

Sviðslistadeild

Samtímadansbraut

CENTER // PERIPHERY

a sharing in three steps

Greinargerð til BA-prófs í samtímadansi

Rita Maria Muñoz Farias

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Abstract:

The performance *center // periphery : a sharing in three steps* and this reflection paper are the culminations of an identity crisis of what dance is and can be when there are two opposite binaries residing in my body and the research done to see if it is possible to express them at the same time. These two oppositions are contemporary dance and Chilean folklore dance.

The research has been both personal and mind opening to my surroundings. I have looked into the *why*'s and *how*'s of my movements; my inspirations, my goals, my (self-put) limitations. This reflection paper is the process and the culmination of a process that is and might be forever on-going. It is a long analysis of both my way of thinking and seeing myself, my dance, and the dance around me, and how I move. An analysis of my inspirations and where some ideas might have originated and how this translated into the performance *center // periphery : a sharing in three steps*.

The text has been structured into three, aligning them to the left, center, and right; like three steps being taken forwards. The idea behind this structure was taken from the performance itself and its dramaturgy of being divided into three 'steps'.

This is my body; dancing, moving, sharing; trying to communicate, trying to express, trying to show my periphery and my center, trying to combine them.¹

¹ "center//periphery : a sharing in 3 steps. (2018)," *Vimeo*, published October 15, 2018, <https://vimeo.com/295183473>

first step : IDEA

S T E P S

To start with, I wanted to explain the ‘steps’ of the title and why *a sharing in three steps* is important to understand aspect of the sharing and of this essay. The idea from the three steps came from knowledge and ideas I have acquired through the years from dancing, thus I wanted to make this a clear melting point of identities and ideas for myself. I wanted the merging of my contemporary and folklore identities to be part of all possible aspect of this sharing.

The sharing has three main parts and this idea came from two main sources; the basic structure of *cueca*² and the structure of Aristotelian dramaturgy. *Cueca* is a folklore dance from Chile with many varieties depending on geographic sector and social status; it is also the dance that was most common to perform during my time as a folklore dancer, mostly because of popularity but also because it is the national dance of Chile. For anyone that has not heard about *cueca* it is a dance in which a man pursues a woman³; it is a partner dance with no physical connection between the partners. It is structured with a beginning, middle part, and an end, and all of these parts have geometrical figures that the couple dance (i.e.: half circles, full circles, eights, lines) – more about the dance itself will be explained further down in the text. Taking this structure from *cueca* I wanted to find a similar structure I related to contemporary dance, or to Western mentality, which is why I decided on the three act structure – the three acts being ‘setup, confrontation, resolution’⁴ – something I studied and used both in writing and in creating choreography when I was younger.

I wanted to incorporate these ideas as much as possible, which is why I incorporated them into the choreography, the dramaturgy, and this text. I did not follow neither the structure of *cueca* nor the three-act structure completely, but took the idea of ‘3’ being a good way of separating different parts and making it easier for me and for the audience to see when the different parts started and ended.

² “Chile’s National Dance: The Cueca,” *Pepe’s Chile*, accessed October 13, 2018, <https://pepeschile.com/chiles-national-dance-the-cueca/>

³ “Chilean Music,” *South America*, last updated January 9, 2018, <http://www.southamerica.cl/Chile/Music.htm>

⁴ Gabe Moura, “The Three-Act Structure,” *The Elements of Cinema* (blog), published June 1, 2014, <http://www.elementsofcinema.com/screenwriting/three-act-structure/>

The reason I called them steps were because of how important my footwear (or lack of) was to the sharing and the movements. I felt wording it this way would not allude too much to neither of the two structures I had taken the inspiration from.



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FOLKLORE // CONTEMPORARY

Over the years I have had this problem with wanting and trying to pinpoint what dance is; I have been trying to understand it – what it is, what it gives, what it feels. The more I read, see, and discover the more my perspective changes and widens - it went from dance having to be choreographed movement on-stage to nearly *anything* as long as it is called dance. I am happy to have broadened my perspective as it has given me more tools to work with. However, as the overthinking person I am, I started questioning my own dance and how it is perceived, mostly how I perceive it.

When I was asked the normal question of “when did you start dancing” I usually answered that I started when I was 16 years old, because it was at that age that I first began dancing modern, ballet, and jazz. Sometimes I would mention that I had danced Chilean folklore when I was younger, but I rarely specified that I had started when I was around five-six and that it had been around ten years in total. It was when I went on an exchange to Argentina the fall of 2017 – which I will expand on further down – that I started asking myself the question of *why*: Why did I never talk about my folkloric dance roots? Why did I usually just mention it in a passing? Why did I never call myself a folklore dancer at 16 years old, when my classmates that had danced ballet since they were five years old did that?

⁵ “Center // periphery : a sharing in 3 steps”, *Facebook*, published October 3, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/events/271272273719831/>

There is usually a bit of pride when talking about something you did for years, especially during your childhood years. I cannot recall ever feeling this pride. However, I did not feel shame of my past either. The feeling is closer to it not being serious enough and that I wasted my time of folklore instead of having had ballet. As I never took ballet as a child I cannot say how much of what I learnt would have been similar and different if I had danced only ballet (or ballet together with folklore).

The folklore group I danced with was *Grupo Folklórico San José*⁶ and the main reason I joined was because my father became one of the teachers around that time. The group was originally formed so the second-generation children of Chilean immigrants could learn about the culture of their parents. The dances would be rehearsed for a year and eventually presented during the annual celebration of *Las Fiestas Patrias*⁷ – Chile’s celebration of Independence. We would meet up every Friday and learnt a large variety of dances, but we always practiced *cueca*. All of us learnt the basic steps and structure of this dance, but also how to dance with each other, use our attire, play with the music and steps.

As the teachers had only learnt this dance by going to *fondas*⁸ and *ramadas*⁹: places that pop up during September throughout Chile where people dance and party to celebrate their independence, none of us learnt more than what they knew and later what they could research on videos they found. They only wanted to have us connect with their culture, so we never learnt a certain technique or taught about alignment or putting coordination in focus. If I learnt any of those things thanks to *cueca* and folklore it must have come as a side effect, because their focus was to teach us how to dance as a group, how to feel confident, and how to do the steps.

My contemporary dance came much later, and I was actually more invested in jazz dance to begin with. I think this was because I could connect more to the feeling of putting on a show for people and having fun in the transition stage between folklore and what I started calling ‘proper dancing’. The reason why I found contemporary to be more compelling in the end, was because of the freedom and exploration it entailed. There was so much to do and to explore! So many different styles within, so many different and inspiring teachers.

⁶ English: The Folkloric Dance Group of San José.

⁷ English: Native Land Holiday.

⁸ “Where Chileans Celebrate the Fiestas Patrias: Ramadas and Fondas,” *Pepe’s Chile*, accessed October 14, 2018, <https://pepeschile.com/chileans-celebrate-fiestas-patrias-ramadas-and-fondas/>

⁹ “Where Chileans Celebrate the Fiestas Patrias: Ramadas and Fondas”.

However, one problem I always faced was that I started a bad habit of over-analyzing movements because I wanted to do everything perfectly. I felt I had a disadvantage because of my lack of knowledge of dance, especially ballet. I wanted to become a ‘proper’ dancer, and all dancers we learnt about in dance history in high school had danced ballet or modern dance to get where they were. I know now that it limited me, but I have mostly only focused on getting things correctly and learning them.

When researching this stage, how I started them and how differently they evolved, I looked up videos of myself dancing. This was both to see how I danced, what steps I did then – this was especially important for the folklore to see if I had forgotten steps I used to do –, and how I expressed myself. With folklore it made me realize how different it is to be filmed and watch the dance, as it is something so social all my memories from dancing are more vivid with more playfulness than what I saw there.¹⁰ The contemporary, on the other hand, was more how I imagined it would be as it is something I still am doing.¹¹ Still, just researching where and how I began with these dances did not answer any of my questions. I realize now how I created a clear cut in between my folklore and contemporary, something I will go more in depth further down, but first I want to explain where the idea from this showing came from.

FRANCE

I believe that one of the first times I seriously started thinking about the duality of my dance experience was during the spring of 2017. I was on a one month exchange at the dance academy ACTS in Paris and during my time there I had two instances where I was confronted with the idea that *dance is universal*; the first being during a showing they had as a class, the second when I was asked by one of the students to give him an opinion on a piece he was creating for a competition.

I had a hard time understanding the pieces, which in part can be attributed to my rusty French. Even so, it bugged me how certain they were that dance was universal and that there should therefore be no problem understanding whatever message they had been trying to convey. This was especially troubling for me with the second performance as what I saw: a woman being

¹⁰ “LA CUECA DE MIS NIETOS,” *Youtube*, published September 22, 2008,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKegZ3wNit0>

¹¹ “Improvisation,” *Vimeo*, published March 11, 2017, <https://vimeo.com/207908483>

harassed and struggling to get away from a toxic relationship, did not fit at all with what he was trying to convey: the way the government – especially males – represses its people.

Dance is universal – this statement for me was troubling and I remember writing countless pages in my journal trying to pinpoint what exactly made me feel like this. One reason was: how come I, as another contemporary dancer from Europe, could not understand the symbols and ideas that this other contemporary dancer was putting forth? On the one hand it could be because his message was not clear. On the other was how our experiences, vocabulary, and body language were probably different enough for us to not be able to say that understanding dance is a universal thing. And this last thought was the first time I had made even tried to link my folkloric background to anything contemporary,

A R G E N T I N A

Fast forward a couple of months and I am on an exchange at the university UNA in Buenos Aires. When I had the option of choosing my own subjects I immediately set my eyes on their faculty of folklore after having chosen classes with the faculty of movements. To discover that they had an entire faculty dedicated to their folklore with degrees in folk dance, folk music, culture studies was fascinating to me. And, just for fun, I decided to take a course in tango and in Argentinian folkloric dances, this way I would learn about their culture and I would have fun with my fellow exchange students.

What I did not see coming was how dancing folklore would end up feeling like coming home; similar rhythms, steps, social situations, and ways of expressions, as what I had danced as a child. In the end I ended up having fun, but not because it was easy – Argentinian folklore dance was one of the hardest subjects that I took – but because I felt good while dancing and it felt good to connect to other people.

Seeing and experiencing how important folklore was to the general population of such a big South-American country – people coming together at *peñas*: “Argentinean folklore party”¹² and *milongas*: “[t]ango dance parties”¹³ nearly every weekend to dance and sing – brought up more questions than answers to my already strange relationship with folklore and

¹² “Peñas Folklóricas in Buenos Aires, Argentina,” *A Gringo In Buenos Aires*, published June 10, 2010, <https://www.gringoinbuenosaires.com/peas-folklricas-buenos-aires-argentina/>

¹³ “What is ‘Milonga’?,” *Escuela de Tango de Buenos Aires*, accessed October 21, 2018, <http://escuelatangoba.com/marcelosolis/milonga/>

contemporary. Even here, in a country so connected to their folklore dances I felt that talking about my folkloric background was strange, and I still struggled with feeling inadequate identifying as a folkloric dancer. I am not sure as to exactly why I felt this way but talking to the people studying folklore and how much they worked and studied the dances, attires, steps, history, and more – it felt like I could not match that with what little knowledge I had.

Thus, Argentina left me with an incredible experience and a feeling of wanting to dance more folklore, while at the same time giving me endless questions of my own identity and my own relationship to my roots in dance and identity related to it. I went to Argentina for the contemporary dance, which I expected to be old fashioned, but ended up with something different. It is *their* contemporary dance, a dance that is constantly evolving with their own standards and ideals. I realized how I had gone there seeking something and judging it from a Western perspective, expecting them to be struggling to achieve the contemporary dances that are happening in Europe or in the States. And although most of the dancers talked about were Western the only time I heard talk about being ‘behind’ was someone criticizing that Western point of view.

I had never voiced my own thoughts, but it did put my own views of art outside the West in perspective, how post-colonial countries are seen as always lagging behind and that they merely react to the new produced by the West, instead of producing anything new themselves.¹⁴ And this idea is a big part of the research I did, which comes in the next step.

C H I L E // N O R W A Y

Growing up as a second-generation immigrant is interesting, and I think I can feel that it did affect me greatly. One aspect is that I do not have a strong feeling of national pride to either country, nor do I have a strong feeling of belonging. It is strange to be in-between countries, cultures, dances, mindsets. At times everything is just a big mash of different ideas, and it is impossible for me to distinguish where one thread began and ended. And at other times they are so opposite from each other that I struggle to know how to create a middle way to honor both of them.

¹⁴ Colin Rhodes, *Outsider Art Spontaneous Alternatives* (London: Thames&Hudson Ltd, 2000), 202.

Identity and belonging have been a big question to me from a young age, however, I believe that me researching these topics helped me to put into words several feelings I have had over the years; questions I did not know how to voice before. There has always been a very clear line between one side of my life to the other, and realizing this in my dancing has made me realize this in other parts of my life. In dance I see this in how I had a hard time feeling the same type of ‘fun’ when dancing contemporary as when I danced folklore, I missed how people would cheer you on when dancing and not look with a stoic face, but I also felt freer in expressing myself with contemporary because more was allowed and different feelings are involved.

Thus, starting on this journey shone a light on threads to places I did not know it would guide me to. Can I make a choreography where both my contemporary and folkloric side are present? Is it possible for me to merge these two ‘styles’ into one, merge them in my body? Have either of those two binaries left any residue in the other, and will it be visible? In the next step (research) I will write about post-colonialism in the body, dance and how Western society see what is thought of as ‘outside’. I will also delve a bit into how dance in general is seen, and what I mean with the title *center // periphery*.

second step : RESEARCH

While doing my physical research I also started reading and looking up things – I tried to find connections and reasons as to *why* I had this extreme separation of folklore and contemporary dance. I spent a lot of time thinking back to how I talked about dance before, looking at videos of myself dancing, and reading about dancers and choreographers that were on the periphery of the art world.

Even after this research I have to say that I still do not think there is one straight answer – there are many factors that have contributed to me thinking and dancing the way I do. The ones I present here are the ones I have had more time to research and that make the most sense to me now. They are also the ones that helped me with my physical research and that influenced the structure and dramaturgy of the sharing.

When looking up information about art in the periphery, and how that came to be, I stumbled upon the term Outsider Art. Reading further about this term I found that, although not

completely related to my research, it encompassed art on the periphery of western ideals. Artists, especially Expressionists who were critical to the contemporary art, took inspiration from ‘outsiders’ (mentally ill patients, people from outside the artistic circles and non-Westerners, mostly from colonies) and created their own work from there.¹⁵ I was interested in the reason why they made art from colonies be part of the ‘outsider’ group and found *Outsider Art Spontaneous Alternatives* by Colin Rhodes. Reading this, although mostly centered towards the use of art by mentally ill patients, answered that question rapidly. One example about this, which also explains my feelings towards the ‘inferiority’ of folklore to the contemporary, is that

[t]hroughout the period of colonial expansion in the West, which began in earnest in the seventeenth century, colonial subjects were typed as Other and, through the construction of a number of discourses of power and control, excluded from participation not only in determining their own destiny, but also in establishing dialogue with the subjugating power.¹⁶

Rhodes does not talk explicitly about anything folkloric here, but points at the sentiments that I had about countries outside the West – how they had to look to other ‘better developed’ countries in guidance. As I mentioned when I wrote about my stay in Argentina, and which I will write more about here: many of my preconceptions about ‘non-Western’ societies were challenged. What I felt about my parent’s homeland, and what I thought of many other ‘Third World countries’ was definitely what Rhodes talked about. I cannot say with absolute certainty that it still lingers in Western societies, but I do believe some part of this feeling of superiority that colonialism created is not completely gone. And I must have absorbed this idea from my environment, which is why I believe some ideals do linger.

Another aspect, which I also started to discover thanks to Rhodes’ book, was that when Westerners started defining art it excluded many of the cultures on the periphery of the West. Most cultures and their art that did – or still do not – share their values would not have been included and by hindsight become undervalued or seen as *other*. Art, defined by Dubuffet in Rhodes’ book, is that in ‘its very essence’ art should be ‘of the new’ and that ‘we expect art to uproot us, to unhinge doors.’¹⁷ There are many more definitions to what art is and what it

¹⁵ “INTRODUCTION TO THE LINKS AND SIMILARITIES BETWEEN GERMAN EXPRESSIONISM AND OUTSIDER ART,” *KDOUSIDEART* (blog), published January 30, 2012, <https://kdoutsiderart.com/2012/01/30/introduction-to-the-links-and-similarities-between-german-expressionism-and-outsider-art/>

¹⁶ Rhodes, *Outsider Art Spontaneous Alternatives*, 198-200.

¹⁷ Rhodes, *Outsider Art Spontaneous Alternatives*, 23.

should be, many philosophers, writers and artists have come with own points of views or great essays about this¹⁸ – all depending on their ideology, period of time, and other factors. The reason Dubuffet’s definition made such an impact on me while researching was that he was making a clear distinction as to what he believed art should be and that he at the same time used native art from *other* colonized countries as inspiration. I am not saying that he did or did not see art of other cultures as ‘uprooting’, but where those art pieces meant to be that way?

I do not want to comment on how Dubuffet’s definition also leaves out many Western art pieces and styles – which it probably also was meant to do, and this way elevate his own style and vision – because most Westerner artist have been able to voice their own opinions and have their voice heard. These *other* cultures were without any voice during colonist times to say whether they felt this included or excluded them, and this inability to express themselves probably lingers when it comes to native art. In respect to this I can say that the folkloric dances I learnt were meant and used to bring unity, joy, and a feeling of belonging, they were not made to be new and to unhinge – they just evolved as the community needed them. This is the same with other art practices inside folklore, do their purposes and uses become less important because they do not follow what art is ‘supposed’ to do?

Nicholas Thomas, a cultural historian, also said that categorizing everything as ‘art’ might be problematic because of the way it is defined; e.g. ‘Oceanic Art’ might be associated, by Western viewers, to be objects in museums and that excludes huge parts of the identity of the indigenous esthetics where other aspects might be either more important, or certain objects lose their value outside of the context they are used in.¹⁹ It is interesting to hear how the use of language depending on the context might change the way things are seen, so how is art defined?

The word ‘art’ was used in Old French during 13th century and meant “skill as result of learning or practice”²⁰ and now has multiple definitions, one being that it is “the quality, production, expression, or realm, according to aesthetic principles, of what is beautiful, appealing, or of more than ordinary significance.”²¹ Reading this definition it seems to me

¹⁸ Maria Popova, “What is Art? Favorite Famous Definitions, from Antiquity to Today,” *brainpickings*, published June 22, 2012, <https://www.brainpickings.org/2012/06/22/what-is-art/>

¹⁹ Rhodes, *Outsider Art Spontaneous Alternatives*, 203-204.

²⁰ “art,” *ONLINE ETYMOLOGY DICTIONARY*, accessed October 20, 2018,

https://www.etymonline.com/word/art#etymonline_v_17037

²¹ “art,” *Dictionary.com*, accessed October 20, 2018, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/art?s=t>

that both contemporary dance and folklore can go under this category of art. Both follow esthetic principles of what is beautiful in the environment they belong in – although contemporary dance does go against this definition as well. Both are significant to the community they belong to, or to the audience that follow them. Would defining folklore dance under ‘art’ and ‘dance’ end up erasing part of the identity as to why it is special to Chileans? Would it put it equal to all other dance types? Would it end up playing into ideas of colonialism and how everything must try to reach up to Western standards? I do not know how defining it as folklore helps or does not help me in making it feel less inferior to contemporary dance, although this brings me to the next topic: an invisible hierarchy in dance.

This is incredibly subjective and something I have noticed in myself, but one example I could come up with is to search ‘dance’ on Google or Pinterest and see how many non-Western dances are depicted. Every time I have done this I have been at around the 4th row of pictures before encountering any other dance not mainstream Western. I do know that I held some dance techniques higher than others, and the ones on top were always Western technical dances.

An example of how this hierarchy is something I still unconsciously think came a couple of days before the first sharing. I was talking with my friend about her little sister that started the dance line at my old high school this year. “She should be put in the more experienced group” I started telling my friend, as her little sister had danced Classical Indian Dance for many years and that if I “that only danced folklore” got in that group she should be there too. Had my friend not commented on what I had said I would not have noticed how I, again, lowered folklore to other classical dances.

I have tried to take action to see if incorporating this folklore identity more will have any effect, and thus I decided to write ‘Contemporary/folklore dancer’²² in the description of my Instagram profile. It felt like a huge step, as I had never called myself a ‘folklore dancer’, and I wanted to make myself more comfortable with that term. I also posted a video of myself dancing where I mentioned folklore for the first time since I started using Instagram.²³

²² Rita Maria Muñoz Farias, “ria_kegori,” *Instagram*, accessed October 15, 2018, https://www.instagram.com/ria_kegori/

²³ Rita Maria Muñoz Farias, “ria_kegori”



However, I have not danced anything remotely close to folklore and shared it. It still feels like it is not ‘important’ nor ‘good’ enough, but hopefully I will be able to take that as my next step, so folklore and contemporary dance videos can co-exist on my Instagram profile. My main obstacle is that it feels hypocritical of me, as a person that is technically ‘not’ from the country it originates from and thus has not had enough immersion in it culturally to explore it further than in social situations. This has probably more to do with feelings of identity and that I feel that, as a person that grew up in Europe, it is more expected of me to be contemporary.

Later on when deciding on the title I came across another instance where I had this preconceived notion of my own identity and dancing. *center//periphery* as a title came halfway through the process and I had immediately decided that the center would equal contemporary and that my periphery was my folklore. It was not until I read Bojana Kunst’s essay *Performing the Other Body* where she stated that “the conviction that there is always an unbridgeable difference concerning the way different bodies may be understood – a cultural difference so powerful as to be inescapable” is something that “the colonizing West” used to establish its identity – by creating “the fact of difference”²⁴ that I started to wonder when I decided what my center and periphery would be.

²⁴ Bojana Kunst, “Performing the Other Body,” *EUROZINE*, published March 20, 2003, <https://www.eurozine.com/performing-the-other-body/>

Thus, I started to wonder if the reason behind the *center* of my sharing being contemporary was because Europe has become the center and South-America is the periphery on most aspects, e.g.: the West has nearly full hegemony over defining and developing dance. My dance was probably just reflecting this idea, but which one was my center then? When thinking about it I could see both in either role and decided that looking at it with that mindset was better and could open up more for the process of physical research as well.

With this mindset I started realizing how important it is that I realize that one ‘type’ of dance is not superior to another. Now I see how everything has its history and its own ghosts, as it comes from one tradition passed on to another. Dance is beautiful in many ways, but one fascinating part is how we archive with our bodies; we have lessons upon lessons from other people who have had their own archival process throughout their own lives. Everything brings a ghost of ‘something’ and ‘someone’ else a trace that might be visible or barely there. My folklore is like a haunted house on my shoulders, and though this might be seen as positive or negative depending on the perspective of the person, I have come to realize how my contemporary is similar. My contemporary dance is full of its own ghosts, its own memories. And it was with this mindset I went into the physical research and performing.

third step : PERFORMING

(S P O K E N) L A N G U A G U E

The idea of using my voice in the performance came abruptly one day after reading through some thought I had written down. I was inspired by Kari’s *Bending the Line*²⁵ where she performed a dance lecture, talking about the spot in-between her shoulder blades. I then tried it a couple of times, and using voice felt like the right approach to continue developing the sharing.

I had certain topics that I wanted to talk about during the performance that could give insight into the movements and to my research. I wrote down the topics and from there made the sentences that in the end became the soundtrack of the performance. As the movements and

²⁵ “Bending the line”, *Vimeo*, published March 5, 2018, <https://vimeo.com/258595483>

dramaturgy settled, what I wanted to say and where also shifted, so it went through different stages throughout the process.

In the beginning I wanted to play with when I talked in real life and when my ‘past’ (recorded) self was talking; I started out with the recordings but in-between silences I said some sentences. The main reason why I wanted to try this was to see how much it changed the focus of the audience, however it ended up feeling like I used it as a way to make the performance more impressive. Thus I discarded the idea.

I ended up using mostly my voice as a recording except the third step where I talked. One of the main reasons was because I took inspiration from the *aro* or *relaciones* that happen before the dancing starts in *cueca* – they are used to tell stories, make fun of people, flirt, and in general set the tone of the dance.²⁶ It is not something that is usually done by dancers, especially in a more performative context, and I have personally never done an *aro*. However, I did end up doing it as a way of conveying confidence and to differentiate between the contemporary-me (contemplative, research, fluidity) and folklore-me (flirtatious, confident, rhythmic). It was not to show that folklore was a bigger part or more present part of me.

S T A G E

As I wanted to have a sharing, and make this a more intimate and wholesome performance, I took some steps to see how I could make connections and have small details to hopefully make my ideas and questions more understandable.

The space was small and I wanted the audience sitting by the walls around me to mix the use of space of both contemporary dance: having more than one front, and folklore: the audience being spread around the dancers. Because of the projection I use I had to only use three walls for the audience.

Because of the seating arrangement I started the movement research by exploring circles and spirals to play with who could see what depending on my movements. It was also because of this that, besides audio-me and real-me talking, I had a soundtrack consisting of the recorded

²⁶ “Aro aro aro! Words to Celebrate Chile,” *Chilean Adventures of the Pelirroja Peligrosa* (blog), published September 20, 2013 (6:38 p.m.), <https://gabriellebills.wordpress.com/2013/09/20/aro-aro-aro-words-to-celebrate-chile/>

sounds of movements when I danced once. Throughout the entire sharing this will be in the background somewhat faintly; one way of alluding to my past movements. I also used it to help me know when the talking would come. I was in a constant dialogue with the sounds I was doing in the present with my body to the sounds I was doing in the past.

For the costume I wanted to play with the feeling of ‘blending’ folklore and contemporary, to try and play with these elements on my body as well as with my body when moving. It is because of this that I had a mixture of, what I felt represented, ‘modern’ and ‘folkloric/traditional’ clothes on. Nowadays Adidas is a very big thing in the contemporary dance community and I found light blue FILA shorts that represented this ‘trend’ for me. The top, crocheted, was a nod to something handmade and therefore more towards the traditional side. On the other hand, these two were also representing the opposite, but something I knew only I would know. In *cueca* the attire that I mostly used is called *china*²⁷: a frilly knee-length dress with an apron or a wide belt, flower stamps, and a petticoat underneath, inspired by what maids and peasant women wore around the 19th century. As it is normal to show the legs when dancing folklore I decided the shorts would be a good mix between the contemporary and a hint towards the *china* attire. The crocheted top, even though alluding to something ‘old fashioned’ with the way it is made, is still more modern as something ‘see-through’ compared to the *china* attire, which covers most of the skin of the upper body.

The shoes were a complete nod to my folkloric roots, but the handkerchief was something that was more in-between. As a plain light blue synthetic handkerchief, it is a far-cry from the extravagantly frilly white cotton handkerchief that is commonly used when dancing *cueca*. For me, this handkerchief, reminded me that it was not a folkloric dance performance and that the rules were freer; it represented a freedom from the rules that I have assigned the two dance styles, a freedom to try more.

My hairdo was also an attempt at merging a typical ‘contemporary’ hairstyle of having half of the hair in a ponytail and the *cueca* counterpart of braiding the hair when dancing; I braided the upper part of the sides of my head and gathered it in the back as a ponytail.

My original idea for the lights, to have a spotlight on the floor, was discarded because of issues with the space. This is something I am very happy about, as having the lights shine up

²⁷ “Aro aro aro! Words to Celebrate Chile,” *Chilean Adventures of the Pelirroja Peligrosa* (blog), published September 20, 2013 (6:38 p.m.), <https://gabriellebills.wordpress.com/2013/09/20/aro-aro-aro-words-to-celebrate-chile/>

on the walls created a play of shadows when I danced; a play with multiple-me's. I also think, in retrospect, that my original idea would have limited me as my idea was to use the circle of light to represent the center and periphery. Now I could concentrate on the movements and exploring without limiting myself to being inside/outside a circle. The shadows reminded me of how I played with my past and present self with the recorded audio I used, here the shadows represented another part of me.

The videos were the last element used during the sharing, done this way for the audience to be able to see the two dances I used for the whole sharing side-by-side. I put this in the end mainly so the audience should not feel that they needed to see something and understand what it was before or during the performance. The videos could give extra information to what they had already seen and experienced while watching me move. Having this at the end also helped me explore this idea about *dance is universal* and how 'communication is limited by perspective'²⁸ – because they might see something in the first two steps that they would not have seen had the third step been before. It has something to do with that when you have the same vocabulary (or at least a general understanding) you can communicate something that you before couldn't.

CENTER // PERIPHERY

The first sketch of the performance that I made I had my folklore shoes consistently in the middle with all contemporary movements being on the periphery of the circle that they made.

Funnily enough, this was the opposite of what I wanted to convey, but with time it became more and more apparent that having folklore in a performance that I saw as inherently contemporary – because of the setting and other factors – would be very difficult for me and I therefore struggled to find a way to convey my ideas in movements and not solely on paper where I could voice my thoughts.

The structure, as I said in the beginning of this reflection, was taken both from Western and folkloric ideals and having this it helped me continue on with the movement research. After I had created and set both the first and third step I still had one hurdle to overcome, which was step two; finding a way of 'merging' the two dances. Strangely enough it felt like being

²⁸ "Arrival: A Response To Bad Movies," *Youtube*, published February 15, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z18LY6NME1s>

bilingual, but in movements. For me it is easy to substitute a word from Norwegian to Spanish, and vice versa, without batting an eyelash if I do not remember the word in the language I am talking in. It is not a merging of languages, it is just my lazy brain that goes for the fastest and easiest route. That is what trying to merge contemporary and folklore felt like; I tried to do something that would be both at the same time but ended in me either doing one movement from one dance first then the next afterwards, or dividing my body in two and trying to do them at the same time.

It was frustrating. It felt like I had embarked on an impossible task and would not succeed. My break-through, if I can call it that, came after a writing session where I tried to put into words what it was that I wanted to do and how it could work out. I want to share the passage here, as it opened my eyes into what would then become the second step in the sharing:

How do you show impossibility? How can a body show others that it is failing at mixing/merging these two 'disciplines'/selves? Putting on the shoes leaves me incomplete – I'm neither contemporary as the shoes limit my flow of movement nor am I folklore because I miss a crucial part of the identity – still on the floor taunting. Do the two and make the in-between of trying to mix them? Interrupting the flow because something's always missing/in the way? Tense, introverted, still, building a flow and not completing?

The first and third steps were fun to do in front of an audience; I enjoyed being able to look at the audience, play with what I know and share my experiences with the ones watching. The second step however, although now structured, was still horribly awkward and felt like it took forever before it was the next step. During rehearsals I noticed how frustrated this part made me, as I felt this impossibility was just me limiting myself and not succeeding in creating what I had initially planned. I think the reason the struggle was so big was because I had an idea of wanting to merge them and after merging them I could show others and myself how one my contemporary dance had influenced my folklore and vice versa. And then, when I was tasked with finding a way of showing this, I noticed how I did not know if anything had been influenced by the other, and if they had how to show it. It felt like no matter what I did I would be trying to do something contemporary, but it would never be completely contemporary; the flow was not there, the shoes where in the way, and I was suddenly not in complete control of how I usually moved.

Because of this I wrote, many times, before the actual sharings how I wanted the second step to be, how I wanted to be; be confident, be awkward, be insecure, be intense, be soft, be a

mess; flow, stop, start, come, go; speed, roll, whip, jump. This did help me to enjoy the second step, because it was not meant to be beautiful or nicely put together as the first and third step. I struggled, I had a hard time, I felt strange, but I also tried to enjoy being watched in that stage. Writing and putting my questions on paper (Why can't my contemporary and folkloric side meet? Where does the line go? Can I ever merge them? And will it even be visible?) helped put my ideas of how the performance could have been – and there is a possibility that with further research I could have ended up with something different or even overcome this mental block and 'merged' the dances. However, I do think a lot of these struggles also have to do with my own ideas about dance, how I still have a voice in the back of my head saying that folklore is not as impactful as contemporary dance.

Structure wise all three steps were somewhat different, and movement wise I tried to differentiate them mostly in how I expressed myself and my intentions, especially as the second step would have influences from both my contemporary and folklore dance.

The first step (contemporary) was nearly entirely set and choreographed, but even in the improvised parts in this step I had some task of exploring a movement or quality before continuing with the rest of the choreography. The reason this step was structured like this is because, when dancing contemporary, I have always felt more secure doing set choreography than improvising when in front of an audience. Also, making a sequence and then working from those movements to expand it was something I always used to make set dances. When it came to movements I tried to have them be how I move when I improvise; turns to come up and down from the floor; articulating my arms and fingers as waves; using my head to look at my extremities to make them the focus point; articulating my spine; shoulders or hips to cause a ripple effect in the rest of the body. The parts that were set were done trying to have keep a flow in the movements, but as I like to use articulated 'stops' – creating a popping effect at times – I still incorporated this. In the parts that were more improvised I tried to explore the physicality of expanding and coming up and down from the floor. The reason I decided on exploring these two specific things is because they are things I have been told repeatedly over the years that I should try to feel more confident in doing – so I would not shrink my movements I wanted to have it as a task in this part.

The second step (in-between) was set in the structure, but not in movements. I decided to do it this way while trying to discover how to show this in-between stage. Thus in the three different stages (and one transition stage) everything was improvised with tasks I had

previously decided on helped me convey and explore the in-between stage – and exploring and trying to do something I felt I could not do. In the first part of this step I had set myself the task of dividing my body in two and that I would see how it was to have contemporary-me and folklore-me in each part of the body: e.g. I walked around the stage with the shoes on and could either have my feet be folklore and upper body contemporary, or vice versa. The second part was trying to do more contemporary movements with the shoes – which was really hard for me at times because I was not used to coordinate extra centimeters when moving – and while doing these movement and struggling trying to do something folkloric. This could be either trying to do a folkloric step or a hand movement in a position that was far from optimal and would lead me to topple over or interrupting what I was doing to try out the folkloric movement. The third part was, as I started calling it, the ‘frustration being released’ part. It was more folklore based, shifting from the other part that had been more towards the contemporary, and I focus more on trying to make rhythm with my heels. There is a lot of stomping and creating loud noises with different parts of my body and my heels – trying to recreate the rhythm that is a big part of the folklore dance. The reason I structured the second step this way was mostly because it represented the stages I went through while trying to merge these two dances; starting with this very divided and insecure body and ending with frustration at trying and failing to merge them.

The third step (folklore) was completely improvised, except the very beginning. In the beginning I walk around the stage, close to the audience, positioning the handkerchief correctly in my hand before I start stomping with my heels to make a rhythm and then I start with the improvisation. The inspiration and reason to have this structured this way was partly because of how *cueca* is structured. This is the dance that I mostly used as inspiration for this step and because of that I found it important to have parts of the structure of the dance incorporated into this step. *Cueca* starts with walking arm in arm with your dance partner – and is now probably done to insinuate flirting, although I have always used this to clarify how the dance will be executed – before the man leaves the woman on one side of the stage, then the man goes to the other side directly in front of her and both start clapping. The set part is directly inspired by this, while the rest are completely improvised movement – taken from *cueca* and some other folkloric dances that I might remember in the moment – but my task is to play, flirt and amuse myself and the audience. I use my handkerchief as a way to communicate whatever intention I have towards a person I am dancing for in the audience (i.e.: hiding my face to show embarrassment, putting it on my head because I am cocky). I

also use my heels to create rhythms to move myself towards or away from certain parts of the room while dancing, or I dance the half circles with one person directly in front of me.

Now, at the end of this reflection and of the performance I want to say that it has been an emotional journey trying to analyze patterns of myself and reasons as to why I think and move certain ways. It has brought me great joy to also understand that, although it will be a slow process, doing this research has helped me become more confident in both my contemporary dance and my folklore.

There are also many topics that have peaked my interest and I would like to delve deeper into theoretically as I feel I barely scratched the surface on, i.e. how postcolonialism might have affected how dance is perceived, how definitions of art, dance, or other statements made by the West might have affected how cultures in the periphery look at their own culture and art. I have also become more interested in my own dancing, something that might sound strange, but it made me realize that the history I have in dance and what I have to offer can bring a different perspective to the dance scene, I have something to offer here.

This process left me with questions and inspiration, and I hope that by sharing this I could give someone a perspective into a different and less known dance style, show my own struggles with identity that I know other second-generation immigrants do go through, and another perspective into how some ideas should be challenged because that can bring new perspectives. I have at least ended up with many new tools and different ways of looking at things I thought of as being absolute. I also think that it could be interesting to continue with this sharing and see how different it would be to perform in Norway and Chile. Would anything change for me? How would the reactions and feedback differ, or would they be similar?

To finish up I want to comment on the title “center//periphery” – did I find out which one corresponds to these terms? No, I did not. And I think even if I continue researching I would like to keep it like this, because I feel like the connotations those words have might further the gap I have between the dances. I want both to be on the periphery and center, I want them to be able to co-exist in me and around me as equally important and valuable.

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