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The dance of tradition in contemporary art. Edmundo Torres' *China Diabla* performance

Resumen:

Este artículo explora la relación entre tradiciones de la danza y conceptos y convenciones del arte contemporáneo, a partir del caso de la performance de *China Diabla*—la diabla danzante de los Andes peruanos—realizada por Edmundo Torres en 1995, en Berlín frente al Reichstag cubierto por Jeanne-Claude y Christo. Atento al carácter religioso de esta danza —marcada tanto por la espiritualidad andina como por la devoción católica— mi argumento retoma la noción de sincretismo en tanto sedimentación de prácticas religiosas. A diferencia de la promoción del folklore como medio para salvaguardar la cultura nacional (implementado por el estado peruano), las tradiciones sincréticas se caracterizan por su capacidad de cambio y transmisión. Comprometido con la continuidad y transformación de las tradiciones andinas a través de la confección de máscaras, el acto de vestir y la danza en las calles, la obra de Edmundo Torres participa en la constitución de una diáspora latinoamericana. Su performance frente al Reichstag cubierto se convierte además en una intervención en la autorrepresentación, a finales del siglo XX, de Alemania como una nación reunificada en la posguerra. Demuestro cómo, a través del baile con los visitantes y para el monumento cubierto, *China Diabla* amplifica la devoción, extendiendo su alcance a los territorios de la diáspora y al campo del arte contemporáneo.

Palabras clave: danzas andinas, arte contemporáneo, tradición, sincretismo, diáspora latinoamericana

Abstract: This article explores the relation between dance traditions and contemporary art concepts and conventions, focusing on Edmundo Torres' 1995 performance of the *China Diabla*, the dancing female devil from the Peruvian Andes, in front of the wrapped Reichstag by Jeanne-Claude and Christo in Berlin. Attentive to the religious imprint of the devil dance—marked by both Andean spirituality and Catholic devotion, I draw on an understanding of syncretism as the layering of religious practices, mobilizing the term for cultural analysis. In contrast to the promotion of folklore as a means of securing national culture, particularly by the Peruvian state, syncretic traditions are characterized by changeability alongside transmission. Committed to the continuity and transformation of Andean traditions through mask-making, dressing, and dancing, especially on the streets, Edmundo Torres' lifework actively participates in the formation of a Latin American diaspora. Moreover, his performance in front of the wrapped Reichstag becomes an intervention in Germany's self-representation as a postwar, reunited nation at the turn of the 20th. Century. I show how, by dancing with fellow visitors and for the wrapped monument, Torres' *China Diabla* performance amplifies devotion, extending its reach to diasporic terrains and the field of contemporary art.

Keywords: Andean dances, contemporary art, tradition, syncretism, Latin American diaspora

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At the beginning of my search stands this image: a photograph of the *China Diabla*, taken in Berlin during the closing event of Jeanne-Claude and Christo's famous full-wrapping of the German Reichstag building with a grey fabric during two weeks in the summer of 1995 (**fig. 1**). You see the giant clothed parliament in the background; in front of it, a large group of people standing, or sitting around having a picnic, some of them photographing the building and each other in front of the building. Posing a bit farther away from the crowd, she looks at the camera with bulging eyes and a forced smile showing her adorned teeth. She wears heavy makeup and a shiny dress, gloves and rings, earrings, and hair adornments. Her long hair is divided in two braids, and we get to see the upper part of her *pollera*: a voluminous, layered skirt used by so-called "cholas" in the Andean region: urban Indigenous and *Mestizo* women.[1] Her prominent horns moreover transform her into a devil.

Behind the mask and the dress is Edmundo Torres, the mask maker, dancer, and personifier of the *China Diabla*. His crafting hands and dancing body grant life to the the female devil—the *diabla,* but body and hands also become spirited through her. Theirs is a personal relation: Torres crafted her first, simple mask out of self-made paper paste at the age of fifteen, while still living in Puno, the city at the shore of the Titicaca Lake, on the Peruvian side of the Andes. We might imagine him wearing that first mask as he still does now in dance performances, yet without the elaborate, and expensive, garments and adornments that came in later. "Granting life", "becoming spirited": I am opting for a spiritual register here and not, say, one stemming solely from performance or dance studies to describe the relation between dancer, mask-maker, and the devil. For it is in Andean syncretism that the *China Diabla* was born into and raised — both a character and a dance tradition. It was during the famous Catholic celebration in honor of the Candelaria Virgin that Torres first danced her back in the early 1960s, not as part of the official dance ensembles though but as the sole dancer, accompanying a group of musicians.[2]

Fig. 1. Edmundo Torres, *China Diabla*, 1995, performance in Berlin. Photograph by Max Meier. Courtesy of the photographer.

What follows is an introduction to the *China Diabla* dance tradition, and an exploration of Edmundo Torres' *China Diabla* dance performance in general, and specifically in front of the wrapped Reichstag. This emblematic work of contemporary art, which spanned over 20 years from its initial conception to its eventual realization, is deeply connected to German politics as well as the

country's self-representation as a postwar, reunited nation. Against this backdrop, my article asks: How does Torres' performance engage with the piece? What does his *China Diabla* dance reveal, for example about the place of the Latin American diaspora in Berlin of the 1990s, and how? Moreover, how does this dance tradition challenge contemporary art concepts, transforming prevailing conventions? The syncretic imprint of the *China Diabla* compels me to expand the discussion of tradition to encompass not only cultural, but religious and spiritual dimensions too. For instance, what happens to devotion in a dance no longer dedicated to the Virgin? Isn't it?

1. Introducing the *China Diabla*: Cultural, social, and (syncretic) religious stories of the female devil in the Andes

Let's not translate *China Diabla* to "Chinese Devil", please.[3] There are at least four ways to tell her story, four stories behind her appearance in Berlin: a cultural, a social, a religious, and a personal one. From the 1950s on, she became part of the famous *diablada* dancing groups in Puno, joining a number of devilish figures through time, like the major devil or *diablo mayor*, the special devil, the devil with spade, the red devil, the devil of the seven sins, a number of *chinas—china supay, china loca, china reina*, as well as the bear, and the angel.[4] Every year during the Candelaria Virgin celebration, these characters take on the streets of Puno and dance: some of them in ordered formations and others alone, moving freely between different formations and the crowd and mixing up dance styles —like the *china loca* in recent editions, embodied by male dancers.[5] Together, these devils and *chinas* form part of long-established ensembles devoted to the *diablada*, a dance style that through the years has become the face of Puno—Perus' declared capital of folklore since 1985.[6] They partake in a number of dance parades, processions, and contests, which alternate with masses in honor of the Virgin throughout a whole month, the central day being the 2d. of February.[7]

The official title of "capital of folklore" is part of a complex, historical process, fueled by the region's independency from Spain, of defining national culture for both Peruvians and foreigners, particularly tourists. Folklore works as a category for selecting, promoting, and ultimately freezing Indigenous and *Mestizo* cultural praxis.[8] *Mestizaje* on its part suggests here the exclusive mixture of Spanish and Indian or Indigenous peoples, excluding the African diaspora. Contradicting earlier attempts to soften, reduce, or eliminate these traditions through penalization by the state authorities, from the 1930s on, a number of public institutes and foundations were formed to foster dance ensembles, introducing cultural contests to be held around the time of the Candelaria celebration.[9] They funded theatre presentations both in the region, in Lima, and abroad, as well as research projects. Where former governments saw a religious or vernacular threat to the project of the modern nation and citizen, later ones saw the possibility to pin down national culture, and to profit from it, for instance through tourism.

Under the sign of folklore, tradition didn't necessarily become the opposite of modernity but a delimited space within the modern nation and its culture. Puno's dance traditions and particularly the *diablada* became now, and still are, representative for Peruvian folklore —and the manifestation of "authenticity" and national culture, however debated. For the dancers, this means the investment in the perfection of costumes, masks, and movements, the adaptation of movement to the stage both in the context of theatre presentations and choreographed parades on the street, and the control and limitation of their creative expression. For in the rationale of folklore, national tradition has to be rescued from the past and protected from future change —the "originality" and "authenticity" of national heritage is at play here, but of course, time and again, the dancers disobey these mandates. Paradoxically then, the modern concept of folklore ultimately turns dance practice into unchanging tradition. This is the *China Diabla's* cultural story.

Now, the dance traditions of *Candelaria* also form part of a social field, extensively explored by Max Meier in a study of Andean festivities in Peru.[10] These festivities result from migration and settlement —exceeding temporary religious pilgrimage, from the villages on the Andean highlands to the cities not only in Peru, but in Bolivia as well. Increasingly since the 19th Century,

Indigenous peoples and practices confronted and became entangled with the urban classes. Therefore, what characterizes this social field is both the survival and adaptation of rural rites, connected for example to the agricultural cycle, and their appropriation, regulation, and standardization as part of a national project. These processes resulted in the formation of dance ensembles by different rural and urban, working classes, as well as their inclusion or exclusion by the urban elites, for example through means of participation fees and the costumes prizes for the contests and shows.[11] With a mask crafted out of inexpensive paper, Torres' first *China Diabla* couldn't have participated in the official parade as we know it today, but danced freely as part of an Andean music group of *sicuris* —the Aymara term for the brass wooden instruments played.[12] In a conversation we had in summer, Torres explained how in the city of Puno, during the 20th. Century, dancing increasingly became a means of recognition as a citizen by others.[13] This shows the immense social impact following the title "capital of folklore".

Finally, being a devil undoubtedly makes of *China Diabla* a religious, in fact a Catholic case in point, integrating dances in honor of the Candelaria Virgin to this day. Her religious or spiritual life however goes way back in time; a life we can only poorly approximate, as is the case with so many syncretic practices throughout the continent. Missionary theatre plays, fostered especially by the Jesuits during the early colony build an entry point: theatric representations including good and evil characters as a means of redirecting already existing dance rites towards Catholic faith and morals.[14] Formerly connected to the agricultural cycle, these dance rites were subsumed under the liturgical year, and filled with biblical figures like angels and devils — the latter ones becoming numerous and diverse over time, eventually fleeing the play and taking up the city streets and village paths in dance performances, first alone, and then in groups.

Contrary to an understanding of mission work through means of prohibition and imposition, Jesuits and other orders practiced what we might call "syncretism from above," meaning the partial acceptance of Indigenous or Afro-diasporic spirituality within a delimited expression of Catholic devotion and moral obedience. By no means was this an uncontested process, neither in the church nor in colonial and post-independence societies.[15] The regulation and penalization of Indigenous or Afro-diasporic cultural and religious "excesses" mark a colonial continuum throughout the history of the independent Republic, but also the endurance and proliferation of precisely such "excesses". The protagonism of devils in Candelaria and their formal association with *Supay*, a non-colonial deity inhabiting the underworld and accompanying the miners is but one example.[16] In fact, in today's *diabladas* there is only one character explicitly representing the Catholic devil. All others are somewhat freed from a strict Catholic concept of bad or evil, however formally reminiscent, especially through their horns.

With the term syncretism —both a principle of colonial governance and an analytic category— I mean to suggest a layering of religious practices over time against the idea of the fusion of two distinguishable religions into one; a dominant idea in religious studies and anthropology throughout the 20th Century.[17] Unlike fusion, layers touch but do not dissolve into one. By means of excavation, layers from the past may be accessed, but only partially.

This view is reminiscent of Diana Taylor's discussion of performance and performance studies in relation to history and historiography.[18] Drawing, among others, on a syncretic celebration combining "diverse, incongruent, even contradictory elements — some biblical, some Aztec, some Mayan"[19] in Tepoztlán, a town south of Mexico City, the author shows how dance and theatrical performances challenge the assumed linearity of history through the sedimentation of performance over time. While always occurring in the present, performance is also connected to the past in particular, that is intimate, but also limited ways.

Finally, extended to the study of racial discourse, the notion of layers opens up the concept of *mestizaje* to include migrations and diasporas, especially the African diaspora, otherwise ignored in the idea of fusion between two distinguishable races. This is relevant because of the centrality of *mestizaje* in national formation processes throughout the continent, in its various modalities.[20] For instance, we have seen how in Puno, the category of folklore plays a role in crafting a

unified national history, making regional traditions legible as products of the mixture between Spanish and Indigenous cultures. This narrative consistently denies the strong presence of the African diaspora across history and territory.[21] Throughout the 20th. Century, Afro-Peruvian music traditions underwent their own process of so-called disappearance and reappearance or revival within delimited spaces, with their recognition as part of the nation's cultural fabric overlooking complex historical and territorial entanglements.[22]

2. Dancing the *China Diabla*: Edmundo Torres' performances between the streets and the stage

Fig. 2. Edmundo Torres, *China Diabla*, 2003, performance at the Hemispheric Institute for Performance and Politics' "Spectacles of Religiosities", New York. Screenshot by the author from the institute's website.

With the crafting hands and dancing body of Edmundo Torres, Puno's *China Diabla* settled in Berlin in the 1970s. Since then, she has appeared at numerous exhibitions and plays in Europe, Peru, and the United States, as well as private and public parties and parades, organized by the ever-growing Latin American diaspora in Berlin, such as the so-called *Karneval der Kulturen* held every year since 1996 during *Pentecost*—yet another Catholic celebration. Preparing for the famous carnival parade on the streets of Kreuzberg, Torres has directed dancers, taking up different characters and styles as part of the ensemble *Ríos Profundos* (Deep Rivers), named after the homonymous novel by José María Arguedas.[23]

Berlin's *Karneval der Kulturen* features dance groups from or connected to the Brazilian, Nicaraguan, Colombian, and Bolivian, but also Korean, Nepali, Ghanan, and Angolan diasporas, among others. It was founded in the 1990s in reaction to a series of racist assaults in Germany, with the aim at fostering a post-migrant sentiment in society through means of entertainment and culture.[24] For Latin American communities especially in Berlin, the carnival has remained a more or less entertaining, more or less politically significant meeting point in a landscape of grass-roots newspapers, solidarity groups, literature festivals, and exhibition series since the Chilean exile following Augusto Pinochet's coup d'état in 1973 at least, all of which form part of what we can indeed call a Latin American diaspora.[25]

Not only did Torres' *China Diabla* moved from the streets of Puno during Candelaria to the streets of Berlin during *Karneval der Kulturen*. Time and again, she was invited to dance in theaters, for example during an evening event, part of the so-called *Encuentro* hosted by the Hemispheric Institute for Performance and Politics in New York in 2003 with the title "Spectacles of Religiosities".[26] *Encuentros* are large events gathering artists, researchers, and activists across the Americas around a common subject since its first iteration in 2000. In the video recording of the event, we see her enter a theatre through the audience space, where people sit in groups around tables (**Fig. 2**). She wears a silver blouse, a pink *pollera*, and white high-heeled boots—a similar, if not the same outfit as her 1995 performance in Berlin. Rapidly moving through space, she elevates her skirt delicately with one hand, the other raising a white handkerchief into the air. She dances to *diablada* music performed by ensembles that prominently feature brass instruments.[27]

From the very beginning, her dance incites participation: sitting on the laps of spectators, flirting or leaning back against them, and inviting them to join her in a loose serpentine dance that forms a circle, which then dissolves. Her bulging eyes fixate on particular individuals, with the mask serving not as a means of hiding but of dramatizing the gaze. Using her whole body, the devil seeks to dance with someone. Most audience members freeze when approached by her, avoiding interaction, and refusing to stand up and join the dance. Many of them are male: at one point, she caresses the face of a man while sitting on the lap of another. Torres' *China Diabla* dance

emphasizes femininity in the dress, gestures, and movements marked by delicacy and subtle provocation. Indeed, femininity marks all *chinas*—a term used for female characters, oftentimes embodied by male dancers.[28]

Studies on other Andean dance traditions have shown how gender norms are negotiated in the figure of the *china* danced by men, both as a means to exclude women from parades —who, when finally able to dance, are prescribed a particular feminine ideal— and as a site of exploration for homosexual, transgender, and transvestite dancers.[29] The use of the mask here varies, on the one hand providing anonymity and socially detaching dancers from characters, and on the other, being removed by queer dancers who publicly highlight the connection between cross-dressing and the *china* character. After several failed attempts, the first to accept Torres' *China Diabla* invitation in New York is not a man but Susana Baca, a central figure in the Afro-Peruvian music "revival" and a performing guest of the *Encuentro*, alongside Torres. What begins as a solo evolves into a dynamic group dance, open to new members. Significantly, while moving through the audience, neither the devil nor her co-dancers step onto the stage, which remains illuminated but empty.

Torres' use of space in his brief *China Diabla* performance is interesting, as the audience seating area fuses with the dancer's stage, while the actual theatre stage remains untouched. The conventional isolation of dancers and their separation from the audience shifts when the dancer joins the theatre's social space, where different people come together to enjoy the show, much like in the streets of Puno during *Candelaria*. This artistic decision belongs less to contemporary dance or theatre practice than to the tradition —or what I earlier called "life"— of the *China Diabla,* marked by both the survival and transformation of Indigenous and *Mestizo*, as well as Afro-diasporic spiritual, religious, and cultural practices under colonial and post-independence governance. Over the past several centuries, the female devil traveled from missionary theatre plays to *sicuri* music groups to the streets of Puno and the diaspora, dancing alone or in ensembles, participating in plays and contests that aim at strengthening Catholic devotion and morals, or "authentic", national folklore and the prominence of Puno as folkloric capital.

Borrowing the concept of the repertoire, introduced by Diana Taylor in her 2003 study of performance, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, we might consider this long tradition as a history of bodily transmission.[30] The author and founder of the Hemispheric Institute in New York includes a photograph of Torres' *China Diabla* in a chapter on the contemporary theatre group *Yuyachkani* — initiated in 1971 with a Quechua name linked to reflection and memory.[31] Drawing on Indigenous and *Mestizo* dance and theatrical traditions themselves, alongside popular theatre practices, the members of *Yuyachkani* have been active interlocutors for Torres, who has crafted masks for their plays. For Taylor, in performance, bodies become carriers of knowledge, or of memories and meanings, transmitted through the body's presence, but also lost in the fleeting nature of the performative. "The repertoire both keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning," writes Taylor.[32] Thus, each one of *China Diablas'* appearances remains unique, although embedded in a syncretic tradition that changes with every transmission. Instead of signifying unchanging past as the opposite side of modernity, tradition in the sense I am proposing is marked by changeability, unlike folklore.

Edmundo Torres' *China Diabla* performances moreover are characterized by a high degree of intentionality, that is, the will to perform this dance tradition at precise moments, like the closing event of Jeanne-Claude and Christo's wrapping piece. I hear this dynamic resonate in accounts of syncretism as the conscious excavation of sediments from the past —the notion of sediments contradicting the model of historical linearity, as we have seen consulting Taylor's insights on the relation between performance and history.[33] In their compilation *Syncretism/Antisyncretism*, Rosalind Shaw and Charles Stewart for instance write that even when lacking knowledge about origins, the past "may be available for retrieval and rehabilitation at the right historical moment".[34] Contrary to the unstoppable course of religion through time, that is, the inevitable flow of religions parallel from or into one another, characteristic of previous definitions of syncretism, the idea of religious sediments make space for

intentionality and consciousness. But it also suggests that the buried past can never be accessed fully. Like all histories, religious histories do not follow a single path from the past to the present. Not everything is transmitted; some practices and meanings are inevitably lost, impossible to trace back.

As a cultural practice immersed in syncretism, *China Diabla* performances are always sites of transmission and transformation of both Catholic religion and Andean spirituality. Moreover, Torres' *China Diabla* performance in a theatre or the field in front of the Reichstag building in Berlin, wrapped by Jeanne-Claude and Christo, force an encounter —however subtile, between dance tradition and the spaces of contemporary theatre and art. I write subtile because at least in the case of the Berlin performance, this one didn't make it into the media or academic reception of the spectacular art piece.

Finally, the broader, cultural context of the Latin American diaspora in Berlin expands the *Diabla's* territorial range, complicating, by the way, narrow definitions of syncretism as the fusion of two religions solely. This expansion doesn't equal the secularization of dance tradition though: the *China Diabla* remains a syncretic character, and her dance imbued with religious devotion and spirit. Like familiar concepts in dance and performance studies, the ideas of bodily transmission and the repertoire, as proposed by Diana Taylor, do not exhaust these dimensions, nor does her own exploration of syncretic practices in terms of performance and history. Religious practices and spirituality remain at the horizon of cultural analysis, without becoming its subject —although it is worth noting that the 2003 iteration of the Hemispheric Institutes' *Encuentro* was precisely dedicated to "religiosities", gathering contributions that addressed different modalities of religion in terms of both imposition and resistance across the Americas. My own insistence on syncretism as an analytic category for the study of contemporary culture links back to these discussions, pushing them further.

3. Dancing the *China Diabla* in front of the wrapped Reichstag by Jeanne-Claude and Christo, Berlin 1995

Jeanne-Claude and Christo wrapped the Reichstag building with a thin synthetic fabric permeated in aluminum.[35] Today the parliament meets there but, in the summer of 1995, the building was about to become a construction site after serving as an exhibition space for German history, and the outpost of the parliament of West-Germany, which met in Bonn. The wrapping piece only lasted for two weeks. The negotiations however, between Jeanne-Claude and Christo's team and numerous German politicians, as well as the public debate on the project date back to 1976, that is, twenty years before the project's realization.[36]

The number and diversity of raised arguments responds to the fact that throughout these two decades, the Reichstag has come to embody significant events in Germany's recent history, like the fall of the Berlin Wall and the so-called reunification of the German Democratic Republic with the Federal Republic of Germany, the move from the Western capital from Bonn to Berlin, the accomplishment of full sovereignty after the Second World War, and Germany's official remembrance and social reckoning with the country's violent past, especially the Third Reich and the Holocaust, as well as the crafting of what some of the parliamentarians referred to as the renewal of German national identity.[37] Stefan Engelniederhammer's study brings together the public arguments, stemming from a time-lapse between the Willy Brand and the Helmut Kohl administrations. Some of them range from a negative view of contemporary art as distracting from the need to remember the past, or as disrespectful of a built symbol to German history and its peoples, to the positive approval of the project —fully financed by the artists, by the way— as a means to fuel tourism, and to disseminate a positive image of Berlin and Germany to the world, against its bad reputation due, among others, to the growing Neo-Nazi scene and racist assaults against foreigners.

On this line, the wrapping and unwrapping of the building was interpreted as a cleansing from the past and a beginning anew, or as the triumphal transition from divided to unified Germany. Asked for his view on these

interpretations, in an interview Christo answered vehemently "Nein, nein".[38] The project's debate is still alive, and the wrapping piece a mirror of recent developments like growing right-wing radicalism and xenophobia, anchored in the country's history. The image of the mirror brings together contemporary art with reflection, and self-reflection. Instead of becoming signifiers to a simple historical narrative —like the end of the Cold War and a unified, bright future— the wrapping and unwrapping act activates and intensifies the senses and incites questions.

Attentive to the changing of light conditions and the movement of the thin fabric, Andreas Huyssen for instance reflects on the relation of the piece to monumentality, concluding that what characterizes the wrapping is not the negation, but a reformulation of the monument as temporary, fragile, and vanishing, remaining only in memories and media.[39] Somewhat reminiscent to music, these qualities contradict a view of the monument as the stabilization of memory, associated with architecture. According to Huyssen, in Berlin of the 1990s, the wrapping piece challenge an ever-growing turn to architectural monuments, especially of the Holocaust, as a means of redemption, eventually leading to forgetting, at the heart of Germany after the Berlin Wall. This is the work's political history.

Described, however, as a two-week-long happening,[40] the wrapping and unwrapping of the Reichstag was a highly participatory social event. Annette Hauschild's photographs from the time showcase people dancing at sunset, sitting on mats and covered in blankets while looking at the wrapped building (**Figs. 3-5**). There is trash scattered on the ground, cigarette packs and beer cans, and some even improvised a sausage stand with a grill, sunshade, and a cooling box. Unlike a dance performance or theatre play, this happening didn't have a clear division between stage and audience, with visitors alternating between spectatorship and acting —sitting to contemplate the building's dance or dancing themselves. Also, the status of the building varies: Is it part of the stage set, the show, or the main actor itself? In any case, the images show how, contrary to the predictions of some parliamentarians, Berliners greatly welcomed the project, some even demanding that it be prolonged —a petition declined by the artists.[41]

Fig. 3. Annette Hauschild's photographs from "Verhüllter Reichstag - die letzte Nacht", 1995, Berlin. Photograph by the author from the exhibition catalogue Träum weiter. Berlin. © Annette Hauschilds

Fig. 4. Annette Hauschild's photographs from "Verhüllter Reichstag - die letzte Nacht", 1995, Berlin. Photograph by the author from the exhibition catalogue Träum weiter. Berlin. © Annette Hauschilds

Fig. 5. Annette Hauschild's photographs from "Verhüllter Reichstag - die letzte Nacht", 1995, Berlin. Photograph by the author from the exhibition catalogue Träum weiter. Berlin. © Annette Hauschilds

Part of this participatory, social field, we can imagine Edmundo Torres dancing the *China Diabla* to techno instead of Andean music from Peru, and ask: How do they intervene, not only in Berlin's social fabric, but in Germany's political history and national self-representation in the 1990s, as well as in the workings of contemporary art? Taking seriously the devil's religious life invites me to pose this question as one of syncretism, by which I mean the layering of religious practices through time, encompassing migration and diaspora, accessed partially and transmitted further, for example through dance. Fleeing the dance formations of *Karneval der Kulturen*, the *China Diabla* danced now alone, just like she did back in Puno surrounded by the *sicuri* music group. We have seen how constitutive changeability is for her syncretic tradition. Moreover, the decision to dance in front of the wrapped Reichstag is marked by intentionality, and autonomy. For a moment, she left the parade in Kreuzberg, whereby the street becomes a stage designed for the expression of diasporic culture, in order to join others in the open field in front of the wrapped piece— less a stage than a temporary dance floor or sausage stand. In contrast to Puno, where, as Torres recalls to dance is a recognized means of becoming a citizen, his 1995 *China Diabla* performance exits the limiting space of culture in order to intervene in the midst of official and unofficial negotiations over memory politics in post-Berlin-Wall Germany.

Averting the depoliticization of the Latin American diaspora through the category of culture and entertainment, for example in the reception of *Karneval der Kulturen*, the devil's unexpected dance here insists on the presence of Latin Americans as part of Germany's social fabric through means not only of culture, but of religion. I see this practice as anti-folkloric —the category of folklore implemented as a means to pin down unchanging culture, as we have seen. According to Néstor García Canclini —an author known for his study of hybridity in cultural terms— the term folklore was imported to Latin America from Europe and institutionalized as part of the modern state apparatus, fostering the separation of objects from practices and of practices from socio-political contexts.[42]

In this sense, the status of Puno as the folkloric capital is still at work today, as seen, for instance, in the disregard and repression of political agency, particularly during the protests against Dina Boluarte, the current president of Peru.[43] It was in the province of Puno where social discontent following Boluarte's designation as the successor to Pedro Castillo, after his failed attempt to dissolve the Congress in December 2022, was felt most strongly. State abandonment and social indifference toward the region fueled the long-lasting protests, which were brutally repressed by the police, including the killing of at least 17 protestors on January 9, 2023, in the city of Juliaca.

4. Dancing tradition in contemporary art: Religious categories and cultural analysis

Marked by the movement and adaptation of marginalized practices through centuries of colonial and post-independence governance, the history of syncretism helps navigate the relation between Andean dance traditions, the Latin American diaspora, and Edmundo Torres' life-work. Performances like his 1995 *China Diabla* appearance in Berlin are not isolated exceptions, but integral to the flow of tradition —also because, as he mentioned in our conversation, masks and dances often follow the improvisation of mask makers and dancers, thus complicating their systematic study or approach.[44] These processes cannot be sufficiently discussed in contemporary art terms, with Torres featured as an artist addressing Andean dance traditions or the Latin American diaspora in Germany through performance art.[45]

The scope of his practice challenges art historical categories, tied to production and exhibition conventions, as well as the art market. While taking part in Jeanne-Claude and Christo's happening, the *China Diabla* dance disrupts not only its imagined public, but also the figure of the singular artist, the unique status of artworks, and the public program. The very notion of the contemporary, as distinguished from the past, is challenged through the temporal continuity that characterizes tradition. Torres' performance is unique and contemporary, yet it is also collective, depersonalized, and traditional. Moreover, it is a practice of religious transmission, attentive to the life of the female devil, which is both Catholic and

Andean, connected to *Supay*. If our understanding of contemporary art might not be prepared to carry her weight, then in what ways does contemporary art shape or alter religious devotion?

We have seen how in Torres' 2003 performance in New York, the *China Diabla* dance tradition alters theatric spaces and roles, the audience space fusing with the stage, and the spectators becoming dancers. Evoking the street carnivals of Puno and Berlin, for instance through music, the female devil doesn't dance for, but with, the audience —an interaction insufficiently described by terms of, say, participatory art, famously dealt with by Claire Bishop.[46] This was the case too during the performance in Berlin, where the *China Diabla* posed for the camera with a number of passerby who, like her, came to see the wrapped monument on the closing day.[47] Some of them might have left with a piece of fabric, distributed by numerous assistants, indeed becoming participants of the work in Bishop's sense.[48] The passerby's interaction with the dancing *China Diabla* in front of the building, however, responds to the very life of the devil, who becomes spirited through the wearing of the mask and the dress by Torres, and through a dance that isn't trained or choreographed, but includes a number of spontaneous, yet intentional, interactions. Part of this tradition, the crafting of masks is intimately linked to the dancing with the masks; the convergence of both practices in Torres' work bears witness to it. The term "contemporary artist" cannot possibly capture this life-work, touched significantly by Andean dance traditions, and therefore, by religious syncretism. Even though Torres doesn't consider himself a believer.[49]

In the Andes, the devil's dance not only involves dancing with the devil, either behind its mask or in front of it, like the visitors of the carnival with whom the *China Diabla* flirts. Also, the devil's dance is dedicated to a somewhat holy audience —not the public of a show, but saints or the Virgin, as in the case of the Candlemas or Candelaria celebration in Puno. It is in honor of her that the dancers take to the streets alongside a series of cultural, religious, and economic activities from the end of January through mid-February.[50] These include official events organized by state authorities, such as the raising of the national flag in a ceremonial act, dance and beauty contests, as well as dance parades all entitled "folkloric", Andean rites of payment or permission-asking to the earth or *Pachamama*, for example through fires in front of the church guarding the Virgin's representation, the proliferation of market stalls selling food, beverages, costumes, and crafts, and a series of devotional practices that highlight the Catholic imprint on the whole celebration. Devotees fulfill a series of prayers in the days leading up to the 1st and 2nd of February, which mark central days in the festivity. The representation of the Virgin is dressed in new garments, given to her by a worshipper as a gift. She is carried through the streets several times in processions, and at some point, the dance ensembles stop by her, kneel, or offer her flowers as a sign of reverence.

These practices have become far more significant than the blessing of candles celebrating the Virgin's presentation of Jesus Christ at the Temple in Jerusalem forty days after his birth —the biblical story behind Candlemas; the oldest Catholic festivity in honor of the Virgin. Indeed, as Max Meier shows in his book, throughout the Andean territory, the Virgin became a highly ambivalent figure, with her various representations taking on different, often contradictory, roles in relation to Catholic doctrine. In Puno, some of the dancers offer their dance as a physical and economic penance after having committed sins or in exchange for protection throughout the coming year.

And in Berlin? If we consider Torres' *China Diabla* performance in front of the wrapped Reichstag as a dancing with and for in this devotional sense, whom is the dance for? The shimmering building begins to take on significance, not as stage set, show, or actor—theatric categories at home in cultural studies, but as a monument dressed for a period of time in order to be contemplated, photographed, and danced for, for instance by the devil. Andreas Huyssen rightly differentiates between packaging and veiling, the latter term implying visibility making.[51] He describes Jeanne-Claude's and Christos' as a work of veiling and, what is more, of beautifying the monument. Crossing the city dressed with the garments and mask of the *China Diabla* in order to dance with fellow visitors for an itself dressed, or masked,

monument, Torres keeps taking part in a long syncretic tradition, which doesn't cease to be devotional. His *China Diabla* performance indeed amplifies devotion, extending its reach to diasporic terrains and the field of contemporary art. We have seen how tradition is marked by both transmission and change, or transformation, unlike the delimitation implied in different implementations of the category of folklore.

Moreover, to worship the monument in this sense means to grant the monument life through the acts of clothing and dancing, but also pilgriming, paying it a visit. These are not representational, but relational acts; acts of becoming alive in relations. While being danced for, the Reichstag itself doesn't represent the dressed Virgin, nor the devil, even though its peaks formally resemble the devil's horns. Such formal reading would mean yet another attempt to capture its life, this time through means of cultural analysis. By centering religious categories, and especially the term syncretism, I aim to offer an additional method to art and cultural studies dealing with contemporary art and performance, such as the studies of Diane Taylor and Claire Bishop just cited. When understood as layering rather than fusion, syncretism allows us to relate contemporary art to tradition by encompassing both rupture and continuity. It extends the analysis of colonial power dynamics through the Independence period to the present day, including the Latin American diaspora. For the study of dance performance, religious categories further enrich our analytic vocabulary through practices such as carnivals, pilgrimage, and devotional dance.

Notas

[1] For a discussion of the history and ambiguous connotations of the term *cholo*, see: Max Meier, *Engel, Teufel, Tanz und Theater. Die Macht der Feste in den peruanischen Anden* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 2008), 80 ff.

[2] Torres, Edmundo. Recorded personal conversation, mp3, 1 h. 49 min. 37 sec., July 2024.

[3] For the development of the *China Diabla* and the discussions on Asian influence, particularly in the costumes of the *Candelaria* celebration, see: Meier, *Engel, Teufel, Tanz und Theater. Die Macht der Feste in den peruanischen Anden*, 256 ff. For the popular use of the term *china* for the designation of female dance characters in the Andes, see interview with David Aruquipa Pérez: «Quién es la China Morena y cómo fue usada en las fiestas populares de Bolivia para comenzar la lucha de las mujeres trans hace 70 años», BBC Mundo, https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-65343650 (accessed January 16, 2025).

[4] Manuela Mamani Borda et. al., *Génesis de la danza ritual la diablada peruana desde el punto de vista de la creación de sus vestuarios ancestrales y contemporáneos* (Lima: Ministerio de Cultura, 2021), 33 ff.

[5] For an insight into recent versions of the central dance parade, see: "Festividad Virgen de la Candelaria 2024 (13/02/2024)", Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dbLUJE7FSV4 (accessed January 27, 2025).

[6] Juan Carlos La Serna Salcedo, *Sicuris, máscaras y diablos danzantes. Historia de la Diablada y la identidad cultural en Puno*, vol. 6, *Pueblos y tradiciones*, (Lima: Ministerio de Cultura, 2018), 158. In what follows, I will refer to Ibid., 103 ff.

[7] For this years' program, see: "Festividad de la Candelaria. Cronograma, orden de presentación de danzas en trajes de luces y grupos excluidos", La República, accessed December 13, 2024, https://larepublica.pe/sociedad/2024/12/05/fiesta-de-la-candelaria-estos-son-los-12-conjuntos-excluidos-y-orden-de-presentacion-de-danzas-en-trajes-de-luces-lrsd-162705#google_vignette.

[8] For the history and socio-political function of the category of folklore, in relation to "tradition" and "the popular", and between Europe and Latin America, see: Néstor Canclini, *Culturas híbridas. Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (Ciudad de México: Editorial Grijalbo, 1989), 193-199.

[9] La Serna Salcedo, *Sicuris, máscaras y diablos danzantes. Historia de la Diablada y la identidad cultural en Puno*, 6, 36 ff., 103 ff.

[10] Compare: Meier, *Engel, Teufel, Tanz und Theater. Die Macht der Feste in den peruanischen Anden*, 17 ff., 244 ff.

[11] See also: La Serna Salcedo, *Sicuris, máscaras y diablos danzantes. Historia de la Diablada y la identidad cultural en Puno*, 6, 117 ff.

[12] At the beginning of the 20th. Century, the devils danced freely in groups of *sicuris* or accompanying other dance ensembles until they formed own ensembles, from the 1940s on. See: La Serna Salcedo, *Sicuris, máscaras y diablos danzantes. Historia de la Diablada y la identidad cultural en Puno*, 6, 14.

[13] Torres, Edmundo. Recorded personal conversation, mp3, 1 h. 49 min. 37 sec., July 2024.

[14] Meier, *Engel, Teufel, Tanz und Theater. Die Macht der Feste in den peruanischen Anden*, 180 ff., 193 ff; La Serna Salcedo, *Sicuris, máscaras y diablos danzantes. Historia de la Diablada y la identidad cultural en Puno*, 6, 29 ff.

[15] Meier writes of the expulsion of the Jesuits by the Spanish crown after 200 years of presence in the region, in: Meier, *Engel, Teufel, Tanz und Theater. Die Macht der Feste in den peruanischen Anden*, 180.

[16] For an in-depth study of the relation between miners and the devil in the case of Potosí in Bolivia, see: Pascale Absi, *Los ministros del diablo. El trabajo y sus representaciones en las minas de Potosí* (La Paz: Instituto de Investigación para el Desarrollo, 2005).

[17] For an exploration of the term syncretism based on the *Alasitas* festivity in Puno, see: Sebastián Eduardo Dávila, «Desecularising culture in method. Five theses on syncretism», Blog for Transregional Research, Forum Transregionale Studien, accessed December 13, 2024, https://trafo.hypotheses.org/51954.

[18] Diana Taylor, "Performance and/as history", *TDR* 50, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 67-86.

[19] Ibid., 17.

[20] See for example: Lourdes Martinez-Echazabal, "Mestizaje and the discourse of national/cultural identity in Latin America, 1845-1959", *Latin American Perspectives* 25, no. 3 (1998): 21-42.

[21] See: Bettina E. Schmidt, "Afro-Peruvian representations in and around Cusco. A discussion about the existence or non-existence of an Afro-Andean culture in Peru", *Indiana* 24 (2007): 191-209.

[22] See: Heidi Carolyn Feldman, *Black rhythms of Peru. Reviving African musical heritage in the Black Pacific* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2006), 1 ff.

[23] The author's work is known for the immersion of the reader in complex Indigenous and *Mestizo* worlds, especially in the Peruvian Andes.

[24] «Wer sind wir, was tun wir - und warum?», Karneval der Kulturen, accessed December 9, 2024, https://www.karneval.berlin/de/karneval/was-ist-der-kdk.html.

[25] The monthly newspaper *Lateinamerika Nachrichten*, associations like *Haus der Kulturen Lateinamerikas*, and exhibition sites like *neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst (n.G.b.K.)* form part of such landscape. On Latin American projects at *n.G.b.K.*, see: Sara Hillnhütter and Eylem Sengezer, «Latin America», Discourse, nGbK, https://ngbk.de/en/diskurs/wissensspeicher/lateinamerika (accessed December 9, 2024).

[26] «Spectacles of religiosities», Hemispheric Institute, https://hemisphericinstitute.org/en/enc03-home (accessed January 16, 2025); «Edmundo Torres», Hemispheric Institute, https://hemisphericinstitute.org/en/enc03-performances/item/1526-enc03-edmundo-torres.html (accessed December 9, 2024).

[27] Torres, Edmundo. Personal communication, December 2024.

[28] See interview with David Aruquipa Pérez: «Quién es la China Morena y cómo fue usada en las fiestas populares de Bolivia para comenzar la lucha de las mujeres trans hace 70 años».

[29] See: Enzo E. Vasquez Toral, "Queer fiesta. Hybridity, drag and performance in Bolivian folklore", *Performance Research* 25, no. 4 (2020): 98-106; Enzo E. Vasquez Toral, "From the club to the fiesta. Drag and folklore in La Familia Galán", in *Queer nightlife*, ed. Kemi Adeyemi, et al. (Ann Arbir: University of Michigan Press, 2021).

[30] Diana Taylor, *The archive and the repertoire. Performing cultural memory in the Americas* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2003), 20; Sebastián Eduardo Dávila, Ulrike Jordan, and Diana Taylor, "In the aftermath of violence. On being present and calling into presence", in *On withdrawal. Scenes of refusal, disappearance, and resilience in art and cultural practices*, ed. Sebastián Eduardo Dávila et al., *Critical stances* (Zürich: Diaphanes, 2023), 165 ff.

[31] Taylor, *The archive and the repertoire. Performing cultural memory in the Americas*, 197.

[32] Ibid, 20.

[33] Taylor, "Performance and/as history".

[34] Rosalind Shaw and Charles Stewart, "Introduction. Problematizing syncretism", in *Syncretism/anti-syncretism. The politics of religious synthesis*, ed. Rosalind Shaw and Charles Stewart (London, New York: Routledge, 1994), 16. The authors consult Mariane Ferme's chapter in their book: Mariane Ferme, "What 'Alhaji Airplane' saw in Mecca, and what happened when he came home. Ritual transformation in a Mende community (Sierra Leone)", in *Syncretism/anti-syncretism. The politics of religious synthesis*, ed. Rosalind Shaw and Charles Stewart (London, New York: Routledge, 1994).

[35] «Wrapped Reichstag», Christo and Jeanne-Claude, https://christojeanneclaude.net/artworks/wrapped-reichstag/ (accessed December 9, 2024).

[36] For a detailed survey of these discussions, see: Stefan Engelniederhammer, *Die Reichstagsverhüllung im Dialog zwischen Politik und Kunst* (Berlin: Berlin Verlag Arno Spitz, 1995), 65 ff., 111 ff.

[37] Ibid., 145-146. In what follows, I will refer to 65 ff., 111 ff.

[38] «"Das ist meine letzte Chance"», Der Spiegel, accessed December 9, 2024, https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/das-

ist-meine-letzte-chance-a-1a8a509e-0002-0001-0000-000013679368.

[39] Andreas Huyssen, *Present pasts. Urban palimpsests and the politics of memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 30 ff.

[40] "Träum Weiter. Berlin, die 90er", exh. cat. (Leipzig: C/O Berlin Foundaton, Spector Books, 2024), 128.

[41] Huyssen, *Present pasts. Urban palimpsests and the politics of memory*, 36.

[42] Canclini, *Culturas híbridas. Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad*, 193-199.

[43] Manuela Cano, «Perú. Puno, el epicentro de las protestas que no parecen mermar», France 24, https://www.france24.com/es/américa-latina/20230221-perú-puno-el-epicentro-de-las-protestas-que-no-parecen-mermar (accessed December 9, 2024).

[44] Torres, Edmundo. Recorded personal conversation, mp3, 1 h. 49 min. 37 sec., July 2024.

[45] His work cannot be easily integrated in studies such as: Peter Chametzky, *Turks, Jews, and other Germans in contemporary art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2021).

[46] Claire Bishop, *Artificial hells. Participatory art and the politics of spectatorship* (London, New York: Verso, 2012).

[47] Torres, Edmundo. Recorded personal conversation, mp3, 1 h. 15 min. 15 sec., January 2025.

[48] See: Andreas Conrad, "Christo, Jeanne-Claude und Berlin. Der Stoff, aus dem die Träume sind", Tagesspiegel, https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/der-stoff-aus-dem-die-traume-sind-5366416.html (accessed January 17, 2025).

[49] Torres, Edmundo. Recorded personal conversation, mp3, 1 h. 15 min. 15 sec., January 2025.

[50] In what follows, I will refer to: Meier, *Engel, Teufel, Tanz und Theater. Die Macht der Feste in den peruanischen Anden*, 172-174, 192-193., 444-451.

[51] Huyssen, *Present pasts. Urban palimpsests and the politics of memory*, 33-36. Veiling could be furthermore explored as connected to religious dress.

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