

## Lecture One: week one

### What do we see as dance? What do we understand dance to be?

The earliest records of dance sit alongside the earliest records of humankind. The Bhimbetka Rocks date back 30,000 years.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXTU7BjIWi4>

The Bhimbetka Rocks show pictures of what looks like people dancing across the thousands of years of human activity they represent. Anthropologists have identified what is depicted as dancing because:

- 1) The people depicted are making shapes with their bodies.
- 2) There seem to be musical instruments being played nearby.
- 3) The people depicted are in groups, holding hands or making formations.

By looking at what we identify as dance in ancient cave paintings we also get a glimpse of what we see as dance today.

We associate dance with music.

We associate dancers as making shapes when they move.

What else do you see dance involving. As you reflect on this think about what kind of dancing you are thinking of? Now try to think if there is a kind of dance that is an exception. For instance, you might say dance is done in a dance studio. But there are some dances that can only be done outside – like an Egungun dancer, Nigeria (see page 53). You might think dance always involves conscious considered movement. But there are some dances that are done in trance – like a Barong ceremony dance, Indonesia (see page 31).

Most dance has some kind of music and involves moving shapes but defining dance is impossible because there are so many kinds of people, experiences and cultures that express themselves through dance. Each dance is unique to the setting, culture and history of the people who dance it. That is why on this course we are looking at our own perceptions of dance first. We need to be aware of what our own biases are before we can try to understand other people's cultures and points of view. Otherwise all we see in "others" is what we already expect to see in them. This takes us away from ever seeing something new or understanding difference.

Now think about what you consider dance to be and try to notice where the influences come from that shape how you see dance. People can be very upset and insulted if you show them something that you call dance but they do not think is dance! Why are people so passionate about what dance is?

A main reason is because dance expresses some 'thing' and uses the human body to do it. The body is the canvas dance is written on. It is very hard to separate the dance from the dancer doing it. When you talk about a dance it is as if you are talking about the dancers executing it too.

*"How can we know the dancer from the dance?" Yates (page 12)*

So, dance becomes a representation of the people who are dancing the dances. Dance has a power because it means so much more than just the steps being done it represents peoples personal-identity, history and culture.

**Let us start to think about what makes dance so powerful:**

Dance has been used across history as a way to:

- bring people together as a community,
- worship/ritual
- celebrate

Because of this dance has also been a something that has been legislated against and outlawed. All around the world there have been points in time when the 'power' of dance has meant that governments, kings and queens, and even armies have enforced laws banning dances. As you are reading Chapter 1 make a not of all the dances that have been changed or outlawed as part of a political power struggle.

Watch the Week One video and Chapter 1 in the set book.  
Respond to Discussion Board One.