

10

TOWARD A THIRD PERFORMANCE

Dance, Exile, and Anti-Imperialism in Fernando Solanas's *Tangos: El exilio de Gardel*

Victoria Fortuna

In one of the final scenes of Argentine director Fernando Solanas's 1985 anti-authoritarian film *Tangos: El exilio de Gardel* (*Tangos: The Exile of Gardel*), one of the film's protagonists, Gerardo, shares yerba mate with Carlos Gardel and General José de San Martín. This ghostly encounter with the iconic early twentieth-century tango singer and the nineteenth-century independence hero takes place at night in a cavernous, fog-filled Paris train station. While the shared experience of exile in France unites the men, the context of Gerardo's exile is the main subject of the film. *Tangos* follows a group of political exiles living in Paris during Argentina's last military dictatorship (1976–1983). Marked by the torture, disappearance, and murder of an estimated 30,000 citizens (known as *desaparecidos*), the military government targeted anyone broadly linked to leftist activity and tightly scripted proper modes of citizen comportment, policing everyday life in public as well as private space.¹ Motivated by direct threats from the government as well as fear of repression, thousands of people (including Solanas) lived abroad during this period.² As the characters pass the yerba mate and reflect on their exiles in a space defined by bodies in transit, San Martín asks Gardel to sing. He declines and instead plays a record on a gramophone. Gardel selects *Volver* (*Return*), his famous ode to the transnational subject who yearns to return home to Buenos Aires and reflects mournfully on time's effect on the body and memory.

This haunting scene exemplifies how Solanas's film positions the effects of dictatorship and exile in relationship to legacies of empire spanning from the independence era to the global Cold War. The last military dictatorship, like other brutal dictatorships that spread throughout Latin America in the 1970s, aimed to curb the rise of communism and received support from global powers including the United States and United Kingdom.³ The anachronistic presence of San Martín in the scene questions whether an Argentina torn apart by political violence is indeed *after empire*. San Martín died in France in 1850, having

left South America during the earlier struggle for independence. His presence in the scene positions the fight for independence from imperial influences as yet unfinished. At the same time, Gardel's presence in the scene highlights how the film identifies performance repertoires—specifically the tango—as sites of anti-imperial resistance. Though identified as Argentine (Gardel grew up in Buenos Aires), there were controversies over whether he was born in France or Uruguay (historians have concluded that he was born in Toulouse, France). As a popular entertainer he traversed national borders throughout his career with long stays in Paris. The simultaneous cultural nationalism and statelessness that Gardel embodies reflects the exiles' own transitory state as well as their search for cultural identity. The main action of the film follows the struggle of the political exiles to stage a performance called a *tanguedia*.⁴ A name that combines the words tango, *tragedia* (tragedy), and *comedia* (comedy), this fictional genre blends dance, music, and theatre rooted in *rioplatense* (Argentine and Uruguayan) traditions to express the exiles' experiences.

To understand how the film integrates representations of exile with anti-imperial politics, this chapter focuses on the prominent role of dance in the *tanguedia* as well as in the broader narrative development of the film. In addition to tango music and dance, the *tanguedia* also features a number of contemporary dance sequences. These scenes are performed by the well-known Argentine contemporary dance company Nucleodanza; choreographers Susana Tambutti and Margarita Bali co-directed the group between 1974 and the mid-1990s. This chapter demonstrates how the film's integration of tango and contemporary movement genres functions on two related levels. Both choreographic repertoires work to capture the fractured experiences of violence and exile. At the same time, the incorporation of both genres aims to realize a mode of performance (the *tanguedia*) that expresses a specifically *rioplatense* worldview and resists both the cultural alienation endemic to exile as well as legacies of cultural imperialism in Latin America. In writings and published interviews, Solanas defines cultural imperialism as the national and international mandate that Global South cultural production engage with both popular and high art aesthetic values aligned with the Global North, a topic explicitly thematized throughout *Tangos*.⁵

This chapter develops how the histories of both tango and contemporary dance and their reception in the moment of the film's release expose nuances as well as tensions in the film's anti-imperial politics. The film's appeal to the cultural specificity of tango rubs up against the dance's often-discussed role in the global marketing of racialized and hypersexualized Latin American dancing bodies, or what Marta Savigliano has termed "the political economy of passion."⁶ A French-Argentine co-production, *Tangos* was screened at prestigious international festivals including the Venice Film Festival and received significant critical acclaim. The film's successful distribution and reception, particularly in Europe, likely benefited from tango's status as a "hot" international commodity. Additionally, though definitions of "contemporary dance" vary widely, the genre typically signals some relationship to the Western concert tradition (e.g., classical

ballet, modern, and postmodern dance), complicating the film's appeal to Argentine performance traditions and identity.⁷ Ultimately, I contend that the inclusion of contemporary dance in the *tanguedia* in fact accurately represents this genre as part of Argentine dance history and decenters its historical and ongoing attachment to the United States and Europe at the same time that the film's invocations of tango illustrate the form's own nuanced history of national resistance and global exotification.

A close reading of the film's movement politics nuances the rich body of scholarship on Solanas's oeuvre broadly and *Tangos* specifically. Scholars have explored in depth how the non-narrative structure of *Tangos* and its representational devices work to express the psychic, corporeal, and political aspects of exile.⁸ As evidenced in the ghostly scene in the Paris train station, the film crosses time and place, and blurs the line between reality and fiction. Throughout the film, struggles to negotiate the aesthetic and production challenges of the *tanguedia* bleed into, and become confused with, the personal lives of the film's protagonists. Fragments of characters' lives are revealed to the viewer through exchanges of people, letters, and telephone calls between Buenos Aires and Paris; flashbacks to lives left behind; and human rights organization meetings. Mannequins (often naked, broken, and dismembered) lurk among the *tanguedia* performers as they rehearse and appear regularly within the exiles' everyday lives.⁹ As Romina Miorelli notes, the mannequins contain multiple meanings: they index the absent presence of *desaparecidos*, visualize the corporeal displacement of the exiles themselves, and register the physical toll of attempting to maintain a sense of



FIGURE 10.1 *Exilio de Gardel: Tangos* (1985).

Source: Tercine, Cinesur.

cultural identity in exile.¹⁰ Furthermore, at critical points in the *tanguedia* rehearsal process, characters' physical bodies quite literally rupture, with breaks in the skin revealing insides made of broken mechanical springs and gears.¹¹ While the emphasis on fractured bodies bears particular weight in light of the political context of *Tangos*, in 1989 Solanas referred more broadly to his films as "pictorial bodies" (*cuerpos pictóricos*), pointing to a marked corporeal sensibility in his filmmaking.¹² Writing on the film, however, largely has not attended to the role of dance in constructing *Tangos*' "pictorial body" or to the ways in which the different performance genres at work contribute to its nuanced imagination of *rioplatense* cultural identity.

Toward a Third Performance

Solanas's turn to performance in *Tangos* as a site of cultural reclamation and political resistance formed part of a broader shift away from the political documentary work that marked the early portion of his career, when he first articulated his political mission as a filmmaker. In 1969, Solanas and fellow filmmaker Octavio Getino published the well-known essay, "Toward a Third Cinema: Notes and Experiences for the Development of a Liberation Cinema in the Third World." For the authors, Third Cinema names minoritarian filmmaking committed to social change whose content and filmic devices interrupt aesthetic, intellectual, and economic dependencies on the Global North.¹³ They define Third Cinema in opposition to First Cinema, or the Hollywood production model that promotes escapism and capitalist values, and Second Cinema, or European art cinema focused on self-expression.¹⁴ Solanas and Getino's manifesto grew out of their work with the Liberation Film Group, a movement that developed in conversation with the leftist militant movements that gained force in Argentina in the late 1960s. Solanas's 1968 *La hora de los hornos* (*The Hour of the Furnaces*)—his first feature-length film—sounded a call to revolutionary action as it explored Argentine political history in three parts over the course of over four hours.

While Solanas's earlier work equated the didactic representation of political histories with politically efficacious cinema, later works embraced fictional narratives, cultural mythologies, and performance practices as part of a new wave of Third Cinema.¹⁵ In addition to its central role in *Tangos*, Solanas's *Sur* (*South*, 1988) also takes up tango as part of its exploration of the life of a former political prisoner living in Buenos Aires following the return to democracy. While this move toward artistic expression prompted some critics to accuse Solanas of moving toward the Second Cinema he once rejected, in an interview with performance artist Coco Fusco he stated that his turn to performance themes and practices in *Tangos* was also a challenge to critics who dismissed his earlier work as agitprop lacking "artistic creativity."¹⁶ The film's multiple "esthetic levels," which combine song, storytelling, dance, and music, both provide a flexible structure that allow Solanas to tell a complex story and invite spectators to experience the film as a "synthesis of the arts."¹⁷

This turn to performance also aimed to extend Third Cinema's search for cinematic modes proper to the Global South that are not dependent on "closed models and genres" from the United States and Europe.¹⁸ In an interview featured in the film's publicity dossier, Solanas articulated his vision for the *tanguedia* as a kind of "third" performance:

One day I asked myself, "why can't I invent a synthesis-word that captures what I think if every day the North sends us turns, terms, and phrases that aren't ours?" The *tanguedia* is my personal vision of this history of love and melancholy...it is the sum-synthesis of a tango, plus a tragedy, plus a comedy. Some French critics have spoken of a Brechtian aesthetic: I would say that it is best to let the great Brecht rest and talk about something else. This something else is, in fact, the *tanguedia*, a genre with great predominance from musical performance as well as the *sainete rioplatense*.¹⁹

The *sainete* is an early twentieth-century popular theatrical genre that used stock characters to express social critique in Argentina and Uruguay. As Solanas notes in the same interview, the mixing of tragedy and comedy captured in the term *tanguedia* also invokes the related early twentieth-century *grotesco criollo* (creole grotesque) theatre tradition.²⁰ While *sainetes* often invoked humor through stock characters, *grotesco criollo* plays relied on tragicomedy to effect social critique.²¹ The genre is closely associated with the work of Argentine playwright Armando Discépolo who frequently collaborated with his brother, Enrique Santos Discépolo, a well-known tango lyricist. The *grotesco criollo* reemerged during the last military dictatorship as a way of engaging the incomprehensible violence of this period.²² By locating the *tanguedia* within a genealogy of popular Argentine music, dance, and theatre, Solanas makes a claim for the *tanguedia*'s cultural specificity as both uniquely suited to express the exile's experience and as a way of rejecting northern cultural imperialism. The *tanguedia*, as Solanas formulates it here, constitutes a Third Performance, a hybrid "something else" that rejects the imposition of both European cultural references (like Brecht) as well as commercialized Argentine, and more broadly Latin American, culture.

An early episode in the film explicitly thematizes the *tanguedia*'s attempt to circumvent the demand that Latin American cultural production both market difference and adhere to Global North aesthetic frameworks. Viewers first experience the *tanguedia* when Florence, a French actress, comes to a rehearsal and agrees to help find a production space and secure financing for the project. Pierre, a French *tanguedia* collaborator and human rights ally closely connected to the Argentine exile community in Paris, has invited her. Upon her introduction to the cast, she iterates a series of stereotypes around Argentine and Latin American culture. Florence jokingly suggests that she expected Gardel himself as the *tanguedia*'s creator, comments on what she perceives as the female lead's hypersexuality, and confuses Colombian Nobel Prize winner Gabriel García Márquez for an Argentine author. At a later full-length showing of the work, she exclaims

that the *tanguedia* is “magnificent” but difficult to understand. Other spectators join her in asserting that the performance is “too Argentine.”²³ Florence and the other spectators represent a northern gaze that both purports to “know” Latin America through its cultural production while also imposing its own aesthetic preferences and demands for translatability. Their reaction to the *tanguedia* highlights both its cultural specificity and the politics of European cultural imperialism that render it illegible in Paris.

Interpreted as a form of Third Performance, the *tanguedia* extends the political commitments of Solanas’s cinematic repertoire through a hybridized genre that prioritizes Argentine popular performance traditions, particularly tango. This move, however, ultimately invokes the complex past and present of this music and movement form, which has both national histories embedded in resistance as well as its own privileged place in Global North audiences’ desire for the exotic other. Furthermore, the prominence of contemporary dance in the telling of the exiles’ stories simultaneously supports and complicates Solanas’s conception of the *tanguedia* as a synthesis of Argentine performance history aimed at working against cultural imperialism.

On Tango(s)

Tangos opens (and closes) with a wide-angle shot of a couple dancing at a distance on a Paris bridge. Geneva Grand Theatre Ballet dancer Robert Thomas choreographed the duet and performed it with fellow company member Manon Hotte. As the couple moves across the bridge, they execute choreography that foreshadows the hybridity of the *tanguedia* itself. Their movement oscillates between tango-inflected partner work reminiscent of socially danced tango and movements more closely associated with theatrical tango and the virtuosic concert dance vocabularies that inform it. Socially danced tango is typically improvisational, and the leader generally prompts the steps of the follower through subtle physical cues. Theatrical tango performances, on the other hand, are conceived specifically for the concert stage—often for tourists or presentation abroad—and feature set choreographic sequences. In the film’s opening, glimpses of the socially danced tango are visible in moments of close embrace (inclined torsos pressed together), a tight kinesphere (minimal extension of limbs beyond base of support), and small, detailed footwork. The choreography, however, also includes virtuosic vocabularies associated with theatrical tango, including soaring lifts, deep back arches, arabesques, high leg extensions, and a vertical spine.²⁴

The camera soon cuts to lovers Mariana and Juan Dos (Juan Two), the musician co-writing and composing the *tanguedia*. Juan Uno (Juan One), Juan Dos’s co-author, has remained in Buenos Aires; a running narrative throughout the film is that the *tanguedia* cannot be completed until Juan Uno sends the ending. The search for endings—both for the *tanguedia* and for the exiles’ time in Paris—is an ongoing theme throughout the film. Mariana, the *tanguedia*’s lead actress, has spent the past eight years living in exile with her now twenty-year-old

daughter, María. Mariana's husband and María's father, a lawyer, is a *desaparecido*. María, like her mother, works to represent her experience of exile through performance throughout the film. She forms part of a group of young people creating a street performance that parallels the creation of the *tanguedia*.²⁵ As they come into view, Mariana and Juan Dos echo the distant couple on the bridge as they perform a more sensual tango that trades virtuosic flourishes for the intimacy of the close embrace. Their dance travels along the banks of the Seine and ends with suggested sex on a bench beneath a bridge. Mariana, dressed in a loose white shirt, deeply slit black skirt, fishnet tights, and black heels, summons the image of the *tanguera* (female tango dancer) femme fatale. Juan Dos is dressed in a long dark overcoat and fedora hat reminiscent of Gardel's favored dress.²⁶

The pairs of couples dancing on and underneath bridges—structures symbolic of physical and emotional journeys—establish tango as a modality for expressing and representing the experience of exile in the film. These opening scenes also manifest the complex history of the dance itself. A form of music and dance with diverse African and European components, tango first developed in Buenos Aires in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²⁷ Impoverished immigrants and migrants from rural regions were among the first to dance tango, which was initially practiced in the most marginal spaces in Buenos Aires. Tango emerged in the midst of intense modernization projects that, beginning in the post-independence period, worked to modernize Buenos Aires and attract immigrants and agricultural labor to rural areas. Nation-building texts like President Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's *Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism on the Argentine Plains* (1845) advocated for the migration of northern Europeans, populations that he considered desirable. Millions of immigrants indeed arrived during this period; however, the majority were southern European (largely Italian), poor, male, and concentrated in the urban capital. The upper classes racialized the new immigrant population and constructed them as “sexual inverts,” in part for their association with early tango culture.²⁸ In these early years, tango formed part of a national panic related to immigration, race, class, and gender as its steps and song lyrics captured experiences of exclusion, displacement, and loss.²⁹ For anthropologist Julie Taylor, early tango culture “protested modernization and the projects of capitalism” as it offered opportunities to express experiences of violence and exclusion.³⁰

The dancing bodies in these opening scenes recall this history as they move through a different context marked by loss and estrangement. Their invocation of tango as a way to express the experience of exile reflected broader uses of the form to process the violence of the last military dictatorship in dance halls and on concert dance stages throughout the late dictatorship and post-dictatorship period.³¹ As Taylor writes in her auto-ethnographic account of dancing tango in Buenos Aires during and after the last military dictatorship, “the tango has become a way to explore other experiences of exclusion deeply felt as part of Argentine realities. It is marked by absence, by rupture, by violence – it bears these spores.”³² Solanas's film in fact inspired the title of her book, *Paper Tangos*,

and frames from the film feature in the upper corners of each page to create a flipbook—a literal tango on paper. The frames animate the *milonga loca* (crazy milonga) from the *tanguedia*. The film's opening tangos along the banks of the Seine, then, both summon tango's early history of resistance to Eurocentric modernization projects and inscribe a new era of struggle into the form, illustrating tango's role in crafting a Third Performance that aims to articulate a *rioplatense* worldview and reject the dominance of Global North forms of expression.

At the same time, however, the theatrical virtuosity of the distant couple dancing on the bridge (the Geneva Grand Theatre Ballet dancers) as well as Mariana and Juan Dos's evocative dress (which summons well-worn stereotypes of Argentine culture) also echo the tango's own international travels—and value—in a global cultural economy that fetishizes difference.³³ In other words, *Tangos* flirts with movement vernaculars at once deeply embedded in expressing marginal experiences and thick with entanglements in the “political economy of passion.”³⁴ Circulating first through the upper-class salons of Paris and London in the early twentieth century and then across the globe, tango became not only a symbol of Argentine national identity but also a key referent in the global exotification and hyper-sexualization of Latin American dancing bodies. *Tangos*' premiere came on the heels of renewed national and international interest in the form in the 1980s, fomented by the premieres of Broadway-style theatrical productions, such as *Tango Argentino*, that premiered in Paris in 1983.³⁵ Even as it worked toward anti-imperial forms of performance and cinema, *Tangos* undoubtedly courted—and likely benefited from—the European desire for the “hot” Latin American other.³⁶

By positioning the *tanguedia* as a Third Performance aware of its own entanglements in uneven circuits of exchange, the film opens up a variety of interpretative possibilities that both challenge and ascribe to stereotypical imaginations of tango and Argentine culture. Echoing its name, the film indeed invokes a breadth of tangos as opposed to a singular, “authentic” one. These multiplicities arise not only through the alignment of tango with exile in a way that recalls its historical depth but also in the film's inclusion of contemporary genres within the *tanguedia*'s hybrid structure. While Solanas's own formulation of the *tanguedia* privileges forms comfortably identified as “Argentine” (tango, *sainete*, *grotesco criollo*), the inclusion of Nucleodanza's contemporary choreography to express traumatic experiences of political violence and exile refuses conceptions of Argentine dance as limited to tango and offers an expanded imagination of cultural identity and resistance.

Choreographing Violence

By the time the company began work on the film, Nucleodanza was well established on the Buenos Aires contemporary dance scene. Susana Tambutti and Margarita Bali, along with Ana Deutsch, formed the company in 1974 and developed their early work during the peak of state terror.³⁷ Nucleodanza emerged

three decades following the establishment of US-born Miriam Winslow's group in the mid-1940s, which dance historians recognize as the first modern dance company in Argentina.³⁸ While Winslow's company is identified as modern dance's national beginning, modernist choreographers had been presenting work and completing residencies in Buenos Aires since the early twentieth century.³⁹ Across the 1950s and 1960s, the modern dance community grew in dialogue with transnational developments in the form, and contemporary dance as a category emerged during the late twentieth century as a genre related to but distinct from the mid-century techniques associated with modern dance.⁴⁰ While tango continues to dominate both popular and scholarly conversations about Argentine dance, a growing body of scholarship has begun to explore histories of concert dance in Argentina and the Global South more broadly. This scholarship argues for a transnational approach to concert dance history that does not situate these histories as secondary but rather as integral to the global circuits of exchange that mobilize concert dance production.⁴¹ In this light, attention to Nucleodanza's participation in *Tangos* and to the role of contemporary dance-based choreography in the *tanguedia* complicates perceptions of tango as the only dance genre capable of representing *rioplatense* experiences. Incorporating contemporary dance into the *tanguedia*'s Third Performance framework both acknowledges its role in Argentine dance history and challenges any singular alignment with empire.

Viewers experience one of the most extended glimpses of contemporary dance's role in the *tanguedia* during Florence's rehearsal visit to determine if she can help the exiles produce the show; this is the same scene where she iterates a series of stereotypes about Latin American culture upon meeting the cast. Though set in Paris, the scene was shot in the Tienda San Miguel in Buenos Aires, an ornate building whose interior includes gilded balconies and richly detailed stained glass. This visual conflation of here (Paris) with there (Buenos Aires) comments both on the geographic displacement of exile as well as on a history of urban development projects that strove to craft Buenos Aires in Europe's image around the turn of the twentieth century.⁴²

As Florence and *tanguedia* collaborator Pierre watch from a balcony, the camera zooms in on the action below. The camera first captures a mannequin draped in streamers before cutting to Mariana and the troupe of *tanguedia* dancers, performed by members of Nucleodanza. A male dancer, seated at a table, swigs a drink and leans forward to kiss a mannequin seated across from him. Two female dancers—standing alongside a mannequin's pelvis and legs—perform rhythmic, robotic sways of the hips with one forearm draped over their eyes. The scene cuts to a group of dancers who partner each other in a tightly choreographed, highly stylized sequence reminiscent of tango. The scenes cut quickly between a couple dancing tango and the Nucleodanza dancers performing a contemporary sequence with suitcases; their movement vocabulary is based in fluid turns, leaps, and leg extensions. Male and female dancers somberly sweep past each other, pausing briefly in embraces that represent the farewells that mark exile.⁴³

Later glimpses of the *tanguedia* demonstrate a similarly hybrid movement palette. An arresting duet performed by Nucleodanza members Nora Codina and Guillermo Altamirano titled “There Were Two Exiles” briefly cites tango—the dancers pause occasionally in a close embrace, chests tightly pressed together—though the majority of the movement focuses on virtuosic lifts, leg extensions, and weight shifts rooted in contemporary dance. This poignant, romanticized duet follows an episode in the film in which Mariana, whose husband is a *desaparecido*, confronts dictatorship supporters visiting from Buenos Aires at a Parisian social event. They express anger over the name of the *tanguedia*—*The Exile of Gardel*—which Mariana announces when introducing the musicians performing at the event. Their heated exchange concludes with one of the visitors accusing Mariana of “subversion,” the dictatorship’s language for political dissent.⁴⁴

Following this violent argument, Codina’s mournful movement quality stands in for Mariana’s own interrupted mourning process and estrangement from her home. Mariana may never know how her husband died or where his remains rest, and she does not know when she will be able to return to Argentina. The duet articulates the intense vulnerability of exploring these themes. Codina folds into and out of her partner’s body as they execute a movement vocabulary that, unlike the tangos featured in the film, bears no ostensible cultural markings tied to *rioplatense* identity (save the few brief echoes of tango’s close embrace). Her back arches, leg and arm extensions, pointed toes, and pirouette turns compliment Altamirano’s vertical spine and stylized lifting. At one point, Codina’s thin, transparent tunic slips off of her body as she dances, leaving her nude save for a pair of briefs. The exposure of Codina’s body, juxtaposed with Altamirano’s clothed one, could be read as extending a cinematic tradition of objectifying female bodies on screen. However, the elusiveness of her body in motion, which continually slips just out of the camera’s view as she executes the dynamic and challenging choreography, comments instead on how the trauma of loss and exile strips the body bare.

Codina and Altamirano’s duet invites consideration around how the *tanguedia* processes not only its performers’ life experiences through a breadth of performance traditions but also of those involved in the production of the film itself. Codina, whose standout performance grounds the duet, lost her husband to forced disappearance and experienced clandestine detainment and torture herself. She shared with me in an interview that her performance of the duet not only drew on these experiences but also offered a space for healing through the collective reckoning with the dictatorship that the film represented.⁴⁵ The film’s use of movements associated with Western concert dance to express Mariana’s (and subsequently Codina’s) estrangement from her partner and nation expands the *tanguedia*’s dance repertoire beyond the tango’s easy association with *rioplatense* culture and history.

Additionally, Nucleodanza dancers perform the only explicit representation of forced disappearance in the film. In a *tanguedia* scene that comes nearly at the end of the film, dancers run terrified through the balconies of the Tienda

San Miguel, pursued by men wearing suits and dark sunglasses. Some carry mannequins while others toss armfuls of papers over the balcony as they run. The scene ends when the suit-wearing men capture one of the female dancers, and grasping her four limbs, swing her above their heads in a stylized lift. This scene closely follows a flashback to Mariana's husband's forced disappearance, which took place in broad daylight when he was pulled from his car at gunpoint as his terrified daughter María looked on from the passenger seat.⁴⁶ Bali and Codina's recollections of the process of filming the harrowing chase scene, however, point to the limits of performance as a modality for delving into painful pasts. Bali noted that, while she and Tambutti were tasked with choreographing the scene, Solanas intervened heavily, pushing the dancers to embody the intense fear of a pursuit with life and death at stake.⁴⁷ For Codina, the mandate to replicate the terror she personally experienced blurred the line between productive engagement with a traumatic event (as in her duet with Altamirano) to re-infliction of trauma, pointing to the need to attend to the ethics—and stakes—of representing violence.⁴⁸

In these scenes, the expressive possibilities of contemporary dance offer a structure for keeping the body whole as it represents the trauma of the past and the reality of the exilic present. Recall the proliferation of ruptured bodies in the film. As mentioned earlier, main *tanguedia* collaborators (including Juan Dos and Pierre) literally explode at critical junctures in the creation process. These characters physically erode over creative differences in how to tell their story and over struggles to find an ending for the performance, a metaphor for and visualization of the corporeal and psychic toll of exile. The broken bodies in these scenes literalize Sara Ahmed's description of the corporeal effects of exile: "the intrusion of an unexpected space into the body suggests that the experience of a new home involves an expansion and contraction of the skin."⁴⁹ While moments in the creation process result in a rupturing of the skin—a literal inability to move forward—the *tanguedia* suggests that contemporary dance vocabularies offer forms of motion capable of accommodating these expansions and contractions as they attempt to capture the ways that trauma is experienced and stored in the body. At the same time, however, Codina's off-screen experience filming the chase scene also exposes the point at which dance—and representation more broadly—constitutes a re-traumatization itself.

Ultimately, these moments from the *tanguedia* demonstrate how the film's movement vocabularies draw as much on contemporary dance as they rely on tango to express exile and loss. At first glance, contemporary dance's presence appears to run counter to Solanas's conception of the *tanguedia* as a Third Performance intended to resist legacies of cultural imperialism. For audiences familiar with Solanas's anti-imperial politics or invested in tango's exceptional relationship to Argentine identity, contemporary dance's inclusion begged the question of whether this form's relationship to Europe and the United States made it an appropriate vehicle for exploring dictatorship and exile. As Tamara Falicov points out in her examination of the film, some Argentine critics indeed "accused

Solanas of using tango music and dance that was not truly national but ‘sterilised, very European, not expressive of our tango.’⁵⁰ It is unclear whether these critics referred to the tango choreographies featured in the film or to Nucleodanza’s contributions that, while based in contemporary dance, do cite tango. They may have conflated both, pointing to audiences’ conceptions of movement authenticity as well as the limits of dance literacies more broadly.

However, it is also possible to read the inclusion of contemporary vocabularies in the *tanguedia* as a bold claiming of this form as part of Argentine dance history and equally viable resource for political expression. In this light, contemporary dance’s presence constitutes an anti-imperial gesture that decenters the form’s historical and ongoing attachment to the United States and Europe—particularly significant within the context of a film with international reach. It is not implausible that French audiences, for example, met the presence of contemporary dance with surprise at the same time that they fetishized the film’s focus on tango. Reading contemporary dance as consistent with the *tanguedia*’s Third Performance frame articulates with scholarship that both acknowledges concert dance’s relationship to the Global North and argues for a consideration of it as equally “Argentine” to the tango.⁵¹

One of the first films to take up the last military dictatorship as a central theme, *Tangos: El exilio de Gardel* proposes the act of making performance—and dancing, specifically—as a privileged mode for representing and processing the experience of political violence and exile. In Solanas’s conception, the *tanguedia* as a genre summons Argentine performance traditions (tango, *sainete*, and *grotesco criollo*, among others) rooted in marginal experiences able to both resist cultural imperialism and speak back to the last military dictatorship, itself understood as a legacy of empire. At the same time, the actual movement vocabularies featured in the film and employed to express exile and violence tell a broader story. While tango indeed summons a history of dancing displacement and resistance, it also inevitably intersects with the politics of the global political economy of passion. Nucleodanza’s contemporary choreography plays a key role in the *tanguedia* as well as in the film’s narrative development, offering a nuanced vision of cultural identity as it attempts to represent deeply traumatic experiences of violence and loss. Focused attention on the role of dance in the film, then, not only nuances a rich scholarly conversation on how the film represents violence and exile but also opens up complex questions about the demands of the global cultural economy (particularly relative to tango as a multivalent signifier) as well as to the politics of marking or unmarking contemporary dance’s relationship to Argentine cultural identity.

Notes

- 1 See David Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina: The Nationalist Movement, Its History and Its Impact* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), for a detailed historical analysis of this period in Argentina. For a performance studies–based analysis of the last military dictatorship’s disciplinary practices, see Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*:

- Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War"* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).
- 2 Pablo Yankelevich, "Exiles and the Argentine Diaspora: Issues and Problems," in *Exile and the Politics of Exclusion in the Americas*, eds. Luis Roniger, James N. Green, and Pablo Yankelevich (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2014), 198–213 and Marina Franco, "Exile as Rupture, Transformation and Learning Process: Argentineans in France and the Humanitarian Plight," in *Exile and the Politics of Exclusion in the Americas*, eds. Luis Roniger, James N. Green, and Pablo Yankelevich (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2014), 183.
 - 3 For a discussion of the intertwining national and neo-imperial forces that shaped the last military dictatorship, see Federico Finchelstein, *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War: Fascism, Populism, and Dictatorship in Twentieth Century Argentina* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).
 - 4 While *Tangos* features one Uruguayan character, the overwhelming focus of the film is on Argentine characters and culture, an emphasis reflected in this chapter.
 - 5 Coco Fusco, "The Tango of Esthetics & Politics: An Interview with Fernando Solanas." *Cinéaste* 16, no. 1/2 (1987/1988): 57.
 - 6 Marta Savigliano, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995).
 - 7 For a discussion of the tension around Argentine modern and/or contemporary dance as a category, see María Eugenia Cadús "La danza escénica durante el primer Peronismo: Formación y práctica de la danza y políticas del estado" (PhD dissertation, University of Buenos Aires, 2017), 29–30.
 - 8 Zuzana M. Pick, *The New Latin American Cinema: A Continental Project* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1993), 167–176; Louise Ciallella, "Between the Look (la Mirada) and the Escape (la fuga): The Imaging of Women in Solanas' *La hora de los hornos* and *Tangos/El exilio de Gardel*." *Feminist Media Studies* 3, no. 3 (2003): 301–314; Cécile François, "*Tangos, el exilio de Gardel* o la revolución estética de Fernando Solanas." *Revista de crítica literaria y de cultura* 13 (2005). Accessed June 1, 2018. www.lehman.edu/faculty/guinazu/ciberletras/v13/francois.htm; Christian Wehr, "Memoria cultural, experiencia histórica y perspectiva mesiánica en el cine de Fernando Solanas: *Tangos. El exilio de Gardel* (1985)." *Taller de Letras* 49 (2011): 219–230; and Romina Miorelli, "Materialising Exile in Solanas' *Tangos: El Exilio de Gardel*." *Modern Languages Open* (2016). Accessed June 1, 2018. www.modernlanguagesopen.org/article/10.3828/mlo.v0i0.90/.
 - 9 Fernando Solanas, *Tangos: el exilio de Gardel* (Ennetbaden: Trigon-Film, [1985] 2006), DVD.
 - 10 Miorelli, "Materialising Exile in Solanas' *Tangos: El Exilio de Gardel*."
 - 11 Solanas, *Tangos: el exilio de Gardel*.
 - 12 Quoted in Ciallella, "Between the Look (la Mirada) and the Escape (la fuga)," 302.
 - 13 Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, "Toward a Third Cinema: Notes and Experiences for the Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World," in *New Latin American Cinema, Volume One: Theory, Practice, and Transcontinental Articulations*, ed. Michael T. Martin (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, [1969] 1997), 37.
 - 14 Solanas and Getino, "Toward a Third Cinema," 42. While Solanas and Getino associated Second Cinema with an emphasis on individual artistic genius, multiple critics have pointed out how aspects of the Third Cinema movement often reaffirmed the primacy of the male film auteur. See Anthony R. Guneratne, "Introduction: Rethinking Third Cinema," in *Rethinking Third Cinema*, eds. Anthony R. Guneratne and Wimal Dissanayake (New York: Routledge, 2003), 16–17.
 - 15 Jorge Ruffinelli, "The Three Lives of Fernando Solanas." *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America* (Fall 2009): 42. <https://archive.revista.drclas.harvard.edu/pages/past-issues>

- 16 Fusco, "The Tango of Esthetics & Politics: An Interview with Fernando Solanas," 59.
- 17 Fusco, "The Tango of Esthetics & Politics: An Interview with Fernando Solanas," 57–58.
- 18 Fusco, "The Tango of Esthetics & Politics: An Interview with Fernando Solanas," 58.
- 19 Simón Mizrahi, "Entrevista con Fernando Ezequiel Solanas," in *Tangos: El exilio de Gardel* Publicity Dossier (1985), private collection of Nora Codina. Translations by author unless otherwise noted.

Un día me dije: ¿por qué no puedo inventar una palabra-síntesis que englobe lo que yo pienso, si desde el Norte nos envían a diario giros, términos y frases que no son nuestras? La tanguedia es mi visión personal sobre esta historia de amor y melancolía...es la suma-síntesis de un tango, más una tragedia, más una comedia. Algunos críticos franceses han hablado de una estética brechtiana: yo diría que es mejor dejar descansar al gran Brecht y hablar de otra cosa. Esa otra cosa es, justamente, la tanguedia, un género nuevo con gran preponderancia del espectáculo musical, y también del sainete rioplatense.

- 20 Mizrahi, "Entrevista con Fernando Ezequiel Solanas."
- 21 For more on both genres, see Manuel MacCarini, *Teatro de identidad popular: los géneros sainete rural, circo criollo y radioteatro argentino* (Buenos Aires: Inteatro, 2006) and Osvaldo Pellettieri, *El sainete y el grotesco criollo: del autor al actor* (Buenos Aires: Galerna, 2008).
- 22 Playwright Griselda Gambaro's work is closely associated with this turn. See Ana Elena Puga, "The Abstract Allegory of Griselda Gambaro's Stripped (*El Despojamiento*)." *Theatre Journal* 56, no. 3 (2004): 415–428.
- 23 Solanas, *Tangos: el exilio de Gardel*.
- 24 Solanas, *Tangos: el exilio de Gardel*.
- 25 Solanas, *Tangos: el exilio de Gardel*.
- 26 Solanas, *Tangos: el exilio de Gardel*.
- 27 For a succinct discussion of tango's historical development, see Simon Collier, "The Birth of the Tango," in *The Argentina Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, eds. Gabriela Nouzeilles and Graciela Montaldo (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 196. For deeper attention to tango's Africanist influences and relationship to Afro-Argentines, see Robert Farris Thompson, *Tango: The Art History of Love* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006).
- 28 Jorge Salessi, "Medics, Crooks and Tango Queens: The National Appropriation of a Gay Tango," in *Everynight Life: Culture and Dance in Latin/ o America*, eds. Celeste Fraser Delgado and José Esteban Muñoz, trans. Celeste Fraser Delgado (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 151.
- 29 Savigliano, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*, 30–31.
- 30 Julie Taylor, "Death Dressed as a Dancer: The Grotesque, Violence, and the Argentine Tango." *TDR: The Drama Review* 57, no. 3 (2013): 118.
- 31 Tango scholars have noted that socially danced tango became a way for Argentines at home and in exile to process the experience of political terror, see Savigliano, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*, 12; Julie Taylor, *Paper Tangos* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 61, 71–72; Taylor, "Death Dressed as a Dancer," 127; and Gustavo Varela, *Tango y política: Sexo, moral burguesa y revolución en Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ariel, 2006), 187–199. Furthermore, as I have demonstrated elsewhere, a range of contemporary dance works produced from the late 1980s through the early 2000s engaged tango themes and movement vocabularies as an embodied paradigm for approaching the trauma of political violence. See Victoria Fortuna, *Moving Otherwise: Dance, Violence, and Memory in Buenos Aires* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 109–137 and Victoria Fortuna, "Tango and Memory on the Contemporary Dance Stage," in *The Futures of Dance Studies*, eds. Susan Manning, Janice Ross, and Rebecca Schneider (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020),

- 321–341. Among these works is Nucleodanza co-director Susana Tambutti's 1985 *La puñalada* (*The Stab*), a piece that emerged in dialogue with her work choreographing for Tangos, Susana Tambutti, interview by author, Buenos Aires, July 22, 2011. For stand-alone analysis of this work, see Victoria Fortuna, "A Dance of Many Bodies: Moving Trauma in Susana Tambutti's *Lapuñalada*." *Performance Research* 16, no. 1 (2011): 43–51.
- 32 Taylor, *Paper Tangos*, 72.
- 33 In her analysis of these scenes, François reads the camera's descent from Thomas and Hotte dancing on the bridge to Mariana and Juan Dos dancing underneath it as representative of a search for and return to tango's "roots," embodied in the latter couple's version of the tango. See François, "*Tangos, el exilio de Gardel o la revolución estética de Fernando Solanas*."
- 34 Savigliano, Tango and the *Political Economy of Passion*, 1.
- 35 Savigliano, Tango and the *Political Economy of Passion*, 3 and Taylor, *Paper Tangos*, 43.
- 36 In fact, Vincent Canby's 1986 *New York Times* review of the film titled "Argentina 'Tango'" goes out of its way to explicitly distinguish the *tanguedia* (translated to English as the "Tango-Dy") from the *Tango Argentino* production.
- 37 Fortuna, *Moving Otherwise*, 82–83.
- 38 Susana Tambutti, "100 años de la danza en Buenos Aires." *Funámbulos: Revista bimestral de teatro y danza alternativos* 12, no. 3 (2000): 25 and Laura Falcoff, "La danza moderna y contemporánea," in *Historia general de la danza en la Argentina*, ed. Beatriz Durante (Buenos Aires: Fondo Nacional de las Artes, 2008), 231–321.
- 39 Fortuna, *Moving Otherwise*, 14.
- 40 Fortuna, *Moving Otherwise*, 10–12.
- 41 See Prarthana Purkayastha, *Indian Modern Dance, Feminism and Transnationalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Cadús, "La danza escénica durante el primer Peronismo"; Emily Wilcox, *Revolutionary Bodies: Chinese Dance and the Socialist Legacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019); and Fortuna, *Moving Otherwise*.
- 42 Adrián Gorelik, *Miradas sobre Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 2004), 74.
- 43 Solanas, *Tangos: el exilio de Gardel*.
- 44 Solanas, *Tangos: el exilio de Gardel*.
- 45 Nora Codina, interview by author, Buenos Aires, April 12, 2011. Concurrent with her work on *Tangos*, Codina also took up her experience of clandestine detention and the loss of her husband in her own choreographic works, including *Vivos* (*Alive*, 1984) and *Suicida* (*Suicide*, 1984).
- 46 Solanas, *Tangos: el exilio de Gardel*.
- 47 Margarita Bali, interview by author, Buenos Aires, May 5, 2011.
- 48 Codina, interview by author.
- 49 Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-coloniality* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 90.
- 50 Tamara Falicov, *The Cinematic Tango: Contemporary Argentine Film* (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), 56.
- 51 Cadús, "La danza escénica durante el primer Peronismo" and Fortuna, *Moving Otherwise*.