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Creating Knowledge with Somatic Movement and Visual Art

Tamah L. NAKAMURA · Kathy P. HAIRSTON

Abstract

This paper initially reviews sociologist Peter Park's three forms of knowledge: representational, relational and reflective (1997, 1999, 2001), delineating the intersections among them. This discussion will offer an extension of Park's theories to include artistic aspects of knowing. Using these ways of knowing as lenses, the authors will describe knowledge creation in two separate research settings: somatic movement and visual art with examples to be taken from research participants' experiences.

Constructing Knowledge

Many people often associate learning and acquiring knowledge with such traditional activities as reading a book, listening to a lecture in a classroom setting, writing and taking notes. Other activities can include interactive or "hands on" experiences such as riding a bike, learning how to operate a new form of equipment like a computer, or using a new software program. Learning and acquiring knowledge also involve the act of interpreting information, often in the form of symbols and codes that take shape in verbal text.

Sociologist Peter Park (1997, 1999, 2001) describes the generation of knowledge and the creation of community specifically in the context of participatory research or participatory action research. In this form of research, everyday people address common needs, solve problems, bring about change and improvements in their lives and, as a result, cultivate three types of knowledge: representational, relational and reflective (Park 2001, 1997, 1999). According to Park (2001):

People engage in three different kinds of activity: inquiring into the nature of the problem to solve by understanding its causes and meanings; getting together by organizing themselves

as community units; and mobilizing themselves for action by raising their awareness of what should be done on moral and political grounds. For this reason, gathering and analyzing necessary information, strengthening community ties and sharpening the ability to think and act critically emerge as three main objectives of participatory research, requiring three different kinds of knowledge. (p. 81)

Representational Knowledge

Park's (2001) description of *representational* knowledge is captured in the more detached Westernized view of an objective knowledge involving a functional subtype and an interpretive subtype. It is embedded within positivistic, analytic, and reductionist epistemologies. Such knowledge has its origins rooted in the classical physics theory of matter as separate entities. It carries over in fostering a Westernized worldview based upon materialism (or the physical aspects of existence), fragmentation and an external object orientation. This knowledge is assumed to be value-free and neutral with a focus on linear thinking and quantitative measures. With such an emphasis on quantitative measures, logic and causal relationships become more feasible, thereby making such knowledge about the workings of the world easier to change, improve, control and predict events (Neumann 2001).

The functional type of representational knowledge describes, explains, or understands a phenomenon as an object, or as objective knowledge. This perspective requires the researcher to be separate from the research participants and view them from a distance from which only the researcher can see and know or judge what the participants are doing. This method traditionally has been applied in the natural sciences, but is of limited use in social settings to understand either the meaning for the participants, or the interactions among human beings with the researcher as a participant in the research.

The functional subtype's inability to address the meaning that human beings attach to events and experiences as participants signifies one of the limitations of this branch of representational knowledge (Park 1999). Unlike the functional subtype of representational knowledge that concentrates on the analytic and reductive, the interpretive aspect of representational knowledge rests on the meaning that humans attach to events and experiences in its portrayal of reality (Park 1999). Although the knower is still separated from the known, this form of knowledge enables the knower to become closer to the known by considering "the backgrounds, intentions and feelings involved both in understanding human affairs and textual and other kinds of artifacts that are human creations" (Park 2001 p 3). As a result of this process of engaging, the knower and known come together as a merged entity. The act of bridging disparate pieces of information

together that occurs in this process allows for a meaningful whole to be created, yielding a change in both the knower and the known due to new understanding (Park 2001).

Relational Knowledge

Relational knowledge is created when the interpretive branch of representational knowledge and its applications to human beings intersect, enabling people to know one another affectively (Park 2001). This kind of knowledge is nurtured from trust, caring, and respect, and engaging in interaction through such means as expression, both verbal and physical, communal activities, and sharing beliefs and values. It does not have a practical purpose and application as its goal, but generally operates as an end in itself that enriches and becomes part of the individual. Here, relational knowledge unites both participants who become both the knower and the known (Park 1991). The respect, caring, sincerity, authenticity and trust that emerge from the various forms of connection and interaction among human beings, as in sharing stories, experiences, activities, conversations, space etc. along with the expression of such physical manifestations as hugs, handshakes, kisses etc., lead to the development of relational knowledge that continually fosters and sustains communities.

Once relationship is developed, the participants engage in dialogue to clarify their situation and choose a direction or action to improve their situation. Relational knowledge is important for reflective knowledge in two essentially recursive ways. That is, its establishment is necessary to carry out community building, and it is reciprocal in that it is the product or outgrowth of a community context, therefore it is itself relational. It is an essential type of knowledge for building and maintaining community and human relationships as well as for reflective knowledge development (Lynd, 1992; Park, 1999, 2001; Richards, 1998).

Reflective Knowledge

Often, it is not enough for one to possess knowledge just for the sake of pure understanding. Knowledge with the express purpose of catalyzing action or change can be construed as another type of knowledge. Park (2001) defines reflective knowledge as follows:

This kind of knowledge provides practical moral criteria for comprehending the social nature of the problems that affect classes of people and points to what people themselves can do in order to improve their situations. (p. 7)

The understanding gained is not simply one of a critical understanding of society, but it includes a moral component which may best be described by Freire's term conscientization,

which includes both consciousness and conscience (1970). Reflective knowledge is a form of understanding, which brings confidence as a human being, and courage to live through the new state of awareness. In order for people to gain this reflective knowledge and commit to it with confidence and courage, they must be connected to one another through relational knowledge. That creates an interdependence between the two forms of knowledge.

This particular type of knowledge requires conscious reflection among the knowers who, according to Park (2001), must be willing to critically analyze, evaluate and assess issues and questions with respect to morality, social and practical problems. Reflective knowledge assumes humans operate as free and autonomous beings who “act effectively and responsibly on their own behalf in the context of their interdependent relationships” (Park 2001, p. 86).

Social action produces change in participants that goes beyond intellectual understanding (Park 2001). Such change often elicits resistance from the gatekeepers of the status quo who perceive those who challenge it and its prevailing social norms to be a threat. Those who challenge the status quo and its prevailing social norms will come to understand the visceral, emotive and unyielding attachment those gatekeepers possess toward the status quo (Park 2001). Such understanding on the part of participants who challenge the status quo provides a concrete foundation to the abstract conceptual knowledge of social reality generally acquired through theoretical analysis (Park 2001). Such understanding propels participants to take part in such “political activities as petitioning, lobbying, advocating, negotiating, protesting, and organizing (Park 2001 p.8).” By engaging in these political activities, participants feel the power they acquire through them as autonomous agents (Park 2001) and reap the emancipatory benefits.

The Role of African American Visual Art in the Construction of Knowledge

(Kathy P. Hairston)

Many marginalized populations of color, including African Americans, have consistently manipulated symbols, language, sounds and images that structure meaning for a particular group of people. In addition, they have recreated and negotiated these meanings in various behaviors and activities that shape their everyday experience. This process of comprehending, attributing, interpreting, reflecting, re-interpreting and giving new meaning within a culture becomes important in changing and shaping reality. In fact, Hall (1997), Jones & Jones (2001), and Gilroy (1993) discuss how marginalized populations, especially African Americans, have used music and art to reconstruct positive images while displacing negative ones created and fostered by dominant culture. Hence, it is through this process of reflection, interpretation and change by members of a society that reality becomes socially constructed, thereby creating knowledge.

The Study

Working with a small group of visual artists provided the benefit of capturing rich, descriptive details about artistic creation as a tool for creating knowledge. For this study, a total of 9 African American visual artists who lived in the Middle Atlantic region of the United States were interviewed. They concentrated primarily on the two-dimensional aspects of art: drawing, painting, mixed media, fiber/textile art, photography, collage, and found objects. All have extensive knowledge and experience in the visual arts, having graduated from college and continually exhibiting their artwork nationally and internationally.

As part of the interview process, I collected written and visual information including biographies, reviews by art critics, catalogues, photographs, and artist postcards that were given to me by the artists. Having both written and visual data proved to be immensely useful in analyzing data and identifying relevant themes as part of this inductive study on artistic production. Also crucial to this research is the data and any newly-developed inductive theories and paradigms, which are derived from it that accurately reflects and captures the culture, norms, values, beliefs, experiences, ideals, and standards along with the diversity of the African American visual artists in the study. In this study, all of the artists embraced diverse cultural influences and many expressed multiple forms of knowledge primarily through process, materials, and images.

Selected Findings

Most of the artists expressed multiple forms of knowledge and all showed diverse cultural influences primarily through process, materials and images, and content, all of which impact the creation of a final art product for the visual artist. The process of creating the artwork along with the materials and images that artists use in this process proved to be two of the most common themes that emerged from this study. The actual physical part of creating the art, referred to as *art and process*, represents one aspect of artistic creation. The act of mixing up, manipulating, and combining different and somewhat disparate elements together in their work illustrates this *use of materials and images*, particularly with found objects and organic forms. Artists manipulate various materials, images, and forms, including found objects, often recycling items no longer thought to be valuable while resurrecting them with new life and purpose. Such a unique assemblage of materials, images, and forms results in the delivery of striking content and multiple meanings often left to the interpretation of the viewer. Such a practice is very common among the artists and is prevalent in both African cultures and African American cultures as well.

Blurring the Boundaries with Materials and Images

A seasoned painter whose work has evolved and now encompasses such media as paper, textiles, and found objects like beads, feathers, lace, flowers, wood, and metal, Martina Johnson uses them to capture the spiritual and earthly lives of women through dramatic imaginary, scenes and symbols (Johnson-Allen, 2003). She also employs aromatic elements coupled with textiles to evoke all senses to further engage the viewer with her work along with music, visual representations, literature, and the spoken word. For instance, Martina was inspired to design Haint's Apron, as seen in Figure 1, based on Toni Morrison's book, *Beloved* (2004), as a creative way to show how people can make something out of nothing:

She describes a slave, a lady who is a slave and she's going to get married. She didn't have any money or anything or any property. So, she went around borrowing little odds and ends, like a little piece of this and a little piece of that, old lace, found objects and things. She put it together and made herself a wedding gown and says 'I know I look like a Haint's Apron, but it was my dress and something I made for myself.' (Interview August 11, 2004)

The slave woman's behavior in *Beloved* and the act of designing the apron by Martina both demonstrate a number of traits associated with reflective knowledge, including resourcefulness, assertiveness, and critical reflection. For example, the ability to create something, a unique wedding garment from found objects thought to have little worth, in the face of perceived lack, no money and no property, denotes resourcefulness. In addition, the decision to recycle and infuse new life into discarded objects perceived as no longer useful reflects a powerful statement by African Americans that challenges the value and worth of objects and possessions. Furthermore, the ability of African Americans to confidently stand firm in the face of opposition while challenging and questioning beliefs, thoughts, and perceptions, as seen with the value of these objects and possessions, denotes assertiveness and resistance toward Western culture. This denotes reflective knowledge. As a public visual statement, Haint's Apron acts as a tool that symbolizes how African Americans challenge what is considered valuable and worthwhile in a given cultural context.

Haint's apron represents other attributes of relational, representational, and reflective knowledge as it relates to visual art.



Fig. 1 Haint's Apron
1 – Martina Johnson

For instance, Haint's apron is functional in nature in that it serves a particular use and purpose, especially within a community-based setting. The intended purpose of Haint's apron was not strictly for the person wearing it alone, but for wearing within a public context, a wedding ceremony where families, friends, and other loved ones, are gathered together within a small community. These attributes also carry over into relational knowledge in that Haint's apron becomes a symbol and a ritualistic work of art as part of a public ceremony that link participants (bride and groom) together with spectators (families, friends, and other loved ones). Finally, sewing or the physical act of creating Haint's apron represents a useful and practical skill, demonstrating the application of representational knowledge. Once again, Haint's apron becomes a tool to signify a new way to experience beauty and value while challenging one's beliefs about what is considered valuable, thereby illustrating reflective knowledge.

The Impact of Needlework and Quilting

The incorporation of collage as an artistic technique demonstrates both a unique way that visual artists manipulated materials, images, and forms including found objects while illustrating a new method for blending boundaries and distinct art forms. One form of collage is derived from needlework and quilting traditions found in African and African American culture, which often reflect visual accounts of oral traditions. The practical skills and applications that result from



Fig. 2 Self-Portrait – Al Loving

women using fabric, needle, thread, and a variety of objects to sew garments and other utilitarian products such as blankets and quilts for use within a community signify one facet of representational knowledge. Interpretation as another facet of representational knowledge uniquely intersects with reflective knowledge in these various forms of needlework. Through these practical rituals of sewing and quilting, often relegated to females, women engaged in deliberate acts of protest and resistance, thereby creating quilts and other work as symbolic products of liberation.

The technique of sewing and stitching fabrics together is evident in the work of artist Al Loving. In his "Self-Portrait No 23, the swathe of hanging, hand-dyed cloth strips, with stitches that criss-cross surfaces, and with space included as part of the composition, represent a dramatic move away from the conventions of paint" (Patton, 1998, pp. 225-226). Al's work, completed in 1973 and shown in Figure 2, signifies a common practice among many artists who do not distinguish and often blur the boundaries between art and craft.

So in terms of making these connections between your life and the art...it's not always that easy. When I did though, break out of the box and tore the fabric, it felt more connected. It felt more like this was more my world. And that connection I could make at that point, because at one time...when I bought the house in Newfoundland, incredibly beautiful wilderness...and my neighbors would say well..."How come you paint that stuff? How come you don't paint these mountains and this beautiful place?" And all I could say to them was that I don't know this place. I tell my neighbor, I said "I hear cars on the other side, but I've never been there. I can't paint those mountains until I know what's on the other side." I can't just sit there and look...I gotta know what that is. And I realized at that point, that was so. If you paint stuff like that, for it to have integrity, you have to go there, you have to be in there. (Al Loving, Interview December 10, 2004)

Al Loving was highly influenced by the African American Abstract Expressionist artist, Sam Gilliam, known for his drape paintings, starting in the 1960s and 1970s. In this process, Gilliam discarded traditional stretchers used for mounting canvas and hung the canvas on a wall or ceiling in a free form style in a number of installations such as one along the outside exterior of the Philadelphia Museum of art in 1971 (Patton, 1998). Here, in this process, both Al and Gilliam synthesize paint, sculpture, and the environment with draped canvas, much like that of a garment in their visual works of art. Like Al Loving, many artists pull from West African traditions and African American cultures that embrace textiles, fiber, and quilts in their own work. Once again, African American visual artists, like Al, demonstrate their reflective knowledge by questioning

the belief in Western culture that arts and crafts are separate disciplines, thereby blurring boundaries and clearly showing that both can be combined together as part of the art making process in creating new art forms. Finally, Al Loving's innovative use of fabric as part of his creative process blends some of the characteristics of representative knowledge with reflective knowledge. The functional uses of fabrics in arts and crafts associated with the traditions of African and African American women have given way to more reductive, analytic, detached and individualistic works of art with viewing and aesthetic pleasure in mind. Yet, Al's use of these fabrics in a non-traditional way demonstrates assertiveness, resourcefulness, critical reflection, and resistance within the community of artists and viewers.

Somatic Movement and Knowledge Creation: Seiryukai Butoh Dance Group Japan

(Tamah L. Nakamura)

Representational – Interpretive

As a researcher and as a full participant in the activities of Seiryukai, I used an inductive approach including methods such as participating in group activities, events and discussions, observing participants' interactions, recording discussions and interviews listening for topics which would come from the participants themselves to answer the question "How do participants perceive Seiryukai in their understanding and their lives?" Instead of a functional knowledge representation, I was seeking an interpretive knowledge representation. Park (2001) described this as a way of knowing that:

manifests itself as understanding of meaning and requires that the knower come as close to the to-be-known as possible. This means taking into account the backgrounds, intentions, and feelings involved both in understanding human affairs and textual and other kinds of artifacts that are human creations. (p. 3)

Park also points out the gap in Habermas's rationality based on cognitivist concepts which value mental processes as rational. This view does not include our knowledge of others through affective ways of knowing as rational. Park (2001) captured perfectly the way in which Seiryukai establishes relationship when he says, "We establish relationships with our bodies and feelings, in pleasure and pain, in laughter and tears, and with shared experiences and stories" (p. 5). The following section offers conceptual support for somatic dialogue as a form of interaction to create relationship and reflective ways of knowing not only through verbal dialogue but also through body movement interaction engaged in by Seiryukai participants.

Somatic Dialogue – Embodied Knowledge

In addition to opportunity for verbal interaction in many activities such as dinner discussions and overnight retreats, Seiryukai activities include Butoh workshops in which participants communicate non-verbally through body movement. Entering the practice room people begin to reconnect, first, to their own physical bodies. Then through a series of movement explorations the participant has an opportunity to interact with her inner self and other participants moving in a group. The three-hour Butoh workshop is carried out without exchanging words among participants. Friere (1970) said that dialogue is not only what I say and not only what you say. It is not about the words alone which are spoken. Dialogue is about getting into the same space. The space that Seiryukai participants share in Butoh workshops is a space where they move individually, and in a group with others with no explicit instructions as to what to say with their bodies. The dialogue that emerges is a somatic dialogue, that is, interactive words with the body. Exploration of the somatic self through self-discovery and internal transformation of one's images is one activity in Butoh workshops. The soma is the body as perceived from within by first-person perception (Hanna, 1988, 2003, 2003-4, 2004-5). Our own experience of our own body, that is, first-person observation provides us with factual information that the third-person observer does not have access to. Our bodies communicate information to us about our intersubjective relationships with the world around us and with others. Therefore, instead of considering the body as simply "an object of study, or a text on which social reality is inscribed" (Csordas, 2002, p. 241), it also becomes a process of "somatic modes of attention" particular to certain cultural practices (Csordas, 1993, p. 138). Participants in Seiryukai, for example, do not practice choreographed steps in Butoh workshops nor are their dinner discussions guided or controlled. Instead they focus on their first-person experience of how they see themselves and engage with others, and not on how others see them. In this way they create further relationship and reflection through two forums of dialogue: verbal and somatic.

Mi as Somatic Self

Japanese philosophers help us to understand that consciousness and movement can be transformed by extending the body's vocabulary and that theory for extending the body should shift the concept of bodymind from a dichotomy to a unity so that the focus will not be limited to the mind. There has been a long tradition in the West to dichotomize intellect and emotion and to see the body as a site for options thus suggesting the ability to control the body, while Japanese approaches see bodily practice as cultivation of the mind-body integration. Yuasa (1987) and Nagatomo and Leisman (1996) used the word body in English, while Ichikawa used the indigenous Japanese word *Mi* in their discussion of bodymind unity. Yuasa (1987) emphasized bodily

recognition or realization through personal cultivation (*shugyo*) as the path through self-knowledge to true knowledge. Indigenous terms for knowledge in Japanese include *chishiki* (cognitive knowledge), *taitoku* (understanding through the body), and *etoku* (to acquire/master through the body). The last two terms, *taitoku* and *etoku*, emphasize total bodymind knowing. When we understand Yuasa's self-cultivation, Ichikawa's *Mi*, and Nagatomo and Leisman's somatic knowledge (Ozawa-De Silva, 2002), the meaning of the concept of the body is expanded beyond the limits of the skin as the boundary of the body. Kasai Akira, a Butoh dancer, talks about the consciousness changing when the senses change, and the physical body follows that change. Kasai said, "the sensations of your body must reach out" (Fraleigh, 1999, p. 247). Ichikawa (1992, 1993) called this the body expanding beyond the limits of the skin, and for Yuasa it is cultivation of the mindbody unity. Personal self-cultivation is an awareness of somatic self.

A closer look at Ichikawa's (1992) definitions of *Mi* helps us to understand a somatic self and an interactive self as a non-dichotomous way of being:

The word *Mi* (身) not only expresses the dynamics of our living body, it also has a potentiality for a different way of categorization than the mind-object or the mind-body dichotomy. I am not suggesting *Mi* as a specific category connected with Japanese language but the word *Mi* expresses the concept better than the word *body* and *Mi* can be used as a universal concept. I would like to propose the word *Mi* as another possibility of systematization besides the dichotomy of body and mind. (pp. 78-79)

Ichikawa (1993) identified 14 ways in which *Mi* is used in the Japanese language. Three of his definitions support the concepts of an interactive, recursive self through the meaning of different selves and as a reference between self and others.

Mi ni shimiru – to feel both at the conscious as well as unconscious level.

Mi o motte shiru – to know with your whole body and whole mind, that is, your whole self.

Mi o motte shimesu – you try to show or explain yourself with your whole mind and whole body (whole self). In some cases, you even do that at the expense of your life. (p. 83)

Mi then is a somatic self which is a relational, interactive experience of self observed from the first-person perspective.

Participants' Experiences

Kuroiwa Toshiya films Mr. Harada dancing butoh



Kuroiwa Toshiya, a 36-year-old media specialist, exemplifies a reflective identity through a relational sense of self. In his interview he describes his experience of videotaping Seiryukai workshops as a relational connection.

I feel my way of looking at things has changed after I got to know Seiryukai and felt the breathing and energy of Butoh. A photographer tries to feel what a person in front of a camera is feeling. That means the photographer must be there as a person. He must be himself. He needs to realize his own existence. The camera moves automatically. I am not trying to move it consciously. No logic, no consciousness. They are all gone. My consciousness connects deeply with the dancer or the stage. It is as if I am fusing with Butoh. I am walking slowly.

He offers an example of a self that is not relational among many of his undergraduate students who use new equipment for hours and even stay up without sleeping. But they often get lost in the machinery. They think that if they have the most modern equipment, they can take the best pictures. More than that, they think they took good pictures because they are good. They think they are great. They think it is because of their talent that the pictures came out well.

In Kuroiwa's reflective identity, developed through his relational knowing, he talks about a changing sense of self. Through his experience in the *Ba* of being in relationship through the camera lens, he describes his reflective identity by understanding that it requires courage to stay

in the relational *Ba*.

Kuroiwa explains his experience of increased courage through a relational sense of self represented in poetic transcription:

A stage of elevated feelings
Reasoned quietness
In unorganized chaos
Connect through the camera lens
To changing, quivering
reality and illusion
I am a technician
An observer
In one integrated moment
In this violent current
Filming and physically experiencing
Is both an attraction
And a fear beyond description

He recognizes his new sense of agency increases through an increased sense of courage of self as he compares it with his students who are full of their own ego – a non-relational self. He realizes that it is terrifying to open himself to the other, but at the same time, it is very rewarding to do so, and also dangerous not to do so. He also realizes that it is not only dangerous not to see through the eyes of the other but that it is dangerous not to become the other to realize a relational self. His recognition of this relational self that becomes the other is realized first at the somatic dialogue level and then through his verbal dialogue in the group and with me in his interview. Kuroiwa becomes aware of his reflective self, that is he understands that he has changed in both beliefs and actions.

Matsuoka Ryoko: The body is sadness.



Matsuoka explains in her interview

Tears will come out even if you are not feeling sad. You cry not because you are sad. Tears come out because it is the sadness itself. The body is the existence of sadness. The body is sadness. I do not feel tears running down my face or my nose dripping. If I do, it is as if I am looking at another me with tears and nose running.

Matsuoka experiences a greater sense of affective and feeling self as she connects her Seiryukai experience to her life:

Values were made for us at school in our education system. But at Seiryukai we can experience our own movement as beautiful; our own feeling is beautiful. From doing Butoh I have learned to sense parts of my life and things around me more carefully; to include my sensing memories from the past; to bring more of myself to my present self; to be present with myself.

Through her participation in Butoh practice and Seiryukai activities she says that she now concentrates in a more focused, reflective manner on tasks in her daily life. "There are many valuable important things that we tend to overlook. It's important to see things that we overlook in our daily life. Something I experienced. Something I remember." She reports that she has

become more open to listen to different kinds of music and to see and participate in many kinds of art performances and exhibitions. Matsuoka experiences an increased self of connection to her affective self as she connects her feelings to her past, her educational experience, and life around her. Through her Seiryukai interaction her sense of self as beautiful and connected is increased.

From Kurioiwa and Matsuoka's experiences we can understand that embodied knowledge is a way of knowing that extends their relational and reflective ways of understanding their experiences. Their somatic movement experiences give them relational and reflective experience beyond words. They reflect through their embodied experiences through butoh-related movement activities toward understanding the meaning in their lives.

Intersections

Intersections and Degrees of Influence

Since no one human act and no one form of art or movement represent any pure form of knowledge, we cannot assume that different forms of knowledge exist alone in isolation. Although different forms of knowledge in one form may be illustrated in one context, often isolated from each other, some of the characteristics associated with these forms of knowledge may not be unique to one form of knowledge. As there are many ways to acquire knowledge, there are multiple kinds of knowledge to acquire, which serve different purposes. In other words, representational knowledge, relational knowledge and reflective knowledge are not necessarily pure forms of knowledge that exist alone in isolation, as seen in Figure 1.

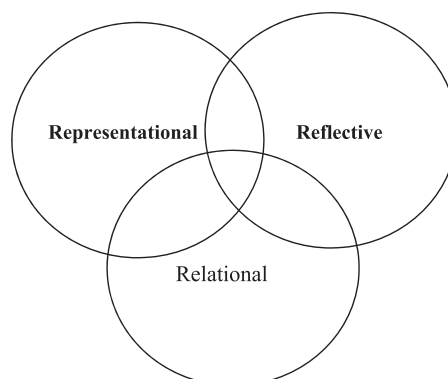


Figure 1 Degree of Influence

In each of the respective studies, research participants capitalized on different approaches in sharing their understanding and awareness of self. Extending beyond the traditional written and oral methods of storytelling, they explore narratives visually and through movement.

Question: What are the benefits as compared to writing or Western ways of traditionally creating knowledge?

Tamah: For the butoh dancers and participants in other activities such as filming the movement, knowledge is created in interactional relationship. For Kuroiwa when filming butoh, his self-awareness is expressed as follows: “the photographer must be there as a person. He must be himself. He needs to realize his own existence. The camera moves automatically. I am not trying to move it consciously. No logic, no consciousness. They are all gone. My consciousness connects deeply with the dancer or the stage. It is as if I am fusing with Butoh. I am walking slowly.” This is what Ichikawa identifies as *Mi* - a somatic self which is a relational, interactive experience of self observed from the first-person perspective. It is not what others hear or see, but what Kuroiwa, himself, experiences that he can identify with as self.

Kathy: As already noted, more traditional forms of research and knowledge are often anchored in processes that require analysis and explanation, which depend on verbal and written language for its expression and understanding. Unfortunately, this form of language, whether oral or written, does have some limitations when it comes to uncovering hard, or uncomfortable experiences and articulating them. When this limitation occurs, people will often turn to non-verbal symbols and metaphors found in art that encompasses color, shape, texture, sound, movement etc., to convey a particular experience or story (Silver 2001). Visual media can be especially effective since it enables an individual to access a range of emotions, feelings and experiences that may normally be too difficult to express in words. Thus, visual media provides some unique benefits over the limitations of written and verbal languages.

For anyone creating art, visual arts offers opportunities to apply and interpret symbols and visual image, often in the place of text, to articulate stories, and to readily capture a particular body of human experiences, thoughts, values, beliefs, and emotions. In the case of visual art, these images then become building blocks for the creation of visual narratives that often take shape in the form of codes, scripts, and metaphors to be transmitted onto a wide variety of media, be it a painting, drawing, collage, sculpting, metalwork, textile or fiber work. Much like music, visual art possesses a sense of structure and composition, an aesthetic, patterns, rhythms (repetitive elements and features that facilitate flow and movement), and tonal qualities as well as the manifestation of a collective social expression and celebration.

Question: What is the perception of knowledge of those who create based on their own

experiences versus and the outsider's perception?

Tamah: The butoh dancers express their stories through somatic movement which allows them to experience their own movement through first-person somatic observation without judgment by or from others (third person observation). They become self-aware by exploring narrative through movement followed by discussion.

Ryoko says, "Tears will come out even if you are not feeling sad. You cry not because you are sad. Tears come out because it is the sadness itself. It is as if I am looking at another me with tears and nose running. Doing butoh we can experience our own movement as beautiful; our own feeling is beautiful."

Thus, she experiences her own beauty, and is not bound to accept a socially prescribed agenda of body, or movement or beauty.

Kathy: One who creates from his or her own experiences likely operates with a different lens of perception and reality versus one based on an outsider's perception. Creating based on, or from an "outsider's perception," increases the likelihood for distortions and misinterpretations to emerge since the context and values that are relevant to the creation of artistic expressions are often overlooked, ignored or discounted, particularly for marginalized populations. Therefore, as a way to rectify misinterpretations that surface from a dominant culture, visual art often becomes a tool used by marginalized populations to engage in deliberate and powerfully subtle acts of resistance, to fight hegemony and to reclaim power.

Hall (1997), Jones and Jones (2001) and Gilroy (1993) discuss how marginalized populations, especially African Americans, have utilized music and art to reconstruct positive images while displacing negative ones created and fostered by the dominant culture. In fact, many marginalized populations of color typically manipulate symbols, language, sounds and images that allows them to structure, recreate and negotiate meaning in various behaviors and activities, which shape their everyday experience. Furthermore, this process of comprehending, attributing, interpreting, reflecting, re-interpreting, and giving new meaning within a culture becomes important in changing and shaping reality. Hence, it is through this process of reflection, interpretation, and change by the members of a society that reality becomes socially constructed.

One form of visual art uniquely permits artists and non-artists alike to produce, recreate and reconstruct images and reality due to the immediacy and access of a camera regardless of

socioeconomic status. This very act of photography allows African Americans to practice what Stuart Hall (1997) refers to as a transcoding strategy, where one “takes an existing meaning and re-appropriates it for new meanings” (p. 270). Moreover, they simultaneously began to counteract, disprove, and displace prior images constructed by the dominant culture and those meanings attached to them.

The development of such cultures of resistance and oppositional cultures indicate that members of oppressed subordinate groups are reflective, creative agents who constructed a separate reality in which to survive, rather than acting as powerless pawns who merely react to circumstances beyond their control (Mitchell & Feagin 1995). Therefore, resistance “becomes a powerful, socio-emotional, psychological and political response to oppression” (Rivera, 1999, p. 12), for marginalized populations “realized through action” (Rivera, 1999, p. 21), one of which includes the creation of art and music.

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