

PARtake: The Journal of Performance as Research
Volume 3, Issue 1 – Spring 2020
ISSN: 2472-0860



***Searching for El Duende: An Auto-ethnography of the
Phenomenon of Flowing in-and-within Dance***

Sarahi Lay Trigo, PhD—University of California, Santa Cruz
Postdoctoral fellow of the National Council on Science and Technology
(CONACYT-México) 228822

Opening. The Power of Auto-Ethnography in the Dance Field

“Can I be my own informant?” is an interrogation that resounds deeply in subjects who work with self-ethnography in an academic field. Such is the case of this work, in which I reflect on the phenomenon of Flamenco Art¹, *el duende* (the pixie), using as data my own experience as a dancer (what can also be called performative autoethnography as highlighted by Allison Upshaw).² Being both an ethnographic observer (passive-self) and an informant actor (active-self) is not an easy task, since the boundaries between these two activities can become blurry and deceptive. Stacy Holman Jones says that “auto-ethnography is not simply a way of knowing about the world; it has become a way of being in the world, one that requires living consciously, emotionally, and reflexively.”³ Hence, I seek to keep an attitude of self-awareness throughout this reflection. I exercise a self-reflexivity act (epistemological surveillance)⁴ that helps me to maintain a balance between what is necessary to tell and what is not, avoiding the temptation of developing a narcissistic, or a self-indulgences⁵ voice.

In being a self-informant, it is important to be aware of my personal positionality—where I am socially situated. I am a flamenco dancer and also a researcher in the fields of anthropology and dance. Born and raised in Guadalajara, Mexico, I started dancing Spanish folkloric dance when I was a child of 18 months. Fourteen years later I became a professional flamenco dancer (a *tablado* dancer). My studies in dance were principally focused on flamenco and ballet, yet I have a diverse background that includes the practice of different movement techniques such as: Mexican Folkloric Dance, Modern, Yoga, Pilates, Kung Fu and Latin Rhythms. Human motion, in its different structures, styles and traditions, has been the only language that I have truly felt as *mine*. I hope that my immersion in the world of dance serves to explicate the elusive and magical energy that flows in-an-within-the-dancer: *el duende*.

This work is divided in three parts. First, I present the definition of *el duende* in flamenco dance. Second, I work in the notion of *el duende* as an inner-outer force. And third, I develop three qualities or moments that are present when *el duende* appears. In closing, I present an intimate lyrical re-creation of this phenomenon.

Defining *El Duende* in Flamenco Dance

I am here. I am there. I dance.

I am everything: movement, dance, joy, sadness, passion, love, life, death, mind, body, feelings, absence, presence. I-am-You, You-are-Me. I dissolve in-and-within the instant. There are parts, yet they exist as a whole. I am energy, fluency, flow. My being is flowing.⁶ I cry: Olé! I find my voice. I find myself at the tablado.⁷ Then, a remate:⁸ not a finale, but a beginning. Everything occurs perfectly—no script, no choreography, no prior arrangement. It is art improvisation. The instant flows; el duende arrives. It is intense, magical, ephemeral and eternal.

I am dance. I am el duende.

El duende is a magical spirit. The *Real Academia Española (RAE)* describes *el duende* as “a mysterious and ineffable charm.” García Lorca and Di Giovanni⁹ say that *el duende* comes “from *duen* [dueño] *de casa*, “master of the house.” Deriving from popular Spanish culture, *el duende* is “a playful hobgoblin, a household spirit fond of hiding things, breaking plates, producing noise, and making a general nuisance of himself.”¹⁰ *El duende* is “the bearer” of the dark sounds. It is a mystery. *The goblin* loves to play, and when it is around you cannot see it, but you know it is there. *El duende* is all that, in a cultural sense, and yet something else in Flamenco art.

Paraphrasing Federico García Lorca’s theory¹¹, *el duende* is power, struggle, true living style, blood, old culture, creation, earth spirit, radical change and religious enthusiasm as energetic God. *El duende* is human pain and sorrow that burns the blood. It is full presence and evasion, life and death. *El duende* is being, in both the abstract and the concrete. For me, to have *duende* means to possess art as an individual performer (dancer), and to have art as a form of communication with *the other*, the others, the otherness.¹² *El duende* is at the same time an individual and also a collective experience. In this article I will not specify the gender of *el duende* (he or she, her or his), but I will leave it as “it,”

since from my perspective *el duende* is an inner-outer force that necessarily takes on the gender of the dancer.

I agree with Rafael López Pedraza¹³ who argues that *el duende* is at the same time an individual and a collective phenomenon in fusion. This understanding separates my work from those who believe that *el duende* is a highly individual experience that flows from the performer's subconscious, as Matteo M. Vitucci pointed out; and also from those who argue that *el duende* is an otherness, an alterity or an energy that it is outside the performer (see, for example, *Acercamiento antropológico al duende* by Eloisa Mogedano Tejero).¹⁴ For me, *el duende* is at the same time a personal and a collective force, which must be understood by its double nature. *El duende* is like a cord with two points: one that begins in the individual reality, and the other that goes to the collective, but does not end there—it continues to flow. It is not an easy task to explain its double (in-and-out) flowing nature. *El duende* is, concurrently, an emotional intangible existence in a being—in this work, in a dancer—that is shared with the collective. Or, as Cathy Serrano and Carmen Elgorriaga say, *el duende* is a “force that illuminates flamenco performers and listeners [audience]”¹⁵ at the same time.

In my experience, *el duende* is a concept commonly used in flamenco art. Resonating with Timothy J. Mitchell,¹⁶ *el duende* appears at bullrings as an expression to describe the bullfighters' abilities—to talk about their courage, valor, and/or their personal way of defeating death at the arena. Christopher Maurer explains *the pixie* as “a demonic earth spirit who helps the artist see the limitations of intelligence [...] who brings him face-to-face with death; and who helps him create and communicate memorable, spine-chilling art.”¹⁷ At the *tablados*, the goblin serves to describe the artist's ability to have *duende* (it could be a dancer, a musician and/or a poet). *El duende* in flamenco art exists, as the first point of the cord, in three forms: *el cante* (singing), *el toque* (mainly guitar, but also percussions as the *cajón*) and *el baile* (dancing).

The work *In Search of Duende* describes the idea of *having the pixie* as “an inexplicable power of attraction, the ability, on rare occasions, to send waves of emotion through those watching and listening to them [the artists].”¹⁸ From another point of view,

Javier Francisco Mora Contreras¹⁹ describes *the pixie* in *Las Raíces del Duende*, as a personal poetic form of experience at the *cante jondo*, a magical inspiration in which the *cantador* (flamenco singer) experiments the sublime and the tragic as a melodramatic expression of flamenco lyrics. In *Acercamiento Antropológico al Duende* Eloisa Mogedano Tejero²⁰ argues that this phenomenon is an external force that takes possession of the artist, an alterity who owns the performer. Michelle Heffner Hayes says that the *goblin* is a way “of representing the complex and intricate decision-making process of the practitioners who operates within the parameters of the tradition. This process is witnessed and applauded by an informed audience. It is precisely this recognition that brings meaning to the performance.”²¹ This last definition helps me to highlight that *el duende* is an inner-outer force, a personal-collective phenomenon.

According to Donn E. Pohren, “the term *duende* is widely used, [...]. [And] it does not necessarily have to pertain solely to flamenco, but to any richly emotive source whose creators and perpetuators carry [...] ‘dark sounds’ in their blood.”²² Dark sounds can be understood not only as the nostalgic sound of pain of the *cante jondo* (*quejío*),²³ but as a special form to transmit memory, history and emotions through art. In my practice, in the world of flamenco dance, *the pixie* as the name of *el duende* will be always linked to a flamenco root.

El duende loves the *cante jondo*,²⁴ the *jaleo*,²⁵ the *juerga*²⁶, *los palos* (musical rhythms, more than fifty exist in flamenco). It loves the *mestizo* lyrics (*los cantos de ida y vuelta*), the *algarabía*, the stories of tragedy, sadness, lost, love, tragedy and death. *The pixie* also loves the particular aesthetics of flamenco dance: the hands that flower, the hips that sway, the arms that fly, the *zapateado* that drills, the unexpected *remates*, the *desplantes* (disrupting breaks in movement patterns), and the mixed dance movement full of passion and sadness. In this work, I reflect only on *el duende* as a form of dance, and in a very particular form of dance: the *baile jondo*. Claus Schreiner in the book *Dance and Music from Andalusia* describes the *baile jondo* as:

The very essence of flamenco dancing and express its basic soloist nature [...]. This is the only format in which the real flamenco can emerge: the expression of an individual’s innermost feelings and inner intensity. Only a soloist working within a

defined format can give full range to his own improvisation, his own creation; only in this way can the “duende,” that mysterious genius which sparks spontaneous inspiration in the world of flamenco, really take hold of the artist. Such individual expression is simply not possible when a *soleá* (a type of *baile jondo*), for example, is danced by four people following a closely choreographed, drill-like dance routine.²⁷

Following that description, *el duende* in flamenco dance—in *baile jondo*—must be understood as an intimate, soloist-collective shared experience. The elements are: the dancer, *el duende*, the others, the other, the otherness and the instant. To go deeper, to understand my particular form of experience *el duende*, I need to elucidate *el duende* as an inner-outer-force.

El Duende as a Phenomenon of Inner-and-Outer-Force

El duende arrives alone—no one can ask *the goblin* to arrive. It can be evoked, but as capricious as it is, *el duende* only appears when it wants, and to whom it chooses. When I commenced dancing in *tablados*, it was very common to hear members of the flamenco and bullfighting community (mainly dancers, musicians, poets and bullfighters) talk about *el duende*. They entreated it, as when a poet invokes the Muse. Nobody ever gave me the impression of knowing it perfectly; *el duende* seemed more like a fairytale, a legend. To *have the goblin* (*tener duende*) was like winning the lottery—but I didn’t know how to buy a ticket for this magic game.

Years passed. The only thing that potentially promised me a chance to meet this magic force was my status as belonging to a flamenco community. Maybe, by some strange chance of fate, this belonging would grant me an opportunity to become the “chosen one,” the preferred daughter of flamenco dance. No matter how much I learned, however, this goal seemed impossible. Being a Mexican rather than Spanish flamenco dancer was a problem for the flamenco community. For them, being a “foreigner” (not born in Spain) meant that the magic of *el duende* could never be something I might experience. It was said in Mexico that *the goblin* only belongs to the of its own origin: born in Spain, and being a cultural creation of flamenco world, *el duende* loves bullfighting arenas and *tablados*, but in *Spain*, not in Mexico. How I wished I had been born in Spain!

But life is dynamic and unexpected, and my fate changed. Suddenly, while not being obsessed anymore with this magical creature, I finally met *el duende*. It was in the middle of a *Soleá por Bulería* (one of the most known forms of *palos* flamenco), dancing at *Siglo XV* (one of the *tablados* I used to perform in my natal city). In an instant, and in one night, the individual-collective magic appeared. The enigmatic force that had always been a chimera for me was something I finally felt, and vividly breathed. I was seventeen years old. I experienced it as a rupture in time, an electric shock. In a flash I left the space-time and returned. I felt different space-time relations, present in the way that happens only when *el duende* flows within me.

After that day I realized: *el duende* lives in me. There is no trick. I have *duende*, even if I am not a flamenco dancer from Spain. I am a Mexican dancer with *duende*. Perhaps I have a mestizo one, a Mexican-flamenco *duende*, but my *duende* exists. I had spent what felt like a lifetime searching for *el duende* outside, but here it was: inside. This magic essence, I have realized, is a personal and intimate inner-outer-force that connects everything in an instant. It is an emotional release, a profound sense of buoyancy, a reliving of sorrow, pain, ecstasy, joy, movement, music, dance. Everything happens simultaneously; there are no boundaries—the limits of inside and outside disappear. *El duende* is an energy that runs through my veins and reaches the audience. It has the power to touch all people involved, in an instant. “Dance” with *duende* means to flow.

In my experience, *el duende* is definitely not an external force,²⁸ an “other,” or an “otherness” (that is outside of the dancer) or an “alterity”; *el duende* is the pure essence of the fluent existence in-and-within. *El duende* does not handle me like a doll, so I have more power and self-control²⁹ than ever, regarding what I want to show with the dance. It is Me-*el duende*-and-All. I am (*el duende*) when I dare to be myself throughout dance—without fear, judgment or shame. It is a particular way of expressing life through flamenco dance. It is an inner-outer expansive energy-force. In *duende*-time I become a shared existence in a continuous dialogue: with myself, the others, the Universe. I am in a state of flow, moving with a sense of shared energy and power.

For me, *el duende* is an inner-outer force with three qualities. *El duende* connects me (as an inner force with my whole being at present moment), re-connects me (as an outer force with the others and the environment), and, finally, makes me flow (as a dance improvisation art in-and-within the instant). Only with these three stated moments: the connection (liaison of the being as an inner-force), the re-connection (liaison of the being as an outer-force) and the flowing (*duende* flows in-and-within art improvisation) can I formally say: *Hay duende!*

I will now describe the nature of these moments or qualities.

El Duende as a Phenomenon of Three (Connection, Re-Connection and Flowing)

1) The connection (liaison of the being as an inner-force)

For a connection, a disconnection.

One's self-connection is fundamental to find *the pixie*. I am, as proposed by Xavier Xubiry's philosophy, a sentient-intellectual reality at once,³⁰ yet I am dealing—in everyday life—with different levels of sentient and intellectual impressions. These include: the corporal, the intellectual, and the emotional. For me, in being a dancer, *el duende* is the only presence capable of creating the balance, the equilibrium that tempers *the being* as a whole while dancing in the present moment. To achieve it, I must be present. I must “develop a sense of self and become comfortable with that self. An emerging being,” as described by scholars Lynne Anne Blom and L. Tarin Chaplin.³¹ Connection with myself in the present moment, as if I were meditating, is essential, because, as Tomas Bien and Beverly Bien say “life consists only of this present moment—the very one we are so busy running away from.”³² *El duende* is that magic that allows me to flow within the dance in the present moment. This presence or connection can also be explained, as dancer Felice Wolfzahn wrote, as that precise moment when you can appreciate “a million energies that pass through you.”³³

To find *el duende*, to awaken that force, the dancer must become a connected *being*. One can understand this concept as having a double meaning: a substantive (that refers to be connected in all dimensions: corporeal, biological, emotional and spiritual); and as an

inflected verb (be or to be connected with the act of dance). With that notion (the being, the dancer-being) I am trying to include not only the reality of the *being*, but also the action of *the being*. This means referring at the same time to *the being* that is in time-space (existence), and to the being that inhabits time-space (*the being* that acts, *the being* that takes action). For me, that is what defines this magic phenomenon of *el duende*. *The pixie* is at once a tangible and an intangible force, a subject and an act. It is simultaneously a subject-act (dancer-dance) that also belongs to the others (audience and other participants of the performance), the otherness, and the moment (time-space). Everything is working together as a single movement of reality. *El duende* is an intimate form of re-ligation, and a gestating external energy in-and-within the dance movement.

Yet, to have *duende* exists another secret: the movement as a medium for *el duende*.
For a connection, a medium as liaison

Movement in dance is an indispensable medium. Not only for *el duende*, but also for dance in general, as explained in the book *The Moment of Movement: Dance Improvisation*.³⁴ Without movement, no *goblin* or connection can occur. Only with-it-and-within the movement can the dancer try to find *el duende*. Only if the dancer is moving is it possible to evoke the magic. Then, if the *pixie* desires it, it will meet the dancer, or rather, it will emerge from the darkness of the dancer's inner-self.

El duende travels throughout movement.³⁵ Movement is its natural medium. Movement is not only a medium of action, but also a medium of meaning. Francis Sparshott highlighted that human "action is possible only in a world that is found meaningful. But the meanings, to provoke action, must themselves be practical meanings: things desired as perceived must have been perceived as desirable."³⁶ Using this logic, beings in a general sense—and *dancer-beings* in a particular sense—are allies and co-creators of movement meanings. Therefore, movement as a human reality is not only the capacity to be in the world, but a way of means being-in-and-within-the-world.

The first thing I did before I met *el duende* was to master flamenco dance movement.³⁷ One must have all the codes, steps, movements and manner of expression of that dance art. The *zapaeado*, the *desplantes*, the faces (how important is the face in

flamenco!), the different styles of each *palo* flamenco, the *palmas*, the beating as-one-in-movement, the emotions—I immersed myself in all of it. With that mastering of the dance form, I was then capable of using it as fuel for dance improvisation.

Without that movement appropriation it is very difficult to dance freely, to flow, to improvise—or to receive *el duende*, which is the highest level of flowing that exists in flamenco dance. Then, and only then, with movement as an instrument and as a meaning mode of being, I am able to flow and be interconnected in-and-within-the-world.

Yet, when I achieved this first connection (myself-and-the-movement), there was still *no goblin*. I had to go further. And, as I said, being with *el duende* is not an individual art but an art to be shared—that is why I had to move myself to another type of connection.

2) The re-connection (the dancer and the others, the other, the otherness)

As I described in the previous section, to connect something, one needs first something to *connect to*, and a *medium* through which that connection can occur. In this second moment, what do I need to connect? I need to connect myself to the environment (musicians, audience, time-space). How do I succeed? In my experience, becoming a master of the air and a master of the water. I will now explain these metaphors.

Becoming a Master of the Air

Peter Sloterdijk affirms that the omnipresent element in human world is the air: “man is like all other beings, a disciple of the air.”³⁸ Without air, we are not alive. Air is that invisible source of life, indispensable for everyone. No air, no life. Nancy Chen notes:

In many indigenous cultures and traditional medical systems, the process of breathing and the external environment of air and wind were viewed as a continuum. The movement of air was viewed as a sacred power. The significance of breath for both physical animation and well-being has been noted by scholars and practitioners alike.³⁹

In flamenco dance, air is also needed—it is the mutual, imperceptible space-time that dancers, musicians, and spectators shared in any kind of performance. For me, in order to find and know *el duende*, the dancer has to become an artist of the air, a breathing-master.

Air is an internal and an external vital energy. So, as it enters, it also goes out. Steven Connors argues that “reflections on air produce complex convolutions, even convulsions, of inner and outer, as we learn to get on the outside of our own interiority with respect to the air.”⁴⁰ In this case, reflections on air produce the natural channel of an inner-outer energy, that energy that I called *el duende*-flowing. So, during my professional trajectory as a dancer, just by knowing the art of air, I learned how to handle gravitational force to achieve lightness through movement. In other words, I learnt how to manage air force-energy while dancing. So, although invisible, one must have to be aware of air presence, as air is the only channel in which the dancer, the movement, the others and *the pixie* will be intertwined.

Discovering this took a long time. Only after several years of dance training did I learn the importance of the air in this way: how to inhale and exhale in the correct way. Inhalation as a force of presence becomes a movement with intention, a muscle-tone with vital energy. An exhalation as a *desplante* becomes a movement to erupt, dominate and manipulate the environment. I am in-and-within-the-air. An exhalation as a scream exclamation could be an *Olé!*, *Ay Dios!*, or a simply *Y!* The last one is my favorite. It is short and strong, and it becomes an exhalation with plenty of sound and volume that transforms the air.

I always cry out (no matter what kind of stage it is, either a *tablado* or a theatre). That act makes me feel that I am present. It helps me to accentuate the movement. Screaming upsets the vibrations of the movement in-and-within-the-air. To scream at performance time helps to shake (metaphorically) the space-time, and that act also helps to promote exultant screams of excitement from the audience and the other participants in the performance. The dancer and the others start to share common meanings in the performance act. The communication channel is prepared. *The pixie* is coming. Then the dancer and the others (musicians and audience) are becoming co-producers and co-performers of the air as dance-meaning-performance-environment. Air becomes the *goblin* medium house.

But the task does not end there. *The goblin* must be out of its invisible house. Everybody—even if it is only for an instant—must see *el duende*.

Then, the dancer has to achieve a mastery of water. We have to keep in mind that air is an invisible medium. To produce a visible *pixie*, dancers must become as water in movement in a dynamic aerial container (the air environment).

Becoming a Water-Master

I speak of water here in a metaphorical sense. I take from water its essential qualities: its plasticity (as water is capable of possessing any surface that contains it); its power of conducting energy (its way of act as a medium in-and-within movement); its capacity to make objects and humans float weightlessly; and, most important of all, the way that water flows. The dancer in *flamenco* dance has to achieve and master movement plasticity as if the dancer were water. To become water it is not to achieve fluid movement, but achieving also the plasticity to manipulate the dance movement as a dialogue with the otherness.

The first time I discovered this idea, I was at one of my very first performances in a *juerga* in a *tablado*. I was going to dance at the *Night Gala* of a performance “*la zapatilla de plata*” that was going to be honoring Miguel Espinoza “*Armillita*” (a Mexican bullfighter). This changed my perspective of dance movement. I was used to theaters, not to *tablados*, not to *juergas*. Changing the practice room or the formal stage for a social gathering was a shock. Being the youngest member of *the cuadro flamenco* (people formation to perform at *tablado*, including musicians and dancers) was a challenge in itself, therefore, trying to find *el duende* was an unfulfilled dream. That day was not my lucky day, but I learned a lot. By observing my fellow dancers, I realized how a dancer must take the stage. One must enter with confidence, and *garbo* (grace). To be flexible was essential, as was following the rhythm of the music. Dancing and at the same time trying to be aware of the flowing mood of the audience at the gather was indispensable. To achieve plasticity with movement and flow with the moment was what I have to look for. Only by flowing was I going to be able to become a medium of fluency.

Water-movement is what helps me to share my essence, my sparkling and playful *duende* with the audience, with the others (musicians and partners), with the other (space-time), the otherness. Something that seems mysteriously impossible to trap becomes visible and flows with my dance movements. Then, in the performance act, I have air as an invisible medium to the others, and water-movement as my personal form to produce a visible *duende*. That is the combination of both medium channels to prepare the entrance of *el duende*. But still, *el duende* needs another quality to make the magic flow in the instant: art improvisation.

3) The flowing: art improvisation in-and-within the instant

El duende needs me: it needs me as a whole being. It also needs all everyone and otherness or it will never arrive. *El duende* is an intimate spell that has to be shared

The pixie desires me in a complete state of re-ligation (first connection). It wants me to stop being-me in order to be-*el duende*-and-the-otherness and flow. In other logic, *the goblin* wants me in a mode of mind-trance⁴¹ where I can experience “the fullness of a dance of attention”⁴² and then to improvise. Dance improvisation in general, is:

an essential skill and tool for dancers. It is grounded in the kinesthetic experience and its constantly changing dynamic qualities through self-movement. It requires a spontaneous kinesthetic response in a spatiotemporal vigorous qualitative dynamic happening of affect and movement; a momentum that allows dancers to perform innovative material and as such supports the creative process.⁴³

Improvisation, in flamenco art, is one of the most powerful tools for the dancer.

Improvisation is a quality of *baile jondo* that emerges principally and in all its glory at *juergas*. Dancers do not have prepared steps or any type of previous choreography—they present at the performance act as solos with the only preparation that the experience had given to them; this is what is called *tener tablas*. In order to experience improvisation in its entire splendor one must be present, especially at the *juergas*, where the flamenco community gathers to dance, sing, play or recite poetry without a set structure.

Someone begins playing the guitar, for example by *palo* (rhythm) *de bulería*,⁴⁴ and suddenly, little by little, or abruptly, people start joining the guitar player by clapping, then the *cajón*, then the singing, then chorusing a couple of verses. People call out, they become

excited. Cries of *Olé* are over the place, someone sings, someone else toasts (there is always wine and food). The performance begins what is known as *jaleo*. The environment shudders, the energy flows through the air, the madness becomes water-being, the effervescence liquid and contagious. Someone starts dancing and performs a *patada por bulería* (what is a quick dance execution), then, out of nowhere, *el duende, los duendes*, begin to appear.

Improvising, for a *baile jondo* dancer, is essential. You must be able to create, in an instant, a whole dance choreography: steps, expressions, *desplantes, zapateados*, and *cierres* (or finales) as if you have practiced that choreography for years. That is the magic of improvisation at flamenco dance. That moment will never be repeated. And even if the audience knows it is a unique performance, what does not cease to surprise them is that the dance looks like a year's training act in how it has been already structured. Improvising is not easy. One must be able to flow.

Through art improvisation I experienced what I was capable of regarding doing in-and-within dance-movement in the *el duende* instant. Only in this kind of trance movement experience did I discover the genuine liberation of myself through dance.

Improvisation becomes the climax of a dance creation at flamenco. It is a back-and-forth spirited atmosphere of communication. Improvisation as *el duende* is a composing and re-composing movement that becomes a way of introspection and self-knowledge (first connection), then a medium of a dialogue with the other, the others, the otherness (second connection)—and finally, a climax of flowing improvisation as an inner-outer force. To improvise is the most important way of learning, of discovering, and of encountering the magic and enchanted existence of *el duende*.

Closure: Sharing an Intimate Duende-Instant

The dancer is expecting the magic to arrive. It is like running in the dark. It is a ritual preparation. The tunnel, birth canal, it is time to start.

It is a quiet night in the city, the *bailaora* leaves the quarters, and the moon wanes. Sometimes you have to be a risk taker. Everything is packed in the duffle bag— years of practice, pain, suffering, blood and glory. Bandages. Bleeding blisters. Emotional tattoos.

Open wounds. Miracle lotions, infallible Chinese remedies. All is in the waiting room: make-up, earrings, flowers, instruments, the *lunares* dress, the *bata de cola*, the *mantón de seda*, the leotards and the *pericones*, the tights next to the shoes and the lingering in the dark. Underneath all, in a parallel dimension but in the same one, hidden deep inside, there is a little playful fellow waiting like a desert seed for water—cautious, reserved, but eager to come out and play. It waits for the wizard dancer, a wicked rhythm, conjuring steps.

The doors open as usual, a quarter after nine spotlights turn on, tables are ready and the *tablado* is clean, yet there are traces of sweat. Patrons come in as expected, fifty or sixty people, locals mixed with tourists. Radiant fragrances of spices, *paella* and *tapas*, *jamón serrano*, beer and wine float from the kitchen. The air is warm—flushed rosy cheeks, wine as perfume, laughter, ever louder volume. People encounter each other and movement is all around.

One hour to midnight. The perfect stage. The tuning of the guitar; we are all tuning in; a minor chord is played. The *rasgeo*, the beating *cajón*, the *palmas* (clapping), a voice, the *cante jondo* ... I am praying for the intangible to arrive. Everything begins. The spark plug is firing, building the moment slowly. The percussion exudes a continuous beat, the *cajón*, the strings vibrate and the sharp singing poetry cuts me inside. The air connects the audience, as everyone is in communion with the same breath. All is breathing. I slowly walk onto the scene; I raise a blooming hand, my pupils are dilated, my pores open: I am there. The dress flies, my feet stomp, my thoughts are gone and my soul awakened—improvisation begins. Time and space disappear. I can only be; all is absent yet present, forgotten but remembered. The last chord is evoked, the spell, my essence is prepared. I have received the first connection and I want the second one. I look to the fourth wall as a mirror on the bar. I am becoming-you; I am the audience. First *remate*. Rhythm leading the movement, *el duende* just arrived. Like a character from the twilight zone and therefore having escaped the rules of nature and time—there is my precious *duende*, bringing joy, sentient suffering, bitter freedom. And also sweat, I am absolutely free of being. I scream. I have a voice. I am. I am-in-and-within. God as Universe smiles. Everything is accomplished: the two *liaisons* are done, now is time for *duende*-flow. Endless movement.

Perfect equation. Me at one space-time point and the other: time-space, audience, musicians, rhythm, silence, noise, music, and the Earth rotating on her axis. Connecting, flowing—everything is dancing in-and-within *el duende*. Magic is present. Miracles exist in an ordinary land. I am this instant. *Do not blink and hold your breath*. Then a *pirouette*, a *patada*, a *desplante*, a tear, a dewdrop of sweat and a final *remate*. The Magic is gone. *Duende* time is gone.⁴⁵

-
- ¹ The word Flamenco has different approaches. Flamenco “comes from the gypsy jargon of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Here it means pretentious, flashy, flamboyant [...]. The word flamenco was first used by gypsies to identify gypsy traits and later on to identify their songs and dances” Cathy Serrano and Carmen Elgorriaga, *Flamenco, Body and Soul*, (Fresno: California State University: 1990), 29-30.
 - ² Allison Upshaw, “My Body Knows Things: This Black Woman’s Storied Theory in Performative Autoethnography” in *Doing Autoethnography* (Rotterdam: Sense, 2017), 55-66.
 - ³ Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams and Carolyn Ellis, eds., *Handbook of Autoethnography* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 10.
 - ⁴ Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, *Una invitación a la sociología reflexiva* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2005).
 - ⁵ Leon Anderson and Bonnie Glass-Coffin, “I Learn by Going” in *Handbook of Autoethnography* (Ibíd.), 76.
 - ⁶ I return to the idea of *flow* of Thomas Turino with his takes of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (recognized author for developing the concept of flow in psychology). See Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life. The politics of participation* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008).
 - ⁷ “Andalusian pronunciation of *tablado*, or stage, refers to flamenco clubs where patrons can eat, drink, and see a show,” see Meira K, Goldberg, Ninotchka D. Bennahum and Michelle Heffner Hayes, *Flamenco on the Global Stage. Historical Critical and Theoretical perspectives* (North Carolina: Macfarland, 2015), 296.
 - ⁸ Usually is an end at flamenco dance that is generally made with different sequences of short *zapateados*. Is used to make an emphasis in an ending of a musical phrase or to make a final ending.
 - ⁹ Federico García Lorca and Norman Thomas Di Giovanni. *In Search of Duende* (New Work: New Directions, 1998), ix).
 - ¹⁰ Ibid.
 - ¹¹ Federico García Lorca, *Juego y teoría del duende* (Biblioteca Universal, 2003). Available online at: <http://biblioteca.org.ar/libros/1888.pdf>

-
- 12 “The concrete otherness—and even the abstract form drawn from it—has an epistemological function and also an ontico-ontological relevance. We have no reason to deny the dense reality of the conscious machinery in ourselves. From the metaphysical point of view, the “other” with its kinds and its multiform causality is both the starting point and the terminal one of any true enquiry on person,” Emmanuel Levinas, *The Self and the Other. The Irreducible Element in Man. Part I. The Crises of Man*, (Holland: Springer, 1977), 109.
- 13 Raphael López-Pedraza, “Reflections on the Duende” in *Cultural Anxiety* (1990), 55-78. Available online at: <http://www.jungatlanta.com/articles/Duende.pdf>
- 14 Eloisa Mogedano Tejero, “Acercamiento antropológico al duende” [Anthropological approach to *el duende*], in *Anales de la Fundación Joaquín Costa*, No. 26 (2009), 73-94.
- 15 Serrano and Elgorriaga, x.
- 16 See, Timothy J. Mitchell, “Bullfighting: The Ritual Origin of Scholarly Myths,” in *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 99, No. 394 (October – December, 1984), 394-414.
- 17 Christopher Maurer, “Preface” in *In Search of duende* (New York: New Directions, Bibelot, 1998), ix.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Javier Francisco Mora Contreras, “Las raíces del duende. Lo trágico y lo sublime en el cante jondo” [The roots of the goblin. The tragic and the sublime in cante jondo], *Doctoral Dissertation* (Ohio: Ohio State University, 2008).
- 20 Mogedano Tejero, 91.
- 21 Michelle Heffner Hayes, *Flamenco. Conflicting Histories of the Dance* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2009), 162.
- 22 Donn E. Pohren, *The Art of Flamenco*, (Westport: Bold Strummer, 2005), 64.
- 23 Serrano and Elgorriaga, 56.
- 24 “*Cante jondo*, a plastic expression of music and poetry, springs from the mysterious creative instinct and artistic genius of the *andaluz* in a spiritual, almost frenzied, lament, uttering his sacred and pagan culture. For in *cante jondo* we find synthesized the racial distinction, the elegance, the sadness, the frustration, the dreams, the loves, and the individualism of the *andaluz*, who signs in a lament that throbs with a passion for life and a spiritual union with death,” F. Herrera y Sánchez “Cante Jondo: The Soul of Andalusia”, in *Hispania*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (February, 1953), 88-90.
- 25 “The *jaleo* is a necessary and intricate component of flamenco. It usually serves as an accompaniment and encouragement for flamenco’s other components, but I have also heard *cuadros* perform the *jaleo* very effectively as a solo number. The *jaleo* is basically made up of hand-clapping and shouts of encouragement, and can also be supplemented by finger-snapping and rhythmical punctuations with the feed (from a sitting position),” Pohren, 126.
- 26 “The *juergas* are spontaneous little feasts that attract the interest and participation of people who happen to be around and are not officially scheduled. They can last from

-
- a few hours to entire days, or, as the informants said, as long as there is wine. The question of who takes part in a *juerga* and how, is very crucial for the performance of difference,” Maria Papapavlou, “City as a Stage: Flamenco in Andalusian Culture,” *Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Europe*, Vol. 3, Issue, 2 (September, 2003), 21.
- 27 Claus Schreiner, *Dance and Music from Andalusia*, (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1990), 94.
- 28 Maybe because of his strange nature, people tend to recognize it as an external force, or because *el duende* has been thought as an otherness we just tend to repeat this impression. But, as I say, *el duende* is at the same time an internal and an external force.
- 29 Definitely is a different way of self-control, one in which the mind (commanding thoughts) has nothing to do with dance.
- 30 Xavier Zubiri, *Inteligencia sentiente. Inteligencia y realidad* (Madrid: Alianza, 1980).
- 31 Lynne Anne Blom and L. Tarin Chaplin, *The Moment of Movement. Dance Improvisation* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1988), 22.
- 32 Thomas Bien and Beverly Bien, *Finding the Center Within: The Healing Way of Mindfulness Meditation* (New Jersey: Wiley, 2003), 8.
- 33 Felice Wolfzahn [interview] in Agnes Benoit, *Nouvelle de 32/33 Danse. On the Edge/Creatures de L'imprevu* (Brussels: Contredanse, 1997), 127.
- 34 Blom and Chaplin.
- 35 “Movement is one with the world, not body/world, but body-worlding. We move not to populate space, not to extend it or to embody it, but to create it,” Erin Manning, *Relationescapes. Movement, Art, Philosophy* (London: MIT, 2009), 13.
- 36 Francis Sparshott, *Off the Ground. First Steps to a Philosophical Consideration of the Dance*, (New Jersey: Princeton University, 1988), 240.
- 37 In the works of the Swedish psychologist Anders Ericsson and his collaborators performed during 1996, 2006 and 2009, it has been proven that the acquisition of skills that allow the transition from novice to expert in various artistic sports and scientific professions, such as being a doctor, skier, musician, visual artist or chess player at national or world championships levels requires spending large number of hours in practice; something that has been called *theory of expertise*. In this sense, Carla A. Ureña (2004) conducted an investigation into the acquisition of skills in dancers in which it is concluded that to reach the level of expert in classical dance requires at least ten years of training and about 8,239 hours of practice. See Carla A. Ureña “Skill Acquisition in Ballet Dancers: The Relationship between Deliberate Practice and Expertise,” *Doctoral Dissertation* (Florida: Florida State University, 2004).
- 38 Peter Sloterdijk, *Esperas I* (Madrid: Siruela, 2003), 80.
- 39 Chen, 8.
- 40 Steven Connors, *The Matter of Air. Science and Art of the Ethereal* (Wiltshire: Reaktion, 2010), 30.
- 41 This state of mind-trance at flamenco art, since this kind of musical structure is made

of repetitive rhythmic patterns, in which the use of the *cajón*, or even the clapping (*el palmeo*) of the dancers stands out. Then, dancing these rhythm patterns become more important than the harmonies or melodies that are part of the music. Hence, flamenco music promotes and facilitates reaching this state of mind-trance. Besides, “research has demonstrated that the human cognitive system allocates attention most efficiently to a stimulus that occurs in synchrony with an established rhythm background,” Sabrina Trapp, Ondrej Havlicek, Annett Schirmer, and Peter E. Keller, “When the Rhythm Disappears and the Mind Keeps Dancing: Sustained Effects of Attentional Entrainment,” in *Psychological Research* (2018), 1-7.

⁴² Manning and Massumi, 4.

⁴³ Katia Savrami “A Duet Between Science and Art: Neural Correlates of Dance Improvisation,” in *Research in Dance Education*, 18 no. 3 (2017): 273.

⁴⁴ The *bulería* is a *palo* flamenco that it is composed of twelve measures; the pace is fast. Its time, as almost all flamenco *palos*, is characterized by having different accents. *Bulería* is a typical and essential dance at the *juergas*. People used to make a semi-circle and then start to dance one by one by *patadas* of *bulería*.

⁴⁵ This section, titled “Closure: Sharing an Intimate *Duende-Instant*,” was written in collaborative reflection with Luis M. Pérez