

Two to Tango: A Reflection on Gender Roles in Argentina

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Abstract:

Art forms maintain a well-established history throughout the world. Dance, one art form, maintains a particularly rich historical tradition, grounded in the local environs of socially accepted norms that have evolved both over time and through the influence of external social forces. Argentine tango, in particular, has been recognized as an international art form deeply rooted in local culture. The purpose of this article is to critically examine the roles of the man and woman in this dance rooted in Argentine culture.

- 1 *Woman: It is Saturday night, around 10:00 PM. I go to my closet and look through the dresses and slacks, deciding which to wear to tonight's milonga. Sometimes I'm in the mood for a backless dress, other times long, flowing pants. Tonight, it will be a dress, one that skims the bottom of my knees. After I'm dressed, I apply makeup. Eyes are very important in tango. They will communicate an interest in, and an intent to dance. A thin, delicate line of black eye liner will define them. The selection of shoes comes next. Although there are many styles and colors, tall stiletto heels distinguish these shoes from all others I own. I choose classic black. I finish with a dab of perfume behind each ear and on my wrists.*
- After I finish dressing, I go out to the street to catch the bus. Within 10 minutes, the bus arrives and before long, I'm headed down Suipacha in the SanMartín Park district in Buenos Aires. Within thirty minutes, I'll be at milonga Cachirulo at Maipú 444.¹*
- Man: I just stepped out of the shower and looked at the suit and tie I will wear to the milonga. As I gel and slick my hair back into a small pony tail, I wonder if I should wear my Flabella or Dracos shoes. I settle on my Flabella black patents with white square lace across the front. I choose a dark suit with a yellow tie and a handkerchief tucked smartly into my jacket pocket.*
- Woman: Upon arrival at Milonga Cachirulo, I walk up the stairs to the room where the milonga is held. I pay my entrance fee, and am immediately greeted by Hector, the organizer. We engage in pleasant small talk before he leads me inside and to a table that is at the far corner of the room, on the edge of the dance floor. I sit down at the small, round table and look around the room. I see many friends. I also see many I do not know. It is not long before my eye catches the eyes of a man across the room. He nods. I nod. The cabeceo completed, he makes his way onto the dance floor. I meet him on the floor.*
- Man: Around 11:00 PM, I leave my apartment, but almost forget one of the most important things. I hurry back in and spray some cologne on my wrists and handkerchief, then hurry back out. I step out onto Suipacha in the SanMartín Park district, and hail a taxi, directing the driver to Maipú 444! Ah, así! Milonga Cachirulo...You are going to dance tango tonight! I settle back and enjoy the tango music of Troilo as we wind our way through the back streets. After a short five-minute drive, we arrive. I pay the driver, and step out onto the broken pavement, locating the sign so small that if one did not know the place it would be missed.*

¹ A milonga is the social setting, often in a large hall, where Argentine tango is danced. The term milonga is also used to describe one dance at the milonga.

As I ascend the steep stairs, I hear the music of Buenos Aires....its distinct rhythm of the tango. The walls of the reception area are adorned with beautifully painted portraits of tango dancers. I see a familiar face, Norma, the woman at the desk who takes the ten-peso admission fee. She asks if I am solo. I nod with a smile.

After I walk through the curtain into the milonga, I find that it is already full of dancers. Hector, immediately greets me at the door with a hug and a kiss on the cheek, and we exchange pleasantries. He escorts me to my usual table. As we walk across the perimeter of the dance floor, I scan the room and see many friends. I stop and exchange greetings with some, and make eye contact with others...the dancing will begin soon...

2 Art forms maintain a well-established history throughout the world. Each geographic region upholds particular artistic traditions, thus preserving local and national customs, conventions and practices particular to the art. Shifts in contemporary local political, social and economic dynamics, as well as the influence of wider regional and international forces slowly alter the form, thus creating continually evolving and developing types of and variations within the art itself. These creations are deeply rooted in subtle yet ever-present cultural nuances interpreted by the artist or performer. Dance, one art form, maintains a particularly rich historical tradition, grounded in the local environs of socially accepted norms.

3 Argentine Tango, as differentiated from Ballroom Tango, and hereafter referred to as tango, maintains a long and rich history. It is generally believed that it originated in the port city of Buenos Aires, Argentina, danced by locals in and immigrants to the area in the 19th century. It then made its debut in Paris at the turn of the 20th century. Tango has been studied from multiple scholarly perspectives. The ethnic and racial origins of the dance of South American countries, the African subcontinent, and eastern and western Europe offer one focus of research (See Azzi, 1991; Collier, 1992; Collier, Cooper, Azzi & Martin, 1995; Halabi, 1985; Lewis, 1996; Natale, 1984; Vidart, 1967; and Viladrich, 2005). Other scholars have concentrated on the economics of tango, examining the shift of the dance's popularity from the poor neighborhoods in Argentina to wealthy international cities of the world, as well as the industry it created (see Savigliano, 1993; and Taylor, 1976). Tango has been used to study others' art works (Ham, 2009), as well as symphonic music (Drago, 2009; Granados, 2001; Luker, 2007; Tsai, 2005). The social impact of the dance has been studied by yet others (Meret, 2005; Merritt, 2008; Savigliano, 1995; Seyler, 2008). In addition to the scholarly literature, the press has both advertised and critiqued performances of touring tango shows such as *Tanguera*, *Forever Tango*, and *Tango Argentino*, *Tango X2*, *Tango Fire*, *Tango Buenos Aires* and *Tango Fantasia*.

4 Whereas the study of these macroscopic social-structural constructs related to tango including but not limited to the chronology of its history, the economics of the industry, the music that supports it, and the popular culture that revolves around it place tango in the broader sociological context, the microscopic nature of the art form holds equally important elements for understanding the dance. By grappling with the roles played by individuals that are inextricably linked to the social and cultural norms of the community, we further our understanding of the art. In this context, scholars have examined and interpreted roles in tango rooted in patriarchal tradition, and have emphasized this element of the dance (see Savigliano, 1995). Less attention has been paid to the gendered roles of both the male and female dancer. Thus, the purpose of this work is to critically examine the gendered roles of the man and the woman in Argentine tango, thus revealing particular ways in which the relationship between partners creates the dance.

5 The essay is divided into three sections. First, the essay offers a brief overview of second-wave feminist thought used to interpret the roles played by its dancers and analyzes the roles in this framework. Second, it takes a microscopic look at the particular roles played by and actions of both the man and woman. It concludes by using the concept of structural coupling to consider the relationship between the partners.

Positioning the Study in the Literature

6 This work refers to a number of terms and concepts. To maintain clarity, we will define these here. "Sex", referred to in the manuscript as woman and man, is the biologically determined category of personhood, particularly important to understand in the context of this piece because it forms the basis for the socially constructed gender roles of each dancer. "Gender identity" refers to both the ways in which an individual personalizes gender, and its impact on social interactions. Gender identity is seen throughout the work in terms of the short narratives in the voices of a woman and a man, as well as of the invitation, the embrace and the movement of the couple. Herein, gender identity is a set of "...culturally based expectations of the roles and behaviors of males and females..." (<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGENDER/Resources/strategypaper.pdf> accessed on August 2, 2009). It is realized in terms of masculine and feminine roles played by each individual. According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), hegemonic masculinity is the design of gender practice which acknowledges the problem of the legitimation of patriarchy that assumes dominate subordinate positions maintained by men and women, respectively. Femininity, on the other hand, refers to the socially constructed and personally interpreted

characteristics and behaviors associated with femininity of women. The concepts of masculinity and femininity are also realized in terms of what is referred to as "gender presentation". Gender presentation is used to refer to the specific choices that one makes to represent self in public. It is characterized by choices of body position, hair style and color, jewelry, clothes, accessories, fragrance, make up and shoes. The look may change depending on the time of day and the venue for each individual.

7 As Lorber and Moore (2007) recognize, people are created within specific cultural situations. They are shaped by ideas rooted in cultural traditions of maleness and femaleness. The situations can be viewed in terms of roles played by women and men. At a milonga, women and men socialize with each other off the dance floor either at single-sex tables or in heterogeneously mixed groups. They also socialize with each other on the dance floor upon greeting each other prior to the dance embrace, as well as in the embrace. In each case, there is a wide variety of expressions and actions assumed by both women and men. It is within these parameters in which the roles of women and men who dance tango are realized. Prior to analysis of these roles, we position this work in terms of second-wave feminism.

Second-Wave Feminism

8 Second-wave feminist theory is the most appropriate context for this essay because it positions gender roles in terms of maleness and femaleness. Within this tradition, second-wave liberal feminism is based on the relatively non-threatening view that women's subordination to men is rooted in a set of gender identities and roles that are used as justifications. Thus, as second-wave liberal feminists saw it, the way to liberate women (and men) from oppression would be to open the public world to women and, as a correlative, the private world to men (Elshtain, 1981, p. 237). This idea is applied to this work to argue and demonstrate ways in which women, who are active participants in the public performance of tango, are not subordinate to men in the dance, but rather equal but different partners in it.

9 Second-wave liberal feminists believe women can only be equal to men when women had control over their own sexual pleasures (and, less important in this case, reproductive powers). Second-wave radical feminists, sometimes referred to as radical libertarian feminists, examined consensual sex between two adults. They argued against the idea that acceptable sex could be experienced only in a committed, long-term love relationship, and argued against the notion that sex for sex's sake was promiscuous. Specifically, as Firestone (1970) saw it, women would no longer have to be passive, receptive, and vulnerable when they were freed from their role as reproducers. They would not, in other words, need to send

out biological “signals” to men to dominate and possess in order to procreate. Instead, women (and men) were encouraged to demonstrate their femininity and masculinity.

10 In the context of tango, the gender roles of both women and men relate to second-wave feminist thought. We identify sex as the individuals engaged in the dance, that is, women/woman and men/man. More importantly, gender identity relates to the individual’s interpretation of his/her roles in the dance. This type of identity is realized in the socially learned performative behaviors, such as dress, speech, body language, demeanor, and posture. It is both the individual’s presence, as well as the ways in which the individual interacts with a dance partner that construct the gendered roles exhibited in the dance.

11 The sex of the individual, and the gendered roles each individual plays are fundamental elements of this partner dance. The following section examines elements of tango that relate to the gendered roles played by the woman and the man in this art form.

The Tango: *Salon Style*

12 Tango salon style is one of the most traditional styles of Argentine Tango. One of its main characteristics is the elegance of the embrace. The couple embraces closely but the embrace is flexible, opening slightly to make room for various figures and closing again for support and poise. The style of dance is often used in large salons where the execution of long steps that focus on the music’s melody is possible. The dancing of Osvaldo Zotto and Lorena Ermocida, as well as Nito and Elba exemplify the style and embrace.

Milonguero Style

13 On the other hand, *milonguero* style originated in the confined spaces of the bordellos, and in crowded cafes and dance halls in downtown Buenos Aires. It is danced in close embrace, chest-to chest, with the partners leaning slightly towards each other to allow space for the feet to move. (Similarly, *apilado* is an older version of the *milonguero* style still in use today where there is a more pronounced lean of the women’s body against the man’s body. Carlos Gavito and Geraldine Rojas dance in this style.) In traditional *milonguero* style, dancers rarely use embellishments or complicated figures simply due to the lack of space on the dance floor.² This style and embrace can be seen by watching Omar Vega, or Pibe Avelleneda and Caterina Musitano, dancing to the more rhythmical music of Juan D’Arienzo, Rodolfo Biagi, Carlos Di Sarli, and Osvaldo Pugliese.

² This style of dance has shifted, and, as a result, today’s *milonguero* style includes complicated figures.

14 Both the salon and *milonguero* styles call on the invitation and embrace, both of which are described in more detail here:

The Invitation: (cabaceo) Woman: The cabaceo begins when I enter the milonga. As I enter the room, I see familiar faces and deliberately glance at and make eye contact with the men with whom I want to dance that evening. With others, I stop for just a moment to say hello, as I make my way from the doorway to my table. As I sip my glass of wine at my small, round table, I watch the dancers on the floor. After a few minutes pass, I begin to look around the room, making eye contact with several men with whom I want to dance. I pick and choose. This is the beginning of the invitation (cabaceo).

This first phase of the invitation, as practiced in Buenos Aires, relies on the dancers' presentation – that is, their clothes, hair, and presence as they enter and walk through the room. After being seated, another layer is added to the *cabaceo*. Next, a more directed attempt to invite one to dance begins.

Man: I am seated in a very good vantage point, seated at table on the perimeter of the dance floor, with an excellent view of the floor.³ I am at a very traditional milonga, where the men and women sit on separate sides of the room. I see a friend dancing. As she past my table, she briefly opens her eyes and we make contact. As milonguero, I wait until the tanda of four songs is finished, and watch her as she exits the floor during the cortina (break in between tandas when a short segment of a different music is played).⁴ She is seated at an awkward angle for me to make eye contact, but she knows where I sit. If she turns sideways, we can make eye contact. After a few moments, she glances my way. We nod to confirm our agreement to dance, and approach each other on the dance floor.

Woman: "After this cortina I will canvass the room with my eyes, and end up focusing on the man with whom I want to dance. I will make eye contact with him, and we will extend an ever-so-slight nod to each other. I wait for him to rise from his chair, and make his way toward me. Slowly, I also rise, and meet him on the dance floor.

This second phase of the invitation, again, as practiced in Buenos Aires, and less often in other cities where tango is danced, is not spoken. Rather, it occurs when the eyes of the women meet the eyes of the man. In this case, given that the woman has already invested a considerable amount of time looking at the men in attendance at the milonga (as she is seated at her table), as well as those on the dance floor, her 'dance card' of sorts, has already been planned.

15 This unspoken dialogue occurs between the one who glances and the one whom receives the glance. If she ignores a man, he never has the chance to dance with her. If she

³ A man who dances tango is referred to as a *tanguero* and/or *milonguero*; a women is referred to as a *tanguera* and/or *milonguera*. Both dress well in order to impress. There are large pillars in some of the rooms where milongas are held in Buenos Aires. If one is seated at a table next to one of these pillars, the pillar will not only obstruct the view of the person seated at it, but also the ability of one trying to make eye contact with the person seated there

⁴ A *cortina* (several measures from a song) signals the end of the tanda and allows the dancers sufficient time to leave the floor and return to his/her seat.

asserts herself, looking at the man, the man invites her (with his cabaceo) to dance. In these two phases of the invitation, the woman's power in the situation is marked by her prerogative to accept (or not), with a simple nod. Yet this is only one way in which her gendered role as a woman is realized in this dance.

16 The power of gender identity is also asserted in the way that she presents herself. Her choice of hair style, dress and shoes convey her femininity. In Buenos Aires, many women wear hair pulled back away from the face. Not only a style, but also a function, tied-back hair keeps it out of the face of the man who is standing within centimeters of her. Her dress must be comfortable to move in, but also one that accentuates her figure. Her tango shoes come in a wide variety of styles and colors, but all have stiletto heels. Her makeup may be more or less pronounced, depending on her personal preference. Jewelry complements the outfit. Her look may change, depending on the time of day and the venue for each individual. The milonguero also asserts a power in his presence based on that which he chooses to wear. A suit, or dark trousers and a suit coat, with (and sometimes without a tie, in less formal venues) is the most common dress for men.

17 The gendered identities as a woman (and a man) at the milonga is based on and (subjected to) "...culturally based expectations of the roles and behaviors..." of the community. These socially constructed norms originated from the biologically determined aspects of being male and female. Unlike the biology of sex, gender roles and behaviors can change historically, sometimes relatively quickly, even if aspects of these roles originated in the biological differences between the sexes. Hence, it is important to note the expectations are deeply imbued in both the sexual (and sensual) origins of Argentine tango in the brothels amongst prostitutes and their clients, as well as the current culture of Argentina that includes the desire to dance as a social activity. The embrace is a central element in the tango.

The Embrace (*abrazo*)

Man: As we meet on the floor, I stand in front of her.

Woman: I want to dance with him. I like his style of dance. I meet him on the floor. The style will determine how far I stand from him.

Man: I offer my left hand to her, and bring her close. If we are already standing in close proximity to each other, I will start the embrace with my right hand around her back, and then I will offer her my hand.

Woman: I gently clasp his hand, curving my fingers around his hand, feeling the warmth of his hand in mine. I take a small step forward, moving my torso closer to his, and raise my left arm gently up, and behind his head, slowly lowering my elbow, forearm and hand around the back of his neck.

Man: Upon feeling the woman's body next to mine, I gently embrace her back in my arm.

During the initial embrace, she extends her left hand in the air and gently lowers it, until she decides the place she wants it to rest on the man's back. Some women choose to rest it at the base of the neck. Others choose to wrap it around her partner's back, gently cupping his left shoulder in the palm of her hand. Yet other women choose to place the left hand on the scapular region of the back. If they stand very close to each other, and in a very close embrace, the man may start the embrace with his right hand around her back, and then extends his right arm.

18 As the dance continues, the embrace is manufactured by the partners with a deliberate, yet fluid set of movements. In close embrace (that is, from direct contact between the two torsos to several inches between the torsos), movement is created by the steps danced by the couple. In other words, the embrace is not static, but rather moves fluidly throughout the music, depending on the step in which the dancers engage. As Raul Bravo noted, "[...] advanced couples working together, commit, [and] play on the dance floor like a mirror" (personal conversation, April 10, 2010). In this sense, the embrace provides a negotiation with one's partner through a series of invitations and responses, rather than commands and the completion of orders. The embrace engages rather than seizes, and joins two together as "[...] intertwined, inseparable partners in the dance of movement" (Levin, 2000, p. 173). In other words, it is "[...] a common union of two partners in a state of conversation" (Dinzel, 1994, p. 48). Stating in it yet another way, Carotenuto (1989) recognizes that each individual brings elements of identity, partnership and community to the encounter. One's identity is related to the role played in the encounter of the dance.

19 Traditional tango in Buenos Aires is most often danced in close (opposed to open) embrace. Carotenuto (1989, p. 46) continues, "[...] within the tango embrace, one questions, doubts, seeks, affirms, and finds momentary solace from their "fundamental isolation" that reappears inevitably at the end of a tanda." His idea demonstrates the active roles in which women and men engage in the embrace. Her femininity is actualized in the gentleness with which she holds the man. His response reinforces her choices. As they move throughout the music of the tanda, based on the angle at which the man dances around the room, the steps he choose to do, her response to those steps and freedom to react in a variety of ways, each requires a sensitive approach to each other by both woman and man.

20 Related, the concept of community to which Carotenuto (1989) refers, is evident in the consistent nature of the body position of women and men seen throughout the dance venues in Buenos Aires. The behavior associated with the embrace as it is described herein is

consistently found in group lessons, afternoon practice sessions and evening milongas in the most traditional schools and venues throughout the city.

21 Close embrace naturally positions the woman's head in very close proximity to the man's head. Head position is a related element of the *abrazo*.

Head position

Woman: I place my left cheek touching his right cheek. I feel the warmth of his face, and the fragrance of his cologne as he waits for me to complete the embrace the most intimate part of the embrace.

Man: As she embraces me, and as our cheeks touch, and I feel her hand on my back. I feel her breath as she exhales onto the corner of my mouth. As the music continues, I squeeze her hand and torso very so slightly. She, in turn, brings herself closer to me. As this happens we adjust our heads slightly so our noses are almost touching, I can feel the corner of her lips against mine. Every breath she takes can be felt on my lips...

The head positions of both the man and woman also demonstrate ways in which power is asserted in tango. The man's head position is static. Neutral positions engage the head facing forward or looking slightly to the left. Here, the woman asserts more power by the placement of her head. She can choose to place her forehead on his right cheek. In another position, she looks over his right shoulder, with her right cheek gently touching his right cheek. A third position is cheek-to-cheek, looking in the same direction, with his right cheek to her left cheek. In a fourth position, common in salon style, the woman directly faces the man; her right eyebrow gently touches his right temple.

22 Head position is also culturally defined. In Buenos Aires, her identity as a female partner is directly related to her presence in the embrace. Her breath is close to his. The scent of her perfume is evident with each breath. Her body, specifically her head, gently touches his. The physical differences between sexes are closely matched while in this position.

Movement

23 There are fundamental, rudimentary movements in tango that serve as the foundation for the dance. They are: walking (forward, backward, left and right); curving (right and/or left) thus called an *ocho*, the *molinete* and *giro*, and the embellishment. Stylistic differences determine whether forward walking is executed with the heel/ball of foot, or the outside ball of foot through the heel. The *ocho* is a lead figure lead by the man in which the woman moves in a figure "8" motion. The *molinete* is a movement in which the woman moves around the man stepping forward, side, back and side as the man pivots at the center of the figure (<http://www.tejastango.com/terminology.html#M> accessed on December 23, 2009). The turning figure, a *giro*, is a pivoting movement of the man in order to follow the woman as she

proceeds around him in her *molinete*.⁵ Finally, the embellishment is an optional leg movement by either partner that adorns the step.⁶

24 These basic movements are artistically interpreted with the melody (and phrasing), rhythms (non-syncopated and syncopated) and tempo. Although movements should capture either/or both lyrics and instrumental elements of each song, the interpretation of each song will be expressed differently by the dancers. In every case, however, the interdependence of the man and woman should be constantly demonstrated, thus creating a dynamic of the passive and active follower that are roles played by both the woman and the man.

25 Dancers assert their gendered roles in terms of the execution of other rudimentary concepts integral to the tango – axis, inertia and acceleration/deceleration. The axis or *eje* can be imagined as a line stretching from the metatarsus, through the spine, and through the crown of the head. The stability of this line within each dancer should ideally remain the same with each partner, while accommodating oneself within the other's embrace. Inertia is the action of motion created by two people moving in either a parallel or perpendicular angle. Momentum is the impetus of and movement through an action. Acceleration and deceleration are the increase and decrease, respectively of speed and movement. Movement of these steps, that is, the dance, requires a relationship between two people. The man leads, with the intention of moving the woman in the direction she wants to go. She responds, taking that lead, responding to it, and sets up the next movement. They continue this 'conversation' of sorts as equal elements of the dance.

26 In this interaction, the man provides the *llevar*. In other words, he offers a gentle hold to protect. This concept is directly related to and interpreted as masculinity. The woman, on the other hand, follows (*seguir*). Some assume this represents the feminine, subservient role because she follows the lead of the man. However, the Spanish translation of the word "follow" means to continue and to resume. In this role, she is an active participant. She complements the man with movement that he is unable to produce by the simple fact that the dance requires two people to execute the move. She may enter into space offered by the man, or stay on the periphery of it. She may choose to embellish the movement, in which case he must provide the time for her to finish the movement. In another case, the man may start the lead and, at some point in the step, she will finish the step. This type of movement also can be likened to a conversation. He (or she) initiates a conversation by offering an opening greeting – "Hello, How are you? The other responds, "Fine. Nice to meet you." And the conversation

⁵ This description reinforces the idea that the tango is danced as a conversation—not with one person dominating but rather a give-and-take experience of both dancers.

⁶ There are numerous types of embellishments by both men and women.

ensues. The person who initiated the conversation does not know how the other will respond. Rather, one gives the other time to respond, and then s/he builds the next and following sentences of the conversation on that which went before it. In dance, the two individuals engage with body movements that respond to the other. In one case, he actively constructs the experience, she acknowledges it and moves with a freedom of choice. She may follow that step with another, and he moves with it. In other words, tango is a series of conversations in which the energy developed by the initiator of the action, and used by the recipient in order to create additional and continued energy, which, in turn, creates the new movement. Structural coupling, a concept developed by Maturana and Varela (1980; 1998), is a useful concept to further explain this idea.

27 Structural coupling is the union of two participants guided by environmental structure and principles. From this perspective, the relationship is comprised of the dialectic of the *self* and the *other than self* (Ricoeur, 1992). It is an intimate degree of one relating to and cannot be conceived as without the other. He refers to the interpretation of *otherness* (or *other than self*, or *oneself as another*) not only in terms of comparison to the self, but also in terms of implication which relies upon the self. This communication occurs within social spaces of the individuals. It is directly applicable to Argentine tango.

28 Argentine tango involves the relationship of the couple within the social environment. Ricoeur's theory relates to the *marca/seguir* relationship in Argentine tango (1994). This relationship requires each individual to think in terms of the other in both the physio-mechanical and the cultural-social domain simultaneously. The physical, cultural and social parameters of the dancers structure the relationship amongst elements of identity, action and intentionality. Together, the two individuals will

develop a story as a whole that opens up new ways of thinking and acting, which may appear contradictory but which in actuality provide a new sense of time and order of importance of our activities. (Herda, 1999, p. 4)

This new story, created within the environment of the milonga, will transcend their individual identity into a shared one, and with it, the creation of a new identity, one that is multidimensional—that is, the dance. To this effect, Herda's words are a propos, "Narrative has the power to hold several plots, even those that may be contradictory. What is the identity of such a narrative?" Ricoeur (1994, p. 248) describes the narrative identity as "...not a stable and seamless identity." He further states that just as narrative identity gives us the possibility to compose several plots on the subject of the same incidents (which, then, should, not really be called the same events), so it is always possible to weave different, even opposed, plots about our lives (p. 248).

The most fundamental task in organizational development is to understand the identity of the organization in terms of the *relationships* that *emerge* between each partner within the structure of the dance (that is, its organization). The problem is that, here, organizational development is described by each component and its relations as separate although related. We prefer to define the organization of the couple in terms of Maturana and Varela's autopoietic systems that are characterized for having "circular organization" and being "self-referential" (1980, p. xviii). This notion implies *interdependent* relations between the two partners. As the authors indicate, all operationally closed living beings or systems have the following features in common: a system, a structure, and a process.

29 The first feature, system, is defined by "[...] the relations between components that define a composite unity of a particular kind" (1980, p. xix). The second feature, structure, is explained by Maturana and Varela (1980, p. xx) as

[t]he actual components (all their properties included) and the actual relations holding between them that concretely realize a system as a particular member of the class (kind) of composite unities to which it belongs.

The third feature, the *process* of self-generation (termed "autopoietic organization" by Maturana and Varela) is rooted in dynamic relations amongst the components of the system which constitute a "[...] network of ongoing interactions" (1987, p. 43-44).⁷ In tango, the system is the cultural and social venue of and experience in the milonga where the two individuals meet. The structure can be described in the macroscopic sense as the frame within which the music organizes the social event and the layout of the furniture, including chairs tables organize the dance floor. In the microscopic sense, structure can be defined as the individuals' goals, objectives, intentions and actions throughout the *cabaceo* and dance. The process begins with the idea of the milonga, the arrival at the space, the invitation, the movement, that is, the dance.

Conclusion

30 Scholars have examined the performing arts throughout history. One genre that has received less attention in the scholarly literature is the tango of Argentina. By using the feminist literature that positions gender at the center of the relationship between women and men, this work sought to examine roles played by women and men, and the connection of those roles to each other in Argentine tango. The work revealed the importance of the physical presence of the femininity of the woman and the masculinity of the man as one element of gender role. We also found three elements – the *cabaceo*, the *abrazo*, and the

⁷ See Guim (2001) for its use in the ontology of social organization as it applies to Argentine tango.

movement that exemplify gendered roles of the individual. The *cabaceo* is initiated by the man. The *abrazo* is initiated by the man, but is determined by the woman, who exercises her prerogative to embrace him in different ways and at different lengths. Movement is initiated by the man, and responded to by the woman. After this initial movement, the couple plays off of each other, engaging in a continual conversation of lead and follow of both the woman and the man who create a new element – the dance. In short, tango is a dance created by the union of two separate but complementary individuals who create movement based on the phrasing of music. It requires the active participation of both dancers who, defined by the gender roles they assume, create something unable to be accomplished by one.

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