

THE NORDIC MINUET

ROYAL FASHION AND PEASANT TRADITION

EDITED BY PETRI HOPPU, EGIL BAKKA
AND ANNE MARGRETE FISKVIK



A New Chapter in European Dance History



<https://www.openbookpublishers.com>

©2024 Petri Hoppu, Egil Bakka, and Anne Fiskvik (eds). Copyright of individual chapters is maintained by the chapter's authors.



This work is licensed under an Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0). This license allows you to share, copy, distribute and transmit the text; to adapt the text for non-commercial purposes of the text providing attribution is made to the author (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work). Attribution should include the following information:

Petri Hoppu, Egil Bakka, and Anne Fiskvik (eds), *The Nordic Minuet: Royal Fashion and Peasant Tradition*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2024,
<https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0314>

Copyright and permissions for the reuse of many of the images included in this publication differ from the above. This information is provided in the captions and in the list of illustrations. 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.

Further details about CC BY-NC licenses are available at
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/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All external links were active at the time of publication unless otherwise stated and have been archived via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine at 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>

Digital material and resources associated with this volume are available at
<https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0134#resources>

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-80064-814-2

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-80064-815-9

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-80064-816-6

ISBN Digital eBook (EPUB): 978-1-80064-817-3

ISBN HTML: 978-1-80064-820-3

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0314

**NORDISK
KULTURFOND**

 **NTNU**

Front cover: Pierre Jean Laurent, *Veiledning ved Undervisning i Menuetten* [‘Guidance for Teaching the Minuet’], ca. 1816, Teatermuseet, København. Photo: Elizabeth Svarstad.

©Royal Danish Library

Back cover: Otto Andersson, *Folkdans, Kimito ungdomsförening* [‘Folkdance performed by the Kimito organization’], 1904. The Society of Swedish Literature in Finland,
https://www.finna.fi/Record/sls.SLS+105+b_SLS+105b_66?lng=en-gb, CC BY 4.0

Cover design by Katy Saunders

20. Some Reflections on the Minuet

Mats Nilsson and Petri Hoppu

Our journey into the world of the Nordic minuet is about to end. What can we now say about this dance? What kind of conclusions, if any, can we make at this point? Are we able to grasp the actualizations of the minuet, whether in text or with our bodies?

It is now time to reflect upon the minuet's structural, social, cultural, and historical dimensions and our own embodied dance experience. As active folk dancers we have danced various minuets from the Nordic countries. Our explicit knowledge matters, but so does our tacit knowledge—namely, the skills and movement-awareness in our bodies. Our bodily engagement is essential when understanding both other people's knowledge and our own somatic knowledge.¹ The dance we observe is deeply connected to the dancing we perform. Both observation and participation are part of a dialogic relationship between the people involved in the activities. As in dance research, dancing as an action has ontological and epistemological consequences for those involved; in this discipline, scholars not only acquire information about dance, but their work is, above all, an exploration into dance and even research as dance.² All these perspectives are

-
- 1 Deidre Sklar, 'Reprise: On Dance Ethnography', *Dance Research Journal*, 32.1 (2000), 70–77 (p. 71); Mats Nilsson, 'Participatory Dancing—the Polska Case', in *Dance and the Formation of Norden, Emergences and Struggles*, ed. by Karen Vedel (Trondheim: Tapir, 2011), pp. 131–50 (pp. 135–37); Petri Hoppu, 'Encounters in dance and music, Fieldwork and embodiment', in *(Re)Searching the Field, Festschrift in Honour of Egil Bakka*, ed. by Anne M. Fiskvik and Marit Stranden (Bergen: Fakhbokforlaget, 2014), pp. 151–59 (pp. 151–53).
 - 2 Timothy Rice, 'Toward a Mediation of Field Methods and Field Experience in Ethnomusicology', in *Shadows in the Field, New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, ed. by Gregory F. Barz and Timothy J. Cooley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 42–61 (pp. 56–61); Mats Nilsson, *The Swedish Polska*, translated from Swedish by Eivor Cormack and Jill Ann Johnson (Stockholm: Svenskt visarkiv/Musikverket, 2017), pp. 110–13.

included in this chapter which is the conclusion of our journey, a reflection on this project and on our experience as dance scholars and dancers.

The Start

Where does a minuet start, and where does it end? This question underlies much of our research on the minuet in Nordic countries. A second aspect is the emotional association of the minuet to a dance with positive connotations, as this genre is generally perceived as a dance denoting dignity and high social status. A third feature identified in this book is the fact that the basic movement structure of the minuet resonates on some level, prompting us to associate special emotions and values with the minuet as a dance or a way of dancing.

The minuet has high social value as dance, but the same is true for minuet music, whether it is performed together with choreography—as a dimension of dance—or without choreography, for example as a part of a piano sonata. One intriguing aspect about the choreography and the music is that, despite sharing the same name, they do not always follow each other. The name ‘minuet’ is applied to dances that don’t have the figures and steps that we identified as essential features of the dance. On the other hand, some dances have basic minuet steps and movements, but they are not called ‘minuet’. Concerning minuet music, there must be an openness to understanding how, and even if, the dance follows the music structure. There are minuet tunes, but the minuet is danced to other music as well. The phenomenon that dance, music, and labels do not directly correlate is certainly not unknown in the broader field of popular dance.³ Since the minuet was once a popular dance, we have realized through this research that the relationship between its choreography, music, and title cannot be taken for granted.

Form and structure are not enough to define the essential nature of the minuet, but it has many more facets. Our conclusion is that the minuet is what emerges when values, movements—especially the steps—and the music in different historical and social contexts in Europe are combined.

3 Mats Nilsson, ‘Dancing names—a neverending story’, in *(Re)Searching the Field. Festschrift in Honour of Egil Bakka*, ed. by Anne Margrete Fiskvik and Marit Stranden (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2014), pp. 419–27; Mats Nilsson, ‘Dans är musik i rörelse’, in *Lekstugan. Festschrift till Magnus Gustafsson*, ed. by Mathias Boström (Växjö: Smålands musikarkiv/Musik i Syd, 2015), pp. 223–29.

Minuet Dancers

The minuet in its original form is generally considered to be a French court dance, in fashion in the eighteenth century.⁴ However, as several researches have shown in this text, the dance likely originated as a French folk dance, perhaps some version of a branle popular since the sixteenth century.⁵ Whenever it started, Europe's royal courts elevated the minuet to a position of primary importance, a popularity probably due to its dual use as a social ballroom dance and as a ceremonial dance performance. The Swedish royals were no exception, and the Francophile King Gustaf III (born 1746, reigned 1771–92), for example, is said to have danced the minuet with pleasure.

The minuet is likely to have spread from the continent to Scandinavia via aristocrats who travelled to Europe for pleasure or diplomacy. Since the aristocracy and gentry did not reside only in capital cities but possessed estates and manors in the countryside, the dance was able to also spread to other groups in society. The joint participation in different festivities in the local communities by servants of the court and agricultural workers further enabled the advance of these new dances from the gentry and royal court to the 'folk'.⁶ Thus the minuet became popular among ordinary and rural people, though, as will be explained later, this phenomenon did not occur everywhere.⁷

The minuet seems to have become established as a court dance from its folk-dance roots at the French court of King Louis in the mid-1600s, and to have faded by the time of the Congress of Vienna in 1814-15. When the diplomats, kings, and members of the military who took part in these peace talks after the Napoleonic Wars went to parties and balls, the waltz was the preferred

-
- 4 Gunnel Biskop, *Menuetten—älsklingsdansen. Om Menuetten i Norden—särskilt i Finlands svenskbygder—under trehundrafemtio år* (Helsingfors: Finlands Svenska Folkdansring, 2015), p. 16; Eric McKee, *Decorum of the Minuet, Delirium of the Waltz* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), pp. 55–56; Tobias Norlind, *Dansens Historia. Med särskild hänsyn till dansen i Sverige* (Stockholm: Nordisk rotogravry, 1941); Matts Stenström, *Dansen. Dess utveckling från urtiden till danspalatsens tidevarv* (Stockholm: Lars Hökbergs förlag, 1918).
 - 5 Ivo Cramér, Henry Sjöberg, Folke Kenneryd, Ingemar Johansson and Rolf Heinemann, *Folkdåns: ett kompendium* (Stockholm: Brevskolan, 1969).
 - 6 This was not the only way dances spread from upper to lower class groups. For some time there had been contacts on many social levels: tradesmen, craftsmen, soldiers, sailors, ambassadors etc. See Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd ed (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).
 - 7 Magnus Gustafsson, *Polskans historia. En studie i melodytyper och motivformer med utgångspunkt i Peter Dufos Notbok* (Lund: Lunds universitet, Avdelningen för musikvetenskap, 2016); see also Jan Ling, *A History of European Folk Music* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 1997).

dance.⁸ Whenever minuets occurred during these proceedings, the French and English participants were said to have smiled as they regarded the dance as an expression of old-fashioned affectation.⁹

However, even if the minuet disappeared from the royal and gentry balls and fell out of fashion during this time, it continued to be danced at popular events. Especially in Denmark and Swedish-speaking Finland, the minuet was preserved among ordinary people until it was filmed and documented in the twentieth century.¹⁰ Examples of this preservation are harder to find in Sweden and Norway. A few sources from the nineteenth century refer to the minuet, suggesting that the dance was still known in these countries, but it seems to have disappeared during the industrialization period. Swedish and Norwegian sources from the early twentieth century make no mention of the minuet.

The popular minuet came to life again in Sweden, however, during the late twentieth century.¹¹ In the 1960s, some Swedes, particularly the folk-dance specialist Börje Wallin, started to search for traces of a popular minuet in Sweden. Wallin also studied the continuous tradition of minuet dancing in Denmark and Finland to aid his understanding of the Swedish text sources he was able to find.¹² Since 1990, the minuet based on Wallin's research has been danced in at least three different contexts. This minuet is performed in folk-dance groups, at folk music festivals, and in folk-based theatre dance performances. The process of Swedish minuet (re)construction tells a story of a highly-valued dance, a dance form that needed to be reborn, one way or another. In the Nordic folk-dance history, this is exceptional, though not unprecedented.¹³

The Minuet as Choreography

The minuet is a couple dance dominated by one basic figure; this type of dance in Swedish is called *figureringsspardans* [figuring couple dance].¹⁴ Nevertheless,

8 McKee.

9 Karl-Heinz Taubert, *Das Menuett* (Zürich: Pan, 1988).

10 Biskop.

11 See Chapter 18.

12 Linnea Helmersson, *Eldsjämlarna och dansarvet. Om forskning och arbete med att levandegöra äldre dansformer* (Falun: Folkmusikens hus, 2012).

13 The creation of the Norwegian song-dance tradition at the beginning of the twentieth century followed a somewhat similar development trajectory. See Anne Fiskvik and Egil Bakka, 'Trading Dance Fields', in *Dance the Formation of Norden. Emergences and Struggles*, ed. by Karen Vedel (Trondheim: Tapir, 2011), pp. 59–105 (p. 65).

14 *Nordisk Folkedanstypologi, En Systematisk Katalog Over Publiserte Nordiske Folkedanser*, ed. by Egil Bakka (Trondheim: Rff-centret, 1997).

there are many ways to dance the basic figure. Manuals and textbooks describe the minuet as a couple dance with walking and figure motifs, always performed slowly and gently, and without rotation or whirling are found in the polska, polka, or waltz. There are few tactile contacts and, when these occur, it only the partners' hands that touch.

In many regards, the minuet shares similarities with the contradances on the British Isles when it is danced in a longways formation. Men and women face each other, making the same figures, but otherwise the couples do not interact. The lines move back and forth, and the lines change side, following a pattern resembling the letter Z or S.¹⁵ In another motif, the lines move sideways and parallel: the dancers in the line walk after each other in one direction, turn, and go back again. However, the steps of the minuet and contra dances differ from each other. While the British dances used 'walk', 'run', 'shuffle', and similar steps, the minuet is based on the French branle simple step.¹⁶ Chain and circle dances in the Faeroe Islands, the Balkans, and other parts of Europe also use the branle simple step, but with different tempos and in different directions.¹⁷

Minuet music is usually assumed to be in 3/4 metre (although 3/8, 6/8, and 6/4 have been used), which fits easily with the step's six movements. According to some researchers, however, dancing is not always in sync with the music.¹⁸ One often dances on the pulse without concern for the formal musical beat, as in a basic foxtrot step wherein two slow and two quick steps are danced during one and a half 4/4 bars.¹⁹

One question that has been raised with regard to the minuet is, assuming it started in the European courts as a couple dance, when did it become a dance in line like the contradances? The popular minuet in Denmark and Finland is always danced in line formation, and we also have information that similar practice was used among the European nobility.²⁰ When we have danced the Bourrée in France and a similar dance (the Frezian) in Slovenia, we have had use for our ability to dance the minuet.²¹ In those cases, dancers are also organized in rows and do not interact with the other couples, like the performance of the minuet in Denmark and Finland and like the contradances *anglaise*.

15 Cramér, et al.

16 6 parts in the step—3/4 music two bars—6 or 8 steps in a sequence over and back.

17 Lisbeth Torp, *Chain and Round Dance Patterns. A Method for Structural Analysis and its Application to European Material* (Köpenhamn: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1990).

18 McKee, p. 16.

19 CentralHome, *Dance Steps: Foxtrot* (Centralhome.com, 2018), https://www.centralhome.com/ballroomcountry/foxtrot_steps.htm

20 See Chapter 9.

21 See also Chapter 2.

Today in Sweden, the reconstructed minuet often includes a polska turn ‘on the spot’ [slängpolska]. This motif is like the ‘swing your ladies’ movement found in contra dances. Whether this minuet-polska combination has a historical basis is unclear; it may be a product of the revival process suggested by structural similarities in the music of the minuet and the polska. Also, a polska or ‘pisk’ is often included as a final motif in the minuet danced in Finland and Denmark—as we have seen in previous chapters.

Meanings of the Minuet

So far, we have discussed the minuet as a dance structure or dancing experience. Now, to investigate the meanings of the minuet, we take a step back to consider the dance’s larger social and cultural context. We need to first look at the minuet’s symbolic dimension. Since dance is an effective symbol, those who hold power in a society often wish to control it. For example, at eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century peasant weddings in Nordic countries, ceremonial dancing with the priest as the first dancer was a manifestation of the existing social hierarchy.²²

Dance does not function solely as a symbol. First and foremost, it consists of movements, sensations, touch, and emotion. When we regard dance as a symbol, we emphasize its explicit character as a means of communication, a kind of movement language. But it is important to recognize that symbols operate cognitively; they do not uncover embodied, affective aspects of dance. Referring to the body as much more than an extension of thinking, Michael Polanyi stated, ‘you know more than you can say’.²³ There is always an implicit, hidden, or unconscious dimension to what we think of as human knowledge.²⁴ It is not only what we know in our heads but also what we can do—what we feel in our bodies—that belongs to our understanding.

This is easy to understand when one investigates the minuet: few of even the most experienced dancers can explain what happens when they dance the minuet, but no spectator can deny their skill. The minuet should not be seen

22 Petri Hoppu, *Symbolien ja sanattomuuden tanssi. Menuetti Suomessa 1700-luvulta nykyaikaan* (Helsinki: SKS, 1999), pp. 38–40, 53–54. Contemporaneously, the upper classes in Poland created five national dances to symbolize a mythical Polish character. Roderyk Lange, ‘Some Notes on the Anthropology of Dance’, *Dance Studies*, 1 (1976), 38–46.

23 Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1966), pp. 4–5.

24 Mario Biagioli, ‘Tacit Knowledge, Courtliness, and the Scientist’s Body’, in *Choreographing History*, ed. by Susan Leigh Foster (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 69–81.

merely as a precise choreography but a living phenomenon that is actualized at dance events and in dancing bodies. And it is amazing how powerful these dancing bodies are: people want to join them, dance together, touch, and be touched. There is no dance without people who want to dance.

Taking the interaction between the symbolic and embodied meanings into account, the minuet can be analyzed as both presentational and participatory dancing.²⁵ At the royal courts in the eighteenth century and in theatre art dancing, the presentational dimension dominates. On stage, at the theatre, it is the audience who watches the dance that feels entertained. At a royal ball, the king and queen and the nobility demonstrated their dancing skills for each other in the minuet. The steps and dance motifs are elaborate and complicated performances of status equally oriented towards the audience around them. Popular dance events, on the other hand, emphasize the participatory dimension. Here the step in a more basic form survives, and dancers play with many figures and formations with their partners. The energy of this dance is projected from within the dancing couple's dynamics. Participatory dancing is inward-facing, oriented towards one's partner and one's self, whereas presentational dancing is more outward-facing.

The relation between the minuet's presentational and participatory dimensions is reflected in the dance structures, styles, and practices. A formal and strict choreography often implies controlled and disciplined dancing, reinforcing symbolic aspects: discipline creates power and stability, manifested in the dance's explicit symbolism. The less formal dance structure in participatory dancing, by contrast, enables improvisation, individual variations, and, consequently, changes in the dance. Note, however, that structural patterns can be found in even the most informal and improvisational dancing, implying that dance methods are not arbitrary.²⁶

At any rate, a looser structure makes it harder to control the dance, which means that it is not all that useful as a symbol. Rather, the meanings in participatory dance are more related to the dynamics of dancing, the embodiment, and enjoyment of dance. Symbols of dominance lose their power if their users, in this case, minuet dancers, can change the form of a potential symbol. Those with power, whether they have been dancing masters or

25 See Andriy Nahachewsky, 'Participatory and Presentational Dance as Ethnochoreological Categories', *Dance Research Journal*, 27.1 (1995), 1–15; Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life. The Politics of Participation* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008).

26 Roderyk Lange, 'The Dance Folklore from Cuiavia', *Dance Studies*, 12 (1988), pp. 6–22.

folk-dance instructors, often want to maintain the importance of the symbolic and stable as it legitimates their status.²⁷

Values of the Minuet

The meanings of the minuet, thus, can be traced back to its symbolic as well as its embodied dimensions. This, however, does not explain how the dance could remain attractive over several centuries. The minuet is an exceptional case in the sense that, even though it developed in the seventeenth century, its popularity surged within different groups of people in Europe and America for hundreds of years. Today, it still appears in various contexts as an object of active dancing. One might say that the minuet never lost its symbolic power, even if was not enjoyed or appreciated as much during certain periods of time. Instead of studying its origins or appearances as separate phenomena, we should try to identify the trajectories that have contributed to its enduring significance.

In this, we can follow Arjun Appadurai's ideas about the circulation of forms and forms of circulation. Forms refer to various phenomena that can be moved from one location to another and, in being moved, are given new meanings and messages. Essentially, the circulation of forms contributes to the construction of the 'local' by connecting it to the 'global'. Local practices do not exist in a vacuum; that is, they are affected by global flows, which have their own trajectories, depending on the context of their appearances. As Appadurai emphasized, a 'locality' is not just an accidental site of fusion but something that includes a mutual transformation of circulating forms.²⁸ Dances like the polka, quadrille, salsa, or minuet can be seen as such forms.

Forms of circulation have various trajectories, which explains how phenomena travel between different parts of the world. Not everything travels everywhere, but forms enter contexts where they are appreciated and approved at some level: they find significance in how they are manifested in cultural and local practices. According to Appadurai, localities are not fixed sites but they 'are temporary negotiations between circulating forms, and are thus not scalar subordinates of the global, but the main evidence of its reality'.²⁹

Appadurai understands cultural trajectories to pass through different 'regimes of value in space and time'. To accomplish this, he explained that '[w]e have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed

27 Hoppu, pp. 38–45; see also Anya Peterson Royce, *The Anthropology of Dance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977).

28 Arjun Appadurai, 'How Histories Make Geographies: Circulation and Context in a Global Perspective', *Transcultural Studies*, 1 (2010), 4–134.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

in their forms, their uses, and their trajectories'.³⁰ According to David Graeber, 'value' refers to how we choose to represent the importance or meaning of a specific phenomenon and how we organize our social worlds according to particular ideals. Value is generated through action or the process of creation itself, and it always emerges within a social context. People enact the significance of their efforts to themselves through value. To be valued, a phenomenon must be continuously compared to something else, and this takes places through dynamic processes and negotiations.³¹

The question of value is inextricably connected with the history of the minuet and its forms of circulation. The minuet has spread throughout different parts of the world for centuries, and it has been valued highly again and again in each new context. This repetition does not imply that the values assigned to the minuet have been arbitrary; rather, it shows that the minuet has been a part of many narratives that have created strong symbolism around the dance. Moreover, the forms of circulation have been connected to a specific European high culture. The dance did not spread to all social classes of Western civilization, but it did spread to a comparatively great extent in the Nordic countries. Why did this happen?

If we take, for example, the peasants in Southern Finland, we can see that the minuet was popular among them from the late eighteenth until the early nineteenth century, retaining some popularity even later.³² There is no evidence at all, however, that the minuet was practised by contemporaneous Estonians who resided on the other side of the Gulf of Finland.³³ The economically independent peasants in Finland could be part of the circulation of dance forms that crossed all the social classes during the latter part of the eighteenth century, an era during which the peasants' standard of living rose significantly while much of Finland was part of the kingdom of Sweden. Conversely, Estonian serfs, later villeins, retained a different social structure: subordinated by their German-speaking landlords, they were excluded from this cultural exchange.³⁴

30 Arjun Appadurai, 'Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value', in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 3–63.

31 David Graeber, *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value. The False Coin of Our Own Dreams* (London: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 45–46, 86–87, 254.

32 Hoppu, pp. 260–61.

33 For example, Herbert Tampere does not mention the minuet in his comprehensive collection of Estonian folk instruments and dances, *Eesti rahvapillid ja rahvatantsud* (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1975).

34 Ea Jansen, 'The National Awakening and the Estonian Nation', in *Estonia: Identity and Independence*, ed. by Jean-Jacques Subrenat (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 83–106. The serfdom was replaced by *villeinage* in Estonia in 1802, which improved the peasants' living conditions. Irja-Gea Kukk, *Our Land, Our Surveying Story. A*

The minuet and its values could thus live on in Finland, at dancing events that combined dance participation, history, and social context.

However, the connection between the dance and society's values is not a simple narrative, even when it comes to the minuet. The minuet was a popular dance among Danish peasants since the eighteenth century, but their social status was different from that of their counterparts in Norway, Sweden, and Finland during that time. The Danish *Vornedskab* [*villeinage*], an obligation for farmers to remain on the estate where they were born and there take over a farm, was a social structure that never existed in other Nordic countries. Although it was abolished in Denmark in 1702, it was soon followed by the corresponding *Stavnsbaand* [manorial bondage]. All peasants between the ages of fourteen and thirty-six (later four and forty) were forced to stay on the estate where they were born. It was not until 1788 that the restriction was repealed and several other reforms Danish society were enacted.³⁵ Thus, the Danish peasants' position was comparable with Estonians until the late 1700s, but the former still adopted the minuet while the latter did not.

One possible explanation for this disparity is that the Danish peasants' position might not have been as subservient as it appears. In other words, perhaps the contrast between different social classes in Denmark was not as structurally important as in other parts of Europe, including Estonia. Consequently, the upper social classes' dance culture in Denmark may not have been exclusive, and the peasants may have been able to observe it and perhaps even enter it before the last decades of the eighteenth century. Moreover, development within rural Denmark continued to be robust as early as the latter part of the 1700s. Clearly the Danish rural people maintained their self-awareness before the peasant liberation in 1788. Documents show that the Danish peasants were able to promote their rights and act politically long before the abolition of the *Stavnsbaand* and, therefore, that they regarded themselves as respectable people despite their low social status.³⁶ And, as respectable people in Danish society, they allowed themselves to dance the minuet.

Short Journey Through History (Tallinn: Estonian Land Board, 2020), p. 21, https://maaamet.ee/sites/default/files/documents/2021-09/Maa-amet_2020_ENG.pdf. Villeins had more rights than serfs: for example, they could hold their own property. However, they still lived under several legal restrictions that differentiated them from freemen and they remained tied to their lord's land. Martyn J. Whittock, *A Brief History of Life in the Middle Ages* (London: Running Press, 2009). p. 30.

35 Birgit Løgstrup, 'Stavnsbånd 1733–1800', in *Danmarkshistorien.dk* (Aarhus Universitet, 2011), <http://danmarkshistorien.dk/leksikon-og-kilder/vis/materiale/stavnsbaand-1733-1800/>

36 Birgit Løgstrup, 'Danish Peasants Making Politics in the Eighteenth Century' in *Scandinavia in the Age of Revolution: Nordic Political Cultures, 1740–1820*, ed. by Pasi

With this example, we can see that even in the case of dance, and the minuet in particular, the question of value is closely connected to power relations in society. The specific forms through which power is manifested affect the politics of value as well as the processes through which dance becomes practice among certain groups of society but not others.³⁷ That the minuet has been known among peasants in all the Nordic countries proves that these countries have had a unique social structure, enabling dance forms to circulate relatively freely. Although these countries were class societies during the time the minuet was first flourishing, and different classes had dance events of their own, dancers and particularly musicians could cross the class boundaries and adopt new dances.

The Feeling of the Minuet

As we consider concepts of meaning and value, we must not forget that we are talking about dancing, embodied action. Meanings and values are produced and reproduced through actions, and it is toward dancing bodies we turn our final attention.

We, the authors of this chapter, are dancers of the Finnish, Danish, and the reborn Swedish minuet. The minuet provides participants with an extraordinary feeling because of the repetitive, contemplative flow it requires. This feeling also occurs in other types of dancing, but it is the combination of calmness of movement juxtaposed with the intensity of music which is unique to the minuet. The flow created by the intense calm produced by performing slow, repetitive movements is very different than the kind of flow we feel in the rotating, whirling steps of a polska.

When dancing minuet in line, as is the case with most documented versions in Nordic countries, there is a strong feeling of togetherness produced by participating in a collective of moving dancers. Each person dances in the same manner, even without a fixed order, simply because they know the dance structure. Yet, even in this sameness, there are possibilities for small individual improvisations when passing a dance partner or turning when the lines shift direction.

Combining minuet with a 'slängpolska' (couple turning on the spot) gives the dancing an even greater dimension. The contemplative, slow minuet gives way to the whirling, ecstatic slängpolska. Partners first have no tactile contact,

Ihalainen, Karin Sennefelt, and Michael Bregnsbo (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 291–302.

37 Julia Elyachar, *Markets of Dispossession: NGOs, Economic Development, and the State in Cairo* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005).

then they move close to each other, embrace, and turn together as one unit, often at high speed compared to the figures in the minuet.

Noteworthy is also the mental connection forged between dance partners. Even without this tactile connection or eye contact, one feels the closeness of and interacts with the other. This feeling of mental tension is especially present in minuet dancing as part of a couple rather than in line. For many dancers, this is an integral part of the minuet.

... and the End

In the beginning, the question was: *where does a minuet start and where does it end?* This seemingly simple question is as hard to answer as the basic one underpinning this book: *what was and is the minuet?* Minuet dancing started somewhere in early modern Europe, in the seventeenth century, as a combination of a branle step and a couple dance with organized steps and movement and without tactile connection, all while changing places and flirting. As stated repeatedly, the minuet has mostly retained these structural features for centuries, but it has also sometimes changed quite radically, at least to some extent.

The ceremonial dance at weddings, for example, can be seen as a manifestation of stability: under the eyes of the elders of a community, the structure of the dance has not changed much, creating an atmosphere of the *status quo* in society. On the other hand, the minuet structure has experienced significant structural changes when the dancing has been free, as in the Swedish minuet revival of the twenty-first century. However, even with these significant adjustments, the basic, overarching dance structure has remained largely untouched.

The control and the stability of dancing are made explicit in discourses of the minuet that emphasize the dance's calm and dignified character. In order to accomplish this, more lively and vivid variations either have been ignored, or they have been taken into the discourse and made explicit: they have been given a strict structure and, in this sense, have been 'tamed'. The reality of dancing, the action, however, is somewhat different from this discourse.

Power, stability, and discourse can be seen as symbolic dimensions of the minuet. The minuet as a precise choreography with specific denotations has a character and meaning one can articulate and explain. Thus, it has been a symbol of order, whether in a political, national, or educational sense. Yet the dance also has opposing dimensions that cannot be easily put into words. The minuet encompasses something that cannot be uttered, something whose meanings are found in the act dancing itself. Although scholars often legitimize the minuet through its symbolic meanings, the ultimate reason for dancing cannot be found anywhere other than in dancing, in social bodies.

The minuet and its meanings have lived on at dance events at which the dance, its history, and social context have been combined. To the participants, this dance has held symbolic value, strongly connected to their social reality, but it has been, above all, something that they have enjoyed. The minuet's symbolic dimension has been essential to its preservation in the Nordic countries in multiple contexts throughout the centuries. But it was only through its vast popularity as dance, movement, and embodied experience among different groups of people that it was able to survive for such a long time.

References

- Appadurai, Arjun, 'How Histories Make Geographies: Circulation and Context in a Global Perspective', *Transcultural Studies* 1 (2010), 4–134
- , 'Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value', in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 3–63
- Bakka, Egil (ed.), *Nordisk folkedanstypologi, en systematisk katalog over publiserte nordiske folkedanser* (Trondheim: Rff-centret, 1997)
- Biagioli, Mario, 'Tacit Knowledge, Courtliness, and the Scientist's Body', in *Choreographing History*, ed. by Susan Leigh Foster (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 69–81
- Biskop, Gunnel, *Menuetten — älsklingsdansen. Om menuetten i Norden — särskilt i Finlands svenskbygder — under trehundrafemtio år* (Helsingfors: Finlands Svenska Folkdansring, 2015)
- Burke, Peter, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd edn (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009)
- CentralHome, *Dance Steps. Foxtrot* (Centralhome.com, 2018), https://www.centralhome.com/ballroomcountry/foxtrot_steps.htm
- Cramér, Ivo, Henry Sjöberg, Folke Kenneryd, et al, *Folkdans: ett kompendium* (Stockholm: Brevskolan, 1969)
- Elyachar, Julia, *Markets of Dispossession. NGOs, Economic Development, and the State in Cairo* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005)
- Fiskvik, Anne and Egil Bakka, 'Trading Dance Fields', in *Dance the Formation of Norden: Emergences and Struggles*, ed. by Karen Vedel (Trondheim: Tapir, 2011), pp. 59–105
- Graeber, David, *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value. The False Coin of Our Own Dreams* (London: Palgrave, 2001)

- Gustafsson, Magnus, *Polskans historia. En studie i melodityper och motioformer med utgångspunkt i Peter Dufos notbok* (Lund: Lunds universitet, Avdelningen för musikvetenskap, 2016)
- Helmersson, Linnea, *Eldsjälarna och dansarvet. Om forskning och arbete med att levandegöra äldre dansformer* (Rättvik: Folkmusikens hus, 2012)
- Hoppu, Petri, 'Encounters in dance and music, Fieldwork and embodiment', in *(Re)Searching the Field, Festschrift in Honour of Egil Bakka*, ed. by Anne M. Fiskvik and Marit Stranden (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2014), pp. 151–59.
- , *Symbolien ja sanattomuuden tanssi: menuetti Suomessa 1700-luvulta nykyaikaan* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1999)
- Jansen, Ea, 'The National Awakening and the Estonian Nation', in *Estonia: Identity and Independence*, ed. by Jean-Jacques Subrenat (Amsterdam—New York: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 83–106
- Kukk, Irja-Gea, *Our Land, Our Surveying Story. A Short Journey Through History* (Tallinn: Estonian Land Board, 2020), https://maaamet.ee/sites/default/files/documents/2021-09/Maa-amet_2020_ENG.pdf
- Lange, Roderyk, 'Some Notes on the Anthropology of Dance', *Dance Studies*, 1 (1976), 38–46
- , 'The Dance Folklore from Cuiavia', *Dance Studies*, 12 (1988), 6–22
- Ling, Jan, *A History of European Folk Music* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 1997)
- Løgstrup, Birgit, 'Danish Peasants Making Politics in the Eighteenth Century', in *Scandinavia in the Age of Revolution: Nordic Political Cultures, 1740–1820*, ed. by Pasi Ihalainen, Karin Sennefelt, and Michael Bregnsbo (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 291–302
- , 'Stavnsbånd 1733–1800', in *Danmarkshistorien.dk* (Aarhus Universitet, 2011), <http://danmarkshistorien.dk/leksikon-og-kilder/vis/materiale/stavnsbaand-1733-1800/>
- McKee, Eric, *Decorum of the Minuet, Delirium of the Waltz* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012)
- Nahachewsky, Andriy, 'Participatory and Presentational Dance as Ethnochoreological Categories', *Dance Research Journal*, 27.1 (1995), 1–15
- Nilsson, Mats, 'Dancing names — a Neverending Story', in *(Re)Searching the Field: Festschrift in Honour of Egil Bakka*, ed. by Anne Margrete Fiskvik and Marit Stranden (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2014), pp. 419–27
- , 'Dans är musik i rörelse', in *Lekstugan. Festschrift till Magnus Gustafsson*, ed. by Mathias Boström (Växjö: Smålands musikarkiv/Musik i Syd, 2015), pp. 223–29

- , 'Participatory Dancing — the Polska Case', in *Dance and the Formation of Norden, Emergences and Struggles*, ed. by Karen Vedel (Trondheim: Tapir, 2011), pp. 131–150.
- , *The Swedish Polska*, translated from Swedish by Eivor Cormack and Jill Ann Johnson (Stockholm: Svenskt visarkiv/Musikverket, 2017)
- Norlind, Tobias, *Dansens historia. Med särskild hänsyn till dansen i Sverige* (Stockholm: Nordisk rotogravyr, 1941)
- Polanyi, Michael, *The Tacit Dimension* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1966)
- Rice, Timothy, 'Toward a Mediation of Field Methods and Field Experience in Ethnomusicology', in *Shadows in the Field, New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, ed. by Gregory F. Barz and Timothy J. Cooley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 42–61
- Royce, Anya Peterson, *The Anthropology of Dance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977)
- Sklar, Deidre, 'Reprise: On Dance Ethnography', *Dance Research Journal*, 32.1 (2000), 70–77
- Stenström, Matts, *Dansen. Dess utveckling från urtiden till danspalatsens tidevarv* (Stockholm: Lars Hökbergs förlag, 1918)
- Tampere, Herbert, *Eesti rahvapillid ja rahvatantsud* (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1975)
- Taubert, Karl-Heinz, *Das Menuett* (Zürich: Pan, 1988)
- Torp, Lisbeth, *Chain and Round Dance Patterns. A Method for Structural Analysis and its Application to European Material* (Köpenhamn: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1990)
- Turino, Thomas, *Music as Social Life. The Politics of Participation* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008)
- Whittock, Martyn J., *A Brief History of Life in the Middle Ages* (London: Running Press, 2009)

