

# *The Feeling of Seeing: Factual Life in Salsa Dance*

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## Abstract

Salsa dancing, a partnered dance premised on the felt sense of connection, is well suited to an exploration of Henry's radical phenomenology of immanence and Heidegger's facticity of life. Birthed in social celebratory contexts, salsa carries a particular motile freedom. What matters most is not how the dance movements are created from an outer frame of reference, but the experience of interactive responsiveness that emerges from unanticipated acts of giving life to another. Connecting to one's partner and exuding a presence filled with life is revealed in an in-depth interview with two-time world champion salsa dancer, judge, choreographer and coach, Anya Katsevman. This interview attempts to invoke the kinetic, kinesthetic and affective registers of the lividness and livingness of salsa dancing. As a phenomenological inquiry into factual life, the inter-view is presented not so much as a matter of shared perspectives or viewpoints, but more in the way of an inter-feeling, a practice of life engagement. This affectively-oriented approach provides both promise and challenge to the field of phenomenology. It invites us to delve more deeply into feeling acts of seeing. It also helps us understand how, through attending more fully to acts of seeing, we can increase the intensity with which we feel the upsurge of life.

## Introduction

Jose presses 'play' and rushes over to get into position. His stance is open, facing the front of our practice stage. I angle toward him. My back is to the crowd that will one day be there to cheer us on. Jose is ready to receive my right leg. My foot finds my hand and is guided to rest on his shoulder. My other hand reaches around and feels his shoulder blade. My elbow rests on his arm that completes the embrace. Our free hands, my right, his left, both hold my elevated ankle. His eyes then turn to meet mine and we wait. "Hola Amigos," we hear above a clapping crowd on the live recording. The applause fades to silence and seven seconds pass until we hear the slow sensual wail of horns that mark the beginning of our fast paced song, "Mama Guela," by Tito Rodriguez. This is the opening position to our salsa-on-2 showcase routine. We know it well, yet there is nothing routine about the moment when our eyes meet. On some days, in the midst of

our mutual look, Jose will crack a big grin. I giggle, drop my eyes and then have ample time to compose myself before the salsa rhythm starts. Other days we begin by looking into each other and then either he averts his eyes or I do, and we ping pong back and forth from looking elsewhere to looking into each other until we know it is time to start. More recently, however, we have experienced the entire seven seconds without giggles, grins or aversions. I feel calm and welcomed in a way that lies beneath Jose's usual upbeat, humorous demeanor. He is fully here and comfortable in being here, just as am I. I am no longer aware of how long it takes for this song to begin. I am just here, feeling deeply into Jose in this moment, knowing that I am feeling a part of him that he doesn't offer up so easily. And he sees me. Not the hyper, silly me that loves to come out when I dance, the 'ham' if you will, but the real me, the part of me that is a constant beneath the outer blinks of sheathed eyes.

This opening vignette is about sensing life through a mutual gaze of sustained duration. Such a look emerges within the context of a dance routine that will be performed at upcoming salsa competitions and shows. While there is a degree of routine, an automatized familiarity in moving into the opening position, the sense of life and all its intensity emerges when the eyes meet. Such looks are difficult to sustain, however if the dancers stay present to one another, there is an awareness of life as it is happening, right in the flow of these living moments. Sensing life in the momentary flux and flow was also a fascination of Martin Heidegger from his early lecture courses (Campbell, 2012) to identifying "life as the fundamental Fact, the central concern of his thought" (Raffoul, 2008, p. 71). Life as a topic of philosophical inquiry was so central to Heidegger's thought that he compared it to what plants are to the study of botany. Heidegger regarded phenomenology at that time and arguably throughout all his work as an attentiveness to the Beingness of life itself. He referred to this Beingness as the "facticity" of "being-there for awhile at the particular time" (Heidegger, 1999, p. 5).

Such facticity of life can be contrasted to moments when we, ourselves, are not fully present. We may be in the middle of a conversation with a colleague, for example, and at the same time have distracting thoughts. Did I turn the coffee machine off? Did I respond to that email? Did I...? Such thoughts do not coincide with the streaming nature and flow of life itself in this very moment with my colleague. Factual life refers to moments when we experience the 'here' and 'now' in the stream of life flowing not by us, but with us. We are fully 'there' so to speak, not in regard to the particular location of the 'there,' but in the way we can experience the very upsurge of being there in the moment.<sup>1</sup>

Embracing factual life requires phenomenological theorizing from the pulse of life itself. It means considering not just the thing or things themselves that appear before us but also the 'activity' within the 'facticity' of their appearances and the feeling of what is 'there' already

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<sup>1</sup> 'Da' translated from German means 'there', but the meaning of the "'Da' of Heidegger's 'Dasein' is neither here nor there" (Schufreider, 2008, p. 351). Rather, "Dasein can only locate its own 'being' by coming back to a 'here' that is always 'there,' where it finds itself bound to others (*Mitsein*) as well as the beings (*das Seinde*) in being -t/here (*Da-sein*)" (Schufreider, 2008, p.351). The backslash in 't/here' depicts this sense of being 'here' in the 'there' of being. It may also be applied to the motile nature of facticity, as indicated by the 'act' within the 'f/act.' Facticity thus transforms the fixed, nominal concept of the 'fact' as it is taken up in empirical research by returning to the things themselves, which is to say, to the 'factualities' of consciousness (Kisel, 2008).

before we focus upon whatever is specifically ‘here.’ In the present inquiry into salsa dance, I am interested in this phenomenality of life that is manifested in this particular disciplinary form of life. I am interested in the Beingness of life that “is itself never the possible object of a having, since what is at issue in it, what it comes to, is itself: *being*” (Heidegger, 1999, p. 5, emphasis in original). This exploration offers a way of engaging in a phenomenology of life as life itself is most intensely felt, in its essential facticity.

## **Salsa Dance as a Context for Exploring Factual Life**

Life as the central preoccupation of this phenomenological inquiry requires a participatory approach coinciding with Heidegger’s early thinking where the challenge for the phenomenologist is to depart from “the comfort of looking on at life” and, instead, “participate in it” (Campbell, 2012, p. 2). The phenomenologist must do more than gaze out the window on the spectacle unfolding outside in the world, or sit in an armchair musing on life’s meaning, and actually live the research question. This particular inquiry into the facticity of life is situated within the context of salsa dance since it is a practice that I pursue for the sake of feeling more alive. While I have competed at national and world levels, what matters to me are not the results of competition, but the feeling of life that courses through my veins when I dance. I have come to realize that, in the midst of life’s busyness, dancing salsa is a practice that not only animates my very being as it is happening, it also carries a positive, residual affect that ripples out into everything that I do. Salsa has thus very much helped me find the strength, steadfastness and resilience in difficult times (e.g., Lloyd, 2015; Lloyd, 2016; Lloyd & Hermans, 2016). I am not alone in experiencing the surge of vitality that salsa dance affords; it is a relational and social form that appeals to many (Bosse, 2013; Domene, Moir, Pummell, & Easton, 2016; Skinner, 2007).

Salsa dance, like the sauce to which its name is linked, connotes an experience that may be described as spicy and hot, or what Izzy Sanabria, the man first responsible for using ‘salsa’ as a marketing term, describes as giving Latin food its flavor (Renta, 2014, p. 119). Imagine what it is like to experience hot sauce on one’s tongue. Whoa. Just as eating may be an awakening sensual experience, so, too, is the experience of being moved by music, and for that reason, their descriptive idioms are often interchanged. To say a jazz band is ‘cooking,’ for example, means that the musicians are really swinging. And when “all the ingredients [a]re cookin’ just right...Latinos would say, ‘It ha[s] Salsa y Sabor’ (sauce and taste)” (Renta, 2014, p. 119). Salsa, as a descriptor for a genre of dance infers that the movements are neither bland nor boring, but that there is something in their very nature, a flavor and spice, that wakes us up, commands our presence, and brings us fully into the moment.

## **An Affect-Oriented Phenomenological Inquiry**

Researching what it ‘feels’ like to be fully alive while experiencing salsa dancing requires a particular shift away from how phenomenological research is usually conducted. Husserl’s (1982) “eidetic reduction,” which “seeks to describe *what* shows itself in experience or consciousness” (van Manen, 2014, p. 228, italics in original), emphasizes vision as the dominant sense-making mode. Phenomenologists following the eidetic reduction thus seek to understand

this *whatness* through an analysis of the object's sense data or noematic content as well as the mental process of sense bestowal, which Husserl described as the noetic moment (Husserl, 1982, pp. 213-214). Such an approach to research is well suited to phenomena construed as 'things' where visual modes of meaning-making very much align with the Greek origin of the word phenomenon and, specifically its derivation "from the Greek verb *phainesthai*, meaning to 'show itself'" (Henry, 2008, p. 82). Yet, in the case of what is not a visible thing, such as factual life that cannot be reduced to an object or a thing, there needs to be appreciation of that very "no-thingness" (Campbell, 2012, p. 2). Heidegger (1999) clarified this point in his *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity* where he wrote:

The word "phenomenon" has its origin in the Greek term φαίνόμενον which derives from φαίνεσθαι, showing itself. A phenomenon is thus that which shows itself as something showing itself. This means that it is itself there and is not merely represented in some manner, examined indirectly, or something reconstructed. (p. 53)

When researching factual life, one does not direct one's gaze towards a phenomenon that may be objectified and considered external to oneself since facticity is the recognition that the human being becomes or rather "is the thing itself" (Campbell, 2012, p. 4). Hence radical ontological shifts are warranted in the research process to appreciate that "factual life is the immediacy of the self's participation in life" (p. 33). A shift from detaching oneself from what one is seeing, to stepping inside the phenomenon from a first-person, feeling-oriented stance, even when listening to the experiences of another, is required.

While such a first-person approach to phenomenology has yet to be fully embraced in terms of a formulated methodology (Sheets-Johnstone, 2014), Michel Henry's (2008) notion of "material phenomenology" provides much philosophic guidance in this direction. He formulates an ontology of facticity that shifts the focus of meaning-making from what appears in the visual realm to the very act of things appearing, which is to say, from the 'what' of appearances to the 'how' of their appearing. Henry (2008) presents an ontology of feeling which he describes as a field of "auto-affectivity" in which immanent life appears unto itself. His example of art helps us better understand this inherent feeling life has for itself.

Art opens us to knowledge of an entirely different nature: it is knowledge without object. Life is its ontological milieu, a life which embraces itself entirely without ever separating itself from itself and without being placed in front of itself like an object....The knowledge of art develops entirely within life; it is the proper movement of life, its movement of growth, of experiencing itself more strongly. (Henry, 2009, p. 18)

Henry's (2008; 2009) affect-oriented thinking provides new direction in phenomenological research by moving away from visible things. Although Heidegger's facticity lends itself well to being a fully feeling-oriented phenomenon, his description of care as being "ahead of oneself" (Heidegger, 2010/1953, p. 227), for example, indicates the influence of vision, in the sense of objective and detached directionality, and its role in phenomenological sense-making. The omnipresence of vision in Heidegger's thinking is likely because, as Henry makes evident, phenomenology "functions as a seeing, necessarily obeying an immanent teleology of seeing as well as the *a priori* laws and limitations that define its sphere of activity"

(Henry, 2008, p. 78). Henry, by contrast, was very much sensitized to the difference between making sense of phenomena by visual and other affective and kinesthetic means. He was very much aware of the influence of seeing in the methodology of phenomenology and its inferred arrival outside of, or distance to, that which we hold to be of interest. He dedicated much of his time to consideration of how to begin an inquiry where there is no objective distance from that which we wish to explore phenomenologically and where there is “no Outside, no Separation, no Ek-stasis” (p. 2). While mindful of the dominance of vision in phenomenology and that, for example, “to be ‘relating-to’ is to see” (p. 80), Henry considered what it requires of us to see in ways where “*seeing does not see itself*” (p. 81). He went on to explain that if we attend to the how of our phenomenological seeing, we should not say that “we see” (*videmus*) but, like Descartes, “we feel our seeing” (*sentimus nos videre*)” (p. 81).

### From ‘Inter-view’ to ‘Inter-Feel’

The present inquiry into factual life uses a participatory approach in creating a textual description of the context for the research question, *What is it like to feel fully alive while experiencing salsa?* This approach is necessary in exploring the phenomenon at hand with a sense of immediacy. It is also a step that is very much influenced by van Manen’s (1997, 2002, 2014) approach to textualizing phenomena and, given that the data gathered in this study pertain to the motility of life, it is also inspired by a particular derivation of van Manen’s approach called “motion-sensing phenomenology” (Lloyd & Smith, 2015; 2006). Alongside this writing, I continue to engage in a daily practice of social, competitive, and performative salsa which is informed by the practical knowledge acquired at workshops given by the world’s best salsa teachers at over nine international salsa congresses over the past four years. The specific data source for the inquiry, however, is a two-hour interview with two-time world champion, international judge and choreographer, Anya Katsevman<sup>2</sup>. Anya, who was intrigued by this topic, opted to reveal her identity when she signed the University of Ottawa ethics review board approved consent form.

The term ‘inter-feel’ rather than inter-view better describes our interaction, especially since one of the most prominent prompts from me upon reviewing the transcripts was, “How does that feel”? Regardless of the event or situation that was described, my intention was to get inside the experience, to try as much as possible to feel it as Anya would, and to find a way to share this feeling through my descriptive prose or in Anya’s own words. Such an approach to ‘inter-feeling’ was premised on a relational trust developed prior to this recorded conversation when I had sought out Anya’s help in my preparation for competing at the 2016 World Salsa Summit. What also lent itself well to the relaxed and hospitable nature of our conversation was the location. We met and discussed Anya’s experiences of salsa over a breakfast buffet the day after a competition that she had judged in Montreal.

And so, after we had walked around the buffet and made our selections from the hot and cold options of eggs, sausages, fruit, and muffins, we found a nice quiet table to eat and talk. The formalities of signing ethics forms were completed and from that point on the conversation flowed. As Anya spoke, my eyes drank in her every word. I barely looked down as my fork scooped up the eggs or my hand reached for the coffee cup. Although I brought a pad and paper

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<sup>2</sup> See the website: [www.anyakatsevman.com](http://www.anyakatsevman.com)

to take notes, I did not use them. Perhaps it was because Anya's eyes, although shy and furtive at the beginning, soon became wide and full. I was drawn into their orbits as she described what it was like for her to dance in world competitions, international performance venues, as well as in local practices and shows. What I did, as an affect-oriented researcher, was to talk minimally and probe every now and then into the felt sense of salsa that she offered me.

### **Larger than Life or Life Itself?**

Imagine you are a professional dancer at the world competition waiting backstage while getting ready for the final round where five couples take the floor. This competition provides you with an opportunity to show your true nature as a salsa dancer who can respond in the moment to your partner, the music, the place you take on the floor, and all those present whose cheers, claps and mesmerized eyes intensify the energy of the living moment. You know from the minute you walk on the floor that you are being judged subjectively in the confidence of your walk, the posture and openness you assume while you wait for the music to begin, and the feeling of connection you exude as your hand makes first contact with your partner. All of this, your walk, confidence, and readiness to fill your place on the floor, emerges from a corralled-off and dimly-lit backstage area with a carpeted floor beneath your feet that is nothing like the wooden floor awaiting you. Like racehorses compacted into a contained area before a race, there is discomfort, yet you've decided it is time to generate a warm bubble of confidence. Some competitors are chatting and laughing, others are wearing headphones as they sit and stretch to warm up, while some are just standing there watching the huge monitor that shows what is happening on the stage in real time. You know that going into this last phase of heated competition that it is time to be dominant. Everyone here has worked hard, but you feel a deep hunger for this win. Despite winning last year, you know that this year you have more to prove since the reigning longtime champion was not there last year and your title of being the best in the world remains questionable. You are ready for this moment. No one is going to take it away from you.

When I asked Anya Katsevman to recall one of her best performances this deep hunger for a win came readily to mind. Fueled by the politics of the event in terms of what she felt was an injustice in the way the competition was judged, there was a particular intensity in the way she danced the evening that she won her second title.

The way the Championships worked back then was very unfair. You had the same competition spread over two days so a whole bunch of us competed on Thursday and then a whole bunch of the contestants in the same division competed Friday and the cumulative score qualified you for the final. From the Thursday night competition only one couple made the final and that was us. From the Friday night competition 5 other couples made it to the final which meant that their scores were just generally higher that night. So mathematically we were coming into the final in 3rd place.

What this situation created was a particular affect that was all consuming to the extent where Anya felt she was being driven purely by emotion. There were no conscious thoughts of what movements she should do at any given time. As the following excerpt from our interview indicates, she had no recollection of how she did what she did. She just did it.

I don't remember any thought process whatsoever. I had absolutely no mental awareness of being there, none. I know everything went well. I was there but I wasn't there, I don't know who was there instead of me, but everything was just perfect.

Her statement "I was there but I wasn't there" is particularly interesting in terms of facticity, as Heidegger (1999) first described it as the sense of being there for a while. Yet the amount of time, the duration, was questioned to the extent that Anya wondered if someone else were there instead of her. And to whom may we attribute this life? Was the dance more than, or larger than, she? Was the dance life itself? Was she there or not there? I asked her: "And how did it feel? Were you aware of your feelings?"

No. Because of the rush of adrenaline and emotion I guess I didn't stop to think about it.... You have to stop thinking. You have to go out. You have to connect to the music, connect to your partner, connect to everything, and zone into your dance so much that you're not thinking. You're feeling and you're expressing and when that happens you have the best show.... I can feel myself expressing my talent, you know, through things that live in my gut that I have no control of. I can feel myself letting them out and then I acknowledge that they come.

I then asked, "What does that feel like, these things that come out?"

A lot of times you create something new. That's why it's so important to separate yourself from the mental process because so many times you just all of a sudden accent something you practiced 1000 times totally differently or you add something extra or you find a moment that you didn't find before in your choreography. It's just how you connect your soul to your talent or whatever expressive artistry that lives inside you. You can't connect to that if you're thinking.

Did it happen from the moment you walked out there or was there a moment when it emerged? Can you describe it in terms of intensity? Did it gradually build or was it already there?

That 2010 world championship was unlike anything I have ever experienced. Usually prior to a competition, I try to boost myself up, remember whatever positive things people I respect or admire have said to me, remember any kind of obstacles I've overcome, and just find myself in my achievements or in things that are important to me and that help contribute to a positive environment. What I remember differently about that day was that I was angry, very angry.

I continued to listen and soak in the emotion of Anya's words with the intention of getting deeper inside this feeling, not just the framing of this experience, but feeling it as she would. What was the anger she felt toward the injustice of how the competition was judged and how it fueled her to the point of not recalling exactly what happened.

I felt there was an injustice. I think if we had all competed on the same night it would have been a different result. I was angry. Going into the competition, I never wanted to talk to anybody. I don't like the distraction; I don't like the fake attitude. I like to keep to

myself. I just remember being angry and just telling myself that I'm not going to let anyone take this away from me because I deserve it. I worked for it. You know, my partner was never a good person to connect with for me. We had a completely different understanding of preparation. He liked to run the routine thirty seconds before we'd go on stage. I hated that. He talked to everybody and spent his time distracting himself. So I just had to find my own way to go on stage. I just remember telling myself to be dominant. Take Center Stage. Be dominant. And then I don't remember anything.

Fueled by an all-consuming anger, Anya's sense of the dance taking on a life of its own can be understood through what Henry (2008) describes as "auto-affectivity." We exist, according to Henry (2008), in an "invisible phenomenological substance" (p. 2) constitutive of affect, every affection, and "the pathetic immediacy in which life experiences itself" (p. 3). So, instead of focusing on Anya's initial wondering about 'who' was doing the dance, we can instead turn to the facticity of her experience that was driven by an all-consuming anger.

Henry (2008) describes what it is like to experience emotion in such a singular way.

Life is the experience of itself. Once this experience occurs, it is singular in a radical sense. It is necessarily this experience, irreducible to any other experience. For example, each anxiety is this anxiety. By touching each point of its being in the immediacy of auto-affectivity, it fills everything. It fills the whole world, as one says figuratively, even though it is not in the world. It is only the whole of being, insofar as it is not in any world and insofar as no horizon overflows it from any side. It leaves no room to escape where there would be license to get rid of oneself and where there would be something else besides oneself. (p. 120)

To be moved so singularly by such affectivity is reserved in Heidegger's philosophy to feelings of love or hate, which are described as "passions (*Leidenschaften*) as opposed to simple affects (*Affekte*)" (Agamben, 2008, p. 102). To Heidegger, affects simply come and go. They are transient unlike "love and hate, as passions, [that] are always already present and traverse our Being from the beginning" (p. 102). Yet for Anya, winning a salsa performance was sustained from beginning to end by an affectivity. My questioning was then directed towards moments when she felt feeling completely alive while performing or competing.

## **Experiencing Facticity through Acts of Giving**

After a few contemplative moments where Anya took several bites of breakfast, I asked her if she ever felt a moment when she felt fully alive and totally present in salsa. She recalled a particular performance in Italy.

I remember one occasion where it was just the right night and everything was so exciting and positive. I was in Italy. It was a very difficult trip in the sense that the organizer wasn't treating us right and we had no idea what was happening. We were totally new to the business. We didn't know anybody. It was very messy. We were supposed to perform at a nightclub where apparently the crowd never liked anyone and

our product was so new and nobody knew us. There was just a lot of stress and a lot of speculation and doubt and we really had a lot to prove that evening. I remember going out to that show and just being fully present and aware, and so in control of the environment that I decided that night that I'm not going to let these people not like me. It was important for me to do well here, and I like what I do and I think I'm good, and that it is important. I remember every second of dancing that show and how well it went and how much people loved it. And at the same time I could say that I wasn't thinking, that during the dance I wasn't plotting or planning or judging myself because that's a lot of the thinking that usually happens while you're actually performing. You try to judge yourself. You try to evaluate what's happening. I just remember giving and giving and giving and to me that's what I try to do on stage...to give. And it went great.

I asked, "What were you giving? And what does such giving feel like?"

I give my energy. I give my passion. I give my feelings. I give my relationship to myself, and I share it with everybody. It depends honestly. It's not always dance related. Sometimes I inspire myself through the music; sometimes I connect to the choreography; sometimes I connect to my partner; sometimes I connect to the crowd; and these are all variables I am aware of. I haven't learned how to do this on command yet, so for me that's something that happens in the moment, obviously, because of whatever I did prior, but I don't know what that is or what the right formula is to get it every time. And sometimes it doesn't work, and when it doesn't, I draw on these other non-tangibles like my partner being there, the music being there, the crowd being there. They don't always give back. Therefore you can't connect to them. The music is sometimes really quiet. Your partner is sometimes not in the mood. So it's important to have all of these things. At the end of the day, it's best that you connect to yourself.

My response to Anya was that "I like this notion of giving because while you can't make someone accept, there is still an offering. There is a sense of here I am, and an opening to a shared consciousness." To which Anya replied, "In my opinion, that's what performing is. You have to share yourself. You have to be vulnerable. You have to give."

As I probed deeper into this moment of giving that Anya experienced that night in Italy, I was curious if there was something in the motions themselves that was part of this giving; something that emerged from the interactions with her partner. And then our conversation took an interesting turn. Anya described the imbalance of this 'giving' in relation to the stage presence aspect of the partnership.

We've always had a very close relationship. We were obviously doing the impossible together. We went on this journey together. He earned every bit of it so that's not at all what I'm trying to say. But we never had that connection through the eyes where I could look at him and see the person on the other side of me. So it's very difficult because I know what you're asking me. I've experienced it, but not with him. I tried my best to create that relationship for the both of us and maybe I took for granted whatever reaction I got in return. I only remember what I did to create it. I remember crossing his boundaries of comfort. I remember always being in his personal space because I had to create intimate moments. I remember creating explosive moments of stillness. I

remember giving those things to him in the dance. I remember him executing the work, but I never felt this exchange of powers.

Such a response took me by surprise because this was the partner with whom Anya had experienced her best competitive salsa outcomes. Not being interested in results, however, but the experience of connection and feeling fully alive in the moments of salsa dance, I asked if there were moments when she had experienced this mutual exchange with someone else. Anya responded with a definite, "Yes!" and proceeded to describe what it is like to feel such a connection.

It's a friendship. It's knowing that you're doing this together, and it's possibly feeling a different way just because your partner did go in there feeling a certain way. You look in your partner's eyes, you feel the readiness and then you go into this experience together and then you give and give.

What does it feel like when a partner gives?

It's unusual because I'm usually the person filling it up. So, whatever reaction I feel, it changes me and that's nice because then I get to experience it instead of creating it.

I probed further into the physicality of this sense of giving. "So when you get this new sensation, is it a pressure that's different?" since I wondered if it came from the interconnected hands.

For me it's in the eyes, and I understand what my partner's experience is or what he is trying to give to me. And then I get to react to it, which is more exciting for me than it is to create it. So if I set the mood it's fine, but if he sets the mood then it excites me more, and I'll probably even end up giving more. But then it's something that came from my gut as opposed to my head.

I asked Anya, "What is it in the eyes that you see, particularly if you were to describe it to someone who's never experienced these eyes?" She responded, "Well, your soul of course." She then elaborated on the eyes in salsa dance:

It's usually pretty intense, not in a negative or positive way. You can see a sense of focus. He doesn't even have to give to me. He just has to be present, and you see that focus in the eyes. If a person's eyes are focused, you can see determination and confidence and just the fact that they're into what they're doing. Once I see a person's eyes focused and clear, I then can sort of create whatever I want. But it has to match. What the body is doing physically has to match with what you're feeling emotionally and the way that you project that is through your eyes. You can have the most beautiful actual movement but if your eyes are dead, it doesn't match up. It's a lie.

The presence of life in the eyes of salsa dancers comes to the fore in terms of the way or the how of looking, and not in what the eyes are looking at. Such a description aligns well with Henry's (2008) notion of feeling our seeing and becoming more aware not so much of the thing

we are looking at but the sense of feeling in the act of seeing. When such a feeling is absent in the way the eyes see, a dancer may only be going through the motions. The dancer is not doing anything ‘wrong’ per se. But to experience salsa in a way that exudes life, a palpable presence should be there, and this, according to Anya, is communicated through the eyes. It is a presence that lets the other know *I am experiencing this moment as it is happening in the facticity of life*, or in “the being-*there*-involved-in....the being there of Dasein” (Heidegger, 1999, p. 5).

### **Feeling Acts in Life at Large**

I have learned much from speaking with Anya about the experience of feeling fully alive in salsa and what may flourish if one attends more closely to the experience of seeing. She was able to articulate what it means to orient to the feeling of our seeing, and she explicated through example what Henry (2008) was getting at in his ontology of an invisible, transcendental affectivity. When pressed to delve into the physicality of connection with her partner, she did not reduce such an experience of responding to the other to evident gestures or body language. Rather, she continued to speak of responding to the soul of the other which became for her the ‘whatness’ of her seeing. Just as one’s soul cannot be objectified, neither can the presence of life, the ‘there’ in one’s being.

I left this interview with a particular challenge to practice not only my movements in my upcoming salsa shows with technical precision, but to also experiment with acts of seeing affectively within my dances. Such laden presence is not easy to achieve as the inclination to soften or even to close one’s eyes when connecting to the feeling of one’s movements remains so strong. To see through one’s eyes and be fully present in the life of the dance adds, however, a whole other level of intensity. I also experiment on the social dance floor and notice that my eyes usually rest softly on the sternum of the person in front of me. When my eyes are soft like this I primarily respond to cues I am feeling through our entwined hands. But when I lift my eyes to meet my partner’s and add to this interaction an act of feeling my seeing, there is an energy communicated back to me. Sometimes it is met with aversion or a startle, but on more than one occasion, it opens up a feeling of connection where a true intermingling happens and where our invisible selves merge. In such moments of entwined consciousness, there is no Merleau-Pontian (1968) gap of the flesh to bridge the communication between us. There is a meeting of souls where no separation, let alone an outside, exists. All that exists in these moments is the experience of life itself as co-presence, not necessarily with intention or direction as Heidegger favors (Campbell, 2012), but a feeling of just being there together.

Such acts of feeling one’s seeing in daily life awakens us from the pervasive daze in which we usually find ourselves and from what Huntington (2008) describes as “the sleeping relation to existence” (p. 333). To feel acts of seeing, especially when relating to others, requires a vulnerable openness, and a way of living life where one’s protective shell lifts. Huntington (2008) speaks in detail of such a “primordial active receptivity to life...out of which unconditional modes of being-with arise” (p. 338). The daily challenge we face is not to harden against life, despite hardships that one may occur. Indeed, there is inspiration to be found in the salsa experience that works against our protective tendencies to subdue a sense of life and to connect to others in meaningful ways, not just on the dance floor but in everyday life. And when this co-presence is felt, in a more pervasive sense, we may increase our feelings of being at home in the ‘here’ of the ‘there’ (t/here) and act in factual ways. A participatory consciousness may

emerge for the many and varied ways we interact with others where acts of seeing are also deeply felt.

Imagine you are walking to the grocery store from your car. Instead of thinking of the list of items you wish to purchase, you approach the store with a sense of openness. You see what lies before you: the doors that open automatically, the multi-colored display of fruit in the stand, and then you feel something. You turn your head and see a person who is looking at you. You experience more than a uni-directional encounter. You engage in a mutual exchange, so much so that you feel the depth of the other. Time opens and this moment stretches into a small eternity. Now, there are two ways you might respond to this moment. Without practice, the feeling of being held in this person's eyes may paralyze you from acting upon it. You protect yourself by looking down and then away, and you walk to another aisle only to realize minutes later that you've missed your chance. Such is the present day social media phenomenon of a 'missed connection' – a moment of uninterrupted eye contact in everyday life that motivates people to place personal advertisements in public online spaces in the hopes that it may be experienced again. For example:

*Streetsville Go Nov 24 - Woman in Red jacket:* We were on the GO train that arrived around 7pm on November 24 at Streetsville. You were wearing a red jacket and you were kind of tall. We looked at each other for a few moments as we left the station, and I kind of held the door open for you... for some reason I can't stop thinking about you! Anyways, in the slim chance you see this, message me! (Craigslist, Nov 30, 2016)

Although a 'missed connection' is formally described as a particular type of personal advertisement that is placed after two people make eye contact with each other but are too shy or unable to exchange contact information, it may be deserving of another name. Nothing is 'missed' during a moment when two strangers meet, exchange glances, and hold each other in a mutual gaze. It is a moment of complete fullness where nothing else exists. It is as if someone uttered a magical "open sesame" command and a second pair of invisible eyelids that usually separate us from others, open. There is entrance into each other's souls. The world is no longer in front of us as an 'out there' or 'over there' entity. An invisibly shared womb nurtures the fragility of this unshielded existence. But if one is not used to experiencing such an opening to a shared consciousness, a lack of responsiveness may ensue. Only when the moment leaves us do we label such a soulful, boundless connection as a moment 'missed.'

Perhaps not only in such romantic encounters, but also in the way we see and respond to others, this inquiry may inspire daily practices that intensify factual life. To experience such facticity is to participate fully in the world to the extent that the self cannot be separated from what is experienced (Campbell, 2012). Through salsa, I am able to sense on a regular basis how responsive I am to my partner in the life of the dance. Worthy of future inquiry, however, is what emerges from other activities premised on a relational consciousness that also intensify feelings of life. Emerging from this inquiry, the importance of 'feeling acts of seeing,' is simply a first step in attuning to the life that is always there, ready for us to experience whenever we open ourselves up to all that is available to us in any living moment.

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