Bantaba: Designing the Sacred Circle

Tashiara Scott

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BANTABA: DESIGNING THE SACRED CIRCLE

CELEBRATING THE DRUM AS THE APEX OF WEST AFRICAN DIASPORIC DANCE

TASHIARA SCOTT
MAY 3, 2019

A thesis/dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University
This project explores designing an interior space that supports West African and African Diasporic dance forms. The space will offer community dance and drumming classes, host performances in a flexible multipurpose space that converts to performance space, and offer education about West Africa through exhibits integrated throughout the space. The space will serve as a community builder and connection to ancestral roots for Richmond’s African American and Jackson Ward communities.
HAVE YOU EVER SEEN AN AFRICAN DANCE?

They say we dance like rivers, hands flowing
North like Nile
Like deserts do not surround us,
They say we move too dynamic to be in disarray
Too potent to be powerless,
Too spirited to be mummies,
Too vibrant to be starving,
That seasons do not pass when drought tucks us
into bed at night and famine like roosters crows
emptiness into our mornings
They ask
How could dried up xylophones ring out such rich
symphonies
And why is there so much life in that barren
planet of a person
ABSTRACT

MOTIVATION
In Richmond, there are 1.21 times as many African Americans as any other ethnic group. Yet 63.4% of African Americans live in poverty (Richmond, VA). African Americans face greater exposure to stress due to low socioeconomic status and poverty. In these communities, “discrimination and deprivation undermine individuals’ ability to accumulate the social and material resources to mitigate the effects of stress” (Brondolo, 2018). In this city’s African American community, where stress levels are high and consequential health concerns are prevalent, dance can be a remedy for managing stress and improving health (Hanna, 2006).

DESIGN PROBLEM
How can an intentionally designed interior environment support dance as a remedy for stress and its negative health effects? How can the design of this environment celebrate the culture of the African American community?

METHODS
Literature reviews on the relationship between space and dance will help inform design decisions. Studies of programmatic precedents will focus on spaces involving dance, healing, community engagement and cultural specificity. Studies of conceptual precedents that involve movement, rhythm and the body will take place. Rudolf Laban’s notation system for studying movement in dance will be utilized to analyze the movements required of African dance, resulting in a more targeted design approach. A dancer with a background in African dance will serve as a research advisor. Interviews of African American dancers will be conducted to gain insight into the practice of dance and the needs of a dance space.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS
Research shows that dance reduces stress levels. Specifically, African dance, significantly decreases perceived stress and repeated practice can lead to overall stress reduction (West, J. et al). African dance’s main purpose is to serve as an expression of the physical and psychological states of individuals, allowing for emotional release (Welsh-Asante, 1996). Dance can be used to cope with stress by discharging repressed aggression, improving self-esteem and allowing for selfexpression. Dance also prevents stress through physical exercise (Hanna, 2006). Additionally, research from Steven Holl, Santiago Calatrava and other architectural masters discuss the relationships between dance and architecture.

CONCLUSION
The research will inform the design of a cultural dance center for the city’s historically African American neighborhood. The interior design of this center will support African dance and culture, foster creativity, and encourage stress reduction. The design will also support the secondary programs of dance movement therapy, seminars, celebrations, community outreach, educational programs, and exhibitions.
In a society that is more sedentary than ever and where face to face communication is at an all-time low, it is more important than ever to get moving and create community with others. More specifically, within the African American community, a panoply of adversary conditions, and a unique exposure to social, economic and environmental, stressors, negatively impact the health of individuals and the community. What if there was a place that supported physical activity and a connection to history and culture, as one way to alleviate these problems? With dance being Africa’s most culturally pervasive physical activity, what if there was a dedicated and intentionally designed interior space for African diaspora dance, culture and community programming? Through design, this project provides an answer.

In America, sedentary behavior and physical inactivity are major health issues. In general, the United States has seen a recent focus on health improvement. In December 2010, the Department of Health and Human Services launched Healthy People 2020. The program has four overarching goals: “Attain high-quality, longer lived free of preventable disease, disability, injury, and premature death; Achieve health equity, eliminate disparities, and improve the health of all groups; Create social and physical environments that promote good health for all; and Promote quality of life, healthy development, and healthy behaviors across all life stages” (National Center for Health Statistics, 2011). This recent focus on health improvement is a result of recent health statistics. One major health problem that exists in our country is the lack of physical activity. Sedentary behavior is a serious public health issue. In fact, inactivity has similar outcomes as smoking. Currently, 80% of adults in the United States don’t meet the national guidelines, created in 2008, set by the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion for aerobic and muscle strengthening activities. These guidelines state that physical activity is a key component in improving overall health and regular activity reduces the risks of many adverse health outcomes. They assert that a minimum of 150 minutes of physical activity a week is necessary for health benefits (Healthy People 2020 Physical Activity Guidelines).

Physical inactivity is a primary cause of most chronic diseases. Physical activity prevents, or delays, chronic diseases, implying that chronic disease need not be an inevitable outcome during life (Booth, et. al, 2012). If inactivity could be reduced by 10%, 533,000 deaths could be averted each year and if reduced by 25% the estimate was that more than 1.3 million deaths could be avoided (Lack of exercise as ‘deadly’ as smoking, 2012).

In addition to sedentary behavior and physical inactivity, African Americans face a complex set of issues that negatively impact health. Many of the adverse health outcomes and chronic diseases occur in larger percentages in the African American community. In its Health Disparities and Inequalities Report, the CDC reported persistent health disparities in many areas regarding African Americans, including high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, and diabetes (Health Equity in Richmond, Virginia, 2016). In Virginia, the current adult hypertension rate (2017) is 32.4%, ranking us 24/50 of states (The State of Obesity, n.d.) The prevalence of high blood pressure in African Americans is the highest in the world, in fact. This disease increases risks of heart disease and stroke. While high blood pressure tends to be genetic, it can be controlled. A few of the lifestyle changes the American Heart Association recommends are: enjoying...
physical activity, managing stress, and maintaining a healthy weight play a significant role in treating and preventing cardiovascular disease and heart attack. In addition to physical activities, stress management techniques are very or extremely effective (Stress and Exercise, n.d.).

Heart disease and stroke account for the largest proportion of inequality in life expectancy between whites and African Americans. In 2019, African Americans in the United States had the highest mortality rates from heart disease and stroke as compared to any other ethnic group (Community Health Assessment Richmond City, 2017). For people with heart disease, exercise can reduce the risk of dying from heart disease and having a heart attack. For people without heart disease, regular exercise can decrease the chance of developing heart disease. Active people with high blood pressure and heart disease are less likely to die prematurely than inactive people with these conditions (Exercise and Heart Disease Statistics, n.d.).

Obesity is one of the risk factors of obesity. Obese rates in Virginia were at 30% in 2017, compared to 11% in 1990 (The State of Obesity, n.d.). Additionally, African Americans are disproportionately affected by obesity. 63% of men and 77% of women 20 years old and older are overweight or obese (Howard, 2017). Unlike diet, dieting and maintaining a healthy weight, but regular physical activity plays a major role in getting pounds off and keeping them off (“African Americans and Heart Disease, Stroke, 2015”).

Lastly, but not conclusively, diabetes plagues the African American community. It is treatable and preventable with lifestyle changes, including regular physical activity, managing stress, and maintaining a healthy weight. Diabetes is a consequence of psychosocial, economic and environmental stressors (Howard, 2017). In 2016, there were 1.21 times more Black residents (27,100) than any other race or ethnicity (Richmond City, VA, n.d.). In addition to national guidelines, Richmond, Virginia in particular has been working recently to focus on physical activity in the city. In 2017, physical activity was identified as an area of focus for Richmond in the Capital Region. Collaborative with a strategy to support, expand, and promote programs that offer opportunities for physical activity and community Health Assessment Richmond City, 2017).

The effects of physical activity on the cardiovascular system and mental health through physical activity and creative expression.

In Richmond’s African American community, where stress levels are high, physical activity is low and the disparities we see in the chronic diseases are largely preventable. Just being black in America triggers disparities we see in the chronic diseases are largely preventable. Just being black in America triggers disparities between blacks and whites (Brondolo, 2018).

People experience stress when they do not have enough resources to meet even small demands. In the United States, stress and its consequences are not equitable among racial and ethnic groups, which differ in the demands they face and the resources they can access (Brondolo, 2018).

Where we live can determine opportunities to access high-quality healthy foods or outdoor space – all contributors to our health. There is a relationship between social and economic conditions and how they impact health disparities. African-American health is improving, and many of the disparities we see in the chronic diseases are largely preventable. Just being black in America triggers disparities between blacks and whites (Brondolo, 2018).

African Americans in the United States, stress and its consequences are not equitable among racial and ethnic groups, which differ in the demands they face and the resources they can access (Brondolo, 2018).

Dance is the soul of Africa. It is the foundation of all of the arts and weaves a tale about the daily lives and connected to rituals (Welsh-Asante, 2010). Dance in Africa is a pragmatic part of life. It is used to celebrate both every day events and major life events. African dance can be described as dances that are imbued with meaning, infused purposely with rhythm and connected to rituals (Welsh-Asante, 2010). Traditionally, in non-western practices, dance has been used to help people deal with pain, trauma, conflict and stress. African dance’s main purpose is to serve as cultural and artistic expression for communities. Dance prevents stress cognitively through self-expression and physically through exercise. African dance is a form of communication that allows for emotions, sentiments, beliefs and other reactions through movement (Welsh-Asante, 1996). Dance, reactively, can be used to cope with stress by discharging repressed aggression and improving self-esteem. Historically, dance has helped people to reduce, resist and escape stress (Hanna, 1988). There are many ways to alleviate stress, for example as yoga and meditation, exercise, writing, etc. But dance, on top of being excellent strengthening and aerobic exercise, allows for a form of self-expression, or release, that aids in stress relief.
African American social dances started as a way for enslaved Africans to keep cultural traditions alive and retain a sense of inner freedom. They remain an affirmation of identity and independence. Dance is a language, and social dance is an expression that emerges from a community. A social dance isn’t choreographed by any one person. It can’t be traced to any one moment. Now, social dance is about community and connection; if you know the steps, it means you belong to a group. “Social dance is part structure and part individual creativity,” Brown said. “It supports your identity. It’s telling us who you are. It’s an amplification of who you are. It says you’re a part of the group. It’s a language, and social dance is an expression that communicates affirmation of identity and independence.”

Across Africa, dance is different and varies across ethnic groups. There are hundreds of thousands of variations. Commonly, dance is influenced by the physical environment and thus, clothing worn (i.e., rattles on the hips). Particularly, in West Africa, elements of dance are visible, as the drums. Its relationship to the music is one thing that distinguishes it from other types of dance. Dance and drumming are synonymous projections with ardent, driving rhythms, passion and percussiveness and high energy. In artistic expression, they are as conveying realism. This form of dance would be explosive and precise. This ephebism is seen in the strength in the dance forms, communicated in circular (or cipher or set de flo) and line formations (Welsh-Asante, 1996). In African American dance, basic muscle memory and retained traditions, which is referred to as a force of vital aliveness, is a critical part of African dance, without this component, it is no longer African dance. In short, African dance is explosive and precise. This ephebism is seen in the speed and drive of the music and movements and in the strength in the dance forms. African dance is characterized with intentional, fierce angular movements and in the strength of the percussiveness of the music and dance. They are the source of the African dance. In West Africa, elements of dance include: body segmentation, complex hand, arm and foot movement, facial expressions, miming, pelvic contractions and story-telling that commemorates everyday experiences. Dance is performed commonly, in circular (or cipher or set de flo) and line formations (Welsh-Asante, 1996).

In African American dance, basic muscle memory and movements from West Africa are apparent. These characteristics cut across ethnic distinctions; They are as conveying realism. This form of dance would be explosive and precise. This ephebism is seen in the strength in the dance forms, communicated in circular (or cipher or set de flo) and line formations (Welsh-Asante, 1996). In African American cultural complex. (Welsh-Asante, 1996)

The relationship between the dance and the drum in a commonality across many countries and thousands of ethnic groups.

African dance is the art of movement governed by the drums. Its relationship to the music is one thing that distinguishes it from other types of dance. In Africa is diverse, but the one commonality is the relationship to music. “Dance and drumming are synonymous projections with ardent, driving rhythms, poignant complexities of form and consonant articulate...
Space and time are the common mediums in which both exercises operate and are therefore the basis for the collaboration. The dancer in space introduces the consideration of time—movement of the body in space. This reveals a quality that traditional, static proportions and solutions never achieve. The dancer explores all the potential orientations and interactions between space and time. The body is pushed and pulled by the possibilities of its movement in space. Being able to see those possibilities through the dancer, the explorer of space-time, provides the consideration of time—the movement of the body, both exercises operate and are therefore the basis of architectural or interior, that focuses specifically on cultural centers are non-profitable, permanent cultural structures is based on broad spaces where different values among the members of its community. Its objective is to promote cultural activity. An intentional space for dance has been given little architectural focus, as there has been little research done on the interior of dance spaces. Furthermore, there exists little or no research on a dance space, architectural or interior, that focuses specifically on African dance. A designated place for dance and connection to culture could improve the health of the African American community, and build even stronger connection to culture could improve the health of the African American community, and build even stronger

Another designer, Santiago Calatrava’s set for the New York City Ballet aesthetic is the apex of African performing arts. The drum is talking to the body and the dancer is talking back to the drum. “If the secret is beat upon the drum, the secret will be revealed in the dance.” (Welsh-Asante, 1996).

“Dance is an expression of time and space, using the control of movement and gesture to communicate” (Welsh-Asante, 2010).

The dance to the drum aesthetic is the apex of African dance. The drum is talking to the body and the dancer is talking back to the drum. “If the secret is beat upon the drum, the secret will be revealed in the dance.” (Welsh-Asante, 1996).

Dancers can be cultural ambassadors, such as Alvin Alley and Katherine Dunham, leaders of African Diasporic dance. And futher, choreography can be used as a “window for social change,” such as creating “spaces for dance in the African American community, and build even stronger connection to culture could improve the health of the African American community, and build even stronger connection to culture could improve the health of the African American community, and build even stronger connection to culture could improve the health of the African American community, and build even stronger

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“Dance is an expression of time and space, using the control of movement and gesture to communicate” (Welsh-Asante, 2010).

To understand the relationship between the body and space, architects and dancers manipulate space (Nayak, 2008). And further, choreography can be used as a “window for social change,” such as creating “spaces for dance in the African American community, and build even stronger connection to culture could improve the health of the African American community, and build even stronger connection to culture could improve the health of the African American community, and build even stronger connection to culture could improve the health of the African American community, and build even stronger connection to culture could improve the health of the African American community, and build even stronger

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How does a man answer such questions, how does he breathe truth into the ignorant, so I answer with this simple question:

Have you ever seen an African dance?  
Have you ever felt the music possess limb to limb  
Like there are Angels having a feast in body  
Spiritual movements paralyzing each vertebra  
from remote to rural?
It’s construction was announced in 1923 and completed in 1925. It was designed to be finest car dealership in Richmond at the time, the Emrick Chevrolet Dealership. The primary construction materials were brick, concrete, steel, and glass.

Conrad Crodd hired architect H.T. Barnham to build one of the largest automotive sales buildings in Richmond, Virginia at the time, according to the March 4, 1924 Richmond Times Dispatch. The building was constructed with three floors and a basement originally as was fully fireproof and carried the lowest insurance rate of any building in the south, according to the architect. It was built to be occupied by Emrick Chevrolet Sales Corporation. The building has 178 feet of plate glass show windows, and the entire exterior of the building was supposed to be windows. The interior had model elevators, dumbwaiters, and traveling cranes. Cars were assembled and disassembled here for show, but it was not a car factory.

The building is on the triangle of Brook Road, West Marshall and North Adams streets. The building is known by several addresses, 101 West Marshall Street and 310 North Adams Street and 2-12 West Marshall Street. An advertisement in at 1923 Richmond Times Dispatch listed the location of this building as 114 West Broad Street.

The building was frequently referred to as “in the triangle” in Chevrolet advertisements. The triangular shape of the building and its large “showroom windows” are the most stand out features of the building. The building appears to have been added on to as the Marshall Street exterior side varies greatly in design elements and shape. It is now condos, each floor has two to three condos, there is resident parking and a rooftop deck. Its condo renovation was completed by Walter Parks architects and it is owned by a real estate company currently.

The building belongs to the 1920’s and is built in commercial industrial style typical in Richmond in the 20th century, with steel and reinforced concrete framing. This style comes from the 1903, architect Albert Kahn. The widespread use of steel and reinforced concrete in the early 20th century brought with it
BUILDING INFORMATION

BUILDING CONSTRUCTION TYPE
TYPE I

GROSS AREA
33364 (SQ. FT.)

EFFICIENCY RATIO = 60%

TOTAL NET AREA
20018 (SQ. FT.)

A VISUAL INVENTORY
EXISTING MATERIALITY

1. Interior Terracotta Brick
2. Interior Brick
3. Concrete Flooring
4. Original Elevator - Wood + Metal
5. Exterior Concrete
6. Wire Mesh
7. Polished Concrete
8. Old Logo
9. Exterior Tile
10. Interior CMU
EXISTING INTERIOR PHOTOS

Main entrance

View from main entrance

Attached parking garage

Windows

Exposed joints and ductwork

Roof

Fifth floor circulation, terracotta brick

Garage entry

Residential entry

Roof access
SITE PARTI DIAGRAMS: SECTION

- FLOORS + WALLS
- FENESTRATION
- FENESTRATION SOLID VOID
- COLUMN GRID
- LIGHT AMOUNT
- FUNCTION
- FENESTRATION PATTERN VOID
- EXTERIOR WALLS + WINDOWS
- ENTRANCES
- COLUMN GRID
- LIGHT FROM WINDOWS
- FENESTRATION PATTERN SOLID
- RECTANGLES WITHIN
This model abstracts the form of the building.

This model explores the fenestration patterns.
Jackson Ward was established in the early 1800’s and is the largest predominantly African American nationally registered historic district. According to the New York Times, it was a thriving African American community in the 19th century and continued to thrive until the 1930’s. The City of Richmond built an interstate right through the district, displacing many residences and businesses and built public housing. The district fell into decline and is now being gentrified with multifamily housing and restaurants, displacing many of the current residents.

Boundaries of the immediate district (not the area served) are defined by Belvidere Street, Broad street and the interstate. Major paths in this district are Broad Street, Leigh Street, Marshall Street, Clay Street, as they run east to west connecting the district to the rest of the downtown area. Brook road crosses the district at a diagonal making it stand out and providing a quicker path through the district. 2nd street is a historical path in the district. Nodes and landmarks include Abner Clay park, Ebenezer Baptist church, the Bojangles statue, the Maggie L. Walker statue and the Coliseum, due to their standout features and historical significance.
SHOWS close relationships to adjacent buildings.

SHOWS surrounding urban context on all three sides.
VIEWS FROM THE SITE

- View To Broad St. + Maggie L. Walker Statue
- View To Apartment Buildings
- View To Commercial Establishments
- View To Row Houses

SITE STUDY: SUN PATH

- Summer Solstice Sun Path
- Fall/Spring Equinox Sun Path
- Winter Solstice Sun Path
Have you ever seen an African dance?
Have you ever sat in awe and watched the rhythm
take flight in mind like rockets
Full orchestra playing and matching in sync
Forgetting that this man knows not piano
Knows not of viola’s complementing violins
Cello's and double basses
Nor does he know of woodwinds and brass
Or music sheets, all he knows is rhythm,
How he composes symphonies with each
movement
That raw, untainted and unmastered rhythm.
That causes his feet to pound firm on the ground
Crusty and cracked enough to build trenches yet
he stomps
Forgetting that the soil can taste his blood
Does it taste like fear, like he knows that his
barren soil will not produce for his family?
Does it taste like negligence, like he willfully
ignores his plight like incompetence is his
mantra?
Does it taste like cowardice, like he cringes at the
site of blood, of tears, and of death?
Does it taste like death, does it taste like a plague,
does it taste like a curse
Does it taste plain and empty, like there’s a
zombie residing in his inner residence?
1. LOBBY AREA + WELCOMING SPACE
In this area, there will be a space that transitions visitors from the outdoors into the indoors, a reception space where visitors can gather information about programming and events. This space welcomes all visitors, from program participants, to curious walk-in visitors.

2. EXHIBIT + INFORMATION SPACE
This space will serve as a museum exhibit style space on history of African Dance and Dance in African American Culture. Some parts of the exhibit will be permanent and some of it will be rotating. This space is important because it will educate program members and the community on the importance and history of dance, facilitating cultural interest and conversation.

3. GATHERING AREA
This area will serve as a public, casual and flexible, changing space for groups small (2) to larger (5) to gather and have conversations or meetings. Community members may gather here for non-private organization or association chats, talk with their friends, decompress with friends before and after dance programming, for staff to talk with each other, etc.

4. MULTIPURPOSE PERFORMANCE SPACE
In many dance studios, the studios themselves often serves as performance spaces, with the audience sitting on the floor around the room, as dancers perform in the middle. In this case, the performance space will double as rentable programming or event space, and act as a studio for the largest dance classes. This space is important as it will allow for multi-use functionality and allow the center to have a variety of program.

5. OFFICE SPACE
Office space for staff that run and support the program’s mission and daily functions.

6. LOCKER ROOMS
A place for dancers to change clothes and/or shower.

7. SNACK GRAB / CAFE
A place for visitors to grab snacks, possible from rotating local vendors from restaurants in the neighborhood.

*Through the process of concept development, a drum studio was added in addition to the dance studios.
**Program Visualization**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social dance</th>
<th>African dance performance</th>
<th>Dance space used for multipurpose</th>
<th>Dance teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Square Footage by Program Space (sq. ft.)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Space</th>
<th>Square Footage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lobby + Welcome Area</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit + Information Space</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Gathering Areas</td>
<td>150 X 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multipurpose / Performance</td>
<td>5750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance Studio 01 - Large Studio</td>
<td>3000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance Studio 02 - Small Studio</td>
<td>1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Space</td>
<td>750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locker Rooms</td>
<td>1500 X 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cafe</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Through the process of concept development, a drum studio was added in addition to the dance studios.*

**Occupancy Classifications by Program Space**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Space</th>
<th>Occupancy Load</th>
<th>Water Closets/Per Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lobby + Welcome Area</td>
<td>Assembly Group A-1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit + Information Space</td>
<td>Assembly Group A-3</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Gathering Areas</td>
<td>Assembly Group A-3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multipurpose / Performance</td>
<td>Assembly Group A-1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance Studio 01 - Large Studio</td>
<td>Assembly Group A-3</td>
<td>5 + 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance Studio 02 - Small Studio</td>
<td>Assembly Group A-1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Space</td>
<td>Assembly Group A-3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locker Rooms</td>
<td>Assembly Group A-2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cafe</td>
<td>Assembly Group A-2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Occupant Load + Water Closets per Gender by Program Space**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Space</th>
<th>Occupant Load</th>
<th>Water Closets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lobby + Welcome Area</td>
<td>Occupant Load: 40</td>
<td>Water Closets: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit + Information Space</td>
<td>Occupant Load: 400</td>
<td>Water Closets: 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Gathering Areas</td>
<td>Occupant Load: 40</td>
<td>Water Closets: 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multipurpose / Performance</td>
<td>Occupant Load: 14</td>
<td>Water Closets: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance Studio 01 - Large Studio</td>
<td>Occupant Load: 30</td>
<td>Water Closets: 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance Studio 02 - Small Studio</td>
<td>Occupant Load: 15</td>
<td>Water Closets: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Space</td>
<td>Occupant Load: 7</td>
<td>Water Closets: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locker Rooms</td>
<td>Occupant Load: 30</td>
<td>Water Closets: 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cafe</td>
<td>Occupant Load: 66</td>
<td>Water Closets: 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GRAPHIC PROGRAM

AREA BY FLOOR
FLOOR 01 8185 (SQ. FT.)
MEZZANINE 6035 (SQ. FT.)
FLOOR 03 8144 (SQ. FT.)
FLOOR 04 8144 (SQ. FT.)
FLOOR 05 2081 (SQ. FT.)

BUILDING CONSTRUCTION TYPE
TYPE I

GROSS AREA 33364 (SQ. FT.)

EFFICIENCY RATIO = 60%

TOTAL NET AREA 20018 (SQ. FT.)

FLOOR 01 AREA 8165 (SQ. FT.)
MEZZANINE AREA 6035 (SQ. FT.)
FLOOR 03 AREA 8144 (SQ. FT.)
FLOOR 04 AREA 8144 (SQ. FT.)
FLOOR 05 AREA 2881 (SQ. FT.)

FLOOR 02 GATHERING AREAS - 150 X 4 SQ FT.
FLOOR 03 MULTIPURPOSE/PERFORMANCE - 5750 SQ FT
FLOOR 04 DANCE STUDIO 01 - LARGE STUDIO - 3000 SQ FT.
FLOOR 05 DANCE STUDIO 02 - SMALL STUDIO - 1500 SQ FT.
FLOOR 06 OFFICE SUITE - 650 SQ. FT.
FLOOR 06 LOCKER ROOMS - 1500 X 2 SQ FT.
MEZZANINE CAFE - 1000 SQ FT.
Have you ever seen an African Woman dance?
Have you ever watched her hips steal the spotlight gyrating in fervent excitement with each drumbeat?
Smile synonymous to sun like she did not cry rivers last night
Like the man who was meant for protection did not become a predator and her prey
Like his flesh did not become Prime, and hers pillage for his desires
Watch her hips gyrate in pleasure like they did not gyrate in pain last night
Like the beautiful earth around her waist did not crack, and quake like Armageddon
Like she did not pay for her beauty with mundane beatings.
Have you ever looked into the eyes of death and told her that there is something lively about her
Watch her hips gyrate in joy like they did not quiver at the sight of her son six feet under
Watch her hips gyrate with so much freedom like she did not know slavery too well

PRECEDE NT STUDIES
Critical takeaways:
programming and space planning
reuse of a historic interior

In 2005, Cavagnero was commissioned by the east bay performing arts center to renovate and rehabilitate a poorly kept and dilapidated, 16,000 square foot heavy timber, reinforced concrete structure.

The mission of the project was to create a space for public education and a vehicle for social change, which is a mission of my thesis’ program.

Cavagnero also has to work within the constraints of a long, narrow volume. The program of this project is similar to mine, with spaces for practice of dance and a place for performance. My thesis will also involve the challenge of designing to a uniquely shaped space.


1. Large open space with wood floors and lighting grid provide practical support for dance program.
2. Large windows allow for community to experience the program and dancers to feel connected with the surrounding community.
3. Lobby space allows for check-in and information.

Photos: https://www.cavagnero.com/project/east-bay-center-for-the-performing-arts/
In section, the performance space spans two floors, creating the openness desires for performance, while creating a hierarchy in relation to the other spaces in the building.

Performance space converts into practice space by way of retractable bleachers that push into the space between the second and third floor.

With my project requiring openness, the need for the performance space to be multi-functional and with an existing

An acoustic barrier separates the entry, welcome and music classroom areas. Given the drumming that will happen with my program, acoustics should be heavily considered in design.

Photos: https://www.cavagnero.com/project/east-bay-center-for-the-performing-arts/
The third floor is open to the second floor below, as this performance space spans two stories. The seating bleachers expand and contract, allowing the space to be used for another purpose when a performance is not taking place.

Photos:
https://www.cavagnero.com/project/east-bay-center-for-the-performing-arts/
PRECEDENT STUDY

PERFORMING ARTS CENTER: DEE AND CHARLES WYLY THEATRE
Dallas, Texas
REX + OMA
2009

critical takeaways:
relationship between performance space and performance support spaces

"Unlike a typical theater, the Wyly positions back-of-house and front-of-house facilities above and beneath the auditorium instead of encircling it. The theater can be altered into a wide array of configurations -- including proscenium, thrust and flat floor -- empowering directors and scenic designers to choose the stage-audience configuration that fulfills their artistic desires, or to invent one of their own. Directors can incorporate the Dallas skyline and streetscape into performances at will, as the auditorium is enclosed by an acoustic glass façade with optional black-out blinds and panels that can be opened to allow patrons or performers to enter the auditorium directly from outside."

A thoughtfully programmed backstage area supports performance functions. Stair and elevator circulation backstage allows for movement to the "back of house" programming with exists above and below the performance floor.

The project challenges the relationship of the backstage area and welcome area to the performance area. They are typically in a successive order. Here, they are stacked. This may work well for my buildings performance program. Due to spatial needs, performance support could be moved to another level.
critical takeaways:
vertical relationships
relationship between floors
relationship between egress and dance or performance spaces

DS+R designed this space for the buildings’ users to be unhindered by boundaries. The misalignment of the floors and the sheer glass wall between them allow the rooms to be visually connected to each other, enhancing an overall feeling of lightness and airiness.

“The building is open in every way—open plan, open section, open-sourced.” Large floor plates, high ceilings, and complete flexibility are the defining characteristics of the building’s main studio, meeting, and production spaces, which occupy the front section of the four-story building and are fully visible from the street.”

The staggered position of the floors and the glass partition allow connection between floors and create a transparent flow and sense of community vertically. Split levels allow for connection between spaces. Relationship between circulation and gathering area create opportunities for interaction.
PRECEDENT STUDY

JOAN WEILL CENTER FOR DANCE (ALVIN AILEY SCHOOL)

New York, New York
IB Architects
2007

critical takeaways:
programmatic similarities + multipurpose dance spaces

The Alvin Ailey School of Dance is the largest American facility dedicated entirely to dance. The school had previously been borrowing space. “Having a building,” says Ailey artistic director Judith Jamison, “conveys stability and strength.”

Red brick, a common material in the largely residential neighborhood, encloses the core mechanical and circulation spaces, which wrap around the north and west sides of the building. Projecting from the hefty L-shape core are layers of glass-walled dance studios, which appear to float. All studios have sprung pine floors.

The top four floors are reserved for company use. Each floor has a reception area that doubles as a lounge for administrative staff and dancers. The second, third, and fourth floors house administrative offices and two conference rooms.

The large windows allow dancers to see the city and the city to see the dancers. There are large images of African American dancers throughout the space. Those images make the dancers feel that it’s really their building,” Bernstein, F. A. (2005). Revealing Movement. Interior Design, 290-299. Retrieved September 29, 2018.

1. Large dance studio overlooking NYC https://structuretone.com/design-for-dance/

2. Photos of dancers throughout the space https://www.ibarchitects.com/project/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater

3. Dance space used for multipurpose https://www.alvinailey.org/rent-alas-visits/rent-our-space
Have you ever seen an African King cry?
Watch his tears dance down his cheeks in morbid helplessness
Galloping through the bed farm wrinkles on his face
As he watches his people dance on empty stomachs
He looks and notices that
See through Vessels never looked so beautiful
The way the sun finds home in melanin
Skin never hugged bones with such force
Vicious plagues never plagued a place with such potency
Would you want to know his thoughts?
Would you want to know the silence that dances inside
Would you want to know the nervous inferiority that causes his head and feet to nod and tap?
Would you want to know that his throne carries no power?
Because a seat is not a seat when faith is lacking
Would you want to know that he is king only by title because circumstance has stripped him to peasantry?
Dance therapy removed and drumming studio added.
BLOCK PLAN AXON SKETCHES
PLAN SKETCHES
Have you ever seen an African dance
Have you ever looked on in tears, heart skipping
with smile and said, "this is beautiful"
That this grace is worth glancing at twice
When rain meets a sunny day
How his outro fades like the sun behind the
mountains at dusk
How his movements are tears filled praises
Limbs telling folktalest worthy of the king’s ears
To say that this dance brings our souls before God
How our knees kiss the floor in humility and our
hands marry the sky in adoration,
and how our hearts pour out its supplication
That in this state of devotion, we find faith, we
find flaw, yet a blazing firefly still buzzes within
That we move like there’s a solar flare skipping
inside
That we dance because it frees the soul from this
shackled flesh!
SUPPLE: In West African dance, the body is supple. It is willing and ready to respond to change. This is a defining characteristic of movement in West African dance. The vital aliveness in the movement is demonstrated through flexibility and suppleness. The knees should always be supplely bent.

POLYMETRIC RHYTHM: Polymetric rhythm is a characteristic of African dance and style that cuts across ethnic distinctions. It refers to different body parts moving at different rhythms and the idea of their being a constant rhythm that individuals deviate from and return to.

AKIMBO OR ANGULAR: Angularity is a characteristic of African dance and style that cuts across ethnic distinctions and is considered dynamic and equated with life.

INITIAL CONCEPTS EXPLORED: Concept work initially explored, two and three dimensionally, distinguishing qualities and characteristics of West African dance that transcend country, culture and ethnic group.

MUSIC CONTROLS DANCE: In traditional African dance, it is the integrated art of movement that is controlled by music. It’s relationship to music distinguishes it. If the music didn’t exist, the dance wouldn’t.

EXPRESSON THROUGH MOVEMENT: African dance is a LANGUAGE, its a form of communication that allows for expression of emotion, sentiment, belief and other reactions through movement.

STYLIZED ASYMMETRY: Stylized asymmetry is a characteristic of African dance that distinguishes it and contributes to its vital aliveness or “coolness”.

STYLIZED INSTABILITY: West Africans cultivate divinity through richly stabilized traditions of personal balance, which is demonstrated in the movements of dance.

HIGH INTENSITY: West African dance is vitally alive due to many factors, including its high intensity and high energy.

GROUNDED: Being grounded or close to the earth is a common distinguishing characteristic of West African dance and is often communicated through bended knees.

COMMUNITY / CIRCLE FORMATION: One common African dance formation is the circle, allowing dance to be a communal act.

COMMUNITY CONNECTION: African dance is deeply ingrained into the culture. It brings the community together.

SET DE FLO: One common African dance formation is the set de flo, where dancers perform or compete while a crowd gathers around to spectate.

LAYERS OF MOVEMENT: This model focuses on the layers of movement that occur in dance.

HIGH INTENSITY: West African dance is vitally alive due to many factors, including its high intensity and high energy.

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COMMUNITY / CIRCLE FORMATION: One common African dance formation is the circle, allowing dance to be a communal act.

COMMUNITY CONNECTION: African dance is deeply ingrained into the culture. It brings the community together.

BENDED KNEE: “Dance with bended knee, less you be taken for a corpse” - African Proverb

Knees are supple and bent. Straight line of the back through the neck and head, set over buoyant knees and stable feet. Flexible potency should be at the knees.


1. Community
2. Set de Fio / Circle Formation
3. Polycentric Rhythm
4. Akimbo / Angularity
5. Exterior Concrete
6. Community
7. Polymetric Rhythm
8. Polymetric Rhythm
9. Bended Knee
10. Balanced Asymmetry
11. Layers of Movement
12. Stylized Instability
13. Akimbo / Angularity
14. Akimbo / Angularity
15. Polymetric Rhythm
16. Akimbo / Angularity
17. Bended
18. Polycentric Rhythm
19. Akimbo / Angularity
20. Akimbo / Angularity
21. Bended
22. Polymetric Rhythm

TYPICAL DANCE FORMATIONS

- Teach And Learn
- Call And Response
- Circle or "Cipher"
- Half - Circle or Drum to Dance
- Line Formations
FINAL CONCEPT STATEMENT

African dance is unlike any other form of dance. Its relationship to music, is primarily what distinguishes it from any other art form. 2

West African dance commonly occurs in the bantaba, or the dancing ground, which is regarded as a sacred space. Bantaba also means celebration, dancing circle or drumming circle. It’s a place in which the community comes together and life is celebrated. In some West African cultures, the drum circle, or bantaba, is a place to celebrate birth, death and other milestones. 3

The project celebrates the relationship between African dance and music, its dance forms, and its circle or bantaba formation. There is a critical relationship between African dance and the drum - the dance cannot exist without the drum. This relationship is expressed in the building’s circulation. The drum is the physical core of the building and spans all levels, allowing sound to travel through the building. The shapes of the spaces reflect and support the circle or bantaba formations.

OTHER CONCEPTUAL DRIVERS

AKIMBO / ANGULARITY
Angular forms, bended limbs (or akimbo) and suppleness are essential to the dance forms. Angles are dynamic and equated with life and communicate beauty, vitality and strength. 1

POLYMERIC RHYTHM
Simultaneous use of different rhythms. 1

POLYCENTRICISM
Two or more centers of movement (or body parts) activated simultaneously. 1

GROUNDEDNESS
Rootedness in physical space, with the body taking its orientation from the ground. 1

3. https://plexus.org/chalkboard/@salon/messages/264.html
Marrying the conceptual driver of akimbo or angularity, this study explores the many angles of the building’s plan. This study later informs acoustical and lighting design in the project.
We dance like it's our last for our legacies are more genuine when painted on tainted canvas for tomorrow may crumple this page with dementia causing us to forget the heavenly joy that was penned here tonight.

To rest in our sleep and wake up anew moving like pain did not sleep here tonight.

So the next time you see an AFRICAN dance, pause, take a moment, look closely, and maybe just maybe you might find the joy hiding in the crevices of our plight.

- JASON NKWAI
**PLAN KEY**
1. Djembe Storage + Exhibit
2. Drum Circle + Dance Studio
3. Storage for Chairs
4. Operable Windows for Sound Distribution
5. Large Drum Storage + Exhibit
6. Custom Acoustic System
7. Custom Light Art Pendant

**FLOOR 02 PLAN**

**PLAN KEY**
1. Gather Space
2. Double-Sided Educational Exhibit
3. Accordion Glass Doors
4. Practice Area
5. Technique Studio

**FLOOR 03 PLAN**
PLAN KEY
1. Gather Space
2. Double-Sided Educational Exhibit
3. Accordion Glass Doors
4. Practice Area
5. Community Studio
Dance is the apex of African performing arts. Across 54 countries and thousands of ethnic groups, the dance and drum relationship remains a commonality. Dancing and drumming are two synonymous projections. Without the music, the dance cannot exist. (2)

Spanning three floors, the drum studio serves as the “drum of the space,” or the key organizer for the building. This formal relationship mirrors the role the drum plays in West African dance. In this space, drumming classes and dance classes take place.

The building incorporates drum storage on the interior that doubles as an informational exhibit on the exterior of the studio on floor 02. On floors 03 and 04, the general exhibit overlooks drum and dance activities below. All three levels have operable windows, for sound control.
DRUM STUDIO MODEL

Drum studio model

Inside of the drum studio

Plan view of drum studio

Drum studio model
“IF THE RHYTHM OF THE DRUM BEAT CHANGES, THE DANCE STEP MUST ADAPT.”
-KOSSI PROVERB

“The dance to drum [relationship] is a potent and vitalizing element of African culture.” (2) When the drummers change their beat, the dancers must also change their steps to follow the rhythm.

The operable partitions on floor 02 allow visitors to experience the faint sound of drumming, or the full sound, as preferred. These partitions open into dance studios on floors 03 and 04 to allow dancers to move to the rhythm of the drum from the drumming studio. This creates a sense of connection between spaces.

These partitions open into dance studios on floor 03 and 04 to allow dancers to dance to the rhythm of the drum from another studio, creating community and togetherness with separate classes.
An integrated exhibit, which is accessible through a spiraling wooden staircase, wraps around the drum studio on floors 02, 03, and 04. Along the staircase is a path illuminated above and below. On floor 02, djembe drums and larger drums are displayed in a storage case that doubles as a display. The showcase is located in the drum studio.

On floors 03 and 04 lives a rotating exhibit filled with West African dance related artifacts including masks, textiles, and more. These historic artifacts are displayed in a double-sided glass case, with one side featuring a spiraling path and the other, an overlook into the drum studio below. From there, guests can become immersed in classes and practices.
Located below the drum studio, on floor 01, the cafe and snack bar serves snacks, beverages and light fare for visitors, the community, class participants and performance attendees. Books line the walls providing opportunities for education about West African dance and culture.
1. Walnut or Walnut-Stained Flooring
2. Acacia-Stained Oak, Railings
3. Hard Maple, Wax Finish
4. Safari Bisque Beige by PPG
5. Existing Concrete Floor, Polished
6. Plexwood Geometric, Wood veneer
7. Nano Seating by Ideon Design
8. Dune Linear Suspension by Kuzco Lighting
9. Brass Drum Coffee Table by France and Son
1. Armstrong Wood Grille Acoustic
2. Safari Bisque Beige by PPG
3. Assorted Treated Mudcloth Upholstery
4. Shaw Contract Inside Shapes Impressions II
5. Bronze and Black Shade by Dainolite
6. Mudcloth Round Ottoman by Design Mix
7. Mid Century Gondola Sofa by Adrian Pearsall
8. Brass Drum Coffee Table by France & Son
9. Bookshelf by Terasso
10. Djembe Side Table by Swahili Modern
11. Fahmida Chair by Thos Moser
The flexible multipurpose space supports West African dance forms and serves as a performance area for African dance. It is more than a theatre; it is a bantaba, in which everyone is welcome and included in the performance. West African dance is typically done in a circle, ring or cipher formation, known as the bantaba. The space is designed to support this type of dance.

During performances, the seating is raised, allowing viewers to have an elevated experience. Alternatively, for a more economical use of the space, it is used for community classes when performances are not in session.

Concept study about the angles of the building ties in the conceptual driver akimbo, in a custom acoustic and lighting ceiling fixture, that disguises structural trust and theatre lighting equipment.
"THE TRUEST EXPRESSION OF A PEOPLE IS IN ITS DANCES AND ITS MUSIC. BODIES NEVER LIE."
-AGNES DE MILLE
THANK YOU

FACULTY
ROBERTO VENTURA
CHRISTIANA LAPANZI
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EMILY SMITH
CAMDEN WHITEHEAD

STUDIO COHORT
TIA GOODE
JESSICA KEEGAN
RICHARD ROZEWSKI
MAGGIE DAVIDS
ANGELINE TROILO
ABBY BARRAS

SUPPORT
MOM & DAD
FRIENDS & FAMILY

PROOFREADING
DARLENE ADEOJO

ETHOS

DESIGN CAN EITHER DIGNIFY PEOPLE, OR DISHONOR THEM. CHOOSE THE FORMER.

DESIGN IS MULTIDISCIPLINARY. A DESIGNER SHOULD BE ABLE TO DESIGN A SPOON, A CITY, AND ANYTHING IN BETWEEN.

USERS FIRST. DESIGN IS ABOUT THE PEOPLE WHO WILL EXPERIENCE IT.

USE CONTRAST. DUALITY EXISTS FOR REASONS.

CONSISTENCY IS KEY. CONSISTENCY IS CRITICAL TO VISUAL SUCCESS.

FIND WHAT’S MOST IMPORTANT IN A PROJECT. EMPHASIZE THAT.

PARAMETERS ARE A GIFT. USE THEM TO INFORM DESIGN. WORK WITH THEM NOT AGAINST THEM.

PROBLEMS ARE A DESIGNER’S BREAD AND BUTTER. FIND THEM. SOLVE THEM.
Have You Seen an African Dance?
Poem by Jason Nkwai

1Have You Seen an African Dance?
Poem by Jason Nkwai


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