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La Nueva Escuela De La Danza Flamenca: Postmodern Shifts in Flamenco Dance

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Illeana Gomez

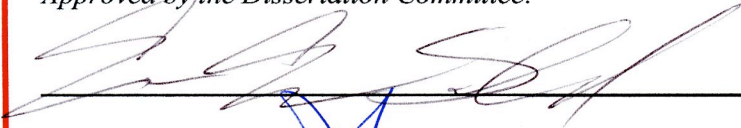
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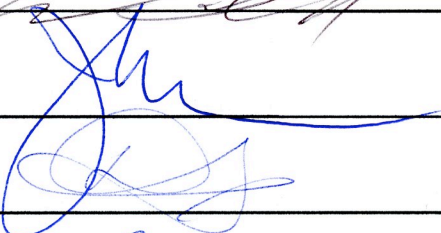
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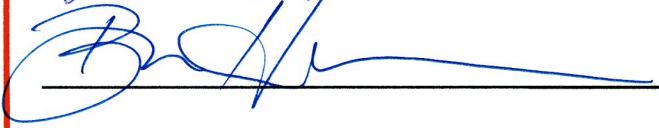
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**LA NUEVA ESCUELA DE LA DANZA FLAMENCA:
POSTMODERN SHIFTS IN FLAMENCO DANCE**

BY

ILLEANA GOMEZ

B.A., Cultural Anthropology, University of Texas at Austin, 2005

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Fine Arts
Dance**

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

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ABSTRACT

Within the past ten years flamenco, the musical genera from Andalusia, the southernmost region of Spain, has gone through a very evident transformation. This transformation involves an intellectualization of flamenco in that there is an increasing preoccupation with technique. This concern for technical virtuosity can be seen in the complexity of flamenco music, as well as the increased skill of dancers most apparent in their physical ability and musicality. This technical revolution has even influenced the manner in which shows are produced, and is highlighted by a sense of innovation, realism, and the increased use of literary and philosophical themes.

In the current state of flamenco dance, movements have become more symbolic as opposed to gestural, dancers are exploring a variety of concepts, themes, and aesthetics, and there appears to be an ideological shift toward innovation. These changes in the dance have developed from the globalization of flamenco, or what Marta Savigliano calls “worlding” in her article, “World Dance and Dancing Out There in the World.” As a result of the “worlding” of flamenco, it has shifted from cultural practice to low art, also known as popular art; and from low art to high art, also known as fine art. With this shift, flamenco dance has even been integrated into university dance programs in the United States, sitting alongside concertized dance forms like ballet and modern dance.

This essay examines the current state of flamenco dance as a result of modernism, globalization, and the world dance phenomenon (in the United States). Some of the most current flamenco dancers are creating works that appear to incorporate characteristics that resemble contemporary choreographic elements. These elements manifest themselves as inclusions of more diverse uses of space and perspective, variations on traditional themes, as well as hyperstylizations and variations in aesthetic. This essay specifically entails the analysis of a select body of work by dancers in what I have come to call, *La Nueva Escuela de La Danza Flamenca*, or The New School of Flamenco Dance. I focus, specifically, on the technical ways in which this emerging group of dancers are innovating flamenco, and the challenges these innovations bring to the basic mechanism of flamenco dance. Furthermore, I discuss my own experiences with approaching flamenco from a choreographic standpoint, as was my task in the University of New

Mexico's MFA program. From my experience, I hope to highlight the tension that occurs when trying to fit flamenco into a contemporary dance paradigm.

From this research what becomes apparent is that these dancers are shifting the priority of flamenco dance, and setting new standards in a mode that is distinctly of the 21st century and characteristically postmodern, depicting a departure from romanticism, and a movement toward realism, innovation and technical virtuosity.

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INTRODUCTION

There is a drastic shift occurring in flamenco dance that is perhaps as significant as the movement which occurred in modern dance nearly a century ago. Some of the most recent flamenco dancers in Spain appear to be expanding customary practices in flamenco by incorporating characteristics that resemble more contemporary choreographic elements and aesthetics. These elements manifest themselves as inclusions of more diverse uses of space and perspective, variations on traditional themes, and hyper stylizations and variations in aesthetic. These dancers -consciously or not- are shifting the priorities of flamenco dance and setting new standards.

This essay will examine the current state of flamenco dance as a result of modernism, globalization and the world dance phenomenon in the United States.¹ In order to complete my task in examining the current state of flamenco, I will first analyze the works of dancers in what I have come to call *la Nueva Escuela de la Danza Flamenca*, and then provide my own experiences and insights as a flamenco-focused MFA student in a flamenco focused university dance program at the University of New Mexico.

From my research what becomes apparent is a trend in flamenco dance that is distinctly of the 21st century and characteristically postmodern, depicting a departure from romanticism and a movement toward realism and innovation.

¹ By world dance phenomenon I am describing the public's growing interest, particularly in academia, in ethnic dance in the late 20th century, and its relabeling of the terms "cultural" or "ethnic" as "world" (Savigliano 163).

THE “WORLDING” OF FLAMENCO

“Flamenco is undergoing a transformation. It is changing in order to appeal to a wider audience. Before, flamenco was only for the chosen few, for specific gatherings. Now, it has reached the universities and the concert halls. It has reached every kind of cultural event...”

(Mario Maya, comments from a documentary of Ay Hondo!)

In the perspective that art is a reflection of society, I agree that all art forms must evolve in order to honestly connect to, and be the voice of, a given generation. However, whether I agree with Maya² in his statement on the globalization of flamenco, I have yet to decide. Many people in the flamenco community argue that in the current state of flamenco, some dancers look for new forms and styles *just* for novelty’s sake, placing less emphasis on tradition. The reckless preoccupation with innovation may, in some cases, result in dancers whom rely entirely on technical skill and rhythmic virtuosity, often with disregard for the *arte*³ and the *sentido*⁴, thus “destroy [ing] the majesty” of the flamenco art form (Garcia 12 [translation by Gomez]). However, before discussing the current state, I must first discuss the events which have lead up to the present condition.

In flamenco, the *cante*⁵ has historically been a practice of the impoverished and of a marginalized people (Pohren 256). Although this legacy infuses and continues to define

² Mario Maya was a flamenco dancer, choreographer, director and writer. Born in 1937 in Cordoba, Maya is one of the most prominent figures in contemporary flamenco. He began his professional career at the age of 13, and since won many awards, including the prize for dance in the 1982 *Biennal de Sevilla*. He is most well known for his flamenco dramas, or flamenco plays. Maya died in 2008 (Mario Maya, flamenco-world.com).

³ *Arte* is literally “art” in Spanish.

⁴ The *sentido* refers to the sentiment of a flamenco *palo*, or musical style

⁵ The term *cante* means flamenco song. The first manifestations of flamenco were voiced and performed a *palo seco*, or without instrumental accompaniment. The *cante* remains as the central element of flamenco music and the main structural factor in dance expression.

and inspire flamenco performance, flamenco is no longer strictly an expression of the lower classes, or of the Gitano or Spanish Roma. One can see this in the dance, more specifically. Flamenco dance is taught in universities and academies outside of Spain, practiced by many across the globe, and performed in a variety of venues. This describes the evolutional “worlding” of flamenco. Scholar Marta Elena Savigliano uses the term, “to world” to mean globalize as she discusses world dance in her article, “World Dance and Dancing Out There in the World (164). While Salvigliano uses the term in reference to the world dance movement, I utilize it to also describe the process of flamenco’s commodification, intellectualization⁶, its incorporation into academia, and its inclusion in the category of high art.

One of the most significant events in the “worlding” process was the unraveling of flamenco as a profession. During the period of the *café cantantes* (1869-1910), or flamenco night clubs, dancers became public attractions. And with this, the dance was sanitized to appeal to the public audience. “Voices were no longer inevitably raucous and broken; they soared toward the high notes with timbre and tessitura more proper to arabesques and pure virtuosity than to the naked unfettered expressivity of Gypsy song” (Leblon 73). Then, in the midst of the modernist movement, flamenco took another shift during what flamencologists call the operatic or theatrical period. From this moment on,

⁶ In this essay I utilize the term intellectualization to describe a more recent preoccupation with technique in the flamenco of the 21st century. This concern for technical virtuosity can be seen in the complexity of flamenco music and the use of intricate rhythms, in the increased skill of dancers (most apparent in increased speed of footwork and a heightened sense of mobility), and has even influenced the manner in which shows are produced. This technical revolution is highlighted by a sense of realism as well as the increased use of literary and philosophical themes.

flamenco established its place on the theater stage, standing next to ballet and modern dance in a category of “concertized” dance.⁷

Flamenco’s newfound home on the stage, both in the *tablao*⁸ style venue, and on the proscenium stage, placed performers in the position of being public attraction and commodity. This notion of the flamenco artist as a commodity was taken to a new level of exploitation in the period of Francisco Franco’s dictatorship in Spain (1936- 1975), in which flamenco was defined and utilized as nationalist propaganda. Under Franco, the intention of the Spanish government was to prevent regional or local allegiance and create a powerful dictatorship under the rhetoric of a unified Spain. For a government to authentically define a dance or practice which historically was significant to a particular cultural group implies a level of colonization, or a controlling of that which is considered by them to be too exotic. During this time, flamenco was not acknowledged as Gitano or Andalusian, but defined as generically Spanish. In doing so, Franco was promoting “the richness of Spanish art while hiding the poverty and regional allegiance of artists” (Washabaugh 103).

The “cleaning-up” of flamenco has resulted in its integration into mainstream academia, and its inclusion as a world dance discipline. This inclusion demonstrates a validation of the other by institutions of power; which, in actuality, are controlling and defining it (Savigliano 164). The “worlding,” of flamenco implies much in regard to the manner in which it is criticized and appreciated as art, thus affecting the actual dance

⁷ Jonathan Jackson uses the term “concertized” to describe performance modes that are presented on a proscenium-type setting.

⁸ *Tablao* refers to a wooden stage or a nightclub with a stage to dance flamenco. The word *tablao* has also come to mean a performance form based on the conventions of the *tablao* setting, which has its origins in the *café cantantes* of flamenco’s golden age.

production (Savigliano 164). The fact that flamenco is now a “concertized” dance form means it has to assimilate to the conventions and standards of the theater. These new standards have, perhaps, penetrated dancers’ ideology surrounding “good” dance, as it is defined by scholars, critics and other institutions of privilege.

The shifts of flamenco from cultural practice, to low art or popular art, then to high art or fine art, are significant to the manners in which it continues to evolve ideologically and technically, as well as how it is perceived. Even though flamenco continues to be a popular art, flamenco’s integration into the fine art realm represents an upward mobility and intellectualization of sorts. Peter Manuel claims that flamenco went through its first shift toward intellectualization in the 20th century with the influence of Marxism in Andalusia, the teaming of flamenco poets, such as Garcia Lorca, with flamenco singers, and the “overt politicization of flamenco lyrics” in the dying days of Franco (53). The Gitano pride movement or neo-Gypsy interest, which unraveled in the period surrounding Franco’s death in 1975, depicts the use of art for expressive and functional purposes, invoking a modernist ideology.⁹ Dancer Mario Maya, for instance, experimented with flamenco drama, or flamenco dance theater, in which he based dances

⁹ Flamenco scholars commonly understand that under a forced exile of gypsies, non-Christians, and Muslims, more than two centuries ago, the first elements of flamenco were formed. Since then, *Gitanos* or gypsies of Spain, have treasured flamenco, preserved it in their families, and later began to utilize it as a form of economic means. Many of the flamenco songs depict Gitano related themes, and often discuss family life, love, and oppression. During the period of the Spanish Civil War and under the dictatorship of Francisco Franco, *Gitanos* continued to be persecuted and discriminated against. Many were killed including poet, and flamenco enthusiast, Federico Garcia Lorca.

During Franco’s regime, the government attempted to define “authentic” flamenco by promoting a certain kind of flamenco aimed at attracting tourism. With the rise of tourism, Franco’s flamenco erased the gypsy experiences of famine, mining, prison, and struggle in general, and flamenco became more popularly signified as Spanish (Manuel 52). The Gitano Pride movement in the 1970s involved a reinvigoration of Gitano visibility in flamenco. Artists like Jose Menese sang protest style songs, while theater companies revealed their frustrations of the political situation in Andalucía. While this movement saw its peak during Franco’s death, the neo-Gypsy interest was more a reaction to five centuries of Gypsy persecution, agitated by Franco’s dictatorship.

on the works of such poets as Jose Heredia Maya.¹⁰ In these dramas, he produced themes, often political ones, portraying the struggle and social experience of the Gitano. This inclination toward the theatrical as an overt political reaction to Franco, demonstrates a new found sense of freedom in flamenco expression

¹⁰ Jose Heredia Maya is a gypsy poet, intellectual, and activist from Granada who authored , “Camelamos Naquera” a theatrical production “devoted to gypsy identity” (Manuel 55).

LA NUEVA ESCUELA DE LA DANZA FLAMENCA

Israel Galvan is a dancer from Seville and was a pupil of Mario Maya. Israel Galvan can be thought of as the black sheep of flamenco, and *flamencos*¹¹ either applaud his style or, outwardly, reject it. Because Israel embodies a truly unique style, which incorporates a variety of influences, some may go as far as saying that what he does is not pure of authentic.

In a performance at the 2006 Festival Flamenco International in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Israel Galvan performs an entire piece from the downstage left corner. Barefoot and in silence, he begins in a rectangular pool of light, facing the audience. As the guitarist first strums of the guitar, Galvan slowly, yet steadily, moves his hand from next to his body into the darkness. In an abrupt motion, he brings his hand back beside his body and into the light from the unknown territory. He pierces the downstage left diagonal in a striking gesture with his hand. The dynamic shifts as he proceeds to take an assortment of shapes with facings in various perspectives. In one pose after another, he contorts his body to the extreme, and then in an instant, as if prompted by a sudden mood change, he returns to his beginning stance, calm and collected. These moments of stillness, intermixed with bold spurts of movement, are characteristic of his performance, as he utilizes these moments of suspension to build tension, quietly preparing the audience for another burst of movement. The light envelops the rest of the stage as he turns right, giving his profile to the audience.

In this small patch of light, Galvan manages to tell the story of this twenty first century's globalized condition. He speaks of the evolution of flamenco, in its artistry and

¹¹ The term *flamenco* or *flamencos* (*pl*) refers to a practitioner or *aficionado* of flamenco.

form, and represents cross global communication by demonstrating the influence of other music and dance forms on flamenco. More than just a quirky sense of style, Galvan's movements reveal **his** flamenco reality, demonstrating the evolution of flamenco and its intellectualization.

While his dances demonstrate a consciousness of space and perspective as well as theme and motif, his unique style is a rare embodiment of both orthodox flamenco and avant-garde. The starkness of the piece described, the fragmentation and sporadic movements, and his unique stylization all portray a departure from the often romantic nature of flamenco performance.¹² Galvan, together with such dancers as Rafaela Carrasco¹³, Belen Maya, Rocio Molina, Andres Marin, Chloe Brule¹⁴, and Olga Pericet, comprise a new wave of flamenco modernism.

From Antonia "La Argentina"¹⁵ and Vicente Escudero,¹⁶ to Carmen Amaya and Mario Maya, the role of the avant-garde performer in flamenco has been, historically, a prolific one. Continuing this legacy, contemporary flamenco performers feel compelled

¹² Romanticism in flamenco involves the mythical portrayal of Gitano and Andalusian life.

¹³ Rafaela Carrasco is a dancer from Seville who began studying with, master dancer, Matilde Coral at the age of eight. She danced with Mario Maya and then in the *Compañía Andaluza de Danza*. Carrasco has won several awards including best choreographer in the *XI Certamen Coreográfico de Danza Española y Flamenco*. Rafaela currently has her own company and continues to work and collaborate with other artists in flamenco and contemporary dance.

¹⁴ Chloe Brule Dauphin is a classical and flamenco dancer from Montreal. She has danced for such renowned and contemporary artists as Israel Galvan. In 2005 she began her solo career, and, in her current work, fuses a variety of aesthetics and techniques from modern to classical dance (Chloe Brule Dauphin, flamenco-world.com).

¹⁵ Antonia Mercé or Antonia "La Argentina" was a ballerina, and flamenco dancer who was one of the most revered neo classical performers during the theatrical period (early to mid twentieth century)

¹⁶ Vicente Escudero was a ballet and flamenco dancer, and later a painter. Escudero was a controversial figure in flamenco, and danced with La Argentina. In the 30's he became inspired by the surrealism movement in art, and his dancing later reflected cubism. Escudero has been featured in several films and gained wide success and acclaim in America. His dance depicts the first wave of modern flamenco (Vicente Escudero, flamenco-world.com)

to emphasize innovation, so much so that it seems that in order to find success in flamenco dance one must bring forth a totally unique style.

In the tug of war between tradition and innovation, there are those dancers who give purists reason for concern. Flamenco first came into existence from the merging of disparate cultural influences (Spanish, Romani, Moorish, Jewish) and since then has grown to include an array of musical styles and instruments. In reality, flamenco is a hybrid form, steadily morphing since its inception. Framed in this light, one can even argue that the essence of flamenco is vanguard. It is hard to imagine that perhaps at one point in time such a legendary figure in guitar as Ramón Montoya¹⁷ pushed the boundaries of tradition. Consider Carmen Amaya. Carmen Amaya, also known as “La Capitana,” was an international icon of flamenco dance (Paco Sevilla). Amaya was a revolutionary figure in that she broke down gender barriers for women in flamenco by embodying male identifying factors, such as wearing men’s pants and performing fast, intricate footwork. Her innovations highly influenced the technical development of the female dancer, and she is considered one of the most *pura flamencas*¹⁸ of all time. However, were her challenges to tradition not avant-garde?

The current preoccupation with novelty is, in part, a result of the influence of the *Bienal de Sevilla* which has impressed in flamenco an ideology of innovation.¹⁹ As intended by its original director, Jose Luis Ortiz Nuevo, the *Bienal* was intended to build

¹⁷ Ramón .Montoya was a gypsy from Madrid and was one of the most influential guitarists in flamenco history. He was born in 1880 and died in 1949. Montoya raised the bar in regard to flamenco guitar technique, being one of the first to integrate classical guitar techniques into flamenco. He was known for his virtuosic performances, often times outshining the singer. He is an important figure in the professionalization of the flamenco guitar, specifically the recognition of the solo, flamenco guitarist (Ramon Montoya, flamenco-world.com).

¹⁸ In this sentence, *pura flamenca* means “pure” flamenco practitioner; practitioner in the sense that flamenco is the person’s profession and way of life.

¹⁹ The *Bienal de Sevilla* is a large scale festival and competition that is produced every two years in Spain.

bridges between flamenco and the fine arts in general. Nuevo set the tone for the *Bienal* in that “he approached flamenco with clarity, and above all, with a mind free from any bias or blind allegiance to what many called purity (Garcia 17 [translation Illeana Gomez]). The first *Bienal de Sevilla* was in 1980, and since then the *Bienal* has created a space in which traditional flamenco artists are featured along side contemporary ones, with dancers exhibiting their creative ideas and styles. Furthermore, the *Bienal* is noteworthy because it has influenced the increased preoccupation with technique in flamenco, from the music to the dance to the production of actual shows.

It is significant to note that dancers in *La Nueva Escuela* are primarily theater dancers as opposed to *tablao* dancers. The theater space- itself- implies a certain level of power and privilege. Flamenco’s debut on the proscenium stage during the flamenco theatrical period facilitated the complete fusion of the music and dance, as well as the performance of fixed choreography. By complete fusion of music and dance I mean that the steps performed by the dancers are almost completely in sync with the music. Thus, the dancer and musician enter into collaboration, resulting in, not only a dance, but also a musical composition. The new venue of the theater, along with the implementation of set choreography implies a clear migration of flamenco across social lines, as mentioned previously. In this process of migration, the dance “is no longer the same form as in the community of origin. Rather, the dance retains traces of that origin, now refashioned both through changes in movement style and through its performance by different dancers in different contexts” (Desmond and Fish 37).

When flamenco began to be defined as a category of art alongside the fine arts, its perception and production were altered. At the same time, the movement that this

consideration facilitated has resulted in a dance that depicts the stark realism and fragmentation characteristic of the 21st century. As opposed to romanticism, this approach to flamenco, in my opinion, realigns the dance with the current postmodern condition and creates a greater sense of universal appeal.

The following demonstrates the technical ways in which dancers of *la Nueva Escuela* are innovating flamenco. Because the body of work under analysis are choreographic, they are situated within a contemporary dance paradigm. Thus, I will consider what is occurring in the current state of flamenco under the following categories: use of space; themes and narratives; and style and aesthetic variation. Furthermore, I will indicate the challenges these innovations bring to the basic mechanism of flamenco, as well as the challenges that occur when integrating flamenco into a contemporary dance paradigm from the perspective of my own experiences with flamenco choreography in the MFA program, at the University of New Mexico.

Use of Space and Perspective

As a result of the environment in which flamenco was cultivated as well as those environments in which it was expanded or professionalized, flamenco dance has developed certain articulations of space that are specific to and reflective of the intimacy of its social and cultural practice. Because dancers historically performed on small platforms, with little room for large or traveling movements, movements and pathways tended to be less locomotive and more circular in nature. Although the dancers of the early 20th century expanded flamenco movements to match the theater space, certain characteristics of the *tablaó* continue to define flamenco performance even as dancers

currently perform on the theater stage. If you were to take the spatial pathway utilized in a *tablao* performance, and compare it to a dance performed on a large stage, what you would find are similar circular pathways, which hover around center stage.

Likewise, the proximal nature of movements in flamenco have perhaps stemmed from the fact that it has historically been a communicative device for a select group of people. Consequently, the movements in flamenco dance are more gestural in quality than most ballet or modern dance. When analyzing this through the lens of dance composition, the gestural nature of flamenco is indicative of a representational mode of presentation, as opposed to a symbolic mode. Representational modes are similar to pantomime, while a symbolic mode of presentation involves taking movement as it occurs in daily interaction and abstracting it, adding other features in “action and dynamic stresses” (Autard 27). In symbolic movements, a dancer can take an action or gesture and expand it to involve several movements, “a gentle sway in sadness may be taken as a large body movement into side extension followed by a circular upper trunk movement with a turn” (27). Gestural movements are more pedestrian in nature, and do not require locomotion to convey their intent.

Another articulation of space in flamenco is the use of internal focus versus external. In the ideology that dictates the understanding of flamenco as cultural expression, the dance is not intended for the pleasure of the consumer, but rather for the pleasure of the individual dancing, who is compelled into motion by the music and the emotions aroused in a given moment. The Gitano cultural worldview believes that when a dancer is so inspired in his or her dancing, he or she is taken over by *duende*, or spirit. A moment of *duende* describes a trance like state to which the dancer’s focus turns

inward as he or she becomes a vessel for uninhibited expression. This state of emotional ecstasy can be thought of as a sense of flow or connectedness with one's self.

To expand on the articulations of space mentioned above, some of the most current dancers are utilizing space and perspective in distinct ways, often challenging the flamenco community to let go of the conventions to which they are accustomed. The work of Belen Maya is one such case. Belen is the daughter of dancers Mario Maya and Carmen Mora. She was born in New York, but lived the majority of her life in Madrid where she studied classical dance and flamenco. In addition to her Spanish dance training Belen studied Hindi and contemporary dance and is recognized as a modern figure in flamenco (Belen Maya, Flamenco-world.com). In Belen Maya's 2007 show *Dibujos*, she dances a *buleria*²⁰ in a triangle that she draws on the floor with chalk. In this example, Maya confines her dancing to the sharp lines and corners of the triangle, diverting from the circular pathway, while at the same time, narrating the intention of her show which in English is titled, "Drawings." Andres Marin,²¹ similarly, in his piece, *El Cielo de tu Boca* employs an angular shape in which to dance. In this piece, he dances in a square of light, creating prominent diagonals with his body from one corner to another.

The *circle* in flamenco, from the spatial positioning of people at a *juerga*²² to the physical structures and conventions of the dance, creates community via a sense of shared

²⁰ *Buleria* is a style of flamenco music performed in 6/8 time. *Bulerias* are often upbeat and playful in nature. As per the conventions of flamenco performance, *bulerias* often come at the end of a performance in a *fin de fiesta* of final party in which the dancers' improvise revealing the characteristics of their personalities.

²¹ Andres Marin is a dancer and choreographer from Seville, born into a family of flamenco artists. He has never danced in a company, but works professionally as a solo artist. He is known for his experimentation and unrest in regard to creative innovation. His works incorporate such elements as video, diversity in musical style and staging. In 2006 Marin was named best male dancer in the *Bienal de Sevilla*.

²² A *juerga* is a party in which people sing, play, and dance flamenco.

knowledge. In the action of drawing out the space with sharp lines and angles, dancers like Belen Maya test the stability of that community (if only for the particular moment in time). In Israel Galvan's inaugural homage to Manolo Sanlucar,²³ in the 2008 *Bienal*, Galvan performs most of the piece in profile. Dancing in profile inverts the traditional mechanism of flamenco dance structure which relies heavily on a frontal mode of presentation, possibly indicative of its fusion with Spanish classical dance. In flamenco performance, this frontal mode commonly acts as the main perspective and the point from which to diverge, in order to create dynamic variation and musical phrasing. For example, to accentuate a *caída*, or end of a song verse, a dancer might perform a back change as a *remate*²⁴, or punctuation in the music. This action sends the body around the corner and into profile, slowly turning around them, to face the audience once again. In profile, this action will have a different effect on the audience, thus the dance takes on new meaning. Galvan's performance in profile depicts a deviation from the norm as a means of conveying a particular choreographic concept. I often find that while watching Galvan perform, I am forced to invest much more attention to the intricacies of his movements as I attempt to fit them into traditional flamenco conventions.

In flamenco academia, at least in my experience taking classes in Spain and in the U.S., elaborate spatial engagement and explorations of perspective are not stressed. In classes we are told to expand our bodies, to fill the space with our presence, and to make clear shapes in that space. However, discourses surrounding spatial awareness do not

²³ Manolo Sanlucar is a flamenco guitarist and composer. He is most well known for integrating flamenco into symphonic music (Biography, manolosanlucar.com).

²⁴ A *remate* is a movement or combination of movements which accentuate the end of a rhythmic phrase, or punctuate within the musical phrase.

typically promote engagement with the greater space. Instead, spatial awareness is more personal or internal. This produces the sense that the dancer is dancing with him or herself, as opposed to dancing with the others. It is understood that investigations in perspective, for example, are explorations that students must make on their own. This approach to flamenco academia, especially in the United States, is based on certain ideas surrounding authenticity. There is so much to learn in flamenco about musicality, body technique, and aesthetics. To complicate it with experimental works may be counterproductive to student growth and possibly detrimental to the maintenance of the tradition. This is especially true when students lack a cultural or personal history with flamenco, as is the case with most flamenco students, at least at UNM.

Narratives and Themes

A strobe light flashes and some industrial sounds intermixed with fragmented footwork introduce the piece entitled, *El Cielo de Tu Boca*. A gong rings and Andres Marin's body becomes visible on the black stage. As he stands in a square of light, his silhouette shows on the projection screen behind him. The screen flashes in various patterns of fluorescent white light and Marin begins a rhythmic dialogue with the sound of a train in the background. Marin proceeds to do pushups at the edge of the square of light and a man playing bells appears stage left. Marin paces back and forth, eventually laying his head on the seat of a chair, which is placed on the upper left corner of the square of light.

In the above piece, Marin performs utilizing projection and non-traditional sounds such as train noises and illegible human voices as music. This performance seems to echo

the 1960s postmodern dance movement, which was rooted in the ideology that “art and life should be inseparable” (Reynolds and McCormick 356). Instead of creating a fantastical world that is meant to provide the viewer with an escape from reality, Marin’s performance creates a line of connection with the viewer, bringing the material products of everyday existence into the foreground. Here, the technology that is used to mediate between reality and representation becomes the very focus. As a result, it is producing art instead of reproducing it.

The above described piece is far from a traditional flamenco performance, in which the music, especially the *cante*, dictates the mood and theme of the choreography. Contrary to modern dance in which the dancing body is the central element, in flamenco the dance merely interprets the music. The movements and techniques in flamenco are not symbolic in and of themselves. Instead, they reveal cultural attitudes and postures. Theoretically, the same movements can be danced in the tragic *soleá*²⁵ as they can in the *alegría*.²⁶ The distinction for the dancer becomes, then, in the embodiment of the *sentido*, or feeling, which distinguishes each *palo*.

Nevertheless, the highly gestural and communicative nature of the dance lends itself to theatrical performance, and the communication of thematic narratives (specifically more literal in nature). In the vaudeville style flamenco that occurred in the early twentieth century, performances were first infused with story lines. This narrative quality has persisted in flamenco dance and has become the customary non-traditional mode. Such post Spanish civil war artists as Mario Maya, Maria Pages, Antonio Gades,

²⁵ *Soleá* is a style of flamenco music and dance. The word *soleá* comes from the word *soledad*, which means solitude and reflects the general mood of this song form.

²⁶ *Alegría* is a style of flamenco music and dance from Cadiz. It has the same *compás* as *soleá*, but livelier and more joyful. The music is in a major key, which feels brighter than the minor key used in *soleá*.

and Antonio Canales²⁷ are key proponents of this style. These artists exemplify a wave of modern performers who revolutionized the way in which flamenco is performed by their creation of elaborate musical dramas. These dramas are complex endeavors in that they involve the layering and interweaving of various structures to create a final stylistic production. Canales' *Torrero* is a good example of this style in which the life of a bullfighter is depicted through a dance that, almost note for note, is in sync with the melodic phrases being played on the guitar.

As dancers continue to approach flamenco in a highly theatrical way, there are several things that distinguish *La Nueva Escuela* from their predecessors. For one, dance themes depict a growing departure from romanticism, specifically the idealization of Gitano and Andalusian life. In contrast, contemporary flamenco tends to be more realistic, in that theatrical performances engage in current issues and global concerns. Israel Galvan's 2007 production entitled "*El final de este estado de cosas*," depicts the seven biblical signs of the apocalypse, and was inspired by his Lebanese student who sent him a video of herself dancing to audio recordings of bombs. "I felt like dancing to the chaos we are living nowadays," states Galvan (Israel Galvan, esflamenco.com). The show entitled *Mujeres* by Belen Maya and Rocio Molina also portrays a departure from romanticism and an increased sense of abstraction. *Mujeres* is far cry from the narrative of *Carmen*, which has been played out time and again in flamenco, Spanish dance, ballet and contemporary dance. Based on the neutrality of their movements, and decreased use of flamenco identifying gestures, my interpretation is that *Mujeres* is not about one type

²⁷ "Antonio Canales is one of the most prolific choreographers in flamenco" (Garcia, 57). As an innovator he is able to balance pure flamenco and theatricality. His choreographic repertoire depicts diversity, from his portrayal of Greek mythology to his reproductions of fairytales, such as Cinderella.

of woman, but possibly any and all women. Additionally, *Bailes Alegres Para Personas Tristes*, by Belen Maya with Olga Pericet²⁸, is another piece which is clearly theatrical, yet demonstrates an abstract concept. In this most recent work, the two dancers seem to share the same persona, yet one dancer appears more melancholic than the other who is contented. While one can determine, that one dancer is sad and the other is happy, the literal details of the narrative remain a mystery. This is a contrast to the very literal and mimetic nature of productions of the theatrical flamenco of the post-Franco era, such as *Amor Brujo*, *Bodas de Sangre*, and *Torrero*.

On a more technical level, dancers are shifting toward the creation of symbolic movement and the implementation of movement motifs to arrive at a given theme instead of just relying on the music. Motifs are devices, or movements in this case, that are utilized to convey a certain theme, and are often repeated or used in variation to give recognizable form to the content in a dance. In flamenco motifs rarely exist, and when they appear they do so musically. This is understandable because, as opposed to modern dance, which focuses on the body, flamenco at its root is about the music. Thus, flamenco dance is an expression of the music and cannot stand without it. As a result, the movement motifs are inspired by the music as opposed to movement for movement's sake.

In the performances of flamenco from the time of Carmen Amaya, dancers do not establish motifs or thematic movement; they rarely repeat the same movement sequence twice. In contrast, newer artists are employing motifs in their choreography, utilizing more symbolic type movements, and utilizing repetition to establish themes. Rocio

²⁸ See page 20.

Molina²⁹, in her performance at the 2008 International Flamenco Festival in Albuquerque, utilized a certain hand movement over and over again throughout her choreography. She gestures her hand above her head, moving her fingers in waving motion, as if plucking a guitar or playing castanets. However, a more specific example of the creation of motif is that Molina begins and ends the piece with the exact same movement sequence and musical theme.

What are the challenges? The music is an authenticating factor in flamenco performance. As a result, if the dancer wants to maintain the integrity of flamenco, then one must be motivated by the music in the creation of themes within a given choreographic endeavor. To illustrate, a certain melodic phrase from the guitar may become a theme to which the dance returns to throughout the piece, and is played in a certain style or *palo*. Ideally, if each *palo*, or style, conveys a distinct sentiment or *sentido*, then the melodies and rhythms of the guitar reflect these sentiments as does the dance. If a person goes into the process of flamenco choreography with a theme or motif in mind, it would be counterproductive to choreograph to a *palo* that does not maintain the integrity of the theme. It is said that the *siguiriya*³⁰ is sung by those who “can stand it no more, when not even sobbing will bring them comfort” (Kirkland 39). A person choreographing flamenco might find it difficult to impose a thematic narrative that has to do with joy upon a *siguiriya* - unless this is the juxtaposition the choreographer seeks.

²⁹ Rocio Molina is a dancer from Malaga. At a young age she moved to Madrid and completed her degree at the Real Conservatory of dance. She has been recognized, numerous times as a premier dancer. In 2002, she won the prize for the most outstanding dancer at the *XI Certamen de Coreografía y Danza de Madrid*, and then again in 2006 won best dancer under the “*Flamenco de Hoy*” Critics’ Prize (Biography, Rociomolina.com).

³⁰ A *siguiriya* is a music style in a mix of 3/4 and 6/8 time. *Siguiriya* is considered the most *jondo* or deepest of flamenco songs.

Furthermore, it is significant to note that dance cannot help but be a commentary on society, and whether it is planned choreography or improvisation, the movements and gestures that a person performs are embodied in a certain way because of social and cultural forces. Often times, posture, the way a person holds their body, can say much more than words. One can see this in classical ballet, and especially in folk dances such as flamenco and African dance. The way a flamenco dancer holds his or her body reveals much about the history of the people who cultivated the art form. Although the performance of traditional ballet or flamenco may not be as relevant in the present day, the body shapes and techniques, nonetheless, communicate something and evoke certain feelings in the viewer. Through kinesthetic empathy, a viewer watching flamenco, or a student embodying the technique, may connect to movements as they impart a history of pain, struggle or rebellion. For this reason, attempting to compose abstract ideas in flamenco choreography can be complicated due to the fact that not only the song verses, but the dance itself is infused with so much meaning already. As my mentor Eva Encinias-Sandoval, Professor of dance at the University of New Mexico, stated cleverly, “it is like beginning to paint on a red canvas as opposed to a blank one.”

The imposing of concepts on flamenco becomes part of the fragmentation I find characteristic of *la Nueva Escuela*. When it comes to themes and motifs in flamenco choreography there is a negotiation that must occur. The question is about priority: Which does the choreographer value more, the communication of their idea or integrity of the flamenco tradition?

Hyperstylizations and Aesthetic Variations

"We're islands. I feel isolated. We're islands of people who have created a very personal language, each one their own isolated and very complex world."

(Interview with Belén Maya by Silvia Calado, 2005)

The most complex issue in the current state of flamenco is that of individual style. In today's flamenco, dancers embody very individual styles, resembling pieces of this and pieces of that. The complexity of style is in part a result of the compression of time and space in today's globalized world, but becomes further intensified by the fact that flamenco dance is a solo form and much value is placed on individual expression.

The abundance of styles and aesthetic variations in the current condition proves to create a quality of fragmentation in the dancing of some artists. "I move in such a way, it's possible some people might find it strange," states Rocio Molina in an interview with *Sonia Martínez Pariente*. "I really like to experiment, learn from other types of dance, pick up other techniques. Like Molina, Olga Pericet, is the embodiment of fusion and techniques and technical virtuosity. She is considered more of a *bailarina* than a *bailadora*, meaning she studied classical dance and was educated in an academy as opposed to being a self taught dancer. However, her dancing illustrates a stylistic quality that mixes classical with flamenco aesthetics, and infuses contemporary techniques. Apparent in her dancing are the long geometric lines of contemporary dance. She stretches her body outward, often extending her arms in space, breaking the inward rotation of the arms which is so characteristic of flamenco dance. Her truncated flamenco

movements are highlighted by her classical lines she intermixes within her dancing. Israel Galvan, in particular, incorporates Butoh style movements, in his latest piece, *Tabula Rasa*.³¹ Furthermore, the signature trademarks which define his style include unorthodox gestures such as rolling his finger nails against his teeth, or dancing barefoot. Galvan often moves as if he were mocking dance. Performing a traditional step in flamenco called *marcajes*³² or marking steps, Galvan distorts his body, bending his knees to the extreme or swiveling his hips in a caricature-like fashion.

It is important to note that dancers do not often take on a distinct or rebellious style because they want to necessarily shake the ground of tradition; rather they claim it as an articulation of their individuality and personality. In an interview with Silvia Calado Olivo in 2002, Galvan states,

“I don't deliberately try for it, no. You can tell when something is forced. I feel good dancing beyond the edge. It's not that I have a strategy, nor have I decided to be more avant-garde than anyone else. It just comes out that way..... I know I'm not the typical flamenco dancer whose only point of reference is flamenco dance, but that doesn't mean that I want to innovate or fuse with modern forms. What I think, what's in my head, there are many images, many body movements, many possibilities within the music”

³¹ Butoh is a subversive Japanese style of dance. It is characterized by slow and exaggerated movements. The imagery in Butoh dance can be violent, grotesque and sexual, and it is often considered taboo by mainstream society.

³² The term *marcaje* refers to the way a person marks and holds time with their body in flamenco dance.

EXPLICATING MEANING FROM THE BLURRINESS

Dwight Conquergood states that “meaning emerges through dialogue and encounters along borders of intersection” (484). When cultures come into contact, what results is a new cultural experience of hybridity, as evident in art. Flamenco is something that has, historically, emerged from the collision of various cultures. Although it maintains the very structural and technical qualities that define it, like all art forms, it continues to evolve. The so called blurriness of the present day performer is not blurriness, but the artists’ current experience in society and their depiction of it. What is apparent is that variation in aesthetic and incorporation of fusion result in a fragmentation that is characteristic of *La Nueva Escuela*. As I mentioned previously, the imposing of themes and narratives in flamenco as well as aesthetic variations account for the hybridity in flamenco dance and the sort of fragmented nature in which dancers’ styles are bits and pieces of other styles. For me, this style represents the mediatization of postmodern society in which the human mind is entertained briefly by snippets of information only to be amused by something else within a short period of time. While flamenco is most successful when audience members have some prior knowledge, or *afición* for the music and structure, dancers like Marin, and Galvan require that the viewer have a keen knowledge of flamenco in order to really get it. In general, these artists’ approach to dance is reminiscent of the work produced by dancers in the 1960’s postmodern movement in that their performances call into question the bureaucracies which define dance and art in the first place. Furthermore, as flamenco evolves, what becomes increasingly apparent is the “contact zone” between the traditional and the contemporary

world (Arrizon). Dancers, such as Galvan or Molina, epitomize this hybridity of flamenco as it is portrayed in a constant negotiation between the past and the present.

While leading dancers in what I have come to call *La Nueva Escuela de La Danza Flamenca* navigate the space between tradition and innovation, the heterogeneous nature of flamenco dance continues to bring up controversy surrounding authenticity and integrity. Because of its cultural, political, and social roots, issues surrounding authenticity continuously surface and resurface, remaining at the forefront of flamenco history. The concept of authenticity is dependent on memory. Mike Sell suggests that, “authentic existence is a historically conscious existence” (2). In an interview with Silvia Calado in March 2002, Galvan states in regard to his production *La Metamorfosis*, based on Franz Kafka’s novel, “I based each piece on different dancers. I took from Vicente Escudero, from Enrique el Cojo...because I saw fragments of the book in their personalities....” (Calado). Through Galvan’s performing body, legendary dancers like Vicente Escudero are immortalized. Escudero was one of the most controversial flamenco dancers in history, and by invoking his spirit Galvan acts as a living effigy, re-embodying the qualities of the great dancers who have passed.

Embodying the styles and qualities of great dancers is an authenticating action. I propose that one such way these dancers are able to walk the tight rope between tradition and novelty is by means of their persona or flamenco personality, as it is manifested through their purpose, presence, and style. What becomes apparent is that the persona in flamenco acts as a mediator (one of many) between that which is considered to be authentic flamenco and that which is not.

In part, I find that the reason for this has to do with the fact that flamenco dance is a solo form, which places much value on individual interpretation, and style. It is thought that in flamenco performance, the *duende* or spirit, brings out the innermost self and reveals one's honest expression of emotion. The flamenco persona, then, is whom the dancer becomes at the height of their performance. Galvan states,

“... what I understand by purity is each person's authenticity...Purity is what comes out from within. There's also a lot of deceit in the sense that there are people doing things that are orthodox but don't come out pure. Flamenco is still alive because of that. Each person, each artist creates his own flamenco.”

(Interview by Carlos Sanchez)

FITTING FLAMENCO INTO A CONTEMPORARY DANCE PARADIGM

Flamenco dance is the product of an environment in which people were negotiated into, or forced into, certain patterns of behavior in order to better deal with social isolation, or marginalization. I feel that flamenco is an improvisatory form for similar reasons as is hip hop, in that people, out of necessity, became good at code switching, or moving between languages as dependent on the context of a given situation. It reflects conditions where people were almost forced into certain patterns of behavior and coping mechanisms as a way to manage social isolation and oppression. This perhaps explains why the flamenco performance, is often subversive and sarcastic in nature. At times a dancer's gestures seem to mock social norms, high society, tragedy, and vice. Sometimes this includes the acting out of inverted gender roles, or depictions of a loss of bodily control. When dance forms such as flamenco or hip hop are taken out of their original contexts, and then applied to more privileged pedagogical models as American modern dance, what occurs is the unleashing of an array of choreographic problems.

Throughout the course of my study at the University of New Mexico, I have observed that dancers of hip hop have also encountered challenges in accomplishing the tasks for classes structured on contemporary choreography. For many flamenco and hip hop students such tasks as constructing a complex pathway is difficult because of the nature of the technique and style. Often, I have found myself in the awkward position of trying to conform my flamenco dances to the standards and expectation of contemporary choreography, which has often marginalized the status of folk and ethnic dance. In the university setting, flamenco students are encouraged to consider not only musicality, but

also such elements of choreography such as use of space, relationships on stage, motifs, and theme. In her article, “Choreographies and Choreographers,” Foster claims that in the mid - 1900s “the choreographer, an inspired individual artist, took on a new luster in comparison with the roles of social dance teachers” (Foster 111). This position of the choreographer as an artist, not *just* social dancer, places the choreographer in a situation of prestige and privilege above improvised forms.

In flamenco, a person’s ability to properly interpret through improvisation is heralded as the ultimate *arte*. The idea that authored dance is art, as opposed to improvised dance, is incongruent with the core structure and philosophy of flamenco dance. Furthermore, the view of the choreographer as an artist distinct from the social dancer suggests that dance forms which continue to be practiced at gatherings, night clubs, and other social events such, are not artistic in their own right. Being a flamenco dancer; myself, I have to agree with Michelle Heffner Hayes when she states that flamenco is “neither fully spontaneous nor fully choreographed” (106). Instead, in their performance of improvisation, dancers “make rapid compositional choices based on their knowledge of a system of meaning” or a road map (106). This system of meaning in flamenco refers to the set structure or codes that define community dialogue in flamenco. Such systems of meaning include *compás*, traditional responses to the music, understanding of the sentiment, and the roles people play within the community of performers. In this situation, people within the community are affected by the quick decisions made by the dancer and dancers are able to adjust to environmental shifts such as dancing to various *letras*, verses, and singers. In flamenco, a person’s ability or

inability to improvise, or make quick decisions, in a given moment defines virtuosic performance.

My studies at the University of New Mexico, including various choreography classes as well as the creation of a final MFA show, validate the tensions between flamenco and more contemporary ideas of choreography which approach dance composition as a methodology. Jacqueline M Smith-Autard, for example, in her book, *Dance Composition*, suggests a roadmap to creating successful choreography. This methodology includes the identification of stimuli, decision of the type of dance, mode of presentation, improvisation, evaluation of improvisation, selection and refinement, and motif as the starting points for composition.

When it comes to flamenco, following a methodology of this nature becomes particularly difficult, specifically in regard to the ways in which flamenco references the music. Many contemporary choreographers feel that “good” dance can stand alone, without musical stimuli. Upon reflection, it becomes clear that flamenco dance always references the music, especially the *compás*, or rhythmical structure. It does not ever exist for itself. One particular scene from Carlos Saura’s film, *Carmen* comes to mind. In this scene, dancer Antonio Gades attempts to inspire one of his dancers to feel the dance more, and he performs a *farruca*³³ for her, unaccompanied. Even though he is dancing without music, the dance does not stand on its own. In this instance Gades *is* the music. The *compás* and *palo* (style) in which he is dancing is apparent in his performance, and is the common language or point of understanding between him and his viewer. While Galvan frequently dances without musical accompaniment, he too continues to reference

³³ A dance in 4/4 time usually played in the key of A minor

the *compás* and *palo*, however abstract and fragmented it may be. If flamenco dances were to take auditory stimuli as *just* that, stimuli, then it could not possibly be flamenco.

Through my creative process as well as the study of more *avant-garde* flamenco choreographers, it becomes clear that there is a negotiation that comes into play in which certain qualities remain while others are lost. In order to remain true to flamenco as well as the choreographic vision, the choreographer must decide what qualities (movements, structure, music) have priority and why.

Typically, I begin my process of choreographing a flamenco piece with music or rhythm. Each *palo*, or style of music, tells its own story, and inherent in each *palo* is a mood. In embarking upon a new choreography I ask myself what mood I want to express. This decision then informs the style of music I will begin working in. After having a clear commitment to a musical style, one of the very first steps in my creative process involves listening to recorded music and engaging in moments of improvisation. “Jam sessions” allow for me to listen to how my body wants to move in a particular style of music. As I listen to various verses I think about how I might accent or highlight certain moments within. I may listen to guitar pieces by various artists and decide on melodies that I am moved by. These are the moments in which I become sensitive to certain reoccurring movements and patterns. If I am drawn to a certain arm pathway or foot pattern, I begin to wonder why that is. After engaging in this process, I find that my mind is full of ideas and I am ready to begin to make decisions regarding the overall structure of the piece. Such decisions may involve what the entrance of the dance might be, and the quality of my movements in that moment. Perhaps, I make a decision to begin with a low level of intensity and build slowly. Perhaps, I choose to begin with a high level of dynamic and

then gauge the dynamic there after. I continue to work this way until I create an outline or a shell, similar to what Twyla Tharp calls “spine.” When choreographing in flamenco, musical structure tends to be my spine. After I establish the musical skeleton for my piece, I begin filling in the gaps by recalling the reoccurring movements from my jam out sessions. As I try to define these movements more clearly, I come up with more movement, some that perhaps transition logically from the prior. In this moment my work is purely logical and has very little to do with a theme.

The spine which guides my process in the choreography of traditional flamenco is not the same in the development of, for example, a thematic dance. It is difficult to impose a story or message onto an already established musical and choreographic structure because the story does not ever get to develop organically. It is always guided and influenced by what is happening in the music and by the mood of the *palo*. For example, if I create my dance from a musical perspective, and then later decide to tell a story with my choreography, it may be challenging to convey the story if my *zapateado*, or rhythmic steps, do not allow me to travel in the space because of their physical and musical complexity. Thus, if the inspiration for a choreography is conceptual, and not musical as described above, then my approach to choreography must shift to begin with this as a point of departure instead of just musicality.

Remates, and *cambios* are combinations of steps, which emphasize certain parts of the *letra*, or song verse. While maintaining this element means integrity to the flamenco tradition, minimizing their role may be necessary in order to communicate a clear concept or message. In order to convey a concept, sometimes the choreographer must decide that certain elements of cultural dance can be maintained while others inhibit

their intent. My experience in choreographing the piece, *Interface/ Encrucijada*, points clearly to this tension.

When I first began choreographing this piece I knew I wanted it to be a duet between two men, and I decided to set the piece in the style of *taranto*, even though men rarely perform dance in the style of *taranto*, which are considered *mineras*, or mining songs, and reflect the emotions and true-life experiences of miners from the region of Murcia. I used the mining experience as inspiration for the concept of this piece. I created symbolic movements which were meant to depict things like labor, or such abstract ideas as remembrance. Movements were intended to illustrate a relationship between two characters; one in a celestial dimension and the other in an earthly dimension. The idea was to explore colliding dimensions, in which the realities of the two dancers interweave, breaking boundaries between time and space.

I approached this choreography as I did others before- from a musical standpoint. I began with a *salida* or entrance, then moved into a *falseta*, and into the *cante*.³⁴ However, I soon realized the challenge this structure posed as I attempted to convey the concept of the piece and the relationship of the characters, while at the same time maintaining the integrity of flamenco.

My first section of movement was choreographed only to guitar. This particular section did not have a set rhythm. In other words, it was totally guided by the melody. With this rhythmic freedom, I found it easier to depict my narrative because I was able to concentrate solely on the development of movement vocabulary and the relationship of the characters. However, because the structure of my dance was based on a flamenco

³⁴ *Falseta* means a musical phrases played by the guitarist before the *cante* enters or in between verses.

musical structure, the conveying of my concept became harder as I progressed into other musical sections that did have compás. For instance, I found myself reworking my steps over and over again, in order to properly convey the characters' relationships in space. On several occasions, I would create a footwork phrase and then realize that the steps within the phrase were difficult to travel, or that I would not be able to move my upper body in elaborate ways while executing the footwork phrase. One such negotiation I needed to make, in this case, was altering footwork by minimizing the intricacy of the *zapateado*, or series of rhythmic steps. By minimizing the complexity of the footwork which involved various combinations of toe, heel, jabs, and flaps, I was able to create a more lyrical body. This alteration meant that my movements were no longer bound by the priority of being a musician. Instead, I gave priority to things like weight shift and spatial orientation.

As I continued in my process, I found that the biggest challenge involved choreographing in the section of *cante*. In the section of *cante*, it became much more difficult to fuse the phrasing of the words, and their meanings, with the choreographic narrative. To interpret the *cante* can become much more confining. This is especially true in such *palos* as *taranto*. I found that the symbolic movements I developed, and the movement quality I used in the first section of my choreography were no longer relevant to the *taranto letra*, and it became harder and harder to fit them into the phrasing of *taranto cante*. Traditionally, the movements in the style of *taranto* are much more contained. They are slow and suspended movements, and much closer to the body. The distal, more lyrical style movements, which I developed previously, seemed to be incongruent with the narrative and tradition of the *taranto*. In the end, what I had to do to

restore my piece was remove the *cante*, and replace it with a poem by Federico Garcia Lorca. The poem was recited without *compás*. Instead, I found the natural rhythm of the movements and phrased the poem in response to the dancers and their relationship.

My experience in choreographing this piece is significant because it entails the compromise that inevitably occurs in the process of fusion. In my final product, what I did was invert the priority of my interpretation from *cante* to dance. While this decision was important to the concept of my piece, it discarded, completely, my interpretation as a flamenco artist; so while my piece was effective as a dance choreography, it was no longer flamenco as it was no longer being influenced by the tradition of the *cante*.

CONCLUSION

Flamenco has been, and always will be about the human experience. It is about everyday people, about communication and expression, and about the struggles and joys of human existence. As modern dancers in the wake of the 20th century felt compelled to go beyond the fantastical portrayals depicted in romantic ballet, the work of artists in *La Nueva Escuela* reveal a movement in flamenco which is the voice of this generation. While flamenco has always been political, current dancers are more openly exercising their voices in reaction to the world around them. Furthermore, their avant-garde, almost rebellious, interpretations of traditional flamenco stretch the boundaries of what aficionados consider pure.

Until recently, I had always seen flamenco through a very traditionalist lens. Perhaps, this was my struggle to find authenticity as an American flamenco dancer. However, current dancers prove that flamenco is not stagnant. It is obvious that the social atmosphere of a given time has an effect on the forms in which people of a given area express themselves. From flamenco's conception, social factors – cultures in contact, oppression, and marginalization - have played a part in the development of flamenco dance to where it is today. The stories once told by the dancing flamenco body have evolved, now, to include the traditional stories of struggle, joy, family, and pain, but also those contemporary stories that depict the realities of our postmodern condition.

The “worlding” of flamenco, which has resulted from capitalist endeavors, has increased with the compression of time and space, and has lead to the current condition in which flamenco dance is fully accessible to the public on sites such as Flamenco-world.com and YouTube.com, and integrated into university programs as the one at the

University of New Mexico. As contemporary *flamencos*, such as those who comprise *la Nueva Escuela*, become more visible on the global stage via film, internet, and theater, their works test the flamenco community, and bring awareness to the dance community at large.

At the Northwest American College Dance Festival, in March, 2010, the University of New Mexico entered a flamenco piece into the choreography competition. The flamenco presence in this competition at ACDF raises questions regarding the ways in which cultural dances fit into the conventions of contemporary dance. For the ACDF organization and board, this means having to think about how they will handle the increasing amount of culturally specific dances coming into their competitions; how adjudicators will consider culturally specific dances, if they are not well-versed in these traditions; and how they will integrate live musicians into their competitions, if the dance style is reliant on musician/ dancer interaction?

With the fast rate at which flamenco is evolving it is essential that the flamenco community maintain the balance between tradition and innovation, so that as it shifts, the specificities of the art form are not lost. I feel that one way of maintaining this balance is through education. For example, universities that offer flamenco for dance credit should be able to provide a solid education in the traditional style. Furthermore, these institutions should be able to offer courses that not only emphasize dance technique, but musicality, culture, and socio political issues in flamenco. Knowledge of the *letras*, where they come from, who sang them originally, as well as the deconstructed meanings of movements as they relate to Gitano culture and suggestions of “Spanish-ness” are all important to a dancers’ holistic understanding of flamenco.

In regard to innovation, I found my experience as a student at the University of New Mexico to be greatly beneficial in my development as a choreographer. Although, I was a flamenco student and not a contemporary dancer, I was pushed by faculty to take contemporary choreography classes. While I was reluctant at first, taking contemporary choreography allowed for me to discover certain patterns, themes, and movements that were unique to my voice and that will continue to inform my work in years to come.

The evaluation of the postmodern shifts in flamenco, as embodied by *la Nueva Escuela*, is important because it demonstrates the constant evolution and revolution of the art form. The growth of theatrical flamenco, for instance, has instigated a set of events that have changed the face of flamenco dance, from its institutionalization to the very ways in which it is choreographed. Although, the dancers in *La Nueva Escuela* began as *tablaos* dancers, for the most part, they are now theater dancers. This relates to my experience at the program at UNM because as I studied, primarily in the theater mode, I was able to create parallels between what I was being taught and what I was observing in the postmodern flamenco movement. I imagine their work as the manifestation of what I was being taught at the University of New Mexico. Thus, they exemplify that which I struggled so hard to achieve, the fusion of contemporary ideas of choreography and traditional flamenco.

As I was being tested with the various tasks of choreographing in my MFA program, I wondered how the true masters of flamenco might approach such issues as space, and theme, and how they might manage the space between flamenco tradition and innovation. As a performer and flamenco dancer, this analysis is vital because in order to continue on my journey in this form, I need to know where flamenco comes from and

where it is going, so that I too may continue to weave my flamenco reality with the history of flamenco.

APPENDIX: FLAMENCO STRUCTURE

The rules of the *tablao* performance are based on the activities that occur at social flamenco gatherings, or *juergas*. There is a certain structure in flamenco that is followed in order that the gatherings flow with order. The most basic structure requires a triple thread of *cante*, dance, and guitar. The interaction of these three elements is, in large what defines flamenco. How exactly the interaction is executed, separates the good flamenco from the mediocre. First and foremost, it is important to understand the centrality of the *cante*. The *cante* is the guiding element providing the structure for both the guitar and the dance. The dance and guitar, traditionally, are interpretations and accompaniments to the *cante*. This understanding is vital especially in the improvisation of flamenco because it is important to understand the *cante* as the main determining factor in when and how a dancer dances and when and how a guitarist accompanies.

The *cantaor*, or singer, typically begins his singing with a *salida*, or entrance, in which he defines the key in which he will sing, and begins building chemistry with the guitarist. He then proceeds with how many verses he or she chooses and finally ends with an *estribillo*, or a more uplifting chorus. Within the verses of the *cante* there are natural rises and falls. Specific moments within the *cantaor's* musical phrase include *respiros* (moments of breath), and *caidas* (falls of the *verse*). Within the verses there are pushes or places of accentuation, ideal for interaction between the singer, dancer, and guitarist. The phrasing of the *cante* is what the dancer or guitarist is to interpret or accompany. The characteristics of the *cante* are reflected in the structure of the dance. For example, the *cantaor's salida* can also be the dancer's entrance into the dance space. Or, the dancer may choose a *respiro* to stand up and dance. The short, usually improvised dance

performed at a *juerga* is called a *patada*. According to the curriculum at the National Institute of Flamenco in Albuquerque, NM, the structure of a *patada* consists of the *salida*, dance in the center, and an *ida*, or exit. The most basic movements include walks, marking steps, *cambios* or transitions, and *remates*, or combinations of movements which accentuate the end of a rhythmic phrase. The process of getting up and dancing is the dancer's *salida*, in which he or she defines his or her persona and the dance space. Everything has its place and everyone has their role. The dancer calls in the singer to sing with a *llamada*, or type of *remate* then proceeds to dance according to the rises and falls in the verse.

These structures and hierarchies maintain order within a *cuadro*, or group of flamenco performers, and are important for improvisation's sake. An understanding of the music is the main common denominator within a performing group. On a basic technical level, the glue that holds everyone together is the *compás*, or rhythmic meter. This is one of the qualities which define the musical style, or *palo*. Together with the *compás*, the *palo* is determined by the verse structure, the key in which it is sung, and the chord progressions played. *Palos*, ideally and historically, maintain different *sentidos*, or feelings. The *sentido* is difficult to describe with words. It is intangible and may not be captured in only an understanding of a technical element like *compás*. One could say for example that some styles are more somber than others, while others are more festive or sarcastic in nature. The tangos style, for example, is characterized by 2/4 and 4/4 time signature and is sensual and playful in nature. In contrast, *Solea*, a 3/4 time signature is more melancholic. Understandings of the elements, both technical and intangible, are

vital to the unspoken communication between singer, dancer, and guitarist, and thus the integrity of the tradition.

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