

Book Review: *The Archive and the Repertoire- Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* By Diana Taylor

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In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Diana Taylor posits performance as *a vital act of transfer* (2) and a legitimate way of knowing. In a text that is evidently about broadening our collective understanding of the political significance of performance, Taylor establishes how the repertoire challenges the underlying assumption of western academe that the written form was the only mode through which there could be claims to social memory and identity - a claim which supports established status quo relations (XVII). Citing de Certeau, Taylor notes: “*The power that writing’s expansionism leaves intact is colonial in principle. It is extended without being changed. It is tautological, immunized against both any alterity that might transform it and whatever dares to resist it* (18). Performance functions as an epistemology through embodied and cultural practices.

In delineating the archive and the repertoire, Taylor lays out the key distinction where the first, contains enduring materials such as texts, documents building and bones, and where the second- is about the ephemeral, embodied knowledge (19). Embodied acts of transfer include songs, dances, habits, customs, and communication that preserve ways of being. In assessing this non-archival way of knowing Taylor asks whether performance is that which disappears or that which persists, questioning the tendency to regard archives as more reliable. Importantly, the

repertoire is not oppositional to the archive, they do not exist as binaries, the repertoire expands the traditional archive (26) and combines to make political claims. She writes

The relationship between the archive and the repertoire as I see it is certainly not sequential (the former ascending to prominence after disappearance of the latter...Nor is it true versus false, mediated versus unmediated, primordial versus modern. Nor is it binary. Other systems of transmission- like the digital- complicate any simple binary formulation. Yet it too readily falls into a binary with the written and archival constituting hegemonic power and the repertoire providing the antihegemonic challenge. Performance belongs to the strong as to the weak....the modes of storing and transmitting knowledge are many and mixed and embodied performance has contributed to the maintenance of a repressive social order (21)

Nowhere does Taylor make its contribution to the ‘maintenance of the repressive social order’ more clear than with her discussion of Princess Diana, where one could argue she had enacted wayward, riotous behavior that was ‘out of pocket’ for the crown, but through performance (and its traces that Taylor discusses as the performative, ghosts and hauntings), she was strategically reconfigured as a model humanitarian and a member of the Royal Family. Taylor writes:

The transgressive, casual Diana was now thoroughly smuffed out, in part by the very people who claimed to love her.... But the physical staging [of her funeral] was also an act of restoration; it bracketed and emplotted the event, the first and the last act of the Princess of Wales...the funeral provided aesthetic closure and emotional resolution... The restitution of

social order, disrupted but probably not profoundly altered by the crisis, meant Diana once more returned to the official body she tried so hard to elude (150-151).

But the performatic/the repertoire - which I see as the central point she is foregrounding- even in its own ephemerality is about laying bare how the traditional archive works toward disappearance and thus is a push toward more decolonial engagement with the quotidian as holding knowledge. In line with Peggy Phelan who she cites throughout the text, she argues that to document events is to change their meanings- alter the event itself, that as soon as writing becomes a mode, you are writing toward disappearance but the repertoire enacts embodied memory by requiring presence- *people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by 'being there,' being a part of the transmission...the repertoire both keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning (20).*

To be clear, there is a distinction between performance/performative and the performatic whereas the latter is the “nondiscursive realm of performance”. That is, a methodological shift transfigured from patterns of cultural expression in terms of texts and narratives [to] scenarios that do not reduce gestures and embodied practices to narrative description (16). By considering Taylor’s treatment of scenarios, the boundary-pushing possibilities for the repertoire as knowledge production becomes even more clear since as she writes *the scenario precludes a certain kind of distancing (32)* and therefore implicates us in the ethics and politics of our work (33).

The *Archive and the Repertoire* is poetry, theory, and is a method of storing historical memory through performance. The book takes up a fundamental question about

interdisciplinarity and how we might push back against the colonial and imperial foundations of area studies by valuing the social, political, and epistemic systems of those most notably wronged by coloniality. By visibilizing how writing has always been a privilege of and privileges western thought, Taylor both show *whose memories, traditions and claims to history [have] disappear[ed] [5]* and how performance can and has worked against such disappearance. Performance implicates the real through the presence of living bodies - bodies that bare the markings of a history distinct from those reflected in the traditional archive. The performance - as Solmaz Sharif says forces us to “look” - a full seeing of the other’s absence, a seeing which also entails the acknowledgment of the other’s presence.