

This is the presentation of my Master's Thesis given on November 20, 2015 at The Center for Modern Psychoanalytic Studies (CMPS). There was a short intro thanking those who helped with the presentation and some words about my relationship to both tango and psychoanalysis. I was first invited to cmps to teach an Argentine tango class to a group of Modern Analysts going to Argentina. It was my first time in the great hall at cmps. On the way out, I picked up some literature on the Master's program and I enrolled later that year.

1ST SLIDE "IT SUBLIMATES THE MADNESS"



INTRODUCTION

What is the relationship between Argentine Tango and Psychoanalysis?

- Is it a coincidence they were born in the same year? In Vienna, in 1880-81, Anna O. (Bertha Pappenheim) fell ill to mysterious illnesses and symptoms and began her treatment with Josef Breuer. Her treatment marked the birth of psychoanalysis. As Anna O did her chimney sweeping in Vienna, down in the Rio

de la Plata, there was a cauldron of improvisation and experimentation in the fire that bubbled up to form the Argentine Tango.

- Both share a winding road of preformation and development and neither resembles their origins. Freud's predecessors include the 18th century Catholic priest, Johann Joseph Gassner, who performed faith healings and exorcisms; the physician, Franz Mesmer, who worked with animal magnetism, and the French neurologist, Charcot. Hypnotism was used, the laying on of hands, the casting out of demons, massage, the slapping of foreheads – none of which resembles the modern psychoanalytic frame. The tango was influenced by earlier dances such as the African candombe, waltz, and mazurka, yet listening to African drumming and then listening to a tango by Astor Piazzolla, it would be difficult to recognize any connection between the two.

The tango began as a dance of immigrants. It spread through the brothels of Buenos Aires; no respectable girl would be seen in a tango dance hall. In 1912, the tango became all the rage of the Parisian upper class, and as a result, was then reclaimed by the middle classes in Buenos Aires.

If we consider psychoanalysis, we see, perhaps, a similar progression; from Gassner's hillside peasants waiting in line for days to be cured of all ills, to Freud's upper class patients visiting him in the comfort of his suite at Berggasse 19, to today's therapy for all classes. Although, psychoanalysis, in some cultures, is laden with stigma – the stigma of mental illness - to be caught on the couch might be thought of as unsavory as being caught in the dancehall! Is it any coincidence that Argentina hosts more psychoanalysts per capita than any other city in the world? They even have a neighborhood called Villa

Freud where all the psychoanalysts live and work. The Argentines are all in analysis, and they understand that soul searching is a lengthy process. Does Argentina's symbolic universe of tango play a part in this? There is a Club Sunderland located on the outskirts of Buenos Aires – an old converted basketball court where hundreds gather every week, just to practice their tango walk. The actor, Robert Duval, a passionate tango aficionado has said, “Yes, sir. I practice the walk every day. It takes 5 minutes to do a figure. It takes 10 years to learn to walk like a Porteño (native of Buenos Aires).

***Caminar* How We Walk**

- It is well documented that Sigmund Freud loved to walk. There are many references to Freud's summer excursions walking through the Austrian and Bavarian mountains, and his fast paced daily constitutionals counterclockwise round the Viennese Ringstrasse.
- The defining move of the tango, more so than any step or figure is – *el caminar* – the walking, and we walk counterclockwise around the dance floor.

Walking counterclockwise originates in a dance movement of the Congo identified with the immortal path of the sun and is believed to give longevity to the dancers.

One wonders if Freud's choice to walk counterclockwise daily around the Ringstrasse contributed to the longevity of his work. A path to the sun is a path to light and enlightenment, a path of making the unconscious, conscious. Counterclockwise hints at regression - a favorite tool of psychoanalysis.

Freud, on occasion employed the “walking cure” along with his talking cure. He walked four hours with Gustav Mahler (the Austrian composer), in August of 1910, when Mahler was in crisis and asked for immediate consultation.

- In tango, as in psychoanalysis, there are many schools of thought and many arguments on the correct way to go about talking and walking. The choreographed tango exists for the stage and the dancers have a predetermined way of moving. There is no discovery. This sort of tango usually contains a lot of *ganchos y quebradas y elevación* (showy kicks, back breaks, and lifts). This is a very interpretive and aggressive style much like Freud's early analysis with Dora (Ida Bauer) in which he admittedly ignored the transference and somewhat verbally bludgeoned her over the head with his interpretations about what was going on in her unconscious.
- The tango danced socially is a completely improvised dance. It is created in the moment and inspired by the music, the partner, and the creative use of space on the dance floor. It is, if you will, a free association, a 'say everything' kind of tango that must also adhere to a certain 'frame' or *coda* of the dance. Within Tango de Salon (social dance style), there exists Villa Urquiza, Club-Style, open style and close embrace, Orillero, Canyon, Fantasia, Nuevo, and Milonguero or Apilado style (to name just a few). In the same way, we have Classical Freudian Psychoanalysis, Jungian, we have drive theory and object relations schools, we have the two most prevalent in Argentina - Kleinian and Lacanian - and we have Ego and Self Psychology, Interpersonal, Intersubjective, and Modern Psychoanalysis (to name just a few).

The focus in this paper is on the style most predominately danced on the crowded dance floors of Argentina – the close embrace – club or milonguero style.

*It takes two to tango and two to form a psychoanalytic relationship. Or does it?

In the literature review, I explore the ideas of one, two, and three person tango as it relates to psychoanalytic theory.

Para Dos Two-person tango

In popular culture, it is common to think of Argentine Tango as a sexy and sultry dance between a man and a woman. But could the embrace of the tango be more a kin to Freud's (1905) sexy baby nursing in mother's arms – perhaps even floating in the womb, especially when dancing in the close embrace? The connection between the couple in close embrace is sternum to sternum or from breast to belly – so from the source of the flow of the mother's milk (the breast) to the destination of the milk (the belly). Oxytocin, the feel good hormone is released during sexual intercourse, as well as birth and breastfeeding. Current studies show that it is also released during hugging. To dance a tango is equivalent to a three-minute long hug. To dance a tanda (a set of tangos by one orchestra) yields twelve to fifteen minutes of hugging. A milonga¹ can last four to six hours (or longer) changing partners/breasts every fifteen minutes! No wonder tango is a dance so full of longing – the longing to return to the nurturing arms of the mother! Winnicott writes about the analytic couch: “In so far as the patient is regressed (for a moment or for an hour or over a long period of time) the couch is the analyst, the pillows are breasts, the analyst is the mother at a certain past era.” As Winnicott's holding environment suggests, the analyst must be a container and in the same way, the arms of the leader contain the follower, the embrace of the couple becomes a container for all the emotions experienced in the dance. In the abrazo or embrace, there is no interpretation. Only feeling. How does the analyst work with the preoedipal patient? You cannot

¹ Allow me to introduce you to the milonga. You will find the word reoccurring many times throughout this

interpret. You can only feel the emotional inductions of what the patient may have no words to communicate.

Tres Esquinas Three-person tango

Choose an audience member and illustrate the open side of the embrace. Talk about how another can infiltrate. Talk about searching for the third. Introduce Cabeceo.

The music as third.

How is the Oedipal at play? The Cortina - literally meaning “to cut”, is a minute of non tango music that is played to signal that the couples must break apart, and clear the dance floor. They may then form new partnerships for the next tanda (set of tangos). Could this be the push to resolve the Oedipal complex? You must now leave the mother or the father that you so tenderly embrace and find another. Does not the Cortina also summon the fear of castration, which is at the core of Freud’s Oedipal complex?

In discussing the Oedipal, Lacan emphasizes the importance of the third party in the primary pair (mother/child) and writes of “the place that she [the mother] reserves for the Name-of-the Father in the promulgation of the law”. It is this all-important Father that helps move the newly formed individual from the primary and exclusive relationship with the mother into the wider world of relationships with others. The tango and its codes serve as the law of the father. It is the code of tango that determines when and how the couples may form, it determines how long they may dance together, and when they must break apart. This third comes between them with its Cortina and insists that they now must dance with others.

Another third in the tango are ***the witnesses***. Everyone is watching and everyone wants to be watched.

Uno One-person tango

Winnicott speaks of “a further state of regression in which there is only one present, namely the patient, and this is true even if in another sense, from the observer's angle, there are two.”

Spotnitz writes:

... unlike the patient functioning at the oedipal level of development, the pathologically narcissistic individual does not invariably relate to the analyst as a separate and distinct person. In their relationship, the schizophrenic patient transfers feelings that he developed for himself as well as for others during the first two years of life. He may also confuse the analyst's feelings with his own. In short, a two-way emotional transaction is revived and communicated as originating in one locale—the mind of the patient. That transaction, suggestive of a re-experiencing of the ego in the process of formation, is identified as narcissistic transference.

The tango is described as “one body with four legs”, in the tango $1+1=1$, as the dancers, especially in the close embrace become one. Leaders often see the follower as an extension of themselves in the dance.

HISTORY OF THE TANGO

(I turned to the great Argentine writers for the answer)

In 1930, Jorge Luis Borges wrote:

Despite the divergences that I have enumerated and that would be easy to increase by interrogating inhabitants of the cities of La Plata and Rosario, my informants concur on one essential fact: the tango originated in the brothels.” He reiterates (1982): “But the tango, the tango in Buenos Aires, as most people have written about it, was evolved in

the brothel houses about 1880. And the people don't accept it because they knew whom it came from.

Examples of bawdy tango song titles have been cited to support tango's origins in the whorehouses of Buenos Aires. I will offer up a selection: "El Choclo"², "El fierrazo"³, "Concha sucia"⁴(1884), which was later amended and signed by F. Canaro as "Cara sucia"⁵, "Al Subir, Al Bajar"⁶, "El Once"⁷, "La payanca"⁸ (1917), and one last example, "Siete Palabras" upon which my investigations have revealed several scurrilous meanings, some which I was asked not to repeat.⁹

Tango is chockfull of libidinal undertones although Argentinian writer Ezequiel Martinez Estrada, in his book *Radiografia de la Pampa* (X-ray of the Pampa) describes the tango as a dance of death. He concurs with Borges about the origin of the tango but is much less forgiving about it.

There is much documentation of a heated dispute between Borges and Ernesto Sabato on the origins of the tango. Sabato dedicated his 1963 essay, *Tango discusión y clave*, to Borges. The essay begins by extending an apology to Borges, but then, Sabato goes on to write: "The millions of immigrants who rushed over this country in less than a hundred years, not only spawned those two attributes of the new Argentina which are resentment

² The literal meaning is "the corn cob", but in Lunfardo, (the Argentine street slang that abounds in the lyrics of the tango), "el choclo" means 'the penis'.

³ The iron rod.

⁴ Dirty cunt (vagina).

⁵ Dirty face.

⁶ Going up and going down.

⁷ The Eleven. Ten fingers around a penis. To amuse itself.

⁸ Nickname of a whorehouse girl.

⁹ Siete Palabras means 'the seven words'. Two discoveries are sited. a) A reliable source revealed that this tango was originally called Siete Pulgadas, which means "7 inches" and refers to length of a penis. b) Several sources concurred that the seven words are "andate la puta madre que te pario". Go to the whore mother who spit you out (gave birth to you).

and sadness, but prepared the coming of the most original phenomenon of the Plata: the tango.....But Enrique Santos Discepolo¹⁰, its ultimate creator, gives what I think the most endearing and accurate definition: "It is a sad thought that is danced.””

Sabato’s version is the one officially accepted by the CETBA (Centro Educativo del Tango de Buenos Aires). The CETBA is run from a large public elementary school. During the day, children are educated there. When night falls, the building transforms into a government sponsored tango-learning center. All the classes are free and focus not only on dance classes, but history of tango, tango in film, tango in culture, and tango teacher certification. During my time there, I was told to “forget the brothel and all I had heard about it”. I was taught about the *conventillos*—the tenement houses of the mid 1800’s and how immigrants from all over Europe (Italians, Spaniards, German and Russian Jews, blacks from Africa) were sharing common space (kitchens and patios); how they also shared musical instruments, and dance steps and stories and how a new people were formed and a new dance – the tango, from sharing and merging ragtag bits of all their different cultures.

The tango had its Golden Age from the 1920’s through the 1950’s with the peak occurring in the 1940’s. It lost its traction with the introduction of British and American Rock & Roll. In the years of the military takeover led by Jorge Rafael Videla who deposed President Isabel Perón (third wife of Juan Perón), the tango disappeared.¹¹ During the junta or ‘dirty war’ in Argentina from 1973-1983, the tango was banned along with other arts (including psychoanalysis) as subversive. In the years of *la guerra sucia*,

¹⁰ Tango musician and composer of many famous tangos.

¹¹ There were two clubs on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, Sin Rumba and Sunderland, where the tango continued to be danced in those years. There was a lookout that would warn the people to stop dancing before the police came in.

no one danced as people were forbidden to congregate. It is estimated that over 30,000 people “disappeared”¹² during these years. Videla was eventually prosecuted for crimes against humanity and these trials were presided over by the writer Ernesto Sabato. Videla died in prison in 2012.

The tango Renaissance in Argentina began in 1983. Dancers emerged who had not danced tango in the milongas since 1955 (year of military coup and deposition of President Juan Peron). These men and women endearingly known as the “old milongueros” transmitted their teachings of the tango to a new generation. In 2009, the tango was declared “part of the world’s Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity” by the United Nations. At present, the tango continues to evolve.

Bring Gaby ON STAGE (to read Dr. Perl, Ms. Segade, and various other characters)



Borda 1 PRESENTATION

¹² Most of those who disappeared were raped, tortured, and killed.

The Hospital Borda was founded in 1863 and is the largest (and one of the last) psychiatric hospitals in Buenos Aires. The Hospital Borda is only for men. The neighboring Moyano Hospital is for women. There is an average of 1272 beds available and the average length of stay is 441 days. Interned patients 1160, outpatients 975. The forensic ward, Penal Unit 20 Diego Alcorta, houses violent patients who come from the prisons. The Borda is also the first in the world to broadcast a radio program from inside a mental institution. This began in 1990, with Radio La Colifata (Lunfardo slang for “the crazy woman”) and the program includes sports and the Borda Tango Club. The Taller (workshop) Tango known as “All of Crazy for Tango” program has been meeting for 13 years now twice in the month at the Borda.

In 2008, the mayor of Buenos Aires announced that the city would be closing the Borda within two years. There was a huge public outcry and even today one can see graffiti on many walls of the Borda and surrounding areas where it is written “NO TO THE CLOSING”. The Borda was not closed but since 2010, it has greatly diminished and fallen into disrepair.

A week before coming to the Taller Tango at the Borda, I met with Laura Segade, the tango teacher who prepared me for my visit. I was told to dress modestly so as not to provoke or over stimulate the patients. I was told that it was very important that women follow and men lead the tango because the men need to understand the difference between the sexes and not become confused. “None of that queer tango,” I was told. I would be expected to follow if I were to participate as a dancer. I could also choose to participate as part of the public and just observe. I was told to introduce myself by my name and as a dancer. No more.

Ms. Segade also spoke at length about her experience of teaching the patients at the Borda, how much it had moved her, and even changed her life. She spoke with great feeling and compassion yet still nothing could have prepared me for all the feelings I would encounter upon first entering the Borda. **2ND SLIDE**

Situated on 49 acres and located on Calle Ramón Carrillo, in Barracas, a neighborhood in Buenos Aires, the Borda is shaped like the letter ‘H’ with two side wings. Gardens and courtyards sprawl in between the wings and the entire area is enclosed with a high barred gate. I receive an email with a pdf attached giving detailed directions and including a Google map of the Borda. (Diagram 2)

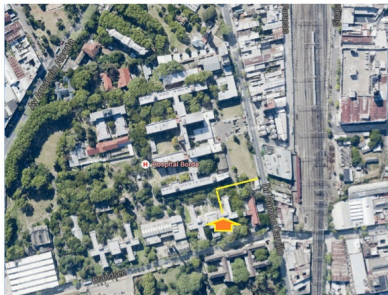
CLASES DE TANGO EN EL HOSPITAL BORDA

CUANDO: los 2º y 4º miércoles de cada mes, a las 11.30 hs (te pedimos estés 10 minutos antes)

DONDE: HOSPITAL I.T. BORDA, Ramón Carrillo 375, CABA
DPTO IV - SERVICIO 25 B - 2º piso, derecha

Indicaciones para llegar: Acceder al predio del Hospital por el portón principal, y seguir derecho por la vereda y por la calle interna, en total unos 50 metros. En cuento se cruza un porton de rejas abierto, donde hay una garita a la izquierda, entrar, doblar a la izquierda hacia Infectología, y al final de la galería hay una puerta a la izquierda. Subir por la escalera los dos pisos hasta el Servicio 25 B, entrar al pasillo y doblar a la derecha dirigirse al Servicio 25 B. Preguntar por el taller de tango del Servicio 25 B. Jefe: Dr. Guillermo Hönig.

Integrantes del taller: Lic Silvana Perl, Adrian Mascherpa, Rufino Bogado, Laura Segade, Christine Eydoux, Ana Ferraz Guerra, Lesley Speakman, Roque Silles, Ana Laura Gómez, Adriana Rossi, Lucie Lebouef, Lucila Cores.



(LOOK AT IT AND TRANSLATE)

“Enter the courtyard of the estate through the main gate. Follow straight by the path to an inside path to the right. In 50 meters, cross another open gate. The gate has bars but it is open. There is a security post on the left. Enter and turn left toward “Infectología”. At the

end of the gallery there is a door to the left. Go up two flights of stairs. Enter that hall and turn right toward Service 25B. Ask for the Tango Workshop at the 25B”

Although there are gates and guard posts as described, the only ones guarding are several feral dogs roaming the grounds. During my field placement in a New York hospital, I went through several interviews and fingerprinting before I could begin my internship or even visit the premises and once there, I was given passcodes and then a keycard to get in and out of the lock down facility. It is more relaxed in Argentina.

I arrive at – Servicio 25B – the door opens and a small woman beckons me in. It is Silvana Perl. Under five feet with a shock of salt and pepper hair, I am immediately struck by her dynamic and bigger than life personality and passion. She is wearing a white lab coat. Others begin to gather in her office.

Perl takes off her white lab coat and changes into a sheer white pullover sweater that looks kind of like a feather boa. The sweater is see-thru and on her t-shirt underneath, Betty Boop peaks through. Perl proceeds to divide us into two groups. I have an immediate sense of being part of a team. She explains that it is important to make a cambio – a change in the environment. Half of the group goes into the dining hall and sweeps up cigarette butts from the floor. They move tables against the walls and rearrange the chairs in a semi circle to create a dance floor space. Someone else brings in a boom box and the tango music begins to play very loudly to signal to the patients that the tango lesson is about to begin.

Perl introduces me to one of the patients and says I should speak English with him. I feel very nervous and not sure what to say. The patient approaches and asks where I am from. All my Modern Analytic training goes out the window as I answer his question without

asking a question of my own. “New York”, I tell him. He begins to sing: “It’s up to you, New York, New York”. I immediately feel welcome and relax.

Perl motions and I follow her with the second group. She explains that it is important to make a situation like something on the outside - like something that happens in the community outside of the hospital. In the tango community, it is very common to go around and pass flyers to invite people to a milonga. Perl hands me a stack of flyers and says: “Vamos! We will make a seduction to the tango!”

SLIDE 3 Borda tango flyer



Out in the sunshine and the raw beauty of the grounds, as we pass all the smiling men, I feel the seduction of the place and its residents. Is schizophrenia seductive? Am I beginning to spiral toward the primordial like a moth to the flame? In his memoir, Michael Greenberg describes his daughter’s madness as “being in the presence of a rare force of nature, such as a great blizzard or flood: destructive, but in its way astounding

too.” He also calls it “the evil seduction”. Pope Pius X in 1914 called the tango “the evil seduction.

We proceed to walk to another building in the Borda that is in significantly poorer condition than Dept. IV. We walk through a long corridor and every 20 meters or so, there is an open patio room off to the left with six cots to a room. These rooms have no doors. In the first room, three men lay on their beds, one man is standing, and two men are sitting up. We invite them to the tango and pass out the flyers. One man waves us away. Two men do not even sit up from the bed. Two other men ask if they can bring their guitars and Perl encourages them to do so. We walk through a maze of halls and rooms saying hello and inviting everyone to come to the class. At the end of our tour, we have collected eight men and one woman (who is visiting a patient). The energy is very high and we step lively across the estate gathering more participants as we go along back to the Dept. IV building. I feel very elated and as I look behind me at our troop, I feel like I’ve stepped into Philippe de Broca’s 1966 film *The King of Hearts*. Our group is unruly, chaotic, mad, and altogether marvelous. There is a sense that we are dancing or prancing across the square even though we have not yet begun to dance. We pass again under the sign “Infectologia” which frightened me at first when I entered alone as I took it to mean “infectious diseases”. Now as I enter the area, I feel happy and think only that it is the tango that is infectious.

We follow the sound of the tango music to the dining hall (now transformed into a milonga). There are other men there, the tango ladies, and the teachers are already illustrating a step. Perl instructs everyone to get into a circle and we introduce ourselves.

SLIDE 4

APPENDIX D
Photos Borda Hospital



Dr. Perl gathers the group

We say our names and then either the word Doctor, Teacher, Dancer, or Audience to define ourselves. The class formally begins. The women stand behind Laura, and the men behind Roque. They teach the paso basico – the basic step. It is an eight-count step. The men step back with the right, side with the left. Forward with the right, forward with the left, and on the fifth step, they bring the right foot together with the left foot and shift the weight onto the right foot. We stop after the fifth step. After reviewing this several times, we join in a big circle again and Silvana Perl makes all the couplings and no one changes partners without her consent. A young patient in his early twenties was told I was from America. He flirts with me and laughs and yells repeatedly that he wants to dance with ‘la Americana’. Perl does not put us together. She is very aware of not over stimulating the men and also of protecting the ladies.

I notice a man dressed very elegantly and wearing a silk cravat. He seems to be instructing the ladies and I have the idea that he is here from the outside and not a patient. Later, Laura says to remind her to tell me about him. I then imagine that he must be a success story, a former patient who was cured and discharged. Although I am not coupled to dance with him, I am very aware of his presence in the room at all times. I don’t know

what the feeling is but I would just describe it as hyper awareness. The first man I dance with seems to be heavily medicated. Ernesto takes hold of my triceps. (The full embrace of the tango, sternum to sternum, is not used in the class.) **SLIDE 5**



I am no stranger to being held by a man in the tango, but I do initially find it disconcerting to be held by a patient in a psychiatric ward. His hands tell me that I am there, that he recognizes me, but his eyes are vacant and do not acknowledge my presence. Ernesto faintly shifts his weight from side to side. His movement is very subtle and I focus and try to follow him. As the teachers call out the steps, the rest of the class begins to move but Ernesto just stands there holding me and shifting the weight. I find myself challenged by the great analytic lesson of waiting for the contact in this exercise. I know how to dance the lead. I even know how to back lead. Inside my head, I am impatient to give him some direction. I even know the paso basico in Spanish. I can say to him: “detrás con la derecha, salida con la izquierda, paseo adelante con la derecha, paso adelante con la izquierda, y juntos”. I can say nothing and just move him, back lead him with my body. I feel myself screaming inside and I pose this question in my mind: “I wonder what Ernesto is screaming inside?” At that moment, he makes eye contact with me for the first and only time. It is a fleeting contact and I see a lot of pain in his eyes and

I feel a lot of suffering in his body. By now, the class has repeated the paso basico twice. I say nothing. I do nothing. I wait. Finally, Laura comes over behind him and gently prods him on to do the step. She uses both words and her body to guide him. He is very shaky but he performs it to completion and feels very proud. At the end of the step, he gives a joyous grunt and he also gives a triumphant shake to my arms (which felt kind of like he was patting himself on the back) that lets me know he is happy and also lets me know that in some way I exist for him or that I am actually a part of him. After this moment, he fades away again and I feel I no longer exist (to him). I am sad to lose the momentary contact or feeling of being a part of him, but at the same time, I am also happy and proud that I was able to follow my directive and be a true follower. I do not interpret or instruct. I am able to wait for his lead.

We gather once again in the big circle and Dr. Perl rearranges the partners. **SLIDE 6**



This time, she pairs me with Horacio, who greets me with more enthusiasm than Ernesto, however his breath is horrid. I feel like I might pass out from the contact. There are codas in the tango and these codas, (rules), are also followed in the Borda. If a man is not

dressed in clean clothes and properly groomed, he is told to leave the class. Unfortunately, not much can be done about the breath although this is included in the tango codas. Horacio also seems heavily medicated, but he is able to speak to me and I feel he is engaged and present and aware of my presence. Unfortunately, the fire-breathing dragon between his lips makes it very difficult for me to focus on anything he is saying. I fantasize that we are in an office sitting on opposite sides of the room and I can really listen to him. I look across the room and my eyes meet the eyes of the man with the cravat. He looks very happy instructing the ladies. I am miserable. Another analytic lesson comes to my mind concerning how much one can contain, tolerate, or bear. I am able to bear the bad breath and continue through two more *paso basicos* with Horacio.

The class in the Borda must end when the lunch arrives in the room. The staff begins to come in to set up the food and Perl gathers everyone in a circle. She says we will end by singing the tango, *Volver*¹³ (To Return). The two men with the guitars go and grab them up so they can play along. The audience, the doctors, the teachers, the dancers, all join in. The elegant man with the cravat sings the loudest. We sing: “*Volver*” It’s a song about returning to the past. *siempre se vuelve al primer amor* - you always return to your first love... There are moans and wails and whispers of ‘return’. The guitars are out of tune and some voices are off key. At the end, Perl says it sounded like “mierda del culo”¹⁴ and we all laugh.

The patients all sit down for lunch and Dr. Perl gathers the team in her office and asks us for feedback on our experiences. This lasts for fifteen minutes, much like my site

¹³ 1935 Music by: Carlos Gardel Lyrics by: Alfredo Lepera

¹⁴ Shit from the ass.

supervision at my New York field placement. Perl puts a great emphasis on the fact that we are a team and a container of sorts for the patients. This team includes of course - the Argentines – doctors, teachers, and dancers. There are also dancers from England and France and myself from the United States. One woman cries as she tries to explain how much the patients moved her. Everyone is quite stimulated and I would say elated by the experience. All present are in agreement that the patients seem different after the class. They are more full of life.

SLIDE 7



Laura speaks about how these patients have no resistance to learning. They will just do it – even though they can't do the step. Not at all like the normal people she teaches who are full of resistances. When Perl turns to me, I tell her that I am not sure which is more seductive—the tango or the locos. I tell her that I felt seduced by the madness. I do not mention specifically the attraction I feel toward the elegant man in the cravat but I would learn his story soon enough.

Dr. Perl Interview SLIDE 8



Dr. Honig, Dr. Perl, Ms. Roséan, and Ms. Segade

As a modern psychoanalytic student training in the techniques of treatment for the preoedipal disorders, my interview with Dr. Perl is rather alarming and a bit comical in nature. I walk to her home in Palermo Soho, (the area known as Villa Freud), just a few blocks from where I am staying. Dr. Perl invites me into her home. I follow her through a hallway and into the kitchen. She apologizes but she must prepare and cook a fish while I interview her. She seats me at a large wooden dining table and speaks to me through a pass through window.

Perl inquires about my school and about the theory of my thesis. I attempt to explain Spotnitz, but at the mention of the narcissistic transference, she waves her arm as if to shoo something away and makes a comment about not understanding what the American psychoanalysts are up to. I attempt an explanation of the technique Spotnitz developed for working with narcissistic rage in the transference. While trying to adequately explain this, the word ‘mother’ falls out of my mouth and a pot lid crashes to the floor with a loud bang. Perl comes running out of the kitchen with her hands above her head, shouting: “NO! NOT THE MOTHER! The mother is the root of the psychosis. We cannot go there!”

Here begins my entry point and initiation into Lacanian theory...

I make a mental note not to mention ‘the Mother’ again.

I propose a question about the theory of my thesis.

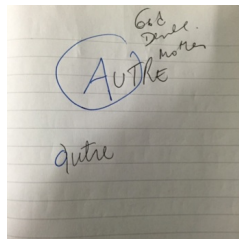
Roséan: Do you think we are becoming one with the patients or the patients are becoming one with us when we dance tango during the class?

Perl: They cannot become the other. They have to know the differences of the sexes. They have their own world. The other doesn't exist. The Other is like a Pacman that eats you up.

“The other doesn't exist” seems to ring true to me in relation to what I've studied about the narcissistic transference and in relation to my experience of dancing with some of the patients.

Dr. Perl comes and sits next to me at the table and draws a diagram in my notebook:

SLIDE 9



P: You are not the Other, but, the other. Lacan says Other with this one. Other or other.

Otro...God, eh, Devil. It's very often, Mother –

R: Mother.

P: (she sings) Mother, you had me but I never had you.

R: Bueno. Lacan is very difficult for me.

P: For all of us. (pause) Tango has a structure. If you want to dance, you must arrive to this structure. The draw, the choreography. There are RULES how to dance. Also there are some rules about the different behaviors -

R: Of the man and the woman?

P: The man and the woman! And how the man leads the dance and how the woman follows him and there are all of those kinds of rules or tips – they are in the structure of the dance. So, then, you have this condition that if you want to dance, you must dance with the other one. You can't dance alone. You must direct yourself, project yourself to the other one to dance, you must go out from your island. So at this moment, you are not psychotic. I don't know if all of them but in the moment that you are dancing... because you are with other, because you can hear the music and follow the music with the other without paranoia. Why? Because of the structure. The structure is something known by all of us. All of us even teachers, assistants, psychoanalysts, medics – all of us are under the tango's structure. So, I cannot become like this 'Other' that I can do with him that what I want. Firstly, because I am also under the rules of the tango. We all are in the same situation. We are dancing by art's rules - under art's rules. It must be artistic. You cannot dance under free expression. I don't believe about free expression in psychosis. I think that it leads to nothing because the psychotic needs guides- *como se dice? Pistas ferroviarias!*

R: railways...

P: Si! Exactamente. And then you can improvise or put your own expression but you must be walking within the rails. So, this experience builds a language - a kind of

common language. So, you go out from your island and from your deliria and you must give the hand, beg the woman dance...

R: and would you say that this population, uh, that you're also successful with them with the rules of psychoanalysis? In other words, to come on time, to lie on the couch?

P: NO.

R: No! Why not?

P: Because psychoanalysis, it's not an art. Sometimes it can work but it's not the main thing.

R: So they are not able to come in the office and lie—

P: Yes, but it is not the intention to establish that like a structure. The structure is the structure of the dance not - other thing. The dance has - art has rules. Even in a free expression of art. You must be in contact with the pencil, the paint- the color. You cannot do what you want. You are not free. Nunca! And I think that we have not and we don't look for evaluation about if it's a cura sana –if it lets the psychotic free of illness, tango. NO. It's therapeutic because they enter in a common language and you can see that AT the hour since the lesson, you can see, they are in the class, looking for the other. Following the steps.

R: and does it have a lasting effect?

P: I don't know. Doesn't matter to me.

R: Doesn't matter because what matters is in this moment.

P: Yes, the moment that you are sure that it held - holds something but it will not change the illness. But you can see that it does not fix it. It depends transference elemente.

R: It depends on the transference?

P: Yes, because at this moment he can experience a transference. With what? With the tango. (pause) Through the teachers, through those assistants, it is not without that. But we can change a lot of teachers and the experience will be the same because we have a structure related to the – we call it - dispositivo. Related to the workshop – taller. There are different functions - teachers, me, and the other psychoanalysts, assistants - and we keep those functions very clear because there is some eroticism in the tango even that we don't embrace each other - but it comes– the erotical tango.

R: I notice that you –every time we change the couple, we stop and you make the couples. This is part of your structure.

P: Yes.

R: I noticed that one man was very excited, stimulated to dance with 'la Americana' but you didn't put him with me.

P: Exactly.

R: So, you were watching very carefully?

P: Si.

R: For the erotic stimulation and to keep something on a level that won't over stimulate? Is that correct?

P: Si. Si. Because in this moment, obviously, some lady with eh..., I recommend not to come with... erotic clothes and clothes that you can see the you know ... (shows the outline of a female figure with her hands). Normal. (pause) The patient could build his own history about father, mother, grandfather who dance tango, who hear tango, you know and this is very important because you can enter in a genealogical tree and it gives you some order, you know. What do you say, that there is no difference in psychosis so there is no generation difference because it's - what was the main forbidden that doesn't work – the incesto.

R: The taboo of incest.

P: So without this forbidden, all is chaotic. Mental chaos. So we work with - not main because the main doesn't exist that we call there in place of the father. Father's functions. Rules, common language, order, generation order.

R: All these things are connected with the father?

P: Yes. And that can give some symbolic order. Not at the main mind but yes, you can help yourself with – we call them like Freude parche. You know you have something broken and you put on some sheet of – sheet no - tela - this - (demonstrates with sleeve)

R: Fabric. To patch it!

P: Yes. Exactamente. Muy bien.

R: So it's a patch.

P: Exactly. So tango has these conditions. And all these things can be connected we call them patches. You can use it because the tango has all those elements that you can use.

- The sexual difference
- Recognition of the other
- The rules - the structure
- Lazo Social – the social links

I was not at all expecting the answers she provides. She has not confirmed for me that tango creates a warm oneness and awakens feelings from the first years of life. Or has she? I am also disappointed that she does not invite me to share the fish she cooked. Our interview ends and I am ushered out the door as her man comes home in time for supper. Somehow, in my encounter with Perl, my preoedipal theoretical investigations are quashed and I depart with the feeling of Oedipal envy as the man and the woman (the mother and the father) retreat to enjoy their private pleasure (the fish dinner) without me. This Oedipal complex is quickly and successfully resolved as I meet up with friends to enjoy a delicious *entraña*¹⁵. Dr. Perl does however gift me with a paper she has written for the Borda Journal. It would be weeks before I could get it translated but when that is accomplished, I find gems that did not come up in our conversation.

SLIDE 10/11

¹⁵ Argentine skirt steak



The exile of the patients, the horrible isolation and stigmatization imposed upon them and how the spontaneous tango community created in the hospital counteracts that and “would use tango as a symbolic intermediary, as setting a common signifier”. She questions whether tango speaks its own language through the 2x4 heartbeat rhythm, the 8-count step and its cadence and phrasing. “The body is subject to the symbolic order of organized choreography in time and space. What supports a deed with the body in space

and time, the base could be thought of as a picture, as a letter.” The necessary understanding of right and left side of the body helps the patient to restore spatial orientation. Dr. Perl is dancing her psychotic patients into the symbolic order of Lacan.

Laura Segade Interview SLIDE 12



My meeting with Ms. Segade starts at the Bonafide coffee shop near my residence in Villa Freud. I begin by asking her if the schizophrenic patients at the Borda treat her as a part of themselves or do they relate to her as another person. She has not thought about this before and it doesn't really matter to her. What she feels is that they are there for her in the way they can be and she is there for them and together, they make tango. She describes dancing with the men as bringing her back to the origins of tango when figures and steps did not exist and there was zero technique. She feels a powerful creative force because the men have to go to some inside places to find their tango. She speaks at length about what tango means to the Argentine.

Segade: For us tango is not just a dance. It's an attitude, it's a philosophy, it's a way of thinking, of seeing life, to react, to suffer. It means a lot of things and it's pretty impossible that someone who was born here can't feel a way of the tango even if they don't dance at all and in Borda I can feel that. The same as their madness, I can connect my own madness with their own. We can share that power. We can have many beautiful moments sharing our crazy moments and the same happens with tango but with the tango we use it as a goal. For example, they have to be very focused on the tango. It doesn't really matter how they are, how they look at you because sometimes they are very obsessed and I change partners very often to protect the ladies. The tango is the reason to be there. It's the way. It's the goal. It switches the function all the time. I don't know if there is an awareness coming back to your question, if they are aware of me - of they - I don't know but I know they feel. For me it's enough. And they feel as a man dancing tango and they make me feel as a woman dancing tango and it's quite a moment, right? Because as I told you once, when the class is beginning, many patients come to have a class of tango and when the class ends, many men left the class not patients.

Her words move me deeply and I find my ears pricking up as it sounds like she is describing some things similar to Modern psychoanalytic technique. She is working with feelings. It sounds possible that she is joining the patients. For sure, she is joining the resistance, as you cannot dance tango unless there is (literally) a resistance between the couple. The man and the woman both lean slightly forward in the embrace (even in the practice embrace) to create a resistance. Without this resistance, the woman cannot feel the mark (the lead) of the man and he cannot feel where the weight of the woman is without it. The woman (follower) must wait for the contact. She does not initiate

movement on her own. She must wait for the transference of weight. (The modern psychoanalyst must wait for the transference of feelings.) This slight physical pressure created between the bodies of the couple also works to counteract whatever resistance (mental, emotional, or physical) the woman has to following the lead. It facilitates her surrender to the dance. Could we say it facilitates the opening – the surrendering of her unconscious? Freud (1893) wrote of his experimentation with “the pressure technique”. He used his hand to apply pressure to the patient’s forehead in order to overcome resistance and extract information from the unconscious. Freud also asked the patient to close her eyes. In the tango, the follower closes the eyes. The pressure technique segued Freud’s use of hypnotism. Eventually, he abandoned both. Has the tango abandoned these two techniques?

I pull out of my thoughts and ask her another question:

R: Did you say they leave the class not patients during your time there?

S: Yes. For me, it feels like this. There is a transformation. Every time.

I have many questions in my mind. Freud and Lacan both believed that schizophrenics could not be psychoanalyzed because they could not form the all-powerful positive transference. Were these patients forming positive transferences through the tango? What about the negative transference? Spontitz (2004) wrote: “In his [Freud’s] analytic work he apparently strove to detach the negative transference from himself. To operate in that manner, however, makes effective treatment of the schizophrenic patient impossible. It precludes the full development of negative transference, which is indispensable for resolving obstacles to the verbal release of aggressive impulses and feelings.” (p. 131)

I ask Ms. Segade if the men ever exhibit aggression? She tells me that yes, they do and when they do, Dr. Perl and the staff escort them out of the class. They have to follow the rules. She tells me about a patient who tried to pick a fight over the Falklands War with the British lady who comes to the class. He had to leave the class. Many of the patients are heavily medicated. Some are not. I wonder why there isn't more aggression.

I remind her to tell me the story of the man with the cravat. She is reluctant at first and I suggest that she change his name.

S: Eh, maybe. I don't know. Well...em, his name. I really don't know his name. But-

R: He looked very put together. He looked like a man.

S: He is. He is Jorge Rafael Videla. You know who is? He was a dictator here.

R: A dictator here?

S: Yes. Not HE. The original, Jorge Rafael Videla.

R: Oh

S: He is a crazy man. He thinks he is.

R: Oh he thinks he is. I see what your saying. He thinks that he is this dictator.

S: Yes, he [Videla] was our president. He was a fucking son of a bitch here. He was terrible.

R: And the patient has chosen that identity for himself?

S: Yes, because he was with the military when the dictatorial government took place here and he has to be many procedures kidnapping people, torturing I don't know exactly the story because it has always has changed. Yes. And well, he killed his mother. He really killed his mother. He spent eleven years at the jail in Borda. There is a jail in Borda.

R: I read that that the forensic unit had closed.

S: Well, I don't know right now but last year it was open. When he was in jail, he said he was Videla's son. And when he ended his sentence, he felt so bad because he needs to be punished all the time. The doctors in the Borda share with us their histories because we need to know some specific pathologies or behaviors. We have to be very aware of the words we use sometimes because we deal with a lot of paranoids. For example, we never use like "take care of your back" because it's very paranoid. We don't want to crush. That's all. Take care of the lady. That's all. I have a very funny story. Once I was talking about the paso basico – I was telling them that this is a structure that holds many figures - it's like the Mother of the structure. The doctor was: "Come here. NEVER! Never ever speak about the mother. The mother is the main problem. The origin of the psychotics." So, I'm sorry, the paso basico it's not the mother – it's the...

Ms. Segade and I are both laughing and I feel elated that I am not alone in getting scolded for mentioning the mother.

S: And Videla - coming back to him, as a dictator, I think the most human being there. He's very warm, cozy, he's always aware of the other, what the other needs. He's a very happy guy. Always.

R: He's a permanent resident there now?

S: Yes.

R: Can you tell me about experience you have dancing with the dictator? I haven't seen him dance last week.

S: He was happy because he was told to teach ladies who didn't know how to dance. He was so happy. He always calls us doctors. "Si, Doctora. Si Doctora." He's so funny. He started to dance last year but he came to the class as public for many years just to watch

and then one day – “Ok, I’ll start today”. And last year he felt so good dancing. He told me: “Doctora, I never thought that I could learn anything so complicated and with so much pleasure. I wish more people from outside come here because we are good people and we want to share we want to show them what we do here and it would be great to have more people from outside here. He was so happy. Very happy. We have many experiences with him.

R: Dancing with him?

S: Ah, yes. It’s very funny that - the concept - to try to agree to a concept with them or with Videla in this case. Because when he starts the paso basico, he makes huge movements. Videla, please, I can’t make that movement with you. It’s very big.

‘Excuse me Doctora, I make it tiny now.’ And it’s the same (laugh). It’s very funny and we change places sometimes without saying that I will lead him to the movement and we are just having a dialogue with movement trying to reflect one to the other trying to get into this mantra this movement together to get into the same vibration. *Juntos*.

I silently wonder how this man can be so loved. I may be falling in love him too. And how can he be so happy? I feel envious of his happiness. Could I be connecting with my own narcissistic countertransference archaic rage? Is Videla the spokesman for all of our unconscious infantile wishes to kill the preoedipal mother - to annihilate the bad Omnipotent breast? I theorize that if one actually kills his mother, there is no more aggression. It’s all worked out. I run this theory by my analyst. She responds by saying that we don’t know the circumstances under which he killed her. I backtrack upon hearing that and begin to imagine the horrible tortures that Videla’s mother put him through. I begin to feel sorry for him. Maybe it was an accident? I ask Ms. Segade if she

knows the circumstances. She tells me she doesn't know the details of the murder of Videla's mother, but she was told that it was "very bloody and cruel". She also confesses that she cannot see him as a psychotic nor a killer... and that he certainly is a whole chapter of the Institution...

I think now that the aggression is definitely there in the Borda. There is a man, Videla, who is allowed to be – who is accepted as – a horrible dictator, guilty of matricide – and no one is denying him this identity. Each time his chosen name is spoken, it evokes the memory of the dirty war, of hatred and aggression, of the violent deaths of 10,000 to 30,000 Argentine citizens. Are they in a way containing his rage? Is the tango with its rules, a container?

The most striking thing Ms. Segade said to me was: "When I was asked to be the teacher in the *Taller*, it scared me to death. Two moments in my life – one when I decided to become a mother and the other when I was asked to be the teacher." It seems to me, that she knows, consciously or unconsciously, that by teaching in the Borda, she will once again be engaging with the preverbal psyche and she does not take this commitment lightly. A fascinating revelation!

The Borda Hospital (2nd visit)

On my second visit to the Borda, I easily found my way through the maze. I again participated in the class and danced with two different patients. Dr. Perl partnered me with men not as heavily medicated, as the first time. My second partner, Osvaldo, was not leading well but he was very quick to scold me for not following his steps. I experienced several feelings in this interaction with him – first, there was anticipation to

make the step in the prescribed way. Then, fear as his indications to me were not clear at all, nor were his movements following the steps reviewed in the lesson. He led a *paso basico* of his own devise. Then, there was surprise when he confronted me with my inability to follow his moves. Of course, I then felt anger but this was quickly displaced by happiness as I realized he was actually communicating with me about the dance. It seemed a very precious thing. In the milongas, one of the codes is not to teach or correct the woman. The man must be able to communicate the steps without words. It is considered very bad form to correct the follower publically in the milonga or to teach her the step. Even in a class, the man who corrects the woman is probably the man who has not executed the step well. But somehow, in this class, with this man – I felt a wonderful sense of joy that he was able to tell me in words that he was pretty much disgusted with my lack of understanding his moves. I felt there was a trust between us in this moment. He explained what he was trying to do and I made another attempt to follow him. I still had no idea what he was trying to communicate in terms of movement. The movement made no sense in terms of the *paso basico*, but I asked him if my step was correct and what he wanted and he responded in the affirmative. Finally, I felt sadness as at the end of the class, Osvaldo disappeared into some private place. There were no more words or any recognition of me. I have to wonder if this last is a result of schizophrenia or a following of the codas of the tango. Once the embrace is broken, the tanda ended, the Cortina played, the couple separate and go to their separate sides of the room.

At the end of this lesson, there was an exhibition given. **SLIDE 13**



One of the patients and his partner volunteered to illustrate the step we had learned. After showing the step, the audience was asked how it was. On this day, Videla was not dancing. He was part of the audience. He also looked markedly different than the first time I had seen him. No longer wearing the elegant cravat, he was wearing a hoodie and looking kind of gangsta’.

He proclaimed loudly on the presentation of the step: “Podría ser bueno or puede ser malo”.¹⁶ “It could be good. It could be bad.”

At the end of the class, we gathered in a circle and Dr. Perl led us in the singing of another tango - this time, the famous *Cambalache* (The Bazaar). (*music que*)

This tango was banned for many years and the lyrics speak of the corruption of the twentieth century.

¹⁶ “It could be good or it could be bad.” The milonga joins whatever feeling you bring into it and magnifies that feeling to help you to tolerate and feel all the emotions. Sounds a bit like analysis.

Cambalache is *lunfardo* slang for a junk shop or bazaar with all kinds of things mixed up together.

As I leave the Borda that last Wednesday afternoon to prepare for my flight back to New York, I discover that on the following day, there will be a PARO – a National Strike in Argentina. Everything will stop. Already there is a sense of chaos in the air. A cambalache, or more accurately, a quilombo¹⁷ in Buenos Aires. Some lyrics of the tango run through my head:

“cambalache

problematico y febril! (problematic and feverish)”

There is a problem getting a flight home and I am running a fever.

“El que no llora, no mama, if you don’t cry, you don’t get suckled”

The Argentines know how to cry and they shut down the city to bang pots and pans in the streets protesting the inflation and devaluation of the peso.

“y el que no afana es un gil. And if you don’t steal, you are stupid.”

I pay a ransom to the Argentine Animal Control so they will release my dog out of Argentina even though I have already fulfilled all the USDA paperwork to return home with her.

“Dale nomas! Dale que va! Go ahead! Keep it up!

Que alla en el horno Nos vamo a encontrar! That there, in hell we’re gonna reunite.

No pienses mas, sentate a un lao. Don’t think anymore, move out of the way.”

¹⁷ A shitstorm. A big mess.

I decide the airport must be the hell. I can't think anymore and I am just moving out of the way of a shouting moving mob of angry people. I am quite sure that I felt more *tranquila en la casa de los locos*¹⁸.

The presentation ended with a close embrace tango demonstration given by Jim and Linda Gucciardo and was then followed by a Q&A. Empañadas, Malbec wines, and Alfajores cookies were then served at the social to end the evening.



¹⁸ The nuthouse.