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Introduction

The Four Branches of Awareness

My partner and I have spent our Friday night dancing tango at the weekly summer milonga hosted by Stockholm's amusement park, Gröna Lund. We are taking the boat from the amusement park back to the Old Town, standing out on the deck and admiring the city pass by as we engage in conversation with another man who is returning home from the same event. This man, Swedish, white, middle-aged, does not dance much these days, being generally disillusioned with the politics of partner selection. Too many women, he feels, sit and wait the whole night for their perfectly idealized partner, rather than deigning to dance with anyone else. He does like to come and observe the proceedings, however. In his years of watching he has seen many things. The man is relating to us a story of the time he saw a woman do a boleó on her own initiative, without being led to do so by her partner, and in kicking her leg up in the air accidentally impaling a neighboring man's calf with her stiletto heel. Finishing his story, he says: "she must have felt so..."

At this point I must interrupt my anecdote in order to allow the reader to ponder what someone in this situation might say next. I would like to think that were I telling the story, had I witnessed the event, I might come up with any number of different adjectives to describe the hypothetical feelings of a woman who found herself in this unfortunate situation. She might feel guilty, or sheepish, or remorseful, or embarrassed, or ashamed, or perhaps mortified. This man said none of these things (or their Swedish equivalents). Instead, what he said was:

"...cheap."

"Excuse me, what did you say?" is what I said then.

"She must have felt so cheap."

"That is what I thought you said."

Had he used any of the adjectives I might have anticipated, I would not be relating this anecdote. The word "cheap" is unexpected here, however, and bears interrogation. In Swedish as in English, the term when applied 1 / 2 to a woman implies devaluation as a function of sexual availability. It takes too little effort to convince her to have sex, and this somehow lessens her worth as a human being. The relevant question in this context becomes: how does impaling a strange man's calf with

your heel at a milonga mark you in this way? I will begin answering this question by examining how tango shapes the female body. For the purposes of this example, I will lay bare the gender politics of the system by assuming a normative male leader and female follower.

Tango principles mandate that the woman strive to bring her knees together after every step, and by extension that her feet should default to hugging the floor. The sexual implications of these rules are not lost on some instructors, who may make winking comments about the need for women of propriety to keep their knees together, or their feet on the floor, or their legs closed. At the same time, a parallel principle of tango embodiment demands that she keep her chest oriented toward her leader. The significations of this rule, too, can reveal themselves when women fail to adhere to it in class and are chastised for losing contact with or losing interest in their partners. While the lower body performs chastity, in short, the upper body performs fidelity. Simultaneous adherence to these two distinct impulses is enabled by an extreme dissociation between the woman's hips and torso, which allows her to pivot her chest separately from her legs. This freedom of movement at the hips itself reflects an embedded ambivalence in expressing the carnal threat of her body while, in enabling that dual performance of propriety, simultaneously mitigating its danger.

When impulses sent to the lower and upper body conflict so greatly as to demand a choice between the two rules, however, fidelity trumps chastity. This means that the man can exploit the woman's need to constantly be facing him to manipulate her leg positioning and so control her sexuality. On the one hand, he can use this power to emphasize her chastity by leading any number of standard moves that actually compel her to cross her legs tightly into a position known as the "cross."¹ On the other hand, he can move himself in such a way as to manipulate her into compensatory chest movements that render it difficult or impossible for her to keep her legs together at all, or even in some cases to keep them both on the floor. This may result in any of a number of tango's more sexually suggestive moves. In a standard *volcada*, he leads her forward but then repositions himself so she cannot complete the forward step without violating fidelity; instead, her front leg hangs parted in the air until such time as he decides to bring her back into that chaste cross. He might also lead a variation of that step in which he surprises her by positioning himself such that her left leg snakes suggestively around his right in a *gancho*. Alternatively, he might engage a sudden and well-timed shift in directional energy that causes her free leg to whip up into the air—this is the *boleo*, mentioned previously.² 2 / 3

By and large, the more sexually suggestive the move here, the more physically dangerous it can be to perform on a crowded dance floor. The cross, chaste, is also quite safe and stable. The woman's legs join together directly under her body, supporting her weight. The leg-wrapping *gancho* can limit the couple's mobility, however, and thus the man's ability to react quickly to movements of surrounding dancers. If the woman is brought forward in a *volcada*, this shifts her off balance and potentially exposes her back leg to being stepped on by other couples. If her leg is launched upward in a backwards *boleo*, her stiletto heel can do real damage to dancers in her immediate surroundings, as exemplified in the man's story. The key structural factor that makes it dangerous for the woman to initiate her own back *boleos* and leg extensions is that they extend behind her. She cannot see to determine whether these movements might put her in danger or endanger others. As a result, she has to trust the man's judgment and vision (literally) to keep everyone safe. In sum, the geography of the dance constructs female sexuality so as to be materially dangerous to the woman herself and to society—her surroundings—and demands that it be placed under responsible male control.

Even the music works to enforce this constriction of her sexuality. Most other partner dance musics compel motion with internally contrasting iterative rhythmic patterns, such as the waltz oom-pah-pah or the percussive polyrhythms of salsa. The regular accompaniment patterns found in classic tango music, meanwhile, are usually too minimalistic to compel motion, leaving dancers to rely primarily on interwoven melodies and countermelodies to inspire their movements.³ The man is

thus granted quite a bit of freedom to choose which melodic or rhythmic line to engage with at any given time. This in turn solidifies his control by obliging the woman to defer to his interpretations. The music, in inspiring rather than compelling movement, even permits him to suspend motion in the middle of the dance. Where she interprets the music, it is primarily to fill in these sorts of gaps he leaves her in his lead, though even here tango convention prohibits her from initiating her own shifts of weight. At the same time, the music's facilitation of danced pauses—combined with its typically moderate tempo—slows the pace of the dance around the floor to an extent that the space accepts considerable crowding, like the bumper-to-bumper of rush hour traffic. The resulting close proximity of surrounding dancers, in turn, reinforces the need for tight male control of the woman's legs.

Hence, when a woman initiates her own boleo and impales a neighboring man's calf, his injury becomes the result of her violation of all the dance's careful constrictions on her sexuality, laid down through her individual tango training and responsibilities to her partner and surroundings, and enforced even by the texture of the music. In kicking up her leg without being compelled to—in giving it away for free, effectively—she 3 / 4 renders herself a danger to society. Of critical import here is that these inhibitions on her body are enforced not by individual dancers or teachers or malcontented wallflowers but by the very structure of tango itself as a combined music-and-dance form. Instructors Homer and Christina Ladas, for instance, do their best to mitigate the gender hierarchies of tango by encouraging students at their classes and practicas to dance in socks and learn to both lead and follow. Yet they famously claim that the paywall of their pedagogical website is protected by “The Curse of the Unled Boleo.”⁴ They will not put admonitions against this type of infraction in the same explicitly sexual terms as the man on the boat, but they will remain fully as insistent on its inappropriateness.

When I say the lead/follow system is ideological in nature, that is what I mean. Its complex web of interpersonal and intersensory relationships enforces its heteronorms independently of the social views of its specific participants. The unled boleo does not need to be explicitly named as a sexual violation for its implicit signification to remain in force. Nor could that move reasonably be reclaimed, for instance, by sex-positive dancers as a way to assert female sexual independence, given the actual physical dangers it represents on a crowded dance floor.

The embedded ideologies of any given dance need not be limited specifically to power dynamics of gender, either. Intersecting tensions between class, racial, religious, and national identities also inform the inner workings of tango, transecting the more obvious politics of gender and sexuality. Tango is marked by traces of the cultural worlds of African slaves and their descendants, as well as those of working-class immigrants from the turn of the twentieth century. It also bears considerable evidence of work done to whitewash that past in the project of elevating it to the position of national dance of Argentina, where it may represent all that country's ambitions toward refined European cosmopolitanism. The drums associated with the African-derived dances from which the tango developed are conspicuously absent from the music of its golden age, their polyrhythms replaced with the poly-melody of instruments associated primarily with the European orchestra. The woman's extreme twisting at the waist is enabled by an interplay of African-rooted hip dissociation and an exaggerated upward expansion of the chest, a performance of aspirational whiteness that literally compels her to stretch as far as she can from the marked blackness of her lower body. The sudden incorporation of stiletto heels displaces the gaucho's phallic belt knife onto her feet and instrumentalizes her as the sexual danger in need of control, exaggerates her upward stretch to whiteness, and simultaneously yields to him her balance. The same elements that assign power and control to the man thus work to render the dance white, Catholic, chaste, bourgeois, and refined. They manufacture the woman's need to close her legs, to keep her feet on the floor, and whatever else happens, never to come off as cheap.

Toward a General Theory of Lead/Follow Partner Dance

The purpose of this book is to lay out a general framework for analyzing social partner dance that marries technical and social considerations. My reasoning is that the lead/follow system is coherent enough across dance forms, and different enough in its operation from other dance systems, to warrant its own theoretical apparatus. I argue in Chapter 7 as to the historical roots of this internal coherence, that this gendered division of dance roles has developed and spread superculturally in a dialectical relationship between a European bourgeoisie and its economic, racial, and colonial Others. In this book, therefore, I distinguish between a broader category of “paired dance,” which necessitates two participants but demands no more than that, and its narrower subset “partner dance,” a type of paired dance rooted in that gendered lead/follow system. Paired dance has developed independently in distinct cultural settings around the world. Partner dance, meanwhile, is of a specific—if centuries-long and global—historical and cultural moment.

For practical reasons, my own research has been narrower still, focusing on partner dances that have been formalized, standardized, and cosmopolitanized by an international community of instructors. Part of the rationale for this choice is that the standardization that happens as a result of this process enables me to make global claims based on local experience. If I observe the same practices among dancers of a particular form in San Francisco, Boston, and Stockholm, I can infer the influence of that international teaching circuit and assume its extension to other places I have not visited. My primary motivation, however, is that these instructors have already done much of the groundwork necessary for establishing a general theory of partner dance. Much of the project of this book has involved adapting specific pedagogical ideas into a more general scholarly theory.

Although this book is conceived as a work of theory, therefore, my primary research methodology has been ethnographic. I have interviewed dance instructors—and participated in workshops, classes, and social dances—across as broad a range of cosmopolitanized forms as I could find. I have supplemented this primary source material with the work of other scholars of partner dance, who are cited throughout the book.

The tradition among those other scholars—which I have also adhered to in my previous work—has been to focus on one specific form or a range of related forms. This book’s generalizing orientation is unique in this context and will undoubtedly be controversial to some. I return in greater detail to the ethics and uses of my generalist approach in the book’s concluding chapter. For the moment, however, I will simply lay out my argument and let it speak for itself. [5 / 6](#)

The Three Methods of Coordination

There are, by my count, three distinct methods by which partnered social dancers typically coordinate their movements. The most complex method is *leading and following*, in which one person guides the movements of the other primarily through haptic cues.⁵ A more egalitarian approach is that of *responsorial riffing*, in which the two dancers use mainly visual cues to engage in a back-and-forth interplay. The third method is *choreography*, in which the dancers move according to predetermined patterns. Distinct dance forms may privilege one of these methods over the other two, and sometimes two or three of these systems will operate in tension within the same form. Minuet is primarily choreographed, for instance, while lindy hop is characterized by a tension between lead/follow and responsorial riffing.

All formalized social partner dances will involve at least some choreography, at the very least as something for dance teachers to impart as material. Some forms will have an associated vocabulary of standardized moves, which may grow and change over time. Most will have one or more basic steps—regular weight-shift and/or movement patterns that form a foundation for the dance’s other movements to emerge out of. All will have at least some established parameters for how to move

and how not to. The question of how all these elements work together in the context of an improvised lead/follow dance is treated in depth in Chapter 4 of this book.

Responsorial riffing tends to privilege the visual channel largely because the haptic is so committed to processes of lead and follow. While haptic riffing is possible, it runs the risk of being confused with the lead/follow interplay that takes precedence in that channel. Haptic riffing thus tends to manifest as more of an advanced technique.

Of the three methods, riffing is that least privileged by instructors. Teachers do not usually delve into this process beyond occasionally encouraging people to be generally inspired by their partners' gestures.⁶ The reason for this bias is primarily practical—choreography is easier to teach and a more tangible product for students to buy, and the conservative gender dynamics of lead and follow may be equally saleable (Usner 2001, 90–92; Pietrobruno 2006, 176). The cultural politics of this lacuna are worthy of consideration, however, since the globality of the lead/follow system is (as I have argued elsewhere) a product of European colonialism against which African-originated processes of riffing may be construed as a method of resistance. For this reason, techniques of riffing may be of particular interest for anyone looking to analyze anti-colonialist politics within a given partner dance form. Because the present book relies primarily on work I have done with instructors, however, it also betrays their biases—I too engage only briefly with communicative processes of riffing. I am also more concerned with analyzing the overarching power structure than resistance to it. 6 / 7

This chapter, and most of the rest of this book, is dedicated to the analysis of leading and following as an ideological system. For this reason, most of the analyses I offer might seem to ring truest where that system is overtly privileged. They may initially seem less applicable to forms that offer clear mechanisms for individual dancers to subvert the lead/follow power imbalance, for example through emphasis on choreography or riffing. These are important interventions, and I do address them to some extent in this book. While I do encourage others to follow this thread, I also recommend resisting the temptation to avoid the discomfort of examining the gendered hierarchy of lead and follow by overemphasizing those potential subversions. No matter the attitude of individual dancers or pairings, the social rules of almost any partner dance space will favor the lead/follow system in the sense that the leader can always assume they have the right to override the follower's impulses, whether they choose to exert that privilege or not. In almost every circumstance, the leader may cede and reclaim power at will.

To keep my introduction to the lead/follow system simple, I begin here with the dance in which that system is most clearly foregrounded. Argentine tango is often done with a chest-to-chest connection with the dancers looking past one another, and so is mediated primarily via touch and pressure to the near exclusion of visual partner communication. The dance in its social form thus has no significant tradition of responsorial riffing, being frequently positioned (literally) so as to cut off visual cues in favor of haptic ones. Moreover, its choreography is minimized relative to most other formalized dances. Tango is typically taught today as having no basic step, and its movement vocabulary is highly atomized. Hence, while the principles of lead and follow that I discuss in the following sections are not specific or unique to tango, they are perhaps most obviously consistent in its practice.

The Four Branches of Awareness

As part of his pedagogical model, tango instructor Homer Ladas presents a set of four branches of awareness to which the social dancer must be attuned: *self*, *partner*, *music*, and *surroundings* (interview, 18 April 2013). The advanced dancer, in Ladas' formulation, must have the capacity to accept and integrate information from all these branches at once. Cognitive scientist Michael Kimmel, meanwhile, describes the same four elements but associates them specifically with the tango leader, whom he says “must interpret the music, navigate the dance floor to avoid collisions, feel and direct

the partner, and sense his own body in relation to all these parameters” (2012, 82). In allocating that responsibility to the leader exclusively, Kimmel also implicitly assigns the leader the additional task of navigating those parameters on behalf of the follower. Ladas, meanwhile, whose pedagogical orientation tends to the comparatively egalitarian, discreetly subverts the power imbalance implicit in Kimmel’s 7 / 8 more conventional formulation by positing the branches of awareness as the responsibility of any advanced dancer. The subtle distinction between their two positions gets to the essence of the couple dance power dynamic (Kimmel) and the possibilities for subverting it (Ladas). As I hope to demonstrate, the leader’s capacity and responsibility for navigating the four branches of awareness on behalf of the follower is the effective engine of lead and follow as an ideological system.

To understand how self, partner, music, and surroundings fit together to enable that system, I find it useful to imagine them abstractly as a set of concentric circles radiating outward from the follower to the leader to the dance floor and finally to society at large, with music mediating each of these connections (see Figure 1.1).⁷ From the inside out, this ordering represents a hierarchy of awareness, with the follower’s body as center of attention. The partnership, in turn, occupies the core of the dance relative to its surroundings, with the music mediating at all levels. The image also suggests a significant difference in orientation between the two roles. When I am acting as a leader, my primary attention is focused on my partner. When I am acting as a follower, however, my own body takes precedence.

The relationships represented in this image are also key to the system as a gendered power structure. However, while the hierarchy of awareness proceeds from the inside out, as a power structure the system exerts itself in the opposite direction, from the outside in. Society dictates terms to the dance floor, which in turn limits the leader, who in turn exerts control over the follower. Here, too, each of these three interlocking relationships is mediated by the music. Much of the rest of this book is dedicated to analysis of these multidirectional relationships; here I summarize them briefly.

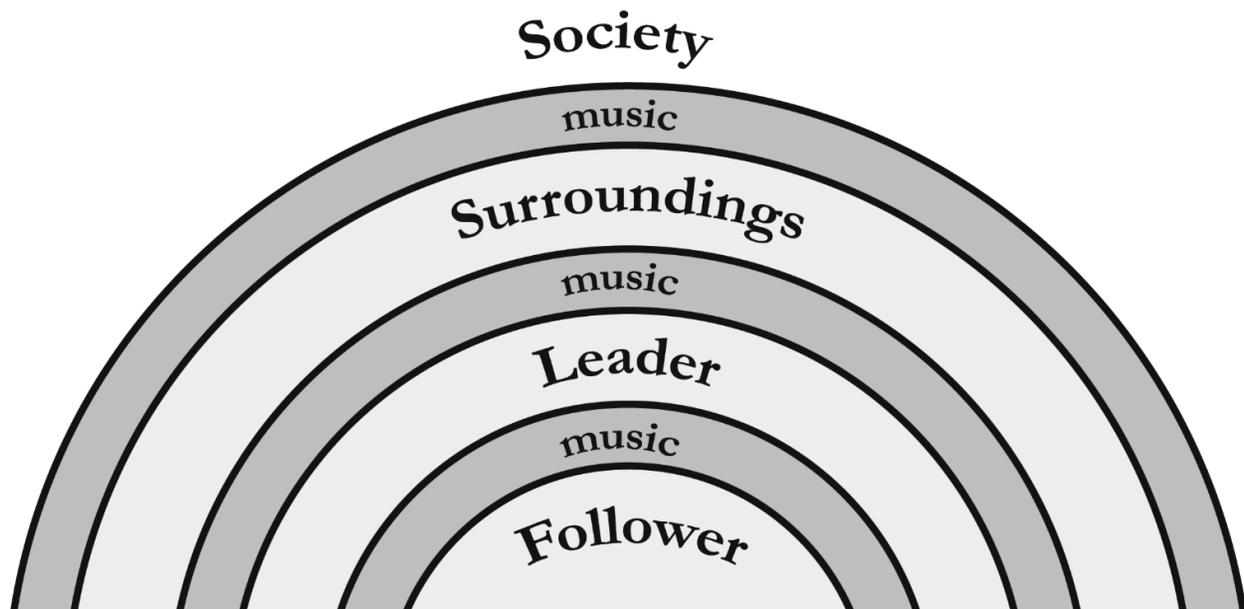


Figure 1.1 The four branches of awareness in relation to one another and to society⁸ 8 / 9

That outermost relationship of society to the dance floor (“surroundings”) expresses itself most clearly in the way the floor’s occupants model broader social heteronorms and intercorporeal behaviors. The standards of couplehood are established not only within the partnership itself but also in all the surrounding couples. This means, for instance, that on most floors, even if the couple is not made up of the traditional dyad of male leader and female follower, their surroundings probably will be composed of such twosomes primarily. Even on a “queer” dance floor, furthermore, the twosome will remain the normative social relationship, with partners embracing one another and avoiding physical contact with everyone else. The music, on top of this, will impose its own set of embedded cultural values on the space. These values may, of course, vary depending on genre, style, and form. No matter what, however, the music will always dictate standards of movement to coordinate and unify the dance flow.

The dance floor limits the leader’s movement possibilities, in turn, via the presence of other partnerships and the need to respect their respective personal spheres. Because everyone around the partnership is also in motion, the leader must learn with experience to predict the movements of surrounding dancers based on the norms of the form and act to avoid collisions. The music mediates this relationship as well, by coordinating movement on the floor and thus making the motions of surrounding dancers more predictable.

At that innermost relationship, the leader exerts control over the follower, by the very definition of those terms. The leader may also respond to impulses from the follower, but never to the same extent the follower responds to the leader; the moment that two-way communication becomes equal and balanced is the moment the lead/follow relationship dissolves. Coordination of movement within the partnership is mediated by the music, which establishes common reference points for timing and phrasing. The music also serves as impetus and justification for the uneven power dynamic, as the leader may use the follower’s body as a tool to interpret its sounds.

While all of these relationships are in play at once, the primary one is that between leader and follower. A key mechanism for enforcing that primacy is the degree of labor needed to maintain the hierarchy of that innermost relationship within the broader system. The outermost relationships here are stable. Society contains the dance floor. The couple’s surroundings, by definition, surround the couple. The music saturates everything. The leader, meanwhile, does not actually encircle the follower. Most of the follower’s body, in fact, is directly exposed to their surroundings at all times.⁹ The leader is still responsible for ensuring that the couple not come into physical contact with surrounding dancers, however. This means that the conscientious leader must be active in maintaining a constant 360 degrees of protection around their partner, despite only 9 / 10 ever occupying a fraction of that circumference. The corresponding task for the follower to maintain this hierarchy is to keep their body pliable enough for the leader to move it at will and thus protect it. The supreme challenge for both partners is to avoid a situation in which the follower is so preoccupied with trying to figure out what the leader wants that the focus of the dance shifts from the follower onto the leader.

Theorized from the outside like this, it becomes fairly apparent how all these aspects of the lead/follow system work together to establish a patriarchal power structure. Social heteronorms dictate the power-imbalanced couple as fundamental unit of the dance floor’s metaphorically constituted society. Experienced from within by dancers, however, that mandate feels softened (and is thus made more palatable and effective) by two distinct characteristics of the system’s mechanics.

First of all, the segmentation of the system naturalizes its power structure and diffuses any sense of individual agency in its enforcement. The leader exerts control over the follower not as an expression of individual dominance but rather as a function of necessity, to protect the follower from collisions with other dancers in their surroundings. The music justifies and shapes activity on the floor, but again its power has no clear agent—musicians and deejays are simply giving the

dancers what they want and, often, what they paid for. Each aspect of the system works in tandem with the others to shape and constrict possibility for its participants. The source of its power has no location.¹⁰

Second, any potential feelings of gender-based oppression in the system can be mitigated by the hierarchy of privilege that operates simultaneously in the opposite direction, centering the follower as focus of awareness and experience. The system deploys a trick of bourgeois patriarchy, offering the woman a privileged place in the world in exchange for her relinquishment of agency. This is the arrangement that Michael Kimmel's formulation, positing the four fields of awareness as the leader's sole concern, represents, and that Homer Ladas' counter-proposal (making all dancers responsible) challenges. Either position is workable, and different dancers will operate from different assumptions about distributions of responsibility. Some dancers when following will maintain awareness of their surroundings, interpret the music directly in their own movements, and allow their bodies to engage in active conversation with those of their leaders. Others will retreat into a more meditative state, permitting their leaders to take responsibility for all aspects of the dance.

A wide spectrum also exists between these two approaches, and some followers might change their mode of engagement situationally from one form, one leader, one dance to the next. The world of partner dance trends heavily to the latter approach, however, which has much to offer the follower as an avenue of pleasure. The ideological soft power of partner dancing lies in the follower's bliss of abandoned responsibility as the leader takes charge of more and more of the dance's concerns. It begins 10 / 11 with allowing the leader simply to handle the job of avoiding collisions. Already by this point, if I am in an embrace as a follower, I might choose to close my eyes and begin to focus inwards. At a deeper level, my leader begins to interpret the music through my body, and I get to experience the pleasure of becoming the vessel of the music without any significant effort of my own in that moment.¹¹ The leader by this point has taken responsibility over not only their own body and our surroundings but also the music and even my body. My primary duty as a follower, dancing with a leader who has taken on this most extreme level of responsibility, is to enjoy myself and share that enjoyment with the leader.

The four branches of awareness, arranged in this manner, are the building blocks of lead and follow as an ideological system. They are the channels of sensory input that regulate how dancers select from a dance's choreographic vocabulary to create its movements in the moment. This book engages with these four elements, plus that fifth concern of movement vocabulary, as the defining and essential features of all formalized social partner dances.¹² The necessity of a special theory for analyzing this type of dance is once again apparent, given that the relationship between dancer and outside viewer—so central to established dance theory—here finishes at a distant sixth.

Sensory Inputs

Whereas sight is typically privileged in the analysis of staged dances, a much broader range of sensory information is relevant here, with each of the four branches of awareness tied to at least one primary sense distinct from the others. Sight may be relevant initially in the awareness of self. Beginners will often look at their feet until admonished by instructors not to, and even advanced dancers will troubleshoot their form by looking in a mirror. These moments are only of preparation and training, however. In the moment of actual social dancing, awareness of self is guided primarily by the three senses governing perception of one's own body, in relation to space (proprioception), movement (kinesthesia), and gravity (the vestibular sense). The relationship to music is primarily aural, though when the volume is loud enough it may be tactile as well.¹³ That to surroundings (the rest of the dance floor) is mainly visual, though when mistakes are made it can also extend to touch, pressure, and even pain.

The partner relationship is connected to a range of senses—smell, temperature, touch, pressure, and sight—all of which contribute to its pleurability (or, in unfortunate circumstances, its discomfort). Of these senses, only the last three actually communicate movement cues, and touch and pressure are typically primary. The degree to which touch and pressure retain their primacy over sight, however, is dependent on the distance between partners. In a tango close embrace, the functional 11 / 12 communication is entirely based on touch and pressure, because the closeness obscures the dancers' visual fields of one another. In a blues or lindy disconnect position, where the partners are not touching, the communication is entirely visual. The ratio of visual to tactile cues scales along the range of positions between these two extremes, but the tactile channel can become privileged over the visual as soon as the partners touch.

The simultaneous activation of all ten of the abovementioned senses is undoubtedly a major part of the draw of social partner dance and may compensate for the marginalization of many of those senses in interpersonal interactions elsewhere in a visually biased society.¹⁴ Theorists generally agree that the modern West has privileged sight (or sometimes sight and sound) above all other senses.¹⁵ Divisions between these and the “lower senses” have been essential to the organization of a rational, industrialized, modern society and used to naturalize the class, race, and gender hierarchies upon which that society is built.¹⁶ Sight, uniquely, seems to grant instantaneous command over large spaces.¹⁷ In Merleau-Ponty's words, it allows us to be “everywhere at once” (1993, 146). The externalization of sight—the illusory notion that we project it outwards whereas the remaining senses penetrate our bodies—is a direct reflection of those power dynamics. It helps with the construction of a masculine subject, socially powerful, with a bird's-eye view of the world, and clear boundaries between the internal and external. In so doing, it also produces some of the major alienating effects of modernity, in particular the sense of alienation from our own bodies.¹⁸

If partner dance, with its interpersonal sensory richness, acts as a counterbalance to that alienation, it might explain how conspicuously well its historical practice in Europe and the Americas maps to the ebb and flow of visual supremacy in Western history. The sixteenth-century spread and popularization of partner dance in Europe is largely coeval with the rise of the printing press and Marshall McLuhan's typographic age, with its broad sociocultural shift from aural to visual privilege. McLuhan argues that this visual period lasts until the rise of television, at which point the electronic age ushers in a long-awaited transition to a tactile era.¹⁹ This period in the 1960s and 1970s is also precisely that of social dance's individualization in the West, as if society's need for physical human contact was being fulfilled elsewhere, freeing dancers from one another's arms so they could do the twist, the watusi, and the electric slide.²⁰ David Howes and Constance Classen suggest that the neoliberal age ushered in by Reaganomics in the 1980s, and the internet age of the 1990s, represented an interruption of McLuhan's tactile era and a return to the visual (2013, 91). This moment also coincides with the resurgence of partner dance (swing, salsa, and tango) in the 1990s. Since that time, the trend of internationally circulating partner dances has continued unabated, and periodically invigorated itself with the introduction of new dances. 12 / 13

The (solo) dance club has continued to reign supreme since the age of disco, so none of these are dances of the day in the way they might once have been. A common feature of social partner dance scenes since the 1990s is a nostalgia for a time and place past—the golden age of tango, the swing era, the Victorian ballroom, the blues jook joint. Inverting the analysis and reading dance as a barometer of social trends, one could see the parallel existences of solo and partnered social dance in the present day as evidence that Howes and Classen's proposed reversion to a visual age is not as total as they suggest.

The Four Branches in Tandem

When I studied partner dance pedagogy, my teacher, Andreas Berchtold, used the metaphor of a dance “toolbox” for improving our technique. He was supplying us with a set of tools that we could apply to fix our dancing when we felt something was going wrong. The box should be put away, however, when the dance was working well. It may be useful to know how to repair your car when it breaks down, but that’s no reason to drive around with a set of ratchets in your lap. When the tools come out, they should come out one at a time, fixing different elements of the dance in sequence until you get to a point where you can put the toolbox away again entirely. The goal, in other words, is to consciously build up a set of embodied practices and then shift them, one at a time, into the realm of the unconscious and automatic.

The four branches of awareness operate according to a similar principle. When Homer Ladas introduced them to me, he was quick to note that the adept dancer does not attempt to engage with all of them simultaneously as discrete concerns, at least not on a conscious level:

Self, partner, music, and surroundings. . . . They all have to work in concert, I mean as an advanced dancer they have to be running on subroutines semi-automatically—I know multitasking doesn’t exist, but you’re so proficient at it that it’s mostly automated in the background while you switch from one idea to the next.

(18 April 2013)

The bracketing of inputs into four distinct boxes is thus not so much an experiential reality in the practice of dancing as it is a device for structuring pedagogy (or theory). Teaching partner dance means building students’ capacity to automate action and reaction in each of these areas.

Examples of how dance pedagogy separates the four branches abound. Many teachers will start a beginning lesson by teaching their students how to move and position themselves according to the norms of the dance, by themselves and without music, so bracketing the awareness of self.²¹ Some will also introduce the music as an independent element, asking 13 / 14 beginners to listen and identify significant structural features before attempting to synchronize their bodies to them. The partnership might be approached as a discrete lesson point as well, with the teaching of a functionally sound and stylistically appropriate embrace or handhold. Over the course of the lesson, the instructor will then typically integrate these discrete elements, perhaps two and then all three of them. The practiced teacher, in bringing multiple branches of awareness together, will still ask students to focus only on one thing at a time. From the outset, the goal is to get people to concentrate on certain factors and automate others.

Only rarely is floorcraft—the art of engaging with surroundings—taught at that very first lesson. If it does come up, it is usually as a final word, attached to some discussion of etiquette so that new dancers are able to enter the social floor without embarrassing themselves or getting in other people’s way. Proper floorcraft relies on decent command of the other three branches of awareness, to the extent that they can, as Ladas suggests, run on subroutines. A lesson that focuses in earnest on dealing with surroundings may not come until a few weeks or months into a dance student’s education, if at all. By and large, floorcraft is learned *in situ* on the social floor. While early exercises and lessons may segregate any of the first three branches of awareness, the fourth can only be learned in a context where the other three are already at play.

This distinction is only relevant in pedagogy and training, however. In practice, none of the four branches of awareness operate independently of the other three. The interconnectedness of the branches is perhaps most obvious in the relationship between self and partner. Anyone who has had the experience of learning dance movements individually and then learning to do those same movements in an embrace will know that those two embodied experiences are qualitatively

different.²² The couple's shared center of gravity is shifted from that of the solo dancer, so that what outwardly appears to be the same movement done solo and in partnership is experienced differently in the two cases. When a movement designed to be done in embrace is learned solo first, that part of the learning process is simply a stepping-stone, and the embodied knowledge it represents can be jettisoned as soon as the movement is relearned in partnership.

The music is similarly integral to the partner relationship, as well as to floorcraft. It coordinates movements within the couple via beat induction and other elements of iterative patterning, and makes the timing of other couples' motion predictable enough to allow safe navigation of surroundings. Partnership and surroundings also enjoy a direct relationship, since navigation is always a two-body problem. The dense web of interrelations between the four branches of awareness makes them inseparable in practice. Teachers and scholars may tease them apart for analytical and pedagogical purposes, but immersed in the real-time act of dancing they will ideally be experienced holistically.²³ 14 / 15

The interactive play of the senses in social partner dance further reinforces the holism of the experience. While certain branches of awareness may privilege one sense over another, that does not mean those senses are discretely bound to those branches. Sight is used to navigate surroundings but may also be at play in the partner relationship. The vestibular sense is applied individually at first but reconfigured in embrace via touch and pressure, just as the proprioceptive and kinesthetic fields of perception are expanded to include a second body.²⁴ Hearing may be synesthetically bound to body movement, with lower frequencies attached to downward motion and high-pitched or overtone-rich sounds attached to ascending motion.²⁵ Sound can thus be a visceral binding agent not only within the partnership but for an entire dance floor.

Even the separation of the senses itself, like the separation of the four branches of awareness, may be understood as an analytical conceit. Scholars of the body and sensation tend to agree with Merleau-Ponty that all experience is, if not precisely synesthetic, then at the very least pan-sensory to the extent that our perception of space emerges from a pre-conscious integration of sensory information.²⁶ Alva Noë has demonstrated that our putatively distinct senses are not even restricted to specific organs of the body; when we see the uphill slope of an airplane interior at take-off, for instance, that aspect of the visual input is granted by the vestibular organs of our inner ears, and not our eyes (2004, 26). Howes and Classen connect what they consider an artificial isolation between the five senses in Western thought to an alienating culture of the individual (2013, 170, 173). Dovetailing with arguments about the isolating effect of visual bias in Western society, this view lends credence to the notion that social partner dance, with its complex sensorium and inherently communal and communicative properties, might compensate for that trend.

Choreohexis and the Senses

If sensory fragmentation and visual bias are inherently alienating, then that alienation is also fundamental to a certain kind of analytical thought. The compartmentalization of the world, and the detachment of the subject from it, may form an ideological basis for hierarchies of class, gender, and race, but the critical distance it engenders can also become a powerful tool for challenging those very hierarchies. Conversely, while partner dance privileges corporeal relations otherwise Othered in the austere and masculinizing discourse of Western intellectualism, its densely layered disciplining of embodied practice encode its own ideologies of identity so deeply on the body that they can become difficult to untangle and critique from within.²⁷

The teaching process I have described is very nearly a handbook for doing the kind of cultural indoctrination of the body that Pierre Bourdieu 15 / 16 describes in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977). Each element of embodied knowledge is carefully imparted and iterated until it becomes automatic and unconscious, layered down as prerequisite for the next. Automation is a functional

necessity of this process, since nobody can have simultaneous conscious command of all the complex embodied knowledge required to operate in partner dance in real time. That necessity, in turn, is fundamental to the ideological power of the practice. The habituation of knowledge to the level of the unconscious, the construction of a cultural context in which that habituation is (more or less) uniform, and the impossibility of making it work any other way all conspire to naturalize what I, adapting Bourdieu, have come to call the dance's *choreohexis*.

For Bourdieu, habitus is the sedimentation of culture on the body, “the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations” (1977, 78). The actual physical manifestation of habitus, meanwhile, Bourdieu calls *hexis* (a Greek word usually translated as “state” or “disposition”). In my adaptation of this terminology, if the pedagogical process of creating a partner dancing body is one of dance habitus, then choreohexis is its physically manifested product. Choreohexis establishes a baseline for predictability of movement, out of which the actual foundational movement patterns of any given dance emerge. It is not the same thing as command of a battery of moves, or dance vocabulary. Rather, it is the set of automated and unconscious rules that grants the kind of predictability in a follower, for instance, to allow a leader to spontaneously lead them in an entirely new move.²⁸

Proper choreohexis is an absolute necessity for the easy simultaneous navigation of partner dance's four branches of awareness. The constraints it imposes on my body are enforced and reinforced by the ebb and flow of the music, by the human being connected to me as a partner, and by other dancing couples who box or herd us into whatever space the norms of floorcraft dictate. My embodied self-discipline allows me to relax into those constraints, and the social reward for the comfort I generate in that process (as a leader or a follower) is the opportunity to choose my partners. Relaxed adherence to the embodied norms of the dance grants me status and standing in its social microcosm, just as violation of those norms is subject to sanction—I am rejected by potential partners, or chastised and boxed out of the space. These rewards and punishments enforce iteration of embodied norms beyond the lesson or workshop and onto the social floor, extending and strengthening the subtle coerciveness of the practice. Judith Butler's observations about gender and other forms of socially regulated identity being “incessantly reconstituted” via iterative performance could not be better exemplified than in the pedagogical and practical world of social partner dance (1993, 105).

The strictures of the dance imposed by the four branches of awareness also contribute greatly to its pleurability. There is a truism, in full effect 16 / 17 here, that art is enabled by its limiting parameters; too much possibility is paralyzing. This is doubly true in improvisation, where all decisions must be made in real time, and triply so when those decisions must be coordinated with a partner. Limiting the menu of options makes every choice easier, which makes it more comfortable and thus more enjoyable. The resulting sense of mastery grants an illusion of control and empowerment, made utterly convincing by the process of self-indoctrination that has automated, naturalized, and made invisible the limitations imposed on us by the dance.²⁹ In other words, not only does the dance force social conformity on our bodies, it convinces us to crave and find pleasure in that conformity, and to experience it as agency. The experience is compelling enough to make partner dance not only enjoyable but also, by many accounts, addictive.³⁰

This principle is at work in both leading and following, though in different and distinctly gendered ways. The dance demands that both people within a partnership conform to choreohexis and, usually, vocabulary. Additionally, however, following also means conforming to the lead. To lead well is to embody the limits of a follower's menu of choices, to one or only a few at a time, without disturbing their sense of agency.³¹ That restriction, when imposed with proper subtlety, intensifies the follower's pleasure in conformity. The joy of following lies in feeling a freedom of movement so total that it liberates you even from the responsibility of deciding how to move.³² The

implicit gender politics of this principle can be challenged by sensitive leaders, active followers, and switch dancers, but these interventions also face an uphill battle against that bliss of freedom found in relinquished agency.

The coercive pleasure of the dance is further intensified by the panoply of senses—pre-consciously integrated to a unity of purpose—to which dancers open themselves when stepping onto the floor.³³ Classically, a single message gains credibility and power when conveyed via multiple sensory channels.³⁴ Lawrence Sullivan suggests that the aesthetic unification of the senses “enables a culture to entertain itself with the idea of the unity of meaning” (1986, 6). Thus far I have framed the senses at play primarily as means of perception, necessary for coordination, communication, and navigation within the dance. For its power to indoctrinate, however, sensation is equally significant as an end in itself.³⁵ Only in the realm of aesthetics, in fact, is the full array of senses engaged here. Smell, much discussed as a vital concern, serves no technical function in the dance, nor does temperature.³⁶ The ten senses at play are only in fully integrated effect in the creation of the total ideological–aesthetic experience, simultaneously received and enacted by the dancers.

I began this chapter with a brief anecdote about tango, as an entry point into a discussion of how that dance ensnares its practitioners’ bodies in a dense weave of intersectional identity politics. Choreohexis, or as I put it in that specific context, “how tango shapes the female body,” lies at the [17 / 18](#) center of this web. The web is woven, however, by more strands than one, through more senses than simply those three governing the awareness of self. The ultimate point of that discussion was to demonstrate that tango enforces its ideologies through the power of its movement vocabulary, filtered pan-sensorily through what I would later call the four branches of awareness. The tango body is governed by the dance’s specific norms not only of choreohexis but also partner communication and floorcraft, as well the idiosyncratic texture of its affiliated music.

Similar exegeses could be done for any social partner dance form or variation upon it. Those vocabularies, norms, and textures will shift between forms, producing each dance’s distinct embodied politics. The constant is that those five elements—self, partner, music, surroundings, and the vocabularies they regulate—will always be the intersecting parameters that shape the specific ideology of any given social partner dance form. The study of this subject is thus best served by attention to the interplay of all these parameters.

Plan of the Book

The rest of this book is conceived as a toolbox for scholars, instructors, and dancers who are interested in parsing the embodied ideologies of any given partner dance based on this five-part framework. Each chapter is a compartment dedicated to one of these five elements; each element is assigned one or more chapters. For every element, I offer a set of analytical tools designed to apply to the range of possible variations within it, and ideas for how to analyze those variations.

Chapter 2 deals with the construction of the individual partner dancer, the process of cultural indoctrination that molds a body so as to be legible to potential dance partners. Here I dissect the various parameters of an individual dancer’s body attitude: posture, level, tone, articulation, and range of motion. I discuss how the range of possibilities in each of these parameters have ramifications both for a dance’s physical and affective/semiotic functions. In particular, I note how various aspects of body attitude function to mark gender, race, class, and other aspects of identity. I also reflect on the nebulous ontology of those markers, formed as they are of an inseparable mélange of biological predispositions, sociocultural norms, and crude stereotyping.

Chapter 3 addresses the human geography of the two-body system and the physical channels of partnered communication. Here I chart the standard ways dance partners typically position themselves and move in relation to one another so as to maximize communication, freedom of motion, and dynamic effects of momentum and rotation. The first half of the chapter deals with all

aspects of positioning. I explore various types of frame shape, and how their mirrored postures impact the physical relationship between the two partners. I enumerate the standard 18 / 19 ranges of proximity and angles of orientation between partners, analyzing how they balance competing concerns of communication and mobility. I transition into the second half of the chapter, which deals with more dynamic aspects of the two-body system, with a discussion of how dancers can coordinate their footwork within the partnership depending on proximity and orientation. I then address principles of axis and rotation, with a particular focus on how rotational energies signify on gender and sexuality. Finally, I discuss partner connection and techniques associated with linear momentum, addressing how different approaches to elasticity (push and pull) mark identities of class, race, and gender.

Chapter 4 grants an overview of the various ways that distinct dance forms structure content. Of central concern in this chapter is how teachers and dancers “chunk” material to be strung together in a dance, be it in the form of elemental building blocks, discrete moves, or full-fledged choreographies. Differences in approach to chunking can have real ramifications on the gender politics of a dance community. Larger building blocks make a dance easier for leaders to learn, while tending to reduce followers in classes to the status of props. Smaller building blocks, meanwhile, demand greater attention to technique, which tends to be more relevant to followers and more difficult for leaders. At the same time, smaller building blocks intensify lead/follow communication, which on the one hand allows for a more dynamic interplay within the partnership, and on the other enables the leader to exert greater and more meticulous control over the follower. The second half of the chapter addresses the nature and use of basic steps. Here I shore up my argument for a generalized theory of social partner dance by exploring how and why certain basic-step weight shift patterns tend to recur across almost all partner dance forms.

Chapter 5 concerns the relationship between music and dance. I discuss how certain predictable elements of musical meter, tempo, and phrasing can help coordinate a partnership, and how dancers can match their movements to the rhythms they hear or, alternatively, weave in and out of the musical texture. I look at how dance musics that privilege lyrical melody work to guide movements in ways distinct from those that privilege rhythmic patterning, and how different kinds of groove can affect a dancer’s movement style. My primary concern in this chapter, however, is how the music intervenes in the lead/follow relationship as a third point in the triangle, and how different ways of constructing and delivering music can affect changes in that tripartite relationship.

Chapter 6 deals with floorcraft, the technique that enables leaders to steer their followers around the floor without bumping into or otherwise disturbing other people. I argue that this process naturalizes masculinity as responsibility for control over public space, and for maintaining and protecting a private sphere on behalf of a woman. Floorcraft also helps reinforce socially established body norms for men and women, in part by 19 / 20 privileging tall leaders (advantaged by a better view of the floor) and slender followers (who are easier to control). I examine how different geographies of floorcraft produce distinct formations of gender in relation to public space, frequently in ways inflected by racial and class identifications. Certain forms, especially older folk dances of Europe and vernacular dances of the Americas, tend to divide the floor into private zones for each individual partnership. Others, particularly dances of the European aristocracy, allow dancers to move about the whole floor in predetermined patterns, constructing the entire space as public. Progressive dances split the difference by compelling each partnership to form a private bubble that circulates unidirectionally around the room in a common flow of traffic. These dances, which were popularized with the rise of the bourgeoisie in Europe, encourage leaders to demonstrate command of the public space to protect a private sphere on behalf of their followers, in a perfect performance of bourgeois class status and separate-spheres ideology.

Chapter 7 engages with the gender politics of the lead/follow relationship. I begin by critiquing the concepts of “lead” and “follow” in social partner dancing, addressing the evolution of those terms as used in pedagogy and practice. While I myself use the recently developed noun forms “leader” and “follower” throughout this book, I also take the opportunity here to problematize them, suggesting that while they may make people feel freer to try the roles not assigned to them by sex, they also tend to exaggerate gender stereotypes associated with those roles. Here I work to counter that effect by complicating the notion of the lead/follow relationship as one of pure domination and submission. Building on the pedagogical mantras of “leading is doing” and “following is being,” I posit the leader as the agent of the dance, and the follower as its center.

Chapter 8 builds on the themes of Chapter 7 to delve deeper into the power dynamics of the lead/follow system and to examine strategies dancers and instructors have engaged to reshape those dynamics, including same-sex dancing, role-flipping, co-leading, and switch dancing. A central concern here, and one not easily resolved by queering interventions, is the fundamental principle of friction in the system. To maintain an effective and constant connection with their leader, the follower must briefly resist any lead before accepting it. On the one hand, this principle is sometimes celebrated for establishing the follower as an independent subject with mass of their own. On the other, its common framing as a “no” becoming “yes” can always be read on some level as an aesthetic validation of rape culture. As a way to deal with this problem, I conclude this chapter by framing lead/follow dynamics as a system of power exchange, borrowing analytical models from kink communities and BDSM theory.

The concluding chapter elaborates on my underlying rationale for developing a general theory of social partner dance focusing on the lead/follow system as an ideological power structure. I suggest that an overview can reveal things that specialized studies will not, just as much as the [20 / 21](#) inverse is true. I counter the potential critique that a totalizing view might reflect a colonialist mindset by noting that I use this perspective to reveal what is already colonizing about the culture of partner dance. I then go into some greater depth about why it makes sense to consider partner dance as a generalizable phenomenon, addressing commonalities, overlapping practices, and historical connections between forms. Finally, I make the case that a specific theory of partner dance is necessary because established dance theory proves unable to engage convincingly with the most salient features of the practice.

While this book does engage some focused analyses of individual dances, such as that which opened this chapter, I include these moments primarily to exemplify general principles and to inspire other scholars and practitioners to think about the forms in which they are embedded in similar terms. None of my analyses of individual dances are exhaustive, because for any such analysis to be truly complete, it would also need to engage with social, historical, political, and cultural contexts well beyond the scope of the present work. As a general exegesis on the practice of social partner dance, this book should stand on its own. To an equal degree, however, I intend it as scaffolding for future work—my own and that of others, work that confirms as well as challenges my conclusions—to facilitate the construction of more focused analyses that take into account and interlace all relevant concerns of both text and context. My hope is that practitioners, teachers, and scholars will find inspiration in both aspects of the book.

Notes

1. Examples of these moves include *ocho cortado*, walk to the cross, and linear back volcada.
2. A subtle feature of the way tango gets marketed as exotically dangerous and sexual is in the way its most precarious movements (*gancho*, *volcada*, *sacada*, *colgada*, *boleo*) and sinuous leg motions (*ochos*, *lapiç*) retain their Spanish names, while its more innocent structural parameters (cross system, parallel system, step, pivot, walk to the cross) usually get translated into English.

3. For a deeper discussion of the way tango music reinforces the leader's power over the follower, see Chapter 5 of this book.
4. Homer and Christina Ladas' website features this note on copyright protection: "just in-case there are a few unscrupulous characters or thieves amongst us, these video lessons are protected by The Curse of the Unled Boleo!" (www.theorganictangoschool.org/Copyright). This statement is followed by a video of a man dancing with a woman who initiates so many of her own boleos that he decides to walk off the floor, whereupon she enthusiastically kicks herself off balance and falls out of frame. The video ends with the captioned statement: "A boleo is not a solo."
5. Leading and following does not mean that the leader never accepts impulses from the follower, but simply that leader impulses take precedence over follower impulses. Variations of this method include switch dancing and co-leading, both examined in greater detail in Chapter 8. [21 / 22](#)
6. Black Hawk Hancock, for instance, discusses a moment of personal confusion in his lindy hop fieldwork when his follower suddenly shifted into riffing on the social floor; he had never been prepared for that eventuality by his teachers (2013, 59–60).
7. Carolyn Merritt has also conceived of tango's sense of communion in terms of "a series of successive circles around the dancer—beginning with one's partner, extending to the surrounding dancers on the floor, to the observing dancers, and to the larger room" (2012, 120).
8. Note that "follower" and "leader" in this image translate respectively to "self" and "partner" from the follower's perspective, "partner" and "self" from the leader's perspective.
9. Thanks to Corinna Campbell for encouraging me to think more about the complexity of the lead/follow relationship within this model.
10. This exemplifies Foucault's arguments about power existing within the structure itself, as opposed to being possessed by someone at the top of the structure (1995, 176–77). In three significant respects, however, the controlling force of the lead/follow system also goes beyond Foucault's more generalized observations about prisons, armies, schools, and hospitals. First of all, the carrot is more effective than the stick, and this system more than any of those others is crafted to give pleasure to those within it. Second, where Foucault observes that power is typically enforced visually through surveillance, the lead/follow system deploys almost all the senses in concert to shepherd its participants. Third, unlike the institutions Foucault analyzes, this system has no warden, general, principal, or director for its participants to even dream about overthrowing. The lead/follow system has no observable head, so its power becomes even more invisible and thus intractable.
11. I may have put considerable work into training my body to follow and so to enable this moment of release, however.
12. Vocabulary is an essential element of the dance but does not operate as a distinct channel of awareness. It is not an observable element of the space that can be sensed as distinct from all others, in the way that self, partner, surroundings, and music all are. Vocabulary transects these elements, operating within and across categories of self, partner, and surroundings.
13. Music that is loud enough to be felt in the bones is a staple of club music (Jackson 2004, 27). Less commonly is the music so loud in social partner dance settings, though salsa clubs can be an exception (Washburne 2008, 59).
14. This is truer of nine of these senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch, pressure, temperature, proprioception, kinesthesia, and the vestibular sense) than it is of the tenth (pain). Pain as a negative reinforcement against bad floorcraft is an essential element of the dance as an ideological system but could not reasonably be considered a "draw" for most dancers.
15. Marshall McLuhan, famously, links modernity in the West to a privileging of visual culture and the written word (1962, 1–9). Others have argued that both sight and sound are privileged above all other senses in the West (Montero 2006, 232–33; Howes and Classen 2013, 67).
16. Howes and Classen note that sight and hearing in the West tend to be associated with the upper classes, while the remaining senses are typically affiliated with the lower classes and with women (2013, 67–68). Sight is associated with the mind and the public sphere, while the remaining senses are of the body and the domestic; women must be guided and protected by men due to their poor vision, and men must take care not to be seduced by the a women's touch or scent (Classen 1998, 71–74). Smell in particular may be

thought vulgar, and smells originating from the body considered morally repugnant (Vannini, Waskul, and Gotschalk 2012, 133). [22 / 23](#)

17. For Walter Ong, an essential distinction between sight and sound is that sight allows the viewer to project outward into an external world, while sound surrounds and penetrates the listener (1982, 72).
 18. Barbara Montero rejects Hegel's contention that aesthetics are limited to sight and sound as senses external to the body, and suggests that dance provides us with an opportunity for a more inclusive, corporeal aesthetics via proprioception (2006, 232–33).
 19. These transitions are mapped out and explicated in McLuhan (1962).
 20. For a more detailed discussion of the move from partnered to solo dancing in the 1960s and 1970s, see, for example, Lawrence (2009, 199–202).
 21. Sa.l Escalona remarks on salsa pedagogy in Paris that beginners are generally taught without music, and that learning steps with music only happens starting at the intermediate level (2014, 176).
 22. From a cognitive perspective, the mind calculates spatial information by integrating information from proprioceptive and tactile channels, such that physical contact with another person might radically change an individual's perception of their own body in relation to space (Canzoneri, Ferrè, and Haggard 2014).
 23. One or another of these branches of awareness may sometimes be foregrounded to correct a problem—we have lost the beat so we listen carefully to the music, my partner is not communicating as expected so I focus on them, the floor is too crowded so we have to relocate, I have lost the feel of the dance so I concentrate on my own body. I thank Samantha Jones for this insight (reader response, received 28 October 2017).
 24. Ethnographer Phil Jackson, writing on club dancing, argues that on the dance floor the kinesthetic sense can even extend from the individual body to the body of the crowd (2004, 19).
 25. I examine this phenomenon with reference to blues and swing dances in Chapter 5 of this book, and with reference to Scandinavian folk dances in Kaminsky (2014, 53).
 26. Merleau-Ponty compares the collaboration of the senses to binocular vision. We do not perceive two separate monocular images unless we close first one eye and then the next, and by the same token, our default attitude is to perceive the visual world as conjoint with the aural and tactile (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 238–42). Howes and Classen argue the case in even more extreme terms: “*The senses interact with each other first, before they give us access to the world*” (1991, 258, italics in original).
 27. The body structures and conceals the mind (Csordas 1994, 8) and places its habits “beyond the grasp of consciousness” (Bourdieu 1977, 94).
 28. Juliet McMains also writes of this phenomenon, whereby a clear lead can enable followers who are familiar with the conventions of a dance to execute moves correctly without ever having done them before (2006, 99). Randal Doane also engages Bourdieu's concept of hexis in his ethnographic analysis of neo-swing, but frames it more widely to include modes of dress and other aspects of cultural practice (2006, 89–90).
 29. The notion that dance gains its ideological force as a function of the limitations it places on body movement is not a new one; Maurice Bloch made a similar argument over forty years ago (1974, 72).
 30. Tango especially is frequently discussed as being addictive, with the potential to spin people's lives out of control (Savigliano 1998, 103; Palmer 2005, 50; Merritt 2012, 133–38; Davis 2015, 97–99).
 31. This system rather obviously enforces broader social limitations on feminine range of movement and thus feminine sexuality (see Bartky 2010, 81–83; Young 2005, 32).
- [23 / 24](#)
32. Please note a distinction here between “following” and “being a follower.” Followers can make decisions about their movements and frequently do. In these moments, however, they are not (by definition) actually following the leader. The problem here is with the noun form “follower,” which falsely implies that people in this role only ever follow. This problem is treated more closely in Chapter 7 of this book.
 33. According to Richard Shusterman, it would be a mistake to think of pleasure as involving distinct body parts; it is necessarily experienced by the whole body (2008, 42).
 34. Edmund Leach writes of the coercive power of multi-sensory ritual: “Although the receiver of a ritual message is picking up information through a variety of different sensory channels simultaneously, all these different sensations add up to just one message” (1976, 41).

35. David Howes notes that anthropologists often make the mistake of thinking of sensation as purely a function of perception, forgetting that the experience of sensation itself can be powerful and may even take precedence over the information it conveys (1991, 9).
36. Kathy Davis notes that the initial impression you get of a partner as you enter a tango embrace is one of smell, and that this sets the stage for all other interactions (2015, 57).

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