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TRANSFORMING BODIES: TANGO IN THE MICHIGAN ARGENTINE TANGO CLUB

By

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis deals with issues of authenticity in the performance of tango in the Michigan Argentine Tango Club based in Ann Arbor, Michigan. A historical analysis provides a framework for understanding the way tango has been appropriated in many cities throughout the world. Ethnographic fieldwork and interviews are used to investigate dancers' feelings and behaviors about tango within the club. Music, choreography, gender roles, and trance are discussed as aspects of dancers' Argentine tango performance that balance between constructed Argentineness, specific tastes and desires, and practical considerations within the club.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores tango performance in the Michigan Argentine Tango Club (hereafter MATC). Based in Ann Arbor, Michigan, MATC is one of many tango communities throughout the world that has "re-appropriated" the tango. By "re-appropriation" I mean not only the way that MATC's performance of tango has been adapted to suit their needs, but the way dancers construct a concept of authentic Argentineness in teaching and performing tango. In this thesis, I argue that what makes MATC a successful tango club is their practice and performance of what they consider authentic combined with what is desired by dancers in their club.

The history of tango has always been about local representation of tango, and I argue that when MATC's calls their tango "Argentine" they actually refer to a constructed Argentina that MATC shapes to meet their own needs as a thriving tango dancing community. This reconstruction takes the form of both picking and choosing which aspects of "Argentina" that serve their club best, as well as creating a narrative about Argentina that helps dancers feel that what they do in MATC is authentic, nostalgic, and ultimately transformative.

Tango originated as an urban phenomenon in Buenos Aires Argentina, although it was danced in other neighboring cities in the Río de la Plata region,[1] such as Montevideo, Uruguay. Paris during the 1910s was historically the first place and time where tango was appropriated by what Marta Savigliano calls upper class "scandalization." Savigliano uses the word "scandalization" to refer to a process by which tango became a subject of debate and consequently an object which people used to exert their cultural authority. As

Savigliano states, "In the Río de la Plata region, both reactions, scandal and fascination, were hardly more than low-key rumors until the dispute turned up in Europe. The debates over the tango in Europe immediately amplified tango's 'erotic problem' at home" (1995: 114). Michael Largey's concepts "vulgarization and classicization," two terms that refer to upper class borrowing of lower class music, can also be used to explain the way elites used tango music and dance to increase their cultural power and reinforce social and political distance from the lower class roots of tango. Like dancers in Paris and London that reinterpreted the tango during the 1910s, upper class Haitian elites retold the myths and stories of Vodou in ways that strengthened their cultural authority, and allowed elite Haitian composers to project their music as "idealized and ahistorical" (2003: 13-14).

Ann Arbor is distanced in time and space from Paris during the early 20th century, and while similar concepts of Parisian "appropriation" apply to the way MATC teaches and performs tango, they do not have a "scandalous" relationship to the tango. MATC does not think of what they do in their practices or their *milongas* (formal tango dances) as exotic or naughty. However, if we go back to Largey's concepts that deal with how cultures use music and dance to remember history, MATC dances a version of the tango that is "classicized," "idealized," and operates on a premise that tango is an essential cultural icon of Argentina. Dancers in MATC perform a tango that can remain disconnected from social and political realities in Buenos Aires, making what they do not only connected to a constructed Buenos Aires, but a Buenos Aires that remains outside of history—an autonomous Buenos Aires brought to life in the imaginations of MATC's dancing bodies. This reconstruction brings MATC a kind of cultural authority within a global economy, and while this thesis focuses more on performance than on a global

economy of cultural goods, it is important to keep negotiating tango's commodity value. No matter where tango is danced today it cannot escape its history as a cultural product that carries with it the weight of exoticism, authenticity, and scandal.

Although many dancers in MATC go to Buenos Aires and bring back inspiration, new teaching techniques, movements, and recorded music, they do not, nor can they bring back all the pieces of the Argentina that they imagine. In this way, talking about the tango of Buenos Aires or more generally of Argentina is a problem. All of the following are examples of Argentina's tango: the tangos Borges describes in the late 19th century where knife fights in the *milongas*[2] of the *payadores* and *milongueros* began to immigrate from the country into the city;[3] tangos of the *conventillos* (suburban tenement housing) and *orrillas* (slum dwelling on the coast) where white immigrants began to dance in a "sentimental" style; tangos danced during the heyday of Argentina in the 1920s through the 1950s where tango was an activity of popular and national sentiment; or tangos in a city now twice the population of New York City, where a small world of travelers, locals, and world class teachers dance a multiplicity of tango styles into the wee hours of the morning. Perhaps it is all these tangos of Buenos Aires, Argentina(s), and many others not listed here, that MATC dancers imagine.

Even for dancers in MATC who have never been to Buenos Aires, this place still has an important appeal and function. Dancers in MATC have constructed a relationship with Buenos Aires' tangos that creates a special connection in their minds. This connection has the power to affect not only the energy in their dance and the way that they feel as human beings, but the way dancers realize themselves as a community of dancing bodies. In Ann Arbor, this magical connection to an object and place allow

people to perform in ways that bring personal transformations as well as larger social transformations.

Dancers in MATC not only think of Buenos Aires when they imagine tango, they also think of all of the cities where they have danced. This creates a kind of meta-narrative on the tango, where dancers connect nostalgically to an imagined Argentina, and to all of the other places they have found great dances. This occurrence in Ann Arbor compares to other cities throughout the world that connect in some respect to Buenos Aires' tangos, whether actively in their minds or indirectly through the use of recorded music, and yet distinguish their dancing as unique to their location.

Background and Cultural Context of MATC

Tango has had a general resurgence in the last twenty years in the United States, and the Michigan Argentine Tango Club is one of many local tango communities that have taught and performed tango in the Midwest. New York has the longest connection to tango, as it became popular in Broadway shows in conjunction with the popular ballroom dance couple Vernon and Irene Castle.[4] Today tango dancers travel in a network of Midwest cities such as Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, and Pittsburgh that teach Argentine tango. Since I started attending classes in the fall of 2001, MATC has grown from a handful of dancers who met informally each week into an internationally known tango club with hundreds of members. The club hosts some of the most respected and influential teachers in tango. Teachers such as Brigitte Winkler, Tom Stermitz, Alex Krebs, and Susanna Miller, continue to visit the club, sometime more than once a year, attracting dancers from all over the world to dance in Ann Arbor.

My participation with the club began as a dancer who having recently moved to Michigan in 2001 to pursue a Master's degree in flute performance was looking for a place to dance tango. As I began to dance more, I simultaneously found musicians who were interested in playing tango. My decision in 2003 to study tango as an ethnomusicologist came out of my interest in both dancing and playing tango, and was continued as I began to wonder why so many people (including myself) are so engrossed in Argentine tango.

Even though this thesis dissects the way tango is performed in Ann Arbor, the underlying problem I investigate is why dancers are crazy about tango. MATC's home page reads:

> *¡Hola! ¿Bailamos Tango?*
>
> Welcome to the Michigan Argentine Tango Club web page. Our group consists of students from the University of Michigan and community members from Ann Arbor and surrounding areas, all of whom are very enthusiastic (read crazy...) about the dance.[5]

Answering the question of why people in MATC are so "crazy" about tango brings along with it a set of deeper questions that this thesis explores: What is it that MATC dancers say they are attracted to in tango? How do they show their feelings about tango in their behaviors on and off the dance floor? Why has tango historically been such a touchy dance and still today claims such strong feelings of love or hate? How are feelings of authenticity and nostalgia a part of an obsession with tango?

Through a critical look at the way tango is taught and performed in MATC, this thesis offers an understanding of the way tango is embedded in a web of nostalgic

feelings and authentic representations. However, what I have discovered is that these feelings are part of a web of performance that is passed from dancer to dancer with a great amount of variation, and while MATC dancers hold on to their feelings of an idealized tango past, they also engage in a conscious effort to perpetuate innovative ways of performing tango.

General Terms and Concepts on Tango Music and Dance

The social style of tango that MATC performs looks nothing like the style of tango that most Americans have seen in movies or on ballroom competitions on television.[6] MATC teaches beginners what they call close embrace or *milonguero*, an improvised style of tango danced very close (chest to chest and belly to belly) that works on the premise that dance partners maintain an energetic upper body connection along with a heightened sense of awareness of the music, their partner's movements, and the dance floor. Since dance partners are literally stuck together, they put themselves in physical danger of stepping on each other or running into other dance couples if they haven't refined and practiced how to hold their bodies together, how to communicate movement, how to navigate with other dance couples, and how to listen to the music.

The aesthetic of MATC's close embrace operates on a male lead and a female follower. This gendered alignment works better physically because on average men are wider, taller, or larger framed than women. Historically, Argentine tango's gender roles also maintain connected to ideas about male "machismo" or male display of dominance. In Savigliano's analysis this display has historically encouraged women who danced tango to adopt the role as an objects wagered between the choreography of men's steps

(1995: 46), and in the words of Taylor, established the "overwhelming choreographic state of the central theme of the dance...as an encounter between the active, powerful, and completely dominant male and the passive, docile, and completely submissive female" (1976: 281). While the residue of Argentine machismo lingers in MATC (and in most tango communities for that matter) dancers in MATC are taught how to negotiate their socially performed roles as men and women on the dance floor.

MATC teaches men and women to learn typical choreography for their roles, but ultimately not be locked down in the stereotypical behaviors or movements for those roles. Women often perform movements that draw attention to their legs and hips, such as *boleos* (a move caused by an interruption of a turn causing a followers leg to swing free), *ochos* (a movement that occurs when partners walk on crossed feet and consequently a follower's hips draws and imaginary figure eight on the floor), or *lapis* (meaning pencil, where the female draws circles on the floor with her pointed toe). Women practice making moves such as these look graceful and beautiful. Men practice how to cue women into these moves, but they also practice making their part look smooth and elegant to match their follower. In short, while women are expected to posses typically feminine qualities in their dancing (grace, lilt, agility, beauty), and men are expected to possess typically males qualities (clarity, strength, courage), dancers in MATC do not think of themselves as defined by the gendered qualities of their socially performed roles on the dance floor.

Although MATC dancers perform close embrace as their main style of performance, they also offer classes on open embrace, a style that operates on connection between arms and bodily alignment constructed without their torsos touching. Although

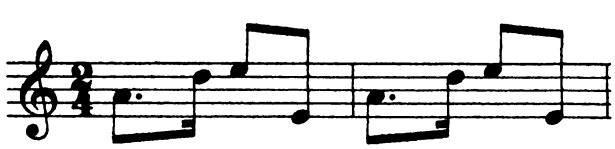
partners in open embrace dance a few feet apart, which allows them more room to perform "flashy" leg movements, lifts, and kicks, open embrace is still a social improvised style of tango, and many tango dancers enjoy switching between open and close embrace.

After four years of participation in MATC, I have observed very little hostility between dancers in MATC concerning stylistic preferences.[7] Although the unspoken rule is that the more styles a dancer can perform the better the dancer they are, tango styles are usually the source of debates not only on which one is the best but which is the most authentically Argentine. While MATC presents that what they do is Argentine, they also keep their door open to possibilities in tango performance.[8]

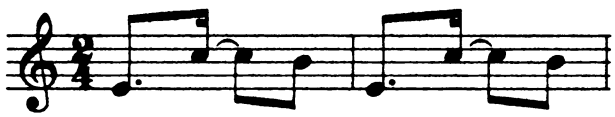
The way MATC teaches and performs music is another factor that makes their club so successful. I have observed that MATC always plays very danceable music, from the very first beginner's lesson to the bi-monthly *milongas*. By danceable I mean tango music that is straightforward in beat but varied enough to inspire improvisation and good social energy on the dance floor. Recordings of Carlos Di Sarli's orchestra from the 1930s-1950s are popular to use for beginners not only because his arrangements are usually realized in a slower, more easily danced, "two-feel," but because it clearly displays many things that make tango sound like tango: a consistent *marcatto*, the signature beat pattern of tango, always felt in groups of two or four, where accented beats are preceded by an accelerated sweep; typical tango orchestration of three *bandoneóns* (accordion-like instrument with buttons), three violins, bass and piano;[9] and a clear distinction between melody, accompaniment, and filler. It is these distinctions that dancers are taught to recognize and then respond to in their improvised movements.

Dancers in MATC are well educated about Argentine tango music, and Di Sarli is just one of many Argentine orchestras that are part of MATCs body of recorded tango music. Other prominent tango music from what is generally referred to as "the Golden Era" (roughly the 1920s through 1960s) include orchestras of Pedro Laurenz, Miguel Caló, Rodolfo Biagi, Ricardo Tanturi, and Juan D'Arienzo, but also include more modern sounding orchestras of Horacio Salgan and Osvaldo Pugliese.[10] As dancers become more comfortable with the sound of tango they not only begin to harbor favorite orchestras but learn how to express movement differently with different orchestras.

There are three main stylistic categories of tango that dancers must learn to recognize and dance to: tango (as described above), waltz, and *milonga* (another meaning of the term which refers to a faster style of tango danced in two). Waltz maintains the characteristic sweep of the *marcatto* as described above. The only difference is the way the character of steps is changed in waltz to match three beats of time instead of four. Although dancers group the dance style *milonga* with tango, the word *milonga* originally referred to the late 19th century song and dance duels of rural gauchos that preceded the urban performance of tango in Buenos Aires.[11] The *milonga* as a style of music and dance (not *milonga* as the dance event itself as described above) can be recognized by a signature rhythm. Musical examples 1-2 show two prominent manifestations of this rhythm.



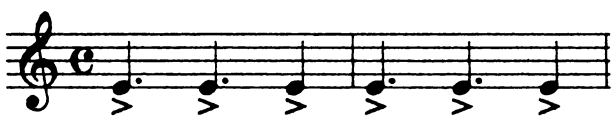
Musical Example 1



Musical Example 2

The style of *milonga*, whether it is a slower-paced *milonga* as ones sung by Carlos Gardel, or a faster-paced *milonga* of D'Arenzio's *Milonga de mis amores*, has a completely different feeling than tango. Dancers use similar steps to dance to *milonga*, but there is a more refined style of *milonga* called *milonga traspie*, (traspie—to trip). In this style of dancing *milonga* (which will not be focused on in this thesis) dancers use alternating foot work that require dancers to switch between their right and left feet in rapid succession.

There is also a modern version of the *milonga* rhythm that is borrowed form the older rural form of *milonga* called the *milonga campera* (or *milonga* of the countryside). Example three shows the way this rhythm is typically written.



Musical Example 3

While this rhythm sounds the same as the rhythm in example number 2, the difference is that is it is written in four and played very fast. Astor Piazzolla, an Argentine composer of tango music of the late 20th century who is known for his innovative tango compositions, often uses this older form of the *milonga* rhythm. For example, it is the basis for his composition, *Libertango*.[12]

While Piazzolla is respected by tango dancers in MATC, his music is almost never played in MATC. Most dancers say that Piazzolla is wonderful for listening, not for dancing. Piazzolla's music thrives on unpredictability, where it can suddenly jump from a slower lyrical section without any obvious beat to a faster section using the type of *milonga* beat shown in example 3.[13] Also, Piazzolla's frequent use of the *milonga campera* rhythm discourages dancers; it is difficult to fit steps with the syncopations in the composite rhythm.

However, despite the challenges of learning three styles of music that are lumped together into the general category of "tango," learning steps in MATC is never separated from the more important process of learning *how* to listen and move to the music at the same time. This way of teaching tango is not standard for all tango communities. Many dancers are left to decide on their own how to string learned steps together to fit with the music. The integration of movement and music is difficult to learn at first, and many beginning dancers who come to learn tango in MATC are frustrated by the amount of time it takes to learn both. However, I have observed that as people take the time to learn how to integrate improvised movements with music, it allows more people to dance successfully with one another. Steps in MATC ultimately serve as a way for two people to negotiate their bodies' physical movements with the music. Without this integration of movement and music, dancers learn to rely on moving in ways that are too predictable or ways that looks good outwardly to an audience, both of which can function without consistent partner communication.

At MATC's *milonga*s (the dance event itself), dancers are trained to use danceable music in formal ways that bring the necessary consistency and energy for good

social dynamics. Music is organized into *tandas* (rounds), which consist of three to four pieces of music usually by the same orchestra, always in the same style. *Tandas* usually follow some kind of pattern, generally three *tandas* of tango, one *tanda* of waltz, one *tanda* of *milonga*, followed by three *tandas* of tango, and so on. In between each *tanda* there is a *cortina* (curtain) or music that cues dancers to exit and enter the dance floor and find a new partner along the way. Many dance communities try to follow this type of organization, but MATC takes the formality more seriously than any other tango community that I have observed. As a friend from the Kansas City community told me once on his first visit to MATC when he noticed everyone politely exiting the dance floor after a *tanda*, "Wow! they have got everyone so trained here." The *tanda* is a practice that is used in Argentina and yet it serves a practical function in MATC. It is this mix of the practical with the authentic that shows how feelings toward Argentineness can unite dancers formally and emotionally.

The findings in this thesis show a trend in the literature of tango and in tango's globally varied representations that define it by local standards, but simultaneously revert to establishing a connection with Argentina. The tango in MATC is just one example of this type of relationship. As an ethnographic investigation, this study will offer in greater detail that is up to date exactly how it is that they dance an Argentine tango in Ann Arbor, Michigan. An investigation of the way tango music and dance is performed in MATC offers a guide to those who want to understand the way that tango has traveled and is represented in different ways throughout the world. The nature of tango is to travel and to be adapted to meet the needs and tastes of those who transported it. Argentine tango today is about local and international representations. The following chapters in this

thesis help to show the way that performance of tango in MATC is both a representation of local Ann Arbor tango and that of Argentina.

Chapter 1 is a historiography of tango that looks at the way different authors have traced the "origins" of tango. In laying out a variety of viewpoints on tango, beginning in the 1890s through to today, this chapter will show how histories of tango have been consistently reshaped to fit the cultural aesthetic and needs of a particular dance community.

Chapter 2 looks at the way dancers in MATC are taught to use their senses to create "tango spaces" that strike a balance between constructed notions of Argentine tango performance and selective performance concepts that dancers find desirable in their club. MATC dancers' sense of tango space is linked to Argentina by how they have been taught to move in the close embrace, how to move in the larger social dynamic of the dance floor, and how to use Argentine tango music. However, in this chapter I argue that even though Argentina serves as a foundation for the way MATC teaches tango, dancers also create performance practices that appeal to their own tastes and desires.

Chapter 3 will look at the way tango performance is taught and performed to bring a sense of heightened awareness and sensory stimulation that leads many dancers to experience what tango dancers call "tango trance." Although not all dancers say that they experience trance mentally or feel it physically, dancers in MATC comment in interviews and show by their fervent participation that tango performance allows them to experience an increased sense of community and a self transformation, both of which do not normally occur in their everyday lives.

Each of the three chapters in this thesis looks at the way MATC's dancers strive for an authentic tango and yet maintain a process of balancing between their own needs and wants for tango performance with what they deem to be authentic Argentine performance.

[1] The names Argentina (land of silver) and Rio de la Plata (river of silver) reflected early explores' hopes for riches in this region of South America. However, as Castro points out, it was only a dream that the large river system draining into the Atlantic ocean was connected to silver mines of Bolivia, and for most of the 17th century this "land of silver" continued to disappoint the Spanish (2001: x-xii).

[2] The *milonga* is a word that has changed meaning many times throughout history and is still used today in MATC to refer to a tango dance party. Borges' use of the word refers to the late 19th century duels that involved song, dance, and poetry, as well as physical fights.

[3] *Payadores* were men from the countryside who sang *payadas* (improvised verses) that became part of the performance in a *milonga. Milongueros* were men who more generally performed *milonga.* Later versions of *milonguero* also refer to men who performed *milongas* in the city.

[4] See (Castle and Castle 1914), (Castle 1958) and (Roberts 1999).

[5] "Michigan Argentine Tango Club." http://www.umich.edu/~umtango/ Accessed February 21, 2005

[6] For an overview of current tango trends that popular audiences have been exposed to in the 20th century see (Goertzen and Azzi 1999).

[7] This is not the case in other tango communities throughout the Midwest where differences of style keep many separate tango clubs "fighting" with one another.

[8] Tom Stermitz of Denver has helped to resolve the problem of tango styles by addressing tango's performance representation as "tango performance concepts." He writes, *The problem of decent navigation does not relate specifically to a particular STYLE of tango, rather to the dancers' MENTAL CONSTRUCT of what it means to do tango. People need to be capable of choosing a concept of Tango APPROPRIATE to the conditions, and to be able to change habits. For example: (1) Performing on stage is a CONCEPT (not style) of doing tango where the goal is to project externally to an audience, use exciting vocabulary, and to manage the floor in a way that the audience is entertained. (2) Doing tango at a wide-open practice is a CONCEPT of doing tango where you can walk with long-strides, work on 6 or 8 step figures, zig-zag around the room without hitting anyone, practice the fancy material from your last workshop, etc. (3) Tango in a crowded milonga is a specific SOCIAL ACTIVITY consisting of: (a) Meeting and dancing with old and new friends, (b) Seeking a tango trance, (c) Lanes that progress around the room; no zig-zagging around the middle, (d) Smaller 2-3 step sequences and rock-steps, (e) Moderate strides and cautious boleos, (f) MAYBE we tolerate occasional brushes with other dancers. These are all VALID ways to do tango; each is appropriate in the proper situation. I think the CONCEPTS of doing tango in practice vs. a milonga are not well-differentiated by most teachers and dancers, at least here in the US.* This was originally submitted to the "Tango-L," a national list-serve, and is now published on "FLOORCRAFT: Navigation Skills and Awareness." http://totango.net/floor.html Accessed March 28th.

[9] Originally tango was a street music that was played on portable instruments such as flute, violin, and guitar. Later, quartet of bass, piano, *bandoneón*, and violin became the standard instrumentation that eventually grew into sixteen or more piece orchestras called *orchestra typicas*. These instruments became the signature sound of tango and even today it is rare to see a group that does not have at least one of these instruments in its group. Especially with recorded tango music, *bandoneón* is almost always present. Even an experimental group such as *Será una noche* (1998), that take traditional tangos and add improvised arrangements with a wide variety of wind and percussion instruments, still keep the *bandoneón* on the majority of the tracks.

[10] See the CD anthology entitled *Los 100 Mejores Tangos Milongas y Valses del Milenio*, a compilation that includes all of the major tango orchestras listed in this thesis.

[11] See (Rossi 1926) and (Borges 1930) who argue that that native culture of Argentina is found in the *milonga.*

[12] See *Soul of the Tango: The Music of Piazzolla* (1997).

[13] For additional musical analysis of Piazzolla's music see (Kutnowski 2002) and (Maurino 2001).

Chapter 1

Tango's Transforming Body

Some people speak of *tanguedad*, or *tanguidad* ["tango-ness"], which refers to the essence of the tango. But I've come to the conclusion that the essence of the tango is that it does not have an essence. That is, the essence of the tango is its permanent capacity for *aggiornamento* [updating]: its permanent ability to adapt to the era.

--interview with José Gobello[1]

This chapter will provide an overview of the ways that authors since the early 20th century have adapted the history of tango to match their own culturally and time-specific analyses. Tango developed out of musical and social practices of *rioplatense* (from the Rio de la Plata or the area between Uruguay and Argentina), African, and European culture. This chapter will look at three rhetorical strategies used by authors to trace histories of tango. The first strategy argues that native Argentine culture, exemplified by the *milonga*, is the most important predecessor of tango. The second strategy defines the conflicts of race, sex, and class embedded in tango performance as a working out of Argentine identity. The third strategy explains how feelings of nostalgia, authenticity, and exoticism were constructed around dancing tango to make it a desirable dance in Europe, America, and Asia. The findings in the chapter reveal the malleable nature of the tango

that allows for many reasons how and why different tango communities throughout the world can label their version of tango "authentic."

Each strategy offers a different cultural perspective that can help a reader understand the different ways that tango has been rhetorically appropriated and physically transformed throughout history. The first strategy uncovers the deeply rooted tensions concerning race, and pure Argentine identity that are linked to the performance of tango. The second strategy shows how authors of the late 20th century redefined the social, economic, and political conflicts in Argentina according to tango. The third strategy gives descriptions of the places where tango was first appropriated and transformed outside Argentina, which set the framework for looking specifically at tango performance in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Strategy 1: Tracing Tango's Origins Back to "Native" Argentine Culture

Jorge Luis Borges and Vicente Rossi are two authors that argue about how tango's origin story can been traced back to native Argentine culture. Borges' and Rossi's analyses of tango reflect a deep concern to uncover a tango that is connected to "real" Argentine identity. Borges, one of Argentina's most famous literary figures, wrote about the tango in *Evaristo Carriego*, a work written in 1930. Named after a Buenos Aires neighborhood friend of Borges, Evaristo Carriego, the work constructs a mythology of Argentine culture. Borges wrote about the Buenos Aires neighborhoods such as Palermo where he grew up, and included a section on the history of tango that, like many other authors, traced tangos performed in urban neighborhoods.[2] In addition, Borges suggested that the "true" sentiments of the Argentine tango are not to be found in stereotypical

understandings of violence, prostitution, and sentimental lyrics but in the spirit of the male duel within the *milonga*. The *milonga* was originally a rural art form that involved verbal, physical, and musical dueling. In the countryside of Argentina, the men who danced these duels were called *gauchos*. As the *milonga* moved into the city of Buenos Aires, these men were called *compardritos*, or men who performed the sentiments of the men of the country and the city.[3] Many authors link tango to the *milonga*, but most only refer to when the *milonga* was brought to the city and transformed into to what is often called *tango-milonga*.[4] Borges, however, seeks to unearth the sentiments of the rural *milonga* before it was absorbed and changed into the less pure form—tango. Borges explains,

> Merely to connect the tango with violence is not enough. I maintain that the tango and the *milonga* are a direct expression of something that poets have often tried to state in words: the belief that a fight may be a celebration (1984: 134).

Borges develops the connection between tango and violence in an attempt to construct a history of tango that reflects not only male courage and bravery, but to construct a history of Argentina through the tango that gives Argentines a sense that they have brave and honorable past. Borges calls this his "Cult of Courage" (1984: 137). This cult, however, is thought of in terms of individual courage, not in terms of a courage that stands for national Argentine identity. As Borges clarifies,

> The Argentine find his symbols in the gaucho, and not in the soldier, because the courage with which oral traditions invests the gaucho is not in the service of a cause but is pure. The gaucho and the hoodlum are looked upon as rebels; Argentines, in contrast to North Americans and nearly all Europeans, do not

> identify with the state. This may be accounted for by the generally accepted fact that the state is an unimaginable abstraction. The truth is that the Argentine is an individual, not a citizen (1984: 142).

The emphasis Borges placed on tango's origins of personal bravery and violent performance counteracts what he feels was the sentimentalization and Italianization of the real tango. Borges argues that tango lyrics became nationalistic, nostalgic, and romantic expressions that were not suited to the original tango. He writes,

> The early *milonga* and tango may have been foolish, even harebrained, but they were bold and gay. The later tango is like a resentful person who indulges in loud self-pity while shamelessly rejoicing at the misfortunes of others. Back in 1926 I remember blaming the Italians (particularly the Genovese from the Boca) for the denigration of tango. In this myth, or fantasy, of our 'native' tango perverted by 'gringos,' I now see a clear symptom of certain nationalistic heresies that later swept the world—under the impetus of the Italians, of course (1984: 146).

Borges felt that immigrant culture contaminated Argentine cultural assets such as the *milonga* and tango. The emphasis Borges places on "boldness" and "gayness" over "pity" is his attempt to uncover a tango that is real in its intent, not sanitized by a corrupt or moral society. He goes as far to say that the sanitized tango that was acceptable for a mainstream society is a far more "vulgar" tango than the original violent tango that was true to its form. In the concluding paragraph on the section "history of tango" he writes, "In the everyday tango of Buenos Aires, in the tango of family reunions and respectable tearooms, there is a streak of vulgarity, an unwholesomeness of which tango of the knife and brothel never even dreamed" (1984: 147).[5]

Vicente Rossi traced native Argentine culture in similar ways as Borges, but he linked the roots of the *milonga* and tango to Afro-Argentines in the *Rio de la Plata* region who danced *milonga* in *academias* (local dancing establishments). During the 1920s white middle class and elite culture of Buenos Aires attached a stigma to the way they saw blacks dance *milonga* and tango. For example, *quebradas* and *cortes*, gymnastic moves performed primarily by black *milongueros* and *payadors* that emphasized pelvic and hip contortions, became subversive gestures that adopted the derogatory labeled *cosas de negros* (things of negros).[6] However, in 1926 Vicente Rossi wrote a book called *Cosas de Negros*, an ironic flip of the original condescending meaning of the phrase that displayed the importance of native Afro-Argentine performance in the Rio de la Plata region. He was the first author to argue that the *milonga* or "mulonga," (a Brazilian spelling of the term meaning words) was the most influential element in the formation of tango. In addition to the *milonga*, Rossi also discussed the *candomble*, a black carnival dance that used movements and music from *milonga*, the sound of the African drum "tan-go," and the establishment of San Telmo, a black neighborhood in Buenos Aires, as further evidence of black roots in the tango. The logic that Rossi uses in conjunction with his evidence is that since the *milonga* can be traced as primarily "black," originating in *rioplantense* culture, then the origins of the tango are also black (1926: 125-126).

Rossi and Borges link tango to native Argentine culture, however one of the problems in discussing their narratives is that Borges' and Rossi's definitions of native Argentine culture are defined differently. Borges establishes the importance of Argentine native culture while Rossi establishes the importance of black *rioplantense* culture. As Walter Castro, an author who writes on Afro-Argentine contributions in dance, theater,

music, and stage, points out, Borges is interested in establishing a connection to white Argentine culture, not to a larger syncretic system of culture that existed throughout the *Rio de la Plata.* Castro outlines Borges' arguments as follows:

> His [Borges'] arguments against the Rossi thesis were as follows: these so called early tangos (labeled as such by Rossi) were nothing more than *milonga*s and not true tangos; if there was a black connection it was with the *milonga*; this connection, if it existed at all, existed only in Uruguay and not in Argentina because the *milonga* there was creole based; and lastly if there was a *milonga* connection with tango, it was only with the Argentine *milonga* (2001: 87).[7]

Although Borges clearly states in the first sentence in "History of Tango" from *Evaristo Carriego* that he "[subscribes] to every one of their [Rossi, Sábato etc] conclusions—or, for that matter, to any other" (131), Castro's argument is important because Borges simultaneously embraces many narratives of tango while constructing his own tightly woven version of pure Argentine tango and *milonga.*[8]

Strategy 2: Tango Works out the Conflicts of Race, Class, and Sex in Search of Argentine Identity

While the above paragraph discusses the ways native Argentine culture was defined through "original" performances of tango and *milonga*, Marta Savigliano argues that the question of male identity (black and white) is really what is at stake in Rossi's and Borges' accounts. Savigliano is concerned with what she calls the "Macho Cult," perhaps a play on Borges' "Cult of Courage," and is left to wonder with so much machoness constructed in the literature of tango how can it be counteracted or explained?

Savigliano dissects Rossi's early accounts of tango, showing how in his "praise of blackness and tango's black roots, Rossi erases both sensuality and love from his choreographic construal of the *rioplatense* black" (1995: 40). Rossi's tango is meant to allow men a chance to show off to each other. He writes that "it was only the cult of a new art of emotions and dancy acrobatics that was pursued [...] exempt from any traces of sensuality for our *criollos*, under the tin roofs of their *academias*" (Rossi [1926] 1995: 42). Women were present but as objects of display, and not danced with for their good looks, only for good dancing (Rossi 1926: 148).

Rossi and Borges displayed in their narratives on tango a machoness that compares with other narratives on tango. Borges described violent knife fights, where women are non-existent except as a wager or an object that makes a man look good. Savigliano fleshed out Rossi's description of the *academias* showing how the gendered choreography of *milonga* and early tangos were a play between men, and ultimately a working out of a changing male identity as the tango moved from the country into the city. Savigliano argued that Rossi offers a kind of reverse exotic of the tango, a pre-immigration tango that Rossi hopes will give the reader a sense of *milonga* before it moved into the underworld Buenos Aires and became an object high class and European appeal. Rossi and others such as Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, and later Ernesto Sábato wrote about tango that sought to recover a pre-exoticized tango, but simultaneously construct a macho tango. Martinez Estrada argued of the fall of the character of the *compadre* into the *compardrito* ([1933] excerpted in Borges and Palenque 1968: 44-49). Sábato pointed out that a male dancer's sexual concern for women is not as great as his concern about being judged by his peers (1963: 14-15).

Savigliano's analysis of Borges and Rossi shows how their celebrations of a cult of maleness were more than macho displays on the dance floor, they were ways of understanding the place in which they lived.[9] Thousands of people, primarily from European countries such as Italy, Germany, and Poland immigrated to Buenos Aires, Argentina in the late 19th century, and while immigration ultimately helped to build Argentina into an industrial nation, Buenos Aires at the turn of the century remained a place of economic, political, and social turmoil.[10] As Borges and Rossi distinguish a *milonga* that was not associated with prostitution and crime, but with "pure" fighting, they counteracted many of the changes that occurred as the *milonga* and tango began to become popular in the 1930s and 1940s. Neighborhoods "appropriated" their own version of the tango for the first time, and *lunfardo* (slang language associated with the Buenos Aires underworld) lyrics became the focus and the appeal of sung tangos.

Tango's association with crime and prostitution not only discouraged middle and upper class from dancing it; this association became a target for policy makers and political officials who saw tango as a source of social contamination. The Argentine government originally implemented a mass immigration program to promote economic development. However, Jorge Salessi talks about how the government's plan back fired, giving power to a dangerous heterogeneous mix of middle class people who in their sexual trafficking via the tango were a threat to society. He summarizes:

> Thus the immigration that was meant to provide the labor necessary for the integration of Argentina into the Eurocentric blueprint of 'progress,' 'modernization,' and 'internationalism,' was now a foreign force living within the national borders and capable of striking against and paralyzing the meat and grain

> exporting economy that kept enriching the landowning class. An Argentine sexual science seeking to define strict border controls around the definitions of sex and gender, class and nationality, was an urgent response to this threat (1997: 143).

Salessi refers here to the way that the policy of immigration was a double-edged sword, bringing the necessary labor force to Argentina, but along with it, a society that threatened elite standards of sexual behavior. Salessi dissects how public officials target prostitution, specifically men to men, surrounding the tango, and how "homosexual panic" among late 19th century Argentine elites perpetuated the need to create a homogenous Argentine identity (1997: 141). [11] Adolfo Bátiz, a policeman who wrote about prostitution in 1880, shows the agenda to control the great number of men involved with prostitution. Bátiz argued that prostitution was an "evil as necessary as life itself," but "that prostitution [should] not proceed so capriciously and at whim, without any guide to tell the various agents where the truth lies" (Bátiz [1908:15-16] quoted in Salessi 1997: 149). Salessi uses this quote in his article to show how Bátiz established normal prostitution from abnormal prostitution, inferring that men to men sexual trafficking is a kind of social disease (1997: 152). Psychiatrist J. M. Ramos Mejía promoted a national education on reversing "sexual invert's sensibilities," and Eusebio Gómez, the criminologist, established that prostitution and criminality lead to homosexuality (Salessi 1997: 146). [12] Both these men asserted power over people they believed to be a detriment to a functional society (even though this targeted group of immigrants made up the majority). These officials attempted not only to set the social order straight, but asserted that a moral society was needed for Argentina to function in the "modern" world.

Julie Taylor also wrestles with contemporary issues through an exploration of gender and identity in her writing. Although her works from 1998 and 2001 attempt to define Argentine tango sentiments, underneath she explores conflicts of race, sex, and class in search of a personal Argentine identity. The title of her book, *Paper Tangos* (1998), is a metaphor for the dialogue between Taylor's experiences as a fieldworker and tango's history that are danced out on paper. Taylor not only draws upon the history of political, economic, and social struggle of the tango of immigrants, but links the struggles she was a part of in Argentina during the late 1980s and early 1990s. She writes,

> In Argentina, the tango, with its many exclusions and mirrors, can create a space to reflect on power and terror. The tango can talk about these things, how to carry them with dignity and grace, and how to demonstrate the nobility of the human spirit by learning to bear such suffering and nevertheless to dance...Argentines have conflated it [the tango] with experiences similarly marked by violence that they sense in other absences: in exile, internal and external; in war; and in the letters sent from exile, from jail, and from war. So tangos and letters collapsed into 'paper tangos.' Like letters in an Argentina scarred not only by censorship but by attrition of public services, tangos are coded messages between two people with the acute awareness that this message may—even probably will—be read by a third (1998: 71-72).

The larger historical picture of violence and social unrest in Argentina that Taylor says is danced out in the tango establishes the tango in Argentina as something that must be lived and experienced to be understood. She acknowledges the appropriation of tango in Paris during the 1920s, but keeps Argentine tango attached to those who live today and

are faced with the ongoing political reality of everyday life that is danced out in the tango. The violence that Taylor alludes to most directly in her writing are the years between 1976-1983 when Argentina was ruled by a military dictatorship under José Rafael Videla that began the Proceso de Reorganizatión Nacional (Process of Nation Reorganization). This was the name the military gave to the government giving them the power to eliminate any persons associated with "leftist" agendas, or in other words anyone who challenged traditional or moral values. It has been estimated that between 9,000 and 30,000 people were tortured and or killed, becoming part of what the regime referred to as "the disappeared." Target groups included many activists and, especially, intellectuals.[13] While Taylor alludes to experiencing this type of subversive condition, *Paper Tangos* makes a connection to a more general history of tango that links the original violence of the tango (alla Borges' *milonga*s and *lunfardo* lyrics) with the current violence that she and her informants embody in Argentina.

Strategy 3: Europe, America, and Asia Dance a Nostalgic, Authentic, and Exotic Tango

Like the agricultural products of Argentina, such as grain and beef, the tango was imported first to European countries by high class entrepreneurs. In chapter two of Savigliano's book *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion* (1995) she argues the idea that tango was part of a web of other exotic products, including dances, that can be traced from the late 17th century into the 20th century.[14] Savigliano discusses how the eventual acceptance of tango among the Parisian bourgeois not only encouraged other places such as London and New York to use tango as a way to accumulate cultural

authority, but how the performance of tango in these cities set up a particular type of representation of tango as a global exotic good.[15] The relationship that Parisians had with tango was based on their own re-working of tango's naughty associations. Tango in Paris was desirable because its choreography and gender roles were both subversive and tasteful. As Savigliano observes:

> Tango [in European society] did not perform "instinctive" sensuality (like the dancers of the "primitives"), rowdy excitement (like the dancers of the peasants), or overt impropriety, cynicism, or defiant aggression toward the upper classes (like the dances of the urban marginals). Nor did it focus solely on the erotic powers of the female body, like other "traditional" exotic dances. Tango's sexual politics were centered in the process of seduction. A fatal man and a femme fatale who, despite their proximity, kept their erotic impulses under control, measuring each other's powers. In its choreography, the tango resembled a game of chess where deadly contenders took turns moving invisible pieces with their dragging feet. Their mutual attraction and repulsion were prolonged into an unbearable, endless tension. And everything took place, apparently, under male control. Women's erotica, a threatening discovery for the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, could not be tamed by male bourgeoisie manners. When faced, however, with a Latin-type male—the man of wild passionate nature, as untamed as the women—heterosexual erotics seemed to fall back into a proper male-centered course (Savigliano 1995: 110).

This passage shows how careful shaping of tango's choreography, gender alignment, and its associations with the Latin-male leader made it a perfect fit for the cultural desires of

the Parisian upper class. According to Savigliano, the associations tango originally had with "primitives," "peasants," and "urban marginals" were not only bypassed by a smoothening of the choreography, but by but an emphasis on male power over female. The exoticism and sexism of the stereotypical "Latin" leader allowed Europeans to feel safe participating in tango because this alignment reinforced the narrative of male dominance that, while may have potentially been threatened by "women's erotica," was already in place. Savigliano calls tango a "versatile hybrid," a phrase that explains the way tango was adapted to suite the codes and manners of the colonizers, but keep the association with exoticism of the colonized (1995: 111).

As the context in which tango was used or performed changed, so did its meaning. In Paris, tango was dependent upon the telling of a narrative that rooted in an "exotic" Argentina. Other places such as London, New York and Hollywood also retold their own versions of Argentine exoticism. In London, upper class events such as "tango teas," fashion trends, and dance manuals were associated exclusively with an exoticized and refined tango.[16] In New York, tango found its way into Broadway shows,[17] and in Hollywood, figures such as Argentine Carlos Gardel and American Rudolph Valentino played tangoesque characters in films that appealed to U.S. and European audiences.[18] By the 1940s, tango became associated with a Europeanized Argentina that suppressed previous associations that tango had with black roots and urban marginals.

Carlos Gardel, Argentina's most idolized actor and tango singer (a white man and son of a single mother who immigrated from France, and who recorded over 1,000 songs, including tangos) was most often seen dressed in Hollywood films as a *gaucho*.[19] Gardel was a pivotal figure in establishing a whitened image of Argentine culture, the tango, and

the gaucho. He also encouraged feelings of Argentine nationalism and progress as he became Argentina's internationally-known superstar.[20]

New York became a pivotal city for the emergence of tango due to teaching and performing of Vernon and Irene Castle, two ballroom teachers and Broadway performers who re-worked the tango to appeal to a cosmopolitan and upper class taste for dancing during the 1920s. They helped to establish a sense that tango could be taught with a method, was attractive but naughty, and yet flexible enough to be made socially polite. In the Castles' manual, *Modern Dancing* (1914), they help to establish tango as something that was taken from an exotic place, but that could appeal to the disciplined and refined world of ballroom dancing. By cataloguing moves such as "The Cortez," "The Promenade," "The Media Luna," and "The Scissors" (1914: 83-104) they brought what they thought was a recovery of a tasteful and yet challenging tango. As the Castles' explain in their introduction to the chapter on tango:

> The Tango is not, as commonly believed, of South American origin. It is an old gipsy dance which came to Argentina by the way of Spain, where in all probability it became invested with certain features of the old Moorish dances. The Argentines adopted the dance, eliminating some of its reckless gipsy traits, and added to it a certain languid indolence peculiar to their temperament. After Paris had taken the dance up a few years ago, its too sensuous character was gradually toned down, and from a rather obscene exhibition, which is still indulged in by certain cabaret performers, it bloomed forth a polished and extremely fascinating dance, which has not had its equal in rhythmical allurement since the days of the Minuet (1914: 83).

The Castles show here that issues of origin are often set selectively within the bounds of what is important to people. In this situation the Castles' value high class taste, sexual control, a skepticism for what is not under the care of Europe, and yet a "fascination" for what was at one time "reckless."

During the 1930s, Tokyo was another city where tango was appropriated. Authors and journalists spoke about Tokyo's acceptance of and participation in tango as a kind of battle won by the Argentine tango. In a chapter from *Historia del Tango* entitled "Tango in the Orient," Bates and Bates wrote about the tango's popularity in Japan as a type of "conquest," and how it has the power to seduce *even* the Japanese (Savigliano 1995: 171-172, Bates and Bates 1936: 73). In her chapter on tango in Japan, Savigliano explains Japanese tango contests, exhibitions, the popularity of the traveling tango show *Tango Argentino*, as "exotic exchanges." Savigliano defines exoticism in this case as "a way of establishing order in an unknown world through fantasy; a daydream guided by pleasurable self-reassurance and expansionism" (1995: 169). Her definition of the word exoticism is an important concept because, as she notes, Argentina and Japan, two countries that have very little in common politically or socially, construct an imagined relationship between each other through an exotic and authentic tango.

Although the strategies discussed in this chapter are set up as three different methods or pathways that writers have used to talk about the history of tango, the three strategies have a common preoccupation. All of the histories of tango are in some way concerned with what it means to perform Argentineness. With the case of Rossi and Borges, they write about a performance that is based on an ideal Argentine origin. However, even their similar excavating methods have the potential to bring about a

different understanding of native Argentine culture, for Borges one that is not necessarily tied to Afro-Argentines and for Rossi, one that is. Savigliano's critique of Borges and Rossi show how their rhetorical positions serve not only as a way to reinforce Argentineness through tango, but as a way to reinforce their "cult of maleness." The argument that Savigliano makes is that painting a picture of "machoness" is really about establishing an Argentine identity at a time in history when the social and political stability of Buenos Aires was under threat. Taylor echoes the writings of Borges and Rossi in her own tangos that, on paper, dance out what it means to be Argentine and to dance tango in the late 20th century. The tango first was bought and sold in the United States in many forms: in the Hollywood films of Carlos Gardel, Broadway shows, and in the ballrooms of Vernon and Irene Castle. Each one of these modes of presenting the tango was based on a tailored representation of Argentine identity.

Today, cities all over the world continue to teach and perform what they call "tango." Some cities construct a stronger connection to Argentineness, as can be seen in the literature about Japan, but others throughout history have taken an "essence" of tango and put it to their own uses, as can be seen with the Castles who turned an improvised dance from the urban slums of Buenos Aires into a codified set of steps that could be performed at upper class ballroom events. Other cities today maintain more or less strategically connected to Argentina. The city that we will look at in the next chapter, Ann Arbor, also constructs not only its own relationship to Argentina, but its own version of the Argentine tango.[21]

[1] See (Zlotchew 1989: 274).
[2] See also (Matamoro 1982), (Sábato 1963) and (Castro 1990).
[3] See also Estrada's excerpt from *Radiografía de la Pampa* (1933) in (Borges and Palenque 1968: 44-49) entitled "El compadre." Martínez Estrada follows in line with Borges in explaining naturalness and pureness of the *compadre* who upon entering into the city became a less idealized version in the urban *compadrito*. For a translation in English see (Martínez Estrada 1971).
[4] See, for example the way Matamoro explains the meeting of *milonga* and tango (1982: 15-18).
[5] Borges' poetry also depicts violent scenes surrounding the performance of *milonga*. See the poems "Milonga de Manuel Flores" and "Milonga de Albornoz" in (Borges 1999). (Cara-Walker 1986) also provides an analysis of the way Borges' poetry reflects an Argentine esthetic in the 19th and early 20th century *milonga*.
[6] Castro argues that the use of the phrase "cosas de negros" was used by elites in Argentina since the early 19th century, and later , was key in marginalizing black influences in the tango of the early 20th century (2001: 65-105).
[7] Castro's constructed this summary based on information in (Borges 1930) and (Borges and Clemente 1928).
[8] See also (Andrews 1980: 156-177) which provides information on the cultural contributions of Afro-Argentines in the 19th century.
[9] For example, see (Nouzeilles and Montaldo 2002) which gives a thorough background on the social and political history of Argentina.
[10] In addition, the interior of Argentina became an important resource as the vast *pampas* (plains) were developed agriculturally for the export of crops and beef to European markets. Previous to the economic and social boom in Argentina, the interior of the country had remained a largely unsettled Spanish colony. However, between the years of 1880-1910 Argentina's population grew, primarily in the Buenos Aries area, from a scant 100,000 to over a million (Castro 1990: 32).
[11] (Tobin 1998) also provides convincing evidence of male to male dancing in tango, and argues that tango's homosocial desire has been "scandalized."
[12] See (Mejia 1898: 235-236) and (Gómez 1908: 122, 181-182).
[13] Plotkin writes, "Educators, from kindergarten teachers to university professors, and intellectuals in general had to be closely scrutinized because they were potential fifth columnists of international subversion. It is not by chance that 21 percent of the "disappeared" were students (including high school students); professionals accounted for another 10 percent" (2001: 218). See also (Plotkin 2003: 2-6).
[14] See the chapter sections "Manufacturing Exoticism," "Dance Master and Spectacle Entrepreneurs," "Montmartre, Fin de Siécle," (Savigliano 1994: 83-106).
[15] For additional readings on culture and capitalism from the 15th through the 20th centuries see (Bourdieu 1984) and (Braudel 1981).
[16] See Gladys Beattie Crozier's book *The Tango and How to Dance it* (1913). Chapter 5 is cited in (Franks 1963: 179-180, 225-22) with the subheadings "How to arrange an Informal Tango Tea," "Tango Teas a Delightful Form of Informal Hospitality," "Avoidance of Trouble and Expense Entailed by an Evening Dance," "Dancing the Tango in a Small Room," "How to serve Tea at an Afternoon Dance," and "Decorations for a Tango Tea."
[17] See (Roberts 1999) for a description of the first Broadway shows that used tango.
[18] In a famous scene from *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921), Rudolf Valentino plays the gaucho-dressed "latin lover" who dances a tango with Beatrice Domínguez. See (Savigliano 1995: 133) and (Collier, Cooper, Azzi, and Marin 1995). Carlos Gardel's first experience as an actor was in the Argentine silent film *Flor de durazano* (Peach Blossom), see (Collier 1986: 52). During the 1930s Gardel worked for Paramount acting and singing in films such as *El día que me quieras* (1935) and *Tango Bar* (1935), see (Grunewald 1994: 131-135).
[19] Even though Gardel is often seen portrayed as a *gaucho*, many of the early *gauchos* and *payadores* were black. Castro discusses the most famous black *payador*, Gabino Ezeiza (1858-1916), who later in his life had a recording career and today is still known as the "paydor of the payadores" because of his skill at improvising poetry in duel style (2001: 73-76). Castro mentions many other black *payadores*, such as Valentín Ferreyra, Facundo Galván, and Higinio D. Cazón, who were also well-known performers in other theatrical arts. Likewise, when black *payadores* such as Ezeiza moved into the city they helped to popularize the new urban song and dance form, *milonga*, that became popular in Buenos Aires. Many of

the early tango musicians and composers of the Old Guard (1890-1920) were also black, such as Rosendo Mendízabal, who wrote one of the most famous Old Guard tangos that is still danced to today "El entrerriano" (The Man from Entro Ríos) in 1897. Many other black musicians were essential to the popularization and performance of tango, most of which were known by racially specific nicknames such as violinist "el negro" Lorenzo, who played with Enrique Saborido, clarinetist "El Mulato" Sinforoso, and the concertino player "El pardo" Jorge Machando. See (Castro 2001: 89-90).

[20] See Castro's chapter on Gardel titled "Tango Star 1925-1930" (1986: 89-130).

[21] For a through investigation of other cities in the world where tango is danced see (Pelinski 2000).

Chapter 2

Making Tango Spaces: The Performance of Ann Arbor and Argentina in the Michigan Argentine Tango Club

When MATC dancers perform tango they ultimately construct their own version of the tango. However, when MATC teachers teach tango they give dancers the tools needed to construct a relationship to Argentina that serves as a strategy not only to unify the club's social atmosphere, but to heighten dancers' enthusiasm for tango.

The spaces where dancers learn to dance tango are not as important as the way dancers actually connect to one another within those spaces. Most venues where tango is danced in MATC have to be made into "tango spaces." University classrooms, meeting rooms, ballrooms, old dancehalls, private residencies, restaurants, church gyms, outdoor venues, or private party venues are redecorated and rearranged into dancing spaces. A sound system is brought in and positioned so that everyone can hear the music without anyone getting a loud blast of music in their ear. Lighting is altered by either turning down the lights, if possible, or turning out the lights and using candles. Tango in MATC is never performed in full light. Table-clothed places to sit, or places to lounge are usually set up so that dancers have a comfortable place to retreat when they want to rest or to be social. Light refreshments, usually water, fruit, and sometimes soda are provided.

Through their senses of sight, touch, smell, sound, and intuition, dancers learn how to communicate moment to moment movement that is performed without speaking to one another. During this movement, dancers enter into a state of deep concentration.

Leaders learn how to keep both partners from bumping into anyone, how to balance the amount of energy given for each partner, and how to signal a follower to move to the music, but still allow her some freedom to interpret the music. Followers learn how to respond to a lead without anticipating and without falling behind. They learn to listen to music, and encourage the leader to participate with them in interpreting the music. Like the leaders, followers also learn to balance the energy they give so that ideally both partners maintain a consistent upper body connection without pushing or leaning back. The best social tango performances are the ones that seem to happen without planning, only a seeming intuition and simplicity. As with jazz musicians who improvise night after night without speaking a word to each other on stage, everyone on the tango dance floor seems to be reading each other's mind, and it appears as if they were born knowing how to dance together. In essence, social Argentine tango aims to be a type of "organic" performance, where bodies respond naturally to one another through their senses.

Tango performance in MATC is a collective performance not only of constructed Argentineness, but of subconscious exchanges of tango feelings that are unique to Ann Arbor.[1] MATC is involved, as all tango communities, in a long history of tango's appropriation to match the time and place in which it was danced. Although MATC dances and teaches its own version of tango, they also strive to keep Argentine sentiments, or at least what they label as Argentine sentiments. "Argentineness" is learned through improvised movements, recorded tango music, and "close embrace" energy exchanged with each new partner. However, MATC also teaches tango through practical methods that appeal to the wide mix of people from Asia, Eastern and Western Europe, the Middle East, and the US, most of them students, faculty, or alumni of the

University of Michigan. For example, MATC uses Argentine music in such a way that relates to historical practices from Argentina, but they also use music in ways that bring the type of social energy to *milongas* and *practicas* that is desired by dancers in the club.[2]

Feelings about Argentina in MATC are not only feelings that bring credibility and energy to the club, but are also feelings of endearment. Those who are committed to tango dancing, or in the words of those in the club "addicted to tango," maintain feelings about Argentina that evoke a longing for the past paired with a participation in the present. Without a balance between past nostalgia for Argentina and a present image of Argentina, the power of Argentineness would loose its affect. Christine Yano describes a similar type of relationship to nostalgia in her study of fans who are crazy about the Japanese ballad genre called *enka*. Like tango dancers' nostalgia for Argentineness, *enka* fans' desire and yearning for Japaneseness establishes "a particular relationship with the temporal past that distances it from, while also placing it firmly in, the present" (2002: 15).[3]

Learning to Tango Ann Arborian-Argentine Style

Every Wednesday night dancers join together on the campus of the University of Michigan in classrooms that are made into tango lesson spaces for each class that MATC offers: beginner, advanced-beginner, and intermediate. Volunteers for the club clear out chairs and refuse, sweep down the floors, hand out name tags, check registered dancers off on the master spread sheets, and take money from those who want to just pop in. Since MATC is a non-profit and self sustaining group, members are encouraged to volunteer their time and skills to help make a night of lessons run smoothly. As a result of

MATC's cooperative structure of running the club, lessons and group membership are very affordable. A seven week series of lessons is $10 for students and $20 for non students.

While making a place suitable for tango dancing is important, the key to a successful social dynamic depends more on the way bodies connect physically and emotionally in a practice or on the dance floor. Dancers may comment how in the University of Michigan Student Union building, the ballroom has a nicer floor than the Pendelton room, but ultimately the energy and feeling that people seek when they come to dance *milongas* depend more on the way physical and personal relationships are constructed through performance of tango.

Physically, dancing tango poses risks. Dancers put themselves at risk of injury or discomfort from the partner they choose to dance with, and as a tango community grows the dance floor fills up with "traffic." The first thing dancers learn when they come to MATC for lessons are the importance of basics such as the line of dance,[4] and that leaders and followers are responsible for not bumping, kicking, or tripping other couples. One of the dancers and organizers in the club, Paul R., dealt with this problem by passing out a typed set of guidelines for dancers about how to navigate at a *milonga*. This handout was based on the comparison between highway driving and dancing on a dance floor. The directions talk about how dancing tango should be much like avoiding accidents on the freeway: "never backup! never rear-end somebody, there is only one way you can go, stay in your lane, be mindful of traffic around you, don't park on the freeway, yield when merging, and be sure to apologize if you do have an accident." Paul R. also includes the advice to "NEVER TEACH ON THE DANCE FLOOR!" and on the

back includes a glossary of basic terms such as *tanda* (a set of 3-5 dances), *cortina* (the transition music between *tandas*), and *ronda* (the beautiful concentric circles that form when everyone is dancing in a lane). Many tango groups around the United States also strive for such unified dance floor etiquette.

Beginners' classes in MATC are structured so that dancers learn how to maximize partner to partner comfort. The many challenges in learning to dance tango, such as the closeness, balance, position, and differences of personality are all dealt with at the same time. The first issue, how to feel comfortable in the close embrace, is important to introduce to dancers first because even if people who come to dance tango have a dance background they can easily be turned off or intimidated by having to dance so close to someone. MATC teachers dealt with this problem in the fall of 2003 by introducing beginners slowly to the concept. We proceeded with an exercise where we formed two circles, one for leaders and one for followers. Sarah Y. and Brian A., the two teachers for that lesson put on some slow music, a piece by Astor Piazzolla, and turned off the lights. Each woman was supposed to keep her eyes shut while she walked around to each man and hugged him for thirty seconds. The positive aspect of the exercise was that it encouraged every person to embrace, therefore easing any uncomfortable feelings about dancing in close embrace with a stranger. In these lessons, we were also introduced to the way that one should hold a partner. The teachers made sure that the men did not hold the ladies arm higher then her heart, that the ladies did not hang on their leader's shoulder, and that the couples did not lean too much with their heads. Other aspects were addressed to create a more comfortable embrace, such as the alignment of the connection between the two partners. Women and men were to lean slightly more forward onto the ball of

each foot, ideally so that the axis between the two partners could be shared. This concept of the shared axis remains crucial to carrying out the fundamental choreography of close embrace tango.

Workshop teachers who have been invited to MATC also focus on issue of technique, body relationships, and feedback between partners. The first class of the workshop weekend in September 2003 with Christopher Paulos and Caroline Peattie, two teachers from San Francisco, focused on technique in the close embrace. They moved us through many exercises where we learned to fine tune our shared axis, and then learn to walk our own walk. Christopher and Caroline started by saying that they were "taking away our arms." We danced the first tango of the workshop weekend classes with our arms behind our back. This allowed us to use the torso connection more to find our shared balance, and we learned how to practice relying on upper body communication and shared axis balancing, instead of our arms or heads of our balance.

As dancers learn to walk in MATC, they are encouraged to develop their own sense of balance, how to share the axis with someone, how to hold someone comfortably while in motion, and most importantly how to walk their own walk. As we progressed through rounds of switching partners we were allowed one arm back, for followers the left arm that goes around the man's shoulder, and for leaders the right arms that goes around the woman's upper back. Christopher asked Guillermo, a broad shouldered man with a large build to demonstrate this exercise with Caroline. Christopher used Caroline and Guillermo not only to show how without the full use of our hands we could learn to rely on our own shared axis for balance, but that an added challenge in dancing tango is that we must also learn to dance with any body type. Christopher pointed out that even

though Caroline's and Guillermo's body types do not match, they can still dance together and learn from one another. After Caroline and Guillermo walked around for a minute, Christopher said that we could all see that Guillermo has a certain body type that gives him a certain walk. (Christopher also made a joke here about Guillermo being well endowed, and then patted his own belly saying, "he was still working on it.") Christopher's point was that "we have to dance our own body type." He explained, "Guillermo has a certain forwardness to his walk and the broadness of his chest helps him lead. Caroline cannot become his body type." Christopher expanded on the concept by saying that learning our own "paradigm" helps each of us to understand our own habits, which in turn helps us know our partners' habits, and to therefore help each other dance better. Caroline and Guillermo continued to dance and Christopher drew attention to Guillermo, who was an example to leaders with big torsos; they have the potential to compensate for some follower's tendencies to rely too much on a leader's body for balance. Likewise, it could be that if a follower dances with someone smaller then she might compensate for her leader's balance.

Learning to walk your own walk is an important concept not only to the exercises presented by Christopher and Caroline during the workshop, but for most exercises presented by Argentine tango teachers. "The walk" is the most basic function of the way many groups teach close embrace tango, and is certainly crucial to the way MATC teaches tango. I learned the concept of "the walk" even from the very first tango lesson I went to in 2001 with Brigitte Winkler in downtown Kansas City, Missouri, where upon expressing my apprehension about wanting to participate in that night's lesson I was told

by a friend who had taken a private beginner's lesson with Brigitte, "if you can walk, you can tango."

There are no specific rules in MATC about how a person should walk. In MATC's performance of tango, I would change the statement about walking to "if you can walk your walk, you can tango." The character of the walk in close embrace tango has a smooth and an elegant quality that can be seen by the way dancers carry their bodies, but as long as a dancer is in balance, and their partner is comfortable, walking is a matter of self-expression. During a beginner's lesson in the Spring of 2004 Sarah Y. and Brian A. asked dancers to just walk around the room to different styles of music, a waltz, a *milonga*, and one of D'Arenzio's tangos. We were asked to express the music with our bodies in just a simple walk, without using tango vocabulary. As tango dancers, we were ultimately encouraged to find our own way of walking.

Learning to dance tango is also emotionally challenging. As dancers learn to express tango music through their bodies in an intimate embrace, they also open themselves to criticism and possible rejection. MATC deals with this problem by encouraging dancers to learn how to give positive but constructive feedback to their partners. During practices, teachers in MATC encourage, just as Christopher did in his "learning to understand our paradigm" lesson, that good social dancing is a result of learning how to acknowledge and change one's own personal bad habits as well as helping partner's habits be recognized and changed. Without a medium to communicate problems to one another, danced habits have the potential to be passed silently from person to person, much like cold germs, and can create negative feelings or injuries among dancers. One habit that was passed around in MATC was a tendency for leaders

and followers to lean into each other too much with their heads. Tom Stermitz of the Denver tango community and Christopher and Caroline of the San Francisco tango community worked on this in workshops, and with later reinforcements in classes this problem has been solved.

As teachers help dancers in MATC create "tango spaces," they also help to cultivate a cognitive connection to Argentina. In 2002, a teacher for the introductory lessons began the class by asking dancers questions about the origins of tango. "What do you think of when you hear the word tango?" began the first lesson of the semester. In answering some of these questions some people said "passion," and another person said "connection." Finally, the teacher said that it meant "a sacred place that you must ask permission to enter."[5] In 2003, the same teacher began the new series of lessons by asking what people knew about tango. Many people said the same sorts of things, "passion," "sensuality," "connection," but she finally said, "yes tango was sexy, and sensual," but "that it could also be a very spiritual dance." The teacher's response both times was to steer beginners in a direction the might help both to connect them to an Argentine way of thinking about tango, but at the same time transcend the myth that tango is danced *only* because it is exotic.[6]

Tango in popular American culture is seen as a Latin, and therefore exotic dance (Goertzen, Chris and Maria Susana Azzi: 1999). Indeed, many dancers openly admit that they are first drawn to tango because it is "naughty," or "sexy." In Joanne Bosse's discussion of ballroom dancers in the Midwest, she also points out that one of the way they think about Latin dance versus Modern ("Standard" or "Smooth") dance is that Latin dances can be learned intuitively. Bosse's informants thought of learning Latin dances as

an "organic" process that engaged "primal" forces, whereas Modern ballroom dance were learned through careful training (2004: 4-9). Bosse's observations are important for my study because she shows how Latin dancing in the Midwest is often seen as something exotic, when in reality it requires the same amount of serious effort to learn as "non-Latin" dances.

MATC dancers and teachers embrace tango's Latin or exotic associations, however they do not allow their version of the tango to be defined by strict definitions of what is nostalgic or authentic. Many dancers in the club are aware of the way nostalgia and authenticity operate within the club, but admit that they are attracted to tango anyway. As Anna K., a student in anthropology at University of Michigan who had been dancing for a couple of months expressed:

> A: I think there is probably another side of it [tango] that I am probably less likely to admit to you that has something to do with the cultural sedimentation around tango as a kind of exotic dance form and all of the associations that I don't want to say I have anything to do with, but probably realistically drew me in at some level.
>
> C: Yeah, how much of this association with exoticism has to do with Argentina or the tango being real because it is Argentine?
>
> A: It's more like I really believe that authenticity is something that people construct. It is something that is right now one of the most dominant ways of, or kind of styles of creating value, and I think it relates to where we are in kind of a post-industrial capitalist state, that kind of thing where you have nostalgia working. Nostalgia is such an important aesthetic criteria right now, and I think

> that authenticity is also important in the same way right now. Not to say that authenticity hasn't been important at other times and other places, but it seems that it has particular salience right now. And I don't know where it comes from, but it seems that tango is very tied up in that, well certainly in a wider frame, it seems to me that it's not uniform in the tango dancing community. I think there are some people interested in authenticity, and that's a strain of discourse that you get throughout tango practice in the country for instance. But there's also something about taking tango and moving it in new directions away from its roots, and maybe not wondering if its authentic or not. And it seems to me that I guess there are different forces or different trajectories going on at the same time.

Anna K.'s first comment is a typical response for dancers in the club. She is not oblivious to the fact that she is attracted to tango on some level because it is "exotic," but neither does she celebrate that fact. Anna K.'s answer to my next question shows how authenticity is intertwined with the process of feeling nostalgia for tango. Both have the power to give MATC tango cultural value. However, Anna K.'s conclusion is that she senses MATC does more than resurrect a desirable and authentic tango. Dancers like Anna K. are also allowed to take risks when they move that might lead to a new or non-traditional way of performing Argentine tango.

Dancers who regularly attend lessons in MATC learn quickly what aspects of tango music and choreography are Argentine or authentic. The first distinction teachers make between Argentine tango and other concepts of tango is that Argentine tango movement is always integrated *with* the music. Many tango groups teach by counting and memorizing steps, and then they leave it up to the dancers to decide by themselves how

to link a set of steps together to fit with the music. In MATC, basic rhythmic patterns, such as the quick-quick-slow, are always taught first. Then, these rhythms are used as building blocks to perform more complicated maneuvers such as a switch from parallel to cross systems.[7] As beginners internalize the quick-quick-slow rhythm in their bodies, they begin to see how it can be linked to other choreographic possibilities with the music. This pedagogical strategy encourages dancers to internalize how their bodies fit into varying tango arrangements and corresponding flow of "traffic" on the dance floor. After a year of dancing in the beginners' lessons, I observed that most dancers transitioned smoothly from tango lessons into the tango performance at the *milonga.*

MATC's strongest connection to an Argentine way of dancing is solidified by the substantial body of Argentine tango orchestra recordings that are ordered into compilations and used for lessons, *pracitas* (practices usually following a lesson) and *milongas*. These tango orchestra recordings are almost exclusively distributed through Argentine record labels. Although some recordings of current group such as *Gotan Project* (a "techno-tango" group) have been played for dances, DJs in MATC primarily use recordings made in the 1940s through the 1970s. The repeated use of this recorded music helps to give dancers a sense of familiarity with the musical style of tango. As dancers practice improvising the same vocabulary over and over to the same stock of recordings, they engrain a sense of bodily memory through musical cues. This repetitive use of music also creates a sense of feeling in dancers' bodies that, for those who become "hooked," is fool-proof.[8] As dancers perform to these recordings they feel that they are dancing to something not only desirable, but something that perpetuates desire.

While the music helps dancers maintain a connection to Argentina and therefore underlies what they do as authentic, it is also serves as the initiator and inspiration for movement and feeling on the dance floor. When I asked Sarah Y. about what it means to be a good follower, one of the things she said was that followers have to be alive, express the music, have good technique, and be deeply connected to their partner, all at the same time. However, the music for her is the main inspiration for keeping her mind and body focused within the multi-channeled experience of dancing tango. She continues,

> I think that we also have to feel the music and be inspired. For example me, if the music doesn't inspire me, in my body I am there, but my soul, my heart are somewhere else, and I can just suffer through the dance. I can have a good physical dance you know, and my partner might enjoy it, but if he's very thin skinned or looking in the dance for the same thing I do, he knows I'm cold. Sometimes it's hard to explain in words what it means to feel the music and how you express it. And its not just embellishments, people sometimes confuse it with embellishments, like tap here or do this or that, and it's not necessary. Even without embellishments you can express what you feel. It's your whole body movement or your body control, how you connect with your partner. It's still kind of hard for me to explain, you really have to experience it to be able to understand.

The way that Sarah Y. expresses herself in a dance is brought about by a bodily connection with the music. The music helps her channel feelings of her mind and body into each movement that is shared and negotiated with a partner.

Ultimately, tango music is also the driving energy behind a successful *milonga*, and while Sarah Y.'s description in the quote above is easier to understand if experienced

(as she also expresses) versus explained in words, a reader can imagine that as the same recordings are played practice after practice and *milonga* after *milonga* tango music becomes affectionately engrained in dancers' minds and bodies. For example, a 1954 recording of D'Sarli's orchestra playing *El choclo* not only remains an unquestionable tango artifact; it is also constructed in dancers' minds and bodies as *the* original source of feeling.[9] MATC dancers learn to memorize the sound of each orchestra and the arrangement they play, as well as the words to the tangos. Memorization of tango arrangements on a conscious and subconscious level is a natural outcome of tango performance in MATC, and is expected of successful dancers.[10]

Most of the recordings used in MATC date from the 1930s through the 1950s, and dancers agree that this dated or as in Tom Stermitz's words "rinky-tinky" sound quality of the recordings is what gives them not only their unique character, but an inherent feeling.[11] As in Susan Stewart's argument about the physical distance and desire of souvenirs, recorded tango music from the 1940s and 50s perpetuates a desire for that which is far away or exotic (1984: 135). Even dancers that at first commented that they did not understand tango music later said that the sound of the recordings was what helped them eventually become addicted to tango.

Beyond the sound quality of the recordings, the instrumentation in Argentine tango orchestras alert MATC dancers to the authenticity of what they are listening to, and consequently to the feeling inside their bodies when they move. Dancers are taught how to recognize what they listen to while they dance. When a recording is played at a practice or *milonga*, dancers have already been guided through the basic instrumentation that makes up the core of a tango orchestra: *bandoneón*, piano, violin, and bass. In

addition, dancers learn to anticipate the idiomatic parts that each of these instruments plays in tango orchestra arrangements. Without the foundation of the bowed double bass, the drive or bite of the *bandoneón's marcatto*, and the melody and inner lines played by piano and violin, dancers have a hard time feeling like they are dancing to real tango.[12] One interviewee, Sarah Y., commented about the difference between live tango music and the tango orchestra recordings usually used.

> Without *bandoneón*, without piano, it's a totally different thing. The sound is not as rich, it's not as drivable, it is not so, you know, tangoish. People feel the difference. But, when you guys came some of the songs were excellent, and I really enjoyed that, but would I want to have it every night? No. I mean it's nice to have it [live music] once and a while, but to have it every night would be more difficult. [13]

Sarah Y. expresses in the end that live music is more difficult to dance to. She is most likely referring to the change she would have to make from the recordings she knows. Embedded in her comments is also the fact that live music is not as affordable or logistically possible as DJ tango music. Since most tango groups are run by self sustaining communities of people and/or are non-profit organizations, paying for a twelve piece tango orchestra for regular tango events is not possible. In addition, musicians who want to perform tango, even with a more affordable instrumentation such as a trio or quartet, are expected to meet the challenge of providing the same "tangoish" sound of the "full" orchestra recordings that dancers are used to moving to at *milongas*. The *bandoneón*, (an instrument that, unfortunately, is almost never played in the United States[14]) is usually the first instrument mentioned as a signifier for the driving sound of

tango. Paul R., one of the leaders in MATC, explained once in an interview that the sound produced from four *bandoneóns* has the power to literally shake the heart.

While the sheer power of the *bandoneón's* volume affects dancers' bodies, there are also other cues in the music that not only assure dancers that they are dancing to Argentine tango, but signal choreographic possibilities to couples on the dance floor. Argentine tango has a kind of elasticity, or what Tom Stermitz calls a musical "point of compression." For example, dancers learn to listen for the way beat four delays slightly to build to a heavily accented, but short, first beat. Musicians refer to these short but heavily accented beats as *marcatto*. On the larger phrase level, dancers anticipate elasticity by learning the way eight bars can build up and then delay just before a new and slightly faster section.

Tango musicians also learn to recognize the way rhythms (usually written in shorthand) on tango charts look and how to perform them stylistically. *Marcattos* are written as straight eights and performed with accents on one and three.[15] Musicians in a tango group learn to refine the style of a *marcatto* by copying tango recordings. The *varriaciones*, fast melodic variations usually played at the end of a tango, are also important parts of a tango orchestra arrangement. As a signal that a tango is about to end, *varriaciones* give musician and dancers one last burst of energy. *Varriaciones* are usually written out and played in unison by the lead players in a band. In small groups *varriaciones* are often improvised.[16]

The organizational scheme that MATC uses to compile music for a night of dancing not only facilitates social interaction and smooth transitions on and off the dance floor, it also helps keep dancers connected to Argentina. MATC dancers are trained to

use *tandas* (rounds of three to four tangos), and the musical cue of the *cortina* is important because it ensure that dancers will continue to switch partners throughout a night of dancing, which helps to keep the social energy at a *milonga* flowing. The use of *tandas* and *cortinas* are presented not only as Argentine ways of structuring a *milonga*, but as social formalities that help to maximize social interaction and keep a sophisticated attitude toward social dancing in MATC.

For dancers who immerse themselves in tango events, the music becomes a part of a dancer's subconscious and when heard becomes an inspiration to balance between focusing on their partner and the music. The ultimate goal expressed by teachers is to find the point in which the self, a partner, and the music are given simultaneous, but equal attention. When tango teacher Alex Krebs of Portland came to MATC to give a workshop on tango musicality in September of 2004, he taught that we were supposed to balance what was going on in the music with what our partners were doing. He stressed that the information he was giving to people about how to listen to rhythm and form in tango was not meant to take over people's attention. We finished the class with an exercise where we listened to one of D'Arenzio's arrangements with our eyes closed. He had us raise our right hand for when the music was lyrical, our left hand when it was *marcatto*, and both had if it was lyrical and *marcatto*. About half-way through he stopped the recording and playfully scolded us that many people had lost focus, had their eyes open, and were looking around. He said that we needed to learn how to concentrate, because you cannot dance tango without absolute attention. Then he said that for the *milonga* later that night we should plan on doing what ever we needed to do help us focus, "drink your matê," he

exclaimed. Concentration, on the music and our partners, was the most important thing to develop if we wanted to become really good dancers

I observed that dancers in MATC engage simultaneously in an Argentine way with their own way of dancing. When I asked Anna K. to comment more on how she thought MATC balances their concern for authenticity with what is new in tango she replied,

> I think it works, I think it's a pretty good balance between the two, between constantly trying to say, 'this is how we do it in Argentina, this is real tango,' with an interest in the new things that people are doing. I think that the interest in Caroline and Christopher and Brigitte Winkler are fundamental forces in how people think about what's possible in tango. At the level of what happens in classes and things like that there is a real emphasis on 'we dance close embrace because this is what they dance socially in Argentina. This is real social dancing.' So in one sense we are doing the more authentic form than other places.

Anna K. 's observations underlies the balance that MATC strikes between weekly lessons taught by local teachers, where there is an emphasis on teaching dancers how to think and move "like they do in Argentina," and monthly workshops, where world renowned tango teachers are invited to teach the basics, plus what is possible in tango.

The ways that MATC extends beyond the tradition of tango are seen as necessary aspects of learning to tango. As a night of dancing progresses, tango repertoire is chosen from modern recordings such as the techno-tango *Gotan Project*, and can include non-tango music such as Maria Callas singing the "Habanera" from Bizet's *Carmen* that was played by Alex Krebs all night *milonga* during MATC's second year anniversary. While

the music that MATC DJ Paul R. plays is primarily from the traditional Argentine tango repertoire, the dancers in Ann Arbor embrace the moments where they are encouraged to break the usual music form. Dancers have more fun with these moments; they often switch between open and close embrace, use more creative embellishments, and some dancers switch their typical dance role—men dance with men, women dance with women, or women lead men.

There are also moments in workshops where guest teachers have reflected this type of experimentation that can be seen as extending beyond the tango tradition. During a workshop weekend in 2001 Tom Stermitz sensed seriousness building to a point where it suppressed the energy in his class. He quickly turned on *Sublime's* recording of *Summertime* to help awaken the energy and flow between bodies and minds. Christopher and Caroline along with Brigitte Winkler, a teacher who founded the tango community in Berlin, Germany, are seen as teachers that explore innovative possibilities for teaching and performing Argentine social tango. Christopher once mocked one of the ways that he had been taught to dance by a teacher in Argentina. "You must walk like a panther," he said with a fake Argentine accent. He added that while there were many important things that he and Caroline learned taking dance lessons in Argentina there were also many things that were built up that were not important to good social dancing. If read between the lines, Christopher was saying that walking like a panther was more of a strategy for teachers to project a kind of mysteriousness or dangerousness in dancers' walks, than a way to promote social dancing that was creative and alive.

MATC's members acknowledge that historically Argentine tango is performed with men leading and women following. However, for a successful dance, partners learn

to negotiate the rules, behavior, and danced movements they perform, which leads to the ultimate goal of dancing tango—a heightened state of self expression. The constant negotiation of gendered rules and expectations in MATC not only challenge the notions of what it means to perform this socialized role in a public space, but also how that role is linked within an aesthetic of Argentine authenticity. Having clearly stated and unstated rules in tango may seem that men and women are locked into their roles, and as discussed earlier, that they may run the risk, for example of being trapped into the male dominator, female dominated roles. In MATC dancers are taught that a successful tango dance depends on making the roles more symmetrical. Historically, many different strategies have also been used to understand the inherent asymmetry in the roles of lead and follow in tango (Taylor 1998: 10, Savigliano 1998: 42-47). However, in MATC the goal in tango performance is to find a balance between the way leaders and followers move through their improvisation. This balance seeks to bring comfort, understanding, agency, and ultimately a transformative experience for both partners. Anna K.'s statement offers an understanding of the way that gender roles can comply with the rules of Argentine social tango, and how those rules are realized within in MATC. She states,

> I would personally like to see lots of mixing up in terms of leading and following. I think it [leading and following] goes along with that idea that playfulness is key, and maybe that question of authenticity as well, because it seems to be reinforcing that gender distinction between leaders and followers. However, really focusing on the fact of leading and following by calling them those names really downplays the playfulness. One of the main goals of that or the function of such a firm distinction is because that is how they do it in Argentina, and that there are

these gender histories, I guess you could say, that were right there at the origin of the dance. And that somehow the dance comes from a bed of strict gender distinctions...and that these are all ways of tracing it back, maybe creating a genealogy of the dance every time you dance. You are re-creating this of Argentineness...I think though that one of the things I really like about tango.

The ways gendered roles are constructed in MATC are based upon an Argentine aesthetic, but as Anna K. explains, MATC does not seek to create a stereotypical copy of Argentine gender roles. Dancers perform their roles in a way that leads to a maximum amount of communication and interaction between partners.

The way that dancers in MATC learn the close embrace is based not only on the creation of productive tango spaces that allow for people of many places to dance together in MATC, but that make people feel that they are coming together to dance a varied, but common Argentine dance. The performance of choreography, the use of tango music, and the negotiation of Argentine tango's gendered roles in MATC show how tango performance is created within a space where considerations of original representations that are tied to local needs and personal desires meet with concerns for the preservation of Argentine sentiments that are tied to nostalgia and authenticity. Dancers in MATC recognize their own attachments to both of these goals. With this mix of commitment to adaptation and to preservation, MATC continues to create thriving tango spaces.

[1] See (Feld 1996: 134) where he talks about the way place can function as the physical space where people perform as well as a location that can be evoked through the senses. (Greene 2003) also discusses the way body movement and music come together in a "confluence of practices" (206).

[2] Seremetakis argues that we remember the past in part through a web of feelings retained in and exchanged through our subconscious body sensations. She reiterates, "Senses are meaning-generating apparatuses that operate beyond consciousness and intention. The interpretation of and through the senses becomes a recovery of truth as collective, material experience" (Seremetakis 1994: 6).

[3]See also (Largey: 2003) for an analysis of the way Haitian composers used Vodou and "cultural memory" to establish an authentic national identity among the elite class in Haiti. Like tango, Vodou was a flexible cultural good because composers could maintain distance from its origins and adapt idealized versions of it to help to legitimize its performance in a new cultural context (12-13).

[4] Like other ballroom dances, tango follows a counterclockwise line of dance.

[5] Collier cites Ricardo Rodríguez Molas as the one who traces tango to an African term meaning "reserved ground" (1995: 41). For the original source see (*La Historia del Tango* 1976-87: vol. I, 57-58).

[6] Christine Yano also says that singers and fans of *enka* realize their participation as something that goes beyond preserving the exotic. She states, "Nostalgia's function within this framework is to preserve distance [feeling of desire]—but to preserve as well a yearning to transcend it" (2002: 16).

[7] Parallel system is when partners walk on the same foot mirroring each other, as if both partner's feet were moving in a train track. Cross system is when partners walk on the opposite feet at the same time.

[8] See also (Connerton 1989) for a consideration of bodily social memory.

[9] Raymond William's argues that, "social forms...become social consciousness only when they are lived, actively, in real relationships, and moreover in relationships which are more than systematic exchanges between fixed units" (1977: 130).

[10] A tango teacher in Kansas City name Korey Ireland sent an email during his travels in Buenos Aires that talked about the way people in the public spaces of Buenos Aires use the tango. After seeing a tango orchestra concert on January 12, 2005, he wrote: *Once again I was struck by the power of this music and its importance in this culture, the audience knew every song, and there was often an audible murmer of audience participation (possible involuntary) in these beloved melodies. And it was wonderful to see the full orchestra, in past visits I've seen musicians performing in trios and quartets, very occasionally with 5-7 players, but this year I've had the pleasure of seeing several full tango orchestras (3-5 bandoneóns, 4 violins, piano, bass, cello, guitar, singer) which I think says good things about the economic health of the Buenos Aires tango scene. Then of course, after the concert there was dancing till dawn, but then I suppose that goes without saying.*

[11] Even through dancers are drawn to the nostalgic sound of old recordings, many tango DJs remaster or touch up recordings that were originally transferred at the wrong speed or contain distracting clicks and pops. For example, see the website "Totango Restorations: 1100 Tango Classics Cleaned" http://www.totango.net/ttindex.html Accessed March 28th. (Castro 1999) also gives a background on the way tango music was disseminated through recordings made during the "Golden Era."

[12] The *bandoneón* is often referred to as *la boca* (mouth). When fully extended, the *bandoneón's* bellows look like a biting mouth, and its sound in tango is often said to have a percussive bite.

[13] Sarah Y. refers here to the *milonga* that my group placed at in March of 2002. The instrumentation was flute, guitar and bass.

[14] Argentine bassist and tango scholar Pablo Aslan informed me in 2003 that even through New York had many tango groups, there was only one *bandoneón* player that knew tango well and that if he ever left or was ill that all the tango groups would be without a *bandoneón*.

[15] See Salgan's book *Curso de Tango*.

[16] Before the 1920s tango groups were smaller and generally improvised an arrangement off a lead sheet. This is comparable to the way jazz combos perform tunes together. Then, Pedro Laurenz, started writing out arrangements that surpassed what other groups could do by just improvising. He helped to set the trend of using arrangements, and as a result tango combos began to grow into larger tango orchestras.

Chapter 3

Dancing "The Perfect Dance:" Leading, Following, and "Flow" in the Argentine Close Embrace

The way that MATC dancers learn to perform Argentine tango is based on a principle of cultivating skills and personal wills to accomplish a beautiful and connected performance of the close embrace. The end result of MATC's efforts is that they bring hundreds of people together in social performances at their *milongas* in an environment that not only allows complete strangers to have successful improvised conversations with one another, but that often allows dancers to enter into states of trance. Successful dances between partners, harmonized social energy, and heightened states of conscious occur on a regular basis in MATC in part because their club has such a unified approach to the multifaceted experience of dancing Argentine tango. However, this does not mean that everyone in MATC dances the same way, it means that MATC brings a common goal of bringing good social energy and allowing for the most common motivation in dancing tango—"the tango high."

Dancers in MATC ultimately seek what I call "the perfect dance," a dance that makes people enter into a heightened state of energy or consciousness, in dancers' language a "tango high." When dancers enter into this state they do so within the confines of the close embrace. However, "tango high" and "the perfect dance" are not experiences that happen spontaneously. They are the result of many hours of training and practicing a complex set of skills. The "tango high" is best demonstrated by what Mihaly

Csikszentmihalyi calls "flow" or "optimal experience," a state of happiness and contentment that humans make happen through "voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile" (1990: 3). It is this emphasis on "voluntary effort" that I want to stress in learning and performing tango. Dancers reach their heightened state of consciousness through a great effort and it is through skilful dancing alone (and not through any other methods of reaching an altered state of consciousness) that dancers experience the reward and the motivation for dancing tango.

"Flow" in Practice

People who come to a beginner's tango lesson could easily be bombarded with too much information: how to execute choreography, how and what to listen for in the music, and how to adjust their body alignment. The basics of how to walk in close embrace without hurting someone are difficult enough without even considering a move to make or what is going on in a piece of music. The way MATC avoids this problem is to delay teaching steps to beginners at first. As one beginning dancer, Sarah Y. described in an interview, "it took three to four lessons before any steps were even taught, which might turn some people off, but so far it seems to be working. And besides, it is better than backtracking. Teaching a bunch of steps and then trying to get a bunch of people to walk together without hurting each other." Sarah Y.'s observation is correct in that while the attendance dropped some from the 80 + people that came to the first beginners lesson of the term in 2003, there remained a core group of people that were challenged enough in the beginning by having to learn such a seemingly basic concept as how to walk pressed up against another person's torso.

Another concept that is taught is the difference between "dancing for your partner" versus "dancing for the audience." Beginning dancers are often attracted to "tango-like" moves such as *boleos* or *ganchos*, which may make them feel more in the spirit of dancing tango, but are generally not practical for social tango dancing. With the case of the *boleo* or other kick-like movements that can be embellished by a follower, these can even be dangerous for the social dance floor. *Ganchos* (leg hooks, usually performed between a partner's legs) also can be dangerous, but more often than not are impossible on a crowded dance floor. To add spice to their dance, beginners are taught more subtle ways to embellish. Movements as simple as gently wiggling one's torso, changing the character of one's step, or altering the energy of the torso connection are all embellishments that can be felt, but not seen, in the moment they are performed to the music.

There were two workshop teachers that visited MATC in the last two years that taught dancers how to actively seek these more intimate types of embellishments. In the fall of 2003, Hsueh-Tze, a dance instructor from Boston, taught us how to embody different instruments of the orchestra in our steps. Borrowing a leader from the group of dancers taking her class, she demonstrated a light and lilting walk when the violin had the melody, a peppier walk to match the bass, and a pronounced weighted walk, as if moving through honey, to the *bandoneón's* accompaniment. Through careful attention to the character of her movements we could see the change in her steps, however, as she reminded us, her partner was the one who really knew and understood the changes she made in her walking steps. In January of 2004, Brigitte Winkler and Tom Stermitz taught a class called "Chasing the Tango Trance," which included yoga-like breathing exercises

that challenged leaders and followers to breath in and out to the timing of a particular set of steps. The goal of the class was for dancers to become more aware of their partners, and to encourage dancers to strive for a natural timing in their dance that could be executed without force. We ended the class with a visualization exercise where everyone was instructed to embrace their partners and then close their eyes. The followers were asked to pick an object or material in their mind, and in their dancing embody that image. After dancing one tango like this, both partners opened their eyes and the leaders were asked to explain to the followers what it was that they thought she had been imagining. The first partner I danced this exercise with guessed that I felt like something heavy or solid, like a brick wall. I had been imaging a tree. However, the second partner I danced with, a man from Columbus, Ohio, said before we began dancing that this exercise was too "out there" for him, and I had trouble showing with my body that I was imagining the wind. Brigitte and Tom commented on this problem at the end of the class. The goal wasn't for leaders to guess exactly what the follower was trying to emulate in her body, but to use the exercise as a door to open up awareness to the follower's body.

While male and female roles in tango may be more balanced today, Argentine tango performance continues to operate on the aesthetic premise that men lead and women follow, and MATC is no exception. As Anna K. commented, gender is in service of making the look and feel of the improvised movements of tango successful.

> A: You say ok we are going to improvise, but we are going to agree before we start improvising on a framework. We are going to agree on, and in tango I think it mostly ends up being an aesthetic framework that eliminates some possibilities entirely. And to do that and start questioning those things that you have

eliminated potentially messes around with there being any shared basis on which to structure your improvised movements, which is what makes tango so possible, or maybe what I should say so successful so frequently. The structures are so firm, or the things that you don't allow, or the taboos everyone agrees upon so much that there is no conflict when you get out there and everything looks beautiful even if it is the first time that partners have done it.

C: Do you mean when you say eliminating the possibilities that you can't just switch roles in the middle of a dance?

A: Right, and for the most part you don't just switch roles without talking about it. You don't switch roles without saying, 'ok, now that part has ended and we are going to start a new part.' At least traditionally certainly, and traditionally you don't switch roles at all because you have the man leading and the woman following. The roles are defined when you walk out onto the stage. I think that is one of the things that make the improvisation so successful. So what do you do if you are prepared to start questioning those things? And how do you know what the rules are for the improvisation? I think that you might find that there is a lot more miscommunication and a lot more conflict on stage if you don't have those rules and those structures so firmly set at the beginning. So I really don't know how far you can take it and not have it end up as contact improvisation. Not that there is anything wrong with contact improvisation. I think that is something that would be a lot of fun to play with in terms of tango, but I think that there is

something that, almost a seamlessness or a unified vision that tango brings to the viewer and to the participants that is very satisfying to me aesthetically.

Anna K.'s comments reflect the gendered aesthetic that is desired for tango performance in MATC. However, in practice, MATC give dancers a place to switch roles without loosing the "firm structure" of the gendered embrace, or a dancer's identity as a leader or follower. This process of learning the other partner's role is taught as an essential part of learning to become a good dancer in MATC.

One of the ways that MATC helps to lead beginners to the point where they can switch roles is to encourage dancers to practice dancing beyond the natural tendencies of lead and follow, for men to be more sensitive and flexible, and for women to be more decisive and more active. Women who are new to tango may sense that it is enough to just follow their male leaders, but MATC teaches that without a forum for women to express their version of the story they can easily become passive dancers. One of the teachers in the club, Sarah Y., commented on the role of followers:

> And the same thing for women of being active in the dance, and sometimes women are so sexually repressed that it is difficult for them to express that in the dance, to be open and be very comfortable with their own sexuality. I think men love to feel when a woman is alive, when she is really alive and participates in the dance, not just follows. Sometimes you can also have good followers, very clean technique, wonderful to dance with, but they are cold. They are cold maybe because they are not able to feel and show it in the dance, because of their personalities, or maybe they are not taught. Nobody ever told them that your are

supposed to feel the music too. Or that we are allowed, it's ok when we dance to not *just* follow.

Sarah Y.'s comments demonstrate the irony of the close embrace. The gendered frame remains firm in the outward performance, but on the inside men and women reach an optimal experience by bending the gendered frame. In essence, women must learn to lead within their role as followers, but without showing it. Marta Savigliano's words to explain the role of females are "docile bodies in rebellion," meaning that while historically women were at best hustled from man to man and at worst the victims of a violent death by the hands of a man, within their role they did more than willingly submit themselves to their leaders, they rebelled within their role (1995: 69-71). Brigitte Winkler expresses a less violent image of how women can "play" within their roles. Terry S., a dance teacher from Pittsburgh once explained Brigitte's idea about the role of the follower being like the other side of an interesting conversation. Terry S. summarized what Brigitte taught him and his partner in a lesson on teaching tango:

> Instead of a leader saying to a follower 'oh what a nice day,' and her response being 'yeah what a nice day,' he should say 'oh what a nice day' and then wait for her to respond with 'yes, the sky is blue! The sun is out!'

In this way, a follower is in charge of her own creative response to a leader's idea. As expressed in Brigitte's metaphor, the interesting tango conversation happens through a dual responsibility of the leader waiting for a follower to speak and then a follower taking the initiative to speak up.

Tom Stermitz, a guest teacher from Denver who visited Ann Arbor in 2003, said that the women in the club danced very nicely, and for the most part performed their

steps perfectly, but what he wanted was "women that are alive." He didn't want to dance with "perfect rag dolls." This comment was not meant to encourage the women in MATC to be defiant or resistant to the lead. As he told me the first time I danced with him in Denver, "I don't want you to be a rag doll, but I don't want you to be a brick wall either." Followers during Stermiz's classes were encouraged to strike a balance between dancing a dominated role and dancing with their own sense of choreographic agency (Savigliano 1995: 60).

Leaders on the other hand have been encouraged in MATC to learn how to balance the power they have as the initiators of each movement. When asked about good leaders one of the male leaders and teachers in MATC, Brian A., said:

> I guess that I have only been doing this a year and that traditionalists hate to see women leading and men following, well I think they hate to see women leading more than the other [we both laugh]. But for me I think that it's great that people know how to do both. Since I started following, which is very recently, it's just opened up my eyes to that sensitivity that we were talking about. If a leader knows how to follow, then he knows how to be sensitive to certain things that followers need. Because it's a completely different feeling being a follower than it is to be a leader. You can be equally playful, equally musical, rhythmic, all that stuff, but in a different way than a leader might. So yeah I think it's great I'm all for it.

Alongside Brian A.'s explanation of the benefits of switching roles, he alludes to the those whom he calls the "traditionalists," referring to men and women who want to see the male to female structure of the embrace remain firm at all times, and are deeply

bothered by those who switch roles. Brian A. is aware of the tensions that exist in MATC (as well as the tango world in general) surrounding the switching of roles. However, Brian A. and his partner Sarah Y., who both teach beginners in MATC switch roles themselves, and ask people in their classes to see what they can learn from switching roles. Sarah Y. said in an interview that it is "absolutely necessary" for dancers to switch roles at some point, and that pedagogically it makes sense. She stated, "You can teach men a hundred exercises, and tell them, you know you don't have to squeeze here, a woman would feel this and that, but it just makes sense to me, you know, why don't you follow? Just try it!"

Brian A. and Sarah Y.'s sentiments underlie the philosophy of other MATC dancers who develop keen partner awareness that allows them to express themselves when they dance. Many other teachers, especially the followers in the club, also use the same tactics in their own dancing and can be seen signing up to take workshop weekend classes as leaders. Through persistent practice, dancers arrive at a place where they can have meaningful conversations with each other in performance. Brian A.'s comments show the way that balancing the gendered roles of lead and follow, listening to the music, and negotiating a good connection lead a playful improvisation that brings both joy and fun.[1] Brian A. reiterates,

> A good leader has to be assertive, but gentle at the same time. He really has to pay attention to what the follower is doing, what the follower is able to do, and what the follower is unable to do. He has to be very musical, has to have a sense of fun. Because a lot of tango music is very playful. Technique is important, but not necessary for a great dance. I'd say the same for a follower too actually. You have

a good connection, but if you do just simple things, you can have a great dance. You improvise, you move with the music, you move with the room, you can have a great time doing almost nothing.

In this passage Brian A. also mentions the word "connection," which is a very meaningful word to dancers in MATC. To have a good connection not only implies the physical alignment needed for two dancers to move together in perfect synchronicity while sharing an axis. It also implies an emotional investment where both dancers concentrate deeply on the way their bodies move to the music. Dancers also talk about connection as a kind of attention that someone brings to the dance where a partner listens (in a bodily sense) to what he or she has to say. Anna K.'s comments on the way connection not only brings her a successful dance, but gives her a sense that she is sharing the learning process with someone else.

C: So what is it about tango that has drawn you to it since I know you have danced a lot of different styles, what is it about tango?

A: I think the first and the easiest answer is the connection. That's the answer at the top of my head all the time, is the connection. Because I've always done, well for 24 years I did independent dances, where I was a solo performer on stage kind of thing...Dancing with a partner became a way for me to think about dance from inside my body as opposed to from outside. I don't have to look in a mirror when I tango. And that I think was the first thing that it was for me was that the reflection I was getting, or there was that constant feedback, still like you would have from your teacher, but it was from your partner. And it was a much less

hierarchical kind of feedback also. It was really about a sort of joint project instead which I really, really like about tango.

As MATC members negotiate gender roles to make them more symmetrical, they simultaneously bring out the natural tendency in dancers to help one another meet the challenges of dancing. Since MATC is a non-profit group that is run entirely by volunteers, including the dancers who teach weekly lessons, the dancers in the club are dependent on one another to learn how to dance.

"Flow" in Performance

Dancers in MATC gather every other Saturday from 9:00PM-1:30AM in the Pendelton room, a ballroom in the University of Michigan Student Union building, for what they call the *Milonga Picante*. The banquet size room is set up half with round tables covered with white table cloths and the other half of the room is left for dancing, a rectangle approximately 30 feet by 60 feet. Dancers find partners they know or scramble to dance with those they like, but eventually branch out to dance with those that they have never met before. DJs within the club play tango music non-stop throughout the evening. As the night progresses, the dance floor fills up, and concentric rings start to form on the dance floor. Ideally, MATC strives for the dance floor to be overly crowded, so as to mirror the crowded late night dance floors of Argentina. Men wear button up shirts that are usually tucked in. Some wear jackets, and others wear ties. Women tend to wear skirts or dresses, and spike heels are preferred. Men's faces are deeply concentrated. Their eyes are wide open, and their brows are furrowed generally because the most important rule for them is to make sure they do not let their follower bump into anyone or

anything. Women are taught to close their eyes, and while some fluctuate between open and closed eyes, the follower's faces are interpreted as a sign of how well the dance is going. A smile or relaxed face means that she is enjoying the dance, while a frown or puzzled look is often a sign of miscommunication or discomfort.[2]

Regularly scheduled *milongas* are the rewards for long hours learning how to dance Argentine tango. Tango performances at the *milonga* give dancers a time and space to perform their hard won skills. Ideally MATC dancers dance without thinking, talking, or teaching. In performance they are taught to use only their emotions and bodies to communicate with one another on the dance floor. The very specific and highly refined skills involving choreography, postures, music, social behavior, dress, and technique are put on display at the *milonga*. Although dancers move with a natural smoothness and beauty, they have worked hard to make the social and physical connection on the dance floor appear seamless.

As dancers become skilled at dancing and learning how to communicate at a high level with their bodies, they say they become addicted to intense connections created with their partners on the dance floor. Every person I interviewed said that they were in some way drawn to tango more than other activities in their lives, and most talked about their "addiction to tango" with a certain amount of guilt. One person felt guilty about breaking other appointments to dance tango, another spent more time dancing than studying, another about neglecting their personal relationships at home, and many said that dancing tango was the best part of their week.

Although MATC dancers compare their involvement in tango to an addiction, perhaps dancers' attachment to what they experience at the *milonga* is a more natural

reaction to the physical and emotional high that is the result of a disciplined process of learning how to dance. While dancers talk jokingly about "tango highs" or "getting their tango fix," they also talk about tango being addictive because they feel that the energy and skills cultivated while learning and performing tango are infinite. Every person that I interviewed mentioned something about how they felt so drawn to tango because of the way learning and performing complemented each other. Paul R., one of the main founders of the club, summed up all other interviewee's thoughts with the metaphor that tango was like "an onion, or an artichoke," inferring that tango was like an infinite process of discovery. Each new layer that gets peeled off uncovers something new and unexpected that can be refined and performed at the *milonga*. Tango dancing in MATC is like other artistic disciplines, such as martial arts, yoga, and tai chi, that cultivate mind and body awareness in practice and performance.

Another aspect of tango in MATC that leads dancers to crave the performance is the way the boundaries blur between the hard work it took to learn how to dance and the play necessary for performance. In short, the irony of tango is that play is achieved by a steady work ethic. MATC dancers' play is manifested through improvisation, and although they essentially learn the same types of choreographic patterns, they perform movements with endless variation. Margaret Drewal also defines play and improvisation as categories that are not only linked and yet unbound, but that happen as a result of intentionally learned skills. Like tango in MATC, Drewal discusses how improvisation in Yoruba rituals not only maintains a negotiation of what is appropriate but also a "competitive interrelatedness" (Drewal 1992: 7). When dancers perform at the *milonga*, the goal is to simultaneously challenge and maintain the boundaries of what is possible

choreographically within their steps and within their gendered roles. Elizabeth McAlister also discusses the relationship between work and play in the Lenten processional performances in Haitian Rara bands. She argues that the outer "play" in the performance of Rara, which appears as a carnivalesque scene of musicians, dancers, and singers processing down the street, simultaneously operates alongside the coded religious "work." The dimensions between work and play in tango are similar to what McAlister describes for work and play in Rara: "These two values [work and play] are enacted structurally through performance codes, use of private and public space, gender relations, and social hierarchy (2002: 31). As in other types of social dance performances, it is not always clear to an outside observer that the outward play displayed by a couple dancing tango also involves mental, physical, and for some, spiritual work.

Tango Trance

While "flow" or optimal experience is generally felt by those who work hard to learn how to perform tango, there is another dimension to dancing tango that draws people in—trance. When I refer to trance, I mean to suggest a state of heightened consciousness beyond optimal experience where a person feels simultaneously that they are asleep and awake, or as many dancers put it, "like a dream" where their senses are acutely activated, even through they forget what is going on around them. Trance usually happens when leaders and followers dance together with precise timing and alignment, actively listening and interpreting the music, while paying critical attention to one another. Not all dancers experience trance, and when it happens it usually only lasts

during the duration of one tango, about two to four minutes. When the tango is over, dancers wake up.

I know from having experienced trance while dancing tango that it is not only difficult to talk about, but that trance and "tango high" are similar feelings that often get linked together. When talking about trance, dancers have said that it is like "waking up from a dream," or that they could have "lived a lifetime." As one interviewee observed:

> Sometimes when you have a very good dance you're simply high. I guess it doesn't necessarily have to be tango, for some people its something else. It's just the passion that makes you so absorbed in that activity that you lose yourself in it, and that's what it's all about, like its just pleasure you know? It doesn't happen all the time, but when it happens that's what you start searching for. You express emotions and everything. Its not that I go there and dance for other people, I dance for myself, and I dance for my partner, but I express my emotions and I'm living through these emotions. Every tango is like you can live a lifetime, you go through one emotion after another all the time. I wasn't necessarily conforming for other people, I was living through the experience of other people, and that is a very rich emotional experience for me.

In looking at the literature on music, dance, and trance, MATC's performance of tango trance underlies the idea that while similar trance experiences occur in parts of the world that have historically nothing to do with each other, not all trance experiences are universal (Becker 2004: 40-45). In religious rituals, practitioners use altered states of consciousness to provide personal or communal healing, receive divinations, or communicate with ancestors. In these types of rituals, the quality of trance performance

itself is crucial to success of the performance. Laurel Kendall shows in her study of Chini, a woman who made several failed attempts at becoming a Korean shaman, that learning to become a shaman may appear as a calling that leads naturally to initiation. However, through her ethnographic accounts she shows that "Korean shaman's practice contains a tacit acknowledgement that becoming a shaman is a slow and by no means certain process" (1996: 49). Kendall's study of a failed possession-trance ceremony also helps to show how rituals involving practitioners who enter altered states of consciousness are, like tango performances, learned through careful training. In Chini's case, she was called to be a shaman. However, entering into a trance that would not only let spirits speak through her, but that could offer divinations and healing for family and friends in the audience, was not natural or easy for her to do.

As in the performance of religious ritual trance, MATC distinguishes between the training needed to learn to trance, and the performance of trance. In *milongas*, dancers are taught not to analyze, teach, or even talk to their partners. The performance should look and feel completely natural, seamless, and subconscious. Therefore, in MATC's tango, trance is de-emphasized. Dancers do not think of themselves as performing trance, they think of themselves as performing the dance even though trancing may be part of the experience. This contrasts to religious possession trances where spiritual possession is usually at the forefront of a ceremony. Karen McKarthy Brown also talks about possession trance in Haitian Vodou as "possession-performances" (1991: 5). In her book on the Vodou priestess, Mama Lola, she makes the distinction that not all practitioners who receive the sprits become practicing healers. Brown continues, "In urban contexts, those who function as priests or priestesses for Vodou families can do so because their

skills (including the skill of being a good "horse" [vehicle] for the spirits) have been recognized and repeatedly proven. Some of these skills are taught in the initiation chamber, but others are inherited" (1991: 354). In both Chini's and Mama Lola's case, reaching possession trance involves a set of skills that are taught and refined, but that can also be skills that involve a certain amount of intuition, or predisposition for healing.

The same balance between skill and intuition applies for tango dancing in MATC as it does for other settings where trance is performed. To experience tango trance requires a dancer to perform beyond the basic skills of good balance and clear steps that follow the music. The ethnographies on Chini and Mama Lola are valuable for this study because they offer an understanding of the way intuition in trance behavior works in MATC. As seen with Chini's case in shamanistic rituals, even though skills for trance may be practiced, a person may not experience trance. Mama Lola learned special skills during her initiation training that would help her to perform possession trance, but she explains that an important skill in learning to perform as a possession trance healer were skills such as "the gift of eyes," or the ability to sense what people need, as well as basic self-confidence (1991: 355). For Mama Lola, these skills are crucial to possession trance, and they cannot be taught. Dancers in MATC are drawn to tango when they begin to see and feel the place where technique and training are matched with intuition and self expression.

MATC's all night *milongas* are another type of format that allows dancers to experience a heightened state of energy that can lead to trance. An all night format helps people get into the spirit of "losing oneself in the dance," and serves as a way to boost dancers' excitement about tango. Dancing at an all night *milonga* is not a courting ritual.

The early morning hours draw dancers who have a commitment to dancing tango that is perpetuated by a relentless search for more great dances. The last all night *milonga* I observed in MATC was in the fall of 2004. It took place at a place called the Pittsfield Grange, a historic meeting hall just outside of Ann Arbor. The dancers who showed up to dance from 1:00AM-6:00AM had just come from the "regular" *milonga* (9:00pm-1:00am) that was held in the University of Michigan Union ballroom. Most of the people at the all night *milonga* were dancers within the club who knew each other or at the very least had danced with each other already. The only thing in the room besides a handful of folding chairs and three wooden benches was the stereo used by the DJ. During the *milonga* I noticed that dancers were more flirtatious; some altered the formalities of the embrace as they held each other with both arms, as if hugging while dancing; others let their hands fall to the sides of their bodies, others off the dance floor gave each other back rubs. However, it was clear to me that dancers' behaviors were not in hopes of finding a partner to take home with them. The goal of an all night *milonga* is to engage completely in tango dancing, and while many people do find partners within the tango community, romantic preoccupations take a back seat to the performance of energetic and connected social tango.

The music for tango dancers is also one of the most important aspects to the ritual of finding "tango trance." It is not only the most important aspect that brings inspiration and feeling in the dance, but it is also inseparable from the dance. As Sarah Y. explained when I asked her what makes tango sound like tango,

> To me, tango music and tango dance, they are inseparable. I mean there is tango music that you can only listen to and you don't necessarily have to dance to, or

> sometimes it is difficult to dance to. But to me tango is music, and you cannot think about tango music separate from the dance. Music is the driving force. Ok? Music inspires all emotions, and you want to go out there and express them in the moment.

The familiar format and sound of the music is what makes dancers feel connected to one another. The way dancers learn to think about music in MATC is also completely integrated into the way they think about moving. Dance steps are not only in response to the music, but are often planned and shaped around the form of a tango. Since dancers in MATC have heard the same tangos over and over, they learn to memorize the form, orchestration, and emotional changes in the music. The process of dancing to the same music brings dancers continued inspiration to try new combinations while resting in the certainty of what will occur next in the music. Dancers in MATC are also very attached to the format of the way music is presented in *tandas*. When the first sounds from a particular tango arrangement are played on the sound system, most dancers in MATC can already hear the entire song in their heads before it finishes, but since they are improvising, they don't know exactly how it will be danced out in the movements with their partner.

When MATC dancers commit themselves to learning the skills, behaviors, and social codes of social Argentine tango necessary for "the perfect dance" or "tango trance" they cultivate emotional and bodily responses that are beyond what is necessary for everyday life. Judith Becker explains how those who enter into a trance are not able to explain the process that they use to enter into trance. She continues, "Like riding a bike, or learning via biofeedback, once you learn you don't forget. You know that you know,

but cannot describe the knowing to another...The predictability of trancing and the stereotypicity of trancing, conforming to community expectations, is not, I am convinced, a result of fraudulence, of chicanery, but of skill. Trancers and deep listeners have more control over the activities of their minds and bodies than most of us" (2004: 68). It is this combination of learned skills, social predictability, and subconscious performance that come together on the dance floor in MATC that allow dancers not only to dance in the "flow" or "trance" of the close embrace, but to dance skillfully with others who have learned to perform the "perfect" dance.

[1] In other places throughout the United States, I have observed that sensitivity and compromise through balancing partner roles are also taught as fundamental skills for a successful tango dance. In a tango lesson in Portland during the summer of 2004, tango teacher and *bandoneón* player, Alex Krebs, stressed that "tango is danced together." He showed beginners how to adjust their step size to match their partners, and how to give different amounts of energy back to their partners.

[2] See (Savigliano 1998) for a discussion of the gendered codes of behavior at Buenos Aires milongas.

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