

Africanist Aesthetics, Jazz Dance, and Notation Walk into a Barre

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Abstract:

This article focuses on the development of a theoretical framework for jazz dance in which researchers hypothesized how motif notation concepts from Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) and Language of Dance® (LOD) could be used to help learners understand how the roots and branches of jazz dance styles are related. We began by investigating the Africanist aesthetics of jazz dance to better grasp how each element influences the feel of jazz as it exists within various jazz dance styles. To differentiate between the styles, we deciphered how the Africanist aesthetics blend with Europeanist aesthetics and movement vocabulary to merge into a variety of distinctly American dance forms. Notation-based dance theory offers a unique lens for analytical observation that helps to support theory discussion surrounding the essence of jazz as it is felt in the body. The Africanist aesthetic framework we created provides conceptual tools for comprehending the scope of jazz dance and a movement analysis perspective that might contribute to social, concert, and commercial or entertainment research. We hope this framework proves useful to others in their jazz inquiries by offering fertile conceptual ground for jazz dance research and pedagogical development within academic and artistic practices.

Keywords: jazz dance | Laban Movement Analysis | Language of Dance | American dance | dance education | dance notation

Article:

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of jazz dance and a movement analysis perspective that might contribute to social, concert, and commercial or entertainment research. We hope this framework proves useful to others in their jazz inquiries by offering fertile conceptual ground for jazz dance research and pedagogical development within academic and artistic practices.

We begin by exploring the manifestation and embodiment of the Africanist aesthetics represented by symbolic notation to clarify their essences. Next, we deepen analysis of six representative jazz styles to reveal our understanding of the blends of Africanist and Europeanist aesthetics as manifested in African American vernacular roots, Latin jazz, jazz funk, classical jazz, contemporary jazz, and lyrical jazz. We developed figures and charts to provide jazz faculty, jazz dance students, and jazz dance artists with theoretical language, notation, and a diagrammatic framework depicting a layered literacy approach that can serve various instructional and creative needs. We believe these tools can assist with bridging gaps in awareness around which jazz is often discussed as mere social, entertainment, or recreational practices, and we provide three examples for how they could be used.

RATIONALE AND STANCE OF THE RESEARCHERS

Our desire to deepen our understanding of various jazz dance styles was fueled by our need as instructors to be clear with our language about the similarities and differences among jazz dance styles and in our approaches to identifying how jazz dance is experientially different from modern and ballet. We were conscious that Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) itself is situated in Eurocentric ways of knowing. To ensure reliability and respect for the Africanist aesthetics when we analyzed using LMA, we worked tirelessly with video, music, and movement activities that represented the lifeworld of the genre and styles studied. There is no expectation that we, two North Americans, can know Africanist aesthetics as Africans do, but, as jazz dancers of many styles, we fully attended to the styles of jazz that are living traditions in North American society by embodying the Africanist aesthetics as authentically as our body, mind, and spirits allowed.

Our initial goals with this exploration were to use multiple forms of dance literacy to deconstruct “where the jazz is” in what our students call jazz dance. Because Western concert dance vocabulary is often used to teach jazz dance forms, we aimed to distinguish the disparate movement concepts across the jazz styles that are inherited from Africanist aesthetics and provide language and tools to address the dance vocabulary that we consider to be missing from our students’ voices. Our aim was also to provide ways to help educators, students, and choreographers to gain a broader perspective of the Africanist aesthetics that influence the feel of jazz in the forms they have been dancing in studios and schools.

THEORIES THAT GROUND THE INVESTIGATION

The seminal texts by Brenda Dixon Gottschild (Citation1996, Citation2000), Marshall and Jean Stearns (Citation1968), and Robert Ferris Thompson (Citation1974, Citation2011) provide a clear theoretical base for understanding the concepts of Africanist aesthetics found in jazz dance forms. Applying these concepts—in English—to physical movement in each of the styles of jazz dance revealed the similarities and differences, which we then further analyzed using motif notation. The Africanist aesthetics provided the hub of our understanding, but it was the motif notation—the dance-based dance literacy—that provided us with the framework to distill and distinguish areas of convergence and divergence.

Dance-based dance literacy using motif notation holds many possibilities for the discipline of dance, such as reading an artwork as text (Barthes Citation1978); reading and analyzing the body (Laban and Lawrence Citation1947; Laban Citation1956); understanding dance as culture (Williams Citation2004); understanding and contextualizing events, causes, and motivations in history (Walsh Citation1951); phenomenologically bracketing what we see in dance (Sheets-Johnstone Citation1966); and so on. Because notation concepts can provide visual clarification of assimilation and appropriation of Africanist aesthetics concepts, the process of using notation can provide outcomes for increased clarity about vocabulary representing the jazz styles.

We used motif notation because our dance experiences with these analytical tools have shown us that when we have multiple forms of representation, we learn more deeply and sometimes more quickly, and in multidimensional ways that mere discussion in English might not capture.

METHOD

Africanist aesthetics is a broadly used term representing the synthesis and hybridization of cultures of a wide array of African coastal peoples who were landed together in the Americas during the slave trade between 1500 and 1870. To wrestle with that topic, we synthesized information about Africanist aesthetics from Gottschild (Citation1996, Citation2000), Thompson (Citation1974, Citation2011), and Stearns and Stearns (Citation1968) and formed ten foundational elements (ephebism, improvisation, propulsive rhythm, polyrhythms, polycentric body, valuing the average body and equilibrium, ancestorism, coolness, embracing the conflict, and high affect juxtaposition), seven of which could be represented symbolically using concepts from either LMA or Language of Dance® (LOD) motif notation frameworks (Hutchinson Guest and Curran Citation2008). We outlined these seven Africanist aesthetics, thus expanding our comprehension of the cognitive and psychomotor relationships between the Africanist aesthetics and the motif notation.

Because jazz dance is an experiential phenomenon that lives in the jazz dancer's body and soul, and in the music, we made conscious efforts to enliven ourselves physically and intellectually to develop theory. Working with six jazz dance, jazz music, and dance notation colleagues, we danced, experimented, and analyzed to find answers that moved us beyond intellectual investigation and mechanics of the body. Through this process, we were able to connect the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor experiences of jazz dance to support our understanding.


As we explored, we discovered the movement elements and aesthetic values that were needed to generate the appropriate jazz feeling for each style. This process led us to understand how the feelings of the six styles are embodied, both toward intensity of elements and aesthetic goals. As experienced in jazz music where the jazz feel can best be understood through hearing and playing in a given style, we observed that jazz dance follows this same principle. Qualities and rhythms are felt, but are fluid and nuanced so that it is nearly impossible to pin down why the rhythmic structure has such a distinct flavor. Thus, the word *jazzy* is the best adjective that we have found to describe dance of this nature, and it is a commonly used term among jazz dancers, albeit colloquial, to reference this point. By graphically mapping the qualities of Africanist aesthetics for six distinct jazz styles, we gained a deeper appreciation of the heritage of the styles and new tools with which we could differentiate among the styles that are often conflated.



RESULTS

Three of the ten Africanist aesthetics concepts are metaphorical rather than movement ideas, so these could not be translated into movement notation. We provide analysis on the remaining seven foundational elements for which symbolic representations were represented: improvisation, ephesism, propulsive rhythm, polycentric body, high affect juxtaposition, embracing the conflict, and aesthetic of the cool. We provide a description of each Africanist aesthetic along with motif notation that best represents each concept, followed by movement examples that portray six selected jazz styles. The six styles we selected are African American vernacular roots, classical jazz, Latin jazz, jazz funk, lyrical jazz, and contemporary jazz. Although these styles have diversity and subcategories within them, we chose to work with these six as anchor points for our analysis because they are styles commonly taught under the umbrella of jazz dance technique within studios and schools. We acknowledge that each choreographer and each jazz dance work will have its own identifying characteristics that present exceptions to the attributes we identify. We believe the six selected styles provide a structure that is useful for comparing and contrasting between them and with other styles of jazz not explored here. We then provide figures and tables revealing our detailed analysis of the relationships between the jazz styles and examples of how to use the tables and figures in sample teaching and composing practices.

EXPLORING THE AFRICANIST AESTHETICS


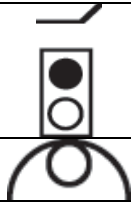








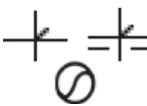
Play and Improvisation

Play and improvisation define one's relationship to music, of the self to other, to the community, and to themes and concepts present at the moment. Stearns and Stearns (Citation1968) identified the freedom to improvise using a wide variety of material. Thompson (Citation2011) noted the importance of the active dialogue between the dance and the music and the importance of improvising in relationship to the larger group. We chose the LOD concept of the person's relationship to the rhythm of the music P  to represent the playful and often improvisational relationship jazz dancers have to their music selections (see Table 1).

Jazz dancers and choreographers experience the concept of relationship with music P  universally, and, thus, it is the most powerful common thread that unifies the jazz dance forms that we explored. Although the individual's personal relationship to the music P  is essential to all jazz styles, the values exhibited in each style vary. One's relationship to music across jazz styles can vary from the playful footwork inspired by the rhythmic heartbeat of Latin music and

the long-short, long-short weight sensing ⁹ rhythm of swing, to the syncopated rhythms danced to lyrics in contemporary jazz.



TABLE 1 Seven of Ten Africanist Aesthetics Translated to Dance Vocabulary and Dance Notation

Africanist Aesthetics Concepts	Africanist Aesthetics Terms in Dance Notation	Africanist Aesthetics Terms Described in Dance Terms
Play and Improvisation		Person relating to music, being with the music, or in some cases, being the music
Ephesism		Torso in Free Flow Effort Quality: ongoing, yielding, fluent, easy going, pouring
Ephesism		Uplift, Buoyant in relation to gravity
Propulsive Rhythm		Slight or strong accents or impulses to begin an action or phrase
Polycentric Body		Rhythm State: Sensing of weight with gravity and intuited use of time, by using both Weight and Time Effort Qualities
Polycentric Body		Whole Body in Flexion
High Affect Juxtaposition		Simultaneous, Sequential, and/or Successive Actions with limbs or body areas
Embracing the Conflict		Rotation of pelvis in relation to other body parts
High Affect Juxtaposition		Cross Lateral body patterning: Establishing three-dimensional movement, differentiating the diagonal quadrants of our bodies
High Affect Juxtaposition		Juxtaposing radically different ideas sequentially to undermine the concept of uniformity all while embodying the timing and the rhythm
Embracing the Conflict		Dream State, Passion Drive, Transverse Spatial Tension: exploring Time, Weight, and Flow with intermittent attention to Space (others or the world) with an approach to Kinesphere using three-dimensional tension


Although the physical manifestations differ, each of these styles identifies with the root of the Africanist aesthetic of play and improvisation. In fact, it is this umbrella concept that shapes the rest of the movement ideas addressed herein.





Ephedism

Ephedism epitomizes a youthful energy and way of relating to oneself, others, and the world. This vital aliveness, fluidity, and flexibility to respond to change translates into a physical suppleness that allows the body to accommodate to changes brought about by carrying a heavy load (Thompson Citation1974, 1–45) or by encountering uneven surfaces. Gottschild (Citation2000) noted that the ephed energy of the movement takes precedence over form, and feeling registers as intense bodily sensation rather than emotion. We used three concepts to symbolize this complex

principle: (1) the torso in free flow  , conveying vibrancy and sensuality; (2) the dynamics of rhythmic uplift  needed to resist gravity and to depict the sensation of youthful approach to

life; and (3) the concept of weight sensing ⁹ , which connects humans to the earth. The experience

of free flow in the torso  is part of what gives jazz dance its ephed sensuality, evoking a sense of youthful vibrancy often capitalized on for its evocative sex appeal.

Rhythmic uplift  is readily found in the pulse that exists in what is known as *groove*. Groove is established when the downward bounce and buoyant uplift in the body repeats to establish rhythm and a feeling that reflects the subdivision of the beat of the music. We see groove embodied in African American vernacular roots, Latin jazz, and jazz funk when rebounding energy is felt in the core of the body and the torso circles upward on the appropriately named upbeat. The ultimate effect of rhythmic uplift  in jazz dance is the feeling that one could dance forever, without fatigue, and be forever young. Generally, uplift  exists in other dance forms, but, in this context, we address the rebounding, buoyant, rhythmic manifestation of uplift  contributed by the Africanist aesthetics.




Weight sensing ⁹ is the dancer's powerful connection to gravity and, thus, the earth. In weight

sensing ⁹ , the dancer is keenly aware of his or her pelvis in relationship to gravity and the gentle












rebounding swing of the dancer's body with each shift of weight. Weight sensing ⁹ is particularly strong in African American vernacular roots and other styles closely linked to social dance








practices. On the other hand, weight sensing ⁹ is nearly absent from most lyrical jazz and contemporary jazz works. It is reduced in favor of balletic or modern dance relationships to gravity, which use overcurve and undercurve to shift the weight through space, rather than perpetual

rebounding of the pelvis to bounce the dancer's weight through space. Weight sensing ⁹ , in the form of a bounce, a head nod, a swinging snap, or a simple step-touch, rocks the body in gravity

and, when added to a steady propulsive rhythm, creates the sense of groove that is contagious within the jazz dance idiom. Weight sensing  paired with an emphasis on time, known as rhythm state , is one of the most powerful combinations of elements that make movement feel jazzy because rhythm state  reinforces embodiment of groove.





Propulsive Rhythm











Propulsive rhythm means simultaneously suspending and preserving the beat, giving the movement a swinging quality (Stearns and Stearns Citation1968). By giving equal emphasis to subdivisions of the pulse, dancers enliven the off-beat phrasing with accents  to create syncopation (Thompson Citation1974). Propulsive rhythm can feel like a surge of energy and is part of what makes jazz dance so infectious for its participants. It is continually renewing and inspiring one's relationship to the music . We used two ideas to symbolize this percussive and propulsive approach to rhythm. These two ideas are often paired together, but can also be found separately. The first concept is slight  or strong accent  to begin an action, sometimes called impulse phrasing , due to the accent  being paired with a body part that leads the action. The second movement concept is rhythm state , the dynamic interplay between sudden  and sustained  time effort qualities, and strong  and light  weight effort qualities.





When it comes to defining jazz and manifesting the feel of jazz, the use of propulsive rhythm sometimes creates a divisive line in theory. Styles that embody a propulsive rhythm, including African American vernacular roots, Latin jazz, some classical jazz, and jazz funk, are also those that more closely identify with social or street dance movement vocabulary. Lyrical and contemporary jazz often lack this Africanist aesthetic; however, conceptual remnants of rhythmically propulsive origins can be seen in simultaneous  sequential  and overlapping or successive  use of body parts, the extensive use of impulse , and the presence of body-part leading  in both lyrical jazz and contemporary jazz. Weight sensing , when paired with rhythm state , might be one of the most powerful combinations of elements that make movement feel jazzy because it reinforces embodiment of groove.

Polycentric Body





Having a polycentric body encourages movement to initiate from more than one center, providing the ultimate democracy of body parts in relationship to one another (Gottschild Citation2000). A jazz dancer needs a fluid spine, a body stance and posture characterized by flexed knees, and a


bend at the waist or hips to maintain multiple movement and rhythmic patterns among body parts (Stearns and Stearns Citation 1968). Symbols that help us represent this idea include whole body in flexion , simultaneous actions , sequential , and successive actions .

Whole body in flexion  resembles the predatory animal stance we see in much jazz dance. The dancers yield to the earth so they can access the power of gravity and use it for sensing their weight  and for manifesting ephemerism. The power of the legs and the fluid responsiveness of the ankles, knees, and hips to gravity are requisite for polyrhythms to exist within the anatomical structure of the body. Similarly, the whole body in flexion  allows the entire body to inhabit the rhythm of the movement and to fully access free flow  of the hips, ribs, and shoulders. When whole body flexion  and free flow  occur together, the dancer can move many body parts with simultaneous  or successive actions . Latin jazz and jazz funk reveal simultaneous  and successive actions  in body rolls, spiraling, and snaking actions of the body, which can only be achieved with a supple body that flexes with ease.








In addition, a strong cross lateral  connectivity in the torso and a rotating pelvis  work together to generate the iconic use of the pelvis in Cuban motion and jazz isolations. The cross lateral  use of the body emphasizes the hourglass figure of the female form and is responsible for the seductive jazz walks seen in Latin jazz, classical jazz, jazz funk, and other hybrid forms. The rotating pelvis  can exist in any of the three planes in jazz dance, thus emphasizing shaping of the torso and when executing a figure-of-eight in the hips. Regardless of the range of freedom of motion, the pelvis as a center of movement is one of the essential qualities that notably separates jazz dance from modern dance and ballet.

High Affect Justification


High affect juxtaposition marks the paradox or moment of extreme contrast within a dance phrase (Gottschild Citation 1996, 13). From high to low, quick to slow, or big to small, one can mark these moments with the use of an accent . Both slight  and strong accents  are just the first of many dynamics seen in jazz dance, but they are universal in their presence within the individual's personal relationship to music .





Accents  exist in the early African American vernacular roots and the hard-hitting jazz funk of the late twentieth and early twenty-first-century music videos. Although the intensity of juxtaposition varies from piece to piece, the dramatic purpose and striking effect of these contrasting moments are part of what has made jazz dance so appealing to the entertainment industry and commercial dance venues. High affect juxtaposition supports the dynamic theatricality common to performances held in large-scale arenas and stadiums.

Embracing the Conflict

Embracing the conflict, essential to the context of jazz dance, refers to the inherent sense of contrariety that emerges in jazz dance on a personal, social, and historical level (Gottschild Citation1996) and can be seen as a simultaneous pushing and pulling through twisted core–distal relationships in the body in the form of transverse spatial tension . The twisting and wringing of the torso communicates the feeling state of the performer as he or she exists within the story and, thus, offers personal insight into the narrative or emotional theme situating the meaning-making in a visceral experience of desire, yearning, and surrender. The use of transverse spatial tension  is augmented by frequent use of dream state , and passion drive , which both take the dancer's attention away from space and into sensing and sense memory of the movement or narrative—often in the form of bittersweetness. The dancer emerges from dream state  and passion drive  to relate to self, other, and the world using various forms of relating , most predominantly awareness, addressing, motion toward and away, traveling toward and away, nearness, and grasping contact. Embracing the conflict makes the individual performer inextricable from the larger context personally, socially, and historically.

Aesthetic of the Cool

Aesthetic of the cool is how a dancer focuses his or her attitude and gaze to combine vitality with composure resulting in a dynamic tension between visible attitudes and those that deliberately remain masked (Gottschild Citation2000). Robert Farris Thompson (Citation1973) identifies the cool demeanor as an aesthetic attitude of nonchalance that contrasts with the hot intensity of the moment. This intensity is generated through physical prowess and valued passion of the sexual body that is requisite to contrast the cool exterior. In jazz dance, aesthetic of the cool can manifest as a detached facial expression juxtaposed against a cross-lateral, asymmetrical body shape, intricate footwork, or impressive athleticism. We used the concepts of indirect and direct space effort  with their contrasting factors to represent how one focuses one's attention in aesthetic of the cool.

The aesthetic of the cool , or the simultaneous use of hot and cool, exists in different capacities. The element that seems to drive all other aspects of this playful hot and cool  feeling in a jazz piece is the intentional use of the gaze and, often, the intentional interplay between direct and indirect attention to space . The use of focus does two things for the jazz dancer. First, it makes the dancer human. Second, emphasizing the vision of the dancer, while in motion and in connection to the audience, puts the dancer in a relational or social context. The aesthetic of the cool  can vary in its tone, but it is an essential ingredient in creating the feel of jazz.

ANALYZING SIX JAZZ STYLES








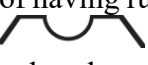


What makes something feel jazzy? How do we know we are dancing a jazz combination rather than a modern dance or ballet combination? By viewing jazz dance through the lens of these foundational movement components, we could distinguish commonalities and differences among

various styles of jazz, as well as unique combinations and expressions used by individual choreographers or jazz dance works. The motif notation and movement concepts offer vocabulary for discussing the what, how, and why of jazz dance. Through investigation of each movement component, we identified aspects of jazz that work together to cultivate the feel of jazz, as intrinsic to the movement. The tables and figures that resulted from our research help us to depict the various strands of jazz as they relate to the Africanist aesthetics.


Although jazz dance clearly emerged from a social dance context and often from couple dances, we narrowed our focus to improvisational and choreographic concert approaches to jazz dance to assess which of the Africanist aesthetics were most prevalent and in what ways. We chose the following six jazz dance styles because these six are commonly taught in jazz dance courses and in studios.






African American Vernacular Roots in Performance

The African American vernacular dance steps performed to rhythms of blues, ragtime, and dixieland music of 1890 to 1940 (Malone Citation 1996, 70) were repurposed from social to theatrical settings that showcased free-styling individuals and choreographed groups dancing the Black Bottom, Boogie Woogie, Cakewalk, Camel Walk, Charleston, Jitterbug, Lindy, and Swing. Although music and dance of this era was not labeled jazz until roughly 1920, in retrospect, the dance and music is categorized under the umbrella terms *jazz dance* and *jazz music*, respectively.








The music of this era, which shares the same names, supports rhythmic uplift  and continuous weight sensing . For example, the propulsive rhythm of Boogie Woogie (a long-short, long-short, long-short rhythm) promotes a swing-like feel that reinforces weight sensing  in the body. Whole body in flexion , free flow in the torso , and transverse spatial tension  allow for the movement of the shoulders, pelvis, and limbs to articulate the rhythms of the music. Earl Snake Hips Tucker of the 1930s Savoy Ballroom and Cotton Club exemplifies the polycentric body in his use of successive movements and extreme free flow  of the whole body to create the illusion of having rubber legs (Hazzard-Gordon Citation 1990, 122–23). The use of the forms of relating  makes African American vernacular roots feel sociable, playful, and infectious for the observer. Interpersonal relating contrasts with the use of dream state  and passion drive , revealing the personal feelings of the dancer embracing the conflict.

Latin Jazz



Latin jazz, as inspired by the rhythms of salsa, cha-cha, merengue, samba, and others, also retains all of the Africanist aesthetics of African American vernacular roots. The difference between Latin jazz and African American vernacular roots resides in the rhythmic structures underlying the footwork and the consequential variation in weight sensing , use of the pelvis, transverse spatial


















tension , and cross-lateral  connectivity in the torso. The weight sensing  in Latin jazz tends to follow a circular rise and fall, whereas the African American vernacular roots forms tend to swing and bounce. For instance, the syncopation of Latin jazz is based on the *clave* rhythm at the heart of Latin music, and the playful footwork is inspired by this rhythmic heartbeat. The rocking footwork inspires a circular figure-of-eight of the hips and oppositional movement in the shoulders. Free flow in the torso  also manifests in a pulsing rib cage for merengue-based Latin jazz. The forms of relating  are inherent in the social origins of Latin jazz as the dancers relate to each other and the audience as partners. Frank Hatchett played extensively with Latin rhythms, blending footwork from traditional Latin social dances with presentational concert dance values (Hatchett and Gitlin Citation2000). Andy Blankenbuehler's choreography for *In the Heights* blends Latin jazz dance with jazz funk and hip hop (2007–2008). Choreographer Sergio Trujillo used Latin jazz dance to tell the story of Emilio and Gloria Estefan's rise to fame in the Broadway musical *On Your Feet* (On Your Feet Citation2015).

Classical Jazz









Classical jazz contrasts sharply with African American vernacular roots and Latin jazz as it adopts Europeanist qualities from ballet and modern and Asianist qualities from East Indian dance forms, and, hence, does not retain the signature jazz feel of weight sensing , rhythmic uplift , and the ephebic spine  that are key to African American vernacular roots and Latin jazz dance styles. Classical jazz keeps the deep flexion of the lower body, but relinquishes some of the rebound in the legwork, preferring the elegance of a floating upper body in relationship to the rhythmic stepping patterns of the lower body. This blend of aesthetics fostering an independent rhythmic identity was the hallmark of Matt Mattox (Semko Citation2015). Jerome Robbins and Peter Gennaro used actions with slight  and strong accents  that typify much of the choreography for *West Side Story* and, perhaps, most clearly in the finger snap-driven choreography of Robbins's "Cool" (West Side Story Citation1961). The use of the pelvis and direct space  work synergistically to create the sexual energy embedded in classical jazz dance. Director and choreographer Pat Taylor, of JazzAntiqua Dance and Music Ensemble, has used the mobility of the pelvis in subtle ways, whereas others have employed it explicitly, and at times promiscuously as seen in some of Bob Fosse's work. Classical jazz is home to an array of iconic jazz dancers and choreographers over the decades, such as Gene Kelly, Jerome Robbins, Matt Mattox, Gus Giordano, Bob Fosse, and Lynn Simonson, who used these qualities with more theatricalized forms of relating  on stage and screen.



Jazz Funk

Jazz funk is a somewhat sprawling category of music and dance, as it originated with the funk of James Brown and has evolved over the decades with influences by R&B, hip-hop, pop, and electronic dance music. The most recognizable signature feel in jazz funk is perhaps its use of weight sensing  combined with an accented rhythmic uplift , as inspired by the driving duple




















rhythm with laid back accents  on counts two and four. Dance hall music and videos, such as Jon Aizpun's choreography for Rhianna's "Pon de Replay" (Pon de Replay Citation₂₀₀₅), are good examples of this duple beat accented music that incites a rhythmic uplift . The strong accents  on two and four incite a piston-like action, up and down with the beat. B-boys inhabit this physical groove while dancing to funk-inspired music for their top rock. Jazz funk incorporates polyrhythms, as the groove resonates in multiple body parts simultaneously and is facilitated by the stance of whole body in flexion  and free flow through the torso . The free flow in the torso  and whole body in flexion  also support the frequent incorporation of simultaneous , sequential  and successive actions  that are only achieved by a supple body that flexes with ease. All of these ideas converge into one, as seen in snaking actions of Les Twins, twin brothers Laurent and Larry Nicolas Bourgeois from France, who came to wide public awareness in a televised dance competition (World of Dance Citation₂₀₁₀). On the other hand, the pelvic rotations  and figure-of-eight pattern of cross lateral use of the torso  go unemphasized as the duple funk music allows little time for circular pathways in the groove. Jazz funk often alternates between powerful accents  of the head, arms, and torso with a free flow  groove in the torso. This combination of elements is, perhaps, best exemplified in Anthony Thomas's choreography for Janet Jackson's video "Rhythm Nation" (Rhythm Nation Citation₁₉₈₉). He uses extensive piston-like groove and strong accents  to generate high affect juxtaposition. Relationship  continues to be present as the dancers relate to themselves, each other, and the audience with acute awareness and direct attention to space . Strong athleticism among dancers is required to provide the wow factor of high affect juxtaposition needed to project to audiences in stadiums large enough to house music performers such as Madonna, Britney Spears, and Beyoncé.

Lyrical Jazz

Lyrical jazz retains the fewest of the Africanist aesthetics among the styles we analyzed, yet it does unequivocally retain a personal relationship to music . Lyrical jazz was originally set to power ballads of the 1980s and 1990s, including *Billboard Magazine* hits like Bette Midler's "Wind Beneath My Wings," Heart's "Alone," REO Speedwagon's "I Can't Fight This Feeling," and myriad ballads from Madonna, Cher, Wilson Phillips, and the Bangles. Favoring the individual's relationship to the story within a song in the spirit of embracing the conflict, lyrical jazz partners the meaning and the rhythms of the lyrics with the movement. The use of accents , impulse phrasing , and intentional use of direct  and indirect space , coupled with a free flowing, expressive torso  and transverse spatial tension , create the humanity behind the personalized stories in lyrical jazz. By emphasizing dream state  and

passion drive , lyrical jazz dancers embrace the conflict through dynamic gestures and facial expressions. Forms of relating  are canonized in works by choreographer Doug Caldwell (Citation2016) and, more recently in, Mia Michaels emotional “Gravity” (Michaels Citation2010), Mandy Moore’s sentimental “It Must Have Been Love” (Moore Citation2009), and Tovariss Wilson’s cathartic “Right Here Waiting” (Wilson Citation2005).

Contemporary Jazz

Like lyrical jazz, contemporary jazz no longer emphasizes weight sensing  or rhythm state . Curiously, some of the Africanist aesthetics have been readopted by contemporary jazz, making contemporary jazz a closer relative to African American vernacular roots than its predecessor, lyrical jazz. The lineage of jazz aesthetics can be clearly seen in the use of free flow in the torso , polycentrism in the form of simultaneous  and successive actions , frequent use of accents , impulse phrasing , whole body flexion , use of both indirect and direct attention to space  to generate the aesthetic of the cool , and the dancers’ ubiquitous personal relationship to the music P . The continued use of embracing the conflict and emotional narrative is present with the use of dream state , passion drive , and forms of relating , which are often cathartic. Contemporary jazz, which is often set to pop music, in which syncopated rhythms are most often sung (Shaffer and Wharton Citation2017), does not regularly achieve groove in the individual’s relationship to music P , but, rather, uses expressive embodiment of distinct accents  and textures to manifest a relationship with the music. The combination of whole body flexion , free flow in the torso , and interspersed direct attention to space  in contemporary jazz often evoke an animalistic power that is ephelic and captivating as commonly seen in the choreographic works of Sonya Tayeh’s “Tore My Heart” (Tayeh Citation2009) and Travis Wall’s “Like Real People Do” (Wall Citation2014).

Exploring the Tables

Table 2 provides details about each of the six jazz styles analyzed using seventeen criteria, which consist of concepts about body, time, energy and dynamics, effort qualities, kinesphere, improvisation, and relationship.

To visualize relationships between the styles, we created a Venn diagram (see Figure 1) depicting shared and unshared qualities among the styles. The Africanist aesthetics are depicted in the upper rectangle. The lower rectangle represents theoretical relationships we see between ballet and modern dance (the scope of this article foregoes detailed elaboration into qualities of ballet and modern dance). The six overlapping ovals represent the six related and overlapping styles of jazz dance and their corresponding qualities with Africanist and Europeanist aesthetics.

Table 2 Africanist Aesthetics in the Family of Jazz Dance Styles (Blank Spaces Indicate a Predominantly Europeanist Aesthetic)

	Body					Music	Energy and Dynamics		Effort Qualities					Approach to Kinesphere	Contextual Theory	
	Polycentric body: Simultaneous, sequential, & Successive Actions, Body part isolations§ #	Initiate with Accented Body Part‡§#	Whole Body in Flexion#	Torso emphasizes Cross Lateral connectivity patterning ‘#	Pelvis Rotates in relation to other body parts	Person relating to music, music and dance not separate entities†§#	Accents§	Buoyant rhythmic uplift‡	Weight Sensing bounce‡§	Rhythm State †‡§ (Time + Weight)	Dream State** (Flow + Weight)	Passion Drive** (Flow + Weight + Time)	Direct or Indirect Visual Focus#	Transverse Spatial Tension**	Improvisation†‡§#	Relationship**
African American Vernacular Roots															✓	
Latin Jazz															✓	
Classical Jazz																
Jazz Funk															✓	
Lyrical Jazz																
Contemporary Jazz																





Figure 1 can provide students, teachers, and jazz dance artists with a reference tool for examining how two styles might or might not share affinities. For example, by looking at the center of the six overlapping ovals, one can find that the person's relationship to music P , forms of relating , and accents  are shared by all six of the overlapping jazz styles, thus reinforcing the importance of one's relationship with music P  in all six styles. This information can inform the way we understand, frame, and teach jazz dance by offering new structures for guiding our pedagogy, creative projects, educational theory, and advocacy.

Figure 2 is a three-pronged tool that represents how jazz dance styles relate and coexist with each other from the viewpoint of concert dance, social dance, and commercial dance domains. By tracing the contexts in which jazz dance exists, we can see how social vernacular dances continued to revive jazz dance, both in the concert and commercial settings throughout the temporal progression of jazz dance. Figure 2 provides the jazz dance scholar with insights into how jazz dance styles cross-pollinated as each was repurposed to meet different artistic and social needs. We can also see how Latin social dance and hip-hop continue to bridge the social dance experience with jazz trends in various performance venues. Although Figure 2 represents three venues over time, it is structured with the intention of highlighting common affinities and relationships rather than to be chronologically precise.

Our pedagogical discussions about teaching and learning jazz dance in academic environments gave birth to the realization that jazz dance curricula are often narrowed to focus mostly on technique classes, without as much curricular support of jazz composition, history, theory, and pedagogy that are typically essential in modern dance and ballet curricula. We felt it important to focus our inquiry on jazz pedagogy and analysis in ways that might assist jazz dance teachers to find new ways to interweave theory of Africanist aesthetics into their composition, history, and technique classes.

We immediately saw how an instructor could take one of the figures or tables and develop an entire curriculum around the concepts, a jazz style, or a comparison of styles. This practice could provide, for example, new ways of scaffolding jazz dance technique and performance training by incorporating new ways to introduce movement concepts from a particular style.

Figure 1. Relationships between six jazz styles and Africanist and Europeanist aesthetics.

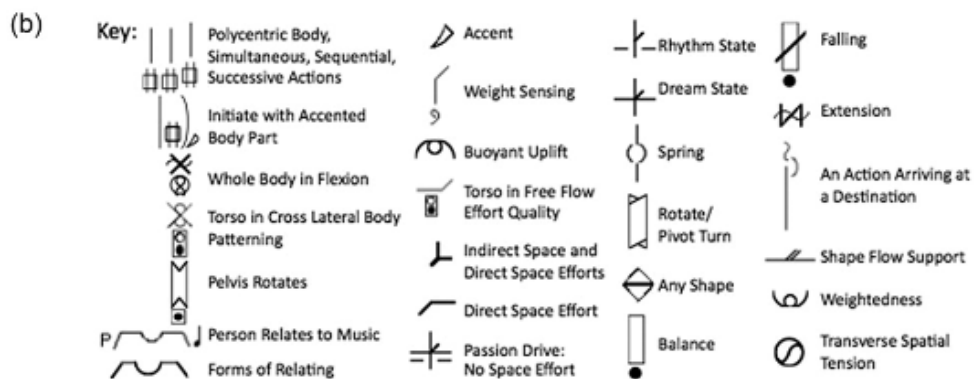
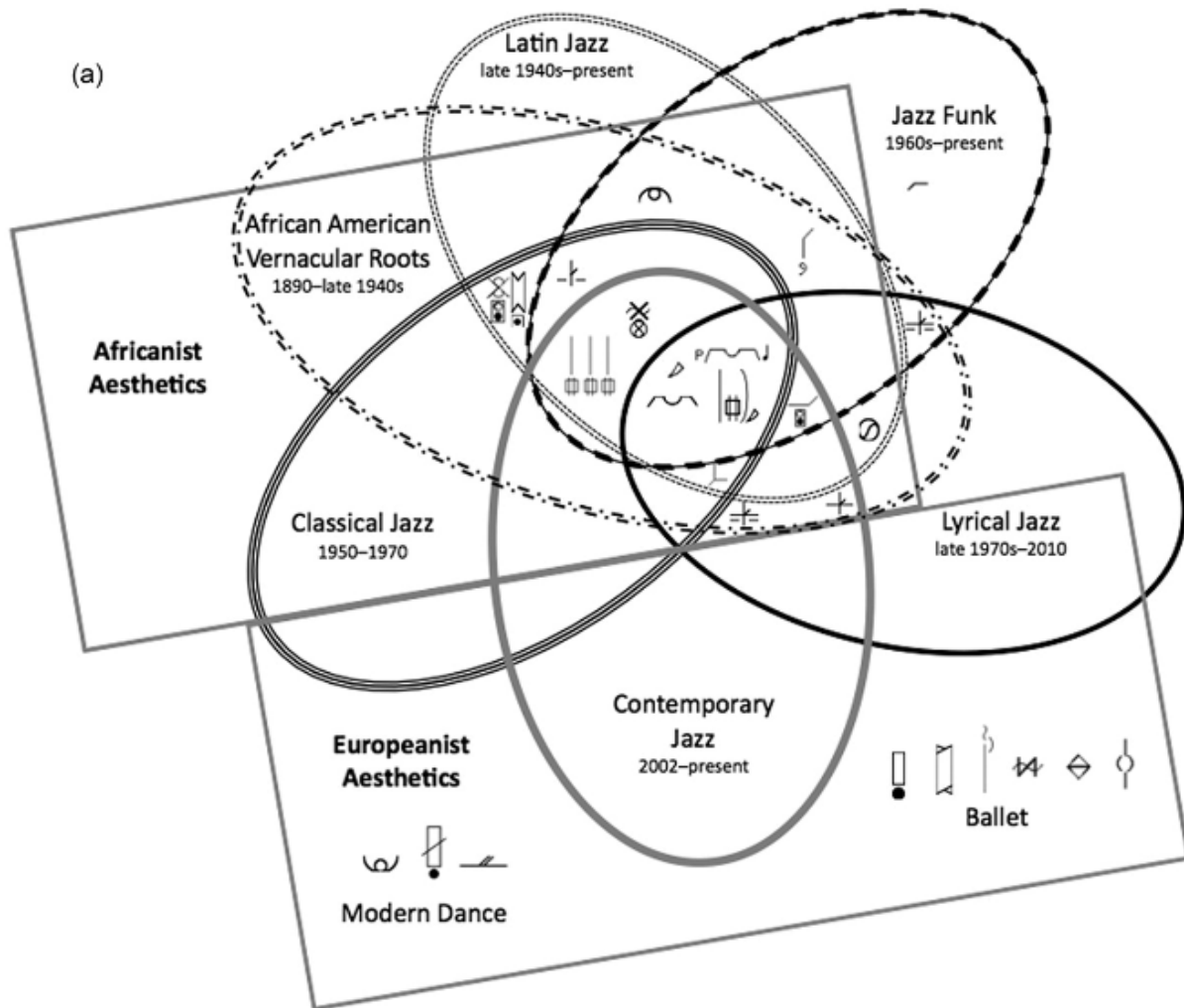
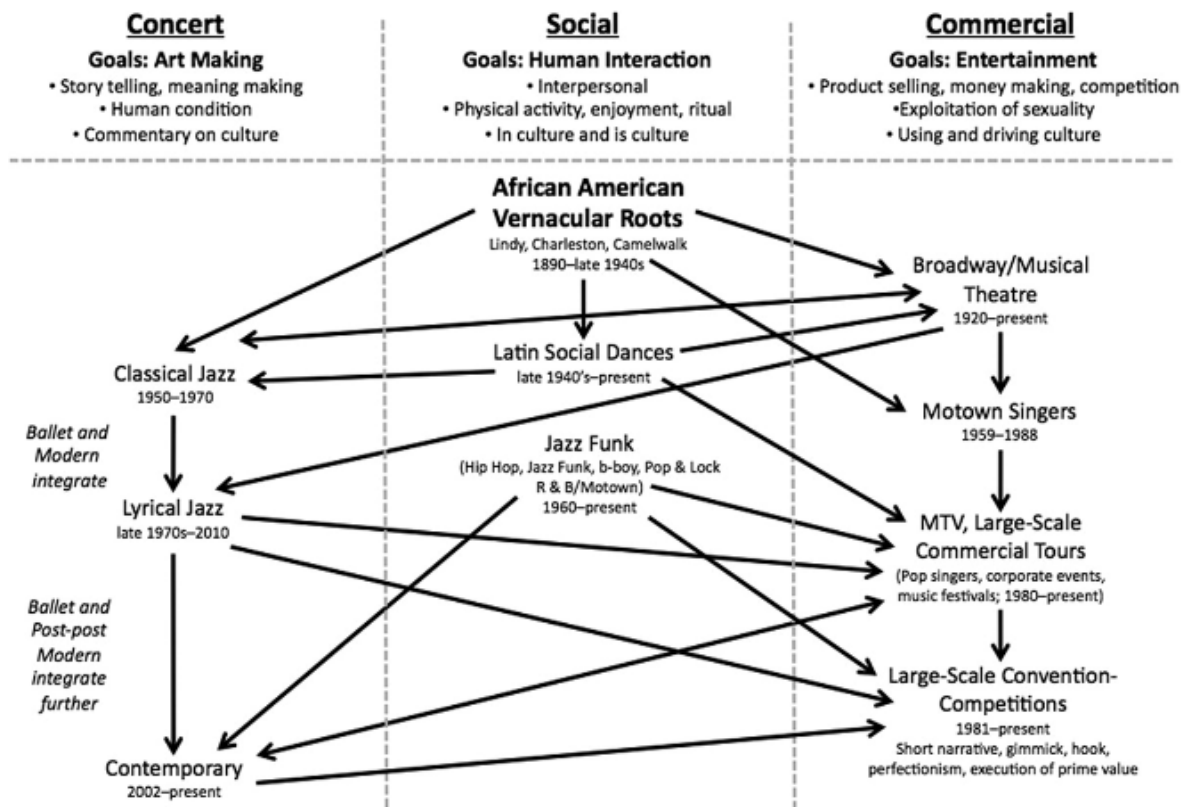




Figure 2. Relationships between vernacular roots and concert dance, social dance, and commercial dance.






PEDAGOGICAL APPLICATIONS






Example 1: Teaching Example in a Classical Jazz Technique Class

Students today are likely more familiar with contemporary jazz dance than other forms of jazz dance; therefore, comparing and contrasting their learning to what is familiar might offer a new inroad for investigation. When teaching classical jazz, we have found that Table 2 is a handy, quick reference for highlighting the body and effort and energy concepts of classical jazz to assist students, who might only be familiar with contemporary jazz. For example, classical jazz involves

more use of cross lateral  patterning and pelvic rotations . These elements give classical jazz the needed twist in the torso and freedom in the hips to perform the highly refined jazz walk of

Jack Cole. Classical jazz uses less free flow in the torso , often supporting an elongated spine with bound flow . This posture differs from the released or thrown torso that contemporary jazz inherited from modern-based release technique. The verticality of the classical jazz torso

requires the dancer to stay in relationship with space  at all times. In contrast, the contemporary

jazz dancer might momentarily attend to space , but is often invited to surrender vision completely and emote with eyes closed and body released, thus entering passion drive . A dance instructor can reference [Figure 1](#) to assess which concepts are shared with other jazz styles. This visual tool might be useful to share with students to aid in differentiation of styles. [Figure 2](#) is a tool for referencing the venue from where the dance style emerged, whether it was a social dance form, a concert dance form, or a commercial dance form, and with which other venues and styles it intersects. One can see that classical jazz has been influenced by African American vernacular roots and Latin jazz, has shared relationships with musical theater and ballet, and has evolved into a new form, lyrical jazz. A more detailed analysis of qualities found in classical jazz dance and their relationships to other forms can be found in [Figure 3](#), which also includes ballet and modern dance. This chart shows the qualities, actions, and approaches to movement that are most important to each style of dance and how Africanist aesthetics is part of each. Although classical jazz maintains many aspects of the Africanist aesthetics, it does not emphasize weight sensing , free flow in the torso , or rhythmic uplift . We provide this chart as a quick reference for teachers to clarify vocabulary and for reference in lesson planning.

In the next example, we explore use of the tables and figures as teaching aids in a technique class.

Example 2: Teaching a Contemporary Jazz Technique Class





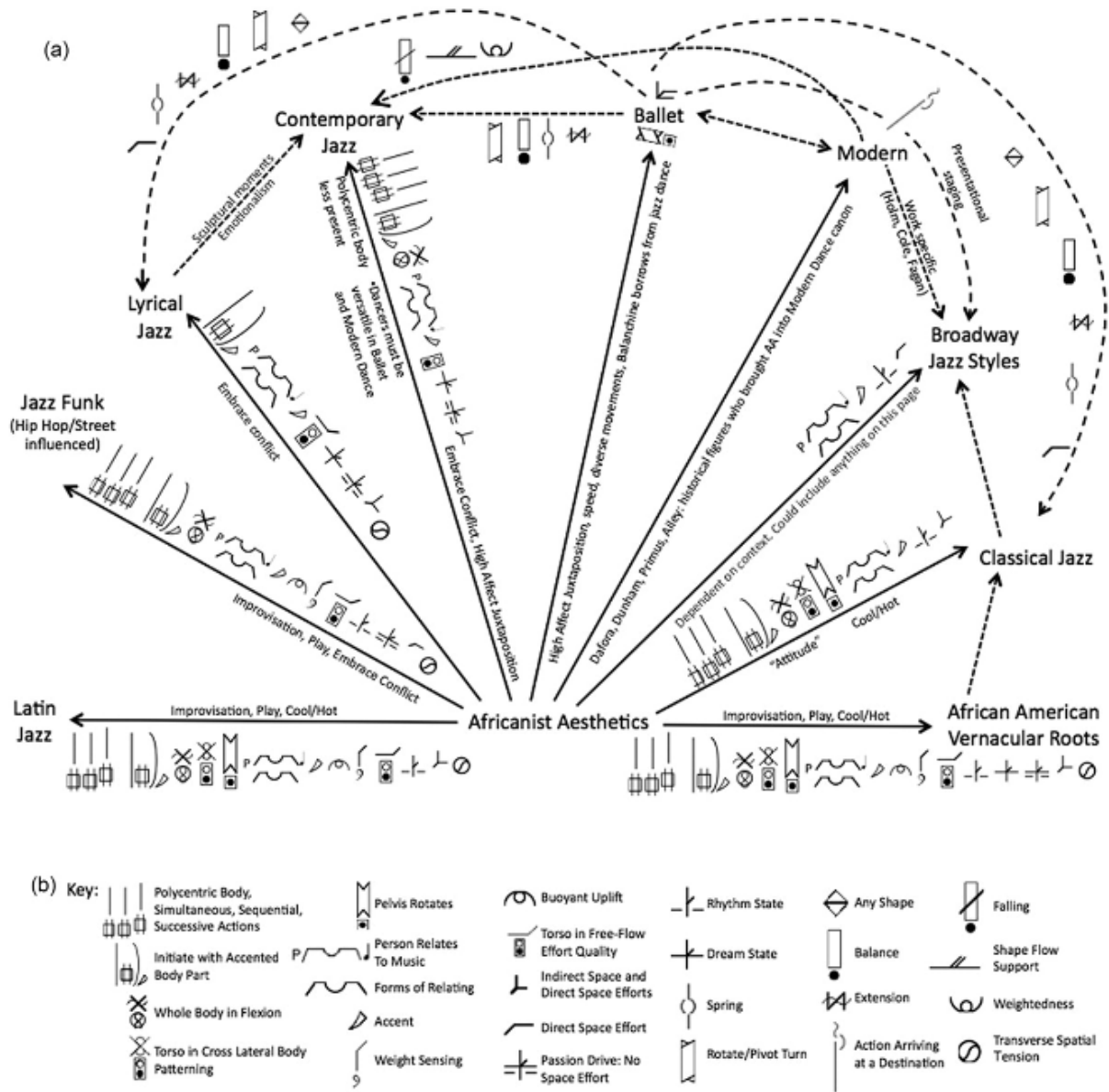
We have found that the tables and figures have helped us to more clearly identify areas for growth in student performance while supporting students' awareness of the Africanist aesthetics within contemporary jazz. For example, given that contemporary jazz dance choreography leans toward Europeanist aesthetics of ballet and modern dance, many contemporary trained jazz dancers struggle with rhythmic uplift , weight sensing , and whole body in flexion . By looking at a sample, popular piece of contemporary jazz choreography, an instructor could enrich a particular movement quality or aesthetic dynamic by identifying the Africanist aesthetic elements intrinsic to the phrase. Because many studio and commercial jazz practices predominantly use reproduction teaching styles of command and follow, using a conceptual framework of Africanist aesthetics can redirect the pedagogy toward production teaching styles of guided discovery, divergent learning, and learner-initiated approaches (Mosston Citation 1972). Teachers can cultivate specific Africanist aesthetic qualities through improvisational circle warmups or playful call-and-response games using motif notation flashcards or simple motif scores. Students might initially feel self-conscious exploring and making choices on their own, but working within a conceptual framework with motif notation supports a shift in personal responsibility among students. For instance, by cultivating the dancer's personal relationship to the music P  in technique class, teachers can foster the jazz dancer's sense of autonomy and artistry. In the next example, we provide ways to challenge students' use of concepts from Africanist aesthetics in a jazz dance composition context.

Figure 3. Africanist aesthetics found in jazz styles and related genres.



Example 3: Teaching a Jazz Dance Composition Class

Instructors can generate choreographic assignments using motif notation and the Africanist aesthetics to incite questions about what makes jazz dance vocabulary and philosophy unique within the vast array of dance forms. We designed an assignment that invites students to choreograph a solo focusing on a subset of the Africanist aesthetic concepts. This choreographic premise directs students to select desired performance qualities based on their choices of Africanist and Europeanist concepts. Working with motif notation gave us specific language to coach

students with generating new movement that is specific to a particular lineage of jazz dance. These literacy practices invite students to generate movement by exploring their own interpretations of the jazz dance concepts, rather than stringing together a sequence of classroom steps. The jazz styles charts in [Figure 1](#) and Table 2 help pinpoint which motif notation concepts a student has explored well and which might need more investigation. For example, contemporary jazz students




might struggle with applying the unfamiliar concept of weight sensing  in their choreographic phrases. However, the same students will likely succeed with their use of accents  and free flow in the torso , both of which are commonly incorporated in contemporary jazz composition.

Figure 3 can be used as a tool in composition classes to clarify how the various styles relate to each other and when styles relinquish various Africanist aesthetics and adopt Europeanist qualities. In Figure 3, each jazz style is depicted by a rib on the fan, thus distinguishing among the styles and acknowledging their interrelatedness. Teachers can use Figure 3 to assist students with analyzing the composition of their jazz dances and also clarifying historical context, origins of the jazz style, and relationships with other dance styles. Students can then assess their choreographic choices as aligned with their desired performance qualities. This approach can lead to discussions of how cultural and aesthetic values must be present in a choreographic work if the students wish for their dances to fall under the umbrella of jazz dance, or a certain stylistic category within jazz dance. The chart also addresses the notion that ballet and modern dance have borrowed some movement ideas and philosophies from jazz and the Africanist aesthetics.

DISCUSSION

The motif notation symbols represent the cognitive, kinesthetic, and affective experience of the movement, as well as the metaphor of the movement ideas. What impressed us most in this research was the transformative embodiment that can emerge when joining jazz dance and motif notation in a playful and experiential literacy practice. This layered literacy approach illuminates how including or excluding various Africanist aesthetics in a jazz dance style affects the feeling of the dance style as it is observed or performed. The use of motif notation symbols to represent movement concepts provides visual representation of selected characteristics of Africanist aesthetics to support experiential deepening of learning.

This research can serve as a resource for further inquiry and investigation, such as analyzing current cultural jazz practices or reevaluating trends in jazz dance pedagogy. By fusing the critical thinking aspect of LMA and LOD with the physical exploration of jazz dance, we experience the richness and the nuance of jazz styles as felt in motion and parsed in critical analysis. Clarified terminology and embodiment also allows us to better articulate similarities and differences, trends, and affinities within a given sample of choreography. We anticipate that our symbolic representation will allow for an unfolding of many layers of aesthetic meaning behind the jazziness of jazz dance that can guide creative practices, historical discussion, and development of curricula.

CONCLUSION

Concept-based inquiry using symbolic notation connects the critical with the personal. A dancer who is kinesthetically adept with a certain style can also benefit cognitively from grasping the distinct movement components from motif notation for improved concept identification, analytical discussion, and independent creation. The concepts of LMA and LOD provide a bridge to help dance teachers, dancers, and dance artists to explore and develop deeper cognitive, affective, and physical ways of knowing dance. We believe exploring pedagogy, using motif notation from LMA and LOD, enhances the discussion of educational philosophies and creative practices within dance. We assert that these tools and frameworks have a potential for enhancing agency among dance educators of all styles and sectors. The concepts, as represented in English and dance notation, can help to solidify learning objectives by making implicit ways of knowing more explicit for all involved.

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