

THREE PERSPECTIVES FOR THE STUDY OF HYBRIDIZATION IN THE ITALIAN TANGO¹

Enrique Camera De Landa

INTRODUCTION

As a result of my research into the phenomenon of the acceptance of the Argentine tango in Italy at the beginning of the 20th century, I discovered that a local type of tango has developed all over the country. Today it's called tango *liscio*, which means "flat". The name *liscio* comprises four couple dances: waltz, polka, mazurka and tango. The tango *liscio* derives from the Rioplatense tango, that was imported from Paris into Italy just before the Great War². Nowadays the *liscio* is very different from the original tango; even if the presence of the Rioplatense genre has begun to increase again in the last fifteen years, it is a minority urban movement, whereas the *liscio* is very well known in provincial towns and villages all over the country.

In this paper I will present some ideas concerning hybridization, mainly in the Italian tango. There are two reasons for my choice: first, that I have researched this topic in depth, second, the processes of hybridization are more evident in it. The Rioplatense scene will be mentioned insofar as it helps to understand the questions considered.

L. HYBRIDIZATION AND IDENTITY IN THE TANGO

Let us consider an example of Italian tango: *Agata*, a satirical song written and composed by Pisano & Cioffi, in the version performed by Nino Taranto. I'd like to point out the contrast between the words of the performer in the introduction ("Adesso ascolteremo un vero tango argentino" "Now we'll heard a true Argentine tango") and the musical and literary traits of the piece, which clearly show the influence of Neapolitan theatrical songs (*canzonetta napoletana di cabaret*). The exotic connotations with which Italian artists and audiences imbued the tango – a tendency that would subject it repeatedly to new processes of hybridization- did not affect the persistence of a symbolic link between

tango and Argentine culture. Considering *Agata* is a satirical song, there may be some deliberate irony in these introductory words. Nevertheless, the fact is that during my fieldwork in Italy I often noticed that people identified the tango with Argentine culture in general. For example, Raoul Casadei (probably the most famous creator and performer of *liscio*, that is, Italian polka, waltz, mazurka and tango) told me that Argentine musicians are unsurpassed when it comes to producing tangos. He also said: “I sometimes enjoy trying to imitate Argentine tango styles, even if I can’t reach their level; for example, Piazzolla’s³”.

This identification of the tango with Argentine culture involves a parallel phenomenon in the mind of the majority of Italian people: the unconscious refusal to acknowledge the existence of a kind of tango created in Italy and consumed principally by Italians. This situation is well illustrated in the definition of tango provided by the *Dizionario Enciclopedico Universale della Musica e dei Musicisti*, published by UTET –perhaps the most prestigious music dictionary in Italy today–, which discusses Argentine and flamenco tango but, paradoxically, not tango *liscio*. This despite the fact that I have found more than a thousand tangos with Italian lyrics composed in Italy (some of them used in the past, others still performed today or created recently).

In the tango, hybridization is intimately related to the subject of identity. Both appear like *leitmotifs* in the history of this genre (or, if we adopt the expression proposed by the Cuban musicologist Danilo Orozco and apply it to the multitude of “genres” that contain the name tango, as a “generic complex”). One example of this “identity crisis”– that surround tango is the concern of many scholars and amateurs with identifying the title of the first tango (¿*Dame la lata?*, ¿*El queco?*, ¿*El negro Schicoba?*)⁴ and the date of its birth in the Rioplatense area (around 1870’s and 80’s). Just as revealing is the dismay of such scholars when they find the word “tango” on musical scores published before that period. From 1850’s on, this word appeared in *habaneras* written by zarzuela composers in Spain. Some Argentine composers wrote “habaneras-tango” and the “tango-habaneras”, which can be considered part of the transition process leading to the establishment of the Creole tango, as well as the umteen example of hybridization between similar genres⁵.

The same “identity crisis” occurred in the 1960’s, when some “purists” affirmed that Piazzolla’s music could not be considered as tango (“This is no tango!” was the criticism most often leveled at Piazzolla’s works and in latter periods at other composer’s music). This struggle for the definition of the “true tango” continues to be typical of the “orthodox” or traditionalist critics⁶.

During the international dissemination of the Rioplatense tango at the beginning of the twentieth century, the expression “true tango” was present in different languages. Uruguay was always ignored, but the expressions “Le vrai tango argentin”, “Il vero tango argentino”, “The true Argentine tango”, are to be found in the press and other written documents of the Northern Hemisphere, relating to a wider phenomenon: the transformation of tango when it is received by societies away from its place of birth, something to be considered as a danger by people looking for a single and unchangeable identity for this dance. In this context, it is important to note that the choreographic elements of the tango shocked western society, while its musical elements were almost forgotten due to the controversies caused by the arrival of the new Rioplatense tango)⁷.

The choreographic freedom and creativity that marked the beginning of the “original” Rioplatense tango, in addition to the speed with which it spread in the North, resulted in a situation of heterogeneity and confusion. Dance teachers reacted by organizing conferences and publishing handbooks in order to produce a standard code of steps and movements. One of the most zealously pursued objectives of the transformation of tango choreography was to make it more acceptable or decent. These two goals of homogeneity and moral acceptability produced a new style, that gave the users an “illusion of uniformity”, but did not avoid the subsequent production of local variants in countries where the tango continued to be danced. Only the English recreational dance schools –that today make up the International Dance Sport Federation– eventually established this “illusion of unicity” in tango choreography through the elaboration of a rigid system of standardized steps, movements, rules of combination and even of costume. The initial process of change was commented on in the European press:

“Perhaps it is not the original tango. What is danced in our country could be an edition.... how can I put it?...attenuated....restrained and corrected. There are too many appearance to be saved, too many susceptibilities to be avoided, to enable us to afford the luxury of an ‘authentic’ tango. Time–big a leveling agent –will perhaps permit the disappearance of so many prejudices and so many... moral concerns”⁸.

In Argentina, the perception of this change –which was the consequence of a choreographic hybridization produced by cross-cultural contact– led to the definition of a “original identity” for the tango as well as to its idealized condition of immutability, a quality that appealed to some poets:

“They have changed your face in Europe / they’ve referred to you in French «le tangó» / but these things have not changed you / and you are

still poor like me". From: *Tango, te cambiaron la pinta*, that means: *Tango, your appearance has been changed*)⁹.

Here the poet anticipates a central issue in the subsequent tango lyrics: gold, that shines in the center of the City (a metaphoric place created by the people born in the suburbs and taking root) causes corruption and a loss of identity. In other words, the hybridizing power that shines in the center of the World –which in that period, for the *porteños*– threatens to rob the inhabitants of the world's periphery, i. e. the suburbs of Buenos Aires, of their identity.

The poet defends himself against this danger by affirming the tango's impermeability to change, or, to put in other words, the impossibility of hybridization in tango. In view of the continuous and unending hybridization of tango, the persistence in this attitude shown by certain practitioners could be interpreted as a psychological defense in order to integrate the changes into "the nucleus" of the tango identity (with which they identify their own personality)¹⁰.

This tendency towards "identity preservation" that we find in the way different societies produce cultural artifacts, may be explained in part by the dialectics of stability and transformation. The Rioplatense tango originated in a process of hybridization that took place in a rapidly changing society, namely in that of Buenos Aires and Montevideo around the 1880's. If we apply the definition of hybridization (production of hybrid beings) and hybrid (everything that is a product of elements of different nature) to this case, we can explain hybridization on various levels:

–on the *ethnic* level: beginning with the discussion of the contribution of the African-South Americans to the tango, and considering that this dance-song genre was born in a society full of immigrants, the majority of which were Spanish and Italian, followed by middle-Europeans, Orientals, Slavs, Syrians, Lebanese, and so on;

–on the *sound* level: through the use of the street-barrel organ, flute, harp, strings, piano, guitar, brass band, bandoneon, etc.;

–on the *spatial* level: following a line of progressive social promotion through dancing on street corners, *patios de conventillos*¹¹, *peringundines*¹², *academias*¹³, "casitas", open air restaurants, theatres, dance-halls, and cabarets;

–on the *psychological level of characters* associated with the genre: the *cafishios*¹⁴, female owners of dance places, *compadritos* and other figures of Rioplatense mythology, who are joined, in every period, by "normal" individuals and groups.

This universe of interactions (that includes a special relationship between oral and written practice) is enriched and complicated when the tango took off in the Northern Hemisphere. Pelinski establishes two kinds

of tangos that developed after this process of internationalization: the *porteño* (that is territorialized), and the nomadic (devoted to cross-cultural interactions). This methodological strategy allows him to establish a continuum between “two different ideal types”.

The aspect of interaction may be included in the broader category of cross-cultural process, and perhaps it would be useful to try to define the relationships between this important subject –one that has a long history in ethnomusicological research¹⁵– and hybridization. But, beyond this issue, the debate between “stability” –sometimes confused with “tradition”– and “change” can also be observed in the Rioplatense area. In fact this conflict is so strong in the region that the whole history of the Rioplatense tango is narrated in terms of two opposing tendencies:

–the *traditionalist* (orthodox), initiated by Francisco Canaro

–The *avant-garde*, which that begins with the innovations of Roberto Firpo, and finds its paradigm in Julio De Caro¹⁶.

The orthodox school shows a tendency to articulate melodies with rhythmic simplicity; this is the music that is more suitable to popular dancing. The main representatives of this school are Francisco Lomuto, Juan D’Arienzo, Alfredo De Angelis, Mariano Mores, and many others. The *avant-garde* pays special attention to experimentation with the sound and with the formal structures of tango. Here we find Osvaldo Pugliese, Aníbal Troilo, Horacio Salgán, Juan Carlos Cobián, Osvaldo Fresedo, Astor Piazzolla, Dino Saluzzi, Gustavo Mederos, and Juan José Mosalini.

I propose to discuss the possibility of considering this dualism as a defense that pursues a kind of “equilibrium between opposing tendencies”. Perhaps this criterion could be helpful for explaining both the disruptive force of the conflict between hybridization and identity, and the responses it generates in the behavior of the social actors in the tango.

II. TRIPLE PERSPECTIVE ABOUT HYBRIDIZATION

Summarizing the argument to this point, we can say that:

A. The Rioplatense tango was born as a result of a multilevel hybridization process.

B. Its homologous genres also underwent various processes of hybridization. Similar processes occurred in the earlier, contemporary or subsequent stories of Cuban tango and Brazilian tango, among others¹⁷.

C. The cross-cultural diffusion of the tango that took place after the first consolidation process in the Rioplatense area, and its consequences from that moment to the present, can be better understood if we apply

the hybridization concept at three levels: of the object, as a process, and as a consideration.

1. HYBRIDIZATION IN THE OBJECT.

The analysis of the structural traits in the Italian tango reflects, as we'll see, the product of an interaction of the elements (suppression, substitution, transformation, etc.). We have a hybridization case when these elements are of a different nature or come from different sources.

2. HYBRIDIZATION AS A PROCESS

The hybridizing processes in the tango begin with the reception of this Rioplatense genre in Italy and go through consecutive phases, that imply transformations both to the structures -literary, musical, or choreographic- and social agents (individuals, groups, social classes and subcultures). These two kinds of transformations (that can be considered hybridization when the factors are of different nature), are related to changes in the socio-cultural contexts. Thus we can distinguish four stages in the history of the Italian tango:

2.1. RECEPTION

The first stage began around 1913 with the arrival of tango in Italy, with a new and daring choreography that was immediately accepted by the upper class. As a reflection of the socio-political situation of that time, the new genre caused different reactions and confrontations between the institutions, such as the church and the government. Newspaper articles of the period, dealing with tango are surprisingly exhaustive, sometimes even obsessive. Many aspects of the socio-political situation of the country are reflected in these articles about the new South-American dance, recently imported from Paris. In this way, tango becomes an excuse for some critics and commentaries that sometimes don't have almost any relation to it. These texts can be classified in the following aspects of hybridization:

2.1.1. Chronological aspect (the various stages in the tango's arrival including date of arrival, sources, characteristics of the source country, etc). The first mention of tango I found in Italian newspapers and magazines dates from 1913, and it becomes a recurring subject immediately afterwards. However, it had been danced in some European capitals some months earlier, Paris being the first city that encouraged the diffusion of tango, as

it has done already with other dances, such as the waltz and the polka. In this way, Parisian agencies also acted as mediators between the Rio de la Plata source and the Italian cities, incorporating the tango as another element of the hybridization process. Italians received tango from two different places (Argentina and Paris) and by two different routes: directly through the relationship created by the immigrants (small and horizontal) or through the prestigious influence of Paris news (big and vertical), and indirectly, through the previous reflections in aristocratic and politic London or Berlin media.

Directly: From Argentina (small & horizontal)
 From Paris (big & vertical)
 Indirectly: Paris - London & Berlin

Some writers evidenced a xenophobic prejudice associated with the South-American origin of tango. Argentina, however close to Italy through its ties to the emigrants, was very far from Europe and shared different cultural and social values (some of which were inherited from the aborigines). Consequently, in an Italian description of the tango present during a *velorio del angelito* –a ceremony that takes place after the death of a child in the Northern provinces of Argentina– this South-American folk tradition was taken out of context and its real meaning distorted.

The origin of tango was associated with exotic references, from a possible Asiatic origin, to a Cuban, or Spanish one. Some writers recalled that in Argentina the tango was a lower-class phenomenon, still rejected by the establishment (class hybridization).

2.1.2 Choreographic aspects. There are numerous references to the kinetic elements. We had already spoken about the fact that the socially disreputable aspects of tango were associated with its choreography, not its music. There are also references to the appearance of teachers and academies who participated in the hybridization process through their inevitable respective backgrounds and criteria.

2.1.3. Psychological aspect. Many texts recognize the powerful effect of the tango presented in Italian cities. This effect is manifested in the strong response that it provoked among the Italian bourgeoisie. The sources confirm that the tango's amazing success in the northern hemisphere directly affected Italian society. It also apparently affected those who had not yet the opportunity for any direct contact with the dance known as the tango and that indicates that the society was affected by something

other than a choreographical style or a new diversion. For the European it was treated as an exotic product of mysterious origin, carrying erotic connotations and coming from a marginal social environment. These attributes converted it into an object of curiosity that would be identified with the forbidden. A phenomenon whose sole mention was a transgression and whose continuation promised new pleasures.

Other articles and advertisements from the Italian press related the tango with a color -the “color tango” is mentioned in the descriptions of the dresses worn by upper-class women at high-society balls-, with a style and it was even used in shoe advertisements. Prestigious voices belonging to the world of art were also heard; like the voice of Gabriele D’Annunzio proclaiming the virtues of tango, Tommaso Filippo Marinetti wrote a pamphlet in a futurist style against the tango and *Parsifal* (don’t forget that we are in 1913 and this Richard Wagner’s Musical drama was being performed everywhere). Italy absorbed every bit of news regarding the tango boom from Paris. For example: the discourse pronounced by Jean Richepin in defence of the tango and his theatre comedy entitled “Le tango”; or “The “Aerial tango”, performed in inimitable style by the French pilot Pégoud with acrobatic aerial displays often associated with tango figures.

2.1.4. LOCAL ASPECTS.

Milan constitutes a good example to research the type of places in which the new dance was practised: Movies -which were not shown in salas exclusively dedicated for projections, but were used in theater rooms especially prepared for this event-. It is possible to find references about the choreographic practise of the tango during the intervals between productions. It also mentions the use of tangos together with other dances in the performances of plays, and also productions inspired by the Rioplatense dance (this is the case of the film *Tangomania*, whose production was announced in the Santa Runegunda theater).

Tango was also practiced in the great masquerades held during carnival period, in private dance halls and large clubs. In social circles and societies, dances and formal evening balls were held. The tango could also be found in parties offered in the private homes of the upper class or members of the aristocracy, with newspapers including the inexhaustible lists of personalities that attended the party. The new dance would also appear in fashion shops and its explicit mention and related publicity indicates that it served as a signal to attract an exclusive clientele. Sometimes the

instrumentalists and professional dancers that participated in these dance halls are mentioned.

2.1.5. LEGAL ASPECTS.

The tango was subject to official prohibitions and ecclesiastical censure. We can even find examples of these prohibitions in the Italian press which are motivated by the news arriving from other places, like Berlin, where the Emperor Wilhelm forbade the execution of the dance among his officials; Vienna, where the *Burgmeister* also condemned it, or Paris, where a statement issued by the Archbishop Cardinal Amette (followed by different kinds of reactions in French society, from the formal protests of Parisian dance teachers to anticlerical satirical poems) is reproduced in Italian newspapers.

It is in the ecclesiastical world where the principal condemnation of the tango was verified. It is certain that there were no explicit declarations by the Pope regarding these notions –the story of Pope X and the *furlana* was invented by Jean Carrère, correspondent for *Le Temps*– but there was also the curate of Rome raising his voice against the scandalous novelty. The pastoral letter delivered to the parishes of Rome is followed by a chain of condemnations produced daily by cardinals, archbishops, bishops and colleges of priests. Some of them use the tango theme to point arrows at the layman sector and the progressiveness of Italian society, and this fact is inscribed in the line of attacks that the Vatican sent to the same targets in the moment of tense relations between Church and State. In the Italian Senate a bill was debated about the priority of civil matrimony over religious matrimony and this fact originated daily virulent attacks from both parts, which were published in the press for public commentary.

As a result of such condemnation, some dance teachers began to “clean up” the choreography of the tango in order to make it “more decent”. This explains some of the hybridizing consequences we have already mentioned.

2.1.6. RELATIONAL ASPECTS.

Besides the *furlana* –which only became fashionable during a brief period of time– other dances are mentioned with relation to the tango on different occasions. The *trescone*, the *saltarello* and other dances of Italian folklore only appear in the quality of “cousins” or contemporaries of the *furlana*, not as dances in style in Italian cities during those months. On the other hand the Boston waltz, the one-step, the two-step and other dances are

frequently mentioned as fashionable dances, which constitutes reference material about the choreographic practice in Italian halls, and perhaps could have been secondary hybridizatory components in the definition of the local style or performance.

2.1.7. MUSICAL ASPECTS

The music is the great absent figure in the relative documentation at the time the tango was received by the European capitals. Italy does not constitute an exception to the rule. Only three examples of music are found as appendices in the book “Balli di oggi” by Francesco Giovannini. Although the first is well presented as “tango brasiliano”, the second as “tango argentino” and the third only “tango”, it is not possible to detect the musical differences in these pieces that would allow us to consider them as belonging to a different genres or as significant variants of a genre¹⁸.

Concerning this first period in the history of the Italian tango, I propose the following explanation: local musicians tried to imitate the musical traits of the Rioplatense style, even if they could not avoid minor differences originating from their background seeping into their pieces. In contrast, some dance teachers made changes to their choreography in order to make it “cleaner” and “more decent”. Thus, two kinds of hybridizing behavior can be distinguished: conscious or deliberate (dance teachers), and unconscious or unintentional (composers).

2.2. SONGS DURING FASCISM

During the First World War, some references –with photo included– about the soldiers dancing the tango in the trenches constitutes the exception to the general silence that fell over all mass-media in regard to the tango and all types of social diversion. Nevertheless, the existence of the prestigious Festival di Piedigrotta –a song competition that took place every year near Naples– would safeguard the continuity of the tango production in Italy (because some artists created and performed tangos in the Festival), and, simultaneously, would produce a hybridizing interaction between the two styles (Neapolitan and Rioplatense).

The second stage took place after the Great War, when the tango was revived with the appearance of the lyrics in the Italian genre (it must be remembered that tango-songs had been created in Argentina in 1917, when Carlos Gardel sang “Mi noche triste”). During these years, more evident differences with the Argentine tango started to arise. Italian tango

audiences seem to have preferred the dance from the beginning. When lyrics of the Argentine tango were imported in to Italy, they couldn't understand them and didn't try to translate them. Because of this, a local repertory of sung tangos appeared in the 30's, (which was a very rich time for Italian popular song). Here there is a paradox: from a circumstance of limitation -incomprehension, not translating- a fact of richness was derived (the production of a big repertory that, even having some relationship with the Rioplatense model, reach a consistent degree of autonomy).

The hybrids appear in this period from the beginning: in the film that created a model for the contemporary tango style -*Los cuatro jinetes del Apocalipsis* (1921)- Rodolfo Valentino, dressed with gaucho clothes, dances a tango in the international style. Local politics are also to be considered: Benito Mussolini liked tangos and applauded Eduardo Bianco's performance when this famous Argentine musician played with his tango group under the invitation of the King Humberto. As a consequence of that, the tango didn't receive the kind of prohibitions suffered by jazz; on the contrary, fascism encouraged the creation and diffusion of local tangos (which formed an extensive repertory).

The ambiguity -or contradiction- between the "awareness of property"¹⁹ and the sentiment of dependence on the Argentine led Italian creators of tangos to exaggerate the traits of style that allow the recognition (identification) of the genre. This kind of behaviour transformed some style unities -*museme*- into clichés. This is particularly evident in the musical formulae: the melodic succession of the dominant-descending V-IV-III scale degrees, that the Rioplatense musicians adopted for the tango²⁰, was converted into a predictable resource (mainly in particular points of the macro-structure) by Italian tango composers. The accentuation of the arsis in the perfect cadence at the end of the pieces, typical of Rioplatense tango, was used in dynamic, agog and timbre, and exaggerated to such a degree that the final chord of the tonic sometimes disappeared.

We should ask ourselves if these cases of exaggeration -which are motivated by the danger of losing the identity of a cultural product when it is imitated- could be included in the hybridization category. Here there is no combination of elements of a different nature or from different origins, but the manipulation of a single element. Perhaps the same phenomenon can be observed when a new element, not belonging to Rioplatense tango, is incorporated into the Italian style. This is the case of the motive break that occurs through the articulation of chords only in uneven pulses (occupying the whole pulse or making its binary division), which gives a sensation of rhythmic stammering and always appears at the

same point of the macro-structure (at the beginning of the final chorus).

In other cases the hybridization is obvious: for example, the descending melodic line (from VI to I) followed by a perfect cadence at the end of the theme of *Hernando's hide away* (which is neither Italian nor Rioplatense) has been taken by Italian composers as a cliché. Perhaps the similarity with the descending line IV-I followed by a lower auxiliary tone, which ends the first musical section of *La Cumparsita*, could have confounded them²¹.

Among the more evident hybridization that take place in the sound is the combination of instruments used in the Rioplatense area (the guitar, for example), or emblematic of the tango (the bandoneon register in the *fisarmonica*²²), with others taken from the local traditions (ornaments used in folk music), or belonging to contemporary jazz bands (trumpet with frequent use of mute, the saxophone)²³, or typical of that period (vibraphone, cu-cu). Some “neapolitan” tangos include mandolin and two voices singing in parallel thirds. Certain musical themes were used (“Amami *Alfredo*” from *La Triaviata*, for example), directly quoted or used as models, a vocal style stemming from the bel canto style, and a lot of stylistic *muséme* (for example: the semantic relationship between descending melodic contours and feelings of sadness, jealous torments and passionate renunciation)²⁴.

I have outlined some of the changes and hybridization produced in the musical structure. Another change involves the textual structure or the relationship between the musical and literary structure. In this repertory, the text is written over a previously composed melody, so it must match the melodic and rhythmic characteristics. Most Italian words finish on an unaccented syllable, but the final-accented melodic segments caused some adjustments to be made: the first and third person of the preterite and future tenses (*fuggí, sperai, rivedró, tornerai*), the final-accented or monosyllabic adverbs (*mai, più, così*), personal pronouns (*tu, me*), apocopes (*cuor, amor*), etc (Bandini 1996).

Among the “ideational” sources of hybridizations in Italian tango, exoticism is one of the strongest. Phrases like “La pampa infinita me chiede la vida e questa è per te” (the infinite pampa ask me for my life which is for you)²⁵ or “laggiù nell’Arizona/terra di sogni e di chimere/se una chitarra suona/cantano mille capinere”²⁶ (there in Arizona/land of dreams and chimeras/if a guitar plays/a thousand swallows sing), indicates that the flat environment of the Argentine pampa can be replaced by the Arizona desert; or the Hungarian *puszta*, where a “gitano dall’aria triste e appassionata” (a sad and passionate gipsy) plays a sweet serenade²⁷. And exoticism is what we find in the improbable characters like the Japanese

(and obviously abandoned) *Samaka Liù* or behind the frequent confusion between tango and Spanish culture.

Other evidence of hybridization includes (a) the way in which the thematic topics *-topoi-* of the Rioplatense tango are transformed to conform to the Italian ambience –something we could call “thematic hybridization”, (b) the process of “folklorization” or the permanence of some Italian songs in the collective memory of the people to the extreme of forgetting that they were originally tangos (as in the case of *Chitarra romana*), (c) the explicit political allusions (the “fascist” tangos like *Sul lago Tana* or *Il minatore*), as well as (d) the complex relationship with the local film industry.

2.3. *LISCIO*

The third stage is that of the tango *liscio*, which was born after the Second World War. It is an evolution of the previous local tango: some songs are still preserved, but a new homogeneous style begins to spread all over Italy.

The origin of the term *liscio* –that seems to have been applied in Italy after the Second World War– is not well-known, but it probably indicated some special way of dancing in pairs without exaggerating steps and movements²⁸, like it were used in the Rioplatense tangos after the beginning of the twentieth century²⁹.

The most widespread hybridizing trait in this repertory is the incorporation of the tango in a tradition developed in various Italian regions–especially in Romagna– from the middle of the nineteenth century: the “bailes de pareja enlazada” (Vega 1956), urban pair dances performed also in rural areas (almost exclusively waltz, polka and mazurka)³⁰.

In the fifties, the romagnolo³¹ musician Secondo Casadei began to incorporate tangos into his repertory. His nephew Raoul Casadei –a “living myth” of the popular music produced in Romagna– followed his initiative, mainly after the new growth of the *liscio* fashion that took place at the beginning of the seventies. The “Casadei phenomenon” grew so much during those years, that many other musicians decided to adopt his prestigious name for their ensemble, which gave raise to dance orchestras: Giancarlo Casadei, Celestino Casadei, Claudio Casadei, and Ezio Casadei, among others) (Manfredi 1981: 29). From that moment on, the leading musical instruments of the *liscio* were the saxophone and the *fisarmonica*, always accompanied by the inevitable rhythm of the slide drum, with the frequent inclusion of the electric bass and the acoustic or electric guitar. Sometimes, other instruments are added to this organological base (which is very different to the standard ensemble used in the previous stage).

Following his commercial instincts, Raoul renewed every aspect of *liscio*:

-He included new instruments in his ensemble, like the twelve-string guitar³².

-He composed new pieces (sometimes formal schemes that were different to the usual ones), and incorporated attractive young musicians into his orchestra.

-He created a cooperative and the club *Musica solare*, with a growing number of local branches all over the country.

-He designed and built a big complex -the *Ca del liscio* - that contained enormous ballrooms.

-He founded a musical company -*Simpatia Edizioni Musicali*- exclusively devoted to the publication and distribution of his works (sound and video records, scores, floppy disks).

-He created a radio program -*Navegando col re del ballo italiano*- that was transmitted in more than forty local broadcasting stations.

Today, Raoul continues to increase his activities (related to an agency for contracting shows and organizing musical weekends, travel holidays, and competitions, and to a floating discotheque...). Even if he has tried to renovate the genre creating the “solar tango”, he recognizes that his maestro was Castellina, the musician who created a model for the Italian tango. Castellina -whose real name is Roberto Girardi -represents a double stylistic bridge: one between the ambit of traditional music and *liscio*³³, and another between the historical stages³⁴. After having operated these two kinds of hybridization -ethnic and historical-, Castellina converted the sound that he obtained from his accordion into the defining trait of his performance style; and this is what constituted a model for a generation of Italian tango interpreters. Today, this traditional Italian tango style is one of the most appreciated characteristics of this orchestra³⁵.

Even though the world of *liscio* is occupied by hundreds of interpreters, the comparison between these two emblematic musicians is sufficient for us to observe the existence of two branches of hybridization-or two “speeds” of hybridization-in the *tango liscio*: Castellina stands for the consciousness of a local tango tradition (forgotten hybridization), whereas Casadei leads the continuous renovation trend that sought to adapt to the changing tastes of young people (renewed hybridization). Castellina’s style belongs to a hybridization process that occurred in the past, while Casadei promotes every kind of hybridization in the present.

Castellina: forgotten hybridization (in the past, hidden).

Casadei: renewed hybridization (in the present, obvious).

In Castellina’s style the contradiction between an awareness of

ownership (of local tango) and the simultaneous negation of it is present once again, because performances of the genre are often announced with the typical: “and now, an Argentine tango!”.

In the Italian song called “Un tango italiano”³⁶, we have the exception to the rule of contradiction mentioned above: the text is an explicit declaration of identity and identification. Hearing an Italian tango emitted by a jukebox in a foreign country where she lives, the singer –who has been away from her homeland for a long time– recalls her former Italian lover and decides to return to him. The Italian tango melody, that comes to her “between strange sounds of jazz”, represents a sign of identity from her past. By identifying with this “home” tango that belongs to her past enculturation process, she finds the way back to her lover, who will no longer be a stranger to her.

2.4. POSTMODERN TANGO IN ITALY

The fourth stage in the history of the Italian tango began during the 1980's and is characterized by a continuous –and sometimes strong– hybridization between different kinds of tango styles. The massive emigration of Argentines during the dictatorship of the 1970's, the relationship between cinema and tango, and some very successful shows such as *Tango argentino*, can be considered as some of the facts that produced new approaches to the “original area” of this generic complex. Today in Italy there is a clear coexistence between various types of tango (Rioplatense, *liscio*, Italian song created between the two world wars, standard)³⁷; but there are similarities between these styles, caused by social agents that are moved by creative curiosity or commercial interest (such as singer-songwriters, jazz musicians, directives and teachers of the sporting dance clubs). As a result of this, hybridization (viewed as an activity) increases. Old and new sounds can be appreciated living together, folk melodies set to tango rhythms, the use of improvisational techniques in long and asymmetric forms derived from jazz styles, and a strong tendency to integrate and mix different kinds of musical elements.³⁸ Are these post-modern tangos?³⁹

3. HYBRIDIZATION AS A CONSIDERATION

The history of Italian tango shows that hybridization can be studied through the observation of the interaction processes between different kind of traits. This is not to say that these elements are closed, self-sufficient, stables or homogeneous. On the contrary, every component of an hybridizing

process can also be seen as an hybrid. Every cultural entity can be analyzed as a trait belonging to a cultural ambit in a particular conjunction of space and time (and this can be done both from outside that culture or from inside it). But the same cultural phenomenon can be considered as a component participating in one or more processes of interaction, that involve both the objects and the people. The Italian tango, for example, can be seen both as a genre belonging to the Italian culture (from outside: we, non Italians, observing it; from inside: Italians composing, performing, hearing or dancing the song called “Tango italiano”); and as a component of interaction processes (in the objects: the relationships between an Italian tango and its Rioplatense model; in the people: the behavior and meanings related to tango in Italy).

In this sense, a melody of tango incorporated in an electronic composition is so hybrid as the tango danced by a couple in a Italian *liscio*-hall. We have historical evidence of this in both cases: in the first case, the interaction between the musical structures, and in the second, the behavior of the people.

The semantic changes (that occurs in every individual mind as a normal part of human perception according to each individual’s particular circumstances) are phenomena to be considered in the study of hybridization: The same phenomena can be observed in the semantic explications shared by groups of individuals. An example of this social process can be observed in the opinions of some personalities living in the North Hemysphere about the new arrived tango, published by the magazine *La Nuova Antologia* the 16 January 1914. Their responses cover a wide range of actitudes: rejection, enthusiasm, acceptance and indifference¹²⁶. Although they exhibits a considerable degree of irony, the opinions about tango are related with the considerations, that is, the way everyone looks-or consider-both the new cultural object-the dance-and the growing fashion related with it use.

The objects and processes related to the Italian tango can be considered in different ways: hybridization being only one of them. Applying this particular kind of consideration to a performance of Italian tango, we can observe it as an hybrid *object*, and try to enumerate the traits that confirms this. Or, we can study the hybridizing *processes* that have led to this consequence. But if we forget the hybridization question and we take into account other tales or possibilities, complementary aspects of the phenomenon under observation will emerge. I quote here only one, related with the significance and meanings involved in the experience of the participants. One of the performers-the dancer Antonello Lanzi, leader of a dance group-wrote to me a letter trying to express his feelings about

the tango danced by him and his partner. Let me quote here some paragraphs:

“*Oh, my beautiful Valentino, I've dreamed about dying with you...*, sings a splendid voice with deep performing feeling; and we see on the stage a man and a woman bringing to life the story of the song. They move with sensuality, underling with original figures the music played by the orchestra with mastery an passion”. (Personal communication).

The letter reflects Antonello's views of tango as a “danza which figures both give deep feelings, and offer the oportunity to improvise, to communicate, and -above all- for the couple to dialogue through dance” until this ends “with a perfect *casché*”, causing the thunderous applause of the public that “awake from a hypnotic trance”. Antonello is even more explicit when he writes that “every musical piece has its history, its dialogue, and its language; every couple dance the tango with a degree of skill that is related to their personality and the story they are living”. (Personal communication).

Pelinski affirms that “within the objective possibilities related with the musical structures and guided by the vital experience of an audience that is located far from the Rioplatense culture, the nomadic tango can acquire meanings hardly contemplated by the *tango porteño*” (Pelinski 2000: 67). Antonello's testimony offer us an evidence of the complementary situation: a kind of tango that is different from the Rioplatense one, can produce sentiments and sensations that are similar the those originated by the contact of the “original” tango.

CONCLUSION (SOME QUESTIONS AND ONE MORE EXAMPLE)

I would like to conclude by raising the possibility that the same materials used by scholars to study the Italian tango would allow both to take the hybridization into account and at the same time to ignore it. It might be illuminating to ask how much our knowledge of this tango history would change if we include the “perspective of hybridization” in our research. Today there may be some post-modern tangos in which the presence of the stylistic hybridization principles is even stronger. How often do creators and performers take pleasure in their explicit hybridizing action? Is the value of hybridization growing today?

Final example: During a concert gave at the University of Valladolid on August 30th, 2001, by *Aires tango* -the Italian complex which style is based on the fusion or tango and jazz music-, the leader of the group, Javier Giroto, played some isolated sounds in a *siku* (the andean South-American

pan flute), followed by a musical variation over a traditional melody from the North-Western area of Argentina. This use of a folk instrument was an exception in that performance and could be considered an sporadic or isolated hybridization within a context of an explicit hybrid musical style, i. e., a style constructed over a continuous or constitutive hybridization¹²⁷. The same hybridizing attitude that generates a musical style which identity is based on the fusion, temporality produces moments of increased –and even more explicit– hybridization. And these episodes confirm hybridization as a form of identifying behavior for the musical group.

Using a scale of various degrees of hybridization, we could have measured, at that moment, an episode of, say, “the third degree” within the context of a “second degree” style.

Final question: Does the tango possess a specific trait that makes it specially prone to hybridization?

The first possible answer refers to the compatibility of its musical system with others: Following this interpretation, the tango –that has always been created by using the grammatical elements and the syntactical rules of the Western tonal system– would facilitate hybridizatory interaction with other musics belonging to the same system, more than other based on different systems. The tritonic-system based *baguala* and the pentatonic *huayno* of the South American Andean area, would have less potential for hybridization⁴². Despite this, I have analysed a wide range of hybridatory possibilities between the tonal system and both the tritonic (in the *bagualas*⁴³) and the pentatonic (in the *huaynos*⁴⁴).

The second possible answer refers to the capacity of interpolation: This is an area that depends on socio-cultural and historical circumstances. During the 1990's, some Argentine rock composers began to incorporate musical traits from folk and tango, but this tendency could have been motivated by the need to overcome a creative crisis (or by the ability of the musicians) instead of being the consequence of some specific traits of the rock musical system itself. A large dose of caution and hability is necessary for travelling between the analysis of both the objects and the behaviors that produce them, in order to interpret correctly the hybridization process.

Another continuous journey along which the researcher needs to take care, is the methodological movement between the three perspectives of the hybridization phenomenon: the observation of the hybrid object reveals the existence of the hybridizing processes and imply an explicit behavior in considering them. At the same time, the process don't exist

independently of the object (people, songs, etc.). Finally, without consideration there is no consciousness of hybridization (that in to say: hybridization simply doesn't exist).

NOTES

1. This text is a revised version of the article: "Hybridization in the Tango. Objects, Process, and Considerations", which has been published in Gerhard Steingress (ed.) 2002, *Songs of the Minotaur. Hybridity and Popular Music in the Era of Globalization*, Münster/Hamburg/London, LitVerlag, pp. 83-112.
2. Rio de la Plata is the region between Uruguay and Argentina in which the tango was born.
3. The Argentine composer Astor Piazzola is well-known everywhere because of his links with tango music.
4. The possibility that *El Queco* could have been the first rioplatense tango or an andalusian one is discussed.. *El Negro Schicoba* could be a piece derived from the *candombe* (Salas 1986).
5. "Al menos hasta que se descubra documentación todavía inédita, el tema de los primeros tangos se mueve en el plano de las aproximaciones o sencillamente de lo conjetural" (Salas 1986: 52)
6. Pablo Vila (1995) has dealt with the relationship between tango and identity from other point of view: the function played by this genre in the configuration of the ethnic identities of the immigrants during the twentieth century in Argentina (Europeans in the first stage, Latin Americans, in the second).
7. The European choreography of tango had its own characteristics from the beginning, differing from the Rioplatense. There are reports of a series of movements made by the dancers with rigid precision, something which was really far from the improvisatory principles followed by the Rioplatense dancers of tango during the initial period of its history. We should note that in Italy -as in other European countries- Argentine teachers were more prestigious than the locals. Nevertheless, we must take into account that this European version was born in Paris: "Ma il tango che si balla ora in Europa, confrontato con quello che dalle Antille passò in Argentina, è quasi irriconoscibile. Il tango riveduto e corretto ad uso della buona società è stato inventato a Parigi" (from an Italian newspaper).
8. *Il Teatro Illustrato*, anno IX, N° XXII, 15-30 Novembre 1913
9. ("Te han cambiado la cara allá en Europa / te han llamado en francés «le tangó»/pero estas cosas no te han cambiado / y eres todavía pobre como yo" *Tango, te cambiaron la pinta*).
10. In Psychology the integration is seen as a mechanism of defence that allows the personality to incorporate the changes without losing its identity nucleus.
11. Buildings inhabited by immigrants living in poor conditions.
12. Public places for dancing and drinking..
13. Places frequented only by men, in which where possible to pay for dancing with women.

14. Pimps.
15. See the Wachman, Waterman, Ortiz, Nettle and Kartomi contributions; and the application to the nomadic tango by Pelinski (2000).
16. About this stylistic dichotomy, see Ferrer 1960.
17. On this issue see Ortiz & Nuñez 1999.
18. For a further description of these tangos see Cámara 1995, 2000.
19. The consciousness about the existence of an Italian tango.
20. This formula, typical counterpoint to the ascendent line from V to I had been used by romantic composers and was very frequent in different popular genres during the thirties (we find it, for example, at the end of the blues scheme).
21. In fact, Gino Stefani (1992: 168) makes this mistake quoting the Italian cliché as the *La Cumparsita* typical ending formula.
22. The absence of bandoneonists in Italy was compensated by the use of the bandoneon register in the keyboard accordion, that in Italy is called *fisarmonica*.
23. The sound of the jazz bands, forbidden in Italy during Mussolini's rule, appears in the tango that fascism approved.
24. A more detailed description of the museemes and semantic association in the Italian tango from the Mussolini period see Cámara 1999b.
25. *Munchita*.
26. *Tango delle capinere*.
27. *Violino tzigano*.
28. "...the word *liscio* is not referred to the music, but it indicates the way of dancing it, that requires a continuous *lisciare* [smooth, drag] of the feet" (Chiesa, w/d: 75).
29. "[In the rioplatense towns] the tango coreography suffer a double adjustment. In one hand, it is simplified by the way of dancing "*liso*", that means: without figures." Novatti & Cuello 1980: 33.
30. The *galop*, the *cuadrilla* and the *manfrina* were also danced.
31. Born in the Italian region of Romagna.
32. "I've created the solar *liscio* solar and, consequently, the solar tango. The reason of this term is in its sound. The sounds of violin and clarinet, typical of the traditional tango, together with the accordion, evoke an open air space where mortadela is eaten. Instead of this, if I include the Mediterranean twelve-string guitar and the percussion, I give an idea of holidays, of the sea, Greece, ships, Sicily, and I encourage tourism and international openness..." (Raoul Casadei, personal communication).
33. Before he began to compose and perform music to be danced in pairs, he used to play the *organetto*, a bitonic accordion with eight basses and twenty-one melodic stops originating in rural areas.
34. He participated in the multitudinous concerts organized by Mussolini in Rome, playing a *fisarmonica* (that was a gift from the fascist movement).
35. Even if he no longer plays anymore, the young accordionist of his group exhibits the performing style Castellina transmitted to him.
36. Authors: Palesi - Beretta - Malgoni.

37. During the third stage, the standard dances, based on the rigid codes developed in England by the Arthur Murray School, arrived in Italy, wherer they were a tremendous success everywhere. Italian sport dancers have reached important places in the international ranking and some of them have been awarded first prizes and became famous teachers in their own right.
38. Recently, the ethnomusicologist Tim Rice used an example of rioplatense tango performed in an additive Bulgarian rhythm to illustrate a paper about “The Attenuation of Bulgarian Nationalism Through Medited Music and Dance Performances” in the 36th World Conference of the ICTM (Río de Janeiro, july 4-11 2001).
39. Gerardo Gandini calls “postangos” his performances of well-known Rioplatense tangos.
40. Danza acrobatica, senza grazia , di moda, volgare, l’espressione materiale del tempo, il risultato di un’esuberanza indisciplinata, sfrenata, focosamente giovanile, decente, dependiente de quien lo baile, resultado naturale delle tendenze della vita moderna, comparable a las sombras del ping-pong, salvaje, atea, demoníaca, reprobable, aburrido, de efectos extraordinarios, disonesto, casto (purchè lo si danzi con uno spagnuolo o con un argentino), relajante, antipático, melancólico, contrario a la sicurezza pubblica” (from an Italian newspaper).
41. Even if most of the audience didn’t recognized the folk melody, the use of a *siku* was an evident change. We could say that it was an isolated covert and overt act of hybridization (the hidden melody was played on a visible instrument).
42. Remember Waterman’s theory of affinity, which he uses for proposing that similarities between both southern Sahara’s African and European musical systems facilitated the musical acculturation in the Americas (Waterman, 1952).
43. See Cámara “The Baguala” (forthcoming).
44. Cámara 1995.

WORKS CITED

- Bandini, F. 1996, “Una lingua poetica di consumo”. In Coveri, L (ed.), *Parole in musica. Lingua e poesia nella canzone d’autore italiana*, Novara, Interlinea, pp. 27-35.
- Cámara, Enrique 1995, “Procesos de aculturación relacionados con formas musicales en el carnaval andino argentino de influencia boliviana”, Granada, *Cuadernos de Arte de la Universidad* 26: 297-314.
- , 1996a, “Baguala y proyección folklórica”. In Jordi Raventós (ed.) *Actas del I Congreso de la Sociedad Ibérica de Etnomusicología (Barcelona, 9-10 de marzo de 1995)*, Barcelona, La ma de guido, pp. 109-143.
- , 1996b, “Recepción del tango en Italia”, *TRANS (Revista Transcultural de Música)* 2 (noviembre/diciembre 1996), <http://www.sibetrans.es/trans/>
- , 1998, “Rasgos musicales de los tangos italianos de entreguerras”.

- In Luis Costa (ed.), *Actas del II Congreso de la Sociedad Ibérica de Etnomusicología (Valladolid, 22-24 de marzo de 1996)*, Santiago de Compostela, Sociedad Ibérica de Etnomusicología, pp. 179-190.
- , 1999a, “Algunas consideraciones sobre el estudio del tango italiano”. In Carlos Sánchez Equiza (ed.), *Actas del IV Congreso de la Sociedad Ibérica de Etnomusicología, Granada, 9 al 12 de julio de 1998*, s/ l, Sociedad Ibérica de Etnomusicología, pp. 313-335.
- , 1999b, *Passione Argentina: tanghi italiani degli anni Trenta*, Roma, Discoteca di Stato.
- , 2000(1995), “Escándalos y condenas: el tango llega a Italia”. In Pelinski, Ramón (ed.), *El tango nómada, Ensayos sobre la diáspora del tango*, Buenos Aires, Corregidor, pp. 163-250).
- , In press, “The Baguala: A syncretic vocal expression of Indians, mestizos, and criollos” in Latin American Music”. In Kuss, Malena (ed.), *An encyclopedic history of musics from South America, Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean*, New York and Farmington Hills, Michigan: Schirmer Books-The Gale Group, 2 volumes.
- Chiesa, Riccardo w/d., “Secondo Casadei: dagli inizi al 1940”. In Turci, Mario (ed.), *Il ballo liscio*, Museo degli usi e costumi della gente di Romagna, Quaderno 3, Maggioli editore, pp. 67-77
- Ferrer, Horacio 1960, *El tango, su historia y evolución*, Buenos Aires, Peña Lillo.
- Ortiz Nuevo, José Luis & Núñez, Faustino 1999, *La rabia del placer. El nacimiento cubano del tango y su desembarco en España (1823-1923)*, Sevilla: Diputación de Sevilla.
- Manfredi 1981, *Raoul Casadei: Il liscio*, Roma, Lato Side.
- Novatti, Jorge & Cuello, Inés 1980, “Aspectos histórico-musicales”. In Novatti, Jorge (ed.) *Antología del tango rioplatense*, Buenos Aires, Instituto Nacional de Musicología, pp 1-43.
- Pelinski, Ramón (ed.) 2000 (1995), *El tango nómada, Ensayos sobre la diáspora del tango*, Buenos Aires, Corregidor.
- Salas, Horacio 1986, *El tango*, Buenos Aires, Planeta.
- Stefani, Gino 1992, *La melodía*, Milano, Bompiani.
- Vega, Carlos 1956, *El origen de las danzas folklóricas*, Buenos Aires, Ricordi.
- Vila, Pablo 2000 (1995), “El tango y las identidades étnicas en Argentina”. In Pelinski, Ramón (ed.), *El tango nómada, Ensayos sobre la diáspora del tango*, Buenos Aires, Corregidor.
- Waterman, Richard Alan 1952, “African influence on the music of the Americas”, in *Acculturation in the Americas*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, pp 207-218. [in: Garland Anthology vol 3, *Music as culture*).