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TANGO AND DANCE/MOVEMENT THERAPY: A PARTNER DANCE

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of the requirements for the degree of
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Sarah Lawrence College

Abstract

This thesis aims to explore the parallels that are present between Argentine social tango and dance/movement therapy. Through a personal embodied inquiry of both the dance form and the therapeutic modality, the author draws a comparison of therapeutic elements such as collective and shared experience, attunement and the therapeutic relationship, expansion of movement repertoire, presence in the here-and-now, and integration of the whole self. The analysis demonstrates that while each form is distinct, there is also commonality and a shared language that grounds them both at the center of movement as a form of therapy. Tango is a social dance in and of itself, and dance/movement therapy embodies many different forms of movements and dances, however, at the heart of both forms is the whole, vulnerable self centered around a collective and shared experience.

Keywords: dance/movement therapy, tango, attunement, integration, collective effervescence, connection

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Dedication



To tango and everyone involved in my journey for giving me so much body-wisdom and passion and for bringing me to dance/movement therapy.

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My relationship with dance and movement started when I was really young, and it has accompanied me throughout what seems like my whole life. It has helped shape who I am, and inform who I want to be. From dancing classical ballet, to modern dance, to physical theater, and finally leading up to Argentine social tango, I have been able to experience how my body has aided me in the process of my own growth, development, and transformation. This internal and almost intangible understanding of the power that dance and movement hold led me to study dance/movement therapy, and that intangible understanding quickly took shape and form, and became tangible knowledge. Dance/movement therapy is a way to use body movement, dance, and expression to heal, make sense of, and integrate what we experience in our mind, body, and spirit. Dance/movement therapy gave me a way to integrate the transformational and impactful experience that learning how to dance tango has given me. This therapeutic modality has given me the words and knowledge to understand that my body-felt experiences¹ while I danced tango were connected to my feelings, thoughts, and emotions. Although there has already been extensive research done with the use of tango in dance/movement therapy, particularly with the elderly population that suffer from Parkinson's disease and with adults that have self-reported depression (Hackney, 2007; 2014; Lakes, 2016; Pinniger, 2013), I aimed more to describe and understand my own experience with tango. Throughout this process, the parallels between the dance form and the psychotherapy appeared to be inextricably connected. At times, it seemed as if I were saying the same thing in two different languages. Both tango and

¹ Body-felt experiences will be defined in this paper as embodied and physical feelings that are immediate reactions to an interaction, a person, or a situation.

dance/movement therapy were dancing with each other, and I was with both of them, to make sense of my own experience. This thesis aims to explore those parallels and look at tango through the perspective and lens of an emerging dance/movement therapist.

History

My History with Tango

When I began to dance tango, as a freshman in college, I saw it as a dance like any other. I came from a background in classical and modern dance, and dancing seemed like the normal and easy thing for my body to do. I was really used to it. My arrival to tango came about after facing the painful reality that I could not continue to dance ballet due to physical and time constraints. It was a sad arrival, but I was giving myself to this new experience, partly in the hopes of it reviving my deep connection to movement and dancing. However, I did not expect to encounter what I did. I found a dance that challenged me and intrigued me, but that also enveloped me in its sorrowful embrace. The pain and sadness that I brought to tango had space to manifest itself through my body.

I also encountered a community of people who came to tango also searching for something. They were longing for tango to aid in the process of that search, and at times, found it the answer to what they were looking for. As I continued to dance and travel the world in search of more and more tango, I not only deepened my relationship with tango, but also began to see in others and recognize in myself some patterns. Many people who danced tango around the world shared a story of seeking connection, whether that be to themselves, to others, to a country, to music, to dance. A lot of tango

dancers and *aficionados/as*² were immigrants, travelers, or from another place than where they were living. At times, homesick or looking to escape, they were looking for change or a reminder of home. Tango music and dance was able to connect these dancers to some of their past experiences of loss, migration, sickness, and love (Davis, 2015). Tango became a worldwide community that embraced us, wherever we were in our journey.

My History with Dance/Movement Therapy

I decided to write a thesis about tango because this dance form is what began my journey to dance/movement therapy. My arrival to the field came as a result of me continuing to dance tango and discovering that I was receiving so much more from the dance than just pleasure for dancing or perfecting my craft as a dancer. I did not see myself as a dance teacher, and I also did not see myself as someone who would just dance for fun, even if at times I did just that. When I danced tango and moved my body, I always felt like there was so much more. The experience and feeling of dancing felt like it was an untapped experience, like maple syrup inside a tree waiting to be discovered. From having danced different dance forms for years, my understanding of what dance provided for me and for others began to expand and grow. I became curious about the power that movement had on my psychology. I recognized that whenever I felt sad, angry, or needed to reconnect with myself, I would go out to dance tango and would always feel better after. It did not eliminate my problems or emotions, but it did make me aware of what I did have within me that helped me feel better. Every time that I

² Aficionado/as are people that are very passionate about tango dancing, at times their lives revolve around dancing and traveling the world to dance tango.

experienced stagnation, when I would dance or move, I would experience my thoughts and feelings as also having space to move and become clearer. I have always felt the most clear after dancing tango and moving my body. I wondered if such a thing existed out there in the world where dance was seen and utilized as more than just an art form or an exercise. Indeed, such a thing existed already and it was called dance/movement therapy. I dove deep into tango, and found myself immersed in a world that opened up more and more worlds for me, and within me, and later discovered that dance/movement therapy aims to do just that. The dance form helped heal my emotional wounds over the years, the same way that dance/movement therapy sets out to. I was able to find my own ground in a song, a step, a pause, much like how dance/movement therapy uses music to ground others in rhythm. As I held on to others, in the form of an embrace, I learned how to be with myself, love myself, and celebrate myself and my power, the same way that dance/movement therapy sets out to do in a shared space. As I leaned in, to listen with my body, to another's body, in order to create something with them, I discovered what it can look like to share, to wait, to receive, and to give whole-heartedly. I later discovered that the same process occurs in the psychotherapeutic field where there is a deep embodied listening. As I listened to music that was written during times of despair, solitude, pain, and joy, I was able to forge intimacy and trust with the person I listened to this music with. As I listened to my body, I learned what was truly important. My passion for this dance led me to be a part of a worldwide community that shared this passion with me. I was instantly connected

to other bodies and souls, and it was as if I knew them all along, as if I knew myself all along.

History of Dance/Movement Therapy and Tango

The passion for tango that is present, effervescent, and collective, creates a vibrant energy that keeps dancers like me coming back for more each time. Durkheim (Carls, n.d.) refers to that vibrant energy as collective effervescence. This experience alludes to those moments in cultural life when the gathering of people that makes up a general public meets so as to play out a ritualistic custom. During these moments, the group of people meets and takes part in a similar activity, which serves to bind together and connect this gathering of people. At the point when people come into close contact with each other and when they are amassed in such a style, a specific "power and vibrance" is created and discharged, driving members to a high level of communal enthusiastic energy. This outside, extra-singular power, which is a central component of religion, moves the people into another, perfect domain, lifts them up outside of themselves, and causes them to feel as though they are in contact with a phenomenal vitality (Carls, n.d.). The word religion can be easily interchanged for tango or dance/movement therapy in this case. That sense of connection is not as easy to find, therefore it becomes precious when it is found. In tango, there is a look, a nod, a joining, a dance, a shared experience with your partner and the people in the room with you as you dance. In dance/movement therapy there is also a dance and shared experience between the therapist and the client. All the other things that get in the way in the "real world" seem unimportant in these spaces. Presence and collective, shared space is what

is ruling the experience. The music that is being listened to, the person that is being embraced, the steps that are being taken, the smell of someone's skin in close contact with someone else's, and being surrounded by dozens of others experiencing the same thing takes over, and the senses awaken the dancers to be fully present in what is being lived. That level of vulnerability, openness, and connection is required in tango, as it is in dance/movement therapy.

History of Dance/Movement Therapy

That passion and presence is not present only in tango but in all of the origins of dance and it is what Dance/Movement Therapy is founded on. The concept of collective effervescence is at its root and foundation. The ancestral origins of the need for dance and congregation gave way to Western psychology seeing how powerful dance and movement could be. Dance has been considered as healing and therapeutic for centuries in many different cultures throughout the world. Dance/movement therapists have a clear understanding of dance as a healing practice, due to the teachings of ancient rituals and practices, where dance and movement has always been considered central and sacred (Serlin, 2003). Between the 1940s and 50s, dance and movement began to formalize in the Western world as a practice to express feelings and emotions and integrate them with the body's motions (Chaiklin, 2016). At the time, many of the early dance/movement therapists were modern dancers who trained in dance and became teachers themselves. Many saw for themselves and for others how the process of taking a dance class or creating a dance had an effect on their psychology (Levy, 2005). The restorative and therapeutic relationship is characterized as an intuitive give and take in

which the dance/movement therapist offers their sentiments, thoughts, and body, by reacting through outward appearances and stances, which express that he or she is genuinely present in mind and body (Sandel et al., 1993).

History of Tango

Argentine social tango is a stylized dance form that is said to have its origins in the 1880s along the Río de la Plata in between Argentina and Uruguay in the cities of Buenos Aires and Montevideo, respectively (Savigliano, 1995). However, the development and evolution of tango is so far reaching and so broad and varied in its beginning that it is difficult to pinpoint just one starting point (Brophy, 2013; Davis 2015). Even more so, the origins of tango have become a worldwide controversy (Savigliano, 1995). Tango's beginnings were heavily influenced by black African roots, and is considered a result of the influence of *candombe*, *canyengue*, and even Afro-Cuban rhythms like Habanera (Thompson, 2005). Others believe in the narrative of tango being born in the brothels of Buenos Aires, as an exotic, sexualized dance; however, there is much more to it than that. Exoticizing and ostracizing a dance that had origins in the lower class of Argentinians and immigrants is considered one of the reasons for that being one of the mainstream narratives of tango (Savigliano, 1995). One of the most agreed upon theories of the origins of tango is that it is a product of the *barrios* or slums of Buenos Aires, where immigrants from Italy, Spain, and other countries in Europe lived (Davis, 2015; Savigliano, 1995; Taylor 1998; Thompson, 2005). They first arrived in the country at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century with promises of land, work, and prosperity, and

love, but soon found out the harsh reality (Denniston, 2015). Many were scraping by, and finding solace in the streets of the port city of Buenos Aires, with each other, and in the brothels. Tango music and the dance form did not have a particular “father” or originator, but rather was born out of the same narratives and lives of the lower class workers, immigrants, and the people living in these slums or *barrios*. It arose as a way to cope with the hard living situations, and as a way to find love, and a group of people to belong to, a way to find a community (Denniston, 2015).

As tango began to take more shape in Buenos Aires and Montevideo, by the 1920s, it began to spread to Paris, London, Japan, and New York City (Davis, 2015). It arrived by way of different circumstances in each place. It arrived in Japan, by way of an Argentine diplomat. It made its way to the salons in Paris when young students, sons of the higher class Argentinians, were sent to study at college. Before tango was being danced in other parts of the world, it was seen as a lowly form of expression in Buenos Aires by the higher classes and elites. However, this changed when it became recognized and praised by other countries. It not only changed how the world viewed tango, but in effect, it changed how Argentina saw it. This also had a huge effect on how the dance looked and was received in Argentina (Savigliano, 1995). Today, tango has become a “transnational” and globalized community. Some people even say that there is not a need to go to Buenos Aires to experience the magic or passion of tango (Davis, 2015), as tango dancers can travel almost anywhere in the world, and will most likely find a community to be a part of, even if just for one night.

The Form

Collective Experience

Another concept that dance/movement therapy utilizes to describe some of what occurs in a session is called the “UR experience” (Schoop, 2000). The *Ur* is described as a level of existence that is eternal; an energy beyond ourselves that surrounds us. It is a vital force that moves and connects us to ourselves and to what is outside of ourselves. It is the experience of time and space that has no limits and is incomprehensible, but it is always present nonetheless (Schoop, 2000). This can occur in a dance/movement therapy session when there is the use of rhythm and repetition, exploration of polarities through the body such as lightness and heaviness, or sadness and joy, and the connection to the fantasy or imagination of a client through movement. As a dance/movement therapist in training, it was remarkable to experience how a single movement that a member shares in a group can lead to the development of complex themes that are explored by the group as a whole. Those moments happen particularly in group sessions where there is a group of people that gather together, move together, and share the therapeutic process. Often sessions gather in the shape of a circle as a way to connect in an egalitarian way and have every member see each other and their movements. The sole act of coming together in a circle, joining in collective movement, or expressing an individual movement, has the potential to elicit more synchronized and rhythmical movements amongst the members and a collective, shared experience is created (Levy, 2005). This collective experience is one of the main foundational aspects

of dance/movement therapy that draws people collectively to most healing dance forms, and it is what drew me to tango.

The concept of the *Ur* experience also manifested itself in tango. I experienced it as I realized how the music in itself, and how the dance was danced had a specific tone of nostalgia, melancholy, sorrow, pain, longing. This made me wonder if these qualities of the dance were some of the reasons why it attracted a specific type of person to the dance. I felt a connection to something bigger. As I immersed myself in the tango world and community, I found myself being a part of something bigger than just me and my body. I became a part of a practice that is part of the dominant culture of a whole country, that spans across the world and is the bloodline of a people. Tango, in many ways, is an effort to share stories and keep memories, emotions, and ways of living alive. More and more it felt like I was part of that history, it felt right.

The Partner Relationship

Tango's biggest challenge is what it requires for the dance to flourish. I quickly learned that classes were very different than a ballet or modern dance class. Yes, I was learning sequences, etiquette, and steps, but there was not a recipe for how to do things. I was used to having the code and knowledge and then executing it. The phrase "It takes two to tango" is a cliché, but it is also true. I did not understand the true meaning of this phrase until I began to learn the dance. I learned to dance tango as a follower, but I did not grasp what it meant to be a follower at the time. The main thing I discovered was that even though I knew how to execute the steps, I could not independently execute them until I was led to do the steps by the leader. My following required a certain

amount of relinquishing control. I later on discovered that it was not a complete renouncing of my control, but a paradigm shift of what control actually meant in the dance. Thus began my partnership with this dance form. At first, I was resistant to the idea of listening and following. I would gauge what the leader was trying to do, and then would do it before they could lead it. I had first fallen in love with how tango looked, but I had yet to discover how tango felt. After many, many hours of practicing, dancing with many different leaders, and hearing about this idea of letting go of control, it finally clicked. My body began to understand how to wait for the leader's mark. Once I discovered how to do this, I completely relinquished control and I became a strict follower. My movements were exactly what the leader marked, nothing more, nothing less. This was great for a while, and then a teacher asked me, "where are you?" This question led me on a path of rediscovering who I was in this tango equation with another human being. It became clear that learning this dance was not going to be a straightforward or short-lived process. I knew all the steps, I knew how to follow, but I was still discovering what it meant to be fully present and active in my following. Over time, I discovered that I could still be me, and show myself in this nonverbal conversation. The distinction became clear between doing whatever I wanted because I knew how to, and following actively while still giving something back for my leader to respond to. I had to learn to be kind to myself and my body for not knowing right away how to follow a lead, or how to take a certain step. I learned what it means to truly wait, pause, and listen, and then respond while staying present through it all.

In dance/movement therapy, there is a conversation that often takes place between the therapist and client. There is an inherent back and forth in communication. In dance/movement therapy it is often referred to as attunement and mirroring. Attunement can be best described as the tuning in, matching, and synchronization of the muscle tension shifts of another person (Amighi et al., 2018). It can be done in different ways, like matching someone else's tone or volume of voice. Another way could be if someone has their hands clenched in a fist, the therapist can scrunch up and tighten their face to match the quality of the tension in the person's hands. Attunement can also be done through touch, where a therapist can feel and match the client's pressure as they touch palm to palm (Loman & Sossin, 2016). This shows how attunement can happen in an intermodal way, where the tone of voice and vocal rhythm can match someone's movement, or someone's facial expression can be matched by a movement (Amighi et al., 2018). This technique is particularly utilized as a way to establish connection and rapport between the therapist and the client. When there is a kinesthetic identification in which the client can see themselves or parts of themselves in the therapist, there is usually a better response to treatment, or trust can be established more easily (Loman & Sossin, 2016). As I feel my own body and someone else's body, I learn to adapt my own muscle tension, rhythm, and physical sensations to that of my partner. In a reciprocal manner, my partner attunes to me and my movements as well. This process was happening all the time and I never had the words to describe what it meant. It felt as if this person knew me so well, and as if we were connected by a thin string that shot out straight out of our hearts and chest space. Being

physically connected by an embrace hold, as we move through space, and, in the case of a follower with their eyes closed, the way in which communication and creation took place was through the synchronization of our own rhythms and movements. Tuning in to the subtleties of muscle tension shifts, weight changes, and preparation of movements facilitated and made the communication pathway clear.

Structure

Argentine social tango's form as it refers to the dance and how it is danced, has many different styles and variations to the technique; however, there is a form and a structure that remains constant throughout each style. One key element is the fact that tango is an improvised form that is danced socially, and does not have a choreographed sequence or set of steps. Within the dance couple, there is a leader and a follower, and traditionally the leader marks the steps that are going to be danced; however, it typically unfolds more like a conversation (Olszewski, 2008). This conversation unfolds in a non-verbal manner, and the conversation begins even before the couple gets together. In the socials where tango *aficionados/as* go to dance, called *milongas*³, eyes are peeled out for other eyes. The reason for this is the *cabeceo* or head nod. It is the way that dancers ask each other to dance. It is started by a *mirada* or eye contact from the leader to the follower at a fair distance apart. If the follower would like to dance with this leader, they would return the look and accept to dance with a head nod (Olszewski, 2008). Once this is established, the leader will usually go to the follower and they will join the dance floor for the next three to four songs for what is called a *tanda* or set of

³ Milongas are the more formal tango dance where tanguero/as congregate to dance this social dance. It is often at a dance studio, restaurant, bar, or community center. There is usually a DJ that is creating the playlist live of what is listened to and danced to.

songs belonging to the same orchestra, from the same era. The whole exchange is non-verbal and is put in place for a couple of reasons, but primarily to keep it an equal exchange and agreement, where either party can choose to accept the dance or not (Denniston, 2015). It also diminishes the effects of rejection, since neither dancer would have to verbally ask someone to dance, or verbally have to deny a dance, or feel obligated to accept a dance they truly do not want to accept. Once together, the couple connects into an *abrazo* or embrace. *Abrazo* translates directly from Spanish as “hug”. The embrace is considered one of the most important components to the experience of dancing tango. Two people wrap their arms around each other in an embrace that looks partly like a hug, and partly like a dance hold. They dance cheek-to-cheek (Davis, 2015), and the follower mostly dances with their eyes closed, since they are walking backwards most of the time. The leader becomes the guide of where the dance will go, and the follower trusts the leader to guide them. Their dancing follows a *ronda* or big circle on the dance floor that moves counterclockwise (Thompson, 2005). Once the *tanda* or set is over, the couple can decide to continue dancing together or, if either the follower or the leader say “thank you”, it signals that they are done dancing with this person (Olszewski, 2008). In terms of what is actually danced, is generally up to the leader and follower, and is also dictated by the music. There is not a script and there is not a choreography. Whatever will be danced is born the moment that the couple embraces and responds to the music (Davis, 2015).

Similarly, dance/movement therapy is a form that has many different styles and techniques, however, there is also a structure and form that is almost always present in

some way or another. It is a therapeutic modality that aims to express and process emotions that may be hard to express verbally, through the body, utilizing movement and dance in a structured, semi-structured, or open-ended manner (Krabill, 2015). It can happen in both individual and group settings. Like in tango, in dance/movement therapy there is not a set of rules to follow and sessions can look many different ways. The arc of a dance/movement therapy session usually has a warm-up phase, a theme development, and a closure (Levy, 2005). Music is often used, but is not necessary. The warm-up phase tends to do just that, warm up the body and the mind to be present and to share space with others. There is an infinite amount of possibilities of how to begin a group, and how a group or individual session is structured depends on the therapist and on the clients participating. It also depends on the feeling and tone of the day and of the group, as well the needs that the clients, or setting might require that specific day. Context, capabilities, and treatment goals are taken into account when structuring a dance/movement therapy session. An example of a warm-up is offering a word or phrase that describes how you are feeling and showing a movement that represents how you are feeling. Another possible warm-up is creating a circle in which each person offers a movement for the group to collectively warm-up to, as a way to involve everyone participating and foster agency and ownership of their own therapeutic space. Later in the session, there is a theme development phase and it usually takes up the bulk of the session. It is where treatment goals for the session are addressed, or it can also be where a movement that the therapist picked up from the warm-up can be developed further and explored with the group or individual. For example, if a client has as a treatment

goal to learn how to express his frustrations in a healthier way, and during the warm-up he began to shake his hands very strongly and erratically, the therapist might pick up on that movement and ask the client about it. The therapist might ask the client to exaggerate the movement and then minimize it, as a way to explore what it looks like to control a big movement or feeling, and being intentional about how to deliver it. It is in this phase where the therapist is choreographing in the moment to meet the client's therapeutic needs as they arise. As an emerging dance/movement therapist in training, the theme development phase of a session was also one of the hardest ones to grasp. Similar to tango, over time, I realized that knowing all the techniques and interventions was not the important part, and learning how to listen and be present in the here-and-now came first. Finding the stillness to truly observe the people in front of me, and responding genuinely with what I thought would be the best intervention at the moment was the most important part of the development. Lastly, there is a closure to every group or individual session. It is where everything explored can be wrapped up and integrated either verbally or non-verbally. The closure is a space where the clients can prepare themselves to leave the session and return to their daily lives. It is also where deepening and integrating the content and experience of the session takes place. A verbal integration of what was explored in the session can usually lead to new awareness and insights of how some movements might have brought up a feeling or a thought, or even something unconscious for the client. The same can happen in a non-verbal manner, where a client may have been moving erratically at the beginning and have mentioned feeling anxious; and towards the end, after going through the

therapeutic process of being seen, reflected, and encouraged, they demonstrate a slower pace that appears more calm and in control. Like in tango, a dance/movement therapy session is never the same as another because it unfolds like a conversation. A client may communicate something with their body, and the therapist responds to it, either verbally or through movement, and the client responds or does not respond, and the therapist continues the conversation one way or another, either expanding it, or changing the topic of body movement conversation. Very much so paralleling my experience of learning how to dance tango, I had to learn how to be kind with myself as a therapist when I did not know right away how to respond to something that was brought by a client. The biggest lesson in understanding how to fit within the loose structure and form of a dance/movement therapy session was to honor who I was and show up genuinely and truthfully. Once I was able to be my own version of a dance/movement therapist, the theory and practice had more space to manifest itself freely.

Dance/Movement Therapy aims to integrate meaning with bodily sensations created by movement. In this practice, the therapeutic relationship between a dance therapist and the client evolves as a dialogue that utilizes verbal and non-verbal expression. Both the client and the therapist collaborate in the co-creation of a trusting and safe environment where the therapist can see and interact with some buried aspects of the client's self, and as a result facilitate a process of awareness that can enhance the communication between the therapist, the client, and the client with themselves (Fischman, 2016). Within dance/movement therapy, movement becomes the central

language, and the therapist enters a collaboration with the client to assess and interpret the messages that come forth through observing their movement. With this information, the therapist can develop or design a myriad of interventions that focus on addressing the needs of the client (Gleissner, 2017).

Passion for the embodied experience of tango is one of the main elements that keep *tangueros/as*⁴ and *aficionados/as* returning for more in an almost ravenous way. The dance form in and of itself, particularly the embrace and the connection with someone else, is one of the ways in which that passion manifests itself and keeps dancers coming back in search of more (Davis, 2015). The effects of hugging someone, while moving rhythmically to music, on a dance floor full of people doing the same thing, has proven to be very invigorating and at times, even addictive. A survey of tango dancers concluded that tango can lead to a dependence and behavioral addiction (Targhetta, 2013). Some of the effects recorded by tango dancers were craving, feelings of tension, pleasure and relief when dancing, and physical withdrawal symptoms when there was an absence of tango dancing. However, this study concluded that the positive effects of dancing were significantly higher than the negative effects (Targhetta, 2013). For some, even the aspect of having the eyes closed can be experienced as a meditative experience that enhances the awareness to the here and now, and shifts the focus to the present. There is a level of intimacy that is created nonverbally through the exchange (Davis, 2015).

⁴ Tango dancers are often referred to as *tangueros/as* .

Transformation

Presence in the Here and Now

When I danced tango, I listened to the music, to my body and to someone else's body, focused on what was exactly in front of me in order to move forward and be able to achieve more than before. In dance/movement therapy, this phenomenon or state of awareness is often referred to as the *here-and-now*. Focusing on the *here-and-now* lends itself to a more powerful and effective therapeutic process (Yalom, 2015). The experience is biphasic, consisting of the lived experience of the here-and-now and followed by the process of illumination. When I learned and danced tango, I quickly became aware of the importance of being in the here-and-now in order to be more in tune with my tango partner. As a consequence, my mood improved, I was able to dance better, use my body in more effective ways, and also discover all the different ways in which my body could move. Possibilities were endless if I was truly present, and this also translated to my life. However, the illumination process of what was going on in my body and how it was affecting my mind and spirit were not present. The integration of my experience was made possible with the awareness of dance/movement therapy and its therapeutic process.

This experience is one that dance/movement therapists are paying attention to, in terms of what is happening in the moment with their client. Because this therapeutic element is about being in the present moment, at times it can feel elusive to describe how the here-and-now manifests itself in an already fluid dance/movement therapy session; however, it is unsurprisingly an embodied experience. Some ways in which

therapists bring their presence to the here-and-now in a session are by paying close attention and bringing greater awareness to the environment, noticing subtle shifts and changes in energy, tone, and movements, being mindful of their own bodily sensations, and trusting the therapeutic process enough to allow for things to evolve (Sinki, 2015). As I learned this craft through practice, it became clear that the best sessions I was able to facilitate were the ones in which I was fully present, in mind and body, and was able to commit fully to listening to what the clients were saying verbally and non-verbally. When I was able to trust that whatever was needed for the session was already present in the room, and when I gave voice and was curious of my own bodily sensations, it usually led to deeper connections with the clients, and they were able to trust that I could hold the space for them to explore their own feelings and sensations.

Letting Go

As I learned to dance, I needed to relinquish control and let go in order to be able to follow better, in order to learn how to really dance. This process of letting go and giving up control as I had known it was not easy and I resisted it. That resistance was one of letting go of the self that I believed I was. Letting go was about learning the dance form, but at the same time it was a process of understanding who I was as a person. As we let go of the layers and the stories that we hold on to, some questions of identity arise. Who am I? Can this version of myself still be me? In dance/movement therapy this process happens primarily through the body, as it did for me in tango.

As I embarked in my studies with dance/movement therapy, it became clear how that years long experience of learning how to dance tango paralleled the therapeutic

process that takes place in dance/movement therapy, and also how it paralleled my experience of learning the craft as a dance/movement therapist. When I first was learning what dance/movement therapy was and how it was done, any answer I would get would feel elusive. There is no *yes or no*, and there is no *right or wrong*. There is also not a playbook of what dance/movement therapy looks like. I had to truly let go of having all the answers ahead of time.

In tango, at least for the follower, and to some extent also for the leader, there is not a pre-scripted formula of what is about to happen in the dance. When a follower agrees to a dance, they are agreeing to enter an unknown situation, in which there is little control over what will happen next. This experience is also very present, if not primary, in the therapeutic experience where there is a lot of processing of how to manage the uncertainty that life presents constantly. Working through this uncertainty through the body, like in tango, can open pathways to being more at ease or flexible to the uncertainty and the unknown that is ever present in daily life.

Expansion of Movement Repertoire

As I entered a new dance form and a new community, I also entered a vulnerable and at times, uncomfortable space. Learning new ways in which to move my own body and accessing new movements that were not there before, was similar to the experience that happens in a dance/movement therapy session or process in which therapists aim to support the expansion of the clients' movement repertoire. As I discovered this new dance, I also discovered what I was capable of, and who I could be. Doing something new, uncomfortable, and vulnerable gave me access to parts of myself that were more

unconscious. It awoke parts of me that seemed lost or asleep. The sadness and sense of loss with which I arrived into tango after having to stop dancing classical ballet, found a home and a place to manifest itself through this new dance form. Learning this dance, and as a result of it expanding my movement repertoire, led me to tap into my own inner resources and capabilities of coping with this loss (Lee et al., 2018). This brought forth a sense of recovery of this loss, and instilled a sense of hope. I was uncovering a new me, or rather the original me, that did not depend on a dance form to be who I am, but instead was solidified by my own dancing. Through tango, and, consequently, through the body, there was a reworking of my own world, and I was opened up to new paradigms.

The expansion of a client's movement repertoire can sometimes be one of the main goals for dance/movement therapists to work on. It can also happen in clinical settings like hospitals, nursing homes, schools, or private practice. For example, if a client comes into a session with a narrow range of movement, where they keep their limbs close to their torso, maintaining themselves upright, with appearing tension in their spine, a therapist might wonder about the client's access to more horizontal movements that take up more space. Another possible way to expand this client's repertoire might be to integrate movements that require some yielding or extending, like using a ball either to sit on or throw around the room, respectively. Some considerations the therapist should have when having expansion of a client's movement repertoire as a goal is why the client is presenting how they are. With the understanding that there is a connection between the body and the mind, someone's movement repertoire might be

symbolic of how the person is feeling. Using the body and allowing the client to explore their own ways of moving, gives way for the client to discover on their own the different options that are within their abilities. This usually works better than having them telling us how they feel, and the therapist responding with what to do (Lee et al., 2018).

Integration

Tango is very personal for me. I had a hard time putting into words such a deep, history filled experience, my own history and its own history. Also, as I read more and more, and listened more and more, I discovered that there are some stains and shadows that are a part of this beautiful dance and experience, and it led me to question my own experience and how I perceived tango to be. So, this research led me to discover that it is not all beautiful, powerful, and healing. Tango was also born out of a heteronormative macho culture, and there is a misrepresentation of the participation that women had in its history (Savigliano, 1995). One of the most famous tango couples in the history of the dance were Juan Carlos Copes and María Nieves. He spoke about this woman that he spent 40 years with, as his life and dance partner, as if he owned her, and as if she belonged to him. Her presence in his life is portrayed as a mere accessory to his success and genius (Dunker et al., 2015). Similarly, that is how the beginnings of tango history portrays women (Savigliano, 1995). There is also an almost universally agreed upon erasing of the influence that African music and dances had on the conception of tango as it is experienced today (Savigliano, 1995; Thompson, 2005). In the process of uncovering these shadows that are a part of the tango experience, I began to question my experience as a whole. Is it really all I have made it out to be? Were my experiences

true? Do the stains of misogyny and racism overpower the light and beauty of the dance form and what it has given me? Coming to terms with the fullness, beauty, ugliness, and reality of a dance form that has changed and transformed my life, was a hard pill to swallow. I questioned my own experiences in the dance throughout the years, and how it has shaped who I am, or not. Davis (2015) grappled with the idea that she was “a feminist that was passionate about dancing tango”, and she found a way to have it work for her. She found a way to let her passion for tango coexist with her feminism and scholarship. She discovered that she is not the only person that has found a way to have her passion coexist with how the rest of her life looks (Davis, 2015). Similarly, I also concluded how all aspects of the dance made it what it was. My relationship with tango became more full, and my desire to connect with others through tango was not diminished, but, rather, transformed.

Dance/movement therapy also embraces dancing with the wholeness of the dance, of the therapeutic process, and of myself as a person. As tango is an intimate experience, the therapeutic process that occurs in dance/movement therapy is also very intimate, and as you get more intimate there can be discoveries of what makes a person whole. The therapeutic process in general is very introspective and tends to look at all the holes, divots, and stitchings that make up a person. Some examples of the shadows and dark spots that can come to light during this process are feelings of shame or guilt, repressed anger towards oneself or others, suffering abuse, or struggles with addiction. When confronted with some of these shadows or dark spots that are illuminated through dance/movement therapy, some of the ways in which they are released is

through the use of rhythm, like stomping, thrashing, percussion, or even through mirroring. When seeing their own shadows in someone else, it can be easier to accept them or come to terms with them. When these aspects of oneself show up in therapy, they can lead to questionings and resistance to look and explore further. However, it is in the acceptance of oneself as a whole person, owning and facing the beauty and the shadows where there can be a true commitment to the therapeutic process and the treatment itself. When one is able to embrace the nature of the relationship between the beauty and the ugliness, there is a better integration of the self. This integration then becomes evident in the movement range of the person. They are usually more able to access different rhythms and movements.

Conclusion

Search/Inquiry

The self-inquiry that I went through in my journey with tango is what clients in dance/movement therapy go through as well. It is a process in which there is an attempt to bring about awareness, or facilitate the path for the clients to become aware of what it is they are searching for themselves as it comes up through a movement experience. Tango came as a result of people searching for things like love, land, work, money, and community (Savigliano, 1995; Denniston, 2015), and in the dance/movement therapeutic process there is also a search to become a better human being, and a search to feel a part of something. The experience of community, universality, and shared experience are central to what unfolds in the therapeutic process. Tango led me to

dance/movement therapy because the dance form and practice was doing what dance/movement therapy does without me being aware that it was happening.

This whole thesis is a partnering dance between dance/movement therapy and tango, and it parallels with the actual partnering that occurs in tango, but, more so, it also parallels with the dance that I have personally done with tango and with dance/movement therapy, respectively. This dance between and across modalities has made it clear how it is not the steps and structure of tango that live in me, but the communal and relational aspects of it. Being present, favoring connection, tuning and attuning into myself and others, and letting go of my own judgments, living for and allowing to be impacted by the shared and collective experience, and embracing the fullness of myself and of tango have been how I have integrated my experience.

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