

WALTZING THROUGH EUROPE

Attitudes towards Couple Dances in the
Long Nineteenth-Century



EGIL BAKKA, THERESA JILL BUCKLAND,
HELENA SAARIKOSKI AND ANNE VON BIBRA WHARTON (EDS)



<https://www.openbookpublishers.com>

© 2020 Egil Bakka, Theresa Jill Buckland, Helena Saarikoski and Anne von Bibra Wharton.
Copyright of individual chapters is maintained by the chapters' authors.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC BY 4.0). This license allows you to share, copy, distribute and transmit the text; to adapt the text and to make commercial use of the text providing attribution is made to the authors (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).

Attribution should include the following information:

Egil Bakka, Theresa Jill Buckland, Helena Saarikoski and Anne von Bibra Wharton (eds.), *Waltzing Through Europe: Attitudes towards Couple Dances in the Long Nineteenth-Century*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0174>

Copyright and permission for reuse of many images included in this publication differ from the above. Copyright and permissions information for images is provided separately in the List of Illustrations.

In order to access detailed and updated information on the license, please visit <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0174#copyright>

Further details about CC BY licenses are available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

All external links were active at the time of publication unless otherwise stated and have been archived via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine at <https://archive.org/web>

Updated digital material and resources associated with this volume are available at <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0174#resources>

Every effort has been made to identify and contact copyright holders and any omission or error will be corrected if notification is made to the publisher.

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-78374-732-0

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-78374-733-7

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-78374-734-4

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 978-1-78374-735-1

ISBN Digital ebook (mobi): 978-1-78374-736-8

ISBN XML: 978-1-78374-737-5

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0174

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.

14. Nostalgia as a Perspective on Past Dance Culture in Finland

Helena Saarikoski

My ongoing study concerns a late development of the dances that form the subject matter of this book. Sometime in the mid- to late nineteenth century, local groups of young Finnish men in rural villages started to organise dances for their own amusement, so that they could invite girls of their age to have fun with them. In contrast to older popular dance culture, they danced couple dances, and they danced for their own amusement and as a leisure activity, not only as a ritual on designated occasions. This phenomenon in Finland was a modern development. Rural working-class people adopted and arranged the dances as an expression of a new autonomous youth culture, a new romantic idea of marriage, and a new kind of leisure culture, or popular culture.

Unlike music, which was always played to accompany dances and written by named musicians, composers and lyricists, the dances were considered of common creation, known and danced by everyone. From the very beginning, these dances were also considered exotic novelties, arriving from foreign countries and big cities far away from Finland, whether in Central Europe, North or South America, or elsewhere.¹ A young person typically wanted to master the dances that formed the local repertoire à la mode, so as to be able to take part in youth culture, on local dance floors.

In 1991, a collection of manuscripts was gathered by the National Museum of Finland (NMF), written by elderly people recollecting their

1 Helena Saarikoski, “‘Taian tanssiin ruveta’”. Tanssikulttuurin muistomerkki 1800-luvun alkupuolen Vienasta’, in *Tanssi tanssi: Kulttuureja, tulkintoja*, ed. by Helena Saarikoski (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2003), pp. 119–45.

dancing youth. These written memories formed the research material for my study. The material on pavilion dances is extensive and consists of approximately four thousand standard pages, from 543 respondents. Of this amount, roughly a quarter is defined as the research material proper in my study, according to the criteria of its being a personal experience narrative or a narrative of specific events from participants' point of view.² The respondents, who were mostly elderly people by the time of the inquiry, were asked to talk about dances and dancing at pavilions in their youth. The narrated events took place between 1910 and 1970. After two decades of discos triumphing over couple dances as the amusement of choice for young people, the couple dance culture had come to be considered as a 'vanishing folk tradition', a suitable subject for an inquiry by the Museum. The inquiry produced unique material for cultural dance research: a large collection of vernacular writings by ordinary people, describing their own dancing, in the form of personal experience narratives.³ To approach dancing and dance events via such narratives, I developed a narrative-ethnographic method of source criticism. Such narratives of days gone by are deeply embedded in contemporary discourses concerning and defining the subject matter. I looked at the respondents' personal experiences on past dance floors, as they were framed and shaped in the discursive realm of the narrating time.

The Dances and Dance Culture

New couple dances became popularised in Finland in successive waves of dance and music culture: first, in the 1840s, the Waltz, and later the Tango, the Foxtrot, *Humppa* (two-step), and, finally, rock 'n' roll dances. Forms of longer duration such as the Polka and the Schottische and, to an extent, the Mazurka, were practised along with the new ones. The dances were introduced in Finland largely by professional dance

2 I explored these criteria in two methodological articles based on a preliminary sample study. Helena Saarikoski, 'Tanssi kirjoituksena, kirjoitus tanssina', *Elore*, 17.2 (2010), 4–9, <https://doi.org/10.30666/elore.78872>, http://www.elore.fi/arkisto/2_10/saarikoski_2_10.pdf; and Helena Saarikoski, 'Menneisyyden ruumiinkokemusten tutkiminen kirjoitetuissa aineistoissa', in *Tekstien rajoilla*, ed. by Sami Lakomäki et al. (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2011), pp. 117–36.

3 Sandra Stahl Dolby, *Literary Folkloristics and the Personal Narrative* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989).

teachers and as part of the social customs of the elite.⁴ The dance forms, however, soon became assimilated into popular dancing and the dances themselves were arranged and developed into local variants by common people.⁵

Throughout the twentieth century until the 1980s, the couple-dance forms, or simply *dances*, were an everyday and common form of socialising for young people in Finland. From the late nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century, the dancing events of the youth in rural villages developed into a regular institution, in connection with a new kind of autonomous youth culture and the early developments of modern leisure culture.⁶ The rural dance institution was characterised by dance events organised on a weekly basis by local people — first, by young men in a village, and, later, by the nascent civic societies, the local youth societies, labour societies, sports clubs, and so on. Small dance stages (literally, *tanssilava* in Finnish) or temporary roofed dance venues (also called *paviljonki* in Finnish) were built for summer dances by local young people, to be their meeting places for amusement and socialising. From the first decades of the twentieth century onwards, local civic societies built their own houses (*talo*, lit. ‘house’, or *seurantalo*, ‘society’s house’) which were also to serve as dance places. A temporary dance floor, or an open-air stage for dancing, could also be built just for one occasion, for example, for wedding dances or for St John’s Eve, or Midsummer dances.⁷ The new dances were accompanied by local musicians; often there was only one musician playing the fiddle or the accordion.

4 E.g. for the Waltz, Petri Hoppu, *Symbolien ja sanattomuuden tanssi* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 1999), p. 203; referring to Gunnel Biskop, ‘Om borgerligt valsande före 1840’, in *Kring tiden. Etnologiska och folkloristiska uppsatser*, ed. by Anna-Maria Åström and Ivar Nordlund (Helsingfors [Helsinki]: Society for Swedish Literature in Finland, 1991), pp. 86–96.

5 For France, cf. Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), pp. 368–69, and pp. 446–51.

6 Matti Sarmela, *Reciprocity Systems of the Rural Society in the Finnish-Karelian Culture Area* (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennicae, 1969), pp. 128–50.

7 Aila Nieminen, “‘Tanssilava, järvi ja hanuri’”. *Lavatanssit Suomessa vuosisadan vaihteesta 1960-luvun loppuun asti* (unpublished MA thesis in ethnology, University of Jyväskylä, 1993), pp. 30–35. ‘Helismaa ja kumppanit juhannuskeikalla’, 5:35, posted online by Jukka Lindfors, *YLE*, 8 September 2006, <https://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2006/09/08/helismaa-ja-kumppanit-juhannuskeikalla> (the singer Reino Helismaa and others on a St John’s Eve gig; a TV documentary film of the artists and the festivities in north-eastern Finland, 1948).



Fig. 14.1 View from the Punkaharju State Hotel down to the beach towards the ship jetty and bandstand. Postcard (unknown author), c.1905. The Finnish Forest Museum Lusto, image from the Nuutti Kanerva Collection. Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Valtionhotellin_laivalaituri,_Valtionhotellin_tanssi-ja_soittolava,_circa_1905_PK0059.jpg?uselang=fi#file

Nowadays, the popular couple-dance genre has a particular name: the Pavilion Dance Culture, named after the specific type of light building that was erected for dancing; these Finnish dance pavilions were important venues for the dances discussed in this book. Pavilion dancing (Finnish *lavatanssit*) is a popular hobby, and the dance forms are undergoing a minor revival in today's Finland.

The 1970s saw the popularisation of the 'loose' dance (*irtotanssi* in Finnish) — so called by dancers who were used to couple dancing, since in the 'loose' dance there was no dance frame uniting the couple, and indeed no strict pairing of couples on the floor at all. The dance audience became divided along generational lines; younger people went to discos while the elderly still went dancing at pavilions and society houses.⁸ Dance music was assigned to two different genres, *dance* and *rock*, and bands specialised in one or the other (even if individual musicians could move quite smoothly between each genre).⁹

Practically all young people danced, in spite of hostile attitudes to dance perpetuated by sectarian Lutherans. Parents usually allowed their youngsters to go dancing anyway, because, after confirmation, it was considered the right of young people to do so. Going dancing was conventional when looking for a girlfriend or a boyfriend. Most older couples, the parents of those who are now middle-aged, met each other at a dance event. This is often evoked as the shared foundation for the nostalgia that is felt towards this form of dance culture and dance music in the consciousnesses of present-day Finns.

The overwhelming majority of ordinary dancing Finnish people (that is, nearly all Finns) learnt to dance by means of imitation, invention and peer guidance. In historical sources, we may trace and date the arrival of specific dance forms via known mediators, such as dance teachers or artists. However, to trace the 'arrival' of a dance in the life of any individual dancer, the beginnings of waltzing or tangoing in any

8 Sini Kuha, 'Tanssilavat, konvat ja discot nuorten areenana 1960-luvun Jyväskylässä', in *Tanssilavan luona. Huvielämää Jyväskylän Ainolassa*, ed. by Henna Mikkola (Jyväskylä: Minerva, 2005), pp. 55–72. 'Dansholmen, Tolkis FBK', 12:45, posted online by The Archive of the Finnish Broadcasting Company, YLE, 26 October 2011, <https://areena.yle.fi/1-50228262> (dances at the pavilion of Dansholmen, Tolkis VFB; a TV documentary film of dances in the South coast of Finland, 1966).

9 Sven-Erik Klinkmann, *Från Wantons till Wild Force* (Stockholm: Gidlunds, 2010), pp. 354–83.

particular body and in the lives of specific individuals, we have to look for different kinds of sources: oral history and other unconventional sources of grassroots history.

On the basis of an inquiry that also provided the material for my own study, Aila Nieminen has described the overall choreography of pavilion dances at the level of culturally shared knowledge of dancing customs and etiquette:

To start with, lines or groups of women and of men faced each other on opposite sides of the floor, waiting for the music to begin. At the first tunes, the men rushed towards the women to choose and catch the one they wanted to dance with. Dance couples were formed usually by a man asking a girl for a dance, according to set turns of asking for men and for women; the *women's turn* or *asking* came later in the evening and was shorter than the men's. Customarily, there was no good reason to refuse a dance, except a man's overt drunkenness (there is no traditional rule concerning a drunken woman, since, before the mid-1960s, it would have been hard to imagine such a sight at public dances). Two women could occasionally decide to dance, for several customarily acknowledged reasons, whereas it was usually not acceptable to dance in a male-male couple, or so-called ox couple.¹⁰

Each couple danced turning around its own axis. At the same time, the entire dancing crowd also progressed counter-clockwise around an (imagined or real) central pole of the dance floor. The twofold turning around was a new bodily protocol,¹¹ first introduced with the Waltz in the mid-nineteenth century. Acquiring the skill was not easy for the dancers who were used to the more static models of earlier social dances.¹²

The dancers' step pattern does not necessarily follow the musical rhythm — actually, it is claimed that the Finnish audience dances to the words and not to the music.¹³ Finnish dance music is always sung in Finnish, and the dance itself is characterised by inhibited emotional expression. At a dance event, it is thus the song lyrics that most clearly

10 Nieminen, “‘Tanssilava, järvi ja hanuri’”. All translations in this chapter from the Finnish are by Helena Saarikoski.

11 Judith Hamera, *Dancing Communities* (London: Macmillan, 2007), p. 32, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230626485>

12 Hoppu, *Symbolien ja sanattomuuden tanssi*, pp. 202–04.

13 Klinkmann, *Från Wantons till Wild Force*, p. 346.

express the emotions involved. Different couples on the floor can follow a different pattern to the same music. In practice, the identity of a dance, or dance type, like the Tango, Foxtrot or Two-Step, is more likely to be found in the music than in the dancers' movements.¹⁴

It was during the first decades of this modern popular culture of weekly public dance events that Finland gained independence, after little more than a century of Russian rule of the north-western province, the Grand-Duchy of Finland.¹⁵ Finland declared independence after the October Revolution in December 1917. The declaration was followed by a civil war in the spring of 1918. With far-reaching societal and cultural consequences, the country was divided into two warring parties, the working-class Red Guards and the victorious White Guards. The trauma of the civil war was evident in the dance culture, as well as everywhere in Finnish society; the dance venues were divided according to the owner's affiliation to one or other of the two parties. For example, a sports club belonged either to the working class or to the bourgeois central organisation, and some of the dancers also felt obliged to choose their dancing venues accordingly.

An old cultural divide was — and, to an extent still is — felt between the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking Finns in the coastal area where neighbouring villages or even houses may belong to different language areas.¹⁶ The dance audience was divided between the pavilions of each language group and so were dance music and bands. The dance music played by Swedish-speaking bands was influenced by the Swedish country-like *dansbandsmusik* and the musicians had frequent contact with

14 Cf. Nieminen, "'Tanstillava, järvi ja hanuri'", the appended observation report; dance types are identified solely on the basis of music and no attention is paid to dancers' movements in this respect.

15 Before 1809, areas that today belong to Finland were known, since ancient times, as the eastern province of Sweden.

16 At the end of 2010, there were nearly 300,000 Swedish-speaking Finns, or 5.5 % of the total population of nearly 5.5 million (*Statistics Finland*, http://www.stat.fi/index_en.html). Alongside Finnish, Swedish has the status of an official national language. The Swedish-speaking population is not evenly distributed regionally. While the so-called *Svenskfinland*, or Swede-Finland, is more of a cultural concept than a regional one, there are still two Swedish-speaking areas on the South and West coasts of Finland. Åland Islands, south-west from mainland Finland is an autonomous area with Swedish as the only official language.

Sweden, the United Kingdom and even further abroad.¹⁷ The Finnish dance music evolved more into a genre of its own, characterised by the largely romantic-nostalgic *Schlager*-type texts, always sung in Finnish, and the overwhelming popularity of Finnish Tango music. While many individuals were bilingual, the dance organisers, the venues and the music did not straddle the divide, and it was always a little adventure to take a dance trip to a pavilion of the other language group.

The religious, political, and ethnic divides created some of the historic differences that emerged and became embodied in the popular dance culture, intertwined with the more readily evident generational and gender differences and identities.

The 1920s in Finland were characterised by a modernist impulse. Besides jazz, Tango was introduced as an exotic dance from the New World. Bigger dance pavilions were built to gather larger audiences. In turn, these groups ran the fundraising of the organising civic societies and also provided for a more professional entertainment business, based on starring vocalists. Larger dance bands were established which travelled across smaller or larger areas, and thus standardised the music played on dance occasions.¹⁸ This modernisation thrust was connected to technical innovations such as the bicycle, which enabled people to make longer trips to dance events, and the radio and gramophone was within every person's reach.¹⁹ Still, the overwhelmingly agrarian structure of society did not change to any remarkable degree. Indeed, Finland remained agrarian and rural until the late 1960s, the age of the Great Migration to towns and to Sweden in search of jobs in industry and in services.

-
- 17 Klinkmann, *Från Wantons till Wild Force*; Anna-Maria Nordman, *Takt och ton i tiden. Instrument, musik och musiker i svenskösterbottniska dansorkestrar 1920–1950* (Åbo [Turku]: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2003).
- 18 Marko Tikka and Toivo Tamminen, *Tanssiorkesteri Dallapé. Suomijatsin legenda 1925–2010* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2011).
- 19 Saara Tuomaala, 'Polkupyörällä pääsee. Suomalaisen maalaisnuoruuden siirtymiä 1920–1940-luvuilla' in *Nuoruuden vuosisata*, ed. by Sinikka Aapola and Mervi Kaarninen (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2003), pp. 355–72; Tiina Männistö-Funk, 'Säveltulva kaupungissa — Gramofonimusiikki uudenaikaisena kaupungin äänenä ja makukysymyksenä Helsingissä 1929', *Ennen ja nyt*, 3–4 (2008), <http://www.ennenjanyt.net/?p=272>

During the Second World War in Finland,²⁰ public dances and dancing in general were forbidden, as part of the moral mobilisation of the so-called home front, in support of the warring eastern front.²¹ The wartime dance prohibition from the central government was met with local resistance. Indeed, the prohibition was not obeyed; people danced during the war, but it had to be done in secrecy.



Fig. 14.2 Dances on the stage of Käpylä VPK, Helsinki, 1945. Photo by Väinö Kannisto. Helsinki City Museum, CC BY 4.0, <https://www.helsinkikuvia.fi/search/record/?search=tanssi&page=14>

After the war, the prohibition was abolished by the end of the 1940s; this led to an unforeseen blossoming of public dances as a highly popular amusement activity of the new leisure culture. The 1950s and 1960s saw what can be called the golden age of popular couple dance culture.

20 The Second World War in Finland proceeded in four phases called the Winter War (1939–1940), the Interim Peace of 15 months, the Continuation War (1941–1944) and, finally, the Lapland War, from September 1944 to April 1945, when according to a separate peace treaty with the Soviet Union (1944) the German troops had to be forced out of the country.

21 Sakari Pesola, 'Tanssikiellosta lavatansseihin', in *Rillumarei ja valistus. Kulttuurikahakoita 1950-luvun Suomessa*, ed. by Matti Peltonen (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1996), pp. 7–18; the Finnish war-time dance prohibition is considered unique, at least on a European scale.

From the 1960s onwards, the new rock 'n' roll and Disco-based forms of youth culture meant that the popularity of dance pavilions and of couple dances in general declined.²² This diminishment, which seemed to amount almost to a total disappearance of couple dance culture, was at its most severe towards the end of the 1980s, by the time of the inquiry that produced the narrative material for this study. From the now-dominant city perspective, pavilion dances came to be considered an old-fashioned and weird pastime for elderly people in the countryside, if they were considered at all.²³

Perhaps with the coming of age of a generation that possesses their parents' and grand-parents' nostalgia toward pavilion dances, the degrading label has given way to a new vogue for pavilion dances, which are now conceived primarily as a dance genre and no longer as a socialising instrument for small communities. Today, there are hundreds of large dance pavilions and society-house floors that are of national significance in Finland, as well as all the smaller pavilions, the dance restaurants, and the night-clubs. Going out to enjoy an evening of couple dances is a popular hobby among many other dance hobbies, and it shows no sign of disappearing.²⁴

Ethnographic Approach to Archived Material

Of the popular variants of the Tango, the Finnish Tango is especially famous and Finland possesses one of the most outstanding Tango cultures outside Argentina. The Finnish Tango, like its Argentinian cousin, was developed by ordinary people and became one of their embodied passions of choice.²⁵ But the Finnish Tango developed into a very different mood and style of both dancing and music.²⁶ According

22 Kuha, 'Tanssilavat, konvat ja discot', pp. 67–72.

23 'Dansholmen, Tolkis FBK', <https://areena.yle.fi/1-50228262>

24 Juha Laine, 'Suomalaisten nuorten tanssilavakulttuuri — modernia kansankulttuuria?' (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Jyväskylä, 2003); Kerkko Hakulinen and Pentti Yli-Jokipii, *Tanssilavakirja. Tanssista, lavoista ja lavojen tansseista* (Helsinki: AtlasArt, 2007).

25 See, e.g., M. A. Numminen, *Tango on intohimoni* (Helsinki: Schildts, 1998), pp. 5–6; for Argentina, cf. Marta E. Savigliano, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995).

26 Tuomari Nurmio — *stadilaista tangoa etsimässä*, dir. by Tahvo Hirvonen (Pettufilmi Oy, 2009).

to a comparative perspective, these differences could be put to use to reveal the differing mentalities of the two peoples. The dance forms could be read as modes of representation and decoded in terms of their representative relationship to the social realities beyond dance.²⁷

From an ethnographic perspective, however, the research questions revolve more around the presentation and self-presentation in dance of and by the dancers than around representation. Dancing is seen as an embodied performance practice in which people present themselves to themselves and to each other, as they see themselves through their dancing. The realities studied are not external to dance, but are seen to emerge in the dancing itself.²⁸

I take what I term a narrative performance perspective on the written material, as contrasted to an empiricist, or so-called recovery perspective.²⁹ The writers are not innocent reporters of past event, but they consciously create stories of their own life history, and, as a means of social action, take part in current discussions.³⁰

To exemplify my approach, I present the following excerpt of the material in which the respondent describes first how she learned to dance when she was sixteen, in a wedding party, at the end of the 1920s, and then discusses dancing in her youth more generally. The dances took place in Antrea, a small rural parish in southern Karelia near Vyborg, then the second largest city in Finland.

Refreshments first, then dancing began, and there was a band from Vyborg. Our neighbour's son asked me to dance, [...]. I won't come, I said, I can't dance, this Tuomas he said, now tonight I'll teach you to

27 Susan Leigh Foster, 'Choreographies of Gender', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 24.1 (1998), 1–33, <https://doi.org/10.1086/495316>

28 E.g. John McCall, *Dancing Histories. Heuristic Ethnography with the Ohafia Igbo* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 2000), <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.15520>

29 See Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987).

30 Richard Bauman, *Story, Performance, and Event* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511620935>; Jerome Bruner, 'Life as Narrative', *Social Research*, 54.1 (1987), 11–32; Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs, 'Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 19.1 (1990), 59–88 (at 62–66), <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.19.100190.000423>; Eric E. Peterson and Kristin M. Langellier, 'The Performance Turn in Narrative Studies', *Narrative Inquiry* 16.1 (2006), 173–80, <https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.16.1.22pet>; Michael Bamberg, 'Stories: Big or Small. Why Do We Care?', *Narrative Inquiry* 16.1 (2006), 139–47, <https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.16.1.18bam>

dance. And as it happened, he asked me to every piece. At first, I stepped on his feet and also on other dancing couples' feet and all the time had to apologise to whoever's feet I stepped on. After a few hours of these dancing lessons I then got the rhythm and learned the swing of it. By the end of the evening also boys I did not know, wedding guests, came to ask me, and that is how dancing began in my life. The Tango was the first dance I learned. My second dance was the Waltz.

I enjoyed lively movement and speedy goings-on. I was a slim and tall lassie, and agile too with a reasonably good sense of rhythm, so I always had great fun. I loved the Schottische and the Polka and the Waltz, dances with speed and action. I had three regular Schottische partners [one was my cousin, and one was a former classmate, and the third was a family friend of my younger uncle's]. [This last one] used to go to dances in the Youth Association's and the Lottas' and the Civil Guard's³¹ social evenings and in the summer to pavilion dances, when he did not have to go to work. He was a good dancer, not lacking speed. All these three men had a similar style of dancing Schottische so that you only touched your partner with your fingertips and kept a distance of stretched arms during the hops, and when the whirling part began, they stormed around and around. Whenever the sound of the Schottische started, one of these three boys, anyone, the quickest, would run from the other side of the hall to ask me to dance, and we would go around at top speed as there were not so many dancing couples on the floor.³²

The meaning of the dances to the dancers emerges and can therefore be studied in the narrative material. Dances become firmly embedded in their historical, cultural and ethnographic contexts and in the emotional and conceptual meanings given to them by the dancers. Meanwhile, the dance itself is not easily separated from the dancers, or the respondents, nor is it described objectively or according to universal descriptive traits that depart from the narratives. Bodies and movements are described in detail, such as the way the dance was first learned stepping on other dancers' feet, as in this account, and the way the Schottische was danced by the particular partners and divided into the choreographic aspects of the *hops* and the *whirling part*. By accumulating such detailed

31 The Lotta Svärd and the Civil Guard were voluntary auxiliary paramilitary organisations, the former for women. Both organisations were disbanded and forbidden in 1944, by the Allied Commission.

32 Antrea, previously Eastern Finland; NMF:K37/504. Referring to the archived material, a place name is followed by NMF = National Museum of Finland; K37 = Manuscript collection 37 (1991), Pavilion Dances; 504 = identifying the respondent.

descriptions, the embodied practices become articulated conceptually, in the discursive realm. But this will amount to a culture-specific conceptualisation of the moving bodies and the embodied practices, to a description of the dances as experienced by the dancers; and not to an objective description.

Nostalgia as Emotion and as Narrative Device

Nostalgia is commonly defined as an emotion: longing for the past or something other which is unreachable.³³ The next quote reveals itself to be nostalgic immediately, from the first intuition. My question is, how to analyse explicitly an emotion in a text? How to make the written text speak out in an emotional voice?

I think the dancing trips of today's youth are different altogether. I suppose they'd go out there wearing whatever, although the make-up is always flashy. A dance band must be renowned and have a glamorous vocalist. Who would these days twirl around on a cosy wooden floor of the little workers' or societies' house, accompanied by the gaffer next door? Or on a small, uncovered stage in an alder thicket, circled by gnats. Or walk her bicycle on a wood-path fertilised by the cows. The youth today wouldn't care for or have the time to listen to the cheep of the bird in the night, not that they'd hear it from the noise. And surely, they wouldn't laugh at the summer rain on the saddle of their bicycle coming home from a dancing trip. We, the fortunate elderly, had the chance to experience that in our youth, and I too feel like a lucky girl; despite the wartimes, I experienced many merry trips.³⁴

In order to analyse emotions, I see as necessary a dialogue between the supposed writer and myself as the reader. There is no emotion in a written text as such, in the paper and ink, so to speak, and there is no emotion in research without the personal involvement of the researcher with the people she is studying. With written materials, the dialogue and the involvement must be established by methods of reading. In order to make the analysis of emotion more explicit, I therefore describe my personal and emotional reactions to this piece of text and try to clarify the path I took in interpreting it.

33 E.g. Karin Johansson, *Nostalgia. En känslans historia* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 2001).

34 Forssa, South-Western Finland; NMF:K37/666.

When I first read this passage, to tell the truth I felt quite irritated. The text is full of stereotypes of the 'good old times' which, as we all know, never existed in the first place. I felt offended as a reader since I realised that she had written with a reader precisely like me in mind, representing 'today's youth' or younger people as compared to her. She is considerably older than I am, maybe some fifty years, and with totally different generational experiences of the amusements of our youth. I think it is this condescending attitude toward other people's (my own) experiences that I first read into the text and that annoyed me.

My next reaction was to name this piece of text a *nostalgia piece*, or more exactly, *the* nostalgia piece, in the material I had read through by that point in time. This naming, as I reflect on it afterwards, is equivalent to granting a conscious attitude to the writer. The text is not an outcome of an innocent longing for the remembered past. It was the writer's intention precisely to create a nostalgic piece of writing in response to this inquiry. Here I am entering into a dialogue with the supposed writer, as I see her in her text.

In order to understand this text, I then looked for shared grounds for understanding. Of these, nostalgia is the self-evident one. Nostalgia can be seen as largely defining the research subjects of folkloristics and ethnology in the context of modernisation, in the (for the most part) nostalgic discourse of 'disappearing' traditions of agrarian society that must be preserved in the archives and museums and saved by the researchers. The inquiry itself has set the stage for nostalgia as a mood to recount this 'disappearing tradition'.

Looking at nostalgia as a narrative device, there is of course the juxtaposition of the here and now with the object of nostalgia. What is interesting is the amount of highly patterned images and motifs in this small piece of text. Stereotypes of 'today's youth' are contrasted with an idealised picture of past dance trips. It is only in the last lines of the story that the teller refers to her own experiences as the source of this utopia. There are several specific markers of the good old times, and the less good times of the present: for instance, busy and noisy modernity, again a stereotyped image; noisy both aurally and visually, in the *flashy* make-up and the *glamorous* vocalist. While the story itself is individually crafted and presented as an autobiographical narrative, the writer relies

heavily on culturally shared images and notions as the authoritative sources of her text.

The next aspect I noticed was that besides nostalgia there is considerable irony in the story. The reasons for happiness, and for feeling lucky to experience all the gnats and cow fertiliser, cannot be taken at face value as expressions of pathetic nostalgia. They are left enigmatic, without further explanation of the narrator's intentions. The ironic motives, however, do not contest the goodness of the good old times. The irony points at the understanding of the supposed reader: the writer is challenging the interpretive imagination of the reader she has had in mind. She has engaged in a dialogue with her imagined reader, and, in my interpretation, I am engaging in continuing this dialogue, now with the imagined writer or author of the text.

As a possible interpretive frame, I suggest what I have termed a narrative of guts, Finnish *sisu*. The Finnish notion of *sisu* (literally, 'the inner', 'the innermost') conveys endurance and courage, inner moral strength, but also hard work to reach a goal, and it is part of Finnish self-understanding, a trait attributed to Finns in particular as *the Finnish Sisu*. *Sisu* has been explicated as being an *ethos of toughness*, verbalised as: 'Life is hard; we have to manage it; we have managed it; we are proud of that'.³⁵

My suggestion is that in her story the narrator gives content to and animates, or embodies, the notion of Finnish *sisu*. Within this interpretive frame, I can find a common ground for understanding between my 'life-world' and that of the narrator's, and comprehend the happiness she is claiming. Even if I myself might not identify with the ethos of *sisu* in the way it is expressed in this text, the ethos provides an interpretive frame within which the text becomes intelligible to me; or, to put it more simply, as a native of Finnish culture I can understand what the text is about if it is about *sisu*.

The motives and contents of such a small story reveal themselves to be highly culturally specific. My initial discomfort with this text arose, in the first place, from the time difference between the narrated world and my own life-world, estranging me from the narrated past and from its idealisation as well. From that distance, the text could be

35 Matti Kortteinen, *Kunnian kenttä. Suomalainen palkkatyö kulttuurisena muotona* (Helsinki: Hanki ja jää, 1992), p. 63.

approached and made familiar by means of some more general cultural models: the interpretive frames of nostalgia and that of Finnish *sisu*. The former represents, in the first place, a reflective awareness as the researcher of the discourses in which the research is embedded. The latter is admissible as contextualisation in Finnish culture at large. In this interpretation of mine, the popular imagination that was communicated by the narrative was not the goodness of ‘the good old times and cosy places in the countryside’ as such, but that there is something *Finnish* that is worth remembering and that continues in spite of the changing times.

The narrative in this reading constructs Finnish self-understanding or, one could also say, national identity. Since this is precisely the aim of such traditional collections, and since the writer could be seen to be responding to such a call in the inquiry, one might ask whether there are no other discourses or attitudes discernible in the material than the ordered national-romantic nostalgic gaze at the remembered past.



Fig. 14.3 Illustration of the ‘Open air dancing’ entry on the Living Traditions wiki, hosted by the National Museum of Finland at the Pyhäsalmi dance pavilion, Northern Ostrobothnia region, Finland. Open air dancing is included in the list of Finnish Intangible Cultural Heritage. Photo by Sari Hovila (2011), CC BY 4.0, <https://wiki.aineetonkulttuuriperinto.fi/wiki/Tiedosto:Pyh%C3%A4salmi.jpg>

Cultural Heritage: An Alternative Perspective to Nostalgia

Finnish folklorist Jyrki Pöysä suggests that cultural heritage ought to be considered as a new perspective on the research subject of folkloristics and ethnology, differing from nostalgia, which dominated much earlier research.³⁶ I explore his suggestion here by presenting one more excerpt from my research material and by comparing and contrasting the two perspectives.

The narrator of this second excerpt first talks about the dances right after the Second World War, and then of how she learned to dance, as a child, before the war. In the course of her narrative, she describes a local revival of the dance pavilion culture after the war, and we can see that this revival or reconstruction was based on the memories that the young people had of their childhood and the local dance culture that existed before the war.

I'm of the war-time youth; turned seventeen when the racket of war was over. The Fritz burned down my home, about three km from downtown Tornio, and half of the houses in Yliraumo, too.³⁷ The house of the Youth Society was left standing, fortunately. After all the commotion was over, we had a cleaning bee at the society house, there was no shortage of labour, and the bee dances have really stayed with me.³⁸

We had lived through a time of anxiety, but the young had the will to live and hopes for the future, so we started to organise social evenings with all kinds of amusement: plays, old dances, courses on folk dance, and in the end, we had an hour-and-a-half of dancing. This Youth Society really was an important site for recreation in the area; in almost every event there was a full crowd of people, and hardly any disorder at all. I only remember that the Raumo boys were jealous of the Karelia boys, of whom there were many in the neighbourhoods, and many marriages,

36 Jyrki Pöysä, 'The Performative Nostalgia of Work', paper presented in the IV Spring School of Finnish Folklore Society, Helsinki, 15 May 2009.

37 During the Lapland war (1944–1945), the civil population, of ca. 170,000, was evacuated to more southern parts of Finland and partly to Sweden. The German troops, forced to withdraw by the Finnish, used scorched-earth tactics.

38 'Cleaning bee' refers to a gathering of people who volunteer for communal work — here, to clean the society house. Similarly, 'bee dances' refer to the dances held by this collective gathering.

too, were settled between these immigrants and the locals.³⁹ All my siblings were involved in the society, and we all danced.

I remember, when I was a child, my parents would go out and my sisters rolled the rugs aside and the gramophone started to play, and the dance started. Back then girls and boys mingled differently from nowadays; there was a larger circle of friends. Because I was the youngest (of eight siblings), I soon learned all the dances and the songs, and I still remember them.⁴⁰

There are elements of nostalgia in the story; for instance, the emphasis on the communality of the dancing young people of the village. Although the narrated events, especially the setting of the story, are extremely emotional and anxiety-laden, there are not many direct expressions of this at the textual level. Instead, the expressions referring to 'remembering' can be read as pointing to affective moments.

There is a double movement of orientations or time perspectives in the narrated time: to the past, in childhood memories, and to the future, because the war is over and the time of peace has arrived with its new hopes and possibilities. There is not as much nostalgia for the past as there is action to build a desired future. The exact point in time of the narration is irrelevant to the narrated time, except that the telling is posterior to the events related, since the story is about something remembered. In contrast, in the first text I discussed, the reference point of the narrated past is always in the present of narrating, in the oppositional present.

Both nostalgia and irony are reflective, conscious attitudes taken in the narrative present towards the narrated world. So, the perspective of cultural heritage is, indeed, tantamount to an economic aspect of profiting, more or less metaphorically speaking, from past history. The two perspectives have in common the selective valuing of the past, with the power dynamics of who can say what is valued and how and to what ends.

Nostalgia means a view according to which there is no return to the good old times, except in memories — it criticises or deplors the present,

39 The inhabitants of the areas that Finland had to cede to the Soviet Union were evacuated and resettled in Finland. The resettlement of a population of 450,000, representing nearly 15% of the whole Finnish population at the time, did not proceed without conflicts at the local level.

40 Alatornio, Northern Finland; NMF:K37/569.

but with little constructive alternative perspective. In contrast, creating a cultural heritage involves selecting and screening ideas, items and traits from the past in order to construct a future of a desired or planned kind. In an item that is defined as belonging to cultural heritage, there is some productive value invested for the present and for the future. While nostalgia involves a politics of emotions and remembering, cultural heritage refers in a complicated way to an economy of traditions and lore.⁴¹

Concluding Remarks

The collection of the pavilion-dance material was part of an ethnological project that was pan-European. The aim was to collect detailed information on every aspect of agrarian culture before the so-called vanishing traditions disappeared from living memory. The new narrative approach to these materials leaves aside the myriad facts, and with them an understanding of the producers of this material as 'informants'; it considers them instead as storytellers, or conscious form-givers to their past, and so a whole range of new kinds of knowledge becomes available.

A narrative evaluation of the materials enables a focus on what the respondents reveal in their dialogue with the archives: on the life experiences as they are articulated and presented in the stories and on the meanings given to the experiences and events by the narrators, or the people studied themselves.

There is no reach 'beyond' the narratives that form the research material, to the 'authentic' or 'unspoiled' experience of pavilion dances. According to the definition of experiences presented in this chapter, experiences are created by the very act of narrating. The phenomenon of pavilion dances as an entity in itself, as it can be discerned in the material, was created by the dialogue of the archive with the respondents and in a larger contemporary context, a dialogue defined by the prevailing nostalgic gaze backwards in time to this dance culture and to forms of agrarian and urban culture of the twentieth century.

41 Petja Aarnipuu, *Turun linna kerrottuna ja kertovana tilana* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2008).

Narratives, as contrasted with facts, are always already contextualised in discourses. Besides nostalgia, which can be considered the dominant discourse defining much of the research subject under ethnological inquiry, I have explored the alternative and complementary discourse of cultural heritage, as it can be seen to be expressed in the research material. Other discourses that are present in the material — for example, popular resistance against the many ways of condemning dancing — are not touched upon in this chapter. Both nostalgia and cultural heritage are powerful discourses in research; the collected written and oral histories add to these kinds of discourse. Discerning and analysing the discourses that govern the material are important means of reflection and source criticism in research, but they are also a method in their own right. Discourses cannot be separated from the study of the dances that are defined and narrated in them.

Bibliography

- Aarnipuu, Petja, *Turun linna kerrottuna ja kertovana tilana* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2008).
- Bamberg, Michael, 'Stories: Big or Small. Why Do We Care?', *Narrative Inquiry*, 16.1 (2006), 139–47, <https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.16.1.18bam>
- Bauman, Richard, *Story, Performance, and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511620935>
- Bauman, Richard, and Charles L. Briggs, 'Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19.1 (1990), 59–88, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.19.100190.000423>
- Biskop, Gunnel, 'Om borgerligt valsande före 1840', in *Kring tiden. Etnologiska och folkloristiska uppsatser*, ed. by Anna-Maria Åström and Ivar Nordlund (Helsingfors [Helsinki]: Society for Swedish Literature in Finland, 1991), pp. 86–96.
- Bruner, Jerome, 'Life as Narrative', *Social Research*, 54.1 (1987), 11–32.
- Buckland, Theresa Jill, 'Dance, History, and Ethnography: Frameworks, Source, and Identities of Past and Present', in *Dancing from Past to Present: Nation, Culture, Identities*, ed. by Theresa Jill Buckland (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), pp. 3–24.
- 'Dansholmen, Tolkis FBK', 12:45, posted online by The Archive of the Finnish Broadcasting Company, *YLE*, 26 October 2011, <https://areena.yle>.

- fi/1-50228262 [Dances at the pavilion of Dansholmen, Tolkis VFB; a TV documentary film of dances in the South coast of Finland, 1966].
- Davis, Natalie Zemon, *Fiction in the Archives* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987).
- Foster, Susan Leigh, 'Choreographies of Gender', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 24.1 (1998), 1–33, <https://doi.org/10.1086/495316>
- Hakulinen, Kerkko, and Pentti Yli-Jokipii, *Tanssilavakirja. Tanssista, lavoista ja lavojen tansseista* (Helsinki: AtlasArt, 2007).
- Hamera, Judith, *Dancing Communities* (London: Macmillan, 2007), <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230626485>
- 'Helismaa ja kumppanit juhannuskeikalla', 5:35, posted online by Jukka Lindfors, *YLE*, 8 September 2006, <https://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2006/09/08/helismaa-ja-kumppanit-juhannuskeikalla> [The singer Reino Helismaa and others on a St John's Eve gig; a TV documentary film of the artists and the festivities in North-eastern Finland, 1948].
- Hirvonen, Tahvo, dir., *Tuomari Nurmio — stadilaista tangoa etsimässä* (Pettufilmi Oy, 2009).
- Hoppu, Petri, *Symbolien ja sanattomuuden tanssi. Menuetti Suomessa 1700-luvulta nykyaikaan*. (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 1999).
- Johannisson, Karin, *Nostalgia. En känslans historia* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 2001).
- Klinkmann, Sven-Erik, *Från Wantons till Wild Force. Nya sound i en gränsstad* (Stockholm: Gidlunds, 2010).
- Kortteinen, Matti, *Kunnian kenttä. Suomalainen palkkatyö kulttuurisena muotona* (Helsinki: Hanki ja jää, 1992).
- Kuha, Sini, 'Tanssilavat, konvat ja discot nuorten areenana 1960-luvun Jyväskylässä', in *Tanssilavan luona. Huvielämää Jyväskylän Ainolassa*, ed. by Henna Mikkola (Jyväskylä: Minerva, 2005), pp. 55–72.
- Laine, Juha, 'Suomalaisten nuorten tanssilavakulttuuri — modernia kansankulttuuria?' (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Jyväskylä, 2003).
- Lehtipuro, Outi, 'Voiko perinnettä kerätä? "Maaailman suurin kansanrunousarkisto" ja kansanrunoudentutkimus toistensa haastajina', in *Tutkijat kentällä*, ed. by Pekka Laaksonen et al. (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2003), pp. 13–33.
- McCall, John, *Dancing Histories. Heuristic Ethnography with the Ohafia Igbo* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 2000), <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.15520>
- Männistö-Funk, Tiina, 'Säveltulva kaupungissa — Gramofonimusiikki uudenlaisena kaupungin äänenä ja makukysymyksenä Helsingissä 1929', *Ennen ja nyt*, 3–4 (2008), <http://www.ennenjanyt.net/?p=272>

- National Museum of Finland (NMF), *K37 Lavatanssit*, compiled by Aila Nieminen (Helsinki: Ethnological Archive of the National Museum of Finland, 1991).
- Nieminen, Aila, "'Tanssilava, järvi ja hanuri". Lavatanssit Suomessa vuosisadan vaihteesta 1960-luvun loppuun asti' (unpublished MA thesis in ethnology, University of Jyväskylä, 1993).
- Nordman, Anna-Maria, *Takt och ton i tiden. Instrument, musik och musiker i svenskösterbottniska dansorkestrar 1920–1950* (Åbo [Turku]: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2003).
- Numminen, M. A., *Tango on intohimoni* (Helsinki: Schildts, 1998).
- Pesola, Sakari, 'Tanssi kiellosta lavatansseihin', in *Rillumarei ja valistus. Kulttuurikahakoita 1950-luvun Suomessa*, ed. by Matti Peltonen (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1996), pp. 7–18.
- Peterson, Eric E., and Kristin M. Langellier, 'The Performance Turn in Narrative Studies', *Narrative Inquiry* 16.1 (2006), 173–80, <https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.16.1.22pet>
- Pöysä, Jyrki, 'The Performative Nostalgia of Work', paper presented in the IV Spring School of Finnish Folklore Society, Helsinki, 15 May 2009.
- Saarikoski, Helena, 'Menneisyyden ruumiinkokemusten tutkiminen kirjoitetuissa aineistoissa', in *Tekstien rajoilla. Monitieteisiä näkökulmia kirjoitettuihin aineistoihin*, ed. by Sami Lakomäki et al. (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2011), 117–36.
- , 'Tanssi kirjoituksena, kirjoitus tanssina', *Elore*, 17/2 (2010), 4–9, <https://doi.org/10.30666/elore.78872>, http://www.elore.fi/arkisto/2_10/saarikoski_2_10.pdf
- , "'Taian tantsihin ruveta". Tanssikulttuurin muistomerkki 1800-luvun alkupuolen Vienasta', in *Tanssi tanssi: Kulttuureja, tulkintoja*, ed. by Helena Saarikoski (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2003), 119–45.
- Sarmela, Matti, *Reciprocity Systems of the Rural Society in the Finnish-Karelian Culture Area: With Special Reference to Social Intercourse of the Youth* (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennicae, 1969).
- Savigliano, Marta E., *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995).
- Stahl Dolby, Sandra, *Literary Folkloristics and the Personal Narrative* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989).
- Tikka, Marko, and Toivo Tamminen, *Tanssiorkesteri Dallapé. Suomijatsin legenda 1925–2010* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2011).
- Tuomaala, Saara, 'Polkupyörällä pääsee. Suomalaisen maalaisnuoruuden siirtymiä 1920–1940-luvuilla', in *Nuoruuden vuosisata. Suomalaisen nuorison historiaa*, ed. by Sinikka Aapola and Mervi Kaarninen (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2003), pp. 355–72.