

# Dancing and movement food for thought as part of new lecture series

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You may be what you eat, but according to guest lecturer Samuel Gill, you also are what you dance.

The values of dance can become so engrained into the tissues of one's body that they become a way of life, Gill said.

Gill, a Wichita State alumnus and professor of religious studies at the University of Colorado, presented "The Primacy of Dancing to Culture and Life" as the premier lecturer for a new lecture series conducted by the department of anthropology called the David and Sally Jackman Visiting Scholars series.

The Jackmans, now deceased, provided a \$4 million endowment to the department, for which a small portion has been allocated to bring scholars involved in contemporary issues to the campus.

"The intent is to try and get some diverse but interesting subject matters.

You don't want someone up there talking about nothing. You want someone who's a little creative.

Maybe it's a little controversial and maybe it's a little 'up-there' but it's food for thought," chair of the anthropology department, Peer Moore-Jansen, said.

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SAMUEL GILL, WSU ALUMNUS

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some fresh air into the department and onto campus.

There's also the hope that we can reach beyond the anthropology department and get also to the campus community and to the community itself."

The lecture series is being modeled after the current Watkins lecture series.

Gill, who received his degree in mathematics from WSU before going on to study religion and dance, brought some fresh perspective to the table about dance, movement and culture.

As mentioned in the lecture, children learn how to dance before they can talk.

It's through that movement that we as living beings begin to explore the environment around us, which then helps us to discover ourselves.

However, Gill pointed out that while all dancing is movement, not all movement is dancing.

"There is a level of distinctiveness that defines dance," Gill said.

Student and musician Christopher Herriage was curious about where this line of distinctiveness is to be drawn.

"I think it's impossible to come up with a clear definition. Everybody's concept of what makes a dance a dance is going to be subjective just coming from one's own personal experience and background.

"Personally, I'd have to really do some soul searching to see what I consider dance," Herriage said.

Gill showed a video clip of Gene Kelly in "Singing in the Rain." He emphasized two clear points in the song, one when Kelly "breaks into dance," and another when he "falls out of dance."

This was about as distinctive as the definition of dance was narrowed down to. Gill said dancing is bounded.

Gill mentioned the number of popular films—including "Flashdance," "Center Stage," and "Step Up"—that combine very contrasting dance styles such as ballet and break dancing.

According to Gill, ballet is characterized by a vertical axis and an air of aristocracy while break dancing exists primarily on a horizontal axis and is characterized by more aggressive, fight-like movements.

Gill defined dance as the only art of which we ourselves are the stuff of which it is made.

"Man is no longer an artist in dance. He has become a work of art," Gill said.

This concept was demonstrated through a short clip of a Bedoyo dance, a sacred ritualized dance of Java, Indonesia.

Java is one among several places including Ghana, Mali, Costa Rica, Puerto Rico and

Bali that Gill has studied dance.

In many cultures, the dancers cooperate as a unit to create the cultural work of art.

Also, many cultures have a dance that is distinctive to one culture. However, Gill stressed that dance did not have to convey an underlying story or message in order to be considered dance.

"Dancing itself doesn't mean anything. Dancing enables the possibility for meaning to occur," Gill said.

The video clip spurred a comment by anthropology and music student Audrey Brown.

Brown compared the Bedoyo dance to Pilobolus, an internationally renowned dance company characterized by a strong element of physical interaction between the bodies of the performers and the exaggerations or contortions of the human form.

"There's no story behind it and there's no music. It's all about the movement and creating these images and pictures," Brown said.

Moore-Jansen was pleased with the turnout for the first event as well as the speaker himself.

"He was not confrontational and he took criticism very well," Moore-Jansen said.

"Instead of being defensive about the questions he embraced them and really tried to understand and then relate what he was trying to say.

"This is the kind of debate that would be good for students to see.

"It would allow them to realize that you can have discussions about different perspectives and not necessarily agree with everything that is being said."

As the lecture is the first of a series, those interested in hearing the second guest lecture may contact Jens Kreinath of the anthropology department at 316-978-7193. The lectures are free and open to the public.