Forced Secularization and Postmodern Discourses within Contemporary Performance: Weaponizing Multicultural Rhetoric to Ratify Asymmetries among Dance Practitioners

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Abstract
In the context of the multicultural and postmodern rhetoric of contemporary art festivals, we examine a case study in which the Hungarian choreographer Eszter Salamon appropriates Mapuche practices—the *kawell tayil* and the *choike purrún*—in her piece *Landing: A Ritual of Empathy* (2017). We analyze the discursive and embodied dimensions of this borrowing and its harmful consequences for indigenous communities. We show how the postmodern values of secular art institutions and the legal limitations to protect indigenous ritual expressions contribute to these dynamics. Adopting an optimistic stance, we outline criteria for curatorial practices that could prevent further misuses of indigenous culture.

KEYWORDS

postmodern dance, multiculturalism, Mapuche Nation, appropriation, curatorial practices

Introduction

In the context of international performance festivals, current rhetoric about inclusive diversity can function as a Trojan horse to perpetuate the appropriation of non-white cultural practices, a phenomenon that has been documented since the nineteenth century. Extrapolated to the new "contact zone" (in Mary Louise Pratt's terminology) of international festivals, this curatorial discourse can allow the cosmopolite to keep speaking on behalf of racialized "others."[1] As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has illuminated, these "others" become sources of inspiration that cosmopolites feel free to use, while at the same time the "others" are not allowed to fully represent themselves.[2]

Recent scholarship highlights how much modern dance was actually inspired by, copied from, and/or ascribed to indigenous and folk dances. Dance scholars have explored the links between Martha Graham and Native American cultures;[3] the associations of Ruth St. Denis and

Loie Fuller with Indian dances;[4] Mary Wigman's orientalist exoticization of "primitive" cultures;[5] and Ted Shawn, José Limon, and Lester Horton's uses in their work of cultural material from First Nations people across the Americas.[6] All of these cases reveal the role of traditional and indigenous cultures in feeding modern dance, which failed to acknowledge its debt, let alone consult or compensate them. Are these dynamics any different on the current international stage under the frame of postmodern rhetoric that conveys inclusive diversity?

In this article, we explore issues surrounding the appropriation of elements that belong to two cultural rituals of the Mapuche, a people indigenous to a region spanning parts of present-day Chile and Argentina: the *kawell tayil* sacred vocal expression and the *choike purrún* ritual dance.[*] An unauthorized staging of both cultural traditions took place at the KunstenFestivalDesArts in Brussels, on May 5, 2017, in a work entitled *Landing: A Ritual of Empathy*, directed by Hungarian choreographer Eszter Salamon. After the performance, Mapuche representatives expressed their discomfort with the project. Building upon previous research on cultural appropriation, this case study investigates the ritual elements brought to the international dance stage and illustrates how postmodern rhetoric, despite its promises of multiculturalism and inclusive diversity, overlooks and even enshrines the appropriation of subaltern communities' cultural practices.[7]

We critically examine the controversy generated by the performance of *Monument 0.6 Landing: A Ritual of Empathy* (hereafter referred to as *Landing*), presented as part of the series

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[*] *Mapuchezungun, Mapudungun*, or Mapuche language is an oral language, for which a written form is currently being adapted. The term *tayil* can also be written as *tahiel* or *taiel*, but since most of the references cited in this paper use the form *tayil*, we use this spelling.

Monument 0 by Salamon in the aforementioned festival. We illustrate the tensions between the perspectives of Salamon, who defines herself as a post-conceptual choreographer,[8] and the Argentinian Mapuche activist Moira Millán, speaking in representation of the bearers of the appropriated ritual practices. We draw evidence for their contrasting stances from interviews and curatorial texts as well as published material in journals, newsletters, and other digital records. It should be noted that, when we began this research, multiple reviews and recordings of the performance were available on YouTube and Vimeo. However, these materials are not available anymore, we presume, as a consequence of the controversy. Eszter Salamon's website features a replacement for *Monument 0.6* choreographed later, as if *Landing* never happened.[9] Rather than let this piece fall into oblivion, we wish to understand what the dance field can learn from this case study. The progressive disappearance of performance documentation has eliminated the possibility of carrying out a movement-based study, constraining our analysis to written evidence. Nonetheless, expanding beyond the piece itself, we consider the discourses of diversity and multiculturalism and how these broader curatorial frameworks enable the abduction of traditional practices within secular contemporary art institutions.

As a group of three Latin American researchers, we focus on this case to consider what makes for decisively anti-racist practices in the dance field and to counterbalance the progressive disappearance of the available evidence about this piece. As *mestizas* of the Global South, we aim to use our twofold vision as well as our bilingual training to build bridges of understanding that are clearly missing between the two parties of this case. As researchers from three countries—Ecuador, Guatemala, and Argentina—with indigenous heritage and colonial pasts (and presents), we assume critically our position as *mestizas* because the label counteracts disentanglement from indigenous populations, and such distancing can deplete these groups even

more. We each operate within the local complexities that shape our experience as *mestizas* scholars. Without disregarding traditional ascription to ancestral communities, our article references Mapuche researchers and representatives. Additionally, one of the authors is a member of the multi-ethnic *Lof* (community) Vicente Catrunao Pincén, sharing her perspective as an active practitioner of the *Nguillatún* ritual celebration in Neuquén, Argentina. Thus, either as *mestizas*, brown, female, queer, and/or migrant, our ensemble of positions coalesces in the intent to sharpen the awareness about neo-colonial dynamics within art institutions.

In the first section, we describe the dispute generated after the appropriation of the *kawell tayil* and *choike purrún* by choreographer Eszter Salamon in the 2017 KunstenFestivalDesArts. We then examine the discursive and performative layers of this event, foregrounding the contextual details of the *kawell tayil* and the *choike purrún*. Our third section analyzes the systemic and underlying legal and racial dynamics that operate in this and other cases of artists who appropriate indigenous cultural expressions, elucidating why these claims keep arising. Taking up the lack of legal protection for indigenous cultural expressions, section four describes the dangers of thinking that the only possible connection between practitioners and culture is that of ownership. In order to frame our investigation with a solution-seeking approach, in the final section, we present recommendations and examples that help envision more respectful engagement with indigenous practices to generate genuine spaces for cross-cultural encounters.

The Controversy over *Monument 0.6: Landing: A Ritual of Empathy*

To give an account of Salamon's piece, we draw from the remaining videos available online, information provided by one of the dancers who performed in the work and whom we interviewed, and the accounts of audience members whom we contacted.[10] Those present for the evening performance remember *Landing* taking place outside of the Wiels Centre for

Contemporary Art in an open space without technical equipment or special effects. The performance involved a group of dancers who sang the word *kawello* a cappella while walking in circles; they were surrounded by an audience. The dancers wore a metallic *poncho* and their faces were painted in vibrant colors. Both the costumes and the singing resembled traces of the Mapuche ritual practices *choike purrún* and *kawell tayil*.

Three years later, Mapuche activist Moira Millán published a review of *Landing*, expressing her outrage about the Hungarian choreographer's claims that the Mapuche practices were extinct and that the work was a much needed revival.[11] Millán shared in an interview: "The Mapuche people's vision on the circular and harmonious relationship with life, which is represented through circular dances like this, is belittled, ridiculed, and distorted."[*] Millán is especially concerned because she suspects that Salamon "is probably earning some good money to do this trickery."[12] For Millán, the staging of *Landing* was an offense to the heritage of Mapuche people because it not only appropriated sacred practices but also benefited the European choreographer financially.

We observe the different positions occupied by Salamon and Millán. Millán is clearly addressing the appropriation of the *kawell tayil* (a sacred oral expression) and elements of a circular dance that we have identified as the *choike purrún* (dance of the ostrich), both of which are executed in a ritual celebration of utmost importance for Mapuche people which is known as

[*] Nadia Mayorquín, "Mujeres De La Tierra Por El Buen Vivir," *Sonámbula: Cultura y Lucha de Clases*, March 26, 2020, https://sonambula.com.ar/mujeres-de-la-tierra-por-el-buen-vivir/, par. 9. All translations by the authors.

the *Nguillatún*.[*] As an activist for land ownership who negotiates between her community and governmental and transnational agents, Millán sees this appropriation not as an isolated incident but rather as a recurring pattern in the relationship between members of first-world countries and indigenous nations of the Global South.[13] Curiously, Salamon, the choreographer of *Landing*, has also acknowledged "the 'colonial' enterprise of the past" and "the neo-colonial tendencies of today, in which the art world participates."[14] Despite the coincidence of both reflections on colonialism, we highlight the positionalities from whence these enunciations stem and the contrasting consequences of their utterances. This case provokes a consideration of the pragmatic effects of these claims—whether they denounce or ratify power asymmetries between the contemporary dance field and traditional ritual practices.

Beyond the Discourse: Scrutinizing the Mapuche Elements in *Landing*

The discursive dimension of this case involves the words of the choreographer as well as the statements displayed by the institutions that fund, curate, and circulate this work. Born in

[*] The *Nguillatún* ceremony is also known as *Camaruco*, *Kamarikún*, *Llellipun*, or *Lepun* according to María Catrileo, "El Ngillatun como Sistema Conceptual Mapuche," *Estudios Filológicos* 53 (2014): 27–38, and Camila López, "Historia y Memorias Mapuche: Un Recorrido Histórico Sobre el Ngillatún en la Provincia de Neuquén," *Aletheia* 6, no. 12 (2016): 1–23. See also María Mendizábal, "Aproximación al Canto Ritual Mapuche," in J*unta De Hermanos De Sangre. Un Ensayo De Análisis Del Nguillatun a Través De Tiempo Y Espacio Desde Una Visión Huinca*, ed. Isabel Pereda and Elena Perrotta (Buenos Aires: Morgan Internacional, 1994), 142–53, and Jacob Rekedal, "Warrior Spirit: From Invasion to Fusion Music in the Mapuche Territory of Southern Chile" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Riverside, 2015), 399.

Hungary and now based in Germany, Salamon defines herself in public interviews as a female post-conceptual European choreographer.[15] Her choreography *Landing*—part of a project named "Wars and Dances" and a series entitled *Monument 0*—was co-produced and supported by the Centre National de la Danse (France), PACT Zollverein (Germany), and the NATIONALES PERFORMANCE NETZ (Germany). Salamon describes the series in which *Landing* is included in the following way:

> Monument 0 is closely related to everything that has been forgotten, excluded, and repressed in modern dance history and in history generally. The movement material is generated through the embodiment of tribal war dances. But the dances that are performed on stage do not stand on their own. They are not easily recognizable expressions that originate from places where the Western world has waged wars in the last hundred years. So, I decided to investigate those dances. Not because they fascinate me, but because I wanted to put them in relation to the "colonial" enterprise of the past and also address the neo-colonial tendencies of today, in which the art world participates.[16]

In her framing of the project, Salamon makes explicit her awareness of the unequal global power dynamics. The promotional materials published by *Landing*'s host institution, the KunstenFestivalDesArts, provide similar language about the performance with an emphasis on its international resonances:

> Through embodiment and transformation of dancing and singing rituals of the Mapuches, *Landing* not only conjures amnesia; it also imagines a future caring for the common and the sharable. This transfigured ritual activates a temporary

> landscape, "a possibility of living," where past and present trace each other, and where the local and the global reverberate.[17]

The curatorial text from the KunstenFestivalDesArts provides a larger frame for contextualizing *Landing*. The festival program describes how the work endorsed the intention of "sharing a cultural expression that the West, in its great endeavour to standardise everything, has relegated to the rank of 'quaintness.'"[18] Alongside these intentions, the program also acknowledges the issue of identity when performing these rituals, framing such questions as nothing but a threat: "By rejecting this 'blackmailing of identity,' the choreographer identifies the flaws in the world's dance and sows some symbolic new ground." Interpreting Salamon's mention of the "world's dance" as a unified concept that fits all dance practices which are not Western, it is crucial to appreciate how, for her, identity was a potential field of dispute even before the controversy arose, while for others, it is precisely the instrument that facilitates an examination of power imbalances[*].

We observe Salamon's artistic decisions regarding the dancers' appearance in *Landing* as connected to her dismissal of identity issues, as she did not present the performers as indigenous peoples. On the contrary, the dancers had a quotidian look. The only item of clothing distinguishing the dancers from the audience members was a metallic *poncho*, which as an isolated element, could be traced back to the garment that Mapuches wear for the *choike purrún*. In addition, the performers' faces were painted with vibrant colors—yellow, turquoise, and orange—that masked their ethnic traits. Here, we find a blurring of identity, and we interpret Salamon's intention of presenting both the *kawell tayil* and the *choike purrún* as transnational expressions of art beyond origins and boundaries, which, in turn, allows her to reject the perceived "blackmailing of identity." The KunstenFestivalDesArts program frames this performance as helping to "imagine a future caring for the common and the sharable." Nonetheless, from the Mapuche perspective, "the common" and "the shareable" in this controversy were not as common and as shareable as Salamon and the festival intended them to

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[*] A deeper clarification on the concept of 'world dance' and its current debate among scholars can be found in Susan Foster, *Worlding Dance* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 209.

be.

We listen to Millán, who deems the re-inscription of the Mapuche *kawell tayil* and *choike purrún* in a foreign context as "cultural extractivism":

> Immediately, the European supremacist voice legitimates those conducts, galvanizing them with exotic, postmodern, and cool values. The European tradition to steal recurs under different names and categories. A hypocritical capitalist Europe aims to redeem itself, convinced of the messianic duty to free the enslaved when it has been itself the enslaving force.[19]

This statement from a Mapuche activist starkly contrasts with the language of the artist and the contemporary performance festival. In order to address the abyss between the art festival and the Mapuche practices, we offer accounts of the ritual within its traditional context, drawing from both scholarship as well as Mendizábal's personal experience.

In Argentina and Chile, ethnomusicologists have described how the *kawell tayil* and the *choike purrún* are strictly embedded in the Mapuche construction of kinship and their cosmological worldview, which has survived despite Christianity, colonialism, and capitalism. Ethnomusicologist Carol Robertson describes the function of these rituals:

> Part of the engineering of survival of the Mapuche nation and of the self-perception of individuals in that nation relies heavily on the act of "pulling the ancestors"—the act of fusing living and deceased members of a patrilineage in the performance of *tayil*-specific melodic contours and syllabic utterances.[20]

Stressing the role of identity, "pulling the ancestors" expresses a sense of belonging and connection within a kinship system, which is the opposite of a blurred or dislocated sense of identity sought by the festival.

In Neuquén, Argentina, even if both the *kawell tayil* and the *choike purrún* are part of the same three-day-long ceremony known as the *Nguillatún*, they are performed separately because they correspond to different sacred moments. The *kawell tayil*, a particular element of the *tayil* expression, is dedicated to horses during the *Nguillatún* ceremony, in which animals are regarded

as transcendent as ancestors and deities.[21] The *choike purrún,* or dance of the ostrich, is executed by a squad of five male dancers who usually share kin. The dance consists of movements of the head, arms, torso, and feet revolving counter-clockwise around the *rewe* (the axis of ceremonial circularity and source of sacredness). The *purrufe* (dancers) wear marks of paint on their faces, torsos, knees, and legs as well as a headdress (*anün*) made of ostrich feathers dyed with several colors. The full costume includes knee-length pants, a belt crossed over the torso with bronze rattles (*kaskawilla*) sewn on it, and a *poncho* over the shoulders. Dancers hold the ends of the *poncho,* moving them up and down to imitate the flapping of a bird's wings (Figure 1). **<Place figure 1 near here.>**

This dance is embedded in a cluster of sonic and performative synchronicities that enact the connection with deities and ancestors. According to scholar Jacob Rekedal, the ritual is believed "to set in motion the same forces that were awakening at the moment of Creation."[22] The *choike-purrún* takes place during the *Nguillatún* at the moment when the ancestral lineage, to which each of the male dancers belongs, connects with the supernatural domain, from the Earth to the heavens, from the *mapu* to the *wenumapu* (the place where the deities and ancestors of the dancers who have passed away coexist). This connection happens through sound, specifically the *tayil* performed by the women and the rhythmical sequence executed with the *kultrún* membranophone. The lyrics of the *tayil* add to the acknowledgment of ancestors and express the soul of the dancers' specific lineage. The complete performative event is fulfilled with the sound of other wind instruments such as the *pifilka* played by men, the pounding of hundreds of riders on horseback galloping to surround the sacred space, and the shouts of men haranguing the dancers.[23] According to Mendizábal, it is an overall "*corpus*" of performative heterophony that enables a sacred connection during its execution; also, as men and women

perform different elements, gender roles are of utmost importance according to the dual Mapuche cosmovision.[24]

The construction of identity within the ritual is strikingly different from the context of postmodern performance. For the Mapuche, identity transcends a mere physical appearance and involves the deeper layers of a cosmovision that respond to a spiritual realm.[*] This contrasts with the assumptions about identity operative in the international dance scene. The secularization of indigenous sacred expressions transforms them into emblems in a postmodern vacuum; dancers hide who they are. The danger of detaching the dance from the dancers, as Marta Savigliano observes,[25] is that it erases the kin relations among performers, the connection with the supernatural domain, and the land from the ritual practices. This results, overall, in dismantling what is considered sacred, as Quinsy Gario writes: "The re-enactment of the dance, though stripped of its spiritual meaning, is an active participation in the centuries-long colonial effort to eradicate the Mapuche."[26] Let us not forget that sacred rituals are a key dimension of the resistance to material and cultural extractivism.

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[*] According to María Ester Grebe Vicuña, the worldview involves the experience of different states of consciousness that are part of the transmission of the practices: "The *tayil* is usually received in a dream, in which a dead ancestor who was a *tayil* interpreter or her spirit intermediator appears: the *rangiñelwe* who teaches a melody pronounced in the dream. Either the ancestors or spirits act as teachers or messengers." See María Ester Grebe Vicuña, "El tayil mapuche, como categoría conceptual y medio de comunicación trascendente," *Inter-American Music Review* 10, no. 2 (1989): 72.

Our discussion aims to connect the discursive and embodied layers of this case. We have noted the tensions between the perspectives of Mapuche representatives and the intention of a European choreographer who avoids a discussion of identity. From the embodied dimension, we find another an attempt at blurring who the dancers are in the revival project. *Landing* does not coincide with the Mapuche local rites, resulting in a distortion of the practices that leads to an imposed secularization. The apparent "ritualistic resuscitation" of the tradition, as critics who witnessed *Landing* called it, ignores the fact that neither the *kawell tayil* nor the *choike purrún* have died yet.[27] They are still alive as experienced by one of the authors, who currently participates in the *Nguillatún* ceremony in Neuquén, Argentina.

The discursive statements that contextualize this case start with the choreographer but also involve the institutions that funded and hosted the performance. In the larger scope of the international dance scene, we are still eager to know how the Mapuche practitioners benefited from the performance of *Landing*, as the Mapuche people were not consulted for this performance and the meaning of their practices was distorted. The discourses of international art institutions contrast with the struggle to protect the legitimate means of transmitting ritual practices. We arrive at two key observations about how cultural appropriation operates. First, ritual practices become abstracted from the bearers, the place, and the events in which they are executed. Second, the re-enactment requires a discourse that satisfies the secular postmodern rhetoric of fluid and non-monolithic identities, instead of acknowledging the resistance of the cosmological worldview and kin that is endemic to the ritual practices.

Doomed to the Public Domain: The Cosmopolitan Condition behind the New Resurgence of Old Cultural Appropriation Dynamics

Multiculturalism, both as a political tool and a dogma for the "diversity of society" against the "monoculturalism of the Western intellectual tradition,"[28] has permeated the field of dance. Discourses about multiculturalism, diversity, and postmodernism usually go hand in hand in the curatorial texts of international festivals and biennials, inviting further consideration of the relationship between these terms.[29] Some scholars, such as Roida Rzayeva Oktay, highlight the symmetry and overlap between multiculturalism and postmodernism. Other definitions of postmodernism, such as one offered by the Tate, frame the term as "a reaction against the ideas and values of modernism" that is "associated with scepticism, irony and philosophical critiques of the concepts of universal truths."[30] As the Tate's website describes, postmodern artists frequently "borrow from or ironically comment on a range of styles from the past,"[31] suggesting a continuity with the appropriation found in modern dance.

Postmodern rhetoric can reiterate hierarchical and asymmetric relationships of power, despite its alleged break with modernism. bell hooks notes how the emerging political traction of marginalized communities can be dismantled "by a powerful repressive *postmodern* state."[32] According to hooks, "We should indeed be suspicious of postmodern critiques of the 'subject' when they surface at a historical moment when many subjugated people feel themselves coming to voice for the first time."[33] The disregard for non-Western and non-white subjects is not an isolated phenomenon since it is reinforced, according to theorist Walter Mignolo, with the belittling of their corresponding knowledge systems. Mignolo describes the Western world as a knowledge-making hegemony that frames non-European contexts as "places of non-thought (of myth, non-western religions, folklore, underdevelopment involving regions and people)."[34]

Dance scholars have explored the consequences of this epistemic stratification within the dance field. Jacqueline Shea Murphy notes how the West's claim to a particular knowledge over others explains why some dances are deemed artistic and acceptable only when performed by white bodies, as seen during the emergence of modern dance in the twentieth century.[35] Even within newly-founded international spaces for what is termed "world dance," Marta Savigliano has noted that ethnic dances are considered "less-artistic dances" and "sources" for "aesthetic discovery" by the West, where other cultures are always "ruled by 'the' Dance: Ballet, of course, but also Modern, Postmodern, and above all, Choreography."[36] In the same vein, Anthea Kraut foregrounds how indigenous and collective dances recurrently encounter obstacles to legal protection, in contrast with Western creations that are "made up of discrete works of individual, identifiable authors."[*]

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[*] Anthea Kraut, "Race-ing Choreographic Copyright," in *Worlding Dance,* ed. Susan Foster (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2009), 77. Elsewhere, Kraut observes,

> Whereas racialized and colonized persons are characteristically rendered "fully open to capital" and "susceptible to abstraction and exchange" as commodifiable objects, white persons are granted the rights of "possessive individualism." As proprietors of their own personhood, whites are sheltered "from the invasive forces of capital," such that "[they] may commodify [their] bodily or intellectual labor, but not [their] flesh." In the formulation of modern liberal-democratic theory, with its roots in seventeenth-century conceptions of the individual as the "proprietor of his own person or capacities," whiteness equals property ownership equals proper subjecthood.

As a deeper approach to such inequalities, Walter Mignolo elaborates on what semiotician Émile Benveniste terms the "formal apparatus of enunciation" to illuminate the specific conditions that empower a "subject producing and manipulating signs" either as words, costumes, sounds, or movements.[37] Beyond the formal apparatus of enunciation, Mignolo finds consensual agreements that shape frames of understanding. Such frames include the foundation and delimitation of Western scholarly disciplines. We extend his analysis to Western artistic disciplines and the works they allow to be created and curated. Art institutions ratify the uneven ground between European and indigenous artists, as demonstrated by the case of *Landing*.

Salamon, in the role of an international post-conceptual artist, has the freedom to explore traditions from other nations. On the other hand, belonging to an indigenous group from South America limits Mapuche participation in international festivals to a source of inspiration for Salamon and others like her. The experience of the Mapuche contrasts with the conspicuous nature of the cosmopolitan subject in the West, as indigenous legal scholar Rebecca Tsosie glosses here:

> According to Waldron, the cosmopolitan citizen "refuses to think of himself as defined by his location or his ancestry or his citizenship or his language." His personal identity (for statistical purposes or surveys), say as a male American of Irish descent who lives in San Francisco, is not "compromised" when he "learns Spanish, eats Chinese, wears

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See also Anthea Kraut, "White Womanhood, Property Rights, and the Campaign for Choreographic Copyright: Loïe Fuller's Serpentine Dance," *Dance Research Journal* 43, no. 1 (Summer 2011): 4.

> clothes made in Korea," listens to Italian opera or practices "Buddhist meditation techniques." The cosmopolitan citizen is the ultimate individualist, a "creature of modernity, conscious of living in a mixed-up world and having a mixed-up self."[38]

In the older version of cultural appropriation characteristic of modern dance, an outsider took a cultural tradition sustained by insiders without permission, recognition, or compensation. The shift from modern to postmodern or post-conceptual dance changes the rhetorical and discursive dimensions of appropriation, reflective of contemporary cosmopolitan borrowing. Postmodern artists blur the boundaries between cultures, nations, and identities by embracing a multicultural stance. Is the postmodern discourse a successful disguise for cultural appropriation? Our preliminary answer is yes. New versions of old patterns keep arising, despite Salamon's investment in fleeting identities.

The vision of an international stage that equalizes clusters of practices—wherein unequal positions become secondary under the spell of a transnational artistic forum—is surely appealing. Nonetheless, by falling for this Trojan horse, practices from subaltern communities are closely juxtaposed with artists from former colonial powers or current neo-colonial forces; this conflict, if not addressed, simply accelerates the abusive dynamics between them. Instead of adopting a relativistic stance whereby all cultures are different but equal, we propose that the contact zones facilitated by international art initiatives have to acknowledge what Savigliano calls the "forced articulations through colonizing globalization."[39] Presenters should respect those who refrain from entering this field of visibility, rather than punishing them by relegating their practices to the public domain.

Even if using different labels, the case of *Landing* reinscribes the dynamics of illegitimate appropriation between developed nations and peoples of the Global South. While specific to this

artist and festival context, this case study illuminates the larger effects of inclusive postmodern rhetoric for sustaining power relationships, disguised by discourses that shake the compass without actually changing the map. The material effort to change the conditions of "everything that has been forgotten, excluded and repressed in modern dance history,"[40] as stated by the choreographer of *Landing*, remains an endeavor beyond the bounds of the aesthetic field. This effort should include addressing the underlying conceptual, perceptual, and relational impediments to genuine cross-cultural engagement.

We contend that blurring identities to refigure new symbolic grounds, as Salamon claims to do,[41] is not an innovation of postmodern art. On the contrary, this is a recurrent strategy employed to dispossess marginalized communities, as hooks describes. Enabling this dispossession are the frames of understanding provided by art institutions. During colonial times, nation states more explicitly denied the specific identities of indigenous peoples to undermine their ancestral rights to land. Mapuche people continue to experience this type of struggle, not only from nation states but also from transnational agents that challenge their ancestral rights to lands.[*] Once differences between Native Americans and European Americans are diffused, then

[*] The Benetton Corporation has been in conflict with the Mapuche community for years over the right to establish their factories on indigenous land. Interestingly, the company started financing art projects and exhibitions with strong multicultural and cosmopolitan themes. In parallel to public statements and political lobbying, Imago Mundi (the art foundation funded by the CEO of Benetton) has internationally displayed the exhibition *Don't Ask Me Where I Am From*, which includes contemporary artists from all over the world who foreground the obsolescence of strong ethnic or national identity markers. Henry Kim, the Aga Khan Museum's Director and CEO,

no special land rights need to be accorded to Native peoples. Settler colonial countries can then absorb Native land and regulate its sale and purchase according to their laws, as Murphy has detailed.[42] Race, ethnicity, and origin continuously shape the dynamics of authorship in dance and in cultural production at large. While not necessarily evident to those involved, appropriation in dance resonates with larger arcs of colonial power and dispossession.

The Contradictions of "Owning" Culture

While acknowledging the limitations of legal regimes as forms of protection, traditional dance companies have found legal methods to shield their creativity in the cultural sphere. For instance, the indigenous company Bengarra Dance Theatre based in Australia developed a legal model for the protection of their repertory of traditional dances that circumvents the formal rules of copyright law.[43] Other companies such as the Oedo Sukeroku Taiko, a taiko ensemble in Japan, have verbally warned practitioners and third parties not to perform the sequences and movements included in their repertory without authorization.[44] In other cases, the difficulty of protecting their practices has pushed dancers to obtain patents not of the movements themselves but for the technical equipment necessary for their performance. The Oedo Sukeroku Taiko company used

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describes the project: "This exhibition reinforces our belief that culture is fluid and that it is possible to live free from nationalism—a perspective on the world that comes at a critical time." Quoted in Shaheena Janjuha-Jivraj, "Italian Billionaire Luciano Benetton and the Aga Khan Museum Partner to Create Cultural Dialogues," *Forbes*, November 29, 2019, https://www.forbes.com/sites/shaheenajanjuhajivrajeurope/2019/11/29/luciano-benetton-and-the-aga-khan-museum-partner-create-cultural-dialogues/.

this strategy when it patented its slant stand for percussion instruments,[45] and Löie Fuller patented her garments, mirrored rooms, and illumination mechanisms for the stage.[46] However, we do not advocate for the individual privatization of culture through expanded application of intellectual property regimes. This strategy could arguably be framed as a neo-colonial endeavor, promulgating the notion that the only possible relationship between practices and practitioners is that of commodification and ownership. Nonetheless, we are eager to discover how alternative paths of protection could allow dancers to regain agency in ways that are as creative as their movement compositions.

We also look to the UNESCO 2003 Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage as another avenue to safeguard so-called traditional practices. Unlike individualized copyright, the Convention recognizes communities and practices across state borders, which is relevant to the Mapuche people. Nevertheless, the Convention does not grant legal protection to traditional practitioners in instances of cultural appropriation, which can further expose these practices and render them open to the Western world, as law scholar Lucas Lixinski notes.[47]

To embody the *choike purrún* and the *kawell tayil* without the cosmological worldview and proper ritual execution contradicts the purpose of these cultural practices. Both practices require the apprehension of the technique as well as the "soul" of the kinship, meaning particular states of consciousness and social interactions not easily grasped by outside researchers. These aspects of the rituals resonate with the experiences of Grebe, Robertson, and Mendizábal in Mapuche communities in Chile and Argentina.[48] Robertson cites the words of a Mapuche chief in Neuquén, Argentina:

> If you want us to tell you directly and definitively what *tayil* is, you will be kept waiting. Not even the women can give an answer. It can be said neither in

> Mapuche nor in Spanish. . . . If one is to understand, one has to know all that comes from being Mapuche . . . . You must know how to marry, how to do rogations, and how to bury the dead. One has to know many things.[49]

These words outline how the cultural tradition responds to the specificities of the Mapuche context. As their kinship system, worldview, and relationship to the land are pillars of their cultural identity, their embodied expressions do not necessarily fit onto copyright regimes or other legal premises.

Mapuche practitioners are in a vulnerable geopolitical position if the legal protections for their cultural practices do not involve land ownership. The most effective way for colonial powers and current nation states to justify taking Mapuche lands is to deny the existence and contemporaneity of their culture, and conversely, the most effective way to eliminate their culture is to deny their lands and their ritual spaces.[50] Legal regimes of cultural ownership are not enough to protect Mapuche expressions. Their ritual practices depend upon the connection with the physical space from whence they emerge, a connection which is overlooked by the law and international conventions[51]. To explore the possibilities of contact zones that could be respectful of indigenous struggles, we move now to an analysis of recommended curatorial practices and institutional policies, offering examples of how to present artistic works that involve indigenous practitioners.

Responsible Curatorial Practices, Institutional Policies, and Artistic Collaborations

To understand the institutional framework that supported a project like *Landing*, we turn our analysis toward the curatorial texts and mission statement of the KunstenFestivalDesArts. We observe the use of keywords such as “international,” “contemporary,” “hybridity,” “representation,” “diversity,” “porosity,” “blurred,” “identity(ies),” and “borders” in the

festival's framing discourse. The KunstenFestivalDesArts presented "numerous projects in 2017 where an approach to reality is prompted, in which borders are blurred, artistic creations in which sensitive experience prevails."[52] We wonder how a choreographer who is aware of the "colonial enterprise of the past and. . . the neo-colonial tendencies of today,"[53] and a festival that is "always addressing the fundamental question" of "who is represented"[54] could have offered this disrespectful performance. An answer might lie in the discourses of "diversity" and "internationalism" and their potential to be weaponized against marginalized communities.

We argue for a needed shift in curatorial practices to refrain from repeating the appropriation of indigenous expressions that is at the heart of the colonial paradigm. There is a pressing need for a renewed commitment to blur borders, although not those that expand the horizon of European artists to imbibe the heritage of the world and reframe it for their individual purposes. A new set of curatorial and institutional practices must arise to create alliances between European institutions and practitioners from developing countries in order to blur the political and physical borders that preclude artists from the Global South from circulating their embodied knowledge systems and representing themselves. This revision in curatorial practices must aim to end the colonial dynamics that keep fostering the dispossession of, not only fossil fuels and minerals, but also epistemologies, knowledge systems, and dance practices of minority groups. In other words, the frames of understanding in cultural production and curation must acknowledge the unequal ground between various participants and groups.

To enact such a shift in the curatorial guidelines of museums, festivals, and cultural institutions, it is urgent for curators, boards, executive committees, and other stakeholders to refrain from extractive and appropriative exhibitions. We also hope that they explicitly condemn these illegitimate methods of artistic production. To produce real fissures in colonial and neo-

colonial dynamics and overturn the racism, xenophobia, classism, and discrimination legally enshrined and made palatable through aesthetic ventures, it is crucial to alter the dynamics of European stages. Especially in a festival such as the KunstenFestivalDesArts, which mission statement aims at "Engaging with the city's inhabitants, the festival serves as a way to rethink the geography of the capital of Belgium and Europe, increasing the porosity of its territorial, linguistic and cultural divisions.[55] Cultural institutions must include an actively anti-racist and anti-appropriation stance in their mission statements, funding opportunities, and institutional guidelines. We make this suggestion not to constrain artistic exploration or eliminate "fluidity and movement between genres or identities," in the words of Director of the Kunstenfestivaldesarts Christophe Slagmuylder,[56] but rather to frame such interconnections with fair and respectful conditions.

Economic and embodied attentiveness can reconfigure the asymmetrical relations within art institutions. If the international dance stage "inaugurates a new axis of competition over resources available," as Savigliano observes,[57] then special attention has to be placed on the funding and curatorial policies underpinning it. Far from being speculative, these interweaving considerations have already been put into action by several artists, practitioners, and scholars.[58] These thoughtful approaches are relevant to artists even when their pieces do not explicitly draw on decoloniality or aim to "address the neo-colonial tendencies of today, in which the art world participates," as Salamon proclaims.[59] There are different—and more honest—ways to engage with indigenous artists, instead of having what Gario refers to as "groups that have enforced dominance through violence demonstrat[ing] their accumulative power to caricature the heritage and bodies of others."[60] We turn to an example of a Norwegian production that illustrates a more respectful form of cross-cultural engagement.

Vidas Extremas was a stage work by Norwegian/Spanish hip-hop dancer Nicolai López, directed by Jon Tombre in collaboration with Hætta Productions. Portraying resistance to everyday violence and genocide in Guatemala, *Vidas Extremas* featured Guatemalan *mestizo* hip-hop performers alongside Sami artists (a group indigenous the Sápmi territory, encompassing Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia) and Maya Kaqchikel artists (indigenous people from the Guatemalan highlands). López describes how this performance emerged from the exchange between Sami artists, Norwegian producers, and a Maya Kaqchikel *Sotz'il* group in the Riddu Riddu Festival.[61] This Festival is organized by the Sami Nation in Norway to revive their identity in conversation with international indigenous artists. Through the Riddu Riddu Festival, López had the opportunity to meet Lisandro Guarcax, the founder and leader of the *Sotz'il* group who was murdered in 2012.[62]

López, based in Norway, co-created *Vidas Extremas* through multiple visits to Guatemala. He and Cristina Hætta traveled to Guatemala in 2012 Riddu Riddu. They were shocked to see the violent context both in Guatemala City *favelas,* where hip-hop dancers perform, and in the indigenous village *El Tablón,* where *Sotz'il* is based. With the support of the Sami National Theater Beaivvas, López was able to visit Guatemala several times with Jon Tombre. In one of the visits, they also invited Sami artists to Guatemala in order to run a three-week workshop that was the seed for the development of *Vidas Extremas.* After its premiere, the performance was awarded the Hedda Prize, which honors outstanding achievements in Norwegian performing arts.[63] During a personal interview with the authors in 2018, López explained how the Guatemalan performers wished to present the work in the National Theater in Guatemala. López described the risk this posed to local performers who would be challenging a government that allows everyday violence:

> Once again, the white guy is thinking, but you know what? This cannot be my decision, even if it was my idea, my production, it cannot be my decision. Because I can give advice such as "you cannot do that because you will get killed." But who am I to decide if you want to perform and risk your life? I don't know what that means. Us [Europeans] who work in the art world, we say, "Oh yeah, I want to die for art and so on," but we don't have the slightest idea of what that actually means.[64]

We find that López's approach as a producer not only allowed Sami and Maya Kaqchikel artists to affirm their positionality but also clarified his own identity as a white cis-gender heterosexual male who is eager to attend and listen.

Vidas Extremas prominently involved indigenous cultural bearers as part of the creative process and final performance. With their respective artistic and hybrid identities, the creative professionals involved in this example enlarges the role of choreographers and producers; they not only represented indigenous dances but incorporated the practitioners as creative agents. We highlight their presence as performers because it provides a counterexample to the phenomenon of separating the dance from the dancers that Savigliano discusses.[65] *Vidas Extremas* did not seek to blur identity markers; rather, the work acknowledged and amplified indigenous worldviews, historical struggles, and cultural legacies.

We highlight this indigenous festival and international collaboration in order to foster a solution-driven perspective. The embodied participation of geopolitically vulnerable practitioners in this innovative exchange made possible a consensual, bilateral, and deep engagement with indigenous epistemologies—aspects missing from Salamon's *Landing* and other projects that export traditional culture to the stage or the museum. Even if framed as a

decolonial effort, the rubric of representing the other might result in catastrophic consequences. Beyond shallow references to visibility, representation, or diversification, we are inspired by cross-cultural projects that attend to the struggles of indigenous communities over their land and material conditions.

Conclusions

Our analysis of Salamon's *Landing* and its appropriation of indigenous Mapuche practices allows us to explore how good intentions to support cultural diversity can sometimes disguise the misuse of traditional practices within a secular context. We pinpoint how the Mapuche *kawell tayil* and *choike purrún* were taken from their legitimate cultural bearers and infused with postmodern cosmopolitan values that blur the identities and worldviews behind them. These findings emerge from discourse analysis of texts and interviews as well as the domain of embodiment and performance, enabling us to find a pattern of hiding and diluting the cultural traces surrounding the practices.[*]

Our discursive and embodied appraisal of Salamon's project illustrates the iterations of appropriative attitudes present in the world of contemporary performance, regardless of the novel and intricate rhetoric surrounding postmodern dance. The postmodern discourse of international dance festivals and art events can reinforce the conditions of stratification between practitioners. We acknowledge the need to contest the doom of being represented by someone else or being forced to remain as the perpetual source of inspiration for non-indigenous artists. Beyond the particular case studied, we aim to illuminate the systemic reasons for the recurrence of these

[*] If recordings become available in the future, we will add detailed movement analysis as another layer to our case study.

almost archetypal cases present in modern and postmodern dance. We tackle the larger frameworks that leave indigenous bearers and their artistic practices unprotected and vulnerable.

Scholars have shown that ritual practices are embedded in cultural systems that transcend ownership status. We affirm that indigenous communities inhabit ritual practices as an aspect of their cosmological worldviews and kin relationships that connect the community to a territory. Thus, we find the protection of land in order to safeguard Mapuche practices of utmost importance; this priority stands in opposition to the artificial division of tangible versus intangible heritage.

We propose that choreographers must acknowledge cross-cultural embodied knowledge, as dance not only engages with diverse meanings and cosmologies but also responds to political and economic struggles. We seek a transformation of the choreographer's role to become a grounded agent that embodies diversity not as a metaphor but as a committed cultural mediator. We believe that the principles of participative creation should apply to the phases of choreographic development and design, as well as to the economic gains and forms of public recognition that result from presenting dance.

We have contrasted the Salamon case study with an example of a production that included indigenous knowledge, allowing bearers to have a say in how it was created and presented. We highlight the crucial value of informed consent, attribution, and compensation related to the use and circulation of ancestral cultural expressions as well as the attention to the violent context in which such expressions survive. We also emphasize the importance of building cross-pollinating experiences of mutual learning that do not abstract or de-corporealize the knowledge of indigenous populations. The impact of new performance projects cannot be

measured only in aesthetic terms but must include a consideration of the relational, ethical, and creative paths in the cultural exchanges from the local to the global and back again.

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