

**REPOSITIONING THE OBJECT:
EXPLORING PROP USE THROUGH THE FLAMENCO TRILOGY**

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Abstract

Reflecting on the creation process of my flamenco trilogy, this thesis explores how one can reposition iconic flamenco objects when devising, creating, and producing three short films: *The Fan*, *The Rose* and *The Bull*. Each film examines personal, historical, and local relationships to iconic flamenco objects, enabled through the collaboration with filmmakers: Audrey Bow, Dayna Szyndrowski, and Clint Mazo.

Dedication

I wish to dedicate this thesis to my mother Pat Smith. An inspirational teacher, artist, arts enthusiast, and the most wonderful mother a daughter could ask for. Miss you.

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INTRODUCTION

Through the collaborative process I was able to create a trilogy of short films: *The Fan*, *The Rose* and *The Bull*, which explores the use of choreography and dance on film to reposition iconic flamenco objects. These objects are emblematic of the art form of flamenco and tied to a common movement vocabulary and are thus considered iconic. The impetus for this project is my continued interest and research into flamenco objects, which involves a desire to challenge myself in order to show personality and originality within my chosen art form of flamenco.

The fan is a common handheld flamenco dance prop with the ability to dramatically change size when opened or closed. The rose is used as adornment, and iconically placed in a flamenco dancer's hair. The bull is associated with Spanish culture and shares many similarities with the art form of flamenco. Each object brought with its history an established set of movement qualities associated with the object and the potential for further movement experimentation. Each film was made separately with collaborators who contributed their own artistic style to filmmaking. Due to this, the films took a varied creative approach that allowed the films to be presented together as a trilogy, as well as stand alone.

Chapter one will explore the process of inserting the personal in an art form that is tied to tradition. Chapter two discusses the role of objects in flamenco performance, in addition to new approaches to the flamenco *cuadro* (performance group). The influential work of filmmaker Carlos Saura is discussed in chapter three, as well as the use of film and the flamenco female on screen. The following three chapters explore each film and object individually, discussing the objects history, creative choices, and collaborative process. The thesis concludes with a reflection of learning outcomes and future plans for the work.

Working collaboratively was generated by established artistic relationships between me and the other individuals, as well as having common creative goals. This process permitted me to realize the creative possibilities of working with film and experimenting with flamenco tradition.

CHAPTER 1 | In Search of the Personal

Flamenco is an art form that involves mastering a specific movement vocabulary and adhering to structural rules. These rules are commonly guarded and labeled as “traditional” or “pure,” and intentions have been made to preserve and uphold these rules. Such rigid structures often restrict the ability to explore alternative artistic possibilities within the choreography, and as a result artists courageously choose to break rules in order to explore what I am referring to as the personal—a sense of connection and relationship; something of personal significance and meaning. This can include showcasing one’s dance history by incorporating alternative dance training, or taking creative freedom by leaving the structural norms associated with a flamenco song.

The idea of “pure” versus the “experimental” is an ongoing debate; “[t]he movement towards purism in flamenco flourished through the end of the [twentieth] century and continues to buoy conversations among traditionalists” (Hayes 50). As flamenco artists increasingly experiment to showcase the personal and a sense of choreographic originality, conflict can occur. Historians of flamenco argue “[t]he concern seems to be that the innovations in contemporary flamenco, which are a welcome change for many flamencos from the tourist-oriented productions in the *tablaos*, also threaten to eradicate traditional flamenco by introducing a new vocabulary into the choreography” (Hayes 51-52).

However, rather than aiming to please tourist-oriented audiences, I argue experimenters are on an artistic journey and in search of the personal which can lead to experimenting with traditionally prescribed elements: movement, rhythm, instrumentation, objects, clothing, and performance location. Internationally renowned flamenco artists including Belén Maya, Rocío Molina, and Israel Galvan have made notable careers for themselves based on their originality,

and thus departing from *flamenco puro* (pure flamenco). Because of this move to originality, many critics have marked these artists' work as 'not flamenco,' and consider their divergence a direct threat to the art form.

For example, in an article on The Guardian's website writer and dance critic Judith Mackrell discusses Rocío Molina, an experimental flamenco artist, and acknowledges that: "Some say she is killing 'real' flamenco" ("Rocío Molina: Flamenco and Beyond"). This is ironic because experimental flamenco artists are known to possess a high level of traditional knowledge and technical skills. Indeed, many artists, including Rocío Molina and Israel Galvan, clearly understand the intricacies of the art form and both have mastered the technical aspects, which is fully evident in their performances. Nevertheless, as Paula Citron suggests in a Globe and Mail article, Galvan has been described as an artist that has "never found satisfaction as a traditional flamenco dancer. Rather, he has been a maverick and a revolutionary who's transformed flamenco puro into something that is both intensely personal and very contemporary."

Performers not only depart from traditional flamenco techniques, many artists oscillate between traditional and experimental forms, fusing with modern styles. José Mercé, for example, is someone who, "in a full-fledged concert, might perform the first half in traditional style, accompanied only by guitar, and devote the second half to his semi-pop hits (like "Aire"), accompanied by five or six instrumentalists and background singers" (Manuel "Composition, Authorship, and Ownership in Flamenco, Past and Present" 115).

To showcase the personal and a sense of originality in the choreography, traditional rules are continually broken. This experimentation speaks to how flamenco began, as a mixing of cultures and ideas that lead to a hybrid art form. Furthermore, as flamenco scholar K. Meira

Goldberg, argues, “[i]t is clear that change, criticism, and ideological conflict have been present throughout flamenco history. These intervals in flamenco history serve as a frame of reference for the consideration of contemporary flamenco artists and their artistic evolution” (*Flamenco on the Global Stage* 293). This suggests that adaptation and change have and will continue to be a significant aspect of what defines the flamenco performance. Adding support to this view, Belén Maya stated in an interview on flamenco’s shifting status that “they (the traditionalists) have to accept that flamenco has changed, it is changing and will continue to change” (Maya qtd. in Hayes 180). Flamenco dancers and choreographers continue to feel a necessity to evolve and fuse with outside influences to satisfy personal artistic needs. These artists are more interested in delivering a personal, authentic experience rather than a reproduction of the past.

My choreographic goals are similar to many of the experimental artists mentioned above; I work to use flamenco knowledge as an anchor for its evolution. I believe choreography is utilized to reveal artistic possibilities within the art form and, in doing so, viewers are able to question established flamenco stereotypes. I agree with Goldberg’s assertion that “[t]his reference to and re-presentation of the past is one of the compositional tools contemporary choreographers use to relocate themselves within the flamenco tradition” (*Flamenco on the Global Stage* 299). Breaking these established stereotypes has been a continued interest of mine. I am continually inspired by flamenco artists that resist the flamenco postcard identity and instead seek to display their individual artistic voice.

CHAPTER 2 | The Role of Objects in Performance

“Props have many lives—practical, referential, rhetorical, phenomenological, psychological, ideological—but each begins when an object is plucked from the world and placed upon a stage, where it uncannily becomes at once itself and other than itself”

(Sofer 29)¹

Objects incite the imagination, aiding in storytelling and bringing a sense of reality to the visual poetry of flamenco performance. The transformative ability of objects excites choreography, and this ability for transformation creates dynamic contrasts in the work. Choreographic possibilities increase as props are used for their versatility. In other words, props or objects “help to establish location, social situation, historical period and generic style, conspiring dramatic context[,]” and further, “they aid the identification of the characters, their gender, status, class and type” (Pearson 115-116).

Objects become an extension of the body; a catalyst for the exploration of shape and space, as they have the ability to trace the body, confine the body, extend the body, and to change the lines of the body. As theatre historian Andrew Sofer suggests, “[b]y definition, a prop is an object that goes on a journey; hence props trace spatial trajectories and create temporal narratives as they track through a given performance” (2). This journey through the temporal narratives traces and creates a fracturing of time, as the viewer is easily transported to personal experiences and memories involving an interaction with the object. In this way, “[o]bjects open

¹ The opening quote by Andrew Sofer suggests two points: first, props have many lives; and second, objects become props once they are placed on stage. It is this second point that I would like to address, as throughout the thesis I have used the words object and prop interchangeably. It is not that I disagree with Sofer’s scholarly insight; my choices are due to the complexities of my research, and the collaborative and creative process that I utilized. Furthermore, reclaiming the definitions of the terms object and prop from a purely scholarly interpretation reflects my own training as a professional flamenco dancer who understands the words reference a cultural history that migrates to, informs, and embodies the theatre I create as an artist.

doors to the past; they help us to reclaim ‘forgotten’ performance practices and to reimagine historical narratives” (Schweitzer and Zerdy 14-15).

The relationship between the object and the dancer becomes a duet as the object is elevated to the central role in the choreography—the object thus becomes a partner from which to mimic or contrast. The aim is not to replace another moving body, but to “create additional modes of communication and exchange” (Shaw 210). While objects are beginning to be recognized as powerful tools of creation, some believe that they are not getting the credit they deserve as a *collaborator* in the choreographic process. Indeed, theatre scholars Marlis Schweitzer and Joanne Zerdy aptly ask: “while most of us tacitly acknowledge the importance of objects to our work, how many of us identify objects as a collaborator on grant applications, dissertation projects, article submissions?” (14).

Flamenco objects, such as the fan, the rose, and the bull, are inspiring due to their transformative nature. They are catalysts for exploration and discovery with their ability to inform movement choices as well as to ignite the imagination, which can thereby transcend the object itself. Objects enable choreographers to explore the limitations and possibilities between traditional and experimental forms, as well as what is expected and what is unexpected by the viewing audience. This stylistic contrast between traditional and experimental movement vocabulary becomes an intriguing theme to explore when utilizing flamenco objects. Because these objects have a rich and rooted history in flamenco dance and culture, the object’s presence alone anchors the performance in what is thought of as traditional. However, experimental choreographic choices can reposition the object(s), surprising the audience by taking them away from what is assumed. In this way, the object is a springboard into the experimental, and it is this

contrast, of moving back and forth between traditional and experimental forms, that excites me as a choreographer.

Flamenco's Relationship with Objects

Flamenco has an extensive history of object use. These objects not only include *la rosa* (the rose), *el abanico* (the fan), and *el toro* (the bull), which are the focus of my research, but also *castañuelas* (the castanets), *sombrero Cordobes* (the Cobovan hat), *bastón* (the cane), and *mantón de Manilla* (the large shawl). An affinity for object use in flamenco stems from continued adaptation and assimilation of the art form with a range of cultures that include Moors, Jewish, and Gitano (the Romani people) (Hayes 10). These influences created, and allows for, varieties in style, sound, and storytelling that occurs in *letras* (songs), as well as the use of objects in performance. Music scholar Machin-Autenrieth confirms that, “[f]lamenco is often seen as the musical by-product of centuries of alleged exchange and intermixing between a myriad of cultural groups” (Peter Manuel qtd. in Machin-Autenrieth 10).

The origin of flamenco is commonly attributed as a creative outlet for the poor and marginalized (Totton 14). Flamenco scholar Robin Totton confirms that, as a result of the Christian Reconquest in 1492 the Christians intolerance of the times drove the *Gitanos* (Moors and Jews) underground where the music developed until the end of the eighteenth century (Totton 14). Further research shows that flamenco was developed and continues to be influenced by a multitude of cultures including Cuban, African, Moors, Indian, South American, Asian, Spanish folk as well as Gitano (the Romani people) (Hayes 140-144; Phillips 405; Nash 136). For example, the narrator in the film *Flamenco* by Spanish filmmaker Carlos Saura gives an insightful description of this, explaining:

Flamenco appeared in Andalucia, Southern Spain, in the mid-nineteenth century as a consequence of the intersection of towns, religions and culture that gave way to a new kind of music: Greek songs, Arab poetry, Gregorian chants, Castilian ballads, Jewish laments, the rhythmic forms influenced by African cultures in diaspora (*el son de la negritud*) and the accent of the gypsy towns that came from far-off India to settle here—these elements combined and gave form to the art we now call flamenco, expressed in the song, the guitar and the dance (Carlos Saura qtd. in Hayes 140-141).

Flamenco has incorporated Andalusian folk music and dance into its repertoire, this includes the *palo* (song form) *sevillanas*, which is the only *palo* danced in couples (Manual 143). The South American influence is seen in the inclusion of the *cajon* (a box drum) in the 1980's (Flores 34). Another example, generated as a product of Spanish colonization, is the Afro-Cuban influenced flamenco *palos* of the *guajira* and the *rumba* (Hayes 143-144). For example, the below lyrics come from a common song called the *guajira* and reflect the Cuban influences:

Me gusta por la mañana
después del café bebio
pasearme por la Habana
con mi cigarro encendió

I like it in the morning
 after I drink a coffee
 I stroll through Havana
 with my lit cigar

(Manuel “The ‘Guajira’ between Cuba and Spain” 144).

This early Afro-Cuban influence on flamenco is further demonstrated when pioneer filmmakers the Lumière Brothers chose to capture on film the first male flamenco dancer ever recorded, Jacinto Padilla—a man of Afro-Cuban descent dancing at the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris (Goldberg *Sonidos Negros* 134-144). Although this film brings into question the racial undertones of white consumption of Blackness, the Lumière Brothers also gave Padilla and the Afro-Cuban influence on flamenco historical importance and validity. Even with the making of this documentary many have undervalued the Afro-Cuban contribution to the art form. Watching the Lumière Brothers' footage of Padilla, it is easy to recognize the resemblance his style has to the dance style of the legendary El Farruco, who is one of the greatest male flamenco dancers of the twentieth century and the patriarch of the Farucco family (Goldberg *Sonidos Negros* 148).

The East Indian influence can be seen in the similarities of movement vocabulary shared between flamenco and kathak. For example, both employ “the combination of the body attitude, or maintained torso placement, with the integration of specifically shaped arm movements coordinated with the feet” (Phillips 405). The use of the arms demonstrates further similarities, as Phillips elaborates, “Kathak and flamenco use the arms to make clear spatial shapes in space, to accentuate the stately body stance, and to punctuate the rhythm” (405). Furthermore, both art forms utilize a mode of communicating with the musicians. Dance scholar Miriam Phillips explains that:

[i]n kathak, the jughalbandi is a competitive play where the kathak dancer, through the ingenuity of his foot rhythms, tries to ‘outsmart’ the tabla player. They go back and forth echoing each other’s rhythms, performing shorter and shorter segments until they come together in an accelerated climax. In flamenco, while the singer is singing the first line of

the song, the dancer does lyrical, silent ‘marking steps.’ Then, during the singer’s *respiro* (breath, a pause in the song verse), the dancer frequently makes an audible rhythmic response. There often is call and response toward the end of a footwork section where the dancer and the guitarist, along with the *palmeros* (hand-clappers), respond to the dancer’s rhythms (409).

The Asian influence on flamenco can be seen in the use of the fan as well as the *mantón*. These fashion accessories and dance objects have come to be “considered a symbol of Spain as a whole” (Nash 136). However, these items were a result of trade; they were brought into Southern Spain through the port of Cadíz in the early nineteenth-century (Nash 136). The word *mantón* is shortened from its longer name *el mantón de Manila* which references the city of Manila in the Philippines, where many of these items were gathered before being shipped to Spain (Nash, 136-139). According to Spanish Studies scholar Elizabeth Nash, the *mantón*

started to become a popular female fashion accessory in Spain and Spanish America after 1821. That was the year trade with the colony of the Philippines was centralized in Seville. In the second half of the nineteenth century, anything Chinese or Japanese—silk, porcelain, fans and tea—became hugely fashionable throughout Europe. The Philippines’ capital, Manila, became a key city for Spanish and Latin American trade and the so-called Manila shawl, the *mantón de manila*, a much-prized commodity. But the origins of how this Chinese product became identified with Spanish ladies go back nearly three centuries before[...] Spanish consumers called the range of religious vestments, shawls, counterpanes and other hangings that reached Spain from Manila ‘Manila embroidery,’ even though it was worked in south-east China (136-139).

Although the foreign influences from Cuba, Africa, India, South America, Asia, and Spanish folk are at times contested by “flamenco purists,” it is difficult to argue against the fact that this mixture of musical influences and cultures is what constitutes the very definition of flamenco. Flamenco was and continues to be shaped by a multitude of outside influences, which shape the movement vocabulary, musical variations, and the use of a variety of objects within the art form.

New Approaches to the Cuadro

The *cuadro* refers to a group of flamenco performers, their formation when performing, and the relationship that occurs between the performers. Specifically, “[i]n its ‘traditional’ form, the *cuadro flamenco* is made up of singers, guitarists, *palmeros* (singers or dancers who accompany the lead dancer by clapping) and the dancers arranged in a half-circle at the back of the stage. The dancer’s area on stage is delimited by the *cuadro*” (Flores 34). Flamenco is a collaborative art form; performers feed off each other to create dynamic moments in the performance.

The vast majority of my performances are done as *cuadro flamenco*. The *cuadro flamenco* is often emblematic of the traditional and is how flamenco is experienced around the world for tourist consumption, as Flores confirms (34). However, this presentation can, in turn, create stereotypes that limit the ways in which flamenco is performed. The establishment of flamenco stereotypes is due, in part, to nationalistic actions taken by Spanish dictator Francisco Franco (Goldberg *Sonidos Negros* 129). As Music scholar Eva Ordóñez Flores explains, “[t]he export of flamenco occurred in connection with pro-Franco propaganda, sending an attractive original image of Spain all over the world. In order to appeal to further Western audiences an

exhibition form of flamenco has been developed where it which now appears side by side with the original *cuadro flamenco*” (34). Flamenco audiences begin to expect a “traditional” performance that is tied to seeing the *cuadro*. In fact, one of the earliest examples of flamenco on film is found in *Danse Espagnole de la Feria Sevillanos* by the Lumière Brothers in 1900, which captures the *cuadro flamenco* (Goldberg *Sonidos Negros* 129).

With the creation of my three films I decided to stray from the performative norm of the *cuadro* and instead showcase the sole performer. This was a choreographic challenge that I wanted to undertake; I was curious about what this limitation could produce. I was also interested in the relationship that could occur between my collaborators, who operated the cameras, and between the edited footage of myself—rather than that of the typical *cuadro*. Furthermore, I was interested in replacing one aspect of traditional flamenco for another by repositioning the traditional flamenco objects into a performance, absent of other traditional norms. I feel this is a motivating way to use the traditional as a foundation, leading into experimentation.

CHAPTER 3 | The Film Trilogy

Saura's Influence: In Dialogue with the Past

An impetus to create my three films was a desire to build a flamenco trilogy that would be in direct dialogue to the flamenco trilogy made by Spanish filmmaker Carlos Saura. Saura is instrumental in introducing flamenco to the world at large, as his career involves an extensive history of bringing flamenco subject matter to the screen (Kinder 14). Saura has been described as one of the “most brilliant and highly acclaimed film-maker[s] to come out of Spain” and is perhaps best known for his trilogy: *Blood Wedding* (1980), *Carmen* (1983), and *El Amor Brujo* (1986) (Kinder 14). This trilogy revolves around steadfast, linear narratives; the music, dance, and dialogue are depicted through typical stories of love, loss, and desire. All three of Saura’s films were created in collaboration with acclaimed Spanish dancer, flamenco dancer, and choreographer Antonio Gades who has been “credited by many artists and dance critics with ushering in the new era of flamenco dance, beginning with *Bodas de Sangre* (Blood Wedding) in 1981” (Pierdra qtd. in Thomas 98).

This new era established excitement for flamenco’s ability to fuse with others dance forms such as ballet. However, in opposition to this was the idea that these films “deal with the Spanish people’s participation in celebrations of fabricated Spanishness and their identification with a reflection of themselves that does not correspond to their reality” (Stone 592). This can lead to problematic stereotypes that are easily formed regarding Spanish identity, as well as with flamenco’s aesthetic (Stone 592). Regardless of controversy, these “films paved the way for future flamenco projects undertaken by Carlos Saura, which enter the dialogue of purists in the recounting of flamenco history, the definition of tradition, and reconfigure the roles of practitioners in determining flamenco’s future” (Hayes 122). These later films refer to Carlos

Saura's *Flamenco* (1995), and *Flamenco Flamenco* (2010); two films that marked a definite shift in Saura's cinematic approach to capturing flamenco on screen.

In *Flamenco* and *Flamenco Flamenco*, Saura encapsulates flamenco's past, present, and future by his chosen selection of flamenco performers. This diverse group includes the old, the young, the traditional, the experimental, the contemporary, the experienced, and the newcomer. All these artists are held to the same importance, and in doing this, Saura bridges flamenco communities; uniting everyone under the genre of flamenco, regardless of how they use experimentation.

The History of the Flamenco Female on Screen

My trilogy includes *The Rose*, *The Fan*, and *The Bull*. All three films focus on a sole female performer (portrayed by me), and bring the topic of cinematic portrayals of the flamenco female into discussion. The history of portraying the flamenco female on screen is extensive and at times controversial. Film scholar Francisco Griñán Doblas details "[t]he late entry of Spanish film-makers into the industry" and argues that this "meant that the earliest filmic tropes of Spain were those created by foreigners, a foreign gaze fascinated by Spanish iconography and native customs, from Andalusian folk costumes and dance to everything to do with bullfighting" (499). This foreign gaze created Spanish stereotypes that included a narrow depiction of Spaniards as bullfighters and *Gitanos*, and an idealized version of the female flamenco dancer. For example, this idealized representation led to the iconic yet stereotypical image of the flamenco female, often depicted to showcase her beauty and sexuality with a rose in her hair and a ruffled polka dot skirt.

Doblas suggests “[t]hese stereotypes were carried over from the art, music, drama, and world literature of the nineteenth century[;]” specifically as “archetypes already deeply rooted in the minds and psyches of film operators and film directors, both from Spain and abroad” (499). As a result, many viewers hold the image of the flamenco female to that of the deeply rooted, iconic stereotype; thus resulting in problematic and narrow-minded views of what is Spanish culture and what is considered flamenco.

Saura, along with many other filmmakers, notably included the flamenco female as a central motif in many of his films, including his flamenco trilogy. Throughout his career Saura has increasingly made cinematic decisions that invite the viewer to question established stereotypes. For example, Saura chooses to portray the female by working with a variety of emotional states, with non-traditional costuming, and by showcasing unpredictable movement and musical choices. These creative choices and modes of representation are instrumental in redefining the flamenco female’s clichéd image.

Following Saura, asking the viewer to question flamenco stereotypes is also an objective of mine. With the creation of my trilogy, I aim to continue the dialogue regarding the flamenco female, and at times challenge the stereotypes with my chosen attire and to showcase pain as much as beauty.

Filmic Potentials, Varied Landscapes

“The invention of film and video technology has had a profound impact on dance: on access to it, and on the creation, understanding, and appreciation of it”

(Mitoma xxxi)

Shifting from the three dimensions of dance to the two dimensions of the screen, speaks to today’s digital world. With the use of digital technology artists now have the ability for their work to reach larger audiences than ever before. This allows for exploration in new environments, a different kind of intimacy through camera work, and dramatic editing and overlay effects. Digital technology is the future, and this drives a necessity to get proficient at it. Exploration with filmmaking continues to feel like a natural progression for my work, and I would agree with dance scholar Judith Mitoma that “[c]reating dance for the camera is a natural extension of the dance artist’s skills—sensitivity to visual form, motion, space, time, and light, as well as a passion to communicate” (xxxix).

Film enables audiences to be transported to a variety of landscapes that are not available in a conventional stage setting. Dance scholar Sherril Dodds suggests it “seems that part of the agenda of dance designed for the camera is to avoid the transposition of a stage content to screen. One way in which this can be achieved is to locate the performance in a site that would not bring to mind, or normally be associated with, a stage setting” (23). This approach highlights the significance of locational choices and possibilities, which add to the meaning behind the work.

My decision to leave the stage and instead situate my films outdoors mirrors the historical locational shifts that flamenco has faced. Throughout history flamenco performance moved from private homes, to the *café cantantes* (flamenco clubs), to large theatre venues, with each new setting shifting the art form. Goldberg confirms that this transition “from the *café cantantes* to the

theatres in the 1920's, for example, led to changes in the flamenco repertory" (*Flamenco on the Global Stage* 292). Furthermore, Goldberg argues the "resulting amalgam of forms called *opéra flamenco* (flamenco opera) threatened to displace what had emerged as 'traditional' flamenco in the cafés, a setting already once removed from the private locales where flamenco was and is practiced among families and intimates" (*Flamenco on the Global Stage* 292-293). All three films created in my trilogy were filmed outdoors in Canadian locations that include Vancouver, Galiano Island, and Toronto. Due to flamenco's locational history, I aimed for my work to be in dialogue with the historic evolving performance spaces of flamenco's past, yet also present an example of current performance environment possibilities. This dialogue is available within the medium of film.

Camera Tricks

Working in film permits the exploration of editing techniques, camera angles, and the use of close-ups which are all exciting choreographic tools. The camera allows for precise visual control, as framing permits the creators to direct the viewer in specific ways. Quick edits with dynamic timing enable suspense to build within the choreography. Furthermore, editing can explore a fracturing of time, as the flow of movement choices can shift from one moment to the next. As flamenco is largely an emotive art form, intensifying this aspect with close-ups is extremely effective. Indeed, Dodds affirms that "[t]he close-up has become a dramatic device for relaying psychological perspectives" (4). Film also invites the audience to connect on a deeper level because "[t]he camera functions not only to capture or record images, but to increase the kinesthetic exchange between audience and performer. In doing this, the camera performs a

double role, one as an extension of the spectators visual sense, and secondly, as an apparatus that engages their tactile sense” (John Cook qtd. in Broadhurst and Machon 33).

My choice to work with the medium of film was further influenced by the skills and logistics of working with my collaborators: Clint Mazo, Dayna Szyndrowski, and Audrey Bow. These collaborators and I share a creative history, and all possess filmmaking skills. Each collaborator brought their unique background and approach to art making. Dayna is a dancer, photographer, and filmmaker. She has devoted herself primarily to tap dance, jazz music, and improvisation as a means of communication. Audrey is a filmmaker and photographer, originally from France, who moved to Vancouver to study graphic communication and film. The amalgamation of these two fields has led to Audrey’s signature cinematic style. Clint is a Vancouver based DJ who has performed both nationally and internationally, and whose interests lie in both music and sound exploration.

The Fan, *The Rose*, and *The Bull* are a result of these collaborations. Each film took a varied approach; however, the approaches connect through the exploration and repositioning of flamenco objects. As mentioned earlier, each object chosen is iconic to the flamenco tradition, yet I have used them as a springboard into the unexpected; each object takes an alternative approach that challenges any links to flamenco objects which have become clichés. The three objects will be discussed in the order they were presented to the public on December 1st, 2019.

CHAPTER 4 | The Fan

The film begins with the single strum of a guitar as the scene opens up with the dancer (myself) dressed in black and positioned in an outdoor landscape, between a water feature and stone wall. Time is fragmented; quick edits inspire foresight of what is to come in the choreography. Moments of stillness embodied by the dancer encourage a sense of arrival and preparation. The sound of guitar music continues, and the dancer's movement reveals the use of a multicoloured hand fan. The viewer's eyes are directed to the fan by: utilizing close-ups to draw attention, methods of juxtaposition that accent the brightly coloured object (and only item of colour in a monochromatic landscape), and by using the fan as an impetus for the dancer's movement. As the film continues viewers are shown how the fan can be manipulated, ending with a close-up on the fan, drawing viewers in to enter its world.

Object History

The fan is an iconic Spanish accessory, and as such it has become established in flamenco's repertoire. However, its roots are of another world. The fan arrived in Spain with Spanish and Portuguese merchants returning from Asia in the 15th century (El Palacio Andaluz). The fan was an attractive item, desired for its initial exclusivity and aesthetic beauty; yet, it was primarily reserved for the wealthy as "[t]his accessory experienced its maximum splendor during the reign of Louis XIV and Louis XV, under whose regency the fan ran as an essential complement in the wardrobe of the noble ladies" (El Palacio Andaluz). As time went on the fan became Spain's must-have accessory, it became more easily available and useful to keep cool (Fuchs).

However, the fan was so much “[m]ore than a fashion statement, it was a courtship tool women used to signal their romantic interests, the right tap or flutter meaning anything from ‘come hither’ to ‘don’t waste your time’ (Fuchs). This fan language has been broken down to specific gestures. According to El Palacio Andaluz, a flamenco *tabla*o (show venue) website, fanning yourself slowly conveys a lack of interest or indifference. Striking movements with the fan indicates impatience, and pressing your lips to the edge of the fan transmits distrust or disbelief (El Palacio Andaluz). El Palacio Andaluz further explains that in Spain today the use of the “fan language” has disappeared, leaving “the fan a mere fashion complement, although it also has a functional use in summer time. But it is precisely the use of that particular language that caused it to become a complement to flamenco dancing, where it plays an essential role” (El Palacio Andaluz). Due to this history, and the fan’s extensive use in dance, it has “entered into the stereotype of Spanish dress” and remains emblematic of the art form (Veliz 82).

Creative Choices: The Fan

The fan was chosen for its historical importance in flamenco; its association to the adaptation of outside influences and its ability to dramatically transform in shape. My approach to repositioning the flamenco fan was to explore movement possibilities using a non traditional dance fan.

I have danced with the flamenco fan for years and have developed a level of comfort and ease when engaging with the object. To challenge this, I decided to use a magician’s magic fan. Magic fans are used to entertain audiences with their ability to dramatically change colour. Part of the reasoning to choose a magic fan was the tie that magic has to the circus. Circus performer Jacinto Padilla is a historical flamenco figure that has given me confidence and validation to

explore the use of magic in my choreographies. Furthermore, on a personal level my father Gerardo Avila was in the Cirque du Soleil as one of the first head clown magicians. I have many inspirational memories from this time, and these memories play into my creative process. Through this investigation, I found that magic truly aids in effective choreographic elements such as, surprise, contrast, and entertainment.

The magic colour changing fan behaves differently than the flamenco fan. Flamenco fans have the ability to quickly open and close for dramatic effect. In contrast, the magic fan requires the assistance of the other hand to properly open. This had a direct effect on the choreography, as both hands were needed. Furthermore, the magic fan does not create any sound when opened or closed, and thus the percussive aspect that is significant with flamenco fans is lost with this object. Working with the idea of a soundless prop inspired me to abandon any additional sounds in the film. Moreover, I wanted to explore the benefits and challenges of creating a flamenco film that had no live sound. Many other dance forms do not have the need to record bodily percussive sounds; however, because flamenco is a percussive art form, recording live sound for a film is expected. Thus I wanted to see if I could be successful in working with this limitation, with no additional sounds.

The musical track for *The Fan*, titled *Chôros No. 1*, was created by Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos and played by guitarist Peter Mole, a member of my *cuadro* (group) in Vancouver. It was important for me to pay homage to my *cuadro* in this way, even though he was not physically present in the film. The track is not a traditional *palo* because I was not working in a traditional way, and this departure from tradition is further expressed with my intention to displace the fan from its expected performative structure.

Choreographing The Fan

The fan belongs to a group of flamenco objects that have a close relationship to the female form; specifically, “the shawl, the castanets, the hat, and the fan are exclusive signifiers of the female body, functioning as hyper corporealized extensions of the arms, the head, and the hands” (Goldberg “Flamenco on the Global Stage” 227). My choreographic decision making was informed by the intention to explore a personal take on presenting the fan and the female body. To create the choreography I experimented with tracing the body’s actions and form with the object, as it contributed to the creation of extended lines. Through movement and gesture, I also focused on finding physical range which included contrast in weight, density, shape, volume, and energy.

My choreographic process involved improvising with the object first, without the soundtrack, and then afterwards with the soundtrack included. Improvising without the track fostered my object exploration, unrestricted by timing. Adding the music later helped to fix the improvisation, creating a preplanned choreography. Nevertheless, I still left some room in the choreography to improvise on film because improvisation has been important to the art form of flamenco.

Improvisation is a signifying element in flamenco’s formation, existing back through flamenco’s history. As discussed earlier, the flamenco *cuadro* relies on improvisation to create a dynamic and personal performance, and as a result its importance should not be overlooked. Dance scholar Anthony Shay discusses authenticity in folk dance, and emphasizes the significance of improvisation. Shay states: “improvisation is one of the most important elements in the traditional dances of most societies, particularly in dances performed in non-ritual contexts” (Shay). Even though flamenco is controversially defined as folk, Shay’s statement

demonstrates the role of improvisation in flamenco, whether considered folk or influenced by folk, as well as points attention to the surrounding cultural context linked to the tradition.

To be able to improvise, artists need to possess a deep understanding of flamenco's rhythmical structures, song structure possibilities, body movement vocabulary, and methods of musical communication, which have developed historically and in connection with cultural movement throughout the geographic region. Shay goes on to define improvisation, arguing that this knowledge must be in place before improvisation can occur. Specifically, Shay is referring to "the phenomenon by which a person dances extemporized movements from within a definite framework characteristic of his or her specific tradition of dance movements" (Shay). Moreover, Shay explains "[t]here is an implication that the person dancing has a more or less full knowledge of that movement repertoire in much the same way that a jazz musician has command of his instrument and musical idiom" (Shay).

Song structure and knowledge of *letras* (songs) is one form of knowledge that allows for the framework of improvisation. For example, Flores suggests "[t]he interpretation of flamenco in the *cuadro flamenco* framework behaves like a musical conversation" (38). Moreover, musical and gestural cues are given to signal changes, and "[t]his frame, which a priori seems to be rigid, marks out the performer's choreographic interpretations" (Flores 33). Thus it is through such (structured) improvisational openings that artists can extend from their knowledge base. As Flores elaborates, "[w]hat seems to be paradoxical is that it is precisely those restrictive limitations that allow the artistic expression to be maximized" (33). Flores goes on to assert that in contemporary flamenco,

choreographic articulations (*llamadas*) are more and more pre-planned. Many dancers do not leave room for any improvisation. However, the sound elements are like an

ornamental form, through losing their primary function which is to insert a change, which can still be made by the *cajón*, the *palmas* or the guitar. In spite of that, the flamenco identity remains unchanged because these elements still follow the traditional rules of flamenco choreography. These persistent residual forms, though having lost all of their primary function, are a reminder of the degree to which improvisation has always been a key element of flamenco (44).

On my quest to reposition the object, instead of wearing a common flamenco costume, I decided to wear a simple short black dress. Nash informs that “[t]he flamenco frock, widely regarded abroad as Spain’s national dress, is purely Andalusian, inspired apparently by the gaudy, frilly working overalls of gypsies and humble peasant women of the late nineteenth century who accompanied their cattle-dealing menfolk to the fair” (146). This flamenco outfit is, at times, expected from the audience, and so in defiance of this, and in order to focus the viewers on the fan as the main visual interest, I decided to wear a simple dress. I chose this particular black dress because the pleats mimicked the slats of the fan, creating a connection between the costume and the object.

Collaborations

This was a uniquely personal collaboration because Clint is also my husband which created an extra level of understanding and intimacy while shooting the films. Originally, our intention was to film the dancer’s body in full frame and in one take. This would function to show the physicality of the choreography, a device that Fred Astaire utilized on screen (Billman 13). Dance scholar Larry Billman further explains that, “[k]eeping Astaire and his partners in

full-frame at all times and having the camera follow them afforded Astaire seamless long takes that allowed the viewer to realize the physicality and immediacy of the dance” (Billman 13).

When it came to film day, after our arrival at the location, we decided to shoot at three different sites. This choice was inspired by the sunlight, where it was shining, and it was also a tactic to avoid capturing bystanders in the background. Spatial limitations of two of these sites required a tighter shot in order to frame the background with the grey wall. Contrary to our initial plans, we decided to film a few close-up takes to accommodate more options in editing. When reviewing the work we found that the tighter shots contributed to the fans ability to assist in dynamic framing. This permitted the body to disappear as the fan filled the majority of the screen, focusing the viewer on the shape and colour of the fan. Once the editing process began, it was more compelling to show a variety of shots, as opposed to the initial idea of a single long take. Further choreographic decision making took place during the editing process, as editing allowed for the repetition of movements, the use of reverse footage, and displacement of the sequential choreography.

CHAPTER 5 | The Rose

The Rose begins with a close-up of rose petals on a floor. Then a figure, played by me, wearing black heeled shoes and a black skirt, walks backwards over the petals. In the next moment, defying gravity, one by one the rose petals float upwards out of frame. The scene cuts to a long stemmed red rose held on top of my head. A struggle occurs as the weight of the rose seems to push the dancer's body to the floor. The scene opens up as trees in the background come into focus. Words in Spanish are spoken and then the rose falls from the dancer's head to the shoulders, and continues slowly sliding down the side of the body. The rose is held in the dancer's hand and continues to be manipulated at different speeds and angles. The film is absent of additional musical accompaniment; the only sound is that of the dancers actions and ambient background noises. Segments of footwork are interrupted by the dancer breaking into song, in Spanish. A final stabbing movement of the rose initiates another section of words, now spoken in English, as the rose is precariously placed on the head, only to fall off. The final shot displays the rose falling to the floor.

Object History

Like the fan, the rose is historically linked to the flamenco dancing body; however, in this case as a symbol of the body itself. It was established through the commercialization of flamenco, and has been chosen for its connotations of femininity, beauty, grace, love, passion, and fertility. The iconic Spanish postcard image depicts a beautiful woman wearing a red rose in her hair and a colorful dress, fitted at the hip and exploding into a sea of ruffles from the thighs down. This commercialized postcard imagery of the flamenco body was made popular in the era of Franco's leadership, and is commonly associated with the general public's idea of authentic

flamenco performance. Initially, Franco's image of flamenco was not accepted as authentic from many Spanish audiences. For example as American flamencologist William Washabaugh points out, under Franco's rule flamenco authenticity was a political debate (Cited in Hayes 136). Further, Washabaugh claims that "*andalucista* opponents of Franco sought to advance their cause by undercutting Franco's uses of flamenco. They portrayed his *nacional flamenquismo* as artificial spectacle, a tourist site to be visited while sampling Spain's delights" (Washabaugh qtd. in Hayes 136).

The commercialization of flamenco has, at times, created a paradox where the audience watches a parody of flamenco, all the while believing they are witnessing an authentic performance. In this parody the performers are actors, re-enacting old videos, not displaying true emotion, and pretending to be *Gitanos* with roses in their jet-black, dyed hair. In the commercialized environment "[t]he word flamenco evokes the body of an imagined woman—a *bailaora*. In this way, she is a *Gitana*, Spain's exotic "Other," typically wrapped in a heavy embroidered shawl, which is an emblem of wealth and empire, and with a red rose in her dark hair (Goldberg et al. *Flamenco on the Global Stage* 12). K. Meira Goldberg, Ninotchka Devorah Bennahum, and Michelle Heffner Hayes describe this imagined woman as having "corset-defying bends, lascivious hips, and sinuous arms and hands [that] seduce the viewer, only to reject this invading gaze with a stamp of defiance" (*Flamenco on the Global Stage* 12).

Artists, in turn, adapt to the wants and needs of the audience to make a living, fulfilling the viewers' flamenco fantasy with their choice of costume and by displaying fabricated passion. In this respect, audiences experience the perception of authenticity, which they believe to be the "real thing," yet it can be drastically different. In other words, such performances of flamenco aim to confirm audience expectations rather than emerging from genuine expression, which

complicates their “authenticity.” Belén Amaya is an artist that switches between what the traditional audience wants and the unexpected or experimental. Belén states,

[a]t times, I ‘put on the flower’ and dance in a very classical way. But it’s like a costume I put on. I can do it, or not. The traditional artists, the critics, the festivals, they always want you to enter that space and stay there, because they believe that tradition is more forceful. When I depart from tradition, it has no value for them (Belén qtd. in Goldberg *Flamenco on the Global Stage* 298).

In an interview about the marketability of new shows, Pastora Galván reflects on the desires that audiences place on expectation and consumption of beauty, represented in the rose. Galván states “[y]ou have to ‘put on the flower,’ you have to be beautiful” (Qtd. in Hayes 187-188).

Creative Choices: The Rose

The rose was chosen for its prominence in flamenco, to continue my examination of iconic flamenco imagery. I sought to challenge preconceived expectations and connotations that exist between a flamenco dancer and a red rose. As this iconic image entails a plastic rose placed in the dancer’s hair, I instead chose to dance with a live, long stemmed rose—thus shifting the hair accessory to a handheld prop. Using the rose as a handheld prop is very rare in flamenco, I have not seen other flamenco artists explore this. The shift in my use of the rose brings a renewed choreographic awareness to the object and, furthermore, invites audiences to reflect on existing meanings associated with the object.

For *The Rose*, I explored the process of creating film without having a background musical track. I wanted to investigate the use of silence in combination with sounds made solely

by voice and body percussion. The decision to do this was partly due to the creative challenge of working within sound limitations, and partly in response to an investigation of how silence can contribute to the impact of the other existing sounds.

The choice to sing was made to showcase another level of vulnerability, as well as to demonstrate that “[f]lamenco dance is intimately linked to its song and music” (Flores 36). Flamenco dancers are trained to respond to the singer’s vocal choices and this creates an exciting call and response relationship. It is well established that “[f]lamenco dance has an interpretive function in relationship to flamenco music” (Landborn 53). To be able to predict changes in the *letras* (songs), many dancers learn the songs and it is quite common for members in the *cuadro* to switch roles in order to show diversity as well as to surprise the audience. Responding to my own voice with movement was an interesting juxtaposition to the common *cuadro* relationship. It was a decision that related to the elements of flamenco, yet shifted into an unpredictable place.

The poem spoken and sung in the film is titled *La Rosa/No Buscaba la Aurora*, by Spanish poet Federico García Lorca (see transcription below). This poem was chosen to draw a parallel to *Blood Wedding*, the first film of Saura’s flamenco trilogy that was also written by Lorca. Lorca is an influential figure in flamenco’s history as he collaborated with Spanish composer Manuel de Falla “to hold a festival devoted to the Andalusian song form *cante jondo* (deep song), generally regarded as the sacred prototype of flamenco, in Granada in 1922” (Hayes 48). Lorca “sought to revive and preserve ‘traditional’ flamenco that they believed had lost its integrity in the commercial theatres of Spain and foregrounded the tradition’s supposed gitanoandaluz (Andalusian gypsy) origins to construct flamenco as a transcendental, universal folk-art capable of embodying the deepest expressions of the human condition” (Qtd. in Machin-Autenrieth 11).

This was done in response to the commercialization of flamenco that showcased the dancer and lessened the prominence of the flamenco singer. For example, Goldberg elucidates that “[i]n response to the denunciation of flamenco among Spanish intellectuals, but also as a reaction to the commercial environment, composer Manuel de Falla and poet Federico Garcia Lorca, among others, organized the Concurso de Cante Jondo of 1922 in Granada. Part of the perceived compromise of flamenco song related to the emergence of dance within the spectacle” (*Flamenco on the Global Stage* 293).

La Rosa/No Buscaba la Aurora

by Federico García Lorca

*La rosa,
No buscaba la aurora:
Casi eterna en su ramo
Buscaba otra cosa*

*La rosa
No buscaba ni ciencia ni sombra:
Confín de carne y sueño
Buscaba otra cosa*

*La rosa
No buscaba la rosa:
Inmóvil por el cielo
Buscaba otra cosa*

Section Spoken: English translation

The Rose

Was not looking for the rose

Motionless in the sky

It was longing for something else

Choreographing The Rose

The choreography began with the rose held on top of my head. From this point, I asked myself: What movement vocabulary can challenge the clichéd relationship between flamenco dancer and the red rose? This led me to explore how giving weight to the rose can lead to the destabilization of the object, and thus its stereotype. The object's role underwent many transformations in the choreography: from imagined as heavy in weight, to a weaponized dagger, to symbolic of beauty and an object of desire—seen caressing the neck. Investigating the rose in this way was inspired by what I noticed about the object itself: contrasts between beauty (recognized in the delicate and vibrantly coloured petals) and pain (notable by the thorns)—both of which are familiar themes in flamenco as well as in my broader choreographic praxis. Furthermore, I created interesting contradictions and conflicting meanings by using the object as itself, as something it is not, and as a metaphor—an idea derived from Bertolt Brecht, that I learned in conversation with Darcey Callison as well as through a directed reading course.

Akin to *The Fan*, I wanted to show an adaptation of the traditional dress; therefore, I chose clothing that would help bring focus to the colourful object. The dress and shoes chosen were fully black, devoid of any patterning. The dress's fabric was stretchy to allow for body extension, and the dropped sleeves created interesting arm lines. My hair was tied up, simple and

clean, for the practical reasons of not getting hair in my mouth while dancing as well as to match the styling of the outfit. Furthermore, having the hair in an updo reflected of the usual styling of the iconic flamenco dancer when the rose is placed in her hair. I felt that this would contribute to establishing the idea that the rose transitioned away from its usual position in the hair.

Collaborations

My collaborator Dayna is a dancer, photographer, and filmmaker. This pairing was unique in that she has also trained in flamenco. This was important as she clearly understood my vision for exploring the relationship to the object. We decided to film in a partially constructed studio that had a solid floor, but no outer wall on one side which allowed for good sound quality of footwork and ample light. The background was comprised of trees which added to the concept of displacing the object from Spain, to a personal Canadian setting. In order to facilitate multiple camera angles, the choreography was set with no room for improvisation. The editing was done by Dayna, which gave her the chance to utilize her editorial eye and provide further creative input. After the completion of the first edit we went back and forth with changes before deciding on the final cut.

CHAPTER 6 | The Bull

The Bull begins with an opening shot of a reflective, mirrored jacket placed on a wooden chair. The scene is outdoors, industrial arches in the background suggest that the location is under a bridge. Even though the space is fairly open, there is a feeling of confinement, provoked by the surrounding trees and man-made cement structures. The sound of a heartbeat is audible, creating suspense. Walking slowly into the frame, the bullfighter is introduced. Tight edits allow for close-ups of the bullfighter's costume as well as the introduction of an alternate character: the bull. The scenes that follow suggest a preparation for battle. The bullfighter limbers up with shoulder rolls and the bull's arms confine the face, mimicking the confinement of a bull before a fight.

Both characters have different movement qualities and costume choices; however, they are both the same person, thus making it apparent that the battle is with oneself. The bullfighter speaks a few words in Spanish and then throws a cane, signaling that the battle will commence. The battle occurs through the striking actions of both characters. Finally, the soundtrack reaches a climax and the bullfighter makes a final strike, forcing the wounded bull to the ground.

Object History

The origin of bullfighting is uncertain. It is thought to have “evolved from ancient roots (hunting practices of Paleolithic tribes, fertility rites of early matriarchal cultures, or bloody contests between humans and animals in the Roman Colosseum)[;]” however, this theory remains questionable (Landborn 13-14). Nevertheless, to this day “bullfighting remains deeply entrenched in Spanish life” (Landborn 13-14). As such, it has become emblematic of Spanish identity.

Some Spaniards regard bullfighting as a beloved cultural practice. For example, Nash attests that “[b]ullfighting reports duly appear in the culture section of Spanish newspapers, not on the sports pages” (130). This does not take away from the fact that it is a controversial practice and remains central to polarized debates in Spain and beyond. Anti-bullfighting organizations have mobilized in Spain with “slogans proclaiming that ‘torture is neither art nor culture’” (Landborn 13-14). Regardless of controversy, bullfighting, similar to flamenco, is considered a Spanish cultural tradition that explores basic human impulses when faced with hardship and trauma.

Flamenco dance scholar Adair Landborn explores the relationship between bullfighting and flamenco, suggesting “[t]here are many ways bullfighting movements function in flamenco dance, from direct enactment in theatrical productions to the subtlest of gestures in casual settings” (191). As the art form of flamenco has been continuously influenced by its surroundings, it is no surprise that it shares many similarities with the practice of bullfighting. Regardless of morality debates, the popularity of bullfighting in the southern province of Andalusia, Spain, created an obvious source of inspiration and exchange between the two practices. It is evident that “[t]he two cultural practices overlap and affect one another through this dynamic interplay between sociality, artistry, and catharsis” (Landborn 80). Both practices are known for their passionate emotional release in response to hardship and struggle. For bullfighting, the struggle for life is evident; in flamenco the struggle stems from the art form’s origin as an outlet for the poor and marginalized.

Further parallels are notable in how both practices are considered soloist art forms, that foster individual expression. Landborn elaborates that “[b]oth flamenco and bullfighting provide tremendous opportunities for individual achievement; public expression of emotion and displays

of unique personal idiosyncrasies are encouraged and celebrated” (72). Additionally, both practices employ chance as a defining characteristic. Landborn suggests,

the unpredictable behaviour of the bull and the situational uncertainties of the bullfight are prototypes of the unpredictability of flamenco artists and the improvisational opportunities that open up in performance situations. A fundamental tension exists in flamenco performance between two contradictory imperatives, performing within the constraints of the tradition’s formal patterns (the civilizing influence of human society) and the improvisational impulse (the wildness of the bull) (164).

The uncertainty of the outcome in both practices entertains audiences, and it is this, the “play between change and stability[,]” that keeps “flamenco audiences coming back to see what will develop next” (Landborn 72).

Movement aesthetics are also shared between the flamenco dancing body and the bullfighter. This includes the basic posturing qualities present in both forms, such as the physicality of holding one’s own ground when faced with obstacles—Landborn confirms, “the movements of bullfighting and flamenco dance express specific movement ideals that performers try to embody while facing intense challenges” (190). Specifically, the “striking separation between the upper and lower body in the movements of flamenco dance expresses Spanish and Andalusian cultural attitudes and beliefs” (Landborn 206-207). This posturing aids both practices, the lower body is used for stability and thereby allows the upper body the freedom to quickly react.

Certain flamenco *palos* also show direct references to bullfighting. Landborn elaborates that “[c]lear reference to the bullfighting movement vocabulary exists within flamenco’s more playful dances, such as the *bulerias*, an improvisational form, and the *sevillanas*, a folk dance

form and social dance for couples” (53). Additionally, the *palo* known as “*farruca*, often provides evidence of the phenomenon of bullfighting movement crossing over into the stylistic vocabulary of flamenco dance” (Landborn 53). Bullfighting has further inspired crossover in object use, as Landborn argues, “[t]he use of transitional objects in the movement vocabularies of flamenco dance and bullfighting is pervasive” (199). Furthermore, Landborn continues, this is exemplified “particularly in the cape-like manipulation of the fabric of flamenco shawls and skirts” (53).

The cultural practices of bullfighting and flamenco clearly share the similarities of being connected by a high level of emotional exchange and participation (Landborn 72). This is evident in the audience role of participation that is integral to both events. The *jaleo* or shout commonly spoken as ‘olé’ is essential, as it creates a unique relationship between the performers and the audience members. Landborn confirms that, “[s]ociality is fundamental to flamenco arts; the flamenco performance arts model is of interactivity. This applies also in the bullring, where vocal participation is not only accepted, but forms part of the aesthetic expectation” (Landborn 78).

Many flamenco artists deliberately draw on the bull or the bullfight for choreographic inspiration. Jacinto Padilla can be considered the first dancer ever documented to do so, as he came from a circus performing background that involved bullfighting (Goldberg *Sonidos Negros* 14). His bullfighting skills of acrobatic jumping, to avoid the bull directly, contributed to his unique dancing style (Goldberg *Sonidos Negros* 14). Today flamenco artists still continue to look to bullfighting for choreographic inspiration; however, this constant reference can at times come across as a cliché. One artist that defies this cliché is Isreal Galvan. His 2007 production *Arena* was designed to be performed in a bullfighting arena that drew parallels to life and death; the

bull and the bullfighter. Particularly, Galvan's *Arena* "tells the complex relationship between flamenco and bullfighting. A story repeatedly shown on stage, but he knows that his gestural proposal is different from all that has already been shown of this relationship between" (Labesse). Galvan states, "I wanted to stand out from the clichés, take all the liberties" (Qtd. in Labesse).

Creative Choices: The Bull

I chose the bull in order to explore what my personal take on this iconic flamenco image would develop into. I wanted to experiment with the clichés as well as contradict them. Because portraying the bullfighter is very common, expected even, I decided to initiate my choreography from the standpoint of the bull rather than the matador. Working with the bull also allowed me to show a parallel with themes used in Saura's flamenco trilogy, such as "passion, honor, revenge and death" (Rolph 201).

Choreographing The Bull

For this film I was interested in exploring how connecting the bull's vulnerability could translate to a movement vocabulary. It felt appropriate to investigate movement from an internal place and this led to an investigation into butoh, a Japanese dance form. This quote from a butoh film inspired me greatly: "You don't make a figure of a tree, you feel it inside" (Geoffroy and Oliveira. "Dancing In Between - A Portrait of Butoh With Tadashi Endo"). This led me to investigate choreography from the inside out. I kept asking myself: "What does it mean to move as the defeated, opposed to the victor?" I started with an emotional feeling of containment, attuning to this feeling to initiate the choreography.

My choreographic inspiration shifted, and I turned to viewing bulls and bullfights on film. I have a strong aversion to bullfighting, which has created a paradox because I have embodied the movement of the bullfighter many times in my work. I had to confront the act of bullfighting, and embody its practice, without resisting movement that is related to animal cruelty. To manage this conflict, in choreographing and filming *The Bull* I used the bullfight as a metaphor for facing one's personal fears. I explored a sense of risk with moments of quick, responding gestures, known in the flamenco vocabulary as *remates*. After much examination into the bull's choreography, I realized it was necessary to also portray the bullfighter. I felt this would help establish the narrative of an internal battle and present an exciting contrast between the two characters. This decision also allowed for the idea of responding to myself instead of another individual, as done in the flamenco *cuadro*. In the end, it was a choreographic exploration of what it is to be both the bull and the bullfighter characters, both the aggressor and the victim.

I approached the bullfighter's look and movement choices as an examination of precision and perfection, emblematic of the bullfighting character. I searched for clean and sharp body angles, that were at times robotic, to draw a parallel to the poised and tactful decision making of a bullfighter's next strike. I chose a red skirt in order to conjure the image of the bullfighter's cape—which is used to distract the animal. The mirrored jacket was worn to reference the bullfighter's traditional outfit which is called a *traje de luces* (suit of lights). I wanted to play off this name and also use the reflective nature of the mirror to tie in the idea of confronting myself in the mirror. The bull, on the other hand, had a simpler look. I chose a black velvet bodysuit to resemble the texture of animal hair, and loose hair and makeup application to evoke the state of the distraught and wounded bull.

The narrative of a bullfight provoked me to show a variety of emotional facial expressions. This is important as “the flamenco arts are based on emotionality,” Landborn asserts (53). With the bull character, I wanted to progressively become more and more disheveled in order to investigate ideas surrounding ugliness in flamenco. An expectation for beauty has become a central concept in flamenco, especially for the flamenco female. However, the exploration of “ugliness” in flamenco is increasingly being presented by many female flamenco artists, including Belén Maya and Pastora Galván (Hayes 186-187).

For this film I truly explored the “dancer as musician” concept. For the musical score, I decided to produce a song made from previous recorded live sound bites of the vocals and body percussion produced in movement. This involved going to the film location and recording myself doing *palmas* (hand-clapping) in both *altas* (high pitch) and *sordas* (low pitch), footwork, *pitos* (snapping), as well as *jaleos* (shouts). Timothy Dewaal Malefyt illustrates the role of sound in performer-viewer relationships during performances of flamenco, describing the jaleo as “a quality that signals personal familiarity, song knowledge, and intimacy between performers and audience” (67). Similarly, I wanted the *jaleos* to be present in the film in order to reference to the participatory viewing audience of both flamenco performances and bullfights. With bullfighting audience members shoot *jaleos* to praise the courage of the bullfighter, to show approval, or to demonstrate their bullfighting knowledge (Landborn 78). Furthermore, the vocal sound helped build tension towards the climax of the film.

The only additional sound that was added to the track was a heartbeat. The heartbeat added a sense of urgency, as the bull in a bullfight is struggling for survival under an extreme time pressure—the bullfight’s duration “is based on the amount of time it takes for the bull to realize that it is the man, not the cape that is the target” (Nash 132).

I have been working on creative projects with my father Gerardo Avila for several years. He is a clown, mime, director, magician, and poet. Being a native Spanish speaker, I often ask him for translations of *letras* and for the creation of poems that I can adapt into my flamenco repertoire. As I began to create choreography for the bull I knew that I wanted to add spoken word. This was in part because *The Bull*, similar to Saura's trilogy, is character driven (which allows for dialogue) and also because I have a desire to entertain my audience with contrasting elements. Through the discussion of the choreography, clothing choices, and theme, my father and I created the following dialogue:

El espejo refeja
El vidrio corta
El vidrio revela
Plasma manifiesta
Buscando el momento
El ángulo perfecto
Apuntando, arremetiendo olé
Vida y muerte olé
¿Quién soy yo?

English Translation:

The mirror reflects
 The glass cuts
 The glass reveals
 Plasma manifests

Looking for the moment

The perfect angle

Pointing, lashing out *olé*

Life and death *olé*

Who am I, *olé*

Collaborations

My collaborator and I chose a location that in some respects resembled a bullfighting arena and in others contradicted it. The ground was sandy, similar to a bullfighting arena; yet we were able to find a cement platform to dance on, which made the footwork and turns possible. We chose outdoors for optimal lighting conditions, and instead of being surrounded by an audience like a bullfight would have, the location was surrounded by the industrial structure of an overlying bridge and trees.

This film involved the most planning (of all three films), as the lighting, attention to sound, and the use of close-ups were extremely important. My collaborator Audrey was strategic in framing the beginning shots to establish the narrative. The opening shot captured the vignette of a chair that had a few items placed on it. The chair was chosen for its motif in flamenco and connection with the flamenco *cuadro*. This film had a clear beginning, middle, and end, and used editing techniques to create tension, leading to a cinematic climax. All choreography was set with no room for improvising, due to the need for multiple takes from different angles. The camera offered the audience new spatial perspectives with the use of overlay, an editing device employed in order to simultaneously show both the bull and the bullfighter.

CHAPTER 7 | CONCLUSION: Learning Opportunities and Future Projects

Making *The Fan*, *The Rose*, and *The Bull* reminded me that film has the ability to create alternative realities, and that there is great value in the camera's ability to invite the viewer into different worlds, intimately. I learned that preparation and planning is key in the development of dance-film productions; many hours were spent planning the choreography, clothing, locations, sound, camera work, and transportation (among other details and logistics). I also learned that I enjoy a creative challenge, such as the challenge of creating choreography without the typical and expected flamenco *cuadro*. Rather than responding to the artistic repartee of other members in a *cuadro*, as a solo flamenco artist I reacted to my own musical decisions and created in response to the suggestions and camera work of my collaborators, who thus became my behind-the-scene, unconventional *cuadro*.

This thesis project was the catalyst that granted me the opportunity to explore the repositioning of flamenco objects. My pre-established choreographic relationship to these iconic flamenco objects, the fan, the rose, and the bull, was challenged as I used them in unconventional ways that questioned established stereotypes. I allowed the objects to inform the choreography, inviting each object to transform and incite the imagination. The objects enhanced the choreography and my performative effectiveness. Through research, I learned that flamenco invites new objects to be continuously introduced as it remains a living art form, and with this it continues to absorb and be influenced by outside cultures and interpretations.

With the creation of these three films I have a new understanding of the challenges of working with dance on film. Furthermore, I found that the logistics of planning for the films with a limited budget was a definite obstacle. Many friends and family members stepped in to assist in the process, and collaborators were chosen due to personal relationships. Obtaining desirable

lighting was also a significant challenge, because appropriate lighting is an element that can make or break image and performance quality.

I found further challenges with the deliverable length required. Today, I have noticed, people have a short attention span, especially for film; therefore, I questioned whether the films would be more effective if they were shorter. This was a recurring question throughout the creation process that was inspired by a quote from Doris Humphrey which states: “All dances are too long” (159).

With *The Fan*, a concern that I was grappling with was encapsulated with the question: How will a non-flamenco audience relate to the object? To a Canadian audience the fan object can feel outdated and un-relatable as an accessory; therefore, I puzzled over whether I would be able to take the audience on a journey, without them wondering why the object is there in the first place. While producing *The Rose* I found myself pondering whether the audience would be able to follow the reference to the clichéd postcard image, and if I would be able to establish a discourse with this iconic image? Further challenges rested on my decision to work in the non-familiar realm of performing in silence, without additional instrumentation, and I wondered if *The Rose* would be more effective if done live. Finally, *The Bull* required the most planning due to the working methods of my collaborator. We left little to chance with a very clear idea of what was needed and how the film day would unfold. This being said, I did underestimate the challenge of dancing on cement, a decision that I would heavily question doing again.

As a result of the collaborative process, each film has a very different approach and cinema-graphic treatment. I wanted each film to explore the objects in different ways, as well as be able to stand alone as individual works. Working with collaborators was generative; in the

process of making these films I learned that I can achieve my artistic vision through collaboration.

The films premiered at the Supermarket (a restaurant and bar) in Toronto, on December 1st, 2019. They were shown to the public as part of a *cuadro* show that included three local flamenco artists. The show began with a screening of *The Fan*, followed by a live performance and an intermission. *The Rose* and *The Bull* screened after the intermission, and the show was concluded with a further live performance. It was a great opportunity to showcase the films, and the show gathered both a general audience as well as an audience versed in flamenco.

A questionnaire was distributed to the audience after the films to engage audience feedback; to get a sense of how the films were received. General consensus for *The Fan* suggested that the most effective moment was when the fan was placed on my heart. Many felt that *The Fan* was personal and intimate, and that the film was successful in reconstructing the role of the fan to the dancer. With *The Rose*, the beginning shot of stepping on the rose petals stood out to questionnaire participants. The film led some to question the traditions and conventions tied to the rose, as well as the possibilities that the object can have to transcend these limitations. *The Bull* stood out for its suspense and cinematic treatment. Movement, editing, sound, clothing, and lighting choices were effective storytelling devices, and most viewers read the work as a representation of an internal struggle.

The Fan, *The Rose*, and *The Bull* are scheduled to be screened in Vancouver, in May 2020. This will be an opportunity to honour and celebrate with my collaborators as we present the work once more to the public; after which, the films will be available online for further public reach. I also intend to submit the films to film festivals, in the hope of further exposure.

My practice will continue to explore the medium of film, honing my skills and research to deliver interesting content. My aim is to continue to collaborate, learn, and grow while contributing to Canadian dance on film. My interest in flamenco objects continues to be a creative motivator. Currently I am intrigued by, and interested in, transposing the trilogy to the stage with multiple dancers. I am curious how this would develop the concept of repositioning the fan, the rose, and the bull as flamenco objects.

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Appendix

Figure 1: The Fan Dance Studio*Figure 2: The Rose Dance Studio*

Figure 3: The Bull Dance Studio



Figure 4: The Fan Dance Still From Film



Figure 5: The Rose Photo Taken On Location



Figure 6: The Bull Photo Taken On Location



Figure 7: Social Media Flyer



Figure 8: Social Media Flyer For The Event

TABLAO FLAMENCO TORONTO
 Sunday December 1st
~~3pm~~ New Time → **1:30pm**

OBJETOS
 Film Screening of OBJETOS
 The Fan
 The Bullfight
 The Rose
 Thesis PRESENTATION
 by Maria Avila.
 PERFORMANCE by Tablao group

The Supermarket
 268 Augusta Ave
 \$20 Advance
 \$25 Door
 www.eventbrite.ca

Maria Avila

Lia Grainger

Shirlita Pili

Matt Sellick

Figure 9: Set Up Day Of Event

