Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies
Vol. 21, No. 2 (2025)

The Tradition and its Metaphors: *Envioletá* (Nîmes, 2023) by Javiera de la Fuente[1]

Javiera de la Fuente and Fernando López Rodríguez

Reading guidelines

This text emerges out of a double dialogue. First, the internal dialogue by artist Javiera de la Fuente with her own creation, *Envioletá*, which brings together and mixes texts from different sources (a notebook documenting the creation process, an artistic dossier, research notes, discussion with other artists, etc.). Second, the dialogue between this polyphony of texts and the external perspective of artist-researcher Fernando López, which has led to the new (and potentially endless) conversation that we have registered here.

To aid the reading of this text, we have marked the voices with different colours, as well as "stylised" and adjusted some fragments and we have proposed an order of reading that may be reinterpreted at any time by the reader. We start by contextualising the project *Envioletá* as a whole, to pave the way for the subsequent analysis of two of its sequences or sections, which can be presented independently and which we use to propose two ways of relating to the traditional repertoire as artists.

Javiera de la Fuente is a Chilean flamenco dancer, movement artist and researcher who has been based in Seville since 2011. Her work establishes a dialogue between Andalusian and South American popular culture and contemporary performance art, with flamenco being her main expressive language. She has created the scenic project *Envioletá* and its performative version *Envioletá/un estudio* and is working on a new project, entitled *Canto a lo Poeta*. **Fernando López** (Madrid, 1990) is a dancer, choreographer, and philosopher. He holds a PhD in Aesthetics from the University of Paris 8-Saint Denis and combines his artistic activity with academic research and teaching. He has published, among other works, *Queer History of Flamenco: Diversions, Transitions, and Returns in Flamenco Dance* (Egales, 2020), translated into French (L'Arche) and English (Michigan University Press) in 2024.

[1] Translated by Carlos van Tongeren.

The first way of approaching that relation with cultural heritage, the tradition and/or the repertoire, will be discussed using the sequence "La Zarzamora" ("The Blackberry") and is related to the agricultural imaginary about the act of "collecting" (music, movements, rituals, and even "traditional" objects).

The second way, which logically and chronologically appears at a second stage, of tiredness or exhaustion, has to do with opposition to that tradition, or in other words: a way of confronting it in order to look at it from an outside, a perspective that allows us to approach it in a way that is less integrated and, perhaps, more porous and open to other cultural references. To examine this second approach, we consider the sequence "El Gavilán" ("The Hawk"), an *anti-cueca*,[2] before trying to find "a way out of the text" and, perhaps, out of the problematic relation with the tradition and its metaphors.

To read Javiera de la Fuente's words, follow the colour purple.
To read Fernando López's words, follow the colour olive green.[3]

1. About *Envioletá*

"*Envioletá* is a series of states traversed by contradiction"
Observation by Francisca Crisóstomo López,
dance and accompaniment in *Envioletá*

Envioletá is a hybrid project that aims to think, write and say, dance or move, subvert and intone part of the poetic, sonorous and performative legacy of the Chilean dancer Violeta Parra who, rooted in popular tradition, ascended to fame in the middle of the twentieth century. We have revisited an obscure and initiatory period in her life, one in which La Violeta,[4] now a synonym for Chileanness, immersed herself in the world of Andalusian popular song,

[2] *Cueca* was declared the "Chilean national dance" in 1979 under Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship, although it is also performed in other countries like Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, and Argentina. It is danced in couples who do not make physical contact and originates at the end of the 18th century. It represents the courtship of a woman by a man, and is characterised choreographically by both performers' playful use of a handkerchief performers. Anonymous, "La cueca," https://www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-article-93131.html.

[3] The mixture of our voices is represented by this colour, unless otherwise noted.

[4] In Chile, we say "La Violeta" (placing an article in front of her name) to address Violeta Parra from a perspective of familiarity and belonging. It is like saying "our Violeta."

the "Spanish genre" that travelled through Latin America in the 1940s and 1950s, in part as a result of the vast exodus of Spanish Republicans that reached the shores of Valparaíso in 1939. Dipping in and out of some of these stories, we maintain that *Envioletá* is a series of states of contradiction, a way of doing and being that takes inspiration from and inhabits both Violeta Parra and flamenco indiscriminately.

Through artistic residences and research stays in Spain and Chile, and aiming to follow an unhurried process, *Envioletá* has been nourished by both territories and their respective inhabitants/artists/travellers in such way that each sequence composing it contains multiple voices and bodies, including those that are absent. Given its migratory character, *Envioletá* is based on questions to which there are no answers, as they will keep opening all sorts of new formations out of their own fissures. In that way, perhaps, the piece deterritorialises the meanings of flamenco, of Chileanness, of what is identifiable or danceable. In that sense, it is an open work, composed by sequences that sustain themselves as autonomous pieces and, at the same time, in relation to the others, adapt themselves and take inspiration from each context. These open compositions, which are collectively entitled *Envioletá/A Study*, have been performed at the following venues: Centro Federico García Lorca (Granada, Spain, 2022); Museo Reina Sofía (Madrid, Spain, 2022); Universidad de Talca (Chile, 2022); Museo Carmen Thyssen (Bienal de Málaga, Spain, 2023); Festival Wadi (Córdoba, Spain, 2023); Centro Cultural Ex Royal (Valparaíso, Chile, 2024).

I would like to ask you a very simple question: why (or to what end) did you do a project about Violeta Parra?

La Violeta and her arts always enable us to access questions around tradition, the popular arts, colonialism-decolonisation, memory, the avant-garde, margins, ruptures, politics, poetry, feminism, contemporary composition, etc. She is full of paradoxes that reaffirm and question all of this, almost without resolution, and that is what I find most interesting about her. Of course, there is some "identification" on my part... personally, since my adolescence she has been a guide, companion, mentor and, at the same time, I have always been intrigued by her. Therefore, after the publication of Víctor Herrero's biography of her, in which Violeta's relation with the Andalusian popular world is examined more than anywhere else, the artist-scholar Pedro G. Romero and I thought it opened up a path to be explored and

given further consideration.[5] According to Herrero's research, which contains testimonies of her children and siblings, Violeta Parra soaked up, studied and performed styles such as the zambra, the fandango, sevillanas, and pasodoble with passion and commitment.[6] Within a context of intercultural encounter and exchange between the Spanish Republican universe that had taken refuge in Chile and the popular urban world of Valparaíso and Santiago, Violeta stood out nationally in her performance of these genres, which she started rejecting from the 1950s as she considered them to be linked with the Francoist regime. In my conversation with researcher Paula Miranda, author of *Violeta Parra en el Wallmapu*,[7] she highlighted the importance of continuing to open up new possibilities for storytelling around Violeta, and remarked that through this new research route we might even be able to move beyond Chile, beyond traditional popular culture, beyond her biography and what seems recognisable about her. Since that encounter, it has been important to us to deepen and restrict our research to that epoch and period in her life and art, precisely because it is little-known and also as it relates to my own experiences and practices. Thereafter, when composing the embodied aspects, movements, music, images, and scenery for the piece, all those stories started to lose prominence, their literal meaning has been more or less removed, like becoming mere reflections in a mirror; but I have returned to their origin, as if it were a channel through which I or we can find the real mystery, the real battles and contradictions and paradoxes. In short, it is not so much a performance about Violeta Parra but rather one more pathway that La Violeta has opened in me, in us, whoever we are, as we search —constantly— for new stories about ourselves personally and collectively, going to and rummaging in their fissures, in the silences, in that which is silenced when we talk about flamenco, territory, identity, migration, colonialism, the body, movement. There is a pulse of resistance in her,

[5] Víctor A. Herrero, *Después de vivir un siglo* (Editorial Lumen, 2017).

[6] Herrero says the following: "In the cafés and restaurants in Santiago one began to hear not only the songs of the Civil War, but also different genres of Iberian folklore, from the pasodoble and fandango to flamenco. Interestingly, the Aragonese jota was similar to the Chilean cueca. And the Andalusian jota featured a type of footwork that was also used in the cueca." Herrero, *Después*, 80. This repertoire started to grow following the important South American tours of Spanish artists such as Carmen Amaya, Angelillo, Los Churumbeles and Gabriela Ortega, who, although they did not go to Chile (the southernmost country in the continent), were broadcast on the radio and shown in the cinema. As Violeta's son Ángel Parra said: "These were all artists who my mother admired enthusiastically" (quoted in Herrero, *Después*, 80).

[7] Paula Miranda, Elisa Loncon and Allison Ramay, *Violeta Parra en el Wallmapu. Su encuentro con el canto mapuche* (Pehuén Editores, 2017).

in us, and in all these materials (as we now call them) that is truly rich. An invitation to break with what is known, to do everything at the same time, with disregards. A rebelliousness that belongs to flamenco and to Violeta which is a source of vital energy, conceptual stimulation and, above all, embodied savagery that distrusts the structures of power, whether these be called institutions, the social order, capitalism, or tradition. This, and the act of recovering voices from the past that tell other stories, is also about resistance. Like in that famous quotation, where she is asked to give advice to new generations of musicians, and Violeta says: "They should sit on the piano, destroy the patterns, they should shout and not sing, blow the guitar and strum the horn. Hate the math and love the turmoil... creation is like a bird that has no direction for its flight and that will never fly in a straight line."[8]

2. Re-collecting: The "La Zarzamora" sequence

Apparently, Violeta Parra went from village to village to collect the romances, poems, and songs of the peasants. In the Iberian Peninsula we also have these kinds of "collectors" who remind us of Heiddeger's *Sammlung*,[9] the gathering of meaning. I'm thinking, in the context of flamenco, of someone like Antonio Mairena,[10] a keeper of songs, or someone like Juanjo Linares, who gathered, in the context of folklore, the songs and dances from different regions of Spain. It is likely that they invented some of them, as in the case of the well-founded doubt about the authenticity of the *soleá de Charamusco*.[11] Maybe I would have done the same.

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[8] Beatriz González Fulle, "Introducción," in *Violeta Parra, 100 años. Cuaderno pedagógico* (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, 2017), 9.

[9] Francisco Vidarte, "Heidegger. La lectura como reunión," in *¿Qué es leer? La invención del texto en filosofía* (Editorial Tirant Lo Blanc, 2006).

[10] For more information about the singer and flamenco scholar Antonio Mairena, we recommend the following studies: Francisco Aix García, *Flamenco y poder: un estudio desde la sociología del arte* (Fundación Autor, 2014); José María Bonachera, *La vida y la muerte de Antonio Mairena* (Pre-Textos, 2006); José María Bonachera, *Teoría y juego del mairenismo* (Editorial Renacimiento, 2015); Pierre Lefranc, *El cante jondo. Del territorio a los repertorios* (Universidad de Sevilla, 2001); Peter Manuel, "Composition, Authorship, and Ownership in Flamenco, Past and Present," *Ethnomusicology* 54, no. 1 (2010): 106-35. From the perspective of gender, we could add my book in which a chapter is dedicated to Mairena and the question of sexual orientation. See Fernando López Rodríguez, *De puertas para adentro. Disidencia sexual y disconformidad de género en la tradición flamenca* (Egales, 2017), 49-53.

[11] Pedro G. Romero discusses the dispute around this variety of *soleá* as follows: "There is an exemplary case, this dispute around the soleá de Charamusco that is so beloved by flamenco aficionados. Andrés Raya and other connoisseurs recount

I can relate to the bulimic research of these artists and I can identify with what Derrida called "archive fever" or *mal de archive* (and which here has the peculiarity that it is the sick who bring forth and preserve their own archive).[12] The philosopher of deconstruction defines this illness as follows:

> It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive, even if there's too much of it, right where something in it anarchives itself. It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement.[13]

Violeta is known and valued especially for the side of her that was a collector, she is synonymous with Chileanness because of it. The point is precisely that her period as collector preceded the time that we have recovered and selected here. The story of Violeta de Mayo (her stage name from when she interpreted the "Spanish genre") is something even stranger or harder to explain, since her version of Andalusian folklore was mostly the consequence of her brother Nicanor's recommendation, following the arrival of more than 2000 Republican migrants from Spain, on the Winnipeg in 1939, an operation coordinated by Pablo Neruda, the Chilean consul in France at the time.

Shortly after this event, Nicanor recommended that she study and perform the Spanish repertoire that was gaining in popularity, that this would be a good opportunity to pick up singing and guitar playing. This was her equally little-known and oft-rejected Lorquian period (Lorca who was also a collector, like Nicanor). Prior to this she had dedicated herself to domestic matters, her husband and children. There is of course something practical

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it on their blogs; and José María Bonachera presents an interesting analysis of this case in his *La vida y la muerte de Antonio Mairena*. [...] It turns out that what resounds in this soleá, the vocal turn that gives it its identity, both to this variety and to others such as the soleá petenera, soleá apolá, soleá de Triana, soleá de Paquirri, soleá de El Fillo, etc., in sum, this musical feature first appears in a petenera, of Mexican origin, which was recorded by El Mochuelo on wax cylinders. A petenera that wasn't even adapted to flamenco, presented merely as a song. Pepa Sánchez has informed us of this fact, although Faustino Núñez had already warned us about it previously." Pedro G. Romero, "El don de Enrique (I)," *CTXT*, 2 de febrero, 2015, https://ctxt.es/es/20150122/culturas/63/flamenco-Enrique-Morente-obra-poética.htm.

[12] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (University of Chicago Press, 1996).

[13] Derrida, *Archive*, 91.

and vital about taking up Nicanor's suggestion —she was looking for personal and economic independence— but the way in which Violeta related to this world and repertoire was what I call *envioletá*, that is to say, viscerally, passionately, irrationally, obsessively, in a committed, immersive, honest, and contradictory manner. If you say *envioletá* you also say *flamenca*, some of us believe. Once she was well prepared, she went to the Baquedano theatre in Santiago, where she won a Spanish popular song contest with "La Zarzamora," the song with which, many years later, the LGTBIQ+ community would say goodbye to Lola Flores at the latter's funeral. This unexpected victory meant a great change for the whole family. After this, and for the next ten years, she successfully toured Chile as Violeta de Mayo, accompanied by her children dressed up as Gitanxs, dancing farrucas and sevillanas and playing the castanets.[14] One day, she saw the flamenco dancer La Chunga who was on tour and performing in Santiago, and then she quit. Following this experience, which even led her to stop speaking, she considered that it was not possible to perform flamenco or any other popular song style from Andalusia without having been born and grown up in the right cultural or territorial context. As time went by, she also started feeling awkward about the fact that the copla style, Lola Flores, and a large part of the genre she performed were associated with Franco's fascism, and she then straightaway turned her back on all of this. It was after this episode that she decided to go to the Chilean countryside to collect songs and poetic and musical forms that she thought were too valuable to let die out with their elderly performers. Violeta obviously became an unelected spokesperson for this material; in fact, she very much thought of herself as a missionary and interpreter of Chileanness.

Certainly, the idea behind my idea of "collecting" is related to the fact that collecting is also re-inventing: one creates archives by selecting and ordering the sources, changing them without knowing (or doing so on purpose) and, therefore, such creative labour disrupts the agricultural take on the artist: here the seed that has been planted, the fruit that is being "harvested" and the fruit that is subsequently being "prepared" are not the same, since there is an entire process of transformation that changes the nature of those

[14] Herrero, who quotes Karen Kerschen, notes that "the success propelled the whole family into a deep immersion into Spanish culture [...] Violeta wrote her own musical about bullfighting and gave the parts of two young Gitanos to her two children, who danced to the rhythm of the Spanish guitar played by their mother." Herrero, *Después*, 81.

archives, texts, pieces of music, etc. "To collect" is to (re)invent what is being collected.

On the other hand, reading the notes you have given me about Violeta's biography, the idea of "contradiction" resonates with me, and I think that she may have lived with her internal contradictions until they were too strong or obvious and she decided to abruptly change course (like when she saw La Chunga's dance performance, or even when she committed suicide...). If I have interpreted this correctly, this is a sign of great courage and honesty since there are people who are able to turn a deaf ear to such internal contradictions and live with them for decades without changing anything in their lives.

This makes me think about similar moments of radical change in my own artistic life and about the need for employment that may have sometimes slowed it down (for instance, forcing me to keep dancing traditional flamenco longer than I needed to, not so much because of flamenco itself, but rather because of my colleagues, the type of audience, the context of the performances, the type of cultural agents, the artistic and political values at play, etc.).

In fact, I now wonder whether I have changed course at all or whether I have allowed those things I no longer wanted to do to die out, like someone who stops watering a plant until it dries out and, once it is no more than a corpse, throws it in the bin with no sign of sadness because there is no more life in it.

I also wonder about the degree of intensity such contradictions may reach before they stop being "liveable" and force us to move in a different direction, almost like a choreography in which one moves against one's own shadow until the latter becomes too large and makes us turn (here I'm thinking of Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*, which I was rereading yesterday, and how it defines the spatial diversions of those of us who do not follow a *straight* lifestyle[15]).

Before delving into this more deeply, I would like to briefly go back to this idea of orientation that positions the body, space, movement, and their possibilities and types of displacement at the heart of a number of issues, such as the question of identity, and artistic, symbolic and cultural production. In other words, the premise that flamenco is rooted in a single territory and

[15] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006).

a culture, and that understandings of cueca and Violeta only relate to Chile, are both false and unfruitful.

When we name/describe/delineate something, this thing disappears. What remains after that is what I find most interesting. This is why flamenco and Violeta have been displaced in *Envioletá*, for me this displacement is a way to keep creating, to remain as a body that is at once flamenco and *envioletao*.

I have mentioned all of this because it is part of our "La Zarzamora" sequence, although as I said, these anecdotes have sunk into a rather deep or remote layer of the scenic and performative concept. However, I think that writing may be a good way of recovering these references and homing in on one of the least-known aspects of Violeta's world which represents much more than her role as collector. In fact, now that you mention it, the musical references from Violeta that we used and disassembled in *Envioletá* are her later compositions. They are those that appeared after her archival work, and which have remained in the history of Latin American music as sources of inspiration that are *envioletás* for suggesting ways of artistic composition in a contemporary, even an avant-gardist manner. "El Gavilán" is a very elaborate anti-cueca. "Run run se fue pal norte" ("Run Run He Left for the North") and "Qué he sacado con quererte" ("What Have I Gained by Loving You") are original compositions from a later period. They truly are new forms, a subversion of the archive that she herself created.

[View video of "La Zarzamora" at: https://vimeo.com/1085470847]

3. To put-forward: The "El Gavilán" sequence

"El Gavilán" is one of the most experimental compositions that Violeta Parra has left us. It consists of approximately 12 minutes of anti-cueca, a genre invented by her and her brother Nicanor (the anti-poet), an actualised or personal take on the cueca, the most eminent traditional style of music and couple dance from Chile. The cueca and anti-cueca both have their roots in music and dance styles whose origins are African (and which reached the Americas due to the slave trade during the colonial era) as well as Indigenous (mainly Mapuche), Arab, and Andalusian (the most important Iberian migrant collective in Chile). We imagined a way of opening up this composition, to analyse and play with it, to dissect it and stimulate its twists, its ruptures, to use them and develop our own Gavilán.

In *Envioletá*, the "El Gavilán" sequence was performed with guitar and vocals, and I danced it as a *pas de deux* together with dancer Francisca

Crisóstomo, almost like an impossibility, in a utopian manner. I have also performed it as a solo piece, a type of cueca danced with a Manila shawl. The composition imposes itself in such a radical manner that we almost did not want to add any choreographic information, we just wanted it to support our journey. Considering the perplexity that it provokes when listening to it, we are also surprised by the fact that we can relate to it. For reasons of dramaturgy, it is the only song/composition that we have preserved in a literal manner. Thus, we have observed the reactions of different audiences in France, Spain, and Chile; these were extreme as well as diverse. Some people decided to stop listening and leave the venue, while others have thanked us for forcing them to listen to it, for having rescued it from a kind of oblivion as it is uncomfortable and difficult to stomach, yet also emotive and brilliant.

In Violeta's words, "El Gavilán" is the promise of a dance; it was written as a popular opera in Chile for a ballet company that never performed it.[16] Too avant-gardist for its time, yet relevant today. We cautiously propose to take up this promise, while preserving the sense of expectancy, its attention to the present (that which appears in the present moment, improvisation) and to what may come, a series of relations that move between flamenco and its territorial and temporary extensions, its pasts and its future, its new sounds, its new bodies.

It is an invitation to subvert Chilean "national song," to dominate it technically and aesthetically until it reaches a point of exhaustion where it becomes void: an expression has to mutate in order to survive.

[View video of "El Gavilán" at: https://vimeo.com/1085471143]

So, Violeta Parra does not limit herself to "collecting in order to give away"[17] or to being a non-elected spokesperson for popular culture. She also is (or she ends up being) someone who makes Chilean anti-folklore, anti-cuecas: we need to remember that etymologically, "anti" means "to place oneself in front of something," to "op-pose," and this is interesting since, beyond the philological anecdote, it suggests a movement that leads us to "move away" from folklore (because we were in it or we embodied it) and to confront it.

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[16] Mario Céspedes, "Entrevista a Violeta Parra en Radio Universidad de Concepción," 5 January, 1960, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NAPmZNdd2tg.

[17] Isabelle Launay, "Recoger para dar: de la recolecta etnográfica en tiempos de revolución... al escarbado poético en tiempos de crisis. *Los Serrenhos del Caldeirao, ejercicios de antropología ficcional* de Vera Mantero (2012)," trans. Fernando López Rodríguez, in *La investigación en danza 2018*, Varios authors (Mahali, 2018), 471-476.

To confront it, like a reflection in a mirror, is not the same as being it, embodying it: it implies an exercise of dispossession that instantly affords a degree of distance, since when placed in front of something, or from a distance to it, we can see things we did not see before, when we embodied something (folklore) so closely that it was not only "ours" but also a part of ourselves. To anti-folklorise is maybe not the same as opposing folklore in a Manichean sense, but rather to position our body and mind in a place that allow us to appreciate its nuances, its sparkles and shadows. It is also, in a way, to look at ourselves as if we were a reflection, a hologram or apparition, to pretend that we are looking at ourselves like others would, to recognise in a flash what normally stays unnoticed.

Regarding flamenco, this concept of anti-cueca does not so much remind me of the *anti-flamenquismo* movement, which indeed caricaturises, denounces, and rejects flamenco, than of other aesthetic labels like "ex-flamenquismo" coined by Niño de Elche and all the aesthetic labels that different flamenco currents have applied to themselves since at least the 1990s[18]: new flamenco, flamenco fusion, contemporary flamenco, open flamenco, inclusive flamenco, queer flamenco, etc.

These artists, despite their unequivocal differences and different (and sometimes antagonistic) aesthetic and political perspectives, confront flamenco to look at it in a different way (maybe because they felt forced to "move away from flamenco" due to pressure from their communities or out of personal interest). However, when doing so, they do not turn their back on flamenco and rarely do they leave it in search of other worlds; and if they do, they always come back as if attracted by the magnetic force of the source. Anti-flamencos place themselves in front of flamenco, but they remain spellbound like faithful exegetes, constant repeaters of the musical and choreographic canon or eternal complainers in a constant state of protest. Thus, us anti-folklorists and anti-flamencos jump (or fall) out of flamenco, but we stay in its orbit without ever really leaving: the reverse of folklore is also folklore; the reverse of flamenco is also flamenco; the inversion of values maintains their validity, even when they have been turned on their head.

That is very interesting and true. If we observe the most eminent representatives of flamenco, these were also transgressors. I am thinking of La Niña de los Peines, Manolo Caracol, La Chana, Camarón, Paco de Lucía, Enrique Morente. Fernanda Romero who identified with all her Gitano

[18] Fernando López Rodríguez, "El surgimiento del baile flamenco contemporáneo. Historia y debates estéticos (1990-2008)," in *La investigación en danza 2020*, Various authors (Mahali, 2020), 111-9.

symbolism and wildness whilst also searching for female liberation; Israel Galván rebelled against his destiny as a prodigy of traditional dance when he was still almost a child; or even Milagros Mengíbar, who starts lifting the bata de cola[19] for the first time, and the revolutionary Carmen Amaya, of course! They are all, to different degrees and in different ways, disobedient. Many of our examples, those who are named today as part of the repertoire or archive (Antonio el Bailarín, Manuela Carrasco, Mario Maya) "re-invented," that is to say, subverted the mirror of folklore to cast back a new reflection, or rather to show its (dark?) flip side. In their creative activity they of course did their jobs, but they also explored the technical and formal limits of the former, and they moved beyond them to open new pathways. For me, this opening up undeniably occurs with reference to the existing path —albeit as negation or opposition. As Isabel de Naverán's observes, "dance can be read as an act that prepares bodies for contagion, for the interruption of the established continuity and for a microscopic, cellular transformation."[20] Dance and flamenco understood not as spaces for identitarian or static affirmations, but rather as bodies in a constant migratory state. I ask myself and I ask you: do we need to deny something to feel free to dance and create? Is the other side of the mirror the same as a lack of identification with our medium or environment? Its meaninglessness? A vital, visceral necessity that stems from desire? Is flamenco, like any other artform, condemned to repeat and copy itself infinitely or does it have the obligation to self-explore —to turn inwards, backwards— to be able to keep walking the path of creation, inspiration, of the hackneyed notion of duende? (Rocío Molina, Eva Yerbabuena, Vicente Escudero, Belén Maya, Antonia Mercé.) Would it be a matter of ecology to select what survives in flamenco, to make it sustainable? For me, the question would be: how can we create something at the same time as acknowledging the margins of a territory and its stories in order to be traversed by those margins? In any case, I think: let's not be scared, dancing is always a fugitive image.

I believe that in many cases these transformations of the repertoire have occurred in an organic manner, through the creative processes of each artist. When someone creates something, even within a very simple scenic context (such as that of a café cantante or tablao) inevitably they transform the musical and choreographic material, without there necessarily being a will to

[19] A flamenco skirt or dress with a long train [translator note].
[20] Isabel de Naverán, *Envoltura, historia y síncope* (Editorial Caniche, 2021), 43.

break away from anything: they simply generate an artistic response to a question (a desire, an idea, a narration, or a simple sequence of movements).

I say this because I think that, in most cases, artists did not think about "revolutionising" anything: they were simply doing their creative work. Terms such as "revolution" or "renewal" appear later as labels proposed by aficionados, critics, specialists, or historians, who try to evaluate the scenic event by comparing it to the perception (which is inevitably unprecise and biased) that they (and these are often men) have of the History of Flamenco.

As such, the task of composition (and there I find that the term "creative ecology" that you mention acquires its full meaning) is no longer something organic but rather is understood as something that is related, whether from a sense of radical rupture or a conservative type of renewal (the political and aesthetic "centre"), to the codes that preceded it.

This also presupposes the belief that these previous codes do indeed exist in a crystalised and definitive form, which we know is completely false, even when the artists themselves claim that they are interpreting a song or dance style "exactly as they learnt it from their parents or grandparents," since in this process of learning and repeating there is already a whole set of micro-changes and variations at work that, when added up, produce great differences that are not merely interpretative, but rather touch the kernel of the musical and choreographic structure, in other words, the very process of repetition occurs through forms of change and variation over which we do not have any type of control, artistically speaking.

The canon, then, is nothing but an optical (myopic?) effect provoked by an imaginary form of control over the development of artistic forms that, in order to maintain a sense of order, reduces the malleability of the horizon to the set margins of a fixed image; a map that starts being confounded with reality itself. This type of artistic short-sightedness, moreover, can only generate a permanent nostalgia (which another philosopher, Michel Bernard, defines as "perverse" in the sense of "pathologically self-absorbed"[21]) since reality is never able to fully resemble this crystalised mental image (an image that they confound with a "past" that, undoubtedly, was a lot broader, richer and more diverse than can fit on a postcard).

As an artist, I am incredibly bored by the "repetition compulsion" with which all debates about this matter are reactivated (phrased in terms of "pious respect" for the now consecrated forms created by artists who, as you have indicated yourself, were initially considered to be "revolutionary

[21] Michel Bernard, "Le désir de mémoire ou les effets pervers de la nostalgie," in *De la création chorégraphique* (Les Presses du Réel, 2001).

innovators"). This bores me, in the worst possible meaning of the expression, as it stops us from discussing a number of valuable things that occur in the artistic act, and because it constantly circles back to a form of unpleasant paternalism according to which as artists we CAN create but we SHOULD continue suckling the decayed breast milk of the masters: however, I don't know an artist or a researcher who is more of a sucker than I am... literally.

As a researcher, moreover, I am not only bored but also worried by this debate since it converts doing research about flamenco into a type of sterile knowledge, it converts Academia into a Funerary School that only deals with corpses; corpses which it does not even claim to dissect but just to venerate (by recounting jokey anecdotes about artists' lives or reproducing audio-visual archives without analysing them), thus constantly generating an atmosphere of a yearning after the dead, an afflicted wake for them.

4. The tradition, beyond the metaphors

As Javiera de la Fuente writes and senses, "a flamenco that is *envioletao*, while rooted in the tradition, from within and deep down, finds a way to step beyond it": *rootedness* means "to have or put down roots," rather than going away or travelling in search of adventures. How do we move forward, then? How to get rid in a definitive manner of that which once we considered to be our identity but which is now not so much a place of "eternal return" but rather a type of "Groundhog Day" or yet another iteration of a traumatic event invoked by our "repetition compulsion"?[22]

I am thinking about this archive fever in relation to the explanation given by Freud for the anal origin of capitalism, as an economic system ushered in by the involuntary movement of the closure of the sphincter to avoid the loss of what we do not need and yet do not want to lose: faeces as the origin of the notion of private property.

Conversely, I am also thinking about the opening of the same sphincter, about my desire to release, to let go, to open up, and about how difficult I sometimes find this, despite the plenitude I experience every time it happens.

[22] Here, I compare, in a not very technical manner, Nietzsche's famous but never truly clarified concept of the "eternal return," according to which reality repeats itself differing from and coinciding with itself within the same gesture, with the Freudian notion of "repetition compulsion," which refers to the psychological tendency to repeat traumatic events with which we somehow end up identifying ourselves, thus experiencing a certain pleasure in their recurrence.

Contrary to artists with Diogenes syndrome (with whom I identify almost completely) I spoke with Kevin André Magné (@kevingmagne), who is an ex-bailaor and currently a non-flamenco dancer, as well as a multidisciplinary artist and curator of three editions of the experimental flamenco forum Aullidos en Chile (Screams in Chile); they confess that they needed to let go of flamenco to be able to talk about other things, to be able to undertake research and delve into other artistic practices they were also interested in.

"I had already experienced many things in flamenco and the next step would have been to move to Spain." Instead, they decided to stay in Chile to continue exploring other artistic possibilities that needed time, energy, and space that flamenco would help open up.

They tell me this in Parque Italia in Valparaíso, where there is a nocturnal encounter entitled "Memories of Revolts. Commemoration for Historical Reparation," organised by LesboTransMarika from Valparaíso and defined as "Variety + Open Mic," which reminds me of the infinite and extremely creative subtitles of dozens of librettos of musical pieces from the early 20th century that I collected to conduct my research about the farruca and garrotín.

In this encounter Kevin "seizes the mic" to stage a performance about his own experience with HIV and this performance draws on the rhythm of a box of antiretroviral pills used as a rattle; it draws on the poetic word and lived experience; it draws on dance and lipsing, and on a performance of the Eucharist where the artist pulverize part of their medication and offers it to the attendees, who ingest it by taking a sip from a bottle of whisky that we just bought in a nearby corner shop.

Not a trace of flamenco. And yet, how can we talk about HIV in the style of soleá? Is it necessary to constantly evoke flamenco references to link the issues that interest us and our lived experiences to the identity of a *bailaor* from which we are struggling to release ourselves? Can we leave flamenco in a storage room (well-ventilated and equipped) to which we'll return to only when we need to, when we need each other? How to let go to make space for things that we currently don't even dare to imagine? How to permit a partial or total exfoliation, whether transitory or definite, in our deepest inner selves?

Perhaps it is a matter of opening up our arses, loosening the sphincters, of letting go, of loosening up, letting ourselves be penetrated by what is out there, by life that overflows us; it is a matter of storing the archive very clearly labelled at the back of a drawer to be able to return to it whenever we need to but without constantly having to have it show it in a prominent

place in our living room, where we have to see it every day and discuss it when someone visits our home and where we feel forced to explain its origin and why it exists.

Perhaps it is a matter of letting go of identity, letting go of the Cueca and anti-Cueca, Chile and Spain so we don't have to be in favour of something but also not against anything. To stop affirming (ourselves) so we can relate to flamenco and the other aspects of our lives in a slightly freer way, without carrying out processes of creative research that return us every time to our home independent of (and indifferent to) whatever might happen on the road and might eventually redirect us towards other places and destinations.

In my experience, flamenco remains a useful code, a language of efficient signs that don't necessarily have meaning, but rather allow us to conjure up and embody a diversity of issues, such as, why not, HIV. I'm not talking about returning to the masters, but rather to those linguistic codes that have survived, a sort of collective selection of images.[23] Thus understood, flamenco is the malady and cure at the same time, poison and medicine,[24] it

[23] Here I would like to evoke Andrea Soto Calderón's reflection about Georges Didi-Huberman's ideas regarding the image as a structure of representation that can be "torn apart", that is to say, an open structure: "[t]o rid the images of their afterlives, the times and experiences that they accumulate, as well as the seeds of new images that they garner." See Andrea Soto Calderón, *La performatividad de las imágenes* (Ediciones Metales Pesados, 2020), 48. These ideas about tearing apart and survival are applicable to any formal language, even the most colloquial one. They can be applied to an idea of "collective natural selection," carried out by the popular knowledge that also constitutes flamenco.

[24] The philosopher Jacques Derrida also plays on the double meaning of the term *pharmakon* in his text "Plato's Pharmacy," to return to its use by Plato himself in the latter's *Phaedrus*. See Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Athlone Press, 1981).

In said context, medicine and poison are not presented like two substances that can be distinguished in essence, but as one unique "pharmakon" whose effects, beneficial or harmful, depend on the dose and context of usage. In this way, we can also return to the image provided by Javiera to think about flamenco, interpreting its excessive creative usage as something that can be upsetting and make it indigestible, or as a conduit of health.

It is not entirely anecdotal to discuss flamenco as something that is either curative or poisoning given that the title of the present text is "The tradition and its metaphors," a clear reference to the famous text Susan Sontag wrote in 1978 when she was undergoing a cancer treatment. In *Illness as Metaphor* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2013), Sontag prompts us to crush the imaginary that holds ill people responsible for their illnesses, understanding the latter as somatic symptoms of certain psycho-behavioural blockages; it is the metaphors, perhaps, that most sicken us of the illness, what most irritates us and dis-empowers us, since they hold us

remains in my body and my way of doing —of dwelling, relating to others, thinking, feeling—, a medium that contains the materials that I need and manipulate on stage, in the studio, in life. Flamenco, I insist, as a methodology. Returning to archive fever, if we have gathered steps, styles, *palos*, repertoires, shapes with no bottom, bottoms with no shape, what we can do, without deciding whether we are or aren't doing flamenco, is to go to those ventilated drawers and choose to create, with more or less freedom.

I would actually say with a lot of freedom, since I understand flamenco as an art form that originates and is defined by Otherness, both on a spiritual level —the searches of the soul, beyond intellectualisms and formalities— and on a socio-political level. That archive includes resistance to racial, colonial, spiritual, patriarchal, capitalist hegemonies. At this point I would say that flamenco is an accumulation and selection of those codes that we cannot define, therefore we cannot even oppose them, other than by means of an exercise. And going back to the metaphor we coined at the beginning of this conversation, I remember an article by Ursula K. Le Guin about stories structured around a hero (the masculine figure of a hunter, warrior, rapist, creator, who uses a spear or sword, who fabricates and throws bombs) and the preferred characters, words, myths, traditions recounted by stories about everyday and transcendental life, collected by women —in a basket, a bag, a continent.[25] If we link that metaphor to our discussion, it doesn't matter so much what the hero, creator, dancer recounts as the fact that what they recount relates to existence, and such stories are also collected in the basket of traditional art forms. In that sense, I

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responsible for a process of physical decay that, while this may be the result of a variety of psychosomatic reasons, cannot simply be cured with a simple change of attitude or a magical effect of the will.

Metaphors help us to think about certain realities, but they also stop us from seeing others in a clear manner. This also occurs, perhaps, with the metaphors we use to relate to the "tradition," imagining the "tradition" as an illness for which flamenco itself can be used, in a specific dose and combination, as a remedy: maybe it is the metaphors about the tradition what most sicken us about it; the root as a botanical metaphor for flamenco's imaginary origins; the act of drinking breast milk as a maternal metaphor for learning and for an extractivist relation to the past understood as a "source"; "purity" as a virginal metaphor for perfect mimesis; "respect" as an ethico-religious metaphor for relating to the canon; "recollection" as an agricultural metaphor for doing research; and the concepts of "rupture" and "revolution" as aggressive metaphors for the creative act... And what if flamenco could cure the tradition (or its metaphors), injecting itself with the adequate dose of the substances that best define it —inconformity and the unique perspective of each interpreter for whose description there (still) are no metaphors?

[25] Ursula Le Guin, "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," in *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts On Words, Women, Places* (Grove Press, 1989).

would not avoid going there to collect what others before me have already had to invent and have selected from those who came before them so they could keep dancing in the present, in a way that is above all sincere and faithful to themselves. This is what the exercise of going further consists of, of liberating ourselves as you say, of taking ourselves beyond the boundary which is redefined every time, and constantly making it venture further, one body after another, one sound after another. Of course, we have to give up identity, as it is yet another construct, like time, and science. If we understand it this way, like a game with its rules and tricks, if we are aware of its fictiveness, we can travel far and freely, and when we return home, we will always be different.

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