

## Transcription and description: tasks for dance research

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*We are celebrating our dear colleague Adrienne Kaepler and I will do that through comparison and reflection upon some of our differences in point of departure and the resulting differences in methodologies seen in the context of trends in our fields. She is an anthropologist of dance specialising on Tonga and Hawai'i, while I am an ethnochoreologists specialising on Norway and the Nordic Countries. I will describe my own point of departure in a quite personal way, while I have had to base my reference to Adrienne more on her published works. Her engagement with the safeguarding of dance in Tonga already during the very first years of the twenty-first century has been followed up by similar engagements from many colleagues, each for cultures they study. It does in my mind signalise the need for ethnochoreologists and dance anthropologists to engage with tools for transmission, two of which are transcription and description. My article ends with an apology for, a definition, and an exemplification of those.*

### Some memories

At the ICTM world conference in Edinburgh in 1969, I was listening to Adrienne Kaepler presenting her work on the dance in Tonga. As a first-timer with a rather weak command of English, but still having experience in fieldwork and dance analysis, I was very impressed by her presentation. She was one of the young stars there, and I may have stuttered a few words to her at some point. As far as I can remember the two of us did not meet again until around 1990 when the ICTM Study Group on Ethnochoreology made a new start, attracting anthropologists of dance from the USA and Western Europe. Before that, through the 1970s and 1980s I worked intensively with documenting traditional dances of my country for research purposes, but even more for the purpose of supporting their transmission, as a cultural value for the communities from which they came, and I mostly published in Norwegian for a Nordic readership. In the same period, Adrienne worked intensively at the Bishop museum in Honolulu and from about 1980 at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC, also with fieldwork, research projects and publications in English.

### Norwegian discussion

My perspective on work with dance first came from my strong involvement in the organised Norwegian folk dance movement, but also from the attitudes of the mostly old traditional dancers and musicians, as well as from some young people in their communities. They saw traditional dance first of all as valuable heritage, which also became part of the vision for my professional work at the Norwegian Centre for Traditional Music and Dance. I felt pressure from many sides of the research environment against the validity of treating dances or immaterial folk culture as objects of value. My teachers of folkloristics in the 1960s, Svale Solheim, Olav Bø, Brynjulf Alver, and Reimund Kvideland all grew up in rural environments close to folk culture and

did teach us with an attitude to folklore as values for the community, but all were quite distant to dance as a topic. At the same time particularly Alver also argued for new methods and approaches in tune with international trends of the discipline (Heggli 2013). Ballads, fairy tales, and other folklore genres had been collected as isolated texts almost without context since the middle of the nineteenth century, and large text archives had been established. Alver argued that current collecting should be based on research projects defining what and how to collect. I found that understandable from the field of folklore, but problematic for dance, that hardly had collections in our country.

The only academic in Norway who had engaged with dance as part of his discipline at that time, was Jan-Petter Blom who already worked as a social anthropologist at the University of Bergen. He was never my teacher but inspired me and advised me on my magister dissertation. In our many discussions he teased me as student of folklore by criticising the folklorists for lack of theory, a point that was stressed even more when I moved to Oslo to study Regional Nordic Ethnology. The curriculum at the end of the 1960s was about to change. It had a specialisation in material folk culture, such as traditional house building, agricultural implements, traditional costumes, social customs etc. taught by people working in museums. This was suitable for people aiming for careers in traditional museums with large collections of objects from the past. Under the leadership of Knut Kolsrud, the programme kept some of that orientation for a while, but slowly developed towards a more theory-based discipline based particularly on American anthropology. I remember reading Alfred Kroeber and Robert Redfield. The study of old rural objects, their forms, history, and distribution slowly lost focus for the benefit of contemporary culture with less emphasis on objects. It was the interest in the traditional culture that attracted me to folklore and ethnology, so I felt that much concrete and practical knowledge about the life of the past that would still be needed was left behind. On the other hand, I felt the engagement with the present to be necessary. It may have been one reason why I started documenting twentieth-century dances, such as tango and rock'n roll already in the mid 1970s, even if my priority was on older material. Building a national archive for traditional dance, I saw the need not to turn a blind eye on other dance genres.

#### **Meeting with European folk dance research**

Abroad I met researchers who had similar experiences in folk dance collecting, but who had different opinions. Roderyk Lange<sup>1</sup> had worked with traditional dance in his home country Poland and stresses in several articles how dances change when they move from the rural context to the urban as for example when they were taken up as 'national dances' by the upper classes in the early nineteenth century (Lange 1976: 38). He was also sceptical to what could be achieved by folk dance revival:

Many attempts have been made to keep the peasant version of *kujawiak* alive. But this has never really been possible. Even the 'regional' dance groups which try to retain the dance

heritage consist in many cases of young people who are already at a distance from the old ways of life. For them, the musicians have to play a set version of dance melodies instead of improvising. The spell arising out of improvisation and the interaction between the musicians and the dancer has been broken (Lange 1974: 50).

During long discussions, it turned out that Lange and I had different views on the possibility of continuing traditional dancing. He felt that the dances would change too much to be of value and interest in a new setting, and had ended up with the conclusion that the traditional dances could not be transferred from their old rural settings to the urbanised population of today. I felt that changes could be minimised particularly when the dances were used in the communities they came from, even if it was in new functions, and that they were of value in spite of the changes.

Jean Michel Guilcher who together with his wife collected and analysed French traditional dance as a lifelong endeavour was also critical to the amateur folk dance revival movement and their ways of dealing with the material. He felt the values in past movement systems and movement skills hardly were transferable to new generations, but did, however, look at good revival work with some understanding:

The members of our current folklore groups, in applying themselves to seize from outside the forms of movement out of use, have little chance of living through them the same psychic state as the members of the peasant communities of the past. Men of another time and another society invested something else in the dances, and consequently make another dance. This means that the traditional dancers' dancing can only be understood by the milieu, the culture, the mentality, where it flourished and were transmitted. The link that we perceive between a movement structure and psyche is of its environment and of its time (Guilcher 1971: 31).<sup>2</sup>

My comments to Guilcher would be that dances and movements of the upper classes in Europe of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, at least the ballet and the classical music have been transferred, despite all changes that have occurred and the big differences in living conditions that even happened to the practitioners. Why then, would the dance and music culture of the lower classes be so much less transferable or valuable to transfer. One understanding that is usually not explicated might be that the arts of the upper classes would be made with other intentions and have other qualities, something I would question.<sup>3</sup> So I retained my point of departure and got surprising support for it through the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage when it was established in 2003, with which I engaged from the beginning (Bakka 2015).

### **Impressions from American discussions**

In the 1970s, while Adrienne worked at the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum in Hawai'i, she carried out a regional research program on music and dance in Oceania for UNESCO with Barbara Smith at the University of Hawai'i (The Journal of American Folklore 1974: 369). She did a lot of fieldwork, produced publications and participated in the North American debates and conferences. Then around 1980, she was employed at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC., which presents itself as 'the world's largest museum, education, and research complex' (Smithsonian Institution [n.d.]).

In that time, Adrienne engaged in basic discussions on dance research, for instance in a review of Judith Lynne Hanna's book *To Dance Is Human* from 1979. The core of her criticism is that Hanna does not support her theories with sufficient empirical data, and she evaluates the present state of dance research as follows: 'There are too few detailed studies of human movement and those who feel the need to theorize will continue to be hampered by lack of empirical data until more relevant studies have been carried out and published' (Kaeppeler 1981: 218–19). Her publications on Tongan dance were already well known and are ideal examples for combining careful study and analysis of movement structures and theory. Hanna (1981: 808–10) wrote an answer to defend her book, which I think gives an interesting impression of different views on dance research at that time:

Researchers operate on the basis of theory, whether they make it explicit or not. It is appropriate to develop theory on the basis of what is known, to make the theory explicit, and then to modify it as relevant data are collected and analyzed. On the basis of current theory and knowledge, including my own fieldwork in several settings, the book presents a dynamic communication model which combines textual (movement) and contextual (culture, society, history, ecology) approaches with human evolution and symbolic interaction. The communication theory systematizes and makes explicit much of what is usually segmented and implicit. It attempts to encompass both surface phenomena and the underlying reality of which the observer or participant may be unaware.

In a much later article Adrienne again stresses the importance of dealing with movement, but in balance with how it functions in society:

What anthro/ethno/indigenous fieldworkers do with their data and how it is presented in publication varies widely. But all of these researchers focus our attention on movement content as well as social, cultural and political concerns such as gender, the body, ethnic, cultural and national identity, the negotiation of tradition, and turning the ethnographic eye on any society. In order to find the larger view as advocated here, fieldwork is not

only recommended but is necessary in order to bring movement into focus as part of a total cultural system (Kaepler 2000: 116–25).

Why then, is technical engagement with movement still unusual? Many researchers may still think that producing well researched descriptions of dance forms that can be of direct use for practitioners is not academic work. Having described some two hundred different dances, based on average of three to four transcriptions each, I know very well that this is very time consuming, cumbersome and demanding work. It may seem that dance description is not necessary for the study of dancing as a social phenomenon, and that transcription and description in most cases does not take us anywhere far for such purposes. It is much easier to write up our descriptions and discussions about how dance interacts with gender, the body or identity based upon our general impressions or participant observation of dancing in the community we study. It may seem that we can glean the necessary information about dancing from what the dancers tell us. However, it seems that Kaepler and others have somewhat different views: 'Kaepler cautions us to put the same value on movement events as members of the group one is studying; and Keali'inohomoku reminds us that: "Dance should be studied because it is important to the people involved"' (Frosch 1999: 261). This quote may ring warning bells about lingering colonial attitudes where researchers study 'the other' to glean knowledge about 'man'<sup>4</sup> for the needs of the colonial powers and western research communities. Keali'inohomoku's point that research should also be done for the needs of the communities studied could be achieved by outsiders as well as by community members themselves. Adrienne stressed this in more careful wording on several occasions, and such attitudes probably contributed to two of her awards.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Revisiting work in the ICTM Study Group on Ethnochoreology**

The Study Group took as its first task at its start in 1962 to develop a common terminology, which then became a work on how to analyse dance structure. In 1974 a syllabus to this end was published (The I.F.M.C. Study Group for Folk Dance Terminology 1974). Adrienne Kaepler had submitted her Ph.D. dissertation on Tongan dance (1967), and I had submitted my magister dissertation on Norwegian couple dances (Bakka 1973), both with structural analysis as the core theme. But there had not been any contact between any of us before the mythical meeting and chat in a bathroom at the ICTM Conference in Bayonne 1973, between Anca Giurchescu from Romania and Adrienne Kaepler, USA. They both individually and together told us colleagues of the Study Group, how amazed they were when they realised to be working with so similar questions and ideas about structural analysis. The bathroom meeting came to represent a 'first contact' event between East European and North American dance research for our group. However, we did not, as far as I remember, discuss these

contrasting perspectives much in the ICTM Study Group on Ethnochoreology, where Adrienne and I were working together and discussing a lot during the decades around the turn of the century. The members of the group may have assumed that we had more similar opinions than we actually had, which actually slowly dawned at least on me.

Looking back at the work with structural analysis, I now realise that, in spite of the seemingly similar point of departure, there were basic differences in the way we in the Study Group created and used our material. The Hungarian work with transcribing dance from films to Labanotation was based on the principle of notating each dancer's dancing exactly as it happened on one particular film from beginning to end (Fügedi 2018).<sup>6</sup> The method of structural analysis claims to be based on such transcriptions.<sup>7</sup> In practical terms, however, the examples used do not refer to filmed realisations. They rather seem to be written down by Labanotators from their own experience and memory or from the standard taught forms in the folk dance movement.<sup>8</sup> These forms therefore do not represent single instances but a system level and muddles up what the structure of a dance as presented in the East European system for structural analysis represents (Giurchescu and Kröschlova 2007).

If we have a dance with many variations, the structure of a single realisation does not represent the total vocabulary and grammar of the dance. Transcriptions of many realisations of the dance, however, could show more of the totality, that we in Norwegian dance research have called the dance concept: 'We suggest that dance has two dimensions: the realization and the concept. The realization is the actual dancing of a dance. The concept for the same dance is the potential of skills, understanding, and knowledge that enables an individual or a dance community to dance that particular dance and to recognize and relate to each particular realization of it' (Bakka and Karoblis 2010: 172–73). A transcription of a standardised form where variations have been taken out can only show the structure of that form, and not what might have been there in any non-standardised version. So, the formula showing the structure of a dance is well suited to show one realisation of a dance, but not the ensemble of variations between the different realisations of one dance.

Adrienne Kaepler avoided this point by analysing the elements that could be used to build dance motives, and how the elements could have a series of allokinés, versions that carry the same meaning and can replace each other in the dance composition (Kaepler 1972). She did not go into the total pattern of one realisation or one dance, and since the Tongan dances are choreographies using these elements to create a dance, the question of differences between realisations did not come up in the same way.

#### **Adrienne Kaepler and the safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage**

Adrienne always stressed that for an anthropologist of dance the aim was to understand a community through the dance, rather than the dance itself. It was, therefore, a surprise for us, her colleagues, that she

engaged with the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, and was instrumental in getting dance onto the UNESCO lists and that she praised the safeguarding measures put in place in the Tongan Kingdom. Her main argument was that she realized the value dance had for the Tongans:<sup>9</sup>

Lakalaka is a unique legacy to Tonga and is considered by the Tongans as the living cultural history of the community. Through performance, lakalaka have become chronicles of the history of the Tongan people. Lakalaka is in danger of disappearing, due primarily to the lack of means for safeguarding and protecting this oral and intangible form. Lakalaka is in danger of disappearing, due primarily to the lack of means for safeguarding and protecting this oral and intangible form (Kaepler 2004: 2–3).

The consequence was a recognition of researching the dance also for its own sake, as Intangible Cultural Heritage, and it is interesting to see how Adrienne also engages with this idea, stressing the importance of oral transmission:

Tongan musicians believe that the music of the lakalaka cannot be written down. Notation could be made (with difficulty) by listening to a tape recording and writing down what occurred on a specific occasion. But this does not cover the possibilities of how a lakalaka could or should be sung. Each time a lakalaka sung speech is performed, it is performed differently and each rendition is 'correct.' Indeed, the music can only be perpetuated through the oral tradition – both for known historic lakalaka, and the structure and strictures of lakalaka composition. Likewise, Tongans believe that the dance movements of lakalaka cannot be written down, but must be passed in the oral tradition by learning the dance and reconstructing it each time the lakalaka will be performed (Kaepler 2004: 3).

In these two quotations Adrienne points to the core problem of notating traditional dance. Transcription of one performance (or realisation in our Norwegian terminology) is not sufficient, but she does not go on towards the question of transcribing, analysing and comparing many realisations in order to find out as much as possible about the dance concept, the source of knowledge and skills in the practitioner's bodies from which the realisations spring. Her solution is to support the oral tradition, and I agree that needs to be the ultimate aim. My experience, however, is that an oral tradition under pressure tends to shrink and become more and more simple. If it is supported by conventional systematic teaching the danger for standardisation and simplification is even larger. In my mind the best tool for safeguarding is a systematic survey of all that is collected and known about a dance, including films, interviews notations and transcriptions. Such a survey can also be built

further as time passes and should not be regarded as a fixed standard at any given time. Instead, it should be a pool of knowledge about the dance concept, which can support the recreation of different realisations just as in the traditional context.

In her classic and renowned work Adrienne has to a certain degree described such a dance concept by identifying the elements and the morphology for combining them, as she learned it directly from the performers. But the step from understanding the principles of building motives to the building of a full choreography that could be performed are, as far as I can understand, missing. In her defence it should be said that the idea of making a description that could directly support learning the dance was probably very far from the aims of a dance anthropologist in those days. Her article from 2004 about safeguarding of Tongan dance ends with Tonga's National Action plan which includes 'Field research to identify and record lakalaka practitioners, research in Tongan and overseas archives to find texts and other information about lakalaka, workshops given by recognized practitioners and composers and a national lakalaka festival' (Kaepler 2004: 4). It is my impression that many anthropologists are sceptical or even very critical to the 2003 UNESCO Convention (Brown 2012: 93–97; Keitumetse 2006). To me and other supporters, it is encouraging that Adrienne took a strong lead in support of it already at the very beginning. In one of her latest articles, she also stresses how historic film footage of music and dance in archives needs to be made available to the communities it came from, and how it can help the continuation of practices (Kaepler 2017).

### **The tools of transcription and description**

This introduction above was meant to serve as a backdrop for the presentation of two concrete, simple and flexible tools that I think can be helpful in dance research and particularly for efforts to support safeguarding when it comes to solve part of the dilemma that Adrienne found among practitioners at Tonga – that they believed their dance could not be notated because of its changeability. My proposed tools are not meant to be stand-alone methods, but to be combined into larger methodological approaches. The following is also an argument for the study of dance movements in a way that only film documentation allows. It should in my opinion cancel some of the reservations that dance researchers have expressed against the use of film recordings as research material. As researchers, I think we should base our work on documentation that can be re-examined, on stringent observation and advanced analysis of material if we want to support safeguarding. The tools I present here are 'transcription' and 'description.' In order to show how I understand and use the terms differently from other fields, I want to shortly sum up how the terms are used here. Generally, the term transcription is often used for the converting of the content of one specific process of human expression into some kind of writing or notation. For instance, transcription of speech is understood



as taking down the words or the sounds spoken. It is also possible to transcribe the content of documented events or other kinds of human interaction, again listing how the process is running from beginning to end. A transcription is most often based on a sound or film recording of the process and is listing the content of the specific recording in the order elements occur, from the beginning to the end. For dance transcription, it can be a Labanotation score recording precisely what is shown on a piece of film. If for instance somebody gives you a recording of a dance which is danced three-and-a-half times before the recording ends, and asks you to make a notation of it to be published in dance manual, you will write it down as it can be danced once. It does not have relevance for your task that it was performed more times in that one specific case. Your task is to tell how the dance is or should be danced in general, not how it was done in that specific case. The problem of how such a notation represents the possible spectre of variations is usually not raised. If a piece of music is transcribed, one option is to take down exactly what is recorded within certain parameters, or the way a specific composition should or could be carried out, an idealized or standardized version. Such kinds of transcription are called 'descriptive transcriptions' in ethnomusicology (see Seeger 1958; Nettl 2015: 78). However, this definition of transcription in my view is not suitable for the approach I present here.

My proposal is to define the tools 'transcription' and 'description' based on some specific principles: Transcription, as used here, is the transfer of a filmed dance realisation into writing in the order the movements occur, referenced through time codes or other means to keep track of the timing. The transcription takes down one specific process or action as it happened at one specific point in time and as it was documented while it happened. If it turns out that there are variations in the dance, so that it is not done in quite the same way each of the three and half times it is done, a transcription will show you that. Notations may show or refer to variations, but most often they do not, or at least not in a systematic way. If you make several precise transcriptions first, it enables you to make a notation of the dance for the collection where the variations are included in a systematic way if you wish. You can put the variations as alternative options, for instance in footnotes.

The term 'description' refers to a document that is built by comparing a set of transcriptions of different realisations. It lists the elements from all compared transcriptions and explains how the combination of elements is done. It is in other words the description of the vocabulary and the grammar of a practice. Then this, perhaps quite complex description, can help the people who give workshops or teach the practice to understand the complexities and help them adapt their teaching to that understanding. Teaching can still be simple but build up to a basis for developing complexity and deeper understanding and variation little by little (Bakka 2017: 223-240).

### **Dance movement transcription**

This article presents dance movement transcription as the converting of one person's specific movement sequence into some kind of writing or notation. It requires that the movement sequence is filmed so that the

transcriber can study the recording and take down the movement elements in the order they occur.<sup>10</sup> The transcriber can define the level of detail or the aspects of movement recorded in the transcription but should keep to the level and the aspects he or she takes down as consistently as possible through the transcription. That means that a transcription records as much as possible of a totality, but that it also can record only selected aspect of a dance; arm movements or step patterns etc. The level of detail or the aspects chosen depends on the focus of the study and the questions asked (Hutchinson Guest 2014: 177–78). Transcription is, in other words, to systematically take down in writing or notation the movement content of a dance realisation. Bakka and Karoblis have explained a dance realisation in the following way:

We suggest that dance has two dimensions: the realization and the concept. The realization is the actual dancing of a dance. The concept for the same dance is the potential of skills, understanding, and knowledge that enables an individual or a dance community to dance that particular dance and to recognize and relate to each particular realization of it (Bakka, Aksdal, and Flem 1995: 21; Gore and Bakka 2007: 93). We argue that the approach to dance through its realization is underestimated in anthropological research and ethnographic work in general (Bakka 2005: 72). A realization is the only full and proper way in which a dance becomes available for us. We consider demonstrations, rehearsals, and illustrated explanations as secondary and only as hints to a full expression of the dance. Consequently, we see the full, normal realization as the primary source to, and the only fully valid form of, dance. The realization makes dance available perceptually (Bakka and Karoblis 2010: 172–73).

One main argument for recommending this kind of movement transcription is that it allows us to establish a firm empirical basis for studying movement patterns. Each element or aspect of the dance that is transcribed refers to a specific point in the documented realisation and can be revisited and re-evaluated. The description or classification the transcriber is doing for each element he or she transcribes can be verified, questioned or falsified. A process of transcription is of course influenced by the background, knowledge, and opinions of the transcriber. Still, working from documentation with a stringent transcription system will easier enable a critical distance to the movement material.

A quite usual approach to making notations for practical purposes was<sup>11</sup> to look at a dance being shown several times and then take down what the collector considered the best version or the most typical version based on impressions and observation and perhaps notes. If the collector looks at the dance and then makes statements that generalise about the totality, based on impressions and opinions, it may be sufficient for practical purposes, but for research, it is a shortcut to a notation that is not properly supported.

Theatrical dance is usually seen as works, and researchers in this field tend to comment on the work as a totality of the choreographer's and the dancers' intentions and maybe the audience's interpretations or understanding. One realisation is then seen as an imperfect version of the abstract totality, and the latter cannot be reached or observed directly. Only the descriptions, opinions and understandings of the artists and the audience will be available for characterising the abstract totality, which can be seen as a dance concept. With such material, it can be difficult to break out of the conventional and internal discourses of the artistic field and find a critical distance. The analysis of realisations may enable the researcher to bracket his or her preconceptions and see a western theatrical dance work from a distance similar to the one a western researcher might take to a dance form that is unknown to her or him (Keali'inohomoku 1983; Buckland 1999). With transcriptions of realisations, that is individual performances, you will be able to compare them, to see to which degree they are different, and if so, how they are different.

To sum up, transcriptions as those described above could be used as a firm empirical basis for discussing techniques, intentions or aesthetical ideals with the choreographer and the readings or interpretations with critics or members of the audience.

The way to transcribe, as it is proposed here, has the problem that the system has to be learned from the beginning by every new reader, and it is dependent on written language for explications. It does not have the benefit of Western staff notation that is generally known or Labanotation that has at least some readers internationally. My transcription, however, has the benefit of giving beginners in analysis a simple start, and that it can register just a few simple aspects of dance patterns. It also enables a person with knowledge of terminology for the piece he or she wants to analyse, the possibility to use that in the transcription, which can also be helpful and facilitate the work. A full Labanotation score will often give a redundancy of information if the questions asked are simple. Shorthand techniques in Labanotation can probably have similar benefits as transcription in terms of avoiding redundancy. It is also possible to take terms such as motive, phrase or cell, or other basic ideas from various models of structural analysis as presented in Kaepler and Dunin (2007).

As a conclusion to the argumentation for using the principle of transcription, I refer to a piece of basic information from Penn State University Libraries (2019): 'Empirical research is based on observed and measured phenomena and derives knowledge from actual experience rather than from theory or belief.' This links with the following statement: 'A bottom-line in our argument is that, despite all the cumbersome work it takes, generalizations need to be based upon the explorations of singular events, such as realizations of dance. We argue that there is a need for dance research to work systematically with empirical material and to strive for transparency about how singular events bring us to generalizations' (Bakka and Karoblis 2010: 187). We think that Ethnochoreology and Dance Anthropology would benefit from strengthening the

empirical basis for its research, and hope that use of transcription as a simple and easy tool can make that easier since it is open for a broad range of adaptations.

#### **An example of a round dance transcription: Ringlennen from Røros**

The transcribed dance in this example belongs to what I have proposed to call the dance paradigm of round dances, that is a kind of couple dances which dominated in Europe in the nineteenth century (Bakka 2005). In the Nordic countries, we investigated round dances in a large shared project where we documented them in twelve locations, two each in Denmark, the Faroe Isles,<sup>12</sup> Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden (Urup et al. 1988). The project developed terminology for the round dance paradigm, and I will use part of that terminology with some adaptation for the transcriptions and description.

The Nordic project classified the motives found in a selection of 299 dance realisations, that were analysed and used for a video publication. There were many couples dancing in most realisations, and the total number of individual dances documented was considerably higher. The project identified five main types of motives:

**Promenade motives:** The two dancers in a couple hold each other and move forward, backwards, sideways or diagonally along, but on each of their side of the circular line of direction. In the transcription, these motives are listed as P-Motive 1 and P-Motive 2.

**Turning motives:** The two dancers in a couple face each other. They hold each other and turn clockwise or counterclockwise around their own axis while moving counterclockwise along a circular path forming a circle together with the other dancing couples. There are two subtypes: One-measure-turning (T-Motive 1 m) where the couple makes one full turn on one measure of the music, and two-measure-turning (T-Motive 2 m), where the turn takes two measures.

**Rest figure motives:** the couple faces each other and uses the steps from the two-measure-turning while moving from side to side and/or along the line of direction. It is a variant of two-measure-turning where the couple rests from the turning. These motives are listed as (T-Motive 2 m) and not specified, to reduce the detail level.

**In place motives:** The two dancers in a couple travel no more than a few paces in one direction, but dance, forth and back across an imagined spot.

**Miscellaneous motives:** Motive that does not fit into the other motive types (Urup 1988: 257).

Promenade and turning motives were the most usual motive types in the 299 dance realisations large project material, and only these types are listed in the transcriptions and description of the dance analysed here. The dance, however, does also have some rest figure motives. They function as variations to two-measure-turning motives, and to keep detail level down. I have counted those as two-measure-turning

motives. I have also left out details of the dance fastening,<sup>13</sup> all gestures of free leg, small variations in the directions the dancers use etc. If the aim of a project is to produce a description for teaching the dance, such details would need to be added in transcriptions and the resulting description. The film documentation would be used to illustrate the work of the teacher and give students a deeper visual impression. The aim here is not so much to make a full description for transmission but rather to show how transcriptions are necessary as a point of departure for a description of dances with many variations.

The dance name *Ringlenner* is a local version of the German *Rheinländer*, a dance name which is mostly found in German, Norwegian and Danish sources. In Swedish and English, the same dance is mostly called *Schottis/Schottische*. The *Reinlender/Schottis/Schottische* as described by dancing masters was a very simple form following the structure of the music with two measures of P-Motive 2 and two measures of T-Motive 1.. An example of this can be observed in a film that shows the German dance teacher couple Fern teaching a standardised *Rheinländer* form for TV (see Figure 1). The basic dance structure shown here was commonly danced by late nineteenth-century lower classes, and when I did my fieldwork in all parts of Norway between the late 1960s to late 1980s this version was common in most of Norway except for eastern Norway where forms were more complex. The simple form was taken up by the dancing masters towards the very end of the nineteenth century. We find close parallels to the simple form taught by The Fern's in the books of the dancing masters from the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries (Isachsen 1886: 46; Dodworth 1888: 60; Zorn 1905: 247). The Ferns' style as presented here was commonly practiced in dance schools in the 1960s. [\(Unfortunately the Fern video is taken down from YouTube and is no longer available](#)

**Step 1: transcription** [You can see the transcription here:](#)

The transcription form shows seven couples dancing the *Ringlenner* at a recording from Røros, Norway written into a spreadsheet). [You can see the film here:](#)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGj6k7jVd5U&ab\\_channel=NorwegianCentreforTraditionalMusicandDance](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGj6k7jVd5U&ab_channel=NorwegianCentreforTraditionalMusicandDance)

The first column gives the time code from the recording at the beginning of each repetition, and below, how many seconds the repetition took. Then, there are three columns for each of the seven couples dancing. The first column gives the steps of the male dancer, the second the steps of the female dancer, and the third the couple motives. There are some cells filled with colour, stressing the lengths of musical repetitions and couple motives. Coloured letters in red and green are used to show how the step patterns crossing measures (barlines) are placed. The first pattern is given in red, the following in green. The codes used for transcribing of steps are:

L = Left

Field Code Changed

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R = Right

S = *Svikt* (a movement down and up on one foot)<sup>14</sup>

Ss = Double *Svikt* (a movement down and up and down and up again on one foot)

T = Transfer of weight (a movement that takes over the up-movement from the previous S)

In the couple motives columns

P-motive stands for Promenade motives, and there are two versions of them

T-motive stands for (Couple) Turning motives, and there are 2 versions

1 m stands for 1 measure turning

2 m stands for 2 measure turning

/v stands for variation

Figure 2. Transcription of the Ringlenner. (Transcription by Egil Bakka 2019)

### **Step 2: description**

Having shown the process of transcription, the next step is to make a description based on an analysis of the transcriptions, and this can take many forms. One of them can be a summary of the findings from the analysis, to function as answers to the questions the researcher may have asked. The aim may be to build it into a broader discussion of the dancers' attitudes and understandings of choreo-musical relationships. Then aspects or details considered irrelevant for the questions posed may not be transcribed or not described.

Another form of description can be made for transmission purposes and be formulated as a systematic explanation of how the dance was done in the available transcriptions. This should then be quite detailed and will have a similarity to dance descriptions in manuals, but include the variations of a motive as alternatives, and explain how the dance structure can be built. In the following I present two exemplary analyses focusing on music-dance relationships, and elements of the dance respectively.

### **Music-dance relationship**

The film used for this transcription gives us a common version of a *Ringlenner*; the musicians play a melody with two parts (A and B) with 8 bars each. They play each part twice (AA, BB), and then repeat all again, so that the total is AA BB AA BB, adding up to a total of 64 bars. The seven dance couples start dancing at slightly different times, and they stop when the music ends.

In most versions of *Reinlender/Schottis/Schottische*, all step patterns are corresponding to one 4/4 bar of the music, but the version from Røros breaks this clear and square dance-music relationship, making it ambivalent. The P-Motive 1 takes one and a half bars of music (six beats), which by itself disturbs the clarity. It also influences the dance-music relationship in the rest of the dance, enabling even the step patterns that cover just one bar of music not only to start on the first beat of the bar, as usual, but also to start on the third beat of the bar. Through this, the dance pattern spans two half bars (beat 3 and 4 of one bar plus 1 and 2 of the next). A dancer accustomed to the clear and square dance-music relationship when dancing the *Reinlender* will have an uneasy feeling if another couple 'divides' (particularly the T-Motive 2 m) between two bars. One may get the feeling that the other couple is out of beat. The difference between the couples is easily observable when a couple that carries out a pattern within one bar and a couple that does shift the pattern to span two half bars (T-Motive 2 m) are dancing next to each other. In the transcriptions we see male dancer 7 hesitate and stop a couple of times to switch from dividing a one bar pattern over two half bars to the standard version. Male dancer 2 makes a similar change, waiting for two beats, but without hesitation.

We can take this phenomenon of ambivalence on to a more general level. Having discovered this seeming ambivalence in the transcriptions, we can interview the practitioners about their understanding and experience. Can they confirm that there is some ambivalence, and what do they feel about it? Siri Mæland has interviewed dancers inspired by the explicitation interview technique, which is very promising (Mæland 2019). The question can even be taken out into broader spectres; the tension between the regulated, unison and transparent opposed to the irregular, individual and ambivalent. The *Reinlender* is a typical example: some forms are simple and square, other forms are complex and advanced. It could for example be investigated by putting the findings from the transcription and interviews in relation to aesthetic feelings of communities, intrinsic qualities of social dancing and the related musical culture.

### **The elements of the dance**

The dance recording of the 7 dancers has four kinds of motives mostly coming in the following order:

#### Promenade motives

P-Motive 1 is used by all except one couple and is danced 2 or 3 at a time.

P-Motive 2 also use by all except another couple and is mostly danced 1 to 2 at a time.

#### Turning motives

T-Motive 1-m is used by all couples and are danced between 2 to 6 at a time, but most often 3

T-Motive 2-m is used by all couples and are danced between 4 to 8 at a time, most often 6 or 8

It is interesting to take the motives apart into cell elements, according to the East-European structural analysis method (Giurchescu and Kröschlova 2007). It shows that the whole dance is built on three different motive cells taking two beats each. These elements relate to the musical structure so that they will always start on beat 1 or beat 3 of the measure:

1. Foot-1S Foot-2S
2. Foot-1Ss
3. Foot-1S Foot-2T Foot-1S (Used by couple two, best visible in the last part of their dance)

Finally, the motive cells are built on three different types of paces, an S-pace, an Ss-pace and a T-pace. A pace is the period from the moment a foot takes support till the support has been taken by the other foot. The traditional way of registering or notating the relationship between footwork and music is to give the time value for each pace, that is from the moment a foot takes on weight till the foot loses the weight. If the weight is taken off the foot through elevation and ends back to the same foot, however, the time value of the stepping part and the landing part are each registered by themselves.

#### **An example of a theatrical dance transcription**

The following example is a transcription of a small Mark Morris piece (see sawing14s 2019). Mark Morris is an American dancer, choreographer and opera director (Jordan 2015). In this piece Morris is performing a danced interaction with three puppets to the 'Anger Dance' by Henry Cowell.<sup>15</sup> The point is to demonstrate concretely how the choreography is constructed in terms of movement and 'narrative.' We can ask how the interaction is constructed in term of regularity and irregularity, and look at the dance-music relationship, and by adding more aspects to new columns more questions can be asked. The aim here is not to say anything about a similarity or difference between Norway and the USA, in terms of methodology, but to demonstrate that the method can be used on very different kinds of dance material and help to answer very different questions.

Figure 3. Transcription of Mark Morris dancing 'Anger Dance'. (transcription by Egil Bakka 2019)

[Link to YouTube clip: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MX3B31ZNXw0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MX3B31ZNXw0)

Field Code Changed



Time	Measure	Mark	Animal 1	Animal 2	Animal 3	Phrase
code	1-2-3-	Morris				
00:01	1	Move				1
	2	Command				
00:03	3		Immitation			
	4			Immitation		
	5				Immitation	5 bars
	6	Command				2
	7		Immitation			
	8			Immitation		
	9	Move			Immitation	4 bars
	10	Move				3
	11		Immitation			
	12			Immitation		
	13				Immitation	4 bars
	14	Command				4
	15		Immitation			
	16			Immitation		
	17				Immitation	4 bars
	18				Move	5
	19			Immitation		
	20		Immitation			3 bars
	21	Move				6
	22	Move				2 bars
	23	Move	Immitation	Immitation		7
	24	Move	Immitation	Immitation		
	25	Move	Immitation	Immitation	Immitation	
	26	Move	Immitation	Immitation	Immitation	
	27	Move	Immitation	Immitation	Immitation	
	28	Move	Immitation	Immitation	Immitation	6 bars
	29	Reaction	Reaction	Reaction	Reaction	8
	30	Reaction	Command	Command	Command	
	31	Reaction	Command	Command	Command	3 bars
	32	Reaction				9
	33	Reaction				
	34	Reaction	Command			
	35	Move				4 bars
	36	Command	Immitation	Immitation	Immitation	10
	37	Move				
	38	Move				
	39	Command				
	40		Immitation	Immitation	Immitation	
00:40	41	Move	Immitation	Immitation	Immitation	6 bars

### Step 1: transcription

In the transcription, I register the interaction between Mark Morris and three puppets. I have established four categories: **Move** means a movement that is not directed to the other agents, **Command** is a move

giving someone else a command, *Imitation* is that the agent imitates someone else. The yellow ones mean that the puppets imitate movement that comes from Morris, the green ones are imitations of movements initiated by the puppets. A reaction is that one agent *reacts* towards another agent.

### **Step 2: instead of a description**

In this case, as we have only one realisation of the dance, and since the dance may be intended as a fixed choreography, a description process may not make sense, but a summary of findings is still possible.

The categories of interaction as transcribed above could certainly be developed and more precisely defined, they are just simple examples. The music is simple and circling around a motif of two bars, that is repeated most of the time. If we look at the movement phrases, most of them start on even number bars, somehow breaking with the two-bar pattern in the music. The phrases are of different length, and both these features are creating tension with musical regularity.

As for the interaction categories, the *move* category belongs to Morris, whereas the *imitation* category belongs to the dolls, the other categories are done by Morris as well as the dolls. There are some problems to use the video for movement analysis, it has many cuts and some pieces where we cannot see all the agents. It does give the impression, though, that it is a continuous dance, and that the pieces are shot simultaneously with different cameras, but most likely it is pasted together of pieces shot at different times. The continuity of sound and movement patterns still enable us to analyse it as one piece of dance. We could have made a column for the camera clips, to see how a change of camera influences our reading of the dance. We could also have made columns for the movements performed, and a number of other aspects.

### **Epilogue**

In this article I have revisited a past shared with a dear colleague, reflecting on some common and some different threads in the histories of our lives. We have in common that we have dealt with the movement content of dance, by analysing it in detail, but we did it for different purposes; Adrienne in order to learn about the society, and me for the sake of transmitting it to new generations. The 2003 Convention, however, made us both work for the same purpose, although still in different ways and with different understandings. Adrienne has shown through her work that the values of the communities she researched mattered to her, and she promoted them, maybe without explicating that as much as I have done. She has not continued to develop the impressive system for analysis of movement that she started with her Ph.D., instead moving on to other issues, whereas I have found movement analysis in all its aspects ever more interesting and important. This is why I have taken the liberty to combine the revisiting of the past with a piece aiming to inspire my students and colleagues towards more movement analysis by proposing some strategies that are

not so demanding and take the advantage of online publishing which allows video illustrations much more efficiently than before. Works about dance have been difficult to write and even worse to read, because it is such a challenge to imagine and understand dance from descriptions and notation. The possibility to combine seamlessly the watching a dance film with the reading of its analysis, is in my mind a revolutionary progress. The potential of this technology can be taken much further than here, but I hope the attempt can be an inspiration.

## Notes

1. In the summer of 1983 I stayed several months in Lange's centre at Jersey to learn Labanotation from him.
2. 'Les membres de nos actuels groupes folkloriques, en s'appliquant à saisir du dehors des formes de mouvement sorties de l'usage, n'ont guère de chances de vivre par elles le même état psychique que les membres des communautés paysannes d'autrefois. Hommes d'un autre temps et d'une autre société, ils y investissent autre chose, et par suite en font une autre danse. C'est dire que la danse des danseurs traditionnels ne se comprend que replacée dans le milieu, la culture, la mentalité, où elle s'est épanouie et transmise. Le lien que nous percevons entre une structure de mouvement et un psychisme est de son milieu et de son temps' (Translated from French by Bakka).
3. It may not have been seen necessary to argue for the value of classical music and ballet, but a parallel argument for the superiority of modern or expressive dance permeates a book such as McFee (1994).
4. For an example of the historical use of the term 'man' in social anthropology see Linton (1936).
5. Kaeppeler was awarded a prize by the YWCA (World Young Women's Christian Association) in 1977 for increasing the 'understanding of world cultures,' and the International Tribal Art Book Prize in 2009 (Wikipedia [n.d.]).
6. Janos Fügedi (2019, pers. comm., 17 February) confirmed my understanding explicitly.
7. Form analysis as carried out by the Study Group for Folk Dance terminology takes into consideration a dance instance and not a dance system as a whole (Giurchescu and Kröschlova 2007: 22).
8. Fügedi (2019, pers. comm., 17 February) explains: 'Most probably: the notator learned the dances, either from text or after demonstration. ... the issue of generalization in case of both dances [used as examples] may have a certain validity. ... the notation implies a definite, strict structure that meets the musical structure, which indicates a sort of steady performance, ... [which] present the main, let us say, the "socially expected" or "socially accepted" features of that particular dance.'

9. In retrospect my impression is that many anthropologists did not see the study of dance forms with an aim to support safeguarding as a legitimate task for their research, and I think many still keep that opinion. Even if most researchers see the dances they study as valuable, they may not see it as legitimate to engage with questions of value. I think Adrienne's change of mind was about the willingness to engage in such issues, not a question of value in itself.
10. It could be argued that it is possible to transcribe a movement sequence while observing it live. It would depend upon the density of the material and level of detail aimed for if it is practically realistic. Additionally, if a transcription should be available for revisiting and re-evaluation, documentation would be needed, which is why transcribing without documentation is not included in the definition here.
11. The method was typical for folk dance collectors, many of whom did not have film recorders at least in the first half of the twentieth century.
12. Although the Faroe Isles officially are a part of the Kingdom of Denmark, we brought them into the project as a separate unit.
13. A general term for kinds of ways people holds each other when dancing proposed by William C. Reynolds for (Bakka et al. 1995: 107).
14. The video with the Fern's has a simplicity that may help to observe the svikt patterns. They both do: S – S – S(s) S – S – Ss (here with a hop between S and s) STS STS STS S(s).
15. Morris appeared on Sesame Street (Episode 3682) in a segment with the three rod muppets 'Baby Tooth and the Fuzzy Funk' (Muppet Wiki [n.d.]a, [n.d.]b).

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