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ABSTRACT
This article historicizes the ubiquitous analytic rubric of identifying Africanist commonalities, tracing it back to "the Aesthetic of the Cool" proposed by U.S. art historian Robert Farris Thompson in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In my argument, I draw on my own research trajectory, reflecting on why I initially used this analytic lens but later decided to focus instead on specific people, places, and time periods. Looking at Thompson's work in detail—his methodology and his sources, including ideas from Alan Lomax's "Choreometrics" project—reveals an analytic framework that is very much a product of a place and time (1960s United States) rather than a set of universal Africanist commonalities.

KEYWORDS
dance; capoeira; aesthetic of the cool; Africanisms

In the early stages of writing my PhD dissertation, I was asked to justify my decision not to use Robert Farris Thompson's "aesthetic of the cool" in my analysis of capoeira. Thompson's theories of African and Afro-diasporic commonalities have become nearly required analytic principles for anyone engaging in research on dances of the African diaspora in the United States. Thompson's work has been disseminated in dance studies largely through dance scholar Brenda Dixon Gottschild's groundbreaking 1996 article on the Africanist presence in the choreography of George Balanchine,[1] where she strips the "emperor" of ballet of his genius status by identifying and revisibilizing the patterns and qualities she identifies as the "five Africanist premises" present in Balanchine's work.

Recognizing previously invisibilized Afro-diasporic contributions to hegemonic dance practices remains crucial to dance scholarship; however, I question what we might be missing or glossing over by continuing to look for "Africanist" commonalities when studying movement practices that are unquestionably Afro-diasporic, such as capoeira or hip-hop. While there are in fact debates within these dance communities on the American (in the continental sense) versus African origins of these practices, including which specific African aspects may have been retained or lost, we as dance scholars can choose not to enter these debates. Instead, we can analyze

the debates themselves: What is at stake for those making each opposing claim? What are the histories of these debates? Where and when do/did these debates take place?

In the following pages I historicize the ubiquitous analytic rubric of identifying Africanist commonalities, often referred to as "the Africanist Aesthetic," tracing it back to the work of U.S. art historian Robert Farris Thompson published in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In my argument, I draw on my own research trajectory, reflecting on why I initially used this analytic lens but later decided to focus instead on specific people, places, time periods, narratives, and counternarratives.

Reconsidering methodologies

In her now classic essay "Dancing in the Field: Notes from Memory,"[2] dance scholar Sally Ann Ness reflects on the losses that inevitably take place when fieldnotes become fixed ethnographic texts. By sharing her fieldnotes and reflections from two initial ethnographic encounters (two tourist dance lessons), she keeps the writing "in motion" and destabilizes the authoritative ethnographic monograph by publishing "too soon." I look at the dusty print issue of the *Journal for the Anthropological Study of Human Movement* on my bookshelf with the feeling that my article "Resistance from the Inside: An Analysis of the *jogo de dentro* in Brazilian *capoeira angola*" may have been, in fact, published too soon, but not purposefully like Ness's. At first delivered as a conference paper at the 29th Society of Dance History Scholars Conference in 2006, the paper was published in the same year, which was also the year I started my PhD studies at the University of California at Los Angeles. In my perhaps prematurely published essay, I draw on Brenda Dixon Gottschild's "five Africanist premises": embracing the conflict, polycentrism/polyrhythm, high-affect juxtaposition, ephebism, and the aesthetic of the cool.[3] I argue that the game of capoeira angola "embodies Africanity by literally and symbolically embracing conflict," and I analyze several "paired contraries" found in the practice.[4]

Although my research methodology was ethnographic, my analysis focused primarily on identifying Africanist characteristics, glossing over the rich details, failures, and contradictions inherent in field research. Readers don't know who else attended capoeira practice with me, and they don't know very much about me either (my racial identification, my previous movement training, or my linguistic competence in Portuguese, for example). They don't know where or when capoeira classes were held; they are not invited to picture the dusty concrete floor that students took turns sweeping prior to each class. They don't know that the practice space (*espaço*) often smelled of incense, and that a mural painted on one

of the walls kept us connected during practice to Salvador, Bahia—the city considered to be the cradle of *capoeira angola*—even though we were hundreds of kilometers away, in the southeast region of Brazil.

Classes held in this small *espaço* near the State University of Campinas attracted many college students; in my late thirties, I was one of the oldest students there. Whenever my body couldn't keep up during the infamously brutal Monday classes (*treino de segunda*), Mestre Jogo de Dentro would tease me about needing to start a class for senior citizens. Students who had fruit trees in their yards would often share their bounty of seasonal fruit with their fellow capoeiristas—we shared limes, oranges, starfruit, lychees, acerola and mangoes. I met the other capoeira students' children and spouses; I attended baby showers and birthday parties. In this short article, I missed the opportunity to examine the various specificities of my ethnographic research; instead of drawing on the rich, nuanced, unexpected and often contradictory particularities of my research, I reached conclusions based on Africanist principles that, in shifting my focus to preestablished continuities, allowed me to gloss over the particularity, humanity, and sociality of the ethnographic research process.

Historicizing Africanisms

In this section I historicize the notion of "Africanisms," as proposed by anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits, followed by an analysis of Robert Farris Thompson's African dance "canons" and his "aesthetic of the cool." In the 2009 documentary *Herskovits at the Heart of Blackness*,[5] historian Vincent Brown dubs Melville Herskovits "the Elvis [Presley] of African American Studies"—taking credit for but also mainstreaming ideas circulated by U.S. scholars such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Latin American scholars such as Fernando Ortiz and Arthur Ramos. The son of Jewish immigrants, Herskovits is known as a pioneer of African and African American Studies (then known as Afroamerican studies) and the founder of the African Studies program at Northwestern University in 1948.

Herskovits intended to identify and recover the African origins of "New World Negro cultures" and quantify retentions of Africanisms through his scale of intensities, a "logically conceived continuum" that, as Herskovits argued, would facilitate cross-cultural comparison and aid in understanding processes of cultural change.[6] In his 1945 paper "Problem, Method, and Theory in Afroamerican Studies," Herskovits proposes a "Scale of Intensity of New World Africanisms," which measured African retentions in the Americas in various domains (technology, economic life, social organization, non-kinship institutions, religion, magic, art, folklore, music, and language) using the following scale: (a) very African, (b) quite African, (c) somewhat African, (d) a little African, (e) trace of African customs,

or absent, and (?) no report. While Herskovits's work challenged "the racist myth that the Negro had no meaningful African history or heritage,"[7] his model of passive acculturation, focused on what was retained, overlooks the inventiveness and inventedness of New World African identities.[8] Anthropologist Andrew Apter notes that the "intensities" proposed by Herskovits are "highly relative and subjective" and his domains (religion, art, etc.) "are in no way discreet and ignore class divisions."[9] In addition, Apter notes that "the scale of intensities resembles the anthropometric measures of physical anthropology."[10]

Unlike Herskovits' scale of intensities, Thompson's correlations between Africa and the New World are less precise and often only implied through anecdotal comparisons. His focus lies on identifying African aesthetic commonalities, which he refers to as African "canons of fine form." Thompson identifies ten formal features of African dance: 1. Ephebism: the Stronger Power that Comes from Youth; 2. "Afrikanische Aufheben":* Simultaneously Suspending and Preserving the Beat; 3. The "Get Down Quality": Descending Direction in Melody, Sculpture, Dance; 4. Multiple Meter: Dancing Many Drums; 5. Looking Smart: Playing the Patterns with Nature and with Line; 6. Correct Entrance and Exit: "Killing the Song," "Cutting the Dance," "Lining the Face"; 7. Vividness Cast Into Equilibrium: Personal and Representational Balance; 8. Call and Response: The Politics of Perfection; 9. Ancestorism: Ability to Incarnate Destiny; and 10. Coolness: Truth and Generosity Regained.[11] An analysis of each of these principles would require a much longer study—Thompson's explanation of each is as vague and confusing as their titles—so I will focus on the features that are relevant to my argument.**

His ninth feature, "Ancestorism," subtitled "ability to incarnate destiny," refers to the ability of African ancestors to return through dancing. He

* Robert G. Armstrong, in his book review of *African Art in Motion*, points out that this term is grammatically incorrect in German, and notes: "If we can't get so well known and closely related a language as German right, what happens when we get to Yoruba or to the Ejagham language cluster?" He notes that Thompson misunderstood key terms in Yoruba in his research; Thompson worked from translations of transcribed interviews, and drew conclusions from these translations, which likely simplified the original lexicon. Robert G. Armstrong, "African Art in Motion: Icon and Act by Robert Farris Thompson," *Research in African Literatures* 12, no. 4 (1981): 533-534.

** Here I am alluding to Thompson's analytic methodology of considering only the evidence that was "germane" to his analysis. He explains: "it was agreed, when I undertook to write this book, that I would be free to omit those objects in the collection that were not germane." Thompson, *African Art in Motion,* 5. All of Thompson's "canons of fine" form, however, are equally as problematic as the ones I chose to discuss.

explains: "We realize that Africans, moving in their ancient dances, in full command of historical destiny, are those noble personages, briefly returned."[12] In Thompson's understanding of Africa, dance and performance are preserved rather than invented: "many or some of the gross structural traits of African performance have been in existence for at least four hundred years."[13] Thompson's Africa is located in a static past, where dances have not changed in four hundred years, preserved by returning ancestors. His first feature, "Ephebism" refers to the youthful quality that transcends age. Thompson explains: "People in Africa, regardless of their actual age, return to strong, youthful patterning whenever they [dance]."[14] In addition to suggesting an Africanity unaffected by the passage of time, ephebism also perpetuates stereotypes of non-white bodies as naturally possessing remarkable vitality and physicality, bodies that are slow to age, and consequently always ready for work. Thompson constructs an Africa where the natives are strong and full of "vitality," but harmlessly cool and composed; it denies intentional artistic authorship by insisting on a slow to change ancestral culture that cyclically returns; it ignores historical and geographic specificities and excludes Africa from modernity.

Thompson's vague, hyperbolic, and florid language is noted by several reviewers of his 1974 *African Art in Motion*. Judith Lynne Hanna, in her review published in *Dance Research Journal* in 1975, wonders if the book shouldn't be reviewed by a poet. She continues: "Since the author's methods appear to have been based upon an attempt to work within the traditions of history and the social sciences, I have decided to review the book as a work of historical and/or social science research."[15] In his review of the book, ethnomusicologist David Ames notes that "there was a tendency to force facts in to pre-conceived pigeonholes, and since Thompson tends to rely a great deal on poetic statement, not infrequently this gives the reader the impression that facts are being bent by a kind of lexical sleight of hand or that conclusions were unjustifiably being extrapolated from fragmentary evidence."[16]

It is worth noting that Thompson supplements his research, which was initially restricted to Nigeria and Dahomey (Benin), with dance examples and analyses derived from the Choreometrics project by Alan Lomax, Forrestine Paulay, and Irmgard Bartenieff. Among the well-known problems with Lomax's Choreometrics are his assumptions of static and homogeneous societies, the methodology of correlating work habits and dance,[17] his purportedly universal analytic rubrics and his hierarchical and evolutionary approach to culture.[18] Like Lomax, Thompson fails to locate his dance examples in specific time periods; his Africa is a place outside of time, always in the ethnographic present. Most importantly, we know very little

about his informants: their age, gender, social class, or level of dance training and skill. Thompson's Africa and diaspora are populated by anonymous, ahistorical dancing bodies that nonetheless revere their equally anonymous and ahistorical ancestors.

There is little doubt that Thompson cherry picks through his evidence to prove a point, but what exactly he was trying to prove was not clear to me until I read the two articles on the "aesthetic of the cool" that precede the book *African Art in Motion*. In "An Aesthetic of the Cool," published in the journal *African Arts* in 1973, Thompson relates metaphors of "coolness" with composure at the personal level and with social stability at the communal level and stresses that "part of the power of the cool is undoubtedly rooted in […] this quality of referral to ancestral custom."[19] The idea of balance that undergirds Thompson's "cool" is exemplified by his paired opposites, where muscular force is paired with respectability, and "wild upsurges of animal vitality are tempered by metaphoric calm."[20] I hardly need to explain the problems with using the dehumanizing adjective "animal" to refer to a vitality understood as particularly African. Thompson's point here, however, is that this "animal vitality" is tempered or cooled—the idea that undergirds his writings on the "aesthetic of the cool."

Although his "aesthetic of the cool" has been widely used in U.S. dance studies, Thompson developed his notion of "the cool" in his 1973 article through non-dance examples. He cites various examples of the term "cool" in selected African languages and makes a connection between coolness, purity, and social order through thinly connected descriptions of various rituals from randomly selected African cultures as well as examples from Cuba, Haiti, and Surinam. The links between coolness, purity, and social equilibrium are never fully explained—these concepts may be related but they are not synonyms. Thompson offers one example of "the cool" from the United States: in an anecdote taken from Zora Neale Hurston's 1935 book *Mules and Men*, an unnamed man in Florida uses the word "cool" in a conversation that Thompson interprets as a moment of flirting, and he claims the man used the term in "an African sense"—without, however, supporting this claim. This passage was in fact my first clue as to the "Americanness" of the "aesthetic of the cool."

An article Thompson published in 1966, also titled "An Aesthetic of the Cool" and subtitled "West African Dance," is where he first began articulating his ideas of a shared Africanist notion of "cool." This article does include dance examples: he refers to specific movement and musical patterns, specifies where dances come from, and he even names some of his informants. Going back to this article was illuminating because it confirmed my earlier suspicions that the "aesthetic of the cool" is a direct rebuttal to racist attitudes in the 1960s United States, countering in

particular the stereotype of violent and out of control Africans. At the end of this short article, Thompson writes:

> Terrible events occur in West Africa not because the inhabitants lack moral control (their dances make this clear) but because thus far no society on earth has ever completely satisfied or embodied a definition of ideal behavior. […] When an African, finding his security threatened, kills his neighbor, depressingly large segments of the Western world believe that he does so instinctively, without any moral check whatsoever. But an increasing familiarity with the ideal of the cool, documented by the nonverbal 'texts' of the dance, will reveal a fact of moral equality.[21]

In the same way that Melville Herskovits' 1941 book *The Myth of the Negro Past* is a rebuttal to the assumption that "Negroes" had no history or culture (i.e., no past), Thompsons's "aesthetic of the cool," with its emphasis on stability, balance, control, and composure, is a response to racist assumptions that Africans and African Americans lacked the ability to be controlled or composed. Thompson articulated his notion of "the cool" during a historical moment of heightened activity in the U.S. Civil Rights movement. Control and composure, respectability and non-violence, core principles of Thompson's notion of "cool," were foundational to the ethos of early civil rights protests such as the lunch counter sit-ins of the 1960s.[22] Thompson took a slang term developed in the United States—"cool" meaning "good," "peaceful," and "calm"—and went on a quest to trace, or perhaps invent, a pan-African origin for cool as an aesthetic that would legitimize his claim of "moral equality" between Africa and "the West" and by analogy, between blacks and whites in the United States.[*]

Thoughts on Africanisms as methodology

Identifying Africanist characteristics has become such a ubiquitous research methodology in U.S.-based dance studies that, when beginning my doctoral dissertation, I was asked to articulate the reasons why I would not be employing this methodology. In this section I will revisit these reasons and point to the essentialist thinking that we risk engaging in by relating our dance analyses to a set of alleged common Africanist traits.

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[*] Art historian Krista Thompson suggests that "[Robert Farris] Thompson's work eventually moved from being a source that investigated African diasporic arts to one that produced them," noting that visual artist Jean-Michel Basquiat acknowledged being influenced by Robert Farris Thompson's book *Flash of the Spirit*. Krista Thompson, "A Sidelong Glance: The Practice of African Diaspora Art History in the United States," *Art Journal* 7, no. 3 (2011): 18.

When making my list of possible Africanisms in capoeira, I began with the idea of paired contraries; looking for opposing ideas that nonetheless coexisted in capoeira practice was a broad enough concept and seemed to fit. The "get down" quality also seemed like an easy fit, but I was uneasy with the implications that a downward focus or groundedness would be conflated with a primitivist "connection to the earth." Claiming this connection for an Afro-diasporic movement practice seemed too simplistic and essentialist.

I continued making a list of core characteristics of capoeira that could fit into the existing model of identifying Africanisms, until I hit a methodological brick wall. Capoeira's *malandragem*—translated as cunning, deception, or trickery—is the core element of the game. It is what makes games enjoyable, smart, beautiful, and memorable. During a capoeira game the goal is to deceive the other player, to signal a kick but deliver a sweep, for example. *Malandragem* is the mark of a skilled player. Could that be an Africanism? And if not, why not? Taken out of the context of capoeira practice, trickery and deception are negative characteristics, and the generalization of these attributes as "Africanist" became immediately problematic. Would I then be claiming that deception and dishonesty were Africanist characteristics? The moment I realized that a negatively valued principle would not work was the moment the entire system of common "Africanist principles" fell apart. Dance scholar Ann Cooper Albright has noted that, when using the analytic model of identifying Africanist principles, "we must be careful not to assume uniformity in the name of unity. Indeed, we must also call attention to the ways in which only certain aspects of African dance (celebratory, acrobatic, presentational, energetic, etc.) get marketed as 'African.'"[23] Recognizing Thompson's aesthetic of the cool as a model of analysis that only allows for celebratory features corroborates my observation that his analytic model is a rebuttal to racist attitudes of the 1960s and an effort to uplift African Americans through respectability politics.

In the past three decades, there have been numerous variations of the analytic model of identifying Africanist commonalities in dance studies, too many to list here. One of the oldest publications focused on commonalities is Kariamu Welsh Asante's "Commonalities in African Dance: An Aesthetic Foundation," first published in 1985 and reprinted in the edited volume *Moving History/Dancing Cultures,* often used as a textbook in U.S. universities.[24] However, as Thomas DeFrantz notes, the idea of identifying commonalities can be traced back to Zora Neale Huston's "Characteristics of Negro Expression," first published in 1934.[25] The big difference between Hurston and Thompson, however, is that Hurston's conclusions are drawn from her personal observations, and her essay does not have the veneer of objectivity that Thompson's writings do.

DeFrantz claims that "Thompson's writings build upon fieldwork that he conducted on the [African] continent"; however, Thompson's research findings came not only from his own research, but from research conducted by members of the team working on Alan Lomax's now infamous Choreometrics project, published in *Folk Song Style and Culture* in 1968. Thompson's own movement analysis was influenced by the Laban-based ideas of Bartenieff and Paulay, who collaborated with Lomax on this project. Thompson notes that Lomax, Bartenieff, and Paulay "confirmed the existence of a distinctive human motion in Africa." In *African Art in Motion*, he provides a lengthy quote from *Folk Song Style and Culture* that includes the tenacious and harmful tropes of a hyper-sexualized and primitivist Africa:

> Because of contrastive use of a variety of transitions, shaping and effort qualities, dancing gives the impression of extreme liveness and high excitability. […] It is with this polyrhythmic handling of the body, combined with dramatic bursts of strength and speed, that the African dancer produces an effect of orgiastic excitement.[26]

In 1969, five years before the publication of *African Art in Motion*, Joann Keali'inohomoku had published her influential article "An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance,"[27] where she critiques exactly these types of primitivizing statements about dances of brown and black others.[*] Although the emerging dance studies community at the time was aware of Thompson's writings,[**] Thompson does not engage with or acknowledge current debates in dance studies, where scholars were starting to write against essentialist claims such as the one above, where "extreme liveness" and "high excitability" (in themselves problematic generalizations) are equated with "orgiastic excitement."

Despite the fact that Thompson was an art historian not engaged with (or interested in) new developments in dance scholarship in the late 1960s

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* Critiquing Walter Sorrel, Keali'inohomoku writes: "Primitive dances, he tells us, are serious but social! He claims that they have 'complete freedom' but that men and women can't dance together. He qualifies the last statement by saying that men and women dance together after the dance degenerates into an orgy!" Joann Keali'inohomoku, "An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance" [1969], in *Moving History/Dancing Cultures*, ed. Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 34.

** In a footnote, Thompson briefly mentions a letter he received from Keali'inohomoku; Thompson, *African Art in Motion*, 230 fn 56; *African Art in Motion* was reviewed by Judith Lynn Hannah in *Dance Research Journal*. Judith Lynn Hannah, "African Art in Motion: Icon and Act by Robert Farris Thompson," *Dance Research Journal*, 7 no. 1 (1974-1975): 31-33

and 70s, his analytic framework has become ubiquitous in dance studies. While, of course, not all U.S.-based scholarship on dances of Africa and the African Diaspora relies on Thompson's Africanisms, it is still in current use.[28] Julie Kerr-Berry, in her chapter "Africanist Elements in American Jazz Dance," published in the anthology *Rooted Jazz Dance*,[29] develops her own version of Thompson's Africanisms, adding one particular element that highlights the essentialism inherent in these Africanisms: "flat-footedness." Kerr-Berry's Africanist element of "flat-footedness refers to when the full surface of the foot makes continuous contact with the ground […]. The foot is not only flat but also bare to ensure reverent contact with the earth."[30] Taking this principle literally would mean that only those born with the loose tendons and ligaments that lead to *pes planus* would be fully able to embody this Africanist element.* The further suggestion that feet have to be "bare to ensure reverent contact with the earth" offers a clear example of the tenacious primitivism inherent in these Africanisms, where Africans are repeatedly conceptualized as "barefoot natives" inhabiting an unchanging past and denied contemporaneity, inventiveness, and authorship.**

A small typo in Cristina Rosa's article "Playing, Fighting, and Dancing: Unpacking the Significance of *Ginga* within the Practice of Capoeira Angola" illustrates how little these Africanisms are grounded on any tangible commonalities (despite our best efforts, typos happen). In her glossary of Africanisms, which derive both from Thompson's canons and Dixon Gottschild's five premises, one of the principles reads as "high-effect juxtaposition."[31] The fact that this Africanist principle works just as well with the word "effect" (consequence, outcome) instead of the original "affect" (emotion, mood) points to the malleability of these principles, which can be bent to describe a wide variety of characteristics.

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* This principle seems to be an attempt to reclaim and code as positive the myth that "black feet" are flat and hence unsuited for dancing. However, by framing flat feet as an "Africanist element," Kerr-Berry only reinforces and legitimizes this essentialist myth. For a discussion of the correlation between flat feet and blackness, see Brenda Dixon Gottschild, "Feet" in *The Black Dancing Body: A Geography from Coon to Cool* (New York and Hampshire: Palgrave McMillan, 2003).

** Seemingly unaware of the scholarship on the complex history of Afro-referenced invention in Afro-diasporic religious traditions, Kerr-Berry claims these practices were simply "retained in the dancing body of Africans for centuries." She goes on the make the claim, without supporting it with any evidence, that *orisha* dances "were one source of jazz-based isolations." Julie Kerr-Berry "Africanist Elements in American Jazz Dance," in *Rooted Jazz Dance: Africanist Aesthetics and Equity in the Twenty-First Century,* ed. Lindsay Guarino, Carlos R.A. Jones, and Wendy Oliver (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2022), 81.

Acknowledging our ancestors

The moment I decided to not use Africanist premises or canons in my research, a whole world of specificity opened up: instead of looking for continuities or commonalities, I began asking who *claimed* to preserve capoeira's Africanity—when, where, and to what end? How had capoeira's tradition been defined at specific moments in history and by whom? What was at stake for specific personages in capoeira history, and what led them to be seen as either detractors or guardians of Africanity? Who were these capoeira "ancestors" and how could I engage with them in a game of capoeira across time, as Susan Leigh Foster invites us to do in "Choreographing History"?[32] These seemed far more interesting questions than identifying any "Africanisms" retained in capoeira.

Eschewing common features and implicit African retentions yielded an analysis that demanded recognition of Afro-diasporic authorship and invention. By letting go of a model of timeless features and principles, I was forced to focus on specific developments at specific time periods, which opened the possibility of investigating the people—actual individuals—who sparked specific debates, set trends, or disseminated a particular innovation. By moving beyond a model of anonymous ancestrality, I was able to see my capoeira "ancestors" as innovators and authors; I was able to listen to their repeated claims of authorship, such as Mestre Bimba's claims of borrowing moves from wrestling, Judo, and Jiu-Jitsu to expand capoeira's movement repertory, or Mestre Canjiquinha's claims of having invented the standard repertory of Bahia's folkloric shows in the 1960s. Authorship and inventiveness are in fact essential to Afro-diasporic "traditional" practices like capoeira. In my book *Staging Brazil: Choreographies of Capoeira*, I propose that the only indisputable tradition in capoeira is a "tradition of invention."[33]

Herskovits's methodology was a product of his time: the early days of anthropology, when scholars were trying to establish the field as scientific and objective. Dixon Gottschild's five Africanist premises were instrumental in identifying and acknowledging African American influences on dance forms deemed solely European such as ballet—in fact her notion of "visibilizing" has enabled dance scholarship to address histories of invisibilization. I wonder what methodologies for studying dances of the African diaspora might be relevant to our particular historical periods—the one we are in right now, at the time of this writing, but also the periods to follow, as this article becomes "dated" with the passage of time. Time passes for everyone. Dances everywhere undergo change—in the United States, in Brazil, in Africa, everywhere. Likewise, dance methodologies should be reexamined periodically; they too must change. My questioning here in no way dismisses work in dance studies that employs Thompson's or Dixon Gottschild's ideas (in all fairness, even my 2006 article may not

be all that bad), but rather it invites dance scholars to historicize the analytic models they employ in their work.

As important as the idea of common Africanisms and the notion of "an" Africanist Aesthetic have been to name, affirm, and visibilize the presence of Africanity in selected African American dance and movement practices, we, as decolonial twenty-first-century dance scholars, need to keep in mind the colonialist and racist ideas that intersect with the histories of the very analytic methods we employ. Examining Thompson's work in detail, including his methodology and his sources, reveals an analytic framework that is very much a product of a place and time. The "aesthetic of the cool" should be understood as particular to the 1960s United States rather than a set of universal givens; Thompson was a white ally whose oeuvre insisted that Africans and African Americans were able to be controlled and composed, in other words, "cool." Moving beyond Thompson's respectability politics and his Africanist commonalities—derived from questionable data and challenged by dance scholars at the time—may allow us to acknowledge new continuities, and, most importantly, to identify productive discontinuities, inventions of traditions, traditions of invention, and Afro-referenced innovation.

Notes

1. Brenda Dixon Gottschild, "Stripping the Emperor: George Balanchine and the Americanization of Ballet," in *Looking Out*., ed. David Gere, Lewis Segal, Patrice Clark Koelsch, and Elizabeth Zimmer (New York: McMillan, 1995); Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996).
2. Sally Ann Ness, "Dancing in the Field: Notes from Memory," in *Moving History/Dancing Cultures*, ed. Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001).
3. Dixon Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence* (13-17).
4. Ana Paula Höfling, "Resistance from the inside: An Analysis of the *jogo de dentro* in Brazilian *capoeira angola,*" *Journal for the Anthropological Study of Human Movement* 14, no. 2 (2006), 86.
5. Llewellyn Smith, *Herskovits at the Heart of Blackness* (Norcross, GA: Vital Pictures, 2009).
6. Melville J. Herskovits, "Problem, Method, and Theory in Afroamerican Studies," *Afroamerica* 1, no. 1-2 (1945), 50.
7. Andrew Apter, "Herskovits's Heritage: Rethinking Syncretism in the African Diaspora," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 3 (1991), 237.
8. Apter, "Herskovits's Heritage," 236.
9. Apter, "Herskovits's Heritage," 238.
10. Apter, "Herskovits's Heritage," 238.
11. Robert Farris Thompson, *African Art in Motion*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press), 1974, 5-45.
12. Thompson, *African Art in Motion,* 28.
13. Thompson, *African Art in Motion,* 29.

14. Thompson, *African Art in Motion,* 5-6.
15. Judith Lynn Hannah, "African Art in Motion: Icon and Art," book review, *Dance Research Journal*, 7 no.1 (Autumn 1974-Winter 1975): 31-33.
16. David Ames, "African Art in Motion by Robert Farris Thompson," *Ethnomusicology* 24, no. 3 (1980), 561-563.
17. Joann W. Kealiʻinohomoku and Drid Williams, "Caveat on Causes and Correlations, Folk Song Style and Culture: A Staff Report by Alan Lomax," review, *CORD News* 6, no. 2 (1974).
18. Susan Leigh Foster, "Worlding Dance: An Introduction," in *Worlding Dance* (New York: Palgrave, 2009).
19. Robert Farris Thompson, "An Aesthetic of the Cool," *African Arts,* 7 no. 1 (1973), 42.
20. Robert Farris Thompson, "An Aesthetic of the Cool," *African Arts,* 7 no. 1 (1973), 42.
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