DANC 212: Dance in Popular Culture
Spring 2015
2 units
Day: Tuesday
Time: 3:00-4:40pm
Location: PED 205

Instructor: Saleemah E. Knight
Office: STO 3rd Floor
Office Hours: To be scheduled by email
Contact Info: saleemah@usc.edu
Syllabus/ Course Design: Saleemah E. Knight

Catalog Description
Examining the role that dance plays in popular culture, taught in studio and lecture format; practical studies in the evolution of dance, from recreational to professional settings.

Full Course Description
This course serves as a means of examining the role of dance in contemporary culture, including its styles, techniques and evolution. The course encompasses a lecture and practical studio component.

Course Overview
Dance for the mainstream stage experiences ebbs and flows based on popular culture. This course will investigate how social dance functions as culture, that is, as a byproduct of society, community and economy. By using the classroom and studio, the course will aim to widen student perspectives about cultural dance practices and foster opportunities to discover how the history of social dance within various societies and communities has affected and paralleled the perception of codified and popular dance forms over time. The course will give an overview of iconic moments in social dance, highlighting its origins within particular cultural groups. It will also highlight notable choreographers in the fine arts dance continuum who contribute to the popularity of a dance and/or utilize influences from the form within a codified technique. Students will make through lines between these mediums and popular culture.

Learning Objectives
In this course students will:

- Develop critical thinking, analytic and cognitive skills by utilizing various approaches to viewing, critiquing and appreciating performance aesthetics celebrated within particular cultures.
• Understand the parameters of culture based on identifiable characteristics, traditions, values and rituals practiced by particular societies and/or ethnic groups.
• Engage in conversations surrounding theoretical, historical and aesthetic movement signatures, in the American canon.
• Question the overall ability for the human experience to influence movement practice and infuse meaning into movement.
• Develop skills in reading comprehension, including active interpretation and analytical skills that foster critical and creative thinking.
• Develop skills for the observation of dance performance from a subjective perspective that involves the use of cognitive context building, framed by cultural awareness by way of learned histories, customs and practices of a particular culture.
• Develop efficient research, writing and speaking skills, which incorporate observation and reading comprehension into a persuasive term paper and oral presentation.
• Examine the creative aspects of dance and how they simultaneously interrelate with art dance and popular dance.
• Identify significant creative artists in the dance continuum with an understanding of their cultural heritage and place them in a historical context, as well as speak to their contributions to the field.
• Embody the physical practice of dance (relevant to course material) in the studio and/or classroom.
• Become active participants in the local fine arts dance scene by attending at least one professional-level live dance performance during the semester.
• Make connections between their own personal history/culture and the larger history of the discipline.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required
Students will be required to view media both inside and outside of class for discussion and to fulfill assignment requirements.

Readings (pages assigned TBA):


Assigned Youtube Viewings (from checked reliable sources):


Stone, Andrew L. Stormy Weather (Excerpts). Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.


Additional Video Materials:


Description of Assignments and Student Assessment

- **Readings and Viewings:**
  Students will have 0-3 reading assignments per week (totaling 50 pages or less), and/ or an equivalent video viewing assignment each week. On weeks where there are no reading assignments, we will be focusing on in-class practical movement studies related to the prior week’s reading. There are four papers due this semester: one directed research paper, one short response paper, one term paper/ oral presentation and one Dance Reflection paper. **Students should complete the assigned reading or viewing prior to the class meeting date for which it is listed.**

The readings for this course contain many primary sources written by those present and/or highly researched in the related topic or creation of a major dance work. However as dance is a predominantly non-verbal form of human expression, viewing, experiencing and embodying different dance forms through in-class participation and video viewing will also be a supplementary and/or primary source for exposure to the material. The purpose of visual media shown in class will provide vital information required to succeed on pop quizzes, written papers and exams. Students are encouraged to engage with additional material and re-view watched performances at home to aid in movement recall and better comprehension of specified readings and assignments.
• **Attendance:**
  Guided discussion surrounding viewing and in-class activities attribute greatly to a student’s success in this course; regular attendance is required. For this course, proper participation requires attention and focus. Cell phones and Internet searches for the purposes of social interaction during class time can limit a student’s progress and learning within the course. Actively participating in discussions, master classes, guest classes, and group activities; asking thoughtful questions; coming to class fully prepared; and exercising personal responsibility and consideration of others at all times is apart of successful attendance and participation in this course. If you have more than four unexcused absences, your grade will reflect these instances. Excessive tardiness may also be recorded as an absence.

• **Quizzes:**
  On occasion, there may be an in-class pop quiz at the beginning of class, based on the readings assigned for that day. (Late and absent students will not have the opportunity to make up the quiz.) The quizzes will be returned and can aid as a study guide for the course exams.

• **Mid-Term, Final Exam and Presentations:**
  Students are required to be in class on the day of exams and presentations. It is a student’s responsibility to note the dates of all exams to insure proper attendance. Exams will consist of short answer and essay questions. Please note the dates below for the specified mid-term and final exam:

  **MIDTERM:** TUESDAY, MARCH 10th, 3-4:30PM (WEEK 9)
  **FINAL EXAM:** TUESDAY, MAY 12th, 2-4PM (WEEK 16)

**Papers and Presentations**
*A link for MLA formatting can be found here: [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/].*

• **“Dance Makers and Cultural Influence” Paper (due Tuesday, February 17th, Week 6):**

  Choreographers aka “dance makers”, have utilized their personal experiences, as well as pulled from other’s cultural backgrounds, to make creative artistic choices throughout time. Using at least three scholarly resources, and two popular sources, please write a thoughtful and well researched paper that investigates the relationship between a choreographer’s culture background and experiences and their work as a choreographer. The paper must give a short overview of the choreographer’s biographical, cultural and choreographic history as well as briefly outline at least one of their most famous works from beginning to end (i.e., in
terms of Alvin Ailey, his most famous work from Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater would be *Revelations*, which should be highlighted within the paper). The paper should primarily discuss highlighted movement aesthetics, values, experiences or traditions of the culture(s) being drawn upon by the choreographer.

The paper should be at least 5 pages in length and written in MLA format. It will also be necessary to include a properly written, MLA formatted bibliography. *

**Example topics (you may also choose choreographers outside of this list):**
Katherine Dunham and the Dunham Dance Technique/ Company
Alvin Ailey and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre
George Balanchine and New York City Ballet
Bob Fosse and his iconic Broadway Musical choreographies

• **“Hip Hop, Social Dance and Commercial Mediums ” Short Response Paper (due Tuesday March 3th, Week 8):**

Looking at film classics like “Stormy Weather”, we see a strong sense of social dance related to the Jazz Dance umbrella and its beginnings within the African American community. We can also see a through line between dances in the Jazz continuum and the social dances of the 80’s and 90’s where hip-hop began to infiltrate popular culture in movies such as *House Party* and *Breakin’ 1 & 2*. Please write a short 2-3 paged response, identifying connections between the culture and the aesthetic values. Things to consider are setting, method of learning, movement aesthetics, etc. You may also reference the music videos of MC Hammer and how these dances transfer to a highly commercialized medium. The paper should be written in MLA format and must include at least three credible sources as well as an MLA formatted bibliography. *

• **“Socio-economic Power and Popular Dance” Term Paper and Oral Presentation (Weeks 13-15):**

The paper should be written in MLA format and must include at least five credible sources as well as an MLA formatted bibliography. *

**Part 1:** Based on chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the Dodd’s reading and the course lectures please write a 5-7 page summation that convinces your audience of the importance of understanding cultural relevance within popular dance. Your paper should highlight one of the dance forms discussed this semester from a cultural perspective as well as include an example from popular commercial media to prove your point. **Your popular culture example should not be one that we used in class this semester.** It will be necessary for you to do research by applying what
you have learned to other popular commercial media that was not touched upon in this course. (For example, if the topic of your paper discusses the importance of understanding cultural values in Latin Dance, you may choose to use any film other than *Dirty Dancing* as an example of where we lose cultural context for Latin Dance forms in commercialized media.) Your paper should also discuss some of the resulting factors that play out on the popular screen ranging from casting choices to appropriated movement vocabulary, invisibilization, performance vs. performativity and transgressive body politics. Please be thoughtful in your language as not to make generalizations about any group of people. The best way to do this may be to initially make it clear that your summations are based on common thoughts and practices, but are not concrete.

**Part 2:** Please also create a 5-10 minute presentation, convincing your audience on your views. It may be necessary to give contrast and comparison examples. You may use video as well as any other relevant visual aid to help persuade your peers.

- **“Dance Reflection” Paper (due the day of the final exam, Tuesday May 12th, 2015):**

  Students are required to observe one dance concert during the semester. A 2-page, double spaced, written paper is due on the day of the final, in which students are required to write their observation of the entire show, including any technical elements that they recognize from class being translated to the performance stage in reference to specific pieces. Students are also encouraged to engage all of their senses while observing the work (i.e. what was the mood of the piece?, how many dancers were in the piece?, were any sounds incorporated into the movement?, did it appear to travel in any particular way?, costuming?, multimedia?). Any conflicts should be brought to the instructor's attention at-least one month prior to the date of the concert. Dance reflection papers should be written in proper MLA format. *

**Grading Breakdown**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance, Participation, Quizzes</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Dance Makers and Cultural Influence” Paper</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Term</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Short Response Paper</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term Paper and Oral Presentation</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dance Reflection Paper</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>500</td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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</table>
A+ = 100 points  
A = 96-99 points  
A- = 91-95 points  
B+ = 88-90 points  
B = 85-87 points  
B- = 81-84 points  
C+ = 78-80 points  
C = 75-77 points  
C- = 71-74 points  
D+ = 67-70 points  
D = 61-63 points  
F = 60 or below

**Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topics/ Daily Activities</th>
<th>Reading / Homework (pages TBD)</th>
<th>Deliverable/ Due Date</th>
<th>In Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction to Course/ Course Overview</td>
<td>No reading assigned</td>
<td>Jan. 13, 2015</td>
<td>DISCUSS: Course requirements, overview VIEW: Spike Lee “Michael Jackson BAD 25”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Dance in Popular Moving Images</td>
<td>READ: Borelli, <em>Dance and the Popular Screen</em> and Desmond, <em>Meaning in Motion</em></td>
<td>Jan. 20, 2015</td>
<td>DISCUSS: Borelli and Desmond Readings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The Musical on Film/ Appropriation and racial divide in Dance-Based Musicals and Films</td>
<td>READ: Borelli, (98-109) and Brannigan (140-71)</td>
<td>Feb. 3, 2015</td>
<td>DISCUSS: Borelli and Brannigan Readings and Dance Makers and Cultural Influences Paper VIEW: Hollywood Musicals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Reading/Viewing</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Discussion/Assignment</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Hip Hop in America</td>
<td>READ: Jeff Chang, <em>Can’t Stop, Won’t Stop</em></td>
<td>Feb. 24, 2015</td>
<td>VIEW: “Breakin”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>View</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>SPRING BREAK</td>
<td>SPRING BREAK</td>
<td>Mar. 16-20, 2015</td>
<td>SPRING BREAK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VIEW: Formalized Latin Dance (TBD)</td>
<td>VIEW: Jerome Robbin’s “Westside Story” choreography</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Understanding the context of hip hop within the concert dance realm/ Latin Dance Culture</td>
<td>READ: Gottschild’, “Prince Scarekrow and the Emerald City” article from <em>Dance Magazine</em></td>
<td>Mar. 31, 2015</td>
<td>DISCUSS: Prince Scarekrow article VIEW: Latin Dance Styles READ: Chasteen 1-15</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Latin Dance Culture and the Embodiments of Value in Popular Dance</td>
<td>READ: Chasteen 17-32, Borelli 135-50 and Dodds, 29-44</td>
<td>Apr. 7, 2015</td>
<td>DISCUSS: Chasteen and Dodd’s readings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Summation and Reflection: The Value of Popular Dance</td>
<td>READ: Dodds, 66-83 and 84-99</td>
<td>Apr. 21, 2015</td>
<td>Socio-economic Power and Popular Dance Paper Due and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Assignment Submission Policy
All assignments will be submitted in class. Exceptions will be made only in truly exceptional circumstances.

Additional Polices:

• Class Conduct:
  Please bring a paper notebook and writing instrument to class; laptops, notebooks, tablets and other technology will only be permitted at certain times. Phones will not be allowed and should not be visible during class. Texting or Internet engagement during class time will result in lowering of your class grade. Your attention during class time is greatly appreciated, and also required.

• Please Note:
  This class takes place at a university committed to equity for all students, where diversity and inclusion are considered critical to the academic environment. In this classroom, free speech is respected, and civil discourse is expected, with a safe learning environment the priority. We will endeavor to use language that is respectful—sometimes being inquisitive and creative, because language changes all the time—particularly when it comes to differences in age, ethnicity, gender identity or expression, race or socioeconomic status. If you have a preferred gender pronoun that is not being used, please advise the professor.

Statement for Students with Disabilities
Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website and contact information for DSP:
Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis
In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct
Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards [https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/]. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/.

Discrimination, sexual assault and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity http://equity.usc.edu/ or to the Department of Public Safety http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. The Center for Women and Men [http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/] provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems
A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the American Language Institute [http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali], which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. The Office of Disability Services and Programs [http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html] provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency
Information http://emergency.usc.edu/ will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.