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Suvi Satama

Turku School of Economics, University of Turku, stsata@utu.fi

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

Suvi Satama
University of Turku

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

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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 booties 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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Picture 5: Hanna Seppänen
Pictures 6 and 7: Hertta Kiiski

About the Author(s)

Suvi Satama – a PhD candidate in the Department of Management and Entrepreneurship at Turku School of Economics, University of Turku (Finland). She is currently finalizing her PhD about dancers' embodied agency. She worked as a visiting scholar at the University of Amsterdam in 2014. Her research interests include physically intensive professions, embodied and aesthetic dimensions of organizational life, arts management, creative research methods and ethnographic approaches to the study of organizations and professions.