

Surviving Sunset: Identity, Prejudice, Music, Hollywood

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*Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Practice-Led PhD in
Music*

The University of Leeds

School of Music

September 2025

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Living in a state of psychic unrest, in a Borderland, is what makes poets write and artists create.

— Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute, 1987), p. 73

Music can [...] move the violated body and heart from terror to transcendence.

— Adele Bertei, *Why LaBelle Matters* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021), p. 174

Story-telling is not an impersonal myth, but neither is it a personal fiction: it is a word in act, [...]. [Glauber Rocha's] internal critique would first isolate a lived present beneath the myth, which could be intolerable, the unbelievable, the impossibility of living now in 'this' society [...]; then he had to seize from the unliving a speech act which could not be forced into silence, an act of story-telling which would not be a return to myth but a production of collective utterances capable of raising misery to a strange positivity, the invention of a people [...].

— Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galetta (London: Athlone, 1989 [1985]), p. 222

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the following people:

Martin Iddon and Stan Erraught who served as my dissertation supervisors; their advice and humour proved indispensable throughout this project.

Scott McLaughlin and Arianna Phillips-Hutton for their help and enjoyable conversation.

My friends and colleagues, Warren Beardall, Mark Epstein, and Rafael Mendes, whose listening ears and words of encouragement are always appreciated.

Pia, the provider of continual emotional and intellectual support who, along with my wonderful children, Seth and Zebedee, listened patiently to constant 'PhD talk'.

My exceptional adventurous mother, whose childhood narratives and experience provided so much of the subject matter.

And a special thank you to the Stanley Burton Research Scholarship fund whose support made the past three years possible.

Abstract

My research is primarily focused on the strategies certain Mexican Americans used to overcome the racism they encountered while living in Southern California during the mid-twentieth century—hiding in plain sight, passing and tall tales—and what role Hollywood may have played in this narrative. These tactics to avoid discrimination often extracted a high price from the practitioner. Arguably what Daniel Silvermint terms ‘permissible form[s] of self-regarding complicity’, they are also capable of rupturing familial histories and, although identity may be considered a mutable concept, (dis)connection from one’s racial heritage by hiding in plain sight or denying an integral part of yourself can lead to mental health issues, shame and loss of, what Tahlia Eastman calls, an ‘ontological sense of belonging’.

I have used my creative practice to investigate the gap between intellectual discourse and emotional knowledge as, although theory provides contrasting philosophical perspectives and academically stimulating discourse about the human condition, music allows the practitioner to express something theory cannot by offering the means to express a different truth and reality than the empirical world of understanding, a reality with an(other) relationship to time and space.

The musical compositions for this thesis have a complex relationship to the past through use of ‘anamnesis’, fabricated recollection, suggested narrative, and enigmatic allegory. I question myself through work that inhabits a space of collaged ‘no time’, aural space constructed of an elusive multiplicity that offers many possible readings. Using incorrectly remembered past occurrences juxtaposed with current audio imaginings, I create soundscapes for events that never happened but might have. Consciously leveraged through nostalgia’s false golden filter and many layers of obfuscated meaning (real, false, and double bluff), these compositions offer the listener an ambiguous space where they might create their own understandings, much like Svetlana Boym’s reimagining of the Romanticist motto “I long, therefore I am”, as ‘I remember therefore I am or I think I remember and therefore I think.’

Through re-engagement with familial myth and fading recollections of Hollywood, at the intersection of truth, authenticity and multiracial identity impacted by colonial monoracial(ist) narratives, I have composed sonic dispatches offering the listener an emotional dialogue that, in my opinion, goes further than academic literature and theory, but is also meant to work in conjunction with them. The difficulty lies in defining exactly what that means and yet, within that liminal borderland of inexplicability, the ‘magical’ possibilities of music in concert with academic thought might be encountered.

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Surviving Sunset: Additional Materials & Creative Practice

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2. 'Father'

3. 'Recuerdos' ('chacho')

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2. 'Father'
3. 'Recuerdos'
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Introduction and Research Objective

This thesis examines how certain strategies for deflecting racism — hiding in plain sight, passing and tall tales — impacted the identities and lives of the Mexican Americans who presented as flamenco performers in Hollywood during the mid-twentieth century, an interdisciplinary inquiry that leverages the combined affect of contextual research, creative practice and critical analysis. It is also an experimental attempt to push the boundaries of what an academically and musically informed methodology might reveal about the psychology of self.

My decision to use a practice-led autoethnographic methodology (rather than grounded theory based on qualitative data research, the approach I first considered) became necessary after all the interviewees who had agreed to speak about their personal experiences and truths, changed their minds. As a dual-heritage Mexican American musician/composer and flamenco guitarist who has spent an entire life passing as white, interrogating my personal experience and responses to the previously mentioned ‘strategies for deflecting racism’ seemed the only viable way to continue this inquiry.

The principal output of this creative research (eight recordings meant to evoke what could be described as authentically inauthentic authenticities) is presented in the guise of a notional album entitled *Surviving Sunset*. Influenced by twentieth and twenty-first century artists who value spontaneity and raw expression, my compositional approach draws inspiration from the free atonality of Arnold Schoenberg’s Surrealist automatism, Stockhausen’s electronic ‘open’ music (compositions that offer performers and the work itself a high degree of variability and freedom in form and duration, as opposed to ‘closed’ music with scores expected to be played exactly as written), cinematic soundtracks by Bernard Herrmann, the gestural “abstract expressionist” drip paintings of Jackson Pollack, John Cage’s aleatoric music, the self-taught musicality of Jimi Hendrix and David Bowie, Punk’s anarchic energy, the early pioneers of the “industrial” noisecape: Z’ev, Einstürzende Neubauten and Test Department and more recently, Latinx ‘gangsta’ rap. The resultant soundscapes, primarily emotional responses to information the contextual research revealed, were then critically analysed for emergent understandings — production expertise, recording technique and use of standardized forms of arrangement quickly less relevant considerations: it was, instead, the music’s fundamental embodied responses to the contextual and intellectual elements that were paramount in this exploratory investigation seeking to understand/discover how one might provoke deeper resonance and visceral empathy for subject matter in a listener/reader.

Informed by introjected familial post-memories of poverty, racist experience, abuse and Hollywood’s cinematic simulacrum of reality, my sonic dispatches are from, and about the collateral damage generated by colonialism.

Chapter 1

Introduction

As a minoritarian child of mixed heritage who wondered, “to which group do I belong?”, the struggle to make sense of cultural ambiguity under the harsh gaze of discrimination eventually prompted the question, “who am I and, even more significantly, who can I hope to be?”. My response, a lifetime of creating and inhabiting imagined personas both on- and off-stage, has shown me that identity is a malleable concept and strategically altering it can be a successful tactic of survival, one with the potential to positively change how others perceive you, a conclusion many of the Chicana flamenco artists from the Los Angeles barrios who performed at El Cid, the flamenco restaurant and tablao on Sunset Boulevard central to this narrative, arrived at as well.¹

Hollywood, which promises utopia but rarely delivers, also intersects with, and informs this enquiry. Once considered more attractive than almost anywhere else in America, Hollywood was promoted as “gayer, newer, brighter and younger than anything in the history of man”,² the brutal business ethic at the heart of this centre of cinematic industry remaining partially concealed behind a liberal sprinkling of PR tinsel. Despite and perhaps in part because of the rumours of lives destroyed in pursuit of its proffered riches, the gloss of cinematic techniques developed for the creation of ‘stars’ (make-up, lighting, camera angles) and the ensuing emotional affect produced by its iconic visual language of appearance proved so effective it eventually infiltrated borderlands (both willing and skeptical) around the world.³

During the mid to late 1930s, my teenage Mexican uncle worked as an occasional bouncer in a rundown cinema in one of Mexico City’s disadvantaged neighbourhoods. He often snuck in his younger sister who became enamoured of the glitzy musicals that proliferated at the time. These films inspired her life-long belief in the benefits of ‘blondeness’, a personal conceptual and methodological blueprint for altering impoverished circumstances. As my mother used to say, “you can forget it if you don’t have blue eyes!”. The colonial attitudes and aspirations of America were widely and successfully disseminated through Hollywood’s production and distribution of scripted fantasies of possibility. Based on the work ethic of a primarily Protestant country whose favourite trope remains, “whoever you are, if you work hard enough, you too will achieve love, respect and all your most cherished desires!”,⁴ this exemplary platitude is deceptive because a

¹ Tablaos, developed during the late 1950’s, are the modern version of Spain’s early nineteenth century Café Cantantes (Singer Cafés). The name is a colloquial term for tablao, (the wooden floorboard on which flamenco is danced) and references the venues where flamenco is performed <<https://www.tablaoflamenco.org/tablao-talk/2023/3/28/what-is-tablao>> [accessed March 2025]; Fernando López Rodríguez, *A Queer History of Flamenco, Diversions, Transitions, and Returns in Flamenco Dance (1808–2018)*, trans. by Ryan Rockmore, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2024 [2020]), pp. 15–16, 47.

² Mildred Adams, ‘The City of Angels Enters Its Heaven’, *New York Times*, 3 August 1930, in Brett L. Adam’s, ‘Latitude in Mass-Produced Culture’s Capital: New Women and Other Players in Hollywood, 1920-1941’, *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 25/2 (2004), p. 69 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3347305?seq=5>> [accessed 3 July 2025].

³ Laura Isabel Serna, *Making Cinelandia*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), pp. 19–32.

⁴ Daniel Luzer, ‘The Protestant Work Ethic Is Real’, *Pacific Standard Magazine*, (4 September 2013) <<https://psmag.com/economics/protestant-worth-ethic-real-65544>> [accessed 17 January 2023]; William H. Young, ‘The Protestant Ethic and Western Civilization’, *National Association of Scholars*, (2011)

WASP identity was often the unspoken caveat in the majority of these morality fables as Roman Catholicism's adherents, primarily impoverished Irish, Italian and Mexican immigrants, were not considered white enough in the US.⁵ Most of the literal and metaphoric journeys undertaken by my family were fueled by a promise of fame and fortune manufactured in the Dream Factory.

Another important thread in this tapestry of discrimination is mainstream society's proscription of homosexuality and the resulting pressures and outcomes that dictated for many of the Chicax flamenco artists that populate this narrative. The increasingly rigid heteronormativity of the 1940s exacerbated negative sentiments regarding what was generally considered an unacceptable masculinity with the Second World War providing a framework for a warrior mentality that heightened already established anxieties and could transform those fears into feelings of hatred, sentiments that continued to resonate unchecked until the Stonewall riots of 1969 eventually opened possibilities for a new conversation, at least for younger gay and queer white Americans.⁶ Traditional male gender expectations were also embedded throughout the patriarchal, Roman Catholic influenced society in Mexican barrios. To be a faggot or maricon was considered anathema in both cultures.⁷ This attitude, constructed from a narrow concept of gender that could only safely imagine homosexuals as feminized and physically ineffectual 'sissies', a weakened form of masculinity shaming to 'real men', left few places to hide for those whose sexual identity differed from the prescribed norm, their homosexuality perhaps revealing the fragility of heterosexuality.

Partly in response to the prevailing Anglo American perception of Mexicans as uneducated dangerous and unwanted 'wetbacks' attempting to gain illegal entrance to their morally and financially superior country,⁸ the performance of masculinity for young men within Chicax communities which was acceptable to their peers became the acting out of an uber or hyper machismo.⁹ Although an understandably angry response to demeaning

<https://www.nas.org/blogs/article/the_protestant_ethic_and_western_civilization> [accessed 17 January 2023].

⁵ WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant); Hernán Vera and Andrew M. Gordon, *Screen Saviors: Hollywood Fictions of Whiteness*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), Albert William Vogt III, 'The Costumed Catholic: Catholics, Whiteness, and the Movies, 1928–1973', (published PhD dissertation, Loyola University, Chicago, 2013). <https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/693> [accessed 17 January 2023].

⁶ Karen Franklin, 'Unassuming Motivations: Contextualizing the Narratives of Antigay Assailants', in Gregory M. Herek, ed., *Stigma and Sexual Orientation: Understanding Prejudice Against Lesbians, Gay Men, and Bisexuals*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998), pp. 1–20; R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005 [1995]), p. 198; Library of Congress, ed., '1969: The Stonewall Uprising', *LGBTQIA+ Studies: A Resource Guide*, July 2022 <https://guides.loc.gov/lgbtq-studies/stonewall-era> [accessed 9 March 2025].

⁷ Andrew A. Reding, 'Update: Treatment of Homosexuals in Mexico', *refworld*, 1 May 2000 <<https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/uscis/2000/en/96718>> [accessed 7 July 2025]; Michael S. Patton, 'Suffering and Damage in Catholic Sexuality', *Journal of Religion and Health*, 27/2 (1988), pp. 129–42

<<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27505965>> [accessed 7 July 2025].

⁸ A.K. Sandoval-Strausz, *Barrio America*, (New York, NY: Basic, 2019), pp. 32, 42, 134–5; René D. Flores and Ariela Schachter, 'Who Are the "Illegals"? The Social Construction of Illegality in the United States', *American Sociological Review*, 83/5 (2018), pp. 839–68 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/48588674>> [accessed 02 January 2023]; Jorge A. Bustamante, 'The "Wetback" as Deviant: An Application of Labeling Theory', *American Journal of Sociology*, 77/4 (1972), pp. 706–18 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2776755>> [accessed 02 January 2023].

⁹ Connell, *Masculinities*, pp. 83–84; Jennifer Rodriguez, 'Domestic Violence in the Latino Community: The Struggles Latina Women Encounter Due to Societal and Geographical Disadvantages', (published undergraduate dissertation, Union College, Schenectady, NY, 2012). <<https://bit.ly/4pqYuWu>> [accessed 7 April 2025]; Carlos A. Cuevas and others, 'Interpersonal Victimization Among a National Sample of Latino Women', *Violence Against Women*, 18/4 (2012), pp. 377–403 <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.1177/1077801212452413>> [accessed 7 July 2025].

attitudes from the dominant culture, the unpalatable truth was that their women and joteria bore the brunt of a misdirected violence more often than the actual perpetrators of racist cruelties.¹⁰ The commensurate price for the exercising of this demand cost many Mexican immigrant communities as much as the vilification they experienced from the white structures determined to keep them in a position of subservience.¹¹

Systemic abuse tended to be prevalent in the homes of many Mexican barrio families, the women and children too often becoming the focus of men consumed by the need to exercise control, a confirmation of power they felt they no longer possessed in any other manner. When a people have been forcibly disconnected from their ancestry and belief system through the economically driven ideologies of a conquering nation a negative morphogenesis can take place. Those with a history of subjugation, enslavement and maltreatment find alternatives for surviving the seemingly unendurable.¹²

Power denied creates a metaphorical vacuum, one that demands filling and, although not always, violence is often the male response to this demand as described in studies by Lori Handrahan and Johan Galtung.¹³ Violence in Mexican barrios, a physical demonstration of impotence and rage, became the habitual response to a situation that appeared hopeless, and constituted a new, debilitating reality that solved nothing.¹⁴ A practice in which the physical, emotional, and spiritual trauma embedded in the flesh and psyches of those who cannot defend themselves demonstrates another legacy of colonization, one that seems embodied in a continual cycle of brutal behaviour. The ensuing shame can be difficult to

¹⁰ 'joteria', a reclaimed Mexican pejorative describing the LGBTQ+ community (like the term 'queer' in English).

¹¹ James Diego Vigil, 'Chicano Gangs: One Response To Mexican Urban Adaptation In The Los Angeles Area', *Urban Anthropology*, 12/1 (1983), pp. 45–75 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40552988>> [accessed 17 January 2023]; Kimberle Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review*, 43/6 (1991), pp. 1241–99 <<https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>> [accessed 17 January 2023]; Martínez-Guzmán Antar and Katherine Johnson, 'Narratives of Transphobic Violence in the Mexican Province of Colima: A Psychosocial Analysis', *International Journal of Transgender Health*, 22/3 (2021), pp. 253–68 <<http://bit.ly/40jWEwL>> [accessed 17 January 2023].

¹² Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, (San Francisco: CA, Aunt Lute, 1987), pp. 16–23;

T. Jeanette Rodriguez, 'Lady Blood: An Intuitive Inquiry into the Transformative Effects of Remembering my Ancestors', (published PhD dissertation, Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2018), pp. 89–90 <<http://bit.ly/45AHfMb>> [accessed 4 April 2025]; Michelle Garcia-Olp, 'How Colonization Impacts Identity Through the Generations: A Closer Look at Historical Trauma and Education', *Electronic Theses and Dissertations* (published PhD dissertation, University of Denver, 2018) <<https://digitalcommons.du.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2487&context=etd>> [accessed 17 January 2023]; Catherine McKinley, 'Historical Oppression and Indigenous Families: Uncovering Potential Risk Factors for Indigenous Families Touched by Violence', *Family Relations*, 65/2 (2016), pp. 354–68 <<http://bit.ly/4ecoC38>> [accessed 4 April 2025].

¹³ Lori Handrahan, 'Conflict, Gender, Ethnicity and Post-Conflict Reconstruction', *Security Dialogue*, 35/4 (2004), pp. 429–45 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/26298582>> [accessed 4 April 2025]; Johan Galtung, 'Cultural Violence', *Journal of Peace Research*, 27/3 (1990), pp. 291–305 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/422690>> [accessed 4 April 2025]; Christopher Goffard, 'L.A. Crime Fills a Power Vacuum', *Los Angeles Times*, 4 January 2001 <<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2001-jan-04-me-8084-story.html>> [accessed 23 January 2023].

¹⁴ Devona Gruber and others, 'The Role of Shame in General, Intimate, and Sexual Violence Perpetration', in K. G. Lockhart, ed., *Psychology of Shame: New Research*, (New York: Nova Science, 2014), pp. 39–62 <http://www.antonioacasella.eu/restorative/Gruber_2014.pdf> [accessed 4 April 2025]; Catherine Burnette, 'Historical Oppression and Intimate Partner Violence Experienced by Indigenous Women in the United States: Understanding Connections', *Social Service Review*, 89/3 (2015), pp. 531–63 <<https://doi.org/10.1086/683336>> [accessed 4 April 2025]; Rodriguez, 'Domestic Violence in the Latino Community'.

process and adversely impacts the imagining of a potentially better future.¹⁵ It is challenging to dream of a brighter reality when painful memories from the past impinge on and help create a dysfunctional present. Although this can seem a hopeless situation, I am in agreement with the thoughts of José Esteban Muñoz who writes about the need for “a modality of imagination that allows a glimpse of another time and place: a “not yet” where (all) youths of colour actually get to grow up”, based on the idea that “hope [...] is the emotional modality that merits us to access futurity.”¹⁶ even though, as pointed out by Ernst Bloch, hope can be disappointed.¹⁷

Lack of a definite sense of belonging precipitated a lifelong search for the displaced pieces of my personal puzzle. Re-imagined through and informed by the apocryphal mythologized narratives my family loved to recount, the patchwork construction I call self bears a certain similarity to Mary Shelley’s metaphoric literary creation, Frankenstein’s monster, albeit an occasionally goateed, zoot-suited version. This eclectic approach (that of using disparate narrative elements to form an identity I can perform confidently) is also reflected in a creative practice based on the non-linear assemblage of compositions taken from musical fragments recorded over time. Using memory, emotional tension, and musical dichotomies, I intuitively combine seemingly disparate and disconnected aural spaces into a homogeneous whole: evocations of jungle atmosphere here, hip-hop strut and choral harmonies there, all mediated through the anguished duende of flamenco, evidence my attempts to come to terms with an incomplete self. Through these hauntologically inspired aural invocations, I can retrieve fading memories of long dead relatives, conjure bittersweet incidents from my childhood and ask questions about what often seem like unacceptable losses in my life.¹⁸

The epistemology of multiplicities that informs my creative practice also weaves flexible, transformational strands into and throughout my life creating new perspectives and interpretations of long-established personal histories. Through a continual exploration of possibilities — some previously unnoticed element of the musical language I speak, a compositional approach untried or an aspect of identity yet unexplored — I leverage experiential knowledge accumulated during the lived project of my life to help restore the lacuna in my injured sense of self.

1.1 Contextual Background

¹⁵ Siri Thoresen and others, ‘Loneliness as a Mediator of the Relationship between Shame and Health Problems in Young People Exposed to Childhood Violence’, *Social Science & Medicine*, 211 (2018), pp. 183–89 <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277953618303022>> [accessed 4 April 2025].

¹⁶ Jose E. Munoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, (New York: New York University Press, 2009), pp. 95–98.

¹⁷ Ernst Bloch, *Literary Essays*, trans. by Andrew Joron, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998 [1965]), p. 341.

¹⁸ *Hauntology* refers to the return or persistence of elements from the social or cultural past, as in the manner of a ghost; Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*, (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2014) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/fq.2012.66.1.16?seq=1>> [accessed 5 April 2025]; Tia DeNora, ‘Music and Self-Identity’, in Andy Bennett and others, eds., *The Popular Music Studies Reader*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), pp. 141–47; Boaventura De Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South, Justice Against Epistemicide*, (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2014), pp. 88–89.

The American West is essentially a story of re-invention.¹⁹ Expansive territory in the New World meant those willing to traverse its vast landscape could do so and leave behind the person they had been. Who would know? One of the fundamental premises Protestant America was established on is the concept of rebirth and renewal, the ability to become someone else: hiding in plain sight.²⁰

There is also a longstanding folkloric tradition in the US known as the tall tale. Based on exaggeration expressed as literal truth, this practice was originally much more than braggadocio, it was a frontier survival tactic. Immense violence was required to conquer the former inhabitants of what is now known as the USA and once no longer officially needed, the mercenaries, gunslingers, and psychopaths required to achieve 'manifest destiny' began using their skills on the general populace whenever they were desperate or so inclined. Life was brutal in the West and the need to appear extraordinarily tough essential. Tall tales were born from this need to present a larger-than-life identity without blinking.²¹

Vaqueros, originally a Spanish export to Mexico and the new world, became known as cowboys (an anglicized term for vaquero) in the newly conquered American Southwest.²² These skilled workers, by now a cultural mix of Mexican, African and Anglo-Americans, were hired by ranchers in Texas and California who depended on them to protect their livestock. Their elevation to quintessential heroic signifiers of the taming of the West was primarily attributable to the efforts of showmen like Buffalo Bill, paintings by Frederick Remington, and numerous popular novels written during the late 1800s.²³ It was an exaggeration, a semi-fiction.

During the first decade of the nineteenth century, the US film industry, based mainly in New York, found a measure of success producing silent two-reel depictions of harsh 'Wild

¹⁹ Nathalie Massip, 'When Western History Tried to Reinvent Itself: Revisionism, Controversy, and the Reception of the New Western History', *Western Historical Quarterly*, 52/1 (2021), pp. 59–85; Neal Conan, 'A Short History of Americans Reinventing Themselves', *National Public Radio News*, 10 May 2006 <<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5396637>> [accessed 10 February 2023]; Andrzej Bryk, 'Covenant, the Fear of Failure and Revivals as the Contemporary Sources of American Identity', in Włodzimierz Bernacki and Adam Walaszek, eds., *Amerykomania Tom 2*, (Krakow: Jagiellonian University Press, 2012), pp. 51–111 <<https://core.ac.uk/reader/225129170>> [accessed 10 February 2023].

²⁰ T. J. Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2009).

²¹ James E. Caron, 'The Violence and Language of Swapping Lies: Towards a Definition of American Tall Tale', *Studies in American Humor*, 5/1 (1986), pp. 27–37 [accessed 10 February 2023]; James E. Caron, 'Hunter S. Thompson's "Gonzo" Journalism and the Tall Tale Tradition in America', *Studies in Popular Culture*, 8/1 (1985), p. 13 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23412909?seq=13>> [accessed 26 March 2025].

²² Edward Larocque Tinker, 'The Horsemen of the Americas', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 42/2 (1962), pp. 191–98 <<https://read.dukeupress.edu/hahr/article/42/2/191/159726/The-Horsemen-of-the-Americas>> [accessed 7 July 2025];

Katie Nodjimbadem, 'The Lesser-Known History of African-American Cowboys', *Smithsonian Magazine*, 13 February 2013 <<http://bit.ly/4kU09IP>> [accessed 24 February 2023].

²³ Annie Proulx, 'How the West Was Spun', *The Guardian*, 24 June 2005 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/jun/25/featuresreviews.guardianreview24>> [accessed 10 February 2023];

Ijeoma Olou, 'What the True Story of Buffalo Bill Reveals About the Myth of the Wild West', *Time*, 12 November 2021 <<https://time.com/6114737/buffalo-bill-cody-wild-west-myth/>> [accessed 24 February 2023];

Linda Logan, 'The Geographical Imagination of Frederic Remington: The Invention of the Cowboy West', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 18/1 (1992), pp. 75–90 <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/030574889290277G>> [accessed 24 February 2023]; Nikita Triandafillidis, 'From the Ranch to Hollywood: The Origins and Cultural Development of the Cowboy in the U.S.', *Modern Diplomacy*, 29 October 2022 <<http://bit.ly/468ANMt>> [accessed 7 February 2023].

West' narratives. Hollywood, an area of land bought and named by Harvey and Daeida Wilcox in 1887 and subsequently developed into property for the privileged by real estate magnet H. J. Whitley, was also being used to make films. By 1915, the sunny climate, varied terrain and available workforce had turned it into the centre of the American film industry.²⁴

The advent of the 1920s saw US audiences grow tired of gritty, realistic 'Westerns' that usually featured William S. Hart, the unsmiling first cowboy star,²⁵ so the vaquero was reimagined again, this time as a handsome, sparkling, iconic symbol of rugged American individuality. Tom Mix, the first 'Hollywood cowboy' star, had perfect teeth, was a friend of Wyatt Earp, and always wore white.²⁶ The seeds of Hollywood's Golden Age, a cinematic era and style that influenced the world for over four decades, were sown.²⁷ The moguls of fledgling Hollywood, that metonym for artifice and exaggeration, understood surface appearance and fabrication trumped substance and truth, so they revived the tall tale. Although Hollywood promoted a mythology of the white heterosexual, hyper-masculine cowboy (Tom Mix, Gary Cooper, Alan Ladd, John Wayne, Clint Eastwood), the reality was that cowboys 'on the range' had same-sex relations with each other, often simply as practical choice, since the ranchers that hired them required they remain single (cheaper than providing accommodation and wages for a family). Cross-dressing was also regularly practiced in the 'Wild West' (male-to-female and female-to-male), though none of these practices were viewed as queer at the time.²⁸

When my parents relocated the family to LA in 1958, Hollywood was already degenerating into a shabby simulacrum of its former glory. The increasing popularity of TV, eventually to become a recognizable Hollywood trope in itself (*The Last Picture Show* released in 1971, golden age of TV, etc.), blacklisting of some of its finest screenwriters during the McCarthy era and passage of anti-trust legislation designed to curb the monopolistic power of the 'Big 5' movie corporations in 1948, had shaken local government's belief in the movie industry's continuing financial viability.²⁹ With funding for the architectural facelift so desperately needed to physically maintain its illusion of perpetual youth and desirability proving increasingly problematical to obtain; its cracks, venality, and vulnerability became increasingly evident in the constant unforgiving glare of the Southern California sun. Haunted by memories of a grand past, Hollywood Boulevard was no longer the preferred destination of the rich and famous. Filled with unattended cinemas, failing tourist shops

²⁴ Steven Mintz and Sara McNeil, 'The Rise of Hollywood and the Arrival of Sound', *Digital History*, (2021) <https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/topic_display.cfm?tcid=124> [accessed 24 February 2023].

²⁵ Encyclopaedia Britannica, eds., 'William S. Hart', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, updated 1 February 2023 <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/William-S-Hart>> [accessed 24 February 2023].

²⁶ Donald W. Reeves, 'Mix, Thomas Edwin (1880–1940)', *The Encyclopaedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, Oklahoma Historical Society <<https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry?entry=MI051>> [accessed 10 February 2023].

²⁷ Yesterday's America, ed., 'The Rise and Fall of Hollywood's Golden Age', *Arcadia Publishing.com* (2019) <<http://bit.ly/3ZFhvKQ>> [accessed 10 February 2023].

²⁸ Peter Boag, *Re-Dressing America's Frontier Past*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), pp. 1–20; Blake Allmendinger, *The Cowboy: Representations of Labor in an American Work Culture*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Michael Craig Gibbs, 'Frontier Re-imagined: The Mythic West in the Twentieth Century', (published PhD dissertation, University of South Carolina, 2018), pp. 1–6 <<http://bit.ly/3HN6QYq>> [accessed 11 March 2025].

²⁹ Harrison Whitaker, 'How Hollywood Watched Television', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 53/1 (2024), pp. 46–63

<<https://academic.oup.com/camqtly/article/53/1/46/7637311>> [accessed 7 July 2025].

selling cheap lingerie, and every variety of hustler, it now seemed a failure of the American dream.³⁰

The 13th Council District of LA, which encompasses Hollywood, Echo Park (home to a large Mexican American community) and Silver Lake (with its boho, hippy atmosphere), is an area that during the 1960s was home to a thriving art community that contained perhaps the greatest concentration of gay population and gay businesses in the nation. It was also where a troubling gay/straight divide between the working-class Latinx families already established in Echo Park and the upwardly mobile white and Latinx gays who kept moving in had begun, a situation exacerbated by the fact that, as LA playwright Luis Alfaro observed, “the Chicano community was still holding on to the belief that Queer Latinos did not exist.”³¹

We were living near the Moreno Highlands overlooking the Silver Lake reservoir (real estate developed by Daisy Canfield, wife of the Spanish silent film star Antonio Moreno) in 1962 when my parents opened the El Cid. They had obtained a building originally constructed as a soundstage and cinema theatre by D.W. Griffith for his silent film *Birth of a Nation*,³² an irony my parents were not aware of at the time. Griffith, although considered a visionary and one of Hollywood’s most successful directors, had been a white supremacist and unapologetically racist. His next film, *Intolerance*, an ode to compassion, was made partly in response to the negative publicity caused by his glorification of the Ku Klux Klan in *Birth of a Nation*. Racist attitudes are not easily altered. Even in the 1960s, a white Hollywood man recalled that “we were all closet bigots. It was considered real déclassé to go to bed with a Mexican.” It was “okay to sleep with Blacks and Mexicans but not to be seen with them publicly.”³³ An interesting correlation with the cowboy narrative might be drawn here: cowboys could fuck one another out ‘on the range’ but that’s strictly where it remained (never to be mentioned in their essentially respectable home and public lives).

1.2 Personal Narratives

I have been hiding in plain sight, passing as a single heritage white individual most of my life. I have also been aware that many of my friends, parent’s friends and co-workers did the same. By disguising racial heritage and, for many, sexual orientation, living and working in relative safety was possible. This acceptance turned out to be fragile, with the consequences of discovery often severe. The stories that follow demonstrate both positive and negative aspects of hiding in plain sight and passing. They also offer different perspectives on the

³⁰ Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, ‘History of the Walk of Fame’, *Hollywood Walk of Fame* <<https://walkoffame.com/history/>> [accessed 13 February 2023].

³¹ Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons, *Gay L. A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians*, (New York, NY: Basic, 2006), pp. 297–98.

³² Jill Weinlein, ‘El Cid: Dinner Theatre Reborn on Sunset’, *Beverly Press & Park Labrea News*, (2012) <<https://beverlypress.com/2012/10/el-cid-dinner-theatre-reborn-on-sunset/>> [accessed 10 February 2023];

Michael Locke, ‘El Cid Flamenco Silver Lake c.1905’, (2006)

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/michael_locke/1475306070/> [accessed 10 February 2023].

³³ Faderman, *Gay L. A.*, p. 286.

users and uses of those strategies, strategies that helped shape my identity and still inform my creative practice.

Emilio 'la Guapa' was the light-skinned son of a wealthy Mexican family. Having upset his mother and shamed his father by being unequivocally attracted to men, he chose to move to Hollywood at the start of the 1960s where he had heard he could be who he was. The El Cid on Sunset Boulevard was a nightclub with a reputation for being minority inclusive (gay staff, Spanish food and Latinx friendly) so Emilio became a familiar face and eventually a friend of my mother, one of the owner/performers.

They would gossip about his affairs, bemoan his estrangement from his parents and regularly express astonishment over his mother's insistence that if he just got married and had kids, he'd 'go straight'. This remained the status quo for many years until one day he received a call from his mother telling him his father had been diagnosed with a terminal illness and that her most fervent wish was his relationship with the family be healed before that occurred. She then begged him to join a religious community who promised that between God's will and their expertise, gay individuals could become straight. Emilio finally succumbed to his mother's pressure.

He became a member and within six months was married to a quiet woman he had been introduced to at a church meeting. Within three years, Emilio was the proud father of a child and presenting as a straight man. His father died content, and his mother was overjoyed her son had finally seen the light and been 'cured'. This reconciled situation was not to last.

Five years later my mother received a frantic phone call from Emilio who was in the middle of a terrible divorce. He revealed he had not been able to stop having sex with men and that his quiet wife had immense anger issues. She cited his continued homosexual activity and he the serious physical damage she was inflicting on their child.

The outcome of the resulting split destroyed him. The court found neither of them safe, ruling their child be put into care. The friends and reputation he'd worked so hard to establish within the church community and the new persona he'd created for his mother were irrevocably gone. He was left a solitary, broken man.

Gays in Mexico were drawn to LA because in Mexico, "you're either a drag queen or a total closet case." Family violence against homosexuals was common with brothers and fathers believing honour demanded they beat, drive away or even kill their sexually aberrant sons.³⁴ At first Hollywood provided Emilio with like-minded compatriots but when intolerance and the law turned their unforgiving gaze on him, it offered no real support. Like so many aspects of Hollywood, community solidarity proved elusive and ultimately illusory.

* * *

The woman now affectionately known as 'La Jefa' by her familia, danced her way out of the East LA barrios behind a veil of choreographed illusion during the 1960s and 1970s. An embodiment of simmering passion, she presented as a sensual flamenca temptress on the El Cid stage. Men in the audience were captivated by her powerful sexual presence but disappointed once they discovered she was married and resolutely faithful to her husband.

³⁴ Faderman, *Gay L. A.*, p. 282; Andrew A. Reding, 'Update: Treatment of Homosexuals in Mexico', *refworld*, 1 May 2000 <<https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6a63e0.html>> [accessed 24 February 2023].

Her persona was seamless, so my mother was shocked when her butch waitress disclosed they had been having a torrid affair conducted after hours in the deserted club, on stage. This was her parting shot delivered as response to being fired for thievery and my mother, also a friend of J's husband, realised she couldn't tell him what she knew without potentially destroying their family: they had three children by this time. Caught between a rock and a hard place, she was aware that, sooner or later, J's husband would find out and never forgive her for keeping it a secret. She was right.

Not too long after this revelation, J told my mother that as a young woman growing up in a violent homophobic neighbourhood, she feared her lack of interest in acquiring a boyfriend was sure to be noticed, and so, to stop any dangerous speculation, gave in to her mother's insistence she marry a local boy and start a family as soon as possible.

My mother and the other performers at the club kept quiet as her family life began to unravel. J finally told her husband, moved out and attempted to join the gay community in Hollywood, a scene she found dissatisfying and too male-centric. She also discovered that as a flamenco dancer, without the contribution of her husband's salary, she couldn't survive financially so she asked to be allowed to return home. Her husband agreed, but there was payback.

J had to sleep alone in a room at the rear of the house for many years. Over time the relationship with her children improved and eventually she was blessed with many grandchildren. Her 'former' sexuality is never spoken of (by anyone, including herself) and she is now a devoted and beloved grandmother. Then life, which can be *muy chistoso*, played one of its tricks and her husband was diagnosed with dementia.³⁵ She is now his permanent carer and the acknowledged Jefa of their extended family. In her late 80s, she teaches master classes of flamenco in the tough East LA barrio she was born in.

J.B., born in East L.A., recalled that "anyone that I knew who was gay was just beat up." J.H. remembers that though he worked hard in the Chicano movement in East L.A., he found "little or no tolerance about homosexuality there." J.V., a working-class Chicana woman, says it was access to places outside her barrio, such as North Hollywood, that changed her life. Closeted Chicano males, even those 'passing' in barrio gangs, also felt it necessary to seek refuge in gay bars that were at least a few miles from home with Hollywood providing them an escape from East LA with its constricted Catholic mores and the entrenched homophobia of its gangs and cholos. The social mobility that came from the ensuing possibility of cross-class relationships saved many Mexican American gays from economic dead-ends, jail, or getting killed in a drive-by.³⁶ According to J, nothing much has changed in the barrio, it's still as unforgiving an environment as it was in her youth.

* * *

I was an adult before I understood my mother was considered a snob by many of our relatives. They had not forgotten or forgiven her youthful commentary on barrio culture and Latinx men.³⁷ Although light skin made escaping the physical squalor she lived in possible

³⁵ 'muy chistoso', a Mexican term for 'very funny' that tends to be used sarcastically.

³⁶ Faderman, *Gay L. A.*, p. 285–86.

³⁷ George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican/American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 139–40.

and her disdain palpable, racism's circling path always returned her to the same emotional space, shame.

To avoid the negative connotations attributed to Mexicans, my mother practiced many strategies. When they first met, she told my father she was of Russian (her family nickname was Olga) and Italian descent (her dark hair and eyes). My father being an avid linguist, quickly learned a few phrases in both languages to surprise her and immediately realised she had no idea what he was saying. She told me she felt shamed on two levels, for feeling the need to hide her Mexican heritage and for having been caught pretending to be what she wasn't.

Once married, my father asked if she was interested in learning to speak English properly. Her affirmative response set into motion a very destructive dynamic. My father took on the role of instructor and mentor and never let go, often angrily poking her in the forehead and calling her ignorant when she didn't understand something. This shamed me as well as her. I was a child and couldn't protect her.

Intent on becoming fluent and convincingly American, my mother began to use English as her primary mode of communication. This was the cause of unexpected verbal surprises because of the different placement of words in phrases and the differing views of life the two languages expressed. Her use of incorrect syntax was a source of great amusement for my father, his condescending laughter another regular cause of shame.

As an up-and-coming actress in Hollywood during the late 1950s and 1960s, she found herself continually being typecast as either a maid, chola, or simple Catholic Hispanic girl. Infuriated by this situation, she made an appointment to bleach her dark hair blond, a decision with catastrophic consequences. Her hair turned green and fell out. My father was less than sympathetic in his response. As the star dancer in their 'authentic' flamenco show, the only reliable source of income they had at the time, she was obliged to immediately buy a very expensive wig to cover her visible shame.

Having lived in the US since she was twelve, my mother is still being shamed for her Mexican heritage. Now living in a home for seniors situated near Hollywood Boulevard, my mother told me an elderly white man had berated the woman she was sitting next to during lunch. The woman, also white, had asked my mother how to eat tacos. A question that caused the man to tell the woman in a loud voice not to be so stupid, couldn't she see my mother was nothing but an ignorant Mexican who probably ate them with her hands. My mother was so shocked she said she couldn't respond. She told me it was like seeing the sign 'No Dogs, Negroes or Mexicans allowed' when she first arrived in Brownsville, Texas as a young girl.³⁸ She felt belittled and worthless.

* * *

Hollywood offers a potent myth based on the possibility of re-creating oneself and, through that process, achieving acceptance and success. The reality for Mexican actors, until recently, was reinvention as a WASP fantasy of whatever category your skin colour and accent/language placed you, while their everyday life remained coloured by the intolerance of entrenched racist attitudes.³⁹ Hollywood's promises tend to be one-sided.

³⁸ Sandoval-Strausz, *Barrio America*, p. 44.

³⁹ Duncan Campbell, 'Hollywood's Hidden Hispanics: Why LA's Latinos Are Invisible on Screen', *The Observer*, 18 December 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/dec/18/hollywood-hidden->

Hiding in plain sight, as a strategy for positively changing the perception of others, is also practiced by the sexual predators, drug-dealers and criminals who inhabit every aspect of the Hollywood film industry and music business. Producers, agents, managers, directors, fellow actors, musicians, even the organisations they're part of are not always what they seem.⁴⁰

My mother's cautionary tale of having to sneak out a bathroom window at a party in Bel Air organised by a coterie of Disney's top executives is a good example. As soon as all the actors arrived the front door was locked and what ostensibly was a friendly get together became an enforced orgy. My mother's disappearance was noted, and her contract voided within a week.

My father, an engaging performer and raconteur, was also hiding in plain sight, his racism only revealed surreptitiously within our home. He refused to visit our 'ignorant' relatives in the barrio and made fun of my 'buela's rough colloquial Mexican vocabulary and limited knowledge of English. To alleviate the severe depression he suffered from, he chose to take daily prescription drugs for years rather than go to a psychotherapist and engage in self-reflection. His reasoning? He had no intention of giving any smart-ass Jew money for something they'd invented that he knew was worthless. With his dyed black hair and Mexican wife, no-one ever guessed how intolerant he really was.

I have hidden in plain sight my whole life as well. A smiling child secretly traumatised by familial abuse from both sides of the family. An apparently confident youthful guitarist whose main reason for performing was the attention received, moments of solace in a desolate, lonely childhood. When eleven, my father told me I walked like a girl. He then proceeded to swing his hips and mince in an exaggerated fashion to show me what I looked like. The 'happy' persona I had so carefully constructed was not to be seen again for decades.

* * *

Hollywood has completely informed my life and creative practice. I spent every weekend at the local cinema, then walked to Hollywood Boulevard to see the latest films by the time I was 10. Channel 13 in LA showed black and white classic films and early comedy shorts almost 24 hours a day and I would sit in front of the TV screen for hours after school and often in the evenings. With both parents gone, either performing or networking, I held loneliness at bay with the help of Hollywood. Its cinematic values became mine. The adage espoused in those movies — if you can dream it, you can achieve it! (a popular capitalist mantra in the States) — became embedded in my belief system along with a love of Hollywood gloss and schmaltz too.⁴¹

[hispanics-los-angeles-la-la-land-brownout](#)> [accessed 14 February 2023]; Nomia Iqbal, 'Rita Moreno: If I Wasn't Hispanic, I'd Have Had a Different Career', *BBC News*, 10 December 2022

<<https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-63861394>> [accessed 14 February 2023].

⁴⁰ tembar-46477, 'Hollywood's Sexual Predators', *IMDb*, 3 November 2017

<<http://www.imdb.com/list/ls025905553/>> [accessed 10 February 2023]; Daniel Sanchez, 'A List of Every Musician and Music Executive Facing Abuse Allegations in 2018', *Digital Music News*, 26 December 2018 <<https://www.digitalmusicnews.com/2018/12/26/musicians-music-executives-abuse-allegations/>> [accessed 10 February 2023]; Mark Savage, 'Timeline of the charges against Sean Combs', *BBC News*, 11 December 2024 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c869qd5j09xo>> [accessed 3 April 2025].

⁴¹ Ruth Whippman, 'Why the American Dream Is Making You Unhappy', *Time*, 11 August 2016 <<https://time.com/4446915/american-dream-making-you-unhappy/>> [accessed 14 February 2023]; Lewis Howes, '20 Lessons from Walt Disney on Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Chasing Your Dreams', *Forbes*,

I learned that many actors had re-imagined names and personal histories, a studio PR technique for creating an aura of mystery and ‘star quality’ around the individuals they had under contract. I also realised it worked. Norma Jeane Mortenson does not have the same impact the name Marilyn Monroe does. My creative practice still contains appreciative gestures that acknowledge the debt I feel I owe to an industry whose output helped me survive a difficult and solitary childhood. An industry whose participants have much experience in the use of the strategies: hiding in plain sight, passing and tall tales.

Music, as a marker and maker of identity, is a foundational aspect of this project. For people who are compelled to migrate, holding on to an original culture and identity can be difficult.⁴² Music provides a way to remember who you were, are and might be, a sonic pathway for imagining a different, better futurity. It not only helps define identity but is also capable of re-establishing and even creating it through its ability to produce an ‘emotional translation of reality’,⁴³ one that provides a conduit for reclaiming and redefining what has been partially forgotten or lost.

1.3 Contextual Video Review of Music

Use of exaggerated persona in musical performance is a tradition with a rich history and much research focused on decoding its multi-layered meanings, including the almost symbiotic layer of complexity added by the audience’s participation in helping shape these public identities as they make meaning and sense filtered through personal context.⁴⁴ The following selection of historic and contemporary artists all use music and video informed by Hollywood’s cinematic sensibility and ethos to explore, create, proclaim, or alter identity, approaches which also intersect and resonate with my own creative work. This contextual review should be read while viewing the accompanying video in *Contextual Video Review of Music*, a folder which contains a collated and edited sequence of relevant videos. For convenient navigation, timecodes for each appear in the relevant paragraph. I have also included videos of other artists who have influenced me, they act essentially as an addendum to the contextual video review; explanatory text concerning how they influenced my compositional approach and sonic identity can be found in the introductory section of Chapter 3.

Hiding in plain sight, passing, and the practice of disseminating tall tales are kindred strategies as all, to varying degrees, are based on the re-purposing of prototypical elements i.e., the idea that if identity is not considered static, ‘recombinant potential’

17 July 2012 <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/lewishowes/2012/07/17/20-business-quotes-and-lessons-from-walt-disney/>> [accessed 14 February 2023].

⁴² Douglas Henry Daniels, ‘The Significance of Blues for American History’, *The Journal of Negro History*, 70 1/2 (1985), pp. 14–23 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2717635>> [accessed 5 April 2025]; Jason Toynbee and Byron Dueck, ‘Migrating music’, in Jason Toynbee and Byron Dueck eds., *Migrating Music: Routledge Culture, Economy, and the Social Series*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), pp. 1–18; Richard Dyer and Paul McDonald, *Stars*, (London, UK: British Film Institute, 1998), pp. 2, 26, 42, 102–03; Gerhard Steingress, ‘Social Theory and the Comparative History of Flamenco, Tango, and Rebetika’ in William Washabaugh, ed., *The Passion of Music and Dance: Body, Gender, and Sexuality*, (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1998), p. 164.

⁴³ Jenny F. Mbaye, ‘Musical borderlands: A cultural perspective of regional integration in Africa, City, Culture and Society’, *Elsevier Journal*, 4 March 2015 <<https://bit.ly/4bhtx3r>> [accessed 5 April 2025]; Thomas Schäfer and others, ‘The Psychological Functions of Music Listening’, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4 (2013), p. 511 <<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00511>> [accessed 5 April 2025].

⁴⁴ Charles Fairchild and P. David Marshall, ‘Music and Persona: An Introduction’, *Persona Studies*, 5/1 (2019), pp. 1-16 <<https://bit.ly/3NsFIR1>> [accessed 5 April 2025].

remains available as fuel for new and more productive realisations and resistances. They could be described as examples of what, in the Greek language, is called *metis*, tactics that undo, modify, and replace the established order. I believe the actions of the Chicax who reimagined themselves as flamenca/os could be interpreted as a form of *metis*. They ‘tricked’ the perceptions of the dominant non-Mexican population who viewed them as undesirable others, without changing what they couldn’t: their Mexican heritage. They seemingly eclipsed themselves by manipulating how they presented themselves. Through undoing their proper place (the barrio, unskilled labourers, house cleaners) and ‘disappearing’ into their own action, they reappeared as exciting, exotic flamenca/o performers, a method of survival that has roots in the beginnings of life and is still used in contemporary society.⁴⁵ *Metis*, based on an individual’s sampling of fragments of their identity or aspects of events they have witnessed or participated in, which stripped of original context are then used as a foundation for something new and advantageous, mirrors similar technological practices in dub and hip-hop often used for the same purpose: as a means for resisting prevailing hegemonic power.⁴⁶

Jalacy Hawkins was given the epithet Screamin’ Jay Hawkins by his label, Okeh records, for the release of his single ‘I Put a Spell on You’ (1956). By the end of that same year, he had begun portraying the white American stereotype of a ‘crazy’ black and essentially ridiculous ‘voodoo man’ in response to an offer of money from a popular 1950s DJ, Alan Freedman, if he appeared from a coffin at the beginning of his stage act. Although stunts like this proved commercially effective, Hawkins eventually felt they were exploitative and demeaned his stature as a vocalist (Screamin’ Jay Hawkins, ‘I Put a Spell on You’, performed for the TV show *Night Music*, 1990 [00:00 – 01:20]).⁴⁷ His persona was reminiscent of the black animated characterizations developed during the 1920s by, among others, the Harman-Ising studio for Warner Brothers’s Looney-Tunes whose racist imagery has interesting conceptual links with early flamenco and Chicax stereotypes. Spain justified its colonization and slave trade with an ideology based around blood purity, i.e., ‘white Christian’. It then turned its racialized Others into “native comic characters”, often depicting them in Christmas festivities as simple-minded, light-hearted slaves that paid no mind to their terrible circumstances, imagery not dissimilar to the caricatures of large black ‘mammies’, ‘lazy, good for nuffink black men’ and ignorant, brutish, moustachioed Mexican ‘banditos’ included in the early cartoon animations and films released by Walt Disney and Hollywood.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall, (Oakland: University of California Press, 1988 [1984]), p. xix.

⁴⁶ SCZ, ‘Remixing: Decolonial Strategies in Cultural Production’, *Decolonization*, 10 March 2015 <<https://bit.ly/4aDWJS0>> [accessed 12 March 2023]; Paul D. Miller, ‘Algorithms: Erasures. and the Art of Memory’ in Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner, eds., *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 1–454 (348–54) .

⁴⁷ Ian McCann, ‘I Put a Spell on You Brought Bliss to All Who Touched It — except Its Composer’, *Financial Times*, 6 February 2017 <<https://bit.ly/45fWVn9>> [accessed 17 March 2023]; Ken Chang, ‘Hawkins, Screamin’ Jay’ in Edward M. Komara, ed., *Encyclopaedia of the Blues, Volume 1*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 415.

⁴⁸ Adrian G. Flint, “‘African Witchdoctors’ and Popular Culture: Global Hierarchies and the Reinforcement of the Colonial World Order”, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 38/4 (2020), pp. 594–609 <<https://bit.ly/45C92L7>> [accessed 5 March 2025]; Steve Rose, ‘Repressed Brits, Evil Mexicans, Arab Villains: Why Are Hollywood’s Animated Movies Full of Racist Stereotypes?’, *The Guardian*, 6 April 2014, <<https://bit.ly/4spJ3QQ>> [accessed 13 March 2023]; Marit Nieuwboer, ‘Representation of Mexican Culture in Animation Films For Children’, An Analysis of *Coco* and *The Book of Life*, (published Master’s dissertation, Utrecht University, 2019) <<https://bit.ly/4pxSeMM>> [accessed 13 March 2023].

Bulla, a Spanish dance description that covers nonsense, ruckus, and 'chufas' (comically confused movement), is a historic euphemism for blackness, sinful misguidedness and undesirable 'otherness'. It was also a descriptor of flamenco because of its noisy rough energy and the dark-skinned Blackness of the Gitanos who developed and performed it. An artform that embodies despair, rage, and resistance, flamenco was at first considered unacceptable ruffian's music by the educated Spanish, a music of the 'others', Moriscos and Gitanos, a noise unsuitable for the ears and eyes of cultured people. It was not until the late eighteenth century that Spain would dance Blackness for Europe with the fandango and flamenco.⁴⁹

Although I find the public identity of Screamin' Jay Hawkins challenging to view, I created a stage persona with certain similarities to his in my efforts to reclaim a confused Mexican heritage. Papa Tigre, my rasquache, Spanglish speaking alter ego was comical and angry in equal measure (Widescreen, 'En Mi Vida', music video, 2009 [01:20 – 02:43]).⁵⁰ A "guileful ruse", developed because of and in response to prejudicial attitudes that, although based on a partially emasculated version of maleness, also revealed the ability to "change, become, and pass".⁵¹ The Gitano flamenco identity I invented for Carmen, my flamenco rock band, was occasionally discomfiting (Carmen, special guests on David Bowie's The 1980 Floor Show, *The Midnight Special*, 1973 [02:43 – 03:26]). I relied on Roberto, a vocalist and choreographer with the band who was a Chicano flamenco from East LA who spoke fluent Spanish, to do interviews with Latinx music magazines. I tried to speak Spanish during an interview once and failed badly which I found a very upsetting experience.

Tom Waits, raised in a middle-class Southern Californian home, reinvented himself as an itinerant, semi-alcoholic street philosopher. Much like John Cale, whose voice, among other possible readings, could be said to embody the dust and darkness of Welsh coal mines, Waits's abrasive vocal articulations exude a sense of depression era dustbowl grit, a voice from an invented past and someone other than his original self — a constructed identity, entirely real, but not natural (Tom Waits, 'Bad as Me', music video, 2013 [03:26 – 03:57]).⁵² Tom performs narratives of the impoverished filtered through the lens of classic Hollywood film, often arranged with musical signifiers of blackness (jazz and blues motifs) and delivered from the standpoint of a dispossessed other.⁵³ This artistic vision was partially formed by a familiarity with Mexican border culture, his father often taking him as a child to Tijuana where he started to believe there was a Christlike quality in the beggars he saw: "See a guy with no legs on a skateboard, mud streets, church bells going ... these experiences are still with me at some level".⁵⁴ My appreciation and subsequent emulation of rasquache was also fostered through youthful visits with my mother to this notorious town.

⁴⁹ K. Meira Goldberg, *Sonidos Negros: On the Blackness of Flamenco*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 5–7, 49.

⁵⁰ 'rasquache', a colloquial Mexican term for a poor, uneducated, rough individual.

⁵¹ Goldberg, *Sonidos Negros*, p. 183. Goldberg draws the expression "guileful ruse" from Jayna Brown's *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 125, and "change, become, and pass" from Eva Woods Peiró's *White Gypsies: Race and Stardom in Spanish Musical Films*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), p. 117.

⁵² Thomas Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁵³ Gabriel Solis, "'Workin' Hard, Hardly Workin'/Hey Man, You Know Me": Tom Waits, Sound, and the Theatrics of Masculinity', *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, 19/1 (2007), pp. 26–58
<<https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1533-1598.2007.00105.X>> [accessed 22 June 2025].

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Marilyn Manson, who plays with flamboyant gender representation, is considered a visually transgressive artist, 'not because he offers a viable alternative to mainstream American culture [...] but because he offers the (re)construction of central American ideologies by means of crossing cultural, social and moral boundaries' (Marilyn Manson, 'The Beautiful People', music video, 1996 [03:58 – 04:38]).⁵⁵ He was accused of being a sexual abuser by over a dozen women in a series of lawsuits (all recently dropped because they exceeded the statute of limitations and were difficult to prove beyond a reasonable doubt). All claimed to have experienced him as a predator, hiding in plain sight within the monstrous theatrical persona he created.⁵⁶

Kim Dracula takes inspiration from Manson's artistic approach, both using their creative practice to comment on gun culture, violence, the fascistic Christian elements of white conservative society and 'otherness'. Kim, who also incorporates elements of Jim Carrey's comically manic film persona into his own, uses the unexpected juxtaposition of incongruous musical genres to comment on the chaos of contemporary white society (Kim Dracula, 'Make Me Famous', music video, 2023 [04:39 – 05:09]). Through their use of extravagant public identities, they both could be described as physical manifestations of the 'tall tale'.

Married and with children at the start of their career (Fever Ray, live performance at Coachella, 2010 [05:10 – 05:39]), Karin Dreijer AKA Fever Ray, now describes herself as queer and very gender fluid. Exploring gender representation along with aging and love, in their most complicated or marginalized incarnations, using imagery and colour in a manner reminiscent of David Lynch, they had hidden in plain sight and passed as a straight woman until they could no longer sustain the falsehood. They now perform tall tales of lesbian and 'othered' sexuality (Fever Ray, live performance from Red Trails tour, 2018 [05:40 – 06:08]). I have also included a clip from 'Kandy', where they portray a grotesque female who lap dances with an ageing androgynous male also played by Dreijer (Fever Ray, 'Kandy', music video, 2023 [06:09 – 07:31]).⁵⁷

Poppy and Jinjer both redefine conventional expectations of femininity through their public identities. Jinjer currently presents herself as an MCU-styled mythic Norse warrior, her diminutive stature and age masked by the powerful physicality she displays on stage. Like many Hollywood actors of smaller size, she performs on a raised platform that creates the illusion of height, her own adaptation of the tall tale (Jinjer, live performance in Toulouse, 2023 [07:32 – 08:22]). Poppy's current public identity, at first tightly controlled by one of Hollywood's many predators, a manager and sexual partner who erased her past and dictated her present as his strategy for future success, has been partly created in response to this pernicious influence, the toxic experience as someone else's puppet fuelling her reincarnation as a performer who knows exactly where her boundaries lie. Poppy's previous incarnation was deliberately childlike and robotic, a vapid pink and

⁵⁵ Coco d'Hont, "I Am Your Faggot Anti-Pope": An Exploration of Marilyn Manson as a Transgressive Artist', *European journal of American Studies*, 12/2 (2017) <<https://journals.openedition.org/ejas/12098>> [accessed 22 June 2025].

⁵⁶ Rania Aniftos, and Anna Chan, 'A Timeline of Abuse Allegations Against Marilyn Manson', *Billboard*, 23 February 2023 <<https://bit.ly/3Nry4GA>> [accessed 20 March 2023]; Brandon Drenon, 'Marilyn Manson sexual assault investigation dropped by lawyers', *BBC News*, 24 January 2025 <<https://bit.ly/4jl7zP4>> [accessed 14 April 2025].

⁵⁷ Marris Lorusso, 'Fever Ray's "Radical Romantics" Explores Love in All of Its Freaky, Complicated Forms', *National Public Radio*, 10 March 2023 <<https://bit.ly/44WGonP>> [accessed 13 March 2023]; Michael Cragg, 'Fever Ray: On Pleasure, Patriarchy and Political Revolution', *The Guardian*, 18 November 2017 <<https://bit.ly/4bmTFKd>> [accessed 17 March 2023].

blonde-haired vision of whiteness framed as ironic comment on capitalism's interaction with technology (Poppy, 'Moshi Moshi', music video, 2017 [08:23 – 09:24]). A former anorexic with experience of abuse, her stage persona now shows no evidence of that previous damage and vulnerability. By reverting to her naturally dark hair, she appears to be embracing not only her inner strength but also her Latinx, Portuguese, and Anglo heritage.⁵⁸ It could be posited that at the start of her career, Poppy hid trauma in plain sight by presenting curated images of herself filtered through a lens of faux innocence, an affectless persona developed in response to deep emotional scars. Her contemporary angry identity possibly a strategic tall tale presented to erase the previous depictions of her as a passive participant in life (Poppy, live performance at Reading Festival, 2022 [09:24 – 10:31]).

Chapter 2

My Methodology and Musical Process

The primarily (auto)biographical ethnographic methodology I have implemented incorporates and builds on the thoughts of John Lederach, Barbara Lüneburg, Nicky Haire, Graeme Sullivan, Lyle Skains, Jean Penny, Donald Schön, Vitoria Ecclesia, Jean Penny, Elizabeth Fisher, Rebecca Fortnum, Nelson Goodman and Wanda S. Pillow, among many other creative practice researchers. Pillow, like Schon, writes about the benefit of “reflection-on-action” before undertaking any critical analysis of work, i.e., incorporating an incubation period that allows the unconscious mind to continue its work on problems from a more distanced perspective, and like Lederach, espouses the need for the researcher to remain critically aware of their positionings. Schön, Lederach, Fisher and Fortnum all include ‘not knowing’ as a fundamental component of discovery in arts-based research. Ecclesia espouses autoethnography because, in her view, ‘personal experience cannot – and should not – be turned off’, while Lüneburg believes Goodman’s ideas for ‘worldmaking’ (as a process for exploring the identity of the artist creating it) have much to offer a practice-led/based project if implemented with academic rigour: all these conceptual stances inform and are supportive of the ‘methodological pluralism’ and praxis I have implemented in this exploratory study.¹

⁵⁸ Joseph Hammett, ‘Poppy’s Subversive Ideological Critique by Joseph Hammett’, *The Gnovis Blog*, Spring (2022) <<https://bit.ly/3YrcZys>> [accessed 13 March 2023]; Erik1714, ‘Poppy’, *Ethnicity of Celebs | EthniCelebs.Com*, 2022 <<https://ethniccelebs.com/poppy>> [accessed 17 March 2023].

¹ Lyle Skains, ‘Creative Practice as Research: Discourse on Methodology’, *Journal of Media Practice*, 19/1 (2017), pp. 82–97 <<https://bit.ly/4sngb5b>> [accessed 7 July 2025]; Maarit Mäkelä and Nithikul Nimkulrat, ‘Documentation as a practice-led research tool for reflection on experiential knowledge’, *FormAkademisk*, 11/2 (2018) <<https://bit.ly/4sp6EBm>> [accessed 11 April 2025]; John Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. ix; Barbara Lüneburg, ‘Knowledge Production in Artistic Research – Opportunities and Challenges’, *British Journal of Music Education*, 10 (2023), pp. 8–10, 20–23 <<https://bit.ly/3NgpdYd>> [accessed 3 January 2026]; Nicky Haire and Raymond Macdonald, ‘Understanding how humour enables contact in music therapy relationships with persons living with dementia: A phenomenological arts-based reflexive study’, *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 74 (2021) <<https://bit.ly/495h1mj>> [accessed 3 January 2026]; Donald Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner*, (London: Routledge, 2017 [1992]) <<https://bit.ly/4jl7JWy>> [accessed 3 January 2025]; Graeme Sullivan, *Art Practice as Research*, (DC: Sage Publications, 2009 [2005]); Vitoria Ecclesia, ‘Art and Rigour: Creating

From the start, I suspected the research process might reveal difficult aspects of self I previously believed were resolved or wasn't yet aware of as the social and cultural frameworks during my youth and early adulthood were quite different from current ones (attitudes and behaviours acceptable then no longer considered so now). I wondered at what point and by what means hidden or suppressed elements of my psyche would be uncovered, for there was little way to know what combination of elements might bring them to my attention and once noticed, how to address them. As evidenced in the critical analysis of my creative output, I chose to remain not only uncomfortably self-reflective and critically aware of my positionings (to the best of my abilities) but also deeply entangled in this artistic investigation 'to understand self and other': many years of study and work as a qualified Gestalt-based psychotherapist providing the experience needed to engage in rigorously disciplined self-examination.

During the first eighteen months, along with researching the contextual background, I produced an initial body of creative work ('No Puedo/Yes You Can', 'La Gente Guapa', 'Empress of the Ants', 'Father' and 'chacho') based on narratives shaped by the patriarchal colonialist ideologies this thesis is investigating. Featuring relatively 'explanatory' tall tales rapped over danceable hip-hop rhythms infused with flamenco, cumbia and Middle Eastern orchestral flavours, they provided an interesting listening experience (in my estimation) and fertile ground for critical analysis, but my supervisors felt there was something missing. Eventually their suggestions to experiment further with the creative output started me questioning the compositional template I was using. Was the ability to create emotional resonance in a listener (especially one not cognizant of the stories that inspired them) being limited by their overt and, to a certain extent, commercially influenced musicality, i.e., were my creative artefacts too accessible? I then remembered my band Carmen achieved its potential because my youthful willingness embraced the concept of "not knowing". Realizing age had made me cautious and wary of taking a 'leap in the dark', I began anew to experiment with form, sound and what the term 'musical' might encompass beyond the technical skills and expectations I had come to rely on.

By means of these endeavours 'to make meaning through complicated and messy [recordings] that [are powerful] and [...] evocative.'² I began seeking to gain knowledge whilst engaged in a process of metaphorical 'worldmaking'. Via the interdisciplinary implementation of contextual history, intellectual understanding and creative practice, I began to construct '[...] what Goodman calls a 'world version' that tries to replace some

Methodologies for Artistic Research in Music', *Culture Crossroads*, 22 (2023), pp. 13–20 <<https://bit.ly/3LIQQpX>> [accessed 11 April 2025]; Jean Penny, 'Reflections on Practice-led Research Methods and their Application in Music Performance Research', *Malaysian Music Journal*, 3/2 (2014), pp. 84–92 <<https://bit.ly/4q8fzFM>> [accessed 16 April 2025]; Wanda S. Pillow, 'Dangerous Reflexivity: Rigour, Responsibility and Reflexivity in Qualitative Research' in P. Thomson and M. Walker, eds., *The Routledge Doctoral Student's Companion*, (Abington: Routledge, 2010), pp. 270–282; Wanda S. Pillow, 'Reflexivity as Interpretation and Genealogy in Research', *Sage Journals*, 15 (2015), pp. 421–426 <<https://bit.ly/4qBfEBt>> [accessed 31 December 2025]; Elizabeth Fisher and Rebecca Fortnum, *On Not Knowing: how artists think*, (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2013), pp. 70, 76–78 <<https://bit.ly/4aZ4h1V>> [accessed 10 January 2026]; Mika Hannula and others, *Artistic Research – theories, methods and practices*, (Helsinki: University of Gothenburg and Academy of Fine Arts, 2005), p. 67.

² Lüneburg, 'Knowledge Production in Artistic Research', p. 7, a quote drawn from Maggi Savin-Baden and Claire Howell Major, *Qualitative Research: The Essential Guide to Theory and Practice*, (Milton: Routledge, 2013), p. 299.

parts of the one departed from with new findings: a more hopeful 'world', one no longer shaped by the dysfunction of familial fictions and racist ideologies.³

My soundscapes represent a foundational core of this 'worldmaking'. An embodiment of the diversity of behaviours, emotional responses and states of mind being explored — themes of identity, racism and Hollywood — they were used to investigate my research questions concerned with long-term results of survival strategies to avoid racism and how to make those difficult realities more viscerally apparent for a listener/reader. Through an exploratory use of contextual research, critical analysis and creative practice, I made another version of the world I am familiar with. This new, unexpectedly hopeful, world was drawn from existing practice by articulating the knowledge contained in the art, which in combination with a willingness to interrogate, challenge and replace (or re-imagine) unhelpful, negative 'realities' or 'truths' when necessary. An example of worldmaking that reflects worlds explored, their multiple perspectives and the artistic-interrogative approaches I implemented, to paraphrase Lüneburg.⁴

In the previous chapter I discussed the results of my research into the multi-faceted intersectional influences that affected the choices of the subjects of this thesis. During this historical examination, an aspect of the issues being researched emerged that I became interested in illuminating further: to what extent do the strategies of hiding in plain sight, passing and tall tales truly obscure what both the predatory and the vulnerable believe would damage their credibility if seen? Within this thesis, these tactics often serve as kindred solutions for addressing similar problems, so what remains visible when they are implemented? And what might the less obvious long-term consequences be for the practitioners?

While actively (deeply) listening to and analysing the musical work recorded for this thesis I became aware that certain personal vulnerabilities I believed camouflaged were more visible than I first considered.⁵ Creative practice, combined with its scholarly analysis, can expose what has been hiding in plain sight, and once you see (hear) what was thought concealed, you begin to see (hear) it elsewhere. As a result of this realization, my research, an 'in vivo' dialogic conversation between creative practice, intellectual analysis and contextual research, proceeded to focus more intently on how the previously mentioned strategies, tactics I also implement, are manifested: in my work as well as the larger cultural picture in the US.

I have leveraged the creative act as experiment during my search for original knowledge. Through the deliberate introduction of unfamiliar elements (distorted sonic abstractions, uncomfortably lengthy repetitions, vocal narratives made indecipherable, abrupt silences) into recordings that in other respects continued my existing musical practice, I took the familiarity and expertise provided by more than sixty years of professional commercial experience and 'troubled' it. In other words, unfamiliarity with what I was doing and lack of knowledge concerning what outcome would be achieved, meant my technical competencies were harder to lean on, I was working in the dark.

³ Lüneburg, 'Knowledge Production in Artistic Research', p. 10.

⁴ Ibid, p. 12, 18–19.

⁵ Christy Thomas, 'Active Listening: Teaching with Music', *Yale Center for Teaching and Learning*, 30 November 2015 <<https://bit.ly/3Nt3v3y>> [accessed 11 April 2025]; Pauline Oliveros, 'Deep Listening: A Composers Sound Practice', (Pine Lake Road, NE: iUniverse Publications, 2005) <<https://bit.ly/44UIFRC>> [accessed 2 January 2026].

Once a track was deemed finished, a decision arrived at in collaboration with my supervisors who I relied on for guidance as, unaccustomed to this paradigm of creating music, I had almost no benchmark to judge the results by, I allowed a certain amount of time to pass (approximately a week) before relistening and interpreting what I heard. This post-activity distancing helped me better identify hidden directions and meanings contained in the abstracted musical narratives, as ephemeral patterns and trace emotions are often not easily evidenced during the actual creative process, a concept Graham Wallas terms an “incubation period”, Donald Schön refers to as “reflection-on-action” and Skains employs in his research practice.⁶

Aware of a tendency for repeating technical and creative elements I deem successful and to default to ‘happy’ Hollywood endings (both lyrically and musically), I felt it important to provide breathing space — not only between output and its analysis but also between composing each new piece, a decision I hoped would prevent habitual work habits from interfering with the unique narrative of each soundtrack. The contextual information I read inspired the compositional work; my critical analysis of the ensuing creative output then often suggested another direction not previously considered which then widened the research arena and influenced the next soundscape: a confluent rhizomic process that appeared to create “[a] whole [that seemed] more than the sum of its parts”, to paraphrase Fritz Perls’s Gestalt theory and slightly misquote Aristotle.⁷ This process supported the possibility of unexpected outcomes, i.e., *serendipity*, ‘a mental connection that has the potential to lead to a valuable outcome’ through a ‘convergence of knowledge and experience’ that makes it possible to notice connections and understand their significance.⁸ That my creative practice displayed an over-arching positivity, a realization discovered during the final weeks of research, was a product of serendipity — I had unexpectedly noticed connections that allowed a new interpretation of what, until that ‘eureka moment’, had seemed hopelessly negative.

The phenomenological philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the auto-ethnographical theories of Stacy Holman-Jones, Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner and Jean Penny (who advocates for the practice researcher’s use of a combination of approaches that ‘[...] may include a mix of ethnography, auto-ethnography, musicology, narrative and qualitative [...] methods’), have also helped inform the approach of my methodology as I use my lived experience of the world to not only move beyond the detachment of intellectuality and science but also include them, thus grounding abstract thought with embodied knowledge with the goal of producing ‘[...] analytical, accessible texts that change us and the world we live in for the better’.⁹

⁶ Skains, ‘Creative Practice as Research’, p. 88; Maria Popova, ‘The Art of Thought: A Pioneering 1926 Model of the Four Stages of Creativity’, *The Marginalian*, (28 August 2013), an article describing Graham Wallas’s theory of the four stages of the creative process <<https://bit.ly/4bi9cen>> [accessed 31 December 2025]; Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner*.

⁷ Fritz Perls, *The Gestalt Approach and Eye Witness to Therapy*, (Palo Alto: Science and Behaviour Books, 1989); Paul Martin, ‘Who said “The whole is greater than the sum of the parts”?’ , *SE Scholar.com*, (6 June 2019) <<https://bit.ly/4qahycP>> [accessed 31 December 2025].

⁸ Skains, ‘Creative Practice as Research’, p. 90; Stephann Makri and Ann Blandford, ‘Coming across information serendipitously – Part 1: A Process Model’, *Journal of Documentation*, 68 5 (2012), p. 686 <<https://bit.ly/4bH1jPM>> [accessed 21 January 2026].

⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology Of Perception*, trans. by Donald A. Landes, (London: Routledge, 2012 [1945]), pp. xx-xxv <<https://bit.ly/3NsrrUB>> [accessed 20 January 2026]; Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams & Arthur P. Bochner, ‘Autoethnography: An Overview’, *Historical Social Research*, 36 4 (2011), pp. 273-276, 281, 284 <<https://bit.ly/3YKna1j>> [accessed 20 January 2026]; Ellis, ‘Autoethnography: An Overview’, p. 284, Ellis draws this phrase from Stacy Holman Jones, ‘Autoethnography: Making the personal political’, in

As part of this methodology, I analysed each track (after an incubatory period) before moving on to the next, a tactic for curbing my tendency to create analogous templates. I wanted to ensure the sonic responses to my contextual findings had the time and space to manifest their own unique identity and truths. Truths that, of course, are in response to current research interests: if the contextual positionings and questions were changed, I suspect my investigation would almost certainly produce different understandings from the same musical artefacts.

Cognizant of academic arguments that critique the validity of knowledge produced through ethnography and the autobiographical (described by Anna Kornbluh as part of an industrially ordained expansion of the contemporary image economy, a 'Narcissus's mirror' where "Every I, [is] lousy with panache."), I tend to disagree with their often-Hegelian influenced theoretical positionings and, although I find the theoretical approaches of practical musicology focused on the technical aspects of musicking as a means for acquiring knowledge (the *how* it is made) are excellent, I also felt they did not offer a particularly pertinent route for this project.¹⁰ Like many of the researchers cited at the beginning of this chapter, I believe that without the inclusion of emotion and lived personal experience, you learn nothing, and so, decided not to distract myself with intellectual or technical recording concerns during the creative process (to the best of my ability).

It is now worth highlighting the nature of my past musical practice, as the methodological approach I established for this doctoral project cannot be entirely separated from my long history of creating (and task managing) artistic projects. When I formed Carmen, my flamenco rock band, in 1969, I did so for two reasons: to incorporate the flamenco of my 'Spanish' heritage (I was still blind to the effects of denying I was Mexican since early childhood, so the most salient part of my heritage didn't even enter the equation) with contemporary musical approaches and in doing so, create a completely new genre of music. This meant a philosophical and practical template needed to be made to answer the many different questions this conceptual premise raised: how to technically combine flamenco with contemporary rock, what instrumentation, how to teach musicians the rhythms, whether to include dancers, what language to use, how to sartorially present it, and who was I hoping to engage?

Being cognizant of flamenco's emotional congruity with the blues-influenced electric guitar-based rock music that was being developed in England during the latter half of the nineteen sixties, both primarily articulating the trauma and rage of marginalised people (a perception that, on current reflection, was perhaps mistaken) meant that I felt confident both musical expressions in combination would produce a cohesive whole. I decided my target audience should be of a reasonably similar age to myself so that we spoke and understood a similar musical language. As I was not fluent in Spanish, and ideas for supplanting English as the major language of global communication were part of the

Handbook of qualitative research, Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds., (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2005), pp. 764; Penny, 'Reflections on Practice-led Research Methods and their Application in Music Performance Research', p. 91.

¹⁰ Anna Kornbluh, *Immediacy, Or The Style Of Too Late Capitalism*, (London: Verso, 2024), pp. 49–52; Simon Zagorski-Thomas, *Practical Musicology*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic: 2024); Kirk McNally and Toby Seay, 'Studying Recording Techniques,' in Simon Zagorski-Thomas and Andrew Bourbon, eds., *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Music Production*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), pp. 233–249; Manuella Blackburn, 'Portfolio of Electroacoustic Music Compositions', (published doctoral dissertation, University of Manchester, 2010), p. 7 <<https://bit.ly/3LthbuA>> [accessed 3 January 2025]; Mäkelä, 'Documentation as a practice-led research tool for reflection on experiential knowledge', pp. 2–3.

zeitgeist, Esperanto being an example, I chose to write Spanglish lyrics, a tactic I hoped might also open doors for us in the many countries where Spanish was primarily spoken. The melodies and lyrics of our songs were often inspired by flamenco narratives written in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries which imbued our music (performed with drums, electric bass, guitar, vibraphone, and synthesizer) with what I hoped, was a certain 'timeless' quality.

I experimented with dancers who only appeared during instrumental sections which I felt didn't work, they seemed too separate from the band. I wanted the dancing to be an integral part of the whole. I eventually sourced two flamenco dancers, male and female, who also played contemporary instruments and sang, my sister Angela, and Roberto, who conveniently spoke fluent Spanish and had just finished a role as choreographer and featured dancer in Jose Greco's flamenco show: Greco was a highly successful Italian American film actor and Spanish dance interpreter.

Santana, Malo, and El Chicano relied heavily on bongos, congas, cowbells, and guiros to signify their Latino identity; I decided Carmen needed to use castanets and heelwork to express the flamenco heritage vital to our unique identity. The castanets were amplified by the vocal mics but, to enable the heelwork to match the volume of the other instruments, we had to design an internally mic'd stage we used for all our live performances. Not a simple or easy task!

The 'look' I developed for the band, what statements and community our clothing signified we were allied with, was highly influenced by the transvestite street stylings of the New York Dolls and Bowie's high fashion conceptualisation of the same ideas. We presented ourselves as a 'flamencoized' gender-fuck statement of transgressive visual intent.

Although, beginning in my late teens, I worked from a practical template developed from 15 years professional experience in performance, 7 of those in the commercial music industry, I always chose to rely on intuition and emotional 'knowing' when making decisions. I had little idea how to accomplish 'the Carmen project' at the start, the music evolved because of intention. Where Carmen's music began was very different to the final product. It became what it was meant to be through my willingness to let it reveal itself through mistake, happenstance and serendipity. I gave my creative project permission to express its own identity. A process that bears similarity to my current methodology.

So, what have I created now? What are you listening to? This investigation is presented as if an album of progressive rock, albeit an unusual one. It is a musical package that, at first, might seem akin to the dystopic output of Throbbing Gristle, Ethel Cain, or the eerie ambient soundscapes musician/composer Akira Yamaoka created for the video game and film franchises of *Silent Hill*,¹¹ but in fact, is something else, smuggled in and hiding in plain sight, each individual work an interculturally informed chimerical fever dream, each fever dream part of an intergenerationally damaged whole depicting the melancholic weight of re-imagined familial memories describing (in)authenticities, cruelty and prejudice: burnt offerings that point to the Sisyphean task of effecting real-world positive change.¹²

¹¹ Neil Megson (Genesis P. Orridge, 1950-2020, co-founder of Throbbing Gristle) and Ethel Cain (Hayden Silas Anhedonia) both use music to explore and express the darker, abusive sides of the human condition, while Akira Yamaoka, influenced by Trent Reznor of Nine Inch Nails and Angelo Badalamenti, both composers of dystopian music, also creates ambiances of dread.

¹² Neil De Votta, 'Review: Arresting the Post-Cold War Sisyphean Quandry: Ethnonationalism, Internal Conflicts, and the Quest for Conflict Resolution', *Journal of Third World Studies*, 17/1 (2000), pp. 177–82, 188–92 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/45197853>> [accessed 16 April 2025]; Bertram I. Spector, 'Negotiating Someone

Shifting, mutating and doubling back on itself, these soundscapes are in reaction to the long-term psychological distortions an abusive familial narrative bequeathed, one whose interactions were shaped by patriarchal colonialist ideologies. To discover and be touched by the authentic emotional core beneath the theatrical sonics of anger implemented to protect them requires effort, as the auditory rage and despair heard in the many-layered compositional artefacts created for this thesis can only serve as contemporary surrogates for the original forceful emotions borne from unhappy ‘postmemories’.¹³ There is more. Beneath the abrasive scrapes, industrial moans and sounds of war (sonic metaphors acting as second-hand references for emotional and psychic pain), a further layer of dissemblance exists: the detached and deliberate use of what was once authentic damage. I did, initially, know how it felt to be abused but I normalized it and eventually learned how to use it for advantage.¹⁴

Textual analysis and contextual information have played a significant role in this methodology; the soundscapes an emotional response to their insights just as frequently as they are to early memories and familial mythologies. Primarily concentrated on uncovering emergent psychological and emotional distortions instigated by the patriarchal, colonialist influenced ideologies I’m studying, a need to engage in or include process-composition discussion has not seemed particularly relevant. Having just stated that, on listening to the completed work after a period of reflection-on-action, I decided to layer the mastering compression and limiting I applied three times. This production tactic made all the tracks sound ‘squeezed’ and intense: a sonic replication of how I emotionally responded to the contextual information and the memories they unearthed.

At times, the supervisory process for this PhD seemed to replicate the asymmetrical power dynamic of an early parent/child relationship — the supervisors (father figure) guiding and chiding the researcher (who can feel as if an unskilled child again). This metaphoric re-engagement with, in my case, negatively remembered intra-family communication, although difficult, proved useful. These occasionally uncomfortable encounters exhumed and re-animated feelings of inferiority and impotency from youth that I again experienced viscerally. This re-acquaintanceship with a distressing past provoked an interesting realisation: although challenging sentiments can lead individuals into an emotional cul-de-sac (me included), they also ultimately fuelled my compulsion to attain technical mastery over craft (in itself, an interesting choice of words that exposes the need for power I still crave), pursuit of which has provided much satisfaction in my life.¹⁵

Else's Peace Agreement: A Sisyphean Task?', *Negotiation Journal*, 28/3 (2012), pp. 365–72 <<https://bit.ly/4prN0SD>> [accessed 16 April 2025].

¹³ Ross Truscott, 'Introjection', in *Encyclopaedia of Critical Psychology*, Thomas Teo ed. (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2012), pp. 1–3 <<https://bit.ly/4qBfMRt>> [accessed 6 April 2025]; Magdalena Zolkos, 'Transposition, generationality, and trauma: from psychoanalytic Holocaust studies to post-mnemonic cultures', *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, 29 (2024), pp. 51–68 <<https://bit.ly/4aJfZ0C>> [accessed 6 April 2025].

¹⁴ Frøja Storm-Mathisen, 'Violence is completely normal': Managing Violence Through Narrative Normalization', *The British Journal of Criminology*, 65/1 (2025), pp. 36–51 <<https://bit.ly/4stsEv2>> [accessed 15 April 2025]; Kasonde Mwaba and others, 'My story is like a magic wand': a qualitative study of personal storytelling and activism to stop violence against women in Turkey', *Global Health Action*, 14/1 (2021), pp. 1–2, 7–9 <<https://bit.ly/3LcSZq0>> [accessed 15 April 2025].

¹⁵ Michele M Tugade and Barbara L Fredrickson, 'Resilient Individuals Use Positive Emotions to Bounce Back from Negative Emotional Experiences', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 86/2 (2004), pp. 1–2, 19–20 <<https://bit.ly/49kKN5s>> [accessed April 15 2025]; Sharon Faye and Joel Hooper, 'organizing principle for emotion experience', *New Ideas in Psychology*, 50 (2018), pp. 6–7, 18–19 <<https://bit.ly/49iyW7Q>> [accessed 15 April 2025].

My father let me know he was always aware of every slip I made; as response, I resolved never to expose a mistake. I shielded vulnerability behind displays of virtuosity, raw authenticity discarded in pursuit of perfection; my susceptibility to verbal abuse hidden in plain sight behind dense layered arrangements and polyrhythmic aggression, an impenetrable artistic stance so ingrained I seem unable to discard it. In all modes of communication, I still find it difficult to express myself with clarity, perhaps a response to my father's contemptuous voice and my mother's protective over-estimation of my abilities.¹⁶ During childhood, being multi-racial me often seemed untenable, the results of that conflicted situation still evidenced in my creative practice ('thick' arrangements filled with auditory diversions and musical detours that distract the listener, including myself, from the real heart of the matter: a deep inner disconnection from self), my public persona (a tendency to be overly diplomatic) and my writing (the endless struggle to be 'succinct'). If you look carefully, the false protection of perfection can be discerned, attempting to hide self-doubt in plain sight.¹⁷

Hiding in plain sight and passing (considered, within this thesis, as almost interchangeable strategies) are meant to conceal what a practitioner deems must remain secret, but to what extent are they effective? Most, if not all, of humanity practice some level of these tactics, so how successfully do they conceal who we really are, and at what cost?¹⁸ My work and its analysis are an attempt to uncover new understandings and learnings that may, hopefully, prove helpful to others who tread a similar path. For, although evidence that belies persona is almost always visible to those who look carefully, it can be difficult to publicly disclose what the majority have chosen, for whatever reason, not to acknowledge; 'whistle-blowers' can be left in a vulnerable position, open to potential ridicule, condemnation or worse.¹⁹

This work may seem relatively 'clean' and distanced on first listening, perhaps not dissimilar to Hollywood's polished, nostalgic, simulacrum of remembered pain and loss, but that would be an inaccurate impression, one determined by the auditory trompe-l'œil employed to protect vulnerabilities and mask unpleasant truths. Through sampled elements of diegetic unease (I imagine the characters in my soundscapes hearing the religious chants, cannon-fire, etc., that envelop them) and non-diegetic ambiances meant to evoke dreamlike atmospheres of melancholia, I challenge the emotional availability of a listener, while my inclusion of obvious aural tropes (ticking clocks, spinning tops, heart beats, historic radio programs), could be interpreted as clues the composer is "Just kidding!", except he is not.

¹⁶ Nelda Andersone, 'Decoding the Inner Critic's Origins and Purpose', *Psychology Today*, posted 16 December 2023

<<http://bit.ly/45R6XMw>> [accessed 17 April 2025]; Lisa Firestone, 'Narcissism and the Critical Inner Voice', *Psychology Today*, 11 January 2019 <<http://bit.ly/4kcYgPX>> [accessed 17 April 2025].

¹⁷ Felicia Boma Lazaridou and others, 'Racialised identity, racism and the mental health of children and adolescents', *International review of Psychiatry*, 35/3-4 (2023), pp. 277–79, 280–84 <<https://bit.ly/49aFPI8>> [accessed 15 April 2025]; Chandra D. L. Waring, "'Be Confident", "Creative" and "Careful": Advice From Multiracial Adults', *Journal Committed to Social Change on Race and Ethnicity*, 9/1 (2023), pp. 30–37, 51–59 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/48732753>> [accessed 15 April 2025].

¹² Karen Lollar, 'Strategic Invisibility: Resisting the Inhospitable Dwelling Place', *Review of Communication*, 15/4 (2015), pp. 298–315 <<http://bit.ly/3lb3kqQ>> [accessed 6 April 2025]; David Raymond Jones and others, 'Hiding in plain sight: Exploring the complex pathways between tactical concealment and relational wellbeing', *Organization*, 30/3 (2023), pp. 473-89 <<http://bit.ly/44KP0xW>> [accessed 5 April 2025]; Tatiana Mayskaya and Arina Nikandrova, 'The dark side of transparency: When hiding in plain sight works', *Journal of Economic Theory*, 212 (2023) <<http://bit.ly/44cD347>> [accessed 5 April 2025].

¹⁹ Karen Boyle, 'Hiding in Plain Sight: Gender, sexism and press coverage of the Jimmy Savile case', *Critical Studies in Television*, 13/4 (2018), pp. 387–404 <<https://bit.ly/4gHEU9z>> [accessed 17 April 2025]; Charmaine R. Lim and others, 'The Consequences of Whistle-Blowing: An Integrative Review', *Journal Patient Safety*, 00/00 (2017) <<http://bit.ly/3GsnlDd>> [accessed 17 April 2025].

The music is confrontational: daring the listener to discover and experience the embedded distortions and confusions within, but the listener must work for it, as I do. Who am I, what can I be? By obscuring vulnerability and feelings of self-doubt behind musical bluster and bluff, I have protected myself from potentially unwelcome understandings. My mother still believes she's inherently stupid because her monied, abusive husband took every opportunity available to point out and make explicit what he asserted was proof of her profound lack of intellect. This creative output is not meant as casual background.

Music, although it cannot alter painful events from the past, potentially gives an individual access to the emotional response that was produced by historical events.²⁰ By (re)immersing and engaging with that response, an individual can potentially (re)imagine their relationship with it.²¹ Most problems, when faced, appear less daunting and a return to circumstances that when first evoked were overwhelming, offers an opportunity for positive change through what might be considered a process of mental time travel, stimulated by music's emotionality.²² Creative practice allows me to confront and metaphorically re-negotiate the terms of how the foundational traumas of my childhood now affect my adult self. They need not define me. I, instead, redefine their meanings within compositional arrangement in the hope my music will provide a form of virtual access to the experience of the unrooted trauma of hiding in plain sight and passing for those who haven't experienced it directly and, at the same time, suggest possible modes of (re)negotiation for those who have.²³

²⁰ Joanna Kantor-Martynuska, 'Emotional Responses to Music and Their Musical, Individual, and Situational Factors: an Integrative Approach', *Psychological Studies*, 53/1 (2015), pp. 30–45 <<http://bit.ly/4erKWG6>> [accessed 6 April 2025]; Kathyleen Marie Higgins, *The Music of Our Lives*, (Blue Ridge Summit: Lexington Books, 2011), pp. 107, 171; Tia DeNora, *Music Asylums*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), p. 116; Fiona Magowan, Arianna Phillips-Hutton and others, *Sounding Conflict: From Resistance to Reconciliation*, (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), p. 159.

²¹ Crystal C. Wang and others, 'Music Interventions for posttraumatic stress disorder: A systematic review', *Journal of Mood & Anxiety Disorders*, 6 (2024) <<http://bit.ly/44q6kXQ>> [accessed 7 April 2025]; Yirin Ren, 'Music can change how you feel about the past', *The Conversation*, 2 December 2024 <<http://bit.ly/3J6OcLD>> [accessed 7 April 2025]; Patrik Juslin and John A. Sloboda, 'Music and Emotion', Diana Deutsch ed., *Psychology of Music*, 3rd Edition (Cambridge: Academic Press, 2013) <<http://bit.ly/4nvKLhf>> [accessed 7 April 2025].

²² Marina Trakas, 'Journeying to the past: time travel and mental time travel, how far apart?', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14 (2023) <<http://bit.ly/3J6OkuB>> [accessed 6 April 2025].

²³ Hans-Eckhart Schaefer, 'Music-Evoked Emotions – Current Studies', *Frontiers in Neuroscience*, 11 (2017) <<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5705548/>> [accessed 6 April 2025]; Lars-Olov Lundqvist and others, 'Emotional Responses to Music: Experience, expression, and physiology', *Psychology of Music*, 37/1 (2009), pp. 61–90 <<http://bit.ly/3TnYkl4>> [accessed 6 April 2025].

Chapter 3

The Creative Work

3.1 Introduction

Three centuries of colonial domination and enforced poverty (1521–1821) created almost impossible living conditions for many of Mexico's inhabitants. Post-conquest, their indigenous tradition of storytelling and oral folklore became an instrument of cultural survival, difficult realities shared as tall tales: commonalities of hardship and pain offered with a pizca of myth, humour, and exaggeration.¹

This strategy, of coping with dire circumstance through expressions of comic ferocity and horror, also infuses the sensibility of many of the visually violent street festivities in Mexico: from Xantolo, a dark, rough version of La Dia de los Muertos celebrated in Xilitla, to the Spanish influenced carnivals in Campeche where they celebrate with the Dance of the Pig's Head, a grotesque referencing of food and the stomach that acknowledges 'gay matter' (life's absurdities and cruelty) by combining the bloody severed head of a pig with laughter, exuberant dance movement and music, while Veracruzanos burn a figure that represents the 'bad moods' of the past year, thus making space for the new, fresh year to be born.²

These festivities also manifest a certain philosophical connection with the medieval carnivalesque world view once widely celebrated in Europe, the endless cycle of nature acknowledged through grotesque exaggeration — laughter/tears, joy/degradation, life born from pain and death, all metaphorically embodied in the functions of our 'lower' strata: the belching, farting, gluttonous, eating, lusting, excreting, living and dying populist body of the marketplace. A gloriously vulgar evocation of the universal aspects of humanity expressed in the language of working class and impoverished communities, an inclusive recognition

¹ The Aztec capital city, Tenochtitlán, surrendered to Cortez on August 13th, 1521, Myles Hudson, 'Battle of Tenochtitlán', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15 May 2024 <<http://bit.ly/4IUUF239>> [accessed 30 April 2025]; 300 years of colonization followed the Spanish conquest of the Aztec and Mayan civilizations. On August 24th, 1821, Mexico gained its independence, Gordon R. Willey and others, "Mexico", *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 30 April 2025 <<https://www.britannica.com/place/Mexico>> [accessed 30 April 2025]; Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America, Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, trans. by Cedric Belfrage, (London, UK: Serpents Tail, 2009 [1973]); Carl Gutiérrez-Jones, 'Humor, Literacy and Trauma in Chicano Culture', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 40/2 (2003), pp. 117–24 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/40247383?seq=11>> [accessed 23 May 2025]; Leslie Reese, 'Storytelling in Mexican Homes: Connections Between Oral and Literacy Practices', *Bilingual Research Journal*, 35/3 (2012), p. 277 <<http://bit.ly/4kgQ3dP>> [accessed 23 May 2025]; 'pizca', a Spanish term meaning 'a pinch of', or 'just a bit'.

² Raquel Paraíso, 'Zapateado in Sonos de Xantolo and Sonos Huastecos: Embodied Feeling' in K. Meira Goldberg and others, eds., *Transatlantic Malagueñas and Zapateados in Music, Song, and Dance* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019), pp. 268–282 <<https://www.academia.edu/39927007/>> [accessed 2 September 2024]; Ronald Lowe, 'Yucatán's Dancing Pig's Head (Cuch): Icon, Carnival, and Commodity', *The Journal of American Folklore*, 116/462 (2003), pp. 420–43 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4137756>> [accessed 2 September 2024]; Bob Brooke, 'Veracruz Lives for Carnaval', *The Real Mexico*, (2004) <<http://bit.ly/4eBHITG>> [accessed 2 September 2024]; Astrid Velasco Montante, 'Carnival Fiestas in Tlaxcala', *Voices of Mexico*, 2018, pp. 88–91 <<http://bit.ly/44lqoWF>> [accessed 2 September 2024].

(carnival was originally for both rich and poor) of our baseline commonality publicly articulated without fear of censure by authority.³

The creative work composed for this thesis incorporates a particular aspect of this approach: the use of wild dark humour to evoke, describe and cope with the horrors of life.⁴ The emotional heat radiating from maternal tales of brutal childhood experience provided an early introduction to the sharing of harsh events in this extravagantly embellished manner, my mother's furious jocularity an expressive tool that was both frightening and useful in thawing the sense of cold disconnection I often struggled with.

The flamboyantly obscene "call to pussy", delivered by Cheech Marin in Rodriguez and Tarantino's 1996 film, *From Dusk till Dawn*, serves as a relatively contemporary example of this style of communication.⁵ Marin is an L.A Chicax comedian who used to perform a coarse Mexican working-class character created from a pastiche of racial clichés. Although his ability to write and deliver witty 'choloisms' was undeniable, white audiences primarily laughed because the stereotypical depiction confirmed their prejudiced beliefs about poor, uneducated Mexicans from the barrio.⁶

My stage delivery, until recently, was primarily informed by Marin's exaggerated Chicax stoner monologues, something Marin has abandoned since reconnecting with his former comedic partner, Tommy Chong; their humour now openly ridicules prejudiced white perceptions.⁷ Although it served to provide a tenuous (re)connection with my rough Mexican heritage, I too have discarded the assumed pachuco-inflected accent I affected to portray Papa Tigre, my Chicax stage persona. Having passed as a white upper middle-class American for much of my life, I now realize my use of rasquache barrio street talk might be considered offensive by that community. If known, my mixed-race identity would also have been considered unacceptable in the white US neighbourhoods I was raised in during the 1950s, '60s and '70s: potentially 'othered' by both sides of the equation, nowhere has felt truly safe or like home.⁸

³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. by Helene Iswolsky, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, First Midland Book Edition, 1984 [1965]); Rodney J. Giblett, 'Grotesque Body of the Lower Strata' in *The Body of Nature and Culture*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 56.

⁴ Gulnara Karimova, 'Interpretive Methodology from Literary Criticism: Carnavalesque Analysis of Popular Culture: Jackass, South Park, and 'Everyday' Culture', *Studies in Popular Culture*, 33/1 (2010), pp. 37–51 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23416318>> [accessed 23 April 2025]; Diana Taylor, 'Humor and Violence', *Emisphérica: Performance and the Law*, 3/1 <<http://bit.ly/4lfJUQq>> [accessed 23 April 2025]; Barbara Creed, 'Horror and the Carnavalesque' in Leslie Devereaux ed., *Fields of Vision: Essays in Film Studies, Visual Anthropology, and Photography*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 130-34.

⁵ Cheech Marin's 'Titty Twister' speech in Robert Rodriguez and Quentin Tarantino's *Dusk Til Dawn*, <<http://bit.ly/4l9QTKo>> [accessed 26 August 2024].

⁶ 'cholo', a delinquent Mexican male.

⁷ 'pachuco', a Mexican gang member or member of Mexican resistance culture depending on your perspective; Javier Durán, 'Nation and translation: The 'Pachuco' in Mexican popular culture: Germán Valdéz's tin tan', in *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 35/2 (2002), pp. 41–49 <<http://bit.ly/3l2xRag>> [accessed 27 September 2024].

⁸ Gloria Andalzua, 'La Prieta', in Cherríe L. Moraga and Gloria Andalzua eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women Of Color*, (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002 [1981]), p. 220–33; David Lloyd, *Under Representation: The Racial Regime of Aesthetics*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), p. 90; John Edgar Wideman, *Brothers and Keepers* (London, UK: Alison & Busby, 1985), p. 52; Tahlia Eastman, 'Passing in plain sight: reclaiming narratives of hidden Aboriginality', *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 19/1 (2023), pp. 136–44 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/11771801221147061>> [accessed 2 May 2025].

My sonic dispatches, in many aspects, bear similarity with the gonzo writing style of Hunter S. Thompson which '[...] operates as a vehicle for social criticism. [...], forsakes any claims of objectivity and blurs the distinction between fact and fiction, [.....] to expose and defy the oppressive structures of society [...].'

(Jeffrey Horvath).⁹ By recounting mythologised familial tall tales of troubling events using indecipherable, time-stretched vocals backgrounded within distorted (un)conventional musical arrangements (technical strategies that conceal more than they reveal), I critique the long-term results of colonialist practice whilst re-examining difficult childhood memories and the cultural realities that helped create them.¹⁰ These dense soundscapes, on first listening, may seem like no more than fossilized remnants of psychic damage from the past, but do not be mistaken, the original raw emotions still pulsate within.

The artists detailed below (music, dance, painting) acted as inspirational influencers, their creative ideas helping me shape the sound palette and compositional form of my soundscapes. There are embedded links in the following paragraphs that allow the reader to watch and listen to these catalysts of my creative output.

Much of my childhood was spent watching movies on TV or in the local cinemas, their orchestral scores often emotionally affecting me more than the visual narratives: from Scott Bradley's use of Arnold Schoenberg's dissonant atonal and twelve-tone techniques in the soundtracks of the Tom and Jerry cartoons I watched as a kid (although I didn't realize until much later whose musical language had inspired the music that made me laugh), then, in my teens, the dark 'Hollywood fantastical' orchestral scores written by Bernard Herrmann for Ray Harryhausen and Alfred Hitchcock excited me, while Arseny Avraamov's metallic 'Symphony of Industrial Horns' (1922), the seminal industrial soundscape that, among many others, influenced James Horner's track 'The Iron Foundry' for *Aliens* (1986) spoke to the adult me, more recently, the ambient melancholia of Akira Yamaoka's scores for the Silent Hill franchise.

My father, a landscape and portrait painter from 1948-1959, introduced me to the artwork of Rufino Tamayo, Frida Khalo and los "Tres Grandes": Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros, artists who also inspired Jackson Pollack. My father told me Pollack loved Mexican art and had spent a year with Siqueiros (1936) observing and incorporating many of his artistic ideas without crediting him. Even so, I found his gestural 'drip' paintings and outsider persona, fascinating. Carmen Amaya's furious expressions of baile, cante, pitos y palmas fuelled my love of flamenco, her angry style of performance one my mother emulated.¹¹ My parents had lived in the cuevas of Sacromonte with members of Amaya's family in 1949, my father painting their portraits in exchange for flamenco lessons.¹²

I began composing in the early 1960s, when the structure of commercial songs on the radio (the primary way I accessed contemporary sounds during my youth) was a firmly established two and a half to three minutes of various permutations of

⁹ Jeffrey J. Horvath, 'A Savage Journey to the Heart of Literary Freedom: Gonzo Journalism as a Vehicle for Social Criticism in the Literary Nonfiction of Hunter S. Thompson', *Student Publications* (2015), p. 3 <<http://bit.ly/4npJcBn>> [accessed 26 March 2025].

¹⁰ Caron, 'Hunter S. Thompson's "Gonzo" Journalism and the Tall Tale Tradition in America', p.13; Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*, (New York, NY: Random House, July 1972).

¹¹ 'baile, cante, pitos y palmas' Spanish terms for flamenco dance, singing, finger-snaps and handclaps.

¹² 'Sacromonte' a referent for the cave dwellings in Granada's historic mountainous Gypsy quarter, where flamenco artists and their families once lived and performed.

verse/chorus/verse/chorus/bridge/instrumental section/chorus — a well-defined, successful formula I also used. Then, during the latter half of that same decade, other forms of sonic expression emerged that began new conversations with audiences: Karlheinz Stockhausen's modern-classical electronic art music (*Telemusik*, 1966,), the avant-garde synthesizer experimentation of Pink Floyd's twelve minute *A Saucerful of Secrets* (1968,) a track Richard Wright and Roger Waters explicitly acknowledge was influenced by Stockhausen, and Jimi Hendrix, whose harmonically distorted free-form electric guitar manipulations inspired by the conceptual ideas of John Coltrane, Buddy Guy, and Jeff Beck mimicked the sounds of war *The Star-Spangled Banner* (1969). Foxtrot, the fourth album by Genesis (1972), contained the 23-minute *Supper's Ready*, a track that combined classical music's symphonic structures, English folk and vaudeville with contemporary rock instrumentation that helped define the expanding genre of 'prog rock'. Then, in the mid 1970s, the abrasive sounds of punk and tracks like the Sex Pistol's *Anarchy in the UK* (1976) prepared audiences for the dystopian 'industrial' music of the 1980s and 1990s: *Z'ev*, *Einstürzende Neubauten*, *Test Department* (who specifically drew from Russian futurism and Arseny Araamov's 1920s industrial symphonies) and the metal-rock punch of *Nine Inch Nails*, Marilyn Manson and *David Bowie's* mid-nineties Goth rock, while *Chicanx Hip-Hop*, *Queer Latinx Rap*, the flamenco guitar of *Tomatito* and flamenco fusion of *Rosalía* and *La Gore* and *Bjork's* orchestral/electronic dance fantasies, in combination with her bizarre folk/fairytale performance personas, have also served as inspirational fonts for the past two and half decades.

As a dual-heritage individual who had spent a lifetime passing and even now occasionally feels disenfranchised (albeit an internalized emotional space rather than external reality), I find resonance with the often-grotesque stage personas and raging sounds of these artistic 'others'. This curated selection of artists — many of them 'outsiders' who live/d unconventional lives and upset established rules (musically, visually and politically) — have all influenced the musical direction and compositional style of this thesis. The noisy, metallic sounds of industrial noise are incorporated into every soundtrack for *Surviving Sunset*, while sampled orchestral moments inspired by Herrmann infuse the work with a sense of loss, elusive symphonic remnants that reference former (perhaps still current?) uncomfortable hegemonic histories. Woven from threads of frustration, anger and identity confusion, the 'sonic fabric' of my musical communications, all infused with the emotional legacies of colonialism, can be discomfiting.

When it was first suggested the approach for composing and arranging needed to be re-considered, I was surprised. As my initial work incorporated familial mythology, what I considered relevant musical signifiers (flamenco/Mariachi/Cumbia/Middle Eastern/Orchestral/Hip-Hop/Rap) and professional production values — I was unable to imagine what could be missing from the programmatic soundtracks for imaginary films I was crafting.¹³ The need for change seemed solely based on a decision made by influential others rather than personal choice which made it difficult to know what new direction to take. It was not until I began to re-evaluate the role creative work played in this project, that my perspective began to shift.

¹³ Elizabeth H. Margulis and others, 'Narratives imagined in response to instrumental music reveal culture-bounded intersubjectivity', *Psychological and Cognitive Sciences*, 119 4 (2022), pp. 1, 6–7 <<https://bit.ly/4qLaL9c>> [accessed 10 January 2026]; Celine Darr, 'From Story to Song: Exploring the Storytelling Potential of Instrumental Music', (published honours thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2023) <<https://bit.ly/4sp9S7Q>> [accessed 10 January 2026].

With my early musical attempts deemed somewhat autonomously self-contained and (perhaps) only superficially connected to the contextual, historical and analytic investigations I was undertaking, it appeared as if the original purpose of the musical output had been forgotten — that it evoke uncomfortable emotional response in the listener, states of being that paralleled (in some manner) what the contextual and critical analysis exposed. Although my beginning efforts had regaled the listener with mythic familial tall tales rapped in a faux Chicana accent over danceable Latino beats, they were not providing the visceral provocation I had expected.

What if, instead of considering my creative work the paramount element of this thesis, I repositioned it as part of a wider dialogue, another voice in a cumulative synergistic conversation, each aspect (academic and creative) contributing relevant information that informed the other in an iterative, cyclical process? With that thought, I began to deconstruct the relatively 'literal' tracks I had already produced by re-envisioning them as abstracted sonic responses within an interactive discourse and no longer tasked with being the sole embodiment and location of new knowledge. This idea, once decided on, raised two new important questions — what 'shape' might these abstract sonic responses take and what sounds should they include? After much trial and error, I decided that the cinematic soundtrack (with its spoken word, synchronous/asynchronous diegetic and non-diegetic ambiances, contrapuntal and acousmatic sound, SFX, Foley, and use of orchestral score) demonstrated the most suitable conceptual 'shape' for my new work, while the musical influences mentioned previously modelled the abrasive sonic lexicon I now desired.

I began this project with two tracks, 'No Puedo' and 'La Gente Guapa', initially expecting them to form part of the music portfolio for this project, but they ultimately fell outside of the final more coherent body of work. Nonetheless, they set the frame for the later work and so I've chosen to describe them here.

3.2 Commentary on the (un)Included Early Tracks

3.2.1 'No Puedo'

Prologue

My concept was to create a cinematically inspired journey, a soundtrack of Mexican and Chicana history that points to the endless circle of violence that continues to shadow the mestizo descendants of the Aztecs. I imagined it as a musical odyssey that takes the listener from the landing of Cortez in the New World (1519) to a familial narrative describing events from the late eighteenth century, then fast forwards to a 1940s LA Latina dance hall, offers zapateado against contemporary drum rhythms in a style reminiscent of Carmen (my flamenco rock band from the 1970s), and finally ends with the sounds of a drive-by shooting in an imagined contemporary East LA barrio. I also wanted to include a statement about personal challenges, one that could be read as a genuine response to the debilitating artefacts produced by historic colonialist practice and ironic comment on Disney studios 'Hollywood spin' on what might be considered a foundational US platitude: "All dreams can come true if you just believe enough and work hard!"

Track Commentary

With this filmic script in mind, I constructed the opening scene. Out of silence, a melody played on a wooden flute signals the Aztec presence. Then a deep hard-hitting impact, the imagined sound of a comet smashing into earth, indicates a history-altering event has just occurred and, at the same time, informs the listener they are experiencing a Hollywood influenced narrative. As the reverberations of this collision fade, an immense pitch lowered jaguar's roar, the imagined sound of Tezcatlipoca's nagual,¹⁴ layered with monkey shrieks and the beating wings of startled birds introduces the atmosphere of a Latin American jungle crackling with exaggerated energy provided by an extra track of high-pitched insect noises layered in to emphasise the dangerous potential of this primal environment. The distant sound of waves breaking on a beach and the creaking of wooden ships fades in — two very differing dominant cultures are about to meet.

Layered samples of Gregorian chant can now be heard in the distance, a signifier of the brutal Inquisitional mentality the conquistadores bring with them. These ghostly voices of Roman Catholic devotion are truncated by the massive groan of a ship being anchored. A raspy throated flamenco cantaor echoes that groan,¹⁵ I introduce my vocal presence with subdued jaleo as a short burst of zapateado closes this opening scene.¹⁶

Hollywood studios tend to commission scripts they believe will hold an audience's attention, historical veracity not a particularly important ingredient in that formula.¹⁷ I learned this during childhood and apply that lesson in my musical work. The sound and melody produced by the 'native flute' is a fiction, the only examples of an Aztec approach to musicality being relatively modern guesses and, although flamenco did not exist at this juncture in time, I include it to provide a punchy cierre¹⁸ and preview of its influential presence in this piece.

'No puedo' means 'I can't', words that express one possible reaction when confronted with what appears to be an impossible situation. I chose this negative exclamation so that I could include its opposite, a paraphrased affirmation taken from Walt Disney's animated version of Pinocchio.

Using a small digital recorder in my student room, I recorded myself singing this short statement of defeat – both solo and over a looped hip-hop rhythm played through the speakers of my laptop. Although not an ideal sonic space, I loved the raw affect it captured. I also recorded a few tracks of palmas to include as flamenco percussion.¹⁹ It now sounded like a small cuadro spontaneously performing in some imagined Andalucian cueva.²⁰ After the widescreen Dolby Atmos quality of the intro, this intimate lo-fi depiction of private despair provides contrast by instantiating movement from the broader picture to a snapshot of individual emotional collateral, an auditory production/arrangement choice

¹⁴ Sandra Busatta, 'The Jaguar: The Aztecs' Dark Side of Power', *Antrocom*, 3/1 (2007), pp. 5–7 <<http://bit.ly/44vp4oW>> [accessed 6 September 2024].

¹⁵ 'cantaor', Spanish term for singer.

¹⁶ Goldberg, *Sonidos Negros*, pp. 69, 34–35.

¹⁷ Scott Alan Metzger, 'Are Movies a Good Way to Learn History?', *The Conversation*, 2017 <<http://bit.ly/4IDy1n6>> [accessed 17 April 2023].

¹⁸ 'cierre', a flamenco dance term for a powerful finish.

¹⁹ 'palmas', flamenco handclaps.

²⁰ Eva Ordóñez Flores, 'Dance Improvisation Rules and Practice in the Cuadro Flamenco', *The World of Music*, 83/5 (2008), pp.33–47 <<http://bit.ly/45RiFGR>> [accessed 17 April 2023]; the caves in Sacromonte, Granada, where flamenco families lived and performed until the mid 1960s; Matthew Machin-Autenrieth, 'The Zambra, Tourism, and discourses of Authenticity in Granada's Flamenco Scene', *MUSICultures*, 43 2 (2016), p. 163 <<http://bit.ly/4nJKfMS>> [accessed 12 May 2025].

that comments on the vast differences between historical perspective and lived human experience.

After four mood-establishing bars, I use a cinematically inspired EDM rise to introduce the looped drum kit recorded in my room, hip hop influenced bass, Hammond church organ and a gospel inspired choral response to the repeated “No puedo” verbalisation: “Yes You Can!”. This positive statement has been multi-tracked, harmonised and sung in a high register to emphasise the cheerful Jiminy Cricket quality of its melody and sentiment. I also re-introduce the ‘native’ flute and double its melodic content with the sound of a marimba to create an auditory link between the distant imagined Aztec musical presence that opened the composition and the modern Afro-Cuban inflected musical space it now inhabits.

A loud timbale fill further announces my first inclusion of Latinx rhythm influences as high-quality sampled BD and snare tracks double those in the original lo-fi loop to add a noticeably contemporary dynamic punch as I start shifting the track into a different gear and decade. During the first repetitions of “No puedo” I use automation to reduce the stereo image which I then widen again as the positive answering refrain “Yes You Can” begins. Whether I can or ultimately cannot, my hope for integrating both sides of my familial heritages and becoming whole again reigns eternal, even if proffered with a certain amount of cynicism.

A brief combination of audio SFX, reminders of this opus’s soundtrack roots, is now used to propel the listener towards a rapped Spanglish cholo styled narrative. At this point a cajon replaces the palmas as percussive driver, a rhythmic signifier of the role African slavery played in the expansion of Spanish empire.

Delivered in a Chicanx street-style that has remained relatively unchanged since the 1940s, I recount a familial myth about my indigenous relatives set in the final decades of the eighteenth century.²¹ Great, great grandma Trinidad came from abject poverty. She wasn’t Mexican; she was pura India and supposedly a bruja. Her village relied on the shamanic journeys and magical skills they believed she possessed, and I tell of her elemental battles with a spirit jaguar, or nagual, who represented Death.

Whatever truths may be contained in that tale are now impossible to know but one of her daughters, the twelve-year-old La Chilona did catch the eye of a much older schoolteacher who married her when she turned fourteen. My maternal great grandmother then became the exceptionally cruel, brutal parent of thirteen children, echoes of the damage she inflicted still apparent in my mother’s behaviour. I chose this story because I believe her behaviour was partially born from the brutality of poverty exacerbated by racism, a consequence produced in response to historic Spanish colonialist practice in Mexico.

The final line of this Spanglish rap, ‘buela Angie’s advice I “fuck ‘em up a bit!”, ends with a mariachi style grito that propels the listener towards a bebop vocalisation the cheerful refrain, “Yes You Can”, punctuates. I also include a chaotic, high-pitched, Latinx-inspired electronic percussive emulation which moves around the stereo field and emphasizes the manic cartoon-like quality of the ‘nonsense’ syllables while non-stop gritos continuously reaffirm a Mexican presence.

This montage of tracks serves two purposes:

²¹ Anthony Macias, *Mexican American Mojo*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 3–4.

1. To make a further ironic comment about the mindless fabricated buoyancy inherent in Disney inspired affirmations, the Jiminy Cricket optimism now leveraged to agree with my 'buela's advice to physically damage anyone who gets in my way.
2. To point to Hollywood's distribution of racially stereotyped representation through inclusion of a Heckle and Jeckle inspired Bebop nonsense vocalisation.

A further nuance is that slaves invented forms of communication that couldn't be understood by their masters. Among those strategies were the alteration of tempo or rhythm in a song to convey hidden meaning and use of 'nonsense' interjections that were secret coded messages. My addition of a repetitive 'nonsense' verbalization references those covert resistances and foregrounds Blackness as an important element in the extended Latinx diaspora.²²

I now layer in a sampled Latinx horn section and raise the volume of the congas and cowbell, percussive instrumentation that highlights the Spanish Afro-Cuban influence in Mexican music. The trumpet solo is treated with extra reverb to emphasize the nostalgic, slightly haunted dance hall atmosphere it was my intention to establish. I was thinking of the LA Zoot Suit riots when I created this section of the composition, some of my relatives were involved in the violence that occurred and sent to prison where they were badly beaten by the white guards in revenge and just because they were Mexican.²³

A classic Hammond organ glide segues the track into a Carmen [my flamenco rock band] flavoured flamenco rock mixture with zapateado and palmas performing contrapuntal rhythms over hip-hop styled drums, bass, and percussion. This brings the listener forward in time through its conflation of early nineteenth century, 1970s and contemporary musical genres, a distillation of the different centuries, cultures, and artistic genres that inform this musical narrative and my creative practice.

The final scene returns to the sound of waves breaking on a beach and the creaking wood of ships as a marimba, now doubled with a kalimba to further acknowledge the African influence in Latinx music, begins to play a repetitive theme. The 'native' flute heard in the opening is heard playing a simple contrapuntal variation of the first melodic theme. 'Theme and variation' is a common musical structure in classical arrangements, and I use this idea as a reminder of European colonial intervention in the New World.

I speak a repeating set of English and Spanish words over the final instrumentation that imply my understanding of narratives, whether historical or personal, is that they are just stories, their truth relative to the context and perspective they are told from. A final brief gospel influenced choral sigh seems to herald a positive conclusion when a loud gunshot, the sound of revving engines and rising urban street ambience break the harmonic tranquillity almost achieved. A loud siren indicates police intervention as the volume of the waves increase and then fade into the distance.

²² Alexis Hancock, 'Coded Resistance: Freedom Fighting and Communication', *Electronic Frontier Foundation*, 24 February 2021 <<http://bit.ly/4lrMhPf>> [accessed 26 March 2023]; Goldberg, *Sonidos Negros*.

²³ Richard Griswold del Castillo, 'The Los Angeles "Zoot Suit Riots" Revisited: Mexican and Latin American Perspectives', *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, 16/2 (2000), pp. 367–91 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1052202>> [accessed 8 July 2025]; Antonio Franco, 'Threads of the Zoot Suit Riots: How the initial explanations for the riots hold up today', *Voces Novae*, 10/4 (2018) <<http://bit.ly/3ZZy8kB>> [accessed 30 August 2024].

My view of world events tends to the cynical: the ultimate scene depicts resolution thwarted at the last minute, a reference to continuing racial tensions in the US. The colonial legacy of the Spanish who conquered the Aztec territories in the first part of the fifteenth century has not been dismantled yet, their implementation of the mestizo concept still informing prejudicial attitudes in Mexico and much of South America.²⁴

3.2.2 'La Gente Guapa'

Prologue

The concept for 'La Gente Guapa' was that it be in musical dialogue with the 1990s techno-Goth scene, with 'The Beautiful People' by Marilyn Manson as conversational partner. This exercise in temporal displacement, contemporary perspective recreating past narrative to form an artistic hybrid that could not have existed historically, required I revisit an emotionally disaffected side street from my past — the black and white imagery in Manson's video speaking to childhood memories of oft watched 1930s Hollywood horror films, Tod Browning's *Freaks* in particular, loneliness and feelings of 'otherness'.²⁵

My career as a composer began with my first band in early 1963. With no formal training in any relevant area, like many other youthful singer/songwriters of the time, I relied on confidence and what I thought was an innate ability to express myself effectively with and through music. My roots were in flamenco and Spanish classical guitar but, excited about the possibilities of the electric guitar and enamoured of the barber shop harmonies of the Beach Boys, I chose to abandon this musical heritage and assume the persona of a white surf dude. Although there are clearly parallels with the earlier disavowal of my Mexican background, this renunciation was self-motivated. I convinced my parents to buy me an electric guitar and amp and did not look back, for a while.

Although I was unaware at the time, this was a pivotal next step in the journey away from my original identity: it would be many decades before my discovery of and acceptance as a member of London's alternative sexual, music and performance scene during the mid 1980s to the beginning of the twenty-first century provided what I thought was resolution for the primary incomplete gestalt in my life, "Where and with whom do I belong?" As it happens, no healing occurred there.

'La Gente Guapa' parallels the structure and energetic thrust of the Manson track but offers a differing commentary on the themes of US capitalism, feelings of 'otherness' and anger, than those espoused in the original. Manson's philosophical approach is made clear in these two short sets of lyrics: "And I don't want you and I don't need you, don't bother to resist, or I'll beat you" and "There's no time to discriminate, hate every motherfucker that's in your way". This is an uncompromising manifesto for those considered the (un)beautiful 'others'. From my perspective the attainment of inclusivity requires persistence and sensitivity, anger and blame rarely conducive to the achievement of workable solutions.

Track Commentary

²⁴ Marisol de la Cadena, 'Reconstructing Race: Racism, Culture and Mestizaje in Latin America', in *nacla*, 25 September 2007 <<http://bit.ly/4l95CVV>> [accessed 17 April 2023].

²⁵ Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, (London: Repeater, 2016); Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, (New York, NY: Basic, 2001).

To begin with, I replaced the original 4/4 rhythm with a flamenco bulerías 12/8 time-signature which, on reflection, was probably sub-consciously motivated by my need to take immediate control of the artistic process, perhaps an instinctive response to another performer's powerful statement. I paraphrase the instrumental introduction of the Manson track with added zapateado, palmas, sounds of static, radio channel searching, and snippets taken from a Mexican American border police radio transmission — sonic remnants of a denied racial heritage. The entrance of a Jimi Hendrix inspired guitar phrase layered over a surf punk guitar riff chases the previous reminders of my Chicana border town (San Diego) beginnings away. This stylistic conflation of time and disparate styles includes almost every major musical influence in my creative practice: flamenco, surf punk, late 1960s psychedelic rock, and techno — a *mezcla*²⁶ of interrelated abrasive auditory proclamations that describe the inner tensions and intentions often just beneath my measured and diplomatic external persona.²⁷

My entry vocal, positioned at the forefront of a suddenly gentle 1970s Latinx influenced Rhodes piano, bass and conga arrangement, is sung in sombre Spanglish. This delivery, filled with a raspy weariness, is in direct opposition to Manson's virulent sarcastic tone and could be read as the contrasting voices of elder age and argumentative youth. I speak of false idols and the need to recognise and ignore them while Manson advocates the destruction of those who judge you and stand in your way. In retrospect, it seems no more than an argument with myself, I was once a young man who raged.

I return to the instrumentation of the intro for the chorus which is layered with triple tracked vocals to add body. At this juncture I decided to occasionally muffle the backing track of the chorus to create an auditory mirror of the lyrics, “la gente guapa, la gente guapa, no se donde estan.”, “the beautiful people, the beautiful people, I don't know where they are.”, “No veo la gente guapa, where have they gone?” it's an unexpected artistic intervention that, hopefully, reinforces the idea thematically central to this section, the disappearance of those “gente guapa” when they don't want to be bothered with the harsher aspects of life.

A synth rise, like a heaven-sent prayer, introduces choral harmonies reminiscent of the West Coast band the Mamas and Papas, layered over the same flamenco chord progression used in their signature song, ‘California Dreaming’ — celestial voices of angels coming to rescue Southern California's minorities from the discriminatory intolerance of ‘la gente guapa’. Or are they? The lyrics in the final bars of the bridge deliver a warning, a precis of the ‘beautiful people's’ behaviour towards those they consider ‘less than’ and the cutting edge of their intentions, wielded, perhaps, like the blades of the conquistadores. Saved by a ‘Deus ex machina’, or in this case, a heavenly chorus, occurs in Hollywood film plots, but not the real world.

At this point, I diverge from Manson's template to present a flamenco-inspired pastiche based on a much later section of the Manson arrangement, another example of my creative pre-occupation with re-organising temporality. This consists of a series of deep ‘ohs’ sung over a backing track that includes a 1980s-inspired synth keyboard doubling the bass line, a confusion of genre and time that evokes the Pop, Latin Jazz stylings of bands

²⁶ ‘mezcla’, a mix or blend.

²⁷ George Lewis, ‘New Music Decolonization in Eight Difficult Steps’, *Herri*, 5 <<https://herri.org.za/5/george-lewis/>> [accessed 17 April 2023]; George E. Lewis and Joy H. Calico, eds., ‘Editorial Introduction’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 72/3 (2019), pp. 607–11 <<https://doi.org/10.1525/jams.2019.72.3.607>> [accessed 9 July 2025].

like Blue Rondo à la Turk and the imagined sounds of Cerberus's many layered howls heralding the entrance to Hades. Or could they be the more primal growls of Tezcatlipoca's nagual originating terrible earthquakes in the depths of the earth that will eventually destroy the world, my world. We must all pay our dues eventually.

Having used *razqueado* to play flamenco chords in the bridge,²⁸ I continue the traditional flamenco atmosphere by underpinning the next interlude with guitar *picado*.²⁹ This is a meditative breath that features a melancholic version of the "la gente guapa" choral refrain over the sound of slowly moving water and 'Charon's foghorn' in the background, even 'la gente guapa' cannot escape the underworld. This moment of foregrounded mortality, referenced through classical Greek mythology, a foundational aspect of the European belief in their 'superior' culture and humanity, is introduced by a sonic representation of fairy dust, SFX that alludes to the artifice of Hollywood and, at the same time, acknowledges the magical cinematic affect it can produce.

I return to the original riff and sing an exhortation in Spanglish urging the living 'othered' to follow their own path and stop accepting the false ideology and mierda of 'la gente guapa'.³⁰ For much of my youth, I was a dedicated follower of fashion, these lyrics speak to that younger self who felt it necessary to emulate the images of thin, 'beautiful' white people in style magazines to feel attractive and worthy of success.³¹

I reprise the 'angelic choir'; did I lose faith too quickly the first time? Like Orpheus who, admonished by the gods not to look back, did, losing everything he was about to achieve in that moment of doubt: my hopes for a colonialist change of heart seem doomed to failure, revisitation of this crucial musical moment revealing no new perspective. The track closes with a re-iteration of my perception of 'la gente guapa', that they act in bad faith, sung over the same flamenco *picado* guitar pattern. Prejudice directed towards Mexicans and Latinx is still very much in evidence in Southern California and much of the US.

3.3 Liner Notes

The finished project ultimately developed into a sort of album, entitled *Surviving Sunset*, as a means of hiding something else in plain sight. You'll turn to commentary on the 'officially' included album tracks presently but, even if it's slightly artificial, here are the liner notes.

Surviving Sunset is an attempt to make sense of a conflicted past, one informed by difficulties from without (colonialist, racist and capitalist tenets) and within (familial cruelties exacerbated by those external ideologies). It speaks to and from the emotional residue left by kindred secrets (fear, loss and trauma), as it connects the personal to a broader cultural landscape. By leveraging creative practice to explore and express the outcomes that resulted from the multiplicity of influences that inform this narrative, my hope is the listener either: recognizes elements of their own journey (and thus feels less alone) and/or gains more knowledge about and empathy for the harsh odyssey of the 'othered'.

²⁸ 'razqueado', a flamenco guitar strumming technique.

²⁹ 'picado', a flamenco guitar-picking technique.

³⁰ 'mierda', colloquial Spanish term for excrement.

³¹ Dhandapani Saravanan and Nithyaprakash Venkatasamy, 'Fashion Trends and Their Impact on the Society', *International Conference on Textiles, Apparels and Fashion, Coimbatore*, 30 September 2015 <<http://bit.ly/3Trh7fv>> [accessed 18 April 2023]; Kelly Oakes, 'The Complicated Truth about Social Media and Body Image', *BBC Future*, 12 March 2019 <<http://bit.ly/468Xccs>> [accessed 18 April 2023].

All samples and loops were obtained from Splice.com and Logic Pro. Stems extracted from my own previous recordings are footnoted as they occur in the work.

3.4 Commentary on the Creative Work

3.4.1 'Empress of the Ants' [00:00 – 07:42]

Prologue

'Empress of the Ants' is informed by autobiographies chronicling lives of abjection: *Children of the Dead End*, *Children of Sanchez*, *Chav Solidarity*, *Because of Love*, *Love Medicine*, and *Empress of the Ants*, the primary inspiration for this track.³² The subaltern existence described in these books is familiar to me, for although I have never personally experienced poverty, some of my earliest memories include the 'humorous' anecdotes from a desperate childhood my mother recounted in order I appreciate the privileged existence she helped create for our family — Winnie the Pooh served with tales of starvation, brutality and suicide as bedtime material. The heavy weight of memory my mother carried eventually became a mutual burden. She shared her early trauma with me, and together we made it ours.³³

As previously mentioned, the use of humour and exaggeration to safely express brutal circumstances is a descriptive device used in many autobiographies describing an impoverished life.³⁴ When writing the lyrics for 'Empress of the Ants', a process of intergenerational re-imagining, my own sense of theatre added a further layer of distancing to what are truly terrifying childhood remembrances.³⁵

My mother, like many other children caught in a similar economic position, regularly consumed handfuls of dirt because of the iron missing from a diet that barely provided sustenance (geophagy, a desire to eat dirt), shared her internal space with the resultant

³² Patrick Macgill, *Children of the Dead End*, (Edinburgh, Scotland: Berlin, 1999 [1914]); Oscar Lewis, *Children of Sanchez*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1964 [1961]); Dominic Hunter, *Chav Solidarity*, (London, UK: Active Distribution, 2019 [2018]); Franko B., *Because of Love*, (London, UK: Live Art Development Agency, 2018); Louise Erdrich, *Love Medicine*, (London, UK: Flamingo, 1994); Margarita Cordova, *Empress of the Ants*, (Los Angeles, CA: Bambaz, 2019).

³³ Jessica P. Cerdeña and others, 'Intergenerational trauma in Latinxs: A scoping review', *Social Science & Medicine*, 270 (2021) <<http://bit.ly/3GecMcn>> [accessed 7 September 2024]; Emma Reese and others, 'Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma: The Mediating Effects of Family Health', *International Journal of Environmental Research Public Health*, 19/10 (2022) <<http://bit.ly/4ovCvOS>> [accessed 7 September 2024].

³⁴ Brian D. Vivona, 'Investigating Humor Within a Context of Death and Tragedy: The Narratives of Contrasting Realities', *The Qualitative Report*, 18/50 (2013), pp. 1–22 <<http://bit.ly/4k6GTjM>> [accessed 7 April 2025]; Ulrike Willinger and others, 'Cognitive and emotional demands of black humour processing: the role of intelligence, aggressiveness and mood', *Cognitive Processing*, 18/2 (2017), pp. 159–67 <<http://bit.ly/3G9Jvzw>> [accessed 7 April 2025].

³⁵ Ricardo Phipps and others, 'Thematic Analysis of Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma in Latinx Immigrant Families in the Southern US', *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, (2022) <<http://bit.ly/4euZyoh>> [accessed 27 August 2024]; Lizbeth Arellano-Victoriano, 'Intergenerational and Collective trauma: Its Impact on Second-Generation Mexican American College Students', (published undergraduate thesis, California State University, 2022) <<http://bit.ly/4kS4sht>> [accessed 7 September 2024].

tapeworms and was always prepared to counter danger with immediate violence.³⁶ She also dreamed of having blue eyes, a physical transformation she was convinced would open the door to every imagined possibility. Though this aspect of passing was never achieved, she experimented with bleached blonde hair in her quest to be considered 'white' and middle-class.

Can this current sonic acknowledgement and response to harsh familial narratives help heal that trauma? Possibly.³⁷

The first version of 'Empress of the Ants', constructed in a manner like my previous work over the past decade (using contemporary Pop and Hip-Hop production techniques with a foregrounded rapped vocal), although technically excellent, seemed somewhat obvious and unexciting. My supervisors and I then discussed different approaches for expanding practice, a conversation that culminated in the decision I develop a set of 'composer's instructions' for introducing randomness, abstraction and the unexpected, an approach alluded to in Joan Didion's pithy observation, "Make a place available to the eyes and in certain ways it is no longer available to the imagination."³⁸ My use of familiar creative templates was constricting the possibility of new learnings, the potential magic of music and sound obstructed by over-reliance on the literal, the 'known': a subconscious choice based on fear of failure and what the 'unknown' might reveal.

After much thought, I wrote the following suggestions:

1. Radically deconstruct my established formulas for producing commercially viable music and take an artistic 'leap in the dark'.
2. Engage in autopoietic conversation with this different approach and respond 'in the moment' to its unfamiliar processes.³⁹
3. Stop assuming the guise of a musical 'Wizard of Oz', and reveal, not unlike Brecht, the creative techniques and ideas that inform my practice.⁴⁰
4. Embrace 'not knowing' what the outcome will be.

The joy in creative accomplishment can be lost during the process of intensely composing and crafting arrangements, engineering, producing, writing lyrics, and performing vocals,

³⁶ Gerald N. Callahan, 'Eating Dirt', *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, 9/8 (2003), pp. 1016–21 <<http://bit.ly/4k8o0gh>> [accessed 7 September 2024]; Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America*, p. 63; Cordova, *Empress of the Ants*, pp. 50–53.

³⁷ Nora Landis-Shack and others, 'Music Therapy for Posttraumatic Stress in Adults: A Theoretical Review', *Psychomusicology: Music, Mind, and Brain*, 27/4 (2017): pp. 334–42 <<https://bit.ly/4jrZrMQ>> [accessed 9 July 2025]; Wang and others, 'Music interventions for posttraumatic stress disorder'; B.D. Beck and others, 'Music therapy was noninferior to verbal standard treatment of traumatized refugees in mental health care: Results from a randomized clinical trial', *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 12/1 (2021) <<https://bit.ly/4qVQ9eH>> [accessed 7 September 2024].

³⁸ Joan Didion, *let me tell you what I mean*, (London, UK: Fourth Estate, 2022), p. 22.

³⁹ Autopoiesis (from the Greek auto, "self" and poiesi, "making"). The relationship between systems and their environment based on self-reference; self-reproduction and change not dependent on the external environment: Ralf Rogowski, in *International Encyclopaedia of the Social & Behavioural Sciences* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2001), pp. 8500–502 <<http://bit.ly/3GglPsj>> [accessed 10 September 2024].

⁴⁰ Laura Bradley, 'Training the Audience: Brecht and the Art of Spectatorship', *The Modern Language Review*, 111/4 (2016), pp. 1029–48 <<http://bit.ly/4m8Ov79>> [accessed 27 August 2024]; Anne C. Stichter, 'The Role of Breaking the Fourth Wall in Audience Ego Identification', *Aletheia*, 1/2 (2016), pp. 2–15 <[doi: 10.21081/ax011](https://doi.org/10.21081/ax011)> [accessed 7 September 2024].

so these instructions offer the possibility of an artistic destabilization grounded in the childlike delight of construction and (de)construction as potential solution for freeing the fearful spirit inside me, a spirit still grappling with the meanings implied by historic imperatives that demanded concealment of a major aspect of racial heritage.⁴¹ In the search for new learnings these experimental (to me) mixing and finishing strategies proved helpful as I mined the less explored regions of my psyche for potentially unaddressed 'content'.

I recast the initial completed versions of 'Empress of the Ants', as well as 'Father' and 'Recuerdos', tracks to which I will turn presently, as beginning work and foundational springboards for further artistic and intellectual experimentation. The transmuted results of this exercise in auditory metamorphosis still contain many of the elements of my previous 'literal' approach, their gallows-humoured, carnivalesque influenced tall tales now hidden in plain sight within vastly re-imagined sonic arrangements, as I metaphorically re-negotiate acceptable terms with the seminal influences that shaped me.⁴² Using the (re)constructive approach of my 'composer's instructions', I am bypassing (to a certain extent) long-established creative structuring rigidities, the final results somewhat unknown. I still have little idea of how this process is affecting the information I'm trying to discover in the work.

Constructed from the internalized echoes of an abject existence whose brutal details I am somehow more familiar with than those of my own youthful circumstances, these oft-recounted narratives became the source of bleak 'postmemories' that eventually displaced the relatively comfortable textures of everyday existence and caused me to doubt who I was in relation to such harsh realities.⁴³

Track commentary

Snippets of Mexican radio transmission, hungry spavined dogs barking in the distance and the insistent Aeolian sigh of desert wind depositing sand on every available surface introduce this hauntologically influenced re-interpretation of my mother's impoverished early years, an opening evocation of melancholic 'tiempo perdido' soon augmented by a repetitive synth note that presages the roar and thunder of 'La Bestia', the mighty freight train many poor Latinx ride illegally to Lechería (a station just outside Mexico City) in the hope of eventually reaching and crossing the heavily barricaded borders of the USA.⁴⁴ The

⁴¹ Raquel Wright-Mair and others, 'Latinx College Students' Strategies for Resisting Imposter Syndrome at Predominantly White Institutions', *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 23/2 (2023), pp. 725–43 <<http://bit.ly/4fvQwYM>> [accessed 15 September 2024]; Mary Dueñas and others, 'You're not really here because you deserve to be here: How Latinx college students experience imposter syndrome', *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 24/2 (2023), pp. 349–61 <<http://bit.ly/4orOexl>> [accessed 15 September 2024]

⁴² David J. Hargreaves, 'Musical imagination: Perception and production, beauty and creativity', *Psychology of Music*, 40/5 (2012), pp. 539–57 <<http://bit.ly/3HiwOTG>> [accessed 7 April 2025]; Kelly Jakubowski and Tuomas Eerola, 'Music Evokes Fewer but More Positive Autobiographical Memories Than Emotionally Matched Sound and Word Cues', *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition*, 11/2 (2022), pp. 272–88 <<http://bit.ly/3H5CXTf>> [accessed 7 April 2025].

⁴³ Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of PostMemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), pp. 31–35 <<http://bit.ly/3Umejk5>> [accessed 2 April 2025]; Kathy Behrendt, 'Hirsch, Sebald, and the Uses and Limits of Postmemory' in Eleanor Ty and Russell J. A. Kilbourn, eds., *The Memory Effect: The Remediation of Memory in Literature and Film*, (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013), pp. 51–67 <<http://bit.ly/46bVPK5>> [accessed 7 April 2025].

⁴⁴ 'tiempo perdido', lost time; Edyta Lorek-Jezińska and Katarzyna Więckowska, 'Hauntology and Cognition: Questions of Knowledge, Pasts and Futures', *Theoria et Historia Scientiarum*, 1/15 (2017) <<http://bit.ly/41CldWi>> [accessed 2 September 2024]; Grafton Tanner, *Babbling Corpse: Vapourware and the Commodification of Ghosts*, (Winchester, UK: Zero, 2016); Veronica G. Cardenas, 'Aboard 'the beast':

introduction of what could be imagined as brushstrokes (sampled vinyl scratching transformed by radical frequency cuts, phase-filtering and echo effects) begins to add further rhythmic noise to the din of 'La Bestia's' massive chugging engine, the sound of a metaphorical broom signifying my attempts to clear away harrowing maternal 'postmemories'.

This auditory fever dream abruptly ends on a lonely, yet potentially hopeful, piano note, a sonic gesture evoking Disney studios and Tinkerbell. Has the burning steel heart of 'La Bestia' been soothed and softened by the touch of her magic wand? Would that it was so.

The note fades, a Mexican radio announcement heralds the crowing of a cockerel (an evocation of rural existence and 'cockfights', a blood sport popular among the working class in Mexico) and a spoken narrative begins recounting tales of a child, the self-proclaimed mythic Empress of the Ants. Based on stories of my mother's youthful infatuation with blue eyes, the fearsome accuracy of her stone-throwing and ability to stoically endure the pain of sitting on a hill of red ants while pretending to remain unscathed, these are whimsical, fantastical interpretations of what were very harsh circumstances.⁴⁵

Slow arpeggiated chords introduce the spoken narrative, its words time-stretched to the point of unintelligibility ensuring no listener can decipher the original literal performance; rather like my blurring of maternal heritage until that racial truth became unrecognisable.⁴⁶ A harsh brittle quality, reminiscent of my father's coruscatingly didactic tone (when verbally 'educating' either my mother or the whole family), was also added to the vocal through a liberal application of clip distortion, while the time-stretching provides an auditory approximation of how those patriarchal colonialist inspired 'lessons' were received. I deflected his scathing harangues concerning our deficiencies by repetitively composing melodies and instrumental arrangements in my mind, a creative barricade that obstructed his verbalised negativity; much like Shamengwa, a native American who, through music, survived and found freedom from an impoverished, hellish family existence in Louise Erdrich's novel, *The Plague of Doves*.⁴⁷

At 03:05, the laboured thud of a beating heart enters and quickly gains volume, the excited shouts and screams of children and an instrumental tango join at 03:35, their evocation of past lives and worlds continuing as the heartbeat slowly fades away by 04:02. The backing track stops during the narrator's final words 04:44–04:47, which, by now, are completely indecipherable (a comment on the loss of voice experienced by the abjected 'other').

migrants' daring train ride through Mexico – in pictures', *The Guardian*, 13 December 2017 <<http://bit.ly/4otMe8l>> [accessed 26 August 2024].

⁴⁵ Cordova, *Empress of the Ants*, pp. 58–60; Araceli Orozco-Figueroa, 'The Historical Trauma and Resilience of Individuals of Mexican Ancestry in the United States: A Scoping Literature Review and Emerging Conceptual Framework', *Genealogy*, 5/2 (2021), pp. 1–35 <<http://bit.ly/3Tkuj5C>> [accessed 7 September 2024]; Sophie Isobel and others, 'Psychological Trauma in the Context of Familial Relationships: A Concept Analysis', *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 20/4 (2021), pp. 549–59 <<http://bit.ly/45HMzwC>> [accessed 9 July 2025].

⁴⁶ Jessica M. Vasquez, 'Blurred Borders for Some but not "Others": Racialization, "Flexible Ethnicity," Gender, and Third-Generation Mexican American Identity', *Sociological Perspectives*, 53/1 (2010), pp. 45–72 <<http://bit.ly/4knvTia>> [accessed 7 September 2024]; Clare Sheridan, "'Another White Race:" Mexican Americans and the Paradox of Whiteness in Jury Selection', *Law and History Review*, 21/1 (2003), pp. 109–44 <<http://bit.ly/4knvTia>> [accessed 7 September 2024]; María Carla Sánchez, 'Whiteness Invisible, Early Mexican American Writing and the Colour of Literary History' in María Carla Sanchez and Linda Schlossberg, eds., *Passing: Identity and Interpretation in Sexuality, Race, and Religion*, (New York: New York University Press, 2001), p. 65.

⁴⁷ Erdrich, *The Plague of Doves*, p. 202.

My use of the tango during the spoken narrative (sampled from personal work recorded three decades ago),⁴⁸ parallels the mental strategy I once used as protection from my father's destructive behaviour.⁴⁹ By drawing attention away from the increasingly unintelligible babble of the narrative, it demonstrates how music can be used to either divert or recall difficult events from the past, thus providing an opportunity, if wanted, to reconnect with distressing memories and emotions. Through revisiting and including elements from my musical past, an auto-historical and psycho-geographical mining of one's own artistic practice, I have been able to gain emotional access to difficult childhood experiences, not in the hope of changing them, but in the hope of reframing their meaning and importance.⁵⁰

The tango is also a musical referent for the vast reach of Portuguese colonialism in South America, an even greater, more lucrative empire than the Spanish conquered and ruled, its melancholic tonalities a signifier of racist informed traumatic death accomplished on a truly grand scale: the enslavement and murder of many thousands of indigenous inhabitants forced to work in the Minas Gerais region of Brazil (the gold mines), for "there is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (Walter Benjamin).⁵¹

A romantic acapella melody, sung in Spanish, re-introduces the backing track that now includes a deep syncopated bass note and melodic motif played by a Mariachi horn section (a combination of nostalgic romanticism and a certain musical brutality serving to reference differing perceptions of poverty). After four bars, a call and response chorus begins, a musical signifier of the often-unacknowledged African presence in Mexico, a result of Spain's historic slave trade.⁵² The call line, "Esta niña de la calle" (this little girl of the street), is answered by a whispered response, "Empress of the ants". Both vocal lines, through use of reverb and clip distortion, have a granular sound reminiscent of the many legged scuttling of an ant colony, a sonic reinforcement of words that express a tough, parched reality.

'Empress of the Ants' is a tall tale, a child's claim of magical powers to gain respect. To emphasize this fictional, otherworldly aspect I layered numerous whispered takes,

⁴⁸ Sampled from a demo recording by David Clark Allen aka David Randall-Goddard.

⁴⁹ Martina de Witte and others, 'Effects of music interventions on stress-related outcomes: a systematic review and two meta-analyses', *Health Psychology Review*, 14/2 (2020), pp. 294–24 <<http://bit.ly/4nrVARk>> [accessed August 2024]; Matthew Tull, 'Using Distraction for Coping With Emotions and PTSD', *verywell mind*, (updated 28 June 2021) <<http://bit.ly/4eBASuy>> [accessed August 2024].

⁵⁰ Sébastien Caquard and Amy L. Griffin, 'Mapping Emotional Cartography', *Cartographic Perspectives*, 91 (2018), pp. 4–16 <<http://bit.ly/449ZruW>> [accessed 27 August 2024]; Andrew Steger and others, 'Emotional cartography as a window into children's well-being: Visualizing the felt geographies of place', *Emotion, Space, and Society*, 39 (2021) <<http://bit.ly/419N7Rj>> [accessed 27 August 2024]; Andrea Pitts, 'Gloria E. Anzaldúa's Autohistoria-teoría as an Epistemology of Self-Knowledge/Ignorance', *Hypatia*, 31/2 (2016) pp. 352–69 <<http://bit.ly/44LaOcm>> [accessed 30 August 2024]; Hazrat Inayat Khan, *The Mysticism of Sound and Music: The Sufi Teaching of Hazrat Inayat Khan*, (Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, 2022), pp. 100–102 <<http://bit.ly/41AwXIO>> [accessed 9 July 2025]; Higgins, *The Music of Our Lives*, pp. 63, 107, 114.

⁵¹ Charles R. Boxer, *Race Relations in the Portuguese Colonial Empire: 1415–1825*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1963); Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America*, pp. 46–65; Walter Benjamin, 'Thesis on the Philosophy of History', in Hannah Arendt, ed., *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn, (New York, NY: Schocken, 1968), p. 256 <<http://bit.ly/4m8JtaL>> [accessed 16 July 2025]

⁵² Beau D.J. Gaitors, 'Afro-Mexicans: Illuminating the Invisible From Past to Present', *The School of Liberal Arts Magazine*, 11 June 2021 <<http://bit.ly/44t5cTn>> [accessed 27 August 2024]; <<http://bit.ly/44pCXF2>> [accessed 27 August 2024]; Edgar Bahena, 'Mexico is also Afro!', *Unesco*, 1 September 2023 <<http://bit.ly/3ZXHBsG>> [accessed 27 August 2024].

including a pitch shifted low octave version (perhaps a demonic presence?), then implemented various obvious echo and reverb effects to create the imagined sound of spirits, their voices continuously swirling around the stereo field repeating the response line. These reverberant ghostly emanations also serve as sonic metaphor honouring the shamanic skill supposedly possessed by our indigenous familial ancestor, Trinidad.

As a final thought, I edited and sampled the initial vowel of *Empress* which I then occasionally added to the beginning of the response phrase to re-create the stuttering effect used for the chorus of 'My Generation', the Who's seminal hit single from 1965. The stutter, a brief vocal gesture inspired by John Lee Hooker's 'Stuttering Blues' references frustration, anger, the pain of 'others', and my mother's doubts concerning her conflicted wish for white middle-class acceptance — although the prospect of failure was personally shaming, success would inevitably incur the acrimony of darker-skinned relatives.⁵³

I re-introduce the sound of the 'metaphorical brush' during the final moments of the work, added reverb and echo considerably extending its presence within the stereo field, its augmented sense of auditory vastness meant to imply the Sisyphean task of cleaning up humanities muck might require infinite effort and time.⁵⁴

After re-imagining 'Empress of the Ants', I became aware that the reorganisation of emphasis and arrangement potentially altered affect and meaning for the listener as well as myself. This version, though based on the same musical foundations, offers quite differing emotional soundscapes to engage with, an outcome that tangentially demonstrates Ruth Hubbard's well known philosophical comment on subjectivity, 'truth is in the eye of the beholder,' in this case, 'the ears and imagination of the listener'.⁵⁵ Although content from the original first mix remains embedded as a foundational internal 'truth' within this version of 'Empress of the Ants', the ensuing artistic interventions provide a differing external 'sonic veracity': a different reality (in this case auditory rather than visually performative) that obscures the original truths so that they are no longer easily discerned, yet, nevertheless, continue to exist. An artistic intervention that could also be interpreted as an implementation of hiding in plain sight and passing.

3.4.2 'Father' [00:00 – 08:54]

Prologue

Colonisation operates on many levels.⁵⁶ This track was, among many other ideas, primarily inspired by familial practice that mirrored on a personal micro level, the global sense of

⁵³ Eds. of The Stuttering Foundation, 'New Memoir by Lead Singer on "My Generation," the Most Famous Stuttering Song in Rock History', *The Stuttering Foundation*, 23 January 2019 <<http://bit.ly/4ldsQKP>> [accessed 27 August 2024].

⁵⁴ Nurane Shabili, 'The Labor of Sisyphus', *Medium*, 11 October 2023 <<http://bit.ly/4l9ky6u>> [accessed 11 September 2024]; David Newman, 'The lines that continue to separate us: borders in our 'borderless' world', *Progress in Human Geography*, 30/2 (2006), pp. 143–61 <<http://bit.ly/4marz7R>> [accessed 11 September 2024]; George F. Will, 'Choosing immigration criteria is a Sisyphean task', *Los Angeles Daily News*, 21 January 2018 <<http://bit.ly/44sJVJh>> [accessed 11 September 2024].

⁵⁵ Ruth Hubbard, 'Science, Facts, and Feminism', *Hypatia*, 3/1 (1988), pp. 5–16 <<http://bit.ly/4m7UWY6>> [accessed 28 August 2024].

⁵⁶ Vanessa Andreotti, 'Multi-layered Selves: Colonialism, Decolonization and Counter-Intuitive Learning Spaces', *Pedagogy, Otherwise*, 8/27 (2016) <<http://bit.ly/411OABb>> [accessed 28 August 2024]; Sylvia Tamale, 'Peeling away at the layers of colonisation - public lecture', *stias*, October 2019 <<http://bit.ly/47krz0q>> [accessed 28 August 2024].

superiority and privilege colonialism operates from on a macro level. My white, very upper middle-class father considered himself intellectually superior to the rest of his family; my mother was regularly berated for her ‘uneducated ways’ and I certainly never seemed to live up to the standards my father expected, perhaps he felt I had too much inferior heritage.⁵⁷

The original, now indecipherable, lyrics speak of a familial situation that became polarized. My mother’s influence exacerbated the difficulties. Issues around the missing father she never knew, lack of experience concerning what role a father plays in family life and the vastly different social and cultural milieu she was raised in meant she often judged her husband, my father, very harshly, albeit in a quiet passively aggressive manner. Their communal narrative was one of inevitable loss. I was assigned the role of caretaker for her unspoken anger, a psychic tsunami concealed beneath a cool, distant facade. Her unresolved childhood fears, rage, and shame eventually shattered my sense of security, damaging defences which, like the walls of Jericho, eventually came tumbling down (a metaphorical description, as is mine).⁵⁸ From a very early age I was privy to the knowledge she planned to leave him, a poisonous secret I was entrusted to keep. The lyrics: “Father, the one I blamed for causing so much damage and pain y the father I loved were one and the same”, conflates my emotional response to both their behaviours.

Track commentary

The sound of footsteps open this track, the heavy thud of an older man (my father, the past) and the lighter tread of a younger man (myself, the present) and a nod to Coppola’s film, *The Godfather Part 11*, which juxtaposes scenes from the father’s youthful story (his rise to mafia don) with his son’s violent journey to power after his father’s death — Coppola’s a visual conflation of time, mine sonic.

Through the use of plate reverb, I placed those footsteps in a clinical sounding auditory space — perhaps an imaginary ‘red room’, an idea partially inspired by the kitchen interrogation scene in Martin Scorsese’s film *Casino* (where the need for extreme violence was attributed to the victim’s lack of cooperation, a self-serving logic also used to justify a slave’s ‘punishment’ in the colonial environment)⁵⁹ and the hiding in plain sight accomplished by Adam Britton who, along with the ‘Torture King’, distributed horrific ‘red room’ content on the dark web (sadistic practice concealed behind a masquerade, e.g., friendly next-door neighbour, priest, or father).⁶⁰ This idea also references the ‘pulp’ magazines (*True Crime*, *Startling Detective*, *Stag*, etc.) that targeted working-class male readers in the early to late twentieth century by disseminating ‘factual’ stories of brutal

⁵⁷ Rodriguez, ‘Lady Blood’, p. 207

⁵⁸ Anne Habermehl, ‘Archaeoacoustics and the Fall of Jericho’, *Archaeoacoustics III: The Archaeology of Sound*, Conference in Tomar, Portugal (2017), pp. 79–84 <<http://bit.ly/3UmmRYk>> [accessed 7 September 2024].

⁵⁹ Diana Paton, ‘Afterword: Punishment, Slavery and Legitimacy’, *Journal of Global Slavery*, 7/2 (2022), pp. 203–09 <<http://bit.ly/4otXcuv>> [accessed 5 June 2025].

⁶⁰ Onkar Mhaskar, ‘Red room... Myth or Real?’, *Linkedin*, 12 November 2023 <<http://bit.ly/4ljHEqc>> [accessed 31 August 2024]; Joel Hunter and others, ‘Global network of sadistic monkey torture exposed by BBC’, *BBC News*, 20 June 2023 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-65951188>> [accessed 3 September 2024]; Tiffanie Turnbull, ‘Adam Britton: British croc expert admits sexually abusing dogs’, *BBC News, Sydney*, 26 September 2023 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-australia-66920778>> [accessed 3 September 2024]; Marjorie Florestal, ‘Healing Racism’s Psychic Wound: A Jungian Approach’, (published Master’s dissertation, Sonoma State University, 2016), pp. 20–21 <<http://bit.ly/45cn3zB>> [accessed 11 September 2024].

crimes for those who viewed themselves as ‘tough guys and real men’, a definition of masculinity I struggled with, my father pretended to be, and my uncle (who always left ‘men’s magazines’ in sight around his home) acted out.⁶¹

Tarantino and Rodriguez are two relatively contemporary Hollywood directors who have harnessed and re-interpreted this trashy ‘male interest’ oeuvre in their films.⁶² To be predatory and ready to inflict damage, or weak and less than a ‘real’ man (read potentially homosexual) seemed the ubiquitous positioning of masculine role models offered by the predominant US proletariat culture that most of my Mexican relatives resonated with and aspired to during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s.⁶³ A polarisation of possibilities and readings.

The word “Papa” is spoken in a garbled voice by the son (either as fearful youth to a parental embodiment of danger or as an adult, speaking to their deceased father), a voice influenced by the vocal quality Brando assumed in *The Godfather* (through use of a guitar distortion plugin).

The next sequence uses a time-stretched section taken from ‘Empress of the Ants’, the imagined sound of ‘La Bestia’ now mutated into the ambience of a subterranean way station for some unspecified Purgatory. Random electrical bursts, perhaps the crackling energy of an imagined nightmarish laboratory, are also layered in. The word “Father”, increasingly distorted, is now repetitively spoken, the imagined garbled voice of Victor Frankenstein’s misbegotten creature calling out to his ‘father’ in hope of recognition and love; a tortured spirit born from misconceived nature, nurture and identity, taking the first steps in learning to fear and eventually hate his creator. Finally, at 01:25, the phrase “Did you?” is whispered, a question that infers more than it reveals.

The track begins again, with melancholic chords in a minor key meant to infer separation and loneliness (the equation of minor keys with sadness is a cultural distinction, primarily understood as such in Western harmonisation).⁶⁴ Mexican gritos are sporadically included as reminders of mixed heritage, as well as the occasional percussive hit (could they be the sounds of those attempting to push back against the privileged attitudes and behaviour that hurt them).⁶⁵ The exhortations to “Father” become continually more grotesque until the sound of a spinning top, the tick tock of an old fashioned clock, and random electrical bursts become omnipresent — an auditory continuum evoking ambiguous childhood memories, and the inexorable passage of time.

⁶¹ Erin A. Smith, *Hard Boiled: Working-Class Readers and Pulp Magazines*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000).

⁶² Gary J. Hausladen and Paul F. Starrs, ‘L.A. Noir’, *Journal of Cultural Geography*, 23/1 (2005), pp. 43–69 <<http://bit.ly/45mWuXe>> [accessed 9 September 2024].

⁶³ Bill Osgerby, “Giving ‘Em Hell: Conflicted Masculinity in the American ‘True Adventure’ Pulp of the 1950s and 1960s’, *Media History*, 23/1 (2016), pp. 28–49 <<http://bit.ly/4oBq7gn>> [accessed 9 September].

⁶⁴ George Athanasopoulos and others, ‘Harmonic organisation conveys both universal and culture-specific cues for emotional expression in music’, *Plos One*, 17/2 13 January 2021 13 January 2021 (corrected 10 February 2022) <<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0264048>> [accessed 9 July 2025]; A.D. Patel, *Music, Language and the Brain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 9–10.

⁶⁵ The Mexican ‘grito’ is attributed to the priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, given when he launched the Mexican war of independence; Sarah Al-Shaikh, “It’s an expression of our identity:” Michiganders reflect on “El Grito” in Mexican culture’, *WLNS.com*, 13 October 2021 (updated 13 October 2021) <<http://bit.ly/3UmLaVV>> [accessed 29 August 2024].

At 02:52, a different filtered and stretched version of the original track returns, as well as the spoken word “Papa”. The audio now seems muffled, as if submerged (like the ‘illegals’ who drown trying to cross the Rio Grande to reach the U.S. border).⁶⁶

Pre-dating by seven decades George De Santis, the US Republican governor of Florida who, concerning the benefits of slavery, stated in 2023, “They’re probably going to show that some of the folks eventually parlayed, you know, being a blacksmith into doing things later in life,” my father practiced a daily, aggressive educational reminder that targeted his wife, “Use the brain, don’t be like the rest of your family!” He, like De Santis many years later, was convinced harsh administrations of superiority were ultimately beneficial for those who were ‘less than’.⁶⁷ As far as I can discern, all it accomplished was to leave my angry mother with an unshakeable belief in her innate stupidity, a belief she still accepts without question. Plops and indistinct sonic bleeps now infer the metaphoric bubbling lava waiting to erupt in volcanic response to my father’s colonial treatment of his family.

After 24 seconds the question, “Did you?” is repeated. The subterranean purgatorial ambience returns. Its melange of uncomfortable noises segue into the indecipherable voice of a station master, could he be calming the sorrowful crowd with a promise of eventual salvation? An orchestra now adds a gentle tonal wash as a repetitive distorted Mariachi trumpet and guitar riff begin, the word “Father” randomly layered on top.⁶⁸ The backgrounded instrumental music is deliberately soft, nostalgic, and drenched in reverb (an auditory description of our ‘perfect’ family life, a lie we continually reinforced to each other) as the sound of the word “Father” becomes increasingly brutal, dry and foregrounded.

Just as the volume of the word “Father” reaches its apogee, the combined noise of infrasonic convulsions, subsonic tremors, and falling debris evidence a massive (psychic) upheaval that subsumes all other sound until the erratic, onomatopoeic ... *rrr!* of the spinning top returns, only to fade away as deep electrical surges and random bursts usher the track out (yearned for imagined memories of childhood overtaken by the more brutal realities that actually occurred, the anger and hurt never satisfactorily addressed).

3.4.3 ‘Recuerdos’ [00:00 – 12:26]

Prologue

Grossmont was a beautiful isolated early nineteenth century wooden house originally built as an inn by Edward Fletcher, one half of the property speculators, ‘Fletcher and Gross’, who developed the area as a bohemian enclave for wealthy artists. Situated on Grossmont Hill overlooking La Mesa, San Diego, it was the home of my father’s family and where, during my first five years, I spent every weekend. A familial home where my great aunt B

⁶⁶ Karl Eschbach and others, ‘Death at the Border’, *The International Migration Review*, 33/2 (1999), pp. 430–54 <<https://doi.org/10.2307/2547703>> [accessed 15 September 2024].

⁶⁷ Molly Glass, ‘BU Historians Weigh In on Ron DeSantis’ Slavery Remarks and His Defence of Florida’s Controversial Social Studies Curriculum’, *Boston University Today*, 31 July 2023 <<http://bit.ly/4ovBp5s>> [accessed 29 August 2024].

⁶⁸ Rachel Yvonne Cruz, ‘Música del Mariachi: Conservator of Mexican Culture and Heritage’, *Estudios Humanísticos Filología*, 45 (2023), pp. 143–64 <<http://bit.ly/4mF3ANW>> [accessed 29 August 2024].

dispensed love, laughter and belief in the possibility of an inspiring future, but also a shadowy place of dysfunction and loss, where I became anchored to a dystopian past.⁶⁹

My great aunt and grandmother were two polarised sisters from a large, troubled family continually at war with itself, their light and darkness inextricably entwined. The best and worst happened at Grossmont, experiences that shaped my life. My grandmother took my first language from me, 'suggesting' to my mother that I would sound like my uneducated 'buela Angie if I continued speaking Spanish, and that was *not* acceptable. Great aunt B collected crockery and threw it at her sister when she found out what she had said but it was too late, the damage was done — the 'superior' convictions of her sister's racism had already won.⁷⁰

The gulf between paternal upper middle-class privileged 'white' positionality and maternal Mexican 'street-smarts' grew ever wider with the move to LA and unexpected death of my great aunt, six months later. Hollywood films became a visual narcotic that assuaged the pain of her loss and kept loneliness, always threatening to consume me, at bay.

Track commentary

Grainy lo-fi urban ambience, captured at the corner of 'Heart-attack and Vine',⁷¹ opens this meditation on *tiempos pasados*⁷² — the audio noise of my hand-held field-recording of street conversation and traffic (further enhanced by a distortion plugin) creating a sonic landscape that parallels the uneasy, smudged quality of memories from my first years in 'La La Land'. A muezzin's call begins — its vaguely cartoonish quality a result of the vocal having been doubled two octaves higher, an auditive allusion that points to the influence of Disney during my youth, the melody also referencing an early musical epiphany experienced when first hearing the middle eastern influenced film score Bernard Herrmann composed for *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad*.⁷³

As the euphonious, reverberant splash of someone pissing joins the winding call to prayer in harmonious synchronicity (a satiric comment on organised religion), a monumental crack of glacial ice floe provides an auditory surrogate describing frozen emotions thawed — mine, on hearing Herrmann's previously mentioned orchestral fantasy. Many of the melodies used by Carmen, my flamenco rock band, were inspired by his pastiche of Greek, Middle Eastern, and European musicality filtered through the lens of Hollywood's imagined approximations of realities that never existed.

A distant siren's shriek heralds the primary flamenco/Arabic inspired guitar motif that drives this work (01:14).⁷⁴ The energetic force of the guitar riff, loud and brash, is doubled

⁶⁹ The Grossmont Inn, 'UC San Diego Library', *Library Digital Collections*, October 2020 (modified 27 November 2020) <<https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb8194051m>> [accessed 1 September 2024].

⁷⁰ Richard Delgado, 'The Law of the Noose: A History of Latino Lynching', *Alabama Law Scholarly Commons*, 12/5 (2014), pp. 4–6 <<http://bit.ly/3HeSqQR>> [accessed 4 June 2025].

⁷¹ "I was in a bar one night on Hollywood Boulevard near Vine Street, and this lady came in with a dead animal over her arm, looking like she'd obviously been sleeping outdoors. She walked up to the bartender and said, "I'm gonna have a heart attack," and he says, "Yeah, right, you can have it outside." I thought that was pretty chilly. So I re-named Hollywood Blvd. "heartattack" excerpt from: Stephen Peeples, 'Heartattack and Vine, US Promo Pack', transcription by Thomas of Finland as published on Gary Tausch's Tom Waits Miscellania, *Tom Waits Library*, September 1980 <<http://bit.ly/4mysuhQ>> [accessed 1 September 2024].

⁷² 'tiempos pasados', times gone by.

⁷³ Andrew Achenbach, 'Herrmann The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad', *The Gramophone Newsletter*, December 1998 <<https://bit.ly/45CaMUF>> [accessed 1 September 2024].

⁷⁴ Sampled guitar from a demo recording by David Clark Allen aka David Randall-Goddard.

an octave lower on repetition (remembered youthful enthusiasm, mixed with the bluster of older age?) as the sirens now sing seductively, perhaps in hope of luring me back to the past, where the promise of early dreams now languishes. As if crashed against the rocks of some harsh reality or consumed by a Scylla-like mythic 'other' (a tympani strike layered with the sound of an explosion), the guitar phrase abruptly stops while time-stretched moans begin to fill the sonic space, a compositional intervention describing adolescent hopes battered by brutal (monstrous) music business practice.⁷⁵ With no utopia to regain or nostalgic childhood 'land of bumble bee and Eucalyptus tree' (discernible lyrics in the first version of 'Recuerdos') left to return to, I felt broken.

The ominous noise of multiple bumblebees, angry and much changed from early benign memories of Grossmont, joins the moaning cries (haunted exhortations from an estranged childhood) as a staccato Spanish chord sequence begins. Palmas, frenetic and rhythmically disconnected from the rhythm guitar pattern, emerge from the background as guttural jaleo begins to add further chaotic momentum — the energetic shouted phrases echoing, repeating, and reversing.⁷⁶ The flamenco/Arabic guitar motif rejoins this frenzied, disparate and increasingly cacophonous explosion of sound struggling to remain a cohesive whole, its clarity and definition a sonic illustration of the guitar's anchoring presence in my life.

As this chaotic arrangement seems about to explode, a vocal choir enters providing angelic balm. This harmonic musical salvation swells to meet the layered sound of church bell, explosion and deep tympani strike (an aural description of the gothic, violent aspects of Roman Catholicism).⁷⁷ The continuing sound of bumblebee and birdsong presage a spoken narrative delivered in words so garbled and backgrounded they are virtually indecipherable.

This indistinct, rather sinister voice is automated to move continuously across the stereo field, prancing back and forth from speaker to speaker in spatial gestures meant to imply the slippery, trickster element of memory — the aspect that (re)imagines difficult events through the false comfort of nostalgia where, circumscribed in an indeterminate psycho-geographical locus, they wait to draw blood.⁷⁸

The inhuman quality of this voice suggests that it emanates from some potentially dangerous, allegorical being, perhaps Huehucóyotl, a shapeshifter from the Aztec pantheon of deities, Lugh, the Celtic messenger god, or Loki (all clever tricksters who cross boundaries, are driven by an insatiable appetite for sexual satisfaction, and who defy authority, characteristics also ascribed to the carnivalesque folk figure of The Fool).⁷⁹ As

⁷⁵ Marco Benoît Carbone, 'Transformations of Scylla and Charybdis: Encounters with Otherness and Ancient Greek Myth in Post-Classical Perspective', (London, University College Press, 2018), pp. 112–14.

⁷⁶ Kate Swanson, 'Flamenco Palmas and Jaleo', *Hub Pages*, May 2010, [updated 25 December 2017] <<http://bit.ly/3ZNhSTv>> [accessed 1 September 2024].

⁷⁷ Eveline G. Bowers, 'Violence and the Negotiation of Difference: Nineteenth-Century Catholic Encounters with the Religious and Secular Other' in in Eveline G. Bowers, ed., *Catholics and Violence in the Nineteenth-Century Global World*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2024), pp. 1–19 <<http://bit.ly/4kYT7MQ>> [accessed 1 September 2024].

⁷⁸ Barbara J. Little, 'Violence, silence and the four truths: towards healing in U.S.-American historical memory', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 25/7 (2019), pp. 6 31–40 <<http://bit.ly/4IkUsNy>> [accessed 11 September 2024]; Anna Gotlib, 'Nostalgia as a weapon', *Culturico*, 19 September 2022 <<http://bit.ly/449BRNC>> [accessed 11 September 2024].

⁷⁹ Priscilla Escobedo, 'The Codex Borgia - Codex Yoalli Ehēcati', *UTA Libraries*, 15 September 2021 <<https://libraries.uta.edu/news/codex-borgia-codex-yoalli-ehecat/>> [accessed 4 September 2024]; John Thor Ewing, 'The Birth of Lugh: Óðinn and Loki among the Celts', *Sinsear*, 8 (1995) <<http://bit.ly/4IADhYD>>

the final words are spoken, a sampled orchestral loop of swirling, tense strings grows in volume (an evocation of expanding European privilege?) as giant orchestral strikes acoustically describe either the footprint of colonisation or the elemental gargantuan sound of some earth-shattering demonic creature, Papa? On further contemplation, I believe the monstrous footsteps could also reference the overweight, jolly RC priest who abused many of my classmates, ‘altar boys’ at the local Catholic primary school we attended (1960–62).⁸⁰

Indistinct moans and noises (the sound of tortured souls) can now be heard backgrounded beneath the thunderous steps, A church bell’s funereal toll begins, soon followed by an edgy orchestral loop augmented by the serpentine energy of a sinuous electronic sub-bass line (a referent for Quetzalcoatl, the Aztec feathered snake deity, warrior and patron of the arts) as melancholic notes scraped from a fiddle emanate from the left, and then right hand side of the stereo field.⁸¹ The trickster has returned, now playing ‘the devil’s instrument’ to call attention to their renewed presence (the fiddle has been condemned by Christian religious leaders since the middle ages because of its association with feasting, drink, and promiscuity). As well as mischievous, the trickster figure is considered potentially demonic, and since this work is partly concerned with the effects of religious moral strictures learned in childhood, I deliberately placed the violin’s entrance on the left side, traditionally known since Biblical times as the ‘Devil’s side’ (an idea perhaps introduced by right-handed people).⁸²

Borne on a susurrant of icy wind, the siren’s cry is heard again as the fiddle’s final note is joined by an electrical buzz (a sonic depiction of prankster energy) that introduces Gregorian chant. At first, the electrical buzzes attempt to upstage the ghostly religious choral meditation, but the two competing tones eventually resolve into a mutually harmonious pitch (their oppositions discovering compatibility) that introduces a return performance of the spoken narrative.

As reverberant echoes of Gregorian fervour provide a ghostly ambience, the spoken recapitulation is now delivered directly from centre stage. Still communicated in what seems an unfamiliar language from a different world (cosmic Spanglish, or an abstraction of my clumsy attempts to speak Spanish and express Mexicanidad?), the meaning remains impossible to decipher until the last phrase, which is uttered with a modicum of clarity: “forever, in some ancient hell.” Is this message a cryptic warning and, if so, to whom?

The wind and siren’s cry return, rising in pitch and volume until the metallic strike of hammer on anvil (Hephaestus, the Greco-celestial blacksmith or Huehuetotl, the Aztec

[accessed 4 September 2024]; Helena Bassil-Morozow, ‘Loki then and now: the trickster against civilization’, *International Journal of Jungian Studies*, 9/2 (2017), pp. 84–96 <<http://bit.ly/40gGJ2c>> [accessed 4 September 2024]; Elizabeth Kaufman and Bharath Ganesh, *The Trump Carnival: Populism, Transgression and the Far Right*, (Boston: De Gruyter, 2024), pp. 18–32 <<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111238135-003>> [accessed 4 September 2024].

⁸⁰ Victoria Kim, ‘Abuse victims sue stock firm’, *Los Angeles Times*, 28 June 2008 <<http://bit.ly/3USSgSh>> [accessed 14 May 2025].

⁸¹ Jacqueline Cogdell Djeje, ‘The (Mis)Representation of African American Music: The Role of the Fiddle’, *Journal of the Society for American Music*, 10/1 February 2016, pp. 1–32 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196315000528>> [accessed 4 September 2024]; Herbert Halpert, ‘The Devil and the Fiddle’, *Hoosier Folklore Bulletin*, 2/2 (1943), pp. 39–43 <<http://bit.ly/3laaLOR>> [accessed 4 September 2024].

⁸² Sanja Milenković and others, ‘Historical aspects of left-handedness’, *Srpski arhiv za celokupno lekarstvo*, 147 (2019), pp. 1–13 <<http://bit.ly/3J7Z3VK>> [accessed 4 September 2024].

god of fire, metal, and war, or both? I am, after all, a product of two differing cultures) stops all sound.⁸³ There follows a brief silence, soon broken by the thunder of a single taiko drum strike (its powerful sound lured Amaterasu Omikami, a Japanese Sun Goddess, out of self-imposed exile heralding the return of light, dance, and joy in the world).⁸⁴ The flamenco/Arabic guitar riff, now supplemented by a second guitar adding unexpected harmonies, returns, as the trickster — playing the fiddle as if thoroughly inebriated — plays a sleazy tango inspired melody that stumbles around the stereo field until a cumbia drumbeat begins providing a punchy rhythmic focus behind the guitar motif (Cumbia straddles the past and future, created by Afro-Caribbean and Colombian slaves, it has become an iconic contemporary Latinx dance genre).⁸⁵ A distant backgrounded middle eastern influenced hip-hop chant now enters after four bars (a sonic expression of my desire for adventurous living and ‘exotic’ experience?).⁸⁶

The rhythm halts for a staggered moment, then begins again with additional off-beat cumbia percussion and time stretched moans now audible. Stopping abruptly for another staggered breath, this time longer and with a reverberant echo tail that keeps the rhythmic pulse in motion, the track continues as harsh distorted chords played on electric guitar (stem-sampled from ‘Viva Mi Sevilla’, an instrumental Carmen track recorded in 1974) add increasingly choppy counter-rhythms.⁸⁷ A prominent percussive gesture, like the barking of an aggressive guard dog (referencing the sneering attitude of the Spanish press towards Carmen)) stops the riff. Carmen consisted of three Mexican American and two English members, the Spanish press and flamenco aficionados claimed we were inauthentic and had no right to perform flamenco.⁸⁸ A time-stretched electrical buzz fades into a further iteration of the Gregorian chant, this time mixed with Hollywood ambience and the sound of waves and sea gull cries recorded at a southern Californian beach (nostalgic sounds recalling my surf-punk past, a reality I desired that never actually existed).⁸⁹

A dispirited, distorted enunciation of the palabra (word), pocho (a street insult describing individuals like myself, Mexican American’s who have lost touch with their culture and can’t speak Spanish), emerges from this watery ambience, its repeated echo eventually ping-ponging towards a melancholic guitar melody quietly discernible in the far left of the stereo

⁸³ Thelma D. Sullivan, ‘Tlatoani and Tlatocayotl in the Sahagun Manuscripts in Sahagún: The Man and His Manuscripts’, *Estudios De Cultura Náhuatl*, 14 (1980), p. 233 <<http://bit.ly/4lhA3IP>> [accessed 10 July 2025]; Encyclopaedia Britannica eds., ‘Hephaestus’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 25 July 2024 (updated 12 June 2025) <<http://bit.ly/45xLtnH>> [accessed 10 July 2025].

⁸⁴ János Kárpáti, ‘Typology of Musical Structures in the Japanese Shintō Ritual “Kagura”’, *Asian Music*, 39/2 (2008), pp. 152 <<http://bit.ly/469bs52>> [accessed 5 September 2024].

⁸⁵ Israel Márquez, ‘Digital Cumbia: Tradition and Postmodernity’, trans. by Moses Iten, *Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Dance Music Culture*, 14/1 (2022), pp.60–75 <<http://bit.ly/3ZKVLNC>> [accessed 5 September 2024]; Jennifer Chu, ‘Cumbia Along the Autobahn: Rhizomatic Identities and Postnational Music Production’, *Ethno musicology Review*, 29 March 2015 <<http://bit.ly/4eBBmkp>> [accessed 5 September 2024].

⁸⁶ Scott Cohen, ‘Searching for Escape, Authenticity and Identity: Experiences of ‘Lifestyle Travelers’ in M. Morgan and others, eds., *The Tourism and Leisure Experience: Consumer and Managerial Perspectives* (Bristol, UK: Channel View Publications, 2010), pp. 4–5 <<http://bit.ly/4lrA39T>> [accessed 30 September 2024]; Graham Huggan, ‘Re-evaluating the Postcolonial Exotic’, *International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 22/7 (2020), pp. 808–24 <<http://bit.ly/3T38qHZ>> [accessed 5 September 2024].

⁸⁷ Sampled guitar from ‘Viva Mi Sevilla’, a track by David Clark Allen aka David Randall-Goddard on the Carmen album *Dancing on a Cold Wind* (1974).

⁸⁸ Diego García-Peinazo, ‘“The World’s First Flamenco Rock Band”? Anglo-American Progressive Rock, Politics and National Identity in Spain around Carmen’s Fandangos in Space’, *Rock Music Studies*, 7/1 (2019) <<http://bit.ly/3HWXidj>> [accessed 5 September 2024].

⁸⁹ V. Mannucci and V. Mattioli, ‘Mark Fisher | Hauntology, Nostalgia and Lost Futures’, *Blackout*, 26 April 2019 <<http://bit.ly/4k8BJ73>> [accessed 5 September 2024].

field (an elegy for who I might have been?).⁹⁰ Thunder and rain offer distant accompaniment as random sparks of electrical energy suggest either a dissipation of the cosmic mercurial presence I assumed for theatrical purposes or, the crackling of overworked synapses resulting from a constant search for clues that might help me reconnect with abandoned or missing aspects of my being.

Glacial crepitation can be heard again as the muezzin's call returns in a specific gesture that references the Quetzalcoatlitic renewal (rebirth from the ashes of what was) I hope to initiate by sifting through the 'tiempo perdido' of a dysfunctional past.⁹¹ A final electrical gasp joins as this soundscape, with its surfeit of ambivalent memories, draws to an ending that points back to the beginning – an auditory synonym describing the cyclical loop of birth, death, and rebirth.⁹²

The last 3 minutes and 44 seconds of 'Recuerdos' combines aspects from almost every decade of my musical career. Sampled aggressive electric guitar chords from Carmen's second album (08:41), *Dancing on a Cold Wind*, and gentle instrumental melancholia taken from my solo album, *Widescreen* (10:19),⁹³ communicate through the alternate musical languages of youth and older age for, 'it is in the present that we make a memory, in order to make use of it in the future when the present will be past.' (Deleuze).⁹⁴ The rasped palabra, "pocho", references a lifelong struggle to reclaim the Mexican side of my heritage.

This musical evocation of, undoubtedly, many incorrectly remembered recuerdos, is informed by my awareness that memory and nostalgia can present misleading narratives, distant events sometimes (re)interpreted to fit a current agenda, tall tales constructed from the ashes of a past, perhaps less relevant to our present than once considered. These are memories re-imagined as fictional Hollywood soundtrack.⁹⁵ In the rough wisdom of my 'buela: "You can take hindsight and wipe your ass with it, that's all it's good for!"

3.4.4 'Brownsville' [00:00 – 16:08]

Prologue

Brownsville, once known as the 'back door to the Confederacy', is a rather uninviting town with a violent history. Sprawled across the extreme edge of southern Texas, situated on the U.S. side of the border and opposite Matamoros, Mexico, it was the site of the first battle in the States war with Mexico and the last battle of the Civil War, one fought

⁹⁰ Spencer R. Herrera, 'The Pocho Palimpsest in Early 20th Century Literature from Daniel Venegas to Américo Paredes', *Confluencia*, 26/1 (2010), pp. 22 <<http://bit.ly/40gWMgs>> {accessed 5 September 2024}.

⁹¹ Miguel López Lozano, 'Traces of Red: Historiographic Metafiction and Chicano Identity in Guy Garcia's 'Obsidian Sky'', *Confluencia*, 24/1 (2008), pp. 42–4 <<http://bit.ly/3GnYshB>> [accessed 6 September 2024].

⁹² Anne S. Dowd, 'Cycles of Death and Rebirth in Mesoamerican Cultural Astronomy and the Calendar', *Ancient Mesoamerica*, 28/2 (2017), pp. 466–70 <<http://bit.ly/4IsFbui>> [accessed 6 September 2024]; Octavio Paz, 'A Matter of Life and Death: Aztec myths and Christian beliefs in Mexico', *The Unesco Courier*, 8/9 (1977), p. 27 <<http://bit.ly/4kn9x0e>> [accessed 6 September 2024].

⁹³ Sampled section of 'Isobel', a track on David Clark Allen aka David Randall-Goddard's album, *Widescreen*, (2007).

⁹⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, (London: Athlone Press, 1989), p. 52.

⁹⁵ Svetlana Boym, 'Essay on Nostalgia and Its Discontents', *The Hedgehog Review*, 9/2 (2007) <<http://bit.ly/3GdBbi8>> [accessed 6 September 2024]; Eve Babitz, *Slow Days, Fast Company The World, The Flesh, and L.A.*, (New York, NY: New York Review, 2016 [1972]), pp. 7, 162.

between the Union and local Confederate cotton blockade runners.⁹⁶ The Mexican government, although having only recently lost those territories, still allowed illegal cotton to be transported over the border and shipped from its ports, as long as the mordida was right.⁹⁷

My maternal family moved to Brownsville for a brief period in 1942, an outcome of my 'buela Angie's marriage to an Irish American man she caught the eye of in Mexico City, an individual she never loved or even pretended to care for. He was a means to an end with Brownsville just a stop gap on the way to San Antonio, where many of her brothers and sisters had relocated. Neither situation was meant to last as long as they did; the resulting waiting game almost broke all the players.

Sub-tropical desert heat can be oppressive and the majority white population of Texas, hardcore prejudiced, facts that made time spent in Brownsville a slow simmering, tense part of my 'buela's strategy to gain U.S. citizenship for herself and core familia. During this time of travail, Brownsville, which contains many Roman Catholic Churches that cater to its poor Mexican population, seemed to offer little help to young girls with overly interested older stepbrothers.⁹⁸

Track commentary

With these facts in mind, I started building the ambience with a sampled peal of church bell I pitch shifted and lengthened until it achieved a dolorous, dreamlike tonality, it's dark resonance now a harbinger of woeful tidings. As this funereal reverberation of Roman Catholicism fades, the sound of flies (the ubiquitous insect of desert landscape, Spaghetti Westerns and death), snippets of inarticulate street conversation and a Muezzin like vocalisation combine to create a cinematically Biblical ambience — one that is interrupted by a voluble and rapidly escalating family argument (La familia de mi madre, desdichado en Brownsville).⁹⁹

Emerging from this angry, re-imagined historic turbulence, my mother's calm voice is heard recalling the US border town where her familia arrived at the end of a long train journey from Mexico City. As she finishes her statement, the huge whoosh of a fireball shoots from left to right across the stereo field (the sound signifying the obliteration of their previously abject existence). However, a now omnipresent crackle of burning timber would seem to reflect the destructive power struggles that threaten to envelope their new life. Always opaque (Mexicans can be a stoic people who tend to speak euphemistically when discussing serious subject matter), my mother remembers abject poverty as preferable to the violence and abuse practiced in her family's new configuration.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Robert Henderson, 'The Backdoor to the Confederacy, Camels, Cotton, Union Insurgents, and a Texan lynching along the Rio Grand', *Access Heritage* <<http://bit.ly/3HUqMIU>> [accessed August 2024].

⁹⁷ 'mordida', a bribe.

⁹⁸ Jocelyn Solis, 'Re-Thinking Illegality as a Violence Against, not by Mexican Immigrants, Children, and Youth', *Journal of Social Issues*, 59/1 (2003), pp. 18–23 <<http://bit.ly/3FQMxc0>> [accessed 24 June 2025]; Domingo Martinez, 'I Grew Up On The TEXAS-MEXICO Border, But Now I Barely Recognize It', *Texas Observer*, 26 March 2018 <<http://bit.ly/40AKkbw>> [accessed 28 August 2024]; Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican/American*, pp. 165–67.

⁹⁹ 'My mother's family, unhappy in Brownsville'.

¹⁰⁰ Michelle Y. Martin Romero and others, 'Coping (Together) With Hate: Strategies Used by Mexican-Origin Families in Response to Racial–Ethnic Discrimination', *Journal of Family Psychology*, 36/1 (2021), Manuscript version, pp. 11–13 <<http://bit.ly/41rU2NW>> [accessed 24 June 2025].

Joining the flames burgeoning roar, a male choir sings a repetitive chant demonstrative of faith (in who or what?), their voices shifting, reverberating, and echoing in unexpected configurations that result in odd spatial and time based distortions, an auditory trope often used in horror film for heralding the inexorable advance of some terrible, inevitable fate (Catholicism's complicity with Spanish colonisation in the New World is well documented).¹⁰¹ My Mexican cousins were obliged to take showers in their underwear so as not to accidentally become aroused and thus commit sin. Their parent's efforts were unsuccessful.

To the accompaniment of a backgrounded church organ, the Lord's prayer and service for Holy Communion sung in Spanish can be indistinctly heard, the sound slowly slipping back and forth across the stereo field (Religious fervour can be used to conceal temporal improprieties, the indelicate shift of balance from one to the other often hard to avoid by those pledged to a vow of chastity difficult to maintain), many of my Catholic relatives and friends were abused by priests they once trusted.¹⁰²

A plaintive violin refrain enters from the right speaker followed by a lo-fi sample of classical Spanish guitar melody from the left, brief melodic comments delivered over the ongoing ambience of flame and Catholic fervour, a melancholic referencing of historic European and racist influences that oppressed the Mexican inhabitants of this U.S. town. In response, at 01:03:54, a jaunty accordion leitmotif begins (an import German immigrants introduced to Texas and Northern Mexico during the mid-nineteenth century, an instrument that Mexican's embraced and made their own), its cadence remaining unchanged throughout the work (a lengthy melodic repetition that references the Mexican ability to endure). At 01:07:40, the chant noticeably dips in pitch (a sonic indication of the unbearable strain caused by maternal familial tension in Brownsville), at 01:08:13, my 'buela's ability to endure is suddenly overcome — the irritated shriek and fizzle of arcing electrical current describing this momentary loss of control, the ensuing silence laden with dangerous potential.¹⁰³

The track continues, a bold call of energetic Latinx brass now accompanying the accordion (although patience failed momentarily, a forceful response was rapidly asserted). This indistinct chatteration continues to reverberate, self-absorbed and oblivious to individual trauma. At 13:51, the pitch lowered tones of a priest (implemented to add a pompous, self-important quality to the words) intone 'Padre Nuestro' (the 'Our Father', a foundational expiation of Catholic belief).¹⁰⁴

The buzzing of flies and ululating bird calls begin to gain prominence on either side of the stereo field as nature, humanity (both racist and 'othered'), religious hypocrisy, all

¹⁰¹ Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America*, p. 53; T.G. Powell, 'Priests and Peasants in Central Mexico: Social Conflict During "La Reforma"', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 57/2 (1977), pp. 296–313 <<https://bit.ly/4q4LzKX>> [accessed 28 August 2024].

¹⁰² Mary Beth King, 'UNM researcher's study on clerical sexual abuse cited in Washington Post article', *University of New Mexico News*, 2 July 2024 <<http://bit.ly/3Umnxgk>> [accessed 28 August 2024]; BBC News eds., 'Marcial Maciel: Mexican founder Legionaries of Christ 'abused 60 minors'', *BBC News*, 22 December 2019 <<http://bit.ly/4mzr1lj>> [accessed 28 August 2024].

¹⁰³ Manuel F. Medrano, 'From Accordion Roots to Conjunto Music: An Unlikely Journey', *The Journal of South Texas*, 32 1 (2018), pp.162–66 <<http://bit.ly/44m7fIT>> [accessed 28 August 2024]; Anne H. Gunkel, 'The Polka Alternative: Polka as Counter-Hegemonic Ethnic Practice', *Popular Music & Society*, 27/4 (2004), pp. 407–27 <<http://bit.ly/4k4b3nG>> [accessed 10 September 2024].

¹⁰⁴ Grace Agolia, 'The Mass for Millennials: The Our Father', *Church Life Journal*, 28 April 2016 <<http://bit.ly/3HU1udQ>> [accessed 11 September 2024]; Frances Hagopian, 'Latin American Catholicism in an Age of Religious and Political Pluralism: A Framework for Analysis', *Comparative Politics*, 40/2 (2008), pp. 149–68 <<http://bit.ly/40jg5FX>> [accessed 11 September 2024].

impacted by the still glowing embers of historic Spanish colonial practice and current prejudicial U.S. ideologies, jostle for predominance within an increasingly chaotic auditory space. The priests final verbal 'blessing' is curtailed as the track unexpectedly stops, consumed by the blast of a second fireball that whooshes between the left and right speakers until the echoing snap of its tail signals an abrupt cessation of its bellowing roar. What seems a brief holding of breath follows, perhaps my maternal families?

A slowly shifting, increasingly loud tone now begins to dominate the stereo field. What could have provided a meditative auditory experience is, instead, foregrounded as evocation of uneasy aftermath, its brooding modulations carrying the listener towards a final tolling of church bell (familial dissonance was not healed in, nor after Brownsville).

I have on further listening, realised the slowly shifting tone could also be imagined as an expression of internalised discomfort, my mother's and my own. Her need to share what hadn't been successfully processed meant we both suffered. My father, uninterested in other's pain, his own trauma more than he could bear, chose to ignore this troubling aspect of our mother/son dynamic.

The primary intent of this extended work is to stimulate increasingly uncomfortable tension in the listener, a conceptual method for producing deeper connection to the discomforts and displacements a racist environment can produce in the colonised mind and body. Intellectual knowledge of the damaging historicity of colonisation may be compelling and ultimately terrifying, but I am trying to push further through my sonic attempts to evoke the ambience of past oppressions, poverty, racial prejudice and the 'sublime' (the almost unimaginable evil humanity is capable of), as described by Adorno and others.¹⁰⁵

My hope is that if individuals can viscerally experience the impact of subjugation, dread, pain and enforced loss through the emotional affect music is capable of conjuring, a stronger empathetic connection to the 'other' might be established, one that initiates more compassionate understandings and dialogue.¹⁰⁶

3.4.5 'Sandstorm' [00:00 – 08:53]

Prologue

This work is a musical reassessment of the dynamics of my parent's relationship, its analysis, an examination of the resultant long-term repercussions their behaviour initiated.

The ship's bell in the fog operates as sonic signifier of my father's lifelong wish to infiltrate and explore exotic cultures as an eighteenth-century sea faring adventurer, a colonially inspired Orientalist dream eventually excoriated by the relentless sandstorm of his wife's

¹⁰⁵ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans by E.B. Ashton, (London and New York: Routledge, in the Taylor & Francis e-Library 2004 [1973]) <<http://bit.ly/4ei3Pv2>> [accessed August 2024]; Gene Ray, 'Terror and the Sublime in the So-Called Anthropocene', *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies*, 16/2 (2002), pp. 1–20 <<http://bit.ly/4l2bMYa>> [accessed August 2024]; Norman Theriault, 'The Role of the Sublime in Art, Literature, and Psychology', (published MA thesis, University of Houston, 2008) <<http://bit.ly/400wb7l>> [accessed August 2024].

¹⁰⁶ Higgins, *The Music of Our Lives*, pp. xx, 128–29, 169; Adam Harper, *Infinite Music*, (Winchester, UK: Zero, 2011), pp. 35, 123; Oliver Sacks, *Musicophilia - Tales of Music and the Brain*, (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), pp. 244, 246; Solveig Korum, 'The Sound of Reconciliation? Musical and Sociocultural Harmony in the Sri Lanka Norway Music Cooperation', *Asian European Music Journal*, 5 (2020), pp. 51–65 <[doi: 10.30819/aemr.5-7](https://doi.org/10.30819/aemr.5-7)> [accessed 28 August 2024].

will.¹⁰⁷ Her desert spirit, impossible to control or contain, proved a much stronger force than he first realised.

On my fraternal side, one branch were once reasonably wealthy Southern plantation owners with all that implies. The Civil War rewrote their narrative but colonial memories and privileged attitudes, though carefully backgrounded, remained.¹⁰⁸ Publicly rejecting a racist ideology, his wife obviously Mexican, my father was unaware of just how prejudiced he really was. He had assumed the role of mentor, enjoying the power he thought it gave him in their relationship. My mother tolerated the imbalance to learn ‘the rules’ of upper middle-class white society, knowledge her aspirations required. It was a means to an end.

Convinced he was too predictable and ‘safe’ in his approach to life, my father blamed his privileged white, upper middle-class upbringing for depriving him of the aura of danger and excitement he wished to project. I inherited a similar lack of self-esteem. We were both mistaken, but that fear drove our actions and lives in unfavourable directions. My father manufactured and to a degree, in my estimation, called in the destructive energies and incidents that harmed him, “Our minds aren’t passive observers, simply perceiving reality as it is. Our minds change reality,” (Alia Crum).¹⁰⁹ Unable to address his issues directly, perhaps this was his way of exteriorising a toxic relationship with his parents and war trauma experienced in WW2, a subconscious attempt to metaphorically reconnect with painful past occurrences and script a different, better outcome.¹¹⁰ Unfortunately, lack of intentional clarity meant there was never a possibility for healing wounds he refused to consciously acknowledge.

My father would never visit the barrio to meet his wife’s relatives, he felt they had nothing in common and, though he wouldn’t admit it, they frightened him. This situation caused friction. My maternal relatives were aware of his attitude towards them and often brought it to my mother’s attention: “El piensa que’s mejor, y tu también.”¹¹¹ This guerrilla war, one filled with emotional skirmishes and simmering anger, eventually broke into the open when ‘buela Angie chased my father and tried to push him off the balcony in the El Cid.

Over decades, my father’s aquatic hopes were eventually absorbed by the dilatancy of his wife’s granular materials, the sharp quality of their relationship now due as much to her

¹⁰⁷ Jennifer Yee, ‘Exoticism and colonialism’, in *The Cambridge Companion to French Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 151–67 <<http://bit.ly/44anNDy>> [accessed 29 August 2024]; Jean-Francois Staszak, ‘Other/Otherness’, in Robert Kitchin and Nigel Thrift eds., *International Encyclopaedia of Human Geography*, 8, (Oxford: Elsevier, 2009), pp. 43–47 <<http://bit.ly/4eeClqq>> [accessed 29 August 2024].

¹⁰⁸ Samantha Payne, ‘A General Insurrection in the Countries with Slaves’: The US Civil War and the Origins of an Atlantic Revolution, 1861–1866’, *Past & Present*, 257/1 (2021), pp. 248–79 <<http://bit.ly/44tQZ9L>> [accessed 29 August 2024]; Philipp Ager and others, ‘The Intergenerational Effects of a Large Wealth Shock: White Southerners After the Civil War’, *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper Series*, (2019) <<http://bit.ly/4ng231J>> [accessed 11 September 2024].

¹⁰⁹ Alia Crum, ‘Stanford experts urge healthcare professionals to harness power of people’s mindsets’, *Stanford Report*, 27 February 2017 <<http://bit.ly/467sDUE>> [accessed 29 September 2024]; John Sanfey, ‘Simultaneity of consciousness with physical reality: the key that unlocks the mind-matter problem’, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14 (2023), pp. 1–16 <<http://bit.ly/44m98Ft>> [accessed 14 September 2024]; Jack Pransky and Thomas M. Kelly, ‘How the formless comes into form: A process by which Universal Mind powers consciousness and thought to create people’s psychological lives’, *Cogent Psychology*, 4/1 (2017), pp. 1–15 <<http://bit.ly/4lpC7iD>> [accessed 15 September 2024].

¹¹⁰ Falko F. Sniehotta, ‘Towards a theory of intentional behaviour change: Plans, planning, and self-regulation’, *British Journal of Health Psychology*, 14/2 (2009), pp. 261–73 <<http://bit.ly/45WfwWv>> [accessed 29 August 2024]; Richard P. Bagozzi and others, ‘Goal-directed Emotions’, *Cognition and Emotion*, 12/1 (1998), pp. 1–26 <<http://bit.ly/3HWCFxQ>> [accessed 29 August 2024].

¹¹¹ “He thinks he’s better than us, and you do as well.”

distant manner as to his daily manifestations of white patriarchal privilege. As her practical, determined approach wore away at his sense of power, anger and bad behaviour took their place. Neither could see the part each played in the erosion of what could have been a successful partnering of two very different cultures, viewpoints, and racial heritage. They managed to live for over two decades as though in a magical realist fantasy, my sister and I regularly reminded of the brilliant, better than most, family we were part of. Although they were a sterling example of the Hollywood/US mantra: 'If you can dream it, with enough hard work you can achieve it!', I often wondered why day to day existence felt so harsh and unloving.

Track commentary

'Sandstorm' opens with the sound of wind at sea as a ship's bell rings forlornly, its captain lost and hoping for a response. The sea wind morphs into the deeper susurrations of an increasingly louder polvareda or haboob (Mexican and Arabic terms for sandstorm) as a rough flamenco voice sings a short Middle Eastern flavoured motif, (a maternal cry of defiance?).

As the flamenco voice fades, Middle Eastern and African percussion (Darbuka, an iconic Middle Eastern drum and Djembe, a West African drum) begin. The intersection of these three sonic expressions is crucial to flamenco, and they also represent foundational aspects of my musical roots. The Moors (an historic European colonialist term referring to North African/Arabic Muslims, i.e., dark-skinned people) occupied Andalusian Spain for 800 years; their Middle Eastern musical intonation (the use of 24 chromatic notes in a scale rather than the 12 used in Western traditions), improvisational vocal approach and use of dance movement inform flamenco, which also incorporates late nineteenth century African American gestural expressions.¹¹²

Chanting in rhythm, a voice enters after a bar and a half (or six beats — reminiscent of the flamenco 12/8-time signature) repeating the phrase "Fuck 'em up". I have literally and technically 'fucked up' the recorded voice, there are three over-dubbed layers one reversed, two echoed and chopped — discerning the words is difficult, as difficult as unpicking the second generational trauma and rage, inherited from both sides of my familial lineage, they express.

Sonically answering this distorted repetitive vocal phrase are the sounds of air raid and police sirens. History remembered; paternal battle experience in World War two, brutal police beatings and prison time resulting from my maternal relative's participation in the L.A. Zoot Suit riots, parental mutual disdain — the familial battlefield.

The grating shriek of forcefully torn material stops all sound ... a rip in the fabric that binds family together? This abrupt intervention is followed by silence, a bated breath (two beats), the calm before a storm. The constrained anger hinted at suddenly bursts forth in an orchestral explosion (historic pain, current dysfunctions and potential future ruptures). As the cacophonous thunder of the blast recedes, the plaintive chant of the flamenco re-

¹¹² Erin Blakemore, 'Who Were the Moors?', *National Geographic*, 13 August 2024 [2019] <<http://bit.ly/3HPvZlh>> [accessed 30 August 2024]; Peter Thoegerson, 'Microtonal Modes and Scales in the Middle East and Central Asia' (research paper), p. 9 <<http://bit.ly/4eLGBV5>> [accessed 30 August 2024]; Simon Shaw, 'Moors in Mesoamerica: The Impact of Al Andalus in the New World', (published undergraduate dissertation, University of Bristol, 2010) <<http://bit.ly/4kVkWp4>> [accessed 30 August 2024]; Goldberg, *Sonidos Negros*.

enters (mother, the true 'patron de la familia', always first to assume a semblance of normalcy).

The return of darbuka, djembe and 'Fuck 'em up' chant are now accompanied by a slow heartbeat, the sound of laboured, medically assisted breathing, and electrical crackling. These additional non-diegetic emanations refer to my father's lengthy hospitalisation resulting from a gunshot wound to the stomach — the El Cid was robbed one night by a drug dealer who, on leaving, shot my father at close range. Backgrounded, a Middle Eastern muezzin's vocal wail can be discerned, an auditory metaphor for the almost inexpressible emotion I felt at the time and the distancing I practised dealing with it. I am not Middle Eastern Muslim but like 'Bilal', the dual heritage Ethiopian/Arab slave who became known as the first muezzin, I also endured: he, the brutality of enslavement and I, the harsh emotional realities of my father's two years in intensive care.¹¹³ Although his near-death resulted from a heroic, abortive attempt to stop the armed burglary, he was still an abusive male who battered me emotionally and verbally regularly.

A powerful sparse hip-hop beat now begins in conjunction with a solitary distorted synth bass note that emphasises the downbeat of every four bars, a rhythmic expression of dominance and sonic signifier of Mexican resolution and legendary ability to endure (a partial truth but also a product of the white imaginary).¹¹⁴ I also introduce the dancing tap of a typewriter, its percussive clack referencing World War Two dispatches, flamenco taconeo, and my mother's work as a bilingual secretary whenever acting or performance opportunities were scarce.¹¹⁵

The ship's bell tolls again, a forlorn tintinnabulation describing my father, now truly adrift in an etheric miasma of anaesthesia, as the muezzin-like wailing continues, re-imagined as song of the siren. After four bars of 4/4 timing, I switch to 12/8, adding a timbale strike on the third beat of the bar, a reminder of the Latinx/African element always present in my music; the backgrounded voices now become melancholy slave chorus. Black presence and 'miscegenation' (a pejorative colonialist term that describes sex between different ethnic groups) in Latin American history has often been 'pushed back'. My racial heritage includes a small percentage of West African DNA, which is referenced through placement of the timbale strike on the third beat of the bar rather than just before or on the downbeat, a percussive echo of the WASP relegation of darker skinned 'others' to third-class personage.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Pashew Nuri, 'From Slave to Master: The Story of Bilal the Unbreakable', *Medium*, 27 June 2020 <<http://bit.ly/3ZNQUeB>> [accessed 30 2024].

¹¹⁴ Stanley Brandes, 'Is There a Mexican View of Death', *Ethos*, 31/1 (2003), pp. 127–44 <<http://bit.ly/3HWtuxx>> [accessed 11 September 2024]; Lee Bebout, *Whiteness on the Border: Mapping the U.S. Racial Imagination in Brown and White*, (New York: New York University Press, 2016); Melissa L. Morgan and Rufus R. Gonzales, 'Strength in the Face of Adversity: Resilience Among Mexican Nationals and Mexican Immigrants to the United States', *Interamerican Journal of Psychology*, 51/1 (2017), pp. 88–106 <<https://www.academia.edu/96779518/>> [accessed 11 September 2024].

¹¹⁵ 'taconeo', flamenco heel work; Vicki L. Ruiz, 'Risk Takers and History Makers: Mexican Women of the World War II Generation', *History Now: The Journal*, 53 (2019) <<http://bit.ly/44kj7Ln>> [accessed 29 September].

¹¹⁶ Taunya Lovell Banks, 'Mestizaje and the Mexican Mestizo Self: No Hay Sangre Negra, So There Is No Blackness', *Southern California Interdisciplinary Law Journal*, 15 (2006), pp. 199–234 <<http://bit.ly/43ZE6a>> [accessed 23 September 2024]; Pablo Miguel Sierra Silva, "'Negros, aquí? Blacks, here?": Blackness in the Mexican Archive', *InVisible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Culture*, 31 (2020) <<http://bit.ly/4nldjW4>> [accessed 30 August 2024]; Christina A. Sue and Tanya Golash-Boza, 'More than 'A Hidden Race': The Complexities of Blackness in Mexico and Peru', *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 8/1 (2013), pp. 76–82 <<http://bit.ly/3HUTxVS>> [accessed 11 September 2024].

Air raid and police siren return, this time rising to meet an angular crash of breaking glass, a forewarning of impending violence like the shout preceding an escalation of a familial battle. The sharp thump of a grenade launcher and accompanying explosion signal the beginning of war. A foregrounded wartime broadcast on Spanish radio is joined by the rapid, anxious clack of typewriter keys, dispatches from the edge.

A metallic echo, the scraping sound of unpredictable danger ricocheting chaotically nearby, heralds the return of the hip-hop beat, sub bass note, and timbales. After four bars of 12/8, the percussive keys of a typewriter once again rhythmically duplicate flamenco taconeo. Now, as MC, solo guitarist and accompanist for the dancers at El Cid (my physically and emotionally broken father no longer able to enter the nightclub he created), I instantiated a persona of supremely detached calm I have yet to unravel, as the family continued to disintegrate after my father's shooting.

After a final reverberant rasp, 'We'll Meet Again' can be heard in the distance, sung in Spanish (a romantic song and beloved optimistic narrative during World War Two that was recently co-opted by the jingoistic right in Britain to create nostalgia for an imperialistic past — two different meanings, one leveraged as hope, the other as a component of right-wing propaganda).¹¹⁷ I include this as a signifier of my father's unresolved wartime trauma, the family disintegration and message to myself. The first two are self-evident, the final message is from my Mexicanidad (or my love of the idea of Mexicanidad) letting me know I will find a way to incorporate Latinx culture back into my life, perhaps by learning to speak Spanish again.¹¹⁸

As the songs final words "un día soleado" (one sunny day) fade into silence, the sound of slow heartbeat, assisted breathing, and melancholic Middle Eastern chorus are reprised — this time including the addition of a flamenca voice (re-pitched much higher) singing a lonely motif, 'en voz afillá y aire gitanao', redolent of loss and death.¹¹⁹ This childlike voice represents both the emotionally available space many artists cultivate when engaging in creative practice and my mother's mourning of her former husband's untimely death. This section is also arranged in 5/4, a time signature that sits somewhere in between the expected and the unexpected: the robbery and shooting at El Cid, my parents' divorce, my father's re-marriage and untimely death, although to some degree predictable, were not expected.

At this point (05:01), I return to 4/4 timing and introduce finger-picked acoustic guitar I recorded over two decades ago on tape, the key and modality technically altered from melancholy G minor to a more hopeful E major.¹²⁰ This re-adjustment of tonal atmosphere, tempo (the speed of the original guitar part has been considerably altered), conversion of analogue to digital, and conflation of time, speaks to and with the past, re-interpreting and re-purposing the original intention. Initially elegiac, this section of previously sombre

¹¹⁷ Luke Turner, 'We'll Meet Again: how toxic nostalgia twisted Vera Lynn's pop masterpiece', *The Guardian*, 18 June 2020 <<http://bit.ly/4k9O1fx>> [accessed 30 August 2024]; Kate Guthrie, 'Vera Lynn on Screen: Popular Music and the 'People's War'', *Twentieth Century Music*, 14/2 (2017), pp. 245–70, <<http://bit.ly/44sJI8Z>> [accessed 30 August 2024]; Higgins, *The Music of Our Lives*, pp. 154–59.

¹¹⁸ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 39, 41, 42; Furzeen Ahmed and others, 'Race, language and (In)equality', *Research Journal of the National Association for the Teaching of English*, 58/1 (2024), pp. 2–5 <<http://bit.ly/4lhRVTR>> [accessed 11 September 2024].

¹¹⁹ 'en voz afillá y aire gitanao', in a rough voice and gypsy style, i.e., very emotional.

¹²⁰ Sampled guitar from a demo recording by David Clark Allen aka David Randall-Goddard (1998).

instrumental is now sonically re-imagined as ultimately hopeful: the sound of belief in the possibility of a better future.¹²¹

The Spanish radio broadcast is reprised, this time the words acting as an energetic percussive driver, the Middle Eastern Choral voices sound more optimistic, the noise of electric drills that have been continuously backgrounded in the mix as signifiers of unease and danger, facilitated by the change of key, now seem to blend harmoniously with the voices and guitar. After 8 bars, I introduce my mother's voice speaking about the brutal experience of growing up poor in Mexico. The deliberate speeding of her voice an attempt to sonically parallel the chaos her manic energy imparted while recounting them. For the past decade, I have constructed Hollywoodized, 'perfectly considered', musical artefacts for an appreciative, dwindling audience of ageing fans. Revelling in hard-won production skills: composition, arrangement, engineering, sampling, recording and mastering — my voice has been leveraged to portray persona, rather than reveal self. Though this once seemed appropriate, it no longer does. After many listening's I decided an important element was missing: my authentic voice and presence. I also chose to sing, instead of speaking.

As the primarily high-mid and treble tonal space is occupied by a glitchy Spanish radio broadcast, intense high-pitched female vocal narration, sampled finger-picked guitar pitched up to a relatively high register and backgrounded chorus, all glued together with industrial noise that occupies the 1kHz to 16kHz frequency range — I decided to use a low baritone vocal approach which led me stylistically to the 'Blues', age and experience having provided a wealth of difficult circumstances to elicit the emotional veracity required. I then positioned this vocalisation of struggle within a very different musical arrangement than the 'Blues' are traditionally associated with. Although the 'Blues' are the product of a different set of circumstances and culture than mine, one I am not attempting to claim or co-opt, its weary expression of defiance seemed appropriate. My use of the 'Blues', like many of my ideas, offers both positive and negative readings, understandings that oscillate within a troubling duality of interpretation (am I co-opting an 'others' musical tradition borne from difficult circumstance or acknowledging its power?), in a manner not unlike the conflicted relationship I have with my mixed-race heritage.¹²²

My struggle for personal clarity is again pointed to, the words, at first, partially obscured but as the backing track begins to fade, they become increasingly clear: "Got a storm inside, storm inside, sandstorm blinding my eyes". This phrase is repeated four times before it changes into a statement of defiance: "I keep falling, I keep crawling, 'cause I'm coming back to life." The final phrase, repeated twice and beginning with the words "coming back to life", is sung a cappella, the single word "life" repeatedly echoing at the end (perhaps a fragment of identity refusing to be bound by strict definitions). As Judith Butler has posited, "Re-imagining identity and racial heritage as a strategy of individuation offers the possibility of new beginnings and freedom, although not without cost."¹²³

¹²¹ Munoz, *Cruising Utopia*, pp.104, 144; DeNora, *Music Asylums*, pp. 93–95; Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, pp. 16–17.

¹²² Christian O' Connell, 'The Colour of the Blues: Considering Revisionist Blues Scholarship', *Southern Cultures*, 19/1 (2013), pp. 61–81 <<http://bit.ly/3lb196t>> [accessed 31 August 2024]; Larry Neal, 'The Ethos of the Blues', *The Black Scholar*, 3/10 (1972), pp. 42–48 <<http://bit.ly/4llwvph>> [accessed 31 August].

¹²³ Judith Butler, *The Judith Butler Reader*, Sara Salih and Judith Butler, eds., (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 91; Cohen, 'Searching for Escape, Authenticity and Identity: Experiences of 'Lifestyle Travelers'', pp. 9–10; Stanley Cohen and Laurie Taylor, *Escape Attempts: The Theory and Practice of Resistance to Everyday Life*, (London, UK: Penguin, 1976), p. 23.

Further listening's have suggested another interpretation of the meanings imparted by the muted shriek of aggressive drilling that underpins this piece. In the final section, they could be reimagined as the thrum of electric lawnmower, its machinery engaged in the purposeful process of removing what is no longer needed — action that allows sunlight to illuminate what is usually shrouded in darkness. An apt metaphoric description of the work I am currently engaged with, an exploration of what remains hidden beneath my curated surface.¹²⁴ Is my identity a product of tactical manoeuvring, a way to connect with like-minded others, or strategy for holding fear of inevitable mortality at bay?¹²⁵ 'Sandstorm' marks another shift in my work; the original mix is not hidden within an abstracted remix. Perhaps the need to cloak truths in ambiguity is dissipating?

3.4.6 “¡Soy Yo!” [00:00 – 08:07]

Prologue

The mighty roar of Tepeyóllotl, Tezcatlipoca's nagual or animal spirit, opens this composition, a guttural proclamation of my mestizo roots, that troubling combination of conquered and conquistador.¹²⁶ The sound was created by layering the warning growls of oceloti and tigre, the jaguar (oceloti) representing my Indio DNA and the tiger (el tigre), the Spanish colonial (re)interpretation of this important Meso-American deity.

The jaguar, considered a noble and courageous creature by the Aztecs, was ruler of time, night, and the underworld. The Spaniards reinscribed those positive cultural meanings by rechristening the jaguar, 'el tigre', an image leveraged as metaphoric description of a newly conquered people's capacity for cruelty and barbaric violence, the original indigenous concept, culture and language invalidated within a self-serving colonialist discourse.¹²⁷ The layering of both aspects, the colonised and the coloniser's re-imagined perspective of this jungle predator, also references a similar opposition within my heritage.

There is, of course, another perspective. The Aztecs *were* obsessed with the torture and violent death of as many suitable candidates as possible, a practice based on the religious and philosophical belief that their primary God, Huitzilipochtli, required continual bloodshed to keep the world in existence. Whether this was simply an excuse that concealed a desire to dominate, or the result of harsh territorial struggles for survival, may never be fully known, but the Spanish view of their culture was partly formed from extremely brutal

¹²⁴ Donald Kalsched and Daniella Self, 'Unlocking the Secrets of the Wounded Psyche: The miraculous survival system that is also a prison', *Psychological Perspectives*, 51/2 (2008), pp. 190–207 <<http://bit.ly/44KUDfG>> [accessed 11 September 2024]; Michael L. Slepian, 'The New Psychology of Secrecy', *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 33/3 (2024), pp. 139–45 <<http://bit.ly/44HsohU>> [accessed 11 September 2024].

¹²⁵ David San Filippo, 'Perspectives on the Fears of Death & Dying', *Faculty Publications*, 30 (2006) <<http://bit.ly/4kDaWA9>> [accessed 14 September 2024]; Calvin Conzelus Moore and John B. Williamson, 'The Universal Fear of Death and the Cultural Response', *Sage Publications*, 1/1 (2003), pp. 3–13 <<http://bit.ly/4ewcQB3>> [accessed 14 September 2024]; Zohreh Shariatinia, 'Heidegger's ideas about death', *Pacific Science Review B: Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1 (2015), pp. 92–97 <<http://bit.ly/44eW1FN>> [accessed 14 September 2024].

¹²⁶ Frederick Slater, 'Were-jaguars and Jaguar babies in Olmec religion', *Essex Student Journal*, 3/2 (2010), pp. 1–9 <<https://doi.org/10.5526/esj114>> [accessed 6 September 2024].

¹²⁷ Chris Harrop, 'Bringing the "Tigre" to Mesoamerica: Language Colonisation and Colonial Hierarchies', (article, University of San Diego, 2018) <<http://bit.ly/4lkXMs7>> [accessed 11 September 2024].

experience.¹²⁸ The Aztec warrior society bore similarities with Sparta and Mongolia under Genghis Khan, where militaristic training and fascistic dedication to the 'state' were non-negotiable requirements — a societal indoctrination bearing a certain similarity to that promoted by the opportunistic intersection of Hollywood, video-game designers and the U.S. military-industrial complex.¹²⁹

Track commentary

A jaunty finger-picked Latinx guitar riff follows the opening roar, signifying music's ability to voice resilience and defiance in the face of difficult circumstance.¹³⁰ A cowbell joins, its Cuban cadence a reminder of the influential part African and Latinx (the colonised 'others') music has played in much of contemporary Western (the coloniser) popular culture. A swirling echoed bansuri flute melody, percussive Carnatic Konnakol vocalisations and dry djembe thump, synchronised with saw-toothed bass notes on the 'one and' of the 4/4 bar, join the insistent cowbell and Latinx guitar riff as the deep buzz of an electrical surge heralds the entry of a catchy melodic leitmotif played on the flute.

At 00:33, sampled flamenco jaleo can be heard on the left side of the stereo field, ending as the percussive vocalisations begin again. An electrical buzz reintroduces the melodic flute gesture and the 'jaleo' repeats on the right side. The electrical surge represents harsh realities, and the immense energy required when a people emigrate, an action implemented primarily in the hope of improving difficult circumstances.¹³¹

The Roma (once referred to as gypsies, an abbreviation of Egyptian and considered a pejorative term by some) are nomads, it is postulated that they were once members of the 'untouchable' castes in India. Unique in claiming identity as freedom expressed, rather than based on any territory, they claim no narrative of a lost homeland; they have been historically treated as untrustworthy outsiders in many of the countries they have immigrated to, and Spain was no exception.¹³² Flamenco communicates a darker, harsher

¹²⁸ Caroline Dodds Pennock, 'Mass Murder or Religious Homicide? Rethinking Human Sacrifice and Interpersonal Violence in Aztec Society', *Historical Social Research*, 37/3 (2012), pp. 276–302 <<http://bit.ly/4npiUD>> [accessed 13 September 2024]; Linda Jane Hanson, 'Aztec Human Sacrifice as Entertainment? The Physio-Psycho-Social Rewards of Aztec Sacrificial Celebrations', *Electronic Thesis and Dissertations* (published PhD dissertation, University of Denver, 2017) <<http://bit.ly/46cfeuu>> [accessed 13 September 2024].

¹²⁹ Roberto J. Gonzales, 'From GI Joe to America's Army: Militarism and Culture in the United States Do GI Joe', *Revisita de Estudos Universitários Sorocaba*, 38/1 (2012), pp. 13–35 <<http://bit.ly/3Ggsrlb>> [accessed 14 September 2024]; J. Nazareth, 'If We Rest We Rust', *The Journal of the United Service Institution of India*, 102/428 (1972), pp. 218–22 <<http://bit.ly/4ekxGDo>> [accessed 14 September 2024]; Manuel Aguilar-Moreno, *Handbook to Life in the Aztec World*, (New York: Facts on File, 2006), p. 105 <<http://bit.ly/4edyc5S>> [accessed 14 September 2024].

¹³⁰ Janine Natalya Clark, 'Music, Resilience and 'Soundscaping': Some Reflections on the War in Ukraine', *Cultural Sociology*, 18/1 (2024), pp. 150–70 <<http://bit.ly/4k0r8Lb>> [accessed 11 September 2024]; Magowan, *Sounding Conflict*, pp. 12–13, 25; Nadia Young, 'Shaking the Ground: Intersections of Cultural Trauma, Collective Memory, and Resilience in Assyrian Popular Music and Dance', (published PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 2023) <<http://bit.ly/4nne1XE>> [accessed 11 September 2024].

¹³¹ Francesco Castelli, 'Drivers of migration: why do people move?', *Journal of Travel Medicine*, 25/1 (2018) <<http://bit.ly/4i9Odwk>> [accessed 16 September 2024]; Marta Tienda and Susana Sanchez, 'Latin American Immigration to the United States', *Daedalus*, 142/3 (2013), pp. 48–64 <<http://bit.ly/4eG7tiH>> [accessed 16 September 2024]; Matthew C. Wilson, 'The Economic Causes and Consequences of Mexican Immigration to the United States', *Denver Law Review*, 84/4 (2007) <<http://bit.ly/44eY1hh>> [accessed 16 September 2024].

¹³² Morag Goodwin, 'The Romani Claim to Non-Territorial Nation Status: Recognition From An International Legal Status.', *European Roma Rights Centre*, 27 May 2004 <<http://bit.ly/4i0GNvs>> [accessed 15 May 2025].

duende than the typical bansuri flute melody from northern India, where they originally emigrated from: movement does not guarantee improved conditions.¹³³

Taconeo, thought to be derived from northern India's Kathak dancing but more forceful (the dancer metaphorically becomes the floor in Kathak, while taconeo goes beyond the floor and breaks it),¹³⁴ initiates the chorus as the Konnakol vocalisations become more forceful and the bass starts a rising note pattern meant to convey a sense of hope. A vihuela, strummed in mariachi style (a guitar-like instrument from 15th-century Spain re-imagined by Mexican luthiers in the 19th century), and Rhodes piano provide further chordal and rhythmic accompaniment.

Both instruments are relatively contemporary 'new world' adaptations of European court instruments, their inclusion referencing the ingenuity of once subjugated people. By re-imagining elements of the dominant culture, in this case an appropriation of what was once used to express the 'superior' musicality of the oppressor, a personal form of communicative agency was established, a repurposing of the artistic tools of colonial engagement.¹³⁵

I gently mask both the Mariachi vihuela and the electric piano (by lowering their high middle frequencies) to foreground the Konnakol vocalisation, its rhythmic patterns echoing the flamenco heel work that introduces it. By juxtaposing their commonalities (Indian vocal percussion and flamenco) and backgrounding the European instrumentation, I am highlighting how the cultural heritage of a subordinated community can remain embodied and expressed through art (music and dance), something even a superior power cannot erase.¹³⁶

The instrumentation returns to reprise the first verse, this time with the addition of syncopated snare beats that begin during the recurrent flute motif. In my imagination, the soundscape now places the listener in some imagined bandit borderland, perhaps the Mexican desert, where rough tigueros in guayaberas sucias are smoking 'mota',¹³⁷ laughing and dancing around cacti under the sun in a fantasy portraying 'la vida loca'.¹³⁸ Freeing oneself from Hollywood's visual stereotypes is a difficult process.

¹³³ Priya Moorjani and others, 'Reconstructing Roma History from Genome-Wide Data', *PLoS One*, 8/3 (2013) <<http://bit.ly/45EPyGd>> [accessed 16 September 2024]; Rosa Maria Aisa and others, 'Discrimination and self-reported health for the Spanish Roma', *PublicHealth*, 134 (2016), pp. 105–08 <<http://bit.ly/40Zcl7C>> [accessed 16 September 2024].

¹³⁴ Miriam Phillips, 'Becoming the Floor / Breaking the Floor: Experiencing the Kathak-Flamenco Connection', *Ethnomusicology*, 57/3 (2013), pp. 396–427 <<http://bit.ly/4ovDYVo>> [accessed 16 September 2024].

¹³⁵ Robert Neustadt, 'Reading Indigenous and Mestizo Musical Instruments: The Negotiation of Political and Cultural Identities in Latin America', *Music & Politics*, 1/2 (2007) <<http://bit.ly/411O8mC>> [accessed 16 September 2024]; Gavin S.K. Lee, 'Five Decolonial Narratives in Global Music History', *Journal of Music History Pedagogy*, 14/1 (2024), pp. 96–98 <<http://bit.ly/3ZLfigR>> [accessed September 2024]; Miguel Arnedo-Gómez, 'Fernando Ortiz's Transculturation: Applied Anthropology, Acculturation, and Mestizaje', *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, 27/1/2 (2022), pp. 130–31 <<http://bit.ly/4k6jxL6>> [accessed 16 September 2024].

¹³⁶ Begoña Echeverría and Heather Sparling, 'Heritage Language revitalisation and music', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 45/1 (2024), pp. 1–8 <<http://bit.ly/4ejL3DB>> [accessed 16 September 2024]; Alexander Hew Dale Crooke and others, 'Music, social cohesion, and intercultural understanding: A conceptual framework for intercultural music engagement', *Musicae Scientiae*, 28/1 (2024), pp. 18–38 <<http://bit.ly/3ZLRedK>> [accessed 16 September 2024].

¹³⁷ 'tigueros', Spanish slang for 'bad boys', 'sucias' is a Spanish word for 'dirty', 'mota' is Mexican slang for marijuana.

¹³⁸ Susan P. Mains, 'Imagining the border and Southern spaces: Cinematic explorations of race and gender', *GeoJournal*, 59/4 (2004), pp. 253–64 <<http://bit.ly/3TKsHCc>> [accessed 16 September 2024]; Serna, *Making*

The second chorus retains the original instrumental arrangement and now includes a hip-hop drum beat that elevates the energy. It also features a harmonised background chorus singing “¡Soy Yo!” (“It’s me!”), while I rap of mixed race, passing, and my resonance with Mexicanidad. Halfway through the rap, a string section begins a Middle Eastern-flavoured motif that points to the strong Arabic influence in flamenco, is reminiscent of Bizet’s *Carmen* and also, again references Bernard Herrmann’s orientalist fantasy scores.¹³⁹ A sudden crack of bullwhip, diminishing in level as it echoes from left to right, ends this section (the sound of colonisation disappearing?). Would that the real-world solution was as simple as lowering a fader.

A powerful orchestral percussive strike silences the whip’s fading echo (begone painful colonialist auditory allusion!), a moment of quietude followed by an enveloping ambience of continuously shifting metallic timbres. Within this industrial miasma (much dangerous factory labour in the U.S. has historically been provided by extremely underpaid Mexican immigrants),¹⁴⁰ a backgrounded “¡Soy Yo!” can be heard in the distance as a religious choir, cloaked in deep reverb, sings a simple melodic plea to their creator (the Roman Catholic Church seeking absolution for its financial involvement in Mexico’s and South America’s narratives of colonialism?).¹⁴¹ I pan this vocal offering (“¡Soy Yo!”) from side to side, mirroring other similar sonic movements within the arrangement, all acting as signifiers for one of the primary concepts that informs this track: the dualistic interaction of oppositions.

What is now becoming increasingly apparent, through arrangement decisions and production, are the two opposing levels operating in this musical composition; my embracing of a Mexican heritage and awareness of the immense work still required to dismantle the Global North’s colonialist inspired positionality, one that continues to attenuate the better aspects of humanity on both sides of the equation.¹⁴²

Returning at 04:19, my voice, now vocoded, affirms my choice to reconnect with the Mexican racial roots I abandoned in childhood. The vocoder’s metallic robotic quality references the self-distancing, android-like lack of emotion I implemented to deal with

Cinelandia, pp. 28–31; Colin Gunkel, *Mexico on Main Street, Transnational Film Culture in Los Angeles Before World War 11*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015) pp. 6, 29, 90, 152–53; Elena Dell’agnese, ‘The US – Mexico Border in American Movies: A Political Geography Perspective’, *Geopolitics*, 10/2 (2005), pp. 204–21 <<https://bit.ly/3YUEVuF>> [accessed 16 September 2024].

¹³⁹ Robin, ‘The Archivist’, ‘The Sound of Stereotypes: The Impact of Film Scores on Stereotypes and Bias’, *The City Voice*, 20 February 2021 <<http://bit.ly/44x0g0Q>> [accessed 16 September 2024]; Peter Franklin, ‘Modernism, Deception, and Musical Others: Los Angeles circa 1940’ in Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh eds., *Western Music and Its Others*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 143–62 <<http://bit.ly/440Een9>> [accessed 25 June 2025].

¹⁴⁰ Matthew Hall and Emily Greenman, ‘The Occupational Cost of Being Illegal in the United States: Legal Status, Job Hazards, and Compensating Differentials’, *International Migration Review*, 49/2 (2015), pp. 406–42; Eric Zuelke, ‘Immigrants Work in Riskier and More Dangerous jobs in the United States’, *Population Reference Bureau*, 30 October 2009 <<http://bit.ly/4kYwJDI>> [accessed 17 September 2024].

¹⁴¹ Christian Rivas, ‘A Troubled Marriage: Colonial Imposition of the Catholic Church in Mexico’, *The Forum: Journal of History*, 15/1 (2023), p. 5 <<http://bit.ly/3HUgylj>> [accessed 17 September 2024]; Alexandria E. Castillo, ‘Constructing ‘Race’: The Catholic Church and the Evolution of Racial Categories and Gender in Colonial Mexico, 1521–1700’, (published PhD dissertation, University of Houston, 2017), pp. 150–204 <<http://bit.ly/3HYMPOz>> [accessed 17 September 2024].

¹⁴² Shela Sridar and others, ‘Learning to walk the walk: Incorporating praxis for decolonization in global health education’, *Global Public Health*, 18 1 (2023) <<http://bit.ly/443pCDC>> [accessed 17 September 2024]; Readsura Decolonial Editorial Collective, ‘Decoloniality as a social issue for psychological study’, *Journal of Social Issues*, 78/1 (2022), pp. 7–26 <<http://bit.ly/4eplgcohttp://bit.ly/4eplgco>> [accessed 18 September 2024].

passing, acknowledges the secrecy that tactic involved (the vocoder is derived from a German military invention that disguised vocal transmissions) and offers an empathetic nod to Laurie Anderson's use of the vocoder.¹⁴³ Although she, amongst other feminist concerns, was highlighting the freedom to *reject or scramble gender*, whilst I am alluding to what was enacted to *reject and scramble elements of racial identity*, there is, to my mind, a certain divergent congruity, or incongruent symmetry, apparent. In other words, both uses ask questions concerned with definitions of authenticity and the inauthentic.¹⁴⁴

The act of passing entailed losing touch with the heritage denied and becoming a potentially shameful secret for the family my skin colour and features resembled. My response to this difficult situation was instantiation of a digitised, android version of self, a buffer for life's upsets that was, at first, successful.¹⁴⁵ Over time, I forgot I operated from within a fabricated persona of false invulnerability, eventually considering it to be an authentic aspect of identity. Now, as result of this memory resurfacing, I have begun the task of separating from an emotionally armoured inauthentic facade that, once protection, became a camouflaged prison.¹⁴⁶

At this point in the track, I am reflecting on the idea, 'we can be who we want to be'.¹⁴⁷ For, although reimagining persona in the family was axiomatically presented as positive, I sometimes questioned whether the real purpose in doing so was to hide some self-perceived lack; reconfiguration conceived and implemented from a sense of failure, rather than the spirit of adventure.¹⁴⁸

As my spoken declaration finishes, a massive whoosh of fireball and electrical crackles act as sonic descriptors of a conflicted, stressed mind. The backgrounded verse and chorus begin to perform a shifting, modulating auditory dance (every choice requires the balancing act that is compromise). I speak again of Mexicanidad in a vocoded voice for,

¹⁴³ Kay Dickenson, 'Believe'? Vocoders, Digitalised Female Identity and Camp', *Popular Music*, 20/3 (2001), pp. 333, 336–37 <<http://bit.ly/45B2Ns1>> [accessed 11 August 2024].

¹⁴⁴ Max Wolf Valerio, 'It's In My Blood, My Face – My Mother's Voice, The Way I Sweat', in *This Bridge Called My Back*, pp. 41–46; Lloyd, *Under Representation*, pp. 90, 93; Butler, *The Judith Butler Reader*, pp. 91, 94; Carolin Huber and others, 'Authenticity occurs more often than inauthenticity in everyday life: Evidence from retrospective reports', *Social Psychology*, 53/2 (2022), pp. 63–72 <<http://bit.ly/4loKHO9>> [accessed 18 September 2024].

¹⁴⁵ Katarzyna Tomaszek, 'You better stop hiding your true self! The relationship between perceived false self, academic burnout, and mental health problems', *Current Problems of Psychiatry*, 24 (2023), pp. 217–27 <<http://bit.ly/459ydFe>> [accessed 18 September 2024]; Robert Ehrlich, 'Winnicott's Idea OF The False Self: Theory as Autobiography', *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 69/1 (2021), pp. 75–108 <<http://bit.ly/3J2bTVw>> [accessed 18 September 2024]; Rodriguez, 'Lady Blood', pp. 143, 207.

¹⁴⁶ Katrina P. Jongman-Sereno and Mark R. Leary, 'The Enigma of Being Yourself: A Critical Examination of the Concept of Authenticity', *Review of General Psychology*, 23/1 (2019), pp. 133–42 <<http://bit.ly/4m3Yllr>> [accessed 18 September 2024]; Helen Swaby, 'Learning to "live upside down": Experiencing the true and false self in psychotherapy training', *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, 18/2 (2020), n/a <[doi: 10.1002/ppi.1531](https://doi.org/10.1002/ppi.1531)> [accessed 19 September 2024].

¹⁴⁷ Susan M. Anderson and others, 'Contextual Variability in Personality From Significant – Other Knowledge and Relational Selves', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6 (2016), pp. 1–46 <<http://bit.ly/41CRQTN>> [accessed 19 September 2024]; Thomas A. Shaw, 'The Semiotic Mediation of Identity', *Ethos*, 22/1 (1994), pp. 83–119 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/640469>> [accessed 19 September 2024]; Elisabetta Crocetti and others, 'Identities: A developmental social-psychological perspective', *European Review of Social Psychology*, 34/1 (2023), pp. 161–201 <<http://bit.ly/45tMKuj>> [accessed 19 September 2024].

¹⁴⁸ Il Bong Mun and Hun Kim, 'Influence of False Self-Presentation on Mental Health and Deleting Behavior on Instagram: The Mediating Role of Perceived Popularity', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12 (2021), pp. 1–7 <<http://bit.ly/4lhwLVZ>> [accessed 19 September 2024]; Mia Janković Shentser, 'The Selfie: The Phenomenon of False Self vs. True Self Representation in Contemporary Media Communication', 2019, pp. 51–70 <<http://bit.ly/4mAfGaY>> [accessed 19 September 2024].

like the hours of daily practice that ensure mastery of one's craft, repetition is required when embedding new behaviours and thought.¹⁴⁹ After a second repetition of the verbal affirmation, another fireball rumbles and sizzles.

This shifting mesmeric dreamscape, gently shaped by subtle differences in volume, tonality, and increasingly abstract flute motifs, continues, the abstracted sense of place and fantastical ambience slowly continues to transmogrify. At 06:51, a third fireball heralds a distant beat of martial drumming that grows closer with every bar. What inevitable force is approaching?

A loud electrical charge suddenly introduces the full impact of my creative past. Distorted electric guitar soloing (07:15), sampled from Carmen's second album *Dancing on A Cold Wind*,¹⁵⁰ screams in empathic symmetry with the fierce taconeo that now drives the rhythm as saw-toothed bass notes hit in conjunction with a compressed slamming BD on the one and two and a half of the 4/4 bar; a communal expression of long controlled anger and passion set free.¹⁵¹

The supercharged electrical burst that initiates this musical conflagration of creative practice references the engine roar that announced arrival and departure of the integral 'muscle car' of time travel in *Back To The Future*; an iconic sound that embodies the possibility of revisiting the past to recalibrate the future, which will then become an altered present.¹⁵²

Halfway through this section, the vocal line "¡Soy Yo!" returns. On the third beat of the ninth bar, there is a sudden moment of silence, an expectant hesitation broken by my voice intoning the palabras, "En este momento" ("In this moment"). "Soy yo!", is then re-introduced and repeated until it finally fades into the reverberant distance, pitch shifting to new unexpected keys with each vocalisation, a sonic description of a lifelong choice to manifest versions of me that, on occasion, have been radically different — the statement's original meaning ("It's me!") now expanding to infer, "I am many possibilities!"¹⁵³

The lyric statement, "¡Soy Yo!" ("It's me!"), describes a constant, but a constant infused with unpredictable variability. Although my private self has always remained relatively coherent and sober, my public engagement with the world has been imaginatively

¹⁴⁹ Sean H. K. Kang, 'Spaced Repetition Promotes Efficient and Effective Learning: Policy Implications for Instruction', *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 3/1 (2016), pp. 12–19 <<http://bit.ly/45b8l6n>> [accessed 19 September 2024]; Christoph Wulf, 'The Movement of Repetition: Incorporation through Mimetic, Ritual and Imaginative Movements', *Gestalt Theory*, 42/2 (2020), pp. 87–100 <[doi: 10.2478/gth-2020-0010](https://doi.org/10.2478/gth-2020-0010)> [accessed 19 September 2024].

¹⁵⁰ Sampled guitar from 'Viva Mi Sevilla', a track by David Clark Allen aka David Randall-Goddard on the Carmen album *Dancing on a Cold Wind* (1974).

¹⁵¹ Messay Kebede, 'The Rehabilitation of Violence and the Violence of Rehabilitation: Fanon and Colonialism', *Journal of Black Studies*, 31/5 (2001), pp. 539–62 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2668075>> [accessed 20 September 2024]; Hugo Canham, 'Theorising community rage for decolonial action', *South African Journal of Psychology*, 48/3 (2018), pp. 319–30 <[doi:10.1177/0081246318787682](https://doi.org/10.1177/0081246318787682)> [accessed 20 September 2024].

¹⁵² Sorcha Ní Fhlainn, "There's Something Very Familiar About All This': Time Machines, Cultural Tangents, and Mastering Time in H.G. Wells's The Time Machine and the Back to the Future trilogy', *Adaptation*, 9/2 (2016), pp. 164–84 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/adaptation/apv028>> [accessed 20 September 2024].

¹⁵³ Claudia Manzi and others, 'Multiple social identities and well-being: Insights from a person-centred approach', *The British Journal of Social Psychology*, 63/2 (2024), pp. 792–810 <<http://bit.ly/44HlvMI>> [accessed 20 September 2024]; Sarah E. Gaither, 'Why We Should All Consider Our Multiple Identities', *Society for Personality and Social Psychology*, 19 July 2021 <<http://bit.ly/4lGuzbr>> [accessed 20 September 2024].

dramatic and theatrical. I believe a foundational me exists, but that constant also proffers many interesting possibilities. Instead of only feeling destabilised and false because of my practice of ‘shapeshifting’, I’m beginning to embrace a chimerical self and the potential freedom that idea offers, while remaining aware there are opposing perspectives to that concept.¹⁵⁴ The recent realisation that there may be a foundational self I can access potentially means I may no longer need to operate from the position of inauthenticity I thought was my only reality. I am now in the process of recovering an emotionally engaged manner of encountering and interacting with others, once natural to my original, authentic psyche, or, at least as authentic as a human can be.¹⁵⁵

This track, a meditation on current meanings of heritage, identity, and persona in my life, musically contains and reflects many of the potentially contradictory elements that inform my being. As a multi-racial mixture of colonised and coloniser, I was bequeathed a legacy that offers both pride (what fascinating diasporas to be part of) and sorrow (a hybrid, whose maternal ancestry is the product of centuries of colonisation).¹⁵⁶

3.4.7 ‘Padre Nuestro’ [00:00 – 06:12]

Prologue

A musical narrative describing oppression, ‘otherness’ and colonial war. A cinematically inspired instrumental that: evokes the Roman Catholic church’s collusion with Spanish colonialism, posits re-imagined possibilities influenced by the Reconquista in 1492 (which forcibly expelled most of their flourishing Jewish and Middle Eastern population) and the attempted extermination of its Roma inhabitants some 250 years later (1749), summons the cacophony of naval battles between Spain and Britain (for control of the seas to ensure the safety of colonial riches), briefly alludes to the US struggle for independence from Britain’s colonial aspirations (1775–1783), and ends with a musical dialogue between colonizer (Spain) and colonized (the Aztecs and Mayans), a conversation that remains unresolved. And whilst the commentary explores and describes the wider historical concerns of the thesis as evidenced in the music, this work is also an emotional response to the personal battles, racist cruelties and patriarchal positionings practiced within mi familia.

¹⁵⁴ Su Jung Um, ‘The Chimera: Multiple Selves, Conflicting Desires, and Fluctuating Power Relations in Qualitative Research’, *The Qualitative Report*, 26/5 (2021), pp. 1693–1704 <<http://bit.ly/4menTSo>> [accessed 20 September 2024]; Lucrezia Compiani, ‘The Chimeric Self: A Neo Naturalist Bundle Theory of the Self’, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10 (2019), pp. 1–14 <<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00202>> [accessed 20 September 2024]; Mary I. Bockover, ‘Self and Social Roles as Chimeras’, *Comparative Philosophy*, 9/1 (2018), pp. 97–109 <<http://bit.ly/41uvfJ4>> [accessed 20 September 2024].

¹⁵⁵ William Hart and others, ‘To be or to appear to be: Evidence that authentic people seek to appear authentic rather than be authentic’, *Personality and Individual Differences*, 166 (2020), pp. 1–6 <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2020.110165>> [accessed 20 September 2024]; Olaf Dammann and others, ‘The Essence of Authenticity’, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11 (2020), pp. 1–6 <<http://bit.ly/41uvioe>> [accessed 20 September 2024].

¹⁵⁶ Tayyab Mahmud, ‘Colonialism and Modern Constructions of Race: A Preliminary Inquiry’, *University of Miami Law Review*, 53 (1999), pp. 1219–46 <<http://bit.ly/4ostA0n>> [accessed 20 September 2024]; Jacquelyne Ruby Anton, ‘The Land of Disenchantment: Settler Colonialism, White The Land of Disenchantment: Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy, and Race in New Mexico, 1598 – 1910’, (published Master’s dissertation, California State University, 2022) <<http://bit.ly/3UpKsr0>> [accessed 20 September 2024]; Claudia García-Louis, ‘Suficiente, Enough: Reckoning With the Complexities of a Colonial Past That Racializes LatinXs as MestizXs’, *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 23/3 (2023), pp. 291–306 <<http://bit.ly/4IEYH6F>> [accessed 21 September 2024].

Track commentary

The track begins with a solo tenor voice over a simple contrapuntal melodic figure played on metallophone. This sparse melismatic opening is soon accompanied by a sung, droned bass note coupled with the harmonic complexity of a male choir as a sombre liturgical mood is established. At 00:47, the voice of a penitent partaking in the Roman Catholic church's Sacrament of Penance for absolution (confession) is heard intoning the title of the track, "Padre Nuestro" (my triple-tracked voice: as originally recorded, slightly pitch-lowered, and whispered). A brief confessional dialogue is initiated by this phrase, one that at first admonishes the listening priest for not being readily available and ends with a request for absolution (signifying the Roman Catholic church's power over its adherents, a control facilitated by a 'believers' fear of damnation). This dialogue also serves as reminder of the secretive, potentially collusive aspect of the confessional ritual.¹⁵⁷

Simultaneously, in reinforcement of this darker interpretation of a central Roman Catholic sacrament, a deep synth sub-note joins the sung bass drone as, one octave higher, partially submerged in the increasingly sonorous atmosphere, an arpeggiated saw toothed noise surreptitiously 'swims' from side to side within the stereo field, an auditory movement suggestive of predation which references Trump's 2019 suggestion to stock the Rio Grande with snakes and alligators as a method for deterring immigrants who swim across.¹⁵⁸

The final phrase, "for I have sinned", is followed by a swiftly rising glissando on harp that ends with cymbal strike and piano chord. In the ensuing reverberant space, a zephyrical breath of wind chime provides delicate affirmation of absolution, a symbolic benediction of Disneyesque magical dust and ironic sonic gesture that questions the emotional authenticity of the previous *mise en scène*. One should always be wary of, not only institutions claiming access to spiritual truths and salvation, but also the producers of cinematic fairytales, for they are often not what they seem. In the reverberant distance, a guttural growl can be discerned.

The gruff snarl is curtailed by a massive percussive strike that initiates a renewed instance of chorale, this time underpinned by a repetitive rhythmic loop suggestive of the drumbeat used to enforce the galley slave's rowing tempo in so many cinematic depictions of life during the Holy Roman Empire (a Hollywood trope and re-interpretation of historical fact, as rowing was considered a skilled labour almost always provided by paid professionals).¹⁵⁹ Mixed quietly in with the mournful liturgical choir are multiple layers of stretched, pitch-altered atonal groans, auditory reminders of religiously sanctioned brutality, a re-imagining of Roman Catholic piety that points to their role as beneficiaries and moral absolvers of capitalistic expansion.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Giuseppe Bolotta, '(Un)holy Secrets: Politics of Silence and Confession in the UK's Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse', *La Ricerca Folklorica*, 76 (2021), pp. 45–50 <<http://bit.ly/4etMrng>> [accessed 22 November 2024].

¹⁵⁸ The Times Editorial Board, 'Opinion: Trump's gator-filled 'moat' may be the silliest of his harebrained ideas', *The Los Angeles Times*, 2 October 2019 <<http://bit.ly/4m2Fw7A>> [accessed 5 February 2025].

¹⁵⁹ Lionel Casson, 'Galley Slaves', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 97 (1996), pp. 35–44 <<https://doi.org/10.2307/2936000>> [accessed 23 November 2024]; Megan Gingerich, 'The Portrayal of Roman Gladiators and Slavery in Film', (published Senior thesis, Liberty University, 2020) <<http://bit.ly/45ypWtt>> [accessed 2 January 2025].

¹⁶⁰ Camden Eckler, 'Prevailing facets of Spanish colonialism: the roots of exploitation and inequality in Latin America', (published thesis, University of Tennessee, 2020) <<http://bit.ly/4kkJ6bx>> [accessed 23 November 2024].

This ceremonial soundscape continues its description of fading dolorous grandeur from 01:23 to 01:44, as two time-stretched, echoed Hi-Hat barks imply oceanic susurrations while further thunderous percussive strikes warn of the impending approach of some, yet unseen, force. At 01:01:45, the choir and rhythmic loop fade as a distorted vocal chorus quickly rises to meet an aggressive kick drum, cymbal crash, excoriating nu-metal guitar chord, and additional electronic rhythmic patterns that introduce a new melodic theme and provide continuing percussive emphasis. The advent of British colonialism.

The new motif, a wry expression of elegiac 'End of Empire' pathos, is performed by a layered combination of pitch destabilized piano, harp and distorted electric guitar played in unison; a partially broken, de-tuned audio exclamation of loss, the dissipation of an identity financed through enslavement of the 'other'. The original melodic figure returns and gently responds to the new theme, its soft voice offering consolation and a metaphorical shoulder to cry on — perhaps, in mutual commiseration over the coming loss of a remarkably 'cost-effective' workforce for realising profit.

A reconfiguration of the earlier arpeggiated saw-toothed figure serves as cantabilistic expression of dismissive laughter directed at the sense of sovereignty held by distant rulers. This satirical musical gesture replaces the gentle melodic figure previously articulated and initiates a different, harsher conversation which, after 8 bars, is superseded by the stuttered phrase, "pe-peligroso" (da-dangerous), a camp declamation sung in mocking response to threat of armed reprisal.

The backgrounded snarling growl is heard again (angry response of affronted sovereignty?) as, once more, a rising chorus of distorted anguished voices (the wailing of that 'cost-effective' workforce) pushes the track forward towards a brief symphonic swell and strike that re-introduce the 'End of Empire' motif. Additional snare beats now enhance the increasingly militaristic pulse as an uneasy ephemeral ambience drifts like canon smoke, around and above the soft contrapuntal melody of the metallophone.

This newly introduced ambience, suffused with the smoky residue of battle, acts as a prescient auditory portent of coming war; the symphonic movement and orchestral hit leveraged as musical interventions that both attempt to silence its troubling message and in doing so, confirm it. A final explosive strike ushers in a new soundscape of sombre possibility: the wash of undulating sea, creaking timber, and flapping canvas indicating a further dislocation: perhaps the pitiful aftermath of an Anglo-Spanish maritime conflict. The orchestra continues to deliver explosive strikes.

A siren's distant cry entices as, rising like a djinn, a lyrical Middle Eastern string motif, mixed left in the stereo field, is quickly succeeded by explosive flamenco 'rasqueado' on the right, the sonic triumvirate occurs once more, their spatial orientation reversed on repetition.¹⁶¹ An aural referencing of intersectional influences from Andalucía (Arab polytheism, Islam, and Romani musical expression), the home of flamenco.¹⁶² Although the

¹⁶¹ 'razqueado', percussive flamenco guitar technique.

¹⁶² Tania Flores, 'The Barzakh of Flamenco: Tracing the Spirituality, Locality and Musicality of Flamenco From South of the Strait of Gibraltar', (published research dissertation, Independent Study Project Collection, 2011) <<http://bit.ly/44rBePx>> [accessed 24 November 2024]; Rosamaria Cisneros-Kostic, 'Flamenco and Its Gitanos An Investigation of the Paradox of Andalusia: History, Politics and Dance Art', *Electronic Theses and Dissertations* (published Master's thesis, University of New Mexico, 2010), pp. 171, 178–84 <<http://bit.ly/44od8VW>> [accessed 24 November 2024].

Reconquista threw off the shackles of approximately eight centuries of Muslim colonization and rule, their former presence continues to inform Spanish culture.¹⁶³

The seductive ululation of siren's call continues (are they tempting the naval combatants to abandon their struggle and join them?), as a sharply delineated combination of tapotement and scrapes begins, a looped synthesis of historic rhythmic vernaculars still in contemporary musical use (palma and darbuka), both distinct percussive expressions of Spain's 'others'. A brief alternative Middle Eastern string flourish now provides baladien movement that precedes the downbeat every 4 bars. At 04:29, a burst of afillá flamenco cante (an energetic 'call to arms') intensifies the atmosphere as an Arabic string flourish introduces the explosive reverberance of battle engaged. An angry concatenation of contratiempo taconeo begins.¹⁶⁴

The cantaor mournfully exclaims again, this time accompanied by a second voice providing harmony, an auditory affirmation of phralipe or quirobo in the face of death, 04:51.¹⁶⁵ A raucous bugle mobilisation, at first in the distance, draws rapidly closer, an auditory improbability that infers advancing cavalry (Padre Nuestro is now in a process of time-jumping, a temporal displacement that offers portents of the US war of independence). This intersectional disruption of time and place layers a snapshot of future capitalist struggle, the US Civil War over the economics of slavery, into the current sonic imaginary describing military struggle from the past also motivated by colonialist financial concerns. Oppression of the 'other' for gain, seems a human practice without end.¹⁶⁶

The siren's ululations continue to haunt the auditory remnants of this rapidly fading soundscape until a Spanish classical inflected guitar motif begins a desolate monologue, soon accompanied by an Aztec flute's lonely sighs. This instrumental dialogue of lament, increasingly dissonant and inharmonious, stalls on a final despondent note, a failed conversation; for until the conquered achieve parity with a former conqueror, there is little possibility of real exchange.

The Spanish continue to view most Mexicans with a measure of disdain.¹⁶⁷ Mexicans are aware of this attitude (whenever occasion forces them to remember), but they still tend to admire the former European masters who helped create them, grudgingly accepting their proof of superiority (white skin, relative wealth, and cultural sophistication). Personal and observed experience seems to confirm a continuing lack of parity, the dialogue is never between equals. A colonial past, unsuccessful war against US expansionism, and ensuing racist rhetoric blaming economic failings and crime on the 'uneducated, violent nature' of

¹⁶³ Muneeza Shamsie, 'Introduction: The enduring legacy of al-Andaluz', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 52/2 (2016), pp. 127–35 <<https://bit.ly/492q7jG>> [accessed 10 December 2024].

¹⁶⁴ 'contratiempo', counter-time.

¹⁶⁵ 'brotherhood' or 'brother in arms' in the Romany language.

¹⁶⁶ James Oakes, 'Capitalism and Slavery and the Civil War', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 89 (2016), pp. 195–220 <<http://bit.ly/45bFNPn>> [accessed 14 2024]; Jeffrey Rogers Hummel, 'U.S. Slavery and Economic Thought', *Econolib: Economic History*, 26 December 2022 <<http://bit.ly/47pqBQh>> [accessed 14 December 2024].

¹⁶⁷ Kevan Antonio Aguilar, 'The "Indios" of Spain and the Mexican Revolution: Ideologies and the Labor of Internationalist Solidarity', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 104/3 (2024), pp. 434, 443–45 <<https://doi.org/10.1215/00182168-11189922>> [accessed 2 January 2025]; Christina González and Patricia Gandárra, 'Why We Like to Call Ourselves Latinas', *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 4/4 (2005), pp. 392–96 <<http://bit.ly/4mCkQmW>> [accessed 2 January 2025].

Mexican immigrants, evidence an extended history of exploitation and oppression by the 'white races'.¹⁶⁸

Although Padre Nuestro ends on a note suffused with a sense of loss, the present still feels alive with possibility. For this pale-skinned Mexican American, "moved by a sense of longing to be again what I was not" (Patti Smith, *Woolgathering*),¹⁶⁹ music continues to facilitate emotional connection and response to a once abandoned heritage, a means to explore 'what I am not'.

3.4.8 'The Sound of Survival' [00:00 – 21:13]

Prologue

This final track presents the (re)imagined past, present, and potential future of some of the Chicax flamenca/os who performed at the El Cid during the 1960s and 1970s; a kaleidoscopic sonic microcosm composed of eight decades of possibility expressed simultaneously.¹⁷⁰ I was raised in an ambiente falso, almost nothing was authentically what it appeared to be and almost no one was who they claimed to be.¹⁷¹ The El Cid restaurant and tablao, named after Spain's legendary hero of the Reconquista, an honoured warrior by both Muslims and Christians (1043–1099), was a fantasy, a product of my father's artistic imagination and skill. He redesigned the original soundstage/cinema theatre by building a raised wooden stage (with moveable backdrops inspired by German Expressionist surrealism), sculpted numerous statues placed within pointed Moorish arches he fashioned, constructed a tiled water fountain, recreated from his memories of The Alhambra and planted a version of the 'hanging gardens of Babylon' (i.e., a desert oasis garden) along the descending entrance steps that began on Sunset Boulevard: a unique imaginary informed by Hollywood's 1961 epic 'historical' drama recounting the story of Rodrigo Diaz aka El Cid, the legendary 11th century Spanish 'warrior'. Although some were dodging the racist attitudes towards Mexicans prevalent in LA at the time, other performers at El Cid (including my father and myself) were simply (if anything can be considered as such) examples of personal fantasy presented as public 'reality'.

Track commentary

The opening scratches of needle on vinyl are interrupted by the noise of rapid channel searching (where can communal interests be found?), an activity that yields snippets of various 1940s Mexican and Spanish radio programs but settles on no definite channel, or 'home' (a personal referencing, as my 'white' Mexican American features and skin colour have left me feeling unsure of where I belong).¹⁷² This atmosphere, composed of

¹⁶⁸ Negin Ghavami and Letitia Anne Peplau, 'An Intersectional Analysis of Gender and Ethnic Stereotypes Testing Three Hypotheses', *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 37/1 (2013), p. 119 <<http://bit.ly/44mvFTX>> [accessed 2 January 2025].

¹⁶⁹ Patti Smith, *Woolgathering*, (London, UK: Bloomsbury Press, 2012), p. 65.

¹⁷⁰ Alicia Delaney, 'Juan Crow: A Discriminatory Past with Contemporary Consequences against Mexican Americans', *Undergraduate Review*, 17 (2023), pp. 217–34 <<http://bit.ly/45cqUg3>> [accessed 10 January 2025]; George A. Martinez, 'The Legal Construction of Race: Mexican-Americans and Whiteness', *JSRI Occasional Paper #54*, The Julian Samora Research Institute (Michigan State University, 2000) <<http://bit.ly/4fB6dOw>> [accessed 10 January 2025].

¹⁷¹ 'ambiente falso', false environment.

¹⁷² Laura E. Gómez, 'Mexican Americans and the Question of Race', *Contemporary Sociology*, 45/3 (2016), pp. 297–99 <<https://bit.ly/495myJB>> [accessed 10 January 2025]; Shane T. Moreman, 'Performativity and the Latina/o-White Hybrid Identity: Performing the Textual Self', *USF Tampa Graduate Theses and*

melancholic moments referencing a Latinx inflected past, continues unresolved for the first minute.

At 01:00, a contemporary interview with one of the original founders of the El Cid flamenco restaurant and tablao begins. Barely audible at first, this female voice is underpinned by a repetitive synth generated bass note (referencing the ever-present, hyper-machismo of flamenco in this narrative).¹⁷³ The soundscape now consists of audio from the nineteen-forties through to the current twenty-first century and, although these sonic signifiers are each 'authentic', their simultaneity could be considered 'inauthentic' (conflated juxtapositions achieved through digital manipulation). The historicity is further confused through use of various contemporary audio plug-ins and recording techniques: distortions, reversals, eq shelving, cut/paste modifications, and improbable echoes that create a quagmire of auditory references, an invented reality meant to provoke questions about authenticity.

At 01:31, on the right side of the stereo field, the dulcet tones of a 'lounge' piano coupled with a suave male Latino voice, typical of the 1940s, introduces a 'canción romántica' (romantic song) but before the song can be heard, the brasher output of other competing radio stations overpower its gently 'camp' ambience. At 03:31, now on the left side of the stereo field, the same slow 'canción romántica' begins again, this time brutally disrupted at 03:46, by the rip of a needle being rapidly scratched across one side of a vinyl record, a noise ending with an almost cartoonish echo that bounces from left to right until a loud pistol shot demands centre stage. A wave of reverberant sound fills the empty space following the sharp crack of gunfire, dissipating as the initial vinyl scratching returns at 04:00, overlaid with a despondent female voice repeating the word "Ok": an audio depiction of stereotypical 'white' beliefs concerning the casual violence they imagine occurs in everyday Latinx realities and signifier of the robbery and shooting that occurred at El Cid in early autumn, 1972.

A religiously infused 'romanticized' view of love and desire, coupled with violent macho attitudes and practice, are often two sides of the same colonized coin in Latinx culture. Although there is a strong feminist and queer Latinx agenda to positively re-write that narrative (the Latinx LGBTQ+ community currently in the process of philosophically (re)defining 'machismo', perhaps as 'caballerismo': a re-imagined gentler, racially positive manner of achieving honour and respect), machismo was still firmly in place during the 1940s through to and including the 1980s, when I left Hollywood for London.¹⁷⁴ Another interesting aspect of Mexican male 'machismo' and female 'marianismo', is the parallel with white working-class male behaviour and rise of the 'trad wife' ethos in the States. Although 'marianismo' is based on the Catholic feminine ideal of subservience and chastity as symbolized by the Virgin Mary, while the 'trad wife' is informed by patriarchal concepts

Dissertations, (published PhD dissertation, University of South Florida, 2005) <<http://bit.ly/478FmHp>> [accessed 25 June 2025].

¹⁷³ Lisa M. Stronsick and others, 'Masculine harps and feminine horns: Timbre and pitch level influence gender ratings of musical instruments', *Psychology of Music*, 46/6 (2018), pp. 896–912 <<https://bit.ly/4bifGKf>> [accessed 10 January 2025].

¹⁷⁴ Jennifer Domino Rudolf, *Embodying Latino Masculinities, Producing Masculinidad*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 1–8 <<http://bit.ly/4md17KG>> [accessed 25 June 2025]; Emma Garcia, 'Blending the Gender Binary: The Machismo-Marianismo Dyad as a Coping Mechanism', *Honours Projects*. 23 (published PhD thesis, Illinois Wesleyan University, 2021) <<http://bit.ly/4598M6K>> [accessed 10 January 2025].

based on the financial and sexual control of women, the restrictive rules concerning expected behaviours are similar.¹⁷⁵

The use of physical power (willingness to inflict damage) as proof of masculinity, and expectation of a subservient ‘mothering’ role for girlfriend or wife, is not confined to a Latinx cultural heritage, male ‘machismo’ continues to blight lives on both sides of the border. The repeatedly spoken “Ok” (like a broken record) does not signal agreement with the use of violence to settle everyday matters, it is simply a statement of weariness and despondent futility.

At 04:36, a plaintive voice asks: “Can you hear me?”, “Hello?”, “Hello?”, “Hello?”, “Oh Golly, now what?”, “You’re gone!”, “There you are!”, “Now can you hear me?”, expressions prompted by fear. The effects of prejudice and poverty, when experienced in childhood, are sometimes never completely resolved. A seemingly unrelated occurrence, decades later, can trigger responses surprisingly out of character in individuals who are usually self-sufficient and capable. Shame, rejection and brutality can carve permanent marks in the psyche.¹⁷⁶

A traditional, plucked Mariachi melodic ostinato (in a Huapango style), layered with flamenco performances recorded in the 1940s begin at 04:54, the female voice of one of the original founders of the El Cid is heard again at 05:01.¹⁷⁷ Her spoken narrative, now placed more prominently in the mix, has been treated with a reversing effect which intermittently renders meaning incomprehensible, an opacity that mirrors the hidden emotions behind the apparently cheerful energy of the interviewee, until the earlier vocal expressions of fear are clearly repeated at 05:51. This elderly Mexican woman, who overcame prejudice, racism and extreme poverty to become a self-made financially successful US citizen, sounds like a frightened child because of the momentary loss of an iPhone connection (our facilitator for the interview). The damaging experiences of early life, which originated from a colonialist created environment of abjection, continue to negatively impact her psyche.

As the verbal chronicle continues, it becomes increasingly difficult to understand, the interviewee’s voice changing tone, sometimes exhibiting an adult sonority, sometimes that of an excitable child as it moves continually around the stereo field in, what seems, a random manner (maybe an attempt to conceal and hide truths still too difficult to publicly acknowledge). Violins and trumpets, playing a Mariachi melody that reinforces the 6/8 over 4/4 timing already in place, enter and contribute a further musical layer at 12:38, their

¹⁷⁵ Ashley A. Mattheis, ‘Trad Culture: Reproducing Whiteness and Neo-Fascism through Gendered Discourse Online’ in Shona Hunter and Christi van der Westhizen eds., *Routledge Handbook of Critical Studies in Whiteness*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), pp. 91–101 <<http://bit.ly/4m3Zoat>> [accessed 10 January 2025]; Jacqueline Beatty, ‘The Truth About the Past That ‘Tradwives’ Want to Revive’, *Made by History at Time*, 22 April 2024 <<https://time.com/6962381/tradwives-history/>> [accessed 10 January 2025]; Michelle Fine and others, ‘(IN) Secure Times Constructing White Working-Class Masculinities in the Late 20th Century’, *Gender & Society*, 11/1 (1997), pp. 52–68 <<http://bit.ly/45cwZZY>> [accessed 10 January 2025].

¹⁷⁶ Carlos Pitillas Salvá, ‘Child Poverty as a Potential Developmental Trauma: Shame, Self-Esteem, and Redignification of Childhood’, *Semantic Scholar* (published research paper, Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2016) <<http://bit.ly/4lr2cgP>> [accessed 10 January 2025]; Diego Zavaleta, ‘Shame, humiliation, and poverty’, *MPPN Dimensions magazine*, 9 (2020) <<https://bit.ly/4aCMJbH>> [accessed 11 2025].

¹⁷⁷ a family of Mexican music styles that includes a form of zapateado much like flamenco. Alex E. Chávez, ‘Huapango Arribeño: A Mexican Musico-Poetic Tradition at the Interstices of Postmodernity (1968-1982)’, *Latin American Music Review*, 33/2 (2012), pp. 186–226 <<https://bit.ly/3YWxkM8>> [accessed 11 January 2025].

joyous clamour rendering the interviewee's words practically indecipherable except for the occasionally discernible 'nombre artística/o' of an LA flamenco performer from the early 1960s.¹⁷⁸ The interview is primarily a meditation on the Chicax who reinvented themselves as flamenca/o performers during the middle decades of the twentieth century while the use of 'old skool' Mexican and flamenco music layered with a contemporary Mexican American monologue, a combination of past and present, points to the immutable attitudes about Mexicans many individuals in contemporary US culture still hold: the new view same as the old.

Swiftly traveling across the soundstage at 16:40, an unexpected 1950s inspired whoosh of Sci-Fi spaceship is followed by reverberant mechanical scrapes and echoing sonic bleeps that join the ever-expanding layers of audio complexity of this track's arrangement. Evidence of a superior 'alien' technology (and perhaps a culture advanced beyond racism?), or not so oblique reference to the many illegal 'aliens' gathered at the US/Mexican border?

Although apparently ignored by the ceaseless chatteration of the interviewee, these imagined noises from deep space continue to become more prominent in the mix, an audial reminder that it is not so easy to dismiss or quiet the voices of those trapped in negative positionality. On the other hand, it also references the surprising willingness of many 'white' and brown Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and Latinx to disregard their own people once they become legal citizens of the United States. They helped vote in a racist president who promises to keep out what he refers to as "criminally dangerous 'south of the border' illegals".¹⁷⁹

At 19:58, the track is curtailed abruptly. After five seconds of silence (a re-gathering of inner fortitude?), an exuberant Mexican 'grito', a resurgent 'call to arms', suddenly fills and energises the emptiness. Although the fight for respect in a 'white' world often seems endless, after a brief respite, the Mexican ability to endure ensures the struggle for acceptance and parity, with and within the US, continues. The grito is quickly superseded by a corte downbeat phrase of flamenco cante jondo (the Roma gitana/o community are also on a journey for equality).¹⁸⁰

The melodic ostinato and repetitive needle on vinyl scratching begin again at 20:09, a synth bass and mournful wail of a distant coyote entering 10 seconds later. The vocal presence of the coyote in this composition references two concepts:

1. The Aztec's 'Huehucóyotl', an anthropomorphic deity who was wily and sinvergüenza.¹⁸¹ A deity and culture hero of the pre-Hispanic Americas who, with its ancient native 'trickster' energy, embodied many aspects of Loki and the European carnivalesque.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ 'nombre artística/o', stage name.

¹⁷⁹ Jack Herrera, 'White Mexicans have had a role to play in white supremacy', *Prism*, 18 December 2020 <<http://bit.ly/45awHTf>> [accessed 11 January 2025]; Benjamin Hart, 'The Latinos Who Found Their Inner MAGA', *New York Magazine Intelligencer*, 15 November 2024 <<http://bit.ly/3J2fjYm>> [accessed 11 January 2025].

¹⁸⁰ Jesús López-Peláez Casellas, 'The politics of Flamenco: *La leyenda del tiempo* and ideology', *Popular Music*, 36/2 (2017), pp. 196–215 <<http://bit.ly/3H89AQa>> [Accessed 14 January 2025]; Cisneros-Kostic, 'Flamenco and Its Gitanos', pp. 1, 10–11, 209–67.

¹⁸¹ 'sinvergüenza', without shame.

¹⁸² Carlos Monterrubio and Katherine Dashper, 'Unravelling the complexities of carnivals: potentials and challenges for social change in Mexico', *International Journal of Event and Festival Management*, 4 December 2024, pp. 4–7 <<http://bit.ly/45b9BMf>> [accessed 16 January 2025]; Marina Barys Janer,

2. The primary nickname given to the facilitators of illegal border crossings between South America and the US, i.e., people smugglers.¹⁸³

As the miasmatic plucked Mariachi ostinato, synth bass pedal point, and flamenco background slowly fade away, (the flamenco gestures morphing into sounds of distress meant to signify the human cost of harsh U.S. border policy and action), the crackle of repetitive vinyl scratch returns to lead out what is now become a troubling musical procession.¹⁸⁴

'The Sound of Survival', is an attempt to musically and emotionally describe, to paraphrase Rodriguez, the 'mixed, confused, impure, unpasteurised', intersectional mestizaje heritage I come from and am.¹⁸⁵ Or, to paraphrase Vasconcelos's term, though not his whole and often critiqued conceptual vision of racial meaning and validity, my *desire to be recognized* as a member of the Latina/o raza cósmica.¹⁸⁶ An auditory snapshot referencing methods of survival (hiding in plain sight and passing) still implemented to counter the negativity of racism: their opposing realities caught in a time loop that seems never-ending.

3.5 Reflections on the Musical Commentary

There are many configurations possible in regards the ordering of these tracks, so I will explain the reasoning behind this choice: my creative spirit downloaded them from familial memories contained in some internalized folder with its own hierarchical logic, attempts to re-order them invariably sounded wrong.

The first track recorded for this project, 'No Puedo', a cinematic soundtrack that begins with the Spanish colonisation of the Aztec and Mayan civilisations and ends in an imagined version of a contemporary East LA 'drive-by', was followed by 'La Gente Guapa', a meditation on the self-centred lives of Hollywood's rich and famous inspired by Manson's 'The Beautiful People'. Both tracks, (un)included in the final version of *Surviving Sunset*, were deemed too literal, the lyrics delivering unambiguous versions of their stories over arrangements based on commercial pop, rock and hip-hop tropes which left scant opportunity for a listener to make their own meanings. Focused on production quality, recording technique and genre concerns (did it 'hit hard' enough and were the orchestral flourishes appropriately cinematic?), they were composed, arranged and recorded to

'TRICKSTERS OF THE SPECTATORial: The decolonial proposals of performance activism through the encounters with La Pocha Nostra and Freddie Mercado', (published PhD thesis, University of Essex, 2018), pp. 59–63, 88–91 <<http://bit.ly/4fvEj6p>> [accessed 30 May 2025].

¹⁸³ David Spener, "Some Reflections on the Language of Clandestine Migration on the Mexico-U.S. Border", (paper prepared for presentation at the XXVIII International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Panel CSM034, "Migration, Religion, and Language", 2009), pp. 14–25 <<http://bit.ly/4mAOzfJ>> [accessed 15 January 2025].

¹⁸⁴ Ari Sawyer, 'Statement of Human Rights Watch: The Human Cost of Harsh US Immigration Deterrence Policies', *Human Rights Watch*, 26 July 2023 <<http://bit.ly/41zibJ>> [accessed 16 January 2025]; Donald Kerwin and Daniel E. Martínez, 'Forced Migration, Deterrence, and Solutions to the Non-Natural Disaster of Migrant Deaths Along the US-Mexico Border and Beyond', *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, 12/3 (2024), pp. 127–59 <<https://bit.ly/45CbUYp>> [accessed 15 January 2025].

¹⁸⁵ Lee Bebout, 'Postracial Mestizaje: Richard Rodriguez's Racial Imagination in an America Where Everyone Is Beginning to Melt', *American Studies*, 54/1 (2015), p. 90. Bebout draws the quote I paraphrased from Richard Rodriguez's, *Brown: The Last Discovery of America*, (New York, NY: Penguin, 2002), p. 197 <<https://bit.ly/4q80vrM>> [accessed 11 January 2025].

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p.93.

impress others, rather than express emergent emotions and confusions of my own, a result in opposition to what I ultimately decided to musically actualize.

These first two tracks were followed by 'Empress of the Ants', 'Father' and "Recuerdos". At first arranged and produced in a manner like 'No Puedo' and 'La Gente Guapa', 'Empress of the Ants' was the first track to be (re)imagined using the composer instructions. With little idea of what the result might be, I found myself in a position of artistic vulnerability; how should I proceed and who would be the final judge of whether a new approach was successfully accomplished? I felt deskilled. 'Empress of the Ants' was eventually deconstructed and reconfigured three times before reaching satisfactory completion, the original essence finally embedded within an abstracted lo-fi musical casing, rather like a sonic version of the drive-in B-films I enjoyed in my youth (during summer vacations, I and a couple of young cousins would occasionally be packed into the big boot of a Mexican relative's car and sneaked into the local drive-in cinema). 'Father' and 'Recuerdos' were next, the process alluded to in the composer's instructions becoming easier to facilitate with each (re)working.

After 'Empress of the Ants', 'Father', 'Recuerdos', 'Brownsville', 'Sandstorm', '¡Soy Yo!', 'Padre Nuestro', and 'The Sounds of Survival' were composed and recorded (in that order), I decided the narrative thread might be improved if the tracks were presented in chronological sequencing, but the results proved unsatisfactory. The 'corrected' reconfiguration, an attempt to force my creative output to follow a more historically accurate timeline, proved to be a mistaken return to my didactic self, the new grouping disappointing, its emotional affect subdued. I also began to alter their original openings and endings due to changes I was making in their narrative order, a tactic I subsequently realized subtracted from the raw expressions of affect they initially embodied and expressed. The music's original flow had created its own chronology and reality, one different than the one I tried to impose. As Adorno posited, "We don't understand music, it understands us.", so I stopped trying to 'correct' the presentation of its truth content.¹⁸⁷ Could the need to reorder and tidy 'linear inaccuracies' in the track's ordering have been an intergenerational manifestation of the immaculate cleanliness and order daily maternal effort produced in our familial home, my mother's self-acknowledged response to racist beliefs about 'dirty' Mexicans?¹⁸⁸ I suspect so.

As I now begin to include, contextualise, and process the information I have been studying, what are my creative practice and academic thought producing because of their conversational exchange? What understandings, not previously noted or perhaps considered, are being revealed?

I have used art to experiment with public persona and communicate my reaction to life since childhood. Authentically inauthentic (although not an Andalusian gitano, I was raised to be a flamenco guitarist from the age of two), and inauthentically authentic (although a 'Hollywood kid', my knowledge of and familiarity with flamenco is genuine), my identity is rather like some metaphoric Möbius strip.

¹⁸⁷ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. xii.

¹⁸⁸ Niki Adams and Priscilla Lui, 'Coping Strategies for Distinct Discrimination-Related Stressors', (preprint PhD thesis, Southern Methodist University, 2021), pp. 3–7 <https://osf.io/preprints/psyarxiv/s93ka_v/> [accessed 18 January 2025]; Sophie Berjot and Nicolas Gillet, 'Stress and coping with discrimination and stigmatization', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2 (2011), pp. 1–10 <<http://bit.ly/44KRM6k>> [accessed 18 January 2025].

Music has allowed me to express myself but has that been a false self? Now a father and older man, perhaps presentation as an ageless, Hollywoodized image of who I wish I could be, is no longer, if it ever was, necessary or appropriate. The boundaries of that particularity were informed by a fundamental Hollywood lesson I introjected during adolescence; career survival is dependent on ability to present as convincing expression of ‘youthful potency’ but has that identity script become irrelevant?¹⁸⁹ I am not a Chicxanx gangbanger or sexual ‘conquistador’, nor was I ever. However, that doesn’t necessarily mean my earlier performances of musical persona were ‘inauthentic’. The characters I create all issue from the same font and could be perceived as genuine aspects of personal identity. They all facilitate various possibilities of being that would be difficult to access in any other manner, not unlike the stage identities manifested by (among many others) David Bowie and Lady Gaga. There are many differing perspectives on the meanings and (co)creation of persona for both artist and audience.¹⁹⁰ The strategies implemented for a better life have also played a major role in forming the unreality of who I think I am.

As a musical storyteller nurtured within a dual-heritage family based in Hollywood — persona, identity, and reality all part of a continuously edited script — I have, for the past decade, been focusing my creative output on unpicking attitudes, dysfunctional behaviours and intergenerational trauma swept under a carpet woven by US myth, Disney and my family. My father told tall tales: as an expression of disdain for what he considered the ordinary, the commonplace and the less educated ‘other’. My mother told tall tales: to hide from her impoverished racial heritage and the unbearable memories it bequeathed her, and I use tall tales: to appear tougher and more experienced than those I interact with. Tall tales, that somewhat catachrestic US American tradition, adopted as our familial multiple-use strategy.¹⁹¹

My artistic output, a synthesis of Hollywood and the Brechtian, is an amalgamation of *dramatic* and *epic* theatricality.¹⁹² Both *escapist catharsis* (surrendering to the cinematically fantastical soundscapes) and *detached response* are possible (social issues inform my music, encouraging a listener to think and make their own intellectual meanings). A ‘tangible expression of intangible realities’ for Aristotle and powerful enough to be considered a form of enlightenment in Schopenhauer’s, Wittgenstein’s, Adorno’s,

¹⁸⁹ Heather Addison, “‘Must the Players Keep Young?’: Early Hollywood’s Cult of Youth”, *Cinema Journal*, 45/4 (2006), pp. 3–25 <<http://bit.ly/4fx2G3t>> [accessed 21 September 2024]; Linda Outcalt, ‘Aged by Popular Culture’, (published PhD dissertation, University of Victoria, 2021) <<http://bit.ly/4ogdrsB>> [accessed 21 September 2024].

¹⁹⁰ Theodore Gracyk, ‘Performer, Persona, and the Evaluation of Musical Performance’, *Contemporary Aesthetics (Journal Archive)*, 15/15 Article 13 (2017), pp. 79–86 <<http://bit.ly/44JoSUc>> [accessed 23 September 2024]; Kai Arne Hansen, ‘(Re)Reading Pop Personae: A Transmedial Approach to Studying the Multiple Construction of Artist Identities’, *Twentieth Century Music*, 16/3 (2019), pp. 501–29 <<http://bit.ly/3TQhDDF>> [accessed 23 September 2024]; Zsófia Nagy, ‘Musical persona: A case study of Lady Gaga’, (published BA thesis, University of Uppsala, 2024) <<http://bit.ly/4kiQLac>> [accessed 23 September 2024]; Wendy Commons, ‘Hang On To Yourself: Bowie, Burke, and the Rhetoric of Stage Persona’, (published PhD dissertation, Texas Woman’s University, 2019) <<http://bit.ly/4kkuaKy>> [accessed 23 September 2024].

¹⁹¹ Neil Schmitz, ‘Tall Tale, Tall Talk: Pursuing the Lie in Jacksonian Literature’, *American Literature*, 48/4 (1977), pp. 471–473 <<http://bit.ly/4I7f3Fj>> [accessed 25 September 2024]; Caron, ‘The Violence and Language of Swapping Lies’, pp. 27–29, 32–34 <<http://bit.ly/4lyuGwd>> [accessed 25 September 25].

¹⁹² Mustafa Oğuz Yeğın, ‘Direct Gaze of the Actor Towards the Camera in Cinema in the Context of Identification and Alienation: A Discussion on the Films “Brand New Testament” (2015) and “Funny Games” (1997)’, *E-gifder*, 12/3 (2024), pp. 1558–87 <<http://bit.ly/3J80Ji0>> [accessed 19 January 2025]; Vishal Joshi and Shakuntala Kunwar, ‘Shakespearean and Brechtian Drama and Theatre: An Audience Response Perspective’, *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 13/1 (2021), pp. 1–11 <<http://bit.ly/4Inc0Z9>> [accessed 19 January 2025].

and many other philosopher's estimation, music is posited as a language that intimates other dimensions, a different world where possibilities beyond our current understandings might exist.¹⁹³ In much the same manner as a 'ping' of sonar, I keep sending musical communications in search of commonality into the ether of humanity in the hope of finding resonance. Although, as the feedback of others is largely unavailable now, what responses these abstract sonic metaphors might evoke in a listener remains unknown.

So, what is real and what matters?

There are many further interpretations that could be considered regarding this use of camouflage rather than the relatively simple ones that can be observed historically. I am referring to my musical engagement with the hiding in plain sight, passing and tall tales discourse I have been critiquing in relation to this research. My creative practice and its analysis, after much (re)arrangement, (re)mixing, (re)reading and (re)writing, offers interesting, convoluted understandings and insights brimming with theatrical, cinematic and literary references. The analysis also appears to reveal and examine many difficult private truths that operate, not only within but also beyond the historical context of my research, 'appears to' being the pertinent aphorism.

On thoroughly reviewing my musical analysis and listening to the compositional input many times, I have become increasingly aware that survival strategies put in place during childhood, still cleave to me as if the 'face-hugger' in *Alien*; the more I try to remove or step out from behind them, the tighter they cling. The music reveals this track by track, trick by trick. As example, I believe the first narrative, 'Empress of the Ants', is imbued with something indefinable, a kind of magic. Then, as I listen to each sequential recording, there seems a lessening of that magic. All the soundtracks remain technically impressive, yet there tends to be a diminishing of emotional affect in each successive piece. In other words, as I became increasingly familiar with the parameters of my 'new' manner of composing, arranging, and producing, less of the 'unexpected' occurred, resulting in the ¿no se que? inexorably diminishing as I regained control of the process and began to 'know' what I was doing.¹⁹⁴ I am also aware this is a very subjective opinion.

Principally motivated by fear (that my music might lose its unique identity and, as a result, so might I, for those two identities can seem indelibly entwined), the parameters and form of my artistic output have tended to remain tightly structured. Thus, 'not knowing' is a metaphorical borderland I never willingly investigate, and yet during this research I have been continually pointed towards its shadowy spaces. Once entered and engaged with, I remembered (for I have done this before) that real change, whether artistic or intellectual, tends to happen during moments of 'not knowing', for when we 'know', a level of inflexibility is manifested that can stifle 'in the moment' experimentation, an approach we imagine safeguards us from failure but also inhibits the possibility of true innovation.

Music (through performance, arrangement, and production) can reveal the stratified condition of our humanity, our multi-layered states of being. Listening back to my

¹⁹³ Sarah Whitfield, 'Music: Its Expressive Power and Moral Significance', *Musical Offerings*, 1/1 (2010), pp. 11–13 <<http://bit.ly/4fP1d97>> [accessed 19 January 2025]; Robert Ralph, 'Schopenhauer and Music', *The Musical Times*, 54/850 (2013), pp. 792–94 <<http://bit.ly/4fuo21r>> [accessed 19 January 2025]; Marco Marchesin, 'Wittgenstein's Account of Music and its Comparison to Language: Understanding, Experience and Rules', *Philosophical Investigations*, 45/4 (2022), pp. 490–511 <<https://doi.org/10.1111/ph.in.12342>> [accessed 19 January 2025]; Moya K. Mason, 'Theodor Adorno's Theory of Music and its Social Implications', *MKM Research* <<http://bit.ly/4fyLR8o>> [accessed 19 January 2025].

¹⁹⁴ ¿no se que?', 'I don't know what?' or, in French, 'je ne se quoi?'.

soundscapes after a period of time (a practice I employ to defamiliarize from the intensely focused process of composing, arranging, mixing, and mastering), disclosed much interesting information: how my application of reversed and chopped sounds could be read as both frightened confusion and all-consuming rage, the gentle sonic gestures backgrounded within primarily aggressive instrumental narratives that imply vulnerability, the screeching, scraping distortions heard in almost every track evidencing the suppressed anger hidden behind my seemingly diplomatic public self, subconscious patriarchal attitudes emerging and shaping aspects of my arrangements — the placement of maternal stories and interviews in a central position (the spoken narratives primarily unintelligible) that serves my needs, not my mother's, and, if we are most critical of the negative aspects of ourselves we perceive in others, a musical analysis filled with references to my father's domineering and privileged behaviours which surely points to traces of those same possibilities within myself ("We always see our unavowed mistakes in our opponent", Carl Jung, i.e., a projection of similarities).¹⁹⁵

The creative work composed for this thesis is an attempt to artistically express and understand a difficult still evolving racially fractured history through music. The lived realities of these tales, already (re)imagined and (re)counted many times, have been further distanced from their original urgencies and meaning through my musical (re)presentations. By a constant blurring of positionalities, I both question and obfuscate 'truths' while apparently exposing them. Nothing is what it seems on first listening. I deliberately conflate elements of time to create a sense of disjuncture that mirrors the unease I have felt as a hidden 'half-breed' and comments on the ensuing confusion and sense of loss (of community). The maternal caveat 'never drop your guard' comes to mind, for I too submerge what I feel and, like my mother, turn painful realities into tall tales to hide discomforts in plain sight and pass as OK, a Latinx approach to adverse or uncomfortable situations.¹⁹⁶

The primary foundational and brutal reality that begat these psychological dysfunctions is colonialism: my maternal heritage born from and misshapen by the violence of its historic implementation, my paternal ancestry made (un)compassionate and heartless through their exploitation of those whose skin was darker, and the loss of intrinsic parts of my identity and original self because of the poisonous maelstrom manifested by its racist ideologies, a reality I share with the older 'white' Mexican American women my mother introduced me to.¹⁹⁷ When the time arrived to speak their hidden truths, fear of negative consequence still ensured their narratives remained unspoken. Many individuals and communities harbour unshared sorrows and secret loss engendered by supremacist attitudes; they are the often unrecognised 'collateral damage' of the Global North's colonial and ongoing post-colonialist approach to 'others'.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Carl G. Jung, 'Structure & Dynamics of the Psyche', in Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hull trans. and eds., *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung | Complete Digital Edition*, 8 507, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975 [1960]), pp. 342–44

<<http://bit.ly/3UmycaM>> [accessed 24 April 2025].

¹⁹⁶ Nicolle Londoño-Rosado, 'Silencio: The Hispanic/Latino Reticent Approach To Racism', *Florida A&M University Law Review*, 17/2 Article 9 (2023), pp. 162–63, 160–80 <<http://bit.ly/3GwdyBw>> [accessed 15 April 2025].

¹⁹⁷ Jude Mary Cénat, 'Complex Racial Trauma: Evidence, Theory, Assessment, and Treatment', *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 18/3 (2023), pp. 675–87 <<http://bit.ly/46QvYI7>> [accessed 3 June 2025].

¹⁹⁸ Maximilian Felsch, 'The Scientific Shortcomings of Postcolonial Theory', *International Studies*, 60/1 (2023), pp. 113–30 <<http://bit.ly/3USeLqn>> [accessed 25 September 25]; Sneja Gunew, 'Postcolonialism and Multiculturalism: Between Race and Ethnicity', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 27 (1997), pp. 22–39 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3509130>> [accessed 25 September 2024]; Suki Ali, 'Managing racism? Race

Colonial ideologies remain more pervasive than many well-meaning white individuals are aware of. Assumptions of superiority are woven into the ‘white fabric’ of western society and culture and never questioned, a mindset that, as well as harming the ‘other’, diminishes the humanity and spirit of the practitioner — and there are consequences for treating people from a conceit born of privilege.¹⁹⁹ I spent decades harvesting resentment over an inability to feel emotionally engaged. Unable to be myself (racist violence in Southern California at the time (1950s–70s) making that potentially dangerous), I responded by developing a distanced, diplomatic persona that, internally, was far from serene or understanding. Many paid a price for trusting who I appeared to be and yet, ultimately, I did not want to act in that manner or be that troubled person.²⁰⁰

The 2024 Olympics in Paris ended with a rendition of ‘My Way’ (Paul Anka’s English translation of ‘Comme d’habitude’ by Jacques Revaux, Gilles Thibaut, and Claude François), a song whose philosophy is distilled in the final verses, “For what is a man, what has he got, if not himself, then he has naught”. If the paternalistic pronouns were altered, the lyrics might proclaim, “For what are we, what have we got, if not ourselves, then we have naught”, a fitting definition of what colonialism attempts to erase through the process of ‘othering’.²⁰¹

At times, my creative practice seems to be a synergistic conversation with important unresolved aspects of my unconscious self, perhaps even more than it is communication to others. After years of rigidity, I am again allowing for the ‘unknown’ to occur — a methodological approach once at the core of my creative epistemology that bears comparison with Jung’s use of the I Ching, an oracle for self-awareness based on synchronicity, a concept that posits coincidental events in space and time mean more than mere chance and constitute, ‘a peculiar interdependence of objective events among themselves as well as with the subjective (psychic) states of the observer (listener) or observers (listeners), rather than causality.’²⁰² Like Jung’s use of the I Ching, my current work offers snapshots of the moment in which they were cast and requires subjectivity to understand the results arrived at: a mirror of my internal state of being during the time I expressed it.

Age now brings moments of doubt and fear into my creative life, “Do I still have anything relevant to say or anything emotionally affective to communicate through my work?”, for as theatre-maker Anne Bogart notes, ‘Without emotion, you learn nothing.’²⁰³ I struggle with these insecurities as I no longer actively participate in the commercial world of the music

equality and decolonial educational futures’, *The British Journal of Sociology*, 73/5 (2002), pp. 923–41 <<http://bit.ly/3JaxD1y>> [accessed 25 September 2024].

¹⁹⁹ Lisa B. Spanierman and others, ‘Psychosocial Costs of Racism to Whites: Understanding Patterns among University Students’, *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 56/2 (2009), pp. 239–52 <<http://bit.ly/45otSN9>> [accessed 23 September 2024]; Hinekura Smith and others, ‘Coloniality, institutional racism and white fragility: A wero to higher education’, *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 51/2 (2022), pp. 2–3 <doi: [10.55146/ajie.v51i2.34](https://doi.org/10.55146/ajie.v51i2.34)> [accessed 23 September 2024].

²⁰⁰ Wideman, *Brothers and Keepers*, p. 32–33.

²⁰¹ Patrick Wolfe, ‘Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8/4 (2006), pp. 387–409 <<http://bit.ly/3ZZcEUU>> [accessed 25 September 2024]; Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, ‘Decolonization is not a metaphor’, *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1/1 (2012), pp. 1–40 <<http://bit.ly/44lpdqd>> [accessed 25 September 2024].

²⁰² Jung, *The Collected Works*, pp. 668–70; Key Sun, ‘Impact of the I Ching on Carl G. Jung & its Implications’, *Psychology Today*, 1 March 2017 <<http://bit.ly/3J6LwO5>> [accessed 7 May 2025].

²⁰³ Anne Bogart, ‘The Role of StoryTelling in the Theatre of the Twenty–First Century’, in *Sounding Conflict*, p. 7.

business or currently perform live, a situation that also prompts the questions, “Why, and who am I making music for?” One answer to those queries is that I am still trying to recover and reconstruct the shards of an identity deconstructed during childhood, an early confusion that still distances me from my emotions. I hide in plain sight by presenting a layer of amiability that covers a layer of disconnect that disguises a layer of rage that protects the traumatized child inside: the many layered cloak of invisibility I am still in the process of removing in hope of reconnecting with the original inquisitive self that entered life.

I do not claim my creative practice, satisfying as it can be, provides healing in any tangible manner, what I believe is that it foregrounds issues that need resolving, issues from my unconscious, slipped through the fiercely guarded gates of my defence mechanisms and embedded as coded messages in my artistic work in the hope that I read them.

Chapter 4

Conclusions

The crux of the matter is that, although I am completely familiar with white culture and society, I feel like an imposter, my spirit still resonates with my mother's Mexican way of being; though she spent much of her life publicly re-inventing her heritage, she was always Mexican at home. At the same time, it would be difficult for me to either join or find acceptance within a Mexican American community: both my European features and pale skin colour have allowed me to deny their world and blood since childhood; the gap is now too big.

As a white-skinned, European-featured US citizen born shortly after WW2, I appeared to have won the lottery. There was nothing unavailable. Raised in Hollywood, where dreams could be made real, I realised them. I felt entitled to everything the white 'American dream' seemed to indicate I was owed but the disconnected and unacknowledged Mexican half of my heritage felt uneasy, if I put my head too high above some notional parapet there might be terrible consequences — a paradox that meant life often seemed intolerable.¹

Although I have always consciously identified with the minority roots of my maternal lineage, the privileged presumptions I subconsciously operate from have been revealed during this research. Informed by a colonialist influenced viewpoint that continues to provide the tenets for social and cultural attitudes in the U.S. and much of the Global North, my positionality has also been influenced by a white-centric racist belief system that remains almost unassailable.²

As a mixed-race individual, my spirit traverses a metaphorical minefield originally planted during the Spanish colonization of Mexico and continued through the racial and cultural politics of the US. Ideologies that excused the use of darker-skinned 'others' for slave labour by portraying them as not quite human undesirables and visible proof of WASP superiority: the 'purity' of whiteness contrasted by the 'impurity' of darker-skinned races. Mexicans, aware of US white society's attitudes and behaviour towards those with darker skin and not wanting to be included in the even worse discriminatory behaviour directed towards African Americans, distanced themselves from black communities to be considered whiter.³ They also distance themselves from each other based on 'whiteness', with pale-skinned 'puro Spanish' Mexicans disdaining working-class Mexicans who often have Indio features as well as darker skin.⁴ Many hundreds of Mexican Americans

¹ Analia F. Albuja and others, 'Identity Denied: Comparing American or White Identity Denial and Psychological Health Outcomes Among Bicultural and Biracial People', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 45/3 (2019), pp. 416–30 <<http://bit.ly/4mHyTYt>> [accessed 23 September 2024]; Jessica M. Vasquez, *Mexican Americans Across Generations: Immigrant Families, Racial Realities*, NY: New York University Press, 2011), pp. 129–62 <<http://bit.ly/3Hvjnj8>> [accessed 23 September 2024].

² Mahzarin R. Banaji and others, 'Systemic racism: individuals and interactions, institutions and society', *Cognitive Research: Principles and Implications*, 6 Article 82 (2021) <<https://doi.org/10.1186/s41235-021-00349-3>> [accessed 23 September 2024]; Nkiru Nnawulezi and others, 'Ambivalent White Racial Consciousness: Examining Intersectional Reflection and Complexity in Practitioner Graduate Training', *Women and Therapy*, 43 3–4 (2020), pp. 365–88 <<http://bit.ly/41Bi3C9>> [accessed 23 September 2024]; Arthur Scarritt, 'Tripartheid: How Global White Supremacy Triumphs Through Neoliberalism', in Kevin Floyd, ed., *Totality Inside Out: Rethinking Crisis and Conflict Under Capital*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2022), pp. 91–134 <<http://bit.ly/4ouxA0p>> [accessed 23 September 2024].

³ Lori L. Tharps, 'The Difference Between Racism and Colorism', *Time*, (2016) <<https://time.com/4512430/colorism-in-america/>> [accessed 25 May 2023].

⁴ Sánchez, *Passing*, pp. 64–91; Ana K. Kinsie, 'Colorism in Mexico: An Examination of Inequality and the Psychological Impact in the Form of Depression', (BA thesis published as e-book, Portland State University, 2021) <<http://bit.ly/46M1G9v>> [accessed 25 June 2025].

were lynched in Texas and California during the decades between 1848 and the late 1920s.⁵

My DNA is a mixture of Anglo-Saxon, Celtic, Nordic and Spanish/Indio (Mexican), with just over 1% Northwest African. I thus fail the infamous 'one drop rule' codified in the late nineteenth century, a legislative practice based on the idea that even one drop of black blood, or for that matter any racially 'impure' blood, disqualifies the owner from being considered white, thus denying them the privileges that designation bestows.⁶ This leaves me no place where I feel both authentic and accepted. Where I am accepted, I feel like I am playing a role, where I believe my soul belongs doesn't exist, except in nostalgic memories of the few short times I visited and played in the barrio areas my mother's relatives lived in. I, like so many children born to immigrants with a white partner, inhabit a 'no place', not able to be myself because I don't fully understand who I am or who I belong with or to, a condition of identity instability mirrored by another Mexican American musician from L.A., Jeffrey Lee Pierce. Jeffrey, unlike myself, was unable to deal with his sense of lack of belonging to either a Mexican or white community; the emotional complications that resulted from being biracial and 'passing' eventually contributed to his early death.⁷

Hollywood posits that although race, heritage and ethnicity matter, if necessary, they can be successfully disguised and altered for personal benefit, usually a case of "Who do you want to be, as long as it's Anglo-Saxon." This ideological directive was first used by Hollywood's 'Founding Fathers', primarily eastern European Jewish immigrants who anglicized their names to disguise their racial difference and side-step the prejudicial attitudes of the dominant WASP culture of the US.⁸ This reinvention of self in service of fame and fortune was adopted by my mother and many of the thespians and musicians she and my father knew in Hollywood.⁹ Unfortunately, other than the obvious white make-up my 'buela Angie applied daily, there is no disguising a non-white racial identity if your skin is dark.¹⁰

⁵ William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb, 'The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Descent in the United States, 1848 to 1928', *Journal of Social History*, 37/2 (2003), pp. 411–38 <<http://bit.ly/3URFaEK>> [accessed 21 April 2025]; Delgado, 'The Law of the Noose: A History of Latino Lynching', pp. 1–4 <<http://bit.ly/3ZY7A39>> [accessed 4 June 2025].

⁶ Gayle Wald, *Crossing the Line: Racial Passing in Twentieth-Century U.S. Literature and Culture*, (London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 11; F. James Davis, *Who is Black? One Nation's Definition*, (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2000 [1991]), pp. 4–6.

⁷ Leonard Nevarez, 'In Exile: The Rootless Cosmopolitanism of Jeffrey Lee Pierce and the Gun Club', *Musical Urbanism: Blogging at the intersection of urban studies and popular music*, 23 June 2015 <<http://bit.ly/3TmC4lq>> [accessed 25 May 2023].

⁸ Steven J. Ross and others eds., *From Shtetl to Stardom: Jews and Hollywood*, West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2017), pp. vii, ix–xiv <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1wf4dv1>> [accessed 11 May 2025]; Eric P. Kaufman and Andrea Ballatore, 'New York Yankees and Hollywood Anglos: the persistence of anglo-conformity in the American motion picture industry', *Nations and Nationalism*, 25/4 (2019), pp. 1–9, 34–35 <<http://bit.ly/4loNM0y>> [accessed 11 May 2025].

⁹ Agata Frymus, 'The almost perfect Anglo-Saxon type, more English than the English': Vilma Bánky's star image in 1920s America', *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 15/4 (2017), pp. 425–41 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/17460654.2017.1383928>> [accessed 24 September 2024]; Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, pp. 147–49; Dyer, *Stars*, pp. 13, 109, 112.

¹⁰ Margaret Hunter, 'The Persistent Problem of Colorism: Skin Tone, Status, and Inequality', *Sociology Compass*, 1/1 (2007), pp. 237–54 <<http://bit.ly/3la7HCD>> [accessed 25 September 2024]; Nayeli Y. Chavez-Dueñas and others, 'Skin-Color Prejudice and Within-Group Racial Discrimination: Historical and Current Impact on Latino/a Populations', *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 36/1 (2014), pp. 3–26 <<http://bit.ly/3Tle9co>> [accessed 25 September 2024].

In a manner not unlike Mezz Mezzrow, the middle-class Jewish jazz musician who chose to deliberately ‘cross the line’ and become, in his own estimation, black, my father tried for decades to become ‘gitano’.¹¹ He dyed his blonde hair, beard, and eyebrows black, learned to speak fluent Spanish and spent vast hours in the Southern California sun acquiring a perma-tan, in his attempts to be seen as an Andalucian flamenco gypsy while my Mexican mother claimed either Russian, Italian or French heritage to be accepted into white society and find work as an actress in Hollywood, a strategy that wasn’t particularly successful. She was always relegated to the role of either a Mexican chola, maid or ‘spooky’ psychic. Despite the failure of their strategies, these daily familial narratives of passing seemed to indicate that identity was no more than a fluid construct, a complete fiction to be re-written as the occasion demanded but, although there is veracity in that perception, the legacy of a life-long application of that concept is a vague sense of ‘wrongness’ and personal confusion concerning who you really are. Ironically, both sides of the racial class equation in my family used the concept of a fluid identity for different purposes: my father, from a positionality of privilege, attempted to pass as a visually convincing flamenco ‘gypsy’ while my mother, from a position of undesirable ‘other’, attempted to pass as a member of the ‘white’ races.

In my efforts to be and express the ‘real thing’ through my art, I followed a similar path to acquire ‘authenticity’ because, although white middle-class life offered relative safety from the harsher aspects of existence, it seemed a vanilla choice. At 14, I began language ‘slumming’.¹² To be convincing in the burgeoning blues influenced world of ‘white’ rock music, hard rock, heavy metal and progressive, I subsumed the ghetto speak of the time to have ‘street cred’. Yet, as the jazz musician Sidney Bechet wrote in reference to Mezzrow, in his autobiography *Treat It Gentle*, “When a man is trying so hard to be something he isn’t, when he’s trying to be a name he makes up for himself instead of just being what he is, some of that will show in his music, the idea of it will be wrong.”¹³

The strategic alliances with ‘whiteness’ many individuals with both white and darker-skinned racial heritage, who look like their white parent, put into practice — from claiming a superior Spanish, thus European heritage through to passing, remains a subject of much controversy within the US Latinx community.¹⁴ Are they ideologists attempting to subvert notions of colour and race, pragmatists using any available means to leverage a better life, or just sell-outs to the altar of capitalistic aspiration?

The price of accepting the poisoned apple of passing is usually an individual’s loss of community and sense of self. To be considered ‘white’ and remain in that society requires an act of subterfuge, never admitting to your other heritage, which means you’re false in the world you’ve chosen. Your other community knows what you’ve done and feels betrayed by your ability and willingness to sidestep the struggles and lost opportunities that are a legacy of their skin colour and features. Individuals who pass seem condemned to be perpetual outsiders.¹⁵ Their struggles, joys and achievements are never truly echoed by a community that understands or resonates with them. To quote Gayle Wald, ‘the impossibility of passing for the great majority of racially despised and degraded people

¹¹ Wald, *Crossing the Line*, pp. 53–81.

¹² Peter Hitchcock, ‘Slumming’, in *Passing*, pp. 160–86.

¹³ Sidney Bechet, *Treat It Gentle*, (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1960), pp. 168–69.

¹⁴ Roosbelinda Cárdenas, ‘To My Fellow White Latinx: It’s Time to Decline the “Get Out of Whiteness Card” (OPINION)’, *Latino Rebels*, 5 October 2020 <<http://bit.ly/41x0pzy>> [accessed 20 May 2023].

¹⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, ‘Making and Unmaking of Strangers’, *Thesis Eleven: Critical Theory and Historical Sociology*, 43 (1995), pp. 1–16.

means that crossing the line remains a private and individualised practice'.¹⁶ Passing always leaves a bitter taste.

Hiding in plain sight and passing can also facilitate unexpected shameful behaviours and attitudes when an individual practicing these strategies loses connection with their hidden racial truth. After decades of hearing casually prejudiced comments during white social gatherings, the realisation that I too was developing a distrust of Mexican Americans and thought of them as 'less than' was truly upsetting. Like John Edgar Wideman describes in his autobiographical book *Brothers and Keepers*, I became, 'expert at going with the flow, protecting myself by taking on the emotional or intellectual colouring of whatever circumstance I found myself in. I had no feelings apart from the series of roles and masquerades I found myself playing.'¹⁷

As much as he loved her, my father also used his wife, my mother, to confirm his superior class and intellectual ability. He was, to some degree, 'slumming' when he courted her. She lived with her older brother and mother in one of the more deprived tenements in San Diego and never allowed him to meet her there because she was ashamed of their circumstances. Unfortunately, his attitude of privilege became my own over time, a belief that I was owed a certain deference because of my white upper middle-class positionality. These cultural intersections concerning ethnicity, gentility (or lack of), education, financial status and intelligence operate as boundaries, markers of 'white' distinction that, as Maria Sanchez writes, '[...] perpetuate social and economic dominance [...]', a legacy of Spanish and US colonization in the New World.¹⁸

The white sense of privilege my father wielded, as barrier and weapon, proved destructive for him as well. While married, he never cooked, cleaned or engaged much with his children, he simply disappeared into his commandeered art studio (always the best room in whatever home we lived in). This behaviour eventually created tremendous resentment and was a contributory factor in my parents' divorce. He lost his family because of an exaggerated belief in his right to act out as the double-edged sword of white colonialism damages all with its poison.

Unable to sustain relationships with women from his social class after my mother divorced him (white, upper middle class, and university educated) and threatened by what he perceived as their commonality, a strident, overbearing personality, he chose to become exclusively involved with 'othered' women he felt 'superior' to (Native American, African American, Salvadoran).¹⁹ This eventually led to a second disastrous marriage, imprisonment for spousal abuse and his eventual death by manslaughter, colonialist inspired attitudes and behaviour the common ingredient in this self-determined catastrophic narrative.

The transference of colonial attitude within the paternal familial line did not end with my father. As previously mentioned, I have also spent most of my life operating from a

¹⁶ Wald, *Crossing the Line*, p. 80.

¹⁷ Wideman, *Brothers and Keepers*, p. 33.

¹⁸ Sánchez, *Passing*, p. 65.

¹⁹ Suzanne M. Spencer-Wood, 'Feminist Theorizing of Patriarchal Colonialism, Power Dynamics, and Social Agency Materialized in Colonial Institutions', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 20/3 (2016), pp. 477–91 <<http://bit.ly/4ev35mB>> [accessed 23 September 2024]; Natália Maria Félix de Souza and Lara Martim Rodrigues Selis, 'Gender Violence, Colonialism, and Coloniality', *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of International Studies*, 22 February 2023 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.729>> [accessed 23 September 2024].

positionality of white privilege. The insidiousness of its cultural penetration is almost impossible to avoid, and like my father, I remained unaware of the damage it was wreaking in my life and of the ‘relentless reciprocity [that] binds the colonizer to the colonized — his product and his fate’ (Jean–Paul Sartre).²⁰

I began this research focused on how Chicana from the barrios of LA used flamenco to escape and create a better existence and identity for themselves. I then realised that all the individuals I planned to write about were children of completely Latin heritage, the Chicana flamencos all looked Latin and had relatively dark skin. Although they were raised in LA Mexican American communities, many were LGBTQ+, which meant they couldn’t openly be themselves in their barrios. Theirs is not the same existential pain the white Latinx children of immigrant’s experience because of passing. The Chicana flamencos knew they were Latinx; they just nudged it towards the Spanish part of their heritage. They have loss as well but it’s different. They never denied a Mexican heritage, just presented themselves in a way that allowed for a ‘misinterpretation’ that favoured their work and social opportunities in Hollywood. It was their passing that disguised what, at the time, was considered an unacceptable sexual preference — unacceptable to the US government, WASP society, and the Roman Catholic beliefs of the Mexican American barrio communities they grew up in — but as far as race was concerned, they were just ‘fooling their white folks’ by hiding in plain sight.²¹

Constructing and inhabiting a seemingly authentic, inauthentic persona does not produce genuine identity, it creates performance, one that invariably leaves behind or denies aspects of a former ‘unacceptable’ self whose forsaken, abandoned fragments of character, interests, and behaviours often contain what a now fractured self needs to be truly whole. Hiding in plain sight and passing may open certain doors but the ones that must be bolted often conceal what really matters.²²

According to Kathleen Marie Higgins, music can be used for establishing and creating identity and for memory retrieval because music addresses and provides satisfaction to the various components that make up a person, it provokes a harmonious integration of the entire multi-faceted human being, which is why it’s so powerful as a statement of identity.²³ Although true, it is only a part of the whole picture. Music can also become a hiding place for individuals who feel traumatised. In other words, not necessarily a space for building community, establishing a sense of identity, and pushing back against

²⁰ Jean–Paul Sartre, from his introduction in Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. by Howard Greenfield, (London, UK: Earthscan Publications: 2003 [1965]), p. 24 <<http://bit.ly/44sqUqn>> [accessed 7 May 2025]; Andrea L. Smith, ‘Colonialism and the Poisoning of Europe: Towards an Anthropology of Colonists’, *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 50/4 (1994), pp. 383–393 <<http://bit.ly/3G4tET2>> [accessed 24 September 2024].

²¹ Langsten Hughes, “Why Not Fool Our White Folks?”, *Chicago Defender*, 4 January 1958, in Wald’s, *Crossing the Line*, p. 1–266 (10)

²² Rosita Albert and others, ‘Strengthening, Hiding or Relinquishing Ethnic Identity in Response to Threat: Implications for Intercultural Relations’, *Intercultural Communications Studies*, 14/1 (2005), pp. 107–15 <<http://bit.ly/4mAPVHI>> [accessed 24 September 2024]; Eastman, ‘Passing in plain sight’, pp. 136–44 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/11771801221147061>> [accessed 24 September 2024]; Shirley A. Newcomb, ‘The Impact of Racial Miscategorization and Racial Ambiguity on The Impact of Racial Miscategorization and Racial Ambiguity on Multiracial Identity and Well-Being: A Qualitative Study’, (published PhD dissertation, Marquette University, 2017) <https://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu/737> [accessed 24 September 2024]; Henry A. Willis and others, ‘The Associations Between Internalized Racism, Racial Identity, and Psychological Distress’, *Emerging Adulthood*, 9/4 (2021), pp. 384–400 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/216769682110055>> [accessed 24 September 2024].

²³ Higgins, *The Music of Our Lives*, pp.117–18.

prejudicial attitudes, but rather a hermetic space used to establish a sense of personal safety.²⁴ A space that allows for illusory personas to be developed and used as protection from potentially dangerous others, and oneself. A use of music that may eventually provide positive results but may also hold these individuals in a kind of relatively benign stasis, unable to grow further than the fantasy world they have created. A borderland whose liminal threshold allows for a restricted movement out from within but presents formidable barriers to entry. A place I am familiar with.

As an artist who deals with personal trauma through their creative practice, I have found that trauma in some form often connects all the areas I am using as contextual background for the theoretical critique of my creative practice. Trauma, in my experience, is a driving force behind the unreasonable behaviour, depression, fetishes, addictions, and fame seeking that many musicians, composers, producers, and performers act out.²⁵ Music as interpretation and expression of internal pain or used as a palliative rather than positive expression of individual or communal identity, although it could be argued these are forms of positive action.

How have, and do, all these different perspectives and realities affect my creative practice? Where do I fit in the spectrum I've described? Until now, I had not spent much time consciously interrogating my reality as a white-skinned product of a mixed-race marriage. Passing was thrust upon me at such a young age I never questioned what it might entail or eventually cost. It was not a choice I made or considered, just a fact of life that seemed more like embracing what I visibly looked like than a renunciation of what I didn't appear to be. By the time I was old enough to evaluate what passing might mean in terms of a whole integrated self, the strategy was so ingrained I never considered doing so. I had hidden an aspect of myself I didn't know mattered. I am not alone in this situation; there are a multitude of 'white' Mexican Americans dealing with these problems as they grow older.²⁶

Music became a solution that addressed two major issues in my early life: the profound lack of boundaries in my family and my uneasy relationship with identity. Through song writing, I established a unique artistic presence within a family of already successful, extremely competitive artists. Composing, an expansion of a language I was already familiar with, gave me the ability to musically imagine myself in a utopian world that proffered more fulfilment than the one I seemed to occupy in the present. I can become metaphorically lost within creative practice, (re)imagining my identity continuously through a lens focused on a magical futurity which often seems more 'real' and rewarding than any current reality — a personalised version of 'sympathetic magic' that, through music and the imagining of performative personas, helped me construct a more interesting identity than I

²⁴ Keith Negus and Patria Román Velázquez, 'Belonging and detachment: musical experience and the limits of identity', *Poetics*, 30 (2002), pp. 133–45 <<http://bit.ly/4mFm3Ki>> [accessed 4 June 2025].

²⁵ André Douglas Pond Cummings and Caleb Gregory Conrad, 'From "Mind Playing Tricks On Me" to "Trauma": Adverse Childhood Experiences and Hip Hop's Prescription', *Washburn Law Journal (Bowen Law Repository)*, 59/2 (2020), pp. 267–69, 279–85 <<http://bit.ly/4IUHGWD>> [accessed 25 April 2025]; James William Teachenor II, 'A Phenomenological Study of Trauma, Creativity, Resilience, and Artistic Inspiration', (published PhD dissertation, Liberty University, 2022), pp. 3, 13–17 <<http://bit.ly/3TYuMdT>> [accessed 25 April 2025].

²⁶ Gabrielle Rivas, 'Struggling With My Identity As A White Passing Latina', *The Know Youth Media*, 12 June 2018 <<http://bit.ly/4lhziV9>> [accessed 4 June 2025]; Kevin R. Johnson, "'Melting Pot" or "Ring of Fire"?: Assimilation and the Mexican-American Experience', *California Law Review*, 85 5 (1997), pp. 1259–1313 <<http://bit.ly/3GqAlyH>> [accessed 4 June 2025].

thought I had. A mimetic process practiced within the fantastical space of artistic creativity.²⁷

I began forming bands during my teens, a practice that allowed me to establish new families based on mutual goals and skill sets. Besides learning how to arrange instruments and voices (every new composition building a bridge I was convinced would take me to my envisioned 'home', a mythic place of love and acceptance), I gained the skills needed to be an effective leader (father figure?), one that could inspire his 'family' and maintain hope during the struggle for a communal dream — not too dissimilar to the function of the 'Houses' Karen McCarthy Brown describes, formed by gay people of colour in Greater Newark as an inclusive simulacrum of conventional familial communities. They are both ways of inculcating and reconfiguring aspects of dominant social discourse through imitation.²⁸

My creative practice is also the only space I have found for expressing a Mexican American identity in a manner satisfying to me. The theories I read about identity, racial authenticity, colonisation, and 'othering', are intellectually stimulating but do not offer a means to access the emotional connection I desire. Only through the energetic language of music, with its ability to assimilate and recombine disparate elements as a (re)imagined whole, am I able to embody this important aspect of my identity. An identity also imprinted, from the moment of my baptism, with the religious belief system and sexual strictures of the Roman Catholic church,²⁹ a bequest of my Mexican mother who, like many Mexicans, practiced a hybrid form that combined earlier indigenous understandings and ritual as well.³⁰

In practical terms, it meant I have been able to express the contradictory, conflicted aspects of my Catholicized sexual self through appearance and physical performance on stage as well as the everyday sphere of my life. Throughout adulthood, I have relied on theory to help me intellectually de-construct a complicated relationship with sexuality, but only through creative practice have I been able to embody and perform my struggle with these difficult questions in a positive manner that provides an escape valve for the pressures those ambiguities build in me.

Music continues to facilitate two main purposes in my life. It provides a safe place to 'hide', a place where work towards achieving technical excellence (as guitarist, vocalist, arranger, recording engineer, mixer, or mastering specialist) blocks whatever intermittent confusions and self-doubts threaten to overwhelm me. On the other hand, it is also a space that allows for hope, dreams, and imaginings that could become realities. A place where I can renew myself when I intuitively realise the person I am publicly performing has outlived their usefulness, a place where I re-invent identity on my own terms.

Sometimes the music in my head, a combination of rhythm, melody, and indeterminate ambience, stimulates visual phenomena that presages the revealing of a new identity; I suddenly 'see' my new persona including their (my) new name, and 'hear' the music they

²⁷ Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*, (New York: Routledge Press, 1993), pp. xiii–xiv.

²⁸ Karen McCarthy Brown, 'Mimesis in the Face of Fear, Femme Queens, Butch Queens, and Gender Play in the Houses of Greater Newark', in *Passing*, p. 210.

²⁹ Patrick R. O'Malley, "The Churches Closet", in *Passing*, pp. 228–59.

³⁰ Jessica Frankovich, 'Mexican Catholicism: Conquest, Faith, and Resistance', *Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World: Junior Year Abroad Network Blog*, Georgetown University, 22 March 2019 <<http://bit.ly/4ezBpNt>> [accessed 27 May 2023]; Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican/American*, p. 167.

(I) will soon be creating. In pointing the way and, at the same time, responding to the new direction revealed (an 'in vivo' poetic conversation), my music also becomes what it wasn't yet. Dependent on an interpenetrative crossing of internal borders that results in external change, this evolutionary process plays an integral part in a never conclusive experimental shapeshifting, my postmodernist approach to the construction of a palimpsest identity as described by Zygmunt Bauman.³¹

Music, as conceptualised and described by Adorno, 'thinks': and thinks beyond the capacity of philosophy, 'music says We directly, regardless of its intentions' and 'the force with which the private I is externalised in the work is the I's collective essence', perhaps the essence that drives us to think conceptually.³² Through the universality and visceral qualities of its sound-based language, music allows practitioner and listener, to go much further in addressing unresolved issues, difficult emotions, and trauma. As stated in *Sounding Conflict*, 'Sound, in its immaterial materiality, is ever at the centre of communication, of relationship, and of the potential for both conflict and transformation'.³³

Could there be a foundational unifying driver behind most of the troubling issues I have been researching? I have come to believe a unifying factor might be fear of the unknown, humanities fundamental terror concerning potentially catastrophic outcomes and meanings that we don't know.³⁴ In response, many of us rage (internally and/or externally) against an existence that seems filled with difficulty, cruelty, and uncertainty — an existence that seems to demand a complete disavowal of vulnerability; an inauthentic condition of disconnection capable of creating a kind of metaphorical blindness to the acts of kindness there are in life.

What can music offer in response?

Whilst engaged in this conversation focused on the negative intersections fostered by colonialist practice, prejudice, patriarchal attitudes and capitalism during the mid-twentieth century, my creative practice kept exposing uncomfortable facets of my emotional, spiritual, and relational being that, until now, had remained relatively unexplored, or ignored. My father, for all his failings, was quite philosophically informed. As active listening unmasked elements of the prejudiced, patriarchal, untrustworthy and aggressively competitive person I am capable of being, I recalled paternal words of advice given when I was boy, "Never think you're not capable of the worst, things happen. The choices and actions we make are mainly dependent on the situation we find ourselves in." He certainly made liberal use of the apologia embedded in those phrases.

Having introjected my father's pessimistic Schopenhauerian view of humanity at an early age, it is second nature for me to make meaning through its cynical, despairing filter,³⁵ but that is not the only positionality available, there is something else my music evidences: the

³¹ Bauman, 'Making and Unmaking of Strangers', p. 7.

³² Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 167, 177.

³³ Magowan, *Sounding Conflict*, p. 1.

³⁴ R. Nicholas Carleton, 'Fear of the unknown: One fear to rule them all?', *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 41 (2016), p. 5, 11–14 <<http://bit.ly/4lb0hxF>> [accessed 12 April 2025]; Kacper Kwidzinski, 'The Fear of the Unknown', *DigitalCommons@COD*, 19 March 2023, pp. 1–9 <<http://bit.ly/4ezlfnp>> [accessed 12 April 2025].

³⁵ Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The Essays of Arthur Schopenhauer: Studies in Pessimism', trans. by Thomas Bailey Saunders for *The Project Gutenberg Ebook 10732*, 20 December 2020 [2004] <<http://bit.ly/44rxQUP>> [accessed 22 April 2025].

wonderfully diverse inclusivity of an intercultural approach to life.³⁶ The encompassing musical melting pot that is my compositional blend, not for commercial reasons but simply because, in my experience, all musical expressions of identity are capable of resonating with each other, points to positive possibilities that reach beyond the realm of art.

Can the artistic practice of crossing boundaries and mixing cultural identities be transferred to other contexts and leveraged when ‘us versus them’ dynamics polarize the conversation? How might ‘not knowing’ be utilized as a positive space for negotiation? Could it prove helpful for national policymaking, addressing the post-colonialist impasse, deconstructing hegemonic behaviours, unraveling the barbed wire of prejudice, the current LGBTQ+ rewind and whatever else prevents us from acceptance of others and ourselves. Without total disruption of the status quo (violent revolution?), equitable existence for all in the real world appears an almost impossible task to achieve. What if that goal was approached with ‘*the capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist*’, [...].³⁷ What if the conversation for positive change began from a place of ‘not knowing’, a perspective that allows for the unknown to emerge: perhaps a way forward to a tangibly different future. A better future we ‘don’t know’ yet.³⁸

My artistic work, ultimately an affirmation of inclusion, offers an example of how difficult attitudes and thoughts about the ‘other’ might be surmounted. The less than charitable aspects of character (the wounded, mean-spirited facets of my disavowed ‘other’ self) were unable to prevent the accepting interculturality my creative practice exhibits, the seemingly impassable boundaries erected by an entrenched sense of privilege circumvented by musical expressions that acknowledge no borders. Many decades of experience have shown me that fighting against unwanted characteristics is a fool’s game, so instead, I am now making peace with what I cannot deny. This practice-led research has made previously hidden angers, hurts and privileged attitudes visible; they no longer act as subconscious motivators colouring my thoughts and actions.

I now believe a final narrative I chose not to include in Chapter One, may be relevant. An older Mexican friend of my mother became a successful prostitute at twelve. Recruited by a madam who ran a ‘home’ in the better part of Mexico City, she was advised to hide in plain sight and pass as a maid to her family and friends. She concealed this new reality ‘successfully’, the money she brought home assuring the positive collusion of all who guessed (almost everyone).

Much later in life, she confided to my mother that on reflection, it wasn’t worth it. She realised she had traded the possibility of real affection, love and friendship for money; a reward she now felt was meaningless. Although it seemed a practical way out at the time, it had never given her emotional sustenance or a sense of pride. Instead, she had lived

³⁶ Lucas Lixinski, ‘Cultural Heritage and interculturality: a call to action’, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 29/12 (2023), pp. 1361–73 <<http://bit.ly/4nwd52X>> [accessed 22 April 2025]; Gunther Dietz, ‘Interculturality’, in Hillary Callan ed., *The International Encyclopaedia of Anthropology*, (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), pp. 1–17 <<http://bit.ly/4IBiN1Y>> [accessed 22 April 2025]; Amanuel Elias and Fethi Mansouri, ‘Towards a critical transformative approach to inclusive intercultural education’, *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 18/1 (2023), pp. 8–9 <<http://bit.ly/44rjt2P>> [accessed 22 April 2025].

³⁷ Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, p. ix.

³⁸ Ben Anderson Nathe, ‘Not-Knowing Gives Way to Knowing’, *Child & Youth Services*, 30 1-2 (2008), pp. 120–22

<<http://bit.ly/45Que19>> [accessed 22 April 2025]; Nico Stehr, ‘Knowing and Not Knowing’ in P. Muesberger and others eds., *Knowledge and Action. Knowledge and Space 9*, (Springer.com, 2017), pp. 1–299 (113–26) <<http://bit.ly/3GnTDVv>> [accessed 22 April 2025].

her life as a cypher, a ghost that did not exist, a falsehood. Her life had been a tall tale, poverty and racism created the conditions; she paid the price.

Writing this theoretical critique concerning a particular effect of 'white colonisation', is a reality that has left me feeling proud but also doubly colonised. From hiding my racial heritage since childhood to writing about the effects of doing that as an adult using a colonisers language, funding, and higher education environment has been quite a breath-taking experience.

What if this research, in opposition to the negative thoughts I expressed earlier concerning the conflicting heritages my DNA revealed, opens a space for those opposing familial racial identities to link arms and establish positive community. A re-imagined alliance of the potentially dissonant aspects of self that, rather than continuing the existing state of confusion, posits an internal landscape inhabited by the multiplicity of identities particular to my journey, joyfully interacting and expressing themselves through my creative practice

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