

Only the sky is the limit, or is it?
**Embodied agency as an illusory leeway to convey aesthetic knowledge in dance and
fashion**

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how aesthetic knowledge is formed, shared and made visible through the use of embodied agency within the everyday life of two sensual and kinetic contexts typically set at the margins of organization studies: *dance* and *fashion*. We work from the assumption that aesthetic knowledge, created and conveyed in time and space, includes the non-rational, embodied, sensual and culturally laden ideas of knowledge. Taking embodied action and “doing” seriously, we define embodied agency as a leeway to use one’s productional space at work. Observing closely the bodily work in the day-to-day life of the expressive dance and fashion performances with illusory aspects and a “life” that extends beyond the onstage performance, helps us to unravel the micro processes through which aesthetic knowledge in these contexts is created, negotiated and reformed. More specifically, this paper explores the ‘behind the scenes’ dynamics of those mundane situations of the two contexts, such as the

rehearsals of a dance performance and a fashion show, where adorned bodies perform in relation to others in kinesthetic ways.

The empirical material of this paper derives from two separate, on-going ethnographic studies conducted by the two authors of this paper. By combining the empirical settings of dance and fashion we show how ethnographic studies can not only negotiate but also 'dance' together, and how combining the two settings can enrich the views on the research phenomenon.

Our close study provides with an empirical example further understanding of the particular, sense-based and culturally laden nature of aesthetic knowledge in creating onstage performances aimed at illusory bodily perfection. Moreover, we show how embodied agency enlarges and, controversy limits the use of one's productional space within the embodied forms of aesthetic knowledge that are created. Our paper illustrates how the culturally laden and embodied aspects of aesthetic knowledge matter not only to fashion and dance organizations, but the ever-growing aesthetic economy in a broader sense.

* The authors are listed in alphabetical order.

Key words: aesthetic knowledge, embodied agency, dance, fashion

INTRODUCTION

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 to the present moment and aim at creating a performance with a contemporary twist. They go through the piece without the music by 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."



Picture 1 The dancers should “bring down” the controlled, balletic movements.

Let the empirical episode and the picture above, illustrating how the cultural background leaving traces in the bodies of the agents and subtlety of day-to-day work, play out in an everyday situation of a dance rehearsal, serve as a starting point for this paper. More specifically, this paper explores *how aesthetic knowledge is shaped, shared and made visible through the use of embodied agency* within two exhilarating, sensual and kinetic performances circulating a concept of extraordinary bodies performing and telling stories: *dance* and *fashion*. A “turn to embodiment” (e.g. Hassard et al. 2000; Dale 2001; Dale & Burrell 2000) within organization studies and the ever-growing interdisciplinary scholarly

interest paid to dance as work (e.g. Slutskaya 2006; Wainwright & Turner 2006; Aalten 2007; de Cock & Slutskaya 2008; Price 2008; Holland 2010; Chandler 2012; Coupland 2013; Roberts 2013; Stanway, Bordia & Fein 2013) as well as fashion modelling work (e.g. Entwistle 2002; Soley-Betran 2004; Soley-Betran 2006; Entwistle & Wissinger 2006; Wissinger 2007; Mears 2011; Entwistle & Wissinger 2012; Neumann 2012) demonstrates how the settings of fashion and dance, traditionally marginalized as “feminine”, are becoming increasingly influential also to organization studies. These specific contexts we view as seemingly constrained, sculpted and shaped by a number of pre-defined occupational practices, cultural standards and dominating body-ideals, where both models and dancers self-manage their feelings and their bodily capital (e.g., Hancock & Tyler, 2000) into desired cultural forms (e.g. Aalten 2007; Mears 2008; Mears 2011) as they perform both offstage and onstage.

In line with Parkins (2000, 59) we “cannot think of agency without the body” whereas we view aesthetic knowledge as a phenomenon fundamentally sensory and embodied (e.g. Ewenstein & Whyte 2007), deriving from our sensory experiences *and* particular culturally bounded situations in a rather broad way. As such, aesthetic knowledge includes both the sensory and the culturally laden aspects¹. We define embodied agency as a leeway to use one’s productional space at work, through which aesthetic knowledge is negotiated, reformed and performed. By productional space, we refer to the various possibilities of performing the work that a model or a dancer has within the present, specific production. By combining the theoretical notion of embodied agency with aesthetic knowledge, we illustrate how the creation of aesthetic knowledge at work is wrapped with situated, meticulous and varying forms of embodied agency. Far from simple, our close study opening up the offstage of dance and fashion provides with an enriching empirical example not only focusing on the end performance and on the front stage situations of the actors, but instead further understanding of how aesthetic knowledge is formed, contested and negotiated in the dynamics, the repetitive training offstage and the meticulous practice of the day-to-day life of dance and fashion.

Governed by specific norms and certain regimes, embodied agency in the settings of dance and fashion appears to be significantly restricted and controlled by constraints such as the

¹ We view aesthetic knowledge as embodied, sensory and culturally bounded (see e.g. Aalten 2007; Holland 2010; Entwistle & Wissinger 2012) further relating to the creation of an aesthetic “surface”, the performing of aesthetic labour and the landscaping work of ballet dancers or fashion models.

self, other actors on the field, the garments, the gaze, choreographies, lighting, sound, space, the presence of the audience, occupational culture, traditions, institutions and structures² (see e.g. Barnes 2000; Noland 2009; Holland 2010) where physical structures direct gazes in certain ways, and certain ways of looking are emphasized over others. Hence, both dancers and models seem in their everyday work to balance or struggle between 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 in certain time and space, which in turn affects and determines how aesthetic knowledge is shaped and shared within the specifics of the context. In addition, the *agency of their own* may set certain mental and physical limits and constraints for their embodied work and, in this way, affect and restrict their nuanced personal space central for the creation of aesthetic knowledge at work.

Our paper emphasizes a multifaceted embodied view of agency that emerges in specific contexts as a result of possessing a body that moves and feels (Noland 2009, 105), where models and dancers performing nuanced variations of bodily movements, expressions and gestures further mediate between getting their agency denied on the one hand, to finding complex and surprising ways to achieve agency on the other³. Consequently, we work from the assumption that issues of individual, embodied agency are from the beginning interwoven with complicated issues of knowledge, power, freedom and resistance, hence, rendering visible the complexity around embodied agency. However, the dance and fashion show rehearsals, for instance, were not only a way of dealing with the perplexities of a script but also a process of opening it up so that it was perceived in a new way (see Mangham 2005, 950). By using their ability to sense and feel at work and by sharing aesthetic knowledge with each other, dancers and models become masters of their own profession.

We view both dance performances and fashion shows not only as aesthetic, embodied *performances*⁴ in the meaning of overwhelming subjective experiences registered by all our interacting senses, but also as complex time-space sequences “nested within social, cultural,

² We are aware of these constraints but elaborate further only those of them that appear to be relevant in relation to our argument and rise to the hub based on our fieldwork and the research material that we have gathered.

³ Although particularly feminists have criticized the idealized, limited representations of the performative bodies in both fashion (e.g. Bartky 1988, Bordo 1993) and dance, the form of ballet in particular (e.g. Adair 1992; Aalten 2004), we work from the assumption that the bodies of models and dancers are not (only) passive, constrained and denied agency in their working contexts *as such*, but also seemingly active as subjects in searching for and finding creative ways to achieve embodied agency.

⁴ Here, we deliberately use the concept of performance instead of other related concepts intending to capture the time-consuming processes of producing and meticulously putting together fashion shows and dance pieces.

technical, and economic circumstances that extend in time, space, and kind beyond what happens onstage” (Schechner 2006, 245). Performance, here understood as a single, expressive and even spectacular “act” getting its force from repetitive work offstage, practice and training, captures nuances of *performing* in relation to others in ways, which do justice to aesthetic and bodily dimensions of our research subjects within our empirical contexts. We view the concept of performance different yet intertwined with the process of *performativity*, by which we understand the continuous refinement of the working practices towards a never-achieved illusory perfection (e.g. Kamoche et al. 2003; Gherardi 2009). The performance composed of different phases from a beginning to a breakdown and aftermath, does not include only the ‘end result’ onstage, but the meticulous, sensitive day-to-day work offstage with its anxieties, before and after the performance onstage.

We do not consider the detailed study of the two traditionally performative settings of fashion and dance solely as excellently illustrative examples of the versatile utilization of embodied agency and the creation of aesthetic knowledge at day-to-day work, thus challenging dominantly over-rationalised understandings of knowledge within organization studies. Instead, turning the spotlight on these *bodily* settings and capturing the atmosphere of these performances with multiple ‘illusory’ aspects managing the aesthetic (e.g., Hancock & Tyler 2007) in order to perform (here, understood as more than economically), and where knowledge is transmitted without the need for continuous verbal explanation, adds valuable, critical insight to our understanding of knowledge creation within an ever-growing expressive *aesthetic economy* (Böhme 2003, 82, see also Entwistle 2002, 2009) that explicitly serves “to stage, costume and intensify life” in a broader sense.

Finally, we acknowledge the differences between dance and fashion, and have deliberately chosen to examine two different aesthetic performances⁵. In this paper however, we do not concentrate on the differences between dance and fashion. Instead, we shed light on the confluences of the two performances, by going ‘behind the scenes’ and beyond the surface, and in this way make them ‘dance’ together. Creating knowledge through fully enabled bodies practicing, performing and working together towards an onstage performance of illusory perfection, is at the very heart of both dance and fashion. In both performances the

⁵ As a performance, the fashion show is an explicitly commercial setting, promoting fashionable clothing in an artistic or visually spectacular way that draws the viewer’s attention particularly to merchandized *dress* and *body surface*, whereas dance, meanwhile problematic as creating idealized bodily representations, is primarily focused on the *artistic impression* of the dance piece and the *inner meanings* of it.

'lure' of perfection is evident, as the aim and struggle for recognition, success and desirability. The point is also not to fade away from the memories of the audience, but to affect people's impressions (e.g., Hancock & Tyler 2007) and to make a long-lasting impression that lives far beyond the defining moment onstage. Hence, we view particularly movement, illusion, performance and aesthetic labour as the vital points of connection between fashion and dance.

This paper proceeds as follows. We first discuss the theoretical background of our paper and the notions of aesthetic knowledge and embodied agency in specific. Then, we open up the contexts of dance and fashion that we have intensively studied. We provide with insights from our on-going studies and show the winding path from the collecting of empirical material to the discussion based on the co-operation between us two and the participants on the field. The combination of the two contexts and our co-operation brings novelty to the theoretical understanding of embodied, experiential sides of aesthetic knowledge and the discussion of critical organizational aesthetics in specific (see e.g., Eagleton 1990; Hancock & Tyler 2000; Böhme 2003; Witz et al. 2003; Taylor & Hansen 2005; Hancock 2005; Hancock & Tyler 2007; Warren & Rehn 2007; Styhre 2008), that deliberately distances itself from romantic, uncritically optimistic and over-simplistic understandings of aesthetics and knowledge.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Embodied agency as a conceptual thread

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), to which we attach this paper. Alongside with the "corporeal turn", a "turn to embodiment" in organization studies (e.g. Hassard et al. 2000; Dale 2001; Dale & Burrell 2000) has raised an ever-growing interest to the role of the body at work (e.g. Hindmarsch & Pilnick 2007; Patriotta & Spedale 2009) and to the research of embodiment (e.g. Moreira 2004; Wainwright, Williams & Turner 2007; Brown, Cromby, Harper, Johnson & Reavey 2011; Tarr & Thomas 2011). Still, relatively little attention has been paid to the embodied founding of knowing (Yakhlef 2010). In this paper, we define embodiment as a process whereby collective behaviours and beliefs, acquired through acculturation, are rendered individual and "lived" at the level of the body (see Noland 2009). We view the bodies of both dancers and

models as fully enabled⁶ culturally idealized representations of the human body (Douglas 1966), in a sense that they are physically fully trained throughout their careers and fully enabled to both express their individual creativity and “the specific cultural meanings embedded in the roles they embody” (Schechner, 2006, 233) on the everyday stages they are now performing.

Agency implies rationality and free will (Campbell, Meynell & Sherwin 2009). According to Noland (2009, 9) “agency is the power to alter those acquired behaviors and beliefs for purposes that may be reactive (resistant) or collaborative (innovative) in kind”. The concept of kinesthesia, a source of sensations of which the subject is more or less aware, is crucial for embodied agency. Without kinesthesia the subject could not be able to distinguish her own body from other bodies, would have no capabilities for independent movement, and thus, would be incapable of adopting agency at all (see Noland 2009). As we have observed dancers’ and models’ working, it has revealed to consist simultaneously of routinized repetition and improvisational, aesthetic sensitive movements and gestures. This led us to explore how agency might work from the embodied perspective.

Agency emerges as a result of embodiment, of possessing a body that moves and feels (Noland 2009, 105). Neither constructivist nor affect-centred theories of subjectivity and agency have much to say about kinesthetic experience or motor intentionality, the dynamic engagement of the body in a specific context that invites subjects to effect change (see Noland 2009, 4). Neither does the existing literature on embodied agency (e.g. Campbell et al. 2009; Noland 2009) look at the *offstage* performances of it. In this research paper, we address these critical neglects, and analyse the role of the body in the transformation of subjectivities and bodily, expressive practices in day-to-day life offstage of both dancers and models.

We argue that embodied agency provides an enriching concept in *critically* approaching embodied forms of knowledge. As it has been widely discussed within social sciences, agency as the human capability of acting and carrying out actions exists only in relation to others (Liimakka 2008). By continuing this thought, especially interesting in the case of professional dancers and models are their experiences exposing in the gaze of others and themselves as experiencing the others gazing at them (see Fredrickson & Roberts 1997) and, in this way,

⁶ The tension between enabled and disabled bodies in relation to embodied agency is interesting and under examined topic. In this paper though, we do not discuss this tension more thoroughly. For a more detailed discussion of the debate of disability see Albrecht et al. (2001), Corker & Shakespeare (2002) and Mitchell & Snyder (2006).

constructing their embodied agency in relation to other human and non-human agents in their context.

In line with Noland (2009), we view agency as embodied experiences and processes of carrying out actions. In this research paper, we identify embodied agency as the leeway of one's productional space at work, highlighting the bounded relation with embodied agency and the current production. We argue that dancers' and fashion models' bodies come into being through their agency and their agencies are constructed through gestures and aesthetic details in offstage working. Embodied agency is in a sense a journey through which aesthetic knowledge is constructed and further negotiated, and through which the productional space of a dancer or a model may be widen. In what follows, we open up the existing theoretical body of literature concerning aesthetic knowledge. Here, we understand aesthetic knowledge in a broad sense and position our study in the field of critical organizational aesthetics in specific. For us, the aesthetic view to knowledge serves as a vehicle for exploring embodied agency.

Aesthetic knowledge

In the theorization of *aesthetics*, there is a rich and multifaceted literature from which the philosophical concept can be approached. Shusterman (2006) points out that in the literature, 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, an ever-growing interest in aesthetics since the early 1990s has produced a wide range of literature (Gagliardi 1996; Strati 1999; Linstead & Höpfl 2000; Witz et al. 2003; Guillet de Monthoux 2004; Taylor & Hansen 2005; Warren & Rehn 2007; Hancock 2011) exploring the non-instrumental and the non-rational dimensions of organizational life, where questions of art, beauty, taste, *sensory experiences* and the *intuitive, imaginative nature* of everyday life are at the heart. Despite often focusing on physical organizational artefacts (see e.g. Strati 1992; 1996; 1999), aesthetics can be understood widely as the epistemological questioning of sensuality and knowledge (Hancock 2011), a subjective phenomenon based on *sense* experiences, involving *perception, imagination* and *intuition* (Ewenstein & Whyte 2007).

A critical approach to organizational aesthetics, furthermore, takes into consideration that personal, sensory experiences are never “pure” from ideologies or power relations (e.g. Eagleton 1990; Warren & Rehn 2007; Hancock; 2011), but instead, “learned reflections of

particular cultures' preferences" as Warren & Rehn (2007, 165) put it. Also, critical organizational aesthetics questions managerialist, representationalist and reductionist understandings of aesthetics (e.g. Stokes 2011), rendering visible how aesthetics could be a matter of careful manipulation and manufacture of surface and materiality, landscaping of bodies, spaces and environments (e.g. Hancock & Tyler 2000; 2001; Witz et al. 2003; Pettinger 2004; Dean 2005, Hancock 2005; Hancock & Tyler 2007; Warhurst & Nickson, 2007), images in and of organizations, meanwhile reflexively considering the difficulties of carrying out research that captures subjective aesthetic experiences (e.g., Warren 2008). This is the way of understanding aesthetics to which we base our paper on and the theoretical discussion of organizational aesthetics that we link our paper to.

There is a growing but (still) marginal body of studies concerned with embodiment and aesthetic labour in the workplace (Aspers 2006; Hancock & Tyler; Hindmarsh & Pilnick 2007; Sheane 2012), considering both emotional and physical dimensions of aesthetic work, where bodies are both 'produced' and perceived in certain ways. The role of the body and the aesthetic dimensions of work have been explored within different working communities, such as academia (Taylor 2000), flight attendants (Hancock & Tyler 2001), ballet dancers (Aalten 2007; Wainwright et al. 2006), architectures (Ewenstein & Whyte 2007), anaesthetic teams (Hindmarsh & Pilnick 2007), hairdressing salons and hairstylists (Chugh & Hancock 2009; Sheane 2012), fashion modelling (Wissinger 2012) and craftsmen (Taylor 2013). Aesthetics, including perceptual and emotional human skills and capabilities (Styhre 2008) complements traditional ways of knowing, working and leading⁷, which have left individuals' emotional, symbolic responses unexamined within the field of organization studies.

Aesthetic knowledge we view as fundamentally embodied. It is both something that actors can come to possess as an identifiable style, such as expression through non-verbal signifiers, referents and signs, and something that becomes manifest in their practice as a specific competency, involving feeling, sensitivity and bodily experience (Ewenstein & Whyte 2007). In this paper, we view aesthetic knowledge as created from our sensory, day-to-day experiences (see Ewenstein & Whyte 2007; Taylor & Hansen, 2005; Hancock, 2005). We highlight the culturally laden aspect of aesthetic knowledge; it is of both embodied and

⁷ Recently, several scholars have drawn their attention also the aesthetic and embodied side of leadership (see e.g. Duke 1986; Sinclair 2005; Hansen, Ropo & Sauer 2007; Ladkin 2008; Ladkin & Taylor 2010; Barthurst, Jackson & Statler 2010; Koivunen & Wennes 2011).

cultural kind. We base our argument on the *spatial* and *temporal* dimensions of knowledge creation and sharing within the performative contexts onstage. Here, we consider aesthetic knowledge as socially negotiated and bounded to the “corporeal turn” (Sheets-Johnstone 2009), which gives a possibility to “get closer to the subjective essence of life itself, instead of being stuck to dead and fragmented representations of it” (Vermees 2011, x). Furthermore, we consider bodily practices vital as a source of aesthetic knowledge (see Roberts 2013).

We are aware of closely related concepts to aesthetic knowledge⁸ such as *sensible knowledge*, as 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*, as presented by Parviainen (2002, 11) as “knowing in and through the body”, or *tacit knowledge*, as discussed by Styhre (2009) as knowledge that cannot really be articulated. According to Styhre (2009, 997), however, aesthetic knowledge is “neither wholly explicit nor tacit, but a combination of the two forms of know-how”.

In other words, we work from the assumption that aesthetics is a form of organizational knowledge (Harter et al, 2008; Strati 1992, 1996) based on tactile, olfactory, visual, audible (Styhre, 2008) and culturally laden *embodied* capabilities rather than only rational logics (Harter et al., 2008; Strati 1992, 1996, 2003) and is in constant *interplay between individual and collective aspects* in it (Bouty & Gomez 2010). Understanding aesthetic knowledge from a performative point of view draws our attention to the lived, embodied experiences rather than to the recognition of past experiences (see Peterson & Langellier 2006). Aesthetic knowledge is performative, we argue, in a way that the embodied capability of moving creates aesthetic knowledge by repetition and imitation, in other words, by “*the doing*”. On the other hand, aesthetic knowledge is performance in a sense that the body-possibilities of a dancer or of a model create aesthetic knowledge and actualize one possible variation or representation of aesthetic knowledge, “*the making*”, differing from the activity (the doing) itself. Performing aesthetic knowledge is both a way to produce different nuances and variations of aesthetic knowledge and a way to “*culture*” it in the temporary, spatial moments of day-to-day work of the dancers and models.

⁸ Here, it is also worth pointing out the extensive work carried out by feminist philosophers (see e.g. Halford et al. (1997), McDowell (1997) and Witz (2000) in “acknowledging the body in the production and evaluation of knowledge” as Grosz (1993, 187) puts it.

According to Ewenstein and Whyte (2007) aesthetic knowledge has two dimensions: the symbolic and the experiential. Both of these dimensions are recognizable in both dancers' and models' everyday-work; the symbolic dimension refers to the style, a sum of the performers' entire being, shaped by the culturally laden expressions and traditions of moving, dressing and performing for instance, whereas the experiential captures the corporeal experience of knowing. Following the idea of Taylor and Hansen (2005), we argue that the distinction between intellectual, propositional knowing versus aesthetic, sensory knowing is not just *how* we know things but *why* we know things. Intellectual knowing aims at clarifying and objectifying truth, while aesthetic knowledge is created through subjective, personal experience for its own sake.

We use the concepts of *aesthetic experience* (e.g. Taylor 2002; Ewenstein & Whyte 2007; Warren 2008; Sutherland 2013) and *aesthetic reflexivity* (e.g. Nickson, Warhurst, Witz & Cullen 2001; Ewenstein & Whyte 2007; Mack 2007) to understand and to explain the multiple ways in which aesthetic knowledge emerges, is negotiated and developed in the everyday life of dancers and models. Aesthetic experience is momentary of nature, exists often tantalizingly beyond our grasp and is difficult to verbalize (Warren 2008). By having long, informal talks with our research subjects and by listening to them we try to capture this ephemeral nature of aesthetic experience in the day-to-day life of fashion and dance. By aesthetic reflexivity we refer to the creation of knowing in and through our sensory-emotional experiences (see Sutherland 2013). Aesthetic reflexivity is the mechanism through which aesthetic knowledge is developed and applied by actors (Ewenstein & Whyte 2007).

INTRODUCING THE “ORDINARY” WORLDS OF DANCE AND FASHION

Working in the culture of ballet and the aspiration of having an ideal balletic body

The occupational culture of ballet is highly controlled and idealized, sharing moral beliefs, such as considering pain as a commonly shared part of the everyday-work and behavioural codes of how to achieve a “perfect body” (Aalten 2007). The balletic body is based on an elite and narrow cultural field of dance (Wainwright & Turner 2004). The aesthetic ideals of ballet are obsessive and bewildering; although one could expect the ballet dancers to treat their bodies carefully and respectfully, they often are confronted with eating disorders and serious injuries deriving from chronic overburdening of the body (Aalten 2007). Though, the occupational culture of ballet has a strong desire of craving for a never-achieved perfection that is produced and re-produced in daily life of the ballet companies.

Despite all organizational change towards flatter and postmodern organizations, hierarchical order is dominant (Diefenbach & Sillince 2011). National Ballet is an illustrative example of a highly hierarchal organization in which teachers, ballet masters and choreographers operate as gatekeepers to the profession and dictate which bodies approximate most closely to the ideal balletic body. Company ballet dancers have usually permanent contracts, while contemporary dancers tend to work on short-term contracts (Tarr & Thomas 2011). As Wainwright et al. (2006) argue, the balletic habitus is constantly negotiated and replicated by the interplay between agency and structure⁹. In other words, the balletic body is surrounded by embodied practices that the cultural world of ballet has created.

According to Wainwright and Turner (2004) classical ballet is in spite of several occupational features, such as working hours and institutional arrangements, a calling, within which ballet dancers are typically astonished that they are paid to do something that is a joy for them. On the other hand, the occupational culture of ballet can be considered to be in a transition; while the older dancers talk about a calling and about how they have sacrificed their life only for dance, the younger generation consider themselves as “officer-dancers” who have a regular eight to four -job and plans for the future after the ballet career. A normal working day of dancers in National Ballet is from 10 am to 5 pm. From time to time they have longer days and performances in the evenings. Sometimes it feels like the body had no time to recover by the following day. (Satama 2009.) In this sense, it is a constant competition season that they have there, and makes the profession mentally hard.

In the world of ballet dancers are confronted with two bodies: the ideal body and the experienced body (Aalten 2007; Foster 1995; Reed 1998). The ideal body is able to perform certain movements endlessly and with ease, whereas the experienced body struggles to fulfil the demands placed on it. Extra-thinness as a specific ideal form, physical requirements such as perfect balance and suppleness, and perseverance as a trait are examples of and essential tools for the making of an ideal body which allows entrance to a professional world of ballet (see Gvion 2008). It may happen that a dancer with a good shape gets a role even if there were some other dancers with better technical skills or soul. What counts is the dancer as a

⁹ Bourdieu links agency with structure through the process of habitus (see Wainwright et al. 2006). We argue that *embodied* agency can be worked loosely without the notions of habitus and structure and though, we do not draw upon the classical works of Bourdieu in this paper.

whole, his or her personality. The decisions are often made by the artistic manager of the company who has his or her personal desires. (Satama 2009.)

The situation of a ballet dancer, her or his own body being constantly compared by other dancers and by his- or herself to the image of the ideal ballerina, creates a context of living as an objectified body. The appearance is central in the profession and there are certain traits that the dancers are expected to have; to be considered as a typical ballet dancer you need to be squeamish, persistent and buckle under pressure. (Aalten 2007.)

We argue that working in the context of a National Ballet highlights the role of other people in embodied agency. However, it is not just the organization and the people in it but also the embodied experiences, the history of the body and the so-called “embodied map” (see Parviainen 2006) that influence ballet dancers’ perceptions of their bodies. However, the background of the ballet context constraints but also allows possibilities for using embodied agency in creating and sharing aesthetic knowledge, which are discussed more thoroughly in the analysis.

The ‘ordinary’ fashion show and the ideal body of the fashion model

Supposedly not fixed or formal objects but complex, temporal, social, historical creations in a certain time and space, today’s fashion shows, juxtapose notions of transformation, draw upon various sources of inspiration that differ in context. We argue, however, that fashion shows organized around the world tend to be carefully planned, “ritualized” performances that share many surprisingly common features and constraints. Apart from the central element of a fashion designer’s latest clothing collection to be staged, a runway show usually requires a space, a catwalk, organizers, performers and an audience. Importantly, a fashion show needs to continue to ‘live’ on particularly in virtual spaces, such as media, in fashion blogs and on the Internet.

The rapid-fire parade of moving bodies is a fashion show format rarely challenged, where adorned young, beautiful and slim fashion models stride down a runway in a choreographed yet straightforward manner before an influential fashion audience of bloggers, celebrities, photographers, journalists, consumers and garment buyers (e.g. Evans 2009; Mears, 2008). A “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) put into practice on a formal staging called a catwalk. Often “fixed” in its conventions, rigid structures

and with many repetitive elements, Gruendl (2007) compares the fashion show to a ritual of an ancient Greek procession or a site of social learned behaviour, where those taking part tend to behave according to existing norms and expectations (e.g. Skov et al., 2009; Entwistle & Rocamora, 2006).

The fascination of the fashion show appears to be in the presentation of fashionable clothing on young, fully enabled and well-groomed, ultimately stylized human bodies. Through disciplinary bodily alterations and specific gendered forms of dress, make-up and footwear, fashion models are transformed into staged 'looks' and performing "cultural commodities" (Mears 2008, 429). In order to create a spectacular, vibrant and colourful onstage illusion of bodily perfection, where models embody, project and "promote" certain commodities and aesthetic ideals, a formalized artificial and distinct mannequin walk is usually applied. The show often becomes what Evans (2010) calls a platform subject to the objectifying gaze and the "tyranny of slenderness" (Mears, 2008, 431), where gender as image and idea is performed¹⁰.

Fashion models work in a disciplinary regime of surveillance and objectification, in which the female body is broken down by a ubiquitous gaze and put on display for unspecified judgment. (Mears, 2008, 430)

As further illustrated by Mears (2008) above and Soley-Beltran (2006, 23), fashion models can be approached as "artefacts performed through the reiteration of collectively defined gender standards and practices". Being at once unique and 'serially reproducible', the exposed and even exploited bodies of fashion models, objects of desire in a sexualised market (Frisell Ellburg 2008), further disciplined, starved and exercised through a number of techniques therefore embody a contradiction. In line with Wissinger (2009) and Soley-Beltran (2004, 2006), we want, however, to avoid a polarizing or sensationalist view towards fashion modelling work as solely empty and passive.

Fashion models are, nevertheless, usually portrayed as purely passive, ritualized objects to hang clothes on from which the model's subjectivity and agency appears to be entirely erased (e.g., Frisell Ellburg 2008; Neumann 2012; Rundqvist 2012). Perhaps the most explicit way in which a model's subjectivity becomes 'reduced' to a gendered surface is through clothes and

¹⁰ Feminist scholars (e.g. Bartky 1988; Bordo 1993; Rundqvist 2012) have traditionally been critical of the representations of women in fashion. As Evans (2001) points out, the word 'model' itself refers paradoxically both to a human ('the girl') and a dress.

other bodily adornments (Mears 2008), performed under the objectifying gaze. However, modelling work also constitutes strongly of emotional, material and symbolic matters. On the catwalk a commoditized fantasy is being sold – not necessarily the model’s subjectivity. This becomes evident also in our empirical context, a group fashion show performance in a Finnish setting, where certain norms of an ordinary fashion presentation are deliberately challenged. Mainly run by women striving to create a caring atmosphere, the models of the show are also encouraged to be *active* performers, embodied agents resisting to certain repressing, dominant norms of fashion. Hence, we illustrate the fashion performance rehearsed towards illusory perfection also as a site of encouragement and care, nuanced embodied agency, (partial) norm breaking and even resistance.

METHODOLOGY

This paper takes an aesthetic approach on organizational life. We turn towards an aesthetic epistemology (Strati 2000) in order to link together sensuous ways of knowing with the bodily dimension. In other words, the methodology of our study is aesthetically sensitive (see Warren 2008), where the sensual experiences of us as researchers in gathering the empirical material are important, but mutually important are exploring the aesthetic experiences of our researched subjects. Here, we work from within our own “explicitly sensory framework” (Warren 2008, 563), in order to account for “multi-dimensional ways in which we experience reality” (de Cock & Slutskaya 2008, 852). Our aim is furthermore to “breathe life into organization studies” (Dutton 2003) by studying organizations and people that inspire us by using research methods that preserve the lived experience of those and, in this way, revitalize and profoundly enrich the phenomenon of aesthetic knowledge.

The methodological approach of this research paper is ethnographic. In general, ethnography is a way of thinking, analyzing and writing about social life (Watson 2011). Thus, it is more a research approach than a concrete, pre-defined set of methodological tools to be used in the field (Van Maanen 2011). Ethnography has been widely adopted as a way in which understanding of the micro processes of organizational life can be reached (Kellogg 2009; Michel 2011). In line with this view, we 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 (see Crotty 1998, 7; Pink 2011, 22; Van Maanen 2010; Watson 2011). What furthermore makes our study engaged to an ethnographic approach are the ways in which we have carried out our fieldwork, headwork

and textwork (see Van Maanen 2011). Our fieldwork includes long-term participant-observation aiming at capturing the specifics of culture and its meanings. Our headwork aims at capturing the lived experiences of the actors both offstage and onstage and within the textwork, we aim at a style of writing that allows for the voices of those we have studied to be heard instead of us to speak for them.

The empirical material of this paper derives from two separate, on-going ethnographic studies. The first one of these is a dance production of two retired dancers, a female and a male, both with a life-long background in the world of classical ballet. They retired from the Finnish National Ballet at the same time, in June 2012. The production of these two ex-ballerinas provides with an interesting example of the co-creation of aesthetic knowledge in the freelance field, where the dancers have gained more freedom, personal space and agency to decide of 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 constrained by their professional background.

An annual group fashion show performance in a Finnish context, an inspirational ‘hybrid’ in which fashion, dance and other theatrical elements are mixed and woven together in ways that challenge the norms of an ‘ordinary’ fashion show, serves as the second empirical setting of this paper. With eight different designers’ collections to be staged, seven women’s and one men’s collection, all with unique choreographies, music, script and ‘feelings’ to be communicated and with a working style allowing for multiple persons to become part of the work in progress, we illustrate how aesthetic knowledge is a complex, collective matter where the performing models are no ‘quiet’ dolls, but actively participate in changing, shaping and choreographing the overall performance. With nuanced choreographed movements performed and with an explicit will to create an unconventional fashion show presenting collections in unexpected ways, our paper further illustrates a fashion show not solely as an oppressive site of exploitation of women and men, but also a site of nuanced embodied agency and knowledge creation.

The empirical material from both empirical settings includes participant observation, photographs, video clips and numerous informal conversations with both dancers and models. Our aim is not to compare the settings of dance and fashion with each other or identify differences between them. Instead, our interest is in the creation of aesthetic knowledge

through fully enabled bodies in two illusory performances and also, in constructing careful interpretations which would reveal patterns or aspects that may be insightful in other contexts, as well (see Czarniawska 2008). In this paper, we use photographs constructed and selected by us for presentational reasons (e.g. Rose 2007, see also Van Leeuwen & Jewitt 2001) in order to create a reflexive and multifaceted ethnography that could be characterized as ‘messy’ (Marcus 1994). However, we do not here conduct a visual analysis. Also, we are aware of the realistic tradition of using photographs as ‘evidence’ deriving particularly from anthropology (e.g. Bateson & Mead 1942; Collier & Collier 1986). This is not our purpose. Instead, we acknowledge the multivocality of the visual to open up to different forms of knowledge, aware of our own roles in constructing knowledge through the empirical material. The photographs included in this paper intend to illustrate our arguments and invite the reader to sense and interpret those spaces that we have taken part of, experienced and constructed.

The analysis of this paper began with a close reading of our field notes and notes of the informal discussions with the dancers and models. After the first close reading on our own we met to discuss the first impressions and thoughts that had risen in our minds based on the reading. We also discussed the viewpoints of aesthetic knowledge that we agreed to bring under closer look in this paper. After that we wrote separately broad descriptions from some episodes from the field of fashion and dance of which we had sense about relating in a way or another to the discussion of aesthetic knowledge. We combined the photographs taken about these episodes to the written text to illustrate the episodes and to work as triggers to deepen and thicken our interpretations. The movement between research material and analysis was not sequential, but rather iterative, and involved a continual refinement of our interpretations.

As much of the work that we observed was non-verbal, this allowed (and forced) us to use our own aesthetic sensitivity to explore more about what we had witnessed and why this was meaningful. We continuously met to discuss our interpretations of the field notes and developed our combined thoughts further. In this way, we made our contexts “dance” together. We talked openly about our interpretations and conclusions with the participants through the final draft of this paper. Although they found it difficult to combine the theoretical understanding to practice, they were very cooperative, open-minded and interested in discussing our ideas of this paper. Finally, due to the methodological challenge of aesthetic muteness, i.e. organizational members’ difficulty of transforming their aesthetic experience into words (Taylor 2002; Warren 2008), we saw our aim of capturing the distinctive nature of

aesthetic knowledge among the work of fashion models and professional dancers and translating it into language as exceptionally challenging but interesting.

ILLUSORY ASPECTS OF EMBODIED AGENCY AT WORK

Creating illusory freedom for using embodied agency offstage: *“My intention is to give you all available space to create and invent”*

“...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 that our models get to produce 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” (see picture 2).

Modelling work “may mirror the politics of oppression and agency”, Mears (2008, 450) writes. The quote above, as expressed by the pro-feminist show director during a rehearsal, illustrates her overall explicit will to empower the models of the show and let them *express* and mobilize themselves in the roles they embody (Schechner 2006) throughout the performance. Also, the quote renders visible the director’s deliberate will to imply embodied agency and to work against fashion’s dominant convention of merely presenting scripted, adorned, docile bodies ‘disciplined’ on the catwalk (Mears, 2008, Entwistle & Mears 2012) in ways that restrict movements and solely confirm to the dominant norms of a traditionally oppressive setting (e.g., Chapkins, 1997; Peiss, 1998; Gill, 2003; Neumann, 2012; Rundquist, 2012).



Picture 2 Rehearsing movements revolting against the ‘conventional’ fashion show.

However, Mears (2008) remarks how the celebrating of “women’s potential for agency”, a central idea in the entire fashion show production, still runs “the risk of downplaying structural inequalities”. In other words, despite attempts that may imply agency towards experiencing freedom, models are always, at least to some extent, restricted by the complexity of dominant fashion norms, cultural traditions and structures in their specific context (e.g. Entwistle, 2002, 2009; Entwistle & Wissinger, 2012). This indicates that experiencing freedom through embodied agency in the context is illusory.

If Skov *et al.* (2009, see also Entwistle & Mears 2012) describe the movement pattern of the ‘ordinary’ mannequin walk as strictly scripted with the legs lifting the knees higher than in a normal walk while the upper body is kept passive causing the model to look like an idealized object, the variety of nontraditional ‘theatrical’ movements stretching existing fashion conventions and the knowingly ‘overdoing’ of choreography in the fashion performance provided with a striking contrast to ‘traditional’, exaggerated ‘strutting’ or gliding up and down the catwalk (e.g. Skov *et al.* 2009; Entwistle & Mears 2012). Instead of erasing individual, bodily nuances, the performance aimed at using the stage grandly and knowingly balanced on the fine line of performing expressively, but not taking too much attention away from the garments.

Different to a view of models purely as silent, constrained forms for promoting garments denied their agency (e.g., Frisell Ellburg 2008; Soley-Beltran 2012), it appeared particularly important to the director to give the models freedom and space to invent, let them experiment to walk, gesture and express themselves by using their entire sensory framework (e.g. Warren 2008) and carry out nuanced embodied actions (Noland 2009) offstage. The director did not apply a strategy of 'uniformization' of the models (e.g., Soley-Beltran 2012), or direct the bodies to move in manners of looking as similar as possible. Instead of merely giving directions or asking the models to convey emotions only according to *her* idea of the script, the director continuously positively encouraged the models to actively verbally and kinesthetically participate in inventing, improving and changing the script and the overall formation of the show: "*Always come up with any suggestions on anything, really!*" she continuously said at the different rehearsals. The verbal rehearsals, the collective working progress in which the models actively participated, differed from modeling work described as physically expressive but often non-verbal, where models merely communicate emotions and energy through movements and gestures without saying a word (Wissinger 2007). If the rehearsals were verbal, the onstage performance, however, was nonverbal.

Let the following empirical episode render visible the collective dimension of aesthetic knowledge formation in a rehearsal situation, where the artistic expression gradually develops through the *collective* sharing of ideas and the experimental use of embodied agency in off stage's practicing. The episode shows how aesthetic knowledge emerges in interactions with other actors and materials as Ewenstein & Whyte (2007) address, here, in relation to cloths, music, lights and an imagined audience in particular. The episode further illustrates the importance of aesthetic matters such as sensing the 'moods' of the staged collection, or listening to the music while performing. Also, the episode renders visible the importance of the gaze in gaining embodied agency, where the models are supposed to get to experience pleasure as stars of the spotlight (Mears, 2008) and even gain power and "norm-breaking" subjective agency in a traditionally restricting setting:



Picture 3 Models waking up from beneath clothes.

I am at the rehearsal for the first collection to open up the fashion show. The staging aims at communicating a feeling of a 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 and experimenting on the way. An original idea with the models onstage “waking up” from beneath cloths (see picture 3) 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 (see picture 4), that the models ‘dance’ 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 smoke, too, and you would be standing onstage in this “mannequin forest”, first like statues, from which you wake up to life. This is our statement - you are not dead but instead, alive!” the director verbalizes her ideas to the models.



Picture 4 Models waking up in a fashion dummy forest onstage.

At a rehearsal in a gym hall of a local school in the evening, the models and the director together discuss how to end the staging after symbolically removing the dummies (see picture 5) off stage, showing that models can be vivid, flesh and blood human beings with expressions. “It feels like there is now too much emotions left onstage”, Saima (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 taking a clear contact to the audience!”. To this, Vilja (model) continues: “Yes, let’s show them that we are happy! The look is always so awfully important!” They collectively come up with an 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 take eye contact with (see picture 6), thus revolting against the distant gaze of models that usually does not look. Meanwhile, the music ‘whispers’ playfully. As the music ends, all models give a sincere, happy smile in order to perhaps ‘confuse’ the audience only seconds before the lights go off, and the models leave the stage.

By showing emotions and energy, by gazing and even smiling at the audience, the models revolt against the idea of being mere sad objects of surveillance or victims of the gaze (e.g. Mears, 2008), even though they still perform models being gazed at, and as such, are

restricted by different cultural laden aspects of modelling work.



Picture 5 The lifeless fashion dummies backstage that the models ‘dance ‘off stage.



Picture 6 Models discuss with the director on the additional stage on the day of staging the show.

While the illusory space of doing and inventing is particularly ‘given’ by the director to the models, where aesthetic knowledge operates through embodiment and emotion (Styhre 2008) and is furthermore spatialized through the body (Entwistle 2010) as illustrated in the episode above, the following episode from the context of dance shows how the space is illusory in the form of “inner tasks” that the dancers figure out during their everyday training. The teaching is a part of one of the retired ballet dancers’ everyday-work. She often starts her day by giving lessons to younger ballet dancers in the opera house or in other organizations where dancers from different backgrounds gather together to learn from her.

The following episode is from a morning class she gave before moving to work with the own freelance production downstairs (see picture 7 below), in the same building.



Picture 7 The dancers combine their classical background with a contemporary twist in their own production.

The episode below illustrates the ways in which the retired ballet dancer is able to create an illusion of a dancer’s possibilities to stretch the limits of his or her embodied agency by encouraging them in several ways, for example by using vivid metaphors in her speech during the class. She gives the dancers an impression of everybody having a free will in the use of embodied agency (see Campbell et al. 2009), although it does not fully actualize in their training.

It is Friday morning, 10 am. I sit in the corner of the rehearsal studio, on the floor, as the morning class starts. The rehearsal studio, surrounded by mirrors, is full of professional dancers coming from various backgrounds, both from classical ballet and contemporary. There are around 30 dancers from which three are men and the rest of them are women. 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 advice from the former prima ballerina. I am surprised by her ability to verbalize all the details and 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 by stopping from time to time next to the dancers to demonstrate the ways in which the warming-up movements can be expressed and sensed throughout the body.



Picture 8 Dancers' everyday-work is characterized by the tension between routinized movements and aesthetic, sensual presence.

The empirical episode above illustrates the amount of sensational details that the dancers need to struggle with even when conducting warming up, a basic part of their everyday work. The day-to-day training includes so-called “inner tasks” through which the dancers try to widen their possibilities for independent movements and deepen kinesthesia, “the source of sensations”, which Noland (2009) argued to be an essential for embodied agency. Also the frequent thought of stretching “*beyond the limits of the body*” encourages the dancers question their existing embodied agency. They work in front of the gaze of each other and the mirrors all the time and, in the spirit of what Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) argue, predispose themselves to experience and construct their embodied agency through the others

and through mirroring themselves at their day-to-day work. The dancers are advised to carry out embodied actions (Noland 2009) and widen their possibilities to use the routinized movements in a vivid, relaxed way: *“I didn’t mean to swing like a loose macaroni. Be strong and relaxed at the same time. The ideal is to be partly supported, partly relaxed. Try to find the both sides of you at the same moment.”* This relates to the experiential dimension of aesthetic knowledge, discussed by Ewenstein and Whyte (2007); it is a competency, involving feeling, sensitivity and corporeal experience. In the case of the dancers, the experiential dimension can be *stretched* by mental exercises and by embodied, sensual practices in dancers’ everyday-work.

As the morning class proceeds, the dancers move to bigger movement series as their bodies get warmer. “Spin out every single movement you make. Use different kinds of qualities, that is ‘the thing’. Make every movement to be something unique and your body to be fully alive! Stay on the foot. First the head down, so that it can go somewhere. It is more interesting as there is somebody living in the body. Who is living in there? You are!” The dancers laugh and actively try to make the movements alive.



Picture 9 The former prima ballerina demonstrates to the younger dancers how to “stretch the limits” of one’s embodied agency.

The empirical episode above describes the meaning of using one's personal background in the development and learning process of aesthetic knowledge. It is related to using *different qualities* versatility, as Minna emphasizes after the morning class. Depending on the dancer's background the embodied agency of his or her has developed during the years into a certain direction. It materializes in the symbolic dimension of aesthetic knowledge (see Ewenstein & Whyte 2007). It is based on a specific vocabulary, in this case on the terminology of ballet, expressions through non-verbal signifiers, such as the nuances that Minna aims at verbalizing, and signs, such as the pointe shoes used during the class.

"There is a huge variation in the dancers' capabilities of moving", says Minna. What Ewenstein and Whyte (2007) have not pointed out are the various symbolic dimensions that can be interacting and negotiated between actors. During the morning class this negotiation becomes visible both in the speech and in the movement of the dancers as they try to stretch their limits of their embodied agency and work in the same space with each other. By internalizing Minna's advice the dancers are able only partly to widen their embodied agency due to their various, cultural laden backgrounds as dancers.

The script as a a form of negotiation and sharing of aesthetic knowledge: *"...but it was something totally different than what I had imagined!"*

The script of the fashion show knowingly left a lot to the models' subjective interpretation and the *expressive* performing of different feelings of the staged collections in mind. Aesthetic knowledge comprises this sensing of different moods and the ability to translate emotions, imagination and experience into a new sphere (e.g. Styhre 2008; Entwistle 2010). Before going on stage, the models of the show were, again, reminded to *fully throw themselves* into the rhythm of the music and those moods of the collections and to let their bodies go. At noon on the day of the actual show, the chaotic, noisy backstage silenced for a moment when all the models gathered backstage around "model mama" Lana for a short briefing. She delivered detailed, hands-on advice to the female models on how to technically walk in the heels, by instructing them to slightly bend and point their toes inwards in the shoes, only to get a better grip of the slippery stage. Getting the right touch for walking renders visible the importance of meticulous aesthetic skills (see Styhre 2008), vital for accomplishing their task as models, especially as walking in high heels significantly "change the gait of the body" as Entwistle & Mears (2012, 9) put it. The briefing prepared the models for the performance, and I could sense an excitement in the air:

The models are partly dressed in their staged outfits and everyone looks focused and listens carefully to Lana, a central figure in the fashion show setting (see picture 10). Lana gives her final advice to the models, pointing out that the stage is slippery and that everyone needs to check their heels. Also, she again emphasizes that the fashion show to be staged intends to differ from a 'traditional' catwalk-thing: "Now this year you are encouraged to throw yourself into the theatrical part, therefore, you're not supposed to do any basic catwalking even if, even though, of course, what we have onstage is a catwalk. What we intend to do here, or what becomes your challenge as models, is specifically to delve into the mood of the collection, so now, the interpretation of it is up to you!"



Picture 10 Models gather backstage for a briefing.

The working in both dance and fashion is based on extensively practiced performing, repeated movements, verbal articulations and the sharing of knowledge, expressive doing before the onstage performance, where the overall sensuous performance 'grows' out of detailed, extensively practiced and expressive bodily work. Nuanced moods, mental and bodily states are channelled through the repetition of movements, here considered as the surface. We have followed the offstage performances of dance and fashion rehearsals into performance, the training and practice as the performers reshape their movements and get the techniques and

knowledge into their bodies, in order to be able to perform movements with ease and courage, and use their embodied agency in nuanced ways. As the offstage performance proceeds, the focus shifts towards getting beyond the surface to a more profound level of working, where not only what looks and sounds good – what *feels* good matters in order to be able to ‘let go’ and get beyond the structural expectations of the script.

Another episode from the fashion context renders visible an attempt of getting beyond the surface in a rehearsal situation, as things (momentarily) fall into place and make sense (see also picture 11). Meanwhile, as the episode below illustrates the centrality of the body in circulating knowledge (e.g. Parkins, 2000), it also renders visible the influence of culturally laden ideas of aesthetic knowledge in creating styles of walking that confirm to formal mechanisms of expressions and movements in fashion. Despite the idea of being an ‘unconventional’ fashion show, the desired movements of this particular staging intended to look soft, gracious and sophisticated, where the models consciously attempted to produce a desired styles of walking (e.g. Entwistle & Mears 2012). As such, the episode illustrates a rehearsal situation still heavily confirming to and reproducing formal mechanisms and cultural meanings of bodily expression in fashion and the standards of ‘feminine’, highly exaggerated, stylized and beautiful catwalking that calls attention to models as objects (e.g. Entwistle & Mears 2012):

I am at a fashion show rehearsal in the evening at a local school. Prior to the rehearsal, project manager Iro, the five models present and I gather around director Jutta on the floor of the gymnastics hall, who describes the intended feeling and the choreography of the staged collection, inspired by the Swan of Tuonela. She depicts the feeling as a "David Lynch film" that has an "expecting 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 where the models will appear onstage peacefully one by one, circulating tranquilly around before walking down the catwalk slowly in a formation.



Picture 11 The models and the director discuss the choreography at a rehearsal.

The choreography is challenging also in the respect that the models must be able to “use the space grandly”. The rehearsing begins, and I move to sit along the wall with a direct view to the rehearsals in the middle of the floor. As Jutta directs, 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 completely blank expression and habitus?” Elena (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 (model) makes a suggestion on the final phase of the choreography, and Jutta seems sincerely happy to receive input from the models. The models perform the suggestion, walking all the way to the end of the “catwalk” as Jutta firmly follows the performance.

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: ".just imagine it in those white suits!" (excited tone)

Jutta: "And with the lights! And with the shadows of your suits!"



Picture 12 The 'swanlike pride' of the models onstage.

As the episode above illustrates the admiring and encouraging gazes of the director and the project manager, the agents' growing excitement of the forthcoming fashion show after getting it 'right' with the script in mind and continuously *imagining* the actual onstage performance (see picture 12), the episode below captures the unpreparedness and imperfection of a dance performance even after the dancers move from the rehearsal studio to the theatre (compare pictures 13, 14 and 15).



Picture 13 Kare is training his solo before moving to the theatre.



Picture 14 The dancers break the limits of their embodied agency by creating movements that they haven't tried out never before.

Despite of the chaos in the theatre, the dancers concentrate on being present on the stage and on the artistic impressions that the piece wakes in the mind of an imaginary audience.



Picture 15 Dancers concentrate on being present onstage despite of the chaos offstage at the dress rehearsal.

The script serves as a frame through which the rehearsals are carried out. Interestingly it is the only part of the production, which is negotiated until the performances onstage, and even in the aftermath of them.

It is only one week to the first night and the dancers start rehearsing on the stage. They have managed to book three rehearsal days from the theatre which is luxurious. It is in common to practice just in the week of the first night. I sit in the middle of the empty audience, sensing how the overall atmosphere of the piece has in some way changed as the dancers have moved to the theatre. The space has a huge power (see picture 16). The lightning in the theatre is softer than in the rehearsal studio and the dark stage makes the dancers look more assertive and the piece more ready than it actually is.



Picture 16 Dancers and the empty stand a week before the premiere.

Various people come and go during the rehearsal. They comment and give advices to the dancers concerning the script. I wonder how they are able to internalize all the detailed, subtle comments as it is only one week to the premiere. It seems they absorb all the comments but regard only a part of them. From time to time, they discuss together the various comments and try different versions of the scenes. They end up with a jointly agreed version which can though never be finalized as it changes and develops even in front of the audience.

Finally they go through the whole piece, videotape it and go sitting in the audience to analyze the taped section from the small screen of the video camera. The lack of the gaze of the audience is challenging and they have to try to imagine it, and put their own gaze into the position of that of the audience.

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 subtle."

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."

Kare: "We need to think about this wholeness during the weekend. Maybe the different emotions are not transmitted clear enough to the audience."



Picture 17 The dancers create an illusory space of the script.

Getting beyond the surface of the script is a task far from simple, and it is always risky in a sense; even the dancers try to get inside the head of a spectator, they can never be sure of whether they get beyond the surface or not in the mind of the spectator. The only way to survive is to listen to themselves, feel the movements and refine them continuously and endlessly towards a never-achieved perfection (e.g. Gherardi 2009). As Minna states: *"It's about a sense of professional pride as I have an endless drive for refining the movements and impressions, knowing in the same time that it may not make any difference to the audience"*.

While Kare is positioning himself to a viewpoint of a spectator and digesting all the options of how to proceed, Minna shows me pictures of the sequel of the piece because they need to start working on it before the current piece has even come to an end. I feel overwhelmed with the dancers' chaotic working style, in which taking care of practical things and communicating

and sharing knowledge in aesthetic, abstract ways are wrapped with each other in an incredibly perfect harmony.

The empirical extract above illustrates the aesthetically sensitive, meticulous but, on the other hand, practically chaotic nature of the dancers' working until the final day before the premiere. The script with its structure is an illusion in a sense it is bounded within time and space, and it is renewed continuously as it is performed onstage. The final version is always a surprise, both for the actors onstage and for the audience¹¹.

DISCUSSION

Drawing on the lived experiences of the two retired ballet dancers and the dynamics between the director and the models working towards an untypical fashion show, this paper explored different ways of creating and sharing aesthetic knowledge through embodied agency. Dance and fashion are evidently traditional, expressive and sensual aesthetic performances orientated towards bodily movements and the careful presentation of bodies onstage, where the bodies of the agents are at the heart of conveying knowledge. Therefore, these contexts provide with excellently illustrative examples of understanding the interplay between embodied agency and aesthetic knowledge at day-to-day work. The lived situations of the agents in the contexts of fashion and dance that we observed show how aesthetic knowledge, tied in time and space, is continuously negotiated, shaped and renewed through embodied agency in what appears as mutual, empathetic understanding and respect for each other's' personal background, meanwhile formed and constrained by the specifics of the traditions, the occupational culture and the 'authorities' of both fashion and dance.

We have illustrated how the dance and fashion performances both include chaotic, verbal, creative phases towards 'non-verbal' idealized bodily perfection onstage, bound up with artificially constructed, theatrical, dressed up *desires* (e.g. Böhme 2003; Hancock & Tyler, 2007), high unpredictability and multiple elements of surprise as well as a strong, underpinned desire for recognition (e.g. Butler 2004). As such, both performances, we argue, are excellently illustrative example of risky aesthetic economies (Böhme 2003; Entwistle 2009) that explicitly rely on embodied agency in creating spectacular aesthetic performances.

¹¹ As a researcher, it was extremely interesting to observe the rehearsals and to see the dance piece and its development tens of times before the premiere. The performance onstage was unique, unimagined and bounded with time and space; it was something that had never seen before and will never be.

We illustrated two illusory aspects of embodied agency through which aesthetic knowledge emerges in the everyday-life of dance and fashion. These aspects are the creation of illusory freedom for using embodied agency and the script as a structural illusion. First, we suggest that the frames settled at offstage work of both dancers and models create an illusion of freedom for using embodied agency at work. The freedom to use embodied agency in creating, sharing and negotiating aesthetic knowledge is always an illusion in the sense that both models and dancers are individual embodied agents with different backgrounds, regulating their ability to take advantage of the freedom of movement; the freedom is achieved only partly and by some actors, depending on their backgrounds as embodied agents. There seems to be space given for embodied agency of the dancers and models but it is not achieved in 'reality'. Also, these two performances deliberately attempting to break dominant norms, are still regulated by the norms, the traditions, structures and institutions of their respective contexts (e.g. Barnes 2000; Entwistle & Mears 2012) and to some extent, reproducing them.

Second, the script is the basis of the performance, and an unquestionable part of a dance piece and a fashion show. It gives the structure for the production and the space through which aesthetic knowledge emerges. Nevertheless, the script is an illusion in the negotiation and sharing of aesthetic knowledge as the actors need it only to organize they day-to-day working offstage. In the end, the script is formed and negotiated in the spatial, temporal defining moment onstage, where it becomes an illusory aspect of aesthetic work. Despite our recognition of illusory aspects of embodied agency, we claim that there is still always a certain amount of agency; achieving agency is not a complete illusion in itself in this sense.

Methodologically, our study shows how two contexts can complement each other by 'dancing' together; the illusory aspects that we described would not have emerged from the research material without combining the two contexts. In other words, several complementary aspects of embodied agency emerged as we joined two contexts. For instance, based on the interplay between the two contexts we claim that different degrees of embodied agency actually exist; while the retired ballet dancers were both performers and choreographers of their own production, they had more possibilities for the use of embodied agency than the models of the untypical fashion show, traditionally seen as objects (see e.g. Mears 2008; Entwistle & Mears 2012). In addition, we showed in this paper how the two ethnographic studies can be combined in practice.

While our study has focused on the contexts of fashion and dance, the meaning of the insights of this paper and particularly the relevancy of embodied agency in creating aesthetic knowledge is undeniable in other embodied professions, such as musicians and actors, craftsmen, physicians, teachers, pilots, service occupations, arguably all professions that use a certain level of embodied agency at their day-to-day life. Differing from previous studies on aesthetic knowledge in the field of organization studies (see e.g. Ewenstein & Whyte 2007; Taylor & Hansen, 2005; Hancock, 2005; Styhre 2008), we have brought the culturally laden basis of aesthetic knowledge to the fore by linking it with embodied agency. The cultural foundation of aesthetic knowledge materializes in the illusory aspects of embodied agency that we described. Through our analysis of empirical material deriving from the contexts of dance and fashion, we suggest that embodied agency might be a core issue of the formation and negotiation of aesthetic knowledge in organizations in overall.

Our empirical study renders visible how matters of agency in two traditionally restricted contexts are complex, nuanced and varied. We have illustrated how embodied agency is at the heart of creating knowledge, where the potential for achieving agency are multifaceted. Our study contributes to the theoretical understanding of *embodied* agency as a central component in the formation of aesthetic knowledge at work. In this respect, we believe that the recognition of embodied agency and the illusory aspects of organizing of an embodied agent that we described will open up completely pristine stages to the conceptual development of embodied agency, aesthetic knowledge and the interplay between them.

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