NYU Buenos Aires
Tango & Mass Culture: Identity, Nation and Gender
SASEM-UG 9150-001 / SPAN-UA 9751-001

Instructor Information

- Edgardo Dieleke, Ph.D.
- 54 911 6868 3953
- Office Hours: Thursday 3:15 - 4:30
- ed69@nyu.edu

Course Information

Tango, ever since its very origins in the late 19th century, has been a form of expression and a phenomenon spanning central aspects of Argentine culture, gender identity and its tensions, as well as class and race conflicts. This class takes a cultural studies approach to the uses, appropriations and manifestations of tango from the present day all the way back to its origins. It invites students to work on current definitions and uses of tango by writing weekly reports based on interviews, small-scale research and relevant visits. The aim is to arrive at an understanding and a definition of tango, its meanings and possibilities, so as to gain insight into Argentine culture and the presence of tango nowadays.

When tango first saw the light of day in the late 19th century, Argentina was going through an intense period of modernization along with the arrival of millions of immigrants who were making a significant impact on society and its customs. Born in popular, brothel-like environments and initially stifled by the authorities, tango ended up growing into a global success, becoming the ultimate “national product”. Between 1880 and 1920, a series of discussions around national identity, gender relations and culture will mark a constantly changing society forever.

Tango as a cultural product is, to this extent, a subject of study that, beyond its musical aspects, is linked to several issues that can help us acquire the tools needed to undertake a critical assessment of key aspects in the relationship between culture and society. Using several kinds of materials, such as tango lyrics, films, short stories and novels, we will discuss certain theoretical points that are essential to understanding the debates surrounding the different conceptions of national, racial and gender identity that intertwine in a society working to define itself. Furthermore, tango has given rise, through its lyrics and imagery, to a series of narratives about the city of Buenos Aires, with notable effects on local literature and cinema. Thus, this class will focus on the convergence of tango as a mass culture phenomenon, on the one hand, with Argentine literature and cinema, on the other, with tango as a narrative trigger. Moreover, the use of tango made by cinema and literature will lead to discussions regarding gender relations and mass culture effects on the definitions of passion.
Given the possibilities offered by Buenos Aires in connection with tango, several outings will be scheduled throughout the course to visit relevant sites within the city including milongas (tango dance halls), in addition to meetings with musicians. To this end, some of the regular lectures will be replaced by visits and field trips around town for which students will also be required to write special reports. Throughout this series of visits and meetings, we will address the different meanings and uses of tango in Buenos Aires.

The class format combines lectures with seminars where participation and discussion are fundamental. Students are expected to analyze and prepare texts beforehand to discuss them in class. Lastly, considering special activities outside of class, make-up classes will be added and regular classes will be rescheduled as needed.

Course Overview and Goals

Upon Completion of this Course, students will be able to:

- Define and analyze the scope of tango nowadays: where do current manifestations take place? In which aspects? Demonstrate knowledge of the main theories of cognition.
- Analyze the importance of tango, modernity and Argentine identity.
- Discuss gender, class and race being discussed by the Argentine society.
- Analyze the narrative modes of tango and mass culture, as well as their connection with other arts such as film and literature, including other music genres.
- Acquire tools for cultural analysis from a cultural studies perspective.
- Inquire into the current state of tango by looking at its environments and protagonists: providing tools for ethnographic description and interviews with musicians, dancers and researchers.

Course Requirements

Class Presentation

Two (10-15 minute) class presentations on a topic selected by the student from a list provided by the lecturer or chosen by the student. One of them will be based on an aspect/issue discussed in class for which every student must conduct some small-scale research. This presentation will last around 15 minutes. The other will focus on a given artist linked to tango—a poet, singer, musician or dancer—as agreed upon with the instructor.

Research Blog

The research blog is a collective blog, a fundamental component of the course. Students are expected to post a weekly entry, following the prompt given by the instructors. Depending on
the different prompts, students will be asked to write in relation to excursions to tango nightclubs (milongas), interviews or reports based on urban ethnographies (visit to barrios, archives and more). The research blog will be based on extra-curricular activities. In many cases, classes will be re-scheduled, given that there will be extra time used for these special activities. Throughout the course, students will learn creative and reporting skills to be able to write for the blog.

Response Paper
There will be one reaction paper (4 pages), in which the students will have to discuss crucial texts to the course.

Final Paper
A longer final project paper (8 pages, double-spaced) is required. The final paper involves further research, and at least three external sources are required, in consultation with the instructor. The format of the final paper also allows the possibility of some special research, such as an interview or a documentary essay on tango and the city today or its characters, similar to the work done for the research blog. In this sense, each student could work on a special project, following their interests explored in the blog.

Grading of Assignments
The grade for this course will be determined according to the following formula:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments/Activities</th>
<th>% of Final Grade</th>
<th>Due</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Presentations and Class Participation</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response Paper</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Blog</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>December 11th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component results in failure of the class

Letter Grades
Letter grades for the entire course will be assigned as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Explanation of Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Clear evidence of understanding, plus the ability to apply knowledge and reflect on the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter Grade</td>
<td>Explanation of Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>student’s own learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Evidence of understanding and the ability to apply course content, but lacking reflectivity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Evidence of good understanding, but lacking evidence of reflectivity and the ability to apply course content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Evidence of understanding in a minimally acceptable way, and lacking reflectivity and the ability to apply course content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Plagiarized, did not participate satisfactorily, did not hand in work, lack of understanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Letter Grades**

Letter grades for the entire course will be assigned as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>100-94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>93-90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>89-87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>86-84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>83-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>79-77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>76-74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>73-70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>69-67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>66-65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week/Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sessions 1- 2</td>
<td>• <em>Introduction to Tango and Mass Culture – What is Tango?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 28 - Aug 30</td>
<td>• Songs of love and chagrin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 11- Sept 13</td>
<td>• <em>Dancing and the origins of Tango</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 18 – Sept 20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sessions 9 -10</td>
<td>canción</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sessions 9 -10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 25 - Sept 27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sessions 11 - 12</td>
<td>• The Milonga Today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 2 - Oct 4</td>
<td>• Tango and the Dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sessions 11 - 12</td>
<td>• Tango and music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 2 - Oct 4</td>
<td>• Tango Today and its musicians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sessions 13 - 14</td>
<td>• Gender roles, the Origins of Tango and Mass Culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 15 - Oct 21</td>
<td>Spring Break – No Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sessions 15 - 16</td>
<td>• Smith &amp; Kosslyn chapter 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 23 - Oct 25</td>
<td>Concepts and categories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Psychological Bulletin 129, 592-613. (pdf available via NYU Classes) |
| Sessions 17 - 18 | **Tango and Hollywood**  
• Tango celebrities. New models of masculinity and femininity. Carlos Gardel  
• The Hollywood model and the celebrities. Tango and film  
• Sexuality as a spectacle |
| Oct 30 - Nov 1 | • Simon Collier:  
• “Carlos Gardel and his encounter with Tango”  
• “Carlos Gardel and the Cinema”  
• Screening. Cuesta Abajo (1934)  
• Special guest: Julieta Laso (Singer of Orquesta Típica Fernández Fierro) |
| Special Blog for Week 9-10: interviews with dancers, singers and musicians. |
| Session 19 - 20 | **Tango and national identity**  
• Modernity and Avant-Garde in Tango |
| Nov 6 - Nov 8 | • Borges, Jorge Luis. “History of Tango”, in Evaristo Carriego (1930).  
• Oliverio Girondo “Milonga”; Emilio Pettorutti’s Dancers, The song of the people |
| Reaction Paper |
| Sessions 21 - 22 | **Tango and exclusive traditions. Black tango and tango criollo**  
• Tango and avant-garde |
| Nov 13 - Nov 15 | • M Karush “Blackness in Argentina”  
• F. Garramuño “Primitive Modernities” |
| Oral Presentations |
Course Materials

All texts will be available in PDF on NYU Classes (accessible through the “Academics” tab on NYU Home).

Supplemental Textbooks & Materials
(Not required to purchase)


Course Policies

Attendance and Tardiness

- Study abroad at Global Academic Centers is an academically intensive and immersive experience in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centers is mandatory, and unexcused absences will be penalized with a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade for every week's worth of classes missed. Students are
responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. Repeated absences in a
course may result in harsher penalties including failure.

- Unexcused absences affect students’ grades: In classes meeting once a week, a
  2% deduction from the student’s final course grade occurs on the occasion of the first
  unexcused absence.

- Absences are excused only for illness, religious observance, and emergencies.

**Illness:** For a single absence, students may be required to provide a doctor’s note, at the
discretion of the Assistant Directors of Academics. In the case of two consecutive absences,
students must provide a doctor’s note. Exams, quizzes, and presentations will not be made up
without a doctor’s note.

**Religious Observance:** Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled
class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday
only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday.
Students must notify their instructor and the Academic Office in writing via email one week in
advance before being absent for this purpose. If exams, quizzes, and presentations are
scheduled on a holiday a student will observe, the Assistant Directors, in coordination with the
instructor, will reschedule them.

**Please note:** if you are unable to attend class, you are required to email your professors
directly and notify them.

**Late Assignment**
Late submission or work will be accepted only with justifiable reasons of health or family
emergency.

**Academic Honesty/Plagiarism**
- At NYU, a commitment to excellence, fairness, honesty, and respect within and
  outside the classroom is essential to maintaining the integrity of our community.
- **Plagiarism:** presenting others' work without adequate acknowledgement of its
  source, as though it were one’s own. Plagiarism is a form of fraud. We all stand on
  the shoulders of others, and we must give credit to the creators of the works that we
  incorporate into products that we call our own. Some examples of plagiarism:
  - a sequence of words incorporated without quotation marks
  - an unacknowledged passage paraphrased from another's work
  - the use of ideas, sound recordings, computer data or images created by others
    as though it were one’s own
  - submitting evaluations of group members’ work for an assigned group project
    which misrepresent the work that was performed by another group member
  - altering or forging academic documents, including but not limited to admissions
    materials, academic records, grade reports, add/drop forms, course registration
    forms, etc.
  - For further information, students are encouraged to check this site.
Disability Disclosure Statement

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosecsds@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

Instructor Bio

Edgardo Dieleke holds a Phd in Literature, is a filmmaker and editor. He earned his PhD at Princeton University in Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Cultures (2013). He wrote a thesis on contemporary debates on fiction and non-fiction in Latin American Film and narrative. He also teaches at Universidad de San Andrés and is the local director for the Summer Program of Princeton University in Argentina. As a scholar, Dieleke has published several articles on mass culture, literature and film studies. He is the editor of the Film Magazine Las Naves. He edited with Cortés Rocca and Claudia Soria the book Políticas del sentimiento. El peronismo y la construcción de la Argentina moderna (2010). As a filmmaker, he is particularly focused in the Documentary. He directed with Daniel Casabé the films The Exact Shape of the Islands (2014) and Cracks de nácar (2013).