



Research Report required for the completion of
Master of Arts – Applied Drama
(MAAD)

CHALLENGING PERFORMANCES OF HEGEMONY IN TANGO:
LIBERATION THROUGH PEDAGOGY

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March 2015



To the movement practitioners



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Date: September. 24, 2015

Acknowledgements

To my family, especially my mom and my granny, who always have inspired and supported me along the journey with so much joy.

To Matthew Wilhelm-Solomon, my partner, words are not enough to show my gratitude and admiration for your unconditional love, care, help, and patience.

To Emy and Chris, for loving me, holding my hand and smiling.

To my supervisor, Warren Nebe, for his, rare but cutting edge support, visionary enthusiasm and care.

To the whole Drama for Life family, my gratitude.

To Tamara Gordon, for her gentle and profound way of teaching drama.

To Tshego, Bibi, Charaé, Les, Sinethemba, Sibongile, Themba, Modisana, Matlakala, Sandile, Khlox, Zandi, Ayanda, Leane, Jacqui, Hamish, Lereko and Peter thank you for the African experience.

My deep gratitude to my MAAD colleagues, Masesi Sessy Dumela, Oluwadamilola Apotiere-Abdulai, especially to Bongani Ntshingila and Maria Atalia Cambane for the beautiful friendship, and Limpho Kou who taught me so many things about life.

To all my MADT colleagues for so much support and lightness.

To Marcia Pompeo Nogueira, for her availability, and amazing and inspiring capacity to spread knowledge amongst people.

To Mmabatho Mogomotsi who engaged with me in a journey of self-reflection.

To Hazel Barnes and Kabi Thulo, my examiners on the PAR, who gave me precise directions to carry on the path of researching gender and dance.

To Antony Schrag, who taught me to unlearn and undo, my gratitude for the tips in the earliest phases of the research.

To Jim Millar, for his loyal, and trustful care, as a learner and as a friend.

To Melanie for holding so much space.

To Brett Klette, the rare kind of friend.

To Pedro Farias, Alejandro Angelica, Eduardo Silva, Matias Facio, Sonia Burdett, and Raúl Navalpotro my Tango masters who taught me the mysteries of this beautiful, passionate dance.

To my friends Marina Christofidis, Débora Bentrano and Carol Huriah, ‘maridas’ who encouraged me to follow my guts.

To my friend Ana Carolina Dionísio, Carú, who helped in the interview and inspired me in so many ways.

To Ondrej Viceník for lessons on the dance floor, partnership and the lovely moments sharing movement.

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore ideas of liberation in relation to the present tendencies of *gender representation* in Tango. I argue that the traditional pedagogic model, observed in Johannesburg, tends to perpetuate hegemonic discourses mainly through terminology in which gender binaries, codes and subjectivities are normalized. Such representations reduce, or even reject, plurality and diversity by sustaining specific power dynamics, necessarily related to the role of men and women. Tango is characterized by certain aesthetic elements described in this thesis, and here I prioritize the analysis of its role as a social dance, in the category of couples' dances. I argue that couples' dances are embedded in historically and socially constructed stereotypes; thus, the dynamics observed in balls are not capable of reflecting present gender complexities and identities.

To do so, I first present a critical reflection of the history of couples' dances and Tango, along with my own lived experience as a movement facilitator. Then, I present descriptions of the first phase of the research, the Performance as Research (PAR) project in which I aimed to deconstruct hegemony by challenging gender fixities. The PAR included creative processes, interviews, performance, media and textual production, and the main outcome was related to the pedagogy of dance, presenting the DE-GENDERED MODEL of teaching-learning.

In the second phase of research, or what I call the fieldwork, I engaged with different methods, such as dance meetings based on investigative approaches, body mapping, micro-performance, group discussions and questionnaires to collect data together with a group of 9 participants. I made sense of all the information collected during PAR, and, given by participants during fieldwork, by correlating theories of performance, critical pedagogy, gender and queer studies, with the purpose of including collaborative pathways of embodiment.

Key words: Tango, gender representations, collaboration, pedagogy of dance, diversity.

INTRODUCTION

“If gender is not an artifice to be taken on or taken off at will and, hence, not an effect of choice, how are we to understand the constitutive and compelling status of gender norms without falling into the trap of cultural determinism?”

(BUTLER, 1993 preface ix)

Rational for this study

If social organizations tend to determine, or even impose, on us an existence with fixed gender identities in order to regulate social behaviours, I argue that, at least in dance, practitioners should be allowed to enter the imaginary sphere and experiment different identities through interchanging multiple roles. This is the most relevant role of dance: flowing, non-verbally and corporeally, between abstract and concrete realities in order to reinvent different ways of existing insofar as the body makes meaning of such experiences.

My work as a movement facilitator in Brazil, the country where I was born, was always conducted as if I were researching movement with ‘aspirants’ of dance, facilitating a knowledge that they already had undiscovered. I have been prioritizing egalitarian relations with participants by calling classes ‘dance meetings’ (meetings with oneself, and the other). In order to generate knowledge about human material and body movement, the methods involved me inviting participants to share personal triggers, approaching notions of critical pedagogy. This allowed sometimes the access to the ark of memories, sometimes by being in touch with other forms of art, or sometimes exploring the body as a source of learning in order to engage in dialogue. The concept of *investigation* always permeated the encounters.

The body, epicentre of subjectivities, is capable of inventing categories of real and unreal, private and public, nature and culture (VILLAÇA, 2010 pg. 63), however, concepts of the *body* are immersed in normative definitions mediating such categories. Dance engages with methods of analysis emphasizing corporeal perceptions (developed through non-verbal channels) that allow the comprehension of subjectivities, in a subjective way. It is possible to embrace the experience and knowledge that each being has, carried with a range of characteristics and gestures, related to re-cognition *in* several forms of interrelationship. With

that, the body is understood as communicative and expressive, capable of formulating its own intelligence and meaningful history.

For many years I worked with ideas of the feminine connected to sacredness, mainly teaching belly dancing to groups of women. With a ritualistic approach, the work resulted in a mystical form of gender activism. This approach shaped much of the way I understood women's bodies and the roles women could possibly assume in the dance meetings context, situating the group work as a powerful pathway of interchanging experiences, socially and individually. The dance meetings used to include processes embracing cultural, psychological and historical contexts in order to engage in dynamics that could allow participants to have free access to creative improvisations within dance forms. In addition, the cognitive process of each individual was always a key aspect in the choices of pedagogical methods: the words I would use, the images I would collectively present, the pace of engagement with technical information, resources and didactics. Each participant was considered a continuous source of knowledge for study.

The perceptions I had about women's bodies, though, changed completely when I started to work with couples, in the Johannesburg context. The whole approach had to be adjusted to a *new form of understanding women's bodies and roles*, which now was situated in relationship to men's bodies. That was a crucial element to start this research journey. In spite of the fact that I was still working in the field of movement, dynamics of connection, and expression, the hierarchical opposition between dance roles (leader and follower) gave me the feeling that women's voices were silenced.

Before, I used to engage with women creating safe spaces to share experiences and perceptions. Now, working with couples, I found myself, since of the beginning of the learning process, giving much more attention to men's development than to women, due to the very characteristics of their dance roles, leader and follower. I understood that, in the core of the relationship in the couples' dances, there was form of gender relation based on the invisibility of women, and that this invisibility suppressed their desire to create (see chapters 3 and 4) because of the fixity of power. With that, I recognized hegemonic representations in the performance: I had to teach women to *silence their desire to create movements*, and to develop docile bodies in order to 'receive commands' to allow the creation and expressivity of their partners. I itched to review my own engagement in gender and understand the relevance of the body embedded in such a relation.

Within this perspective, which is embedded in my own experience as a facilitator in the field of performance, education and gender, I decided to question such dynamics from inside-out. Thus, this thesis is the outcome of almost three years of lived experience in Johannesburg - South Africa as a dance instructor, and embraces knowledge developed in those other not so distant memories about women's bodies.

My observations resonate with Antonio Gramsci's (1976) when he understands hegemony as the *normalization* of unequal power dynamics. Therefore, challenging hegemony was the starting point of a journey in which I could not fully grasp the ending point, at the beginning. I had no precise direction, or pathway, or clues to follow other than my levels of frustration related to the new ways I had to engage with women when teaching, always positioned in relation to the men's/leaders' power.

The pathway that this research traced was procedural; every phase led to the next, every finding shaped the following phase, and here I aim to present such processes, partially as they were (chronologically), and partially framing the most important aspects of the findings to prioritize clarity.

It is important to make clear that my interest lies in the *relationship between two bodies in dialogical movement* that are embedded in hegemonic gender representations, *not in a specific technique* of dance or performance. In this sense the analysis traced about Tango, could be analogically applied to any other Western dance among couples, which has its historical heritage in characteristics from the French balls during the 15th century, as framed in chapter 2.

To be specific, I am not interested in deepening the technical analysis of Tango steps, neither the aesthetic elements, nor the analysis of the history and culture of Tango (although I engage with them to illustrate my points). Thus, the binary relations of *any* style of dance in the field of couple's dance can be mirrored in this analysis, and the limitations of this study lays on the political provocations to transform the gender representations, only. The historical and technical construction of steps of dance, is a minor condition due to the approach I am engaging with, theoretically. **I am focused on the hegemonic representations in the relationship between bodies and their possible social impacts and consequences.**

That is why, sometimes I will refer throughout this thesis to *couples' dances* when unfolding dynamics of any kind of social dance for couples; and sometimes I will refer specifically to *Tango*, when it comes to the analysis of the fieldwork, or in relation to the cultural or social elements illustrating situations. Those very same elements, though, define

the borders of the aesthesis of Tango; intertwined, they are a vibrant frontier that frames performative relations. Nevertheless, the research was limited to questioning the power dynamics embedded in praxis. Also, the interdisciplinary mode of understanding the dance (couples' dances or Tango) shaped the research itself, as it is possible to verify in chapter 4, 5 and 6.

In the field of theories of dance, couples' dances are a performance that have been historically shaped by different contexts: from the Minuet classical dances of the European nobility in the medieval age (WOSIEN, 2006 pg. 51), to the iconicity of the Hollywood-Broadway Productions in the early 20th century projecting African American culture with the 'Swing' and the 'Rhythm' (HALEY, 1974). Nowadays couples' dances are one of the most widespread types of social dances around the globe, with many potentialities of exploration.

The aesthetic elements, or the aesthesis of Tango, is presented here as a result of the relational tensions between *form* and *content*, in which signs and symbols are formed, aligned with concepts of semiotics. In the relationship between dancers, *form* is associated to the plasticity of the moves and the two bodies engaging in specific codified steps; and *content* is associated to the qualities of the relation that they create and symbolically represent during the performance. Precisely, living *in* the content, are the hegemonic representations, which consequently are reflected in the form since they cannot be seen separately.

Couples' dances in Johannesburg play an important role as social practice: many dance studios are spread throughout the city - from town to suburbs and townships - and many schools have them as an extra-mural practice. Competitions are part of the annual schedules for schools and community centres, with prizes, trophies and certificates promising a future to children practitioners. One of the protocols of weddings ceremonies is the wedding dance. Thus, the practice is embedded in multicultural elements and social responsibilities, having teachers, learners and practitioners from a fair range of races and classes. However, the Johannesburg scene is very conservative and restrictive when comes to thinking about gender politics.

As a social practice, studios devote a lot of effort to increase the engagement of adults by promoting parties, classes and events; it is treated as industry, selling the image of a kind of bourgeois 'social life'. For singles, it is a way of meeting new people, and for the couples, a way of having fun together and improving connections in their relationships through a body language. In both cases, it is a healthy physical practice in which dancers share pleasant

moments within a codified mode of moving with the other. Yet, the 'other' must be a body representing the opposite sex, reinforcing and perpetuating gender binaries.

As a researcher, woman, Latina¹, and foreigner in the Johannesburg terrain, I used all the privileges and barriers experienced to create meanings and to be able to articulate concepts that, hopefully, will reverberate through the dance field. The cultural differences between the pedagogical practices in my background, and the pedagogical practices in Johannesburg, made me aware of the need to deconstruct the present dynamics.

In this sense, I witnessed the ways South Africa struggles with gender and race issues, at so many levels. In spite the fact that the hegemonic representations I am questioning in Johannesburg are also practiced in other parts of the world, there are covert South African particularities in the social dynamics, framed in chapter 6.

I question, for instance, why there are so few black people attending the *Milongas*, if there are a large number of blacks in other styles of dance such as salsa? What, in terms of gender and body politics, is possibly happening? This question led me to analyse some social and cultural aspects intrinsic to pedagogic dynamics.

Tango was the language, or genre of dance, chosen to be analysed for its many potentialities as a form of activism against hegemonic representations, even historically as presented in chapter 2. The discussion brings about the **present pedagogical dynamics as the main intersection between traditional and contemporary practices**. The pedagogy of dance determines the social behaviour in couples' dances, as discussed in chapter 3, by co-relating the dance and gender roles, articulated together (the role of the man as leader, and the role of woman as follower). The field of dance and education was densely analysed, from different angles (concepts of body, performance, and gender). Determinations of dance and gender roles generate hierarchies and silent segregation to any being that does not identify with such gender configurations.

Framing the Structure

In terms of structure, this thesis is constituted by the following chapters, from 1 to 6, *weaving description and analysis*.

¹ Linguistic: the feminine of Latin.

- 1- *Theoretical and methodological approaches*, are situated in chapter 1. This part includes the web of theories and methodological practices considering the ways concepts of body, gender, performance and critical pedagogy are framed. Other theories supporting the research are also weaved along this chapter. Key terminology, mainly related to the specific genre of dance, are separately conceptualized, so readers may quickly access them.
- 2- *Historical reflections* of couples' dances and Tango, presenting a brief panorama about origins, are discussed in chapter 2. Here I trace a historical line, considering a few relevant events concerning the origin of couples' dances, and then specifically of Tango, so readers may visualise the historical facts linked to the matter of gender. The historical research is connected to the analysis of aesthetic elements. The section on *aesthetic elements*' is also situated in chapter 2, briefly presenting qualitative analysis of movements. This analysis is important to understand how historical and social contexts influenced the etymology of movements and the plasticity of the dance (related to form).
- 3- *Critical reflections about my lived experience* as a movement researcher during the last 3 years within different groups and styles of dancing in Johannesburg, are situated in chapter 3. This part frames specific social dynamics in the balls of Johannesburg. I also unravel theories about the sign and systems of meanings, the object of the study of semiotics, in order to better comprehend structures related to social dynamics that occur in the balls. The analysis of signs helps to understand articulations of cultural patterns.
- 4- The Performance as Research (**PAR**²) project, which is framed as the *first phase* of data collection, is situated in chapter 4. I weave analysis about the PAR project, which was a performance that investigated the creative processes of a same-sex Foxtrot piece, with Mmabatho Mogomotsi. The main finding in this phase was the creation of the DE-GENDERED model of teaching-learning applicable to any couples' dances. In this phase, I also posed the question: *What would happen, in terms of diversity, if the de-gendered ballroom technique was used in the Johannesburg context?* The model was the base-line to approach the next phase, the dance meetings.

² Acronym for Performance as Research, and can also signify Practice as Research in the field of Theatre in Education. Throughout this essay I will utilize it in relation to a project described on chapter 4.

- 5- The Tango *dance meetings* are framed as the primary *fieldwork* of the research, or the *second phase* of the data collection, and are discussed in chapter 5. I thoroughly describe the fieldwork, which investigated the application of the pedagogical de-gendered model, embedded in critical pedagogy, with a group of 9 participants. The main question in this part of analysis was: *What were the impacts of the lived experience (of the participants and the facilitator) in engaging in the de-gendered Tango as a source of knowledge to tackle hegemonic representations in Tango?*
- 6- The outcomes of the descriptions of chapters 4 and 5 are summarized and analysed in chapter 6, which also aims to frame the possibilities and limitations of this study.

Thus, the research aims: **to explore forms of gender relations in the performance of Tango using a deep theoretical and practical analysis, involving PAR and fieldwork; to indicate directions to new methods of teaching-learning focused on the pedagogy of dance in order to challenge hegemonic representations; and to rethink collaborative dynamics leading to an egalitarian and inclusive way of *tangear*³.**

³ *Tangear*: Spanish neologism which transforms the word Tango (noun) into an action (verb).

CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

This chapter frames the theoretical and methodological approaches to support the practical research in its two phases: the PAR and fieldwork. Here, I invite the reader to consider a few aspects of analysis defining the place from where I understand representations of hegemonic relations in Tango.

Firstly, I am focused on the unequal and unbalanced aspects of gender relations in the performance.

Second, 'change' is an inherent element constituent of the representations of power (which intend to become fixed) and the changes of social relations correspond respectively to the changes of power (also the directions of social changes do not follow a determinate one-way direction). So, I argue for change in the gender representations, and I present directions to change. However, for change, the unification of active voice is necessary to define directions insofar as communities specify their desires and needs.

Third, historically, gender relations are embedded in relational elements and tend to be associated to binaries (the mediation of sexualized bodies) and the struggle against binaries, according to Jacques Derrida (SCOTT, 1991 pg. 18-21), lives in *inverting* and *deconstructing* hierarchies precisely in opposite and polarized relations. It is important to frame the approach of the concept of deconstruction I engage with⁴:

The very condition of a deconstruction may be at work, in the work, within the system to be de-constructed. It may already be located there, already at work. Not at the centre, but in an eccentric centre, in a corner whose eccentricity assures the solid concentration of the system, participating in the construction of what it, at the same time, threatens to deconstruct. One might then be inclined to reach this conclusion: deconstruction is not an operation that supervenes afterwards from the outside, one fine day. It is always already at work in the work. Since the disruptive force of deconstruction is always already contained within the very architecture of the work, all we finally have to do to be able to deconstruct, given this 'always already', is to do memory work. (Derrida in DICK and KOFMAN, 2002)

In this sense, I enjoyed the position of being part of the dance-instructors' 'market'⁵ and the Tango-dancers' community in Johannesburg, so I could potentially and critically look

⁴ Excerpt of the documentary *Derrida*, 2002. At: 14:51 minutes

⁵ The word 'market' is in brackets because it is how dance-instructors, and studios refer to the field of couple's dances. However, I don't identify with this terminology due to its direct relation with the economics.

at these practices from inside-out, and present perspectives for the betterment of their pedagogies and politics.

Fourth, the historical focus of the analysis (social and political), which often privileges reason and consciousness in detriment to the inclusion of the body, here, has a partial weight. The body (individual, performative and communicative) assumes a crucial space in the lines of thought. The body, in a relational state, exists between discourses, institutions and corporeality; and in relation to the other it exists either in *communicative action* or in *domination*. Within this perspective, gender as a category became indispensable in the analysis of the micro universe of couples' performances and the impacts that such performance has in the social dimension.

Fifth, the terrain of action of the performance is social and regulates aesthetic limitations to the collective; and finally, the logic of social performances functions beyond categories of analysis assuming its own particularities, pluralities and centralities. That is how I present the Johannesburg contexts.

The frames and claims given above draw theoretically from the following subsections: feminism; queer theory; semiotics and performance studies; and critical pedagogy.

Theoretical Frame

i) Feminism:

Gender is a category that aims to mediate the *differences* focused on the gender, and the normative concepts of their symbols and signs, mostly historically and culturally established. The mediation is also related to social organizations (education, religiosity), as well as political institutions (economy, the State etc.), and sexuality (practices, desires and rights). Joan Scott (1991) asserts that gender should be a primary category to signify power relations, not in a sense of analysing of the roles of men and women as empty and overflowing concepts (since they are impermanent and repressed), but to recapture histories where women were invisible and confined to the private world of the family and sexuality, ignoring the forces that were respectively manipulating the public sphere by institutionalized machineries of several forms of power (SCOTT, 1991 pg.21).

Simone de Beauvoir (2001) and Scott (1991) play an important role in clarifying political, social and historical aspects of the oppression of women. Both authors' theories help

to weave, throughout this text, support for ideas of hegemonic representations as well as the deconstruction of hegemonies. Descriptions of the routines of dance may be better understood by engaging with these writers.

The post-structuralist⁶ approach to notions of social construction (where identities are understood as being entirely socially constructed) point to ideas of the performance of *liberation* through the deconstruction of traditional rules and codes.

Gender studies help to understand the roles played by couples in dance. Fixed roles are established involving the man *as a leader* and the woman *as a follower*. These roles are not innocently determined; it is not a coincidence that the hierarchy privileges power to the man; in fact, it is a reflection of patriarchal values from centuries ago when social dances were first practiced. In this sense, the gender representations in couples' dances are out of step with today's gender configurations; they need to be revitalized. The fundamental basis of such determinism (or the evacuation, or dislocation of the human agency) in which patriarchal structures that, still, are symbolizing mediaeval beliefs about women and society. Inscribed on these fixed roles are many nuances that represent gender inequality.

ii) Queer theory:

Queer as a concept emerged from a necessity to overcome controversies about binaries between masculine-feminine and hetero-homosexual discourses: "such linguistic and discursive binary figures inevitably get framed in hierarchical terms, thus reinforcing a politics of exclusion and domination" (SEIDMAN, 1995 pg. 54).

Although queer theory was conceived a while ago with a promissory future to engender ruptured transformation in the politics and policies of gender at the first moment, it failed in its purpose due to its characteristics. According to Teresa de Lauretis (1995), its power lost strength through its own fragility of being an unfixed, unstable and unclassified form of identity. Its constitution does not allow the conformity that gender politics needs in order to address socially descriptive rules of behaviour.

Lauretis abandoned the term 'queer' three years after firstly using it, by asserting that the term "has very quickly become a conceptually vacuous creature of the publishing industry.

⁶ Beauvoir cannot be classified as a post-structuralist, the term is more associated with authors as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler, but many of her ideas pre-empted this movement.

[...which] now represents it as devoid of the political or critical acumen she once thought it promised” (JAGOSE, 1996 *). A review of Judith Butler’s writings engages with the concept ‘queer theory’:

*Butler does not try to anticipate exactly how queer⁷ will continue to challenge normative structures and discourses. On the contrary, she argues that what makes queer so efficacious is the way in which it understands the effects of its interventions are not singular and therefore cannot be anticipated in advance. Butler understands, as de Lauretis did, when initially promoting queer over lesbian and gay that the conservative effects of identity classifications lie in their ability to naturalise themselves as self-evident descriptive categories. She argues that if queer is to avoid simply replicating the normative claims of earlier lesbian and gay formations, it must be conceived as a category in constant formation. (JAGOSE, 1996 *).*

Therefore, queer is a performative concept that actively aims to be an open platform for free gender-sex-desire practices, and by this, its dynamics do not claim to consolidate queer as a closed category in itself, thus being difficult to generate political establishments, but its action is very much about gender policies.

There are pulsating and floating elements in queer studies. If queer is an open concept that deprives itself of a ready descriptive qualification, attuning theory-practice that does not intend to be classified in form and content, then it is a field that a de-gendered model of dance could be related to. Queer theory gives method to deconstruct the traditional roles of the Tango performance.

iii) Semiotics and performance studies:

The theoretical starting point in gender and queer theory is complemented by a third perspective, performance studies. Hypothetical states of performativity lead to fertile terrains of exploring pedagogies, allied to notions of: first, semiotics⁸; second, *investigation* as a pedagogical process, or as a learning process.

⁷ When the author uses ‘queer’ she is referring to queer theory.

⁸ Semiotics is a theoretical field of study, which draws from philosophy, sociology, linguistic, anthropology, aesthesis among others, intertwining concepts to understand how communication happens through systems of codes, signs, and meanings, engendering subjectivities.

The individual body in a hypothetical state of 'questioning', or the state of the body embedded in hypo-thesis⁹, enters into a metaphysical sphere of self-reflection. The hypothetical state of the body is a mode of investigation through speculative possibilities, generating a 'butterfly effect' of connections and conclusions.

For Pierce (TRIPADALLI, 2008 pg. 104), there does not exist a separation between perception and knowledge, and this relation is inherent to the cognitive processes of the body's learning. *Cognition*, thus, is linked to the *apprehension* of knowledge, according to semiotics. By undertaking journeys of exploratory movements, the body expands its knowledge through the perception of the unknown. Therefore, the investigation is a source of learning.

The investigation is a transitory, procedural, passage from one state into another, and the change is inevitable. The experience then is the vehicle of existence of the body, it is the materialization of abstraction. The body produces knowledge through the lived experience by the skill of self-realization.

In this sense, "the movement produced by the body develops the capacity to think about movement meanwhile moving" (TRIPADALLI, 2008 pg. 103). Therefore, it was ideal that none of the participants of the fieldwork had contact with the technique of Tango previously.

The 'purity' of their bodies, not shaped as Tango dancers, allowed perceptions about the movements and roles from a 'less' biased viewpoint, if compared to trained bodies that carry a specific knowledge. The movement was experienced by non-constructed bodies in technical terms of aesthesis of Tango. There was a big distancing between *technique* and *participants*, and they could give feedback from this place of hypothetical strangeness. Every technical nuance was unfamiliar, therefore, it was given a new dimension; the small was made large through the lenses of participants.

The chosen methodological practices dialogued with this comprehension, wherein the performative body is a never-ending source of knowledge production. The inclusion of notions of semiotics linked to performance were beneficial to the investigations of the movements of Tango during dance meetings, analysed in chapter 6, as well as the comprehension of dynamics in the balls, analysed in chapter 3.

⁹ The term hypothesis comes from the Greek hypo (under) thesis (related to theory). The idea of the body in hypothetical state, explored by Tripadalli (2008), brings light to the speculation of a provisory formulation, attested by the experience in movement.

iv) Critical pedagogy:

Lastly but not least important, critical pedagogy based on Freire (2013) and Louro's (1997) guidelines inspired the reflections throughout the research process: "The fundamental effort of education is to help with the liberation of people, never their domestication" (SHOR, 1993 pg. 25).

By criticizing the very 'traditional', or sometimes 'normal'¹⁰ structure, and tracing the roots of how information about gender patterns are spread among the small Tango community in Johannesburg, I reached a place of *education*. Gramsci (1976) asserts about education "the problem was not one of model curricula but of men, and not just men who are actually teachers themselves but of the entire social complex which they express" (GRAMSCI, 1976 pg. 25).

The transmission of knowledge, or the pedagogy of Tango dance, is filled with concepts that create boxes: from how to step, to how to look at the partner and engage with the opposite sex (*cabeceo*¹¹); how to keep the posture (*pinta*¹²); and how the functioning of the couples during the performance should be. These normative definitions are intrinsically related to the concepts of femininities and masculinities.

The critique of the policies of systems of oppression influences liberation from top-down dynamics. This thought, developed by Paulo Freire (2013) during the time of struggle in the dictatorship era in Brazil, inspired new forms of education that are aligned with the formation of politically conscious individuals.

Pedagogy, when associated to critical positions, leads to non-authoritarian dynamics. The subject is the centre of the learning process and the individual influences the social. The aim of critical pedagogy is social change, equality, diversity and empowerment of every individual within society.

Guacira Lopes Louro (1997) problematizes the gender dichotomies and normative definitions that govern the daily relationships of the private sphere, where behaviours, things and status are normalized and reinforced by education. She explains the need to deconstruct

¹⁰ Guacira Lopes Louro questions the senses of what we consider *normal* and she asserts that the processes of normalizing things, relations and status are precisely the most dangerous processes of alienation. She defends the development of critical thinking to any considered *normal* dynamic.

¹¹ Spanish language: translation 'nodding'. The gesture is made to invite a lady to a dance (www.tejasTango.com/terminologias).

¹² Spanish language: translation 'appearance, presentation'. Include clothes, grooming, posture, expression and manner of speaking and relating to the world (www.tejasTango.com/terminologias).

the “permanent aspect of the binary-opposition of masculine and feminine” (LOURO, 1997 pg. 30) in order to embrace collaborative dynamics and diversity. Education, as an institution of knowledge, is deeply involved in the perpetuation *or* transformation of unequal dynamics.

Invariably normalizations perpetuate binary dynamics based on the policies of, first, differences (us and them), and second, similarities (when convenient to a grouping). It is important to think how dance subscribes notions of femininity and masculinity in the body, perpetuating subjectivities that are socially constructed.

In the classroom, the understandings of frontiers of diversity and difference in pedagogical approaches (LOURO, 1997; GIROUX, 1992), brought about new forms of embodiment engaged in collaborative modes of dance. The problem-posing¹³ method, opposed to the banking system¹⁴ method of teaching, held collaborative aspects of the relations among participants, rather than, hegemonically, prioritizing the will of one: in the fieldwork, we considered all dancers as potentially creators of movement.

Methodological Approaches

The interdisciplinary characteristics of the methods to engage in dialogue with participants were based on cognition approaches, drama, and group discussions. All the methods framed in this section were strongly weaved with theories explored in the previous sections, promoting a continuous process of reflection on praxis.

Embodied Cognition is a branch of cognition theories within neuroscience that investigates the relationship between the body and the mind shaping meanings within specific contexts. In other words, the investigation happens inside of the process of movement and gestures shaping the mind and its systems of values (WILSON, 2001; BLAKESLEE, 2007). The concept of ‘investigation through experimentation’ is also understood by cognition studies as a form of acquiring knowledge.

The cognitive process of creating body movements, according to embodied cognition studies, is directly connected to systems of meanings (values and meanings). Conversely, the discipline also investigates the impacts of human gestures in the process of making belief in

¹³ One of the methods of critical pedagogy that aims to develop critical thinking where “students learn to question answers rather than merely to answer questions (SHOR, 1993 pg.26)

¹⁴ Freirean designation of a system of education where the teacher understands the learner as an empty entity who needs to be filled (depositing) with predetermined information, not considering their background, context and previous experience as part of knowledge. (FREIRE, 2013 pg. 62)

the mind. Therefore, according to embodied cognition studies, values and beliefs are perpetuated through a range of forms of gestures, codes and movements. These insights were useful in the analysis of gender representations in the socials.

Body mapping, which is a branch of cognition studies, is largely used in different spheres of body-mind theories due to its interdisciplinary and practical nature. According to Sandra Blakeslee (2007) “body maps provide a valuable lens for examining ourselves as a species and as individuals” (BLAKESLEE, 2007 pg.5). The investigative approach of body mapping is open, in a sense that it can be applied in several disciplines.

Through a special mapping procedure, your brain attaches this space to your limbs and body, clothing you in it like an extended, ghostly skin. [...] Your ability to sense, move, and act in the physical world arises from a rich network of flexible body maps distributed throughout your brain – maps that grow, shrink, and morph to suit your needs. (BLAKESLEE, 2007 pg. 3)

Body mapping, linked to performance studies, was the first approach to community building among the group, and it was used as a form of introducing individual bodies. Participants ‘mapped’ internal and external topographies of their bodies, finding connections, pathways, meridians, constellations, wholes, emptiness, scars, accumulations, broken bones, centres, traumas, strengthens, etc.

Somatic education, another field of study, was associated to pathways of engagement in the meetings. The discipline investigates the pedagogic praxis linked to phenomenological theories that understand the body as an experience, focusing “on the human experience and subjectivity as a source of valuable knowledge” (BOLSANELLO, 2005 pg. 99). Through specific exercises followed by reflections, the discipline aims to unpack cognitive connections between the psychological and physical, leading to awareness, and to qualitative improvement of the lives of learners-participants.

This discipline was not directly used as practice, but much of the literature about it potentially increased levels of engagement between facilitator and participants in the classroom, as well as the ways theories of the body could be understood during the process of analysis. The *lived experience* of participants, and the levels of reflection they presented, was literally the most valuable knowledge produced, more than the Tango technique that was in development. The participants’ reflections were key to unpacking pedagogical issues.

The drama approach immersed in critical pedagogy permitted us to synthesize dialogues and weave methods in the classroom in a flowing manner. In order to capture the

outcomes, the group discussions during dance meetings were recorded. Generally, the discussions happened in the beginning or in the end of sessions about particular topics.

Having now outlined the key theoretical and methodological approaches informing this research I will now briefly give definitions of the key terminology.

Key Terminology

This section is concerned with key concepts that are used throughout the text, such as the dance roles, abstract names and definitions, and linguistic designations. I see the need to clarify terminology in order to avoid misunderstandings in the role language plays, particularly with regard to the technical terms of dance.

Firstly, I present key concepts summarized below:

Aesthesis is a category of analysis, based on notions of semiotics, which is concerned with the sensorial experience and perception of the world generated by relational tensions between *form* and *content* resulting in a range of signs and meanings (see OED 1993, pg. 34; Tripadalli 2008, pg. 104). This relation will be theoretically explored further in chapter 3.

Balls, are a formal social assembly for dancing, generally, with an organized programme or special entertainment (OED 1993, pg. 173). In this thesis I use the term to refer to a variety of social dance meetings, including *Milongas* (see below).

Collaboration. Alison Oddey argues that the concept of collaboration requires the engagement of a group as a group, managing a variety of interests involving everyone, enhancing all the possibilities (ODDEY, 1994 pg. 11). I also present collaboration as mode of engagement working against the hierarchy in Tango.

Content, in dance, is associated to the qualities of relations that dancers create and symbolically represent during performance; it refers to mood, fulfilment, gravity, relation, emotion, weight, imagination, meanings, feelings and symbols.

Form, in dance, is associated to the plasticity of the moves of the body engaging in specific codified steps; it refers to body's shape, mode, lines, symmetry, directions, plans, technique, and dimensions.

Hegemony is a term used here as a category of historical and political analysis. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) bring light to this concept based on Gramsci, as the *normalization* of the signifiers of unequal relations (LACLAU and MOUFFE, 1985 pg.50-51).

Improvisation is a technique of expression based on a range of dimensions such as vocabulary, presence, and emotions where one engages in a process of creation without a pre-established choreography. Improvisation is one of the forms of engagement I present as a pathway to come against hierarchy in Tango.

Liberation, is drawn from Freirean rhetoric. In the 'Pedagogy of Oppressed' (2013), Freire writes a protocol for practices of freedom, pointing out systems of oppression that are mainly concerned with, or focused on, under privileged groups or minorities. Recounting his experience in education with adult literacy and community-based work, the term liberation was widely used by Freire, and became an icon of his theory. Nowadays it is related to challenging any top-down relations, and aims at egalitarian and collaborative social dynamics.

Milongas, here, I use to denominate the social Tango practices, or balls. Originally, *Milonga* is also a folk rhythm and dance.

Sign is the object of the study of semiotics, more precisely the sign-formation related to its functionality and expressivity. The sign emerges through the relational tension between the *signifier* and *signified* (ECO, 1976 pg.13).

Teaching-learning or teaching and learning. During my undergraduate, I focused my study in movement and the cognitive process of learning (field of pedagogy of dance), mainly using Rudolf Laban, Tina Landau and Anne Bogart as theoretical references. As a result, now I see the two terms closely related, simply saying, they are 'different sides of the same coin', that is way I frame them always together.

Secondly, the following exploration aims to compare the *traditional* names currently used in the field of the pedagogy of couples' dances, and *contemporary* names used in spaces where gender roles and hierarchies have already been challenged. The nomenclature used by dance instructors in Johannesburg frames top-down dynamics amongst learners. I will explore such pedagogical aspects in chapter 6. The 'Traditional Nomenclature' section explores traditional forms of engagement in the balls:

Traditional Nomenclature¹⁵:

Entregarme: translation 'surrender'. To give oneself up to the leader's lead¹⁶.

Codigos: translation 'codes'. Refers to the code of conduct or social behaviour in Tango balls, for instance, to find a dance partner in the *Milongas* the code is to do the *cabeceo*.

Commands: a form of signals to indicate the steps, movements and direction of the dance. The leader must be very clear in what he is asking and the follower must respond as soon as the indications are understood. Generally, instructors teach followers to not move or respond if the command is not clear, requiring the leader to be very precise in the signals' emission.

Follower: the practitioner, generally a woman, who is determined to *seguir* (follow) the leader, actively dancing as a mirror. If the leader is stepping with the left leg, the follower would then step with the right. Followers cannot pre-anticipate steps, movements and directions in order to develop the readiness of their body's response. The follower must be absolutely available to receive commands or indications and respond as quickly as she can in order to permit the creativity of the leader. The challenge to the practitioner is to be subordinate to the desire of the leader.

Frame: the 'hug', or *abrazo*, or dance position, or embrace that allows the signals of the steps to be sent from the leader to the follower. The *brazos* (arms) of the leader have different roles in the communication: the left hand holds the right hand of the follower and the right arm embraces the back of the follower (examples in chapter 2). The follower embraces with the left arm the shoulder/back of the leader making a small pressure against it, so the movements and direction of the leader can be clearly identified.

Leader: the practitioner, generally man, who is determined to lead the couple, including the directions of navigation, the pace of the evolution, the creation of sequence of movements and the linkage between steps. The development of the cognitive body of the leader is intricate and challenges the practitioner to create strategies of displacement and the perception of the surroundings in order to avoid any accidents with other couples.

¹⁵ All non-English terms are derived from Spanish.

¹⁶ www.tejasTango.com/terminology.html#sacada

Parejas: translation 'couples', the two partners in Tango, implicitly men and women.

Steps: codified movements previously determined by the technique, allowing the dialogue between practitioners, generally the leader and the follower. Some instructors engage in teaching sequences of steps, which make the dance very predictable.

The nomenclature above clearly reveals embedded gender hegemonies. To resist these, I use a different type of nomenclature that engages with more contemporary modes of understanding concepts of body and dance technique's development. The following terms modify the dynamics of dance into a collaborative process. By emphasizing egalitarian relations, both practitioners can be potentially creators and movement proposers. I frame these terms as a 'contemporary nomenclature'.

Contemporary Nomenclature:

Dancers: practitioners who are actively charged to undertake the creative process in a collaborative mode. In this case, practitioners are devoted to learn steps from the perspective of both sides of the frame: initiating with left or right leg, and managing the knowledge of both roles. Hence no matter which gender or sexual orientation, dancers engage in negotiation in a communicative path through flexible roles. The improvisational aspect is highly desirable: the more playful the dancer, the more possibilities of communication and collaboration. The idea is to embrace diversity. Ideas of collaboration are presented on chapter 6.

Frame: or *abrazo*, or embrace, or hug, or connection. It is not fixed allowing the interchange of sides and the expansion, dimensionally, of the possibilities of creation. The *abrazo* delimits the space of practitioners but not roles.

Impulse: or indication, or the *trigger* of movement given by one of the dancers which is developed and explored by both practitioners. According to this mode of motion, both practitioners can establish the rhythm and pace of evolution, as well as propose steps creating a unique body dialogue, not previously established by codes and sequences of steps. The steps are still codified, but the linkage of steps becomes a moment of extreme creativity and attention to the other, where at any moment dancers can propose something different. This dynamic invites dancers to be in states of listening to one another.

To conclude, in chapter 1, I have presented a panorama of the elaboration of the *theory* and *methods of practice* engaged in this research. The intersubjectivity of praxis and the interdisciplinary characteristics of the methods discussed here enabled me to find important evidence to question hegemonic representations in the field of Tango performance. The body, engaging with modes of investigation, is framed as a potent source of subjectivities and knowledge. Language and terminology is framed as a relevant element of communication, which often carries covert dimensions of meanings. The next chapter develops the approach outlined here with a critical reflection on the historical and aesthetic aspects of couples' dances and Tango.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL AND AESTHETIC PERSPECTIVES

This chapter aims to trace the historical line of, first, the French social dances which couples' dances are etymologically connected with; and second, specific contexts of Tango within history. The analysis of the aesthetic elements of movements unpacks associations of movements with their origin.

Aesthetics and Representations of Gender in Couples' Dances

Historically speaking, couples' dances have their heritage in the social dances practiced in the 15th century in Europe. The first registers of couples (man and woman) dancing together indicates connections between the aesthetic structure (formations, movements, behaviour) and social purposes (interactions, meetings, observing and being observed). All the movements had a code related to how people should present themselves, their clothes, shoes, status as a *form of court* (WOISEN, 2006 pg. 35). This Western practice, was inserted and absorbed by different cultures and countries.

Luis XIV, the French 'Sun King', developed and codified many of the steps of the Ballet dance, as well as codes for social manners in the French ballrooms. As an expert in movement, rhythm and dance, Luis XIV used to perform in the parties, structuring the first *Ballet* codes. The codes created by him influenced manners in the balls to date.

In the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, still inspired by the French Royalty, the social dances transformed Europe into the cradle of the classical dances like the Minuets, the Baroque Dance and the *Belle Danse* (beautiful dance), but their popularity was not as high as it was during 15th century, suffering a decadent fall (WOISEN, 2006).

Nevertheless, in the 20th century, the couples' dances reappeared in parts of the world, reinvented. In the USA, dance was a form of self-expression and was shaped within a structure that is most similar to what is presented now. Every decade had a huge impact in terms of the quality of movements and conduct, being a representation of historical and political contexts. Several documentaries were made about the styles of dance established in each decade (PRITCHETT, 2009; HALEY, 1974).

The USA, with its influence and power extending back in the 20th century, became a key reference of art and advertisements. The cinema industry, the World War I and II, and the

explosion of African American music were the main reasons for the huge development of the couples' dances in the first few decades. One of the most prominent styles was the Big Apple. While the country was struggling with the economic depression, people were dancing from coast to coast. The documentary 'Dancing the Big Apple: 1937' (PRITCHETT, 2009) shows the evolution of it and other styles that kept the country literally moving within the war and economic struggle:

The year is 1937 and the country was recovering from a huge economic struggle. Unemployment was growing fast and the soup lines were getting longer. In Europe fascism is on the rise, the growth of Hitler's power was frightening. In Asia, Japan and China are in combat. The whole world is turning around the war. This is the time for America to buckle down and... DANCE?! (Dancing the Big Apple: 1936 in PRITCHETT, 2009).

Animal Dance, Tango, Charleston, Lindy Hop, Rumba, Swing, Mambo, Twist, Mod, Country Western are some of the styles that were being developed along the 20th century. Each style had its movements reassuring social identities, or as a form of social protest. The musicals were generating billions of dollars, and also creating celebrities of dance, such as Fred Astaire, Gene Kelly, Frank Sinatra and Ginger Rogers - they inspired and remain as great references for dancers from all over the world.

The same happened in other American countries; dance was being used as a form of representation related to forms of identity. Cultural manifestations of dance can be traced in Latin American countries, such as *Samba Gafiera* in Brazil, *Salsa* in Cuba, and *Tango* in Argentina. Each of them were originally embedded in an ethnic diversity constituting the movements and the body dialogue. The exoticism of the dances made them known around world.

In spite the fact that the most radical feminist theories were being shaped during the 20th century, no reflections on gender roles in dynamics of couples' dances could be identified by my literature review.

It was only during the 21st century, with the advent of the incorporation of concepts of the body as a category that gays and lesbians, mostly activists, appeared as couples dancing in scattered places around the world. Unfortunately, their activism was not strongly enough to change traditional dynamics. They were firstly marginalized and considered outsiders or transgressors having their own space of action, rather than being integrate into the established social balls. Nowadays, ballroom, Tango and Latin dances compose a large variety

of performances and social dynamics. In the more conservative balls and dance studios though, the binary structure remain the same regarding the heterosexual couples.

In terms of aesthesis, it seems that tensions between technical and historical aspects differs one style of dance from the other: there are the more passionate styles such as Salsa, Rumba and Mambo; and the more classical styles such as Foxtrot, Tango and Waltz. During historical research and literature review, I observed strong connections between the etymology of movements and the political-social context of their origin; some dances were pure activism and protest, for example, Cuban Rumba was considered lower-class dance and became a symbolic representation of Cuban identity during the USA occupation in the beginning of the 20th century (UTSET, 2011 pg. 57) maintaining territories and holding space for diverse modes of performances.

The differences among styles, passionate or classical, are also determinant in the social relations; people tend to make choices of which styles they identify with the most, and thus classifying and grouping themselves.

Brief Historical Panorama of Tango

“Tango is a full form of art, it is compounded by dance, a genre of music, a poetic expression, a type of singing, a pictorial iconography, and finally a philosophy of life.”

(ANJELICA, 2012 pg. 5)

The origins of Tango are not precisely traced; there are many controversial facts in its history. All the versions claim to hold the trophy of the truth: some researchers assert that Tango was originated in Argentina, others in France; however, some facts repeatedly appear in articles and books. If the origin of the music is certainly blurred, the dance was definitely originated in Argentina, and it was worldwide spread by the cinema, and the professional dancers that went to France in search of fame, mainly in early 1920s until 1960s. Charles Chaplin, Oscar Wilde, Manuel Romero, Woody Allen, and Carlos Saura¹⁷ are some of the prominent names related to the growth of Tango.

Argentina is a South American country colonized by Spain in the 16th century with the advent of the great routes of navigation and slavery. During the 19th and 20th centuries,

¹⁷ <https://todayinTango.wordpress.com/tag/10-best-Tango-films/>

migration was a fact directly related to the national identity due to the profound effects and modifications on the demographic and economic aspects in the country. For instance, in 1880 Buenos Aires had 210.000 habitants, and by 1920 the figure had risen up to 1.200.000 people in the same area, mostly Italians, French, Polish, Russians, Hebrews, Ukrainians, Portuguese, Greek, Hollanders, British and Belgians.

The disproportional growth in the port areas in Mar del Plata, mainly in Buenos Aires and Montevideo (Uruguay), shaped social contours transforming them from an exclusively rural societies into a powerful urban economy. Politically, Argentina was becoming an established and democratic state, economic, which quickly configured oppressive relations and dynamics of marginalization (FIAMINGHI, 2010 pg. 1-4; ANJELICA, 2012 pg. 4).

After the yellow fever epidemic in 1870, most of the privileged population living the central area of Buenos Aires, abandoned their properties. The *Chorizo* house, a mansion belonging to a rich family, was occupied in the event by a large group of underprivileged people and became a famous shelter.

After the case, many other occupations took over the city becoming ghettos called *Conventillos*¹⁸ where, then, migrant workers and *crioulos*¹⁹ were living in the peripheral neighbourhoods. The first manifestations of Tango were strongly shaped by the social dynamics in these poor places (ANJELICA, 2012 pg. 5). Hence, the origins of Tango are connected to a history of migration and social transgression.

The cultural manifestation of Tango is a combination of music, poetry and dance; they could not be seen separated. Music and poetry are often described as *lamuriosa*²⁰ and nostalgic, and the dance as passionate.

Back at 19th century, Tango was associated to the communication of feelings of desperations and frustration of the migrants and *crioulos* from the suburbs against modes of oppression and marginalization. These people understood Tango as form of identity, which was considered priority as a poignant urban form of art. The bourgeois society, though, saw Tango as a lower-class practice discriminating against it, associating it with brothels or people with bad manners. Deliberately improvisational, Tango became a powerful vehicle to communicate and redeem struggles and difficulties in life.

¹⁸ Spanish language: translated as 'small convents'.

¹⁹ Mix-raced people, or afro-descendants coming from Europe to America, or Africa during Portuguese and Spanish colonization by the slavery routes and in the migration movement happened during the 18th and 19th centuries.

²⁰ Spanish language: translated as *whining*.

As migrants were traveling with little luggage and small instruments (such as violins, guitars and clarinets), the new local music was deeply influenced by their origins. The music inspired the pace to the dance made on the streets and allies. With multicultural aspects based on African and *Canyengue*²¹ rhythms, and Eastern European arrangements, the primary movement in Tango were then originated, the *camiñadas*²². The dance was a form of interaction between partners from different nationalities, and soon, became an important form of socialization. Strongly influenced by European balls, it kept the same structure of anti-clock wise direction for couples' navigation and gender roles. (ANJELICA, 2012 pg. 4-8)

Originally, the improvisational element shaped four styles of Tango: *Andaluz*, *Milonga*, *Habaneril*, and *Negroide*. Each of them developed historically in three different eras *La Guardia Vieja*²³, *La Guardia Nueva*²⁴, *La Epoca de Oro*²⁵, and more recently the *Tango Nuevo*²⁶. (FIAMINGHI, 2010 pg. 1-4)

During the 20th century until now, Tango aesthetically evolved into a very accurate technique of performance compounded by music, lyrics and dance, in relation to each of the eras. It became an art to be staged combined with important orchestras and famous composers such as Osvaldo Fresedo, Francisco Canaro, Osvaldo Pugliese, Carlos Gardel, and Astor Piazzola, amongst others.

A study about the representations of women in Tango, made by Judith Gomez Bas²⁷ (2005), raises gender issues of: 1- women were always represented from the perspective of the desire of the man; 2- they hardly had voice, with rare exceptions as Bas (2005) showing the construction of the imagistic world of Tango; 3- the representations were biased to maintain the image of the women as lower than the men, despite the fact that they played an important role as the potent vehicle of creation as muses.

²¹ South American indigenous rhythm, or a very old style of Tango, involved fast rhythm and with a close embrace. Also associated to somebody or something from a lower class. (www.tejasTango.com/terminology.html#sacada)

²² Spanish language: translated as 'walks', a very important technical element in Tango dance.

²³ Spanish language: translated as *the* 'old generation'.

²⁴ Spanish language: translated as *the* 'new generation'.

²⁵ Spanish language: translated as 'the golden era'.

²⁶ Spanish language: translated as 'new Tango'.

²⁷ Judith Gomez Bas is an important *lunfardo* (slangs and vulgar vocabulary) writer and Tango researcher who developed a study on the female archetypes represented on the poetry and lyrics. She identified 9 fixed characters recurrently represented on the *Tanguera* literature: *la morocha* (the cheek brunet); *la vieja* (the elder); *la prostituta* (the prostitute); *la niña* (the child); *la mujer de armas* (the woman with guns, or the hard woman); *la Malena* (the Madeleine, or the desirable and romantic); *la musa* (the muse, idealized distant woman); *la fulana* (the gossip); *la mina* (the young woman in allusion to the sweet whore). The characters frame the personification of the women from the suburbs, brothels or streets. The 'correct' bourgeois woman was only part of the imagination of the Tango, from an unreachable distance.

Presently in South Africa, there are controversies about the name and style of Tango: there is the Argentine Tango and the Ballroom Tango. I see the Ballroom Tango as a stylized Argentine Tango, originated in the Blackpool Festivals (England) and other World Championships established since 1920s, shaped as a competitive dance.

In this regard, there are clear scissions between the aesthesis to the ‘competitors’ and the ‘social dancers’. Their universe are oppositely constructed²⁸, and the vehicle whereby the construction happens is the same, the body, or the *construction of the body* (individual, political and social). There are differences between the body’s construction for competitions and the body’s construction for socials; they carry two separately polarized intensions, although they coexist in the same space.

In the socials, competitors and social dancers perform in the dance floor, although they rarely interact. I explore, in chapter 6, dynamics established by forms of hierarchies of knowledge, when speaking about the field of the pedagogy. In the classrooms and in the balls, there are forms of hierarchies reified by the differences in levels of knowledge amongst learners.

In the environment of competitions, the relation between form and content are precise and metrified; they are more of a sport than a communicative path. The technique is maximized in detriment to the dialogue between two bodies. The definition of rules is very restrictive in terms of rhythm and how to allocate the rhythm in the body. The competitors must pursue an unlimited precision and perfection demonstrating absolute *control* over their bodies and emotions.

On the other hand, the social style of dance is not framed as technically as the competitive dance; therefore, it allows more space for expressivity *based on* emotions. The social style is a sphere of dance that practitioners go to the social parties to enjoy the dance as well as to enjoy the people of dance; it holds an enormous space for socialization. This aspect of socialization is fundamentally historical, since the primary balls were established through veins of status and negotiations for social purposes, and it is the focus of this research.

To summarise, Argentine Tango, or simply Tango, is a traditional dance originated from Argentina, which was a physical practice initially made by migrants and *crioulos* on the ports of Buenos Aires, and later became a well-known social dance, very gendered. Nowadays,

²⁸ Several authors (Beauvoir, 2011; Louro, 1998; Marques, 2004; Estés, 1992; Butler, 2001; Scott, 1991; Parker, 2001) engage in theories of post-structuralism who challenge ideas about the construction as a basic element of identity formation, some cases deeply criticizing it. Here, I am using in relation to the construction of the body and gender’s representations.

Tango is a worldwide social dance, with featured characteristics and peculiar methods of teaching.

Elements of Tango

In analysing aesthetic elements of Tango, one can create bridges between the *historical contexts* and the *qualities of movements*. Often Tango is considered a style of dance that represent states of emotion from the part of dancers. This representations are due to the levels of intimacy through proximal contact and the plasticity of the dance, where elements of resistance and opposition between performers create an imagery of passion. Qualities of movement and type of body connection are often standardized according to fashionable tendencies though.

A very important element of Tango is the *abrazo*, or the frame, or the embrace, which is one of the channel of communication between bodies, which is often called connection. The dancers are required to involve their partners with a kind of 'hug', within specific dynamics of contact: the leader must embrace the follower holding the back of the partner in a way that could send signals of conduction to lead the directions, with arms below the arms of the follower. The follower must embrace the leader with arms above the arms of the leader, and create a kind of pressure between arms in a sense of 'locking' the body of the leader. Within this kind of 'connection', the dialogue is facilitated by the pressure applied between the two bodies.



Embrace, or *abrazo*. Photo: Eduardo Longoni/Corbis

The distinction of the leader and the follower, in spite the positions of the arms (below or above), is also determined by the *side* (left or right) of the 'leading arm', or the arm that maintains the frame opened, as well as pointing the directions of navigations in the ball. The leader must keep the left hand open, and the follower must keep the right hand open, holding each other's hands. The arms positions allows space for close contact, being related to the historical facts of the *Conventillos*, where Tango was a form of social engagement for 'more permissive' people, back in the days.

Another important element of Tango, and this one strongly differs Tango from other styles of dance, is the concept of *resistance*. Generally speaking, in other styles of dance, the follower engage with the leader in a way that the body response to the 'command' is immediate; the body assumes a performance of lightness and quick reaction, almost like being inexistent, or feather weighted. The follower must move with the leader causing minimum impact in terms of weight, the faster the response is to the command, the better is the dancer, and the more virtuosic steps the leader can engage with.

In Tango, the logic of the body response is the opposite of that. The follower must 'resist' the direction in which the leader is pointing to, creating a sense of opposition, or counter movement. The appliance of the force in the opposite direction of the body weight of the leader, generates an elastic dynamic. That is why Tango assumes a visual impression of a 'dispute' or a 'fight'. This element can be related to the rebellious characteristic of it, where

historically, couples where permitting-and-not-permitting proximity, framing a silent negotiation.



Two images of the resistance, or the counter opposition, that bodies engage with during performance.
Dancers: Gabriel Marino; Jorge Talquenca and Eva Yufra. Photo: Plaetix.

Visually, dancers engage in movements of proximity and intimacy. The Tango connection requires that the chest of dancers touch or face each other's chest closely. The leader sends most of the directions through positioning its chest, and the follower uses the leader's chest as a reference of displacement. In most of the cases, when embedded in gender relation, the body of the women *must adapt* to the frame of the men; she must mould her body to match with his.

This dynamic can be very uncomfortable, for instance, when bodies have a difference of height, or simply are incompatible. Generally, men force women to mould their bodies by forcing the embrace, transforming the performance into a struggle between bodies. This dynamic is inherited in patriarchal notions of leading. Men believe that they can enforce women to adjust to a particular way they like to dance, not having in consideration the body-desire-preference of women.

The position of the head is also important part of the communication: follower must keep the head towards the leader, and the leader must be able to visualize the ball in order to navigate the couple.



Head and chest positions as an important mode of communication. Photo: Paula Lobo

Lastly, the entangling of the legs, is a result of the counter movements as well; the free leg reacts as a whip. The *ganchos*²⁹, *sacadas*³⁰ e *boleos*³¹ are important steps of Tango, hence it is part of the dialogue established by the dancers. Such dynamics of body response, in the relationship between the leader and the follower are simultaneously precise and subtle, requiring a lot of practice to reach good levels of communication.



A variety of *ganchos*. Image courtesy of Emilie Boudet³²

²⁹ Spanish language: translation 'hooks'. The effect of the leg hooking the leg of the dance partner, externally or internally. Also the *ganchos* can happen around the hips.

³⁰ Spanish language: meaning 'displacement of the leg or foot'. Dynamic of displacing the leg of the partner using ones own leg.

³¹ Spanish language: translation 'to throw'. A swivel with one of the legs causing an effect of whipping action.

³² <http://www.emilieboudet.com>

The historical perspectives showed in this chapter, gave relevant information and contextualization to the comprehension of key points, for instance, Tango has a multicultural and diverse origin, and is very much connected with African heritage. The transgressive and rebellious elements linked to Tango history are impressed in the qualities of movements, as it was possible to grasp in the aesthetic analysis.

Nonetheless, the covert values sustaining the gender representations of roles in Tango are dislocated. According to its origin, the gender roles were compatible to that social moment. But presently, Tango may be understood as a mode of engagement that represent domesticized and naturalized gender representations. However, the dance still contains several potentialities in its performance to engage in concepts of collaboration, rescuing in it the improvisational aspects.

CHAPTER 3: VEILED DYNAMICS

This chapter aims to unravel abstract and philosophical concepts related to the behavioural codes (social and individual), silently negotiated, in the environment of balls. By scrutinizing my own experience as a movement researcher, I trace a social profile of gender politics in the universe of the Tango community of Johannesburg, which also is discussed during pedagogical analysis in chapter 6.

Observations of dance practices in Johannesburg played a relevant role in identifying *naturalized* dynamics related to power. I have witnessed awkward situations, perceived and reinforced by my cultural difference, which triggered me to engage in this journey. The descriptions and analysis in this chapter were associated to gender and performance studies and queer practices.

I attempt here to analyse the Tango performance to validate new possibilities of relations in couple's dances. In order to minimize the risks of falling into the same issues since the present form of the dance is based on a hierarchical relation (leader and follower), I propose an observation on the levels of control in the socials balls steering so little diversity. To do so, I engage in the comprehension of the functionality of signs.

In an analytical mode, I theorize concepts of the sign and systems of meaning associated with the codes of behaviour observed in balls. Signs operate by silently weaving meanings that influence behaviour. I explore the construction and formation of a sign, which invariably is linked to systems of meanings. Signs are always an element of an 'expression plane' conventionally correlated to one (or several) elements of a 'content plane' (ECO, 1976 pg.48). This complex and reciprocal relation between sign and meaning determines much of social behaviour.

Reasons to Interrogate Relations Silently Negotiated

During three years of experience working with weddings couples³³, mainly in Johannesburg, I could observe many unequal dynamics between couples that aimed to dance.

³³ Designation of couples that seek a particular type of performance to present during their wedding celebration. With rare exceptions, the couples want to perform an iconized dance, 'Broadway' style, with dramatic moments, lifts, turns and falls, demonstrating their perception about this genre of dance (more to show, less to feel). Generally also, they come to classes with a very tight time frame (at best, two months) which makes difficult to develop nuances of genuine body language and connection between them.

I have also witnessed situations with gay male learners. The rigid and restrictive gender structure that any kind of couples' dance has, frames a kind of embodiment that is associated to exclusivist engagements, allowing very little sense of collaboration between practitioners.

Although there are levels of improvisation, the dance is very much mediated and controlled by technical codes, and the creativity (or guidance) of steps is given from, exclusively, one practitioner (leader); thus, the representation of the couple's relation prioritizes the will of one: the man.

These two concepts, collaboration and improvisation, are weaved together in the discussion in chapter 6 as part of the main findings of this research. Here, though, I will focus on the exploration of the concepts of sign-formation and systems of meaning in order to understand how practitioners engage in the social performance through behavioural codes, within concepts of categorization or grouping.

The codes of couples' dances suggest that it is to be practiced by a heterosexual men and women, at least it is desirable that people play roles of a man and a woman, with exceptions around the world where practitioners are also gender activists. Any person that does not identify with this 'veiled rule' is automatically not so welcome - unless she/he performs according to expectations of interactions with the opposite sex. I strongly support forms of dance applied to activism embracing political discussions.

Dancing should be a practice of freedom, expression, encounter and pleasure, open to any being as they are. Or at least, dance should offer space for practitioners to experiment abstract realities, creating connections in deeper levels through imagining or reinventing other identities and worlds.

Critical Reflections as a Dance Teacher

In 2013 I worked as a ballroom instructor in one of the oldest dance studios in Johannesburg, which was firstly established 25 years ago. The studio is located in one the traditional middle-high class suburbs of the city, Rosebank, which is predominantly black African³⁴ (48.66%). The studio has a full schedule for students as a form of practice: social parties, group and private classes and specific lessons for technique.

³⁴ According to the City of Johannesburg – Gauteng website, census made in 2011.

As a female instructor³⁵, I was given the male students, and wedding couples. The only female student I had was an adolescent (13 years old) that had been harassed by a previous male instructor, and the father did not want her to learn with a male instructor anymore. In spite of the fact that we were same-sex teacher-learner, she grew as a dancer more than any other student of mine. I felt that she was relaxed and focused on the technique and she was not engaging in any kind of pre-judgments or uncomfortableness, common at her age within other-sex relations.

Her mother, who was a busy business woman and had little time to engage with her daughter's extra-school activities, came to the studio one day to meet the dance teacher that her daughter was always talking about. We had a long conversation about how strong the connection was between us as a teacher and learner. I then understood that I represented an important gender-role model to her, not only as a dance teacher. This fact reinforced the will to investigate gender determinations in the pedagogy of couples' dances. Why should instructors always be the opposite gender of learners as it is established in the Johannesburg dance market?

I observed many other situations that created limitations, for instance, amongst gay men. Due to their 'sex', they were directly allocated to a female instructor (me) rather than have the opportunity to choose the sex of their instructors; they were 'naturally' accommodated to female instructors with no other option. On the dance floor, no matter the sexual orientation, the code is men dance with women. Nonetheless, it seems that women dancing together is more likely to be accepted than men dancing with men, although not without stigmatizations.

In October 2013, I had the opportunity to study Tango in Berlin, Germany. The class was designated as 'Practice for Women' and I assumed that was for practicing the female steps. But as soon as I got to the Studio *Nou Tango Tanze* at *Chausseestraße*, I realized that the aim was a little different from my expectations. The dance instructor, Raúl Navalpotro, wanted us to learn/dance the male steps (as leaders) in order to understand the dynamics of leading, so female dancers would: first, understand better the 'commands'; and second, be able to have more independence in the *Milongas* (social Tango practices) as the majority of practitioners were women.

³⁵ Category given by the studio

The session was very pleasant and insightful. I was being hosted by a lesbian couple, friends of mine, and they got very excited with the news about classes because they always wanted to learn as a couple, although they said that they never had found a place that offered dance lessons specifically for lesbians. That reinforced the clue to investigate gender dynamics in Tango.

The impositions of the dance roles in terms of leading and following seemed to not always function comfortably with heterosexual people as well. For instance, with wedding couples, for which generally there was limited time to develop choreographies for the wedding celebration, it would have been more suitable in most cases if the roles could be freely interchanged, and the women could also lead the men.

Many women³⁶ taught by me during the year of 2013 in Johannesburg complained about the fact that they felt absolutely inadequate within such a structure; they spend their days *demanding* and *commanding*, both, in the professional and domestic life, and they resist suddenly letting go the ownership of their movements. They questioned why they have to follow amenably. During fieldwork, this dynamic was also verified (see chapter 5) when female participants were questioned about their role's preference in the questionnaires. For instance, one of them said: *'I loved to lead as I felt more central and able to connect with my desire'*.

On the other hand, most men when starting dance lessons, felt similarly awkward because they have never been in touch with dance movements and rhythm before, and suddenly they must lead their partners while they are still trying to govern their own bodies; they are focused on simply stepping to the beat of the music, which can be a hard task itself.

Firstly, in cultures that are still embedded in patriarchal values, men are often discouraged from engaging in movement expression or dance activities. The impositions are to keep a certain distance between men and men, and their expressive and communicative bodies. Taking the decision of becoming a dancer requires already a certain effort. Secondly, the traditional gender structures and the pedagogy of dance linked to traditional values of gender, impose upon men that they represent particular roles (such as the protector, the leader, and the creator)³⁷ from the earlier phases of learning steps.

Thus, the beginning of the (traditional) learning process is not an embracing and relaxed experience, but a rigid approach that makes most people give up, thinking that they

³⁶ Most of practitioners registered in the studio as learners were middle or high class, educated, presently employed.

³⁷ This was verified in the interview with dance instructor, explored in chapter 4, on the title 'Interviews with Instructors and long-term Practitioners'.

are not good enough to become dancers. Clearly though, with time and practice, values are reified and confidence grows, thus couples that persevere in their aim to learn, somehow 'naturally' adjust to the aesthesis.

All in all, concerning the pedagogic perspective, the learning process could be a phase of support and care for both practitioners, with less expectations and more fluidity.

Performances of Hegemony

Back at this point, my divagations were flirting with modes of pedagogy of dance, at least towards the deconstruction of gender representations. In spite of the very positive aspects of dancing, the social balls are reflecting performances of hegemony. The politics and policies of the body's performance tend to control, regulate and survey individuals. The conservativeness of the environment of studios and socials in Johannesburg, reflects its gender politics. For instance, one of the contradictions is the fact that country permits homosexual marriage, but there are no homosexuals in the social parties. Also, there are no queer dance practices, even if were only to frame paradigms of freedom, or bring about performances capable of representing diverse and complex forms of identities.

The social performances in the balls represent valuable material to analyse. People perform predictable and tedious actions: men pick the women; men who are shy, or in the early phases of learning, in general, dance only with their instructors (mostly women); women must wait to be picked: there are the popular ones and there are the ones who are rarely or never picked; there are no cross-transgender-homo-bisexual people in the precinct, apparently. The levels of acceptance and unacceptance are constantly mediated through erotic capital³⁸, or knowledge capital³⁹.

³⁸ Erotic capital is a psych-social concept framed by Catherine Hakim, as the fourth capital humans have: economic, cultural, and social. She asserts that attractive people have more chances to be successful in a 'sexualized culture affluent modern societies' (Hakim, 2009). Here, I'm engaging with the concept in a sense of *beauty, or appearance* which is the first judgment men generally make towards women. The most beautiful ladies, according to men's judgment, are always picked, even if they are new to the community, or do not dance so well.

³⁹ Knowledge capital in a sense of movements, or, knowing how to move or dance, which means 'perfectly respond to the commands' of the man, leader. In the balls, as the allowance to dance comes from men as the behavioral codes dictate, women tend to become competitive, competing for men's attention. Women improve their skills as dancers to try assure that they will be invited to dance. This dynamic cannot be generalized though.

In a reflective mode, it is easy to conclude that gender shapes relations and such relations determine social dynamics. It is desirable that a kind of aesthesis in Tango preserves the traditional and codified gender representations in order to sustain the apparent 'safe' environment in social balls. People who do not identify with the determined masculine and feminine features, become undesirable, or, at best, they do not feel embraced by the social's covert and silent movements, which are mediated by the aesthesis.

The bodies of *tangueros* and *tangueras*⁴⁰ are constructed, and represent a strong sign of expressivity. Such affirmation demands the delimitation of the certain cultural contexts, explored further in this section. Butler (1993) argues that, when thinking about the subject of the body's construction, it is necessary, first, to rethink the meaning of the construction itself (Butler, 1993 preface X).

Thus, I invite the reader to think about Tango as a language, which has been practiced for over 100 years *as it was back in its origins*, with very little change in terms of its content. Its aesthesis has been associated with virtuosic movements, intimacy, teamwork, hard work, communication, proximity, entertainment, practice, socialization, health, sexual symbolism, happiness, etc. Yet, it is still fundamentally connected with historically obsolete concepts of masculine and feminine, which are repeatedly reproduced over generations.

The performance of Tango is situated between the *communicative path* amongst individuals and the *social codes* determining relations. These two modes of experience operate differently as agents of categorization, which are responsible for grouping people in the same ball, or even grouping people in different styles of social dances.

In other words, each ball has a particular configuration according to elements of meaning. For instance, in Johannesburg there are three main cultures of dances, grouping people: Salsa, ballroom, and Tango⁴¹. The groups of people tend to be loyal to one or two styles of these dances. Each style is embedded with a type of embodiment that symbolizes a set of signs relationally signifying a set of meanings. Consequently, groups of people gather by their attraction to these very signs (or meanings, or both) according to their intention with the culture of dancing.

Joan Scott asserts that "classifications suggest a relationship between categories which allow distinctions or grouping" (SCOTT, 1991 pg. 3). The phenomenon of distinction steers

⁴⁰ Spanish language: the people who are affectionate and practice (listen, dance, play) Tango.

⁴¹ This description is specifically about the Johannesburg context, however, the dynamics of categorization happens all over the world, but with different priorities, culturally grouping people in different styles of dance. This information is based on my observations along the last 3 years.

groupings, and inevitably occurs in couples' dance environments due to the *relational elements* intrinsic to them. Aspects such as body contact (proximal), identifications, and socialization strongly account for categorizations.

The aesthesis of Tango weaves complex categorizations, because it is a form of expression that includes music, dance and poetry strongly framing the body of practitioners, or the 'idealized body' represented by the image of *el tangueros, la tanguera*. Some *tangueros* and *tangueras* even say that Tango is a philosophy of life, the social codes are established by a range of 'proposed human behaviour' shared between the dancers and the society to which they belong (ANDREOLI, 2010 pg.107).

According to Gladis Tripadalli (2008), in the field of performance, the body intelligence is formed between sign, object (movement) and systems of meaning (culture). The assertion suggests that the process of meaning of a performative experience is very much rendered by/through the body. The hegemony existent in the gender relations in Tango, is part of the culture of Tango. It frames ideas of masculinities and femininities, from over 100 years ago. Men and women have established roles constructed socially and historically through specific signs codified during the migration era in Buenos Aires, and '*tradition*' plays the role of the *gatekeeper of such signs*.

In chapter 4, it is possible to verify the discourses of practitioners embedded with parallelisms between dance and life. These parallelisms are supposedly allocated to a sphere of fantasy, but in fact, they operate to establish categories of masculinities and femininities. To teach, interviewees engage in discourses that associate and project the role of men and women in dance, onto the role of men and women in symbolic marital relationships. That is how instructors exemplify performative behaviour in the classroom: through symbolic projections of marital relationships (see section 'Interviews with Practitioners'). The symbolic function of projections of men and women's behaviour between dance and everyday life, is a form of representation that crystalizes and reifies behaviour through the very same projections, reinforcing signs of subjectivity.

Within this dynamic, gender representations shape both dance and life, reifying minor forms of control that assure the preservation of patriarchal values in the balls. The reification, or the naturalization of an abstract concept transformed into a concrete reality, is an important part of the construction of codes of behaviour in Tango.

Dance is a perfect field to investigate processes that involves subjectivities due to its direct action weaving connections between the body and abstract realities. Its power operates

through symbolism⁴², within nonverbal communication. Scott Christopher (2000) who unfolds concepts of symbolic interactions, describes his perception of the metaphors intrinsic to dancing:

Dance seemed to be the perfect metaphor for introducing how sexuality and symbolic interaction could be integrated. Picture two young, single adults dancing sensuously with each other, their bodies closely intertwined. Both are dressed seductively in tight-fitting clothes that show off their athletic bodies. Their feet follow an intricate, intertwining pattern as they flow across the floor. A Tango plays, a dance well known for its sexual and romantic tension. (CHRISTOPHER, 2000 preface)

Although Christopher (2000) presents a cliché representing Tango, he asserts that dance is a metaphorical expressivity that functions through symbolic interactions. The performance is based on deep levels of connection of parts of the body and “wild, joyful abandon with nonverbal language, instead, they convey meanings by the press of a breast, the closeness of the hips, and a look of the eyes” (CHRISTOPHER, 2000 preface). Tango requires belly to belly, chest to chest, legs entangled, cheek to cheek, and the frame (or hug, or *abrazo*) delimits the space between bodies. The body’s reactions are embedded with an accurate attention to the body of the other. The more proximal is the dance, the more intimate it is.

The social aspect of the performance requires a regulation between bodies that are sexually categorized. With that, an element, which is often ignored by the society of Tango, needs to bond with this analysis: the *sexuality*. In chapter 2, the section ‘Elements of Tango’ explored the aesthetic form as the representative of passion. Tango invites dancers to concrete levels of proximity, even if just symbolically experienced through the field of performance. Bodies are moving closely together flowing in metaphors of marital and sexual relations.

The symbolic levels of the sexuality of the performance are projected in the many parallels between the dance and sex: “similar to sex, one can dance alone, but its full capacity for meaning and pleasure is best realized with a partner” (CHRISTOPHER, 2000 preface).

The presence is more-or-less meditative and the dynamics of give-receive evoke dialogues without words, but filled by negotiations. The proportion of space between bodies is directly relative to moods of acceptance or unacceptance. These negotiations subvert

⁴² Simone de Beauvoir asserts that symbolism was elaborated by human realities as language that holds a range of meanings, simultaneously integrating and separating discourses. Semiotics also studies the operation of symbolism when weaving mediation between the body and the environment through signs.

motions and emotions; in addition, they are based on confusions of symbolisms of gender roles.

Overall, the multiplicity of the interpretative dimension of the micro relation of the couple in performance, is embedded in historically and culturally constructed signs and meanings. Sometimes, the social dynamics frame behavioural codes in which they ignore deeper forms of the interpretations of signs, in order to maintain the sober and traditional image of the performance. As a result, there are impacts in social dynamics: practitioners meta-perform in balls creating personalities and grouping according to covert criteria in order to accept or not accept people.

The reflections about my previous experiences in dance, and the situations lived by learners and practitioners described in this chapter were fertile to trigger arguments to question hegemonic representations. The annoyances perceived have generated deep levels of reflection about the everyday life in the dance studios and in the roles dance teachers can play in classrooms, discussed in chapter 6. Theorizations about codes of behaviour led me to understand that Tango as a social dance is still not yet well researched, or perhaps research is kept within informal contexts.

Embedded within the experiences described in this chapter, I was invited to create a performance as research, the PAR, where I attempted to tackle the demands of equitable representations.

CHAPTER 4: PAR – FIRST PHASE OF RESEARCH

This chapter aims to *describe* and briefly analyse the PAR project, as a powerful process steering deep reflections about the pedagogy of dance. Thicker analysis about the pedagogy is presented in chapter 6. During the PAR, I developed a graphic called the DE-GENDERED METHOD OF TEACHING-LEARNING, presented in the section 'Ideas of Pedagogy' as the main finding of this phase.

Originally, the PAR project was not part of this research, but it was incorporated by its significance. Better saying, the PAR was a project *totally separated* from my initial Master's research, which was focused in gender issues.

Meanwhile, Mmabatho Mogomotsi, a South African dramatherapist candidate, born and raised in Limpopo, invited me to be her dance instructor and help her to compose a ballroom performance for her PAR. I accepted, and quickly I realized that her PAR, could be 'our' PAR, since we could use the same media (dance/performance) for the project. Same-sex performance seemed an excellent platform to investigate gender politics in dance with a South African lady.

We negotiated the basis for the project, agreeing in time frame, content for rehearsals, objectives of each of us, and what we would share in terms of media. For Mogomotsi, she was investigating ballroom as a platform to overcome an emotional block of performing on stage. For me, I had the will to investigate gender representations in ballroom, knowing that we should create a performance using our bodies as female representatives - keeping our womanhood in this negotiation. I must confess, I was in a darkroom at this point. I did not have a clear idea of how we would perform. I got into this terrain following my guts and trusting that justifications would be shaped along the process. I was aware that, perhaps, I would not find anything.

During the rehearsal phase, I could not engage rationally with theory. I was deeply immersed in practice. I allowed myself to absorb the process slowly, and towards the end, I felt that it was appropriate to start making connections. I decided to record a video of myself speaking about gender roles to be presented as entrée to the body's performance. For some reason, I could not articulate much but the perceptions of the PAR process, and that was not enough. I decided then, on the day prior to the public performance, to interview (video recordings) practitioners to help me clarify blind spots. The outcome was so striking, that I

spent the night editing a short video (approximately 8 minutes) to be screened during the performance.

On the following day, many connections were made due to the audience response, and the feedback of examiners Kabi Thulo, Hazel Barnes, and Warren Nebe. During textual production about the process, the literature review demonstrated that there were no theoretical productions correlating gender, performance and couples' dances in the South African context. There was very little material to investigate and trace queer ballroom performances in Johannesburg. In parallel, my involvement with the Tango community brought me close to the environment.

Hence, I embraced hegemonic representations in Tango as my main research for the Master's course. The PAR was a turning point as a movement facilitator, therefore, it was embraced as a component of this research due to the relevant evidence presented below.

Process Description: Self-reflection as a Source of Knowledge

The first phase of the research was part of the first semester of requirements for the Master's course, where students were required⁴³ to engage in the PAR project, which included: 1- creative process, 2- performance, 3- media production (not obliged), and 4- textual production. The project actually started as a playful idea to perform a same-sex Foxtrot and investigate, within the creative process, questions of gender and body. The project revealed major points about the **pedagogy of dance** and **projections of stereotypes** in ballroom.

Mmabatho Mogomotsi and I created and performed a dance piece together. The dynamics during the rehearsals brought about the will to interview practitioners and dance instructors about their perceptions of gender roles. The whole process (rehearsals and reflections) was recorded and also I kept a journal as a form of registering the situations and thoughts. The performance included a video of the interviews, a dance performance, and some acting. The statement for the research was: *how two female heterosexual oriented would adapt their performance within a style of dance that has such a gendered role-model (who would lead, who would follow under the umbrella of gender representations of ballroom)?*

⁴³ Towards the completion of the first semester of course work.

I had a vague idea of breaking down boundaries between the roles of the leader and follower to trace a blurred and fluid frontier, but had no idea of how we would allocate our gender representations in it. She had some experience as dancer and learnt the traditional and strict principles long ago while still child. She never danced after this period but she had remote and strong memories of it: she described in detail a male instructor as being a dominant, ruthless and powerful man.

Therefore, the impression of the memories about the leadership in ballroom did not allow her to play such role; it was inconceivable to be the leader. She was blocked in the beginning of the process, she refused. During rehearsals, as we overlapped roles (instructor and learner, leader and follower) I slowly put myself as a follower while delivering instructions. Her corporal response surprisingly showed a stereotyped behaviour, imitating a 'butch'⁴⁴, in order to look like and feel like a leader - or confusingly like a man (we actually embraced that in the performance as form of mockery).

The opposite was respectively true, when she played the role of the follower, her performance assumed modes of languidness and softness (we also embraced it in the performance, and, strangely, during the actual performance, the audience understood this element as being comic reacting with loud laughs). The audience read female performers exaggerating manners of female as an element of strangeness and comedy; when female performers were representing manners of male, there was no reaction.

I observed the impact of exchanging roles during the rehearsal process. Her body searched for gestures to state a condition, but also her personality identified with the postures changing behaviour. Therefore, as we were playing multiple roles, I understood two major aspects: the pedagogy of the dance realistically, concretely and objectively pressed and perpetuated gender models on her psyche and body; and this phenomenon invariably symbolizes projections of stereotypes.

⁴⁴ Vulgar adjective used to categorize a specific behaviour or group, among lesbians; generally means a lesbian woman who has more masculine look or behaviour.

I observed as well my motion playing from one role onto another: woman, dance instructor-facilitator⁴⁵, leader, man, follower, creator, learner, supportive friend⁴⁶. I identified moods that my body was experiencing because of each role played, mainly the ones I am not used to. I remember asking myself ‘why am I doing this?’ or ‘why am I feeling that?’ meanwhile playing the leader’s role. I felt as if I had a thick wall surrounding my body; as if I were being surveyed; as if I was not allowed to be a man because I don’t know *how* to be man; but I was only playing as a leader (I did not need to *be* or *represent* a man). The confusion was also on my side.

I realized how thin the line is that separate both roles (dance-gender) by the way they are constructed. Sometimes I felt embarrassed asking ‘may I hold you like that?’ Internal dialogues made me aware of the projections notwithstanding fictional. In moments, while simultaneously playing the leader and the instructor I was cautious about the power I had over my dance partner, and the amount of trust that was demanded from her. The contrast of jumping from one role to another (follower-leader) made me aware of unpredictable manifestations, emotions and thoughts that flourished.

Towards the end of the rehearsal process, I had an obscure perception about the whole, as I was still too immersed in the intensity of the practices. I needed to bring more voices to be able to clarify contexts lived, and some distance.

Interviews with Instructors and long-term Practitioners

I went then to one of the old dance studio I used to work in Johannesburg and spent the day interviewing people, mainly instructors. I interviewed 7 people, including instructors and long term practitioners. In interviews, the discourse of the majority of the dance instructors was embedded in normalized gender stereotypes. Part of the testimonies were compiled into a video, screened as an entrée during the PAR performance. During editions I had to listen over and over parts of it to select the excerpts to be addressed on the video.

⁴⁵ I understand the difference between these two modes of engagement in teaching, through the lens of power dynamics: the ‘instructor’ engages more with the *banking* system (Freirean term: depositing knowledge into the learner); the ‘facilitator’ engages more with collaboration. These concepts cannot be generalized, they represent my own practice and understanding. In this case, I engaged with both roles in order to succeed on the task of communicating with my partner, as she was extremely attached to the image of her male instructor.

⁴⁶ Her engagement and research on the PAR project was to investigate drama methods to overcome a psychological block of performing on stage. I had to be very sensitive and empathetic to her pace as she was deeply engaged with dramatherapy methods applying on herself.

During this process, I started to make connections and clarify blind spots about internal perceptions described above.

Below, some of the most relevant excerpts of interviews. In order to protect interviewees I nominated them with capital letter, which do not represent their initials. The question was ‘what is the role of the man and role of the woman in dance’:

“The role of a man in a dance is to maintain that masculinity. Of course the man is usually to be the head in everything, of course you can also align this to a dance. In dance the man is the head because he is the one who’s driving direction ‘where we must go now’ especially within ballroom dance. Now the role of a female in dance, of course is be subordinated and reach the moment when her femininity enjoy, dance, as far as her partner is there” (M, black male)⁴⁷

“Well...I think they have complex roles. The simplest is the man is the leader, he will lead the steps he will decide what he is going to do, he has to take snap decisions when things are going wrong and the ladies have to be more intuitive, they have to feel, they have to respond to what the leader is giving to them, but at the same time they are not just passive, they need to be very active dancers. People often think that the lady is there only to do what the man wants, but in fact she needs to work on herself, she needs to work on her own musicality” (B, white female)⁴⁸

“Very classically saying man is the frame and the lady is the picture, and goes quiet deep in the sense that he is really irrelevant. He is there only to make sure that he frames her, and she is as beautiful as he can make her, which is very metaphorical in life. So through dance you learn a lot more than steps, you learn a lot of ethics, respect for woman. Hmm, the role of the woman is, she....she....first of all she must be beautiful but also very importantly she must be accommodating to whatever she gets from the guys. If the guy is not that skilled in dancing she will have to stick with him, off rhythm.....which is also very metaphorical in relationships. If the guy has issues or problems she must stick with him, give him a change to work through it. Ya....lots of metaphors in dancing” (S, white male)⁴⁹

The interviews given by professional teachers of dance, agents of the dissemination of a certain knowledge, exemplify the normalized discourses of hegemony, but also contradictions of roles of men and women. There are behavioural assumptions for both sexes that engender the construction of gender, in a standardized mode. If the role of the man is to

⁴⁷ M: South African practitioner.

⁴⁸ B: South African professional dancer.

⁴⁹ S: South African instructor.

be protective, dominant, provider and actively engaged in the leadership⁵⁰ while dancing; according to the logic of binaries, what remains for the 'other'⁵¹ role (of the woman) is to be receptive, passive, fragile, and unconditionally follows the man, although keeping a form of resignation represented in the musicality, where she has then space to be creative. Nonetheless, the levels of collaborations stands only while reproducing particular roles.

Excerpts like 'subordinated', 'be the head in everything', 'she is as beautiful as he can make her', or 'as far as her partner is there' demonstrate the significant power men have over their partners.

The woman exists only through the man, according to interviews. The annulation of women's voices in terms of leadership, or desire of movement, reflects a kind of *invisibility*. If the opposite relation is established between A and B, and only A or B has voice of command, the relation is, therefore, a manifestation of A or B, only, which makes the opposite partner an invisible agent of creation. The invisibility, in this case, reassures forms of domination, which are already symbolically represented by the very aesthesis and symbolic interactions, as seen in chapter 3. The agency of women is restricted to the contingent of the role of a follower, without any kind of autonomy. Yet, the roles of the men and the women are determined, invariably, by the same fixed binary function.

There is confusion when instructors and practitioners were asked, for instance, how man-and-man dancing together would be accepted? Or, why there are no trans-people practicing Tango? Or even why can't ladies lead? Instructors do not know what to say as it is demonstrated in the following interview excerpts. Often instructors rely on a non-critical answers such 'I do not know, maybe because that is how it should be, right!' There is a sense of distancing, or alienation⁵², as if no one is to blame for the power dynamics' in dance: it is determinate by its history and tradition. Such questions create silent discomfort among the majority of practitioners. When asked about same-sex people performing:

"You will get ladies dancing with ladies but you won't find guys dancing with guys unless they are two instructors because they have that 'level' of understanding, you

⁵⁰ These concepts were repeatedly cited by instructors and long term practitioners during a series of interviews about gender roles to the PAR.

⁵¹ The term *other* here is inspired on the book 'O segundo sexo' (Translated: The second sex, from the original French title: *Le deuxième sexe*, 1949) of Simone de Beauvoir, feminist theorist who wrote about the woman's situation on the biological, psychological, historical and mythical perspectives.

⁵² Alienation: blind submission to beliefs or institutions, lack of critical thinking and political consciousness. Simone de Beauvoir (2013) explored the concept of alienation in 'The second sex' while analysing psychological aspects of women's submission on the public sphere of societies.

know, they can do it somehow, but generally no, guys will not dance or they would really prefer not to. Girls can hold hands, guys don't, I guess is cultural. I've seen some cultures that guys hold hands which I found very strange. I guess is cultural, I mean dance has a lot of culture in it, hmm.....but ya generally guys are homophobic, that's why.”(S)

“Well in that case (same-sex performance) is perfectly fine. One person will be the leader and the other person will be the follower and they can switch, I've seen that. I've tried leading, is insanely difficult, I don't really want to do it [...] in South Africa unfortunately there is stigma” (B)

“About a gay relationship or a lesbian relationship seems to always have the ‘female’ if you would like to call it like that, in the male to male relationship. There is always the dominant and the passive. [...] that aspect of negotiation is really, at the end of the day, what decides who is going to be the dominant and who is more passive and relented.” (P, white male)⁵³

Excerpts above are representing most of the answers of interviewees. There were repetitions in discourses when talking about gender roles and most of them used projections of dynamics between men and women as a symbolic form of representing marital relations (thoroughly explored on chapter 3). Most male instructors said the phrases similar to ‘that’s how it should be’ when talking about their expectations of women’s behaviour meanwhile dancing.

The symbolic and figurative gender representations on the discourses are, more or less, according to gender race and class of the interviewees, sustaining levels of the superiority of men and the submission of women. These values underlie the subjective composition of the roles.

Ideas of Pedagogy

The pedagogy of dance is a relevant area of action to question dynamics about the body, and social dynamics embedded in specific body performances. The education reaffirm content connected to values and beliefs. According to the statements framed during creative process of PAR, in terms of the *pedagogy of dance*, the knowledge transmission of couples’ dances are connected to traditional structures.

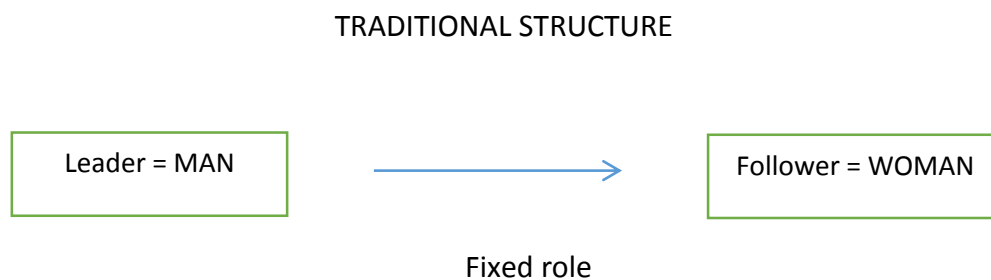
⁵³ P: white male South African instructor.

Isabel Marques (2004) researches the pedagogy (or the field of study of methods to teach and learn) in the field of dance. She created an analogy to better comprehend pedagogy as a *concept*. Pedagogy is a 'map' (content), and its 'streets' (didactics) would be the pathways available, the routes teachers would trace to move with learners from one point to another on the map. This analogy is very fertile in the analysis of methods of teaching and learning.

Focused on pedagogical aspects, I had, at this point, three main sources of analysis: the combination of observations of my previous experience as a teacher; the feedback given by my dance partner during the PAR of her cognitive process when child with her dance instructor embedded in projections of gender stereotypes; and the reflections over interviews after project.

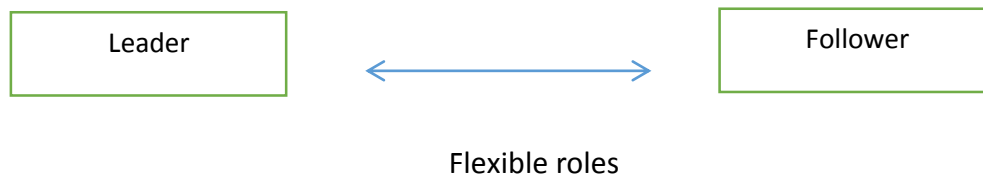
This source made me engage in critiques to the structures and methods of teaching couples' dances. In an attempt to represent, structurally, such dynamics during textual production, I developed two *pedagogical graphics* capable of representing the hegemonic aspect of the gender relations.

In the first one, I traced the traditional structure associating the fixed roles of *dance* and of *gender*, which gave me the visual perception of the performative relation:



Then, by detaching the gender element, and eliminating it from the dance roles (leader and follower), the following model would transform the roles into a flexible dynamic to interchange power. What seemed a very simplistic solution to a binary opposition, in fact, became the inspiring method to be investigated during the following phase, the *dance meetings*, concerned with the application of the pedagogical model.

NEW POSSIBILITIES TO BE EXPLORED



This new possibility of learning, which I called the *de-gendered model*, is a new methodological propose to teach-learn couples' dances. The main element that differs from traditional methods is the **elimination of the gender fixity**. The idea was that any person with any sexual orientation could engage with the role dances. Leaners and practitioners would have to learn steps from both dance roles, and they could negotiate and interchange them according to partners and performance. It would be an open platform to negotiations engaging in communication. This communication could be verbal, but I imagined several approaches based on collaboration and notions of improvisation to support non-verbal dialogues, which could transform the dance into a very exciting and unpredictable body language.

Conceptually, the model would open space to the complexity of the couple's relation, as well as to diversity, starting from scratch, the classroom dynamics would frame basis of connection amongst people. I, then, posed the question: *what would happen, in terms of diversity, if the de-gendered ballroom technique was used in the Johannesburg dance context?*

I started to seek for groups involved in queer ballroom, or in more gender-open practices. During this phase, I could not find an active group within non-traditional practices to engage with in investigation happening in the city. The solution was to open a brand new space, inviting 'aspirants of dance' to join a research group. For my surprise, the number of interested people in dance lessons based on non-conventional mode was large, and, quickly we formed a group to investigate the de-gendered model, as described in chapter 5.

The PAR project as a whole, including the internal processes and interviews, was very relevant to critique modes of performance and pedagogy in dance. Also, it was possible to verify deep meanings and impacts of stereotypes' reproductions experienced by my dance partner. Also, the interviews were very insightful to shape pedagogical approaches presented further on this paper, exploring the possibility to have more open social coexistence in the balls, through the de-gendered model.

CHAPTER 5: DANCE MEETINGS AND GROUP DYNAMICS

The following chapter aims to *describe* and analyse dynamics during the fieldwork, which was concerned with the exploration of the de-gendered method (challenging gender fixities). As a result, I point *directions* towards a non-hierarchical Tango performance in the following chapter (6). I opt to divide the description (chapter 5) and thick analysis (chapter 6) in two different chapters in order to prioritize clarity.

I present evidences collected during dance meetings through subjective analyses of material given by participants during the research; voice recordings during reflections in dance meetings; and the answers of questionnaires applied at the end of the process. The three phases of data collection are woven throughout this chapter.

Fieldwork Description

The second phase of the research, the *dance meetings*, was shaped to be the fieldwork entering in the ambit of movement investigation. Within hypothetical states of the body, explored in chapter 1, I embraced the concept of the *lived experience as a source of valuable knowledge* based on the methods of 1- movement investigation during dance meetings, 2 - body mapping, 3- group discussions, 4- micro performance and social *Milonga*, and 5 - questionnaire. The body is understood as a catalyst of experiences, and capable of learning through self-realization. The theoretical components of this phase were aligned with performance, gender and queer studies.

The participants volunteered through e-mail contact given on posters⁵⁴ spread inside of Wits Campus, as well as beyond the walls of the institution. The space available to shelter the research was the 14th floor, at the University Corner Building, Wits University. The research was open to participants inside and outside campus, and it was composed, mostly (70%) by students and staff members from Wits University. All the participants engaged in the research by their own will.

⁵⁴ Poster: appendix 1. The drawing was made by me, and the idea was to present two asexual bodies with no representation of hierarchies dancing together. The concept of the layout was minimalist, no colours, containing only enough information about the research.

I advertised the *DE-GENDERED ballroom or Argentinian Tango dance classes*, and engaged with participants virtually, forming an email group to negotiate agendas and content. I sent them a list of styles of dance to their choice, framing the democratic aspect of the research. The email sent to participants to define time frame and style of dance is on appendix 2. The vast majority of participants choose Tango as a style of dance that they would like to engage in the research, by virtual election. None of participants had Tango lessons previously.

The Letter of Consent (appendix 3) and the Information Sheet (appendix 4) were given to participants on the first day of meetings. We had 5 encounters of (1,5) one and half hour each. In the first meeting we stayed over 30 minutes longer, totalling 8 hours of fieldwork. The group included 9 participants, some of them had previous experience with dancing, others briefly, and one was currently attending ballroom classes as a learner.

The participants:

- 1- A: female, mixed race, 23 years old, student.
- 2- B: female, white, 20 years old, student.
- 3- C: female, black, 40 years old, worker.
- 4- D: female, white, 57 years old, resigned.
- 5- E: female, white, 21 years old, student.
- 6- F: female, white, 23 years old, student.
- 7- G: female, black, 26 years old, worker.
- 8- H: female, black, 21 years old, student.
- 9- I: male, Indian, 26 years old, worker.

One of the participants, male, came only to the first meeting saying that he would not be able to attend the other meetings as he was leaving the city, but at least, he wanted to know more about the method. Thus, he is not listed above. The configuration of the group itself tells something about the resistance of male people to engage in dance classes, even if is a project inviting people to a 'de-gendered' or non-traditional modes of embodiment.

The technical content in terms of steps, were explored during classes gradually, in order to fulfil methodological requirements. Due to the short period of the research, as well as the focus of it (the aim was to look at the gender dynamics rather than the virtuous technical element), we decided to develop only four steps, prioritizing the walks as the main mode of body connection:

Camñadas (walks, basic dynamic of displacement in the dance floor)

El Abrazo (frame, within notions of leader and follower)

*Cuadrado*⁵⁵ (the basic 8 steps of Tango in which dancers trace a square pattern on the floor)

*Ochos adelante y atras*⁵⁶ (pivoted movement of legs)

i) Community:

The concept of community is complex and immersed in dynamics of inclusion and exclusion based on a “form of illusion, a wilful mis-recognition of the world we live in” (PETRA, 2007 pg.9). To consider this group as a community, it is necessary to explore the basis in which it is possible to engender such a concept.

Primarily, the group had no relations previous to the dance meetings, so they were not an already established group. They were not dancers as well. The participants were attracted by the subject framed on posters which, in capital letters, said: DE-GENDERED dance classes. More than 50% of the group said that they joined the group because they were interested in gender studies; and 90% said that they appreciated, or were curious about the gender studies. In spite the differences between individuals (race, gender, class) and not previous relation, the subject was a key point of connection amongst them. Ideally, they cannot be considered a community, but a group of individuals who shared experiences collectively under a common interest.

The concept of ‘community of interest’ though, or the communities formed by a range of associations predominately characterized by the commitment to a common interest (NOGUEIRA, 2008 pg. 135), brought a new light to the engagement with concepts of communities in this research. Participant ‘B’ shared her reflections with the group:

The sense of community was strongly created by changing partners and sharing experiences verbally. The fact that it was a small group and you could get to know each of us also collaborated.

Participant ‘D’ reflected on her perception of the facilitator’s role as well as the community building process:

⁵⁵ Spanish language: translated as ‘square’.

⁵⁶ Spanish language: translated as ‘figure eight forward and backward’.

The facilitator's role contributed to the creation of a space that was safe, and allowed the participants access, easy access to negotiate, experience, explore make themselves vulnerable and trust the process.

Although, the community of interest's concept is more related to dynamics of exclusion (groups of women, homosexuals, blacks, street children, amongst others), the group manifested a common interest in learning a de-gendered method; and, some of them, revealed feelings of exclusion when saying that they '*wanted to learn dance before but they did not have the opportunity to learn with same-sex person*' (participant B) or '*I liked the idea that dance would mess up with gender norms*' (participant I). Participant 'G' wrote her opinion about community building:

The experience has built a community even outside the walls of this room. There was a level of trust that was required among participants.

Participants 'C' gave her testimony:

Tango enabled us to know one another, experience different feelings in our bodies. Tango gave us a sense of friendship and togetherness, helped us to function like we would not ordinarily do.

All in all, it is irrelevant if this research could categorize the group as a community in the strict sense, even if based on common interests. However, the process allowed the group to strongly engage in the research, and participants functioned as a reflective and reflexive as a collective raising important aspects of the theme.

ii) Movement investigation in dance meetings:

The collaborative mode of engagement was framed since of the beginning by electing the genre of dance that the group would study, Tango. The de-gendered model was the object of study, and the idea was to engage with a 'more-or-less' structured plan to the meetings, in order to keep an open space: warm ups, interactive activities within specific themes, technical development, practices, reflection. This structure was then permeated by drama approaches to engage in dialogue: discussions, problem-posing, body mapping, and group reflections.

The specificity of Tango within its aesthesis, enriched the research in many different levels, for instance, when discussing ideas participants had about the performance. The Tango music, as a platform for dance, evoked debates about rhythm and musicality. Elements of the

body performance evoked excitement and challenged the group. Also, the group could engage in social practice with the participation of a Tango dancer.

As it was showed on chapter 3, the pedagogy of dance, which is concerned with a particular knowledge and its methods of transmission, is uncritically developed by instructors and practitioners nowadays in Johannesburg. The majority of the long-term practitioners and instructors do not question the traditional structure of couples' dances. The standardization of gender is hardly questioned in dance studios.

The research allowed learners, who had high levels of strangeness to such standardization, to question processes of reification of hegemonies. Although participants engaged in the de-gendered model, the group discussed traditional models embedded in power practiced in the dance field, as some of them had such reference to compare. Participant 'B' shared her perspective about power in dancing:

...being a follower is not a passive role at all, it's probably more active than the leader, I think... I think that is just deeply embedded in power ... the leader is the dominant and the man... and that was really frustrating, I think. You have to decide who's going to be the man, who's going to be woman? This is just wrong I think.

Participants gave important inputs about technique and power. Participant 'E' shared her view about the investigation of exchanging roles (power) while dancing, demonstrating feelings of frustration towards projections of stereotypes on dancing:

I think something that I found quite interesting was sort of like "how we are going to make shifts?" because you sort of lose track of how you suppose to move, like a second, it's like your mind suddenly has to reset, how to move backwards how to move forwards, and I think that is quite interesting getting back into the sudden shift of power.

The participatory interaction helped to think new possibilities of relations throughout the dance meetings. Yet about power, participant 'I' raised questions about equality versus hierarchies:

...and this is a conversation that we have about gender equality, the challenges are not about like... about empowering woman, when we talk about gender equality it's about the fact that binaries themselves are necessarily unfair, rather race or gender or sexual. Then I wonder if 'can we do a dance like this and do not have that binary regulation? And not have necessarily ...a person dominant?'

This perspective point directions towards the deconstruction of power dynamics. The idea was to challenge the gender stereotypes impregnating the dance roles, the roles of the leader and the follower were embedded in hierarchies. In this regard, it was possible to

technically explore new forms of connection during fieldwork critically thinking about the role of the leader and follower. Reflections from participants, such as above, helped to compose ideas and establish directions, mainly pedagogically, to carry on investigations about new modes of *tangear*, presented in chapter 6.

Between practice and reflections, participants engaged in the de-gendered model to learn steps, in comparison to the traditional model⁵⁷. They showed a range of perceptions: in the field of movement (technique) they were engaging in the learning process, discovering new possibilities of expression. On the other hand, in reflecting on relations underlying power within the traditional pedagogy, they were extremely critical, mainly the ones who had only briefly passed through the normalization of gender dynamics in dance studios.

The critical element was embraced as part of the investigation. The technical investigation of the bodies' movements from a perspective a non-trained bodies; and the investigation made by the problem-posing, evoked layers of reflection about the traditional pedagogy of Tango, as well as about the de-gendered model itself. Participants and facilitator engaged in modes of questioning the normalized dynamics through problem-posing.

The components of engagement were slowly allowing dialogue as soon as the qualities of movement were absorbed by the practitioners, for instance, the *camiñadas* (walks). We engaged in different exercises of walks, and each of them, there was reflective component about gender roles.

In this sense, the process of acquiring the technique, and developing the 'connection between bodies' was slow and procedural: every aspect of connection was discussed, experienced and reflected, so participants could, first, construct the body of the dancer with specific qualities of movement; second, investigate and analyse the impact in terms of perception, emphasizing collaboration. Some exercises were only focused on the shifting of the weight, which is the first form of connection between Tango performers. Participant 'F' described perceptions on basic levels of connection during the *camiñadas*, with one another, using hands as a form of connection:

it's like, we had... like an initial force between our hands, still in pressure and then when something slightly shifted, that force then neutralized again. Ok, hmm, with that 'figuring out' of who is leading who is following in the moment, hm, I found with us, it was not just the hands, but it was also ... because in your periphery you see the whole body, you can see where the legs want to go or where the balance is, so it's not just the

⁵⁷ The traditional model was graphically represented on chapter 5 on the title 'Ideas of Pedagogy'.

hands. There are moments where you go, "ok, I can feel when the weight shifted in the person", and then you are, like "ok, it will change", and then it changes, of course.

The lenses they were looking through amplified relations, and the process reinforced negotiations in collaboration, questioned and reflected during meetings. The body, the dance, the model, the gender relations, every aspect was being constantly analysed.

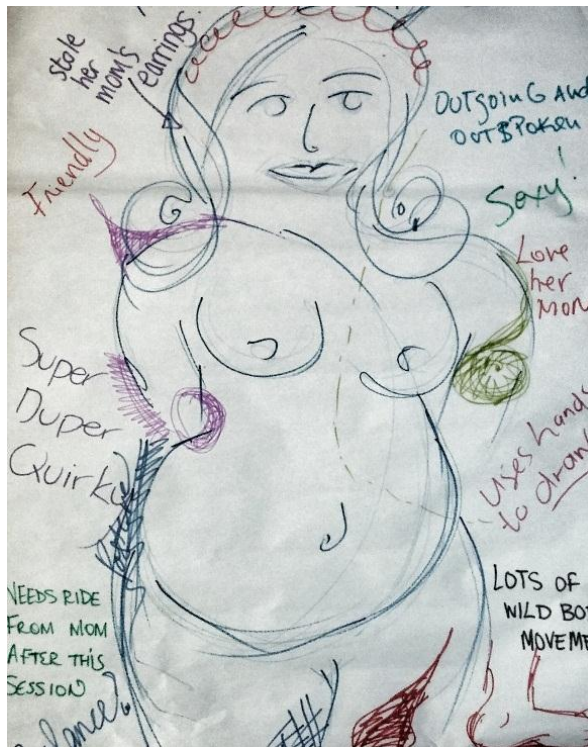
iii) Body mapping:

Body mapping was the method utilized to introduce their bodies to one another, using a metaphorical approach as a symbolic construction of the imagery of the body. As the group was not familiar with one another, body mapping associated worked in order build community. Massage and touch activated their memories to trace self-portraits; firstly as an individual process, than embracing the collective as part of each map. Participant 'F' reflected on the process of mapping her body, and sharing it with the group:

The introduction on getting to know about each other encouraged us and created a greater communication and sense of community. I realised how intricate body movement and memory is and this expanded into areas of understanding the dancing steps.

The task of drawing their body, creating a specific form to represent and delimit on the paper the frontiers of the internal and external spaces, was self-reflective and a powerful process of awareness. The group was then divided in pairs and with techniques of massage and touch to awaken their memoir, participants could symbolically represent places of strength, weaknesses and emotions related to specific parts of their bodies. They could investigate their history without exposing themselves, but using symbols instead.

By mapping their bodies they could delimit spaces of privacy, and spaces of possible encounter and communication. Participants showed respect for the processes and for one another, based on the openness. They could visualize their own history, understanding and acknowledging limitations and strengths, but they could share with their partners the information they wanted to.



Self-portrait of participant, symbolically mapped with its history on the internal space. On the external space, participants could write words of feedback based on collective activities.

In presenting their map to the group, conversations about the concepts of body and performance aligned ideas amongst participants. They had the chance to write on each other's maps words about first impressions, as well as to give feedbacks from collective activities.

iv) Group discussions:

The group discussions assumed different forms from the conventional circles. For instance, the first activity, in which participants would share information about their bodies, was walks with music: when the music stopped the random encounters would frame partners who shared aspects such as how they were feeling, something about the history of their bodies, qualities, traumas, wounds, scars, strengths, etc. The relaxed and interactive mode of engagement opened up possibilities to project their perceptions about themselves, individually and collectively. The conversations were then associated to the drawings-maps previously made through weaving connection among subjective methods.

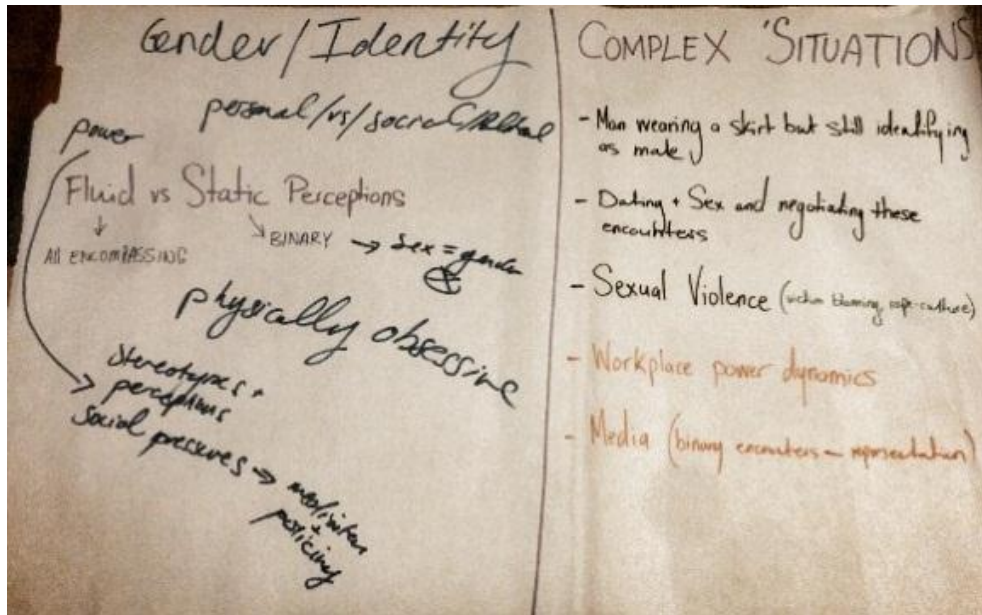
Other forms of discussions, such as the debate after watching the PAR video, also allowed deep conversations about the gender roles in dancing. Fertile insights were posed by participants in this matter. Participant 'I' shared his perception of the interviews:

It seems to me that the dance is necessarily about masculine and feminine roles and even when the instructors are trying to be progressive about their ideas, still it's about negotiating roles, necessarily masculine and feminine, and maybe it's because dancing between two people that's the only binary this mode of dance can imagine, ... I think that's not good enough, that's a bit boring. The second thing goes that... and it was one male instructor who mentioned this, but this is quite a Western concept of gender actually quite a new thing, when we think about this particularly ways binaries manifest, and then I wonder if other forms of dance from other cultures allows fluidity, and when it comes to expression and that's something to maybe think about.

In contemporary performance and gender studies, scholars are discussing impacts of different forms of binaries in everyday life that perpetuate power dynamics, pointing ambivalences in *normalized* speeches and behaviour incoherent with practices of diversity. The critiques produced by participants reflected the lack of identities' representation and inclusion of complex forms of relations in Tango.

In order to discuss gender, and exchange point of views about it, participants (divided in two groups) debated, listed and presented notions of the concept. Here, ideas of codification and de-codification of Freire (2013), explored by Nogueira (2014) during a workshop given in Johannesburg⁵⁸, was used as form of framing the theoretical space that participants were sharing. They conceptualized gender and defended it to other group relating it to their everyday life. The task also involved the exemplification of 'complex situations' in gender, so they could frame ideas through identification.

⁵⁸ 7th Drama for Life Africa Research Conference. Power, pedagogy and praxis: the role of theatre for development in a contemporary global health context. Wits School of Arts. Wits University. 21-22 November 2014. Professor Marcia Pompeo Nogueira was one of the Keynote speakers (Towards a dialogical Theatre for Development) and the facilitator of a workshop (A playful experimentation on codification).



Group tasks: listing issues and situations in order to generate collective information about gender.

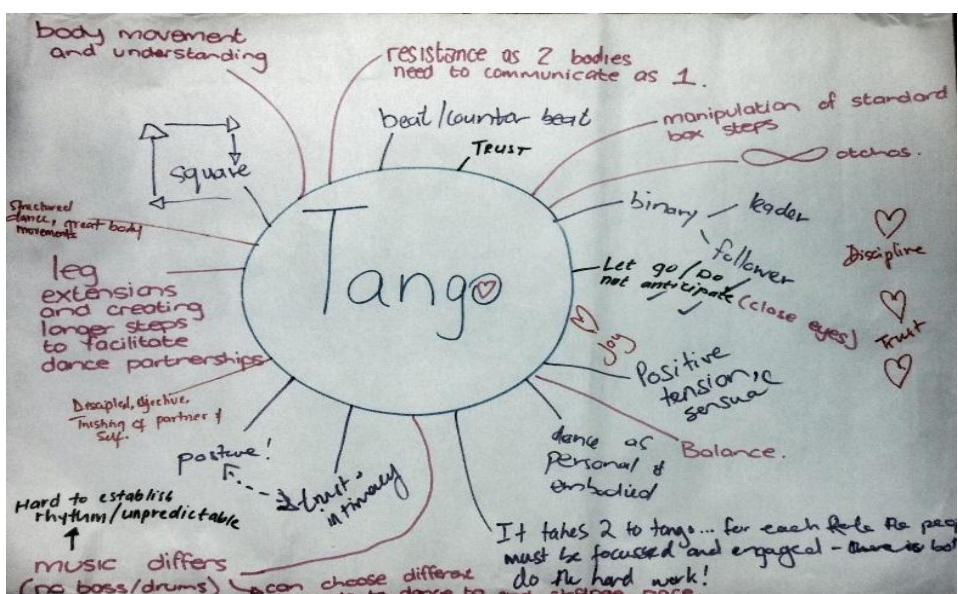
Spider-grams helped to frame participants' imagery about Tango. Initially they had distant and idyllic ideas about the dance, popping out words such as sexy, tantalizing, romantic, flexible, passion, communication and partnership. These words do not represent concrete ideas, but abstract notions of what Tango could be.



Spider-gram: first discussion about participants' imagery about Tango.

After the research was done, we created another spider-gram and participants were much more concrete and capable to represent from inside-out their comprehension. They

engaged in sentences more than words, such as: manipulation of standard box steps; beat/counter beat; body movement and understanding; music differs: hard to establish rhythm/unpredictable; dance as personal embodiment; positive tension, sensual; disciplined, objective, trusting of partners/self; resistance as 2 bodies need to communicate as 1; let go, do not anticipate, close eyes; if takes 2 to Tango both must be engaged and focused; square.



Second spider-gram of Tango: imagery of the dance, after the dance meetings.

v) Micro performance and *Milonga*:

On the fourth encounter, in addition to the activities to the meeting, Ondrej Viceník, a male dancer from Prague, who has an extremely well developed technique, came to visit us. In spite the fact that he has been dancing only for less than two years, his skills are doubtless. Ondrej is considered one of the best dancers in Johannesburg presently by the Tango community: his style goes from *Tango Nuevo* to *Milonguero*. He was invited to join the group to bring perspectives about rhythm and musicality, playing the role of the leader.

The idea of the micro performance was to perform to participants 1 or 2 Tango songs, so participants could witness an advanced performance embedded with notions of body connection. Also, the dancer was invited to dance with participants since he is used to leading, framing then practice and socialization, a small *Milonga*. The practice lasted 30 minutes, and

all the participants had the opportunity to dance with him. He also added important information about the music and rhythm, exemplifying it with different songs.

Participants responded the questionnaires about the perceptions of dancing with an advanced performer, and the outcomes were controversial. Due to the character of the research, some of the participants felt secure with his leading, immersed in the experience, and excited about it, such as 'D':

I loved his instructions, precise and professional, I've just trusted him and allowed myself to enjoy. I felt supported by his knowledge and abilities.

Others, went from awkwardness to delight during dancing. Due to the strong sense of community built among participants, some of them felt that they did not know him well, showing levels of feelings of intimidation. The proximity of Tango and the lack of knowledge was a major issues in this case. Participant 'F' said:

I felt intimidated because he was 'new' in the group, however once the dance continued I relaxed and even learnt cues from him expanding my following knowledge.

Or as participant 'C':

Dancing with Ondrej was magnificent, he is good dancer and leader. At first I was afraid and shy but he led me beautifully and helped me to go through the dance floor. Still, the only limitation was that I could not really meet up with his steps.

Yet, participant 'G':

I felt intimidated and insecure of my dancing abilities. Not familiarity, therefore not comfortable.

The gender aspect of the research (questioning standards) also contributed to levels of reflection. For instance, participant 'B' declared that she felt out-of-place to be playing the role of the follower:

I felt awkward as if I was doing everything wrong. I wondered if I would have asked him to be the follower and if it would have made difference. Also I felt more comfortable dancing with other women then with men.

Participant 'I' described his experience, on the matter of gender, in dancing with a male, white, heterosexual, leader:

I didn't like to be follower. He was a white heterosexual (?) gendered man... why would I want him to lead? Would the act of letting him lead in dance reinforce hierarchies of injustice?

The reflection of participant 'I' was concerned with the lack of space for negotiations between performers. The dancer was playing the role of the leader, and participant 'I' felt that

he had to play the role of the follower. Here, the race difference was a relevant matter to participant 'I'; seems like this difference is profoundly sensitive in the South African context.

The fact that the group was trained in a *de-gendered technique*, within methods of critical pedagogy and problem-posing framing political elements of hegemony and gender binaries, the dynamic of presumption of the gender and dance roles during small *Milonga* was already dislocated. Participants already wanted to deconstruct and negotiate roles during the social practice, and experiment different possibilities. In this experience, the fixity of the role of the dancer was already questioned as an element of strangeness by some of the participants. Hence, **the response to the social performance proved to be immediate if the pedagogy embraces collaborative methods providing safe space for diversity.**

These discussions led me to conclude that *if* the pedagogy of dance embraces the acceptance of plural forms of gender and relations, the change would occur in the social environment. By making possible the inclusion of other gender categories and the negotiations of the body's performances, the dance will allow the inclusion of complexities.

vi) Questionnaire:

The need to engage in a formal method of collecting objective material for analysis came from the levels of subjectivities of the methods used during process. In order to maintain the quality of the research findings, participants were requested to answer the questions below on the last day of group meetings. The analysis of *the answers of questions 1, 2, 3 and 5 were allocated on the previous sections* of this very chapter number 5. The analysis of answers of *questions 4 and 6 are allocated further* in this section.

De-gendered Argentinian Tango

(This is an anonymous questionnaire, feel free to share honestly your personal thoughts about the process)

- 1- What attracted you to participate of this research, in order of priority?
- 2- In which ways (if) do you think the lived experience on Tango enabled the construction the sense of a community amongst participants?

- 3- Could you describe what in your opinion the de-gendered method of teaching-learning dance enabled or created barriers to human connection in terms of gender?
- 4- Did you identify yourself with a particular role presented (leader or follower)? Why?
- 5- Could you describe the experience of dancing with Ondrej? Any reluctance, or fear, or pleasure, or limitation or strength perceived? Why?
- 6- What are your thoughts about the methodology applied during the meetings?

Since most answers were weaved along textual analysis, here, I will focus on the *question number 4*. In terms of gender, the controversies of the 'social expected behaviour' explored on chapter 3, projected stereotypes not capable to represent the desire of most participants in terms of dance roles. For instance, heterosexual and homosexual women demonstrated the same preference for leading. The man had no preference at all. The answers shows that the dance roles should be much more related to the personality of the practitioners, than cultural determinations. Participant 'G' is woman with no previous experience in dance and her preference was leading:

I was in 'control' and could decide where and when to go. I found myself anticipating all the time when following.

Participant 'F' is also a woman and had previous experience in dancing:

I often found myself in the leader's role, this was a result of the request from the partner. I did, however, feel interested in the leader's roles as I had previously learnt the follower's role; so a new role was more challenging to me.

Participant 'B', also woman, with brief experience preferred leading:

I felt more accomplished in this role and it felt good to dance it.

Participant 'D', woman, with brief previous experience:

I loved to lead as I felt more in control.

And participant 'C', woman, preferred to follow:

I identified myself as follower because being a leader takes more training and experience...being a follower was much easier for me. The leader initiates, I could not do that on times I was asked to lead, but as follower I was excellent.

All in all, only one female participant felt more suitable to the role of the follower, although she related her difficulties with a lack of experience. Within such panorama it becomes thinkable to reconfigure the determinations of dance roles.

Similarly, the answers of *question number 6*, which was concerned with the feedback from participants about the methodology, or, the pedagogical and cognitive aspect of learning both roles, glimpsed the possibilities of negotiating movements.

The de-gendered model, applied in this research, demanded no more than the usual effort of learning from the part of the participants. In fact, it is easy to teach the same step initiating with the left foot (leader) and immediately teaching the same step initiating with the right (follower). The dynamic of cognition is challenging, but learning a new form of movement is equally challenging.

Participant 'B' gave her perceptions already critiquing the social environment in which she had previous experiences. Her words illustrate dynamics occurred in studios:

I think it was a fantastic methodology, it gave me lots of confidence and made me feel connected to my body in very good ways. I think the talks were interesting, sharing with others made it easier, more enjoyable to dance with them. I felt much less pressured to be perfect. In terms of gender, compared to other dance spaces, I felt more welcome, more accepted and free to use my body. The method made me feel secure in my knowledge and confident. I did not feel the same mind of reluctance or oppressiveness as in other spaces where people care about my gender. I felt in the teaching space, the de-gendered methodology let me engage more freely and I did not feel limited like I do in gendered spaces.

Participant 'F' shared:

Thoroughly enjoyed the de-gendered approach as it makes dancing more accessible. I think it challenges the conception or traditional stereotypes on gender binaries. Also shows the intricacies of both the leader and the follower's steps and the dance communication. To me this method broke through the gender category and allows for greater expression, creativity and holistic understanding of dance itself.

Participant 'G':

It broke the stereotypes that only one person can lead, sharing roles. Very challenging though because the roles could be reversed at any moment being structurally flexible.

Participant 'C':

The de-gendered method was able to eliminate the leader-follower principle, taught us that anyone could be the leader and the follower, as such is not restrictive. I enjoyed and thought it was technical.

The analysis made by participant '1' showed high levels of critical thinking about the de-gendered method. In fact, the model really accomplishes change in the sense of gender dynamics. *Hegemonies, for more than minimized, were still playing roles as the leading and following structure was maintained:*

I think the de-gendered method (but was it de-gendered) allowed for people to reflect on how dance is gendered, and maybe choose their preferable role. I'm not sure if the method (in and off itself) critiqued the concept of gender, or that the dance roles we learnt were devoid of gender.

The traditional structure of teaching/learning boxes people in gender profiles, projecting stereotypes for social behaviour. The inputs of participants showed that dance should be about the performance of individuals in relationship. Therefore, answers from questionnaires have proved that forms of teaching and learning can be strongly challenged by changing the very values intrinsic in the pedagogy of dance.

Tripadalli (2008) asserts that the body in relationship assumes two different forms of relating: in communication or in domination. Thus, pedagogies of liberation should be associated to methods of collaboration in communicative mode, breaking down all the hierarchies including between teachers and learners.

In deepening the comprehension of fieldwork experience, the meetings were embedded with collaborative practices and dialogue. According to the feedback of participants, in spite the fact that we engaged in a de-gendered model, the interdisciplinary approach of methods was the differential to develop trust among participants. The critical element of 'questioning' opened space to produce good evidence of deconstruction of binaries. With that, I believe that *the pedagogy of dance proved to be a potent tool of transformation in the field of gender politics.*

In the whole, I understood that the essentiality of the hierarchic character of the relationship leader/follower, even if minimized, did not change in the core of the relation. Still, is necessary to engender a performance which could be fully embedded with concepts of collaboration and improvisation, as artefacts of creation, which I aim to explore on chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6: TOWARDS NEW FORMS AND NEW CONTENT

This chapter aims to combine analysis of the outcomes from the shared process of the PAR described in chapter 4, and the issues participants raised in the fieldwork described in chapter 5. I illustrate social dynamics using situations observed in the studios and balls, rendering theory related to notions of performativity (improvisation in a collaborative mood), and elements of critical pedagogy applied to the pedagogy of dance.

I present new possibilities of engagement focusing on the core of the relationship between the two performers. Hence, I thread argumentation over this chapter (hegemonic gender representations, and critical embrative pedagogy as a tool of transformation) and I point directions to change the present gender politics in Tango.

During fieldwork, associations between *form* and *content* in the field of pedagogy supported the construction of the lines of approach to express and embrace pluralities and heterogeneities for social purposes. We, participants and I, challenged the fixity of binaries during fieldwork, yet, hierarchy was playing a role. Now, I question *how can we discuss paradigms in Tango embedded within concepts of improvisation and collaboration as primary methods of teaching-learning-performing in order to challenge power dynamics the roles of leader and follower play?*

Towards New Aesthetics of Tango

During fieldwork, one of the participants asked: *is it possible to have an egalitarian collaboration in a genre of dance which is a binary itself?* I argue: it is possible to create *conditions* embedded in corporeally fair negotiations in order to embrace and mediate *differences* between poles.

With that, I am proposing two things: the first **articulates the core of the relationship between dancers, insofar as the functionality of both dancers assumes an egalitarian value.** That is a big challenge since the functionality of dancers, traditionally, is organized under a hierarchical mode. In this sense, I am arguing for a change of the *culture of leading* in dance, embracing a collaborative dynamic. Collaboration, here, means embracing the will of both as a form of creation. That also means, leading and following must not be fixed, and both roles

must be actively creators. Both must take account of the responsibilities for the relation that should not be pre-established, but freshly shaped as it go.

Embracing collaboration may seem impossible to long-term practitioners, according to the traditional model. But when changes the traditional mode to a contemporary mode of understanding the body, it become, let say, less impossible. I invite the reader to create a new picture of Tango: both dancers are responsibly active in the creation, both are proposing steps, they are dancing with integrity in their bodies, both take care of the surroundings to avoid accidents, both have independence of moves, and both are listening to the body of the other within the music. There is a considerable expansion in the functionality of dancers, and by functionality I mean 'how' performers are engaging with each other.

The change is subtle and it may not be reflected in the form of the body's engagement at all. By that I mean, I am talking about the mood of giving-receiving, which in a collaborative mode, *both dancers give and receive*, rather than the leader gives and the follower receives. This last dynamic is related to obsolete concepts of masculinities and femininities. Participant '1' gave an outstanding reflection on the roles of the leader and the follower, which are linked to forms of predominance:

we are still moving between poles ... the challenge is, I don't know if that would work, maybe we need more options, maybe it's not just about following and leading but about resisting and maybe that would mean 'you move in a different way' or maybe it's about instead of leading enticing, there are other ways to think about and negotiate movement I guess. I feel like if you keep the poles, those particular poles, you still, at best, saying 'it's fine following, you can take power later, but that doesn't change the binary itself.

This reflection suggests that the change goes beyond the simplest interchange of hierarchical roles. Again, it is necessary to reformulate the core of the relation. The basis of engagement must fully embrace concepts of *collaboration*. There are many ways to engage in the concept, in fact, **the very characteristic of collaboration as a concept suggests that every relationship should, hypothetically, be entirely negotiated.**

For instance, I could argue that collaboration requires two major states of the body: the listening mode, and the presence mode. One might think now that those states are already a conditional part of the performance. Yes, and they are operating simultaneously, but with different intentions. The leader listens to the music; the follower, mostly, listens to the body movement of the leader. The leader is present in its internal process of creation, making sure that accidents will not happen in the ball; the follower is present in the response to the

commands of the leader. The same states of listening and presence are operating with completely different intentions, barely they meeting genuinely, given the specificity of the functionality of each dancer.

In this case, it could be said that the leader and the follower would engage in the same states of the body, but the functionality of traditional roles establishes the engagement with states in very different places; and, to make it worse, they are embedded in hierarchy. So, dancers are not engaging in a relationship with one another, but they are engaging with the roles they must play using the other as an agent, or a trigger, for action.

In terms of improvisation, dancers train to know exactly what to do, and they seek out comfortable zones while dancing. Derrida (2002) emphasizes the vicious aspects that language has intrinsic to its functionality (insofar as it carries culturally constructed signifiers), predetermining signified ideas. Yet, improvisation, according to Derrida, is not easy and is the most difficult thing to do:

One ventriloquizes, or leaves another to speak in one's place: the schemes and languages that are already there. ...there are already a great number of prescriptions that are prescribed in our memory and culture. All the names are already preprogrammed. It is already the names that inhibit our ability to ever really improvise. One is obliged more or less to reproduce the stereotypical discourse, and so, I believe in the improvisation, and I fight for improvisation, but always with the belief that it is impossible. (Derrida in DICK and KOFMAN, 2002)

As Derrida (2002) said, the most difficult part of improvising is the fact that we have a restrictive vocabulary to communicate, and we often recur to the same schemes. We should fight, as Derrida, for improvisation, seeking for modes of relation in which embodiment accounts for pluralities of beings, possibly avoiding pre-established schemes. When dancers engage in the pre-established steps or sequences, that is not improvisation, but the reproduction of schemes. Dancers engage in very predictable moves, *thinking* that they are improvising.

Understanding the relationship between the two bodies as a unique and unfinished dialogue, allows spaces for collaboration and improvisation through a vast camp of study and exploration. Unravelling the present fixity of *gender* and *dance* roles would demand the development of guidelines for technique from the part of the actual practitioners and instructors. The change must have a starting point, amplifying the modes of performance.

The second thing I am proposing here with my arguments is about, let say, the 'kind' of people that are welcome to social dynamics. I am talking about *differences* in a social-political level.

The raw reality is: according to the Johannesburg City website, the demographics of the city are: Black Africans account for seventy three percent (73%) of the population, followed by Whites at sixteen percent (16%), Coloureds at six percent (6%) and Asians at four percent (4%)⁵⁹. In spite of the fact that Tango has a huge influence of African rhythms and moves, as was explored in chapter 2, there are very few black-male representatives attending the *Milongas*; there are very few black-female representatives as well. In terms of sexual orientation, there are no gays, lesbians, transgender, cross-gender, bisexuals apparently representing their gender orientation. There is no Queer Tango community in Johannesburg. What could possibly be happening?

The Tango community in Johannesburg is very unified and small, and very settled in terms of social dynamics. It may be difficult to see the need to refresh relational dynamics, from the perspective of the community members. Perhaps, considering the reality presented above, one might start to engage critically with current politics of body and gender.

The struggle to maintain a quorum to attend the weekly Tango activities is a good cue to question the politics in the classrooms and balls. Why are there so few people (approximately 50 practitioners attending *Milongas* weekly) practicing Tango in a metropolitan area of over four million inhabitants (4.000.000)? Meanwhile, Tango has been highly popular, reinventing performances and embracing differences (socially and artistically) in other parts of the world such as Latin America, North America, Europe, China, Australia and Japan.

Tango assumes the politics of whatever place it is performed. Tango is just a language of expression. The conjunction of signs explored in chapter 3, definitely spills out in the systems of meanings of covert dynamics represented by teachers and practitioners in each place. The local Tango community members complain that they '*need new blood*', they want to attract new practitioners, mostly young people. From inside-out, some members feel that there is need to renovate dynamics.

To complete my fieldwork, I embraced pedagogical approaches that immediately attracted new people. None of the participants were Tango dancers, but all of them were

⁵⁹ http://www.joburg.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=404&Itemid=52

Tango admirers. I have been speaking with scholars about my research and many of them demonstrate earnest enthusiasm with the approach. Most of them would like to experience classes where the combination of codified steps meets freedom of expression and diversity.

In this sense, there are a few restrictive points related to the sphere of the pedagogy. Tango, which mostly is structured as group classes, has an unstable attendance from learners. The gender structure is restrictive. Most Tango classes are taught through sequences of steps, embracing directives to improvisations, but only from the perspective of the sequences' structure. In other words, there is no exploration of the individual's movements within the music. Generally, people learn one or two steps and they play around the linkage between them. Although there is some exchange of partners, there is no playful mood. Tango classes are serious and traditional.

Generally, the more advanced learners help the beginners, which generates hierarchies between learners. In other words, advanced learners have the power to intervene in the learning process of beginners, which can be nice, if the other way around also happen. Beginners, though, are seen as having nothing to give, just to receive, as if they needed help, as if their bodies were inexpressively innocent and devoid of movement information.

In the sphere of critical pedagogy, learners, no matter how much of a beginners they are, have a key role in the group dynamics: they have a neutral position, and they have lots to offer within that perspective. This was actually a dynamic strongly explored in the fieldwork and beginners gave valuable evidence of it. The knowledge must be worked from inside-out, framing collaborative dynamics of the outset. The dynamic of advanced learners 'helping' beginners, without the other way around, reinforces hierarchies. Every 'one way' pathway, in relationships, frames hierarchy, which allows space for other unequal dynamics. Who is better than who? And who decides who is better than who? Generally, this decision comes from the leader, which in the classroom is the teacher. So, Tango classes are embedded in hierarchies.

I suggest that tango instructors manage differences in a more egalitarian mode, including beginners as potentially creators and thinkers of movement. Differences then meet halfway, and all the learners are acknowledged as a relevant part of the social dynamic. From the perspective of critical pedagogy and liberation, there are no, really, better or worse learners, there are people constructing something together.

In the field of education, Henry Giroux (1992) writes about crossing the borders of differences. He asserts that educators should see culture as a potent element of connection rather than an element of discrepancy:

It is important for critical educators to take up culture as a vital source for developing the politics of identity, community and pedagogy. In this perspective culture is not seen as monolithic or unchanging, but as a site of multiple and heterogeneous borders where different histories, languages, experiences, and voices intermingle amidst diverse relations of power and privilege (GIROUX, 1992 pg.255).

Within this approach, education is to express social content, and such **content must be continuously revised and reinvented to acknowledge the social and historical transformations of societies**, as well as the will and needs of minorities.

In embracing differences, practitioners and instructors, *ideally*, would engage in methods of knowledge transmission tackling gender binaries and hierarchies. For instance, by embracing the desire of new learners, the practice of choosing the gender of their instructors and partners should be priority, as well as breaking down prejudices from the part of instructors of same-sex relation among learners. Instructors should teach people to *dance*, not to play gender roles; this is a big confusion in the codes of Tango. The chances of the accomplishment of new dynamics would increase dramatically, as it was possible to grasp during fieldwork.

Transformation, in the classroom, might be slowly incorporated by instructors, who should seek for constant betterment of their methodological approach. I encourage instructors to see themselves as vehicles of knowledge always engaging critically with their own practices. Consequently, learners would get in touch with new contents and methods. As a result, people would feel more welcome and less intimidated by the rigid configurations.

It may be difficult to visualize the application of these concepts to dance teachers, who need to frame structured systems of movement in order to teach, according to the traditional structure. But if one changes the viewpoint of the relation to an open mode of *communication*, new methodological organizations will be constructed. The aim of this research is to evoke modes of the pedagogy of liberation. The liberation of relations would take place in the balls, transforming the environment of couples' dances and Tango, potentially, in an attractive place of performances of freedom. The challenge of transformation becomes an opportunity to rethink values expressed by societies.

Propositions that Could Possibly Inspire New Forms of Engagement

In Brazil, for instance, in the genre of dance called *farró*, which is predominately taught in socials (practitioners learn as they go), dancers perform fluidly different roles. The Brazilian *farró*, allows dancers to engage with three and sometimes with four people, exchanging partners and roles while they are dancing.

Often couples of women, no matter their sexual orientation, are skilfully dancing on the dance floor. Also it is common to see three people performing: two men and a woman, or, two women and a man; or four people: generally two couples which interchange roles and gender. It is also very possible to find couples exchanging roles continuously, to the point that the dynamic leading-following means ‘moving together’.

The primary aim of *farró* is to communicate, to interact with people. There are regions, though, in which the patriarchal culture is still strongly operating, this style is also embedded with binaries. Nonetheless, in urban centres, such São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Curitiba, the couples’ dances are playing a diverse range of performances. *Farró*, presently is huge in Paris, as much as Tango is in Berlin.

The classrooms are mostly framed as group classes with both-sex instructors, and people often interchange roles. In the balls, young couples tend to be more open to collaboration creating brilliant performances in *farró*, inspiring other dancers to create modes of engagement. People engage fluidly in whatever role they feel like, without stigmatizations.

The *Tangible Group*⁶⁰, based in Paris (FR), developed a unique methodology to combine Tango and notions of contact-improvisation⁶¹. They organize weekly meetings, where people gather to explore ways of communicating and expressing using their methods as guideline on the dance floor. They have a structured system, with symbols and signs, in which dancers engage to communicate states, or moods, of their bodies: ‘inspiring’, ‘being inspired’, or ‘I don’t know’. These three states are not fixed, they change according to the dancers’ mood, and dancers negotiate movements within the technique of Tango and contact-improvisation. The group is more interested in ways of expressing and connecting than the technique itself.

⁶⁰ Contact: tangible.free.fr and association-tangible.wix.com

⁶¹ Contact-improvisation is a method of contemporary dance it was first presented as a series of performances conceived and directed by American choreographer Steve Paxton in June 1972 at the John Weber Gallery in New York City (<http://www.contactimprovisation.co.uk/history.html>)

In 2013, *Tangible* produced an experimental video-dance, *Le Balscore*, and I was invited together with a group of 50 other dancers to participate in a recorded session. The idea was to engage with their experimental technique and live music. The experience, intense and fertile, lasted over three hours, and probably changed completely my way of seeing Tango. More information about the group on the website:

<http://www.contactquarterly.com/contact-improvisation/newsletter/view/the-balscore#>

Limitations of this Tango study

This section aims to meet the task of framing the limitations of the research. Firstly, challenging hegemonic representations in a kind of artistic embodiment that was constituted so long ago, with so many particularities, is difficult.

Tango, is a genre of dance that combines many cultural, historical and social elements, briefly explored in chapter 2. The study of each of these aspects would be a subject for a much broader and extended research project. This research, though, was limited to question traditional practices in Johannesburg, aiming at the development of the pedagogy of dance in order to challenge power representations and embrace diversity in the practice, classrooms and balls. The gender representations that this research questioned, may possibly inspire the local Tango community, or others dance communities, practitioners and researchers.

I prioritize theoretical engagement with notions of the performative body, gender and critical pedagogy in order to deal with the hegemonic elements holding the dancers' relationship in the Johannesburg context. Other perspectives may be suggested or incorporated in further research, which may complement analysis in other fields of study that may be related to Tango in South Africa.

The intricacies of the aesthetic element of Tango, which in itself is a vast terrain of exploration, here was tangibly accessed in order to illustrate and demonstrate notions of qualities of movement and the relationship among dancers.

The scope of the research is contained. Firstly, I framed the analysis of the PAR project, having the two performers' relationship as an object of reflections about their experience in the representation of gender roles. This process brought about the will to interview long-term practitioners, which revealed patriarchal values.

Then, I framed the practical research among a group of 9 participants, self-selected, in which beginners and non-experienced participants gave their voices in order to investigate the de-gendered pedagogic model. This group, despite the fact that they were not dancers, gave substantial evidence to reflect on the modes of engagement and the social dynamics.

Lastly, I attempted to frame a social profile of the Tango community in Johannesburg, in order to look at its gender politics. However, the Tango community is a small group of people, and the study reflects my own perceptions during the last three years of engagement. I also engaged with dynamics of dance studios and other genres of dance to question power. Social and political representations of specific class, race, and gender in the Tango community, or dance studios, were made based on observations, and they illustrate critiques of pedagogies and social dynamics.

CONCLUSIONS: THE QUESTION IS GENDERED OR DE-GENDERED?

This research aimed to rethink practices in which couples' dances and Tango are embedded in Johannesburg. I was part of the local Tango community during this research, therefore, I was able to closely observe and identify some social dynamics worth questioning, from inside-out. More than questioning social dynamics in Johannesburg, I am questioning the mode of performance that the traditional Tango proposes, in the core of the relationship among dancers. In this sense, the scope of the questions I posed throughout the argumentation may be projected to other binary dances. I am interested in how people appropriate and reinvent the Tango performance in order to express themselves and communicate. I framed the social practices in the balls in order to illustrate points of argumentation.

Tango is passionate, dynamic, intense, profound and sexy. The genre of dance offers so many artistic dimensions and so many forms of human communication. Its aesthesis is mysterious and emotional.

From a social perspective, Tango is an excellent tool to create dialogue, embracing culture, intuitiveness, rhythm, communication, music, movement, non-verbal language, negotiations, listening, power, collaboration, giving, receiving, sharing space, and improvisation. All those levels of engagement were briefly or deeply experienced somehow in this research. In spite of all these qualities, dance can represent forms of inequality and oppression, precisely because of hushed negotiations. According to contemporary theories of body and performance, traditional Tango can be seen as a very controlling and exclusivist platform.

The relevance of the research, then, meets the forms of frustration that people might have had when trying to dance and had to engage with layers of non-egalitarian covert values. I tried to contemplate the many questions learners and practitioners raised during my experience in South Africa.

The codified nature of the steps of Tango does not, in itself, characterize hegemony. In fact, it constitutes beauty and plasticity. Changing the codes of steps would essentially change the aesthetics of the dance. I remain supportive of its plasticity in 'duo' thinking more about body dialogues in a communicative pathway, rather than performances of domination.

The challenge, according to the definition of form given on chapter 1 (Key terminology), is not about changing the form of Tango. The challenge lives in deconstructing

the content of the relation, or, in the unavailability of space to breaking down hierarchies, dominance and subordination. The challenge **is about the possibility to embrace new forms of relations, not enclosed in the command or the will of one.**

During this research, many aspects of the performance of couples' dances were challenged. The lived experience as a powerful mode of engagement in states of investigation, opened up processes of self-reflection, and group reflection within participants. The body, which has its own intelligence, was the catalyser of meaningful experiences, associated to theories of gender and performance.

During PAR, the roles I was playing evoked deep reflections about the profession of a movement facilitator. The environment of dance studios that I have been involved for the past years have specific methodologies of teaching. The inadequacy of the training for the dance instructors, at the best, professional dancers, is that it lacks knowledge of cognitive processes, physicality and the politics of gender. The ones who perceive a career are able to create multiple ways to promote wellness and, hopefully, this research will inspire instructors to expand knowledge about critical pedagogies and theories of the body.

In spite of the gaps in the instructors' formation, and the rigid conservative mode that dance may be embedded with at times, dancing is an important pathway of empowerment, self-expression, self-knowledge, intricate communication, practice of the imagination, reinvention of the self and the world.

So, the question, lastly is not only about gendered or de-gendered modes of engagement, but also about how one finds a kind and gentle processes of collaborations in Tango in a diverse and egalitarian way. The important aspect to be acknowledged is **performances of hegemony are *passé*.**

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Appendix

Appendix 1 (Poster to invite participants to the research)

research purposes

contact: amcbailarina@gmail.com

FREE

DE-GENDERED
ballroom - latin
argentinian tango

**dance lessons in Nov/Dec
no previous experience required**

Limited number of participants

Appendix 2 (Virtual letter welcoming the group, instructions for classes and style of dancing election)

Dear participants,

I am writing to enhance the will to participate of the series of DE-GENDERED dance lessons, starting next week, Tuesday, at 5pm at University Corner building. I still have to confirm the room, but definitely it will be at UC.

Please, find below some instructions to your own benefit:

- Bring very comfortable clothes since you will engage in a movement workshop;
- We most likely will dance on barefoot or socks, so bring something that your feet can feel also comfortable;
- Come prepared to move: maybe you want to eat before, or you don't want to eat;
- Bring some water as we won't have break
- Try to be there 10 minutes earlier so you can have some time to be present with mind and spirit;

The research will engage with different methodologies, permeated by dance, so we will have a lot of fun!

You can invite friends still, but the group will be closed after the first session, so they must be with you from the beginning.

Ultimately, to have a good utilization of time, I would like to anticipate a democratic decision relating to STYLE of dance. So please, reply to all saying which one of the following rhythms would you like to learn:

ARGENTINIAN TANGO SALSA MAMBO RUMBA
FOXTROT WALTZ BOOGIE

As our time will be short, we will prioritize one or two most voted rhythms, so you can have a good amount of learning.

I hope to see you soon!

Wellness,

Adriana Cunha

Appendix 3 (Letter of consent to participants)



Drama for Life

Academic, Research and Community Engagement/Division
Applied Drama, Drama Therapy and Drama in Education
Wits School of Arts
UNIVERSITY OF WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG
Private Bag 3, Wits 2050
Director: Warren Nebe

Programme Managers: Academic – Tamara Gordon 011 717 4728; Cultural Leadership, Fundraising and Partnerships – Munyaradzi Chatikobo 011 717 4615; Recruitment, Student Welfare and Scholarships – Natasha Mazonde 011 717 4755; Projects, Finance and Administration – Caryn Green 011 717 4727; Research - Hazel Barnes and Warren Nebe 011 717 4729; Media and Communication – Gudrun Kramer 011 717 4733

Letter of consent

I, _____ , registered under the ID number _____, from _____, aged _____, capable of my own faculties, here confirm my participation in the research *“De-gendered” ballroom dance techniques: a performative architecture for diversity’*, which aims to theorize diversity using notions of embodied cognition and body mapping as methods, coordinate by Adriana Miranda da Cunha, and supervised by Warren Nebe.

As this is a Practice-based Research, I am aware that I will participate of six ballroom dance lessons and I was informed that voice recordings might be used, so, I give authorization for register, analyse, write or record in order to be part of the final research report, exclusively. Therefore I understand that my participation will be neither confidential nor anonymous due to the fact that we will be working in group, so I will be reserved in sharing very personal information or uncomfortable details. I am aware that I can withdraw at any moment.

I am aware of all the procedures that will take place in the research and I am participating by my own will.

Name:

Phone:

Email:

Appendix 4 (Information sheet)



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Information letter

Dear participant,

My name is Adriana Miranda da Cunha, I am a master's candidate from Drama for Life (DFL), Wits School of Arts (WSOA), Wits University and I am doing Practice-based Research (PAR) as a prerequisite for a completion of Master's degree. The research is titled "*De-gendered" ballroom dance techniques: a performative architecture for diversity*", and is focused in interdisciplinary studies, and supervised by the Professor Warren Nebe (073 671 2500). My aim is to offer ballroom lessons without gender determinations in the technique, and thus analyse the *lived experience* as a source of knowledge within the learning process.

I would like to invite you to participate in the research, by attending six (6) dance lessons of one hour and half (1,5 hour) class, most likely happening Tuesdays and Thursdays in November and December, from 5pm to 6:30pm, at University Corner Building, 17th floor, DFL. The meetings will be based on embodied cognition, body mapping, and somatic education methods as a form of engaging in research.

You will be request to learn ballroom techniques, and speak about the perceptions you have from the learning process, although you are not oblige to share any information that you are not comfortable to. You will participate of *group* meetings, where confidentiality and anonymity are desirable, so I will frame activities to develop trustful environment, but in this case I cannot assure that information won't leak out of the process. So, please, be mindful when sharing very personal details. Your real name will be anonymous in the final research report.

For the analysis procedure, I might need to voice record some of the sessions in order to collect data, but the material won't be publically used, and also will be kept in safe space.

Please, be aware that you can withdraw at any moment, as well as be in touch with me or my supervisor to clarify inquiries about the research.

In case of any uncomfortable feelings arise during the process, I ask you to approach me privately, so I can help you to find an appropriate counselling, most likely at CCDU.

Thank you for your participation,

Adriana Miranda da Cunha

078 974 9999

Appendix 5 (Balcore – *Tangible Group* video-dance)