

Good essay on
cultural significance
of dance genres vis--
vis the premises of
deid...

[Art & Culture](#), [Dance](#)



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Introduction

Deidre Sklar published her commentary “ Five Premises for a Culturally Sensitive Approach to Dance” to provide premises as to why dance, as a form of art, is imbued with cultural values. The five premises include the following: “ movement knowledge is a kind of cultural knowledge is conceptual and emotional as well as kinesthetic,” and “ intertwined with other kinds of cultural knowledge,” getting the meaning of dance requires looking “ beyond movement,” and “ movement is always an immediate corporeal experience” (Sklar). It is important to note said premises in further understanding the cultural significance of any given kind of dance. This study, in undertaking the foregoing, uses two of the premises mentioned by Sklar in understanding the cultural significance of two popular kinds of dance – the ballet and the jitterbug. Both ballet and the jitterbug are chosen for their popularity within their cultural milieus – the former being classical and the latter being modern, and are evaluated on the premises by Sklar on

movement knowledge - that of one being “ a kind of cultural knowledge” and “ intertwined with other kinds of cultural knowledge.”

The Premises

Sklar mentioned in her first premise that dance involves the knowledge of movements that resemble cultural knowledge of a particular kind. In that sense, one must only think of belongingness as a key to understanding how certain movements of a particular dance is practiced. For instance, Sklar herself mentioned that ballet has to involve movements that are appropriate for the style it resembles and the culture of refinement it represents, not in such a way that would make those more appropriate for hula, which is another form of dance. Such movements of ballet, therefore, resemble the cultural knowledge known by a ballet dancer, given that he acquired his title not just out of emulating recitals casually, but out of his countless sessions of practice under mentors and within a cultural milieu that makes ballet fashionable – the classical arts, among many others (Core of Culture; Sklar). At the same time, the third premise of Sklar, which describes dance as one where movement is also “ intertwined with other kinds of cultural knowledge,” also refers to the fact that dance is also connected to related, if not completely different, kinds of cultural milieu, given that its continued usage throughout time has entailed the influence of different cultural practices across generations. It is in such a context where one would argue that dance evolves throughout time, with its essence not lost, but in fact further improved the more it is practiced by people (Sklar).

The Dances

Ballet is an archetypal form of dance with strong connections to cultural themes within the times it was practiced. As perhaps the most popular kind of dance in the Western world, ballet came to resemble the ostentatiousness of the nobility who lived there, in that they hosted court parties and practiced most of its known movements towards greater development. From there, ballet became the signature dance of nobility, particularly kings, in their courts, coupled with grand parties, superfluous costumes and, when preferred, dramatic portrayals of plays where characters act and dance at the same time (Core of Culture). In that case, one could see how ballet has come to resemble the lifestyle of the nobility in the Western world, which is known until now for its excessive riches and strong patronage for the arts. The first premise, of Sklar applies on account of the foregoing, which her third premise is applicable to the fact that ballet, throughout time, was developed across generations and even into the modern period, where it is classified as a form of dance that resembles the classical traditions of the Western world, coupled by contemporary movements that seek to supplement, not entirely change, it (Core of Culture).

The East Harlem dance culture in the city of New York in the United States (US) served as the birthplace of the jitterbug. Closely resembling the movements of a person influenced by alcohol consumption, the jitterbug is undoubtedly a product of its time, given the 1920s to the 1940s resembled a period wherein Prohibition, the notorious constitutional amendment banning alcohol across the US, was in place. The African-American community, with their relative exclusion within ghettos like East Harlem, became the first

ones to pick up the jitterbug. Yet the prevalence of radio broadcasting, which gave jitterbug songs ample playtime, became perhaps the main reason behind the growth of the jitterbug in popularity among white Americans alike, particularly after the Second World War (Mortal Journey). One could therefore see how the first and third premises of Sklar would fit into the history of the jitterbug – its exclusiveness to the African-American community, its growth during the time of Prohibition and its increase in popularity among white Americans due to radio broadcasting. Therefore, one could say that the jitterbug has evolved throughout the cultural facets of its time (Mortal Journey, Sklar).

Conclusion

The premises raised by Sklar establishes how culture manifests itself in different expressions – dance, in particular. Given the cultural histories of ballet and the jitterbug, it is thus difficult to dissociate forms of dance from specific kinds of cultural movements. In studying dance, Sklar herself has, indeed, argued that the cultural milieu is an ever-present element.

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