

The body in culture

In “Qualities of Memory: Two Dances of Tortuga's Fiesta, New Mexico”, Deirdre Sklar (2006) argues that thinking itself – including the ways someone access, organize, retrieve and presents information – is as much a matter of somatic understandings as of semiotic ones. Whereas identity has been considered in terms of ethnicity, race, gender, and class, Sklar suggests that “the way kinesthetic energy is organized to carry meaning constitutes a difference that has yet to be investigated” (Sklar 2006, 97).

All thinking occurs in one or another sensory modality, but the ratios are different for different individuals and, perhaps for the same individual in different circumstances.

(Sklar 2006, 98)

Sklar describes a shift in North American cultural anthropology, with reference to the fact that art, including dance, is meaningful because of its sensory modes of knowing. Sklar describes how anthropology, performance studies and dance ethnography have been influenced by insights about the meaning of the senses for cultural knowledge and memory. Emotions and senses as knowledge and bodily awareness have been raised as a central part in the study of cultural appearances. Researchers in the field have asked themselves what it would be like if there exist different forms of reasoning, memory and attention for each of the modalities of consciousness (seeing, smelling, speaking, hearing, etc.) instead of reasoning, memory and attention being general mental powers (Sklar 2006, 98). Sklar describes this as promising but notice that in some cases kinesthesia, the proprioceptive experience of movement within one's own body, is omitted.

While kinesthesia might be subsumed under touch, as the changing contours of touch within our own bodies, omitting it from the sensorium leaves us with no sensory reference point for addressing movement as a way of knowing. Is kinesthesia then excluded from the sensorium because it refers to no external object and can only be apprehended proprioceptively, that is, within one's own body?

(Sklar 2006, 98)

Sklar notices that the meaning of kinesthetic sensations is rarely the focus of our everyday awareness, that is, how movements are automated and become knowledge that is used unconsciously. With reference to Pierre Bourdieu, she says that people do not own their

habitus, rather they are owned by it. She describes research that weaves together phenomenological analyses of perceptual principles and sociopolitical analyses of collective practice. With reference to anthropologist Thomas Csordas, and how he weaves together Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological analyses of perception and Pierre Bourdieu's sociopolitical analysis of collective practice. Sklar brings forward how

the concept of phenomenology's lived experience, is never merely individual and subjective but develops as relational and cultural constructions in social space. [...] sociologist's "practice" is not only a collective sedimentation passed on through generations but an opportunity for individuality, agency, and somatic awareness.

(Sklar 2006, 100).

With the description of embodiment as perception and experience of the world, the concept of *somatic modes of attention* is defined. The concept describes "a way of participating in culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one's own body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others" (ibid).

Sklar, Deidre. 2006. "Qualities of Memory: Two Dances of Tortugas Fiesta, New Mexico." In *Dancing from Past to Present: Nation, Culture, Identities*, edited by Theresa Jill Buckland, 97-122. Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press.