

Lecture Week Eight

- How do we understand (read) the body in Western Cultures? How do others understand (read) the dancing body?

Dance tells the story (or the text) of the principles of the society from which it has developed. When people dance their concepts for things such as gender, power, age, relationship with God, relationship with community emerge in the dance.

Watch the ted talk by Trevor Copp & Jeff Fox that talks about the assumed principles behind the Latin dances they perform. This is not a critique of the dance form they do. The point of watching this video is to recognize that dance reflects the cultural values of a society at a particular time and place it stems from. Therefore when we see dance we are not familiar with, we might miss the important signifiers that tell us about how the dance should be appreciated.

In this week's Discussion Board you are asked to think of questions you can ask when you watch a dance that will help you be more aware of the nuances of the culture and dance. You may not be sensitive to thinking about these questions because you come from a different culture or perspective so you assume what things mean. As we study dance around the world, we can see that what we assume about other people has more to do with us than it does with them!

From watching the Ted talk, it is clear that one question to ask yourself when you come across a new dance is....

Are there specific gender roles for doing this dance?

Can both men and women do the dance?

Do they do the same things?

Are there more than two gender roles in the dance?

In Chapter 7 of the text book we can see how dances from across cultures have influenced each other. The Chapter focuses on influences on American dance from the late 1870's. As we read we must keep remembering and respecting that Native American nations have a rich history of dances. These are not really discussed in the chapter. The chapter is focused on the dance influences of the settlers of America. Although, the chapter gives examples from one American perspective it can be sure that across the world, dances and artists have influenced each other. What we are thinking about in this unit is how that influence manifests in understanding of the dance itself. How well have dances

from other places been 'read,' and when have they been misunderstood. We know many Native American dances were misrepresented and misunderstood within American written history. For instance, many Native American dances have been banned.

In the discussion board for this unit you are asked to think of the kinds of questions one should ask oneself when you encounter a dance (or piece of art) from a culture you are unfamiliar with.

As part of seeing the nuances of understanding a dance you are asked to watch 'Rize' and 'Traveling the Distance.' In both of these videos the dancers try to explain what the dance means to them culturally. This gives you the opportunity to hear from a dancer from within the culture the dance has grown from, talking to you about the dance. But of course, coming from a culture does not mean you can fully articulate what it means. As you watch, use critical thinking to try to understand beneath the surface of what is being said. Watch with empathy and remember one person's opinion does not represent a whole culture. You can also see how important it is that dancers doing these forms of dance can 'read' the dance.

The dance's form is almost like a conversation with the dance - challenging and communicating significant notions.

Think about how you understand the body – how you read the bodies around you. Have you noticed you read bodies different in different micro-cultures (home, school, work)?