

MATS NILSSON

The Swedish Polska

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Preface to *The Swedish Polska*

When we first published Mats Nilsson's book *Från långdans till bugg* [*From long-dance to jive*] (2004) as an e-resource on our website, we had not anticipated the demand for literature about dance and folk dancing in Sweden. Since its online publication, the book has been one of Svenskt visarkiv's most used e-resources. International readers regularly request English-language literature in this area, and this new publication is in response to these requests.

The Swedish Polska was first published in Swedish as *Polska på svenska*, in 2009, and has since been widely used by university students and dance scholars. In addition, it has been read in wider circles by dancers, musicians, and other interested readers. The English online version is a translation of the original book with minor corrections, not a new edition.

Mats Nilsson is an ethnologist based at the University of Gothenburg, where his primary research interest is folk-, and popular dancing in Sweden and Scandinavia. Today, he is one of few Swedish ethnologists who research and publish in this area. He received his PhD from the University of Gothenburg in 1998 with a dissertation entitled *Dance – continuity in change*, a study of social dancing in Gothenburg from 1930 until 1990. However, Mats is not only an academic but also a dance practitioner with an almost lifelong experience as dancer and tutor. These combined competences make up an important foundation for this book.

Throughout the study, Mats' personal relationship to dance and dancing is reflected through thoughtful reflections and observations of the Swedish polska dance scene. With a personal and not overly academic language, Mats allows himself to move around the Swedish dance floors to ponder on the nature of dance and music, as well as their social roles and functions – in the present and in the past.

Stockholm, 11 March 2016

Dan Lundberg

Director, Svenskt visarkiv (Centre for Swedish Folk Music and Jazz Research)

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HÖNÖ, AUGUST 2009
Mats Nilsson

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Polska the Swedish Way?

IS THERE SUCH a thing as “Swedish” dance? Is it possible to talk about a “Swedish” polska, considering the name’s connotations with Poland; the word polska in Swedish being the term for a Polish female as well as the Polish language? And on what grounds can we call the polska Swedish? I believe we *can* talk about Swedish dance, just as we talk about Egyptian, Argentinean, or Spanish dance, because certain dances exist and are being danced among the people who inhabit the geopolitical area, which for some centuries has been called Sweden. Polska is one of these Swedish dances that have been danced and shaped by the people who live in this particular part of the world.

This is not a manual on how to dance the polska. The best way to learn is on the dance floor, along with other dancers. No sooner has this been stated than some of my own views on dancing are revealed. It is something you do, it is an activity, and not something you learn by reading a book.¹ But maybe this is, after all, a kind of manual; a textbook about possible attitudes and relations to dance, such as physical movement and music making, which can also be applied to other non-material expressive cultural manifestations. The idea is that this text should bring something new to people who are already familiar with, and knowledgeable about polska dancing – as well as to all those with a more general interest in dance or cultural studies as a whole. However, this book is first and foremost a scholarly essay on dance.

The Swedish title for this book, *Dans – polska på svenska*, (literally, *Dance – Polska in Swedish*) has a background of its own. This is my third book on dance. The two previous ones are titled *Dans – från långdans till bugg* (*Dance – From Long Dance to Bugg*), 1990, and *Dans – kontinuitet i förändring* (*Dance – Continuity in Change*), 1998 – hence, the idea of giving this, my third book, a title in a somewhat similar style. The first book, from 1990, is a textbook for a study circle on dance, an educational and part historical text on popular dance in

Sweden from the Middle Ages onwards. I had wanted it to have the title *Dans på svenska* (*Dance in Swedish*), but the publisher vetoed it. At the time, the publisher considered the title potentially discriminating against immigrants, or, “new Swedes”. I found their argument difficult to understand, as most of the Swedish dance repertoire is ‘immigrant’, and this was one of my points in *Dans – från långdans till bugg*. The book from 1998 is my doctoral dissertation on dancing in Gothenburg between 1930 and 1990. Using the expression “in Swedish” would have been too general in that context, so I focused on my reflections on continuity in change instead. However, now the time is right to develop my thoughts on Sweden and Europe’s shared dance heritage by looking at a particular case; the Swedish polska dance. That is why I chose the title *Dance – polska på svenska* for this book.

In the text, I approach polska dancing from four different angles. These are, with polska as dance, as music, as a name, and as an experience. The first angle looks at polska as movements and choreographic form. There are two aspects here, mine and other researchers’ words to describe the movements which make up the way polska is danced, and the dancers’ own words and names for the dance they dance. Although these two positions do not always concur, there is a general agreement between dancers and researchers of what it is that constitutes polska as a dance.

Secondly, polska is a musical form – in this case a form of dance music. Dance music is an important part of nearly all forms of dance, something that cannot be completely ignored. Polska is usually described by both dance practitioners and researchers as music in triple time with a distinctive rhythm.

Thirdly, polska is a name, a term for something. The starting point here is, what name dancers use for their dance form, and what name they give to the music they dance to. In fact, one could argue that it is the name polska, which bring the dance and the music together. It is in the language and the mind that we establish norms and shape the perceived relationships between sound and movement.

The fourth, but in many ways the most important, aspect is that polska constitutes the experiences and emotions which arise from dancing the polska. In the act of dancing, the physical movements of the dancer and the sound of the music fuse. At its best we stop thinking and just “do” the polska, we rotate and ‘float’ with the music, allowing ourselves to reach a “flow”, and a complete experience.² In this context, ‘fluidity’, or, to ‘float’ (*flyt*), is a technical term used by polska dancers, while ‘flow’ denotes the psychological and creative experience reached through dancing.

When these four aspects (dance, music, the term and the experience) are brought together they make up the phenomenon I call polska dancing, as a manifestation of a twenty-first-century Swedish dance subculture. It is of course possible to start from any one of these four aspects, but their order has not been chosen at random. This book focuses on polska as dance form and the way of dancing. It is primarily about the polska dancing of the early twenty-first century, rather than a history of the polska and polska dancing as a whole. On the other hand, it is not possible to leave out history altogether: it affects us constantly, just as we are constantly affected by dance forms from other countries. That is the reason behind the section on the possible background of the polska and the meaning of the name.

In other words, it is polska as dance that is the focus of his book, not the music. This is an important statement, for some readers possibly provocative, as many practitioners and researchers regard music and dance as a unit. The idea here is to place the dance at the centre and not turn it into an appendage to musicological research, theatre research, sociology or any other discipline. I prefer to start from the other end and begin by looking at the dance and the movement and then “append” the music.



Korro Folk Music Festival 2006. Photo: Leif Carlsson.

My ambition is to begin in the present and move back through history, starting by a “reading” of twenty-first century polska dancing, before moving back in time to see in what way this resembles the polska dancing from the 1600s to approximately 1900, and then return again to more recent times and the present day. This idea of moving backwards through history is one I have carried for a long time. It was difficult to realise in the two previous books, due to the overriding conventions of writing a textbook and an academic dissertation, respectively. Now is the time to see whether this approach will work.

The book begins with an empirical study dealing with how, where and why twenty-first century people dance in this “archaic” fashion, whereas more academic theoretical discussions are to be found further on, where I also discuss what dance ethnology is or rather might be. A central assumption here is that dance and the study of dance resemble, yet have different preconditions from, the study of music.

The period of data gathering and fieldwork which form the basis for my description of polska dancing is hard to pin down, as the line between where my study began and ended often blurs. My C level essay (equivalent to a bachelor thesis) of 1983 (Nilsson 1983) already dealt with dance, and whenever I have had the opportunity to choose the direction of courses, texts and essays, dance has always been included. This book builds on the experience and knowledge I have acquired over the years from about 1965 when I began to dance myself, although the more specific material originates from the 2000s. In 2002, I was awarded a grant from the Dance Academy’s Council for Research and Development, which enabled me to which enabled me to travel to polska dance events throughout Sweden, mainly in the year 2003. This more intense participation in polska dancing continued until 2006.

Behind my descriptions and analyses there are numerous conversations with polska dancers of all kinds and a few formal interviews. Data from participant observations are also included in the material. Although these have not always been carried out in a systematic manner they are numerous, and include a hundred-odd observations of different kinds during the 2000s. Most quotes are taken from the questionnaires I used during fieldwork. Those who took part in courses and dance evenings were asked to answer five questions on an A4 sheet handed out during the 20-30 minute break. Students at some of the regular ethnology courses at the University of Gothenburg also answered the questionnaire. Most answers were brief notes of one to five sentences, but occasionally considerably longer. The response rate from the participants

was high, around 95 %. In that way I gathered a large quantity of relatively frank answers, varying in length and quality. The total was 175 responses from 11 different occasions during the years 2003–2006.³ As a method, these short open surveys provide useful qualitative data, although not enough for a statistical analysis.

Apart from fieldwork, my analyses and statements are based on a motley collection of material: books, essays, articles, journals, programmes etc., including books of instruction, collections of polska dances and web sites. One category of material, indispensable to dance research, includes films, videos and DVD-recordings of dance in all possible contexts.

II

Polska – What is it?

WHEN SOMEONE ASKS what polska is, the answer will depend on who is asking, in what context the question is asked and who is answering the question. There is more than one way of posing the question, just as there are several answers as to what polska is.⁴ If I ask my neighbour, a person on the street or most of my students, the answer is often a counter question “What, polska?” After the initial surprise, the most common answer is “a language” or “a woman from Poland” (these, being alternative meanings of the word *polska* in Swedish). Very few people think of any kind of dance.⁵ When I point out that it has to do with dance, the answer may be “Oh, you mean polka”. If I persevere and say that it is about the dance called polska, the respondents become even more puzzled. One student answers as follows: “I don’t know what polska is. I’m thinking polka, that’s a dance, isn’t it? But, I don’t know anything about it.” (Vodo47). Another student, herself a dancer of “West African”, flamenco and salsa, as well as “oriental” dance, replied, despite her diverse dance background, that she “didn’t think anybody danced polska” nowadays (Vodo45).

Phonetically, “polska” sounds like “polka” and for most Swedes, both are forms of dance and music with which they have no real connection, yet concepts which they think about as old and often associate with Poland. A young student, who does Irish dance and classical ballet, comments on the question of what polska is as follows: “traditional music and dance, maybe from Poland!” (Vodo410). Another young student who dances “disco”⁶ when he, as he puts it, “has had a few beers”, replies in a similar manner (although without reference to Poland) that polska “sounds like some form of traditional dance (like schottische, for example)” (Vodo415).

It is not uncommon that polska is associated with a kind of folk dance, or what is often referred to as *gammaldans* (literally “old-time dance”; *gammaldans*

is an umbrella term used in Sweden for waltz, polka, schottische, hambo and mazurka). Among younger people, who are neither interested in polska or folk music, categories such as folk dance and gammaldans are often fused together. But categorisations are tricky even for the polska dancers themselves.

For those who have no idea of what polska dance is or what the music sounds like, the best thing to do is to hum some well-known Swedish melodies, such as the Christmas song “Nu är det jul igen” or the popular folk song “Vårvindar friska”. These are polska melodies to which you can dance either polska, or its near relative, the Swedish “hambo”.

What Do the Polska Dancers Say?

This chapter focuses mainly on the dancers’ experiences and statements about polska as a dance. In my material, the dancers’ own views on what polska is can be divided into four main categories. For most of them it has to do with special *feelings* and experiences, often linked to the music and the dance partner. The *music* is important, and most dancers particularly emphasise the special triple metre, sometimes referring to the rhythm and accents of the music. The dancers also see the *form*, the movements, as something special, such as the pair’s constant turning and improvisation. Others stress *tradition* and cultural heritage – as important aspects, that is, the long history of the polska in Swedish folk culture. When trying to describe what polska dancing means to them, many of the dancers have associations to more than one of the four aspects of feeling, music, form and tradition. One woman who has played and danced for twenty years expresses herself in the following way:

Polska is so much, but above all it is triple metre, and couple dancing/ interaction/communication that spring to my mind. And then I think about two contradictory issues, historical ties to tradition, our responsibility for the cultural heritage, and freedom/improvisation.
(Fin4)

Feeling, music and form are often mentioned together – they form a coherent whole. The music is clearly important, especially combined with the freedom, improvisation and interaction of the dancing couple. In addition, the polska tradition and wishes to preserve a cultural heritage, play a certain role when the dancers explain what polska means to them. However, feelings and experiences are what most polska dancers emphasise. The various experiences and the



The polska is just as hard to express in words, as it is to catch the turning of the polska in a photograph. Orsa 2003. Photo: Mats Nilsson.

way they are expressed in words often merge; the dancers do not differentiate between feelings, music and dance. Positive feelings are often related to the triple metre and the turning motion, but also to something primordial, such as the “virgin forest”. The glue that holds the polska dance together is the social dimension of being with like-minded people. The uniting factors are, the polska music and dance, and the people who play and dance the polska.

The Feeling – Elation, Trance and Meditation

According to many practitioners, dancing polska – even watching it – is a sensual experience. Achieving a feeling of “intoxication”, of “falling into a trance” or that the dancer reaches a state of “meditation”, are typical ways of attempting to describe the feelings brought about by polska dancing. Positive feelings, such as “a challenging attraction” and “sensualism” are often mentioned by the dancers. One informant regards polska as “an addictive poison, pure narcotics” (Fin3). This polska dancer began at the age of 25 and has “drugged” himself with polska dancing for over 30 years. A somewhat younger woman, who has done a lot of dancing, expresses a similar thought of a kind of intoxication in saying that polska is:

...body memories, I've learnt most on the dance floor, body against body. The role models, meetings, and passion will be with me forever – want to experience it all over again! (Dh3).

Polska dancing today is practically always a couple dance ⁷ and has much to do with the interaction between two individuals and two bodies. In order to reach a state of elation, both dancers need to contribute equal levels of energy and be independent in their own dancing. It is by no means necessary to have been dancing polska for 20 or 30 years; a 60-year-old man had this sensation after a mere three years. Polska for him is a “great deal of emotion and “feeling”. When both are independent in the dance it is ‘intoxicating’. It has given much – a new world opens up” (Fin18).

The elation brought about by moving together with another person leads in certain situations to a sensation of being in a trance. This, however, is not something that differentiates polska from other dance forms:

It's near-trance! It pulsates like the heart beat. It (the polska) is happy and sensual and rich in dialects. There's melancholy in it too. Polska dancing is relatively new to me; otherwise I dance anything

from disco to tango or lindy hop. I can honestly say that for me the folk music and dance have restored my health after a year on sick leave!! (Arv12)

What is sometimes termed 'trance' resembles what other dancers express as a "meditative feeling". A middle-aged woman adds that "polska is for me almost like meditation; one forgets everything else and just follows the music" (Arv15). One person, categorizing herself as a "young woman in mid-life" needs this, what she calls, "polska dose", in order to cope with her stressful everyday life:

Polska is feeling, floating on the rhythm, in the rhythm and be swallowed by the present. A near-meditative state, a whole world, when there is harmony between partner and music. A feeling of timelessness, close to nature. A wonderful break, a breathing space, a change from a stressful every-day and career in business. Active neither in dancing nor playing but in need of a "polska dose" from time to time (Fin5).

A meditative feeling is something the dancer experiences strongly; the music and the movements transport the individual dancer into a special emotional state. Other feelings that dancers describe have to do with sensuality, something that is better achieved together with the dance partner than alone, and something the couple shares. The experience may be said to alternate between the individual and the couple-related emotion. One can be seduced both *by* the polska and *in* the polska.⁸ Most dancers talk more about how they have been seduced by the polska, but it is obvious that people who dance also seduce each other in the dance.

A wonderful sensual couple dance, which turns out differently every time you dance, depending on whom you dance with. Not too fixed a pattern, but with wonderful interaction with the music. The rhythm provides the steps. (Nor15)

These views were expressed by a nearly 50-year-old woman, who is an avid and enthusiastic dancer. A somewhat older dancer, who describes herself as a seventy-year-old aunt, says that polska is "wonderful rhythmic music, sensual, if given the chance to dance for a long time with a good dance partner". (Pod1).

A man who has just passed 50, and who has been dancing polska for two years, expresses a similar feeling, briefly and concisely, saying that the polska is “meditative, deep, summer nights” (Fin17). Here he associates his feelings with a milieu where the polska is particularly prevalent – namely the summertime folk music and dance gatherings (*spelmansstämma*) and folk music festivals.

The suggestive element can be part of the sensual and meditative feeling, but here it is even more a matter of the polska creating fluidity and “flow”, a constant repetitive turning and spinning where everything works both at the technical level of the dance, and in relation to the dance partner. When the continual turning of the bodies works frictionless within the couple, the movement creates what the dancers try to capture in words, such as elation, trance and meditation. Or is it perhaps, that the suggestive, monotonous and repetitive dance creates the very precondition for meditation and sensuality? Dancing then becomes a special and powerful physical experience where consciousness can be disconnected from disconnected from actual dance steps and movements.

The Music – Grooves in Triple Metre

Today polska is predominately danced as a couple dance to music in triple metre, *tretakt*, and so, one needs a dance partner. Couple dance and *tretakt* are two common code words for polska. A female dancer, “married to a so-called folk musician and a frequent attendee at various concerts” puts emphasis on the music rather than the dance:

Polska = bewitching, [I] like the music more than the dance. With the right partner magical, suggestive. More partner-dependent than other dance forms, and being married to a musician, I am often left without a dance partner”. (Nor22)

The word *trolsk* (magical or bewitching) keeps cropping up, as do thoughts of melancholy and fluidity. Such words and feelings are highly applicable to polska music. According to one dancer, “the music is magical, melancholic (often) and you forget that you are exercising” (Fin11). Many dancers stress the connection between polska music and polska dance as the most significant aspect. When the suggestive allure of polska dance interrelates with the music, this is expressed as a *sug*, a “pull”, or groove:

It is precisely the variation in the dance/music that is so very attractive. It may vary from simple, monotonous, low energy and enjoyable, to fiery, energetic, powerful and lively. It is a challenge and it gives a lot of freedom. [I] have discovered that other dances, like waltz and schottische, also give space for individual interpretations and expressions of your own. But the polska has an a “pull”. It also requires more technique than the waltz, for example (Tob5).

The aspects that create the “pull” or groove in polska are the special 3/4 metre and the rhythms inherent in this musical form. The word *sug*, frequently used by polska dancers, literally means “suction”, and refers to something which pulls or draws you in, primarily as a rhythmic metaphor, similar to the English “groove”, but also to a more sensual alluring pull, something which you cannot resist. One way of describing the pull of triple metre is explained by one dancer as, dancing on the “half beat, you ‘omits’ a step where the beat is, ‘swing over it’” (Kat2). That the music plays a part in creating this pull is obvious. The importance of the music is evident and this is expressed by practically all the dancers – and for some it also leaves its mark outside the dance hall.

I got hooked on the polska because of the fantastic music. When things are at their best, I walk in “polska time”! It has everything to do with the music (Pod3).

The alluring “pull”, or groove, is one way on explaining what polska is. Another way is to stress its fluidity (*flyt*). One dancer says that, for him, polska is “the music, feeling, fluidity of the dance. Sometimes, to certain music, “crazy dancing” (Fin10). Fluidity, *flyt*, often recurs as an explanation of what polska is. Then it is a matter of a combination of the abundant turning, which unceasingly “flows along” on the triple metre, and the characteristic rhythm of the music. Even people who have played a lot of folk music have difficulty finding words to explain what polska dance is. A female folk musician answers quite simply, “Oh dear, hard! When it pertains to the dance, I think of flow. Too difficult to answer, it can be so much” (Arv2). A younger male dancer suggests that the energy of the music, together with the pace of the dance, somewhat contradictory, creates a feeling of calm in the dancing:

A calm interaction partly between the dancers, but also with the music. That is, it is energetic and can be fast, but for me the feeling is one of calmness within the music and towards the other dancer. (Mal6)

That the music is important for the polska dancers is self-evident. At times it is so important that it is, in fact, the music that predominates, the dance is only thrown into the bargain. One dancer, for example, says that, “to begin with the polska was a chance for me to dance to the folk music I already enjoyed listening to” (Pod2). One of the youngest informants puts it like this:

I think that what’s special about the polska is the beat and the music in general. What I think is good about polska dance is that once you find the beat, it is hard to lose the beat of the music. You become one with the music. (Nor19)



The regeneration of interest among polska musicians is good. Korrö 2006. Photo: Leif Carlsson.

For most people who are familiar with polska, it is primarily a matter of its special triple metre music. The music does not, however, automatically enable one to dance to it, even if one is generally accustomed to dancing. According to one folk dancer, who has also danced foxtrot and Swedish *bugg* (a dance originating from Lindy Hop or jitterbug), polska is “wonderful music but nothing I long to dance to. Maybe because of [my] poor knowledge of dancing” (Göt6). “Rubber band music” is an expression used by some musicians to describe the special rhythm of the polska. The rubber band effect has to do with the placement of the second beat in relation to first and the third. This causes tension and creates the particular polska feeling, partly due to the change of the relative length of the beats.

The Form – Turning Couple Dance

Characteristic for polska dancing of the 2000s is couple dancing, that is, two people dancing together, continuously turning to an alluring triple metre. One informant who “does all kinds of dancing except line dance” phrases it as follows:

When you’re dancing with someone and everything’s just right, you become like a single body, breathing as one. It’s sensual and exciting. The polska is more varied than other dances. It is also more sensual. Similarities with other dances: contact with a dance partner, communication within the dance, your own balance, energy, forward-motion, contact with the music. (Nor27)

According to the dancers, polska is danced by two people physically holding each other very close. Typically, the dancing couple is made up of a man and a woman. When you visits a dance environment this is clearly the case, although it is not unusual for two women to dance together. Seeing two men dance together, on the other hand is very rare, although it does happen. A young female dancer anticipates that things are changing on that front. For her polska is:

Like an oval wheel, laid-back, yet dynamic. A way of socialising. No longer strictly couple dancing, also woman/woman, man/man. (Vodo43)

The *oval wheel* in the dance is one way of describing certain polska variants or, as one dancer puts it, “the beat of the polska is somehow ‘falling’, a bit as if it moves like an ellipse” (Vodo369). In order to make the polska work and to feel its pull, it is important to get this wheel to fall, spin and roll. A crucial factor is dancing with the “right” person, someone who is fun and enjoyable to dance with, which may induce the feeling more easily. There has to be consensus, agreement between the dancers of the couple about what constitutes a good polska dance for that special “good” feeling to be achieved, that is to say, for the dance experience to be positive. Regardless of whom one dances with, there has to be a functioning interaction between the dancers so that at least the spinning and the rotation work with as little resistance as possible. The polska achieves added potency when the couple manages to get the turning movement to continue without apparent friction. Dancing is, as has been said before, a matter of finding fluidity and “flow”, of getting the movements to continue, while time stands still; or rather to experience the feeling that time disappears.

Once I could dance the polska well, knew how to turn, to keep my balance, it turned into a sensual, magical dance for me. Once you get accustomed to a partner, it’s like breathing together. A more varied dance than others. Having contact with another person – the movement of the dance itself is healthy – you communicate, not only with the other person, but also with yourself. Your own balance. It’s energising. (Nor26)

The youngest of my informants, a ten-year-old boy who took part in a dance course with his parents, thought that – “it’s fun, you spin” (Nor23) – when dancing the polska. Technically, as far as steps and turns are concerned, polska is a simple dance that is easy for most people to learn, although some people find it hard because of the music:

[I] experience it, tempo-wise, most often as a rather “fast” dance form (high tempo). There’s something tricky about the steps, which, I seem to recollect, many found it hard to pick up. Most people thought the polska was difficult. I thought it much more fun than the waltz (haven’t tried Vienna Waltz, though). (Vodo32)

The polska is a couple dance in which the turning and joint spinning, around a shared axis and around the dance floor, are the most crucial components. This is evident from the dancers' accounts as well as from observations on the dance floor. The dancers walk and turn in couples, but not necessarily at the same time as other couples, nor in the same manner as other couples. Occasionally you see someone turning under uplifted arms, or dancers in the couple letting go of each other and spinning around, each on their own. The freedom to improvise means that it is the dancers in the couple who decide how and when they do what – nobody else decides for them. The polska does not consist of a closed structure but of a basic pattern from which the couple can improvise. It is a dance with “...great variation, great freedom to the same music. There are very few right/wrong situations” (Nor7).

Instead of seeing the variants and possibilities of variation of the polska as limitations, as the right and wrong variant or way of dancing, it is possible, according to some dancers, to regard the breadth of variations actually as freedom to improvise. The basic patterns, with turns and rotations as the most important elements, are mixed with promenades and turning under arms with joined hands (in a similar pattern to the baroque *allemande*). Individual couples decide for themselves for how long to turn and for how long to promenade. The freedom of the dance, in the form of a simple foundation which may be improvised upon, and the fact that the music can be used in different ways, is an aspect highlighted by several polska dancers. This freedom in the polska is, however, nothing unique; it can be found in other dance forms too, which a 22-year-old dancer points out, saying that

“...what feels so tempting is the freedom, which you also find in *bugg* and foxtrot, which is what I started to dance about seven years ago”. (Göt13)

Something Ancient

The combination of polska music and dance, is regarded by some dancers as a tradition – something that has been around for a very long time, and is important to take care of and preserve. Some view the polska as the primordial dance, something to do with primeval forests (*urskog*) and indigenous origins. One young informant repeats a great deal of what has been said above about polska as feeling and music and with a link to this “primeval forest”:

Polska isn't one thing, many dances are called polskas. But the only thing that I think makes them into an entity, is that they have some kind of triple metre. I also see polskas as intimate dances – whether they are tranquil or wild, to me they are more often expressions of a deep melancholy, a force, a greater expression of the “primeval forest (urskog) and vastness of nature”, than other music/dance (for instance, gammaldans). I think that it's the music that gives me that feeling. I think that the music is intimate and often has a more modal character than other types of folk dance music (Mal8).

For many polska dancers, the polska, is thus, something original and ancient. This notion of origin sometimes approaches something “ancient Swedish” (ursvenskt) or the “soul of the people” (folksjälén). However, none of the informants reflect on how old something must be to be ancient. One self-proclaimed dance enthusiast:

...music from the people. The soul. You can see and hear the link to folk music from all over the world. The music is a manifestation of the people's history and soul. (Fin2)

When thinking about origins, it is also easy to see the polska as a Swedish and Nordic tradition, where polska dancing and music making becomes a way of preserving this cultural heritage. The dance is kept alive by dancing it. Or to use an older dancer's words, “for me, polska is a matter of keeping the recorded polskas alive and passing them on” (Fin9). The cultural heritage, as well as the fact that there is some kind of origin from which it is derived, are points made mainly by the older dancers. One older dancer returns to the idea that polska is a great many things all at once, and sees it as:

...a collective name for older traditional music and dance, that is to say, the Swedish cultural heritage. Keeping contact with the very origins. The magical, a manic contact and the spinning. (Pod6)

One of the dancers suggests that polska is something “...traditional. Not a performance, but something you dance for your own sake” (Arv17). Even then, it is indirectly a matter of cultural heritage and of distinguishing the polska dance from dances used in staged appearances by popular folkloristic folk dance groups [folkdanslag], usually referred to as “folk dance displays”.

The polska is therefore, according to him, traditional and something you dance for your own sake. The groups dance mainly quadrilles (and other formation dances), in order to perform for others, and that then does not count as cultural heritage, according to this particular polska dancer.

The phrase “social dance” (sällskapsdans), as a term for polska, appears only once in my material. That is when a woman says that the polska is “a social dance which exists in about a hundred variants, depending on province and country” (Kat2). Linking variants of the polska to geographical areas and regions does occur, and becomes part of the thinking surrounding cultural heritage. However, what is essential for some of the dancers, is the age of the polska, and the fact that it has been passed down from generation to generation. This does not necessarily mean that they wish to preserve it as a cultural artifact, but rather, to use and develop it as a living part of the culture. Polska as a Swedish tradition is emphasised more strongly than its artifactual value as part of a cultural heritage. This means that the polska’s link back to pre-industrial society is in fact of greater importance than viewing the polska as a piece of cultural heritage. Although age, rather than geography is highlighted, regions and parishes are used as divisions in all instruction books⁹. In a variety of books, as well as among dancers, most polskas are placed in a geographical location.

The Core and Limits of the Polska

Ultimately, the polska is not a mass of parts, but a single entity. Polska dance is not only a feeling, a triple metre with a ‘pulling’, alluring rhythm or endless turning, but all of those at one time. It is a totality, experienced in the moment, precisely while one is dancing, and which creates positive memories in both body and soul – something pointed out by most of the dancers.

In my questions about what polska is, one way of attempting to define it has been to reflect on its relation to other dances. Starting from the question of what distinguishes a dance such as the polska, I tried to get the dancers to explain both differences and similarities with other dance forms. An older male dancer compared it to a foxtrot and regards the polska as having “jazz’s freedom to improvise” (Nor12). Finding similarities between polska and jazz has to do with experiences of freedom, nothing to do with steps and choreographic turns. This is similar to notions of sensuality in comparisons made by some dancers. “Mischievous and joy, pride, sensuality and machoness. The dance is freer than other dances” (Nor24), says a 43-year-old man who dances both folk and modern, about polska. For the great majority

of uninitiated non-polska dancers, expressions such as such as “mischief”, “pride”, “macho” and “sensuality”, are not commonly used labels for polska or Swedish folk dance, but more often associated with dances from other parts of the world. But experiences and wordings like these are not alien to polska dancers who happily use them when talking about the polska. One comparison sometimes made by the dancers concerns certain similarities in the dance figures between polska and Swedish *bugg*, not least in those variants, usually referred to as *slängpolska* (literally “fling” polska. “Polska is like the *bugg* tunes of old days” (Arv7), according to a female dancer.

The proximity of the polska to historically related dance forms, such as polonaise, minuet, hambo and mazurka as well as waltz and polka, sometimes causes a problem when the question arise of what is unique and typical for the polska – as opposed to these and other dance forms, such as tango, *bugg*, salsa or “disco” dance. Dancers and musicians tend to separate these forms from each other, rather than include the similarities between these dance forms and those of the polska. Even dancers who see the similarities between polska and other dances are keen to stress the differences between them, and highlight the value of polska in its own right.

My view is that dances are in many ways similar, even having more similarities than differences. But they are experienced differently due to the fact that they occur in different context, in different groups and have different meanings and significance for the dancers. Some of the informants also mention these similarities. The following quotation from a 36-year-old woman states that:

... [My] interest in dance is incredibly narrow – it has to be *folk dance*. [I] Listen (almost) exclusively to folk music – get goose bumps from a solo fiddle...Polska is a dance, which its simplest form, is really easy and useful but which can be developed endlessly according to mood and taste. Polska can be danced to any music. Polska is like other tunes in 3/4 metre, just in the same way as it can be danced to music in 2/4 metre. I see more similarities with other music and folk dance than differences. (Nor2)

As previously mentioned, the “pull” (*suget*) is often pointed out as a characteristic feature of the polska, or in the words of a female dancer, “Polska has a special pull – feeling, compared to other dances” (Mal1). The experience of this “pull”, throughout referred to as the result of rhythm and rotation combined, is explained by the dancers as stronger in the polska than in other

dances – such as, schottische and waltz. When the alluring ‘pull’ has grown strong and addiction developed, several respondents notes that they dance at least once a week, and additionally at weekend workshops, or attend folk music concerts where there is generally opportunities to dance after the performance.

At courses, and on certain dance evenings (*danskvällar*), different variants on the basic polska form are taught. The basics may be simple, but it often takes beginners some time to build routine and fluidity in their dance. Many experience issues when not knowing many, or at least a few, polska variations, especially in context where some of these may be labeled as right or wrong in relationship to the music played at the time.

Polska, for me, is a dance with possibilities...Can be too much right and wrong. Think it's a pity that it has to be separated into such clear divisions as it is just now, Boda [polska] etc. (Malr6)

Many informants regard learning to dance the polska as difficult, but once they know how, it is a sensual dance. For the majority who have tried *gammaldans* (schottische, waltz, hambo etc.), for example, it is evident that the polska has yet another dimension to offer:

Polska is hard to get into, but once it works, it is such a tremendous joy and feeling. It is more sensual than gammaldans – tunes and music wonderful. (Arvr6)

On the other hand there are dancers who feel more at home with, for example, waltz and schottische, such as the woman who has been doing gammaldans and folk dancing for 17 years, since the age of six:

It has to feel good for me, and my partner. I move in the way I perceive the music and which fits in with that of my partner. Polska is still the dance where I feel myself most limited. I often have to pay a lot of attention to hearing and feeling the beat. Compared to schottische, waltz or polka, I feel a big difference. It's so warm and close to my heart and so secure that I allow myself to “go with the flow” more and try new things: a new turn, a new step, new hold, etc. When a polska is played, I am also more dependent on a good dance partner. In other dances where I feel secure, I happily take the

lead. As a female, I find it easy to follow as I relax in a completely different way. In the polska I rely on my partner but feel that far too much energy is spent on concentration. (Tob3)

To be able to relax and enjoy oneself, it is important to have the security of knowing the repertoire and of mastering the basics of the dance. The feeling, the enjoyment of dancing and moving in triple metre, often recur as an explanation of why people dance the polska. On the other hand, that is precisely what motivates the dancing of other dances as well, which is pointed out by this informant:

Enjoyment on every level. Dancing together. Regardless of whether the polska is tranquil or quick, there's a wish to move together which makes me want to dance more and experience more. The 3/4 beat makes me feel great! The similarity for me is that dance is pleasurable in all its forms, from disco, *bugg*, modern – *snoa* (Swedish turning dance in duple metre) and polskas. (Malin)



Polska dancing at a private party in Gothenburg, 2009. Photo: Mats Nilsson.

According to this female dancer, it is not the form of the dance that creates the enjoyment, but the way it works and flows, regardless of dance form. Achieving the fluidity and flow, mentioned earlier, and perhaps seduction, appears to be an important driving force in both the triple metre of the polska, and the “even jog” of other dances. If the possibilities and driving forces are the same, the difference between polska and other dances becomes a matter of how the dance is constructed. Polska is a couple dance with a lot of turning, as opposed to a number of other dances:

Couple dance is different in that way from modern disco dance, circle dances and line dances. Great fun and you get to spin a lot. Can be varied pretty freely. Then there is *slängpolska* too. Then you dance on the same spot, just as in disco dance, almost. You move around the room in a certain direction. (Vodo318)

Polska – But Schottische and Waltz Too

In folk music contexts and at polska dance evenings, waltz and schottische are also danced in addition to the polska. This music and these dances seem to be the most common ones to mix in with the polska.

Where I grew up people danced mostly polska, so for me it's close to my heart, waltz too. Both those dances have a nice and wonderful swing, which can make you feel as if you're floating above the dance floor. (Malr6)

None of my informants mention the idea of why it is just waltz, and not, for example, hambo, mazurka or polka, that is the most common. One reason why waltz is included as a complement is that it has a varied swinging triple metre and is popular with dance musicians. Polska, which makes up about 90 % of the repertoire is experienced as, and is said to be, more difficult and more challenging than dances such as waltz and schottische. The reason for this may be that polska is seen as a number of dances with complicated steps, while waltz and schottische are regarded by dancers as dances with fewer variations than the polska. This is what a female polska dancer says:

I began with snoa, polka, schottische and waltz, the final step to get through was the polska. A dance which was more difficult and with

endless variations, it feels as if I could go on for the rest of my life and yet not be able to learn them all...frustrating and compelling. (Arv11)

Schottische in 4/4 metre is, as the polska, experienced by dancers and musicians as rich in possibilities for improvisation, which may explain its relative popularity even among polska dancers.

Polska is triple metre with “pull” and a good pace to it. Playful and happy. A dance that’s not so strict. Yet, on the other hand, the schottische too is playful and fast. In the polska you can make your way round as best you like and to me it’s anything but strict. You can do more or less as you like, as long as you’re enjoying yourself. (I know it’s not like that everywhere, but that’s my image). (Malr2)

That schottische, but not polka, occurs in connection with polska dancing is not all that difficult to explain. As a dance, polka is simply a fast dance in duple metre, a schottische at a higher tempo. If so, it is the “straight” high tempo that is uninteresting, compared to the calmer schottische, which is easier to improvise on. Nor does the polka have the pulsating triple beat of the polska. The more tranquil music of the schottische is probably in better harmony with the sensuality of the polska. Yet another potential explanation may be the element of ‘buffonishness’, (*töntstämpel*), which surrounds polka dancing, especially in the way it tends to be taught in school gym classes. The absence of the hambo, as well as of the mazurka, from polska dance contexts, is due to the fact that both of them are musically, and with regards to dance technique, two extremes of the polska. The hambo is not played and danced because it has become a fixed form of polska without much freedom and improvisation. The mazurka, on the other hand, is usually associated with a high tempo and a “straight” triple metre, without any particularly pulling rhythm, just like the polka. The fact that jazz dances, such as foxtrot, and more recent couple dances, such as bugg, are missing at polska dance evenings is very much due to the music being so different, even though, technically, the dances have some similarities. They have their own respective dance and music venues. Nevertheless, dance techniques sometimes cross over into folk dance venues; and to schottische music in particular, some dancers are more than happy to do a bit of foxtrot or bugg. A brief resumé of how the polska dancers explain what polska is comes from a 48-year-old woman “who likes dancing very much and goes dancing as often as possible”:

Triple metre music with different rhythm, a dance with “plenty of oomph” in it. A dance that requires an extremely sensitive ear. Polska is a dance with a varying character, a dance that gives you “aha moments”! I like polska partly because you are “allowed to” spin a lot and for a long time. The polska music/dance and playing a polska can produce a meditative state. (Mal13)

In other words, the polska is danced to music in triple metre with a characteristic rhythm, which differentiates it from other triple metre dances, such as waltz. The never-ending turning in couples, together with the music, creates an experience that the dancers describe as “*sug*”, that is, “pull” or “allure”. According to the dancers, the monotony, turning, and the “pull” in turn evoke meditative feelings. Furthermore, flirting, and feelings of fluidity and flow, are also part in the holistic experience aroused by the polska as a combined music and dance experience.



Polska Dancing in Sweden in the Twenty-First Century

POLSKA, AS PRESENTED in the previous chapter, is a couple dance with a long history, that involves walking and turning to a “pulling” rhythm in triple metre. This dancing is practised within, what might be called, polska dance domains (*arenor*) or venues. What are these domains and how does one find them? And, the polska dancers, who are they, and why, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, do they dance something which, in their own eyes, is an “ancient” dance form?

Venues – Where People “Do” the Polska

All dance genres have their own specific locations. But finding the dance of interest, and the location where it is taking place, is not always easy. The formal entrées into the world of polska are few, and the established organisational structure in the form of associations and institutions is weak. It is the informal networks that are most helpful to those looking for venues and people involved with polska dancing. One of my students, a keen dancer – though of neither polska, nor any other couple dances – believes that “polska dancers are likely to be found maybe in the old cottages in [Gothenburg’s] Slottsskogen park, and most are probably old people” (Vodo413).” (Vodo413). That this student associates polska with older dancers is not uncommon. Another student answers quite simply that, polska is danced by, “retired people, I think. At the Liseberg Amusement Park? At dance pavilions” (Vodo325). For those not familiar with the city of Gothenburg, one of Slottsskogen park’s “provincial cottages”, *landskapsstugorna*, is indeed used by a local folk dance association, and the Liseberg Amusement park was once well known for its dance pavilion.

Folk Dance Associations

It is far from obvious how one finds locations where polska is being danced, as they are seldom advertised in the public media. What advertising there is can only be found in specialised magazines for the initiated and on certain websites.¹⁰ Events with polska dancing and music are rarely mentioned in the daily papers.

For the uninitiated, it is easy to assume that polska and polka are the same thing and associated with conventional folk dancing, in which case it would not be unreasonable to begin searching for polska dancing among Sweden's folk dance associations. The following comment appeared in the survey about where polska is danced:

Folk dance groups (*folkdanslag*) dance the polska. People, who play or like to listen to folk music, dance the polska. Polska is danced at fiddlers' gatherings (*spelmansstämmor*), folk music festivals, in bigger cities, university towns. Students play and dance polska. In Umeå and Uppsala, students have fiddler's groups (*spelmanslag*), and they arrange dance evenings. (Malr)

In many places in Sweden there are associations where people do folk dance, often called *folkdanslag* (folk dance groups).¹¹ One might expect polska to be danced in these organizations, or at any rate, that those who dance there know what polska dancing is, and where to find it. However, as the majority of informants point out, polska today, is not primarily found among the folk dance groups. Their role, as far as polska dancing and polska dancers are concerned, varies greatly. One student at a *folkhögskola* or "folk high school" (a public adult education institution, often with focus on arts education), who had previously danced in her local folk dance group, says that when she:

...first started here at school I soon missed the kind of dance I was accustomed to. So I found my way to the folk dance group. It turned out that they had been a larger group to begin with, but had split into two. One polska group and one general. That's why there's no polska in the group where I practise. The gap between folk dancers and polska dancers is pretty big, unfortunately. That's the case in many parts of the country. (Tob3)

In many, but not all, folk dance associations, folk dance and polska dance

are separated and consequently, also the venues and the people who dance folk dances and polskas respectively. One dancer suggests something similar when pointing out that:

...polska is often danced/played at special dance events/parties, more rarely in folk dance groups. Many young people are fascinated by it, and play as well as dance the polska. (Göt5)

This suggests what has become more and more evident in the twenty-first century, namely that folk dancing in Sweden, and polska dancing in Sweden do not completely overlap. Many of the polska dancers appear to have a stronger bond with folk music than with folk dance:

I have many friends of my age who play and dance, and in those contexts when I'm out dancing, the young are in a majority. The natural forum for the wild folk music that is alive today isn't the folk dance groups. Free individuals meet at improvised, but *regular* dance evenings. Many are studying at folk high schools and universities and become full-time folk musicians. (Tob4)

The members of the folk dance associations are sometimes torn between at least two main trends in the dance repertoire. They either prioritise folk dance or polska dance. Besides these, there is the repertoire of what is usually called *gammaldans*. For most people, this is a separate group of dances – primarily couple dances such as polka, waltz, hambo, mazurka and schottische – danced by gammaldans dancer at particular gammaldans events. Even if one dances several repertoires, this does not happen on the same occasions. However, instead of splitting the folk dance group into two groups with separate repertoires – one with the typical folk dance repertoire of quadrilles and similar set dances¹² and one with polskas – the entire repertoire of the folk dance association may change:

In my home town, the polska (in various forms) is about to take over from the traditional folk dances (Gröna boken). Among the younger people (< 50 years) it has already taken over. Polska is played and danced in more contexts than folk dance. (Nor25)

“Gröna boken” (The Green Book), or as it is also sometimes named “Gröna bibeln” (The Green Bible), refers to the book *Beskrivning av Svenska folkdanser* (*Description of Swedish Folk Dances*) which contains descriptions of the basic repertoire of the folk dance movement and is bound in green.¹³ The change in the repertoire which has been going on within the folk dance movement has not always been painless, and sometimes leads to splits and separation of old folk dance associations into new groupings.

Sometimes I get the feeling that polska is regarded as more cultured than hambo, for instance, and that there's far too high a wall between the folk dancers and the “play-old-polskas-people”. Both sides seem completely happy with that. Hambo for the folk dance groups and polskas for those who shun gammaldans, sort of. Is that right? That's not what I want! (Mal2)

Not all folk dance groups have polskas in their repertoire, but certainly the repertoire described in the Green Book. Nor do all folk dancers want to dance to too much polska music. “Personally I find there's far too much polska played at dances”, (Göt12) writes a young female folk dancer. Among the younger informants, however, the interest in polska is generally greater than among the ordinary folk dancers, although there are exceptions as in the above quotation.

Folk dance groups exist all over the country. In some of these they also dance polska, usually in special groups on separate evenings. As already mentioned, most dancers separate conventional folk dancing from polska dancing. The folk dance associations are dominated by middle-aged and older dancers, although there are some young people taking part in this activity. Within the folk dance movement, people fail to realise that there are, in fact, quite a number of young dancers because they move in different circles, and meet at different venues. This is what an elderly folk dancer with an interest in polska says:

Most of the polska dancers are elderly. I dance at dance practice evenings, fiddlers' gatherings and at courses. I hope the interest will grow among the young. (Nor19)

On the whole, dancers tends to dance together with their own contemporaries. The older dancers generally socialise with each other and the younger ones

mainly with their own age group. The polska dancing youths are primarily to be found in the bigger cities. There the division between folk dance and polska is even more clearly marked than in the provinces. The split between “ordinary” folk dancers, and polska dancers does not divide folk dance groups in smaller places in quite the same way as in bigger cities, but then there are fewer young people dancing in rural areas.

Younger folk dancers are of the opinion that if recruiting members to the folk dance associations is on the agenda, it is precisely polska music that should be used. Most of those active within the folk dance groups would like to see this rejuvenation and a change of repertoire from doing only the classic folk dances to including polska as well. But not everybody wishes to change the repertoire, although they would be happy to see more young people as members of the folk dance associations. One possible reason for the older folk dancers’ reluctance to dance polska may be their sense of insecurity. The new repertoire in the form of the couple dance polska places new and different demands on the dancers of the folk dance associations. The older dancers prefer to stick to the repertoire of quadrilles and similar dances they are accustomed to rather than change to a new couple-based repertoire.

Other Polska Milieus

The dance houses that have been established since the mid-1970s are, besides the folk dance associations, the foremost dance venues during the winter months. Stockholm has a special position with its numerous dance and music occasions, which is partly a result of its large population and great number of practitioners. A young folk dancing woman who knows where to find polska dancing, and who the frequenters are, points out that dancing occurs:

...at fiddlers’ gatherings, at the Allégården, Stallet, Skeppis. The young who do not dance other kind of folk dancing. (Göti)

Friday nights at the folk music café Allégården in Gothenburg, along with Sunday nights at Skeppsholmsgården (popularly known as Skeppis) in Stockholm, are two of the better known polska dance venues during the winter season. They were both started over 30 years ago while Stallet in central Stockholm is a relatively newly opened concert and dance venue where polska, among other genres, is played and danced. It is also obvious that there are variations and differences between the people who are attracted to

different kinds of event. Choosing where to go to dance polska is not least a question of age and to some extent repertoire.

In and around Stockholm you meet many young (Skeppis) who play/dance polska, the same at fiddlers' gatherings. But at polska courses the average age of the dancers is 50-60. At *slängpolska* courses there are often younger people taking part. (Mal13)

Age, repertoire and venue go hand in hand to a great extent and vary accordingly. Younger dancers seek out each other and want a faster pace and more flow while the older ones want more of the order provided at courses and within associations. Courses resemble association evenings where a dance leader decides what is to be danced but are even more structured by an instructor who chooses and teaches dances. At popular polska venues it is often the musicians who pick the tunes. The difference then being that the musicians play what they like and know, which is likely to lead to better music than if they have to play music they dislike or are less familiar with. My material shows that this freer way of using the polska more often attracts young people, or rather dancers below the age of about 40, while older dancers prefer a more structured choice of music and dance and as a consequence courses and associations.

In the Stockholm area it is possible for anyone who so wishes to dance polska seven nights a week. Even in Gothenburg there is on-going polska dancing outside the folk dance groups once or twice a week during the winter months. In other university towns quite a lot of polska is being danced too, in the city of Linköping, for example:

Incredibly many people dance. At home in Linköping the interest is great. Students start to dance in cafés and at dance evenings and soon join a course for beginners. It's polska straight away. Old *gammaldans* is hardly to be found (a pity, I think, since I dance both and don't want to go without either). The dancing is very free and everybody dances as they wish and feel. (Mal11)

Places outside the bigger cities offer fewer possibilities to dance polska in the winter time. In smaller places it is difficult to maintain continuity all the year round, there is not enough people to arrange dance evenings every week or even every month, possibly only once or twice per term. Today there are folk

high schools scattered around the country which offer courses in folk music and where folk dance in some form or another are part of the curriculum. Such places occasionally become active polska dance milieus.

Many of my friends play and dance polska. But they're folk musicians, after all. Here on Gotland, polska is danced far too seldom. At school we used to have some dance and music evenings, but otherwise there's not much of it. (Kati)

The dance halls and folk music cafés have, in their 30-odd-year existence, developed a standardised format, almost identical in all places. The evening begins with dances and tunes being taught for about one hour. Then follows a concert of about the same length and finally, dancing to musicians playing "live music", or maybe even "living music" (*levande musik*), as it is so ingeniously called. This type of dance venue appeared towards the end of the 1970s as an alternative to the evenings arranged by the folk dance associations.

The most important meeting places during the summer for folk musicians and polska dancers are *spelmansstämmor* (fiddlers' gatherings) and folk music festivals. People travel there to get a weekend of music and dance, often with concerts and courses during the day and dancing several nights in a row. The fiddlers' gatherings are a genre-specific folk music event¹⁴, where there is also dance and nearly always polska. They could be compared to a kind of summer music festival, usually held somewhere in the provinces. The larger gatherings often last a couple of days, while the festivals tend to be somewhat longer, three to five days. Certain fiddlers' gatherings and folk music festivals can be compared to techno music raves. Hundreds of people, mainly young, dance and perspire and live out their desires during long summer nights. There are two obvious factors that stand out as different from a rave. The only probable drug at a fiddlers' gathering is alcohol, and the music has to be "live", having a DJ spinning records would not be a possibility, and simply not acceptable. Furthermore, in my experience, and according to my informants, the musicians who play in the dance hall have to be really good.

Like the dance halls and cafés, gatherings and festivals have developed a similar structure and similar content. One can take part in playing tunes, various forms of polska dancing, or attend a folk song workshop, and sit down to sing with others. In the afternoons there are performances and concerts by well known as well as unknown music groups indiscriminately and in the evenings and at night people dance.

In the province of Värmland, on the banks of the river Klarälven, a fiddlers' gathering is arranged in early June every year at the heritage centre (*hembygdsgård*) at Ransäter, Munkfors. For many folk musicians and polska dancers this event marks the start of the music and dance ventures of the summer, and for some beginners it is also an initial contact with the night time folk music making and polska dancing:

Started to dance polska three years ago after my first visit to the Ransäter gathering. Got 'hooked' on the delight, urge and energy in the barns! [I] don't play, but have gotten more and more itchy to begin, so I have "tried" a little. (Malin)

Besides Ransäter, many fiddlers' gathering, and folk music festivals are arranged all over Sweden. Some mentioned in my material are: Bingsjöstämman in the province of Dalarna, Hovrastämman in the province of Hälsingland, the folk music festival at Korrö, Småland, and the Urkult festival at Nämforsen, Ångermanland. There are many more and of varying sizes. Every weekend, right through the summer, one can find a *spelmansstämma* or its equivalent in some Swedish district.

The summer gatherings and festivals can be considered as the "holy" season of the polska and the polska dancers' "number one festivity". During the autumn-winter-spring period, polska dancing is maintained at dance halls, folk music cafés, courses and various association evenings, what I tend to describe as the *grey everyday of the polska*— for those who manage to find their way to those, often unpublicised events, that is.

It's a question of finding yourself in the right context, know the people who enjoy expressing themselves with polska as a base. As that's what I look for, I find those places. But it's not always obvious to others. (Dh3)

The woman quoted above is able to find her dance locations because she is part of the group, the network. She also realises that those who are not are less likely to find the polska dancers and the polska dance locations. Like all special interests, polska dancing creates and exists in its own milieu and becomes a significant means of socialising for those already initiated. The following quotation summarises the "polska world" in Sweden in the 2000s:

The folk music lives and thrives in a number of small islands, if you don't know where to look it may be hard to find. Practically all my friends and acquaintances dance or play polska. Our relationship is somehow based on folk music. Polska is played and danced everywhere! At festivals, dance halls and at home. (Tob6)

Informal networks, word of mouth communications, are absolutely key for finding out where and when polska is being played and danced. Networks of people who know each other are the most common channels for keeping informed. Other common routes of information are via dance halls and courses. But that presupposes being in touch with these in order to get access to the media used for disseminating news of the activities. Of the journals or magazines it is mainly Folklore Centrums informationsblad (the Folklore Centrum pamphlet), *Folkmusik och dans* (Folk Music and Dance), *Hembygden* (The Home Country) and *Spelmannen* (The Fiddler) which are important channels for spreading information.



Dance evening at Korrö folk music festival, 2006. On stage the local band Sågskära.
Photo: Ronny Lindkvist.

Polska Dancers – the People Who “Do” the Polska ¹⁵

Approaching the question as to who the polska dancers are, one could equally well ask who does *not* dance the polska. There is no simple answer to this question – but my material shows a great shortage of middle-aged men, as well as working-class people and the even harder-to-get-hold-of category: immigrants. One hypothesis is that an immigrant middle-aged male worker is the least likely polska dancer. There is, however, an interest in polska in the USA, England and Japan, for example. In post-modern society, polska has become an export product both in the form of dance and music.¹⁶ Many Swedish music and dance course instructors travel to the polska dance and folk music events arranged in those countries. A hint of what groups of people, socially and age-wise, who are not found among the polska dancers is expressed by this dancer who states that the one missing is the “average Swede” (*medelsvensson*):

I've got a feeling that the interest in folk dance is on the increase and more and more people want to give it a try. And yet I feel as if it's only within a rather alternative circle that the interest is spreading. I don't think many “average Swedes” manage to get in contact with the polska. (Mal17)

Who the average Swedes really are can also be questioned. The group of middle-aged people, under-represented in my material, are the ones born in the 1960s and '70s while there are more of those born in the 1940s, '50s and '80s. That means that today's generation of people aged between 30 and 50 is missing. Dominating the group of polska dancers in the first seven years of the 2000s are consequently two age groups: those aged approximately between 15 and 30, and those over 50. These two generations of younger and older polska dancers respectively hardly ever meet on the dance floor, they have their own separate venues.

The dance evenings are mostly frequented by younger people, but one or two older couples who're really good dancers do turn up to to let loose and enjoy today's way of playing and dancing. Of course there are many older people who dance, but they've got their own groups. Some groups focus a lot on variants and steps and are good, but they're seldom seen out just dancing 'it all out'! (Mal11)

It is possible to differentiate the 1970s generation – the older ones, from the 1990s generation – the younger ones, on the basis of the time of their first contact with the polska. The reason behind the division of the polska dancers of the 2000s into two age groups is partly the so-called folk music revival of the 1970s when those born in the '40s and '50s began to dance, and partly the increased interest in folk music and world music of the 1990s, which attracted the younger ones born in the 1980s, the latter sometimes being linked to the ongoing globalisation of cultural offerings. And it is by no means self-evident that these groupings are aware of each other's existence.

In the '70s it was a popular movement, today scattered remnants of it without much sign of regeneration. Isolated to little islands and with more or less “folksy” connotations, *knätofs* (knee tassels, a distinctive part of folklore costume for men). (Kat4)

Despite this somewhat pessimistic informant, who was already active in the 1970s, it is possible in 2007 to find polska dancers without knee tassels. It seems rather that the polska's links to the folk dance movement, often given the epithet *knätofsarna* (“the knee tassels”)¹⁷, is on the decrease. The distance between certain polska dancers and the folk dance groups is growing, the younger polska people do not connect polska with folk costumes and folk dance groups, but rather with folk music and folk musicians.

There are quite a few young people who dance and play. There seems to be a great interest. The label of “knätofs” and “buffoon” (*tönt*) is more and more on the way out. Polska is danced both within associations and at special venues all around the country. They sort of mushroom here, there and everywhere. Both the old and the young dance, though if there is a difference it would be that the older people like dancing to fiddlers groups (*spelmanslag*), and the younger ones to bands and single fiddlers. (Mal7)

The significance of what occurred in the 1970s is obviously of great importance. That is when Sweden (and several other countries) was swept by a folk music wave¹⁸, which in time was to result in folk music becoming a subject at the music academies and conservatoires and folk dance to appear on the curriculum at, what is now, the University of Dance and Circus, and furthermore, it led

to the establishment of a new interest group, *Riksföreningen för folkmusik och dans* (Rfod)¹⁹, (The Swedish Folk Music and Dance Association), in 1982. The old organisation for folk dance, *Svenska Ungdomsringen för Bygdekultur*²⁰ (The Swedish Youth Ring for Village Culture), did not succeed in channelling any new youthful interest in dancing folk dance to folk music.

The 1970s wave of folk music enthusiasm also had a political dimension, something some of the present-day polska dancers feel they can still trace among today's dancers.²¹ If there was a tendency towards the left which was most common among the folk music people of the 1970s, there were and are other political leanings as well. A 25-year-old woman who votes for the Swedish Green Party and has attended a Waldorf (Rudolph Steiner type) school, asks herself whether that might not be typical of the polska dancers and goes on to answer the question of who dances polska today:

Both young and old, middle class? Have noticed strong leanings to both left and right, politically. Slightly different worlds - associations, fiddlers' gatherings, dance halls, midsummer. (Dh2)

Whether polska is a folk dance or not is discussed from time to time. Folk dance and folk dancers are controversial designations among the polska dancers themselves.²² However the concepts are being used, there are two groupings: the folk dancers who primarily do "ordinary" folk dancing and possibly some gammaldans, and those who practically only dance the polska – the polska dancers. The latter, can in turn be split into two groups, the association dancers, who are mainly linked to various dance organisations, and the folk music people, who are principally to be found near the folk music milieus. Some individuals appear in both groups, but not all.

The more I move around in folk music and polska dance circles, the clearer it becomes that there is one group that can be called "the folk music people" (*folkmusikfolket*), which attracts many of the younger dancers. That term is not, however, used by the dancers themselves. I have not heard or seen any word used internally by the group about themselves, other than that they say that folk music and polska dancing are shared spheres of interest. The music is explicitly important and the best known and popular musicians and a few dance instructors are clearly in the limelight.

I spend a lot of time in folk music circles, so practically everybody around me dances and plays. Not my family, relatives, though. As

long as you know where to look, you can easily find people who dance and play everywhere. All ages. (Mal4)

This informant may be right when he says that there are polska dancers of all ages, but what I can see is that different age groups rarely dance at the same time in the same place. It does occur, but it is unusual. Yet it is possible to find occasions and venues where the younger ones dance, and different venues or times when the older people dance.

The folk music people can be seen as a travelling company who, after a number of visits to summer gatherings and festivals and winter folk music cafés, recognise each other.

We're a pretty small and sort of intimate band. We recognise each other by sight at all the gatherings round the country, and then realise that we're a tribe of our own. But we're happy to invite others to join us, for the dance/music is so endlessly openhearted. (Fin1 25)

Several informants see this own "tribe" as something positive; the characteristic of intimacy becomes an important ingredient, as does the feeling of being a small group of self-selected "nomads of the present" cultivating their own networks.²³ A 20-something-year-old female dancer says, for example, that among the polska dancers are to be found "all sorts, young, old, competitive dancers (*uppdansare*) and 'for pleasure' dancers, but in pretty closed circles" (Mal5). Some polska dancers regard themselves as an "inner circle", the "hard core", or say that the dancing takes place "behind closed doors". Some complain that the group is small and that conflicts arise despite the fact that they are all engaged in just polska dancing, while others see it as a bit of a thrill and fun to belong to a special, slightly secretive, group. The fact that academics and university students figure chiefly among the younger polska dancers is also pointed out. And with that it is not difficult to discern the connection with university towns, young people, folk music and polska dance. One of the dancers sees three main groups of polska dancers:

Where I come from older people dance (folk dance groups, clubs, "ordinary folk") several times a week at the village hall, Folkets hus (*The People's house*, a community assembly hall found all over Sweden), parties – and in the summer at fiddlers' gatherings, too. The young do the same (in Hälsingland [province]). Everybody

dances according to their ability and how they feel. When I'm in Stockholm there are: a) "professional dancers" (course instructors etc.); b) young "give-it-a-go-what fun" dancers; c) club dancers (good, regular amateurs) on the dance floors. In Stockholm I miss those I described above – there are seldom any adults/older folk who dance without being really good and only for the fun of it; at home that type of culture is more alive. Feel as if people take it all much more seriously in Stockholm. (Mal8)

This quotation demonstrates the differences between the provinces and the bigger cities. The division into sub-groups is less prevalent in smaller places in the north, for example, than in Stockholm. The first group mentioned in the quotation, the "professional dancers", is a recent (since the early 2000s), small well-educated troupe of polska dancers, who are often engaged as course leaders and instructors at weekend courses, dance halls and festivals. "Give-it-a-go-what fun" dancers and "club dancers" correspond more or less to the groups I mentioned earlier: folk music people and association dancers, respectively. Among the association dancers the older ones are in a majority, even if there are some younger dancers there too, while the younger practitioners are in a majority among the folk music people.

The younger practitioners of today, the under 30s, arrive at polska dancing mainly via the music. That is also the case with the members of folk dance associations who dance polska. It is the exciting music and the good musicians who make some dancers more or less abandon the ordinary folk dance group repertoire for polska dancing. One could say that folk music has succeeded where the folk dance groups have failed in getting more people, not least the young, more interested in folk dance in its wider sense:

[I] have played the fiddle and folk music since I was nine via the music school. Started to dance in a folk dance group (*folkdanslag*) at six, but thought it boring, so I quit after a few years. By way of the fiddle, I got in touch with "popular dance" (*folklig dans*) [an alternative term for 'non-association' folk dances, see chapter six] and learnt to dance at fiddlers' gatherings. (Anonymous informant)

Older polska dancers tend to have more of a folk dance background than the younger ones. An older folk dancer, as he calls himself, who lives in one of Sweden's larger university cities, notices that "many young people have begun

to discover the polska as a dance, and we've got more and more young people joining our dance group who want to learn the polska" (Nor26). However, they join to learn to dance polska, not the ordinary folk dance group repertoire. That theme keeps recurring and many, primarily among the young exclusive set who have trained in just polska dancing, clearly see the division between the Swedish polska dancing and folk dancing scenes:

I've come across two kinds of groups. Partly the polska dancers, who are nearly all over 40, many around 55. Several of them learnt in the 70s. They dance mostly in their own hall, once a week and they go there year after year. Some of them travel to Røros [a town in Norway famous for its annual folk dance festival], for example. They learn dances, like four new ones every week, and have the Blue book²⁴ as their bible. The only important thing is where you put your feet; they never talk of how to improve your dancing in any other way. They're conservative. The other group are young like me. Many have been to courses/schools, many play or sing. You learn at fiddlers' gatherings and festivals and it's mostly there you dance. You don't know that many dances but you dance in your own way. Have fun. The polska dancers compete for polska medals and think it's important to wear a folk costume and that the one who leads is a man, and the one who follows is a woman. And, generalising a little, you could say that the different groups are 1) serious, conservative, old; and 2) happy, unpretentious, creative, young. (Mal15)

The "serious", "conservative" and "old" dancers, mentioned in the quotation, are principally to be found in the group which I called association dancers, above, while the "happy", "unpretentious" and "young" in the main belong to the group folk music people. The phrases used in the quotation may be somewhat pointed but do in many respects reflect the division that exists among the polska people. The split between "younger" and "older" and between "serious" and "conservative" are judgmental statements, and ones also made by some of the dancers themselves. My observations support the idea of there being two main groupings, although the boundaries between them are less clear and more difficult to articulate than in the quotation.

How large was the total group of polska dancers in Sweden in 2007? We are "Not many but amusing! Travel to Stockholm in the winter and to Dalarna in the summer", says one dancing female from the northern region of Norrbotten,

and to the question of who dances the polska, her answer is “everybody I know” (Podg). There is a link between the fact that the active dancers are few and that “everybody knows everybody”. You generally know at least all the dancers within your own age group. The polska dancers often meet at the most popular fiddlers’ gatherings and festivals in the summer where, at the bigger of them, between 5,000 and 10,000 musicians and dancers gather.²⁵ That is probably the best guess, if somewhat uncertain, at the number of polska dancers in Sweden that can be produced.

Meaning – Togetherness, Cultural Heritage and Aesthetics

The driving forces behind polska dancing are primarily the possibilities of socialising with like-minded people, where the shared interest provides an outlet for passions, flirting and experiences of flow. There is also a degree of fascination for the cultural heritage, as well as the aesthetic qualities of the polska, both as a dance and as music.

I’m a young girl and I both dance and play folk dance/folk music. The reason why I’m interested in this genre is, among other things, that I grew up with it, but the main thing is probably because that’s where I’ve had my greatest dance and music experiences (kicks). (Mal16)

Being together, socialising and dancing with like-minded people, are the great driving forces, and they imbue polska dancing with meaning for all dancers. The polska, in itself, is therefore not the only precondition for practising the polska, but also the fact that there are other people who share the same interests and needs. Although the patterns are not entirely unambiguous, certain tendencies are evident and these are to do with who the polska dancers are, where they dance and why. As has already been said, it is possible to discern two groupings: one dominated by younger dancers, the folk music people, and one where the older dancers are in a majority, the association dancers. It has to be stressed again, however, that this does not mean that either of these groupings consists entirely of one age group, or that one age group only is to be found in the one group. On the contrary, the age spread within the groupings is considerable. In addition, the groups overlap, and some individuals may be active in both. They have a double competency and can cope with changing milieus. This is how an older dancer expresses the experience of these differences:

Young people dance polska, older people dance polska from... Got into the “polska-ing” where there was a lot of talk mostly about right and wrong, we danced the right way and everybody else was wrong. I’ve had my eyes opened to the fact that there is “justification” for what the others are doing, I’ve become more tolerant and wonder *very much* why, etc. (Arvi8)

Within each group there is, according to this informant, a degree of intolerance towards “the others”, the ones who belong to the other main group. A degree of ethnocentrism could be said to emerge, we are in the right, they are in the wrong and dance the wrong way.²⁶ The above quotation brings out a difference in people’s attitudes to the polska. That the “young dance polska” means that the young do not ask questions about and discuss what type of polska the musicians are playing, but only dance the way they feel like to the music. The younger ones among the folk music people dance a kind of basic polska and are not particularly fussy about what version it might be. When, on the other hand, the older people dance the “polska from...” this alludes to a use of language, which has been devised over time, in order to differentiate in minute detail between the recorded variations, and to emphasise that the polska from Boda differs from the polska from Orsa, although the differences are minute to an onlooker, if any at all.

Together with sensuality that leads to attraction between two bodies may end in seduction. Polska dancing works just as well as any other dance, regarding seduction and being seduced. Many couples are formed out of a shared interest in polska dance and music.²⁷ This is most clearly evident among the younger people, but it does definitely occur among older dancers as well.

There is a degree of intolerance sometimes discernable among younger and older dancers alike. A 40-year-old female dancer who has been dancing for 20 years thinks that “some dance only polska and look down on other dances, that gives me ‘negative feelings’” (Nor22). So being together with others creates meaning in the polska dance, but it has yet another aspect than the one of being inclusive – namely the wall it builds against other dance forms and the dancers attracted to them. That is not unique to the polska context, however, but is a tendency that can be traced in all kinds of dance groupings.²⁸

The cultural heritage, that the polska has a long tradition in Sweden is not something the majority of informants stress as an important or decisive reason for their polska dancing. But of course most dancers and musicians have a fascination with this ancient, or at least hundred-year-old, tradition. When

preservation of the Swedish dance tradition is highlighted more explicitly, however, it is often done so by the older dancers and/or by the younger association dancers, more seldom by the dancers of the folk music people.

When it comes to attitudes about the historical variants of polska, an interesting split emerges. In the associations, not least regarding the competition for polska medals (*polskmärkesuppdansning*), there is often an attempt to fix and preserve the technique and form of the dance as it is assumed to have been performed in older times. Or rather, to dance the dances in the way they were recorded in the descriptions and as interpreted by the most prominent dancing masters and members of the medal jury at the competitions for polska medals. The dancers who compete for dance medals equate to, or form part of, the association dancers, while those who dance only for pleasure seem basically to equate to the folk music people. Trying to fix a manner of dancing is in some sense a tradition of its own, separate from what is represented by the folk music people's dancing for pleasure. To them it is more a matter of expression and emotions, something which has always been, and still is, an important factor in popular folk tradition.

Aesthetics and polska as stage art among other dance genres – something danced on a stage to demonstrate for onlookers – is a small and rather novel phenomenon with links to artistic stage dance traditions such as ballet and others. What dominates here is the visual, the movements and positions which the audience experience, and not the feelings of the individual dancer. As this part of the polska field is minimal, as seen in its entirety, and not talked about by my informants, it is awarded but little space in this book. From a cultural-political point of view, however, it is in fact, a big question. "Polska aesthetes" are, to a very much larger extent, to be found among the younger than among the older dancers, and more often among those who have studied folk music/polska dancing than among the amateurs in the dance associations. The quality of the dancing itself and its aesthetic dimensions play an extraordinarily large role in this group. Aesthetics play a significantly more minor part in the performances arranged by the folk dance associations. There it is the social dimension that scores highly instead. Practically anybody who so wishes and has a minimal knowledge of how to dance can take part in a public performance by a folk dance association, but hardly in an artistic stage performance.

Against the background outlined above, polska is, in the twenty-first century, danced in three main contexts and milieus, which are somehow linked to different purposes and functions. Togetherness is placed at the top,

as everything indicates that this is the biggest and most important reason why people get together to dance polska. Socialising, seeking feelings of fluidity and flow, and via the dance, achieving physical and emotional contact with a dance partner are essential ingredients in polska dancing. Cultural heritage is included in the motivation for dancing by some dancers, and implicitly touched upon by many others. Polska as stage art is a small niche, but thoughts on polska aesthetics are present in many dancers, even on the ordinary dance floor.

Another perspective is to state that, among the folk music people, particularly the younger ones, the large group does after all consist of pleasure dancers and not of aesthetes. They have become interested in polska dancing because of the special music. Even those who began their dance careers within the folk dance groups have become interested in the polska due to the music, not initially via the dance. They have, so to speak, changed repertoire because



Competition performance for polska dance medals at Orsa, 2003. On stage are the musicians, on the right the judges, on the left outside the picture the administrators and in the foreground the onlookers. The dancing couples are being judged. Photo: Mats Nilsson.

of the exciting polska music. The most typical way of coming into contact with the polska world is through friends, and wanting to socialise together with an exciting and unusual form of music.

The association dancers are, on average, older and have developed their polska dancing to a greater extent within folk dance groups and similar organisations. Dance leaders and instructors have been the inspiration here, although friendships within the associations play a certain role too. The cultural heritage is of greater importance in this group than among the folk music people, which is evident partly in that this is where the polska competition dancers are mainly to be found.

Not-for-profit ideals and volunteering is somewhat more common among the association dancers than among the folk music people. Yet, by far the biggest number of the folk music people's dance halls and folk music cafés are run as non-profit organisations or clubs with only very few active people. These clubs, which are the main organisers of folk music and polska dance events, often struggle to break even. Generally there are only a few individuals carrying out the demanding administration and organisation of dance and music events, while the majority of members only attend the events themselves.

Summarising table

"Folk musik people" dancers	Commonalities	"Association" dancers
<p>More younger dancers</p> <p>Polska dancing mixed with schottische and waltz</p> <p>Music (e.i. the musicians) of foremost importance, dance a positive complement</p> <p>Dancing occasionally but not regularly every week</p> <p>Achieving a feeling of transcendence, or flow, through physical exertion, is an important driving force</p> <p>Practising one's dancing at music and dance events of various kinds</p> <p>Consider polska as a continuously developing "living tradition"</p> <p>Dancing "here and now" although origin is sometimes pointed out</p> <p>Seeking and using similarities between different ways of dancing to a greater extent</p> <p>Prepared to travel to good dance events around the country, and in some cases even internationally</p> <p>Aesthetics an important aspect for some dancers and often stressed at courses and stage performances</p>	<p>Polska dances enjoy a high status</p> <p>Courses</p> <p>Togetherness with like-minded people a driving force</p>	<p>More older dancers</p> <p>Polska dancing is combined with gammaldans and folk dance group dances but on different evenings</p> <p>Dance most important but music a necessary complement</p> <p>Dancing and practising every week</p> <p>Collecting emblems, knowing many dances and dance them correctly an important driving force</p> <p>Practising one's dancing mainly in various organisations</p> <p>Attempting to preserve a cultural heritage</p> <p>Dancing most frequently with reference to the "there and then" of the dance</p> <p>Rather cultivate differences between different ways of dancing and variants</p> <p>More locally anchored but with contacts nationally in the form of countrywide associations and networks</p> <p>Fellowship, that anybody who wants to can join in, is an important principle</p>

IV

A Contemporary Dance Form

The polska is a dance that is very current today, while at the same time, having roots stretching far back into the past. Within the polska dance form there are two, simultaneous time dimensions: one contemporary, present-day dimension, and one stemming from the past. Polska dances do, however, vary somewhat when looked at from various times in history. It is both a contemporary and a historical dance. On the dance floor level, the polska is primarily a social dance, but it is also used in public performances by folk dance associations, as well as for staged artistic performances by professional dancers. In other words, polska dancing exists on several levels at the same time; on a temporal level where today's dance interacts with dance forms from the past, and on a social level where people of different ages and groupings dance in a variety of contexts.

In this section we leave the dancers and take a closer look at the polska dance itself. The purpose is to see how the polska is being danced on the dance floor, when practised within a social context and for pleasure. I begin by giving my view of how polska is being danced today and then continue with some thoughts on the music to which polska is danced. At the end of the chapter, I suggest a typology for the polska as it is danced in the twenty-first century.

How is Polska “Done” Today?

A somewhat philosophical way of looking at polska, as with any dance form, is seeing it as being “done” while it is danced. One may ponder whether dance exists at all, other than as a set of potential ideas, when it is not actually being done. Thus we create dance whenever we dance, and with that arises the possibility that the polska is both similar and different, every time it is danced. Another view would be, as the anthropologist, Adrienne Kaeppler

suggests, that dance is, like, for example, a sport, a form of culturally “structured movement”.²⁹ This means that different cultures, however they are defined, have different concepts as to what is dance, and what is not dance, in the same way as opinions differ as to what constitutes good or bad dance. Dance is in every sense something that is created within an interaction between people.³⁰

My view of polska dancing is that we create dance “here and now” based on ideas from “there and then”. The distance may be near or far away, on either a cultural or geographical map, in the very same way as on a time axis, the polska may have been danced the day before yesterday or hundreds of years ago. When dancing the polska today, we set out from an initial starting-point consisting partly of notes and fragments from the past, interpreted in the present day, and partly from dance knowledge in a more general sense. On the basis of this knowledge of historical forms, and general knowledge of how dance can be performed, we then create polskas in the present.³¹ But what are the forms and movements, the choreographic patterns, that shape the polska of today?

In most of Sweden, Scandinavia, and Europe, dance is the movement of feet, and the shift across the floor these footsteps create. The couple – that is, dancing with another individual – has been, and still seems to be the norm. Dance is also closely linked to music in the sense that, more or less, everybody in Sweden today regards dancing as something done to music.

In Sweden, we use feet and steps to dance, that is, in order to make those movements, which most people call dance.³² Steps are basically moving the feet in order to shift one’s body weight. However, it is also possible to take steps and shift the body weight without moving the body – that is to say, either the steps are done in place or, in such a way that the body moves around the room. Although other parts of the body, mainly the arms, are sometimes employed when we dance, most Swedes still feel that “dancing is steps”. Dance steps are therefore important and something the dancers often mentioned in connection with polska.

One Name – Two Dance Forms

With the help of steps we set the body in motion and create polska dance. The most important movement in all polska dancing is the turning, the spinning. With this turning motion, the two individuals in the couple create a dance experience together. Turning has two main forms; one with movement through the room, and one where the turning is done on one spot in the room. It is therefore relevant to see polska as two dance forms with

the same name; or if you prefer, one name referring to two different dance forms. These two main forms are then varied and supplemented with other motifs and we can therefore say that there are a number of different ways of dancing, within the two forms.³³

Along with a majority of dancers, I choose to use the term *rundpolska* (round polska) for the most frequently practised way of dancing polska. In this form, the couple turns clockwise around its common axis, while at the same time turning in an anti clockwise circle around the room – following another axis through the middle of the circle – that is to say, with two different rotations simultaneously. The phrase often used for this double rotation around two axes, one within the couple, and one around the room, is *dancing in waltz direction* (*valsbanan*). Other common names for this *rundpolska* are basic polska (*grundpolska*) or common polska (*vanlig polska*). These names suggest that the dancers regard that way of dancing as the typical way, as the basis for most variations. A special form that ought to be counted as a polska *in waltz direction* – as the dancers do two simultaneous rotations – is *bakmes*, which, according to the ethnologist Mats Rehnberg, is a “backwards polska” (“*polska baklänges*”).³⁴ This way of dancing is characterised by the fact that rotation is achieved by the dancers walking around each other rather than turning as a couple (see more below).

In the other way of dancing polska, the couple rotates around a common axis, remaining in the same place on the dance floor the whole time without in fact moving through the room, that is to say, only one rotation around one axis. *Slängpolska* is the most common name for this form of polska.

The basic movement that divides the polska into these two dance forms is the way in which the couple turns around one another (known as *omdans*), in other words, how the turns within the couple are performed. Besides the way the couple dances around one another, both forms of polska sometimes include various other dance patterns or motifs. The most common of these I choose to call a *promenade turn* (*promenadtur*), which sometimes involves turning under the partners’ arms. Somewhat less common is the *figure turn* (*figurétur*), often done as an individual turn, that is, the dancers do not hold onto one another, nor do they necessarily make the same movements at the same time.³⁵

The *rundpolska* and *slängpolska* are the dominant terms most dancers use today, indicating the two forms of polska dance, one, which moves around the room, and one, which turns in one place. For analytical purposes, I choose to use the term *polska in waltz direction* rather than *rundpolska*. Instead



Practicing polska in waltz direction/*rundpolska* before the polska dance medal competition (*polskmärkesuppdansningen*), in Orsa, 2003. Photo: Mats Nilsson.

of *slängpolska* I use the expression *polska on spot* (*polska på fläck*), where *slängpolska* becomes the largest subgroup.³⁶

Polska in Waltz Direction

The most common way of dancing the polska today is definitely dancing *in waltz direction* (*valsbana*), that is to say, turning clockwise within the couple and at the same time turning anti-clockwise around the room. Or, as it is sometimes expressed, turning “with the sun” (*medsols*) within the couple, and moving “against the sun” (*motsols*) around the room.³⁷ This represents as much as 80-90% of all polska dancing. One of the informants summarises what she calls *rundpolska*, quite simply as “right-left-together in different ways” (Nor5). This rhythmic chant, *right-left-together*, describes both the sequence of steps and which foot carries the body weight during the turn. First the right foot is moved and takes the body weight, then the left foot is moved and the body weight is transferred to the left leg, and finally the right foot is placed next to the left foot without shifting the body weight from the left

to the right leg. Next the right foot is moved in order to, once again, take the body weight – and so it continues, *right-left-together*, performing a complete turn for each full combination. This combination of steps, beginning on the right foot, is a description by a person who dances the woman's part in a polska turn – or a person who dances the man's part in the *hambo* turn. Here the relationship between the polska and the *hambo* becomes clearly evident. The sequence *left-together-right* is equally common, although it is then often a person dancing the woman's *hambo* part, or the man's part in the polska; whereas *together-right-left* is the woman's combination in most polskas. The sequence is the same in all of these combinations, but the dancers start it at different times:

Left-together-right, left-together-right
Right-left-together, right-left-together
Together-right-left, together-right-left

or

Left-together-right, left-together-right
Left-together-right, left-together-right
Left-together-right, left-together-right

Left-together-right, *left-together-right* as well as *together-right-left*, *together-right-left*, respectively, are, without doubt, the most common step combinations used to achieve a polska turn in waltz direction. If one person in the couple does the first combination, the dance partner does the second. The combination is the same for both dancers in the couple, but the foot movement is shifted by one beat in relation to the dance partner.

Many of today's dancers call, *left-together-right* and *together-right-left*, basic polska steps (*grundpolskesteg*), as they are common step patterns used when dancing to any kind of polska music. *Common polska* (*vanlig polska*) is a name frequently used by the dancers just because it is often a matter of moving in the rotation with the help of these three step combinations. In the survey of *gammaldans* (literally old time dancing but includes mainly schottische, waltz and polka), undertaken in the Nordic countries by Nordisk förening för folkdansforskning or NFF (Nordic Association for Folk Dance Research), the term used for this way of turning is *entaktsomdansning* or Eod, (one-measure turning), since, in triple metre music, one measure of three beats is generally

needed to complete an entire step sequence, and one whole polska turn.³⁸ Ethnologist Ernst Klein describes polska as “a single-direction dance”, that is to say, every new turn starts on the same foot, compared to the waltz, which begins on the left and then the right foot on alternate turns.³⁹ The latter is typical of what might be called *tvåtaktsomdansning* or Tod (two-measure turning), and is mainly to be found in waltz, polka and schottische, dances usually referred to as gammaldans. However, *two-measure turning* is unusual in today’s polska contexts where *one-measure turning* completely dominates – with the exception of the *bakmes* step combination, as well as isolated, brief variations of *two-measure turning* combined with *one-measure turning*.

According to the dancers, the objective, and the whole point of dancing the polska, is in the turning, which they describe in terms such as, flow (*flyt*), pull (*sug*) or bounce (*gung*). It is all about getting the turning around the couple’s own axis working smoothly. Once the turning is mastered, one person doing *left-together-right* and the other one doing *together-right-left*, the couple can go on turning for almost any length of time, transporting themselves into a trance. It is up to the couples themselves to decide for how long they go on turning. The couple can then take a rest from rotating by resorting to the most common way of varying the polska, the promenade. Side by side and holding each other closely, the dancers walk forward, marking the metre and rhythm with their steps, ready to turn again when the time feels right. There is no fixed norm for how long to keep turning, dance around one another, promenade, or dance a figure motif. The couple, or rather one of the dance partners, decides.

In the promenade, which is practically always included as a variation to the turning in the polska, the dancers walk with what has come to be called a *försteg* (literally, pre-step), in which the dancers step on beats one and three in each measure, while “gliding across” (*glider över*), or avoid emphasising, the second beat. This way of walking is also common in *bakmes*, a way of dancing that is often used to add variation to the turning of the polska. In *bakmes* the dance partners stand side by side and “walk” past each other, exchanging places in an anticlockwise turn – instead of the normal clockwise rotation of the polska. While one of the dancers walks forward, the other one turns on the spot. It becomes an alternating walk past one another, one measure walking on the spot, followed by one measure walking forwards along the waltz direction, and so on.

Polska on Spot

As already mentioned, the name polska is also used for a dance form that does not involve rotating around the room, but where the dancers move around in a limited area. Mats Rehnberg compares this way of dancing to the game “mala salt” (“grinding salt”)⁴⁰, a wide-spread and well documented game found in most regions of Sweden:

Two people spun around with the tips of their toes close together and arms stretched out and bodies bent well back, quite similar to the game “grinding salt” (Rehnberg 1943:209).

That way of dancing polska differs from the *rundpolska* (polska danced *in waltz direction*) in that the couple does not, *in principle*, move around the room, but instead, the turning is done only around the couple’s own axis, not around an axis. The turning is thus, not done in waltz direction but on one and the same spot in the room. As much as possible, the promenades and figure motifs are usually done in place. Today, however, what is common is a certain forward drift, a degree of movement around the dance floor, but not in an obvious waltz direction and generally pretty slowly, despite the fact that course leaders and instruction books often emphasise that it is an “on spot” dance (*fläckdans*), not a waltz-direction dance.

The promenade is a distinctive and important component of *on spot* polska dances. Beside the rotation of the turn, the couple moves forward, around and sometimes backward, while at the same time, turning around under each other’s arms. These motifs exist in the polska *in waltz direction* too, though to a lesser extent.

The dominating step of the turn in polska on spot (*polska på fläck*) is a combination of slow walking and more rapid changing of feet. Schematically, the step can be described as *walk changefoot walk*. In terms of weight on either foot, the most common variant is *left rightleft right*. Both dancers perform the same combination of steps simultaneously, their weight resting on the same foot (e.g. left-left), and not displaced in relation to one another (e.g. left-right), as would be the case when dancing in waltz direction.

With regard to polska *in waltz direction* as a dance form, it is typically danced in the same way to all polska music. On the other hand, polska *on spot*, that is without movement in waltz direction, is danced in two different ways to two different types of music. As already mentioned, the most common way is the one the dancers often refer to as *slängpolska*, which is danced to music

with a lot of notes, and referred to as “*slängpolska* music” (*slängpolskemusik*) or “semiquaver polska” (*16-delspolska*). Other terms used for this music is “even polska” (*jämn polska*) or “symmetrical polska” (*symmetrisk polska*). Basically, it is a matter of moving with the beat. As for polska music where quavers and triplets “even polska” (*jämn polska*) or “symmetrical polska” (*symmetrisk polska*) are more prominent, people tend to use waltz steps or *försteg*. This dance variation is less common and sometimes called *fläckpolska* (“on spot” polska). However, I have instead chosen to use one of the most frequently documented local names for this type of dancing, namely, *trinnpolska*.

What *trinnpolska* and *slängpolska* have in common are: turning on one spot, promenade with under-arm turns, and perhaps figure motifs. What differentiates them, both in terms of the movements in general and the steps, is the rhythmic pulse of the dance. The *slängpolska* “trots along” while the *trinnpolska* “pulsates forward”.

Today, some of the younger dancers use the folk *minuet* (*menuett*), revived around 1990, as a figure motif when dancing *slängpolska*. In the minuet, the dancer moves over six beats (two bars of music), but rests on the 2nd and



Polska on spot - *slängpolska*, at a dance workshop in Malexander, Östergötland, 2003. Photograph: Mats Nilsson.

6th beats. The step sequence is *right-rest-left right-left-rest*. The music for the minuet resembles the semiquaver music of the *slängpolska*, and combining the turning of the *slängpolska* with the dance figures of the minuet, makes the dance more varied. In addition, both ways of dancing are repetitive, monotonous and mesmerising, though in different ways.

Couple Dance – a Gender Issue?

In most cases polska is a couple dance (*pardans*), and that is how it is defined by today's dancers. In this context, couple means that a man dances with a woman, or a boy with a girl. It is not uncommon today for girls to dance with girls, but definitely uncommon for boys to dance with other boys. Whenever this norm is broken, it is young adults who dance with each other, not older dancers. However, there seems to be a slow but steady change under way among younger dancers.⁴¹ For example, during the autumn of 2007, a course was held in 'queer' polska where the objective was to demonstrate that, regardless of gender, the two dancers have the same steps and can play the same role, and that it is not necessarily one and the same person who leads (*för*), and one who follows (*följer*) all the time.⁴²

That couple dancing refers to two people dancing together is not particularly controversial. Most of the people I have talked to also regard couple dances, including polska, as an opportunity to have an erotic rapprochement between dance partners.⁴³ What is more in question, however, is whether the two dancers flirting with each other can be of the same sex, particularly if two men dance together. Today, two women dancing together is more accepted, not least among the younger dancers, and is fairly common. In this book, as elsewhere when I write and speak about dance, I try to use the more neutral word partner instead of man and woman.

Polska is a dance form that is, potentially, relatively equal between the sexes, compared to the fashionable dance forms of the twentieth century, such as foxtrot and *bugg*. That one of the dancers in the couple, that is to say, the man, will lead and decide, is more of a social and historical construction than technically a necessity in the dance. There is no need in the polska – as opposed to foxtrot, for example – for a definite "leader" (*förare*) in order to dance the polska.⁴⁴ It is also possible in the polska to change leaders at any time. If the couple only does turns, both partners are – when it works well – equally active as the 'motor' and leader of the dance. Perhaps one should not really say that the leader is the motor of the dance, but rather the 'guide' or 'steerer' (*styrare*); the one, within the couple, who directs the

movements, and the way of travelling across the floor. One way of describing this is that it is the two dancers, together, who constitute the motor of the polska, and they take turns being the “guide”; it is the dancers’ muscles and the machinery of movement, which together with music as the fuel, “create” the dance, and make it happen.

Music to Dance to

A clear indication of the significance of the music is that, more or less all the informants emphasise the triple metre and the rhythm as being characteristic of polska. Many think of the music first, and the dance second when they hear the word polska – or rather of good music and capable musicians.

Live music is a consistent feature of polska dancing in the twenty-first century. The music is played without sheet music and by ear, and “by ear” (*på gehör*) – in the sense that no notation is used during the actual performance.⁴⁵ One characteristic is therefore that it is always “live” dancers who dance to “live” musicians playing polska music. In smaller venues the musicians like to stand in the middle of the room and the dancers move around them in waltz-direction. At dance events, the polska dance music is never provided by recordings, but always by one or more musicians. I have only once come across a polska disco, an attempt in Gothenburg in the early 1990s. It was not a success and was never repeated.

Today most of the dancers agree that polska is a dance to music in triple metre, with a special emphasis that differentiates it from, for example, the waltz. Putting the musical differences between the triple metre music of the polska, waltz and mazurka, into words is difficult for most of the dancers. They often choose words such as “pull” (*sug*), “drive” (*drag*), “suspense” (*häng*), “swing”, or “bounce” (*gung*) to describe the polska; words which suggest an experience that is transferred from the sound of the music to the movements of the body. Musicians sometimes use the expression “rubber band music” or ‘asymmetrical triple metre’ (*asymmetrisk tretakt*) to describe the polska music, compared to the more symmetrical triple metre of the mazurka, for example.

Collectors or researchers have also failed to formulate, simply and intelligibly, how the dance and the music actually cohere. Therefore we know very little, historically, about the relationship between the dance and the music, something pointed out by many researchers who focus on dance.⁴⁶ Using my own experience as my main source, I maintain that it is the metre, the pulse, the beat or “the groove” which bind the dance and the music together. The

meeting of sound and movement happens at this elementary level, then the musicians can vary the music and the dancers the dancing – each in their own way – as long as they concur on the metric structure.⁴⁷

One division of polska music in triple metre, often used by dancers and musicians, is quaver polska (*8-delspolska*), triplet polska (*triolpolska*), and semiquaver polska (*16-delspolska*).⁴⁸ This division into three main types relates to the dominating and distinctive elements of each note value, or rhythm (i.e. quaver, semiquaver, or triplet), in the various tunes. All of them also have triple metre as a basis and that is what the dancers make use of. However, their perception of the tempo varies. The quaver polskas with many triplets are often felt by the dancers to be fast and sometimes are called *pols*. The semiquaver polska is felt to be slow to dance to, but often considered to be fast, as far as the music is concerned. The tempo of a dance and the tempo of the music are two different parameters, and may very well be experienced differently, as for example in the *slängpolska*. In ‘semiquaver music’ (i.e. *slängpolska* music), there is a steady flow of notes, to which the dancer mostly move slowly. A faster tempo in the music does not automatically result in a faster dance; the music’s tempo and the dance’s tempo do not necessarily go hand in hand. If the music’s tempo increases, the dancer can, for example, dance on every second beat instead of on each and every beat.

The semiquaver polskas – which are used for several different types of polska dance but in particular for *slängpolska* – are typically even, and many people experience this steady pulse as duple metre although it is a basic triple metre structure. Musicologist Sven Ahlbäck calls this phenomenon ‘metric superimposition’ (*pulsöverlagring*).⁴⁹ Dancers can step both according to the duple and the triple metre. Quaver polskas can also be played in this even, symmetrical, manner, but may just as easily be played asymmetrically.

Polskas are nearly always ‘multi-melody dances’ (*flermelodidanser*), which means that each dance can be used for a great number of tunes.⁵⁰ This implies that a variant of polska can be danced to different melodies of the same type (e.g. all semiquaver polskas). It is also possible to change the type of music (e.g. from semiquaver to quaver polska) while keeping the same dance form and way of dancing, although the experience will be different. In other words, the same manner of dancing can be used to a wide variety of music and tune types. Therefore, dance forms can be compared to tune types in music. A dance form such as polska *in waltz-direction* or polska *on spot* can thus be danced to different types of tunes, such as quaver or semiquaver polskas.

Single-melody dances, where the same melody is always played to a specific

dance, include, for example, the special polska variants called *snurrebockar*. In addition to a promenade and turning, as in other polskas, these *snurrebockar* also include a figure motif where the dance partners turn to and greet one another. The *snurrebockar* and other single-melody dances are more often danced in folk dance associations within the folk dance movement, and rarely by the ‘folk music people’ who prefer multi-melody dances. The association dancers and the folk dance organisations constitute a more formalised dance milieu where the notion of “one dance, one tune” often occurs. The connection between music and dance becomes standardised and deviations are perceived as wrong or as something difficult to dance. In less formal dance and music milieus on the other hand, it is easier to accept that the same dance form can be danced to a variety of tunes.

In other contexts, I have argued that the dance music and what I call the



Good live music is one of the most important ingredients for polska dancing. Korrö 2006. Photo: Leif Carlsson.

music dance actually only meet in the metric pulse when it comes to folk dance and popular dance – both in the polska and the waltz, as well as in the foxtrot and disco dancing.⁵¹ Sven Ahlbäck's way of looking at musical meter has been a source of inspiration in this matter.⁵² It is possible to apply a number of ways of dancing to the musical meter of one tune, what I call *dance meter*, a kind of step rhythm (see more below), which is not necessarily the rhythm of the music. It is possible to apply one and the same way of dancing to the metre of all types of tunes, as long as there is a metre, and a beat, to follow and relate to.

A Typology for Twenty-First Century Polska Dances

The following polska typology is intended as a tool for understanding today's polska dancing. It is not meant to settle once and for all what polska is, and which genres and main forms exist. Rather it is an attempt to isolate how the polska is done from a technical point of view, and not why people do it or who the dancers are. It is what I see on the polska dance floor, what the dancers themselves say, as well as my own experiences as a dancer and teacher, that forms the basis for the division of the dance forms into main groups. Terminology and concepts are mainly based on the work done within the association Nordisk förening för folkdansforskning (Nff).⁵³ The names of the concrete dance forms stem from the names the dancers themselves use. From these dance names, I select some and use them analytically as concepts, thereby standardising their meanings.

As a typology based on the movements of the dances, this is a dance typology and not a music typology. The music is added later when I construct ideal types and some main types of polska variants that are danced and played in the twenty-first century. The starting point for categorisation is the turn or rotation, and whether it is done in waltz direction or on spot, in one place in the room. The reason why the turn is used as the point of departure is that it is the very first, and the largest movement we see when polska is being danced – and also because it is what gives the most intense experience when we dance.

This classification and typology is meant as an aid to understand and clarify the similarities and differences between various polskas and their close dance relatives. From the supposition that turning is the most important movement in all polska dancing, the two main forms then are, as already stated, polska danced *in waltz direction* and polska danced *on spot*. These

two dance forms have different conditions movement-wise and that is why I divide the classification of polska below into two main forms, one for dance *in waltz direction* and one for dance in place, or *on spot*. Using Grüner Nilsen's conception of polska for all dances turning in one place, and his conception of waltz for all the forms that move in a waltz direction, is in many ways attractive.⁵⁴ But it would, on the other hand, infringe too much on how the names waltz and polska are used by the dancers today, creating unnecessary confusion around the concepts of waltz and polska.

The System of Svikt and Foot Movements

In addition to turning and steps, I also use *svikt* (using flex in the knees to create a smooth up and down motion) as another parameter in analysis. The use of *svikt* is a way of trying to understand similarities and differences in how we dance through a combination of transfers of the body weight in the form of steps. Each shifting of the weight entails a greater or lesser bending or *flexing of the knees*.⁵⁵ An ordinary walking step is a *svikt*, abbreviated as a capital S, and consists of a bending, and a straightening of the knee. Two walking steps, one after the other, then becomes SS, first a step and *svikt* with the one leg – then with the other. We can also flex without shifting the body weight to the other leg, by remaining in place, and bob up and down with the same foot on the floor. This is abbreviated to a small s. Walking one step and bobbing a little – flexing the knee with a spring, without moving forward – thus become Ss. The weight-transferring step, T, entails transferring the weight to one leg, while bending that leg's knee. The step is completed when the other leg is brought close to the weight-bearing leg while straightening the knee. The T-step is never present without an S-step. An ST-combination involves taking a step, transferring the body weight and bending one leg – but then letting the other leg take over the body weight and stretching with the other one. By combining these three different ways of *svikt*, we can analyse and compare dances from the way the dancer uses steps, or rather weight transfers, in the dance. The stated number of *svikt*, knee flexes, are per measure (e.g. over three beats in triple metre), or rather until the same sequence is repeated.

The background of the *svikt* system is to be found in Norway and it is principally used to demonstrate that dances are basically simple, but can be varied and made complicated in many ways.⁵⁶ This system could even be used to subdivide polska dancing into dancers' personal variations.⁵⁷ I use the *svikt* system to a limited extent and only to identify differences and

similarities between the principal types. Regardless of the way we dance, the movement itself, the step, can be done slightly differently resulting in different experiences. One aspect that cannot be analysed with the *svikt* system is whether an individual dances in a “smooth”, “bouncy” or “rocking” manner. *Svikt* is more a matter of frequency than amplitude. Nor does *svikt* help to notate whether an individual dances “with attack” or with a degree of “restraint”. Dancing smoothly implies that the turning is felt and looks as if it is just flowing; bouncy means that each step is marked with a slight but obvious knee bend; and a rocking manner refers to a markedly softer and deeper knee bend. All three of these ways may have the same *svikt* curve. Dancing “with attack” means that the step has been started before the beat, while dancing “with restraint” involves putting the foot down a little after the beat. These relationships between dance and music are difficult to notate and they are not visible in the form of *svikt* either. On the subject of polska and steps, Ernst Klein said as early as 1937:

...firstly, every polska is a *very simple dance, done with walking steps, running steps and sometimes hopping steps*. Anything requiring greater choreographic skills is absent from the very beginning. There are, however, in various polskas a series of interludes of a more or less singular kind. /-/ Variety and finesse of performance, which are by no means lacking, have been created in quite different ways, than by means of complicated foot positions and dance steps. (Klein 1937:276, italics as in the original)

These interludes and the variety in the polska that Klein refers to are articulated through walking, running or hopping steps. The steps, are in other words, not something that turns the polska into a complicated dance. Yet, these simple steps are used in a diverse number of ways, creating variations. Another way of approaching how the polska is varied is to regard walking, running and hopping steps partly as *svikt*, and partly as longer steps – that is to say as combinations of foot movements (step rhythm). Both steps deal with how the body is handled: the former (*svikt*) more vertical, the latter (step rhythm) mainly horizontal. The steps of the feet transport the dancers around the room or on the spot; *svikt* occurs in the legs and knees when the foot is set down and the body weight transferred.

In the typology below *svikt*, capital S, concurs with a transfer of the body weight to another foot, capital R (right) or L (left). *Svikt* without transfer

of weight (small s) I note with a small letter, r or l for the active leg. The difference is that it becomes obvious which foot takes on the body weight and not only that there is *svikt*. Besides, there will be *svikt*, without weight transfer (s) also on the other foot than the one stated as active (l or r). The T-step in the *svikt* system is harder to replace, as, in this case, the systems complement each other. However, combining left right, as leftright (LR), in writing instead of separating left right (L R) could possibly signify this T-step.

Both *svikt*, and what I have referred to above as foot movements, are meant to describe and help us understand subtle differences between polska variants (and similar dance forms). Other established notation systems for dance and movements, such as the most widespread Laban notation⁵⁸, do not fully cover these aspects, or are unnecessarily complicated for this purpose. What in the end unites, instead of differentiates the polska variations from each other is their movement through the room, that they are danced with turns and promenades *in waltz direction* or *on spot*.

Waltz Direction⁵⁹

Waltz direction (valsbana) is an expression for a couple dance moving in a forward-moving circle. In Northern Europe “right about” (*rätt om*) means anti-clockwise, and the circle normally moves to the right if, as a dancer, one faces the middle of the ring.⁶⁰ To be able to turn in this way reasonably easily, the dancers will face each other, eye to eye, with alternated feet. The left foot of both dancers should be outside their partner’s right foot, and when one partner’s body weight is on the left foot, the other dancer’s weight is on the right foot. It could be said that the dancers take different steps, in the sense that the weight rests on different feet, left and right respectively, in the turning.

Turning in waltz direction can be done principally in two ways; either as a *one-measure turn* or a *two-measure turn*. *Entaktsomdansning* (Eod) or a *one-measure turn*, implies that the couple rotates around their own common axis over one measure of music, usually clockwise. More correctly, one turn of the rotation needs a full combination of steps for it to be properly completed, normally over one measure. One Eod in waltz direction is thus danced with two rotations simultaneously, one within the couple and one in the dance hall. The turning in *rundpolska* is a very typical Eod.

Tvåtaktsomdansning (Tod), *two-measure turn*, implies that two measures are required, in fact two full step combinations, to complete one turn of the rotation around the couple’s own axis. Thus, in one step combination there

is enough time to do half a turn. Turning in waltz and polka are typical Tod, and so is *bakmes*. Tod is unusual as a polska turn but exists as a complement or variation in certain polska forms. The steps used in Tod are what are most frequently called waltz steps and polka steps respectively, and they can be used instead of *försteg* when promenading in the polska. Since waltz steps and polka steps are used as variations in polska dancing, I refer to them here as “waltzing” and “polkettering” respectively. Walking with a *försteg* is the most common term used for the promenade motif, which practically all dancers do before starting the polska turn. This combination of steps produces a limping character as the dancers take a step on beats one and three within the three-beat measure and gliding over beat two.

Bakmes is a common name for a special way of dancing in *waltz direction* and is built upon the *försteg*. The dancers face one another, standing side by side, with their left feet close to each other. When one of the dancers takes a left step forward, the other one takes a step backward on the spot, and then moves on with a left step forward, as the partner now get to step backwards – and the pattern continues. The result is that the dancers alternate walking past each other in an anti-clockwise rotation within the couple, and anti-clockwise in the waltz direction. In addition, the *bakmes* may be reversed and danced in the opposite direction with the right feet close to each other, that is rotating in the same direction as the polska. The *svikt* and step, in a polska turn in waltz direction, may be summarised as follows (the forms, “köra”, “slunga” and “snoa”, are explained further below and in chapter five):

Entaktsomdansning (Eod) one-measure turn

Rundpolska, 3 sviktar (flexes) (SsS, sSS, SSs)

S s S S s S

L r R L r R

s S S s S s

r R L r R l

Rundpolska, 2 sviktar (flexes) (SS)

L R L R

R L R L

Tvåtaktsomdansning⁶¹ (Tod) two-measure turn

Waltzing, 2 sviktar (flexes) (STS)

L R L R L R

R L R L R L

Polkettering, 3 sviktar (flexes) (STSs)

L R L r R L R l

R L R l L R L r

Snoa, 2 sviktar (flexes) (SS)

Bakmes, 2 sviktar (flexes) (SS)

L R L R

R L R L

Unregulated (2 turns over 3 measures in 2/4 metre)

Köra, 3 sviktar (flexes)

L r R L r R

r R L r R L

Tvåtaktsomdans duple metre turn (Tod in 2/4 metre)

Slunga, 2 sviktar (flexes)

Lr R Lr R

R Lr R Lr

Polska on Spot⁶²

Polska on spot implies that the turn is ideally done in place – on one spot in the room. The dancers in the couple find themselves slightly to the side of one another during the turn, to the left of the partner with right feet close to each other (clockwise rotation). The dancers stand either a little apart, holding each other by their out-stretched hands, or close together with their hands holding each other's bodies. The two dancers do the same steps simultaneously and the couple rotates around their common axis. Although clockwise is the most common form, it makes no technical difference to rotate anti-clockwise instead.

Turning on spot is executed, and experienced differently, depending on whether one uses a slower walking tempo, or a more pulsating, faster tempo when doing the movements. The first way is a slow walk often called *slängpolska* which today is the most common way of dancing polska on spot. The other way, which produces a faster and a more pulsating dance style, where

waltzing is an important ingredient, is experienced more as running. This is less common and the dancers call it simply polska on spot (*fläckpolska*). As already stated, I prefer to use the name *trinnpolska* for this form.

In polskas on spot, and above all in the *slängpolska*, not only is the turn important, but also the promenade and figure are important and obvious parts of the dance form. At times promenading and figure motifs take on even greater importance than the turn.

The minuet is rarely referred to in other contexts as a couple dance or polska, but is included in the term *contradanse*. In my opinion, the minuet and the *slängpolska* are similar enough to be included in the same category without any difficulty. In fact, today the minuet is danced by some dancers as a figure motif to *slängpolska* music. In Sweden, but above all in Finland, they have often existed historically side-by-side. Turning in polska on spot can be summarised as follows:

Walking (slow)

Slängpolska, 3 sviktar (flexes) (SSTS, promenade SS or SsSs)

L RLR L RLR

Minuet⁶³, 6 sviktar (flexes) (SsSSSs)

R LRL

Running (fast)

Trinnpolska, 2 sviktar (flexes) (STS, ST, SS, Ss)

LR L R LR

Trinnpolska, 3 sviktar (flexes) (SSS, SSs, Sss)

L R L R L R

Twenty-First Century Polska Variations

Combining the two main types of polska dance, *waltz direction* and *on spot*, with the main types of polska music, gives us the table below, containing the most popular polska dance variants today. I choose to call them *rundpolska*, *bakmes*, *slängpolska* and *trinnpolska*. Note that *rundpolska* and *bakmes* are essentially danced the same way to all types of polska music. But if the music is somewhat different, so is the experience. Even though, technically speaking, polska is also danced to dance music in 2/4 and 4/4 metre, these are not called polska, and these variations are also present in the chart below. These ways of dancing the polska in duple and quadruple metre are not perceived as polskas by most dancers, but I see them as a way of using the character of polska dancing to music other than polska music. On the basis of what I see and hear on the dance floor, I have slightly modified the three-part division of polska music that dancers use by combining the quaver polskas and the triplet polskas to the group of uneven polskas, leaving the semiquaver polskas as even polskas. With that I also avoid the dilemma that some quaver polskas are played evenly.

However my reasoning and whatever I do, there is one constant problem left, namely *bakmes*. As evident from the table below, *bakmes* falls into all three categories of dance in *waltz direction*, but not at all within the *on spot* dances. The number of ways of dancing is in fact greater if the special way of dancing *bakmes* is included.

Music type	Uneven Polska 3/4, quavers, triplet	Even Polska 3/4, quavers, semiquavers	Polka/Schottische/ Engelska ⁶⁴ 2/4 & 4/4
Dance form			
Waltz direction	Rundpolska Bakmes	Rundpolska Bakmes	Rundpolska (Köra/Slunga) Bakmes
On spot	Trinnpolska	Slängpolska Minuet	Turn (turning on spot)

In the chart above, there are nine combinations of polska music and polska

dance. What, in fact, emerges is that the same way of dancing appears in several squares: the same way of dancing is used to all the three main musical forms, just as three different forms of polska dance can be danced to one and the same form of music.

As already mentioned, I include the minuet as a variation of the *slängpolska*, as it is sometimes used as a motif in *slängpolska* dancing. Music in duple and quadruple metre is an interesting area both today and historically, as shown in the table above, but which has neither been researched nor highlighted as potential combinations of different forms of dance and music. For the time being I use the word *köra* for a polska turn where one dances the three-part *left-together-right* (LrR, SsS) across the bar lines in duple metre. In *slunga*, the three-part step is instead danced within a two-beat measure. The dancers pull the step together with a quicker *leftright right* (Lr R, S S)

An interesting example of a combination of various dance forms is the recently popular *Finnskogspolsen*, which consists of an initial promenade, then a turn (polkettering, Tod, three *sviktar* (flexes) SSs), moving into one more turn (polska *in waltz direction*, Eod, two *sviktar* (flexes) SS).⁶⁵ That is precisely what might happen when new dance variations emerge. Dancers take what there is, to mix and match into new combinations, in this case a *one-measure turn* (Eod), and a *two-measure turn* (Tod). Newly combined variations are then created. That is the way it probably is when people dance and enjoy themselves today, as well as in days gone by. We mix and use what we have at hand, to create and make dance and music out of what is currently available.

Polska Dance in Neighbouring Nordic Countries

A glance at polska dance in neighbouring countries proves the existence of the name polska in Denmark and Norway, as well as Finland. As dance, the polskas are mainly recorded, described and danced in Norway and Sweden. There are some similarities between the dances in these countries and some more superficial differences. What in Norway is called *pols* or *springlek* corresponds more or less to the Swedish *polska in waltz direction*, whereas, from a technical perspective, *springar* and *gangar* are close to the *polska on spot*. The similarities are, in my opinion, due to the fact that they are basically and historically the same dance forms, but which have evolved differently for various social and political reasons. Norway's struggle for a national distinctive character and freedom from the union with Sweden (1814-1905) are part of the picture.⁶⁶ In Finland too, polska is recorded as a dance, mainly as *polska on spot*, often to music in 2/4 or 4/4 metre. In Denmark polska is also danced

to music in duple or quadruple metre, although it is not called polska, but usually *sönderhoning* when danced in waltz direction and *fannikedans* when danced as *polska on spot*.⁶⁷ The following diagram sums up the discussion on polska dance technique, with regards to music and dance type, pulse, *svikt*, step rhythm, dancers (i.e. D1-D2, and, for rarer two couple turns, DI-DIV), and some common variations.

Music	Uneven polska 3/4, quavers, triplet	Even polska 3/4, semiquavers	Polka 2/4	
Dance				
Polska in Waltz direction ⁶⁸	Rundpolska I left-together-right and together-right-left			Ver. I Unregulated
	Pulse	O o o O o o		O o O o O o
	D1	L r R L r R		L r R L r R
	svikt	S s S S s S		S s S S s S
	D2	r R L r R L		r R L r R L
	svikt	s S S s S S		s S S s S S
	Rundpolska II lefttogether-right and right-lefttogether			Ver. II
	Pulse	O o o O o o		O o O o
	D1	Lr R Lr R		R Lr R Lr
	svikt	S S S S S		S S S S
	D2	R Lr R Lr		Lr R Lr R
	svikt	S S S S		S S S S
	Rundpolska III left-right and right-left			Ver. III
	Pulse	O o o O o o		O o O o
	D1	L R L R		L R L R
	svikt	S S S S		S S S S
D2	R L R L		R L R L	
svikt	S S S S		S S S S	
Runpolska IV left-right and right-left				
Pulse	O o o O o o			
D1	L R L R			
svikt	s S S s S S			
D2	L r R L r R			
svikt	S s S S s S			

Polska in Waltz direction	Rundpolska V left-right-right and right-left-left									
	Pulse	O	o	o	O	o	o			
	D1	L	R		L	R				
	svikt	S	S	s	S	S	s			
	D2	R	L		R	L				
	svikt	S	S	s	S	S	s			
	Bakmes									
	Pulse	O	o	o	O	o	o			
	D1	L		R	L		R			
	D2	L		R	L		R			
							Bakmes			
							O	o	O	o
							L	R	L	R
							L	R	L	R

Music	Uneven polska 3/4, quavers, triplet	Engelska 4/4
Dance		
Polska on spot	Trinnpolska left-rightleft left-right-left left-right	Turning leftright
Pulse	O o o O o o	O o o o O o o o
D1	L R L R L R	L R L R L R L R
Svikt	S T S S T S	S T S T S T S T
DII	L R L R L R	L R L R
Svikt	S S S S S S	S S S S
DIII	L R L R	
Svikt	S S S S	
DIV	L R L R L	
Svikt	S s S S s S	

Music	Even polska 3/4, semiquavers												
Dance													
Polska on spot	Slängpolska left-rightleftright												
	Pulse 1	O		o		o		O		o		o	
	Pulse 2	O	o	o	o	o	o	O	o	o	o	o	o
	Turn	L		R	L	R		L		R	L	R	
	Svikt 1	S		S	S	S		S		S	S	S	
	Svikt 2	S		S	T	S		S		S	T	S	
	Prom. 1	L	R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L	R
	Svikt	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
	Prom. 2	L		R		L		R		L		R	
	Svikt	S	s	S	s	S	s	S	s	S	s	S	s
	Minuet right-rest-left-right-left-rest												
	Pulse 1	O		o		o		O		o		o	
	Pulse 2	O	o	o	o	o	o	O	o	o	o	o	o
	Step	R				L		R		L			
Svikt	S		s		S		S		S		s		

V

Some Historical Aspects

THIS BOOK IS based on polska as a way of dancing.⁶⁹ Or more correctly, two different ways of dancing where the name polska is used for both of the two dance forms. Dance-wise, polska differs from other ways of dancing, such as the group- and contradances quadrille and engelska[italics], the nineteenth-century turning couple dances waltz and polka, and the various twentieth-century promenade couple dances such as foxtrot, tango, bugg and salsa, as well as, twist, shake, disco and techno. Polska is, all the same, historically, socially, functionally and movement-wise, closely related to several of those dance forms.

When my informants dance the polska, history plays a subordinate role – they say themselves that they are dancing today and not yesterday. Yet, history does occasionally have some significance, although then more as an idea of the past and how that past is connected to what is being danced today.⁷⁰ Does the history of the polska then, play a part for the dancers in the twenty-first century? Well, possibly in the simplistic way that the dances are being danced today, but their roots go back some hundreds of years ago. Some dancers on the other hand do undeniably look for a mythical, unambiguous explanation of both the name polska and the origin of the dance forms, something that it is difficult to find proof of in historical documents.

The name polska easily leads one's thoughts to the country of Poland. And there probably is some kind of link between the name of the dance and of the country.

Poland and Sweden are areas which are geographically and culturally close and have been so since at least the late Middle Ages, sharing elemental features regarding dance and music, for example.⁷¹ The whole of northern Europe are after all more alike than not and less separated as cultural areas than might at first be thought. What happened after the Middle Ages is that in northern

Europe we cultivated the same music and dance material in near-similar yet dissimilar ways and that we who dance and make music in Sweden thereby created a Swedish polska which deviates from the one in Poland.⁷² If one accepts this argument, it means that the polska has not wandered from Poland to Sweden, but that it has existed for so long on both sides of the southern Baltic that it is impossible to talk about a spread in either direction, but that we belong to the same cultural area in matters of dance and music.

We can see a culturally relatively similar medieval Europe, which has over the years splintered into dissimilarities.⁷³ The similarities have not been stated enough over time, while the differences have been exaggerated, not least during the building of the European nation-states during the nineteenth century. One part of this process is, for example, the adaptation of social dance for use on the stage and as entertainment and the twentieth-century canonisation of folk dance repertoires in the separate countries.

Folklorist and musicologist, Tobias Norlind, and ethnologists, Ernst Klein and Mats Rehnberg, are the Swedes who have studied and written most about polska dances and their history.⁷⁴ Their counterpart in Denmark includes Haakon Grüner Nielsen, and in Swedish-speaking Finland, Yngvar Heikel. These researchers were all active in the first half of the twentieth century, the period when the peasant community's cultural manifestations began to disappear. They had direct contact with the older community in many ways. After 1960, Henry Sjöberg was the main polska dance researcher in Sweden, and he, together with his colleagues in Norway, Egil Bakka, and in Denmark, Hening Urup, contributed to what we know about the polska as a dance, and its history in the Nordic countries. Below I discuss the history of the polska in three parts, starting from these and some other researchers' texts. Firstly, I deal with polska as a dance form, then with the polska music, and end with some different forms of the name.

Polska as Dance

Around the year 1500 there were, according to Tobias Norlind, two main forms of dance in Sweden, namely song dance (*sångdans*) and, what he describes as, a “modern dance without song with carefully considered dance steps”.⁷⁵ Judging by the notated music, the dance seems according to Norlind to have consisted of two parts: a “pre-dance” (*fördans*) or promenade in duple metre and a “post-dance” (*efterdans*) or “running dance” (*springdans*) in triple metre.

The dance name polska, or rather the form Polnische Tänze (Polish

dances), existed in German as early as the mid-1500s and is likely to refer to a couple dance form. It is likely that this dance was already known in Sweden as well since trading contacts across the Baltic with Germany, and Poland, had been developed well before the 1500s.⁷⁶ In royal and aristocratic circles there were also connections pointing to affinity between Sweden and the southern coasts of the Baltic. Sweden's King Johan III's (1569-1592) queen, Katarina Jagelonica, was Polish. And during their son Sigismund's reign of Sweden and Poland jointly (1592-1599) we find the oldest polskas in Swedish notebooks.⁷⁷ The first time the word polska is used in connection with dance in Sweden is, as far as we know, when Karl IX (king 1599-1611) writes that "Unless you provide this poor priest's widow with justice, you shall know that my stick will dance a polska on your back".⁷⁸ There is proof of polska dance as a name in Germany as early as 1540 and in Denmark 1647.⁷⁹ From the 1600s there are notes of a three-part Polish dance to which, in addition to the two parts in duple metre and triple metre, there is also a final dance which in Swedish texts came to be called "zerra" or "cheese and bread" (*ost och bröd*). Sometimes the German "Käs' und brot" was used. How this *zerra* was danced is not made clear however.

At which point polska as a dance form became established as a general popular dance is more difficult to know as the name is one issue, the music and the way of dancing yet another. The occurrence of the name polska does not tell us what the dance looked like any more than what the music sounded like. The polska may very well have been danced without appearing in printed sources and danced to any type of music. We simply do not know, as there are no sources.

Yet, there is a great deal that suggests that polska is a name of the earliest couple dance known to have been spread in Sweden. One interpretation is that in the 1600s the term polska simply referred to a couple dance with turning. On the other hand a dance, which came to be called polska, did not emerge and was not created in a vacuum. More or less identical dances are likely to have existed and been danced in Sweden and northern Europe even earlier. Mats Rehnberg, for example, is of the following opinion:

What one cannot get away from is that the older dances in the country had already prepared the way for the polska. The high-spirited couple dance, which it has been possible to verify as far back as the fifteenth century and which is likely to have survived among the peasantry in the sixteenth century, had a great deal in common with

the polska. The typical sixteenth century dances with their division into a slow pre-dance and a jolly post-dance show a clear kinship with the polska, such as it initially begins to emerge. (Rehnberg 1948b:25)

Dancing “Polish”

It is possible to trace the name for polska dance back to the early 1600s. But, how was this polska danced? Polska seems to refer to some form of couple dance, as already shown, although the name was also used for “long dances” (*långdanser*) with unlimited numbers of couples, “long polska” (*långpolska*) and variants for two couples (four people), sometimes called “four-polska” (*fyrpolska*). Polska or similar forms of couple dances probably existed in the whole of the Nordic area, in Germany and Poland and possibly even in England from the 1600s on. But despite the fact that the name polska occurs, we know very little about what the dance looked like and what differentiated it from other dances.

Although it is quite possible to tell most dances apart on account of dance steps, turns and tunes, the various dances are rarely such pure phenomena that the odd feature in one dance cannot also be found in another one. This may be due to the rhythmic similarity of the tunes, to proximity in time, to development from a common strain or to variations of a pre-eminent pattern. (Rehnberg 1966:28. Cf also Burke 1983:144ff.)

According to Norlind, “dancing ‘Polish’ in the late 1700s [meant] dancing wildly, fast and passionately”.⁸⁰ This agrees with a description from a dance party in 1882 by the Danish ethnologist Feilberg:

“...for the polska dance went, no, went is definitely not the adequate word, it spun, racketed, whirled, rushed and tore across the floor, a whew, a thump on the beam, scattering the dust; then to the other side, around, so that the women’s skirts stood out like fans, and one couldn’t follow the quick steps of the feet on the floor; a new stamp of the foot, a new whew, a new thundering bang on the beam, couple after couple, dance after dance, until the musicians were no longer able to keep up.” (quoted in Grüner Nielsen 1917:56f)

That account tallies in many ways with what I see and experience on the twenty-first century dance floor when young people dance. Maybe the most characteristic feature of the polska was not how it was danced as far as steps and turns were concerned – but rather a question of strongly entering into the very spirit of the dance. In 1897 folk music collector, Nils Andersson, also described the polska as “fresh, lively and forceful”.⁸¹ What impact does this have on our way of dancing polska nowadays? One can hardly say we do it in the same way as 100 or 200 years ago. The polska we dance today may have something, but certainly not everything, in common with the dance which was danced in the peasant communities before the year 1870 or thereabouts. So what then is similar and what is dissimilar today compared to earlier times? Put somewhat pointedly, it is first and foremost the name which is the same and partly the way it is danced. We might also, on more or less firm premises, imagine that certain parts of the dance and the ways of doing it are the same.⁸²

Henry Sjöberg, one of the great polska dance enthusiasts of the late 1900s, is of the opinion that there is no specific Polish dance, or German for that matter, nor does he differentiate between the German and the Polish dances.⁸³ What was possibly Polish dance and German dance and partly English dance merge and become blurred in the end – all of them include motifs such as promenade, under-arm turns, and turning in couple. Sjöberg interprets it as the same dance which has been given different names in different contexts. The Polish-German-English dance has also done a return class journey, first as a people’s dance, which was later adopted by the gentry and after that spread among the ordinary people again.⁸⁴ All according to Sjöberg, but that viewpoint does not seem entirely unreasonable. That cultural manifestations spread between different groups in a society is nothing new.⁸⁵ Besides, the countries and cultures of northern Europe are in fact not that unlike one another, and dances and dance music may very well have been the same among both ordinary people and the gentry. The difference between the various social strata was more a question of style than of dance form.

One hypothesis is that German dance, in the texts often appearing under the French name *allemande*, could refer to a form of promenade couple dance with swinging and spinning under arm, similar to certain motifs found mainly in today’s *trinnpolska* and *slängpolska* but also in the *rundpolska*. Polish dance would in that case be the special polska turn, the turning in the *rundpolska*, and English dance when the music is in 4/4-time. The problem may also be that it is only one part of the dance that is described. Mats Rehnberg points out:

Characteristic for all eighteenth-century instructions for the allemande are the directions about arm movements, hand holds and twists. What to do with one's feet during the dance one almost has to guess. It would however seem as if it was the waltz that was danced. Many a time there was no clear differentiation made between waltz and allemande. (Rehnberg 1948b:40)

According to Norlind, the polska underwent a change during the 1700s in that the pre-dance and post-dance became independent dances, partly in the shape of the promenading polonaise (*slängpolska?*), and partly the livelier running dance (*rundpolska?*). Norlind also refers to a party at Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus's country house Hammarby, outside Uppsala, and quotes Fabricius who thought that "it is true that our balls are not particularly brilliant, the company not numerous, the music miserable, the dances not varied, just the interminable minuet and polska". The polska, along with the minuet, was obviously the most popular dance and both of the dances were danced in the same environments.⁸⁶ Norlind goes on to state that "it turned into a kind of double existence, where the minuet could appear like a polska and the polska like a minuet". And there is a similarity between the polska music and the minuet music, declares Norlind.⁸⁷ In old descriptions, the dance music is notated as a combination of first a pre-dance in a calm 2/4 tempo, followed by a faster post-dance in 3/4 time. This can be interpreted as being a slow promenade in even metre, followed by a turn in triple metre at a faster dance tempo. It is, in that case, these two parts which have gradually developed separately into independent dances – *slängpolska* with minuet and *rundpolska*.⁸⁸ In Finland as well, polska was danced along with minuet as two different dances with different characteristics, according to Yngvar Heikel:

The minuet is danced particularly at weddings with unshakeable solemnity, without a hint of a smile. After that follows the polska, with yelling and shouting, full of sparkling joie de vivre. In the olden days the minuet was danced at a slower tempo and even more ceremoniously and gracefully than nowadays and accompanied by bowing and curtsying, the girls usually holding their skirts out with their hands. (Heikel 1938:IX)

A young Finnish dance researcher, Petri Hoppu, on the other hand, sees the characteristics of the dances, in any case those of the minuet, as a social difference rather than as a time difference.

As a ceremonial dance, the minuet was dignified and calm but, as a common dance, it probably had a wilder character. (Hoppu 1999:15)

The polska and the minuet are thus dance forms, which can be combined and used as different motifs in the same dance. Maybe they are even parts of the same dance or, quite simply, the same dance which simply developed differently in different contexts? The steps of the so-called long dances and song dances (brandle steps) clearly reappear in the steps of both the *slängpolska* and the minuet. In the 1600s the division between dance for pleasure and other dance functions, was neither particularly clear nor significant; polska and minuet were simply regarded as dances alongside other dances, among the common people as well as among the upper classes. In his comments on the minuet, Matts Stenström points out this similarity of form but difference of dance style:

The minuet came from Poitou and was originally just a provincial form of brandle, but through stylising for courtly use it lost nearly all its 'folky' style, and the good peasants of Poitou would certainly not have recognised their jolly dance had they seen it danced under the enormous chestnuts at Versailles. (Stenström 1918:163)

Be that as it may, many of us dance *slängpolska* and minuet today to the same music and sometimes as part of one and the same dance. And it feels right.

In addition to polska as a name of music and dance, the dance name *trinnpolska* or various derivations of it, such as *trinna* or *trinning* occur in some sources⁸⁹. In the *trinning*, too, the couple seems to dance around on one spot in the room and not in waltz direction around the room. According to Heikel, the polska in the Finnish region of Österbotten was also named *trinddans*.⁹⁰ In the dance descriptions and on the video films I have seen, there is an *on spot* polska, named *trinning*, which is not a *slängpolska*, danced to even semiquaver music, but which is danced to pronouncedly uneven quaver music. In Finland, polska and *engelska* also come together, in name as well as in choreography. Yngvar Heikel notes:

...that another dance for nine people, standing three and three, is the “Hamburg polska”, also known as “Nine men’s polska” or “Nine men *engelska*”, in which there are exchanges of lines, figurations and polskas in three small circles, partly also dancing in a large circle. A variation of this is “Big Hamburger” in Pyttis for 12 people. (Heikel 1938:XII)

Polish dance (*polska*), German dance (Hamburg *polska*) and English dance (*engelska*) flow together, at least name-wise, in this quotation. But the forms also seem to be the lines of the *engelska*, the turns in small circles of the *polska* and the figurations with spins under uplifted arms of the German *allemande*. Maybe then it is the French minuet, and with that the branle, which leaves its traces in the figurations? That would give us a North and West European dance tradition with forms entering into and departing from one another through the centuries from the Middle Ages up to about 1900.

Hambo, Waltz and Other Polska Relatives

That fashionable dance forms of the nineteenth century, such as hambo, mazurka and waltz, are in many ways, technically as well as socially and historically, closely linked to each other is not such a far fetched thought. Nor is it particularly difficult to see the connections with *polska* dancing. All these dance forms are, first and foremost, couple dances with turning, danced to music in triple metre. There is evidence that they have been danced by the peasantry as well as gentry in roughly the same geographical areas in the northern and middle parts of Europe over a period stretching from about 1500 into the 1900s. A recurring problem, however, is working out what the terms and names refer to, and what dancers and musicians actually danced and played in earlier times. Mats Rehnberg, who made an inventory of the dances on the island of Sollerön in lake Siljan in the 1940s finds:

...oral tradition confirms that the *polska* had been the most common dance even on Sollerön. Nowadays the terms “gambelpolska” (old *polska*) and “slänjpolska” also occur. /-/ As most middle-aged and older people knew how to dance the *polska*, there appears to be no difficulty getting to see the dance being done, but there is definitely some confusion between the older *polska* and hambo, which most of the fiddlers equate with the *polska*. (Rehnberg 1943:208f)

To this day it is a sliding scale of opinions as to whether the dancers and musicians perceive the dance and the music as polska or hambo. Some twenty-first-century musicians talk of a “polskafied hambo” as well as of a “hambofied polska”. The musicians slightly shift the emphasis of the beats, something that may be described as them playing a “heavy one” (*tung etta*) instead of a “floating two” (*flytande tvåa*) or a “short three” (*kort trea*). Ernst Klein’s comment on the similarity between polska and hambo is that “the character of the hambo is precisely that of an old threshing-machine equipped with a modern engine”.⁹¹ A part of this modern engine is the firmer structure of the hambo; it is always danced to eight-measure phrases while the polska does not have that kind of fixed form. According to Rehnberg, the turn is the same in polska and hambo:

...the polska spins around in the same way as the turn is done in the hambo. What is reported to be characteristic for the polska is that you spun around for as long as you could manage, whereas corresponding movement in the hambo occupies a set number of bars. In the hambo the forward dancing is done with an open hold also a set number of bars, while the movement with an open hold in the polska was unregulated as to its length and to be considered more as recovery. A somewhat knee-bending gait was also typical of the polska. Several fiddlers consider the hambo to be danced a little more slowly than the polska. (Rehnberg 1943:209)

Polska is older than the hambo and also has a freer form. The fixed form of the hambo is in many ways typical of the fashionable dance forms of the 1800s, the so-called *gammaldans* dances and their twentieth-century offshoots which are today often called *gillesdans*.⁹² The form of these dances is fixed and the possibilities for improvisation are slim. The motifs are danced in a set order and to a set number of measures, usually four or eight measures. The hambo consists of a promenade for three measures, one measure to get into the turn, three measures for rotating and then one measure for getting into the promenade again. The number of single-tune dances, where one dance variant is always danced to one and the same tune, is also significantly greater among the *gammaldans/gillesdans* dances than is the case with polska. One of the informants thought of the polska that:

...the dance per se is more exciting than gammaldans, for example. Although the form of the polska is basically simpler than many other dances, it feels less monotonous than hambo, for instance. You often enter a sort of meditative state when it gels with the dance partner. (Tob2)

The meditative state of the polska, which many dancers mention, occurs in the constant rotation which is not broken off after eight measures as in hambo, but which goes on for as long as the dancers wish and the music is playing. Here we are approaching the other important polska relative, namely the waltz. Here too there is an historical link as well as a dance connection. But there are also some significant differences. Historically, both polska and waltz are dance forms with long traditions in Central Europe; but the historical link is also present in what is referred to as waltz steps, which are common in many polska variants, and in the never-ending turning.⁹³ In a description of polska dancing in Sweden's Jösse district from 1824 the following is written:

...the dance is remarkable for the agility that is required for dancing it. First several couples dance around waltzing, after which two couples at a time perform on the stage. (K.A. Nicander 1824, quoted in Rehnberg 1966:30.)

Waltzing in this context does not likely refer to what we today think of as the dance waltz, but, rather refers to the turning. The eternal rotating in the same direction is distinctive for what Gruner Nielsen calls "people's waltz" (*folklig vals*). This concept then also includes the turn which I call polska *in waltz direction*. Gruner Nielsen also reflects that this way of dancing is seen precisely as the common or ordinary people's way dancing, which other parts of Danish society despised:

Waltz is at present deeply despised, and the common people's forms require of the dancers a strong resistance to dizziness, for it is characteristic of them all to drag around without interruption in a circle, constantly to the right (Gruner Nielsen 1920:8).

What is waltz and what is polska is not always entirely clear, and the names of the dances are at times quite hard to decipher. According to fiddler Frans

Leopold Levan, a dance in the northern part of the province of Halland was called *sutare* which was “a kind of simple waltz, somewhat jumping. You *sutar* around the floor.” Another fiddler, Fritz Brogren, reports on the other hand that *sutare* is the term for a form of polska, and it was danced “around the walls not in one place.”⁹⁴

The turn, in what is today called polska and waltz, respectively, is technically different. Polska is a single-measure turn, so-called *entaktsomdans* (Eod), whereas the waltz is a two-measure turn, so-called *tvåtaktsomdans* (Tod). It is in fact less a question of one or two measures in the music, but more a question of the need for one or two step combinations in order to complete a turn. As the music is typically in triple metre, the step combinations of the polska concur with the number of beats to the measure. In the waltz two three-beat measures are required for the completion of one step sequence, in the polska one measure. Ernst Klein realised this difference clearly:

In accordance with the simple character of polska, the important feature is that it is always directed one-way. This simply means as follows. When dancing the waltz, you start left-right-left and continue right-left-right, after that again left-right-left. In the polska, on the other hand, you do as follows. You start: right-left-right-left and continue in the same way endlessly until perhaps you turn and dance in the opposite direction. This is, as far as I can find, common for all polska dances. (Klein 1978:44)

The second example of the quotation, right-left-right-left refers to the turn, and in the example the dancers start on the right foot. Other variants start instead on the left foot. Besides, if the dance “perhaps turns” it probably refers to an on spot polska, although that is not made clear in Klein’s text.

When I ask dancers of today if the polska resembles any other dance they have danced, the answer is often:

...of course it reminds you of waltz and hambo, although there is more of a pull in the polska than in the waltz. It is not as tied to turns as the hambo. The “short three” which is there in some places is reminiscent of Balkan music, time-wise (some Balkan music). (Mal7)

The absence of fixed turns is an important factor of the polska dance for particularly the younger polska dancers. They want to do as they like, turn

and combine promenades and figure motifs in their own way. Another of my younger informants puts it as:

...I don't quite understand why, but I feel more hemmed-in when I dance to other music in triple time, such as hambo and waltz. /-/ The difference between polska and other dances in triple metre has to do with the music. Polska is more melancholy and not so boisterous. (Mal15).

Polska (Dance) Music – Not Only Triple Metre

Despite my toning down the music part in this book, it is undeniably a vital element of what defines polska, both today and historically.⁹⁵ Polska as music occurs in at least two different contexts, one as concert music and music to listen to, and the other as dance music.

Researchers and dancers alike associate polska with music in triple metre and with special rhythms. As early as 1885, Karl Valentin presented the division of the polska music's triple metre tunes into triplet, quaver, or semiquaver polskas, which most people still use.⁹⁶ Another type of division would be to consider whether the polska has a symmetric, asymmetric or undivided beat.⁹⁷ If I have understood it correctly, symmetry means that in triplet and quaver polskas the time interval is the same between all the three beats, whereas asymmetry entails the beats of the bar being shifted in relation to each other. A semiquaver polska is experienced rather as a form of single-beat where all beats of the bar are equally stressed and in the same way.

The triple metre is evidently dominant and basic for the polska as music just as, according to ethnomusicologist Ewa Dahlig-Turek, it has a rhythm with:

...descending structures within a triple metre, meaning that the rhythm is more condensed at the beginning of the measure (on beat 1, or beats 1 and 2 than on beat 3. (Dahlig-Turek 2003:11)

On the other hand, dancing is also done in the polska way to music in duple and quadruple metre, although it is then rarely called polska by today's dancers. Grüner Nielsen also touches on the subject that the kind of metre varies and that polska has not exclusively been danced to music in triple time. There are in Finland, just as in Sweden and Denmark, examples of polska having been danced to both duple metre and quadruple metre music. Moreover, there

are examples in Danish sources of the term *engelsk pols* (English pols[ka]) having been used for polska turning in duple time.⁹⁸ In Sweden music called *brännvinspolska* (aquavit polska) was recorded mainly in the southern province of Skåne. These tunes are notated throughout in duple metre⁹⁹ and often used for dancing *engelska*. Norlind also mentions that polska had been danced in England, that the name had existed at least in the 1700s, and that *halling* (an acrobatic men's dance) and reel are originally the same dance and that "the reel is often called *brännvinspolska* in Sweden".¹⁰⁰

Notating old dance music using the music system common today is a recognised problem and has been questioned.¹⁰¹ If not otherwise, music becomes standardised once it is written down. Ernst Klein states quite briefly...

...that polskas are in triple metre does not necessarily mean such a great deal and is in many cases probably more a matter of a standardisation that happened when written down. (Klein 1978:50)

Old dances have been danced to newer and more modern music as the musicians have learnt new tunes and when the musicians try out new music, the dancers test dances they already know. Music and dance have not always simply accompanied one another; the tunes have been adapted by the musician to suit the situation and local circumstances. Similarly the dancers have adopted new ways of dancing and adapted them to the old music available. From his surveys of dance on the island of Sollerön Mats Rehnberg relates:

The old fiddler Skräddar Daniel of Rothagen communicated the highly interesting piece of information that it was considered easier to dance polkett to an old polska tune, which was not too fast, than to a fast polkett tune. As well as the terms "polkett in waltz" and "fast and straight" this shows that, when first introduced, polkett was perceived more as a way of dancing, rather than as a separate dance. (Rehnberg 1943:212)

Polkett danced to not too fast polska music may have been what is sometimes called *gubbstöt* (literally "old man's thrust"). Norlind quotes a certain Rosenberg who, in 1875, notates dance alternately in triple and quadruple time, "which however did not embarrass the dancers, on the contrary".¹⁰² The change of metre was thus of no limiting significance. The fact that we today associate polska with a dance in triple metre does not entirely exclude the possibility

of it having been danced to music in duple and quadruple metre in earlier days, which is rather likely to have been the case. Or maybe it is the smooth structure of the semiquaver polska that appears in notated music as duple time or quadruple time and is experienced as an even metre?

The supposition that the roots of the polska are in Poland occupies both musicologists and dancers. Although it is hard to say categorically that the music and dance came to Sweden from Poland, there is a clear historical connection. According to Nils Dencker...

...most of the polska tunes in northern Poland seemed, just like our own, to be in 3/4 time (mazurik), and some of those northern Polish melodies do sound rather like our own, whereas the type was somewhat different in southern Poland (Krakowiak). (Nils Dencker 1931, quoted in Sjöberg 1997).

Even if polska in Poland and Sweden once were the same music and dance, the differences have increased over the years. In a comparative study between polska music in Sweden and Norway with folk music in Poland, Ewa Dahlig-Tureg, Polish ethnomusicologist, states:

Outside of Poland, in the new environment, rhythms once defined as Polish got new meaning, new performance context and new form. In fact, they are no longer Polish. (Dahlig-Tureg 2003:164)

Folk music researchers in Norway think in similar terms, namely that forms of names and music and dance forms do not always go together in a simple and predictable manner. Musicologist Björn Aksdal for example writes:

There is no general and basic distinction between dance tunes called “pols” and many of the tunes played on the ordinary fiddle named “springar”. In many cases, the same tune is called “pols” in central Norway and “springar” in western Norway.¹⁰³

Polska music for listening stands on its own legs, but it is also an important part of the polska dance. The instrumentation, on the other hand, is immaterial to the dance. Instruments which have been popular at various times in history have also been used for dance plays and also for polska dancing. What that means is that historically polska has been danced to music played on

mouth-harp (harmonica) or Jew's harp, the Swedish nyckelharpa, bagpipes, clarinet, violin, accordion, and into the 1900s on all the modern and electric instruments which then came into fashion. In the late 1900s, polska music was even played on instruments such as the saxophone, djembe drums, bouzouki, didgeridoo, and more.

Historically, before approximately 1900, solo playing with or without drones or two people playing in unison were the most common ways of presenting dance music outside the upper class ballrooms. Playing together in the form of octave intervals or in thirds is also recorded, as is accompaniment using chords on a supporting second violin.¹⁰⁴ Cultural manifestations such as dance and music forms of polska are always part of a bigger context. It is in the dancing itself, when we do the polska, that the music meets the dance and the relationship is formed between sound and movement.¹⁰⁵

“A Beloved Child Has Many Names”

Polska is, as is obvious from the above, a name of two forms of dance. For these two main forms there are several names which are more or less difficult to interpret and specific to certain environments. The point of the survey below is not to sort out in detail the history of all the forms of name of polska, but rather to show how varied the flora of names is in handbooks and records and what the background of the names might have been.

In the names of older dances there are, in addition to Poland (*polska*, *polonaise* and possibly *polka*), one also finds Germany (*allemande*), France (*française*), Scotland (*ecossaise*, *schottische*) and from England (*engelska*, *anglaise*). Names of cities are to be found behind some dance names such as *hamburska* or *hambo* (Hamburg), *lybeckare* (Lybeck) and *varsoviienne* (Warsaw) or as in the case of the mazurka other geographical areas (Mazur or Mazovia in Poland). The dance forms popular in the 1600s, 1700s and 1800s were often named after countries, cities, and regions in Europe.¹⁰⁶ The supposed origin of these dance forms is thought to have given the dance its name. According to Mats Rehnberg, form or geography are common ways for naming dances:

Dance terms are basically of two kinds, descriptions of how they are performed or arrangements such as springar, long dance and quadrille or suggestions of the origin or home of the dance such as polska, anglaise, skåning and bleking. (Rehnberg 1966:18)

Whether Rehnberg has in mind folk dances and older countryside dances in the broad sense, is not clear. But what he sees also provides us with a different approach to dance names which links up with the terms and names of dances used by polska dancers today, namely the custom of putting a place name either at the beginning of the name, for example *bodapolska*, or as an addition after the name, polska from Boda.

If a dance – or any other phenomenon – is linked to a place name, one should also take into account that this geographical association would initially have originated with people from outside the stated place, who by specifying the place wished to characterise the phenomenon. (Rehnberg 1966:17f)

According to Rehnberg, it is thus not the inhabitants of the parish of Boda, just north of the locality of Rättvik, who at first named their dance *bodapolska*, but those who do not live or never have lived there.¹⁰⁷ It is, in other words, a question of dances being named where distance in space or time plays a vital role. *Bodapolska* is the same dance as polska from Boda. The choice of name might possibly suggest that *bodapolska* refers to there being only one polska in Boda and which is danced in a particular way, whereas the polska from Boda opens up for the possibility of several variants of the polska from Boda. These local place indicators are nearly always additions and not the main name of the dance. They are, more likely, indications of the places where the dance was recorded in the 1900s. Most commonly it is villages, parishes, districts or counties that are used – and some diffuse localities, such as, the forests areas Finnskogen and Tiveden. For the folk music people who dance for fun and for the sake of giving full vent to their feelings, names such as *grundpolska* (basic polska) make more sense, while the abundance of names is significantly greater among the association dancers.

I do not pretend that the following survey of polska dance names and what polska dancing has been called other than polska, is a complete one, but would rather like to elucidate the problem of how dance names and dance forms are *not always* connected.¹⁰⁸

Most of the polska dance names used by the dancers today are linked to the word polska with an addition of a prefix or a word at the end, such as a place name. Generally speaking, the dance is also danced to what most people consider as polska music in triple metre, although there are exceptions (see below).

Rundpolska is the most common name used by the dancers for the most common way of dancing the polska. The name refers to the turn, the rotation in the polska which is danced around the room *in waltz direction*. Names near at hand which are also in use are *vanlig polska* (common polska) and *grundpolska* (basic polska), indicating that it is the most common and most elementary way of dancing the polska.

Sometimes the dancers say quite simply that they are going to dance polska or possibly *pols*. There is a clear tendency that the latter is mainly used for faster music often and typically using triplets. Other older names which indicate some form of *rundpolska* but more rarely used today are *polsdans* and *polske*. That the name polska refers to the country of Poland is obvious. As has already been made clear – analysing the link to Poland is on the other hand more difficult. The same applies to the French sounding forms *polonäs*, *polonais* and *polonässa*. Whether these names really indicate a real difference in the way of dancing is argued and uncertain. There may nonetheless be a difference in the music. *Polkamazurka* is as far as the name is concerned an amalgamation of polka and the Polish region Mazuria and as to dancing, a nineteenth-century form of what is called *mazurka* in Sweden.

Other names for polska dancing, appearing mainly in records and manuals, are for example *bondpolska* (peasant polska), most likely indicating the peasants' way of dancing polska as opposed to the way the gentry danced the same polska. *Senpolska* (late polska) is harder to deduce, it might be an indication that it is danced more slowly. *Storpolska* (great polska) has been used in the sense of "great" as popular or extra good and referred more to a fiddler's favourite tune than to the dance. Another explanation is that *stor* referred to the tune having three or more repeats, whereas most commonly it has just two. *Gammalpolska* (old polska) indicates that there are newer polska forms such as *hambopolska*, a nineteenth-century name for the way of dancing which evolved to become hambo, as well as older forms, old polskas. *Svängpolska* (swing polska) is hard to decipher, as all polskas swing. Could it be a local distortion of the name *slängpolska* (fling polska)?

All the names above seem mainly to have referred to variations of polska in waltz direction, at least in records and descriptions. *Slängpolska* is the other common dance name used today and which most frequently refers to polska with turning in place. The word *släng* (fling) might refer to the fact that the rotation makes a flinging and bustling impression on the onlooker. Historically and in the records from the 1800s and the 1900s, *slängpolska* is also used for naming variants of *rundpolska*.¹⁰⁹ We cannot therefore assume

that the name *slängpolska* in historical sources always means what we today understand as *slängpolska*. Other names for polska on the spot are *bleking* or *blekpolska*, where *bleke* means windless, or calm and may indicate that the dancers do not move forwards in the room; and *korspolska* (cross polska) from a motif in the dance where the dancers jump up and cross their legs or possibly from arms being held crosswise when rotating around on the spot. The name *trinnpolska*, mainly recorded in the west of Sweden, might possibly be derived from one of the Norwegian words for step, *trinn*. *Fyrrpolska* (four polska) is a version of *slängpolska* where two couples dance together. *Dansa fyra* (dance four) is another *slängpolska* for four people.

In some dance names used for ways of dancing in which the dance technique is either one, or the other, of the two polska forms, and which are danced to polska music, the word polska does not even figure. *Springdans* indicates that the music is often played at a high tempo, as is *springlek* – most commonly occurring in records from western Sweden. The suffix *-lek* is an old word meaning music, dance and pleasure, in a broad sense. *Runtenom* and *svingedans* are names common in the province of Skåne, probably referring to the endless spinning or twirling. *Snurrandet* (spinning/twirling) is included in names such as *Snurrebock*, where the part *bock* (bow) refers to a motif, included in all the recorded versions, with the dancers bowing to each other.

Hamburska and *hambosk* are names with a likely link to the German city of Hamburg.¹¹⁰ The historical connection with Germany is obvious (cf *hambo* below). As to the mazurka, so popular in the 1800s, it is the Polish region of Mazuria that gave this dance-wise close relative of the polska its name.

Trinning, *trinna*, *trinddans* are all linked to the Norwegian word for step, *trinn* (cf *trinnpolska* above). The same way of dancing is also called *kringellek*, where *lek* is combined with *kringel* which may be associated with the twirling. *Norske* is another dance name which, like *trinn*, suggests a connection with Norway. What is uncertain, however, is how people danced to this music.¹¹¹ A dance name such as *travare*, recorded in the county of Närke, probably refers to a dance that grinds on, trots on, in a similar fashion as the *slängpolska*. The name *birenbomska*, which may refer to a barmaid, is recorded in the province of Skåne as a variant of the *rundpolska*.

There are dance names used for ways of dancing which are polska, but where the music is not the typical music in triple metre. The dances are not perceived as polskas by today's dancers, possibly because the music is played in duple metre. From a technical view of dance, it is a *rundpolska* but with the even rhythm/pulse/beat the rhythmic experience becomes different,

and the combination of dance and music is therefore not experienced as polska. *Slunga* usually indicates dancing to a relatively high tempo, with the three-part step of the polska condensed and danced on one beat of the duple time music. When dancing *köra*, the three-part polska step is instead trodden on three beats in the duple metre music, which means treading across the bar lines. The Danish *sönderhoning* is the same dance as *köra*.

There are also dances which are called polska, but where neither the dance nor the music is anything like polska. Even though the name is polska, few of today's dancers recognise these dances as polskas. Explaining these names is not a simple task. A possible reason may be that polska dancing was so popular for a long period in history that polska quite simply became a synonym for "couple dancing".¹¹² Besides the on spot polska, *slängpolska* has been used as the name of a waltz variant, and *Tyska polska* (German polska) is a schottische, whereas *Ryska polskan* and *ryssapolska* (Russian polska) are more like *engelska*, a genre of group or set dances. According to the Danish dance researcher, Bill Reynolds, *rysk* and *ryssa* are 'Danifications' (and 'Swedifications') of the German word *rutschen* meaning slide, glide, crash down.¹¹³ Tunes with names such as *brännvinspolska* are closer to *engelska* in musical form. We do not know whether they were used for polska dancing, but it is definitely possible to dance polska to both duple and quadruple time.

Hambo is probably the best-known dance in Sweden which is related to the polska. The music is similar to the polska while the dance can be seen as a variant of the mazurka; or rather, a turn of the nineteenth-century fashionable mazurka, which later came to be used as a dance in its own right.¹¹⁴

Finally, there are dances which are neither called polska, nor which, technically speaking, are a polska dance form, but which are danced to polska music. Such dances are perceived by the majority of dancers as separate dance forms. The question then arises of when one form becomes a different form. Historically these dances are difficult to differentiate from the polska. On the other hand, what is technically a waltz, polka or schottische, may be perceived as polska dance if the music is polska – even though technically and analytically they are not polskas.¹¹⁵ Gubbstöt, for example, is danced polka to polska music.

Bakmes is a special way of dancing which is often combined with polska. The dancers see the name *bakmes* as a distortion of *bakleds* or *bakmeds* (backward/s). According to Mats Rehnberg, *bakmes* is "polska counterclockwise".¹¹⁶ One variant of *bakmes* is called *gammalvänster* (literally, "old left"). The way I see it, *bakmes* is more of a separate dance form than a backwards polska, because

Analytical dance form	Analytical music form	Name of music	Name of dance
Polska on spot Slängpolska -----	Even polskas triple metre, semiquavers	Bleking Polska Polonäs Slängpolska	Bleking Blekpolska Fyrpolska Korspolska Polska Slängpolska Travare
Trinnpolska	Uneven polskas triple metre, quavers/triplets	Polska Trinning Kringellek	Fläckpolska Kringellek Polska Polska på fläck Trinna Trinning Trinnpolska

Included in the table is the dance name polska whatever is being danced/played and what technically is a polska dance – whatever it is called, as well as dances to polska music whatever they have for technical dance form. Not included, however, are dance names which refer to dances which technically-speaking are waltzes, schottisches, polkas, and so on.

Waltz	Waltz triple metre	Waltz	Slängpolska
Schottische	Schottische quadruple metre	Schottische	Tyska polskan
Engelska	Engelska quadruple metre	Brännvinspolska Engelska	Polska (Finland) Ryska polskan Ryssapolska
Polka	Polska triple metre	Mazurka Polska	Gubbstöt

VI

A Popular Cultural Manifestation in the 2000s

THE POLSKA HAS a long history, which is dealt with in chapter five. Moreover, in chapters II and III, I show that polska dancing is a strong and living tradition in Sweden and in chapter IV, I discuss the way polska is danced today. Despite its long and convoluted history, the polska in the early twenty-first century, is an active and popular dance form.

Polska dancing in contemporary Sweden is a subculture with several parallel subdivision. A number of distinct groupings exist side by side and they are distinguished by differences in their approach to dance and music in general and in their way of dancing, of playing and in their dress and style. The various groupings of polska dancers meet primarily within their own domains, although, to some extent, these groupings, as cultural subdivisions, tend to overlap.¹⁷ Some people move between the cultural subdivisions, which I have identified in this study, although the majority belong to one or the other of these groups.

To begin with, it is possible to discern some general differences between the polska dancers of the folk music world and the polska dancers of the associations. Most of the “folk music people” do not regard polska dancing as some historical relic or as a museological activity, but as a youthful enthusiastic form of dancing and music-making in the present day. This particular subdivision of polska dancing can be seen as a popular youth culture, parallel to any other manifestation of popular culture, such as hip-hop and metal music. The domains of the “folk music people” are folk music festivals, fiddlers gatherings (*spelmansstämmor*) and dance halls (*danshus*), but also private music and dance events.

The second large cultural subdivision of the polska world is made up of people, often a bit older than the former group, who dance mainly within the framework of folk dance associations. In such contexts there is a degree

of museological dancing, an emblematic collecting of dances. The most important domains for this group are polska associations (*polskeföreningar*) and the polska dance medal competitions (Polskmärkesuppdansningarna). The historicising and heritage-minded dancers are largely to be found among association dancers. Associations and courses also provide greater sense of security and order than the former group's less structured polska dance and folk music events.

A third slightly smaller subdivision, which does not strictly belong to either of the previous ones, considers polska dancing as part of world dance and world music. This "world culture" is, despite much similarity between the world's cultures, a kind of nurturing of differences between various forms of dance, music, dress and language. These somewhat younger polska dancers can be found at various courses and in smaller groupings who, for instance, would like to turn the polska into a staged art form.

Dancers within these three cultural subdivisions all regard the polska as a form of dance and music in the present with links stretching back in time, links which are often expressed in terms of folk dance or *folklig dans*, (literally, "folkish" or "popular" dance, see below.)

Folk Dance, *Folklig Dans* and Popular Dance

Concepts such as "folk dance", "folklig dans" and "gammaldans", as well as, "modern dance" and "popular dance", have more to do with the circumstances or contexts in which they are danced, and less to do with what dances are being danced. The same thing can be said of the slightly newer but nonetheless problematic term "world dance", which includes, for example, tango, salsa, flamenco, as well as, "African" and "oriental" dance, and sometimes even polska. What is most common today, however, is that dancers and researchers alike regard the polska either as a folk dance in the broader sense of the word, or, as a popular dance (*folklig dans*) from the 1800s. It is possible to argue that it is a popular dance also in the twenty-first century, although dancers do not use that term themselves.

With the term "popular dance" I refer to the dance forms that are danced by the category of people who do most of the dancing, that is, the young, in every time period, who dance for enjoyment. Today, in the twenty-first century, it is the young people who dominate the dancing scene, just as it was in peasant societies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The two main forms of the polska – dancing in waltz direction round the room, and

dancing on spot, in one place – were probably the couple dances that were predominant in the pre-industrial society. Today though, polska dancing is a small, somewhat exclusive, popular subculture, in parallel with a large number of other subcultural forms of music and dance.

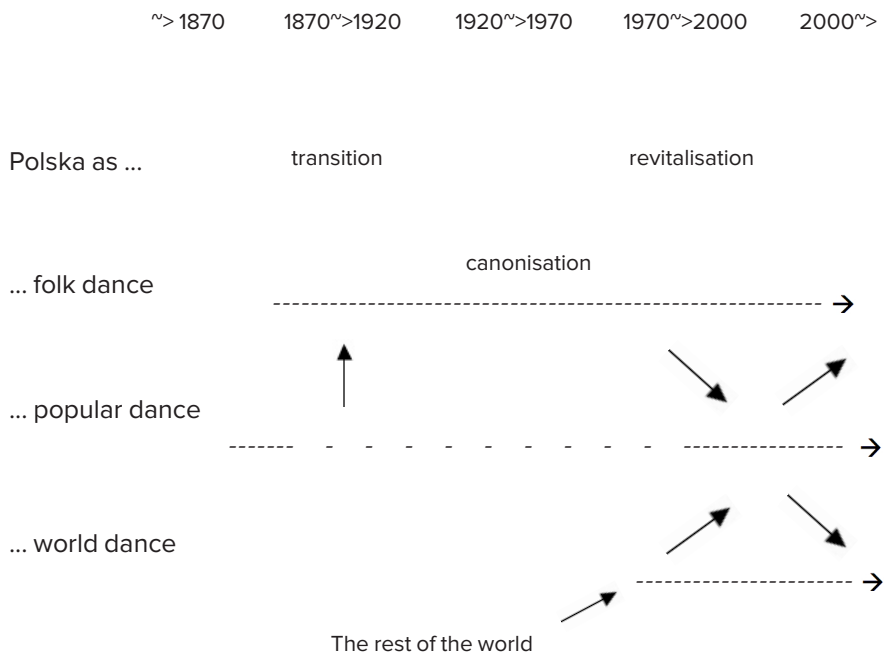
The term *folklig dans* is used by Ernst Klein in the title of his article “Folkdans och folklig dans” from 1927.¹¹⁸ The reason behind his choice of the concept *folklig dans* was that he saw clear differences between what was being danced as folk dances by folk dance groups (*folkdanslag*), and what he saw people actually dance for their own enjoyment during his field work. *Folklig dans* is thereby similar to the English term “popular dancing” and refers to the kind of dancing that has always been going on, regardless of when, where and what is being danced. Nowadays the term *folklig dans* is used within the folk dance movement rather as an umbrella concept for a group of couple dances in which the polska is also included. In this context, the genre *folklig dans* is placed alongside other genres, such as folk dances (quadrilles etc.) and *gammaldans* (strictly structured couple dances). In my opinion, all of these three genres are to do with strictly structured dances and dance contexts, that is, association dancing, and to some degree, dancing in all three cases correspond to Klein’s definition of folk dance. Personally, I prefer to use the term *folklig dans* in Klein’s sense of the word, by using its English translation “popular dancing” to refer to less strict dancing, primarily for enjoyment. In my view, *folklig dans* and popular dance, thus become more or less synonymous.

At some point between 1880 and 1920, Swedes changed their cultural direction regarding music and dance. During this time, impulses and searches for the newest thing gradually found new routes. The ethnologist Alf Arvidsson sees a paradigm shift in the music around the year 1920 because of the great changes in instruments, repertoire and country of origin, which seems to be consistent with dancing as well.¹¹⁹ Before 1920 most new trends, by far, came from or via Europe, mainly Germany and Great Britain; after 1920 it was America and above all the USA that became ever more important as the metropolis of all things new. The exact years for this change of focus may be disputed, but, it is around this time period where most changes in music and dance happened. What was popular before 1920 is often called folk dance and folk music, what became popular after 1920 was jazz and modern dance and music. The *gammaldans* repertoire, which contains dances popular mainly from ca 1850 to ca 1950, overlaps these periods, and were initially danced in parallel with the folk dances, then later alongside jazz and foxtrot.¹²⁰

When it comes to the most modern trends in dancing and the most up-to-date dance contexts in the twenty-first century, it is harder to categorise, and gather dance practices under one single concept. Short of something better, I choose to look at these practices as our contemporary popular dance. I have failed to find a good terminology for these practices. Maybe, we can talk about young “pop-cultural dancing”.¹²¹ This would make it a contemporary popular dance and, if that is the case, we are talking about techno, disco, and similar dances practised at discotheques, raves, and clubs. This means that “pop-cultural dance” can be considered the ‘*folklik dans*’, or popular dance, of the late 1900s and early 2000s, and in other words, a functional continuation of the polska, waltz, and foxtrot dancing of the 1800s and early 1900s.

Folk dance as a concept was created and came into use in the early 1800s¹²² and was used by the gentry, and high society, to refer to the dance and dances of “the others”, that is, the ordinary people of their own country. Before about 1800 the difference between the dances of the elite and the people was not as pronounced and clear. The same dances were danced but in different contexts – the gentry in their salons and ballrooms, the people in their cottages, on bridges, piers and at crossroads. In the latter half of the nineteenth century ordinary people kept dancing their dances, and from time to time the bourgeoisie brought these “folk dances” to the stage as entertainment. Today, most people use the term folk dance (*folkdans*) to indicate the dancing and repertoires of folk dance groups (*folkdanslag*), and similar associations.

The term “world dance” is nowadays mainly used for dance forms originating from areas beyond Europe. Whereas, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, folk dance was a term for the dances of “the others”, in the sense of the lower classes in a country, today, the term “world dance” is used for dances of “the others”, in the sense of dancing by other “peoples”, in other parts of the world, as seen through “Swedish”, “European”, or maybe “American” eyes. Dance forms, which are regularly included under this heading in Sweden today, are, for example, Egyptian dance, West African dance, Argentinean tango, Spanish flamenco, and Indian *bharatanatyam*. The nearest Swedish or Scandinavian contribution to world dance and world music is the polska.



(Polska) Dancing through the Centuries

As a dance, the polska never disappeared completely, and even less so as music. Although, it can be said to have survived in different ways as folk dance and popular dance in Sweden. As a popular *folklig dans* it has survived the longest in Boda, in the province of Dalarna¹²³, and as a folk dance within the folk dance associations.¹²⁴ Similar examples of *folklig dans* with links stretching way back in history are found in Røros, Norway¹²⁵ and Fanö, Denmark.¹²⁶ In Finland the polska has survived into our time and then typically alongside the minuet. In the 1990s the polska began to regain its status as a popular dance in Sweden, not least at folk music festivals and in dance halls. However the concepts are defined, the polska traditions, as dance and music, go back a long way in Sweden and the Nordic area – something which several of the dancers point out. From the seventeenth century until the end of the nineteenth century and in some places into the twentieth century, the polska was, by all accounts, a very popular and frequently occurring dance, which is approximately the

sense I lend to the term *folklig dans* and popular dance. After about 1920 the polska turned into more of a folk dance, that is, a dance which was danced within the folk dance movements, and which later after its revitalisation in the 1970s developed into a pop-cultural *folklig dans* again in the 1990s.

The polska is definitely related to other dances, both in form, sentiment and function. As to experiences and emotions, polska dancing can be compared to dancing the foxtrot, tango, flamenco, salsa, swing or similar forms of couple dances from various parts of the world. But even disco and other modern and postmodern dances can provide the same dance experiences and feelings of flow. As far as the type of music and the form of dance are concerned, the closest relatives are to be found in mazurka, hambo, minuet and waltz. As to the form, but not always to the music, there is also an affinity with such dances as Hungarian czardas, certain variants of schottische, polka and breakdance. The polska is, and has probably always been, primarily a couple dance, and is perceived as such by dancers, despite the fact that such clear definitions are often difficult to make. For example, the couple also plays an important role in group dances, such as quadrille and *engelska*, where many couples dance together. There are, at times, also couple motifs in some early circle dances, or solo dances, and in more modern dances as danced in discotheques or clubs. Disco, hip hop and breakdance are essentially not that different from polska or other dance forms, when they are danced by young people for the sake of enjoyment.

It is hard to argue against there being something very special about the polska music. The music has its own blend of general musical elements, which make it if not unique, at least quite special. Not only the musicians and musicologists but also the polska dancers themselves, as well as dictionary definitions refer throughout to the beat and the rhythm as being the main characteristics of the polska. Dance researchers and musicologists also agree on the importance of the triple metre and the specific rhythm for the polska as a dance form.¹²⁷ Music in duple or quadruple metre is hardly ever referred to as polska by contemporary Swedish polska dancers – even if danced as polska technically speaking. Rather, it is the triple metre and the specific rhythm, which are crucial for the dancers.

Everything points to the fact that it is, and has over time, been the young who, by far, do most of the dancing in Sweden as in the rest of Europe - at least if we think of dance in its entirety and include all kinds of dances. In the pre-industrial peasant society, the period of youth used to last from confirmation up to marriage. Nowadays our concept of youth is slightly

different; yet it is young people from the high school level, up to the time they establish themselves with families, who dominate the dance floors. In the past, older people used to dance on special family occasions but not very often in between. Now, in the twenty-first century, there are special dance venues for pensioners and senior citizens (*seniordanser*), something that caught on in the late 1900s.¹²⁸ Dancing retirees probably formed the fastest growing group of dancers at that time. Another group that danced considerably less frequently in the old society is what we now refer to as people in their middle age. *Mogendans*, “mature dance”, the current expression for dance events aimed at the middle-aged, is still relatively common in Sweden even though this genre reached its peak during the 1980s. In the 1990s and 2000s, more exotic dance forms from around the world have been on the increase, and become popular among dancers in contemporary Sweden.¹²⁹ The majority of dancers in many of these contexts are middle-aged women and the dancing usually takes place at courses, or in clubs and associations.



From the northern barn at Ransäter 1997. The fiddlers' gathering at Ransäter has, ever since its beginning in 1971, been one of the highlights for polska dancers and musicians. Photo: Mats Nilsson.

The return of Polska Dancing

Through the centuries, the polska has been danced, changed and influenced by other dance forms, not least by such popular nineteenth-century dance forms as waltz and polka. It is also a pop-cultural dance in the sense that it is possible to find a few basic themes with a great number of variations. Good and exciting dance music is also an important part of popular dancing. At the end of the twentieth century there was an increasing number of young well-educated musicians who could, and wanted to, play for polska dancing and that provided the crucial pre-requisite for turning polska dancing into a popular dance form again. All pop-cultural dance, including polska, is basically made up of simple dance forms, danced to exciting music, provided by good musicians. Of course there are basic rules and polska-specific movements, but they are not particularly complicated. The dancers walk and circle around each other, spin and turn in couples to music in a specific triple metre rhythm, played by like-minded people who, with the help of music and dance, try to achieve flow.

Is the polska really the same dance in 2009 as in 1650? That depends, of course, on what we mean by “the same”. On the one hand the name, the most important movements, and main characteristics of the music, have been in existence since the seventeenth century and are still present in 2009. On the other hand, it is not the same dance, in the sense that it would be performed in the same way today as 400 years ago, or, that it looks the same; that would not be possible. A great number of the preconditions for how a dance is performed have changed. Floors, music, musical instruments, physical work, dress, eating habits, drinks, ventilation, gender relations, and more, have changed and influenced the way the polska is executed. The style, the entire look of the dance and its movements are affected by being connected to everything else in the here and now. The fiddler (*spelman*) Røjås Jonas experienced three epochs of polska dancing in his own lifetime in the early and mid-1900s. He remembers how rough floors and heavy boots with metal heel caps produced a vigorous polska in the 1930s. Later there followed a period with dance entertainment for tourists at the Persberg Hotel in Leksand, where the dancing took place on a parquet floor which was smooth and slippery. People danced in leather shoes with thin soles, but more as entertainment for tourists. According to Røjås Jonas, it was:

...no longer a matter of raving and ranting, drinking and dancing and having fun - people danced for the sake of doing something beautiful for someone to watch. It suddenly became a show.

After the period of paying tourists at the Persberg Hotel came another period...

...and then again it was no longer a question of a show, but of dancing and enjoying yourself. But a little bit of the show epoch was still there, had affected the dance, there was still a little left of the graceful, a little of the ceremonial, but it was now once again a matter of enjoying yourself... /-/So the polska then became a little more vigorous again, although there was still a little left of that elegance due to the floors having become smoother, even in barns and places where there was dancing. And people were still wearing leather shoes, no metal heel caps. (Röjås Jonas in Charters 1979: 113)

Röjås Jonas's account demonstrates how a dance is changed due to the contexts and the circumstances in which it is danced. We can ask ourselves yet again whether it is the same, or a different polska which was danced during the three epochs that Röjås mentions. The answer is both yes, and no. The rotations and promenades are the same but there are three different ways of executing them. What Röjås experiences is that the coarse dancing for enjoyment was becoming polished and changed when done for a show, but partly reverting when the polska became a dance for pure enjoyment again. Similarly, a cultural manifestation which is alive and in use is more or less changed as it passes on to new generations. Otherwise a way of dancing dies out and a cultural manifestation disappears because it is not being passed on. One example in contrast to the polska in Boda is the way of dancing called *segla* (literally, sailing) which I documented together with mazarurka in Gothenburg in the early 1980s. Now nearly 30 years later, *segla* is practically extinct. A variation which the dancers call *Seglarvals* (Sailing waltz) exists, but it lacks some of the characteristics of *segla*. A similar mazarurka version is danced as *Göteborgsmazarurka* in some *gammaldans* associations.¹³⁰

As mentioned earlier, the polska is danced today both within the organised folk dance movement and in pop-cultural contexts. By far the greatest number of dancers today – within, as well as outside, the folk dance associations – regard the polska as a form of folk dance. The reason why some dancers are hesitant as to whether polska is a folk dance or not, is because to them, folk

dance has come to mean certain dances, such as quadrilles and other group dances, or rather the context where those are commonly danced, that is, in folk dance groups. Instead of folk dance, the term “folk dance group dances” (*folkdanslagsdanser*) is sometimes used about this repertoire. Alternatively, polskas, and a few other couple dances, are placed in the category “rural dances” (*bygdedanser*), or *folklig dans*, which undoubtedly complicates definitions, and creates new, less distinct genres. The reason for this separation is, that the older polska dancers wish to separate the polska from the basic folk dance group repertoire. Some younger dancers on the other hand see no point in differentiating between folk dance and *folklig dans*, but view it as one and the same category of dance with roots in a pre-industrial Sweden. Folk dance, and even more so *folklig dans* become, for most people, fluid concepts that, at times, are difficult to keep apart – as both *folklig dans* and folk dance refer to dances with roots in the nineteenth-century peasant society.

The polska has moved from being a popular, *folklig*, couple dance from the seventeenth up to the nineteenth century, to again become a popular dance in the twenty-first century, and, potentially, a Swedish “world dance”. In between, it has survived partly as a folk dance, danced within the folk dance associations, and partly as a narrow strain of popular dance, with links back to the time before 1920. In Sweden, it is probably the variant usually named *polska from Boda* that has survived the longest in an unbroken tradition, and which is still being danced as *folklig dans*.

Polska dancing has, in other words, never really stopped, or disappeared, although the link has sometimes worn thin. Between the first traces of a couple dance named polska in the seventeenth century, and the polska dancing of the folk music gatherings and festivals in the twenty-first century, nearly 400 years have passed. During that time the polska has moved from having been an extremely common popular dance – up until the mid-1800s – to becoming a rarity and oddity until the mid-1900s. It was then that a small group within the folk dance movement became interested in polska dancing again and that interest in turn was the starting-point for the 1970s revival. This revival was in turn a precondition for a polska renaissance and revitalisation, providing the shift back to popular dance that the polska underwent in the 2000s. The polska is once again alive and vibrant, and two forms of polska dancing – in waltz direction, round the room, and on spot, in one place – are flourishing as the young (of all ages...) take to the floor accompanied by exciting live music.



The Folk Music Café at Allégården in Gothenburg is one of the venues where the polska was revived in the 1970s, and where polska dancing still goes on 30 years later, 2003. Photo: Mats Nilsson.

VII

Dance Ethnology – Studying an Expressive Cultural Manifestation

WHY DO I use the term dance ethnology (*dansetnologi*) for a field in which I am active, and not dance anthropology or ethnochoreology, which are likely to be more prevalent internationally? My empirical field is dance and my academic milieu is within ethnology and folklore. Does that make me an ethnologist, a dance ethnologist, a dance researcher or maybe a dance scholar? The answers to such questions are seldom simple but an attempt at explanation might look like this:

It is misleading to assume that dance is a universal language, as many have done in the past. Except on a most superficial level, dance cannot be understood (that is, communicated) cross-culturally unless individual dance traditions are understood in terms of the culture in which each tradition is embedded. (Kaepler 1992:197)

The anthropologist Adrienne Kaepler considers dance as culturally structured body movements, which has become one of my own starting points.¹³¹ That then makes dance ethnology into the study of dance as human bodies and movements, as physical encounters between people but also as mindful meetings between dancing individuals. It is after all not only bodies that meet in the dancing but also the dancers' inner feelings and thoughts.

Linked to the physical movements that we call dance are often, though not always, corresponding “culturally organised sounds”, in other words, music. Nearly all of us have an opinion about what is good or bad dance music. What is not to be taken for granted, however, is that the relationship between movement and sound, that is, between dance and music, is the same in all cultures. We must instead examine the potential link between

dance and music empirically before making statements about what it is like. Provided there is a link.¹³²

The anthropologist Drid Williams titles one of her books *The Anthropology and the Dance*¹³³, as opposed to her colleague, Anya Peterson Royces, who uses *The Anthropology of Dance*.¹³⁴ Royces's title is more conventional and suggests that there is such a phenomenon as special dance anthropology. Williams on the other hand wants to emphasise the anthropology in her work, that as an anthropologist she studies dance and nothing else. There is no special dance anthropology, nor any special anthropology of dance, according to Williams. What she does promote, however, is "anthropology of movement", that is, a wider field where dance is only one part. Like many others in the field, Williams also maintains that anthropology is a way of thinking and not a study of anything in particular.¹³⁵ My own relationship to ethnology is similar. But in addition to being a way of thinking, ethnology is also a way of working, a way of seeing, of looking at, and taking part in the culture of which I myself am a part. Or, as it is often defined in current discourse, ethnology is a way of "reading" culture and cultural manifestations in one's own surroundings – and that is what I do in this book. I "read" polska dancing, through my ethnological glasses, and wearing my dance shoes. Would it have been different had I worn anthropological glasses? Yes, I believe so, but it is difficult to say exactly how the difference would have manifested itself. Besides the ethnological glasses, I do in fact have a pair of folkloristic ones, as it is within the Swedish ethnological sub-field of folklore that I move most frequently. This may be where I reconnect with anthropology, as, in for example the USA, folklore studies are often combined with anthropology. Nonetheless, it is as a Swedish ethnologist/folklorist that I study dance, and therefore I use "dance ethnology" (*dansetnologi*) to describe what I do, as neither "the ethnology and dance" (*etnologin och dansen*) nor "ethnology of dance" (*etnologi om dans*) sound particularly good in Swedish.

Swedish ethnology and folklore are not my only link with the world of dance research. Impressions and ideas to do with dance research have also come my way from ethnomusicologists and from my involvement with the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM). It is principally as a member of the Study Group on Ethnochoreology within ICTM that I cultivate my international contacts and extend my knowledge. Not least has the work in the Sub Study Group on Structural Analysis, resulting in the book *Dance Structures, Perspectives on the Analysis of Human Movement*, 2007,¹³⁶ widened

my views regarding dance analysis. In another working group, the Sub Study Group on Round Dances, we discuss and compare couple dances of the 1800s, the way they are danced today as well as the way they were described in the 19th century.

The work within Nordisk förening för folkdansforskning (Nordic Association for Folk Dance Research), where I am an active member, resulted in the book *Norden i Dans, Folk-Fag-Forskning* (The Nordic Area in Dance – People, Dance, Research).¹³⁷ The conferences arranged by Nordiskt forum för dansforskning (Nordic forum for dance research, NOFOD), have resulted in contacts with dance researchers in other subjects and disciplines, such as anthropology and dance studies. All this has stimulated my thinking about dance, and blended with my educational background, with discussions with friends, colleagues and students, and my own dance experiences.

International and Nordic collaborations are important for a small subject such as dance research. Dance and dance music do not occupy a large niche in Swedish ethnology, anthropology or musicology.¹³⁸ However, in addition to a number of C and D theses¹³⁹ – equivalent to bachelor-, and master degree theses – a few books with broad focus on popular dancing, *folklig dans*, and other related entertainment dances, were nevertheless written in the 1990s and 2000s. In ethnologist Alf Arvidsson's *Sågarnas sång* (*The song of the Saw-Mills*) (1991) and *Från dansmusik till konstnärligt uttryck* (*From Dance Music to Artistic Expression*) (2002) dancing for pleasure is included as a part of the use of music. Owe Ronström's *Att gestalta ett ursprung* (*Giving form to an origin*) (1992) deals with emigrants from the former Yugoslavia, who continue to use "their" dance and music in Sweden. Ronström's *Russindisco och seniordans* (*"Raisin Disco" and Senior Dance*) (1997) describes the dancing of retirees. In Jonas Frykman's *Dansbaneeländet* (*The Dance Pavilion Misery*) (1988) and partly in Berit Wigerfeldt's *Ungdom i nya kläder* (*Youth in New Clothing*) (1996) the theme is young people's dancing in the 1930s and 1940s. Other ethnologists who touch on dancing in their texts are Johan Wennhall in *Från djäkne till swingpjatt* (*From School Boy to Jazz Swinger*) (1994) and Kerstin Gunnemark in *Ung på 50-talet* (*Young in the '50s*) (2006). In *Dansens och tidens viivlar* (*The Whirls of Time and Dance*) (2004) the historian Eva Helene Ulvros gives an insight into different dance milieus during different epochs in Sweden. In *Moderna människor* (*Modern People*) (2004), by the musicologist and media researcher Johan Fornäs, dancing is an inevitable phenomenon.¹⁴⁰ There are also texts where the private and personal dance experience is the very starting point. The literary academic Birgitta Holm writes, for example, about her

falling in love with the couple dance (2004) and the author, Kerstin Thorvall, (2002) about her great and problematic need for dancing.

In the 2000s a number of books were published with a nostalgic undertone of dance pavilions, public amusements parks and the visitors and artistes who frequented them in the second half of the 1900s. Eva Dahlström's *Det var dans i Folkets park...* (*There was Dancing at the People's Park...*) (2004), Bengt Edberg's *Det var dans bort vid vägen* (*There was Dancing by the Roadside*) (2003) and Staffan Bengtsson's and Göran Willis's *Hela Svenska Folkets Park* (*The Entire Swedish People's Park*) (2005) are some of them. Gunnar Danielsson's *Dansbanor i långa banor* (*Dance Pavilions by the Dozen*) (1994) is of a somewhat older date. One of the more recent is *Dansminnen, moderna möten och magiska kvällar* (*Dance Recollections, Modern Encounters and Magical Evenings*) (2008). It is not only in books, but also in films and documentaries that dance band music and dance pavilions are highlighted and romanticised. In the spring of 2008, Swedish television showed, for example, the documentary film *Får jag lov – till sista dansen?* (*May I have the Pleasure - of the Last Dance?*), which deals with the dying culture of the Swedish dance band.

In addition to the researchers referred to in this text – albeit not always explicitly – the British social historian Peter Burke's books *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (1984)¹⁴¹ and *History and Social Theory* (1994)¹⁴² have been greatly inspiring, as have the French anthropologist and cultural sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's thoughts on fields, capital, habitus and distinction.¹⁴³ Media researcher John Fiske's reasoning on the user perspective with regards to media culture has influenced my way of looking at similarities and differences between popular culture and folk culture.¹⁴⁴ Finally, an ethnomusicological text which could have been added to this list, although I do not refer to it directly, is Mark Slobin's enduring book, *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West* (1993).

Researcher and Dancer – One and the Same Person

My perspective on dance derives very much from my background in ethnology and folklore studies.¹⁴⁵ In addition to working as a dance teacher, my professional background also includes journalist, lorry and train driver, lock-keeper, and a few other bits and pieces.. All the experience and knowledge I acquired in those jobs, as well as all the ones picked up in ordinary everyday life, have become part of the dance researcher Mats Nilsson.¹⁴⁶

It has become important for me to differentiate between three pairs of



The researcher and dancer – one and the same person. Gothenburg 2008.
Photo: Bengt Nilsson.

concepts: insider-outsider,¹⁴⁷ from the inside—from the outside, and emic-etic. I am an insider, alternating between looking at dance from the inside and from the outside, but my perspective is emic, I want to understand dance from the dancers' perspective, even though the conventions of academic research often forces me to make etic statements as well. Therefore, this text – that is, the written text in this book – contains, despite my desire to bring out the polska dancers' views and understandings of the polska, first and foremost, my own interpretations, explanations, and opinions about the phenomenon of polska dancing. Ultimately, it is only within quotation marks that the dancers themselves have their say.

In my own polska dancing life, I have moved from being an insider, solely a participating dancer, to becoming a consciously observing participant oscillating between the “absolute” participation (emic) and the analytical distance (etic). A question, however, is when I might become, if I ever can become, a complete outsider. My life in dance and not least in the polska dancing world as a dancer, teacher and commentator, stretches back over more than 40 years. Does that mean I can be anything but an insider? Yes, it would seem so, at least up to a point. Since the first years of the twenty-first century, and particularly after 2006, I have become less active as a dancer, and it is obvious that things occur of which I have no previous knowledge. New contacts are made, new activities emerge and old ones disappear. New, young musicians appear, as do new networks and informal dance and music contexts to which I do not automatically have access. This development surely makes me more of an outsider?

I am a “fully participating observer” but even more of a “native” starting to explore his own world than a researcher who risks “going native”.¹⁴⁸ Sociologist, Erling Bjurström's thoughts on a hermeneutic ethnography, a continuous ongoing interpretation of the fieldwork process, appeals to me. Furthermore, Bjurström's argument that ethnographic fieldwork is a constant balancing act between “on the one hand, empathetically placing oneself into the lived culture of people, and on the other, seeing through it”¹⁴⁹, becomes quite a challenge. The risk is a loss of perspective, not knowing, or being able to account for whether it is the others or myself I am exploring. It may possibly become unclear who it is I am really studying. One approach is to alternate between looking at polska dancing first from the inside, as a mere participant, and then shift perspective to consider the same dancing as an observer from the outside.

Emic and etic are a particularly complicated pair of concepts.¹⁵⁰ If insid-

er-outsider has to do with me as a person, my understanding, my familiarity with the group and environment, and “from the inside-from the outside” is about where I find myself mentally in my observation of the dancing, emic-etic has to do with what scholarly perspective I use as my analytical filter. It is, to some degree, close to “from the inside-from the outside”, although this relates more to an intended placement. However, emic-etic has more to do with how I think and relate to the dance, than where I am. Emic-etic is more exclusive than insider-outsider and “from the inside-from the outside”. Insider-outsider is more of a continuum, whereas emic-etic is more like either/or.

My academic deliberation has clearly influenced my way of teaching dance, as well as my own dancing. Dance variants fuse these days when I dance and I dare take liberties and mix dance movements in a totally different way from before I started to reflect on dance more generally. Nowadays I “know” that the dance variants are in fact open and possible to improvise upon, that they do not need to be closed and limited to the recorded forms or the dance instructors’ versions. At the same time my teaching of dance and my own dancing has affected my scholarly thinking. Dancing has demonstrated that neither theories nor interpretations are fixed when they are put to the test and exposed to the movements of the body.

As a result, I see my research as explorations *into dance* just as much as explorations *about dance*.¹⁵¹ It might also be research *as dance*, as choreography with turns and steps in various directions and tempi that I am dealing with.¹⁵² Be that as it may, I am myself part of my research area and everything that happens becomes a two-way affair where ideas move between thinking and doing. My dance experience influences my research and scholarship, while knowledge generated through research influences my dancing.¹⁵³ This is nothing unique to me. In his dissertation on minuet dancing in Finland, my Finnish colleague, Petri Hoppu, writes:

As I regard the body as the basis of society, I also see my own body as the centre of my work. My thoughts, theories and analyses are based on my bodily experience. I call my methodological basis ‘the hermeneutics of the body’. The body is the ultimate source of interpreting and understanding because of its spaciality and temporality. Furthermore, this does not mean only observing but also participation. Because my own dancing has been a very important element of my research, I have interpreted my material partly through my own body. Of course, this does not mean that the

dance could be understood without referring to their (sic) context but, when doing research by dancing as well, one must always take into account the social context. (Hoppu 1999:14)

For me, dance ethnology is to use qualitative methods¹⁵⁴ in a scholarly investigation of all conceivable aspects of the field of dance, while including one or several of the eternal questions of who, what, how, when, where, and why, focusing on dance and dancing. Who dances what and why? Who claims what and why about dance and dancing? Who dances when, and how? We can pose almost any questions as long as dance is included as a significant part.

Dance is, in fact, similar to any other expressive cultural manifestation – but with a few differences.¹⁵⁵ Dance has to do with body and movements and not with sound, or spoken or written language, which are often regarded as the most important media for expressive culture. Movements, including dance, are a parallel communicative system to sound as spoken language and music, as well as to material symbols of various kinds. What I promote is an independent dance ethnology, a parallel to, what has come to be called, ethnomusicology.¹⁵⁶ Dance may happily be the youngest in the same family of cultural expressions, but not a stepchild of musicology or any other discipline.¹⁵⁷

Folk Culture and Popular Culture

Dance ethnology can pose any questions and formulate any problems for discussion from ethnological perspectives, as long as they are about “dance”, in some sense. But what does an ethnological perspective mean? This is not the right place to discuss ethnology in general, only the occasionally problematic concepts, and phenomena, of “folk”, “popular” and “tradition” in connection with polska dancing.

Polska is a name for two dance forms, alive in the present and with roots stretching far back in time. This makes questions about dance as tradition, how cultural manifestations are passed on, and about continuities and discontinuities interesting. Tradition has basically come to mean “handing down knowledge, passing on a doctrine”, at least in English language texts, according to Raymond Williams. The concept is also, according to him, “in its most general modern sense a particularly difficult word”¹⁵⁸ as it is a “valued” word, not least in theories of modernity, where tradition is negatively loaded, principally in the form, “traditional” ... theorists. For postmodernist

theoreticians, tradition and traditional are opposites of modernity, progress and change.¹⁵⁹ But as the American folklorist Henry Glassie phrases it:

Accept, to begin, that tradition is the creation of the future out of the past /-/ If tradition is a people's creation out of their own past, its character is not stasis but continuity, its opposite is not change but oppression, the intrusion of a power that thwarts the course of development. (Glassie 2003:176-177)

A close, but not too far-fetched, interpretation that I make of Glassie's ideas is that one of the powers opposing tradition, is the work of cultural conservation, preservation, and cultural heritage. Instead of preserving an ongoing change (how?), it is a matter of fixing cultural expressions and forms, both temporally and spatially, as something that is alleged as "is" or "has been".¹⁶⁰ We then get "dead" museum forms of music and dance, not a living cultural manifestation. A living culture changes as it is being practiced and passed on. And it is not only a question of what we learn, or what is passed on to future generations, but also how it is passed on. Learning occurs both formally and informally. With regard to dance, courses and dance schools are considerably more formalised than learning on the dance floor.

Our knowledge of dance is, in addition, both knowledge of a material, the dances per se, and knowledge of how that material can be used and danced, the performance. These become two sides of the same coin: the technical knowledge of the material, *the dances*, is not the same as the knowledge of how the material can be used, *the dancing*. If we preserve the dances as they were, but not the practical and theoretical knowledge of how they can be danced today in new circumstances, the dances will "die".

While looking at museological work and concepts such as cultural conservation and preservation, we also find ourselves close to the concepts of "folk", *folklig* and "popular". These concepts often comprise a time factor, not least when combined with the equally hard-to-define term "culture" and turned into compound concepts such as folk culture, *folklig* culture and popular culture. It is commonplace today to see folk culture as something old and in some sense dead but possibly picturesque whereas popular culture is something new, modern and alive. "Folk" has a sense of the "retrospective", according to Raymond Williams, and is often, he says, placed as the opposite to the "popular".¹⁶¹ Somewhere in between we would then find the Swedish use of the concept *folklig*. This concept of being *folklig* can be found both in

the past and the present whereas folk culture has more to do with the past, and popular culture with the present. Having gone through and summarised various theories on culture and popular culture, media researcher John Storey states:

Finally, what all these definitions have in common is the insistence that whatever else popular culture might be, it is definitely a culture that only emerged following industrialization and urbanization. (Storey 1993:16)

Folk culture thus becomes something that precedes, or rather, is considered separate from, industrialisation and urbanisation, whereas popular culture is evidently linked to the emergence of modern society. A variation on this view is to look at folk culture as the popular culture of the pre-modern society, roughly along the lines of my interpretation of Peter Burke's argument in the book *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*.¹⁶² Forms and media differ but the function in both folk culture and popular culture is to amuse and entertain.

Is polska then a kind of folk culture, *folklig* culture or popular culture? Yes, all three concepts can be used for polska, seen both as dance and music. It is the emergence of modernity that leads to the polska being documented and moves it from being an expression of a *folklig* culture, to becoming folk culture; it is then revitalised in the late-, or postmodern society to become a popular dance once again. From this point, the polska lives on as a born-again pop-cultural manifestation in the postmodern society.

Polska Dance as a Research Field

I consider polska dancing a twenty-first century subculture; a field with several subdivisions. In these fields there are a number of different active operators which can be approached from different angles.¹⁶³ One starting-point would be to begin with the actual cultural expression dance, another to begin with the socio-cultural group who dances, that is to say, the people who dance.¹⁶⁴

If we follow the same trajectory as this book, and begin with dance as a cultural manifestation, it becomes important to separate the dances themselves, or the polska as choreography, from the performance, the dancing, and the execution of the polska in any given context, by asking both, "What is polska, and according to whom?", and "How and by whom is polska done?" Inherent in the question what polska is, there is a technical-practical part as

well as an emotional one. In the question about the “doing”, dance and music are linked. This is also where the dancers create purpose and meaning in their dancing.¹⁶⁵ A third and important aspect is all statements about dance – that is, what is said, written and spoken, about dance – and the question, “Who states what and why about dance?”¹⁶⁶

We can also begin by asking, “By whom and why is polska danced?” This question deals with the people who could be called “doers”¹⁶⁷, and whom I refer to as dancers, polska dancers and musicians in the text. The people who are practically involved in creating polska dance events can be called “makers”. The issues then have to do with the context and the main question becomes, “When and where is polska danced?” Alternatively, we return to tradition, “handing down” and “passing on”, by asking ourselves, “How and why do we learn to dance polska?” Here we approach a discourse on dance which relates to the recurring question, “Who claims what and why about polska?” Even if these “knowers” are often seen as the professional knowers, everybody who is involved knows something and claims something about polska dancing. Makers are those who arrange and create dance and music events, while doers are those who actually dance polska and make polska music. One and the same individual can, of course, take on one, two or all three roles simultaneously. The latter is, however, not very common.



At the extreme ends of the above figure are those active in the polska field: doers, makers and knowers. In bold and capital letters in the middle is the cultural manifestation itself, the subject of the struggle, polska dance. The subgroups – musicians/dancers, volunteers/employees and academics/others – can be found in each of the three main categories of doers, makers

and knowers. However, they carry slightly more importance within certain categories and I have for that reason placed them where they are most significant. It is on dance floors and stages that the polska is created and it is in conversations and various media that different aspects and attitudes converge.

All who make music and dance are doers. Makers ensure that venues appear to make the dancing possible. The dancers are often the makers in the polska world, the ones who create dance occasions. In most cases, dancers are also the makers who arrange, and create, polska dance events. Musicians may be makers of concerts, but less frequently of dance events. Professional knowers today are, in most cases, also doers, which was not the case with the older generation of researchers. On the other hand, knowers are very seldom makers.

Another approach to the field of polska dancing is to look at the field of ethnological study as divided into three main aspects: social categories, cultural manifestations, and culture-producing domains (*arenor*).⁶⁸ This perspective makes it relatively easy to see polska dancers as a social category, the polska as a cultural manifestation, and folk festivals, and dance halls as culture-producing domains.

A more schematic formulation of the various aspects of the field of polska dancing discussed above, produces the following table; and this, is the matrix on which this book – *The Swedish Polska* – is constructed.

Polska dances	Dances per se	The cultural manifestation The choreography. What it is all about, the polska
Polska dancers	Individuals and groups	Doers Those who dance polska and play polska music.
Polska dancing	Arenas and performance	Doers and makers Besides doers, people are needed for arranging and organising dance and music events. It is thanks to the makers that a time and space for dancing is created.
Statements on polska	Discourse and history	Doers, makers and knowers After reading this book we all know something about polska. Although, some of us are also professional knowers, for example, as researchers.

Notes

1 For a more detailed discussion see Nilsson 1990 and 1996.

2 Csíksszentmihályi 1992, 2001 and G Klein (ed) 1990.

3 See more in the list of sources.

4 Cf *Polska. En bok till folkmusik och dansåret 1990* (Polska. A Book for Folk Music and the Year of Dance 1990). 1990:11–13.

5 If we turn to [Swedish] encyclopedias and lexica we find that polska is “a Slav language spoken in Poland”, “a Polish woman” or a “lively couple dance in triple metre” (*Bra böckers lexikon*, Volume 18, 1978). *Svenska Akademiens ordbok* states that there is proof that polska “also polsk, pålsk, på polska (in Polish), på polskt sätt (in a Polish fashion)” (SAOB, columns P1429–P1432, accessed 6 February 2016 from: <http://g3.spraakdata.gu.se/saob/>)

6 “Disco”, in colloquial Swedish may refer to many forms of dancing in a night club setting, not only the iconic 1970s dance style.

7 Historically, the name polska exists for dance variations for two couples, e.g., but they are rarely danced today.

8 See also Nilsson 2007a

9 See list of instruction books under Sources.

10 In particular the periodicals *Folkmusik och dans* (published by Riksförbundet för folkmusik och dans), *Hembygden* (published by Svenska Folkdansringen) and *Spelmannen* (published by Sveriges Spelmäns Riksförbund).

11 Svenska Folkdansringen, in 2007, was comprised of a total of 385 organisations, including around 21,000 members. The other large, nationwide organisation, Riksföreningen för folkmusik och dans (Rfod), had in the same year 120 member organisations which included a total of 15,000 individual members, and approximately 500 more directly connected individual members. Since some members have dual membership as both individuals and in organisations, it is difficult to know the exact total number, but a reasonable estimate of organised folk dancers in Sweden would be 25000–30000. These figures do not include dance groups organised within immigrant associations and the like.

12 See Göran Andersson 2007:533ff on how the standard repertoire was developed.

13 The nick name for the book stems from its green covers and the dances are sometimes called “Green book dances”. First published 1923, new editions 1926, 1933, 1944, 1952, 1964 and 1975.

14 See e.g. Österholm 2006, Skarin 2007.

15 In the research project Music, Media, Multiculture the model “Doers-Knowers-Makers” was presented. The model describes different roles for actors in groupings in which music and

dance have central positions. The “doer” has as his/her prime motive for taking part in the activity simply to make music or to dance. The other significant actor roles are the “knower” and the “maker”. http://carkiv.musikverk.se/www/epublikationer/Lundberg_Malm_Ronstrom_Music_Media_Multiculture.pdf

16 Lundberg, Malm & Ronström 2000.

17 See Hjertberg & Martenius 2005 for more views on *knätofs* as a symbol for folk dance.

18 See M Ramsten 1992 and Polska 1990

19 From 2008 known as, Riksförbundet för folkmusik och dans.

20 From 2007 known as, Svenska Folkdansringen.

21 See Arvidsson 2008.

22 Helmersson 2005a and 2005b.

23 Using an expression by Melucci 1992.

24 *Beskrivning av Svenska Folkdanser del II* (Description of Swedish Folk Dances), where most of the polskas recorded and described in the 1950s and 1960s are included. Sometimes called “Blue book” due to the colour of its cover. Cf “Green book”, *Beskrivning av Svenska Folkdanser*, with a green cover and the “Orange book” (*Bygdedanser från Bohuslän, Dalarna, Gästrikland, Värmland och Västergötland. (Regional Dances from the Counties of Bohuslän, Dalarna, etc.)* 1975, which has an orange cover.

25 The folk music festival of Korrö has ca 5,000 visitors. Popular fiddlers’ gatherings, such as the one at Bingsjö, assemble 10,000 visitors, as does the one at Ransäter (2006).

26 30 years ago I might have been one of those arguing in that way. Over the years I have (I would at least like to think so) due in part to my studies of ethnology, become more and more tolerant and culture relativistic, that is, anybody may be right or wrong, seen from their horizon and from their circumstances.

27 Nilsson 2007a.

28 Concerning dance in the form of polska and salsa, see e.g. Toft 2006.

29 Kaepler 1992:196ff.

30 Although animals also dance. See e.g. the ethologist Per Jensen 2007.

31 See e.g. Planke 2005 on interpretation of old sources in the present day, the importance of sorting the material, in my case regarding dance descriptions and knowledge of how the material can be used to “do” dance from written descriptions.

32 See also Nilsson 1999.

33 Cf Grüner Nielsen 1917:43, 52f.

34 Rehnberg 1943:210.

35 The starting point for many of the terms and concepts used below are based on the work within the *Nordisk förening för folkdansforskning (Nff)* (Nordic Association for Folk Dance Research) and two of their resulting publications: *Gammaldans i Norden* (Old time Dancing in the Nordic Area) 1988 and *Nordisk folkdanstypologi* (Nordic Folk Dance Typology)

1997. My typology does *not* entirely follow Nffs.

36 Cf Nilsson 1990, where I use the term *polska typ I* for *slängpolska* and *polska typ II* for *rundpolska*, because of an assumption that *slängpolska* is older and *rundpolska* is younger. In this book, several years on and my perspective having changed, I choose to call the most common form “polska in waltz direction” and the somewhat less common form “polska on spot”. History has to yield to choreography.

37 Sjöberg 1989:26.

38 *Gammaldans i Norden* (Old Time Dancing in The Nordic Area) 1988:250. Cf also, *Nordisk folkedanstypologi* (Nordic Folk Dance Typology)1997:37.

39 Klein 1937/1978:44.

40 The game *mala salt* is described in Tillhagen & Dencker 1949:143.

41 Helmersson 2005b and Danielsson 2008 regarding queertango.

42 Allégården, Göteborg , 28/9 2007. Queer dance was later changed to “Dance with movable roles”.

43 Nilsson 2007a.

44 Ängquist 1996.

45 Learning the music today is, however, often with the aid of sheet music and recorded music.

46 Klein 1978:42, Sjöberg 1989:28, Nilsson 1990:25-26. Cf also the musicologists Ling 1989:246 and Lundberg & Ternhag 2002:135.

47 Nilsson 1990, 2005.

48 Norlind 1911:344, Olsson 2002.

49 Ahlbäck 1989, Lundberg & Ternhag 2005:111ff.

50 *Gammaldans i Norden* (Old Time Dancing in the Nordic Area) 1988:252.

51 Nilsson 1990, 2005 and 2007b.

52 Ahlbäck 1986, 1989 and 2003. See also Lundberg & Ternhag 2005:111ff.

53 Reported in *Gammaldans i Norden* (Old Time Dancing in the Nordic Area) 1988 and *Nordisk folkedanstypologi* (Nordic Folk Dance Typology) 1997.

54 Grüner Nielsen 1917:3 & 1976/1920:10. See also Urup 2007:131.

55 Blom 1972 and 1989, Bakka 2007.

56 Bakka 1978, Bakka & Aksdal & Flem 1992, Blom 1972, Okstad 2002.

57 See e g Okstad 2002, where she studies the Rörospols variations using svikt.

58 After Rudolf Laban, German dance analysist. See Hutchinson 1977 & 1984 and Sällström 1991.

59 In the Nff book *Nordisk folkedanstypologi* (Nordic Folk Dance Typology) 1997 called OPGP-3- (OmdansningsPardans, Gammal, Polska och springarformer, typ 3 (Forms of Couple Dancing with Turns, Old Time, Polska and Springar Type 3).

60 Note that song games and song dances normally move clockwise in North Europe just

as do circle and chain dances in South and East Europe, whereas couple dances in North and West Europe are danced in circles anticlockwise.

61 In the Nff book *Nordisk folkdanstypologi* (Nordic Folk Dance Typology) 1997 called OPN---- (OmdansningsPardans, Nyare) (Couple Dancing with Turns, Newer).

62 In the Nff book *Nordisk folkdanstypologi* (Nordic Folk Dance Typology) 1997 called OPGP- 2-, OmdansningsPardans, Gammal, Polska och springarformer, typ 2 (Forms of Couple Dancing with Turns, Old Time, Polska and Springar, type 2).

63 In the Nff book *Nordisk folkdanstypologi* (Nordic Folk Dance Typology) 1997 called: FP F or ME E - -1- (Figureringspardans resp. Menuett med polska som efterdans) (Figure Couple Dancing. Minuet with Polska as an After Dance).

64 Engelska, literally 'English', is most often classified as a group dance in contradance form, which I do not discuss in any detail here.

65 Hol Haugen 2004 and Karlsson 2003 and the DVD Østerdalens rumba 2003.

66 See e g Eriksen 1993.

67 Sönderhoning and Fannikedans are in Grüner-Nielsen 1976/1920 included in the group popular waltz (*folklig vals*).

68 In the Nff book *Nordisk folkdanstypologi* (Nordic Folk Dance Typology) 1997 called OPGP-3- (OmdansningsPardans, Gammal, Polska & springarformer, typ 3).

69 Klein 1937/1978:41, Nilsson 1990.

70 Cf Centergran 1996, on regional costume/folk costume.

71 Ling 1989 and Nilsson 2008. Cf also the debate in Grüner Nilesen 1917:4 and Norlind 1911:35off, where he states that different researchers see different migration routes and countries of origin for the polska in northern Europe.

72 Cf nation building and 'Swedification' of Sweden in e g Ehn, Löfgren & Frykman 1993. For equivalents in Norway, see Eriksen 1993.

73 Christian, agrarian, feudal and with Latin as its universal language. See principally Burke 1983.

74 Klein's article *Om polskedans* (On polska dancing), 1937 is still the best text ever written on the polska.

75 Norlind 1930:19.

76 Troels Lund, quoted in Norlind 1930:121.

77 Norlind 1941:63.

78 Norlind 1911:369, Norlind 1930:122, Rehnberg 1966:27 after Fryxell 1832. In Denmark there is a similar quotation in Holberg's play *Jeppe på berge* (Jeppe on the mountain) (ca 1750): "... truer Nille sin mand med, att hun skall lade meser Erik (stokken) danse polskdans på hans rygg" (Nille threatens her husband that she'll let master Erik [the cane] dance polska on his back), Grüner Nielsen 1917:50.

79 Grüner Nielsen 1976/1920:144.

80 Norlind 1930:130.

81 Quoted in Runnqvist-Jakobson 1927:128.

82 Cf that *polska* has in some contexts been a word for dancing similar to “jazzing” and “stuffa”. See e g Nilsson 1998.

83 Sjöberg in *Folklig dans* (Popular Dance) 1:66.

84 *Folkets danser* (People’s Dances) 1979, *Folklig dans I* (Popular Dance I). Cf also Klein 1927.

85 “Gesunkenes Kulturgut” and “Erhobenes Kulturgut” are well-known concepts in old ethnology.

86 Norlind 1930:131ff.

87 Norlind 1911:347ff, with reference to Leffler.

88 Ramsten 2003, Nyberg 1989.

89 See e g Rehnberg 1943:209.

90 Heikel 1938:IX. The name *Trinddans* exists in Denmark too, but then in the form of a chain dance.

91 Klein 1937/1978:49.

92 Old-time dances, according to most people who dance them today, are waltz, polka, *schottische*, *hambo* and *mazurka*. Gilles dances are variants of these “elementary dances”. See further e g *Gammaldans i Norden* [Old-time Dancing in the Nordic Area] 1988.

93 The word *waltz* means in fact rotation and spinning. “The name *waltz* is derived from the old High German *walzan*, turn around one’s own axle” (Andersson 1895-1916). See also Urup 2007:131.

94 *Svenska låtar Bohuslän & Halland* (Swedish Tunes from Bohuslän & Halland) 1931: 61, 85. (Thank you Karin for the tip!)

95 Ramsten 2003 contains much food for thought on the history and special character of *polska* music. For a brief summary of the history of *polska* music see Nyberg 1989.

96 Olsson 2002, Nyberg 1989:2 and Norlind 1911:344.

97 Aksdal 1989:10-11.

98 Grüner Nielsen 1917:53 and 1920:7, 10, Koudal 2003:34 and the DVD *Folkemusik på film* (Folk Music on Film) 2006.

99 Andersson 1895-1916: 21f and Ermedahl 1974.

100 Norlind 1930:135. Cf also Rehnberg 1966:43 on contacts between Scandinavia (Norway) and England during the early 1800s and Nilsson 2008.

101 See e g Aksdal et al 2005, Ahlbäck 2003:165ff, Lundberg and Ternhag 2002:56ff for examples of the difficulty of deciphering musical notation.

102 Norlind 1930:127.

103 Aksdal et al 2005:16.

104 Olsson 2002:39, Nyberg 1989:12, Lundberg and Ternhag 2005. Cf Åkesson 2007:15 as to

vocal folk music, which historically was sung solo without harmonies.

105 Eriksson & Nilsson 2006.

106 See Wahlberg 1991 re the dance name hambo.

107 Boda is otherwise a common village name all over Sweden, but in polska circles it is linked to Boda village in the Rättvik area of Dalarna.

108 I have come across these names of the ways of dancing polska not only in conversations with dancers and musicians but also in archival records and literature, mainly in manuals, collections of exemplars and on video/DVDs. Moreover, I have over the years danced myself practically all the variations described to which the names refer.

109 *Beskrivning av Svenska folkdanser del II* (Description of Swedish Folk Dances part II) 1975:114.

110 See e.g. Wahlberg 1991.

111 Eriksson 1996.

112 Cf “jazzing” became synonymous with dancing in the early 1900s.

113 Reynolds 1992.

114 Sjöberg 1989:27.

115 E.g. polkettering in the Finnskogspols, popular in the early years of the 21st century.

116 Rehnberg 1943:210.

117 See also Nilsson 2006a.

118 Klein 1978:64.

119 Arvidsson 1991.

120 For discussions on the history of dance in general in Sweden see e.g. Klein 1978:10ff, Nilsson 1998, Norlind 1941, Rehnberg 1948a and 1948b, Ronström 1997, Sjöberg 2005, Stenström 1918, Tegner 1991, Ulvros 2004, Wennhall 1994, Wigerfeldt 1996.

121 The English expression “popular dancing” also fits, but has a wider scope than ‘pop-cultural dance.

122 According to Rehnberg 1977 the word folkdans was used for the first time in Sweden in 1818.

123 See e.g. the DVD *Dalapolskor*, 2005.

124 *Beskrivning av Svenska folkdanser* (Description of Swedish Folk Dances) 1964 and *Beskrivning av Svenska folkdanser del II* (Description of Swedish Folk Dances part II) 1975 and VHS *Svenska folkdanser och sällskapsdanser volym 7 och 8* (Swedish Folk Dances and Social Dances volumes 7 and 8), 1992.

125 Okstad 2002 and the DVD *Noreg i spel og dans* (Norway in Music and Dance), 2002.

126 Grüner Nielsen 1920/1970 and the DVD *Folkemusik på film – 1970'erna*, 2006.

127 Norlind 1911, Klein 1978:41ff, Rehnberg 1948a, Sjöberg 2005, Lundberg & Ternhag 2005, Ling et al 1980.

128 Ronström 1997.

129 See e.g. Dahl 2006, Holm 2004, Högström 2006, Kihlstenius 1996, Koskinen 2005, B Ramsten 1998 and 2000, Stilling 2008, Toft 2006 and Westergren 2006.

130 Nilsson 1998:185ff. The same phenomenon is stated by Yngvar Heikel regarding the minuet dancing in the village of Vexala in the Finnish region of Österbotten, where the young danced the minuet differently from the older dancers (Heikel 1938:15).

131 Kaeppler 1992:196ff.

132 See further Nilsson 2005.

133 D Williams 2004.

134 Peterson Royce 2002.

135 See also Hylland-Eriksen 2004:169.

136 Kaeppler & Dunin (ed) 2007.

137 Bakka & Biskop (eds.) 2007. See also the previously published *Gammaldans i Norden* (Old-time Dance in the Nordic Area) 1988 and *Nordisk Folkedanstypologi* (Nordic Folk Dance Typology) 1997.

138 In academic dance studies, housed along with musicology at Stockholm university, the focus is principally on scenic, artistic dance contexts although folk, social and for-pleasure dance are included.

139 Or as will be valid from the autumn 2007, bachelor and master degree essays.

140 For research into the history of polska, polska music and polska dancing, see chapter V.

141 Nilsson 1998.

142 Nilsson 2005 and 2007a, 2007b and 2007c. See also Ronström 1992:46 and Åkesson 2007:30ff for similar arguments on music making.

143 Bourdieu 1987 and 1995 and Broady 1990.

144 Fiske 1994 and 2001.

145 This is not the place for a lengthy exposition on my version of what ethnology/folklore is and how ethnologists/folklorists work. Anyone wishing to know more about what ethnology or folklore may be are referred to Arnstberg 1997, Arvidsson 2001, Ehn & Löfgren 1996, Kaijser & Öhländer 1999, Eriksen & Selberg 2006 or Toelken 1996.

146 See Bourdieu's dispositions and habitus, as interpreted in Broady 1990.

147 I often use the English terms insider and outsider. According to the dictionary the Swedish equivalents are "initierad", "invid" and "utomstående", "främling".

148 See Fangen 2005 for a résumé of several sociological and anthropological perspectives on participating observation. For concrete field examples from anthropology and ethnology see Gustavsson (ed.) 2005, for examples from folklore see Kaivola-Bregenhøj et al (ed) 2006, and for examples from cultural and media studies and ethnology see Gemzöe (ed.) 2004, and for everyday "non-scholarly" observations see Rasmussen 2000.

149 Bjurström 2004.

150 Headland et al 1990.

151 See Karlsson 2002:44 regarding the question of research on art (on dance) or in art (in dance) or as art (as dance).

152 Cf the title of Hallberg's book *Etnologiska koreografier* (Ethnological choreographies) (2002).

153 See Nilsson 1996, 1998, 2005. Many contemporary Swedish ethnologists, folklorists and musicologists argue similarly. See e.g. Arvidsson 2008:20-21, Eriksson 2005:21, 272, Hermansson 2003:17, Nordström 2002:13ff, Ronström 2008:22-23 and Åkesson 2007:3of , 121f.

154 In depth interviews, questionnaires (open surveys) and participating observation.

155 See Feintuch (ed) 2003 re folkloristic perspectives on expressive cultural manifestations.

156 For ethnomusicology see Lundberg & Ternhag 2002.

157 Somehow it deals with the same struggle as feminism – not to be subordinate in a structure.

158 Williams R, 1988:318ff.

159 It seems somehow as if many postmodernists do not want to see their own traditions. But that is a different discussion.

160 Cf discussion in Ronström 2008.

161 Williams R, 1988:136-137, 237.

162 Burke 1978.

163 Polska fields from Bourdieu's concept of field (cf Arvidsson 2002 and Broady 1990).

164 These two starting-points form one of the differences between folklorists, who tend to begin with the cultural manifestation, and ethnologists who tend to begin with the social group. Then they meet as the folklorist always puts the manifestations in context and the ethnologist always has to consider the concrete manifestations.

165 Nilsson 2005.

166 Cf Ronström 1992 who builds on Merriam 1964.

167 Lundberg, Malm & Ronström 2000:148-149.

168 This three-way split is more or less derived from Arvidsson 2001. Cf also the current classical ethnological division of culture into three parts: social, spiritual and material culture, highlighted by Bringeus in *Människan som kulturvarelse* (The Human Being as a Cultural Being") (2001).

Sources

Survey

A. Yourself

Describe yourself in any way you want. Who are you? Man/woman, young/old? Do you dance and/or play music?

B. Your own polska dancing experience

How have you learned to dance/play polska? Do you dance/play polska often and gladly, or seldom? Please explain.

C. Polska dance and musical form

What is polska for you? What is similar/dissimilar to other dances/tunes?

D. Polska dancing and playing today, in the years 2002-2003, on the dance floor...

Who dances/plays polska today? Where and when is polska danced/played today?

E. ...and on the stage

Have you danced/played polska at polska dance medal competitions, exhibitions, and competitions or on stage, or have you seen anyone doing it? Please explain.

Arv 1-18,	Course in Finnskogspols, Arvika, 2005-01-07
Dh 1-3,	Folk dance education at the University College of Dance, Stockholm
Fin 1-22,	Course in Finnskogspols, Göteborg
Göt 1-21,	Ungdomsringen's Götaland's Conference, Göteborg
Kat 1-6,	Dance course, Katthammarsvik, Gotland, 2005-06-27
Mal 1-17,	Students at the folk dance course , Malungs folkhögskola
Nor 1-27,	Ungdomsringen in Övre Norrland, Twelfth Day course, 2003
Pod 1-17,	Föreningen Polskedansarna ("The Polska Dancers", a dance association), Stockholm
Tob 1-11,	Course in folk dance, Spring 2005 Tobo
Vod03 1-25,	The summer course in folk song and dance (2003), Göteborg
Vod04 1-17,	The summer course in folk song and dance (2004), Göteborg

175 total surveys answered on 11 occasions

Interviews

Björn Sverre Hol Haugen

Sinkelipass – dance group (Birgitta Möller Nilsson, Anders Nilsson, Andreas Brechtold)

Visits and Observations 2003–2005

Dance Venues

Allégården, Göteborg

Boda loge, Rättvik

Felan, Örebro

Skeppsholmsgården, Stockholm

Stallet, Stockholm

Västra sund, Arvika

Groups and Associations

Sinkelipass, Stockholm

SOS, Göteborg

Polskedansarna, Stockholm

Spelmansstämmor (Fiddlers' Gatherings) and Festivals

Göteborg (Slottskogen), Västergötland

Katthammarsvik, Gotland

Korrö, Småland,

Linköping, Östergötland

Ransäter, Värmland

Uddevalla, Bohuslän

ÖA-gilletts dagar, Öckerö, Bohuslän

Competitions

Gregoriusleken, Östersund

Polskmärkesuppdansningen, Orsa

Courses

Dalslandsdanser, Göteborg

Finnskogspols, Ingesund, Arvika

Seminarium K3, Sarpsborg

Slängpolskehelg, Malexander, Östergötland
Trettondagskursen, Sunderbyn, Norrbotten

Educational Institutions

DOCH, School of Dance and Circus, Stockholm
Erik Sahlström Institutet, Tobo
Malungs Folkhögskola

Audio Recordings

24 polsdanser från Finnskogen. CD 2002. Finnskogens kulturverksted, FiKCD1960.
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Stockholm: Svea fonogram.

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Bygdedanser. Dalarna. En video från Dalarnes Hembygdsring. VHS 2002.
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Bygdedanser från Jämtland/Härjedalen mfl landskap. 2. VHS 1996. Jämtland/Härjedalens distrikt av Svenska ungdomsringen för Bygdekultur.
Bygdedanser från Jämtland/Härjedalen mfl landskap. 3. VHS 2002. Jämtland/Härjedalens distrikt av Svenska ungdomsringen för Bygdekultur.
Bygdedanser, insamlade av Ingela och Gert Ericsson, Floda, Västergötland. VHS 1988.
Dalapolskor. Traditional dancing from Dalarna. DVD 2005. Dalarnes Hembygdsring.
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Danser från Småland. VHS 1998. Smålands musikarkiv/Samarbetsnämnden för folklig dans.
Danser från Södermanland. VHS 1996. Samarbetsnämnden för folklig dans.
Danser från Östergötland och Tjust. VHS 1988. Linköping: Folkungagillet.
Danser i Norrbotten. VHS 1994. Svenska ungdomsringen för Bygdekultur. Övre Norrlands Distrikt.

Danser i Västerbotten. VHS n.d.. Svenska ungdomsringen för Bygdekultur. Övre Norrlands Distrikt.

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En dokumentär om dalapolskor och gamla danser från Bergslagen. VHS 1995. Kalle Strandell/Hörkens Bygdedansare.

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Programme notes

Folkmusikkafeét Allégården (dance cafe/hall) 2003-2004, 2006-2007

Gregoriuskappleiken (competition) 2003

Korrö (festival) 2003

Polskmärkesuppdansningarna (dance competition) in Orsa 1-3 aug 2003.

Katthamradagarna (festival and workshops) 2004, 2005

Newspapers and Magazines

Folklore centrum (magazine and event listings)

Folkmusik och dans (members magazine for Riksförbundet folkmusik och dans Rfod)

Hembygden (members magazine for Svenska Folkdansringen ((previously Svenska Ungdomsringen för bygdekultur))

Spelmannen (members magazine for Sveriges Spelmäns Riksförbund)

Vi väva vidare (members magazine for Ungdomsringen in Göteborg)

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