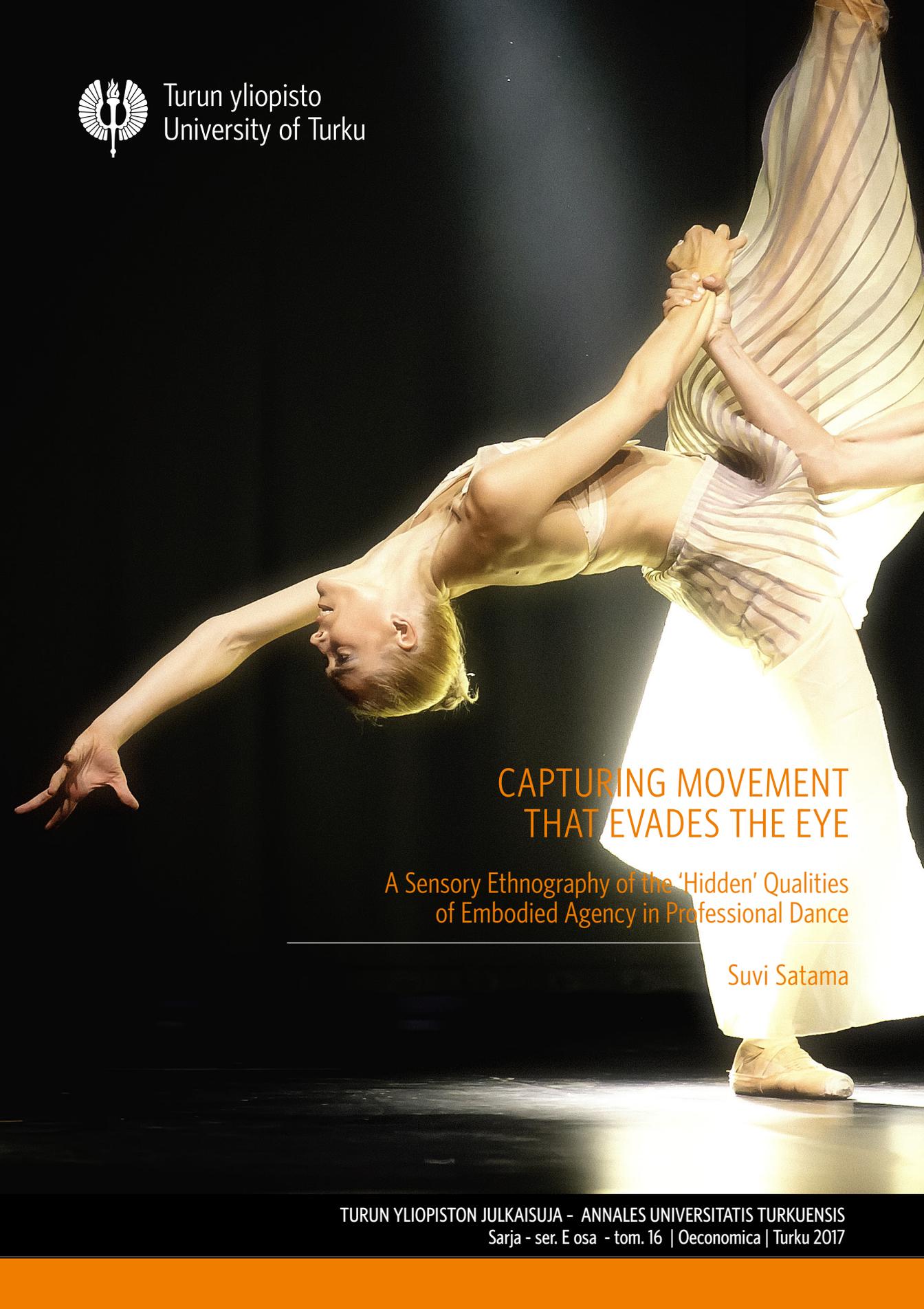




Turun yliopisto  
University of Turku



## CAPTURING MOVEMENT THAT EVADES THE EYE

A Sensory Ethnography of the 'Hidden' Qualities  
of Embodied Agency in Professional Dance

Suvi Satama



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# SUMMARY

## Capturing Movement That Evades the Eye: A Sensory Ethnography of the 'Hidden' Qualities of Embodied Agency in Professional Dance

The body is an essential feature of our everyday lives. What is known, sensed and felt flows within and through the body, and the majority of our everyday interaction is fulfilled using our bodies. This PhD thesis explores embodied agency in professional dance as an aesthetic phenomenon, surrounded by various regimes, struggles and passions. I define embodied agency here as a context-dependent and relational leeway for individuals, groups and collectives to act in their mundane lives. Here, I understand embodied agency as an ambiguous and unfinished process of creation and becoming.

But what is embodied agency in plain terms, and what does it actually consist of? For me, embodied agency means people acting at work in ways that are coherent with their personal desires. Hence, embodied agency is a sense of self-assertion — it is about being able to work within the 'limits' and pushing against them when needed, and an ability to provoke and question, but not too much. More specifically, embodied agency involves those 'qualities' of everyday practices — actions, individuals, contexts, artefacts, rules, texts, discourses, and embeddedness — through which we become who we are.

This thesis adds to the current debate surrounding aesthetics and the body within organization studies. By aesthetics, I refer here to the sensory-based skills and capabilities — such as emotions, imagination, intuition and other subtle, unspoken perceptions and activities of organizational agents. I determine the body as being the platform for the aesthetic qualities to be experienced and known. By using a sensory ethnographic approach, this thesis aims to identify the fine-grained qualities of bodily movement that emerge between off-stage and on-stage in which embodied agency is constantly challenged and reformed — by never reaching stability or perfection.

The empirical material of this thesis comprises participant observation in four dance productions, eight in-depth interviews and two photo-elicitation interviews with professional dancers, as well as short visits to different dance productions and workshops, informal discussions with the professional dancers in the field, and visual material, including photographs and videos. In addition to an introductory part, this thesis consists of four sub-studies, each of which aims to provide complementary aspects to the phenomenon of embodied agency. The accomplishment of this aim is threefold; first, the context of professional dance, which builds on the aesthetics of bodily movement, offers an avenue for exploring the research phenomenon closely; second, the presence of the two distinct worlds of off-stage and on-stage, within the context of dance, offers a special avenue for studying embodied agency; and third, by having observed different kinds of dance productions both in classical ballet and in the freelance field helps to unravel the multifaceted perspectives of the research phenomenon in greater detail.

To give a short overview of the four sub-studies, the first sub-study explores the subtleties of achieving embodied agency in ballet and fashion. The second one describes the aesthetic and relational dimensions of collaborative creativity in professional dance. In the third sub-study, the focus is on the interrelations between passion, vulnerability and embodied agency. The fourth

sub-study describes the researcher's embodied agency by problematising her different positions in relation to her aesthetic experiences during an ethnographic research process.

This thesis challenges the dominant view of downplaying the role of the aesthetic qualities of the body in social studies in general, but also specifically within organization studies. It brings forward the question regarding embodied agency and how it matters in our day-to-day actions. Hence, this thesis is much more than a study about dance, dancing and dancers. It illustrates how being a relational phenomenon, embodied agency is dependent on cultural expectations and bodily practices that are constantly on the move, which are also affected by other humans and non-humans. This thesis contributes to the literature of the body and aesthetics in organization studies by offering a more nuanced understanding of how and to what extent embodied agency can be negotiated. Methodologically, this thesis brings fresh openings to the use of visual material by illustrating the ways that the photographs can be used as a tool for opening up spontaneous discussions about sensitive aspects that are difficult to verbalise. Moreover, this thesis describes the ways the researcher is practising embodied agency in the field as well, and suggests that the researcher's aesthetic experiences do fundamentally matter when carrying out qualitative research.

Keywords: embodied agency, aesthetics, body, bodily movement, ethnography, dance

# TIIVISTELMÄ

Avauksia liikkeen taakse: aistietnografia ammattitanssijoiden kehollisen toimijuuden nyansseista

Keho on olennainen osa jokaisen ihmisen toimijuutta. Kehon kautta tiedetään, tunnetaan ja aistitaan, ja suurin osa arkipäivän kommunikaatiostamme välittyy kehojemme kautta. Väitöskirjani tarkastelee kehollista toimijuutta esteettisenä ilmiönä ammattitanssin kontekstissa. Kehollisella toimijuudella tarkoitan sitä kontekstisidonnaista ja suhteissa rakentuvaa pelivaraa, jota yksilö tai ryhmä hyödyntää arkipäivän toiminnassaan laajentaakseen ammatillista liikkumatilansa. Tutkimuksessani kehollinen toimijuus määrittyy erilaisten kehollisten käytäntöjen sekä tanssijoiden työssään kokemien voimakkaiden tunteiden ja vaikeuksien kautta. Tarkastelen kehollista toimijuutta väitöskirjassani moniselitteisenä ja jatkuvana luomisen ja tulemisen prosessina.

Väitöskirjani liittyy kehoa ja estetiikkaa koskevaan organisaatiotutkimuksen keskusteluun. Estetiikalla viitataan yksilöiden ja ryhmien aistilähtöisiin kykyihin, kuten mielikuvitukseen ja intuitioon sekä muihin hienovaraisiin, sanattomiin tapoihin toimia. Kehon käsitän olevan näiden esteettisten hienovaraisuuksien rakennusala, jonka kautta niitä koetaan ja työstetään jatkuvasti. Hyödyntämällä aistietnografista tutkimusotetta kuvaan väitöskirjassani tanssijoiden herkkää työskentelyä, jossa kiteytyy näyttämöllä ja harjoitussaleissa koettujen hetkien välinen vuoropuhelu. Lisäksi väitöskirjani tuo esille niitä tapoja, joiden kautta kehollisesta toimijuudesta neuvotellaan liikkeiden muodossa niin, että se ei koskaan saavuta vakautta tai lopullista, täydellistä muotoaan.

Mutta mitä kehollinen toimijuus tarkoittaa käytännössä? Ymmärrän kehollisen toimijuuden yksilön tai ryhmän tapoina toimia työssä henkilökohtaisten tai yhteisten tavoitteiden ja halujen mukaisesti. Kehollinen toimijuus on tunne itsetietoisuudesta – se on kyky rikkoa rajoja ja kyseenalaistaa niitä tarvittaessa mutta kuitenkin riittävän hillitysti. Kehollinen toimijuus sisältää arjen hienovaraiset käytäntömme – toiminnat, yksilöt, kontekstit, artefaktit, säännöt, tekstit, diskurssit ja mukautuvaisuuden ympäristöömme. Näiden esteettisten käytäntöjen kautta tulemme sellaisiksi toimijoiksi kuin nykyhetkessä olemme.

Väitöskirjani empiirinen materiaali koostuu havainnoinnista neljässä ammattitanssiproduktiossa, kahdeksasta syvähaastattelusta, kahdesta kuvahaastattelusta, lyhyistä vierailuista tanssin kentälle ja epämuodollisista keskusteluista ammattitanssijoiden kanssa. Lisäksi väitöskirjani sisältää valokuvia ja videoita koostuvaa visuaalista aineistoa. Väitöskirjani rakentuu johdanto-osion lisäksi neljästä osatutkimuksesta, joista jokainen täydentää kokonaiskuvaa kehollisen toimijuuden eri puolista. Muodostan kokonaiskuvan kolmen näkökohdan kautta; tanssin kontekstissa liikkeiden hienovarainen estetiikka on keskiössä ja siksi tämä konteksti on erityisen sopiva väitöskirjani tutkimuskysymyksiin vastaamiseksi. Toisaalta tanssissa läsnäoleva lavan ja harjoitussalien välinen vuoropuhelu tarjoaa erityisen näkökulman kehollisen toimijuuden tarkasteluun. Kolmantena keinona kehollisen toimijuuden kokonaiskuvan saavuttamiseksi on väitöstutkimukseni aineistollinen kattavuus, joka on erityisen monipuolinen. Se sisältää sekä erityyppisiä tanssiproduktioita että erilaisia aineistoja, kuten haastatteluja, havainnointimuistiinpanoja ja valokuvia.

Väitöskirjani ensimmäinen osatutkimus tutkii niitä kehollisia käytäntöjä, joiden kautta toimijuus määrittyy hienovaraisesti baletin ja muodin konteksteissa. Toinen osatutkimus tarkastelee yhteisöllisen luovuuden esteettisiä ulottuvuuksia, jotka rakentuvat eri toimijoiden välillä kehollista toimijuutta harjoittamalla. Kolmas osatutkimus keskittyy intohimon, haavoittuvuuden ja kehollisen toimijuuden välisiin yhteyksiin ammattitanssijoiden keskuudessa. Neljäs osatutkimus tarjoaa syvällisen katsauksen keholliseen toimijuuteeni tutkijana. Tämä osatutkimus kuvaa hetkittäisiä, esteettisiä kokemuksiani kenttätyötä toteuttaessani ja problematisoi niiden kautta tuottamiani tulkintoja etnografisen tutkimusprosessin aikana.

Väitöskirjani haastaa organisaatiotutkimuksen perinteisen käsityksen, joka on väheksynyt kehon merkitystä työelämässä. Tutkimukseni osoittaa, miten kehollinen toimijuus näkyy organisaatioiden arkisessa toiminnassa monin eri tavoin. Näin ollen väitöskirjani on paljon enemmän kuin vain tutkimus tanssista ja tanssijoista ja tuottaa tietoa kehon roolista työssä ammattialasta riippumatta. Väitöskirjassani kuvaan, miten relationaalisenä ilmiönä kehollinen toimijuus on riippuvainen kulttuuriin sidotuista odotuksista, kehollisista käytännöistä sekä muista kehollisista ja ei-kehollisista toimijoista. Väitöskirjani kontribuoi kehoa ja estetiikkaa koskevaan tutkimuskirjallisuuteen lisäämällä ymmärrystä niistä aistilähtöisistä tavoista, joilla kehollisesta toimijuudesta neuvotellaan ja joiden kautta ammatillista liikkumatilaa laajennetaan työssä.

Menetelmällisesti väitöskirjani tuottaa uusia avauksia visuaalisen materiaalin hyödyntämiseen organisaatiotutkimuksessa. Kuvailen väitöskirjassani tapoja, joilla valokuvia voi käyttää spontaanien keskustelujen avaajina arkaluontoisista aiheista, joista on vaikea puhua tai saada esille esimerkiksi haastatteleamalla. Lisäksi väitöskirjani avaa näkökulmia siihen, miten tutkija harjoittaa kehollista toimijuutta kentällä sekä siihen, millainen merkitys hänen kehollisilla kokemuksillaan on tutkimuksen kokonaiskuvan kannalta. Väitöskirjani osoittaa, että tutkijan esteettisillä kokemuksilla on syvälinen merkitys laadullista tutkimusta tehtäessä.

Asiasanat: kehollinen toimijuus, estetiikka, keho, liike, etnografia, tanssi

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*“She has a strange feeling of absolute harmony. It’s a perfect moment. A soft light, a scent in the air, the quiet murmur of the city...” (The narrator from the movie Amélie)*

Just ahead of getting this to print, I woke after a terrible nightmare, where I only had a small booklet of some unknown photographs and a messy bunch of papers in front of me as my doctoral dissertation. Today, however, I trust we finally have a refined piece of work in front of us. Relating to my nightmare, the words above from one of my favourite movies, *Amélie*, describe my feelings as I handed this study for printing. As having given my best, I felt mixed sensations of joy, gratefulness, pride and relief, but anxiety, despair and insecurity as well. In general, writing this dissertation has been an incredible journey filled with exciting moments spent with outstanding dance artists in the field, countless hours of deep discussion with the clever people around me, long and therapeutic walks with my dogs in the woods, and lonely but inspiring moments of sitting, reading, thinking and writing.

I am utterly happy I have been able to combine some of the most precious subject matters from my life – dance and writing – in this work. To me, dancing is a sweet escape from the everyday. It is beauty, emotional bursts, bravery and a window to the ‘unspoken’ aspects of life. It is digging into some of the most primitive things in human kind. Research then, to me, is a combination of independence and deep collaboration, constant questioning of my thinking patterns, curiosity in other people, their stories and the diverse aspects of the world we are living in. Since I was a little girl, I have been fascinated by fairytales, poems and storytelling, and therefore, I find writing about the things that interest me the most a privilege.

So, the time has come for me to thank the people – supervisors, pre-examiners, colleagues, friends and family, both humans and non-humans – who have touched me in multiple ways and provided me the support that I needed along the way. First of all, I want to thank my primary supervisor and mentor, Professor Juha Laurila, for his open-minded attitude to my cutting-edge research topic throughout this process, and all the amazingly detailed remarks, sincere advice and instructive comments that he has given me throughout. Without you, Juha, I would not have learned as much I have now to work independently as a post-doctoral researcher. Countless hours spent together discussing with you this study have taught me so much about what it is to be a researcher, and many things about the phenomena of life in general. You are incredibly rigorous and thorough in your comments, and you have a specific talent for being flexible and strict at the same time. I appreciate how you have thrown yourself into this novel and perhaps a bit provocative topic that I had, and guided me firmly to the end of this process. Still, you have given me the space that I needed to find my own path and ways of doing research. So, thank you, Juha, with all my heart. Maija, my second supervisor, I want to thank especially for her “mental coaching” and the long, therapeutic and inspiring dog walks along the river Aura. Maija, you have encouraged me to break the limits and approach research a bit differently. You were my supervisor during my Master’s thesis as well, and it was probably already there that I got that

sparkle to continue researching the particular field of dance with the help of your encouraging and positive attitude. So, thank you, Maija.

I could not be happier to have the two best preliminary examiners for this thesis that one could imagine, and therefore, being able to see and develop “its full potential as a finished artefact that people will own, and read”, as Professor Warren put it. Thank you, my pre-examiners, Professor Antonio Strati and Professor Samantha Warren, for your supportive, analytical and detailed comments to the final manuscript ahead of going to print. As experts in this field, I truly valued your comments and the time you spent reading through this thesis. Your thoughts forced me to think deeply one more time about the topic of this dissertation and make it even better and stronger in all respects. I am also grateful to Professor Samantha Warren who has kindly agreed to be my opponent for the defence of this thesis.

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There are also many intelligent and kind people who have contributed to my career more than they probably even realise. I want to thank my co-authors Dr. Astrid Huopalainen and Dr. Annika Blomberg for their great writing companionship. Astrid, you mean so much to me. You are a true friend, a soul mate, a great colleague. It has been so important to me to share the mundane joys and struggles of being a mother, a dog-owner and a researcher with you. I am utterly happy to have you in my life, and I look forward to writing loads of fascinating papers with you in the future. And Annika, thank you for being in my life too. The humour we share is something that cannot become forced, and I hope we will collaborate and continue breaking the limits with our creative ideas in academia in the future. Dr. Arto Ryömä, our solid combination of being the D-man and the ballerina (“pakki ja palleriina”), the conceptual pair first introduced by Associate Professor Niina Koivunen, has worked as a humorous but serious inspiration for my work throughout. Arto, thank you for discussing my research with me deeply, and listening to all my worries related to the tensions between passion and insecurity in our academic work. Your support both as a colleague and as a friend has been priceless to me.

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Within this piece of work, I feel privileged to have had a chance to follow the work of incredibly talented professional dancers so closely. It has been a unique experience in my life. Minna Tervamäki, you are one of the most talented artists I know. Thank you for letting me come so near to you. My sincerest thanks go also to Jonna Aaltonen, Niina Airaksinen, Auri Ahola, Karoliina Lummikko, Kare Länsivuori, Tiina Myllymäki, Anu Viheriäranta, Anna Torkkel, and other professional dancers involved in this study. Thank you for giving your time and always being willing to share your thoughts with me even about the most painful aspects of your careers. Niina, thank you also for the possibility to work as an assistant in your dance productions “SOJIKU4” and “Nordic Roots”. Thank you, Minna Hatinen, Emma Heinonen, Hertta Kiiski, Esa Kyyrö and Kim Laine, as well as Anna, Minna, Niina and Tiina, for giving your amazing photographs to add light to this thesis as a whole.

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In Taipalsaari, by the lake Saimaa where my soul and body always rest,

17 March 2017

*Suvi Satama*



The retired ballet dancer looks at the puzzling moment captured in the photograph and explains as follows:

*“This photograph reflects the merging of the artists’ opposing forces, being sensitive and powerful at the same time. Both of us combine both traditional and contemporary elements in our work, and therefore, make art that truly feels like ours. Furthermore, when working together, we aim at creating something unexpected. I find the power of seeking and doing together as a truly inspiring and driving force in my work.”*

...and I realise – this is what the relational nature of embodied agency is about.



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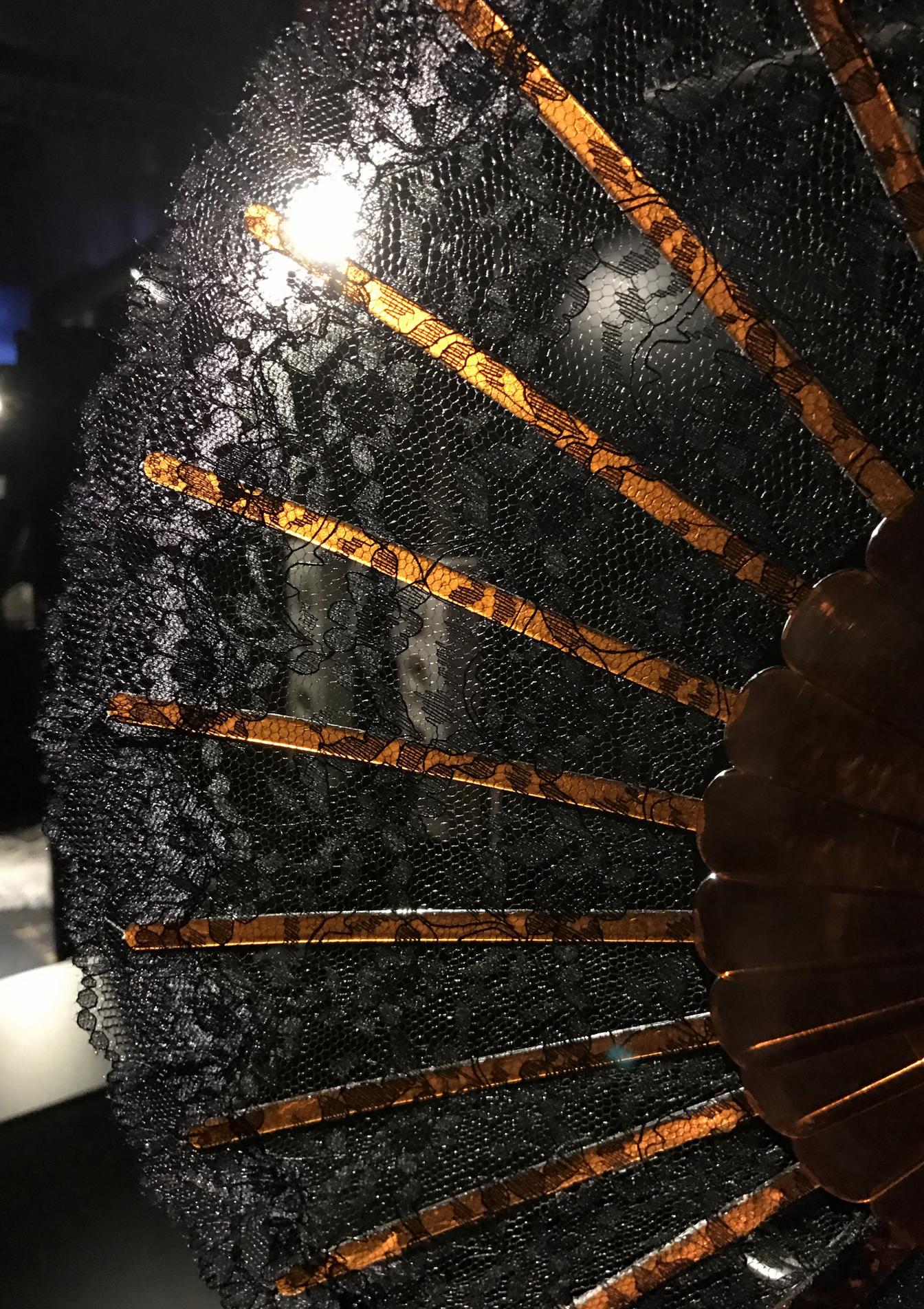
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## INTRODUCTION

*The train arrives in Helsinki at 9:30 in the morning. I walk through the city centre and feel very nervous... almost physically sick. Finally, standing in front of the theatre I think to myself “here I am”, and get a strange, passionate feeling of having achieved something, while sensing the annoying tickling in my stomach. The porter leads me to the main theatre hall. I look at the soft chairs covered with red velvet that stand in front of me and the mystic power of the empty audience flows through my body. This is the first time the dancers are rehearsing on-stage in a ‘real’ theatre.*

*The dancer, already standing on-stage, shouts to me with a happy and warm tone in her voice: “Hey Suvi, oh, you came already, welcome! Just take a seat wherever you want.” I feel the anxiety leaking out of my body as I select my red velvet seat, which helps me feel cosy and relaxed. I look at the stage where the female dancer is marking the steps alone. Meanwhile, she thanks me for having been present at the rehearsals for all these months and tells how much strength that having another person there has given her. Her compliments give me a kind of new, meaningful dimension to my research. We talk about how it would be impossible to distance myself from empathising with the dancers’ mundane struggles and joys and not be who I truly am in the field, to be “just a researcher”. In a strangely relieving way, this small chat between me and the dancer makes me feel liberated and encouraged not to pretend to be someone I am not. Therefore, this ethnographic piece of writing is a truly aesthetic experience for me too.*

*(A note from my ethnographic diary, 9 October 2012)*

### FROM A DISEMBODIED VIEW TO THE SENSE OF AESTHETICS

The aesthetics of our bodies lies at the heart of conceptualising social interactions and agents. In fact, they are present in every single nuance of our mundane lives. This study aims at uncovering embodied agency at work. I must admit that throughout the years of writing this study my relationship with the highly ambiguous concept of embodied agency has deepened into a love-hate relationship, involving the simultaneous emotions of joy and madness, excitement and frustration. Finally, just before getting this work to print, I was able to write down what embodied agency really means to me. To put it into one single sentence, embodied agency appears to be the means for people to act at work in the ways that are coherent with their personal desires and feelings. Hence, embodied agency is a sense of self-assertion. It is about being able to work within ‘limits’ and push up against them when needed, and “the need to provoke but not provoke too

much” (Taylor 2013, 78). By aesthetics, I refer here to the sensory-based aspects, such as emotions, intuition, fine-grained nuances of the everyday work (Linstead and Höpfl 2000; Strati 1999) and being involved with “any kind of sensory experience” (White 1996, 195) to which relationality and the body are attached to (Koivunen and Wennes 2011). Throughout this synthesis, I have included plain examples of the kinds of actions and behaviours from both the dance field and outside of it that I understand as being embodied agency to give concrete meaning to this (at first glance) abstract phenomenon. Furthermore, in order to immerse the reader in the fascinating creative field of dance I have included photographs from the productions that I have been observing as a part of this ethnographic study. I have also chosen to include some photographs from the experiences of the dancers that I know to do justice to their colourful and affective profession as such. These photographs are published with permission. Therefore, this synthesis is not only theoretical and methodological, framing together the four interrelated sub-studies, but hopefully a valuable ethnographic artefact in its own right.

Furthermore, I address dance as a theoretically valuable and empirically fascinating context to explore those ‘hidden’ qualities which attach to the aesthetic view of organizations (for an insightful overview, see Strati 2000b). For me, dance has appeared as a rich aperture for understanding myself and people around me as embodied beings, continuously shaped by our bodily experiences, and the incredibly complex array of feelings, affections, attitudes and beliefs that we are inevitably affected by in our daily lives. In the synthesis part of the study, along with my writing, I present valuable thoughts from Mary, Joanna and Alice<sup>1</sup> – three different professional dancers who have given me extremely valuable insights and their permission to share them here with us. Mary, a retired ballet dancer currently works as a private entrepreneur and has taught me the passion for ‘doing’ and what collaboration with other people can be at its best. Joanna, a friend of mine, has worked in different dance companies in Finland and abroad, both in the freelance field and in classical ballet. Therefore, her experiences have provided multifaceted perspectives on the core concept of this study, embodied agency. Alice then, started her ballet career late, as a 11-year-old girl “without any kind of sport background”, as she told me. She worked at the Finnish National Ballet for several years, but decided to leave the company and move into the freelance field.

The opening vignette from my ethnographic diary above renders visible the embodied excitement that flew throughout my body every time I went to follow a dance rehearsal during the two years that I spent in the field of professional dance. Therefore, this study is not only an ethnography of professional dancers’ embodied agency, but also a reflective story of me practising embodied agency as a researcher as well.

I have grown up in a fully artistic environment filled with music, theatre, photography, painting and other kinds of dimensions of the arts. For example, I remember the very first opera for children, “Puss in Boots” (‘Saapasjalkakissa’) that I went to see with my father. During the interval my father took me to have a closer look at the instruments of the orchestra beneath the stage. There was a player of a double bass practicing. He played a little song for me, and I was totally blown away. This was one of the embodied experiences within the arts that I remember. My journey of conducting a sensory ethnography in dance probably started in 1990, when I was

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the synthesis, I use pseudonyms in order to anonymize the identity of the dancers.



a 6-year-old girl and my parents took me to my first ballet class. Interestingly, the grandmother of our neighbour, who often saw me playing with her grandchild, had told my mother that “you should take Suvi to a dance lesson, there is something in her”. It was then my father that often took me to the ballet class, while my mother stayed at home with my little brother.

Already my very first memories from the dance field entail emotional bursts of happiness and frustration, joy and disillusionment, as well as an endless willingness to try. For instance, when I put the pointe shoes on for the first time, I remember the feelings of pride and excitement flowing through my body. Merja Tuohimaa, the teacher of ballet at the Music School of Central Helsinki (Keski-Helsingin musiikkiopisto) and a newly-retired ballet dancer from the Finnish National Ballet, encouraged us to try them on along with the older girls attending our class. That was one of those moments on which my life-long attachment with the field of dance builds.

Returning to 2017, for me, doing ethnography was a fundamentally aesthetic and embodied experience that touched me in ways I could never have imagined. When I started my ethnographic research project, I thought that even if I was studying dancers, I as a researcher would be the invisible follower in the field, and that (hopefully) nobody would pay attention to me. Furthermore, one of my supervisors warned me before entering the field by saying: “Don’t get too immersed with the dancers’ rehearsing!”, because of my own background in the field of dance. But that was not how it went after all. I did not stay as an invisible observer and many times I found myself totally immersed into the rehearsing situations that I experienced with the

dancers. Even so, I feel as though I have made an insightful exploration into the embodied agency professional dancers.

The main purpose of this study is to grasp on the subtle ‘qualities’ of professional dancers’ embodied agency and by so doing, challenge the disembodied, over-cognitived and rational approaches of organization studies (Pullen and Vachhani 2013; see also Strati 2000a; 2016, 253). Within these approaches the mind takes over the body (Thomas 2003) and the body is seen as being a ‘taken-for-granted’ aspect of organizational life (Hassard et al. 2000; Michel 2011). Even though the lexical, linguistic, semiotic and symbolic approaches have contributed greatly to organizational studies, it is relevant to problematise the human body “to fully understand how organizations operate” (Styhre 2004, 101). Writings on the aesthetics of organizations “share the general feature of conducting an epistemological polemic against the dominant image conveyed by the rationalist paradigm” — as Strati (2016, 251) writes, and this is the ideology that I very much emphasize in my writing.

Therefore, the positivist and rational paradigms were popular in the field of organization studies until the late 1980’s. Of course, various other perspectives, such as the critical realistic (for example Archer et al. 1998), and social constructionist (Berger and Luckman 1966), and the four paradigms: functionalist, interpretive, radical-humanist and radical-structuralist, introduced by Burrell and Morgan (1979), existed in parallel. The social constructionist view (Berger and Luckman 1966) was then complemented by the aesthetic perspective of organizations at the end of 1980’s, introduced and developed by Gagliardi (1996), Strati (1999) and Guillet de Monthoux (2004). The main idea of the aesthetic perspective was to question the existing ‘over-cognitivist’ paradigm and move beyond the idea of the “only analytical-scientific thinking providing a valid description of organization” (Strati 2016, 251). Nevertheless, it has still remained a rather marginal perspective in organization studies, maybe partly because of its abstractness and difficulty to verbalise.

This study therefore aims at uncovering those “invisible doings” of a professional dancer’s work between off-stage and on-stage through which embodied agency is practised, negotiated and reformed. For me, embodied agency involves those everyday practices – actions, individuals, contexts, artifacts, rules, symbols and texts (Gherardi 2016, 682) through which we negotiate our place in the world and become who we are. In my view, the “invisible doings” include those actions and behaviours which are often taken-for-granted aspects of our mundane lives, but which matter for the development of our embodied agency. For example, when going to my workplace in the morning, I open the door to my room and often leave it open to give an ‘unvoiced’ message to the others that I am here, I am available. Then I have a small, a rather shallow talk with my colleague in the coffee room to have a relaxed start to the day. This makes me feel part of our working group, even if most of us in academia are not physically present daily in the workplace. As another example, I took my young dog to the vet for a kidney control last week, and wanted to thank the veterinarian who has saved my dog’s life several times during the past few years. I gave her a picture of my dog, a small card with words of thanks and a bar of chocolate. The vet got slightly embarrassed, with a light smile on her face. Perhaps, this small gesture was a rather unusual, and in this sense a provocative, action (see Taylor 2013) for her, as she covered my present with her papers, but yet, I believe a nice and a truly valuable one. These kinds of mundane

bodily actions are seldom paid attention to in academic debates, even if they are significant for the well-being of people and organizations, as I have learned now.

Moreover, this study brings up my own aesthetic experiences, feelings and sensations as the researcher and views them as meaningful aspects of building up this ethnographic study. The distinction between different research paradigms leads to the danger of seeing them as competitive or mutually exclusive, which should not be the case. It needs to be stressed, however, that my aim is by no means to downplay the value of the rational and intellectual side of human behaviour, or to position “the sensory realm as somehow above and beyond rational intervention and structuring” (Hancock 2005, 45). Rather, I wish to offer a complementary, aesthetic view to the dominant, more functionalist views of studying organizational actions.

This study has been inspired by the recent debates about the body and aesthetics in organization studies, which focus on the sensory-based and embodied aspects of human behaviour. I find drawing insights from these debates as a curious exploration of seeking, writing and learning, even if I agree with Annemarie Mol, who writes that relating to the literature is never specific enough and the references “will inevitably be too crude” (Mol 2003, 30). Even so, I acknowledge and question the Cartesian body-mind duality, which has been prevalent in Western society (Sinclair 2005b). Instead, in this study I view embodied agency as a relational phenomenon shaped and negotiated by the socio-cultural environment, the mind-body interplay (Fisher and Reiser Robbins 2015), personal desires of embodied agents and other aspects discussed further in the sub-studies of this thesis. Therefore, I work with an understanding of embodied agency as an ambiguous and unfinished process of creation and becoming. Here, I view embodied agency “as itself an active force, focusing on the agency of lived experiential bodies” (Bell et al. 2016).

The aesthetic details of different professions have been studied from various perspectives related to each other. For instance, Atkinson’s detailed, ethnographic account of a day’s lesson in a glassblowing studio illustrates the sensuous ways that the work of a glassblower is embodied and demands “a feel for the glass and for the tools” (Atkinson 2013a, 400) and management of the body posture (Atkinson 2013a, 401), therefore being a holistically embodied practice. In a similar way, in their study Ewenstein and Whyte (2007) argue that aesthetic knowledge is not only the symbolic context, but in fact, an integral part of people’s everyday work. By analysing the work of the architects, they identify the symbolic (consisting of signs and symbols) and experiential (consisting of feelings and sensory-based experiences) sides of aesthetic knowledge as a part of the professional practice. Related to these two studies, Taylor (2013) offers a perspective of “beautiful action” in organizations which comes from exceptional craft skill, as in the studies mentioned above, and which reaches beyond “instrumental efficiency and effectiveness” and aims higher, “to aim for beauty” (Taylor 2013, 79). When I think about my own life, the beautifulness of the everyday actions around me entails a sense of respect towards each other, feeling compassion for each other (see Lilius et al. 2011), and overall, listening to what my *own* feelings are telling me by not following other’s expectations or many times strict and simple-minded advice. Those experiences are particular and local, and therefore, experienced subjectively (Taylor 2013).

Furthermore, by studying the routine staff of a music-recording company in the US, Siciliano (2016) offers another viewpoint to the study of organizational agents from an aesthetic perspective. In his ethnographic study, he shows how, in a task-oriented, monotonous type of job, the feel of expression and aesthetic sensitivity is also present. In a similar way, Wright (2016)

discusses organizational routines as bodily accomplishments and questions the existing research of routines neglects the body. Finally, Mirchandani's study (2015) complements these studies by arguing that even telephone-based customer service workers are in fact embodied and based on fine-grained interactions through the use of voice during calls, "bodies are imagined, evaluated, and monitored" (Mirchandani 2015, 915). All these studies are examples of how aesthetics, feel and body are present in all professions and actions in organizations. In line with these studies, I aim to capture what I believe are some of the most essential features of embodied agency in a professional dancer's work. These include the importance of on- and offstage practices, relationality and the dynamic interrelation between passion and vulnerability. By so doing, I aim at developing the discussion of organizational aesthetics and the body in organizations, both theoretically and methodologically.

By reviewing the research literature on aesthetics and the body in organization studies, I was able to identify some key themes emerging in the literature, discussed more thoroughly in section "Defining aesthetics in organization studies". To mention some of the most obvious themes related to the body, *the embodied perspective to leadership* has recently been discussed among various academic scholars in organization studies. For example, Koivunen and Wennes (2011) touch on the relational view of leadership through analysing how a symphony orchestra is led. Continuing with this idea, Bathurst and Cain (2013) support the relational view of leadership by describing the aesthetics of gestures, which "occur moment-by-moment" (Bathurst and Cain 2013, 358). Ropo and Sauer (2008b) then, concentrate on describing the aesthetic dimensions of leadership by using dance techniques as a metaphor for different leadership styles. As Ropo et al. (2013) describe, the relationship between leadership and material place can be conceptualised using the notion of embodied experience, overlapping with the notion of aesthetic experience. This will be reflected further on by focusing on me as an embodied researcher in the field in sub-study four of this thesis.

Moreover, *the gendered dynamics of the body* have gained an established position among organizational scholars. For example, Haynes (2008) speaks about how the identity of female accountants builds on gendered expectations and embodied experiences in early motherhood and how the different forms of professional and maternal embodiments coincide after having a baby. Slightly similarly, Bell and King (2010) write about conferences as places consisting of "a between-men culture", which reinforces masculine values, which is enabled through certain bodily dispositions of control and endurance in academia. Relatedly, Muhr and Sullivan (2013) argue that people make sense of leaders through the gendered expectations they have on their presumed gender. However, Hancock and Tyler (2007) suggest that the aesthetics of gender are 'done' and 'undone' by producing and performing certain organizationally legible gendered subjects and, in this way, the bodies of the employees work as "material signifiers" (Hancock and Tyler 2007, 515). In addition, work in the service sector has become much more aesthetically demanding compared to past decades, and the gendered judgements of the personalities are present already in the recruiting phase in companies (Parviainen 2011b). To give an example from my own life, I remember one gym class I attended some months ago in which the female teacher was very tired and even 'flabby', and made me not willing to try my best. It was surprising, as I had got too used to the female instructors who seemed to be always overly energetic and happy. The one-hour class seemed to take forever, and sensing the people



around me I seemed not to be the only one feeling frustrated. Hence, these studies mentioned above illustrate how the body and its aesthetic qualities are integral yet unstable and are even hidden features of organizational life.

Furthermore, the themes related to *the senses* have recently been actively (yet marginally) discussed in top-journals related to organizational studies, even though their wider potential has remained scant (Warren 2008). In this study, I view the senses as vital points of connection between aesthetics and the body. More specifically, I view the body as the experiential platform for the senses to emerge and through which aesthetic (i.e. sensory-based) experiences are then expressed and lived through by taking the sensing self as the focus instead of the different senses and their usage (Pink 2009). The senses are therefore culturally and socially interconnected (Classen 1997), and they produce “(subjective) perceptions, unique to the perceiver’s emplaced viewpoint-in-time” (Dicks 2014, 661). Apparently, in the work of professional dancers, the senses play an important role as the dancers are continuously in physical interaction with each other and need to interpret each other’s moods of the day. “Pretty quickly I notice if someone is having a bad day. We work so close to each other that we notice each other’s worries pretty easily, one cannot hide them”, a ballet dancer once described to me.

Some examples of the studies discussing the senses include the meaning of touch in workplaces, explored by Fuller et al. (2011). By analysing quantitative survey data, they conclude that touch has multiple positive effects in the leader-follower-relationship. Furthermore, Driver (2008) and Flores-Pereira et al. (2008) reflect upon the meanings of food, drinking and taste in organizations: while food practices can be seen as “embodied performances” in which the self and others are constructed and controlled (Driver 2008, 913-914), the “ritual body performance” (Flores-Pereira et al. 2008, 1023) of after-work drinks illustrates how organizational culture is embedded in the experiences of the body. Riach and Warren (2015) provide an insightful analysis of the everyday smells that occur in offices, and below, they illustrate the ‘messiness’ of embodied beings:

*“To accept a fully working body — senses, smells and all — is to accept the unbounded, messy, unpredictability of employees, foregrounding the constantly active and inter-corporeal character of embodied organizational lives.” (Riach and Warren 2015, 805-806)*

In line with this argument, in this study I view the embodied agency of professional dancers as a constantly and relationally changing and developing phenomenon, surrounded by the senses, which by now, have remained a surprisingly marginal research topic among organizational scholars.

In addition to the perspectives related to aesthetics and the body in organization studies described above, there are some recent studies about the meaning of *the physical appearance and embodied presence* in working life. This aspect resembles the discussion of leadership traits, which has a long-standing tradition in organization studies. Recently, the physical presence of

leaders has gained growing media attention, at least in Finland, and the meanings of it have been enthusiastically discussed. In their book on the relevance of the physical appearance of Finnish leaders, Tienari and Meriläinen (2016) use anecdotes of dog breeds, such as hounds and Saint Bernards, to describe different leader types. They conclude that being in good physical shape is related to a leader's credibility, and therefore, becomes an ideal for successful leadership (Tienari and Meriläinen 2016). Moreover, to give some examples of the academic publications related to the theme of physical appearance in working life, in her study Valtonen (2013) argues how the height of the body "is immersed in wider social and political struggles" (2013, 215), and how "a whole range of material and sensorial practices — and not only visual" (2013, 197) – are embedded in the practices of how our agencies are negotiated in our day-to-day lives. In a similar way, by complementing the literature that highlights the importance of the visual gaze in work places, Meriläinen et al. (2015) explore 'ideal' executive bodies that are voiced in consultants' talk during a recruiting process.

Therefore, it is not only the sight through which the bodies are evaluated which matters, but also "different sensory cues", such as the energy and intensity of the bodies of the candidates. However, these studies do not take into focus the distinction between off and on-stage which provides a fruitful viewpoint for studying the development of embodied agency, which is part of this study. As Czerniawski (2012, 132; 135, emphasis added) argues, negotiation and manipulation of cultural interpretations and expectations of bodies starts from *the backstage*, which shows the everyday life experience of the agents. By taking seriously the distinction between off and front-stage, this study aims at broadening our understanding of embodied agency in relation to the experiences of 'rehearsing', bodily transformation and capturing the various struggles and joys present in the constant movement between off- and on-stage.

## THE MEANINGFULNESS OF EMBODIED AGENCY IN OUR LIVES

*"To drop the tools of rationality is to gain access to lightness in the form of intuitions, feelings, stories, improvisation, experience, imagination, active listening, awareness in the moment, novel words, and empathy". (Weick 2007, 15)*

What is embodied agency and why does it matter in practice? Throughout this manuscript, I have been struggling with the attempts to recognize how this study is much more than a study of dancers, dance and dancing. The broader meaning of this study has been close to my heart throughout the research process. Hence, as I have now worked on my thoughts, I could describe embodied agency as the set of an individual's abilities for finding a sense of freedom at work. These abilities include intuition, feelings, experiences, imagination and other qualities described in the quote above, and therefore, I believe, could interest both researchers and practitioners alike. Furthermore, the highly abstract concepts of "bodily transformation" and "transformative body" are attached to embodied agency in various ways. By accepting ourselves as continuously transformative beings we can better recognize those means through which working practices



may be reformed and challenged, and in this way, we may (or may not) gain increased flexibility at work.

It is also an important notion that aesthetic approaches can be falsely seen as being relevant only to artistic organizations (Jackson and Parry 2011, 125). Therefore, I want to highlight the practical relevance of the findings of this study outside dance organizations. Hence, in fact, just like the professional dancers have the emotional attachment and enthusiasm to conduct the hardily practised movements as perfectly as possible — not only during the on-stage performance, but also at their work off-stage — so should the leaders understand the meaning of the “felt meanings” in their everyday work also. In the everyday-life of organizations, onstage could be seen as the official part of the company, while the backstage refers to the informal organization, in which the social relations between people are not only attached to the formal nominations, status and positions in the company (Parviainen 2011b). Here, backstage, the spontaneous, wild, compassionate, affective, nasty and dirty practices and behaviours become expressed, and therefore, visible. Therefore, exploring the on-stage-backstage dynamics could tell us much more about the characteristics of companies and their people than only looking at the ‘surface’.

While acknowledging the importance of existing studies of the aesthetic body this study moves on from a focus on the unchangeable characteristics of the bodies to consider the complex ways in which embodied agency is (re)created and challenged, therefore being constantly “on the move”. By so doing, this study aims at going beyond the traditional view of looking at organizational members as ‘a-mobile’ and somewhat fixed agents. By ‘everyday life’ I refer here to the meticulous off-stage<sup>2</sup> working and rehearsing which happens behind the curtains, but in fact, also on-stage, while performing. The study aims to further our understanding of how exploring the everyday-dynamics between professional dancers and other (non)-human agents in the field can contribute to the understanding of both organizational everyday (inter)actions from an embodied perspective and organizational research methodology, through the use of and recognition of the embodied agency of the researcher itself. More specifically, the study brings forth the themes of rehearsing, bodily transformation and aesthetic qualities, such as feeling vulnerable during the ‘moving’ process of becoming an embodied agent. For example, Joanna, a freelance dancer who had worked in various dance companies around the world described the process of bodily transformation from the perspective of an ageing body in the following way: “The more experienced you become and the older one gets, the more you appreciate the aspect of being trusted. In other words, I can do my work the way I want, and I get the liberty to express the movement in my own ways”.

By using professional dance as the research context, this study offers novel and complementary viewpoints to the existing debates on aesthetics and the body in organization studies. More specifically, this study aims at speaking beyond the specific field of dance and opening up the negotiation of off-stage and on-stage embodied practices and aesthetic qualities of bodily movement through which embodied agency is formed, negotiated and challenged. Therefore, the study illustrates not only how embodied agency takes place and in which kinds of situations in the mundane work of professional dancers, but also in what kinds of relations and to what extent. This is elaborated by drawing attention to other human and non-human agents and questions how embodied agency intersects with them and why this is significant for our discipline.

2 Even if I use the words off-stage and on-stage separately, I view them as dynamically overlapping and relational worlds, thus not as separate entities.

By other human agents I refer here to all the other individuals that are involved in the working processes of the professional dancers I observed. Joanna described this aspect vividly by reflecting her own experiences from abroad: “I did a couple of projects in Vienna, and working there was hard for me. The choreographer was like ‘forget about the feeling’, when for me, it was ‘all about the feeling.’ It was confusing.” As such, embodied agency seems to be an individual’s attempt to reach a sensory-based balance between ourselves and the people around us. By non-human agents, I mean the material artefacts, such as the mirrors, the garments and pointe shoes, the music and the cultural background, beliefs and norms related to different dance genres that are undeniably present in the off-stage and on-stage work of the professional dancers. Of course, the mirrors, or other material objects are never in the same position than other human agents interacting with the dancers, but even though, they play a valuable role in shaping and determining of what their embodied agency is going to be like. Mary once described vividly her changing relationship with the mirror as follows: “I have thought long about what being gazed upon by the mirror makes me as a human being. A rather strong criticism of myself becomes evident. As one gets older, you understand how the picture you see from the mirror changes and evolves, it is never objective. I have learned not to use the mirror. It can be rather disruptive and you can’t get rid of the mirror, you are *in* the mirror. Nowadays, I try to use the mirror as a tool for refining my poses and nothing else.” This is an important example of the ways we continuously judge ourselves through others, here through the mirror. As I already previously mentioned, in today’s business world, judgments and decisions in recruiting situations are increasingly affected by the non-humans, such as clothing, accessories, ways of talking and in general, are based on our first impression of the person (Parviainen 2011b).

To sum up, this aspect is related to the growing debate of materiality among organizational scholars, who have studied it, for example, in relation to organizational communication (Ashcraft et al. 2009); ethics of its entanglement and to the ‘lived’ embodiment (Dale and Latham 2015); everyday organizational life (Orlikowski 2007); and leadership in the British Royal Navy (Hawkins 2015), for an overview of materiality in organization studies see also Carlile et al. (2013). However, it is important to note that in this study, I chose to leave out the thrilling yet complex discussion of the interrelations between the professional dancers and the audience, a valuable human agent, due to my limited possibilities of focusing on all kinds of aspects of professional dancers’ embodied agency as deeply as I wished.

Moreover, the work of professional dancers can be seen to be mirrored in the work of leaders in terms of balancing between off-stage and on-stage worlds; the difficult decisions of management are first made off-stage, hidden from the public gaze, and only afterwards ‘performed’ on-stage and exposed to the opinions and criticism of the personnel and other people. Moreover, leaders, as other people in all work organizations, are exposed to “aesthetic qualities” (Mitias 1988, 28) and “aesthetic abilities” (Dobson 1999), referring to the things and actions we judge around us based our emotional sentiments those awake in us. In other words, we all are undeniably attached to our bodily reactions and experiences that are difficult to verbalise but which deserve to be recognised more thoroughly in our practical lives.

Therefore, by highlighting the non-verbal actions of working life, this study encourages managers and other policy-makers to take a second thought on what their actions, motivations and decisions are actually based on. In other words, even if the decisions made at the managerial

level are often thought to be based on ‘pure’ rationality, this is not the whole truth when the people are presumed as embodied and (sometimes) irrational beings. Further, robotization, the application of artificial intelligence and technological developments have already changed today’s business world. But can robots be humans in the future? What kinds of aspects make our behaviours and actions priceless when compared to robots? These are the questions that need to be taken seriously and answered with the understanding that embodied agency can be made use of. Hence, the intuitive, emotional and embodied nature of our behaviour should be acknowledged both at the operative and the managerial level in all kinds of companies. This resonates with the thoughts of Dobson (1999) concerning success and the successful aesthetic manager — it is no longer enough to focus on the outcomes of the company, but rather think about and also lead to redefining what success in today’s business world actually is, as Dobson (1999, 14) writes.

## THE CENTRAL CONCEPTS OF THE STUDY

The central concepts of this study are *embodied agency* and its relation to *bodily movement*, *aesthetics* and *the body*. *Embodied agency* in this study is defined as a context-dependent and relational leeway for individuals to act at work. In other words, it is the set of skills and capabilities, such as the ability to handle criticisms from colleagues, or finding one’s own ways of doing work, which within a wider time perspective helps us to uncover satisfaction and well-being in our lives. Furthermore, I view embodied agency as an aesthetic phenomenon, defined and surrounded by various organizational regimes, struggles and passions that derive from the cultural background and the aesthetic experiences of the people. Therefore, using embodied agency as a theoretical pinpoint is particularly important for comprehensively understanding the embodied formation of social actions. Similarly, understanding this helps in developing workplace practices in which the aesthetic details of work are noticed and valued, and understood as creating company success.

In this study, embodied agency is realised through the fine-grained *bodily movements* through which the dancers manage their mundane work. By bodily movements I refer to the various “ways to integrate and manage our actions through our bodies” (Huopainen 2015, 829) and to the often overlooked ordinary work activities (Llewellyn and Hindmarsh 2013). As Joanna once described: “I get the feeling inside my body through the movement, and I hope to be able to transmit this to the audience. The feeling arises through the liberty of not thinking too much about the form or the regulation of the movement. If the movement becomes too controlled, the feeling does not get the space to come into existence. Sometimes the choreographers have too tight and too strict counts for the movements. There is no space left then for our own agency.” Therefore, we coordinate our work through the intersections between verbal actions with the people around us, bodily movements and the material resources that we have (see Llewellyn and Hindmarsh 2013, 1403).

Bodily movements have been explored by focusing on their standardisation in fitness services (Parviainen 2011a), routine-based customer work on service encounters in an art gallery (Llewellyn and Hindmarsh 2013) and fashion show organizing (Huopainen 2015). In his

inspiring, inter-disciplinary study of human movement and walking, Ingold (2004, 336–337) argues that shoes support our established notions of the body, just as writing supports that of science in a way that appreciates “head over heels”. All these studies contribute alternative perspectives on the meanings of bodily movement in mundane organizational life. Here, following the movements of professional dancers in the field opened up a fascinating world in which I got the opportunity to follow the ways in which the *movement* was the substance of the work. In fact, many times, the energy for carrying on the rehearsals despite the sweat, pain and continuous interruptions seemed to stem from the empathetic, intense and many times hilarious movements between the dancers.

The *aesthetic* view of organizations argues that “art and science cannot be kept separate if the intention is to understand everyday routine in organizations”, Strati (2016, 251) writes. Therefore, the aesthetic perspective on organizations, discussed firstly by Gagliardi (1996), Strati (1999) and Linstead and Höpfl (2000) in organization studies, is concerned with the non-rational, sensory and experiential dimensions of mundane actions that challenge the view that only analytic-scientific thinking would provide a ‘valid’ description of an organization (Strati 2016). I believe to gain a deeper understanding how the senses, emotions, affects and bodily bursts become enacted with our selves demands a dedicated attitude towards the world in practice, and doing research in a scientific sense. Therefore, in my view, the aesthetic view is entirely appropriate for this aim, as it “problematizes the rational” and “challenge(s) the logic of (the) organizing process” (Linstead and Höpfl 2000, 1).

The recent “turn to embodiment”<sup>3</sup> (Shilling 2003) in organization and social sciences, discussed broadly also by Hassard et al. (2000), Dale (2001) and Wolkowitz (2006) has brought the body into discussion among organizational scholars as well. In this study, I view the body not only as a physical, socio-cultural object, but also as the site and ‘platform’ of human experience (Merleau-Ponty 1989). Therefore, we embody our surroundings aesthetically before we make any further interpretations of them. Also, I agree with Parviainen (2014), who uses the notion of “double bodies”, referring to the difference between the physical body and the lived body. Here, I view the body as a conscious, active and reflexive entity of a human being. The corpse instead, is the material and physiological part of a person, acting despite his or her willingness. This distinction is relevant for understanding our behaviour in our everyday life. For instance, Parviainen (2014) illustrates how there are situations in service work in which the perception of the qualities of the physical body, such as the weight, height, looks, and attitude, as seen from the customers’ perspective sometimes does not coincide with the lived body felt emotionally from the inside. There might be a flight attendant, looking beautiful and a happily satisfied worker in the customer’s eyes, but when we dig into her inner feelings, it turns out that she is totally bored and tired of her work. Because of these kinds of tensions, we make constant efforts to guide the impression that others receive from our bodily presentation. In real life, of course, the body and the corpse cannot be separated conceptually in this way. As such, they become entwined, and therefore, form a coherent whole (Parviainen 2011b). Throughout this thesis, however, I use the word ‘body’ to refer to the ideas of the “lived body”, discussed by Parviainen as explained above.

<sup>3</sup> Embodiment is a closely related concept with the body, and can be defined as “the experience and awareness of the lived body, constantly in movement” (Coaten and Newman-Bluestein, 2013, 677). For the clarity of this study, I avoid using the term embodiment, but instead, focus on the concepts of the aesthetics and the body.

The increasing interest in the embodied aspects of organizational life has fostered an expanding scholarly interest in the role of the body at work. These studies deal with the spoken and unspoken micro-practices in the pedagogy (Atkinson 2013b); subtle coordination and inter-corporeal knowing in an anaesthesia team's (Hindmarsh and Pilnick 2007) and surgeons' (Moreira 2004) work in the operating rooms of hospitals; and detailed "face games" and the patterns of interaction in a group setting (Patriotta and Spedale 2009) – to name just a few. These studies entail sensory details of the working body and therefore, even if not stated clearly,



view the body as an aesthetic matter — as do I. Therefore, although the relationship between aesthetics and the body is largely overlapping in organization studies literature (see for example Ropo and Sauer 2008a; Koivunen and Wennes 2011), in this study I view them as concepts that complement each other. Aesthetics involves bodily gestures, experiences and sensations, and therefore, would not exist without the body. Whereas the body receives and transmits aesthetic experiences, judgements, emotions, sensations and gestures.

Therefore, while aesthetics involves senses, emotion, fine-grained details of organizational agents and (embodied) memory, the body is the platform through which the felt meanings are experienced. Together, these two concepts form an epistemological perspective that highlights the physical, subjective and experiential ways of ‘being-in-the-world’. In fact, many organization scholars have dismissed the aesthetic discourse on organizations even if our day-to-day decisions are partly based on aesthetic knowledge (Ewenstein and Whyte 2007; Strati 2013, 241–242) and agency in the sensuous interactions and encounters (Llewellyn and Hindmarsh 2013). In this study, I aim at grasping this critical neglect by analysing closely the daily, ‘behind-the-scenes’ dynamics and interactions of professional dancers from an aesthetic perspective.

## MOVING IN THE FIELD AMONG PROFESSIONAL DANCERS

Dance and movement are considered a promising research area to explore many body-based dimensions of being and interacting in organizations (Biehl 2017; Biehl-Missal and Springborg 2015). These aspects include leadership — studied from a relational, embodied perspective in symphony orchestras (Koivunen and Wennes 2011), and as an embodied practice wrapped with spatiality (Ropo et al. 2013). Such studies are from the viewpoint of arts-based interventions, like the experimental study of Hujala et al. (2014) for example, which uses dance sessions for teasing out the emotions of a group of managers, and using dance as a metaphor and heuristic device. This kind of study has also been carried out by Chandler (2012) and Ropo and Sauer (2008b). Surprisingly, only a few empirical studies have been conducted in the context of dance in organization studies. A recent and notable exception is the first special issue in the *Organizational Aesthetics* journal. This integrated dance into the management field, was guest edited by Biehl-Missal and Springborg (2016), and consisted of different dance-inspired ideas (and in which sub-study 3 of this thesis is included). Other examples utilising dance in organizational research include the study of Chandler (2012), discussing the potential of the dance analogy for providing “a richly multidimensional view of work” (2012, 865) and offering some alternative openings for how we could see work as dance.

In a similar way, Ropo and Sauer (2008b) use dance as a metaphor for describing different leadership styles. Hujala et al. (2014) use dance and creative movement as a method to reveal unspoken thoughts of the managers attending a dance session. In their article, they conclude that these kinds of experiential methods might provide new knowledge about the emotional and sensory sides of the managers. However, these studies mostly use the artistic context of dance as a method to teach something about management from the arts (see Taylor and Hansen 2005, 1217). Hence, they do not explicitly consider the potential of

professional dance as an avenue for understanding the dynamics and embodied practices<sup>4</sup> through which the various and hidden, sensory-based characteristics of us, the embodied agents, could be revealed. The value of the aesthetic and embodied side of organizational agents is therefore acknowledged, yet still awaits deeper and more thorough exploration, especially empirically. This study aims at taking up this challenge and by doing so, building existing understandings of the versatile sides of the aesthetics of the body among all agents in an organizational setting.

Some recent attempts of thinking differently about the body and organizing are the studies of Slutskaya and De Cock (2008), which focus on carnival dance and its analogies to contemporary organizations; also, Sørensen's (2006) study about innovation from an embodied perspective; as well as the study of "monstrous embodiment" in organization studies (Thanem 2006). Moreover, a recent article by Biehl-Missal (2016) explores movement in organizational spaces through a site-specific performance of a techno club in Berlin, Germany. All of these studies speak for the potential which the context of dance has in broadening our understanding of the sensuous, embodied aspects of organizational life.

When attempting to defining 'dance', one could describe it as a "situated embodied aesthetic practice" (Thomas 2003, 93), which provides a rich platform for exploring both the changing practices of dance forms, the evolution in the "histories of the bodies" and both the possibilities and limitations of the physical body. Even if the experiences of dancers may be difficult to translate into written text, this does not mean that dance lies outside of language (see Thomas 2003, 174). To me, the research material of the everyday life of dancers turned out to be something completely other than ineffable sentiments and repressed words. In fact, it turned out to be full of vivid descriptions of their behind-the-scenes dynamics and interactions that entirely carried me away with them. The embodied work of professional dancers in specific has been touched by some scholars — mainly those with a sociological background. Most of these studies are ethnographic, aiming at getting inside the dancers' world and experiences. What is also in common for these studies is that they highlight the physical challenges and the meanings of pain and injuries for a dancer's identity. For example, while Aalten (2007) describes in detail the occupational culture of ballet by highlighting the overburdening of the body that leads to injuries, so too do Wainwright and Turner (2006; 2004), who handle the complicated inter-relationship between the body, injuries and identity, more specifically.

In a similar spirit, Wulff (1998) offers detailed descriptions of the culture of ballet dancers and their struggles, and Tarr and Thomas (2011) provide a description of how pain and injuries could be methodologically presented in academic work. However, the above mentioned studies focus on the vulnerabilities of a dancer's profession, and do not include what is central to this study: embodied agency and its ambiguous relationship to the interplay between passion and vulnerability (see sub-study 3 for a closer analysis of this matter), therefore extending the existing literature of the embodied side of human behaviour.

Another valuable perspective of embodied agency that became visible when I moved among professional dancers in the field was the entanglement of the dancers' bodies and materiality. Hoogsteyns (2013) study describes the material agency of ballet dancers through the example

4 In this study, I define embodied practices as the everyday actions of embodied agents "in concrete social, cultural and historical contexts" (Davis 1997, 15; see also sub-study 1). Furthermore, I view embodied practices as processes "in which all the senses and emotions come into play and movement is central" (Ferguson 2016, 1).

of the meaning of pointe shoes. This is akin to concepts mentioned in this study, where I view the interplay between the other human agents (such as the colleagues, choreographers and the audience) and the non-humans (such as pointe shoes, mirrors, the rehearsal studios and the occupational culture) as significant aspects that help to shape a professional dancer's embodied agency. For example, as I already previously described, Mary, the retired ballet dancer told me vividly about her ageing body and its relationship with the mirror. During an in-depth interview, she continued describing how "there are only a few professional dancers who dare to rehearse without a mirror". Further reflecting on rehearsing with or without the mirror she continued: "You can see only the surface of your body through the mirror. The movement becomes much more interesting when you think about how it feels by training without the mirror." This relates to Hoogsteyns' (2013, 130) argument that "the dancer does not have a full embodied sense of the self. She is actually actively trained to ignore the signals and limits of her physical body". Therefore, the dancers seem to be dependent on the mirrors, important 'non-humans' during their off-stage work, which then disappear when moving to on-stage. This is an interesting point



of view to the discussion of materiality as it implies that the entanglements between the bodies and materialities are “heterogenous, interdependence, co-constitutive and dynamic” (Dale and Latham 2015, 167), and is discussed further in the sub-studies 1 and 3 of this thesis.

But why did I choose professional dance as the research context<sup>5</sup> of this study, after all? What kinds of insights, both scholarly and practical, can this unusual organizational context offer us? In the first place, I need to stress that for me, choosing dance as the research context was a sum of my own background and desires behind it, existing connections within the field, and first and foremost, moments of luck and chance. The whole research process was somewhat ‘messy’ which I had to deal with and accept. Also, I met some ‘sceptics’ during my research journey who doubted what the dance context could offer organizational scholars or the business world. I remember how even one of the professional dancers asked me suddenly during an interview that “coming from a business school, how come you don’t explore the funding side of the dance field to help us?”. Her question made me feel confused and offended, and I even do not remember what I answered her; however, I kept my head and the ideas that I had about the research design remained.

But there were also some preconceived reasons for studying embodied agency in the context of dance. From a methodological viewpoint, the aesthetic understanding of organizational life (Strati 1999; 2016) provides a particular platform for carrying out sensory ethnography (Pink 2009; Warren 2012) in the context of professional dance. As Siciliano (2016, 18) writes, “in terms of generalisability, ethnographic research typically sacrifices breadth for depth”. Therefore, the piquancy of carrying out sensory ethnography with professional dancers lies in the possibility to capture the detailed moments of the professional dancers’ mundane work that would never be visible through any other means. Therefore, this was one of the main reasons for choosing the context of professional dance to the very focus of this study. Following the notion of “backstage” (Goffman 1959), I aim at capturing those private moments of professional dancers’ work that the public gaze never reaches. Front-stage and backstage are not mutually exclusive, because “the private sphere of subjectivity becomes realised in and through the public” (Islam 2010, 248). Observing closely the “behind the scenes” dynamics of professional dance helped me to unravel the embodied micro-practices through which context-dependent, restricted forms of embodied agency in this context were negotiated and reformed. I also decided to choose professional dance as the empirical context of this study because of my interest in “turning to my senses” and using my own aesthetic sensitivity (Warren 2008) and personal attachment to the dance field. This is part of an attempt to highlight detailed situations of embodied work that can further our understanding of the meaning of agency from an embodied view in other occupations, as well.

Following the rehearsals of the different dance productions as a part of the research material turned out to be a total sensual experience for me – an experience in which my different sensations became blurred. For me, being in the field and following closely the rehearsals worked also as a ‘practical’ way of “turning to my senses”. Hence, I remember days in the field when I could see how the dancers seemed to be stressed out, hear the choreographer’s overheated words, and smell the swetty clothes and pointe shoes on the floor. However, none of these sensations dominated over the others, instead they became a holistic sensory experience that I could still feel when the

5 Here, I use the word ‘context’ when talking about the field of dance in overall. By ‘setting’ I refer to the four different dance productions within which I conducted the fieldwork of this study.

rehearsal was over. Hence, more than anything, this thesis is a serious attempt to account for the *sensing* researcher as a crucial part of ethnographic practice (see Warren 2012).

Finally, choosing to study embodied agency in the context of professional dance lies in its special characteristics that I found very compelling. The art of ballet has evolved from French and Italian courts to its present, contemporary form, in which new styles are combined with the technique of ballet. As dance is a physical and extremely wearing profession (cf. Ropo and Sauer 2008b), it involves specific health risks and demands that are almost obsessive (Aalten 2005). For example, ageing, eating disorders and specific ideals of the shape of a dancer's body can turn into threatening consequences of the profession (Aalten 2005; Wainwright and Turner 2004). Therefore, I found professional dance as a very natural context to explore the phenomenon of embodied agency as the characteristics and subtle details of the moving bodies of the dancers were easy identifiable when I was observing the dancers' work in the field. Also, by using professional dance as a research context, it is possible to develop the ways in which we speak about bodily matters within organizational life. My observations of professional dancers' has revealed that their work simultaneously consists of routinised repetition and improvisational, aesthetic sensitive movements and gestures. Hence, I find dance an excellent context to tease out many sensory-based, under-researched aspects of human behaviour described and analysed in the sub-studies of this thesis. These special characteristics, to name a few, made embodied agency very fascinating to explore in the context of dance.

I would like to shortly describe here my own attachment to the dance field. As I already described in the very beginning of this thesis, I have practised dance since as I was six years old and thus, my genuine interest in the professional dancers' work made this ethnography a truly enjoyable and empowering experience for me. I have some advantages when conducting sensory ethnography in the context of dance because of my personal background with it. For example, due to my personal experiences from ballet and contemporary dance lessons, the interpretations of this study probably seemed more credible for the professional dancers themselves than the interpretations of a researcher, without any closeness with the dance context, would have been. Because of my dance background, I felt like practising embodied agency as a researcher with the professional dancers during the research process. To put it in plain terms, there were moments in the field when I occasionally felt confusion, frustration and exhaustion from the dancers' attempts to rehearse the same parts of the production over and over again. I also remember the end of one day when I felt enormous relief and joy with the dancers as they figured out a great end for their performance. In general, I usually felt exhausted after the days in the field just as if *I had rehearsed* in the sweaty pants with the dancers, even if I had just been (aesthetically) truly present in their working days. Therefore, I think that my cultural understanding of the context of dance has been unique and I have been able to understand the fine-grained nuances and the professional vocabulary of the dancers in the field. Therefore, there was no need to spend years and years in the field — my own experiences in dance allowed me to quickly get into the sense of aesthetic details of professional dancers' work. Furthermore, having practised dance myself has lead to a greater awareness of reflexivity and help me to understand how I as a researcher have been producing the world of the professional dancers myself (see Cunliffe 2003, 985). Moreover, even if negotiating access to the field of dance was a continuous process (see Bondy 2012) in this study, it was rather easy, partly due to my existing connections within it.



On the other hand, there are some negative aspects related to my own attachment to the context of dance. Of course, having danced since my childhood, I have some fixed connotations of the genres of dance, such as classical ballet, which in my view, give weight to physical appearance and technical skills of the ballet dancers more than to their capabilities to express themselves through movement, which certainly have affected the ways in which I have interpreted the research material. Trying to stay open-minded for what I saw and felt during those specific moments I was observing was challenging throughout the research process. It was encouraging to note that the dancers found my study as a way of “clearing my own thoughts and finding motivation for the work that is hardly ever thought of in the mundane life”, as Joanna put it.

Moreover, I also consider some of the professional dancers as close friends of mine, and sometimes moving in the field among them made me feel insecure about my study, because I was aware of having so many different roles in the field. For example, during the production of two retired ballet dancers, I felt of being a technical assistant (who for example put the music on) and an empathetic listener in between being the researcher. While in the solo production, I considered myself both as a close friend of the dancer and an ethnographer. Balancing between these kinds of different roles was a hard but also rewarding and eye-opening experience for me, helping me understand how multifaceted a process of doing ethnography actually is.

## OUTLINE OF THE THESIS AND OVERVIEW OF THE SUB-STUDIES

This thesis consists of the introductory part (synthesis) and four sub-studies. While the introductory part aims at giving an overall description of the theoretical background and the methodological choices of this study, as well as uncovering the wider meaningfulness and potential of the study, each of the four sub-studies aim at offering complementary viewpoints to the phenomenon of embodied agency. I want to stress, however, that even though the ‘synthesis’ in the Finnish scholarly community is viewed as a theoretical and methodological piece of its own, drawing together the different sub-studies of the thesis, I approach the synthesis in a slightly different way. In this thesis, the synthesis, of course, works as an “umbrella artifact” both theoretically and methodologically. But being more than that, I decided to include some yet unused thoughts from the three dancers, Mary, Joanna and Alice, and examples from other settings as well, to anchor the phenomenon of embodied agency in our everyday life. In so doing, I hope this thesis satisfies also those ‘sceptics’ who may be reserved about these kinds of innovative areas and ideas in the field of organization studies.

In this study, I will argue that embodied agency at work consists of detailed, (inter)actions that working life should consider more deeply. To give a short overview to the enclosed sub-studies: the first sub-study explores the subtleties of achieving embodied agency in two empirical contexts explored ethnographically – ballet and fashion. The second describes the aesthetic dimensions of collaborative creativity among professional dancers and illustrates the relational nature of embodied agency. The third sub-study focuses on the interrelations between passion, vulnerability and embodied agency, which, in the mundane work of professional dancers, are intertwined with each other in complex yet meaningful ways. The fourth sub-study features myself, the researcher, and problematises my practising of embodied agency in the field and my aesthetic experiences during an ethnographic research process.

By now, each of the sub-studies is either published or in the review process. Two of the sub-studies (1 and 3) have been published in international scholarly journals and have been subjected to peer review. Sub-study 2 has been submitted to an international scholarly journal for peer review and is currently under review with the journal, while sub-study 4 is to be submitted to an international scholarly journal in the near future. Each of the sub-studies has been written as a separate publication and therefore, has a contribution independent of this thesis. All of the four original sub-studies are reproduced and attached at the end of this thesis with the permission of the publishers: Taylor & Francis (sub-study 1) and Creative Commons Attribution - Non commercial (sub-study 3). The outline of the study is summarised in Figure 1 below.

<p><b>PART I</b> SYNTHESIS</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Introduction</li> <li>2) Theoretical Background of the Study</li> <li>3) Methodology</li> <li>4) Introducing the Sub-studies</li> <li>5) Discussion and Conclusions</li> </ol>
<p><b>REFERENCES &amp; APPENDICES</b></p>	
<p><b>PART II</b> ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS</p>	<p>SUB-STUDY 1: Satama &amp; Huopalaianen: ‘Bring Down the Controlled Movements!’ – Exploring the Possibilities of and Limitations on Achieving Embodied Agency in Ballet and Fashion.</p> <p>SUB-STUDY 2: Satama &amp; Blomberg: Creative Bodies on the Move: Exploring the Aesthetic Dimensions of Collaborative Creativity in Dance.</p> <p>SUB-STUDY 3: Satama: ‘Feathers on Fire’: A Study of the Interplay Between Passion and Vulnerability in Dance.</p> <p>SUB-STUDY 4: Satama &amp; Laurila: Momentary Aesthetic Experiences as a Source of Ethnographic Understanding: Insights from a Study of Professional Dance.</p>

Figure 1. Outline of the Thesis

The remainder of Part I is organized as follows. In the following chapter, I provide an overview of the theoretical background of the study. In Chapter 3, I then discuss the methodological approach of sensory ethnography, the research material and the analysis of the study in detail. Thereafter, Chapter 4 summarises the four sub-studies that form the overall description of the phenomenon of embodied agency. Finally, I conclude my thesis in Chapter 5 so that it develops a sustained and in-depth analysis of the empirical, conceptual and theoretical contribution of the study for our understanding of the qualities of embodied agency in the context of professional dance. Furthermore, the last chapter summarises the key points of the study and contributions, allowing a reflective space for opening up the wider potential and meaningfulness of the study within organization studies.



# STUDYING THE COMPLEXITY OF EMBODIED AGENCY

## THE AESTHETICS OF THE BODY AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Defining aesthetics in organization studies

*“Aesthetics are a form of knowledge and they have their own truth.” (Strati 1992, 216)*

To build up the theoretical background of this thesis, I begin with a literature review of the existing discussions of aesthetics and the body in organization studies. By first introducing the discussion of aesthetics, I highlight the importance of the sensory-based side of human behaviour and then move onto the discussion of the body, which forms the setting for the aesthetic aspects to emerge. The theorisation of aesthetics consists of a rich and multifaceted literature from which the philosophical concept can be approached. Besides, as Mol (2002, 30) points out, “it is never possible to relate to the literature specifically enough”. Throughout, I felt overwhelmed by the impressive literature I read and the insightful studies already made, and therefore, felt insecure about how to handle them in a manner that was sufficiently sophisticated and respectful. As such, in line with Mol, I view the theoretical literature discussed here as a “source of authority” (2002, 30), which has helped me to find justifications for the meaningfulness of the specific topic of my thesis.

Originally, the word aesthetics derives from the Greek word *aesthesis* and refers to sensory experience (Hansen et al. 2007). The ancient German philosopher Baumgarten defined aesthetics as knowledge based on feelings (Baumgarten 1750). In day-to-day language, aesthetics is often connected only with art or beauty, yet it is much more than that: aesthetics is connected to “felt experiences” in the world (Taylor 2013). Therefore, it is “concerned with knowledge that is created from our sensory experiences” (Taylor and Hansen 2005, 1212). As the quote of Strati (1992) above finely illustrates, aesthetic experiences are always subjective, therefore never reaching pure objectivity, and demand aesthetic reflexivity (Sutherland 2013) from the person “living through” them. Shusterman (2006) points out that aesthetics is commonly approached as “a mode of sensory perception or experience”, as a “special faculty or exercise of taste focused on judgements of beauty and related qualities”, or as a “theory of fine art”.

In organization studies, a growing interest in aesthetics since the early 1990’s has produced a wide range of literature exploring the non-instrumental and the non-rational dimensions of organizational life — with questions of art, beauty, taste, sensory experiences and the intuitive, imaginative qualities at their heart. Already 20 years ago, both Gagliardi (1996) and Strati (1992; 1999; 2000a; b) aimed at addressing the value of aesthetics as a “manner in which organizational life is approached, studied, understood” (Strati 1992, 215). Thereafter, aesthetics has been used to scrutinise, for example, its potential to explore organizational artefacts (Hancock 2005), sensory experiences in relation to the physical surroundings of the workplace (Warren 2002) and, in a

similar spirit, the co-creation of aesthetic categories and experiences of shipboard organizational life (Griffiths and Mack 2007). Taylor’s and Hansen’s (2005) review of the field of organizational aesthetics reveals how the concept of aesthetics can be approached from various perspectives in terms of content and method (see Figure 2 below).

		CONTENT	
		INSTRUMENTAL	AESTHETIC
METHOD	INTELLECTUAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Artistic forms as metaphors for organizations</li> <li>• Lessons from the arts for management</li> <li>• Using aesthetics to deepen our understanding of traditional organizational topics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professions that are aesthetic in nature</li> <li>• Aesthetic forms within organizations</li> <li>• The sensory experiences of day-to-day life in organizations</li> </ul>
	ARTISTIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arts used to work with individual and organizational issues</li> <li>• Aesthetic forms used to illustrate intellectual arguments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Artistic forms used to present the sensory day-to-day experiences in organizations</li> </ul>

Figure 2. Categories of Organizational Aesthetics Research (adapted from Taylor and Hansen 2005, 1217)

As we can see from the Figure 2 above, the field of organizational aesthetics can be categorised into four different ‘slots’: intellectual analysis of instrumental matters; artistic form, used to analyse instrumental things; intellectual analysis of aesthetic matters; and artistic form, used to explore aesthetic issues. In this study, I closely associate myself to the slot of “intellectual analysis of aesthetic matters” (highlighted with grey in the figure), which focuses on the aesthetics of the professions, industries and products and aims at uncovering the aesthetic forms within organizations and the direct sensory experiences of mundane organizational life. More specifically, throughout this thesis, I aim at moving away from the narrow attempts at looking at human behaviour as ideally rational, logical and systematic, and explore the ways our actions in organizations can be seen as messy, unorganized, emotionally complex and even dirty. In their article, Taylor and Hansen (2005) also divide the field of organizational aesthetics into four analytical dimensions: aesthetics as epistemology, aesthetics as criteria for judgements, aesthetics as connection and aesthetic categories. Therefore, despite the vigorous attempts to categorise and organize the term and the field of aesthetics in various ways, what is actually meant by it in organization studies has remained shattered and even partly contradictory, due to the polyvalence of it (Warren and Rehn 2007).

Despite often focusing on physical organizational artefacts (see Strati 1992; 1999), aesthetics can be widely understood as the epistemological questioning of sensuality and knowledge, a subjective phenomenon based on sense experiences, involving perception, imagination and intuition (Ewenstein and Whyte 2007). Therefore, it does not necessarily always include aesthetic

categories — such as being beautiful, ugly, grotesque or tragic (Strati 1999). In this study, I do not focus on aesthetic categorisation, but instead, look at aesthetics in the spirit of Hansen et al. (2007, 545), who define aesthetics as “felt meaning generated from sensory perceptions, (involving) subjective, tacit knowledge rooted in feeling and emotion”. Related to this viewpoint, Alice once described to me the difference between ballet technique and an Israeli dance technique she had been studying. She explained how “ballet is like bricks, and you are given readily choreographed series of movements. The Israeli technique, instead, is like DNA, there are no complete series and you need to be able to make use of your whole capacity and all the layers of knowledge inside of you, as you may have a lot of different tasks to complete simultaneously”. I found this aspect really interesting to describe how choreography, rehearsing and repetition are entwined with spontaneous and aesthetic work, and how tacit knowledge is rooted in the dancers’ everyday rehearsing. Broadly, aesthetics is based on the idea that knowledge has a sensory basis and that our arguments around our thoughts and feelings inform our cognitions (Taylor and Hansen 2005). Moreover, as Küpers (2013b, 54) writes, organizations are “embodying aesthetic ‘properties’ and use various aesthetic symbols and artefacts” in their everyday lives. Therefore, organizations can be seen as dynamic and organic systems, filled with sensory details. For example, as Küpers exemplifies, there are situations in the workplace in which the dullness of unproductive meetings or empty rhetoric may lead to frustrated feelings in the employees, or the joy related to the uplifting drive of successful performance achievement at work. Always, these aesthetic feelings “imply a potential transformation” and are always embodied in the temporal, non-verbally expressed, inter-personal space (Küpers 2013b, 28).

Aesthetics, including perceptual and emotional human skills and capabilities (Styhre 2008) complements traditional ways of being, knowing and working, which have left individuals’ emotional, symbolic responses unexamined within the field of organization studies. A critical approach to organizational aesthetics, furthermore, takes into consideration that personal, sensory experiences are never “pure” from ideologies or power relations (for example Eagleton 1990; Warren and Rehn 2007; Hancock 2005). Instead, they are “learned reflections of particular cultures’ preferences” as Warren and Rehn (2007, 165) put it. This is the understanding of aesthetics that I base my study on. In other words, I work from the assumption that aesthetics is experienced by the senses, rather than only rational logics (Harter et al. 2008; Strati 1992) and this is a constant interplay between its individual and relational aspects (Bouty and Gomez 2010). Therefore, this study develops the relational understanding of the aesthetic ‘qualities’ of embodied agency. By doing so, this study goes a step further by bringing forth the previously under-researched aspects of the embodied agents being on the move between off-stage and on-stage in a constant relation to the various human and non-human agents around them.

I am aware of closely related concepts to aesthetic knowledge, such as sensible knowledge — proposed and defined by Strati (2007, 62) as “[w]hat is perceived through the senses, judged through the senses, and produced and reproduced through the senses”, bodily knowledge, presented by Parviainen (2002, 11) as “knowing in and through the body”; or “tacit knowledge”, a concept introduced by Polanyi (1966), and later discussed by Styhre (2008), as knowledge that cannot really be articulated. The majority of organizational scholars view aesthetic knowledge as being created from our sensory, day-to-day experiences (see Ewenstein and Whyte 2007; Taylor and Hansen 2005; Hancock 2005). In line with this view, in this study I view aesthetics

as including the mundane experiences that reach ‘beyond’ verbal language (Dicks 2014, 656). Hence, the tranquil moment of drinking your morning coffee from a porcelain cup in the cute little balcony, surrounded by the beautiful sunlight and the voices of small birds in early spring is an example of a holistic sensory experience which would be different if you drank a take-away coffee from a carton cup in a crowded bus on the move. Or sensing a stranger tense atmosphere in a meeting between the people present is another example of a mundane, subjective experience reaching beyond words. Hence, I have chosen to use the term aesthetics instead of the other related terms mentioned above for the clarity of my argument.

### Previous research on the body in organization studies

The research on the body has strong roots in sociology, but for decades the body has been a rather overlooked research topic among organizational scholars (Sinclair 2005b) and the discussion has remained surprisingly static and normative until recent years. Actually, the body had been viewed as having little to do with “the clean and sanitised world of the work organization” (Hancock and Tyler 2000, 89) even if since the 1990’s “the body and experiences of embodiment appear substantially more visible than ever before” (Waskul and Vannini 2006, 1). Luckily, an increased “mobilities turn” in the social sciences (Cresswell 2006; Urry 2007) currently aims at shifting the attention from the structural emphasis of organizations towards movement and mobilities (for example Costas 2013) and to the emphasis on the embodied qualities of people in organizations. Along with the “mobilities turn”, the “corporeal turn” (Sheets-Johnstone 2009) in the sociology of the body has turned the attention from a fleshy materiality towards more-than-fleshy sociality (Witz 2000).

Pierre Bourdieu, who stated that “the relation to the body is fundamental dimension of the habitus that is inseparable from a relation to language and to time” (Bourdieu (1990, 72), and Mauss (1968), whose research on the body techniques and classifications of body postures and gestures became well acknowledged in the field of sociology — are among the most well-known sociologists to have researched the body. In organization studies, Styhre (2004) identifies four perspectives through which the body can be scrutinised: phenomenology, feminist theory, theories of practice and postmodern theories, through which the body within organizations can be examined. On the other hand, Gherardi et al. (2013) identify three aspects through which the body in organizations can be looked at: “the body that works through the senses”; “the body that experiences through the senses”; and “the body that knows through the senses”. This division relates to the “theories of practice” – dimension, which Styhre (2004) identified. In this study, however, I do not focus on a single aspect that Styhre (2004) or Gherardi et al. (2013) mention, but rather view the different aspects through which the body can be researched more blurred. I therefore treat embodied agency here as an active and continuously shaping source of abilities that can be developed and negotiated further (see Hall et al. 2007). But how do I make sense of this slippery and rather ambiguous notion of embodied agency concretely? For me, the *embodied* side of agency materializes in the actions, thoughts and behaviours rooted in our bodies. For example, I have never enjoyed making presentations in front of an audience. However, as a doctoral student, I have overcome my anxiety of performing as I have had to present my research

proposals in front of an academic audience in international conferences. I have marked how it is actually my body that remembers how it feels to perform, and because of the repetition and the experience I have gathered by now, I see it as a joy to share my ideas with other scholars. Hence, my embodied agency has developed further and widened my personal (well-)being at work.

Moreover, the body has also been recognised at the methodological level. For example, by researching family resemblances, Mason and Davies (2009) show the ways the senses are entangled with our lived experiences and that too often the scientific research is “oddly abstracted and distanced from the sensory, embodied and lived conditions of existence that it seeks to explain” (Mason and Davies 2009, 600). Moreover, Benoot and Bilsen (2016, 482) show how “doing qualitative research in an embodied and reflexive way” can both protect the researcher from emotional distress and improve research quality. In this sense, by taking into account the body and the senses, one-sided, traditional ideas of reality can be broken down (Zanutto and Piras 2013), even if one must avoid being over-enthusiastic about the methodological idea that the senses would be ‘all’ (Mason and Davies 2009, 587). Throughout this study, I aim at acknowledging not only the bodies of the research participants, but also its role in my knowledge production as the researcher. For me, my senses often told me what was meaningful for the matter of this study. For example, as many of the dancers I interviewed told me openly about the hard and vulnerable moments of their career, on the one hand, and about their endless joy and zeal on the other, at some point in my research journey, I *felt* that I should take a closer look at the relationship between passion and vulnerability in this thesis as well.

To sum up, I draw together in Table 1 below some of the key themes that have contributed to the understanding of the body in organization studies during the past 10 years. Further, I summarize the limitations of the existing studies to which this study reacts on the right side of the table.

Table 1. Some of the Key Themes of the 'Body' in Organization Studies

THEME OF THE BODY	EXEMPLARY JOURNAL, YEAR, ISSUE AND PAGES	AUTHOR(S)	TITLE OF THE EXEMPLARY ARTICLE	LIMITATION TO WHICH THE PRESENT STUDY REACTS
<b>SENSORY-BASED LEARNING &amp; KNOWLEDGE</b>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of Management</i> (2013), Vol. 29(4): Special issue on "The body, the Senses and Knowing in Organization".			Inadequate views of the ways in which embodied knowledge is relationally produced and shared by the embodied agents in between the off- and on-stage worlds.
	<i>Organization Studies</i> (2010), Vol. 31 (4), 409–430.	Yakhlef, A.	The Corporeality of Practice-based Learning.	
	<i>Journal of Management &amp; Organization</i> (2008), Vol. 14 (5), 560–572.	Ropo, A. – Sauer, E.	Dances of Leadership: Bridging Theory and Practice Through an Aesthetic Approach.	
	<i>Management Learning</i> (2007), Vol. 38 (1), 61–77.	Strati, A.	Sensitive Knowledge and Practice-based Learning.	
	<i>Organization Studies</i> (2007), Vol. 28 (9), 1395–1416.	Hindmarsh, J. – Pilnick, A.	Knowing Bodies at Work: Embodiment and Ephemeral Teamwork in Anaesthesia.	
<b>GENDERED BODY &amp; EMBODIED GENDER</b>	<i>International Journal of Work, Organization and Emotion</i> (2012), Vol. 5 (1), 91–108.	Thanem, T. – Knights, D.	Feeling and Speaking Through our Gendered Bodies: Embodied Self-recognition and Research Practice in Organization Studies.	Narrow descriptions of how gendered bodies are (un) done through mundane (bodily) practices.
	<i>Human Relations</i> (2009), Vol. 62 (5), 763–786.	Rumens, N. – Kerfoot, D.	Gay Men at Work: (Re)constructing the Self as Professional.	
	<i>Gender, Work and Organization</i> (2007), Vol. 14 (6), 512–533.	Hancock, P. – Tyler, M.	Un/doing Gender and the Aesthetics of Organizational Performance.	

THEME OF THE BODY	EXEMPLARY JOURNAL, YEAR, ISSUE AND PAGES	AUTHOR(S)	TITLE OF THE EXEMPLARY ARTICLE	LIMITATION TO WHICH THE PRESENT STUDY REACTS
THE MATERIALITY OF THE BODY	<i>Leadership</i> (2013), Vol. 9(3). Special Issue on “The Materiality of Leadership: Corporeality and Subjectivity”.			Insufficient understanding of the relationship between embodied agents and non-human agents.
	<i>Organization Studies</i> (2007), Vol. 28, 1435–1448.	Orlikowski, W. J.	Sociomaterial Practices: Exploring Technology at Work.	
	<i>Organization</i> (2005), Vol. 12 (5), 649–678.	Dale, K.	Building a Social Materiality: Spatial and Embodied Politics in Organizational Control.	
AESTHETIC & EMBODIED WORK, THE BODY WORK	<i>Human Relations</i> (2013), Vol. 66 (5), 621–644.	Gatrell, C. J.	Maternal Body Work: How Women Managers and Professionals Negotiate Pregnancy and New Motherhood at Work.	Partly oversimplified picture of the dynamic and reshaping nature of embodied work; the meaning of “never-achieved perfection” in the sensory-based, embodied work.
	<i>Work, Employment and Society</i> (2007), Vol. 21 (1), 103–120.	Warhurst, C. – Nickson, D.	Employee Experience of Aesthetic Labour in Retail and Hospitality.	
	<i>Organization Studies</i> (2007), Vol. 28 (5), 689–708.	Ewenstein, B. – Whyte, J.	Beyond Words: Aesthetic Knowledge and Knowing in Organizations.	
IDENTITY & THE BODY	<i>The Academy of Management Review</i> (2005), Vol. 30 (1), 78–95.	Clair, J. – Beatty, J. – Maclean, T.	Out of Sight but Not Out of Mind: Managing Invisible Social Identities in the Workplace.	Limited view on the ways identity builds not only on physical appearance, but also on the ‘inner’ bodily sensations and experiences which this study aims at uncovering.
	<i>Work, employment and society</i> (2016), Vol. 30 (3), 489–505.	Einarsdóttir, A. – Hoel, H. – Lewis, D.	Fitting the Bill? (Dis)embodied Disclosure of Sexual Identities in the Workplace.	

THEME OF THE BODY	EXEMPLARY JOURNAL, YEAR, ISSUE AND PAGES	AUTHOR(S)	TITLE OF THE EXEMPLARY ARTICLE	LIMITATION TO WHICH THE PRESENT STUDY REACTS
<b>EMBODIED LEADERSHIP</b>	<i>Leadership</i> (2011), Vol. 7 (1), 51-71.	Koivunen, N. - Wennes, G.	Show us the Sound! Aesthetic Leadership of Symphony Orchestra Conductors.	The unrecognisable nature of the on-stage and off-stage worlds in which embodied leadership is negotiated.
	<i>Leadership</i> (2005), Vol. 1 (4), 387-406.	Sinclair, A.	Body Possibilities in Leadership.	

As we can see from the table above, the themes related to the ‘body’ in organization studies touch on multiple subject areas of research. The first theme identified in the table above — *sensory-based learning and knowledge* — relates to the fundamentally sensory ways of learning and producing knowledge within organizations. Gärtner’s (2013) review of the discussion of the body in organization studies identifies six viewpoints of embodied knowledge in the research literature; brute, physiological, enactive lived, intelligible, situated and social. However, to my knowledge, these different epistemological groundings to the body are seldom explicitly visible in the research of the body. To give some examples of the research on the sensory-based learning and knowledge, Bazin (2013) shows how routinised factory workers produce knowledge through their senses and use gestures in an aesthetic way. Wright (2016) looks at organizational routines as embodied performatives and criticises the existing views on how routines are constituted in the research literature by offering an alternative understanding for how “embodied actors produce and reproduce routine activity in organizational settings” (Wright 2016, 148).

Hindmarsh and Pilnick (2007) offer a relational view to the body in the workplace by showing how “inter-corporeal knowing” (2007, 1396) of anaesthesia teams is produced and coordinated. In a slightly similar manner, the study of Patriotta and Spedale (2009) argues for a collective understanding of interaction in which meanings are shared collaboratively, i.e. not only through speech, but also through particular “face games”. So too do Ropo and Sauer (2008a; b), who argue that the knowledge is aesthetically and bodily co-constructed between the leader and their followers. Both Yakhlef (2010) and Strati (2007) explore sensory-based knowledge from a practice-based view, which, however, has “paid more attention to social relations, interactions, and discourses, and less to bodily practices” (Yakhlef 2010, 409). All these contributions have aimed at overcoming aesthetic muteness (Taylor 2002) by offering detailed descriptions of how embodied knowledge is formed and produced. However, they have not paid so much attention to the ways the embodied agents constantly reform and produce knowledge relationally with other agents between the off- and on-stage worlds, which provide an interesting tension to the exploration of this theme and to which this study aims to react.

*Gender*, the second theme of the body visible in the table above is an established theme within organization studies. Even if gender is an inseparable part of a dancer’s embodied agency and strongly defines the whole dance profession, in this study, I do not focus on the gender perspective

as such. My focus is more on the embodied practices and dynamics which I view as context-dependent and relational, affected by other non(human) agents and various experiences, both empowering and vulnerable ones, of the dancers themselves. Nevertheless, the gendered dynamics are undeniably present in all the sub-studies of this thesis and slightly analysed in sub-studies 1 and 3. By showing the ways the professional dancers challenge the present gendered working practices, this study gives some clues of the ways gender is challenged and (un)done through the body in the day-to-day work of professional dancers, therefore adding fresh insights to the existing research literature. For example, it has been studied from the perspectives of gendered performativity (Hancock and Tyler 2007), concerned with how the self is constructed through the gendered bodies and dichotomies (Muhr and Sullivan 2013; Rumens and Kerfoot 2009), and also of how the researchers are doing and undoing gender through their bodies (Thanem and Knights 2012). Therefore, there is a reason for considering that organizations are “gendered processes” (Acker 1990, 140) in which the body works as a means for controlling these processes.

*Materiality*, the third theme identified here, and its relation to the body is one of the most popular issues discussed in organization studies literature of the body over the past decade. A good example of this theme is the special issue on the materiality of leadership” (*Leadership* 2013, Vol. 9, Issue 3), which draws together papers which explore the ways in which the body “becomes the carrier of emotion, desire or motivation” (Pullen and Vacchani 2013, 315) and the ways the materiality of the bodies in leadership could be conceptualised and understood from an embodied perspective. Both Dale (2005) and Orlikowski (2007) take a socio-material stand to explore materiality within organizations. More specifically, Orlikowski (2007, 1444) argues that all practices are socio-material and Dale (2005, 649) complements this idea by writing that social processes and structures and material processes and structures are *mutually enacting*.

Inspired by these ideas, in this study I view embodied agency and materiality as inseparably intertwined and continuously affected by each other, and the body as “both material and social” (Huopalaainen 2015, 829), consisting of aesthetic experiences to which physicality and materialities around it are linked. Hence, by joining the growing group of scholars studying the materiality of the body, I seek to further deepen our understanding of the relationship between the body and materiality by viewing embodied agents as shaping and being shaped by various forms of materialities in their daily work. By seeking to deepen the existing discussion, this study aims at uncovering the ways materiality is not a separable, but a holistic part of shaping one’s embodied agency in its own right.

Furthermore, there is a growing but (still) marginal body of studies concerning *the body and aesthetic labour* in the workplace (Hindmarsh and Pilnick 2007), identified as the fourth theme of the body in the table above. This theme considers both the emotional and the physical dimensions of aesthetic work, where bodies are both ‘produced’ and perceived in certain ways. Actually, plenty has already been written on the role of the body in different organizational contexts, such as knowledge-intensive professions, including academic scholars (Taylor 2000), expert organizations (Ropo and Parviainen 2001), teachers (Probyn 2004), architects (Ewenstein and Whyte, 2007), female managers (Gatrell 2013), front-line service employees (Stein 2007), and teachers of managers (Sinclair 2005a). Furthermore, the body has been discussed among physically intensive professions, including flight attendants (Hancock and Tyler 2000); restaurant

workers (Erickson 2004), female football players (Kotarba and Held 2006), ballet dancers (Aalten 2007; Wainwright and Turner 2006), fashion modelling (Wissinger 2012), sex shop workers (Taylor 2011), the military (Godfrey et al. 2012) and firefighting (Hall et al. 2007). In addition, the craft-professions which demand a particular (bodily) skill, such as hairdressing salons and hairstylists (Hall et al. 2007; Chugh and Hancock 2009) and anaesthetic teams (Hindmarsch and Pilnick 2007) have gained attention among researchers of the body at work. The variety of the contexts in which the body at work has been explored demonstrates how it matters not only in obvious physical professions, such as those of professional dancers' or athletes', but in fact in all professions.

In line with these studies, I also find the term “body work” essential for this study. This is because my focus in this study is on the professional dancers' daily bodily actions through which they form, challenge and (re)negotiate their embodied agency. In research literature, the term “body work” refers to the work that is carried out on the body outside of the formal domain of wage labour. Body work relates to the body as an entity that is in a “constant process of becoming” (Hancock and Tyler 2000, 97). The worker is “idealised as a rational, mechanical element in an organizational machine”, Holliday and Thompson (2001, 117) write. Therefore, the working bodies are often hidden, even if they become frequently interrupted through the working practices in which the workers become evaluated (Meriläinen et al. 2015) and thus, re-embodied (Holliday and Thompson 2001, 117). Wolkowitz (2002) explores the social relations of body work and claims that “the experience of those whose paid work involves the care, adornment, pleasure, discipline and cure of others' bodies becomes more central to the sociology



of work” (Wolkowitz 2002, 497). In sum, body work is a project which is accomplished as part of an individual’s identity (Hancock and Tyler, 2000), and therefore, as a part of one’s embodied agency too.

*Identity* and the body has a strong scholarly position as well. In this study, I view the notion of identity as slightly overlapping with the notion of agency, as both of them build on one’s personality, its strengths and vulnerabilities and are judged, shaped and (re)negotiated in a certain time and space. There are some illustrative examples of the link between the body and identity in organization studies. For example, in their study of a filmed rugby tour, Cunliffe and Coupland write how “sensemaking is inescapably embodied and entwined with identity”. (2011, 83) On the other hand, Mavin and Grandy (2016) give an account of elite female leaders’ agency, which is managed through a complicated embodied identity work. In a similar spirit, Einarsdóttir et al. (2016) discuss the disclosure of sexual identities in the workplace. This links to a wider thought of managing invisible identities at work which affect the various ways people manage their identities in their social interactions (Clair et al. 2005). For example, “a pregnancy slowly moves from invisible to visible” (Clair et al. 2005, 91) and thus, makes the women negotiate their conflicting demands of work and child care.

Finally, *leadership* has been widely “constructed as an activity of brains without bodies” (Sinclair 2005a, 402) and as an “objective characteristic that individuals have or not” (Hansen et al. 2007, 553). Recently, several scholars have drawn their attention to the embodied side of leadership. In these studies, leadership is often treated as a relational phenomenon, which highlights the “middle space” between leaders and followers (Ladkin 2013, 323). “Leadership is a bodily practice, a physical performance in addition to a triumph of mental or motivational mastery”, Sinclair (2005b, 387) illustratively writes. For example, leadership and its attachment to the body has been studied from a relational perspective in symphony orchestras (Koivunen and Wennes 2011), as already mentioned, as well as emphasising the fleshy materiality, and inter-subjective relations (Ladkin 2013). Moreover, embodied leadership has been explored by giving a detailed account of the aesthetics of gestures (Bathurst and Cain 2013) as well as embodied practices in leadership in the context of the military (Fisher and Reiser Robbins 2015), by positioning it close to a relational understanding of leadership as well. As Ladkin (2008, 40) suggests in her study of leadership as an embodied matter, “the concept of ‘leading beautifully’ brings our attention to that often unarticulated, but nonetheless powerful aspect of how leaders embody their role”. Therefore, the followers also use their aesthetic senses when making assessments about their leaders and what leadership for them entails (Hansen et al. 2007). Therefore, all these studies treat leadership as an embodied phenomenon, and by doing so, challenge the traditional, mental mastery of leadership. Nevertheless, the studies of embodied leadership do not pay much attention to the off-stage–on-stage division which largely shapes the leaders’ negotiation of their embodiment and on which this study focuses. Therefore, my thesis aims at extending the existing studies of embodied leadership, as well as offering detailed analysis of the interaction between front- and off-stage in which the work of embodied agents takes places and through which their bodily negotiations transpire.

The themes of the body identified above are, of course, interrelated and partly overlapping. For instance, Ropo and Parviainen (2001), make an argument on the embodied leadership discussion by proposing that the body is related to leadership knowledge and that it cannot be

transferred directly from one to another. The “felt meaning”, discussed by Taylor (2000) is in this sense a complicated inner sense of actors that must be negotiated, discovered and learned randomly (Ropo and Parviainen 2001). In this way, the themes of bodily knowledge and embodied leadership become entwined.

In sum, within organization studies, all the themes discussed above illustrate the various valuable angles from which the body can be approached, and all of these studies have thus inspired me throughout this study. Regardless of the differences between these themes, their common characteristics are that in each of them the body is treated as a means to organize, shape and negotiate our mundane actions. Further, in this study I view the body as a central theoretical aspect through which embodied agency emerges. I want to stress, however, that in my view, the body should not be considered only as a means for giving new insights to existing theoretical discussions, such as gender and leadership, but as a research topic worth exploring in its own right.

### The entwined relationship between aesthetics and the body

Embodied agency, the phenomenon at the heart of this study, is actualised through the entwined relation of aesthetics and the body. In other words, embodied agency, the leeway for using one’s personal space at work, consists of aesthetic details which are transmitted through our bodies. In organization studies literature, aesthetics and the body are often treated as overlapping concepts and the ways in which they complement each other was not clear for me when I started to explore the existing literature written on this matter. Therefore, and for the sake of this thesis, I felt it necessary to clarify the ways in which the body and aesthetics are interrelated. As discussed in the previous section, ‘aesthetic’ refers to “the senses and perceptual faculties, or powers of visual discrimination, corporeal awareness and various modes by which we apprehend the sensory environment” (King and Vickery 2013, 3). To put it in other words, aesthetics “involves meanings we construct based on feelings about what we experience via our senses” (Hansen et al. 2007, 545). By attaching to this view, in this thesis I view aesthetics as a concept which involves senses, emotions and (bodily) memory. Küpers (2013) gives a vivid account of the “very presences” of the five senses in organizations. By giving a voice to the senses themselves, he writes: “the look, sound, smell, taste and tactual feel that is our entire sensorium, is the very base for all your individual and collective perceiving, knowing, deciding, communicating, acting...” (2013, 37).

Therefore, the senses form the basis of experiences and the felt meanings that aesthetics are all about. Following the categorisation of Gherardi et al. (2013), the senses are attached to the body in three ways: the body working, experiencing and knowing through the senses. Hence, the sensing body is very central in organizational life, regardless of the “bodylessness” of organizational theories (see Hansen et al. 2007). By the term experience I refer here to “reflection and interpretation, immersion in sensory environments, and a specific function of self-consciousness” (King and Vickery 2013, 3). More specifically, throughout my ethnographic research process, I moved back and forth with my immersion in the moment in the field, my reflections on my own reactions to them and the ways I interpreted those moments as a curious, sensing and dedicated researcher.

The body then, does not simply refer to physical manifestations. It therefore entails more than appearance, which includes the value for the visual gaze over other senses (Meriläinen et al. 2015, 6). Rather, it is a “sensing perceiver, knower and actor” and is “grounded in everyday experience and integrally (connects one) to herself and her environment in an on-going sensual interrelation” (Küpers 2013, 51). From time to time, the term of ‘embodiment’ is also used as a synonym for the ‘body’. In my view, embodiment refers to the whole sensory process of constructing meanings based on feelings about what we experience via our senses in and through our bodies (Hansen et al. 2007, 545; see also Gärtner 2013). Throughout this study, though, I use the term ‘body’ instead of ‘embodiment’ for the sake of clarity. Therefore, I view the body as a mediator of the felt meanings of which aesthetics consists of.

Finally, influenced by Strati (1999) and Koivunen (2003), I approach the conceptual pair of aesthetic and the body not as a fixed formulation of organizational life, defined by certain ‘a-mobile’ characteristics, but instead as a relational, inseparable and on-going involvement. Together, the body and aesthetics form “an epistemological perspective that highlights the experiential way of knowing” (sub-study 2, 7). In the following subchapter, I describe three important aspects – relationality, materiality and gender – attached to embodied agency, which I identified based on this study. The theoretical notions of aesthetics and the body are constantly



involved with these aspects as well, even though they are not always explicitly mentioned in the following sections.

## THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF EMBODIED AGENCY

### Embodied agency as a relational endeavour

*“Dance is relational; it is dancers and spectators, musicians and choreographers, barmen and tipsy clients.” (Letiche 2012, 185)*

The notion of ‘agency’ is widely discussed in sociology and organization studies in general. During the past years, it has gained a rising interest in the particular domain of the embodied, relational perspective, which I navigate within this study. Widely speaking, the individual forms of agency have been popular among organizational researchers (Raelin 2016, 149). In Western tradition, individual self has been seen in power over relationality and relationships, which have been considered largely instrumental (Gergen 2011, 280–281). Traditionally, agency has been defined as “a continuous flow of conduct” (Giddens 1979, 55), to have power (Stones 2005), and more recently as “the ability to engage in purposeful action” (Sherwin 2009, 145) and as the “capacity to take action” (Tourish 2014, 80). In a similar spirit, Ahearn (2001, 112) defines agency as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” and argues that it is a concept that has been defined often too simplistically or narrowly (Ahearn 2001, 113), and in contradictory and overlapping ways, as also Emirbayer and Mische (1998) state. Moreover, the wide notions of freedom, choice and power are often associated with agency (Barnes 2000; Campbell et al. 2009; Davies 1991; Emirbayer and Mische 1998). Nevertheless, the tendency to treat agency as a synonym of free will across many scholarly disciplines is problematic, because to do so downplays its social nature (Ahearn 2001, 114). Therefore, by using an aesthetic approach in this study, I bring forward a more nuanced understanding and conceptualisation of agency.

Hence, despite of few examples (Campbell et al. 2009; Noland 2009) surprisingly little has been said about the embodied nature of agency. These scholars explore embodied agency as a cultural phenomenon which is affected by the surrounding people (for example Noland 2009; see also Gergen 2011), therefore being relational in nature. The cultural understanding of agency, discussed also by Hernandez and Iyengar (2001) highlights cultural differences as important sources of motivation. Therefore, “independent cultural members are more motivated by contexts allowing personal agency; independent cultural members are more motivated by contexts that allow for collective agency”, Hernandez and Iyengar (2001, 287) claim. The feminist view of agency highlights the capability of women in challenging and questioning the existing historical, political and discursive contexts through their bodies (Parkins 2000). Building these literatures of agency in which rather clear separations of the personal and collective agencies of people have been identified, I define embodied agency as a ‘mobile’ and context-dependent, yet partly constrained transpersonal leeway through which one’s personal space is negotiated, challenged and reformed. Here, I view embodied agency as a truly relational endeavour, including the deeply personal desires, affections and vulnerabilities. For me, the relationality of embodied agency

materializes in the mundane, embodied moments of saying hello to my colleague instead of holding one's peace, or listening carefully to what my PhD supervisor has to tell me when we met face-to-face during the past years within this ethnographic research process. Therefore, embodied agency is both affected by the agent's personal feelings, experiences and senses, and the actions of the surrounding world and its cultural background, and is, therefore, always relational in nature.

The notion of embodied agency offers an important theoretical starting point for studying the bodily practices of movement, or the dynamics of actions learned, mobilised and continuously repeated in time and space. By highlighting the relational nature of embodied agency, I argue that embodied agency exists *only* in relation to others (see Gergen 2011). In a similar way as the musicians features in the study of Koivunen and Wennes (2011), professional dancers have to engage in relational listening, the ability to understand how listening to each other's ways of moving (in the dancers' case), both in off and on-stage work, affects their relationship and development as professionals. For instance, Alice described how "there is usually a good spirit in a working group which is formed voluntarily between the [freelance] dancers. Maybe it's because nobody has told them to dance a certain role. Instead, the roles are divided together by listening to each other's feelings." Therefore, it is essential to scrutinise the role of other humans and non-humans (including the historical and socio-cultural traditions, as well as the material artefacts — such as the sweat, the mirrors and other details of the dancers' daily environments), as is done in all the sub-studies of this thesis. For clarification, the differences between individual and relational understandings of agency are summarised in the table below.

Table 2. Comparing Individual and Relational Agency

	<b>INDIVIDUAL AGENCY</b>	<b>RELATIONAL AGENCY</b>
<b>THEORETICAL IDEA</b>	Agency is a "summation of individual acts" (Raelin 2016, 149).	Agency is a complex, temporally embedded process, defined and shaped by interpersonal interaction (see Emirbayer and Mische 1998; Raelin 2016).
<b>CENTRAL CONCEPTS</b>	Power, choice, freedom, autonomy, rationality, motivation, the self, structure.	Practices, collectivity, interpersonality, dialogue, reflexivity, complexity.
<b>FOCUS ON</b>	The individual acts and the choices made within the structures of the environment.	The shared practices and interactions between different agents in a certain time and space.

The 'purely' relational view on agency is a rather new perspective in the discussion of agency in organization studies, even if Cleaver (2007, 226) writes that "agency is commonly conceptualised as relational". Even if today the organizational scholars speak louder for the relational understanding of human behaviour, it is often still viewed as a bundle of separate individual actions (see Bathurst and Ladkin 2012). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the differences in how the term relationality is understood and used in academic debate. Whereas Cleaver makes a hard self-other division by writing about how agency is "exercised in a social world in which the structure shapes the opportunities and resources available to individuals"

(2007, 226), in this study I align with the softer self-other differentiation developed by Hosking (2011), and view people and their worlds as emerging processes that enable the complexity and multiplicity of life (see Hosking 2011, 47). In a similar spirit with this soft treatment of the self-other-distinction, Tourish (2014) and Raelin (2016) study leadership as collaborative agency and argue that it becomes “mobilised through engaged social interaction” (Raelin 2016, 149) and is “a primary means by which the agency of organizational actors is enabled and constrained” (Tourish 2014, 80). Furthermore, Edwards (2005) uses the notion of “relational agency” and Linell (2016) the notion of “participatory agency” to describe the meaningfulness of working and interacting with others. In fact, Cleaver (2007, 223) continues this thought by arguing that “agency is central to understandings of collective action”, while Koivunen and Wennes (2011) call for a more relational understanding of human action in general.

Throughout this study I highlight the relationality, including the socio-cultural and historical traditions and expectations for how to move in a certain situation. In professional dancers work, especially in the context of ballet, the conventions for how to move are highly controlled, and embodied agency is defined by the occupational culture of the dance genre. For example, “in order to dance a convincing *Giselle*, female dancers submit to gruelling training and need perfect control of their bodies” (Aalten 1997, 197). Therefore, behind every performance, there is the ideal image of how to move according to the cultural values and expectations of the specific context, which certainly affect a dancer’s embodied agency. Moreover, in line with the views explained above, I understand embodied agency as consisting of relational, on-going processes that involve not only speaking, but also listening, symbols, gestures and movement (Hosking 2011, 52). For example, the dancer “has to feel and relate to what an audience sees and feels”, Letiche (2012, 180) explains. Nevertheless, embodied agency does not always need physical interaction between people and things to be developed further. Mirchandani (2015) explores the idea of ‘reading’ bodies without physical contact. Embodied agency therefore does not materialise only in physical contact with others, but also through voice, which can be used to “emulate imagined ideal workers” (Mirchandani 2015).

Moreover, from a relational standpoint, the concept of kinaesthesia, a source of sensations of which the subject is more or less aware, is crucial for embodied agency. Without kinaesthesia the subject could not be able to distinguish her own body from other bodies, would have no capabilities for independent movement, and therefore, would be incapable of adopting agency at all (see Noland 2009). A closely related concept, kinaesthetic empathy (see Koivunen and Wennes 2011) is also essential in order to communicate the ideas and inner meanings of embodied agency by physical gestures and movements in a relational way. Neither constructivist nor affect-centred theories of agency have much to say about kinaesthetic experience, the dynamic engagement of the body in a specific context that invites subjects to effect change (see Noland 2009, 4). In this study, I address these critical neglects and, by giving a voice to professional dancers, I analyse the ways in which embodied agency is shaped between the professional dancers and other humans and non-humans relationally.

Finally, a professional dancer’s embodied agency is specific in the sense it is highly bodily aware and constantly controlled and challenged in the dancers’ daily rehearsals through the demands of both high physicality and the occupational culture of dance (see Aalten 2007). Governed by specific norms and certain regimes, embodied agency in the context of professional dance appears

to be significantly restricted and controlled by constraints such as the self, other actors on the field, the garments, the gaze and the mirrors, choreographies, lighting, sound, space, the presence of the audience, and not at least its occupational culture and traditions (see for example Barnes 2000; Holland 2010; Noland 2009) in a relational way. Hence, in their everyday work practices the professional dancers seem to balance the ability to act as freely as they wish on the one hand, and becoming the embodied instruments of other's agency on the other. Alice shedded light on this aspect by describing how "there are those choreographers, who search for good personalities for their production. On the other hand, there are those choreographers who are keen on their own style of movement, and therefore, aim at creating their 'fantasy' by cloning the movements despite the different personalities of the dancers." Therefore, the professional dancers move in a continuous process of "dialogical or participative person-world making" (Hosking 2011, 62) and the negotiation of how they are going to move in relation to each other and in relation to other people involved in the working process.

### The entanglement of embodied agents and materiality

"Everyday organizing is inextricably bound up with materiality", Orlikowski (2007, 1435) writes. Therefore, in order to place the body in social processes, we must understand the ways in which the body is material and social (Lyon 1997). Moreover, there are epistemological differences in how to understand the role of materiality in the world. It can either be understood as "surrounding human action", or in the view of "neither the human nor the material has primacy" (Gherardi 2016, 685). In this study, I view materiality as a surrounding aspect of embodied agency, still affecting its development in multiple ways. The following quote by Barad (2003, 801), written over a decade ago, perfectly captured the position of materiality in organization studies more generally:

*"Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters. But there is an important sense in which the only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter."*

However, during the past decade, materiality has gained growing scholarly attention in organization studies and apparently, it seems to matter now. Hence, the materiality of the body and all the tangible artefacts and elements it is surrounded by and constituted through is worth exploring (cf. Lyon 1997). Following the work of Barad (2003), Dale and Latham (2015) argue that humans and non-humans are inseparably entangled, and therefore, the 'cut' between beings and things is misleading. They describe these entanglements as "heterogeneous, interdependent, co-constitutive and dynamic" (Dale and Latham 2015, 165), therefore being constantly on the move. Similarly, Leonardi and Barley (2010) and Phillips and Oswick (2012) argue for more recognition of the notion of materiality, in order to engage in novel methods of advancing organization studies both in a theoretical and methodological sense. But what does materiality consist of and how does it matter for the sake of this study? Here, I understand materiality to consist of the sweaty, leaky, bloody bodies as well as set pieces, costumes and make-up, things

and other artifacts surrounding the professional dancers' everyday life both off- and on-stage. As Alice exemplifies, there is a strong 'toitoi'-tradition at the Finnish National Ballet: "It means that we give small gifts to each other on the premiere night. If somebody is dancing the same role as I, we give each other a small gift to support each other. It's such a nice and concrete practice". Hence, as Barad (2003, 829) argues, the thinking human subject is just part of the world, rather than having a privileged position in its regard.

During the past few decades, the material bodies have gained research interest among organizational scholars as well (for example, Leonardi and Barley 2010; Molz 2006). The materiality of the working bodies is embedded in the flesh and therefore, related to the corporeal reality of all embodied agents (cf. Gimlin 2007). In her study of round-the-world travellers, Molz (2006) aims at "fleshing out" and materialising cosmopolitanism in order to understand it as an embodied phenomenon. Nevertheless, the "thing-ness of leadership" is a rather new subject of study (Hawkins 2015). Leonardi and Barley (2010) closely study the social construction of appropriations, which are "the practices that turn material properties into constraints on and affordances for human action" (2010, 19). Pullen and Vachhani (2013, 315) write that "leadership is practised through and between bodies, where matter matters". Moreover, there is a clear connection between the body and non-human materialities, which has not yet given



enough attention to by organizational researchers, as Dale and Latham (2015) argue. Therefore, the material bodies are inevitably and inseparably present in organizational life.

Therefore, a yet underdeveloped issue in organization studies is how embodied agents interact with other human and non-human agents. As Orlikowski (2007) argues, materiality has been taken for granted, therefore leading to a limited understanding of contemporary organizations. Drawing inspiration slightly from the Actor Network Theory (ANT), in this study I problematise the interrelation of embodied agents and materiality both off-stage and on-stage. The early advocates of ANT are the sociologists Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, who suggested, rather radically, “to regard humans and non-humans as equivalent aspects of actor-networks” (Toom 2016, 690). Partly because of these kinds of arguments, ANT has been criticised for taking a too simplistic view of agency (Hawkins 2015, 955). Regarding this study, I agree with Law and Singleton (2013, 500), who write that ANT “at its best is a set of sensibilities to the materialities, the relations and the specificities of the world, sensibilities that explore how matters get assembled more or less precariously for a moment”.

Hence, the academic discussion has drawn a rather clear division between the material things and humans (Dale and Latham 2015, 168). For example, the meaning of “material stuff” has been explored in the learning process (Taylor and Statler 2014), even if exploring materiality is not about studying ‘things’ only (Cooren et al. 2012; Hawkins 2015), but more about the stuff or mode of being of social interactions (Cooren et al. 2012). Therefore, this study is concerned about the debates of how we understand and write about the relations between the (material) body and its intersection with other material elements without making too simplistic divisions between embodied agents and other humans and non-humans around them. To give an example about the nature of the non-humans in the context of professional dance, the tension between the hidden backstages where the colleagues and material artefacts, such as the unfinished set-pieces and mirrors are present, intersect with the on-stage materialities, such as the garments and the physical space, and other humans, such as the colleagues of the professional dancers. As Mary points out, “the contrast between the sweaty and smelly backstage life, where we have the ugly rags on, compared to the illusionary actions on-stage where we are portrayed as beautiful princesses, is huge”.

Moreover, in this study I discuss materiality of the body as an empowering source of force itself by focusing on the agency of lived experiential bodies in relation to other humans and non-humans, such as the mirrors and the cultural expectations of how a professional dancer’s body should look, present in the field. This kind of approach combines both the cultural background and the materiality of the bodies.

Already a decade ago it could be stated that materiality had been turned into “a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation” (Barad 2003, 801). Therefore, the linguistic turn (see Barad 2003) in organization studies had led researchers to eagerly employ discourse analysis. It had a strong position among many organizational scholars in the 1980’s and 1990’s (Dale and Latham 2015, 168) in exploring how the social reality is experienced by individuals. However, as Phillips and Oswick (2012, 471) claim, there has been a scholarly tendency to engage with discourse approach in a unilateral way. Therefore, they continue, there is a need and possibilities of integrating “discourse and materiality” approaches (Phillips and Oswick 2012). In this study, however, I wish to complement the existing views on the interrelation

between discourse and materiality by highlighting the bodily *movement* as a source of interaction in the professional dancers' mundane work. In my view, the language the professional dancers use off-stage is constantly affected by materiality and the movements they rehearse or perform.

“Humans are constituted through relations of materiality — bodies, clothes, food, devices, tools, which, in turn, are produced through human practices” (Orlikowski 2007, 1438). In fact, an organization could be seen as a “hybrid of human and non-human contributions” (Cooren 2004, 388). In line with Orlikowski's (2007) above statement, I view embodied practices, discussed in more detail in sub-study 1, as being defined and surrounded by various materialities. In this way, the relationships between the dancers and the material objects define many organizational and individual processes and actions (Knorr Cetina 1997). For example, as Alice explained me, she did not use the pointe shoes every time the manager told the female dancers to do so. For her, it was “a kind of message to the structures, ballet masters and colleagues that — “hey, I have the courage to take my own personal space at work”. Therefore, the use of pointe shoes largely affected the ways the dancers could or could not move in the rehearsals and therefore, was an important material tool for defining their daily work.

Material objects define individual identities as much as families, work communities and other forms of sociality do (Knorr Cetina 1997). Therefore, “we cannot study ‘materiality’ without studying social relations” (Hawkins 2015, 954), which became obvious during the research process of sub-study 1 as well. In a similar sense, communication within organizations is material, as it is in constant interaction with the tangible artefacts, such as objects, sites, and bodies (Ascraft et al. 2009). Furthermore, practices can be seen as “embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding” (Schatzki 2001, 11). Therefore, the role of materiality in shaping and negotiating the actions of embodied agents becomes visible in all sub-studies in some ways. In this thesis, the bodily experiences are seen actualised in a relational way in between human and non-human agents. It is given a lot of weight, especially in sub-study 1, which provides viewpoints into how embodied agency is relationally constantly on the move with other humans and non-humans in the context of fashion and ballet. For example, the freedom of practising with bare feet allowed the retired ballet dancers to (partially) break free from their background of classical ballet. Therefore, the non-human agents turned out to be crucial in the negotiation of their embodied agency.

### (Un)doing gender of embodied agents

The gender-related themes have been broadly discussed among organizational scholars, and gender as a research discipline has gained an established position within the studies concerning the body at work. (Coupland 2015). Gendered bodies have been studied for example in the contexts of maternity (for example Gatrell 2013; Haynes 2008), highlighting the various beliefs and expectations which are ‘loaded’ to the professional bodies and “other forms of gendered embodied self” (Haynes 2008, 328), and massage therapists (Sullivan 2014; see also Hancock et al. 2015), both studies focusing on the ways in which the proximity of the bodies in intimate labour becomes a constantly negotiated, gender-laden process. In a similar way, in their study of pub workers in the UK Riach and Wilson (2014) argue that people construct their space at

work through continuous negotiation of “bodyspace”. By continuing with this same idea, Tyler (2011) discusses the “bodyspace” of sex shop workers and Bryant and Garnham (2014) focus on female wine makers, showing how the gendered body is also a product of cultural expectations and hierarchies — concealing “the structural relations of power” (Bryant and Garnham 2014, 411) and “the meanings attached to particular types of work” (Tyler 2011, 1477).

On the other hand, in their fascinating study on (embodied) executive search practices, Meriläinen et al. (2015) point out that the search for the ‘ideal’ body is not based on any rational or conscious judgements, but on sensory evaluations, taken into the focus in this study as well. Therefore, the formation of a professional body image, based on the “never-achieved perfection”, is a process in which “gendered images and practices themselves can also become embodied” (Haynes 2012, 346). In a similar way, the professional dancers involved in this study aimed at reaching the “ideal body” through the repetition of movements and by trying to follow the (gendered) ideals of ballet and contemporary dance. From a gender perspective, the “never-reached” perfection seemed, in this study, to be a central issue in framing embodied agency of the professional dancers, and was achieved only partly through the never-ending refinement of the bodily movements behind the scenes. On the other hand, Alice described how she had become “totally fed up with the gendered stereotypes of the ballet world — the woman is always the vulnerable, light feather, while the male is the strong one and always saves the woman”, and I totally agreed with her. “Therefore, all the choreographies I have been involved with recently, can be performed both by a male or a female dancer”, she added. In this way, embodied agency can be negotiated through questioning the prevailing, yet hidden patterns of gender at the workplace.

Bodies and cultures have been separated conceptually by distinction between sex and gender; sex is concerned with the bodily differences between women and men, while gender refers to the cultural formation of these differences (Aalten 1997). Therefore, embodied organizational negotiations are in fact shaped by gendered perceptions of bodily propriety, as Hancock et al. (2015, 1715) argue. In a similar spirit, in their study of female football players, Kotarba and Held (2006) deal with agency in terms of the women taking up the rough sport of football as a means for filling in their boring life-style. The female football players “move away from the constraints of traditionally experiencing their bodies as objects and move towards the liberating experience as subjects” (Kotarba and Held 2006, 163). Even if the research literature on the gendered body has increased, Thanem (2013) argues that it has still remained “disembodied”. People “do gender” while at work — while producing an organizational culture and its rules governing what is fair’, Gherardi (1994, 591) writes. There is still room and potentiality for theoretically sophisticated gender studies among organizational scholars (Harding et al. 2013). Professional and gendered discourses are ‘written upon’ people’s bodies and when thinking about women’s bodies, they may constrain their professional identities (Trethewey 1999). In a similar spirit, Haynes suggests, in her study of professionals in accounting and law firms, that professional identity and gendered embodiment are firmly entwined with each other (2012, 504). Moreover, we acknowledge the gendered nature of writing and therefore challenge the ‘taken-for-granted neutrality of the ways in which organization studies is written (about) and theorised’ (Phillips et al. 2014, 327).

I could have conducted this study entirely from the perspective of gender. Therefore not to posit gender as a central concept of this study was a conscious choice of mine. Especially, the ‘doing’ (and ‘undoing’) gender “routinely and repeatedly unknowingly” (Pullen and Knights

2007, 505) seemed to matter in this study, being a widely discussed approach to study gender in organizations. For example, when following the retired ballet dancers' production, I paid attention to the ways the male dancer carried the female dancer still in rather masculine ways, originating from the practices of ballet. In this production, however, the dancers obviously tried to loose themselves from the existing ways of doing gender for example by portraying the female dancer as a strong woman compared to the fragile man. Interestingly, originating from the early work of West and Zimmerman (1987), the "doing gender" -aspect has brought the dynamic, fragmented and never complete nature of gender to organizations (see also Butler 2004), and referring to that, gender is not something we are, but something we do apart our physical sex of being a female or a male (West and Zimmerman 1987). It is therefore a social and discursive practice (Gherardi and Poggio 2002), which is formed and negotiated actively by the embodied agents in their everyday lives. In their study, Pullen and Simpson (2009) rely not only on the "doing-gender" -thought, but also describe the ways gendered norms and expectations can be disrupted through undoing gender. Undoing gender is therefore a process which challenges and disrupts the activities through which gender difference is maintained (Deutsch 2007) and the 'Otherness' becomes questioned (Pullen and Simpson 2009).

Therefore, as the men in the study of Pullen and Simpson (2009) undid gender in the feminised settings of nursing and primary school teaching, so did the professional dancers in sub-studies 1 and 3 of this thesis. So, inspired by their ideas, as well as other studies exploring the ways gender is 'undone' (for example Deutsch 2007), in this study I intend to enlighten the ways gender is "created continually in ubiquitous on-going interactions" (Deutsch 2007, 122), although I want to emphasise that I do not focus on the gendered aspects of professional dancers' embodied agencies as such. Even so, in sub-study 3, the gender aspect became visible through the analysis of photographs. For example, the female ballet dancer's masculine poses, breaking up the 'traditional' image of a "sophisticated ballerina", as well as the male dancer embracing the fragile female dancer in another photograph, rendered visible the gendered dynamics present in the professional dancers' off-stage work. Moreover, in sub-study 1, the freelance production of two retired ballet dancers seemed to challenge the clear gender roles, as I described above, and therefore, made gender a meaningful aspect of developing their embodied agency. Finally, as a researcher I took a reflexive position throughout and after the fieldwork phase by thinking of my "research self" as a gendered body too (cf. Pullen 2006). In this way, my embodied gender was present during the research process and certainly affected the research material I was able to collect and the ways in which I analysed it. These methodological details are discussed more deeply in the methodology section.

## Shaping the problem: a summary of the literature review and research questions

In this study, I combine the theoretical debates of aesthetics and the body within organizations. My aim is not to concentrate on the physical artefacts and forms of organizational aesthetics, but rather on the sensory-based, intuitive and emotional action. "Organization is an inherently embodied practice, since it is people and their bodies who organize", Warren (2002, 227) once wrote, a point I fully agree with. Therefore, by concentrating on the sensory-based dynamics

and actions of the professional dancers I aim at finding out how embodied agency is actually constructed, negotiated and challenged. Moreover, doing research aesthetically is a particular mode of analysis and suitable for ethnographic research. Therefore, I focus on aesthetics as a mode of analysis and crafting (see Warren 2008; Taylor 2013). In other words, I aim at keeping my senses open during the fieldwork to grasp all the subtlest details of the professional dancers' mundane work.

Based on the theoretical framework described above, some under-explored aspects of embodied agency can be identified. First, the existing literature on aesthetics and the body in organization studies treats bodily movement as a rather foregone conclusion. For example, Strati (2016) discusses the "epistemology of the unseen" thrillingly, despite cropping out the term bodily movement. In his study of three different contexts, a sawmill, a roofing firm and a secretarial office, he focuses on the sensible knowledge that derives from the senses of touch, hearing and sight (Strati 2007). On the other hand, Sutherland and Ladkin (2013) discuss aesthetic agency as an ability to invoke "strategies of action" based on the social agents' experiences of their environment in which they operate. Actually, there are a few exceptions which discuss bodily movement as a central element of their study: Biehl-Missal (2016) treats bodily movement as a way to interact in relation to the sound, the music and architecture of the specific space. In a similar way, Llewellyn and Hindmarsh (2013) point out that bodily movement works as an aesthetic practice through which the customer-employee relationship is negotiated in the course of encounters. Throughout,



my aim is to build these studies by paying attention to the ways embodied agency is negotiated through the mundane bodily movements, which is the focus of this study.

Moreover, this study aims at extending the existing studies (e.g. Dale and Latham 2015; Orlikowski 2007), capturing the detailed ways that materiality is entangled with our everyday life. In my view, the existing organization studies literature has paid surprisingly little attention to the relational aspect (for example Raelin 2016) of embodied agency and materiality. For example, Sutherland and Ladkin (2013, 122) conclude that they “have begun to create a means by which aesthetics can be brought into relief as a significant and researchable aspect of organizational and relational activity”, but remain rather shallow with this argument. In this study therefore, embodied agency is constantly produced in relation to other humans and non-humans, discussed more deeply in sub-studies 1 and 3.

Furthermore, by taking seriously the distinction between off and front-stage, this study aims at broadening understanding of the role and experience of ‘rehearsing’ and its relationship to bodily transformation within organization studies. The difference between off-stage and on-stage work has remained under-explored among organizational scholars even though it can be applied from the dance field to many other fields, such as service and managerial work. Just like the professional dancers practice their movements off-stage towards the final outcome on-stage, so do the managers and service workers; they practice their speeches and ways of acting off-stage until they are ready to perform on-stage in front of their personnel and stakeholders. Therefore, there is no adequate research on where and how embodied agency actually takes place, and why and to what effect these actions happen. Therefore, this study aims at opening up the negotiation of off-stage and on-stage embodied practices through which embodied agency is formed, negotiated and challenged.

Inspired by the recent methodological developments of ethnography as a sensuous endeavour (Pink 2009; Warren 2008), my enthusiasm for conducting sensory ethnography derived from my need to understand and conceptualise the mundane micro-practices and sensuous doings of professional dancers. In other words, I was keen on understanding the ways the dancers constantly interacted with each other in the field both through rehearsing and performing movements and through verbal expressions, and the ways their work appeared as a fundamentally embodied and emotionally laden practice. Moreover, I wanted to bring novel insights into the existing literature on the different positions of the researcher in the field and the literature on aesthetic experiences by acknowledging that as a researcher I was actually practising embodied agency myself in various ways during the research process. As I have already illustrated, in concrete terms this meant for me the ways I was experiencing the situations in the field throughout my body with all my senses along with the dancers. Therefore, in order to understand the research subject and the interpretations I made, I believe it is crucial to understand the researcher as an embodied, feeling and compassionate subject as well (see for an excellent example of this the article by Hansen and Quinn Trank 2016). When doing research, it is thus important to remember to ask oneself questions like who am I now and how do I feel now? What do my feelings tell me about this specific research situation? This was for me as a researcher an important reflection that I constantly made. Therefore, using sensory ethnography as the methodological starting point allowed me to capture not only the “invisible doings” of the research participants, but also my own embodied agency as a researcher. The felt sense and experience (for example Bathurst and

Cain 2013; Taylor 2013) of the research participants and of me as the researcher are aspects that interest me especially.

By locating my study on the embodied and aesthetic sides of organizational agents I focus on the embodied activities in which bodies are in moving relationships with each other in gestural, fine-grained and ambivalent ways, moment-by-moment (for example Bathurst and Cain 2013; Ropo and Parviainen 2001). As such, my aim is to offer for the reader a “guided tour” into the ‘hidden’ qualities of professional dance through the four sub-studies. While each of the four sub-studies tackles a specific research question or questions, they all contribute to the joint, overall research theme of embodied agency. Based on the aesthetic view taken in this study, the following research question is considered central for this study:

*How is embodied agency shaped, challenged and negotiated among professional dancers?*

This main research question is divided into four sub-questions which are further elaborated in the sub-studies as follows:

1. How do professional dancers achieve embodied agency in between off- and onstage? (Sub-study 1)
2. How are the aesthetics of embodied agency visible in the professional dancers’ relational work? (Sub-study 2)
3. How are passion and vulnerability involved in the phenomenon of embodied agency? (Sub-study 3)
4. How does the embodied agency of the researcher affect her interpretations of the ethnographic research material of professional dancers’ work? (Sub-study 4)

However, I want to stress that in practice, the four sub-questions described above became overlapped and blurred in the sub-studies, and therefore, their division into four separate entities is just a rhetorical tool for me to try to convey the ways the different sub-studies focused on different aspects of embodied agency. In fact, I found it a bit uncomfortable to present the research questions in the way I do above because in my view, this kind of presentation represents a danger of giving an oversimplistic impression of the phenomenon of embodied agency. However, ‘slicing’ the research phenomenon into separate sub-questions allowed me to simplify the research problem in a good way too, and hopefully make it more understandable for a variety of readers.

To conclude, I view embodied agency as a fundamentally sensory-based phenomenon, derived from the tacit, intangible and ineffable experiences (Warren 2002, 242) of organizational agents. Therefore, I find sensory ethnography, discussed in the next chapter, as a vital methodological approach for this study. Sensory ethnography highlights the socio-culturally entangled, subjective experiences of organizational agents (Sunderland et al. 2012), and therefore, in my view, it is a promising approach in answering the research questions described above.



# METHODOLOGICAL MOVES

## SENSORY ETHNOGRAPHY AS A RESEARCH APPROACH

*“The senses are everywhere.” (Bull et al. 2006, 5)*

Organization studies has undergone rather many re-orientations during its fairly short history (Reed 2005, 1621; see also Strati 2000c). The epistemological grounding of this study lies within the social constructionist perspective, which is an ‘anti-objectivist’ theory of knowledge (Gergen 1991), which has evolved “through the influence of post-structuralism and postmodernism during the 1970s and 1980s” (Reed 2005, 1625; see also Berger and Luckman 1996). However, the theoretical paradigms overlap and paradigmatic pluralism is present. As Strati (2000b, 32) argues, “neither organizational thought nor the study of organizations as social contexts relies on a single paradigm”. Indeed, social constructionism has also produced a rich spectrum of the varieties of perspectives, such as relational constructionism (Hosking 2011), which sees “persons and worlds as emerging processes” rather than separate individuals and actions, and supports multiple rationalities of life (Hosking 2011, 47).

In this study, I view reality as socially constructed (Hosking 2011), and throughout the research process I have critically questioned myself in terms of how I am to ‘know’ and how I am to ‘act’ (see Newton 2011, 8). In other words, for example, throughout the fieldwork phase I was feeling insecure about whether I was missing something important and questioning myself why the actions that I paid attention to were relevant for my study and what was my justification for using them as the relevant part of my research material. Of course, we miss all kinds of happenings and details all the time. Therefore, I learned little by little to trust myself as a sensing ethnographer in the field, and to feel satisfied and even thrilled with those actions I captured in my small notebook.

Broadly speaking, this study departs from the positivist, modernist framework of highlighting rational agency, empirical knowledge and language as representation, and joins the non-positivist, postmodern commitments of appreciating communal and relational rationality, the social construction of reality and language as social action (Gergen and Thatchenkery 2004). In practice, this meant for me that I had an open-minded and appreciative attitude towards the professional dancers I observed or interviewed and towards doing research in general. Throughout, for me, doing research was hence a process of learning about myself too. Of course, the divisions between the kinds of epistemological and ontological perspectives described above are not as simplistic as often pictured. Therefore, it is almost impossible to conduct research by positioning oneself purely in one paradigm. Furthermore, this study takes a critical stand. By critical, I refer here to questioning “the alignment between knowledge, truth and efficiency” (Fournier and Grey 2000, 17), and the narrow and “operationalized socio-cultural ideology” (Hancock and Tyler 2004, 642) of our everyday lives. Instead, throughout the research process, I aim to resist “the overwhelming pressure to be ‘useful’ and ‘perform’” (Fleming and Banerjee 2016, 273) By so doing, I take my time continuously reflecting and asking the big questions without obvious practical answers.

Methodologically, I turn towards an aesthetic epistemology (Strati 1999) of studying the embodied agency of professional dancers. In other words, the methodology of this study is aesthetically sensitive (see Warren 2008), where the sensual experiences of me as a researcher in gathering the empirical material are important, but mutually important are exploring the aesthetic experiences of the researched subjects. Therefore, this study looks at embodied agency as a multifocal phenomenon that combines different philosophical and sociological standpoints of organizational aesthetics (for an overview, see Strati 2016, 254–257). In fact, the concept of multimodality<sup>6</sup> is currently a widely discussed term in qualitative research, referring to studies in which the research material is not only verbal or numeric but also consists of ‘multisensory’ material, such as photographs and videos, observations of bodily movements and material surroundings and artefacts (Dicks et al. 2011, 228; Pink 2011). The issue of aesthetic study also includes the choice of what the researcher wants to study and how she or he will do this (Rosen 1991, 21). Here, I work from within my own “explicitly sensory framework” (Warren 2008, 563), in order to “breathe life into organization studies” (Dutton 2003) by studying organizations and people that inspire me. Perhaps, my “sensory framework” derives from my early childhood, when I was a little dance student, thrilled with putting the pointe shoes for the first time on. Here, I use my memories as a strength in this study by hoping to be able to empathize with the dancers I observed in deeply sensuous ways (see also Hansen and Quinn Trank 2016), which is by no means a matter of course:

*“Empathy for researchers is hard to find, neither from ethnographic or non-ethnographic researchers, nor from people outside or inside your ethnography.”*  
(Warden 2012, 167)

Perhaps, it is difficult for us to throw ourselves into research situations and truly try to empathise with those we study, as the somewhat depressing extract above describes. Even so, in addition to using my own set of experiences as a point of departure for my research, I also aim to achieve an empathetic understanding by using creative research methods, such as the photo-elicitation technique, that preserves the lived experience of professional dancers and, in this way, revitalize and profoundly enrich the phenomenon of embodied agency.

Broadly speaking, in this study I apply an ethnographic approach (see for example Van Maanen 2011a; Yanow 2009; Ybema et al. 2009) to understand the detailed day-to-day actions of the professional dancers that I study. In general, ethnography is a way of thinking, analysing and writing about social life (Watson 2011). There are several epistemological groundings, therefore not only the social constructionist one applied here, through which ethnography has been used as a methodological approach. Moreover, ethnography can be viewed both as a method (i.e. a technique for collecting research material) and as a methodology, consisting of a theoretical and philosophical framework (Brewer 1994, 231). It is also valuable to note that even if anthropology and ethnography depend on each other and are often treated as synonyms, they are not the same (Ingold 2008). While anthropology can be described as a “broad discipline”,

<sup>6</sup> It has been argued that multimodality and ethnography derive from different descriptive and analytic conventions and therefore, are incompatible. But in fact, a ‘classic’ ethnography, Pink (2011, 273) argues, is theoretically and methodologically coherent with the multimodality paradigm.

involving many branches (Pink 2011, 261), ethnography is a way of describing accurately and sensitively the lives of people in a certain place and time (Ingold 2008). Here, along with Coffey (1999), I understand ethnography as a methodological activity, which cannot be separated from an ethnographer's self, being thus part of our lifeworld. Moreover, ethnography is somewhat related to ethnomethodology<sup>7</sup>, although it does have its own characteristics.

The distinctive qualities of defining good ethnography can be summarised as first, creating the impression of the researcher having “been there”, second, describing mundane everyday life, third, having multivocality and rich descriptions from the field, and fourth, offering an insightful description in novel and revealing ways (Bate 1997). By viewing ethnography as more of a research approach than a concrete, pre-defined set of methodological tools to be used in the field (Van Maanen 2011b), I find its strength as being engaged with the first-hand experience of a particular social setting (Atkinson et al. 2011). For example, I remember one evening from 2011, when the choreographer (a friend of mine) of a freelance dance production, called me with a frantic tone in her voice and said that she does not have a place for the dancers to stay. The situation was desperate and chaotic, and I thus rented my own flat for one of the dancers, and organized another flat of another friend of mine for the rest of the dancers. In this way, I became involved in the construction of the whole working process and its messy characteristics ‘behind-the-scenes’. Hence, ethnography highlights the importance of context in making cultural knowledge and the construction of meanings visible (Hansen 2006). In line with this view, I underline the nature of ethnography as a process of experiencing, interpreting and representing knowledge about culture, organization or individuals based on the ethnographers’ own experiences (Rosen 1991, 2; Pink 2011, 22; Van Maanen 2010; Watson 2011). Ethnography is an effective approach to studying the complexities of marginal and even trivial jobs (Smith 2011, 221). Ethnographic approaches therefore reveal and overturn assumptions and taken-for-granted thoughts that lie behind many organizational cultures and behaviour. For me, ethnography here is a way of thinking, experiencing and exploring the aesthetically sensible, barely verbalised work practices of professional dancers.

There are some excellent examples of ‘classical’ organizational ethnographies conducted in various contexts (Kunda 1992; Orr 1996; Watson 1994). Kunda’s (1992) ethnography of a high-tech company in the US describes how the details of a flexible, informal work culture and management style leads to the commitment and personal growth of the personnel of the company. In a similar spirit, Orr’s (1996) ethnography of copier machine technicians illustrates how their work practices build on their daily talk about the machines, the customers and themselves. Watson (1994) instead, gives voice to managers by describing the ways in which managers shape their identities and the working practices of the organization. There are also excellent examples of ethnographies conducted outside the field of organization studies. For example, in his study, Young (1991) gives a detailed account of the police forces in the UK, while the study of Nippert-Eng (1996) is a fascinating description of the lines between our work and personal lives. Moreover, some recent examples of high-quality ethnographies in my view is, for example, “Loud an Proud”, written by Hillary Pilkington (2016), exploring grassroots

<sup>7</sup> Ethnomethodology studies activities of people to understand the ways they make sense of their environments and actions. It is not so much concerned with *what* they are doing, as ethnography, but rather *how* they *make sense* of it (see Francis and Hester 2004).

activists in the English Defence League. By applying an ethnographic approach, Pilkington aims at understanding the tensions within the interpretations of who the English Defence League actually are and what their missions are. In addition, the book by Samantha Holland, called “Pole Dancing, Empowerment and Embodiment” from 2010, is a multidisciplinary ethnographic account of pole dancing, a sort of leisure activity, relating to the discourses of body, gender, age and fitness. In a slightly similar spirit, Sassatelli (2010) discusses in her brilliantly written ethnography of the consumer culture of fitness gyms in inspiring ways. Moreover, “The Body Multiple”, written by Mol (2003) is an insightful ethnography of the mundane work practices of dealing with a disease called atherosclerosis. Drawing on fieldwork in a Dutch hospital, Mol (2003) combines creatively ethnographic descriptions and analysis by using two parallel texts in the book — one analysing her ethnographic material and the other reflecting the relevant research literature.

As Bate (1997, 1151) writes, ethnography can be defined as a kind of fieldwork activity, a kind of paradigm and as a way of writing (Bate 1997, 1151). It has been argued that the strength of ethnography first and foremost conveys the lived experiences of the research participants in a vivid and dynamic way (Smith 2011). Moreover, by following good research practice, an ethnographer’s strengths include the abilities to discuss broader issues of the social world through the small-scale descriptions of events from the field, possibilities to illustrate the complexity of the research material and question the authority of the ethnographic material, and therefore, engage readers with “ethnographic imagination” (Brewer 1994, 235–236). On the other hand, ethnographic descriptions have been criticised for being unreliable, ungeneralisable and even naive (Hammersley 1991), and as Fine (1993, 288) concisely states, “ethnography is nothing until inscribed: sensory experiences become texts”. I also remember how insecure I felt about making notes in the field. What was, after all, my point in making them? What would I write, and what would I not write down when observing the dancers? Could I really get something valuable out of those messy sentences and words? These were the questions that constantly bothered me in the field. Therefore, writing is a challenge the ethnographer inevitably faces as “ethnography is ultimately about transformation” (Fine 1993, 290) into meaningful patterns of text.

Therefore, more specifically, what engages my thesis with organizational ethnography in line with the ‘traditional’ ethnographies of Kunda (1992), Orr (1996) and Watson (1994) mentioned above, are the ways in which I have carried out the fieldwork by aiming to get inside the world and headwork of the research participants by trying to understand their mundane practices as a continuously evolving process, shaped in time and space and text-work, and by aiming to give detailed accounts of the daily lives of the professional dancers that I have observed (Van Maanen 2011b; see also Bate 1997). Nevertheless, differing from these ethnographies, I call this study a sensory ethnography in particular, drawing upon the classical studies of Classen (1993), Stroller (1997) and Howes (2006a; b) in the social sciences, and Pink (2009; 2011) to whose writings and ideas I attach my study specifically. Therefore, instead of understanding participant observation alone as the main ethnographic tool for collecting research material (see for example Atkinson et al. 2011, 4), I highlight the sensory nature of ethnography (see Pink 2009; 2011), and therefore, also view my own feelings as a researcher and other qualities of the research material, such as the visual material and the atmospheres they may create (see Biehl-Missal 2013) as meaningful for this piece of writing.

Inspired by the work of Bull et al. (2006), I view the senses as a relevant point of departure for understanding embodied agency consisting not only of physical and biological features and the ‘surface’ of the bodies, but also cultural and political perceptions (Bull et al. 2006, 5). For example, when conducting the fieldwork, I not only paid attention to the bodily movements of the professional dancers, but also the overall sensory atmospheres of the situations, aesthetic ‘cues’ of the dancers, such as their moods, ways of talking to each other and acting in relation to each other, and the embodied, empathetic reactions that being in the field awoke in me. Therefore, for me, ethnography was more a ‘sharing’ and ‘learning’ practice (Dicks et al. 2011, 232; Pink 2011) and a holistic sensory approach through which I could experience all the enthusiastic and creative, but also the cruel, fleshy and painful moments with the professional dancers in the field.

Sensory ethnography is a form of ethnography, recently most actively discussed and developed by Pink (2009; 2011), which draws its inspiration from phenomenological anthropology (Merleau-Ponty 1962; see also Ingold 2008). It has also been called “multisensory ethnography” (Dicks 2014), an approach embedded in the wider spectrum of scholarly work that features sensory methodologies (Low 2015). Basically, sensory ethnography is an approach that emphasises subjective, physical experiences that are culturally and socially produced and reproduced (Sunderland et al. 2012). Therefore, sensory perception is not only a physical, but also a cultural act, Classen (1997, 401) writes. For example, I have spent a year in Italy, and have some close friends there, who view the Finns as polite, trustworthy and shy because of their quietness. Interestingly, in our country, silence is a sign of respect, not taken as rudeness or a “who cares” attitude, as it might be interpreted in some other countries. The subjective experiences of silence thus vary from country to country. Further, the senses are interactive, adaptable and fluid by nature and shape people’s everyday life by working as modes of experiencing what is meaningful in life (de Waal Malefyt 2015). We therefore hardly notice how our senses affect our everyday lives as they are so embedded in our experiences. According to Valtonen et al. (2010), the specific feature of sensory ethnography is that “it directs epistemic attention to the ways in which the senses play a part in the performance and coordination of practices and in the subsequent interaction with the social and material world”. Hence, they claim, it is not concerned with individual experiences as such.

Throughout, I build up the idea of separating individual experiences from sensory ethnography (see Valtonen et al. 2010), and view sensory ethnography as attached to individual experiences through the senses. This aspect relates to the special features of sensory ethnography identified in research literature, which can be scrutinized under three main points: first, sensory ethnography is concerned with overcoming the audio-visual hegemony of contemporary ethnography (Pink 2009), and therefore, aims at capturing not only the specific five senses of sight, sound, touch, taste and smell, but also sensory experiences that are not yet widely recognised (Pink 2009; 2011). Therefore, it aims at capturing what it ‘feels’ like by bringing together the sensory, emotional and intellectual experiences of people (Sunderland et al. 2012, 1056; see also Warren 2012). Second, sensory ethnography views human experience as fundamentally embodied (Sunderland et al. 2012), and third, it is always emplaced (Pink 2009), or embedded in its social and cultural surroundings and the everydayness of them. More than anything, I strive to keep these points in my mind throughout the methodological encounters of this study.

Sensory ethnography has been applied to study many organizational phenomena involved with the senses. Overall, sensory methodologies have been used and the senses have been studied among ‘feminist’ occupations, such as care work among elderly people (Martin 2002) and beauty therapists (Sharma and Black 2001), focusing on what exactly makes the women not only look good, but in fact, feel good during the beauty treatments. Moreover, the interrelations between the body and the senses has been studied among the work of architects and their ‘unspoken’ knowing (Ewenstein and Whyte 2007), and, in the same spirit, among anaesthesia teams and their inter-corporeal knowing during demanding operations in the hospital (Hindmarsh and Pilnick 2002). Nevertheless, all these studies seem to focus on one of the five senses and not on the holistic sensory experience explored through sensory ethnography. In fact, an example of the holistic understanding of the senses is Hansen’s (2011; 2012) intensive and emotionally loaded ethnography of a death penalty team. In his study, which he however does not call sensory ethnography as such, he combines narrative and ethnographic methods<sup>8</sup> to explore how suffering and compassion may produce both practical, analytical and methodological outcomes “to better communicate the humanity of those we study as well as our own” (Hansen and Trank 2016, 354).

Hence, there are few studies that call themselves sensory ethnographies in particular. For example, Lande (2007) studies professional soldiers ethnographically by analysing the cultural patterning of military work, which “takes place at the level of the body” (Lande 2007, 95). In addition, de Waal Malefyt (2015) explores brand rituals as a means for developing consumer-brand relations towards a more holistic understanding of the senses in consumer research, while Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2009) explore the sensory practices of the working body by showing examples drawn from what they call “corporeal ethnographic fieldnotes” (Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2009, 218). Along with them, I view my ethnographic fieldnotes as corporeal (except of preferring the word ‘embodied’ instead), as I have aimed at writing down my observations and feelings about the embodied activities of the dancers, and by so doing, capture the lived, moving working practices of them and also my embodied experiences from the field. Furthermore, in their studies, Stevenson (2015) and Low (2015) focus on the sensory construction of cities and urban life, and view our physical environments as “sites of human experience” (Low 2015, 295) instead of being only functional and modern structures. Finally, the studies of Markuksela (2013) and Valtonen et al. (2010) use sport fishing as a case to illustrate how “the idea of fishing lies on the appropriate use of the senses” (Valtonen et al. 2010, 377) and how sensory ethnography enables them to capture the bodily aspects which affect the ways people act on different occasions. In line with these sensory ethnographies, I aim to understand how the senses are integrated in the (cultural) working practices of professional dancers (cf. Porcello et al. 2010, 51), and extending the existing literature of sensory ethnography described above, I take bodily movement as a critical standpoint to understand the sensory experience and ‘being-in-the-world’ for those I study.

Here, I rely on the cultural approach to sensory ethnography (Classen 1997; Valtonen et al. 2010) and view ethnography as a bodily project, which is shaped and affected by the cultural values and meanings that I as a researcher and all the humans and non-humans in the

8 The combination of these methods is called the ethno-narrative approach, which aims at analysing discourse by using narrative methods produced within a distinctive context, which is then described via thick ethnographic descriptions (Hansen 2006; 2011).

field are surrounded by. More specifically, by the 'cultural', I refer here to the beliefs, norms and expectations formed over time and to the (embodied) practices shaped by the research participants. The body, then, is the pathway to observing and registering all the senses present in the field (Valtonen et al. 2010, 375; 378). For example, in sub-study 1, the embodied practices of the ballet dancers and of the fashion models were at the very focus, and therefore, provided an avenue for understanding both the cultural laden ideas of the senses and the ways in which we, two ethnographers, were inevitably practising embodied agency as well.

My fieldwork includes long-term participant-observation aimed at capturing the specifics of the culture of professional dance and its meanings, and at understanding the professional dancers' social world (Rosen 1991), while my headwork aims at capturing the lived experiences of the dancers both off-stage and on-stage. In sensory ethnography, the researcher's body is crucial in capturing the socio-experiential ways of knowing of those s/he studies and the methodological and analytical endeavours overall (Low 2015, 309). In other words, I aim at empathising with



the professional dancers' everyday situations by sensing their feelings and the overall atmosphere of the working day, and by capturing the real situations of the moments in the field in my ethnographic diary. Hence, along with Warden (2012, 167), I disagree that "ethnographers should hide the emotional consequences of research in favour of appearing more academic". For me, feeling empathy and strong involvement with the dancers' mundane struggles opened up a vibrant world in which doing research was more than lonely toil or boring process of writing — it was an adventure filled with emotional bursts of all kinds. Within the text-work, I aim at a style of writing that allows for the voices of those I have studied to be heard instead of only me speaking for them. In concrete terms, this means that during the fieldwork, I wrote long descriptions in which I aimed to capture the rehearsal situation as I experienced it, the atmosphere of it and the interaction between the professional dancers as subtly as I could. Therefore, I aimed at giving "thick descriptions" (Rosen 1991; Van Maanen 2011a), which included interpretations of both the actions of the research participants and me as the researcher and the meanings I constructed based on what I experienced in the field.

Moreover, the role of the researcher in a sensory study is discussed, for example, in the light of "aesthetic sensibility", a concept used by Zanutto et al. (2013, 188; 192) and being an important feature of sensory ethnography. Sensibility is not only a research tool, but also enables the (re)-evaluation of the choices the researcher made during the research process, and therefore, increases his or her reflexivity. In this way, the sensory ethnographer must constantly and actively reflect on his or her own sentiments in relation to those of the others in the field, and therefore, objectivity and subjectivity do not become mutually exclusive (Van Ede 2009, 71). For example, when Alice working for a dance company explained to me how she felt she had been downplayed by the management of the company, I felt anger. Meanwhile, I aimed at reflexively distinguishing my bodily sensations and the tale the dancer was telling to me without 'over-sentimentalising' it. In my view, this was critical in being able to make analytical reflections on the research material for a broader audience. In general, "the body of the researcher is also a crucial ingredient towards realising such methodological and analytical endeavours, together with those whom s/he studies", as Low (2015, 309) puts it. In other words, throughout the research process, I felt that my own bodily sensations also told me a lot about the research phenomenon. I will discuss my aesthetic involvement as a researcher with the research phenomenon more specifically in methodology section.

## ENTERING THE CONTEXT OF PROFESSIONAL DANCE

Context is a central focus in ethnography, as it is material in the construction of meaning (Hansen 2006). By context, I refer here to the field of dance in its entirety, and use the term 'setting' to refer to the different dance productions in which I conducted the fieldwork. I started to plan my fieldwork at the very early stages of my doctoral studies and choosing professional dance as the research context was clear for me from the very beginning of the study because I had friends working as professional dancers, and therefore, access to the field was already partly negotiated beforehand. These previous, personal contacts also led to new contacts and facilitated the work in the field. For example, the retired ballet dancers had a huge network of contacts and they

introduced me to other people who they thought would be useful for my study. Moreover, I had personally practised dance for over a decade before entering this particular field with an ethnographic study in mind and so I had “bodily knowledge” (Merleau-Ponty 1989) of the field as well. In practice, this meant that in general, I knew the technical details of classical ballet and the challenges in conducting the movements, and so there was no need to verbalise all the skills or qualities required — the knowledge was ‘imprinted’ in my body already. Also, most of the professional dancers that I interviewed seemed to be used to thinking and talking about their bodies. Consequently, this helped me overcome the difficulty of speaking about the sensory-based dimensions of the dancers’ work, “aesthetic muteness” (Taylor 2002), by interacting with such professionals who were able to ‘translate’ their feelings and thoughts driven by bodily movements into spoken language.

Throughout the research process, there were also several challenges related to my personal relation with the field of dance. First, I had to avoid ‘over-sentimentalising’ the struggles the professional dancers had behind the scenes. As discussed more thoroughly in sub-study 4, my own sensory-based experiences in the field were sometimes overwhelming, leading to situations in which I had difficulties keeping in mind my primary role as a researcher in the field. In addition, there were moments in which I felt like a therapist to which the professional dancers could turn and let out their feelings behind the scenes. On the other hand, I appreciated the dancers’ openness hugely as it helped me in getting quickly immersed emotionally in the subtle qualities of their work. Moreover, the ethnographic research process was in my view messy, consisting of fragmented moments of which I had to make sense. Giving myself permission to ‘drift’ in the field without knowing exactly where my study would lead me was stressful. In other words, the tension between my strong personal attachment to the field of dance and the uncertainty of my study as a whole was sometimes hard for me to handle. This was also because of the feeling that surrounded me of the pressure of doing academically proper research. I remember how during the years I was working on this study I met some ‘sceptics’ who doubted my work, for example, by questioning that “how on earth could I not know the specific research questions of my study after two years in the field?” Despite these direct doubts, I tried to stay strong with my openness towards what my research could bring within the following years and not to make any fixed plans related to it.

Regarding the choice of the empirical settings, I wanted to find common characteristics of embodied agency in regard to different kinds of dance genres, both classical ballet and contemporary dance. Hence, I wanted to get a versatile overall-picture of the professional dancers’ embodied agency. Therefore, this study includes four dance productions (settings) that I observed for 19 months altogether: 1) a production by two retired ballet dancers, 2) following different productions in the Dutch National Ballet for one week, 3) a freelance production by one choreographer and five professional dancers and 4) a solo production. Hence, I did not want to concentrate only on the ballet companies, which are examples of unique cultural contexts, defined by various norms and hierarchies (see Aalten 1997). In addition to these four “core productions” described above, I observed several productions, workshops and dance lessons for shorter periods during the research process and conducted in-depth interviews and photo-elicitation interviews with professional dancers in the field.



In the case of the production by the two retired ballet dancers, I contacted one of the dancers by sending the summary of my research plan to her and asking about her current work and whether I could follow her next rehearsal. I received a positive email from her on 14th August 2012:

*“Hi! Of course I remember you! I write you now quickly in between the rehearsals. I try to become familiar with your study later when I have a bit more time. I’m in a hurry now. I’m currently working on a production with my colleague. You could come to follow our rehearsals from September on. I’ll get back to you soon. M.”*

In September 2012, after discussing the practical issues such as the schedules of the rehearsals, I started to attend the rehearsals twice or three times a week. The rehearsals lasted about four hours per day.

Negotiating access to the Dutch National Ballet was a more difficult task. I knew a Finnish ballet dancer who was working there as a soloist and I contacted her to ask for help in negotiating formal access to the organization. In all, it took almost two months before access was fully agreed upon and the time frame for the field visit was fixed. I conducted the fieldwork in the

Dutch National Ballet during the first week of August in 2011. As I entered the Dutch National Ballet on the first morning, the executive secretary came to welcome me. The secretary thought I was coming to hold an audition for the dancers, as she had forgotten about the agreement with her about the visit. This led to a confusing but humorous situation in which I had to assure the executive secretary that I was not here to hold an audition and explained the purpose for the agreed visit all over again. During the week at the Dutch National Ballet I then attended numerous dance rehearsals varying from classical ballet to contemporary dance and was free to move between different classes and rehearsals as much as I wanted.

The third dance production I gained access to was a freelance production including a choreographer, five professional dancers, two composers and musicians. Negotiating access to this production was smooth, as I had worked as a marketing assistant for the choreographer of this production since August 2010. I knew the choreographer personally very well and to get to observe the rehearsals I only needed to ask for the rehearsal schedule and explain the overall idea of my study to the choreographer. Vilén (2010, 54–55) points out that negotiating access is a continuous process even after entering the field, and Cunliffe and Alcadipani (2016) describe gaining access as a fluid, temporal and political process, filled with backstage dramas and even deception. In the sub-settings of this thesis as well, negotiating access was an on-going process as with all the dance productions, I had to agree each time I wanted to come to follow the rehearsals.

Finally, gaining access to the solo production was easy, and in fact, I was invited to follow it. This was because the dancer of the solo production was a close friend of mine, working now as a professional dancer. I entered the field in September 2011, after one year of the beginning of my doctoral studies. The rehearsals took place mainly in the evenings and lasted from three to four hours. I attended the rehearsals from two to four times a week. The rehearsal period lasted all together for three months.

## EMPIRICAL MATERIAL OF THE STUDY

Researching the aesthetic and bodily actions and experiences of the research participants sets requirements for the quality of the research material. Accordingly, I collected different kinds of research material to be able to capture the versatile characteristics of embodied agency as richly as possible. The empirical material of this study consists of field notes, informal discussions with various professionals (not only professional dancers, but also the choreographers, musicians, light and sound designers and other people involved) in the field, in-depth and photo-elicitation interviews with professional dancers, autoethnographic diary notes, and visual material (photographs and video clips). As described in sub-chapter 3.2, the observational material from the field includes a 4-month-long solo production, a week-long visit to the Dutch National Ballet, a 2 month-long production by two retired ballet dancers and a 14-month-long freelance production. I used a small notebook to record my observations in the field. During the fieldwork phase I wrote descriptive field notes (see Emerson et al. 2011, 5–6), which were my perceptions and interpretations of the events, talk and activities between me and the research participants.

To sum up, Table 3 below gives an overview of the research material collected for the overall study.

Table 3. Summary of the Empirical Material of the Study

<b>QUALITY OF THE EMPIRICAL MATERIAL</b>	<b>TIME FRAME OF COLLECTION</b>	<b>AMOUNT OF THE MATERIAL GATHERED (IN HOURS / PAGES)</b>	<b>MY ROLE AS THE RESEARCHER</b>
Participant observation, solo production	09/2011 – 12/2011	50 hours	Actively involved, insider, a friend of the dancer.
Participant observation, freelance production (1)	06/2013 – 08/2014	20 hours	Insider, employee of the production.
Participant observation, retired ballet dancers' production	09/2012 – 10/2012	70 hours	From an outsider to an insider.
Participant observation, Dutch National Ballet	08/2011	20 hours	Outsider, moments of insider.
Short plunges: A freelance production (2), a dance workshop	05/2011 – 08/2011	10 hours	Partly insider, partly outsider.
8 in-depth interviews with professional dancers	09/2013 – 01/2014	14 hours, 150 pages of transcribed text	Supporter, creator of a loyal atmosphere.
2 photo-elicitation interviews with professional dancers	04/2013 and 01/2014	5 hours, 30 photos and 40 pages of transcribed text	Active participant, selector of the photographs to be discussed.
Autoethnographic notes	05/2011 – 10/2012	20 pages of handwritten text	Very personally involved, the self as the researched.
Informal conversations with the dancers and other agents in the field	05/2011 – 12/2015	30 hours	Insider.
Semi-structured interviews with professional dancers	01/-12/2009	21 interviews, duration approximately 1,5-2 hours	Active and empathetic listener.
Photographs and videos	05/2011 – 10/2012	30 photos, access to 200 photos, 2 hours of video material	Varying from an outsider into an insider.

<b>'SNAPSHOTS' OF THE PRACTICAL ACTIONS I UNDERTOOK IN THE FIELD</b>	<b>SPECIFIC VALUE FOR THE STUDY</b>	<b>USED IN</b>
Discussed the choreography with the dancer, gave opinions about it.	Insights into the working process of a professional dancer practicing alone.	The whole thesis.
Planned the marketing of the production, sold tickets at performances.	Understanding relational nature of embodied agency.	Sub-study 2.
Put the music on and off in the rehearsals, took the dancer's dog out between the shows.	Revealing aspects of bodily transformation.	Sub-studies 1 and 2.
Sat quietly on the floor in the rehearsals taking notes.	Insights into the work of classical ballet dancers.	Sub-study 4.
Arranged flats for the dancers. Sat quietly in the empty theatre seats in the rehearsals taking notes.	Additional information on the field of professional dance.	The whole thesis.
Tried to lead the interview toward the themes that I found personally fascinating and wanted to hear the dancers' thoughts related to them.	Deepening understanding of the thematic substances.	Sub-study 3.
Encouraged the dancers to show me meaningful photographs of their career, and selected the photographs to discuss more deeply.	Revealing aspects of embodied agency that did not come out through other research material.	Sub-study 3.
Wrote my thoughts, feelings and sentiments down right after the observation situations.	Reflecting own thoughts and feelings.	Sub-study 4.
Forgot my role as a researcher and became more like an empathetic friend.	Gaining additional knowledge beyond formal interviews.	The whole thesis.
Travelled around Finland to interview the dancers.	Background information of professional dancers' work.	The whole thesis.
Negotiated permission to publish the photographs taken by photographers in the productions.	Visual representations of embodied agency.	Photos: all the sub-studies.

It is important to notice that I did not use all the research material summarised in the table above explicitly in the final written report of the study. Instead, as my ethnographic research journey proceeded, I was capable of distinguishing relevant parts of the whole research material in relation to the research questions of the study. These parts of the material included the solo production, the short plunges into the field (including freelance production 2 and a dance workshop), informal discussions with professional dancers and other agents in the field and video material. Nevertheless, all this explicitly ‘unused’ research material also shaped my knowledge of the research phenomenon and affected the ways I was capable of interpreting the research material I chose to use in the study. The research questions were then formed and gradually refined based on my experiences in the field until the final writing phase of this research journey.

Ethnographic fieldwork is usually considered a long-term project, but researchers from disciplines other than anthropology often conduct fieldwork within a shorter time frame (Sherman Heyl 2011). In addition to spending several months in the field within the three dance productions described above, I also made short plunges into the field; I observed a dance workshop in August 2010 in Turku and dance teaching in September 2013 in Helsinki. Furthermore, I used 21 semi-structured interviews with professional dancers in Finland as background material for this PhD study. I conducted these interviews in 2009 for my Master’s thesis (Satama 2010), dealing with dancers’ professional identity and career development. These interviews inevitably affected on my thinking about their profession even if I did not explicitly use them as research material in the final thesis at hand.

I conducted the ethnographic in-depth interviews after the fieldwork and based on the additional questions that had risen during the time in the field. I wanted to get in touch with professional dancers from as many and varied backgrounds as possible to raise multiple aspects of embodied agency that I had not considered so far. The themes we talked about during the interviews raised many never-thought-of-before-aspects just as I had hoped (see Appendix 3 for an extract from an in-depth interview). In my view, the professional dancers themselves also felt inspired by the questions and gave me such comments as “this develops also me as a dancer” and “these questions are challenging but so much more interesting than the questions I’m usually asked by the press”. Conducting the in-depth interviews allowed me to get into the research topic even more deeply by making more specific interview questions on the topic of the main research questions in this study. Therefore, the link between the research questions (RQ) and the interview questions was strongly entwined. For example, RQ 1 about the possibilities of and limitations on achieving embodied agency made me seek more detail about the ways in which the professional dancers experienced their everyday training in relation to the possibilities they had in choosing how they worked and how the professional dancers aimed at “breaking free” from their cultural background. I recorded all the in-depth interviews on my mobile phone with the verbal permission of the interviewees and transcribed them later at home. For a more detailed view, the in-depth interview outline is attached in Appendix 2, and an extract from the transcript of an in-depth interview is available in Appendix 3.

Photographs turned out to be a substantially valuable and emotionally impassioned part of the empirical material of this study as well. More specifically, I applied a hybrid approach to their production (Ray and Smith 2012, 296). In other words, some of the photographs were taken by me during the observation situations to help me recall and later report the essential features and

the overall atmosphere of the individual sessions. Many of the rehearsals were videotaped by the professional dancers themselves, as they used video as a tool for looking at how their movements, positions and expressions looked from an outsider perspective. I had access to all this video material. In the final report, I did not use the video material even though I watched them during the analysis phase to recall the rehearsal situations and to get back to the situations themselves.

Throughout this study, I understand the status of photographs as emotional artefacts as important as the analysis of their representation (Warren 2009). As Belova (2006, 93) argues, “the practice of looking can be conceptualised as a deeply embodied and pre-reflective involvement with the surrounding world and others where all senses intertwine”. Following this idea, I also asked the professional dancers to bring their own photographs (as another type of source) with them in order to conduct photo-elicitation interviews (Harper 2002; Warren 2005). These photo-elicitation interviews were especially meaningful in describing how the professional dancers saw their work and in enabling the unconscious thoughts and emotions to be expressed (Bell and Davison 2013). In part, this was because I asked the professional dancers to tell me freely what first came into their mind as they saw the photographs. Consequently, I felt they talked to me emotionally and seemed to describe aspects of their work to me that probably would have remained hidden if I simply interviewed them. For example, one freelance dancer showed me a few photographs, which I interpreted as visual representations of her obsessive affections towards reaching an ideal body and perfect movements. This was interesting because I had not thought to question her on these issues during the in-depth interview, and therefore, conducting the two photo-elicitation interviews provided me with additional knowledge about the professional dancer’s embodied agency. Based on the chosen photographs and the dancer’s convictions related to them, I then made my own interpretations.

Finally, a part of the research material of this study consists of my auto-ethnographic research notes. Haynes (2011, 134) writes, “A reflexive use of autobiographical material provides a valuable resource for exploring, presenting and representing the self, encapsulating a personal, intuitive knowledge deriving from a knowing subject situated in a specific social context”. Therefore, drawing on the researcher’s personal experiences (Wall 2006; see also Holman Jones 2016), autoethnography is a valuable tool for making use of “the subjective ways of knowing” (Haynes 2011, 135). In this study, autoethnographic research notes were used especially in sub-study 4 to describe my various roles and aesthetic experiences as the researcher in and after the fieldwork phase. In addition, I felt that refining the synthesis at the end phase of the process was a kind of autoethnographic practice, in which I constantly aimed at mirroring the embodied agency of professional dancers with my own thoughts about what I understood as being embodied agency outside dance and then reflected them to my own experiences of (working) life.

## UNPACKING THE AESTHETIC INVOLVEMENT OF THE RESEARCHER

I find my aesthetic sensitivity as a researcher and openness to listening to the various experiences of the research participants as an essential part of this study in dealing with the challenges of capturing the sensory-based phenomenon of embodied agency. In fact, Küpers (2013) and Warren (2002) talk about researchers as embodied agents, and in their view, new research

practices should acknowledge the meaning of the researchers' sensory-based skills and include creative forms of expression, such as photographs, videos and stories. This "embodied research practice" (Küpers 2013, 41) is connected to the idea of using artistic information and processes in qualitative research (see Barry and Meisiek 2010; Sutherland 2013; Taylor and Ladkin 2009). In line with Küpers (2013) I view research in this study as an embodied project that treats the researcher as a feeling, sensuous agent. By using the artistic context of professional dance as a source of my research knowledge, I view myself as also practising embodied agency during the research process. As has already become clear by now, this transpired in my own experiences as empathising with and immersing into the rehearsal situations offstage and throughout, focusing on me as a sensing person too.

Practising embodied agency as a researcher relates to the on-going debate about the practice of reflexivity in ethnography (for example Sherman Heyl 2011), and in qualitative research more generally (for example Berger 2015; Cunliffe 2003; Sutherland 2013). In other words, my own embodied agency as a researcher in the field consisted of fragmented moments in which I aimed at staying as reflexive as possible. In general, reflexivity means "complexifying thinking or experience by exposing contradictions, doubts, and possibilities" (Cunliffe 2002, 38). In fact, as Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009, 1) argue, data and facts are "the constructions or results of interpretation" and, as they continue, "we have to do something with our sensory impressions if these are to be comprehensible and meaningful" (2009, 1). In this sense, being a reflexive researcher means not only understanding the mutual interaction between the researcher and research participants (Sherman Heyl 2011), but also the aesthetic involvement and experiences of the researcher and their affect on the research material and their interpretation. In this study, this seemed to be crucial in understanding the interplay between the ethnographic situations in the field and the immediate, aesthetic reactions they awoke in me and the reasons behind them. Reflexivity therefore raises difficult questions about how to analyse and write about social experiences which are hardly ever simple or static, but rather complex, fluid and relational (Cunliffe 2003).

Therefore, for me, being reflexive was actualised through my continuous interaction with the professional dancers and other agents in the field. It also allowed me to practice a sociable and dialogic form of qualitative research, and therefore, work with rather on the research participants (Sinha and Back 2014, 475). By recognising research "as a co-constituted account" (Finlay 2002, 218), I aimed at applying reflexive research practice and continuously challenge my own conceptualisations about the nature of reality and research knowledge (Cunliffe 2003). Furthermore, throughout the research process I tried to recognise and acknowledge those moments in which I 'forgot' my role as a researcher and immersed totally in the rehearsal situation in the field. By doing so I could at least try to remain analytic and avoid 'over sentimentalising' the situations that I lived through with the professional dancers in the field. This relates to the techniques of introspection and inter-subjective reflection (Finlay 2002, 213-216). For instance, I remember a rehearsal at the Dutch National Ballet in which I felt terrified about the language and the way in which the practitioner guided the dancers' work in a rather cruel way. He used bad language and seemed to be really anxious and overheated throughout the rehearsal. Of course, my own sentiments worked as important cues for deciding which actions or moments were meaningful for the purpose of this study. In conducting sensory ethnographic research, I used

my own affects, emotions and embodied reactions as analytical tools to identify the aspects I wanted to focus on. Sub-study 4 focuses more specifically on my aesthetic experiences during the ethnographic research process and explores how and to what extent I was able to remain reflexive about my own actions and thoughts.

The notion of reflexivity connects to compassionate research methods, which in turn include ethnography, aesthetics and emotionality, and which culminate in the researcher's "deliberately compassionate and committed position" (Hansen and Quinn Trank 2016, 352; 371). Compassion, a valuable and timely term, is grounded in relationships and interconnectedness (Rynes et al. 2012, 504), and it takes many forms in academic work (Hansen and Quinn Trank 2016). As such, there are many explicitly denied researcher's experiences that involve real dimensions of the organization under research, such as the sensory, perceptual, relational, tacit and visual (Zanutto and Piras 2013). Turning these 'suppressed' experiences of the researcher into a written format requires "an open mind, as well as the courage and will to turn one's own body into a research tool", as Van Ede (2009, 70) argues, which also relates to reflexivity and compassionate research methods. Only by so doing, can the researcher be able to understand the 'other'.

To give a practical example of my attempts and willingness to be an 'embodied' (and compassionate) researcher in the field, at the beginning of every observation session in all the settings, I felt a bit uncomfortable being bodily present, sitting in front of the rehearsal studio and writing my field notes in my notebook. Some dancers gave me comments such as "oh, you're writing so much" or "may I ask what kinds of things you are writing down" or just giving me looks of wonder and excitement. As time passed, I started to feel more relaxed both mentally and physically, and in my view, the dancers seemed not to scout my presence any more. To my relief, they seemed to get used to it. By feeling a natural part of their rehearsals and often being asked for my opinions about their work, I felt I was becoming "aesthetically involved" with their work. Of course, I was never able to become "one of them", and therefore, always felt in a sense an outsider.

Consequently, my emotional experiences and reactions and ability to be aesthetically sensible (see Warren 2008) were a useful analytical tool during the research process. Being aesthetically sensitive helped me to identify various atmospheres in different situations that I was observing and by this build a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon in question. For example, I could live through the transformation of the solo dance production along with the dancer from the rehearsal studio to the theatre where the project group spent the last week before the performances. Following the argument of Adler and Hansen (2012) of courage leading to compassionate research, I also felt more encouraged to ask difficult and even painful questions from the dancers, such as themes related to their eating disorders, tensions in their family relations because of their demanding profession and their (sometimes) complicated relationships with the company leaders both in the field and when conducting the in-depth interviews.

Moreover, many ethnographers regard field notes as personal, unfinished and even embarrassing writings that cannot be shared openly with other people (Emerson et al. 2011). I recognise this aspect in my own study as well. When some of my colleagues asked for my permission to read my field notes just out of curiosity, I felt uncomfortable and embarrassed in some sense. My notes from the field indeed reveal my personal thoughts about what I have seen and experienced on the field. I also felt unsure about whether the field notes were total nonsense or written somehow 'wrongly', as researchers do not have a clear consensus on how and when field

notes should be written (Emerson et al. 2011). On the other hand, the pleasure of doing research on a topic that is very close to me personally was an intimate experience (cf. Whiteman 2010) that made me write passionately about every single observation I made. By using the romanticized notion of a “labour of love” (Clarke et al. 2012), working on this study consisted, of course, not only of passionate but also painful sentiments, such as boredom, pressure of productivity and exhaustion. Nevertheless, the simultaneous existence of both of these affective sides and my overall enthusiasm for learning, exploring and wisdom (Bell and Sinclair 2014) became a way of becoming “aesthetically involved” with the research phenomenon and a true driving force for this academic work. For me, becoming “aesthetically involved” with my study was therefore a process of practising embodied agency as a researcher in and after the fieldwork as well.

Finally, I was present in the field as a gendered researcher too. The gendered aspect of research is a valuable yet rarely discussed aspect of academic work (for example Phillips et al. 2014; Plowman et al. 2011; Pullen 2006). The role of gender in relation to the aesthetic involvement of the researcher raises interesting issues about the dynamics of gaining access to the research material and the ways in which the research material is finally analysed. For example, I questioned myself about whether being a (young) female in the field affected how the professional dancers shared their stories openly with me. Would they have spoken differently if the fieldwork had been conducted by a senior male academic, thereby producing different kind of aesthetic involvement with the research participants? Also my choices of the analysis methods and the writing style were surely gendered (cf. Biehl-Missal 2015). Related to this, Plowman et al. (2011, 76) argue that women rely more on “connected knowing” than on “separate knowing”. This, in my view, contributes to the idea of the aesthetic involvement of the researcher as well; by daring to become sensuously involved with the research participants and all the other (non)human agents in the field, I felt able to create interpretations inspired by the “connected knowing” that probably would not have come about using “separate knowing”. In other words, by understanding my compassion as a generative force of this study (Dutton and Workman 2011), I continuously aimed at absorbing the modes of the atmospheres and the changing moods of the professional dancers in the field and strived to give attention to the slightest nuances of their interaction. By doing so, I wished to be able to understand embodied agency as a phenomenon affected on and by various features, and to produce novel theoretical insights through engagement with compassionate research methods (Hansen and Trank 2016).

## ANALYSING EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

### Making sense of the field notes

Moving from field notes to writing the ethnographic texts of the sub-studies for this thesis was a rewarding and insightful, yet truly challenging process for me. Ethnographies are stories from the field (Van Maanen 1988; see also Emerson et al. 2011), involving literary conventions that make them understandable for a wider audience (Atkinson 1990). In this study, I view the analysis of ethnographic field notes dealing not only with language and speech, but also with analysing them as “speaking embodied beings” (cf. Cunliffe 2008, 131). More concretely, when I

read through my messy field notes at home, the different personalities of the dancers seemed to “pop out” of the text and in an imaginary sense, move around my work room. It was fascinating how, in this way, the field notes could come to life over and over again. Since much of the work I observed was non-verbal, this allowed (and forced) me to use my own aesthetic sensitivity to explore more about what I had witnessed and why this was meaningful. Therefore, respect for the nuanced, bodily laden details of the field notes in the analysis phase became an important aspect of producing both practically and analytically rich ethnographic material for this study. In terms of choosing and leaving some parts out in the final manuscript, I had to select only a part of the total research material from the field. I found it seamy to cut the texts of the manuscripts of the sub-studies in order to stay within the word limits of an article format. Therefore, I also had to exclude some voices or topics and privilege others (see Emerson et al. 2011). This was hard for me, but made it possible to force myself to really think what were the most important aspects of the research topic that I wanted to speak out.

In line with Vilén (2010, 59), I call the analytical method applied to the field notes of this study a multi-stage inductive approach. In other words, there were certain stages where the analysis of the field notes loosely proceeded on the basis of the detailed descriptions from the field. I want to stress, however, that the analysis was not at all as linear a process as described here. I describe it here as a loosely three-staged process, as otherwise the reader could never have a clue of how I actually did the analysis. In reality, however, I often felt desperate about the huge amount of research material that I had and about the doubts of whether I could ever make sense of it as a whole. In fact, making sense of my field notes started already in the field. During the fieldwork I wrote an ethnographic diary about all kinds of thoughts and observations that came to my mind when observing the professional dancers’ movements, gestures and emotional expressions with each other. Moreover, I wrote down the details of their mundane speech. At home then, I went through the field notes and I quickly wrote down on my computer parts of them that fascinated me the most. More specifically, in my view, there were some thrilling moments that I had experienced when observing professional dancers’ work in the field. These moments entailed actions or talk that to my acknowledge, seemed to describe the phenomenon of embodied agency. Of course, these moments were only reflections of my experiences in the field, and becoming an “intimate insider” (Taylor 2011) in the course of the research process involved negative aspects. For example, experiencing the thrilling moments with the research participants in the field are always personal and partial and in a way compromises that need to be appreciated without trying to prescribe, estimate or anticipate them (Taylor 2011, 18).

By conducting sensory ethnography, these parts of the field notes often created an embodied, emotional reaction in me when I read them through, and by so doing, gave me the feeling that they could be essential in understanding embodied agency. To give an example from the retired ballet dancers’ production, during one rehearsal the male dancer continuously joked about the movements of the piece and gave sarcastic comments to the female dancer about how she was as “heavy as a sack of potatoes”, and the female dancer could not help laughing at his jokes. Meanwhile, the dancers tried to develop their choreography further together. Therefore, humour derived from their embodied interaction and relational working style seemed to be an essential characteristic of their embodied agency. In sum, this identification of the most

valuable parts of the overall material of the field notes in my view was the first phase of the analysis of the field notes.

As Emerson et al. (2011) write, choosing field note excerpts is not only a matter of “picking the most interesting examples” for the researcher, but also a way of introducing the analytical themes of the research phenomenon in depth. Therefore, I found it important to form analytical themes<sup>9</sup> that would give some kind of structure and logic for the analysis of the field notes. Therefore, when reading the field notes closely I decided to pay attention to aspects that repeatedly happened or emerged continuously in the field. For example, the professional dancers seemed to follow certain working patterns during the rehearsals, which apparently guided and structured their days. In a similar way, the professional dancers appeared to always work in (close) contact with other dancers and agents in the field, and therefore, I anticipated this to be a central aspect of their embodied agency. In developing the themes, the researcher not only names them but analyses and creates links between them. At the same time, I went through the relevant research literature and formed the basis for the subject matter of embodied agency. I named the themes formed based on my fieldwork experiences as *personal space*, *routines*, *passion and vulnerability* and *relationality*.

After naming these themes I started to actively think not only about their characteristics, but also the interrelations between them. This could be viewed as the second phase of analysing the field notes. This way of analysis also resembles to some extent the grounded theory approach developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), which originally aimed at allowing researchers to use their imagination and get rid of the tradition and trend of testing hypotheses in sociological research during that time (see Locke 1996, 239). In the spirit of the grounded theory approach, I was interested in the words and actions of the professional dancers and wanted to enter the field as soon as I could (Goulding 2005, 296). However, as Locke (1996) argues, grounded theory has been often used without any specific information, for example, on how the theoretical categories central for this approach emerged. Therefore, we are reproducing grounded theory as we only “thinly write or miswrite a research method” (Locke 1996, 244). Moreover, there are some specific principles in grounded theory, such as constant comparison, coding and core categorising (Goulding 2005, 297) that I have not applied in this study, and therefore, I could not have considered my methodological approach as having been grounded theory in its most original form.

On the third phase of analysing the field notes, I focused on finding more detailed descriptions of the analytical themes described above. In the research literature, texts are often interpreted as the only construction material even if in fact, context is research material as well. Therefore, even if it is non-discursive, it forms meaning for the analysis and interpretation of the research phenomenon at hand (Hansen 2006, 1072). So, by making sense of the field notes my aim was to share the meaning of experience, giving voice to the research participants themselves. I wrote broad descriptions from episodes from the field and combined the photographs with these descriptions to illustrate the moments “in action” and to work as triggers to deepen my

<sup>9</sup> This way of analysing could be also described as an inductive thematic analysis (see for example Fereday and Muir-Cohrane 2006, 82–83; 91), in which the themes emerged from the field situations and research participants’ discussions and thus, became the categories used as the basis of the analysis.



interpretations. The movement between research material and analysis was not sequential, but rather iterative, and involved a continual refinement of my interpretations.

Moreover, I had to translate my field notes into English, which inevitably affected and slightly changed the tone and nuances of the original field notes. Actually, the final ethnographic descriptions from the field changed pretty much from the 'raw' research material. One example of this is the development of the original research note on the two retired ballet dancers (see Appendix 1) into a polished extract (see the opening vignette for sub-study 1). The original research note was fragmented, messy and discontinuous, and included all kinds of detailed accounts and thoughts from everyday situations and the dynamics of the professional dancers' work. To prepare the original field note into a polished ethnographic description from the field, I added some details that I remembered when reading the original field note shortly after the observation situation at home. Therefore, I refocused and elaborated on certain more general

aspects to my discipline (see Emerson et al. 2011, 201), such as becoming blind with one's own work and over-controlling it. I wanted to highlight these aspects in the final ethnographic description. Of course, all the aspects that were not included in the final manuscript were as revealing as those that were (Van Maanen 2011b, 26) in the sense that they told much about what I regarded as essential and interesting. Therefore, the aspects that I chose to write about could be viewed as “deconstructions of texts” (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2000, 172). The chosen aspects became visible in the final ethnographic description, as the following edited and translated English ethnographic episode illustrates:

*“It is Wednesday afternoon. The room is small, and two of the walls are covered by mirrors. I sit in front of the mirror, trying to capture the dynamics between the two retired ballet dancers who are constantly on the move, talk simultaneously, and amazingly seem to understand each other from an unfinished movement. I can sense some excitement in the dancers’ working. The dancers combine their classical background in the present moment and aim at creating a performance with a contemporary twist. They go through the piece without the music counting on the rhythm and the steps. The dancers have internalized the movements totally and they do not need to go through the technical details anymore. Though, they feel they have become blinded with their work. Hence, an actor is invited to follow their rehearsal.*

*The actor steps in, we greet each other. He asks about the thoughts behind the piece and sits beside me in front of the dance studio. I put the music on and the dancers go through the 30-minute-long piece. I have seen it tens of times and I wonder what kind of reaction the performance wakes in the mind of the actor.*

*The actor sits beside me in the dance studio while the dancers go through the piece. The music ends. The actor stands up and starts to explain his comments vividly and eagerly. He says he avoids commenting on the choreography because it is simply excellent. Instead, he comments: “You are performing too perfectly and controlled now. You should ‘bring down’ the controlled movements — the piece is too ‘choreographed’ now.”*

In the final version of sub-study 1, its opening vignette reveals how the empirical episode described above has been scrutinised even more to follow the guidelines of a rather strict and compact article format. Therefore, editing the field notes requires delicacy in preserving the vividness, the original atmosphere and the story the researcher is attempting to tell. As Emerson et al. (2011, 202) put it, it demands balancing between the “tension between analytic propositions and local meanings”. Here, I understand the “local meanings” consisting of the professional dancers’ personal experiences and actions of their work, and the meanings they construct for them. Hence, in the ethnographic descriptions I wrote, I aimed at including vivid details of the dancers’ (inter)actions to make the reader more immersed in this unique research context. Meanwhile, as Van Maanen (2011, 13) writes, “the trick of ethnography is to adequately display

the culture in a way that is meaningful to readers without great distortion'. In my view, this was the most challenging but also most valuable and instructive viewpoint during my path of writing and analysing the ethnographic field notes of this study.

### Digging deep into the in-depth interviews and autoethnographic notes

When conducting ethnographic interviews the researcher should develop a trustworthy relationship with the research participants by listening to them respectfully, have self-awareness of his or her role in the research process, and therefore, be aware of the ways in which the close relationship between the researcher and the research participants affects the study in overall (Sherman Heyl 2011). During this research journey, there were some professional dancers with whom I became closer than with the others. The issues arising from different research positions and relationships are further analysed in sub-study 4 of this thesis. When it comes to the eight in-depth interviews of this study, I felt it surprising that all the professional dancers, even those that I met for the first time, in my view, seemed to relax and talk rather openly with me. For example, I felt surprised when some of the ballet dancers talked so openly about the youth-admiring practices of the artistic manager of the company. This trust deepened my understanding of the various sides of the research phenomenon. On the other hand, I always remained a bit suspicious whether the dancers hid some of their genuine thoughts and talked in ways they wanted their profession to be like in its 'ideal' form.

Central for an ethnographic interview process is that it is a co-constructed social interaction in which the interviewees choose to share the points they want with the interviewers. In addition, close listening is also required after the interview situation itself, during the transcript and analysis phase (Sherman Heyl 2011). While listening and transcribing the interviews, I made notes on the points that I found interesting and relevant from what the professional dancers said in the margins of the transcribed text. I transcribed all the interviews myself and by so doing, analysed the interview material continuously during the transcription phase. By first marking the phases of the interview situations in which the research participants laughed or showed some kinds of emotional reactions towards my questions, I then made my own interpretations of the meanings the laughter (or another emotional reaction, such as a sigh or a change in the tone of the voice) conveyed. These emotional reactions of the interviewees therefore provided insightful 'behind-the-words' knowledge about the topics that the research participants in my view considered sensitive or otherwise tricky. For instance, when I asked about the relationships and competition between the professional dancers in the National Ballet, some of the interviewees laughed in an uncomfortable way and created an atmosphere of a sensitive topic to talk about. This provided me 'unspoken' information about the 'hidden' aspects of the topic we discussed.

After having transcribed the eight in-depth interviews, I read them through in detail over and over again. I paid close attention to the paragraphs that I had marked during the transcription phase and moved them into another document. I also extracted thoughts and phrases that linked to the themes of personal space, routines, passion and vulnerability and relationality. In this way, the interviews worked as in-depth information about embodied agency. Finally, I

combined the selected parts of the transcriptions with the ethnographic descriptions that I had written based on my field notes. By doing so, I created a cohesive dialogue between different types of research material.

In a similar sense, I wanted to create a dialogue between the research participants' voices and my own thoughts. Therefore, using autoethnographic diary notes opened up an avenue for reflecting my own roles and aesthetic experiences during the research process in relation to all the other people in the field (see sub-study 4). In this study, I view autoethnography as a mode of "restoring and acknowledging the presence of the researcher/author in research" (Wall 2006, 6) and an embodied, reflexive way of doing qualitative research (Benoot and Bilsen 2016). Representing the self in research may lead to tensions which derive from the question of dealing with sensitivity, theorisation of autoethnographic material and issues in the ways in which the researcher's identity is presented in the written manuscript (Haynes 2011). In this study, the analysis of the autoethnographic research material proceeded in a slightly similar way as the analysis of the field notes described above, but as I already mentioned before, was by no means a straightforward or linear process. Even so, I had three strong but slowly arising aspects in my mind related to my aesthetic experiences in the field: empathising with the nuances of the professional dancers' work, the moving roles as a stranger and as a friend in the field, and the usage of the photographs. After having these three aspects in my mind, I then wrote down my personal thoughts and feelings related to them. Only then, could I make deeper reflections and interpretations of my autoethnographic notes. In analysing the autoethnographic notes, I found it helpful to do this in collaboration with my co-author (and supervisor), who was able to reflect on the research material perhaps more analytically than



I would have been able to do myself, therefore bringing forth a “supportive reflection” of the autoethnographical material.

### Visual analysis of the study

Photographs can serve as facilitators for reflecting aesthetic interpretations (Warren 2008) and in discovering the sensory-based details of various professions. Of course, not all kinds of research subjects, which, for example, put more weight on the verbal interactions, benefit from the use of visual material. For instance, it would make no sense, in analysing the interaction between the leaders of a multi-national company, if it was mainly done virtually and the photographs would thus not illustrate the social practice of the studied world. In this study, though, I use photographs in various ways. First, they work as a tool for returning to the observation situations during the analysis phase. During the fieldwork, I took numerous photographs to capture and later recall the rehearsal situations, the materialities involved with them and their atmospheres. Furthermore, the photographs used here work as reflectors for analysing aspects of embodied agency from a visual perspective, and therefore, allowing the multiple voices of the research participants and artefacts to become expressed and analysed (Ray and Smith 2012). For example, by looking at the photographs from the production of the retired ballet dancers, I was able to immerse myself (and I still can) in the fleshy and mundane moments of action, the smallest expressions that were still in the photographs.

“Isn’t your work more like a piece of art, not research because of all these beautiful photos?” one PhD student asked me when I was lecturing about visual analysis for the PhD students at our university. This was a good question, and I remained a bit confused after hearing it. Actually, this question relates to the puzzle of “whether ethnography is more a science, modelled standardised techniques and reporting formats, or an art, modelled on craft-like standards and style” (Van Maanen 2011b, 34).

Even if for me doing ethnography and using photographs were in a sense creating pieces of art, I found photographs essential visualizations in capturing some of the ‘hidden’ qualities of a professional dancer’s agency in a scientific sense. For example, looking at the photographs of the retired ballet dancers revealed some delicate postures in which they were breaking the technical ideals of ballet, and therefore, developing their embodied agency. Also, by using photographs in the synthesis of this thesis, I wished to enliven the otherwise greyish and boring pages, but also to bring a sense of aesthetics and movement close to the reader and by so doing, creating aesthetic experiences which “necessarily implicate an object” (Warren 2008, 572). Hence, I have not analysed the photographs included in the synthesis at all, but rather allowed them to take their full emotional potential by using them in different sizes in places in which I got the *feeling* that here or here would be a great place for a photograph. Of course, I believe the photographs in the synthesis complement my argumentation in imperceptible ways as well.

The field of organization studies could benefit from using visual material to “incorporate diverse voices within organizations” and to access “multiple levels of understanding” (Ray and Smith 2012, 288; 311), because in fact, visibility underlies the everyday practices of organizations (Davison et al. 2012). Moreover, visual methodology, consisting of the questions of how and

where we know, offers alternative perspectives to advance current (interdisciplinary) theories and collaborative research agendas (Pink 2007; 2012). Despite these advantages, the actual use of the visual material in organization studies has gained rather limited attention despite the growing interest in visual methodologies overall.

However, there are some thrilling examples of how photographs have been used in organization studies. For example, Kuronen and Virtaharju (2015), who explore leadership mythology through the case of the President of Finland, Urho Kekkonen, use visual discourse analysis to reflect on the research material consisting of photographs, correspondence exchanges and media material, and a photo-essay as a way of reporting the findings of the study. In another study by Pink et al. (2014), videos are used to show how the atmospheres emerge from our everyday environments and how and why researching and understanding atmospheres actually matters. In this study, I had video material from the solo production, retired ballet dancers' production and freelance production of one choreographer with five dancers. Nevertheless, I did not use these materials at all because I felt the other research material was rich enough to describe the aspects of embodied agency I focused on in this study.

Some other examples of using photographs in organization studies include a study by Warren (2002), who explored the "aesthetic processes of organizing" in an IT firm using photographs taken by the research participants to express their aesthetic experiences in the physical space of the company during the semi-structured interviews. Using the same idea, in a study of professional accountants, Warren and Parker (2009) used research participant generated photographs, also known as photo-voice technique or auto-photography in line with interview material to explore the identity of the accountants from a visual viewpoint. Therefore, in these two studies, photographs were used as an "aesthetic lens" (Warren 2002, 224) in exploring the non-rational dimensions of people and their work. In a similar spirit, Peltonen (2014) aims at analysing "how it feels being there" by analysing photographs taken inside the university buildings and builds reflective narratives based on them. He concludes that photographs may "convey some of the emotional states and intuitive impressions relating to being in the field that the ethnographer may have difficulties in representing with purely verbal forms of expression"<sup>10</sup> (Peltonen 2014, 20). Finally, another kind of example of using visual analysis in organization studies is in the recent article by Bell and Taylor (2016), which explores the vernacular mourning related to the death of former chief executive Steve Jobs. By focusing on visual imagery in their analysis, Bell and Taylor show how "the role of the visual in framing messages" (Bell and Taylor 2016, 115) is present in the mourning practices.

While many studies have focused on the findings one can make through using visual material as exemplified above, the value of the research participants' own experiences and their voices are highlighted in many visual studies as well. For example, Jenkins et al. (2008), used photo-elicitation to explore military identity. They argue that this technique is not only about the value of the photographs as such. Instead, it is an interactive process between the researcher and the research participants in which knowledge is created through reflexive interaction (Jenkins et al. 2008). On the other hand, Slutskaya et al. (2012) combined photo-voice and photo-elicitation

<sup>10</sup> I agree totally with this conclusion, which became realized most of all in sub-study 3 of this study in which I used photo-elicitation interviews to capture the professional dancers' thoughts related to the hardly verbalised concepts of passion and vulnerability at their work.

in their study with male butchers, a marginal group whose gendered and class-related dynamics have often remained silenced and the research participants' confidence to express their feelings and thoughts limited. These are great examples of the power of photographs conveying powerful, emotional stories. Yet, Gabriel (2012) uses the notion of "narrative deskilling", and points out that "the attempt to read a story in every picture, every image or indeed any meaningful text is symptomatic of an era which has lost its ability to tell and to listen to stories". Hence, a distinction should be made in between the individually constructed and media-dominated, 'spectacle-centred' photographs, he argues, and I totally agree.

In sub-studies 1 and 2, I only used the photographs to illustrate the situations in the field and to bring the reader closer of the dynamics of the professional dancers' everyday work. The two photo-elicitation interviews that I conducted for this study are included in sub-study 3, dealing with the conceptual pair of passion and vulnerability in relation to embodied agency. In general, the use of the photographs in interviewing has been applied by the techniques named photo-elicitation, photo-voice, reflexive photography, auto-driving and photo novella (Hurworth 2003). The idea of photo-elicitation used in this study is in combining photographs with an interview (Harper 2002), which I conducted with two professional dancers. I wanted to find out whether photo-elicitation interviews would provide some alternative views to the research phenomenon of this study and they certainly did. Photo-elicitation has been argued to stimulate the research participants' capability of expressing their often unconscious representations of life, and produces richer information than other research methods (Slutskaya et al. 2012) and empower the research participants to be involved in the research process actively (Rose 2012; Van Auken et al. 2010). My experience of conducting photo-elicitation interviews was in line with these arguments, and in my view, letting the two professional dancers talk freely about photographs that were important for them unlocked aspects of embodied agency that I had never thought of. These aspects are discussed in sub-study 3.

The two photo-elicitation interviews I conducted proceeded loosely in two phases. First, I asked the professional dancers to show me meaningful photographs from their career. After a quick look and discussion of all those photographs I then chose some pictures that I found relevant and interesting based on the theoretical viewpoints that I had decided to focus on. In this way, I lead the discussion to certain themes that I found meaningful for the overall purpose of this study. Even if photo-elicitation lets the researcher sustain a certain interview agenda, it leaves respondents their own space to embed the photographs into the joint conversation, which leads to new insights and untouchable knowledge (Lapenta 2011). This also happened during the two photo-elicitation interviews that I conducted. Interestingly, they triggered of a collective discussion about the everyday life of professional dancers (see Vila 2013). In addition, they highlighted unspoken aspects of professional dancers' embodied agency that I had not realised before using this technique. For example, the embodied obsessions of one of the professional dancers with whom I conducted one of the photo-elicitation interviews became visualized, and therefore, also verbalised, as discussed more deeply in sub-study 3.

Finally, in sub-study 4, I further discuss the power of the photographs as the creators of my personal aesthetic experiences during and after the fieldwork. For me, the photographs worked as an analytical source of my mental inspiration and emotion in the writing process of this study. In other words, the photographs that I analysed triggered new theoretical openings, such as the

vulnerable and relational aspects of embodied agency, which complemented the other types of research material. Therefore, in my view, the use of photographs throughout this research journey played a vital role not only as generating hidden aspects and analytical outcomes of embodied agency, but also as a site of deep commitment and enthusiasm from my personal, researcher's point of view. More specifically, for me the photographs worked as an inspirational source of writing ethnography. Moreover, I experienced conducting the photo-elicitation interviews and their analysis as so exciting that I felt I was truly fulfilling some of my personal achievements and professional desires. Throughout the process, the analysis of the photographs was also an aesthetic experience for me, and led to interesting methodological contributions to this study in its entirety.

### Overcoming methodological challenges

Having different types of research material from various contexts is certainly a strength. Even so, it also raised methodological challenges during the research process for this study. Of course, there was the issue of language; working with Finnish and English throughout the writing process raised a concern of what kind of consequence this would have on the analysis and findings. I wrote my field notes in Finnish, except when visiting the Dutch National Ballet, I wrote them in English because the dancers communicated in the rehearsals in English. Therefore, as English is not my mother tongue, in the final written synthesis and in the sub-studies I struggled to express myself in ways that do justice to those I studied and the richness of the empirical context of dance.

Translating research material from one language to another relates to questions of the differences between languages (see for example Birbili 2000), and in this way, to the quality of the findings. Therefore, the process of translating the research material entails a “creative reproduction of values” (Xiang 2008, 242), and therefore, is never value-free. Hence, I acknowledge that I surely left out some of my thoughts when translating my field notes into English, and focused on the thoughts that appeared clear and convincing in written English. Moreover, there was the challenge of “getting lost” in the nuances of translation. In other words, while some words used in the original field notes and transcriptions of the interviews exist in Finnish, they did not exist in English. In addition, some words took different meanings in English and Finnish (see Cunliffe and Karunayake 2013). In this study, there were some expressions, such as “heittää läppää tähtitanssijoille”, which could be translated as “make a wise crack to top-level dancers”, but which does not fully transmit its original meaning. Therefore, I had to compromise by substituting some of the expressions or leave them out of the final manuscript.

In addition to the methodological challenges of the language, I found the tension between the freedom of research and the rigidity of method a conflicting issue. More specifically, I found it confusing to try to be methodologically innovative and having the stuff of “proper research” (Warren 2002, 227) at the same time (cf. Zanutto and Piras 2013). Therefore, in moving from the field to analyse and interpret the field notes in order to write a polished ethnographic text includes a dual awareness of members and outside audiences (Emerson et al. 2011). Therefore, I



had to keep in mind that I was primarily writing to a scientific audience, and within it especially to researchers working on the same scholarly debates of the body and aesthetics in organization studies as in my study. Hence, my reader audience includes professional dancers or the wider audience outside academia. This affected how I wrote this study overall and, for example, the way in which the synthesis 'had' to be written so as to not to be too unconventional. Also, I felt that sometimes the richness of the empirical material and the interpretations I had made was constrained by the structure of the thesis and the interrelations between the different sections included in it. For example, entering and exiting each sub-study at the end of the synthesis felt for me a somewhat clumsy and outdated practice for presenting the compilation of the thesis. Still, I hope the synthesis guides the reader through the delicate landscape of this sensory ethnography, and the sub-studies will then offer different facets to understand the aesthetic qualities of the professional dancers' embodied work more specifically.

Methodologically, "aesthetic muteness" (Taylor 2002; Warren 2008) was a true challenge for this ethnographic piece of writing. Capturing the hardly describable feelings of the professional dancers in a written format was a demanding task. I wished to overcome this at least partially. Therefore, the difficulty of having only "limited linguistic descriptors for what we hear, taste, touch and smell" (Sparkes 2009, 33) was continuously present during my research process. During the months in the field I realised that I was not able to face down aesthetic muteness completely. Apparently, I had to accept its presence. For example, there were many moments in the field that passed by quickly, during which I could sense an indescribable atmosphere filled with the suppression of the various feelings of the professional dancers. Then there were those days when the dancers struggled with some ideas that they were only partly able to transform into movement. Therefore, there were many kinds of micro-level actions that I noticed. Nevertheless, they remained unwritten due to my difficulties in transcribing them into words and linking them analytically to wider theoretical discussions.

Looking at this study as a form of a compilation thesis raises a criticism related to ethnography; by using "thick descriptions" (Van Maanen 1988) the ethnography in the sub-studies of this thesis has been conducted by compromising all the research material and the tales I would have wished to tell. Therefore, the article format of the ethnographic studies set a challenge for the thesis, as there was limited space in each of the essays to describe the phenomena under study thickly. This was because there were strict word limits in the scientific journals the sub-studies of this thesis were sent to, and comments from the reviewers that inevitably guided the form of the final empirical extracts in a certain direction. Yanow (2009) discusses "the methodological angst" that organizational scholars have towards the ethnographic approach. She describes how ethnography entails strong and outdated myths, such as the need to be immersed in a single, bounded community for a long time, and calls on organizational ethnographers to "rid themselves of the inferiority complex they seem to carry with respect to anthropology" (Yanow 2009, 196). In my view, I have been able to overcome this angst through conducting ethnography in the article format. I also feel that the findings of this thesis describe the phenomenon of embodied agency in a versatile way. In addition to the edited field note episodes, I have used direct quotes as much as possible to give voice to the professional dancers themselves and asked for their comments on my interpretations throughout the research process.

## Ethical reflections on the methodology of the study

Ethical questions are important to clarify the confidentiality and responsibility of the study. In ethnographic research, the concern with privacy is high as the researcher aims to gain deep insights into the research participants' thoughts, attitudes and feelings (see Hammersley and Traianou 2012, 105–106). The topic of this study, embodied agency, is connected to the professional dancers' personal experiences, which are fundamentally rooted in their emotional and vulnerable bodies. Therefore, it was an ethical question for me whether it was justifiable to study this kind of topic that aimed at going beyond the public (see Hammersley and Traianou 2012, 109) by revealing profoundly personal aspects of the professional dancers' embodied agency and the 'hidden' sensory qualities of their work.

Furthermore, I had known many of the research participants for many years before starting this study, and therefore, I was concerned about the ethical implications of researching these people, who I considered friends (see Brewis 2014). To give an example, the research questions I used in the in-depth interviews touch on this ethical concern as they were partly rather personal and probably made the professional dancers feel vulnerable and exposed to the public gaze. Even so, all the interviewees seemed willing to share their thoughts with me and even found the interviews 'therapeutic', as one of the dancers commented to me. I experienced the atmosphere of the interviews as liberating, as the professional dancers talked about private matters in their lives, such as motherhood, eating disorders and twisted relationships with their colleagues and bosses. Similarly, Alice enthusiastically pointed out to me after the interview was over how "the research questions were so interesting and so different from the ones presented by the press — they are always so predictable, unlike these".

When carrying out observations, researchers often enter places that are not publically accessible. A "private place" can refer to home areas, privately owned places that cannot be entered without gaining permission to do so, or private activities such as a picnic in the park (Hammersley and Traianou 2012, 111–112). In this thesis, the rehearsal studios in which my participant observation took place were not publically accessible. I obtained permission to enter them and I had to negotiate entry to them continuously (cf. Vilén 2010). Moreover, I conducted some of the in-depth interviews at the professional dancers' homes and one even at my home. For me, these "private places" were more fruitful than the "public places" (for example cafés) for conducting in-depth interviews because in a home environment the way of talking was, in my view, relaxed and unashamed and the cosy atmosphere seemed to encourage the dancers to talk openly. In public places more "warming up" was needed to get deeply inside the issues under discussion. Further, the home was a much more peaceful and quiet place to conduct an interview than a public place, where it was often hard to find a quiet corner without other people in sight. On the other hand, conducting some of the in-depth interviews at the professional dancers' homes felt for me like it blurred the relationship of me as the researcher and the professional dancers as research participants in the sense that I was no more working on the participants, but rather with them in a mutual relationship. This viewpoint is further elaborated in sub-study 4.

Using visual research material raises distinctive ethical issues, such as affecting the rehearsal situations, consent, anonymity and copyright (see Hammersley and Traianou 2012; Pink 2007; Warren 2002). Taking photographs or videos relates to the concern about disrupting

the observation situation by affecting the research participants' behaviour (Hammersley and Traianou 2012, 67). The consent of the research participants highlights that they are aware of what the research deals with and what their explicit agreement to participate means. I view consent as a rolling process (Rose 2012, 335) that allows flexibility and the development of both research ideas and the relationship between me as a researcher and the research participants. So, throughout the research process I actively discussed my research ideas with the professional dancers involved, and by so doing, was able to negotiate my thoughts continuously with them. This kind of reflexive research is ethical as it means "doing research with your informants, rather than on them" (Sinha and Back 2014; Rose 2012, 336).

The professional dancers involved in this study were used to being under the gaze of the others, and therefore, did not seem to be disturbed by being photographed. Instead, I sometimes found it uncomfortable to photograph them and decided to concentrate on the rehearsal situation without taking pictures. However, in the Dutch National Ballet, I was allowed to take only a couple of photographs, which were not permitted to be published anywhere. In addition to the photographs I took by myself in the field, a professional photographer was present at two rehearsals with the retired ballet dancers. After the rehearsals, I asked both the dancers and the photographer for their permission (and obtained it) to use the virtual archives of those photographs as part of this study.

According to Holliday (2004), research that includes identifiable images of the research participants renders the relationship visible and allows the images to "talk back" from the participants' voices. Therefore, the use of visual material may have a powerful effect on the study in its entirety that deepens its message in various ways, as the visual studies of Slutskaya et al. (2012), Warren (2002) and Pink et al. (2014), to name a few, all demonstrate. On the other hand, the aspect of anonymity can be ethically questioned. In the photographs published in the sub-studies of this thesis, the identities of the professional dancers are mostly recognisable, and therefore, not anonymized. Furthermore, the dancers visible in the photographs are likely to be recognisable to other dancers even if their faces are not pictured. In fact, as Mary once commented, they "can recognise each other even by only looking at their feet", which is a truly unique characteristic of professional dancers. Nevertheless, I did not see blurring the faces of the dancers of the pictures an option as if I had done so, I would have diminished the power of the photographs by leaving the emotions reflected in the faces of the dancers and all the other valuable aesthetic details out. Finally, I needed to make sure that I had the copyright for all the photographs published in the sub-studies of this thesis. The photographs were taken by myself, by the professional dancers, by their friends and by a professional photographer. Therefore, I agreed with the dancers and the photographers by email on the use of selected photographs.

Engaging in dialogue with the research participants about what makes the research ethically appropriate for them is important as well (Clark 2012, 26). I continuously met with some of the professional dancers to discuss my interpretations of the field notes and developed my thoughts further. Furthermore, I talked openly with them about my interpretations and conclusions through the final draft of this study. Although the professional dancers found it difficult to combine the theoretical understanding and their practice, they were very cooperative and, in my view, open-minded and interested in discussing the ideas of the

study. In this way, all the informal discussions with them worked as a means for reflecting the ethicality of this study.

At this point of the synthesis, I encourage the reader to read through the four sub-studies attached at the end of this thesis. In what follows, I summarise the main points of them, but to understand the thesis as a whole, it is desirable to take a closer look at them. Also, I want to point out that the order of the sub-studies is a conscious choice of mine; by presenting the sub-studies in the order they are presented now, I aim at moving the reader's attention and imagination from the broad and collective aspects of embodied agency to its more private spheres.



# IMMERSING IN EMBODIED AGENCY: INTRODUCING THE SUB-STUDIES

## NEGOTIATING THE LIMITS OF EMBODIED AGENCY

Sub-study 1: Satama, Suvi – Huopalaainen, Astrid (2016) 'Bring Down the Controlled Movements!' – Exploring the Possibilities of and Limitations on Achieving Embodied Agency in Ballet and Fashion. *Culture and Organization*, published online before print 28 February 2016.

I wrote sub-study 1 with my colleague Astrid Huopalaainen, a doctorate from Hanken School of Economics, Åbo Akademi University. We met in a tutorial organized for doctoral candidates in Rovaniemi, Finland in 2011 and realised that we shared a lot of interests and affections both in academic and private matters. Soon after the tutorial, we decided to start working on a joint conference paper, which would deal with embodied agency in two empirical contexts: dance and fashion. We presented the paper at the Organization Studies Summer Workshop in May 2013 in Mykonos, Greece and at Egos in Montréal, Canada in July 2013. We submitted the paper to *Culture and Organization* in January 2014, and after three review rounds the publication was accepted to the journal in January 2016.

Sub-study 1 explores the mundane embodied practices of ballet and fashion where embodied agents negotiate their potential and limitations in achieving agency. The purpose of the sub-study is to explore *how embodied agency is practised, reformed and challenged by ballet dancers and models working on and off-stage*. The existing literature on embodied practices and agency (for example Noland 2009; Michel 2011; Sutherland and Ladkin 2013; Springborg and Sutherland 2015) says surprisingly little about how embodied agency is negotiated and challenged between off and on-stage. In this sub-study, we view embodied agency as a gestural, inter-corporeal phenomenon (Noland 2009, 105) in relation to “emerging social interaction” (Sutherland and Ladkin 2013, 108). The empirical material of the sub-study derives from two ethnographic contexts of which one is a production by two retired ballet dancers, and the second an annual group fashion show. By combining the two contexts the sub-study demonstrates how two ethnographic studies can be combined in practice and enrich views of a joint research phenomenon.

Based on the analysis, we illustrate three aspects of how embodied agency is negotiated in ballet and fashion. First, the repetitive, mundane rehearsing off-stage created certain frames of freedom for using embodied agency. Despite possibilities for using embodied agency relatively freely, agency in the contexts of ballet and fashion is to some extent always shaped by a cultural background and its traditions and norms for how to move in these contexts. Breaking the norms, we argue, involves some creative borrowing from the past, which was actualised in the movements of the ballet dancers. By combining the technique of ballet and the dancers' personal ideas of how they wanted to move they were able to partly become free from their background. Among fashion models, this was actualised in the minimalist catwalk combined with their vivid (instead of 'dead') gaze.

Second, we describe the interplay between embodied agency and other human and non-human agents in the two contexts. Some of the most important human agents in these contexts were the director in the fashion show and the professional actor involved in the dance production. In addition, other non-human agents in both contexts, such as the script, the props, the music, and the costumes shaped the embodied agency of the ballet dancers and models so that they could or could not develop it further. This relates to the third aspect in which we illustrated how the bodily side of the script, a significant non-human agent in ballet and fashion, was vital to negotiating embodied agency. The script, we suggest, gives structure to the production and allows the mobile leeway through which embodied agency transforms. Nevertheless, the script is a loosely followed structure in the negotiation of embodied agency. In the end, it is formed and negotiated in the spatial, temporal moment on-stage when the ballet dancers and fashion models are performing.

This sub-study views embodied agency as one theoretical lens for understanding embodied practices in organizational life more profoundly. Consequently, this sub-study specifically describes the particularities of embodied practices, which in the contexts of ballet and fashion seemed to be insecure, mobile and relational. These particularities contribute to further developing our understandings of the transformative body within organization studies and the social sciences more generally. Therefore, the ballet dancers and the fashion models in this sub-study seemed to balance between the liberating and constrained sides of their embodied agency. More specifically, they struggled to let go of tradition and established norms, on the one hand, and made use of these on the other. We have illustrated how the social and organizational structures, objects, people, spaces, and their complex relationships shape constructions and experiences of agency. We believe that the recognition of these neglected aspects of culturally based embodied agency that we have described will open up new stages in the conceptual development of embodied agency and practices in organization studies.

## EXPLORING THE COLLABORATIVE CREATIVITY OF THE EMBODIED AGENTS

Sub-study 2: Satama, Suvi – Blomberg, Annika (2016) Creative Bodies on the Move: Exploring the Aesthetic Dimensions of Collaborative Creativity in Dance. Paper under review for *Scandinavian Journal of Management*.

The background story of sub-study 2 is partly similar to the story of sub-study 1 described above. I wrote sub-study 2 with my colleague Annika Blomberg. Annika wrote her PhD thesis about hegemonic and alternative perspectives on creativity, and therefore, she had knowledge about the theoretical discussion of creativity, whereas I had read aesthetics literature and I had empirical material collected in the field of professional dance. We presented a previous version of the current version of the paper at Egos in Montréal, Canada in July 2013 and decided to work on it after the conference. We sent the current version of the paper to the *Scandinavian Journal of Management* in March 2016, and it is there currently under review.

Hence, the purpose of sub-study 2 is to explore the aesthetic dimensions of collaborative creativity among professional dancers. The main research question of this sub-study is to find out *how collaborative creativity is negotiated in sensory-based ways between professional dancers and other agents in the field*. By questioning the existing views of collaborative creativity, which look at it as an individual and mental process (Montuori and Purser 1995; Glaveanu 2010), this sub-study illustrates the various embodied ways in which it emerges. Here collaborative creativity is explored as a collective phenomenon that is derived from the embodied agents' shared gestural patterns (Bazin 2013, 378) and sensory experiences of one another (compare Hansen et al. 2007; Koivunen and Wennes 2011).

The empirical material of this sub-study is derived from two separate freelance dance productions in which one of the researchers, me, conducted ethnographic fieldwork. The first of the dance productions is the one by two retired ballet dancers (the same dance production as in sub-studies 1 and 4). The second dance production is a freelance performance in which a choreographer worked with five dancers, several musicians and other agents — such as the composer, the makeup artist and the technicians — involved in the production. The empirical material from both productions includes participant observation, photographs, video clips and numerous informal conversations with professional dancers and other agents in the field.

Based on the analysis, we identified three aesthetic dimensions — emotional, intuitive and improvisational — through which collaborative creativity emerged. The key aspects of the three dimensions partly overlapped as they all involve aesthetic characteristics, and in this way, support one another. The emotional dimension was characterised by various emotional loadings that characterise the dancers' work. The blend of emotions between the different agents was in a constant interplay, therefore making collaboration both cognitively and emotionally charged (compare John-Steiner 2000). Confidence and self-doubt, mutual intimacy and dependency among the embodied agents were key characteristics of this dimension. In the production featuring the two retired ballet dancers, the dancers had more confidence in showing their emotional states to each other maybe partly because of their lifelong background together in the National Ballet. In contrast, showing one's emotions in the production featuring the choreographer and five dancers was more reserved and the emotional dimension in this production demanded more time to become manifest.

The second, intuitive dimension materialised in the dancers' work through their own emotional, embodied experiences, on the one hand, and through a joint bodily and mentally shared experience on the other. Even if shared intuition made the collaboration more fluent, it required constant effort to negotiate the various solitary intuitions into a shared, relational view. By following the idea of relational leadership (for example Koivunen and Wennes 2011) meant that by listening to each other's embodied signs carefully, the dancers led the rehearsal situation and the on-stage performance collectively. In the production by the two ballet dancers, the intuitive aspect of their collaborative work was easily actualised between only two embodied agents. In the production by the choreographer and five dancers, intuitive sensations of each participant were more difficult to respect, therefore making the collaborative work more complex.

The third aesthetic dimension of collaborative creativity — the interplay between playful and serious improvisation — illustrated how the playfulness of improvisational work helped the dancers to rehearse the pieces in an open-minded and relaxed atmosphere, while they needed the

serious way of working to immerse themselves in the multiple layers of creative work. While the retired ballet dancers sometimes used even ‘harsh’ humour due to their career-long knowledge of each other to proceed improvisationally with their work, the five dancers of the freelance production used more humour that stemmed from their joint embodied improvisation off-stage. In both productions, the interplay between the two styles of improvisation was at the heart of finding a creative solution to overcome the unresolved issues of the production and to create something unexpected.

The specific contributions of this sub-study can be summarised into two main aspects. First, the sub-study agrees with other organizational scholars (for example John-Steiner 2000; Kenny 2008; Glaveanu 2010) regarding the argument that creativity is developed in an intensive collaboration between different (embodied) agents. By going a bit further, though, the sub-study extends the understanding of collaborative creativity as deriving from sensuous (inter)actions by identifying three aesthetic dimensions of it — emotional, intuitive and improvisational. Second, as creativity is a highly sought-after capability in the current business world, it is important to recognise that creativity takes place not only in the minds of single creative individuals but also in the social dynamics between people. Moreover, even if organizations are places of rich verbal discourse and collaboration builds largely on verbal communication (Sonnenburg 2004), fine-grained gestures, bodily presence and embodied signals play a crucial role in conveying the hidden meanings and sometimes even repressed albeit valuable experiences of working life behind the words.

## PASSION AND VULNERABILITY IN RELATION TO EMBODIED AGENCY

Sub-study 3: Satama, Suvi (2016) ‘Feathers on Fire’: A Study of the Interplay Between Passion and Vulnerability in Dance. *Organizational Aesthetics*, Vol. 5 (1), 64–93.

I wrote the third sub-study report myself. In relation to the other three sub-studies of this thesis, which I wrote with a co-author, this was a strangely lonely but empowering writing process. Luckily, despite having worked on this paper by myself, I could discuss it with all the professional dancers involved, and meanwhile, aim at staying reflexive with my thoughts and interpretations. There was a call for papers for the first “Special Issue” on Dance, Movement and Organization in *Organizational Aesthetics* and I decided to submit my paper there in December 2013. In January 2014 it was published as a part of this special issue.

The focus of sub-study 3 is on *the interrelations between passion, vulnerability and embodied agency*. The sub-study describes how the relationship between passion and vulnerability works as a means for expanding embodied agency between off and on-stage, and exposes the aspects through which the interrelation between these concepts materialise among professional dancers. This study separates from viewing passion only as a silent ‘obligation’ of professional artists (Sheets 2014), but more as a genuine and bodily grounded interest in the artistic work. Vulnerability is understood here as entailing both physical and mental challenges, which I do not

consider only as negative consequences for professional dancers (compare Mullen et al. 2012; Tarr and Thomas 2011; Wainwright and Turner 2006), but instead aspects which empower professional dancers' embodied agency.

Inspired by Gherardi et al. (2007), I view vulnerability as the painful, yet strengthening side of a passionate commitment towards one's work, deriving from the bodily experiences of professional dancers. Therefore, passion includes controversial meanings — desirable, joyful and exciting emotions on the one hand, and vulnerable, painful and severe aspects on the other. In this way, suffering can be seen at the heart of passion. Moreover, I understand both passion and vulnerability as fundamentally embodied phenomena, deriving from sensory-based ways of being in the world (see for example Ropo and Sauer 2008b). The empirical material of this sub-study consists of eight ethnographic in-depth interviews with professional (female) dancers from various backgrounds. In addition, I conducted two photo-elicitation interviews with professional dancers. Here, I discuss the idea of using visual material to create 'atmospheres' that have "aesthetic, emotional and corporeal effects" (Biehl-Missal 2013, 356).

The sub-study identifies three aspects through which the interrelation between passion and vulnerability is connected to the phenomenon of embodied agency. First, this sub-study describes how dancing is not only about having the passion to perform on-stage, but about a love for the mundane rehearsal situations offstage as well. Furthermore, embodied agency turned out to be a relational phenomenon in which the mundane bodily practices and on-stage performances are negotiated between the different agents involved in the working process. Second, passionate obsessions, in which passion and vulnerability enacted variously, turned out to be an exciting yet contradictory part of a dancer's embodied agency. Without the passionate obsessions of a professional dancer, his or her embodied agency would not be put to the test, and therefore, would remain underdeveloped. Therefore, the third aspect of the interrelation between passion, vulnerability and embodied agency that was recognised in the sub-study was that widening embodied agency was fulfilled through the interplay between passion and vulnerability.

Theoretically, this sub-study differs from previous research on passion (for example Thanem 2013; Linstead and Brewis 2007), which has not dealt with its relationship with vulnerability. Neither have the existing studies related to embodied agency (Sutherland and Ladkin 2013; Noland 2009) touched on the relationship between passion and vulnerability, or elaborated it as a means for widening both the personally and relationally grounded space at work. Moreover, this sub-study complements sub-studies 1 and 2 by illustrating embodied agency as a relational phenomenon in which the mundane bodily practices and on-stage performances were negotiated between the agents. This finding resonates with other contexts, such as the work of leaders, in which the tricky decisions are negotiated off-stage and then performed on-stage, in front of the employees and stakeholders. Therefore, the findings of this paper can also be a benefit in recognising the aspects related to passionate and vulnerable sensations among other professionals.

From a methodological viewpoint, this sub-study contributes to the (critical) visual analysis of images in organization studies (Warren 2008; 2002) by using the idea of pictures as "generators of atmospheres" (see Biehl-Missal 2013, 356). In greater detail, the photographs in this sub-study were used as sources of atmospheres that could awaken aesthetic experiences in the reader's mind, and in this way, let the reader to experience how the "dancing feathers" were on fire and what this implies. In addition, using photographs in this sub-study led to analytical findings on embodied

agency related to its passionate and vulnerable sides that could not have been identified if only using textual fieldwork material.

## PRACTICING EMBODIED AGENCY AS A RESEARCHER

Sub-study 4: Satama, Suvi – Laurila, Juha (2016) Momentary Aesthetic Experiences as a Source of Ethnographic Understanding: Insights from a Study of Professional Dance. Paper under preparation for submission to *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*.

The fourth sub-study was a mutually instructive learning process with my supervisor Juha Laurila. We presented a previous version of this paper at Egos in June 2012 in Helsinki. The original idea of the paper was to explore the working routines of professional dancers in relation to the researcher's 'involved' position in the field of professional dance. During the following few years, this idea developed into a methodological paper, and therefore focused on the researcher's aesthetic involvement in the field. After a couple of years break, in autumn 2015, we started to rework the paper, focusing on the methodological contribution the paper could offer. We got the manuscript ready to submit in autumn 2016. A suitable journal was tricky to find for this specific, cross-disciplinary methodological paper, and the paper was sent for peer review to *Organizational Research Methods* in September 2016. We got a rejection from the journal on 16 February 2017, though with very well grounded and encouraging comments to develop the paper further. Therefore, we are now planning to submit a completely restructured and more focused version of the paper to *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*.

In its current form, published as a part of this thesis, sub-study 4 concentrates on the idea of combining the researcher's aesthetic experiences with his or her various and moving positions in the field by using the theoretical discussions of aesthetic experience (for example Warren 2008, 560; Ladkin 2013) and the researcher's position in the field (for example Haynes 2011; Enguix 2012; Berger 2015). The purpose of this sub-study is to describe *the ways the researcher is practicing embodied agency during an ethnographic research process*. Deriving from autoethnographic research material in the field of professional dance, sub-study 4 therefore offers an alternative perspective to ethnographic research by giving voice to the researcher's personal feelings, embodied sensations and even physical reactions during and after the fieldwork situations.

The empirical analysis of sub-study 4 is divided into three parts. The first of them illustrates how my familiarity with the technique of ballet allowed me, the researcher, to distinguish the aesthetic elements that are most relevant for the study of embodied agency. Therefore, I become 'aesthetically involved' in the work of the professional dancers and practice embodied agency myself throughout the fieldwork period. The second part illuminates my 'embodied' journey from an 'outsider' observer to a friend with respect to one ballet dancer I had been studying. This part of the analysis highlights the nature of ethnography as a relational, momentary and sensuous practice. The third part describes how photographs taken at the research site awake aesthetic experiences in me through their power of transmitting "embodied atmospheres" (Biehl-Missal 2013; Pink et al. 2014). In this way, the sensory-based, embodied energy between different agents

offers a fruitful in-depth platform for studying the relationship between the researcher and the research participants in the field (cf. Mason and Davies 2009).

This sub-study speaks of a view that regards the personal experiences of the researcher as an embodied activity that can provide innovative conceptual outcomes. Moreover, we argue that conveying the “felt understanding” of the research participants’ world is essential in advancing innovative ways of conducting qualitative research to “encompass the researcher within and beyond the field” (Mannay and Morgan 2015, 166). Based on the findings of this sub-study, this also requires recognition of the researcher’s aesthetic experiences. Hence, the overall message of this sub-study differs from the extant knowledge of the researcher’s varying positions in ethnographic work (for example Haynes 2011; Enguix 2012; Leigh 2014; Cui 2015), especially because the latter is still looking at this position in a rather instrumental and disembodied way. In contrast, the present study can be considered a call for a more embodied, relational and even passionate understanding of the embodied agency of the researcher.

Here, I want to stress that based on the comments we received from *Organizational Research Methods* in February 2017, our aim is to develop the paper in a direction in which more weight will be put on the aesthetic moments in ethnographic research. More specifically, one option would be to refocus the paper on how the aesthetic experiences of the professional dancers and me, the researcher, in the field are enacted. At this point, I find it a challenge to find a way to make my own lived experience and that of the dancers shine through in the writing. So, in the restructured paper our primary argument would be that aesthetic moments allow access to the sensory-based research material, the exploration of the intangible qualities in an ethnographic setting and the embodied agency of both the researcher and the research participants to emerge. In this way, the paper would incorporate aesthetic moments into qualitative research as a source of research material and to illustrate the ways they can reveal aspects that other kinds of research material or methods cannot.

To summarise, sub-study 1 critically discusses the negotiation of embodied agency in two ethnographic contexts complementing each other: ballet and fashion. In sub-study 2, the notions of the body and aesthetics are connected to another theoretical discussion of collaborative creativity and by so doing, illustrate the meaning of them outside the theoretical discussion of embodied agency as such. The role of sub-study 3 is to illustrate the ways in which passion and vulnerability are present in the day-to-day work of professional dancers, and therefore, affect the formation and negotiation of embodied agency. Sub-study 3 gives a practical example of the use of the photo-elicitation technique. Finally, sub-study 4 has a methodological role as it increases our understanding of the researcher’s embodied agency and momentary positions and roles during the ethnographic research process. In its entirety, it also challenges the separation of objective-rationalist presumptions from mainstream organization studies.



# DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

## AESTHETIC ENCOUNTERS OF EMBODIED AGENCY

This compilation thesis has explored different aspects of embodied agency in various empirical settings of professional dance. By making use of my cumulative knowledge of the research phenomenon and by reflecting on my different roles as a researcher in the different settings of this study, I have aimed at providing a holistic understanding of embodied agency. Therefore, the four sub-studies summarised in the previous subchapter are closely intertwined with each other, and therefore all contribute, through their specific foci, to the overall understanding of embodied agency. The overall purpose of this study has been to contribute to the recent debates of aesthetics (for example Gherardi 2009; Hansen et al. 2007; Koivunen and Wennes 2011; Strati 2016) and the body (for example Bathurst and Cain 2013; Bazin 2013; Gärtner 2013; Ropo and Sauer 2008b) in organization studies by ethnographically exploring the aesthetic qualities of embodied agency in professional dance. Where a “turn to embodiment” (Dale and Burrell 2000) has occurred within organization studies, less is still known about how embodied agency is choreographed and practised between the visible front-stage and the ‘hidden’ off-stage, or in relation to the various human and non-human agents present in the field.

The main research question of this study is: *How is embodied agency shaped, challenged and negotiated among professional dancers?* Each of the sub-studies highlights one or several aspects of embodied agency, which can be considered as discussion openers towards more delicate and multifaceted understanding of it. The main argument of this study is aimed at stating the fact that embodied agency is shaped through embodied practices in between off-stage and on-stage, and negotiated through the ‘hidden’, aesthetic qualities — such as the passions and vulnerabilities — which all shape a dancer’s embodied agency in relational ways, by never achieving a finalised, stable form.

I will now give a more specific account of the ‘umbrella-related’ contributions of the study — the contributions which the sub-studies make related to the main argument of the thesis described above. The first aim was to identify the ways that the professional dancers move in order to achieve embodied agency between the off- and on-stage. This was elaborated on in sub-study 1 (Bring Down the Controlled Movements). Sub-study 1 contributes to this thesis by shedding further light on how the embodied agents (ballet dancers and fashion models) try to “break free” from certain conventions, regulations, and embodied norms that surround them in their expressive and extremely physical working contexts. The main argument of the thesis related to the importance of the bodily movements shaping a professional dancer’s embodied agency, was particularly illustrated in this sub-study. Despite recognising the restricted, context-dependent nature of embodied agency, achieving it is not a completely fixed matter in advance. Moreover, based on the first aim, it could be concluded that embodied agency intersects continuously with other human and non-human agents, and therefore, is relational in nature. The various humans and non-humans present in the field also construct a professional dancer’s embodied agency and affect the ways it is negotiated and developed further. Furthermore, sub-study 1 complements the methodological arguments of the thesis by showing how two ethnographic studies can

be combined coherently in article format. Most importantly, the sub-study illustrates how embodied agency is a phenomenon constantly expressed and materialised in interactions that are on the move, never reaching stability and therefore, offering a novel platform for studying the particularities of embodied practices in organization studies further down the line.

The first aim of this study was then elaborated in the second sub-study — exploring the aesthetics of embodied agency in the professional dancers' relational work. Based on the findings of this study it can be concluded that, as already recognised within the first aim, embodied agency emerges not only in the minds of single individuals but also in the social dynamics through the bodily movements between people and the material world.

By recognising a relational view of embodied agency, this study contributes to the understanding of embodied agency as a shared and distributed practice. To fulfil the second aim of this study, three aesthetic dimensions of collaborative creativity were identified: emotional, intuitive and improvisational. These dimensions derive from the notion of embodied agency and therefore, can be seen as the constitutive aspects of it. From the perspective of this thesis, sub-study 2 (*Creative Bodies on the Move*) shows how the aspects of embodied agency can be combined with other relevant theoretical discussions in organization studies and in this way, show interrelations between them and the aesthetic aspects of organizational life. When considering the overall argument of this thesis, sub-study 2 specifically contributes to the understanding of embodied agency as an aesthetically relational phenomenon. Hence, by using detailed empirical episodes in which various professional dancers and other parties were involved, this sub-study illustrates how embodied agency is negotiated between different embodied agents continuously in between off-stage and on-stage, by never reaching its 'complete' form.

To explore embodied agency in relation to two important aspects, passion and vulnerability, which arose based on the fieldwork conducted with professional dancers, the third aim of exploring the interrelations between embodied agency, passion and vulnerability in professional dancers' mundane work, was formed. Therefore, sub-study 3 (*Feathers on Fire*) opens up a thrilling yet challenging viewpoint to develop the understanding of embodied agency at work, by linking it to the conceptual pair of passion and vulnerability. The study illustrated how it is the interrelation between off-stage practices and on-stage performances, both involving passionate and vulnerable aspects, through which embodied agency is developed further. Finally, to achieve the third aim of this study, it could be concluded that the relationship between passion and vulnerability works as a means for expanding embodied agency between off- and on-stage. It was the thrilling, sometimes puzzling, tension between passion and vulnerability that made the embodied agents develop as professionals in sensory-based ways.

By concentrating on the in-depth and photo-elicitation interviews conducted with professional dancers, this sub-study provides in-depth descriptions of the professional dancers' personal views on passion and vulnerability at their work. Methodologically, this sub-study works as an example of what kinds of conceptual insights conducting photo-elicitation interviews may produce. In addition, the idea of using images as creators of atmospheres complements the other ways of using visual material in other sub-studies of this thesis. It is interesting, however, that while passion seemed to be a key thing for the professional dancers' and they openly talked about it, the aspects related to vulnerability were seen in a negative light among the dancers themselves. Therefore, it could be argued, that embodied agency builds on complex affections, which are



partly subconsciously hidden by the embodied agents themselves, but which still affect the nature of embodied agency.

The fourth and final aim of this study was to explore embodied agency methodologically, from the researcher's perspective. More specifically, I strived to illustrate how I as the researcher was practising embodied agency myself during an ethnographic research process and what kinds of outcomes this has on the interpretations and findings of the overall thesis. The study identified the researcher's positions as either an insider or outsider as being continuously "on the move", therefore consisting of fragmented moments in the field. Moreover, the study illustrated how being "aesthetically involved" enabled the researcher to practice embodied agency herself during the ethnographic research process and by so doing, enhanced her opportunities to recognise the micro-level-practices that are critical for understanding the fine-grained nuances of social activities more broadly. Therefore, sub-study 4 (Practising Embodied Agency as a Researcher) has a strong, methodological focus and its role in this thesis is to provide glimpses into the researcher's embodied agency. Furthermore, sub-study 4 gives insights into the various 'momentary' positions that the researcher has during her ethnographic journey among professional dancers and gives an example of conducting sensory ethnography (Warren 2008) in practice. Taken together, sub-study 4 contributes to the overall study by adding a methodological perspective into the researcher's embodied agency when studying sensory-based phenomena which demand certain abilities related to high and systematic reflexivity. Such abilities include consideration of the perceptual circumstances that affect the interpretations (Alvesson and Skölberg 2000, 6), sensitivity and willingness to open up for all kinds of events that may "pop out" unexpectedly during the research process.

The aesthetic focus has provided an insightful view in deepening our understanding of the body's role in constructing one's agency and of the aesthetic, sensory-based side of organizational agents more generally. Embodied agency is about the aesthetics of bodily movements, consisting of subtle, emotional embodied practices, passions, struggles and interactions, which might first seem of little worth, but which, based on this study, significantly shape a professional dancer's embodied agency. Moreover, the sensory ethnographic approach taken in this study has allowed me to deepen knowledge of the experiential basis of embodied (inter)actions between off and on-stage. Moreover, conducting this ethnographic study in a sensory way enabled me to draw attention to those hidden details of organizational life and interaction between different people involved in the artistic work processes that would have remained hidden without that kind of methodological approach.

## CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE OVERALL STUDY

What does this thesis, focused on the embodied agency of professional dancers, have to offer to other work contexts? Or how can the rather innovative ideas explored here become anchored to everyday life outside dance? This study contributes to the *theoretical* debates of aesthetics and the body in organization studies in various ways. I have distinguished three main theoretical contributions in this study, which are: 1) That the negotiation of embodied agency occurs between off-stage and on-stage through the use of micro-level embodied practices and bodily movements,



and therefore builds on these two complementary, overlapping worlds; 2) Embodied agency is constantly in interplay with other (non)human agents, and therefore, is fundamentally relational in nature; and finally 3) Embodied agency involves both empowering and wounding aspects, which instead of undermining each other, support one another, and therefore, lead to the expansion of personal space at work. Next, I will describe these contributions in greater detail.

First, by describing the ways in which embodied agency is negotiated between off-stage and on-stage, the study provides a deeper understanding of how and to what effect embodied agency can be challenged and negotiated further. This study emphasises the micro-level understanding of embodied agency (compare Atkinson 2013a), and offers insights into a surprisingly ‘a-mobile’ discussion of the aesthetics of the body within organization studies, even if “the dominant culture of the twenty-first century is embraced under the general label of ‘aestheticism’”, as Dobson (1999, 4) argued over a decade ago. Moreover, inspired by Atkinson’s (2013a; b) and Mol’s (2002) ethnographic studies of the aesthetic practices in pedagogic, glassblowing and hospital contexts, this study describes the multiplicity of embodied practices in the professional dancers’ day-to-day work. By doing this, it complements the existing knowledge of how embodied practices are negotiated and challenged both off-stage and on-stage. This is actualised through the fine-grained rehearsing of bodily movements, which the existing research literature in the field of aesthetics (for example Strati 2007; Taylor 2013) and the body (for example Ropo and Sauer 2008a; b; Meriläinen et al. 2015) in organization studies has already recognized, but which this thesis has aimed to extend. As Joanna once concretely described, “professionalism is about keeping it fresh despite the millions of times of repetition off-stage, and an ability not to overpractice the movements”, which is one of the insightful ‘first-hand’ thoughts which touches this theoretical contribution.

Moreover, rather than making fairly clear distinctions between the off-stage and on-stage — such as the Nippert-Eng’s (1996) detailed ethnography of the boundaries of home and work has done — in this I study argue for a more subtle understanding of how these two worlds complement and overlap each other. By subtlety I refer here to the idea that off-stage and on-stage are actually not mutually exclusive, but instead complementary worlds, continuously empowering each other. For example, in the professional dancers’ mundane work, both off-stage and on-stage turned out to mix with each other in the sense that the performance never reached its final, ‘on-stage’ form. The rehearsing of bodily movements therefore continued on-stage. This point is meaningful in order to understand how, in working life, we might never be ready for something or completely satisfied with our work even if we tried as hard we could, and we have to accept this insecure imperfection both at the operative and managerial level.

Second, by illustrating how embodied agency intersects with other human and non-human agents, such as the practitioners, managers, mirrors and the use of the pointe shoes within dance productions, the study describes the relational nature of embodied agency, and by so doing, complements the existing approach to the body which recognises its relationship with other bodies and materials (Dale and Latham 2015) and “the shaping of lived experience through the embodied co-presence of the others” (Adamson and Johansson 2016, 2). By complementing the idea of viewing only verbal communication as a “central organizing process that manages the intersection of symbolic and material worlds” (Ashcraft et al. 2009, 2), this study has illustrated how bodily movement is a central interaction within organizations as well. Being a constantly

shaping phenomenon, embodied agency never reaches stability or perfection and therefore, is constantly “on the move” with other humans and non-humans in the field.

Third, the study suggests that embodied agency involves both empowering and wounding aspects which become observable through the personal and intimate experiences of the professional dancers. The study argues that instead of being separate and undermining aspects of embodied agency — the passionate and empowering on the one hand, and the vulnerable, wounding and struggling aspects on the other — do not and could not exist without each other. By so doing, this study has given new insights into existing discussion on the passion for knowing (Gherardi et al. 2007), which has already recognised how passion is anchored in the body and the physical work space (Mack 2007). Here, I have illustrated how passion and vulnerability support each other, and together lead to the expansion of embodied agency at work. In plain terms, for example, when feeling insecure or slightly nervous about a forthcoming speech in front of an audience, after getting through it nicely one might feel blown away, which then leads to a greater awareness and trust in one’s bodily-rooted abilities – that is, embodied agency. In this way, this study also complements the existing studies of the aesthetics of agency (Sutherland and Ladkin 2013; Springborg and Sutherland 2015) by demonstrating its contradictory sides of passion and vulnerability. Therefore, despite the platform of possibilities for using embodied agency freely and fulfilling one’s passions, embodied agency is always partly ‘painfully’ restricted in the sense that all professional dancers have their own cultural backgrounds, regulating their ability to take advantage of the freedom of bodily movement when they work in relation to each other. To conclude, this study complements the emerging literature on the embodied, aesthetic side of organizations (for example Koivunen and Wennes 2011; Taylor and Hansen 2005) by describing how the sensory-based experiences and processes affect actions, based on the moving bodies of the embodied agents.

Furthermore, this thesis points out many *methodological* pinpoints that have been neglected among organizational scholars to date. These neglected aspects relate to the researcher’s “aesthetic involvement” with the research phenomenon, the *momentary* nature of the researcher’s position in the field, the potential of using visual material as creators of aesthetic atmospheres and experiences in organization studies, and of course – the value of the empirical context of professional dance in its own right. Hence, this study extends the existing understanding of the researcher’s positions in the field in relation to his or her aesthetic experiences (cf. Helin 2013; Taylor 2002) through viewing me, the researcher, as an experiencing embodied agent as well.

My study has introduced how becoming “aesthetically involved” with the research phenomenon the researcher may find novel conceptual openings to the understanding of the meaning of *aesthetic moments* in qualitative research. By being aesthetically involved, I have referred throughout this study to the sensory-based, embodied moments in which I have felt as being part of the working process of the professional dancers that I observed. Therefore, becoming “aesthetically involved” allows the researcher to reflect upon his or her momentary, sensuous experiences during the ethnographic research process and in this way, practice his or her embodied agency among the research participants in the field. Hence, this study builds upon existing views of the researcher’s situated body (e.g. Coffey 1999) and senses (e.g. Küpers 2013b) and emotional experiences (e.g. Hansen and Quinn Trank 2016; Lilius et al. 2011) by describing the ways *aesthetic moments* allow access to sensory-based research material, the exploration of

the intangible qualities involved in an ethnographic study, and to extract the full potential of the embodied agency of both the researcher and the research participants. In so doing, a more nuanced understanding of the research phenomenon at hand can be reached.

Hence, this study has been an example of my 'passionate' involvement as the researcher with the research phenomenon under study and the insightful findings this involvement may lead to. Consequently, if more attention was paid to the researcher's affections, sensations and personal attachment to the research phenomena, deeper (although more subjective) understandings of organizational phenomena would probably be uncovered (see Hansen and Quinn Trank 2016; Whiteman 2010). In a practical sense, the study hopefully also encourages other organizational scholars to use an ethnographic toolkit (Van Maanen 2011a) in journal articles to explore organizational phenomena and get rid of the heavy, 'ghostly' anthropological burden that dictates the 'right' to use ethnography only if several years are spent in the field.

Further, by using the word 'involved', the study brings forth the space between off-stage and on-stage, insider and outsider, and discusses the researcher's moving roles and positions during the research process, defined and negotiated in certain moments in the field. Therefore, I argue that my moving positions as the researcher in the field were momentary in nature. Here, it was clear for me that having had personal experience and an 'insider' status prior to starting this study made it easier to negotiate my access to the dance field and get closer to the professional dancers' world. But what surprised me was how I felt like an outsider at certain moments, despite having a simultaneous insider role. Therefore, this study contributes to the existing literature of the researcher's roles in organization studies (for example Haynes 2011; Taylor 2011) by describing how gaining access to the field is a continuous process (Bondy 2012) and so is the position of the researcher in the field. So, there is no clear definition of being an insider or an outsider, as has been previously discussed (for example Gair 2012), but they can both actually simultaneously exist (De Cruz and Jones 2004) and materialise through the researcher's embodied agency in the field, as this study has demonstrated.

Finally, the study has exemplified the use of visual material — namely photographs — not only as a tool for illustrating the observation situations in the field. The photographs used in this study have also been used as windows for recreating the atmosphere (Biehl-Missal 2013; Pink et al. 2014) of the research situations. In this way, they have grasped on the 'unspoken' aspects of embodied agency that probably would have remained hidden otherwise. Moreover, this study has showed how the use of visual material may stir aesthetic experiences in the research participants and the researcher, and by so doing, overcome aesthetic muteness (Taylor 2002), at least partially. Therefore, this study has illustrated how photographs can work as a complementary source of research material that may provide more nuanced and deeper analytical tools for understanding the sensory-based phenomena within organizations. Throughout this study I have, therefore, sought to argue for a more creative and open-minded approach to using different kinds of research materials as a way of exploring the aesthetics of agents and actions in organizations. All in all, by applying an aesthetic approach in this study I have attempted to awaken aesthetic sensations and imaginations through the in-depth descriptions of the professional dancers' embodied agency in the readers that may not have been possible by using more traditional research approaches.

To better understand dance as a deeply embodied and affective work context, we need to enfold and experience it empirically. Therefore, in this thesis, I have tried to do justice to the



dynamic and creatively multifaceted context of dance. Hence, this thesis makes an empirical contribution in and of itself – a sensory ethnography of an unusual setting and organizational context. If dance is still not taken seriously among organisational scholars, the complexity and richness of it as an empirical setting illustrated throughout this thesis has valuable implications on how we actually choose to approach other ‘messy’, ambiguous, moving or even heartbreaking phenomena that we study.

The *practical* relevance of my study concerns, of course, those organizations and parties, such as national operas and foundations, which support training and development of professional dancers’ work and artistic professionals more generally. This study has given insights into those subtle characteristics of professional dancers’ everyday work — such as the attempts to break free from the existing working practices and have possibilities to make one’s own decisions apart from the formal leader of the company or the production. Added to this, it has highlighted the mundane difficulties and delights of the dancers, which deserve to be voiced, and the ways in which being a professional dance artist is, after all, a lifelong, collaborative project. Therefore, this study has aimed at gaining a much more nuanced understanding of the working practices and partly ‘hidden’ affections of professional dancers on an individual level than has been managed to date, to develop all kinds of artistic organizations, their personnel and welfare.

In addition, this study has broadened our understanding of the meaning of the senses in working life. More specifically, in addition to the dominance of sight (Küpers 2013), this study has proven how we are affected by other senses, such as touch, hearing, smell and taste as a whole. Furthermore, this study has illustrated how our sensory experiences may guide our actions and behaviours and by so doing, sometimes restrict our personal space at work. This finding hopefully helps to develop organizations and groups of people with complex disorders, such as autism, on a practical level as well. The practical contribution of this study is also that it encourages looking

at embodied agency as a multifaceted phenomenon, attached to the themes of relationality, materiality and gender. This is an important notion in today's working life in which the work is moving more and more into a knowledge-based and -appreciated direction, where the meanings of the themes mentioned above need to be understood. Even if the work we perform happens largely "in our heads" today, our bodies carry various meanings, messages and hidden qualities that explain a lot of things about ourselves as embodied beings and should be explored further.

To conclude, while this study has focused on the context of professional dance, the relevance of embodied agency is also undeniable in other more "traditional" contexts too. Therefore, all professions can be viewed as embodied, as the senses are present in all working contexts. Therefore, we need to understand the transformative body on the move more deeply. In this way, we can better recognise those means through which deeply rooted ways of working may be made use of, reformed, or broken. By doing so, the people working in different kinds of organizations may gain increased flexibility and satisfaction in their work. In this way, employees could move towards an organizational culture in which the ability to work in relation to each other and appreciating different ways of working, by combining traditions of the occupational settings to the employees' personal ideas in a divergent atmosphere, is supported and appreciated.

## CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE OVERALL STUDY

Writing a doctoral thesis has been a complex yet unforgettable learning process for me, including many vivid, thorough and explicit features through which I have aimed at being both theoretically and methodologically sensitive (see Whittemore et al. 2001). In this study, I have aimed at keeping the final form of the empirical extracts as authentic as possible and stay as critical and reflexive towards my own involvement with the research phenomenon. Therefore, my own subjectivity in relation to the research phenomenon and to those I study has remained a critical standpoint I have had to continuously question. Furthermore, throughout this research process, I have been balancing between the practical relevance and scientific ambitions of this study. Therefore, I have been continuously asking myself in what ways can embodied agency be conceptualised and discussed in 'real-life' and by what means does it matter. Even if being a theoretically highly challenging concept, by using a sensory ethnographic approach and thus immersing myself deeply into the dance field, embodied agency has proved me to make sense in practice as well.

To discuss the overall reliability of this study, I will first reflect on some of the most important limitations related to conducting sensory ethnography among professional dancers. First of all, my personal background from the field of professional dance means that I might have taken some aspects for granted without paying careful attention to them, even if they would have been meaningful for the subject matter of the overall study. In this sense, my personal relation with the field of professional dance could be considered a limitation of this study. Furthermore, the aspects of embodied agency described in this study are based on my personal interpretations and choices, and surely some other researcher would have concluded with different viewpoints of the same research phenomenon.

There are two broader discussions when making critical reflections on this overall ethnographic study that I want to raise here: *analytical generalisation* and *reflexivity*. However, as Halkier

(2011, 787) points out, analytical generalisation in qualitative research is by no means always a desirable way of concluding a research material. There are organizational scholars who claim that analytical generalisation is neither possible nor desirable, or avoid using the terms validity or reliability, such as critical constructionists, feminists, critical pedagogy, and performance studies (Denzin 2010, 424). Nevertheless, in line with Halkier (2011) I argue that analytical generalisation is important and possible — also in this study. Halkier (2011) identifies three ways for analytical generalisation in qualitative research: ideal typologising, category zooming, and positioning. In this study, I mostly relate myself to the idea of positioning, which enables one to generalise the situational, unstable and dynamic nature of embodied agency and conclude something about the “patterns in (the) negotiations and power struggles” of the phenomenon (Halkier 2011, 795).

Analytical generalisation in ethnography has remained a controversial subject of debate in the research literature (Edwards and Bélanger 2008). As having observed four dance productions, this study reminds slightly of a multiple case study as well<sup>11</sup>. Thinking about my study, I must say that I felt it challenging to build a theoretical framework, which would not become overly complex but neither overly simplified. In addition, the rich research material — with regards to both quantity and quality (including different types of research material) — led me in various theoretical directions, and therefore, it took me a while before I was able to make sense of it as a whole.

Regarding the aspect of analytical generalisation in relation to the context, the theoretical notion of embodied agency raises a question of whether the findings of this study are specific to the professional dance context or not. The context of professional dance is very specific, involving unique characteristics, — such as extreme physicality combined with artistic goals and the repetitive work materialising between off-stage and on-stage. Therefore, embodied agency was also clearly observable in professional dance, and therefore, enabled me to study it deeply. This relates to organizational ethnography as an interpretive approach and its “generative potential” (Hibbert et al. 2014, 292), therefore, the ways ethnography as the specific research approach can lead to generative applications. Overall, even though it was tough to aim at transmitting “a sense of ethnography” in article format, I hope that the reader will be able to feel at least a hint of the aesthetic experience I aimed at conveying. By writing a compilation thesis with an ethnographic approach, I hope to have encouraged other organizational scholars to use ethnography in writing their scholarly articles. Moreover, I have aimed at writing all the sub-studies in the same spirit and style, and therefore, hope to have formed a coherent ethnographic description of how I experienced the phenomenon of embodied agency.

Another critical reflection related to the overall study relates to the discussion of reflexivity, which can be understood as “the interpretive, political and rhetorical nature of empirical research” (Alvesson and Söldberg 2000, 1). Reflexivity therefore questions the reality, the constitution of knowledge and our purpose as researchers (Cunliffe 2003), and in doing so, it raises “new ways of understanding experience”, as Cunliffe (2003, 999) continues. Being reflexive demands an ethnographer to have a deep awareness and recognition of his or her impact on

<sup>11</sup> Eisenhardt argues that the strengths of case studies are in their novelty, with their deep and rich empirical material; while their weaknesses in advancing theory development can be summarised into two points: overly complex or too narrow theory building (1989, 547).

the research process, the research material and its interpretations — especially as ethnography is less objective than other research approaches (Monahan and Fischer 2010) — and as in ethnography, the “distinction between fact and fiction therefore becomes blurred” (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2000, 171). The questions such as, what is true research material? Or, what would be the correct interpretation of this empirical episode? Were constantly on my mind during the research process, and therefore made me question the legitimacy of ethnography and the research material that I had and, in the meantime – become reflexive about the “multiple voices, pluralism, multiple reality and ambiguity” (Alvesson and Skölberg 2000, 171) of the empirical material that I had gathered. Therefore, little by little, I realised that this study would be just one story, my interpretation of a dancer’s embodied agency. There was no objective truth or a ‘right way’ of doing ethnography that I should reach for. Therefore, ethnography is not ‘the’ story but rather ‘a’ story among multiple stories (Clifford 1986) to which it must be proportioned to.

In addition, for decades the field of organization studies has been surrounded by the problematic conceptual issues of representation and reality — but not before this ontological distinction was questioned through reflexive awareness in the postmodern era (Chia 1996). In other words, reflexive scholars have a critical attitude towards the idea of providing an “absolute view of the world” (Cunliffe 2003, 984). By addressing the ways of conduct reflexive dialogical action research, Ripamonti et al. (2016) conclude that reflexive research practice allows for developing bridges between theory and practice and to explore the researcher’s ways of doing



research and develop them. This can be done partly by applying “the situated life-with-others” attitude of the researcher (Hibbert et al. 2014). In other words, all research, both qualitative and quantitative, actualises through the interaction between the researcher and the research participants (Cunliffe 2003). Therefore, I understand both the research phenomenon of embodied agency as a relational one, and my role as the researcher as a relationally reflexive practice (Hibbert et al. 2014). Maybe because of that, for me doing ethnography is also a deep emotional process which has taught me a lot about myself as a researcher and as a human being. But to what extent are the emotions of the researcher a strength or a weakness in ethnography? In my view, this ‘border’ is a blurry one, and this is a question I still continuously labour over. Throughout this study, I have aimed at keeping vivid conversations about my research project with both the professional dancers I have observed and interviewed, and with my supervisors and colleagues. Hence, this has allowed me to maintain a genuine dialogue first and foremost with myself about all the choices I have had to make during this study.

## INSIGHTS INTO THE FUTURE RESEARCH OF EMBODIED AGENCY

Interest in the sensory-based, bodily and affective aspects of human behaviour has increased during the past few decades in the discipline of organization studies. Nevertheless, based on this study, many ideas for future research of embodied agency are generated. To keep it simple, these can be divided into three areas: 1) conceptual, 2) empirical, and 3) methodological.

*Conceptually*, the interrelations between aesthetics, the body and agency would be interesting to explore in more detail. More research is needed on embodied agency and its attachments to the sensory and affective sides of human acts and organizing. For instance, the interrelations between routines and sensory qualities at work deserve to be studied much more deeply, as it appears that routines profoundly define a professional dancer’s embodied agency. In line with Wright’s argument (2014), this can be understood as “embodied actions that head towards bodily accomplishments”. In my view, the tension between the routine behind the scenes rehearsing and the bodily-based, spontaneous performing on-stage was an aspect that was very compelling, yet it was not the focus in this study. Therefore, considering future research avenues it would be interesting to explore the sensory-based side of work routines and the meaning of routines in embodied work in greater detail.

Another underexplored conceptual theme related to embodied agency is the aesthetics of materiality and non-human agents. As already acknowledged, the entangled relationship between the body and “multiple materialities” (Dale and Latham 2014, 166) is an essential part of social organizing. Therefore, bringing forth not only the symbolic and material relations with material objects and artefacts, but also with non-human animals (Wilkie 2015, 323) and the effectual relations with them (cf. Pullen and Rhodes 2015) might offer completely new areas of research in organizational life. In order to respond to the “call of the animal” in organizational theory it would be interesting to explore the relationships between humans and non-humans as, in fact, organization studies is “all too human now” (Sayers 2016). More specifically, this could be done by exploring the human-animal relationships by asking: What could we learn from the daily interactions, affective ties and personal bonds between pets and their owners? Moreover,

the unique characteristics of human-animal companionship, such as authenticity, loyalty and empathy, might offer alternative ways of understanding the sensory nature of human behaviour within organizations.

Finally, while embodied agency in this study has been explored from the perspective of the professional dancers, more contributions should be encouraged that discuss embodied agency from the perspective of the audience. “The relationship with the audience is tricky. On one hand it has a huge meaning in our work, while on the other hand, I try to avoid thinking about what the audience thinks” — a ballet dancer explained to me during the fieldwork phase of this study. Therefore, the audience is an important, relational part of constructing the personal space of the embodied agents at work, and therefore, worth exploring in more detail in the future. By so doing, conceptual developments towards the relational understanding of embodied agency could be achieved.

*Empirically*, it would be exciting to study embodied agency in contexts other than the artistic or fundamentally embodied ones, of which dance is an example. Furthermore, the distinctive features of the context of dance are the temporary nature of the productions and expressive work towards the performance in front of the audience. Examples differing from the context of dance could be factory workers, flight attendants, academics, and midwives. Some of these professions are physical as well, but the sensory-based, embodied nature of these professions appears and is shaped in a different light than in dance, and therefore, could offer novel insights into the discussion of embodied agency.

Moreover, studying collaborative environments — such as top-management, top-chef and ice hockey teams in which the play builds on relationally embodied interactions (see Ryömä 2015) — would probably give additional perspectives to this aesthetic research theme. Furthermore, as Gherardi et al. (2013, 334) argue, the research on the body has focused on the ‘able’ body “that is alert, awake, and able to move, think, and interact” (see also Inahara 2009, 47), while sleeping. Disabled, sleeping or dying bodies are almost absent in the current work, apart from a few exceptions (Inahara 2009; Kessler et al. 2012; Valtonen and Närvänen 2016; Valtonen and Veijola 2011; Vickers 2015). Hence, research should open towards multiple bodies that are present in organizations.

It would also be interesting to explore routinised practices among the professionals whose work looks strongly restricted at first sight — such as the office workers — but after a more detailed analysis may reveal much more sensitive and liberated aspects. As Ropo and Sauer (2008, 469) write, in the traditional view of organization studies, the people “are seen as ‘human resources’, as something abstracted from their senses, experiences and gender”, but without more empirical research from different contexts it is impossible to elaborate on the meanings and dimensions of embodied agency and the aesthetics of the routines any deeper.

There is a need for more *methodological* creativity and ‘daring’ to use different kinds of research material, such as videos, photographs, drawings and auto-ethnographic diary notes, and analysing methods that appreciate the sensory side of both the researcher and the research participants. The use of video material, which was not the focus of this study, has already produced interesting methodological insights. For example, the study of Llewellyn and Hindmarsh (2013) makes a detailed analysis of the bodily movement in the museum service sector, while Wilhoit and Kisselburgh (2016) use video material as a participant-driven method to touch on the research

participants' perspectives on practices. This idea could be further developed in sensory-related topics and contexts to analyse in more detail, for example the theoretical notion of bodily movement.

The study of Wilhoit and Kisselburgh (2016) also brings out a methodological viewpoint by arguing how different kinds of research materials produce different research positions for the study. Overall, my role in relation to the research phenomenon of embodied agency has been close — due to my personal background in the field of dance. Moreover, having friends who work as professional dancers, who have also been a part of this study, has made my role as the researcher inevitably 'involved'. Therefore, it would be thrilling to inquire into embodied agency from a different researcher's position. What if I as a researcher would enter the context of ice hockey to explore embodied agency within it without any personal attachment to this field? Or what if I, without any knowledge of the automobile industry, conducted an aesthetic study of the working practices of auto mechanics? These kinds of explorations might provide truly different angles to the phenomenon of embodied agency.

Additionally, it would be interesting to use other methods, such as narrative analysis or discourse analysis to study sensory and bodily-related topics. For instance, it would be exciting to study the aesthetic experiences of homeless people's experiences of being by asking them to write personal stories of their life and then use them as the research material. Using longitudinal or comparative analysis might also produce different kinds of analytical findings — for example, researching the sensory experiences of labour in new mothers, could be done by applying a longitudinal analysis. Therefore, interviewing the mothers 5 and 10 years after labour, asking them to reflect upon their past bodily experiences, would provide rich descriptions of the bodily transformation over the course of time.

Hence, the versatility of these three themes for future avenues of studying the sensory-based aspects of human behaviour illustrate the still uncovered potential that lies around this hardly verbalised research area. At the end of the day, embodied agency is about throwing oneself into the unknown, giving one's all and being relationally entwined with the multiple sensory experiences of life. To conclude, I find a quote of a retired ballet dancer that perfectly captures the essence of embodied agency, the strength to go beyond one's bodily limits in a relational way, as an insightful end for this synthesis:

*“The last notes are playing and the lights go off. I feel overwhelmed. I feel that I have had the courage to jump myself into the unknown, to give up safe solutions and to take risks. After a moment of darkness I hear the bravo-shouts from the audience. When we have made our bows I feel of having walked ahead. At the same time I think that there are some colleagues in the audience that support me to develop myself further.” (A retired ballet dancer's diary note, 2 February 2014)*



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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1.

An extract from an original field note by the production of the retired ballet dancers 3 October 2012

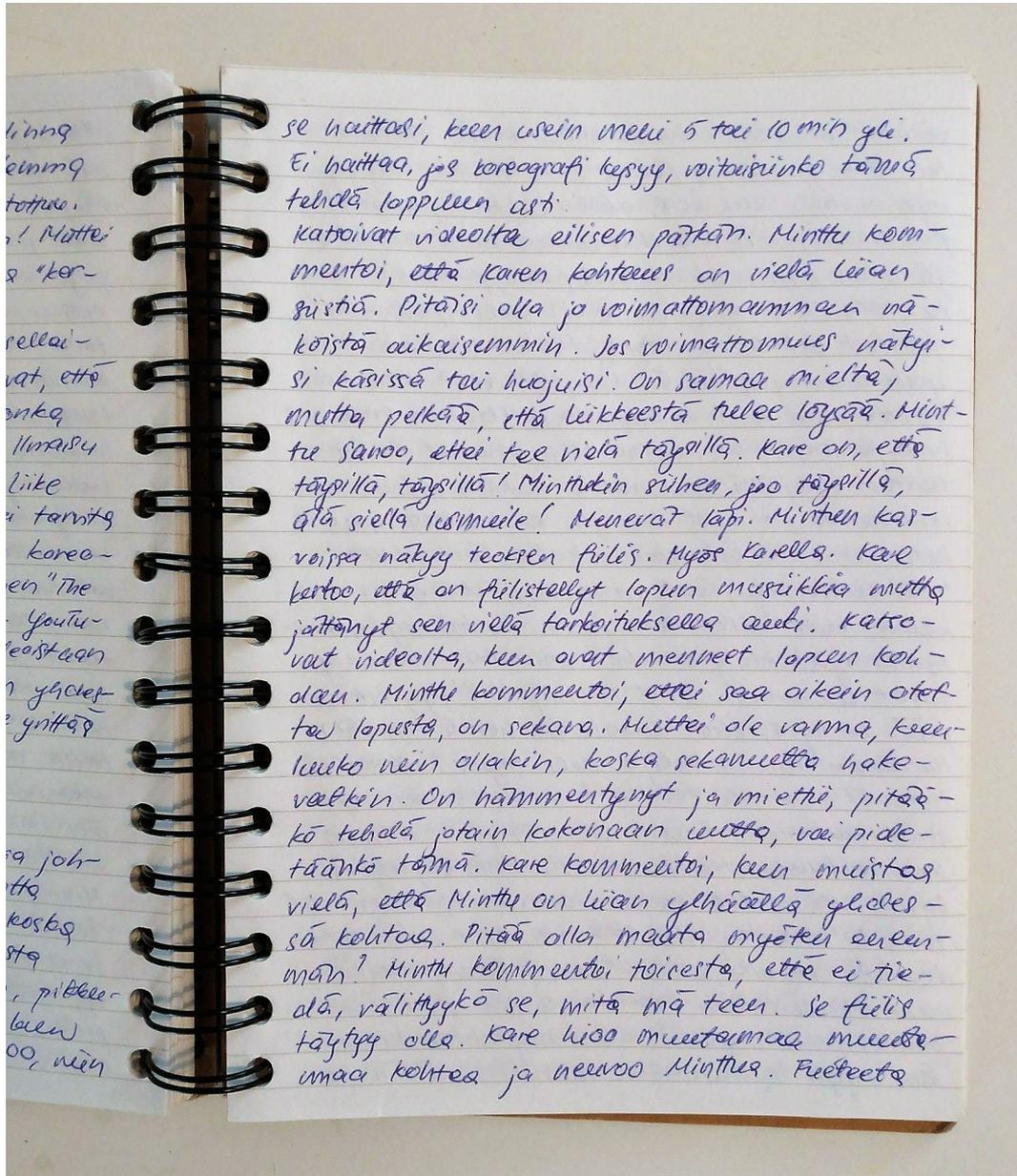
*”Treenit 3.10.2012 Kaikukadulla*

*Henkinen stressi lisääntynyt ja mennyt fyysisen edelle. Baletissa oli fyysisesti niin kuollut, että nukkui vaan. Nyt ensi-ilta lähestyy ja kaikki hoidetaan itse. Oskari Katajisto on katsomassa tänään harkkoja. Vitsailevat. Fueteen voi tehdä koukkujalalla, ei tarvitse olla baletin täydellinen fuete. Kakkososassa muistettavaa/muutoksia? Kantajuttu! Mulla on se fiilis, että nostaisin sut. Tuntuu kuin perunasäkiltä. Vien sut kuorittavaksi. Vitsailevat taas, jatkavat vakavasti. Menevät läpi teoksen.*

*Oskari läpimenon jälkeen: Voisi tiputtaa hallitun liikeen, tuoda omia eleitä. Enemmän leikittelyä ja hymyä alussa, jos uskallatte tehdä siihen semmoista. Ja kontaktissa toisiinne. Keskustelevat teoksesta, mutta ei puutu koreografiaan. Enemmän realismia. Teille oikeasti voitto, jos puratte sitä. Liike on nyt liian hallittua. Klassisen baletin tanssijat ovat niin hallittuja, että nyanssit voivat kadota. Kokeilkaa kaikkea!”*

## APPENDIX 2.

A handwritten extract from the original field notes of the production of the retired ballet dancers  
19 September 2012



## APPENDIX 3.

### An in-depth interview outline<sup>12</sup>

#### *Personal space*

- What is the meaning of movement at your work?
- How do you widen your personal space at work? What kind of means do you have?
- How do you experience your embodied borders?
- Do you feel to fulfill yourself as a dancer when there is choreography to follow?
- What kind of meaning does gender have at your work? How does it effect on you as a dancer?

#### *Routines*

- Please describe your daily routines at work and at home.
- What kind of role do your work routines play in your everyday-life?
- What is the meaning of the refining the fine-grained details at your work? Why do you do that?
- What kind of relationships do the routines and subtle, sensory work have in your mind?

#### *Passion and vulnerability*

- Do you have passion for your work? How does it show in your everyday-life? Does a dancer have to have passion for work in your opinion?
- How does passion form?
- In what sense do you feel vulnerable at your work? What makes your profession vulnerable? What does it mean, how does it feel to be vulnerable at work?
- How do you handle the constant risk on being vulnerable, as on the other hand, you may feel much passion for your work?
- What aspects have made your work easier? And what factors have complicated it?
- What do you think about the end of your dance career? How does it feel? Do you see yourself in a totally different profession in the future?
- How do you experience the relationship between passion and vulnerability at your work?

<sup>12</sup> I made eight in-depth interviews in total. All of them were with women, and their age-range was between 29 and 46 years. Two of the interviewees work currently at the Finnish National Ballet. One of the interviewees had retired from there a year ago, working now as a freelance artist. One of the dancers I interviewed was having a year off from the National Ballet and currently working in various freelance projects. Three of the interviewees are freelance dance artists, working mostly in the field of contemporary dance, and one of the interviewees is a contemporary flamenco dancer.

The duration of the in-depth interviews was from 2 to 3 hours, which allowed the dancers to describe the aspects of their work in rich detail. The in-depth interviews were conducted around four themes that I formed based on the thoughts that arose during the field-work (described above). My aim was to let the interviewees talk as freely and uncontrolled as possible, and that is why I did not have many questions in the outline.

*Relationality*

- What is your relationship towards the audience? What kind of meaning has the audience to your work?
- How do you relate yourself to the critics you face? What is the meaning of feedback at your work?
- Please tell me about your working community; what kind of atmosphere do you have
- For ballet dancers: how do you experience the hierarchy of the National Ballet?

## APPENDIX 4.

## An extract from the transcript of an in-depth interview with a ballet dancer

This in-depth interview was conducted in Finnish on 13 January 2014 in Helsinki, Finland.

S: Voitko kertoa aluksi sun taustasta tanssijana?

A: Mä oon alottanut tanssin tosi myöhään, vasta 11-vuotiaana. Mä en oo sitä ennen harrastanut mitään liikunnallista. Mä en oo ollut mikään jumppariina. Että sikäli erilainen tausta. Mä oon harrastanu sitten muita taiteita tosi monipuolisesti. Kuvataidekerhoa ja näyttelemistä, tosissani kaikkia niitä. Ja sitten tanssiminen, se vaan tuli jostain. Mä en vieläkään muista, että mikä se oli, mä olin nähnyt vaan telkkarissa jotain, ja sitten mä ilmoitin, että mä haluan tanssijaksi. Ja sit se meni oikeestaan tosi nopeasti. Et mä kävin silleen, silloin oli Tanssitaiteilijoiden Liitolla semmoinen kuin Mestaruuden kynnyksellä -kurssi, joka oli tarkoitettu pitkälle edenneille harrastajille. Ja mä menin sinne silleen, mä en ollut ikinä tanssinut, niin mä menin pyrkimään siihen projektiin ja sit mä pääsin siihen. Se oli jotenkin tosi outoa. Siitä tuli sellainen olo, että okei, ehkä tässä on nyt jotain lahjakkuutta. Että ihan alkuun samantien oli treenit seitsemän kertaa viikossa.

S: Etkä sä ollut mitään harrastanut?

A: En millään tavalla.

S: Mitä sitten?

A: Sit mä pääsin siihen ja sit parin vuoden päästä mä pyrin Oopperan balettikouluun ja pääsin sinne ja sit meidän perhe muutti Helsinkiin. Ja sieltä mä oon valmistunut 2004.

S: Ja ooksä siellä nyt sit?

A: Mä menin harjoittelijasopimuksella ja sit mä sain vakituisen sopimuksen ja mut kiinnitettiin sinne. Mut sit mul on ollut semmoisia, mä oon ottanut nyt jo pari vuotta vapaata. Ensinnäkin yhden kauden vapaata ja opiskelin semmoista israelilaista tekniikkaa semmoisen koreografin kun Ohaid Naharin, joka on ihan tosi huippu, niin hänen ryhmässään. Ja sit mulla syntyi semmoinen side sinne. Ja sit mä oon jatkanut niin, että mä käyn siellä aina välillä treenaamassa. Se on ollut hirveen kasvattava juttu. Se on avannut vähän silmiä liikkeellisesti ja muutenkin. Ja ylipäänsä se, että on vuoden pois siitä laitoksesta. Siis mä en henkilökohtaisesti käsität, miten ihmiset on voineet olla siellä 10 vuotta putkeen ilman, että ne ottaa yhtään vapaata. Koska se on semmoinen kupla. Ja nyt mulla on toinen vuosi, että mä oon vapaalla. Mä oon opiskellut kirjoittamista ja tehnyt freelancertöitä. Töitä on tullut tavallaan, kun sana on kiirinyt ja ihmiset on tienneet, että mä oon vapaa, niin niitä on tullutkin aika paljon. Et oon oikeestaan täystyöllistetty. Ja Oopperalla mulla on paikka sitten.

S: Ja mikä rooli sulla on ollut Oopperalla? Kuorotanssijana vai sitten...?

A: Mä inhoon noita yli kaiken. Musta se on ihan kauheeta. Se on jännä, kun se on niinku, joo, mä haluan vaan sanoa sen, että meidän ryhmässä oli tosi pitkään silleen, että se oli ihan uraa uurtavaa, että ei ollut niitä kategorioita. Tää meidän

nykyinen johtaja halusi tuoda ne. Ja hän niinku koki sen, että se on yleisön palvelemista ja yhteistyösuhteiden luomista. Ja sit se toinen, että siitä oli aika kovaa vastustusta meillä ryhmässä. Ja myös sellaiset, jotka on myöhemmin nimitetty johonkin rooliin, niin monet heistä on äänestäneet sitä vastaan. Mut siis mä oon se ihan alin kasti. Mutta jos multa kysytään, että mikä mun rooli meidän ryhmässä on, niin se ei todellakaan oo se. Mä koen, että mun rooli meidän ryhmässä on tosi vahva ja mä oon monipuolinen tanssija. Mutta se on tosi inhottava ja ehkä sitä sitten enemmän baletin ulkopuoliset ihmiset on ottaneet sen, että siitä on alettu puhumaan. Kun joskus on ollut jotain, no yks meidän tanssija sanoi, että se oli ollut yhden meidän tanssijan polttareissa. Sitten ne muut siinä polttariseurueessa kyselee, että no mikä sä oot, ootsä mikään. Sit se tanssija oli sanonut, että no itse asiassa, tää kyseinen tanssija on semmoinen meillä, kun tanssii koko repertuaarin, nykytanssia, balettia, kaikkennäköistä, erittäin käytetty tanssija, mulle semmoinen meidän ryhmän yksi avaintanssijoista. Ja sit se oli et itseasiassa en mä oo, et mä oon ihan vaan kuorotanssija. Ja sit ne oli ollut, että aaa, joo, mut eiks toi oo, toihan on solisti? Et se on tommoista arvottamista. Se ei kerro siitä, että, se kertoo siitä, että minkälaisia rooleja sä teet klassisessa baletissa. Mutta ei se kerro oikeastaan, kun meissä kuorotanssijoissa on erilaisia rooleja.

S: Ja kaikkea muuta, mitä sullakin on, kaikkea.

A: Niin kaikkeen muuhun, nykytanssin ja nykybalettiin se ei millään tavalla liity.

S: Ja onko se vaan sen johtajan, että hän päättää ne?

A: Se on suurimmaksi osaksi hänen ja balettimestarien näkemys. Ne on aina makukysymyksiä. Tottakai, kyllä mä ymmärrän, että halutaan semmoista kansainvälistä tähtikulttia luoda, mutta hirveen vähän sitä on kuitenkaan tullut niiden nimitysten myötä. Että esimerkiksi Minna Tervämäki oli 20 vuotta vaan Minna Tervämäki. Ja silti kaikki ties sen ja mitä se tekee ilman, että hänellä oli mitään titteliä. Mulle se on vaan, että se särähtää, että mikä rooli mulla on. Että vaikka mä olen kuorotanssija, niin mä en missään nimessä koe, että se on mun rooli.

S: Mulla on yksi keskeinen käsite liike, jonka kautta liikkumatila voi muovautua. Haluaisin kysyä, että miten sä koet liikkeen ja mikä merkitys liikkeellä on sun työssä?

A: Fyysisen liikkeen?

S: Niin.

A: Sehän on kaiken mun työn perusta. Periaatteessa mä voisin tehdä mun työtä, jos tarve vaatis ja joskus oon tehnytkin tyyliin, jos ääni on mennyt, niin täysin puhumatta ja täysin hiljaa. Se on se meidän kieli. Samalla tavalla kuin tieteesä on kirjoittaminen tai tutkimustulokset, niin liike on meille se samanlainen peruspalikka. Nykyään on hirveästi yritetty sitä, että tanssitaan ilman liikettä, mikä on tosi mielenkiintoista. Että vaikka seistään ja tehdään siitä tanssia. Mutta kyllä liike on mulle semmoinen, että jossain vaiheessa se minimalismi on mennyt jo siihen, ettei liikuta, niin sit mulla ei olekaan sitä, että liike on meidän kieli, meidän peruslähtökohta.

S: Kun sulla on eri kokemuksia sieltä Israelista. Niin miten ne kokemukset suhteessa baletin liikekieleen? Kun tuntuu, että baletin liikekieli on tosi rajoittunutta?

A: Onhan se tosi. Kyetäkseen ilmaisemaan jotain vapaasti on hallittava se kaikki erittäin rajattu ja erittäin säntillinen liikkuminen. Missä on toisaalta se hyvä puoli, että se tuo on teknisiä valmiuksia ilmaista. Että se on vähän sellainen kaksipiippuinen juttu. Taas tää israelilainen tekniikka on hirveen paljon älykkäämpää liikkumista, koska siinä joutuu ajattelemaan. Balettitunnilla siis periaatteessa voi olla tosi tosi hyvä balettianssija ilman, että osaa ajatella yhtään itsenäisesti tai luovasti. Mä oon sitä mieltä. Ei ehkä ihan niinku, ei voi olla Minna Tervämäki. Mutta voi olla tosi tosi hyvä, sellaisia on paljon, sellaisia ns. urheilijatanssijoita. Koska jos sä hallitset sen ns. urheilun eli sen baletin liikekielen, niin niin harva hallitsee sen hyvin, että se melkein riittää, että sä hallitset sen hyvin, vaikka sä et oo mikään kummoinen ilmaisija tai älyllinen tulkitsija. Sä voit silti aika pitkälle suorittaa sitä. Se israelilainen tekniikka on semmoinen, että siinä näkee heti, jos ei tajuu. Ajattelu on hirveen oleellinen osa sitä ja jokainen tunti on silleen, että sä joudut koko ajan ajattelemaan silleen, että pää sauhuaa. Sä pystyt ikäänkuin menemään hirveen paljon syvemmälle ja tekemään, siinä on semmoisia päällekkäisiä tehtäviä samaan aikaan, niin liikkumaan vahvasti ja sulavasti ja räjähtävästi. Sun pitää ne kaikki näyttää koko ajan, yhtään ei saa antaa periksi. Se vaatii ihan hirveästi aivotyön kerroksellisuutta siihen. Ei oo mitään valmiita liikesarjoja, että mä teen nyt näin, vaan annetaan ohjeita ja sä teet ite ne liikkeet. Se on täysin eri kieli kuin baletti. Baletti on mulle ikäänkuin palikoita ja sitten tää tekniikka on niinku dna:ta. Siinä on perustavan laatuinen ero.

S: Entä sitten, kun sä sanoit, että kun hallitsee tekniikan, niin baletin, voiko siinäkin siirtyä eri tasolle liikkeen kautta? Mä mietin rutiineja tai toistojen myötä?

A: Voi tulla ja tuleekin, mutta se ei ole välttämätön. Se voi näyttää ulkoisesti hyvältä ilman, että mä uskon siihen, että se tyyppi elää läpi sitä tanssia. Ja sitten on sellaisia ballerinoja, käytän nyt Minttua esimerkkinä, koska se on niin hirveen uniikki Suomessa. Sellaisia ballerinoja, joille tekniikka ainoastaan palvelee sen tunteen ilmaisun välittämistä, se on vain työkalu. On hirveesti sellaisia, jotka pysähtyy siihen tekniikkaan, joilla on se tekniikka. Mut sit tää liittyy mun mielestä laajemminkin siihen, että baletin maailmaan, että balettianssijat elää oikeesti kuplassa. Tuolla Oopperalla, kun katsoo ihmisiä, niin hirveen monen maailma rajoittuu siihen taloon. Ystävät on sieltä ja. Jos menee balettianssijan häihin, niin kaikki on sieltä. Ja mitä on se maailma, mitä sä tulkitset Anna Kareninan pääroolissa, jos sä et oo ikinä elänyt mitään sellaisia juttuja? Tottakai hyvillä balettianssijoilla on draamaa ja tapahtuu, mutta tavallaan semmoisia tosielämän tunteita. Mitä sä sitten välität, jos sä oot kasvanut tynnyrissä? Me ollaan pienestä pitäen siinä samassa balettiluokassa, ei oo aikaa tehdä mitään muuta. Keskittyminen ja kaikki aika menee siihen. Niin se on ihan luonnollista, että sit sä meet töihin, niin sulla on edelleen ne pienet piirit, kun sä teet sitä. Ja silloin, kun on rankka näytöskausi baletissa, niin ei kellään oo mitään muuta elämää silloin. Et elämä on sitä, että sä käyt töissä, lepää ja syöt ja käyt töissä. Niin tavallaan se vaatii joko sitä, että on muita verkostoja syntyneet jotain kautta tai sitten... voi sitten ottaa opintovapaata ja tällaisia.

S: Miten se liikkumatila? Sulla se on varmaan laajentunut ton Israelin kokemuksen myötä?

A: Ei se oo pelkästään siitä. Liikkumatila on hirveen mielenkiintoinen silleen, että meidät on koulutettu tavallaan silleen passiivisiksi. Meille sanotaan, mitä tehdään, missä, milloin ja miten sä teet sen ja sit sä suoritat sen ja näin. Mut ehkä iän myötä alkaa tajuta, että kun mä oon tehnyt hirveesti talon ulkopuolella, luonut omaa koreografiaa ja tehnyt muita projekteja, tehnyt poikkitaiteellisia projekteja. Niin laajentanut itse sitä liikkumatilaa. Ja sitten, kun mä oon tehnyt sen, niin mä oon tajunnut, että itse asiassa kukaan ei koskaan rajoittanut sitä. Mut me itse rajoitetaan sitä itsellemme. Se on vähän sama, kuin joku vapaan ottamisesta, että tosi monet on mulle ollu silleen, että vitsi sä oot rohkee, kun sä oot nyt ottanut kaksi vuotta vapaata, et vitsi sä oot rohkee, kun sä teet noita omia juttuja. Ja mä aina sanon niille, että mikäs sua estää? Sä oot ihan samassa tilanteessa. Mussa ei ole mitään sellaista, mikä niinku, että mä olisin jotenkin nyt syntyneet rohkeana. Mä oon

vaan tehnyt ne. Toi on sama kuin yksi tällanen käytännön esimerkki, että toi meidän nykyinen johtaja toi jossain vaiheessa sellaisen, että hän haluaisi, että naistanssijat pitää kärkitossuja aamutunneilla neljä kertaa viikossa tunnin loppuun saakka.

S: Miten ne on sitten yleensä?

A: Jossain vaiheessa ihmiset ottaa ne pois, kun sä joudut 8 tuntia seisoon niillä, niin se nyt on vähän silleen, ettei välttämättä tee mieli joka päivä tunnilla niin. Ja se ei aina ole välttämättä funkionaalistakaan. Mutta siis ihmiset oli ihan että, siis voi ei, mun jalat ja näin ja voi hitto, nyt niitä pitää pitää. Ja ihmiset piti niitä neljä kertaa viikossa ja valitti. Mä en oo nytkään enkä sen jälkeenkään varmaan pitänyt ikinä neljä kertaa viikossa loppuun saakka.

S: Et sä et tehnyt niinkuin se sanoi?

A: Joo joo, tottakai mä treenaan niinku muutkin. Mutta otan itse vastuun, että semmoinen on niinku, että kuunnellaan sääntöjä ja sit noudatetaan niitä ja tehdään, miten käsketään, ja se ei edes ollut mikään sääntö, se vaan oli semmoinen. Miten mä otin sen oman liikkumatilan. Että mä tiedän, että mä oon hyvä tanssija ja mä teen hyviä näytöksiä, että niin kauan kuin kenelläkään ei ole mitään valittamista, niin mä en usko, että kukaan tulee sanomaan mulle, että pidä nyt ne tossut jalassa. Eikä kukaan oo ikinä sanonu mulle. Eikä johtaja oo ikinä sanonut mulle, vaikka se on nähnyt, että mä oon ilman niitä. Ei oo ikinä sanonu mulle yhtään mitään. Sitä liikkumatilaa voi hirveen paljon ottaa vaan itse. Et mä oon tosi paljon ottanut sitä itse, ja sitten mä oon myös sitä kautta, kun sitä rupeaa ottamaan, niin se on myös semmoinen viesti näille meidän struktuureille, eli johtajalle, balettimestareille ja kollegoille, että okei, että hei toi uskaltaa. Sit sitä yleensä annetaankin enemmän. Mut jos sitä pelkää sitä liikkumatilan ottamista jo lähtökohtaisesti.

S: Ja semmoisiakin siellä on?

A: On, ja sitten ne vaan valittaa, että on tää kauheeta eikä tajua, että se on itestä kiinni. Hirveen paljon se on itsestä kiinni. Et mä oon Mintulta hirveesti oppinut. Sehän on aina tehnyt hirveesti keikkoja talon ulkopuolella ja näin. Ja myös opettanut mulle sitä, että pitää luovia. Vaikka okei, meidän pitäisi pyytää lupa joka keikalle. Mutta jos mä nyt meen tekemään jonkun yksityiskeikan, josta meidän johtaja ei saa tietää koskaan mitään, niin en mä nytkään kysy siltä lupaa, että saanko mä tanssia tädin jossain synttäreillä. Että se on sellaista maalaisjärjen käyttöä liikkumatilan ottamisessa.

S: Onks jotain muita tossa baletin maailmassa, että miten sä oot laajentanut liikkumatilaa? Arkisissa tilanteissa? Kuin toi, että sä otit ne tossut pois.

A: Sellaisia, että uskaltaa olla suora. Meidän balettimestaritkin ja baletin johtaja on vaan ihmisiä. Jos ne on hirveesti siellä, että nyt tehdään näin ja näin ja näin, niin sanoo vaan ihan suoraan, että meillä on ollut tässä tosi pitkä päivä, että voitaisko tehdä ensin näin ja sit näin. Yleensä se on aina sanonut, että no joo, tehdään vaan näin. Ihmiset pelkää sitä. Semmoisia on tosi paljon, että just tämmöinen, että en mä miettinyt, kun mä otin kaksi vuotta vapaata, että mitä meidän johtaja ajattelee siitä, saankohan mä tanssia tai vaikuttaakohan se mun töihin. Mä luotan siihen, että ei se vaikuta. Mutta tää peilautuu ehkä yleiseen itsetuntoon. Mulla on hyvä itsetunto ja mä tiedän, että mä osaan ja että vaikka mä olisin kaksi vuotta poissa, niin luultavasti mulle on töitä, koska mä itse uskon siihen. Oon positiivinen ihminen. Jos on perustavanlaatuisen pelko siitä, että kelpaanko mä ja oonko mä hyvä, niin sitten se liikkumatilan ottaminenkin on tosi vaikeeta ja sitten sitä pelkää.

S: Onko noi ollut positiivisia noi johtaja tosta sun, kun sä teet eri tanssijuttuja?

A: Joo. Hän on ollut hirveen kannustava mua kohtaan. Mä luulen, että se on väkisin sidoksissa siihen, miten mä tuon niitä asioita esille. Mä en ikinä mee silleen pyytämään anteeksi, että anteeks, kun mä oon tehnyt tällaisen keikan. Vaan mä meen, että hei, mä muuten tein tällaista, eiks oo kivaa? Ja sit mä oon taas tehnyt jotain kivaa. Sit se on silleen, että no onpas kivaa! Että se on erilainen suhtautuminen siihen asiaan. Oma reippaus, se jotenkin auttaa hirveesti.

S: Miten noi rajat? Millaisina koet keholliset rajasi? Kun on toi liikkumatila, niin missä ne rajat menee?

A: Tarkoitatko sä kehollista, oikeasti fyysisiä eli kehollisia rajoja?

S: Tässä mä tarkoitan sellaista mielellistäkin. Koska kyllähän liikkeessä, sullakin se on päästäkin kiinni.

A: Koska keholliset, jos sillä tarkoitetaan fyysisiä rajoja, niin ne nyt on, että jos on polvi kipeä, niin sitten pitää varoa sitä ja näin.

S: Ehkä mä tarkoitan kehollisilla, että se on yhteydessä mieleenkin.

A: Niin, niin. Mä en koe mitään rajoja et mun mielestä se on ihan rajaton. Mä voin, mä oon nyt mukana semmoisessa teoksessa, joka tulee ensimmäistä kertaa nyt helmikuussa. Mä tanssin Kiasman aukiolla, siinä on semmoinen kauppa. Semmoinen pieni, lasiseinäinen rakennus. Mä tanssin sen katolla helmikuussa. Luultavasti on vähintään pakkasta. Ja mä oon vaan tytyssä siellä, ja lenkkarit jalassa. Se kertoo siitä. Mä en niinku, musta ei oo mitään rajaa siinä, että mitä voi tehdä tytyssä tai mitä voi tehdä pakkasella. Mä olin viime syksynä semmoisessa teoksessa, joka tanssittiin pommisuojojassa. Siel oli tosi kylmä ja hometta ja ikävää. Semmoisten kehollisten rajojen ylittäminen tekee tosi hyvää. Et hei, tääkin on mahdollista! Et ylipäänsä mennä omalle epämurkavuusalueelle. Et vastauksena sun kysymykseen ni hyvin avarina, ellei loputtomina.

## APPENDIX 5.

An extract from the transcript of a photo-elicitation interview



This photo-elicitation interview was conducted in Finnish on 10 January 2014 in Turku, Finland.

A: Tää kuva liittyy semmoiseen, kun mä tein semmoista Kauneus-sooloa, niin toi performanssi, jonka nimi oli *Sweet*, niin se oli eka sitä tutkimusmatkaa. Että mä kyselin ihmisiltä kauneudesta ja sitten ne saivat kirjoittaa noihin sokeri, ja sit mä laitoin ne kaikki sokerikilot niinku muhun, tonne vaatteiden alle. Niitä oli joku kaksyt sokerikiloa niinku mun vaatteissa. Sitten mä oon käyttänyt sitä peruukkia muutenkin.

S: Mistä se sitten se idea siihen? Liittyykö se sun syömishäiriöjuttuun?

A: Liittyy toki, ja kyllähän siinä Kauneus, siinä *And all that's nice*, no se tulee tuolla myöhemmin, niin olihan siinä vahvasti se. Mä en tiedä, että miten ton pukisi sanoiksi, että mitä tossa on sitten... et lähinnä se ihana maailma, että siinä oli niinkun ylipäättään semmoinen utopia-ajatus ja sellainen, että eiks kaikki voisi olla näin ihanaa!

S: Niin tosta tuleekin tosta tukasta semmoinen mielikuva.

A: Ja semmoinen leikki ja joku muu, että eiks voisi ottaa jonkun toisen näkökulman. Toi on aika hirveetä, että kun meillä oli silloin lehdistötilaisuus tosta Ihana maailma –teoksesta, niin olikse sinä samana päivänä, vai siis meillä oli lehdistötilaisuus, niin sinä edeltävänä päivänä oli tapahtunut se joku kouluampuminen, se on jotenkin jäänyt mieleen.

S: Ja silti te teitte...?

A: Ihanan maailman (naurahtaa).

S: Jännä sattuma.

A: Niin joo, ja siinä oli myös just täs esitykses oli, kun siinä oli tosiaan kolme osaa. Se alkoi ku meillä oli tää valkoinen, ja sit siinä oli semmoinen välikohta, kun ihmiset meni sinne toiseen huoneeseen. Siellä oli, me näytettiin siellä sitä meidän haastatteludokkaria ja sit ihmiset sai siellä myös itse vastata niihin kysymyksiin. Sit ne tuli uudestaan tänne, ja me oltiin käännetty toi, et meil oli musta ja sit se oli tosi semmoinen ihan ironisella otteella tehty mutta semmoinen kaamosmeininki.

S: Eikä ollut enää sitä ihanuutta?

A: Ei ollut enää sitä ihanuutta.

S: Niin miksi te otitte yleisön mukaan ja ooksä tehnyt enemmän tommoista, että, sanotaaks sitä yleisöyhteistyöksi vai mikskä, kun te ostallistatte?

A: No tossa tehtiin itse asiassa ekaa kertaa, ja sit ku mä tein sitä Kauneus-sooloa tai sitä *And all that's nice*, niin siihen liittyi, mä tein ihan hirvittävän määrän haastatteluja. Mä haastattelin, mulla oli 15 kysymystä, jotka liittyi siihen kauneusteemaan. Mä kuvasin ne kaikki haastattelut ja sit mä editoin niistä siihen teokseen semmoisen osan. Ja sit mä käytin muutenkin aika paljon sitä haastattelumateriaalia sen teoksen tekemiseen.

S: Niin miksi sä halusit?

A: Jotenkin oli hirveen hyvä kokemus tässä siitä ja se tuntui ainakin tekijän näkökulmasta, että se jotenkin jäməköitti sitä ja tavallaan se oli vaan tosi mielenkiintoista, että miten ihmiset vastaili ja miten inspiroivaa se oli, ja sit myös siinä oli semmoinen ihan oma kerros siihen teokseen ja sit myös sitä...

S: Niin just, mä ymmärrän.

A: 2010 on sit se *And all that's nice*. Tää olis sit seuraavaks keväällä, et ensin oli se performanssi. Hetkinen. Siis ensi-illassa oli 2010 tammikuussa se *And all that's nice*, se oli myös soolo. Ja sit oli tää (jalka ja sokeripussit-kuva).

S: Jos sä voit tästä kertoa enemmän? Sullahan on eri mitä se herättää nyt kuin jos olisi sillä hetkellä kysynyt. Mut se onkin ihan hyvä, että reflektoi sitä jälkeenpäin.

A: Niin, niin. No mä osallistuin semmoiseen performanssityöpajaan. En oo hirveesti mitään performanssia tehnyt, mutta tuolloin, tai no oon tehnyt itse asiassa aika paljonkin, kun mä rupean sitä miettimään.

S: Mikä tän nimi olikaan?

A: *Sweet*. Eli tää on 2010. Tää oli performanssi, sen yhden työpajan, työpajapresentaatiopermanssi. Eli meitä oli kymmenisen eri alojen taiteentekijää tältä alueelta, jotka osallistuivat siihen performanssiin. Sen performanssityöpajan piti saksalainen performanssitaiteilija Johannes Deimling. Se oli itselle kauheen tärkeä se työpaja, että mä löysin sieltä muutamia

semmoisia kontakteja, jotka on edelleen kauhean oleellisia. Esimerkiksi tutustuin sitä kautta kuvataiteilija Jari Kallioon, jonka kanssa me ollaan tehty sit ihan hirveesti töitä sen jälkeen yhdessä. Mutta toi esitys itse, jonka tuolla teki, niin koki itse, että se oli onnistunut. Ja sopi siihen tilanteeseen ja jotenkin niinkun oivalsi, tai koki onnistumisen tunteen sillä, että kun pystyi tuomaan sen oman tutkimusalueensa silloin siihen tilanteeseen. Ja sitten se prosessi, joka oli itsellä silloin käynnissä siihen Kauneus-sooloon liittyen, niin jotenkin tuntuu, että sit löysi semmoisen hyvän tavan käsitellä sitä tossa. Ja sit se tuntui myös, että löysi jonkun simpelin, mutta itselle kuitenkin uuden tavan käsitellä henkilökohtaista aihetta sillai, että se toimi myös esityksensä.

S: Millä tavalla aiheena tää on henkilöhtainen ja miten suhteessa siihen Kauneuteen tää *Sweet* nyt sitten?

A: No jotenkin kun mul on myös se kauneutta käsittelevä soolo, joka tässä tulee kohta seuraavaksi tai ei seuraavaksi mut sitten, mä tein sen 2011. Niin sen nimi oli *And all that's nice*, ja se *And all that's nice* tulee siitä lorusta, kun on suomennettukin se et "mistä on pienet tytöt tehty", kun sehän on englanniksi, että "sugar and spice and everything that's nice", niin se viittaa myös siihen. Et tytöt on tehty sokerista ja tavallaan se, että itelleen siihen liittyy monta asiaa. Et se sweet, että miten omaan henkilöhistoriaan liittyen se, että on pyrkinyt koko nuoruutensa ja lapsuutensa olemaan semmoinen ihanteellinen ja suloinen ja kiva ja söpö. Ja sit sen baletin kautta myös toteuttaa sitä. Mutta sitten sen kaiken sulouden kääntöpuolena on semmoinen hillitön kontrolli ja pelko siitä, että se sun muoto ei saa muuttua miksikään ja et sä et saa, et sokeri on kauneuden pahin vihollinen mut silti pikkutyöt on tehty sokerista. Siinä on niin semmoinen kaksinainen, ihan skitsofreeninen se, että miten sitä viestitään. Toi oli niinkun siihen.

S: Ooksä päässyt eroon sun syömishäiriöjutuista vai prosessoitko sä vieläkin jotenkin sitä suhdetta sokeriin?

A: No kyllä sitä prosessoii varsinkin sillai historiallisesti (naurahtaa). Että tottakai ne asiat vaikuttaa mussa edelleen ja varmaan ne vaikuttaa sillainkin, miten niitä ei edes itse tajua. Mutta en koe, että mulla olisi mitään häiriötä, että ihan sillai vapautuneesti. Varsinkin sillai, ettei mitään tai mielestäni ei ole mitään pakkomielteitä liittyen ruokaan tai sokeriin (naurahtaa).

S: Joo toi oli hyvä, herättää ajatuksia.





## **‘Bring down the controlled movements!’ – exploring the possibilities of and limitations on achieving embodied agency in ballet and fashion**

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This paper explores the subtleties of exercising embodied agency within two contexts shaped by ideals and norms: ballet and fashion. Here, we focus on how dancers and models rehearsing offstage towards onstage performances negotiate their potential and limitations for achieving agency over and over. Whereas a ‘turn to embodiment’ has occurred within organization studies, less is known about how embodied agency is choreographed and practised between visible front stages and ‘hidden’ offstages, or in relation to the various human and non-human agents present in the field. The empirical material of this paper is derived from two separate ethnographic studies. By combining insights from the two contexts, we make a joint effort to explore a complex phenomenon in more detail. This paper develops our micro-level understanding of embodied agency as a relational endeavour, and offers insights into the surprisingly ‘a-mobile’ discussion of embodied practices within organization studies.

**Keywords:** embodied agency; ethnography; embodied practices; movement; ballet; fashion

### **Introduction**

It is Wednesday afternoon. I have been observing the production of the two retired ballet dancers for a month and feel I have got into their scheme of things deeply. I sit in front of the mirror, following the dynamics between the two dancers who amazingly seem to understand each other from an unfinished movement. The dancers do not need to go through the technical details any more, and as they remark, they have become blinded with their work. Hence, a professional actor, a friend of one of the dancers, is invited to follow their rehearsal.

The actor steps in, and we greet each other. I tell him about my study, he nods his head while listening to me carefully and sits beside me at the front of the dance studio. I put the music on and the dancers go through the 30-minute-long piece. When the music ends, the actor starts to express his comments vividly. He comments: ‘You are performing too perfectly and controlled now. You should “bring down” the controlled movements – the piece is too “choreographed” now’. (Field note extract, 3 October 2012)

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Figure 1. ‘The dancers trying to “bring down” the overly controlled movements’.

Let this empirical episode from the rehearsal of a joint production involving the two ballet dancers (Figure 1), illustrating how embodied agency becomes contextually ‘controlled’ by choreography in an offstage situation, serve as a starting point for this paper. We are interested in situated organizational doings and embodied interactions as they unfold in the everyday life of organizing. The purpose of this paper is to explore how embodied agency is practised, reformed and challenged by ballet dancers and models working on- and offstage. Specifically, we shed further light on how these embodied agents try to ‘break free’ from certain conventions, regulations, and embodied norms that surround them in their expressive and kinetic working contexts.

Whereas agency remains one of the classical notions in the social sciences, previous organization studies research on embodied work and agency (e.g. Trethewey 1999; Ewenstein and Whyte 2007; Sutherland and Ladkin 2013; Mirchandani 2015) has rarely focused on the detailed, micro-level embodied practices<sup>1</sup> of rehearsing through which agents actively negotiate the potential and limitations of their agency and aim at ‘transforming’ themselves over time. Here, we try to move away from the traditions of control and agency. Specifically, we approach embodied agency as the context-dependent yet partly constrained transpersonal leeway for individuals producing actions in relation to other human and non-human agents. As such, the notion offers an interesting starting point for critically studying co-created actions learned and continuously repeated through and across time and space, as well as what is experienced, *felt*, and co-created by, in and through the body in a specific situation (see Sutherland and Ladkin 2013, 109).

The choreography of embodied agency has to be carefully practised and negotiated in various organizational contexts, such as operating theatres, management meetings, the military, and elite team sports only to name a few. This paper aims to provide insights into how embodied agency interacts dynamically with other human and

non-human agents in fashion and ballet. This is of utmost importance in our two contexts, where individual embodied agency is shaped over and over by the self and other agents present, such as the audience, the garments, the gaze, choreographies, lighting, sound, spaces, occupational culture, and institutions. The existing literature on embodied agency (e.g. Noland 2009; Sutherland and Ladkin 2013) has arguably overlooked the roles of these many agents that relationally affect, shape, and determine the emergence of embodied agency (or not).

During the past decades, ‘bodies at work’ (Wolkowitz 2006) and embodied aspects of work have gained ever-growing attention among organizational scholars (see e.g. Trethewey 1999; Ropo and Parviainen 2001; Ewenstein and Whyte 2007; Hindmarsh and Pilnick 2007; Küpers 2014; Mirchandani 2015). Furthermore, the ever-growing interdisciplinary scholarly interest paid to dance as work (e.g. Slutskaya 2006; Wainwright and Turner 2006; Aalten 2007; Chandler 2012; Stanway, Bordia, and Fein 2013) as well as fashion modeling (e.g. Entwistle 2002; Soley-Beltran 2004; Entwistle and Wissinger 2006, 2012; Wissinger 2007; Neumann 2012) demonstrates how these two contexts traditionally marginalized as ‘feminine’ because of their preoccupation with overly sophisticated movements, extraordinary beauty and surface, are becoming increasingly studied. We build on these contributions to the literature in order to shed further light on the understudied dimensions of embodied agency as explained above.

Evidently, all occupations are to some extent shaped by a number of embodied regimes, occupational practices, and established norms. Both ballet dancers and models seem in their everyday work to balance the ability to act as freely as they wish in relation to demands from other agents, and the fleshy, material limits of the body itself. Despite the uniqueness of our cases as examples of the versatile utilization of embodied agency at work, exploring them can lead us to analytical findings that illustrate the significance of embodied practices in organizations more broadly, especially as the relevance of embodied agency is actually undeniable in all occupations.

Finally, this paper focuses on the confluences of ballet and fashion instead of the differences between them. Fully enabled bodies interacting together towards an onstage performance of never-achieved embodied perfection is at the very heart of both contexts. Here, we argue that striving for unachievable perfection is an important aspect of the lived experiences of these two contexts, and a key element shaping the scripting throughout. The ‘lure’ of perfection and disciplined everyday practices are evident, as is the aim and struggle for recognition and respect. In particular, we view embodied practice, repetitive rehearsing, and the interplay between off- and onstage as vital points of connection between the two contexts. In what follows, we open up the occupational cultures of ballet and fashion further.

### **Introducing the worlds of ballet and fashion: working towards ideal bodies**

The occupational culture of ballet is highly controlled and idealized, with shared moral beliefs such as considering pain as a common part of everyday work and behavioural codes of how to achieve a ‘perfect body’ (Aalten 2007). This occupational culture has a strong desire for a never-achieved perfection that is produced and reproduced in the daily life of ballet companies. The Finnish National Ballet is an illustrative example of a highly hierarchical organization in which the teachers, choreographers, and ballet masters, who coach, run rehearsals, and restage work, operate as gatekeepers to the profession and dictate which bodies approximate most closely to the ideal balletic body.

Classical ballet has a special technique with its own vocabulary, evolved over the past 100 years. The term ‘contemporary dance’ refers to a more liberal theatre dance genre, which formed as a rejection of the formal structure of ballet (see Salosaari 2001, 15; Tarr and Thomas 2011). Company ballet dancers usually have permanent contracts with regular working hours, while contemporary dancers tend to work on short-term contracts with a sense of insecurity about the continuity of their careers (Tarr and Thomas 2011). In the world of ballet, dancers are confronted with two bodies: the ideal body and the experienced body (Foster 1995; Aalten 2007). The ideal body is able to perform certain movements endlessly and with ease, whereas the experienced body struggles to fulfill the demands placed on it.

As temporal creations in a certain time and space, today’s fashion shows, performative, and expressive organizations, also draw upon various sources of inspiration that differ in context. The rapid parade of moving bodies is, however, a fashion show format rarely challenged where young, normatively beautiful, slim fashion models stride down a runway in a choreographed manner before an influential audience (Mears 2008; Evans 2010). The ‘typical’ fashion show, a scripted, entertaining bodily presentation in motion, has given rise to ‘a range of conventions of movements, poses, and looks’ (Skov et al. 2009, 2) practised on the catwalk. Similar to ballet and often strictly fixed in its conventions and repetitive elements, the fashion show performs another site of socially learned behaviour (Gruendl 2007), where those taking part tend to move according to existing norms and expectations (Entwistle and Rocamora 2006).

Similar to ballet dancers reaching for impossible aesthetic ideals, ‘fashionable’ bodies also conform to narrow Western beauty standards of femininity and masculinity. Fashion models are usually portrayed as self-disciplined, idealized objects to hang clothes on so that the model’s agency is erased (Frisell Ellburg 2008; Neumann 2012; Rundquist 2012). Many researchers have been critical about the dangerous ideals that contemporary shows reproduce (see Mears 2008), as these spectacles often ‘determine ideas of physical beauty’ (Khan 2000, 114). Also, a designer or a choreographer usually directs sculpted, self-disciplined bodies to move in certain, strictly scripted ways on the catwalk. However, rather than being reduced to extremely controlled subjectivities, models must carefully negotiate their use of embodied agency both off- and onstage over and over. In what follows, we discuss the theoretical framework of our study.

### **Embodied agency as a theoretical thread**

This paper turns to the theoretical notion of embodied agency, a kinetic and dynamic socio-material process of interaction (Küpers 2014). The multifaceted and complex concept of agency,<sup>2</sup> bound up with dimensions of ethics, power and resistance, has been widely theorized in the social sciences and the field of organization studies. The significance of the human body in understanding agency is today widely acknowledged, and embodiment and agency have been considered in studies of embodied practices (e.g. Gherardi et al. 2013), embodied interaction (e.g. Streeck, Goodwin, and LeBaron 2011), and feminist theory (e.g. Young 1990; Special Issue on The Body in *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 1996; Witz 2000) in particular. Whereas the complex relationship especially between the female body and agency has been widely conceptualized (Davis 1997; Trethewey 1999) in the social sciences, the focus has arguably often been on structures constraining individual agency in

organizations in a strikingly a-mobile manner, saying less about potentially more disruptive, temporal, and dynamic embodied agency ‘in the making’. Specifically, less empirical attention has been paid to agency ‘on the move’, so as to understand the moving body capable of transforming and expressing socio-cultural contexts in organizational life through co-created actions and performances.

We view embodied agency as a gestural, inter-corporeal phenomenon that involves a body that moves and feels (Noland 2009, 105) in relation to ‘emerging social interaction’ (Sutherland and Ladkin 2013, 108) and to ‘its capacities to act’ (Küpers 2014, 153). Furthermore, in line with Küpers (2014, 153) we view embodied agency as being constantly ‘affected by somethings or somebodies’. However, we notice that this literature has not explored *how* agents negotiate and accomplish agency (and themselves) or not through the meticulous rehearsing towards ‘perfection’ in a context where multiple forms of embodiment or both human and non-human agents interact. In this paper, we address these critical neglects and analyse the possibilities of temporarily achieving embodied agency during rehearsals in fashion and ballet.

Possibilities for agency arise from different forms of embodiment. If the human body has traditionally been attached to all that is awkward in organizations (Brewis and Sinclair 2000; Höpfl 2000) and often been treated in strikingly disembodied ways, today’s ever-growing literatures on gendered subjectivities at work (e.g. Yancey Martin 2003) and feminist analyses of embodied agency in organizational settings (e.g. Warren and Brewis 2004; Sutherland and Ladkin 2013) sufficiently illustrate the importance of studying embodied experiences of agency in organization.

In the last few decades, Latour’s (1996, 2005) work especially has been influential in reconceptualizing agency from ‘an *internal* view of action’ (Vasquez and Cooren 2012, 191) as reserved for humans toward an external (Robichaud 2006), perhaps more ‘messy’ view that involves a multiplicity of agencies. This more hybrid approach has also influenced how we approach embodied agency in this paper. We suggest that the insight from Actor Network Theory (ANT) that non-humans achieve agency has the potential to enrich existing theorizations of embodied agency by shedding further light on the relational achievements of embodied agency across spaces, objects, and bodies involved. Following Dale and Latham (2015; see also Whittle and Spicer 2008), we are meanwhile critical about the fairly symmetrical treatment of embodiment in ANT. Whereas we find inspiration from ANT, we must be aware of its somewhat naturalizing ontology and unreflexive epistemology (Whittle and Spicer 2008).

As a relational phenomenon, embodied agency therefore involves the interface between different human and non-human agents, such as – in our empirical contexts – the audience, the garments, and the script. Even if we act and move alone we must sense the influence of other agents present and watch what is happening around us. Furthermore, we view the bodies of both ballet dancers and models as culturally idealized representations of the human body (Douglas 1966), in the sense that their bodies are physically trained throughout their careers to express individual creativity, perform ‘the specific cultural meanings embedded in the roles they embody’ (Schechner 2006, 233). Their bodies come into being through their agency as constructed through bodily movements, expressions, gestures, and aesthetic refinements in their work.

There is also arguably a dearth of empirical research on the complex interplay between ‘hyped’ front stages and hidden back regions through which the negotiation of mundane acts emerges in organizations. Here, Goffman’s (1956) classical dramaturgical metaphor of the social life helps us to point out transformations of agency taking

place between offstage and onstage. Therefore, we view the negotiation of the presentation of self occurring between the various social settings. As Goffman (1956, 156) states, access to the backstage is usually controlled ‘to prevent outsiders from coming into a performance that is not addressed to them’. By moving between the often glamorized front stages and the less spectacular back stages, we might gain deeper insights into how organizations are performed via versatile actions across space, the freedoms and limitations of models and dancers, as well as the particularities of these worlds. In what follows, we discuss the methodology of this study.

## **Methodology**

The methodological approach of this paper is ethnographic, which allows us to explore detailed micro-level embodied practices. The empirical material derives from two separate ethnographic studies conducted independently by Suvi and Astrid, the two authors of this paper. By bringing our independent investigations together, our aim was to broadly explore embodied agency in two different empirical contexts, and to perceive parallel aspects of a complex phenomenon. Meanwhile, we wanted to make an effort in trying to understand a complicated phenomenon in closer detail, and experience a research journey that allows for surprises together.

To us, ethnography is a collective endeavour. Rather than focusing on our own separate studies as individual ethnographers as is common in ethnographic research, we decided to co-construct meanings and interpretations mutually. This allowed us two ‘critical friends working together’ (Gilmore and Kenny 2015, 60, 73) to engage in a dialogue about the two contexts. As researchers, we also inevitably practice embodied agency, although our embodiment in this paper remains absent, as our purpose was not to focus on our embodied experiences or conduct autoethnographic research. Moreover, the knowledge we are co-producing here is evidently different from what either of us would have created alone.

The first empirical context of our paper is a dance production staged by two dancers, Minna and Kare, both with a lifelong background in the world of classical ballet. They retired from the Finnish National Ballet in June 2012. The production staged by these two ballet dancers, a female and a male, both in their 40s, provides an interesting example of the co-creation of embodied agency in the freelance field, where the ballet dancers have gained more freedom to decide about working on their own than in the traditionally hierarchical ballet world ‘rooted in an ideology which denies women their own agency’ (Daly 1987, 17). Interestingly, the ways in which the ballet dancers struggle to ‘let loose’ while working on their own demonstrates how they are still to a significant extent influenced by their professional background.

An annual group fashion show in a Finnish context, an inspirational hybrid in which fashion, dance, and other theatrical elements are woven together, serves as the second empirical context. With eight different collections to be staged, all with a working style allowing multiple humans and non-humans to come together and become part of the work in progress, we illustrate embodied agency as a collective matter where the models are not ‘quiet dolls’, but actively participate in choreographing the performance. With nuanced movements performed in interactions between humans and non-humans, we illustrate a fashion show not solely as an oppressive site of exploitation, but also as a site of nuanced embodied agency. Of course, these are not mutually exclusive but always interrelated. Similar to dance performances, fashion shows always relate to

wider formations of commerce, desire, gender, and image in society (Evans 2001, 271–272).

The empirical material from our empirical contexts includes participant observation, photographs, video clips, and numerous informal conversations with both ballet dancers and models. The participant observation, 120 hours in total, is documented as field notes in our two separate research diaries. Instead of reflecting further upon our own embodied experiences as researchers, we have focused on carefully describing the ‘in the-here-and-now’ organization of ballet and fashion that we experienced, and *how* embodied actions were produced (or not). Specifically, we have prioritized the analysis of embodied agency in the moment-to-moment ‘goings-on of organisation’ (Helin et al. 2014). Therefore, the voices (but not the actions) of our research subjects have gained less attention and space in the written report. We are aware of the difficulties of representing the field, voicing our subjects, and engaging in a reflexive dialogue, all meanwhile accounting for a rather ‘messy’ ethnographic process in transparent ways. In practice, our fieldwork cannot be divided into neat phases, and this also goes for our co-production. Throughout, we have, however, pondered how to construct representations in ethically informed ways, always trying to show a relational engagement with our researched subjects.

Of course, our subjectivity unquestionably affected our interpretations throughout, and we here construct certain forms of knowledge in inherently incomplete ways. Meanwhile, research always produces and reproduces the researcher (Pullen 2006). Suvi has practised both classical and contemporary dance since the age of six and thus, had a personal involvement with, and an understanding of its special characteristics, as she conducted fieldwork among professional dancers in 2010–2013 as part of her Ph.D. study. Astrid, then, with her passion for fashion, intensely followed the goings-on of fashion in a variety of ways (such as blogs and magazines) in addition to following several fashion show productions in Finland and abroad throughout years 2012–2015 as part of her Ph.D. study.

Suvi has known Minna for many years, and gained access to her and Kare’s production without any difficulties. Astrid negotiated access to the fashion show production by first emailing the project manager, and then meeting the director and the project manager face-to-face. At times, our own embodied experiences helped us to overcome aesthetic muteness (Taylor 2002; Warren 2008) in the field, to build empathetic relationships with our research subjects, and to interpret situations aesthetically ‘from-the-inside’. We were also intensely involved in the research situations; the dancers, the models and the director asked for our comments throughout the rehearsals. Also, if a model was absent from a rehearsal, Astrid replaced her in rehearsing the staging, and if a dancer could not put the music on from the other side of the rehearsal studio, Suvi would do this. In this sense, we were continuously practising our own embodied agency in the field, too.

The dancers’ and models’ bodily capital is essential to discuss to understand their current working styles and ways of using their bodies. Minna’s and Kare’s background was in the Opera ballet school from which the Finnish National Ballet hired them. During their careers spanning nearly 30 years they had performed in leading roles of classical ballet, but also worked as choreographers before retiring. Both of them had a strong background in classical ballet, and both had experienced severe injuries that forced them to think about their future in dance.

The models were all young students and part-time models participating in the show production primarily for the sake of gaining experience, and also for the fun of it.

Everyone worked on a voluntary basis, typical for creative work more generally (Eikhof and Haunschild 2006). Different from the experienced ballet dancers, the models had diverse bodily capital, different backgrounds, and differing modelling experience. Some had signed up with an agency and regularly did local shows and photo shoots, whereas others were entirely self-taught performers doing sporadic modeling projects here and there.

In practice, we conducted our analysis by ‘zooming in’ and ‘zooming out’ (Nicolini 2009) between theory and our empirical material, or by combining our experiences from the field with theoretical elaboration to reach meaningful interplays between these constructs and our contexts. As the work that we observed was multi-interpret-able, mobile, and non-verbal, this allowed us to reflect upon what we had experienced, why this was meaningful, and how we were able to represent such practices in language. We found it helpful to share experiences from the field with each other, and in this way ‘nurture’ each other analytically. Furthermore, we interacted actively with our research subjects throughout the fieldwork phase and afterwards. Although our subjects found it difficult to combine our theoretical ideas with their practice, they were genuinely interested in discussing our ideas. As such, we felt that our roles as researchers were not met with suspicion.

We use photographs to illustrate our arguments and invite the reader to sense those spaces that we experienced. Moreover, the photographs taken during the fieldwork worked as ‘triggers’ for us to deepen our interpretations of the events both off- and onstage. For example, the bodily gestures captured in the still photographs illustrate the various ways in which the bodies of the ballet dancers and the models were stuck in cultural backgrounds difficult to break free from and transform. There is, we believe, added value in showing such representations of the reality being studied. Throughout the empirical analysis, we combine photographs with descriptions from the field to augment and enrich our interpretations.

In what follows, we move on to our analysis. In particular, we focus on the following aspects: embodied agency as shaped and reformed during rehearsals, embodied agency as the interface between humans and non-humans, and the role of the script as a form of negotiation of embodied agency.

### **Embodied agency negotiated during rehearsals**

This first part of the analysis explores the ways in which models and ballet dancers negotiate their embodied agency in practice while rehearsing various forms of choreographed movements, where the agents may or may not make use of established traditions in their setting. As such, this part describes how both ballet dancers and models transform as embodied agents over time, yet sometimes struggle and negotiate various tensions in so doing.

... Of course there might be different views on, you know, like, our models are very expressive and ... lovely [laughs], well like, all models are lovely, I suppose, but you know, we also want our models to use their own creativity and showcase their own skills, like, besides mere walking so that they are perhaps less likely to be so lifeless. The point is to give everyone the space to produce knowledge of their own. (Show director, 5 November 2012)

The fascination of the fashion show appears to be in the presentation of exquisite clothing on stylized human bodies transformed into performing ‘cultural commodities’ (Mears 2008, 429) through gendered forms of dress, make-up, and footwear. As such, modelling work ‘may mirror the politics of oppression and agency’, Mears (2008; 450 – also see Entwistle and Mears 2012) writes. The quote above, from the pro-feminist director of the show during a rehearsal, illustrates her explicit will to employ embodied agency and empower the models to bravely express and mobilize themselves in the roles they embodied. Instead of her ‘controlling’ their agency significantly during the rehearsals, the director worked against fashion’s cultural conventions of presenting docile bodies on the catwalk that tend to erase strong, versatile, and individually formed movements.

Moreover, the models were encouraged to use their acting skills and bring life into the show not as quiet dolls, but rather as expressive and vivid agents breaking certain norms of a traditionally oppressive setting (Neumann 2012; Rundquist 2012). Throughout, the director was a central figure gently pushing the models to develop as embodied agents, strive to let loose, and transform over time. The rehearsed show allowed for creativity, unconventional decisions, and the ability to act relationally. This counteracted the strictly scripted movements of the ‘ordinary’ catwalk.

However, if expressive agency was important to the director, the occupational culture of modelling still affected the models’ possibilities to use or celebrate embodied agency. Despite the director’s attempts at creating a caring atmosphere and giving space to act, models are always influenced by the complexity of the norms in their context (Entwistle 2002; Mears 2008; Entwistle and Wissinger 2012). This became evident in the ways models at times expressed their uncertainty about moving more freely, or talked to Astrid about carefully watching clips on YouTube to replicate certain established styles of moving, hence carefully reproducing fashion’s coded understandings of bodily movements. As such, the negotiation of agency was still affected by an underlying desire to reach certain homogenous fashion ideals, such as the serially reproducible machine-like aesthetics of the walk, or the seemingly confident, distant, and careless attitude of parading down the catwalk in a manner that demonstrates fashion knowledge and hides nerves or the pain of high heels.

The models seemed at times doubtful about moving more freely and adding vivid gazes and fine-grained expressions to their catwalk performance. This doubt was made visible during the rehearsals, as they moved with reserve and talked suspiciously with each other about some of the non-traditional ideas of the director. A similar idea about breaking certain norms was visible in the ballet dancers’ daily work. The ballet dancers struggled with finding the courage to abandon the technical advice they had internalized during their decades in the Opera House, the home of the Finnish National Ballet. While aiming at creating an ‘unbounded’ piece of their own, liberated partly from their previous experiences of classical ballet, they were still inevitably affected by the norms of their classical background.

The history of their bodily capital materialized in the movements they produced, which clearly received its inspiration from the repertoire of classical ballet and in the ways the dancers carried out the movements, for instance through strong support of the body and high lifts of the feet, obvious characteristics of the technical ideals of classical ballet. Therefore, the movements they performed were not radical in any sense, but rather classical with a modern ‘twist’. In other words, the ballet dancers used body techniques that involved creative forms of moving without losing their normative, socially constructed background (see Mauss 1973). Therefore, the ballet dancers resisted their

classical background only partially and wanted to ‘create something novel by using the background as a strength’, as Minna commented. The connection between embodied agency and the structure of ballet organization was thus favourable and overlapping.

Indeed the ballet dancers did challenge certain traditional views on how the male or the female dancer should move according to the cultural ideals of ballet (Wainwright and Turner 2006; Aalten 2007). As rendered visible in [Figure 2](#), Minna performed sparkling, liberated movements that did not express sophisticated, even reserved, balletic ideals, and kept her long hair loose instead of having it in a tight bun. Nevertheless, Kare expressed his masculinity by carrying Minna in his arms, which is the task of the male dancer as per the traditions of classical ballet. In this way, the negotiation of embodied agency and the attempts of breaking free from cultural norms were fulfilled in a smooth harmony with the restrictive site of ballet, which was only selectively invoked in this respect.

Thus, the dancers were happy to use some of the traditional elements of classical ballet, while attempting to go beyond them. On the other hand, they faced criticism from their friend the actor in this matter (see our opening vignette) which engendered a tension between them. In this sense, the ballet dancers struggled between their own opinions and the expectations of the onstage world, and insulated ‘their inner selves from contact with the audience’ and moved ‘between cynicism and sincerity’ to find a balance between these two worlds (Goffman 1956, 12). Thus, despite receiving the critique of looking like ballerinas unable to step out of their comfort zones, after the performance the dancers were also proud of their balletic background. As Minna described: ‘So what if the classical background is still visible in our work? I’m very proud of it. I have turned it to my advantage’. Therefore, making use of their background turned out to be a form of resistance for Minna and Kare; they combined



Figure 2. ‘The dancers aim at breaking the limits of their embodied agency by creating movements that they haven’t tried out before’.

some of the traditional elements of ballet with their own choreographical ideas regardless of others' opinion.

It appears as if the dancers' need to challenge their background derived from their willingness to develop their professionalism by finally deciding themselves how to realize their unaccomplished dreams of unexplored possibilities to move. As Minna continued: 'I have my drawer full of ideas that I haven't been able to realize yet, because ballet has absorbed all of my time. Finally, I have the space to develop the ideas into pieces of my own'. These words reveal how Minna has experienced ballet to some extent as restrictive throughout her career as a ballet dancer, as all her energy had drained into reaching the 'never-achieved perfection' of this world. In other words, the organizational structure of the ballet company prevented Minna from combining her work as a top-level ballet dancer with her inner aspirations as a dancer and a choreographer.

So embodied agency is no separate entity isolated from its environment, but rather a relational phenomenon constantly negotiated on the move. In the situation captured in [Figure 3](#), the ballet dancers combined their classical background with a contemporary twist in the present production; they used movements in which their hands were bent down in an 'ugly' manner from the balletic perspective. Both dancers conducted the same movements without clear gender role divisions. In this way, they challenged the aesthetically pre-defined and highly gendered movements of the occupational setting of ballet and managed to partly break from them.

To conclude, this first part indicates that achieving freedom through embodied agency is continuously negotiated and shaped through the versatile utilization of embodied practices offstage. This negotiation builds upon a creative interplay between the structure of the occupational cultures of ballet and fashion and the personal, embodied desires of the agents: there were obstacles and deeply rooted ways of moving that



Figure 3. 'The dancers rehearsing a piece that challenges their occupational background'.

stemmed from prevailing embodied practices that the agents had to recognize and overcome on the one hand, and make use of on the other.

### **Embodied agency as the dynamic interface between human and non-human agents**

Embodied agency is created in dynamic interactions between human and non-human agents, such as the imagined audience, the structure of the occupational settings, music, and lights, as well as the artefacts of ballet (the bun) and fashion (dummies on stage) present during fashion and ballet rehearsals. [Figure 3](#) illustrates how the ballet dancers created a contemporary tenor to their performance through letting go of the artefacts of ballet, such as the tightly bound bun of the female dancer. However, letting go of the rules of how to conduct movements with a classical ballet technique was far more difficult in practice than they could admit. Routinized repetition still guided the dancers, and the characteristics of ballet moved into their freelance production. In this sense, the traditions of ballet and the contemporary elements of their freelance production were not mutually exclusive, but rather relationally intertwined in their current work.

Other human and non-human agents turned out to matter in the context of fashion, too. The following empirical episode describes a rehearsal situation where the artistic expressions gradually developed through the collaborative sharing of ideas and the experimental use of embodied agency. In this rehearsing moment, agency was achieved when several agents came together. Again, the show allowed for creativity, unconventional decisions, and the ability to act relationally. The episode, illustrated more thoroughly in [Figure 4](#), shows how embodied agency emerged in a rehearsal in



Figure 4. ‘Models waking up in a dummy forest on stage’.



Figure 5. ‘The lifeless fashion dummies backstage that the models “dance” off stage’.

interactions with other human and non-human agents such as the clothes, music, lights, and an imagined audience. Here, it is also interesting to point out the creation of a staging which aimed for a noticeable contrast between the models as vivid embodied agents and the dummies as dead, non-human objects, as depicted in [Figure 5](#).

Specifically, the staging aimed at portraying the dummies as fashion’s sad objects removed from stage by strong, expressive and happy models – empowered agents. The two episodes below further illustrate the importance of aesthetic matters in the rehearsal, such as raising the lights, sensing the ‘moods’ of the staged collection, or listening to the music while performing. Furthermore, the importance of the gaze in shaping and articulating embodied agency is evident here, as the models were supposed to experience pleasure and gain norm-breaking agency by gazing themselves:

I am at the rehearsal for the first collection to open up the fashion show. The staging aims at communicating morning sunset, spring, and lightness, where the three models perform ‘playful characters, like forest fairy meets city girl’ to quote the director. During one month of practicing and getting the performance knowledge into the bodies of the models, the choreography is collectively modified through improvising on the way. An original idea with the models ‘waking up’ from beneath cloths onstage has shifted to another idea of waking up lying on the floor, and finally, to a third version of waking up standing in a forest of lifeless fashion dummies that the models later eliminate by ‘dancing’ them off stage, thus making an explicit onstage statement towards the health-hostile fashion world: ‘The lights would rise little by little, I would like there to be smoke, too, and you would be standing onstage in this mannequin forest, first like statues, from which you come to life. This is our statement – you are not dead but instead, alive!’ the enthusiastic director verbalizes her ideas to the models. (Field note extract, 28 October 2012)

At another rehearsal, the models and the director discuss how to end the staging after removing the dummies off stage, showing models as vivid, flesh and blood human beings with expressions. ‘It feels like there is now too much emotion left onstage’, Saima (a model) ponders. ‘What if we intended to evoke a deliberate reaction in the audience?’ she suggests. The director looks excited and enthusiastic: ‘Let’s end it by you clearly making eye contact with the audience!’. They collectively come up with the

idea of the models walking out on the additional stage in a row, at the end of it, searching for someone in the audience to make eye contact with, thus revolting against the distant gaze of models that usually does not look. As the music ends, all models give a sincere, happy smile to perhaps confuse the audience only seconds before the lights go off, and the models leave the stage. (Field note extract, 7 November 2012)

By showing emotions and energy, and by gazing and smiling at the audience, the models revolted against being victims of the gaze (Mears 2008), even though they still performed as models being gazed at.

Another example from ballet illustrates how the lack of pointed shoes, a powerful non-human agent in ballet, affected the possibilities for the dancers to achieve agency. In the dancers' rehearsals, Minna and Kare practised with bare feet to feel the ground to intensively explore the bodily state of the present moment. This seemed to be intriguing especially for Minna who was used to training with pointed shoes at the National Ballet, and was now 'able to feel the ground throughout the body', as she said. Nevertheless, throughout the freelance production, Minna often moved by unintentionally stretching out her bare ankles beautifully and by so doing, carried out a traditional element of ballet and partly failed to challenge the norm deriving from her background.

In addition, the ballet dancers often took turns to rehearse certain parts of the dance piece alone, and by so doing, tried to 'separate' themselves from their own agency to feel that of the partner relationally. For example, when Kare elaborated on the solo part of the joint production, Minna followed and commented on his work beside him. This allowed some reflective space for both of them. Hence, striving towards an unattainable perfection was linked to the dancers' experience of rehearsing by empathizing with the perspective of the audience. The opinion of the audience seemed to matter for the dancers also as they asked Suvi 'what do you think about this scene?' or 'how do you find this movement?' If the audience felt satisfied, the dancers would be one step ahead towards (never-reached) perfection.

As the interaction between Minna and Kare described above is based upon an equal experience of how to negotiate embodied agency mutually, the following episode describes the relational nature of transferring the accomplishments of embodied agency from the experienced ballet dancer to dance students. It is from a morning class Minna gave before moving to work on her freelance production. It illustrates the ways in which Minna was able to create the space for the dancers' possibilities to stretch the limits of their embodied agency by encouraging these students to forget their embodied backgrounds. This matters because it formed the basis for the students' transformation in their embodied agency. When the dance students felt like having unlimited possibilities to develop themselves, they created relationally an atmosphere of genuine enthusiasm and endeavour in the rehearsal studio.

I am sitting in the corner of the rehearsal studio as the morning class starts. There are around 30 dancers coming from various backgrounds, both from classical ballet and contemporary. The class starts by warming up at the barre. Minna explains enthusiastically: 'Think about the inner surfaces of your thighs! It is a suction coming from your inner thighs, not gymnastics from your outer thighs!'

The dancers seem to take seriously every single piece of advice from the former prima ballerina. I am surprised by her ability to verbalize all the abstract meanings of embodiment she wants to convey to the dancers. 'Make your fingers and toes longer than they actually are. Stretch beyond the limits of your body!' One of the dancers in front of me

spins out her legs and looks like a living rubber band. Minna goes around the rehearsal hall stopping from time to time next to the dancers to demonstrate the ways in which the warming-up movements can be sensed throughout the body. (Field note extract, 21 September 2012)

The empirical episode above illustrates movement not only being unlimitedly expressive, but also culturally negotiated and shaped (Noland 2009) in every single moment in the dancers' everyday work. Thus, day-to-day embodied practices derive from culturally laden assumptions of how to move in a specific situation. The students' motivation to try their best emerged from Minna's ability to give them an impression of having a free will to achieve embodied agency, although it did not fully actualize in the rehearsal. The gazes of the self and the other humans (colleagues and teachers) and non-human agents (mirrors) constructed the dance students' embodied agency and the experience of a never-reached bodily perfection; there was always something that could be done a little better in the eyes of some of the human or non-human agents. To keep up a positive spirit in the rehearsal studio, Minna advised the students to widen their possibilities to use the routinized movements in a vivid, relaxed way:

I didn't mean to swing like a loose piece of macaroni. Be strong and relaxed at the same time. The ideal is to be partly supported, partly relaxed. Try to find both sides of you at the same moment. (Field note extract, 21 September 2012)

The empirical episode above describes the meaning of using the body diversely to develop one's embodied agency. This related to using 'different qualities of movement', as Minna emphasized. Nevertheless, the dance students were only partly able to widen their embodied agency due to their various backgrounds as dancers. This became evident in the daily rehearsal situations, as some of the dancers seemed to struggle with the technical details of the movements, while others performed them smoothly. Therefore, the occupational structure of the dancers' embodied background, a strong non-human agent, affected the ongoing negotiation of their embodied agency by allowing some of the dancers to make more use of it, while the others remained 'prisoners' of their backgrounds.

In addition to the various human and non-human agents involved in the negotiation of embodied agency described above, the script manifested as an important bodily 'guideline' for embodied agency to emerge and be negotiated. In what follows, we describe its nature and role in this process.

### **The script as a bodily framework of embodied agency**

In this final part of the analysis, we illustrate how the script forms a basis for the negotiation of embodied agency in our two contexts, and how it turned out to be one of the most important non-human agents in both contexts. We view the script not only as a mental structure (e.g. Abelson 1981) but as a bodily project largely influenced by the structure of the occupational settings of ballet and fashion modelling. The embodied agency of both ballet dancers and fashion models culminates in the onstage performance, where the overall performance grows out of extensively practised work offstage. Repetition allows for variations of movements and thus enables embodied agency to take various forms and expressions both offstage and onstage. Moreover, it is a part of their structure that leads to the formation of a script.

As the offstage performance proceeds in line with the formal, mentally planned and written script, mutually created by the agents involved, the focus shifts towards getting beyond the script to a more profound level of working on it, where not only what looks and sounds good, but also what feels good matters in order to be able to let go and get beyond the script's structural expectations. Therefore, the connection between embodied agency and organizational structure becomes blurred. At the end, the script is formed relationally by moving bodies during the onstage performance.

As previously discussed, the models were encouraged to actively participate in inventing, improving, and changing the script both verbally and kinesthetically: 'Always come up with any suggestions on anything, really!' the director said at the different rehearsals. The script deliberately left a lot to the models' subjective interpretation. In the ballet context, the script worked similarly as a means for creating relational leeway for the materialization of embodied agency onstage. Minna encapsulated this by saying that 'we cannot plan this too much in advance, we must leave some creative space for the live performance to make it genuine onstage'. Here, it appears vital to point out the presence of coincidences, improvisation, and happenstances in achieving embodied agency. This dimension has been largely overlooked in the existing literature. Specifically, embodied agency actualized spontaneously onstage as the dancers moved by following the formal structure of the script and by adding their own bodily gestures and sensuous interpretations of each other to it. In this way, the script became a relationally embodied tool for the negotiation of embodied agency in which the structure of the occupational setting affected its formation.

Another episode from the fashion context illustrates the careful yet ongoing negotiation of the script in a rehearsal situation emerging in relation to both humans and non-humans, as things momentarily fell into place and made sense. The episode below illustrates the centrality of the models' input in negotiating the script, as it also renders visible the influence of culturally laden ideas of the script in creating styles of walking that conform to formal expressions and movements in fashion. Again, despite striving to be unconventional, the desired movements of this staging were



Figure 6. 'The "swanlike pride" of the models onstage'.

scripted to look soft, gracious, and sophisticated, typical of ‘feminized’ fashion performance. Specifically, the models were to perform ‘swanlike pride’, captured in [Figure 6](#). Although the models were requested to ‘use the space grandly’, the episode illustrates a rehearsal situation still heavily reproducing exaggeratedly ‘feminine’ catwalk (Entwistle and Mears 2012):

I am at a fashion show rehearsal in the evening at a local school. Prior to the rehearsal, we gather around the director [Jutta], who describes the feelings and the choreography of the staged collection, inspired by the Swan of Tuonela, a tone poem by the Finnish composer Jean Sibelius. She depicts the feeling as a ‘David Lynch film’ that has an ‘expectant feeling’ to it, and the body language to communicate it onstage as ‘swanlike pride’, in which the models are to perform as swans in a limbo stage, between dead and alive by appearing onstage peacefully one by one.

The rehearsing begins, and the models begin to slowly walk around the floor in improvising circles, making stops, walking, and making stops again. They do not make any eye contact with each other, but appear to carefully glance at each other’s movements while walking. ‘Make the stops look soft and dreamy’ Jutta directs. ‘Shall we then give a trivial expression and blank essence?’ Elena (a model) asks. ‘A certain pride, otherwise pretty free from gestures and facial expressions. No additional gestures, and a calm walk.’ Jutta answers. ‘What about the poses?’ Elena continues. ‘Do them like a frozen statue.’ Jutta replies. The rehearsing continues, accompanied by ‘inspirational’ music. Irina (another model) makes a suggestion on the final phase of the choreography, and Jutta seems sincerely happy to receive input from the models.

Jutta: ‘Yeah! It works like this! (excited voice, her entire face “bursts” into a smile) Good Irina!’ (gives credit to the model contributing to the staging).

Mona (model): ‘That also felt good.’

Jutta: ‘Let’s put it on the back burner. It looks good. You look so grand and beautiful. Oh my!’ (still smiling, satisfied and proud voice).

Iro (model): ‘... just imagine it in those white suits!’ (excited tone).

Jutta: ‘And with the lights! And with the shadows of your suits!’ (Field note extract, 25 October 2012)

In a similar manner, the formal script of the production of the two ballet dancers still followed the tradition of ballet culture, an important but invisible non-human agent in their embodied work. Both Minna and Kare had their solos as unquestioned parts of the piece, and the performance culminated in a shared part at the end, following the structure of a traditional ballet piece. Without the script internalized from their balletic background they might have lost the fine-grained adjustments of their embodied agency which they could now actualize. Therefore, ballet was only selectively invoked in the sense that Minna and Kare could make use of their background in their current freelance production by having something to be attached to during the difficult moments of the production. In fact, the mutually negotiated script became a mixture of their classical ballet background and the bodily sensations of their current working style, and this enabled totally new forms of embodied agency to emerge.

While the models continued rehearsing their walking, the ballet dancers moved from the rehearsal studio to the theatre in Helsinki's city centre where the performances would take place in a few weeks:

It is only one week to the first night and the dancers start rehearsing on the stage. Various people come and go during the rehearsal. They give advice to the dancers concerning the sequence of the movements. I wonder how they are able to internalize all the detailed, subtle comments. It seems they absorb all the comments but attend only to a part of them.

Finally they go through the whole piece, videotape it and analyse the taped section from the small screen of the video camera:

Minna: 'Yes! Our movement is finally filled with natural nuances! We need to give this video to the light designer. I think our working has developed more subtly' (stirs eagerly on her seat).

Marlene (Kare's wife): 'I agree but still you should make differences between the first and the final parts of the piece. I didn't notice the differences between them' (determined tone).

Kare: 'We need to think about this wholeness during the weekend. Maybe the different emotions are not transmitted clearly enough to the audience' (looks pensive). (Field note extract, 9 October 2012)

Getting beyond the surface of the script to create a genuine onstage performance is far from simple and always risky: the dancers could never predict the reactions that the piece would generate in the spectator. The only way to cope with their tricky relationship with the script was to dare to improvise, and refine the movements continuously and endlessly towards a 'never-achieved perfection', which derived from the aesthetic judgements made of the embodied practices of traditional ballet. As Gherardi (2009, 545) writes, 'practices are constantly refined through the taste-making process', and dance easily illustrates this dynamic tension between repetitive, routine actions, and sensuous improvisation. As Minna stated: 'It's about a sense of professional pride as I have an endless drive for refining the movements and impressions, knowing at the same time that it may not make any difference to the audience'. Therefore, the constant refinement of embodied practices derives from Minna's subjective sense of what she considers 'aesthetically fitting within the community', even if these practices are then contested and questioned by other embodied agents in the field (Gherardi 2009, 535–6).

Figure 7, taken from the dancers' dress rehearsal, captures the serene harmony of the onstage performance created through the non-human agents involved in the rehearsal and through the sensuous movements of the bodily based script. Even if the ballet dancers in the Figure 7 seem to be fully satisfied with the current form of their embodied agency, the shaping of it continues relationally during the onstage performance between them and the non-human agents, such as the script, present onstage.

In ballet and fashion, there is a constant need for renewal. The script is a framework constantly and relationally negotiated in and through the moving bodies. Unsurprisingly, the final version of the script is always a surprise for the performers and the audience present. This interplay creates a fascinating vista to better understand the relational quality of embodied agency and organizing more broadly. In this sense, the interactions between the structural movements of the script, the spontaneous movements of the



Figure 7. ‘The “serene” harmony created through the script’.

embodied agents with their individual embodied histories, and the agencies of the various other humans and non-humans present become a means through which the fashion models and ballet dancers’ embodied agency is dynamically renewed and fulfilled (or not).

## Discussion

Drawing on the lived experiences of the two ballet dancers and the dynamics between the director and the models working towards an ‘atypical’ fashion show, this paper has explored the careful negotiation and subtlety of embodied agency in two different empirical contexts significantly shaped by a variety of embodied conventions. Specifically, we have followed the moment-to-moment practices of rehearsing off- and onstage in two traditionally expressive contexts orientated towards the careful presentation of bodily perfection onstage. Despite an eternal strive for a never-reached perfection tightly tied to embodied regimes, norms, and cultural traditions present here, we have recognized attempts at breaking free from these norms.

Specifically, we have illustrated the ongoing negotiation of embodied agency of ballet dancers and models as a complicated, processual matter always occurring in motion. Both fashion and ballet rely on the versatile use of embodied agency and exaggerated movements in creating spectacular performances. Both include ever-changing and verbal phases towards non-verbal idealized bodily perfection onstage bound up with high unpredictability, surprise, and improvisation. The existing literature on embodied practices and agency (see e.g. Noland 2009; Michel 2011; Sutherland and Ladkin 2013) still says surprisingly little about *how* embodied agency practically comes about or not. Nor has the literature recognized the interplay between off- and onstage negotiation of embodied agency to the extent this paper has. By approaching a dynamic site of interaction on a micro-level the way we have here, we might actually gain deeper insights into dimensions of agency and organizing usually overlooked or taken-for-granted. Specifically, by following fine-grained, embodied processes, and gestures

continuously ‘under construction’ and ‘on the move’, we have developed our understanding regarding the dynamics of embodied agency over time. By so doing, we have also studied ongoing exercising of agency as the coming together of a variety of agents in less disembodied and hopefully more emphatic, inclusive, and dynamic ways than before.

First, we illustrated how the creation of certain frames of freedom for using embodied agency is created over time through repetitive rehearsing offstage. Our two empirical cases turned out to be illustrative examples of understanding the ways in which both ballet dancers and models aimed at challenging the norms of their world, but only partly succeeded by their own, subjective criteria. Despite possibilities for using embodied agency relatively freely, agency is to some extent always shaped by a larger cultural background. While deliberately attempting to break norms, the contexts of ballet and fashion were still regulated by the norms, traditions, structures, and institutions of their respective cultures (Barnes 2000; Entwistle and Mears 2012) and, to some extent, reproduced them. Breaking the norms involved some continuity and creative borrowing from the past and actually did not imply a complete rupture with it. This creative borrowing was actualized in the movements of the ballet dancers, mixing the technique of the ballet and the dancers’ personal, and underlying ideas of how they wanted to move, as well as in the minimalist catwalk combined with vivid gaze of the fashion models.

Second, we described how embodied agency intersects with other human and non-human agents in our two contexts. The director in the fashion context and the professional actor and the wife of the dancer in the ballet context turned out to be powerful human agents that shaped the negotiation of embodied agency in line with the models and ballet dancers’ own personal desires. In addition, other human and non-human agents in both contexts, such as the script, the gaze of the imaginary audience, the props, the music, and the dresses moulded the embodied agency of the ballet dancers and models so that they could or could not transform and develop it further. Paying attention to the entanglements between these human and non-human agents is significant for us, simply because organizational reality is inherently dynamic and complex. ‘It is through various humans, artifacts, technologies, spatial elements and texts that an organization can be said to exist and act’, write Vasquez and Cooren (2012, 192) and we fully agree.

Third, we have highlighted the relevance of the bodily side of the script, a significant non-human agent in ballet and fashion. Specifically, we have foregrounded the concept of script as vital to negotiating embodied agency. The script has been surprisingly overlooked in organizational studies from an embodied point of view. The script, we suggest, gives structure to the production and allows the mobile leeway through which embodied agency emerges and transforms. Nevertheless, the script is a loosely followed structure in the negotiation of embodied agency. In the end, it is formed and negotiated in the spatial, temporal moment onstage. This is significant because it illustrates how embodied agency is always on the move: it never finishes or reaches its ‘final’ form.

Methodologically, our study showed how two ethnographic contexts can be combined in practice to shed further light on a subtle and ambiguous phenomenon; this is in line with newer perspectives on organizational ethnographies, such as sensory ethnography (Pink 2009) and reflexive ethnography (Davies 2008) that treat research as a collective endeavour, acknowledging the situating of the researcher, their relationships with other agents in the field and the sensuous dimensions of doing ethnographic

research. The aspects of embodied agency that we described here would not have emerged as important without combining the two contexts. In other words, several complementary aspects of embodied agency were brought into light as we worked collectively.

As researchers, we are practising embodied agency and the knowledge we are co-producing is inevitably different from what either of us would create alone. This still begs the question of whether this is advantageous: our ‘co-production’ raised critical questions of how to combine two contexts by retaining vivid descriptions of both contexts, and why this was useful. Unfortunately, the ideals of a reflexive ‘co-production’ did not fully actualize; we had to edit down some rich descriptions for the sake of clear argument and, at the end, we found it difficult to make the two contexts ‘dance together’. Based on the interplay between the two contexts, however, we do show the richness and complexity of embodied agency. While the ballet dancers were both performers and choreographers of their own production, they had more possibilities to make use of the interplay between embodied agency and the occupational setting of ballet than the models in the fashion show, who still appeared more bounded by the other human and non-human agents in their context.

## **Conclusion**

A deeper, more nuanced, and developed understanding of contemporary work needs to include detailed, processual, and aesthetic analyses of embodied practices. This paper has considered embodied agency as one aperture for understanding embodied practices in organizational life more thoroughly. Embodied agency, we argue, is significant for understanding the particularities of embodied practices that are negotiated in an ongoing manner, and the detailed bodily interactions in social and organizational life that matter to us more broadly. These emerging, co-created detailed practices involving struggles and limitations, tensions, and experiences of partial freedom have remained largely undertheorized in organization studies.

We have illustrated embodied agency as a relational phenomenon, being shaped and negotiated between different human and non-human agents, and constrained in the sense the agents struggle to let go of tradition and established norms on the one hand, and making use of these on the other. This insight contributes to further developing our understandings of the transformative body within the social sciences beyond the routinized, the disciplined, and the controlled. Specifically, the expressive body that emerges in the dynamic interactions that we have explored tells us more about the relational and embodied dimensions of organizational life. Meanwhile, whereas embodied agency might enable the achievement of freedom to a certain extent at work, the embodied norms and practices of the working community hold back its intensity and create a supportive force in its background in different ways depending on the organizational context.

While our study has focused on the contexts of fashion and dance, the relevance of embodied agency is undeniable in other contexts. All professions and workers are embodied. We need to better understand the transformative body in order to recognize those means through which deeply rooted embodied practices may be reformed, challenged, broken, made use of or not, and how organizational agents in this way may or may not gain increased flexibility. In this way, embodied agents could potentially move towards an organizational culture in which the ability to act relationally by combining

traditions of the occupational settings with the agents' own personal ideas in a divergent atmosphere is supported and appreciated.

Organizational life is also filled with humans and non-humans that influence our actions and affect us. We have illustrated how the social and organizational structures, objects, people, spaces, and their complex relationships shape constructions and experiences of agency. We believe that the recognition of these neglected aspects of culturally based embodied agency that we have described will open up new stages in the conceptual development of embodied agency and practices at work.

Finally, this study has illustrated embodied agency as a phenomenon constantly expressed and materialized in interactions on the move, never reaching stability. Despite recognizing the restricted, context-dependent nature of embodied agency, we argue that achieving it is not completely predetermined. The wider potential of this study lies in this core finding: as human activity and embodied interaction in organizations is always dynamic, insecure, mobile, and relational, understandings of organizational life need to consider analyses of the particularities of these embodied practices, and move in a direction where these dimensions remain 'alive'. Keeping this in mind, it would be thrilling to explore these issues further in other empirical contexts, and bring new, fresh openings to the discussion of embodied agency.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

### Notes

1. We define embodied practices in line with Davis (1997, 15) as the everyday activities of embodied agents 'in concrete social, cultural and historical contexts'.
2. For instance, agency has been defined as 'the capacity to take action' (Tourish 2014, 80), as a sense of power (Stones 2005) or as 'the ability to engage in purposeful action' (Sherwin 2009, 145).

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## SUB-STUDY 2

### CREATIVE BODIES ON THE MOVE: EXPLORING THE AESTHETIC DIMENSIONS OF COLLABORATIVE CREATIVITY IN DANCE

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#### ABSTRACT

This paper explores collaborative creativity as an aesthetic activity and describes how collaborative creativity is negotiated between embodied agents in sensory-based ways. We argue that collaborative creativity is actualised in an aesthetic interplay through which dancers are able or unable to fulfil themselves as creative, embodied agents. To support our argument, we present observations from an ethnographic study of dance. We identify three aesthetic dimensions: emotional, intuitive and improvisational, through which collaborative creativity emerges. The findings have significance for how we understand the sensory-based, experiential foundation of collaborative creativity and treat it, not only as a mental, but also a bodily project.

Keywords: collaborative creativity, aesthetics, embodiment, ethnography, professional dance

## INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to uncover fresh insights about the aesthetic dimension of collaborative creativity among organisational scholars, and by recognising its sensory-based dimensions, develop managerial theory and practice in a more aesthetically sensitive direction. Creativity, in keeping with Sawyer's (2012) sociocultural definition, refers to the generation of a product that is judged as novel and appropriate, useful, or valuable by a suitably knowledgeable social group. Traditionally, creativity has been thought to arise in an individual's mind, even if other individuals and the social, historical and cultural context influence it (Montuori and Purser, 1995; Glaveanu, 2010). However, in this paper creativity is seen as a truly collaborative activity, often studied under the 'collaborative' or 'collective creativity' label, seeing it as emerging from complex interactions between different agents (for example, Sonnenburg, 2004; Hargadon and Bechky, 2006; Sawyer and DeZutter, 2009).

In organisation studies, artistic contexts have been used to develop our understanding of many creative aspects of leadership and organisational life. For example, jazz (Barrett, 1998; Seddon, 2004) and theatre (Sawyer, 2003; Sawyer and DeZutter, 2009) have been studied in order to gain an understanding of collaborative creativity within organisations. However, the aesthetic foundation of creative collaboration has received only rather modest interest. The bodily dimensions of leadership-related themes have been studied, for example, in the contexts of theatre (Biehl-Missal, 2010), symphony orchestras (Koivunen and Wennes, 2011), expert organisations (Ropo and Parviainen, 2001) and dance (Ropo and Sauer 2008). To complement the knowledge produced by the studies mentioned above, the purpose of this paper is to explore the aesthetic dimensions of collaborative creativity through the mundane work carried out by professional dancers. We view aesthetics, including senses, emotion and memory, and embodiment, as deriving from felt meanings in and through the body (see Ropo and Sauer, 2008) as epistemological perspectives. In other words, for us, aesthetics and embodiment are *a way of knowing* that involves embodied and sensuous sources of knowledge.

We base this paper on the idea of collaborative creativity as a collective social phenomenon that is derived from the agents' shared gestural patterns (Bazin, 2013: 378) and sensory experiences of one another (compare Hansen, Ropo, and Sauer 2007; Koivunen and Wennes, 2011) and emerging from the constant negotiation of meanings, ideas and interpretations of one another in *sensory-based* ways. More specifically, we view the nature of collaboration in the workplace as an active interplay between verbal and non-verbal communication, consisting of the dynamics of fine-grained gestures and sensuous interactions to which we seldom pay explicit attention in the practice of our everyday routines (see Bazin, 2013: 378). Although language plays an important role in the way non-verbal interactions and signs function, and vice versa, there are situations in which words fail and in which the embodied interaction complements the inadequacies of language.

We find dance to be a natural context in which to explore collaborative creativity from an aesthetic perspective, as the work of professional dancers consists of the fine-grained bodily interactions among them, thus making the sensuous characteristics of collaboration easy to identify. This paper describes how collaborative creativity is negotiated *aesthetically* between dancers and other agents by identifying three aesthetic dimensions through which

collaborative creativity actualises in the mundane work of the dancers. The findings of the paper have significance for how we understand the concept of collaborative creativity, not only as a 'headship', developing through mental structures and thinking, but also as a 'bodyship', derived from sensory-based experiences with one another. Moreover, the paper shows how the context of dance offers a unique platform for developing managerial theory and practice<sup>1</sup> by describing the aesthetic aspects of collaborative creativity. Next, we will explain the main theoretical concepts of the paper: collaborative creativity and aesthetics.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### Collaborative creativity as a conceptual framework

It is generally agreed that creativity, traditionally seen as an individual-level phenomenon (Montuori and Purser, 1995), is largely affected by social processes and dynamics (Amabile, 1996). The concepts of group or team creativity are used to refer to creativity taking place in a group context, while collaborative (e.g. Kenny, 2008) or collective (e.g. Hargadon and Beckhy, 2006; Sawyer and DeZutter, 2009) creativity addresses creativity that emerges from *social interaction* and results in outcomes that cannot be traced back to any single individual. Although the definitional boundaries are far from clear, group creativity, as understood in this paper, indicates creativity carried out by individuals, although the social and situational environment can influence it. Collaborative or collective creativity, on the other hand, is understood as creativity constructed and produced by the social system, which generates creativity *collectively* (Watson, 2007).

Collaborative creation is often both emotionally and cognitively charged and personally meaningful (John-Steiner, 2000), and it involves the construction of subjectivities and relationships in addition to the construction of ideas and artefacts (Littleton and Miell, 2004). The aspects that turn simple cooperation into collaboration include motivation and relationships of trust, intimacy and mutual vulnerability (Storey and Joubert, 2004), as well as complementarity, tension and emergence (Moran and John-Steiner, 2004). In a truly collaborative encounter, the motivational energy resources can multiply and develop into a joint intrinsic motivation. In a mutually trusting relationship (Sawyer, 1999; Seddon, 2004; Storey and Joubert, 2004), giving and receiving constant feedback and even difficult criticism to and from your partners may result in a stronger engagement with the task at hand (Moran and John-Steiner, 2004). Trust is also central to intimacy and mutual vulnerability, as in a process of intensive collaboration where mutual intimacy develops – trust allows partners to be vulnerable (Storey and Joubert, 2004).

Complementarity refers to the heterogeneity of the collaborators regarding their perspectives, expertise, working methods, temperaments and talents (John-Steiner, 2000; Moran and John-Steiner, 2004), which causes different dynamics, tensions or even conflicts to emerge, but also allows for new insights and combinations. There can be tension between staying in the comfort

<sup>1</sup> In this paper we apply the relational understanding of leadership (e.g. Koivunen and Wennes, 2011) and recognise its collaborative and embodied nature (e.g. Ladkin, 2010; Ladkin and Taylor, 2010).

zone and experimenting or risk-taking, tension between different ideas and views, and tension between different working styles; however, the idea of collaboration is not avoiding tension, but cultivating it (Moran and John-Steiner, 2004). The last aspect – emergence – refers to the fact that the result of a successful collaboration can lead to outcomes that could not have been predicted by the additive power of the individuals (Sawyer, 2012).

Creativity in collaboration is enhanced by the development of collective consciousness (Kenny, 2008), which can be defined as a collective mode of awareness emerging from an intuitively felt sense of each other and the world. In this paper, we want to emphasise the aesthetic dimensions of collaboration in the creation of such a collective consciousness. Therefore, in creating a dance performance, bodily presence becomes as important as mental presence.

### An aesthetic view of collaborative creativity

In organisation studies, the ever-growing interest in aesthetics since the early 1990s has produced a wide range of literature (Strati, 1999; Linstead and Höpfl, 2000; Hancock, 2005; Ropo and Sauer, 2008; Gherardi et al., 2013), exploring the non-rational dimensions of organisational life, in which questions of sensory experiences and the intuitive, imaginative nature of everyday life are at the heart. Despite often focusing on physical organisational artefacts (see for example Strati, 1999), aesthetics can be widely understood as the epistemological approach focused on sensory-based knowledge, which is based on felt experiences and involves perception, imagination, intuition (Ewenstein and Whyte, 2007; Ropo and Sauer, 2008) and learning through the body (Viteritti, 2013; Küpers and Pauleen, 2015).

Alongside the growing interest in the aesthetic side of organisations, recent turns to embodiment (for example, Hassard et al., 2000; Dale, 2001) and affection (for example, Blackman and Venn, 2010; Küpers, 2014) in organisational studies have fostered an expanding range of literature around the role of the body at work (for example, Hindmarch and Pilnick, 2007; Viteritti, 2014). Although the relationship between aesthetics and embodiment is largely overlapping in organisational study literature (see for example Ropo and Sauer, 2008; Bazin, 2013), in this paper, we view aesthetics and embodiment as concepts that complement each other. In our view, aesthetics involves senses, emotion and memory, while embodiment is about felt meanings in and through the body. Together, these two concepts form an epistemological perspective that highlights the experiential way of knowing. Therefore, aesthetics involves bodily gestures, experiences and sensations, and thus, would not exist without the body, whereas the body receives and transmits aesthetic experiences, emotions, sensations and gestures. As Ropo and Sauer (2008: 567) write, 'leadership is socially and *bodily constructed through senses*.' Here, we look at the bodies as groups (Ropo and Sauer, 2008: 567) and argue that collaborative creativity emerges from embodied situations between different agents in the field.

The embodied founding of creativity has been studied by only a few scholars (see Banaji, Burn, and Buckingham, 2010; Tanggaard, 2012), who view creativity as a collective social practice. In line with these studies, Stierand (2014) explores the development of the creativity of world-renowned haute cuisine chefs from a practice-based view. He argues that the development of the master chefs' high-level creativity occurs through 'a stronger embodiment of the tools and

techniques that are used as sensors to the outside world' (Stierand, 2014: 14). In his study of architects, Styhre (2011) concludes that architects draw on both cognitive and embodied resources in conducting their creative work. In addition, Rosa, Qualls, and Fuentes (2008) recognise the importance of the body in creativity, and suggest that bodily involvement in problem solving and idea generation produces additional knowledge, which may invoke unexpected combinations.

To conclude, all these studies mentioned above attach the concepts of aesthetics and embodiment to the exploration of creativity, but still leave it as a side issue. In this paper, we bring these concepts to the centre of focus to further our understanding of creativity from a collaborative perspective. Furthermore, we take into account the role of material artefacts (e.g. mirrors, set pieces, the tight buns in the hair of female ballet dancers) in the ways that collaborative creativity is developed in the daily life of professional dancers. In other words, we view embodied agents, not as separate entities from the world around them, but more in close relation to all of the physical objects, thus recognising their connection to 'multiple materialities' (Dale and Latham, 2014: 166; see also Viteritti, 2013).

## METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach of this paper is ethnographic, which we highlight as a process of experiencing, interpreting and representing knowledge about organisations based on the ethnographers' own experiences (see Pink, 2011: 22; Van Maanen, 2011). We view ethnography as an especially suitable research approach to studying collaborative creativity from an aesthetic perspective, as it demands the researcher's presence in the field to capture all the fine-grained interactions of the agents.

The empirical material of this paper is derived from two separate freelance dance productions in which one of the researchers conducted fieldwork. The researcher who conducted the fieldwork had personally practiced dance, both ballet and contemporary, for decades and was thus partly 'in the know' about offstage and onstage behaviours when entering the field. Therefore, the personal background of the researcher facilitated her access to the field and allowed her to quickly feel like an 'insider' (see Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). Knowing the practices of the dance contexts also enabled the researcher to use her 'aesthetic sensitivity' (see Warren, 2008) when gathering the research material in the field. Moreover, the other researcher also has personal experience in the field of dance and attended a few of the rehearsals of the freelance production to gain an understanding of the mundane situations in the field.

The first of the dance productions was produced and performed by two retired ballet dancers – a male and a female. Both dancers had worked for the Finnish National Ballet for over 20 years and retired at the same time in June 2012. This new step in their careers can be seen as fruitful grounds for collaborative creativity between them; on the one hand, the tradition of classical ballet provides a common language for the two dancers, while on the other hand, the rules of classical ballet no longer apply, and therefore, they are free, and even required, to create their own styles of working.

The second dance production is a freelance performance in which the choreographer worked with five dancers, several musicians and other agents – such as the composer, the makeup artist

and the technicians – involved in the production. The premiere of this production was in August 2014. The choreographer had graduated from the London Contemporary Dance School two decades ago, and after that, had performed in various productions around the world. The dancers of the current production came from different educational backgrounds, which created tensions during rehearsals. For example, there was one dancer who had danced in the Finnish National Ballet for several years, while another had educated himself in the contemporary dance field. Therefore, the different backgrounds sometimes conflicted and affected the ways in which the dancers were able to express themselves through the movements and work in a collaborative production.

The empirical material from both productions described above includes participant observation, photographs, video clips and numerous informal conversations with dancers and other participants in the field. We decided to concentrate on these two settings because we believe the material collected is suitable to illustrate how collaborative creativity appears as a relational, sensuous and embodied activity in these two dance productions. In this paper, we use photographs, not only as illustrations from the field to support our analysis, but also as ‘transmitters of the atmospheres’ (Biehl-Missal, 2013: 356) to give the readers the possibility to immerse themselves in extracts of the actual observation situations.

The analysis started with a close reading of the field notes, during which the researcher who conducted the fieldwork formed descriptions related to the topic of this study. After she had written the descriptions from the field, the two researchers discussed them together several times. With the help of an intensive exchange of thoughts, three aesthetic dimensions of collaborative creativity were identified reflexively from the research material using one of the researcher’s in-depth familiarity with the dancers’ lived experiences (see Berger, 2015: 230), yet through the lenses of our existing theoretical understanding. More specifically, we formed the dimensions by circulating between the theory and the research material and by actively discussing our thoughts and interpretations. Therefore, our focus was on the rich empirical material, but the literature on creativity inevitably guided our interpretations of it. After the dimensions had been formed, we elaborated on them and categorised their key aspects to further develop our analysis.

In addition to the written research material, the photographs played an important role in our paper. We used the photographs to look at what kinds of aesthetic atmospheres they conveyed (compare Biehl-Missal, 2013). We found that the visual analysis was an excellent tool to complement the overall analysis of our paper. In the ensuing section, we describe the three aesthetic dimensions of collaborative creativity that we formed based on the intensive fieldwork phase.

## DANCING BETWEEN AESTHETIC DIMENSIONS OF COLLABORATIVE CREATIVITY

Surrounded by various emotional states and loadings

The first aesthetic dimension we identified based on our ethnographic material was that of emotional loadings, by which we refer to the various emotions that are shared through non-

verbal interactions and fine-grained gestures (see Bazin, 2013: 378) among the dancers and other agents in the field. We view these emotions as fundamentally embodied and partly deriving from intensive collaboration. The dancers aim at awakening emotions in the audience and in the other agents onstage. Furthermore, intensive collaborative work is always emotionally charged, as the dancers need to be fully present both offstage and onstage and sensitive towards the thoughts, feelings and movements of their colleagues. In addition to these viewpoints, the dancers are often confronted with the challenge of mixing up their personal and very intimate emotions with their work. The episode below captures the emotional foundation of the dancers' collaborative work in their rehearsals:

The choreographer stands in the middle of the rehearsal hall, surrounded by five young dancers who listen to her carefully. She seems to be excited and tries to create a relaxed atmosphere by describing her ideas behind the current production. "So, originally, this is supposed to be a solo, but let's make it a duet now. The story attaches easily to the partnership problematic of postmodern times." The dancers nod and seemingly try to catch the world the choreographer is explaining.

The choreographer continues: "Let's divide you into pairs now!" The dancers start joking and one of them suggests, "Let's do it like it was an Argentinean tango. No eye contact ... just the feeling." He grabs the female dancer, and they take tango steps. The other dancers are doubled up with laughter. The group comes quickly to a mutual understanding about the division of the pairs and waits for the choreographer to give them the next step to follow. "Is it like my world in which I am moving, or our joint world?" a dancer asks. "Let it be your world of imagination, although it will be expressed collaboratively," the choreographer replies. (Field note extract and notes from ethnographic diary, freelance dance production, December 1, 2013)

In the empirical episode above, the emotionally charged movements emerged through the mutual interpretation of the given emotional state and the music. The choreographer's verbally described ideas and emotional states were shared and interpreted bodily by the dancers, and they were the starting point for the collaborative creation of the scene. Another emotional aspect of the dancers' work is related to the fact that they work both mentally and physically close to each other and are required to reveal their authentic selves to one another. Therefore, the boundaries between work and home become difficult to draw, as a retired ballet dancer describes:

"We share everything with each other. One would notice if someone had some worries. In this work, it is impossible to hide. You have to be fully who you are." (Field note extract, retired ballet dancers' production, September 6, 2012)

As the quote above reveals, the fine-grained signs reveal the dancer's current emotional state to other agents offstage. Therefore, trust in a partner's capabilities is central to collaborative work, as marginality and self-doubt often seem to characterise creative people. For example, in the freelance production of the choreographer and the five dancers, the choreographer once

said to the researcher: “I really wonder why I’m actually doing this, and am I good enough? Only a few performances and such a huge job. This work is just crazy!” Despite these kinds of challenges and self-doubt, the choreographer trusted herself as well as the interpretational capability of the dancers. The dancers also had to rely on the choreographer’s vision to be able to immerse themselves fully in the emotional state created in the shared understanding during the rehearsal. In this way, collaborative creativity became materialised through the emotional loadings of different agents offstage.

Nevertheless, there are differences between group dynamics and the history of the collaborative processes that guide the emotionality during the dancers’ working days. For example, while the freelance production was only assembled recently and the dancers had not worked together before, the two retired ballet dancers had mutual, lifelong backgrounds in the Finnish National Ballet. Therefore, compared to the freelance dance production of five dancers and the choreographer, the patterns of partnerships were more obviously present in various emotional dynamics in the retired ballet dancers’ production. For example, their caring, respectful attitudes towards each other and unashamed showing of different moods were evidently present in their work. As one of the retired ballet dancers commented:

“I know his [the dance partner’s] temperament very well, and we complement each other perfectly. We have a common sense of humour, and his ideas stimulate my work when I’m stuck with my thoughts.” (Field note extract, retired ballet dancers’ production, September 7, 2012)

As is visible in the quote above, the dancers complemented each other’s creativity by sensing each other’s emotional state in order to combine their ideas into a coherent whole that unfolded truly collaboratively. Another example of the dancers’ demand to immerse themselves into the right emotional state to enhance collaborative creativity in their day-to-day work is the ‘bed scene’ (see Picture 1), which was one of the most emotionally charged scenes of the retired ballet dancers’ production. As Picture 1 renders clear, the empathy and the loss of oneself in the emotional state was possible without a ‘real’ bed and other complete set pieces, which were important material elements and which the dancers did not have until a few days before the premiere. For the dancers, emotions worked as a means of overcoming the imperfectness of the performance and enabled collaborative creativity to emerge despite the messy work offstage.

As the empirical episodes above illustrate, the different emotions of the agents ignited and guided their creative work. Creativity in a collaborative dance production is therefore not an individual ability, but a collaboratively shared, sensory-based project that is charged with a cluster of emotions. The emotionally charged nature of the dancers’ work makes collaboration challenging on the one hand, but it becomes a valuable resource of their creativity on the other. Therefore, the various emotions that are shared aesthetically between the agents and the interplay among the various emotional states become an essential platform for the emergence of collaborative creativity.



Picture 1: The dancers immersing themselves in emotional states without complete set pieces offstage.

### Intuition as a solitary and shared experience

When working between various emotional states and loadings, the dancers involved in the two productions used their intuition in handling the various emotions to develop the dance pieces in a creative spirit. Intuition, defined here as an instinctive, affectively charged ability that arises ‘through rapid, non-conscious, and holistic associations’ (see Dane and Pratt, 2007: 33), has a strongly sensory-driven basis, and therefore, became observable through the spontaneous, nuanced variations of the movements that were created both separately and collaboratively among the dancers offstage.

Through intensive listening and collaboration, the dancers of both productions ended up with a mutual, creative outcome. In this paper, we call this phenomenon ‘shared intuition’, referring to the partly unconscious yet shared and fundamentally embodied knowing of what to do. It builds on collective consciousness (Kenny, 2008), while it requires the integration of the agents’ individually driven, intuitive capacities, to which we refer using the term ‘solitary intuition’. The shared intuition turned out to be a driving force of collaborative creativity in the professional dancers’ mundane work and complemented their individual, solitary intuitions.

The personal backgrounds and experiences of the dancers, on which the solitary intuition is based, form the grounds for shared intuition. Through concentrated and sensuous work, the intuition of different agents develops towards a shared experience. In the empirical episode below, the interplay between the solitary and shared aspects of intuition were rendered visible:

The atmosphere in the rehearsal studio is devoted and peaceful as I step into the rehearsal studio. The choreographer puts the music on and starts to explain to the dancer: “Use proud shapes; you can take some *bourrée* in between the postures. Try to stay up and curled in at the same time.”

The music stops, but the dancer continues moving without the music, putting her soul into the role of the fragile roe deer. The choreographer encourages her: “Yes, yes! Just like that; that’s what I meant!” The dancer seems to easily catch the verbal advice of the choreographer and turns it into forms of creative movement. (Field note extract, freelance dance production, December 7, 2013)



Picture 2: Sharing ideas intuitively by observing each other’s fine-grained gestures.

As is visible in the episode above, by concentrating on each other’s bodily presence and on the ideas the choreographer and the dancer generate together, the embodied agents shifted their focus little by little from routinized patterns of movements towards the aesthetics of gestures in which more space for intuitivism was allowed (compare Bazin, 2013: 378). Therefore, intuition seemed to be more like a shared, yet unspoken understanding of what to do and how than an individual ability, judgement or experience, as recent organisational scholars have suggested (see for example Dane and Pratt, 2007; Betsch, 2008).

Another episode from the same rehearsal of the freelance dance production describes how the solitary intuitions of the choreographer and the dancer develop into a shared intuition:

After giving certain frames for how to move, the choreographer lets the dancer create her own interpretation of the scene. The dancer reflects and carries the story of the roe deer, and the choreographer follows her intensively and gives more detailed ideas of the scene: “Try to get some ethereal softness to your hands. Your body sends impulses to your hands; it brings a sense of bestiality to the movement. Let’s try it together!” The choreographer starts moving beside the dancer, and together, they produce spontaneous movements that were not choreographed in advance. (Field note extract, freelance dance production, December 7, 2013)

In the episode above, intuition develops from the dancer's and the choreographer's solitary intuition towards a shared one. The development of a shared intuition was possible through sharing the responsibility for the situation and for the development of the piece. Actually, the dancer expected the choreographer to interpolate in the action, as her comment reveals: 'It's great to work with her within this piece. She gives us space to use our own creativity by being an equivalent part of the process, and not somebody who tells us what to do.' Nevertheless, during the previous productions with the choreographer, the dancer hadn't felt as satisfied: 'She controlled us much more in the former production two years ago. It was difficult to follow the strict rules because every movement is performed differently by a different dancer.'

In the same spirit, another episode from the retired ballet dancers' production revealed the meaning of shared intuition for the dancers' collaborative creativity. Although the work was sometimes chaotic, shared intuition acted as the dancers' tool for overcoming difficulties and combining different ideas into coherent wholes:

It is Wednesday morning, and I am observing the dancers working in a small rehearsal studio covered with mirrors. Neither of the two dancers dominates the other. When one gets stuck with an idea, the other one helps them to get over it. As it is eight weeks to the first night, the overall impression of the production is one of fragmented chaos.

Although Kare [the male dancer] has done the choreography mainly, the final decisions are made collectively:

Minna: "Should the space start to divide as the end approaches?"

Kare: "Maybe yes. But I have another idea. What if the lights just turned off, and you walked away at the end?"

Minna: "Good idea! We need to put it on the back burner." (Field note extract, retired ballet dancers' production, September 13, 2012)

The empirical episode above illustrates how the dancers' collectively intuitive working style plays a vital role in everyday situations in which different kinds of ideas emerge. The collaboration between the two former ballet dancers has evolved into a solid companionship, in which space is given to each person's insights (see Picture 3 below). Concerning the atmosphere, the lighting and simple surroundings of the rehearsal studio visible in Picture 3 'create a certain "mood" related to the action' (Biehl-Missal, 2013: 363). The modern paintings in the background of the dancers, the grey floor and the daylight coming from the big windows contribute to a more serene and 'living-in-the-moment' atmosphere, which helps the dancers to 'feel' their intuitive sensations in the rehearsal situation.

Moreover, even if the male dancer expresses that he has an overall vision of the final piece, the actual performance emerges from the shared, intuitive interactions and visions of both dancers. This is also visible in Picture 3, in which the dancers look intensively to each other

and seem to catch each other's intuitive thoughts of how to move next. Therefore, the interplay between solitary and shared intuitions and their connection to the first aesthetic dimension of collaborative creativity that we identified, emotional states and loadings, become crucial aspects of collaborative creativity.

### The interplay between 'serious' and 'playful' improvisation

Improvisation was the third aesthetic dimension of collaborative creativity that we recognised from the research material of the two dance productions studied here. In the creation of a dance piece, the dancers and the choreographer had their own visions of what the final version of the performance onstage was going to be. However, none of them could predict how the different parts of the piece would be combined into a coherent whole during the various stages of the process; the collaboration was, thus, largely improvisational in nature.

The improvisation of the two retired ballet dancers was characterised by the interplay between a 'serious' and a 'playful' method of working. By serious improvisation, we refer to concentrated and fully immersed improvisation, involving a deeply embodied understanding of each other's emotions and intuitive capabilities, while playful improvisation was characterised by humorous and childlike working, leaving behind the vulnerable and painful aspects of the work. Collaborative creativity was then actualised through the variation of these sensuously strong, improvisational ways of working, as the following episode illustrates:



Picture 3: The dancers combining their intuitive resources to feed their creativity.

Minna enters the room by asking Kare how he is feeling today and explains to me that the body feels different every day. They start working on a serene section of the piece. As they concentrate fully on the present moment only, new movements are created as a result of the serious immersion into the music, movement, and each other's bodies.

Suddenly, they jump to a totally different section, which includes many unresolved movements. It doesn't seem to bother them as they concentrate on improvising the series of unfinished movements. They laugh and play with the movements as they get stuck with how to proceed. Kare plays the fool with the movements, while Minna catches his jokes by continuing to improvise in the same spirit. (Field note extract, retired ballet dancers' production, September 13, 2012)



Picture 4: The dancers' playfulness being derived from spontaneous moments offstage.

In the empirical episode, and in Picture 4 above, improvisation is achieved through playful interactions between the two dancers. They get impulses from each other's expressions and develop the piece further in a playful, improvisational way, combined with serious, fully present and concentrated working sections. As the atmosphere of Picture 4 suggests, the space is filled with laughter and joy. Both the seriousness and the playfulness are, in large part, embodied and emotionally guided aspects of the dancers' creative work; bodily movements present the humour, and the movements and the body are its sources. Seriousness and concentration are also fully embodied, as the outside world ceases to exist and the dancers focus solely on each other and the music.

In addition, the playful aspect of improvisation is visible in the episode of the freelance dance production below, in which the rehearsal runs with a 'slide scene':

The dancers build the slide from wooden pieces and start the contact improvisation following the comments of the choreographer: "Feel free to try and explore the movements!"

Both the choreographer and the dancers are in stitches as the dancers improvise playfully by trying different kinds of slides in contact with each other. “I am looking for sleeping slides that start varying little by little,” the choreographer comments.

The dancers need to adapt themselves to the circumstances of the different places in which the rehearsals are held. “We just need to pass through this with the material that we already have,” the choreographer explains and continues: “This slide scene should be the climax of the story.” (Field note extract, freelance dance production, August 15, 2013)



Picture 5: The dancers trying different ways of sliding.

As the playfully improvisational episode above reveals, the creative process is a set of tiny experiments, such as the ones with the dancers’ try-outs of sliding down in various ways (see Picture 5). These experiments capture the aesthetic nature of collaborative creativity, which builds on the felt experiences and embodied, sensory perceptions (Hansen et al., 2007; Ropo and Sauer, 2008; Taylor, 2013) of the agents. Moreover, as there was no bed in the retired ballet dancers’ production until the last moment before the premiere, so the slide was missing in the production with the choreographer and five dancers. Therefore, the creativity of the dancers stemmed partly from overcoming the importance of material artefacts, such as the real slide or the mirrors that usually cover the dancers’ working places. Finally, Picture 5 creates a strangely inspiring atmosphere, consisting of massive constructions, huge room heights and windows overlooking the dockyard, in which the dancers were allowed to rehearse twice during the process.

To conclude, the improvisational work in the two dance productions was characterised by alternating between serious and playful moments, both of which appeared to be essential to the development of the pieces into coherent, creative performances onstage. While the serious side of improvisation worked as a means of creating the framework for the performances onstage by processing the pieces analytically, the playful side was characterised by spontaneous humour and unexpected try-outs, deriving from embodied interactions among the dancers. Finally, moving

between these two improvisational modes led to unexpected destinations, and by complementing each other, they were truly collaborative.

## CONCLUSION: THE COLLABORATIVE DANCING ORGANISATIONS

The purpose of this paper was to explore the aesthetic dimensions of collaborative creativity in the context of dance. In this study, collaborative creativity, viewed mostly as a mental process emerging through verbal interactions within organisation studies (for example Sonnenburg, 2004; Sawyer and DeZutter, 2009), turned out to build on fundamentally embodied interactions and sensuous work. In the two dance productions featured in this study, the sensory-based collaboration between the embodied agents both off and onstage allowed the creative ideas, unexpected movement patterns and twists of the productions to come into existence. Moreover, the shared understanding of how to move and how to proceed within the production developed along with the aesthetic interactions among the agents. Therefore, the collaborative work in the two dance productions explored here illustrated the meaning of mutual trust and relational listening (Storey and Joubert, 2004; Koivunen and Wennes, 2011) in the creative working process.

Based on the research material of this study, we identified three aesthetic dimensions, emotional, intuitive and improvisational, through which collaborative creativity emerged. These dimensions materialised somewhat differently in the two dance productions. The key aspects of the three dimensions partly overlapped as they all involve aesthetic characteristics, and in this way, support one another. The emotional dimension was characterised by various emotional loadings that characterise the dancers' mundane work. The blend of emotions between the different agents was in a constant interplay, thus making collaboration both cognitively and emotionally charged (compare John-Steiner, 2000). Confidence and self-doubt, mutual intimacy and dependency among the embodied agents were key characteristics of this dimension. In the production featuring the two retired ballet dancers, the dancers had more confidence in showing their emotional states to each other because of their background together in the National Ballet. In contrast, in the production featuring the choreographer and five dancers, showing one's emotions was more reserved and the emotional dimension in this production demanded more time to become manifest.

The second, intuitive dimension materialised in the dancers' work through their own emotional, embodied experiences, on the one hand, and through a joint bodily and mentally shared experience on the other. Even if shared intuition made the collaboration more fluent, it required constant effort to negotiate the various solitary intuitions into a shared view. The relational leadership (Koivunen and Wennes, 2011), which characterises the relationship between the dancers in one production and the dancers and the choreographer in the other, meant that there was no single leader, but instead, by listening to each other's embodied signs carefully, they led the rehearsal situation collectively. In a similar sense, small teams, entrepreneurs, researchers and other knowledge-intensive professionals can make use of this finding; a creative working process is often a mixture of different people's inspirations that are shared by appreciating even the 'smallest' ideas of the individuals in the group and by consciously working towards a shared

understanding of the task. In the production by the two ballet dancers, the intuitive aspect of their collaborative work was easily actualised between only two embodied agents. In the production by the choreographer and five dancers, intuitive sensations of each participant were more difficult to respect, thus making the collaborative work more complex.

Finally, the third aesthetic dimension of collaborative creativity – the interplay between playful and serious improvisation – illustrated how the playfulness of improvisational work helped the dancers to rehearse the pieces in an open-minded and even ‘silly’ spirit, while they needed the serious way of working to immerse themselves in the multiple layers of creative work and to create a choreographic framework for the performances. While the retired ballet dancers sometimes used even ‘harsh’ humour due to their career-long knowledge of each other to proceed improvisationally with their work, the five dancers of the freelance production used more humour that stemmed from their joint embodied improvisation offstage. In both productions, the interplay between the two styles of improvisation was at the heart of finding a creative solution to overcome the unresolved issues of the production and to create something surprising and unexpected.

The aesthetic dimensions of collaborative creativity summarised above were connected with each other in multiple ways. Only when different emotional loadings among the embodied agents involved in the production were allowed for, and attention was paid to the various emotional states of the current working day, was a solid basis for shared, intuitive work created. Moreover, the playful and serious forms of improvisation took the stage only through a constant negotiation between the solitary and shared intuitions. Consequently, by listening to one another’s intuitive capabilities carefully, the dancers were able to leave space for improvisational acts both offstage and even onstage. In this way, the three aesthetic dimensions of collaborative creativity emerged and were developed further in relation to one another.

The three dimensions also share certain characteristics. They were built on complementarity and trust (compare John-Steiner, 2000) and required concentrated attentiveness, careful listening and conscious presence, as well as aesthetic sensitivity and openness to one another. Moreover, although only three aesthetic dimensions were identified in this study, it is likely that collaborative creativity is also built on other aesthetic dimensions, which were not visible in this empirical material, yet their exploration would further develop our understanding of the phenomenon. Therefore, we encourage scholars to take the challenge of furthering the understanding of the aesthetic dimension of collaborative creativity, especially in a context where it is less visible, such as in top management or product development teams.

This paper makes several contributions. First, we agree with several scholars (for example John-Steiner, 2000; Kenny, 2008; Glaveanu, 2010) regarding the argument that creativity is a joint effort of several people, instead of being a contribution of a single creator, as is often assumed in the context of the arts (Montuori and Purser, 1995; Glaveanu, 2010). In this paper, we described how, in the context of dance, the final performance onstage is developed in an intensive collaboration between different embodied agents involved in the production, and by so doing, complemented the existing views on collaborative creativity.

‘Body comprises emotions, equals the physical presence of people, epitomizes gender, mirrors our physical health, power and moods and reflects our personality’, Ropo and Sauer (2008: 567) argue. It is a site of all human action and experience in organisations. Therefore, the second and

most important contribution of this paper is to analyse the fundamentally aesthetic foundation of collaborative creativity and thus extend the understanding of the phenomenon as deriving from sensuous and bodily (inter)actions. The emotional loadings of the agents have a bodily basis, as they are both experienced and expressed in and through the body (see Ropo and Sauer, 2008; Chandler, 2012) and 'allow the emergence of difference and newness' (Küpers and Pauleen, 2015: 498). Intuition is considered the knowledge that is prior to or beyond explicit knowledge; it is more knowledge of the body and senses than knowledge of the brain. The playful and serious aspects of improvisation materialise in the physical movements of bodies and are experienced and expressed in and through bodies as well. Naturally, we do not want to downplay the relevance of verbal or tool-mediated communication in collaborative creativity (for instance Sonnenburg, 2004), but rather invite organisational scholars to extend their understanding of interaction in collaboration to embrace its aesthetic dimensions also.

Third, even if dance represents a rather marginal context in organisation and management literature, our findings are significant also in other contexts. As creativity is a very sought-after capability in the current business world, it is important to recognise that creativity takes place not only in the minds of single creative individuals but also in the social dynamics and micro-practices between people and the material world (cf. Viteritti, 2013; Dale and Latham, 2015). Moreover, even if organisations are places of rich verbal interaction and collaboration, built largely on verbal communication (Sonnenburg, 2004), bodily presence and embodied signals play a crucial role in conveying the hidden, and sometimes even repressed meanings, which are valuable experiences in working life.

Naturally, collaboration taking place in an office or a meeting room is more physically restricted than in dance, meaning that the interactions within the office environment are focused on verbal communication, and bodily expressions of one's emotions or experiences are often not encouraged, noticed or even tolerated. The subtle gestures and embodied signs are often considered irrelevant for the subject matter at work. Nevertheless, for example, many of us have experienced a meeting in which the participants are seemingly polite and willing to cooperate, yet you can sense an oppressive atmosphere of mistrust, competition and selfishness, which easily suppresses any attempts of collaboration. Although no words convey it, the atmosphere can be sensed from the other's presence and their ways of interacting. Therefore, gestural and bodily interactions play a relevant role in contexts other than dance.

As knowledge-intensive organisations consisting of independent and self-directed experts (see for instance Ehin, 2008) are becoming more common in the contemporary economy, our study may offer insights for managing and organising in such contexts. Often 'the pervasive thirst for predictability, functionalism, and governance in modern organisations' restricts these kinds of creative, embodied practices (Küpers and Pauleen, 2015: 498) from becoming visible and appreciated. In both productions included in this study the responsibility of the situation shifted smoothly from one agent to another, illustrating the nature of leadership as a collective, aesthetic activity that developed in the constant negotiation between the agents in sensuous ways (see Ropo and Sauer, 2008; Ropo and Parviainen, 2001). By highlighting the aesthetic foundation of collaboration, this study also contributes to the understanding of leadership as a shared and distributed practice that allows all agents' voices to be heard (Pearce and Manz, 2005), thus

emphasising the ‘post-heroic’, feminine and egalitarian traits of creative leadership (see Parush and Koivunen, 2014).

We argue that paying attention to the aesthetic aspects of organisational phenomena, such as collaborative creativity, has the potential to provide novel insights into the deeply-rooted practices of management and organisation, to ‘complement (the) traditional(ly) rational, scientific, efficient leadership-oriented curriculum’ (Sutherland and Jelinek, 2015: 303) and to acknowledge the potential of ‘embodied wisdom’ (Küpers and Pauleen, 2015: 494) in all organisational actions. The dancing organisations explored in this study proved how the aesthetic dimension of collaborative creativity often derives from taken-for-granted micro-practices that deserve to be further explored.

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## **“Feathers on Fire”: A Study of the Interplay Between Passion and Vulnerability in Dance**

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### **Abstract**

The focus of this paper is on the concepts of passion and vulnerability, which each provide viewpoints to develop the theoretical notion of embodied agency. To support my argument I present observations from an ethnographic study of dance. The paper describes how the relationship between passion and vulnerability works as a means for expanding embodied agency between off and on-stage, and exposes the aspects through which the interrelation between these concepts materialize among professional dancers. The paper contributes to the surprisingly thin discussion of embodiment at work in organizational studies by deepening our understanding of the link between passion, vulnerability and embodied agency – a triangle deeply connected to all (embodied) professions.

**Keywords:** embodied agency, passion, vulnerability, ethnography, professional dance

### **“Feathers on Fire”: A Study of the Interplay Between Passion and Vulnerability in Dance**

Passion is about fulfilling my desires despite the fear of failing, getting injured and being ridiculed. It's a kind of courage of doing what I want. It is a need to get out of my comfort zone, and the only way of moving forward in my career and life. (Ballet dancer, in-depth interview extract, 13 January 2014)

As the quote above highlights, getting out of one's comfort zone is at the core of expanding the limits of embodied agency, and the interplay between passion and vulnerability is essential in reaching this aim. In this paper, I explore the relationship between passion and vulnerability through the theoretical lens of embodied agency in the context of dance. Being like “feathers on fire”, the dancers involved in this study seemed to experience burning enthusiasm towards their career on the one hand, and moving like brittle feathers in the air on the other, thus working continuously between the tensions of passion and vulnerability.

The focus on “passion and vulnerability” arose from intensive fieldwork that I conducted among professional dancers during the years 2011–2012. The passion for mundane work – which materialized in long working hours, ignorance of the small, even insufficient budget, and the strong enthusiasm for dance, regardless of the pain and fatigue it often produced, and the fragile elements, such as finding oneself continuously under the critical gaze of others – emerged clearly when I was observing the professional dancers' everyday work. Thus, in my view, they deserved a deeper reflection and analysis on their meaning for other professions and the field of organizational studies in a broader sense.

Recently, the embodied and sensory aspects of work have gained ever-growing attention among organizational scholars (see for example: Springborg and Sutherland, this issue; Parviainen, 2014; Springborg, 2010; Ewenstein and Whyte, 2007; Ropo and Parviainen, 2001). Embodied agency, an arguably under-studied phenomenon in organizational studies, is defined here as a blend of transpersonal and individual leeway to act at work (see Pacherie 2012). In immersing myself as an ethnographer in “the moments of action” (Sutherland and Ladkin, 2013: 105) of professional dancers, my aim is to find out how passion and vulnerability materialize through the use of embodied agency and, more specifically, how they affect the development of one's embodied agency. Dance as a research context is fundamentally embodied, and therefore, especially suitable for shedding light on those aspects of work where sensuous, aesthetic qualities are continuously present.

While the relevance of embodied agency is obvious in the context of dance, it also matters in many services and factory work, as well as among workers of the “creative class” (Florida, 2002: 5; 328), such as engineers, teachers, leaders, designers and researchers, for whom their passion for work derives not only from financial compensation, but from deeply bodily experiences of love for work (see Gherardi et al., 2007: 315). The paper goes beyond the assumption of viewing passion merely as a silent “obligation” of highly skilled artistic professionals, considered more as obsessive than harmonious passion (see Sheets 2014; Vallerand et al., 2007), and vulnerability, understood here as a set of physical and mental challenges, only as a negative consequence for professional dancers (see Mullen et al., 2012; Tarr and Thomas, 2011; Wainwright and Turner, 2006).

In the spirit of Gherardi et al. (2007), I view vulnerability as the painful side of passionate commitment towards one's work, deriving from the bodily experiences of a human agent, and therefore, consider it the most important match to passion. The word passion originates from the Latin word “passio”, meaning suffering (Vallerand et al., 2003: 756), and thus includes a

double meaning – desirable, joyful and exciting emotions on one hand, and vulnerable, painful and severe aspects on the other. In this way, suffering can be seen at the heart of passion. Moreover, I understand both passion and vulnerability as fundamentally embodied phenomena, deriving from sensory-based ways of being in the world (see for example Ropo and Sauer, 2008).

Embodied agency instead involves deeply affective characteristics to which passion and vulnerability attach themselves. Indeed, I posit that not only passion as such, but its relationship with vulnerability, is an “important source of fuel that allows people to go through long and at times frustrating practice sessions, and that eventually helps them attain high levels of performance” (Vallerand et al., 2007: 512), and, in this sense, widen their embodied agency at work. Even if increasingly more research is conducted on the bodily and aesthetic dimensions of organizational life (e.g. Sutherland and Ladkin, 2013; Taylor, 2013; Styhre, 2004) and arts-based leadership development and learning (e.g. Hujala et al., this issue; Powell and Gofford, this issue; Zeitner et al., this issue) little is yet known about why and how specific professionals work between passion and vulnerability, and how this relationship is attached to embodied agency. In this paper, I give voice to professional dancers who work both in the National Ballet and in the freelance field. All the dancers involved in this study seemed to balance between passionate obsessions and hints of vulnerability in their everyday work by being constantly appraised by themselves or other agents in the field.

Finally, I use photographs in order to analyse the meanings behind the theoretical framework of embodied agency and to grasp the aesthetic experiences of the research participants (Warren, 2008). I discuss the idea of using visual material to create “atmospheres” that have “aesthetic, emotional and corporeal effects” (Biehl-Missal, 2013: 356) – a concept which has yet to gain much attention among organizational scholars. This paper shows how using photographs as atmospheres opens up a fascinating interplay between text and pictures, and reveals how aesthetic experiences help the reader to get closer to the research context of the study, and touch on the experience of an “insider” (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007: 59–60). In the ensuing section, I introduce the conceptual pair of passion and vulnerability, and specify its attachment to embodied agency.

### **Theoretical background**

#### *Passion and vulnerability as a conceptual pair*

Passion has been studied from several viewpoints among organizational scholars during recent years. In organizational studies, passion has been defined as a “focused, powerful emotion” (Linstead and Brewis, 2007: 353), and as a “strong inclination toward certain activities” (Murnieks et al., 2014: 1584). Moreover, it has been attached to the idea of people doing “what they do for the love of what they do and not for the money” (Gherardi et al., 2007: 315) and to an “intense affective state accompanied by cognitive and behavioral manifestations of high personal value” (Chen et al., 2009: 201). Nevertheless, all of these definitions qualify passion as an individual-driven phenomenon, underrating its relational nature. In my view, passion cannot be explored without its active and continuously evolving interrelations between different human and non-human agents, such as the self, space, time, artefacts, motivations and desires, thus acknowledging the fascinating “entanglement of embodiment and non-human materialities” (Dale and Latham, 2015: 166). In line with the views mentioned above, in this paper I view passion as something that is a strong and powerful drive towards one’s actions, but also highlight its aesthetic, sensory-based, and relational nature, which separates it from pure rational, individual-based thinking and acting (see Koivunen and Wennes, 2011).

Passion has been studied, for example, in the contexts of entrepreneurs (Murnieks et al., 2014; De Clercq et al., 2013; Cardon et al., 2009), musicians (Bonneville-Roussy et al., 2011), researchers (Ashforth, 2005), managers (Burke and Fiksenbaum, 2009), romantic relationships (Sheets 2014), and zookeepers (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009). Moreover, passion has been studied from a knowledge perspective (see Gherardi et al., 2007; Linstead and Brewis, 2007), which highlights the emotional and non-rational nature of passion. All of these studies show how passion becomes a key aspect in understanding the motivation behind the actions of people and organizations.

Closely related concepts to passion are "calling" (e.g. Berkelaar and Buzzanell, 2015; Bunderson and Thompson, 2009), "desire" (e.g. Linstead and Brewis, 2007), and "ambition" (e.g. Benschop et al., 2013); all concepts highlighting the "ideal form of career enactment" (Berkelaar and Buzzanell, 2015: 7), "creative force" (Linstead and Brewis, 2007), and "prioritization of work" (Benschop et al., 2013: 700). Furthermore, the concept of "affection" touches on passion by being "used as an umbrella-notion", which covers all kinds of emotion-laden phenomena, such as sensations, desires, passions, feelings and moods (Küpers, 2014: 151). Moreover, the phenomenon of "compassion" is interestingly linked to passion and vulnerability as well, by referring to empathetic action that aims at easing another person's suffering (Lilius et al., 2008: 194–195). According to Linstead and Brewis (2007: 353), passion is always "for something or someone". Therefore, it includes a relational aspect in which all agents move and their emotions are created and reformed always in relation to each other.

Unlike passion, the concept of vulnerability has remained largely ignored in organizational studies. It has been touched upon slightly by Linstead and Brewis (2007: 353), who write about the "dark side of passion", referring to the possibly dangerous and destructive impact of it, and by Sheets (2014), who explores different modes of passion among couples in love. In a similar spirit, Vallerand et al. (2007) recognize two types of passion: harmonious and obsessive passion, of which the latter closely attaches to the concept of vulnerability. Furthermore, suffering has been explored as a source of compassionate reactions by being "an inevitable part of organizational life" (Lilius et al., 2008: 194). Suffering refers to the painful experiences of a human agent (Lilius et al., 2008), and thus, is strongly connected to vulnerability. Nevertheless, these studies have not explored more closely the embodied side of the relationship between passion and vulnerability as such, considered as the painful side of passion (see Gherardi et al. 2007; Linstead and Brewis 2007: 353). As Gherardi et al. (2007: 320) write, passion is a contradictory phenomenon that includes both pleasing and painful aspects, and the aesthetic categories of beauty and pain. In this regard, this notification is especially relevant in this paper, as my aim is to expand on this "crookedness" of passion, by viewing its vulnerable side as a separate, embodied experience.

Moreover, vulnerability is still seen mostly as a negative consequence in academic debate. For example, Brickson (2011) and Ashforth (2005) deal with the experiences of passion and the obstacles of academic life that could be considered vulnerable aspects. Also suffering, closely related to vulnerability, is seen as a negative phenomenon that causes only harm in work organizations (Lilius et al., 2008: 194). Nevertheless, these studies do not consider the positive outcomes that the vulnerable aspects may have on the passion for one's work. In fact, positive identity can be constructed out of negative experiences that create conditions that allow people to act in new, positive ways (Maitlis, 2009: 70). In line with this idea, I aim to explore the empowering effects that passion and vulnerability may have on each other.

The interplay between passion and vulnerability actualizes between the off and on-stage worlds. Following the thoughts of Goffman (1956), I use the dichotomy of the offstage and onstage here to distinguish the differences between these two worlds. While "the performance

of a routine" is prepared backstage, the unpredictable performance is presented front stage by utilizing techniques that maintain the consensus and solidarity between performers, audience, and outsiders (Goffman, 1956: 152). By off-stage I refer to the dancers' work consisting of meticulous embodied practices that are rehearsed and repeated over and over again. It is then on-stage where the embodied practices are condensed into live performances, which are never perfect, and therefore, always involve the aspect of vulnerability. For example, when a dancer performs onstage, he or she is exposed to the opinions of a public gaze, which may lead to an experience of feeling vulnerable in oneself. At the same time, the experiences of feeling passionate towards the dance profession derive from exposure and being vulnerable and authentic onstage. In this respect, passion and vulnerability become entangled with each other in between being off and on stage in complex and even contradictory ways.

Both passion and vulnerability involve energies that can be described as ambivalent, dark and bright at the same time. The role of these energies has remained blurred yet worth studying. Furthermore, despite the works of a few scholars (Thanem, 2013; Linstead and Brewis, 2007) the embodied nature of passion at work has remained under-explored, and the existing research on passion fragmented, even if its meaning in the everyday life of organizations has been recognized. This paper focuses on the bodily experiences involved with passion by attaching it to vulnerability and to the theoretical notion of embodied agency, which will now be explained further.

#### *Embodied agency as a transpersonal leeway at work*

The theoretical lens through which I view this study is embodied agency. Agency has been defined as "the capacity to take action" (Tourish, 2014), and as a sense of power (Stones 2005). Sherwin defines agency as "the ability to engage in purposeful action" (2009: 145). I define embodied agency as a "mobile" leeway through which one's (trans)personal space is negotiated, challenged and reformed. In other words, I view embodied agency as skilful, sensory-based doing (Springborg and Sutherland, this issue) and as an inter-relational phenomenon in which "we relate to others via sensual bodies as well as its capacities to act, thus agency" (Küpers, 2014: 153).

A turn towards the embodied view of agency is linked to the recent turns to affective (Küpers, 2014: 150) and practice (Miettinen et al., 2009: 1314) disciplines in organization and management studies. These efforts draw attention to "the various aspects of practices, such as the role of objects in them or the relationship between language and embodied routines, power, and so forth" (Miettinen et al., 2009: 1314). In leadership literature, agency is commonly seen as a matter of elite leaders with powerless followers accompanying them and a phenomenon consisting of individual actions; "self-agency" (Pacherie, 2012: 374; 379). Instead of this view, I argue that agency should be regarded as a "co-constructed phenomenon embedded in fluid social structures" (Tourish, 2014) and as a joint-action of co-agents to which various motivational, emotional and embodied factors influence (see Pacherie, 2012: 380).

Agency has been studied from an embodied perspective by some scholars (Sutherland and Ladkin 2013; Campbell et al., 2009; Chug and Hancock, 2009; Noland, 2009; Bruun and Langlais, 2003). These scholars explore embodied agency as a cultural phenomenon which is affected by the surrounding people (see for example Noland, 2009). A closely related concept to embodied agency is aesthetic agency (Springborg and Sutherland, this issue; Sutherland and Ladkin, 2013), which refers to embodied sense-making and reflexive action based on the actors' experiences. In line with the studies mentioned above, I view agency as a phenomenon that is fundamentally embodied, derived from our sensory experiences and

particular culturally bounded situations in a rather broad way. More closely, embodied agency is both affected by the agent's personal feelings, experiences and senses of the surrounding world and the cultural background which has developed it in a certain direction. However, neither these studies nor the others draw attention to the passionate and vulnerable aspects of embodied agents between off and on-stage periods.

Moreover, although much of the literature about the embodied side of organizational agents focuses on its aesthetic and relational nature (see for example Koivunen and Wennes, 2011; Ladkin, 2008; Ropo and Sauer, 2008), little is written about the ways in which it is actually enacted, and the concepts – namely passion and vulnerability in this study – that are affecting its development and negotiation both off and on-stage. I take up this thrilling challenge via passion and vulnerability, through which I hope to bring new insights into the existing discussion about embodied agency. Therefore, the research questions of this study are as follows: first, how passion and vulnerability become visible in the mundane working life of professional dancers both off and on stage; and second, why this relationship matters to the phenomenon of embodied agency. Hence, the study brings forth the aesthetics of passion and vulnerability, concepts deeply connected to the embodied founding of agents in the field. Next, I will discuss the methodology – the ethnographic approach and the use of photographs in this study.

### **Methodology**

The methodological approach of this study is ethnographic. In general, ethnography is a means of thinking, analysing and writing about social life (Watson, 2011). Therefore, I view it more as a research approach than a concrete, pre-defined set of methodological tools to be used in the field (Van Maanen, 2011). In this study, ethnography turned out to be an excellent tool for revealing aesthetically sensible, rarely verbalized practices and details of the mundane work of professional dancers. Moreover, it enabled me as a researcher to move between off and onstage, and to recognize the fine-grained differences between these two worlds. Most importantly, I have personally practiced dance since I was a child, and have many good friends currently working as professional dancers. Thus, my personal background and existing connections to the dance field eased my access to the field, and allowed me to feel myself quickly as an "insider" (see Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). Actually, I felt being in the same situation as Matzdorf and Sen (this issue), who were immersed in the dance context before starting their study through their personal experiences, and therefore, could now use their complex positions as researchers reflexively as a strength of their study.

I conducted eight ethnographic in-depth interviews with professional dancers from various backgrounds after the years 2011–2012 that I spent in the field. All of the interviewees were female, and their age-range was between 29 and 46 years. Two of the interviewees currently work at the Finnish National Ballet. One of the interviewees had retired from there a year ago, working now as a freelance artist. One of the dancers I interviewed was having a year off from the National Ballet and currently working on various freelance projects. Three of the interviewees are freelance dance artists, working mostly in the field of contemporary dance, and one of the interviewees is a contemporary flamenco dancer. The duration of the in-depth interviews was from 2 to 3 hours. The themes we talked about during the interviews concerned passion for work, vulnerable aspects of work, and relationships with others at work, and raised many "never-thought-of" before aspects, just as I had hoped. Also, the dancers themselves felt inspired by the questions and gave me such comments as "this also helps me develop as a dancer" and "these questions are challenging but so much more interesting than the questions I'm usually asked by the press".

I recorded all of the in-depth interviews on my mobile phone with the verbal permission of the interviewees and transcribed them later at home. The total transcribed textual material of the in-depth interviews was about 140 pages. In this study, I present quotations by only four of the dancers because of the limited space of the article format. I chose these four dancers because they represent different kinds of professional backgrounds, and therefore, opened up a comprehensive picture of the research phenomenon. Thus, rather than looking at my research material thematically, I separated these four cases from the total research material and took a deeper look at them. Moreover, these four dancers were verbally the most eminent; they were able to overcome "aesthetic muteness" (Taylor, 2002) by talking about embodied, aesthetically sensitive viewpoints that had remained silent until now.

In addition to the in-depth interviews, I conducted photo-elicitation interviews with two professional dancers. As such, photographs and videos "provide unique access to the details of social action" (Heath et al., 2010: 1) and are valuable sources of expressing aesthetic topics (Springborg and Sutherland, this issue). In this paper, I approach the use of photographs as a means for transmitting "embodied" atmospheres (see Biehl-Missal, 2013) of passion and vulnerability to the reader. In other words, I aim at advancing "sensory possibilities" in organization studies (Warren, 2008: 576) and at creating embodied experiences for the reader by combining the pictures with my diary notes from the field, and the quotes of the dancers. Here I use photographs also to explore the aesthetic dimension of organizational life (Warren, 2002; 2008) among professional dancers and touch upon different aspects of embodied agency, such as the production of gender identities (Schroeder and Borgerson, 1998: 164). I contacted one of the retired ballet dancers I observed during the autumn of 2012 and met her at her home in April 2013. I asked her to show me photographs from her career that would be meaningful for her in one way or another. She showed me 58 photographs and we briefly discussed them. Afterwards she gave them to me on a memory stick. I recorded both of the interviews so as to be able to concentrate on the interview situations fully at the time.

At home I chose the photographs that I found to be the most thrilling – which resulted in selecting 15 photographs in total. The criteria for choosing the limited set of photographs was that I wanted them to transmit powerful emotions that would awaken passionate feelings in me (e.g. "I want to know more about this"), and to visually complement the jointly discussed matters, such as pain and passion for work. I found these photographs the most compelling, however, a different researcher may have ended up choosing different photographs. As a researcher I *had* to choose these photographs, it was a personal process with no right or wrong options.

After having chosen the most interesting photographs, I contacted the dancer to meet her again. My desire was to talk more deeply about the 15 photographs. We met at her home in a relaxing atmosphere. I did not plan any detailed interview questions concerning the photographs in advance. Instead, my wish was to discuss the photographs without reserve and as profoundly as possible. We discussed the photographs one by one with no hurry, and the interview took altogether 1 hour and 50 minutes. I recorded the interview so I was able to be present in the moment and to focus fully on what the dancer was saying. I transcribed the recording later at home.

The second photo-elicitation interview I conducted was with a freelance dancer. I met this dancer in January 2014 at her work place. She had about 40 photographs on her laptop to show and discuss. During the interview, we went chronologically through the photographs and the dancer explained the situations related to them. We agreed that I could stop her on photographs that were interesting in my mind and talk more deeply about them. By the end, there were 18 photographs that we had discussed in more detail. For this paper, I chose 8

photographs that attached themselves to the theoretical discussion of the embodiment of passion and vulnerability, and wrote the analysis based on them and the transcribed text that related to them.

As with all research, this study contains some limitations, which can be summarized in three points: context, complexity of the research phenomenon and researcher's involvement. First, dance as a research context is unique in the sense that the dance profession is extremely physical and consists of special characteristics – such as the aestheticization of movements – that are never thoroughly practiced. Therefore, the findings of this paper can be criticized as marginal, and may not be applicable in some other contexts, even though all professions are embodied. On the other hand, this "extreme" context allows for insights into the relationship between passion and vulnerability and "'aha effects' through sensory, bodily experiences" (Matzdorf and Sen, this issue) that I would otherwise not get, but which apply to organizational life in a more general sense.

Second, the experiences of the dancers deriving from the moving bodies, and the complex context of structures and the role of "non-human" agents surrounding the dancers – such as the working conditions, family life, and the mirrors – turned out to be impossible to capture in a single study. Thus, the findings are my interpretations of the dancers' embodied experiences and simplified descriptions of the complex reality of a dancer's embodied agency.

Third, my personal background with dance and close contacts with the dancers was partly problematic; there were moments when the dancers asked my advice and so I myself was immersed in the observation situations. Even if my "aesthetic sensibility" (Warren, 2008) was useful as an analytical tool on one hand, it sometimes made me feel like I was mentally too close to the phenomenon I was exploring, therefore making it more difficult to be unable to make clear analytical choices and to distance myself from the study. Moreover, as an ethnographer, I felt it necessary to have different kinds of roles in the field, dependent on the day and dance production I was observing; one day I was a friend, another day a cold stranger in the audience. This confused me from time to time, and forced me to expose "contradictions, doubts, and possibilities" (Cunliffe, 2002: 38), and to develop my flexibility as an ethnographer. In the following section I will discuss the emergence of passion and vulnerability in relation to embodied agency among professional dancers.

### **Passion and vulnerability in relation to embodied agency**

#### *Forms of passion and vulnerability between offstage and onstage*

This first part of the analysis explores the experiences of passion and vulnerability emerging from the rehearsing situations of professional dancers. More specifically, this part illustrates how dancers both in the National Ballet and in the freelance field talk about passion and vulnerability from the perspective of mundane work, and how the relationship between these two aspects gets intertwined between off and on stage.

In the everyday rehearsing of professional dancers, passion is manifested in different ways. It happens often that the dancers do not follow the passing of time at all and appear to be fully concentrated in the rehearsal situation itself. The importance of passion for everyday training derives from the love for a repetitive, forbearing working style offstage, as the following interview extract illustrates:

Of course you have to enjoy the everyday work. You can't live only from the glorious moments onstage. They are so short compared to the continuous hard work offstage. You need to enjoy the offstage world in order to keep your passion

alive. (Retired ballet dancer, an extract from a photo-elicitation interview, 19 April 2013)



**Picture 1. Keeping passion alive through mundane rehearsing**

Hence, dancing offstage consists of the endless repetition of embodied practices that are carried out in a passionate spirit. For example, the dancer showed me a picture of an everyday situation: a morning class at the barre in the rehearsal studio of the National Ballet (Picture 1). It rendered visible a relaxed, cosy atmosphere in which the dancers conduct the warming up series, an important embodied practice offstage, by heart, and seem to enjoy routinely rehearsing without any need to be negatively emotionally charged. Moreover, the concrete postures and facial expressions of the two dancers in Picture 1 are slightly reflective and even absent, thus rendering a “meditative” atmosphere of the offstage work. The dancer explained:

There is a huge contrast between off and onstage work. The public audience sees us dressed so fabulously, and behind the scenes we have these kinds of rags on, and we’re sweating like hell. You need to feel your body and its state every day, and not to rehearse routinely. And onstage, you need to overcome your body

state, and perform breathtakingly even if you feel pain and anxiety in your body. That is professionalism. (Ballet dancer, an extract from a photo-elicitation interview, 19 April 2013)

As is clear from the interview extract above, the “dark side of passion” (Linstead and Brewis, 2007) is evidently present in the offstage rehearsals of the dancers. Even if they repeat the movements persistently regardless of the endless sweating, pain and aching in their bodies, they enjoy training their bodies and overcoming the pain or in some twisted manner brushing it aside. The passionate spirit does not always actualize itself when conducting embodied practices offstage, and as the ballet dancer puts it, “it is inevitable that the boredom sometimes captures the mind”. Even if the bodily routines and practices in a broader sense constitute the basis for the dancers’ everyday offstage, they try to suppress this and “feel” the body’s state differently every day, as the dancer describes in the quote above. Thus, the tension between embodied routines and fine-grained, aesthetic style of working is an essential characteristic of a dancer’s embodied agency. Here also the sense of passion becomes actualized and negotiated further.

Moreover, Picture 1 captures the relationship between passion and vulnerability; the dancer in the front has thick down bootees on her feet and a scarf wrapped in a relaxed manner around her waist. These are important everyday non-human agents that construct a dancer’s embodied agency in relation to vulnerability offstage. By utilizing the non-human agents the dancer aims at avoiding injuries, thus overcoming vulnerability to leave space for his or her mundane passion. The interactions between dancers and the kinds of non-human agents mentioned above also strengthen the light atmosphere between the embodied agents and the joy of conducting the everyday embodied practices offstage.

In addition to the mundane rehearsing situations, the passion materializes in the playful postures, liberated communication and shared humour when rehearsing together offstage, as captured in Picture 2 below. The female dancer is laughing out loud, and her posture is far from the cultural ideals of the ballet of having a supported and controlled body (see Aalten, 2007). The picture visualizes the joyous atmosphere of a rehearsal situation with the two dancers offstage, which is good at generating novel ideas and creative outcomes through joint movements. This is where the relational nature of passion, “standing always in relation to otherness” (Linstead and Brewis, 2007: 353) becomes actualized. The two dancers constantly work both mentally and physically close to each other, which creates a vulnerable aspect to their offstage work. This is because their different ideas can easily collide and create argumentative interaction through passionate attitudes. On the other hand, a sense of each other’s enthusiasm towards the joint work in progress engenders passionate commitment towards the embodied work. Thus, the sensory-based, embodied proximity leads to a relational interplay between the feelings of passion and vulnerability in the work of the two dancers.



**Picture 2. Passion derived from joint, playful moments offstage**

We laugh a lot offstage. Our humour derives from the comic nature of everyday situations. Many times I start saying something and then my colleague continues from my thought by finishing it in a funny way. I think the passionate playfulness is related to our embodiment at work, and we need the playfulness to be creative and ready to throw ourselves into the moment. Of course, there are people with verbal skills, but I couldn't be funny verbally. For us humour is attached to our bodies. (Retired ballet dancer, an extract from a photo-elicitation interview, 19 April 2013)

As captured in the quote above, the passion of the dancer is formed and shaped by the bodily interaction between the embodied agents working together offstage. Furthermore, as embodied experiences or practices, nor do the humorous situations that nurture the passion arise in isolation, but "are connected with processes of desiring, needing, fantasizing, interpreting, and evaluating" (Küpers, 2014: 154). Embodied agents are thus in continuous relation with other human agents and "non-human materialities" (Dale and Latham 2014: 166). By so doing, they share the individually grounded passionate and vulnerable sensations with each other and extend towards a collective level of embodied agency. Thus, they move between so-called "inter-passion" and "inter-vulnerability", referring to the shared understanding of each other's feelings, in which responsive, creative situations and relational listening through action emerge (see Küpers, 2014: 150; Koivunen and Wennes, 2011: 60).

The representation of gender identity (Schroeder and Borgerson, 1998: 164) is also visible in Picture 2 in the form of the bodily presence of the two dancers. Here, the presence of the female dancer represents an opposite to the "traditional" image of a ballet dancer with a temperate, self-possessed and fragile appearance. Instead, the female dancer has a cheeky pose and laughs loudly, which would be deemed unconventional in the "sophisticated" ballet

world. Therefore, the passion for work in retired ballet dancers derives from their abandoning of the abstemious characteristics of traditional ballet offstage; finally they have space to express their authentic feelings spontaneously and even wildly, without having any other human or non-human agent judging or restricting their ways of working.

In addition to the shared, mundane and playful moments of passion and vulnerability offstage, the dancers highlight the importance of the colleagues and other people for their passion for work, and as a freelancer dancer expresses, "I couldn't ever think about doing all this just by myself". The importance of the partner is rendered visible in the quote below, and the tension between on and offstage worlds in relation to passion and vulnerability is caught in the quote below as well. Even if the moments onstage are often described with the words "magical" and "breath-taking" by the dancers, they are not enough to keep their passion for the profession alive. As mentioned previously, it is the everyday training that the dancer must enjoy to keep his or her passion alive.



**Picture 3. Relational form of passion in the air**

Working with a partner is such an important aspect of our work. Sensing each other and empathy with the partner is essential. You learn to know your partner without any words, that's something great in this profession. Then there are the taped ankles in the picture again, that's the mundane side. But they don't bother me as I'm totally immersed in that moment. (Retired ballet dancer, an extract from a photo-elicitation interview, 19 April 2013)

The relational aspect of the interplay between passion and vulnerability is rendered visible in Picture 3. It visualizes the pain and injuries that are covered in the tape on the foot, and the shared passion with the partner that captures the whole presence of the dancers and leads to forgetting the physical and secular vulnerabilities. The serene facial expressions of the two dancers in Picture 3 also convey how the dancers are fully immersed in the offstage situation and enjoy moving in relation to the partner. Thus, the close, sincere and subtle relationships between the embodied agents enable the dancers to overcome most of the vulnerabilities of embodied work. Moreover, working constantly in relation to another agent makes the

relationship between passion and vulnerability exciting; both aspects are revealed and shared bodily with each other and in this way, have an impact on each other's experiences of passion and vulnerability.

Therefore, experiences of passion and vulnerability are built relationally and continuously between various embodied agents offstage, and are related not only to other human or non-human agents, but also "imagined things" (cf. Küpers, 2014: 154), which could be described as the "invisible agents" of the dancers' work. For example, in Picture 3 both dancers have almost closed eyes, being immersed in the imagined characters of the roles that they are rehearsing. Furthermore, Picture 3 renders visible the gender aspect of vulnerability, as the male dancer embraces the female dancer affectionately and protectively, and the broken ankle of the female dancer is brought out in the front of the picture. Thus, in the ballet world, the relational aspect of vulnerability includes gendered ideas of strong male dancers taking care of fragile female dancers and, as one ballet dancer states, slightly irritated, "it is horrible how there is this one famous choreographer who (makes) the male dancers carry the female dancers as (if) they were a bunch of chickens". It is the male dancer who leads the situation both off and onstage in the traditional culture of ballet. In the contemporary dance world these ideas are then challenged or even turned down, and as a freelance dancer puts it, "when I dance I feel as there was no gender at all, only androgynous human beings moving in space and time".

Most of the dancers became involved in dance in their early childhood, and therefore, describe their relationship with dance through strong expressions in which a deeply embodied and emotional bond with this art form is highlighted. They describe their relationship with dance as "a strong and driving need", and "a means to express oneself", which reflects passionate involvement on one hand, and reveals their inner feelings leading to exposure of vulnerability toward their profession on the other hand. In line with these notions, a ballet dancer gives a practical example of her passion for work in the following manner:

I had one terrible week last year; I had seven performances in five days. I was totally exhausted. The last performance was for children. There were 20 children eagerly waiting to see the show. When the technique, physical fitness or happy mind is not enough, that is when you need passion. It would have been extremely hard to take it only as a "sports" performance. (Ballet dancer, an extract from an in-depth interview, 13 November 2013)

The passion for the dance profession materializes typically in such non-glamorous situations described above. When talking about a sports performance, the dancer refers to physical execution without having any sensory-based, emotional involvement in the onstage performance. As one ballet dancer describes, passion is "absolutely about throwing oneself and giving one's all always". According to one dancer from the freelance field, passion "arises from the movement", and she adds, "I feel it as my own, it is a part of me. It is my way of communicating. I feel a need to speak in that language". In this respect, passion intervenes with the embodiment of a dancer's work and becomes manifested through the movement when performing onstage.

The ballet dancer showed me the next picture (Picture 4) and explained:

When looking at this picture, I find it funny as these little swans are so graceful onstage, such "supernal" creatures. But then, at the intermission they sit with a relaxed, bad posture, taking off their shoes, they transform to look so human and ordinary, even if they are still very cute. It's magic that flows through our bodies onstage. You can look totally normal in this moment, and after a second when you

step onstage... that's magic. (Retired ballet dancer, an extract from a photo-elicitation interview, 19.4.2013)



**Picture 4. Vulnerable swan chicks offstage**

As the words of the ballet dancer above describe, the interplay between passion and vulnerability materializes through moving between the off and onstage worlds. The dancer talks about the moments onstage as supernatural and inexplicably magical experiences for her. However, when stepping away from the stage, the embodied agency of the dancer transforms into something very human and earthly. The offstage-embodied practices thus develop into a coherent onstage performance, which shows only the ideal form of embodied agency, reaching for perfection that is never achieved.

Picture 4 shows an exciting, but relaxed, atmosphere behind the scenes – the “little swans” have perhaps just danced their parts, and the huge emotional immersion in the moment onstage is over. In addition, the unused parts of the set, left in the wings and the subdued lighting behind the scenes creates “a certain ‘mood’ related to the action” (Biehl-Missal, 2013: 363) that could be described as strongly focused with a deep, embodied presence in the moment even offstage after the performance. Thus, off and on-stage worlds cannot be separated clearly from one another, but instead, they effect and are effected upon relationally by each other and by all of the embodied agents involved in these worlds.

To conclude, when moving between off and on-stage, the entanglement between passion and vulnerability is not always harmonious and simple in kind, but involves various tensions, conflicts, power issues and political aspects, instead. Even though vulnerability can be described as the “human” side of the offstage world, it also materializes onstage when the embodied agents become exposed to the gazes of anonymous agents and when the “never-achieved perfection” becomes actualized. Furthermore, passion becomes rendered to the public audience through the moving bodies onstage, but, without the passion of the embodied agents for the mundane work offstage, embodied agency could not be expanded and developed further. In this sense, passion and vulnerability become entangled with each other in complex and even conflicting ways when moving between off and on-stage.

*Passionate obsessions of embodied agents*

The embodiment of passion becomes visible in vulnerable aspects that relate to the bodily existence of a dancer on a deeply corporeal level, such as their highly disciplined practice regimes, eating disorders, criticism of other embodied agents and ageing. A freelance dancer describes her relationship with eating disorders as follows:

I have become allergic to the subject of eating disorders. When I was 15 years old, a good friend of mine, who wasn't a dancer, suffered from eating disorders. I had to follow it closely, and she fed me! Nowadays, if I sense someone having a twisted relationship with food, I don't want to get closer to that person. It's cruel, but I have experienced my part of that world, and that's enough. (Freelance dancer, an extract from an in-depth interview, 13 January 2014)

In addition to the problematic relationship with food, the dancers struggle with ageing, an inevitable part of one's embodied agency, and negotiate the blurred line between work and home identities (see Nippert-Eng, 1996). A ballet dancer describes:

We dance in the world of young people. I have realized that some day I have to give up all of this. I reached my 30's this spring. I just have to accept it. Luckily my identity has never been that of a dancer first. I am a *woman* who dances. (Ballet dancer, an extract from an in-depth interview, 13 November 2013)

Therefore, the physicality of a dancer's profession brings forth many vulnerable aspects, such as pain, the high risk of injuries, ageing, eating disorders and the fatigue that comes with the continuous pressure to perform at the top level. Nevertheless, embodied agency may be built on other aspects outside the dance career, as the home/work boundary becomes recognized and through this boundary, the dancers produce and maintain "more or less distinct territories of the self" (Nippert-Eng, 1996: 34). For example, in the quote above the ballet dancer emphasizes her femininity, which brings positive outcomes; when a dancer's passion and vulnerability at work are not manifested only off and on-stage, but also in other contexts outside the world of dance, his or her passion and vulnerability at work may not lead into extremities but keep a balance instead. As a ballet dancer expresses, "I have (a) life outside dance too, it's not my whole life". Through the extracts below from a photo-elicitation interview, I will provide another glimpse into how passion and vulnerability are related to each other and how they are incorporated with a dancer's embodied agency.

It was the morning of January 10th 2014, and we were sitting in a cozy room next to the rehearsal studio. The room was filled with various stuff from the stage – the freelance dancer apologized for the mess. But rather than being a mess, in my view it looked like an exciting and groovy mélange of backstage stuff and sets. The dancer offered me some coffee, and brought her laptop to the table in front of us. We started going through the pictures that she found especially important when thinking about the embodied side of her career. After a couple of pictures from some rehearsals we moved to pictures that captured my attention immediately.

By showing me Picture 5 below, the dancer started explaining: "This performance was called 'Sweet', and it was part of my solo production called 'And all that's nice'. I did this in 2010 during a workshop for artists from different fields of the arts. I gained lifelong friendships from this. The performance touched partly on my

problematic relationship with food, but also the theme of beauty.” (Freelance dancer, an extract from a photo-elicitation interview, 10 January 2014, and notes from ethnographic diary, 11 January 2014)



**Picture 5. The foot filled with sugar**

The dancer continued her story: “On the other side of all that sweetness is an inordinate control and fear of changing into something that is not sweet. Sugar is the worst enemy of beauty, but still little girls are made of sugar. There is a warped, almost schizophrenic message behind that children’s poem.” The dancer asks me whether I know the following poem or not, and I easily recognized it from my childhood:

“What are little girls made of?  
Sugar and spice,  
And everything nice,  
That’s what little girls are made of.”

Therefore, in a twisted manner, the poem tells of girls being made of sugar, and still the sugar is the ingredient every woman, especially female dancers, are expected to avoid.

The dancer continued describing her relation to food and eating disorders: “I process my eating disorder even nowadays in many ways, also unconsciously. Of course it still affects me even though I feel I don’t have any obsessions related to sugar or food anymore.” (Freelance dancer, an extract from a photo-elicitation interview, 10 January 2014, and notes from ethnographic diary, 11 January 2014)

The thoughts of the dancer behind Picture 5 above reveal the vulnerability of a dancer’s embodied agency, but also the absurdly passionate attitude towards sugar that some of the dancers may have. Picture 5 renders visible an almost sarcastic atmosphere from the foot wrapped in tights in a mystic, festive colour of purple, and filled with a packet of sugar with a

cheap Finnish trademark. The leg of the dancer in Picture 5 is of a female dancer, and the poem above is about little girls, thus reflecting the obsessive thoughts of females and the twisted relationship towards everything sweet since their childhood. Moreover, as a ballet dancer explains, "there are many more female ballet dancers than male ballet dancers, and that's why female ballet dancers have much more competition between each other than the males, who are sometimes even treated as special and supported more than female dancers from their early career". Therefore, from a gender perspective the vulnerability of a dancer's embodied agency appears differently among female and male dancers; the females seem to have a more complicated involvement in it.

The vulnerability is not only related to physical challenges, but also to the pressures that other agents surrounding a dancer's embodied agency affect on its emergence. For example, the freelance dancer tells how she has "demanding but supporting parents" who "silenced and ignored her eating disorder at first". This led to a worse disorder. She told me that throughout her whole life she has "aimed at being a perfect and a cute girl". She adds, "through the ballet world it was easy to materialize that aim". Thus, vulnerability is a relational phenomenon that affects and is affected by various agents. The following extract from a photo-elicitation interview clarifies the obsessive, vulnerable side of passion as well:

The dancer showed me a thrilling picture in which she is dressed in a golden dress with a funny flower headdress. My gaze attaches to all the words on the blackboard and on the wall in the picture. The dancer explains:

"Many things associate intuitively, they are difficult to verbalize. For example, this picture is related to my obsessions. I made a list of all kinds of obsessions and problems that I had suffered from. All of those words on the blackboard in white are connected to me". The dancer laughs in a slightly ironic way as we take a closer look at the words in the picture. (Freelance dancer, an extract from a photo-elicitation interview, 10 January 2014, and notes from ethnographic diary, 11 January 2014)

The dancer continued: "I have suffered from anorexia, bulimia and insomnia. I have also had phases of paranoia in my life. Well, hysteria is a kind of 'feminine' action. And I also had pneumonia after I had my second child. Then melancholia, anemia, and apathy are also very familiar to me. Those words in red are irrational, they don't have a meaning, and they are just a part of the performance. During the performance I became encrusted with those roses, I transformed into a golden creature with roses. It was a fundamentally personal performance again."

I felt overwhelmed after the dancer had told me about all the symptoms that she had suffered from during her career. How come she is still dancing? She must feel passion for her work. She must have been through so many things that many people can't even imagine. The list of all the things the dancer has suffered from is impressive. After showing those two pictures we moved on to completely different ones that introduced a totally different atmosphere to the interview situation. (Freelance dancer, extracts from the photo-elicitation interview, 10 January 2014, and notes from ethnographic diary, 11 January 2014)



**Picture 6. Wounding obsessions of a dancer**

Here we can see Picture 6 rendering a bizarre atmosphere in which the dancer is wrapped in a glorious, golden costume with roses on her head, but at the same time she is surrounded by vulnerable words of obsessive desires of her embodied agency. The separate words written down on the wall with bloody paint are like loose descriptions of the dancer's fragile embodied agency. Interestingly, the appearance of the dancer is androgynous; her forward set pose is masculine, but the slightly curved pelvis and the close-fitting costume reveal that it must be a "she". Thus, Picture 6 gives an impression of passion and vulnerability existing among embodied agents similarly whether it was a "he" or a "she". In addition, the words of the dancer above reveal the complexity of the interplay between passion and vulnerability among embodied agents; the obsessive thoughts derive from her passionate attitude toward the dance profession.

In a similar sense, a former ballet dancer described the complex relationship of ballet dancers working in the Opera house toward their embodied agency:

The more beautiful people, the more complex their body relationship is. I think that "normal people" are more comfortable with themselves than ballerinas. (Freelance dancer, former ballet dancer, an extract from an in-depth interview, 13 January 2014)

The occupational culture of ballet has a strong desire for a never-achieved perfection that is produced and re-produced in the daily life of ballet companies. It is a strong non-human agent that has a central role in forming and re-forming the passionate and vulnerable aspects of a ballet dancer's embodied agency. To be more specific, ballet dancers are confronted with two bodies: the ideal body and the experienced body (Aalten, 2007). The ideal body is able to perform certain movements endlessly and with ease, whereas the experienced body struggles to fulfill the demands placed on it. Extra thinness as a specific ideal form, physical requirements such as perfect balance, suppleness, and perseverance as a trait are examples of essential tools in the making of an ideal body, which allows entrance to the professional world of ballet (see Gvion, 2008). Therefore, there is an ideal embodied agency performing

without any vulnerability, and the experienced embodied agency tries to find a balance with the actual feeling of vulnerability in order for the dancer to be able to survive the demands of the National Ballet and not to suppress their passion for dance.

It may happen that a dancer with good shape in the eyes of the artistic manager of the ballet company, gets given a role, even if they are not a leading member of the company. This is because there are other dancers with wider and deeper technical skills or passionate "soul". The decision is often made solely by the artistic manager of the company who has his or her personal ideas of what kinds of bodily qualities are appreciated. In this sense, the classical ballet dancers' embodied agency is scrutinized by the artistic manager even if the dancer has the potential and willingness to develop. The role divisions are made based on the physical characteristics of the dancer in a rather cruel way, and this creates a vulnerable atmosphere between the managers and the dancers within the company. One ballet dancer described:

The dancer is prisoner to his or her own body. We get the role partly based on our physical qualities; the artistic director of the National Ballet makes the final decisions of the role divisions. He may be seeking a female dancer who is tall or short, or whose arabesque is high. If you don't have it, you're automatically out of the game. (Freelance dancer, former ballet dancer, an extract from an in-depth interview, 13 January 2014)

Therefore, working in the context of ballet highlights the role of other people in the formation of the passionate and vulnerable aspects of one's embodied agency. A dancer's agency is brutal in the sense that it is constantly compared with another, and the critique touches one's embodied agency on a profound level, also affecting a dancer's passion and vulnerability towards the embodied profession.

*Widening embodied agency through the interplay between passion and vulnerability*

This part of the analysis focuses on the means for allowing embodied agency to be widened through the interplay between passion and vulnerability at work. The necessity of passion and vulnerability for the development of a dancer's embodied agency becomes visible in the two quotes below:

I have passion for what I do for sure. I know a lot of dancers in whom I don't see the passion, the fire. They are scared of being who they want to be, and timid of taking personal space at work. (Freelance dancer, former ballet dancer, an extract from an in-depth interview, 13 January 2014)

In my opinion, there has to be some passion for work if you are a dancer. If you don't have it, it becomes visible onstage; everybody notices the lack of it. One can see if you don't immerse yourself totally in the roles that you dance. And secondly, you get too tired without passion in this profession. How could you torture yourself year after a year, and live with the pain that we experience daily? I feel that as a dancer I must have a strong drive that makes me go forward, and I call it passion. (Ballet dancer, an extract from an in-depth interview, 13 November 2013)

Passion becomes fused with vulnerability most of all in the daily life offstage, and it is during the mundane moments where embodied agency becomes transformed and developed further through this fusion. As the quote above describes, passion and vulnerability are active elements in the everyday lives of the dancers, and in this way, they continuously shape a dancer's embodied agency. Another ballet dancer highlighted that even if there is an

emotional, magical involvement in the dance profession, she still maintains a down-to-earth attitude to the profession:

Although our profession can be called a “passion profession”, this is still just a job among other jobs. There are those days when you are really tired of all this work, and try to dig the motivation from somewhere. You may not find it right away. It can take a day or a couple when you feel that ballet sucks, but after letting loose the bad feelings come and go, you may have a totally different mood a week after. (Ballet dancer, an extract from an in-depth interview, 13 November 2013)

Dancing as a profession is not about artistic glory and pure enthusiasm, but rather about “doing everything in terms of the work”, as one ballet dancer comments, and “the amount of work is enormous compared to the salary we get”, as one freelance dancer adds. In contrast to the passion the dancers say they have to have for what they are doing, they seem to be extremely susceptible both physically and mentally in various ways. One freelance dancer describes her attitude towards the physicality of the vulnerability as follows:

I have gained a realistic perspective to the physical dimension of vulnerability during my dance career; I have four legs and hands, and a head that works, and I’m happy. You need to maintain common sense in this work. Anyone can slip on the street, you shouldn’t be constantly thinking about the risk of injury. (Freelance dancer, former ballet dancer, an extract from an in-depth interview, 13 January 2014)

The quote above illustrates the importance of not over-reacting to all the possibilities of getting injured or of other risks the dancers have due to the high physicality of their profession. The joy and even passion for work disappears if a dancer constantly worries about the vulnerable side of his or her embodied agency. Instead, appreciating basic health and prowess in their embodied self strengthens their sense of the “skilful knowing and doing” (Springborg and Sutherland, this issue) of their embodied agency. In addition to the high risk of injuries, the dancers often struggle with the impossibility of gaining perfection in their work. One ballet dancer vividly explains the problematic relationship with making mistakes during embodied work:

Many of us are allergic to making mistakes and to failure. But you should give space to them, and allow failures to happen. The fear of making mistakes has such a strong, negative power. (Ballet dancer, an extract from an in-depth interview, 13 January 2014)

The aspect of being afraid of making mistakes relates to the criticism that is targeted towards the dancer’s inner self and touches purely him or her as an embodied agent. A former ballet dancer describes this as follows:

Being constantly under criticism makes me also vulnerable. The criticism is targeted at you, not something you have written, for example. And in everyday work you’re physically so bare. That makes you even more vulnerable. When I was younger, I was more neurotic and insecure about myself. Nowadays, I can handle my failures better. Once I slipped on the Opera stage, as the floor was incredibly slippery. I was lying in an X-position onstage. It felt like time had stopped and everybody was staring at me. But when you experience those kinds of situations often enough, you get more relaxed. You understand that hey, this is only ballet. (Freelance dancer, former ballet dancer, an extract from an in-depth interview, 13 January 2014)

In the National Ballet, the dancers are constantly under the evaluative gaze of other organizational members, such as the ballet masters, the choreographers, the artistic manager of the company and colleagues. Even if the ballet dancers I interviewed talked about “being used to the gaze of the others”, the gaze certainly affects their embodied agency; they are obligated to do their best and seek an unreachable perfection as the gaze of the others demands it. As their career goes further and their embodied agency gets more self-confident, the gaze of the others does not guide their embodied agency anymore. In other words, the sense of agency they experience moves from being controlled by the gaze of the others to a more liberated level (see Pacherie, 2012: 344). Moreover, it is at that point that a dancer’s embodied agency may be widened and developed further. Therefore, ageing, the maturation of one’s embodied agency, and all the experiences the dancer gathers during his or her career bring a more relaxed and easy-going attitude towards mistakes, failures and being gazed at that are inevitable characteristics of embodied agency. Ageing, a vulnerable aspect of a dancer’s career is thus a strengthening experience that opens up totally new stages of embodied agency, ones that the dancer has never experienced before.

In the contradiction of being constantly in front of others, the lack of appreciation and attention makes a dancer’s embodied agency vulnerable as well. One freelance dancer showed me Picture 7 in which two dancers are performing with amusing hats on.



**Picture 7. Performing passionately for children**

The dancer explained:

I feel like I am often left in the shadow with my performances that are made for children. This is related to a common view of undervaluing child culture and putting it into a weird, restricted “box”. I appreciate it and I like the style that I have found with my colleague. We create really abstract pieces for children and with that same passion as those for adults. They don’t need to be any kind of “diibadaaba”. (Freelance dancer, an extract from a photo-elicitation interview, 10 January 2014)

Here, the dancer feels love for what she does, but this is suppressed by the public audience. She continued:

In general, dance performances for children are considered simple, and something that are only scrambled through. This is just an incomprehensible way of thinking. (Freelance dancer, an extract from a photo-elicitation interview, 10 January 2014)

Hence, striking the right balance between being judged and becoming appreciated is at the heart of the relational aspect of the interplay between passion and vulnerability. The other agents, such as the audience and their opinions have an indirect impact on the dancer's embodied agency, as the quote above reflects.

A former ballet dancer compares a dancer's vulnerability with the vulnerability of other professions as follows:

The brother of a friend is a fireman. In his profession screwing up is on a totally different level than in this profession. He told me about a situation in which a woman was hanging on a burning balcony and the ladder had got stuck. The woman died because of that. So you'd better have a sense of proportion when thinking about vulnerability in a dancer's profession. (Freelance dancer, former ballet dancer, an extract from an in-depth interview, 13 January 2014)

The story of the fireman told by the dancer above describes how vulnerability is actualized on different degrees, dependent on the aesthetic qualities of the profession. While the fireman can be beaten up by the pain of not having been able to rescue the person from the burning balcony, a dancer can drive him or herself into a serious burnout and long sick leave by getting into "a state of physical and mental overtraining", as one ballet dancer puts it.

Especially in classical ballet, where you can always train harder toward the aesthetic ideals of ballet, the competitive culture and hard work ethic leads some of the dancers to these kinds of situations in which they exceed the limits of their embodied agency. In addition, passion and vulnerability are extreme characteristics of a dancer's embodied agency and hence, predispose extremely strong emotions to spring up in a dancer's body. As the ballet dancer explains in the following quote, the constant pressure between passion and vulnerability is an evident trait of a dancer's embodied agency:

Some dancers feel they are not good enough. It appears either as overly boosted self-confidence and arrogance or as a constant uncertainty about oneself: am I good enough? Are my ankles ugly? Doesn't this costume look awful on me? (Ballet dancer, an extract from an in-depth interview, 13 January 2014)

The quote above reveals the never-ending aspiration towards an unreachable perfection, which demands genuine passion for one's work. On the other hand, vulnerability appears in the form of the feeling of dissatisfaction toward the body and in the never-achievable combination required to form the ideal body. The list of factors where the dancer can improve is endless, and the constant lack of self-confidence makes his or her embodied agency vulnerable. To avoid vulnerability, the body is equipped with different kinds of material artifacts, non-human agents, such as the hammer, tape and massage ball, as pictured below.



**Picture 8. The body equipped with various tools**

As one ballet dancer expresses, Picture 8 captures the “rugged atmosphere of the everyday offstage”. Moreover, the strongly taped ankle in Picture 8 illustrates the physical fragility and discomfort of a dancer’s profession. For example, choosing the right pair of pointe shoes is a “long and devoted procedure”, and aims at the perfect sensation of one’s embodied agency onstage. Nevertheless, being truly comfortable with one’s body is not achievable, as this quote by one ballet dancer reveals:

I think that all dancers have some weaknesses, some “Achilles heel”. And most of us are very sensitive if we dare to admit it. We may not be verbally courageous, but through the arts we are able to open up our souls. I think that our vulnerable sensibility actually feeds our passion for work. (Ballet dancer, an extract from an in-depth interview, 13 January 2014)

Therefore, dancers construct their embodied agency on the basis of the balance between passion and vulnerability; both aspects are needed to become a professional dancer and to manage as an embodied agent. A retired ballet dancer captures a fascinating view on this relationship as follows:

What I find extremely interesting in life in general is that on the one hand you need to be able to throw yourself into the moments, relationships or any kind of work with passion and dedication. On the other hand, you need to be able to give

it all up – just like that. That’s the law of life and an eternal discrepancy – to be fully passionate and to be able to let it all go at the same time. (Retired ballet dancer, an extract from a photo-elicitation interview, 19 April 2013)

The tension described in the quote above illustrates the fundamental quality of being a “feather on fire”. If one never has the courage or willingness to accept the pain of loss, grief and risky situations, he or she cannot achieve a passionate attitude toward work and life overall. In the final section, I will discuss the empirical, conceptual and theoretical contributions of the study to our understanding of the connection between passion, vulnerability and embodied agency in the context of dance. I will then conclude reflectively, detailing how and where there is space for opening up the wider potential of the study.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper was to explore passion and vulnerability in relation to embodied agency, and it aimed to make two main contributions: first, in the above I have described the complex ways in which passion and vulnerability materialize in the mundane, embodied experiences of professional dancers, and the aspects through which they describe these concepts when moving between off and onstage. The paper showed how the “dark side of passion” (Linstead and Brewis, 2007) includes not only vulnerable or even destructive elements in regard to embodied agency, but empowering and restorative aspects as well. Second, the paper described ways in which passion and vulnerability are attached to each other and to embodied agency in non-harmonious ways, which, to my knowledge, has yet to be explored in the existing literature on the embodied side of agency.

Theoretically, this study is different from previous research on passion (e.g. Thanem, 2013; Linstead and Brewis, 2007), which recognizes its embodied nature but has not dealt with its relationship with vulnerability, a concept deeply connected to passion. Neither have the existing studies related to embodied agency (Sutherland and Ladkin, 2013; Noland, 2009) touched on the relationship between passion and vulnerability, or elaborated it as a means for widening both personally and relationally grounded space at work.

I have further foregrounded the concepts of passion and vulnerability as vital to understanding the aesthetic, sensory-based dimension of embodied agency, something that has been surprisingly overlooked in organizational studies. While this study has focused on the contexts of professional dance, the insights of this paper and particularly the relevance of embodied agency are undeniable in all other professions as they are all embodied in some way. Therefore, this study contributes to the recent turn toward embodiment (Dale and Burrell, 2000), aesthetics (Taylor and Hansen, 2005), and affect (Küpers, 2014) in organizational life by revealing the ways in which sensory-based and intuitive experiences of embodied agents affect all the actions and interactions made in the day-to-day life of organizations.

The paper made a methodological contribution to the (critical) visual analysis of images in organizational studies (e.g. Warren 2008; 2002) by using the idea of pictures as “generators of atmospheres” (see Biehl-Missal, 2013: 356). In other words, I did not only use photographs as visual examples from the field, but more as sources of atmospheres that could awaken aesthetic experiences in the reader’s mind, and in this way, let the reader to experience how the “dancing feathers” were on fire and what this implies. Moreover, using photographs in this paper led to analytical findings of embodied agency that could not have been revealed if only using textual material from the field. Thus, the photographs studied in this paper also conveyed meaningful viewpoints of embodied agency, such as relationality, gender, humor, and the range of non-human agents, all of which have an impact on the

bodily actions made within organizations.

I have identified three aspects through which the interrelation between passion and vulnerability is connected to the phenomenon of embodied agency: first, forms of passion and vulnerability became visible *between the off and onstage work* of professional dancers. The study showed how dancing is not only about having the passion to perform on stage, but about handling this and about a love for the mundane rehearsal situations off stage as well. Therefore, it is the interrelation between offstage practices and onstage performances, both involving passionate and vulnerable aspects, through which embodied agency is developed further. Furthermore, embodied agency turned out to be a relational phenomenon in which the mundane bodily practices and onstage performances were negotiated between the agents. This finding resonates beyond dance to other contexts, such as the work of leaders, in which the painful decisions are negotiated offstage and then performed onstage, in front of the employees and stakeholders. Thus, the findings of this paper can also be a benefit in recognizing the aspects related to passionate and vulnerable sensations among other professionals.

Second, *passionate obsessions*, in which passion and vulnerability enacted variously, turned out to be an inevitable and exciting part of a dancer's embodied agency. Without the passionate obsessions of a dancer, his or her embodied agency wouldn't be put to the test, and thus, would remain bland and underdeveloped. Therefore, the third aspect of the interrelation between passion, vulnerability and embodied agency that I recognized was that widening embodied agency in this study was fulfilled *through the interplay between passion and vulnerability*, as described in the final part of the analysis. It was the thrilling, sometimes puzzling, tension between passion and vulnerability that made the embodied agents develop as professionals in aesthetic ways. Furthermore, as visualized through the photographs, the dancing bodies processed the three dimensions described above in concrete movements, gestures and facial expressions; the liberated movements and impassioned postures showed how passion was often formed in an easygoing spirit of the mundane work, thus reaching beyond the vulnerable body, while the sometimes absent facial expressions of the dancers demonstrated how the passion was "hidden" behind the routines of the movements from time to time.

The wider meaningfulness of the paper for organizational scholars is varied. It extends the results of previous studies on passion at work (Bonneville-Roussy et al., 2011; Linstead and Brewis, 2007; Ashforth, 2005) that explore the emergence and outcomes of passion among different professionals. In line with these studies, passion is the empowering strength of work, and helps the dancers to survive through the demanding and frustrating rehearsal sessions. In addition, the findings of this paper increase our understanding of passion and vulnerability as embodied phenomena and as sources for expanding agents' capabilities to act at work both from an individual and a relational perspective. The paper complements the emerging literature on the embodied, aesthetic side of organizations (e.g. Koivunen and Wennes, 2011; Taylor and Hansen, 2005) by describing how sensory-based experiences and processes, in which passion and vulnerability are included, affect actions made by the embodied agents themselves. Thus, conceptualizing passion and vulnerability as embodied phenomena can be a useful framework to study organizational behavior in other contexts as well.

The field of organizational studies needs deeper understandings of the role of passion and vulnerability at work to better recognize those means through which embodied agency may be widened, and how organizational agents may gain a sense of increased flexibility at work. In this way, the embodied agents move towards an organizational atmosphere in which showing their authentic selves with their personal desires and whitewashed weaknesses will

be encouraged. Methodologically, using photographs, videos and art-based research to explore those mundane movement- and sensory-based activities of organizations (e.g. Ludevig, this issue) in organizational studies should be more appreciated and developed further in the future, because of their capabilities in conveying aspects that could not be teased out by using more traditional research methods (see Heath et al., 2010). Passion and vulnerability are inevitable characteristics of organizational life, and therefore, demand more attention to better understand the affections, emotions and motivations deeply rooted in the embodied selves behind all actions in organizations. Consequently, it would be thrilling to explore “feathers on fire” in other empirical contexts, and move our understanding of passion and vulnerability and its complex connections to embodied agency forward.

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### **Photographers of the pictures:**

Pictures 1, 4 and 8: Dancer Minna Tervämäki's personal archive  
 Picture 2: Kim Laine  
 Picture 5: Hanna Seppänen  
 Pictures 6 and 7: Hertta Kiiski

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## SUB-STUDY 4

### MOMENTARY AESTHETIC EXPERIENCES AS A SOURCE OF ETHNOGRAPHIC UNDERSTANDING: INSIGHTS FROM A STUDY OF PROFESSIONAL DANCE

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#### ABSTRACT

Despite the rising interest towards ethnographic approaches among organization studies, relatively little attention has been paid to role of the researcher's aesthetic experiences in the field. This is although a substantial part of ethnographic understanding has been recognized to emerge from the researcher's personal experiences during the fieldwork. By using auto-ethnographic material collected in the field of professional dance, we in this paper argue that ethnographic understanding derives largely from the momentary aesthetic experiences of the researcher in the field. In its entirety, the paper suggests that organizational researchers should get rid of the myth of considering ethnography as a long-lasting protocol that can only yield legitimate findings if exhaustively applied. By even partly releasing themselves from this viewpoint, we believe, researchers could find ever diverse and innovative ways to apply ethnographic approaches in the field of organization studies.

Keywords: aesthetic experience, embodied agency, organizational ethnography, moments, professional dance

## INTRODUCTION: A PIROUETTE BEHIND THE SCENES

“Was that too theatrical, what do you think?” The dancer asked me and moved spontaneously around the rehearsal studio. I answered, “No, not at all, for me the pause feels a smart choice in that section”, and felt a bit uncomfortable about getting so involved in the working process. (Field note extract, auto-ethnographic diary, retired ballet dancers’ production, 5 October 2012)

During the past few decades ethnography has established a prominent position among the main methodological approaches in organizational research (Van Maanen, 2015). Nonetheless, there are both challenges and suspicions towards those who do ethnographic research without formal training in anthropology (Yanow, 2009, p. 186). One response to this is to apply ethnography as systematically and exhaustively as possible. Potentially, another way to overcome such a methodological angst might be in taking researcher’s aesthetic involvement and embodied agency with the research participants in question seriously. At least such a position would be in line with the idea that a researcher’s personal experience is the key in gaining deep ethnographic knowledge of the research phenomenon in the field (Locke, 2011). Accordingly, it has been found that the relationship between the researcher and the research participants is continuously negotiated in terms of the access, quality of the research material and the voices to be heard in the study (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013). However, to date relatively little attention has been paid to how the researcher’s opportunities for ethnographic understanding are entwined with his or her momentary aesthetic experiences, based on his or her imagination, emotions and other fine-grained perceptions, in the field. What is more, the moments during which the researcher’s aesthetic sensitivity may not only make him or her involved with the research phenomenon in sensory-based ways, they may also highlight various subjectivities in the ethnographic research practice. In order to build and illustrate this argument, we in this paper use auto-ethnographic research material from the field of professional dance.

By describing how an ethnographic researcher may use her temporary aesthetic experiences in the fragmented fieldwork situations, we build bridges between two streams of research. On the one hand, there are organizational scholars who have indicated a growing interest in the sensory-based and embodied aspects of human behaviour (e.g., Atkinson, 2013b; Ladkin, 2013; Ropo & Sauer, 2008; Strati, 2016; Taylor & Hansen, 2005; Warren, 2008, p. 560). In our view, however, these scholars have not paid sufficient attention to how the aesthetic involvement of the researcher with the bodily-based, hardly utterable research phenomenon would influence his or her opportunities to conceptualize these subtle aspects while simultaneously keeping in mind the subjective and reflexive aspects of research work. On the other hand, although ethnographic researchers have widely discussed the dynamics related to the issue of subjectivity (e.g. Hayes et al. 2016), researcher’s positions (e.g. Berger, 2015; Bucerius, 2013; Crowley, 2007; Enguix, 2012; Haynes, 2011; Orrico, 2015) and the dilemma of ‘othering’ (e.g., Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012; see also Marcos & Denyer, 2012), the *aesthetic* side of the researcher’s subjectivity has yet received only scant attention. In concrete terms, we connect these literatures through an analysis of auto-ethnographic diary notes. As the extract that opened the paper illustrates, getting understanding about the research phenomenon even in an ethnographic study may consist of

distinct, ambivalent moments during which the researcher is particularly aesthetically involved with those whom he or she is studying even if that was not his or her intention. This, in turn, demands that the researcher not only constantly reflects upon his or her position in relation to the phenomenon under study (see Berger, 2015; Gray, 2008), but also uses his or her own aesthetic sensitivity to make sense of what he or she has experienced in the field.

The researcher who conducted the fieldwork in question had practiced dance since she was a child. Therefore, she already had a life-long, personal knowledge and bodily experiences of dance and many close friends working as professional dancers before she started her fieldwork. This provided her an opportunity to switch between more and less involved roles with respect to the dancers that she was studying. By so doing, she was able to reflect upon the aspects that each of these roles yielded at the different points in her auto-ethnographic fieldwork that this way operated “as a living body of thought” (Homan Stones, 2016, p. 228). In the following section, we open up the theoretical background to the paper, both with respect to the researcher’s subjectivity in ethnographic research and also how he or she may exploit the aesthetic involvement with the research phenomenon to gain a deeper understanding about it.

## AMBIVALENT SUBJECTIVITIES OF AN ETHNOGRAPHER IN THE FIELD

According to DeLuca and Batts Maddox (2016) the knowledge gained through the research process is “always mediated through the self” (p. 286). The discussion on the different positions and the switches between these positions that an ethnographer may take in relation to the research phenomenon has most often occurred under the concepts of insider and outsider research. While some have considered these positions to be generally context specific (Cui, 2015, p. 358), others have emphasized the possibility for a researcher to take on the “dual role” of an insider in one setting and an outsider in another (Leigh, 2014). In line with this idea of a “dual role”, Enguix (2012) argues that the researcher’s position in the field is constantly negotiated within a complex process of “anthropological difference construction” (p. 79).

Moreover, an ethnographer may become a “trusted outsider” and from this position gain insider knowledge in the field (Bucerius, 2013). In a similar vein, Paechter (2012) identifies a difference between “hybrid insider/outsider statuses” that she had to establish when conducting retrospective online studies in order to keep up with the continuously changing circumstances at the research site. Finally, Bucerius (2013) and Orrico (2015, p. 473) remind us that cultural, political and physical elements such as gender influence patterns of interaction between the researcher and the phenomenon during the fieldwork and thus make it an important condition for the building of the position for the ethnographer with respect to those under study.

The researcher’s personal experiences of the research phenomenon and his or her complementary involvement with it through both spoken and unspoken action have also been identified as critical aspects in ethnographic research (cf. Atkinson, 2013b, p. 368). Interestingly, however, we lack studies addressing how the researcher’s aesthetic involvement, derived from her previous sensory-based experiences from the research context, with the phenomenon in focus intervene the process. In fact, ethnographic studies represent a blurred continuum between the relatively distant and ultimately close relationship between the researcher and

the research phenomenon in a rather simplistic way. For example, while in auto-ethnographic (e.g., Wall, 2006) and phenomenology-based ethnography (e.g., Vom Lehn & Hitzler, 2015) the nature of this relationship is very intimate – as the self and the field may “become one”, in institutional ethnography (e.g., Billo & Mountz, 2016) it is distant and the overall approach is theory-driven. Para-ethnography (e.g., Islam, 2015) then lies somewhere in-between the three ethnographic approaches already mentioned, as the relationship between the researcher and the researched happens “side-by-side” and the latter are actually participants in the analysis rather than mere sources of research material. Recent ethnographic approaches also include accidental (Fujii, 2015), micro (Acord, 2010; Atkinson, 2013b), performance (e.g., Snyder-Young, 2010) and digital ethnography (Pink et al., 2016). They all recognize the changing nature of doing ethnography in the sensory world and the researcher’s active role in this process.

However, despite the wide discussion of the relationship between the researcher and the research phenomenon in organizational ethnography, some distinctive characteristics of this relationship are yet to be identified. Within organization studies, there is a particular need for works that recognize the researcher as a feeling and embodied agent in the field under study. We argue that attention to this aspect would allow for a more holistic understanding of the meaning of the aesthetic involvement of the researcher with the phenomenon in focus. This would reveal the potential of the researcher’s aesthetic experiences during the research process in general, as well as the ways in which the ‘momentary’ changes in the relationships between the researcher and the research phenomenon affect both of these experiences (and vice-versa) and the ways of “how we see and understand” the research phenomenon as an “aesthetic counter” (cf. Freeman, 2014, p. 827) and the researcher as an embodied agent in the field.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE RESEARCHER’S EMBODIED AGENCY AND AESTHETIC EXPERIENCES

In this paper, we define embodied agency as a context-dependent and relational leeway for the researcher to experience aesthetic involvement both with the research phenomenon and with the research participants during the ethnographic process. Embodied agency is thus viewed as the source of aesthetic experiences<sup>1</sup>, based on aesthetic sensitivity to which the researcher immerses him- or herself during the fieldwork. Therefore, in our view, the researcher’s aesthetic involvement with the phenomenon under study relies on his or her aesthetic sensitivity that then materializes as “felt-experience of being” (Ladkin, 2013, p. 321). In the spirit of Warren (2008, pp. 560-561), we define aesthetic sensitivity as universal and embodied ways of experiencing the world in an involuntary, overwhelming and short-lived manner. Here, experiencing especially refers to the “ways that our lives, actions and reflections have a certain subjective feel” (Tomkins & Eatough, 2013 pp. 261-262) to us. Aesthetic sensitivity has been found critical for researchers to present themselves more authentically as part of their studies (see Whiteman, 2010, p. 335), which requires both their personal proximity and empathy to the research participants. Recognition of the “inherently subjective” (Taylor, 2002, p. 822) nature of aesthetic sensitivity is valuable for

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, we use the terms “aesthetic experience” and “sensory-based experience” in a similar meaning.

understanding the sensory and bodily aspects of fieldwork especially because it demands looking at the research phenomenon either from the researcher's or the research participants' perspective.

The previous studies on aesthetic experience in the social sciences have been conducted in diverse contexts, which include art (Joy & Sherry, 2003; Woodward & Ellison, 2010), education (Mack, 2015; Paul, 2009; Raikou, 2016), music-recording (Siciliano, 2016), walking in the cities (Stevenson, 2015) and urban traffic (Taylor, 2003). The overall message of the studies that have addressed the aesthetic sensitivity of the researcher as a way in which he or she can become closer with the research phenomenon under study (e.g., Atkinson, 2013a; Taylor, 2002; Pink, 2009; Warren, 2008) is that it can help the researcher to understand the feelings and emotions of the research participants in a way that extends the current ethnographical toolkit (cf. Gray 2008, p. 936). Relatedly, researcher's bodily-based (Ladkin, 2013, p. 320), sensory (Mason & Davies, 2009; Pink, 2009), and lived experience (e.g., Stanley, 2015) also deserve a role in ethnographic fieldwork. Finally, Helin (2013) has found that the ethnographic researcher especially uses the senses in the "dialogic listening" of the research participants as means to find out how to continue with the research process. However, similarly with the existing literature of the researcher's positions in ethnographic research, these studies have not taken seriously the ways the researcher might benefit from his or her aesthetic sensitivity in getting insight into the phenomenon under study through the short-lived, aesthetic moments with the research participants in the field. This argument relates to Pinsky's (2015) idea of "incidental ethnographic encounters", which especially calls for a flexible approach to qualitative interviewing by reminding that formal interviews can be supplemented with informal and incidental moments in the field.

## A SENSORY ETHNOGRAPHY OF PROFESSIONAL DANCE

The methodological approach we base this study on is sensory ethnography, which draws not only on the five senses of sight, sound, touch, taste and smell, but also on the less-acknowledged sensory experiences (Pink, 2009), which are culturally and socially (re)produced (Sunderland et al., 2012). Thus, this paper's methodological argument highlights the lived, sensuous and overlapping experiences of the researcher and the research participants (Stevenson, 2015, p. 4). The first author's personal connections and previous knowledge of the dance field helped her to obtain access to observe the professional dancers' day-to-day work in two sub-settings. The first of these sub-settings is the Dutch National Ballet and the second one a freelance production of two Finnish retired ballet dancers. By bringing the fieldwork experiences from these two sub-settings together, we aimed to explore how a researcher may use her short-lived moments of close involvement with the research participants as a tool with which to gain a more profound understanding of the research phenomenon. Moreover, we were interested in reflecting upon how the researcher's ability to make use of her own embodied agency during the ethnographic research process, which gradually developed in each of the two sub-settings, and this way affected the interpretation of the research material.

The first author gained access to the Dutch National Ballet through her contact to a dancer who worked there as a soloist. During a week-long field visit she was free to move between different rehearsals as much as she wanted. By contrast, the second sub-setting of the study

consisted of a dance production staged by two ballet dancers, a male and a female. Both dancers had retired from the Finnish National Ballet one and a half years earlier and now had a chance to work on their own choreography. The first author also here knew the female dancer as a person, which in our view encouraged her to let the researcher to follow the four-month development of this dance production from its very first rehearsals until the onstage performance.

Thus, the empirical material of this study consists of field notes, diary notes of the photo-elicitation interview experiences, as well as photographs all collected in the settings depicted above. As far as photographs are concerned, a number of them were taken by the researcher during the observation situation to help her recall and later report the overall atmosphere of the research situations (cf. Biehl-Missal, 2013; Pink et al., 2014). In addition to the observation material, the first author conducted two photo-elicitation interviews (e.g., Harper, 2002) with two professional dancers: with one ballet dancer and with one dancer in the freelance field. When conducting the two photo-elicitation interviews, the researcher asked dancers for meaningful photographs from their career that they would then discuss with her. By conducting photo-elicitation interviews the researcher thus aimed to advance her “sensory possibilities” (Warren, 2008, p. 576) to first provoke and then interpret dancers’ responses to them.

## EMPATHIZING WITH THE STRUGGLES OF PROFESSIONAL DANCERS’ MUNDANE WORK

We start by describing how the ‘blurred’ moments of aesthetic involvement help me, the first author of this paper, to immerse myself in the situation in the field, and therefore, not only to identify the gestural nuances of the mundane work of the professional dancers, but also to practice my embodied agency in the field. We bring forth our ideas in the form of two empirical episodes from the Dutch National Ballet, which represents a cultural institution that follows the classical ideals of ballet. These ideals include a highly scripted technique and the skinny ‘ideal’ body, comprised of the long legs and small heads of the female dancers (Aalten, 2007; Wulff, 1998). We claim that by using my previous familiarity with these ideals – my aesthetic sensitivity and embodied empathy with the dancers’ struggles – I was able to identify characteristics of embodied agency that would have otherwise remained hidden. Concretely, I was able to differentiate between the dancers’ moments of joy and suffering as a consequence of their attempts to attain the ideals of the balletic body.

The executive secretary led me into a huge rehearsal studio in which a morning class was about to start. I sat on the floor on the left side of the studio, next to the entrance. One of the dancers was practicing in the middle of the studio, while the trainer was following her with a strict look on his face. The dancer was practicing fouettée pirouettes, which can be considered one of the technical benchmarks of a professional dancer. Just a moment before another dancer had turned several of them smoothly and looked seemingly satisfied, standing relaxed now in the back corner of the studio and giving judging glances at the other dancer trying to do her best in a similar manner. The atmosphere was tense and I could sense the competitive atmosphere between the two dancers. The trainer encouraged

the dancer: ‘Everybody hates the left side, it’s horrible, it’s built that way. So don’t get pissed off yet!’ I felt distressed for the dancer and the smallest muscles in my legs moving even though I was staying still and quiet on the floor. (Field note extract, the Dutch National Ballet, 16 August 2011)

As visible in the episode above, I lived along with the struggle that the dancers were going through and so shared their aims of reaching the ideal body. Concurrently, by sensing the sweaty efforts of the dancers throughout my body, I also became “aesthetically involved” in the episodes in the field and thus, practiced embodied agency as well. The following auto-ethnographic note provides further details of my sensory-based experiences after the empirical episode already described:

How come it was so hard to perform these kinds of routine-based movements perfectly, even if they [the dancers] were all top-level professionals? It seemed that the dancers were aiming at ‘never-achieved’ perfection, which, therefore, created a feeling of frustration in me. I felt a flow of adrenaline going through my body as the dancer tried to do as many perfect pirouettes as she could. Moreover, it felt cruel as the dancers had to be under the constant gaze of others. After the 90-minute morning class the dancers divided into small groups to practise different works in the rehearsal studios. I already felt exhausted and went along with the female soloist who familiarised me with different parts of the building. (Notes from auto-ethnographic diary, the Dutch National Ballet, 16 August 2011)

The note illustrates how I also experienced pain and emotional exhaustion in the field as I lived along with the dancers’ endless repetition of movements. The aesthetic experience I lived through in the described scene above was only a short moment, but it involved powerful sensations that told a lot about the research phenomenon and about me as the researcher. Therefore, these kinds of quickly passing moments of aesthetic involvement that I experienced became an essential part of this ethnographic study. Another example of my sensory-based being in the field in a similar context illustrates how sometimes those being studied may *assume* and even *expect* me to become “aesthetically involved” in the rehearsal situation:

I followed the female dancer to the rehearsal studio in which the male dancer, the trainer and the pianist were already waiting. Even if the atmosphere was relaxed, I felt stressed about being part of the rehearsal situation, as I needed to follow the scene empathetically with concentration. The dancers gave short looks to me, and the trainer gave the pianist a mark to start playing. The scene started with the male dancer walking from the corner across the stage. The trainer interrupted him several times by arguing: ‘No, no, you’re not conveying the emotion deeply enough to the audience now. Let’s try it again!’

After several restarts with the walk the trainer sitting beside me asked me: ‘Did you see the difference?’ I felt a bit confused by her question, but replied with an insecure tone in my voice: ‘Yes, absolutely’. Meanwhile, the female dancer smiled at me empathetically as she knew it was a matter of such small nuances that were almost impossible to recognize

without being a professional dancer. Still, I felt thrilled with my involvement in those moments of action. (Field note extracts and notes from auto-ethnographic diary, the Dutch National Ballet, 16 August 2011)

Hence, when I was making observations in this situation, I was dependent on my aesthetic sensitivity to engage with the subtle qualities of the male dancer's walking. As such, my aesthetic sensitivity was derived from my previous involvement with the micro-practices of dance, and from my true respect for the detailed nuances of their embodied work, of which a person without such a previous 'touch' of dance might have otherwise been ignorant. Moreover, as the trainer encouraged me to get "aesthetically involved" in the rehearsal situation by asking how the development of the piece looked for me, I felt ever more encouraged to involve myself with the production. At the same time, even if the female dancer had had doubts about my aesthetic understanding of dance, as she smiled at me empathetically, my sense of getting involved in the research situation was actualized, which allowed me to gain a sensory-based experience of immersing myself in this offstage moment.

Thus, the moments of "being aesthetically involved" became visible through a relational interplay between me and the research participants and through the trainer's active support to involve me in the rehearsal. Therefore, although I felt like an outsider in the context of the Dutch National Ballet, I was able to develop the 'momentary' feelings of an insider through my subjective aesthetic experiences and knowledge of the embodied practices of ballet that were supported by the research participants in the field. Even so, it is important to note that of course, I never became truly an insider who could be considered a member of the ballet group. Even so, through the moments of aesthetic involvement I was able to combine my understanding of the culture of ballet with my analytical capabilities and by so doing, make interpretations that would have been otherwise probably impossible to tease out.

## NAVIGATING BETWEEN THE MOMENTS OF BEING A STRANGER AND A FRIEND

We continue by illustrating the constant navigation of the sensory-based moments of my various subjectivities in the field. The following extract describes the beginning of the friendship between me and Minna, the other of the two retired ballet dancers, and what my sensations were like during the first phases of the fieldwork.

I still wonder how we became such close friends. It was 2009 when I interviewed her for the first time. I felt extremely nervous as we sat in the canteen of the opera house. I knew she was one of the most appreciated dancers of the National Ballet.

After two two years, I felt simultaneously excited and stressed out when entering the rehearsal studio to meet the dancer, Minna, again. Minna wasn't there yet, and after I had waited for 15 minutes she rushed in with a bunch of bags. She asked me to tell her and the other dancer, Kare, about my research project. Both of them seemed to be very interested

in my research, and therefore, the tense atmosphere broke away. The supportive and appreciative comments I got straight from them gave me enormous energy to go on with my fieldwork. (Notes from auto-ethnographic diary, retired ballet dancers' production, November 2013)

The note above illustrates how I was at first far from feeling like an insider at all even if I was familiar with the practices of dance field. Nevertheless, even if I did not feel comfortable straight from the beginning, my fieldwork in the feminised setting of dance became gradually easier and more natural because of my own embodied agency. Furthermore, there seemed to be a sense of respect towards the academic research project among the retired ballet dancers beyond their own particular professional area. Minna, the female ballet dancer, seemed especially interested in how dance related to other fields, and wanted to actively contribute to the on-going study. For example, she often mentioned aspects that she thought would be really important to work on and even expressed that "it is so great to talk about these issues with someone". By doing so, she conveyed a feeling of genuine interest in my work. In addition, it seems clear that the dancer's recognition that I appreciated her work reciprocally increased her own open-mindedness and appreciation towards me.

Naturally, the process from the first acquaintance to intimate friendship took years and numerous long discussions between me and the ballet dancer. It was thus a complex, fluid and nonlinear process. In the empirical description above, we can also identify the shift little by little from a public place of interviewing into the slightly more private rehearsal situation. Hence, these transitions started to shape my aesthetic experiences in the field as well. Here, through the process of gradually entering more and more private areas with the research participants, the entanglement of my aesthetic experience, my body and materiality (cf. Dale & Latham, 2015, p. 166; Viteritti, 2013) also became visible. Therefore, becoming "aesthetically involved" with the field does not materialize merely through the researcher's previous knowledge of it. Instead, it may be a prolonged process that demands time, unpredictable events, a wide array of social connections and access to the multiple places during the ethnographic research process, as the following note illustrates:

I was sitting on the train, heading to Helsinki to see the premiere of the two retired ballet dancers. The [female] dancer sent me a text message, writing: 'Hi! I'm having a terrible day. Could you please take our dog out? You can collect our keys from the doorman at the theatre. Thank you!' I felt a strange excitement flowing through my body as I had only been at the home of the dancer once. How come she trusted me so much? The home was located within one of the richest neighbourhoods in Helsinki, and I almost felt like a criminal as I entered the home and took the dog out. Meanwhile, I guzzled information about the dancer's personality by eagerly looking at all the paintings on the walls and all the exciting items on the tables. Later, the dancer came home and we talked about her passion for work for hours. (Notes from auto-ethnographic diary, retired ballet dancers' production, 18 October 2012)

The note above captures how entering the home of the dancer was a part of negotiating friendship, and therefore, a sensory-based experience for me. In addition, the tangible and intangible aspects of my aesthetic experience (see Mason & Davies, 2009) were wrapped with each other in a multi-dimensional way, and therefore, making the production of research knowledge a “socio-material process” that attaches the body to the material world (Viteritti, 2013, p. 367; 375). Whereas the tangible aspects of aesthetic experience materialized in my way of seeing, smelling and even touching the surfaces of the dancer’s home, the intangible ones were related to my imagination and personal character of experiencing the situation that actualized somewhere beyond my body. In this way, entering the private life of the dancer under study offered a chance of practicing my embodied agency in a powerful manner that later materialized in further situations of close interaction between them. An example of such a situation is given in the following note:

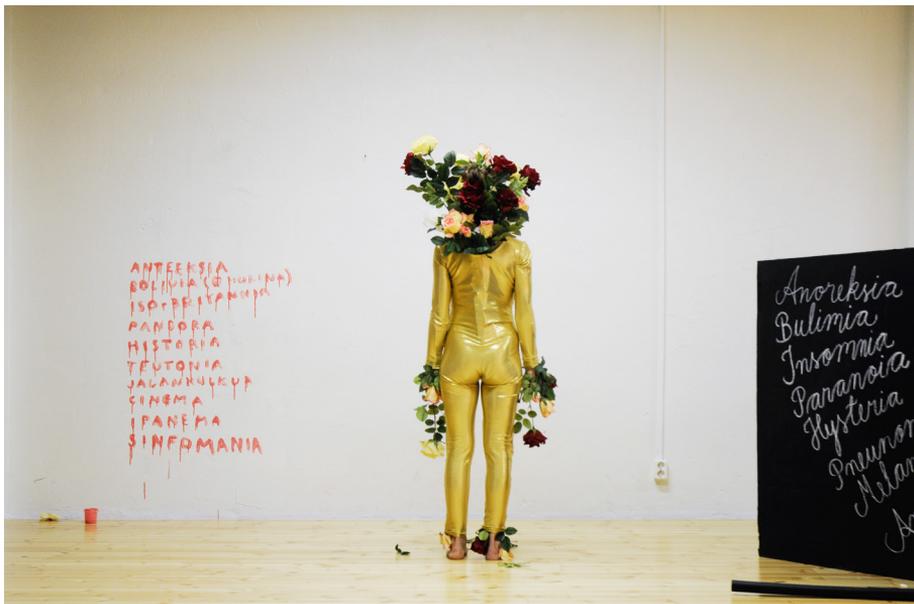
As the years passed by, the dancer often invited me to her home. Those were the moments that I felt like I was becoming a true friend of her. Once, we left her home as she’d had to rush to the theatre to prepare herself for the forthcoming show. Suddenly she said in the elevator, “Don’t tell anybody, but I’m pregnant. It’s only in the very beginning and only my closest friends know. Somehow it’s easy to tell this to you...” I felt privileged for her openness to share such a private issue with me. (Notes from auto-ethnographic diary, 14 April 2013)

The note elucidates how the dancer is ‘constructing’ her intimacy in relation to me by sharing a private experience about becoming a mother. This particular note also illustrates how my and the dancer’s embodied agencies are entwined through the cultural, embodied and gendered backgrounds behind them. Therefore, the feeling, empathizing and gendered body of the researcher and his or her openness to the opportunity to get close to the private selves of the research participants may also contribute to the ways the researcher gets “aesthetically involved” with them and to the quality of the knowledge attained.

## EXPERIENCING EMBODIED AGENCY THROUGH ANALYSING PHOTOGRAPHS

We close our analysis by describing how the use of photographs triggered the creation of aesthetic experiences and practicing embodied agency in me and therefore, also analytical findings of professional dancers’ embodied agency. While photographs are a vital part of sensory methodology (Mason & Davies, 2009; Pink, 2009), here we regard them especially as sources of “re-created aesthetic experiences during the interviews” (Warren, 2008, p. 571) not only for the research participants, but also for the researcher. In other words, with the help of photographs, I could after finishing my fieldwork take a closer look at the photographs in which the world appeared ‘still’, and identify aspects that I hadn’t realised when I was in the field. Therefore, I was able to create aesthetic experiences after the fieldwork and this way further elaborate on the meaning of the various details related to embodied agency visible in the photographs.

Thus, the interpretations I made about dancers' embodied agency when conducting the visual analysis were based both on my tangible perceptions, which include the physical appearance of the dancers and other material elements, and intangible ones, which entail the atmospheres and spirit of the dancers visualized in these photographs (cf. Biehl-Missal, 2013; Pink et al., 2014). In this case, the interpretations made of the photographs that the dancers showed me were linked to my previous attachment to the field of dance. Without my ability to practice embodied agency myself in the field, we claim that the photographs could not have provoked such powerful aesthetic experiences in me as they now did. We may analyse this viewpoint on the basis of three photographs that I here recognized as having triggered the strongest aesthetic reactions from me at first glance. The first of these photographs is the following one:



Picture 1. "Analysing wounding obsessions of a dancer."

I describe my initial experience brought up by looking at this picture in my following auto-ethnographic note:

When I saw this picture the first time, I felt overjoyed and anguished at the same time. This picture captures the contradictions of a dancer's profession; with its painful viewpoints on the one hand – and its unlimited glory on the other, making my imagination soar. These are aspects that I hadn't realized before seeing this picture. Therefore, this picture was one of the most enlightening moments of the time I spent in the field. (Notes from auto-ethnographic diary, 20 April 2013)

The note above illustrates the power of the photographs in generating intuitive, "never-thought-of" research ideas. The picture above envisages how the body of the dancer is entwined with materiality and how this affected my aesthetic experience of looking at the picture. Here, the dancer wrapped with golden costume and stunningly beautiful roses, while at the same time,

looking at the bloody letters on the wall conveyed a mysterious atmosphere that crystallized the interplay between the embodied and material aspects of a dancer's work and provided me with an aesthetic experience that led to unexpected analytical outcomes. Consequently, they turn into essential sources of the aesthetic experiences of both researchers and research participants.

The picture below that Minna, the female ballet dancer, had shown to me was also important for me:



Picture 2. "Practicing embodied agency through looking at the picture."

I wrote about the feelings that it evoked in me in the following way:

This is one of my favourite pictures in my research material. It captures both the passionate and vulnerable aspects of embodied work, and conveys some kind of spiritual connection between the two dancers. This picture demonstrates better than any of the interviews I have conducted with professional dancers that even though their work is largely a life of toil filled with physical pain, the sensory-based closeness with each other gives the dancers the strength to carry on. When I look at this picture, I feel my heart beating fast and some of my most primitive emotions awaking. (Notes from auto-ethnographic diary, 20 April 2013)

Indeed, from a methodological perspective the use of photographs enabled me to experience aesthetically "an intense fusion with things" (Woodward & Ellison, 2010, p. 49). Thus, when looking at this picture, the dancers' strong capacity for expression is only present in an 'untouchable' manner – a manner that led the researcher to feel aesthetic, sensory-based involvement with the situation captured in the photograph.



Picture 3. “Observing the rehearsal surrounded by the aesthetics of materiality.”

While the two photographs discussed above were taken without me being present, there were a couple of rehearsals in the retired ballet dancers’ production that a professional photographer also attended. Picture 3 was taken in one of those rehearsals and it captures a moment of movement and its relation to the surrounding material objects, such as the mirror, the bed, and the clothes the dancers are wearing, as well as the imperfectness in the offstage work of the dancers. I described:

In this picture, I see spontaneous searching of movements and an unfinished piece of art, which has been developed little by little through deep concentration, and which I lived through along with the dancers. I remember the feeling of immersing myself in this moment of action only by looking at the movement and listening to the music. As I have seen the final performance onstage, I now appreciate how the dancers were able to rehearse without the final set pieces so that only the aesthetics of bodily movement was what mattered in the rehearsal. (Notes from auto-ethnographic diary, 28 November 2012)

Here, the note exemplifies how my aesthetic experience became fused with the materiality of the rehearsal situation, namely the mirrors, the mat on the floor representing the bed, and the tight clothes that unashamedly revealed the bodies of the dancers. By underlining the different kind of experience that I had of the unfinished dance piece offstage and of the finished one onstage, the note above especially renders visible the sensory-based experience of the imperfectness when following the professional dancers’ offstage work. Thus, after the dancers were able to let go of the rawness and the never-achieved perfection of the dance piece and concentrate on the aesthetic details of the movements, I was able to do the same.

Taken together, the aesthetic experiences that the photographs created were meaningful for the analysis of the entire study especially because they enabled me myself to practice embodied agency. As a result, I was able to make more fine-grained interpretations of the sensory-based and material aspects of dancers' embodied agency- By observing the dancers' movements as an embodied agent, I felt being able to explore the intangible, physically-conveyed and sensuous aspects of embodied work, which is intertwined with but analytically possible to separate from the materiality in the field.

## STEPPING BACK TO BACKSTAGE: SOME CONCLUSIONS

Drawing on the ethnographic study of the first author of this paper, our aim has been to introduce and illustrate an “aesthetically involved” form of ethnography, which especially emphasizes the researcher's momentary, sensuous experiences during and after the fieldwork phase. We carried out our aim in two ways. First, we combined extant knowledge of the researcher's subjectivity and the diverse aesthetic experiences that the researcher may live through during an ethnographic research process. Second, we worked on these ideas on the basis of auto-ethnographic research material from the field of professional dance. Overall, by viewing aesthetics as an epistemological perspective that highlights emotions, embodied knowledge and memory derived from our senses (see e.g., Ropo & Sauer, 2008; Strati, 1992, 1999; Taylor & Hansen, 2005) we aimed to shed light on the ambiguous ways in which the researcher's altering subjectivities at the various moments in the field affect her aesthetic experiences and this way her interpretations during the ethnographic research process (cf. Berger, 2015). This way we respond to Pinsky's (2016, p. 281) call for a “more flexible approach to qualitative interviews that can accommodate and derive knowledge from the full range of encounters between the researcher and participant”. In the same spirit, we argue that in organization studies, ethnographic approach should be understood to consist of embodied, sensory-based ‘incidents’ that are happening in certain fragmented moments during the research process.

In its entirety, this paper especially warrants three conclusions. First, in the spirit of Thoresen and Öhlén (2015, p. 1589), our analysis speaks for a view that regards the personal experiences of the researcher as a sensory-based activity. Therefore, any researcher doing qualitative research should think carefully about potential research topics that stem from their personal affections and experiences, and thus, have a potential to particularly multifaceted and reflexive analytical outcomes (see Whiteman, 2010). For example, these aspects were present above in description of the researcher's ‘embodied’ journey that consisted of sensory-based experiences at some points from a position of a stranger and at some others of a close friend (Ellis & Rawicki, 2013; Orrico, 2015). They were also present in the researcher's aesthetic experiences that the photographs taken at the research site awoke in her (Woodward & Ellison, 2010). The latter also underlines the power of photographs to create and transmit “embodied atmospheres” (Biehl, Missal, 2013; Pink et al., 2014).

Second, our study also highlights the role of conveying the research participants' “felt understanding” of their worlds (cf. Gair, 2012, p. 134) in relation to the researcher's embodied agency and materiality in the field. More generally, our study extends previous largely instrumental

and disembodied understandings of the effects of researcher's varying positions in ethnographic work (e.g., Cui, 2015; Enguix, 2012; Haynes, 2011; Leigh, 2014) by calling for a more sensory-based and relational (e.g., Paul, 2009; Woodward & Ellison, 2010) ethnographic practice in organization studies. More specifically, this study illustrated how the craft of ethnography intended to "illuminate more general features of social phenomena" (Atkinson, 2013, p. 399) is not only a matter of fieldwork, headwork and textwork (e.g., Van Maanen, 2011), but also a matter of (the researcher's) bodywork. Furthermore, by bringing insight into the interplay between the researcher's embodied agency and materiality in the field, our study also illustrates how "aesthetic experiences necessarily implicate an object" (Warren, 2008, p. 572) and how ethnography is a relational practice, entwined with materiality. This also responds to the calls for research that would bring the material world within the "aesthetic frame of reference" (Warren, 2008, p. 561).

Third, this study forwards the current discussion of sensory methodology (e.g., Mason & Davies, 2009; Pink, 2009; Warren, 2008) that pays attention to the mundane and often (analytically) neglected social micro-practices (Atkinson, 2013b). It does this by giving an example of how using photographs as creators of atmospheres (Biehl, Missal, 2013; Pink et al., 2014) triggers researcher's aesthetic experiences and by so doing, also leads to unexpected analytical findings. By conducting sensory ethnography the researcher in this study was not strongly constrained by conventional methodological formats and expectations of conducting either ethnography or visual analysis in a certain manner, and in this way, she was able to overcome "aesthetic muteness" (Taylor, 2002), and to develop the practice of organizational ethnography further. Therefore, in the spirit of Mason and Davies (2009) and Warren (2008), our study calls for more research on the sensory-based 'micro-dynamics' between the researchers and the research phenomena to recognize the extent to which becoming "aesthetically involved" truly matters not only in organizational ethnography, but also in qualitative research more broadly.

Naturally, we acknowledge that our study is limited in several senses. Because aesthetic experiences are inherently subjective (Warren, 2008), their relation to the researcher's position in the field remains blurred. In part, this is because "the relation between the self and the other can never be fully defined" (Thoresen & Öhlén, 2015, p. 1596) and that the relationships in the field are far more complex than often described in scholarly debates (Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016). Furthermore, we recognize the specificity of dance as a research context is specific even though its 'extreme' and fundamentally embodied characteristics also make it in many ways a revelatory case. Therefore, we hope this study will work as an encouraging example for other organizational ethnographers to open up for their senses in the field.

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This is a sensory ethnography of embodied agency at work. Drawing on fieldwork, in-depth interviews, informal conversations and visual material gathered in professional dance, I look at the mundane bodily practices and 'hidden' qualities that emerge between off-stage and on-stage in this unusual context.

Here, I view embodied agency as an aesthetic phenomenon surrounded by various regimes, struggles and passions. It is therefore an ambiguous and unfinished process of creation and becoming who we are (or not) — and never reaching stability or perfection.

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