Cynthia Bull introduces her chapter, “Looking at Movement as Culture”, with a brief summary of a made-for-television series which demonstrates the mind and body split. Bull goes on to discuss how many cultural observers and researchers tend to ignore the movements of the body in order to focus on the mind. On the other hand, many researchers and observers focus on the opposite: paying attention to the body and its movements. One problem this presents is that if only one aspect is solely focused on, then misrepresentation can arise. Movement and the body work together with the mind and language to make up a culture. Like language, movement is constantly changing, being created, and reinterpreted, just as all of culture does.

Bull goes on to explain types of dances in America that demonstrate the shifting cultural characteristics that involve both movement and language as a whole. One such dance is Contact Improvisation. This type of dance has gone through shifts to fit the cultural changes through time as well as aid the cultural changes that were happening. Contact improvisation was a dance form that was created when rock-and-roll dance developed, incorporating dance and movement from black communities into American culture. When it was not so acceptable to dance alone or with individuality, contact improvisation made this acceptable. This type of “free” dancing was associated with social movements of the time because it helped support the desire for individuality and expressiveness.

The Twist was another type of dance that developed, and was thought of as too sexual and anti-social. A type of movement to portray a certain meaning in a cultural context is what these dances did. Depending on where the twist was danced, it could be seen as a form of
rebellion or even a positive message for people against American gender roles because the dance had no differentiation between them.

Bull describes that with the changing cultural environment, Disco Dance emerged which was more controlled, compared to contact improvisation, and depended on a partner of the opposite sex. Later on, words such as, “relaxation” and “looseness” changed to, “stress management” and “fitness.” Since American culture became more conscious of body image, dance activities like aerobics had been created, and these words had been changed accordingly. Bull explains that the words Americans use to describe dance/movement are our constructions related to what is happening in society at the time. The rules of contact improvisation changed over time, just as our body and movements giving specific meaning, and our words used to describe these movements, change with our culture.

I chose this chapter because I found it interesting, and I agreed that you can not simply look and understand the body and its movements without taking into account the language and words used to describe them. Because everything is culturally constructed and changing, understanding movement involves knowing the meaning and associations, as well as taking the time periods into account.

Word Count: 441

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