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HOW DO VALUES FIND EMBODIMENT?
THE FINNISH CASE OF POPULAR DANCES ON PAVILION
FLOORS

The presentation is based on a preliminary sample study of a collection of vernacular writings about popular Finnish couple dances, collected by the National Museum of Finland in 1991 via a thematic inquiry entitled “Pavilion Dances.” The material is extensive and covers memories of popular dancing in Finland throughout the 20th century. I look at the narrated acts in dances as referring to general cultural discourses through a collectively created choreography. This is defined here according to dance scholar Susan Foster as the tradition of codes and conventions through which meaning is created in dance. Through choreography, discourses get embodied and the body can affect the discursive constructions that articulate and define it. I present some examples of narratives of alcohol use in dances and analyze them as simultaneously contributing to and referring to discourses of gender, class and ethnicity, through the choreographies of pavilion dances.

[Note: The title of my presentation is inspired by dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster (1995, 12) who proposes the question, among many others, to be both pondered upon when writing the history of dance and looked after in the kind of writings about bodies moving in the past that form my research material.]

Keywords: popular dances, embodiment of values, Finland.

The National Museum of Finland (NMF) sent out a thematic inquiry entitled “Pavilion Dances”, in 1991, with approximately 250 questions concerning the dance pavilions, or

the specific type of light building aimed for summer dances, and the dances and dancing in the autobiographic past of the respondent (Nieminen 1991). The inquiry could also be answered by writing based on data, which was gathered from one's surroundings, for example, elderly people of one's village or family. The total material collected consists of approximately 4000 standard pages from 543 respondents. Of this amount, roughly a fourth is defined as the research material proper in my study, after the criteria of narrative of personal experience or of a specific event from participants' point of view (of the selection criteria, see Saarikoski 2011). My presentation is based on a preliminary sample of one tenth, or sixty responses, of the total inquiry material (the average length being ca. 7.5 standard pages per response).

Since this was an entertainment for young people, the respondents tell for the most part about dancing in their own youth. The narrated events and experiences took place between 1910 and 1970. In this time period, the most important historical turning points affecting the pavilion dances (or staged right on the pavilion floors) were, in the spring of 1918, the Civil War, dividing the country into what was to become the political right and left wing parties and civic societies; between 1939 and 1944, the Winter War and the Continuation War against Soviet Union; after the war, the abolition of a war-time dance prohibition which led to an unforeseen "dance zest" on pavilion floors, couple dances becoming the entertainment of choice of the post-war generation; and from 1960s onwards, the popularization of rock 'n' roll based youth culture which led to the "disco boom" in 1970s and a decline in popularity of pavilions and of couple dances.

This decline was at the deepest by the end of 1980s and the collection of the material. The general framework for the collection was that of a "disappearing folk tradition" – even if the recognition of a popular cultural form like the waltzes, tangos, foxtrots and two-steps as a "folk tradition" was far from self-evident. The phenomenon of pavilion dances is of modern times. The new couple dances got popularized in Finland from mid-19th century onwards, and in the turn of 20th century, young people started to build pavilions for this entertainment of theirs (Hoppu 1999, 202–203, 293, 390). By the first decades of 20th century, the nascent civic societies took over the organization of dances and the building of locales suitable for them. It was only after the popularization of rock culture, in big cities, that pavilions and society houses started to lose significance. The couple dance culture never "disappeared", if not from the sight of the Helsinki-based academic elite. In today's Finland, popular couple dances (now known by the genre term *pavilion dances*, Finnish *lavatanssit*) are subject to a revival vogue; dancing pavilion dances is a real hobby, and there are courses and clubs organizing for pavilion dance events, alongside the old pavilions that function since decades (Laine 2003; Hakulinen and Yli-Jokipii 2007).

My preliminary understandings read as follows: The pavilion dances are a central institution of modern Finnish popular experience; scenes for constructing age groups, especially youth cultures; generations, in the form of successive vogues of dance and music tastes; genders and sexualities; and of local, regional, ethnic and political identities and group formations; subject of repetitive arguments for or against and an arena of struggle for rule and for resistance. Today, they are a source of nostalgia for communal ways of life and for an imagined national monoculture, the "good old times" of modern agrarian and industrial Finland.

In this presentation, I'll be focusing on one thematic field, the use of alcoholic beverages in dance events and the reminiscent narratives thereupon. I'll present some excerpts from the material and interpret them in terms of the choreographies of pavilion dances.

According to a definition by Susan Foster, choreography is the tradition of codes and conventions through which meaning is constructed in dance (Foster 1998, 5). Choreography is an emerging process through which general discourses of culture can load with meaning specific movements and speech acts at the level of performances (Foster 1995; Foster 1998; see also Salmi-Niklander 2004, 59, 241, referring to Hirdman 1988, 54). In a popular dance culture, choreographies are created collectively by the dancers. This notion of choreography comes close to the concept of embodiment. This is defined by Finnish ethnomusicologist and dance scholar Hanna Väättäinen (2003, 29) as the ways and means of performing or becoming a subject in its different aspects of identity, a gender, an ethnicity, and so on. Through choreography, discourses get embodied and the body can affect the discursive constructions that articulate and define it.

When studying past dances, especially popular dancing, the available materials most often do not document moving bodies in action, but are verbal descriptions. The material in my study is narrative; stories describing embodied acts and experiences and evaluating events. The referential relationship of stories to the "reality as it once happened" is obscure and complicated.

As an example, a piece of text that bears characteristics of folklore genres urban legend and origin legend of a saying:

In the beginning of 1930s there was a refusal in the neighboring village of Drombom that became famous. In cottage dances, a boy stepped forward as the first man on the dance floor. He asked a girl to dance who didn't want to dance and that's when he said, loudly and clearly: 'What does she think she's going to get, a Master of Laws or what'. This became a saying in similar situations. [NMF:K37/187, 1991]. (Southern Finland; original in Swedish).

It is easy to figure that the story might be fantasized around the cutting reply, this also fantasized altogether or invented afterwards as retaliation to the humiliating act of refusal. Or the events might have happened exactly the way they are told here, we cannot know. The meaning to the story runs not through assessed historical facticity, but through choreography concerning a refusal to the asking to dance: to refuse is not acceptable, except in the case of overt drunkenness of the partner candidate. The narrated refusal therefore makes it known (right or wrong) that the man was not in a valid position to make an acceptable proposal. More general discourses giving meaning to the narrated event and detectable through the choreography include demands of masculinity (as potent and valid) and, in his interpretation, demands of class consciousness, since his reply suggests that the woman aspires for a higher-rank partner than of her own class (and of his), and that was not likely to be met in ordinary people's dances. The imaginary encounter with precisely a Master of Laws may represent a contesting attitude toward not only the elite educated people, but the grand society in general, in the context of illegal dances. The story contributes to the choreography, and, through it, to the discourses. We do not need to know whether the event as such ever

happened in order to apprehend the meaning-creation of the narrated acts through that choreography.

CHOREOGRAPHED ACTS OF ALCOHOL USE

In the inquiry, the question [#54] “How did you usually prepare for a dance evening?” was elaborated by a sub-question “Was it customary for you to have so-called liquid courage before going out for the pavilion?” “Liquid courage” is a colloquial way to describe the use of alcoholic beverages (one among the many) not only in the context of popular dancing but more generally as well.

As a rule, woman respondents tell that they themselves or other girls and women did not use any alcohol. It is only the few female respondents who were young post mid-1960s who tell about their own alcohol use in the context of a dancing evening out. The next quotes are some of the most typical answers to this question by female respondents:

The question of liquid courage concerns the male writers, I think. Girls didn't use this 'liquid courage' but maybe one or two girls acted up by taking a cigarette breath. To make an impression.
[NMF:K37/273, 1991]. (Southern Finland; original in Swedish).

I'm pretty sure no-one used alcohol in our circle of girls back then. We had courage and joy to pass around even for the weakest ones.
[NMF:K37/666, 1991]. (Southwestern Finland).

The following writer exemplifies a more free-form style of responding, not directly following the questions posed in the inquiry leaflet but constructing her own narrative around the suggested themes.

There was always accordionist at Kontiainen [the village, and by metonymy, its pavilion], a real one, no two-row squeezer. There was never a real band but a good accordionist did nicely. There was also a buffet, and you could buy a soft drink there, whatever there was back then. The boys had drinks of their own and they went off round the corner or to the woods to drink them. There was never a brawl or anything, someone perhaps tottered a little, that's all. These boozers weren't really liked and they were axed by the girls regularly.
[NMF:K37/492, 1991]. (Western Finland).

In this quote it becomes clear that for boys, “liquid courage” was allowed, or it was even expected that boys would have “drinks of their own” to consume outside the dance pavilion itself, just out of sight from it. Meanwhile, the buffet with coffee and soft drinks was usually managed by women of the organizing society.

The next quote comes from a male respondent. It's a boy's view on “liquid courage” and its effect which can be seen to amount to almost a magic potion intake.

I was so shy I didn't dare to ask for a dance in the Youth Society dances, and my sister tried to take me to dance, but I surely wasn't going to dance with my sister and I wouldn't do it with the girls next door, either. Although I danced with them

at the attic of Vatanen's barn [for rehearsal], I got so shy at the Youth Society that I didn't dare to dance. When the situation started to look desperate for me, the boys figured that Tauno only needed a shot of liquor for encouragement. No sooner said than done, the boys fetched a small bottle of booze and offered it to me behind the storehouse. At first I said 'no' but I wanted to dance so badly I took a zip. When I came back to the dances and after I looked at the merry crowd for a moment, and I wasn't really thinking what I was doing, I just about asked the girl of our next-door neighbours to dance. She was a little astonished by my sudden surge of courage but then she said:

– A-ha, you've got liquid courage in you, at least in your breath.

She didn't think badly of me, she was just glad that I finally did dare to ask for a dance in public. It was in 1935 when I first started dancing in public. I was 16 back then.

[NMF:K37/355, 1991]. (Eastern Finland).

Boys were expected to ask and to lead girls to dance, in order to fulfil the demands of masculinity in dances. To that end, they could also be expected to take the "liquid courage" or more with other boys, as is shown by the action of the boys in the narrated situation. The girl is functioning as a control agent, observing the liquid courage in the boy. But she accepts the use of alcohol as long as it is purposeful for dance and not excessive.

Besides the choreographies of gender, alcohol use contributes to and gets its meaning through various other identity aspects.

The Helsinki Pavilion in Eastern Haxböle was owned by the Folk Democrats, or the Communists. I went to the dance halls my friends took me to. A couple of my friends went to Kulttuuritalo in Helsinki ['The Culture House', owned by the Communist Party] but I never went with them. I wasn't tempted by their dances at all. The orchestras were mostly tango orchestras, with Eino Grön or Reijo Taipale as the vocalist, and so the audience was Finnish. I never went to the Haxböle dance pavilion, either. In 1961, my parents told me not to go there. There were thugs, gipsies and battle mongers, knife fights and booze, they told me.

[NMF:K37/601, 1991]. (Southern Finland; original in Swedish).

A Finnish reader recognizes here an ethnic stereotype of Finnish-speaking common people, associated with working class including drunkards, knife-fighters and gipsies and set in the soundscape of the Finnish tango music. The writer is of the Swedish-speaking Finns, and she augments the ethnic stereotype by a political suspicion of communism, in the somewhat schizophrenic atmosphere of the Cold War in Finland. Since the Civil War in 1918, dance venues were segregated according to owners, the civic associations raising funds by organizing dances. In the bilingual regions of Finland, there were two distinct dance and music cultures present, the Finnish one, represented here by the icons of Finnish tango music, and the Finland-Swedish one which for the writer was represented by their "own" pavilion in the home village.

In the context of popular dancing, the ethnic stereotype can be read as a citation of a colonialist and racist discourse, degrading the Finnish "common style" in dance as well as in alcohol use in comparison to the refined and civilized European manners (for dance, see Väättäin 2003, 71–72; for alcohol use, Apo 2001, 27). This discourse is a

continuation of a long tradition of enlightenment and civilizing efforts directed at the Finnish “common people” by religious and secular elites and authorities (in the context of popular dance, see also Hoppu 1999, 208–209, 371–374, 439–441; Koskela 2002, 117–128; Salmi-Niklander 2004, 253–259).

DISCURSIVE MEANING EMBODIED THROUGH CHOREOGRAPHY

I have described some choreography channeling the drinking of alcoholic beverages on dance occasions and the telling about it. In the context of pavilion dance events (and elsewhere), alcohol use was a gendered practice. The gendered nature of it was also clearly recognized and reflected in the stories of dances. The male practices of excessive drinking were also associated with ethnic and class-based identity aspects.

I interpret the female narrators’ insistence on their abstinence from drinking as a way to secure their decency in the context of the discourses of sinfulness or vanity of popular dancing. These discourses repeatedly led to different measures taken to forbid or limit young people’s dancing, known of ever since the 17th century (Hoppu 1999, 208).

The girls functioning as control agents to drinking can be seen as a self-defending means of the dance institution against the outside public and official control measures. As a choreographic rule, women abstained from drinking, and they also controlled men’s drinking to limit it to tolerable. Women were supposed to refuse an excessively drunken dance partner. Men in turn were expected to be able to limit their own alcohol use to an acceptable “liquid courage” intake in a men-only company, out of sight of the dance pavilion itself. The negative effects of excessive drinking were seen in male practices of making disorder and fighting in dance venues. The outcome of the popular drinking control in the context of dance is a choreographic organizing principle: *a drunken man will not dance*. Either he is only out for boozing and making disorder in the first place and will be excluded from the dance event, or the girls will refuse to dance with him. He will not be eligible as a dance partner, and, by extension, as any decent mating partner at all.

At the level of choreographic principles, the governing of alcohol use on dance occasions can be seen as an attempt to reduce the negative effects of excessive use, including outside control measures; as a modern variation of the traditional ethno-control of alcohol use by Finnish people (of this, see Apo 2001, 381–390). The embodied acts told about both contribute to and cite of such choreographies.

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