

Over-Abundance and Ineffability: Flamenco, Mysticism and the Joyful Language-Game

Ben Meyerson

On the far left, Parrilla de Jerez is playing the guitar. Alongside him are members of the de los Santos family, all performers who have adopted some permutation of the moniker “Agujetas.” Agujeta el Viejo sits between two of his sons – on his right, Agujetas el Gordo, and on his left, the famous Manuel Agujetas, who is singing, leaning into Parrilla as if rapt in a private conversation. Manuel Agujetas, through his father, is one of foremost exponents of a style of flamenco *cante* (singing) that can trace its lineage directly to the great *cantaores* (singers) of Jerez de la Frontera from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – names like Manuel Torre (1879-1933) and Paco la Luz (1839-1901). Both Manuel Torre and Paco la Luz were renowned in particular for their interpretation of *seguiriyas*, a flamenco *palo* (form) that is notable for its solemnity and harrowing lyrics – Federico García Lorca described it as the “perfect and genuine prototype” of *cante jondo* (i.e. flamenco deep song attributed to the Andalusian Gitanos¹). In this regard, Manuel Agujetas is no different: he, too, is well known for his performance of *seguiriyas*, and other *palos* that have been said to possess Gitano origin, such as *martinetes* and *soleares*. It is the early 1970s, and the state-sponsored documentary series *Rito y Geografía del Cante* is devoting an episode to the Agujetas family – naturally, the

Ben Meyerson holds an MFA from the University of Minnesota, and currently splits his time between Toronto, Canada and the autonomous community of Andalusia in southern Spain, where he is completing an MA in philosophy, studying flamenco culture and translating the poetry of Javier Egea into English. He is the author of three chapbooks: *In a Past Life* (The Alfred Gustav Press, 2016), *Holocene* (Kelsay Books, 2018), and *An Ecology of the Void* (Above/Ground Press, 2019). His poems, translations and essays have appeared or are forthcoming in several journals, including *Interim*, *Pank*, *Long Poem Magazine*, *El Mundo Obrero*, *Great River Review*, *The Inflectionist Review* and *Pidgeonholes*. His debut full-length collection of poetry, entitled *Seguiriyas*, is forthcoming from Black Ocean Press.

¹ The Gitanos are the Kalé (or Romani) people of Andalusia. They refer to themselves as Gitanos (which translates to “Gypsies”) rather than “Roma.” In light of this, I will refer to them using the Spanish term, since the word “Gypsy” is most often used in a derogatory context in the English language.

final performance of the half-hour segment is a *seguiriya* by Manuel, the family's most famous son. His voice is wavering and ragged, lurching through both Major-Phrygian and microtonal runs, emerging from a throat so tight that his mouth contorts when he delivers the syllables. There is an affect to his performance that defies precise words, as if he is struggling against something that is felt but not seen, a physical resistance that exerts pressure despite its lack of mass.

More than 45 years later, in 2017, *La Flamenca*, an online newspaper specializing in flamenco, would review the performance of a young *cantaor* named Samuel Serrano, whose voice and style palpably resembles that of the Agujetas family. In the article, Luis M. Pérez extolls “la garganta negra” (the black throat) of Serrano, and attributes his *duende* to “black sounds – those that are now seldom heard” (Pérez 2017). What are we to make of a word like *duende*, or a phrase like ‘black sounds from a black throat?’ When they are employed to describe the singing of someone like Manuel Agujetas, what kind of undefined quality do they suggest? As I approach these questions, I will consider the role of *duende* in flamenco performance practice both as a term with a very specific ideological and social use history and as an aesthetic category that suggests a particular kind of ineffable experience. Due to the heterogeneous mixtures of cultural influences and communally perpetuated modes of memory that have carved out the term’s place in flamenco parlance, its accumulated use across time has furnished it with an ability to disclose a wide range of possible experiential categories and loci of applicability. As a result, the term has been universalized and projected beyond the ambit of flamenco in some instances, while in others, it has been unequivocally affixed to the physical and social sphere of the music’s conveyance, thereby remaining internal to Gitano culture. Despite the mutual exclusion of these two modes of understanding, I will argue that both of them have emerged from the particular communicative logics endemic to flamenco’s performance: the ways in which it inscribes and transmits the specifics of Gitano social history are the very factors that present *duende* as a transferrable phenomenon whose content is, in some but not all respects, identifiable in expressive or creative practices that take place within other historical and cultural milieus. My objective, then, is to entertain the possibility of *duende*’s transferability while at the same time foregrounding the specific, embodied nature of its *gitanidad*² and undercutting any narrative that postulates an unmoored universality in the term’s usage or detaches it from its origins within Gitano social relations. It is, I contend, *duende*’s rigorous historical and situational particularity that allows us to examine its aesthetic structure and draw wider-ranging insights about the relation between performance and ineffability.

² *Gitanidad* is used to refer to that which is part of or pertains to Gitano culture, in the same way that “blackness” is used to talk about black culture and identity.

I will begin with a brief account of *duende*'s reception as an aesthetic concept, and the manner in which the question of its ownership has been a locus of contestation. In and around modern flamenco culture, the word '*duende*' has been used liberally by artists, aficionados and critics alike to describe moments in which a performance yields a kind of ekstasis that eludes the grasp of precise words. While those who reside within the world of flamenco practice seldom attempt to establish explicit or exact parameters for the application of the term (and others like it, such as *pellizco*), its use remains both confident and predictable, the assumption being that one 'knows it when one sees it' (if, that is, one knows flamenco). Scholarship that touches on this topic generally locates itself along a linear spectrum ranging from a treatment of *duende* as a universal and universally translatable aesthetic phenomenon to a view of *duende* as an occurrence that is entirely embodied within the everyday vicissitudes of practice and determined by very particular cultural and socio-economic conditions. Of course, many analyses hover somewhere in the middle of these two extremes, but even so, there is no scholarly discussion theorizing a *duende* that has sought to encompass both ends of the spectrum, a *duende* whose uniquely particularized telluric embodiment in socio-cultural and performance practice might actually lead to an aesthetic moment that, in isolation, would have something to say about artistic engagement with the ineffable as it exists across cultures. Due to their participation in a normative discipline in which the object of study produces the term employed to describe it, scholars of flamenco have typically had a difficult time defining a word like *duende*, and inevitably end up offering an analysis that essentializes or reifies one angle of its significance while obscuring another. This deficit is a result of the misconception, which has persisted since Federico García Lorca's famous lecture, "Juego y Teoría del Duende," that *duende*, and indeed words in general, must exist as terms that refer authoritatively, as 'names' whose definitions remain inflexible across time, space, context and culture. Given my intention to unite the particular and universal valences implicit in the idea of *duende*, I will need to depart from such a rigid conception of language. Instead, relying on Ludwig Wittgenstein's insights in *Philosophical Investigations* and *On Certainty* regarding the relationship between knowledge and linguistic use, I will approach *duende* armed with the idea that words do not 'mean' or 'name' so much as create conceptual categories based on the accumulation of their use within linguistic communities. Thus, in order to determine what kind of conceptual category *duende* discloses (i.e. what it 'means,' in anti-Wittgensteinian parlance), I will treat it non-normatively (which is to say that rather than adhering to the norms of its use, I will consider the factors that condition them) and take stock of its use history, discussing the early-modern ideological mixture from which it arose and the etymological combinations by which it gained its current significance. Following Wittgenstein, I will design a language-game in which *duende* is shown to be affirmed situationally relative to qualities that are identifiable in performance practice. From there, I will demonstrate how the

socially sedimented and situational affirmation of *duende's* ineffable presence gives way to a moment of aesthetic *jouissance* in which the subject rejoices with respect to an existence that has been full of suffering – a moment described in general terms by the philosopher Clément Rosset in his book *Joyful Cruelty: Toward a Philosophy of the Real*.

Many of the major disagreements in the scholarship that addresses *duende* can be attributed to semantic rigidity – that is, an adherence to the idea that a word's definition is a transparent revelation of a referent to which it is essentially and eternally bound. Some scholars treat *duende* as an ineffable ecstasy that is *disclosed* by performance practice even as it possesses a more generalized significance, and others interpret it as an ineffable, ecstatic quality that is *endemic* solely to flamenco performance practice and transmission. Such a disagreement largely stems from the collective attempt to come to an inflexible definition of the term, from asking a question that proceeds more or less as follows: "What does *duende* name?" Framing the idea in this way leads to a division in critical discourse. Scholars in the first camp,³ who believe that *duende* is disclosed by the particularity of performance even as it exists on a more generalized scale, often claim that it is a concept that can either be transported outside of the realm of flamenco culture or be mapped directly onto similar concepts in other cultural, artistic, or religious traditions. Meanwhile, scholars in the second camp,⁴ who believe that *duende* is inextricable from flamenco performance, are usually either reluctant or unwilling to remove the concept from its historical and cultural context. In order to demonstrate this division, I will quickly provide one or two examples from each camp, and then consider where this seemingly unresolvable impasse can lead us next.

The most famous and vehement proponent of the idea that *duende* can be displaced from its cultural context is the poet Federico García Lorca. He calls it a "mysterious power that everyone feels and no philosophy explains," and then says that it is the same thing as what "ignited Nietzsche's heart," or inspired the music of Georges Bizet (Lorca 3). For Lorca, then, flamenco and *duende* represent a particularly definitive and Andalusian articulation of what is a universal phenomenon. Despite all that he did for the furtherment of flamenco during his lifetime and the degree to which Gitanos appear in his poetry, he did not have a great deal of regard for Gitanos in and of themselves (nor did he hold them in contempt, it

³ Many of the traditional flamencologists and artist-aficionados treat *duende* in this way: Federico García Lorca, Manuel Falla, Félix Grande, Fernando Quiñones and Ricardo Molina, to name a few. José Martínez Hernández takes up a similar position in his recent book *Poética del cante jondo: filosofía y estética del flamenco*, though he remains careful to take the social and historical particularity of *cante gitano* and *cante quejío* into account.

⁴ This view is espoused by many performers; a notably vocal proponent was the great *cantaor* Antonio Mairena. Moreover, more and more modern scholars have migrated to this camp, including Luis Lavour, Cristina Cruces Roldán, William Washabaugh and Timothy Mitchell.

should be said). Instead, he was interested in instrumentalizing *duende* in order to propagate an identifiably Andalusian aesthetic mode that could be influential (and even applicable) worldwide, while at the same time maintaining a pronounced social distance from the Gitanos who actually played the music, and about whom he waxed poetic (Mitchell 175). Lorca's ideas have cast a long shadow: there has been a significant contingent of writers and cultural critics worldwide whose work has operated under the umbrella of Lorca's conception of *duende*, flamenco, and more besides.

Some experts, while remaining committed to following in Lorca's footsteps, attempt to qualify his assertions and tailor them more specifically to a flamenco context. They suggest that while *duende* is itself rooted in the historical conditions of the Andalusian Gitanos, it manifests itself as an elemental force that catapults flamenco into universality. Both Ricardo Molina and Félix Grande claim that while *duende* emerges solely from the specific historical and aesthetic conditions endemic to flamenco culture, it always opens up onto a collective human experience that reflects onto all being (Washabaugh 80). Fernando Quiñones makes a similar claim, and then draws a direct equivalency between the "simple elemental force" that is manifest in flamenco song and the state of religious ecstasy in Muslim mysticism (Washabaugh 80, Quiñones 54). Bernard Leblon, for his part, defines *duende* as "a state of exultation or trance brought about by flamenco music. Also used to describe the artist's ability to evoke this in others" (Leblon 133). In Leblon's offering, we can see the problem attendant upon this kind of thinking: on the one hand, *duende* cannot be separated from flamenco, but on the other hand, it is perfectly separate – a trance, an elemental force, a mysterious power, a universal mystery. Despite possessing a greater investment in the particulars of flamenco than Lorca, all of these scholars ultimately force the term *duende* into a semantically inflexible structure in which it is a name for that which it discloses – while *duende* may occur solely within a flamenco context, it does not refer to a quality or occurrence endemic to flamenco and instead names a universal experience that is not attached to the context in which it has arisen.

William Washabaugh, on the other hand, is explicitly and persuasively reluctant to distance *duende* from the flamenco body. He writes:

Why does frustration and failure breed the sort of practice which is characteristic of Andalusian culture in general and of *cante flamenco* in particular? I suggest that we search for the answer to this question in the behaviour of persons caught up in bodily failures.

Bodies in pain turn their attention inward (Leder 1990). When in pain, individuals truncate their customary outgoing (ecstatic) attention, and begin exploring, feeling, and exclaiming about internal realities which, in the normal course of activity, are invisible and, for all practical purposes, absent.

Bodily failures prompt extended and repeated monologues of self-examining body-talk.

The inwardly directed, self-examining expressions which arise on occasions of pain and death, are often non-functional. Their hallmark is their uselessness (Washabaugh 86).

Here, Washabaugh pushes back against the idea that *duende* can be separate in any way from the bodily conditions that give rise to flamenco performance. He suggests that the traditional focus on the voice in scholarly discussions of *cante*, which treats it as if it is the disembodied vehicle for a collective pain or mystery, is missing the point – it is the *individual* body in pain that articulates the pain which has belonged to the collective. Later on in the article, Washabaugh points to the idea that the flamenco body, in the uselessness of its contortion, gives rise to words and sounds that it was not expecting, and, having become a conduit or a locus of radical possibility, succeeds in subverting the institutions that have caused its pain (Washabaugh 86-87). This is a very compelling argument, and one that we will return to. However, it, too, is incomplete insofar as it continues to hew to an insistent semantic rigidity with respect to the norms of the word's use. In confining *duende* entirely to the corporeal realm of the social, he refuses to grant that the term is clearly used most often to disclose something that is beyond the body. He is convinced that most people who use the word *duende* in conversation to refer to an inexplicable or mystical affect are not talking about what they think they are talking about. His analysis remains unable to explain the full normative range of the term's deployment because it is asking: "We know how *duende* is used, but what does it *really* name?"

In reality, *duende* is used both to disclose an ineffable ecstasy that could very well be universal and an intensely particular, telluric phenomenon found amid a set of circumstances that occur solely within flamenco communities. A non-normative (or 'post-normative') reading of *duende*, then, can show us how these two seemingly irreconcilable positions might be brought together. If we consider the use history of the term, it becomes clear that there is an inescapable and marked particularity to it – its communicability is entirely reliant on its cathexis to flamenco practice. On the other hand, the situational mechanics of its use, which I will explicate via a Wittgensteinian analysis, suggest a structure that can be extrapolated onto other forms of mystical practice that have nothing to do with flamenco. Throughout the remainder of this essay, I will demonstrate that it is the very particularity of the term *duende* that allows it to imply (but not disclose) something universal. To begin with, we must retrace the use history of the word itself – in particular, its position relative to ideological sedimentation, and then its etymology.

Duende, as a term that relates to instances of aesthetic ecstasy, is not without context. Andalusia, throughout the centuries, has been a locus of cultural mixture

whereby a succession of theological modes of ekstasis have prevailed. Some flamencologists and performers see a direct through-line between *duende* and *tarab*, which is the term used in Islamic tradition for the ecstatic transcendence that a performer and an audience might share. *Tarab*, in its nascence, was associated primarily with the performance of Quranic scripture and of religious poetry (Shannon 74). While the idea of *tarab* in a vacuum might seem to map well onto the concept of *duende*, flamencologists like Fernando Quiñones draw what is very nearly a one-to-one equivalency, and in doing so divorce both flamenco and *tarab* from their respective cultural contexts. In medieval performance practice, the ecstasy of *tarab* occurs as a component of *samāʿ*, a listening practice which foregrounds a contemplative stillness in which the Sacred is evoked. Such a contemplative state demands the body's negation, requiring a 'place' and 'time' that is located only in the heart. The heart in *samāʿ*, however, is not that which resides in the body or in the body's geographical position; rather, it is located in an enlightened "no-place," and its ecstasy is a fundamental repudiation of the immanent body that is present for the performance. This self-annihilation is even more pronounced in the performer of the music: since the only creative force in the universe is that of Allah, the musician's creativity is one with that of God, a state of affairs which calls for complete self-negation. Thus, the production and reception of music both yield a metaphysical transcendence in which participants abandon their attachment to created things in order to move closer to the Creator (Lewisohn 10-11). It is for this reason that Quiñones describes the flamenco performer as an emotive medium, a conduit for the transcendent ecstasy of *duende*, which, like *tarab*, is then experienced by the audience. He completely neglects the agentic capacity (and indeed the physical presence) of the performers who transmit the *duende*, saying, "sometimes, *duende* is violent, dramatic, manifested in shouts. At other times, it consists of an instantaneous, nearly imperceptible but definitive quiver in the voice or the dance" (Quiñones 60). We must note that in this description, whatever is going on to generate transcendent ecstasy is confined to the voice that is *exiting* the singer, and finds no purchase in the body generating the sounds. Quiñones, then, is clearly of the opinion that *duende* agrees with *tarab*, that it must necessarily involve something approaching a complete self-annihilation so that it might disclose a magnitude that far exceeds any single singer.

The issue with this view is that it suppresses the rather obvious physicality of flamenco performance and dehistoricizes its ideological attachments. Cristina Cruces Roldán, who undertakes one of the few studies of flamenco that is grounded in rigorous historical methodology, notes that there is some distance separating the musical practices of al-Andalus (which are partially preserved in nearby Muslim countries as *música andalusí*) from those found in flamenco (Cruces Roldán 117-118, 126). To begin with, we know that Gitanos, who have been the main cultural purveyors of flamenco in Southern Spain, started to enter the Ibe-

rian Peninsula in the mid-fifteenth century, just as Christian Spain was completing its *Reconquista* of al-Andalus. At first, their influx was slow, and it wasn't until the late sixteenth century that their numbers began to swell (Pym 3-10). Meanwhile, the last of the Moriscos (i.e. forcibly converted Muslims living under Christian rule) were expelled from Spain in 1609. Though Gitanos were often recorded as wandering musicians, there is no mention or record of anyone identifiable as a *flamenco* musician until the eighteenth century (Leblon 37, Pym XIII-XIV). It is, then, not entirely likely that there is an uninterrupted through-line between the ideologies that condition *tarab* and those that have conditioned *duende*. While there are theories that some Moriscos took refuge amongst the Gitanos to evade the prospect of transplantation or expulsion, it is incontrovertible that other cultural ideologies have done much to overtake and influence local attitudes toward music in Andalusia (Cruces Roldán 64).

To begin with, Cruces Roldán contends that *música andalusí*, for its part, was really a mixture of Muslim and Sephardic Jewish musical forms, and that it co-existed and overlapped with the pre-existing folk forms endemic to the region. She concludes that flamenco incorporates elements from both of these traditions along with the prevalent influence of the musical forms that the Gitanos carried with them into the Iberian Peninsula (Cruces Roldán 50). Despite such a diverse admixture, however, Cruces Roldán acknowledges the ideological sway that *tarab* held over *música andalusí* (Cruces Roldán 125). She departs from the argument of someone like Quiñones by recognizing that there were other ideologies of the ineffable that became ubiquitous in a unified Christian Spain over the course of the centuries following the *Reconquista* – the very centuries during which the Gitanos began to establish a permanent foothold in Andalusia and developed the music that would become flamenco. In particular, drawing from Luis Lavour, she points to the powerful influence of Romanticism and the Sublime in European aesthetic discourse in the 18th and 19th centuries as a trend that has informed the positioning of *duende* in flamenco performance practice (Cruces Roldán 118). Before we can address Romanticism, however, we must first take into account the Christian mysticism that was a major source of inspiration for a great deal of Spanish Golden Age art and letters, and also bear in mind the enduring (though conflicted) Catholicism of most Gitano communities in Andalusia. One of the exemplary figures in this Spanish mystical movement was the Carmelite San Juan de la Cruz, who lived during the second half of the 16th century. Since Juan's metaphysics are operating in the tradition of pseudo-Dionysius, his treatment of the ineffable emerges from a similar Neoplatonism to that which we encounter in the Muslim beliefs surrounding *tarab* and *samā'* (Aaron 43). Juan's mystical doctrine, however, differs from that of the Muslims on two major counts. First – contrary to what goes on in *tarab* and *samā'*, Juan is a proponent of an individual mysticism. In *tarab* and *samā'*, there is always a social or a responsive element, a performer

and an audience. For Juan, on the other hand, the journey toward God is conducted inwardly (Banka 104). Such a divergence has a number of consequences – indeed, it is the very thing that conditions the second major difference between the concepts endemic to *tarab* and *samāʿ* and those relating to Juan’s apophatic thought. The social dimension of the Muslim mysticism is directly related to the larger ideal that the voice and selfhood of the performer, in the articulation of the transcendent piety and formal perfection of the music or poetry, does not exist, and that the performer’s creativity is instead identical to that of the Creator. Such a complete and self-negating transition from immanence to transcendence is only possible if there are other immanent bodies present to stand in for the immanent body that has been lost – without this social element, the transcendence would not be communicable. For Juan, meanwhile, the individual nature of the mystic’s inward journey entails the preservation of a selfhood, even as the mystic achieves unity with the Godhead. The soul is constantly torn between its location within the body and its life in God, and so is in pain. In order to transcend this pain, the soul cannot simply unify with God. Instead, it can resemble Him, first through a spiritual resemblance, and then a substantial (i.e. physical) resemblance, which is manifested in action and is enabled by the state of spiritual resemblance (Banka 106-108). Throughout this entire process, it is clearly necessary that the self be maintained – it must continue to be the thing that works toward resembling God, and it must feel both the initial pain of being torn and the ensuing balm of grace. If the self was not preserved, then the transcendence of the mystical moment would go untempered, and man would simply become God rather than resemble Him – which would be blasphemy. In summary, we can generalize and say that the lingering Muslim influence on mystical thinking in the ideologies at play in Andalusia skews toward social participation and complete individual transcendence, while the Christian mysticism in the Iberian Peninsula is more interested in individual experience and the maintenance of an immanent self in the face of transcendence.

The aesthetic values of Romanticism, according to Cruces Roldán, also appear to have had an influence on the development of the concepts that were used to identify *duende* in performers. In particular, she points to the melodramatic exaggeration of delivery and affect, such that the performance takes on traits that exceed sound and disclose the Sublime. She admits, though, that the qualities prized in flamenco singing are often in direct antagonism with those that are valorized in *bel canto* – the voice in flamenco is a voice in pain, in conflict with its song, whereas in *bel canto* it exaggerates the aesthetics of the melody in which it participates (Cruces Roldán 118). Rather than finding the influence of Romanticism in the aesthetics of the flamenco voice, we find it in the emphasis on the individual’s agency in flamenco performance. *Duende* is attributed to a *person* whose feelings are taking the performance beyond the personal and into the historical,

the inexpressible, the ecstatic, in the same way that the Romantic sensibility is rooted in the idea of an individual subject who possesses aesthetic agency.

We have seen that flamenco performance, as a result of its entanglement with *tarab*, engages mystical ideals relating to the social, even as the immanence and telluric qualities associated with *duende* can be traced back to the Christian mysticisms of the 15th and 16th centuries. Finally, we have observed how the ideals of 18th and 19th century Romanticism have emphasized the personal agency of the flamenco performer within the totality of his or her social milieu. This, then, is the ideological backdrop in which the use history of the term *duende* has transpired.

It would be useful, at this juncture, to discuss the etymology of *duende*, and map it onto this ideological cocktail – both etymology and ideology are sedimented as a result of cultural mixture as it occurs over time, and, having already excavated the major ideologies that have informed flamenco’s relationship with the ineffable, we find ourselves at an ideal vantage point to understand how the etymological and ideological processes of accretion have cross-fertilized over the course of centuries.

Odetta Fajardo Montaña draws from multiple sources to break down *duende*’s etymology in her excellent thesis, in which she attempts to further Lorca’s conception of the term as that which pervades any number of artistic and cultural spheres. The first and most obvious source for the word *duende* is from the Latin *domus* or *domitus* and the Indogermanic *demde*. All of these roots relate to the home, the house, and to domestic labor. In Spanish parlance, these roots resolve into the word *dueño*, or *duen*, for short – as in, *duen de la casa*. This usage, in archaic peninsular Spanish, traditionally indicates a mischievous spirit of the home (Fajardo Montaña 14). Here, we can see the manner in which the social dimensions of flamenco’s ineffable are transformed from the guise in which they appear in *tarab* and *samā’*. We must recall that in Muslim mystical practices, the heart is located in ‘no-place.’ In flamenco, on the other hand, the heart is always located at home. This adjustment is likely related to the histories of transit and disenfranchisement that loom large in the cultural consciousness of Andalusian Gitanos: the itinerancy that led them to trickle into the Iberian Peninsula, and then the repeated royal edicts from the late fifteenth through eighteenth centuries restricting their ability to wander and forcing them to engage in menial or subjugating labor in order to ensure their sedentarization. Moreover, male Gitanos were incarcerated and sent to row in the galleys with inordinate frequency, and in some cases, established sedentary Gitano communities were viewed as loci for criminality, leading either to their dispersal or to long-term restrictions on mobility (some decrees, for example, state that a Gitano found outside of his town within a certain window of time would have become the slave of anyone who apprehended him). Furthermore, there were mass incarcerations of entire settled Gitano communities throughout the 1740s, which, of course, tore many away from their houses and their land (Pym 24-30, 98, 149-155). Compounding such injustices, there have

been more recent relocations throughout the 20th century – most famously, the permanent evacuation of the Gitanos from Granada’s Sacromonte neighborhood in 1963 due to a single season of abnormal flooding, and their subsequent dispersion into various *polígonos* (industrial neighborhoods) in other parts of the city, where they initially lived in very poor conditions. In light of this history, the idea of the home is caught up in a double bind. On the one hand, it represents ownership, stability, and an antidote to rootlessness. On the other hand, it represents subjugation and powerlessness. *El duen de la casa* – the mischievous spirit of the home – is an escape valve from this predicament. It subverts the sanctity of the house with its mischief, and in doing so, it both weakens the home’s ability to act as a tool for subjugation and strengthens the ease and ownership that the Gitano might possess over the home, thereby undermining any possible conflation between the Gitano and his former itinerancy, which the state associated with criminal activity. Conversely, though, the very idea that the concept of *duende* might have evolved as an escape valve from such concerns means that at the same time, it must persistently evoke them and force the Gitano to confront the omnipresence of this difficult history.

Spanish, however, is not the only language that has played a role in *duende*’s etymological emergence. As Fajardo Montaña attests, the term also has roots in Caló, which is a language spoken solely by Andalusian Gitanos. In Caló, *duquende* translates to “spirit.” Given the Andalú accent, it is no surprise that the ‘q’ began to fall out of use, so that the word became *du-énde*. Moreover, the word *duquendo* was used to talk about a master or teacher of art, and *duquelas* to refer to suffering or pain (Fajardo Montaña 14-15). Here, we clearly see a conflation in which these terms mutually contain one another in order to produce the concept of *duende*. One might be required to master or teach one’s pain in order to attain spirit; suffering might be a requirement for someone to be filled with spirit and become a master of their craft; one who masters the spirit might be able to transcend suffering; one who is mastered by the spirit might be able to teach about suffering; mastery might allow one to teach about suffering and so be filled with the spirit, etc. The interrelation of these terms discloses all the possible permutations of the Muslim, Christian and Romantic approaches to the ineffable – there is a social dimension, there is a tension between immanence and transcendence, and there is an emphasis on the agency of the performer, or the ‘maestro.’

An etymological reading of *duende*, then, furnishes us with a more contextual understanding of the manner in which the various ideologies hovering around in Andalusia were wrapped up into flamenco culture. It remains for us to determine the criteria by which the presence of *duende* might be identified in flamenco performance. It is key, here, to be very discerning about the auspices under which a term like *duende* is used. It relates to an indeterminate ineffable, to be sure, but it is also exclusively situational. We cannot talk about *duende* as if it is present in everything or as if it is universal, because we know that some things have it and

others do not. By understanding how a situational-but-unsayable term is used, we can begin to unpack the logic of *duende's* ascription in the context of flamenco performance. To this end, we will turn to Ludwig Wittgenstein, who asserts in his later writing that, contrary to popular belief, words do not refer to existing concepts. Rather, their use over the course of time creates categories and delineates the concepts to which they refer. Put another way, words do not 'mean' in and of themselves; what we intuitively assume to be meaning is in reality a result of the accumulated use of terms within their linguistic communities. Wittgenstein is famous for imagining scenarios in which the development of language might have occurred – he calls these scenarios 'language-games.' In order to understand the use-history of a term that discloses a situationally operative ineffability, we must unite two different strands of Wittgenstein's speculation. In his *Philosophical Investigations*, he considers the manner in which linguistic use communally generates concepts, and in *On Certainty*, he explores the necessary conditions for judgment and certainty, emphasizing a similar dependence on communal use of language. The line of inquiry in *On Certainty* relates directly to the identification of the ineffable relative to that which is known, whereas Wittgenstein's project in the *Philosophical Investigations* lays out the blueprint for how communities use terms in order to conceptualize and index ineffability.

In order to consider how ineffability becomes possible, we must recall that for Wittgenstein, conceptualization is co-extensive with linguistic use. The ineffable cannot possibly pre-exist standards for knowledge and communicability. In *On Certainty*, he outlines in detail how standards for knowledge arise within linguistic communities. One of his main conclusions is as follows:

114. I want to say: we use judgments as principles of judgment (*On Certainty* 18e).

When Wittgenstein says this, he means that the instant we doubt the possibility of a given assertion, we are making a judgment about that assertion relative to a set of pre-existing judgments that have generated our communal conception of the world. If none of the previous judgments speaks for the new assertion, then it is impossible to be certain of its veracity. As Wittgenstein shows, these operations of communally sedimented judgment form specific and situational systems of knowledge that internally make sense of everything that is introduced to them:

410. Our knowledge forms an enormous system. And only within this system has a particular bit the value we give it (*On Certainty* 52e).

This passage provides us with a key insight: that within any given culture or society, the system of knowledge possesses an inside, in which judgments can hold value, and an outside, in which that value is unascertainable. We can surmise that an ineffable value, which is unascertainable in itself, must pertain to the outside of the system even as it is indexed as such by the speaker on the inside. It remains

for us to determine how that inside and outside interact with one another – if we answer that question, then we can begin to understand ineffability as an epistemological phenomenon. Wittgenstein himself does not address the issue directly, but he does brush up against it several times. One such moment proceeds as follows:

501. Am I not getting closer and closer to saying that in the end logic cannot be described? You must look at the practice of language, then you will see it (*On Certainty* 66e).

We can see here the end point of the judgment-based system of knowledge. If the logic of knowing and of verification is located entirely within the *practice* of language, then the border between the system's inside and the outside is located at the point at which linguistic use stops. Once one arrives at a territory in which a given word ceases to be operative, one is presented with a problem, and to solve it, one must select a new term. If, in the context of a given linguistic practice, the use of *all* words is extinguished upon arrival at this indeterminate zone and there is no word in use that parses or instrumentalizes its terrain, then it cannot be known. It is beyond that given linguistic practice, and so nothing can speak for it. It is not verifiable. On the other hand, *everything* speaks for the fact that such a zone is beyond speaking. It might be said, then, that the ineffable appears inside the system of linguistic knowledge as a limit, and exists outside the system as an unknowable, unspeakable quantity. In this way, that which I perceive to be ineffable is both in me and beyond me. The main advantage of this Wittgensteinian model for the ineffable is that it locates the unsayable on an axis of individual and communal judgment (in much the same way that *duende* itself combines *tarab*'s collaborative qualities with the individualism of Christian mysticism), and understands that ineffability is only communicable or operative if it is rendered legible by an agreed upon and verifiable limit on linguistic use and the language-game. Furthermore, we learn that the character and location of ineffability must vary depending on the linguistic community. Since no two linguistic communities have an identical practice of language, no two linguistic communities can possess the same logic of knowing, which, in turn, means that zones of ineffability will always differ as they appear across cultures.

It follows that we can grant that there is a situational character to *all* ineffability, in the context of linguistic systems of knowledge. If culture is a situation, then the ineffable is always situational. However, this situational particularity is only immediately apparent if one is not participating within a culture that has generated a system of judgment and knowledge through linguistic use (i.e. every imaginable linguistic community). If one exists within a linguistic community, as we all do, then the ineffable may or may not appear to be situational, and the criteria by which its situational status can be determined from within that community are entirely different. In the eyes of a given speaker who lives within a

linguistic community, there might be one ineffability that presents itself as an all-encompassing universal relative to the epistemological logic of her language practice, whereas another ineffability might solely seem endemic to certain conditions or situations. Whether one views *duende* as a universal phenomenon or as an occurrence related to a particular cultural practice, one truth remains: it is never understood as an omnipresent event or entity that occurs at all times or is in all things. Rather, it must be called up by a performance or an expressive outburst – this situational quality distinguishes it from, say, the monotheistic idea of a transcendent ‘God.’ Though both terms open up onto an ineffability, there must be a meaningful difference in the manner in which the two respective experiences are structured that accounts for the situational specificity of the one and the apparent omnipresence of the other. Can we delineate such a difference with any degree of precision?

Wittgenstein provides us with the tools to approach this question in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Throughout the text, he crafts language-games that demonstrate the manner in which linguistic use generates all concepts. Early on in the text, we can see where the ineffable might be located relative to language:

And indeed we can prevent misunderstandings by saying: “This *colour* is called so-and-so”, “This *length* is called so-and-so”, and so on. That is to say, misunderstandings are sometimes averted in this way. But is there only *one* way of taking the word “colour” or “length”? – Well, they just need defining. – Defining, then, by means of other words! And what about the last definition in this chain? (Do not say: “There isn’t a last definition”. That is just as if you chose to say: “There isn’t a ‘last’ definition”. That is just as if you chose to say: “There isn’t a last house in this road; one can always build an additional one”) (*Philosophical Investigations* 12e).

Here, Wittgenstein begins to elucidate the manner in which limitation functions within language-games. When the use of a term generates a rather indeterminate conceptual category, other words become necessary to define the range of its designation and the context in which it appears. The end, or limit, within the language-game is the point at which specificity is reached such that the intended idea achieves precise extension and communicability. But what happens if the last available term, the final specification, is not enough to render a phenomenon entirely communicable? This is the kind of limitation that discloses the ineffable. Put another way, when a conceptual category that is revealed by the use of a set of terms (in the way that words like ‘all,’ ‘one,’ ‘eternal,’ and ‘instantaneous’ might suggest a totality that contravenes accepted categories, a complex of internal contradictions that we might name ‘God’) proves itself to be immune to firm definition and adequate specification while being modified by other words, it reveals itself to be cognizable but only partially articulable.

It is difficult to reconcile this scenario with the socially determinate model for cognition that Wittgenstein presents. He does, however, offer a potential explanation later on in the text:

429. The agreement, the harmony, of thought and reality consists in this: if I say falsely that something is *red*, even the *red* is what it isn't. And when I want to explain the word "red" to someone, in the sentence "That is not red", I do it by pointing to something red (*Philosophical Investigations* 108e).

While this passage possesses wide-ranging philosophical implications, I will focus on what it can tell us about the possibility for a negative relation with the socio-linguistically determined real. Although gesturing at redness and disclosing the concept *red* while declaring that it is not "red" would simply be lying, in the context of the unspeakable, this idea becomes something else entirely. Imagine gesturing at a conceptual category that has proven to be unspecifiable and therefore incommunicable, and then using a term for that entire indistinct category – one might, for example, use the term "God" to index the ineffable complex that *God* discloses. The mechanics of such a gesture are the same as Wittgenstein's exemplary lie about *red*: it is pointing to the unspeakable and saying that it is speakable, just as the liar points to *red* and says "This is not red." In this new context, however, such negation is not a lie – rather, it is a gesture toward failure. It is indexing our failure to express the conceptual category that defies adequate specification or firm definition.⁵

This is what Wittgenstein can tell us about our engagement with the ineffable. According to this formulation, the word *duende* ought to be a simple acknowledgement that the term itself is the only way we can describe a phenomenon in flamenco performance that can be indicated but not defined. However, we must recall that *duende* possesses certain qualities that distinguish it from the idea of 'God': it is a term that indexes a *situational* ineffability, an unspeakable phenomenon that is identifiable in determinate things rather than in everything or nothing. To this end, I have mocked up my own language-game in which I recapitulate the process by which ineffability is wrapped up into terminology and then insert situational precarity into the mixture.

⁵ Timothy D. Knepper, in his article "Ineffability Investigations: What the Later Wittgenstein Has to Offer to the Study of Ineffability," comes to a similar (though not identical) conclusion through a reading of the *Philosophical Investigations* in conjunction with pseudo-Dionysius. For Knepper, the words that gesture toward the ineffable *do* index failure, but not a pure failure, since often (and particularly in Christian theology) ineffability *is* embodied and represented with at least partial transparency (Knepper 73). I believe that I have accounted for the possibility of partial access to the ineffable in my discussion of the inadequate (but partial or incomplete) attempt to use other words to specify an unspeakable conceptual category such that it might become communicable.

We should first acknowledge that the awareness of any kind of ineffability within a community of speakers is reliant upon a set of standards for knowledge. Once a community is able to make judgments based on accepted and axiomatic and therefore communicable baseline concepts, the ineffable becomes possible. Terms amalgamate according to their use in order to suggest a limit or a principle that is unsayable and yet present, and so speakers use a given term (“God,” for example) to talk about the ungraspable: “that which is in me but beyond me.” In this way, we can see that appeals to the ineffable are determined based on a practice of repeated identification and repeated failure of articulation on the part of the speaker. The speaker’s goal, in such a situation, is to turn the practice of trying-and-failing to index the unsayable presence into an indexical term in and of itself. This kind of language-game is straightforward when the ineffable concept in question is considered to be universal and in everything (as is the case for God). But when I detect a presence that is “in-me-but-beyond-me” in the context of a particular set of experiences, and when I find that such a presence is only in-me-but-beyond-me at certain moments within the framework of those experiences (as is true in the case of *duende*), things grow more complicated. Clearly, this quality that exists in-me-but-beyond-me is *not* in everything, since there are moments in which I know it to be absent. I do not know what it is *not*, and I do not know what it *is* – I only know when it is present. As a result, my use of a given term to pin down a quality that is in-me-but-beyond-me-and-only-in-certain-situations cannot be indexing that quality in itself. Moreover, it cannot be indexing a failure of articulation, since, unlike the universal presence of “God,” this quality is only operative on a situational basis, and so any failure of articulation must correspondingly be situationally delineated. This move away from ubiquity toward situational limitation (and therefore precarity) forces an escalation in the language-game’s complexity. The use of a given term to gesture toward a situationally ineffable quality cannot simply be a matter of directly indexing an unsayable phenomenon and the failures of articulation residing therein, since that would not account for the moments in which the conditions for its unsayability do *not* arise. Furthermore, it cannot disclose a conceptual category that is adjacent to other categories – unlike ‘red’ or ‘stone,’ there is no point at which a term for situational ineffability ends and becomes something else. ‘Red’ might become ‘orange,’ and ‘stone’ might become ‘silt,’ but the situational ineffable is either there or not there – it does not transform into that which is adjacent to it, because that which is unspeakable cannot become that which is speakable. In light of these restrictions, we must conclude that the use of any term to gesture toward situational ineffability must be a repeated practice of affirming the presence of that quality (i.e. affirming that it is there), of attaching it to particular situations and, by the process of elimination, refining the range of moments in which it might be applicable. Moments of applicability indicate moments of presence – moments when the ineffable is right *there*, to be identified, to be pointed out.

If *duende*, as a situational ineffability, is ascertained by way of a radical affirmation of its own presence, then its determining qualities ought to render that presence legible, and so must also be radically affirmative – to the point that they appear to be straining against their conveyance, lurching for joyous release while at the same time feeling the pain of their constraint. Indeed, this assertion is borne out in the analysis of Cruces Roldán, who discusses the pained voice singing against the song, William Washabaugh, who emphasizes the pained contortions of the singer’s body, and Timothy Mitchell, who is interested in the play or mischief inherent in certain manifestations of *duende* (particularly in up-tempo *palos* such as *bulerías*) as a kind of burgeoning joy that emerges from the pain of being an object of amusement for the upper classes.

Moreover, this sense of over-affirmation is reflected in the way flamenco singers talk about performance. Félix Grande, for example, records a quotation from the *cantaora* Gitana Tía Anica la Piriñaca, in which she asserts that “when I sing in the way I like, I have the taste of blood in my mouth” (Grande 1984). Here, we get the sense that the body is affirming its presence in and despite history to such a degree that it is figuratively bursting at the seams, that the song is like blood escaping the mouth. Adding to this sense of overflow and excess, the influential *cantaor* Antonio Mairena speaks of *duende* as that which catches the singer unawares, such that “you don’t know what is happening to you, you’ve drank three whiskeys, or three cups of wine, or three cups of hard liquor, or whatever, and you don’t know how to explain what motivated you” (Fajardo Montaña 25). Here, we see in *duende* an almost carnivalesque physical indulgence that foregrounds the body’s presence and abundance in history to such a degree that it becomes unspeakable or inexplicable, or, at the very least, cannot explain anything about itself apart from affirming that it is there, existing, present.

Manuel Agujetas, for his part, resists the idea of *duende* vehemently, but, in the same breath, he supplants it with a gesture toward generational life – having fathers who sing and children who sing, and viewing it all as labor. Later in the same interview, he speaks of his singing as a staple of daily life, but in doing so, he points to his throat and says, “This can’t stay still[...]The mouth has to be open. If you stay still, it closes and then how does the voice get out? I don’t have any papers or lines – I begin one *letra*⁶ and 300 leave me. I find myself like this, with the help of the one above” (Sánchez Múgica 2014). It appears, then, that despite his resistance to the term *duende*, Agujetas recognizes that the most important thing in his flamenco life is an overflow of history (in the form of familial tradition) and an overflow of the voice bearing *letras*. Even in his explanation, the idea of *cante*

⁶ *Letras* are lyrics in flamenco, but they often pertain specifically to songs that are already in existence, rather than words that the *cantaor* is composing. *Cantaores* spend a great deal of time learning different sets of *letras* for different song forms – certain *letras* are endemic to *seguiriyas*, others to *soleares*, others to *bulerías*, others to *fandangos*, etc. (though there can be a certain amount of flexibility, depending on the context).

as labor exists as an affirmation of presence that intensifies such that the labor exceeds Agujetas himself and is ascribed to his forbears and his descendants. Similarly, the simple act of singing reaches a point of presence at which it proliferates and floods unbidden out of his mouth, as if driven by a force on high. Other cantaores secularize things more than Agujetas does. In a 2009 interview with *El País*, Enrique Morente avoids mentioning *duende* altogether and speaks instead about *pellizco*, a term that is far more commonly used than *duende* in contemporary flamenco circles. He says that in order to earn its praise, a performance must possess *pellizco*, which translates directly to “a pinch” (Cuéllar 2009). Bernard Leblon describes it as “a tightening” by which the performance acquires the tension that is the necessary condition for *duende* (Leblon 135). “Tightening,” here, does not suggest a narrowing. Instead, the tightness is something extra, the result of the performer straining and contorting, being *there* to such a degree that the being threatens to be too much and to overwhelm. The tightening or pinching is simply a way of remaining in the song in the face of all that excess being – be it history, feeling, an intimation of the divine, or all three. How does the *cantaor* possibly confine such magnitude of joy and suffering within the framework, lyrics and notes of a single performance without straining or tautening hopelessly for control over the voice that emerges? Again, then, one cannot help but be struck by this idea of over-abundance, of presence being affirmed to such a point that it is undeniable. Moreover, *pellizco* gives us a way of thinking about the actual mechanics of performance. In some cases, as in *bulerías*, *pellizco* is often talked about in the way that blues and jazz musicians talk about swing. *Bulerías* traditionally operates based on a twelve beat *compás* with five accent points, but it can be broken up in innumerable ways, and often the manner in which singers, guitarists and dancers anticipate and play with time is what determines *pellizco*. But the term can just as easily refer to the vocal delivery or bodily contortions of the singer. When the voice is fighting against itself, it achieves a kind of attenuation or point of rupture, which is the rasp of its breaking apart – the term for this is *rajo*.⁷ There is a direct correlation between the presence of an extra pinch or tightening of voice and the idea of the voice being so present that it breaks in its attempt to contain and shape itself to what it is singing, even as it seeks escape from the overabundance of the history that it transmits. The singer’s contorted gestures and perspiration project this same affect – body and voice as physical capacities contend with failure, even as the voice as an auditory or communicative phenomenon radically affirms itself and the content of its message. *Pellizco*, then, is the necessary condition for *rajo* – for the voice’s ability to reach a point at which the historical, the personal and the

⁷ Nathaniel Mackey speaks of a similar phenomenon when he describes the articulation and transmission of music that has emerged from cultural precarity – he mentions flamenco as an exemplar of such “aridity” or “attenuation” in the introduction to his collection *Splay Anthem* (Mackey xi).

unsayable converge, push against one another, elicit breakages. In this way, we can say that the concept of *pellizco* is a secularized way of identifying *duende*.

At this juncture, we can return to the *seguiriyas* of Manuel Agujetas with fresh ears and eyes. In listening to his lurching, melismatic runs and the seasick stop-and-start of his breath as he navigates the accent points of the *palo*, we must also notice the urgent wavering of his delivery immediately before he arrives at a pause. It is as if his voice is tightening with something extra – *pellizco* – to attenuate or lengthen its presence even as it fades. It thins into a kind of tautened whine (accentuated by the tensing of the singer’s lips), so insistent on enduring that its diametrical opposition to the prospect of going away seems to be the cause of its wilting, rather than any shortness of breath on the part of the *cantaor*. His voice, in other words, withers in its refusal to wither, and, in that regard, fails, acquiring a deathly hoarseness (a *rajo*, an extra pinch or tightening by which the singing uncompromisingly affirms its presence). Though the voice is destined to end and ultimately fall short of fully encompassing the indefinite magnitude, joy, and suffering of being, it fights against the temporal constraints of the song and the spatial limitations of the performer, striving to persist. Indeed, Agujetas’ physical motions only compound this impression – as he sings, his hands make beckoning motions, as if attempting to gather in the entire world and retain what is leaving his body all at once. Often, his mouth contorts in exaggerated anguish. Beyond his desire as a performer to communicate his deep personal feelings in his transmission of the song, he imparts a fear that the sound emanating from his lips will leave and never come back – and along with it, the moment, or life, or history.

The first word that comes to mind in watching a performance like this from Agujetas is *effort*. Though the entire rendition does not last more than six minutes, his face grows sweatier and sweatier throughout – the perspiration glimmers on his brow and cheekbones, apparent despite the black and white of the film. It is *pellizco*: effort as a form of tightening, as a preservation and affirmation of presence. This speaks directly to what Washabaugh describes: the body contending with its particular existence within its cultural and historical milieu, wracked by its failure to contain the magnitude of the song. In failing, it is already more present, more *there*, that it would have been otherwise, announcing itself as that which is more than a mere transparent conveyance for the music, a self-affirmation that runs counter to traditional Western conceptions of music, in which corporeality is often elided (Washabaugh 81). Rather, the body enhances its telluric qualities by demonstrating itself to be a flawed vehicle, whose failures have been enforced and encouraged by the totality of the being in which it finds itself – a being that contains histories of incommensurable joy and suffering. Pérez uses the phrase *soníos negros* (black sounds) when discussing Samuel Serrano and the Agujetas family; talk of *soníos negros* is always adjacent to talk of *duende*, because blackness, in the context of flamenco, discloses a sense of racial difference that opens up onto

precisely this sort of incommensurable history.⁸ As Bernard Leblon attests, Gitanos, having been sedentarized, took up the occupations and even the living spaces of the exiled Moriscos in Andalusia, and as a result, Gitanos and Moors were often confused for one another in the public imagination (Leblon 32-46). Moreover, an entire group of flamenco *palos*, known as *cantes de ida y vuelta*, were the result of a mixture of Spanish musical traditions and styles introduced by African and indigenous slave communities in Latin America (particularly in Cuba). All of this is to say that it is precisely the incommensurability of history – the irreconcilability between quotidian life (or linear genealogy) and institutional subjugation (or accumulated cultural displacement) – that compels the body’s failure and forces it to emit *soníos negros*. As a result, both the body and the voice that moves through it are obliged to be painfully and over-abundantly present, to assert themselves atop and despite the precarity of their position as failing vehicles for the indeterminate subjugation of being, tightening and coiling in on themselves against the prospect of their own fallibility, caught up in the throes of ecstatic suffering.

At other points in the episode, however, the members of the de los Santos family laugh and banter, clearly enjoying themselves. Agujeta el Viejo even insists on performing an *alboreá* – a wedding song. Such an apparent dichotomy between solemnity and levity is not as polarized as it might seem at first glance: in flamenco and in *duende*, joy and suffering go hand in hand. Timothy Mitchell emphasizes this element of *duende*, and is careful to locate it in a socio-historical context. For Mitchell, the relationship between joy and suffering in flamenco is most clearly legible in the manner in which humor was mediated by class in Andalusia until the end of the mid-twentieth century. For a long time, flamenco artists made most of their money by delivering private (and often demeaning) performances for the petty aristocracy of Andalusia, who were known as *señoritos*. Señoritos were well-known for their unbridled sense of humor and their pranks, often at the expense of the lower classes and the flamenco performers whom they hired. There is a word that refers specifically to such acts of ‘humor,’ conducted at an ironic distance and from a position of superiority: *guasa*. *Guasa* was available only to the aristocratic classes; the Gitanos, when they pulled pranks or made merry, did not occupy the privileged ground that was the necessary condition for *guasa*. Instead,

⁸ For more on the structuration of blackness in flamenco, K. Meira Goldberg’s book *Sonidos Negros: On the Blackness of Flamenco* provides an insightful account of how representations of blackness were received from Spain’s colonies, internalized, re-packaged, and exported as a key component of flamenco’s mannerisms and expressivity. Moreover, she explains how Spain, throughout the middle ages and the modern era, both perpetrated and was subject to many interlocking layers of racialized othering. All of these layers, she contends, are present in the sounds and movements of the flamenco body.

they were engaging in an intra-class form of silliness that was known as *gracia*.⁹ From these social observations, Mitchell concludes that even in the most raucous and silly flamenco performances, the ecstasy of *duende* emerges from a very real historicized suffering in which the levity itself is mediated both by the palpable legacy of institutionalized subjugation and by the persistent lack of socio-economic opportunity (Mitchell 180-196). Joy, then, is expressed as another face of suffering, and, equally, the expression of suffering is joyful – a stubborn embrace of life, culture and community.

It remains for us to combine the Wittgensteinian treatment of situational ineffability with the harrowing performance of Manuel Agujetas and the status of joy within flamenco as a quality emergent from suffering or subjugation. In unifying these disparate parts, it is not difficult to arrive at a conclusion: if *duende*, as a situational ineffability, is identifiable as a radical affirmation of presence, then it is also an affirmation of the joy and suffering that come along with being present. In this regard, it is an unadulterated and unflinching engagement with the real, which is a totality that encompasses both happiness and pain. For the philosopher Clément Rosset, such an undiluted embrace of the real manifests itself as a form of cruelty, a willingness to accept both the horrors and the beauty of existence. Such cruelty is rooted in a paradox that is always operative within the subject's joyful volition toward the real – any such volition must embrace existence unconditionally, and so must also be joyful with respect to suffering (Rosset 14). Of course, experiencing any kind of enjoyment at the prospect of suffering is legible only as a kind of cruelty, be it cruelty toward others or cruelty toward the self. Moreover, the real is itself cruel to the subject, and the subject must accept the inevitability of suffering in order to engage with it (Rosset 76).

Rosset mobilizes this idea of cruelty as a critique of the assumptions underlying the vast majority of philosophical speculation. He explains:

Now, if one conducts an inquiry into the history of philosophy, one soon perceives that the majority of philosophies have been able to attain their goal—that is, the proposition of a general theory of the real—only on the strange condition of dissolving the very object of their theory, of banishing it to the near nothingness which Plato called the “least being” (*mè on*) suitable for things of the senses, that is, for real things, which supposedly exist only partially and barely[...]A particular fact must be held to be real, but the whole set of particular facts of which reality is composed can be held to

⁹ Though his analysis is not entirely relevant to this essay, José Martínez Hernández has devoted an entire chapter in *Poética del canto jondo: filosofía y estética del flamenco* to the interplay between *duende* and *gracia*, and the manner in which they constitute one another in the aesthetics of flamenco performance.

be uncertain; in other words, if it is impossible to doubt anything in its particularity, it is nonetheless possible to doubt everything in general (and philosophy is most often the defender of this position) (Rosset 72-73).

For Rosset, then, the fundamental problem in philosophy is its granularity. It accepts particularity but turns totality into an abstraction that is subject to doubt due to the putative limitation of subjectivity. This problem eventually leads to yet another insufficiency: philosophy's unwillingness to engage with that which exceeds understanding, with what we might call uncertainty, or ineffability. He describes this unwillingness as follows:

One can naturally ask oneself whether there is any interest in a philosophical truth necessarily destined to be doubted and uncertain and, consequently, lacking all the traditional attributes of the truth. It should be noted here first of all that the interest an idea presents is never to be confused with certain knowledge of its truth[...]a philosophical truth is essentially of a hygienic order; it produces no certainty, but it protects the mental organism against the whole family of germs which disseminate illusion and madness[...]The act of doubting, in fact, is effective only on what is presented as certain and assured; by contrast, it is totally ineffective against what presents itself as uncertain and doubtful. An uncertain truth is also and necessarily an *irrefutable* truth, doubt being powerless against doubt (Rosset 88).

Here, Rosset suggests that the granular approach of much philosophy leads to an obsession with falsifiability and certainty. Anytime uncertain or ineffable phenomena enter into the equation, they are divorced entirely from any conversation regarding truth. As he attests, it is impossible to doubt that which locates its truth-value in its doubtfulness – phenomena that are unstable or ineffable are immune to refutation within a discourse that is centered around truth-value. The only thing we can do is move toward that uncertainty, and embrace it.

Reading Rosset in light of Wittgenstein, it is clear that the 'uncertain real' of which he speaks must correspond to the conceptual categories of experience that are suggested by limitations in the collective use of terms within a given linguistic community, and so elude (or exceed) the linguistic judgments that ground questions of certainty and falsifiability. To embrace this unstable, ungraspable real involves an element of cruelty, because one must joyfully affirm its presence despite the suffering that it contains. Indeed, *duende* is particularly qualified to be an affirmation of such an uncertain and cruel totality, because it thrives when the flamenco body's vocal presence affirms itself so over-abundantly that it experiences and then bespeaks suffering. Indeed, for Rosset, the experience of suffering is key to the subject's joyful volition toward the real:

Being incomprehensible, reality is only a bothersome thing which occasionally troubles the mind but does not interfere with the ordinary exercise of life. Thus everyone becomes habituated without undue difficulty to time,

space, movement, even though these are[...]notions which no one has ever been capable of conceiving or defining. Things are quite different with reality, however, as soon as it is experienced as intensely painful. In that case, it is opposed by an *intolerance* on the part of the person it affects, while it provokes only a simple and passing state of perplexity in the person who is powerless to understand it (Rosset 79).

Reality, then, is abstract until suffering occurs. A subject who undergoes suffering or pain develops a deep intolerance toward the real, and as a result, the real becomes legible as a corporeal thing. Ultimately, the subject must overcome this intolerance and, despite the suffering, muster up a joy with respect to the real. This process of intolerance and volition-even-so is precisely what goes on during the moments in a flamenco performance in which *duende* is identifiable – with one important caveat. We have observed how the flamenco body and the flamenco voice represent the incommensurable confluence of socio-economic (and historical) conditions, the indeterminate multiplicity of cultural displacements and the unverifiable slippage of racialized otherness. Due to the precarious and nearly chimeric quality of their self-presentation, body and voice take on the equally incommensurable character of the uncertain real that is causing their suffering. When body and voice overdetermine themselves in the face of their own precarity, it is that very same precarity – which is an internalization of their history of subjugation, and is intrinsic to their aesthetic character – that generates their own suffering. Put in other words, in the context of performance, the body and the voice of the flamenco *cantaor* function as the very same uncertain, incomprehensible reality that causes their pain – in effect, the singer’s voice and body, in affirming themselves, produce the suffering to which they are responding. While other cultural traditions deploy bodies in a similar manner such that they become representatives of the suffering to which they themselves are joyfully replying, flamenco is, to my knowledge, distinct in the degree to which it valorizes that tension between joy and pain with terms like *pellizco*, *rajo*, and *soníos negros*.

Although the conditions that give rise to *duende*’s particular brand of joyful suffering are unique to the flamenco culture in Andalusia, to Gitanos and to those who have become intimate participants in Gitano communities, we can nevertheless maintain that, stemming from *duende*, there is a more generalized claim to be made about ineffability as it occurs in artistic and ritual practices across cultures. If the linguistic act necessary for the communication of a situational ineffability (i.e. an unspeakable phenomenon that occurs only in discrete situations, as opposed to a universal like “God”) is the use of a term that indexes a radical affirmation of its presence, then it is likely that the structure of that radical affirmation will always involve a joyful volition toward uncertainty, and the possibility of suffering therein. Often, in traditions in which the suffering is not already inscribed in the mystic’s body, there is a directive to fabricate pain via ascetic practices or intellectual self-annihilation. Meanwhile, we can see loose analogues to flamenco’s

internalized modes of joyful suffering in bluegrass music, in which the persistence of economic hardship seems to possess a direct relation with the aesthetic directive of the “high and lonesome sound,” or blues and jazz, genres wherein the use of terms like “groove” and “swing,” or concepts like “the devil” and “aridity,” disclose the ecstatic or joyous volition that occurs both in response to and in spite of the body’s suffering. We can conclude, then, that while *duende* itself is in no way extricable from its cultural context and from the performance practices and histories therein, the process by which it is identified suggests an experiential structure that is applicable beyond the borders of flamenco.

Bibliography

- Aaron, N. Grace. *Thought and Poetic Structure in San Juan de la Cruz’s Symbol of Night*. Peter Lang, 2005.
- Acosta García, Pablo and Anna Serra Zamora. “Apophatic Mountains: Poetics of Image in Marguerite Porete and John of the Cross.” *Viator*, vol. 48, no.1, 2017, pp. 253-274.
- Almáida, Verónica, “Rito y ritmo: el cante jondo.” *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, vol. 475, 1990, pp. 103-115.
- Alvarez Caballero, Angel. *Historia del cante flamenco*. Alianza Editorial, 1981.
- Banka, Aleksander. “The Concept of ‘Resembling Unification’ in the Mystic Doctrine of John of the Cross.” *Folia Philosophica*, vol. 28, 2013, pp. 103-129.
- Blanco Garza, José Luis, José Luis Rodríguez Ojeda, and Francisco Roblés Rodríguez. *Las Letras del Cante Flamenco*. Signatura Ediciones, 2009.
- Cruces Roldán, Cristina. *El flamenco y la música andalusí: Argumentos para un encuentro*. Ediciones Carena, 2003.
- Cuéllar, Manuel. “Los Morentes se hacen más grandes.” *El País*, November, 2009.
- De la Cruz, San Juan. *Vida y Obras de San Juan de la Cruz*. La Pontificia Universidad de Salamanca, 1960.
- Fajardo Montañón, Odette. *Teoría del Duende: Concepto popular vinculado a la experiencia estética del éxtasis*. A thesis at La Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, 2013.
- Goldberg, K. Meira. *Sonidos Negros: On the Blackness of Flamenco*. Oxford University Press, 2019.
- Goldberg, K. Meira. “Sonidos Negros: On the Blackness of Flamenco.” *Dance Chronicle*, vol. 37, 2014, pp. 85-113.
- Grande, Félix. “Flamenco; ‘...a taste of blood in the mouth!’” *UNESCO Courier*, Oct. 1984, p. 29+. *Expanded Academic ASAP*, http://link.gale-group.com/apps/doc/A3455611/EAIM?u=umn_wilson&sid=EAIM&xid=9bc0a912. Accessed 19 Dec. 2018.

- Knepper, Timothy D. "Ineffability Investigations: What the Later Wittgenstein Has to Offer to the Study of Ineffability." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 65, 2009, pp. 65-76.
- Kripke, Saul. *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Leblon, Bernard. *Gypsies and Flamenco*. The Interface Collection, 1994.
- Lewisohn, Leonard. "The Sacred Music of Islam: Samā' in the Persian Sufi Tradition." *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, vol. 6, 1997, pp. 1-33.
- Lorca, Federico García. "Juego y Teoría del Duende." Biblioteca Virtual Universal, 1933.
- Lorca, Federico García. "Importancia Histórica y Artística del Primitivo Canto Andaluz Llamado 'Cante Jondo.'" Delivered at a conference in the Centro Artístico de Granada, 1922.
- Mackey, Nathaniel. *Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality and Experimental Writing*. Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Mackey, Nathaniel. *Splay Anthem*. New Directions, 2006.
- Mahoney, Timothy A. "Understanding the Christian Apophaticism of St. John of the Cross." *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2004, pp. 80-91.
- Mandly Robles, Antonio. *Los caminos del flamenco: Etnografía, cultura y comunicación en Andalucía*. Signatura Ediciones de Andalucía, 2010.
- Martínez Hernández, José. *Poética del cante jondo: filosofía y estética del flamenco*. Editorial Almuzara, 2018.
- Mitchell, Timothy. *Flamenco Deep Song*. Yale University Press, 1994.
- Moi, Toril. *Revolution of the Ordinary: Literary Studies after Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell*. The University of Chicago Press, 2017.
- Moten, Fred. *The Universal Machine*. Duke University Press, 2018.
- Pérez, Luis M. "La garganta negra de Samuel Serrano." *Revista la Flamenca*, March, 2017.
- Pohren, D.E. *The Art of Flamenco*. Createspace, 2014 (4th edition? Originally published in 1962).
- Puerta Vilchez, José Miguel. *Aesthetics in Arabic Thought: From Pre-Islamic Arabia Through Al-Andalus*. Translated by Consuelo López-Morillas, Brill, 2017.
- Pym, Richard J. *The Gypsies of Early Modern Spain, 1425-1783*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Quiñones, Fernando. *El flamenco, vida y muerte*. Editorial Laia, 1981.
- Ropero Nuñez, Miguel. "El mestizaje en el lenguaje del cante flamenco: el flamenco como 'lengua especial.'" *Litoral*, vol. 238, 2004, pp. 124-138.
- Rosset, Clément. *Joyful Cruelty: Toward a Philosophy of the Real*. Translated by David F. Bell, Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Sánchez Múgica, Paco. "Agujetas, el hombre y el mito: 'El flamenco es mentira.'" *La Voz del Sur*, September, 2014.
- Shannon, Jonathan H. "Emotion, Performance and Temporality in Arab Music: Reflections on Tarab." *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2003, pp. 72-98.

- Washabaugh, William. "The Flamenco Body." *Popular Music*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1994, pp. 75-90.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *On Certainty*. Translated by Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe, Harper Torchbooks (via Basil Blackwell), 1969.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, Blackwell, 2001 (3rd Ed.).



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike International 4.0 License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>; or, (b) send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 2nd Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA