DANCE AND CULTURE

critical approaches to movement, identity, place

SPRING 2018 | DANCE 272

Monday/Wednesday, 9am – 10:30am | UMass Amherst
Monday/Wednesday, 2:30-4pm | Mount Holyoke College

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

How does dance articulate national or cultural identity? How can it inscribe history? How might dance help communities resist colonial or neocolonial pressures? What does dance have to do with sexuality, gender, race, class, religion, politics, or war? In what ways can we research with our own bodies? And how do we render embodied knowledge in text?

This course attends to these questions as we examine dance through the lens of culture and culture through dance. Throughout the semester, students will be immersed in the methods, theories, and practice of dance ethnography, as well as a number of other approaches to researching dance in cultural contexts. Students will gain familiarity with a number of diverse dance practices from both around the world and “at home,” and will develop a nuanced understanding of what it means to study, perform, and write about dance traditions and artistic practices from distinct cultural contexts. Students will sharpen their critical abilities to consider how dance is presented, theorized, and understood, acquiring tools for scholarly analysis of movement. Our analyses will carefully attend to race, gender, sexuality, and nation, as well as related issues of ownership and appropriation, tradition and change, influence and fusion. We will also explore the close relationship between ethnography and artistic creation.

Throughout the semester, students pursue their own research projects that explore dance in relation to culture and culture in relation to dance. This course is open to both “non-dancers” and movement practitioners, but note we will take a bodily approach to the material and you will be required to dance-as-research and/or draw from embodied experience to inform your writing about movement forms. Readings of foundational dance ethnographies and recent work in critical dance studies, viewings, movement exercises, and writing exercises in and outside of class familiarize students with the variety of modalities that comprise the field of dance ethnography and research in dance as culture.