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## **Salsa Magic: an Exploratory Netnographic Analysis of the Salsa Experience**

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This is a paper about the promise of salsa dancing as unfolding social drama. We argue that a turn to dance offers much potential to reinvigorate ways of theorizing consumer culture, necessitating we take seriously talk around such experiences. Based on a netnographic analysis, which is inspired by the informative work of Kozinets (1997, 1998, 2001). We reveal how dance is a reflexive form of knowledge enacted in and through our bodies, where the settled and fixed becomes disturbed. Dance then makes possible shared passions, exhilarations and desires lacking from people's everyday lives granting them a space for expression.

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# Salsa Magic: An Exploratory Netnographic Analysis of the Salsa Experience

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*“The anticipation of the night, Your skin prickling with electricity thinking about going dancing... The feeling in your stomach as you enter the dancehall and look around. The first beat of the drum reverberating around your soul. The automatic smile when you see people enjoying themselves. The wonder and amazement at all the bodies moving so well and so naturally. Being kissed by the magic in the air from all the chemistry, charisma and the good energy flowing all around. The nervousness of my first dance, yet the beautiful realisation that my body and soul remembers what to do and shall guide me through it. The ‘thank God’ feeling that my body and mind can take me to that beautiful place of euphoria again that comes from dancing” (Male, Salsa Dancer, Australia).*

## INTRODUCTION

This is a paper about the promise of dance as unfolding social drama. Such promise has clearly been recognised in attempts to represent dance cinematically: from Powell and Pressburger’s *The Red Shoes*, to the classic *Singin in the Rain*; from Fred Astaire in *Shall We Dance* (or even Richard Gere in the 2005 remake) to the disco inferno of Tony Manero swinging his butt to recognition in *Saturday Night Fever*. Representations of dance as re-enchanting and reinvigorating have always remained to the fore within cinematic discourses. This rich potential has also been recognised in TV advertisements, with the Apple Ipod ‘Silhouettes’ campaign clearly feeding off such liberatory experiences. In this paper we foreground one such dance technique, that of Salsa, to reveal and explore the appeal of the experiences provided by this dance form. We suggest that the scene has grown significantly over the last ten years from its roots in the Caribbean (mainly Puerto Rico and Cuba) and initial transfer to New York and Los Angeles to a phenomenon sweeping the world. As a global export (Madrid 2006) the appeal of Salsa appears much more than this culturally, especially when we turn to the significant rise in popularity achieved by this dance form. Here we can draw attention to the continuing emergence of a gamut of Salsa Congresses, Latin Dance clubs and classes springing up across the globe in countries as diverse as the UK (Evening Chronicle 1998; Sunday Times 1999), Singapore (Singapore Times 2004), Ghana (Africa News 2006), the US (Miami New Times 2000; New York Times 2007) and Canada (Montreal Gazette 2006; Vancouver Sun 2005); to even the success of the Broadway musical *In the Heights* and Jennifer Lopez starring in *El Cantante*, which depicts the life of 1970s Salsa songster Hector Lavoe. Or even *Dirty Dancing 2* subtitled *Havana Nights*, where formal ballroom dancing in the form of Katey meets the steamy passionate embrace of Javier in the Cuban dance halls of the 1950s.

## DANCE WITHIN CONSUMER RESEARCH

Within consumer research what strikes the authors as somewhat surprising is the lack of studies which have taken dance seriously, the absence of studies made more explicit by the value of those exceptions (Wort and Pettigrew 2003; Goulding et al 2002; Goulding and Shankar 2004). For us this absence is troubling, as we explore how as a research context a turn to dance forms, cultures and representations would appear to offer us much potential to reinvigorate our own understanding of consumer cultures (see Featherstone 1991) and ways of theorizing consumer culture. A dance turn within consumer research necessitates we take seriously

notions of (tribal) aesthetics (Maffesoli 2007) and ephemeral communities (Hamera 2007), but also notions of embodiment (Featherstone 1991; Frank 1991; Goulding et al 2002; Joy and Sherry 2003). Dance then promises transformation and transcendence, but also as Frank reveals is communal, bringing forth particular “forms of dyadic associatedness which transcend the individual body to that of the other” (Frank 1991, 80). The experience of embodiment offered through a turn to dance becomes all important for a rethinking of consumers, especially as what we glimpse through attention to dance and the performative realm is a reconsideration of the “human body as a moving agent in time and space” (Thomas 2003, 78). A moving body which questions notions of fixed structures, where agency becomes the ability to “negotiate movements within those structures” (McDonald 2004, 200). The moving body in other words becomes pivotal in exploring consumer culture afresh, suggestive of rethinking our relationship with this world, and the imagined limits cast upon that relationship. For as Meamber and Venkatesh indicate: “the body is a site of exploration and experimentation...a way to understand, explain, refashion our notion of our world.” (1999, 194).

Both Turner (1991) and Featherstone (1991) draw upon the work of Foucault to explore notions of the regimentation and disciplining of the body, as he suggests “Bodily domination is never imposed by some abstract societal Other; only bodies can do things to other bodies. Most often, what is done depends on what bodies do to themselves” (1991, 58). For Featherstone, we might suggest that *bodies matter* (to take a line from Judith Butler 1993) within consumer culture, especially evinced through notions of the performing self where management of one’s appearance and look become paramount. Or as Bourdieu expresses: “The body, a social product which is the only tangible manifestation of the “person” is commonly perceived as the most natural expression of innermost nature...The legitimate use of the body is spontaneously perceived as an index of moral uprightness, so that its opposite, a ‘natural’ body, is seen as an index of *laisser-aller* (‘letting oneself go’)” (1992, 193). For Foucault (1990, 152) then a turn to bodies and their histories becomes a turn to the body as the site for the deployment of power/knowledge relations, but also to reimagine the body as simply unfinished business that is unstable and therefore constitutive in constructing potential resistances.

It is here that the significance of dance as a cultural form and sensibility reveals itself, not simply individual leisure time but a form of letting oneself go, a space for constructing resistance, offering transcendence and transformative potential through becoming “other”, for as Carter (1996) suggests: “The spatial aspects of movement and the situation of the action in the performing space can also be considered for their significance in forming or replicating notions of gender” (1996, 50-51). Dance then as a performative act reveals its significance, the ability to blur and overcome (if only symbolically) contradictions, its ability to provide as Turner reveals a “liminal period...betwixt and between one context of meaning and action and another” (1982, 113). For as Hamera suggests “They [Dance techniques] offer vocabularies for writing, reading, speaking and reproducing bodies. In doing this, they do much more: organize communities around common idioms, rewrite space and time in their own images, provide alibis, escape clauses, sometimes traps, sometimes provisional utopias” (Hamera 2007, 208).

Wort and Pettigrew (2003) explore such symbolic and material refashionings through a group of Australian women's experiences of belly dancing to challenge the assumptions around this dance form. They argue that participation is performed by women to "fulfil their own needs for femininity and sensuality, rather than being an activity designed for the male gaze" (2003, 190). Belly dancing thus becomes a way of "dabbling in the exotic" (ibid, 190), but also for the women a way "to come to terms with the shapes of their bodies" (ibid, 190). In this way, Wort and Pettigrew draw attention to the transformative potential of dance, as illustrated through the importance of adorning their bodies with accoutrements such as costumes but also the application of henna and their associated beauty rituals for making material this transformation from their everyday to dance selves. But perhaps more importantly, as a form of transcendence achieved through a "connection" with other women (ibid, 191). Or as McRobbie proposed: "Dance is where girls were always found in subcultures. It was their only entitlement" (1993, 25). On this entitlement, she continues by writing about the rave experience for women: "This gives girls new-found confidence and a prominence. Bra tops, leggings and trainers provide a basic (aerobic) wardrobe. In rave (and in the club culture with which it often overlaps) girls are highly sexual in their dress and appearance... The tension in rave for girls comes, it seems, from remaining in control, and at the same time losing themselves in dance and music" (1993, 25).

The work of Maffesoli (2007) explores a similar theme but from another conceptual position; he explores the nature and "advent" of the tribal aesthetic itself where he seeks to explain the emergence of this logic, that is to say, aesthetics are defined in terms of their etymological meaning as "people feeling emotions together" (Maffesoli 2007, 27). More so, he argues that the tribal aesthetics speak of an ecological dialectic versus that of simply economic means-ends activities—a spirit which captures the sense of aesthetics as expressing a "passion for life" (ibid, 27), where "situations are the only things of any import" (ibid, 29), since within such contexts (Maffesoli uses the example of the "orgy") lies the possibility for the "loss of oneself in another" (ibid, 30), or better, of a "re-enchancement of the world" achieved essentially through the collapse of the individual and the foregrounding of "shared passion and social empathy" (ibid, 30). The approach of Maffesoli then takes seriously the social sphere as the starting point for any investigation of tribal aesthetics, or as he explains:

"Big meetings, large gatherings of all kinds, group trances, sporting events, musical excitement and religious or cultural effervescence—all raise the individual to a form of plenitude that s/he cannot find in the grayness of economic or political functionality. In each of these phenomena, there is a sort of magic participation in strange things and strangeness..." (ibid, 32).

Salsa dancing then can be understood as one such instance of *social effervescence* where the consumer moves beyond their position of isolated individual through involvement and participation with the emergent social. Parallels can be drawn with the work of Goulding et al. (2002) and Goulding and Shankar (2004) which employs notions of Maffesoli's (1996) neotribalism to explore the emergent rave scene—"the music, the laser light shows, and in some cases the ingestion of drugs like ecstasy and cocaine, and the nature of the dance itself" (Goulding and Shankar 2004, 649)—for producing new dramas and communities constructed around a particular dance form. Or as Sash, one of the respondents better articulates: "You have enough hassle all week at work. What you want to do at the

weekend is break free of all that, go a bit mad, get it all out of your system, dancing is like a release, you can lose yourself... On Friday the fun starts early" (Goulding et al 2002, 275). Dance in other words becomes a useful context to explore the intimacies and embodiments brought into being through such new communities, or as Hamera reveals: "It is a testament to the power of performance as a social force, as cultural poesis, as communication infrastructure that makes identity, solidarity and memory sharable. Communities are danced into being in daily, routine labor, time and talk... emerg[ing] at dance's busy intersections of discipline and dreams, repetition and innovation, competition and care" (Hamera 2007, 1).

## METHODOLOGY

In this section we reveal the methodology adopted to obtain the "deep contextualization of meaning" (Cova, Kozinets and Shankar 2007, 9) necessary for a fuller and richer understanding of Salsa. The material presented in this paper was collected through a netnographic analysis of an online salsa forum (<http://www.salsaforums.com>). Drawing on the excellent work of Kozinets (1997, 1998, 2001, 2002) we argue that a netnographic analysis is able to transcend the 'limits of asking' through observation of people's talk. Salsaforum is an international forum that attracts people from all over the world. The forum began in February 2004 and a testament to its growing popularity is the fact that there are now 3382 registered users, who have made a total of 74638 postings since its outset. Members vary dramatically in the usage of the forum; some have not made any postings and the most active user has made a total of 7265 posts, averaging 4.92 posts per day (figures correct on 14 March 2008). The forum provides an arena for members to discuss salsa music, share salsa video clips, announce events and offer reviews of salsa clubs, DVDs etc. For our analysis, we focused on the "Just Dance" section of the forum. There are a total of 1750 discussion threads in this section of the forum covering a wide range of salsa dance issues. Some threads only receive a few replies while others have received almost 1000 replies. Interpretation was constructed around moving between individual postings, chunks of postings, entire discussion threads and the emergent understanding of the complete data set (de Valck 2007). In addition, our interpretation of the Salsa experience is also aided by knowledge gained through participant observation and interviews. The posting presented at the beginning of the paper highlights a number of issues that will now be explored. Specifically the findings are organised into three key experiential themes: the first exploring the salsa experience; followed by understanding the "magic" of the salsa dance floor; finally, we explore the apparent interaction between the music, the self and the body engendered by the salsa experience.

## 'JUST DANCE': THE SALSA EXPERIENCE

From our analysis of the internet forums, a key experiential theme is that Salsa appears as a shared experience that links individuals together resulting in a relaxed, friendly and comfortable atmosphere on the salsa forum. The forum is viewed as a place where salseros (salsa dancers) can seek advice, support and encouragement from other salsa lovers in all corners of the world. As one participant suggests:

*I love this forum 😊. This place can even out the wildest of emotional roller coasters and hopefully has kept some people going when they might otherwise have given up.*  
(UK, male)

Others concur that the forum provides a helpful support network and analysis reveals that members use the forum as a venue to share positive (e.g. the perfect dance) and negative (e.g. embarrassment at being abandoned mid-song on the dance floor) salsa stories. There is evidence of a sense of camaraderie amongst forum members, as demonstrated through the incessant use of compliments, both written (such as “well said”) and symbolic (smiling or bowing emoticons) during discussions as members praise each other for what are perceived to be beautiful or inspiring words. For example, as one of the participants suggests:

*You can tell from all your posts here that you would be GREAT to dance with. You have a passion for dancing and music plus you appreciate and understand your partner. A winning combination* 🤔🤔 (male, Australia)

This camaraderie is extended to newcomers who often receive words of welcome after their initial postings. As a result of the powerful and often poetic communication between members, the forum serves, we argue, as a rich repository of cultural meanings seeking to embody the social dramas (Turner 1982) of contemporary consumer culture.

### **“BEING KISSED BY THE MAGIC IN THE AIR”: CONSTRUCTING MAGICAL EXPERIENCES ON THE DANCE FLOOR**

The passion felt for salsa shines through in both observation in salsa classes and clubs and analysis of the forum postings. In addition to well-being and health benefits created by physical movement, Salsa is also seen as an activity that has “the power to generate so much happiness.” One member defines a salsa “fix” as “THAT euphoric, satisfying feeling” while another suggests that salsa “gives me all the energy in the world. It makes me feel alive!” One of the reasons for this feel-good factor is because salsa dancing results in a sense of escape from the mundane realities of everyday life and provides relief from feelings of stress or tension (similar to Goulding et al 2002). More so, in terms of the way in which space appears as a social construct, the dance floor is viewed as somewhere that can be separated from the rest of the world akin we would suggest to Turner’s anti-structure “wherein human beings stripped of their roles, statuses, memberships, and moralities, are in communion as human selves—against the demands of organization and structure” (1982, 113). Or, the signature of one of our forum members more succinctly conveys this idea: “Mild-mannered corporate guy by day...raging Salsero by night.” The salsa dance floor offers dancers the possibility of being transported to a liminal space: “another world—where there’s no pain, suffering, worries that life abundantly confronts you with.” In this world salseros experience a sense of peace, it is a world where “everything is effortless, no performance anxiety, no feelings of superiority or inferiority.” The following two postings provide effective illustrations of this other-worldness associated with the salsa dance floor:

Participant 1: I love it when everything around me seems to disappear, when there’s just me, my dance partner and music. In those moments I feel so much passion, so much energy... I truly feel life in my veins. That’s better than...well...anything! (Male, Slovenia)

Participant 2: It offers an environment where you can walk in feeling like a nobody, or maybe just down after a hard day, and walk out feeling completely special and very much appreciated. The best thing is that it comes with no strings attached and there seems to be an understanding and respect for the bound-

aries that separate the dance floor from the rest of the world. For five minutes you can loose yourself and focus all your attention on another human being! (Male, UK).

A vital space of emergence and possibility, for example, a number of salseros compare the emotions generated through salsa with the experience of falling in love suggesting that the “spirit of salsa” makes “time stand still” as people lose themselves in the moment. One forum member commented that: “Looking back on some of the best dances; they now seem like dreams. Maybe they happened maybe they didn’t.” In this way, the dance floor becomes a sacred place (Belk 1989) to be imagined and eulogized.

Some salseros extend their love of salsa from the dance floor to other aspects of their lives. Some suggest that salsa “starts to become a part of you” while others go further and suggest that it becomes a lifestyle and an overarching guiding philosophy:

Participant 3: “Salsa isn’t about girls, it isn’t about who is looking at you, it isn’t about patterns/moves, it isn’t about partying, it isn’t stepping. It is about LOVE, it is a lifestyle where salsa is your world and your mate the subject of all interactions within that world and its love... It is a lifestyle, a lifestyle, it is nothing less...”

For some, devotion to salsa dancing not only encroaches on lifestyle but can actually become a way of life in its own right (de Burgh-Woodman and Brace-Govan 2007).

The previous postings place especial emphasis on the relationship between the dancing couple which is described by the forum members as a “mysterious union,” “gratifying connection” and “magical moment.” In an ideal partnership “you cease being two people dancing with each other, and become a couple dancing together.” This highlights the central role of the social in the salsa experience, defined by one forum member as follows: “Social-in dance terms?-The ability to participate, engage in, and collaborate, with someone-known or unknown- who is of a like disposition”. The reference to “like disposition” in this definition does not refer to demographic or socio-economic characteristics, rather, salsa appears to attract people from all walks of life who are connected through their love of the dance. The internet forum makes possible a sharing of this interest, but also a global connection where talk of people’s salsa experiences is central. As one member suggested, salsa provides an opportunity for “Meeting and dancing with a wide variety of people that I normally would never meet in my nerdy, high-tech world.” It is precisely this tendency that caused Gilroy (1991) to comment that the dance floor could be viewed as a cultural space marked by an absence of the usual hierarchies of society. It could be suggested that salsa provides an opportunity to break down barriers as it creates an automatic link and point of communion between dancers:

Participant 4: “It’s always funny, when I’m hanging out with my salsa friends, to see the puzzled looks on people’s faces. They’re like...what are all of these black, white, latino (you name it) folks doing hanging out together. In fact, we were asked what group we were from or the reasons we were hanging out! LOL It’s all about the dance and the music, baby!”

Salsa congresses are a popular venue for meeting other salsa aficionados and appear to provide a chance for people from many different countries to congregate. It is commonly suggested that even language differences do not inhibit union through salsa; the dancing is the central element. Thus the dance floor offers a space

that is beyond the barriers that may typically prevent meaningful interaction in everyday life. As one member suggested, salsa is “the global language of dance.” Indeed communication through dance is sometimes deemed superior to oral communication offering a way to “perfectly capture and convey something you could never express with words.”

The above definition of social also suggests that even complete strangers can be united through salsa. Observation at salsa clubs indicates that partner switching is the norm as participants rarely dance with the same partner for two songs in a row. As one forum member suggests, “the more you dance with people you don’t know, the better.” Stories of dancing with strangers then appears to offer the potential to generate deep emotions, as articulated in the comment below:

Participant 5: That surprise dance. Someone you’ve never met before, maybe never even seen dancing, asks you to dance, or you ask them, and from the first step, you’re in tune with each other. It just feels so “right” it makes me wanna laugh (and cry) my way across the dance floor. (UK)

As such, the dance floor becomes a space where norms of touch are challenged and where the relationship between private and public space is blurred (Bringinshaw 2001). The presence of “chemistry” between a couple, even those who are strangers off the dance floor, leads to a particularly intense emotion. This was defined by one Salsero as follows: “Chemistry is when both partners are listening, and both are hearing. Chemistry is nuance, appreciated and acknowledged.” The difficulty of putting this chemistry into words motivated participants to use various metaphors to express and understand such extraordinary experiences: “When that spark ignites it’s great; it’s like a story being read for the first time” and “We’re painting a story together and the dancefloor is our canvas.” Thus in Maffesoli’s (2007) words, in order for the “loss of oneself in another,” there needs to a connection between two people through the sharing of emotions and particular dance experiences. Salsa draws our attention to the boundaries of the body, and the extent to which such boundaries are fluid and can be blurred and merged (Bringinshaw 2001). Whereas Douglas (1973) maintains that physical bodily experiences are modified by the social body through adherence to social norms, we suggest that the salsa dance floor may be viewed as one space where this modification is less evident. Whereas bodily behaviour in public spaces is often rule-governed as individuals maintain “territories of the self” (Goffman 1966), in salsa dancing, that personal space can expand to include the extended body, that is, the body of the other.

**“MY BODY AND SOUL REMEMBERS WHAT TO DO AND SHALL GUIDE ME THROUGH”**

The interaction between the music, the self and the body is of central importance in salsa dancing. The previous section highlighted the strong emotional bonds that exist on the dance floor. It appears that connections between the couple are accentuated through the music. As one forum member suggests: “The two of you have become *one* WITH the music.” Music is seen as powerful and energising and as a force that vitalizes the body:

Participant 6: To me, as soon as “the right music” comes on (has to have that certain groove), it touches me deeply, it pulses through me, like electricity, and I want to become one with it. The pleasure I get from the music alone is intense, very much like...you know what I mean ;-)... and if I can dance and click with someone it becomes perfect. I go straight to heaven.

Participant 7: my ultimate goal is to be a true representation of the music that is being played.... on the moment, creative, imaginative, response to the music, that is what I strive for every time I walk in a dance floor ..... someday someday (male).

While mastery of the steps undoubtedly makes participants feel good, especially when learning a new move for the first time, this is not deemed to produce the best style of dance. Rather many believe that truly good dancers are those who not only listen but “feel” the music in their “heart and soul” and are capable of translating such emotion into movements of the body. Even those who do not understand the Spanish lyrics, can be guided by the emotion in the singer’s voice. As another Salsero remarked:

“In fact, when a person is deeply in touch with feelings and the music, changes in a song never heard before are felt way before they happen, they all have nothing to do with technique nor musical knowledge of salsa, rather ability to feel...”

In salsa dancing, the accounts suggest that people’s bodies can be one step ahead of levels of consciousness as people become caught up in the vitality and spontaneity of the “materiality of being-together” (de Certeau 1996, 75). It is this process that leads to self-expression as salseros interpret the music in different ways. As one member suggests, “we aren’t robots, we are all different, so shouldn’t we all display the true US on the dancefloor?” An important goal for many salseros is to achieve flair or “sabor,” that is “an innate response to self expression that can not be taught through a set of physical rules” as participants attempt to “find yourself in the dancefloor” and contact with “inner dancers.” Indeed, one member comments that “Even though this is a partner dance, I would say the most important thing I have learned is to dance for myself.” The dance floor appears as a space characterised by a freedom of expression and freedom of movement and the release of aspects of the self that are often hidden to others:

Participant 3: I like the fact that people get to enjoy you and vice versa. Sometimes the you on the floor can be more ‘you’ than the person off the floor just like an artist might express the deepest part of themselves through their paintings but nowhere else. (Female, UK)

Thus “the way people treat their bodies reveals the deepest dispositions of the habitus” (Bourdieu 1992, 190). Similarly, Fraleigh (1995, 19) suggests, “We dance to enact the bodily lived basis of our freedom in an aesthetic form....We move for the moving, but more, we dance for the dancing.” In other words, salsa appears to provide a form of freedom from everyday constraints where movement is not directed at instrumental or practical goals but rather is channeled into forms of self-expression and action centered upon pleasure and enjoyment. Salsa is a way to allow self-expression and emotion to escape or “burst” as a “radiating essence.” In this sense, Salsa can be seen as a medium of expression through the communicative body, that is, a body in process of creating itself (Frank 1991).

As social drama, salsa dancing appears to demand that participants are in touch with their inner emotions. One forum member provides a particularly rich description of the way in which this may conflict with societal expectations and norms:

“society at large does not teach us how to become in tune with our feelings but rather, how to look to the outside and be lost

in exoteric ideals; a material world that is only to be happy with external possessions. Hence, we go on following what society tells us and forget about the innerself and feelings..." (male)

This member suggests that those who focus on technique rather than letting the music move them are driven by "instant gratification," a central driver of consumer society (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy 2002). They are driven to dance in such a way that fits with others' expectations rather than attempting to dance in tune with their inner selves which would enable "real achievement" in the future. The issue of rationality versus emotion is central to this discussion and Salsa appears as a way to fulfil the "emotional hunger" (Cushman 1990, 600) generated by consumer culture. Or as our participant continues:

"while the mind is busy thinking the body can't feel. The mind is blocking the body from feeling.....Listen to your soul not what step the brain thinks you should do...."

Dancing comes from the soul, not the mind, but to a thinking society such a belief doesn't come easy to stress.....So, while we are taught the do this and do that, our soul has been waiting to be let loose. Our mind (ego) needs something to feel good about, that something happens to be patterns and the thought of achievement through more and more complicated patterns. While the ego rules there isn't telling someone that true fulfillment comes from the soul."

These posts generated a great deal of enthusiasm with forum members suggesting that "his inspirational words are like diamonds" and "jewels". Others agreed that the best dances are those when the moves "just happen". Dancers who are driven by the head are bound by "limits, correctness, and rationale" and therefore fail to realise that "true greatness [comes] from that something inside of you." Creativity is therefore not as constrained as one might imagine (cf. Madrid 2006). As Frank (1991) suggests, for the communicative body, discourses enable more than they constrain. Thus once primary steps have been learnt, salseros can allow their bodies to "play with the music" and thereby overcome the cultural contradictions that they experience in their everyday lives through the medium of dance.

## CONCLUSIONS

*"The presumption of bodies already in motion, what dance takes as its normative condition, could bridge the various splits between mind and body, subject and object, and process and structure that have been so difficult for understandings of social life to navigate."* (Martin 1998).

From the ecstatic bodily gestures of the shaman to the magic of ritual within archaic cultures dance has always been central for the construction, production and reconstruction of our notions of society. From the hypnotic beats of Salsa music and its associated global marketing industries, to its continued representation and commodification within films and advertising, to the multitude of global clubs, congresses and dance classes; Salsa culture has always offered a rich and fertile ground for the transcendence of cultural forms. Our exploratory study foregrounds the lack of attention with the CCT tradition (Arnould and Thompson 2005) to notions of the body and embodiment (Joy and Sherry 2003); Goulding et al (2002) make a similar point on the importance of the body. On the basis of our exploratory netnographic study of the salsa experience we reveal in this study how dance forms such as salsa are rooted in a renegotiation of the relationship with our own bodies and those of others. That is how dance responds to and may

compensate for a need for movement within our everyday lives; moving bodies are always then about a release and transcendence, even when such movement is underscored with a dance technique which is itself disciplining. The desire to dance then responds to a reclamation and renegotiation within the confines of existing structures; navigating and traversing within the confines of those structures whilst offering a partial imaginative release through resolving cultural contradictions on the dance floor. Through touch, sustained eye contact and a "magical" connection with others; through the creation of art with one's body; and through the tendency to forget what one looks like in order to follow one's "inner dancer" to the beat of a style of music which is "infectious". We start to see how dance, but also through the discourses constructed around it, promises a kind of transcendence, an attempt to rethink the rules of association with not only others, but also ourselves within consumer society. Whereas conventional thinking dictates that the body mediates the relationship between self identity and social identity (Goffman 1966), it appears that salsa dancing offers the opportunity for a union between the outer representational body and the subjective experiential body (Thomas 2003). Using Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) terminology, we can suggest that'salsa dancing offers a "flow experience," that is a state of total involvement where one moment flows holistically into the next without conscious intervention (cited in Celsi et al. 1993). More so, we might concur with Turner when he suggests that: "The group or community does not merely 'flow' in unison at these performances, but, more actively, tries to understand itself in order to change itself" (Turner 1982, 101). Herein lies the promise of salsa, as for some, the experiential consumption of salsa provides meaning in life and offers enjoyment and ecstasy through connection (Belk 1989) and "rare imaginative transcendences" (Turner 1982, 101). More so, the online interactions makes possible a continued dialogue around such experiences, where we witness the group generating new forms of understanding and knowledge.

Dance then comes to be seen as a reflexive form of knowledge enacted in and through our bodies, where the settled and fixed is disturbed and placed in motion. Here the importance of dance for an understanding of consumer culture reveals itself. While others may rule out the possibility of escape from consumer culture (Arnould 2007); a turn to dance brings in its gyratory wake a reimagining of consumer action embedded within not only economic and market forces. Rather we see how dance embodies an unquenchable thirst to escape beyond the mundane, a desire for "freedom", especially if understood as the continual and never-ending "attempt at self-disengagement and self-invention" (Rajachman cited by Sawicki 1991, 101). In our minds this speaks of how dance makes possible shared passions, exhilarations and desires lacking from people's everyday lives, compensating and granting them a space for articulation and expression. Whereas previous research has suggested that high octane white knuckle experiences such as skydiving (Celsi, Rose and Leigh 1993) and white water rafting (Arnould and Price 1993) may offer such an opportunity to transcend mundane experience; here we suggest that salsa dancing can result in total absorption as the dance floor becomes a "beautiful place of euphoria." While at the same time we acknowledge and appreciate the role of consumer culture itself in this economy of passions and desire, since it is the character of contemporary consumer culture which furnishes and makes possible the emphatic and constant rejoinder to seek out desire, producing the will to desire desire and passion itself. But to end, we argue that what dance ultimately makes possible, is what de Certeau refers to as a "materiality of being-together" (1996, 75). That is, through its emergent qualities, and brought into being by the sensual and exotic qualities of the music, but also most importantly through the synchronic movements of the

dancers themselves to produce a community space for rethinking the social and notions of shared emotions through a dance form which is itself affiliative and sharable. By way of closure, the promise of dance then can be understood as a social drama which through its performances serves to, as Turner suggests: “keep us alive, give us problems to solve, postpone ennui, guarantee at least the flow of our adrenalin, and provoke us into new, ingenious cultural formations of our human condition and occasionally into attempts to ameliorate, even beautify it” (1982, 110-111).

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