Reframing Tradition

Renegotiating Flamenco Dance within Contemporary Contexts

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Abstract

‘Reframing Tradition: Renegotiating Flamenco Dance within Contemporary Contexts’, is a practice-led inquiry undertaken between 2014 – 2016 at the Victorian College of the Arts as a Master of Fine Arts (Dance) by research. There are two parts of the research: a creative performance work and a dissertation. ‘Fragmentos’ (58 min) was performed to a live audience from 9Th – 12Th December 2015 at the Grant Street Theatre, Southbank. A documented record of this event is complementary to this written dissertation.

This practice-led research explores first hand the underlying qualities and values within a traditional embodied form and their presence and transformation in contemporary performance settings. Such a process references my individual perspective gained through my experience of dancing flamenco, together with the understanding I have acquired of the theoretical, ideological and historical values embedded in the dance aspect of the form. Alongside this I explore other multidisciplinary approaches to making work that includes foregrounding somatic practice and dramaturgical awareness. By setting up a middle ground where the potential of the transformative process of traditional form to contemporary adaption meet, the creative aspect explores the reflexive relationship and uncovers the latent and the unfulfilled potential of both. The written outcome reviews the convergence of these practices through the practitioner (self), and evaluates the potential of meaning that transpires from it.

Coincidently this research has intersected with the impact of my father’s state of decline, diagnosed with the crippling disease of dementia that has ironically energised the essence of these investigations.

Declaration

This is to certify that,

The thesis entitled 'Reframing Tradition: Renegotiating Flamenco Dance within Contemporary Contexts' comprises only my original work towards the Master of Fine Arts (Dance) by research;

Due acknowledgement has been made in the text of all materials used;

The dissertation is 20,256 words in length, exclusive of figures, tables, bibliography and appendices.

Thomas (Tomás) Arroquero

Signed: Date: 15/10/2016

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Introduction

These investigations have dared me to go beyond the sense of myself that flamenco has defined. At worst, these questions I have proposed and continue to grapple with might be classed as either imperfect or not flamenco to a true traditionalist. I might constitute an actual threat to the art form, by intercepting and trying to make it something more than what it is, carving out my own sense of individualism. But at the heart of this practice-led inquiry lies my individual situation galvanised by a complex relationship formed with this time-honoured tradition. Despite my emphatic "love" for flamenco and longevity with the dance aspect of the form, I am also awake to its limitations and what I have made myself become by doing it.

This tussle between self and form, has urged me on to interrogate the very core of my practice and instigate these investigations. From the outset, I sought a "new" voice in flamenco that could reach into its key qualities and express a less explicit, more haunting, insidious form of oblivion; my identity tampered with or jeopardised because flamenco as a medium, with its structures and rules can no longer contain all of me. But while my attitude towards dance and all the things dance can be has expanded, I still find myself holding onto the flamenco form, keeping things in proper place and reluctant to let go of it completely.

To begin, I approached the matter by discerning those elements of the form that have resonated most importantly in me. Naturally, the potential resonances of these qualities have to varying degrees permeated my entire sense of self, having now immersed deeply in both the technical and cultural aspects, but also living with flamenco as a manner of being in the world. Yet for the purpose of my inquiry, it has been important to separate my "selves" and distinguish those aspects of the form that I relate to most, as opposed to the misleading and commercialised description, that has aroused inner and outer battles of character and self. Curiously, flamenco does require a coded way of entry but dancing for me is fundamentally a tool to express. This is personal, sometimes physically demonstrative but other times quite subtle and unlike the conventional image flamenco portrays.

Choosing flamenco's most salient properties that have had a profound implication of discovery and expanse offered me a plinth to commence these investigations. I pared these down to just five key constituents, naming them as impulsivity, viscerality, courage, interiority and rhythm *(compás).* These five main features are deceptively simple but serve as a meaningful and systematised approach to begin. Curiously I note the cultural appendage that sympathises with each, but also how these properties can find expression in the ongoing, lived and practical process of renegotiating tradition within contemporary contexts. I believe these qualities are not *strictly* related to flamenco and can be found already existing in self and life (not just art), but perhaps in their unique combination can be identified as a collective and feed directly back into my inquiry.

In addition to this, it was useful to resolve differences between dancing flamenco and my moving self, uninhibited by the principles of the form. To attain this I used a somatic-based movement practice, as a way to connect with the gradual emerging sense of my own personal movement otherwise withheld by flamenco's conventions. I took note of voluntary actions that emerged rather than prescribed movements that echo the rules of flamenco, but may also set boundaries in the way I think and see. Details like the use of the arms and hands, the even spacing of the feet, the upright torso carried by the legs, the bent knees, the diagonal twist in the waist and the counter movement of the shoulders, the precise placement of the head and an overall symmetry of positioning that places "the body at the calm centre of an embroidering periphery,"[1] instilled as a kind of dance vocabulary that I now generate effortlessly. In flamenco, kinaesthetic awareness is secondary to form and the importance of rhythm and phrasing.

Systematising an approach to distil the key qualities of the form, now coupled with a refined sense of knowing how I move uninhibited by flamenco, seemed like a perfectly practical way in. I considered deepening a process that deploys ideas and skills that connect to all five key constituents and presenting ten minutes of each development back-to-back as a final creative work. However, while this sounds feasible, the ebb and flow of making took its own course, unfolding less didactically and more organically, leaning towards methods and findings that suited the needs of an emergent presence or responses that are intuitive or involuntary.

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[1] Susan Leigh Foster, *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance* (Routledge, 2011), 49.

The written dissertation also complements these findings, materialising through candidly expressing what I began to uncover within the research and the 2-year candidature. Much of the content emerged as reflexive writing; courses of action that addressed a multiplicity of artistic and personal concerns that were pressing for me at the time of making. This also reflects the nature of practice-led research in an artistic field, as the written component reveals the projects intent and goes hand in hand with these processes as they occurred in real time. The writing therefore shared a similar synergy as the creative work, gleaning from a selection of both personal and text based observations that simultaneously informed me in ways pertinent to my inquiry.

Conceiving these strategies and methodological considerations has helped me shape a number of pertinent questions for my inquiry. Making the work however entailed a raft of other initiatives, that included not only alternative ways of conceiving movement but also a curiosity stimulated through readings and writing, figurative images, expressions, anecdotes and time spent ruminating on the subjective nature of these impressions, not to mention conversations with others. The totality of these "initiatives" has to varying degrees entwined, to gently unravel of its own accord.

Chapter 1 **Casting a Shadow on Flamenco** – *my personal experience*

In this first chapter I reflect on my personal journey and experience coming to and from within the dance aspect of flamenco and address the dissimilarity I sense between the politics and the practice of the art form. As a keeper of these traditional values, I give thought to my own identity; my choice to inhabit certain customs and modes together with my background as a first-generation Australian growing up with nostalgia for a picture postcard image of Spain.

I attempt to ascertain the cause of my inner suspicions based on the intriguing preservation of misleading perceptions engendering flamenco stereotypes, reinforced in historical transcripts and film; the spirited nomadic gypsy as anecdotal and the presence of a male, colonial gaze that speaks for an exotic other. The shadow I cast emanates from my position of difference as an outsider to flamenco but also my receptivity for a less constrained version of dance. The apparent paradox of simultaneous love and ambivalence, commercialism versus spiritual and intellectual needs, and my willingness to run after and away from flamenco is at the core of these investigations.

As I write about my experience with flamenco I notice I am becoming subsumed with the notion of the gypsy all over again, not consciously this time, but as I reflect on the Spanish part of my journey it is obviously there, looming so large that it is hard to then assert any other persona or voice. When I refer to "it" I realise how inadequate the words are to describe what I mean; an episode pertaining to a primal force; a unique phenomenon of gypsy extraction that has been inherited into flamenco and managed to survive centuries through an unusually organic resilience. It occurred to me that far from Spain and now at some distance from it both time-wise and distance-wise here in Australia, it is easy to romanticise flamenco and gypsies, even if I rail against it. But it is still very important that "they" and "it" resonate, so that an entirely uninformed audience to flamenco might feel it, but not have it dominate as it so powerfully can.

However, I wonder if I might be still susceptible to a frosting of the lenses, as I pine for the day-to-day Spain on a personal level when still not having fully created a life for myself here in Australia. The one thing that does set me apart from other fellow dancers is the flamenco experience and it is so easy to exploit this point of difference in this research and academic

environment. It is like metaphorically going for the cheap thrill, the *remate* (accentuation of rhythms) that everyone likes and easily applauds as opposed to the one they cannot possibly understand. The danger is to convey the essence again and return to those images that are so transcendent like the bull, the sun, the orange trees and the almighty colour red. I did however intend Spain to be recognisable in the work, but not in a way that automatically magnetises people's mistaken clichéd associations with it. I still search for my own quiet voice in amongst the noise and this must remain paramount, as blurry as it may still be.

Even though I can candidly declare that flamenco is now a filter through which I feel most things, it became crucial for me to recognise those aspects of flamenco that I felt were necessary to escape from in order to develop the creative aspect of the work. In Michelle Heffner Hayes book 'Flamenco: Conflicting Histories of the Dance', the author affirms that,

> "Stereotypical images of flamenco portray the form and its practitioners as passionate, fiery, seductive, potentially violent, sensuous and exotic. The flamenco dancer signifies an enviable and intimidating capacity for passion, both desirable and fearsome."[2]

Associations that have too often become misused or overstated "are assumed as a priori truths merely expressed through the dancing,"[3] and allude to a misconceived version of the form characterised in its representation and by the individuals representing it. I do not exclude myself here with taking on some of these more predictable characteristics – traits that equate to a glossy demeanour and are difficult to separate from the perpetual commercial image flamenco portrays. However, I have always kept away from the intemperance of flamenco and tried to not get lost, keeping myself well intact. This has prompted me to make adjustments constantly, re-evaluating the version of flamenco I have come to know and keep insightful of the manner in which it continues to manifest itself in me.

Naming the key qualities of flamenco has been useful as a starting point, insofar as it has helped me discern those salient properties that have resonated most importantly in me, through my experience of dancing flamenco. But writing about this experience has informed me in other useful ways too that I previously could not have imagined. While living in Spain the

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[2] Michelle Heffner Hayes, *Flamenco: Conflicting Histories of the Dance* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009), 2,3.
[3] Ibid., 55.

experience of being inside flamenco and being foreign were inseparable and this made it difficult for me to imagine any other position beyond the one I subjected myself to on a daily basis. The stark bare walls of the studio yielded protection and also polarised the world featured outside the window. That world often seemed difficult for me to engage in because of the cultural constraint. The prerogative of being an outsider did not equate to "getting ahead" or was seen as a valuable contribution to flamenco.

I sense the irony here as I write because even the origin of flamenco as firstly, a product of Andalusia and secondly, recognised globally as Spanish, is implicitly linked to a cultural incoherence – a series of racial connections or inherited intersections rather than a specific ethnological fact or analysis. Much of flamenco's early history was extracted orally so there are disparities between vastly different social circumstances. Flamenco scholars have also reinforced these historical discrepancies particularly with regards to its provenance and the creative influences pertaining to a singular determined culture. As noted by Hayes,

> "Flamenco, as an Andalusian cultural product, unifies and streamlines the history of Andalusia. In effect, the image of the flamenco dancer gives Andalusian regional identity a recognizable symbol. By extension and through a similar elision of the boundaries that determine difference, the stereotype of flamenco serves as a sign for Spanish national identity."[4]

Yet this also dissolves the nation's vastly different autonomous regions "each with its own, and shared, convoluted histories,"[5] making the contribution of difference even more marginal. Flamenco undeniably has been packaged as a single identity, embedded in the rich cultural history of Spain. The notion of difference did not seem advantageous to assume while I lived and studied in Spain nor was it an attribute for success. But on the contrary, I now write from a privileged position about my experience as an outsider who has invested a substantial portion of a lifetime living inside and learning the dance history of another culture. My way of looking at flamenco has and will always reference two diametrically opposed viewpoints of being simultaneously inside/outside, seen/not seen, knowing/not knowing. Even the nature of this research as an attempt to evolve a seamless integration of traditional flamenco into a contemporary context, requires I remain sympathetic to both. I continually oscillate between

[4] Ibid., 32.
[5] Ibid.

counter reference points, trying to comprehend my position in order to capture an elastic new essence from my old ways and experiences of living and being inside flamenco.

Tradition and Nostalgia

I have given much thought to tradition – its purpose and why we inhabit certain customs and modalities, personal affirmations we hold onto, maintain as a system of belief or perhaps as proclamations for life. By this I mean how cultural environments and experiences shape our lives, and how this gives us purpose or a sense of belonging. What is interesting is when someone seeks out a cultural practice that may not have come into his or her psyche until much later on in life. The "occidental mysticism unique to Spanish culture"[6] described by academic scholar Yuko Aoyama, lends itself to constructing a persona, by taking on a Spanish name or identity to validate one's authenticity. This is often the case with many foreigners like myself, who travel to Spain and partake in the flamenco dream, perhaps to undergo a transformation or put into service as an assertion to account for being in the world.

Recognising a difference between flamenco as performance art as opposed to the local colour embedded in its folkloric tradition, I see how many characteristics have manifested their way over centuries into quotidian life. These qualities are widespread throughout the region of Andalucía, expressed through local customs, the manner of speech and dress. For the reason that flamenco is defined through and exclusively about such a culture, makes it difficult to access if one has not encountered Andalucian life. Adhering to a flamenco way of life could suggest an indifference to other forms of expression or quite bluntly mean a lack of interest in forming any other life outside of flamenco. However when I refer to the notion of flamenco as a manner of being in the world, I am not referencing a type of essence, nor am I claiming that only the Gypsy or Andalucian practitioners are capable of embodying and therefore reproducing these characteristics. Rather, I associate this notion with the gradual development of flamenco as a commodity, where both folkloric practices and dance for the stage are mutually influential, and living with these cultural constructs as a form of identity making.

As someone who has been practicing the art form deeply for over 25 years I have been fortunate to go on an enormous journey with flamenco and simultaneously evolve with it. I was 19 years old when the experience of seeing flamenco (or what I thought was flamenco)

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[6] Yuko Aoyama, "Cultural Survival as a Geographic Paradox: The Case of Flamenco," in *Global Movements: Dance, Place and Hybridity*, ed. Olaf Kuhlke and Adam Pine (London: Lexington Books, 2015), 15.

transpired into a life-changing event. The emphatic love I found embedded in a traditional dance discipline took me to Spain where I lived for almost 20 years. My interest in flamenco has always been self-reflective both in learning and through the processes of doing it, inclusive of performing.

Flamenco in its purest sense has kept me well and also been a conduit for spiritual, therapeutic, social and expressive needs too. I have found so much relevance in flamenco allied to personal growth. Of course, I have needed to survive in the world too and this is quite hard when your craft is so niched. A conundrum I face is negotiating how I can utilise this experience where it can be both fulfilling and sustaining. Like so many dancers I find it a challenge to make a living, piecing together occasional gigs here and there with opportunities to teach, hopping from one project to the next with an undercurrent of uncertainty in-between. Right now I sense a fragmentation, of not being whole in the sense I would like or envisage. In flamenco though, I have always been in the midst of breaking to be whole and making a pathway for myself.

When I speak of being whole here, I am referring to the ideal view I hold of what it means to dance flamenco well. Having formalised this ideal makes the notion of being whole unobtainable because I am always striving to take flamenco to the next level. Preserving the form's technical demands alone requires constant rigour and yet I place these demands upon myself to varying degrees. Breaking to be whole therefore equates to a self-restraint, where I set boundaries on a sliding scale that vary in accordance to my own self-imposed standards. Interestingly though, looking at and exploring other forms within the fields of dance and the performing arts has opened up my understanding of what being whole means. This is not to say that a class foregrounded in somatic movement is any less scrutinising or exposing, nor is it any more a means to an end in terms of financial independence, and yet I have curiously embraced a more neutral position. Commencing a class where I acknowledge that what I bring to the forum is plentiful has shifted my notion of being whole considerably.

Perhaps in beginning flamenco what I sought was actually an identity for myself – one that relates to my background as a first-generation Australian, born and raised in Melbourne of parents who emigrated from Spain in the 1960s. This is the sole reason why I chose Spain as a destination to live. It was always going to be there. Even though I had a sense of what it felt like to be Australian, there was always this "other" particularly at home where Spanish was spoken and conversations about Spain provoked a melancholic nostalgia. I gradually became

aware of the details; things that everyone on the same street did but noticed how in our house were arranged differently. Things like the preparation of food on the table, the small shrine-like religious relics framed all over the house, a figurine on the mantelpiece depicting the esoteric phenomena of a bullfight, and the wooden kitchen table that like a person had its own scent – a vague smell of fried fish, coffee and my father's cigarette ash. The melancholic nostalgia – the passing of someone close causes one to recall, seeing an old photo of how someone used to be, how an object may jolt a memory of the past. In many ways the past is like an anchor that can hold us back. We inevitably have to give up who we were to become, who we will be but that is sometimes easier said than done.

As I was growing up I listened to and was influenced by the music of the late legendary David Bowie. He innovated pop music and personified modern culture throughout his life. Bowie's music appeared from outside the zeitgeist, but in an interview for The Australian in 2004 he confessed to being inspired by the present saying,

> "One of the fortunate things and benefits to me as an artist is that I've always felt pretty much in the now," he said. "I've not been a nostalgist too much, which has allowed me to be fairly free with what's going on today and be a lot more involved in whatever society I'm living in, and writing from it and being stimulated by it."[7]

It is significant that even for an artist like David Bowie, being in the now attributed to letting go of a nostalgia for traditional values, but by admitting to being "not too much" of a nostalgist implies that even he could not detach himself from the notion completely either. Defined as the transmission of customs or beliefs handed down from one generation to the next, traditions evolve organically by virtue of reuse and repetition and bring comfort and strength but at the same time uphold and maintain boundaries that constrain and resist change. Author Susan Leigh Foster comments on the rise of experimental work that juxtapose distinctly traditional dance styles "in an effort to explore the possibilities of intercultural dialogue."[8] She expands on this by saying,

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[7] Vanessa Desloires, "Ashes to Ashes, Stardust to Stardust: David Bowie Dead from Cancer at 69," *The Age*, Tuesday January 12, 2016.
[8] Foster, *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*.

> "Seen in opposition to one another, traditional dances purvey and reinforce the long-standing customs and values of a people, whereas experimental dances, capable only in "modern" societies, challenges the boundaries of and expectations about concert dance itself."[9]

In my case, I have persisted in an effort to push the boundaries of tradition. This has come from an inward desire to re-evaluate and change something about myself that I can no longer sustain by practicing tradition. Yet, in unison I resist letting go of flamenco completely, and remain both in admiration and love with the form. By grappling with these questions I am in fact establishing the tension between my own position, coming to and within the dance aspect of the form, but also asking a question that is current and relevant to flamenco itself. I am initiating an approach designed to channel my own experiences into an issue that is important for flamenco as an art form, a source of controversy and also relevant for all dance forms categorised as "folk." The connotation of this as ethnic, unchanging, quaint, rural, collective versus the assumption of genius and innovation that contemporary dance claims for itself, and in some cases defines against a long-standing tradition.

As a non-custodian to this tradition I class myself as an outsider. As such, I am both fortunate but also potentially hazardous, running a risk of misrepresenting flamenco by "messing" with it and carving out an erroneous version of it and myself. But moving away from flamenco as a formula and only extracting some of its key qualities to muse on could also lead to something less convoluted. In a minimal setting without the embellishment of tradition does connote openness to something more reduced, perhaps a dissolution of form; a practice that consciously embodies the understanding of presence through what movement and stillness are, and being seen and seeing. In an ideal world I might somehow be able to construct a less laden version of myself through dance unbound by flamenco tradition. As an affirmation worth keeping close to me, Kent De Spain offers me a contemporary metaphor for "constructing" an ideal self.

> "Instead of pursuing some kind of verifiable "facts" or "truths", constructivism acknowledges that what we know about something like improvisation is built up over time – through conversation, publication, education – by the people who do it and

[9] Ibid., 196.

> study it. This also means that as ideas and values and practices change, so does our understanding of what something is and how something works."[10]

By saying this, Kent perceives his practice as evolving. To fulfil the ongoing reconstruction of what he already understands and values, Kent absorbs new ideas so that the meaning of his practice is still current. This description is a helpful companion. Both as a guide while he goes about researching but also as I go about discerning the qualities and values of these two parts, (tradition and contemporary) to challenge and inform each other, illuminating further openings and strengthening the frame of reference I have chosen to explore, having described it clearly as "renegotiating tradition within contemporary contexts."

[10] Kent De Spain, *Landscape of the Now: A Topography of Movement Improvisation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 7.

Flamenco's Power of Paradox

According to academic scholar Yolanda Van Ede, the costa tourist version of flamenco that has engendered a rise in profitable markets across the globe reflects "flamenco's global development into what Spanish aficionados (Malefyt 1998; Mitchell 1990, 1995; Steingress 2002; Tieman 1997; Washabaugh 1996) fear to be a mere spectacle; superficial because it is deprived of intimacy, of concert, and of its 'true character' and spirit."[11] I also see myself a part of this cycle. I still continue to perform what I consider to be genuine flamenco in traditional contexts in addition to the more experimental work detailed in this dissertation.

In Spain it made absolute sense for me to pursue flamenco – a daily dose either through learning, practicing or teaching. The reputable flamenco dance academy *Amor de Dios* became home for me in Madrid but the specificities of flamenco happened when I lived in Jerez and spent time in places like Cádiz or Seville and the outskirts of these provinces. It is only within these small, designated areas that an enclave of flamenco artists and aficionados, both local and foreign flourish, making it somehow a more logical choice as a vocational lifestyle.

To a degree I still inhabit this "flamenco bubble," actively teaching but also continuing to study both in Spain and taking workshops from visiting artists to Australia. I have exposed myself to the consumption of flamenco by way of attending innumerable performances during prominent festivals in Spain or local *peñas* and *tablaos,* the purchase of clothing, merchandise, books, magazines, music recordings and videos, newspaper articles and online sources. Between 2001 and 2011 I mainly lived in Jerez de la Frontera, one of the largest towns in the province of Cádiz, Spain. Considered the cradle of flamenco and now officially given the name *Cuidad de Flamenco* (City of Flamenco), it inaugurated its first official festival dedicated to the art form in 1997.

Throughout Spain and particularly Andalucía a number of festivals have taken shape in recent decades including the *Bienal de Flamenco*, Seville, *Festival del Cante de las Minas de La Unión* (Murcia), and the *Festival del la Guitarra*, Córdoba just to mention a few. They bring together the most reputable flamenco artists of the moment and have attracted audience from local, national and international spheres. As a frequent attendee to the *Festival de Jerez* I have seen diversity in these artists' rendition of the art form performed in theatrical settings, generating

[11] Yolanda Van Ede, "Japanese Flamenco: Sensory Shifts in a Transcultural Relocation of a Dance Genre," *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 6, no. 1 (2014): 65.

work from a range of disparate sources – some folk and popular forms, while others have gone in search of the experimental spirit of the modernist vanguard. But while I willingly went about consuming flamenco, I started to make more sense of its shortcomings and perceived a mismatch between the politics and practice of the art form. I would walk away from many of these performances somewhat dismayed and disappointed. Despite the incredible displays of artistry and great feats of technical skill it became gradually apparent I could not connect.

I now recognise particular flavours palpably embedded in flamenco's image and psyche, but supremely linked to this is the "emergence of authority in history and film"[12] on the topic of flamenco, seen through the gaze of outsiders. Hayes discerningly notes that,

> "One of the most powerful ideologies that has informed the development of the flamenco stereotype has been the rhetoric of colonialism. The position of the author in flamenco histories and the role of the viewer in films emulate the part of the colonial gaze in the spectacle of European and American imperialism. This omniscient presence assumes the responsibility of "speaking for" that which it attempts to control. The object of desire, the Exotic Other, becomes the focus of the narrative, drawing the attention away from the operation of power and the production of meaning."[13]

Irrespective of the factual inconsistencies in the origins of flamenco, there are three prevailing tendencies that resonate in chronicled writing and film. The first affirms a strategic nexus of a transitory Romani culture that put down roots in the autonomous region of Andalucía. Flamenco is above all an Andalusia phenomenon but all accounts express the valuable contribution that characterises the Gypsy aspect of the art. Racial authenticity is unclear and transcribed by Professor of Anthropology William Washabaugh as "ethnicity wrought rather than inherited,"[14] alluding to hybridity but always attached to the wandering gypsy; a sub-culture that has been both marginalised but also romanticised by writers and poets largely from the West, maintaining that "their expressions in word and in song fed back into their own fragmentary conditions."[15]

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[12] Hayes, *Flamenco: Conflicting Histories of the Dance*, 13.
[13] Ibid.
[14] William Washabaugh, *Flamenco: Passion, Politics and Popular Culture* (Oxford, Washington, D.C.: Berg, 1996), 75.
[15] Ibid., 84.

Secondly, the flamenco dancing body is generally seen through a dominant patriarchal lens that views the subject as feminine – whether male or female. This perspective is both preserved but also heightened in performance, alongside the presence of an exotic other. It is often exaggerated, "possessing" qualities of mysticism, power, and passion or having forceful charisma. Thirdly, the image of the flamenco dancing body is generally rendered as hypersexual – particularly in the case of the female body. It is mostly the subject of contained desire, culturally on the fringe, giving it "permission" to be wild. As noted by Hayes, the feminine body has always been cultivated in European tradition as a subject to be gazed at where the "other always speaks to the masculine desire of the viewing subject in a heterosexualized dynamic of dominance and submission."[16] Akin to these observations Aoyama also affirms that,

> "Flamenco is particularly susceptible to consumer manipulations, and remains appealing to those whose artistic preferences run towards romanticising the fringes, the alternative, the uniquely transcultural and the marginal."[17]

Without doubt this relates back to a formidable sense of pride characterised by the nomadic Spanish Gypsy, formalised by their apartness as a non-Spanish race. Flamenco "plays up" the ramifications of this culture as one that has moved forward, but still maintains a strong ideology practiced for centuries, and may still find it a challenge to move beyond the bitterness of past. Professor of Sociology of the University of Seville Gerhard Steingress gives me some relief in the midst of my disquiet by noting a distinct difference in the representation of flamenco expressed in music, song and dance over the last three decades. Understandably, social and cultural development experienced by so-called advanced societies has radically changed our way of seeing and feeling reality, and flamenco is not outside of this profound transformation. He explains further by saying (my own translation),

> "In the case of flamenco, the aesthetic evolution of this art has only been possible thanks to the restlessness of the artists themselves, who in their quest for more universal and complex values have had (and have) to avoid a double pressure: the neo-

[16] Hayes, *Flamenco: Conflicting Histories of the Dance*, 15.
[17] Aoyama, "Cultural Survival as a Geographic Paradox: The Case of Flamenco," 13.

> traditionalist (who uphold their aesthetic model as the only valid and legitimate one) and the companies (who put their commercial interests before any other criteria)."[18]

Simultaneously, I sit and watch my father literally vanishing before me in a dissolving of the boundaries of life. I have become overwhelmed by his rapidly diminishing physical and mental states, unsettled by his body a tenuous thread, shrinking to reveal more and more of his skeletal frame.

My father's dissolving form coupled with a set of changing values in flamenco permeates my inquiry. Dance analyst André Lepecki writes about betrayal in a way that parallels my own sentiments. In a sense I have betrayed flamenco by expressing these concerns; a number of personal stumbling blocks that have spurred me on to stretch its boundaries by "softening" the form to swerve away from the more traditional approach that has been upheld since its inception. Yet, by doing this I uphold that

> "Any accusation of betrayal necessarily implies the reification and reaffirmation of certainties in regard to what constitutes the rules of the game, the right path, the correct posture or the appropriate form of action. That is, any accusation of betrayal implies an ontological certainty."[19]

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[18] Gerhard Steingress, "Flamenco: Neo-Tradicionalismo Y Post-Modernidad," International University of Andalucia, http://www.pieflamenco.com.

[19] André Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (New York & London: Routledge, 2006), 1.

Chapter 2 **Movement Improvisation** – *A Newfangled Sense-of-Self*

> "Two things you quickly encounter when you engage in improvisation are the limitlessness of possibilities and the limitation of "self" – your ways of thinking, your style of problem solving, the boundaries of your physicality. Limitations are not an inherently bad thing, just a part of the landscape of the now, and sometimes pushing against them can give you leverage for moving worlds. But in the inevitable moments when you feel restricted by those limitations, sometimes the simplest suggestion from beyond your closed system can crack open your universe in profound ways and open up new pathways for exploration and expansion of that "self."[20]

In this second chapter I will examine more specifically the style and mode of movement improvisation I experimented with and also describe how improvisation is different in flamenco. My willingness to move in "unfamiliar" ways has interestingly further explained both the resonance but also the cultural conditions that construct flamenco, as I reflect on the experiential learning associated with the art form. I compare and contrast this with my more recent experience in movement-based somatic practice and recognise it as both a meaningful and open-ended approach to imagine, see and voluntarily explore "other" choices in movement.

A newfangled sense-of-self also intersects with the rapid decline of my father diagnosed with dementia. The "workings" and the field of meaning behind this situation illuminated potential during the act of moving, engendering change and transpired into scenarios for my creative work. For my purpose it has been important to recognise key pedagogic structures in flamenco in order to highlight a benefit in seeking alternative methods foregrounded in somatic practice.

Movement improvisation is a very complex subject in its finer points but in recent decades a number of practitioners and teachers have emerged to establish well-conceptualised practices. These "movers" have paved the way through processes of self-analysis, developing methodologies that help novices like myself make sense of the perplexities in movement improvisation. To be more precise, the mode of improvisation I experimented with involved a

[20] De Spain, *Landscape of the Now: A Topography of Movement Improvisation*, 8.

movement-based somatic state, initiated through the awareness of self, sensing a variety of states that "arise from an internal experience of intention,"[21] and being drawn and responding to outside forces beyond my body into the body's environment.

Put another way, moving from a self-directed state supported the notion of original movement as opposed to prescribed movement has helped to crack open the idea of myself. Beginning movement from a rich source of sensations sustained by my own sensory faculties, and strengthened by imagination and memories, opened the way for other descriptions and expressions to emerge. But doing what is emergent is not the same as doing whatever I feel like. Self-directed movement requires rigour and attention where the work meets me at the moment of improvising – sometimes profound but other times not. Detaching myself from flamenco completely proved difficult but being open to "otherness" gradually altered my way of seeing things. De Spain helps me account for this by explaining that improvisation,

> "is both selecting and informing your experience in real time, but that what is being selected and informed is not completely of your choosing, because the world is improvising too; and that dance, your interaction with the world, forms you just as you form the world."[22]

To imagine myself in movement unrestrained from what I value as a systematic approach of dance, attached to a historical and cultural moment that encapsulates a defined image, meant letting go of flamenco to some extent. Susan Leigh Foster sheds light on our perceptions of dance choreography, kinaesthesia and empathy, describing them as "the existence of corporeal epistemes that participate in the production of knowledge and the structuring of power."[23] While these have changed throughout the history of concert and social dance, parallels exist between dance forms and styles relative to behavioural constructs specific to gender and the cultivation of these identities over time. Her questions offer me an optimistic insight on the matter and are worth contemplation.

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[21] Kent De Spain, "The Cutting Edge of Awareness: Reports from the inside of Improvisation," in *Taken by Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader*, ed. Ann Albright Cooper and David Gere (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 29.
[22] Ibid., 37.
[23] Foster, *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*, 13.

> "Are there any frameworks within which to affirm the located and partial understanding yielded up in the empathetic moment of witnessing another body? Are there ways in which a shared physical semiosis might enable bodies, in all their historical and cultural specificity, to commune with one another? Are there techniques of knowledge production that invite us to imagine the other without presuming knowledge of the other?"[24]

Proposing these questions to myself does shift my experience of dance and flamenco drastically. Flamenco constantly requires an intense emotional response. It requires ironically, a constant re-visiting of the raw edge of things – even for the lighter forms, in order to get at the organic grittiness that the gypsy canon in particular needs. Perhaps it offers something countering/healing/medicating, due to its intense physical demands. In addition its emphasis on pure organic emotion, insisting on overcoming pain or loss with constant triumph is relentless. Another typical feature is its "fighting spirit" with a command to vanquish the opponent thoroughly and the unwillingness to be "victim." By nature the *golpe* (stamp) must be authoritative, not suffering *anything* – its refusal to ruminate and stew.

When I improvised using a somatic-based state of moving, the resonance of flamenco seems inescapable. But the experience of moving disengaged from its clan-like convocation evoked other enduring images, memories and emotions, related to but not exclusively a part of its world. This newfangled sense-of-self was revealed to me gradually, sometimes identifiably flamenco but other times readably different.

[24] Ibid., 14.

Nuances in Dance Improvisation – *Flamenco juxtaposed with Somatic practice*

Having given thought to my own encounter with flamenco and reiterated by Hayes, I share a consensus view that improvisation in flamenco is only achievable to those who dominate "the codified vocabulary from which improvisations are formed"[25] and are proficient at the practice of moving "in measured sequences, in partnership with musical accompaniment."[26]

> "The decision-making process [in flamenco] may be spontaneous, contextually defined by the situation and the members of the group, but a successful improvisation makes sense through the invocation and subtle disruption of traditional choreographic codes."[27]

Even though flamenco uses improvisation in performance, dancers yield to a contextualisation bound by tradition. In contrast launching into movement from a somatic-based state led to discoveries that deepened the relationship I have with myself. Improvisation in flamenco reciprocates an impetuous flow of rhythm *(compás)* that effectively predetermines the "style" of response, whereas self-directed movement in silence aroused a different kind of residual tension of being constantly caught off guard. Unlike flamenco, I could listen to the room, its architecture and its resonance. Underneath everything I awoke to the breath and this inspired me – the relationship between breath, the living heart and all of myself. Stillness also became a place of receptivity where I could yield to myself.

It is easy to imagine how peculiar I felt improvising for the first time wearing no footwear. No hard surface to press against. Flamenco's primal beat vanished. Here was the exact moment where my loyalty to it fractured. But without the permeations of flamenco life, I slowly began to inhabit other experiences that were unlike the predictability of my own dancing. Ironically, "unhitching" myself from flamenco yet staying exclusively within its default choices disencumbered me, allowing the form to soften and for the "rules" to sit underneath.

In a traditional *cuadro* (flamenco ensemble) improvisation transpires into a series of gestures that signal to participants a disruption in the flow, "with unexpected changes of direction,

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[25] Michelle Heffner Hayes, "The Writing on the Wall: Reading Improvisation in Flamenco and Postmodern Dance," in *Taken by Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader*, ed. Ann Albright Cooper and David Gere (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 110.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 111.

tempo variations and patterning of the arms."[28] The element of risk taking comes down to a dancer's courage, being bold enough to take the initiative in the moment of performing. Responses are highly personal and vary based on a dancer's merit but are shaped within the confines of the form.

It is there even in the way flamenco is experienced; a phenomenon that rises impulsively, epitomised through an unrestrained passion and love of life that drives it into a beautiful art form. That passion and spirit is the inner self – bursting forth into the world – into flamenco, because it cannot be contained inside any longer. Then, spontaneously, just as it crescendos it recedes and fades away, vanishing into itself. As such, there remain traces of metaphorical expressions, vaporous residue that prolongs the experience. What survives beyond the ephemeral is the breathing space of the dancing and this exceeds the individual and that individual's given manner of knowing.

By contrast, somatic-based movement improvisation lends itself to an immediate sense of unbounded possibilities. Unlike flamenco, I can begin to improvise from this chair but the fleeting temperament of movement improvisation makes it susceptible to what De Spain describes as "a never-ending crisis of creativity."[29] Virtuosity "of attention, of choice, of connection, of revealing the nature of experience in the moment,"[30] takes experienced improvisers a lifetime to accomplish despite its accessibility at one's disposal instantly. I could play with shifts in speed, tone, and different planes, the breath, and surfaces in, around and outside my body. I could explore more rigorously my essential nature disentangled from flamenco's formulaic rhetoric. Pioneer of Contact Improvisation Steven Paxton, describes his early experiences of improvising as a sphere of potential that gathers information.

> "The sphere is an accumulated image gathered from several senses — vision being one. As if quickly looking in all directions gives me an image of what it might be like to have a visual surface all over my body, instead of skin. The skin is the best source for the image, because it works in all directions at once […] And relying on its

[28] Ibid.
[29] De Spain, *Landscape of the Now: A Topography of Movement Improvisation*, 13.
[30] Ibid.

> information to protect me, to warn me, to feed back to me the data to which I am responding."[31]

Imagining the potential to draw movement on spherical planes is interesting for me to get my head around. The defined nature of traditional choreography in flamenco can delimit a capacity to firstly "imagine" movement possibilities, and secondly "see" certain movement as a precursory vision to dance.

While this essentially makes the experience of somatic-based improvisation different, it would not be unusual to find that most of its leading practitioners have at one point assimilated the rigour of another genre of dance training that adheres to a particular form, but are now adept in the practice of finding solutions to the puzzle of moving; "in the form of an emergent choice or movement or quality."[32] The greater extent of this research is of course grounded in my journey with flamenco. In selecting somatic-based improvisation as a practice tool, I sought to *not* hide the ramifications of flamenco choreography on my body or throw it away. Rather, I aimed to use improvisation in a way Foster describes "as a creative method that could be implemented in support of [flamenco] choreography as the making of a dance."[33] This was also reflected in my choice of collaborators Jini Lim, Manolo Varela and Kieren Ray who like myself have authentic backgrounds in the art form.

I became interested in the quality of the pedestrian movement as it materialised, working within the parameters of movement improvisation as a body steeped in the principles of flamenco. Even with the resonance of flamenco now technically and culturally ingrained in me, I wanted to prise it away from its conventionality. The practice of somatic-based improvisation opened up potential to "play," transpiring into an altered state of perceiving things, both my previous experience of space but also the image I have of myself – an appearance that at times revealed the "ordinary." The "concomitant and unpredictable unfolding of movement produced by that focus,"[34] offset my appearance as one that flamenco has been so present in defining, transpiring into a broader sense of self.

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[31] Melinda Buckwalter, *Composing While Dancing: An Improviser's Companion* (Madison, Wisconsin and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 79.
[32] De Spain, *Landscape of the Now: A Topography of Movement Improvisation*, 13.
[33] Foster, *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*, 3.
[34] Ibid.

"Allowing" myself to make decisions closely attuned to imagination and perception, stimulated a sense of self that distinguished me from others but was also non-judgmental, indiscriminate and all-inclusive. In flamenco, I would more likely ask myself if I was moving "correctly." Somatic-based improvisation on the other hand does not endorse a vocabulary, repertory or "style," making it less susceptible to miscalculate correctness. Alternatively, choreographers generate work using a compositional framework that supports the dancer's "voluntary" decision-making as "an informal, spontaneous and open-ended exploration of movement possibilities,"[35] making this a third aspect quite different to my experience in flamenco. But even within this notion methods vary significantly. For example the improvisation and dance classes I took part in with Alice Cummins and Rosalind Crisp as part of this inquiry were comparable but also non-identical.

Compatibly both practitioners support the notion of improvisation as a continuous flow of information emanating from the body. Unlike flamenco, classes began with each participant initiating their own voluntary movement, either standing on the spot or lying on the floor. Both practitioners took part and gave instructions while moving themselves, revealing their own process as it emerged for them. Reflecting on these comments shifted my attention away from myself, taking on board some of their findings while curiously shaping my own. Like thought bubbles, I randomly chose to hone in on the phrases that struck a cord in me or seemed more pertinent at the time. Consequently I felt held by what was being said but not regulated, working almost meditatively rather than coercing me to react and move a certain way. Their commentary still seemed authoritative and reliable but not in an imposing or indoctrinating way.

In contrast both have appropriated and utilise individual methods of approach based on their previous trajectory as dancers. Rosalind Crisp[36] for instance uses a selection of what she describes as "tools;" an original set of principles devised to guide the attention of the dancer to his or her dancing. Each tool is a mini practice, beginning with limited guidelines that exercise both being specific and with the potential to expand. Explorations are compartmentalised and engender a kinaesthetic approach.

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Rosalind Crisp, "Classes in Choreographic Improvisation: Artist Led Approaches ", held at the Victorian College of the Arts (August & September 2015).

The kinaesthetic experience for me integrated both an internal sensory input, transmitted by the physical senses, but also worked in tandem with external elements and watching others move. Seeing and being seen intersperse a lot more than in flamenco, and the notion of watching extends out into a peripheral vision. A pivotal moment transpired for me during class with Alice as she watched a group improvisation that I took part in. While commenting on aspects of the work she openly said to me, *"Perceive with your whole body, not just your eyes."*[37] At that moment I sensed something crack open immediately, shifting the criteria I use to make choices, realising just how much flamenco had limited my understanding of seeing and delimited my potential for being seen.

Both Alice Cummins and Rosalind Crisp bring structure to their classes by way of introducing "tools" or "thought bubbles," to saturate the body with attention and assist with the experience of improvisation. In spite of being introduced as warm up exercises I used some of these to generate ideas for my own performance making. Specific tools like folding and pouring, stimulating through touch and working with my eyes closed transpired into segments that featured in the creative work.

For me, improvisation "freed me up" from the discerning eye of flamenco because I was no longer held accountable to the measured cadences that conspicuously define it. I explored an otherness relative to my inquiry – an asymmetry of body positioning and a more autonomous relationship to dance as movement rather than a synthesis with music. This enabled me to shift the contextual relevance of the form away from being exclusively limited to a set of formulaic principles. I found myself tapping into a multiplicity of choices where my response in moving could be both reflexive as a series of actions free from conscious thought and reflective as a way to build on choreographically. The way of imparting kinaesthetic information in class with Crisp and Cummins is vastly different to how flamenco is taught, which led me to reflect on the role of pedagogy in flamenco.

Decoding Pedagogic Bias in Flamenco

The rising popularity of flamenco as a global commodity has seen thousands of foreigners descend on Spain to study the art form at a number of dance training establishments. Dance schools particularly in Andalucía are "relatively recent and took place in the post-Franco

[37] Alice Cummins, "Alive Workshop: Playing with Tone & Tensegrity," held at Dancehouse (10, 11 & 12 July 2015).

era,"[38] profiting by catering to the supply and demand. Those who teach in these institutions are usually the "flamenco celebrities" themselves and at the cutting edge of flamenco today. While teaching helps sustain a longer lasting and more lucrative career, most of these artists impart skilful, rhetorical exercises that minister to the transient volume of foreigners. These are highly personalised, intricately evolved and as Hayes notes often "stem from recognizable structures within the tradition, and only "work" when the decisions are recognizable by the community of participants."[39]

In flamenco there is an ideal sense of what "it" should look like. A well-informed flamenco teacher imparts organised structures, combinations of footwork and movement that students absorb by seeing and "copying." "The teacher's movements serve as a guide, an original sequence that is endlessly permutated throughout the classroom on different dancers' bodies."[40] Students assess for themselves how these formations fit and through regulated repetition strive to reproduce a version of the original material and make it their own. Even someone like myself with an established knowledge in flamenco dance can be stretched and inspired by another dance teacher's demeanour and rendition of the form. In this scenario I would ask myself questions like what does this movement feel like or how does it work on me? Having taught flamenco for many years I have come across a range of both nonprofessional and professional dancers' backgrounds, skills and ages, and can easily evaluate different levels of achievement.

Those with more experience are better equipped at recognising the small details or the "in-between-ness" of things. By saying this I mean the "interconnectivity" between phrases. I ask students to "imagine" what actually happens between one movement and the next. How does the body arrange itself? For example the action of turning can be tricky to negotiate, as we often cannot see what it looks like. Students with limited experience find it harder to assemble themselves in a flamenco way. This also says a lot about teaching methods in flamenco, as most students learn from the outside in and need to go through quite a lengthy phase of being bewildered and disconnected before dominating the fundamental principles.

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[38] Aoyama, "Cultural Survival as a Geographic Paradox: The Case of Flamenco," 10.
[39] Hayes, *Flamenco: Conflicting Histories of the Dance*, 162.
[40] Hayes, "The Writing on the Wall: Reading Improvisation in Flamenco and Postmodern Dance," 110.

In Spain, teachers in this environment expect dance students to already be informed of the multiplicity of structures, differences between *palos* (song forms) and melodic phrasing when supported by the flamenco guitar. To get to this level requires a long-term commitment and involvement; vocational training and activities that include regular classes, solo studio practice but also being attentive to flamenco by way of listening and attending both programmed and impromptu performances. Perhaps most crucial to its "disclosure" is the act of performing it as a traditional ensemble.

Flamenco is most similar to language, expressed as a vocabulary and through teaching a relationship has developed between applied disciplinary practice and its own language pedagogy. For example the word "dancer" is differentiated in Spanish between *bailarín/a*, referencing a dancer of any discipline as opposed to a *bailaor/a* specific to only a flamenco dancer. While pedagogies in flamenco have been adapted from its oral tradition, the art form in Spain has never been set up as a graded system or syllabus.

Naturally it took me years to find an entrance into flamenco, and of course most people tend to look back at me in bewilderment. But having gone through the experience of trying to access a traditional form in a critical fashion, I can now recognise a polarity between methods of teaching; those that uphold "the correct posture" but do not necessarily teach a student anything about flamenco. For example, I have taken private classes by artists from reputable gypsy families in Jerez who embody a lineage of tradition passed down from one generation to the next. Fortunately my previous training and experience in Madrid has given me a solid base – an understanding and ability to interpret the form where I can now absorb more than just the "step." In this scenario I am exposed to a historiography; nuances of the local gypsy dialect that are detectably more intensified. I am not just memorising choreography with pretty steps and yet my teacher can tell me nothing about where to "place" my body or verbally explain stylistic traits.

More specific to the individual student's learning is the potential for developing a "flamenco instinct," but what appears as natural and effortless is generally an entailment of regular and repetitive practice and putting that practice into performance. As a pedagogic foundation, teacher and philosopher Kurt Hahn alludes to the "belief" of teaching by saying,

> "It is believed that regular practice of prescribed dance poses and movements reinforces artistic skills in the habitual body, and as movements become embodied, an experience of freedom and realisation may occur. From a highly disciplined and structured pedagogical foundation it is thought that the skills of an artist can flow 'naturally' or effortlessly from the well-trained body." (Hahn 2007: 43)[41]

Pedagogically flamenco remains loyal to an ideology that privileges a process of information. In this case, pedagogic methods have not expanded to rethink ways of experiencing movement. Unlike contemporary dance, that has absorbed a number of kinaesthetic and somatic practices together with principles from a multitude of sources, flamenco has been reluctant to look beyond its own looking-glass logic. While the complexities of flamenco continue to be on the rise the essential nature of dance as fluidity, movement and presence through the experience of bodily sensations are not "practices" in a classroom environment.

In flamenco, a dancer of outstanding merit already possesses the structural knowledge and has assimilated both the physical and mental demands of the form. Therefore seeking alternative methods foregrounded in somatic practice, beneficial to intuitive awareness that makes one a "better" dancer, by putting a person more at ease and in touch with themselves, are seldom realised. In my own case, my exposure to somatic practices that work from the inside out has modified my practice of flamenco, which has been learned from the outside in. This softening of borders between the experience of the body dancing coincides with witnessing my father's changing states of embodiment while in decline. This, in turn, came to influence my improvisational explorations.

Improvising – *Imagination and the Image of my Father*

> "Simone Forti set very particular physical conditions for her early dance constructions, anything from negotiating moving around on a slanted board or twisting while suspended in ropes to climbing over people or jumping off an unseen height. The conditions of the dance limited the available movement choices as a result, and captured very particular palettes of movement." [42]

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[41] Ede, "Japanese Flamenco: Sensory Shifts in a Transcultural Relocation of a Dance Genre," 67.
[42] Buckwalter, *Composing While Dancing: An Improviser's Companion*, 13.

Writer Melinda Buckwalter's observes the work of contemporary dancer Simone Forti as a 'pallet of movement' essentially marked by constraint. I also see a relationship between my father's chronic dementia as analogous to that of a person moving with a physical constraint; rudimentary mobility limited by a reduced mind and/or aging body. The impact has not unexpectedly offset the way he behaves and has flowed over into his manner of being. Both alone and in the presence of others, his condition has interfered with but interestingly brought to life idiosyncrasies, particularly in the act of moving; movement that fluctuates between wild gesticulation and moments of quiet lingering. This unpredictability coupled with a kind of pacing is curiously congruous with the bodily encounters I see in classes founded in somatic-based movement.

Even though the final creative work was not about my father or dementia, responding to his situation while developing material from a somatic-based state set the tone of the work, where "the movement that although not set, defines the work – something inherent in it, something about its look or feel."[43] Instead of being concerned with form, which is often the case in executing the fine details of flamenco, I could listen with my entire body and metaphorically superimpose the image of my father as a body constrained or obstructed by memory loss. I am receptive to an emerging physicality with a readiness to accept what ever might come into play.

I have been overwhelmed by my father's defiance and the apparent resilience of the human spirit; a vehement presence and a core essence of authenticity, immersed in a rich and meaningful dialogue, often without words and characterised by the smallest gestures and detail. Such fragility has evoked empathy in me mixed with great sadness. His capacity to recall and respond from an impaired memory has been extraordinary. I gradually watch him diminish, vanishing into thin air – a man who now looks at me with eyes of a child. Fine and tenuous, shrinking into a hidden chasm, each time exposing more and more of his skeletal frame.

> "That which is remembered is a process, rather than a content. Memories are not stored in the body; rather, a process of remembering is cultivated in the body."[44]

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[43] Ibid., 12.

[44] Foster, *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*, 186.

In such a manner I observe my father compose himself from an obstructed process of remembering. I see a quiet man in deep thought – an inward sense of release. Ordinary conversations with him are awkward to follow. Random irrational thoughts juxtapose and no longer make sense in real time. Alongside this, I develop a curiosity for the way sequences unfold. Traces of movement are haphazard and pieced together like a collage. A debilitating body transposed into different layers, sometimes repeating but never with an intention to reproduce in exactly the same way. In my journal I write candidly about what I observe.

> *"I watch him move the over bed portable tables around his bedroom as if they were machinery, arranging them very precisely. He might take a few steps backwards, stop and stare at a wall; his eyes glazed over in concentration and then suddenly walk towards a door. He grabs the door handle, moving it up and down meticulously as if it were some sort of high leverage apparatus. He seems to be aware of me and yet disconnected, so engrossed in the task and convinced by his own doing."* 8Th September 2015

The conditions of others at the residency have also kept me transfixed. Humanness that radiates with such tenderness despite the struggle we humans inevitably can and do endure. I have curiously observed the human condition in the advanced stages of life, a fragile state limited by mental or physical constraints. I write what I see.

> *"Individually they radiate grace. I am fascinated by their internal worlds; the small dialogues that ruminate and manifest the complete spectrum of human emotion. Like self-contained vessels they meander through space absorbed meticulously in a task, sometimes quietly sitting and then suddenly shouting at a person that they can see but I cannot. I sense more readily their pulse beating, blood circulating below their translucent skin, nerve endings superficially more intensified. There is something very susceptible about the body in this pure and unadulterated state."* 7Th July 2015

The emphasis on perceiving dance through a kinaesthetic lens has interestingly coincided with the impact of my father's dementia. I am witnessing loss, seeing it through a chasm of silence and the essentialness of human nature. Incorporating my father's memory loss has therefore been powerfully evocative as a metaphoric symbol to generate material. I have been humbled by his degeneration and yet at the same time noted a peculiarity in the abrasive nature of this adversity energising these investigations.

Professor and the Chair of Theatre Studies at the University of Utrecht Netherlands, Maaike Bleeker, values and recognises the interdisciplinary approaches in contemporary performance and supports current theatre and dance practice by raising the question,

> "How to begin to conceive of thoughts as autonomous entities materialised in a medium?"[45]

Essentially, I began this investigation with an inkling for just two things – the first being those aspects of flamenco I felt were necessary to escape from, and the second taking place in the boundaries of life dissolving before me as witness to my father's decline. These became the linchpins for the creative aspect of the thesis, but not to imitate personal circumstance or reproduce a narrative about my father and dementia. Instead, the research unfolded to produce a work imbued with a sense of these events.

The harsh light of my father's condition bluntly persuaded me to reassess my own situation. Seeing him decline compelled me to look inwards towards my own inescapable impermanence, fuelling a kind of creative synthesis. What will become of the dance and my dancing body? How will it continue to transform me, to the extent I have been taken hold by its doing? How will it manage itself and fold into future sustaining moments, as certain modes have already been embedded in me as a kind of knowledge; a reciprocal form that is not only formed by me but also informs me as the dancing subject. Threads of convergence that align with my battle to uphold or sympathise with certain aspects of the flamenco form, and which are on the threshold of transmutation.

My father's condition did resonate in the gathering of ideas and shaping some of the creative aspects in the work. Even though movement improvisation expanded my perception of dance through its infinite possibilities, my agenda to work within thematic content concerned with both my father's condition and flamenco, narrowed my choices of movement exploration. In other words framing the research with this subject matter helped me limit the exercise of moving.

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[45] Maaike Bleeker, "Thinking No-One's Thought," in *Dance Dramaturgy: Modes of Agency, Awareness and Engagement*, ed. Rachel Fensham and Peter M. Boenisch (Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 73.

Nonetheless, it would be inappropriate to say that empathy concerned with somatic awareness is the only requisite for engendering change. Flamenco dance is not less confining as a tool to express, particularly a pressing concern such as the one I am seeing in my father and others like him at the nursing home. However the parameters of the dancing body in flamenco, that insist on formulaic protocol and upholding an image, "structured by the cultural tensions that continually reproduce the stereotype of the Hispanic exotic,"[46] makes it less feasible to inhabit other disparate worlds of thought.

In many senses, connections to my father's circumstances are absolutely there, regardless of which practice I choose to inhabit. As a research tool movement improvisation has illuminated potentiality, drawing upon my longevity in flamenco and personal circumstances. In this manner my approach has been not to distil and stretch the boundaries of flamenco as perhaps previously imagined, but to instead "soften" its inherent qualities and allow the rules of flamenco to sit underneath; "keeping with the essence of dance as movement and fluidity, but also in line with the nature of somatic knowledge as an open, unregulated process."[47]

[46] Hayes, *Flamenco: Conflicting Histories of the Dance*, 157.
[47] Erin Brannigan, *Moving across Disciplines: Dance in the Twenty-First Century*, vol. 25, Platform Papers: Quarterly Essays on the Performing Arts (Currency House Inc., 2010), 49.

Chapter 3 **Performance Elements** – *Constraint, Audience and Object*

In this final chapter I present some of the other key decisions I made to move beyond the conventional presentation of flamenco as theatrical performance, and strategies that point to developing dramaturgical awareness. Specifically I analyse the use of traditional objects in 'Fragmentos' and the approaches I made to slightly skew or shift their implicit meaning. I also give thought to the performance elements of design, image, sound and lighting in the work, and interpret aspects of the dance that dealt with metaphoric constraint, both physical and mental by analogy with the state of decline in my father.

I discuss the consideration given to audience placement as part of the decision analysis in performance. Even though the seating arrangement in 'Fragmentos' did not steer too far away from a conventional format, I did consciously frame the audience within the work. In Spain, the participatory spectator is one of flamenco's defining features. However in this context of making work, I have been intrigued by what uninformed audiences experience or see; onlookers from other divisions coming to flamenco with a "different" set of values but also audiences familiar with the form and predisposed to particular frames of reference. I elaborate on the aesthetic revolution to overcome these conventional references but explain how the renovation of flamenco still relies on its foundations to reframe new work.

Developing the creative aspect of the thesis required I look at both a conceptual framework within the spirit of dance; bodily practices as movement and fluidity, but also evolving a dramaturgical awareness, drawing from sources both personal and outside myself coupled with my background in flamenco. This materialised into a number of key decisions giving thought to the use of object, audience and constraint to counter the orthodox presentation of flamenco as staged performance. Dance-performance-theorist and dramaturge Bojana Bauer perceives dramaturgy as a nexus of ideas gleaned from a medley of sources.

> "The 'practice of subjectivity' is intertwined with the context of the process and the conditions it proposes, not only types of bodily practices, techniques, exercises and experiences, but equally readings, writings, film influences, image references, time spent together and so on. One of the consequences of this mode of work is that

> narratives, images and actions deriving from it tend to morph and become incorporated into the development of the piece's overall composition."[48]

This research came about out of "restlessness;" a need for something more palatable but with a desire to incorporate my extensive background in dance as experienced through flamenco. Working with objects or images specific to flamenco struck me as both self-evident and a conceivable place to generate potential ideas. Transcending the implicit meaning already attached to these objects however meant using them out of context, or to an extreme, to break them free from the demands and expectations already affiliated with the form.

Introducing a third value could tip a traditional flamenco paradigm just enough to propel it into a different place, without compromising it completely. I imagined taking the cartoon image of flamenco; a series of forced gestures and faces to the extreme, dressing my singer up in "flamenco paraphernalia," and asking him to swallow helium before launching into a song, or turning myself into a larger than life figure with an insatiable hunger for gaudy flamenco attire and vestiges of sympathy. Decoupling the dance form away from its key quality of rhythm *(compás)* and interrupting this habitual, eternal pulse or using other devices to explore sound, shifted my perception of dance by raising my awareness to the absence of noise and silence. My research incorporated an analysis of findings propelled by my curiosity to slightly obscure or shift the boundaries of the form, noting to what extent I could modify its technique before it became something else. Resolving these "complexities" demanded I look at other forces outside myself and go beyond my dancing body into the body's environment.

Keeping Away from 'La Carmen' – *Creativity and Risk*

The adaptation of flamenco re-enacted in the theatre has gathered momentum in recent decades and is now recognised globally as a by-product of Spain. While this has launched the art form into international recognition, it has also engendered the flamenco stereotype – a downside of yielding to the demands of upholding flamenco as a commodity. Vast chronicles of flamenco histories, both written and celluloid, have idealised the genesis of flamenco as a tradition, emerging from an eminent past in Andalusia. Disparities between texts describing its

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[48] Bojana Bauer, "Propensity: Pragmatics and Functions of Damaturgy in Contemporary Dance," in *Dance Dramaturgy: Modes of Agency, Awareness and Engagement*, ed. Rachel Fensham and Peter M. Boenisch (Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 40.

origins reinforce Aoyama's transcription of "oriental mysticism,"[49] connecting the dance, music and song to traces of Muslim sovereignty that dominated the region for eight hundred years, the occupancy of Sephardic Jews and the subject of the lower-class, wandering but "spirited" gypsy, popularising flamenco in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Perhaps the most celebrated muse in the West, epitomising the presumption of an exotic female presence in Andalusia, is Prosper Mérimée's fictional character of Carmen. It is important to note that I use the projection of Carmen here as one of many stereotypes affiliated with the form. This reference was not synonymous with the creative aspect of my thesis but as such, it is easy to understand how the image of Carmen may reference or remind one of flamenco. While contemporary flamenco artists have been resourceful in finding ways to overcome such a stereotype, they also "depend" on it as a "genuine source" of information to construct an appropriated image, transpiring into predictable characterisations. Artists are still challenged to completely surpass what Hayes describes as "the gender markings of flamenco"[50] and "struggle to create a space for "authority" in the narratives that contain or constrain their performance."[51]

Productions have generally honed in on thematic content that sympathises with an archetypal "feel" or "narrative." Many performances are stylised to evoke and conjure up "a complex renegotiation of the many identities encapsulated by flamenco as a tradition."[52] Scenarios like a tavern scene or aspects of communal life that include religious festivities and events, or otherwise allude to a message of life crisis, or a celebrated public inauguration such as weddings, baptisms and the like. Dancers generally prescribe to a set of principles derived from aesthetics affiliated with these settings. Despite the reproduction of dance that keeps in character with a time-honoured tradition, technical proficiency has elevated to unexpected heights and continues to be on the rise. Now more than ever, the incorporation of dance vocabulary into flamenco has favourably expanded. Yet, skill and modernisation have also become a large distraction and as a result there is a large block of "feeling-less-ness" in flamenco, particularly when "its survival hinges upon successful 'staging of authenticity'."[53]

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[49] Aoyama, "Cultural Survival as a Geographic Paradox: The Case of Flamenco," 15.
[50] Hayes, *Flamenco: Conflicting Histories of the Dance*, 15.
[51] Ibid., 26.
[52] Ibid., 166.
[53] Aoyama, "Cultural Survival as a Geographic Paradox: The Case of Flamenco," 18.

Evolving a work from a less conventional place meant acknowledging my own inner suspicions; an imbalance of irreconcilable differences between artistic and commercial values, particularly when renditions of the art form serve to remain in "character," by pandering to predictable desires and tastes. The force and intoxicating appeal of these typecasts in general is undeniable, but to create the work I consciously kept Carmen's "alter ego" at bay, juxtaposing the image of flamenco by taking risks, perhaps less radical for some but still a process I coerced myself towards for the benefit of my practice-led inquiry.

The work involved both the fine details of movement improvisation, but also choreography that I conceived exclusively as a reciprocal action, between my moving body and what I sensed through a process of perceiving both the seen and felt experience of an object. Both of these processes I navigated using the imprint of my father and/or dilemmas I describe as flamenco's paradox, to develop choreographic sequences that transpired into the creative scenarios in the work. Cultural theorist and political philosopher Erin Manning recognises an important interplay between previous experience and contemporary advance. Like Lepecki, Manning also affirms that at the heart of generating difference is a certainty in "a differential between what was and what will come to be."[54] This is because,

> "the creative advance is not novelty in the sense of "never before" in the capitalist sense of the "newest new". It is the capacity of an event to activate certain vectors otherwise backgrounded, thereby generating an uneasy field of difference."[55]

Creativity is not always a comfortable embrace, as it often requires two attitudes that are contradictory. Understanding this aspect of creating means constantly grappling with some uncertainty – a process of setting up a system that adheres to a time frame and supports emerging latent potential. It became important for me to stay open to this as a part of the creative process. This awkwardness is of choice, prompted by attempts to destabilise my understanding of dance and what I already know through flamenco, in order to reveal something "known" to me but perhaps have no words for as yet.

Flamenco does tell a single universal/generalised story in a sense – the vanquishing of the negative with the positive – courage over fear – bravery and persistence in the face of death and

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[54] Erin Manning, *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 24.
[55] Ibid.

loss, a folkloric art infused with *gitano* resonance but at the same time too narrow to define as just the provenance of gypsy culture and therefore inaccessible to other ethnological experience. Much as the commitment I have gone through and continue to undergo gives me an enormous capacity to express, it is still a demonstration, a display of technique that holds me in, confines me to logic and limits potential. Staying open while working from a creative place meant not boxing myself in as a maker, giving myself time to explore and develop a process, superimposed with my research questions. I used my intuition to connect with these pathways; an urge that led to moments of seeing one or two possibilities light up quickly like a beacon in the distance. Time of duration, as described by Maaike Bleeker is

> "the duration of the unfolding of that which is becoming. Creating is not about what something is now, or even about what it is not yet; it is about the process of becoming something that has not yet arrived. Being creative involves precisely this ability to recognise such potential."[56]

In my small experience as a maker, bridging between traditional flamenco as a set of principles and a content that challenges and exceeds the boundaries of these expectations is a vast unknown potential. The unknown has been a very tangible companion in this research context, circling back to a need to not only expand myself and move forward, but also go beyond a self that is constantly in a state of perpetual flux and change.

Dance Dramaturgy

> "In dance, what we discover while dramaturging from a place of quasi-nothingness is that for every specific work, in every new project, in every new piece being made, a particular mode of experimenting – that is to say, a particular mode of rehearsal – needs to be invented anew; so that a piece no one knows what it is, and even less what it will be, may become actual. Dance dramaturgy must always remember that each piece demands its specific new methods and modes."[57]

André Lepecki affirms that the role of a dramaturge has emerged in recent decades as a new figure in dance. Traditionally the term has its origins in theatre as someone well informed in

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[56] Bleeker, "Thinking No-One's Thought," 72.

[57] André Lepecki, "Errancy as Work: Seven Strew Notes of Dance Dramaturgy," in *Dance Dramaturgy: Modes of Agency, Awareness and Engagement*, ed. Rachel Fensham and Peter M. Boenisch (Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 61.

performance studies, with an established broader knowledge in the Arts that encompass a vast range of disciplines and subjects. This has opened up the discourse surrounding the dramaturge's capacity to be complimentary to a process as an outside figure, but also a fear with regards to ownership and the balancing of power between the actual maker (doers, dancers, choreographers) and the theory of thinking critically and analysing a process. Despite this divergence, we can safely describe a dramaturge's role as a person "immersed in the life of the creative process, day in, day out, sharing moments both inside and outside the studio, and being in constant dialogue with all the project's participants."[58]

While the creative aspect of my thesis did not engage in a professional dramaturge per se, I did take part in a semester of Dramaturgy and Live Performance classes at the VCA,[59] as incentive to familiarise myself with other processes of making and build on my inquiry. The description I outline above does bear resemblance to the creative process as it emerged for me in the studio. This is to say I developed my own process of critical thinking as an "outside eye" in the guise of a fictitious dramaturge. Taking this stance shifted the way in which the work evolved; a practice-led studio inquiry now linked into the experiencing of sensory activity rather than theory, or exclusively based in formulaic technique as a motivation for discovery.

However, the dramaturgical thrust or force of the work, at best, revealed itself in full-scale production, when all the performance elements resonated alongside each other. Based on this I would propose that the experiences of dramaturgy are both abstract and changeable, manifesting as the structural backbone that moved through the performance. The process on the other hand was cobbled together, informed by my research questions that in turn, allowed me to dig and shape various layers. The more I discovered about the work from excavating, the more I could dramaturge from the outside. This therefore implies that dramaturgy happens externally, realised independently through the handling of ideas, ways of managing materials and constantly remaining in dialogues with the maker, who by contrast is immersed deeply inside the work.

As I went about formalising my creative ideas the dramaturgical "voice" walked with me, as a companion well disposed to my pressing concerns in connection to flamenco and/or my father, helping me navigate my way through some of the "muddy water," before aspects of the

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[58] Bauer, "Propensity: Pragmatics and Functions of Damaturgy in Contemporary Dance," 33.
[59] Dr Alyson Campbell, "Dramaturgy and Live Performance Classes: Kinaesthetic Approaches to Performance Making ", with lecturer Richard Murphet (August - October 2015).

work rendered themselves visible and began to take shape. "Seeing" was important in order to establish whether any of my creative ventures demonstrated potential. As I generally worked alone in both the initial and developing stages of making, it was easier to judge an idea by standing outside myself, looking back at the material as it unfolded. To capture the presence of a developing curiosity, I recorded aspects on my laptop and watched myself from the exterior perspective on a flat blue screen.

Snippets of recordings revealed discoveries that I shared with my collaborators during the final stages, giving them the potential to imbue the practice with their own interpretation or meaning. But discoveries were not exclusive to a visual picture. Rather, ideas began as a flow of kinaesthetic memory, rhythm and tactility, layered with a multiplicity of sensory activity commencing from within the body. Superimposing a mental image or using an object evoked interest in the play of relationships created by that object or image. Attention was called to spatial relationships and an evolving internal dialogue or emotional connection. The visual picture sometimes reinforced a confidence for knowing but this always occurred in a context, as Melinda Buckwalter notes regarding improvisation:

> "there is context to it as well, a body-mind that experiences the world through multiple senses and correlates and prioritises those perceptions according to personal habit as well as to the aesthetics of the time."[60]

In an interview, Romeo Castellucci (Italian theatre maker, director and playwright) confesses his obsession with the body, referring to it as a complete form within itself. The interviewer (Maaike Bleeker) asks Castellucci if he looks for a type of physical presence – an actor with a particular physique, or not? He comments by saying:

> "It is not so much about a personal choice or a certain choice of style. For me the theatre is the physical form of art par excellence, by definition. Thus it is an art that communicates through the body that is on a scene. The body is a physical body moving in a temporal dimension. This is about a physical form of art bound by time.

[60] Buckwalter, *Composing While Dancing: An Improviser's Companion*, 91.

> The body is the minimum and at the same time the maximum that can be communicated."[61]

The flamenco dancing body in performance, finds it difficult to alleviate itself from the subject of life crisis and completely disengage its hand from an appropriated image. Simultaneously it longs for a seamless integration, between this representation and a hypothetical space that supports otherness. As accounted by Hayes, in flamenco one cannot "ignore the blissful immediacy of the dancing body in performance,"[62] and yet it is burdened with projections and perceptions concerning race, gender, sexuality and nationality. At the other end of the spectrum contemporary dance has discerningly grappled with these issues and diplomatically managed to free itself from getting stuck to such labels. While it could also be argued that contemporary dance exists in a historical western paradigm of thought process as a post modernist construct, contemporary choreographers have taken pride in inventing new methods that exist in harmony with a discourse of changing values, and have tried to keep immune from the "historic dualities"[63] that exist in a traditional form like flamenco.

As an example, "attention" and "presence" are qualities inherent in the art form of flamenco, but are not subject-based pedagogies as I experienced in the Dramaturgy and Live Performance classes at the VCA. Identical to this experience, contemporary dance choreographer and teacher Mary Overlie practices 'Six Viewpoints;' a set of descriptions that notate the key constituents of theatre-making to primarily develop one's bodily awareness, and guide dancers and actors through their own performance-making. She articulates the constituents as space, time, movement, emotion, shape and narrative, all of which have been re-worked into a contemporary dancer's checklist for movement improvisation.

Overlie's description of emotion is comprehensive, not just a single hue but a multiplicity of them and as Buckwalter describes, "focuses on the impact of the sheer presence of the performer detached from a specific storyline."[64] She fleshes out this description in an exercise where students practice the "emotional effect of presence," by sitting still and allowing

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61 Romero Castellucci Claudia Castellucci, Chiara Guidi, Joe Kelleher and Nicholas Ridout, *The Theatre of Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio* (London: Routledge, 2007), 217.
62 Hayes, *Flamenco: Conflicting Histories of the Dance*, 157.
63 Ibid., 185.
64 Buckwalter, *Composing While Dancing: An Improviser's Companion*, 25.

themselves to be observed free from restraining thought or feeling. She adds further to this description by saying:

> "The basis of the language of emotion in Viewpoints work is our ability to interact in the present from a natural flow of being . . . This focus demonstrates to actors that they are interesting to watch and capable of being watched without a role to carry them."[65]

A key decision in making 'Fragmentos' looked at the external world of my father and others like him at the nursing home; a fixed reality of an elderly few now grappling with the sense of memory and an ending. Like Castellucci's description of the unadulterated body as art or theatre, I observe the residents in the home as physical forms moving through a "temporal dimension." They are bodies preoccupied in thought, partly affected by persistent disorders of the mental processes caused by a brain disease and marked by memory dysfunction, personality changes and impaired reasoning.

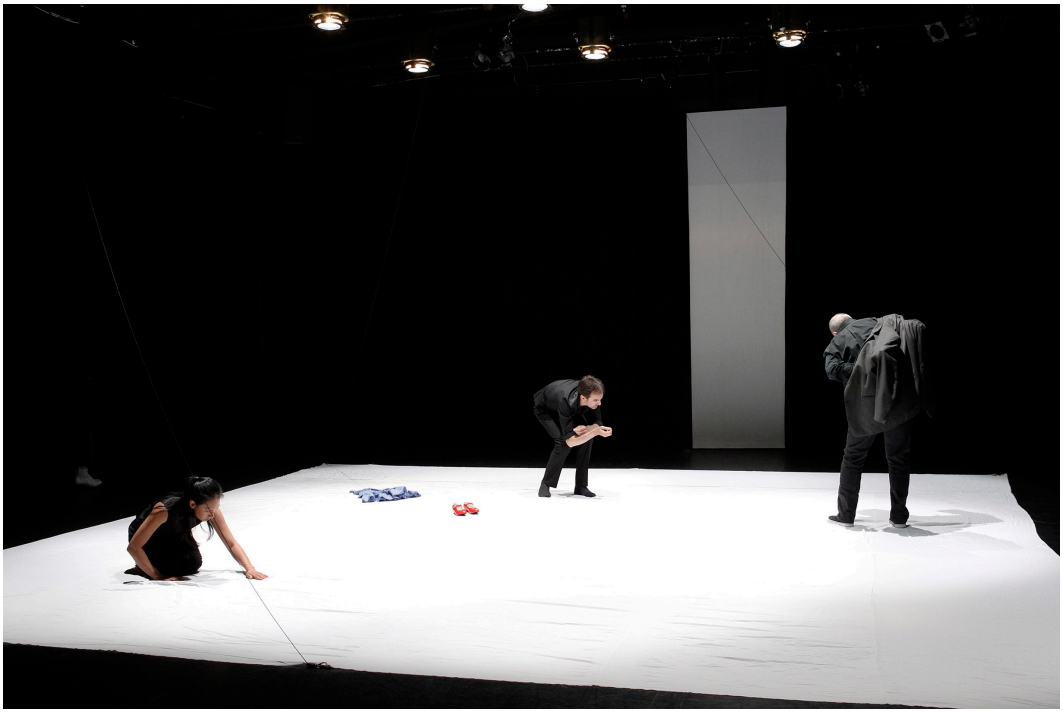

Fig 2. Fragmentos (2015) Photo: Jeff Busby. Performers Jini Lim, Tomás Arroquero and Manolo Varela improvise during the opening scene.

[65] Ibid., 26.

There is a sense of both connection and detachment and naturally this aspect strikes me as a canvas worthy of attention. I also view this through the mirror of my father as a symbol of physical and spiritual reflection. As the "subject" looking at myself into the mirror's space of my father's life both past and present, I tried to voice or express the quality or zone of silence that takes place in the nursing home, taken from the impression of being acquainted with the experience first-hand.

There is also a synergy here between observing my father's condition and Mary Overlie's exercise that touches on the emotional effect of presence. Displaying precisely the comportment of someone with dementia, my father meanders about his room with incredible tenacity despite a limited capacity to manoeuvre. I see enormous fragility and yet a core essence of authenticity. His peculiar tendencies are so gratifying to watch even in the smallest gesture, like when he reaches slowly towards the floor to pick up something that is not there. I am transfixed by the intention of the motion and his attention to moving. I see myself reflected back in my father but essentially I am observing a genuine, human condition – one society generally discards, ignores and chooses not to see. I see a glimpse of a self set adrift in my own distant memories. On the brink of death I see the sighs of the elderly slipping away, and I cannot help but be moved.

I chose to "represent" this aspect as the opening metaphor in the creative work, intentionally setting it up as a kind of viewing that began in the moment of attendance. As the attendees drifted into the space three performers puzzlingly linger, posed on a large white cloth stretched taut across the floor. The dance being "played out" did not seek approval or proclaim in any way its existence. The privileged status of the flamenco dancer had been defaced. Dramatic build-ups and forced entrances were replaced by tiny, modest gestures and understated action. There is nothing about the opening sequence that tries to illuminate or exude pretence. The surroundings can be taken in easily. The design elements are simple and the placement of objects thoughtfully arranged, a hushed audio recording plays in the background and the low-key activity in motion are subtle details to register with ease, both spatially and within the conceptual framework of the first scene.

The Dramaturgy and Live Performances classes I took part in at the VCA exercised a similar overarching principle, that validated to me how someone can be curiously observed without "moving continuously" or assuming a specific "role." Working in small groups, an

introductory task dealt with descriptive composition; an account of the action event told as objectively as possible. We were not allowed to use objects, words and were required to make as economical a use of movement as possible. In building a score, we were asked to include amongst a list of requirements moments of stillness and noticeable breathing. I recall being taken by surprise when watching the other group's showings. The task of communicating an action event using a simple device like the breath resonated and transmitted incredible meaning.

Ordinarily the expressions of flamenco as a dance, song and music form accumulate knowledge that go hand in hand with a long-term commitment and the individual's "lived" experience. This makes flamenco accommodating for mature persons, perhaps no longer capable of performing feats of technical agility that impress, but carry a "quality" relative to a respective life experience. For me this often speaks louder than a technical excersise but as I have alluded to, a lot of performance now demands an upkeep of practice and persistently dipping into disciplinary routines. Interestingly, Overlie's Viewpoints model and the Dramaturgy and Live Performance classes introduce the notion of presence as an intentional element and a quality always readily available. This puts forward the understanding that a broadened experience of one's own presence and its emotional ramifications is of value, and a resource worth considering from the outset in performance-making.

Audience

> "At the root of talking about theatrical experience is the terminology to describe those present at the performance, such as "audience" or "spectator." These words contain preconceived notions of the manner in which a perception occurs; you are there either to listen or to watch. […] A word like Boal's "spec-tator," which captures the notion of watching and active participation is clumsy. Rather, the word "attendee" suggests presence and even can be thought of in the Catholic sense of being "attendant to mass," implying presence and participation."[66]

The audience gaze has been widely considered and re-evaluated within the template of contemporary dance performance. In the same Dramaturgy and Live Performances classes, addressing audience became crucial within the framework of performance making. Long-

[66] Stephen Di Benedetto, "Guiding Somatic Responses within Performative Structures: Contemporary Live Art and Sensorial Perception.," in *The Senses in Performance*, ed. Richard Schechner (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), 125.

standing lecturer Richard Murphet drew attention to the notion of audience as crucial to the decision analysis. Resolving audience placement emerged as a conscious decision to determine the significance of the audience to the maker. Are they the listener, reporter, interested party, jury and how do they become participants within the parameters of the work? As a method of approach to compositional thinking, this was an interesting way of looking at things, imagining what I could do to keep the audience one step behind me.

The wide-reaching aspect of the theatre has intercepted with flamenco's traditional mise en scène, causing the dance aspect to broaden and look beyond its conventional repertory. Now more than ever and affirmed by Hayes, flamenco artists are "shattering the immobilized image of the art form,"[67] using the proscenium stage as a platform to generate new work and elevate flamenco away from smaller venues commonly referred to as *tablaos* (theatre restaurants). Devices like set design and lighting are resourceful components that flamenco companies have willingly explored to recast and reshape the traditional mould. Flamenco artists are boldly thinking in lateral ways, but experimentation generally still only speaks from the margins of tradition. Audience placement is overlooked, as the order of seating is fixed. Like the *tablao* environment the proscenium elevates the stage but formally positions the audience in horizontal rows of seating rather than cabaret style chairs and tables.

For the spectator, the flamenco dancing body is discerningly intelligible and yet exceedingly complex in performance. Traditionally the dance demands individualism but "the solo is a community event."[68] The ensemble is composed of musicians (guitarists, singers and *palmeros*) placed in a linear seating arrangement behind the dancer. This vantage point allows all the members of the ensemble to engage readily, discern with ease the dancers' attention in rendering aspects of the *compás* or a moment when the *compás* is interceded by another member of the group, together with reading visual prompts and gestures. Dancers learn to economise both in terms of space but also when it comes to moving as decisions can happen there and then. Spatial relationships tend to be tight, localised and "veering away from the controlled ambience of the proscenium, and challenging the proposition that there is a preferred point of view from which to observe the art event,"[69] is seldom presented in the presentation of work.

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[67] Hayes, *Flamenco: Conflicting Histories of the Dance*, 158.
[68] Ibid., 161.
[69] Foster, *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*, 181.

The edifice of the European auditorium has impacted on the way flamenco has been choreographed for the modern stage, favouring a front on or face-to-face adaption in dance arrangements. To address the cavernous expanse of the theatre many flamenco choreographers have looked to the scenarios of contemporary dance and ballet, replicating design elements and choreographic structures that mimic formations of other dance styles. The dividing wall of the proscenium has elevated the flamenco performer to an untouchable or fiction-like status but is quickly demolished when audiences are well informed in the protocols of flamenco; its primal source stemming from a culture, a strong sense of community and place, gathering itself up like a tribe.

La familia (the family) to the Spanish and in flamenco has a much wider implication as inclusive to all those "present" at any given moment. For example a Spaniard visiting his/her local bar in a place like Jerez, may stumble across an impromptu outburst of flamenco song or dance and can move from being just an observer to an active bystander, by clapping or screaming out certain phrases in support described as *jaleo*. This is a critical aspect of the experience – blurring the line between spectator and performer. In proscenium settings this aspect can get lost, but in Spain and more particularly Andalusia, upholding a sense of community and social connection is one of flamenco's defining properties. Yet, within this it never seeks to become anything more than what it already is and this is precisely my dilemma and incentive for the inquiry in hand.

Object and Constraint

> "By sensing the structure of the object and allowing oneself to project into and experience that structure, one would inevitably assume a mental state that was inspired by its composition."[70]

Fig 3. Fragmentos (2015) Photo: Jeff Busby. Performers Tomás Arroquero and Manolo Varela interpret a dynamic rendition of 'el compás' – one of flamenco's defining key features.

Incontestably the work exhibited the markings of flamenco, informed by former experiences proficient in the principles of the form. 'Fragmentos' incorporated certain defining qualities of flamenco dance, together with the components of sound; both recorded and live musical accompaniment such as the flamenco guitar, customary song and *palmas* (handclapping). Furthermore I used flamenco aesthetics, objects particular to the form like the red flamenco shoes, but also associative links such as the white-polka-dotted blue *feria* dresses. The *Feria* is a provincial fair that exhibits the customs of a community. Specific to Andalusian folklore, the costuming worn during these annual events represent festivity and has been accessorised with recognisable features. For instance, the dresses are adorned with ruffles, colourful fabrics and

[70] Ibid., 126.

are often worn with decorative paraphernalia such as flowers, fans and shawls.

These aesthetics were absorbed into Spanish dance *(baile Español)* – a semi-convergence of forms that melded the lines of classical ballet with the stylistic and rhythmic orchestration of both Spanish classical music and flamenco. Objects like the fan, the shawl, the walking stick and the tail dress were reworked as props, each with its own creative scope and rigour for dance. While some aspects of flamenco may seem alike, the stylised-provincial costuming of the *feria* is of its own tradition. Reshaped and reinterpreted, these objects now augment the dance aspect of the art form, but also serve as signs that distinguish flamenco from other genres of performance.

These objects of tradition are loaded with meaning and values implicit in a flamenco ethos. Essentially this is a drawback of traditional flamenco's breadth of expression, objects culturally frozen even in Spain. Like lost relics these objects parallel another dilemma I face, living with flamenco as a constructed layer outside of Spain. Without doubt, use and association define objects and this can delimit a potential to expand the significance of what these objects can be. For example, a pair of red flamenco shoes brings to mind so many clichéd abstractions. Concepts like beauty and passion, love and femininity, but I aimed to present the shoes in a less conventional way. By tying the shoelaces together I experimented with how this restricted the action of moving; a bargaining that now relies on an informal agreement between the modified object and a perception of limitations.

In the creative work, the action of covering my ears with a pair of red flamenco shoes in response to the singing voice to deaden the sound was something I did instinctively, but proved effective as a way to shift the object's meaning. The object then mutates into a new form through the simple act of tying the shoes to my head; the representation of shoes now altered as a process of "re-presentation." This denial of representation or "reality" is also typical of surrealism and the surreal attached to some of its more darker qualities are very appealing aspects for me to explore as a maker, but also suit the figurative nature of such "defined" objects like those in flamenco, that are difficult to reform unless taken out of context.

In developing the scope for this research, my interest has been to *not* expend the properties and values of flamenco, that include its related imagery, but filter or "negotiate a path between an overtly interdisciplinary approach to the mise en scène and a commitment to choreographic

technique and crafting."[71] In this context perhaps "transforming" tradition is not the right term, as this could imply ignoring what has been generated or established. Pitchet Klunchun – a traditional Thai Khon dancer, who has collaborated with contemporary artist Jèrôme Bel, prefers to use the word "developing" or reminiscent of where it came from in reference to building new culture.

Without flaunting any false pretext the work titled *Pitchet Klunchun and Myself* stages a dialogue between two artists, revealing to one another the distinct manner in which they work. The collaborative nature of this work is interesting because it tries to establish a middle ground, where traditional and experimental frames of reference come together in mutual conversation. Another way of discerning this area of difference, between the "conventional" and the "un-conventional," has been talked about in Kent De Spain's book where the author elaborates on Barbra Dilley's description by saying:

> "The link that Barbara Dilley talks about, "between the conventional and the unconventional," hints at another ontological structure: that image and imagination sit at two ends of a spectrum with images at the conventional end and imagination at the unconventional end. This has led some practitioners and teachers of improvisation to use the word "image" as a verb, not just a noun. To "imagine" something is to add the "un" to conventional, to change the mundane into the magical."[72]

The traditional objects featured in 'Fragmentos' were displaced and slightly skewed. Conventional images used in unconventional ways precipitated the object's potential to resonate with alternative metaphoric meaning. Setting up the space as a sleek modern canvas strengthened this objective. Large monochromatic areas of black and white produced simple lines and geometric forms, maculated with a suggestion of traditional objects in primary colours of red and blue. In the opening scene a child's blue and white polka-dotted dress and a tiny pair of red flamenco shoes are randomly placed as if they had fallen from nowhere. Was it a child who had lost its way or someone who had died? Its surreal presence was uncovered much later as an overlay worn by a fully grown adult.

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[71] Brannigan, *Moving across Disciplines: Dance in the Twenty-First Century*, 25, 26.
[72] De Spain, *Landscape of the Now: A Topography of Movement Improvisation*, 130.

Fig 4. Fragmentos (2015) Photo: Jeff Busby. Performer Jini Lim uncovers the intriguing presence of a traditional feria dress costume – flamenco attire that evokes vestiges of sympathy.

Looking back on this moment where Jini wore the adult version of the blue and white spotted feria dress, reminded me of a mismatch, between Jini's cultural background as Chinese-Malaysian-Australian and the dress that kept "in character" with a cultural souvenir; a slight cultural slippage of "dress" unmistakably the property of another place. This moment in the show demontrated a pastiche of culturally disparate worlds, flickering between the *folklórica* postcard image from Spain to what almost seemed like the distinct features of an indigenous South American woman dressed in the residue of colonialism.

In another scene an adult pair of red flamenco shoes are salvaged and placed down onto the white flooring alongside the dancer. The cloth, now unhinged, moves organically beneath the dancer's feet as the movement improvisation deepens. Like a reverse silhouette the cloth not only reconfigures to reveal the shape and outline of an evolving presence, but the silky, tenuous surface also behaves as a subtle constraint for the improvisation underway. The red shoes dance with no one in them. Suddenly a cry of a flamenco singing voice comes without warning; *la voz afillada* is the authentic expression of *el flamenco gitano* and characterised by the

raspy or "cracked" quality of the voice, injected with *rajao* or coarseness. I pick up the shoes and dampen the sound by covering my ears.

I struggle backwards towards a chair and sit down. Using a necktie, I tie the shoes covering my ears to my head. I am blindfolded. I hold the shoes in place by clenching the ends of the necktie with my teeth. Senses are dampened, in sight, sound and speech. Unintentionally I have turned myself into a mythical goblin with the capricious workings of dementia and unable to communicate with the outside world. Tradition and experimentation meet in opposition – a face-to-face demonstration where the presence of one modifies the manner in which the other is evaluated. Differences magnify and simultaneously serve as an anchor. Essential elements of both traditional and contemporary practice, that include theoretical and ideological values, establish a middle ground where both frames of reference come together in a mutual conversation.

I think it is worth noting here that while developing this aspect and toying with the idea of dancing with my eyes closed/ears covered/mouth gagged, I sensed an incompatibility between my efforts to deepen the inquiry and my loyalty to or betrayal of flamenco. A dispute in reconciling differences; one that "defends" a particular body image – a constructed system of "technique" that equates to thousands of hours spent in the studio alone striving to reach "perfection," and the other that rallies against this as I do my best to "muck it up." The struggle to uphold the dance in a flamenco way, while covering my eyes and holding the shoes in place over my ears, ended when I decided to let go of the shoes and later open my eyes completely. Now looking back post performance, I wonder what would have happened if I had continued to wrestle with this moment, giving myself "permission" to fall over. Surely this would have been a profound image to unfold and explore too.

In an earlier development stage of the creative work, I had contemplated using black plastic garbage bags as objects to work up against. Conceptually, black plastic is both an unconventional surface to couple with a traditional form like flamenco, but also suits the economical use of objects often featured in contemporary dance performances. I had filled a number of bags, some with leaves and others with air, and arranged them randomly in the space. The black plastic produced a number of interesting effects, both texturally and also as asymmetrical shapes. As inanimate objects they deflected light and this gave them an uneven quality, rather like rocks or stones that uttered sound when gently moved or a louder noise

when scrunched up and removed quickly. Many bags piled together created a wall or a pyramid shape, if assembled in a corner, or could bury someone alive so to speak.

I tried to imagine coming into view from beneath a mound of bags, dressed in a concoction; a giant ruffled tail dress made of black plastic. A figure enveloped in a black cloak. This larger than life flamenco character I had amused myself with, slightly deranged as a reaction of my creative fluid self being stuffed inside a doll costume and forced (of course forcing myself) to go through automated motions. Connotations could be read differently depending on the use and arrangement of the bags, giving potential for both literal and metaphorical meaning. Many bags gathered together unified to assemble a much larger object, with a talent to conceal or obstruct what stirred behind it when the observing body moved. Instantaneously it could demolish and reconfigure as a cluster of smaller individual forms. I found this aspect intriguing.

My "imagination" created "transformation," and this is a very powerful aspect in performance that I hold a lot of interest in both as a creative stimulus to embark on discovery but also as a way to catapult flamenco into a new era.

> "The imagination can make the "not here" sensorily available to the "here," causing absent places and things to suddenly seem present. We can see things that are invisible or see through things that are opaque. We can conjure into a fragile momentary existence things that have never been, even things that could not be."[73]

Even though I had imagined using garbage bags as potential objects, I was not committed to them entirely either. Instead, "playing" with these ideas led me to another discovery that did feature as one scenario in the work. I found a tent one day at my local Scout Hall – a regular space I use for practice. It had been suspended from the ceiling to dry out after the scouts had spent a weekend away camping.

[73] Ibid., 128.

Fig 5. Fragmentos (2015) Photo: Jeff Busby. Performer Tomás Arroquero quietly poses and listens preceding a moment of improvising in a "flamenco way" – ensconced in the faint sigh of a giant, hovering life form.

A silvery blue tent made of parachute cloth hung from the rafters. Its durable, lightweight quality seemed consistent with the garbage bags I had played around with previously. Standing and observing the tent I remember being taken by its scale, colour and form, levitating gracefully in the space like the bone cartilage of a giant dinosaur suspended in the Natural History Museum. Its visual splendour had impacted on me and I listened before moving alongside, in front and behind it, exploring as if I was discovering a newfound land. My next port of call led me inside it, as I improvised phrases of material informed by flamenco but gave myself permission to freestyle; a version of flamenco with few restrictions on the moves or techniques, paying attention to the feedback information communicated back to me by the object itself.

Touching the hovering form heightened my imagination, releasing inner worlds or sanctums. The fall of its soft folds brushed against me. I pondered momentarily, noticing crevasses in the folds and how some opened up and turned into small corridors I could travel through. At times I found myself stuck, enfolded in its silence and a multiplicity of perception, that sometimes

made it difficult to discern if I was moving it, or it was moving me. It continued to move even after I stopped moving, exuding a hushed sound, and quietly rearranging itself as I reposed and listened. While I had a strong sense of this playing out inside my head, I needed to see it to fully grasp what the object was doing. I video recorded my interactions retracing some of the sequences I had improvised earlier. I perceived instantly the object's transmutation. It had an organic quality that shifted from being the interior of a velvety cave to a pliable sheet-like organism. The situation creates an environment to interact and the interaction builds. In an interview by Jeroen Peeters, choreographer Lisa Nelson says,

> "Taking instructions from the objects and listening to them is really what I've been busy with, which includes the objects of the space — the architecture. In a way, I don't think I improvise; I follow the instructions of the space. There are no such things as impulses. There are reactions, but no impulses that just come out of nowhere: what we think of as impulses often concerns reaction to the local environment, to the signals that exist but that we're not so attentive to, although they are very powerfully moving us."[74]

This description is also accurate to my experience in flamenco dance because of the analogy between "reactions" as opposed to "impulses" as the tenacity behind the movement. In the case of flamenco instructions are received in the moment by "listening" to the ensemble environment. An experienced flamenco dancer has accumulated more reflexive action and as such developed greater recourses to "play on."

Despite the fact that impulsivity as a key quality epitomises the spirit of flamenco, improvisation as reiterated by academic scholar Eva Ordóñez Flores, comes down to its structural knowledge where "it is precisely the rigorous respect of these rules that allows improvisation to occur effectively in a group context."[75] Limits are less defined in the case of improvising with an object but the "art" is in listening, despite the outward display of spontaneity. Watching the video furthermore demonstrated the object's capacity to unify with the body, masking different body parts to reveal just my head or legs, and those very distinctive white boots that at a distance seemed to scintillate in the light or could be construed as a Loony Tunes comic.

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[74] Buckwalter, *Composing While Dancing: An Improviser's Companion*, 145.
[75] Eva Ordóñez Flores, "Dance Improvisation Rules and Practice in the Cuadro Flamenco " *The World of Music: Music, Language and Dance: The Articulation of Structures and Systems* 50, no. 1 (2008): 37.

Not only did using objects give me a starting point from which I could launch ideas, but it also helped me compartmentalise these ideas into developing material that rotated different choreographic structures. As a means to illustrate this I can use the example of the opening sequence that deployed movement improvisation as the choreographic focus. I superimposed the image of my father and the nursing home here, because it was helpful for me on an imaginary plane to raise the visceral energy to an "other" level. I initially worked on this segment using a mobile walking frame and Jini held a cleaning rag that were later removed, but the improvisation still preserved the memory of these objects during the final presentation.

In a later scene when the white floor pulled up and turned into the hovering tent, I chose to work with choreographed segments that emerged firstly from improvising in a "flamenco way," but decoupled from the external components that produce the rhythmical aspect *(el compás)* such as the flamenco guitar and *palmas*. Working in silence, I selected the choreographed fragments I liked the most and placed these in designated areas within and around the object. There was potential for the object to resist or comply with my choice of choreographed movement, altering the flow and shape of the material thus causing it to change each night during the performance.

An important aspect in the evolution of using different objects was contingent on the notion of "unification." As I had worked with a number of objects to develop isolated preliminary scenarios, I became concerned with knowing how these would coexist alongside each other as a final work. Envisaging how these objects could interlink and be mutually influenced, led me to the key decision of using one object that could morph into a number of different things. The white cloth has a number of potential resonances. As an achromatic colour, that is a colour without a hue, it could evoke something spiritual or religious, the Western notion of a wedding or funeral, and its clinical crispness might allude to extreme cold or hotness, or bear some semblance to an austere hospital environment. It is also in opposition to black, giving it strong design potential both visually and also for lighting.

Conceiving the object as an enormous white cloth became a workable solution to my problem. It could be tethered to the floor, turning the black flooring into an illusionary large white platform. Unhitching each corner gave the white cloth permission to move. Metaphorically, the symbolic gesture to "remove" or "wipe" the space connoted attachment to the workings of dementia but also in the way of masking. It partitioned as a wall to throw a gigantic shadow

on, morphed into a monumental hovering form and was worn as a mega, long ruffled skirt taken to the extreme to produce a final evocative image; the flesh and bones of an evolving "creature" – perhaps as one that emulates the physical uncertainly of my father, rendering his condition in a kaleidoscope of ways. Like an unfurling sail the image crystallises my prolific journey with flamenco and the one I am still making efforts to unravel, astonished by its magnitude and how it still manages to "contain" me. This coupled with my father's present state of affairs, or what I see as an exact replica of myself materialising through his translucent skin, made it only fitting for me to bury myself under the gigantic mass of white fabric as a final motif and disappear into nothingness.

Conclusion

I began my research primarily because my circumstances are a rare find, having left behind a life in Australia and devoted a substantial part of living in and learning the dance tradition of another culture. Flamenco is more than just a dance form; it has become a filter through which I experience all things, but I do not profess to "be" flamenco. Rather, flamenco has been a vehicle for me to continue to find myself, an inquiry into a relationship of self and the world. A primary objective inside the creation of 'Fragmentos' was to lean away from a known sense of self, but also of making; to *not* strictly rely on a flamenco mandate but search for other ways to "prise it open" and *be* something else. In other words I chose to use this practice-led research as a forum to expand the contextual relevance of flamenco outside of its traditional values by growing from within the art form itself.

As a body steeped in the principles of flamenco dance; that is a body well informed in the understanding of a music and cultural tradition and the practice of "moving to" and "navigating within" *el compás*; one of flamenco's key defining constituents, I did explore movement through a somatic-based practice that allowed for "other" residual layers to emerge. These different shades sometimes curious or playful, which are intuitive and involuntary, were also found in the superimposed image I used of my father, burdened with chronic dementia and memory loss; a childlike state of a man now on the threshold of life and death. As miniature fields of study, these experiences increased my susceptibility to moving in ways unlike the predictability of my own dancing; the entailment of sedimentary knowledge now ingrained in my body and fundamental to my experience of dancing flamenco.

Yet, flamenco is like a red bull intended to simulate blood, not least in relation to its carefully constructed image conceived for an expendable market. Flamenco as a tradition can never completely alleviate or disengage itself from the image it represents. To seek new meaning without the concomitant of its distinctly defined aesthetics – objects with a kind of stylised romanticism and prescribed movement, proved to be a challenge and difficult to surpass completely. There is also much evidence to substantiate that a flamenco ethos predisposes artists to "behave" in certain ways, by sharing the same agenda: to sustain and keep alive flamenco as a tradition, making it difficult to assert any other persona or voice. This is also

apparent even within the song form; verses indicative of a time and place that characterised the art form in the late nineteenth century and have since not been reinvented to incorporate other thematic content. Song verses that demonstrate more bias for "dance," continue to be passed down from one generation to the next as a statutory enactment despite a changing discourse in social and political values. Of course it would be inconceivable to *not* preserve these aspects of *any* art form; the erasure of the song, a culture and a people would be tragic.

By choosing to use and "hold" onto flamenco as a tradition I did run the risk of limiting creative potential in the work; defined objects and a coded language that have an aptitude for "control," or a conspicuous Phrygian mode of sound; modal and tonal characteristics prominent in Andalusian cadence, that undoubtedly "put a name to" the spectacle. The propensity of the audience to jump to conclusions already satisfies preconceived notions of what flamenco represents, and this exceeds the event even before it has commenced. The perpetual image of flamenco will always predetermine how audiences look at it.

In stark contrast to flamenco as a tradition but as an interesting parallel to the issue of "control," North American contemporary-dance-artist Deborah Hay relays her own process in the creation of a political, post apocalyptic piece originally titled 'O Beautiful' in 2002. Over an entire year Hay went into the studio with a desire to make a work that applied no prescribed dance movement. Using just a precise spatial floor plan and a stimulating question that she addressed in her entire body, Hay curiously went about to see if a dance could emerge without "making" it. The costume created for the piece reflected her politically charged intention, but after wearing it post performance she confessed how "strongly" it influenced her dancing. In an interview with Kent De Spain, Hay comments on the work by saying

> "I felt like it [the costume] made me into something…it had too much power over me; that costume, those boots. I felt like it was too loaded and I couldn't overcome the costume, couldn't transcend the costume."[76]

During an unusual heat wave in 2003, Hay was invited to perform the piece in London but removed all her clothing because of the heat. It was only then she realised how liberated she felt not wearing the costume and in dancing nude changed the name of the piece to 'Beauty.' It

[76] De Spain, *Landscape of the Now: A Topography of Movement Improvisation*, 145.

is remarkable that even for an artist like Deborah Hay, (at the antithesis to my field of dance) the evolution of a work also stems from a "process."

'Fragmentos' did pave the way for my intended aspiration and presented as a richly complex and multilayered work, drawing on traditions and conventions from both flamenco and contemporary dance where a productive dialogue developed between them both. This dialogue presented identities not as static signs of origin but as signifiers of the fluid nature of a contemporary multicultural experience. The skills I have developed through flamenco dance have provided me with the tools to sustain the tradition but also renew it. The presence of traditional values closely entwined with a modern use of space, lighting and the presentation of ideas did shift the picture postcard "ideal" of flamenco away from being clearly just another traditional performance. As research, I see this vantage point as an ongoing, shifting and interpretive analysis that will always draw upon my past and present experiences both in and outside of the art form. *¡Qué viva el arte!* (May the art form live on!)

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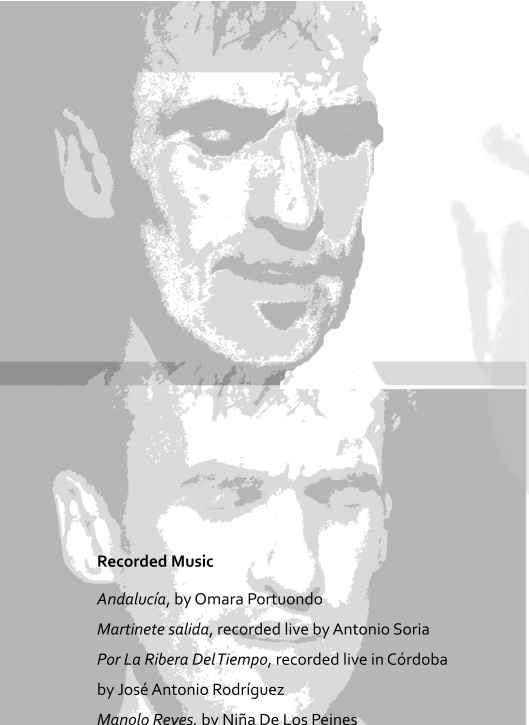


Recorded Music

Andalucía, by Omara Portuondo
Martinete salida, recorded live by Antonio Soria
Por La Ribera Del Tiempo, recorded live in Córdoba by José Antonio Rodríguez
Manolo Reyes, by Niña De Los Peines

I'd like to dedicate this work to Domingo…my father, who can only now imagine what it must be like to see his son dance.

MFA (Dance)
Tomas Arroquero *presents*

FRAGMENTOS

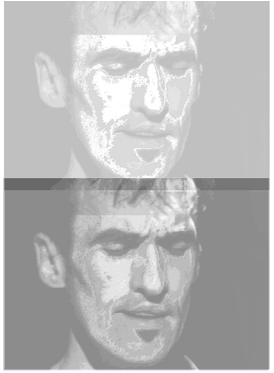
9 – 12 Dec 2015
Grant Street Theatre
Victorian College of the Arts
Southbank

ARTISTIC NOTES

"Under the din a repetition of something is audible, rising – fading – spreading. Small eruptions of rhythm are melding into one and a large group is forming, four or five people deep. Before long the whole structure is thumping with a primal beat;

Dac-a-dac DAC dac-dac - Dac-a- dac DAC dac-dac.

It is barely identifiable as palms coming together. I listen and try for a minute to extract numbers in the cycle, but the thing in the raw is not the thing studied. In the midst of the group there is a man gesticulating and singing. He is inviting people to come in, introducing them in his song. All eyes are fixed on him. They come out and he steps back. An old woman with two twigs of calf that poke out from her hem catches the last hair of each beat. After her comes a small boy, an awkward genius. Then a tall elegant woman sidles forward, hair curled and teaming down her back, all curve and fanned palm. A man with a barrel body leans and sways, kicking unexpectedly.



Under the din a repetition is audible, rising, fading, spreading, out of a shadow into luminosity, peculiar yet recognisable.

The tide of rhythm rallies, accumulates, and gathers strength, as many palms become one rising force. It climaxes, crescendos, then recedes, to build again. Song and dance reflect and shadow, unify.

I'm a petrified piece of tinted driftwood apart from a sea of families who surge away to one side. I feel the water lapping at my feet. I just watch as a small child does at these things when they're obliged to come, dress up, and sometimes, to dance."

This was my first experience of seeing 'gypsy' flamenco – unadulterated in its purest and essential sense. A living, breathing art form that flourishes in Andalucia, in the southern region of Spain. As a long-standing tradition, the resonance of flamenco reigns supreme in Jerez de la Frontera, defining many aspects of quotidian life. Despite having studied the dance in Madrid and previously in Australia, I remember how apart I felt, observing this phenomenon in absolute disbelief.

What has transpired for me during this period of research is twofold – firstly, with my decision to return to Australia in 2011, after living in Spain for 20 years and secondly, with my father's mental and physical decline, induced by a chronic state of dementia.

Before returning I distinctly felt a sense of reaching a plateau. It was no longer feasible to continue in the rigour of flamenco life. Flamenco is more than just a dance form; it has become a filter through which I experience all things. I cannot escape it or myself; a self that flamenco has been so present in defining.

Of course, if the dance and environment are completely gone – that being a situation or habitat like Jerez – what is left? How do I move forward with flamenco and explore it through the lens of contemporary form? As a body now steeped in the principles of this tradition, how do I begin to re-evaluate its looking-glass logic?

The ramification of observing my father's dementia, and those in the nursing home teetering on the threshold of life and death has clearly affected me. Grappling with a sense of an ending and piecing together memory is now more pertinent than ever.

I gradually watch him diminish, vanish into thin air. He is a man who now looks at me with eyes of a child. Fine and tenuous, shrinking into a hidden chasm, each time exposing more and more of his skeletal frame. At the same time there's an enormous fragility and a core essence of authenticity. As I massage his hand I see an exact replica of my own, and catch sight of my skull materialise through his translucent skin – a life force slowly extracted.

What if I examine movement that begins from a somatic-based state in response to my father's deterioration, and others like him, where the body now reciprocates a rudimental pattern of movement, limited by a reduced mind and/or aging body but still incredibly rich and meaningful? How can I allow for "otherness" to emerge, curious or playful, that is ingrained, intuitive and involuntary? Can I transpose what I'm currently experiencing with my father, where a sense of interiority is surfacing; a childlike state superimposed with layers of constructed behaviour and then, a sudden irrational response to an offensive person that he can see but I cannot?

BIOGRAPHIES

Tomas Arroquero
concept, choreography, direction, performance

Tomas's choice of vocation in flamenco dance has maintained itself as a vehicle for him to explore his own personal interests and bicultural heritage. What began at the Spanish Club in Melbourne, took him to Spain where he lived, studied and worked inside the source for 20 years. Tomas is passionate about making innovative work in collaborative contexts, emanating from a desire to propel his experience with flamenco into other spaces.

Tomas completed his first postgraduate study at the VCA (Performance Creation – Choreography, 2012) and undertook a Solo Residency at Victoria University in 2013. The emphasis on perceiving dance through a kinaesthetic lens has transpired into a curiosity for Tomas to pursue somatic forms of movement practice. This has opened up rich territory for him to explore and stretch the boundaries of the flamenco form, supporting his interest in the ongoing, lived, and practical process of renegotiation of its defining characteristics.

Jini Lim
performance

Born in Perth, Jini was introduced to dance at a young age, training in classical ballet, jazz and tap. Whilst completing a Certificate in Dance at WAAPA she began her study of Spanish Dance and flamenco with Deanna Blacher, and furthered this study in Madrid with Merche Esmeralda, Antonio Reyes and Rafaela Carrasco to name a few. She was a member of Perth's Danza Viva Spanish Dance Company for seven years and has performed locally with Arte Kanela, Nella Randone and Tomas Arroquero.

Jini is a graduate of Curtin University completing a Bachelor of Science (Physiotherapy) in 1998, and has experience in the rehabilitation of people with neurological disorders and chronic pain. She is currently fulfilling a long held curiosity of the Feldenkrais method by participating in the professional training program.

Manolo Varela
performance

Manolo is an iconic artist of the Australian flamenco landscape. He began his career as a guitarist in 1975, performing in various tablaos (flamenco theatre restaurants) in Madrid and Barcelona, and collaborating with many of the finest flamenco dancers, guitarists and singers in Spain; including an international tour with Luisillo's Spanish Dance Company in 1976 to Australia and New Zealand.

Returning to live in Australia in 1986, Manolo worked with various Australian flamenco groups that included other expatriate flamenco professionals from Spain. His experience as an accompanist of dance and singing was extensively utilised by Antonio Vargas (Strictly Ballroom and Mission Impossible II) and Diana Reyes companies.

As a guitarist and singer, Manolo has worked with Graham Murphy in the Australian Ballet, recorded on movie soundtracks for Fox Studios and performed in major theatres and festivals throughout Australia, New Zealand and neighbouring Pacific countries.

Kieren Ray
performance

Kieren Ray studied classical and jazz guitar at the Queensland Conservatorium of Music before studying flamenco guitar in Spain with various prominent performers and teachers in Seville, Madrid, Jerez and Córdoba. As a flamenco guitarist, he has performed as a soloist and in numerous ensembles throughout Australia at major arts festivals and concert halls in metropolitan and regional areas. Currently, Kieren continues to collaborate with Australia's finest flamenco performers and visiting international artists.

Jennifer Hector
lighting design and collaboration

This year Jenny travelled with Madeleine Flynn and Tim Humphrey to light their work *Gauge* at Brighton Festival UK, designed the lighting for Jo Lloyd's *Confusion for Three*, co- designed the set and lighting for Tim Darbyshire's *Stampede The Stampede* for Dance Massive, and continued working with Jodee Mundy developing the set and lighting for *Museum of the Imagined Touch.*

Previously, Jenny developed a residential lighting installation *How Are You?*, performed in Shian Laws *Personal Mythologies* and designed lights for the likes of Back To Back Theatre, Rimini Protokoll, Paul Kelly and Paul Grabowsky, The Light In Winter, Balletlab, Stephanie Lake and Robin Fox, Big West Festival and Yellow Wheel. Jenny is the recipient of two Green Room Awards and a current member of the Green Room Dance Panel.

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