

The Local Prejudice of Contemporary Dance

Fabián Barba

Once put into prose, a universal concept carries within it traces of what Gadamer would call 'prejudice' - not a conscious bias but a sign that we think out of particular accretion of histories that are not always transparent to us.

(Chakrabarty xiv)

A Mary Wigman Dance Evening and a personal yet collective history

In 2009, I created the performance *A Mary Wigman Dance Evening* (AMWDE), a dance recital composed of the re-enactment of nine short soli originally created and danced by Mary Wigman during 1925 and 1929. These soli were part of her first tour through the United States in 1929-1930 and became the basis of my staging.¹ As I worked in this creation, I encountered for the first time a rather curious phenomenon: certain dances could be said to look old-fashioned. When those dances have been created several decades ago, as in the case of *Ausdruckstanz*, this kind of observation doesn't seem to pose any major problem. However it can become a rather thorny situation when those dances have been made recently and outside of what could be considered the centers of the so-called contemporary dance scene. I seem not to be able to approach this problem without considering my own personal story. Through my dance education in two different places — Quito from 2000 to 2004; Brussels from 2004 to 2008 — I got in contact with two different dance scenes in which this perception of one of them looking old-fashioned in relation to the other has come clearly to the fore.

I started to study dance in Quito with Kléver Viera, one of the modern dance pioneers in the city. I could say that while I was studying with him, I took him as a model that embodied for me both an image/idea of dance and of a good dancer; taking him as a model, I strove to embody those ideals in myself. At least in an initial formative moment I could say that *that* was the kind of dance I wanted to do and *he* the kind of dancer I wanted to become. A similar process took place while I was in P.A.R.T.S. The main difference was that instead of having one teacher to look at, I had several, all of them with their different bodies, different exercises, different skills, all of them actualizing differing ideas of dance and what a good dancer could be.

It took a while before I realized that I was not going to improve my Quito-acquired technique in Brussels. Traveling from Quito to Brussels I actually changed paradigms: I invested myself in a different kind of technical training, I was initiated into commerce with other ideas, I started pursuing and negotiating other ideals. I didn't improve my previously acquired technique; I put it on hold to focus on acquiring a new one. Thinking retrospectively about this, I have become convinced that an education in dance implies not only a technical education, but also an education in a way of thinking, a way of appreciating work (a way of enjoying or disliking dances), a way of interacting with the network in which one is educated: *a dance education is a way of inscribing oneself within a dance culture.*

To recognize the existence of different dance cultures and one's inscription to them through training and education doesn't necessarily pose a problem. The problem appeared for me the moment I couldn't establish a relation between those two dance scenes. Or when every attempt I made to relate them seemed to encounter a hierarchized field in which the dance scene in Ecuador seemed to be old-fashioned in relation to the dance scene in Brussels, an anachronism, somewhat late.

After *AMWDE* I tried to approach these questions through the creation of another performance entitled *a personal yet collective history (apych - 2012)*, which also followed the logic of a dance recital. It combined eight short solo dances created in different contexts: the United Kingdom (1976), Brazil (2003) and Ecuador (2003), to name a few. This compilation didn't aim to present different decades or periods, nor to give a concise, complete and systematic account of history; it simply looked for dances that could refer me to a different milieu than the one I was inhabiting at the time; I wanted these dances to allow me to infer — however phantasmagorically or vaguely — an idea or image of the context in which they were created, a context historically or geographically different from my actual, present one.

One of the dances I was considering for this new dance evening was a short solo created by my former dance teacher Kléver Viera for my colleague Yolanda Endara (*Yoli's solo - 2003*). As I was coming to Europe to visit different dance schools, I asked Yoli to teach me that solo so I could present it during my auditions. I asked her to teach me specifically that solo because I thought it was a most beautiful dance and the best I could offer as my calling card. Nine years later, during the rehearsals for *apych*, my affinity for this dance remained

undiminished; the pleasure of dancing this solo as I retrieved it from the video surfaced to my skin. Nevertheless, I noticed a gap between this dance and my present situation as a dancer in Brussels. Notwithstanding the familiar pleasure and enjoyment, there was a distance that had installed itself, Yoli's solo seemed out of place, or old-fashioned. It was as if traveling outside of what I have come to recognize as a center for contemporary dance (Brussels) could be perceived as a traveling back in time.

Is it so? Can travelling geographically be perceived as travelling back and forth in time? Even my experience with Yoli's solo seemed to indicate so: I had learned to recognize that dance as belonging to the past, even though I had fully identified with it only nine years earlier. Is nine years time enough for something to become part of the past? No, I don't think that the time marked in the calendar can account for this transformation from "present" to "past"; it was the travel from Quito to Brussels, the change from one dance world to another one. The dance tradition into which I was inscribed through schooling in Brussels constituted my present now. But did it necessarily have to transform my previous experience as a dancer into "the past"? Did it have the right to deny the contemporaneity of the dance world I had come to know in Quito and with which I still entertain affective and professional relations?

To complicate things a bit more, there was another solo haunting the creation process of *apych: La mujer de los fermentos* ("the woman of the ferments"). This is a dance I learned directly from my teacher Kléver Viera who had created it for himself in Quito in 1994. To learn this dance was a very special experience for me. It was a transmission that didn't have anything to do with the teaching of a repertory, it felt rather like a bestowal; something was being passed from one body to the other, from one person to the other, with extreme generosity and care. Learning this dance created a strong bond with Kléver, with that specific dance and with that dance world.

Ramsay Burt (who was assisting in the creation of *apych*) asked me why I didn't include *La mujer de los fermentos* in the performance. The immediate answer was that with this dance I didn't have the detachment I experienced with *Yoli's solo*. I was afraid that my affective ties to this dance would dissolve any kind of critical distance, which was very important to me. However, my initial resistance to performing this solo might have been due to my unuttered fear that a dance that I had come to recognize as part of the past could have the power to forcefully invade the present. I was perhaps afraid that I could suddenly discover myself

turning my back to the future and walking to the past right in front of me.

How to define the present I had to protect from invasion? As that which was happening in 2012 in opposition to what had happened in 2003? No, this present is not defined by chronological time only. The present I was guarding had to do with my current inscription within a dance network in Brussels. It is precisely this inscription that was potentially being challenged by performing *La mujer de los fermentos* in Europe. Had I been invited to dance this solo in Quito, I would have gladly accepted as it would have reaffirmed my inscription within that dance scene. Why did I perceive my concurrent inscription into two different dance traditions as a struggle between that which belonged to “the present” and that which belonged to “the past”? Why is it difficult to recognize two simultaneous dance scenes as contemporary to each other?

Historicism

We can observe how the frontiers between what properly belongs to “the past” and what to “the present” are being guarded also in other situations than the one I am discussing. In Hamburg in 2009 I attended the presentation of a dance performance by a choreographer working in Colombia. At the end of the performance I overheard an important curator saying “that looked very 80s.” For this essay it is not necessary to discuss the quality of that specific work, what is important to my argument is that a work recently made in Colombia was relocated to a past period in Europe. Also in Hamburg I was told about an Eastern European theater festival that took place in that city before my arrival. Apparently the festival “looked 80s” and was not very successful. They explained to me that “they were dealing with questions and concerns that we (in Hamburg) were not busy with *anymore*.” In her article “Politics of Affection and Uneasiness” (2003), philosopher and performance scholar Bojana Kunst, extensively talks about this by critically describing the (deceptive) reception of Eastern European performance art as something *already seen* from the viewpoint of Western European art programmers, as a *déjà vu*.

These concerns invaded most of the creation of *apych* turning it into a thorny and uncomfortable affair. I noticed that I had come to recognize *Yoli's solo* as part of the past because I was thinking of history as a *single linear progression* with a past that is gone, a present that is singular and a future to which we are all heading. At this moment I came upon Dipesh Chakrabarty's book *Provincializing Europe, Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000).² Even if this book is not

concerned with dance nor with South America, from the very first pages I found passages that resonated strongly with my questions, especially in the way Chakrabarty understands historicism:

Crudely, one might say that [historicism] was one important form that the ideology of progress or “development” took from the nineteenth century on. Historicism is what made modernity or capitalism look not simply global but rather as something that became global *over time*, by originating in one place (Europe) and then spreading outside it. This “first in Europe, then elsewhere” structure of global historical time was historicist; [...] It was historicism that allowed Marx to say that the “country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future.” [...] Historicism thus posited historical time as a measure of the cultural distance (at least in institutional development) that was assumed to exist between the West and the non-West. (7)

For Chakrabarty, “to critique historicism in all its varieties is to unlearn to think of history as a developmental process in which that which is possible becomes actual by tending to a future that is singular” (249). Put otherwise, to critique historicism “is to learn *to think the present –the ‘now’ that we inhabit as we speak-as irreducibly not-one*” (249, my emphasis). It is precisely the historicist understanding of history as a global single linear progression that underlines the idea according to which the present of Ecuador could be understood as the past of Europe.

During the creation process of *apych* I noticed that I didn’t need to think of history as something we find in books or archives that throw us back to a time we didn’t experience and that is detached from us. The past I was dealing with actually had the capacity to affect/act upon my present, be it through the sensual enjoyment of the dancing or by the capacity and desire to fully inhabit *La mujer de los fermentos*. The past I was dealing with was not something past, but present. In *apych* I wasn’t dealing with pasts that have passed (away), I was busy with pasts that *are*, that are active and necessary. These pasts do not need to be recuperated, at most they need to be acknowledged and given a place. The idea of pasts that *are* is also articulated by Chakrabarty:

Pasts *are* there in taste, in practices of embodiment, in the cultural training the senses have received over generations. They are there in practices I sometimes do not even know I engage in. This is how the

archaic comes into the modern, not as a remnant of another time but as something constitutive of the present. (251)

How to conceive a present populated by pasts that *are*, a present that is not singular, that is not a complete and closed entity into itself, a present that doesn't reify and detach us from the past?

One month before the premiere of *apych*, when I was still struggling with the status of *Yoli's solo* and *La mujer de los fermentos*, I read this anecdote about the Indian Nobel laureate physicist C.V. Raman in *Provincializing Europe*:

Raman, it is said, would rush home from his laboratory in Calcutta in the 1930s to "take a ritual bath ahead of a solar eclipse." When questioned about this, the physicist is reported to have simply quipped, "The Nobel Prize? That was science, a solar eclipse is personal." (254)

This anecdote raised important questions. How could a scientist, proficient in the use of rational thinking, engage in so-called superstitious practices? How could a scientist, as a modern man, engage in practices that could be deemed to be traditional, as not belonging to modern times? Or making use of rough colonial vocabulary, how could "primitive mentality" and "modern rationality" operate in one and the same person?

After reading Raman's story I felt encouraged to give a place, in my present situation as a "contemporary" dancer working in Brussels, to *La mujer de los fermentos*. I understood that I didn't need to disown this dance because of its ties to a dance community that I had learned to perceive as anachronistic. To undo my own historicist constitution meant to unlearn to think of *La mujer de los fermentos* as belonging to an overcome past, and to acknowledge it as a part of my past, a past that *is*, that affects my present, that inhabits the now; it was to acknowledge the *living* relations I maintain with this dance and that dance community.

A shortcoming of this performance was that even though I managed to modify my relation to this dance and to my own past, I didn't manage to involve important parts of the audience in this process. Some people who attended the performance could see in *La mujer de los fermentos* only a part of my past, for they expressed their desire to see how I would dance "now." Their dissatisfaction could be summarized in these words: "you are showing us what you used to dance, but we would like to see how you would dance now." This proved to me

that I didn't manage to share with them the realization that the "now" that I might inhabit as I dance is irreducibly not-one, that the solo Kléver taught me is part of my past as much as it is part of my present, a present that is not singular. Is this a present that I cannot share with every audience? Am I facing once again a present that cannot be defined through temporal coordinates only? Is "my present in Quito" different from "my present in Brussels," presents that I build through the relations I cultivate with those two dance communities? What can all of this tell us about the contemporaneity of contemporary dance?

Contemporary/Modern Dance and the Denial of Contemporaneity³

On a broader level, "to learn to think the present – the 'now' that we inhabit as we speak – as irreducibly not-one" and to dismantle its practical corollaries is something more difficult to do. The very term "contemporary dance" is problematic. On the one hand *contemporary* has a label function. It designates a kind of dance; we can talk of *contemporary* dance as we talk of *modern* dance or *ballet*, or *hip-hop* or *ballroom* dances or *folkloric* dances... On the other hand, though, the adjective "contemporary" refers to something belonging to or occurring in the present, in the now. "Contemporary", when used as an adjective, could be used to describe any kind of dance practiced in the present (*ballroom* dances, *street* dances, etc.) but it happens that these dances are *not* called *contemporary* dance.

As I see it, *contemporary dance*, at least nominally, claims the present for itself and excludes other kinds of dances from it. In my understanding, *contemporary dance* not only says that it belongs to the present, but that the present belongs to it; *contemporary* dance places itself in the "now," it colonizes the "now." Nominally then, *modern* dance wouldn't be contemporary, it risks thus being placed as part of an overcome past. The adjectives modern and contemporary might be used as synonyms in several contexts. However, a prevalent (historicist) way of assessing dance based on historical periodizations tends to posit *modern* dance as previous to *contemporary* dance, as already a remnant of the past.⁴ To say that the dance I practiced in Quito is *modern* is not a problem by itself. The problem arises when the contemporaneity of *modern dance* is denied.

Talking about modern and contemporary dance as genres, it would be possible to describe their differences through an analysis of their technical, esthetic and philosophical premises. In previous texts (Barba, "Research into Corporeality", "Quito-Brussels: a dancer's cultural geography" and "Impure transmissions"),

where I have discussed the re-enactment of the Wigman dances in relation to my formation as a modern dancer in Ecuador, I have outlined several elements describing a physicality that could be set in sharp contrast to the pedestrian facticity of the early years of the Judson Church, a physicality that I would suggest is archetypal to what have come to be understood as contemporary dance. From my perspective, what could mark the decisive difference between these two dance traditions is the idea of a subtext. I understand the subtext as an (sensorial/sensual/emotional/affective) intensity that *is part of the movement*, not an addendum⁵. In pedestrian movement there is a confessed effort to strip this intensity off the movement, as if it was something added, accessory, extraneous to the dance. Technically, the production of a subtext is linked to a certain use of the gaze, the breathing, the muscular tone, etc. Producing a subtext requires a physicality, a use and imagination of the body, that is sharply distinct to the physicality of the “relaxed” and “slack” pedestrian body (Brown and Rainer 36).⁶ On the level of expression and subjectivity, the subtext of European and US historical modern dance rests upon the idea of an inner-self that is expressed through the danced movement, an essentialist understanding of the self that was critiqued by the dancers of the Judson Church (Burt, *Judson Dance Theater* 90-92).

As soon as I outline the possible project of creating a distinction between modern and contemporary dance, I need to make explicit two warnings that trouble the pertinence of undertaking it. The first one is that the technical production of a subtext or of a pedestrian body is not always and univocally linked to either one or the other understanding of expression and subjectivity. I have seen “expressionistic slack” bodies onstage and, as I argue in “Impure Transmissions,” dances that produce a subtext do not necessarily pretend to address “universal problems of the human condition” (Burt, *Judson Dance Theater* 92). The related second warning has to do with the fact that we might never be able to encounter an exemplary dance work or practice that can be said to be purely modern or purely contemporary.⁷

There are at least two instances that challenge the attempt to create a sharp distinction between modern and contemporary dance based on a physicality that channels a subtext or not. The first one is the critique made by left-wing commentators and dancers to Graham’s work in the early 1930s as being too abstract and formalist, lacking the emotional intensity that could move the audience into taking political action (Franko 38-42). The second one is an account of Trisha Brown in which she mentions how she felt “emotion and

internal commotion while performing those early deductive, systematized, withheld pieces. [How she] experienced a rich subjectivity, whereas on the outside the dance looked objective” (Goldberg 6). These examples challenge the notion of an absolute difference between modern dance (with its perceived “emotionalism”) and post-modern or contemporary dance (with its stated “objectivism”). We might need to find a vocabulary to talk about modern and contemporary dance and account for their difference without erecting dichotomous borders, a vocabulary that could bring forth heterogeneity and non-conflating mixture.⁸

Indeed, what we might encounter once we approach a specific work in the richness of its complexity is mixing, tension and confrontation of different premises inherited from different dance traditions or lineages. Thus, I notice that it would be more interesting and constructive to try and dismantle these distinctions, to show its cross-pollination, to show the porosities of its borders and the generative exchange between different dance traditions. However, I have tried to enunciate this distinction, I have talked as if there was a clear-cut distinction between modern and contemporary dance, because in my view it often remains operative in concealed and detrimental ways.⁹ I have strategically used the vocabulary that generates categories that lend themselves to hierarchic classifications in order to make visible the temporal discriminations it sustains. As I try to dismantle and overcome this dichotomous distinction (modern/contemporary) I acknowledge the need to understand how it operates and the specific effects it has in the construction/construal of reality.

Politics of Time and the Definition of Contemporary Dance

The relevance of the discussion therefore does not lie in an ontological question (what is properly modern and what properly contemporary). The relevance of the discussion of the contemporary in dance, which rests upon epistemological productions, is political. The dismissal of a dance practice as not contemporary makes it invisible within the “contemporary” dance field; if a dance practice is not greeted as contemporary dance (in the ambiguity of the term) then it has no place, agency or relevance within the contemporary dance scene. Following Rolando Vázquez’s analysis in his article *Modernity Coloniality and Visibility – The Politics of Time* I recognize that “invisibility is tantamount to de-politicization” where the political is understood “as the coming together to constitute a public space” (np).

Allow me to approach this argument through a concrete example: when I was studying dance in Ecuador I used to say, as many of my colleagues by then, that I was doing contemporary dance. It is only after my studies in P.A.R.T.S. and my familiarization with the contemporary dance world gravitating around Brussels, that I recognized the dance I used to practice in Quito, and many people do nowadays, as modern dance. If we want to step beyond these dichotomous distinctions, which mirror a certain topology, an authoritative answer as to what can be considered modern and what contemporary dance is out of the question insofar it would repeat these distinctions and underlying topological hierarchies. If there is debate upon these questions, if there is a difficulty to bring them down to closure, it is precisely because what is being contested is the political constitution of the public space called contemporary dance. The kernel of the problem therefore is to understand the political stakes of those definitions, and to consistently and continuously pose a different set of questions with regards to them: who produces those definitions? Where? Supported by which institutions? For whom? On the base of which inclusions/exclusions?

To understand the political dimension of the definition of the contemporary as it is used in dance, it is important to highlight an element that can easily pass unnoticed. At first sight, it might seem that the contemporary can be defined in temporal (the present as opposed to the past or the future) or historical terms alone (as in the periodization of the arts in classical, modern or contemporary styles). However, as I have tried to hint at throughout this text, there is a spatial or, to be more accurate, a geo-cultural dimension that plays a central role in this definition. I understand a geo-cultural location as a cultural horizon (a set of values, philosophical assumptions, discourses, practices, etc.) forged through a specific local history that is grounded on the materiality of national or regional institutions, funding, cultural policies and laws. The interaction between local histories and global tendencies - what Mignolo analyzes as the relation between local histories in which global designs are produced and local histories in which global designs “have to be adapted, adopted, transformed, and rearticulated” (278) – needs to be investigated in order to understand the unequal dynamics of power in the interaction between different cultural horizons and the phenomenon of cultural colonialism. When, in what follows, I talk about the West, I will be approaching it as a geo-cultural location: not as a well-defined territory, but as a matrix for the material and philosophical re-production of culturally specific practices and discourses.

I might not encounter much resistance if I say that contemporary dance (as a kind of dance produced for and by the theater as a physical and institutional space) has become an international artistic practice. There are people practicing this kind of dance in South and North America, Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia¹⁰. Contemporary dance might be easily acknowledged as a global artistic practice, indeed. However, and paraphrasing Chakrabarty, I think that contemporary dance might not be simply global but rather it might have become global over time, originating in one place (Europe and the United States) and then spreading outside it.

This is an hypothesis worth of careful consideration. The implications of this proposition are multiple and important. To imply that contemporary dance originated and is rooted in a Western cultural horizon would mean to say that contemporary dance is a specific kind of Western dance; contemporary dance would thus be defined not only on temporal or historical terms, but also on a geo-cultural one. Dance productions grounded on other cultural horizons (non-Western dances) would thus be, ipso facto, not contemporary dance (or, not fully contemporary). This urges us to inquire whether in a historicist understanding of contemporary dance there is a perpetuation of the equation of the West with the contemporary (the present), and of the non-West with the past (an anachronism). Ultimately, this question would ask if the global spread of contemporary dance, its globalization, entails also a process of westernization as a specific kind of cultural colonialism.

The perils we would encounter in approaching this question are many. First, we would need to avoid reinforcing the dichotomy West/non-West insofar as it creates clear boundaries that hide already existing spaces of intercultural exchange. The dichotomy West/non-West, just as the dichotomy modern/contemporary and past/present should not be approached as ontological categories, but as epistemological constructions. If I use those categories it is only to understand how they effectively operate in the construction of a certain order of things, of an image of the world and the differentials of power they sustain.¹¹ Second, we would need to approach this question through concrete cases as to avoid generalizations. The way contemporary dance might be practiced and negotiated in different geo-cultural locations might respond to particularities that need to be carefully considered in order to fully understand how Westernization might operate through contemporary dance. Third, the globalization of contemporary dance in different locations might encounter resistances and appropriations that need to be acknowledged and that could trouble the

understanding of its global spread as an act of unidirectional imposed foreign colonialism. The global spread of Western practices and institutions does not take place over passive populations. The agency and response of non-Western populations need to be acknowledged and strengthened as they resist, appropriate and/or transform Western artistic practices. In this sense, I am thinking of contemporary dance as a field where multiple forces, pulling and pushing in different directions, conflict and interact with one another. The possible colonial dimension in the global spread of contemporary dance is one of those forces and the one I am trying to make explicit here. To have a fair and complete picture of this political play of forces, we would also need to take into account forces of resistance, appropriation, acclimation, etc. And fourth, contemporary dance, as an artistic practice, cannot be said to be by itself colonial or anti-colonial. It cannot be reduced to something that can be univocally condemned or praised. Contemporary dance, as an artistic practice, can operate either as tool for emancipation and critical thinking (as a means to suspend and challenge established values and the status quo¹²), while it can also be used, most of the times unwittingly perhaps, as a tool for furthering cultural colonialism.

To ask about the Western genealogy of contemporary dance and its globalization is to ask about the political economy of this artistic practice, the institutions that support it and the epistemological constructions that build its ground. It is to ask about the production and circulation of contemporary dance at a global scale. Approaching this question would thus help us to understand, for example, why it is that choreographers and dancers based in the periphery of the Western world (as Ecuador) have not managed to expand their field of influence and recognition beyond regional borders, different from dancers and choreographers based in Europe or the United States whose work has been presented and recognized at a global scale.

Striving for recognition and influence in this order of things is, of course, to accept this order of things; it is to conform to the dominant rule of globalization. If globalization takes the form of, or operates as, a homogenizing and universalist project (Estermann 33), then peripheral regions of the Western world are doomed to lose the game from the start, as entering the game requires the erasure of their cultural particularities and difference in the quest for inclusion, assimilation and recognition. While it is important to understand these dynamics of power, it is also important to challenge and question this order of things. Indeed, a different perspective and project can be embraced to influence on the

processes of transnational and transregional connectivity and exchange at a planetary scale in which contemporary dance might participate.

As I hint towards the Western genealogy of contemporary dance, I suggest that the basic premises that have constituted it are grounded on philosophical assumptions forged within a Western cultural horizon and history. Among those basic philosophical assumptions, a distinctly western/modern temporality (unidirectional and progressive linearity; sharp distinction between past, present and future plays a central role. Even when the practice of contemporary dance has challenged this modernist understanding of time (the interest on re-enactment is symptomatic of this), I would venture to say most of the times this critique of modern temporality might be rooted on Western philosophical critiques of modern temporality. Following Mignolo we could say then that contemporary dance's critique of modern temporality is an internal or, in Estermann's vocabulary, a mono-cultural critique.

The grounding of this critique on Western epistemology has to be made explicit if the discussion of the politics of time in contemporary dance pretends not to be enclosed and limited to a prominently Western debate – or to a debate largely determined by Western categories of thought. This is all the more relevant considering the global reach of contemporary dance. If this globalized notion of contemporary dance is not to remain mono-cultural (i.e., a neo-colonial expansion of a predominantly Western practice) it should open up and take into account different cultural horizons and heritages. The questions I have formulated above, then, might now take an added nuance to our ears: who is defining what is contemporaneity? From which cultural horizon? What relations does it establish with other cultural horizons? Strengthening or challenging which differentials of power? Potentiating heterogeneity or buttressing homogenisation?

If we want the global contemporary dance scene not to remain a veiled mono-cultural (i.e., neo-colonial) practice, we need to pay attention not only to the encounter of Western and non-Western cultural productions, we also need to pay attention to the (Western and non-Western) philosophical assumptions in relation to time and the contemporary and, ultimately, to question the very primacy of such a temporal category to define and judge the value of the artworks: the importance and centrality given to the contemporary might already be distinctively Western.

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¹ The first two sections of this text have been drawn from a draft of a chapter that has been accepted for publication by Oxford University Press in the forthcoming *Handbook of Danced Reenactment* edited by Mark Franko due for publication in 2017. While the second part of the present text interrogates the politics of time involved in an un/localized understanding of the contemporary, the chapter in the *Handbook* moves to explore questions of historical distance and their mediation in the practice of artistic reenactment. I would like to thank Mark Franko for his editorial contribution in the first part of these texts.

² I would like to thank Frederik Le Roy for suggesting this reading to me during a workshop that was part of the creation of *a personal yet collective history*.

³ I am elaborating on the denial of contemporaneity after the notion of denial of coevalness developed by Johannes Fabian. I have opted not to use Fabian's notion following the critiques of it advanced by Berber Bevernage and Rolando Vázquez (personal conversation). Both suggest that, despite the value of Fabian's contribution, Fabian considers the contemporary as a singularity and, what's more, a singularity that is defined by Western premises. The creation of coevalness would thus be limited to "granting" or "including" into that Western contemporaneity practices and populations that have been formerly excluded. Both Bevernage and Vázquez point to the need of critiquing that very idea of the contemporary. To talk of the denial of contemporaneity instead of the denial of coevalness does not solve the problem, but it tries to indicate a change of perspective. The important is not the granting or recognition of contemporaneity (which already bespeaks of a differential of power – who has the power to recognize or include to whom?), but understanding how that contemporaneity is being defined and why it has become an important question at all. I would partly agree with those who respond that the contemporaneity of a work of art guarantees a critical response to contemporary events and situations. However, as I will try to show, I do not think that a critical response-ability is an exclusive attribute of contemporary dance (as a genre) while there is the risk of falling into the trap of an empty quest for formal innovation for the sake of reaching towards a historicist ideal of contemporaneity.

⁴ A similar discussion in relation to the ambivalence of the term contemporary in relation to contemporary art can be found in Heinich, "Pour en finir avec la querelle du contemporain."

⁵ In relation to this Katharine Sehnert and Irene Sieben, two dancers who studied in the Wigman school in the late 50s and early sixties, and with whom I worked during the creation of AMWDE, comment: "It is not *about* emotions. *There are* emotions. It is different what I think a feeling looks like to what the body is doing. [At the Wigman School] we didn't work on emotions" (Sieben, my emphases). "Each movement has its own expression. It doesn't need to have a subtext. It *is* a subtext" (Sehnert, my emphasis). Conversations with the author.

⁶ For a description of these distinct physicalities see my suppositional description of a P.A.R.T.S. and a Wigman's student re-enacting a Wigman score in Ramsay Burt's "Ungoverning Dance" (206, 207).

⁷ Its particular features notwithstanding, a general idea of contemporary dance is as elusive, and nonetheless effective, as the idea of “Europe” in the sense of being “an imaginary figure that remains deeply embedded in *clichéd and shorthand forms* in some everyday habits of thought” (Chakrabarty 4) or as terms like “the West” or “third world” insofar “it is not always clear to what these terms refer, [yet] they are used as if there existed a distinct external reality to which they corresponded, or at least they have the effect of creating such an illusion” (Coronil 52).

⁸ I am thinking of heterogeneity, multiplicity and non-conflating mixture (*mestizaje*) despite and through dichotomous thinking guided by the work of Lugones, specially chapter 6 “Purity, Impurity, and Separation” (121-148).

⁹ This distinction might remain operative, and become useful, wherever we can find the “ ‘desire to wipe out whatever came earlier,’ so as to achieve 'a radically new departure, a point that could be a true present' ” (Marshall Berman quoting de Man - quoted in Chakrabarty 244). This desire might structure different levels of dance-related practice and discourse. This desire might become evident in small expressions like “that looked 80s” or “it is not any longer about..., but about...”; in the curatorial eagerness to find “what’s coming next”; in the creative constraint of producing “something that has not yet been done” or in the praising of a performance as “very original.”

¹⁰ This is not to say that there are no important differences given by those different cultural backgrounds. For a discussion of the relation between modern dance in Ecuador and modern dance as practiced in the United States or Europe, see Barba (“Impure transmissions”).

¹¹ For an analysis of the constructed yet effective dichotomy West/non-West see Coronil 1996.

¹² The capacity to critique, challenge and transform established values and the status quo, however, should not be considered an exclusive prerogative of contemporary dance. In Ben Yakoub and Barba (“(Re)framing the vocabulary in performing arts in Flanders”) we discuss four possible meanings for the word “contemporary” as it is used in contemporary dance: 1) as belonging to the same chronological present (the “now”), 2) as being responsive to the context in which the artist works and lives, i.e., as a critical attitude towards established conventions and the status quo, 3) as an imperative for constant innovation or 4) as an artistic genre. When these four meanings conflate into one under the umbrella of “contemporary dance” (as a genre), different problems arise. The first one is the assumption that contemporary dance is the best-suited practice to maintain a critical attitude towards conventions and the status quo, as if other cultural practices (e.g., traditional dances) would not be able to engage in that kind of criticality and responsiveness. The second and related problem is that this kind of criticality is attached to a modern temporality that equates history with a singular and unidirectional development towards a future that calls for constant innovation; critical attitudes and innovation being thus confused as one same thing. Other ways of relating to history might thus come to be seen as retrograde or conservative, foreclosing the possibility of bringing forth a different philosophy and politics of time, for example one that rescues memory as a site of struggle. As stated by Vázquez, the rescue of memory is not necessarily a conservative move. For him, the possibility to experience the past (i.e., not to reify it) is not essentialist, but rebellious.