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STEPS LAST: A PEDAGOGY FOR
EXISTING IN THE VANISHING POINT

by

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B.A. Political Science, New York University
1994

Presented in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Dance

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Dedication

This work is lovingly dedicated to all the teachers, mentors and guides who have carried me through my long trajectory as a dancer. You have entrusted me with your learned and ancestral knowledge, your secrets, and your infinite wisdom. From my first mentor to my last, I have implemented your teachings every day as I have navigated my path through life. Now I seek to pass on that knowledge in the form of a framework so that we may better understand and value the heritage and culture behind all forms of artistic expression. This work aims to honor the relationships forged during my long career as I attempt to lay bare the value of understanding an art form from the perspectives of its deepest points of origin.



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Thank you to my sure I stayed on track, Mejia for their constant magical place where I studies. Finally, to my Elisenda Lopez Freixes love of nature and for the source. And to Ethan,



this without you. friends and family for making and to Marianna and Freddie support and for offering me a could work and finish my parents, Walter Ocampo and for instilling in me a deep teaching me to always go to for having the audacity to do

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The earth has music for those who listen. – William Shakespeare

People fail to get along because they fear each other; they fear each other because they don't know each other; they don't know each other because they have not communicated with each other. – Martin Luther King Jr.

Movement never lies. – Martha Graham

Learn from my mistakes. – my father



steps last

a pedagogy

for existing

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point

Introduction

In this thesis I will present Steps Last, a pedagogy for teaching flamenco to non-Spaniards rooted in the translation of the Andalusian methodology for transmitting flamenco from one generation to another. At the same time, I will examine how flamenco, at its essence, shatters the notion of the machine-body, freeing us to seek and exist within the awesome concept of the “vanishing point”¹ as a way of achieving permanence through ephemerality.

First, I will present the history of the Steps Last pedagogy and explain how it works. I will break down and discuss how we approach: rhythm, *cante*², improvisation and flamenco’s history as these are the four essential elements that must be mastered in flamenco in order to be able to move comfortably within the form. Next, I propose that we accept the premise of the steps being a secondary concern to the rhythm, the singing, the history and to understanding how to improvise when we are looking to participate fully in the art form.

Finally, I will present the creative portion of this thesis as a deconstructed and fully embodied visual manifestation of the Steps Last philosophy rooted in flamenco’s four foundational concepts. I will adapt the use of a personal story (history), inspiration (*cante*), improvisation, and rhythm for the fulfillment of my artistic manifestation as I navigate the spaces of the visceral and the unknown. My objective is to use Steps Last to explore the possibility of permanence through total artistic freedom by embracing the vanishing point.

¹ For the context of this paper the term “vanishing point” is being used to denote the ephemerality of live performance.

² Flamenco song.

Why Steps Last?

As dancers, our need to move can at times overpower our need to understand the complexities of the form we are moving in. When that form has a historic, cultural, and ancestral connection or point of origin that we have not investigated, we risk missing the substance and spirituality of the form, thus rendering our participation in the form to that of ungrounded corporal maneuvers rather than an embodiment of its fundamental essence. In her groundbreaking book, *Choreographing Empathy*, dancer, choreographer and dance scholar Susan Foster drives this point home perfectly. Here, she explains the long-term effects of “world” dance forms being incorporated into university curricula in the late 1970s with little or no regard to the pedagogical nuances that would enable the authentic transmission of said forms to non-native dancers.

...university curricula slowly added courses in West African dance, Javanese dance, or Bharata Natyam, beginning in the 1970s. These were not studied as proposing distinct theories of choreography, but rather, as techniques that could enrich the student’s awareness of the body while also offering a distinctive “cultural” experience. Taught in the spare modern dance studio, often without costumes, sometimes without live music, students focused on learning the movement first, acquiring technical proficiency, and then dancing a dance. Yet curricular and financial constraints inhibited them from acquiring substantive proficiency. As a result, pedagogy reinforced the image of these dances as traditional and unchanging, since students never learned how to improvise within

the forms, how to collaborate with musicians, or how to arrange and rearrange material to meet the specific demands of a given performance.³

Foster's statement encapsulates the reasons why the term Steps Last is used for this pedagogy, while at the same time explaining some of the fundamental reasons this pedagogy is necessary for an authentic, culturally diverse discourse on dance and movement. By ignoring flamenco's history and culture, and by glossing over the nuances of its rhythms and music we have diminished our ability to improvise within the form, thus contributing to the erroneous, non-native assumptions of flamenco being a "traditional and unchanging" form of dance in which it is enough for students to be "focused on learning the movements first."⁴

The History of Steps Last

Setting the Stage

In 1999 I was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to Spain for my project, "Flamenco and Spanish Dance as a Form of Self-Expression and Communication." I spent the next eleven years living, studying, and working with the Spanish Roma, or Gitano⁵ communities of Southern Spain. It is in these circles where I began to dive into the essence of the form, quickly realizing that learning flamenco dancing without a deep knowledge of its rhythms, singing, and history would keep me from ever understanding

³ Susan Foster, *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 187.

⁴ Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, 187.

⁵ The Roma people in the communities that I lived in while in Spain refer to themselves as Gitanos. Therefore, this is the term I will use throughout this paper when alluding to the Roma people of Spain.

the form on a meaningful level. I also began to recognize that without a deep knowledge of the rhythms and the singing, improvisation would be unattainable. My first (disastrous) attempt at live performance had made it painfully clear to me that the entire form is built on the ability to adapt spontaneously to the rhythms and singing. Hence, I made it my priority to further my knowledge in every element of the form so that I would be able to improvise and participate in a significant way.

While in Spain, I met Ethan Margolis, a young musician from Cleveland who would eventually become my husband. At the time, I was mentoring and dancing with the legendary Farruco family in Sevilla while Ethan was honing his skills as a guitarist in the streets and bars of Sevilla, Utrera and Lebrija in Andalucía, Spain. Ethan was absorbing the local street culture and its rhythms, dancing, melodies, and sung verses, while I was deeply immersed in the private and professional life of one of flamenco's most important family dynasties. As time went on and we travelled back and forth from Spain to the United States to visit our families, we began teaching joint workshops to communities across the US. It is in these workshops that the seeds of the Steps Last Pedagogy began to emerge.

History of Steps Last Teaching Methods

In our joint classes and workshops, I would first teach students basic footwork, arms, and upper body technique. Then I would teach them a short series of independent steps and a small combination known as a *llamada*⁶ in the flamenco style of *Bulerias*.⁷

⁶ *Llamadas* are intense, rhythmic breaks which showcase the dancer as they resolve a rhythmic, corporal, or melodic idea with a burst of percussive movements designed to close a section in their dancing.

⁷ *Bulerias* is a foundational and highly complex style of flamenco defined by its use of twelve and six count rhythmic measures, primarily upbeat tempo, highly improvisational approach to music, song, rhythm and dance, and is one of the most common flamenco styles practiced in and out of Spain.

For the second half of the workshop, Ethan would come in and teach the students how to clap out various rhythms while sitting in a circle, just as we had witnessed hundreds of times in flamenco *fiestas*⁸ in Spain. He would teach them one or two sung verses so that they would better understand what they were dancing to, and then he would get them to improvise, one by one, to his guitar and singing. The idea was that they would each come into the center of the circle and use the steps that I had taught them while he sang and played as the rest of the class played *palmas*.⁹

We taught this way because this is what we were witnessing in Andalucía on a regular basis. This is what flamenco looked like when coming from the people we were studying, working, and living with. Performing was referred to as work and was not always regarded as the ultimate expression of the art form. In fact, many artists were more nervous to sing, dance and play in private *fiestas* than they were onstage as these intimate gatherings were where individual artists would be judged by the community's elders and peers. For this reason, the ability to improvise and embody the rhythms and singing was paramount. It was also clear that *everyone* was improvising: the musicians, the singers, and the dancers. This rendered the traditional model of teaching dance as a fixed set of steps in sequential order to repetitive music with performance as a goal, to be completely archaic and impractical.

We found that at first, these experiments in teaching were fun and illuminating, but they were not always successful. Students were frustrated by not having a set

⁸ Flamenco gathering also known as a *juerga*, in which spontaneous singing, playing, and dancing erupts from unscripted expression and communication among performers and audience members.

⁹ Flamenco hand clapping. This is a profession in Spain. However, it is common for members of any flamenco community in Spain (particularly Andalucía) to be able to clap complex rhythms in social gatherings.

choreography and predictable music to work with. They were used to teachers giving them a series of steps in sequential order and then dancing those exact same steps in that exact same order to the same music over and over until they knew it well enough to feel comfortable performing. It was common for communities of students outside Spain to rehearse with recorded music or with local guitarists and singers who played and sang the exact same material time after time. This was very rare in the flamenco circles that I was a part of in Southern Spain. Every time a singer, musician or dancer “performed” in a *fiesta*, their delivery and material was different. They played with spontaneous variations on their “repertoire,” priding themselves on their ability to innovate and deconstruct the molds of their technique.

Additionally, every formal performance by the same company was different. The melodies and verses the musicians played and sang changed constantly. Singers would sing the same verse in different ways from one performance to another and the dancer and guitarist would adapt. Guitarists would improvise, elongating or shortening their solos, and the dancers and the *palmeros*¹⁰ would adapt their rhythmic patterns and movements to reflect the elasticity of the form. When I tried to teach this, many of my students had a very difficult time believing that this was how flamenco was practiced in Spain and they didn’t understand why I couldn’t just teach them a choreography and not worry so much about what the singer was doing or how the guitarist was surfing over a constantly changing rhythmic landscape.

¹⁰ Professional or formal flamenco handclappers designed to sustain and accompany the singing, the guitar and the dancing.

The Twelve-Count

Another main stumbling block for students was the dreaded twelve-count, unique to flamenco. Almost everyone had learned how to count Bulerias in one of two ways:

12, 1, 2, **3**, 4, 5, 6, 7, **8**, 9, **10**, 11¹¹, or **12**, 1, 2, **3**, 4, 5, 6, 7, **8**, 9, **10**, 11.

This was consistent with what I had been taught as well, but it was not consistent with what I witnessed onstage, in class and in fiestas in the streets and homes of the Flamencos¹² of Andalucía. What I had witnessed was that the rhythmic measures sometimes rotated in twelves and sometimes in sixes. I had identified a clear recurring waltz and another rhythmic pattern that accented the first beat of a six-count measure and nothing else. So, in addition to the two aforementioned variations on the traditional twelve-count, I was identifying rhythmic patterns that sounded like this:

12, 1, 2, **3**, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, **9**, 10, 11 (sometimes referred to as Waltz) and

12, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 (sometimes referred to as Al Golpe¹³).

In addition, I noticed that while in class, most of my teachers created combinations that rotated in twelves. However, when they imparted steps they *themselves* did, not steps created for students in class, but ones that they executed onstage and in *fiestas*, it was common for the steps to have an extra six, so we might have a step that was eighteen counts rather than twelve. Or thirty counts rather than twenty-four. This extra six was explained as the elongation or shortening of a rhythmic measure which can

¹¹ Numbers in bold are accents.

¹² A term that means “Gitano” to Gitanos, but that can also mean of Flemish origin or “one who practices flamenco” to non-Gitanos. It embodies a certain way of moving that is traditionally Gitano and Andalusian in nature, and at its best infers an inimitable, highly improvisational and rhythmic approach that exudes presence through individuality, spontaneity, and emotion.

¹³ Literally translates to “on the hit,” or “on the downbeat,” referring to the accent coming in on the downbeat, or initiating beat, of every six-count rhythmic measure.

happen when the dancer, the singer or the guitarist are improvising, and so I started counting as follows:

12, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, **6**, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, **6**, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, **6**, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, etc.

If I noticed that a step had started rotating in six, I would start counting the back end of the twelve-count rather than going back to the beginning of the twelve. I did this because in Bulerias, the most common culminating beat is the ten.¹⁴ So, by repeating the last section of the twelve, I was always prepared for a conclusion. The conclusion could come at any moment, and I knew that I would have no more than six counts to adapt my steps so that I could end with the musicians on the ten.

When I started to explain this, it was common for my students' eyes to glaze over, and they would short circuit. It happened over and over in every community we entered. It seemed like everything students had been taught contradicted what I was saying. This was 2002 and YouTube had not been invented yet. I had no videos as a way of proving to them that this was what I had witnessed hundreds of times in Spain, and recorded music was not helpful as it rarely reflected natural, unscripted situations. In addition, I was further stymied by the fact that professional flamencos from Andalucía came to the US and taught Bulerias in twelves¹⁵ or simply didn't count at all and told students to "feel" the rhythm. It was very common for students to counter my teaching techniques with

¹⁴ This is what I thought at the time. Traditionally, the most common concluding beat can come on the ten (or the four if you're counting in twelves) since we are not held to twelve count measures. So, if the conclusion comes over the first half of the twelve, it will fall on the four. If the conclusion comes over the second half of the twelve, it will fall on the ten. However, this is not a concrete rule, as at high levels, the conclusion can come at any time within the rhythmic measure, including on a counter or syncopated beat.

¹⁵ So as to not confuse students, it was customary for teachers to square off what they taught in class to twelves, further encouraging the notion that Bulerias only existed in twelves.

statements they had heard from the highest level of dancers telling them they themselves didn't count and to stop using numbers.¹⁶

The Birth of Steps Last

Travelling, YouTube and Changing the Counting Method

In 2004, Ethan founded Arte y Pureza Flamenco Company, an international touring company whose sole mission was to foment Spanish Roma flamenco music, song, and dance around the world. As our company grew, so did our reach. We started touring to more and more communities and now, because of the high level of artists we were working with, we had more influence and our students started to trust us and our teaching methods. This also coincided with YouTube creating a platform that democratized people's access to their audience. Suddenly, Flamencos were uploading videos of their private parties, weddings, street gatherings and informal fiestas. Now I had a way to show people outside the tight-knit, Gitano circles of Andalucía what flamenco looked like when practiced by its creators and innovators. In addition, Ethan began working on hybrid musical projects combining jazz and flamenco. He needed a way to speak rhythmically to jazz musicians without requiring them to learn the flamenco twelve-count of twelve through eleven. So, he simply changed the numbers, made the downbeat the one (as is universally the case in music), and shortened the rhythmic

¹⁶ One of the reasons Gitanos and flamenco professionals from Spain do not need to count is because they are often born into families and communities that practice the art form in every aspect of life. They are completely immersed from birth and can feel the complex nuances in flamenco rhythms as small children before they know *how* to count. Those of us who are born outside flamenco communities need tools to understand what is happening and where we are in relation to everyone else. Counting is one of these tools.

measure to six. This resulted in him superimposing two sixes over the traditional twelve to look like this (downbeat in bold):

The Sixes

	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	Steps Last
	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Traditional 12

As we travelled to various communities around the US, Ethan started to teach in sixes and reserved the use of the twelve-count only for the *llamada*. Everything else was counted in six. So, his students learned to dance their steps on a *numerically sequential* six-count rhythmic measure with incredible results. Within days I saw that his students were able to latch on to the downbeat. They could repeat their individual six-count steps over this simplified numeric phrase and then switch from one step to another at will, thus beginning the process of learning how to improvise. All they had to do was wait for the downbeat to switch to another step and since every step was in six, they were never at risk of getting off-rhythm. When it was time for a *llamada*, Ethan taught students to switch back to the twelve for one twelve-count measure and then return to the sixes. Students learned the twelve-count as if it were a numerical anomaly to the sequential six-count. This new way of seeing the numbers underneath the rhythmic measures exposed them to the traditional twelve while setting them free from having to keep track of it the entire time. The resulting counting pattern looks like this:

1	2	3	4	5	6	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	1	2	3	4	5	6	12s & 6s
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	6s

As soon as we implemented this way of counting, I witnessed an immediate change in our students' demeanor as they were no longer being forced to count in non-sequential twelves while learning how to move at the same time. The simplification of the counting made the rhythm digestible in shorter, numerically sequential increments and allowed students the freedom to concentrate on their steps rather than using all their energy on remembering the confusing twelve-count. Counting in six also made learning the many rhythmic patterns in Bulerias much easier than with the twelve. Over the years Ethan identified, translated, and catalogued nine basic six count rhythms with varying accent patterns that are common in Bulerias. He labelled them and taught students to clap them out before ever making them dance. This allowed students to connect mentally with the rhythm and with what they were doing before they had to connect corporally. It also demystified the changing accents within the rhythmic measures and allowed students to latch on to the rhythm regardless of what beats were being accented. As long as they could count to six, they would never get lost.

Eventually we created worksheets for the students to follow and this is how the Steps Last pedagogy came to be. The concept was simple:

1. Palmas - Teach students to play the rhythms first.

2. Steps As Rhythmic Entities - Catalogue each step as either a layering or imitating rhythmic movement within each rhythmic category.
3. Switching - Teach students to switch from one rhythm to another with *palmas* as a preparation for switching seamlessly from one step to another when dancing.

In addition, Ethan would teach students how to sing at least one verse so that they would learn the cues that govern switching from one step to the next. The singing also prompted the dancer to know when to hold and when to attack with a more explosive step such as a *remate*¹⁷ or the *llamada*. Having a basic understanding of the underlying rhythms and the sung verses gave students the knowledge to be able to decide which steps to use when. This understanding, in turn, allowed them the freedom to improvise almost immediately.

The results of these simple concepts were stunning. Students of flamenco who had spent years and even decades unable to participate in *fiestas* were now understanding how to improvise and dance in informal parties and gatherings. Students who had always wondered how dancers, musicians and singers made artistic choices in the heat of a *fiesta* or a performance now understood where all the cues were coming from. Students who could not latch on to the downbeat or do a *llamada* without losing their place rhythmically, were now able to execute their steps cleanly and on rhythm. The most exciting part of this development was that students could now recognize when they got *off* rhythm and fix it immediately, a skill that had previously eluded them, causing disastrous performances in formal and informal settings.¹⁸ One of the key elements to live

¹⁷ A momentary, rhythmic break exhibiting an artist's personality and level, denoting the end of a melodic phrase, sung verse or rhythmic measure. *Remates* are in multiples of six and typically last anywhere from six to eighteen beats but can be much longer.

¹⁸ One of the key elements to flamenco is having the courage to dive into an idea knowing that you may get lost and being confident enough in your skills to know that you can always find your way out of a "mistake."

flamenco performances, be they onstage or in a *fiesta*, is that the artists possess the confidence to risk getting lost at any moment. Like jazz musicians, flamenco artists are actively searching to unearth the magic that happens when one is free to throw oneself off the artistic cliff.

Steps Last as a Pedagogy for Understanding Flamenco

As state earlier, in the Steps Last Pedagogy, we took a four-pronged approach to teaching Flamenco dance using these four elements: Rhythm, *Cante*, Improvisation and History. Ethan would first teach twelve foundational six and twelve¹⁹ count rhythmic patterns by clapping them out with students, allowing them to familiarize themselves with the various accent patterns as they learned to switch from one pattern to the next. Once they could identify the downbeat and flow seamlessly from one rhythmic pattern to the next with their *palmas*, they were ready to learn a few basic steps in each of the twelve rhythmic patterns. These steps were taught as rhythmic entities, not choreographic segments. This way, the student developed a mental and rhythmic attachment to the step, rather than simply memorizing a series of movements. Steps were taught as rhythmic entities that fell under their respective rhythmic categories either as layering or imitative elements. This allowed the student to latch on to the rhythm and resulted in them being able to remember the step with ease as they did not have to rely solely on memorization for movement recall. They learned to switch from one step to the next on the downbeat in the same way they switched from one rhythmic pattern to the next when playing *palmas*.

¹⁹ Nine six-count rhythms and three twelve-count rhythms.

Once students were exposed to the twelve foundational rhythms and at least one step in each rhythm, Ethan would introduce the singing. He would start by breaking down the lines of poetry of the singing. In Bulerias, we would commonly start with the substyle known as “Bulerias Cortas De Jerez” (Short Bulerias From Jerez), made popular by the Flamencos of Jerez de la Frontera. These verses are known for their upbeat, rhythmic attack and are some of the easiest to dance due to the continuous, riding rhythms which are played under the verses. It is common for scores of verses to follow the same melodic delivery, rhythmic attack, and syllabic structure, therefore making it possible to learn the structure of fifty *letras*²⁰ by learning just one, as many more will follow the same basic melodic and rhythmic patterns. Ethan would teach students to sing or at least recite one *letra* so that they would begin to familiarize themselves with the cadence and rhythm of the singing.

Once students were familiar with the rhythms and singing, they were ready to learn how to improvise using the steps they had learned as rhythmic markers. Finally, we would teach our students about the history of the creators of flamenco and the cultural relevance behind the art form through lectures, readings, films and contact with the musicians, singers, and dancers in our creative projects. Since cultural knowledge shapes the movements of flamenco as much as mastery over the rhythms and *cante*, we emphasized the importance of the history and culture behind the movements as much as the movements themselves.

Ethan and I continued teaching together until 2010. He eventually stopped and I have continued working with these concepts ever since. In the past fifteen years I have

²⁰ Sung flamenco verse.

taught this methodology to over a thousand students in North America and in Europe. I have taught it to non-dancers, college students, beginners, intermediate students and professionals of all ages and abilities. I have witnessed a considerable decrease in learning time compared to the traditional teaching methods of presenting two variations on the traditional twelve-count and using choreography to understand the art form. Within months, students have a basic understanding of Bulerias, the twelve-count, the sixes, and how the singing affects the dancing, rhythms, and the melody. As students begin to lose their fear of improvisation, their interest in the singing increases. This, in turn, amplifies their interest in Gitano culture and history, creating an actual dialogue between students from one culture and masters from another. This dynamic combats the constant exoticification and appropriation of Gitano culture by unsuspecting lovers of their art. It opens a line of true communication and understanding that gives credit where credit is due and engenders in students a deep respect for the complexities of the form.

Flamenco as a Participatory Art

A History of Community

Flamenco is an art form borne of many cultural influences, such as Moslem, Jewish, Afro-Caribbean and the Christian culture of Spain. It is widely acknowledged that the Spanish Roma population of Andalucía is largely responsible for flamenco's inception, widespread interpretation, preservation, and innovation. At its core, flamenco is the expression of Andalusian culture and relies on community involvement and collective participation for its survival and proliferation. As stated earlier, the ability for

*aficionados*²¹ outside of Spain to participate in the art form and experience this community involvement on some level was a major motivation for the creation of Steps Last.

In her curated work, *Participation*, art scholar Claire Bishop discusses the importance of community participation in art. She categorizes the main tendencies found in participatory art forms as those of Activation, Authorship and Community. I will use her categorizations to further exemplify why understanding the history and the culture of flamenco is essential for those seeking to participate in a way that edifies its students *and* its creators.

Activation, Authorship and Community

As Claire Bishop states in the introduction to her book, the concepts of activation, authorship and community are three fundamental agendas to participatory art, and all of these were motivating factors for the Steps Last teaching methods. I will start with the concept of “Activation.” Bishop defines activation as the result of an individual or community becoming empowered by their physical or symbolic interaction with art.²² First, it was important for us to break down the foundational rhythms of flamenco and make them accessible to communities outside of Spain so that they might start the process of successfully participating in the form. Second, we wanted to empower communities all around the US, Canada and beyond to be able to create the conditions under which they could continue working on the art form on their own.

²¹ Flamenco enthusiasts.

²² Claire Bishop, *Participation: Documents Of Contemporary Art* (London: Whitechapel, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006), 7.

It was common for entire communities to go dormant after a visiting workshop had ended. It was as if the creative energy that had been engendered by touring performances and master classes disappeared the minute the visiting artists boarded the plane. In the early days of my teaching, the communities around the US were made up largely of dancers, with a few guitarists, one or two singers and no *palmeros*. This made working on the art form within these communities extremely difficult.

It was common for members of these communities to rely on outside artists who were performing locally to come in, play guitar, sing, clap out rhythms and give the students the environment in which they could dance. As soon as these artists left the community, it was left with dancers who had no way to continue working on their form other than practicing choreography with recorded music or using the one guitarist in their community who was willing to rehearse for free and play the exact same music over and over again. But without rhythm and *cante*, students' efforts to improve were slowed, even if they had a guitarist who was willing to work with them. This left our students and public with little motivation to continue their studies until the next performance or series of workshops came to their city or town.

Bishop's concept of empowering an audience or a social group through activation in order to be able to participate and continue working on the form on their own was key to developing this methodology. This would mean that in addition to dancing and playing guitar, these communities would have to embrace learning to sing, to play *palmas* and to improvise, to create the conditions under which they could practice their steps with live, unpredictable, singing, rhythm and music.

The second motivation cited by Bishop is authorship. This is a very layered and complicated subject, but I will attempt to tackle it from two perspectives:

- 1) that of the individual's contribution to the form through improvisation and choreography and
- 2) the question of who flamenco belongs to.

These are two very loaded subjects that need an in-depth study of their own. However, they are fundamental factors in the creation of Steps Last, while at the same time holding the key to my recurring ambivalence towards teaching this method.

The first, is a key factor in what may motivate us as artists and therefore, as students of art. That is, the idea of being in charge of your creative process and being able to call something your own, be it through improvisation or choreography. For one to have any true authorship over flamenco, one must have an immense understanding of a form that encompasses over fifty different styles in varying rhythmic patterns. One must be able to identify, recreate and play within the underlying rhythmic structure of each style and the many substyles within it. One must understand and be able to navigate its rhythmic and melodic nuances, the many accent patterns that can exist at any given moment in a myriad of styles in 4/4, 3/4, 6/8 and (in the case of Bulerias) in twelves and sixes that alternate based on the sung verses, melodic cues, rhythmic breaks, and choices made in the moment by the singer, dancer, percussionist, and guitarist. One must also have extensive knowledge of hundreds of sung verses, their structure, and the many ways that they can be interpreted. In addition, one must also have absolute mastery over their

instrument, be it the guitar, the voice, the *cajon*²³, the *palmas*, the body, or any other melodic or rhythmic instrument one is choosing to participate with.

If we define authorship as Merriam-Webster's does, it is "the source of a piece of writing, music or art." This would separate most flamenco dancers, singers, and guitarists into two categories: that of author and that of interpreter. While I have worked with, taught, and studied under many interpreters, I have only met a handful of true *authors* of the art form. Steps Last strives to help students become better informed interpreters of the art form, be it through improvisation or choreography, and eventually gives them the tools, through historical and cultural context, to recognize the difference between an author and an interpreter. To have authorship over flamenco, I believe one would have to either be born into it, or do something so revolutionary, so innovative, that the timeline of flamenco will be marked permanently by their existence. However, if we are discussing authorship over one's own creation, such as a choreography or an improvised performance, then perhaps, if the creative work contains all original movements and sounds that cannot be traced back to any of the masters of the art form, an artist may be able to say that they have authorship over their movements.²⁴

This question of authorship over one's movements leads me to the second part of my analysis on authorship; who does flamenco belong to? This is a highly debated subject which is a thesis of its own. I will only say that my formation and understanding of the art form has been under the tutelage of Gitano dancers, singers, rhythmists, and

²³ Wooden box used as a rhythmic instrument, originally from Peru, and introduced to flamenco by guitarist Paco de Lucia.

²⁴ I understand that this is an incredibly provocative sentence. I am not pretending to be the authority over who gets to call flamenco movements their own. I am simply trying to illuminate the complexities surrounding exposing an ancestral, cultural art form to people outside of the culture that created it.

musicians. I consider my involvement in the art form as that of an interpreter and preservationist, as in flamenco, I am neither an innovator nor a creator. I absolutely do not believe the art form belongs to me. Therefore, it would be difficult for me to believe that it belongs to my students.

The question brought up by authorship as a motivation for creating art that includes its audience speaks to the root of the cultural differences between the United States and Spain. When discussing authorship, we are caught between an art form that in Spain is largely hierarchical within its community and the egalitarian idea in the United States that art belongs to everyone. I, myself am extremely conflicted on this topic and have even at times regretted giving students the tools to better understand flamenco based on some developing a sense of entitlement to the form without honoring the strict guidelines followed by its creators and innovators. I believe that by exposing these issues I am contributing to students having a better understanding of flamenco and therefore an increased respect for the communities responsible for its inception, preservation, and proliferation.

Finally, Bishop cites the concept of community as motivation for public participation in art. Of the three, this was and remains my main incentive for teaching and for continuing to implement the Steps Last pedagogy after my husband stopped teaching. Ethan saw teaching as a way to help create communities around the US that valued the rigors that define the art form. The idea was to pass down the knowledge that had been imparted to us by the Gitano community so that *their* community may be held in higher esteem and valued around the world. I felt that if I could give students a small slice of information that would allow them to truly start to understand flamenco and participate in

a way that was empowering, uplifting, and fulfilling, that my students would eventually seek out the source by going to Spain and studying from the Gitano community itself.

Understanding flamenco from the Steps Last perspective is understanding it on a cultural, social, political, and artistic level. This creates communities that are aware of the fragility of the art form and are prepared to defend its survival. The Gitano school of flamenco has historically been pushed aside for more commercial incarnations of the form. By teaching with the Steps Last philosophy of putting the rhythms, the singing, improvisation, and a foundational understanding of the culture that created the art form first, I seek to defend the Gitano school and thus contribute positively to a community that has historically been in peril due to marginalization, exploitation, appropriation, and a lack of understanding from the outside world.

Beyond Flamenco:

Steps Last as a Pedagogy For Existing in the Vanishing Point

The Set Up

In his examination of movement, *Exhausting Dance*, André Lepecki takes us through an exhaustive list of the factors affecting, pertaining to and originating choreography, dance, movement, stillness, and the rejection thereof. In the concluding pages of his book, he sums up his entire investigation with an analysis of how to tackle the concept of vanishing, or, in the words of dance critic Marcia Siegel, the “vanishing point.”²⁵ Lepecki puts forth the notion that “...dance’s complaint regarding the

²⁵ Lepecki, André, *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the politics of movement* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 361.

perception of its being as constitutionally ephemeral became its modernity.”²⁶ Herein lies the driving concept behind the creative manifestation of this thesis. Why is Steps Last important outside of flamenco?

In flamenco, I propose that we accept the premise of steps being a secondary concern to the rhythm, the singing, the history and to understanding how to improvise when we are looking to participate fully in the art form. Our participation hinges on our ability to improvise, take control and relinquish control based on what our singers and musicians are doing. If we concentrate solely on our execution of steps, performing a choreography and working with a predictable musical score, we are relegating ourselves to very specific conditions that, while useful in some performative respects, are not representative of the art form.

The steps first approach also limits the dancer’s ability to participate in *juergas* and *fines de fiesta*²⁷ as well as spontaneous moments of artistic expression occurring in formal and informal gatherings, in bars and streets, in homes and private celebrations, in festivals and holidays and in the everyday moments of real life. The Steps Last approach gives the dancer the tools to exist in all scenarios whereas learning steps first limits the dancer to a very specific, predictable and performative incarnation of the art form. Steps Last can be a blueprint for the moment when we are seeking to present ourselves not only as dancers and performers, but as complete Beings in a “state of being.”

²⁶ Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance*, 357.

²⁷ Improvised party traditionally done at the end of a live performance designed to close the entire show and give everyone onstage a moment to dance. The *fin de fiesta* is often done in lieu of a bow.

The Vanishing Point: Accepting Ephemerality

Flamenco, at its essence, shatters the notion of the machine-body. It refuses to allow us to be expendable cogs in a wheel that turns on predictability and repetition. Perfection is neither possible nor is it the objective. The objective is BEING and allowing the universe to witness it, thus creating a what I will refer to as a “free” dance artist. Free to be who you are. Free to express your pain, joy, sorrow, and triumphs outside the scope of someone else’s movements. Free to dance without motion. Free to dancing sitting down. Free to dance alone or in front of millions with no pretense, expectation, or judgement. Free to make mistakes. Free to recover. Free to fail. These, like all freedoms, come at a price. That of taking the time to learn the art form’s rhythms, singing and history while learning how to improvise.

As a free flamenco dance artist, one must understand the fundamental components that make up the art form to access that freedom and move into the realm of creation. Every performance, therefore, becomes a snapshot in time; a momentary glimpse into a person’s state of mind and being. So, just like we would not accept having the exact same conversation day in and day out with our friends and loved ones, we do not tie ourselves to doing the exact same steps day in and day out. We learn to move outside of the confines of choreography and into the unexplored spaces of improvisation and intuitive creation of movement, stillness, and everything in between and beyond.

Freeing Our Bodies

Before moving into this section, I would like to stress that I am in no way against classical ballet, choreography, or preconceived movement. I have been a choreographer

my entire life, having created my first work at the age of twelve. In addition, ballet has been my foundation for movement and has been the largest part of my formation as a dancer. I took several hours of ballet every day for over twenty years and was on pointe for eight of those years. In addition, I would like to state that creating and dancing choreographies is how I learned to turn movement into art. Creating new work is one of my greatest joys and I will continue to explore choreography and premeditated movement my entire life. The aim of this paper is not to devalue forms that rely on choreography as a mode of artistic expression. On the contrary, I am seeking to find another portal through which to look at choreography so that we may explore its dimensions further. I am, however, taking aim at the notion that *flamenco* relies on choreography for transmission from body to body. It is in this spirit that I tackle the next subject; that of freeing the dancing body from judgement and “othering.”

Dancers have been “otherized” for centuries. In some ways intentionally, as a way of divorcing the moving body from virtue, and in other ways by default, as when we are seen merely as the moving parts of a larger work. This othering of the dancing body has historically resulted in an othering of those who use the dancing body as a form of cultural expression, such as Native American Ghost Dancers, break dancers, and flamenco dancers.

I propose that we change the way we perceive the dancing body, not simply by rejecting the perspective of an outside oppressive force, but by examining our own judgements and conventions. That is, how can we address the dancing body as more than what it is producing and what emotions it is drawing from the spectator? How can we begin to explore the vast landscape of seeing the “other” as a fully evolved, sentient

being? We may begin by accepting a body in e-motion as well as in motion, a body struggling to find itself as we become accomplices to a body in the creative act of Being rather than a body being in the act of re-Creation.

As previously stated, as a lifelong dancer and choreographer, I have dedicated myself to all aspects of the process of creating and manifesting a vision through movement. To me, it is all sacred. I rejoice at the prospect of being part of an elite entity that is charged with another's precious vision and work. It is a daunting responsibility and one that I welcome with the mentality of a fierce warrior. I feel the same responsibility when bringing my own creations to life. With the role of choreographer comes respect, prestige, and a crushing burden if one is not prepared for its responsibilities. In this sense, choreography poses a myriad of challenges.

On the one hand, through choreography, one is presented with the possibility of achieving an eternal creative presence when other bodies can recreate one's work. Or, one can imagine re-enacting their own movements to such a degree of perfection, such attention to its essence and intention that one may become infinite and immortal within their own creation. On the other hand, we must also face the reality that our creation may never be what we envision. It may be worse. Or it may be demoralizingly better than we imagined, posing yet another possible existential reckoning as we realize that sometimes we are not in charge of our own creations. Regardless of how we value the manifestation of our creativity, there exists a small death every time we create. If nothing else, the death of a work that can never be claimed as new again. The death of a work that will never exist in the glow of the perfection in which it was conceived or done in one spectacular moment in time.

Every time we create, we seek to bring forth something so sublime, so important, that it warrants being imprinted on other bodies and carried out by other beings. This inscription of movements on foreign bodies constitutes a challenge to one's own mortality, as now others can eternalize your creation as they recreate your impulses, your shapes, your lines, and your compositional forms. Or does it? Perhaps instead, the creation of choreography simply serves as a reminder to the world of who is NOT dancing the work, of who is absent from the tableau before us. Or perhaps it is the complete opposite. Perhaps the creator ceases to matter. Perhaps the creation is the only thing that matters, and therefore the bodies presenting the work become the work. Regardless of whether we look at choreography as a way of eternalizing the creator, killing the creator, or elevating the ghost of the creator to that of a mythical, untouchable status, the question of Being remains. So, then for me, it is the very possibility of "being" that becomes my focus.

If we experience our art and our performance as a constantly vanishing and ethereal creation we are doomed to a life of longing, or as Lepecki states, "...continuous anticipated mourning and reiterated retrospective melancholia."²⁸ Longing for perfection. Longing to be better. Longing to find the right circumstances and venues to show our magnificent creations. My question is, how can we move past this and eschew all needs surrounding the creation and the presentation of said creation? What if we can be or *become* the creation each and every time we move? What if we can teach others to do the same?

²⁸ Lepecki, 363.





Explanation of the Creative Manifestation

My aim with the creative manifestation was to explore the questions of creation, authorship and being, and attempt to try answering them through the Steps Last philosophy of understanding movement. In lieu of a live performance, I created a short dance film that demonstrated my ability to express the four basic elements of the Steps Last pedagogy within my own body. I created the conditions for an improvised work that recreates the disadvantages and uncertainties that students face when learning flamenco for the first time and used only flamenco's four basic elements of rhythm, singing, improvisation and history to bring my creative vision to life. In order to be able to embody the methodology in my body, I had to deconstruct it completely and divorce it

from flamenco so as to universalize the concept while putting myself at as much a disadvantage as possible.

First, I deconstructed the four elements by turning rhythm into an internal oscillation designed to keep me upright; the *cante* was transformed into the concept of inspiration; improvisation was shown through the navigation of my surroundings and the many interpretations I had for the same song; and the history became an internal story that gave my performance purpose and intention. Next, I deconstructed flamenco's four basic elements of rhythm, *cante*, improvisation and history, to rhythm, *inspiration*, improvisation and *story* as I would not allow myself to dance flamenco for this performance. I used only the four parameters of rhythm, inspiration, improvisation and story as my corporal guide while taking away the ease of moving in any discipline that I have been trained in, specifically flamenco, ballet, tap, Horton, Graham, Dunham, or jazz. In addition, I worked outside, in the wind, with balloons (unreliable props) and on rough terrain that threw me off-balance and forced improvisation on all levels while wearing the *bata de cola*.²⁹ Finally, to add to my discomfort, I did not rehearse or plan any movements leading up to filming day.

In addition to not dancing in the weeks leading up to the shoot, other than the twenty-minute hike up the mountain, I did not have the opportunity to warm up before filming. I did this for multiple reasons. First, as stated earlier, I was striving to recreate the awkwardness that first-time students of dance must feel when learning a new discipline that requires movement when their body may not be prepared, and coordination may be an issue. Second, and I wanted to experiment with the concept of

²⁹ Long train dress requiring a smooth floor and turns for optimal engagement.

not warming up at all as that is how many of my students show up for class and how many flamenco artists frequently take the stage. I have witnessed countless, stunning, performances in large, sold-out venues where the artists are sitting in the green room smoking a cigarette and chatting backstage two minutes before they go on, their pre-performance warm up consisting of putting out their cigarette and cracking their neck.³⁰ This is completely foreign to me as I am militant about my warmup before rehearsal or a performance. For this project, however, I decided to explore movement with no warmup, similar to when I am in a *juerga*. I found that dancing while cold brought an immediacy and rawness to my movements that I really enjoyed. In the spirit of keeping my body healthy, however, this is not something I will do regularly.

Deconstructing and Manifesting the Four Basic Elements of the Steps Last Pedagogy

Rhythm

In Steps Last, rhythm is the fundamental element keeping the singer, dancer and musicians connected. In the Rhythm section of my creative manifestation, I show a short cross section of my daily footwork warm-up to exhibit the continuous, meditative qualities of sound and movement. I usually spend two hours before every rehearsal doing simple, repetitive footwork drills designed to tighten me up rhythmically and sharpen my dexterity, accuracy and speed. The rolling, repetitive footwork sounds invariably put me in a meditative state which I can compare to the effects of shamanic drumming or a beat-

³⁰ This is not to infer that flamencos don't warm up. They do. A lot. But not always. Especially in informal fiesta settings where one dances in the middle of a party. I wanted to experiment with this concept for this performance.

assisted meditation.³¹ This altered state allows me to transcend past the intensity of the physical effort I am expending into a place of corporal effortlessness and expanded rhythmic consciousness.

In nature, rhythm acts as a balancing force, a way to keep an organism in equilibrium.³² I decided to take this concept and use rhythm as the stabilizing force in my dancing. I did not want to rely on sounds that I could make with my feet, hands, or body. Instead, I wanted the centering, grounding nature of rhythm to come through in my movements as I used energetic oscillations to regain my center on unfamiliar, rugged terrain. As Maura C. Flannery states in her essay “Rhythm and Nature,” “A rhythm can be thought of as ‘an interaction of opposed energies’ (Dewey, 1934); when the opposed forces or energies are of about equal strength, the result is balance.”³³ Every time I was thrown off balance (which was continuously), I turned my body’s reaction to the disruption into a movement of equal force in the opposing direction. When using this technique, I found that regaining my balance on the unpredictable terrain was much easier than I had expected. I had not experimented with this before dancing on the mountain and I was incredibly surprised at how easy it was to regain my balance once I employed this method. This is how I chose to show the importance of rhythm in my creative manifestation. Rhythm, in the context of my final performance, kept me upright

³¹ I have witnessed babies fall asleep in their carriages when the footwork begins and wake up the minute it stops. In addition, for the past twenty years I have also used a drum beat to assist in meditation and I find that the effect on the brain and body is the same as with constant, repetitive footwork.

³² Maura C. Flannery, “Rhythm & Form In Nature,” *The American Biology Teacher*, February 1990, 118. <https://online.ucpress.edu/abt/article/52/2/118/14517/Rhythm-amp-Form-in-Nature>.

³³ Flannery, “Rhythm & Form,” 118.

in a literal sense, while rhythm, in the context of my rehearsals, keeps me upright in a transcendental sense.

Inspiration (Cante)

The second most important element in the Steps Last Methodology is the *cante*. The *cante* is what inspires the movements, rhythm, and the flow of flamenco. Since I was not using flamenco music, I turned the element of *cante* into the concept of Inspiration. For my creative manifestation I was inspired by the movement of the ocean, music emanating from a single instrument, the sounds of crashing waves, whales, wind, a lone balloon I found tumbling down a beach and my own novice poems and paintings representing my ability to create works of art and exist in the unknown. My aim in the Inspiration section was to weave all these elements together in a montage of images that inspired this particular performance as I have been capturing them throughout the past year. In terms of the music I chose, I settled on a work that has resonated and stayed with me since the first day I heard it, Jon Batiste's "Chopinesque."

As stated earlier, in flamenco one must understand the singing to be able to anticipate the structure and rhythmic cues being expressed in the music. One must have a deep knowledge of sung verses to be able to work within their structure and adapt to any singer's interpretation of any given verse. To show this concept, I used a song that I am intimately familiar with, Jon Batiste's "Chopinesque." It is, of course, his interpretation of Frederic Chopin's famous Nocturne, Op. 9, No. 2.

Having been raised on classical music and listening to my mother play Chopin on the piano when I was young, the Nocturnes were part of the soundtrack of my childhood.

The first time I heard Jon Batiste's interpretation of this iconic piece I was moved to tears. I have heard many pianists' interpretations of this piece, and Batiste's rendition surprised me early on with his uniquely American sound. The melancholic, isolated notes that stab through the silence in the beginning of the piece give way to a lyrical landscape that is as emotional as it is technical. Batiste's musical language brings American jazz and blues to Chopin in such a way that it elicited a visceral reaction from my body. These are the nuances that flamencos hear when they hear a verse that they are familiar with sung a different way. These subtleties are what color flamenco movements and add depth to the dancer's interpretation. As Ethan pointed out to me early on, in flamenco, the dancer is a visual representation of the singing, therefore the dancer's ability to personify the singing lies solely in their detailed knowledge of the verses being sung to them.

In order to demonstrate the importance of the *cante*, I decided to use a musical piece that I was intimately familiar with, and I chose an interpretation that I had only briefly studied. I had choreographed half of this song before Covid hit, so, I had studied the first half of the song but not the second. Therefore, when filming, I was able to anticipate the exquisite moments Batiste inserts in the first half of his interpretation of this piece and use that knowledge for the nuances in the second half. This intimate knowledge of the piece allowed me to become embedded in the musical landscape while finding inspiration in my location, the sounds and movement of wildlife and nature and the poignancy of a lone red balloon tumbling along a beach. My choice of song, terrain and wardrobe all affected the next element. That of Improvisation.

Improvisation

As stated earlier, flamenco is a highly improvisational art form, regardless of whether we are examining the music, song, rhythms, or dancing. Everyone is improvising over a structural set of rules dictated by the rhythms and the singing, and then using their respective instrument to imbue the performance with their own voice and personality. As a dancer, one needs to be able to react to the singing, play with and eventually manipulate the established rhythms, and reveal their knowledge, personality, and artistic style through corporal expression. This was the hardest aspect to deconstruct since I'm working with music, movements, and rhythms that I am incredibly comfortable with. I decided to show the importance of improvisation by forcing this element on all levels within my own body.

First, I attempted to stay away from my habitual approach to the movements of flamenco and I did my best to steer clear of any movements I had ever done before. I was not completely successful in this aspect, but I was able to limit my trained movements quite a bit. I also did not (and could not) use any of the choreography I had created over the first part of the music, as I was dancing with the *bata de cola* on a shifting, uneven and rugged surface.³⁴ The rugged terrain coupled with dancing outside, dancing with a balloon, dancing on a mountaintop, with no warm-up, barefoot on grass or with heels on an uneven, unpredictable surface forced me to improvise every movement and every gesture as I could not predict any of the conditions surrounding my performance.

³⁴Here is the link to the video of that choreography so that you can see that I did not cheat. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KFrG_57EoVA.

I knew I would have to negotiate every factor of my body in motion as I figured out how to lift and place the *bata de cola* without any of the necessary tools and conditions.³⁵ I had no idea how this would manifest itself in my body and in my movements. Again, I was happily surprised by how much these last twenty years of improvising at least half of what I do onstage gave me the tools to navigate these elements as I forced them upon myself all at once. Using rhythm to find my balance was also instrumental in keeping me centered throughout as I had nothing to ground me other than my internal rhythm.

In the Improvisation section of the creative manifestation, I sought to show these many factors and how they relate to existing in the vanishing point by creating a six-up of eight raw takes filmed on the same day. Every take is different and when I watched them in the editing phase I was surprised by how much I enjoyed the different interpretations of the piece. I realized that by employing the Steps Last philosophy, I had endless versions of the same song inside me still left to express. This was incredibly freeing and edifying as an artist, and as a dancer who has always second guessed herself. These improvisations along with the paintings and the poems I created during this time have set me free and have allowed me to trust every artistic choice I make from here forward.

Story (History)

The final element of the Steps Last technique is understanding the culture and history behind flamenco. Without a knowledge of Andalusian, specifically Gitano, culture and history, movements tend to look imitative and representational rather than

³⁵ The *bata de cola* requires an extreme centering and grounding of the body and a heightened engagement with the core. It moves based on slip, momentum, lift and drag. Those were all taken away as the surfaces I worked on would hold the *bata* in place and prevent it from sliding, thus hindered my ability to use it properly.

personal and authentic. I have found that this is one of the most frustrating aspects for students of flamenco. They long to look authentic and “real” but they are never satisfied with the aesthetics of their movements. Unfortunately for students, flamenco movements are a manifestation of the dancer’s knowledge of *cante*, their rhythmic mastery and their cultural experience and understanding. These are very difficult elements to incorporate in your dancing if you are not deeply familiar with flamenco music, sung verses and rhythms, and if you have not lived in the flamenco circles of Spain.

For Gitanos and many non-Gitano Spaniards who practice flamenco, the art form is part of who they are. It defines a great part of their culture and permeates practically every aspect of daily life. It is common for movements to be “handed down” from one generation to another as an ancestral, corporal language. As with the rhythms and the singing, there are subtleties in movements that will only make sense if they are coming from real, lived experiences. It is not enough to learn the steps and imitate the gestures. One must learn to exist naturally within the form, stop “dancing” and simply “be.”

Though I incorporate short cultural and historical lectures and assign viewings and readings in my classes, I am very limited as my classes are predominantly dance classes, not lecture courses. In addition, I cannot expect my students to dance a story they are still learning and to internalize a culture that they may have no connection to and have never been exposed to. So, to help them discover their own artistic voice and find meaning in their movements, I have developed the final element of the Steps Last Pedagogy; that is: finding a story. I ask my students to dance a story with only four factors:

1. What/who are they?

2. Where are they?
3. What time of day is it?
4. What is the action?

The story must have a beginning, a middle and a conclusion and must begin and end with a set section of movements. If I have linked three steps together and ended the sequence with a *llamada*, then the story must span the length of the entire sequence and must end with the *llamada*. If I have just given them one step, then they must repeat the same step over and over and observe how it changes as they enter different sections of their internal “story.”

One of the most fascinating aspects of this part of the Steps Last Pedagogy is the effects that the story has on dancers of all levels and abilities. Almost without exception, I have witnessed how having a story results in students finding an intention for their movements. The element of finding the *intention* behind the movements leads to dancers being more grounded, adhering much better to the rhythm, expressing the movements to their fullest potential, internalizing, and thus remembering the movements with greater ease, greatly improving their ability to transmit emotion and purpose, and exhibiting an energetic ebb, flow and crescendo in their gestures. Finally, the story eliminates the boredom of repetition as there is now a purpose behind the movements. This is my artificial way of arriving at what comes naturally to those who are raised in or deeply immersed in flamenco culture. For my performance of *Our Ephemeral Nature*, I used an internal story of love, loss and recovery in order to give my movements meaning, depth and purpose.

Final Performance: *Our Ephemeral Nature*

These are the four elements that inspired my final performance of *Our Ephemeral Nature*. I isolated each of the four basic elements of flamenco by deconstructing them and then presenting them as separate entities. I then wove the elements all together in *Our Ephemeral Nature*, culminating in the final performance being a simultaneous embodiment of all four. I used rhythm as a balancing force in my body and as a way of connecting with my own spirit through the repetition of tiny internal oscillations designed to keep me upright. Much like the intensive footwork warmup displayed in the Rhythm section of my creative manifestation, my rhythm in nature served as a meditative, grounding force that enabled me to stay on my feet and push through the difficulties of navigating the terrain.

I sought to juxtapose the strength and beauty of mountains against the fragility of their ecological balance by improvising and dancing in an empowered, yet incredibly vulnerable state due to all the unknown factors I was negotiating. I was inspired and motivated by the ocean and the mountains in the film. The mountains and the beaches in the creative manifestation are just minutes from my house and I have re-connected with my soul ever since moving close to them. After living in cities since the age of seventeen, this return to nature is feeding my creativity and inspiring me to explore uncharted territory in all aspects of my life. In addition to the use of rhythm, improvisation and the elements that inspired my movements, I was navigating an internal story of loss, love and the emotions surrounding the recovery of what comes after sorrow.

Conclusion

As I situate Steps Last, the process of producing my creative manifestation and my deconstructed embodiment of the pedagogy in my final performance, *Our Ephemeral Nature*, I find myself in a literary vanishing point as I navigate André Lepecki's resignation to ephemerality, Susan Foster's defense of virtuosity as a way of celebrating community, Yvonne Rainer's rejection of "performance" and Joann Keallinohomoku's declaration that all dance forms are created equal. When I place my work against that of performance artists and performative choreographers, I can see a connection between the need to express in a state of what I call "naturalness," the need to push the boundaries of pedestrian movements into the highest levels of execution and the urgent necessity to deconstruct and dismantle the long-held Euro-centric, Western philosophies on dance that burden our bodies, our cultures, and our forms of expression.

These four philosophies on movement all converge, resulting in a counterbalance of ideals that leave me in a place of delicious ephemerality. On the one hand, I have always questioned our long-held custom of placing ballet at the top of the hierarchical order of dance. On the other, I am fully committed to the rigors of technique and taking every movement to the furthest potential of my abilities. All while seeking to unveil the importance of virtuosic performance of natural and trained movement as a way of deconstructing the hegemony of ballet as master over all other dance forms and choreography as master over all intentions for movement.

In tracing the de-evolution of choreography, we can see the impact of "No" as a way of bringing the natural body into the conversation of dance and artistic expression, without passing judgement on virtuosity, as in Yvonne Rainer's 1965 *No Manifesto* in

which she declares, among other things: “No to virtuosity. No to moving or being moved.”³⁶ We can also examine Joann Kealiinohomoku’s 1970 seismic declaration that “It is good anthropology to think of ballet as a form of ethnic dance.”³⁷ If Rainer was resisting the virtuosic display of the moving body as being an elitist relic from a bygone era, Kealiinohomoku sought to situate that virtuosity as an anthropological, artistic expression by categorizing ballet, the ultimate in what had traditionally been viewed as a Western ideal of the highest form of physical expression, as “ethnic dance.”

Keallinohomoku gave us a new lens through which to look at ballet and in doing so, she opened the possibility for all dance forms to be considered equal and valuable. Steps Last seeks to bridge this gap in a philosophical and pedagogical sense by teaching the everyday movements of flamenco as virtuosic expression rooted in cultural knowledge and ancestral connection. It was not until I read Susan Foster’s *Choreographing Empathy* that my place in this puzzle became clear. The use of virtuosity in flamenco is, as Foster states, an “affirmation and celebration of communal values.”³⁸ This virtuosity is not to be confused with an elitist attribution of Western values on a complex and layered form of expression as is the case when those outside of the culture of flamenco want to reduce their involvement in it to a mere display of their ability to retain and replicate a set choreography.

³⁶ Geoff, “Yvonne Rainer: No Manifesto,” March 3, 2011, accessed June 1, 2021, <https://1000manifestos.com/yvonne-rainer-no-manifesto/>.

³⁶ Joann Keallinohomoku, “An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance,” In *Moving History, Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader*, ed. Ann Cooper Albright and Ann Dils (Middleton, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 33.

³⁸ Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, 183.

In my twenty-five years of being deeply immersed in flamenco, I see all these declarations coming to life in the way flamenco is realized in the Andalusian school in Southern Spain. The line between life and art is blurred resulting in a spectacular display of both normalcy and virtuosity. We experience virtuosity, “not in distinguishing oneself by an exceptionally brilliant performance” as Susan Foster states, “but as a contribution to community.”³⁹ This building, perpetuating and exaltation of community is the vital, driving force under the form.

Flamenco dancers learn and absorb the tools necessary to allow them to navigate just about any rhythm and sung verse being thrown at them. They also learn to express through stillness and lack of movement. The performative aspects of the form are secondary to the anthropological ones. Listening becomes an artistic, expressive act. (For those wondering whether this holds an audience’s attention, one need only do a YouTube search of “First time hearing” or “Reaction” to see the millions of viewers tuning in to watch a person’s reaction to hearing a certain song for the first time.) The immediacy of this act is one of the most powerful elements of watching a flamenco dancer. The music and delivery of lyrics and verses is ever-changing, thus requiring the dancer to pay close attention to the nuances of the sung verses as they are dancing, making split-second decisions while navigating polyrhythmic accent changes from one rhythmic measure to another.

What makes flamenco so enticing to watch and to do is this immediacy, this uncanny perception of a person’s alive-ness as they thread their movements and sounds through a razor thin needle dictated by speed, stillness, emotion, inspiration, innovation,

³⁹ Foster, 184.

play, ancestry, and an unwavering sense of being. While choreography can make us better dancers, better technicians and bring us to the sublime state of movement with a purpose, it may not create a sense of immediacy or urgency only palpable when there is an actual moment of uncertainty or not-knowing.

The mystery of live, improvised performance takes the experience of the creator and spectator to a place of simultaneous discovery and creation. This forces the dancer to be completely present, an open channel for inspiration as well as for failure. When one has complete mastery over the rhythm, is well versed in the singing, has an arsenal of movements that are readily accessible and understands the history and importance of the form within the culture it has emanated from, improvisation becomes a landscape of unrestrained experimentation and play. If choreography exists as a way to pin down the ephemeral, to catalogue that which is by nature every-changing, then, Lepecki argues, "...the dancer is always already [sic] an absent presence in the field of the gaze. Somewhere between body and ghost, a flash suspended between past and future."⁴⁰

In its immediacy, flamenco gives us the opportunity to move beyond these parameters set by an arbitrary, narrow philosophy that renders the dancer voiceless and soul-less, a body tasked only with perpetuating other people's work and vision. Instead, through flamenco, we are invited to exist precisely at that "vanishing point."⁴¹ We are challenged to rise to the occasion of Being and being-present simultaneously as we discover, create, and express ourselves in the immediacy of the now.⁴² There is no

⁴⁰ Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance*, 363.

⁴¹ Lepecki, 355.

⁴² Lepecki, 355.

pretense or expectation that our efforts will be captured, remembered, or reproduced. On the contrary, we know that our creations are but moments in our existence. We shoulder the responsibility that we possess using the tools, knowledge, and preparation to, at a moment's notice, do it all over again. The brilliance is not in our ability to re-create that which has passed, but in our ability to express what is. The vanishing point becomes the flash of light that illuminates who we are in any given moment in time, giving the dancer eternal permanence, relevance, and an infinite landscape from which to draw upon for inspiration and self-determination. For those threatened by erasure, the vanishing point is where the indelible mark of Being reveals itself.

the end...





I'm always waiting for that first mistake. -Yo-Yo Ma

Supporting Material

The following is a collection of some of the materials that inspired and supported me through this process. My paintings and poems reminded me that I don't have to know how to create in order to create. Seeing what I was capable of outside of dance allowed me to trust my instincts in the editing and assembly phase of the creative manifestation. The photos are stills taken during my walks through nature and on the beach. I turn to nature often for inspiration and these photographs represent some of the incredible visuals I was able to capture on any given day as I allowed myself to absorb my surroundings with no agenda.

I have included my editing notes so that the reader can see a small slice of the effort and time that goes into every cut. The more detailed the instructions, the faster the editor can work (and time is money). The *Our Ephemeral Nature* storyboard has been included so that the reader might appreciate what the original concept was and how it morphed once in production. The storyboard helped me have a clear plan for the shoot and helped me convey my ideas to both the filmmaker and the editor of the creative manifestation film.



First watercolor in summer tones



Watercolor in brown and teal

First Hug (after)

Sounds echo off the platform
She appears through other faces
Long hair over broken shoulders
Beauty, unscathed
Blue suitcase left behind

I run to her
She looks beyond me
I slam into her
Legs around her waist
Face in her neck

We hug so tight
and then, my father (papito)
He is behind me
He wraps his arms around us both
her muffled sob

Pressed between them
They hug so tight that I let go
My legs dangling

His heart in my back
Her heart in my chest
A hug so tight that I let go

For the first time
For the only time
This hug is theirs, not mine

cuetlachtli

a moan comes, haunting through the silence
shes weak but still has some left in her
fight
she'll go down snarling at the violence

shes weak but still has some left in her
as her legs find solid ground
she'll go down snarling at the violence
crouch

as her legs find solid ground
she rips her skirt
crouch
she whispers as she flirts

she rips her skirt
her growl the first of many
she whispers as she flirts
a shiny penny

her growl the first of many
stops the winter in his tracks
a shiny penny
flashes scars on other backs

stops the winter in his tracks
steel eyes focus, then she strikes
flashes scars on other backs
licks her teeth and sinks the bite

steel eyes focus, then she strikes
haunches sprung the terror stops
licks her teeth and sinks the bite
a moan comes haunting through the night

haunches sprung the terror stops
her howl an echoed lick of chops
a moan comes haunting through the night
She disappears into the silence

Poems



Sycamore Cove, CA



Conejo Mountains, CA



Sand Windswept & Striated, Ventura, CA



Watercolor in blue and yellow

Our Ephemeral Nature Shot List

String Out 1:

1:25	Stab	LS	Dress	Mountain	
1:32-1:40	Stab	LS	Dress	Mountain	
2:30	Turn	LS	Dress	Mountain	
3:37-3:55	Turns	LS	Dress	Mountain	
4:07	Stab	LS	Dress	Mountain	
4:11	Stab	LS	Dress	Mountain	Arm Up
4:14	Stab	LS	Dress	Mountain	Arms Up
5:00-7:00	Balloon Footage				
7:28-7:44	Skirt & Toromba	LS	Dress	Mountain	
7:40-7:44	Great sequence	LS	Dress	Mountain	Music sync
7:46-7:49	Lateral Reaches	LS	Dress	Mountain	
8:04-8:09	Belen	LS	Dress	Mountain	Round arms
8:20-8:36	Great Turns & Pose	LS	Dress	Mountain	Music sync
8:39-8:50 (note)	Great Drama & Pose	LS	Dress	Mountain	Music sync
12:58	Enter Frame	FS	Dress	Mountain	Low Music
22:27-22:23	Balloon Reach / Toro	FS	Dress	Mountain	
22:50-23:03	Turns	FS	Dress	Mountain	
23:10-23:17	Back Bends!!	FS	Dress	Mountain	Music Sync
23:45-23:47	Slump to ground	FS	Dress	Mountain	
25:45	Turn	MS	Dress	Mountain	Handheld
26:06-26:12 (?)	Crouched Rock	MS	Dress	Mountain	Music Sync
26:26-30	Stab	MS	Dress	Mountain	Arms Up
26:60-27:13	High Drama	MS	Dress	Mountain	
27:05	Stab Arm Up	MS	Dress	Mountain	
27:26	Slump to ground	MS	Dress	Mountain	
27:57	Start Shorts Take	MCU	Shorts	Mountain	
28:59-29:09	Good Arm Flap	MCU	Shorts	Mountain	
29:36-29:33	Lean Into Stabs	MCU	Shorts	Mountain	
29:44	Good Turn	MCU	Shorts	Mountain	
30:05-30:10	Wild Stabs	MCU	Shorts	Mountain	
30:10-30:23	Sways	MCU	Shorts	Mountain	
30:36-30:31	Turns (2 ways)	MCU	Shorts	Mountain	
31:14	Slow Arm Flap	MCU	Shorts	Mountain	
32:20	Run Up Hill		Dress	Mountain	

Our Ephemeral Nature Concept Breakdown

My Story

Childhood footage showcasing my upbringing, my community, my relationship to nature and my relationship to movement.

Inspiration

Short film stringing together the elements that inspired this project.

Mountains

The ocean

The sounds of nature.

Love and Loss

My ability to create with no judgement.

The red balloon tumbling along a beach.

Improvisation

The 6 Up showing eight raw, unedited takes all shot on the same day with the same song showing me dancing completely differently every time.

Rhythm

Video of my footwork warmup while rehearsing. As a flamenco dancer rhythm is the foundational element to everything I do. It serves as a way to integrate myself with the music, to manipulate and play with the tempo and the accent patterns and a way to ground my movements. The rhythm also serves as a meditational force that elevates the mind, body and spirit to another plane transcending time and space.

The Performance: Our Ephemeral Nature

For this project I wanted to embody the four foundational elements of the Steps Last Pedagogy to create a performance that reflected these elements in a deconstructed, non-literal form. I used an internal **story** on loss and love to give my movements the depth and sincerity that having an intention brings. I was **inspired** by a red balloon I found tumbling on a beach, the sights and sounds of nature, Chopin (music from my childhood) and Jon Batiste (music from my present), and my own ability to create free from judgement. I **improvised** every take, did not warm up or prepare any movements, and chose to dance on rugged terrain with a helium balloon in order to force myself to improvise every movement and gesture. I also attempted to refrain from doing any movements that I was familiar with, seeking to explore only new, spontaneous movements. Finally, I used **rhythm**, the foundational element of flamenco as a grounding force and a way to maintain balance. In nature rhythm is used as a way to stabilize an organism by sending energy in an opposing direction. Every time I felt myself getting off balance, I would hurl my body into the opposite direction with the same amount of force. This stabilized me and allowed me to dance freely while taking advantage of the constant interruptions due to a loss of balance.

Notes For Zak

Zak's Dropbox file upload here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/zgqwjhi79iakx8r/AADwtRaxKsKzLNDeCESF5IIxa?dl=0>

Six Up 2

1. Can we insert the BIG backbend footage during drama moment? Top Center.
2. Drop sound on shorts clip in beginning. Too much airplane. Once airplane is gone you can bring it up so that we hear my shoes on the ground.
3. Drop sound in everything after Chopinesque ends and just leave wind so that we don't hear the next song come on. Then, when I speak to the camera in shorts and Jeff answers cut everything to black.

Performance Edit 7: (Our Ephemeral Nature)

1. Add black Title Slide before entire film.
2. Fade to black in silence.
3. Start film.
4. Add the original red balloon video for acknowledgements and end credits.
5. Add Text for opening and ending.

For Performance:

Information For Title Slide:

Our Ephemeral Nature

A study in equilibrium through rhythm and the immediacy of improvisation inspired by nature, loss, and love.

Information for End Credits Slide:

Our Ephemeral Nature

A performance created in partial compliance with the Hollins University Master in Fine Arts Thesis requirements for Summer 2021.

Concept and Performance by: Cihltli Ocampo

Thesis Mentor: Jennifer Lott

Thesis Media Advisor: Orfeas Skutelis

Filmed by: Jeff Katz

Edited by: Zak Byrd

Assisted by: Mallory Gottlieb

Guest Artist: Tama

Music: Chopinesque by Jon Batiste

A huge thank you to Jennifer Lott for taking me on and for giving me the confidence to follow my instincts. Thank you to Amanda K. Miller and Irene Dowd for your valuable input and generosity of spirit. Thank you to Orfeas Skutelis for reminding me that everything needs to have a purpose.

The earth has music for those who listen. - William Shakespeare

Edit 7 Clip Substitutions

1. Substitute movement at :14 for 6 Up 2: UL at either :27 or :32-46.
2. Substitute balloon birth at :47 for SO1: 11:37-11:39 + 13:28-13:53 or 14:26-14:44
3. Substitute balloon shot at note at :59 for SO1: 15:20 (single still) or 15:40-44 (movement).
4. Substitute Cihkli w/balloon shot on note at 1:01 for SO1: 17:20 (single still) or 17:24-27 (single moving)
5. Substitute Cihkli walking w/balloon shot note at 1:04 for SO1: 20:47-20:52.
6. Cut at 1:19 and go to next clip. Wait until Tama and I are out of frame completely to go to next clip.
7. If there is a gap before my entrance to park, maybe fill it with one of the opening sequence stabs?
8. Wait until 1:27 for me to enter frame with balloon in park.
9. From 2:53-3:01 lets substitute some of the turns from SO1: 3:37-3:55?
10. Instead of speeding up can we do some jump cuts to show action of folding and end music with me smiling and hugging the folded heart, so we don't rush the ending?
11. Fade in wind and show me with Tama from the back. 4 secs.
12. Can we add a cool sequence with some of the best shots put in random order and some turns in reverse? Like flashes on a set rhythm? Each flash lasting 2 seconds with 1 sec blackouts in between?
 - a. SO1 28:59 Shorts Arms Flap in
reverse
 - b. SO1 25:45 Dress Turn in
reverse
 - c. SO1 23:17 Dress Back Bend
 - d. SO1 7:28-7:37 Dress Turns
 - e. SO1 7:38-7:42 Dress Toromba
 - f. SO1 7:44 Dress Pose
 - g. SO1 27:05 Shorts Stab Arm Up
 - h. SO1 8:20-8:36 Dress Great Sequence & Pose in
reverse
 - i. SO1 8:39-8:50 Dress Drama & Pose
 - j. SO3 8:21-8:25 Dress Back Bend Slant
 - k. SO3 8:56-0:00 Dress Turns Slant Sunset
 - l. SO3 10:21-10:31 Dress Turns Slant Sunset in
reverse
 - m. SO1 28:59 Shorts Arm Flap
13. As the last sequences flash, we fade to black. End with Arm Flap again.

For Rhythm Section Video

I've uploaded some of my rehearsal clips. Let's see if we can do something with those.

For My Story Section Video:

I've uploaded some videos of me dancing and roller skating as kid that I thought could be cool. Here are the gaps we could put them in during the home movie:

7:23-7:46

8:05-8:17

8:34-3:38

- This is the end so I'm not sure how to end it. Before I ended it with my me and my mom but now that it's about my story as a dancer, I thought maybe this is a good spot for the roller skating? Lemme know your thoughts.

Notes for Zak – Inspiration

Holy shit! It made me cry!!! I love it! The paintings scroll looks fantastic! So beautiful!

Thank you! (I'm living in exclamation points lately.)

There's a lot of room for crescendo with the music so I'm thinking we should add some stuff. LOL. First, an ocean shot with the golden shimmer of sunset since I mention that in my text. And then me dancing on the beach interspliced with orcas swimming.

OK. Here goes.

I think the way you have the entire beginning is perfect. Don't change a thing. Starting at the ocean foam of 1:13 I thought we could do this:

<u>Song T.S.</u>	<u>Clip #</u>	<u>Clip T.S.</u>	<u>Action</u>
1:13-1:46	3449	:30-1:04	Cross fade foam to sunset shimmer on sand.
1:47-1:55			Balloon on sand
1:55-2:05	4Cactus	:20-:40	Cactus pan up to amazing mountain view.
2:06-2:09	Stock Footage		Killer whales racing (3 secs)
2:10-2:13	2235	:16-:19	Me dancing on beach.
2:14-2:17	Stock Footage		Killer whales racing (3 secs)
2:18-2:26	2235	:20-:29	Me running towards ocean and jumping at the very end. Black out before I land.

Killer whales jumping.

<https://www.istockphoto.com/video/orcas-killer-whales-swimming-gm629700214-113132175>

- I know this sounds crazy, but is it possible to add these amazing orcas to the picture? (I dream about them, and I've been fascinated with them all my life. They are definitely part of my inspiration and I think it fits with the whale sounds in the beginning. I found some great stock footage. It has to be this particular clip, so I don't mind paying for it. Can you download and add to my bill?

Random Music Notes:

2:07/08/09

Big Pulls

2:26

Song Ends

New Zak Notes – OEN, 6Up, Rhythm

Our Ephemeral Nature

Fantastic!!! Thank you! The color correction is incredible. Everything looks amazing! Now I'm obsessing about the very end.

- I'm wondering if we can put the last quote in the sky on top of the scene where I'm looking out over the mountains with Tama.
- Then slowly fade to black, leaving just the quote and the sounds in black for 1-2 secs and then fade out.
- That way it flows better, and the quote closes the whole thing, but it looks like Tama and I are listening to nature.
- Or do you think I should cut that last bit out altogether and end with just the quote?
- Or do you think it's better as is? It just seems a little random to end on the flash of me and Tama when we just had a whole flash sequence that was so elegant and purposeful. It takes me out of the vibe of the end.

6Up

Gorgeous.

- Let's take out the quote on improvisation. Just let it fade to black.
- Let's keep this as an alternate option in case I wanna use it outside of my thesis presentation.

Rhythm

Wow. Incredible! Thank you, Zak! YES!! OK, so here are the edits.

- Let's change the first slide to read: Warning: Loudness
- At :45, can we cross fade the next section in and let the sound overlap for the first few seconds? I think that will be a better transition rather than a hard cut.
- Let's punch the second clip a little later in the second clip. (Rhythm03 - 1:32-2:39) so that we can get it in during that little silence right before the music comes back in. I think that will make a better aural ramp for the transition. Then stop it at 2:39 on the Rhythm03 timeline so we get a cleaner cut into the new section.
- Then cross fade in the final section in at Rhythm03 3:57 (I want to keep one reaction to a mistake in there) fading out on the last 3-4 seconds so that it gives the impression that I'm gonna be there for a while....cause I am. LOLOL.
- This should shorten the whole thing in case they are going to give me a time restraint on these.
- Again, let's keep this version as an extended edit for the future.

For My Story Section Video:

We have about 1:20 to play with.

New Vimeo edit from 7:23-8:41. (Final fade to black can start at 8:39.)

7:23 New clips can start.

7:23-8:41 Section of song that's left.

8:41-8:45 Music has ended but there is still resonance which I like.

Possible Clips:

Clip 134	:18-:52	42 nd St.
Clip 134	3:08-3:32	Spanish Dance!! We gotta put this in.
Clip 137	:36-:49	Boogie Woogie
Clip 138	:23-48	We're In The Money
Clip 130	2:43-2:58	Really cute roller skate with ocean in background. I do a little flip and clap my hands. Nice end.
Clip 126	2:19-2:38	Me diving in ocean but older. Nice dive. Boy behind me gets scared. Hahaha.
Clip 113	00-:10	Fast cartwheels.
Clip 113	1:18-1:57	Roller skating (nice smile at 1:57)
Clip 118	:46-1:00	Sweet moment with my baby cousin in the pool. I like this because you can see how I've gotten a dancer's body already. Kinda cool.
Clip 106		Cute moment where my dad rescues me from the rocks.
Clip 93		Sweet moment with mom at the very end. Big smile.

So, I'm not sure how to end it. Would it be good to go back to my parents? There's a cute moment with my mom at the end that I could use and I have another cute moment with my dad. Here they are and then you decide.

8:22-8:32 Me and my mom. Maybe move this clip from original video to the end?
(Mom hug and big smile from me.)

Zak Notes on Film

First of all, this looks AMAZING. Thank you so much Zak. You hit the nail on the head with your choices and your placement of all the new clips. I love it. I could leave it as is but there are a few details that I think would really fine-tune it and make it even more spectacular. Here they are.

New Title Blurb:

Our Ephemeral Nature

An exploration inspired by the sights, sounds and sensations of nature, the embodiment of loss and love, the intimacy of improvisation, and finding equilibrium through rhythm.

Can we dissolve the title page as follows:

Ephemeral disappears first.

Then all words disappear leaving only:

Our Nature

inspired by

love improvisation

loss

rhythm

Then everything fades to black, and the movie starts.

Film Notes

- 1:39 Can you extend this clip until 1:41? That way the note at 1:41 coincides with the scene switch to the field and still gives me a split second before I enter.
- 1:52 Can we pull the clip from 1:54 in here so that we take advantage of that wonderful note at 1:52? I think it will work really well rhythmically, and choreographically its fine because there are no accents we have to worry about. Then we can just extend this clip by two seconds so that it lines up with the cut you have at 2:07 into the new clip which I absolutely LOVE.
- 3:47 Can we do jump cuts instead of the speed up of me picking up the leash? I think it's a little too jarring and we can achieve the same effect with just a jump cut. Is this possible?
- 3:53 End of piece. I like this so much better. Can we leave my face up for 2-3 more seconds and initiate a three second fade to black 3:55?
Let's allow a second of black and silence before fading in the wind and then the first image of the last sequence of clips.
- 4:02 Can the first blackout be one second shorter? (It seems really long.)
- 4:03 Can this sequence be a slow motion of me just kicking up the skirt the first time? End with the skirt at its full height. As soon as it starts to come down, fade to black.
- 4:08 Switch this clip with the clip at 4:36. 4:08 is a continuation of 4:36. This way we have the satisfaction of one sequence that follows a logical order even if it's split up by other moments. Those of us who know flamenco will be waiting for the back bend and it will be super satisfying to actually get it later on in the sequence. This will only matter to people who know flamenco, but it will be a cool nod to the form

Credits

Can you leave the end credit slide up 3 seconds longer? (There's a lot of info on it.)

Acknowledgements:

Thank you to Orfeas Skutelis for reminding me that everything needs to have a purpose. (Please change everyone to everything.)

Question

Finally, did you color correct yet? I noticed it on the six up but not on the film. Just curious.

PERFECT!!! Thank you so much Zak!

If you have time:

Version 2 For Personal Use (not school).

Can you cut a second version where the credits read as follows:

Information For Title Slide:

Our Ephemeral Nature

Fade to black

Film

Information for End Credits Slide:

Our Ephemeral Nature

An exploration inspired by the sights, sounds and sensations of nature, the embodiment of loss and love, the intimacy of improvisation, and finding equilibrium through rhythm.

Concept and Performance by: Cihltli Ocampo

Filmed by: Jeff Katz

Edited by: Zak Byrd

Assisted by: Mallory Gottlieb

Guest Artist: Tama

Music: Chopinesque by Jon Batiste

Thank you to Jennifer Lott, Amanda K. Miller, Irene Dowd and Orfeas Skutelis.

Final Slide

The earth has music for those who listen. - William Shakespeare

New Video Edit Notes For Zak**For Inspiration Video:**

Black slide first

Whale moan:

<https://www.videvo.net/sound-effect/solo-whale-cry-stereo-pe936401/256877/>

Black for 3 seconds before paintings come in.

My paintings as a quick 20-30 second montage. If there's too many then just use a few.

Fade in Bach Cello Suite Prelude #1 after about 30 seconds overlap with the whale sounds

3714 Water coming through rocks. :03-:21

3727 Water movement. :03-:36 (Whale sounds fade out halfway through this clip.)

Red Balloon on sand :07-:33

4Cactus 0-1:08 Fade to Black

Everything can be on a simple 3 sec crossfade.

Only if you really have the time:

For My Story Section Video:

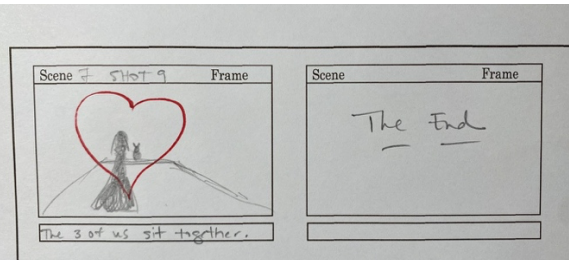
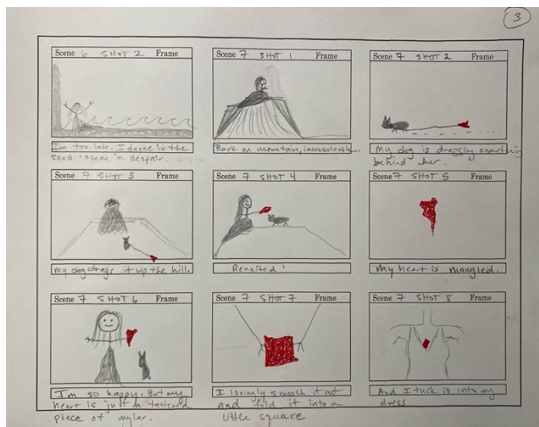
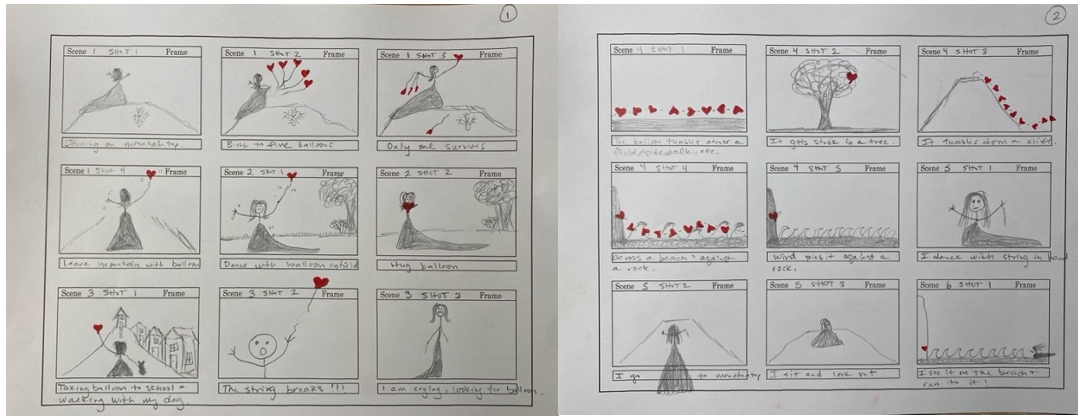
I've uploaded some videos of me dancing and roller skating as kid that I thought could be cool. Here are the gaps we could put them in during the home movie:

7:23-7:46 sub out clip 134 / :27-:51

8:05-8:17 sub out clip 113 / 00-:10

8:34-3:38 sub out clip 130 / :42-3:02

- This is the end so I'm not sure how to end it. Before I ended it with my me and my mom but now that it's about my story as a dancer, I thought maybe this is a good spot for the roller skating? Can fade to black on me roller skating. Lemme know your thoughts.
- I'm thinking this might be too disjointed. It might be better to just leave it as is. Don't worry about this unless you really have time.



Our Ephemeral Nature storyboard



Trio watercolor in graphite, brown and yellow

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