

# [ Swapping the Pleasures ]

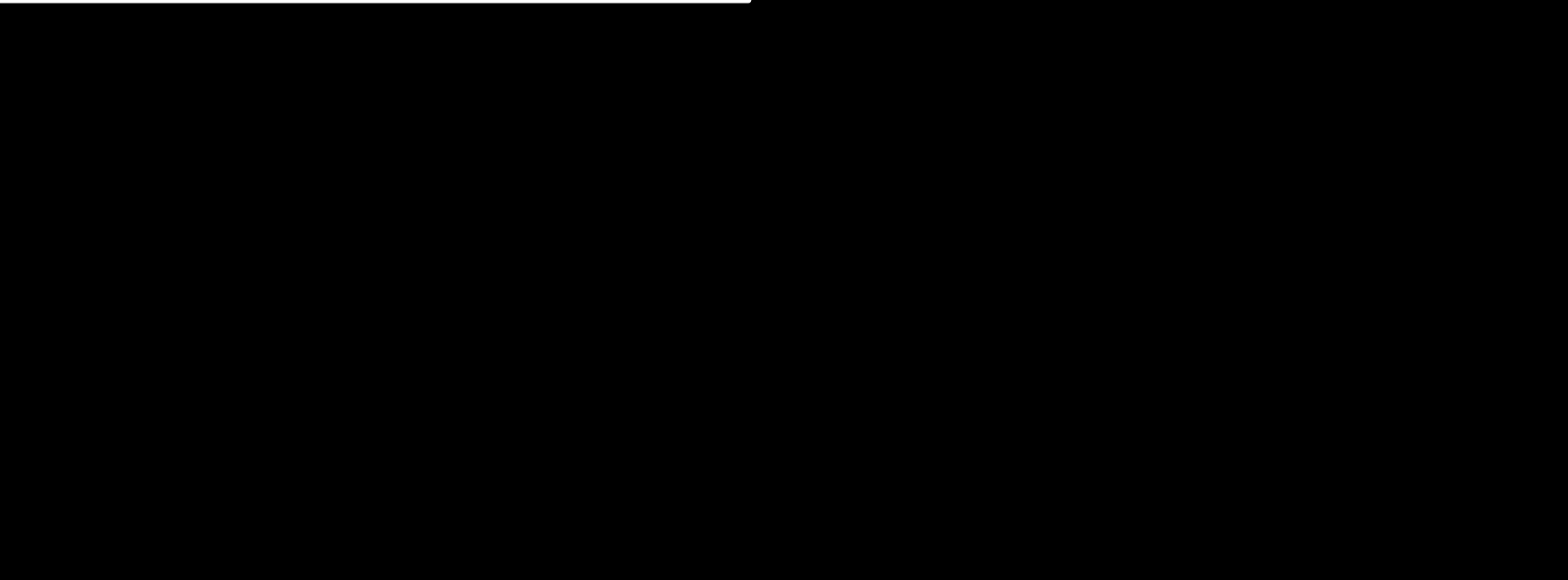
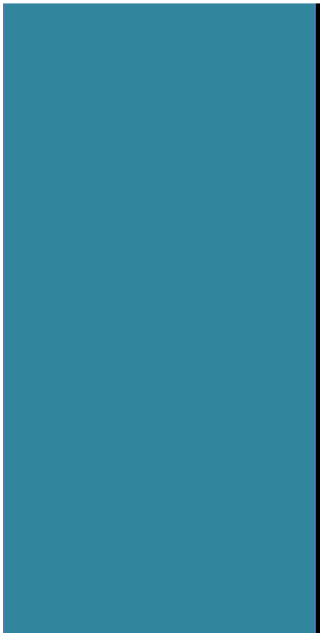
Social Practice Artwork and Alternative Performances: Gender and  
Alternative Pleasure Dynamics within the Social Dancing of  
Kizomba

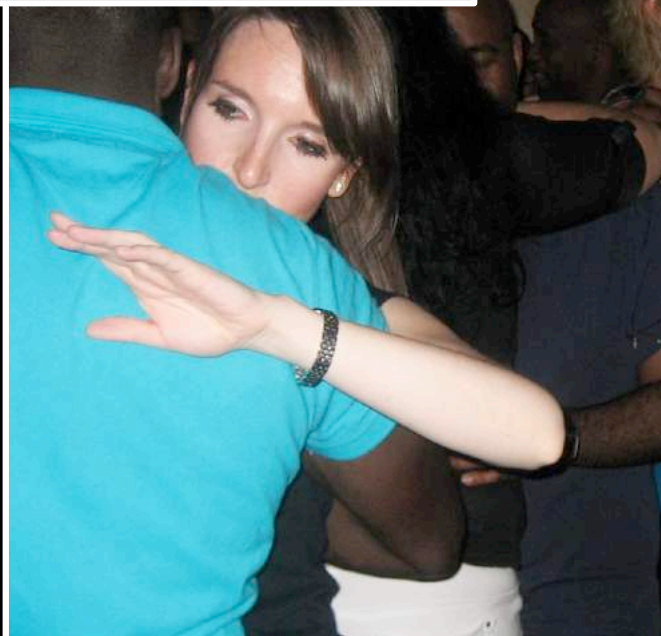
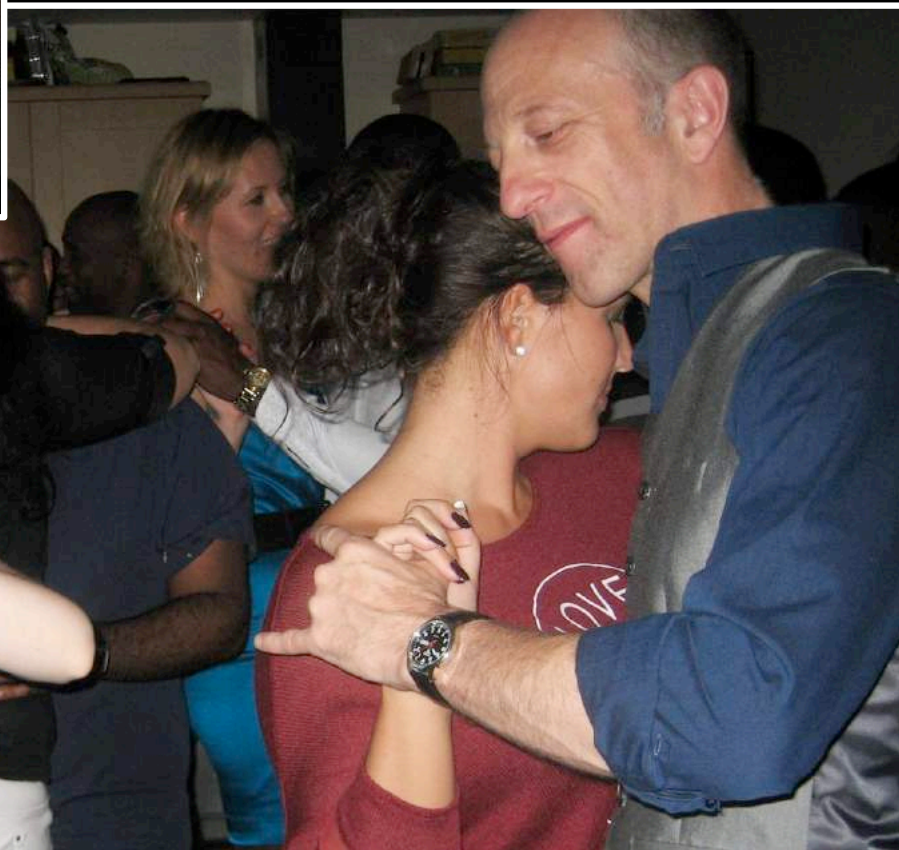
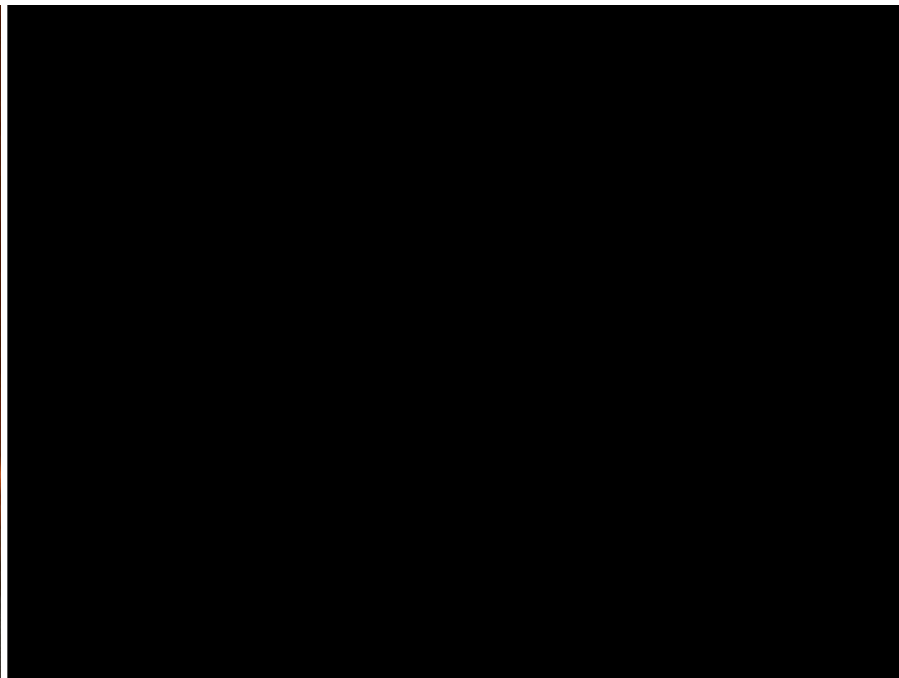
[ Background ]

## [ Art as Social Practice ]

*“...social practice can loosely be described as art that involves more people than objects, whose horizon is social and political change...”*

**Maria Lind 2012**







# [ Kizomba ]



Demonstration at the end of a Dance Class

## [ Kizomba ]



Social Dancing at a bar in Leeds

# [ Models of Gender ]



## [ Gender as Performance ]

*“Gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance.”*

**Judith Butler 1990**

*“...through their teaching and promotion of gender identity as performance, salsa dancers in Montreal inadvertently show that sexual identities are cultural constructions.”*

**Sheenagh Pietrobruno 2006**

## [ Resisting the Gendered Embrace ]

*“Queer Tango is an outgrowth of the sociopolitical movement to liberate members of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgender) community from the predominant heterosexual norms of behavior established in human societies worldwide.”*

**Tango Voice – the voice of tango Argentino for North America**

[ Women Leading Men in Mainstream Salsa & Kizomba ]

## [ A Significant Absence ]

*“Men performing female roles are described as ‘comic’; they are seen as a parody.”*

**Britta Schneider 2013 – discussing Salsa**

## [ Comments on Women Leading Men ]

*“[following in Kizomba] is designed to showcase this sensuality and this does not in my eyes look natural on a man...I like men to dance as men and to lead me and I like women to dance as women and to follow.”*

**Barbara Baker. Facebook Conversation about social Kizomba 2014**

## [ Missing Out On Inaccessible Pleasures ]

*“I guess I never, or rarely, relax into a follower’s role... Maybe I need to try it more. Maybe I’m missing out.”*

**Nicolai V. Salsa teacher and promoter, Leeds 2014**



## [ Why Kizomba ]

1. The dance has a high contrast between leading and following modes ie. followers have very little room for interpretation, with their movements entirely determined by the leader.
2. My most regular form of social dance
3. No record of previous attempts to role-swap in Kizomba in the UK at the time

## [Pleasures of Following Kizomba ]

*“relaxing and very sensual”*

*“I enjoy listening to the music thorough my dance partner's body language and how they chose to interpret the music”*

*“I can completely loose myself to the leader. Nothing else enters my head when following kizomba.”*

**All taken from female participants in the Role-Swap Kizomba Course**

## [ Pleasures of Leading Kizomba ]

*“Matching the moves smoothly to the music to give an enjoyable dance”*

“Having an active state of mind where I listen to music and try to execute the most suitable movement that I know and feel confident that my follower knows”.

**Taken from male participants in the Role-Swap Kizomba Course**

## [ Sexual & Romantic Expression ]

*“as a gay person, it’s much more romantic to dance with a same-sex partner.”*

**Lexa Rosean (ibid)**

[ Initial Project Aims ]

## [ Theoretical Underpinnings of Social Practice ]

*“I don't want an art that points at a thing, I want an art that is the thing.”* Nato Thompson 2012



## [ Theoretical Underpinnings of Social Practice ]

*“art as a means for creating and recreating new relations between people.”*

Maria Lind 2004

## [ Recruiting Dancers ]

Hi kizomba dancers.

I'm planning a short kizomba course where women learn to lead and men to follow.

We all know that it improves our skills when we have some grasp of the other dance role. Most intermediate salsa dancers can swap if the moves are simple but far less can do this in kizomba. A few girls lead but almost no men can follow

So the plan is to get a small group of kizomba dancers together and **teach in a totally conventional way but with the women leading and the men following**. An hours class followed by an hours practice / social dancing. Probably a total of three weekly classes either on Saturday afternoon, Monday evening or Tuesday evening.

## [ Participants ]

**Gender:** 7 Female, 5 Male

**Age:** 26-43

**Ethnicity:** 4 British, 1 Georgian, 1 Polish, 1 Chinese, 5 undisclosed

**Sexuality:** 7 Heterosexual, 5 undisclosed

**Experience of social dancing:** 2-6 years, 5 undisclosed

Half the women could already lead in Salsa, one in Bachata (a dance which uses a close hold similar to Kizomba). None had lead in Kizomba

Most of the men had done some following in Salsa but none had followed in Kizomba

## [ Kizomba Role-Swap Aims ]

1. Create a supportive and non-judgemental environment in which to teach women to lead men and men to follow women
2. Create a relaxed and comfortable environment where men can be led by women in a post-class social setting

## [ Dance Class Format ]

Utilise a traditional binary heteronormative definition of gender as used in conventional classes then

Swap everything along the axis of gender

[ Everything Changes & Nothing Changes ]





## [ Data Collection Methods ]

Online Questionnaire after the classes finished

(completed by 6 of the 7 female participants and 4 of the 5 males)

Participant Observation during the classes and within the Leeds Kizomba community during and after the period of the classes.

## [ Key Results ]

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3. Men had an overwhelmingly positive response to the experience of following

## [ Responses From Male Followers ]

*“I found it to be similar to meditation for the soporific effect on the mind”*

*“I've learn to relax, not to think and plan the moves, to trust the leader and enjoy the dance by simply following”*

*“I learned why followers love Kizomba”*

## [ Men On Following Beyond The Classes ]

*“I enjoy both roles more as a result of doing this course, but following is very blissful and relaxing... and you get to close your eyes!”*

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4. Women enjoyed the opportunity to learn and experience the role of leading but were overwhelmingly of the opinion that following is a far more enjoyable experience

## [ Responses From Female Leaders ]

*“The best thing was being in control of the musicality. To finally be able to listen to the song and interpret it 'my way'”*

*“being a leader is much more difficult than being a follower”*

*“It felt like a huge responsibility, to take charge of someone else's dance experience”*



## [ Women On Leading Beyond The Classes ]

*“it was great fun :)”*; *“It was technically successful”*

*“Occasionally, why not? :) If there is no male dancers around :)”*

## [ Key Results ]

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2. Given a supportive heterosexualised but not herteronormative environment men were happy to learn the following role without resort to parody or banter
3. Men had an overwhelmingly positive response to the experience of following
4. Women enjoyed the opportunity to learn and experience the role of leading but were overwhelmingly of the opinion that following is a far more enjoyable experience
5. Women and men found pleasure in dancing in role-swapped couples in social environments

## [ Men Following Socially ]

*“I've followed some females away from the course. It was very nice. Still, I think I prefer following kizomba to leading it...”*

*“with \*\*\*\*. It was fun as she was leading me round a busy dance floor with my eyes closed so I didn't know where I was on the dance floor”*

*“It is good fun and shows you're open minded to actually be a follower.”*

## [ Women Leading Socially ]

*“only lasted a short time due to my lack of confidence. I need to be made to lead every time I dance so that I get over this”*

*“since the course has ended I am dancing quite a lot with a couple of the followers (\*\*\*\* loves it, and \*\*\*\* sometimes too). I really like dancing lead in a social context but am finding that sometimes I am longing to follow more, because now I have both men and women asking me to lead them.”*

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*“ occasionally females comment on it, normally fascinated by it”*

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*“I would say I received a negative glare when i was leading in Leeds once, and the other occasion nobody noticed”.*

# [ Beyond The Role-Swap Course – Discovering New Dance Possibilities ]





# [ Final Thoughts ]

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APRIL 2013

## "Kizomba Role-Swap Course"

Social Dance Intervention, Leeds

A friendly intervention into the world of Afro-Latin social partner dance. Kizomba is an intimate couple dance, originally from Angola, in which there is a very strong convention of men leading and women following. I have been an active member of this dance community in the UK since 2010 and prior to making this work, I had never seen a woman lead a man dancing Kizomba socially. The work involved my learning to dance as a follower, then advertising and running a short course in which myself and fellow dancer Katya Menhennet taught women to lead and men to follow. The participants embraced the opportunity enthusiastically and it was particularly notable how quickly most of the men relaxed into the role of

[www.davidcollins.eu](http://www.davidcollins.eu)

## [ Final Thoughts ]

*Successful public art should claim its “legitimacy without invoking the notion of art”*

**Mavidorakis 1996**