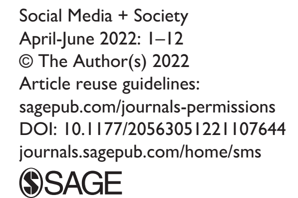
Check for updates



Special Issue: Interrogating Digital Blackness

Social Media + Society
April-June 2022: 1–12
© The Author(s) 2022
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/20563051221107644
journals.sagepub.com/home/sms
SAGE

Soulcraft: Theorizing Black Techne in African and American Viral Dance

Reginold A. Royston

Abstract

This article proposes the notion of soulcraft as an alternative framing for the work that Africans and African diasporans imbue upon material culture and social projects. Through ethnographic encounters with the practitioners of Chicago Footwork and Afrobeats dance music, the author theorizes a Black vernacular approach to the concept of techne. This essay contributes to discourse in the philosophy of technology to document spirituality in viral dance practices and forms of digital embodiment, linking them to metaphysical understandings of "soul" in African and African American philosophical thought. Interviews and critical analysis of digital media help the author illustrate the ways that these African and diasporic media innovators elide the dualistic distinctions between material tech-making and spiritual strivings, in service of an emancipatory ethos for technology.

Keywords

viral video, techne, Africa, dance music, spirituality

Introduction

> *But what is our spirit, what will it project? What machines will it produce? What will they achieve? What will be their morality?*
>
> —Amiri Baraka from "Technology and Ethos" (1971)

As an answer to the above technological jeremiad put forth by the chief theorist of the 1960s Black Arts Movement, this essay proposes a progressive notion of technology that embraces a distinctive Black/African social shaping of the world. In the concept *soulcraft*, I attempt to name the creative work and ethos that people of the African continent and diasporas imbue upon technoculture and social projects. As an ethnographer of digital media, this concept has been apt for describing notions of digital embodiment in my research examining the Chicago House subgenre Footwork, and producers and dancers in the distinct, yet related Afrobeats dance-music scene emerging from places such as Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa and their contemporary diasporas. With fieldwork observations, interviews, and critical media analysis, I illustrate the ways that these African and diasporic innovators elide the dualism between tech-making and spiritual strivings. I want to move the concept *soulcraft* past its hazy association with moral-civic activism, and toward a vernacular description of Black techne, and link it to metaphysical understandings of "soul" in African and African American material philosophy.

In Footwork and Afrobeats dance music, Black bodies interrupt with active and participatory aesthetics, transforming Instagram's static and voyeuristic conventions into a vibrant, interactive media. In Afrobeats, televisual performances—often user-generated remixes of popular songs and professionally made dance videos—allow for what I have termed elsewhere as *affective-exchange* between diasporans and African artists in the homeland via digital media (Royston, 2017). Such video reenactments are kinesthetic and not simply virtual, serving as tools for the exchange of

University of Wisconsin, USA

Corresponding Author:
Reginold A. Royston, The Information School, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Room 4217 Helen C White Hall, 600 N Park Street, Madison, WI 53706, USA.
Email: reginold@raroyston.com

Creative Commons Non Commercial CC BY-NC: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 License (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) which permits non-commercial use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage).

Figure 1. A still from a #challenge video for the Afrobeats song "Antenna" by Fuse ODG. The dancers are in London's Underground railway. The fan-made videos for this azonto song have garnered more than 40 million views since 2012.

embodied knowledge (Daniel, 2005) as well as emotional sentiments around national identities between migrants from countries such as Ghana and Nigeria and audiences back home. Technological innovations within such "street dance" cultures have enabled their spread from impoverished sites on land—in urban Accra or South Side Chicago—allowing for Black digitally enabled embodied practices to cross the otherwise "sterilized" entryways of Western ports. To this end, there was perhaps no more a spectacular demonstration of these lines of flight, then at the 2018 U.S. Grammy Awards, instigated by the Caribbean-born R&B singer Rihanna.

In the globally broadcast American television showcase, Rihanna delivered a staged version of her hit song "Wild Thoughts" with a master class of Afro-diasporic dance traditions: In the filmed performance,[1] Rihanna leads a swarm of dancers, embracing the Latin accents of a Carlos Santana guitar-riff, with Jazz Age foot taps, struts, and shimmies. She and the troupe then journey through Little Haiti and Puerto Rico, excavating *Soul Train* and the b-boys of the Bronx, and conjure *dutty wine* from Jamaica. The performance ends with a South African Afrobeats leg-pump, the *gwara gwara*, to riotous applause. In this embodiment of Pan Africanism, Rihanna effectively broke the internet, uniting fandom from the diaspora and the motherland in one performance. As one South African Twitter influencer quipped, "If Rihanna doing the gwara gwara isn't proof that South Africa is also influencing world pop culture I don't know what is. #Grammys"[2]

Despite having Black diasporic actors at the center of its creative exchange, Footwork and Afrobeats are in some ways quite unrelated. Since the early 2000s, Afrobeats (sometimes called *Afro Fusion*) has come to define an international style of jubilant, up-tempo club music, popular at home and with Afropolitans living abroad. Local dances in cities such as Lagos or Johannesburg have become *glocal* sensations. Encountering the phenomena via WhatsApp or trips back home, diasporans have brought Afrobeats routines back to New York, London, or Paris—which in turn have become global centers for the genre with regular studio classes and important web platforms such as ChopDaily. This multivalent flow between Afrobeats artists in the homeland and diaspora reached an early apex in 2012, when a Ghanaian-British rapper Fuse ODG put out what's come to be known as a "challenge," asking amateur dancers to choreograph his song "Antenna"—a techno-style track, about young lovers and dropped cell phone calls (Shipley, 2013). The video responses on YouTube featured young Black dancers of undetermined ethnicity doing Ghana's *azonto* on the London Underground and Trafalgar Square, among other submissions received from around the world: To date, the amateur versions of "Antenna" have more than 40 million collective views on YouTube (see Figure 1). Such horizontal media interventions, with Black subjects flash-mobbing dance sequences against the backdrop of iconic tourist sites in the West, have arguably reshaped the global optics on identity and the Black body (Wade, 2017), ushering what has commonly been called *African viral dance* (AVD) into the internet zeitgeist as a new genre of digital screen media.

On the contrary, Chicago Footwork, a scion of the faster and raunchier Ghetto House or Juke sound in House music, has struggled to attain widespread attention, despite relying on similar tactics of digital creation and connection within the same timeframe (see Figure 2). Emerging out of House music battle-dancing in the 1990s, Footwork reached a global stage in 2007 when dancers joined Hip-Hop producer Missy Elliot in her videos and tours. Footwork acts soon

Figure 2. AJ James and Jemal "P-Top" De La Cruz competing at BattleGroundz a long-running Footwork event in South Side Chicago, February 2018. Photo by author.

advanced to the final rounds of several TV shows, including *America's Got Talent*. Yet, its blinding kicks, crossovers, and shuffle steps (called *bangs*) set to sci-fi, angular sounds at a blazing 160 beats per minute (BPM) may have contributed to Footwork's further marginalization. Outside of the American Midwest, the Footwork scene is mostly a genre of gadget geeks, with pockets of Eastern European and Japanese fans devoted to its highly technical music composition and, at times, secretive dance structures. Undoubtedly, part of its allure is a sense of wonder at the capacity for Black youth from some of the most destitute neighborhoods of West and South sides Chicago, to innovate on such technophilic, dexterous, and other worldly sounds (Brar, 2016).

This article utilizes interviews, participant observation, and critical analysis of video-graphic social media (YouTube, Instagram, and other websites) to demonstrate how the ethos soulcraft is integral to both these forms. As techniques of the Black body, I argue that both Footwork and African viral dance demonstrate soulcraft, in that their engagement with material innovation attests to a dynamic and interactive relationship between physical and metaphysical practices, toward liberating possibilities. Chicago Footwork produced and performed to its ecstatic capacities enables moments of freedom of the body and soul from conditions of the American ghetto. "Footwork saves lives" is the mantra repeated in many documentaries that have come to represent the form (Battle, 2019; Glasspiegel, 2015; Pennicooke, 2015). The cosmopolitan flows of Afrobeats dance similarly provide forms of flight from the borders of colonialism, from poverty, and from misrepresentations of Africa's place in modernity. In both cases, these forms serve as reflexive practices, tapping into aspirational and spiritual sensibilities that connect homeland and diaspora, and a history of these ideas regarding the soul in Pan-Africanist discourse.

Soul+Craft

While there are useful distinctions between religious and secular concepts of the *soul*, as well as a myriad of unique beliefs among both diasporic Afrodescendants and indigenous African groups, I am using the concept in a theoretical and colloquial sense: *Soul* in philosophical terms is thought to be the metaphysical essence of the individual self. Often synonymous with secular concepts such as *mind*, soul is used to refer to the core of one's identity and linked to the notion of destiny. As I will discuss in detail later, the explicitly emancipatory ideals of soul used as a metaphysical concept have enjoyed favor with political movements both on the continent and its diasporas. Soul most popularly perhaps emerged from a discourse of Black solidarity during the 1960s Civil Rights movement in the United States and has been a distinct signifier for African American aesthetics for

some time. But the sentiments of the concept as used by key Pan-Africanists such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Kwame Nkrumah, Leopold Senghor as well as interpreters of traditional African philosophy are not often discussed in the ways I will analyze below.

Craft by definition is synonymous with technology and its root word *techne* (Gr. "the material arts or practices"). Craft implies skill and technical mastery, yet the concept has historically been used as a foil to descriptions of machine-oriented practices where science, industrialization, and standardization are implied. The notion of craft has been revalorized in the digital age: For DIY knitters and home-brewers, craft is the antithesis of our automated systems of global supply chains and AI (artificial intelligence)-informed design (Sennett, 2008). In reality, technology and craft are inseparable. Facebook's and Google's front ends are not simply a standard cache of HTML and PHP computer languages with proprietary graphics. Their interfaces have been highly tailored by engineers to meet the various demands of tech's stakeholders and they are in constant flux. Gabriella Coleman's ethnography of open-source hackers, one such cadre of elite programmers, characterizes their work as not simply as a science of proficient code-writing, but "a craft-like practice. . . where craft and craftiness converge" (Coleman, 2013, p. 98).

Still, craft as an idiosyncratic or local form of tinkering may be distinguished from systems approaches to technology, such as that of research or bench science. Although idealized since the European Enlightenment as practices that can free human agency, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) and industrial R&D have ultimately been incorporated into what Ruha Benjamin describes as "the carceral logics" of technoscience (2019). Thus, I use *soulcraft* as a more holistic approach to *technology/technoscience*—to point to what emerges out of the African and diasporic engagements with the social and material shaping of the world.

Azonto's Ghost in the Machine

As a digital ethnographer, I have traced the flow of hashtag challenges across social media and interviewed Afrobeats dancers. One of my first mediated encounters in this project took place in December 2016, in the city of Sunyani, in Ghana's central region. After a day-long tech and youth conference sponsored by the nonprofit GhanaThink, I sat with some of the event's organizers watching videos. After viewing downloaded shorts from *The Simpsons* and some hilarious U.S. news clips, a YouTube video of Tekno's *#pana* challenge surfaced on the playlist, featuring a duo of young Black women calling themselves Root Awakening.[3] Backed by Tekno's global hit "Pana," the clip featured a full-frame shot of the dancers, dressed casually and standing in an empty, gray and white dance studio. Unlike the choreographed party vibes of viral dance clips on TikTok today, this was a simple series of long camera takes, demonstrating a carefully choreographed #pana routine—Nigerian *shoki* dance moves, interspersed with dancehall and Michael Jackson steps (see Figure 3). The young men in my company fawned longingly, but also in quiet approval at these intricate steps: I had never seen the video and was only passingly aware of the song. The entire scene nagged at me for months: I was excited by the notion perhaps that these dance performances could be a way to digitally embody Nigerian identity, with participants learning Afrobeats via social media, as opposed to being in-person in a studio or club. Back in the United States, I looked up the group following their handle via Instagram and YouTube: Root Awakening's video submission was the most viewed for the #pana challenge, garnering over 2 million views in less than a year. Also, the group was not based in Accra or Johannesburg, as I had presumed, but in Houston, Texas. Shortly after, I interviewed the pair, Ashley Lewis and Chisom Orji, and learned that they are first-generation Ibo Americans—cousins who started performing in 2014, after years of dancing together at parties and for their sororities in college.

In our interview, we mostly discussed identity rather than Afrobeats: They explained that their childhood attempts to quietly assimilate into both American and Black American culture were ultimately foiled as they began to connect at community parties and with digital media content coming out of Africa. "[Social media], that's the only way I would know it honestly. My parents, they didn't teach me *shoki*," jokes Ashley, in her early 20s (personal interview, 11 July 2017).

Afrobeats has come to dominate pop music worldwide from Zumba fitness classes in the United States, to radio stations in Latin America, and via the BBC in Europe, in part aided by these digital forms of embodied pedagogy: As media objects, view metrics for African viral dance (AVD) videos often outpace the views of the songs whose music they feature. In the Afrobeats genre, the dancers are the curators of tomorrow's popular music. Shot primary on camera phones, AVD defies the stolid icons of metropolitan Europe, with Black bodies in motion at the Eiffel Tower, at cathedrals and subways in Brussels, and or in the Westminster district in London. The trend can be seen as a jubilant counterpoint to Europe's migrant crisis, which has seen the legal internment of Black asylum seekers (from what Donald Trump called "shithole countries"), as a stringent visa process routinely denies formerly colonized peoples access to the metropoles.

During our interview, Chisom and Ashley explain their name is meant to signal their getting in touch with their African heritage ("We are bringing awareness to our roots," Ashley states). We talk about the small fame they have managed to assemble as dancers: They've appeared on stage with touring Afrobeats singers, performed at the SXSW music festival, at weddings and local events in the African migrant community. Chisom has gone on to appear in videos for the Ghanaian rapper M.anifest, along with other viral dancers. I ask the two women to describe how they identity themselves:

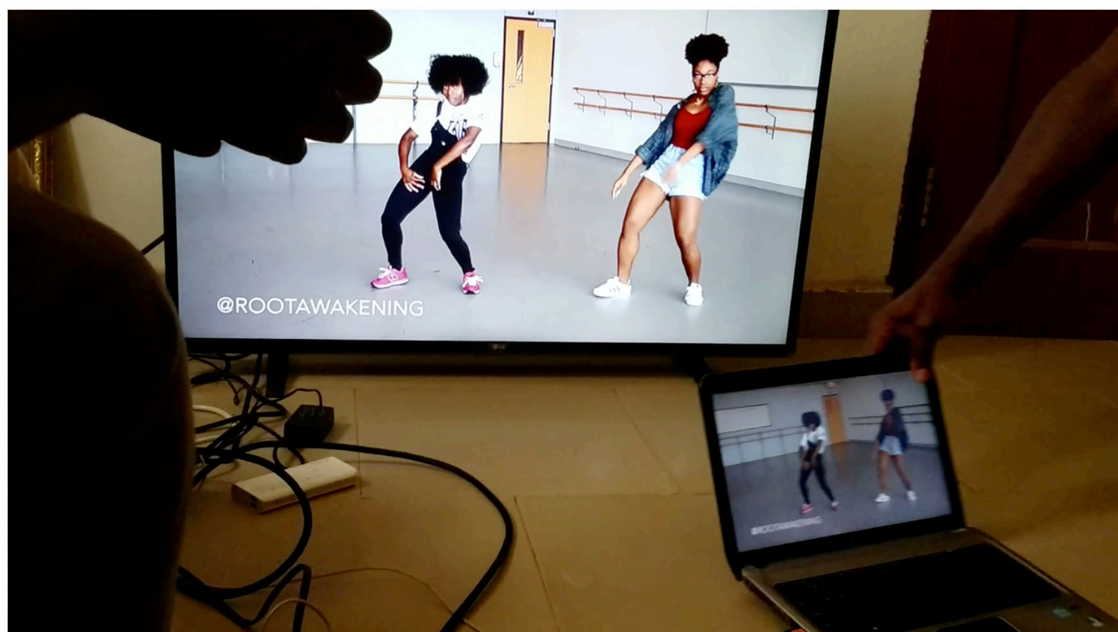


Figure 3. Root Awakening (Ashley Lewis and Chisom Orji) performing in a video response to Tekno's #pana dance challenge in 2016. Photo of video, taken in Sunyani, Ghana, by author.

Chisom Orji: Personally for me, I just feel a deeper connection to like the *shoki* or the *alkayda* or anything that is Africanness, compared to like the *Dougie*.

RR: How do you label yourselves? How do you describe your identity?

CO: Ah, I would consider myself a young wolf who is trying to fly. AL: [laughs] CO: I'm trying to find my wings under the coat of the wolf that I am. I'm trying to fly because I know I can go beyond this world with who I am as a person. I want to inspire everybody, whether it's the dance, clothing, fashion, anything. I'm on this journey to find myself so that I can find the wings to fly.

Ashley Lewis: Oh yeah, by the way, this wolf talk, that's like her spirit animal so. . . [Both laugh.]

CO: Wolves have been like my favorite animals since I was 16 . . . They're leaders. I believe I'm a leader. (Personal interview, 11 July 2017)

While I was hoping to query the tensions in new African diasporic identities that have become major points of reference for post–Civil Rights Era migrants (Adjepong, 2018; Ibrahim, 2014), the aspirational sentiments of Chisom's words echoed the sentiments I had seen in posts from Ghanaian dancers online. They also seemed reflective of my experiences with Evangelical Christian "prosperity gospel" in West Africa, and in line with notions of destiny at the core of African ethno-philosophy that I describe later.

In 2018, during a field visit to Accra, Ghana, I met up with another local Afrobeats choreographer Michael "eFlex" Sarpong. We had been communicating for months via Instagram about his video posts claiming, "Azonto is not dead": The hype around *azonto* had been subsumed by other dances since Fuse ODG's viral hit in 2012. eFlex came into some prominence in 2017, when he began to assert online that *azonto* had spawned all other Afrobeats viral dances and that it is still a vibrant street art. "Look at Dancehall. Look at Hip-Hop. Are they dead?" he told me when we met in Accra. His posts on Facebook at the time described an evolution of azonto from Highlife and Funk-music eras, to the Hip-Hop/HighLife dances of the 1990s, and finally through *azonto* that was influenced by some ethnic and popular dances such as the *dome* and *kpanlogo*: "If anyone tells you azonto is dead, ask the person of the gravestone of azonto, because it has so many steps that he or she don't know."[4]

An active dancer in Accra since 2008, when we met, Sarpong had yet to travel abroad despite invitations to come to Paris and Berlin where diasporic Africans were regularly holding Afrobeats classes and tour with singers. Nonetheless, Europe has come to him: eFlex's social media stream regularly includes young White dancers from France, Poland, and Russia and other visitors to Ghana, synchronizing new street-dance variants with he and his Humble Stars Crew. We met at the Osu Children's Home in the center of Accra, an orphanage where he gets paid US$80/month to teach primary school children popular dance. Not one of the children I met there doing routines with him will likely make it onto a Childish

Figure 4. An Instagram post from dancer eFlex in Accra stating "Your destiny is too great."

Gambino or WizKid video,[5] but their joy is insufferable as they combine local *azonto, pilolo*, and R&B steps in a routine for an end-of-the-year party.

eFlex has reaped some reward for his work. He has appeared on stage with Afrobeats rappers R2Bees and Shatta Wale, choreographed ad campaigns for beverage companies such as Miksi and Malta, and won local dance battles going back 10 years. Financially his reward is more modest. He shows me a recent budget for an ad video for a major local brand, where his take-home was for choreography direction was US$100. He tells me most of the equipment he uses to record and upload his street dancers to social media come from visiting foreigners gifting him their phones, laptops, and tablets. "I am not rich boss. I am from the ghetto, but faith makes you walk in divine provision, your seeds in divine harvest," he states matter-of-factly. It is a statement I would see at times posted to his Instagram profile since then, along with several other inspirational and spiritual axioms. In response to someone writing "Champion" on one of his posts, eFlex responds, "God is the reason." Instagram and Facebook have been essential to advancing his success beyond the borders of Ghana, but eFlex attributes his fortune to his spiritual dedication. In a 2019 post, he struck an evangelical tone during his first trip abroad to Indonesia, where he was hired to teach AVD at a resort:

> When God is ready to promote you, He doesn't take a vote. He doesn't check to see who likes you, who's for you, how popular you are, how many followers you have on Instagram. It's not a vote. It's an appointment. It's up to Him—not your boss, not your neighbor, not your critics, not your enemies, not your relatives. Promotion doesn't come from people; it comes from the Lord.[6]

The notion of "appointment" signals the role of the metaphysical in the shaping of eFlex's life path, what he refers to on other posts as his "destiny" (see Figure 4), reflecting sentiments in both "traditional" and contemporary philosophies (Majeed, 2014). As I discuss in more detail in the next section, this interaction between the physical and metaphysical realms is taken for granted in African/diasporic dance and informs notions of material shaping of the world, especially in service of unity and progress inherent in Pan-Africanist ideas.

From Black Techne to Soulcraft: Tools of Material and Metaphysical Freedom

By using the term *soulcraft*, I intend to provide an analytic for those examining the discourse and practice of Black technocultural innovation drawn from the lived experiences and ontologies of Africans and Afrodescendants, rather than simply racializing seemingly stabilized conceptions of technoscience. A variety of useful and disruptive concepts have been used to explore Black tech-making and innovation in the past 30 years, including Afrofuturism (Dery, 1994), Black vernacular technological creativity (Fouché, 2006), digital diaspora (Everett, 2009), Black technopoetics (Chude-Sokei, 2015), and Black technoculture (Brock, 2019), among others. The root *techne* has been appended to language about advanced material innovation in the Western world at least since the late 19th century. *Techne* can be translated to English as "the material or practical arts." As historian Leo Marx describes, when the word "technology" was appended to the founding of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1861, it marked a moment when the concept achieved

vernacular adoption formerly reserved for terms such as *mechanics* and *engineering*. In this process, *technology* became its own ontological object in the mind of the West, on par with science and reason (Marx, 1997). Black techne, then, might serve as a description of vernacular and counter-hegemonic practices of innovation emerging from the experience of African and diasporic actors. Historian of science and technology Rayvon Fouché deploys techne in his concept *Black vernacular technological creativity* (BVTC), in which he identifies the processes of "re-deployment," "reconception," and "recreation," as central to Black innovators. Imbuing objects with African American aesthetic sensibility, Fouché locates BVTC in the found musicality of a record player "scratch," or by appropriation of state tools such as pagers, or police scanners to counter-surveil the authorities. This reflexive creativity, he states, "results from resistance to existing technology, and strategic appropriations of the material and symbolic power and energy of technology" (Fouché, 2006, p. 641).

To be sure, *soulcraft* is not a new word. It has been famously used by the conservative writer George Will (1984); it was used in the title of a best-seller about the value of creative labor (Crawford, 2009); and it was a word used by occultists and new agers throughout the 20th century. In all these iterations, the concept is poorly theorized, if at all. What can be retrieved is a hazy connection between public morality and civic action. Using my encounters within the rhizomatic Black aesthetics of Afrobeats and Footwork, as opposed to libertarian moralism, I advance soulcraft as a more agentive notion of Black technoculture, in which spirituality is implicated. In this digital ethos, the divisions between the material world and the metaphysical world are not hard and fast, but rather represent a dynamic practice that is also reflected in African and African American ontological understandings of the world.

Of course, I am describing soulcraft as a theoretical and thus highly idealized practice, but as an analytic, one may also focus on the seemingly negative and/or "libidinal" contexts as well, as media scholar André Brock suggests. Brock challenges both the strictly material and valorizing sentiments embedded in Fouché's notion of Black technoculture, arguing we must recognize reflexive and gestural transgressions through tech by Black subjects who neither own the means of production or the platforms. As Brock (2019) states, "Indeed, technology use for Blacks often occurs from the margins of society, where survival, joy and resistance intertwine uncomfortably in the everyday" (p. 211).

Yet, spirituality and an aspirational ethos of emancipation run through the iterative techniques described above and in the contemporary practices in Black viral/street dance. Thus, soulcraft names the metaphysical and material assemblage of Black techne. Adopting this label as an ethos requires a description of some points of origin for thinking on the material–metaphysical dynamism in Black technopoetics. As points of Black relations, the tropes of body and soul run deep within both African American and African theories of being, beyond the Black liberation discourse of the 1960s when "soul" became a popular term, and also prior to embodied notions of technology inherent in concepts such as the cyborg.

In Nelson George's paean to the 1980s, *Post-Soul Nation*, the venerable culture critic describes the transition from respectable Negro politics of the Civil Rights Era to Hip-Hop's emergence as a flowering and remix of the Black soul aesthetic:

> As the sixties progressed, soul signaled not simply a style of pop music but the entire heritage and culture of Blacks . . . We became "soul sistas" and "soul brothers" who dined on "soul food," exchanged "soul shakes," celebrated with "soul claps" as "soul children" marching for "soul power". . . For me this historic period [1960s] was absolutely about soul in its deepest spiritual meaning. It was about faith in the human capacity for change and a palpable optimism about the future. (George, 2004, pp. 4–5)

Continuing this genealogy for notions of *soul*, W.E.B Du Bois's seminal 1903 text *The Souls of Black Folks* perhaps lays an earlier foundation. Although Du Bois never quite gives definition to the concept, his book as a whole affirms a spiritual base for the humanism of Afrodescendants and he deploys all the metaphysical aspects of the concept *soul* as an ineffable substance that unites Black people. While the congregation is itself one material manifestation, Du Bois locates Black essence in the "sorrows songs" of its early religious music, often called Negro spirituals. Du Bois often mentions the concept *soul* or *spirit* and equates these with primordial cores of Black meaning, often shadowed by "the veil" of race, which one might understand technologically as simulacra.

What the soul or spirit is, has been an enduring philosophical quandary in Western thought, in the work of Hume and Locke, Jonathan Edwards, Frederick Douglass, and others. For the purposes of this essay, we can perhaps focus on David Hume's discussion of *self* or identity, which intersects with key ideas related to African and diasporic concepts of the soul (though Hume himself was quite anti-Black). In so much as a soul or one's spirit can be seen as a signifier of the *self*, if not co-terminus with it, we can use Hume's often cited description of this "immortal" aspect of one's identity: ". . . a bundle or collection of different perceptions. . ." As a bundle theory of self, his statement ends, "which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement" (Hume, 1740). Psychology and secular philosophy often discuss soul or spirit as concepts interchangeable with notions of *mind* and *self*, concepts that again represent a fundamental (bundled) core or essence of the individual, and Hume for many serves a precursor to many of these moves with Western thought.

African American cultural workers and theorists thus utilize soul in service of "emancipation," "liberation," or "freedom"—a spiritual process that also results in political,

economic achievements, independence, and/or sovereignty in the material world. We similarly see, in the writings of Pan-African philosophers, a desire to erode a European, dualist ontology, that secularizes political foment. These Pan-African ideals often foregrounded both modernist and "traditional" ontologies that often see little distinction between matter and spirit. Yet for African activists, scholars and political leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah and Léopold Senghor, liberation is the outcome of spiritual strivings. The "spiritual" is conceived as a holistic experience, embedded in the physical and metaphysical world, as I discuss below. This is clearly at the forefront of writings of Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, in his use of the concept "the African Personality" (Odamtten, 2019). Nkrumah saw Marxist dialectical historical synthesis working in Africa as the coming together of "traditional" beliefs ("clusters of humanist principles") and Western industry, which maintained or at least made more complex the acceptance of the non-Western notion of an interactional relationship between material and spiritual forces. Nkrumah stated, "The African personality is itself defined by the cluster of humanist principles which underlie the traditional African society. . . *the interaction of mind and body is accepted as a fact*" (Nkrumah, [1970] 1998, p. 81, emphasis added).

Nkrumah's African socialism itself drew from fundamental assumptions about African "traditional" belief systems, where the soul and spirit (however these are parsed) are seen as forces capable of having impact in the physical world, and vice-versa. As Ghanaian ethno-philosopher Kwame Gyekye (1996) generalizes with regard to African religions, ". . . the emphasis on the pursuit and attainment of human well-being in this world is unrelenting. Indeed, religion is considered essentially as a means for attaining the needs, interests and happiness of human beings in this life" (p. 14).

Links to metaphysical ideas and political realities are also similarly embedded Léopold Senghor's notion of *l'âme noir* ("Black soul"). Sound studies theorist Tsitsi Jaji describes how the African statesmen and poet Senghor "came to assign a place of privilege to early jazz. . .," labeling it "a definitive example of Négritude[7] as 'l'ensemble des valeurs du monde noir [the ensemble of values of the Black world]'" (Jaji, 2014, p. 75). Thus since the late 19th and early 20th century, the notion of *soul* has remained a consistent point of artistic and political convergence between Africa and the African diasporas. Indeed, while soul music may not be the same in form, soul as "the ensemble of values" in these Black worlds attests to idealized strivings, and strivings of ideals, which soulcraft seeks to make material.

In applying notions of soul to both Afrobeats and Footwork, I want to be sensitive to both the unique forms of soulcraft and larger social contexts in which both of these cultural forms have emerged. My intention is not to argue for a precise historical connection or even discrete social ties between these communities of practice. Footwork and Afrobeats producers, rather, possess similar experiences of diaspora, racialization, and social abjection, rooted in African dispossession. These subcultures are also linked through shared techniques of digital representation, incorporating dance, DJing, music production, videography, innovation in mobile and computing devices, networking (including digital diasporas), and the tacit knowledge required to produce meaning and skilled crafts in this technological epoch. As soulcraft, these technological practices also draw upon similar metaphysical ontologies and are deployed toward emancipatory spiritual and material outcomes. Through their work as diaspora/homeland projects, as engagements with technology, and as practices centered on aspirations and influences from metaphysical forces, the term *soulcraft* seems appropriate.

As illustrated in Chisom's aspirations to leadership, and eFlex's online testifying, the notion of a spiritual destiny remains central to African cosmologies and philosophies, directly tied to material realities. In these cases, the aspirational and experiential are not simply about achieving a financial dream or media recognition.

When interviewing Root Awakening, my question about how Chisom identifies herself (answer: ". . .a young wolf who is trying to fly. . .") is not simply about her wanting to distance oneself from racial politics. In her presentation of self to this interlocutor, I interpret that her desire was for me to understand her personal identity as a spiritual journey: Chisom's striving sentiments recognize her virtuous essence and the metaphysical nature of her goals, even over notions of nation and origin. It is through her soulcraft in African viral dance that she motions toward a destiny that has material and spiritual implications.

As a style of electronic dance music, the other Afro-diasporic art form discussed in this essay, Footwork, is often noted for its Afrofuturism, technical proficiency in dance and DJ practices, and, ironically, its staunch profanity (Maduro, 2014). Yet, as I will illustrate in the next section, Footwork, like Afrobeats, demonstrates a similar striving for material prosperity/success that is not strictly consumptive: Technology and technical mastery are positioned as a means of journeying and attainment in this Chicago subculture, similarly drawing upon metaphysical values.

Footwork: Soulcraft in a Hush Harbor

During its origin in the early 2000s, Footwork evolved out of the hyper-local Ghetto House scene—a music style sometimes called Juke, which is typically 33% faster than a typical club song, clocking at 160 BPM or more. Juke tracks celebrate carnality and libidinal freedom (DJ Deeon's song "The Freaks" for example) and were originally played by DJs at teen-dances at skating rinks and parties in Chicago public housing projects such as the Ickes and Taylor homes. Sometimes simply referred to as "booty music," Juke was largely maligned by tonier downtown nightclubs and commercial radio until recently. The music has been thriving in

the Midwest via local independent CD releases, blogs, and early streaming sites such as imeem.com. The Footwork style as a subgenre received major international attention in 2010 with a compilation of DJ tracks on Planet Mu Records based in England. By then, the Footwork style had changed to a grittier, polyrhythmic sound, accentuated with synthesizers and confrontational battle calls on songs such as "Ball 'Em Up" by RP Boo or "Back Up Off Me" by DJ Clent. The 2010 "Bang & Works" compilations featured images of young Black men, battle-dancing at concrete warehouses and non-descript dancehalls. If the images entertained a kind of "Black as primitive" motif, the many blogs and listservs celebrating the emergence of this new genre did little to play down this essentialization: Writers routinely characterized its rapid-fire bass and flat-snare snaps as "future primitive," intimating that Footwork had probably been made with cell phone apps. Critics of the Footwork sound cringingly described it as "junkyard-dog" or "stripped-for-parts," although new media researchers such as myself have been intrigued by the prospect of mobile phones being used as drum machines (Gaerig, 2011). Since participating at live Footwork events, interviewing producers, and examining Footwork media since 2015, I have learned this is not the case: While some Footwork may be played out of phones at parties, its composition is a highly technical process, done across a range of computer software and programmable music equipment.[8] Footwork producers learn their craft via what could be described as an apprenticeship, with young DJs serving as roadies and dancers for older DJs and dancers, who in turn gift newbies their computer hardware and their moves. Peers share a vocabulary of techniques ("tracking" or "labbing" for music production sessions). They often trade libraries of samples and tracks via shared disk drives.

These techniques represent a history of tinkering in the scene: In an interview in June 2010, Footwork impresarios DJ Spinn and Chrissy Murderbot explained that the early Juke DJs hacked into the record player itself, to modify a time-keeping control located on the turntables' main circuit board (Resident Advisor, 2011, 18 m 25 s). With a simple modification via screwdrivers, Juke DJs such as Slick Rick Da Ruler and Waxmaster were able to play songs at much faster tempos than could be achieved by moving from 33 to 45 BPM on a record player. Later, DJs Gant-Man, Traxman, Spinn, and Rashad would take the speed and technological language much more seriously, calling themselves the Ghettoteknitianz, and later TekLife. Yet, despite its cyborg sensibilities, early founder DJ Clent described Footwork this way:

> It's unorthodox. It's more edgy. It's more from the street. To me, it's more from my soul. Some people making House music they make it from their soul, but this is us, from our soul. This is what we make. This is the gutter music, the step-child of House music. (Saiyed, 2011, 0 m 57 s)

Soul, soulfulness, and spirituality are recurrent themes among Footworkers, despite technological proficiency, carnality, and confrontation being dominant motifs. (Among its most well-known Chicago gatherings include Da War Zone, BattleGroundz, and King of the Circle.) In my interviews with TekLife dancer and producer Sirr Tmo Sama, we discussed spirituality at length. He talked about his dance mentors in the scene who also practice what he describes as "African spirituality." He connects the art form to the metaphysical:

> It's the energy of the track that guides the dancers. . . . There's a lot of consciousness in Footwork. A dancer is the spiritual warrior of good. It's the music that gives the frequency, the vibration to do the art. You'll see people tripping at our parties and they do it because they know it's a safe space. You'll be fine . . . people being placed into a safe haven and not crazy. (Personal interview, December 6, 2017)

In my fieldwork, Footwork spaces serve as a place of refuge for some, and the community at times feels tightly guarded. DJs and dancers treat their art as intellectual property, especially with regard to outsiders. In documentaries and clips online, elder DJs can be seen berating neophytes and would-be dancers who come into the dance circle unprepared. While I have interviewed several key figures in the scene since 2015, more often than not, I have been brushed off by dancers and DJs who are either suspicious of my credentials as a researcher and outsider to Chicago or tired of hackneyed portrayals. If Afrobeats' many dance styles can be described as an "open source" means of connecting Africa to the world, Footwork's "ghetto" aesthetics have restricted what its opacity to remain authentic to the South and West Sides of Black Chicago, and unexploited. On social media, Footwork videos up until recently were more documentary than cinematic, not the sort of demo-style that has come to characterize AVD performances of *shoki* or *azonto*. In a community where individual style comes hard-won through competition and training by older "Kings" or "Queens" in the scene, such displays might be considered too ostentatious or inauthentic to the culture's battle-oriented roots.

In the 2014 documentary, "Im Tryna Tell Ya," seasoned veteran DJ Larry Hott of the Red Legends crew explains,

> You got to know your history. A lot of people don't know it anymore, I don't know what's wrong with them. I guess YouTube done told them they could do what[ever] they want to do. . . . You can be who you want to be on the internet. I can say I made up Footwork. If you don't come from this culture, you would think I made up Footwork. . . .This shit is not Hollywood. This shit is Chicago. (Tim & Barry, 2014, 49 m 2 s)[9]

As a Black participant observer, however, these enclosures also represent spaces akin to what in African American literature are referred to as *hush harbors*, the secret meeting spots that enslaved Africans used for "natural religion,"

spirituals, and/or Christian faith (Nunley, 2011). Secluded Footwork sanctuaries create opportunities for the refinement of techniques away from the surveillance of outsiders. On film, DJ Larry Hott and Ant Brown, an early pioneer of the style, admonish youth to learn the roots of the music and hone their "craft." As soulcraft, Footwork begins with an ethos about labor, technical skills, and intergenerational embodied knowledge to service a culture whose techniques are as much metaphysical as physical. Brown says in the film, "If you don't feel the track in your soul, [you can't dance]. 'cause it's a soulful thing for me. I can speak for a lot of guys like that. You can't dance, you can't get to your peak, you could try, but it's not gonna happen. . . just perform the craft, perfect it, master it" (Tim & Barry, 46 m 0 s).

As an ethnographer, I spent 4 years trying to get to BattleGroundz, the weekly Footwork competition that by 2018 had been in effect for nearly 10 years in the South Side's Chatham neighborhood. Living in Chicago the summer of 2015, I snatched glimpses of Footwork at the annual Bud Billiken Parade among local youth, dance troupes. But the Sunday afternoons I attempted to make it to the Final Phaze dance studio that hosted BGz—even returning a year or two later—the doors were padlocked. Each time, I would look through the windows to see the scraped, multicolored tile floor and distressed wall murals that were the familiar backdrop to so many videos online. The lights were off and the street quiet. I would come back at 5:00, 6:00, 7:00, and 8:00 p.m. but it would be no different. During a February 2018 visit to Chicago, I saw that BGz host Maurice "Reese" Dilla posted that week's event to Facebook, goading other dancers to battle and earn US$150 in prize money. On my way to BattleGroundz, at last, I picked up my Footwork contacts, Sirr Tmo and visual artist B'Rael Ali at 10:00 p.m., assuming we were late for the Sunday night event: When we arrived at 11:00 p.m., they chastised me for being too early. As we approached the store-front studio on East 87th Street near Cottage Grove Avenue, I sensed a bit of chest-tightening as they gathered to go inside. Tmo warned me: "We ain't dancing here. Cliques come here to do battle. It's not all about sharing and showing off your styles. This is for battling."

The host Reese, who also produces a YouTube drama series called *Juke*, sat stony-eyed at the front door, quietly talking money from entrants. He spoke to almost no one, but gave nods with icy, hazel eyes; everyone effectively giving him the "kiss the ring" treatment as they entered. I introduced myself as a researcher and he nodded his head in approval of me being in the space, but didn't speak more than five words to me the whole night. The dancehall was familiar to me through the videos, but what you don't see online is the sense of community and ritual centered in the space: Dancers warm up and stretch. A young mother was picking up her grade-school child who was being tutored by older dancers. Larry Hott of the Red Legends was in attendance, cracking jokes on people in the room. The dancers return fire with snaps about sneakers, jokes about bodies, and jokes about mothers.

Before the battle, the dancers (all young men) hang out in a back dressing room of sorts, evoking the feeling of a high school locker room: Daps are given and smack-talk exchanged while shoes are pulled on. Takeout food, soda pop, and cannabis are shared without judgment. I have come to think of those backroom moments as the initiating of the hush harbor. Footwork/Juke events I attended elsewhere in Chicago between 2016 and 2018 in particularly held a similar feeling of seclusion and exclusivity, where moments of transcendental brilliance leapt out. These included Da War Zone battle held at an American Legion Hall in deep West Side Chicago; a Juke party with DJ Mikeymike at a neighborhood bar in Englewood; or at a DJ Clent birthday celebration in the basement of Hales Franciscan High School in Kenwood. My most notable experience of Footwork as a harbor for such Black spirit work took place at the 20th anniversary picnic for Beatdown House Records in September 2017. The party was held in the suburb of Dolton, about 20 min from extreme South Side. At the all-day park affair, nearly 200 people, dancers, DJs, and their families, lunched on free food provided by DJ Clent. Impossibly loud House music blared from several stacks of 18″-wide speakers, each standing 8 ft tall. Beatdown House Records had a permit for the event, but I expected police to show up at any moment. The most officious person turned out to be the groundskeeper, who sat around and watched half the show from his riding lawn mower. The celebration raged until midnight with a Footwork battle peaking at its most frenzied moments. The battle started in front of the phalanx of speakers when a young man and woman in their 20s grabbed arms and swung each other in a circle until an opening had formed. Bass speakers pounded, pulverizing musical notes into a distorted drone, and Footworkers swooped in to compete 1-on-1, kicking dust in the air in the process, and releasing their bodies in ecstasy.

In an interview for a London blog in 2016, Brandon "Chief Manny" Calhoun, a dancer with the well-known Footwork crew, The Era, described the sentiment that Footworkers feel in such moments: "It's like I can't not dance to this. I call it the Footwork holy ghost. Some tracks I hear and I just. can't. not. move. It's some spiritual shit" (Bychawski, 2016).

Months later, as I sit inside the Chatham hush harbor, the battle doesn't begin as dramatically as it did in Dolton that day. The sound system starts and stops jarringly—there is no DJ tonight and so someone's cell phone will play tracks. The room is filled with about 20 young men and just one woman ages 18 to 30. While Footwork is produced by both men and women in Chicago and elsewhere, its vibe is decidedly hyper-masculine, and tonight is no different. Reese announces the terms of the contest: Two rounds of 1-on-1 battle. Three judges decide who advances. Reese walked up to me, points and says, "You're a judge." As the ballistic music pushes all outer spaces away, conversation becomes pointless. All communication is gesture and poetics. As I listen, there is a

renewed awareness of the sonic materiality of the music. The Footwork snare drum, always tinny and thin on normal stereos, is stabbing now. I let the sound roll to the back of my skull, where it rests like a gentle, electric numbing. The bass is thundering, percussive, and relentless.

Whereas House music, Techno, and Hip-Hop are played on a 4 BPM rhythm ("four to the floor"), Footwork's bass is a cacophony of high-speed drum slaps: One might imagine fingers banging down on the soft pads of a drum machine, attempting to transpose *bangs* that might have otherwise been performed with feet on the dancefloor. The speakers sitting a few feet behind us tap out a high velocity series of whooshes, creating a slightly uncomfortable breeze on my neck. I am a judge, helping choose winners. We point at feet when the steps are moving. I can't dance, but I can't sit still either. The intensity of the music and the vibe literally lifts me out of my seat.

The battle begins with a track by RP Boo—credited as Footwork's first DJ—blasting out a staccato remix of "Nights Over Egypt" by R&B group The Jones Girls. Young upstarts *irk and jerk* and throw *ghosts* at seasoned dancers, including the portly Jemal "P-Top" De La Cruz, a member of The Era crew. There's not much drama to the night. Some dancers are dismissed immediately for not knowing real Footwork. Another is chided for trying to mix breakdancing into the style. P-Top seemed to float on air for a few rounds, but eventually lost steam; his elimination allowed some younger talent get shine. Lil Devin, an affable 20-something with large eyes, wins the competition, outlasting the other dancers with stamina, energy, and childlike bravado. By the end, the whole affair is sweaty, exhausting, and redemptive. Newbies have proven themselves or been made to show respect for the OGs. (Reese battled unexpectedly.) The home-turf crew Red Legends showed a bit of impartially as judges, allowing someone outside their team to win. By 3:00 a.m., everyone clears out. No one called the cops.

Coda

As techniques of the body, Footwork and AfroBeats are part of the repertoire of material engagements with the world that testify to both the aptitude and agency of Blacks with technology, but not via a *techne* divorced from either human bodies or spirituality. Rather, these soulcraft challenge the separation of the logocentric, aural, and symbolic worlds with a renewed sense of human ideals, locally articulated. While this soulcraft can be described as a liberatory ethos, it is not one in search of freedom from the problems of the body, as in techno-utopianism, post- or transhumanist discourse. Ultimately, this Black technocultural ethic acknowledges a dynamic interaction between the ineffable and the real, the material and spiritual, and the body and the soul. It is not necessarily a reflection of universal strivings, rather an iteration of distinctly African experiences with material culture through the *long durée*. As expressions of the self, the emancipatory power of practices such as Footwork and Afrobeats dance lay in their roles as material-shaping that reflects the values of the individual makers' creativity. This is a form of cultural capital accumulation that is enlivened by its connection with community, whether it be the insular and closed world of Footwork battle dance, or via views on Instagram and other platforms for contemporary global media.

In our contemporary moment when the media worlds of diaspora and homeland are connected more than ever, Black cultural producers in these forms find inspirations for their similar strivings (autonomy, recognition, communication, and innovation) through shared digital mediums. AVD and Footwork, rather than evolving out of each other or from a common root, represent the dialectical nature of modern African descendant cultures; the urban nihilism of Chicago and the theatrical possibilities of translocal Afrobeats dance have resulted in rhizomatic identities, connected by historical legacies of Africa, as well as broader ontologies of creation. They affirm the humanity of their actors in the face of unrelenting technologies of de-humanization.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: University of Wisconsin, Madison African Studies Program Faculty Travel Awards.

ORCID iD

Reginold A. Royston https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1047-5256

Notes

1. DJ Khaled, Rihanna—Wild Thoughts (60th Grammys Live Performance), digital video, n.d., https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6dwcoj, accessed 1 June 2018.
2. Chiibi, Aubrey (@aubreychiibi). 2018. Twitter, 28 January 2018, 10:42 p.m. https://twitter.com/Aubreychiibi/status/957836393455259648
3. Root Awakening, Pana—Tekno#PanaChallenge, YouTube video, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_bs69rwW6o, accessed 11 March 2017.
4. Michael "eFlex" Sarpong, "The Awaited Video Is Here #History & Little #Info about #Azonto From #Old to #NewSch & How We Got #Azonto with #Music & #DanceSteps For Full #Documentary Email Me:- Flex4world@gmail.Com," video, Facebook, 15 November 2017, https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1582047001860594, accessed 1 April 2019.
5. Though this may have changed: Dance With Purpose academy, based in Accra, was recently featured in Beyoncé's *Black is King* film. See "10 Ghanaian creatives who worked on Beyonce's 'Black Is King' visual album," *GhanaWeb*, 2 August 2020, https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/entertainment/10-Ghanaian-creatives-who-worked-on-Beyonce-s-Black-is-King-visual-album-1023775, accessed 17 August 2020.

6. Michael “eFlex” Sarpong, Photo, Instagram, 26 June 2019, https://www.instagram.com/p/BzLpBwcJBoj/, accessed 1 July 2019.
7. *Négritude* was a Pan-Africanist and anti-colonial literary and political movement in the 1930s and 1940s in Africa, in the Caribbean, and in Europe.
8. These include tools such as the Akai MPC sampler, programs such as Fruity Loops and more recently Abelton Live.
9. ShaDawna Battle, an English professor at Xavier University who learned Footwork as a youth, has been filming a scholarly documentary called “Footwork Saved My Life” since 2018.

References

Adjepong, A. (2018, January 26). Afropolitan projects: African immigrant identities and solidarities in the United States. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *41*(2), 248–266.

Baraka, I. A. (1971). Technology & ethos. In I. A. Baraka (Eds.), *Raise, race, rays, raze: Essays since 1965* (pp. 155–158). Random House.

Battle, S. (2019). *Footwork saved my life: The evolution of Chicago footwork (trailer)* [video]. http://www.drshadawnbattle.com/fsml-documentary/4594700632

Benjamin, R. (2019). *Captivating technology: Race, carceral technoscience, and liberatory imagination in everyday life*. Duke University Press.

Brar, D. S. (2016). Architekture and Teklife in the Hyperghetto: The sonic ecology of Footwork [Architecture and Take Life in the Hyperghetto: The sonic ecology of Footwork]. *Social Text*, *34*(1), 21–48.

Brock, A. (2019). *Distributed blackness: African American cybercultures*. New York University Press.

Bychawski, A. (2016, February 22). “Dancing for the world”: Stepping inside footwork. *The Quietus*. https://thequietus.com/articles/19738-footwork-dancing-the-era-spinn-interview-2

Chude-Sokei, L. (2015). *Black technopoetics: The sound of diaspora*. Wesleyan University Press.

Coleman, E. G. (2013). *Coding freedom: The ethics and aesthetics of hacking*. Princeton University Press.

Crawford, M. B. (2009). *Shop class as soulcraft: An inquiry into the value of work*. Penguin.

Daniel, Y. (2005). *Dancing wisdom: Embodied knowledge in Haitian vodou, Cuban yoruba, and Bahian candomblé*. University of Illinois Press.

Dery, M. (1994). Black to the future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose. In M. Dery (Ed.), *Flame wars: The discourse of cyberculture* (pp. 179–222). Duke University Press.

Du Bois, W. E. B. ([1903] 1989). *The souls of Black folk*. Bantam Books.

Everett, A. (2009). *Digital diaspora: A race for cyberspace*. SUNY Press.

Fouché, R. (2006). Say it loud, I’m Black and I’m proud: African Americans, American artifactual culture, and Black vernacular technological creativity. *American Quarterly*, *58*(3), 639–661.

Gaerig, A. (2011, January 12). Various artists: Bangs & works, vol. 1: A Chicago footwork compilation [blog]. *Pitchfork*. https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/14985-bangs-works-vol-1-a-chicago-footwork-compilation/

George, N. (2004). *Post-soul nation: The explosive, contradictory, triumphant, and tragic 1980s as experienced by African Americans*. Viking Adult.

Glasspiegel, W. (2015). *Meet the era —A Chicago footwork documentary* [video]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fWV_9zfeQ7k

Gyekye, K. (1996). *African cultural values: An introduction*. Sankofa.

Hume, D. (1740). Of the immateriality of the soul. *A treatise of human nature, book I, part IV, sec.6: 252*. https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Treatise_of_Human_Nature/Book_1:_Of_the_understanding/

Ibrahim, A. (2014). *The Rhizome of Blackness: A critical ethnography of Hip-Hop culture, language, identity and the politics of belonging*. Peter Lang.

Jaji, T. E. (2014). *Africa in stereo: Modernism, music, and pan-African solidarity*. Oxford University Press.

Maduro, L. (2014). *Footwork: Afrofuturisme and Changing Same in contemporary dance music of South Side Chicago* [Master’s thesis, Universiteit Utrecht].

Majeed, M. H. (2014). The problem of destiny in Akan and Yoruba traditional thoughts. *Journal of Philosophy and Culture*, *5*(1), 43–66.

Marx, L. (1997) Technology: The emergence of a hazardous concept. In A. Mack (Ed.), *Technology and the rest of culture* (pp. 23–46). Ohio State University Press.

Nkrumah, K. ([1970] 1998) *Consciencism: Philosophy and ideology for de-colonization*. Monthly Review Press.

Nunley, V. (2011). *Keepin’ it hushed: The barbershop and African American hush harbor rhetoric*. Wayne State University Press.

Odamtten, H. N. K. (2019). *Edward W. Blyden’s intellectual transformations: Afropublicanism, pan-Africanism, Islam, and the indigenous West African Church*. Michigan State University Press.

Pennicooke, A. (2015). *Footwurk—The legacy* [video]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YzlnY6qJMG4

Resident Advisor. (2011). *Two of Chicago’s finest purveyors of juke and footwork sit down to talk about the genre* [podcast]. https://www.residentadvisor.net/podcast-episode.aspx?exchange=8

Royston, R. A. (2017). At home, online: Affective-exchange in Ghanaian Internet video. In L. Raiford & H. Raphael-Hernandez (Eds.), *Migrating the Black body: Visual culture and diaspora* (pp. 282–300). University of Washington Press.

Saiyed, G. (2011). *Juke: Why and where with DJ client* [video]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBH-o0J96AU

Sennett, R. (2008). *The craftsman*. Yale University Press.

Shipley, J. W. (2013, May 10). Transnational circulation and digital fatigue in Ghana’s Azonto dance craze. *American Ethnologist*, *40*(2), 362–381.

Tim & Barry. (2014). *I’m Tryna Tell Ya* [documentary]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AlJ88YZ3U8

Wade, A. G. (2017, July 3). “New genres of being human”: World making through viral blackness. *The Black Scholar*, *47*(3), 33–44.

Will, G. F. (1984). *Statecraft as soulcraft*. Simon and Schuster.

Author Biography

Reginold A. Royston is an Assistant Professor in the Department of African Cultural Studies and the Information School at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. His research focuses on digital culture in Africa and the Black diaspora. He teaches courses on race, class, and gender in technology, as well as sound studies. He is a founding member of ai4afrika.com.