

Queer Tango Salon  
London  
2017

# Proceedings



A Queer Tango Project  
Publication

## Colophon and Copyright Statement

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# Introduction

*The Queer Tango Salon 2017: Dancers who think and thinkers who dance.*

There have been two *Queer Tango Salons* to date: one in Paris in 2016 and another in London in 2017.

What follows are the Proceedings of this second event, that is a partial record of the presentations and workshops.

The organisers of the *Queer Tango Salons* had it in mind on both occasions to set about breaking down two kinds of barriers: the barriers between academics and dance activists; and the barriers between using language as a means to consider, explore and answer questions and using dance or movement to address such issues.

All three of the organisers, Dr Jon Mulholland, University of the West of England, Bristol, UK, Dr H  l  ne Marqui  , Universit   Paris 8, France and Dr Ray Batchelor, Bucks New University, near London, UK are (or in the case of Dr Batchelor, were – he is now happily retired) academics.

Academia to those outside it can seem intimidating and the effect can be to disenfranchise those who know and understand things chiefly through their own activist, dance practises and informal reflections, while academics who dance sometimes struggle to legitimise and incorporate this subjective evidence into their work. In reality, these obstacles may neither be as neat or that much of an obstacle, but to the extent that they exist with regard to queer tango, the *Queer Tango Salons* sought to break them down. An open call for contributions was circulated on social media – chiefly Facebook where the dancers “live” – and Keynote Contributors were invited. The purpose was to give dancers voices, and to let the academics dance, think and pronounce.

On the basis of the material presented here, we think we may claim a partial success.

Encouraging research approaches other than the standard academic paper presentation however has proved much harder. This is one reason why the *Queer Tango Salon* is, for the moment, a project in abeyance.

Presenting and publishing papers has a long and (largely) distinguished history. It is one of the things academics “do” as an integral part of their practice and doing so helps advance careers. It has well established apparatuses to ensure “standards” and “rigour”. The alternative approach of using dance to carry out research is relatively novel and has no such formulaic conventions to turn to. This presents both opportunities and obstacles. With the field wide open any number of different approaches might be adopted – but which? And why? And how to record any “answers” the works might generate, if indeed that is possible.

Dancers do not normally speak and write, but activists often do. It should come as no surprise then that in representing their practices, the dance activists often adopted the words, imagery, PowerPoint presentations and the other paraphernalia commonplace among their academic equivalents.

At the 2016 *Queer Tango Salon* in Paris, there were eight research workshops and 13 papers. At the London *Queer Tango Salon* in 2017 there were only four workshops while the number of papers had gone up to 18.

Of those, there were a number of really interesting pieces of work. Where their authors were happy for them to be included, they are reproduced here. There are also accounts of some of the workshops.

More formally expressed, the *Queer Tango Salon's* original aims were, through the medium of papers, seminars, practice workshops and interactive performance to:

- Bring scholars and queer tango practitioners/activists together into one creative space
- Explore questions pertaining the nature and experience of sex, gender and sexuality in the context of the dancing body
- Examine issues concerning the nature of embodied knowledge and the dancing body
- Illuminate the characteristics of queer tango practices, relations and spaces
- Explore the political dimensions of queer tango

- To facilitate the establishment of networks of scholarly and practice-related interest in queer tango for the development of future research opportunities
- To generate a range of outputs contributing to understanding and intervention

We still think these aims worthy, but the problems we had animating practical contributions oblige us to rethink how best the practical research aspects might be fostered and developed.

Meanwhile, we are very pleased that our endeavours have enabled us to present in these Proceedings the contributions which follow.

The Proceedings are a Queer Tango Project publication and the organisers would like to thank Birthe Havmøller, its founder and co-organiser, for her help, support and expertise in preparing this anthology.

The organisers would also like to thank all those whose work is represented here. For running workshops: Olaya Aramo; Carolyn and Rastko; and Joseph Roevens. And for presenting papers: Olaya Aramo again; Lisa Blackman; Birthe Havmøller who both presented and co-presented papers; Aimee Purser; Joseph Roevens again; Montserrat Roser i Puig; and Wiktor Skrzypczak.

Ray Batchelor  
November 2018

# Part 1: Records of workshops

# What Can Queer Tango Learn from Intersectionality?

© Carolyn and Rastko

## Workshop Description

*In this workshop, we will collectively come up with a working definition of "intersectionality". By looking at interlocking oppression and privilege which stem from gender, race, class, sexuality, dis/ability, nationality etc., in the context of queer tango we will ask: What spaces, processes or factors exclude certain groups of dancers? What are the pros and cons of mainstream gay culture for queer tango? What would a truly intersectional queer tango community look or feel like? We will explore gender dynamics on the dance floor, so please bring your dancing shoes, but also, bring an item (an accessory or garment) which you can exchange with others during the workshop.*

We presented a workshop on the subject of intersectionality. We only had limited time and a small group of people (which included non-dancers as well as some folk with many years of dancing experience). We used the concept of intersectionality to interrogate our own experiences, and ask some questions, without necessarily aiming to find answers in what was a very small group, but with the hope that we would take these questions back to the places where we dance. These notes sum up and build on the discussions we had.

## Intersectionality Defined:

A systemic and structural matrix of oppression and privilege affects us all according to Class - Gender - Race - Wealth - Dis/ability - Care commitments - Age - Body image - Language - Nationality and passport - Job/Housing security - Wage slavery... Any examination of oppression shows that various kinds of oppression intersect. Oppression in the capitalist world plays out as about economic power/access to money/time as well as multiple other effects on daily life. In a patriarchal/racist world it's not just about the money, also about things like risk of physical attack in the street outside the venue. Racism contributes to and exacerbates the inequality of access to tango culture. Patriarchy poisons people's minds and patriarchal binaries and leader-

follower expectations also infect our spaces insidiously, even in queer tango.

Resistance to oppression by the tango community – i.e. those of us who organise promote and attend events – can take many forms.

- We should consider where money from our tango activities goes. Rampant gentrification is hitting the kind of low-income neighbourhoods where tango historically flourished in Buenos Aires and London's queer spaces are being closed down due to extreme development pressures. Our choice of venue is critical if we want to avoid contributing to gentrification and displacement of long-standing residents, amenities, businesses and communities.
- We can actively choose not to exclude those with low or no income from attending milongas and practicas (and the *Queer Tango Salon* itself). It is often obvious that those setting the prices have no idea of just how poor some of us are. If somebody is reliant on benefits due to unemployment, and receiving just £10/day to live on (less if under the age of 25) - is offering a slight, tokenistic 'concession' really going to make the event something they can afford to attend? The *Queer Tango Salon* expected people in this category to pay a minimum of £20 just to attend for one day - and we wonder why our numbers are so low?! To counter this, we could offer a "sliding scale" or meaningful concessions. We could also advertise events in ways that make it clear that nobody will be turned away for lack of funds. There are plenty of examples which other groups and communities use we can draw on.
- We can expand our understanding of who might participate in this kind of social dancing (in the workshop people mentioned projects which aim to introduce the benefits of dance to deaf people, those with dementia, wheelchair users etc.).
- We can continue to promote a more communal approach to social dancing which is not ego-driven performative/competitive and take this to the mainstream tango world.
- We can use accessible, safe venues and advertise the ways in which we've improved on access and safety.

- We can change the dynamics of the dance floor to be more inclusive to gender-fluid and less able-bodied people, more elderly people.
- We can actively promote the inclusion of black and brown people.
- We can reclaim the rebellious, anti-capitalist, anti-normative, transformative spirit of queerness.
- We can celebrate the migrant-friendly, internationalist spirit of tango.

We invite you to reflect about these issues, and other ways in which environments we create either perpetuate oppression or don't go far enough to challenge it. Reach out to other queers who are not usually seen at tango events, ask yourself why and find ways to bring them in. Find allies in queer communities and the mainstream tango world.

We would also be happy to hear from you: [queertango@aktivix.org](mailto:queertango@aktivix.org)

# Embodied Leadership with Tango AKA LeadershipTango Workshop: Theoretical Foundations

© Joseph Roevens

## Workshop Description

*LeadershipTango is a self-knowledge and interpersonal dynamics training, not a dance class. Its philosophy and method is Queer: Participants do 4 simple walking exercises with different partners of both genders, and several „intercambio“s” to tango music. Traditionally men hold leadership positions according to a hierarchical „great man“ view. In the 21st century leadership is searching for a new approach, as some top self-managed organizations, such as Zappos & Buurtzorg demonstrate. You will explore what leadership and followership specifically means for you, and for others, by physically experiencing it, and also by sharing your insights verbally and non-verbally with each other, and with the group.*

## Embodied Leadership with Tango AKA LeadershipTango workshop: theoretical foundations

LeadershipTango is a self-knowledge and interpersonal dynamics training, not a dance class. Its philosophy and method is Queer: participants do 4 simple walking exercises with different partners of both genders, and several „intercambio’s“. You will explore what leadership and followership specifically means for you, and for others, by physically experiencing it, and also by sharing your insights verbally with each other, and with the group.

If you are interested in introducing Queer Tango into a university, or into a corporate setting, to stimulate discussions about leadership, followership, ‘connection’, or some sort of ‘collective human experience’, you can watch Dr Joseph Roevens 3. part video, in which he relates his ‘LeadershipTango’ course to important insights in Leadership Theory, Multiple Intelligence Theory, and Pedagogical Theory.

Watch the 1st clip:

<https://youtu.be/Fy0YFpgPsyk?list=PL08Ejq10aIsdte5K4kaRaZzssN11NiuW3>

### **Introducing Queer Tango in the Hospitality Industry**

If you are interested in introducing Queer Tango in the c industry, or in another people-intensive corporate setting, to help reduce voluntary labour turn-over and increase good relations between supervisors and subordinates, watch Dr Joseph Roevens 2. part video.

Watch the 2nd clip:

<https://youtu.be/vBgtSFYSttY?list=PL08Ejq10aIsdte5K4kaRaZzssN11NiuW3>

### **How LeadershipTango Will Transform My University: Paper Presentation**

The Board of Governors of NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences, in the Netherlands is searching for a more fitting 21st century organisational structure, moving away from its classical top-down hierarchy to some sort of self-management with multi-disciplinary teams. As an organizational psychologist and queer tango dancer, Dr Joseph Roevens suggested to central HRM-offices that all NHTV staff could participate in LeadershipTango (Roevens, 2015). He presented a *signature* speech "How LeadershipTango will change your World" at Breda University's All-Staff Study Day in February 2017. Thereafter, during four weeks, 14 staff members of different departments, functions, and academies learned what is typical about their own style of "Leading" and of "Following", and how one can improve one's ability to switch more easily between both. The following video, similar to the presentation delivered at the symposium, the *Queer Tango Salon* in London in 2017 explains why Queer Tango/ LeadershipTango, is a successful approach to stimulate effective, organisational change.

Watch the 3rd clip: <https://youtu.be/boPY3sPDxzk>

For a further description of Queer Tango/ LeadershipTango's pedagogical effectiveness, download this paper relating it to the three dominant learning theories of behaviorism, cognitivism and constructivism.

[https://www.academia.edu/13041363/Embodied\\_Leadership\\_with\\_Tango\\_a\\_pedagogical\\_reflection](https://www.academia.edu/13041363/Embodied_Leadership_with_Tango_a_pedagogical_reflection)

# The Embodiment of Femininity and Masculinity through Tango Posture and Attitudes

© Olaya Aramo

## Workshop Description

*This workshop aims to analyze how tango posture and attitudes prescribe differences for the leader's and the follower's roles. It also focuses on how these differences are depicted as masculinity and femininity, and then to relate that to the different approaches of queer tango towards traditional tango endorsements of femininity and masculinity/leadership and followership. The workshop will introduce the participant to two approaches: the ungendered one, by which queer tango dancers try to neutralize the power forces inscribed in the ideas of "leading" and "following", and the performative one, by which queer tango dancers deepen the symbolic masculinity and femininity inscribed in dancing roles. In the end, a fusion of both perspectives will be proposed, showing how followership and leadership, symbolically masculine and feminine adjectives and aspects are necessary to describe each of the roles.*

I had the privilege of being able to put in practice this workshop for the very first time with experienced and reflective-oriented queer tango dancers. The best audience I could ever have dreamed of. It was a shy first attempt to raise this controversial issue.

It is controversial because it makes us face a fact which makes us uncomfortable: we are embodying power relationships, therefore, are we reinforcing those power relationships? Or are they blurred or even erased by our non-heterosexual or feminist identities?

I think this is the reason why some people felt uncomfortable in the workshop.

I also felt uncomfortable. I am very used to speaking about the dilution of gender boundaries through tango. I'm also used to speaking about the embodiment of gender-unequal power relationships to beginners and intermediate, even advanced dancers sometimes, in the context of

tango skills learning. However, that is very different from asking people to identify with their own internal masculine and feminine attitudes. Furthermore, trying to find whether if they are localized in our bodies touches on something which is very intimate, and at the same time confusing.

It is not easy to understand what femininity and masculinity actually are, moreover for people who don't identify with heterosexuality and heterosexist discourses. We don't take for granted that our bodies are an example of the symbolic content of masculinity or femininity, as some heterosexual people might do. We are against the definition of a wide range of human attitudes as masculine or feminine. Yet we live in a world where those terms are used fluently by almost everyone, including us. In fact, maybe they are even more important for us, who have had conflicts throughout our lives in connection with those terms because of our attitudes, gestures, sexual orientation or sexual identity.

Additionally, in practice, it is very confusing how to approach the meaning of masculinity and femininity without a guideline. That is what the workshop is intended for: finding out what femininity and masculinity are for those who participate. Perhaps a question of layers, here is what I could feel from the feedback:

- The ungendered approach: the first layer is masculinity and femininity as prejudices of human behaviour.
- The performative approach: the second layer is femininity and masculinity as descriptions of attitudes we have dealt with throughout our lives.
- Facing our boundaries: the third layer is femininity or masculinity as limits of our individual identity we struggle or not to overstep.

In the first case we deny the existence of such things as femininity and masculinity, and, because of that, we altogether deny the possibility that we, as queer tango dancers, could be reproducing unequal power relationships through our dancing. We are just neutral subjects or, because we are against that inequality, we erase it dancing queer.

In the second case, we accept the existence of descriptions of certain attitudes as masculine or feminine, and we confront them with our internal feelings, desires, expectations of the other, etc. Here we can

consider which of our attitudes we see as feminine or masculine, and we can embody both masculinity and femininity. Then we can accept that we are unavoidably reproducing some unequal gender relationships through our dancing. We can also take the chance to make conscious how we are attached to these kinds of symbolic constructions and gender relationships by desire, by the feeling our own identity or by rejection.

In the third case, which is the deepest layer and goes to the level of the limits of our own sexual identity, we face a fact that goes beyond dancing. We see how do we feel about being a woman or being a man. Here it is more difficult to understand masculinity and femininity as symbolic frameworks or ranges of attitudes and we feel the fact that those happen within the context of the intersubjectively, existing genders, and even sexes, we belong to or not. And this puts us with our backs to the wall. It makes us decide whether if we are part of one of these two groups. And, if we are, are we still allowed to show attitudes which don't match with it? (Of course we are, but the feeling is still the same).

Another question that I think was on the table (and I would really like to have the chance to develop much more in future workshops) is about the relationship with the other body/person. Although it is totally immediate in terms of tango, because we are touching another body/person, I think in this one-hour workshop there wasn't time to go from the personal experience to the partnering experience. And also with so little time, we didn't have the chance to be able to split what is perceived as personal and individual, and what is perceived as a relationship or partnering, in terms of roles, expectations of the other, feeling the other's expectations, empathy and the lack of it, etc. That is to say, developing the meaning of those gender relationships we were focusing on.

### **Some Final Questions**

Why are we sometimes reluctant with the idea of embodying femininity and masculinity when we dance the tango?

Am I feeling my feminine attitudes as something deeper than my masculine ones? Maybe the masculine attitudes are not mine? Are they

a masquerade? Or maybe they are mine and they are authentic? (I am sort of a woman).

How does the other body/person affect my own feeling of my masculinity and femininity and to my own feeling of my gender/sexual identity?

# Part 2: Papers

# Embodied Politics, Genderless Dance

© Wiktor Skrzypczak

## Description of Paper

*I would like to illuminate some aspects of the genderless social dance concept. It says, that the dance situation may create a space for reflexion, critique and deconstruction of sex based social roles, as it may set up a space which suspends every day's life social roles. I will use the examples of queer tango and contact improvisation which both carried, at least partially, the concept of the genderless encounter in movement. I underline the direct and fine relation between the way we think and speak about us as social dancers and the quality of movement we experience, showing, that a particular mindset always resonates with particular corporeality. A common contact improvisation concept will be presented, which goes beyond the roles of leading and following, aiming an embodied, centred but open and responsive attitude. I'll trace this attitude in queer tango practice and pedagogy and display its improvisational and transformative potential.*

## Link to The Video:

"Queer Tango Salon 2017 - Genderless Dance" (15 min)

[https://youtu.be/JFPqIea6\\_pQ](https://youtu.be/JFPqIea6_pQ)

## Script:

I would like to illuminate some aspects of the genderless social dance concept, which is based on the premise that dance situations may create a space which suspends everyday life's social roles, including sex based roles and which, as a result, induce reflection, critique and deconstruction of these roles. I will use the examples of queer tango and contact improvisation which both carry, from their inception and at least partially, the concept of the genderless encounter in movement.

Firstly, it is important to underline the direct and fine relation between the way we think or speak about ourselves as social dancers, and the quality of movement that we experience, as our particular mindset always resonates with particular corporeality. One of the reasons why people dance queer tango may be the possibility of an authentic, personal meeting. To make it happen, inevitably one must leave behind

the preconceptions about each person and abandon imposed ways of acting upon them - abandon men's and women's dance roles, abandon leader's and follower's roles, abandon the idea of masculine and feminine "energies", and devote ourselves to each person as a complete, indivisible individual being present right in front of us. The dance may be genderless when it leaves behind the imposed sex based roles, bearing some deeper levels of personality.

Contact improvisation, at the time of its creation in 1973, was an experimental response to the rigid structures of classical and modern dance. It contradicted the strict gender roles of ballet dancers and hierarchical relationships between modern dance choreographers and their companies. It resulted in an egalitarian social practice of dance-jams and improvised performances, radically unifying the visual appearance of dancers and emphasising unisexual, universal qualities of movement. What parallels to the queer tango development can we find?

In tango, even in its traditionally patriarchal setting, leading always means listening to your partner, therefore following at the same time, and following is never purely passive. Contact improvisation develops this interrelation further and gives up the terms of *leading* and *following*. For discursive reasons, this generalising dualism is being differentiated as an active or passive attitude, in each case with a demanding, respectively responsive character. The constant intertwining creates a truly egalitarian duet of two dancers dancing exactly the same role. At some point, it is not possible anymore to analyse or grasp intellectually the "current" role, as the dancer's mind switches to an intuitive, primordial state.

Also, the corporeality of the dancer changes. The general muscular tone regulates itself, the contraction and release coordinate efficiently, the center and periphery, the extension and compression find balance. There are no roles anymore, there is only an embodied, centred, but open and responsive attitude. How present is this state in queer tango? It may be close to the euphoric and dramatic late-night hours of many milongas, when it is easier to connect to a partner quickly, directly and deeply. But this experience is not constricted to the last sweaty tandas. One can also begin the milonga with the evening's deepest connection.

It takes patience in this particular moment, some radical listening and a kind of bareness. Just observe the stillness of being together, and notice that it does not exist. There is no stillness. If you are alive, there will be always movement in you. Your breath, your postural reflexes, your gaze always dance and react to your partner's still dance. It may be an awkward feeling, if you catch yourself thinking, "Oh, I was supposed to lead, let's do a move!" Deny the responsibility of initiation. In the dance, you are not the boss, you are not the "real man", you are not the "devoted follower". Maybe you do not have a gender at all. You are one half of this duet; the responsibility stands on four legs. Take your time. Take all the time. On the other hand, if you think, "I'll follow whatever you command, I'll stay calm and react on time!" then you are probably already too late. Let your sentient body resonate to all the reflexes, weight adjustments and yawns which happen in you and between you and your partner. For the sensation is the foundation of every voluntary movement.

Some "schools" of contact improvisation aim directly at this attentive, unbiased state. It is learning partnership through mutual empathy, self-responsibility, shared responsibility and empowerment. Often it happens by deploying somatic methods such as Feldenkrais or Body-Mind Centering®, which instead of prescribing the visual appearance of the dance form, guide the dancer through internal sensations and the search for the visceral roots of movement. Does it mean the traditional formal aspects lose their entitlement? Not necessarily; much more so, they are instantly filled with sensation and expression. Figures in tango and pathways in contact improvisation can "happen" much more, than they can be "executed". This approach trains the dancer as a skillful mover, able to recognize the movement as it blooms, ready to take action and respond at the same time.

At some point, the mentioned radical listening, an apparently passive attitude, gives the dancer a felt overview of the situation, and a profound sensation of orientation and self-authority. It allows the dancer to use the forces which are already there, such as grounding or spatial extension, to ignite strong voluntary movements. The expressive energy can be turned into sharp munition for a Biagi tanda, or in an endless flow of a vals. In contact improvisation, it literally elevates the dancer into an acrobatic flight over the dance floor. The control over the

expressive quality of the movement rather than over its form seems to be crucial, and even in a traditional tango setting, is constantly expected from both roles, showing again the flaws of dualistic formalist thinking.

Why improvise? There are two reasons. Firstly, in a pluralistic society, each dance encounter is different, and there is simply no prescribed ideal way to move. Secondly, I understand social dance as a daily life situation in which laypeople have an opportunity to dance the way they can, maybe even the best way they can, in contrast to a professional dance where the dancers are often expected to display a kind of perfection. Also, from a practical perspective, the time spent on training and on actual dancing differentiates a social dance from a professional one. Improvisation should not be understood as a lack of professional skills though, because actually improvisation techniques are part of every dance curriculum. Much more so, improvisation is a basic skill which is available to every person, which has its roots in intuition, in the encounter with the unknown, with "geniuslessness" and "genderlessness", and which can be methodologically developed. In this regard, improvisation is an intuitive action in a perceived stream of unique situations.

The preconception of two generalized roles may essentially reduce the actual potential and fullness of the dance. Not because it frames and structures, but because it may distract from the mindset of open-ended curiosity and wilfully not-preconceiving, not-knowing. And, in contrast to perfecting the convenience of a form, improvisation is able to take you, in the blink of an eye, to a place where you have not yet been and where you even have not thought of. In improvisation, your "role" emerges as you perform it and you grasp it in its great clarity and complexity as you do it.

A live improvisation deepens the qualities of movement and of connection with the partner. It discerns personal habits and imposed social behaviour. By its transformative potential, it may be a convenient structure for constant redefinition of a queer dancer's identity.

research@stadtliebe.eu  
Mobile phone: +4915788587680

# Queering Orientations: Towards A Queer Phenomenology of Queer Tango

© Aimie Purser

## Description of Paper

*This intervention takes the form of a traditional academic paper. Questions of how we might theorise what it is to dance with someone else are explored through a phenomenological framework, with a particular emphasis on ideas of kinaesthetic empathy and Merleau-Ponty's conceptualisation of intersubjectivity as intercorporeality. As we are theorising the partnering experiences of dancing together in Queer Tango, it also feels particularly important to engage with Sara Ahmed's (2006) notion of Queer Phenomenology in order to explore the lived experiences of queer dancing bodies. Ahmed's insistence that we should think more closely, and more queerly, about phenomenology's emphasis on orientation, allows us to develop a perspective from which we can think through both the directionality of sexual desire and the phenomenon of moving together.*

Academic writing has typically embraced Tango in terms of what is represented in the dance. In a way that curiously parallels prevailing narratives of queer cultures and identities, Tango is celebrated for its ability to evoke or rehearse either radical possibility or tragic impossibility. Tango is given to us as melancholic: borne of displaced communities nostalgic for a lost past, it ritualises colonial and gender hierarchies. It speaks of tragedy and loss both in lyrics which often focus on absence and betrayal and in movement which endlessly rehearses the deferred or unconsummated seduction. Or conversely it is written as transformative and joyful: the improvised dialogical nature of the dance suggests collaboration, creativity and strategies of resistance.

In place of this, I wish to make an argument for thinking Tango through phenomenology. In this way we can engage with Tango, and in particular Queer Tango, not as metaphor but as lived experience.

Phenomenology brings our focus to ways of being-in-the world and being-with-others, and in the work of Merleau-Ponty it is our direct embodied relationship with the world around us which is central to

understanding human experience. In place of Descartes' definition of human being in terms of 'I think therefore I am' – a dualist perspective which locates subjectivity in the mind and relegates the body to mere object – Merleau-Ponty suggests that our primary sense of self is a practical embodied orientation towards the world and others: 'I can'. He names this feeling we have of our body and how it connects us to the world the 'corporeal schema' and considers it be developed through dynamic embodied interaction.

More recently, Sara Ahmed (2006) has enacted an encounter between phenomenology and queer theory (as well as post-colonial theory) in her book *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. She starts from phenomenology's claim that as embodied beings we are always already both located in the world and oriented towards the world in a particular way. Our being-in-the-world is thus always a particular form of situated engagement; it is positional and directional. Ahmed's insight is to think this through in relation to the rendering of identity and desire in terms of sexual 'orientation'. Thus we can begin to consider the ways in which lines of desires position us in and engage us with the world in particular ways. We experience and occupy the world in terms of orientations, trajectories, or lines of movement that may be aligned with the 'straight' lines of normative expectation or may not. Orientation is about where we've come from and how that affects where we're going, and these roots and routes through life in turn open up and close off certain possibilities to us.

So how can this help us understand the experience of queer tango? Firstly, let us see what phenomenology can tell us about our experience of sharing the Tango embrace; about what it is to dance together. Having redefined subjectivity in terms of embodied presence to the world and others, we also find intersubjectivity – our sense of connection with the other as another human subject, not just an object in the world – redefined in terms of direct embodied experience. We recognise the other as another human being because we are both embodied in the same world and there is thus overlap between my experience of my body and my experience of other bodies. Merleau-Ponty speaks of this as a reversibility or reciprocity of perception: when my right hand touches my left, my body is both perceiving subject and perceived object, and this experience of reversibility is also present

when I touch (or see or hear) you, and you me. Intersubjectivity is thus more properly thought of as intercorporeality: I recognise you as human like me by virtue of our mutual embodiment in the world.

This reimagining of the interpersonal as primarily intercorporeal (rather than a question of the meeting of minds) allows us to make sense of some of the most basic and most significant aspects of dancing with someone. As we dance with the other, we can experience a deep sense of connection with that person: an intersubjective connection which occurs at the corporeal level as we mutually perceive each other. Thus phenomenology helps us name and define the embodied understanding we develop of the other as we move with the other; the kinaesthetic empathy which allows us to gauge things from their immediate physical intentions to move in a particular direction through to more subtle states such as their current mood.

I offer the following quotations, which I collected while conducting an ethnographic study with dancers involved in contact improvisation, to illustrate this sense of connection and understanding that develops between bodies which dance together. As you read them, you might reflect on your own experiences of the Queer Tango embrace and thus your experience of intersubjectivity as intercorporeality:

- “You don’t talk you just know ... you feel inside and you just react – that’s the strange thing and that’s really exciting when you just have that, when it’s in sync like that.” [Louisa]
- “There’s this different kind of awareness that you have to have, just because you have to be able to move together ... you have to talk with your bodies so you have to kind of listen to each other – you can’t always do it your way, you have to find the way.” [Anna]
- “You can kind of listen to each other through your bodies. You can become quite close to people – you have to be prepared to work very closely with people physically, but because you’re so close physically you, it opens up something mentally as well, there’s some connection there.” [Tara]
- “You can feel one another, be with one another and experience this thing with one another and I mean, when it gets to that point you know whether they’re feeling sad or whether they’re feeling happy and they don’t even have to even say anything so you know, you have a sense of how they are that day and you take

that into account - there's not a judgement on that it's just this is how the person is today, this is how I am today and this what it is today and that's why it's beautiful." [Steven]

There are, however, queer critiques of phenomenology which we must of course address if we are to employ it in order to make sense of Queer Tango. Firstly, Merleau-Ponty's definition of human being in terms of 'I can' may seem at odds with the lived experience of those whose lives are not so much about grasping the rich possibilities the world offers us but more about suppressing, hiding, passing and missing out. As Ahmed suggests, queer lives do not follow straight paths, but rather are lived obliquely [1]. Furthermore, we might question Merleau-Ponty's definition of intersubjective connection as based in the recognition of a reversibility between us; a recognition that the other who stands before me is a human being 'like me'. Where does this leave, we might ask, those whose lived experiences do not mirror those of all the rest; what chance is there of recognition for those whose embodied orientation towards the world may in fact be radically different from those they stand before?

Yet a queer phenomenology is one which overcomes this through a return to the basic insight that human being cannot be understood in Universalist terms. Subjectivity is always already embodied and thus positioned in and oriented towards the world in particular ways. Returning to this point is also important for thinking about just what 'reversibility' does and doesn't imply within the theory of intercorporeality. Reversibility here is something that happens between individuals, each of whom are embodied and situated in their own particular and unique way. Thus it is a theory of reaching out across difference, not of collapsing different human being into sameness.

So how are we to implement this queer phenomenology? By attending first and foremost to ways in which embodied beings experience themselves as oriented in particular ways, and to the paths and possibilities this opens/closes to us. As part of this we must attend to non-normative alignments (or perhaps lack of alignment) – to queer mis/alignment – and explore how such orientations shape our experiences and our trajectories through life. As we do this, we must of course also ask how things might be otherwise: how possibilities that seemed closed off or out of reach from queer positionalities might

become graspable or how straight paths might be encouraged to meander and multiply.

Queer Tango offers us a lived embodied experience through which it is possible to explore these ideas. Unlike traditional philosophical pursuits, it offers a mode of embodied thinking, through which we can open ourselves up to new types of knowledge – that derived from and expressed by situated, embodied, moving beings. In dance we directly experience ourselves as practically or physically orientated; we are reacquainted with a sense of directionality, of towards-ness, with respect to both the space of the world and the embodied others within it. The dancing of Tango is thus the intense (re)experiencing of those processes of bodily becoming and bodily attunement which underpin our lives more generally. Aspects of our bodily being that normally go unnoticed and taken-for-granted become apparent to us in Tango and are potentially opened up to reflection and experimentation, as we move in a creative and focussed way with the other. Moreover, queer(ed) dancing together allows for the experience of a mutual openness to and sharing, across difference, of non-straight(forward) orientations. Thus it is in the Queer Tango embrace that we might discover and explore how queer 'disorientations' (with respect to the straight path of the normative) might develop into new, collaboratively improvised movement patterns which, in turn, allow us to imagine and embody new ways of being-in-the-world and being-with others.

### Note

1 The origin of the word 'queer' is not known with any certainty, but Ahmed is interested in its links back to words which mean (physically) twisted, crooked, bent, etc. This etymology suggests a German root, linking the English word 'queer' to the German 'quer' which can be translated as 'oblique' and which is itself derived from a root meaning 'twisted'.

# 10 Dogme Rules for the Dance Style of 'Queer Tango'

© Birthe Havmøller

## Description of Paper

*Birthe Havmøller, co-editor of The Queer Tango Book, presents her manifesto, 10 Dogme Rules for The Dance Style of 'Queer Tango' and shares her take on the core values and principles of the dance style of Queer Tango. The roles are 'fluid' in Queer Tango. When you change roles while dancing a tango you are dancing a 'Queer Tango'. This dance style is danceable by everybody, straight and queer dancers alike. The cutting-edge dance style of Queer Tango is the Queer Tango Movement's gift to the greater international tango community. Queer Tango is the latest in a long line of dance styles in Argentinian tango. Birthe invites you to work with the creative constraints of a 'vow of chastity', devoting yourself to the comme il faut-dogme rules for the best practice of the dance style of Queer Tango, and see where this takes your dancing.*

My manifesto, [10 Dogme Rules For The Dance Style of 'Queer Tango'](http://www.queertangobook.org), was first published at [www.queertangobook.org](http://www.queertangobook.org) (2017). It is a vow of chastity with basic best practice rules for the dance style of Queer Tango. It is a set of creative constraints for your inspiration.

## Queer Tango is a Dance Style

When you dance your tangos as 'intercambio', changing roles while you dance, you are dancing Queer Tango. If you are not familiar with the idea of their being different dance styles in Argentinian tango please watch my video, [Queer Tango and the other dance styles in Argentinian Tango](#) (2016), which is video presentation created for the International Queer Tango Festival in Barcelona, Spain last year.



*Martin and Maurizio. Photo: Birthe Havmøller*

### **What is a Dance Style?**

There are a number of dance styles in Argentinean tango, Tango salon, Tango nuevo, Tango milonguero, etc. In their purest form they are mutually incompatible, unique and special. I know Queer Tango is a dance style. It is all in the small details, especially in the way in which you work with the embrace.

We bring a set of philosophical dance concepts and an 'attitude' with us, when we walk onto the dance floor. When two opposing core values and dance concepts clash on the dance floor, we experience the dancing as incompatible. Queer Tango-moves such as 'intercambio' are incompatible with the mainstream practice of man-woman, each one role only, Tango salon social dancing. The dance concepts of 'Leading

while following and following while leading' and the 'fluid roles' are unique to Queer Tango and add to the fact that it is a dance style in its own right!



*Birthe Havmøller leading an 'open role tango'. Photo: Mickael Meilo.*

### **A 'Disclaimer'**

'Queer Tango' is more than a dance style... but in this paper/presentation I will NOT discuss:

- the other meanings of the term 'queer tango'
- the queer practice of dancing 'open role tango'
- activist practices of LGBT people dancing tango



*Queer tango dancers. Photo by Yuri Panov.*

### **The 10 Dogme Rules for the Dance Style of 'Queer Tango'**

Danish film director Lars von Trier coined the term *dogme rule* for the manifesto, *Dogme 95* addressed to the international film industry which he co-authored with a couple of Danish colleagues in the mid-90s. Inspired by Lars von Trier's manifesto I use the term 'Dogme rules' = basic rules for the best practice of the dance style of Queer Tango.

They are:

6 Queer Tango concepts

4 appropriated tango concepts from mainstream tango for Queer Tango

[This presentation below is a short version of the manifesto: *10 Dogme Rules For The Dance Style of 'Queer Tango'*.]

## Queer Tango Concepts:

You must

1) accept that the roles are 'fluid' in Queer Tango

We love the concept of 'fluid roles' in Queer Tango. We will not argue for our limitations or fight for the right to dance one role more than the other, when we dance the dance style of Queer Tango.

2) dance both roles

We will learn to dance both roles, because we interpret the concept of 'fluid roles' in Queer Tango by dancing 'intercambio', changing roles while we are dancing a tango.

3) do away with the traditional gender roles in tango

We will break the norm of the heteronormative gender specific roles of mainstream tango, turning the roles fluid by dancing 'intercambio'. We have the freedom to dance with anybody, who sends us a smile, regardless of their genders.

4) share the labour of leading

As dual role dancer we will learn to improvise from both positions. We will 'follow while leading and lead while following', sharing the labour of leading. And as a courtesy to our Queer Tango dance partners, we give the dancer starting in the position of 'leader' the opportunity to end their dance as the 'follower'.

5) empower the 'follower' in yourself

We accept that tango was designed as a macho/heteronormative dance and we will empower the 'follower' in ourselves by applying strategies to our Queer Tangos, such as the follower initiating a change of positions or 'backleading' to better this flaw.

6) dance queer!

We will dance Queer Tango, Queer Milonga, Queer Tango Vals, Queer Tango Nuevo, Queer Tango Milonguero, etc., applying the dogme rules to all the dances and dance styles in tango.

## The Appropriated Tango Concepts for the Dance Style of Queer Tango:

You must

7) love the concept of 'contact' in tango

No tango without a good measure of 'contact'. We will create a good 'contact' with all our dance partners, as we love the feeling of a yummy embrace. We consider the following to be bad technique: to carry, push, pull or manipulate our dance partner; to break the flow of a tango before the melody has ended; to 'fall' into our steps, etc.

8) accept that 'the leader must follow the follower'

While leading we will be alert and flexible, because we must 'follow our follower', accepting their moves as the starting points of our next steps, always improvising our dances in harmony with our dance partners.

9) dance with the music

We love tango music and will not just 'execute steps', but aim at developing our musicality so that we embody the different rhythms and voices of a tango. This is where we show off and present our skills as dual role dancers.

10) follow the flow on the dance floor

When dancing the dance style of Queer Tango, we will dance in harmony with the flow of the other tango couples (in our lane) on the dance floor, i.e. we will not create ripples of chaos on the dance floor by taking up too much space or by shifting between the different lanes. We do not dance our Queer Tangos, zig-zagging on the dance floor. We dance supporting harmony on the dance floor.

# Portfolio

© Birthe Havmøller

*Queer tango dancers. Photos by Birthe Havmøller from her presentation at the Queer Tango Salon, London, 2017.*



*Photo by Birthe Havmøller*



*Photo by Birthe Havmøller*



*Photo by Birthe Havmøller*



*Photo by Birthe Havmøller*



*Photo by Birthe Havmøller*



*Photo by Birthe Havmøller*



*Photo by Birthe Havmøller*

# Luis Zuleta Benavides and Jace Valcore: Initiating, Marking, and Language

© Carrie Schneider

An audio contribution recorded by Carrie Schneider - link to the audio file:

<https://youtu.be/1YXKSMpVFew>

# Festivalization and Queer Tango – Meanings and ‘Tensions’

© Jon Mulholland

*Jon Mulholland (Associate Professor in Sociology, University of the West of England, Bristol, UK)*

## **Description of Paper**

*Drawing on qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with queer tango practitioners and organisers, this paper explores the meanings attributed to the Queer Tango Festival, as the Festival context has emerged as a primary space for the articulation of a queer geography, practice and sociality. The Festival dates back centuries. Early festivals typically took a religious form and were held under the auspices of the church. From the outset, festivals enjoyed the quality of ‘suspension’ from ordinary life, and tended to focus on expressive forms, including food, clothing, music and dance. Towards the end of the 20th century, Festival began to be used as a generic term for a large array of celebrations that carry few or no religious connotations. Festivals have become significantly more extended and diversified over time, to the point where we might talk of a certain festivalization of life. In accordance with Frederik Barth, we could describe the festival as a “vessel of meaning”, used in all kinds of ways, and filled with all kinds of contents. Festivals are also integral to the ‘experience economy’ offering (potentially commodified) encounters of emotional and aesthetic potency (Bäckström and Johansson 2006) to a typically paying, and potentially touristic audience. But festivals are also instruments of social and cultural change, transmitting and transferring knowledge. They are potentially spaces of intercultural interaction, where new and potentially expressive transgressions can be born and explored.*

## **Abstract**

This paper draws on semi-structured interview data with 25 practicing queer tango dancers, as one part of a broader qualitative research project exploring the natures and meanings of queer tango practices, socialities and spaces. Participants were recruited via their membership

of queer tango groups on Facebook. The project was funded, and ethically governed, by the School of Law, Middlesex University, London.

This paper offers a synopsis of the presentation, *The Festivalization of Queer Tango – Meanings and 'Tensions'*, given to the second international symposium on queer tango, *The Queer Tango Salon: Dancers who Think and Thinkers who Dance*, 15-16th September 2017, London.

### **The Spaces of Queer Tango: An Elementary Typology**

The data were supportive of developing an elementary typology of Queer Tango Spaces. These were:

- Locally-embedded mainstream tango spaces perceived to be 'queer accommodating'
- Locally-embedded mainstream tango spaces actively identifying (explicitly or implicitly) as 'queer friendly'
- Locally-embedded designated queer tango spaces
- International tango festivals perceived to be 'queer accommodating' or known to be actively 'queer friendly'
- International queer tango festivals and tango marathons
- Virtual queer tango spaces – WWW

This paper will focus on the specific context of the queer tango festival.

### **The Festival in Queer Tango**

- Queer tango took to the festival format early in its formative development
- A proliferation and professionalisation of queer tango festivals and queer tango marathons
- Queer Tango Festivals and marathons have established themselves as the much cherished and highly anticipated appointments comprising many a queer tango dancers' annual calendars

### **Festivalisation**

- Through the course of the late 20th century, the 'festival' emerged as a generic category of celebration, carrying few or none of the religious meanings associated with its history, but maintaining its association with a certain suspension of ordinary life, and a celebration of the expressive (Ronström 2011)

- One could say that we have witnessed a 'festivalisation of life' (Ronström 2011)
- The festival industry can be understood as one component of an experience economy (Johansson and Kociatkiewicz 2011)

### Top-down or Bottom-up?

- Top-down Festivalisation – Associated typically with large scale events, promoted by civic elites, policy makers and corporate interests (Zherdev 2014)
- Bottom-up Festivalisation – Associated with informal, grass-roots activism, and generally organised by individuals, collectives and social movements (Zherdev 2014)
- The latter are often provocative, experimental or even disruptive
- Festival organizers can be understood as gate-keepers, taste-makers, and selectors

### Festival Economies

- Festivals are deeply embedded in at least three different economies (Ronström 2011):
  - Monetary economy – Commodification within a globalised market economy
  - Symbolic economy - where the currency is cultural – cultural capital
  - Attention economy - where the currency is a form of visibility that can produce attention
- These economies interact in complex and productive ways

### Festivalscapes

- Festivals can be seen as spaces in which different cultural, aesthetic and political patterns and values temporarily converge and clash, constantly creating, stabilizing and redefining the setting of festival interaction (Chalcraft and Magaudda 2013: p. 174).
- The transient emplacement of global flows – A place and time-specific interaction of global cultural flows and local life (Chalcraft and Magaudda 2013).

## **Dance Festivals**

Dance festivals hold varying commitments to the varieties of cosmopolitanism identified by Chalcraft, Delanty and Sassatelli (2014, cited in St. John 2015) including:

- the relativisation of identity
- the positive recognition of the Other
- the mutual recognition and evaluation of cultures within a shared normative culture
- self-Other relations mediated through an orientation towards world consciousness

## **The Transformatory Capacity of the Festival (Ronström 2011)**

- Festivals as instruments of social and cultural change
- Festivals may transmit and transfer knowledge, technology, and mediate between individuals, groups and cultures.
- Festivals as spaces of exploration and production – bringing new things to life
- Festivals as spaces where dominant aesthetics, ethics, values, symbols and representations may be challenged

## **Festivalization in the Context of Queer**

- Queer festivals as 'anti-identity' festivals? A queer identity as a belief-oriented identity – negating the binary of gender and sexual normativity (Eleftheriadis 2015)
- By engaging people from across borders, queer festivals build 'transnational solidarities' (Eleftheriadis 2015)
- Queer festivals as spaces of affective communication and egalitarian sociality (Brown 2007)
- Queer festivals perform political ideals.
- Queer festivals function as prefigurative spaces in that their ends are realised by the means by which those ends are achieved (Eleftheriadis 2015).
- "...Queer spaces are important because they provide a constructive and practical attempt to offer a non-hierarchical, participatory alternative to a gay scene that has become saturated by the commodity. They offer more than empty transgression. They are experimental spaces in which new forms of ethical relationships and encounters based on co-operation, respect and dignity can be developed. The queerness of these spaces is

constituted as much through the process of building relationships in this basis, as it is from any attachment to specific sexual or gender identities” (Brown 2010 p. 205)

### **Some Empirical Findings**

- The Festivalisation of Queer Tango – Proliferation and professionalization?
- A recognition that QT festivals had grown significantly in number
- Festival as an important temporal and spatial framing for queer tango globally, and for the attendance practices of most participants
- QT festivals as key events in personal calendars, structuring the year into keenly-anticipated date-marked happenings, saved up for, and serving as opportunities to travel to attractive destinations, and get back in touch with geographically-distanced significant others and mutually enjoy togetherness
- Professionalisation - A sense that these events had become more ‘professional’
- An emerging differentiation: ‘huge’ festivals (Buenos Aires and Berlin) becoming distinguishable from smaller, more intimate events (Oslo)

### **Variable Evaluations:**

- Size matters! - increased scale and professionalism of QT festivals as: a source of collective ‘pride’; as testimony to the growth trajectory of the queer agenda; as supporting an enhanced experience
- However, it can be ‘too big’ - “I prefer the smaller ones” (Nigel)
- Peter left the international queer tango festival in Buenos Aires feeling “it was a rip off”

### **Queer Tango Festivals: Places of Passing, and Transitionally, Being**

- QT festivals celebrated as places of gathering and ‘passing’, where connections with like-situated others could be made
- QT festivals as places where ‘bonding ties’ could be formed with yet-to-be-discovered others through the medium of the embrace, and the space-making practices of queer festival attendees.

- Queer tango festivals - co-constructing, however intermittently and impermanently, a particular quality of place in which to temporarily be, and practice

### **Queer Tango Festivals: the Apex of Queer Tango Practice?**

- Opportunity to encounter 'good' dancers, those embodying high levels of technical competence and musicality, was key to the quality of the experience
- However, Savigliano's (2010): 'queer milongas readily accept tango dancers at different training stages without imposing hierarchies based on seniority or authenticity, and are open to innovations of movement techniques and vocabularies, dress codes, and partnering arrangements' (p. 143).
- Astrid - 'in the queer milonga, there's so many diverse people...dancing all over the place, and they don't care if they're good or not'

### **Queer Tango Festivals as Better Than Locally-Emplaced Queer Tango**

- Symbolic and practical exclusions from mainstream tango spaces, and the limitations of locally-embedded queer tango, constituted important push factors for attending of QT festivals
- For James, a regular and happy attendee of local mainstream tango events, the limitations of locally emplaced queer tango drives his attendance of QT festivals
- "I've got limited funds...If I've got money to spend, because there's plenty of [mainstream] tango local to me, I shall go to the queer tango festivals"

### **Queer Tango Festivals: Building a Transnational Community of Solidarity**

- International queer tango festivals as spaces of gathering, events of co-presence where the still influential distancing and fragmenting effects of topographical dispersal find a counter-measure
- Communities of solidarity and sharing come reflexively into being, however fleetingly

### **Queer Tango Festivals: Social Networking Outcomes**

- Dancing connections may also lead to connections of other sorts., deriving from commonalities of: ideology, life-worlds, ethics, desire
  - Establishing of an informal international network of high quality dancing partners
  - New friends
  - Professional Links

### **Queer Tango Festivals: Spaces of Social Trust and Learning**

- Valued as a space of social trust, learning and growth
- BUT – also partialities and limits to an egalitarian and inclusive sociality

### **Queer Tango Festivals: De Facto LGBT Spaces?**

- Participants questioned the 'queerness' of QT festivals by suggesting that QT festivals were in fact de facto gay and lesbian spaces
- "You go to any queer tango around the world. - I went to the biggest one lately in Berlin. It's for gay people, predominantly" (James)
- Peter - spaces marked by queer still driven by agendas, and related dynamics, framed within the histories and still important realities of gay and lesbian struggle
- Points to the challenges associated with making a transition from a LGBT agenda in which binaries frame that which is problematic, and accordingly progressive, to a queer agenda in which binaries become dissolved by the sheer proliferation of forms.

### **The 'De-facto LGBT-ness' of Queer Tango: is That Such a Bad Thing?**

- For Peter, the international queer tango festival, being a de facto 'gay' festival, provides him with the opportunity to enjoy high quality tango in a spatial and cultural context in which he is surrounded 'by people like himself', and where he can feel belonging; where he can really be himself.
- Whilst generally positive about the implications of the queer turn in many respects, he questions whether for him a 'truly queer' space is a preferable place to enjoy tango (in its practice and context) than a more conventionally 'gay' context;

- “I go to the queer tango festivals because I consider them to be gay festivals, so I’m going to find gay people to dance with. That’s what I consider to be queer tango” (James)

### The ‘De-facto LGBT-ness’ of Queer Tango: It Should be What it Says on the Tin

- Some participants were critical of the limitations to the QT festival’s queerness
- I remember going in Berlin into this workshop when you swap partners and this woman said ‘I don’t want to dance with a man’ and I thought ‘Well we’re at a queer tango festival. What kind of attitude’s that? I thought it was supposed to be open’” (Nigel)
- “Just because it’s got a label it doesn’t mean it does what it’s supposed to do or what it states on the tin...cliques form in queer tango”

### The Problem with ‘Straights’

- Queer theory raises ‘troubling’ questions about straightness, heterosexuality, opposite-sex desire
- Queer theory’s valorisation of fluidity, and its resistance to identitarian categories, may also challenge the ontologies on which gay and lesbian identities are formed, challenging any simple binary between same- and opposite sex desire

### Straight Queers?

- Are lesbians and gays ready to include straight queers and straight queer-allies in the context of queer tango?
- Astrid reflects on the fact that she is not seeing many straight people at queer milongas, but questions whether this should be considered as a negative, “I hear...from gay, lesbian and trans people that they’re not sad about it, that not so many straight people are coming, because the energy is changing”.

### Conclusion

The festival serves as a key site within the moral geography of queer tango, offering a place of passing and being, however fleetingly. Despite, or perhaps because, of their fleeting nature, queer tango festivals embody many features associated with a queer project, in particular those associated with the valorisation of fluidity and transformation. But it is also clear that queer tango festivals are complex

and contested spaces, and especially in respect of their queerness. Queer tango festivals can be understood as places of transnational passing, where the meaning of tango's queerness is settled in and through the dynamic sociality of those present, but with outcomes that are, at the very least, yet to be fully determined. Attendees report many of the features associated with queer forms of sociality at queer tango festivals – egalitarianism, affective freedom, inclusion. However, at the same time, multiple partialities are recognised and reported in all these respects, drawing variable evaluations from the participants. In particular, gay and lesbian normativities, rather than a more formally queer sensibility, are seen to predominate the queer tango festival environment, just as they appear to do in queer tango more generally

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# Queer Bodies, Machinic Perception and Dancing Beyond the Self

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*Professor Lisa Blackman, Department of Media and Communications, Goldsmiths.*

## Keynote Lecture

### Abstract

This lecture will explore what queer(ing) Tango practices brings to our understandings of friendship, social relations, bodily attunements, and the politics of dancing bodies. Lisa will explore the implications of listening-with-touch as a queer practice, which connects with forms of somatic attention, which have been relegated, discarded, submerged and displaced within the psychological and human sciences. The lecture will explore arguments, which suggest that tango requires a listening to/with intent, and a sensing of minimal bodily movements responding before they are registered at the level of conscious cognition. These modes of somatic attention point towards modes of communication that trouble separation, boundedness and singularity, and which reveal how bodies (human and non-human) are always in a process of becoming. The dynamics of relation that Tango requires and makes possible will be explored as part of a queer politics of hope, optimism and vitality. Lisa will explore how Tango as a figuration usurps and dethrones the largely sedentary philosopher and his Cartesian thinking from its position and considers what our conceptions of the body might have looked like if the queer dancing body had provided a model for philosophical thinking.

What if philosophers based their thinking on their queer tango dancing, instead of just sitting still at their desks?

Professor Lisa Blackman will shortly be exploring this idea at the *Queer Tango Salon*.

In tango, we are familiar with the ideas of profound “connection” and that two bodies, while dancing, can “become one” – ideas hard fully to express in language. Yet, arguably, in a queer context these sorts of ideas take on additional value, meaning and significance.

In her presentation, “Queer Bodies, Machinic Perception and Dancing Beyond the Self” Keynote Contributor, Professor Lisa Blackman, will be bringing fresh perspectives to the *Queer Tango Salon* of a kind rarely found outside the academy but of absolute and immediate relevance to all of us who dance – and to a purpose:

She writes: “The dynamics of relation that Tango requires and makes possible will be explored as part of a queer politics of hope, optimism and vitality.”

**Part 1 – Straight Philosophy – From oneness to becoming-one-with-another**



*Vintage Female Tango Couple ca. 1920*

I want to explore 2 central questions with you today:

What if philosophers based their thinking on their queer tango dancing, instead of just sitting still at their desks? What would our conceptions of thinking have looked or even felt like if the queer dancing body had provided a model for philosophical thinking.

I want to think these questions through with you today, hopefully with a bit of queer humour, and a serious engagement with how this might inform a queer politics of hope, optimism and vitality. What can queer tango and our experience of profound connection - of sensitive attunement with and through another such that often experiences of border and boundary between self and other are displaced - bring to expanding our notions of what it means to think. To repeat the refrain: What if philosophers based their thinking on our insights and experiences regarding queer tango dancing, instead of just sitting still and sedentary at their desks?

Let's start by unpacking these questions by making them speak firstly to some of the philosophies that have tended to shape academic thinking and which are often referred to as Cartesian – that is they make a separation between mind and body, self and other, rationality and emotion, and importantly for the purposes of the conference “thinking from dancing” and specifically thinking from queer movement practices, including queer tango. The kind of disembodied thinking I am going to illustrate in the first part of the lecture is associated with the philosophy of the French 17th Century philosopher Rene Descartes who coined the famous dictum, I think therefore I am, aligning his sense of selfhood (his sense of masculine authority) with his ability to engage in abstract, conceptual thinking whilst sitting at his desk. Incidentally, the queer cultural theorist and feminist philosopher Sara Ahmed has drawn attention to how important the desk is to straight philosophical thought forming the background horizon of assumptions as to how thought is done. As I have often said there has been an unshakeable assumption within these traditions that academics ideally ‘make sense’ from the neck upwards and the body or embodied forms of sense making have largely been relegated and viewed as an obstacle to the right kinds of academic practice.

In my own work within the field of body studies I am committed to developing theories of the body and embodiment which are **non-dualistic**; that is that do not assume a separation between mind and body, human and technical, natural and cultural, self and other, inside and outside, rationality and emotion, thinking and movement. I have explored how this thinking denigrates certain people and groups who have historically been associated with their bodies rather than minds and also importantly produces a very disembodied approach to knowledge and sense-making - sense-making from the neck-up ie. that thinking is a process separate from the body. What I want to do as a starting point for this lecture is to share something you might not know about Descartes - what I am calling on the first slide Descartes' body:



*Descartes' Body*

In a chapter by Johnstone (1992) called 'The Bodily Nature of Self or What Descartes Should Have Conceded. Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia in a book called *Giving the Body Its Due* (edited by a dance studies scholar and dancer Maxine Sheets-Johnstone) she shows how Descartes continually refused to take on board the views of one of his female disciples, Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia. Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia constantly reminded Descartes of those aspects of his own embodied existence he chose to ignore - this included his own infirmity, as well as the effects of troubles, worries and emotional turmoil on his philosophical reflection.

She suggested that Descartes philosophical speculations and reflections were based on a misguided fantasy that he could exist without his body; that he could overcome his own bodily infirmities. In this sense Sheets-Johnstone refigures Descartes philosophy as a defensive practice, which obscures, disqualifies and disavows the embodied nature of all thinking and reflection. Dualistic thinking however has taken on a truth status and normativity such that we encounter it everywhere but it often only becomes apparent when it is challenged, displaced or de-stabilized in some ways.

In later work Sheets-Johnstone, the editor of the book (1999) has argued that we must be "mindful of movement" when we think about what it means to think, to be and have a body, arguing that consciousness is always a corporeal or kinaesthetic consciousness that is created through the body's movements through space and time. She urges us to "think in and with movement" as the basis of a corporeal or embodied academic practice that does not separate thinking and movement.



*Roland Barthes. Photograph: Fabian Cevallos/Corbis*

Let's explore another key thinker and philosopher who has had a major impact on the arts and humanities, who also thought through sitting or repose. Here I want to turn to Roland Barthes - a key figure within structuralism and poststructuralism and an intellectual who profoundly shaped popular culture **as the study of textuality** and a key cite for the transmission and circulation of symbolic meaning. What I find of interest about Barthes that might usually remain unnoticed is the periods of time that he spent in ill health whilst developing some of his theories of symbolic meaning. One story that can be found on a popular website is that:

"Barthes showed great promise as a student and spent the period from 1935 to 1939 at the Sorbonne, where he earned a license in classical letters. He was plagued by ill health throughout this period, suffering from tuberculosis, which often had to be treated in the isolation of sanatoria. His repeated physical breakdowns disrupted his academic career, affecting his studies and his ability to take qualifying examinations. They also exempted him from military service during World War II." [1]



*Barthes lying down in repose.*

We might conclude from this that Barthes spent a lot of time resting, on his back in bed, perhaps in a chair but certainly in a state of relative immobility whilst he recovered, recuperated and dealt with the physical breakdowns which were to repeat throughout his life. We can imagine Barthes reading and studying whilst suffering from debility honing his ability to deconstruct and notice the kinds of symbolic meaning and associations being made in texts, which shaped what became known as the method of semiotic analysis.

We might imagine him developing his attunement to signs throughout this period and channelling perhaps his emotional frustrations and anxieties through the text. This might indeed be one of the defence mechanisms that intellectualization provides. Of course this is purely speculative but I want to argue not insignificant for the story I am trying to tell for why and how the body has been neglected and relegated within academic thought.

I also think Barthes own over-emphasis on textuality haunts him later in his life following the death of his Mother who he lived with for 60 years and who helped care for him during his long illnesses. He offers us a beautiful mediation on a photograph of her in his last book, *Camera Lucida*, where he explores a more embodied way of analysing how images work and move us. In this work Barthes gives us the concept of the punctum, which refers to the wounding, personally touching affective detail of a photograph, the way a photograph might be taken

to work on and through the body rather than primarily through the codes of language or culture. Indeed this is often how Barthes last book is described exploring the immediacy and affectivity of photography, which he described in this book as working on an asymbolic level.

What we can see is that the analysis of popular culture as text doesn't work and it didn't work for Barthes as he was grieving for his Mother considering the emotionality and viscosity of what it could feel like to be moved by a photograph and its affectivity; for a photograph to become available to new thoughts, feelings, memories, desires within the context in this case of unbearable loss and grief.

In order to open to some thinking practices that perhaps speak more to the kinds of thinking that Tango makes possible and also requires in order to experience profound connection I want to turn to another male figure who spent a lot of time resting in bed dealing with physical ill health, but who perhaps was rather queer when compared with Descartes and Barthes, that is the medical hypnotist Milton Erikson who has certainly been considered odd and strange. Milton Erikson offers another possibility afforded by repose that foregrounds a range of concepts, attunement, becoming-available, somatic feeling, sensitive feel, which I think are more useful for thinking about Queer Tango's potential as an experience that can contribute to a politics of hope, optimism and vitality. I will spend a few minutes telling you about Erikson and why I think his story of rest and immobility and the practices that he developed as a medical hypnotist are interesting for us here today.

Milton Erikson was a medical hypnotist who spent years developing techniques to induce hypnotic trance, and subjected the phenomenon of hypnotic trance to particular kinds of experimental staging. He published numerous in a range of different experimental psychological journals during the forties, fifties, sixties and seventies. He also edited the *Journal of Clinical Hypnosis* until his death in 1980 and is a seminal figure in the establishment of medical hypnosis exploring the role of hypnotic trance in the induction of anaesthesia and pain relief, for example. Due to his history of polio and congenital sensory problems this resulted in Erikson being tone-deaf and colour blind (see Rosen, 2010).

These problems encouraged Erikson to pay attention to minute muscular movements in his attempts to rehabilitate his own partial paralysis and overcome a limp due to the polio. He also developed an acute sensitivity to minimal bodily communications in order to develop ways of knowing that did not rely on cognition – famously he said he could tell a good piano player by the way their hands moved across the keyboard. What characterised being able to enter into hypnotic relations and bring about change was **persistence, training and development – the importance of discipline, training and habit for shaping processes which are often experienced as non-conscious and assumed sometimes therefore to be outside of culture, history, technology, the popular etc. Through persistence, training, discipline and habit he explored different settings or experimental configurations through which these bodily potentialities could become available and become part of processes and practices of change and transformation.**

“When Erickson was stricken with polio he was left with his hearing, his vision, and the ability to move his eyes. He could speak with great difficulty but had few other voluntary physical capabilities. Expected to die, his tenacity and strength of will fuelled the recovery process together with painstakingly detailed recollections of his specific muscle movements learning that the mere thought of a movement could lead to automatic physical response. This started when a fortuitous event occurred on a day when Erickson was accidentally forgotten, sitting in the centre of the room in a rocking chair contrived to serve as a toilet for the paralysed youth. As he sat there, bored with his immediate surroundings, and wishing profoundly that his chair was sitting next to the window over- looking the farm, the chair began to rock, ever so slightly. Erickson noticed immediately, and came to conclude that his longings were somehow translated into minute muscular impulses. His task then was transformed from achieving the impossible (moving what could not be moved) into expanding upon what is possible (minute movement).

“He was then aided in relearning to balance and walk through watching his youngest sister as she moved through the crawling, teetering, and walking stages, and the process forced him to relearn the basic patterns of movement and perception. The polio together with his dyslexia and

colour blindness made him intensely curious about his own difficulties and how they could be remedied. He also developed the ability to derive conclusions from information that is customarily disregarded. For example, lying in bed and hearing the barn door shut and foot steps approaching and someone entering the house, Erickson learned to conclude correctly who was approaching and what that person's mood was. This attention to minute details and their implications contributed immensely to his ability as a therapist.

"When he instructed those who studied with him, he insisted that they attend not only to their client's gross behaviour and statements, but also to the minutiae of their movements, vocalizations, postures, respiration etc." [2]

What can we learn from Erikson's life story within the context of Queer Tango practices? He shows us how we can develop and hone our capacities to attend to minimal bodily movements that often are registered on the edges or margins of consciousness. We are always communicating at these levels or registers even if we might not ordinarily be consciously aware. Think about the way we can catch the mood of others, how we might feel the atmosphere as we walk into a room. We are profoundly connected; we are relational creatures not individualized selves and attending to what passes between us and developing and honing the capacity for attunement allows us to foreground these sensitivities as a queer practice of friendship and vitality. As we know Queer Tango practices can make visible these infra-processes (processes that are in-formation particularly through the practice of improvisation) so beautifully also reminding us that once registered they are often socially codified according to gendered distinctions – the follower and the leader, which is usually mapped onto the feminine and masculine in asymmetrical ways. These social codifications are often profoundly undone and unsettled by queer practices of movement based more on sharing, egalitarianism and undoing and reinventing convention.

The capacity for attunement Erikson tells us [is] not an ethereal affair but requires a technical practice or what Erikson called a setting.

The setting for Queer Tango includes as we know music, atmosphere, mood and the sensitivities of participants or what we might call co-

producers to arouse these potentialities into being together. Queer Tango is a practice like Erikson's version of medical hypnotism that recognises that suggestion is a shared potentiality that can be choreographed, shaped, disciplined and developed through practice. I think Erikson has much to teach us when thinking about embodied sense making, bodily engagement and research as bodily entanglement within the context of Queer Tango practices.

Incidentally for those of you who might not have considered practices of hypnotic suggestion as developed by Milton Erikson as forming part of a queer kinship with Queer Tango his work is still seen as controversial because he does not think suggestion or the suggestive capacities of people are involuntary and effortless. This is an assumption or theory of mind and consciousness, which persists to this day and is difficult to shake off. In part 2 of the lecture I want to explore why this is significant and make an argument as to how and why Queer Tango profoundly unsettles this set of cultural beliefs and assumptions; what anthropologists are calling "cultural invitation". This will enable me to posit an argument that Queer Tango can contribute to a queer politics of hope, optimism and vitality and in my view we really really need this in this new era of drawing boundaries, marking out territories and increasing right wing and populist engagements in radical separation based on racisms, xenophobias, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and fear of the other, rather than what learning from connection might open up.

## **Part 2 Enter the Queer Dancing Body or Queer Dancing Bodies – Tango In-formation**

Interestingly fascist dictators knew very well how profoundly expansive and pleasurable the experience and feeling of moving together rhythmically in time is. In an interesting book by McNeill he explores marching as a form of drill which orchestrates and modules the expansive feeling of moving in time together.

"Marching aimlessly about on the drill field, swaggering in conformity with prescribed military postures, conscious only of keeping in step so as to make the next move correctly and in time somehow felt good. Words are inadequate to describe the emotion aroused by the prolonged movement in unison that drilling involved. A sense of pervasive well-being is what I recall; more specifically, a strange sense of personal

enlargement: a sort of swelling out, becoming bigger than life, thanks to participation in collective ritual" [3]

As I commented in my book, *The Body: The Key Concepts* (2008):

"This example suggests that one of the aspects of corporeality that bind people together is a sense of cohesion which is experienced through the body as an expansive feeling. The concept of muscular bonding that McNeill develops refers precisely to what he terms this 'emotional affect of rhythmic movements and gestures' (1995: 5). This felt, visceral sense of feeling in tune with others is one that has a long tradition within work in anthropology on ecstatic cultures (see Lewis 1971), which tends to focus upon trance states that are brought about through repetitive, ritualistic practices marked by 'prolonged or heightened exertion' (McNeill 1995: 8). For some, these experiences are viewed as pathological and are 'Other' to normal psychological functioning. One such evaluation of these states was made by a famous British psychiatrist, William Sargeant (1967), who was motivated by a fascination with religion and phenomena that, in the cultures he studied, were experienced as signs of a divine, sacred world. These included the healing methods of 'witch doctors' in Ethiopia, Kenya, Zambia, Nigeria and Dahomey; fire walking in Fiji; temple drumming and dancing in India; transitional religious practices in Brazil; Voodoo in Haiti, and Revival meetings across North America. People experienced these states as spontaneous experiences of being possessed or taken over by spirits. This experience of possession was felt in and through their bodies in a range of sensory modalities including motor dissociation, contortions and tics, trembling, tingling in the hands and other body parts, catatonia, fainting, trances, stupor, collapse and feelings of heat, lightness, heaviness and so on and so forth. Sargeant drew parallels with political techniques of conversion in his preoccupations with Communist, Fascist and Nazi revolutions across Europe, and argued that conversion, both religious and political, could be explained by a physiological mechanism, an abreactive reaction of the brain, brought about by rhythmic and repetitive behaviour (1967:171)".

"This is a reductive explanation typical of the kind of biologically essentialist approach that we explored in relation to the naturalistic body. It is assumed that these experiences can be explained solely by a physiological mechanism in the brain (abreaction). He dismisses the

practices that he examines by aligning them to primitivism and therefore argues that they have little to tell us about practices that exist in Western cultures that he does not consider exceptional or abnormal. Military drill or dance are two such examples that McNeill, however, suggests induce a feeling of 'rhythmic kinaesthetic stimulation' that is part of the glue or cement that binds individuals together within the group (McNeill 1985: 7). McNeill's history of muscular bonding shows how the 'muscular, rhythmic dimension of human sociality' has a long history (1985: 156). He charts its importance in animal societies, in the community binding festivals of dance in small communities, in religious ceremonies and in politics and war. In relation to politics and war, it is Hitler's use of muscular bonding during the Third Reich that is seen to exemplify the affective basis of practices that bind people to each other and induce a sensation of solidarity or 'fellow-feeling'. Hitler mobilized the use of marching and other forms of repetitive drill on a grand scale in the huge rallies, such as the Nuremberg rally, that were filmed by the German artist Leni Riefenstahl (1934) and used as propaganda. These films are now available for viewing and provide a disturbing account of the role of muscular bonding in politics and war. We will explore some of these practices in Chapter 2 where we will consider 'communicating bodies' and the role of affect and emotion in bodily practices.

"McNeill suggests that 'repugnance against Hitlerism has discredited rhythmic muscular experiences of political and other sorts of ideological attachment' (1995: 151). He suggests, then, that we have not been keen to explore this gestural, muscular level of communication, preferring to see it as an abnormal or pathological phenomenon that occurs in what are deemed to be more primitive societies, or in those who are seen to have lost their will and submitted to the will of a charismatic leader – in those, in other words, who have lost the capacity for rationality and subsequently become defined by their bodies. This mind–body dualism, as we will see throughout the book, is entrenched and makes an appearance in many guises. However, although not wanting to reduce the affective glue that might bind people together to muscular bonding, it is a concept that introduces an aliveness or viscerality into the body. It is not just inert mass, but reacts back, responds, often at a level that is felt through the body but might not easily be open to articulation. One of the problems of cultural inscription or the socially constructed body is precisely the way in which the body is

viewed as passively written upon and does not seem to have any energy or creative motion. As many people are now arguing, the body that needs to be brought into social and cultural theory must be one that is also enhanced, modified and managed through a recognition of the importance of a register of feeling, affect and emotion (Tamborinino 2002; Thrift 2004). We will discuss these arguments in more detail in Chapter 2. As we can see, then, ironically the move to social determinism further displaces a sense of exactly what kind of body we want to make central to sociology and social theory. The problem as Turner (1984: 248) suggests is to overthrow a 'number of perennial contrasts' between, for example, structure and agency, mind and body, nature and will and the individual and society and to offer solutions that are neither deterministic nor view the body as somehow existing prior to social and cultural processes. These are the tensions and paradoxes with which the range of studies, traditions and perspectives that we will review in later chapters of the book are trying to grapple." [4]

As we can see from Hitler and Mussolini's fascist practices of governing populations, marching and moving together in time to music became a prototypical way of inducing crowds to feel a sense of togetherness and bonding within the context of fascism. These practices have been studied for their means of inducing conformity and of disciplining, controlling and manipulating citizens particularly within studies of crowd or group psychology. Because of the link to manipulation, power and control "suggestion" or what I want to call "becoming-together" within this context has been posited as a capacity to be feared, to be avoided and leaves us feeling cold and repugnant rather than drawing our attention to the positive as well as negative aspects of the experience of profound connection.

"It will be remarked that among the special characteristics of crowds there are several – such as impulsiveness, irritability, incapacity to reason, the absence of judgements and of the critical spirit, the exaggeration of sentiments, and others beside – which are almost always observed in beings belonging to inferior forms of evolution – women, savages and children for example" [5]

On Le Bon and the discrediting of suggestion rather than exploring what suggestion might become in its many diverse modalities (Stengers). In a piece I wrote specifically on Queer Tango back in 2007 for the journal,

*Theory, Culture & Society* (which was based on a review essay of a book by the cultural theorist and philosopher Erin Manning called *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*), I argued that Manning's book is important for foregrounding the kind of sensing, feeling body – a body or bodies that always extends beyond themselves – that Queer Tango helps orchestrate. As Manning argues:

"Tango begins with a music, a rhythm, a melody. The movement of the dance is initiated by a lead, a direction, an opening to which the follower responds. Tango is an exchange that depends on the closeness of two bodies willing to engage with one-another. It is a pact for three minutes, a sensual encounter that guarantees nothing but a listening. And this listening must happen on both sides, for a lead is meaningless if it does not convey a response from a follower. As various Tango aficionados have pointed out, the lead can never be more than an invitation, as a result of which the movement in response will remain improvised".

Argentine Tango Manning suggests demands a "learned desire aware, awake, attentive to the other as another". This other is always unknowable she suggests, and it is opening to the unknowable and the unintelligible that might return us to the "not-yet-inventive".

The improvisation that characterises Argentine Tango for example, can never be taught as pre-learned steps or choreographed moves because it is improvisational. Argentine Tango requires a listening to/with intent, sensing minimal bodily movements and responding before they are registered at the level of conscious cognition. I argued in the piece I wrote that Tango understood in this way would see Tango as part of a broader range of practices and experiences, which see movement, change and transformation as being part of "letting-go" of self-consciousness through attuning to the other such that separation and boundary are displaced.

Odd, strange, anomalous, weird etc.

I want to reclaim the weird or what might be better articulated as the QWeird as part of Queer Tango's political and personal potential.

In terms of my own experience of learning and dancing Tango my experiences of felt vitality and expansiveness came when I wasn't attempting to dance particular steps and respond as either a leader or

follower, but rather when I was involved in a reciprocal, improvised exchange. One example that is particularly memorable was where myself and a partner were playing with exchanging the roles of leader and follower through developing a sensitive feel that wasn't known in advance. This was coupled with a dark room, evocative music and a great teacher who always encouraged us to listen in and through our hearts. These moments for me were rare as it really does require a lot of training, discipline and working against certain habits of thought in order to open to the not-yet and infra-invisible aspects of communication. However, it happens best when one is able to forget self-consciousness. I posit that queering Tango helps to move beyond all kinds of social codification that threaten to close down on Tango's creative potential and for opening up new ways of relating to ourselves and others. As for the question of what philosophers might learn if they moved beyond themselves and even danced together in synchrony rather than write philosophy from their desks, I argue that we would perhaps start from a rather different dictum – not I think therefore I am, but rather "I am relational therefore I don't know what I might become". I think this is a much more radical proposition to explore!

I hope you all enjoy dancing and thinking together over the course of the next 2 days.

Thank you.

## Notes

1 <https://www.poemhunter.com/roland-barthes/biography>

2 <http://cpht.co.uk/cpht/06.%20Erickson%20-%20MD%20Iss4.pdf>

3 McNeill, 1995, *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History*, Harvard Uni Press (p. 2).

4 Blackman, L 2008, *The Body: The Key Concepts*. London and New York: Berg. In the text supplied by the author to the editors, the implication is that, at this point, the author intended to read out this extensive quotation from her own work when she presented. In the event, when delivering the paper, the author elected to extemporise a paraphrase instead. With no accurate record of that extemporisation, in

preparing this eBook, the editors thought it appropriate to include the author's originally intended text in full.

5 Le Bon, 1922, *The Crowd: A Study of Popular Mind*, London: T Fisher Unwin, cited by Lisa Blackman & Valerie Walkerdine (2001) *Mass Hysteria* (Ch.2: Mass Psychology)

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# Authentic by Choice or by Chance? A Discussion of *The Gods of Tango* (2015), by Carolina de Robertis

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## Description of Paper

*This novel follows the development of tango music in Buenos Aires and Montevideo from 1913 onwards through the challenges and soul-searching situations encountered by the protagonist, Leda, a young Italian widow who starts her career as a tango violinist posing as a man: Dante. The story includes Leda's growing success as a Tanguero; her unmasking and persecution as a fraud; her process of self-discovery as a wo/man; and her meeting the love of her life, the Uruguayan tango singer Rosa Vidal, whom she marries and with whom she lives happily for 51 years, playing, singing, composing, and dancing the tango doing intercambio. My talk will be framed by definitions of 'Authenticity' in connection with the self, tango in general, and queer tango in particular, and will be developed by establishing links between Herminia Ibarra's, 'Authenticity Paradox' and the novel. This theory, usually applied to women who reach positions of leadership in business or politics, will be used to show how the adoption of certain gendered attributes (stereotypical male/female behaviours) can become problematic for women in leading positions and what strategies are needed in order to facilitate the delivery of an authentic performance (assuming that such a thing exists).*

*If the tango itself could dance with me, would it lead or follow?"*

(Carolina De Robertis 207)

## Abstract

This novel follows the development of tango music in Buenos Aires and Montevideo from 1913 onwards through the challenges and soul-searching situations encountered by the protagonist, Leda, a young Italian widow who starts her career as a tango violinist posing as a man: Dante. The story includes Leda's growing success as a Tanguero; her unmasking and persecution as a fraud; her process of self-discovery as

a wo/man; and her meeting the love of her life, the Uruguayan tango singer Rosa Vidal, whom she marries and with whom she lives happily for 51 years, playing, singing, composing, and dancing the tango doing “intercambio”.

### **On the Authenticity Paradox**

According to Donald E. Riggio, recent theories of leadership focus on leaders dealing in a straightforward and honest way with followers, and is composed of four distinct components:

1. Self-Awareness (“Know Thyself”). A prerequisite for being an authentic leader is knowing your own strengths, limitations, and values. Knowing what you stand for and what you value is critical. Moreover, self-awareness is needed in order to develop the other components of authentic leadership.
2. Relational Transparency (“Be Genuine”). This involves being honest and straightforward in dealing with others. An authentic leader does not play games or have a hidden agenda. You know where you stand with an authentic leader.
3. Balanced Processing (“Be Fair-Minded”). An effective authentic leader solicits opposing viewpoints and considers all options before choosing a course of action. There is no impulsive action or “hidden agendas”—plans are well thought out and openly discussed.
4. Internalized Moral Perspective (“Do the Right Thing”). An authentic leader has an ethical core. She or he knows the right thing to do and is driven by a concern for ethics and fairness. (Riggio 1)

However, it is not quite as straight-forward as that. As David Drury explains

When you start something new and different in your life you feel strange, like you are faking it, and you can even feel like a fraud. However, in doing that new and different thing you may find a part of yourself you never knew existed. You may find that your identity can incorporate new dimensions of what you can be, of what you are becoming. (Drury 1)

This concept is called the “authenticity paradox” and was coined by Herminia Ibarra, author of the book *Act Like a Leader, Think Like a Leader*. According to Ibarra:

Because going against our natural inclinations can make us feel like impostors, we tend to latch on to authenticity as an excuse for sticking with what’s comfortable. But few jobs allow us to do that for long. [...] By viewing ourselves as works in progress and evolving our professional identities through trial and error, we can develop a personal style that feels right to us and suits our organizations’ changing needs. [...] That takes courage, because learning, by definition, starts with unnatural and often superficial behaviors that can make us feel calculating instead of genuine and spontaneous. But the only way to avoid being pigeonholed and ultimately become better leaders is to do the things that a rigidly authentic sense of self would keep us from doing. (Ibarra 4-5)

Not only that, but, according to Ibarra ‘Fortunately, there are ways of increasing oversight and evolving toward an “adaptively authentic” way of leading, but they require a playful frame of mind. (Ibarra 8)

And in that respect, she advises us to ‘Learn from diverse role models’ and, to understand that ‘most learning necessarily involves some form of imitation’ because ‘nothing is “original.”’ In short, she explains that ‘An important part of growing as a leader is viewing authenticity not as an intrinsic state but as the ability to take elements you have learned from others’ styles and behaviors and make them your own. (Ibarra 8)

In fact, after studying the strategies of successful female leaders, Ibarra discovered that: ‘Essentially, the chameleons faked it until they found what worked for them. Noticing their efforts, their managers provided coaching and mentoring and shared tacit knowledge. As a result, the chameleons arrived much faster at an authentic but more skillful style than the true-to-selfers.’ (Ibarra 8) And, therefore, her final advice was the following:

Don’t stick to “your story.” Most of us have personal narratives about defining moments that taught us important lessons. Consciously or not, we allow our stories, and the images of ourselves that they paint, to guide us in new situations. But the

stories can become outdated as we grow, so sometimes it's necessary to alter them dramatically or even to throw them out and start from scratch. (Ibarra 9)

### **On tango as Background for Authenticity**

In our story, Leda [1] not only drops her identity altogether and takes up that of her deceased husband Dante (and in so doing she finds herself on a journey from hell to paradise), but she drops her original story (of the innocent maiden scarred by the dark story of her cousin Cora's abuse and death) in order to triumph in her job as a violinist in a tango orchestra in Buenos Aires. In that process she has to learn from the existing male environment that she inhabits and, in accordance with the stereotypes of the time, adopts the role of the 'guapo' (the good-looking man), whom, according to Magali Saikin, was not only a male stereotype but a stereotype used by many gay men of those days in order to protect themselves from bullying and abuse from other more "macho" males. Saikin, therefore, asks what is the reason for such a disguise and concludes that:

Si el porteño no se disfrazaba, no se enmascara, entonces sale a relucir su verdadero rostro, su identidad desnuda: será fichado de 'compini' (pederasta pasivo). Este temor lleva y llevó a la población masculina porteña, a generar una serie de medidas y conductas que muestren y garanticen su hombría. Una de ellas era, como señala Salas, la visita al prostíbulo. (Saikin 108)

That is to say that, the "guapo" does not use his power to possess a woman as an end in itself, but to secure his own heterosexual place before other men:

La heterosexualidad era utilizada como 'táctica' en un mundo que no admitía otros héroes y otras diosas que pusieran en peligro los factores de poder dominantes. [...]. Los códigos de la mala vida señalaban una jerarquía de lo masculino. Esta teatralización de lo dominador y lo dominado, de lo fuerte y de lo débil, la naturalización de los roles de género pierde todo fundamento para pasar a ser, sin lugar a dudas, una construcción cultural. (Saikin 115)

In all this our Leda/Dante protagonist is pray to much suffering as she is constantly in fear of being exposed as a fraud, and finds herself

performing according to the heterosexual code, that is, acting like a 'guapo' and, in the process, discovering herself as a lover of women. She uses prostitutes constantly, and even though she refuses to undress before them or to have actual intercourse, she gains their absolute devotion by becoming the only man who excels at giving them pleasure (something that makes her extremely popular).

In this respect, Leda/Dante's success both professionally and sexually, could be seen as derived from her ability to be a chameleon, as Herminia Ibarra described when explaining the Authenticity Paradox. The complication appears in our novel when, after many adventures, Leda/Dante meets Carmen a beautiful and rich woman who is the co-owner of the high-class cabaret where the tango band performs. At this point a passionate but power-imbalanced relationship develops between the two, but tortured by her/his inability to show her/his authentic self, Leda/Dante decides to abandon her for Rosa Vidal, the female singer of tangos that gives their band its originality.

The type portrayed by Rosa would also fit one of the typical stereotypes of the turn of the 20th century tango scene, which originated with Pepita Avellaneda (Josefa Calatti 1889-1969): that of the virile female or transvestite. And, even though this has often been explained as a mechanism by which women could interpret lyrics that had a male voice, Saikin argues that it was instead, not only a personal choice but also something that was accepted and successful:

El fenómeno del travestismo fue siempre condenado socialmente cuando un hombre se vestía de mujer, pero paradójicamente, fue incentivado en el mundo del tango cuando una mujer se vestía de hombre. Son muchas las cantantes que como Azucena Maizani, recurren en la escenificación profesional del tango, a la vestimenta masculina. (Saikin 154)

But what Maizani did was to take this stereotype even further, as she did not stop at pretending to be a man, but progressed to embodying both masculine and feminine attributes at the same time:

Azucena Maizani construía el género modificando la categoría sexual adjudicada por la sociedad a su condición biológica. Una mujer interpreta un texto masculino, vestida de hombre. Vemos aquí un ejemplo de 'crossdressing'. En el 'crossdressing' es posible,

adoptando vestimentas opuestas a las cultural y socialmente catalogadas como indumentarias 'masculinas' y 'femeninas', combinar identidades sexuales. El 'crossdressing' fortalece la alternativa de 'hacer género' ('doing gender') combinando distintos niveles de la identidad sexual. (Saikin 182)

As we see in *The Gods of Tango*, when Rosa appears for her second audition, Leda/Dante is besides herself. On the one hand, she/he is outraged by the sight of a woman who is blatantly and unashamedly wearing male clothes, and on the other fascinated by her androgynous presence:

She wore a man's suit and a dark bowler hat. She held a briefcase at her side. Her breasts and hips were obvious under her clothes; she was too curvy to ever convince the world she was a man. And she was making no attempt to do so. The suit seemed tailored to her round hips. She wore red lipstick and black kohl around her eyes. A woman's face under the arrogant slant of a man's hat. A woman's shoulders squared like a man's, legs farther apart than a woman should ever stand. Dante stared at the apparition, her human eco, her worst nightmare —her face was pretty and frank, pragmatic way, and she knew that face, didn't she, think, think, Dante, search your mind —and then she knew: it was Rosa. (De Robertis 274)

In that particular instance and unlike what had happened in the relationship with Carmen, when Dante gets to know Rosa and falls in love with her, he feels the overpowering need to "come clean with her" and tell her that he is, in fact, a woman. The revelation of his 'Authentic self' and Rosa's absolute delight seem to point towards future happiness, however, shortly after the story takes a turn in that Carmen, scorned, exposes Dante as an impostor in front of his work colleagues and as a consequence one of his mates tries to knife him, killing the band leader instead. Reading the situation, our protagonist quite rightly believes that if she/he tries to tell the police to explain what happened they will never understand, and therefore decides to flee to Montevideo with Rosa.

At this point, the easiest solution would have been for Dante to turn back into Leda, restart her life as a woman and no one would have ever

been able to trace him, but that does not happen. Instead, like Ibarra suggested when she said that if you act like a leader you become one, by acting like a man, Leda becomes one, too:

Sometime in those years, the Shift occurred, though Dante would never be sure of the exact moment, just as one can't know precisely where the river ends and the great Atlantic begins: but one day he simply knew it, simply found himself as he, at home in the pronoun the world gave him each day, not because his body had changed, not because his story had changed, not even because he didn't see himself as a woman, but simply because the gap between inside and outside, self and disguise, truth and pretence, had narrowed and thinned until it became invisible to the human eye. (De Robertis 357)

Indeed, throughout the novel, Carolina De Robertis makes a big point in taking the reader along in her description of Leda's search of self and her plight as Dante. She shows her struggle to pretend to be Dante and her terror of being unmasked. She traces Leda-now-Dante's discovery of her own sexuality; Dante-also-Leda's development of a unique identity, and finally, once in Montevideo, of Dante embracing the fact that he is a man and will never be Leda again. This realisation, together with the responsibility involved in sticking convincingly to his belief makes us think that the outcome is the most authentic for the protagonist and at the same time reveals itself as the key that unlocks the otherwise illogical opening of the novel:

Dante died a happy man, although a strange one, known for living with a coffin in his house. The gossips of Montevideo had spent years speculating about the reason for the coffin. He's a vampire. He's mad. He's terrified of death. He keeps his violin in there, under a witch's spell, that's why your soul breaks open every time he plays, the old bastard. But as for the true reason, they could never begin to guess. (De Robertis 3)

### **On Tango Dancing**

The catalyst of our novel is, indeed, tango. To start with, the whole story revolves around Leda's desire to learn to play tangos on the violin her father gave her for Dante. She then realises that this may be the open door to an interesting alternative to prostitution and further along,

this very activity becomes a medium for the expression of her own sorrow, her worries and her new-found position of relative power within the world of men. Leda initially plays the tangos silently in her room, dressed as Dante, as an act of rebellion (De Robertis 102-103), but soon takes the decision of start existing as a man and in order to do so, starts going out to work, making male friends who accept her as a man, and visiting brothels regularly. It is here that he/she is made to learn to dance the tango by Victor:

“Let me lead”. He whispered into her ear. “Let go”. She didn’t want to let go. She fought surrender. But, as Arturo before, once she let herself relax, the moves began to flow from her or, rather, from both of them, as though a secret tide had caught them both and bore them in gentle circle circumscribed by the legs and arms of other pairs aloft on secret tides of their own. (De Robertis 157)

Of course, at this stage, as a novice, he/she is following, but, soon, he/she is given the following advice: “When you start leading, remember that it’s you who moves the woman. You have to make her feel like she has no choice but to go where your mind sends her” (De Robertis 158). And her leadership skills start to be developed in this direction from that point onwards, and especially when she starts playing in the dance halls, where we see her fascination for the dance increase:

For what happened when bodies filled the dance halls and the tango gripped them like a beautiful curse, propelled them around the room in pairs, bodies caught in the fierce language of dance, the room disappears, the world disappears, all things give way to a single bright circuit of light between two dancers. She // knew how it felt, she’d danced it, too. [...] Hold her close, compadre, Dante would think, flick your leg between her legs, press her so gently to the left that she believes the turn is born from her own will, hold the small of her back like it’s the core of every pleasure on this earth, and I will give you my sound, over and over, night after night, my sound will move you, my sound will guide you, my sound, through you, makes love to her. (De Robertis 185-186)

Then, when Dante starts a relationship with Carmen, the cabaret owner, she asks him for a dance and he performs it totally convincingly as a dapper and virile leader. On that occasion:

Dante reached for Carmen, quaking inside, amazed at the steadiness of her hands. One of them clasped Carme's hand, as the other landed on the small of her back. There was no music but Dante didn't need it, // the music was always inside her, etched into her bones, where it was impossible to lose. She picked a tune in her mind —el Llorón, the one which most made her wish she could step down from the stage and take a woman in her arms—and began. Carmen danced as though she, too, heard the music. She was lithe; she was strong; she had balance; there was no ripple of tension at the start of a move or at the end of it. Her responses seemed to guide themselves. The illusion of a single body on four legs, following commands that came from neither mind, from no mid at all, from something beyond any realm the mind could touch. Raise and lean and glide and hook and turn and back again to the center, always back to the center, then out again to edges where the soul can ache and stretch and make an arc out of its longing, sweep its secret shape into the air where it will leave no mark, because that is the dance, it leaves no imprint, has no owner, gleams and then is gone without a trace. (De Robertis 257-258)

But things change once more after Rosa and Dante settle in Montevideo not only because "They were among the first in their neighbourhood to buy a gramophone", but because "with it, they could dance Tango's in their living room, Dante leading, Rosa supple in her dress, their bodies fused in motion, moving, not just to music, but inside of it" (De Robertis 356). Nonetheless, it becomes clear that the limiting ways of traditional tango do not feel authentic to them, and on the day that Rosa turned forty –in 1936, the year after Gardel's plane crash wrapped all of tango in a shroud of tragedy– she asked for a special gift:

"I want to dance with you, and play the part of the man".

Dante balked. "I haven't worn a dress in over twenty years."

"You don't have to wear a dress. You can still be you, still be Dante? I just want to lead you."

Dante closed the shutters, checked them over and over.

Then Rosa lead.

It was still, at the root, the same dance: the same two bodies, connecting, gliding together, two aching souls reaching for each other and finding more than could be told. And then, in the fourth song, or maybe it was the fifth, they switched roles, without speaking, their bodies deciding, hands moving from waist to shoulder or shoulder to waist and pouring the dance in the opposite direction, which was, they discovered, not an opposite at all but a combination of the very same dance, the same essential language of the body, of two bodies wishing to be one, forming a kinetic poem out of longing. They switched again, again, until their bodies knew before their minds did which way the dance would flow. This malleable secret tango became their truest. They danced it in private for the rest of their lives. (De Robertis 357-358)

## Conclusions

In this communication, we have addressed several issues that link the quest of authenticity to leadership and the fact that authenticity itself end up being just a mechanism in one's personal development. That is, as Herminia Ibarra put it, "feeling like a fake can be a sign of growth" (Ibarra 1).

We have seen that, as Ibarra explains citing Dan McAdams, identity is "the internalized and evolving story that results from a person's selective appropriation of past, present and future." And one has to believe one's own story—but also embrace how it changes over time, according to what you need it to do. Being authentic is, therefore, about "trying out new stories about yourself, and keep editing them, much as you would your résumé" because "revising one's story is both an introspective and a social process", and "the narratives we choose should not only sum up our experiences and aspirations but also reflect the demands we face and resonate with the audience we're trying to win over" (Ibarra 9).

In *The Gods of Tango* we have also observed how society at the beginning of the 20th Century forced individuals to identify with the sex/gender binary and that that prospect did not in any way prove adequate for the characters in our novel. But thankfully, from today's

perspective, we can look at the world differently, as from the 1990s onwards a distinct set of transsexual narratives began to contest the definitional status of 'gender' based on shared experience. These analyses argue that if gender can be learned, then 'womanhood' (or in our case also 'manhood') is available to anyone with the capacity to learn. (Hird 11) However, in addition to this, "Bornstein argues that transsexuals cannot become men or women, not because they are 'inauthentic' as [...] but because transsexuals who refuse to identify themselves as 'female' or 'male' radically deconstruct sex and gender" (Hird 13). And, in this respect, Bornstein's autobiography highlights the fact that "if transsexuals reveal anything at all, it is how messy the 'sex'/gender' binary really is" (Hird 13). In other words, we have so far relied too heavily "on a particular set of assumptions about the materiality of bodies and the relation this materiality has to gender" (Hird 13). And, although queer theory contests the attribution of any particular character to masculinity or femininity, performing or 'doing' gender often seems to consist principally in combining or parodying existing gender practices. Indeed, Hird warns us of the fact that "Queer theory presumes that transgressing boundaries will subvert, and eventually dismantle, hierarchies based on sex and gender", but that "subversion can lead to unanticipated outcomes that may not be transgressive at all" (Hird 14). That is, that "by forging a 'third' sex, transgenderism may leave unchallenged the two-sex system" (Hird 14), which is, in a way, what happens in our novel because, in the practice of "intercambio", the male/female division disappears and the two individuals become equal, that is, they are both leaders and followers irrespective of their physical and of their sexual identification. In this sense, rather than exploring how successfully individuals may define themselves as 'women' or 'men', we agree with Hird that "the foregone analysis suggests that all recourse to 'nature' to define either the constitution of 'sex' or how we 'know' our 'gender' is problematic" (Hird 15).

As for the tango, a non-binary modern society should be able to dance in accordance to the reality of the moment irrespective of sex and gender roles. In that scenario, leading and following should be on offer not only to anyone, but to everyone depending on the mood of the moment. As the leadership theorists explained, adapting to new

circumstances requires new skills, and being authentic in the 21st century, if anything, should mean that we are able to open our minds and bodies to all possibilities without enslaving ourselves to old constrictive (gender or sexual) principles.

### Note

1 There remains to explore the possible link between her character and the classic myth of Leda and the swan.

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# Development of Queer Tango Communities: the Case of Madrid

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## Description of Paper

*This paper focuses on the process of building the queer tango community in Madrid. It raises questions about which factors have sustained or inhibited the growth and stability of this queer tango community. These factors are analyzed. It also describes the particularities of Madrid's queer tango community in the context of the city, the profiles of the people involved and the relationship of the queer tango dancers with both the wider queer tango community and the traditional tango community. This study builds on a previous paper of mine "El desarrollo de comunidades de tango queer: el caso de Madrid" (2013), reviewing the conclusions of that paper and identifying new directions and hypotheses for the future. This article aims to present some queer tango community development local history. It gives some insight about how it could be named as "community development" in terms of queer tango, shaping some of its goals, circumstances, achievements and possible improvements, besides depicting an ideological framework.*

## What is a Queer Tango Community?

A queer tango community is a group of people that gather for the practice of queer tango. Although this could be taken for granted, wondering what a queer tango community is, is a necessary first step to evaluate **how the community forms and grows, how it is different than any other queer tango community** and, therefore, what queer tango communities actually share.

## Common Interests

Regarding the gender/sexual issue, queer tango communities face a major fact: **unlike the heterosexist tango community members, the individuals forming the community are not related to each other by potential desire, but by political solidarity**. Regardless of the political orientation of a queer tango community, this solidarity or at

least an association between different gender/sexual identities and orientations is what most or every queer tango community share. [1]

### The Differences

A queer tango community is constituted by a range of people who hold **different identities regarding not only sex/gender, but also age, race, class and other characteristics**. Although gender and sex seem more important to consider, because they are usually the main clustering material for queer tango communities, age, race and class and the particular **relationship with the broader tango community** are as important regarding the nature, birth and growth of a certain queer tango community. Furthermore the **particular political standpoint** of the queer tango community varies from one local community to another.

### What is its Development?

Besides the initial energy which grows a queer tango community in the very beginning (i.e. a person or group of people who decide to initiate a queer tango group or activity, and who keep doing it at least until an independent community already exists), it is necessary to inquire what we are specifying under the idea of 'development'. Some initial ideas are:

- **Growth and awareness:** we usually take for granted that the goal of development is growing in number. This may be true, but it is limited by other conditions of development. Nevertheless, growing in numbers is related to members' awareness about being part of a particular community and it **could lead to a loss of awareness**, a growth, or it could remain stable. These possible changes are related to the **change in meaning of the values the community** holds, which goes **alongside conflicts that could lead to the splitting up** of the initial community into different communities with different interests and values.
- **Identity and commitment:** the development of a community undertakes the challenge of **building a group identity; sharing, exchanging and building meaning intersubjectively, that is to say, creating a particular form of culture**. This depends upon how committed to each other the members of the community become, which also depends on how the community is useful for them.

- **Usefulness and cohesiveness:** the development also depends upon whether the group awareness is useful for the individuals whose identity is being shaped by the community itself. **Otherwise, why should they insist in being part of the community? Pleasure** can be a utility, as well as **feeling part of a group**. There could also be more daily life applications such as **work, creating bonds, creating families or sharing houses**; practices that could lead to a more cohesive community and may be also to a longer lasting one.

### The Case of Madrid

The history of the queer tango community in Madrid began officially in **2010 with Gotan Queer Casablanca**, a weekly workshop that took place every Thursday for eight months in Casablanca Community Centre Squat in Antón Martín, Madrid. Furthermore, some minor prehistorical facts can be pointed out.

### Prehistory

In Madrid's tango scene, since the early nineties, there have been several **gay male professional tango dancers**, but supposedly they never came out of the closet in terms of dancing.

At some point before, there was an initiative by **Cecilia Barriga to begin a queer milonga in collaboration with traditional tango teachers María Antonieta Tuozzo y Ezequiel Herrera**, but it didn't work.

There was also an interesting initiative by Mariana Ancarola, Pilar Iglesias y Bibiana Degli Esposti between 2000 and 2004. They published a magazine called **Gilda**. While this publication didn't have a feminist approach, it aimed to amplify the voice of women inside the tango community. [2]

### First Phase: Anarchist Approach (2010-2012)

Queer Tango Madrid officially began with a weekly workshop that took place every Thursday for eight months at **Casablanca** Community Centre Squat in Antón Martín [3] (October 2010 to Spring 2011), run by **Caroline Betemps and Olaya Aramo**.

The year after, I (Olaya Aramo) organized a workshop every other week and *práctica* at Casablanca (October 2011 to September 2012).

At that time we were **not very experienced in tango and other kind of dances**, however we were very **involved in the anarchist squatting movement and in the feminist/queer autonomous/anarchist political movement**. I also very quickly became involved in the **traditional tango scene**.

Additionally, there was an antifascist tango scene developing very quickly since 2009 at Patio Maravillas Community Centre Squat, another squatted autonomous space (although not anarchist). This place was run by Carlos Compadrito and Andrea Venturini. We have been very close to them since the very start.

**In the first period**, we showed a very strong political standpoint. **We used to talk at length about queer theory embodiment and post and decolonial status of queer tango**. Caroline and I both had a feminist queer intersectional approach to queer tango.

**In the second period, Caroline moved to Berlin. I started to focus more and more on the dancing. I tried to integrate the discourses in the teaching to the movement form**. However, the intersectional strands were more difficult to integrate within the pedagogy of the dance, so they started to fade.

During this period, many people came, but mostly they were a **transient population** who came for two or three sessions at most. There were also people who came to every session, some of them **related to the traditional tango scene, others who were queers and feminist women, and others who were not queers nor related to the tango scene**.

For some people, Casablanca was the chance to take some tango **lessons for free**, or a place to practice *intercambio*. For some others, it was a **queer tango space**, and for a third group it was a place to dance **traditional tango for free and 'outside' the tango scene**.

**Second Phase: 'MORIR DE ÉXITO', 'DEATH BY SUCCESS' (2012-2015), Olaya Aramo**

In September 2012 Casablanca was evicted and we immediately moved to **Embajadores con Provisiones**, an **autonomous cultural association** in the same neighbourhood (Lavapiés), starting la **Milonga La Traviesa**. By the time La Traviesa was opened, I was

much more involved in the traditional tango scene and I was becoming a more experienced dancer and teacher. Classes started to be paid for, but still it was 'low cost tango' for a large number of people. The milonga was for free.

**La Traviesa died from its own success** because, given the fact that I was permanently involved in the traditional scene, and **I had stopped to be involved with the squatters and the queer movement**, most of the people who used to come to the milonga were people from the traditional and alternative tango scene. **La Traviesa evolved to be an alternative free milonga at an attractive venue.** It became more and more a very successful milonga. But I was becoming more and more disappointed, because that was not what I wanted La Traviesa to be. However on the other hand, it was necessary for the venue to exist, so **I even decided to remove the word 'queer'** when I made the Facebook account 'Milonga La Traviesa'. [4]

**La Traviesa Also Had Two Phases:**

**During the first one (2012-2013), there was a mix between queer people and straight people from the alternative [5] tango scene.** Also many **people from the contact improvisation scene** came because there was a CI jam nearby and they used to come to have a beer afterwards and they danced their own way.

**During the second phase (2013-2015), some of the queer people formerly involved stopped coming because they felt La Traviesa was starting to be an unwelcoming place** for them to come. And it was more or less the truth. La Traviesa was more and more **becoming a fashionable milonga with experienced traditional tango dancers and many people totally unaware of queer tango practices or feminist values.** There was this kind of mixed tendencies from the beginning, but they emerged when the number of people attending the milonga increased dramatically in the second period.

However fortunately everything changed in **May 2014 when I met Manuela and Darío (now Valentina) at the Plaza de Dos de Mayo.** Manuela and Darío were queers, new in the tango scene (Darío had just arrived from Córdoba, Argentina, and Manuela had been taking classes for about two years before starting to go to milongas). **Manuela**

**and I became partners and Darío started to work at the milonga. We put a LGBTIQ flag. The environment didn't change, but at least now we were three self-identified queer people running the milonga,** instead of one. Unlike the former queer members of the community, **Darío and Manuela were also involved in the traditional tango scene.**

La Traviesa did a good job **helping to develop an alternative tango music scene** in Madrid. Although I personally don't like it, I invited some friends to DJ at La Traviesa once a month. La Traviesa also **encouraged many women from the traditional tango scene to lead, DJ and organize tango events.** It definitely **helped to spread the word 'queer' which is now perfectly well-known by everyone participating in the tango scene in Madrid.**

Now a small cohesive group of organizers, we tried to queer La Traviesa up by inviting more and more queer people to come. **Some queers started to attend regularly,** but the general environment continued to be the same: an alternative all-night milonga in an attractive venue on Friday nights. It was an underground milonga in a decadent basement and many people really enjoyed it. But it didn't last. **In January 2015 Embajadores con Provisiones had to close its doors due to financial problems.** We had to move on.

### **Third Phase: Developing Queer Autonomy**

In the last months of La Traviesa **we tried to start to move queer tango from Lavapiés to Chueca,** which is the LGBT neighbourhood in Madrid. Darío and I started to teach at **Fulanita de Tal** (a lesbian disco) and after that at **El Ángel Azul** (a cocktail bar). Previous experiences happened again: **people engaged for short periods and many people from the traditional scene came.** The problem with Chueca is the venues are very small, and the activities were unstable, because we couldn't raise money enough for us, nor for the venues. We also organized a **queer milonga at Plaza Zerolo in Chueca in Summer 2016 and 2017.** [6] We had a moderate success doing the milonga there, but **not many queer newcomers for regular activities, more a traditional open air milonga in a gay neighbourhood.** At the moment we have not succeeded in setting up an ongoing queer tango activity in Chueca. It is **not easy to succeed in this gentrified and unwelcoming neighbourhood.** There also

may be underlying ideological reasons related to our temperament as a group, because **we are not fashionable queers, and Chueca is more about LGBT, not so friendly with queer people.**

At this point, it was important to find a balance between the fulfilment of our political values and, at the same time, give ourselves the chance to become professionals. Our goal was then to form a queer tango community with similar values and points of view on queerness and politics, and to have the freedom to devote our time and efforts to do so. Then we decided to move to the suburbs, avoiding becoming too fashionable in the traditional tango scene, and to provide a safer space for queers and allies, as well as the chance to welcome queer tango newcomers. So we moved to **Vaciador34** in the neighbourhood of Carabanchel, a venue very well known among the young queer movement in Madrid. And at the same time we decided to keep teaching at Lavapiés (at La Mala Mujer feminist place) and to open a brand new Queer Tango School in the centre town, at Estudio de Danza Pepa Guerra (Cibeles).

We have been at Vaciador every Thursday (except for summer time, when we move to open air locations) for the last two years. As Vaciador34 is a very well-known venue among queer youngsters, it offered a very good window for the queer movement to approach queer tango, but the truth is it didn't really work. The people who were attending the milonga during this period were people who found us by themselves. Still there is a significant transient population who come for one, two or three times. And there are people who come from the traditional tango scene, people who dance intercambio, and people who come because it's open rate and they cannot attend other kinds of tango events. Or possibly just people who for whatever reason fancy us. There is now a more stable group of queer tango dancers, and a group of queers who dance tango, but still I feel that it is not cohesive enough. There is still a split between those of us who are part of the traditional tango community and those who are not willing to be involved in it, because they just want to devote a few hours to queer tango a week, or because they don't feel comfortable in the traditional tango scene and they don't want to go.

We decided to have La milonga queer at Vaciador34 on Thursdays so it was not too crowded and for it to be an especially comfortable place for

those who want to attend a queer milonga. It works to an extent, but the truth is it is also difficult for the queer tango dancers to come during the week to a distant neighbourhood (in Madrid, almost all milongas are set in the city centre). Some of them have work in the daytime, others have kids and families, and so on.

Due to the mix of people and interests it is also sometimes difficult to keep the milonga a safe space for queers. I will illustrate this with an example that happened in winter 2016-2017: **we received a visit from a tango band that rehearse next to Vaciador**. They compose new tangos and they are three cis heterosexual men who were very pleased to be immediately invited to play for us. However there was a problem with some of the lyrics, because they decided to play a song about a transvestite that the singer apparently composed, which was considered transphobic by some of the transgender attendees. Of course the members of the band didn't realize that and they didn't intend to offend us (just the opposite!) but some transgender people in the milonga felt uncomfortable. However there were also transgender people at the milonga that particular night who were perfectly ok with the song.

In addition to this, some of us still felt that the queer milonga was not the most welcoming space for queer people, so Manuela decided to create a monthly event specific for LGBT people, ***No está el horno para bollos***. She ran this milonga for some months, but then a violent transphobic situation happened with the owner of the venue, so she decided to stop.

Another major factor in this last two years was **Valentina's transition from Darío**. Like me, Valentina is also very involved in the traditional tango scene. She and I are very well considered dancers among the traditional tango scene, but of course, we face subtle forms of discrimination. For example, other professionals barely offer us any kind of work, and we are not invited to dance very often. This situation it's always changing and of course we don't stay seated 'planchando' for a very long time. We invite people to dance and we look for our own chances to work in tango, we support our allies in the traditional tango scene and we try and have mostly positive relationships with everyone. Valentina has faced other kinds of subtle discrimination in the traditional

tango scene due to her transition, and also our queer tango relationship as professional partners has been affected by it.

In the last phase (2015-2017) **we tried to become an assembly group** [7], but we haven't succeeded so far. We had some meetings, but people are very used to delegating to the organizers, so it has been almost impossible to encourage people to take a leading role in organizing events, or assemblies.

The last big issue that we have faced in recent months has been that Manuela and I split up. I moved from Madrid. Valentina is considering a change of venue so that she and Manuela can continue taking care of queer tango activities in Madrid.

Besides regular activities, in these seven years, we have also been giving workshops in different events and places. Events such as Orgullo Crítico, Octubre Trans, Ladyfest, Aniversario de Diagonal, Jornadas Poliamorosas (Madrid), Contornos de la Sexualidad (Bilbao), Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres Seropositivas (Madrid), Festival de Teatro Convivencias (Madrid), and places and associations like Mercado de San Fernando (Madrid), Apoyo Positivo (Madrid), El Nido (Valencia), La Madreña (Oviedo), Paraíso Local Creativo (Oviedo), La Mandrágora (Valencia), La Nómada (Salamanca), Crismhom (LGBT religious organization, Madrid), Gruñidos Salvajes (Madrid), Semana de Jazz de Candás (Asturias), etc.

### **Achievements:**

**We have supported different kinds of processes related to sex/gender/orientation/feminist identities:** we have helped some women to empower themselves and to start organising tango events, djing, and professionalisation. We have built a safe space for transgender people to express themselves and develop their transition (on the other hand, we have unfortunately also failed in some cases). We have helped some homosexual/bisexual/pansexual/polysexual people to accept themselves and have a safe space to express and develop. We have also facilitated some other feminist and gender-related artistic and political developments.

We have gained acceptance and **spread the understanding of LGBTIQ issues among the traditional tango community.** We can

say that almost everyone in the traditional tango community now knows the term “queer” and has at least an idea of its meaning.

Although we were not direct facilitators of this, in this period, some gay professional tango teachers came out of the closet in the traditional community. Queer Tango Madrid is not the instigator of this, but we feel that we gave them a background for public acceptance with our impulse on visibility, equality and normalization and anti-discrimination discourse.

### **Further Improvements:**

For the growth of the community, **building long-term commitment** in classes and queer milongas is needed.

**Improving a LGBTIQA safe space:** there are two kinds of people regarding this. Those who want to engage with the traditional tango scene and those who don't, because they prefer to remain in an LGBTIQA space where they won't be attacked. We can definitely improve codes, norms and protocols of action and intervention inside our safe spaces, because there have been situations which have been uncomfortable or aggressive for some people in the queer tango scene inside our queer tango community.

Along with this, **we need to improve conflict resolution among members**, as well as cohesion between us, not to be broken apart for personal reasons.

We need to come up with ways to integrate people with and without income to **improve class-related equality**.

**We would like to go beyond the understanding of queer tango as an LGBT leisure activity.** Although people usually look for the most important ties in life in what is called their 'leisure time', at the same time the members of the queer tango community can perceive the community as non-fundamental, 'just leisure'. To go beyond the idea of 'leisure' it is necessary that the community commits to a broader political engagement. We face challenges regarding how to get to this broader commitment integrating a diverse group of people with specific needs.

### **Conclusions**

**Madrid urban features related to tango.** Almost all milongas are set in the city centre, so milongas at the arrabales are less likely to succeed,

and milongas in the city centre are at risk of homogenisation. This has caused different problems to the queer tango scene which are not directly related to the characteristics of the queer tango community itself.

**Organizers involvement in the traditional tango scene:** we are very involved, yet professionally discriminated against. This has shown to be a very important factor in articulating the queer tango community in Madrid: the more involved in the traditional tango scene, the more likely to persist in the queer tango scene for a long period of time.

**The role of the organizers** is extremely important. The organizers' political standpoint, character, temperament as a group, age, class and gender will determine who will feel more comfortable being involved in the group. Small group organizers as those of queer tango also face the duty of trying to integrate people with different views on the same topics.

Individual, **personal affairs** do matter when it comes to the queer tango community. As queer-concerned or anarchists, we can be committed with polyamorous, non-monogamous, feminist or at least honest kind of personal relationships, and this is something that also distinguishes us from the traditional tango scene, where patriarchal ways of personal relationships are kind of legitimised. This means our dancing practice takes place within a framework of personal political work, not just in the form of discourse building. It is difficult to overcome personal affairs in this fair way and at the same time keep a cohesive and peaceful queer tango community.

**Anarchist/autonomous standpoint:** we face challenges regarding professionalisation and at the same time keeping our ideological background. The challenges of professionalisation also meant changes in our values and practices. Can we still understand ourselves and our practices in the frame of anarchism when we are willing to be paid for our experience in tango or when we want to be considered at the same level and status as our heterosexual professional couple colleagues? Can we still consider ourselves anarchists when we make a difference between 'us' the teachers, and 'them' the pupils? Can we consider ourselves anarchists when we decide not to stress an anarchist discourse among our community in order to integrate a larger number of

and diverse people? What is left of anarchism and anarchist values when we consider all these questions altogether? I don't have an immediate response, but I feel there is something left: the pursuing of long-term long lasting change of gender practices and equal power relationships balanced with the respect of individuality and the consideration of a wide framework of economic conditions and circumstances.

**We do have different political views** about the same political issues that concern our own community. This is true in terms of discourse: we need to embody a broad perspective on queer and feminist politics; we are not together because of how we think, but because of the dance. Queers don't have the same opinion about queerness. We also don't share the same opinion about feminism and about the role of politics. This gives us a great chance to become a diverse group that mix different sensibilities, and that is definitely an advantage. However given the fact that we are a small community, it is necessary to solve those conflicts in order to stay together, and the tango and the milonga many times does not offer those spaces for discussion and community discourse building. Therefore it is easy to see that a person who has a conflict decided to just stop coming. We can be cohesive, but perhaps it is not such a good idea to try to be homogenous. Respecting each other's ideas is very important. However, given the fact that what unites us is tango, it is easy to be tempted to the "just dance" discourse. This implies that we will not discuss politics within our groups, which will end up being "just an LGBT leisure activity". Perhaps that is ok for some of us, but it is definitely not enough for all of us. Whether we decide to put more interest in the first or the second group, we are making a political statement.

We not only differ in terms of opinion on what queerness is or what the aim of LGBT politics is, **we also don't have a common sense of desire**. We have no need to stay together because of whom we want to dance with. There are people in the LGBT tango community who want to dance with potential sexual partners, and there are people who don't. There are people who need a safe space from the practice of queer tango, and there are people who want to scatter in the traditional tango community. Perhaps we cannot consider ourselves a "group", but a coalition of allies [8], following the spirit of Judith Butler's Gender Trouble:

I continue to hope for a coalition of sexual minorities that will transcend the simple categories of identity, that will refuse the erasure of bisexuality, that will counter and dissipate the violence imposed by restrictive bodily norms. I would hope that such a coalition would be based on the irreducible complexity of sexuality and its implication in various dynamics of discursive and institutional power, and that no one will be too quick to reduce power to hierarchy and to refuse its productive political dimensions. [9]

**Meaning of queer in Spain/Madrid:** we are not dealing here with the general meaning of the word 'queer' and if there is such a thing as a general meaning of the word 'queer' in the different queer tango communities. We can talk about what we perceive as the meaning of 'queer' in Spain (and in Madrid in particular) and with the meaning of the word among Madrid's queer tango and tango communities. I consider this essay as an example of the local history of community building in terms of queerness and dance, so we will try not to make general assumptions about the meaning of the terms we use, even knowing that general assumptions are presupposed when we use any term at all. In any case, we are part of the builders of the meaning of the term every single time we use it. In Madrid, **the word 'queer' points at the anti-capitalist/anarchist queer movement, which criticise the LGBTIQA** associative movement related to political parties, which was normalized during the nineties. The 'queer' movement is related to the anarchist or at least autonomous non-heterosexual/non-monogamous political movement that seeks for radical forms of micro and macro politic transformation of everyday life and forms of organization. In its conceptualization, ideas against identity reinforcement and non-essentialism are key conceptions to be considered. In any case, there are strong trends also within the queer politics context that encourage the defence of identity struggles and alternative essential explanations of various sex/gender related issues which are in confrontation, as well as an alliance inside the queer autonomous political movement. We, Tango Queer Madrid, were born as an anti-capitalist/anarchist radical queer group and, although we have faced many changes within the years, we still carry this spirit on. 'Queer' has no meaning at all in the Spanish language. Its translation,

'rarito/a/e', being attractive and accurate for those of us who were accused of it in our childhood, is not specific enough to be used to address the sex and gender issue. Although in its use it was intended as a general noun connotation for the LGBTIQ+ community, I think this project was not very successful, and the term is not at all spread among even the whole LGBTIQ+ community [10]. It is definitely an Anglicism and an academic-oriented term known by those who engage with feminist discourse in the academic environment. From there, it has been acquired for politics, but is not accepted in every LGBT activist environment, and of course it is not accepted in every feminist environment. It is even not accepted among all the people participating in the autonomous/anarchist environment, precisely for its foreign origin and also because it is assumed that it can fade or even erase the needs and struggles of those whose sexual/gender identities are neglected and prosecuted by the political system and the law. Other terms that have been used instead are 'cuir' and the most successful, 'transfeminismo'. Therefore, it is a very contested term whose use is controversial and whose meaning is neither natural nor clear to almost no one. Nevertheless, we decided to use this term for at least two reasons.

- It is the term that is used for 'queer tango' in the rest of the world, Argentina and Uruguay included
- We (the founders of Queer Tango Madrid) conceptually and politically agree with it

However, we know that the use of the term by people who don't share the same views or don't have the same political background implies that the meaning of the term itself will change. As a result, this means the development of the community itself and its characteristics is crucial in understanding the meaning of the term.

### Afterword

In 2013, I wrote an essay about the development of the queer tango community in Madrid, from which this essay is a continuation or, at least, this essay (2017) is informed by that essay and is a development of it. I recommend the reading of both essays and I would like to point out some **final reflections comparing former and actual conclusions, circumstances, and changes of view in our own practices and criticism**. In the aforementioned previous essay, I established a distinction between 'queer tango dancers' ('bailarines de

tango queer') and 'queer dancers who dance tango' ('bailarines queer de tango'). This distinction aimed to include those who dance 'intercambio' among the queer tango community, perhaps because at that time I was in charge of 'La Traviesa', which was a milonga where 'intercambio' dancers felt very welcomed (even more than queer dancers'). In these four years I have changed my mind about this. I now think 'intercambio' should not be included in queer tango except by those who know that by dancing intercambio they are not just 'playing the other role', 'having more fun', or 'having more chances to dance', but they do it because they want to overcome the power relationships prescribed by the traditional tango scene. In other words, they are heterosexuals who do not want to conform to heterosexist norms. From this point of view, they are engaging with activism when they dance queer tango. On the other hand, it is also possible that a person dances same sex dancing without any political self-implication. We could ask ourselves: is that queer tango? Perhaps it is not from their own point of view. They are just people who happen to be same sex or gender dancing tango together, but from an external point of view the political implications of their practice are too evident. Although we pursue normalization, this normalization becomes a transformation of gender relationships and, in this sense, it is always activism. Anyway, we also have to respect those who internally don't want to understand their practice as a form of activism, because it is not activism for them. Therefore, for me, 'queer tango' can be defined as LGBTIQ+ and feminist activists tango practice.

Additionally, there were two issues that I addressed in the previous essay that I have not addressed in this one that need further explanation and conceptual development: the relationship between queer tango community development and sexual desire/passion/deep connection, and the development of the technique of dilution of roles as part of the goals of the community building process. I will try to address these questions in my future writings.

## Notes

1 If we imagine a huge growth of queer tango in general, may it happen that each smaller community within the queer tango community could start to split from each other: a gay men tango community, a lesbian

tango community, a transgender tango community, etc. Actually, this already exists to different extents, and the movement towards unification or separation by desire it's is itself a factor in the development of queer tango communities.

2 Mariana Ancarola later moved to San Francisco where she was a part of Tango Con\*fusion for a brief period of time.

3 Part of Lavapiés neighborhood, which is a friendly neighborhood for queers and anarchists.

4 I thought that 'La Traviesa' already means 'transvestite' and it kept a queer spirit, and also everybody knew me so they knew that I was a queer tango dancer, but at the same time I was neglecting myself and my own goals in queer tango.

5 *Alternative* stands for people from the antifascist tango scene and also people who enjoy alternative music for tango, although I would never play it.

6 In the beginning of summer 2017 the police kindly asked us to leave; now we are returning because Valentina and other members of the queer tango community managed to get a permit.

7 We tried to imitate Barcelona's queer tango group, who have been running for the last two years and are organized as an assembly.

8 As Judith Butler puts it in *Gender Trouble*, Routledge, 1999.

9 Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*, Routledge, 1999, p.27.

10 The use of the letter "Q" inside the LGBTIQ+ acronym is a very good example of this, showing how 'queer' is being understood as a particular kind of identity itself.

# Tango Photograph

© Peggy La Baronne



*Queer Tango Salonistas 2017 unwind on the London "Tube".*  
© Peggy La Baronne

# The Origins of Queer Tango as Practices and Conceptions: Competing or Complementary Narratives?

© Ray Batchelor and Birthe Havmøller

## Description

*When was queer tango first danced? And where? And by whom? To which we might add: who wants to know? And why? This has often seemed to some to be a simple matter, easily recited: queer tango originated in Germany, in Hamburg, in 2001. Neat. Memorable. But possibly wrong, or if not wrong, exactly, then at best, incomplete. When the queer tango activist, Federico Imperial asked about queer tangos origins on Facebook, he was inundated with candidates, all earlier than 2001. So, what are we to do? Indeed, how can we say what the origins of queer tango are, if there is little agreement as to what queer tango is? In this preliminary paper, we describe which issues we think need addressing when judging these candidates, and we are then going set them out for appraisal.*

## Abstract:

When was queer tango first danced? And where? And by whom? To which we might add: who wants to know? And why? This has often seemed to some to be a simple matter, easily recited: queer tango originated in Germany, in Hamburg, in 2001. Neat. Memorable. But possibly wrong, or if not wrong, exactly, then at best, incomplete. When the queer tango activist, Federico Imperial asked about queer tangos origins on Facebook, he was inundated with candidates, all earlier than 2001. So, what are we to do? Indeed, how can we say what the origins of queer tango are, if there is little agreement as to what queer tango is? In this preliminary paper, we describe some of the issues we think need addressing and then offer a catalogue. The "origins" question may be unanswerable, but setting out more clearly the many roots of queer tango must be to everyone's advantage.

When was queer tango first danced?  
And where?  
And by whom?

To which we might add: who wants to know? And why?

As Mariana Docampo has noted with understandable irritation, this has often seemed to some to be a simple matter [1] For example, one contributor to *The Queer Tango Book* wrote with airy confidence in 2015:

The first Queer Tango event was organised by Marga Nagel, Ute Walter and Felix Feyerabend in Hamburg in 2000. Thereafter, countless manifestations of Queer Tango sprang up around the world, not least in Buenos Aires shortly afterwards and now in London too. [2]

He was, or rather, I was, after all only parroting what I read elsewhere, not least from Wikipedia where you can still read:

The Queer tango movement...is very recent. It was founded in Germany, in Hamburg, where in 2001 the first gay-lesbian milonga was organized. In the same year the First International Queer Tango Argentina Festival was brought there to life. Since 2001 it takes place every year in order to bring together same sex couples in tango from all over the world. *Born in Germany*, the Queer Tango movement inspired other countries to create local queer tango scenes. Meanwhile, Queer Tango festivals are celebrated for example in Argentina, in Denmark, Sweden and in the United States. [3] [Emphasis added; original references deleted]

...to which the anonymous authors graciously add:

In the bastion of traditional heteronormative tango, in Buenos Aires, the first Queer Milonga, La Marshall, home for the LGBT tango community, opened its doors in 2002. [4]

So, there we have it. In Germany, in Hamburg, In 2001. Neat. Memorable. Routinely repeated. And possibly completely wrong. Or, if not wrong, exactly, then at best, incomplete. 2015 was bumper year for books in English on tango: Kathy Davis. *Dancing Tango: Passionate Encounters in a Globalizing World*, and Melissa Fitch, *Global Tangos: Travels in the Transnational Imaginary*. [5] Fitch in particular cites historical antecedents which pre-date this 2001 episode in Hamburg. When, in 2017, the queer tango activist, Federico Imperial posted the

equivalent of these questions about origins (plus one question about Russia) on The Queer Tango Conversation, a Facebook group set up by the Queer Tango Project, asking about queer tango's origins for an interview he was about to have, he was inundated with candidates, all earlier than 2001. It was that which prompted this paper.

Birthe and I abandoned our original idea of setting out a catalogue of competing claims to be "the origin of queer tango". In part, this was because we realised we cannot say what the origins of queer tango are, if there is still little agreement as to what queer tango is. Birthe and I, (who with Olaya Aramo are each a third of the Queer Tango Project and therefore ought to know) do not agree. Birthe has set her own ideas very clearly in both the *Queer Tango Book* [6] and more recently, in her *10 Dogme Rules for The Dance Style of 'Queer Tango'* found elsewhere in this volume. As her title and presentation make plain, for Birthe, the queerness of queer tango is expressed by the manner in which the roles are danced – or style in which – the roles are danced and this argument may have merit. I have set my ideas out in a piece called "What is Queer Tango?" [7] originally published in 2014, where I argue that, in the absence of agreement, it is best defined by dancing it, and elsewhere, my emphasis is not on practices – apart, perhaps from role changing within the dance, *intercambio*, – but on the awareness of those dancing of the social and political dimension of what they are doing (and not WHILE they are doing it, obviously, but more generally). Of course, this tidy little model breaks down, if the queer social and political queer sensibility resides, not in the dancers themselves, but in the observers, who can see these queer dimensions, even if the dancers themselves are unaware. Nowhere is this conundrum more pertinent than when the observer is looking back at historical data. Who, then, is to claim they know what dancers think, especially, if the dancers are long dead and lived in a culture long vanished?

We can, tentatively,

The Queer Tango Project runs The Queer Tango Image Archive, a digital archive of pre-digital; tango imagery which refers to that agenda outlined above. So, with history, it is perfectly possible for something – some image, or piece of knowledge - may be relevant to queer tango, but not BE queer tango. [8]

So,

When was queer tango first danced?  
And where?  
And by whom?

Birthe and I set out this provisional catalogue, not of competitive claims, but of complimentary narratives with some nervousness. The subject arouses passions. Our account will be incomplete, and will contain errors, for which we apologise in advance. This is not a definitive catalogue of the many roots of queer tango, but rather a provisional one which we present, as much as anything, as a call for still more reliable details to be more widely known. So, to those named, and still more to those not, we say sorry; and please contact us.

### **Casting Caution to the Wind, We Begin with THE EUROPEAN CANDIDATES:**

From the evidence which came to light in response to 2017 Fede's [aka Federico Imperial] Facebook post, and from other sources, the 2000/2001 Hamburg candidates, once a few more names have been added, may be rivals to themselves.

According to Fitch:

The Tango Queer scene in Hamburg, Germany had its origins in a small gay café in Altona: in the "Tuc Tuc," where the first tango dancers met *in the mideighties*. Marga Nagel and Ute Walter were the driving force behind the world's first Queer Tango Festival that took place in 2000. [9] [emphasis added]

This is confirmed by Walter herself, who, in response to Fede's Facebook post wrote: "Marga [Nagel] and I started with teaching LGBT and woman only classes in 1985"

Yet, it seems they were not alone. On the same thread, Sabine Rohde answered the question:

Hamburg! in Our studio Tango Exil start 1985, Ute Walter, Marga, Andrea, cafe tuctuc, the late Effi Effinghausen, the late Isabel Cortes, Mari Paul Renault and I with Maestro Antonio Todaro a.o [= and others] we all Dance/d open role/ switch before (awesome) Ute and [I?] co coined "Queer Tango"

And then, equally significantly, Rohde says:

We were political aware. We all had long, after-Milonga late night discussions about what we are doing with this "macho dance".  
Why us? Now we know a bit more 😊🙄 about the "why us"

Meanwhile, at about the same time, there were others experimenting in Germany:

Munich: Don't remember the name of the gorgeous both roles-dancing ginger haired tall woman with a slim gorgeous dancing man/following...

And something interesting was happening in Berlin. Brigitta Winkler's website asserts that "1986 [saw the] opening of Tanzart school in Berlin with Angelika Fischer. [10] Critically for our purposes, Winkler and Fischer worked as a "Frauentanzpaar" that is, women dancing together. [11]

And Rohde, adds:

Berlin 1986/or 87? : tango meetings at D. Langes Tango from Rio de la Plata. Nicole Nau (damals aus Düsseldorf) danced both roles excellent before going to Argentina for good ...

We have not had time to pursue this lead.

We might make mention of Tony Damen and Andreas Jans, owners of Tango Brujo, Hasselt, in Belgium. Their Tango Brujo website reads: "the founders, tony and andreas [sic], dance tango since 1993 and give lessons since 1999." The many, much later videos on their website imply that they have always danced together, despite that ambiguous phrasing. [12]

But returning to Germany, Winkler's involvement as a founder member of the group, TangoMujer takes us to North, rather than South America.

According to Tango Mujer's website:

In the early 1990s, four female tango dancers began practicing together in NYC: Fabienne Bongard, Rebecca Shulman, Valeria Solomonoff, and Brigitta Winkler. In 1996, they ... became TangoMujer, the first all-female tango company in the world. (...)

...in 1998, [they added] Berlin-based Angelika Fischer to the group (...) [13]

The claims made here relate to performance, rather than the social dance, yet Rebecca Shulmann's name stands out as a link to that social practice.

According to the Shulman's website:

She started to study tango in NYC in 1991 from Daniel Trenner, with whom she began to perform and to visit Buenos Aires. Daniel emphasized improvisation and lead-and-follow skills that are the foundation of social tango. [14]

Fitch, writing about one of Trenner's many instructional videos, in this case, one which includes role exchange – intercambio – quotes him as saying:

The conversational aspect of improvisation is widening to include the follower's asking for time from the leader, the leader giving time of the follower, and, sometimes, an exchange of lead and follow taking place within a dance.

See if you agree with what he says next: "This a gender-free mirror of what Argentine men did, in only segregated company, before."

Fitch asserts, rightly, I suspect:

Trenner does not make any associations between the role exchange and any critical, much less theoretical, rationales for engaging in it. It is strictly seen as a way to enhance one's range as a dancer, but it is still significant in that it demonstrates that this new attitude of openness was becoming apparent almost twenty years ago. [15]

...in other words, at a time when wider, gender politics was on the move.

### **And Argentina? What of Argentina?**

Yesterday [15<sup>th</sup> November 2017] Augusto Balizano closed the doors of La Marshall, which he credibly asserts is, or now was, the oldest gay milonga in Buenos Aires

Edgardo Fenández Sesma writes on Facebook:

this year we are celebrating in Buenos Aires, the 20 years of the first classes of free, diverse, or internationally queer tango. That classes took place in "Gasol Pub" of Recoleta neighborhood in 1997 (teacher: Augusto Balizano), and continued in 1998 until today, in the space "Lugar Gay de Buenos Aires", San Telmo. There is print advertising since 1998 of these classes. That classes were not only the first in which all couples learned the two roles and did "intercambios", but they were also the beginning of the paradigm shift in teaching, learning and language that was used until then. We think this is important, so for some time, I have spoken at tango festivals, classes, milongas, interviews, etc. About this date. [16]

Mariano Docampo has given us an authoritative account of her own role in importing the term "queer tango" (which becomes "tango queer" following Spanish grammatical logic) from Europe, but setting out a distinctively different, more Argentinian and more theoretically grounded practice of her own. Moreover, she reminded us that tango thrives on contact with "the other:" that is, European and North American practices. [17]

### **Conclusion:**

When was queer tango first danced?  
And where?  
And by whom?

We have galloped through a brief catalogue of, now, historical, 20th century tango occurrences which, seem to have embodied some of the dance practices, or some of the social or political concepts, or both which queer tango today includes or is founded on respectively.

We have omitted some other, similar, late 20th century examples, the countless shows, theatrical performances, the photographic and graphic imagery, the cinema films in which tango is represented, not to mention the richly documented tradition of men dancing with each other, and the less well document examples of women dancing with each other.

Perhaps we should not?

The questions as we posed them may be unanswerable in the absence of a precise definition of what queer tango is. However, taking the

looser model of the themes and generic queer tango practices which include, but are not confined to:

- Same sex couples
- Women leading
- Men following
- Women leading men
- Men leading women in a queer tango context
- Role change within the dance

A systematic challenge to norms of sex, gender and sexuality

Some awareness of the social and political dimensions of the significance of their dancing

...we believe we have begun to set out some credible origins narratives – and that the plural is important.

So, in this way, rather in the manner of detecting the evolutionary ancestor species of humankind, we are able to begin to set out the antecedents of queer tango. Few of them “are” queer tango, according to most people’s definitions, but they are relevant in understanding how we got here.

Historians are fortunate that the writing of history, or indeed of histories is a perpetually provisional art. Histories are written the better to understand where our present has come from, but as our queer tango present is dynamic, not static, then the histories it requires are likely to be equally changeable in character.

And in drawing careful distinctions between the European and Argentinian contributions to the origins of queer tango, that same maxim applies.

## Notes

1 Docampo made this observation in her guest presentation at the *Queer Tango Salon*, London, 2017. It is unpublished. For further light on this matter, readers are directed to her book *Buenos Aires Tango Queer* published in 2018.

2 “Coming Out to Dance: or getting it straight – a re-examination of the relationship of Queer Tango to the tango mainstream” in Birthe

Havmøller, Ray Batchelor, and Olaya Aramo, eds. 2015. *The Queer Tango Book: Ideas, Images and Inspiration in the 21st Century*, eBook. The Queer Tango Project [www.queertangobook.org](http://www.queertangobook.org)

3 Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queer\\_Tango](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queer_Tango) accessed 19 Dec 2018

4 As above

5 Melissa A. Fitch. 2105. *Global Tangos: Travels in the Transnational Imaginary*. Arizona: Bucknell University Press.

6 Birthe Havmøller, Ray Batchelor, and Olaya Aramo, eds. 2015. *The Queer Tango Book: Ideas, Images and Inspiration in the 21st Century*, eBook. The Queer Tango Project. [www.queertangobook.org](http://www.queertangobook.org)

7 Reproduced on The Queer Tango Image Archive website: <http://image.queertangobook.org/what-is-queer-tango/> accessed 19th Dec 2018

8 The Queer Tango Image Archive <http://image.queertangoproject.org/> accessed 19th Dec 2018. I set out a notional model for considering the history of tango in relation to queer tango at a conference of dance historians in Iowa in 2015 Uncovering the Histories and Pre-Histories of Queer Tango [Iowa US 2015]: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283197598\\_Uncovering\\_the\\_Histories\\_and\\_Pre-Histories\\_of\\_Queer\\_Tango\\_Contextualizing\\_and\\_Documenting\\_an\\_Innovative\\_Form\\_of\\_Social\\_Dancing](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283197598_Uncovering_the_Histories_and_Pre-Histories_of_Queer_Tango_Contextualizing_and_Documenting_an_Innovative_Form_of_Social_Dancing)

9 Fitch, p. 98. 2000 or 2001? Sadly, the Cologne Queer tango Festival whose website is cited by Fitch as the source for these assertions: <http://www.queer-tango-koeln.de/index.php/home.html> has vanished with the Festival itself which closed in 2016. Walter herself has not commented on an inquiry on just this point posed by Birthe Havmøller.

10 Confusingly, the same website gave 1987 as the date Tanzart opened, but Winkler herself confirmed in correspondence to the authors that it was, indeed, 1986

11 "1986 opening of Tanzart school in Berlin with Angelika Fischer"  
"1987 gründete sie zusammen mit ihrer Tanzpartnerin Angelika Fischer das Studio Tanzart in Berlin. Als Frauentanzpaar arbeiten sie u.a. mit

- dem Klaus Gutjahr Ensemble oder mit Juan Jose Musalini jun.“  
<http://www.brigittatango.de/bio.htm> accessed 14th September 2017
- 12 Tango Brujo <http://tangobrujo.be/html/frames.htm> accessed 14 09 2017; For a 2012 example of their dancing:  
<https://www.youtube.com/user/andreastango> accessed 14 Sept 2017
- 13 Tango Mujer, <http://www.tangomujer.com/our-story/> accessed 14th Sept 2017
- 14 Rebecca Tango, <http://www.rebeccatango.com/about-rebecca/biography> accessed 14 09 2017
- 15 Fitch p. 99; <http://danieltrenner.com/> accessed 14 09 2017; Video example with exchange of lead between Daniel and Rebecca probably from the end of the 1990s.
- 16 Edgardo Fernández Sesma post in Spanish on Facebook, 16th June 2107 given here in a mechanical translation.  
<https://www.facebook.com/edgardo.tangoyfolclore/posts/10155453739249357> accessed 19th Dec 2018
- 17 Docampo in her guest presentation at the *Queer Tango Salon*, London, 2017. It is unpublished. As before, readers are directed to her book *Buenos Aires Tango Queer* published in 2018. It was published in November 2018 and it is in Spanish. The authors have not yet read it.

# Appendix

## The programme of The Queer Tango Salon, London 2017

**The Queer  
Tango Salon  
2017:**  
Dancers who think &  
Thinkers who dance...

An International  
Interdisciplinary  
Symposium of  
Scholarship and Practice

# LONDON

15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> September 2017

bucks  
new university

**UWE**  
**Bristol** | University  
of the  
West of  
England

Legs  
Laboratoire  
d'études de genre  
et de sexualité

### Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> September

7.30  
till  
late...

Welcome to the Salon Milonga!  
**Tango Terra**, 42 Earlham St, London WC2H 9LA

### Friday 15<sup>th</sup> September

9.00  
till  
late...

Dancing at:  
**Negracha**, 4 Wild Court, London WC2B 4AU

### Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> September

9.00  
till  
late...

Dancing at:  
**Corrientes**, 24 Haverstock Hill, NW3 2BQ

**DANCING!**

*The Queer Tango Salon 2017 Programme Flyer*

## **WELCOME TO THE QUEER TANGO SALON 2017!**

The *Queer Tango Salon* 2017, the second of its kind, is seen by the organisers as a both a means by which queer tango is maturing, becoming more reflective and so richer and more interesting and as sign that it is. Some argue queer tango may simply melt away into a more liberal traditional climate, and in doing so, refresh and reinvigorate 21<sup>st</sup> century tango, whilst others are persuaded it continues to have a distinctive, "queer" – for which read "anti-normal" – mission. It is too early to say.

The Aims of The *Queer Tango Salon* are to:

- Bring dance activists and academics together into one space, to encourage them to listen to each other, and to dance with each other
- Explore questions relating to the nature and experience of sex, sexuality and gender in the context of the dancing body through discussion AND through dancing
- Examine issues concerning embodied knowledge and the dancing body
- Illuminate the characteristics of queer tango practices, relations and spaces
- Explore the political dimensions of queer tango
- Facilitate networks of scholarly and practice-related interest in queer tango for the development of future research opportunities
- Generate a range of outputs contributing to understanding and intervention

We hope you will enjoy dancing, listening, arguing, changing minds, having your mind changed and thinking about the *Queer Tango Salon* long after the last word has been spoken and the last tango danced.

Dr Ray Batchelor  
Dr Jon Mulholland  
Dr H  l  ne Marqi  

Organisers of  
*Queer Tango Salon* 2017

September 2017

## THE QUEER TANGO SALON 2017 - PROGRAMME

Friday 15th September

9.00-9.55

REGISTRATION: TEA + COFFEE + DISCUSSION

10.00-10.50

KEYNOTE LECTURE: Mariana Docampo: "Queer", "Tango" – Authenticity, Value and Meaning: a Post-colonial Exploration

"Tango"? "Queer"? "Tango Queer"? What happens when you take the tango, a dance which has been a key part of Argentine national identity, which you as an Argentinian have danced all your life and which generations of your family have danced, and link it with "queer" in terms of queer theory, a set of ideas foreign to Argentina and largely explored through and developed in English, the language of a former neo-colonial power? Why would you do such a thing? How could you do it and not alienate your fellow Argentinians? In this heartfelt extract from her forthcoming book, "Tango queer Buenos Aires", Mariana Docampo answers these and allied questions about the relationships of Argentina to queer tango, and to queer tango's multiple expressions around the world.

10.50-11.00

ROOM CHANGE (Pick up a coffee on the way) SHORT TEA + COFFEE!

11.00

Wiktor Skrzypczak: Embodied politics: Genderless

I would like to illuminate some aspects of the genderless social dance concept. It says, that the dance situation may create a space for reflexion, critique and deconstruction of sex based social roles, as it may set up a space which suspends every day's life social roles. I will use the examples of queer tango and contact improvisation which both carried, at least partially, the concept of the genderless encounter in movement. I underline the direct and fine relation between the way we think and speak about us as social dancers and the quality of movement we experience, showing, that a particular mindset always resonates with

particular corporeality. A common contact improvisation concept will be presented, which goes beyond the roles of leading and following, aiming an embodied, centred but open and responsive attitude. I'll trace this attitude in queer tango practice and pedagogy and display its improvisational and transformative potential.

11.20

Aimie Purser: Queering Orientations: A Queer Phenomenology of Queer Tango

This intervention takes the form of a traditional academic paper. Questions of how we <sup>LEP</sup><sub>SEP</sub> might theorise what it is to dance with someone else are explored through a phenomenological framework, with a particular emphasis on ideas of kinaesthetic empathy and Merleau-Ponty's conceptualisation of intersubjectivity as intercorporeality. As we are theorising the partnering experiences of dancing together in Queer Tango, it also feels particularly important to engage with Sara Ahmed's (2006) notion of Queer Phenomenology in order to explore the lived experiences of queer dancing bodies. Ahmed's insistence that we should think more closely, and more queerly, about phenomenology's emphasis on orientation, allows us to develop a perspective from which we can think through both the directionality of sexual desire and the phenomenon of moving together.

11.40

Paula-Irene Villa Braslavsky: The Normative Framing of Tango: Practical Experiences of Failure

Tango Argentino might seem at first sight an odd passion for feminists, queers and others who wish to think and live out of the normative box of dichotomous dualisms. Tango comes along as "passionate, elegant, exotic" couple dance. So why would anyone engage in a close embrace on the dance floor, risking to be thus embraced by a heteronormative and racist discourse? Because, as I suggest, Tango Argentino offers exciting experiences of 'queer failure' (Halberstam). My paper will trace the normative framing of tango and relate it to practical experiences of failure, paying special attention to the bodily dimension. Key concepts are mimesis, practices, discourse, intersectionality.

12.00-13.00

## Pauliniia Salminen: Video-based Discussion Workshop: Key Figures in Buenos Aires Queer Tango

The tango = 1 man + 1 woman. The definitions of the Argentine tango often focus on gender-specific roles. The tasks are clear: when the man leads and the woman follows, everything goes fine. But what happens if there are two men or two women dancing together? Are the traditional roles respected? Can they be altered? What does the audience think?

Queer Tango used to be a marginal and underground movement until some years ago. Nowadays queer (or "open") milongas and dancing lessons are becoming more common in Buenos Aires. Unlike in traditional events, the dancers can choose their partner and their role, whatever their gender is.

The main character Mariano teaches "regular" tango in an old-fashioned academy, but spends his evenings in Gay or Queer Milongas. Through the documentary, we meet dancers, men and women, who tell about their passion for the tango and about the difficulty of dancing with a partner.

13.00-13.55 LUNCH

14.00-14.50

**KEYNOTE LECTURE:** Prof Lisa Blackman: Queer Bodies, Machinic Perception and Dancing Beyond the Self

This lecture will explore what queer(ing) Tango practices brings to our understandings of friendship, social relations, bodily attunements, and the politics of dancing bodies. Lisa will explore the implications of listening-with-touch as a queer practice, which connects with forms of somatic attention, which have been relegated, discarded, submerged and displaced within the psychological and human sciences. The lecture will explore arguments, which suggest that tango requires a listening to/with intent, and a sensing of minimal bodily movements responding before they are registered at the level of conscious cognition. These modes of somatic attention point towards modes of communication that trouble separation, boundedness and singularity, and which reveal how bodies (human and non-human) are always in a process of becoming. The dynamics of relation that Tango requires and makes possible will be explored as part of a queer politics of hope, optimism and vitality. Lisa

will explore how Tango as a figuration usurps and dethrones the largely sedentary philosopher and his Cartesian thinking from its position and considers what our conceptions of the body might have looked like if the queer dancing body had provided a model for philosophical thinking.

14.50-14.00

ROOM CHANGE (Pick up a coffee on the way) SHORT TEA + COFFEE!

15.00-16.00

WORKSHOP: Joseph Roevens: Embodied Leadership with Tango

LeadershipTango is a self-knowledge and interpersonal dynamics training, not a dance class. Its philosophy and method is Queer: Participants do 4 simple walking exercises with different partners of both genders, and several „intercambio“s” to tango music. Traditionally men hold leadership positions according to a hierarchical „great man“ view. In the 21st century leadership is searching for a new approach, as some top self-managed organizations, such as Zappos & Buurtzorg demonstrate. You will explore what leadership and followership specifically means for you, and for others, by physically experiencing it, and also by sharing your insights verbally and non-verbally with each other, and with the group.

15.00-16.00

WORKSHOP: Olaya Aramo: The embodiment of femininity and masculinity through tango posture and attitudes

This workshop aims to analyze how tango posture and attitudes prescribe differences for the leader's and the follower's roles. It also focuses on how these differences are depicted as masculinity and femininity, and then to relate that to the different approaches of queer tango towards traditional tango endorsements of femininity and masculinity/leadership and followership. The workshop will introduce the participant to two approaches: the ungendered one, by which queer tango dancers try to neutralize the power forces inscribed in the ideas of “leading” and “following”, and the performative one, by which queer tango dancers deepen the symbolic masculinity and femininity inscribed in dancing roles. In the end, a fusion of both perspectives will be proposed, showing how followership and leadership, symbolically

masculine and feminine adjectives and aspects are necessary to describe each of the roles.

16.00-16.30

TEA + COFFEE + DISCUSSION

16.30

Eleanor Durrant: Where's my mermaid trousers? A wardrobe for both roles

In this illustrated talk, I will discuss what I wear to the milonga. I am a middle-aged, cisgender, straight woman; I have been dancing tango since 2007, and leading socially since 2014. I optimise my choice of role and partner in the milonga for aspects of the experience that are, at least in principle, independent of gender, although it is certainly not irrelevant. I will describe my wardrobe experiments and their results, together with the thoughts, practicalities, and imaginative notions behind them, and my experiences of performing a male role and claiming, in limited respects and contexts, male social status. I will use some of art historian Anne Hollander's ideas on fashion as a genre of western visual art to reflect on my choices and on other possibilities available to me and to other people.

16.50

Matthew Coombes and Marion Krauthaker: Gender and well-being in tango - Reflections on the 2016 workshop

Last year, we led an unusual workshop presented as an exploration of the boundaries of mainstream tango and gender binaries through the use of props. Participants were brave enough to take part, use heels for the first time, mix slit skirts and jackets, use filled bras and penises in creative ways or simply reaffirm their own way of being and dancing. Beyond this stimulating moment of sharing and experimentation, we were using the props as 'dialogical props' (Coombes, 2015); that is, artefacts meant to facilitate a dialogue and non-verbal ways of communicating and relating between individuals, objects and researchers (Coombes, 2015). We will present our analyses of the interactions, discussions and feedback triggered by these thought/emotion-provoking objects. While expected facts about queer

were revealed the conflicting emotions related by the participants can also be pointers to identify what queer tango can be. These elements will be discussed through the lenses of gender theory, tango technique and design.

[Unfortunately, in the event, Matthew Coombes and Marion Krauthaker were unable to run this particular workshop.]

17.10

Joseph Roevens: How LeadershipTango will transform my University

The Board of Governors of Breda University in the Netherlands is searching for a more fitting 21st Century organisational structure, moving away from its classical top-down hierarchy to some sort of self-management with multi-disciplinary teams. As a queer tango dancer and organizational psychologist, I suggested to the central HRM-offices that all NHTV staff could participate in LeadershipTango (Roevens, 2015). I presented my lecture "How LeadershipTango will change your World" at Breda University's All-Staff Study Day. Thereafter, during four weeks, 14 staff members of different departments, functions, and Academies learned what is typical about their own style of "Leading" and of "Following", and how one can improve one's ability to switch more easily between both. I will present some outcomes/ benefits of working with QueerTango/ LeadershipTango, and establish why it is a successful approach for organisational change.

## **Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> September**

9.30-9.55

REGISTRATION: TEA + COFFEE + DISCUSSION

10.00

WORKSHOP: Paula-Irene Villa and Michael Cysouw: Queering roles – beyond dichotomy

One of the deepest principles of tango is the separation of the couple into two different roles: the leader and the follower. This is not only instantiated in a difference in intent and power, but also in role-specific movements and body posture, clothing, social practices and gender. In

queer circles, there is a strong wish to disentangle these different aspects of the dichotomy. Gender might, for example, be combined differently with lead/follow intent. However, we propose that a truly queer tango tries to disentangle the dichotomies themselves. This workshop will offer specific techniques and awesome tricks for a truly queer tango experience, blurring the binary structure with every step we take – together, negotiating intensive intimacy.

10.00

WORKSHOP: Carolyn and Rastko: What can queer tango learn from intersectionality?

In this workshop, we will collectively come up with a working definition of “intersectionality”. By looking at interlocking oppression and privilege which stem from gender, race, class, sexuality, dis/ability, nationality etc., in the context of queer tango we will ask: What spaces, processes or factors exclude certain groups of dancers? What are the pros and cons of mainstream gay culture for queer tango? What would a truly intersectional queer tango community look or feel like? We will explore gender dynamics on the dance floor, so please bring your dancing shoes, but also, bring an item (an accessory or garment) which you can exchange with others during the workshop.

11.00

ROOM CHANGE (Pick up a coffee on the way) SHORT TEA + COFFEE!

11.10

Birthe Havmøller: 10 Dogme Rules for The Dance Style of 'Queer Tango'

Birthe Havmøller, co-editor of *The Queer Tango Book*, presents her manifesto, *10 Dogme Rules for The Dance Style of 'Queer Tango'* and shares her take on the core values and principles of the dance style of Queer Tango. The roles are 'fluid' in Queer Tango. When you change roles while dancing a tango you are dancing a 'Queer Tango'. This dance style is danceable by everybody, straight and queer dancers alike. The cutting-edge dance style of Queer Tango is the Queer Tango Movement's gift to the greater international tango community. Queer Tango is the latest in a long line of dance styles in Argentinian tango. Birthe invites you to work with the creative constraints of a 'vow of

chastity', devoting yourself to the *comme il faut*-dogme rules for the best practice of the dance style of Queer Tango, and see where this takes your dancing.

11.30

Kath McGuire: What Mainstream Dance Can Learn from Queer Tango

Partner dancing can be wonderful. It can also be intimidating and unpleasant. This is true whether one is dancing Queer Tango, other queer partner dancing or in the mainstream. The difficulties that people may face when entering a dance environment can be centred around ability, personality, confidence or identity. In many cases these arise due to mistaken assumptions on behalf of the dancer themselves or of the dance cohort they are dancing with. Exposing these assumptions and separating the intrinsic nature of dance from the, sometimes constrictive, social norms associated with dance can help to alleviate some of these challenges. This paper will discuss some of the ways in which mainstream dance can learn from the characteristics, attitudes and behaviours of Queer Tango. While Queer Tango itself is not the only answer, perhaps the mainstream can benefit from Queer Tango to make itself more welcoming and accessible for everyone.

11.50

Constanze Alpen: Same Sex Latin and Ballroom Dancing: Role Change – or the Fear of Losing Identity

Constanze Alpen - Observations and Thoughts on Same Sex Latin and Ballroom Dancing: Role Change – or the Fear of Losing Identity

Questions about same sex dancing include important topics of identity, gender and social policy. As a dancer and attentive observer of same sex dance events, I found two facts that make the issue of gender and identity most visible: the clothes and the role change. I'd like to present my observations and thoughts about the latter in the *Queer Tango salon* 2017. The two mentioned facts make equality dance special compared to mainstream dance and give the dancers the possibility to display variety and diversity. But lately, especially at same sex dance events there is a strong movement adopting the mainstream dance fashion and additionally the role change is danced by less and less couples. So, what's the behind this drifting towards mainstream dance? Asking the

dancers themselves you find a strong connection between the qualities of leading and following and what the dancers define as 'male' or 'female'. Therefore, one can assume they feel undermined about their identity.

12.10-13.05

LUNCH

13.10-14.10

KEYNOTE LECTURE: Federico Imperial: La Vie en Rose, a Parisian Take on Queer Tango

When queer tango is realised in the context of Paris, a city with a long history of fashion, of cabaret, of luxury goods and style, how will it differ from the queer tango "events" which occur elsewhere around the world? In part, the famous and popular annual queer tango event, La Vie en Rose is the embodiment of answers to this question. Paris's relationship with tango has a long and august history and is, indeed the subject of Nardo Zalko's celebrated book *Paris-Buenos Aires: un siècle de tango* (2004). Sadly, Federico Imperial ("San Fede" on facebook) is prevented by a crowded schedule of international queer tango engagements from joining us at the *Queer Tango Salon 2017* to make what would doubtless have been a characteristically closely argued, academic presentation drawing on the latest, cutting-edge scholarship, but in keeping with the spirit of La Vie en Rose, he has arranged for Dita LVR, the glamorous international spy, socialite, and his constant companion and muse, to give us her unique insights into her life of espionage, of danger and of perfumerie...

14.10-14.40

ROOM CHANGE (Pick up a coffee on the way) SHORT TEA + COFFEE!

14.20

Montserrat Roser i Puig: Authentic by Choice or by Chance? The Gods of Tango (2015), by Carolina de Robertis

This novel follows the development of tango music in Buenos Aires and Montevideo from 1913 onwards through the challenges and soul-searching situations encountered by the protagonist, Leda, a young

Italian widow who starts her career as a tango violinist posing as a man: Dante. The story includes Leda's growing success as a Tanguero; her unmasking and persecution as a fraud; her process of self-discovery as a wo/man; and her meeting the love of her life, the Uruguayan tango singer Rosa Vidal, whom she marries and with whom she lives happily for 51 years, playing, singing, composing, and dancing the tango doing intercambio. My talk will be framed by definitions of 'Authenticity' in connection with the self, tango in general, and queer tango in particular, and will be developed by establishing links between Herminia Ibarra's, 'Authenticity Paradox' and the novel. This theory, usually applied to women who reach positions of leadership in business or politics, will be used to show how the adoption of certain gendered attributes (stereotypical male/female behaviours) can become problematic for women in leading positions and what strategies are needed in order to facilitate the delivery of an authentic performance (assuming that such a thing exists).

14.40

Kaatje Jones and China Yggström: Filming "Any Two to Tango": queer tango through visual anthropology

In "Any Two to Tango," two filmmakers embark on a cinematic exploration of queer tango through the lens of the 2017 world championships and the surrounding context of social dancing in Buenos Aires. For the salon, we would offer a 10 minute presentation of the film rushes, along with a discussion of the process of distilling the complexity of a living culture into a streamlined story. Why does queer tango lend itself well to film? How do we choose what to cover? Which aspects will be central? What do we cut and why? What role does the filmmaker have in the whole process? How can we present the intimacy and individuality of the queer tango experience in an authentic way? We will explore these questions and more with a few key moments from the recently-completed film shoot in Buenos Aires. China Yggström will be available to present the rushes.

15.00

Ray Batchelor and Birthe Havmøller: The Origins of Queer Tango: Competing and Complimentary Narratives?

When was queer tango first danced? And where? And by whom? To which we might add: who wants to know? And why? This has often seemed to some to be a simple matter, easily recited: queer tango originated in Germany, in Hamburg, in 2001. Neat. Memorable. But possibly wrong, or if not wrong, exactly, then at best, incomplete.

When the queer tango activist, Federico Imperial asked about queer tangos origins on Facebook, he was inundated with candidates, all earlier than 2001. So, what are we to do? Indeed, how can we say what the origins of queer tango are, if there is little agreement as to what queer tango is? In this preliminary paper, we describe which issues we think need addressing when judging these candidates, and we are then going set them out for appraisal.

15.20-15.50

TEA + COFFEE + DISCUSSION!

15.50

Olaya Aramo: The development of queer tango communities: the case of Madrid

This paper focuses on the process of building the queer tango community in Madrid. It raises questions about which factors have sustained or inhibited the growth and stability of this queer tango community. These factors are analyzed. It also describes the particularities of Madrid's queer tango community in the context of the city, the profiles of the people involved and the relationship of the queer tango dancers with both the wider queer tango community and the traditional tango community. This study builds on a previous paper of mine "El desarrollo de comunidades de tango queer: el caso de Madrid" (2013), reviewing the conclusions of that paper and identifying new directions and hypotheses for the future.

16.10

Jon Mulholland: Festivalization and Queer Tango

Drawing on qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with queer tango practitioners and organisers, this paper explores the meanings attributed to the Queer Tango Festival, as the Festival context has emerged as a primary space for the articulation of a queer geography,

practice and sociality. The Festival dates back centuries. Early festivals typically took a religious form and were held under the auspices of the church. From the outset, festivals enjoyed the quality of 'suspension' from ordinary life, and tended to focus on expressive forms, including food, clothing, music and dance. Towards the end of the 20th century, Festival began to be used as a generic term for a large array of celebrations that carry few or no religious connotations. Festivals have become significantly more extended and diversified over time, to the point where we might talk of a certain festivalization of life. In accordance with Frederik Barth, we could describe the festival as a "vessel of meaning", used in all kinds of ways, and filled with all kinds of contents. Festivals are also integral to the 'experience economy' offering (potentially commodified) encounters of emotional and aesthetic potency (Bäckström and Johansson 2006) to a typically paying, and potentially touristic audience. But festivals are also instruments of social and cultural change, transmitting and transferring knowledge. They are potentially spaces of intercultural interaction, where new and potentially expressive transgressions can be born and explored.

16.30

Luis Zuleta Benavides and Jace Valcore: Initiating, marking, and language – a video contribution Recorded by Carrie Schneider

Abstract to follow!

16.50

Plenary: So, what was all that about then?

## Friday 15<sup>th</sup> September

9.00	MT	REGISTRATION: TEA + COFFEE + DISCUSSION		
9.55				
10.00	MV	KEYNOTE: Mariana Docampo: "Queer", "Tango" – Authenticity, Value and Meaning: a Post-colonial Exploration		
10.50				
10.50		ROOM CHANGE (Pick up a coffee on the way) SHORT TEA + COFFEE!		
11.00	FC	Wiktor Skrzypczak: Embodied politics: Genderless Dance		
11.20		Aimie Purser: Queering Orientations: A Queer Phenomenology of Queer Tango		
11.40		Paula-Irene Villa Braslavsky: The Normative Framing of Tango: Practical Experiences of Failure		
12.00	FC	Pauliniia Salminen: Video- based Discussion Workshop: Key Figures in Buenos Aires Queer Tango		
13.00				
13.00		LUNCH		
13.55				
14.00	MV	KEYNOTE: Prof Lisa Blackman: Title TBC		
14.50				
14.50	MT	ROOM CHANGE (Pick up a coffee on the way) SHORT TEA + COFFEE!		
15.00	DS	Joseph Roevens: Embodied Leadership with Tango*	WS 12 35	Olaya Aramo: The embodiment of femininity and masculinity through tango posture and attitudes*
16.00				
16.00	MT	TEA + COFFEE + DISCUSSION		
16.30				
16.30	FC	Eleanor Durrant: Where's my mermaid trousers? A wardrobe for both roles		
16.50		Matthew Coombes Marion Krauthaker: Gender and well-being in tango - Reflections on the 2016 workshop		
17.10		Joseph Roevens: How LeadershipTango will transform my University		

## Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> September

9.30	MT	REGISTRATION: TEA + COFFEE + DISCUSSION		
9.55				
10.00	WS	Paula-Irene Villa and Michael Cysouw: Queering roles – beyond dichotomy *	DS 16 38 30	Carolyn and Rastko: What can queer tango learn from intersectionality? *
11.00	MT	ROOM CHANGE (Pick up a coffee on the way) SHORT TEA + COFFEE!		
11.10	FC	Birthe Havmoeller: 10 Dogme Rules for The Dance Style of 'Queer Tango'		
11.30		Kath McGuire: What Mainstream Dance Can Learn from Queer Tango		
11.50		Constanze Alpen: Same Sex Latin and Ballroom Dancing: Role Change – or the Fear of Losing Identity		
12.10				
13.05		LUNCH		
13.10	MV	KEYNOTE: Federico Imperial: La Vie en Rose, a Parisian Take on Queer Tango		
–				
14.10				
14.10	MT	ROOM CHANGE (Pick up a coffee on the way) SHORT TEA + COFFEE!		
14.20	FC	Montserrat Roser i Puig: Authentic by Choice or by Chance? <i>The Gods of Tango</i> (2015), by Carolina de Robertis.		
14.40		Kaatje Jones and China Yggström: Filming "Any Two to Tango": queer tango through visual anthropology		
15.00		Ray Batchelor and Birthe Havmøller: The Origins of Queer Tango: Competing and Complimentary Narratives		
15.20	MT	TEA + COFFEE + DISCUSSION!		
15.50				
15.50	FC	Olaya Aramo: The development of queer tango communities: the case of Madrid		
16.10		Jon Mulholland: Festivalization and Queer Tango		
16.30		Luis Zuleta Benavides and Jace Valcore: Initiating, marking, and language – a video contribution Recorded by Carrie Schneider		
16.50	FC	Plenary: So, what was all that about then?		

*Screenshot of the Programme flyer.*



**Saw Swee Hock Centre  
1 Portugal St,  
London WC2A 2AP**

...within walking distance not only of countless coffee shops and restaurants, but also of [Negracha](#) as well as [Tango Terra](#) where delegates who arrive the day before the Queer Tango Salon 2017 will be meeting to dance on Thursday September 14th.

**VENUE KEY:**

<b>MT: Main Venue, Mezzanine, Basement</b>	<b>Registration, Tea + Coffee</b>
<b>MV: Main Venue, Basement</b>	<b>Keynote Presentations</b>
<b>DS: Main Venue, Dance Space, Basement</b>	<b>Workshops</b>
<b>WS: Weston Studio, 6th Floor</b>	<b>Workshops</b>
<b>FC: First Floor Café</b>	<b>All Seminars</b>

*Screenshot of the Programme flyer.*

## **Biographies**

*Biographies from the programme of the Queer Tango Salon 2017.*

Constanze Alpen

Constanze Alpen studied history, politics and German literature at the University of Cologne. She focused on identity, women studies, photography and dictatorships. Since 2013 she dedicated herself to dancing ballroom, latin and argentine tango. The latter she already started in 2006 in Argentina. Since 2016 she started research for a PhD about identity and dance in queer contexts.

constanzealpen@yahoo.de

Olaya Aramo

Olaya Aramo is a queer tango professional dancer, teacher and organizer based in Madrid. Aramo holds a PhD in sociology of gender at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid and a bachelor's degree in Philosophy at the Universitat de València. Along with Birthe Havmøller and Ray Batchelor, she is part of the editorial team of the Queer Tango Book and the Queer Tango Project. She forms part of the Quilombo

Queer Tango Festival in Barcelona, and the International Congress on Philosophy of Dance in Madrid. She works on queer tango theory and practice, contact improvisation and gender, contactango, and the philosophy of dance and ethnomusicology.

olaya.1981@hotmail.com/  
+34 665059794

Ray Batchelor

A former academic, Ray Batchelor dances, teaches at an informal level, researches, writes about and is – to date – the only historian of queer tango in the world, but is mindful this will not last. He has delivered many papers. With his profoundly deaf colleague, Melanie Parris, he ran a research project, D/deaf CAN Dance! where deaf people were taught queer tango as a means of musical appreciation and widening access to the dance floor. He has been a part of Queer Tango London since 2011, is with Birthe Havmøller and Olaya Aramo one third of the Queer Tango Project, co-edited the *Queer Tango Book*, a free, on-line anthology of writings and artworks, contributes regularly to *The Queer Tango Conversation* a Facebook discussion group, and is Curator of *the Queer Tango Image Archive*, all of which are expressions of the Queer tango project's work. He is with football coach, Jack Badu, half of *The Football Tango project* which seeks to counter homophobia in football by teaching the players to dance tango with one another. He has had the privilege of working with Aleksandr Vinogradov on his forthcoming film, *Queer tango goes to Russia*. With academics, Jon Mulholland and Hélène Marqué, he organizes the *Queer Tango Salon*, now (2017) in its second year.

ray.queertango@gmail.com  
+44 7981808449

Luis Zuleta Benavides

Luis' passion for Tango began in 2008 after re-locating to Houston from Grinnell College, Iowa. Luis was a slow learner but his attachment grew from the great friends he was able to make through the dance. He currently enjoys exploring concepts of self-expression, connection and

musicality in movement. Still, his passion for the dance lies in the opportunity to collaboratively express the music and create the dance in another person's arms.

luiszlt@gmail.com

Lisa Blackman

Professor Lisa Blackman is Head of Department of Media and Communications at Goldsmiths University, London. She works at the intersection of body studies and media and cultural theory and is particularly interested in subjectivity, affect, the body and embodiment. Her most recent book is *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation*, (2012), Sage. She co-edits the journal, *Subjectivity* (with Valerie Walkerdine, Palgrave) and edits the journal *Body & Society* (Sage). Other books include *The Body: The Key Concepts* (2008, Berg). Lisa also acts as a key advisor to the *Hearing the Voice Project*, Durham University. She is currently working on a book length project, *Haunted Data: Social Media, Weird Science and Archives of the Future*.

l.blackman@gold.ac.uk  
+44 20 79197633

Carolyn

Carolyn first discovered the joys of both leading and following back in 2006, and played a pivotal role in establishing Queer Tango London. She has decades of experience of teaching and facilitating workshops for LGBTQI people, not just in dancing tango but in a wide range of other skills, from bicycle ballet, to practical self-defence, to self-publishing. When she's not dancing, Carolyn is actively involved in a number of community projects and struggles. She would like to explore the relationship between queer tango and radical politics, in particular the ideas of queer feminist liberation.

queertango@aktivix.org

Matt Coombes

As a Designer, Artist, Researcher and Lecturer Matt, and his business, Contradictory Design, are always challenging the way people think about experiences in relation to people and objects. Project and research subjects include grieving, menstruation, sweat, dementia as well as workshops involving mental health and aging. The work of Contradictory Design focuses on the therapeutic potential in design and wellbeing. Matt has experience in various types of design including product design, service design, design art and design research, working with people who have dementia, and exploring mental health pathways to physical activity. In addition to the creative work, Matt has been dancing Argentine tango for more than ten years and has been influenced by many different teachers, styles and philosophies. He has been teaching for several years in various parts of the UK. Matt uses tango as a research communication tool and he has been involved in Queer tango workshops designed to challenge perceptions around homophobia.

contradictory@hotmail.co.uk

Michael Cysouw

Linguist, Mathemagician, Metagrobologist, Motosophist. Fascinated by all tension between universality and diversity, between grand perspective and practical minutiae. For him, tango offers the possibility to experience an unspoken communication with puzzling complexity.

cysouw@uni-marburg.de

Eleanor Durrant

I come from a windy fishing town in East Anglia. I grew up missing the sea in the Manchester Mittelstand, which gets better once you're grown up. I did what I thought was expected of me and got a law degree, followed by some accountancy and a career in IT. In my early thirties, I decided to learn to dance and continue as long as it made me happy. I now freelance in happy association with a boutique management consultancy.

mshedgehog1@gmail.com

+44 7941 080 647

Mariana Docampo

Mariana Docampo is an Argentinean Queer Tango teacher, co-organiser of the International Queer Tango Festival of Buenos Aires and the founder of the weekly Tango Queer Milonga of Buenos Aires. She has been running practicas and milongas since 2005: Milonga de Mujeres, El Desvío and Prácticas Tango Queer. She has a BA from the University of Buenos Aires, specialising in gender studies. She teaches literature and has written four novels: *Al borde del Tapiz*, *El Molino*, *La fe* and *Tratado del Movimiento* as well as other writings included in various anthologies. She has participated as a teacher in the International Queer Tango Festival in Hamburg, 2006, the International Queer Tango Festival in Copenhagen, 2009, The Queer Tango Days in Copenhagen 2014, and the International QueerTango-Festival in Berlin 2011, 2013 and 2014. She has also given tango workshops in Stockholm, Zurich, Marseilles, Nice, Le Hague, Preston, Brighton and London.

mariandoc73@hotmail.com

Birthe Havmøller

Birthe Havmøller is the creator of the *Queer Tango Project*, co-editing *The Queer Tango Book – Ideas, Images and Inspiration in the 21st Century* (2015) together with Ray Batchelor and Olaya Aramo. Birthe is visual artist and queer arts activist. In 2003 she launched the website *Feminine Moments – Queer Feminist Art Worldwide*. Birthe identifies as a lesbian and a dual role tango dancer. She was a social dancer, dancing the old Danish couple dances and the Irish set dances before she started dancing tango. Her manifesto, *10 Dogme Rules for The Dance Style of 'Queer Tango'* is published at: <http://queertangobook.org/10-dogme-rules-for-queer-tango/>

havmoeller@gmail.com

+ 45 2276 5492

Federico Imperial (aka "San Fede" on Facebook)

Federico Imperial from Paris is a well-known, well-loved and incredibly active member of the international queer tango community. Best known since 2014 for his pioneering work with others on the annual queer

tango event La Vie en Rose (LVR) in Paris which, with its attention to conceptual themes, to style and to standards of professionalism, effectively redefined what such “festivals” might be. In particular, he and his colleagues sought to bring a distinctively Parisian character to the event, such that high fashion, cabaret and even branded luxury goods feature as nowhere else. Apart from *la Vie en Rose*, he teaches and appears at a great many queer tango events around the world and is involved in a range of other ventures which combine queer tango and attractive holiday locations. Most recently, coinciding with his work with Russian film-maker, Aleksandr Vinogradov and the film *Queer Tango goes to Russia*, he has developed an *alter ego*: Dita LVR, a glamorous international spy.

federicoimperial@gmail.com

Kaatje Jones

Kaatje Jones is Director and Owner of Leilani Films. Originally hailing from Boulder, Colorado, Kaatje Jones is a nomadic documentary filmmaker with a background in Visual Anthropology (MA). Her work focuses mainly on expressive culture, indigenous wisdom, and gender. Kaatje believes strongly in the power of film and storytelling to shake loose patterns of judgment and to increase empathy. After over seven years of dancing tango, with experience both leading and following, she hopes to use queer tango as a way to reflect the complexity of gender and sexuality in modern-day Buenos Aires, as well as invite reflection in audiences worldwide.

kaatjeleilani@gmail.com

+1 949 554 8790

Marion Krauthaker

Marion is a Lecturer in Modern Languages and Cultures at the University of Leicester and is specialised in Gender Studies in French and Francophone contexts. Her research originally focused on gender identity in the literature of the 19th century, however her interest has extended over the years in an interdisciplinary fashion to textual genetics, performance and visual studies. Her publications explore

notions of norms and margins and representation, power and marginalisation and scopophilia. Marion has more than ten years of experience teaching Argentine tango having worked and performed at European and Argentinean festivals and milongas. This experience has enabled her to gain a broad perspective of the ways in which tango is seen, performed and portrayed. She shared some of her findings at the Colloque International 'Tango: Creations, Identifications, Circulations' in 2011 (EHESS-CNRS, Paris).

mk467@leicester.ac.uk

Kath McGuire

Kath has been dancing for three years and during that time she has discovered a true passion for dance. She dances Latin, Ballroom and Lindy Hop and has dabbled as a teacher. While mostly a follower, she is developing her skills as a leader. For Kath, dance is about movement and social interaction. It is also cultural and political. Kath believes dance should be accessible for everyone who wants to be a part of it and when Kath dances she aims to make her partner feel welcome and special – just as her dance partners so often do for her.

kath@kathmcguire.co.uk  
+447776064394

Jon Mulholland

Jon Mulholland is an Associate Professor in Sociology, and Associate Head of Department - Sociology and Criminology, at the University of the West of England, Bristol, following a position as Associate Professor in Sociology at Middlesex University, London. Jon has recently held grants with the Economic and Social Research Council and the British Academy, and researches in fields of 'race', ethnicity, nation and migration, in addition to gender and sexuality and popular culture. With Professor Louise Ryan, Jon has published the findings of the ESRC-funded French Capital project in leading international journals, including - *Sociology, Global Networks, Ethnic and Migration Studies, International Migration, and Sociological Research Online*. Emerging from his British Academy-funded project on women's support for the nationalist Right in

the UK, Jon (along with Erin Sanders- McDonagh and Nicola Montagna), is the editor of a forthcoming book, *Gendering Nationalism: Intersections of Nation, Gender and Sexuality in the 21st Century* (Palgrave Press). Jon has recently completed a project on 'Queer Tango as a Politics of Play'.

Aimie Purser

Dr Aimie Purser is a lecturer in Sociology at the University of Nottingham. Her research interests are in connections between self and other, which she explores through engagement with continental theory and with embodied creative practices, primarily contemporary dance. She has published on the dancing body in journals such as *Subjectivity*.

Aimie.purser@nottingham.ac.uk  
+44 7815 544 450

Rastko

Rastko divides his time between film-making, queer tango, trade union and housing activism. The subjects of his films range from examining issues connected with public housing, the texture of urban landscapes, fantasy and the politics of eastern Europe. Three of his films, *April Showers*, *Ripples* and *Whose Fitzrovia?* were made possible through a Leverhulme Trust artist-in-residence grant at UCL's School of Slavonic and East European Studies. He has been dancing tango for the past 5 years.

tetrys@posteo.de

Joseph Roevens

Joseph Roevens PhD is head lecturer in Organizational Behavior, at the NHTV University of Breda, in its Academies of Hotel and Facility Management. He has been teaching participative forms of Leadership internationally since 1997. He co-authored "Organize with Chaos" (1996, 1999, 2007) and contributed to Zappos's recent move to Holacracy. In 1999 he became mesmerized by Argentinean tango. In 2004 he introduced the tango as an ice-breaker with international students at

Bremerhaven Summerschool. It was such a success that he developed a number of exercises which help team-building, and eventually evolved into what is now officially called "LeadershipTango". His pedagogical innovation was demonstrated at Conferences in Manchester (EuroChrie), Ghent (EFYE), and Amsterdam.

roevens.j@nhtv.nl  
+32486504113

Montserrat Roser i Puig

Dr Montserrat Roser i Puig is Senior Lecturer in Hispanic Studies and Associate Dean of Education (Humanities) at the University of Kent. She is a well-established Hispanist who works on the interface between Spanish and Catalan literature, Music and the Arts, and has published widely on how Catalan and Spanish theatre, poetry and narrative take advantage of multidisciplinary. She was president of the Anglo-Catalan Society between 2002 and 2005 and technical editor of the Journal of Catalan Studies from 2005 to 2015. She has been dancing the tango since 2009.

M.Roser-i-Puig@kent.ac.uk  
07719588655

Pauliina Salminen

Pauliina Salminen is a Finnish media artist, based in Marseilles, France. Her work consists of creative documentaries, video installations and interactive pieces. The themes in her work include identity, exclusion as well as border areas and intermediate spaces. Salminen has exhibited her installations in galleries, museums and public space in several countries (Finland, France, Italy, Turkey, India, USA...). Her videos are screened at various European festivals.

pauliina.salminen@gmail.com  
+3366389099

Carrie Marie Schneider

Carrie Schneider is an artist and 2017 Fellow with Project Row Houses and the University of Houston College of the Arts Center for Art and Social Engagement. She is interested in the capacity of people reimagine their space. Her work has been presented at Diverseworks, Elsewhere, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, EFA Project Space New York and many places outside of arts institutions. She organizes public dialogues including *Charge*, a convening advocating for equitable compensation of artists. Her works and writings are published in and in *Cite Magazine*, *Temporary Art Review*, and *Gulf Coast*. She matchmakes artists and activists and dances queer tango.

carriemarieschneider@gmail.com

Wiktor Skrzypczak

Wiktor Skrzypcza was born 1986 in Poland and lives in Hamburg, Germany. He is a certified architect working in field of public and private residential architecture. He was trained 2011-2015 in Contact Improvisation and New Dance at Tanzinitiative Hamburg. He has continued his education through classes with Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Nancy Stark Smith, Ka Rustler, Prof. Dieter Heitkamp, Dr. Thomas Kampe, Iwona Olszowska, Esther Berias and others, currently investigating the methodology of lay movement inquiry. He started dancing tango during his architecture studies and since 2014 has been facilitating queer tango classes in Hamburg. Presently he is initiating his doctoral studies of interrelations between body consciousness and spatial perception and its enhancement through somatic methods.

research@stadtliebe.eu  
+4915788587680

Jace L. Valcore

Jace L. Valcore, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice at the University of Houston Downtown. Jace received their doctorate in Public Affairs and Masters in Criminal Justice at the University of Colorado Denver after graduating with honors with a BA in Sociology from Eastern Illinois University. Their research interests and focus are on issues of

LGBTQ equality and equity in both criminal and social justice. They have published work on hate crime laws and gender in policing, and are currently completing projects on the measurement of gender in criminological research and on the experiences of LGBTQ police officers. They provide workshops and trainings on gender/sexual diversity competency for students, educators, professionals, and community members. Jace is a lover of dance who also happens to be genderqueer; they started taking tango lessons in July 2017 and is excited for the growth, connection, challenge, and community that tango offers.

[jace.valcore@gmail.com](mailto:jace.valcore@gmail.com)

Paula Villa Braslavsky

Paula Villa Braslavsky is full professor (chair) of sociology and gender studies at LMU Munich. She's also currently elected member of the board of the German Sociological Association (DGS), and she's served as elected board member of the German Association for Gender Studies from 2010 - 2014. Her research focuses on the analysis of biopolitics, on Cultural Studies (Pop and Politics, Embodiment within Subcultures such as Tango), on Care & Gender, and on Science/Academia and Gender. She's published widely on gender/social theory, the sociology of embodiment, beautification and normalization, on feminist body politics, and on German and European "anti-genderism" as part of new nationalist populism. She's directed funded empirical research on Cosmetic Surgery, Food/Fitness, comparative analysis of Gender Equality Programs in academic capitalism, and on popular culture. She has written on tango and queerness while dancing (and sometimes teaching) tango since 1994.

[paula.villa@soziologie.uni-muenchen.de](mailto:paula.villa@soziologie.uni-muenchen.de)

China Yggström

Leilani Films, co-director born in Stockholm, Sweden, China Yggström started out in cinema and gender studies, moving on to work as a Visual Anthropologist (MA) and creative. An avid singer and songwriter, China has performed in several constellations, live and on record. Writing on

art, performativity holds a primary focus to how history and identity are re-iterated, explored and subverted through movement. The love of dance comes from both its triggering of muscle memory, beyond the cerebral, as well as the sensation through which mirror neurons have you "believe" what you see is what you do, whereby your empathy and sense of self expand.

china.yggstrom@gmail.com  
+44 7477 713592