

A Text in Movement in the Totonac Flyers' Dance: A Performance-Linguistic Theory

Authors : Luisa Villani

Abstract : The proposal aims to express concerns about the connection between mind, body, society, and environment in the Flyers' dance, a very well-known rotatory dance in Mexico, to create meanings and to make the apprehension of the world possible. The interaction among the brain, mind, body, and environment, and the intersubjective relation among them, means the world creates and recreates a social interaction. The purpose of this methodology, based on the embodied cognition theory, which was named "A Performance-Embodied Theory" is to find the principles and patterns that organize the culture and the rules of the apprehension of the environment by Totonac people while the dance is being performed. The analysis started by questioning how anthropologists can interpret how Totonacs transform their unconscious knowledge into conscious knowledge and how the scheme formation of imagination and their collective imagery is understood in the context of public-facing rituals, such as Flyers' dance. The problem is that most of the time, researchers interpret elements in a separate way and not as a complex ritual dancing whole, which is the original contribution of this study. This theory, which accepts the fact that people are body-mind agents, wants to interpret the dance as a whole, where the different elements are joined to an integral interpretation. To understand incorporation, data was recollected in prolonged periods of fieldwork, with participant observation and linguistic and extralinguistic data analysis. Laban's notation for the description and analysis of gestures and movements in the space was first used, but it was later transformed and gone beyond this method, which is still a linear and compositional one. Performance in a ritual is the actualization of a potential complex of meanings or cognitive domains among many others in a culture: one potential dimension becomes probable and then real because of the activation of specific meanings in a context. It can only be thought what language permits thinking, and the lexicon that is used depends on the individual culture. Only some parts of this knowledge can be activated at once, and these parts of knowledge are connected. Only in this way, the world can be understood. It can be recognized that as languages geometrize the physical world thanks to the body, also ritual does. In conclusion, the ritual behaves as an embodied grammar or a text in movement, which, depending on the ritual phases and the words and sentences pronounced in the ritual, activates bits of encyclopedic knowledge that people have about the world. Gestures are not given by the performer but emerge from the intentional perception in which gestures are "understood" by the audio-spectator in an inter-corporeal way. The impact of this study regards the possibility not only to disseminate knowledge effectively but also to generate a balance between different parts of the world where knowledge is shared, rather than being received by academic institutions alone. This knowledge can be exchanged, so indigenous communities and academies could be together as part of the activation and the sharing of this knowledge with the world.

Keywords : dance, flyers, performance, embodied, cognition

Conference Title : ICCN 2024 : International Conference on Cognitive Neuroscience

Conference Location : San Francisco, United States

Conference Dates : June 03-04, 2024