

## GRACIELA GONZÁLEZ: BODILY EXPERIENCE AND GENERATIONAL CHANGE IN TRADITIONAL TANGO

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### Abstract

The study of body gestures and the participatory construction of the movements of the 'old' Argentine milongueros is hampered by the fact that their protagonists are no longer alive. This work investigates both themes in an indirect way, conducting a semi-directed interview with the relevant teacher and dancer Graciela González, who since the 80's had as master and was dance partner of Norberto 'Pupi' Castello, one of the myths of the milonga 'porteña'. González describes some of the lesser known gestural and intentional characteristics of these 'old' milongueros, and explains how some of these characteristics have been softened as a result of generational changes and the speed of communications brought about by social media.

### Resumo

O estudo do gesto corporal e a construção participativa dos movimentos dos "velhos" milongueros argentinos é dificultado pelo fato dos seus protagonistas não estarem em vida. Este trabalho investiga ambas as questões de forma indireta, realizando uma entrevista semi-dirigida à relevante mestre e bailarina Graciela González, quem desde os anos 80 foi professora e par de dança de Norberto 'Pupi' Castello, um dos mitos da milonga 'porteña'. González descreve algumas das características gestuais e intencionais menos conhecidas desses 'velhos' milongueiros e explica como algumas dessas características foram suavizadas como resultado das mudanças geracionais e da velocidade de comunicação gerada pelas redes sociais.

**Palavras-chave:** *Tango tradicional; Velhos milongueiros; Intencionalidade; Gestualidade; Movimento espontâneo; Eixo e abraço.*

**Key-words:** *Traditional Tango Dance; Old Milongueros; Intentionality; Gestuality; Spontaneous movement; Axis and embrace.*

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Graciela González was born in Buenos Aires. She is a dancer, teacher and researcher of Tango dance. Internationally, she is recognized for her work integrating the pedagogy with the learning of *Tango Salón*.

González started to dance in 1988 and had as her principal teacher the legendary milonguero ‘Pupi’ Castello, who later was her partner in dancing and teaching for 19 years. González completed her education with several prominent personalities of the *Tango Tradicional Salon*, such as ‘Pepito’ Avellaneda, Antonio Todaro, Gustavo Naveira, Juan Bruno, ‘Teté’<sup>2</sup>, Martha Antón<sup>3</sup>, ‘Gallego Manolo’<sup>4</sup>, ‘Turco’ José Braemcha, José ‘Lampazo’ Vázquez, Eduardo Pareja, Gerardo Portalea, ‘Cacho Pistola’, and ‘Nito’ and Elba<sup>5</sup>.

González is considered one of the main figures of the 80’s generation. She created the first technique workshops for women (in January of 1994), technique workshops for men (in June 1995) and later the special *antitécnica* (anti-technique) workshops (June 2016).

The innovative methodology of her teaching is grounded in her vast experience in the study of the gesture of the embraced body of the dance couple, and in the analysis of her own sensations when dancing with the *old milongueros*. She forms part of the jury of the World Tango Dance Tournament in the city of Buenos Aires from its beginnings.

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<sup>2</sup> Pedro Alberto Rusconi (1936-2010).

<sup>3</sup> (1939-2015).

<sup>4</sup> Manuel Maria Salvador.

<sup>5</sup> Juan Aurelio Garcia and Elba Natalia Sottile.

## INTRODUCTION

The dance of the *old milongeros*<sup>6</sup>, has been scarcely studied. There are very few film records from milongas before 1990 – period that still saw milongeros that were born in the first decades of 1900 – and the available interviews to some of these milongeros are not centred in a systematic exploration of such things as the style understood as corporal experience, the couples' participatory creation of meaning, the musical representation of the body in dancing, or the description of the characteristics of the gestures and movements in the different neighbourhoods in the city of Buenos Aires.

There is a reduced number of dancers who learned to dance with the last legendary milongeros. This is the case of Graciela González. She learned to dance in the 80s and she is now a prominent personality of Tango. In this interview, González is invited to describe in detail the deepest aspects of her bodily experience with *Tango Salon* (this is a traditional style of Tango practiced in the neighbourhoods of Villa Urquiza and Saavedra, in the city of Buenos Aires). Throughout the interview, González will spin a number of hypotheses on the effects that the sociocultural context and the arrival of social media had on the tango gestures and the couples' communication.

## TRANSCRIPT

ALEJANDRO LAGUNA: What are the common stylistic features of the *milongeros* of the 80s and 90s?

GRACIELA GONZÁLEZ: To me the fundamental difference between these old milongeros and the newer generations is that they moved towards the woman's axis in order to 'move' her. That is what I try to pass on. But what's happening now is that women are asked to move towards the men. That's basically it, but to me it is an abysmal difference.

AL: It changes the form of the dance.

GG: It totally changes the form of the dance.

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<sup>6</sup>In this work, the term 'old milongeros' refers to the milongeros (men and women) that learnt to dance Tango during the golden decade (1940-1950) and that were born therefore between the 1920s and the 1930s.

AL: And does it change the form of the leading? (*'la marca'*)

GG: No, it is not about the form of the leading, it is about where to position the axis of my *intention*, where is my intention going to. They [the milongueros] moved toward the woman to 'move' her, and the woman where 'in charge' of her own axis in order to move. Actually, there was less effort, and the information path was much clearer and much shorter, because they made the information 'enter' the body of the other.

AL: When you see a dancer, can you tell whether he dances according to this concept?

GG: Absolutely! That's why I want us to go today to the milonga El Rodríguez, because none of the gentlemen in there make any effort. They dance according to this concept or they learn with this concept. When tango started, men's objective was totally about getting to know women, and women's objective was also about getting to know men. So the milonga was about getting to know others... and for that, men needed to dance well and not to cause discomfort to the woman. In those times, if you took a woman off her axis – any of these old ladies that are still around, like Lidia Filippini<sup>7</sup> – she would have no problem in punching you, do you understand? Or she would send you back to sitting.

These *minas*<sup>8</sup> were unmovable and so you needed to know how to dance well. This was what I witnessed... 'La Negra' Martita<sup>9</sup> who used to dance with 'Petróleo'<sup>10</sup>, Adela 'La Gallega'<sup>11</sup>, Alejandra<sup>12</sup> who used to organize the milonga Club Almagro [between 1983-2000] with whom I did my first work in Salón Canning. I had started in January 1988 and started to work with Alejandra in Salón Canning in June that year. The job – which Pupi<sup>13</sup> helped me to get – consisted in dancing two tangos with each man in Alejandra's class, on Tuesdays. There were lots of men, more men than women in the class. That's why my job was to dance with the men while Alejandra taught. She was not very didactic, but everybody learned.

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<sup>7</sup> Lidia Delia.

<sup>8</sup> Lunfardo term meaning 'women'.

<sup>9</sup> Missing data.

<sup>10</sup> Carlos Alberto Estévez, Buenos Aires, (1912-1995).

<sup>11</sup> Adela Ángela Aletti (1930-1987).

<sup>12</sup> No surname has been established for this reference.

<sup>13</sup> Ernesto Norberto Castelo, Buenos Aires (1936-2007). When Graciela González met him, he was 'Pupi'; later when he started to travel he became 'Pupy' – sometimes it was written 'Pupi' in the flyers. According to him it was written 'Pupy'. The nickname came up because a foreigner friend of the family who called him *poupée*, because he looked like a doll when he was born.

AL: What gestural differences do you see between the old milongueros and the ones from newer generations?

GG: Actually, I think that the common element in every style of dancing, from every neighbourhood, is this: It is for the man to have the woman *being* the axis and the centre of the dance, and not to place himself in the centre. I think that's the common element. I can dance... for example, with Antonio Todaro<sup>14</sup>, who was from Mataderos [neighbourhood of Buenos Aires], with [Gerardo] Portalea<sup>15</sup>, who was from Villa Urquiza, with 'Pepito' Avellaneda<sup>16</sup>, who was from the south. But none of them took me off my axis.

AL: Why was this particular way of constructing the dance abandoned? I am starting to be aware of the body sensation that it generates to dance with this concept that you are talking about. In the last class you taught on the *ocho*, I finally understood what you mean: to lead on the axis of the woman.

GG: Very good

AL: So, at every moment during the dance, I was trying to understand where my partner's axis was, and I was trying to think of my posture and my way of dancing in relation to that axis. This produces a sensation of the workings of the bodies that is very peculiar. It is a different world. So, the question is, why did men started to 'shift backwards' as you say?

GG: Actually, the evolution that I experienced was the following. When I started, the division was between *Tango Salón* and *Tango Escenario* [Show Tango]. Pupi, who was a very perceptive observer, would usually say "here come the *gauchos*" [to refer to *Folclore*<sup>17</sup> dancers arriving at the milonga]. And I think that the people dancing Tango Escenario were basically dancers coming from Folclore; men that were used to having their chests very open, and their backs wide and very straight, because Folclore dance is an individual dance, there is no embrace. So I think it had to do with that.

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<sup>14</sup> Buenos Aires, 1929-1994.

<sup>15</sup> (1928-2007).

<sup>16</sup> José Domingo Monteleone, Buenos Aires (1930-1996).

<sup>17</sup> This name designates a type of music and dance from rural Argentina.

The dichotomy then was between *milongueros* and Tango Escenario dancers. Later, the dichotomy was extended to the styles Tango Salón and *Tango Milonguero* – the later term introduced by Susana Miller.<sup>1819</sup>

After that, the styles that remained were Salón, Milonguero, and Escenario. It was like something was added. And at the end of the 90s, a new style arrived: *Tango Nuevo*, which, I believe, decidedly positioned the woman on her heels, placing her centre backwards, and so it started as a very open tango. However, *open* tango and *closed* tango always existed.

It wasn't something totally new. In Villa Urquiza, or in places where there were big clubs, like Mataderos, the embrace was more open. There wasn't closed embrace everywhere. One would open the embrace to do a figure and then close it again. The milongas of the centre that I knew where tango was really danced in a closed embrace that was never open were Mi Club, Savoy, Marabú, Mariano Acosta, El Social Rivadavia, and basically Regin, which is now El Beso. But in Club Almagro, which was the top place, it was a mixture of open and closed embraced; also in the Club Bristol, which was a very big place. And in Salon Canning, there was a mixture of people coming from the north, and from the west, from neighbourhoods like Villa Urquiza, Saavedra y Boulogne, and they all gathered there. I don't want to forget Sin Rumbo, which was called 'The cathedral of Tango' – which is really the cathedral of Tango. And after that, there was the Sunderland Club, but I knew Sin Rumbo first, and then the Sunderland.

AL: You were talking about Folclore and about the reason why the embrace started to be more open...

GG: I think Tango Nuevo exacerbated the distance within the couple and the individuality. I think it also had to do with the arrival of the email, the mobile phones, and social media like YouTube, that had the effect that people started to engage in a different way. That is, when there wasn't any social media means to communicate, people talked more, they hugged more, and there was another type of communication. There were only landlines and at most fax, and that was it. So, I think that one should look at the sociocultural context as well; nothing happens just by chance.

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<sup>18</sup> Renowned Argentinian tango teacher and dancer

<sup>19</sup> This term started to be used from the mid until the end of the 90s to refer to the style of tango that was danced in the milongas of the centre of the city, where for reasons of space, the embrace was not open.

AL: Those days, if you wanted to see Pupi dance – or Portalea, or ‘Lampazo’<sup>20</sup>, or whoever – you had to go to see them at the milonga...

GG: You had to go to the *practica* in [Club] Sin Rumbo, on Wednesdays; that was the *practica* of Portalea and Marta, and they all gathered there, and so those turned to be master classes for the girls like me that were starting. Petróleo would take me and would try to explain things to me, and I wouldn’t understand anything; however, everyone would take me to dance. The level of bodily information that they had was wonderful. It was Portalea, but also Lampazo, ‘Petróleo’, Juan Bruno<sup>21</sup>, Alberto Villarrazo<sup>22</sup>, ‘Cacho Pistola’<sup>23</sup>, ‘El Turco’<sup>24</sup>, I mean, there was an infinite number of dancers that *move* me all the time.

AL: And what is the influence of Classic Ballet, of ballet dancers that started to dance Tango at the beginning of the 90s, after the show *Tango Argentino*?

GG: I believe the influence of Ballet started with the arrival of *Tango x dos*.<sup>25</sup> It was the arrivals of Milena Plebs, Vanina Bilous and Guillermina Quiroga, who were the dancers that added a different aesthetics to Tango, a blend of Contemporary Dance, Ballet and Tango.

AL: With respect to the axis of the body, did something change? Did the axis shift backwards?

GG: No, it was not shifted backwards! The position of the axis didn’t change. Up to that point the axis hadn’t changed at all. The position of the axis changed when the distance between the partners increased and everybody shifted backwards. The position of the axis changed when people started to watch too many videos and got obsessed with ‘aesthetics’. I think concerns on aesthetics aspects prevailed over the connection of the couple.

AL: Graciela, I have always had the impression that the dance of the milongueros had a swing, a *cadence*, and a musicality that were very special. It is difficult to describe what it is exactly that gives me this impression. George Balanchine once said “to dance is to

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<sup>20</sup> José Vázquez (1930- no data).

<sup>21</sup> Nicknamed ‘El Pibe de Ciudadela’ (‘The kid from *Ciudadela*’ a neighborhood in the suburbs of Buenos Aires (1925-2004).

<sup>22</sup> No data.

<sup>23</sup> No data .

<sup>24</sup> José Braemcha (1931-2010).

<sup>25</sup> This was a company created in 1990 by Milena Plebs and Miguel Ángel Zotto in which they were the choreographers and main dancers. See (Laguna 2018) for more details.

make music visible”. And the *music* of these milongueros was made visible in their way of moving the feet, in their way of moving the legs and the body, in how they created their dance, in how they led from the music. The walking of the old milongueros had ‘tango’ in it. Why do you think this characteristic has been disappearing?

GG: There were lots of people that used to go to this practica in [Club] Sin Rumbo, and who are still alive, but didn’t have this ‘*sucundum*’ [idiosyncratic way of moving] that you describe. Not everybody had that. And there were also people that didn’t dance very well. Those who danced well stood out, and nowadays they would also stand out. In other words, there was ‘something special’ about these people that we are remembering that made them different from the rest. But there were also male dancers who are still alive today that did not get noticed at all. Despite not being dancers that stood out, the experience they have cannot be denied, and is true that they have a *quality of movement* that is different and that comes with the years.

AL: How would you describe that natural way of walking that seem to be lost nowadays?

GG: The Tango of today is a ‘facade’. When I was taking classes with the old milongueros, and also in the classes we gave with Pupi, I would watch Pupi take a woman that was coming for the first time – that had never danced before – and he would take her and make her dance without saying absolutely anything. So, what he was doing was to ‘hold her up’ in her axis and let her move in a natural manner. That is, he would follow her, move her without much effort. The less information the woman had about how she was supposed to move, the better it worked.

After creating the course on technique for women and teaching it for a long time, and by the time I created the antitécnica, I arrived to the conclusion that all that Pupi was trying to convince me of was that it wasn’t necessary to have so much information; “why telling the women that they have to do this and that if they already do it? Why do you have to explain it in so much detail?”

But well, it was my own search and my own journey, especially for in my generation. For those of us that arrived to Tango between the 80s and the 90s, in the middle of that transition, our contribution was to provide a special pedagogy in a time where Tango was beginning to revive and spread through classes – it was context of emerging didactics and pedagogies of Tango. At this time, people coming from different dances started to join – there was Milena [Plebs], Guillermina [Quiroga], etc. Tango was starting to gain



importance and therefore, many dancers that could not make a living off their dance started to join Tango. So I think this context was created by the economic situation of the time.

AL: For what I understand, until this time, a characteristic of the old milongueros was that they came from different professions or trades (there were electricians, bricklayers, mechanics, bus drivers, taxi drivers, etc.) They were not Tango professionals.

GG: Yes, yes. That's correct. Pupi worked in the phone company, in ENTEL<sup>26</sup>, Todaro was a construction worker, 'El Turco' too. All of them did something else for a living. Today the profession is to dance Tango.

AL: I see that the *foot* of an old milonguero had an aesthetic quality; he would step and would be very present in that step. Today you see...

GG: A feeble foot.

AL: In my opinion, the foot lost something very special: its 'musical statement'...

GG: I think that my generation attempted to explain things that before were taken as natural. We tried to rationalized them, to standardized them in some way, because it was assumed that if the explanation was clearer, people would get the point quicker. And then YouTube, and other social media started.

AL: Yes, with YouTube the experience of Tango came to be visual and offline. The experience of the dance *in situ* was lost.

GG: I think on the one hand there was an economical need to make a living off Tango. On the other hand, any artistic activity involves the *ego*, and I think the ego often does not help things. I think the maturity and the level of effort that these old milongueros had, to go to the milonga after a full day laying bricks at the construction work... the effort to get a life or survive was very different from that of a 20-years-old in the 80s or 90s. I mean, the level of tolerance to frustration and the level of effort to arrive were lower [in these younger generations] because the road was shorter.

Sometimes I see some guy dancing at the milonga and think to myself "This guy dances really badly but dances all night long. It doesn't stop dancing". I think this has to do with the fact that there are more women in the milonga, and that women nowadays do not say 'no'. Before, the men that danced well were 'breaking their assess' to dance well or else

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<sup>26</sup> National Company of Telecommunications.

they didn't dance with women. I think this has changed because there are more women around and so men do not have to make such an effort because they would still get to dance all night.

AL: For what I understand, before, men used to work a lot on their way of walking and their posture. They placed great importance on that.

GG: In my opinion, this thing about 'walking well' is a myth. I mean, from the moment that we started to try to explain the manner of walking it stopped to be a natural manner of walking. They [the milongueros] would explain the *figures* [the steps], they didn't explain how you were supposed to walk. Nobody explained that. That's why I said that because they had *it*, they didn't have to explain it.

AL: I imagine that they would seek this naturalness when moving, or they would take it from somewhere...

GG: Yes, but there were idiosyncrasies and ways of living that made them all walk this way. So I can't expect that you should walk like Pupi because you were born in a different context and lived different things. So what happens now is that we are going to make the figures in a similar way, because we learnt from them, or because we watched a video and learnt the figure. But the form, the mechanics, the *dynamics of the movement* are different. Because we live in a different context, and we don't have to make such an effort. We have more 'fast food'.

AL: For them, Tango was something that was *lived* in presence, personally. Their experiences with the dance occurred in the milonga, or in the practica, and during the day they had other occupations.

GG: For them [Tango] was that. At that time. In that context where they lived.

AL: In our times, we get distracted with things that didn't even exist in the times of the old milongueros. Today we have countless models of shoes and dresses, make up, multiple forms of communication (mobile phones, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), we have the possibility of watching countless exhibitions on YouTube...

GG: I started in the 1988 and the only house for tango shoes was *Fattomano*, which at the time was making the shoes for the chorus girls and people from theater in general. They had a *Febo* sole [famous argentinian brand] and I would still have them if I hadn't given them away. They were hard and uncomfortable, but they were the only shoes we

had. When starting, people used normal shoes with an elastic band around to prevent them from slipping off. If you wanted more serious shoes it had to be some formal shoes that you adapted somehow. I had my first *Fattomano* after a year and a half of dancing.

Today the first thing you do is to buy the shoes.

It is ok that this is the way it is now. There is an industry around Tango that allow many people to make a living. From the makeup, the clothes, the shoes; to the teachers and the milongas. It is an industry, and that is all right.

AL: And what about the way of understanding the music?

GG: I can't speak about music. I am not the person to talk about music with.

AL: I mean to talk about what you feel...

GG: What I feel is that I cannot explain music. I feel it or I don't feel it.

AL: I am not talking about music in formal terms. I am talking about music in your dance, and what it represents to you...

GG: Well... if there is no music I cannot move!!! I mean, I cannot explain music. I hear the music and I move. I know I have an 'ear', but more than that I cannot say. I can talk about some other things, but not music. I only feel it, and that's it.

I can explain 'why does one move?', 'how does one move?' We can watch a video without music and I can explain the movements to you. But don't ask me to explain how one moves 'inside' music because I can't tell you that. You should look for someone who has worked on understanding music.

AL: You said that the man dances on the axis of the woman. And the woman, does she do the same or something different?

GG: No, she doesn't do something different. I think the man sends an idea of the movement, and the woman performs it. I think it is a question of 'creating movement between two', that something then happens.

AL: There is an intention of dancing on the axis of the woman, of making her dance on her axis...

GG: Because it is also more intelligent to move someone in their axis instead of carrying them around all the time.

AL: In terms of intention, the woman moves on the axis of the man as well?

GG: In terms of intention, the woman moves on her own axis. If I take her off axis, I can't make her move. It is the man that goes around the axis of the woman all the time.

AL: So the importante point is the direction that these intentions take.

GG: That's right, there is *a direction in the intention*. But also, there have always been movements that are *off axis*. They always existed. In my times these movements were called *puentes* [bridges]. Now they are called *volcadas, colgadas*. I think what changed are the dynamics, the way of moving, because the bodies move in a different way now. I think this also has to do with the clothing. The guys from the old times were always wearing a full suit, with jacket, tie, and waistcoat. Not anymore.

AL: So the dance was on the axis of the woman, and when the woman was taken of axis, it was for stylistic purposes.

GG: To take the woman off axis [permanently] I think is style invented to render the woman useless.

AL: You were saying, *puentes* always existed.

GG: Yes, it was to do a figure. Just one figure, it wasn't a style of dancing. It was just a second... a figure that lasted one second, or ten seconds. It was for a visual effect, that was the purpose. It was basically an effect. And it wasn't done in milongas, it was done fundamentally in exhibitions.

AL: So, men learn to dance on the axis of the woman, and women learn to move on their own axis. Apart from this, what else is very important important to learn?

GG: The only thing one should learn are the figures. And the structures. Nothing else. Because if you are off axis, how are you going to dance? How are you going to move?

AL: You said that many men dance with their axis shifted backwards. Therefore, in this case they cannot dance on the axis of the woman, because they would be taking her off axis.

GG: People dance off axis, and so this idea came up that one should 'push the floor' to put the woman on her axis. The man pushes the floor in order to move himself and to move her. Thus, what this pushing the floor does is to 'compensate' for being off axis. In the embrace, the man shifts backwards, taking her off axis, then he pushes against her in order to put her back on axis, and so on. This conception of dancing does not make any sense.

I think to dance taking the woman of axis and then ask her to compensate putting up resistance with her belly or with her chest, or to ‘pile’ herself on the man, or whatever, is an attempt to compensate for what is lacking, for what the man is not doing. When I started, I was told “hug me and follow me”. And so, I hugged and followed. There weren’t any other instructions.

Today, the idea is that in order to connect we need a certain determinate posture, but this posture does not necessarily guarantee a connection. What it does guarantee is that I will feel you because you are pushing me or putting up resistance, but this is not connection. The more effort I am making the less connection there is.

So, if I make an effort to connect, then I start to create the resistances, the off-axis, and I receive a number of demands “I am weighting you down, come here, come seek me, thrust your chest out, lean on me that I carry you”, which are, at bottom, demands to compensate what is lacking [that is, dancing in the axis of the woman].

I think all of this is also related to the fact that Tango became very international. [This implied teaching Tango] in other cultures [that keep greater social distance and are less used to physical touching], where for example, people don’t kiss when they greet each other. So, I think some of these ideas are the result of teachers trying to find bodily adjustments for people to connect, compensating for what was lacking. Or because of their culture, because there were not allowed to touch. Or maybe it is because the aesthetics was more important than the connection.

I think that these ‘pushings’ and these ‘off-axis’ are a consequence of not giving what needs to be given. Not being there, not being present, not risking.

AL: So, constructing the dance around the axis of the woman seems to be the distinctive characteristic of both the intentionality and the bodily expressions of the milongueros in the 80s and 90s.

GG: The purpose of the dance of the man is to move the woman. It is her that follows!

AL: These conclusions are so obvious, but they are not at all trivial. It would seem that we complicate things looking for details and at the same time we cannot see what’s in front of us.

GG: I don't know. Let me give you a super extreme example, think of 'Chicho' Frúmboli<sup>27</sup>. for example. This guy is someone that can move you in your axis, and he is super present at all times when dancing. I think people often focus on the forms and not on the essence.

AL: His message was not understood?

GG: They really didn't understand him. This is also because he had an important development. When I started the course on woman technique I was super feminist. So, when dancing at that time – when the wave of Tango teaching started around the 1994-95 – I would modified a figure the man was leading, because I wanted to do some embellishments. That was such a defiance!

With time this attitude started to change. But this change was because Chicho evolved and I evolved; we stopped fighting the authority. We were 'teenagers' in the Tango, very much like teenagers and very rebellious.

AL: Why did you started to teach technique?

GG: Actually, it started because I used to tell women several things that were clearly working for them. Then I started to have a huge number of women seeking advice and so the idea came to me to create a seminar where I could bring them together. I was saying things that evidently worked for them, because they sprung from my own search for an improvement of the movement. The student is always a mirror for what the teacher herself needs to work on. We are all mirrors for each other!

AL: And what is the *antitécnica* (anti-technique)?

GG: The *antitécnica* nowadays is a return to simplicity, to the movement that is more comfortable and more organic.

AL: A deconstruction of that which is essential in the dance?

GG: Yes

AL: A deconstruction of the workings of the axis.

GG: My work has always been on axis. Whether I was working on technique or on anti-technique, I always worked the posture on axis. I never worked off axis.

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<sup>27</sup> Buenos Aires (1970). One of the most influential dancers in the newer generations of Tango.

AL: You describe a very specific situation on the position of the axis in the old milongueros, among other postural possibilities.

GG: This has to do with the axis of the embrace. When you embrace somebody in a natural way, you position yourself in the centre of the foot. It is the natural way.

AL: The axis of the embrace.

GG: It is the axis of the embrace...

AL:... from which the dance is constructed.

GG: Absolutely. It is like the *Ying and Yang*, they fit together perfectly. That's how you can understand the logic of the movement and how each piece works. However, I also think that there is a lot of mysticism, stereotypes and myths, especially around *rhythm*, and with the phrase "you need to learn to walk first and then you can learn to do the steps". For me, these are all myths.

AL: I wonder what is it that the milongueros might have meant by this phrase...

GG: Well, they say that and kept repeating it. But Pupi never taught how to walk. And if he ever attempted to teach how to walk, the result was very different, because...

AL: It wasn't what he was actually doing.

GG: It wasn't at all what he was doing! I think that in the attempt to explain what they were naturally doing, they generate a big myth around the know-how of walking, that people need to know how to walk. But, what does it mean to know how to walk? Pupi was not walking in a super special manner. His posture was the point, he had a great posture and that made all of his body work well. Portalea stood at 'ten past ten', as they used to say [this refers to the position of the feet in a manner that resembles the hands of a clock when indicating ten past ten]. That was the position in which he stood, and if you told him to close his feet he would no longer be Portalea. So everyone moved in the way they moved because they had to move this way, they had their own history, because they woke up at 8am and not a 3pm, do you understand? Because Portalea used to walk on the dirt of the cemetery [where he worked] – they are lots of reasons why this guy walked as he did.

So, what should you do? Try to imitate, if you want to extract the dynamics of the movement to understand why, to understand how he moved. But Portalea is just one of

them. What should you take from Portalea? His figures. And his way of thinking, if anything.

[When people say] “you have to learn how to walk”, what does it mean to learn to walk like Portalea? If I, for example, have the feet pointing inwards, do I have to place them pointing outwards to be like Portalea? How does that work?

I mean, that seems very invasive to the body. I would be trying to modify your *supporting point*, and that is a problem. According to what I am saying, I think this question that you have to ‘learn how to walk’ is a myth. You arrived to the class walking – how can I tell you that you have to learn how to walk?

AL: Why is that the way of dancing of the old milongueros did not persist?

GG: If you search well, there is a lot of Tango in the whole city. I mean, there is Tango everywhere, but the Tango of the 40s is not the Tango we have today. Why? Because the dynamics of movement are different nowadays where everyone is running around, with their mobile phones, is just different. People wear jeans, they wear trainers.

That’s why we cannot pretend that *the body regresses*; the body evolves according to the situations [in which it finds itself]. I don’t know if it is an evolution or not. It depends, for some people it is an evolution, for others it is a regress. I always think that we evolve in one way or other, and that we try to survive in the context in which we are, and move forwards.

AL: The relation between Tango and the working life has changed...

GG: I was studying to become a teacher, and then I graduated and I was obviously working the afternoon shifts, never the morning shifts, because sometimes I was coming back from the milonga and going straight to the school to teach. What I am saying is that there are a lot of things that determine that you move the way you move and that you have the density you have, all in relation with the kind of life you have, everything that happened to you in the context plus the role models that you had.

My role models were all very strong and very significant woman. *Minas* that you couldn’t move just like that. My role models were goddesses, substantial woman, with knives hidden in the garter. I am talking about very strong woman, they were no joke.



## **CONCLUSIONS**

Graciela González gave us an important testimony and she proposes to recover the natural and spontaneous movements of the body, generating through these movements an awareness of what our body already knows, without the need to invade the body or hurt it with postures on behalf of ‘technique’, which may not be functional. González explains that in Tango Tradicional Salon, the man directs his intention to the axis of the woman in order to “move” her, and the woman when dancing “takes care” of her own axis. This is the central aspect of the interactive communication of the bodies in the dance couple.

González explained that her teaching methodology emerges from a deep immersion in the question of the gestural intentionality of the axis of the embrace, and also from an exhaustive observation of the personality of her teachers and of the context they inhabited.

González understands the bodily transformations and the forms of interpretation in the dance of the new generations as a result of sociocultural changes and the influence of social media. Accordingly, González explains that the expressive gestures of the old milongueros cannot be understood without looking at the context in which they lived and from which their experiences come.

The important legacy of her *antitécnica* understood as body reading and teaching methodology of the Tango Tradicional Salon, is the recovery of the simplest, most comfortable and organic way of moving, to be used for moving ourselves intentionally and dynamically in the axis of the embrace.

## **REFERENCES**

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