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CULTURE IN THE DIGITAL METROPOLIS: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CROSSROADS

The dances of migrant peoples are both absorbed and reshaped within the cultures of cities. As people migrate to urban centers or cross community boundaries within a city, they carry their dance cultures with them and pass them on through the movements of their bodies – expressive practices that are physical languages. The quality that makes a dance popular is that it is a lived corporeal expression that evolves with time, unregulated by rules or notation. Some dance styles, initially rooted in a popular context, can eventually become contained within traditions that seek standardization. British and American-derived ballroom dance tradition regulated such evolved dances as the Cuban *son*, fixing their movements, and thus created the “international” style in which Latin dance is performed in ballroom competitions today (Thomas and Miller, 1997: 94).

Prior to the rise of the Internet in the 1990s, very little textual description of popular dances was available. Currently, however, there is an online abundance of written information on dances that were hitherto unrecorded and consequently not standardized and systematized in textual form. It is often argued that dances “frozen” by written regulations or notation resist change and become standardized (Daniel, 1995: 22). If this argument holds true, the Internet may lead to new forms of standardization. Historians of communications media have focused on the concretization of cultural forms, processes, and practices fueled by developments and changes in technology. A key locus of this work is the transition from scribal to print culture in fifteenth-century Europe, in which the extensive production of texts such as tables, maps, charts and dictionaries reshaped both the nature and diffusion of knowledge (Eisenstein, 1979: 16). The arrival of print engendered varying degrees of similarity and homogeneity in the processes of textual production, rendering information more uniform and standard than it had been in scribal culture (80). The graphic and textual recordings of dance forms on the Internet might be envisaged to yield parallel developments in the mechanisms of standardization and concretization.

A central concern of this research is whether the proliferation of written documentation of expressive practices on the Internet serves to enact new forms of standardization. The aim of this paper is to introduce theoretical perspectives and methodological strategies from which this research draws in order to broach the issue of whether the online circulation of culture leads to an increased uniformity of forms. In addressing the digital dissemination of cultural forms, the focus of this inquiry is limited to a specific popular practice, namely salsa dance. Furthermore, the Internet is not envisioned as a monolithic and homogeneous realm that stands apart from the “real” world (Nunes, 2001: 60) in this analysis of the diffusion of dance on the Internet. Rather, the interaction between the virtual world of cyberspace and the “real” world outside (Miller and Slater, 2000: 1) underlies the conceptualization of the Internet in which this research is embedded. Consequently, both the offline history of the salsa dance and music complex and its performance in real-world locations impact how this dance is theorized in cyberspace.

Contemporary salsa is marked by a proliferation of styles named after cities, nations and dance traditions: New York, L.A., Colombian, Puerto Rican, Cuban and ballroom. This diversity stems from the history of salsa. Although rooted in the cultural heritage of nineteenth-century Cuba, this dance and music has developed in various cities and nations in the Americas since the 1960s. Salsa has also been integrated into the English- and American-derived ballroom tradition. Whereas other Latin dances such as the rumba, cha cha and mambo have become standardized, salsa in the ballroom dance world is not regulated by fixed movements but builds upon popular versions combined with ballroom aesthetics. Although salsa styles circulate in metropolitan areas around the globe, it is rare to find a city in which all the styles flourish. The popularity of a particular style or styles within a city depends on migration, travel and commerce. For instance, New York salsa dominated the scene in Montreal around the mid-1990s, yet with the rise of Cuban immigrants to the city and increased travel to Cuba, Cuban salsa has also become popular in Montreal since the late 1990s (Pietrobruno, 2006b).

Information about all styles of salsa can, nonetheless, be found on the Internet. Some websites are devoted to a particular rendition, and some provide information about a number of styles. Instructors often promote their teaching and dancing expertise on these sites. Through its commodification of salsa into a marketable product, the Internet absorbs all possible variations of the dance that circulate around the globe in commodified form. Just as real cities market the cultures of cities and nations, cyberspace absorbs urban and national cultural commodities.

In the context of the circulation of salsa styles on the Internet, cyberspace can be metaphorically transformed into a cosmopolitan global city. The Internet as a city emerges in numerous writings on cyberspace dating from the 1990s to more recent publications (Mitchell, 1995; Graham, 2004). Building on the writings of Michael Sorkin, Jennifer S. Light, for instance, maintains that as real-life cities are being increasingly envisioned as immaterial, a link between cities and cyberspaces can be more readily established. Both actual cities and cybercities become mediated places devoid of material structure (Light, 1999: 121). Sorkin notes how present-day urban life has witnessed the burgeoning of a radically new kind of metropolis: a city that is detached from physical space (Sorkin, 1992: xi). It is clear that cities in the real world need to be grounded in a concrete physical space, yet their dematerialization emerges in the diminishing link that many of them have to their specific, local geographies (Light, 1999: 120-1). In his

discussion of the film *Johnny Mnemonic*, David Crane further illuminates the interconnection between the “real” and digital city in popular representations. He writes, “But the film not only visualizes cyberspace as a city; its vision of the ‘real’ city owes as much to the virtual one” (Crane, 2000: 95). Cyberspace likewise emerges as a city in the writing of Barry Wellman and Milena Gulia, who portray life in the virtual realm as a lived urban reality, or more specifically as residing “in the heart of densely, populated, heterogeneous, physically safe, big cities” (Wellman and Gulia, 1999: 172). Anandra Mitra compares the enclaves in American metropolitan areas created by early immigrants linked by shared language and common work areas to the organization of Internet space and its conventions along the lines of ethnic and professional affiliations. Various sites become virtual neighborhoods in which outsiders are often unwelcome and feel uncomfortable, echoing how outsiders were once and may still be unwanted in certain neighborhoods in offline cities (Mitra, 2000: 678).

The Internet emulates a “real-life” city through both its diversity and its organization of this diversity into segmented groups or communities. As cities in the “real” world, especially big cities in the United States, become increasingly precarious, unsafe and formidable, factors that have led to the vacating of urban centers and to the fortressing of homes and neighborhoods (Sardar, 2000), the Internet could be regarded as a more secure and manageable city. Nonetheless, the idea that the Internet may be more dangerous than the “real” world is a vantage point that surfaces in both academic and popular discourse circulating in both online and offline circumstances. In his article featured in the online journal *Society Today* entitled “Escaping the Cyber-Slums,” Lawrence Kelemen, for example, claims that the cybermetropolis is more potentially perilous and nefarious than its real-world counterpart. He writes:

Like any metropolis, the web has neighborhoods, some safer and some horrific. Unlike any other metropolis, the web lacks a government, laws or a police force. The only universally acknowledged cyber-crime is the intentional spreading of computer viruses – infectious software programs that could impair the experience of other cyber-tourists. Beyond this, there are no moral guidelines. A turn down the wrong cyber-street guarantees exposure to information or images at least as corrosive as anything available in the streets of New York, Paris, or Tokyo – and often even worse. (Kelemen, 2007)

The cybercity is further envisioned as more threatening and perilous because users can access pornographic material that is more violent and explicit than what is featured in print publications and can be exposed to the threat of abduction, rape, murder and destructive relationships by predatory types who lure innocent victims in interactive forums such as chat rooms, Multi-User Domains (MUDs), and Internet dating sites. The Internet is also viewed as a principle cause of divorce, as partners for extramarital relationships are found on Internet dating sites (Kelemen, 2007). Despite claims made that the cybermetropolis can be even more dangerous than the real-life city primarily because the former is without governance, it seems that the potential perils and dangers of the Internet are still less baneful than those of the real world. The Internet may lead a person to a harmful situation, but the actual physical harm that one might incur can be executed only in the real world. No one can be murdered online. Furthermore, a user can

always turn off his or her computer, whereas a person who is being physically attacked in the real world cannot turn off this world. Therefore, it can be argued that the risks and dangers of the cybercity are more manageable than those of the real-life metropolis.

Although the Internet resembles a global city, the cybermetropolis is distinct from the real-world city in its potential for manipulation and its diminutive size. In effect, the Internet simulates a real-world city but in miniature. Inherent in the process of miniaturization is the creation of diminutive forms that mimic the real yet are more easily manipulated and controlled. According to Susan Stewart, miniatures that generally constitute the stuff of childhood such as toys and dollhouses are cultural artifacts that both correspond to and manipulate objects from the material world (Stewart, 1993: 55). Miniatures provide tamed and manageable misshaped duplicates of physical objects. Consequently, the Internet as a miniature online city is also more easily handled than its real-life equivalent.

The miniature also engenders a realm unto itself that contains a unique logic of time and space. To illustrate this distinct logic, Stewart considers, for instance, the miniaturization of the physical world, such as in historical reconstructions. These diminutive worlds surpass the notion of time as historical, as well as the understanding that events evolve in time, by transporting diverse historical events from their past realities and placing them together in one physical space as though they were a part of the immediate present (Stewart, 1993: 60). In historical reconstructions, calamities, triumphs and exploits of the past are displayed in episodic tableaux whose format provides a break with historical narration and consequently stands apart from the background and conditions from which they are derived. In comparison, Christine M. Boyer illustrates how reconstructions of historical sections of certain cities in the United States are converted into “historic tableaux” devised for commercial profit. These “tableaux” become divorced from the historical and geographical urban environment in which they are located. Boyer notes, “But in fact these tableaux are the true nonplaces, hollowed out urban remnants, without connection to the rest of the city or the past, waiting to be filled with contemporary fantasies, colonized by wishful projections and turned into spectacles of consumption” (Boyer, 1992: 191). For instance, miniaturized commercial worlds that are designed to attract tourists abound throughout the globe, offering scaled-down reconstructions of the world or of a particular nation. In these diminutive commercial spaces, the history of the globe or of a given country is severed from its background and context through the exhibition of the past within an immediate present. Furthermore, the vast history of the world or of a nation is replicated and emblemized within the confines of an accessible and manageable locus whose pleasures can be easily consumed and enjoyed. The Tobu World Square in Japan, for example, offers a spectacle of 102 miniature reproductions of historic relics and architectural marvels from around the world (“Tobu World Square,” 2007). Inspired by the miniature city of Moduradam, built in Holland in 1952, Miniaturk in Istanbul, for example, was completed in 2003. This historical park located along the Golden Horn in Istanbul exhibits miniature versions of historical sites that relate to the history of Turkey by featuring specific architectural wonders from Istanbul, Anatolia and the one-time Ottoman provinces (“Miniaturk,” 2007).

A comparison can be drawn between miniaturized reproductions of the past, exhibited and laid out as historical tableaux in real-world cities, and the dance styles

diffused on websites that take on the shape of tableaux. The salsa styles that are disseminated on the Internet have evolved over time in various cities, nations and regions. Each style has a unique history that is often deeply rooted in the past. The origin of New York salsa, for instance, lies in the *son*, a Cuban dance that was a part of the cultural life of Havana in the early part of the twentieth century (Balbuena, 2003: 35). Nonetheless, the *son* is derived from earlier forms, namely the *danzón*, which can be traced to the *contredanse*, a French elite court dance that arrived in Cuba via various channels in the eighteenth century (24-5); the *son* also originates with the African-derived Cuban complex of the rumba, which is centuries old (Santos Gracia and Armas Rigal, 2002: 51). New York salsa has also been significantly influenced by jazz (Boggs, 1992: 99; Stearns and Stearns, 1968: 360-1), a music and dance form with a deep history in the United States. The roots of the Puerto Rican style are similar to those of the New York style since this latter version of the dance was primarily developed by Puerto Ricans residing in New York in the twentieth century (Manuel, 1995: 52; Glasser, 1998: 10-11). The salsa that is performed in Cuba today, known as the *casino*, has absorbed an array of Cuban dances whose origins can be traced back hundreds of years. For instance, the *casino* incorporates dances of the *santería* (a Yoruba-derived religion of Cuba), such as the *elegguá*, *ogún*, and *ochosi*; aspects from the rumba dances *colombia* and *guaguancó*; and patterns from the *makuta* and *yuka* (Balbuena, 2003: 96). The *makuta* and the *yuka*, for instance, were performed by enslaved people from the Congo and by their descendants (Santos Gracia and Armas Rigal, 2002: 51). Colombian salsa dates back to the presence of Caribbean music in Colombia in the 1930s, arriving in the country first at the seaport of Buenaventura via black Caribbean merchant sailors known as *chombos*. They brought to Colombia recordings of Cuban and Puerto Rican music as well as a Caribbean style of dancing. Although what is referred to today as the Colombia style developed primarily through the fusion of local Colombian music and dance forms with the New York style of the 1960s, the earlier appearance of Caribbean music in Colombia influenced these later developments (Waxer, 2002: 231-2). The Los Angeles style is a recent form accredited with being developed between 1999 and 2002, yet this version is influenced by earlier forms of jazz and Latin-jazz dance: the swing and mambo, respectively (“salsa dance,” 2007). The mambo, which was born in Cuba and evolved primarily from the *son*, was a dance craze in New York and throughout the world in the 1950s (Daniel, 1995:44). The swing dance known as the lindy or the jitterbug was performed in the American jazz culture during the 1920s and 1930s. Salsa has also become one of the dances included with the Latin American dances of the ballroom tradition. The absorption of salsa within ballroom reflects the history of this dance heritage, which, in accordance with its own movement aesthetics, has reinterpreted and regulated various Cuban dances of the twentieth century. For instance, the Cuban *son*, which lies at the heart of contemporary salsa, was refashioned and standardized, under the name of rumba, conforming to certain rules and regulations established by the British dance teachers of the ballroom tradition in 1946 (Buckman, 1978: 197). With a quick search of salsa styles, an Internet navigator can find hundreds of sites featuring the popular commercial salsa styles listed above: New York, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Colombian, Los Angeles and ballroom. As illustrated, the styles of salsa diffused online have evolved over considerable periods of time in diverse real-world locations. Their diffusion on the Internet not only blurs the local and global cultural divide, but also

effaces their historical roots by featuring all these styles together in a singular place, the global metropolis of cyberspace, and at a singular point in time, the present.

How can the Internet, which comprises a gigantic realm of hypertexts and hypermedia, be regarded as miniature? The vastness of cyberspace does not make it any less diminutive. Immensity, according to French philosopher Gaston Bachelard is enclosed within the realm of the miniature. Bachelard's ideas concerning miniaturization are part of his theory of space expounded upon in his luminous work *The Poetics of Space*. He applies the method of phenomenology, influenced by Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, in his exploration of how intimate spaces – childhood homes, drawers, chests, wardrobes, shells, corners and miniatures – are experienced. Husserl questioned the basis of knowledge, claiming that we cannot be sure of the independent existence of the objects around us. All we can be certain of is how they appear to us in consciousness or in our minds (Eagleton, 1996: 48; Husserl, 1913: 137-8). Bachelard consequently integrates a phenomenological approach by envisioning intimate spaces as produced and reshaped through the workings of the imagination. The objective space of a house, for instance – its corners, corridors, cellars and rooms – is less important than how it is transformed through the imagination, a process that resembles the creation of poetry. The childhood home, for example, becomes imbued with figurative meaning that recasts its concrete objective reality. Depending on the emotions and rational faculties of its dwellers, a home can become a place of joy, fear, delight, sadness or magic. The metamorphosis of our first homes through the workings of the imagination renders us all poets (Bachelard, 1958: 6). As we daydream of our childhood homes, the images that we find in the recesses of our minds are the ones that we have forged through the poetic processes of our imaginations, not those of the concrete “real” space (5, 6). But for Bachelard, both the space perceived as an objective entity and that transformed by the workings of the imagination are equally real. He writes, “I myself consider literary documents as *realities of the imagination*, pure products of the imagination. And why should the actions of the imagination not be as real as those of perception?” (158).

Gaston Bachelard further explores the intimate space of the miniature. Immensity, according to Bachelard, is contained within the realm of the miniature. To demonstrate how the minuscule and the vast are harmonious in thought, he provides a simple but cogent illustration. When one looks out at the horizon, distance creates miniatures. The miniatures on the horizon are not actually minute but become tiny through the mind's eye. The imagination captures this immensity and reduces it to a miniature world that can be more easily possessed, controlled and dominated (Bachelard, 1958: 173). As Bachelard writes, “In distant miniatures, disparate things become reconciled. They then offer themselves for our ‘possession,’ while denying the distance that created them. We possess from afar, and how peacefully!” (172). Through the process of rendering the physical world small so that it can be better possessed, values become both compressed and enhanced in the miniature. To understand how immensity is contained within the miniature, one must go beyond the logic of “platonic dialectics” that distinguishes large from small to the “dynamic virtue of miniature thinking,” which enables the imagination to encounter the large within the small (150). For Bachelard, the “Miniature is one of the refuges of greatness” (155).

Susan Stewart further elaborates how immensity is encompassed within the miniature through her discussion of the rise of miniature book printing in the fifteenth

century. With the shift from manuscript to print culture, books were commonly miniaturized to continue the tradition of craftsmanship and discipline inherent in the laborious production of manuscripts. The application of print technology to manufacturing the miniature book necessitated tremendous skill and mastery of craft. Printing tiny books, for instance, required great dexterity on the part of both the printer and the binder (Stewart, 1993: 39). Hours and hours of demanding and fastidious labour are needed to produce the small book. Collapsed and embodied within the tiny space of the miniature book is immensity, namely the infinite time involved in its creation. As the materiality of the miniature book diminishes, the labour involved in its production magnifies, and consequently the significance of the entire object increases, an understanding of the effects of miniaturization that echoes Bachelard's idea that values become enriched in the miniature (Stewart, 1993: 38; Bachelard, 1958: 150). Furthermore, the book most often selected for miniaturization was the Bible. Immensity and grandeur are contained within the tiny bible: the bible, which for some stands as the work of greatest value, also holds the world in both its past and future (Stewart, 1993: 40). According to Stewart, the miniature book also echoed the discovery of the microscope, which enabled infinitesimally minute and invisible worlds to become perceptible to the human eye (40). The microscope resembles the workings of the miniature, as it uncovers the immensity that is enclosed within the miniscule: when one looks into the microscope, tiny and once imperceptible worlds appear massive. Bachelard elucidates the symbolic correlation between the microscope and the greatness that the miniature harbours when he writes, "If a poet looks through a microscope or a telescope, he always sees the same thing" (Bachelard, 1958: 172).²

The philosophy of Bachelard and the literary criticism of Stewart pertain to the virtual sphere of the Internet.³ Although it has been visualized as space (Mirzoeff, 2002: 164), the Internet is simply a communication tool that disseminates information. The Internet is in reality a mere assembly of computers communicating via the TCP/IP protocol (Hine, 2000: 27). Yet the imagination – mobilized by Internet users, Internet entrepreneurs¹ and cyberspace writers – projects a world onto the Internet, transforming it into space, and in this specific context, into a global city (Nunes, 2001: 65). In order for users, who are secluded in their homes or offices, to envision themselves linked to an immense city, they need to produce this space by permeating it with images that recast it as a virtual sphere. The separate page that the user is viewing becomes a part of a gigantic realm. In light of the ideas of Bachelard and Stewart, vastness becomes contained within the miniature space of the webpage through the workings of the imagination. The imaginations of users enclose a virtual global city within the diminutive locus of the computer or laptop screen. Moreover, this immense digital city in turn becomes small through its accessibility by being virtually at the fingertips of its users, which further renders it tamed and controllable. Horrendous and seemingly chaotic events of the "real world," for instance, can be captured on the Internet, where their containment in this virtual space seems to render them more manageable. Since the hanging of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein on 30 December 2006, online videos of this execution, for example, have been featured on the Internet ("Unedited Saddam Hanging Video," 2007). Although these gruesome video images, replayed after the actual hanging, allow viewers to relive the barbarity and brutality of the event, their horror is somehow diminished through the presence of these images within the diminutive sphere of the online video,

which can be controlled and manipulated by users. The Internet as a virtual global city, with all its horrors and delights, is produced and managed through the imagination of its users, who envision its grandeur from the miniature space of their computer screens.

Although individuals are involved in constructing this virtual global city through the workings of the imagination, the deployment of the imagination is collective. Arjun Appadurai observes how the mechanisms that underlie the processes of globalization – media and migration – exert a paired effect on the imagination, producing imagined selves and imagined worlds (Appadurai, 1996: 3). With the technological developments that have occurred over the past century, the imagination in recent times has metamorphosed in Appadurai's vision into "a collective social fact" (5). The imagination, within the contemporary context, is no longer confined to the spheres of art, myth and ritual but is an essential part of the daily mental work of ordinary people (4). In light of the link between imagination and technology, virtuality is not an inherent feature of the Internet but a social accomplishment (Miller and Slater, 2000: 6) that is brought about through the collective deployment of imagination.

The Internet envisioned as a miniature city is produced by hypertexts; textuality plays a part in the creation of the digital metropolis. At the current stage of its development, the Internet is comprised primarily of texts (Hine, 2000: 50). However, as processing and memory capacities continue to expand, the Internet will be increasingly filled with videos. For now, as the textual dimension of the Internet remains pronounced, its virtual spatial dimension continues to be created through users' reading and writing of texts. Gaston Bachelard draws a link between the text and the contemplation of space.⁴ Referring to the childhood home, which remains a sphere inscribed in our bodies and imaginative faculties, he says that when we start to read a description of another's childhood home, a place that can never be fully captured in words, we quickly leave the text and begin imagining the spaces of our own pasts. As Bachelard notes, "It therefore makes sense from our standpoint of a philosophy of literature to say that we 'write a room,' 'read a room,' or 'read a house'" (Bachelard, 1958: 14). Whereas Bachelard's work proposes that through reading and writing, spaces are forged in the mind, Henri Lefebvre compares the city to a book,⁵ or writing, envisioning the entire urban sphere in textual terms (Lefebvre, 1996: 117). The inhabitants of the metropolis create this book – and consequently the city – when it is a lived urban society and not merely an object of cultural consumption (117), a trend that, according to Lefebvre, has led to the demise of urban life. He writes, "In this way the urban is more or less the *oeuvre* of its citizens instead of imposing itself upon them as a system, as an already closed book" (117). Another analogy can be drawn between, on the one hand, how the imagined global city of the Internet is produced and created by the writings of web authors and users' responses and, on the other hand, Lefebvre's vision of the city as a literary work, written and read by its citizens. However, this analogy is problematic within the context of Lefebvre's work: given that he seeks the revitalization of cities as lived urban spaces, transporting the concept of the city into cyberspace appears to undermine his vision of the vital potential of cities. It seems, nonetheless, that Lefebvre's metaphor of the city as a book resonates as much (if not more) in the virtual realm of the Internet as it does in the real circumstances of actual city life.

Global salsa dance styles are circulated on the Internet primarily through texts, a diffusion that in turn renders the space of the Internet a virtual global city. Here, a key

question must be broached: does the removal of salsa dancing from its historical circumstances and concrete lived realities via its circulation as texts, within this miniaturized and thus controllable virtual city space, facilitate processes of standardization? One way to determine whether this dissemination leads to a standardization of movements is to conduct a virtual ethnography of these salsa websites. With the intersection of poststructural-based theory in certain branches of anthropology, ethnographic description is seen less as a realistic account of culture and more as a text resembling a work of fiction (Clifford and Marcus, 1986: 6; Hine, 2000: 52) that is created by the ethnographer's embodied and reflexive engagement with a particular culture. Ethnography faces an epistemological crisis; it can no longer justify claims to represent culture or to authentic knowledge (Hine, 2000: 42). In *Virtual Ethnographies*, Christine Hine deploys the roots of this crisis by illustrating how the textual component of the ethnographic process has creative and strategic applications for online ethnography. Given that Internet use is a process of reading and writing texts, the task of the online ethnographer could be to analyze the content of these texts and to establish the meanings that are produced through the associated textual practices (50). In terms of salsa research, web authors who promote either a given salsa style or various forms of the dance can be interviewed online for an interpretation of their practices; the textual responses of users to styles outlined on these sites can also be analyzed.

Ethnography has typically been an interactive process in which the ethnographer actively engages with a culture. How, then, can the analysis of texts constitute interactive research? Ethnographic research has been done on interactive sites such as Internet Relay Chat (IRC), Multiple-User Domains (MUDs) and newsgroups, but conducting an ethnography of static webpages seems more problematic (Hine, 2000: 50-1). With ethnographic investigations privileging speech, Hine claims that texts have been overlooked as ethnographic material. Texts such as rulebooks, manuals and codes of practice are, nonetheless, viable objects for ethnographic inquiry since they present and shape reality and are entrenched in practice. For instance, the 1924 decision by the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing to standardize ballroom dances such as the waltz and fox trot, and to regulate them in rulebooks, was in response to what they considered the anarchic behavior of young people on the dance floor, a backlash against the swing dances of the 1920s and 1930s with their frenetic moves and rise in individual expression (Buckman, 1978: 194). The present outlining of dance styles online either through textual description or through forms of notation provides a record of lived dance practices and, in the process of freezing them in textual form, may transform and reshape them. Once a text has a cultural context in which it can be situated, it is no longer merely a static piece of writing but becomes a concrete form of interaction that can be circulated. The descriptions of salsa on the Internet are thus engaging with an ongoing and lived practice that thrives in cities throughout the world.

As noted earlier, the tableau-like structure of webpages removes the dance information that circulates on the Internet from both its historical and geographic offline circumstances. How, then, can the online textual descriptions continue to connect with lived practices in offline cities? Brian Massumi's work on the *connectibility* of concepts to their original context once they are uprooted can be useful here to resolve this paradox. He argues that when a concept is removed from the network of concepts from which it is derived, it remains linked to this network: "In other words, the concept carries a certain

residue of activity from its former role” (Massumi, 2002: 20). He envisions this “residue” not in purely static terms but as a kind of rhythm that operates in relations of motion and rest. Massumi borrows from scientific concepts and applies them to the humanities. For instance, drawing from geological sciences, he describes how the ground is not still but full of motion. Immobility is artificially created through the mechanism of measurement, which attempts to freeze what is in perpetual flux. His theory of movement, inspired by science, enables a reassessment of the binary between fixity and mobility in cultural theory (10). Massumi’s insights can therefore be applied to the uprooting of dance from lived circumstances in order to reconfigure their status as rigid texts: Latin dances transmitted in written language on the Internet are disconnected from their historical and geographical links as well as from their actual performance in lived circumstances. Yet these textual fixings contain within them a certain degree of connection to their former context, a vestige of their expressions as lived movements in real-life circumstances.

My virtual ethnographic research of salsa websites is an ongoing process as I continue to contact web authors through online interviews. As Christine Hine points out, however, it is far easier to study the work of producers than of consumers: users leave behind fewer traces. One way for the online ethnographer to understand what it is like to be a user is to become one; therefore, my ethnography consists of surfing the Internet and collecting data from both English- and Spanish-language websites in order to start interpreting their descriptions of dance styles. Early ethnographers typically traveled to a given bounded location, which became the field site of their research, and sought out a holistic account of a given culture. The field site of the virtual ethnographer, according to Christine Hine, is not a fixed site but a field of relations (Hine, 2000: 60). The online ethnographer is less concerned with being in a particular place than with the process of getting there (62). Online ethnography becomes a process of following connections rather than striving for holism. Grasping a holistic picture of the salsa scene on the Internet is unrealistic, as the boundaries of the field site itself are unstable; where they end and begin cannot be ascertained. The user moves from one webpage to the next, traveling horizontally and laterally, without ever being fixed at a particular point. Just as cyberspace has been compared to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s concept of the rhizome, the field site of virtual ethnography, I would add, also assumes a rhizomatic structure. In summarizing its main attributes, Deleuze and Guattari write that “unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regions of signs, and even nonsign states” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 21). They further elaborate that “A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*” (25).

The interconnection between standardization of culture and digital communication can be researched by conducting virtual ethnographies of salsa websites. In the current stage of my research, I have noticed a desire to standardize salsa in the ballroom world surfacing online. For instance, the majority of the Caribbean-based dances that are part of the Latin side of contemporary ballroom – known as mambo, cha cha and rumba – have been derived from outmoded dances, respectively the mambo, the cha cha cha and the *son*, that were once popular crazes in cities such as New York. Since these Latin dances no longer thrive in popular contexts, the standards that have been created by ballroom rules and regulations cannot be threatened by lived dance practices. Salsa, on the other

hand, remains a contemporary popular global craze that thrives in actual circumstances. Consequently, the different styles that circulate throughout the world influence how salsa is danced in ballroom circles. In my opinion, the existence of these diverse styles partly hinders the development of one standard ballroom rendition. Nevertheless, The Internet may accelerate processes of standardization. In the article “What Is Salsa: Is It Mambo in Disguise?” the online writer Armando reveals his disappointment that, unlike mambo, salsa does not have a standard and that consequently anything seems permissible in dance competitions. He writes, “Are we who have a passion for Salsa ready to organize ourselves and establish a standard? Will Salsa finally be given its deserving place among the other established dances recognized by the worldwide dance community?” (Armando, 2003).

It remains to be seen whether the dissemination of salsa on the Internet in textual form will lead to decreased diversity of dance practices in popular lived contexts, including ballroom circles, or whether the interactivity, accessibility and speed of the Internet will facilitate ongoing revisions of lived dance practices and challenge mechanisms of standardization. This paper illuminates various theories and research methods in which the issue of the standardization of culture on the Internet can be embedded and by which it can be further explored.

¹ Mark Nunes describes how Jason Chapnik and other entrepreneurs have regarded the Internet as a global city. Their vision is based on how the Internet is comprised of an urban web of information flows (Nunes, 2001: 64).

² The invention of the microscope in 1590 can be accredited to two Dutch spectacle makers, Zaccharias Janssen and his father, Hans Janssen. Nonetheless, Anton von Leeuwenhoek (1632-1723), who discovered the microorganisms in substances such as bacteria, yeast, blood and water, is regarded as the father of microscopy (Bellis, 2007). The invisible organisms made visible through the microscope captured the imagination in the eighteenth century and also revealed the great strides that were being made in science (Lipking and Noggle, 2006b: 2063).

Just as Gaston Bachelard sees a symbolic link between the microscope and the miniatures created by literary means (Bachelard, 1958: 153-5), it is possible that the microscope influenced the literary imagination of eighteenth-century English writers. For instance, enclosed in Alexander Pope's mock-epic, *The Rape of the Lock*, are airy, brilliant and glittering miniature worlds (Pietrobruno, 2006a). And in *Gulliver's Travels*, Jonathan Swift tantalizes the reader's imagination with his description of the miniature city of Lilliput (Lipking and Noggle, 2006a: 2323).

³ In previous work, I have drawn a connection between the Internet and miniaturization in light of the work of Gaston Bachelard and Susan Stewart (Pietrobruno, 2006b: 211-12). Furthermore, Vivian Sobchack has applied the theories of Bachelard and Stewart on the miniature to an aspect of digital technology. She expounds on the processes of miniaturization that arise through the transmission of "little movies" in the digital object *Quick Time* (Sobchack, 1999).

⁴ Edward Said has further drawn a link between the text and the creation of space. In *Orientalism*, Said elucidates how the space of the Orient was generated through texts. Over hundreds of years, Western scholars from a wide array of fields wrote about the Orient according to their own dreams and fantasies. The Orient produced through literary means is consequently an imagined space, or an "imagined geography" (Said, 1979: 49-73). Furthermore, in his vision of how the space of the Orient is imagined, Said draws on the writing of Gaston Bachelard (Said, 1979: 54-5).

⁵ The book as a city resonates in the writing of Néstor García Canclini. In introducing his work *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, Canclini writes, "Maybe this text can be used like a city, which one enters via the path of the cultured, of the popular or of the massified. On the inside, everything gets mixed together; every chapter refers to all the others and thus it is not important to know the approach by which one arrived" (Canclini, 1995: 3).

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