

WALTZING THROUGH EUROPE

Attitudes towards Couple Dances in the
Long Nineteenth-Century



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Cover image: *A Drunken Scene in a Dancing Hall with a Sly Customer Eyeing a Young Girl* (1848). Coloured etching by G. Cruikshank, after himself. Wellcome Collection, CC BY 4.0. Cover design: Anna Gatti.

13. Dance and ‘Folk Devils’¹

Mats Nilsson

This chapter will discuss how new dances, especially when danced by young people, tend to be seen as a negative and even evil influence by elder members of society. By framing the discussion with the use of the concepts of ‘moral panic’ and ‘folk devils’ by the British sociologist Stanley Cohen and those influenced by his work, I want to place the Waltz and other couple dances as just one example of how social reactions create folk devils out of new dance forms in different historical contexts.

The Waltz ‘In and Out’

In June 2010 the Swedish Crown Princess Victoria married Prince Daniel, and at the wedding party they started the dancing with a Waltz.² In 200 years, the Waltz has gone from being an immoral popular dance to one accepted throughout the whole of society, and accepted by all as the prime wedding dance.



Fig. 13.1 Video: Crown Princess Victoria and Prince Daniel of Sweden's Wedding Waltz (*bröllopsvals*), 19 June 2010, Sveriges Television AB. ‘Victoria & Daniel of Sweden's Royal Wedding Waltz/Bröllopsvals’, 4:15, posted online by 2x7, *Youtube*, 21 June 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLk977Ktaus>

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- 1 This chapter is a revised and updated version of an article published in Swedish in Kerstin Gunnemark and Magnus Mörck, eds, *Vardagslivets fronter* (Göteborg: Arkipelag, 2006).
 - 2 *Det kungliga bröllopet 19 juni 2010*, dir. by Lars Bjalkeskog (Nordisk Film, 2010).

Establishing the date that Waltz dancing became popular in Sweden is difficult, if not impossible; there are too few sources. However, in 1785 it was at least noted by an anonymous author under the pseudonym G. F. Koskull as a fashion among the gentry:

[As to] the Waltz, the earlier fashions we have got from abroad, but this figure we have learned from our own farmers; nobody that has been in the countryside any time during spring or summer can have missed how the people, especially the youth, amuse themselves by laying down in the green grass, preferably on a small hill, always two and two, one above the other, holding each other with the arms and throwing their legs around each other, and in this formation they roll or waltz down the hill. This has previously been a game, but the gentry today has developed it as something serious; it has been introduced into the Contra dance, and is done to music. The formation is nearly the same and is executed in the same way, nota bene: in dance it is done upright. The lady and the man take each other with one hand around the waist, the other hands hold each other, press each other as hard as they can to each other, and turn around in a circle, always so that the man has a knee between the lady's thighs, which must keep them apart, otherwise the Waltz shall not work. Whether a lady is strong or weak, and whether she can stand a stronger or softer Waltz, is something a sensible man shall decide.³

One of the other traces of the Waltz is the name 'väggadans', which means something like 'dancing along the walls', following the inside walls of the house. It is mentioned in 1809 in southern Sweden, in a source that tells us that people danced around the room in a circle when dancing the Waltz, instead of on the spot like one of the Polska forms that had been more common previously.⁴ One example of the reaction towards this novel dance comes from an anonymous writer, who wrote in a Turku⁵ newspaper in 1801:

If you, my lady, want to avoid embarrassment, then stay away from the dances that put you in danger. The Waltzes are such a group, not only because their circular movements are the most harmful: they are also the most indecent and immoral. I want to ask any male if he can have the same respect as before for a girl when he has seen her Waltzing? Even

3 Henry Sjöberg and Anita Etzler, *Folkets danser* (Stockholm: Brevskolan, 1981), p. 136. Translated from the Swedish by Mats Nilsson

4 *Ibid.*, p. 137.

5 Turku was at the time a largely Swedish-speaking town and capital town of the eastern part of Sweden, in south-western Finland.

less can he who waltzed with her have any respect for her. It was well done by Goethe, when he let Werther say that, whatever will happen with love, the girl who he loves should never waltz with someone else.⁶

The Waltz, and later the Polka, became the popular dances of the nineteenth century and replaced the older Polska and the Minuet. In his book, which has the expressive title *Decorum of the Minuet, Delirium of the Waltz*, Eric McKee gives examples to show how bad the new Waltz, as both dance and music, was seen to be by parts of the society in the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁷ A hundred years later in the early twentieth century, around 1920, Waltz and Polka forms had to compete with jazz (both dance and music) as the most popular genre among those who danced, especially the youth. And there was also a debate around the good and bad elements of this new fashion from America. According to numerous sources, the young lost sight of proper morality by taking part in, and performing, these 'negroid mating games' or 'devilish rites'.⁸ The targets here were the American music and dance that became popular around 1900, as well as the advent of jazz in Sweden during the 1920s and its popularity in the dance pavilions of the 1930s. During the 1990s we can detect the same moral reasoning about young people's leisure and the dance events that have widely come to be called 'raves'.⁹

6 Petri Hoppu, 'Folkdansande Eros', *Folkdansforskning i Norden*, 34 (2011), 10–16 (at 10). Translated from the Swedish by Mats Nilsson.

7 Eric McKee, *Decorum of the Minuet, Delirium of the Waltz. A Study of Dancemusic Relations in ¾ Time* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), p. 118, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt2005r6k>. See also Mark Knowles, *The Wicked Waltz and Other Scandalous Dances. Outrage at Couple Dancing in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008) for more examples.

8 Jonas Frykman, *Dansbaneländet. Ungdomen, populärkulturen och opinionen* (Stockholm: Natur & Kultur, 1988) p. 91. See also the discussion in Alexander Agrell, *Hotet från jazzen. En studie av motstånd mot jazzmusik* (Lund: Etnologiska institutionen, 1984); Johan Fornäs, *Moderna människor. Folkhemmet och jazzen* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2004); Göran Larsson, 'Onestep & Jumpa: om moralisk panik i 1910talets Sverige', in *Uppsatser i svensk jazzhistoria*, ed. by Alf Arvidsson (Umeå: Institutionen för etnologi, 1998), 8–35; Gösta Rosén, *Kriget om den moderna dansen* (Stockholm: Harriers bokförlag AB, 1952), and Erik Waller, *Jazzen anfaller* (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1946).

9 Michael Axelsson, *Ravekultur. En studie om ravekulturens gemenskapsbildning och den rörliga platsens fasta punkt* (Stockholm: Etnologiska institutionen, 2004); Henrik Edberg, 'De kommer för lätt undan'. *En jämförelse mellan moralisk panik i 1960talets England och 1990talets Sverige* (Göteborg: Etnologiska institutionen, 1996); Mikael Eivergård, *Hotad moral — en studie av 1930 och 1940talens debatt om ungdomens*

'Folk Devils' as Targets

Morality has to do with feelings and opinions, panic with an uncontrolled reaction, while 'the others' and devils tend to describe what one dislikes. This is how one might briefly summarise theories about moral panic, which are a reaction on a social level and not only on an individual level. It is not just one person, or a couple, whose anxiety about something creates emotional panic, but rather a fear which spreads to large parts of society. This fear singles out other groups or unique events as a harmful threat to the entire society.

Since medieval times (and maybe earlier) dancing has been some sort of folk devil — a behaviour practised by ordinary people that the rulers and elite classes dislike. The combination of body, movement and morality has been an issue for those who do not take part in these activities, especially adults versus the youth. It is said that Augustine of Hippo, who died in 430, formulated his dislike for dancing thus:

It is better to take care of your fields than to dance on Sundays. The dance is a circle, where the devil is in the middle and every movement of the dance is a leap to meet him in hell.¹⁰

New dances and new fashions seemed to trigger opinions about dancing. John of Münster wrote in 1594 about the new and 'indecent' dance Volta:

Nowadays everybody in Germany only wants to dance the Gaillard. Especially there is a new, indecent dance named the Volta, which takes its name from the French word *voltiger*, meaning to fly around in whirls. In that dance the dancer takes the lady with a jump, and she also advances towards him, forced by the music, and he seizes her in an improper place, where she has a piece of wood, and he throws the lady and also himself so high up in the air, so high above the floor, that the onlooker believes

nöjesliv (Uppsala: Etnologiska institutionen, 1987); Peter Nilsson, *Hon dansade som en skadskjuten kråka. En uppsats om rave och massmedia* (Göteborg: Etnologiska institutionen, 1997); Evalotta Sandberg, *Rave och media* (Stockholm: Institutet för folklivsforskning, 1998), and Stefan Thungren, *Raveeländet. Debatten om ravefester som moralisk panik* (Stockholm: Institutet för folklivsforskning, 1998); Elisabeth Tegner, 'Dans i stormens öga', in *Drömmar och strömmar — om att tolka ungdomars värld*, ed. by Mohamed Chaib (Göteborg: Daidalos, 1993), 65–69.

10 Cited in Mats Rehnberg, 'Från svärdsdans till menuett', in *Det glada Sverige: Våra fester och högtider genom tiderna*, vol. 2, ed. by Gösta I. Berg (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1948), pp. 133–82 (p. 170). Translated from the Swedish by Mats Nilsson.

that the dancers will not be able to come down again without breaking arms and legs.¹¹

If moral panic amounts to a spate of moralising that has deteriorated into panic, the folk devils are the group of people, or the activity they engage in, that become targets in this process. Young people's dancing for pleasure seems to be a constantly latent field of moral panic over time. The dances and dance events themselves are then the folk devils that are believed to ruin young people.

Panic does not always arise, but moralising about pleasure dancing (or bar dances, dance pavilions, discotheques, raves, etc.) is apparently a continuous undercurrent in our society. In these dance environments, dangerous things can happen, especially connected with (alcohol and/or narcotic) drugs, and with the physical encounter between human bodies.¹² And if dancing and physical bodies are not dangerous, at the very least they do not constitute pure or fine culture. For instance, in an article in *Göteborgs-Posten* about a danceband trip by boat, the headline read 'The ape stage, round trip'.¹³ Even some of our very well-known and popular performers, such as Hasse & Tage, uphold the image that many of us have of pleasure dancing. In the monologue *Stadslollan* [The City Wench], performed by Lena Nyman, the 'wench' gets pregnant as soon as she sets a foot in the 'boondock' barn dance.¹⁴ In another of their conversations, Hasse & Tage allow the punkrocker Trindeman Lindeman to reveal why dance music exists: if it did not, the whole dance floor would be impounded for disorderly conduct.¹⁵ The implication is that what one does on the dance floor becomes, with music, more or

11 Ibid., pp. 160–61

12 Christina Carmbrant, 'Olaglig ravfest i kyrkolokal. Tre unga greps — flera olika sorters droger i beslag', *Göteborgs-Posten* (16 October 2000), p. 9; Rasmus Malm, 'Regisserad jakt på droger', *Dagens Nyheter* (2 November 2000), part B, pp. 1, 4; Ebba Malmström, '26 unga greps vid razzia mot ravfest. Polisen tog stora mängder narkotika i beslag', *Göteborgs-Posten* (27 Nov 2000), p. 11, and Jan Nyman, 'Världarnas krig', *Göteborgs-Posten* (10 December 2000), p. 11.

13 Frida Boisen, 'Apstadiet tur och retur. Om en rock'nrollkryss till Norge och tillbaka', *Göteborgs-Posten Aveny* (3 March 2000), [n.p.].

14 Hans Alfredsson and Tage Danielsson, '1973: Stadslollan. Monologue with Lena Nyman', in 'Glaset i örat på Berns', *Guldorn från Hasse & Tages Revyer* (Svenska Ljud/Sonet Grammofon AB, 1998) [on CD].

15 Hans Alfredsson and Tage Danielsson, '1979: Punkrockare Trindeman Lindeman', in 'Under Dubbelgöken på Berns', *Guldorn från Hasses & Tages Revyer* (Svenska Ljud/Sonet Grammofon AB, 1998) [on CD].

less what one otherwise does in bed. My point here is not that Hasse & Tage are extreme; on the contrary, they only express prevailing norms, which is why we laugh when we recognise ourselves in their incisive formulations. Similarly, there are examples of pictures in which dance is represented as something superficially calm and innocent, but when one folds the picture in a certain way the real subject emerges — sex.¹⁶

Today the folk devils probably have a greater opportunity to defend themselves, and argue in speech and writing, than ever before in history. The perspectives of the dancers and participants, and a 'defence' of rave and disco, appear for instance in student essays.¹⁷ Here one's own participation and understanding allow one to use the theories about moral panic as a defence against the attacks of the moralists. Those who are subjected to moralising cast back the objections by asserting that 'it is simply moral panic' (compare also Thornton below). Even pair dances, such as the Foxtrot, Tango, and Salsa, are explained and defended by their performers nowadays.¹⁸ There are also examples of an alleged panic being undiscernible except from a Stockholmer's middleclass media perspective. When going to the countryside, outside the capital, many people did not realise there was any panic about dancing.¹⁹

16 Ulf Palmfelt, *Folkhumor i fotostat* (Stockholm: Prisma, 1986), p. 85.

17 Lotta Björkman, 'Go with the flow'. *En studie av rumslighet, rörelse och tidlöshet* (Lund: Etnologiska institutionen, 1996); Anna Cecilia Weschke, *Nattklubbens själ* (Göteborg: Etnologiska institutionen, 1993), and Kajsa Wiklund, *Saturday night fever. En studie av dans, agerande och kommunikation på diskodansgolvet* (Lund: Etnologiska institutionen, 1997). Cf. also Maria Pini, 'Cyborgs, Nomads and the Raving Feminine', in *Dance in the City*, ed. by Helen Thomas (London: Macmillan, 1997), 111–29, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230379213_7

18 Sonia Abadi, *Milongan — omfamningarnas basar* (Stockholm: CKM media AB, 2003); Johan Borghäll, *Salsa! Och livet i Havanna. Om musiken i dansen och dansen i musiken* (Stockholm: ICA bokförlag, 2001); Birgitta Holm, *Pardans* (Albert Bonniers Förlag, 2004); M. A. Numminen, *Tango är min passion* (Jyväskylä: Alfabeta, 1999); Sam Savander, *Dans, inte bara en sexjakt. En deltagares analys av umgängeskulturen* (Skelleftehamn: Artemis, 1997); Kerstin Thorvall, *Nödvändigheten i att dansa* (Stockholm: Bonnier pocket, 2002), and Liisa Ängquist, 'Är det du eller jag som för'. *En etnologisk studie av några generella drag av sällskapsdansens förändring under de senaste femtio åren* (Umeå: Etnologiska institutionen, 1996).

19 Anna Wennerlund, *En förförd ungdom? Om nöjeslivet och moralisk debatt i 1940talets Karlstad* (Göteborg: Etnologiska institutionen, 1995); Chatarina Wiklund, *Om dessa backar kunde tala! Berättelserna om Fällforsen, Övre Norrlands största danshak* (Umeå: Etnologiska institutionen, 1997); and Eva Helen Ulvros, *Dansens och tidens virvlar. Om dans och lek i Sveriges historia* (Lund: Historiska media, 2004).

Moral Panic — Morality in Panic?

The concept of moral panic was not coined by Stanley Cohen in 1972, but rather by his colleague Jock Young. An article by Young in 1971 discusses the general anxiety caused by statistics over the growth of drug abuse, and states that 'the moral panic over drugtaking results in the setting up of drug squads', which in turn causes an increase of drug related arrests.²⁰ It was, however, Cohen who in 1972 introduced the concept to a wider public in his book *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of Mods and Rockers*. During the 1960s, rumours flourished about what transpired when two youth groups as different as Mods and Rockers met on the beaches at the English resort of Brighton. When Cohen subsequently investigated what allegedly happened and what he could establish to have occurred, great differences emerged. It was when he described these differences, and how they could be disseminated, that he gave shape to the idea of moral panic as well as to folk devils.

For Cohen and his younger colleague Kenneth Thompson,²¹ the key element in a moral panic is a series of events or phenomena that generate each other — or, even better, a spiral of events and actions that finally lose their force and die out.²² First, someone or something is defined as a *threat to fundamental social values or interests* by somebody else, usually called a *moral entrepreneur*. The threat is then depicted in an easily recognisable form by *mass media*, which in turn contributes to a *rapid build-up* of the public interest in what happened. Authorities and *opinionmakers* begin to get involved. Next, the panic *disappears* without visible traces as easily as it arose, or else it results in *social changes* of some kind, such as a new law. The actual cause of the panic seldom disappears, despite the panicked moral activities. An alternative formulation is that a moral panic occurs when the public, via mass media, is alarmed with the help of entrepreneurs, those moral crusaders who hound the authorities for more social control and moral rules resting on an absolute ethic. The

20 Quoted in Kenneth Thompson, *Moral Panics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 7.

21 Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, 3rd edn (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 9, and Thompson, *Moral Panics*, p. 8.

22 Thompson, *Moral Panics*, p. 6.

actions of moral crusaders (entrepreneurs) can be seen as symbolic of social dissatisfaction among certain groups or classes in society.²³

The threat that the moral crusaders experience or observe, and the culprits they blame, become evil *folk devils*.²⁴ These stimulate strong feelings of righteousness, primarily among the moralising groups themselves. The literature about moral panic often concerns itself with morality among the deviants — as well as how and why the panic arises. My own interest as an ethnologist is really in the panic's 'victims' and what or who they are, or how they reason. For example, what is it in dance and music that threatens? And, perhaps most importantly, how do the folk devils themselves, or rather the people who perpetrate the devilry, experience the questioning of their morality and their activities? These issues are confronted much less extensively in the literature. Moral panic has two characteristics on which everyone seems to agree. It concerns a social group's worries over the behaviour of another group or category of peoples, at the same time as there is a growing degree of enmity toward the indicated group, which is seen as a threat to the social order. Thompson points out another common feature: that panic implies some measure of inconstancy and disproportionality.²⁵ Here panic means 'generalised fears and anxieties of a large part of the population'.²⁶ Moral panic arises when the official picture of, or the press reaction to, a deviant social or cultural phenomenon 'completely lacks proportion regarding the true threat that exists'. In addition, Cohen notes that there is a periodic tendency to identify and create folk devils as scapegoats (in his case, Mods and Rockers), whose activities are viewed by hegemonic groups (the moralists) as evidence of an internal social breakdown.²⁷ This suggests that the creation of moral panic is a part of these groups' method of exercising power.

Moral panic, then, is collective in its performance and behaviour. It is relatively spontaneous, volatile, ephemeral, impetuous, extra-institutional, and short-lived, arising in situations where clear definitions

23 Ibid., p. 13.

24 Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, pp. 2–3.

25 Thompson, *Moral Panics*, p. 9.

26 Philip Jenkins, *Intimate Enemies. Moral Panics in Contemporary Great Britain* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1992), p. 4.

27 John Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics. Penny Gaffs to GangstaRap, 1830–1996* (London: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 4–5.

or explanations and patterns of action set by the mainstream culture are lacking. The episodic character of these panics distinguishes moral panic from other actions by, for example, more long-lived political or environmental groups. This distinction is often considered important by scholars.²⁸ However, it is difficult to see that political or environmental groups *themselves* would be excluded as moral entrepreneurs. The distinction between moral panic and these other actions ought to lie precisely in whether we are dealing with longer activities which surround moral or other issues, but which are not themselves panicked; or whether we are dealing with a moral/political opinion that creates a panic among influential groups in society.

According to Sarah Thornton, a British researcher in youth culture and media, moral panic is the culmination and fulfilment of young people's cultural goals, in the sense that negative news coverage baptises and confirms transgression as a desired immoral act. Moral panic is, for example, one of the few marketing strategies open to relatively anonymous, late modern instrumental dance music. The tabloid press is in many ways essential to the British youth movement — it helps to delimit the subcultures, at the same time as it differentiates them from the mainstream culture. Positive judgements are the kiss of death. To be misunderstood in the mass media is often an aim, and not an effect, of the youth culture's search for identity.²⁹ Thornton adds:

'Moral panic' is a metaphor which depicts a complex society as a single person who experiences sudden groundless fear about its virtue [...] its anthropomorphism and totalization mystifies more than it reveals. It fails to acknowledge competing media, let alone their disparate reception by diverse audiences. And its conception of morals overlooks the youthful ethics of abandon.³⁰

As for counterattacks, some researchers' critiques of moral panic contain as a clarifying concept the very notion that it has become a simple, sociological excuse or an insult to throw back at the social reactions which surround, for instance, football hooligans and welfare freeloaders

28 Thompson, *Moral Panics*; Jenkins, *Intimate Enemies*; Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics. The Social Construction of Deviance* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

29 Sarah Thornton, 'Moral Panic, the Media and British Rave Culture', in *Microphone Fiends Youth Music, Youth Culture*, ed. by Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 176–92.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 184.

in our time.³¹ Scientific concepts spread into everyday language and their usage, significance and meanings are changed, as social science and daily life constantly influence each other.³² This dual hermeneutics implies that moral panic has become clearly loaded with ideology, and is more of a polemical than an analytical concept.³³

Mass media, as much as the concept of moral panic, is thus employed by both sides — the moral entrepreneurs and the folk devils. To the former, media are a way of spreading their message and creating moral panic, but also a way of trying to affect and alter what causes the panic. Folk devils, the other party in the struggle for interpretive priority, defend themselves by claiming vulnerability to moral panic. But the moralists (and probably also their victims) tend to exaggerate the media's ability to influence behaviour in people who are less educated than they are, at least according to John Springhill. The mass media play a double role, since in addition to being interlocutors for both parties in a moral struggle, they can be, through their news coverage and journalism, a source of moral panic.³⁴

Ignorance at a Distance — Morality and Power

The moral field revolves in two overlapping spheres: official and non-official. When they are articulated together, a moral panic may arise, though it need not.³⁵ Rumours belong to the nonofficial sphere, and their life resembles that of moral panic in many ways.

Rumour begins somewhere, is set in motion and multiplied, and starts to circulate. The process expands and reaches a high point, then declines and splits into lesser sources of rumour. Finally, it usually ceases completely — or is laid latently in the collective memory for the future.³⁶

31 Jenkins, *Intimate Enemies*, p. 8. Compare also *Godmorgen världen*, Sveriges Radio P1, 13 February 2005; and *Kulturnytt*, Sveriges Radio P1, 23 March 2005, where the reactions to the accusation of 'child pornography' towards a children theatre project shown at the University College of Film, Radio, Television and Theatre were rejected as 'mere moral panic'.

32 Antony Giddens, *Modernitetens följder* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1996), p. 22, and Mats Nilsson, *Dans — kontinuitet i förändring. En studie av danser och dansande i Göteborg 1930/1990* (Göteborg: Etnologiska föreningen i Västsverige, 1998), p. 39.

33 Thompson, *Moral Panics*, p. 10.

34 Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics*, pp. 158–59.

35 Thompson, *Moral Panics*, p. 6.

36 Jean-Noël Kapferer, *Rykten. Världens äldsta nyhetsmedium* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1988), p. 8. Translated from the Swedish by Mats Nilsson.

Jean-Noël Kapferer sees rumour as a collective consultation, and refers to the sociologist Tamotsu Shibutani's definition of rumour as 'the group's common exploitation of its intellectual resources to find a satisfying explanation of the event'.³⁷ Kapferer summarises this with the formula $R=B*O$, where R is the rumour, B is significance for the group, and O is lack of clarity. It is easy to perceive that insignificant events or people are not subjected to rumours, or that no rumours arise if everything is unambiguous and clear. Yet, how often does this really apply?

Thus, one angle of approach is to assume that fears and anxiety are what create rumours (and legends) as well as moral panics. The rise of rumours, legends, travellers' tales and similar narratives is almost always rooted in ignorance about what they describe. When we recount and discuss things we do not know very much about — they might be called 'the unknown', and what we seldom encounter, 'the unusual', or what we cannot understand or control, the 'uncontrollable' — we move in the uncertain borderland where belief and knowledge are inseparable.³⁸

All industrial countries have periodic outbreaks of moral panic. This is a hallmark of modernity and of late or postmodernity. Rapid social changes and growing social pluralism increase the potential for value conflicts and lifestyle confrontations, which entail moral enterprises to defend or assert a group's values against others. It happens in the public arena where the media offers opportunities for reinforcement and articulation of fears and demands for social control and regulation to defend one's own values.³⁹

The very fact of a recurring cycle might suggest not so much a persistent irrationality or media induced 'panic', but rather the expression of fundamental contradictions in relations between classes and generations. We should give more emphasis to the *continuity* of the apprehension and loathing of 'modernity' which such fears represent and the specificity of the various constituencies, populist, conservative and fundamentalist, from which they emerge [...] Unfortunately, because of modernity theory's emphasis on dramatic change, its proponents tend to underestimate continuities between preindustrial and urbanindustrial popular culture.⁴⁰

Cohen points out that there is a periodic tendency to identify and create folk devils (such as Mods and Rockers) whose activities are regarded

39 Thompson, *Moral Panics*, p. 11.

40 Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics*, p. 159.

by some groups in society as signs of internal social collapse.⁴¹ When a moral panic arises, it revives dormant stereotypes or folk devils. They linger on as latent motives and are activated when a diversion from other social problems is needed.⁴² Moral panics thus regenerate the dominant and established system of values in a period of anxiety and crisis, while folk devils provide a necessary external threat in the dichotomy between social anxiety and interest groups' policies.⁴³ As a comparison, the folklorist William R. Bascom considers the overall function of folklore to be an important factor for a society's survival and a culture's stability through time.⁴⁴ Outbreaks such as moral panic can therefore be seen as a collective safety valve, and the stereotypes of folk devils as a part of the eternal folklore.

Changes in society often cause anxiety in large groups of citizens. The deficiency in awareness and knowledge of new conditions and technologies creates insecurity and aversion. Relevant here are theories about modernisation and globalisation, where it is precisely change that creates insecurity.⁴⁵ Moral panic is connected with a fear of new technology alongside elaborated forms of popular culture. Ever since the early 1800s, commercial forms of entertainment have been demonised by some groups in society — those who think they have superior knowledge to others.⁴⁶ What is culturally 'over there' but is physically close, which we know little about despite its being nearby, is sometimes experienced as threatening. Our anxiety and ignorance then easily lead to moral panic in the face of these devils, or diabolical phenomena. My thesis about the causes of moral panic and the creation, or rather activation, of folk devils (stereotypes) is that they have to do with cultural distance and inadequate knowledge of the phenomena that each of us now and then demonises in an attempt to wield power. The lack of knowledge refers mainly to our lack of experience of what we moralise about, at least in the same emic sense as those who are subjected to moral lectures.

41 Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*.

42 Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics*, pp. 5, 14.

43 Jenkins, *Intimate Enemies*, p. 7.

44 William R. Bascom, 'Four Functions of Folklore', in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. by Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: PrenticeHall Inc., 1965), pp. 279–98.

45 Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalisering* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2000), pp. 39 and 43.

46 Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics*, p. 159. Compare with Pierre Bourdieu, *Kultursociologiska texter* (Lidingö: Salamander, 1986) and his concept 'distinction'.

The moralist seldom, if ever, meets, in their own arena, the people and phenomena that they react against. The indirect wielding of power by the moralist is due to deficient experience and typically a position on the fringes of real power. One feels threatened but cannot protect oneself and does not know how. Hence, one tries to make the real powers do something, to save oneself the confrontation with immorality, and thus evade an encounter face-to-face with the folk devils.

The dilemma is that, to avoid panic and 'meaningless moralising', we must relativize and question certain claims about what, sometimes with good reason, we dislike. We must examine our own 'centric' attitudes (whether they involve ethno, socio-, or chronocentrism, or the like) and values. Are all young people at a rave on drugs? Why are they attracted there? What is in fact bad and immoral, and from whose perspective? Why do we think computer games, casinos, 3Gmasters, or cell phones are dangerous? Is the creation of folk devils about a genuine fear of technology, more conscious ideological dissociation, or purely moral issues?



Fig. 13.2 *A Drunken Party with Sailors and Their Women Drinking, Smoking, and Dancing Wildly as a Band Plays.* Reproduction of an etching by C. H., c. 1825, after George Cruikshank. Wellcome Collection, CC BY 4.0, <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/y4vwqh7>

Back to Dance

To conclude, youth culture in general — and, especially, where dance is concerned — has been, and continues to be, a target for moral issues and rumours from older people. But in the twenty-first century does it cause moral panics as Cohen describes them, or are they more of a ‘moral dislike’ that doesn’t escalate to panic?

I think there is a little more tolerance towards dance today. There are more dance genres and older people dancing themselves today than there were fifty years ago. Middle-age dancing, and dancing as a hobby, have become genres of their own, parallel to more youth-dominated club dancing. So called *dansbandsmusik* (closely related to country and western music), a relatively large and widespread type of music to which people in their mid-fifties and over still dance the Jitterbug and Foxtrot in amusement parks and elsewhere, generally has a low status among the cultural elite as well as musicians and musicologists.⁴⁷ But it does not create moral panic.

Dance courses are a relatively modern phenomenon, at least for the public at large. My thesis is that these courses are a way of handling the morally difficult aspects of dancing and body exposure, and of institutionalising and disarming the dangerous borderland in which pleasure dancing in a public hall occurs. Here the interest, notably among women, now seems to be in oriental dances,⁴⁸ Salsa,⁴⁹ or Tango.⁵⁰ So, maybe the moral panic entrepreneurs have left the dance field and are now concerned with the internet and computer games, which seem to be the new folk devils. However, there might be a potential moral panic concerning dance in the rather new phenomena of pole dancing (dancing on a pole as in a sex club), especially when there are courses

47 Mats Trondman, ‘Självbedrägeriets och misskännandets princip. Till kritiken av dansbandskulturen’, *Mardrömmar och önskedrömmar. Om ungdom och ungdomlighet i nittiotalets Sverige*, ed. by Fredrik Miegel and Thomas Johansson (Stockholm and Stehag: Symposium, 1994), pp. 177–212.

48 Magnus Berg, ‘Orienten på en höft’, in *Där hemma, här borta. Möten med orienten i Sverige och Norge*, ed. by Åsa Andersson, Magnus Berg and Sidsel Natland (Stockholm: Carlssons, 2001), pp. 145–222; Karin Högström, *Orientalisk dans i Stockholm, Femininiteter, möjligheter och begränsningar* (Stockholm: Stockholms universitet, 2010); Maria Kihlstenius, *Längtan till kvinnlighet. En studie av svenskor på kurs i orientalisk dans* (Stockholm: Institutet för folklivsforskning, 1996), and Hanna Särborn and Cecilie Mykkeltvedt, *Orientalisk dans. Snusk eller konst?* (Göteborg: Etnologiska institutionen, 1993).

49 Britt Ramström, *Livets krydda. Salsadansare i 1990talets Göteborg* (Göteborg: Etnologiska institutionen, 1998).

50 Birgitta Holm, *Pardans*.

for children from six years of age. I have not seen any public reaction that has become a big business at the time of writing, but since there are courses and exercises for young children there is fuel for a spark of moral indignation that could become a fire when it comes to pole dancing.

In light of the examples mentioned above, I see the Waltz as just one dance form through history that older people and the authorities disapproved of when it was new. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, couple dances like the Waltz and the Polka were new and provocative for the older generations, since young men and women were physically very close when dancing — and they could not be controlled in the way that was possible, for instance, in the Minuet or contra dances. After a while, the Waltz became the conventional and morally accepted way to dance. Early in the twentieth century, jazz dancing and the Foxtrot became the folk devils and the immoral dances.

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