doesn't just live in the body; it becomes the body's way of rewriting the form itself—not merely inheriting the culture, but extending it. The movement becomes an expression of the individual who embodies it, actively shaping what Bruk Up is, and what it can become.

An Untamed Form

I remember feeling nervous. I had strategically set myself up in an academic office, hoping to come off as professional for the Zoom interview, but I was dressed in my everyday wear—black beanie, sweatshirt, sweatpants. My notes were laid out in front of me, filled with carefully formulated questions for the man on the other side of the screen—Ghost. But the second he appeared, I didn't look at those notes once.

Ghost was at home, in Newark at the time, exuding an ease that instantly shifted the energy of the conversation. Gold shining in his teeth, he introduced himself like we were two friends catching up on the street. I was prepared to guide most of the conversation with the questions I had prepared. But, immediately, it didn't feel like an interview at all. I felt my purpose shift from gathering information to experiencing something. The "interview" was scheduled for 45 minutes. We sat there talking for three hours.

I told him how I found him—the roots and routes that led me here. I shared that I was tracing cultural lineages connected to the African diaspora within my own dance practice, shaped by non-Western forms like Hip Hop and other street dance traditions. That search had brought me to this form called Bruk Up. I wanted to understand why it felt foreign to me, and yet deeply resonant at the same time. "You're in the right place, Annie. The reason I say you're in the perfect place is because you're not going to really get a lot of articulation speaking about Brooklyn dance culture. So, talk to me, I'm happy to share" he said early on. "I'm really interested in your story—what Bruk Up means to you, and whether there are ways for me to learn and experience it firsthand," I said. He seemed heartened by my curiosity.

As we talked, I asked Ghost about the relationship between Jamaican Dancehall and Bruk Up—whether Bruk Up emerged as a subform within Dancehall or stood as its own distinct practice. "There's a vast confusion of dancing and style in Brooklyn—there's Dancehall and there's Bruk Up. But there's a false representation of what the indigenous approach was, how the Brooklyn ghetto kids were really dancing. We weren't pop-locking like the kids on the West-coast. We started with Dancehall—Raggamuffin music is what powered the dance we were doing here at that time. Kids were diggin' into that style, that sexiness of the waistline in Dancehall 'n tried manipulating that movement with more animation style."[13] he said.

As the conversation flowed, I asked, "So, where does Bruk Up fit into all of this? How did you come to practice it, and what's your

13. Ghost, interview by author, Zoom, April 30, 2024, University of Washington, Seattle WA.

connection to the form?" "We were all into YouTube at the time. A lot of us tried to emulate the dancing we would see in Dancehall and Hip Hop videos. But in the '90s, Busta Rhymes' *"Put Your Hands Where My Eyes Could See"*[14] was the first time we really *saw* Bruk Up. He was dressed up in green like a lizard—weird, animated, crazy shit. That was our introduction. Once we saw that, it took off."[15] He said, "My cousin, Poba—one of the original founders of BSV—became kind of a legend dancing at parties around that time. Everybody gravitated towards him. He inspired me to figure out what *my* version of that was. Everyone in Brooklyn had their own way of doing it—Bruk Up was individual. We were all different characters—like something out of a kung fu flick."[16]

I asked, "Outside of Adams, Poba, and the Bruk Up scene, were there other influences that shaped your movement early on?"[17] Ghost traced one of his earliest inspirations back to a childhood moment: seeing Michael Jackson (MJ) moonwalk.[18] "I was a fan of Michael Jackson, and as a kid, I saw him doing the moonwalk, and I was like…I want to be able to create something like that…an approach to movement you can only find through him alone…I was inspired by the effect that it had on people."[19]

While MJ didn't invent the moonwalk, what Ghost seemed to be getting at was the way MJ *reinvented* it—how his character and aesthetic made the movement feel entirely new. It was the identity and the signature that MJ created that captivated him. But his journey wasn't just about admiration—it was about adaptation and resilience too. He told me how, as a toddler, he suffered a leg injury. Doctors braced his leg for most of his childhood, and as it healed, it grew back

14. Busta Rhymes, *"Put Your Hands Where My Eyes Could See" (Official Video)*, YouTube video, posted June 14, 2019, by OfficialBustaRhymesVEVO, https://youtu.be/GSoQDaXh144.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Michael Jackson, *Michael Jackson – The First Moonwalk (1983)*, YouTube video, posted May 20, 2025, by Kevin D Jimison Official, https://youtu.be/EHdctcgVarg.
19. Ghost, interview by author, Zoom, April 30, 2024, University of Washington.

stronger than before. "What originally felt like a problem, ended up giving me more strength, more balance…I could do things that felt supernatural, and uniquely me in my dance which allowed me to use it as a superpower in Bruk Up…it was a gift,"[20] he said.

That's when I started thinking about George Adams, drawing parallels between his and Ghost's entry points into dance and Bruk Up—how injury, limitation, ailment, circumstance, autonomy, and lived experiences had all become fuel for movement generation. That first call had already stretched past three hours, and yet I found myself wanting more. The way that he was speaking about his truth through Bruk Up felt urgent—like something I needed to keep following. There was still so much I didn't understand, still so much to ask. His story stayed with me long after we hung up.

A few days later, we set up another Zoom call—and then another—continuing the conversation. "So, how did your role help expand Bruk Up? How did the form evolve through you?" I asked. "I created Freeform, me and BSV, and that really allowed us to go beyond traditional Bruk Up. It is a part of the culture, but you now have the agency to draw your character and the techniques that you yourself conceptualize. You have the agency to look like nobody else because you fine-tune your autonomous ammunition. We will always move to Raggamuffin, but the FDM really opened up our possibilities in Freeform."[21] "There's a lot of personal discovery and study when it comes to Bruk Up. A lot of what Bruk Up is—is based on ailments…as superpowers. And I was able to make my identity through that. And that is a story spread all along the Bruk Up community,"[22] he said.

Ghost created a conceptual identity that became a defining character of his dance—his fictional archetype: *Possession*—his signature Freeform Bruk Up style. It was a carefully crafted mind state that blurred the line between dancer and spirit where "movement became

20. Ibid.
21. Ghost, interview by author, Zoom, May 2, 2024, University of Washington.
22. Ibid.

an extension of something beyond the physical."[23] He channeled it—summoning a possessed energy allowing an aura to breathe through different areas of his body, moving as if controlled by unseen forces. His ghostly white contact lenses heightening the illusion, his hypnotic gaze pulling you into the world he conjured. "When people hear the word 'possession,' they think I'm taken over. But it's the music that's taking over me. It's like the sound wants a body, and I'm allowing my body to be the vessel so people can *see* what it looks like through my body—not just hear it."[24]

The movement itself was multidimensional, haunting, and unpredictable. He constantly shifted between textures and dynamics, contrasting pressure with fluidity, disrupting expected pathways, and turning into ever-changing frequencies of physicality. Each motion was a response to the spirit or aura's 'voice,' a conversation unfolding through movement. It was a mind state entirely his own—one that allowed him to summon multiple movement voices, guided by both concept and anima. Through Possession, "I can control my spirit—"[25] The movement transcended classification. It wasn't just a dance—it was a being unto itself, a force breathing through him, consuming him, shaping his very existence in motion.

Freeform Bruk Up takes on a different shape in every dancer. It can't be replicated, neatly defined, or packaged because it isn't built on fixed structures—it's built from within the mover. One's imagination, one's identity, the movement languages one carries, one's anima aren't just a part of the form—they are the technique itself. Freeform is a vessel for storytelling, but not in a rehearsed or premeditated way. Ghost says, "It's raw…it isn't choreographed. This shit is a real-time conversation between self, music, and movement that only that person, in that moment, can be a part of."[26] This concept alone could be why it resists commercialization. It can't be learned passively,

23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ghost, interview by author, Zoom, May 10, 2024, University of Washington.

or even analyzed through video or imitation because it isn't about copying steps—it's about embodying a state of being, in real-time. It demands full presence, an awareness of self, and a deep, internal exploration of what movement could be. No two Freeform Bruk Up dancers move alike. And it makes sense—because no two inner beings are the same. The dance is as fluid and unpredictable as the people who create it. That's what makes this form so powerful. It's a dance that can't be learned from the outside—it lives and breathes, staying alive in its purest form—never diluted, belonging only to those who shape it, never the other way around. As Ghost told me, "Its identity can't be tracked—because it's *new*."[27]

I kept replaying the ways Ghost described what Bruk Up was to *him—how it lives inside of him and how it takes over.* But even after these calls, there was more to uncover. We agreed to meet again, and I expressed that I wanted to go deeper into the practice itself (see Figure 2): how Freeform Bruk Up manifests in the body, and what it asks of those who move through it.

> But that's a story for another time.
> Or maybe, it's only just beginning.
>
> *There's a whole other version of you waiting to exist…*
> *—Ghost, interview with the author, June 15, 2024.*

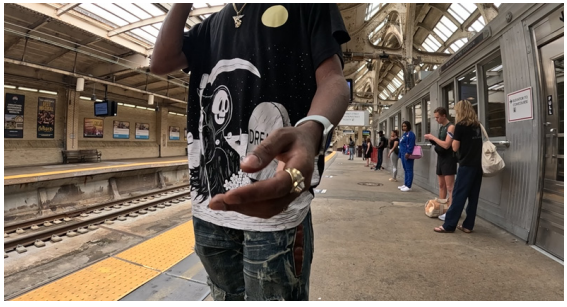
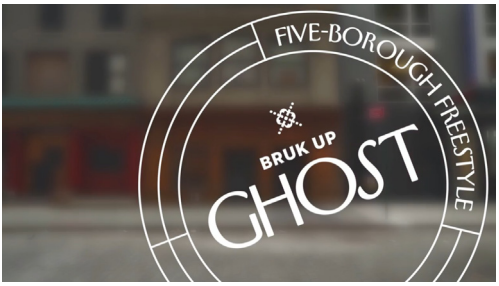


Figure 2: Ghost in Newark Subway station, August 2024, reaching out toward the author. Photograph by author.

27. Ibid.

Short recap video documenting the author's immerseive experience with Ghost in New York. (August 2024, Franklin). For the full video, visit the online journal at https://journals.publishing.umich.edu/conversations/.



A video titled: "Bruk Up: The Ghost - Five Borough Freestyle" showcasing Ghost performing Bruk Up dance, highlighting his distinctive movement style and cultural significance within the Brooklyn dance scene: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khin2DnRknw.

Author Biography

Annie Franklin is a hybrid dance artist, educator, and researcher working at the intersections of street dance, Hip Hop, improvisation, and contemporary dance traditions. Her creative work and research center Afro-diasporic cultural knowledge as a foundation for more honest, inclusive, and embodied models of dance pedagogy, scholarship, and learning.

Originally from the Chicago dance community, Annie is completing her MFA in Dance at the University of Washington. Her work and teaching has been featured at events like the American College Dance Association, the National Dance Education Organization, World of Dance, and the World Championships of Hip Hop-HHI.

Her work highlights the hybridity of street and concert dance, using movement as a tool for cultural discourse, identity exploration, and community building. Annie is excited to join the faculty at Slippery Rock University as Assistant Professor of Dance in Fall 2025.

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