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Articles

# Tidalectic Un/mapping and the Performance of African Diasporic Imagination in the Repertory of Katherine Dunham

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## Introduction

In his 1989 book *Caribbean Discourse*, Édouard Glissant insists that creativity is necessary for (re)constructing and (re)establishing relation between African Diasporic cultures and environments. His provocation affirms that the expression of imagination is integral to sustaining African diasporic life and worldmaking. Historical discontinuity in the Caribbean has led to what Glissant calls “an imposed non-history,” resulting in the erasure of collective communal memory (1989, 64). It is not that those who were violently captured and dispersed from Africa do not have a history, but rather, as the world has become more historically conscious, African diasporic people are compelled to confront the discord between their environment and their cumulative cultural experiences (64). Imagination as a tool aids the reconciliation of fragmented histories; its saliency across African diasporic cultures is evident in the numerous rich and diverse cultural aesthetics. In this article, I foreground imagination to consider how African diasporic conditions converge with choreographic expression. The article “un/maps” dominant understandings of the choreographic process of mid-twentieth-century African American choreographer-anthropologist Katherine Dunham by expanding Kamau E. Brathwaite’s (1993) concept of “Tidalectics” beyond the Caribbean to the wider African diaspora and a distinctly Caribbean comprehension of diasporic imagination. I undertake this analysis by utilizing datasets and visualizations created by the project Dunham’s Data: Katherine Dunham and Digital Methods for Dance Historical Inquiry<sup>1</sup> to trace how the concept of Brazil is imagined and reimagined within Dunham’s paper archive from 1937 to 1962.

Dunham exemplifies how choreography can function as a realm through which ruptured histories can be reckoned with and imagined anew. Her works were located in and drew inspiration from personal visits and research conducted in places such as Martinique. However, she also created work in imagined and unvisited places from different historical periods such as Rarotonga. As one of the first African American woman anthropologists, Dunham utilized her early research and fieldwork in the Caribbean to form her choreographic method over an eighty-year career. Her company toured across six continents, presenting her image of the African diaspora in over

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two hundred<sup>2</sup> works between 1937 and 1962. Dunham's reflexive repertory was shaped by the interplay between dance and anthropology (Osumare 2010,1), responding to locations, cultural contexts, and acquired performer knowledge. Notably, her prominent Brazilian-inspired choreography is overlooked in existing scholarship.

In her essay "Performing the Memory of Difference in Afro-Caribbean Dance," VèVè Clark (1994, 2005b) theorizes Dunham's choreographic process of using scholarly enquiry to recreate the memory of regional dances on her company as "research-to-performance" (325). Clark uses Pierre Nora's (1989) *milieux de memoire* (the location or environment of memory) and *lieux de memoire* (the performance of memory) to characterize Dunham's choreographies as repositories or "sites" of African diasporic remembrance created through a movement vocabulary comprised, in part, of African diasporic dance aesthetics to both share with the world and "preserve memory and history" (Clark 2005b, 323). Clark conceptualizes what she calls the "memory of difference" as a paradigm for dance analysis to account for the variations within Dunham's repertory over time. By extending Brathwaite's notion of Tidalectics, I expand and further complicate Clark's understanding of Dunham's choreographic process in order to bring language to the often chaotic, contradictory, and deeply layered reality of creating and representing regions from which an African diasporic artist is displaced.

Playing on the back-and-forth of dialectical thought and the spatial imaginary of the Caribbean in the to-and-fro movement of the ocean, Tidalectics reflects the fluid relations between land and sea that are contained in African diasporic cultures and identities. As a model, Brathwaite's concept encompasses the sense of arrival/departure and transition across time. Its pathways are multiple and enmeshed. My extended conception of Tidalectics paired with data analysis surfaces the complex positionality of Dunham as both a pioneering minoritized woman navigating the politics of race, gender, and financial precarity and someone who yielded their imperial privilege as a US citizen to gain access to knowledge and people. Comprehending Dunham through this prism resists the flattening that can often occur to canonical dance figures and instead leads to a nuanced analysis of Dunham, her historical context, and her creative work. Studying theater programs, draft programs, and show patter, I use Tidalectics as an interpretative framework to hold the complex in/outflows of Dunham's repertory and analyze the Brazilian influence in Dunham's repertory through a Caribbean lens. In doing this, I emphasize the significance of her own artistry and anthropological work that situates the Caribbean at the center of her worldview. Not only is Dunham's work dialogical across the African diaspora, but the way in which her choreography pulls from different dance histories and cultures makes it possible to consider her repertory as a creolized form. In this, I reposition Dunham from US Black history to global lines of Black scholarly thought through discourses coming out of the Caribbean. Examination of the company's Brazilian repertory offers a choreographic method employed by Dunham that does not fit the research-to-performance trajectory but indicates something beyond it. I turn to Caribbean conceptions of creative imagination to account for what I understand to be Dunham's imagination-driven Brazilian choreography. Caribbean perceptions of imagination, such as the one offered by Glissant, comprehend imagination not only as an artistic endeavor, but also as a critical tool for sustaining life and reconciling fractured and violent histories that are a fundamental condition of African diasporic people.<sup>3</sup> Tidalectic analysis allows for the consideration of Dunham's Brazilian-influenced repertory as both ethnographic exploration and a means of survival.

The analysis of this article is grounded in methods from digital humanities. Apprehending the Tidalectics of any creative process requires a substantial amount of material and the ability to analyze through close readings, wider entanglements, and contexts. Digital methods provide the necessary varied scaling for Tidalectic understanding; consequently, digital analysis is uniquely suited to supporting Tidalectic consideration.<sup>4</sup> At the intersection of the digital and African diasporic concerns lies the opportunity to expound and transform our comprehension of a "complex and unbounded space" (Glover, Gil, and Josephs 2022). In particular, pairing the inherent multiplicity

of Tidalectic interpretation with digital analysis aligns with scholars in Black and Indigenous digital humanities<sup>5</sup> who deem rethinking approaches to archival and digital research necessary to avoiding the historically reductive and harmful cycles of collecting and categorizing data on marginalized communities. The nature of a Tidalectic approach to data underscores what Harmony Bench and Kate Elswit (2020) recognize as the opportunity for data to shift the scales of analysis most used in critical dance studies from the “privileged example and the signature work” to the “quodidian minutiae” (2020, 308) when working with data in relation to dance history. Following Bench and Elswit, this article demonstrates the possibilities for “digital methods to further dance studies” (2022c, 38) capacity to conduct an expanded historical examination of an artist’s oeuvre. On Dunham’s Data project, the utilization of what Bench and Elswit term “visceral data analysis”<sup>6</sup> reorients us to attend to the bodies within the data and “draw out the visceral experiences that underpin and haunt such data, to begin with” (40). I add Tidalectics to fathom the conflicting and multiple trajectories of Dunham’s archive simultaneously. In this way, my approach to Dunham’s repertory dually holds what is known about her choreography and her creative process and—in invoking the question of imagination through data analysis—gives space for other revelations that are held within her archive. This article, therefore, not only positions the body as an archive and keeper of fractured histories but contributes to scholarship that considers choreographed movement as an artistic form that perpetuates African diasporic histories and culture.

This article begins by examining the places that inspired Dunham’s repertory to reposition her within trajectories of Caribbean thought. I adopt Antonio Benitez-Rojo’s (1996) concept of the meta-archipelago to think about how the Caribbean region extends beyond its borders, in addition to expounding on the multiplicity of Tidalectics in order to critically examine how African diasporic imagination manifests within Dunham’s choreography. This article then moves to digital analyses of Dunham’s Brazilian imaginary, uncovering how Dunham’s Brazilian work aligns with Caribbean/African diasporic approaches to authenticity, disrupts our knowledge of Dunham’s choreographic method, and represents her Tidalectically as a complicated figure that both subverted and reinscribed imperial power. To conclude, I reflect on how these ideas un/map discourses around Dunham and what they imply about the African diasporic condition. I consider how a Tidalectic frame that employs data analysis enables the prioritization of contradiction and the undoing of knowledge, which in turn leads to a more nuanced historical analysis of African diasporic dance figures.

## Un/mapping Dunham

I begin this analysis of imagination in Dunham’s repertory by repositioning our understanding of her work from a US-centric lens to a wider Caribbean one through an extended notion of Tidalectics with Dunham’s choreographic and anthropological history. Dunham is beloved as an important African American figure in dance and beyond. However, as many scholars have recognized, her impact did not stop at the borders of the United States. Dunham was global, gaining recognition across the African diaspora in places such as Haiti and Senegal. Dunham herself did not identify with US nationalism, instead seeing herself as a citizen of the world (Dee Das 2017, 8). Through her work and activism, she is deemed an “unofficial ambassador” of the African diaspora (11), although, rarely has this led to the consideration of Dunham within wider African diasporic intellectual trajectories. Shifting the understanding of Dunham’s work to Caribbean thought on imagination further illuminates Dunham’s creative process and choreography as an African diasporic and global figure without negating comprehension of her within US contexts. The influence of the Caribbean on Dunham’s choreography is foundational, comprising over a third of more than two hundred repertory works. In Dunham’s life narrative and oeuvre, this stems, in part, from anthropological fieldwork in Haiti, Trinidad, Martinique, and Jamaica, conducted by Dunham on a Julius Rosenwald grant from 1935 to 1936.

In the Repertory dataset,<sup>7</sup> the geolocation of a particular work is based on language that Dunham uses in theater program notes, the title of the work, and other choreography it is associated with.

Figure 1 envisions the connections to place inspiration made through the repertory. Each colored circle is representative of a mentioned location, the border thickness increases every time a location is cited. The diameter signifies an area of inspiration, whether that be a street, a city, or an entire continent. The labels represent a work. Figure 1 evidences Dunham's choreographic interests in a way that un/maps historical narratives around her work. The repertory reflects regions across the African diaspora and beyond. Present, as expected, is work inspired by the Caribbean (in purple) and North America (in orange). South America, and more specifically Brazil (in mid-tone green), however, features more dominantly than what is indicated within Dunham scholarship, and Africa significantly less. The presence of the Pacific islands and Japan point to the expansive borders of Dunham's artistic curiosity. The concentration of work across the Americas affirms embodied and anecdotal knowledge about Dunham's repertory, supporting my reframing of Dunham within Caribbean thought to consider in detail the role of imagination within her choreography. The seemingly marginal influences of Dunham's oeuvre attest to the need for scholars to account for that which is not included in the historical narrative. Tidalectics offers a way to shift the center of analysis to comprehend Dunham's reach more fully. It is, in fact, through the combination of Caribbean thought and digital humanities that an inherent African diasporic experience of imagination can be sought.

Brathwaite offers Tidalectics to us through the image of a woman sweeping her yard in Jamaica, moving sand from sand. In her movement, Brathwaite finds that she is not merely shifting sand from one area to another but that she is walking on water, echoing the rhythms of the ocean, the historical passage that saw her come to be on this island, and the possibility of the future:

And then one morning I see her [*sic*]  
body silhouetting against the sparkling light  
that hits the Caribbean/Ocean at that early  
dawn and it seems as if her feet,  
which all along I thought were walking on  
the sand ... were  
really ... walking on the water ... and she was travelling across  
that middlepass  
age, constantly coming from where  
she had come from—in her case  
Africa—to this spot in North Coast  
Jamaica where she now lives ...  
And she was always on this journey, walking on the steps of sunlit water,  
coming out of a continent which we didn't fully know how to understand,  
to a set of islands which we only barely now coming to respect, cherish  
and understand ... why is our psychology ... tidalectic, like our  
grandmother's ... like the movement of the ocean she's walking on,  
coming from one continent/continuum, touching another, and then  
receding ("reading") from the island(s) into the perhaps creative chaos of  
the(ir) future.... (Brathwaite 1993; Brathwaite and Mackey 1999, 33)<sup>8</sup>

Though there is a sense of routine within this Jamaican woman's sweeping, Brathwaite clearly emphasizes her actions as a continuous journey, one in which she arrived or was born. As a child of diaspora, she inhabits the liminal space of transition that cannot be fully encapsulated with notions of national belonging; instead, belonging is found in ancestral cultures and practices and their iterations across the globe. In her Tidalectic flow, she moves across continents and along continuums to arrive at the shores of the Caribbean. In this way, Brathwaite's comprehension of Tidalectics symbolizes not only a practical act but also a transformative motion that transcends

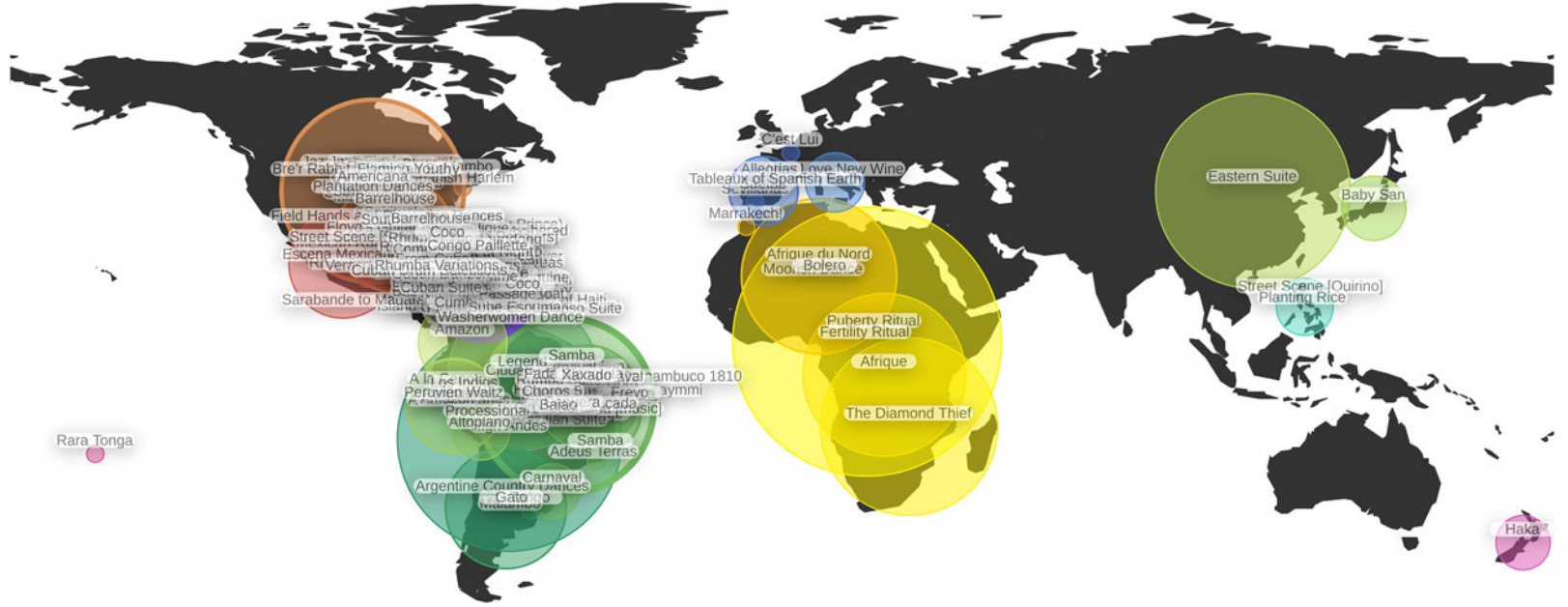


Figure 1. Geolocated Inspiration Map of Katherine Dunham's Repertory 1937–1962 with Labels. Colored circles represent mentioned locations. The border thickness increases each time a location is mentioned. The diameter reflects an area of inspiration, from streets to entire continents. Labels represent a work. Explore interactively online at <https://visualizations.dunhamsdata.org/inspiration>. Data: Harmony Bench, Kate Elswit, and Tia-Monique Uzor. Visualization: Antonio Jiménez-Mavillard (with permission from Dunham's Data).

space and time inherited through intergenerational “grandmother” memory. Just as Tidalectics embodies the continuous and necessary shifting of cultures and ideas, the seemingly mundane sweeping of the yard reflects the ongoing process of collecting and gathering wisdom found in the rituals of Black women. Furthermore, this action highlights, as Elizabeth DeLoughrey (2007) articulates, the complex shifting between “diaspora and indigeneity” and “routes and roots,” (2) echoing not only the Caribbean experience but the African diasporic condition. Tidalectics, therefore, is meaningful for Dunham as a Black woman engaging with dance cultures and epistemological knowledge across the African diaspora amidst financial precarity and misogyny. It encompasses her continuous need to adapt her repertory and strategic approach to ensure her own survival and that of her dance company.

As a model, Tidalectics is not bound to the Atlantic rim; it goes beyond the confines of what can be imagined. Reframing Tidalectics allows for its expansion out from the Caribbean to the shores of the African diaspora and further afield. I follow Benitez-Rojo, who in applying the meta-archipelago to the Caribbean, positions the region as having no real center nor boundary extending “past the limits of its own sea” (1996, 4). Benitez-Rojo’s designation of the Caribbean as a meta-archipelago affirms how it is possible to use Caribbean thought as a paradigm to think about the connections through the African diaspora and globally. In this way, the Tidalectic model functions similarly to Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic* (1993), which considers the African diaspora as a complex flow of cultural exchanges (Gilroy 1993, 190). However, critiques of Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic* highlight its US centricism and its perpetuation of imperialist notions by anchoring modernity solely to the Atlantic and in the slave trade (Oboe and Scacchi 2008, 3). Annalisa Oboe and Anna Scacchi call for an expanded perspective that includes “multidirectional cultural exchanges” across the Pacific, Mediterranean, Indian, and Atlantic Oceans, as well as between Africa, Europe, and the Americas (4). A meta-archipelagic understanding of Tidalectics offers a way to expand our understanding of Black cultural exchange in the way that Oboe and Scacchi call for.

I understand the nature of Tidalectics as a cumulative backward and forward motion with no logic that speeds up and slows down. Like the ocean’s tides, it is affected by what it collects along the way, the environments that it encounters, and the gravitational pull of the moon (what we could comprehend as history, culture, or power). Tidalectic motion carries identities and cultural aesthetics—language, sound, music, dances, beliefs, and other practices—along with it. As these aesthetics journey, they are transformed and so are different on each return to shore. Tidalectic motion refuses to be predicted—its pathways are neither horizontal, vertical, nor circular; it moves between and through them in constant spiraling multidirectional shifting. It is fluid and dynamic, determined by initial conditions: how it came to be, how it came to move, etc. These motions are continuously in the process of forming. This conception of Tidalectics does not dictate any particular pattern of motion as asserted by many other scholars,<sup>9</sup> but complicates its pathways and shifts our awareness of continuity and retention within African diasporic expression. Built into Tidalectics is a complexity that demands comprehension, both the consideration of what is visible across entangled cultural networks with multiple currents of exchange and what idiosyncratic connections can be unveiled through close reading, such as the one Dunham’s repertory provides. This is what Benitez-Rojo articulates through chaos theory as looking for “regularities” or “dynamic states” within seeming (dis)order (1996, 2). In unveiling the manifestations of imagination in Dunham’s repertory, an extended notion of Tidalectics encourages analysis that foregrounds intricacies to complicate our understanding of cultural flows contained within the repertory.

Clark’s conceptualization of Dunham’s creative process as research-to-performance provides a directional paradigm for apprehending her unique approach to choreography. Although Clark recognizes the artistic agency within Dunham’s translation process through her notion of memory of difference, it is obscured by the emphasis on Dunham’s stage work as *lieux de memoire*:



When the dance steps, music and other cultural forms were transformed for stage representation they become *lieux de memoire*, reworkings and restatements of historical danced events whose memory Dunham had also preserved in writing or on film. Dunham's *lieux de memoire* became at once a celebration of Caribbean memory and history preserved in dance form and a reminder of cultural artefacts that one should not forget. (2005b, 323)

As staged sites of preservation and cultural memory, the imaginative choreographic process becomes implicit in favor of its designation as a cultural reference point. This remains true even with the acknowledgement of repertory shifting over time. Exploring the imaginative aspects of the repertory does not invalidate Clark's rigorous observations. Instead, leveraging digital methods to center the role of imagination reveals how it moves Dunham's company forward and positions her within wider African diasporic frames.

Halifu Osumare (2020) interprets Dunham's creative artistry and body-to-body transmission as key aspects of the memory of difference. Jacques Derrida's concept of *différance*<sup>10</sup> further illuminates the shifting nature of meaning in memory of difference in response to what Clark identifies as "several levels" of difference relating to "research, performance, criticism or, scholarship" (2005b, 327). This is what Diana Taylor asserts about how repertory both "keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning" (2003, 20), challenging the notion of Dunham's choreography as a site of preservation. Instead, it aligns with a Tidalectic conception in which meaning is fluid and dynamic. This understanding redefines Dunham's legacy as a canonical African American historical figure and positions her within global lines of Black scholarly thought.<sup>11</sup> Caribbean framing of the interplay between memory and imagination is expounded by these notions of difference and performance, rejecting singular hierarchal versions of history; as put by Glissant, our history could not be "deposited gradually and continuously like sediment" (1989, 62). Imagination prevails in the absence of linear narratives fostering creolized cultures across the islands and African diasporic regions. Historical fractures unite a diverse set of people, compelling them to reckon with their histories in a way that is magnified<sup>12</sup> through cultural aesthetics. This means of producing cultural expression emerges from the inherent African diasporic condition.

Tidalectics offers an alternative way of thinking about mapping, compelling the consideration of what occurs beyond asserted fact. The place inspiration map reflects this in its presentation of geography as Dunham perceived it through her repertory. The different sizes of bubbles and border thickness are the project's attempt to understand the diffuseness and instability of her references. I see Clark's characterization of Dunham's process as research-to-performance as a kind of map in the traditional sense. The concept linearly creates lines across the ocean from place of origin to space of performance. This is assured knowledge that draws movement heritages from Dunham outward to the dancers in her company. Tidalectics disrupts this way of mapping through its ability to hold multiple truths moving in multiple directions at the same time; its traces then become a way of un/mapping. As Tao Leigh Goffe (2020) explains, "if mapping is about knowing and surveying then un/mapping is about unknowing and uncharting territory," Tidalectic un/mapping is not about possession or creating borders but becomes about tracing the infinite possibilities of the interplay between memory and imagination. Open to interception, Tidalectic un/mapping "welcomes not knowing" to be receptive to alternative ways of knowing (Goffe 2020). Tidalectic un/mapping does not do away with mapping that draws definitive lines; its multiplicity allows for these lines to exist alongside many other types of lines. Thus, un/mapping displaces imperialist notions of absolute truth that stake a claim and erect boundaries and moves away from single sources of knowledge. The process of Tidalectic un/mapping is to trace and overlap lines of knowledge, knowing that not everything can be mapped, acknowledging that mapping is a collective process, and understanding that what is traced can be further informed by types of knowledge that can only be felt, seen, or heard. Un/mapping as a verb is a continuous



process of—as Stuart Hall identifies when writing on cultural identities—“being as well as becoming” (1990, 225). In this way, it is not absent of meaning, yet shifts as it belongs to us now, in the future as well as in the past (225).

The remainder of this article engages the Brazilian imaginary in Dunham’s repertory to un/map dominant discourses in Dunham scholarship and highlight her fundamental African diasporic approach to creative expression.

## Brazil in the Dunham Imaginary

The Proportional Geographic Inspiration Chart of Katherine Dunham’s Repertory from 1937 to 1962 below (Figure 2) reflects where the archival repertory was influenced from the course of Dunham’s touring career. The moment Dunham starts choreographing after her anthropological trip to the Caribbean in 1935, a clear Brazilian trend (shown in mid-tone green) persists and grows as Dunham starts to build her repertory. In any given year, Brazil as a site of inspiration is represented by up to a third of the work presented that is connected to location.<sup>13</sup> Between 1937 and 1962, over 14 percent of Dunham’s repertory is described to audiences in show patter and program notes as inspired by Brazil, from Bahia to Pernambuco. Brazil’s influence on Dunham’s repertory is a higher percentage than work inspired by the United States (10 percent) and second only to the largest area of influence—the Caribbean at 33 percent. Given Dunham’s cultural heritage and anthropological work, the Caribbean and the United States are expected sites of inspiration that have been documented within scholarship on Dunham’s repertory,<sup>14</sup> therefore, Brazil’s prominence in the data is unanticipated. Scholars have yet to seriously consider any individual Brazilian-inspired choreography or Brazil’s wider impact on Dunham’s repertory. This leads to the question of what is remembered in dance history and by whom. Its under-consideration positions Brazil as an urgent area of exploration within Dunham scholarship.

Brazilian-inspired repertory exemplifies how Dunham is engaging with African diasporic imagination through the consideration of authenticity in her Brazilian repertory. Examining place inspiration reveals a choreographic method that extends beyond Clark’s research-to-performance. Moreover, Dunham’s fragmental approach to creating prompts a consideration of how she both empowered national Black identities and asserted the privilege of her US citizenship.

### Authenticity Is Not the Goal

Brazilian-inspired work in the Repertory dataset emerges as highly imaginative. In my reframing, I interpret this imagination through Glissant’s (1997, 2009) distinction of the imaginary as all the ways in which we can perceive and conceive of the world (xxii).<sup>15</sup> For Glissant, the imaginary produces expansive representations of the world that do not discard “detail and multiplicity” (2009, 112) but make way for Tidalectic connection. Focusing on the development of Brazil in Dunham’s repertory elucidates the imaginary in Dunham’s Brazilian conception. Through visceral data analysis, we can expound on the development of this imaginative repertory more definitively. For example, Joanna Dee Das recognizes that Dunham’s Brazilian-inspired work is derived from imagination (2017, 67); the data clarifies that before Dunham arrived in Brazil for the first time in 1950, she had already created 50 percent of her Brazilian repertory and had been performing them to audiences across the United States, Mexico, and Europe for twelve years. A Tidalectic consideration of this analysis illuminates the African diasporic connections at work as Dunham conceives of a Brazilian imaginary that follows Caribbean approaches to authenticity.

The mid-tone green wave across Figure 2 indicates the success of imaginative Brazilian-inspired work. It suggests that there was something particular about this repertory that made it popular among audiences, proving it to be integral in the sustenance of a company that was in constant financial precarity.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, its presence in the company’s repertory before any documented

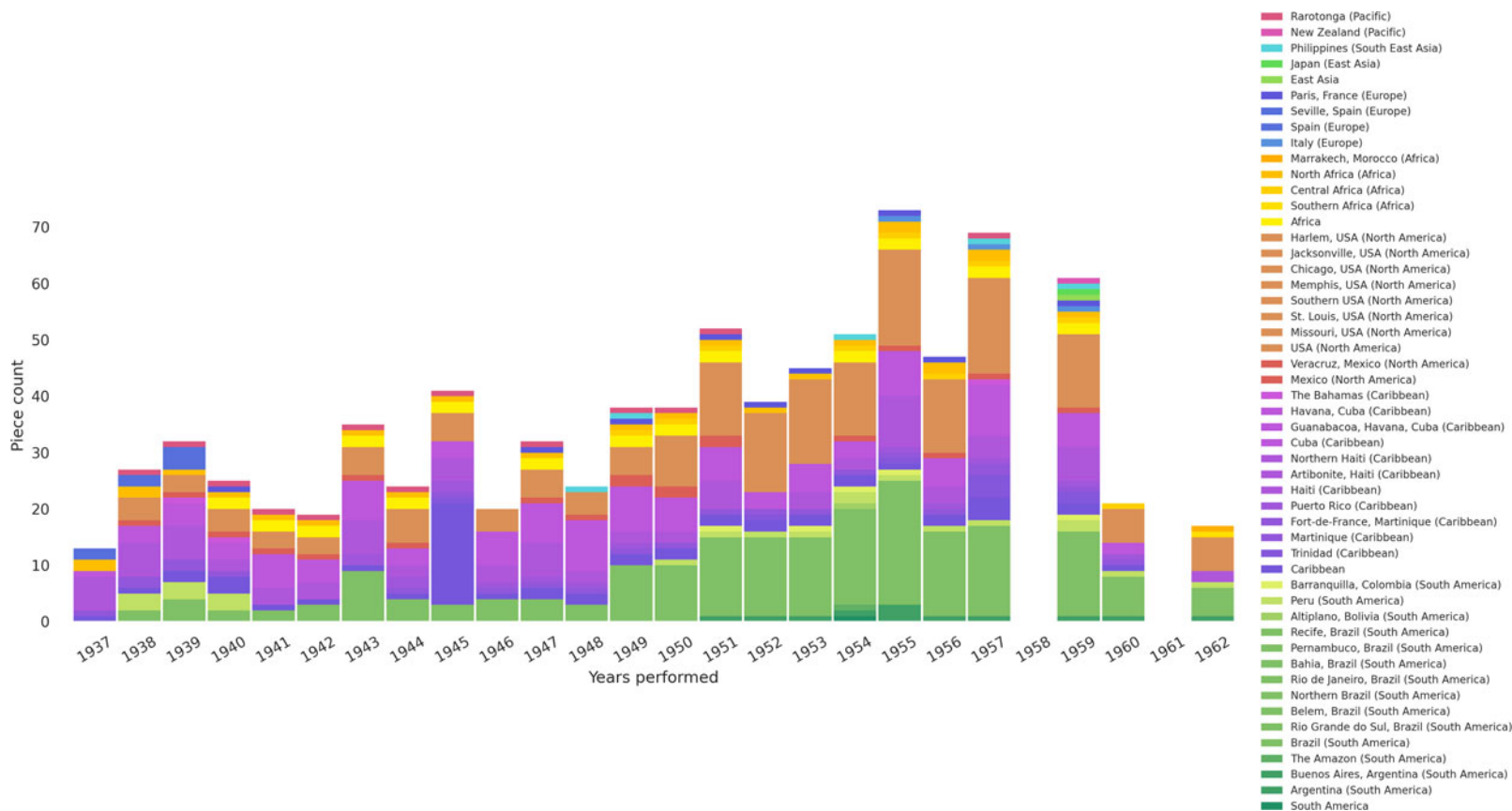


Figure 2. Proportional Geographic Inspiration Chart of Katherine Dunham's Repertory from 1937 to 1962. Years performed progress chronologically from left to right, whereas the piece count, indicating the total number of works inspired by a location performed in a given year, ascends from bottom to top. Each block of color represents geolocations that can be found in the legend. Available online at <https://visualizations.dunhamsdata.org/inspiration>. Data: Harmony Bench, Kate Elswit, and Tia-Monique Uzor. Visualization: Antonio Jiménez-Mavillard (with permission from Dunham's Data).

contact with Brazil makes clear that, as an artist, Dunham was not solely committed to the presentation of cultural memory through her artistic expression but that her interests extended to creating it herself. Consequently, it is possible to understand Dunham's Brazilian imaginary as a creative expression that does not center authenticity. Derrick Walcott reminds us that

in the Caribbean history is irrelevant, not because it is not being created, or because it was sordid but because it has never mattered, what has mattered is the loss of history, the amnesia of races, what has become necessary is imagination, imagination as necessity, as invention. (Walcott 1974, 6)

In the absence of a singular sedimentary historical consciousness that offers particular kinds of cultural knowing/knowledge to a group of people that is deemed accurate and true, authenticity becomes less important in favor of collective agreements that produce unity and perpetuate survival.<sup>17</sup> Cultural accuracy and authenticity legitimize much of Dunham's staged presentation and is at the center of Clark's research-to-performance. This is evident in the way that Dunham consistently clarifies her anthropological credentials in light of her artistic interpretations in the framing of her work to the press. For instance, in 1942, it is reported that Dunham believes that "any dance, native, ritual, even jive, should be presented authentically and not be distorted. This authenticity is a contributing factor in her amazing success" (*Oakland Tribune* 1942, 27). Further, a 1945 column on Dunham in the *Mirror* (Perth, Western Australia) describes Dunham's dismay at her "primitive interpretations" being classed by critics as "sexy" and "sizzling." The reason for this is explained:

She lived for a long while among the Jamaican natives, who as they got to know her, permitted her to see their most secret dance rites. She attended funeral feasts and learned that the idea of all the wild singing and dancing was to externalize grief to make it bearable. During her stay, she wrote many scholarly articles ... her dance recitals, in which she re-created faithfully the routines she had learned in the Caribbean, won the instant approval of critics. (*Mirror* 1945, 14)

Of course, Dunham's public discourse around her work is fueled by the desire for her audiences to perceive the depth of African diasporic dances, the knowledge that her work was created with, and for her being taken seriously as an intellectual and a Black woman.

The case of Brazil, however, presents a paradigm that does not prioritize authenticity in the same way as her repertory inspired by the Caribbean and the United States. It implies a process of creating that stems from not knowing, and in its place, constructing a Brazilian imaginary from her knowledge of Caribbean dance forms. Creating in this African diasporic sense is fragmental and is akin to what Wilson Harris understands as "acts of memory" (2008). The imaginary as an "act" then becomes a tool to interrogate history to find a "profound art of compensation which seeks to re-play a dismemberment of tribes ..." (13). Its cruciality in aiding African diasporic people to perceive how they exist in the world means that the imaginary cannot center authenticity. bell hooks expresses this act as "re-membering," that is "the coming together of severed parts, fragments becoming whole" (1995, 64).

Whereas [Figure 2](#) indicates a constant level of Caribbean-inspired pieces in the repertory, there is a clear momentum that builds over time with the proliferation of her Brazilian-inspired work. The Timeline of Katherine Dunham's Brazilian-Inspired Repertory from 1937 to 1962 ([Figure 3](#)) provides a detailed chronology of the work that constitutes Dunham's Brazilian-inspired repertory. The timeline exemplifies the expanded definition of repertory that the Dunham's Data project adopts to reflect how Dunham's repertory is both embodied and transmitted across generations of performers and is a dynamic entity that changes and adapts according to the needs of the company. In doing this, we go beyond the consideration of repertory as a list of work to include embodied and cultural

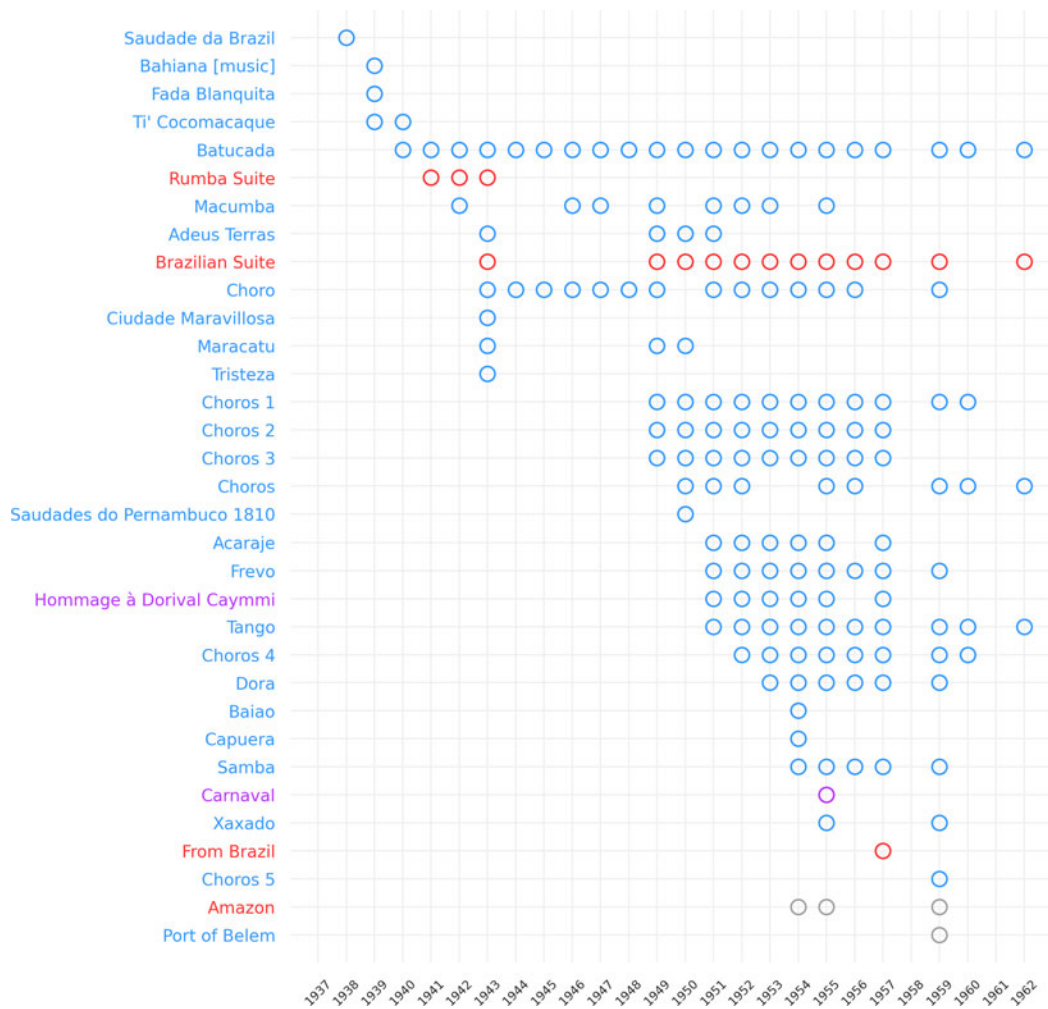


Figure 3. A Timeline of Katherine Dunham’s Brazilian-Inspired Repertory from 1937 to 1962. The titles of Brazilian-inspired works are presented on the left-hand side, whereas years advance chronologically along the bottom from left to right. Circles indicate repertory performed each year. Colors correspond to the nested hierarchy identified in Dunham’s Data’s datasets, excluding the Show category, which has no direct connection to individual Brazilian-inspired numbers in the Repertory data. Gray circles represent pieces referenced in draft programs and correspondence but lack archival evidence of performance. Data: Harmony Bench, Kate Elswit, and Tia-Monique Uzor. Visualization: Antonio Jiménez-Mavillard (with permission from Dunham’s Data).

knowledge that is “entangled with community, whether among those who are co-present or separated in space and time” (Bench and Elswit 2022c, 52).<sup>18</sup>

The imaginative construction of Brazil in Dunham’s repertory is initially subtle and only hints at her interest in the region. In a 1937 show called *Tropics, Impressions and Realities*, Dunham presents new choreography based on her fieldwork in the Caribbean. In a 1938 program of this show (Figure 4), there are pieces based on traditional forms from Haiti, such as *Congo Paillette*, stories from Martinique in the piece *Biguine-Biguine*, and “impressions” from Peru. Toward the end, a Brazilian song, “Saudade da Brazil” composed by Villa Lobos, is played alongside two other songs: “Puerto del Vino” by DeBussy (Spain) and “Sacro-Monte” by Turina (France). The musical influence in Dunham’s shows continues into 1939 with two Brazilian songs, “Fada Blanquita” and “Bahiana” (also known as “Batucada”) appearing in the show *Ballet Negre*. The incremental

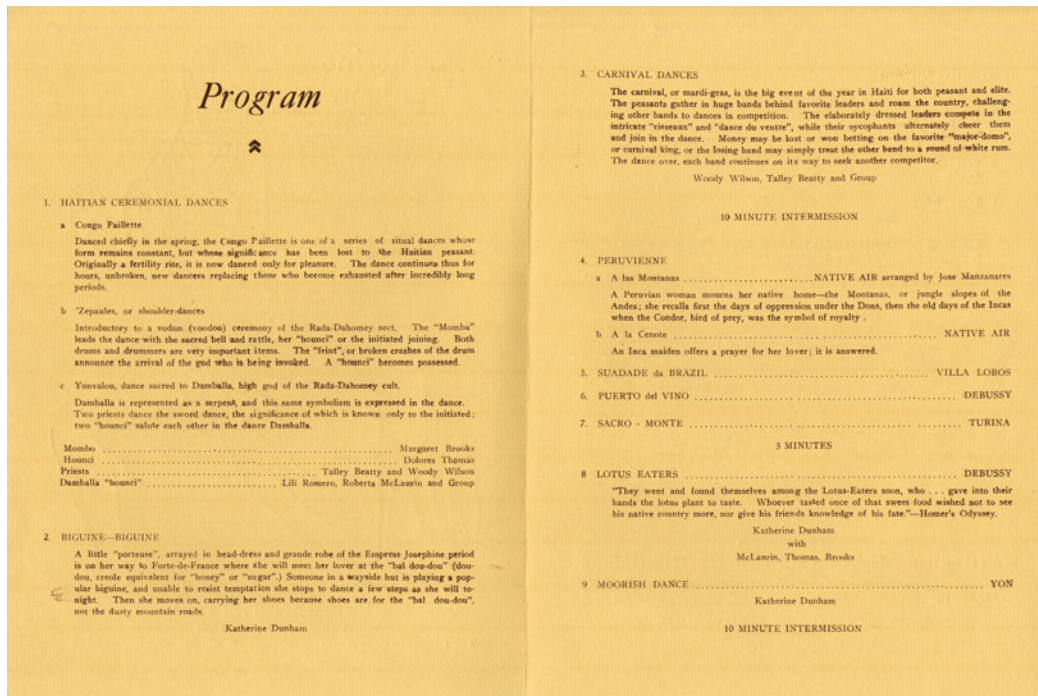


Figure 4. Center pages of the 1938 program “Katherine Dunham and Dance Group in Tropics, Impressions and Realities,” performed at the Goodman Theatre. Katherine Dunham Papers, Southern Illinois University, Box 85 Folder 3 (image courtesy of Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale).

introduction of Brazil into Dunham’s repertory through music exhibits the way Dunham’s imaginary was built over time.

This is contrary to Dunham’s Caribbean imaginary, which developed for months through immersion at the source, enabling her to create an evening-length show around what she had learned (see Figure 4). By 1941, Dunham’s Brazilian imaginary had evolved to include *Rumba Suite*, a container that was comprised of *Macumba* and *Choro* (whose inspiration Dunham attributes to Brazil) alongside pieces such as *Concert Rumba* and *Mexican Rumba*. In her early configurations, Dunham conflates Brazil with the Spanish colonized regions of Cuba and Mexico. As Figure 3 shows, *Rumba Suite* does not sustain and disappeared from the repertory by 1943. *Macumba* and *Choro*, however, continue as stand-alone pieces and as part of the container *Brazilian Suite* until 1955 and 1959 respectively. This again exemplifies Dunham working through her Brazilian imaginary. In its infancy, she connects Brazil to Mexico and Cuba through rumba, which is not typically associated with Brazil, and it becomes more distinct as it develops.

*Choro* and its iterations (*Choros* and *Choros 1–5*) are examples of Dunham making African diasporic connections through her Brazilian imaginary. *Choros* is often described in programs as “early nineteenth-century quadrilles” (Dunham Company 1952). As a form, quadrilles were prevalent throughout many of the Caribbean colonies, as contra dances were danced on the islands by colonial masters. The enslaved Africans mimicked these dances and transformed them into their own creolized versions. Their presence in the repertory data means it is very likely that Dunham came across these dance forms at some point during her travels in the Caribbean. Dunham’s utilization of contra dances in her choreography serves as an anchor for constructing her Brazilian imaginary; this resonates with Glissant’s notion of the multiplicity inherent in the Caribbean imaginary and reveals the haunting of embodiment present in visceral data analysis.



## Un/mapping Research-to-Performance: Another Choreographic Method

The most prevalent region that Brazilian-inspired pieces are attached to after the general category of Brazil is Bahia, with 54 references out of 176 across the Repertory dataset. This is interesting, as Bahiana is one of the first Brazilian musical influences to enter Dunham's Brazilian imaginary in 1939. *Batucada* (also known as *Bahiana*) is one of the pieces that occurs most frequently in the Repertory dataset. Figure 3 demonstrates its popularity in comparison to other Brazilian-inspired repertory. Vanyoe Aikens characterizes it as "the most famous piece, the one that Europe loved" (Clark 2005a, 282). If we understand Dunham's anthropological credentials that positioned her as an entity of African diasporic dance knowledge as one of the aspects that drew audiences to the company,<sup>19</sup> then the example of *Batucada* un/maps this assertion and points to Dunham utilizing another choreographic method that begins with imagination.

Figure 5<sup>20</sup> portrays the relationship between the location from which Dunham's repertory was inspired, the passport nationality of the company's performers, and where the company was touring. In their essay, Bench and Elswit detail how the datasets inform one another as we build them:

As an example, when we find a program in Italian that does not list a theatre or year, we first look to an evolving dataset of Performer Check-Ins to begin to identify the timespan during which named performers were employed by Dunham; we then return to our Everyday Itinerary dataset to determine when we have identified that the company was performing in Italy within those date parameters, and we may further refine that dating using newspaper reviews that reference specific pieces of repertory. Once dated these programs in turn provide further information for other datasets, including additional entries to Performer Check-In and Repertory. (Bench and Elswit 2022c, 39)

The relationships depicted in Figure 5<sup>21</sup> make very clear the correlation between places visited, places of inspiration in the repertory, and performers who show up in the company, in instances such as East Asia.<sup>22</sup> It is known that Dunham's practice was to introduce new members of her company who had intimate cultural knowledge of the regions and dances she was interested in as she travelled. Adding this understanding to the logic of the research-to-performance method, we expect to see a proportionate amount of Brazilian company members or many visits to Brazil. Instead, Figure 6 images the nominal number of performers associated with Brazil and the two visits by the company to the region in 1950 and 1954. In the absence of a Brazilian correlation that supports Clark's research-to-performance, place inspiration helps us to think about the imaginative as a point of creative inception.

The descriptions of works within Dunham's programs are very specific when they appear. They speak to Dunham's experience and philosophies, and act as a method to educate her audiences. Pulling together theater program notes with the Everyday Itinerary further elucidates how imagination functions within Dunham's body of work. Breaking down specific place inspiration of Brazilian-inspired repertory through program notes further reveals the portion of choreography that is founded in, what I characterize as, imaginative locations versus those that are anchored in Dunham's lived experience. The general category of Brazil is attached to over 35 percent of Brazilian-inspired repertory. This is interesting because when we examine Dunham's repertory her specificity around locations that she has visited is evident through their description. *Samba*, for example, which appears in the repertory after the company's 1953 trip to Brazil, is described as "*Samba*—a street version from the favelas of Rio" (Bench, Elswit, and Uzor 2022). Locating *Samba* to the favelas in Rio de Janeiro within the data uncovers Dunham's embodied visceral experience in Brazil and is indicative of her research-to-performance method.



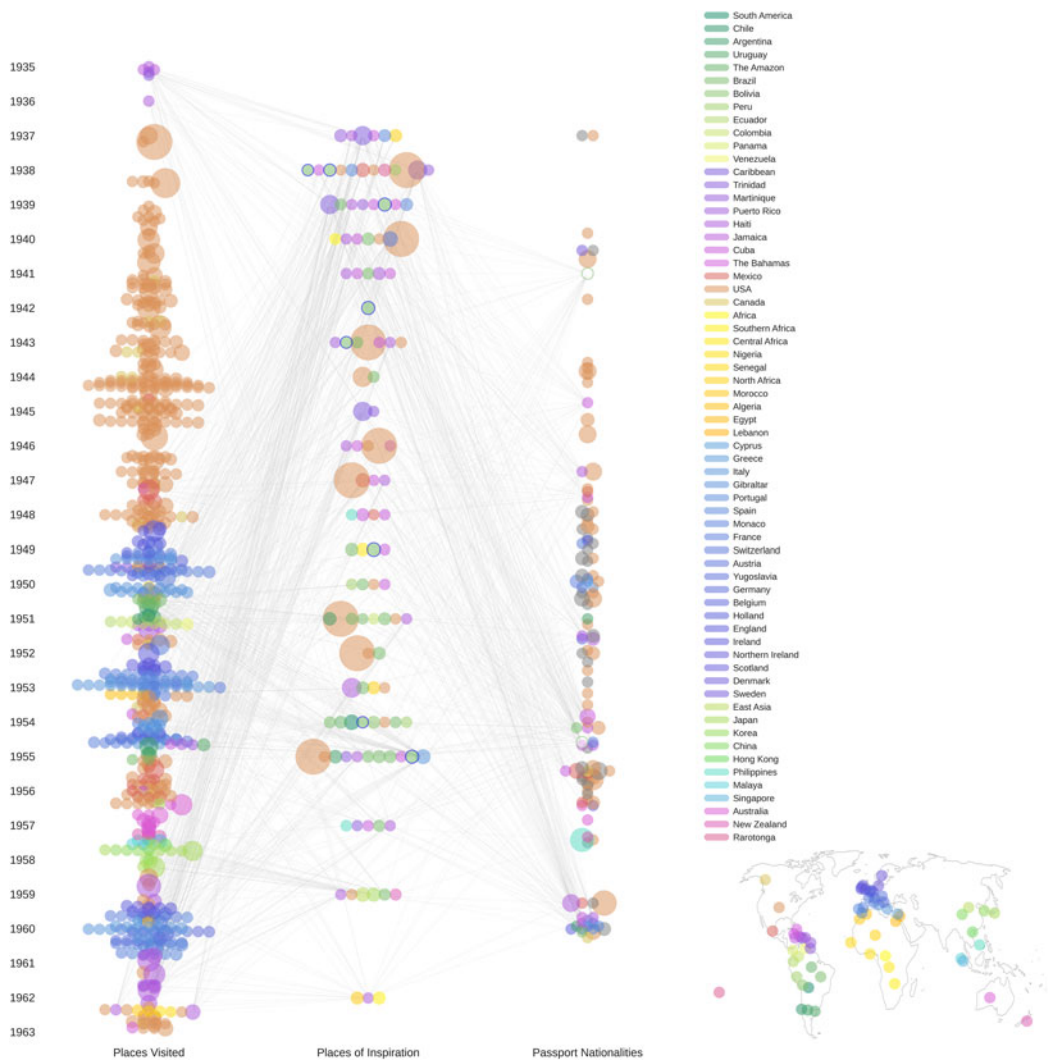


Figure 5. *Multidirectional Flows between Personnel, Repertory Inspiration, and Places Visited by the Katherine Dunham Dance Company from 1935 to 1962.* In chronological order from top to bottom, each colored bubble correlates to a geolocation found in the legend. Blue-bordered bubbles indicate the first time a work inspired by a Brazilian location appears in Dunham's repertory. The diameter of the bubbles above *Places Visited* represents the length of each stay in a particular area. Each bubble above *Places of Inspiration* signifies the earliest performance of work inspired by a particular region evidenced in program material. Bubbles above *Passport Nationalities* reflect every time there is proof of a new performer's national identity upon joining the company. Data: Harmony Bench, Kate Elswit, and Tia-Monique Uzor. Visualization: Antonio Jiménez-Mavillard (with permission from Dunham's Data).

This kind of description occurs often in the program material on performances; *Saudades do Pernambuco 1810*, for instance, is described as a "Tribute to colonial Brazil, inspired by Teatro Santa Isabel, Recife" (Bench, Elswit, and Uzor 2022) and points to Dunham's visit to Recife in June 1950. Consequently, I read the generalized category of Brazil as characteristic of Dunham's Brazilian imaginary.

A piece such as *Macumba* un/maps the directionality of research-to-performance. Appearing first in the film *Carnival of Rhythm* in 1941 and then in 1942 programs, we have evidence for *Macumba's* description being "In Pernambuco, Brazil, an Amazon Indian invocation joins African drums in the

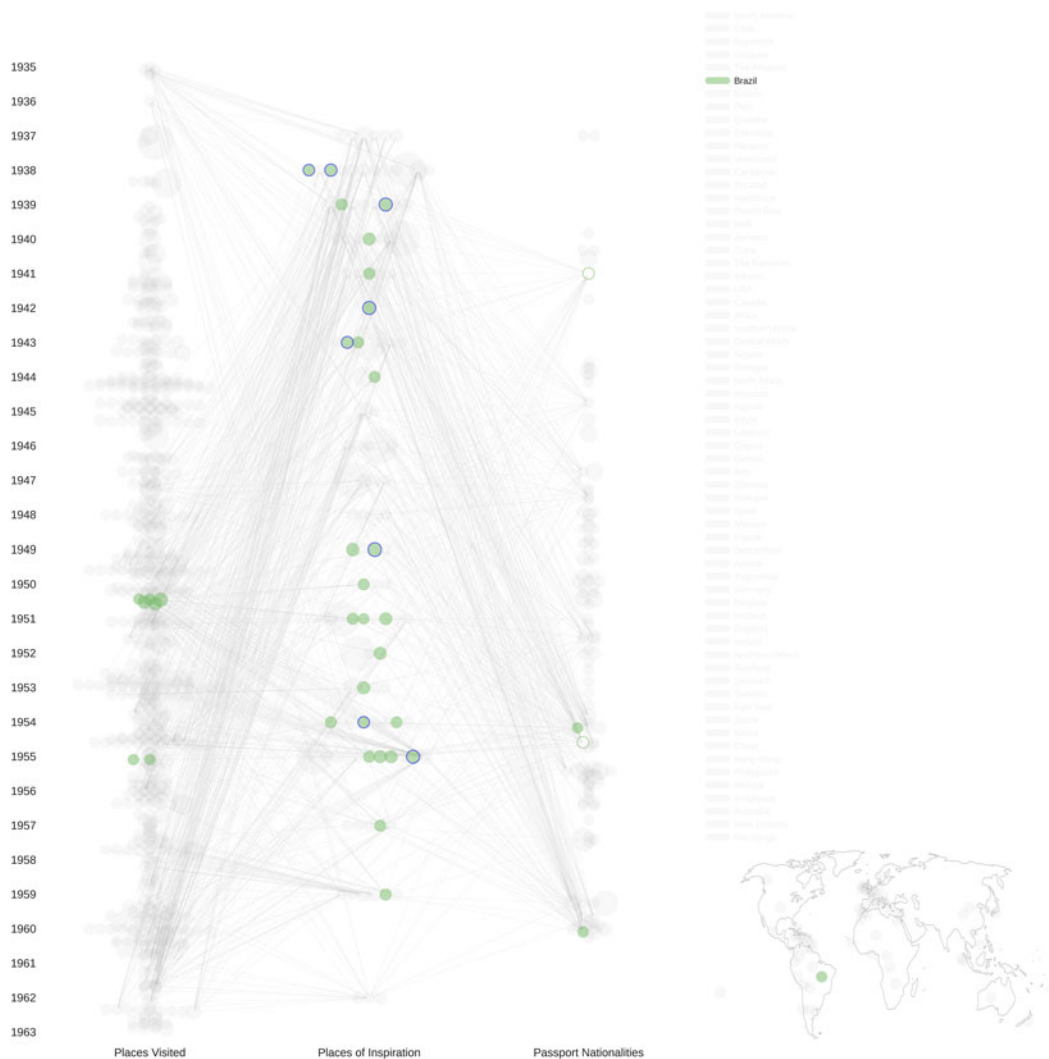


Figure 6. Multidirectional Flows between Brazilian-Inspired Repertory, Company Members Holding Brazilian Nationality and Visits to Brazil by the Katherine Dunham Dance Company from 1935 to 1962. In chronological order from top to bottom, each bubble above Place Inspiration represents a work inspired by a Brazilian location in Dunham’s repertory. The diameter of the bubbles above Places Visited signifies the length of time the company spent in Brazil. Bubbles above Passport Nationalities reflect every time there is evidence of a performer with a Brazilian nationality joining the company. Blue-bordered bubbles indicate the first time a work inspired by a Brazilian location appears in Dunham’s repertory. Hollow green bubbles represent performers Gaucho Vanderhans and Ivan Lopez, who, despite holding passports from other countries, have significant ties to Brazil, as supported by archival correspondence and documents. Data: Harmony Bench, Kate Elswit, and Tia-Monique Uzor. Visualization: Antonio Jiménez-Mavillard (with permission from Dunham’s Data).

Macumba” or “A Brazilian carnival rhythm” or “Carnival time in Brazil” (Bench, Elswit, and Uzor 2022). In June 1950, eight years after *Macumba* appears in the repertory, Dunham and her company visit Pernambuco and perform at Teatro Santa Isabel. The company, however, do not perform *Macumba* even though it is present in the repertory in 1949, 1951–1953, and 1955. Both times Dunham visits Brazil (1950 and 1954) the decision is made not to perform the piece. *Macumba* is an example of a Tidalectic flow that begins first with imagination and is then performed around the globe before washing up on the shores of its geolocation and setting off around the world again. We see the program description change from a characterization that brings together Indigenous and

African cultures on Brazilian soil to contemporary carnival. Without access to the performances of *Macumba*, the reasons for this shift can only be speculative; however, what the visceral data of *Macumba* does exemplify is how continuity and change are occurring simultaneously in backward and forward motion within the creative building of imagination. The Tidalectic flows of *Macumba* unsettle our perceptions of place inspiration. When the origin of that place inspiration is imagined, what is the relationship to the geolocated area, especially when it is encountered after imagination? Can we consider them to be the same place, or can we bring them together through Tidalectics as a differing same? In these cases of creation, Clark's use of *lieux de memoire* becomes displaced in favor of *lieux de memoire* formed by Dunham's imaginary.

There are other pieces within the repertory that feed into the notion of a choreographic process that begins with imagination. *Los Indios*, for example, is a piece that is performed at least ninety times over ten years from 1950, according to programs. Program notes describe the pieces as follows: "In the west of Brazil in the high Andes, two women stop to flirt with a flute player" (Bench, Elswit, and Uzor 2022). What Kate observed when trying to geolocate this piece is, of course, that west Brazil is not part of the Andes, therefore, the implication is that the piece is located west of Brazil somewhere in Peru or Bolivia. This is more than a case of mistaken location, as Dunham is working with Peruvian repertory as early as 1938. Consequently, the assumption can be made that Dunham intentionally created an ambiguous imaginative location for *Los Indios* that draws the indigenous strand of the "Indian" directly to Brazil for her audiences. Further to this, *Para Que Tu Veas* reflects the fluidity of imaginative locations in the formation of Brazil in Dunham's repertory. We have evidence of *Para Que Tu Veas* being performed more than eighty times across twelve years, appearing as a piece in the containers *Brazilian Suite* and *Americana* at different times. The particular oddity of this is not the relationship of Brazil to the Americas but that *Americana* as a container is predominantly presenting a picture of the African American culture in the United States rather than the Americas as a whole. This loose way of holding pieces within locations characterizes the incremental development of the imaginary that Glissant offers. As Tidalectic motion, the meaning of place shifts over time as diasporic people grapple with conflicting ideas around nation and boundaries causing a change in momentum. This was a very present conflict for Dunham who, for example, began dedicating the 1949 piece *Afrique* to the "free state of Ghana" in 1957<sup>23</sup> (Bench, Elswit, and Uzor 2022). As *Para Que Tu Veas* is not described alongside program notes, it is not clear what the performance entailed; however, the piece's composer, Bobby Capo, is a popular Puerto Rican singer and is singing the equally popular song *Para Que Tu Veas* in Spanish. This is contrary to the expected Portuguese associated with Brazil and is another representation of fluidity in Dunham's Brazilian imaginary. These discrepancies present a tension that in some ways could be classified as the painful result of cultural appropriation; however, a Tidalectic frame that comprehends the ruptured state of African diasporic identities and cultures apprehends these tensions as characteristics of the multi-directional, chaotic flows of African diasporic imaginary.

Examining place inspiration in the Brazilian repertory affirms Clark's primary narrative of Dunham's employment of a research-to-performance method to create work inspired by the locations she had been to and conducted anthropological fieldwork in. However, Brazilian place inspiration offers another choreographic method, un/mapping knowledge of the principal method to consider how some pieces were created from imaginative origins. Tidalectically, these multiple beginnings probe us to think further about how the imaginary invites research-to-performance and research-to-performance imagination. They reflect Brathwaite's description of Tidalectic journeys as manifold, moving into the "creative chaos of the future" (Brathwaite and Mackey 1999, 33), coming from one continuum and touching the next.

### **Tidalectic Aesthetic Flows and the Complexity of Power**

In this final subsection, I return to the example of *Batucada* to first consider in detail how Dunham takes a fragmental approach to creating the piece by using her embodied knowledge and taking from cultural images being depicted in Hollywood at the time. I then think more broadly about

how Dunham subverted the presentation of one-dimensional Blackness that was perpetuated at this time by creating a “whole” (hooks 1995, 64) out of ruptured African diasporic retentions. To end, I contemplate how Dunham’s US privilege gave her access to embodied knowledge across the African diaspora through her anthropological fieldwork and the performers she assumed into her company to examine the contradictory way that Dunham also asserted imperial power through the recreation of African diaspora dances on stage.

In 1940, after introducing the song “Bahiana” to her repertory earlier in 1939, Dunham creates the piece *Batucada* (also known as *Bahiana*). The story goes that Dunham hears “Batucada” and decides to choreograph a short dance to it (Dunham 2005, 127). The piece is generally described in program notes as a “Flirtation between a Bahiana and a group of Brazilian rope makers” (Bench, Elswit, and Uzor 2022); sometimes the men are fishermen, not rope makers. The performance of *Batucada* in the film *Carnival of Rhythm* (1941) presents a unique opportunity to consider the pieces’ aesthetic form alongside the archival program material and its historical context. The eighteen-minute film produced by Warner Brothers is devoted to portraying what Dunham considered the “authentic” life of Afro-Brazilians in the Bahia region (Dunham Company 1941). Dunham is named as both producer and choreographer of the film, a significant achievement for Dunham as an African American woman at the time.

In the film, *Batucada* begins with Archie Savage lassoing a rope around Dunham’s waist and pulling her toward him slowly. Dunham, who is costumed as a typical Bahiana woman with a head wrap and jewels hanging from her ears and around her neck, flirtatiously obliges. Singing and swaying her hips from side to side, Dunham wraps herself into the rope as she gets closer to Savage. Savage and the other company men (which includes Talley Beatty) sing as Dunham looks at them. The piece continues much in the same way—Dunham flirting with the men who surround her as she turns and moves with the rope that is around her waist. At one point Savage and Dunham dance a short duet consisting of simple footwork as their flirtation intensifies. The piece ends with Dunham finally arriving close enough to Savage for him to put his hands on her waist. As he does so, Dunham sharply hyperextends her hips back and forth to jut her bum out, while looking back at Savage with a cheeky expression. In programs, *Bahiana* is described as a Samba from the “Batuque people.”<sup>24</sup> However, rather than a presentation of traditional Samba, I deem what is presented as a more Afrocentric representation of Bahiana women compared to the infamous Brazilian performer Carmen Miranda, who was playing a Bahiana woman on film to US audiences at this time.

1939 marks a period of increase in the presence of Latin American figures and narratives in Hollywood that did not subscribe to the lazy stereotypes of the past but took a nuanced approach to the different cultures across the region. This sudden change occurred as a result of President Franklin Roosevelt reviving the Good Neighbor Policy that had originally been introduced to foreign policy in the United States earlier in the 1930s. With the prospect of war with Germany on the horizon, Roosevelt sought to ease tensions with the United States’ surrounding neighbors. His claim was that this policy was “based on an honest and sincere desire first to remove from their minds all fear of American aggression—territorial or financial—and second to take them into a kind of hemispheric partnership in which no Republic would take advantage” (Woll 1974, 280). Hollywood’s response to perpetuate the Good Neighbor Policy on screen in some ways could be classified as a patriotic act; however, Allen Woll identifies that it was not all selfless. Hollywood was eager to develop stronger relations with regions that were already importing US films to create stronger partnerships for economic relief, South and Central America being two of these markets (280). It is, therefore, not a coincidence that 1939—the same year that Dunham introduced the song “Bahiana” into her repertory—is the same year that Carmen Miranda performed as a Bahiana woman in the film *Banana da Terra*. Hannah Durkin writes extensively on the racial and social politics of Hollywood that Dunham was navigating during *Carnival of Rhythm*, stating that scenes in the film “ruptured midcentury US race and gender conventions” (2019, 145). A brief comparison of

Dunham's performance in *Batucada* to a clip of Carmen Miranda performing "O Que É Que A Baiana Tem" (Doni Sacramento 2007) from *Banana da Terra* uncovers many similarities in the Bahiana character that both women are portraying. Their gestures to their jewelry as they move are almost identical. Both women are surrounded by men as they sing; within Dunham's movement, the hips feature more dominantly than what we see from Miranda: they are a point of focus and enticement for Archie Savage and Talley Beatty, who are both enamored by Dunham's performance. Dunham's flirtation is more obvious than what is performed by Miranda, yet there is dainty femininity that does not fall into hyper-sexualized stereotypes often afforded to Black women. Dunham was clearly influenced by Miranda; this extended to her utilizing Miranda's musical collaborators in her own company. Vadico Gogliano, who sang for Miranda in the late thirties and early forties, became a longtime collaborator of Dunham's.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, the work of Dorival Caymmi, who composed "O Que É Que A Baiana Tem" and "A Preta Do Acarajé" for Miranda to record, is used as an accompaniment for pieces in Dunham's Brazilian imaginary such as *Acaraje* (which uses the same song composed for Miranda) and *Dora*. In 1951, Dunham dedicates an entire piece of choreography to Caymmi's music, with the creation of the mixed work *Hommage à Dorival Caymmi*.

Dunham's connections to Miranda, however, are not what is given to her audience in the promotional narrative around *Batucada*. Dunham's claim is that she created *Batucada* (*Bahiana*) from knowledge gained from an unidentified Brazilian "drummer boy" in her company (Dee Das 2017, 68). Although not directly implicated, my speculation from programs, personnel lists, and correspondence is that the "drummer boy" in question is Gaucho Vanderhans, who is mentioned to Martin Sobelman, a producer of *Carnival of Rhythm*, as an alternative to Archie Savage. In her letter to Sobelman, Dunham describes Vanderhans as a "very good native character dancer" (Dunham Company 1941). Furthermore, Vanderhans appears consistently in programs as a percussionist alongside Candido Vincenty during this period. Although the personnel material attributes a Dutch Guianese passport to Vanderhans, the local US newspapers reporting on Dunham's company from 1940 to 1943 characterize the drummer as hailing from Brazil (*Northwest Enterprise* 1943; *Oakland Tribune* 1941; *Los Angeles Times* 1941). Additionally, Yaël Tamar Lewin and Janet Collins's book on Collins' life mentions Emanuel "Gaucho" Vanderhans as "one of Katherine Dunham's drummers" (2011, 96) teaching Collins the rhythms of macumba. Although the account of Vanderhans as the Brazilian "drummer boy" whom Dunham refers to is loosely supported by archival material, it cannot be ruled out. On one hand, we know that Dunham did choose members of her company that had folk knowledge of dances and regions she was interested in. On the other, we also know that Dunham was marketing her work to audiences that wanted to be enthralled by exotic rhythms in a fashion they had become accustomed to in representations of South America maintained by the Good Neighbor policy.

*Carnival of Rhythm* offers a distinct paradigm of Dunham's diasporic fragmental approach to her imaginative choreography in a way that is not possible through her paper-based archive. Dunham clearly draws from popular depictions of Brazil at the time, and there is the strong possibility that she was also learning regional Afro-Brazilian rhythms from one of her drummers. When examining the choreography in the film, it is clear that Dunham relies on her embodied knowledge to drive forward her Afro-Brazilian concept. For example, *Maracatu*, which is described as an "Indian torture dance" by the narrator, features an uncharacteristically heavy use of the shoulders that is more akin to dance practices in Haiti than the creolized Maracatu form that draws from Portuguese, Indigenous, and Afro-Brazilian cultures. Dunham's imaginative practice here is elemental, mixing rhythms, ideas, and other imaginaries to build choreography that is unique to the company and feeds into her Brazilian imagination. Reading Dunham's correspondence with Sobelman uncovers what Dunham means by an "authentic" portrayal of Afro-Brazilian life. It is not that Dunham categorically seeks to represent Afro-Brazil but, with her anthropological knowledge, desires to represent them better than other depictions in Hollywood. For example, in letters, Dunham redirects the script of the narration away from "unsophisticated" and "precious" descriptions such as "Our little



Bahiana girl plays with love like a child with a bright green and red ball” in favor of a more “native flavor” that gives dignity to the “basic character” of the film (Dunham Company 1941).

Dunham’s citation of popular culture within her repertory drew in broad audiences; consequently, her stage became a platform for subverting the one-dimensional and racist portrayals of African Americans that saturated screen and stage. Instead, Dunham educated her audiences, including African Americans, on the complex and diverse nature of Blackness and Black identities through a cumulative Tidalectic process akin to hooks re-membering. Dunham’s creation of an image of the African diaspora is what Stephanie Batiste identifies, specifically, as the “remaking of black racial and national identities in the US” (2007, 20). This harkens back to Glissant’s insistence that the reconciliation between African diasporic people, their cultures, and the environments that they inhabit will only occur through a creative process, the process of un/mapping and (re)making the world to a diasporic understanding. In contrast to this subversion is the reality that Dunham was only able to accomplish what she did through the reassertion of the imperialist power that she held as a US citizen. This is evident in the way that Dunham participated in the extractive practices of ethnography across the Caribbean. Batiste points out that Dunham’s “possession” of traditional and social dance forms reinscribed inequalities as she re-presented and translated dance forms from “developing” nations for theater audiences in the West (20) for a profit—however precarious that may have been. Dunham’s privilege allowed her to embody *Batucada* from a Brazilian “drummer boy” and never identify him. It allowed Dunham to become a voice and image of Afro-Brazilian women on the world’s stage without ever meaningfully engaging with them. Tidalectic un/mapping urges us to contend with the complexity of diasporic narratives and cultures, and in holding these difficulties, fully comprehend our histories.

## Tidalectic Un/mapping

The comprehensive consideration of Dunham’s Brazilian imaginary un/maps much of the discourse around her choreographic method. This does not make Clark’s observations of research-to-performance redundant, but rather, it extends them. Dunham’s research-to-performance method was crucial to her repertory; the data unequivocally supports this.<sup>26</sup> However, what the data cannot account for in research-to-performance is the significant proportion of work that is Brazilian inspired. Dunham’s Brazilian imaginary sustained the company throughout its touring years, attesting to its audience appeal and its significance to Dunham as an artist. My Tidalectic visceral data analysis suggests that the Brazilian repertory is made possible through Dunham engaging a fundamental aspect of the African diasporic condition—imagination. My offering of another creative process that has an imaginative inception does not diminish Dunham’s creative agency or talent but allows a deeper understanding of a significant part of Dunham’s repertory through established African diasporic practice that is about sustaining life through worldmaking.

Positioning Dunham within Caribbean thought allows the understanding of her imaginative creations as necessary African diasporic practice. Imagination in the face of collective communal erasure (Glissant 1989) becomes a subversive act that seeks to go beyond reconstituting the past in order to form a whole picture to also push forward into new possibilities and make new connections. The connections in Dunham’s Brazilian repertory are not static but Tidalectic, a gathering motion that is affected by the conditions and what it picks up along the way as it travels across the stages of the world. The development of Dunham’s Brazilian imaginary is, however, filled with the contradictions that can plague African diasporic people who experience the privilege and power of owning citizenship in a Western nation. Recognizing Dunham’s power and how she chose to assert it presents a conflict in our understanding of her as an important African diasporic canonical dance figure. This conflict is one in which Dunham importantly confronts monolithic narratives of Blackness with the rich diversity of the African diaspora while simultaneously reproducing imperial power through her methods. Tidalectics holds these inconsistencies together and understands them



as the complexity of the African diasporic condition. In doing so, my analysis presents a complicated yet more comprehensive picture of Dunham's choreographic approaches and avoids the danger of a single story.

Through an extended use of Brathwaite's Tidalectics with data analysis, I uncover the imaginative in Dunham's archival repertory materials. My approach to digital analysis orients me toward aspects of Dunham's repertory that have previously been unattended. This has allowed me to trace transmissions that blur the boundaries of nation and point to what is complex and uncomfortable in the creation of African diasporic imagination while un/mapping Dunham's history—positioning Dunham in a global context that expands her repertory beyond the Atlantic. In this context, the skill, rigor, and imagination of Dunham's choreography is about a submarine unity<sup>27</sup> that becomes more than a site of memory to a process of reconciliation and becoming.

## Notes

1. Dunham's Data: Katherine Dunham and Digital Methods for Dance Historical Inquiry is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AH/R012989/1,2018-2022). The project is led by Kate Elswit (P.I) and Harmony Bench (C.I) and includes Antonio Jiménez-Mavillard (2018–present), Takiyah Nur Amin (2018–2019), and myself (2020–present) as postdoctoral research assistants.

2. As identified in the Repertory dataset co-authored by Bench, Elswit, and Uzor (2022). The work counted in the Repertory dataset represents each separate identifiable choreographic work (see the Repertory User Guide for more information: <https://www.dunhamsdata.org/portfolio/datasets/repertory-dataset>).

3. See Saidiya Hartman's engagement with critical fabulation in her 2019 book *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* for a US-centered theorization of historical imagination.

4. Scholarship that employs digital methods to think about ideas that stem from and are about the Caribbean has grown over the past ten years, culminating in the emergence of *archipelagos—a journal of Caribbean digital praxis*, and in collaborations such as the Caribbean Digital Scholarship Collective, which have bolstered the field.

5. Benjamin (2019); Nieves (2021); Johnson (2018).

6. See Bench and Elswit (2022c).

7. As the postdoctoral dance history research assistant on Dunham's Data, I have spent hundreds of hours collecting, organizing, and auditing data drawn from theater programs, draft programs, and show patter found in Dunham's archive toward a dataset that represents Dunham's repertory. The datasets that Dunham's Data manually curated have been built with data collected from Dunham's extensive archive and represent what can be evidenced through that archive. The Repertory dataset records various metrics, including the name of each dancer and musician that ever performed in a particular work, its intertextual relationships, its place inspiration, the description in the program notes and show patter in various languages, and the names that a work is known by between 1937 and 1962.

8. Edited to include details from both the 1999 publication and the 1993 public discussion with Nathaniel Mackey at Poets House in New York City on which the publication is based.

9. See Dalleo (2004); DeLoughrey (2007); Siklosi (2016).

10. See Norris (1982, 31–32).

11. In particular, we can think about the shifts of meaning in Dunham's choreography through *différance* in a similar way to how Colbert, Jones, and Vogel (2020) think about repetition in performance: that it does not just repeat itself through a series of reenactments but that each performance is an unceasing act of the original that unfolds and persists across time.

12. See Glissant (1997, 8).

13. Not all pieces are identified as having been inspired by a specific location.

14. For example, Dee Das (2017); Cadús (2018); Kabir (2015).

15. This opposes the prominent Lacanian conception that contrasts the Imaginary (fantasy image), the Symbolic (language and culture) and the Real (human primordial need) (see Lacan 2018). In its ability to both sustain and operate as the Symbolic, the Caribbean imaginary, as Michèle Praeger (2004) articulates, “feeds and disrupts the field of the Symbolic,” disabling the Lacanian paradigm (3–4).

16. See Bench and Elswit (2020).

17. This is one of the reasons that many Pan-Africanist calls for those living in the African diaspora to “go back to Africa” failed.

18. In their essay “Visceral Data for Dance Histories: Katherine Dunham’s People, Places, and Pieces,” Bench and Elswit conclude that we might contextualize Dunham’s repertory by thinking of it as “a malleable set of choreographed sequences transmitted across generations of performers that evidences and perpetuates embodied knowledge, changes in response to new performers coming into certain roles, and actively cultivates shared literacies among performers themselves as well as between performers and their audiences” (Bench and Elswit 2022c, 52). We represent Dunham’s repertory as a four-tiered hierarchical system consisting of shows, containers, pieces, and dances in dances. This system of categorization reflects our understanding of how Dunham organized and articulated her choreography for her audiences’ comprehension, for example, in her printed programs. We recognize that our approach to representing Dunham’s repertory is limited to what we gain from her midcentury print archive. There are other archives of knowledge found in Dunham’s global community and embodied by dancers that would produce different ways of presenting and organizing Dunham’s repertory.

The smallest element of our nested hierarchy is “dances in dances,” which we represent in aqua. These are mainly social dances predominately from African American and sometimes Caribbean cultures that appear within Dunham’s choreography either in their recognizable social form or developed with other Africanist and modernist dance aesthetics; they only appear within the next tier of repertory, “Pieces.” “Pieces,” colored blue, are more substantial choreographic works that are adaptive; either standing alone within a program or appearing as part of larger entities that we define as “Containers.” “Containers” are a category that brings together multiple pieces under a shared name; sometimes this name is indicative of a common theme or inspiration of the pieces that are encompassed within the container, for example, *Brazilian Suite*. Bench and Elswit identify that *Brazilian Suite* “usually holds 4 to 5 pieces, but across the 63 archival programs listing *Brazilian Suite* in our dataset, we have identified [over] 20 different pieces it included at one time or another” (53). We show containers in red. Alongside containers, we identify “Mixed Works” in purple as choreography that functions within the repertory as both pieces and containers at different times. The final and biggest tier is “Shows,” which we color orange. “Shows” are evening-length events under which we see containers, pieces, mixed works, and dances in dances.

19. Mid-twentieth-century audiences, of course, could not differentiate between what was imagined and what was researched (Dee Das, 2017).

20. Figures 5 and 6 use the three primary datasets manually curated by the Dunham’s Data team; the Repertory dataset (Bench, Elswit, and Uzor 2022), the Everyday Itinerary (Bench and Elswit 2022b), and the Personnel Check-In dataset (Bench and Elswit 2022a).

Utilizing programs, correspondence, pay sheets, and other archival material, the Everyday Itinerary accounts for where Dunham was approximately between 1937 and 1962; the Performer Check-In dataset records the presence of Dunham’s dancers, drummers, and singers in the company as they came and went between 1937 and 1963 (the data in this dataset is incomplete before 1947).

21. Figure 5 is an example of how completed datasets on the Dunham’s Data project can be collated together to produce further meaning.

22. We understand that holding a particular passport does not equate to cultural heritage; we have clarified this by including other locations that Dunham’s performers were associated with underneath the country that issued their passports in the visualization “Select Performer First Check-Ins, by Country and Passport Nationality, 1947–60,” available at <https://www.dunhamsdata.org/index.php/portfolio/images/select-performer-first-check-ins-country-passport-1947-60>.

23. This dedication occurred as a result of Ghana gaining independence from Great Britain.

24. According to Adjoa Osei, “Batuque” is not a commonly known way to describe the coastal people of Brazil but is used to characterize different cultural aesthetics of Afro-Brazilian culture (2021, 230). This is another example of the complicated tensions that arise through imaginary creations.

25. Vadico Gogliano composed pieces such as *Choros* and toured with the company as an orchestral conductor in the late forties.

26. Dunham’s Data makes this argument evident through visualizations such as Figure 5.

27. See Brathwaite (1974).

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