

A LIFE BETWEEN US

Exploring Embodied and Relational Aspects of a Post-Heroic Approach to Leading and Following through Dance

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I am a corporeal being, a flesh and blood body-being. I am a living body that thinks, moves, feels, and senses. I inhabit this world, relating to and sharing it with others, co-existing, engaging in other's bodily movements, creating and receiving moments of interaction and embodied co-creation and co-presence. I am a holonic being, an autonomous individual simultaneously belonging to a family, a group, a community, a culture, a society. I am a woman, a wife, a mother, a daughter, a sister, a teacher, a student, a dancer, a manager, a colleague, a friend, a servant, a leader - following and leading, leading and following – exploring, experiencing and living this life between us.

Charene Griggs

ABSTRACT - *My precis*

Society's investment in the leader-as-hero myth is significant. From this perspective hero-leaders, usually male, are adored as powerful, objectified, disembodied and rational individuals. This approach can lead to the lionization of leadership, where leadership is seen as an exclusive and perhaps elusive domain reserved for those blessed with natural gifts from birth or for a chosen few groomed to follow predetermined guidelines for leadership success.

This research is informed by an alternative approach to the mainstream hero-leader paradigm. Its aim is to shift the focus away from understanding leadership as a phenomenon centred around the powerful individual leader exhibiting particular traits and behaviours, to an understanding of leadership as an embodied and relational process of leading and following, where new practices and insights are created in interaction.

Drawing on the synergies I identify between dance and a post-heroic approach to leading and following, my analysis identifies a leadership continuum. Here, the embodied and relational process of leading and following, as experienced within the three partner dances of Tango, Piloting and TACTICS, is conceptualised as a fluid process that can fluctuate between two approaches, where heroic-leadership is at the one end of the spectrum and post-heroic approaches are at the other end.

This study thus demonstrates that dance can enrich our understanding of a post-heroic approach to leadership, where the focus is on the embodied experiences of an individual in relation to others and the process of leading and following is co-constructed, collaborative and shared, consequently contributing to the growing scholarly research that seeks to consider an alternative approach to the mainstream hero-leader perspectives.

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Finally, thank you to my family, my husband, Kimbrian, my two daughters, Calammé and Romi, and my mom Anneli, for carrying me through this time. Your faith in me never wavered and because of your loving support I can proudly say – it is done.

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RESEARCH QUESTION – *My inquiry*

How can dance contribute to a better understanding of the embodied and relational aspects of a post-heroic approach to leading and following?



INTRODUCTION - *To My Study*

My study explores, both theoretically and practically, an alternative to the mainstream hero-as-leader paradigm that advocates for a *power-over* perspective which is hierarchical, exclusive, leader-centric, masculine and disembodied. Instead, I propose that a post-heroic perspective, where the focus is on a *power-with* approach, is informed by process and practices that are embodied, relational, and where leading and following in a given context is co-constructed, collaborative and the experience is shared.

My literature review aims to critique mainstream leadership approaches that are fixated on the hero-leader as an objectified and disembodied rational agent. I examine a more sustainable alternative; a post-heroic approach to leadership where embodiment and relationality are mutually constitutive elements of the co-authored process of leading and following.

I investigate, through utilising dance as the methodology within a practise-based research framework, how the embodied and relational partner dances of Tango, Piloting and TACTICS can be understood as a continuum. I conceptualise a fluid process of leading and following that can fluctuate between two approaches, where heroic-leadership is at the one end of the spectrum and post-heroic approaches are at the other end.

The title of my study – *A Life Between Us* – is an expression, I believe, that most accurately describes that moment of interaction - whether in dance, leadership or life – as a process of leading and following that requires us to engage with each other through our own bodies and our own lives because we value "feelings of what it is to be part of more than ourselves" (Taylor & Hansen, 2005, p. 1215).

LITERATURE REVIEW – *My Critical Analysis*

My journey into the rabbit hole of leadership research can best be described as an emotional rollercoaster ride. Some days I experienced extreme excitement, even moments of elation, others not as much; doubting whether I was even worthy to comment on leadership at all. It might well have been at that exact moment, where feelings of inadequacy overwhelmed better judgement, that I recognised the power and impact of the hero-as-leader myth on our day-to-day lives, and because of it, or perhaps in spite of it, I persevered because I believe that “leadership refers to phenomena [I] find magically creative, inspirational, and life-full” (Hansen, Ropo & Sauer, 2007, p. 553).

My literature review seeks to consider an alternative approach to the mainstream hero-leader model, shifting the focus away from understanding leadership as a phenomenon centred around the powerful individual leader exhibiting particular traits and behaviours to an understanding of leadership as an embodied and relational process of leading and following, where new practices and insights are created in interaction.

The body is significant and central to my research study; this, I suggest, is the result of being a dancer for most of my life. My orientation to the human body as a moving, thinking, and feeling being, coupled with an in-depth understanding of leading and following in a dance practice context, paved the way forward for exploring this leadership life between us.

The Mainstream Leadership Perspective - *The Leader-as-Hero*

“Good leaders are trailblazers, making a path for others to follow. Great leaders, however, inspire their people to reach higher, dream bigger, and achieve greater. Perhaps the most important leadership skill you can develop is the ability to provide inspiration to your team. If you inspire them to reach for the stars, they just might bring you back the moon.” (Pozin, 2014)

Society's investment in the leader-as-hero myth is significant. We are entranced by heroes, seduced by heroes, and it seems perpetually waiting for heroes to inspire us. We continue to hope that somewhere - out there - there is someone heroic, brilliant, and visionary, who can lead us to victory, rescue us from our predicaments and magic our problems away. Living in this fairy tale it is not difficult to see why writing that is devoted to embodiment, the human body as both a thinking and feeling being, and relationality, leading and following as a dynamic process distributed across two or more bodies, has yet to feature extensively in mainstream leadership literature.

The lionization of leadership, where leadership is seen as an exclusive and perhaps elusive domain reserved for those blessed with natural gifts from birth or for a chosen few groomed to follow predetermined guidelines for leadership success (De Villiers, 2015), could be attributed to society's historical expectation of leaders as "being above other men" (Sinclair, 2005, p. 389). This orientation expresses an approach to the study of leadership known as the great man theory, often linked to the work of the historian, Thomas Carlyle. Here, the focus remains explicitly on leadership effects and efficient outcomes and the leader exhibiting certain traits or behaviours (Hansen, Ropo & Sauer, 2007; Wilson 2016), most of which are, generally speaking, tied to masculine attributes (De Villiers, 2015; Lindsay, 2013, Hanold, 2013; Ladkin, 2013). Sinclair (2005) lends support to this view suggesting that mainstream leadership and practice is the result of a "particular masculine heterosexual bodily performance" (p. 94) where the role of the body is to model a powerful player that is God-like, resolute and often to be feared because of apparent claims to conquer mortality. Performing in this 'super body' (Sinclair, 2011) - where the implied emphasis is on the "explicit mastery of a body being an ingredient of fitness to lead" (p. 6) – is predicated on particular forms of authority, and advocacy for a conception of power that is independent of the body. If these are the mainstream leadership ideologies we have to contend with, then it is not difficult to see why the corporeal, sensory and emotional dimensions and tendencies of the body would remain unchallenged because as Sinclair (2011) points out "bodies suggest weakness and mortality" (p. 6). Studies that do reference the body seem to prioritise bodily appearance and norms; here leaders are described as "good-looking, athletic, wealthy, or smart" (Martinek et al., 2006, p. 142) and researchers appear to be disinterested in a holistic approach, instead fixating on leadership

image, body language and physical activities that reinforce a hero mentality (Sinclair, 2005; 2011). This could be intentional: I speculate that there is much to be gained, financially, as a result of the persistent advocacy for leadership development as something 'housed' in an individual rather than a discourse practiced by a person with a body (Walsh, 2012; Ladkin & Taylor, 2014).

Dominant leadership views that remain strongly rooted in body practices aligned with masculine bodily performances centred around power and prescribed attributes understood as leader-like leave little room for embodied and relational leadership approaches that challenge such assumptions and norms. Sinclair (2011) suggests that men's bodies have been made invisible to support particular ideologies that showcase leadership as a cognitive phenomenon deprived of a corporeal exchange that allows for experiential, embodied and tacit knowing.

Leaders, their minders and the people who write about leadership have an interest in ignoring the body, and elevating 'mental mastery', in an effort to ward off the dreadful truth that we are all – leaders and followers alike – made of the same stuff, physically indistinguishable bundles of tissue and bone.” (Sinclair, 2005, p. 390)

Further to this, patriarchal expectations about male and female physicality and what qualifies as a legitimate leading body (Hanold, 2013) continue to perpetuate situations and environments where women are judged as inferior leaders according to masculine bodily norms and long-held beliefs, whether explicit or unconscious, in the leader-as-hero model (Collinson, 2005; Lindsay, 2013). Collinson (2005) points out that leaders and followers are inherently gendered beings, and therefore the dialectic between men and women, masculinity and femininity, is an inevitable characteristic of leadership dynamics. Still, research points to a gender dualism where men are viewed as the universal powerful subject and women as 'the other'. More recent leadership approaches advocate for widely understood concepts of femininity such as “empathy, community, vulnerability, and skills of inquiry and collaboration” (Yost, 2013, p. 110). While this may be useful there is a very real risk that this strategy, which suggests that women display different but equally valuable 'feminine' styles of leadership (Sinclair, 2013), could lead to other, and in fact,

equally simplified universal assumptions of leadership success. Reynolds (2011) argues that we do not require a radical paradigm shift from “an over-masculinized organisational model to a femininity dominated model” (p. 162) and instead advocates for an integrative approach to leadership and organisational life that more accurately resembles humanity and social reality. Perhaps this is why, despite significant efforts to create an increasingly diverse and more inclusive workforce, many still believe that these gendered expectations of the disembodied individual can force leaders to drive themselves to be something that they are not, eventuating in a distinct disconnect "between the authentic hero or heroine within and the imposter that is disclosed to the world" (Lindsay, 2013. p. 8). Admitting to having appetites and desires for anything other than redeeming helpless and needy followers seems at odds with the wide-held beliefs that most mainstream leadership models advocate for, and therefore, I suggest, the real heroic journey is about embracing our living bodies - warts and all.

A Post-Heroic Approach - *The Embodied and Relational Process of Leading and Following in a Given Context.*

Allegiances

*It is time for all the heroes to go home
if they have any, time for all of us common ones
to locate ourselves by the real things
we live by.*

*Far to the north, or indeed in any direction,
strange mountains and creatures have always lurked-
elves, goblins, trolls, and spiders:-we
encounter them in dread and wonder,*

*But once we have tasted far streams, touched the gold,
found some limit beyond the waterfall,
a season changes, and we come back, changed
but safe, quiet, grateful.*

*Suppose an insane wind holds all the hills
while strange beliefs whine at the traveller's ears,
we ordinary beings can cling to the earth and love
where we are, sturdy for common things. (Stafford, 1970)*

Perhaps, as the poet William Stafford suggests, it is time for heroes to go home; leaving mainstream leadership models, that are hierarchical, exclusive, masculine and disembodied behind as we discover the real things we live by in the here and now. I propose embarking on a post-heroic journey, where the focus is on the body and the embodied experiences of an individual in relation to other human beings (Küpers, 2013; Walsh, 2013, Melina, 2013) and where the process of leading and following is co-constructed, collaborative, and the experience is shared (Collinson, 2005; Denis and others, 2012; Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012).

Embodiment - *The Way We Are & The Way We Know*

*The body wasn't 'a thing', something distant from me, the body was me."
(Parviainen, 1998, p. 3)*

The importance of embodiment to leadership is not new. To demonstrate my point, I turn to the original Greek words used when describing the body: *Sarx* and *Soma*. *Sarx* is usually rendered as flesh, referring to the body as a 'lump of meat', a 'thing' or an object, whereas *Soma* refers to embodiment - the body in its lived wholeness, the lived being, and the subjective. According to Walsh (2013), embodiment is related to body awareness, but not only an awareness *of* the body - as an object - but being aware *as* a body, the first person experience of the body. In other words, embodiment is how we feel, how we relate, and how we do things in the world - the way we are and the way we know.

Melina (2013) reminds us that Mary Parker Follett, considered the mother of collective leadership (Brinkerhoff & O'Neill, 2015), argued back in 1924 that abstract ideas such as reasoning and sense-making originate in the body and emerge through the activities of our daily lives. Hansen, Ropo and Sauer (2007) lend support to this pointing out that embodied leadership perspectives highlight tacit knowing, felt

meaning and emotions as essential to leader-follower relationships as opposed to prescribed traits or behaviours that individuals may or may not have (Springborg & Sutherland, 2016; Wilson 2016). This idea of embodied knowing or tacit knowledge was first developed by the Hungarian philosopher Michael Polanyi (1958, reprinted in 1978), and broadly speaking refers to the 'gut-feeling' or unconscious knowledge that individuals are able to put into practice in achieving skilful doing, yet are unable to say how they do so (Taylor & Ladkin, 2009; Springborg & Sutherland, 2016). Biehl (2017) supports this line of thinking claiming that “the body is an aesthetic sense-making resource” (p. 16), and that knowledge is everywhere in the body, including its movement and expression. We use our bodies for meaning-making; we collect information through our feelings, emotions and perceptions and intuitively coordinate our actions with our intended purposes and outcomes. Arguably this is the very stuff of leadership because it aligns our feelings and intuitions to procedural information which in turn informs our decision-making.

Leadership is a bodily practice; “a physical performance in addition to a triumph of mental or motivational mastery” (Sinclair, 2005, p. 387). That said, mainstream leadership theories still come from a hyper-rational, leader-centric, cognitively biased worldview, with the consequence that the body is simply viewed as a brain taxi instead of thinking of the body as a verb - a process - that foregrounds a holistic perspective of who we are and how we live (Walsh, 2012). When leadership becomes a disembodied activity we essentially disidentify from our physical, living bodies that sense, experience, and reflect with other human bodies (Ropo, 2002; Hansen, Ropo & Sauer, 2007), and for all intents and purposes disregard the possibility that our history is in our bodies, that what we are capable of in our future is in our bodies, and that is only in and through the body that we can feel right now (Walsh, 2012). Embodied awareness brings choice; rather than being victims of habitual patterns that we have picked up from the past, we can choose options that are more appropriate for the situation. I would argue that such an approach is more useful in a world that is often volatile, complex, and ambiguous and where problems are complex and interconnected.

Relationality - A Life Between Us.

“Leadership can’t be done alone.” (Sinclair, 2013, p. 14)

Leadership is not merely a rational process nor does it occur in a vacuum; it is an embodied form of interaction in relationship with others (Melina, 2013; Biehl, 2015). Therefore, collective, distributed, and shared forms of post-heroic leadership (Denis and others, 2012; Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012) help overcome the limitations of leader-centricity and hero-leader perspectives (Wheatley & Freeze, 2011; Marturano, 2013).

The word *leadership* inherently points to a leader-centric approach where the focus is fixed on the binary terms of leader/follower, where leaders are considered powerful and in control and followers largely powerless and predictable (Collinson, 2015; Matzdorf & Sen, 2016). Where conventional mainstream leadership models are centred around the primacy and agency of individuals in leadership positions (Alvehus & Empson, 2019), or as Raelin (2016) suggests an “affirmation of the traits and heroics of individual actors” (p. 134), I choose to use the terms 'leading and following' instead of leadership. This, I believe, emphasises leadership as a process of leading and following which occurs between people participating in that moment of interaction as thinking and feeling human beings, not as a one-way arrangement in which the subjects of leadership (leader and follower) have rigidly defined roles. Küpers (2013) lends support to this view suggesting that “leadership happens in and through the very in-between of leading and following not in a linear or hierarchical line in a dichotomy of leader and follower” (p. 348). Further to this, research into followers is frequently absent from leadership literature unless they appear as “indicators of leader influence and effectiveness” (Harding, 2015, p. 150) or “unproblematic and predictable cogs in the leadership machine (Collinson, 2015, p. 5). These hierarchical perceptions of followers that are apparently so readily seduced by the great hero-leader seem highly questionable, and given the lack of evidence for their existence might very well be imaginary (Harding, 2015). One could consider more contemporary approaches, such as Servant-Leadership or Transformational Leadership. Here, both theories seek to offer normatively good models of leadership, where the leader’s role is to enable the betterment of

followers, through service and/or fostering their transformation. Such aspirations have value but a limitation remains that both continue to elevate leaders as 'better than' followers and thus a co-produced, collaborative orientation is not central to these models. Additionally Transformational Leadership theory in particular has increasingly been subjected to critique as fostering cult-like cultures (Tourish, 2013) and inciting hubris amongst leaders (Wilson, 2016).

Leadership is not a disembodied individual activity but, rather, an embodied co-created process of interaction among people (Biehl, 2017). This insight suggests that leadership is not located in either the leader or the follower but instead occurs in the dynamic and interchangeable process of leading and following, where leaders and followers can move together towards purposeful action and shared goals. For this reason, embodied practices of leading and following should remain open and incomplete, leaving room for improvisation and social choreographies. Where the focus is, first and foremost, on the body and the embodied experiences of an individual in relation to other human beings, there is scope for researchers to offer alternate views to mainstream leadership conceptions which privilege and separate leaders above followers (Collinson, 2015).

Conclusion - *Of My Discourse*

Earlier thinking on leadership was predominantly based on society's historical expectations or models of leaders as heroes, on assumptions predicated on the myth that leadership is a commodity inherited through DNA or located only in the highest levels of an organisation (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). Today, as the poet William Stafford, proposes perhaps it is time for all heroes to go home.

A post-heroic approach to leadership permits us to introduce the body - warts and all – in a revealing but freeing way. Thinking about bodies as sites of new possibilities, participating in that moment of interaction as thinking and feeling human beings enables the process of leading and following to be reciprocal, co-created and shared, giving rise to in a more authentic representation of a collective and collaborative life between us.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY - *My Method*

In this study I've engaged with dance as a methodology with reference to the broader area of practice-based research, where, generally speaking, the practice - usually creative or arts-based - is integral to and embedded in the research process and the creative works are included in the submission (Candy & Edmonds, 2018). Further to this, Sullivan (2006) points out that "art practice is a creative and critical form of human engagement that can be conceptualised as research" (p. 19).

Dance as metaphor for leadership has become fairly widely used over the past two decades, however only very few scholars have used dance, as an embodied and relational practice where the moving body is at the centre of the research framework, to engage with the existence of the invisible (Ladkin, 2013; Biehl, 2017). Biehl (2017) suggests that dance is a collaborative practice, an embodied form of interaction that showcases how people work together. Dancers are able to coordinate their actions without words; they demonstrate physical connection to spaces, contexts and each other, interchange between the role of leader and follower and co-construct the process of leading and following. They simultaneously engage both their mind and body, and emotions are integrative parts of their work. Therefore it can be argued that the integration of dance into leadership research can be seen as "interdisciplinary advances that put the moving human body and its capacity to generate meaning into the centre of attention" (Biehl, 2017, p. 18).

Utilising dance as the methodology within this practice-based research framework, I endeavoured to explore the following:

- How dance, as a practice, can advance both conceptual and practical understandings of a post-heroic approach to leadership.
- How the collaborative, reciprocal and reflexive process of leading and following is embodied and relational.
- How the fluid process of leading and following, and the fluctuating roles of leader and follower can be understood in the context of a leadership continuum.

As a final remark in this section I want to acknowledge as a result of my collaboration with Michael Parmenter, a recognised expert in the field of dance, this study is excluded from requiring ethics approval.



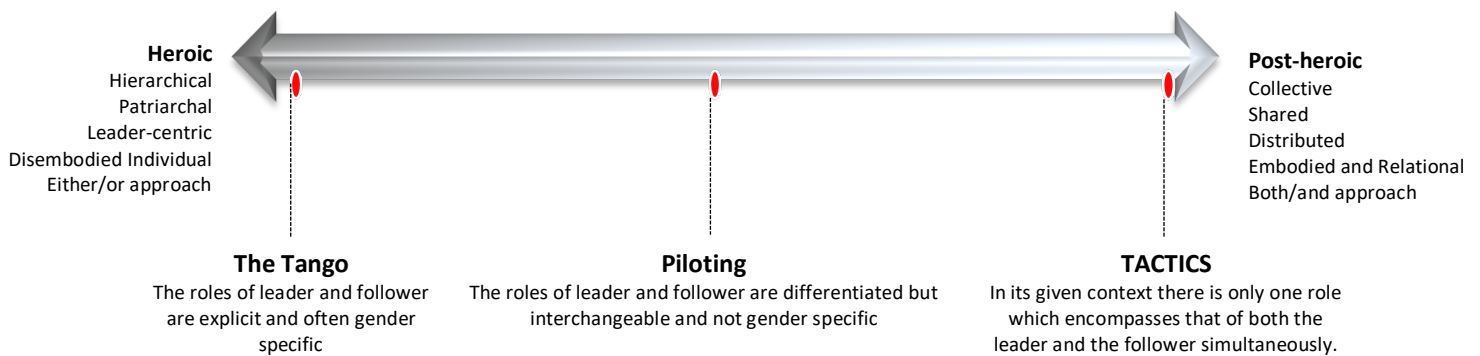
THE DANCE PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH PROJECT - *My Discussion*

“The dance perspective goes beyond common leadership research that view leaders as exceptional individuals and followers as an audience and an uninteresting mass. It brings into our perception the constant creation and decline of these structures, as well the plethora of possibilities that reside in these constant mutual negotiations and creations.” (Biehl, 2017, p. 84)

Leadership is often understood in binary terms such as leader/follower, mind/body, individual/society and exclusive/shared. On the one hand this is important because it helps us to make sense of the world, creating meaning and clarity. On the other hand, inevitably, the binary tends to prioritise the dominant side of the polarity – the role of the leader.

I am informed by an alternative view where leadership, the embodied and relational process of leading and following in a given context, is understood as a continuum where heroic-leadership is at the one end of the spectrum and post-heroic approaches are at the other end. Organisational structures, such as the military for example, are fully representative of a leader-centric, top-down, masculine model of leadership engaging command-and-control methods to achieve desired outcomes. This model highlights one side of an assumed binary dynamic, the leader, often depicted as a powerful and charismatic, yet disembodied being (Parviainen, 1998; Sinclair, 2005; Hanold, 2013; De Villiers, 2015; Wilson 2016), whereas a post-heroic approach, centred around shared, collective and distributed ways of organising and mutual accountability, places equal attention to role of the follower (Harding, 2015; Uhl-Bien, 2014; Chaleff, 2009, Collinson, 2006) and the power of the group (Wheatley and Freeze, 2011; Dennis, 2012; Lindsay 2013; Raelin, 2016; Burn, 2017). When we consider leading and following as a fluid process that can flow and fluctuate between these two models then we avoid falling into the trap of reacting against one dominant side of the polarity in favour of the other. In my opinion, this approach far more accurately represents social reality.

Leadership Continuum



My practice-based research project explored this continuum through dance in collaboration with my long-time dance mentor, Michael Parmenter. Michael is one New Zealand's most recognised and iconic dance artists and a rigorous scholarly approach underpins his work. We have had many stimulating discussions over the years, so when I briefly mentioned my academic intentions and research interest we immediately recognised the potential of our combined efforts. Working together on this project portfolio provided a unique environment for inquiry into the perceived polarities of dance and leadership; however, since the process of leading and following is fundamentally at the core of both these practices the synergies were inevitable.

During a two week workshop process we explored the embodied and relational aspects of leading and following through the partner dances of Tango, Piloting and TACTICS, each understood as occupying a position on the leadership continuum. With this front of mind, I place the dance of the Tango towards the left side of the continuum: here the roles of leader and follower are explicit, and usually gender specific. Situated in the middle, where the roles of leader and follower are differentiated but interchangeable and not gender specific, is the partner improvisation dance of Piloting. On the opposing side of the continuum I position TACTICS, where, in its given context, there is only one role. While occupying different positions on the continuum, all three partner dances, I propose, nevertheless evidence a post-heroic approach to leadership *when experienced in an embodied, relational way*: my study shows that when we pay attention to embodied, relational ways of being, leadership and followership are not fixed and immutable positions. From the outside, however, the Tango can be misunderstood as a leader-

led, heroic, masculinized form of heroic leadership, further reinforcing the importance of embodied ways of knowing for understanding the nature of leadership. Through conceptualising leading and following as embodied, relational, reciprocal and co-created processes (Empson & Alvehus, 2019) I support Karp and Helgø's (2008) advocacy for leadership to be understood as an emergent phenomenon when people interact. Ultimately, leading and following - whether in dance, leadership or life - requires us to engage with each other (relationality) through our own bodies (embodiment) and our own lives because we value "feelings of what it is to be part of more than ourselves" (Taylor & Hansen, 2005, p. 1215).

The Tango



The Tango, when observed from the outside, can seem hierarchical, patriarchal and leader-centric. The explicit nature of the distinct 'leader' and 'follower' roles - where the leader is usually male and the follower is usually female - could lead to some of the widely held assumptions about this distinctive dance form. My research shows that nothing could be further from the truth. I contend that tango is fully representational of a post-heroic leadership approach where the practice of leading

and following, even though the roles of the leader and follower are explicit, is mutually constituting and collaborative (Collins, 2005). This knowledge emerges both from understanding the history of the Tango and from the embodied experience of Tango.

Tango has a very rich and complex history, however for the purpose of this discussion I will not delve too deeply into the historical stages of development or the myriad of influences as these are not particularly relevant to this study. Rather, what is important is the context in which the Tango was first taught and learned.

Tango originated in the port cities and lower-class districts of Buenos Aires and Montevideo somewhere between the late 1800s and early 1900s. Buenos Aires, at that time, was referred to as the city of men due to the influx of thousands of single young male immigrants who arrived in Argentina searching for a better life. Given the distinct shortage of women these immigrants had to learn to dance the Tango and learn it in a way that was acceptable to the local women, or risk not being danced with again (Denniston, 2007). During that time the only way for a man to learn the Tango was to attend an all-male practice dance, known as the *práctica*. Here, the older men would teach the younger men how to follow. This is important to note because a man would first have to learn what is traditionally seen as the women's role. This process would continue for several months and after a while, once the older men were satisfied with their progress, the younger men would be invited to lead. Having said that, they were only permitted to lead each other and only if they demonstrated excellence in following. With both the young leader and follower now well versed in the grammar of the dance - having both engaged in the vocabulary from the follower's side – they were able to quickly and accurately “work out together the best way of combining steps, and of leading them so they could be followed by someone who had never followed that combination of steps before” (Denniston, 2007, p. 17). Once this was achieved, the young men would essentially ‘graduate’ earning their right to accompany the older men to a *milonga*, referring to the place where men went to dance - the Tango - with women. Here, men would dance one role (the role of the man) and women would dance the other (the role of the woman). The whole process, from first going to a *práctica* to first dancing with a woman at a *milonga*, generally took a man three years, with the first nine months spent only

following (Denniston, 2007). Women, on the other hand, learned to dance at home and were taught by their relatives. Although their primary tutors were their fathers and brothers it was not uncommon to learn from their mothers and sisters as well. There was no public forum, the equivalent of the *práctica*, for women to dance together; still, they often practiced together in private and were in fact particularly skilled leaders. This being the case, given the social conventions of that time they preferred to follow rather than lead in the *milonga* (Denniston, 2007).

Turner (2006) points out that the English-speaking Tango community prefer to use the terms 'leader' and 'follower' rather than 'the man's role' or the 'woman's role' because the roles are not gender specific. Unfortunately, creating these role distinctions and separating them into hierarchies suggests placing the male in the dominant position and the female in the corresponding submissive position (Guillen, 2008) thus implying that the leader has higher status than the follower. This was never the intention of the Tango. Denniston (2007) lends support to this view highlighting that "the vocabulary used by the dancers of the Golden Age implied no such judgment" (p. 22). Essentially the Tango is a dance "whose aim was the giving of pleasure to the other person, with the understanding that the giving of pleasure to the other person was the wisest road to pleasure for oneself" (Denniston, 2007, p. 23) or to put it simply - to lead was in fact to follow the follower.

It is possible that the popular culture approach to tango - as portrayed by the media - where the leader (usually male) embodies heterosexism and machismo and the follower (usually female) embodies submission, compliance, and acquiescence (Guillen, 2008) could point to the hierarchical, patriarchal and leader-centric hero-as-leader model. This, in my embodied experience, is not the case in practice. In order to demonstrate this point let's refer to **the Tango** section of the practice portfolio, where I am dancing the role of the woman (follower) and Michael is dancing the role of the man (leader). I argue that due to its unique nature, which I will discuss below, tango is able to critique itself as a perceived hierarchical, masculine and leader-centric model and in the process allows itself to be revealed as an example of a post-heroic approach to leadership, where leading and following is embodied, relational and the experience is shared.

The images below focuss our attention on the Tango vocabulary specifically - illustrating that whether you are dancing the role of the man (Michael) or the role of woman (me), the steps are the exactly the same (Denniston, 2007). This fundamental technical truth supports the claim that one role in the Tango is not deemed more important than the other because both roles, essentially, are engaged in the same basic movements, regardless of whether you are leading or following. Further to this, historically, when learning the Tango, you were required to learn both the role of the man (leader) as well as the role of the woman (follower). There was no hierarchy associated with the allocation of the leader-role, rather the shared understanding amongst the participants was that the very nature of these roles were necessary for the quality of the experience (Denniston, 2007).



The statement that leading, in tango, is in fact following the follower (Denniston (2007) is conceptualised through *the giro*. Giros are simply turns, either to the left or the right and are commonly accomplished using the leader as the centre of the circle. What this demonstrates is the following principle: although Michael leads this step, in the role of the man by initiating the turn, it is then up to the follower, me, to lead the rest of the movement by keeping the momentum pathway going around.

Without this subtle exchange and shared understanding the turn simply cannot happen. This points to the authentic intentions of the tango practice - to facilitate an environment where although the roles of the leader and follower are explicit they are not fixed. Instead, they are mutually constituting and collaborative when both parties have an equal share and responsibility in creating the dance (Collinson, 2005). Chaleff (2009) lends support to this suggesting that “in the dance of leading and following, we change partners and roles throughout our lives. With each new partner, we must subtly adjust our movements and avoid the other’s toes. If we are leading, we must lead; and if we are not, we must follow, but always as a strong partner” (p. 31).

The Tango is a holistic dance practice where all elements work together to create a shared experience. Practically, for us, this meant embracing our embodied roles as a heterosexual woman, primarily in the role of the follower, and a homosexual man, primarily in the role of the leader, however as the analysis above identified, this may change momentarily in order to complete a turn. As I pointed out earlier, despite how it may appear the Tango is not actually a reflection of a hierarchical and masculine approach of prioritising one gender over another but, rather, emerges from the unique historical traditions and cultural norms associated with the Tango in general. I suggest, based on my personal experience, that the explicit role of the leader and the follower in this context, provides a unique platform to “acknowledge the significance of individual agency – for leaders and followers alike – and the extent to which they are co-dependant” (Empson & Alvehus, 2019, p. 19). In its embodied experience, from the outside it appears heroic but from the inside it is co-produced, relational and not hierarchical. I honestly loved dancing the role of the woman (follower) in tango. I particularly enjoyed discovering the power of the follower and how there can be no leadership without followership. This insight reminded me that, in certain contexts, there is nothing more rewarding than following a skilled and skilful leader, allowing oneself to be guided to explore new possibilities and territories, yet simultaneously having autonomy and equal authority to contribute to the shared experience of the dance – which was, in fact, extremely satisfying and utterly enjoyable!

In conclusion, the Tango can be positioned as a process of leading and following that speaks to the significance of the individual leader within a collective; not from a heroic, hierarchical and masculine perspective but rather from the point that in certain contexts, where it is necessary for the roles of the leader and follower to be explicit, the process of leading and following can nonetheless still be embodied, relational, mutually constituting and collaborative (Collinson, 2005).



The Partner Improvisations Forms of Michael Parmenter

Piloting and TACTICS are two partner improvisation forms developed by the iconic New Zealand Dance artist, teacher, and scholar, Michael Parmenter. Fundamentally his approach to this particular form of dance training is premised on the notion of ‘a-subjective’ movement, where Piloting and TACTICS are tools that facilitate explorations that move beyond the prioritising of subjectivity towards the realisation of relationality, or, as he describes it, “the exterior dimension is the embodied life of another dancer”. When participating in this experience one will never move from one’s own independent identity as a dancer towards another dancer but rather one’s movement is the result of a tactile-kinetic exchange with alterity (Parmenter, 2019).

Our practical exploration demonstrates how the two forms, Piloting and TACTICS, share the principle that all movement is initiated through our relationship to the outside. Michael clearly articulates the underpinning philosophies as follows:

“Piloting is all about the continuity, following a line of movement where TACTICS is all about these disconnected moments. Continuity points to a continuation of established knowledge, momentum, etc. and TACTICS is about radical departures, totally new ideas. In the end when you put these two together it is about negotiating between continuity, momentum that has already been gained, but also being open to invention. We want to use the accumulated knowledge that bodies – organisational bodies, industrial bodies and social bodies – already have (Piloting) but then disrupt those, or twist or convert those to support new ways of knowing (TACTICS).”

This statement resonated with me because it supports my ideas around a continuum approach to leading and following, where we accept that both established knowledge (such as the explicit role of leader and follower) as well as radical departures (shared, distributed, and collective approaches), generating new ways of knowing, where the embodied and relational experience of leading and following is co-produced.



Piloting

Piloting can be understood as a representation of a post-heroic leadership approach, comfortably located somewhere in the centre of the continuum. Here, the roles of leader and follower are differentiated, yet interchangeable and not gender specific. This particular partner-improvisational practice supports the principle that everyone can and should lead (Wheatly & Freeze, 2010).

In this dance, the roles of mover (Pilot/Leader) and moved (Passenger/Follower) are separate from each other. On the one hand, in the role of Passenger one is never responsible for initiating a new movement impulse, yet one is certainly required to take ownership for one's own movement and sustaining one's own weight when responding to the Pilot's directives. The task of the Passenger is to discover the continuous line of movement by following the directives of the Pilot: neither obstructing nor constraining the Pilot's initiations, nor adding or embellishing the movement that the Pilot directs. On the other hand, the challenge for the Pilot is to bring the Passenger to life drawing on a variety of spatial and rhythmical choices (Parmenter, 2019).

In the workshop process the discrete roles of Pilot and Passenger are learned by the dancers by swapping roles and discussing experiences with each other. Michael and I are engaged in this introductory stage and familiarisation of the process documented below. Here we cover: establishing trust and preparing the body – by being present both mentally and physically and being fully invested in the process of both leading and following.



After a period of familiarisation with the distinctive demands of being both Pilot and Passenger you move towards a free exchange of roles: first by swapping upon command and then by changing when the movement determines when the roles should change. Always, though, the roles of Pilot and Passenger are differentiated: one is never Pilot and Passenger at the same time. We demonstrate this exchange and interaction below.



Participating in the practice of Piloting, what stood out to me was the rich landscape of infinite possibilities that presented itself in the moments of interaction. When I was the Pilot and Michael the passenger I would guide his movement thinking about the line of continuity that were already present in the moment. However, - because life is unpredictable, Michael would sometimes interpret my guidance quite differently to the direction I intended it to take, echoing Ladkin and Taylor (2014) when they pointed out that “We share a physical world. Each of us brings a different perspective to that physical world but it is openly apparent for all of us with sensate bodies to experience” (p. 2). This resulted in many interesting and varied trajectories from what I believe I proposed in the first place. I came to the conclusion that when we lead with confidence, allowing others to respond and interpret our guidance in ways that might be different to what we initially set out to do, the potential for creativity and success is so much greater.

In the role of the Passenger I loved the challenge of being true to the movement; this meant I had to place certain restrictions on my responses and couldn't just impulsively add a turn or a change of direction if the movement did not require it of me. Initially I battled to keep my eyes closed and trust Michael implicitly. I went through the motions – over-thinking it and only after a few sessions was I able to give myself over to the process wholeheartedly, highlighting Biehl's (2017) point that leadership “is not merely a rational practice but an embodied form of interaction” (p. 5). It reminded me that trust had to be earned, but once you feel safe you are able to contribute generously and without reservations.

In conclusion, I present Piloting, where the roles of leader and follower are separate from each other, yet interchangeable and not gender specific, as a post-heroic approach to leadership. The key idea here is that:

“Leadership emerges as a function of individuals engaged in tasks together through which they come to identify themselves as ‘leaders’ or ‘followers’.
Central to this view is that leading and following are ‘roles’ which are taken up at a given time in response to particular contextual demands. From this perspective, leadership is not solely a function of hierarchical position. Rather, depending on how a situation is perceived by those within it, one individual

may be understood to be most appropriately designated 'leader' at a given point of time." (Ladkin, 2013, p. 322)

The reciprocal interactions between the Pilot and the Passenger evidence an embodied, co-produced, dynamic and relational process of leading and following in a given context.

TACTICS

While Piloting is premised on the notion of *trajectories* and continuity, TACTICS in contrast, turns upon the idea of the *event*, where each moment is discreet and disconnected, an independent reality unconnected to past and future. Here, both dancers take on the same active relation to the other, resulting in only one role, that of Tactor – or as Michael refers to it “an actor who touches”.

Each Tactor has a series of physical tasks or operations that they can perform on the body of the other dancer on the assumption that each of these operations is done as a discreet moment, isolated from any notion of the continuity of movement. Each action is both disentangled from history and memory, and free of the agenda of future possibilities (Parmenter, 2019).

The TACTICS workshop, where you first learn the form, is structured in such a way to enable the exploration of relational movement through touch or the tactile-kinetic exchange of the embodied life of one dancer with the embodied life of the other dancer. Initial participation requires one to take turns in either being a Tactor, who moves to a standard set shared rhythm depicted by the music, or a body frozen in space. The next stage requires both dancers to move simultaneously, however still remaining in the same set shared rhythm as before. Once this task has been achieved you try your hand at moving in your own rhythm, which will not match your partners, and from here seven operations are introduced. I propose that an in-depth understanding of the terminology, vocabulary and movement mechanics associated with this particular partner improvisation form is not required in this study. Therefore the focus remains, in this context, on reflexivity as framed by Ladkin (2012) in which

the “body does not synthesise the world *ex nihilo*; the body seeks understanding from the bodies with which it interacts” (p. 3).



Once you reach the stage where all seven operations are employed at will and each dancer is completely independent of the order and particularly the rhythm in which these actions are performed, you are immersed in an embodied and relational process of leading and following where the binary roles of leader and follower are no longer explicit or even differentiated; instead these roles evaporate resulting in new ways of knowing where the embodied and relational experience of leading and following is in fact one and the same thing. As with PILOTING, movement is always both a-subjective¹ and relational, but where PILOTING is reciprocal the roles reverse in TACTICS as the roles are reflexive; each dancer is both active and passive at the

same time. The TACTICS images capture the progression from the introductory stage, as discussed earlier, through to full immersion, where finally Tactor A, Michael, is focused completely on choreographing a series of isolated tactile actions on me, Tactor B. At the same time, though in a differently improvised order and rhythm, I am executing a series of actions on Michael. Now both Michael and I are dancing independently but together and simultaneously in idiorrhymy.



I enjoyed participating in the partner improvisation form of TACTICS the most. This is partly because my preferred way of moving, as a dancer, is more affiliated with quick, dynamic movement which meant I instantly embodied the movement aesthetics of the dance form. I loved the extraordinary focus on precision and pace demanding quick and calculated decisions, being autonomous, independent and in control – all the while being intertwined with another body, equally engaged with their own narrative. Collinson (2005) advocates for dialectical forms of inquiry that go beyond seemingly oppositional binaries to explore their dynamic tension and interplay, suggesting that we substitute an ‘either-or’ thinking for a ‘both-and’ approach. This line of thinking seems appropriate in this context where the Tactor – the actor that touches - embodies *both* the role of leader and follower, the process of leading and following is reflexive and the experience is shared.



In conclusion, if we consider the embodied and relational process of leading and following as demonstrated in TACTICS, from a ‘both-and’ perspective, where the roles of the leader and follower normally seen as rigid and distinctive positions become one and the same because both dancers take on the same active relation to the other, then I propose that the partner improvisation dance practice of TACTICS demonstrates a post-heroic approach to leading and following. When we

acknowledge that leadership does not occur in a vacuum but in relationship with others who are also performing an embodied discourse that both reveals and constitutes identity (Melina, 2013) then “we cannot escape the fact that individuals observe one another as bodies and through bodies, and as such bodies affect how and what we perceive, and consequently our attributional processes” (Ladkin, 2013, p. 322). Sinclair (2013) supports this line of thinking pointing out that “leadership can’t be done alone” (p. 14).

Conclusion - *To My Deliberation*

This research project, conducted in a practical dance workshop scenario in collaboration with Michael Parmenter, was centred around exploring the synergies between the partner dances of the Tango, Piloting and TACTICS and a post-heroic approach to leading and following. This approach was inspired by Biehl’s (2017) proposition that “perspectives that turn to the body and embodiment in the practice of leadership extends leadership theory towards a more situational, relational and integral understanding of leading and following”(p. 72).

Arising from this study these partner dances emerge as specific examples of different approaches to leadership, something I argue can be understood as a continuum where heroic-leadership models often associated with exclusive, rigid, and hierarchical forms of leadership were positioned at the one end of the spectrum and post-heroic models that incorporate aspects of shared, distributed and collective approaches were located at the opposite end. What I discovered in the workshop process was that even though these dance forms appear to have different places on the continuum - from the outside - when experienced in embodied and relational ways there was more flexibility than expected. Consequently, I argue that leading and following is a fluid process constructed in interaction which, given the context, can fluctuate between either end of the continuum, giving us greater insight into the inter-dependent and dynamic character of leading and following.

Viewing leadership as a continuum frees it from conventional leadership perceptions predicated on a clearly defined hierarchical relationship between leaders and

followers, enabling us to understand it as a fluid, collective phenomenon of leading and following that is constructed in interaction. The vocabulary, techniques and underpinning philosophies of all three partner dance forms point to the roles of leader and follower not as fixed and immutable positions that are hierarchical, leader-centric and disembodied, instead demonstrating through their respective embodied and relational processes of leading and following that the experience is mutually constituted, co-created and shared. Matzdorf and Sen (2016) lends support to my view pointing out that by rejecting the traditional, dichotomous perspective of the leader and follower having rigidly defined roles, and instead replacing this with a dynamic, integrated approach of embodied leading and following that involves the entire body, we can experience a significant change in understanding leadership, and as a result are able to apply that understanding to our own environments potentially resulting in experiences that most accurately resemble and embody a significant life between us.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH - *My suggestions*

The scope of this study is broad; I hope that future scholarship will continue to explore dance as a method and medium that offers rare occasions where the body is in focal awareness, providing a unique environment where new bodily and embodied experiences, in relation to ourselves and others, may be experienced and obtained.

One could consider how the techniques of the three partner dances of Tango, Piloting and TACTICS, could be explored in a dance workshop environment with non-dancers. The use of dance as a somatic practice and training method may help people tap into experiential ways of knowing and tacit knowledge, experiencing the process of leading and following from the inside out rather than only observed and analysed from the outside in. This could increase participants' awareness of their somatic-self and offer an alternative approach to acknowledge and address often unconscious habitual patterns relating to leading and following in their own work life.

The partner dances could be used as a tool in management education to investigate what we implicitly know but are unsure how to articulate. The dance techniques could provide a unique platform for discovering and experiencing embodied and relational reactions and manifestations in response to values such as trust, patience, collaboration, compromise and confidence, as these are intrinsic to and embedded in the practice of the three dances and are also central concerns for leadership.

Finally, a further investigation into the leadership continuum presented in this study could provide opportunities for theoretical discussions regarding the two schools of thought: heroic vs post-heroic, through the lens of its fluid structure. This approach advocates for research that is open to discover the uncharted territories of possible connectivity and commonalities between the two perceived leadership polarities.



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Declaration

Name of candidate: Charene Van Loggerenberg (Griggs)

This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project **entitled** : A Life Between Us: Exploring Embodied and Relational Aspects of a Post-Heroic Approach to Leading and Following through Dance is submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of Master of Creative Practice

Principal Supervisor: Dr. Leon Tan

Associate Supervisor/s: Dr. Suze Wilson

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Candidate Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Charene Van Loggerenberg', written in a cursive style.

Date: 18 June 2019

Student number: 1234 999

Full name of author: Charene Van Loggerenberg (Griggs)

Full title of thesis/dissertation/research project ('the work'):

A Life Between Us: Exploring Embodied and Relational Aspects of a Post-Heroic Approach to Leading and Following through Dance.

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