

*Paseo:*  
Becoming Self  
by  
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## ABSTRACT

*Paseo* is a postmodern dance performance that reveals the migrational passage of bodies through space and time. *Paseo* included five dance participants, and the choreographer/pedagogue. *Paseo* members participated in rehearsal and performance events that completed the investigational study. The creative process focused on integrating somatic and improvisational movement practices to design an environment where dancers could build body-mind awareness and sensitivity to their surroundings, participate democratically, and build agency in their performative decision-making. *Paseo* investigated the performance as an informal site for learning and understanding of migration, identity, and community. Another objective of *Paseo* was to explore the performance as an informal site of learning and its transformative effects on lived experiences that occur from the act of doing, the act of becoming, and experiential sensations.

*Paseo* was part of the Arizona State University's (ASU) School of Film, Dance, and Theatre Emerging Artists I series, one of two performances that shared the stage with fellow graduate cohort member, Grace Gallagher. *Paseo* took place at ASU's Margaret Gisolo Theatre, located at the Physical Education Building East. Performance dates were the following; fix punctuation Friday, November 6<sup>th</sup>, Saturday, November 7<sup>th</sup>, and Sunday, November 8<sup>th</sup>. *Paseo* had a fourth presentation on Saturday, December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015, at Margaret Gisolo Theatre as part of the post-conference performance and dialogue event, "By The People." The conference was hosted by the Participatory Government Initiative on the ASU Campus from December 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate *Paseo* to all immigrants of the past, present, and future. Their sacrifice and perseverance have paved the path towards rich legacies and opportunities for future generations.

I dedicate *Paseo* to my father, who raised me in country that was foreign to him, but sacrificed to give my sister and I the best life he could.

I dedicate *Paseo* to the Zuluaga and Olarte family, my aunts and uncles, and my cousins here and in Colombia.

To my grandparents, Abuelita y Abuelito, who immigrated to the United States for a better life for their children, and for all future descendants of the Zuluaga family tree.

To my stepfather Robert, thank you for being a wonderful father and friend for life. Ryan, thank you for being such a wonderful brother and role model to me.

To my nephews, Luke and Michael, and my nieces, Isabella and Sofia. I am honored to be your uncle and wish you the best on each one of your individual *paseos*.

To my sister, for being a source of inspiration, strength, and courage – and for being my best friend, and always believing in me.

Last, there would be no *Paseo* without my mother. For your fight to survive, to always stay strong, and your unconditional love for our family—thank you for being my biggest fan, Te quiero Mami.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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I would also like to acknowledge my committee chair, Dr. Pegge Vissicaro, for your countless hours in support of the completion of *Paseo*, your mentorship throughout school and navigating the overall graduate experience, and above all, your friendship. Abrazos siempre;

Also, to the beautiful ladies of *Paseo*—Yingzi Liang, Michelle Marji, Emma Niemuth, Ruby Morales, and Emily May— thank you to my very special *Paseo* familia for saying yes, giving yourselves in making the journey possible for all to see, and for making this experience a memorable one.

Last, I would like to acknowledge the best group of colleagues and cohort anybody could ask for. To the Grad Pack members – See Cha, Grace Gallagher, Molly Schenck, Jenny Gerena, Emily May, and Ricardo Alvarez.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The word *paseo* has multiple interpretations and uses in the Spanish language. *Paseo* can describe a walk, or a leisurely stroll, or a promenade or path in a city. A *paseo* can also depict a formal procession of bullfighters into the bullfighting ring. *Paseo* can also translate into a travel, a journey, passage, or excursion. This translation, one of a journey or passage, is what I associate the most as a child. I remember my parents talking about wanting to take us on a *paseo*, an excursion or journey into a new land or place of discovery. As a kid *paseo* reminded me of new adventures and passages of learning and discovery. It seemed appropriate that this thesis, this investigation and journey into my dance, be called *Paseo*.

*Paseo* is more than an applied project required to graduate from Arizona State University's (ASU) three-year MFA dance program. It has become the symbol of the accumulation of knowledge and experiences gained from my past artistic endeavors, the transitional shift into academic life as a graduate student, and the creative imaginings that inspire my future creative choreographic process and pedagogical endeavors. *Paseo* was the creative journey that provided the space for me as an artist to temporarily leave the mambo dance world, a Latin social dance from Cuba and contemporized in New York City in the 1950s, and venture into a new postmodern contemporary dance world. By leaving the familiar into the unknown, it provided the space to explore how both worlds converged. With this journey, I discovered multiple perspectives of dance making and participatory methods that interrogated my previous movement as well as the choreographic and teaching values that informed these bodily expressions.

This shift of practice led me to facilitating a piece that would share a story, a passage through time and space, that produced a democratic environment where both performers and audience members experienced a transformational understanding in migration and identity. The undertaking of the creation of *Paseo* was at times overwhelming, however it revealed insight about how I learn through lived experiences, and how I could share this knowledge as a pedagogue, the lived experience, or embodiment in a performance, becomes an informal site of learning and form of resistance.

This document provides an inside view on the investigative process that guided participants during the development of *Paseo*. It provides the initial background and context before *Paseo*, which examines the framework that drives my work as a salsa dancer, and highlights the ASU Dance program experiences that followed my transition from a mambo to a postmodern dancer. The document explores the backdrop of the beginning stages of researching for *Paseo*, marking the residency experiences in New York City and Havana, Cuba that dramatically shifted and expanded my creative process and pedagogical framework. It describes *Paseo* and the creative process—how the story came to be through somatic work, participatory movement practices, and collective narratives from the *Paseo* cast. Also, it reviews the post-conference *Paseo* performance and dialogue, which provided a social discourse on migration offered to performers and attendees at the “By the People” conference. Finally, the document concludes with the findings of *Paseo* from the methodology used to create an embodied experience performance where both performers and audience members gained understanding of migration and identity.



## CHAPTER 2

### MAMBO TO POSTMODERN CONTEMPORARY DANCE

Before telling the story of *Paseo*, it is helpful to provide context of the previous events and performances leading up to *Paseo* and its creation. Further understanding these past experiences will illuminate the motivation and innate curiosity that fuels my desire to learn and explore alternative ways of working. This chapter reveals the narrative of a mambo dancer that savors embodiment, embracing new movement styles, and diverse learning environments, initiating a wholehearted investigation into postmodern contemporary dance. By investigating forms of modern and postmodern dance, these styles offered understanding movement and the creative process presented in diverse learning environments. Furthermore, I felt that learning postmodern dance would provide new experiences towards challenging personal conventions in movement and choreographic process.

As a graduate teaching assistant, I was assigned to design and instruct ASU's first mambo course because of my 20-year background performing salsa in professional contexts. That led to ASU's first Latin Performance Ensemble group that performed mambo, cha cha, and Latin jazz choreographies around the state beginning spring 2015. I implemented on campus free bi-monthly salsa socials that were attended by students and the surrounding salsa community. These salsa socials gave students opportunities to dance in a safe environment that was exploratory and fun. While I am still active in teaching these courses and building community through dance, my life took a dramatic turn in response to an audition with Kimberly Bartosik the beginning of my second semester of my residency. The experience working with this New York-based artist and

the ASU faculty dance practitioners shifted my thinking in utilizing somatic, improvisational, and democratic classroom practices grounded in postmodern contemporary (PMC) dance, which were the beginning seeds of *Paseo*.

## **Movement and Creative Influences at Arizona State University**

### **Postmodern Contemporary Dance**

ASU's Dance program offers a postmodern contemporary track, which provides students a wide variety of specialists, pedagogues, and visiting artists who offer multiple approaches towards movement. Postmodern contemporary dancing was a departure from Latin dancing, and the thought of (my) relearning dance from a different perspective offered excitement and new challenges in dance. The postmodern contemporary movement track and residencies offered at ASU became the catalyst deviating from my previous experiences, and opened the space for *Paseo* to emerge.

As a graduate student, I made it a point to exhaust every available resource the program had to offer in learning postmodern contemporary dance. Mary Fitzgerald, ASU Associate Professor and previous member of Kei Takei's Moving Earth, exposed me to my first postmodern contemporary dance class that incorporated floor work, inversions and a wide range of kinesthetic explorations. Leanne Schmidt, faculty associate at ASU and director of Leanne Schmidt and Company, valued incorporating somatic practices, such as Pilates and yoga, into our warm-up phrases bringing awareness to the body. Jessica Rajko, ASU Assistant Professor and co-founder of urbanSTEW, added another experiential layer with somatic awareness that supported postmodern technique and movement quality.

## Contact Improvisation

Contact improvisation intrigued me when I first participated in the dance. I observed how social and participatory it was, very similar to Latin social dancing in the ability to create and honor the present. These similar approaches on how to invite the body to experience new relationships to gravity, to the floor, to itself, and other bodies, provided a new social dance experience. This experience opened the possibility for further investigation in postmodern contemporary by experimenting with movement in a similar social and participative environment.

In studying contact improvisation with Tim O'Donnell, an ASU alumnus, I developed greater clarity with the tools and principles associated with partner work and the social and democratic learning environment. Tim's use of bodywork, weight, and the floor, still resonate in my current movement practice. In Cynthia Novack's (1990) *Sharing the dance: Contact improvisation and American culture*, she notes in working with body mechanics of weight sharing, structure, sensing connection, gender roles become irrelevant (Novack, 2014). Contact improvisation became a new form of social dance for me. Cynthia Novack (2002) states contact improvisation symbolizes an egalitarian community in which everyone cooperates and no one dominates (p. 12). This connection between social dance and partner work that focused on listening and receiving, being present in the moment, and observing body physics in space opened new connections in democratizing dance.

### **Kimberly Bartosik Residency (ASU Residency, Spring 2014)**

After my first rehearsal with Kimberly, I knew instinctively that it was important I learn more about her approach towards movement and the creative process. In the first day of rehearsal, she facilitated unique body warm ups and movement explorations that were collaborative and focused on the body. Kimberly danced with Merce Cunningham as a principal dancer for over 10 years, and created her own dance company, Daela. She taught a movement style blended with virtuosic movement, embodying a raw, yet sophisticated form of dance. My body felt free and liberated from the departure from mambo's codified movement structure. Our warm up was group facilitated. Her use of ambient sound as music was a departure from having to be on specific musical count in mambo dance. I began to appreciate this new libortory understanding of dance.

Kimberly's creative process contrasted my previous mambo choreographic methodologies. Elements of release in my torso and pelvis, lengthening my arms and spine, grounded and weighted falls, were concepts I could incorporate into my own social dance. This was the very first time I experienced performance with no adherence with count. A mambo social dancer adheres to the musical patterns and changes in timing when performing or dancing socially. In Kimberly's piece, eliminating the need to choreography to musical counts developed individual agency with movement. Body awareness from my previous mambo background bridged the foreignness of her movement aesthetic. Kimberly's performance provided a new sensation, an aesthetic experience that provided a new perspective and appreciation with postmodern dance.

### **Rosemary Lee (ASU Residency, Spring 2015)**

In the early spring semester of 2015, Rosemary Lee's visit impacted me with her choreographic and pedagogical approach to making work that was meaningful and participatory in practice. Her interest revolved in making dance inclusive involving participant from multiple generations are represented. Her cast comprised high school, collegiate, and faculty dancers. Rosemary blended community building exercises that encouraged individual movement, partner work, and team building. She drew interest and inspiration from the desert topography, while working with the talents of her cast members. Her conceptual approach of constructing images from nature, such as the branches of the trees, halos surrounding bodies, and running rivers, brought a new creative choreographic tool that was visually stunning. Her passion to bring the best out of dancers and her leadership inspired me to become a better director and facilitator of dance.

These postmodern experiences provided by ASU's postmodern movement track and residencies provided space to explore and experiment with new alternative ways of movement and teaching environments. These experiences sparked the idea of creating my very own first postmodern contemporary dance performance. In creating my first postmodern performance, I knew elements of creating environments where everyone collaborated and felt validated were important. Before I could begin to make work for my thesis performance, there was still a need for further development in developing my own framework. The next chapter discusses this investigative phase with other artists in practice.

## CHAPTER 3

### INVESTIGATIVE CONTEXT

Prior to summer 2015, I began preparing how best to research ideas of choreography and movement that would fill an evening length show through a democratic choreographic process exploring migrational contexts through embodied movement. The idea of working with postmodern contemporary artists and experiencing their movement aesthetic and creative process intrigued me, and I decided to look into summer workshop programs in New York City. I felt I had the best chance of re-creating similar learning experiences in workshop/resident environments, such as those with ASU residents Kimberly Bartosik and Rosemary Lee. I noticed three workshops/residencies that excited me. The first being the New York University's Tisch Department of Dance summer residency that featured six local modern contemporary dance companies in New York City, the Trisha Brown two-week repertoire and technique workshops, and the Danza Contemporanea de Cuba two-week Afro-Modern Contemporary intensive in Havana, Cuba. I decided to apply for all three residencies and intensive workshops to explore new ways of movement and creating for *Paseo*.

#### **New York University's Tisch School of the Arts Summer Residency**

In 2015, a week before the summer classes began in New York University's Tisch Department of Dance, I received notice that I had been accepted to the school and would be able to sign up for the dance departments' six-week residency. When the Tisch summer residency came to my attention, I saw the perfect opportunity to learn from six different modern dance companies, six different technique and choreographic processes. The resident dance companies included: Bill T. Jones Company, David Dorfman, Urban

Bush Women, Jodie Melnick, Tiffany Mills, and Ronald Brown's Evidence. The days comprised of ballet technique for two hours in the morning, followed by the dance companies' contemporary technique class, ending with choreography workshop leading to a showing that Friday. A week before the program started, I bought my plane ticket, reserved my housing for the months of June and July, and embarked on my journey into the contemporary dance world in New York City.

### **Bill T. Jones and Continuous Replay**

The first week came started off pretty quick with Bill T. Jones and learning his classic repertoire work, Continuous Replay. Erick Montes Chavero, principal dancer for the company, guided us through the week learning all 46 shapes and phrases Arnie Zane devised as a solo for himself back in 1977. When Arnie Zane and Bill T. Jones collaborated together, the gay stigma that existed in at that time was still high. Arnie devised 46 shapes and phrases integrated with phrase inserts and parameters dancers could choose throughout their own journey, empowering the performer to make their own decisions in the performance. This was the first time I had been exposed to a structure that composed of learning phrases that featured the body's effort as the main character and narrative. The following journal excerpt helped inform me of the possibilities of devising choreographies for *Paseo* with gestures and composition that both empowered performers and illuminated the body.

The last round is one I will never forget. All dancers supporting the clock,  
a. running the 45 shapes supported by each other, each breath, each shape.

I feel Patrick's breathe and delivery of movement fill my body with intense

energy and fever. I can feel the audience holding their breath as they witness a moving freight train pile through the space with completeness and close as we make our final 39 turn, last stretch of 5 more gestures as we turn one last time for our “Its done” karate chop lunge!

The feeling of being a part of such history, such contextual meaning

Arnie and Bill must have felt in the 70s and 80s being a homosexual and finding a clock that ticked in a world of judgment, of critique, of foreignness, all tied into the sense of community, the group built in 20 minutes is overwhelming.

The courage, conviction, the freedom one must feel to give oneself the right to be individual, and supported by the company one cannot replicate. (Olarde, 2015)

The experience with Bill T. Jones and company provided a structure of how one can prime the body in a contemporary dance technique class directly leading towards the choreography. In Erick Montes Chavero’s (principal dancer for the company) technique classes, he shared with us warm-up exercises that explored breath, movement on the floor, and group exercises that brought a unique connectivity and awareness amongst each other. Erick’s values were reflected in each of his phrases. His values that resonated with me were individuality, connection to group, connection to oneself and the ground, the concept of no right or wrong, but simply being present with each other. I appreciated these values, and knew that in making *Paseo*, the movement would directly affect the values conveyed and shared amongst my dancers and myself. These values of connecting with breath, the earth, and trusting each other without judgment, in efforts to create *Paseo*’s community.



## **David Dorfman Dance Company**

I really enjoyed David Dorfman's aesthetic style exhibited throughout his dancers. He was extremely approachable, available, and one characteristic as a resident artist I admired was his ability to remember everyone's names, including my own. While David and his principal dancers rotated teaching modern technique throughout the week, movement was quite grounded on floor work and inversions. His movement was extremely physical and athletic in using upper body to sustain lower body movement in the air and throughout the space. I had the pleasure to work with Carl Flink, who is one of David's principal dancers and a professor of dance at the University of Minnesota. Carl developed a new choreography with our group from using a combination of compositional strategies of setting his own choreography, while guiding us through our own improvisational choreography that would be later used in our piece. Carl adores using text in shows, and lead us through spoken word exercises that were used in conjunction with group movement that utilized time and space. I appreciated using our own personal commentary as text for the piece, which added an intimate touch to our showing. Over time, I observed how a resident could utilize multifaceted approaches towards setting choreography, and his ability to piece together various compositional tools from both choreographer and performer provided an inclusive way to create dance.

## **Urban Bush Women**

Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and her dance company, Urban Bush Women, left a different experience compared to Bill T. Jones and David Dorfman. Jawole and her principal dancers valued community and engagement as being of highest priority, one

that was exhibited throughout the choreographic process. Jawole mentioned the shift as artists in residence and how we must move from a perspective of privilege to a place of engagement. Jawole's warm-ups were not the traditional somatic or corporeal stretches, they were stretches of the mind and voice that provided dancers with opportunities to be vulnerable and trusting of each other. We played with vocal exchange exercises that mirrored and mimicked each others' sound, posture, gestures, and movements. They were fast paced, testing our ability to react and create within seconds notice. These crafted warm-up exercises also created community within the group, allowing dancers to listen and respond to each other with commitment. It is easy to see how these values of community and engagement translate to her dancers embodying a commitment of ownership of their own bodies, their minds, and their voices. Jawole and her artistic philosophy regarding how dance is created and shared amongst the community resonated with me from a public pedagogical framework, and from a directorship point of view, her passion was lived amongst all her dancers.

### **Jodie Melnick**

Jodie's weeklong experience with her dancers proved to be the start of understanding how compositional elements of choreography and concentrated research tied together the values and concepts taught during technique and choreography class. Jodie was specific about her use of objects, such as using a knife with her movement, and observing how her body interacts with the dangerous object. Her values of pushing the boundaries of theatre space and building motifs with her hands and gestures really resonated with me. We warmed up with improvisational movement exercises that

challenged us to go internal and external, working with what we do not normally do and going deep in what we routinely do. With our choreography class, the structure was quite different from the previous experiences. Our group learned seven phrases taught by one of her principal dancers, composed in fifteen different sequences meant to explore theatre space and transitional chaos. This exploration in theatre space created a task that was intentional, brought awareness of spatial relationships and movement rhythms, and more importantly, discovered a new way of migrating through space with specific pathways in mind for *Paseo*. I wrote this excerpt in my journal:

I am optimistic about my transition into modern dance. The show went really well. The piece wasn't about learning the phrases, it was about spatial awareness, complexity, connection with each other and awareness of chaotic-ness. Jodie wanted us to embrace and acknowledge the chaos, but also have an experience as well. (Olarate, 2015)

### **Tiffany Mills**

My experience with Tiffany Mills and her dance company inspired the way I could create *Paseo*. She was gracious in sharing with us her creative process in how she devises work. Her dance company gets into the studio, and with every rehearsal, they improvise. These improvisations are structured; however, their warm-up is based up on sequenced improvisations that capture the body in its present and real time state. She records these sessions, and observes how the collective body moves, what shapes and designs are being created, and what common theme or motif is being shared. This becomes the sketch book from where she utilizes the dancer's embodiment and

recognizes the narratives that are present. These explorations in rehearsal mirror her technique classes, where warm-ups consist of explorations with weight, re-organizing body parts, and connections points with the floor another body surfaces. Her connection of her values in respecting and honoring the body tied to her previous dancing experience as a Trisha Brown dancer. Her improvisational scaffold in class consisted of solo and partner improvisation across the floor, use of playful spatial awareness and pause as parameters, and adding additional parameters that warmed up our mobility, our connectivity, and our creativity with each other. Her attentiveness in building structures and deconstructing them with our bodies, learning about how we build them and how we destroy them, as a binary investigation, captured my attention. She explored how our own systems were already inherent in our bodies, which were being constantly reproduced and conditioned by our society. Our bodies were the gateway to being informed about our community and what was happening. This social sensitivity was alluring and provided a social commentary that made her work more than just exploring movement and space. Inspired after Tiffany's residency experience, I sketched my very first framework of *Paseo*, which included a breakdown of concepts and narratives, offered by creative tools and compositional sequences that could support the piece (see Appendix A).

### **Evidence and Ronald Brown**

Evidence was the last resident dance company at NYU Tisch. By the sixth week, I had a better understanding of what to expect about how companies teach their own technique in preparation towards their movement style and aesthetic. I was anticipating my week with Evidence in that I was curious how Ronald Brown integrates

contemporary dance with African-stylized movement. In their performance, I noticed Ronald uses a mix of both dancing on the beat and off the beat. He employs space and multiple facings to create flow and movement in the space. A lot of my reflection notes described how spatial relations on stage were used, but particularly how he maneuvered and staged transitions. He is a storyteller in his pieces, using African-like movement integrated with contemporary to portray themes with cultural and historical narratives. He recently was selected in a two year Brooklyn Academy of Music funded collaboration with Cuba, called CubaProject, where he co-collaborated work with a fellow Cuban dance company. This type of collaboration was of extreme interest, considering within a month I would be traveling to Cuba myself to hopefully integrate Afro Cuban inspired movement into my practice. The company has its contemporary practice set in their technique, however I noticed the use of undulation throughout the body that integrated full body release and contraction. The main takeaway from Evidence was crafting my own warm-up phrases that could prepare dancers with the necessary body articulations of shape and form, with release and contraction.

### **Trisha Brown Dance Company Intensive**

Once the New York University Tisch Department of Dance summer residency concluded, the following week began the start of a new two-week intensive workshop taught by Trisha Brown's principal dancers and residency program. This workshop proved to be the full articulation and synthesis of constructive methodology and movement research that increased my confidence and awareness of choreographic possibilities. Trisha was one of the founding members of the pioneer 1960s dance collective Judson Church who radically questioned dance aesthetics in their performances

and weekly discussions. They rejected the codification of both ballet and modern dance. They also discovered a cooperative method for producing dance concerts, and who wanted the freedom to experiment in a familiar space that was easily accessible (Banes, 1983).

I was able to examine first-hand her process working in cycles. Each one of her pieces built upon research questions that layer upon each other, taking one, two, three years to construct. We learned “Set and Reset,” part of Trisha’s investigative movement research on unstable molecular structure cycles composed of movement vocabulary that begin with the words of ‘S’: sexy, sequential, seamless, silky, sensual. Each dancer is on the same phrase, acting as independent molecules and overlaying each other with the same material, sharing the same impulses. We learned a “spill” phrase that could be inserted into the overall piece, and how the piece incorporates a simple direction, with choice selections that are instinctually, and can be reorganized. There is a thrill knowing the full piece, however understanding that with a “caller” at the helm calling the directions forward, reverse, or spill, the unanticipated, can change the molecular structure of the composition and performance experience. I understood what Trisha was trying to do from my own observation. The experience became about the performing bodies, moving together systematically, yet deviating from its natural progressions from either a call or from an alternative spill. Her principal dancers, Stewart and Celia, knew this and prepared us accordingly with warm-ups designed to bring awareness to improvisational structures, somatic awareness, and community building tools and exercises that promoted sensitivity to listening, being in space and relationship to each other. These “layers of work” created another structure to work from, one that incorporated lineups, flanking,

sequencing, and landmarks in improvisation. This week was a true blessing, not just as a participant, but as an observer. We watched videos of old Trisha Brown rehearsals, how Trisha built improvisational phrases, with her principal dancers in the background mirroring her movements. We watched their dancers in “lab” mode, and really understood how it meant to be a professional in your craft. Trisha used video recordings as a way of documenting movement and research, watching, and editing the movement that would become instrumental parts of her next choreography.

### **Danza Contemporanea de Cuba Intensive**

In summer 2014, I had the pleasure of meeting Noibis Licea at the Alvin Ailey School in NYC. He was an original member of the Danza Contemporanea de Cuba, Cuba’s premiere modern dance company. Fidel Castro decided to send some of Cuba’s finest dancers to New York to learn the various styles of contemporary dance, in the hopes upon their arrival, they would incorporate their learning into Cuba’s movement expression that was a combination of movement influenced by its people of African, Spanish, and indigenous origins. This style incorporates elements of Martha Graham, Anna Sokolow, and Merce Cunningham with their rich movement heritage of Afro-Cuban diasporic style. Ramiro Guerra, the father of the Cuban technique, or *tecnic cubana*, was appointed as director of the Department of Modern Dance within the Teatro Nacional in Havana (John, 2012, p. 43.) The department was charged to define that which is Cuban, linking the national image of Castro’s regime and the visceral power of dance (John, 2012, p. 43.)

In the two weeks living in Havana, I could sense the richness of culture in the Teatro Nacional. Our schedule involved two hours of morning *tecnic cubana*, led by one

of their principal dancers, followed with two more hours of ballet cubana or folklorico. Those two first hours of technique were exhilarating, in that the structure was repetitious in nature. Technique class is the daily foundation of a life in dance, and Ramiro Guerra knew that the structure for technique class would become the blueprint for training dancers. The tecnica cubana class included a warm-up, floor work and/or barre, complex combinations and across the floor exercises, all danced to a mix of rumba and traditional music, played live. (John, 2012, p. 99.) In the studio, the dancers were free, free to move, express, connect with their music, their ancestors, and live their dreams. The workshop structure supported the training of physique and athleticism in movement aesthetic and quality. My teachers demanded perfection, discipline, and rigor. Dance and training was the one thing they could control.

Outside the studio walls of the Theatre Nacional, the realism of communism in full view radiated with cynicism about the government, the faulty infrastructure or lack of inventory for food, amenities, and other accessible products we take for granted. My living quarters were simple, quaint, and luxurious in Cuban's standards. Francisco, the owner of the home, gave me the do's and don'ts on the island, transportation, and areas to avoid in the big city. It was depressing in a sense, such a beautiful island and culturally rich city, and yet there was a gloom over people's eyes when they knew I was American. There was a feeling of resentment, and disgust at times, that 90 miles from Havana, life was much different in Miami. This interplay of social and cultural life both in the studio and outside of the studio was transmitted in the dance. I felt their way, I felt their struggle, and I prayed for my safety to go home. However, I prayed for them as I left the island, that the people may find the freedom soon that we have here in the United States.



## CHAPTER 4

### *PASEO AND ITS CREATIVE PROCESS*

My two weeks in Cuba are completed, and I am more convinced that I am extremely blessed for my family, way of life, quality of living, and freedoms we hold true in the U.S. Even more so, I am deeply grateful for the sacrifice my grandmother made 50 years ago for moving from Colombia to New York. That made it possible for her, her family, my mom, my sister and I, my nephews and nieces to be free. Free of fear. Free to decide. Free to be individual. Free to be. (Olarate, 2015)

Coming back from Cuba, and having three days before the start of rehearsals for *Paseo*, I realized Cuba had transformed me. I stepped off the plane with a couple pesos, nearly broke for not being able to use my debit card, living off \$300 for two weeks. I have given my clothes and valuables, except for my phone and computer, to my Cuban friends. The country had stripped all the luxuries we take for granted here in the U.S.; my use of a ATM, food being scarce upon supply, no commercial grocery stores, sense of security, etc. My mother told me after I returned home that she lighted candles at church and prayed daily for my health and safety, knowing these risks. Cuba stripped away all my conditional habits and layers of Western civilization, and introduced me to communism. My sense of home, liberties, family, self, all these intersections were threatened, yet I felt liberated knowing I could live in this difference. I had learned how to devise strategies of listening, observation, and adaptation to new surroundings and cultural norms.

Due to this profound experiential influence, I was left thanking my grandmother for immigrating to the United States, and questioning how my own migration patterns in life were tied into my past story. I concluded that *Paseo* would be an investigation in migrational bodies through space and time, and was curious if by examining one's own personal stories on immigration or migration to new environments, one could find deeper understandings of self and connection to others. What could this research reveal about self-awareness and identity? It became clear that the creation of *Paseo* would be a collaborative effort from committee members and peers.

### **Human Migration**

Brettell and Hollifield (2015) noted at the beginning of the twenty-first century in the United States, the immigrant population stood at a historic high of 40 million, which represented 12.9 percent of the total population (intro). Adding to the increased population of first and second generation, Americans accounted for 24.5 percent of the U.S. population. It is projected to rise to 36.9% of the population by 2025 (Brettell, Hollifield, 2015). The United States, as well as other developed countries in Europe and other continents, have become multinational societies due to admittance of foreign workers, refugees as “guest workers,” and other migrating populations that contribute to the complexity of the migration. Whether there was a migration crisis during the performance of *Paseo* still remains to be seen, what is clear is that we are living in an age of migration (Castles and Miller, 2009).

Sociologist Kevin Dunn (2010) states that migration research has always been about bodies (p. 1). The field of migration concerns the movement of people across space

(Dunn, 2009). Writers have defined migration in the following terms: we define migration as the physical transition of an individual or a group from one society to another (Mangalam, 2015, p. 8). Reviewing the process of international migration JJ. Mangalam (2015) writes: The emigrant leaving his native land breaks ties with his people, and with the goals and practices of his home culture. The immigrant entering his adopted land establishes new ties, comes to accept new values; yet he contributes something himself to the new culture. And whatever his direction, the migrant is caught up in the larger problems which confront both native and foreigner (p. 9).

Paseo looked at contributing to the discourse of migration by its own personal interpretation of the migrational experience, as well as the international emigrant, or immigrant.

I was curious if one could devise a performance that brought to life the migrational experience from the perspective of an immigrant's story, which was one that closely resembled my own personal story. In migration research, there were multiple theories and frameworks that attempted to explain migration and its various stages. I selected two frameworks that modeled migrant behavior and its effects. Framing migration in terms of social and cultural processes aided in devising free-writing prompts explicated by *Paseo* performers.

### **MECA model (Multidimensional, Ecosystemic, Comparative Approach)**

The MECA model provides a framework for understanding the experiences of migration and acculturation, the changed ecological context, and issues related to the family life cycle and family organization (Walsh, 2012). Migration is a massive

individual and family transition in time and space. Celia Felicov (2014) describes in her book, *Latin Families in Therapy*, the transition of migration as one of loss and disarray due to the loss of language, separation of loved ones, the emotional vacuum left where “home” used to be, the loss of community, and lack of understanding of how institutions work (p.17). Immigrants were rendered vulnerable, isolated, and susceptible to stress. Immigrants hoped that their sacrifice would provide a better life for their family. She also described the counter experience. In the counter experience of migration, one was open to possibilities of a better life pending if one can sustain surviving in the new environment. Immigrants learned new bonds, while they constructed new lives and partially reinventing themselves. Indeed, the study of the immigrant experience offers fertile ground to consider and identify what helps people rebound from crisis and maintain hope, as well as what risks may challenge their resolve (Falicov, 2014). Falicov’s MECA framework provided explanation on the migrant experience from a social justice and cultural perspective. This context became the inquiry to discover *Paseo*’s interpretation of the migration experience through embodied movement.

### **Family Systems Theory**

General family systems theory provides a useful perspective for examining the impact of immigration on a family’s life cycle (Hong, 2008, p.28). George K. Hong (2008) states in “Impact of Immigration on the Family Cycle” that migrant families use morphostasis and morphogenesis as two key concepts that help define major forces determining family behavioral patterns (p. 28). Morphostasis, also referred to family homeostasis, is a regulating mechanism that families use to maintain stability, order, and

control in the family (Hong, 2008). This regulating mechanism helps families cope with unpredictable deviations during premigration, migration, and post-migration phases (Hong, 2008.) Families use this coping technique to establish balance, resist change, or maintain predictable patterns of growth in responding or reacting to conditions in the new environment. Morphogenesis is focused on the growth and development of a family, by adopting to new regulatory behaviors (family rituals, routines, and problem solving episodes) as well as adapting to newly introduced behavioral patterns (2008). This drive towards acculturation may also be threatening to the survival of the family unit, which struggles to maintain a balance between the tension of individual growth and maturation (2008). Tension related to individual growth and maturation in combination with the experience of struggling to find balance with these forces, was a narrative I wanted to explicate and re-construct in *Paseo*.

### **From Theory to Creative Practice**

The MECA and family systems theory provided guides on how to frame the understandings of migration and the human experience as an immigrant, refugee, migrant worker, etc. in *Paseo*. The theories describe the experiences I feel as a first generation born American, which provided the social and cultural factors experienced by our family. Could this knowledge produced from my own experiences in relation to these theories be translated into a dance performance?

### **Free-write Reflections**

Rehearsals began with free writing prompts that generated knowledge in the form of reflections. These prompts were derived from the MECA Continuities and Changes

Model that describes factors associated with migration and acculturation, ecological context, family life cycle, and family organization. Migrational reflection prompts integrated social and cultural factors of migration that are shared amongst all humans: elements of transit, separations and unifications, assimilation, uprooted, isolation, transitions, rituals, family life and structure, community, absence of family and community. Family Systems Theory provided a framework that described the transformative experience of the immigrant family. This theory cultivated the idea of personal change and adaptation towards maturation and growth. Reflections were conducted before dancers moved in order to access experiential knowledge of this concept as it was connected with our personal experiences.

These written reflections were instrumental in accessing stored knowledge that provided a starting point in creating meaningful movement. Joan Davis, somatic teacher in Authentic Movement, explores the interrelationship between movement and language in many ways, including; vocal utterances as part of movement expression, spoken and written reflection following movement, text or sounds informing movement practice, facilitation through language and touch (Meehan, 2015). The performers' reflections honored and validated the individual voice on migration. After the reflections, open dialogue provided space for ideas and meanings to be exchanged. This writing and reflective experience primed the *Paseo* dancers to explore our embodied migrational movement (See Appendix B for Free Writing).

### **Somatic Practices**

The second part of each rehearsal integrated the use of somatic warm-ups to build

awareness with our bodies and each other. I observed many of the dance companies from my New York experiences used somatic warm-ups as means of priming the body before engaging the creative process. Thomas Hanna (1986) defined Somatics as: “the art and science of the inter-relational process between awareness, biological function and the environment, all three factors being understood as a synergetic whole” (p. 3). The field of somatics includes biofeedback, relaxation techniques, yoga, breathing exercises, Bartienieff, and Laban movement exercises. This body of knowledge focuses on the disciplines of breathing, feeling, and listening to the body. Each person was guided to pay attention to bodily sensations emerging from within by moving slowly and gently in order to gain deeper awareness of the self that moves. In *Paseo*, dancers entered various yoga, Bartienieff and Laban movement exercises, and bodywork that provided experiences in diverse qualities of touch, emphatic verbal exchange, and complex movement experiences that created a connection with the self and their surroundings. Somatic movement in dance validates the dancer's personal and physical experience. In *Paseo*, somatic movement honored the body, the personal experience shared by the individual, and those sharing in the experience. Somatic movement also paved the way towards understanding our internal body structures. For example, we focused on how breath, torso, and/or pelvic support various qualities of movement.

### **Improvisational Practices**

My previous works were constructed with a singular approach towards one creator of choreography and allowing music to dictate what movement would transpire. In working with previous dance companies in NYC this past summer, I observed a

radical shift from my traditional perspective in the creative process by some of the artists. This shift included the utilization of improvisational techniques instead of set compositional choreography and narratives, and the prioritization of body movement over following predetermined musical scores.

Contact and structured improvisational strategies led towards our investigation and interpretation of migration. This convergence of context and movement provided the ideal movement environment for *Paseo* to experiment with migrational context experienced by those individual and immigrant families. First, contact improvisation technique centered around performers experiencing movement from the inside, focusing primarily on the body. The dancers learned how to sense their body's changing configurations and experience kinesthetic awareness. The results were illustrated in how the performers executed the newly acquired skills in the way of moving. This allowed performers to use the body as a site of exploration that is structural, yet is constantly changing in configuration; similar to the transformation of migrational people. Second, in Cynthia Novack's (1990) *Sharing the dance: Contact improvisation and American culture*, she notes that contact improvisation movement structure embodied social ideologies of the early 1970s which rejected traditional gender roles and social hierarchies. Improvisation has no gender codification, according to Novack. In working with body mechanics of weight sharing, structure, sensing connection, gender roles become irrelevant (Novack, 2014). Also, it raises the relationship with cultural ideas to social institutions and movements (Novack, 2014). Contact improvisation embodies issues which must be negotiated, concepts and practices of physical skill, art, mind, body, touch, movement, play, sexuality, freedom, and difference (Novack, 2014). Lastly,



improvisation symbolizes an egalitarian community in which everyone cooperates and no one dominates. In *Paseo*, the performers became collaborators in the creation of movement. Improvising democratizes the process in creating movement and distributes power and authorship across its participants.

For the first four weeks of rehearsing *Paseo* in September, we focused on the following task-based improvisations that explored space and time in relation to MECA's model of migrational experiences. We worked from a scale progression method, starting with exploring movement that explicated their free-writes on migration. These solo improvisations were the beginning compositions for their performance solos in *Paseo*. We progressed with partners and trios, working with exploring body structures in space. We explored using our own body structures as surfaces of exploration, which developed the skillset of using weight and touch as connective tools for partner work.

The investigative process - which featured both somatic and contact improvisation - aided in developing skills towards embodied movement and created a participatory environment where everyone's movement and voice mattered. Somatic awareness and improvisation provided a fundamental approach that valued feeling and sensing body movement over choreography. By connecting to one's senses and displaying this feel through movement, *Paseo* becomes the feel of the journey into the migrational unknown.

### **Setting the Improvisational Score**

Through our improvisation explorations, I observed how the movement across space and time carried the migrational content of our choreography. First, the movement had associated groupings of migration, whether be individual or grouping of bodies.

These movement groupings are seen in human migration where migrants experience the journey alone or with their families. These pathways included diagonal journeys, across the floor patterns, and linear and non-linear approaches. Along with these pathways, when creating group structures, certain bodies initiated the constructions of the structures, while others fulfilled the role of support within the structure. These structures revealed how we build and support as well as lead and follow within structures/organizations in our *Paseo* dance community, similar migrational experiences of those family relatives or friends who help migrants establish in the new county.

Improvisational structures created by *Paseo* dancers included a wall, body murals and moving frescos that would later represent as visual metaphors of geographic borders. These borders reminded us of the border crossings here in Arizona, which separate many families along the United States and Mexico border. Other borders associated in the migrational experience included social and cultural barriers such as language, elements of racism or lack of resources. These improvisational movement patterns conveyed MECA migrational framework experiences, and more importantly, the dancers were beginning to embody the migrational experience.

### ***Paseo* Showings and Feedback**

The feedback provided by committee members within the creative process helped in providing clarification, repositioning, and re-evaluation of strategies and tools implemented towards the making of *Paseo*.

The first comment, which came from a committee member's email, was a pivotal one.

I want to suggest that at your rehearsal today you take yourself out as a dancer and engage with your work as a choreographer. Being a choreographer is a categorically different experience than being a dancer. You need to make that shift... Now you need to begin applying choreographic structures: time, space, energy, rhythm, repetitions, interruptions, etc. You may think you have done that already - but you have not done it choreographically. Stand back. Be brave. Make big graphic changes, radical, try brand new ideas to see more possibilities. Try painting the stage space with broad unpredictable brush strokes of movement to keep viewers engaged and guessing. (Landborn, 2015)

I resisted against this idea at first. Admittedly, I felt the need to perform as a way of honoring my family's immigrant experience. However, my chair response had said it best in her feedback provided.

We are extremely excited about your work but agree it is compositionally weak. At the root of composition is relationship seen through configurations such as solos, duets, trios, quartets, etc. While evident in the dance, you must use your artistic eyes to shape those relationships with even greater purpose and specificity. (Vissicaro, 2015)

It was clear that by stepping out, I could begin to see where the composition needed strengthening, and make real time changes as they occur. Additionally, by being in the piece, I could not observe relationships of the dancers in connection to our concept of the migrational experience. Once I removed myself in the next rehearsal, the feedback provided by my committee members unfolded. I noticed the ambient music chosen produced a monotone movement quality, and dictated how the dancers approached their

dance. The dancers became imprisoned by the sound, lending itself to small, if any, variation in rhythm. With regards to composition, there the piece lacked a refinement in movement crafting where composition would provide variety and opposition towards migration. After stepping out from the performance, and synthesizing feedback provided by the committee and from my own observations, I re-evaluated my role within the process as a facilitator in shaping, sculpting, guiding *Paseo* dancers in developing their migrational story. As my committee chair member mentioned in her feedback,

Yet it is so incredibly difficult to create without having a director's perspective—like Rosemary Lee. Using various prompts to inspire movement exploration, she discovered how the dancers' "resources" informed the choreography, which meant composing from outside the dance not within. You must do that too. (Vissicaro, 2015)

This transition from dancer/creator to facilitator provided the space to discover the dancers' "resources" while empowering the cast to make *Paseo* their story.

### **Lighting and Costume**

*Paseo* was my first piece to light, and in preparation, I enrolled in Production Design with ASU Production Manager Carolyn Koch, to learn lighting design basics. In our class, we devised several lighting production shows to study various lighting options and how those decisions can add additional depth or support to the subject on stage. What I realized is that in lighting *Paseo*, movement came first. Lighting would support the movement and overall concept of migration. I met with Carolyn to discuss how we could use light in a way to create a passage through time and space within *Paseo*. We devised a

lighting concept that fulfilled and exceeded my expectations in supporting *Paseo*. We created lighting that represented the hours of the day from dawn to dusk, starting from early morning as the dancers traveled the waters, to dawn when they arrived on land, to day when faced with borders and boundaries, and night time when confronted with struggle and resistance. I left very satisfied knowing that the lighting concept supported the concept of time and passage and created new environments in the performance space, supporting the overall journey of the dancers.

### ***Paseo* Soundscape**

As my roommate reflected after our final performances, the music had its own journey, or *Paseo*. In the past, music has always been important to my artistic identity. My past choreographies were dictated based on what song was chosen, and narratives were based on the song's expression and lyrical content. The first music selected was somewhat ambient in nature. It lacked many qualities of tempo, contrasting rhythms, and dynamic variety in sound composition. After stripping the original track and focusing on just movement, I decided to create my own sound score the week before tech with the help from ASU Instructional Specialist, Bill Swayze.

The purpose of the soundscape would support the dancers by providing an auditory environment of the imaginary world through which they would travel. In creating this score, I researched nature and electronic soundscapes to select those that would best create this auditory world. The first draft of the score was based on the seven sequences of *Paseo*, where I choose a combination of sound clips of ocean waves crashing, lightning, church bells, construction machinery, and percussive beats.

I pushed the score further, with both the second and final draft of the sound by incorporating elements of repetition, reversing, and dissonance to increase tempo or build tension. The very unique music collaboration with Bill produced a sound score that was very organic and of the earth, rhythmic based, and featured tension and distortion to provide an open canvass for interpretation, both by the dancers and the audience members.

### **Migration Narrative**

*Paseo* had various movement sequences that were very identifiable with the migrational experience, however it needed further defining in compositional structure and layering. By identifying these sequences as chapters to a larger story, it provided clarity on the framework of how *Paseo* related with the narrative of migration. These interconnected sequential vignettes later developed into the journey of this family, this tribe of dancers, voyaging to new land.

The first vignette, *Migration Transit*, focused on the migration experience of displacement and transit. Five performers begin to travel through space, displaying their individual passage towards new land. Their movement quality were those of the ocean, which was accompanied with sounds of rolling waves. This voyage starts out individualistic by each dancer having their own personal intent for migration. During this transit, the audience sees the first signs of interconnectedness of the performers through moments of observation from either a group or solo perspective. These images of sails navigate across the floor, denoting the sails within us. Migration can be voluntary or involuntary, each differing whether being forced for many reasons, religious, political,

war related, and tram associated with the move (Falicov, 2014). Some families travel together as a couple, family or extended group, and has important implications for family connections and disconnections that affect outcomes and coping with the stresses of separation, reunification, or adaptation to the culture (Falicov, 2014). In the transition in between the first and second scene, we observe a violent storm, with intense movement crashing side by side, with fate uncertain as to await the next stage of the arrival.

The second vignette, *Arrival and re-Settlement*, looks at the challenges posed by migrants when leaving their home and once they arrived. New migrant challenges include language barriers, encountering a new culture, and negotiating how to respond to the new environment. In this scene, a performer witnesses this crisis in identity and responds in conviction and confronts the new land. The performers arrive, and experience being pulled and torn apart from “both worlds.” George Hong (2015) notes that in immigrants drive to acculturation, it results in a complex behavior where immigrant families draw upon their capacity to adopt new regulatory behaviors (i.e., family rituals, daily routines, and problem-solving episodes) as well as to adapt culturally familiar behaviors (p. 29). This concept of adopting and adapting, where the dancers are seen navigating through new space, one by one to their area of settlement, resolve the crisis of relocation, viewing the first glimpse of restabilization with unified movement as one group. During re-settlement, we see *Paseo* dancers support the falls through space, typical of those relatives, friends, or acquaintances who usually wait on the other side to help with work, housing, and guidelines of the new country (Falicov, 2014).

The third vignette, *Acculturation*, based its movement and images off the drive towards the immigrants’ family capacity to adopt and adapt new behaviors. We view the

first glimpses of ritual gestures relating of spiritualism, religious, and procreation. Migrants cannot transport physical and social landscapes, however belief systems reflected in religious and traditional medicine rituals have transportability (Falicov, 2014). The cultural identity they bring with them is represented in the type of households they recreate, traditions passed on to their children, the language they speak, the foods they cook, the friendships they form, the connections they keep with their country of origin, and the family and social rituals that evolve over time. A soloist in the same vignette experiences being re-rooted. The performer embodied what family systems theorists and practitioners have long known about the power of rituals to restore continuities with a family heritage and reaffirm a sense of cultural identity. (Falicov, 2014). This restoration and affirmation was embodied by the soloist. She was able to embrace this solo because she was born in America with family who immigrated from Jordan; she truly understood the experience of being re-rooted.

The fourth vignette, *Migration Borders*, dives into the relationship of separation and reunion. Transnationalism has come to refer to the movements, communications, and exchanges between people from emigration sources and their family and friends in destinations. The border created by the dancers becomes a performative embodied approach to transnationalism, where the transnational scene of being separated from the border goes between the binary of agency and structure, to what Thomas Faist (2010) longingly refers to as the in-between places of migration. Faist's research on migrants as transnational development agents analyzes the community, market, and state as master mechanisms of social order from an economic point of view. Faist brought into the discourse one of mobility and how it affects communities. It begs the question of who



was allowed mobility to leave and enter, immigrate or re-immigrate, to be included and excluded. *Paseo* invited the audience to explore in the multiple narratives of border crossings and issues against state powers and law.

The fifth vignette, *The Matriarch*, looks at family structure and tradition that honors the past, similar to memory rituals that tell stories about their countries, their past, recounting their saga. This scene specifically looks into triangles in families, coalitions involving grandmother, mother, child and other intermediate relatives that involve three generational households. Extended family transformations favor collectivistic narratives stemming from three-generational family lifestyles harbor internal obligations to help or support, such as providing economic, housing, or kinship care to those family members in need (Falicov, 2014). This scene unfolds from an image from my own grandmother, our matriarch, portrayed by our own ‘matriarch’ performer in *Paseo*, who provided support and guidance to her extended family in a form of a dress composed of the performers.

The last vignette, *Survival*, looked at the need for adapting in fear of extinction in the new environment which includes the economic, social, cultural and political structures of society (Valtonen, 70). Immigration families face a number of possible relational risks and contextual stressors of poverty, racism, and discrimination (Falicov, 2014). This scene shows us the final resolve of the journey taken by this family of dancers, and ends on a note of hope.

## CHAPTER 5

### SOCIAL DISCOURSE THROUGH PUBLIC PEDAGOGY

In mid-November, Daniel Schugurensky, Director of ASU's Social and Cultural Pedagogy program, asked if we could perform *Paseo* at the "By The People" Democracy Conference on December 5<sup>th</sup> as a post-conference event. This conference is the fourth of a series that started in 2003 at the University of Toronto, Canada, and was being hosted this year at ASU. The conference featured three areas of research and practice: participatory democracy, civic engagement, and citizenship education. Another intention for the conference was to bring together officials, educators, social activists, and students to make connections between the worlds of theory, research, policy and practice.

Dr. Schugurensky offered the possibility of hosting a discussion afterwards with the audience, offering space to dialogue about *Paseo* and human migration. This seemed like the perfect opportunity to showcase *Paseo* with a new audience and gain a deeper perspective about the message being communicated by the performance. What also excited me was the possibility to investigate further the idea of performance as a medium of public pedagogy. The performance becomes the informal educational site where the performer engages from the process of doing and learns through their lived experience.

The second showing of *Paseo: Post-Activity Conference Performance and Dialogue*, occurred on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015 at ASU's Margaret Gisolo Theater, with the question and answer session directly proceeding the show. After the performance of *Paseo*, attendees were notified that both the question and answer (Q&A) session would be video recorded and their responses could be used for potential data. The performance and Q&A were free and open to the general public. There were approximately 40-50

audience members in attendance for the performance, and approximately 25-30 attendees stayed to participate in the dialogue. The discussion was hosted and conducted by committee chair, Pegge Vissicaro. The Q&A lasted approximately 25-30 minutes.

On December 11, 2015, we received IRB approval to follow the protocol of the performer reflection questionnaire under the category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions), and *Paseo* Consent Form. Under the approved protocol, the research study invited *Paseo* dancers/performers/attendees to respond to three prompts that relate to rehearsals and performances of *Paseo* fall 2015. Participants had the right not to answer any question, and to stop participation at any time; they also must be 18 or older to participate. The responses to the post-performance questionnaire will be anonymous.

There were a total of five audience members who participated in the questionnaire, and all five of the performers responded to the interview questions. These questions included the following:

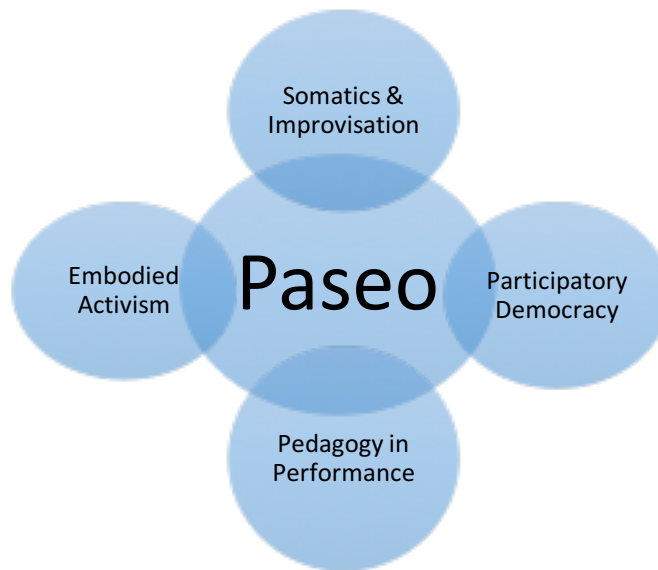
1. Describing your experience during the creative process (first rehearsal up to Emerging Artist Showings)
2. How would you describe your first interactions with your cast members, your role as a participant, and the intention of the show?
3. How did these relationships evolve during the course of the rehearsal process?

The answers provided from the discourse and performer questionnaire are integrated in the analysis of *Paseo* in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 6

### CHOREOGRAPHY AS RESEARCH

*Paseo*'s original inquiry looked at converging my previous dance world of mambo and my new experiences in the world of postmodern contemporary dance. However, what surfaced in the findings of *Paseo* was not a convergence of both worlds, but a deeper appreciation for how I approach the creative process and the performance experience. By analyzing this approach, what emerged was deeper understanding of the core values that I most highly regard in making work that is meaningful. *Paseo* exemplified the interrelation of these values. The following diagram demonstrates these values in practice, and how they supported the creative process and performance of *Paseo*.



## Somatics and Improvisation

In the creative process, somatic and improvisational practices laid the foundation towards participatory foundation and democratic spaces. Annie Kloppenberg (2010) mentions that improvisational methods invite the choreographer periodically to relinquish control during the process (p. 190). By relinquishing control of who was teaching whom, improvisation became the tool that opened space for the cast members to move freely and acknowledge their embodied movement as valid form of expression. The process becomes one of collective inquiry and discovery (Kloppenber, 2010, p. 191).

Free-writing, reflections, and working with the migration context promoted spaces for reflective discourse, which can be better understood as a process in which we actively dialogue with others to better understand the meaning of the experience (Schugurensky, 2001). These were some of the following performer statements with regards to their creative process experience.

*Paseo* was an experience that transformed my artist process. At ASU, we are taught to dance from a somatic perspective and truly listen to our bodies. This piece allowed me to focus in on that principle and develop my personal aesthetic while learning more about origins and emotions that come along with that (*Paseo* Performer 2, 2016).

Our rehearsals than transformed into creative explorations of space, our bodies, and our histories. We learned through movement and we researched our past together. My role in this process transformed into being a vessel for the giving of knowledge and honesty about my home and past, to the audience (*Paseo* Performer 1, 2016).

As an artist, I appreciated the improvisational scores at the beginning of each rehearsal. I feel that put me and the cast in the right mindset to be present in the place we were trying to convey (*Paseo* Performer 2).

Performer experiences related to the creative process surrounded concepts of honoring the body, learning from each other, and creating a democratic environment where everyone's voice and body was validated and necessary. They examined personal movement patterns that emerged through their interactions and relationships with each other. *Paseo* dancers became personally invested in the choreography they performed because it arose authentically from their own life experiences and movement exploration.

### **Participatory Democracy**

In this form of social learning, called participatory democracy, participants experience a transformative learning process that fosters a cohesive community exemplifying democratic attitudes and values, experiential learning (learning by doing), leadership and mentoring opportunities, and genuine care for the common good (Schugurensky, Mundel, and Duguid, 2013, p 11). The following performer responses reveal which creative process strategies informed their practice and overall experience.

In other rehearsals we used writing and our answers to questions that David posed to create movement. This personalized the movement and gave it significance.

Also, the personal research we did on our family history really connected us with the piece, the movement really changed after we did the family research. The piece became a part of the dancers (*Paseo* Performer 4).

David had a strong focus each rehearsal to listening to one another and how we communicate through movement. Much of my learning and processing happens through dialogue and David allowed for dialogue to occur and genuinely valued everyone's input. Each voice mattered whether in movement or vocally (*Paseo* Performer 3).

It was almost like we were working backward to understand something that already existed. We had a community and connection among us that already existed but in David's process we took time to recognize it. We had a journey and story to tell through movement that was in our bodies and through David's process he gave us the opportunity to tell that story (*Paseo* Performer 3).

I appreciate the freedoms we were given to learn about ourselves through each other's journey (*Paseo* Performer 4).

*Paseo's* inclusive choreographic process paved the way towards a democratic form of social learning. In *Paseo*, we were all each others teachers, each others students, and together collectively were the areas of investigation. The participatory environment allowed the *Paseo* cast to make their own connections. Everyone's understanding of migration contributed to the overall knowledge shared amongst the group.

### **Pedagogy in Performance**

Public Pedagogy is a theoretical concept fusing various forms, processes, and sites of education and learning beyond formal schooling. It involves learning in institutions, such as museums, zoos, and libraries; in informal educational sites such as popular culture, media, commercial spaces, and the Internet; and through figures and sites

of activism, including public intellectuals and grassroots social movements.” (Sandlin, 2011, p. 338).

Jennifer Sandlin, Associate Professor at ASU and instructor of the Public Pedagogy class offered at ASU, looks at various informal sites of learning, democratic education, and social activism pedagogical framework that challenges typical formal educational sites. This background informs my analysis of *Paseo*'s performance within the public pedagogical construct as an informal site of learning for the performers and performance.

Elizabeth Ellsworth's (2004) *Places of Learning* investigates pedagogy from the lived experience, privileging the bodies response in affect and sensation (p. 25) Ellsworth examines primary mediums as sites of pedagogy, whether they be architecture, public projections, exhibitions, or performance, and its force that creates the experience of the learning self, and the place that these designers give to pedagogy in there is a powerful place (Ellsworth, 2004, p. 25).

The act of performing *Paseo* became its own pedagogical experience where both the performers ventured into an unknown space, or transitional space, where one encounters shape, space, time, and objects with a pedagogical intent to experience. Because the performance of *Paseo* could never be replicated, and no moment was the same, the dancers found new ways of knowing in the performance that transformed self-experience, awareness, understanding, appreciation, memory, and social relations. The third and final question revolved around describing the performance experience, understanding the content, and presence in the performance space.



My aha moment had to be creating this piece with my family and heritage in mind, and then performance night seeing them all sit front row. There was a section where I was still and slowly moving, and I had time to look in all their eyes, and it was a moment of pure gratitude as I thought to myself, “this is why I am here” (*Paseo* Performer 2).

Every time I got on stage the experience was different. Additionally, the piece simply meant so much to me and, as stated before, was literally a piece of me, it represented (and still does represent) a piece of who I am today (*Paseo* Performer 4).

But I feel like it taught me that performance can be an active experience. As well as being movement that is well rehearsed and prepared it can also be full of live dialogue or negotiation and choice. This is really wonderful. To get to a point to trust yourself and those around you that you can walk on stage together and not know the exact outcome but that doesn't matter because you know how to succeed together (*Paseo* Performer 3).

In essence, *Paseo* becomes the vehicle in which the dancers come to know differently – creating the experience of the learning self by putting their inner thoughts, feelings, memories, fears, desires, and ideas in relation to outside others, events, history, culture, and socially constructed ideas. Ellsworth states that a performance becomes pedagogical when they together they create the potential to disrupt and refigure both inside and outside, both self and society (Ellsworth, 2005, p 38). As the facilitator of *Paseo*, the medium becomes a dynamic that creates the experience of an idea, of a way of making sense of self, the world, and self in the world

Elizabeth Ellsworth brings in D.W. Winnicott's notion of "Transitional Space" as the time and place out of which experiences of the learning emerge. This notion of "Transitional Space," or pragmatics of becoming, builds on Gilles Deleuze's theory of becoming, where "interrogative designs" offer audiences vehicles of transit across the porous boundaries between self and other, between inner and outer realities, and into a felt reality of relation (Ellsworth, 2005, p 17). *Paseo* offered performers a landscape of migrational movement through space and time, corporeally constructed shapes and images, and an organic/abstract sound scape that incited sensations that created conditions for potential learning experiences. It was in this transitional space where creative transformation existed for the dancers, a place where in the performance, the space of self-difference and the process of self-change emerged with an experience of learning self, their history, and an encounter of the future self.

### **Embodied Activism**

Phenomenological studies support the argument for the role that perception plays in understanding and engaging with the world. (Reynolds, n.d.). Embodied knowledge contradicts the Western intellectual tradition of privileging the mind over the body, thus, creating the body as a site of resistance against traditional modes of knowledge. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* claims that we are our bodies, and that our lived experience of this body denies the detachment of subject from object, mind from body, etc. (Merleau-Ponty, p. xii). He suggested the use of this 'mind' is inseparable from our bodily, situated, and physical nature (Reynolds, n.d.). He enriched the concept of the body to allow it to both think and perceive. This embodied state suggests that there

is no meaning which is not embodied, nor any matter that is not meaningful (Crossley, 1994). By honoring and privileging the body's intellect, it validates the body as a production site of knowledge.

In lieu of the relationship between dance and body, a dancers' body becomes an expression of knowing that draws attention to bodies as agents of knowledge in production (Albright, 1997). The dancer is unique among other media of artistic expression. Unlike the musician or singer, the dancer is her or his expression (Albright, 1997). The lived experience in dance can further our understandings of how social identities are formed and negotiated through bodily movement. Elizabeth Grosz (1994) suggests that lived experiences are always embodied, and that it in and through the body that people experience the world and develop consciousness. In this way, *Paseo* performers lived the migration experience through somatic awareness methodologies, improvisational movement and performance.

*Paseo* was the story—the journey of the dancers, and the journey for the audience members. The following excerpt is from one member of the *Paseo* cast who described how the piece was representative of her and family's journey during the Q&A dialogue session.

I feel that by being a part of this piece with David, that it wasn't about me anymore, it became more about the journey of my history, my parents, my ancestors – those who went on the journey, this piece was for them. And through them, I learned more about them, their struggle, about their experience, and who I am from that. (Marji, 2015)

*Paseo* reflected the embodied experience felt by those who journey through space and time facing the oppositional forces that bring pain and joy in the action of migration. Sandlin, Schultz & Burdick (2005) view performance as a form of activism, as critique, as critical citizenship, which in hindsight I recognize that *Paseo* had the potential of doing.

The content never meant so much to me as it did on performance day. After the show, I felt as if I had lived and explored the paths of my ancestors and the paths of the other dancers moving with me (*Paseo* Performer 1)

*Paseo*'s universal theme of migration became the vehicle for voice and activism for the performers, evident in this other performance response. The body symbolized the performer's individual stories and their movement gave space for audience members to produce their own narratives. One of the audience members who participated at the post conference discourse "By the People" had this to say what *Paseo* meant to her.

I'm an immigrant that came here at thirteen years of age. The beginning seemed like your alone in a way, and then you make your own experience, until later on, three of you, came over to help each other up. It felt like when people help you, you feel friends and family help you on your own journey, and at towards the end, I had the interpretation that when you immigrate wherever you go, you may go for a better job, or other reasons, your going to have your own individual experience apart from the others. That was my own interpretation. (Participant 4, Discourse Dialogue, 2015)

In Anca Giurchescu's article "The Power of Dance and its Social and Political Uses," she elaborates on the social aspects on dance, and how the dancer is the soul and

body of dance, He or She is the dance. The dancer becomes a very sensitive medium, able to express and transmit feelings, experiences and ideas, which, at a deep level of significance, are not verbally translatable (Giurchescu, 2001, p. 110). *Paseo* became the vehicle in which one dancer could question her identity of what is meant to be a Mexican American.

As I've grown up, I haven't noticed as much as I should of by this point, how my culture has affected my own personal experience. I didn't notice that until recently, a lot has been happening that I have begun to question who I am as a Mexican American. Having these experiences, this (*Paseo*) being one of them, that, for me, it helped set up a pathway in asking questions, of my family members, my background, and other people that don't ask similar questions that I do. It was a huge, it was amazing experience to perform it again, I was very happy because it feels good in my body, and it feels good to represent those ideas and represent those feelings that are in me, are in my DNA, my every movement as I am. (Morales, 2015)

*Paseo* became more than a performance or a thesis activity, it became a public statement through which we acknowledged our past, our present, and envisioning a hopeful future. The performance site in itself became a shared ownership of all who contributed to this spectacle of resistance. *Paseo* was an embodied and engaging way of bringing critical consciousness towards the hardships and realities of migration.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

The overall *Paseo* experience, from the beginning of its inception during the investigational phase, through the creative process, performances and post-performance, was a risk to learn about postmodern contemporary dance and create my first production in a style of dance with which I was unfamiliar. In the process, I learned about myself and the binaries that exist from an internal/external, mambo/postmodern, choreographer/craftsman, authoritarian/democratic, count based rhythms/soundscape, and plenty others. I have become more willing to bring others in the creative process. I value pedagogical opportunities for others to learn, and value the knowledge people bring. The learning of self, or becoming self, is a discovery that answers some of the questions I have about my motives and process. This discovery will be useful to know as I continue to investigate in the field of social dance.

Unpacking *Paseo* is still a process, and a learning continuum ceases to conclude. One of *Paseo*'s greatest contributions as artist and researcher has been discovering my own framework in making artwork that challenges the traditional conventions of dance as entertainment or spectacle, and by using dance as a vehicle towards transformational growth. *Paseo* provided a practice based research experience of investigating content generated from a group of dancers and bringing voice from implementing democratic pedagogical approaches to the creative process and performance as a means to empower others and create change. Integrating theory in practice, however complex and rigor in praxis, meets the call for future artists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to become engaged activists in

ways that uplifts our discipline, adds a new voice in the discourse, and counteracts the constructions of modernity for the preservation of humanity.

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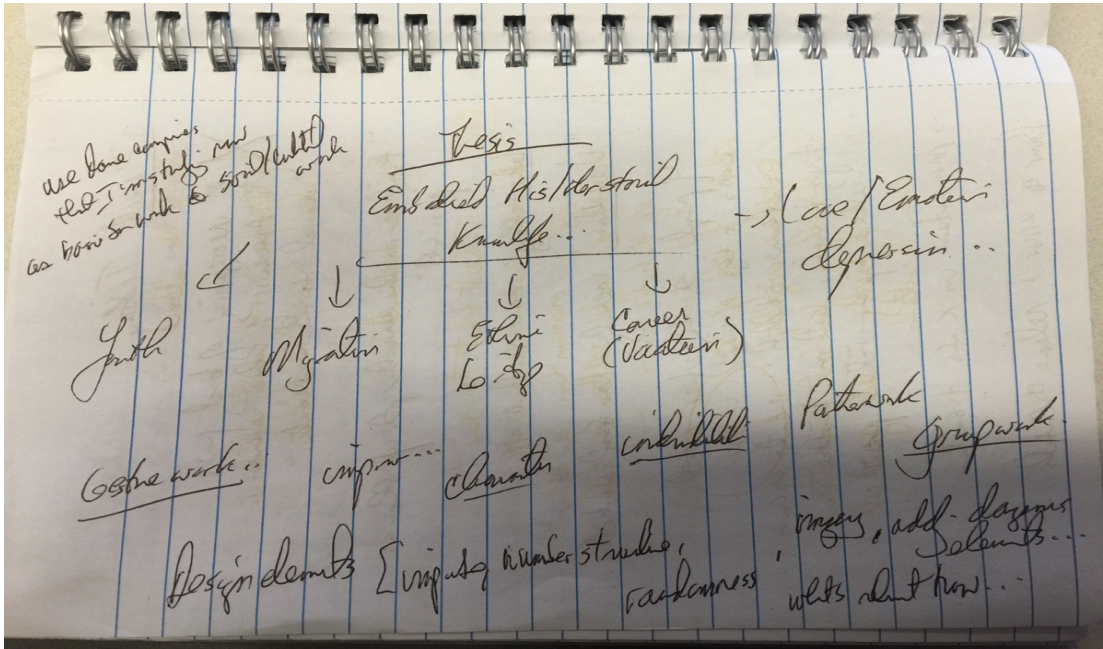
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APPENDIX A

SKETCH OF *PASEO* AFTER TIFFANY MILLS WORKSHOP IN NYC



APPENDIX B

*PASEO* JOURNAL PROMPTS

1. What is your origin?
2. What does home mean to you? What does it look like, feel, smell like?
3. What is your ideal landscape of home? Visual methods of a moving house?
4. Drawing on personal experiences and imaginations, interpret the images of being separated from home, from a secure place.
5. How we encounter social space?
6. How we incorporate strategies to navigate and operate in a new space?
7. How can the body reveal the mobility and transference of self, identity, that relate to nation, ethnicity, community, place and state?
8. What regulates our migration? If it's self, what part of self?

APPENDIX C

*PASEO* PERFORMER

1. Describe your experience during the creative process (First rehearsal up to Emerging Artist Showings.) How would you describe your first interactions with your cast members, your role as a participant, and the intention of the show? How did these relationships evolve during the course of the rehearsal process?
  
2. *Paseo* was an exploration of creative, performance, and community-building processes. What strategies or tools most resonated with your values and beliefs as an artist and performer?
  
3. During the performance week, please describe your experience, such as understanding the content, the movement material, and presence in the performance space?

(For example: If there was a significant moment that lead to a further understanding or intentionality, a ‘aha’ moment, a transformative experience witnessed during a tech run, pre-performance, during the performance, or post performance, what ignited the shift in thinking, feeling, or sensation?)