Celebrating Flamenco's Tangled Roots

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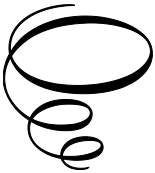
The Body Questions

Edited by

K. Meira Goldberg and Antoni Pizà

Cambridge Scholars Publishing



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K. Meira Goldberg and Antoni Pizà

INTRODUCTION

THE BODY WONDERS, THE BODY KNOWS

K. MEIRA GOLDBERG / ANTONI PIZÀ

This is a good time
This is the best time
This is the only time to come together
Fractious
Kicking
Spilling
Burly
Whirling
Raucous
Messy

Free

Exploding like the seeds of a natural disorder.[1]

—June Jordan

From the *blackamoors* of pre-modern Christmas pageants all the way through to the "sunken place" drawn in Jordan Peele's 2017 film *Get Out*—a place where, as Simone de Beauvoir has written, the subjectivity of "sovereign and unique" beings "is crushed by the dark weight of other things"—Whiteness and Blackness have been conjoined in a series of negative correlations.[2] Purity and pollution, harmony and dissonance, over

[1] June Jordan, excerpt of "From Sea to Shining Sea," in June Jordan, Jan H. Levi, and Sara Miles, *Directed by Desire: The Collected Poems of June Jordan* (Port Townsend, Wash: Copper Canyon Press, 2007 [originally published in *Living room – 1985*]) 331.
[2] Wesley Morris, "Jordan Peele's X-Ray Vision," *The New York Times* (December 20, 2017); Simone de Beauvoir and Bernard Frechtman, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), 7.

and under, order and disorder, Christian epiphany and damning confusion have limned the edge distinguishing freedom and personhood from enslavement and abjection. Yet in these paradigmatic dyads one term always implies—indeed, defines—the other; in these relations there is never erasure, but rather evidence of white culture's perverse fascination—envy, even—with the sonorous, dislocated, inciting, and infinitely suggestive products of Black culture.[3] The impolite music and dance of cacophony, dissonance, and disorder vibrate with a fugitive, turbulent Otherness, hinting at the specters of alternate social, spiritual, and aesthetic orders. "What does it mean," Fred Moten asks in *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (2013), "to call for disorder in the sovereign's 'native tongue'?"[4] We must attend to cacophony, Moten writes; we must "inhabit and maybe even cultivate… [the] place which shows up here and now, in the sovereign's space and time, as absence, darkness, death, things which are not."[5]

Stuart Hall has theorized diaspora as a "radical homelessness," an expression of an "ethics of the self… attuned to the edges."[6] Flamencos, whose embodied and minstrelized Blackness is figured by the Spanish Roma, have always known this statelessness, have always adhered to this code.[7] How, then, can flamenco, as a diasporic complex of performance and communities of practice frictionally and critically bound to the complexities of Spanish history, illuminate theories of race and identity in performance? And conversely, how can the theoretical tools developed in other fields help us better understand flamenco? How may we consider flamenco's purposefully duplicitous roar, its nonsense, and its irony, in light not only of critical race theory but also of other approaches, such as ethics, or theories of gender, or of sound? And, regarding the purposeful ambiguity of calling for disorder in the sovereign's tongue, why are some of the great theorists, such as June Jordan and Fred Moten, poets? How can Black poetics help us read, and explain to others, flamenco's life blood, its verses? As VK Preston has wondered, when cultural wealth—verse, rhythm, or

[3] Horacio J. Becco, *El tema del negro en cantos, bailes y villancicos de los siglos XVI y XVII* (Buenos Aires: Ollantay, 1951), 15.
[4] Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Wivenhoe; New York; Port Watson: Minor Compositions, 2013), 137.
[5] Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 137.
[6] Stuart Hall, Kobena Mercer, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, Nation* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2017), xvi–viii.
[7] K. Meira Goldberg, *Sonidos Negros: On the Blackness of Flamenco* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

gesture, for example—is extracted, smelted, and rendered into the likeness of the oppressor, what of its animating spirit, what of its *soul* remains?[8] And, speaking of dancing in shackles, why do the footwork steps used in early modern Spanish depictions of ruffians dancing under the lash bear such an uncanny resemblance to the shuffle steps of African American dances?[9] That is to say, how can we posit, and argue for, genealogical relationships across the vast expanses of the African—and Roma—diaspora? And how may the codes of flamenco improvisation help us trace these?

This volume grows out of an international performance festival and symposium held on October 15–16, 2018 at The Foundation for Iberian Music at the CUNY Graduate Center and the Fashion Institute of Technology, in which we proposed to mess around with the ideas of nonsense, cacophony, tumult, queerness, race, and the dancing body.

Neither are the essays presented here limited to flamenco, nor, consequently, are the responses to these questions reduced to this topic. We wanted with this gathering to reach out, to find connection, and cross the border into what Jack Halberman calls "The Wild Beyond," to make "common cause with the brokenness of being"— "a brokenness," he writes, "that is also blackness."[10]

What all the essays presented here do share is the wish to come together, as June Jordan recommends, in the whirling, raucous, and messy spaces where the body is free—to celebrate its questioning, as well as the depths of wisdom and knowledge it holds and sometimes reveals. We have grouped the essays included here into five sections, although we readily acknowledge the tangled roots of the questions with which they engage, the fruitful conversations across and between chapters and, hence, the insufficiency of this organization.

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[8] VK Preston, "Baroque Relations: Performing Silver and Gold in Daniel Rabel's 'Ballets of the Americas,'" in Mark Franko, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Reenactment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 285–310.

[9] "Paso de amolar con grillos," Rodrigo Noveli, *Chorégraphie figurativa y demostrativa del arte de danzar en la forma española* (MS. Madrid, 1708), f. 24 (digital pdf p. 55;) Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., "Ring Shout! Literary Studies, Historical Studies, and Black Music Inquiry," *Black Music Research Journal*, vol. 22, Supplement: Best of BMRT (2002): 49–70;
HowcastArtsRec, "How to Shuffle | Club Dancing," *youtube*, January 18, 2012 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDnKVoJL188.

[10] Jack Halberstam, "The Wild Beyond: With and For the Undercommons," in Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 5.

Under the heading "The Strength of Instability," Russell Patrick Brown's opening essay challenges us to experience the percussive affect of queer uncertainty "as a resistance to colonialism's claim that who we are—all that predates or exists outside of capitalism—is dead." In "'This Little Wooden world': Choreo-Navigating Maritime Dance," Brown writes, "the quality of non-arrival becomes the method of knowing." Our movement research practice, he suggests, should seek "not to claim to discover 'new' lands, but instead recover routes between known destinations: communities of dance, post/colonial entrepôts and (dis)inherited identities"—as "a step towards restoring agency to those who have done the work of moving dance." Similarly, in "Embodied 'Sounds': Musical Culture, Popular Agency, and the Corporeal Public Display of Political and Social Power in State-Sponsored Festivities of Nineteenth-Century Puerto Rico," while interrogating appropriation as an aspect of hegemonic control, Noel Allende-Goitía simultaneously argues that the many performing traditions of Puerto Rico, including "the creolized contradanzas, *danzas*, *aguinaldos*, *seguirillas*, *caballos*, old fandangos, new *canciones criollas*, and the African and Neo-African *candungués*, *sicás*, *holandeses*, *danuéses*, and others (danced with a variety of drums called *bombas*)" are in actuality "the embodied sounds of class and political power."

In "Radical Moves from the Margins: 'Enslaved Entertainments' and Harvest Celebrations in Northeastern Brazil," Scott Alves Barton examines the tensions of Brazil's sugar economy, in which culture is a series of "contingencies," acting as the agent, the fuel, and the codependent of capitalism. As sugar plantations devoured the bodies of millions forced to labor there, the allegorical *Bumba Meu Boi* festival enacts an inversion in which, in "a radical act of self-determination," an enslaved woman's "pregnant cravings for (the master's favorite) bull's tongue" are satisfied. This ingestion in turn materializes "'the power of the '*negros d'àgua*,' (water bulls, cows, dogs and horses)" linking mortals to ancestral entities—the "Bantu cosmography of the Kalunga line"—and "the agency that they can assert within the world of the living." "Beyond syncretism," Barton concludes, a "transcultural two-way street" emerges "where a give-and-take between cultures allows the heretofore subaltern to have greater agency in relation to the hegemon."

Opening the section "Queer Ideals," "*La Muñeca Subersiva* (The Subversive Doll)," by renowned flamenco artist Belén Maya, starts as a meditation on the conundrums of advancing the equities of personal and artistic autonomy, integrity, and agency within flamenco as both a tradition-based and tradition-bound artform—and ends as a manifesto, a position paper on how to move forward. We can acknowledge, Maya argues, "the

stereotyped and objectified space of the muñeca" as a "part of the 'archive,'" and yet transit this space "with the awareness that it is a costume which, according to the will of the dancer-person who wears it, can be taken on and off." "To deliberately ignore that there exist relations of power within the flamenco field," she continues, "and to deliberately ignore the degree to which we internalize the discipline that these hegemonic elements exercise over the ways we imagine and produce work, means to renounce our own agency as artists, understood not only as making work, but making transformative and interactive work, which critically analyzes the ways we perform on stage." Instead, Maya claims, we could become "a knowing muñeca…a political muñeca," who inhabits her body "as a point of departure, as a base camp from which to travel to liminal, ever-changing and contradictory identities, in a sustained exercise of recognizing that the body *exists* and yet allow it to transform, disguise itself, mutate." "If we take on the immediacy of the body, with all its consequences," Maya concludes, the body becomes "a vehicle, an instrument, a costume, a mirror…each time less identified and more empty. And more free."

Ryan Rockmore's "Queering the Tale of the Skirt: The Masculine Presence, Archival Histories, and Queer Future of the Bata de Cola" considers, from a dancers' perspective, the *bata de cola* (or Spanish tail skirt). This garment, emblematic of femininity, has been worn over the last decade—transgressively—by male flamenco dancers. Referencing Robin Bernstein's concept of "scriptive things" and queering the skirt's archival history, Rockmore meditates on the bata as "celebration," "liberty," "fluidity," and "grief," pondering suggestively whether the bata de cola enables dancers to "encounter the tales untold that reside inside of their bodies." Daniel Valtueña, in "Niño de Elche, a Heterotopian (Flamencx) Voice," theorizes queerness broadly, deploying Foucault's concept of heterotopia. His discussion focuses on Niño de Elche (Spain, 1985), a heterodox musician and performer whose artistic projects neither conform to the traditional flamenco sphere nor to contemporary practices, creating thus a heterotopia in which non-normative bodies, as Paul B. Preciado argues, challenge the notion of the singing voice and of the dancing body. A large part of Niño de Elche's output consists of performative actions and collaborations with other artists (Los Voluble, Israel Galván, Pedro G. Romero), working to reconfigure and reimagine the traditional spaces of flamenco performance.

Karen Silen's "Troubling Paradises: Changing Faces of the Other in Medieval Representations of Celestial Dancing" opens the section "Key Transpositions." Silen analyzes how the image of celestial dance could be used to define and illustrate visions of social harmony on earth. If in the

crusade dance lyrics from the early-thirteenth century *Carmina Burana* celestial paradise is manifested through combining "dancing with military imagery to emphasize the need to take action to create a more civil, just and peaceful world," Dante's ca. 1320 *Commedia*, on the other hand, depicts "a heaven filled with song, dance and light" in which "the heavenly dancers are moved by their love to transcend earthly conflicts." Despite the fact that these distinct "heavenly visions appear to promote different methods for achieving harmony," she observes, "they share two important features: the desire to identify and defeat the causes of corruption and rapacious behaviors in their respective societies, and an understanding of dance as a way to communicate those ideas." "Medieval dances that imitated the heavenly dance, like today's civil protests, offered a way to form or strengthen like-minded communities, to envision a better world, and to create it through collective action," Silen concludes, illustrating how "dancing, then as now, could serve as a means for communities to theorize, imagine and create a more humane and just world."

Antonio Cortijo Ocaña's "Music in the Spanish Renaissance Theater" summarizes some of the most relevant aspects of music and theater during the Spanish Renaissance, utilizing works by major authors of the *Siglo de Oro* (Lope de Vega, Moreto, Calderón, and Sor Juana) as examples of the interplay between secular and liturgical theatricals, and the importance of music as both "evil and praiseworthy," "popular and folkloric," and "an all-encompassing…spectacle of the senses." In "*Soleá*: Conjuring the Feminine in Flamenco's *Cante Jondo*," Constance Valis Hill explores the "sonoric primacy" and "vocal culturality" of the feminine in "Greek Rebetika, Spanish Flamenco, and the Blues of the United States." She argues that when flamenco took off in the mid-nineteenth century, "it was on womanly wings, propelled by the promise of wholeness that could only be realized by contacting the femininity of the cosmos." She seeks to articulate "the intersections of gender, vocality, and embodiment, and the textual representation of women's self-expression in performance," aspiring "to describe a lexicon of female vocality, not of the technical acoustics of the singing voice (vocal type, range, pitch) but of a sonic field based in emotional content, symbolic meaning, and the conscious manipulation of musical cadence and lyrical content."

María Gabriela Estrada's "*Faux Amis*: False Cognates in Flamenco's Discourse within Ballet and Spanish Dance Contexts" scrutinizes many interventions of flamenco artists in classical ballet companies such as Paris Opera and Ballet Theatre. These collaborations can be described as one of *faux amis*, considering, in the author's words, "the contrasting fascination and discursive disqualification of flamenco within theatrical performances,

dance critics' publications, and the prevailing 'otherness' perspective within historical narratives." Many of these performative encounters perpetuate preconceived notions about Roma artists and "*duende*." Often, Estrada argues, the process of creation, production, and documentation of flamenco "has done a disservice to its recognition as an art form, affecting the communities associated with this artistic genre at a global scale."

Closing this section is the essay that inspires its title: Guillermo Castro's "The Key of *Danzas de negros*: On the Standard Tonalities of Black Dances in Early Modern Hispanic Music." Castro takes up the important question of tonality in Hispanic representations of Blackness, and more broadly the question of how *mestizo* musics such as flamenco take shape. "The so-called '*bailes de negros*' (Black dances) found in the repertoire of Spanish and Latin American music from the end of the fifteenth century through the nineteenth century," Castro explains, "are distinguished by their festive air, their frenetic movements, their lasciviousness, and their lack of inhibition. In the musical sources, the melodic mode which supports these dances is, with some exceptions, principally in a major key." Which raises the question, he continues, "of whether—and which—extra-musical factors might explain such a marked preference for the major key in these musics." Ranging from the *guineos* and *zarabandas* of the *Siglo de Oro* to eighteenth-century fandangos and nineteenth-century tangos, Castro argues for a revision of the concept of *danzas de negros* in the Americas, "in the sense of not conceiving of these mestizo musics as essentialistically 'African.'" While the Africanist elements are important, he continues, "they are not the only cultural presences that give these musics their unique identities." He calls on us to instead "problematize the concepts of *mestizaje* and 'purity,'" by "adding the almost entirely overlooked musical historiography of Spain to our analysis of the process of cultural transmission in the Atlantic world."

"Outlaw Representations" dives into the entanglements of hegemonic structures and racialized stereotypes. Cal Brisbin, Cristiana Grigore (Founder of the Roma People's Project at Columbia University), and Sarah Zawacki's "Criminalized Identity: Exploring Potential Psychological Effects of Roma Stigmatization" takes on "the distal and proximal, that is external and internal damage that racist stereotypes do, to Roma, whose suffering, as the largest ethnic group and most underprivileged in Europe, is often invisibilized." The authors ask, "How to heal, and how to find alliance with other people with racially or otherwise-based stigmatized identities?" Niurca E. Márquez, in "Dancing my Otherness/Multiplicity or *Sin Pedir Permiso, Me Agarro Aquí*," argues that performance is an episteme, a channel towards the transmission of knowledge through "embodied action."

"Seeking an integrated mode of inquiry for flamenco that is aligned with phenomenological descriptions of a choreographic process," Márquez has built "a methodology capable of accommodating a multiplicity of discourses," and "of responding to the intersection of various historical, cultural and social experiences." Settling on collage "as a potentially rich site for exploring said multiplicity in a way that also carried the inherent conflicts of the same," Márquez presents her own experience as a dancer and scholar to expose the numberless imbrications in a space of "contemporary" flamenco, sometimes referred to as *empírico*, *experimental*, *nuevo*, and *fusion*, and the implications of these spaces for the tangled mestiza body. She traces the "pathways in the topography of our mestiza bodies" that "serve as scaffolds to examine and consider what is actually happening"—a process of "deconstructing flamenco performativity," that is also a "decolonizing of the mestiza body."

In "Urban Memories and Rural Mirrors: Toward a History of Romani Performing Arts," Miguel Ángel Vargas, Co-Director of the Theater & Drama Section of RomArchive.eu, proposes building "an international reading of the crucial variety of national examples of Romani performers from Turkey to the USA in a crossed chronology. Connecting influences of the different contexts, we learn about the capacity of Romani artistic agency to break genre limits and adapt the public discourses of alterity." Spanning the "Romani Turkish puppet tradition, the Spanish Golden Age Theater and the nineteenth-century *Teatro Gitanesco* (Gitano-esque theater), the royal masquerades in France, the enslaved Roma jesters in Wallachia and Moldavia, the work with animals in Roma circuses and bullfighting, fairs and carnivals, the theatricality of different Roma religious traditions, the experiences of nineteenth- and twentieth-century international exhibitions, and the relation between institutionalized and independent theatre companies," Vargas reflects on the "space that theatrical fiction and representation might have in the questioning of twenty-first century Romani identities." Roma performing artists inhabit a kind of double consciousness, Vargas argues, the "inside and outside of modernity as a context of the social performativity of Roma identities." "Regarding what is done inside," he adds, "there is, in theory, no documented testimony." Roma artists who "participate in theatrical events where 'gypsy' characters are 'interpreted,'" Vargas argues, "speak to us about survival strategies, negotiation of public identity and resistance." At the tense and alive intersection of Roma rite and theatrical rite, he concludes, "modernity does not see the Roma reality on stage, but Roma reality does reflect the fantasy of modernity."

Clara Chinoy's "Flamenco *is* Gitano: Reflections on the Expression of Gitano Identity in the Flamenco Fiesta" is in close dialogue with Vargas.

Chinoy writes, "The role of the Gitanos in the development and continuation of flamenco has always excited controversy, with many and complex historical and socio-cultural layers to the question. But it is very much theirs." "Among Gitanos," she explains, "a *fiesta* (party) is an assertion of tradition, memory and identity—not only as Gitanos, but as a specific group, local community or family." These are "shared values and construction of identity" which are "embodied in the shared artistic behaviour"; practices which trouble the categorization of flamenco as a universal artform accessible to anyone through dance academies, conservatories, universities, and the internet. "The suggestion of 'universality,'" Chinoy argues, "draws away from the local and identitary elements of flamenco": the specificities of knowledge and skill, transmitted from one generation to the next, "which are the root and essence of the art form." "This brings into new focus questions about 'ownership' and identity," she continues, "which have, in fact, been present since [flamenco's] inception as a performance art in the mid-nineteenth century." "A flamenco—and Gitano—*eco*" (sound, timbre), Chinoy concludes, "is one that goes straight to the heart, or perhaps more accurately, the viscera. 'Good singing hurts' is a phrase commonly heard. That is to say, it is not a specific sound which is valued, but rather a quality of transmission."

Anna Shalom's "Reading the Jácara: Seventeenth-Century Steps and their Influence in Contemporary Spanish Dance" studies the "underworld of danger, cynicism, and intrigue" represented in the *jácara*, a seventeenth-century dance-song whose influence, as the daughter of the Spanish *zarabanda* and the mother of the French *sarabande*, "has been under-appreciated by the broader dance community." Building on the foundational work of Ana Yepes, the leading authority on the jácara as a dance, Shalom documents her practice-based and embodied process of "transcribing and studying the four known sources for the danced jácara: Domingo González (ca. 1650), Juan Antonio Jaque (ca. 1680), Anónimo (ca. 1680), and Olivelles (1701)." Reading these sources comparatively with her own experience as a dancer of both the *escuela bolera* (classical Spanish dance) and flamenco, Shalom explores "the overlapping movement vocabularies of the manuscripts under study," wondering about the outgrowth in Spanish dance today of their expressivity and movement dynamics.

Agnes Nasozi Kamya, who was the keynote speaker at the *Body Questions* conference, opens the final section, "Black Roots." In "Interrogating the African Origins of Flamenco: An East African Perspective," Kamya, a dancer, scholar, and co-founder of the Uganda Flamenco Project, reflects on her experiences of moving to Sevilla and joining "the tiny cohort of professional Black flamenco dancers and scholars working to excavate and

lay claim to flamenco's African roots." She realized then "that the African influence, the Africanist aesthetic, and the African contribution to this artform that I loved, yet felt so visibly Other within, did not include me—even though I'm both Black and African." An understanding of flamenco as an African diasporic form is slowly emerging, Kamya explains, but Blackness is still routinely conflated with Africanness, and the concept of Black Africa as Sub-Saharan makes foreigners of all indigenous Black North Africans. Further, the influence of East Africa, as East Africans were not enslaved as West Africans were, specifically via the trans-Atlantic slave trade, is poorly understood if acknowledged at all. And just as many are ignorant of the impact that the Afro-Muslim Iberian Peninsula had on the European Renaissance, few appreciate the impact of ancient Egypt on ancient Greece; fewer still know that the great River Nile, which originates in Uganda, has always been a channel linking the interior of the continent with the Black Mediterranean. How then, Kamya asks, do we correctly understand this complex history and the various African cultures that shaped the early modern dances which give birth to flamenco? On the other hand, what are African flamencos to make of the impact of Blackness as a singular racial category? Can we say with absolutely certainty, Kamya concludes, that "there is no historical link between East Africa and the Iberian Peninsula and flamenco?" The answer is clearly "no," she states, "however, should future historical research prove otherwise it would only serve to open up flamenco further with more evidence that the world has always been far more interconnected historically than current understandings imply. This would only be a good thing for flamenco, for dance, and for humanity in general in an increasingly divided and unequal world."

Lynn Matluck Brooks's "Representing Others to Find 'Us' in Antebellum U.S. Dance" focuses on the antebellum period (following the War of 1812 and leading up to the U.S. Civil War of 1861–1865), a period of debate and contest in which the "search for a sense of 'Americanness'—for a cultural profile specific to this new nation—was a determined endeavor affecting people of all classes. It connected with such political factors as struggles over slavery, westward expansion, and immigration." In literature, music, painting, and drama, Brooks explains, U.S. artists tried out "flavors that might characterize uniquely American expressions, rather than pale imitations of European arts." Focusing on the art of dance, on Spanish and African ethnic categories, and on "Philadelphia—a major U.S. city symbolically, politically, commercially, and culturally," Brooks seeks to "grasp the role of performed embodiment in this tumultuous period," especially in "the greatest-hit Spanish dance of the period, the *cachucha*," which "showed up on the blackface stage in Philadelphia…performed by

white men in blackface and drag." "No group in the U.S. was isolated from others," Brooks concludes, "impervious to influences of others, unaffected by sights, sounds, allures, and threats of others." "Dances derived (or perceived so) from Spain and Africa, as they morphed and intersected on American dance floors in the antebellum age," came to characterize Otherness, while simultaneously "embodying U.S. cultural formation."

Julie Galle Baggenstoss's "The New Flamenco School Show: Breaking Stereotypes and Planting Seeds of Discourse on Race" reminds the reader that "it is debatable as to whether race is a perception of ethnicity, nationality, or any of the underpinnings of ideology, all of which are part of the discourse about cultural arts in schools." On the one hand, teaching children about "the provenance of song lyrics, musical patterns, and movement vocabulary equips teaching artists to tell the histories of the communities" whose cultural expressions were "fused into what became a symbol of Spain, in a system in which the dominating European white powers subjugated the expressions of Blackness as represented by Roma and Muslim populations." On the other hand, "communities in the New World, including the enslaved people of Africa and Creoles, also greatly influenced the development of flamenco." "Including the cultural expressions of these communities in the discussion of flamenco evolution," Baggenstoss argues, avoids the racial binary, insisting instead on a "system of variables based on historical events and perspectives from both sides of the Atlantic Ocean" which accounts for a "view of the included, as well as the omitted cultural expressions." The "flamenco image of the gaming Generation Z," Baggenstoss observes, "is one that is without an assignment of gender, race, or age, and whose costume could even include non-human attributes." However, "this latest transcultural expression of flamenco," while reflecting "the delicate considerations of postmodernity in the 21st century," problematically erases "the histories of subjugation that led to the formation of flamenco, as well as the social movements of equality and inclusion over centuries." "By contrast," she argues, we should recognize flamenco's "processes of hybridization," we should tap "stories of contact between communities," and should provide children a lens through which to view themselves "in the context of the multiple perspectives of history and communities"—including their own.

Kiko Mora's "A Counter-hegemonic Portrait of Blackness: La Perla Negra, Between the Rumba and Modern Dance (1913–1928)" introduces us to Dulce María Morales Cervantes, "La Perla Negra," a Cuban artist who travelled to Spain for the first time in 1913, and went on to enjoy a notable career on the Spanish stage. Her repertoire, spanning Gitano operas of the Catalonian avant-garde, Salomé dances, and Cuban *danzón*, *rumba*, and

bembé, reveals the racialized entanglements of Orientalism, vaudeville, the ballroom, ballet, and "high modernist dance" on the Spanish stage. A Black Cuban artist seducing the early-twentieth century "Spanish literary and artistic imagination," which found itself "struggling between the modernism of centrifugal and centralist claims of identity—engrossed in the 'Castillian soul' —and the modernism of a centripetal and peripheral awareness," La Perla Negra "placed herself in a liminal position, challenging the audience and critics' racist binary perception of the dance." Her story, Mora concludes, is "a counter-hegemonic portrait of Blackness in the ex-metropolis."

In *The Body's Question* (2003), U.S. Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith hungers for a language that is "shared like smoke," an invisibility that seems "only one part of being, of blackness and desire in a universe bigger than we are." The body, for Smith, is "holy, as is its shadow"—dark and light are holy together, and the self is "disparate"—"I was anyone I wanted to be," she writes.[11]

Dance, like smoke, like breath, materializes for an evanescent, fluid instant, then moves on. The work presented here raises an important methodological question, which is how what the dancing body knows—and questions—fits and can be integrated into a broader academic (and non-academic) discourse. Before film at least, dance was always transmitted "orally" and is only recorded in the most rudimentary fashion, even in the elite contexts in which it is recorded at all. And yet a dancer's knowledge archives a capacious repository of non-White and non-elite practices and histories. Shifting our focus toward bodies and bodies of knowledge that have heretofore been invisible, we trace a root system that nourishes the European canon, but whose unique nature and constituent elements are often blanketed by the politics of Whiteness. These questions are urgently pressing right now, not only in light of our present reckoning with the harsh realities of racial violence, but also in light of the de-historicizing, unmooring, and disembodying effects of living ever more intensely in the global mediasphere.

This volume, in sum, is a polyphonic compilation of voices about the dynamics of dancing, performance, and the embodiment of performative actions. It is an edited volume, which varies from the conference presentations. We are grateful for the participation of several conference participants who are not published here: David Álvarez, Thomas Baird,

[11] Tracy K. Smith and Kevin Young, *The Body's Question* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 2003), xi–xii.

Susan Cook, Barbara Fuchs, Theresa Goldbach, Javier Irigoyen-García, Jay Loomis, Lyra Monteiro, VK Preston, Raúl Rodríguez, Yesenia F. Selier, John Turci-Escobar, and Estela Zatania. We are also pleased to include some chapters that were not presented at the conference: Russell Patrick Brown, Guillermo Castro, Clara Chinoy, Belén Maya, and Miguel Ángel Vargas. An editorial note: we are spelling place names according to native usage, thus, México but New Mexico, and, following *The New York Times*, we capitalize "Black" and "Blackness."[12]

The views expressed by the authors herein do not necessarily reflect those of the editors, and the chapters included here vary widely in terms of methodology, subject matter, theoretical approach, and academic rigor. We include them all—to return to the June Jordan poem which opens this introduction—in their fractious, kicking, spilling, burly, whirling, raucous, and messy freedom, "exploding like the seeds of a natural disorder." To add the voice of one more great poet to this cauldron, as Frantz Fanon concludes *Black Skin, White Masks*: "Oh my body, make of me always a man who questions![13]

K. Meira Goldberg & Antoni Pizà

[12] Nancy Coleman, "Why We're Capitalizing Black," *The New York Times* (July 5, 2020).
[13] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York: Grove Press, 1967. 206

THE STRENGTH OF INSTABILITY

CHAPTER ONE

"THIS LITTLE WOODEN WORLD": CHOREO-NAVIGATING MARITIME DANCE

RUSSELL PATRICK BROWN

Irish-America taught me to dance, my Roma family taught me to use dance to communicate across cultures, and a Black Trans and Queer vogue community taught me how to be myself within my own dance. Over the last eight years a coalition of academics, artists and activists on both sides of the Atlantic gave me blank rooms, pages and weekends so that I might critically engage with my inherited practices. What emerged was study in the wheel tracks of our transatlantic past, a maritime dance made of a persistent and insistent fellowship of subverted gestures, mechanical coercion, playful workdance and aspirational performance. A volatile methodological crucible of history, practice and theory kept away almost all institutional comfort while the reluctant radicalness of embodiment in the context of history—and history in the context of embodiment—crept into conference presentations, classrooms and casual scholarly conversations. Always returning to the studio, which in most cases for me is a rooftop, pier or transit platform, I heard a monster under the floor thundering back at me as I beat out my muffled rubber-soled-shoe stomps, shuffles and heel-work. As this beast followed me through New York City, the American East Coast, rural Ireland and London, its rumblings remained consistent under a floor that never widened, but often fell away. I have come to name this creature choreonavigation, a wayfinding self, made available through the study and the remanences of maritime dance. Choreographically, it is a mappable moment where the dangling isolation of my movements finds resonance with my historical subjects.

Among the variety show of identities that have sailed with me on this voyage, each with an important act to perform, I eventually realized it was

my Roma "gypsy"[1] knowledge that was consistently, quietly providing a way back. A thousand-year, undesirable history of the Roma in the Middle East and Europe laced with expulsion, slavery and genocide primarily manifest today for me in the passive violence of bureaucratic care systems, genetic/learned intergenerational trauma and a white cultural nationalism that *must* fill its emptiness by taking and taking from bodies made to disappear and dance in a "double consciousness" within the Black Atlantic (Gilroy 1993). The depth of this struggle remains largely unspoken, even among many Roma. When my mother and I were interviewed for the "Romani Realities in the United States: Breaking the Silence, Challenging the Stereotypes" (2020) study at the FXB Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University, we were startled to articulate for the first time the discrimination and hardship we had faced. Whether it was my mother being known as a "little gypsy girl" in inner city Cleveland or it was the police harassing my family because I told my kindergarten school counselor that we had family living in trailers on our property, public perception of who we are as Roma was shaped long before we were born. In an American context we are only beginning to articulate our experiences.

Despite these extremities, Roma people thrive. We are doctors, lawyers, writers and politicians. Within my own family, my mother became a nurse and a schoolteacher while proudly building and traveling in our own caravans, an unbroken tradition in our family for over a thousand years. We have insisted on our past, our traditions and we have adapted for the future that flaunts the privileges of digital nomadism. While my great, great grandfather was a blacksmith in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, my grandfather was a landscaper, and I craft code for a living in the USA, we have maintained a devotion to music and dance, a center from which old meets new, here meets there, self meets other. This quiet knowledge that was given no name in my family—we had lost the Romani language during our American assimilation—was still able to add to my other identities as a Queer, Disabled, Irish dancing man.

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[1] The word "gypsy" is a racial slur, and is the root of the term "gypped", meaning to be robbed or swindled by a Romani person or Traveller. "Gypsy" with a capital "G" has been embraced by some Roma and Travellers. For me, self-identifying with either spelling was ultimately oppressive. My family and other Roma I know use "gypsy" in conversation when we want to reference popular, inaccurate perceptions and portrayals of who we are. Even the supposedly "positive" portrayals (usually performed by non-Roma) of gypsy stereotypes are just romantic adaptations of this very old pejorative. In the United States, "gypsy" is more familiar to non-Roma than the terms Roma, Romani, Sinti, Romanichal and other more accurate racial and ethnic names, and is why I invoke it here.

This is undeniably a departure from many Roma families; homosexuality has traditionally been forbidden. The Roma however also have a history of adapting. For example, the language has been lost in many Roma sub-groups, while other groups do not maintain a tradition of traveling and are settled in houses and apartments in big cities. As international Roma peoples, we have the flexibility to understand our differences, and the strength to know who we are. The walls that ethnic nationalism and racism have built cannot stand against people who understand who they are, learn love and loyalty through their family (given or chosen) and compassionately co-exist with and learn from people beyond their front door.

As a people without a nation or history of one, a true exploration of my Roma identity has taught me to look beyond the appropriated, misrepresented images of Roma performance, such as the lascivious gypsy man or woman dancing with headscarves, jewelry and a violin, and instead to see knowledge, and the wisdom of generations I aspire to. In essence, I learned to define home by processes of returning. In travel there is always a returning, a returning that is complicated for Roma people. The most central is a return to family, and then traditions of language, philosophy, beliefs and cultural practices. However, this returning is not guaranteed as so many Roma have "lost" pieces of their identity due to rampant oppression and fear of public exposure. For most Roma, there is nothing to be gained from stating publicly who we are, there is only risk of hatred, fear or—quite often in the USA—confusion, fantasy and mistrust.

In my study of maritime dance subjects, I began to recognize patterns of survival, adaptation and resilience that reverberated within my Roma experience. Lost, found, recovered and stolen pathways echo through archives and register with familiarity. These sympathetic vibrations help me find with other Roma many shared, known routes and methods of finding them. This bold, synergistic act of recovery resurrects an allyship that pierces the time veil, animating dangerous dances seemingly deactivated and preserved in the halls of white nationalism. In choreonavigation's accounting of the self in history, I discovered an intimate method of researching the dances of the disrupted. This knowledge of violence contained within our percussive, early modern dances is not lost in the unspeakableness of history, it is made louder and clearer by it. Flamenco, Irish step dance, Appalachian clog and American tap are extant maritime dances, and within them is wisdom keen to countless generations of trauma: a patient process of letting knowledge become heard. By acknowledging the dancer as living archive, choreonavigation in its fullest sense is a sober returning to self in the context of the heritage, technology, trauma and innovation that made us.

In my study of maritime dance, my returning does the critical work of continually destabilizing the hegemonic force that nationalism has exerted upon maritime dancers. This research is a map and countermap of the discovered, the ancient and the repossessed that defined movement practices within the early modern Atlantic world and its flotsam found today. This lived, post/colonial experience makes available the maritime dancer's juxtaposition between the knowing of self and the betrayal of that through cartography.

The act of mapping bodies, whether in the hold of a slave ship, in a dance manual, or in academic prose, abandons the dancer in a fundamentally anti-humanist transaction. It is an expropriation of bodies into words, texts that will travel without the speaker or the dancer. This abstraction allowed Amalia Hernández to whiten Afro-Mexican dance in the Ballet Folklórico de México; helped Spanish conservatories erase Roma families from the practice and history of flamenco; supported Irish history's denial of the contributions of Roma and Travellers to their country's jigs and reels; and permitted North American cloggers to forget the Black roots of their form. A ceaseless, fractal-like assembly of words, laws, theories and privileges places arms here and not there, puts some faces on stage and hides others. This "choreopolice"-ing (Lepecki 2015) of non-white and/or traveling bodies is limitless in its ingenuity. All bodies will eventually be oriented in relation to the state. The finality of these products, however, can never grasp the state of performance, an act whose end is not clear as that of a printed word or the image of a body.

In contrast to choreopoliced maritime bodies (e.g. an Irish or flamenco dancer in state-sponsored pageantry, or a tap dancer in a Broadway production), other maritime dancers—those still dancing in the streets, on the piers and in the clubs—are set about a "choreopolitical" task (Lepecki 2015). They are dancing towards freedom. Hip-hop, vogue, whacking and a continual stream of emergent Black dance forms do not just dance in spite of the choreopolice, they dance with it. This is what dance makes uniquely available, the ability to incorporate anything and still be dance: to be a method of witnessing self and other and not be halted by conflict, but to add it to the repertoire. Contradictions live in the dance. Jasmine Johnson observes that in the case of Black dance, from which the study of transatlantic maritime dance is inseparable, the laws that controlled Black people for centuries and their uneven and often vague application mean that we cannot always hold the "premise that Black people always *want* to dance when they are 'dancing'" (Johnson 2020, 25). The choreopolitical task of the dancer does not imply their consent or their desire to carry it out. It is the dancer's orienting within this struggle—a Roma dancer like Carmen

Amaya's simultaneous entrapment within and subversion of Gitano stereotypes in flamenco (Goldberg 1995)—that becomes a way forward. Within the vastness of dance's inconsistencies, maritime dance focuses on the traveler's relationship to an arrival. This inquiry of a body to its destination forms a task that only dance can do, and flourishes in maritime dance.

In this proposition of the term "choreonavigation," movement-finding as research practice accesses maritime dance's power pharologies, class constellations, racial shores and captains of capitalism. Choreonavigation helps the researcher tactically anticipate, avoid and integrate the choreopolice, while recognizing the unoriginality of the endeavor. A choreonavigator observes the gestures, styles and currents of power of the post/colonial world. The restriction of freedom presented by post/colonialism becomes both the impediment and a method for choreonavigators to move forward. It is fraught, problematic, and un-claimable. Any methods to correct it cannot be utopian—they are symptomatic if not causative. Dispossession, commodification, collaboration and the affects of hope, greed, and fury are markers of its presence. Choreonavigation comprises the processes of the maritime colonial world that betray the objects, people and traditions within it. Choreonavigation cannot claim the places and people of the colonial world—it waits for them.

I danced while waiting for clearer identity, safer home and re-union. I became a dancer in the wake of perpetual loss, forgetting and abandonment.

Pier Children

On the Christopher Street Pier[2] in downtown Manhattan I practice my hornpipe steps, careful not to trip over the gaps in the wooden planks. While this converted industrial dock has become a romantic setting, it also happens to be free; air conditioned by the Hudson River in the hot summer and less damaging to my hearing disability than banging on the floor of a small dance studio. The odd time I trip on the wooden deck, it emphasizes the skipping, tripping rhythms that make a hornpipe. Neither firmly in a 4/4 or 12/8 meter, Irish traditional hornpipes are unpredictable. Unlike the smooth, steady jig, the *cornphíopa*[3] switches between liquid flourishes and jerking kicks and clicks, and rests upon a history that floats out to sea.

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[2] Christopher Street Pier refers to a collections of piers in New York City, numbered 42, 45, 46, and 51.

[3] "Hornpipe" in Irish Gaelic, is so named because of the horn-shaped pipe instrument, typically a shawm, that traditionally played the music for the dance.

The hornpipe is a dance long associated with mariners, as dance historian Constance Valis Hill observes. The first dancer born in America to achieve widespread popularity, John Durang, danced his "Sailor's Hornpipe—Old Style" in 1784, which became a popular solo stage dance (Hill 2010, 7). He clogged balletic and African American shuffle-and-winging choreography and, though his Hornpipe was not yet what would become the genre of blackface minstrelsy in the 1830s and 40s, Durang undoubtedly helped codify, theatricalize and globally circulate American creolized culture that was, as Christopher J. Smith argues, "already familiar from the boundary zones of streets, wharves, decks, and fairgrounds" (2013, x).[4] These boundary zones made up what Elizabeth Maddock Dillon calls the "performative commons" (2014), and they were the breeding ground of the early modern hornpipe, jig and clog dance. Durang's "racialized fantasy" (Goldberg 2019) of Blackness and sailors embodied and capitalized on these performative commons found in cities like New York, which are "[…] an assemblage of Lenape, Dutch, British and US histories of island becoming" (Gómez-Barris and Joseph, 2019). As dance scholars continue to write the history of tap dance, clogging and stepping beyond their nationalist narratives, archipelagic studies open the archive by queering the relationship between movement and land.

In dance studies, creolization is often interpreted as a uniquely American or Caribbean phenomenon, however colonization's strategic architectures and technologies connect across the Atlantic world and beyond. Within the New York archipelago: "Governors Island connects to locations such as Cochin, Galle, Cape Town and Djakarta, also former Dutch colonial entrepôts. Suddenly the Indian Ocean is in the Hudson River, floating in the New York harbor at once provincial and of the world" (Joseph 2013). A distinctly nautical hornpipe landed on the English stage in the 18th century (Bratton, 1990), when the cultural winds of the Atlantic world began to gather force and create the percussive dance forms we are familiar with today.[5] Durang's use of his training in acrobatics, harlequinades, ballet and other forms within his hornpipe indicates the far-reaching creative, creole and appropriative power of the sea.[6] Taking from some colonized subjects and enriching others, the hornpipe is an invitation

[4] For the definitive biography, see Lynn Matluck Brooks, *John Durang: Man of the American Stage* (Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2011).

[5] When the hornpipe became a staple of the British music hall, T.P. Cooke, an experienced mariner traveled from port to port collecting hornpipes and combined them in his stage performances.

[6] Period images show that routines by sailors in wharf-side pubs were quite different from the 'sailors' hornpipes in professional theaters (Van Winkle Keller 2007, 23).

to early modern maritime dance navigation. In the hornpipe the unexpected can happen.

Back at the pier, forces much older than I am collided.

When I began pierdancing in the summer of 2013 I had elder-given, inside knowledge of the Queer pharology of the hallowed harbor I moved upon. As I clicked, battered and "lept" around Christopher Street Pier, its secret history as a cruising park for Gay sex rose through the wooden planks of the promenade and penetrated my choreography.[7] An LGBTQIA+ gathering place for decades (and perhaps centuries), Pier 45 also has special significance in the Ballroom community.[8] Through multiple pandemics, hate crimes, floods and fashions, these dancers come to vogue, celebrate and form community.

I was choreographing one of my favorite traditional Irish hornpipes, "King of the Fairies" (with gestures I learned from my Australian pole-dancing boyfriend at the time) when I noticed two mysterious people were sitting, watching me. In this picturesque location, I was accustomed to people gathering and recording my dancing or that of the voguing Pier Dancers, but this was a reciprocal connection. Something inside me was calling to them. Eventually we began talking. They were two dancers from the House of LaBeija, which I had never heard of. One, a mother of the House, would introduce me to the world of pier life, and for a summer I would become a "Pier Child."

As I would come to learn, Pier Children are a classification in the Ballroom community. They are African American and Latinx LGBTQIA+ youth who come to the pier looking to enjoy the harbor with their peers, practice their dancing and find or be recruited by a house (a chosen family). Pier Children, who in earlier vogue history would practice at Washington Square Park as well, have not yet begun competing in the Balls where they would then be able to enter a house after they "snatched" trophies. They are on the borders of the city and on the edges of the "Royal," "Iconic" and "Legendary" houses, whose Black ball history stretches back in New York over 150 years, and Black history in the Greenwich Village extends back to

[7] In many Anglo-Irish dialects "leap," "leaped" and "leaping" translate to "lep", "lept" and "lepping."

[8] The House Ballroom Scene, Ballroom House and Ball Culture refer to a countercultural movement of dance, fashion and wisdom that is performed, lived and shared among primarily African-American and Latinx Queer and Trans youth primarily through "Houses," chosen families that provide support, education and community. The dance they created is called "vogue."