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Ciencia Ergo Sum, vol. 10, núm. 1, marzo, 2003

Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México

México

Disponible en: <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=10410105>



Ciencia Ergo Sum,

ISSN (Versión impresa): 1405-0269

ciencia.ergosum@yahoo.com.mx

Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México

México

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The Body as Revolutionary Text: The Dance as Protest Literature in Latin America

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Recepción: junio 10 de 2002
Aceptación: septiembre 26 de 2002

* This paper was presented at the CALACS Congress. February 22-25, 2001. Antigua, Guatemala.

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I would like to thank María Teresa Colombani, Librarian/Resource Technician of the Dance Saskatchewan Resource Center, for her assistance in helping me locate video footage of Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller, and dancers performing the rumba, merengue, samba and tango, to accompany this paper during my oral presentation at the CALACS Congress in Antigua, Guatemala.

El cuerpo como texto: el baile como literatura de protesta en Latinoamérica

Resumen. Paul Valéry, Antonin Artaud, Isadora Duncan y Frank Kermode sugirieron que los movimientos de un baile pueden funcionar como un lenguaje universal que supera las limitaciones de la palabra escrita o dicha. Si el baile verdaderamente expresa los sentimientos del alma universal, que es parte integrante del ser humano, entonces el baile es un medio muy poderoso de comunicación que puede derribar muros y fronteras, unir grupos diversos de la humanidad y promover cambios sociales. Este artículo propone que algunas luchas étnicas y de clases sociales en Latinoamérica han utilizado conscientemente el poder comunicativo del baile para realizar sus propósitos: la rumba en Cuba, el merengue en la República Dominicana, la samba en Brasil, el tango en Argentina y el baile azteca en México y el sur de los Estados Unidos.

Palabras clave: baile, literatura de protesta, rumba, tango, samba, merengue, baile azteca.

Abstract. Paul Valéry, Antonin Artaud, Isadora Duncan, James Collingwood and Frank Kermode all proposed that dance movements may function as a universal human language transcending the limitations of the written or spoken word. If dance really does express and speak to the universal soul inherent in humanity, it follows that dance is a powerful communicating medium that can break down barriers, unite diverse groups and promote social change. This paper argues that some class and racial struggles in Latin America have consciously utilized the communicative power of dance to further their goals: the rumba in Cuba, the merengue in the Dominican Republic, the samba in Brazil, the tango in Argentina, and Aztec dance in contemporary Mexico and the Southern United States.

Key words: dance, protest literature, rumba, merengue, samba, tango, aztec dance.

Dance is a language of the body whose signified concepts, like those of poetry and revolution, frequently elude expression through conventional linguistic forms. In the early twentieth century, the

English philosopher R. G. Collingwood suggested that "every kind of language is a specialized form of bodily gesture and in this sense it may be said that dance is the mother of all languages" (Collingwood, 1938). In his Cahiers, the

French theorist and poet Paul Valéry compared the physical movements of a dancer to a poetic image forged in words: "[...] un homme est penseur comme il est danseur, usant son esprit comme celui-ci de ses muscles et ses

Valéry, Artaud, Duncan, Collingwood and Kermode all proposed that dance movements may function as a universal human language transcending the limitations of the written or spoken word.

nerfs" (1960: 334); just as the English literary critic Frank Kermode, proposed that dance is "the obscure primitive ground from which modern poets draw strength for their archaic art" (1976: 47). Dreaming of a "physical language" (Artaud, 1978) that would transcend the limitations of words with pre-determined significations, the French playwright and philosopher Antonin Artaud sought a "concrete language" (*ibid*) that would allow for the expression of "la Parole devant les mots" (the Word before words, Artaud, 1978). Although Artaud never realized his dream through the form of avant-garde expression he attempted "le Theatre de la Cruauté", his American contemporary, dancer Isadora Duncan, succeeded in transposing her art to the level of social cultural revolution and the embodiment of the poetic spirit of humanity. As if in response to all of the above-mentioned theorists, Isadora declared that "I use my body as my medium, just as the writer uses his words[...]" (Duncan, 1981).

Valéry, Artaud, Duncan, Collingwood and Kermode all proposed that dance movements may function as a universal human language transcending the limitations of the written or spoken word. If dance really does express and speak to the universal soul inherent in humanity, it follows that dance is a powerful communicating medium that can break down barriers, unite diverse groups and promote social change.

Robert Hodge and G. Kress (1979) proposed a theory of language "whose aim was to provide an illuminating account of verbal language as a social phenomenon". In their later work, in 1988, they recognize the limitations of verbal language and see "social structures and processes, messages and meanings as the proper standpoint from which to attempt the analysis of meaning systems". They stress that meaning resides so strongly in visual, aural, behavioural and other codes that "a concentration on words alone is not enough"; that "meaning is produced and reproduced under specific social conditions, through specific material forms and agencies". Keeping their premise in mind, I will attempt to illustrate that some class and racial struggles in Latin America have consciously utilized the social codes of dance forms (their historical roots, movements, even the instruments playing the music to which the dance is performed) to further their goals. I will briefly present the Cuban rumba, the Dominican merengue, the Brazilian samba,

the Argentinian tango and the Mexican/Chicano twentieth century revival of aztec dance as examples of dance forms whose evolution and popularity has been blatantly linked to social movements: the Cuban Revolution, the Dominican Republic's

drive for self-definition in the post-Trujillo era, the Afro-Brazilian struggle for racial equality, the Argentine working class immigrants' struggle for social acceptance in the early twentieth century, and Mexican American immigrant workers' struggle for social recognition, equality and justice. Certainly Latin America is not the only place in the world where dance is linked to social movements; neither are the above-mentioned dances the only examples of that phenomenon. The utilization of dance as a 'physical' language is a human system of communication that very likely characterizes all cultures past, present and future.

Yvonne Daniel (1995) presents a very comprehensive analysis of the ways that Fidel Castro's regime has used the rumba to define, embody, and assert images of national and international identity. She sees rumba signifying an ideal which the Revolution embodied: "equality with the working masses and an identity with its Afro-Latin heritage":

[...] rumba has long been acquainted with workers, beginning with the slave, free black, mulatto and white workers of the nineteenth century. Although rumba was considered African, Afro-Cuban, 'baja cultura' (low culture), obscene, or too sexual by some Cubans before the Revolution, it has been aligned with notions of dignity, recognition, equality and inspiration since then. In striving for social equality, the government has attempted to unify elements of the historically hierarchical system. Rumba openly reveals the Revolution's legal reality of nondiscrimination contrasted with historical cultural biases that emphasized common ancestry with blacks and denigrated equal association between Cubans of African and non-African descent (see Martínez-Alier, 1974: 1-20, 71-75; noted by Daniel, 1995: 117).

If Daniel's analysis of the revolutionary significance of rumba does indeed reflect Cuban lived reality, then I contend that the rumba, as a popular dance form, functions as a 'physical' language expressing Cuba's 'official message' of social and racial equality.

In *Music and Black Ethnicity in the Dominican Republic* (1994), Martha Ellen Davis extends the field of dance as social communication to the socio-historical significance of the instruments producing dance music. In the case of the traditional merengue ensemble in the Dominican Republic, she sees its components as representative of the hybrid nature of Domi-

nican culture: the sounds of the Hohner button accordion (evokative of European influence) blend with the drum, gourd scraper and marimba that have evolved from African cultural roots. Deborah P. Hernández (1991: 116) asserts that

[...] asking the question 'where did merengue come from?' was just another way of asking 'where did we Dominicans come from, and who are we?' Responding to the question forced cultural observers of all socio-political persuasions to consider and acknowledge –or to reject– the country's African heritage.

The *Enciclopedia Dominicana* (1976) suggests that, while merengue was always very popular among the masses, the higher echelons of society did not accept merengue for a long time, because it was related to African music.

The development of commercial ballroom-style merengue was promoted by the dictator Trujillo, who wanted the dance to be recognized as the “artistic symbol of Dominican identity” (Davis, 1994). He founded municipal bands and public music schools in the 1940's and 50's, to develop education, the arts, and industry. Davis observes that, prior to Trujillo, the Dominican working classes previously had invoked the unifying power of the merengue when threatened by outside forces. She quotes Jorge Bernanda (1982) who suggests that Dominicans showed a nationalistic preference for the merengue over foreign genres in dance halls during the first U.S. occupation in 1916-22. Davis alludes to the accelerated tempo of commercial merengue music in the 1970's, that made it more attractive to urban youth seduced by North American “rock and roll” and Puerto Rico salsa.

In *La lucha sonora: Dominican Popular Music in the post-Trujillo Era* (1991), Deborah P. Hernández identifies the key players and sides in the Dominican 'sonic struggle'. Following the assassination of Trujillo in 1961, public debates arose concerning the past and future configuration of the country's national identity, “particularly as it was expressed by... the merengue” (*ibid.*: 105). These dialogues culminated in two conferences on merengue held in Santo Domingo: *The Origin and Evolution of the Merengue* (1976) and *Encounter with Merengue* (1978). Sociologist Dagoberto Tejeda “insisted on the importance of merengue's African roots” (*ibid.*), which Hernández interprets as “clearly an attempt to force those concerned with the country's national and cultural identity to squarely face the issue of race and racism” (*ibid.*). In a



country that tried to deny its African parentage for quite some, it is significant that merengue –a music and dance representing a merger of African rhythms with the Hispanic folkloric dance tradition– should now be “symbolic of Dominican national identity” (Davis, 1994). In view of Dominicans' acknowledgement of the racial merger that constitutes their national identity, I feel that it is significant that the merengue is danced in a waltz-like position with partners stepping to the side and even making turns individually, but never letting go of the partner.

Samba –a Brazilian dance and musical genre with profoundly African roots– also has come to symbolize Afro-Brazilians' ongoing fight for racial equality. Ironically, the millions of foreign tourists witnessing Rio de Janeiro's annual Carnival parade most probably see the richly costumed dancers as an expression of racial harmony. External appearance is not necessarily internal reality, even when dance movements are the signifiers, however. Alison Raphael's article *From Popular Culture to Microenterprise: The History of the Brazilian Samba Schools* (1990), contends that, in the 1970's, the Brazilian Carnival was in danger of losing its authenticity as a result of its appropriation by business enterprises. The Samba Schools became “a convenient vehicle through which the larger society [...] co-opted and undermined a genuine manifestation of popular culture” (*ibid.*: 73). Raphael documents the emergence of the samba from the slums of Rio de Janeiro in the very early 1900's, positing its true origins in the rhythmic drumbeats that traditionally accompanied African religious ceremonies brought to Brazil by African slaves. By virtue of its African roots, the samba became “the chief social mobilizer within Rio's Afro-Brazilian community” (*ibid.*).

The apparent appropriation of the Carnival by business interests in the seventies to the nineties represented, in some aspects, a regression to the 'original' form of the Carnival in the very early years of the twentieth century. In 1928, a group of Black and Mulatto carnival goers created the first Samba School and entered their parade in the Carnival. Raphael emphasizes that this was a newsworthy event because, until then, the city's white elite dominated the parade. Established black working class neighborhoods participated, but blacks from the hillside slums and suburbs were not included. Instead, they formed 'blocos de sujos' or 'ragamuffin bands' and went into the

streets to sing and dance the samba in an informal fashion. After the first Samba School's successful launch, many 'blocos' converted themselves to Samba Schools. For the next thirty years (1928-58), the Carnival truly was a symbol of racial harmony and co-operation. In the mid-seventies, Raphael conducted an interview with three elderly 'sambistas' who told her that, in the early years of the Samba Schools, "it was our own thing. People made the greatest sacrifices –they even went hungry– in order to parade on Carnival Day" (*ibid.*); that "things were better then. People were more united, more united" (*ibid.*). The third told her that "we played, we had fun. I don't think that they have as much fun as we used to" (*ibid.*).

What caused the change? After evolving into a manifestation of social harmony in the 30's and 40's, the Carnival, by the mid 50's, regressed back to its former pattern of domination by the city's 'elite'. Samba Schools began contracting professional artists in order to make their entries conform to "the aesthetic standards of Rio's middle and upper classes" (Raphael, 1990). After the capital of Brazil was moved from Rio to Brasilia in 1960,

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the government saw the Carnival as a major source of revenue for Rio and thus began putting pressure on the Samba Schools to create bigger and better spectacles for the tourist trade. The Schools became efficiently run businesses that catered primarily to the white middle class for financial support and new ideas (*ibid.*). Raphael concludes with the assertion that "instead of representing a spontaneous, indigenous and authentic form of popular culture, the Samba Schools, by the late 1970's, had become profit-seeking micro enterprises rendering services by contract to the city's tourism agency" (*ibid.*). Keeping in mind our parallel between dance forms and signified concepts, we may speculate that the samba became an exhausted 'metaphor' whose original message of harmony was usurped by the mask of moneymaker.

The soul of samba, as music and dance, eluded and transcended those externally imposed signified concepts. In the 1980's, the 'pagode' samba movement emerged as a turning point toward authenticity. Philip Galinsky (1996) describes how the movement generated itself spontaneously

in Rio's working class suburbs, in response to the commercialization and corruption of the city's samba schools and organized carnival parade groups. This grassroots samba movement consequently represented the merger of dance signifiers with written text –cultural resistance being implicit in pagode samba lyrics. Galinsky notes that

'Eu Não Falo Gringo' (I Don't Speak Gringo), written by João Nogueira and Nei Lopes and performed by Nogueira (Acervo Especial BMG 109.0311) asserts both musically and lyrically a strong Afro-Brazilian, nationalist stance when confronted with the imposition of cultural influence from the United States: 'I don't speak gringo/I only speak Brazilian [...] (*ibid.*: 138).

Black carnival groups in Salvador da Bahia soon became, in the words of Larry N. Crook (1993: 90), "the most dynamic and socially dedicated cultural organizations in Brazil's black consciousness movement". The 'bloco afro' emerged as a new type of carnival association: "[...] the creation of an Afrocentric aesthetic movement involving dance, music, poetry, visual designs, costuming, and poetics around a variety of African themes [...] a reinvention of Africa in Bahia" (*ibid.*: 98). In 1983, 'Olodum' (one of the prominent "bloco afro" groups) began "focusing its yearly themes on socialist movements in Africa and diaspora" (*ibid.*: 100). The group also began mixing the samba beat with salsa, merengue, reggae, and candomblé rhythms. A new form of music and dance 'samba-reggae' was born; and Olodum emerged as a force for social change. Olodum has maintained a newly renovated cultural center in the middle of Salvador, where classes in theatre, dance, music and foreign languages are offered. Crook states that the effect of 'Olodum' and the 'bloco afro' movement now is seen throughout Brazil, with dozens of 'blocos afros' popping up in the poorest neighborhoods of cities like Recife, Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. These community based organizations provide alternatives to gang life and other marginal activities so chronic among Brazil's street youth. The 'samba reggae' style of the 'blocos afros' now is firmly embedded within the social and political activism practiced by these organizations. Crook quotes Joao Jorge, a former president of Olodum, who said that, "when these groups do music, they also do politics" (*ibid.*). It is already evident that the musical politics of the 'blocos afro' have opened doors to increased black participation in politics in Brazil – the gate to socio-economic power and the incarnation of the signified concept which samba signifies as physical text.

Just as the rumba, the merengue, and the samba were born from the merger of African rhythms with European music and dance, so the tango was engendered from a simi-

lar clash of cultures in Argentina. Carlos Ibarguren (1963: 32) described the tango as “un producto ilegítimo [...] producto híbrido o mestizo nacido en los arrabales y consistente en una mezcla de habanera tropical y de milonga falsificada”. Marta E. Savigliano (1995) suggests that the tango expresses and reproduces “exiles and alterity”:

[...] The history of tango is a story of encounters between those who should never have met or between those who, having met, will remain forever disencountered. Brewing resentment, it is a stubborn story of impossible but fatal encounters[...] The tango is both a product and a promoter of these hybrid events. Black and white, rich and poor, men and women, colonizer and colonized each is brought much too close to the other; the tango embrace is dangerously tight (*ibid.*: XIV-XV).

Savigliano suggests that “black men and women probably initiated the first tango steps in the Rio de la Plata”, even though the importance of black participation in the creation of rioplatense culture has “frequently been neglected or even erased”. She contends that “the flirtacious closeness of the first black tango dancers” was replaced with the more rigid form of the dance in the early twentieth century, as the tension between succeeding waves of European immigrants, as well as rural and urban environments, increased.

None of the tensions were resolved and the European immigrants, a new army of laborers, had already arrived. No time for healing. More exiles, more distress, and again, few women. How tight could tango’s embrace get? The stiff torsos of the black dances became stiffer; the swaying hips (‘quebradas’) and the sharp interruptions of the dancing marches (‘cortes’) lost their joyful fluidity and became grave, and so did the faces, concentrated in displaying filigrees of footwork (‘figuras’) for an attentive audience of ‘pardas’ and ‘chinas’; themselves escaped from domestic service to become near-prostitutes.

Whose embrace was the tango embrace? Tango’s choreography emerged out of mutual admiration and scornful disdain among the different races, classes and ethnicities; lumped together in the city.

Donald S. Castro (1990) also emphasizes that the evolution of the tango as a popular dance and musical genre was synonymous with racial and class tensions: “[...] the tango when dominated by racially mixed creoles was rejected by the elite as being ‘barbaric’. It was only accepted as being civilized when “whitened” through re-importation from Europe in the period just prior to World War I” (*ibid.*: 92). Savigliano affirms that the tango was polished and accepted by the wealthy and powerful as it made its way from the slums and brothels of South American harbors to the cabarets and ballrooms of Paris, London and New York:

rets and ballrooms of Paris, London and New York:

By the 1920’s, it had become clear that the sin of tango was related to its racial/class origins rather than to its erotic content[...] Tango in its new bourgeois version was re addressed to the world market, including, ironically, those Third World nations where it originated. It became an ‘exotic’ good in the political economy of Passion: appropriation, accumulation, marketing, packaging, commercialization, distribution, and consumption of the wealth of exotic feelings, that is, of the Passion of the Other/Otra (Savigliano, 1995: 12).



Foreshadowing the merger of linguistic and physical signifiers that would characterize the pagode samba movement in Brazil in the 1980’s, the lyrics of tango songs reflected the tension of body movements unconsciously protesting against alienation, poverty and discrimination. Just as the samba lyrics of João Nogueira and Nei Lopes denounced the imposition of cultural influences from the United States, so the tango lyrics of Celedonio Estaban Flores in the early part of the twentieth century frequently pleaded for social justice and the betterment of the working classes:

Sus pibes no lloran por llorar
ni piden masitas ni dulces. ¡Señor!
Sus pibes se mueren de frío
y lloran hambrientos de pan
(His kids don’t cry for crying sake
nor do they ask for cookies or cake, no sir!
His kids are dying of cold
and cry of bellies aching for bread)
(*Pan* [Bread], Flores, 1981: 24)

While Flores’s tango lyrics documented the social inequalities of his era, the tango as a dance form represented an escape from that harsh reality for the Argentine working classes, many of whom were recent immigrants. The lyrics of other tango songs such as Viejo Smoking by Flores, La ultima copa by Juan A. Caruso (Castro, 1990: 182) and Lunes by Gobello depict factory workers and longshoremen replacing “bib-overalls with a store bought suit” (*ibid.*) for a few hours on the weekend, prior to returning to their working class weekday realities.

As a physical language, movements of the tango continued to evolve; to reflect the tense physical realities of alienation

and competition that was prevalent in the social system. Castro (1990) suggests that the tango pitted three societal elements against each other in a battle for cultural survival: the urban creole, the recent immigrant and members of the upper class:

Forced to compete with the immigrant for jobs, women, social status in a system that seemed to favour only the foreigner, the urban creole took out his frustration and bitterness against the immigrant and the elite in a new 'duello criollo', the tango. In this 'duello', the object was to show up the immigrant or the upper class 'swell' as well. Through the development of a complicated footwork and body movements ('el corte' and 'tango con quebrada'), the tango as a dance was not easily done by the novice. The poor immigrant or the swell who tried to emulate the 'creole compadrito' was made the object of ridicule [...] The immigrant, for his part, participated in this 'duello criollo' to show his equality and his desperation to become something other than a 'tano' (Italian) or a 'gringo' (foreigner)[...] The upper class 'swells' also participated in this 'duello'. They sought to prove their masculinity seeking high adventure through slumming[...] The tango was not 'their' dance, but instead an adventure. It was an adventure into the 'low life' and a flirtation with danger (Castro, 1990: 122-24).

As both mirror and signifier of the harsh social reality of Argentina in the early twentieth century, the tango had transformed itself into an intensely physical dance that evoked the unspeakable –wounds in the subconscious mind. Ernesto Santos Discépolo summed up the tango as “un pensamiento triste que se puede bailar” (Castro, 1990), while Ramón Gómez de la Serna described the tango almost as an irritant that keeps old wounds open, that tears them open until they bleed (*ibid.*).

In 2002, most of us regard the tango as an international dance form evoking grace, urban sophistication and egotism. The smooth, contrived moves of ballroom style tango speak more of Northern European chiseled emotions than they do of the dance's not so distant African origins. The relaxed, fluid African movements evoking the natural rhythms of the earth are almost obliterated in the visual acuity of precisely drawn diagrams traced by disciplined high heeled feet, symbolically cold facial expressions and a controlling male/female embrace that denounces the possibility of true intimacy. If the ballroom style tango of 2002 has a social message, it declares coldly that Buenos Aires succeeded in becoming the Paris of the New World; that Faustino Sarmiento's late nineteenth century aspirations to make Argentina a vibrant, industrialized, sophisticated metropolis in the style of Northern Europe were realized, even though he had to obliterate the heritage of aboriginal and black cultural groups to do it.

All previously mentioned Latin American dance forms –the rhumba, the merengue, the samba and the tango– have two common factors. Firstly, they were born from the forced social merger of African and European rhythms and dance movements –from the trauma of Black slavery, European colonization and the uprooting and immigration of both racial groups. Secondly, as these dance signifiers evolved, they came to represent a struggle for social and racial equality in Latin American terms.

In Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Brazil, the warm, hypnotic rhythms of the rhumba, the samba and the merengue speak of warm, vibrant, 'earthy' cultural roots bursting with vitality. If our human family originated in Africa, then these Afro-Latino dance signifiers are conducting us back to our primordial roots; to community, harmony, co-operation. While dancers of the Argentine tango move with a hauntingly beautiful, sophisticated grace, their closeness paradoxically appears dispassionate –a criticism also levied at the Western European/North American technological, materialistic societies that were responsible for granting the tango 'respectability'. Nevertheless, in spite of the controlled tension that is inherent in the tango, an unspeakable emotion –that is neither anxiety nor isolation– transcends the conflict engendered by warring signifiers: the desire to merge oneself with the other, that underlies all profound human communication.

In 2001-02, the partnership of dance and social revolution in Latin America is most evident in the recent resurgence of Pre-Columbian dance. An internet website dedicated to Aztec Dancing (nezahuelcoyotl@hotmail.com) contends that the “the sacred dances of the Mexica hold a very special position in the Yogic practices of the world”, and extends an invitation: “if you'd like to learn the Aztec sacred dances, go to the Zócalo in Mexico City Tenochtitlan on any evening. There are many people there who would be very happy to teach you” (<http://dayofdestiny.com/AztecDance.html>). The website lists Aztec Dance groups in Mexico, the United States and Argentina. Mariángela Rodríguez (1999) describes a “Cinco de Mayo” celebration at East Los Angeles College (apparently the university with the largest number of Mexican American students in Los Angeles, where the Aztec Dancers Xochi Pilli and a Chicano rap group –the Aztec Underground– are the principal entertainers. While the rap group's name appeals to “the pre-Hispanic past to define its nationality” (Rodríguez, 1999), the Aztec dancers also “condense dominant political and religious symbols” (*ibid.*) relevant to Chicanos: “[...] the body is an instrument of battle with which order is restored amid chaos. The dancers are warriors and their musical instruments are their weapons; they fight while dancing and through prayer, religious harmony is established”

(*ibid.*). ‘Cinco de Mayo’ –a minor Mexican holiday– has great significance for Chicanos because the hero of the battle fought on May 5, 1862 was a Texan – Ignacio Zaragoza. The ‘Aztec’ warrior-dancers’ presence at a Chicano ‘Cinco de Mayo’ celebration assumes a contemporary revolutionary significance, when seen in the light of the Aztec Underground’s rap lyrics speaking of “re-appropriating the U.S. Southwest, a territory that Mexico lost in the war of 1848” (*ibid.*). In a socio-historical context, these words assume even greater significance when we remember that the U.S. Southwest possibly was the site of the mythical kingdom of Aztlán –the Aztec’s home before sweeping down from the North to conquer Mexico three centuries before the arrival of the Spanish. As signifiers, the dancers’ movements and the rap singers’ oral text cease being concrete phenomena as their merging movements of signification give rise to a futuristic mythical vision rooted in historical suffering and nurtured by hope.

Like the dancers of the rumba, the samba and the merengue (many of whom are mulatto), the Chicanos (predominantly mestizo) participating in the celebration described above are rejecting Northern European dance rhythms in favor of a more ancient style rooted in the earth, whose movements celebrate the rhythms of the universe.

As the world evolves in the twenty-first century to its inevitable future as a global village, with international communication facilitated by the internet, satellite television and other forms of mass media, it is significant that the dance rhythms of Africa and Latin America are sweeping the world in popularity, as if heralding a new cultural revolution. Ironically, North American mass media –so frequently condemned for imposing its own culture on the world– is now propagating Latino culture in the form of internationally renowned popular singing artists, such as Enrique Iglesias, Ricky Martin, Jennifer López, to name only three. Since the cultural clash depicted so eloquently in ‘West Side Story’, the North American movie industry has produced a slow but steady stream of movies celebrating struggling Latino working class immigrants who make it ‘big’ through their dedication to sensual, provocative, ‘earthy’ dance styles: *Dirty Dancing*, *Staying Alive*, *Flashdance*, and *The Forbidden Dance* –a 1990’s movie that celebrates a fictitious Brazilian rainforest princess coming to the United States to dance the lambada in a competition, in order to save the rainforest and its inhabitants from further exploitation. Although billed by internet movie critic Oren Stone as “probably ranking [...] as one of the worst films

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ever made” (<http://www.soton.ac.uk/~oms/lambada.html>), the latter movie clearly utilizes the power of dance to promote cultural platforms, to inform about social issues, and to promote solidarity through a physical language that speaks to the heart and the soul.

The Argentine protagonist of Julio Cortazar’s novel *Rayuela* (1967) frequently denounced the entire history of Western European thought for its

binary reasoning that disrupts itself with impassible brick walls of its own construction. Like his protagonist Oliveira and like the previously mentioned French theorist Antonin Artaud, Cortazar frequently denounced conventional language for its inability to express the essential nature of the world. It is sad that Cortazar’s hero Oliveira, from the land of the ‘tango’, never learned to dance. Instead, he went mad bumping his head against five thousand years of Western European syllogisms and apparently threw himself out of the window in a last desperate attempt to reach the ‘center’ –the state of ‘analogous consciousness’ that eluded language. Could Oliveira have found the ‘analogous consciousness’ he so desperately sought if he had dared to dance the tango? Let us dare to dream. While the African rhythms that gave birth to the tango were suppressed and confined as the dance form was ‘refined’ by Western Europeans, those roots nevertheless sustained the vital passion inherent in the dance, because they sprang from and spoke to the collective soul of humanity. The dance rhythms of the rumba, the merengue and the samba similarly lead us back to Eden, back to our primordial African roots, back to dancing (as a human family) to the ‘World Beat’. This physical expression of a human consciousness transcending the boundaries of conventional representation finds its common essence in the signified concept of Isadora Duncan’s revolutionary dance, in Antonin Artaud’s dream of a physical language, in contemporary performances of sacred Aztec and other aboriginal dances.

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