

Trading in Imaginaries: Locating Authenticity in Argentine Tango

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Abstract

Argentine tango tends to be associated with highly gendered images of women and men locked in contorted embraces. These images constitute a tango imaginary that is removed from the lived experience of the dance. Remaining close to the experiential core of tango, this paper provides a Heideggerian-inspired phenomenological account that re-imagines tango as a mode of being-in-the-world. By situating us in direct and constant relationship with an attentive partner and furnishing a complex grammar of constraints, tango generates a frame for creating and sustaining worldhood. By examining the *how* of dance, the kind of experience it offers up, we approach the dynamic emergence of Being. In what follows, I draw on my years of dancing tango to elaborate an understanding of the experiential dimensions of the dance, and how these relate to the development of shared focal practices that disclose insights associated with embodied being-in-the world.

Introduction

Musically, the tango is probably not important;
its only importance is what we give it. This reflection is correct,
but perhaps applies to everything. To our own death, for example,
or to the woman who rejects us. The tango can be debated,
and we have debates over it, but it still guards, as does all that is truthful, a secret.
(Borges, 1999, pp. 400-401)

Dancing tango comprised for a time the warp and woof of my everyday existence. Like many others, I succumbed from the outset to the visceral poetics of shared improvisation, the evocations of the music, its complex interplay of melody and rhythm, and to the raw honesty of dancing so closely with a partner. I had previously trained in ballet, contemporary, and improvised dance forms, but nothing prepared me for the completely immersive experience that is Argentine tango. Although Arthur Miller won't tell you this, Argentine Tango is not a series of

steps or intricate patterns to be rehearsed and performed. It is, at its heart, a full-bodied response to infinitely singular cues. Tango puts you in a distinct place and time and in a unique connection with another dancer, and in so doing, a world replete with bodily vigor emerges.

Though years have past, there are nights in which vivid dreams remind me of the felt-sense of tango. I return to a strange yet familiar embrace comprised of minute adjustments; shifting, stepping back, and turning toward another person in ways that feel like complicity in motion. I *am* movement (or perhaps I simply become more aware that this is the case), plunging headlong while at the same time feeling suspended. I do not know where the dance is taking me, and yet I am more than ever aware of where (and what) I am. Travelling with a companion whose movements match, respond to, and instigate my own in a blurring of cause and effect, it feels as though we have become pure temporality and extension. Any senses of before and after, self and other, collapse, leaving something like pure presence in their place.

Although I no longer dance tango every day, the sense of it remains and alters my way of being-in-the-world. My daily living is haunted by experiences whose origins can be traced back to what was disclosed to me through this dance, while the retention of these insights provides the basis for my exploration and assertions in the following account. Among these is that tango embodies numerous truths about the nature of human beings and Being in general, distilled in a potent practice that can be simultaneously accessible and challenging. Tango coalesces meaning around its associations as a cultural product or site of exoticism; however what interests me most are the teachings of tango that make themselves available through attentiveness to the lived experience of dancing it. These teachings draw upon the following insights: First, that embodiment is our fundamental state of being and movement our primary language; this pertains to both self-awareness and other-understanding. Second, imaginaries associated with tango may be instrumental in attaining skilfulness, but may also obscure the authentic experience of the dance. Third, kinaesthetic-kinetic imagery relates to the poetics and poeticising of tango; this interaction with imagery constitutes an Imaginary in which heightened awareness of corporeality brings us closer to the lived and felt-sense of tango as an authentic experience. And finally, tango as it is danced, rather than performed or observed, is an enabling force of Heideggerian *worlding* (i.e., Being-in-the-world), the dynamic interplay of elements through which a world comes to be (Heidegger, 1971, p. 180). Sustaining the tango embrace constitutes a *focal practice* of this generative intentionality.

Van Manen (2007), describing his vision for a phenomenology of practice, speaks of “the pathic power of phenomenological reflections” (p. 12). More recently, he clarifies how “A phenomenology of practice does not aim for technicalities and instrumentalities—rather, it serves to foster and strengthen an embodied ontology, epistemology, and axiology of thoughtful and tactful action” (van Manen, 2014, p. 15). Learning and dancing Argentine Tango entail precisely these dimensions, providing a fertile site for phenomenological reflection and a model of thoughtful action within a well-defined frame. Tango serves as an exemplar for fostering and strengthening these dimensions via an embodied epistemology of tacit skills, an axiology that discloses internal and external degrees of authenticity, and an ontology that echoes Heidegger’s sense of Being as a vibrant mode of being-in-the-world. This is particularly evident in the centrality of the embrace in Tango as a composition of motile relationality that locates us while actively sensing another being. Moving together within this embrace, we find ourselves affected by a mood that perfuses our lives. Argentine Tango provides access to pathic knowing of the kind that van Manen (2007) suggests:

...inheres in the sense and sensuality of our practical actions, in encounters with others and in the ways that our bodies are responsive to the things of our world and to the situations and relations in which we find ourselves. (p. 12)

Through deep listening and kinesthetic attunement, tango partners move with a harmony that can feel transcendent. Attuned to each other, they create a singular, original, never-repeated expression of mutual affinity. I invite you in what follows to dance a tango, which is to say, to appreciate a way of being, a mode of Being, and the subtle aspects of a bodied-state unconstrained by everyday grammars of Time, Space, Weight and Flow.¹

Lesson One: *Balanceo* and Embodiment

How do we begin? With intention. Walking toward each other, across the floor, we have declared our aim with a *cabeceo*. A world is born in this meeting of eyes, and it hangs suspended between us. I move toward the centre, each step deliberate and full, and feel the air thicken. It resists while pulling me in and through it, like water. Now close enough to touch, we embrace, although naively at first, discovering details of distribution and weight, and finding the edges and tones of our singular connection. At the same time, this embrace is universal, with arms and torsos holding, touching, framing the architecture of a shared place that is both familiar and profound. The embrace manifests a virile stillness – the gravitational field of a newborn system coalescing around and between us as we take our first breaths. We hold this embrace and each other; holding on until this world in which we find ourselves begins to move.

Argentine tango, as opposed to ballroom or American style tango, is generally danced in a very close embrace. Rather than consisting of a fixed series of movements (although these may be a teaching and learning tool in some contexts), partners attune to each other through slight shifts of weight called the *balanceo*. Both dancers come to know, through attending to these shifts, which leg is supporting, and which leg and foot is free. One's weight, in tango, is generally distributed more fully toward one side at any moment (in dance-speak, this relates to the felt experience of a relation to gravity because, objectively speaking, our full weight remains distributed throughout the body). From here, the leader (who is traditionally male) initiates the conditions that allow or cause various movements to occur by taking a step, or by opening space to the side through a torso rotation. All tango movements, whether they appear large and dramatic, or small and intimate, rely on these two basic mechanisms of shifting weight and torso rotation that are connected to an upper-lower body dissociation. This is what gives tango its character. The movement can be as simple as walking together; however, for this to be effective from both internally felt and externally seen perspectives, it takes an inordinate amount of practice in harnessing subtle aspects of the two mechanisms described above (body rotation and weight shifting). Some say that it takes ten years just to learn how to walk properly in Argentine tango.

An intriguing aspect of this learning is that, for the most part, adult humans already know how to walk. We have used the same functional mechanisms in an off-hand, unconscious way. Try walking across the room while noticing how weight is transferred from one foot to the other.

¹ These terms are from Rudolph Laban who created a system for notating dance. More details follow in the section on kinesthetic imagery.

Bring your attention to your arms and shoulders and note the swing that accompanies this movement. As you take a step, the opposite shoulder comes forward, while the shoulder on the same side as the foot you've stepped on shifts slightly back. Exaggerate this rotation as you walk, and you will have a sense of the tango gait. Try not to force the dynamic but simply allow it to occur naturally and magnify it. You may feel your upper body rotating around its own axis while your legs stride with confident directness below. Tango brings attention to this everyday locomotion, and this is one of the (many) ways it demonstrates the first lesson – that we are always, already embodied, and that movement is our first and primary language.

In her recent treatise on *Why We Dance: A Philosophy of Bodily Becoming*, Kimerer LaMothe (2015) states that: “Dancing is bodily movement that...always accomplishes the all-important task of exercising the medium through which humans live: their sensory, kinetic creativity” (p. 7). Movement is our mother-tongue, as Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (2011) points out. Human infants are not pre-linguistic; rather, we become post-kinetic as we mature. This assertion contradicts traditional thinking in cognitive science where language is considered necessary for the formation and holding of intentional states such as beliefs and desires. In Sheets-Johnstone's estimation, however, the logic is inverted since infants are not lacking in cognitive capacities due to their unformed capacity for formal (spoken and written) language; rather, the development of cognition is connected fundamentally with motor experience. “Infant spatial perceptions and cognitions are intimately tied to movement and are constituted from the ground up by infants themselves – without a manual and without instruction from anyone” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2010, p.165). More generally speaking, in terms of how the body and movement are implicated in thought, Sheets-Johnstone (1999) writes, “To assume that thinking is something only a mind does, and doing or moving are something only a body does is, in effect, to deny the possibility of thinking of movement” (p. 493).

Movement-derived metaphors are central to linguists Lakoff's and Johnson's (1999) *Integrated Theory of Primary Metaphor* which holds that embodied experience undergirds all ‘thinking.’ According to the authors, we begin our lives in a state of *conflation* in which early subjective experiences and judgments are undifferentiated. These become our primary metaphors, which are instantiated as permanent neural connections crossing conceptual domains. In the latter, “higher level” functions, which I contend are functions of increased experience, maturity and facility, these primary metaphors can be combined in new ways to create novel inferences. The consequence is that what we experience bodily becomes how we think, and how we think and reason is due to the ongoing incorporation in linguistic formations of these embodied, experiential metaphors. Mark Johnson (2007) provides further argument that movement forms the substrate of thought which is augmented through imagination in stating that “our experience of meaning is based, first, on sensorimotor experience, our feelings, and our visceral connections to the world, and, second, on various imaginative capacities for using sensorimotor processes to understand abstract concepts” (p. 12).

‘Mental states’ are not abstract theoretical concepts since one cannot know the experience of mentalizing without having and being a *body*. So-called mental states are necessarily related to bodily conditions, patterns and habits of response and, as such, are visible to the attentive eye. Even when we are not specifically paying attention, we coordinate our actions with others, as in the movement of a crowd on a busy city street. Sheets-Johnstone (2016) calls this “moving in concert” and suggests all animate life forms participate in this dynamic. Movement experience is the primary mode of individual and group organization. The spontaneous choreographies of our everyday interactions are complex exercises in self-movement, timing, and response patterns.

Our capacities for moving singly, interactively and collectively are deep-rooted in our phylogenetic and ontogenetic histories. We can understand the roots of human being and other animate ways of being in the world as forms of “thinking in movement” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2010) which in Sheets-Johnstone’s words, “is in fact the bedrock of our intelligence” (p. 174). Accordingly, dance forms assume, develop, and arrange the embodied elements of our being to generate specific languages. Energy dynamics and force patterns combine with parameters of amplitude, direction, and shape to allow dance practitioners to speak to each other and to an audience if anyone happens to be watching. Sheets-Johnstone further emphasises the importance of distinguishing between perceiving movement as occurring within space-as-a-container and the lived-experience of movement which *generates* a sense of space. She contends, “the adult concept of ‘being *in* space’...is basically a visually forged concept that is foreign to a tactile-kinesthetic/tactile-kinetic spatiality” (p. 171). We do not, experientially, move through space like an object through a void. Our movements are determined by, and determinative of, the qualities of the world in which they occur. LaMothe (2015) describes this similarly in saying “*I am the movement that is making me*” (p. 22, emphasis in original). Sheets-Johnstone (1999) writes:

It is of singular importance to note that movement *creates* the qualities it embodies and that we experience. In effect, movement does not simply take place *in* space and in time. We qualitatively create a certain spatial character by the very nature of our movement. (p. 268)

This generative power of movement and of moving together, commits us to a ‘worlding’ (Heidegger, 1971) of place and time. This is the world-forming power of dance: As dancers come together and begin to move in complex and coordinated ways, their dance begets a world, while the world the dancers come to inhabit is manifest in the very motions they make. Such world-formation is highly apparent in recognisable forms such as tango.

Lesson Two: *Cómo Bailer* and Tango Imaginaries

The *worlding* of tango is a complex interplay of cultural-historic imaginaries and afferent sensations integrally related to the experiential practice of dancing tango. Charles Taylor (2004) defines a social imaginary as the particular way in which “social existence” is construed. It includes imagination of “how [people] fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations” (p. 23). Tango manifests a social imaginary in terms of its rich history and the norms and narratives that have grown up around it over time.

Simultaneously occupying multiple times and places, what is termed ‘Argentine’ tango originated in Buenos Aires/Montevideo in the early twentieth century. This origin is considered by many the ‘real’ place to see and experience the dance form. At the same time, tango is also a transnational phenomenon. Having crisscrossed the Atlantic multiple times, it is now danced in China, Japan, New Zealand, and Africa, while continuing to thrive throughout Europe, the Americas and Russia. It persists unabated in the halls of Buenos Aires where it is a driver of tourism, practiced by global tango immigrants and locals of distinct generations who come to the dance by very different routes. This polysemicity contributes to a complex relationship between what is considered ‘authentic’ and what is ‘imagined’ in tango and generates multiple imaginaries. Primary among these are what I term the *Exotic-Erotic Imaginary*, which deals with

representations of tango linked to affect, cultural commodification, exports (shows) and imports (tourists), and which considers tango as spectacle; in addition the *Mythic-Historic Imaginary*, entailing assumed identities and grand narratives, includes both historical or fictive references to the bawdy roots of tango, and stories with a focus on passion, desire and lust.

How these imaginaries contribute to internal and external measures of authenticity varies with each dance instance. In some cases, the imaginaries may draw upon or influence kinaesthetic sensibilities in ways that contribute to, or detract from, a felt-sense, first-person, or internally valid sense of authenticity, while in others, they can have either an additive or subtractive effect on externally validated measures of authenticity. These parameters of authenticity are subjective and culturally infused as well. Depending on where (and when) one is located, a tango that both looks and feels authentic, conforming with traditional norms for correct use of physical grammar and aesthetic style, may provide a high degree of pleasure and *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) in contrast with a tango that is basically a *pastiche*, which is to say, a tango that attempts to portray historic and local elements, but does so badly and is awkwardly performed. Over-reliance on the imaginaries confines felt-experience to predictable parameters. In this regard, the tango imaginaries may be applied widely to situations in which what we think we know pervades and obscures what it is possible to discover. By the same token, imaginaries also represent the sedimentation of lived experience around shared cultural phenomena, and as such, may connect us with transcendental aspects of authenticity. What follows are more detailed descriptions and examples of these imaginaries.

The Exotic-Erotic Imaginary

Before commencing our first class, I sometimes ask new tango students what comes to mind when they think about tango. The most frequent responses include passion, sensuality, romance, and inevitably, a rose between the teeth and tossing of the head (which has in actuality nothing to do with tango). Tango can function as a powerful signifier of eroticism, exoticism, passion, and romance. These aspects are emphasised in representational interpretations of tango, such as that offered by Marta Savigliano (1995) in, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*. In her account, tango is full of tension and stereotypes: “a melodrama of stereotypes on the move, unstable stereotypes, stereotypes of the unpredictable” (p. 17). She positions tango as key to a “political economy of Passion” and refers to “[a] trackable trafficking in emotions and affects” (p. 1) which has paralleled colonialism. Her reading of tango as a form of exoticism emphasises how it functions as a cultural product and commodity; however, what is passed over in this telling is the lived experience of tango and the agency of tango in the tension that facilitates the emergence of Being. Savigliano admits that “The tango I invoke in these pages is nothing but my own version of tango. It is an appropriated tango (to which I feel entitled) that disrespectfully challenges many legitimate versions” (p. 12).

Coming from Argentina, Savigliano would be acutely aware of the power dynamics in and around tango. She states that the promotion of tango “through imperial exoticism and through ‘civilised’ appropriations generated such a diversity of tango practices that the need to establish an ‘authentic’ tango became a must” (p. 150). She goes on to say that tango “was not an exercise in banality. It was a matter of recognition, legitimacy, representation, and identity” (p. 150). This is where the Exotic-Erotic interacts with the Mythic-Historic – does it *look* like a tango *should* look? From reviews of the “tangos” on shows like *Dancing with the stars* (which I contend are far from authentic) in which terms such as *sexy*, *steamy*, *hot*, and *sultry* are used to

describe the performances, it is evident that tango continues to be a *hot* commodity for consumption. This version of tango is that which is recognised by a popular audience, as it is presented in dance competitions, movies, and advertisements. Fed by shows which brought tango to a global audience in the 1980s and 1990s, after years of it being pushed underground by military dictatorships in Argentina, *Forever Tango*, *Tango Pasion* and *Tango Argentino* launched the latest versions of a global tango epidemic fed by flashy illusions, acrobatics, and exotic-erotic images.

The Mythic-Historic Imaginary

Tango, as it has been popularly portrayed both in and out of Argentina (including in the exotic-erotic imaginary described above), is born of a fiction. This fiction builds on elements of exoticism and eroticism in combination with the haunting qualities and themes of tango music and the evocative period and place in which tango emerged. The story goes something like this: Buenos Aires at the turn of the 19th century experienced a massive influx of migrants who were predominantly young men and who came alone seeking their fortunes. Promised a week's wages and free passage, they arrived to crowded tenements and shanty towns in the *barrios* (neighbourhoods) of the city. There were few women and most worked as prostitutes. Life was gritty, dirty, dangerous and tough. Immigrants from Spain, Italy and Eastern Europe mingled with the cowboys from *Las Pampas* and the descendants of African slaves. Their music, movements and languages blended together to create the Tango as a hybrid, multi-ethnic dance form which spread to Europe when the well-heeled young libertines of the Argentine upper class who were familiar with the brothels travelled abroad as students or soldiers, thereby sparking the Parisian tango craze of the early 1900s.

As Beatriz Dujovne, an Argentine native and dance scholar makes clear, there are many inconsistencies to this myth of the origins of tango. For one thing, tango was not an illicit, secret fetish of the lower classes, danced only in brothels and bars. Those of the middle class were spending some of their disposable income on tango recordings and sheet music as early as 1909. The dance was not forbidden, and "the city brothels had neither space enough for dancing nor any incentive to waste money on it" (Dujovne, 2011, p. 7). There were "academies" where men could pay to dance with more experienced female partners in order to practice and improve their dance technique, but these women were not prostitutes. The appeal of this Imaginary is thus partially in its loose relationship with the truth. "The mythical tango is...a fiction we indulge in with the certitude that it is unreal. Now we can accept these myths for what they are, and enjoy what they give us, with the fullness of an imagined memory" (p. 17). There is an element of fantasy and of play in this story that enlivens the imagination:

These archetypes of sordid gangsters and tawdry ladies of the evening quickly became stereotypes...those who described the early tango clubs saw only what their prejudice allowed them to see: criminals engaged in vulgar dancing. This image was then transported to the outside world, where it was received either with horror and dismay or with excitement and enthusiasm. (Baim, 2007, p. 22)

Relating to these mythical origins provides a sense of participation in a grand narrative of adventure and triumph over dangerous circumstances. Femininity, seduction, and the alluring, irresistible charm of the *compadrito* invite us to assume another identity. In a world that is rife

with sexual innuendos and images, there are few places where we have the license to fully express and enjoy ourselves without inhibition. Tango provides this sultry narrative to all, young and old: Be unashamed of your sexuality and your inborn human ability for seduction. “It is generally agreed that a tango salon is a perfect place to observe femininity in action. It is a space where femininity is performed in an exaggerated and highly sexualised form” (Davis, 2015, p. 106). I consider this assumption of a seductive mythic-historic identity to differ from the circulation of exotic-erotic images of tango in that it is more personal, assumed to be true, lived as such and literally incorporated into one’s own practice of tango. Rather than accruing value through distance and ‘othering,’ this imaginary relies on the playful discovery of an alternative self-reality that is enlivened and released through the dance.

Lesson Three: *Cómo practicar* and Tango Imagery

Imagery is key to tango, both in terms of the evocative power of movement, and in relation to kinaesthetic and motor schemata which evolve with practice and contribute to dancers becoming adept at movement techniques. Through rehearsal, repetition, and the honing of skills related to attending to the nuances of the body in motion, the tango imaginary becomes rooted in heightened awareness of corporeality. We come closer to the felt-sense of tango as an authentic experience. I term this incorporative imaginary *kinesthetic-kinetic*, composed of movement vocabularies and strategies facilitating joint improvisation. This imaginary is more concrete than the aforementioned ones, as it is based on the combination of motor schemata and poetic images that contribute to a teaching-learning strategy for tango as a *practice*. Tango affords in this practice the emergence of corporeal agency through providing a place where one may take a stand, both literally and figuratively. Arriving at this place, which in tango means the embrace, the partners are overtaken by the connotations of the music and the atmosphere in simultaneously calling upon and creating imagery that helps to orchestrate the movements of the dance. Without images to coordinate the complexity involved in each moment of relating with a partner, the dance falls apart; something as simple as creating a shared gestalt contributes to both the felt-sense and observation that the individual dancers in a tango couple are “moving as one.”

For the dance of tango to emerge as such, a shared language for moving effectively and harmoniously together is needed. Kinesthetic and kinetic cues comprise teaching, learning, and performance strategies for creatively entering this shared dynamic world. These “embodied practices” (Spatz, 2015) comprise a means of approaching the seemingly insurmountable task of moving in complete harmony with someone else when every moment is improvised and any direction is possible. The “tango body” described by Kimmel (2009) is aligned axially, channelling energy downward and concentrating it in the body core, aligning hips and chest, or alternatively ‘loading’ the torso in a planar dissociation of the upper and lower body (pp. 90-91). These aspects of the tango *habitus* are often cultivated through images, such as a line or rod dropping through the centre of the body, with spheres that nest on top of each other and rotate in opposite directions, “rooting” the feet into the floor, or gathering energy to channel into a movement. The use of imagery in learning and performing dance is a long-standing tradition (Franklin, 1996); however, what is unique to tango is the use of shared images for joint improvisation. Partners may imagine that they are supporting a ball of energy between them, that they are leaves circling each other in a whirlpool, that a leg has become a cat’s tail, or that they are tracing patterns on the floor. These images allow for poetics to colour the dance and deploy

image schemata that ‘chunk’ complex information while providing shortcuts to mastering movements.

We can broadly understand dance as a transformation of movement behaviour within the dimensions of *Space* and *Time* – an alteration of expression that resonates in the medium of our awareness. It is precisely these dimensions that Rudolph Laban, the early twentieth-century Austro-Hungarian dance master and lifelong scholar of movement, refers to as the qualities that determine the type and style of movement in dance. Laban’s contribution to dance studies cannot be understated, and the use of capitalized terms in this description is drawn from his work and typologies². Laban developed theories related to the range and potential of human movement repertoires and a language for observing and recording movement, which includes dimensions of *Body*, *Effort*, *Space*, and *Shape*. Briefly, *Body* refers to parts of the body are in motion during a movement, and how these parts move (right leg extends); *Effort* refers to the quality of a movement (strong, light, sudden, sustained); *Space* refers to the direction or orientation of a movement (a straight or curved trajectory); and *Shape* refers to the way in which the body transforms in relation to the space surrounding it, or transforms the space itself. Laban’s concepts relate to the earlier discussion of “thinking in movement” in conceptualizing the development of skill and awareness related to movement experience and how movement creates, rather than inhabits, space. Laban provides a language that alludes to the felt-sense of creating a world where, in his words, each “phrase of movement, every small transference of weight, every single gesture of any part of the body reveals some feature of our inner life” (Laban, 1988, p. 19). His terminology is useful in providing detailed and accurate descriptions of movement from an external perspective; however, it also serves to indicate how movement dynamics can emerge from, and focalise, the lived, corporeal experience of tango.

Prominent in tango vocabulary is what Laban refers to as a ‘screw-like’ shape. There is a twisting through the torso that carries through from waist to shoulders. From here the legs extend in quick, direct movements, often with a very sudden Time effort. In my experience, Time is one of the main Efforts in tango, with the many switches from Sudden to Sustained providing dramatic suspense. Sustained movements are more in an arc or curve shape; partners can also hold each other in sudden stillness. This ‘playing with time,’ and the *shape* of this play, connects to the sense of creating a shared world, a ‘time apart’ that accompanies the experience of dancing tango. Tango also involves ‘shaping,’ both with the entire body and in subtle details as can be observed in the feet, which often seem to be drawing a pattern on the floor, or in the embrace itself, which can be tender, tight, demanding or fluid. The core initiates all the movements, and even those motions that seem to be concentrated in the legs are activated through the core, often through subtle cues between the partners. Yet is hard to observe the individual movements separately from the system of the couple; the partners truly form an integrated whole.

To achieve these sudden and sustained movements simultaneously in joint improvisation demands shared attention, complimentary musicality and a rapid means of communication. Whether through the close embrace or the synergistic use of the upper body, with arms and torso moving as a unit, the relative stability of the central image of tango, and the heart of the dance, is provided in the uncompromising persistence of the embrace. Quick direct movements, shaping and ornamentation, and sudden changes of direction are initiated from the centre, giving a sense

² A complete outline of Laban’s theory and methods is beyond the scope of this paper; for an overview of concepts see Dell, 1977 or Bartenieff, Crow, & Dell, 1977

to both participants and observers that the tango couple floats or glides in a self-contained and self-stabilising world.

The kinesthetic-kinetic schemata offer the greatest richness for the *worlding* of tango as the intrinsic connection of function and form. Partners are not required to use the same images; they need only to compliment each other for fluid movement to emerge. Joint improvisation requires attention, focus and openness simultaneously. For this reason, activities that require joint improvisation are among the most thrilling and consistently interesting available to us. Rebecca Lloyd (2015), for instance, compares a jazz band that plays from a score with one that is improvised. “The musical score provides a predictable, well-travelled path with predetermined goals; the jazz band, in comparison, affords a sense of emergence as an infinite number of pathways may be explored between the beginning and end of a performance” (pp. 28-29). Attending to the kinaesthetic senses and kinetic expressions, we press close to an internal sense of authenticity. When I am closely attuned to my motions in the dance while connecting kinesthetically and attentively with my partner, an infinity opens around us through which a singular dance world emerges.

Lesson Four: *El Abrazo* and Worlding

As we bring our weights together, my attention shifts, calling me into the space we share. No longer an *I*, *we* take a step, recalibrate, take another step. Body-to-body, we inhabit a shared axis that can rotate around itself and move in the four cardinal directions, spinning, pausing, holding, and swaying. I become aware of myself within and through this shared place in time, which is not static but fluid, a flux or flow, endlessly renewing itself in each moment.

Tango begins proximally, after the *cabeceo* which is the traditional manner of asking and agreeing to dance with a partner by making eye contact across a space, with two interconnected elements, namely, the establishment of the *abrazo* (embrace) and the *balanceo* (shared shifting of weight). Through the embrace, we find ourselves with a partner, literally bringing a world into being, and coming into being ourselves *through* a world that was hitherto nonexistent. Comments on this *worlding* (Heidegger, 1971) or world formation, abound in tango communities. One such comment from a popular blog is the following: “Tango came at a time when I very much needed to belong somewhere. Miraculously, tango became where I belonged” (Mari, 2015; <http://www.mytangodiaries.com/2015/11/tango-for-lifetime.html/>). *El Abrazo* supports the subtle communication that allows complex joint movement to occur. It is key to what drives up levels of affect in tango. A fifty-seven-year old divorced mother of two states: “When you dance, you are feeling everything – the music, the smoke in the air and the man's body. But the man's body is telling you what you are gonna do next. And so, it's very, very sensual” (Wilson, 2006). The same article quotes a teacher, Natasha Poberaj, who says “we need to embrace someone and feel someone else who is embracing us...Something the whole world needs – to feel embraced.” (Wilson, 2006). Once the embrace has been established, subtle shifting and sensing of weight (*balanceo*) allows for deep communication and joint preparation to move as a unit. From this point on, the *embrace*, rather than either dancer, is the site of the dance. All movements are in service of maintaining this embrace, exploring and establishing what movements are possible for this unique combination of people, music and forces, all focussed on this specific moment in time and position in space.

The embrace in tango, and the practical knowledge required to attain and maintain it throughout the dance, can be considered as an example of a *focal practice* (Borgmann, 1984). In Borgmann's terms: "The human ability to establish and commit oneself to a practice reflects our capacity to comprehend the world, to harbor it in its expanse as a context that is oriented by its focal points" (p. 207). Borgmann draws here on Heidegger's conception of "gathering," which implies the dynamic unity of the *fourfold*: "the interplay of the crucial dimensions of earth and sky, mortals and divinity" (p. 198). The partners engage in a dance which Heidegger (1971), referring to the "the round dance" of gathering, describes in the following way: "The fouring presences as the worlding of the world. The mirror-play of world is the round dance of appropriating" (p. 180). Gathering, here, is intimately connected to *worlding* through a practice "that temporarily brings into their own both the thing itself [the dance] and those involved in the typical activity concerning the use of the thing [dance]" (Dreyfus & Spinosa, 1997, p. 166). The shared movements found in many dances, and more specifically, joint improvisation within the tango embrace, express the human capacity to gather and manifest a world.

Shared engagement brings us into a sense of our own-most authentic being in which we stand apart while preserving a mutual connectedness. Tango demands close and constant attention to self-movement while moving conjointly with a partner in the dance creation. Indeed, tango opens us up to the inherently intersubjective nature of our existence. An example of "moving in concert" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2016), tango is profoundly intimate. It can thus be understood as much more than an aesthetic form, cultural product, or entertainment; it is a focal practice that connects us with the ground of Being itself. Emerging from, and sustained by, our potential for movement, the practice of tango manifests what Heidegger refers to as the *sway* – *das Walten* – which is what holds us, and holds out, the emergence of beings into Being. "In this sway, rest and movement are closed and opened up from an originary unity" (Heidegger, 2000, p. 64) that is housed and expressed through the body. As LaMothe writes: "Whether I am asleep or awake, conscious or not, every movement I make makes me who I am. *I am the movement that is making me*" (p. 22). In the "sway" we discover a primordial power "making" us who we are and who we might become.

The *sway* emerges in tango through improvisation within the confines of the embrace. Sensing anew each moment, without predetermined choreography, dancers use their sense of weight to discover a hitherto unknown world, each movement adding to the world creation. It is this distinct experience of *worlding* that contributes to the well-documented tango addiction and fanaticism; "This sense of being in a world where entropy is suspended explains in part why flow-producing activities can become so addictive" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p. 61). When the dance goes well, when it brings us closer to a sense of our own-most being through the attentive creation of a newly shared world, we have a sense of flowing seamlessly into an expansive and extensive agency. The visceral elements of tango, which require jointly maintained focus and effort, provide a clearing for the emerging-abiding sway, which is "the unfolding that opens itself up, the coming-into appearance in such unfolding, and holding itself and persisting in appearance" (Heidegger, 2000, p. 15). The sway is in the dynamics of "the prevailing of what prevails – a centering, a gathering, a pulling together, in a continual *agon* that always pulls against a pulling apart" (Knowles, 2013, p. 266). Holding each other, persistently, tango partners hold out the possibility of *worlding* in and through the fluidity of the embrace.

Tango Addiction and Here-ness

While in Buenos Aires in 2006, I was interviewed by a crew from ABC news who were covering tango tourism in Argentina. My story didn't make it into their published account, but that of Marina Palmer, a New York advertising executive, did. She had come to Buenos Aires eight years previously on vacation and became a self-professed "tangoholic" (even writing a book about it called *Kiss and Tango*). As the article reports, "Palmer quit her job, moved to Buenos Aires and was out dancing at the *milongas* every single night" (Wilson, 2006). This is not an unusual story. One of many available "tango tour" websites, *Narrative Tango Tours*, claims that: "By the end of the night you will have a firm grasp on the true Argentine tango, and understand why people become addicted to this dance and often change their lives for it." This effect is recursive, as not only do people change their lives for tango, the experience of dancing tango changes people, and this transformation leads to a need to change one's life.

At a recent *milonga* in Toronto, I ran into a former tango student from Montreal who recognised me as his first tango teacher. As we spoke, he confessed that starting to dance tango had been "a big deal" for him. He reported that for up to an hour prior to each class and before going to *milongas*, he would start to experience physiological symptoms such as breaking into a sweat, thereby indicating how the experience of tango can spill over from the dance into the surrounding lifeworld. Tango can subsume identities and generate new selves who know what it means to assert a way of being in and through its embrace in a constantly evolving, never completed search for authenticity.

Dujovne (2011) describes the social (as opposed to spectacular) tango as "one where real people in dance halls pair up to dance a pure form of gentleness and physical closeness... They improvise. They dance for themselves, introspectively. Shunning the external world, their eyes turn inward" (p. 5) to create new worlds of possibility. As Stephen Brown (2010) writes in his *Confession of a Tango Addict* blog:

I must confess that I have been seduced by the magic of a perfect tango (or was it a vals?). The music and my partner resonated in my heart and soul, and mine in hers, as we moved effortlessly around the room. The floor was crowded, but it was just us two and the music, though we were aware of others just enough to avoid collisions. For one sublime tango, we touched each others' hearts in ways that words cannot match. The feeling was unexpected; it was a golden paradise, the promise of heaven. Then the music ended, our eternity of three minutes was over, and we returned as strangers to our own tables.

In his discussion of Being-as such, Heidegger (1962) describes the *clearing* or opening that is synonymous with "Dasein" as the being for whom Being is a concern or question. Dasein is inherently an emplacement, a locale, with this being-in-the-world becoming a site for the emergence of that which is initially disclosed. Dasein is a being-there. "By its very nature, Dasein brings its 'there' along with it. If it lacks its 'there' then it is not factically the entity which is essentially Dasein; indeed, it is not this entity at all. *Dasein is its disclosedness*" (p. 171). In the embrace, tango provides a "there" through which we find ourselves in a place that is replete with meanings that may be referential, as in the case of exotic-erotic and mythic-historic imaginaries, or visceral, as is the case of kinaesthetic-kinetic imagery. The Being of the "there" has both an inner and an outer constitution. Heidegger further breaks down the *existential* of the

“there” into two fundamental *existentialia*: Being-there as state-of-mind (*Befindlichkeit*) and Being-there as understanding (*Verstehen*). Looking at tango as an exemplary form, it is possible to attend to the movements that can be skilfully mastered (*Verstehen*) within an emplacement, a locale, of the embrace and with an accompanying mood of longing (*Befindlichkeit*).

Tango was born in a city of immigrants, and to this day remains most popular in locations with a high density of foreigners such as New York, Montreal, and Istanbul. Here travellers, newcomers and locals find themselves in the arms of strangers yet within a familiar embrace. The music of tango expresses longing for another time, place, a lost love, a dream, yet in the embrace we find both longing and belonging. By incorporating the imaginaries while focusing on the nuanced corporeal and intercorporeal aspects of the emergent dance, we locate a sense of authenticity for ourselves. Being-there in the embrace, a secret is disclosed; with the evocation of mutually constructive imaginaries, we balance, shift weight and are caught once more in the sway of tango.

Acknowledgements

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the generous comments and revisions to this article contributed by reviewers, members of joeLAB at York University (<http://www.braindetective.com/>) and my phenomenological friend and neighbour, Borys Kowalsky.

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