

## A Knotty Duty: Codifying Dance Knowledge, Plus Nationhood

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### Abstract

*What do we codify in dance, inside and outside of its performance? There are various viewpoints: to document a phenomenon, to analyze aspects of choreography or performance, to restage a dance and claim its authenticity, even to prescribe such as an unqualified representation of a national identity—as was and is a bent in post-colonial Philippines. Some of these angles are cursorily surveyed in this paper. Mainly, the paper addresses one practical way of knowing dance: by movement notation, its assets and limits. As one practicing this in a system—acquainted with few others—I discuss this mainly as an educational means. Some specific applications are cited, and the wherefores and whereases in such tasks to understand dance in its scope and significance.*

### Introduction

*Knot-theory models the behavior of systems that have the capacity for self-organization, for generativity and autonomy...\*\*\*Associative or Inferential thought provoked by the knot may thus condition spatial cognition because of the textured and deformative properties of the knot.\*\*\*Navigators, hunters, ocean fishers, trackers and traders must operate with complex mental maps...\*\*\*Less practical models are cosmologies, mental models of the universe, where spirits, ancestors, moral and spiritual qualities, together with terrestrial and celestial phenomena are conceived of as all having their proper place in some three-dimensional scheme.*

Suzanne Kuchner, "Why Knot? Towards a Theory of Art and Mathematics"

Little did I know that when I thought of this paper—without the word 'knot'—I was getting myself into a tight one, made up of several strands. In many ways that's how thinking—or doing—gets to be. It gets to be more 'knotty' when you 'string-in' your, and 'along' other people's thoughts. Plus all other images and experiences you've danced or lived through.

The knots Kuchner surveyed—triggered by Alfred Gell's idea on 'agency'—were shown at a Canberra conference in 1998. The knotty illustrations she presented were in clear dimensions, sculptural, in wood and fibers. She alludes to the legendary Gordian Knot that Alexander the Great supposedly cut, summarily did away with. I also recall Penelope's tapestry that she wove daily and unwove nightly. I've seen our T'boli's intricate abaca weave and tie-dyed designs. Many other Philippine tribes also do so in different materials, designs and colors

I take the image of knots for both choreographic and movement notation methods. In the first there is a dance called *qulpo* among the Ionians of the Greeks, and similarly the *klpu* among the Peruvians. A