

# Writing and Flamenco: Phenomenological Investigations

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**T**his article asks how the art of music may contribute to the understanding of writing as a phenomenological act. More specifically, I will introduce parts of the vocabulary, theory, and practice of *flamenco* to investigate the musicality and notably rhythmic qualities of the handwritten, personal signature. The aim is to demonstrate how the introduction of flamenco *per se* to the qualitative field of writing studies may open a way of thinking of writing as an expressed as well as expressive musical practice. Besides analyzing in detail the flamenco traits of the personal signature the article also scrutinizes the signature-as-music through the phenomenological philosophies of Merleau-Ponty and Derrida. Ultimately the article demonstrates how writing can itself be theorized off the beaten track, following the untraditional clue of guitar play in the flamenco tradition. The portrait that the article paints of writing is thus itself to be considered off the beaten track qua unconventional, unorthodox and, perhaps for some, controversial.

*Keywords:* Writing, phenomenology, signature, flamenco, rhythm, tonality

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## Introduction

Building from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's claim that language and music as equally creative forms of expression evolve around notions, or practices, of "style", "gesture", and "flesh", this article asks how the art of music may contribute to the understanding of writing as a phenomenological act. More specifically, I will introduce parts of the vocabulary, theory, and practice of *flamenco*, the kind of (guitar) music commonly associated with the Roma (*Gitanos*) of Andalusia, southern Spain (Biddle et al., 2007), as a lens through which the amalgamation of continuity and eruption in writing as an embodied form can be comprehended. However, rather than using the 'language' of flamenco as merely a metaphor for the pre-reflexive production of meaning in writing as such, I will exploit specific skills and features of flamenco in a much more direct and bodily fashion and this way critically discuss how certain combinations of motor actions (fingers and hands) and operative knowledge (mastery of *palos*, genres and modes, scales,

cadences, etc.) resonate in writing as a praxis-form. Central to this claim, i.e., that the rhythmic and sonic faculties of flamenco might shed light on vital aspects of writing's phenomenology, is the kind of interaction that constantly transpires in flamenco music, namely that between eruption and continuity, which is to say *bursts* vis-à-vis more *fluent* play. I believe this to be a guiding principle of not only flamenco, but also writing; the necessity of bursts or emissions on top of a calm and smooth permanency, so to say. In flamenco we see this in scales (runs or *picada*); in harmonic progression (e.g., the diatonic Phrygian tetrachord); in the intermingling of *arpeggios* and *ligados* (broken, sequential chords vs. hammer-ons and pull-offs); and in the punctuated accents of *rasgueado* (strumming), *apoyando* (rest stroke), and other modes and practices of fret work. Using the author's handwritten, personal signature and identifiable elements of it such as puncture, pause, descend, and syncope as a recurrent case, the aim is to show how the introduction of flamenco *per se* (and not just 'flamencoisation', *aflamencamiento*) to the qualitative field of writing studies paves the way for a thinking of writing as an embodied, expressed as well as expressive, rhythmic and musical practice. Finally, such enquiry into the lived and experiential mode of writing, rather than borrowing themes and metaphors from e.g., music and then writing *about* writing, hopefully help steer understandings of the nature of writing, as an instantiation of language proper, away from abstract conceptualization and much closer to the energetic *duende* – style, gesture, and flesh – of flamenco's inimitable phenotype.

The reader may ask: why flamenco? And how does a rhythmanalysis of the personal signature specifically inform academic writing off the beaten track? Jazz improvisation with its three basic modes, melodic, harmonic, and motivic, would have been a noteworthy reservoir in which to situate and experiment with the sonorous and rhythmic facets of the written signature. I reckon the same would apply to improvisational Indian music with its usage of micro and quarter tones, the twang of a principal tone (the *vadi*) of the *raga*, and most certainly the drone-like, ephemeral, and 'wooded' timbre that prevails there. However, I stick to flamenco for three reasons: 1) It is the musical form that I know best, performatively (being an avid musician myself) and theoretically. 2) Because flamenco, to my knowledge, is a breed of music that in a profound manner builds self-expression into its language, notably the *burst*, but also, as we shall see later on, the *ligados*, the *picada*, etc. 3) And, finally, there is an articulacy, a poignancy and

soulfulness that reverberate in flamenco and is part and parcel of its ethnicity – even politics – and the way in which it phenomenologically ‘lives’ and delivers its message.<sup>1</sup> Resent calls for multiplicity in academic writing, such as ‘writing differently’ (Gilmore, Harding, Helin & Pullen, 2019) or ‘post-academic writing’ (Badley, 2021; 2020; 2019), clearly benefit from a musical vocabulary, as they push and expand the field of qualitative research on writing’s performativity and affects. However, in order to come into contact with a practice in which music (flamenco) allows for writing the lived experience, rather than just writing about it (Meier & Wegener, 2017), I calculatingly assume a position stubbornly squared off from ‘metaphorical’ understandings of music (Antovic, 2015).<sup>2</sup> That is to say, rather than situating my research and the case study that I propose in music *as* language (which obviously premeditates music as a figurative instrument to unlock ‘diegetic’ or expressive elements in verbal language), I insist on treating writing, specifically the handwritten signature, *as* music. It sounds almost like a recipe of a philosophical tipping point where the axiom ‘writing *is* music’ perilously upsets the relation between epistemology, that which we know and can articulate about music-writing, and ontology, i.e., music-writing’s being. My axiomatic bogus, then, is to spuriously jump from ‘my personal, handwritten signature almost feels as if it were music’ to ‘it is indeed music’. It is from this locus of tiptoeing away from attempts at a metaphorization of writing’s relocated musical relevance, from within this tensioned nook of music-writing’s knowing and being, that the following phenomenological (some would say deadpan) flamenco examination of the handwritten, personal signature takes off. Ultimately, the article demonstrates how writing can itself be theorized off the beaten track, following the untraditional clue of guitar play in the flamenco tradition. The portrait that the article paints of writing is thus itself to be considered off the beaten track *qua* unconventional, unorthodox and, perhaps for some, controversial.

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<sup>1</sup> Contrary to classical and jazz theory flamenco is first and foremost a hereditary and generational knowledge, which only affirms its lived and epistemic inner core. Instead of etudes and exercises, it has *falsetas* or variations of *palo*; instead of the cadential chord progression ii-V-I in jazz, the succession of chords whose roots descend in fifths from the second (supertonic) to the fifth degree (dominant), and finally to the tonic, the archetypical schematic of flamenco is (variations of) the Andalusian cadence.

<sup>2</sup> It thus seems very consensual that music has a hierarchically connected structure of smaller elements linked together in various higher and lower order configurations enabling the extraction of musical meaning as it unfolds over time. Moreover, that such a meaning can result from conceptual assignments that can be (and are expressed in) cross-domain: we hear music *as* something (Schaerlaeken et al., 2022).

The article consists of three sections. The first half of the first section briefly tells the story of the evolution of flamenco as an artform. The second part of the first section introduces the personal signature – my own – and subsequently breaks it down into its pulse, time, tempo, and rhythmical pattern. What follows is an analysis of the *soleá*, a distinct *palo* form or genre, as the base schematics of the signature and its ‘felt’ – or, in our case, annotated – rhythm and the sonic-motoric virtues it carries with it. The analysis also alludes to the tradition of classical music and compares the *soleá* to the sectional sonata form with its five stages including rhythmic shaping that can be explained by the terms of the phases *arsis*, *thesis*, and *stasis*. Section two scrutinizes the idea of writing, or more specifically the handwritten signature, as a nominal factor of how the bodily *gesture* arises at the most rudimentary level of biological behavior and yet still transmits meaning. Finally, section three discusses the phenomenology of writing from the viewpoint of musical interpretation vis-à-vis Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of the ‘flesh’ and Derrida’s deconstructivist vocabulary of the signature as *aporia*. The article concludes with a brief summary of key findings along with a self-critique of potential biases and flawed methodology. And before we begin: things are about to get geeky!

## **I: The flamencoisation of the personal signature**

### *1.1. The evolution of flamenco as an artform*

The early days of *flamencology* argued that flamenco derived from an ancient and secluded tradition which the Gypsies brought with them when they migrated from India six or more centuries ago (Manuel, 2002, p. 13). It now seems clear, however, that flamenco gradually emerged in the late eighteenth century, notably from a diverse and eclectic body of Andalusian music. This very region has a long both rich and distressed history of syncretizing various legacies of different ethnic groups. Arabs, Berbers, Jews, Christians, and Gypsies coexisted for centuries under the Moorish rule, and with the financial and cultural rise of important port towns such as Seville and Cádiz the vast populations and communities of especially black African and Latin American influences founded a strong presence in the local musical culture (Leblon, 2003).

Historically, ‘flamenco’ is rooted in the Andalusian folksong style with reminiscences of Afro-Latin rhythms and the expressiveness and flamboyance of Italian

opera. However, flamenco evolved mainly as a product of a Gypsy-centered subculture comprised not only of Roma *gitanos* but also of bohemians, travelers, and *payo* (non-Gypsy) performers often referred to in the Flamenco catalogue as *senoritos*, ‘playboys’. From the 1830s and onwards flamenco developed two distinct song-types, one being the selections of *fandango*, the other inspired by local vernaculars labeled even today *cante jondo* (‘deep song’), as incarnated by the late Camarón de la Isla (Mitchell, 1994). From this point in history flamenco segregated into the amateurism of private party music and sing (and clap) alongs and entertainment presented by professional musicians (Gamboa, 2004). However, even in the professional realm of flamenco, almost no one were able to read (sheet) music and were thus extremely reliant on *maestro* learning<sup>3</sup> and knowledge carried down through generations.

Before the first half of the nineteenth century flamenco was not performed using a guitar but was instead monophonic in character accompanied only by hand clapping (*palmas*) or striking the knuckles (or feet!) on a table. However, earlier styles of the guitar, in accompanying folk songs and dances, and counting the fandango variants of the ‘aristocratic’ (classical) repertoire, already existed in rudimentary form. These would include the four-finger and very fast version of strumming known as *rasgueado*, arpeggiated passages derived from the lute and the harp, and *falsetas* (stylized ‘solos’) performed between sung passages.

According to Manuel (2002), the landmark figure in the refinement of the modern flamenco guitar style was Ramón Montoya (1880-1949) who was also one of the first professional artists to perform on recordings. Montoya supplemented the generational wisdom of *Gitanos flamenco* with features from classical music, most notably the style and methods of Francisco Tárrega and Miguel Llobet. Among other, Montoya

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<sup>3</sup> A personal, anthropological note: I once took a month long class at an advanced school of flamenco in Seville, Spain. There the usage of ‘maestro’ turned out to be extremely hierarchical and specialised – and local, at the same time. The school in Seville would thus refer to its own breed of *maestra* (specified in the art of *ligado*; the techniques of *picado*, and so on) who in turn referred to the town’s chief *maestro*. He would then refer to established, Spanish ‘demi-god’ *maestra* (Vicente Amigo, El Tomatito, Antonio Rey, et al., again divided into branches of *Gitanos* and *payo* players), all of whom would collectively refer to the true ‘God’ of flamenco, Paco de Lucia. Furthermore, there was a strong sense of history and the exact line of genealogy in any reference to those who would master the technique that the students struggled with: As for the *ligado*, my *maestro* would mention first Rey (the “young one”), then Vicente (“the commercial, pretty guy”), then Tomatito (the “true Gitano”), then Paco (God Himself), and perhaps even Sabicas or Montoya. I guess this was a way of saying that not only was this technique goddamn hard; it also carried the whole weight of proud history.

transformed modern flamenco by pioneering intricate arpeggios, wide-ranging and very fast *picada*, or single-note runs, the four-fingered *tremolo* known from Tárrega's "Recuerdos de la Alhambra" (1899), a varied repertoire of *cantes* in alternate tunings, and much more. Finally, flamenco became truly *flamenco nuevo* around 1970<sup>4</sup> (Steingress, 2005) with the appearance of Paco de Lucia (1947-2014), a *payo* from Algeciras, South Spain, who besides having an unsurpassed technical brilliance applied complex harmonization to the genre (from his ventures into jazz and world music in the seventies and eighties), extremely difficult left-hand slides, bent and 'mute' notes, right-hand complimentary (off-scale) chords, known from jazz, and much, much more (Pérez, 2005).<sup>5</sup>

Although the jump from Montoya's and Paco's *flamenco moderno* to the handwritten, personal signature may seem preposterous and farcical at first glance, I hope to show in the following that there's indeed deep flamenco, even *duende*, in writing and in the signature.

### *1.2. The personal signature: musical analysis*

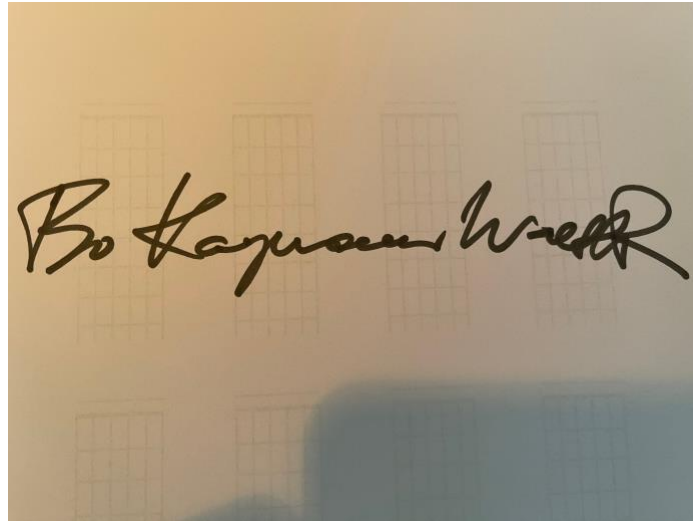
The personal signature is extensively grappled with in graphology and forensic analysis, as well as in contemporary digital cryptography. According to Michaela Fiserova (2018), in a reading of Derrida's *Margins of Philosophy* (1982), the personal, handwritten signature counts as an intimate signifier of three metaphysical traits: (i) the natural, or naturalized, iconography of the author's name (in our case, "Bo Kampmann Walther"); (ii) the materialized proof of physical contact between a signed document and the writing instrument (or 'vehicle') held by the author's hand; and (iii) the capability of the signature to count as an eternal and perpetual manual reproduction. The latter trait, the personal logo or convention, is exactly what is taken to be a guarantee of the author's legal identity – I am who I am because of my unique signature. There's a certain mode of conventional or even parochial realism in the actualization of the personal signature due to its sign

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<sup>4</sup> The new attitudes toward flamenco inscribed in the *Nuevo* movement further coincided with the advent of a new power structure in Spain where democracy replaced the dictatorship of General Franco (Banzi, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Also, Paco de Lucia forged a manner of positioning the guitar that was very controversial to begin with, but has since been embraced by traditional and neo-flamenco guitarists alike. The positioning, resting the guitar almost horizontally on the left crossed leg, allows for much more fluent and faster runs across the entirety of the board.

character and to the randomized nature which it opens to interpretation (semiosis) while still carrying meaning as a singular representation of the author's identity. I will return to Derrida's analysis in the third section of the article. In short: the personal signature is repeatable, retractable, and, most importantly, *replayable*.



*Fig. 1. The author's personal, handwritten signature*

Above, in Fig. 1, is a picture of my personal signature, *Bo Kampmann Walther*. Before we dive deeper into the inherently musical and especially rhythmical features of the handwritten signature, I wish to raise two axiomatic points: First, that music is most clearly an object that contains gestural meaning and signification. And second, that music is an objective sound and/or rhythmical stimulus that acts as the control object for experience.<sup>6</sup> What this means in proto-phenomenological terms is that prior to the subsequent analysis I blocked out instinctual reactions to the signature-as-stimulus and,

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<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that the control object, i.e., the objective sound, holds an ontological or logical primacy of our concrete, practice-based experience with an aesthetic phenomenon (Lewis, 2019). That would imply a reification of the musical phenomenon, which would in turn vaporize the vibrant intermediary space between the (phenomenologically speaking) *intentum* and *intentio* of music. Again, this is another way of insisting upon music's gestalt or holistic quality as perceived existence (which means that other facets or characteristics of experiencing music apart from 'music' alone may come into play); whereas the above, the musical object-stimulus, is necessary in order to enquire *analytically* into its both performed and perceived elements: from an experientially-objectified view, it is simply a (crude) method to sort out 'music' from that which is 'not music'. See also the paragraph on subjectivism in the Coda to this article. For a (historical) music philosophical take on what counts as music I would refer to Arnold Schoenberg's *Theory of Harmony* (2010; orig. 1911).

rather, responded to it by ‘listening’ to the stimulus as being indeed ‘music’. The type of music, the Spanish flamenco, that I believe resonates in the handwritten signature, and which I was eager to explore, is in itself, when compared to European, classical composition music, displaced, raw, off the beaten track. Furthermore, my analysis that followed is also, one could easily insist, ‘off’, as it purposefully obliterates the thin railing between a phenomenon that is ontologically what it is and a phenomenon that is epistemologically what it is perceived and felt as. And, finally, I took the liberty of writing about this ‘beaten’ language-as-music in a manner slightly, if not alarmingly, off the traditional academic vernacular. Thus, the signature-as-music upholds a fundamental discursive meaning, which is the object-meaning of music. Such an object can be understood as a carrier of symbolic signification, readying itself for musical and rhythmical analysis, *and* as a gestural force which may only be fathomed in a holistic fashion, i.e., as a gestalt. I shall come back to this notion of the music-object’s gestalt by alluding to Mark Johnson and his *The Body in the Mind*, in Section Two.

I also wish to flesh out my methodology for the musical analysis of the personal signature. The design involved the following six steps (which can be repeated for verification or possible falsification), see Fig. 2 below:

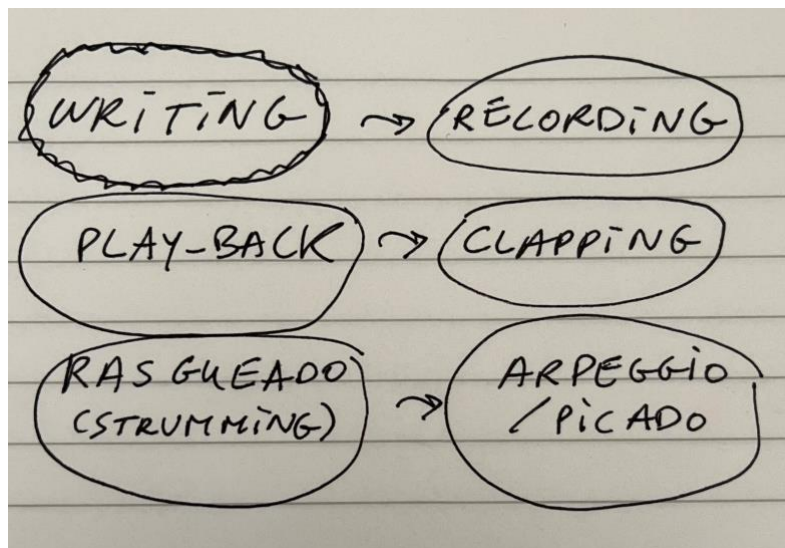


Fig. 2. Methodology steps in analyzing the personal signature as ‘flamenco’



1) First, I wrote my name using a black pen on a piece of paper (which I then took a photo of to include in the article). 2) Then I recorded the actual performance of me writing my own personal signature (using the video recorder in my iPhone with a mounter). 3) Next, I played back the recording and toyed with various pitches (shifts in tempo)<sup>7</sup> followed by 4) handclapping (*palmas*) along with the recording (which I also tried to ‘listen’ to). 5) Finally, I strummed on the guitar (a Hermanos Camps Concierto Blanca, for the nerds), using the method of *rasgueado* that in turn 6) slowly evolved into ‘duplicating’ the handwritten sequence, in the recording, by playing *arpeggios* and *picada*, to see if any of them ‘fitted’ into the pattern – which they did! More on that, and the technical details, in a little while.

Now, in order to accurately probe the handwritten signature as a musical phenomenon we need to establish a base: The signature must comprise a recognizable formal unit and consequently hold a selection and organization of rhythmic properties in sonorous motion. The signature signifies a musical object; it has an event or action character; it instantiates itself in both space (expressed through the medium of the pen and the paper) and time (due to the longitude of the sonorous direction).

Let us zero in on the music-object as a unit of the patterned stimulus known as rhythm.<sup>8</sup> Generally speaking rhythm refers to the patterned and temporal qualities surrounded by a cyclic flow of distinctive phases of accumulation. These phases of accumulation are bodily felt and primordial as they originate in our sensitivity to how we perceive and explore the world around us, as well as within us. They are related to pre-reflexive, kinaesthetic sensations of excitement, tension, arousal, effort, and fatigue; and they connect directly to the throb of our heartbeat and the pleasure-seeking and gratification of desires, as noted by Withrow in *The Natural Philosophy of Time* (1981).

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<sup>7</sup> Such experimentation allowed me to approximately convey the *metronome beat* (MB) of the recorded/played signature, that is, the number of beats per minute. However, because of the conceptual universality I insist on in reproducing the signature as a played, musical event, and because of the various slowing down and speeding up in the process, I’ve refrained from marking the exact MB.

<sup>8</sup> It would probably also be feasible to investigate the *sound* of the signature-stimulus, i.e., those vibratory motions which are caused by energy being imparted to an elastic material and transmitted as longitudinal wave motion. As stated above, I did record my handwriting and were thus able to detect a certain mass of tone, amplitude, frequency, and wave pressure. The sheer sound of my pen scratching the paper surface adds dimension of mass or size, such as pitch and loudness, and could be considered as part of the analysis (although I was not able to detect the specific pitch *class*; notably the ‘E-ness’ in the Flamenco tradition). However, notwithstanding all the interesting and promising features of a sonoric interpretation like this, I decided to stick with the rhythmical qualities solely.

According to Eduard Hanslick, rhythm is the “main artery of the musical organism” (Hanslick, 1986). A staple of any musical interpretation is that rhythm creates form in organizing sound and thus is wholly essential to congeneric musical meaning (Cooper & Meyer, 1960).

Abstractly speaking rhythm, as a schematic with which to organize sonoric motion or direction, divides into three phases that are *felt* rather than being ritualized (and annotated) in the much more reflexive pulse and tempo of musical objects. Consequently, one could argue that the signature is a ‘quasi-composed’ piece of music; it is a trained randomness that nevertheless becomes a systematic execution over time. Rhythm makes us experience accumulation, discharge, and relaxation of energy. The accumulation phase is known as the *arsis* phase as it is an excitation bringing forth mounting tension or strain. The *thesis* phase of rhythm is full of dynamic stress as it forces emphatic releases of energy. And, finally, the *stasis* phase is a loosening of tension that stands for relaxation, a recovery of strength, and a build-up to the next cyclical round of tension. Building on these discrete phases in the rhythmic cycle we recognize implicitly dominant characteristics, such as the ability to discern (or ‘feel’) values of ‘more than’ and ‘less than’; the order of strong and weak beats or pulses (note for instance the instantly recognizable difference between, say, rock and reggae, with strong beats on respectively two and three); repetition of long and short values; the ‘faster than’ and ‘slower than’ in the tempo of events, and much more. “Natural life abound with instances of rhythmic activity for us to observe”, Wilson Coker writes in *Music and Meaning* (Coker, 1972, p. 40). An extension of this view upon rhythm can be seen in Henri Lefebvre’s “rhythmanalysis” (Lefebvre, 2004; also Awad, 2021) and also in Merleau-Ponty’s idea of the Subject-Body that ‘receives’ the world by way of ‘coping’ with recurrent, rhythmical skill patterns, to which we will return.

As for the chicken or egg conundrum, philosophers of music seem to agree that rhythm must have existed prior to *time*. The latter is a measure of duration since it involves the specific structuralization of length in relation to a defined beat unit and how this beat can be multiplied and subdivided. Thus, according to Coker time is the “rationalized form of rhythm” (ibid. p. 42). Springing from time as an ordering principle of the transcendental nature of rhythm we have the *meter* serving as a purely conceptual construct with which to measure (and dictate) rhythmical species and various melodic

motion. The metrical *foot* denotes the organization and measurement of the number of *pulses* (or *tactus*) within the recurring rhythmic unit. One may speculate that the phenomenological ‘feltness’ of rhythm, the transcendental, cyclical rush of energy, has a special quality to it that purports to signify our *spatial* being in the world. Furthermore, we could say that the meter acts as a kind of *temporal* cultification or rationalization. Taken together, space and time, rhythm and meter, point to music and rhythm as delicate matter in motion having also a longitudinal direction and meaning, or indeed purposefulness.

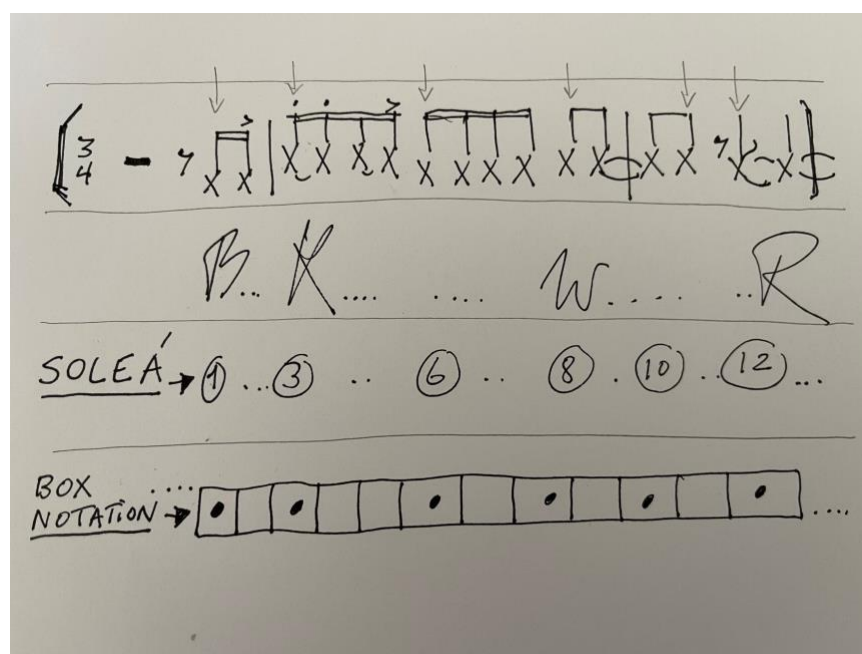


Fig. 3. Approximated rhythmical notation of the personal signature, including the soleá form.

I introduce rhythm, time, and meter because they speak of the principal elements of the music-object, and because they lay out the base of my analysis of the handwritten signature (see Fig. 1). Let us therefore look closer into how a distinct mode of flamenco music (or rather rhythm) may enable us to dissect the phenomenology of the signature in a precise and elusive manner.

As I mentioned in the Introduction flamenco music can be arranged into different distinct *palos*, roughly corresponding to genres in traditional musicology. These *palos* also signify, both historically and in contemporary *flamenco nuevo*, metric shapes that

are discernible from one another. I made a video recording of myself ‘performing’ the act or event of writing the signature, which in turn enabled me to slow it down, speed it up, and otherwise ‘cut it up’ using very basic post-editing tools. Thus, I was able to uncover not only the (approximated) metrical arrangement of the signature-as-music, in this case three over four, as well as the tempo; but further to determine the accentuated ‘heavy’ beats signifying the *thesis* of the rhythmic cycle that corresponded with the *soleá* form (see Fig. 3 above). The *soleá* consists of a cycle of 12 beats or pulses, four times bars<sup>9</sup> of three, and is next to *buleria* considered the most basic form or palo of flamenco music (Díaz-Báñez, 2017).<sup>10</sup> It originated among the Romani of Cádiz and Seville in Andalusia (Bethencourt et al., 2011) and is usually played *por arriba*, that is, in E major, Phrygian mode, or less frequently (though a contemporary artist like Vicente Amigo performs it often) as *por medio*, in A minor.<sup>11</sup> Much flamenco harmony is in the form of what is generally called Phrygian tonality, particularly in its traditional, historic shape (Montoya,

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<sup>9</sup> As the Danish musician and musical philosopher Peter Bastian explained, the pulse in itself is empty and devoid of information, but when it characterizes (or vitalizes) the movements within a superior structure laid on top of it, it is reproducible and open for systematic interpretation. The *bar* thus contains three rhythmical archetypes, the *alla breve* in the 2/4 measure, the *triangle* in 3/4, and the *cross* in 4 over 4 measure. However, identical bar measures, such as the 3/4, may be *felt* very differently: The menuet emphasizes all three beats in 3/4, while the *trio* is perceived as *alla breve* with two accents in one unit and only one beat per bar, making the latter a kind of 2 over 6. (Cf. Bastian, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Together *soleás*, *bulerias*, and *siguiriyas* are called the *Gypsy toques*.

<sup>11</sup> The modal interchange (from minor to major, or the reverse) is more frequent in jazz than in flamenco. Interesting comparisons, however, could be made between the jazz and Impressionist inspired pianist Lyle Mays (1953-2020) who was famous for playing fifths in his arrangements, and contemporary flamenco guitarist Antonio Rey. An example of a modal interchange from Mays would be the chordal progression Bm11 to Bbmaj7#11, thus moving down one semitone to resolve further into the ‘natural’ sounding A minor (6). In a similar vein I’ve noticed Rey play the modal interchange Bm7 to Bmaj11. The fourth scale tone (11<sup>th</sup>) of the B major, the E, is then easily resolved in the root of the E major subdominant tonic (i.e., the phrygian mode). In any case experiments are made by mixing *arriba* and *medio*. Another interesting thing in Rey’s harmonic range is his substitution of the ‘normal’ E major #9 (sharp F) for an E minor sus 2 (b9) but with a F# in the bass. Then the F# can slide up one semitone to G, so that the chord contains the sus 2 (F#), the flattened 9<sup>th</sup> (F), and the minor third (G), and thus we would call the chord Esus2 add b9 over G. With this multi-colored chord (i.e., by having the F, the F#, and the G in there) the tonality may drift into, for instance, Am6, melodic minor scale (the sixth note being the added F#), F#m7, or A sharp (A being the minor third of F#m7). Basically, what all this means is that in contemporary flamenco there’s not only room for modal interchange but also an urge to find new ways of ‘coloring’ the traditional subdominant (and at times very harsh) tonica, i.e., the transitions back and forth between E major, E minor, and E sus(2) chords. To my ears, this brings the traditional, Spanish flamenco closer to a slightly more ‘European’ type of composition music (Debussy, Ravel, Satie), and interestingly also to ‘American’ stage music, like Aaron Copland. See for instance Antonio Rey’s “Desde Mi Cocina” (‘From my kitchen’), from the album *Flamenco Sin Fronteras* (2020).

Nino Ricardo, Sabicas<sup>12</sup>, etc.; see Katz, 2001), in that it roughly coheres with the E-mode, the open sixth string of the guitar in normal E-A-D-G-B-E tuning. The common chord progression known as the Andalusian Cadence is thus Am-G-F-E or variations thereof where the E major harmony (E-G#-B) however functions not as the dominant (V) of the tonic A minor (I) but as the altered Phrygian tonic. From the perspective of classical music theory there is already an element of *thesis*, tension and arousal, in the E-mode of the Phrygian scale (Tymoczko, 2011). Following from this the role of the dominant (V) is played by the supertonic (the F chord), or the sub-tonic (in classical notation, the VI = D minor). The crucial exception, though, is that the E chord is usually played as an E major flat nine (E/b9), the raised third degree being the G sharp with an added F – which along with the Andalusian cadence gives the Phrygian E-mode its distinguishable *thesis* flavor. Add to this the inclusion of non-triadic tones in rapid succession, played on open strings, and all of us instinctively hear, or ‘feel’, “flamenco”.

In the Spanish flamenco, the *cante* is any ‘singable’ tune, melody, or rhythmic arrangement that uses a meter, known as the *compás*, in which the accentuated beats are distributed in a specific pattern through a short sequence that repeats at regular intervals.<sup>13</sup> In our case, the handwritten, personal signature, with its four over three bars, repetition does not exist. However, I would argue that a certain ‘interiorization’ of the rhythmical periodicity acts as a kind of restriction to the musical measure, that is, to the performance of writing the signature which also adheres to its reproduction in music and repetitious playback potential: It almost feels as if it, the signature-as-music, should be executed (played) over and over again. Thus, the *compás* lays out the pattern of accents, which is the sequence of handclaps (*palmas*) or taps that is repeated throughout the whole *cante*. One could say that the ‘playing’ of the signature is a combination of freedom and restriction: The freedom of the timing over the base – accents and syncopes, pauses and runs – laid down by the strict meter or *compás*. Flamenco rhythms corresponding with different *palos* usually have three types of measures or distributions of accents: (i) binary, which is a strong accent every 2 or 4 beats, distinctive of the *seguriya*; (ii) ternary, that

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<sup>12</sup> Behind the stage name ‘Sabicas’ was Agustín Castellón Campos (1912-1990). He mostly lived in the US where he also met a very young and shy Paco de Lucia whom he later claimed to be his most accomplished “student”. Sabicas played mostly in a classical manner using semi-upright positioning, lots of free-strokes (*tirando*), and *tremolo* (cf. Sevilla, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> In the 6/8 or 3/4 *compás* family *soleás* are usually played in E Phrygian, *bulerias* in A Phrygian, and *siguiriyas* in A Phrygian or E major (Ionian).

is every 3 beats, like the *soleá* (at least in the opening two bars of three); and (iii) amalgamated 12 beats. To be precise, the *soleá* encompasses both the binary and the ternary scheme, thus:

1-2-3 / -4-5-6 / -7-8 / -9-10 / -11-12

This means that the *soleá* could potentially be annotated as two bars of three followed by three bars of two – and, as a consequence, the *soleá* may be interpreted both as regular four-beat and three-beat configuration:

{3/4} {3/4} + {2/4} {2/4} {2/4}<sup>14</sup>

Normally, in the *soleá* there is an absence of accent of the first beat (as opposed to Central European composition music and the waltz). In the personal signature (“Bo Kampmann Walther”) the opposite seems to be the case. However, although one might conceive of the capital letters (B / K / W) having a strong accent that further projects the rhythm forward, the first accentuation – the **B**, roughly on the 1-beat – is to be thought of more as a *pseudo anacrusis*, i.e., a suspended, ‘strong’ beginning of the cycle. Since the ‘B’ is suspended – rather than having no presence as a strong beat at all, as in the *anacrusis* – it serves as a marker, I would suggest, of the relative durations between the subsequent beats in the cycle. There is a certain ‘space’ for *rubato* tempo here.<sup>15</sup> Finally, the ‘B’

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<sup>14</sup> Because of the flexible configuration of the *soleá* that can be subdivided into 4/4 and 3/4 (or 3/8) alike, many jazz musicians treat the 12-beat accents as syncopated *triplets*, i.e., by playing the heavy beats as hammered ‘ghost’ notes. This is, however, very non-flamenco (although taken up by Vicente Amigo, among others), as flamenco has eighth or sixteenth notes, and not triplets, or three over two, as its natural base. If one wants to compare the two, the jazz variant and the flamenco proper, try listening to the distinct playing styles of Chick Corea (triplets on the piano) and Paco de Lucia (even notes on the guitar). One of the clear contributions of Paco to the flamenco nuevo was his introduction of ‘hanging’ or ‘lacking behind’ only to *burst* ‘back’ into the even eights (depending of tempo) of the song or melody. This technique he probably adopted from John McLaughlin who did not (as opposed to Paco) play the rapid scale runs ‘cleanly’ and thus purported to ghost notes, triplet slides, and pull-offs as a kind of ‘rescue’. Towards the end of a concert in Berlin, 1987, with McLaughlin and Paco, there is a telling moment where McLaughlin looks in utter awe at Paco while he plays perfectly even, extremely fast and smooth runs, seemingly effortless and upright. See further Valdo, 1999; Clemente, 2010; and Zagalaz, 2012. Check out: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tFQvVliGtA>.

<sup>15</sup> *Tempo rubato* is Italian and stands for ‘free in the presentation’ (literarily ‘stolen time’). It is a musical term referring to expressive and rhythmic freedom often involving a slight speeding up and subsequent slowing down of the tempo of a piece.

initiates the crucial pair of tension-and-relief and the overall rhythmic faculty of *arsis*, *thesis*, and *stasis* to be repeated as characteristic of the signature-unit as such.

What constitutes this tension-and-relief scheme? In the Figure below (Fig. 4), I've juxtaposed the duration of the signature with three distinct 'blocks' each entailing a distinctive flamenco trait: the *arpeggio* and the *picado*. Let's analyse these in more detail:

- (1) An *arpeggio* is a chord (e.g., E-G#-B = E major)<sup>16</sup> broken into a sequence of notes; in flamenco usually in rapid succession, using index, middle, and ring finger: *i-m-a*. In fig. 2 we see that the 'B' serves as a syncopated exposition to the following two sets of sixteenth notes – roughly 'B-o' carried over into 'K-a-m-p-[...]“, i.e., the first part of the middle name. Both capital letters here, the 'B' and the 'K', serve as a mixture of accentuated beats in the soleá compás, and as the suspended anacrusis I mentioned above. Since the arpeggio is most often easier to play, more relaxed and *stasis* minded, it may very well serve as a precursor or framing of the ensuing *picada*. This is illustrated in Fig. 4 below.
- (2) Next, we have two sets of *picada* (singular: *picado*). Notably, Paco de Lucia was famed for his virtuosity in this respect; yet it was Montoya followed by Sabicas who elevated the *picada* to fame and perfected their technique. *Picada* are single-line scale passages performed by playing successively with the index and middle fingers [*i-m*] (although Paco also occasionally used three fingers) while supporting the other fingers on the string immediately above. This is known in the flamenco technique as *apoyoendo* ('rest stroke', as opposed to the 'free stroke', *tirando*, in classical music). When using all strings (E-A-D-G-B-E) the thumb may rest on the

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<sup>16</sup> Since the Renaissance, triadic harmony chords have been one of the fundamental building blocks of Western music. Every pitch has a specific harmony consisting of a series of overtones that enable us to distinguish between triadic patterns all of which, however, come from the octave, the fifth, and the third. The trick is then, as first shown by Jean-Philippe Rameau in his *Treatise on Harmony* (1722), to break down these triads into smaller intervals, major, minor, diminished, and augmented thirds. The basic quality of a triad/a chord is determined by the relationship of the thirds used to construct it (major, minor, raised, flattened). This is known as the 'vertical' (or 'stacked') view of harmony and has been used for centuries in (classical) music theory.

sixth string causing it to bend heavily (which a contemporary musician like Antonio Rey does frequently). Alternate methods include using the thumb rapidly on adjacent strings, known as *pulgar*, as well as using the thumb and index finger alternately (especially when arriving from jazz), or combining all three methods in a single passage. In the illustration below, Fig. 4, the picada comprise '[...] **m-a-n-n** [...]' (i.e., the second part of 'Kampmann') and the entirety of '[...] **W-a-l-t-h-e-r** [...]', so that each syllable corresponds approximately to one sixteenth note in the fast picado. As is also often the case in 'real' flamenco guitar music, the picada cover notes that sit within the 'spaces' between proper melody (*falseta*) notes – such as the 'slides' (*ligados*) up to the first and strong note in a melodic line.<sup>17</sup> This also pertains to the signature-as-music.

- (3) As one can see in Fig. 3 and 4, the picada executed in the personal signature consist of sixteenth notes, the first one fluent and *legato*, the second broken and *staccato*. Yet, there's more to it, and this is perhaps the most 'flamenco' of the whole unit: the *bursts* (Torres, 2005).<sup>18</sup> Introduced notably by Paco de Lucia, carried forth by a player like Paco Pena and witnessed in contemporaries like Antonio Rey and Luciano Ghosn, the *burst* is almost impossible to transcribe to sheet music, as it covers those initial legato phrases that are intended to 'spring load' one's fingers for picado bursts. The burst is an eruption of force; it is an explosion not only of the fingers' movements across the board but probably also of the mind – it is impossible to 'think' that fast! One way of visualizing the semantics of the burst is by sets of sixteenths snappishly flowing over into thirty-second notes. And still, this is only a (classical) approximation. Using the

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<sup>17</sup> Using *ligado* build-ups to strong first melody notes, listen to the middle part of the *cante* "Un Sueno Contigo Alma", on the album *Flamenco Sin Fronteras* ('Flamenco without borders', 2020) by Antonio Rey. Russian virtuoso guitarist Grisha Goryachev has described the technique of fast picado in the *ligado* style as basically treating an array – or explosion – of notes as "one note". I can't think of a more complex and beautifully orchestrated use of *ligado* woven into the *falseta* and finally to be resolved in the main (sung) melody towards the end of the *cante* than Vicente Amigo's "Plaza de Las Sirenas", from the album *Memoria de los Sentidos* ('Memory of the senses', 2017). Sometimes *ligados* are referred to as "slurs"; however, this is mostly when one is coming from jazz where lots of mute and/or ghost notes are used.

<sup>18</sup> See also note above.



guitar as an example (which I performed on top of my own playback of the recorded signature) 'bursting' would be those frenziedly hurried, 'firing' notes played on the first and second strings successively.<sup>19</sup> The bursts inscribed in the picada tally the very strong and blatantly stressed *thesis* in the rhythm schematics, as we discussed before: tension-release-tension.

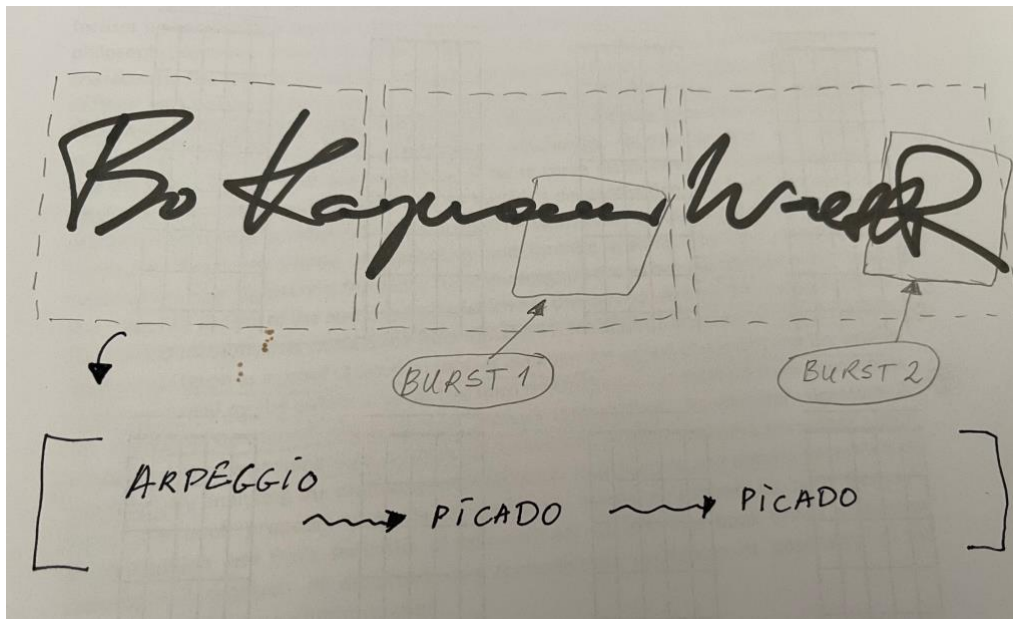


Fig. 4. Flamencoisation of the personal signature: arpeggio, picado, and bursts.

As a last point in the analysis, I would like to pay attention to the signature being a musical example of the *sectional sonata form*. I've already covered areas such as the shift between tension and release, picada and arpeggio, the suspended accentuation in the beginning (the 'B'), the heavy beats along the time of the rhythmic pattern constituting the soleá form (the 'K', the 'm' [-a-n-n], and the 'W'), and the inbuilt bursts following the two ensuing picada runs. The sonata may be taken as the class representative of (European) musical *form*. The sonata literarily means 'a piece played', as opposed to 'a piece sung', like the *cantata* (or the *cante*, in flamenco), as it rose to prominence in the Classical era between 1730 and 1820. The sonata can be divided analytically into five parts, as

<sup>19</sup> For the second part of ['K-a-m-p-m-a-n-n'] and ['W-a-l-t-h-e-r'] I played the light part of the Phrygian mode in the V and VI position while ascending and accelerating and thus extending the pinky into, respectively, the D on the first string and the G# on the second string.

illustrated in Fig. 5 below: (1) Exposition, (2) Development, (3) Recapitulation. The three parts are in turn framed by (i) Introduction and (v) Coda. While the exposition establishes the dominant tonality (usually laid out in the Tonic and the Dominant), as well as the pitch, tempo, and timbre of the prime theme, the development phase utilizes techniques such as inversion, augmentation, subdominant tonic replacement, and the like.

How does the sectional sonata form play out in the case of the personal signature? Let's break it down into pieces:

[\*] *Introduction*: The strong vertical line of the 'B', which is the *arsis* making way for the *thesis*, the tension of arpeggios slowly resolving into the two picada, can be viewed as the initiating indicator of the name sequence: Here, the vertical line [/] of the 'B', before it evolves into the more fluent 'B-o [...]', serves as an introduction not only to the sudden pairing of arpeggio and picado but also to the performance of *ligados*, that is, hammer-ons and pull-offs, illustrated in Fig. 2 as the dotted eighth and sixteenth sets.<sup>20</sup> The introduction is thus a compressed studio of dominant techniques and the musical/rhythmical material to come.

[\*] *Exposition*: Here we have the second part of 'B-o' and the spill over into 'K-a-m-p-[m-a-n-n]' as it further exploits the arpeggio mode while also uncovering the picada. This is the part of the cycle where rhythmical traits and melodic patterns are taken to center stage.

[\*] *Development*: This is the phase where we see a maturation or perhaps an expansion from the commencing beginnings (the *anacrusis*, accents, and arpeggio -> first picado). The name is now fully formed – played – by the picado moving almost deterministically into the two bursts at the end of both middle and surname. Finally, the dynamics of the piece recapitulates, as it almost falls to rest in the Coda, or (potential) reprise.

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<sup>20</sup> Geeky note again: If one listens to Vicente Amigo, the *ligados* sound almost like distant seagulls. They are often 'pulled' from notes very far away, say, from a C# to an A on the first string. Such technique requires, to be expertly executed, very stretchy lefthand fingers (comp. Worms, 2006).

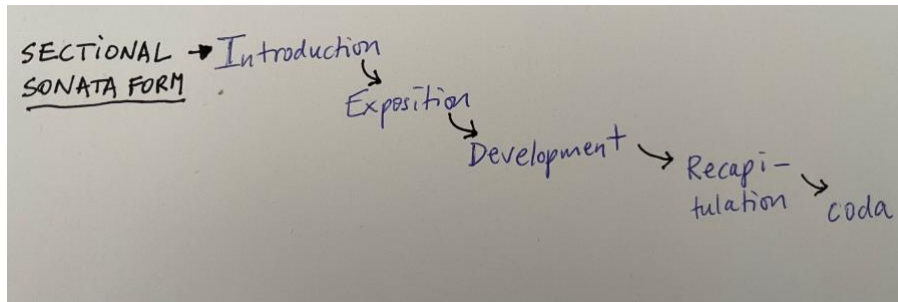


Fig. 5. The personal signature broken down into the sectional sonata form.

To partly conclude, the personal, handwritten signature is a musical object that can be analyzed, and as a flamenco gesture it splits into topics of time, tempo, genre, and levels of expressiveness and the techniques that convoy and enrich it. All of this emmeshes the idea that the signature, as a deep epitome of language performed or played, is ‘music’. The signature is felt and perceived within the bodily, pre-reflexive, not-yet-verbalized realm of meaning making, and subsequently approximately annotated. Let us therefore, in the next two sections, look more closely into the phenomenology of writing and the signature. First by asking the question: why is music a gesture?

## II: Interlude: Music, gesture, and gestalt

In classical music theory, *gesture* is any movement, either physical (bodily) or mental (imaginary). As such ‘gesture’ includes both categories of movements required to produce sound and categories of perceptual moves associated with those gestures (LeBaron & Streeck, 2000). Gestures reflect not only rhythms, dynamics, climaxes or pauses within the music itself – in short: the analyzable properties of (composition) music; gestures also serve communicative and expressive functions in the performance and perceptual consumption of music (Hatten, 2004; Godøy & Leman, 2010). Gestures can thus be said to exactly bridge the barrier between the ontology of music (what music is in itself) and the epistemology that tries to explain how we perceive it (see also Small, 1998). The prime gesturality of music is the fact that we experience and understand the world, including music, through body movement as we make sense of situations and

actions in the world and within music by relating to our own body movements or by forming an image in our mind (Jensenius et al., 2009).<sup>21</sup>

Although the study of musical gesture is a vast and complex field of research, some grounding assumption can be made that according to Gritten & King (2006) is broadly semiotic in nature: "A gesture is a movement or change in state that becomes marked as significant by an agent" (ibid.). The decisive aspect of music gesture is that it is neither completely compatible with music in itself, music as performed or recorded, music as singular or reproduced object; nor is it reducible to subjective perceptions of music (more on subjectivism in the Coda). Rather, music gesture resides in the interchangeability, the quality of music of being capable of exchange or interchange between the performance and the perception of the flow of energy of sounds and pulses which we together call music. This idea of music gesture being not just an intermediary between two ontic realms, music making and musical interpretation, but furthermore a phenomenological and very much physical, and intentional, object in itself, echoes in both Merleau-Ponty and Derrida, as we shall discuss in Section Three.

In *The Body in the Mind* (1987) Mark Johnson describes gestalt structure as a "constraint on meaning". Human beings experience force via interaction implying that there is always a structure or sequence of causality involved (Lakoof & Johnson, 1999). Such sequences he also dubs "image schemata" that can be broken down into its smaller parts while still retaining their integrity as gestalts, i.e., as irreducible patterns of meaning making. One such schemata or gestalt structure is "removal of constraint"; it is a schema "that suggests an open way or path, which makes possible an exertion of force", Johnson writes (ibid., p. 46). There is nothing blocking the force as freely flowing energy or exertion. However, the force is not the source of the removal of any restraining barrier (that would be a counterforce), but rather the felt sense of power to perform some action (which brings the force close to what Johnson terms "enablement").

As I examined above, music is gestural gestalts that involve the movement of objects (sounds and sequential pulses) through space in some direction. There is thus,

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<sup>21</sup> Levinson argues for a view on musical comprehension as spirally interlinking elements played out between the acoustic and the perceptual level when he writes that "to hear the expressiveness of music is to hear it as personal expression; that to hear it as personal expression is to hear a sort of gesture in the music; [...] that to hear such musical gesture is to deploy a capacity to imagine in spatial terms" (Levinson, 2006, p. 77). The ability to hear and resonate with music and its gesturality, on a perceptual level, is thus to possess a "robust spatial imagination" (ibid.).

Johnson would say, a *vector* quality, a directionality inflicted on music production as a forceful movement. We can say, then, that music-objects originate in their gestalts as recognizable and analyzable sources dictated by the ‘laws’ of their schemata; and at the same time that music-objects entail degrees of power or intensity. The former would be the composite nature of music, the fact that music is both ‘sounding’ and can be cut to pieces or broken into bits; while the latter speaks of the expressiveness of the music gesture. However, as we will discuss now in the final section, this expressive gesture that is music is not a dislodged afterimage of the originality it exposures (i.e., the signature that is identical to itself) but an intentional, playful object in its own right.

### III: Philosophy in the flesh

#### III.1. *Body-Subject (Merleau-Ponty)*

Embedded between, on the one hand, the aesthetics of writing as content displayed through various media, and the systematic perception of such content via the grammatical and semantical laws of representational signs, on the other hand, stands the often-overlooked writing machine, the ‘controller’, and the Body as Subject, as Merleau-Ponty ponders in his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1995; cf. Walther & Larsen, 2019). The membrane between the aesthetics and complexity of a writing output passes recursively through a body and a physical controller-input. Such a controller, or in the case above a pen used to execute the signature later to be substituted by video recorded footage and guitar playing in order to procreate the authenticity of the bodily performance, may grab our attention only to fall into the background replaced by a sensation of control, i.e., the abstract machinery of language and conceptual understanding. Such abstraction, Berger & del Negro inform us, requires treating the machinery as an *object* of intentional representation – rather than viewing it as a corporeal ‘within’ immovable from the Body-Subject (Berger & del Negro, 2004; Young, 2011; also Derrida, 2001). Still, the pen and the guitar, along with the interiorized knowledge of sonoric and rhythmic qualities, that close and faultless relationship with writing in and through the hand, seem to inaudibly disappear to be substituted by an even greater revelation – finding a rhythm of play/writing while engaging with writing-as-music itself. I do not perform my own signature for the sake of conceptual clarity, but rather for the joy of playful, rhythmical

mimicry.<sup>22</sup> This innate quality of play, music and rhythm, we might add, is what Berger calls “unreflective consciousness” where the body experiences its own motor intentionality and thus becomes completely absorbed bodily in an act (ibid.).

Speaking from the vocabulary of computer game studies (ludology) Sudnow (1983) insists that the practice of playing computer games is much closer to playing instruments, and certainly completely different than the rational, configurational, and distanced gameplay typically found in studies of what games mean and how we play them. This is a perspective which Hamilton (2011) expands upon when he insists that interfacing with a game is a “kinaesthetic dance of feedback and response that can easily be thought of as a kind of music” (para. 1). So, players play music playing games; the same way everyday writers play flamenco music playing signature. Hamilton calls it the “rhythm of play”. Rhythm is, he explains, essentially division of time segmented into notes and “a whole note contains four quarter notes, each of which contains two eighth notes” (para. 11) that can be divided further, and so on. As we saw in the previous section, this relates to the question of how rhythm rationalizes itself through synthetic concepts like meter, tempo, and foot. The point is that games establish and create different patterns of rhythm – not just as rational means for conceptualization but also as instances of a bodily play, or being in the world. Some rhythms are fast, others dense, others still are slow and some mix and remix patterns creating shifts between hectic or soothing tempos (Walther & Larsen, 2019; Walther & Ryan, 2022).

What is at stake here is rhythm and other modes of structuralizing ‘machines’ that read a set of bodily behaviors organized by space and time into meaningful routines. Seamon (1980) coins it a “place-ballet” of recombining and resequencing patterns of tonality and paces. Furthermore, this insistence of the body as the primary arena of perception, rather than the reliance on reflexive rationality and epistemological assurance as rooted in the tradition of Descartes and Kant, point towards Merleau-Ponty’s chief idea, namely that the body must not be conceived as separate from the mind as in the

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<sup>22</sup> There might be such a thing as sonic or rhythmic remembrance where the subconscious repetition of patterned sequences of sound or pulses acts as a kind of *a priori*, perceptual reasoning with objects in the world and how they function. Thus, I recall back in the days of chunky landline telephones that very often I couldn’t remember the numbers (digits) themselves. And yet the sounds and rhythms of these numbers inscribed a bodily resonance in me which I could then re-duplicate and ‘play along with’ – so that I effectively dialed the right number. For me the telephone numbers were pieces of music. This example may be max speed subjectivism; still it’s important to note the intimate connection between bodily perception and conceptual reasoning.

Cartesian dualism. Merleau-Ponty maintains instead that the body is the principal condition for our being-in-the-world, for subjectivity and intentionality. In fact, he radicalizes the Heideggerian notion of being (*Dasein*) and *Zeug* so that using a tool simply *is* being, tool-being. The Body-Subject doing tool-business means to always-already interact with the world, and the Body-Subject cannot escape that condition.

Going back to the analysis of the signature as a 'felt' (and later performed) piece of flamenco music, we can abstract from the above that when writing one's signature the Body-Subject, *pace* Merleau-Ponty, reacts to solicitations of what it means to achieve 'signature'. Merleau-Ponty would then say that we possess an intrinsic "intentional arc" (1995) that we approach as a tool from a specific position in relation to our body – this exclusive tool being the pen and the body-work it requires to harvest instantaneous meaning. We clutch the pen with our hands and fingers to provide a sensory information about the size, weight, and shape of it. Through our body as medium the rhythm that penetrates and frames such qualities flow freely, and all kinds of data that relate to the rich solicitations implanted in the task at hand are tacitly there for the taking. It is the Body-Subject, Merleau-Ponty concludes, that fulfills series of movements that feel appropriate (while, in fact, they are random) and, at the same time, signify identity. Extending from the musical analysis of the personal signature this appropriateness is a marker of sensuous stimulus qualities that can be interpreted and (in my case) felt as music, effectively an aesthetic quality; and yet it is also a symbolism of the legitimacy of the author's identity, and thus a political or juridical nomenclature. The latter is precisely the point of departure for Derrida's critique.

Merleau-Ponty's conception of the intentional arc is developed further in what Dreyfus (2016) calls the "flow of coping". This skillful coping, as it is, consists of two separate forms of intentionality (Dreyfus, 2002), one in which actions are deliberate and planned and another containing spontaneous and transparent actions. This is especially helpful when considering the music making of the signature praxis, since it involves two seemingly disparate actions; one that falls under the sway of rationalization and identity (the reproductive accuracy and trustworthiness of the signature as a legal act), and another that is the unique product of the imaginative and resourceful non-identity of the author. As we shall see, it is exactly this simultaneous existence of the rational and the 'auratic'

in the signature that institutes its aporetic nature, if I understand Derrida correctly. On a passing note: I would not call this simultaneity aporetic, but rather *musical*.

The intentional arc is thus the 'grip' of our surroundings using tools to both extend and express our pre-epistemic being. How is that connected to rhythm? According to Henri Lefebvre (2004), rhythm is at once a repetition and a renewal (Ringgaard, 2010). Abstractly speaking, rhythm is the corresponding energy of Heidegger's concept of time that he called *Sorge*, in *Sein und Zeit* (Heidegger, 1962). *Sorge* is the spiral of our intentional projection into the future and the connectiveness of this projection to the past that finally lands (momentarily) in the present (*Gegenwart*). Heidegger's conception of time as a continuous moving forth and spiraling backwards rings strongly in what is the essence of rhythm – namely that it is a *compás* of tension and relief, *thesis* and *stasis*. Rhythm, Lefebvre claims, is one of our deepest concepts, felt through our heartbeat, sounding in our womb and exited through the speed of our emotional affect. Speaking in a Heideggerian fashion, rhythm is an exalted measure simultaneously consuming past movement and creating expectations for the next (Schulze, 2012).

As such, rhythm is a pivotal channel for our creative accomplishments, the bursts and emissions of play and of writing. What is important is that rhythm functions not only as a bundled flow of experiences with the world – and the tools to operate the world using the intentional arc – but also as a means to bind memory and sharpen focus. It is precisely this binding mechanism which is accomplished by the musical meter as well as through the repetitious replayability of the performed signature; a way of fastening the endless flux to a steady materialization and allowing the tempo to increase or decrease.

In *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty connects transcendentalism with what could be seen as a radical empirism (Smith, 1993). Yet, as Seip (2009) writes, the concept of the transcendental is related solely to our body and being-in-the-world so that there's a profound transformation from the patterning function Kant attributes to understanding (*Vernunft*) to the operations on the perceptual level. "Consciousness is being-towards-the-thing through the intermediary of the body", Merleau-Ponty says (cf. 1995).

An obvious critique of applying the language of flamenco to the act of writing one's signature would be that this is merely a metaphorization, a replaced representation that only works by a certain similarity of content or structure and therefore is *not* the



‘thing’ (signature) in itself.<sup>23</sup> But what if we attribute intentionality to the world itself? This is what happens in Merleau-Ponty’s later writings, notably *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), in which he introduces the term “flesh” as a name for the kind of being that supersedes the dualism of perceiver and perceived, or, as it were, metaphor and identity. Everything within the world, Merleau-Ponty argues, is part of a system of exchanges which also implies that any true ontology would be an interactionism accounting for the dynamic back and forth participations between beings. This idea of the “flesh” can be read as a radical continuation of Husserl’s proto-phenomenological scheme of *intentio* and *intentum* both comprised within one and the same holistic act of consciousness. Subject and object are not static and distanced things, one functioning by way of thinking, the other by extension, as Descartes claims, but rather they are interchangeable entities and part of the same universality within the world. Coming back to the signature-as-music, Merleau-Ponty’s “flesh” could be regarded not only as the intermediary system with which to grapple the perceptual and sumptuous dynamic of writing, as well as the dance and music that it offers and the flamenco system that seemingly unlocks its secrets; but in such a way that the *directedness* and self-apprenticeship of the “flesh” *is* flamenco: the detectible and kinaesthetic traces of bodily style. Music is not just an image of writing, it *is* writing.

### *III.2. Signature, aporia (Derrida)*

All of the arguments above – the signature as flamenco music, the “flesh” as both controller and intentional object in itself – may be seen as ways of trying to overcome representationalism. Or, invoking Derrida, as modes of collapsing the distance between originality and image/sign. Thus, Derrida explains in an interview entitled “Les arts de l’espace” (2013), that the handwritten signature is not just a placeholder for the conceptual identity of the author herself, but rather the result of a “confirmed performativity”. Such performativity, Derrida says, “is absolutely heterogeneous; it is external to everything meaningful in the work”. The signature is not an eligible *nomen* of identity, the true yet expatriate sign, but rather the “‘being-there’ of the work that is more or less an ensemble of analysable semantic elements” (ibid.). When a signature is

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<sup>23</sup> Compare (Funk, 2011).

performed, an event takes place; and this event is “analysable”. This way, Derrida claims, the signature is both an act that opens up for deconstruction – since the signature may reclaim its “rights” (*droit*) as perceptual property rather than belonging solely to a juridical and metaphysical system – and an act that playfully participates in the constant “tracing back” in an infinite effort to recapture the perfect specimen of that ‘original’ version of the signature. It is because the signature is never completely identical with any other version, and since the shape of the handwritten signature is never reproduced perfectly, that we “commit [...] performatively” to the repetition of original traces. Such “traces”, I would insist, are not representations of a lost original style or legislative identity (i.e., futile attempts to get the signature right); but rather they are bursts of iteration and difference joined together by the repetitious music in them.

Therefore, in my interpretation of Derrida, the signature is haunted not by the originality of the perfect signature it cannot reach, but by the *traces* of the “event” itself. Understood this way, the identity of the signature is not its lost origin or metaphysical unconditionality but rather the identity in the performed ensemble of producing/performing a signature and reproducing it over and over in time. As juridical sign the signature “quotes a set of norms constituting a cultural or juridical context”, Neef and Van Dijck writes (2006); as event the signature represents and *is* the unique style of its writer hosting an “ensemble of analysable semantic elements”, as Derrida tells us. In *Margins of Philosophy* (1982) Derrida writes that “the effects of signature are the most ordinary thing in the world”. They are ordinary, yes, but they are first and foremost impossible because “of their rigorous purity”. A signature must have a repeatable, imitable form. In performing this form, the signature acts out its own *aporia*, Derrida argues (see also Derrida, 1992; 1996). For the signature to detach itself from the present and singular intention of its production it needs to produce a certain amount of sameness by way of “forging” the original style (Fraenkel, 1992). Hence, the authenticity of the signature lies not in the originality of the handwritten signature, or in the inkling of signature-as-identity, but rather in the *making* of it, endlessly, as “stylish traces” (ibid.).

Merging Merleau-Ponty and Derrida together with the musical analysis outlined in the previous section one could argue that the critical stance here is *not* the deconstruction of the role of the signature as epistemic and essentially ‘fake’ iterative reproduction of identity and originality. Rather, the important thing is that within

phenomenology *there is no such onto-teleological base or substratum hiding underneath or behind the signature*. Instead, the metaphysicality of the signature lies within and vibrates throughout its perceptual – and musical – “ensemble” of traces that haunt the performing author-subject and which also seem to summon “analysable [...] elements”. The signature must be understood in its patterned, sequential, and plural sense; it is always-already embodied, trained, and repetitiously anticipating sensuous and musical performance and analysis.

### Coda

In this article I have tried to clarify how the understanding of writing not only benefits from the structured vocabulary of music but that writing indeed *is* music. Here, of course, in the pretext of the handwritten, personal signature, which, as we saw, could be probed using the flamenco system (*compás, palos*, etc.) and the flamenco notation (*arpeggios, picada, ligados*, etc.). Further, we discussed how this idea (or rather perceptual identification) of the musical object-as-writing is profoundly sustained by gestural musicology, by the concept of the gestalt, and by the thinking of Merleau-Ponty and Derrida who both place pre-conceptual materialism rather than rationalized metaphysics at the base of explaining how we perceive and experience the world, including music. The causal context for my musical analysis is thus respectively the flamenco ‘method’ and perceptual thinking.

However, this begs the questions of biases and methodology. Is the introduction of flamenco to the act of writing one’s signature, and hearing/playing its music, not a typical example of a confirmation bias? This bias explains the tendency to search for or otherwise interpret information in such a way that it confirms or supports one’s prior beliefs, values, or ideas (Gerken, 2017). Following from this, I would insist that what really clouds the argumentation is not the information bias in itself, but rather the undecidability as to whether the ‘error’ falls under hypothetical or systematic categories. If the methodological proceedings in this article are flawed in any way, it could stem from both the initiating, deductive claim that writing is music; *and* it could have been the result of the gradual accumulation of supportive evidence, i.e., an inductive fallacy.

Moreover, the musical analysis presented in this article may easily run into the problematic realm of ‘subjectivism’, i.e., that a theory purporting a methodology which

limits knowledge to subjective experience effectively compromises the analytical data and hence the verification and validation of the results. This, then, runs parallel to the challenge of avoiding the confirmation bias in its deductive as well as inductive guise.

As a response to this, I'd like to go back to proto-phenomenology: Edmund Husserl repeatedly stressed that even though the task of philosophy is to provide accurate descriptions of the act of perception as it is experienced from a perceiver, thus seemingly evoking subjectivism, such descriptions will always be narrated from a first-person perspective (Husserl, 1981). However, despite the descriptions' apparent appeal as 'subjective,' or, in fact, *because* of this appeal, they must be even more objectively valid. Vigilant accounts of phenomena in the world that are filtrated through our consciousness must always, Husserl asserted, trigger a conceptual thinking about the idea (*eidōs*) behind them. This is the spectral presence of idealism in Husserl's transcendentalism – as opposed to the later Merleau-Ponty who, as we have seen, favors a much more pan-perceptual transcendentalism placing the Body-Subject and corporeal knowledge center stage. Besides being perceived in the act of consciousness collapsing the distance between object (*intentum*) and subject (*intentio*), phenomena also hold the key as to how they generally (or ideally) invite perception and systematic reasoning. Whenever Husserl ponders a phenomenon (it always seems to be one of the trees in his back garden), he also chases down its transcendental constituent. Husserl referred to this as the *eidetic reduction*, a kind of 'going-back-to-the-idea' (Elliston & McCormick, 1977). The method of eidetic reduction is when the philosopher moves from the consciousness of individual and concrete objects to the transempirical realm of pure essences and thus achieves an intuition of the *eidōs*. It is interesting to note that *eidōs* is the Greek word for "shape", i.e., of a thing – meaning what something is in its invariable and essential structure, apart from all that is contingent or accidental to it. The *eidōs* is thus the principle or necessary structure of the thing, which Husserl often refers to as transcendental idealism or, simply, the 'method' of describing the act of perceptual experience.

In the flamenco interpretation of the handwritten, personal signature I strongly believe the *soleá* to be rooted in exactly such a transempirical realm of pure essences. The *soleá* is the organizing principle undergirding the various sensuous and rhythmical elements woven on top of it. Inferred this way the stipulated *palo* points to the objective 'truth' behind all the trickery that goes on at the surface level that may very well be

disregarded as random and unreliable. In my case, and on a personal note, the question of unreliability is easily overcome by the sheer pleasure of producing music.

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