

# **A weaving of worlds: Relational practices in flamenco and their contributions towards designing the pluriverse**

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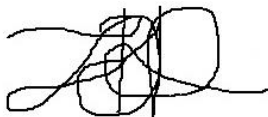
December 2020

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Julia Ruzyczka de Rosenwerth

9 December 2020

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## Introduction

This paper is concerned with relationality and takes reference from the writings of Arturo Escobar, in his book *Designs for the pluriverse: Radical interdependence, autonomy and the making of worlds* (2018), to outline a theoretical framework. The research asks how flamenco – an interdisciplinary performance custom originating in the region of Andalucía in the south of Spain in the eighteenth century (Manuel, 1989), which has risen to international popularity – engages in practices of relationality. By choosing to focus on the relationships that emerge between flamenco performers (singers, guitarists and dancers) in rehearsal and performance contexts, the paper argues that flamenco is a rich and complex example of a relational practice that can contribute to imagining the pluriverse. This argument makes possible a critical discussion around what contributions (possibilities, opportunities and tools) flamenco can offer for an expansion of knowledge around relationality.

Section One will critically establish an understanding of relationality, with reference to the writings of Escobar (2018) and will argue for its necessity in an era of hyper-modernist neoliberalism and capitalist exploitation. Key concepts in this paper will be introduced here, in order to be expanded upon in later sections. Section Two aims to put key relational practices in flamenco into conversation with Escobar's theories. It begins by outlining relational practices between singers, guitarists and dancers in flamenco and then weaves these insights back into Escobar's theories, creating a layered discussion around how flamenco practice can expand Escobar's theories. To aid in the discussion, the following will be referenced: (i) the writings of flamencologists (Holden, 2012; Manuel, 1989 & 2010; and Washabaugh, 1997); (ii) knowledge from flamenco teachers who have greatly influenced my understanding of the form, including an interview with my primary flamenco teacher, Ché Adams, who is the artistic director of *Tierra Flamenca* in Cape

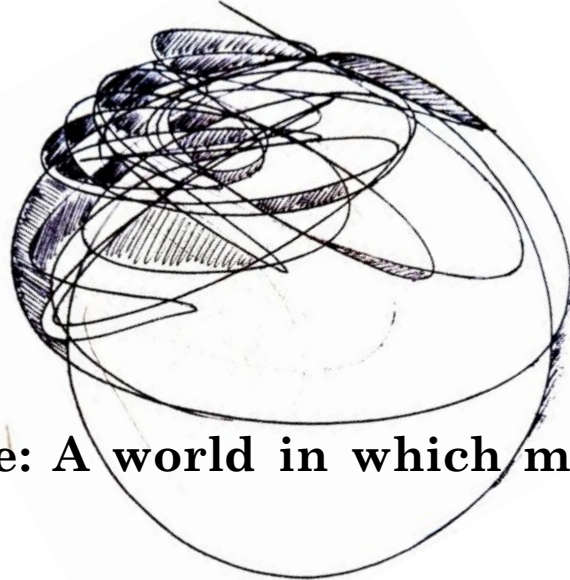
Town (personal communications, 9 November 2020) and the writings of Rosana Maya (2014); and (iii) my personal experiences over eleven years of practicing flamenco.<sup>1</sup>

Section Three, the final section of the paper, discusses how Escobar's theories and key insights from relational practices in flamenco can collide in action by referring to this paper's adjoining practical research entitled *In the outside inside space (IOIS)* (2020). *IOIS* is a long-distance, multimedia web project created by myself in collaboration with Thulani Chauke (SA) and Josman P# (ES)<sup>2</sup>. While *IOIS* does not engage in the aesthetics of flamenco, it works with core ideas concerning relational practices in flamenco and allows these insights to inform its creation. In this process, key concepts in Escobar's writings are thrown into sharp relief, allowing opportunities to navigate their complexity with a richness that could not have been accessed simply by reading his theory. I incorporate these experiences and insights into the paper to: (i) provide an example of how flamenco can be applied to, or intersect with, fields of knowledge that are not usually associated with the form; and (ii) to discuss what opportunities this alternative approach creates for an expansion of knowledge around relationality.

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that the growth of flamenco to international acclaim has been accompanied by conflicting feelings from various parties because flamenco has a deeply political history (explained in more detail in Section Two). As such, recent conversations around flamenco include 'who can do flamenco/ who has the right to do flamenco' – for e.g. see Chico in van Beenen & van der Noort (2011); Holden (2010) or Bahl (2015). As I am not from a flamenco family/ have no ties to a flamenco lineage and have learned flamenco in South Africa – far removed from Spain in many ways – I lean on the writings of the aforementioned flamencologists whose work is generally accepted in the flamenco world. This provides a reference point for my own observations and experiences and pushes back against the potential of writing in a vacuum. I also incorporate knowledge from my flamenco teachers in South Africa to provide necessary context for my assessments. I do not intend to present an objective understanding of flamenco; this does not exist because flamenco's rise to international popularity is multiplicitous and divergent. Rather, I simply want to situate my understanding within a context that holds my knowledge claims accountable and traceable. To see a genealogy of flamenco in South Africa, please see Holden's formidable research on the subject (2012, especially pp. 128-136).

<sup>2</sup> The line drawings seen at the beginning of each section are my own and have been taken from *In the outside inside space*. They can be seen in the context of the project at <https://juliaderosenwerth.com/outsideinsidespace/>



## Theoretical landscape: A world in which many worlds fit

According to Escobar, we are living in a time of utter crisis in which “we are facing modern problems that no longer have modern solutions” (2018, p. 67). The project of modernity and globalisation – so deeply interconnected with the colonial project<sup>3</sup> – which is built on the foundations of extraction, exploitation and enslavement to serve capitalist ideals, is rapidly destroying earth and everyone in it<sup>4</sup>. Borrowing a term from Law (2011), Escobar refers to the ontology of the current state of the world as the “One World World [OWW]” (Escobar, 2018, p.66). He suggests that “if the crisis is largely caused by the OWW ontology, it follows that addressing the crisis implies transitioning towards the pluriverse” (p.68), which is to say “a world in which many worlds fit” (p. 52). In this we have a chance of building sustainable futures for people, animals and ecosystems alike.

One of Escobar’s (2018) strategies for destabilising the ontology of the OWW is to critically investigate lineages of thought that have contributed to its formation (pp. 80-83) and then present alternative philosophical foundations through which to imagine the pluriverse (pp. 97-104). He attributes the OWW to a lineage of Western European dualism, rationalism and essentialism (p.80) – which posits a “Cartesian view of the world as made up of individuals and things” (p. 85). He robustly explains how these schools of thought construct, contribute to, and uphold ongoing hegemonic dualisms that continue to shape (create and destroy) the modern world (pp. 83-85).

The notion of the OWW signals the predominant idea in the West that we all live within a single world, made up of one underlying reality (one nature) and

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<sup>3</sup> See Escobar (2018); Mbembe (2017); Césaire (1955/2000); Fanon (1952/1986); Wynter (2003) and Kendi (2016).

<sup>4</sup> See Escobar (2018); Santos (2016) and Law (2011).

many cultures. This imperialistic notion supposes the West's ability to arrogate for itself the right to be "the world," and to subject all other worlds to its rules, to diminish them to secondary status or to nonexistence, often figuratively and materially. (Escobar, 2018, p. 86)

In the OWW, traditional, spiritual, embodied and practical knowledges become subject to an "epistemic violence", as referred to by Conquergood (2002, p. 146), where the "...[D]ominant culture neglects, excludes, represses, or simply fails to recognize" (ibid) them. This is what Sousa (2016) refers to as *epistemicide* – the killing off, diminishing, or silencing of the multiplicitous and divergent ways of being in, and knowing the world. According to Escobar, transitioning away from the OWW requires relying on radically different ontologies, worldviews and epistemologies (to that of the OWW), that can more accurately, holistically and caringly encompass the complexity of the world (2018, pp. 67-68). Referencing ontological design practitioners and thinkers (e.g. Manzini, 2015), decolonial (e.g. Mingolo, 2011; Sousa, 2016), feminist (e.g. Haraway 2008; Anzaldúa, 2002) and new-materialist (e.g. Bennett, 2010) thinkers, philosophers and scientists from the Global South (e.g. Maturana and Varela, 1980) and political movements emanating especially from Latin America (e.g. Zapatista of Chiapas) – to name just a few – Escobar proposes a relational world view that rests on fundamental concepts of interdependence and mutual constitution as a means to transition to the pluriverse.

Relationality derives from nondualist ontologies (Escobar, 2018, p. 96) and is framed as a radical interdependence of things that themselves do not exist prior to their network of interactions. In this view, things are made, and continually re-made, through their ever-changing relationships. Escobar discusses the biological and philosophical work of Maturana and Varela (1980) whose concept, *autopoiesis*, is useful in clarifying what is meant by relationality. According to Maturana and Varela, an autopoietic system is:

A network of processes of production (transformation and destruction) that produces the components which: (i) through their interactions and transformations continuously regenerate and realize the network of processes (relations) that produced them; and (ii) constitute it (the machine) as a concrete unity in the space in which they (the components) exist by specifying the topological domain of its realization as such a network. (1980, p.79)

Various “interactions and transformations” (ibid) between components produce and “regenerate” (ibid) the system that simultaneously produces them. This surfaces in Escobar’s writing as a form of maxim:

Nothing preexists [*sic*] the relations that constitute it. In these ontologies, life is interrelation and interdependence through and through, always and from the beginning. (2018, p. 101, addition mine)

What relationality implies, on a metaphysical level, is that nothing possesses an essential substance, or foundational quality that can serve to identify it objectively, or individually, outside of its context. It is only by means of a thing’s relationship(s) to its context that it exists and develops specific characteristics at all – whether it be a rock, an animal, a human, thunder and so on. As such, interdependence is necessary for the continuation of the world, and consequently, this world is in constant flux. Because things are continuously constituting one another through their interactions, as in autopoiesis, the idea of singularity; of a static unchanging unity of self/system/ecology/world that is implied by the OWW ontology is hard to encompass. The words of science fiction author Octavia E. Butler come to mind:

All that you touch, you Change. All that you Change Changes you. The only lasting truth is Change. God is Change. (1993)

This axiom is found in *The First Book of the Living in Parable of the Sower* (1993) and forms part of a new religion that the main character, Lauren Oya Olamina, is creating, called *Earthseed*. *Earthseed*’s depiction of a universe in a constant state of becoming speaks to the nature of unending change, adaptation and reformation that Maturana and Varela’s concept of autopoiesis encompasses.

Operating from a premise that everything is mutually constitutive creates the opportunity to rethink the concept of agency, moving away from its historically damaging anthropocentric/ human-centred conception and towards a “vibrant materiality” of all things (Bennett 2010 in Escobar, 2018, p. 132). This is referred to by Escobar as *distributed agency*, a concept “which suggests that agency is not the result of discrete actions by single subjects acting intentionally but largely the effect of complex heterogeneous networks of humans and nonhumans” (2018, p. 125). A flourishing of difference is made possible through this understanding of distributed agency where these heterogenous networks can be imagined as patchwork of divergent worlds (Escobar, 2018,

p.86). This is what Escobar refers to as the *pluriverse*: worlds-within-worlds, or a world in which many worlds fit (2018, p.52). The pluriverse is a political ontology of difference that can contain the multiple worlds that nevertheless already exists in the actual world. It is “about an ethical and political practice of alterity that involves a deep concern for social justice, the radical equality of all beings, and nonhierarchy” (Escobar, 2018, p. xvi). An important question here is how these relational onto-epistemologies can, and are, built, and how they can most effectively unsettle dualisms.

According to Escobar, because one of the dualisms, especially in academia, exists between theory and practice, building theory around relationality that aims to unsettle these dualisms requires reference to practices of relationality that themselves enact “other worlds” (2018, p. 99). He says that the “...the practice of transformation really takes place in the process of enacting other worlds/practices—that is, in changing radically the ways in which we encounter things and people, not just theorizing about such practice approaches” (2018, p. 99). Gherardi (2008), who can be read within a lineage of Haraway’s feminist work on “situated knowledges” (1988), usefully explains how practice can be understood in terms of knowledge-creation:

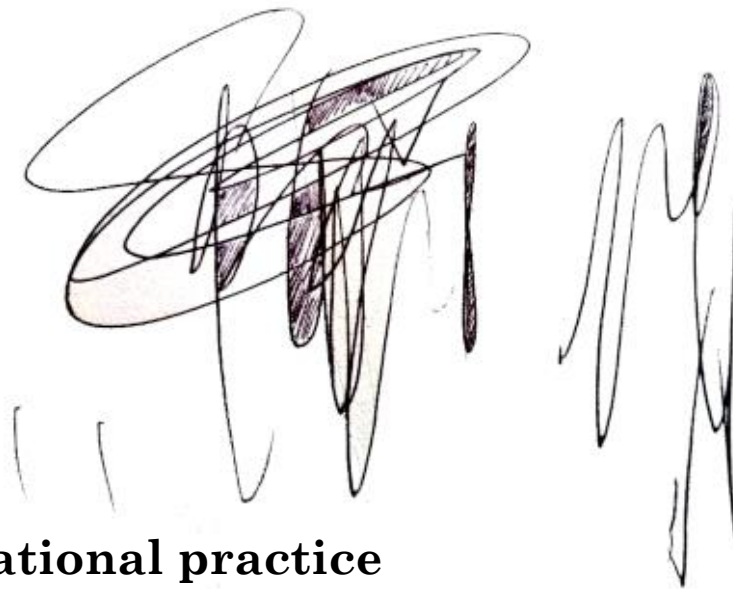
Situated practices are both pre-reflexive (depending on unstated assumptions and shared knowledge for the mutual achievement of sense) and reflexively constitutive of the situated members’ contexts from which they arise. The term ‘practice’ is a *topos* that connects ‘knowing’ with ‘doing’. It conveys the image of materiality, of fabrication, of handiwork, of the craftsman’s skill. Knowledge consequently does not arise from scientific ‘discoveries’; rather, it is fabricated by situated practices of knowledge production and reproduction using the technologies of representation and mobilization (Gherardi, 2008, p. 517).

Gherardi emphasises that employing practice in the process of knowledge creation complicates scientific objectivity and the binary between theory and practice because situated practices “connect knowing with doing” through the use of “representation and mobilization” (ibid). What is more, incorporating practices into knowledge-creation calls the contextual nature of knowledge into question strongly, through the necessary embodiment that action (in practice) requires. This provides insight into understanding how we can be held accountable to our own knowledge-claims. As she says, looking to the context in which one is situated gives much information about what one believes to be



true. This indicates a move away from objective, scientific rationalism as the basis of knowledge-creation, which is what Escobar critiques in the OWW ontology.

While Escobar approaches incorporation of practice into theory through reference to political movements in Latin America to build his theories around relationality (2018), I will be referring to key practices in flamenco performance to build on this theory and aim to create a continuum of “being~doing~knowing” (Escobar, 2018, p. 101). The next section of the paper presents this critical discussion.



## Flamenco: A relational practice

In this section of the paper I aim to critically discuss flamenco and present it as a strong example of a communal performance practice that engages in pluriversal ontologies. With a focus on the nature of the relationships that emerge between performers (singers, guitarists and dancers) in flamenco performance contexts, I argue that flamenco is a deeply relational art form that holds much value in its potential to contribute to expanding knowledge around the pluriverse. To make this argument, I begin by outlining relational practices between singers, guitarists and dancers in flamenco and then weave these insights back into the key concepts, put forward by Escobar, that have been introduced in Section One.

Before moving to an in-depth discussion about specific relational practices in flamenco, it is worth explaining why flamenco is suitably positioned to intersect with Escobar's theories around the pluriverse. While flamenco originated in Spain, a European country, it is considered a marginal artform that expresses deep struggle. The people to whom its origins are attributed include Roma, Muslim, Jewish and local, often working class Andalucían peoples, who were historically subjugated under the Spanish Catholic Christian rule (Manuel, 1989). The late flamenco guitarist, Moraíto Chico's, words about flamenco *cante* (song) reflect this history:

Sometimes it hurts, but that pain also gladdens your soul. Sometimes your soul needs to be hurt. Not everything has to be joy. Pain makes you strong. And as Tía Anica 'La Piriñaca' said: "When I sing, my mouth tastes of blood." Perhaps it is true that us *gitanos*... because of our suffering through the ages... use our *cante*, our singing to scream out our feelings (Chico in van Beenen & van de Noort, 2011).

Flamenco is the result of a bringing together of different peoples and their worlds in response and resistance to the imposing Christian regime in Spain and can thus be considered a subaltern practice that is also foundationally pluriversal in its diverse origins. With reference to Santos (2016), Escobar writes that:

*[T]he understanding of the world is much broader than the Western understanding of the world. This means that the transformation of the world, and the civilizational transitions adumbrated by many indigenous, peasant, and Afrodescendant activists, might happen along pathways that might be unthinkable from the perspective of Eurocentric theories (Escobar, 2018, p.68).*

Albeit not originating in the Global South, I argue that flamenco is one such example of a pluriversal practice that is “unthinkable from the perspective of Eurocentric theories” (ibid) and thus has the potential to radically shift perspectives away from the OWW. When looking into some of the specificities of the form, there are pluriversal structures on various levels, which include, but are not limited to, its inherent interdisciplinarity, communality, the way the performers explore themselves in relation to each other, and the song-structures, or *palos* that they perform in. These elements will be the focus of the discussion going forward.

Flamenco is a performance form that typically includes at least one singer, one guitarist and one dancer. While it is fundamentally interdisciplinary, it is musically-oriented as it developed from *el cante* (the song), which is attributed to the form’s origin (Maya, 2014, p. 39; Manuel, 2010, p. 107). As such, when the elements of guitar and dance emerged in flamenco, they emerged in relation to *el cante*. What this has resulted in, at least from my experience of flamenco dance, is a particular conception of movement from a musical perspective: besides the percussive sounds dancers make with the heeled shoes they wear (that have nails knocked into the toe and heel), they also build strong awareness around their movements’ sound, rhythm, phrasing, tone and force/ energy in order to be in conversation with the music of the singer and guitarist.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> My understanding of the musicality of flamenco dance deepened when I attended a course with Domingo Ortega, of the Ortega flamenco family, in Johannesburg, 2018. He was invited by South African flamenco society, Alianza Flamenca, and worked with South African flamenco guitarist Demi Fernandez to create the choreography and music for our course. They worked in real-time to weave the dance and music together, giving us an opportunity to see their conversation unfold. This became part of the course’s teachings.

*Palos* or song-groups exist in flamenco that serve to provide a basis for performances (Manuel, 2010, p. 107). Each *palo* has a certain *compás* (a beat-cycle with specific accents) and a strong mood: *jondo* (deep song), *intermedio* (intermediate song) and *chico* (light song) (Pohren, 2005, p. 57 in Holden, 2012, p.6). Within these various moods, each *palo* usually has a recognisable melody that differentiates it from another *palo* in that mood. This recognisable melody, in music, translates to recognisable steps in the dance that are usually associated with that particular *palo*, or in the case of the singer, familiar lyrics, recognisable vocal cadences and so on. All these elements come together to form the particular emotion/ feeling-quality of each *palo* – of which there are more than fifty. For example, one of the most fundamental *palos* is the *Soleares* (often shortened to *Soleá*). It is *jondo*, with a *compás* of 12 beats and accents on 12, 3, 6, 8 and 10. With the root of the word *Soleares* being *soledad*, which means solitude, this *palo* has a longing that moves between lament and respite. The *Soleá* does not reach the depths to which a *palo* like the *Siguiriyas* (*jondo*, with a 5-beat *compás*) does, which is often described as the deepest and most sorrowful of the *palos*: an expression of deep pain (Maya, 2014).

What is perhaps most interesting about flamenco is the way the *palo*'s characteristics and emotional quality is approached, especially in live performance contexts. Manuel explains that *palos* can be better understood as “flexible schematic outlines” (2010, p. 108); a term I will adopt in this paper. Performers employ the *palo*'s overall structure and mood as the basis for a particular composition – establishing a mutual understanding of what ‘world’ they are working in – but then work within that structure to suit their needs in rehearsal and live performance. In this way, the *palo* is better thought of as a flexible schematic outline, rather than a rigid structure that dictates a performance. As Manuel (2010) writes:

[One] might be tempted, if only for sheer convenience, to refer to a four-minute rendering of, say, a *soleá*, as a “song,” especially when it appears on a CD with a title... [I]t might be more appropriate, in English, to refer to a typical flamenco rendering of a *cante* as a “set”... [A] singer, rather than announcing “Voy a cantar una canción por bulerías [a *palo*]”—“I’ll sing a song in bulerías”—will say “Voy a cantar por bulerías,” which means, “I’ll sing in bulerías,” and implicitly means, “I’ll sing a few coplas, in a few different estilos [styles], in bulerías... Similarly, instead of saying, “She sang two tangos [another *palo*]” (“Ella cantó dos tangos”), one might more properly say, “Ella cantó por tangos

dos veces” or “ella cantó dos letras [verses] por tangos”—“She sang twice in tangos.” (Manuel, 2010, p.109, additions mine).

The use of the word ‘in’, with reference to a *palo*, as in “she sang twice in tangos” (ibid) indicates not that that *palo* is being reproduced, but rather that the singer is entering that song structure and is placing themself within and in relation to it. One could think of a *palo* as a world, in the context Escobar’s writings (2018). It is an ‘environment’, if you will, that is constituted by various elements, such as mood, “...poetic form, characteristic vocal melodies, in some cases metrical scheme, called *compás* (with distinctive internal accents), and guitar tonalities and conventional accompaniment patterns” (Manuel, 2010, p. 107) as well as the particular marking steps and footwork combinations in the dance.

Adams (personal communications, 9 November, 2020) corroborates this idea and deepens the concept. She says that when working with a singer and a guitarist, choosing the *palo* allows them all to understand the emotional landscape they’re working in. Here Adams refers to the mood qualities of the *palos*: *jondo*, *medio*, *chico*. For example, if they chose to perform in the *palo* of a *Soleá*, which is *jondo*, the emotional environment of the work is on the deeper side of the scale. Movements become heavier and slower; the song becomes more aching, more piercing, *compás* pulsing and steady. Thus, despite the specific technical elements of the *palo* they work with for the creation process and performance, the overwhelming experience and language surrounding that *palo* is mood-oriented/emotional, not technical (Adams, personal communications, 9 November 2020). Thus, the kind of structural support the *palo* offers is experienced more as a landscape/ topology/ palette to work within, and less like a set of instructions.

Creating a performance involves making decisions based on which *palo(s)* to work in, as well as the overall outline of the performance for each *palo*. This outline indicates different sections that are usually dedicated to the various performers. For example, *letras* (verses) are where the singer takes up space and where the dancer and guitarist take supportive roles in adding to/ heightening the singer in these moments (Washabaugh, 1997, p. 52). The *falseta* is the guitarist’s moment to take space, where their playing becomes more intricate and where the singer and dancer offer support and embellishment (ibid). Finally, the *escobilla* (footwork section) is where the dancer becomes the focus, and here the guitarist and singer give way to support the dancer. Supportive roles take many forms, including playing, singing or dancing more simply, or more quietly, or becoming

completely silent, or sitting down. Other forms of support include the use of *palmas* (handclapping to keep time) or *jaleos* (verbal calls of encouragement).

These performance customs can be understood through the concept of distributed agency (Escobar, 2018, p. 125), but importantly, while there is shifting agency and interdependence in flamenco, as described above, it would be naïve to claim that this agency is horizontal/evenly distributed at all times. From my experience, there are various and particular hierarchies that exist flamenco, and while an in-depth discussion of this is outside the scope of this paper, it is simply worth noting that this distribution of agency leans toward shifting levels of power in the composition and does not detract from the necessary interdependence between singers, dancers and guitarists that is required for the establishment of performances.

As Adams explains, during rehearsals, the macro sections (e.g. *letra*, *falseta*, *escobilla*) are what the performers agree will be included in the performance, which provide a basic outline that they can all follow (personal communications, 9 November, 2020). For example, a decision might be made to work in the *palo* of an *Alegrías* (12 *compás* rhythm in a *chico* mood with a particularly joyous energy). They might choose to begin with an *entrada* (entrance), move to a *letra*, then to a *falseta*, then to an *escobilla* and end off with a *bulerías*<sup>6</sup> together. Further, the macro sections depend heavily on who is performing. For example, if just a singer and a guitarist are performing, there may be extended verses for the singer to express themselves, as well as extended *falsetas*, or moments of extended rhythmical and melodic complexity, for the guitarist. In this case there would be no *escobilla* as there is no dancer. The length of these macro sections is flexible, depending on the material the performers include as a group (which changes often, as will be discussed in following paragraphs). As such, macro sections are better thought of as landmarks that all the performers can use to keep track of the direction of the performance as it grows and changes.

In sum, all the elements of a *palo*, as well as the consideration of which kinds of performers are actually performing (singers, guitarists and/or dancers) become the elements that comprise the flexible schematic outline that the performers enter into and work with for their performance. This structure acts as a kind of basket that holds the

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<sup>6</sup> When a *bulerías* is performed at the end of an *Alegrías*, it takes the form of a celebratory, high-energy ‘outro’ that usually includes all the performers singing and dancing together. This differs from the *palo Bulerías* which, while still the most communal of the flamenco *palos*, is much longer and usually features a number of singers, guitarists and dancers who all take turns to perform *letras*.

composition together and provides a reference point to come back to, or to remain connected through – the “backbone” of the performance (Adams, personal communications, 9 November, 2020). What becomes clear with flamenco is that the performers find their agency and ability to adapt to each other through this schematic outline and in relation to it. As Adams says, “there are certain marks we have to hit, but the time at which we hit those marks will be ever-changing depending on what arises in the performance...” (ibid). This is where the root of the flexibility in flamenco performance is located and is where the most give-and-take and communication occurs. Maya’s words come to mind strongly: “You weave your pattern on an embroidered floor” (2014, p. 68). The performance’s flexible schematic outline can be seen as “the embroidered floor” and “your pattern” can be seen as each performer’s individual engagement with the performance as a whole, which in turn continues to weave the embroidered floor.

The flexibility and changes within the given structures in flamenco manifest in a variety of ways in live performance contexts. Adams explains that, on the one hand, things change for very practical reasons:

I may realise that I’m going too fast and I may have to slow something down. I may realise that I’m going too [slowly] and that I need to end a section sooner... and the musicians will then follow that. The singer becomes extremely inspired... and she decides to sing her *letra* over five or six more *compás*; we have to then follow that and go with that. The guitarist plays a different *falseta*; I will have to change my movement in order to match that. And of course, mistakes are made... So, we’ve decided on our structure: a *letra*, then a *falseta* and then *escobilla*. You end your *letra* and the singer starts singing again [going into a second *letra*] when she wasn’t supposed to. Or the guitarist plays the *escobilla* section [instead of the *falseta*], and then you have to, in that moment, either communicate that... “okay, I’m going to go with you”, or you have to communicate to try to get things back to where you want them to be in a way that all the players can understand. And to me that’s the really exciting part. (Adams, personal communications, 9 November, 2020)

In these instances, the flexible schematic outline provides a basic point of reference to come back to which allows the differences between performers to flourish. Having a series of landmarks that that can be easily identified by everyone creates the opportunity for each performer to make changes (or mistakes) in a low-stakes environment where cohesion

can, fairly easily, be re-attained. For instance, in Adams' example, when the singer continues singing after the *letra* was supposed to have ended, there are only two strong options which can be communicated and responded to quickly between performers: go with the singer and add movements to create a second, shorter *letra*, and then continue with the pre-planned structure, or immediately find a transition to move to the *falseta* – as per the original plan. Without the structural backbone of the performance, there would be a myriad of options available, making it significantly more difficult to agree, in the moment, as a group, on the direction going forward.

Beyond the practical elements that can alter the structure of the performance, Adams explains that the aliveness of the form and the ongoing and anticipated changes in the work reside most importantly in the artists' ability to draw inspiration from one another:

The more I give (as a dancer) ... the more feeling I put into my movements... or if I put a particular kind of feeling into my movements, the guitarist has to be there because I'm dancing to his music. I'm putting into movement what his sounds sound like... and the same with the singer. So, in that way I think we're very literally trying to match each other. I'm trying to match the guitar's feeling and the singer's feeling... [The guitarist] may change something that may sound even more exciting or interesting or inspiring or may take the emotion in a slightly different direction and then I'll be like, "Ooh! I want to follow that now!" It may not have been part of my plan, but that's where I'm going to allow it to take me. I think we are all constantly doing that. It's like when you're talking about something and someone says something that comes from a totally different angle... it allows you to think about that [topic] in a different way to what you were experiencing prior to that external thought. That's what we can give each other [as performers]; new little perspectives along the way... new little interpretations along the way (Adams, personal communications, 9 November, 2020, additions mine).

While large changes in structure are not necessarily intended to occur (but often do), most of the flexibility is located between the landmarks that demarcate zones of exploration (i.e. the *letra*, the *falseta*, the *escobilla*). In each there are certain 'kinds of things' that can be done. For instance, in the *letras* the singer is taking space and the dancer and guitarist are supporting through their movements and sounds. For the dancer in these sections, the movements are larger, more focused on the torso and arms; only occasionally punctuating



the composition with footwork. This functions both to give space to the singer (by not overpowering them with loud, incongruous footwork) and to allow the dancer to respond to the feeling quality, intonations, rises and falls and utterances of the singer because the focus on the torso and overall body-movement gives the dancer the opportunity to feed into the fluidity of the singer's voice (whose verses weave over and through the *compás*) in ways that footwork cannot.

What this environment creates is a tangible give-and-take in which each performer needs to have the self-confidence and agency to enact their desires, or express their feelings, and be able to respond to the expressions of the other performers. There is a giving and a listening that takes place which ends up being conversational in form. An important question to consider here is how this negotiation takes place, or what practical technologies and communication strategies are used by the performers, considering the complexity and multiplicity of options that are available.

In flamenco there are various communications strategies that allow respective performers to understand each other and to help predict what the other will do, so that each can adapt to the other's particular navigation of the existing structure. As Holden writes:

By using a protocol of *llamadas* or calls understood by all three participants [singer, dancer, guitarist], implemented by accentuation of foot beats and stopping on significant counts, the dancer is able to communicate effectively with both the *cantaor* [singer] and the guitarist as to when a section may start or end. The *cantaor* would sing an introduction, at the end of which the dancer might execute his or her *entrada*, ending with a *llamada*, indicating to the *cantaor* and the guitarist that they may start the first *letra*. The length of sung verses is dictated by the *cantaor*: the dancer waits to hear the descent of the singer's voice to close the *letra*, either with the *cantaor*, or one *compás* after the *letra* has ended (2012, p. 7, additions mine).

Adams deepens this conversation by explaining that beyond these flamenco traditions (Holden, 2012, p.7), the communication strongly depends on the relationships the performers build together over time – in and out of the rehearsal studio and performance space. Adams explains that she knows the musicians she works with so well that when one of them does a specific body movement, she is able to understand the direction they want to go in (personal communications, 9 November, 2020). This level of communication

can only be built over time and thus, the more holistic and stronger the relationship the performers have, the better they become at communicating in the performance context.

Escobar's discussion around autopoiesis (*vis* Maturana and Varela, 1980), outlined in the first section is deeply relevant to the discussion of flamenco as it highlights the necessity of structure in relational systems. Escobar initially flags the discussion as a point of potential concern, especially for poststructuralists who have widely critiqued the oppressive nature of structures (p. 170). Yet, as he states, this is perhaps a case of "poststructuralism deconstructing too much and not reconstructing enough" (*ibid*). In the example of autopoietic systems, if components do not adhere to a basic structure, or network of interactions between components, then they will cease to be what they are (p. 169). This is because the system and the components are mutually constitutive.

Escobar raises two points to support this idea of structure: 1) the key is that these systems are created from within; they are self-creating, or autonomous, and not subject to a series of pre-determined, authoritative structures, and 2) that it is worth critiquing the conception of structures as 'only-imposing' and ask how and when they can be reconceived as supportive systems that move toward coherence and wholeness (2018, pp. 170-171). The discussions around flamenco can speak directly to these two points of Escobar's.

The structures that are present in flamenco have developed in the practice over hundreds of years and, as such, are emergent (albeit over a long period of time). They are created from within. Further, the fact that the structures are loose, flexible schematic outlines, means that they can always be adapted to the ongoing changes in performance and become responsive in themselves. As such, there is an interdependency between structure and the performers within that structure. While not totally mutually constitutive (*i.e.* the performers do not create the structures as they perform them in real-time) they do change those structures in real-time through their participation with them, and with each other.

To Escobar's second point above, flamenco provides the opportunity to re-orient the meaning of structure towards wholeness and cohesion. Flamenco's interdisciplinarity rests strongly on a sense of cohesion, togetherness and wholeness. The *palo's* flexible schematic outline, the macro structure that the performers agree upon, the supportive roles they take to heighten one another's sections and the communication strategies they develop over time all function to create the conditions for the performers to make something together. In expanding on Escobar's point, it is useful to ask what opportunities this environment in flamenco creates.

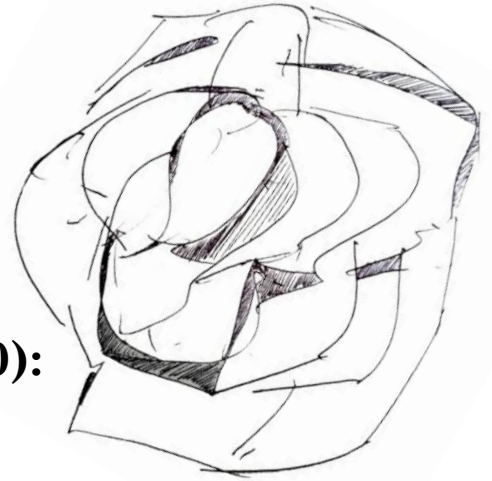
Flamenco's flexible schematic outlines provide fairly particular opportunities that would not be available if those structures were not there. Because the structure is present, the performers can focus more intensely on responding to one another in the moment. This is because they do not need to spend time and energy on building a structure and developing material that would serve to sketch out the basis of their relationship in real-time. Rather they use the structure they have agreed upon, with reference to readily available structural elements present in the evolving flamenco traditions. This provides a unique opportunity to explore the changing states of oneself in relation to others and allows the performers to, energetically, build extremely strong feeling states together. In Adams's opinion, this is the ultimate goal in flamenco – to create the conditions in which the performers can express their inner realities as intensely as they need to (personal communications, 9 November, 2020). Having the support of the other performers in their mutual making-together, with their own, parallel emotional journeys creates the conditions to deeply embody a feeling state.

To conclude this section, flamenco is a complex example of a pluriversal practice of relationality that allows difference to flourish. It brings together worlds of music and dance through a musically-oriented performance form that employs various structures referred to here as flexible schematic outlines (Manuel, 2010). These structures adapt to and hold the performers together so that they can communicate and develop their relationships with themselves, one another, and with the structure itself. Through various macro sections dedicated to singers, guitarists and dancers respectively, each performer has a time in the composition in which to take up space, while the others assume supportive roles that heighten and embellish their work. Thus, there is a distributed, or shifting agency that moves between performers in various degrees throughout the composition. Each performer's uniqueness is not flattened or diluted for the purpose of a 'whole' but rather welcomed as a necessary part of what makes that whole itself. Herein performers have space to navigate their personal worlds in relation to the world of the composition as a whole. Flamenco is thus able to expertly hold and develop difference through its structures.

Further, flamenco is based on a necessary interdependence created both between the performers and between their combined relationship to the flexible schematic outline. This interdependence is sustained through the relationships that the performers build between one another that allow them to effectively communicate and read one another's shifts in desires and energy levels. Interdependence works to create an environment for

the performers to collectively build and explore a feeling state in accordance with the *palos* they have chosen to work within for the performance. As such, the artistry is located most deeply in their ability to self-express and be responsive to the expressions of others.

Finally, flamenco provides opportunities to rethink the concept of structure and how it can be differently perceived as an inherent and necessary part of pluriversal networks. Without the flexible schematic outline, the performers do not have a point of reference from which to relate to one another. As there is a structure to work within, space is created for the performers to delve deeply into their relations with the other performers. In this case, flamenco provides an example of structure that moves toward wholeness, cohesion and care (Escobar, 2018 p.170).



## **In the outside inside space (2020): A case study**

This section discusses the paper's adjoining practical research project *In the outside inside space (IOIS)* (2020) which draws on relational practices in flamenco to inform its making. The aim of discussing *IOIS* is to critically analyse how flamenco's relationality and Escobar's theories can collide, intersect and deepen one another in practice – i.e. in the making of *IOIS*. Including this project in the paper also serves as an example of how key concepts in flamenco can be worked with to investigate and experience relationality without necessarily having to *do* flamenco – i.e. attending classes, building up a personal practice, performing in live contexts and so on. While practicing flamenco as a means to understand its contribution to knowledge around relationality can be extremely valuable and exciting (as I can attest to), I argue that there are more potential ways that flamenco can contribute – beyond the boundaries of its own form and sphere of knowledge. This is not an attempt to dilute the form, but rather, to find as many points of intersection it can have with other bodies of knowledge in order to expand its reach. My desire to go this route comes from a deep respect for flamenco and the tangible tools I believe it holds for navigating the complexities of the pluriverse – a necessary endeavour for our times.

*IOIS* is a long-distance digital collaboration between Thulani Chauke (Johannesburg, South Africa), Josman P# (Blanca, Spain) and myself (Makhanda, South Africa) and builds on existing artistic relationships Thulani, Josman and myself have developed, respectively, over the past few years. It is presented on the website [www.juliaderosenwerth.com](http://www.juliaderosenwerth.com) and can be found at the URL: <https://juliaderosenwerth.com/outsideinsidespace/>. The project responds to 2020's Covid-19 restrictions by finding ways to adapt live performative practices to online, digital spaces, and through this asks how connection and collaboration can be fostered in a time when isolation is predominant.

The discussion of *IOIS* that follows is broken up into three parts based on the project's creation process. First, a discussion around how materials were generated between the three collaborators will be presented, followed by a discussion around how they were assembled on the web page. Finally, a discussion around the website's user interface and considerations about the audience experience of the project is presented. At various points in this discussion, insights from *IOIS* will be woven into the emerging discussion around relationality – as surfaced in Sections One and Two.

Drawing on the relational notion of give-and-take between performers in flamenco; the simultaneous need for evolving self-expression *and* responsiveness to the evolving expressions of others (and how this produces change and development of the performance), one of the key aims of *IOIS* was to practically investigate how an artistic work could function through a foundationally relational format. I wanted to locate the complexity and tension of the work in the relationships between creators, artistic materials and viewers and sought to know how changes in these relationships would change the readings of the work as a result.<sup>7</sup>

I began *IOIS* with the idea of creating a series of little, divergent worlds of artistic materials that could be presented on a web page and interacted with by visitors. Instead of pre-empting the imagination of these worlds, I wanted to explore how they could emerge over time through a series of artistic interactions between Thulani, Josman and myself. I created five pieces of text that would serve as five initial artistic impulses for the project and planned to send them to Thulani and Josman separately, asking them to respond in their particular artistic mediums – Thulani in movement and Josman in sound. The way that I approached creating the text segments was informed by the idea of feeling structures in flamenco *palos*. I wanted my words to appeal to certain moods, or senses of timing or space without being prescriptive. Instead of writing a series of instructions, I tried to appeal to each artist's own creativity, choice, agency and sense of composition.

Upon further reflection, I realised that my approach was text-heavy, which felt increasingly uncomfortable. Although my text segments were developed from creative textual responses I had written around performances I had made over the past two years

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<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that this practical research was done simultaneously with the research and writing of this paper, so each aspect informed the other in various ways throughout. I will highlight these moments in the discussion.

– making the texts particularly body-centred and emergent – I realised this context would be lost on someone receiving them for the first time. Thulani and Josman would simply see the words on the page and not the context from which they arose. Considering Conquergood’s political critique on scriptocentrism and the hierarchy of text in the embodied arts (2002, p. 147), as well as Escobar (2018) and Gherardi’s (2008) writings around disrupting the binary between theory and practice, I realised there was an inconsistency between my theory and my methodology. So, I decided to open up this initial aspect of the project, going through a process of re-responding to most of my texts in movement, sound and illustration. These then formed the first round of multi-media materials that I sent out to Thulani and Josman.

I had initially planned to send all the materials in one go, asking my collaborators to send one response for each piece of material (of which there were five in total). But after more thought I became uncomfortable, again, with my level of power in the collaboration. At this point, it seemed as though everything would evolve in relation to me, which created the potential for a hierarchy in the work that seemed opposed to the interdependence and shifting agency in flamenco performance, and opposed to the ideas of autopoiesis and co-constitution in Escobar’s writings. I wanted to find ways to lessen my position and distribute the creative agency between the three of us, to structurally reflect the collaborative encounter. This led to a solution in which I sent the materials out in two rounds. The first round contained three sets of impulses from me. Each set had a different number of materials. I curated two different rounds for Thulani and Josman respectively, which I asked them each to respond to. I asked for three responses in total for this first round (based on the three sets I sent them), but gave them the choice to respond to one item in the set, or all the items, creating opportunity for compositional choices on their behalf.

Upon receiving Thulani and Josman’s responses, I curated a second round of materials which I planned to send to them each, respectively, again. This gave me the opportunity to share their materials with one another, so that their creative impulses were not only stemming from me. I also took this opportunity to respond artistically to some of the materials that they had sent, switching out some of my initial creations for these new ones, which I added to the second round. Distributing the artistic agency between us three created an interdependence in the work where each person’s creative impulses were able to actively change those of the other, and echoes what Adams explains about how flamenco performance functions: in the live moment, each person’s creative interpretation offers a

slightly different perspective which in turn allows the others to adapt and experience the work in a different way (personal communications, 9 November, 2020). I leaned into this notion for the creation process of the materials.

After receiving Thulani and Josman's responses from the second round of materials, I went about looking at all the materials, considering how I could assemble them on the web page. This began as a process of juxtaposing the materials in various combinations on my computer. I initially based the juxtapositions on the responses I had received for each set that reflected our collective compositional choices as a group. In juxtaposing the materials, I began to create relationships between them, becoming interested in how these relationships changed the readings and tone of each material. The guiding question for this process concerned how I could create the most multiplicitous series of potential readings for each fragment. What I discovered was that while some of the materials did this in their original set, others didn't and were better paired with materials from other sets. I began to open-up the assemblage process, now considering how the materials were 'speaking to' one another beyond our combined compositional choices.

This reflects a phenomenological, new-materialist position that Escobar outlines (2018, pp. 125-126), aided by Scharmer (2009), which states that ontological design should move towards "acting from the presence of what is wanting to emerge" and "involve "letting go," "letting come," enacting, and embodying the emergent" (Scharmer, 2009, p. 32, in Escobar, 2018, p. 126). This letting go includes a letting go of one's egotistical ambitions for the work, in order to allow the materials to speak to one another – to allow their presence to emerge and change the work – through their "vibrant materiality" (Bennett, 2010, in Escobar, 2018, p. 132). In my experience of *IOIS*, trying to find the most complementary and multiplicitous assemblages for the materials required a letting go of my preconceived ideas/assumptions about what the most appropriate assemblages would be so that I could allow the materials to be vibrant, living agents within the work. Through this process I discovered what themes and moods were wanting to emerge, which strongly influenced how the final constellations turned out.

After establishing a sense of how the materials would be grouped, I went on a process of creating the web page and uploading the content. Looking at each set, I considered how the placement/spacing, sizing and movement of the fragments within that set could add further context to the content. It was at this point in the research where the tensions and possibilities between structure and content emerged strongly. Importantly, I had not set

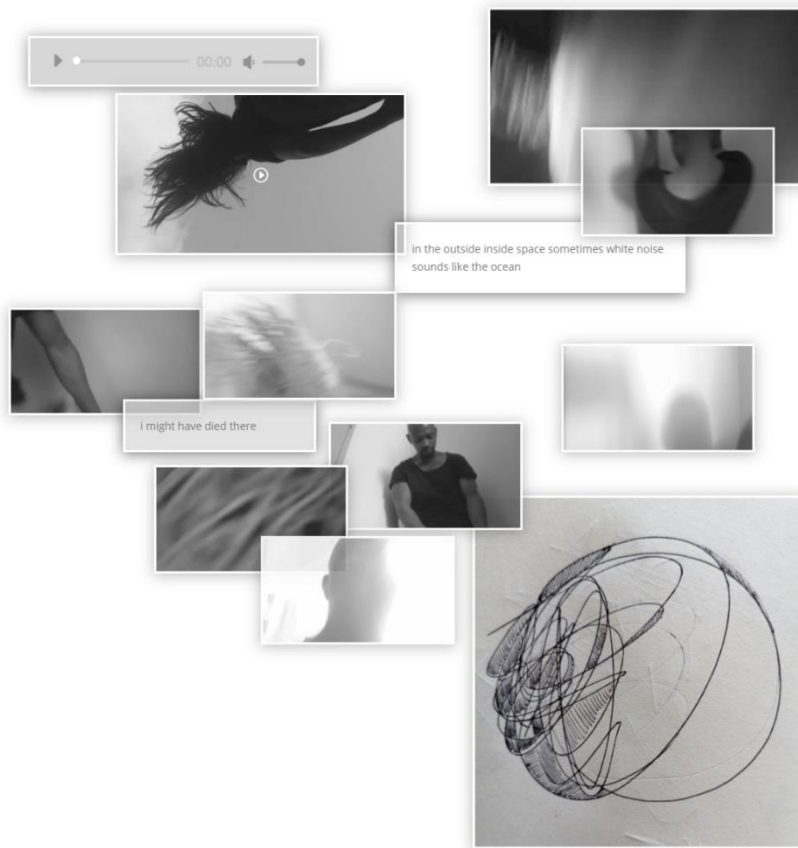


out to explore this; I only had an intuition/inclination to organise the materials into a number of constellations, which was most probably informed by embodied experiences with flamenco. I had the feeling that the content needed to be contextualised through some sense of structure, so that its viewing could be supported by a network of other materials. But, only in the process of assembling the materials did I realise how fundamental it was to the research around relationality and flamenco.

As I began to realise that the fragments were constituting the constellations, I was also realising that the constellations were re-constituting/changing the materials. I began to see this process as a tangible example of interdependent co-constitution (Escobar, 2018)<sup>8</sup>. I would like to explain in more detail, with a visual aid, how I worked with these concepts in *IOIS* and how they relate both to flamenco and to Escobar's writings. Here is a visual representation of the second constellation of materials that is featured on the web page:

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<sup>8</sup> In the timeline of this research, the findings from my assemblage process and the importance of structure in *IOIS* process pushed me to really consider the function of the *palo*, the main structuring element, in flamenco. This in turn resulted in the opening of a whole new layer of research around autopoietic structure and structure-towards-wholeness which is discussed in Sections One and Two.



Set Two is comprised of one video segment, one sound segment, two text segments, one illustration and eight still images. The video is taken from below and shows sections of me moving in circular motions. The text in the first block reads “in the outside inside space sometimes white noise sounds like the ocean” and the second block reads “I might have died there.” The sound has a whooshing, windy sensation to it, in its electronic rendering. I interpreted the feeling-sense that was emanating from these materials as a ‘chaos that resides at the boundary between inner and outer worlds’. I took strong reference for the placement of the fragments in this set from this mood: I wanted to create feelings of circularity and chaos – like a small explosion or whirlwind – which is echoed in the sound and movement quality and the drawing. Being led by the mood emanating from the fragments of materials, I decided to place many blocks in overlapping positions in relation to one another, as well as to experiment with the sizing of each. As such, I interpret the formation of the structural placement of Set Two as emerging from within, or from the components which constitute it, to use Escobar’s phrasing.

What was interesting about this set is that in the process of playing with the various fragments, I sensed the need for a profusion of materials – more so than in other sets. So, I went about capturing stills from Thulani’s video and found something stimulating in the process. His original video was taken by someone else, who was moving while recording Thulani’s movement. The camera person was moving towards Thulani’s body and away, around and down. This created an ambiguity as to which part of the body could be seen. When looking at the video, pausing ever so often to find moments to capture for the stills, I found that there were times when only the texture of the fabric of Thulani’s t-shirt was visible, or when the light behind his head obscured his form almost completely, creating a ghostly quality. I became interested in these ambiguous fragments within the video that, when viewed out of context of the video, created a completely different tone to the video itself. I found that the stills I captured had the effect of being more expansive and more ambiguous than when contained within a moving frame. Perhaps this is because these unclear ‘boundary-moments’ get lost amongst a rush of movement. I zoned into these boundary-moments, expanding and highlighting them. They ended up comprising the eight stills that can be seen in Set Two.

I was particularly pleased to have found this extra layer of ‘content within the content’ as it speaks to the pluriversal idea of a worlds within worlds (Escobar, 2018). I had not planned on including still images in this project, but through a process of experimentation, this possibility arose. This is another strong example of how my personal desires for the work were undercut by the content itself, pushing me to be open to the direction that the work ‘wanted’ or could go in. I was glad to have experienced this as it shifted my centrality in the work once again, allowing me to give more agency to the content itself. I continued to approach each set in a similar way and ended up with the total five sets that can be viewed via the aforementioned URL.

Further, the way that I approached assembling, structuring and contextualising the sets developed the notion of the emotional landscape of a *palo* in flamenco (Adams, personal communications, 9 November, 2020). As explained in the previous section, each *palo*, beyond having a general mood of *jondo*, *medio* and *chico*, has particular feeling qualities that characterise it. The *Siguiriyas* has a sorrowful, mourning quality to it, the *Tangos* has a sensual quality, the *Alegrías* a joyous quality and so on. I grouped the materials according to related feelings, and then assembled the fragments on the web page to create a complex feeling state. This mood/structure functions to hold and contextualise the content contained within it. Importantly, each feeling structure emerged from the feeling

qualities already present in the material fragments it was comprised of – it was not imposed on the materials in retrospect.

The final aspect of building the project concerned the viewer's experience and focused on the functionality of the web page. In thinking about the tension and possibilities created between structure, relationship and agency, I thought about how I could invite this tension into the viewership of the project. I decided to try and mirror my experience of assembling the materials; finding different points of connection between fragments in a set and exploring how the readings of these fragments change when viewed in differing relationships to one another as well as in the context of the set as a whole. This led me to build the web page in such a way that it allows the viewer to make a series of choices about how to view the content. Each fragment can be viewed individually, or simultaneously with any number of other fragments in its set and must be manually clicked in order to be viewed. For instance, in a set, one video can be played simultaneously with one piece of sound, or two videos can be played with no sound. An image can be viewed on its own, or all the videos and sound can be played together, and so on. My intention here was to create a large number of potential ways to view the content which become dependent on the choices of the viewer. These choices are held within loose structures (i.e. the five respective constellations), that suggest certain boundaries within which to view the work and offer a level of contextualisation and support.

The necessary participation of the viewer, by means of the choices they must make in order to view (any of) the work, adds a deeper level of relationality to the project than that of the materials alone. Viewing the work requires a navigation of oneself (one's curiosity, desire or creativity) in relation to the work. Not only is the viewer navigating the materials and how they relate to each other, or how they relate to the set as a whole; they are also navigating how they relate to those materials and to the structures that provide context for those materials. What this environment creates is a necessary dependence on the viewer's participation and a situation in which it is almost impossible for two people to see the 'same work'. Further, it is also almost impossible for the same person to see the work in the same way, twice. There are just too many (subtle and overt) choices that need to be made at every level of viewership that make it very difficult to track back and 'redo' the viewing 'accurately'.

Because the viewers have agency to make choices within the framework of the work, their dwelling in the worlds of the project effects changes within those worlds – much like in

flamenco, where the performers dwell in/ exist in/ enter into the world of the *palo* and effect change through them being there. Viewers of *IOIS* become participatory designers, or co-designers (Escobar, 2018, p. 160), creating an experience unique to their context. Upon receiving preliminary responses from people who have engaged with the project thus far, I was immediately aware of the potential for divergent experiences of the work. Friend and colleague Adriana Jamisse's response to the second set reads:

I struggled a bit with the sound. It was uncomfortable to hear... This one struck me as trauma or memory. (Personal communications, 22 November, 2020)

This differed from supervisor, Dr. Alan Parker's, response to the same set:

...The layers really shift the experience of the thing. I watched the video and the[n] looked at the images without sound, and I was really drawn into the calm and serenity of each component. These abstract body images of light and texture and the sky dance of hair and arms. But then watching and looking at the[m], again, with the score and the white noise/ocean landscape, the images seemed to me to be become less serene, less calm. Was getting a strong celebration, jubilation feeling... closer to ecstasy than serenity. (Personal communications, 23 November, 2020, additions mine)

While Jamisse associated the sound with trauma, Parker associated it with jubilation or ecstasy and speaks to Gherardi (2008) and Haraway's (1988) notions of the contextual nature of knowledge and experience. This highlights the project's pluriversal possibilities. Participation in *IOIS* becomes a tangible example of how one's positionality affects one's experience of the world and thus one's body of knowledge. When viewing the project, only I, Julia, can arrive at my specific series of choices, (which is informed by the fact I created the project, together with Thulani and Josman, along with all the other contextual things that create my 'world') and their resultant meanings. Only Jamisse can arrive at the specific choices and meanings she makes in viewing the project, which are informed by her own context and likewise for Parker. Our points of interest are different, and are further filtered through our mental, emotional, spiritual, political and social states of being at the time of viewing. These elements (and many more) combine to create the specific series of choices a person makes when viewing *IOIS*, thus creating a unique experience that is dependent on them for its realisation. As such, participation reflects a level of self-creation, or autonomy that speaks to the idea of autopoiesis, as discussed by Escobar (2018) and Maturana and Varela (1980).

Finally, the viewership of the project creates the possibilities for a dynamism or aliveness in the work that is located in the viewer's ability to make different choices all the time. In this way, it is not that the materials physically change, but rather that their relationships to other materials change through the participation of the viewer. This provides the potential for the materials to acquire many different contexts which subsequently alter their readings/feelings. This potential is reflected in Parker's response to set two (discussed above), where he explains that when engaging with the materials at first, he had a sense of calm or serenity. This shifted to jubilation or ecstasy when he layered the visuals with the sound (Parker, personal communications 23 November 2020). Nothing changed in the actual materials, only their relationships to one another which resulted in a shift of experience for Parker. As he notes:

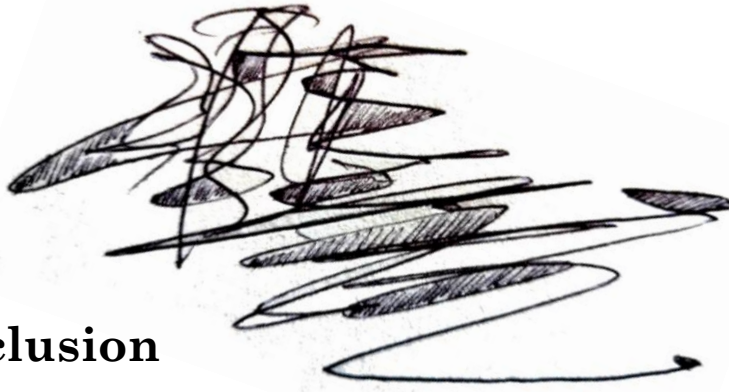
Lovely to be able to stack the layers in different ways and to compose one's one journey through each encounter. Sound adds (and changes) so much... so this especially is an effective layer to control/shift in relation to some of the other images/texts that don't 'shout' as loud or speak in softer, more subtle tones. (Personal communications 23 November 2020)

In conclusion, I sought to draw on key relational practices of flamenco, supported by the theories of Escobar, to guide *IOIS* in order to investigate relationality. The practical research happened simultaneously with the theoretical research and writing of this paper, allowing each aspect to inform the other. The motivation behind the practical research (and its inclusion in this paper as a case study) was to find ways for the practices in flamenco to expand knowledge around relationality beyond the embodied practice of the form. This was not in an attempt to dilute the form, but rather to find more possibilities for expanding its reach. Putting key concepts in flamenco in conversation with Escobar's writings through the practical research of *IOIS* allowed each to collide and expand one another through a continuum of "being~doing~knowing" (Escobar, 2018, p. 101).

*IOIS* created opportunities to explore an interdependence between myself and co-creators Thulani and Josman by finding ways to rely on, and be inspired by, each other's creative materials. This interdependence was fostered as a solution to the challenge of unevenly distributed power in the project. By breaking the content-generation process into two rounds we found ways to spread the initial creative impulses out between us, thus decentralising my power in the project. This speaks to Escobar's theories and offers an

example of how fostering interdependence through action can assist in navigating power and hierarchy among people.

Engaging in a process of assembling the materials into five constellations mirrored the idea of structure in flamenco and led to a deepening of the research into *palos*. I was able to observe a process in which the fragments of materials – grouped together through similar feeling qualities – became the tools through which I built the five loose structures that would hold the fragments. In so doing, the structures became the means through which the fragments could relate. Finally, through the implicit and explicit influence of my flamenco practice, I was able to engage in a notion of structure that was based on feeling landscapes. This deepened my understanding of the function of structures and provided an example of how they can move toward wholeness and cohesion (Escobar, 2018, p. 170), as opposed to rigid, prescriptive organisation.



## Conclusion

With reference to the writings of Arturo Escobar (2018), Section One of the paper argued for the necessity of transitioning toward the pluriverse as a means to unsettle the hegemonic, Western-centric, dualistic ontologies of the One World World (Law 2011 and Escobar 2018) and presented an understanding of relationality based on the writings of Escobar (2018), Sousa (2016), Maturana and Varela (1980) and Gherardi (2008). Section Two argued that flamenco performance is a strong example of a relational practice that has the potential to contribute to a transitioning towards the pluriverse through its interdisciplinarity, encouragement of difference, interdependence between performers and the ways they navigate themselves in relation to the structures within which they work. These flamenco practices were critically unpacked allowing key insights and tools gleaned from the discussion to be woven back into relevant aspects of Escobar's theory. This provided the opportunity to expand Escobar's theories from the perspective of flamenco.

Section Three discussed the adjoining practical research project, *In the outside inside space (IOIS)* (2020). Key relational practices in flamenco were used to inform the making of *IOIS*, allowing them to be put in conversational action with Escobar's (2018) theories where they collided, intersected and deepened one another. This research environment deepened the creative process of *IOIS*, which in turn also 'spoke back' to Escobar's theoretical research through specific (practical and experiential) findings that arguably could not have been accessed through the reading of the theory alone. Key explorations in *IOIS* included how to navigate emerging hierarchies and power structures through the fostering of an interdependence between co-creators, their creative materials and the viewers of the project; how structures can emerge through relationships between internal fragments and how these affect the readings of the fragments in turn; and finally, what opportunities there are to rethink what constitutes 'a structure' and how it can act as a supportive mechanism as opposed to an impositional one.

I would like to conclude this paper with reference to the words of Maturana and Varela: "all doing is knowing, and all knowing is doing" and "every act of knowing brings forth a



world” (1987, p. 26). This paper argues for the importance of engaging in ontologies of the pluriverse from practical, action-based positions and outlines valuable contributions flamenco (and its applications) can make towards knowledge around relationality – a necessary step towards designing the pluriverse.

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