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**Transmission of Craft Knowledge:  
Making a Classical Ballet Dress**

Master's Project

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## **Introduction**

In the modern world, it is common that a craftsperson, i.e. someone who is skilful in making things by hand, finds that their craft has no successors. Many jobs offer better salaries compared to those of craftspeople and young generations do not see their future in crafts. In addition, people's lifestyle has drastically changed, and the need for certain craft-products has diminished ever since the industrialisation. Crafts are popular as hobbies and this can retain the craft, but in many cases, practising a craft merely as a hobby, is not sufficient to keep it truly alive. With the loss of professional craft-making, some special skills are lost and as a result, the professions connected to it are no longer retrievable. This kind of vanishing crafts have been named Endangered Crafts by the Heritage Crafts Association of the United Kingdom (Heritage Crafts Association 2023). The term encompasses crafts that fight for their survival either because there are no longer any experienced craftspeople who could pass the skill on or because no one is willing to obtain the skill.

The aim of this master's project is to get an apprehension of master craftsman, that is of someone who is experienced and highly skilled in a particular craft, by going through the process of making a classical ballet dress under the supervision of a master craftsperson. Since practising craft as an occupation and learning directly from a master is seen as one of the most important factors to the vitality of crafts (Fondation Bettencourt Schueller 2022; Heritage Crafts Association 2023; Michelangelo Foundation 2022), I focus my practice-led research on the process of passing on the knowledge and expertise, i.e. the transmission of the skills: how master craftspeople of an extant craft pass on their skills and knowledge to junior craftspeople. The knowledge transfer process can be revealed by taking the role of a junior craftsperson and thus, by using ethnographic research methods and leaning on literature, in the practical part of this project I studied and recorded the process of skill transition from an experienced master tailor to a novice using the case of classical ballet dress making as an example. I conducted a three-month long participant observation during the period of 16<sup>th</sup> of January – 21<sup>st</sup> of April 2023 at

the costume department of the Theatre Vanemuine in the city of Tartu, Estonia, where I created a classical ballet dress under the supervision of a master craftsperson Külli Kukk.

Mapping the current situation of the ballet dress making in the Estonian theatre Vanemuine and recording the transmission of this specific skill, offers insight into the craft of ballet dress making. Advancing the knowledge of this craft recognises its importance as a specific skill of dressmaking. As Almevik (2016; 46) has declared: “The survival and development of knowledge in craft is directly dependent on the surrounding world’s knowledge of craft.” Moreover, the project seeks to broaden the understanding of crafts in Estonia by showing that craftsmanship and crafts knowledge is not limited to traditional folk culture but may exist in diverse settings such as theatres.

Making of classical ballet dress is a skill that is not taught in any education institution in Estonia. The only place where the skill is passed on and kept alive are the costume departments of theatres. Therefore, the making of a classical ballet dress is a specific skill not known to all seamstresses. The skill has not been used in Theatre Vanemuine for 20 years, meaning that it has not been used for a generation, which makes it, in that sense, an endangered craft. In addition, the small number of classical ballet dresses in Estonian memory institutions illustrates the need to investigate the skill. In the Estonian Theatre and Music Museum’s collections there is only one classical ballet dress which is from the year 1967 bearing number ETMM\_12748:12 Aj 81:178/ T10 (Palu 2023). The dress is for Tsar Maiden’s role in Rodion Shchedrin’s ballet *The Little Humpbacked Horse* (Est *Küürselg-sälq*) (AIRE; Museums Public Portal). Correspondence with the Estonian National Museum revealed that they do not have any classical ballet dresses in their collections (Aljas 2023).

As a part of the documentation process, I made technical drawings and cross-section diagrams of two classical ballet dresses – of the dress I made during the participant observation (Annexes 4–8) and of the old *The Nutcracker* skirt made in Vanemuine 20 years ago (Annexes 11 and 12). Technical drawings and cross-section diagrams are an exact way of documenting the sewing process, representing the pattern, the seam constructions, and the construction sequence. They present accurate information about the dresses’ constructions that photographs and verbal instructions alone cannot deliver due to the possibility of misinterpretation. In the drawings and diagrams, I follow a depicting method used in Estonian and Finnish sewing literature (Kivilo 1983; Lindfors et al. 1989; Ylönen & Häkkinen 2010). How to read the drawings and diagrams is explained in Annexes 2 and 3.

My educational background as a women's tailor and previous work experience in various theatres made it possible to carry out my research about the making of classical ballet dress. Hence, I can be defined as a practitioner who takes the position of the researcher, to inquire into the practice of teaching ballet dress making in theatre surroundings. My background enabled me to understand the instructions the same way as a seamstress who has never made a classical ballet dress before, and it also helped me to concentrate on the skill transmission process.

This project is intended to help to conduct further research in craft and costume studies. Cross-section diagrams capture the technology of seams and technical drawings show the construction of the garment. The information presented is intended to help to reconstruct the classical ballet dress in the future or to compare the construction with other costumes in Estonia or elsewhere. The theoretical part of this project is written to illuminate the complexity of skills transmission and the difficulty to capture the craftperson's knowledge, also bringing attention to the fact that there are skills which might be lost, due to the lack of use.

Overall, the written part of the project consists of 4 chapters. Firstly, in Chapter 1, I give an overview of the theoretical framework relevant to the subject and define concepts such as crafts, master craftspeople, transmission of skills, endangered crafts, and the types of knowledge a craftsperson possesses. In the theoretical part of my study, I rely on the concept of tacit knowledge and, more specifically, on its theorising by the distinguished physical chemist and philosopher, Michael Polanyi (2002). I also use the theories and ideas about the study of craft science developed amongst others by Gunnar Almevik (2016), a professor in the Department of Conservation at the University of Gothenburg, and a research fellow at the Swedish Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities. Next, I compare my own experiences mainly to those of Geoffrey Gowlland (2019), an anthropologist, and Peter Korn (2017), a woodworker, educator and the founder of Center for Furniture Craftsmanship. Chapter 2 opens the background of the ballet dress, while the ethnographic methods used in the project are presented in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4 I give an overview of the project and present my observations by connecting them with the theoretical frame presented earlier. The annexes consist of the project timeline, technical drawings of the classical ballet dress, cross-section diagrams of the dress construction and images about the dress I made in the Theatre Vanemuine. Drawings and photographs in this paper are made by me, unless otherwise stated.

Herewith, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to master Külli Kukk for sharing her knowledge and skill with me, to Caroline Maquignon for acting as model throughout my project, to the Theatre Vanemuine for letting me conduct my project in their costume department and to the Cultural Endowment of Estonia for funding the instructional fee for the master.

## **1 Transmission of Master Craftsman's Skills**

Transmission of skills, or knowledge, is considered a vital aspect for sustaining a craft and skills connected to it (e.g. Almevik 2016, Polanyi 2002, Gowlland 2019, Korn 2017). The objective of the present project is to highlight, how the transmission is carried out and to call attention to the concept of endangered crafts. In this chapter I explain the aspects of transmitting a knowledge connected to a specialist craft, i.e. to a craft where one needs years of practice and supervision to achieve highest quality of skills and become a master craftsman. I give an overview of the concept of craft and master craftspeople, while also discussing apprentice-master relationship, types of knowledge and skills connected to crafts making, and endangered crafts. The theories presented here served as the basis for my fieldwork, guiding my attention while conducting my observations, which I present in Chapter 4.

### **1.1 Craft and Master Craftsperson**

The definition of craft has changed in time. Peter Korn (2017) conceptualises craft as a cultural construction, effected by mindsets and state of society. In the Middle Ages there was no understanding of crafts per se because they were considered as professions. A change took place during the Renaissance when the mind was set above the body. This led to the hierarchical division of trades – crafts and art – that continues even in modern times. (Korn 2017: 31–34) Tim Ingold (2004: 458–159) considers crafts as skilled, technical artistry that embodies both intentionality and feeling.

Craft is practiced by both professionals and amateurs alike (Korn 2017: 30). As highlighted by Henry Glassie (1999: 116), craft tends to be created to express the individual needs of the maker, and gives satisfaction, pleasure, and pride to the maker. Malcolm Gladwell has calculated that it takes 10 000 hours to train a skilled craftsman, which is about five and half hours of training every single day for five years (Ericsson & Pool 2018: 128; Sennett 2021: 34). This is in accordance with the accounts about apprenticeships during Middle Ages and Renaissance. In the guild system of Middle Ages an apprentice first worked in a master's workshop based on an agreement for seven years,

and after showcasing the acquired knowledge, was allowed to develop the skills further for five to ten years, until allowed to prove a higher level of skills and capability of becoming a master. (Sennett 2021: 81)

A master is thus a craftsman who is experienced and highly skilful in the craft that they practise professionally. A master has grasped the whole creation process of the product, from raw materials to finished product. (Almevik 2016; Sennett 2021) As an expert, a master can create, make, and mend everything in the realms of the specific field of craft (Sennett 2021: 319). Master can conceptualise an idea, based on which they can generate a physical object, and is able to see the whole plan that includes the entire process of creating without losing sight of the desired end result (Marchand 2013: 42). In medieval workshops, master was the authority and had the last word (Sennett 2021: 81).

## **1.2 Variating Nature of Knowledge and Skills**

Gunnar Almevik (2016: 32) claims that craftsmanship is explained in contemporary dictionaries as merely “a manual work or a technical skill with little theoretical schooling.” The dictionary explanation, however, tells only a fraction about the knowledge a craftsperson or a master craftsperson possesses about their craft. A craftsperson acquires consciousness from learning experiences; therefore, the process cannot be described as a mere repetition of actions. Michael Polanyi (2002: 62) defines craftsmanship as “a structural change achieved by a repeated mental effort aiming at the instrumentalization of certain things and actions in the service of some purpose.” Bearing this in mind, a master craftsperson possesses varying skills and knowledge about their speciality. The set of skills, knowledge, and even the values of the maker are mirrored through the objects (Glassie 1999: 18).

For this reason, Korn (2017: 67) describes craftsmanship as a lifelong project of self-construction and self-determination through which a craftsperson creates their own narrative. In that sense, as Richard Sennett (2021) has argued, craftsmanship is a way of life, it must be done continuously on everyday basis, in order to know the tools and materials, to improve the skills and knowledge, and to be able to get to the point where one is comfortable to go beyond its craft and explore new territories.

According to Polanyi (2002), a person always knows more than what they can express. This unexpressed knowledge Polanyi calls tacit knowledge, and it is possessed by everyone (Pohjalainen 2012: 1). Sanna Virtainlahti (discussed in Pohjalainen 2012: 7)

argues that even human relationships are considered as tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge accumulates on existing knowledge through practice over the course of years. A person usually does not recognize the skills and tacit knowledge they possess because tacit knowledge is a multi-layered and diverse experience and contains beliefs, mindsets, thought structures, understandings, and professional skills. (Pohjalainen 2012: 2) The opposite of tacit knowledge is explicit knowledge. Explicit knowledge consists of knowledge that can be articulated, formalized, stored and accessed. Explicit knowledge turns into tacit knowledge when an individual is repeating a task to the point where it becomes automatic. (Pohjalainen 2012: 4)

Tacit knowledge works as a background knowledge, it is unconscious, combining traditions and subjectivity of individual. Individuals process and guide their actions based on tacit knowledge. Polanyi believes that by studying and understanding observations, it is possible to understand the knowledge and know-how of skills. (Pohjalainen 2012: 2) In other words, it is possible to study tacit knowledge by conducting observations at workplace and afterwards reflecting on what was seen. Conventional research methods such as questionnaires and interviews will not, however, reveal tacit knowledge, because tacit knowledge is difficult to express and the phenomena to which tacit knowledge relates tend to be abstract and difficult, if not impossible, to conceptualize. (Pohjalainen 2012: 9) Similarly, according to Jonas Frykman, tacit knowledge cannot be put in words without losing some information (Ehn 2011: 54). For this reason, also craftsmanship includes tacit knowledge that is not possible to form into a theoretical teaching. In the process of the craft, there is a lot of thinking through senses, which, through enough practice, becomes intuition. William Morris has described the traditional craft skills as “the art of unconscious intelligence”. (Almevik 2016: 34) Tacit knowledge is also visible for example in collaboration and in creation processes (Wilson 2002). In Polanyi’s opinion, tacit knowledge can be communicated if there are suitable ways to articulate it, for example through metaphors (Polanyi 2002; Pohjalainen 2012: 9–10).

According to Polanyi (2002: 49), knowledge comes through exercise of the skill. Managing the whole work process of a craft is mainly learnt by experience. However, as Virtainlahti (Pohjalainen 2012: 7) points out, also a great extent of theoretical knowledge, learning from others and own reasoning skills are needed. Nevertheless, plain theoretical craft teaching is not possible, because, as Sennet (2008) highlights, crafts involve senses like hearing, vision, touch, and movement, that are tacit by nature and cannot be taught theoretically. The tacit knowledge is mainly transmitted informally in workshops, where

apprentices acquire skills through observation, experimentation, and practice while being under the supervision of other practicing and more experienced craftspeople. Transmission of skills, including tacit knowledge, can also occur through formal education in technical institutions where theoretical and practical learning are combined. (Almevik 2016: 33)

Anthropologists Roy Ellen and Holly Harris (2000: 4–5) have defined the characteristics of traditional knowledge as following: the knowledge is tied to certain place and people, it is passed on verbally while participating or mimicking, knowledge is acquired in practical actions through trial and error often during several generations during which parts of tradition is under constant change. Since these characteristics can be applied to the knowledge possessed about the classical ballet dress making by the craftspeople in the costume department of Theatre Vanemuine, the knowledge of classical ballet dress making can be considered as traditional knowledge. Besides theoretical background, technical skills, such as how to use the tools and materials required in the process, etc, craftsmen have gained a lot of tacit knowledge about the craft through experience.

Between the craftsman and the final product, there is a strong bond of knowledge, and the quality of the outcome depends on the skills of the craftsman (Almevik 2016: 33). An important part of a craftsperson's skills is the use of tools which are connected to the tacit knowledge, e.g. to the knowledge of what tools to use and how to manage them. Hand tools in particular function as extensions of one's body, arm, hands, or fingers. Hands themselves can also be considered as tools. When a craftsman works, there is a brain-hand connection, which is automatic. Due to the repetitive practice and understanding of the tool within the craft, the use of a tool turns into an intuition or a reflex. (Marchand 2013: 44–52; Polanyi 2002: 55–56) Understanding your tools and your material allows to work efficiently and accurately. Constant practice develops physical coordination of body and results in consistent quality. Perseverance, patience, and focus are characteristics required from craftsperson. (Korn 2017: 50–51)

Polanyi (2002: 55) distinguishes between two kinds of awareness that are related to the use of tools: focal awareness and subsidiary awareness. Focal awareness is placed on the object of the task to which individual's attention is focused on during the use of a tool. Subsidiary awareness is the consciousness about the tool used in the process, helping to handle it more efficiently. Both type of awareness require equal attention, and both are relevant in making the process of achieving the goal of the task possible. A sudden shift

of focal attention to matters that were previously only in individual's subsidiary awareness can lead to confusion and interruptions. (Polanyi 2002: 55–56)

For a beginner the focal awareness is set on the tool itself because first they must learn the proper handling of the tool (Polanyi 2002: 60–61). When a person has learnt the use of a tool, they move the focal awareness from the tool to elsewhere replacing it with subsidiary awareness. Eventually tool handling merges into the process of creating a whole and the act of using a tool becomes unconscious. This allows for the master to set focal awareness on the end result. (Polanyi 2002: 60–61; Nimkulrat 2012)

In addition, Sennet (2008) argues that craftsmen use their body movement together with intuition to manipulate their material. Master craftsman's brain processes simultaneously visual, auditory, tactile, and linguistic information (Sennett 2021: 358). Almevik (2016: 34) has highlighted that Michael Polanyi calls this “an intelligent use of our bodies as instruments”. Using the body “as an instrument” means that craftsman uses tacit knowledge that is recorded into their body (Almevik 2016: 34). Geoffrey Gowlland (2019) has demonstrated how a potter can hear whether the beating force of the walls of a clay pot is enough to straighten the walls of the pot at the joint. Mental map of a master catches the slightest sounds that may indicate malfunctioning of a machine or otherwise an error in workflow. Abnormal sounds are filtered out and brought into conscious when necessary. Same sounds might not be recognized by untrained persons. (Korn 2017: 109–110)

### **1.3 Passing on Knowledge and Skills**

Knowledge of making something accumulates over generations and passes on from generation to generation by example and explanation (Korn 2017: 32). Passing on knowledge of a craft, i.e. skills and techniques, is a tradition and the person who possesses the knowledge is a tradition bearer. If a craft has not been practised or transmitted on for over a generation, its skills are irretrievable, and the craft is considered lost. Later attempts to revitalize a craft cannot retrieve the indefinable knowledge that masters of that craft used to have. (Polanyi 2002: 53) Dr Mary Harlow (2016: 143) has stated that from an academic perspective “a major drawback of the loss of craft knowledge is that we lack an understanding of technical language and knowledge, and thus often miss an essential part of the information.”

One problem with transmission of craft knowledge is, as Polanyi (2002: 53) argues, that art, or in this case craft, contains a lot of tacit knowledge that cannot be described in detail, therefore it cannot be transmitted in written form. As Gustav Thane (2022: 345) highlights, when starting to describe the step-by-step process of a craft, it turns into a simple series of actions or lists of techniques. Therefore, craft research is problematic when it comes to written language. Knowledge that is difficult to articulate, is equally difficult to put into written form. (Thane 2022: 344; Polanyi 2002) Thus, as highlighted in the previous subchapters, it could be said that craft can be passed on only by imitating, as for example in a relationship of master and apprentice. This means that the diffusion of a craft is restricted by social contacts, because only the person who has mastered the skill is able to pass it on with all of craft's nuances. It has been found that craftsmanship survives best if it is closely bounded with local traditions. Diffusion of craft from one country to another is recorded in history, but it is usually traced back to a group of migrant craftsmen who have left their home for a reason or another. (Polanyi 2002: 53)

To learn from a master and to follow their examples, one must submit to authority. Apprentice relies on master's decisions and ways of doing things, because they are not yet accomplished enough in the craft in question to analyse and critique the effectiveness of master's skills. (Polanyi 2002: 53) The relationship is based on mutual trust (Gowlland 2019; Polanyi 2002: 53). While working alongside a master, apprentice learns the skill and unconsciously picks up values and rules of the craft, also those values and rules that master himself is not consciously aware about. These rules can be learned in traditional settings of master and apprentice relationship by following master's examples without criticism, surrendering to tradition. (Polanyi 2002: 53) In that sense, as also James J. Gibson has noted, learning is an education of attention (Gowlland 2019). Learning process requires attentiveness and concentration. If one does not pay attention, it is difficult to repeat the tasks. If a task becomes routine, the hands know what they must do and give the mind possibility to wonder. It is sometimes better to show or experience yourself how something is done rather than describe or write about it. By experiencing the process, you get the "feel" of how to do it. (Ehn 2011: 58) Gowlland (2019) points out that according to Yrjö Engeström every activity is based on the existing knowledge about the past activity.

During the learning experience, the master i.e., a more experienced craftsperson, carries out quality control constantly throughout the making process. When something is not good enough, it is fixed immediately. Comparing results is a way of getting feedback.

(Sennett 2021: 315) A good craftsman turns coincidences and restrictions into positivity, improvises within limited circumstances (Sennett 2021: 337–338). Occasional boredom leaves time to experimentations (Sennett 2021: 352), giving possibility to explore and discover (Korn 2017: 37). Also, losing control over work might lead to new discoveries just like problem solving unleashes creativity (Sennett 2021: 150, 333).

During the making of an object, craftsman is moving back and forth between cause and result. The process of making has its own rhythm – moving from activity to questioning and back, then from activity to break, etc. Repeating this process develops the hand skills as well as mind and gives an opportunity to understand the details. (Gowlland 2019; Sennett 2021: 59; 205; 359–360) Object's physical characteristics are a testimony of thousands of decisions the maker has made during the creation (Korn 2017: 65–67). Experience and understanding of details help to develop skilled vision. Skilled vision, which is often referred to as “having a good eye”, is a sensory and cognitive ability acquired during the training of craft. Skilled vision is synonymous with being an excellent craftsman. With that skill master measures the dimensions, volumes, and proportions of work. It helps to judge the characteristics of material in its suitability for the work in hand. In a way, skilled vision is employed for mathematising in practise. (Marchand 2013: 49)

Just as other craft skills, skilled vision is practiced under the guidance of an experienced craftsperson, who, with their teachings and example, highlight the important issues that apprentice must turn attention to while at the same time the values and standards of craft are passed on. There are movements and associations that work for the preservation of craft skills. Organisations like *Fondation Bettencourt Schueller* in France, *Heritage Craft Association* in United Kingdom and *Michelangelo Foundation* in Switzerland, amongst others, work towards preservation and finding ways to pass on the skills to the next generations. (Fondation Bettencourt Schueller 2022; Heritage Crafts Association 2023; Michelangelo Foundation 2022)

The Heritage Crafts Association is using the term Endangered Crafts to refer to the crafts that fight for their survival either because there are no longer any experienced craftspeople who could pass the skill on, or no one is willing to obtain the skill. Since 2017 Heritage Craft Association has created a Red List of Endangered Crafts in UK to be able to monitor the situation of heritage crafts that are defined as “a practice which employs manual dexterity and skill and an understanding of traditional materials, design and techniques, and which has been practised for two or more successive generations”. The list has four categories: Extinct in the UK, Critically Endangered, Endangered, and

Currently Viable. The categorisation is based on both objective and subjective criteria, such as the number of practising craftsmen, number of trainees, training opportunities, issues affecting the viability, etc. (Heritage Crafts Association 2023) The criteria demonstrate clearly that the survival and continuity of a craft is dependent on the transmission of skills and apprenticeship rather than mere practice. Based on the Heritage Crafts Association's criteria, the making of classical ballet dress in the Theatre Vanemuine would be most likely classified as Endangered because of the declining number of practitioners and serious concerns about the ongoing viability of the skill.

## 2 Overview of Classical Ballet Dress

In our collective cultural memory ballet signifies ballet dresses, pointe shoes, swans and fairies (Murray 2022). According to Melonie Murray (2022) ballet is a living culture that is repeated, rehearsed, recreated, restored, and reinvented through time. A dress is a form of material culture, and so the classical ballet dress can be read as a material manifestation of culture (Shukla 2015: 249) as well as a manifestation of a craftsperson's skills. The classical ballet dress is a costume that enables dancers to express personal and social desires whilst signalling the wearer's professional identity (Shukla 2015: 249; Lawson 2000: 62).

A ballet dress is an ensemble consisting of a bodice, skirt, and briefs. Ballet dresses can be categorised by the shape of the skirt as shown in Fig. 1. The classical ballet dress (also called pancake), which constitutes the focus of this MA project, has a stiffened, hooped skirt and a tight-fitting sleeveless bodice that reveals all the plasticity of dancer's body. It is the iconic costume of the swans of *The Swan Lake*. The bell skirt is without a hoop, tacked into a bell shape, worn often in productions of *Don Quixote*, for example. The powder-puff (also known as balanchine) is a short, soft, and full skirt which consists of loosely tacked layers of netting. This style was originally created for the production of *The Symphony in C*. In contrast, the romantic dress has a long flowing skirt that reaches up to mid-calf as for example in the ballets *Giselle* and *Les Sylphides*. (Hamilton 2020; Andersen 2022)

The origins of ballet are in the religious and secular plays of medieval Italy and in various Renaissance Italy's aristocratic entertainments (Collins & Jarvis 2016: 169; Burian 1963: 28). The first known written record of ballet is from 1489, a wedding banquet designed and organised by Bergonzio Botta for the duke of Milan Gian Galeazzo Maria Sforza and Isabella of Aragon. The account describes various performances entertaining the wedding party, such as dance series, singing, mimes and acting performances. Although the dresses of the performers are not described, the source reveals that the costumes, roles and setting of the banquet had a common theme and referenced characters from antique mythology. The renaissance ceremonials, passion

plays, May processions, tournament entertainments, *mascherate*, pantomimes, mimetic dances, the *canti carnascialeschi* and other performances with songs and recitation, all have influenced the birth of ballet that gradually grew into an independent art form. (Burian 1963: 28)

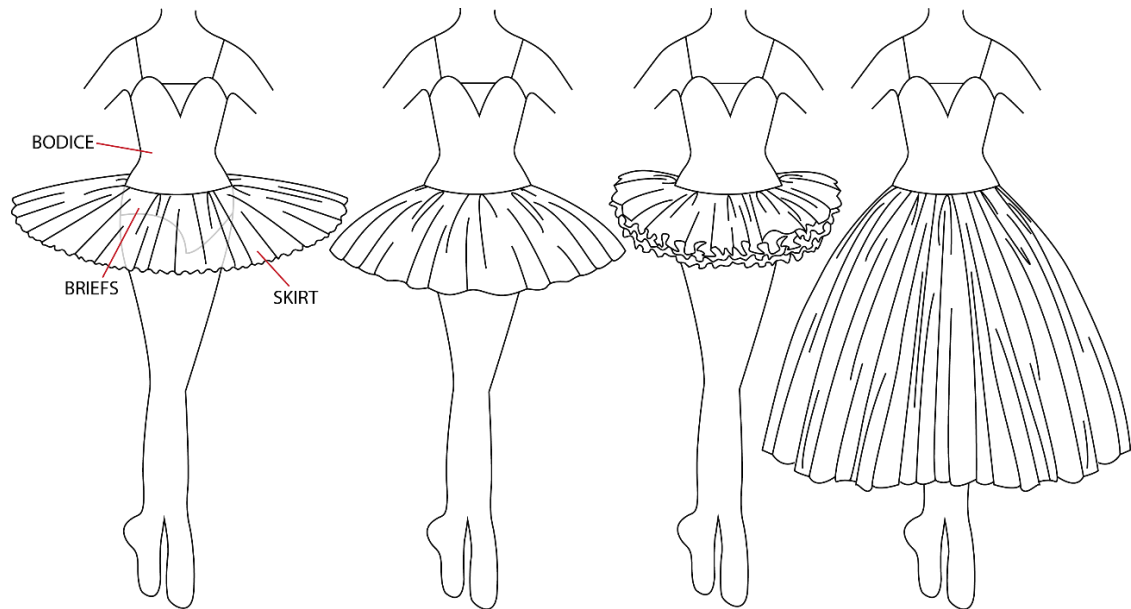


Fig. 1. *Types of Ballet Dresses (from left to right): Classical, Bell-shaped, Powder-Puff, and Romantic dress.*

Correspondingly, the ballet dress has developed over time into a distinct costume. The ballet outfits at the court of French King Louis XIV (1638–1715) were still typical court dresses in shape. However, the dancers' costumes were already regarded as separate clothing from normal court dress and were more lavishly embellished, aiming to impress the visitors and courtiers. With the formation of *Académie Royale de Danse* in 1661, Paris quickly became the leader of ballet as an art form, setting the ideals for movement and costume. In 1681 a French courtier Claude-François Ménéstrier (1631–1705) wrote in *Des Ballets Anciens et Modernes Selon les Règles du Théâtre* a set of rules for ballet costuming, defining the recommended colours and look for various characters. (Collins & Jarvis 2016: 169–172)

Nevertheless, the costumes of the period limited the female dancers' movements due to long skirts and trains that kept their footwork hidden and bulky sleeves that restricted the movement of arms (Collins & Jarvis 2016: 169–172; Burian 1963: 43). Advancement in dance techniques followed by more complex choreography and the desired grace in

expression required lightweight fabrics that were introduced for the performance costumes in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century (Pykälä 2010: 118). The ballet costume still followed the silhouette of the court dress but panniers, the latest fashion, allowed the dancers more freedom to move their legs under the skirt. To exhibit the active footwork, some female dancers started to shorten their skirts. (Collins & Jarvis 2016: 175–180)

Also, the change of fashion during the French Revolution in 1789 influenced ballet costumes. New classical lines of neoclassicism fashion did not use panniers and light fabrics revealed more of dancers' bodies. This allowed freedom of movement but required the use of flesh-coloured tights, which were later changed into less provocative white, for preserving dancer's dignity. (Collins & Jarvis 2016: 187–189; Burian 1963: 53) Female choreographer Marie Sallé (1707–1756) is known to be the first person to perform in a simple neoclassical muslin robe, without a petticoat or a corset (Collins & Jarvis 2016: 170).

The ultimate ideal for the ballet dress emerged in 1832. It was the costume worn in Paris Opera in *La Sylphide* by Maria Taglioni (1804–1884) – one of the best female dancers of its time – that quickly became popular and copied in theatres all over Europe. Taglioni's bell-shaped white muslin dress (Fig. 2.) with a tight-fitting bodice, open neck and shoulders, and midcalf hem has a close similarity to the modern classical ballet dress. (Burian 1963: 64–65).



Fig. 2. Marie Taglioni in the title role of the ballet *La Sylphide*, 1832, detail. (Victoria & Albert Museum)

There is a reason to believe that the Estonian ballet costumes were following the latest trends in the field. Since its emergence in the beginning of early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Estonian ballet scene has been heavily influenced by classical Russian ballet due to the vicinity of the metropole St. Petersburg where new western ballet vogues settled. Also, several ballet dancers from theatres of St. Petersburg were invited to work in Estonia or opened their own ballet schools as did the former first dancer of the Mariinsky Theatre Eugenia Litvinova in 1913. The first dance production, *A Dream in Sculptor's Workshop* (Est *Unenägu kujuraiuja töökojas*), was staged in Estonian National Opera in 1914. The formation of the first salaried ballet troupe at Estonian National Opera in 1918 laid the foundation for professional ballet in Estonia. (Viru 2018: 5–7) Today, classical ballet dresses are made in Estonian National Opera, Tallinn, and in the Theatre Vanemuine, Tartu. Comparison of the making methods in these two theatres would be interesting but falls beyond the limited scope of a Master's project.

### **3 Methods Used**

The aim of this chapter is to give an overview of the methods used in the execution of the practical component of my Master's project. I conducted my project in the costume department of Theatre Vanemuine, in Tartu, Estonia. In order to explore how the skill of making a classical ballet dress is passed on in theatre setting from a professional craftsperson – who has already acquired the skill – to another craftsperson – who does not yet possess the specific skill –, I used several data collecting methods. The project was carried out combining practice-led research method, participant observation, and autoethnography. These methods helped me to experience, record, and analyse the process of transmitting the skill of making a classical ballet dress.

#### **3.1 Practice-led Research**

My Master's project was conducted as practice-led research. Practice-led research is carried out through one's own creative practice, where the practitioner takes the position of the researcher using one's own professional practice as a means of inquiry (Rust et al. 2007). I am a tailor, and I have previously worked in various theatres' costume departments. Therefore, I can be defined as a practitioner who takes the position of the researcher inquiring into the process of skills transmission during the classical ballet dress making in theatre surroundings.

According to Linda Candy (2006: 1), the focus of practice-led research is on advancing the existing knowledge about a practice or within a practice. The making of classical ballet dress is not taught in Estonian educational institutions, which means that the theatres are the only places in Estonia where this skill is transferred. My study maps the current situation at the Theatre Vanemuine and promotes a deeper understanding of the knowledge the master possesses. Advancing the knowledge about classical ballet dress making helps to highlight its importance as a separate skill from dressmaking.

Proper documentation involved in practice-led approach of craft processes creates a necessary link between craft and academic research (e.g. Lassen 2022; Thane 2022). Various means of documentation can be used to bring the craft research up to the

standards of academic research. Fieldwork notes, sketching, diagrams, photographing, and filming are all valuable means of documentation that assist in recording and analysing the data (Kaaristo, et al. 2023: 78). I chose to keep a fieldwork diary, to take photographs of work process and to draw sketches as personal notes for myself in order to record my experience for the analysing stage. The chosen documentation methods can be used without external help, hence I expected these to work best in a busy workroom. Yet, it was difficult to find a balance between documentation and creative working process because each pause for documentation means an interruption of the workflow (Nimkulrat 2010: 73). I did consider filming, but as I wished the knowledge transmission experience to be as non-intrusive as possible, I decided not to use filming as a documentation method. It has been noted (e.g. Seiler et al. 2021: 3) that the presence of a camera makes people conscious about what they say and how they move their body. These adjustments in people's behaviour affect the situation and give false representation of the work process (Seiler et al. 2021: 3). Leaning on Marjut Pohjalainen (2012: 9), I did not conduct traditional questionnaires or interviews because of the difficulty to reveal the tacit knowledge through those methods.

The result of my research captures the characteristics of a culture, in my case the skill transfer process from a master to an apprentice, which is familiar for cultural members, i.e. for the seamstresses of the costume department, and through my research it will become understandable for cultural strangers (Ellis, et al. 2011: 276). In addition, I was able to create technical drawings of the classical ballet dress that serve as extra material, just as Rust et al. (2007: 12) emphasise: “in a research setting, the knowledge associated with the artefact is more significant than the artefact itself”.

### **3.2 Participant Observation**

Participant observation is a method where researcher joins the field as an active member of the group and participates in all the activities that take place (Flick 2018: 313). I chose the method of participant observation to find out how master craftsperson mentors the classical ballet dress making and to determine what kind of knowledge the master possesses. This method complements the practice-led approach, as both allowed me to experience the skills transmission. According to Nigel Cross, the knowledge of a craftsperson is situated in craftsperson's actions and experience (Nimkulrat 2010: 65). Participant observation – learning through taking part in the process, being instructed by

the master, and sharing the same workplace – gave me the possibility to experience the skills transmission myself.

Moreover, participant observation allows the researcher to create a close contact with the bearers of the tradition (Hunt 2016). In the case of my research, it allowed me as the researcher to connect with the master and find out about her knowledge. As I was making the ballet dress myself, I was put into the role of the novice seamstress in the team, and this gave me a better insight into the skill transfer process. Through participant observation I was able to notice the nuances that might not have been recognisable in an ordinary observation process. According to Uwe Flick (2018: 325), observing includes all the senses – seeing, hearing, feeling, and smelling –, and all these senses are possible to be experienced by participating in the making of the dress.

When conducting a participant observation, the difficulty lies in finding the balance between participating and observing (Flick 2018: 314). As a researcher I tried to get as close to the everyday routine of ballet dress making of the costume department as possible without forgetting to distance myself enough to be able to observe properly. Working in the costume department put me in a position where I was able to examine the master cutter's way of instructing seamstresses in their work. I had hoped to sew a classical ballet dress at one and the same time with other seamstresses, but unfortunately at that time the theatre did not have any performances coming out that required the sewing of classical ballet dresses. Instead, I sewed a classical ballet dress amongst the seamstresses in the costume department while they were sewing costumes for a children's piece called "Sipsik".

### **3.3 Autoethnography**

Autoethnography as a research method is a valuable tool to record personal fieldwork experiences of participant observation. Keeping a record of one's emotions and learning process makes it easier to reflect on the experience and make meaning of it (Méndez 2013: 280–282). Autoethnography may reveal the realities that are otherwise not thought about. Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner consider autoethnography as a method that displays multiple layers of consciousness, by which it connects the personal to the cultural (Méndez 2013: 281). Autoethnography has been criticised as well. The main limitation of the method is that personal experiences influence the research process (Ellis et al. 2011: 274). Emphasising the self too strongly makes the outcome of the research too subjective

(Méndez 2013: 283–284). Furthermore, exposing too much of researchers' personal thoughts and feelings, makes them vulnerable to the readers (Méndez 2013: 282–283).

From another perspective, Bengt Molander believes that craft is a part of practical knowledge tradition which is distinct and different from theoretical tradition and is thus never neutral or objective. (Almevik 2016: 34–35) Ellis and Bochner see that autoethnography does not limit the conclusions drawn by autoethnography, because culture's basic essence is to circulate through different individuals, this means that it also circles through the researcher. (Méndez 2013: 284)

While researching the master's skill transfer, I, as an apprentice, became the subject of study for myself. Autoethnography enabled me to understand and record the skill transmission process from a tutee's viewpoint and helped me to examine the participant observation experience analytically. Photos taken during the process help to capture and remember specific moments (Doty 2010: 1047), therefore I took photos when I considered them to be useful for my analysis. I believe my prior involvement in the field of sewing limited my observations, because as a tailor myself, I carry the same values and beliefs as seamstresses and through my prior experience I have accumulated tacit knowledge that I am not aware of, making me incapable to pay attention to some aspects of the master's work. On the other hand, being a tailor myself, I was able to focus more easily on the skill transmission process without getting distracted by the technicalities of the sewing process.

The fieldwork data that I collected enables me to document the construction of the garment with its construction techniques. The data are in the form of notes and writings in my fieldwork diary (Annex 13), photographs, sketches (Annex 13), voice recordings and the finished classical ballet dress (Annex 10). The collected data contains descriptions of the steps of making the classical ballet dress (Annex 9) and the sewing instructions my instructor Külli Kukk gave to me. I noted down as much as I could from Kukk's ways of processing the task, how she experimented with materials and construction to find better solutions for the ballet dress that I was sewing. The photographs I took record the result of Kukk's instructions and visualise the work process (Annex 13).

To get a reference to the ways and techniques of how the classical ballet dress has been made in the Theatre Vanemuine in earlier years, I documented the construction of an old classical ballet skirt still existing in the theatre's storage (Annexes 11 and 12). In addition to the construction techniques and skills transmission, I managed to collect information about the values and mindsets attached to classical ballet dress. The participant-

observation made it possible for me to have a glimpse into the hidden parts of theatre life: the hierarchy inside the costume department, the traditions that are performed in that department as well as in the theatre in general.

## 4 Execution of the Master's Project

Practising craft professionally and learning directly from an experienced craftsperson is, based on theories presented in Chapter 1 of this project, one of the most important factors to ensure the vitality of crafts. I focus my research on the process of transmission of the skills: how master craftspeople pass on their skills and knowledge to apprentice by using ballet dress making as an example. In this chapter I describe where and how I carried out my participant observation of the transmission-process and I also present my observations and findings.

### 4.1 Fieldwork at Theatre Vanemuine

My fieldwork was carried out during the period of 16<sup>th</sup> of January – 21<sup>st</sup> of April 2023 in the costume department of the Theatre Vanemuine, in the city of Tartu, Estonia. The Theatre Vanemuine is a performing arts institution owned by the state of Estonia, and it belongs under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture (Riigi Teataja 2006). Founded in 1870, the Theatre Vanemuine is the oldest theatre in Estonia. It is a three-genre theatre staging drama, dance theatre and music theatre (operas, operettas, and musicals). The theatre has three buildings: the main building known as the Grand Building (Est *suur maja*), the historical Art Nouveau style Small Building (Est *väike maja*) and the Harbour Theatre (Est *Sadamateater*). The Vanemuine employs about 400 people, including a ballet troupe and a symphony orchestra. (Teater Vanemuine 2023)

The costume department where I conducted my fieldwork is located on the second floor of the Grand Building in the centre of Tartu at the address of Vanemuise 6. The costume department creates the costumes for the performances in all of the three buildings. The department employs 15 people and is run by the head of the costume department who serves as a mediator between the costume department and theatre's other departments, also between costume cutters (Est *juurdelõikaja*), scenographers and costume designers. The head of the costume department orders materials for the costumes and manages the budget. The costume department is divided into two sub-departments: one making costumes for male artists and the other for female artists. These sub-

departments are run by two costume cutters (hereafter cutter): Külli Kukk in the sub-department for female artists and Ruth Rehme-Rähni for male artists. The cutters are skilled tailors who create costume patterns based on their interpretation of costume designers' designs, cut the pattern pieces out of fabric, and supervise the construction of costumes by five seamstresses and six tailors. The cutters give cut out pattern pieces to the seamstresses and tailors with instructions on how to sew the pieces into costumes. The division into two sub-departments in the costume department is clear, although both the sub-departments share the same huge workspace.

I carried out my fieldwork under the supervision of cutter Külli Kukk (born in 1962) in the sub-department for female artists, amongst the seamstresses there. Kukk, like most of the employees in the costume department, has learned her skill in an institution for secondary vocational education – *Tallinna Kergetööstustehnikum* in Tallinn, Estonia – from which she graduated in 1983. Since 1986 Kukk has been working in the Theatre Vanemuine, first as a tailor, and from 1992 as a cutter. In 2002 the Estonian Theatre Union *Eesti Teatriliit* awarded Kukk with The Best Technical Staff in Theatres (*Est Teatrite parimad tehnilised töötajad*) reward. Kukk has also been in the role of a costume designer for the Theatre Vanemuine's 2015 production of *The Ugly Duckling* (*Est Inetu pardipoeg*), and she gives patternmaking and sewing courses in Tartu Folk High School (*Est Tartu Rahvaülikool*). Kukk is a member of Estonian Association of Theatre Technical Workers (*Est Eesti Teatri Tehniliste Töötajate Ühendus*) and Estonian Theatre Union. (ETBL; Laureaadid 2002)

As a tailor, Kukk has thorough knowledge of a variety of sewing techniques and vast experience in constructing costumes. Her extensive experience as a tailor complement her work as a cutter. As Henry Glassie (1999: 98) underlines in his research amongst the potters: a master knows the entire process of his craft, including the limits of it. Master cutter Kukk knows the limits of the seamstresses, their abilities and, accordingly, what kind of work result she can expect from them. Likewise, the seamstresses know the standard of quality expected from them. Kukk can be defined as a master because of her vast knowledge and mastery of skills. Kukk's professional background and experience make her an excellent example of a master whose skill transmission is worth studying.

My educational background as a women's tailor and previous work experience in various theatres made it possible for me to be accepted as a seamstress into the theatre. Without the level of skills that I possess, I would not have been able to carry out my research into the making of classical ballet dress. I am trained as a women's tailor

specialised in making historical costumes. This enabled me to work and understand the instructions of the cutter the same way as a seamstress who has never made a classical ballet dress before. My prior experience also helped me to concentrate on the skill transmission process and, for example, recognise the moments when the master cutter had an inner discussion deciding how to solve problematic points in the ballet dress sewing.

Kukk guided me through the whole process of making a classical ballet dress, starting with cutting the fabric and concluding with the final decorative stitches. Kukk mentored me as she would mentor other seamstresses in the costume department. At first, it was planned that there would also be a seamstress in the costume department who would help me when needed. Unfortunately, she broke her arm and had to stay on sick leave for about two and half months. With only one hand, a seamstress is unable to perform her tasks. The accident highlights the reality that for a seamstress – her body is her tool. (Marchand 2013) The accident also showed the unpredictability of fieldwork – the subject of the study, the perception and the understanding of the insight are in a constant change (Hämeenaho & Koskinen-Koivisto 2014: 8).

All the materials used for the dress came from the theatre's fabric storage and were mainly leftovers or pieces that were too small to be used in any production. Also, the threads, elastics, etc used in the costume were from theatre, enabling the dress to be as authentic as other ballet costumes made in the Theatre Vanemuine. Only the stones and beads for the decoration layer I acquired myself from a local haberdashery store recommended by professionals. Since there was no ballet in production that needed costumes, the dress was created solely for my project, and is now in my possession.

I was in the theatre depending on the work schedule of Külli Kull and my own timetable at the University of Tartu. I had as many 8-hour days as possible, alternating with 6 to 4-hour days, for instance when waiting for the model to come to the fitting. Overall, I spent 46 days, that is 304 working hours, in the costume department of the Theatre Vanemuine. The estimated time spent on organising the fieldwork data – that is drawing the garment construction diagrams with the Adobe Illustrator, transcribing the audio files, organising the photos taken, etc –, has been roughly about 120 hours. According to the seamstresses' opinion, it would take them a week to make a classical ballet dress, plus another week to make the decoration like mine (i.e. 80 working hours in total). An overview of my project's timeline can be found in Annex 1.

## 4.2 Transmission of Skills

Küllli Kukkk, who was my mentor during the apprenticeship, is highly skilled in the craft of tailoring that she has practiced professionally for decades. Just as Almevik (2016), Sennet (2021) and Marchand (2013: 42) define a master (see Chapter 1.1), Kukkk has a deep and broad understanding of the entire process of ballet dress making – she can manage the whole creation process from the design to finished garment.

On the first day Kukkk gave me an overview about the making of the classical ballet dress. She did not go too deeply into details, but generalised and explained the process so that I got an understanding of different work phases. Dividing the process into different parts (see Annex 9) helped me to grasp the overall process without getting overwhelmed by the task ahead. Kukkk did not consider the making of classical ballet dress to be a difficult task and her expertise gave me reassurance of being able to carry out such a complex task myself under her supervision without the fear of failure.

I recognised Kukkk's status as a master and it formed the basis of our relationship. The relationship of mutual trust and need to rely on master's decisions is also emphasized by Polanyi (2002: 53) and Gowlland (2019) (see Chapter 1.3). I accepted this social order willingly because I wanted to learn from her. I was not able to assess or critique her skills of making the dress because I lacked prior experience in making the dress, therefore I surrendered to her authority without criticism. The authority is also given to Kukkk by her position in the costume department. She is the one who hands out tasks and seamstresses follow her vision in making of the costumes.

After giving me an overview of the work process, Kukkk showed me an old classical ballet dress that she had fetched from the costume storage (Fig. 3), which was made in the Theatre Vanemuine twenty years ago for the performance of *The Nutcracker*. The production premiered in 2004, which was also the last time the skills of classical ballet dress making were used in this theatre. Kukkk used the skirt as a model on which it was possible for her to explain me the making process and techniques. She allowed me to use the skirt as a reference in case I would like to know how long the stitches should be, how the hooks are placed, etc. Physical model helped me to recognize the tacit aspects of the dressmaking, that Kukkk was unable to express or what I was unable to ask due to the tacit nature. The documentation of old *The Nutcracker* skirt can be found in Annexes 11 and 12.



Fig. 3. *The Nutcracker Skirt – the skirt originally formed a part of a classical ballet dress, now disassembled.*

Kukk brought me also a book called *Historische Schnitte* (see München Deutsche Bekleidungs-Akademie 2017) where the instructions about the making of classical ballet dress with construction diagrams were presented. The written instructions represented the opposite of tacit knowledge, the explicit aspect of knowledge as explained by Pohjalainen (2012: 4). Kukk believed that visual printed material might accompany her explanations and furthermore, she thought that we should try out some of the methods used in that book. I had believed that Kukk has one fixed way of making classical ballet dresses, but I discovered that she was open to experiment. Kukk mixed both theoretical and practical learning, as mentioned earlier to be the case in many formal education institutions according to Almevik (2016: 33).

Master Kukk has not had any training for the making of ballet dresses specifically nor has anyone else in the costume department. Costume cutter Ruth Rehme-Rähni knew to tell me that the skill was learnt during the Soviet era by copying the work of a Moscow seamstresses' unit which was specialised in the making of ballet dresses. The unit was sent from Moscow to other theatres in the USSR to make dresses for ballet performances. The seamstresses of the Vanemuine learned the skill by watching how the Muscovites made the ballet dresses and with time, started to make dresses by themselves by copying

the existing work of Muscovites, and hence created their own way of classical ballet dress making. (Fieldnotes, 19.01.2023)

In this respect, making of the classical ballet dress could be said to follow the definition of tradition by Ellen and Harris (2000) – it is learned, repeated, and partly reinvented by different generations before and after. Unfortunately, the skill of classical ballet dress making has not been used in theatre Vanemuine for past 20 years, making the skill according to Polanyi's (2002) terms to be on the edge of being lost and irretrievable. Skills of making classical ballet dress are not yet lost in Vanemuine, but there is already a seamstress who despite of her long working experience in the theatre has never made one. My project gave her an opportunity to watch from side and learn from my process. This way she was able to become part of the tradition of classical ballet dress making. Also, the other seamstresses were worried that they forget their skills, and they lose the touch with more demanding techniques. As making of classical ballet dress in Theatre Vanemuine has not been used for a generation, the skill in Vanemuine fills the requirements of Heritage Craft Association (Heritage Crafts Association 2023) to be added to the Red List of Endangered Crafts.

In accordance with Engeström's theory (Gowlland 2019) presented earlier in Chapter 1.3, Külli Kukk's existing knowledge about the making of classical ballet dress is based on her past activity. In the making of the dress, Kukk used her prior knowledge and experience that she had accumulated throughout her career, but I noticed that she did not rely entirely on her memory. Kukk had a personal "recipe book" of costumes. It was in a form of an ordinary A4 notebook, where she had made notes about costumes which can be used as bases for next creations. The memo she used on this particular case contained information about widths of the tulle ribs (Fig. 4.).

For the ballet dress Kukk used existing patterns that she kept between her notebook. She had made these patterns for another piece years ago. Patterns had to be adjusted according to the measurements of Caroline Maquignon – the newest member of the ballet troupe, who acted as a model throughout my project. Kukk articulated the instructions of adjustments while standing next to the worktable. The instructions were given in step-by-step order, and each new step was revealed after I had completed the previous step. This method helped Kukk to control the changes I made to the patterns, leaving no room for errors.

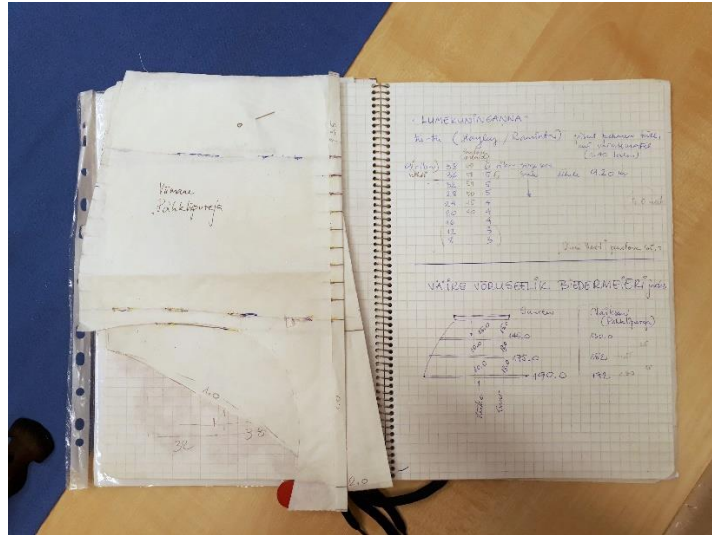


Fig. 4. *The “Recipe Book” of Külli Kukk – at top right are measurements of tulle ribs and pattern of ballet dress’ briefs are on the left.*

Instructions were given verbally, but the language used might not make sense to outsiders. Objects or tools were not always named properly, neither were the actions. “Take 1-2mm from here ... leave that as it is ... turn this around ... and stitch from here” – type of instruction was quite common, but they were always highly visual, accompanied with body movements, pointing with finger to direct my gaze and using eye contact that either directed my attention to an important area or confirmed whether I had understood everything. As Gowlland (2019) has highlighted, learning is a highly social activity where eye contact, gestures, actions on materials play a significant role.

Sometimes Kukk let me to experiment on my own. For example, in the middle of the dress making process she gave me the liberty to design the decoration of the dress (for a more detailed timetable see Annex 1). I came up with different designs, but when discussing them with Kukk, I began to feel as if there is one correct way which she wanted me to discover by myself. I chose to execute the design which I believed meets Kukk’s expectations, and she was indeed pleased with my choice.

As expected, the tacit aspects of Kukk’s knowledge were essential. Kukk gave me the task of cutting out the required fabric pieces and followed my cutting with attention. I knew she was watching and evaluating my every move – how I handle the scissors, do I keep them properly against the table while cutting, do I stop my scissors before the tip or do I close them all way down. I believe she was pleased with my use of scissors because she did not comment and left me to finish the cutting on my own. It seemed to me that with her silence she gave an approval to my cutting method. Fabric cutting is not a

seamstresses' task, it is normally done by the cutter. I suppose Kukk gave me the cutting task for getting me used to the environment. Moreover, through this task she was able to see what kind of a person I am and to assess my skills.

The aspect of tacit knowledge was particularly visible in cutting the fabric as it is something you must obtain a feeling of. According to Polanyi's (2002: 50) theory, watching a video or reading written instructions does not open the secrets of the skill. It is only by observation, intimate experience and guiding of someone who possesses the skill that the correct way of cutting is learnt. Just as Polanyi (2002: 50) emphasized, the rules of craft serve as guides, which are useful only if they are integrated into practical knowledge. (Polanyi 2002: 50) This underlines the fact that traditional learning methods, such as master-apprentice relationships in workshops, are important from the point of view of the transmission and survival of craft.

When I started the process of making the dress, I had no vision of how the final dress should look like, except for the main colour white that I was using. Kukk suggested me to search ideas from the internet, opening some pages for me and pointing out some of the designs. Kukk has vast knowledge of dress designs. The style of dress defines the character. Turns out that some elements of a dress cannot be used freely, because these elements are characteristic to a specific role. Using wrong elements creates confusion. For example, colour white limits the use to quite a narrow group of roles, e.g. swan, bride or snowflake. Another example is the placement of frills on the ballet dress briefs. According to Kukk only swan costumes have briefs fully covered with decorative frills – aiming to produce the illusion of feathers – whilst the costumes of other characters have only the frills that form the skirt, leaving briefs empty.

To learn what Kukk knows about the language of a character's costume would take years, because the information she knows reveals itself only in the situation of making the costume. Working side by side with a master gives an opportunity to access this information. Thus, as already mentioned in Chapter 1.1, to learn the skills needed in making a craft, the apprenticeship-master relationship lasted a minimum of seven years (Sennett 2021: 81). In addition, apprenticeship is a social activity and knowing the master helps to understand their mentoring and makes the processes smoother and more enjoyable. Over time, I got to know Kukk, observing her actions, movements, and also her mood. I did not ask for her help when I noticed that she is busy or overwhelmed with running errands.

For the research purposes, I occasionally asked Kukk about some sewing techniques that are considered common knowledge among seamstresses, because I wanted to find out her reasoning behind her preferences. My inquiry into something so basic, as for example selecting suitable material for work, aroused suspicion in some of the other seamstresses who questioned me with technical questions in order to find out whether I possess the level of skills that I claim to have.

Master Kukk's skilled vision revealed itself in dress fitting. She knew exactly what needs attention, how the dress should fit and what changes are required to make necessary adjustments. Kukk carried out automatically the mathematicising described by Marchand (2013: 49) (see Chapter 1.3). It was difficult for Kukk to express the tacit knowledge she used in evaluating the fit of the costume, hence, I had to use my own reasoning in case my questions did not give me satisfying answers. Consequently, Kukk did not know to express knowledge, unless I knew to ask. The situation introduced a paradox, where apprentice must be aware of knowledge they do not know about and master is unaware of expressing. This shows clearly that responsibility for skills transmission lies equally with master as well as apprentice.

Overall, the skill transmission process took the form of various methods. For example, Kukk gave me verbal instructions, she explained each part of the process in detail. When she used terminology (e.g. *Est vispen*, meaning boning in English) which I did not understand, I asked, and she went into more detail and explained the term. While she explained, she moved her hands to visualise the process, for example how the flow of the fabric should move when creating several tulle layers, just as Gowlland (2019) has remarked: verbal statements and gestures together create meaning.

Verbal communication gave the possibility to ask for help when needed, to discuss the issues raised in the work process, and to get immediate feedback. Some information was offered indirectly, for example hearing other seamstresses evaluating the shape, texture, weight, or visual look of the dress. In addition, visual communication was used since sewing, like most crafts, is highly visual. It might not be possible to understand what the master is talking about without actually seeing what she is showing with her hands. As Almevik (2016: 34), Flick (2018: 325) and Sennet (2021) have highlighted (see Chapter 1.2), craft skills are sensory skills and sewing is a collaboration of senses – holding fabric in position when sewing, while at the same time I watch the upcoming part and keeping an eye on the result. Another sensory mean that Kukk used was hearing – for example, similarly to how Gowlland (2019) and Korn (2017) describe the mental map of the

craftsperson (see Chapter 1.2), she heard when the sewing machine was not working correctly.

Kukk observed me regularly from distance and checked my work process. Kukk gave me articulated instructions about what I must do and explained why it is done that way. She advised and directed where necessary, and when verbal instructions were not enough, she demonstrated the correct move, for example by pinning a seam to the right place herself. Sometimes it was easier for her to communicate the required information by means of drawings and graphs. For example, she showed me the position of hoop on the tulle frills, which helped me to get a better understanding of the task. Kukk often did not explain details that are common knowledge of the trade, such as which sewing machine needle to use or how to iron sateen without ruining it, because she seemed to consider my skills to be equal to other seamstresses. Thus, the teaching process required confidence and patience also from the master.

As Gowlland (2019) describes, focus and attention did shift from meaning to practice, from other person to procedure during the work process. Even though the focus of my attention was on the work in hand, I was simultaneously aware of Kukk's movements and subjectivity. My awareness of Kukk made me more self-conscious and I noticed changing my performance according to how I wished to be seen by Kukk.

I tried to follow Kukk's instructions as well as I could. I did not want to disappoint her by giving a bad result. In some cases, I would have done things differently, but I thought it would be good to follow her instructions in order to see her techniques. Following her instructions, I learn something new, and by adapting the new methods I can later combine them with my own methods. In the middle of the project, following the orders and being in the role of an apprentice started to feel frustrating. I got the feeling that I did not know anything, that I am unable to make decisions on my own and my opinion is not relevant. This frustration was not caused by my mentor Kukk. Rather, these feelings came to me through the work, which was not going as smoothly as I would have liked. Nevertheless, my emotional crisis did not affect my wish to learn or to maintain the high standards of quality set by Kukk.

Kukk and I were both developing our skills of cooperation during the project. She had to adjust her teaching methods according to me and as I had to adjust myself to receive her teaching. I also had to fit into the community of seamstresses and had to adopt the ways of doing, thinking, and speaking of the costume department. This has also been observed by Gowlland (2019), who has highlighted that in the case of a dedicated learner,

also mentoring changes accordingly, because the apprenticeship process is a form of communication.

Another aspect that was revealed in the project was sociality as means of learning. Just as Gowlland (2019) argues, the origin of skill is social and the social interaction with seamstresses in the department became an integral part of my learning process. Indirectly seamstresses formed and moulded my understanding about the ballet dress and making of it. Through social interaction they passed on technical skills and work ethics, which I had not received if I had not shared workspace with them and socialised. As Gowlland (2019) remarks: “Each communicative act being potentially the source of the following one, driving the conversation further”. When I had a technical problem, other seamstresses and tailors came along and shared their experience. They started to discuss between each other how I should continue my work and how master Kukk would like me to solve the problem. It also showed that many of the sewing processes the seamstresses undertake during the day are based on tacit knowledge. For example, each of them knows how to sew an elastic waistband onto briefs, but when they must explain it out loud, it becomes difficult, just as Polanyi (2002) expresses in his theory.

Socialising with seamstresses revealed information about the values and mindsets attached to classical ballet dress, and also gave me access to knowledge of traditions that are performed in the costume department and I even got to experience some of them. For example there was a celebration within the department when they finished making costumes for a piece.

Annex 9 presents The Work Sequence where I tried to write down all the tasks that I completed during making the dress. As brought out in Chapter 1.3, describing a craft process step-by-step, produces a list of actions and techniques which lack the input of tacit knowledge. The work sequence alone does not give enough information to be able to reproduce the dress. It is more useful accompanied by technical drawings and cross-section diagrams, such as found in Annexes 6 and 7. Now a professional seamstress can make reasonable deductions to make a similar dress.

I can conclude that in my opinion Kukk was a good mentor. I am not surprised about it because she is instructing seamstresses on a daily basis as well as giving sewing courses outside the theatre. Kukk was not aware of all the skills she possesses because for her it is a routine and comes automatically. My opinion of Kukk as a mentor is influenced by my own background and skill level. My impression of Kukk’s teaching might have been different if I had not had prior sewing experience. As Polanyi (2002: 49) highlights,

knowledge comes through exercise of the skill. Glassie (1999: 98) describes that a master must be intimately experienced with the entire process to be able to manage the workers. It is important to know what is possible to do and what is not, when it is best to leave apprentice alone and let them practice freely. Kukk has obtained this skill. She was immediately present when an obstacle appeared, and she quickly found solutions. She trusts her seamstresses and has confidence in them and their skills.

Kukk maintained high work result and carried out constant quality control on my work. She did not push me to extremes, but when something did not work as it was supposed to, she changed the plan and offered another way. I noticed at least few times that Kukk had tested some kind of technical solution on the dress when I was not present, because the pins had changed their places. Kukk was working and processing information on her own, she experimented and tested the materials on her own, and when she had found the desired result, she presented it to me.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this master's project was to get an apprehension of master craftsman's knowledge transmission by going through the process of making a classical ballet dress under the supervision of a master craftsperson in the Theatre Vanemuine. The practice-led research in Theatre Vanemuine was a success, because it gave me access to the craft of classical ballet dress making. The fieldwork showed that transmission of craftsperson's knowledge is a long and complex process. Craftsperson's knowledge can be articulated and demonstrated, but there are knowledge dimensions that master is unable to express, due to the subconscious nature of that knowledge, called tacit knowledge. The possession of tacit knowledge might be unknown even to the master. While participating in the work process I was able to experience how the skill is passed on and observe the process of transmitting knowledge by a master craftsperson.

Transmission of craft knowledge occurred in master Külli Kukk's tutoring through verbal and visual communication. The verbal communication was used for giving instructions. The visual communication consisted of the master's physical demonstrations, body movements (pointing, gestures with hands, etc), and also of written material in the form of sketches, drawings and books. Furthermore, the master used an old ballet dress as a model aiding the learning process.

Knowledge was passed on also indirectly. Attitudes, values and ethics of the trade of the master and also those of other seamstresses were transmitted through socialising – what was heard or overheard during, for example, coffee breaks or general discussions influenced indirectly my understanding of the classical ballet dress. Thus, social interaction played a vital role in the learning process – each discussion revealed more information and led to further discussions, revealing knowledge that might not have been expressed otherwise. Socialising also helped to merge into the group and to not stand out as a stranger in the costume department.

In addition, learning requires attentiveness by the apprentice, and it involves more than the use of tools, materials or techniques. As an apprentice I had to pay attention to every detail, to be in the moment and process the information. Master Kukk pointed out what is

worth noting by directing my attention to it. Also, the master had to adapt to the transmission-relationship and guide the apprentice through the process.

Tacit knowledge was expressed through master Kukk's actions. The research showed, however, that it is not easy to capture tacit knowledge of a master for it is revealed in the specific context – hidden knowledge is used, but not understood to be articulated, due to the nature of being unconscious, functioning like background knowledge. Difficult to express, even more difficult to record but possible to learn through classical apprenticeships, tacit knowledge is a significant aspect of craftspeople's knowledge. This was expected based on the previous studies on the subject.

My project proved that the transmission of knowledge does take place in a master-apprentice relationship, but it also revealed that it requires a lot of time due to tacit knowledge, which cannot be articulated. The longer an apprenticeship lasts, the more knowledge can transfer. In addition, longer apprenticeships enable stronger master-apprentice relationships allowing better transmission of knowledge via the aid of better personal connection. Also, from an apprentice's point of view, skills acquisition is a long and time-consuming process, it takes time to go deeply into the craft and unravel the layers of master's knowledge. My findings are supported by the fact that traditional Medieval apprenticeships were at least seven years long. Based on the experience of executing this MA project, I would recommend considering a grant system similar to the one run by the Michelangelo Foundation, giving the possibility for master craftspeople to find time to take apprentices and to tutor.

As a part of the project, I documented the dress that I completed during my project as well as *The Nutcracker* ballet skirt that Kukk presented as a model. The documentation of the earlier Nutcracker dress gives an idea about the way classical ballet dresses were made in the Theatre Vanemuine 20 years ago. Although one dress is not enough to draw conclusions on how materials and techniques have changed over time, the documentation of both the old skirt and the dress made during this project, presented in the Annexes, serve as a complementary source of information for further research of ballet costumes. The project report, the technical drawings, etc, record the knowledge master Külli Kukk possesses and passed on to me. The classical ballet dress I made under Kukk's supervision is a physical manifestation of master Külli Kukk's skills and knowledge.

Making of classical ballet dress is a tradition passed on inside the costume department. Not all the skills and techniques are used in the specific time period, they come up with the project at hand and are being practised there and then, just like the case of the

seamstress in the costume department, who despite her experience had not had a chance to make a classical ballet dress before. My project gave thus a reason to use the skills of classical ballet dress making again. Consequently, we became part of the tradition of making classical ballet dress – she by observing, and I by making. Hence, in its own way, my project contributed to the preservation of this specific skill in the Theatre Vanemuine that otherwise fills the criteria of Endangered Crafts. Furthermore, I hope the project raises awareness of the skill of classical ballet dress making at least among those involved in the process or reading the report later.

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## Resümee

Magistriprojekt „Käsitööoskuse edasiandmine: klassikalise balletiseeliku valmistamine“ dokumenteerib ja analüüsib meistrioskuse edasiandmist klassikalise balletikleidi valmistamise näitel. Meistrit võib defineerida kui isikut, kes on omandanud omal erialal kõrge tasemega oskused. Et elukutseliste käsitöölise olemasolu ja otse meistritl õppimist peetakse käsitöö elujõulisuse üheks olulisemaks teguriks, keskendun oma praktikapõhises uurimistöös teadmiste, sealhulgas oskuste, edasiandmise protsessile ehk sellele, kuidas meister annab oma oskusi ja teadmisi edasi vähem kogenenud käsitöölisele. Selle protsessi uurimiseks asetasin end õpipoisi rolli ja valmistasin meisterjuurdelõikaja käe all klassikalise balletikleidi.

Tegin magistriprojekti raames kolme kuu vältel (16.01.–23.04.2023) osalusvaatlusi Tartus, Vanemuise teatri kostüümiosakonnas, kus minu juhendajaks oli meisterjuurdelõikaja Külli Kukk. Teatrikeskkonnas balletikleidi valmistamise uurimise eelduseks oli minu varasem väljaõpe naisterätsepana ja töökogemus erinevates teatrites, mis lubas mul end määratlada kui praktikut, kes võtab teadlase positsiooni. Eelnev kogemus võimaldas mul juhistest aru saada nagu seda teeks õmbleja, kes pole kunagi varem klassikalist balletikleiti valmistanud. Samuti aitas see mul keskenduda teatris toimuvale oskuste edasiandmise protsessile.

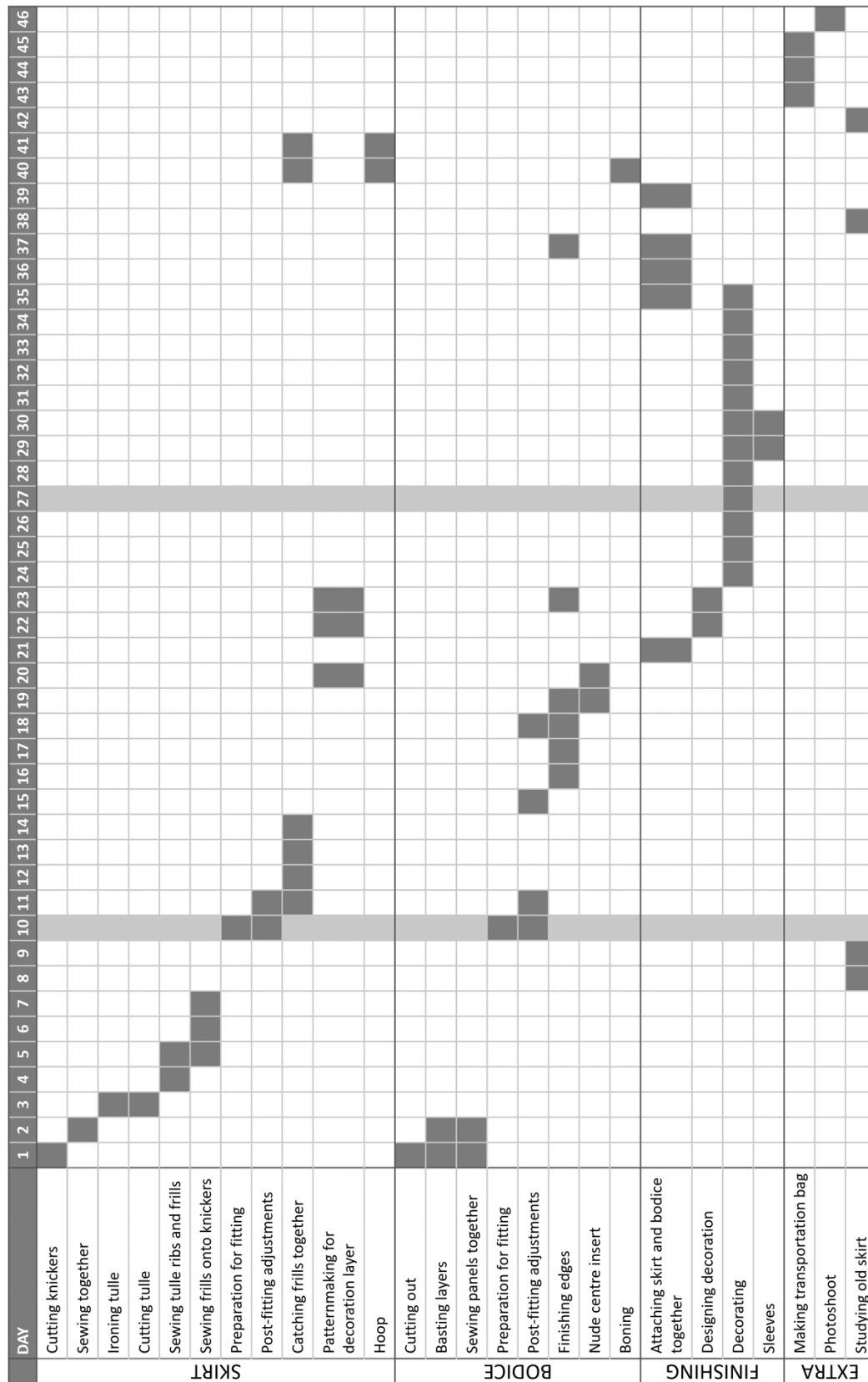
Osalusvaatlus hõlmas kleidi praktilist valmistamist. Lisaks kleidile endale on magistriprojekti praktiliseks väljundiks kahe klassikalise balletikleidi – osalusvaatluse käigus õmmeldud kleidi ja Vanemuise teatri kahekümne aasta taguse *Pähklipureja* balletiseeliku – tehnilised joonised. Õmblustehnilised joonised, kus on tähistatud nii lõige, õmbluste konstruktsioon kui ka õmblustööde järjekord, on täpsem viis õmblusprotsessi dokumenteerimiseks. Õmblused edastavad teavet, mida fotod ja suulised juhised üksi ei pruugi väljendada.

Magistriprojekti kirjalik osa koosneb neljast peatükist. Esiteks annan ülevaate teemaga seotud teoreetilisest raamistikust ja käsitlen sellised mõisted nagu käsitöö (*crafts*), meister (*master craftspeople*), oskuste edasiandmine (*transmission of skills*), ohustatud käsitöö (*Endangered Crafts*) ja käsitöölise teadmiste liigid, millest keskse tähendusega antud töös on vaikiv teadmine. Järgmises peatükis esitan balletikleidi ajaloolist tausta ning seejärel

tutvustan etnograafilisi meetodeid, millel toetusin projekti läbiviimisel. Töö neljandas peatükis annan projektist ülevaate ja esitan oma tähelepanekud oskuste ülekandmisest, sidudes neid eelnevalt välja toodud teoreetiliste lähtekohtadega. Lisaks on töö lisades esitatud projekti ajagraafik ja vaatluse käigus valmistatud klassikalise balletikleidi ning teatris viimati valmistatud klassikalise balletiseeliku tehnilised joonised, läbilõikeskeemid ja fotod.

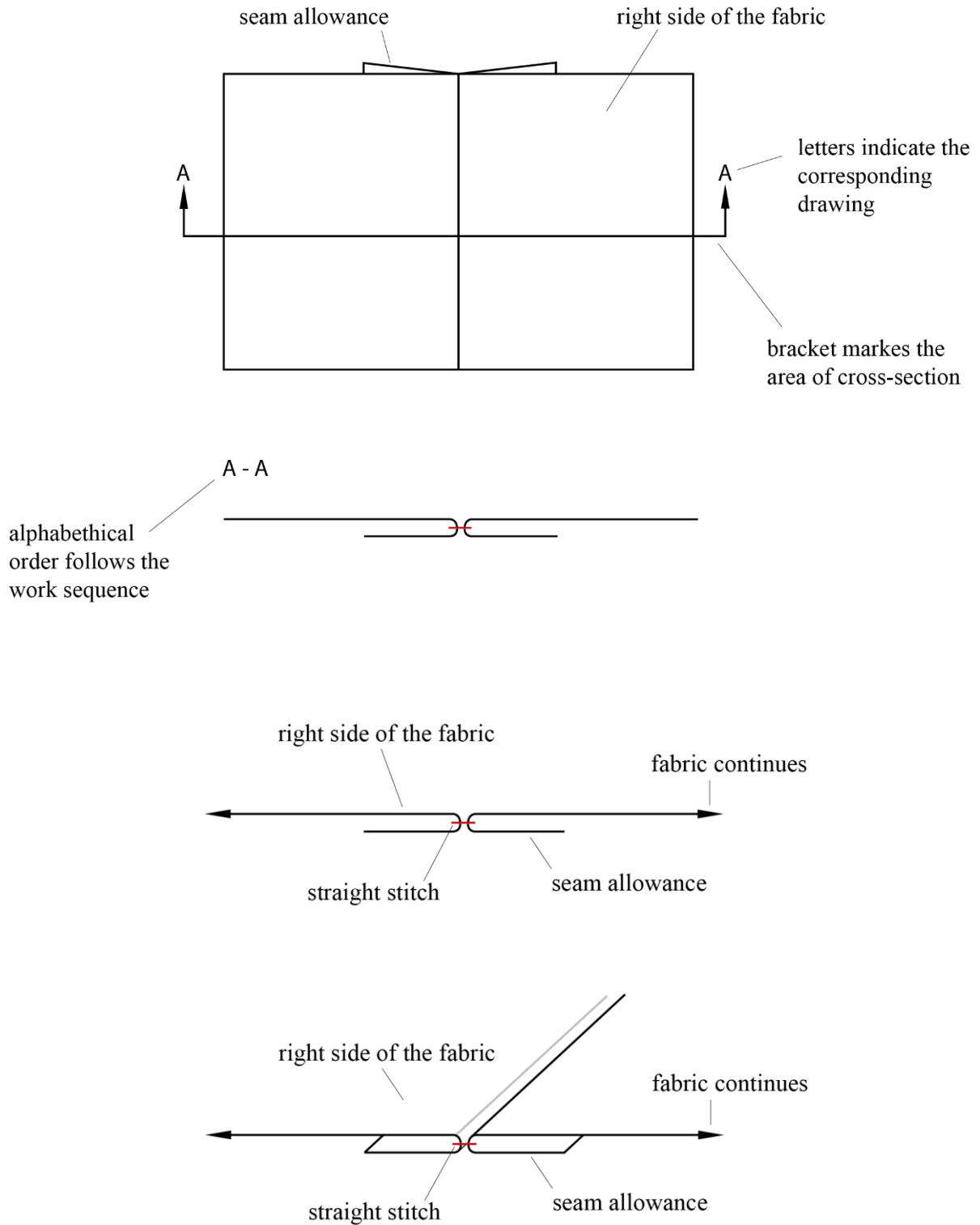
Välitööd osutasid, et oskuste edasiandmine on keeruline protsess. Kuigi teatud tüüpi teadmisi on võimalik artikuleerida ja demonstreerida, on meistril ka teadvustamata ehk vaikivaid teadmisi, mida pole võimalik nende alateadvusliku olemuse tõttu väljendada. Nende teadmiste edasikandmine võtab aega ning nõuab nii juhendajalt kui õpipoisilt pühendumist. Tööprotsessis osaledes sain vaadelda ning kogeda oskuste ning teadmiste edasiandmise protsessi. Teatris valminud klassikaline balletikleit on meister Külli Kuke oskuste ja teadmiste füüsiline ilming.

## Annex 1 *Project Timeline Gantt Chart*

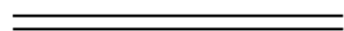
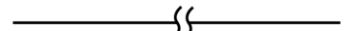


Costume fittings were on days 10 and 27.

## Annex 2 How to Read the Technical Drawings

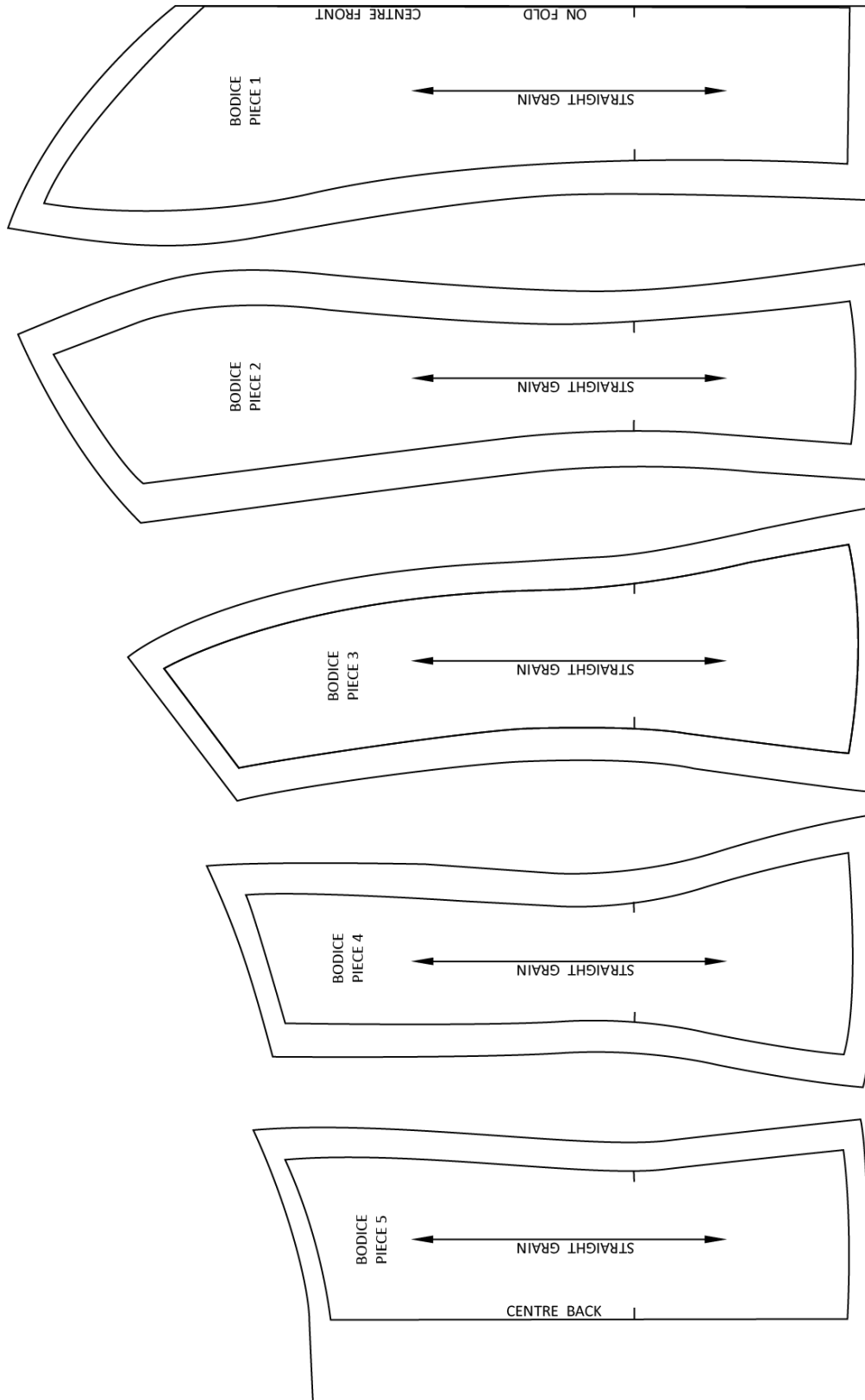


### Annex 3 *How to Read the Cross-Section Diagrams*

|                                                                                     |                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
|    | fabric                            |
|    | double layer of fabric            |
|    | arrows = material continues       |
|    | waves = break line                |
|    | straight stitch (with one needle) |
|   | overlocking                       |
|  | stitch and overlocking            |
|  | hand stitch                       |
|  | elastic band                      |
|  | piping, the dot indicates cord    |
|  | snap fastener                     |
|  | boning                            |
|  | hook and eye                      |

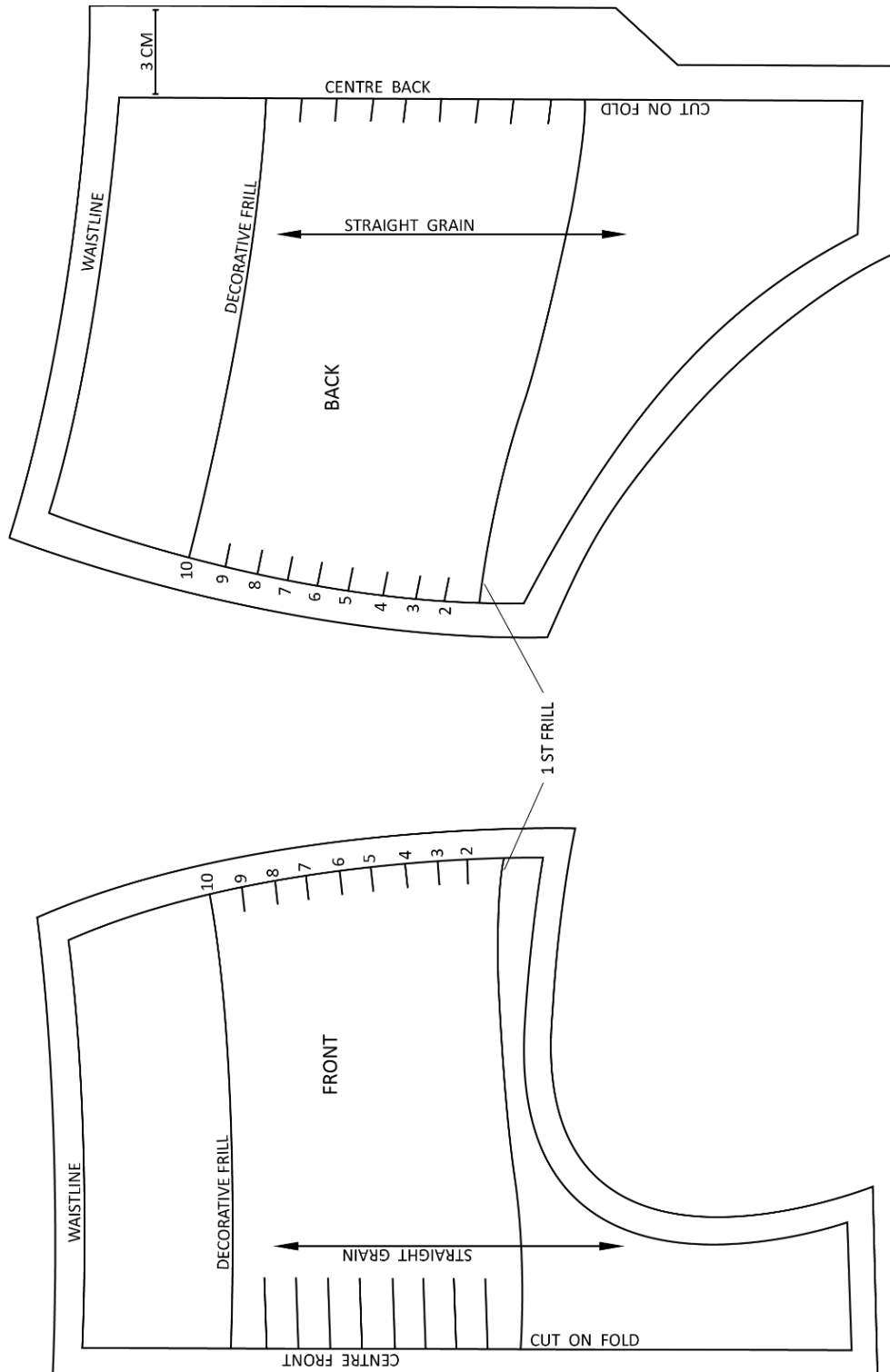
#### Annex 4 *Pattern of the Bodice of Classical Ballet Dress*

SEAM ALLOWANCE 1CM, SIDE SEAMS 1,5CM AND CENTRE BACK 4CM  
PATTERN IS FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES.



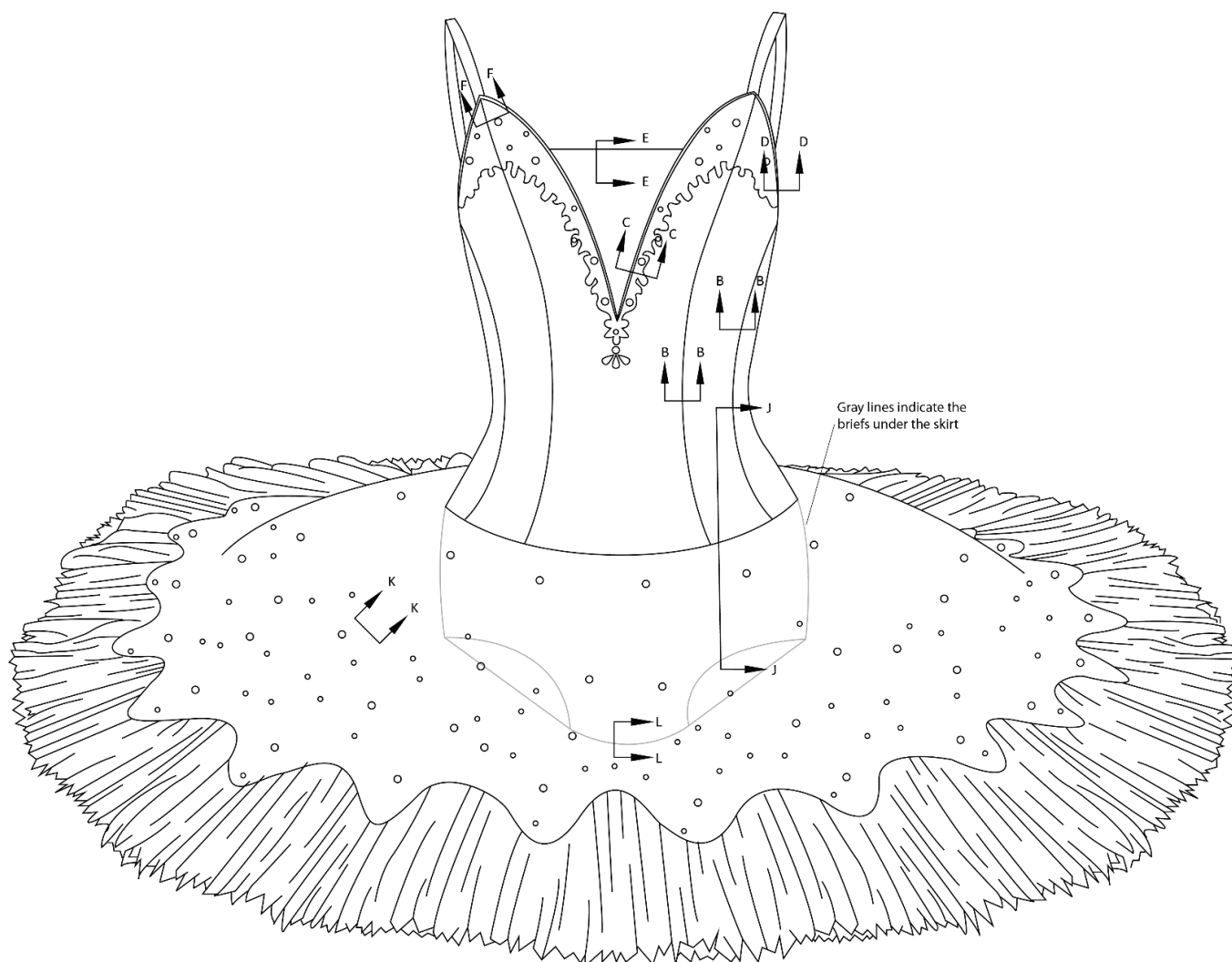
## Annex 5 Pattern of the Briefs of Classical Ballet Dress

SEAM ALLOWANCE 1CM, EXCEPT CENTRE BACK 3CM FOR THE DISTANCE OF 16CM  
PATTERN IS FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES.

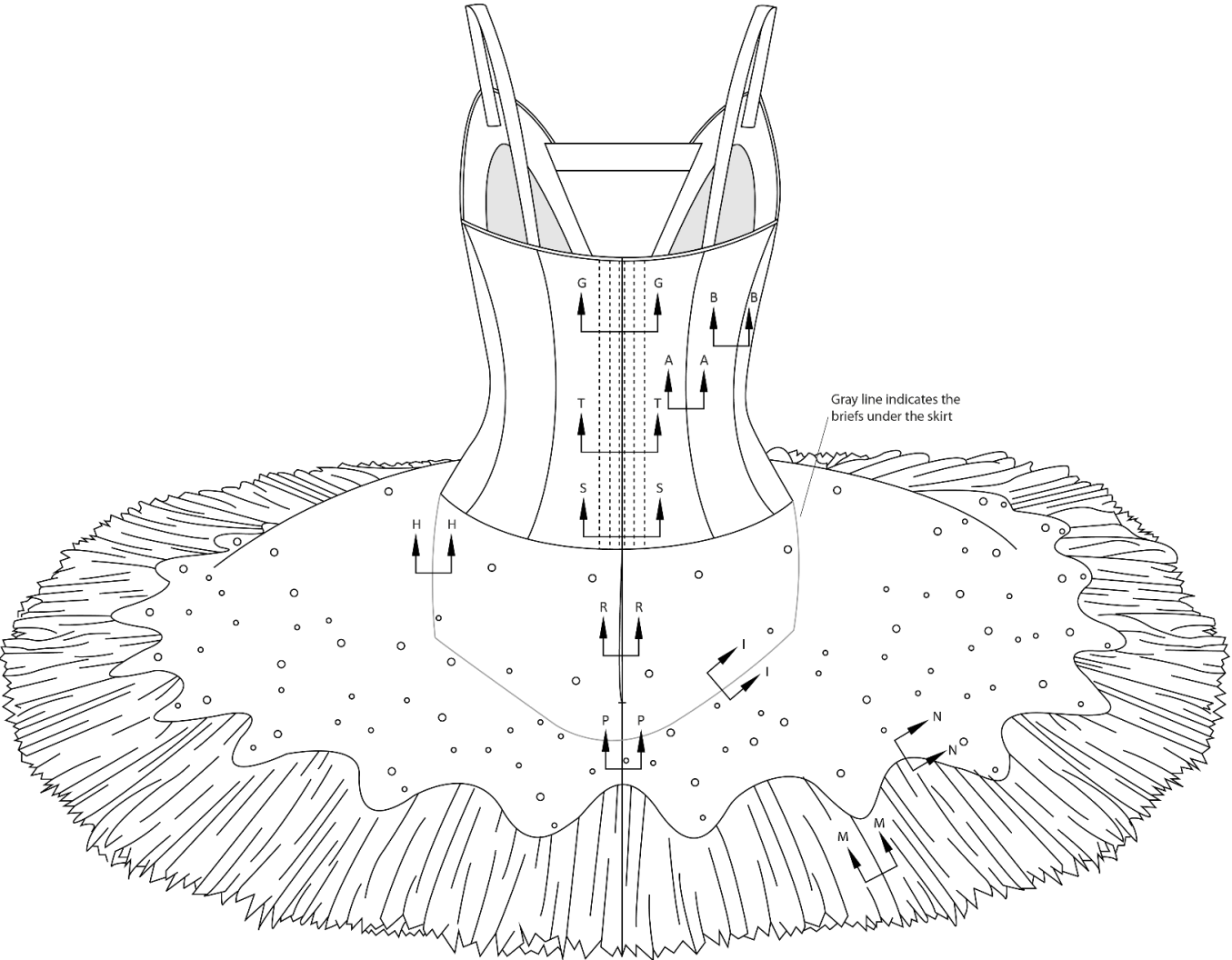


## Annex 6 *Technical Drawings of the Classical Ballet Dress*

### FRONT VIEW



BACK VIEW



## Annex 7 Cross-Section Diagrams of the Classical Ballet Dress

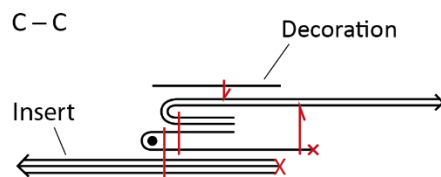
A – A



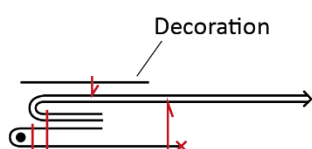
B – B



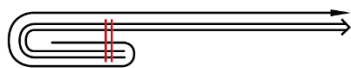
C – C



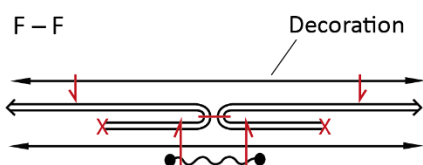
D – D



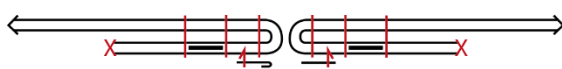
E – E



F – F



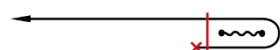
G – G



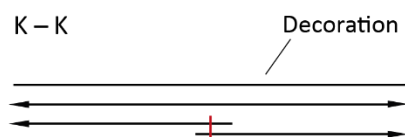
H – H



I – I



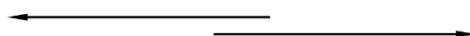
K – K



L – L



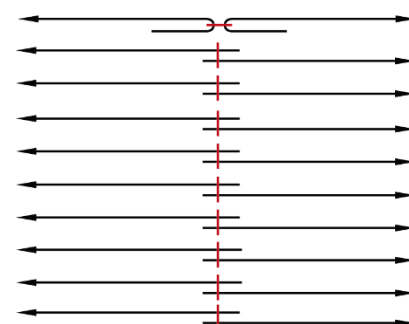
M – M



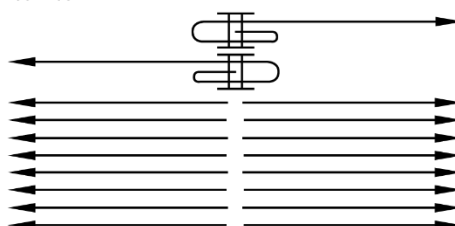
N – N



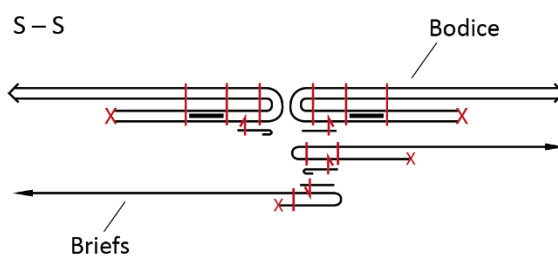
P – P



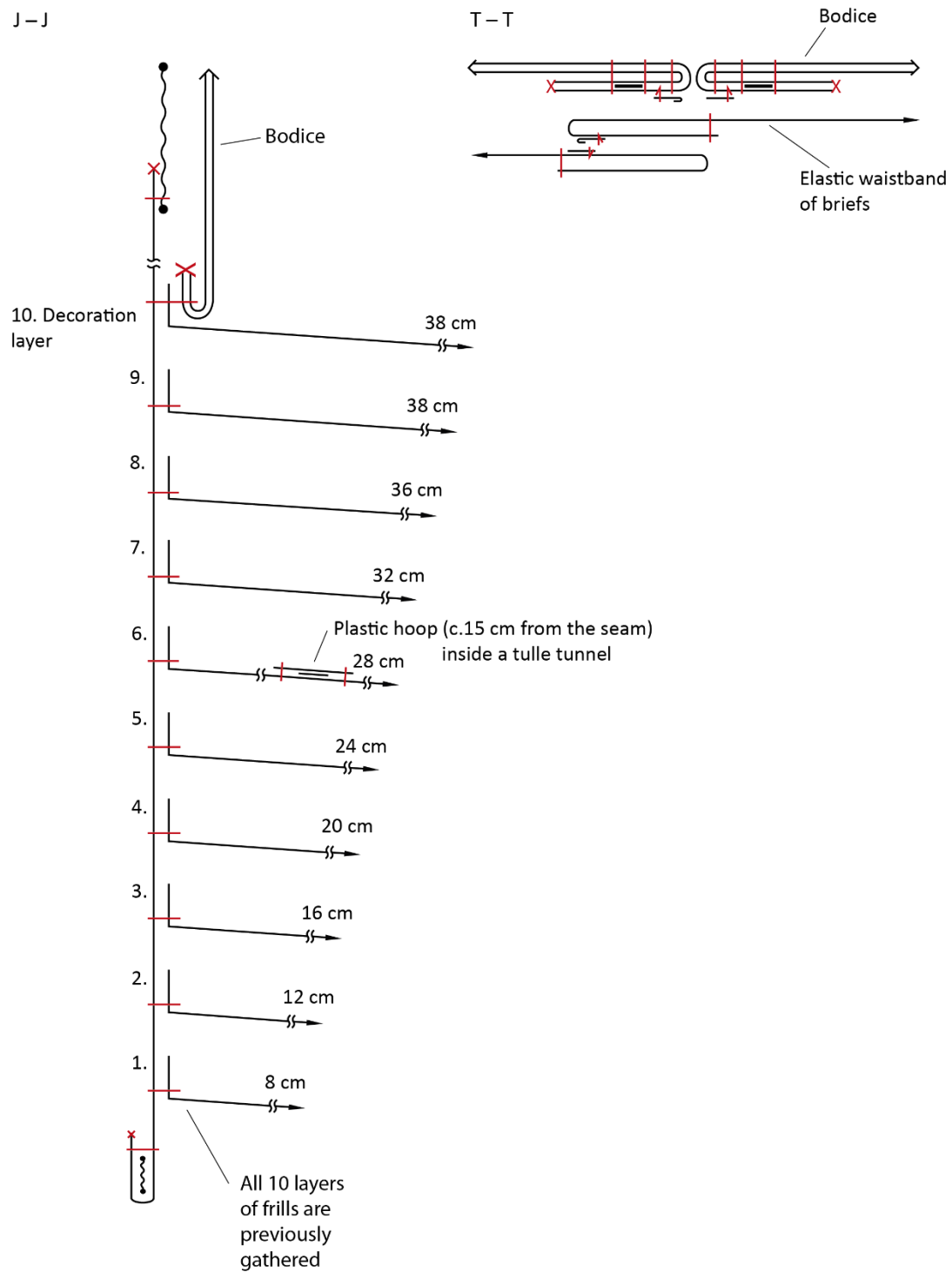
R – R



S – S



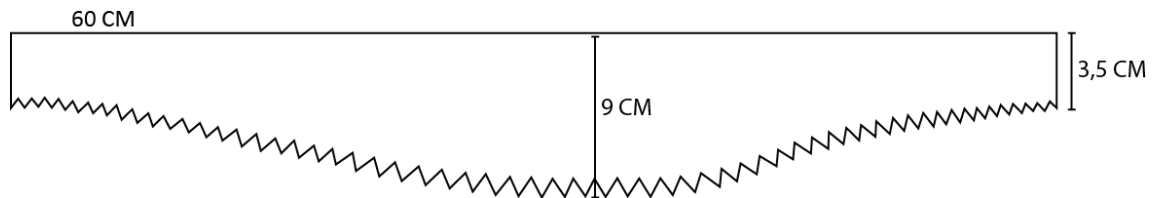
J-J



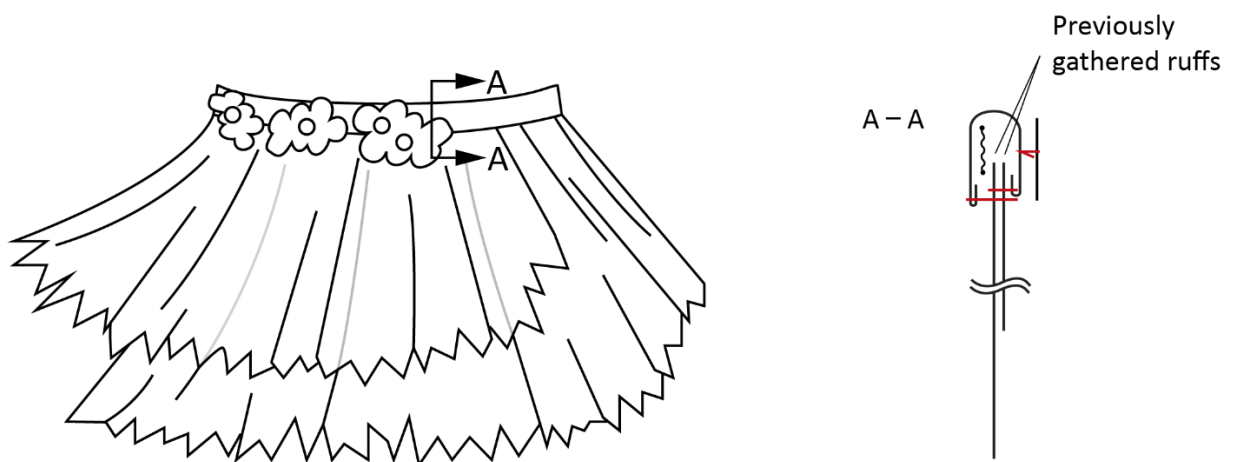
## Annex 8 *Pattern, Technical Drawings and Cross-Section Diagram of Arm Ruffs*

### PATTERN OF THE ARM RUFFS

PATTERN IS FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES.



### TECHNICAL DRAWING AND CROSS SECTION DIAGRAM OF THE ARM RUFFS



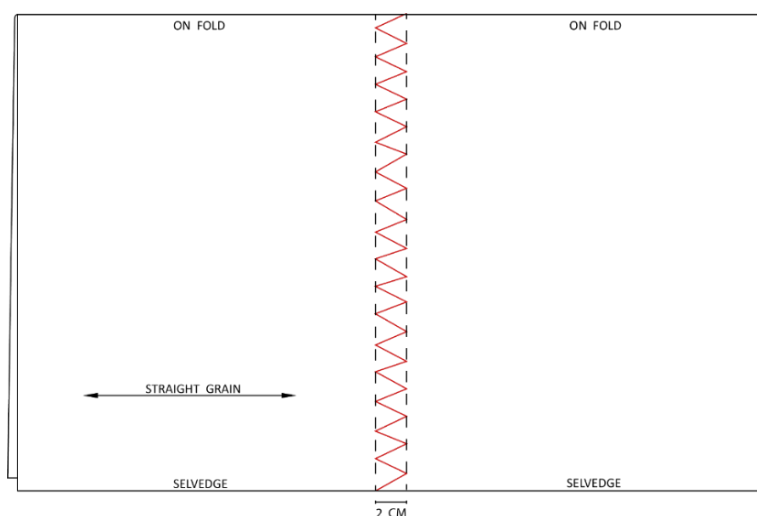
## **Annex 9**    *The Work Sequence*

### **BODICE**

1. Cut the top layer pieces from satin and backing pieces from cotton.
2. Baste the backing to top layer.
3. Sew bodice sides together (A–A).
4. Overlock side edges.
5. Sew tunnels for boning to the seam allowance (B–B).
6. Make corded piping.
7. Finish top edge with corded piping (C–C and D–D).
8. Cut nude centre insert.
9. Finish the top edge of the insert (E–E).
10. Overlock the edges of the insert.
11. Sew the insert to its place (C–C).
12. Add elastic straps (F–F).
13. Insert spiral steel boning into tunnels (B–B).
14. Secure the top edges of the bone tunnels.
15. Overlock bottom edge.
16. At the centre back sew the tunnel for the boning and make the reinforcing stitches so that the hooks will not stretch the fabric (G–G).
17. Attach hooks and eyes.
18. Sew the lace decoration on by hand.
19. Attach the decorative stones.

## BRIEFS AND SKIRT

1. Cut the front and back pieces of briefs.
2. Sew side seams together (H–H).
3. Overlock edges.
4. Insert elastics to leg openings (I–I).
5. Insert elastics to waistband (J–J).
6. Cut the tulle ribs.
7. Cut the outer edge of ribs in points following the red zig-zagged line:



8. Join the ribs into frills (K–K).
9. Sew tulle tunnel on the 6th frill layer (J–J).
10. Gather the frills.
11. Attach gathered frills onto briefs starting from the narrowest (J–J).
12. Sew the centre back seam of the briefs.
13. Sew the crotch seam (L–L).
14. Tack the frill layers together.
15. Sew a frill (M–M) to decoration layer and decorate the layer (N–N).
16. Sew the centre back seam of the decoration layer (P–P).
17. Attach the decoration layer to the briefs (J–J).
18. Sew the bodice onto decoration line (J–J).
19. Finish the closure of the decoration layer (R–R).
20. Attach hooks and eyes to the closure (S–S) and to the waistband (T–T).
21. Insert hoop to the tunnel.
22. Secure the briefs' waistband onto bodice's seam allowance to keep it in place.

**Annex 10**     *Images of the Finished Work*



*2<sup>nd</sup> Dress Fitting. Classical Ballet Dress is Finished. Model Caroline Maquignon.*



*The Classical Ballet Dress, top view*



*The Classical Ballet Dress, view from under*



*The Classical Ballet Dress, bust decoration.*

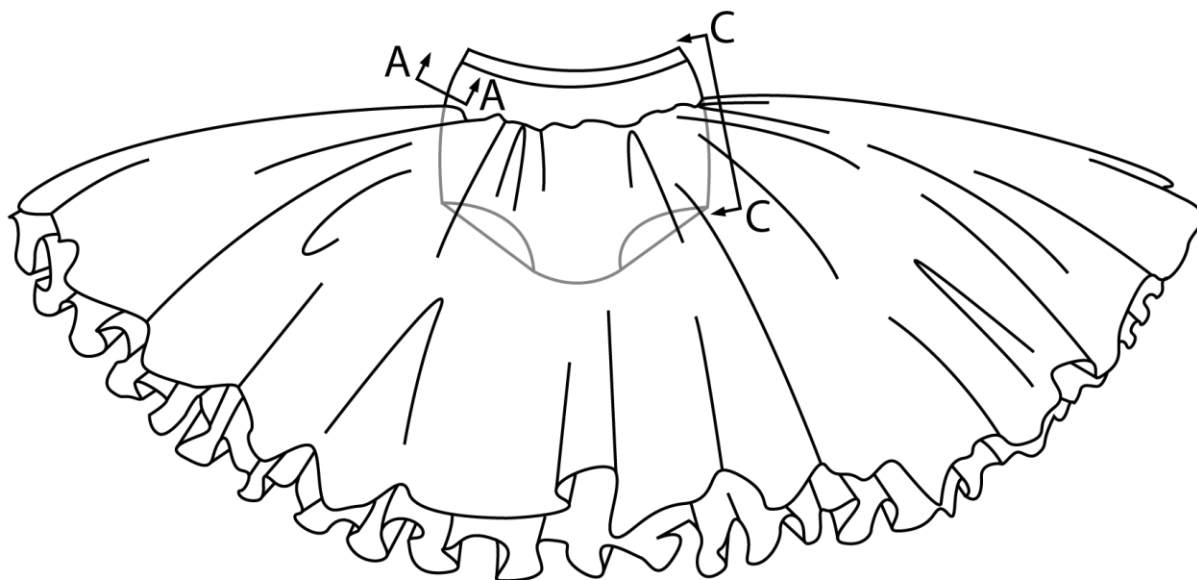


*The Classical Ballet Dress, detail of the decoration layer.*

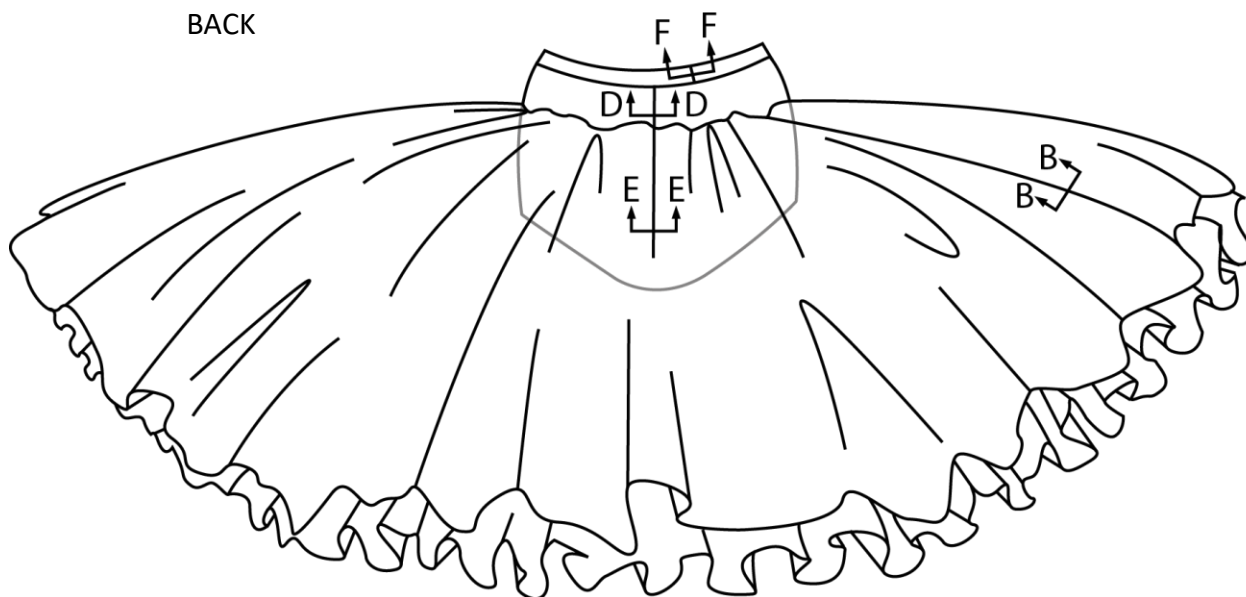
**Annex 11** *Technical Drawings of the Nutcracker Skirt*

Remaining skirt and briefs from the production of 2004.

FRONT



BACK



**Annex 12** *Cross-Section Diagrams of the Nutcracker Skirt*

A - A



B - B



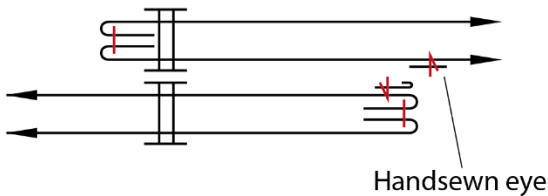
D - D



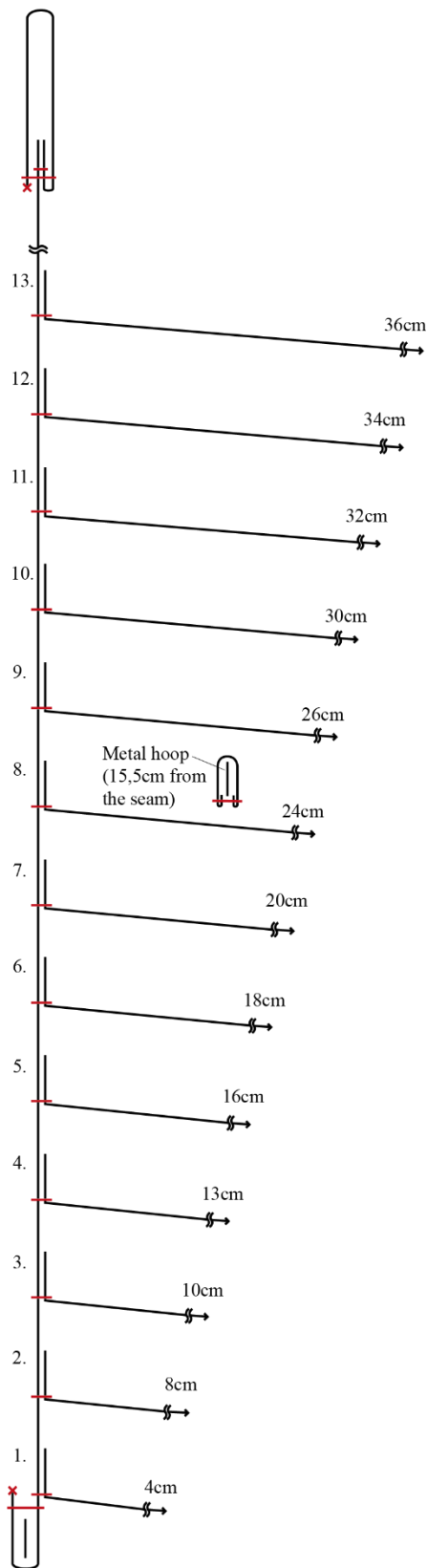
E - E



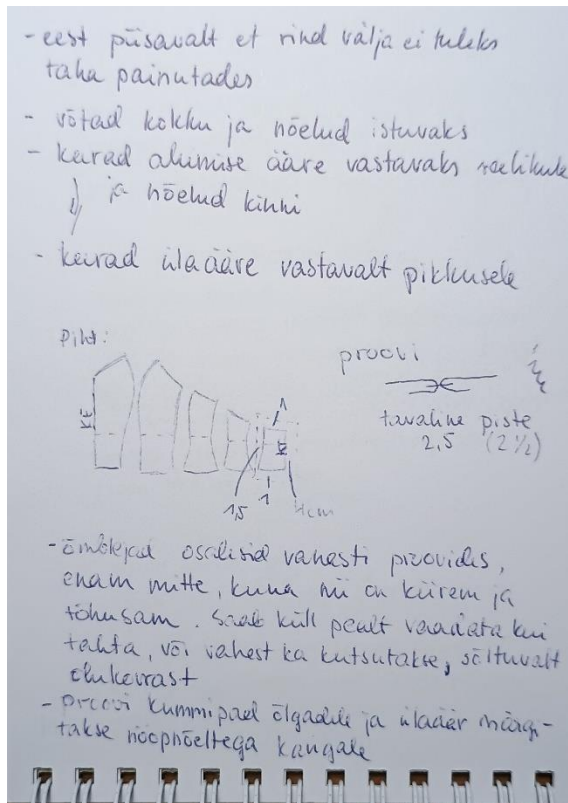
F - F



C - C



## Annex 13 Images of the Fieldwork



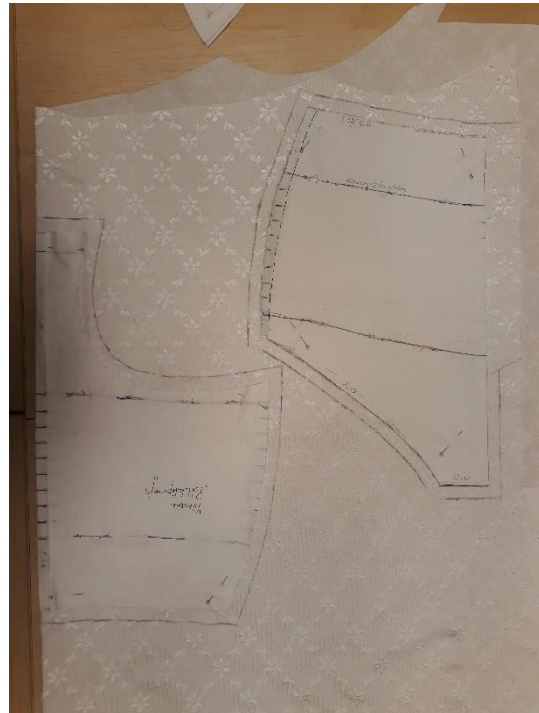
Page from My Fieldwork Notebook.



Sketches of Tacking in My Notebook.



Cutting the Tulle on Kukk's Work Table



Cutting the Briefs



*Sewing the Tulle*



*Sewing the Frills onto Briefs*



*Tacking the Frill Layers*



*Kukk and Maquignon in 1<sup>st</sup> Dress Fitting*

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**12/01/2024**