

Tango Queer

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1. CONCEPT

1.1. What is Tango Queer?

Tango Queer is a tango environment open for everyone. It is a meeting point to socialize, exchange, learn, and practice Tango as a new way of communication.

In Tango Queer nobody takes for granted neither your sexual orientation nor your choice of taking either one role or the other. What is "normal" here is the difference and when you dance you do it with whomever you want to and taking the role you prefer.

1.2. Why was Tango Queer started and what is its propose?

Because it grew in many the need of creating a "liberated " tango environment where rules and codes of traditional tango are not taken into account and are not there to restrain communication between people

Our proposal is to dance Tango without pre-established roles attached to the gender of the dancers. From that point onwards there are unlimited possibilities for dancing.

2. QUEER

2.1. Meaning

The term Queer literally means odd, weird, eccentric, outlandish, and suspicious. It was first used to name the gay, lesbian, transexual and intersexual gay community in a pejorative way.

The Queer movement first appeared in the beginnings of the 90's

within the gay and lesbian community in the United States. Some people decided to call themselves with such deprecatory term and give the word a new meaning. This was done in order to be different from those that looked for a standard identity - call it "straight" - for gays and lesbians. This deliberately created a positive image for the gay male: a professional Caucasian gay male.

Queer characterizes it-self for not asking or claiming for something, but just grabbing it. It does not negotiate, but acts upon. Queer is a confrontational movement, undisciplined, subversive towards conservative foundations. It proposes to create a liberated environment where sensibility can be developed and in which people can express themselves the way they truly feel. And, this way, overcome the shame set upon us by the pre-established social mandates.

2.2. Queer Studies

Queer is usually related to action, cultural and political activism.

However, it was able to make its way to the academy through theory development that proposed a new way of understanding genders, sexuality and gender identity.

The Queer Studies theorists argue that identity is composed of multiple elements, such as: sexual orientation, class, gender, nationality, age, race, etc. Every identity is an unsteady and arbitrary construction.

Its condition depends on an "external disposition". If we think about it in traditional logic standards we will understand that "being" implies "not being". Identities are the result of power relations, the inner core and an outer core.

The Queer theories' main aim is to accomplish a transversal meeting point between social behaviors of submission and control.

2.3. Why "Tango Queer"?

Because...

i) Using the word "queer" to define ourselves involves taking over the term and giving a new meaning to its pejorative connotation. This implies the subversion towards a structure.

ii) Since the term includes anything that is not standard, the term includes everyone, without setting anyone under a static order, but as

a foundation for coexisting in diversity.

iii) The erotic, sensual and social role that gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender occupy in society is pretty much disputed. This actually eases the possibility of exploring through dance new ways of communication.

iv) “Queer” people dancing to Tango the way they feel like, is taking over this chauvinistic emblem that excludes diversity from the structure of the dance itself and promotes power relationships amongst genders. Taking-over offers the possibility of having different dynamics for each one, promoting communication as equals.

3. TANGO

3.1. Feelings

Tango itself as a dance is not only music and movement. Tango has to do with communication between two persons. It is a language established between two bodies that flow with sensuality. For a few minutes - the minutes a song lasts - strong emotions are conveyed among the dancers.

That is why Tango is related to feelings, senses and the way we express what we feel.

However, in its original form, Tango is a dance for export as an argentine emblem.

3.2. Tango as a symbol

3.2.1. Heterosexuality

Something has symbolic representation therefore it “exists”. Only then it is recognized by a society.

Tango is a popular dance and, like any other, it works as a mirror for the society from which it emerges and in which it is practiced. In this case the Buenos Aires City society. But tango is also a dance that has

a strong sensual connotation. Hence this mirror reflects nothing but the way our society sees eroticism between its constituents. In the first place: Man-Woman; then: Active-Passive; two well-differentiated roles, distinct. Such binomial simplifies the complex erotic bond that exists between individuals. Although it represents a considerable majority in our society, it establishes an “allowed” way of feeling that conditions and censors many other different ways of feelings. This is stated as a stereotype to follow, and all those that feel differently are left outside this mould. Because without a doubt, the willingness to unify, divides identity.

Such social representation we could symbolically think of as an “Erotic Feeling Formula”. There, lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender are not represented. Nor straight men and women that conceive eroticism in a different way from the one this "formula" states.

However, our society is changing. And Tango continues to faithfully mirror our society, changing along with it. It is this possibility of change that opens the doors to Queer Tango.

3.2.2. Women

Hardly anyone will argue that tango is a chauvinistic dance. Without going any further, it is firstly evidenced on how roles are designated: man leads, woman follows.

And although - in the best of cases - it is true that roles are meant to be complementary, the position one person occupies over the other is quite uneven. Mainly when the role is naturally associated to gender, and does not allow exchanging roles to be an option.

Such inequality is strictly related to the difference of knowledge. While the man-leader is the one that carries most of the information in relation to steps and movements, the woman-follower is taught from the beginning to allow herself to be guided. Pleasure of the dance increases as the woman becomes more and more docile and the man more confident.

As a result of this dynamic, a woman without a leading man cannot give one single step. She becomes dependant on the man for her

movements.

This sort of relationship is far more evident in the traditional styles such as the “Milonguero” style. In new Tango styles women have begun to participate more and their active cooperation has even become necessary. Still, the symbolic burden of control that the roles bear is the same, being set depending on the gender.

What we question is not the existence of roles, which is the primary basis of Tango structure, but the way they are set and identified with gender, as if one thing was strictly related to the other.

Women are not usually willing to lead and suggest a different role for themselves within the Tango dance. This might be out of contentment or perhaps out of fear of upsetting the man. Nevertheless, within the last years some women have appeared dancing amongst themselves in “Milongas”. This being either because they want to, or to strengthen knowledge with practice, without which exchanging roles could not be possible.

3.2.3. Lesbians

One of the biggest struggles of lesbians was and still is the struggle to be visible, that is to say, for lesbians to be socially recognized.

Lesbians have been historically vanished and, used to silence or disguise their love and eroticism, have perhaps made of silence their way of existence.

To see this, it is enough to go back over how roles in Tango are designated, to which we have given the name “Erotic Feeling Formula”: man-leader and woman-follower.

We have already discussed symbolism in the designation of roles and also the dependence the woman-follower has on the leading-man.

As a result of this formula, a woman that chooses another woman as a dance partner will face a large obstacle: neither of them will be able to lead. Therefore, symbolically speaking, it would be impossible for them

to dance Tango with one another. This does not happen when a couple of men try to dance Tango together, for they both play an active role.

The absence of symbolic representation in such an idiosyncratic dance like Tango makes proof of social invisibility. As a result, for an anthropocentric society like ours, lesbianism is something that cannot be conceived.

That is why we see in the woman-woman formula – the impossible formula in Tango – the most subversive one. In order to bring about this impossible formula, it is necessary that at least one of the women can lead so each woman takes up a different role, or that both of them take in both roles indistinctly, allowing the possibility of exchanging roles.

This practice questions not only the structural sexism in the dance, but also admits the exploration of Tango through an exchange in which difference does not imply power inequality, but a new way of communication.

3.3. Tango history

3.3.1. Marginality

All official stories agree that when Tango was born it was a marginal dance. It would be danced in the suburbs where low class – thieves, “compadritos” and prostitutes - mixed with “rich boys”, and together they began forging the first moves and exploring the eroticism of the dance.

Tango was frowned upon and considered immoral and obscene due to its highly erotic contents. And at the time, it was persecuted with censorship and prohibition.

So there are three elements that cannot be left out when talking about Tango history: eroticism, marginality and censorship. Involved with these elements there are power issues on class, gender and nationality. Lets not forget the still existing dynamic between Argentines and foreigners in the universe of Tango, which started after the so well known “Triumph in Paris”.

All these elements are related to the origins of Tango as a cultural effect and the deep structure of its dance.

The attempt to blend and “normalize” the ways of dancing and the places where Tango dancing takes place is another element. It still tries to find new ways of adapting to cultural and social changes of the dancers.

3.3.2. Roles

There are several studies that show that Tango was originally danced among men. This shows that in the beginning Tango proposed an abstract practice of the genders. Genders were not related to the roles they were socially given as named above. Possibilities could then be varied.

4. DANCE TECHNIQUE

4.1. Role exchange

Queer Tango proposes the possibility for people that dance tango to freely choose the role they want to take up and what gender they prefer to dance with.

To be able to perform this way, the teaching technique used is exchanging roles. This means for everyone to learn to lead and follow. Dancers have the power to choose to dance the role they prefer or to exchange roles, depending on the person they are dancing with and the moment they decide to do so.

This technique allows exploring the dynamics in more equal relationships. Here, the symbolic power that lays on the leading role vanishes when either person can take up either role, indistinctly.

5. INTERNATIONAL NETWORK

5.1. Feedback

We know that, for an idea propagate, flow of people and the exchange

are necessary. The idea is to create a communication network between the persons in different countries who are working with the same outlook.

5.2. Background

Feminism and Queer Studies have begun their theoretical and political activism in other countries. This has inspired us to become involved with it in Argentina.

With regards to Queer Tango we can mention two historical facts that serve as the foundations for our actions: (i) the International Queer Tango Festival in Hamburg which is organized every year since 2000 in the country of Germany. Its founders were the first to use the term Queer Tango. (ii) The book *Tango y Género (Tango and Gender)* by Magali Saikin. She proposes evaluating Argentinean Tango from a gender perspective and establishes the first conclusions ever made about gender tension that take place in Tango, interpreting them as cultural fact.

6. ACTIVITIES

6.1. Tango classes

Queer Tango classes are open for anyone no matter their sexual choice, race, social class or nationality. The idea is to freely choose a dance partner and the role each one wants to take. Both roles are taught in the classes – leading and following – since the beginning. This allows new ways of exploring the possibilities within the dance.

6.2. Milonga

Milonga Tango Queer is open for anyone no matter their sexual choice, race, social class or nationality. It is a meeting point to socialize and exchange points of view, where everyone can freely choose their dance partners and the role each one wants to take.

6.3. Promoting artistic expressions related to Queer Tango

Photography, paintings, drawings, sculptures, comics, caricatures,

movies, theater, crafts.

The fact of not having many artistic expressions showing Tango between women and between men or the appearance of transvestites in Tango proves the historical suppression of such practices, or also the silenced circumstances in which they might have occurred.

We wish to promote such artistic expressions since we are aware about art's symbolic function in society. Please let us know should you have any artistic manifestation related to Queer Tango.

6.4. Promoting debates and information exchange about the Queer subject and Tango.

Queer Tango proposes to consider Tango as a way of viewing the organization of relationships between genders in a society. As well as to take account for the tension generated between people according to their class, gender, nationality, etc, considering the symbolic characteristics of the dance structure. Tango is to be understood as a cultural phenomenon that reflects the society in which it is performed.

The fact that Queer Tango actually takes place questions the basis of such system and provides new possibilities of perceiving it.

That is why we would like to invite you to generate and communicate any theoretical manifestation regarding diversity within Tango.